

WIENER STUDIEN ZUR TIBETOLOGIE UND BUDDHISMUSKUNDE
HEFT 86

MARKUS VIEHBECK

POLEMICS IN INDO-TIBETAN SCHOLASTICISM

**A LATE 19TH-CENTURY DEBATE BETWEEN
'JU MI PHAM AND DPA' RIS RAB GSAL**



ARBEITSKREIS FÜR TIBETISCHE UND BUDDHISTISCHE STUDIEN UNIVERSITÄT WIEN
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Contents

Contents	5
List of figures	7
List of tables	7
Acknowledgements	9
Introduction	11
I Context of the controversies	27
1 Historical development	29
2 Literary and socio-historical background	39
The controversies in the history of <i>dgag lan</i> debate	40
“Polemics” as a literary genre	40
Polemical literature in Tibet	43
Connections to earlier controversies	50
Impact of the debates on later controversies	57
Delineating the contemporary conditions of the controversies .	61
The historical setting	61
A religio-political background for the controversies? . . .	65
Mi pham and the “ <i>ris med</i> movement”?	68
Mi pham as a person of authority	74
Political motives? – Turning to the texts	77
II Main part: the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal	81
3 Textual sources	83

Editions	83
The works of Mi pham	84
The works of Rab gsal	85
The individual texts	86
<i>Nor bu ke ta ka</i>	86
<i>Pho nya</i>	89
<i>'Ju lan</i>	90
<i>Rab lan</i>	92
<i>Ga bur chu rgyun</i>	94
<i>Yang lan</i>	97
4 Issues of controversy and their development	99
Topic I: the interpretation of BCA IX.1	100
Topic II: the interpretation of BCA IX.78	109
Topic III: the interpretation of BCA IX.41–49	125
Topic IV: issues related to BCA IX.2	150
Emptiness as non-existence of true establishment (<i>bden med</i>)	153
Ultimate emptiness and freedom from extremes	167
Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika	183
The absolute as an object of mind (<i>blo</i>) and words (<i>sgra</i>) . .	193
III Supplementary material	211
5 Detailed summaries of the exchanged texts	213
<i>'Ju lan</i>	214
<i>Rab lan</i>	236
<i>Ga bur chu rgyun</i>	272
<i>Yang lan</i>	284
6 Overview charts of the texts	287
<i>'Ju lan</i>	289
<i>Rab lan</i>	298
<i>Ga bur chu rgyun</i>	309
<i>Yang lan</i>	316
7 Structural outlines (<i>sa bcad</i>)	317
<i>Nor bu ke ta ka</i>	317
<i>'Ju lan</i>	320
<i>Rab lan</i>	320
<i>Ga bur chu rgyun</i>	320
<i>Yang lan</i>	321

Abbreviations and bibliography	323
Index of passages	341
General index	345

List of figures

1.1	Geographical extension of the controversies	37
4.1	Relations between the perfections, interpretation I	103
4.2	Relations between the perfections, interpretation II	103
4.3	Interpretation of BCA IX.78c	124

List of tables

1.1	Texts exchanged in the controversies	37
6.1	Intertextual connections in the <i>Ju lan</i>	289
6.2	Intertextual connections in the <i>Rab lan</i>	298
6.3	Intertextual connections in the <i>Ga bur chu rgyun</i>	309
6.4	Intertextual connections in the <i>Yang lan</i>	316

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Introduction

“Beyond each mountain pass is a different religious sect with thousands of scholars and fools who follow it, saying, ‘Just this is true; this will not deceive you.’ This self-authorization of one’s own truth delights a group of similar beings; when told to a group who does not agree, they are scornful.”

(Dge ’dun chos ’phel, *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*)¹

As has been pointed out many times, Buddhism as a whole is not adequately depicted as a harmonious, uncontested, and monolithic tradition. Rather, differences of social practices and doctrinal theorisation form an essential part, and disputes about such disagreements between both adherents to different viewpoints within the Buddhist tradition, as well as with factions outside of it, must be seen as crucial forces that fuelled the development of Buddhist philosophical thought and its living practices. This is as true for the origins of Buddhism in ancient India as it is for the various other cultural contexts that it engaged with in its complex history of dissemination. In the continued process of appropriation that made Buddhism the dominant religion on the Tibetan plateau, controversies of various sorts also played an important role. While doubtful in its historicity, already the initial decision about which principle form of Buddhism should prevail under royal support is commonly remembered as being based on the outcome of a public debate. In this version of Tibetan Buddhist historiographers, the Indian tradition was established as the only authentic source for the Tibetans’ religion. While the actualities of Tibetan Buddhism show manifold cultural influences, the Indian tradition occupies indeed a

¹ Cf. *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* 110.6–11: *la re’i rgyab na mi mthun chos lugs re || de yi rjes ’brang mkhas blun stong phrag re || ’di nyid bden la ’di yis mi bslu zhes || rang gi bden kha rang la sbyin pa ’di || rigs mthun skye bo’i tshogs rnams nyams re dga’ || mi mthun tshogs la smras na zhe re khrel ||*; translation according to Lopez 2006: 63.

particularly significant position – as a source of general cultural knowledge, but also as a very concrete authority in terms of particular Buddhist teachings, often in the form of texts, which were translated into Tibetan. In the increasingly specified and technical debates that emerged in the Tibetan Buddhist scholastic traditions,² these texts were of fundamental importance: since they represented the authentic Indian tradition, aligning oneself with a text could provide authority to one's own scholastic elaborations. At the same time, since any text can be read in different ways and its precise meaning needs to be established, usually with the help of commentaries, such texts provided an inexhaustible source for controversial discussion. It is therefore not surprising that many Tibetan commentaries on essential Indian treatises include polemical features in which the texture of a specific scholastic tradition is made explicit against the contours of other traditions, and that such evoked critical reactions from opposing factions. The resulting discourses not only clarify the doctrinal content of individual traditions, but also address to a large extent matters of textual hermeneutics, in the sense that diverging readings are refuted or argued for by using various means of validation. Studying polemical exchanges can therefore not only inform us about Tibetan Buddhist doctrine, but also about the relations between Indian texts and their Tibetan appropriators and the ways in which the latter negotiated these relations among each other. The present study is to be seen as a very modest step in addressing these issues by providing a careful analysis of a particularly famous specimen of polemical exchange in more recent history.

The subject of this investigation is the series of debates between the famous Rnying ma master 'Ju Mi pham (1846–1912)³ and his contemporary opponents from the Dge lugs school – in particular Dpa' ris Rab gsal (1840–1912)⁴ – that flared up in Eastern Tibet in the late nineteenth century and involved the major centres of Tibetan scholasticism in the almost

² Important general characteristics of the Tibetan scholastic traditions, such as a preoccupation with language and logic, their soteriological significance, their roles in the interpretation of scripture, and their limitations are outlined in Cabezón 1994. All of these topics are at the very core of the debate analysed in the current study.

³ If not specified otherwise, biographical data is given according to the database of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC, www.tbrc.org). All relevant information was retrieved on February 06, 2011.

⁴ TBRC's database gives 1840–1910? as the lifetime of Rab gsal, cf. TBRC, http://www.tbrc.org/#library_person_Object-P254. In short biographies of Rab gsal, 1912 is commonly mentioned as the year of his passing, see, e.g., RSSB (B) 2, *Rab gsal rnam thar* 225, *Jag rung dgon chen lo rgyus* 220. The latter source also mentions that he probably died in Pu rab in Russia (*u ru sa'i pu rab*).

thirty years of its development. The point of departure of these controversies was Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*, an innovative commentary on the ninth chapter of Śāntideva's (approx. eighth century) *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (BCA), a work that the tradition regards as an authoritative presentation of Indian Madhyamaka thought. After the Buddhist religion spread to Tibet, it was this tradition that established itself as the pivotal philosophical system. Not only does its content form the ontological foundation of the Buddhist world view in Tibet, but a correct understanding of it is also commonly accepted as the prerequisite for any soteriological progress. Madhyamaka philosophy was therefore subject to considerable debate among Tibetan scholastics, of which the controversies around Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* are one of the most important testimonies.⁵

Earlier research

While these debates are well known in Tibetan scholastic circles, it was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the writings of Gene Smith that they were introduced to a Western academic audience. In a couple of essays that served as introductions to Tibetan language works, Smith wrote at some length about the general intellectual and social milieu of the controversies and sketched out their main protagonists. He pointed to Mi pham's outstanding position as "one of the most imaginative and versatile minds to appear in the Tibetan tradition" and "one of the most talented figures" of the so-called *ris med* movement, whose innovative commentary "threw Tibetan scholarly circles into several decades of heated controversy."⁶ Several scholars of the Dge lugs tradition are listed as his opponents, above all the aforementioned Rab gsal, but also Brag dkar Sprul sku Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin snyan grags (1866–1928),⁷ and Ldan ma Blo bzang chos dbyings (1890–1949).⁸ He further mentioned a dispute between Mi pham and 'Ja' pa Mdo sngags.⁹ In his notes, Smith provides references to the various texts of the two parties, and while he complains that "only

⁵ In the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, extensive controversies in this matter emerged also between followers of the Dge lugs and of the Sa skya school. For a short description of these debates, see Tauscher 1995: 35–39.

⁶ Smith 2001: 230.

⁷ These dates are mentioned in the short biography attached to his *gsung 'bum*, see *Brag dkar rnam thar*: 2.

⁸ As mentioned in a brief account of his life in *Blo chos rnam thar*: 127.

⁹ Here Smith, as later Schuh, referred to Bdud 'joms Rin po che's *Rnying ma'i chos 'byung*, see 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje 2004. This work has also been translated into English, see Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje 1991.

a small percentage of the polemical tracts that were exchanged back and forth have survived,”¹⁰ he also points to an excellent textual condition for investigating the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal.¹¹

We are very fortunate in that all of the major sources for Mi pham and Dpa’ ris Rab gsal’s controversy centered around the Prajñāpariccheda survive. [...] A critical study of one defined controversy now becomes possible.

Smith does not provide any significant details about the content of the disputes, but he alludes to some general features of the controversies. Mi pham and Rab gsal are depicted as “intellectuals and compassionate teachers who shared similar principles and values,” who became close friends and often visited each other. Their exchange is described as “remarkable for its warmth and good humor,” while Mi pham’s other opponents resorted to vulgarity and crudeness.¹² While such remarks are indeed helpful for indicating the “lively literary style” of the texts involved, it is difficult to back up descriptions of specific character traits or such details as the aforementioned mutual visits in a careful analysis of these very texts.

Smith’s most important contribution for understanding the larger role of these debates is probably their placement along a general divide between scholastic traditions of the Dge lugs school and a network of non-Dge lugs scholars, summarised as “*ris med* movement,”¹³ on the other side. Thereby he also highlights a general discrepancy between two approaches to studying Buddhism: the Dge lugs emphasis on learning through debate, according to specific manuals (*yig cha*) in debating institutions (*rtsod grwa*), which was criticised by the *ris med* masters; these, in turn, founded commentarial institutions (*bshad grwa*) as an alternative model for scholastic education, in which the most important Indian scriptures were approached through commentaries.¹⁴ Smith’s parlance suggests a clear preference. The

¹⁰ Smith 2001: 231.

¹¹ Smith 2001: 232.

¹² Cf. Smith 2001: 233.

¹³ Smith coined the term “*ris med* movement,” which contributed to the image of a unified and self-conscious movement, as indicated and criticized by Gardner 2006 (pp. 112ff.). As will be discussed in more detail in the second part of Chapter Two, it rather seems adequate to think of it as a more loosely connected network of scholars with varying individual agendas.

¹⁴ For a detailed exposition of these two models of education, see Dreyfus 2003b. Dreyfus 2005 deals further with the origin of the *bshad grwa* model in the nineteenth century, see especially, pp. 286ff.

standard education in Dge lugs institutions is perceived as mere technical sophistry where “[...] the rank and file Dge lugs monks concentrated upon the slavish pursuit of formalistic argumentation [...]”¹⁵ For the *ris med* scholars, however, the situation was different: “The basic aim was comprehension, not only of the words and arguments, but also of the doctrinal implications. [...] In other words, many of the great nonsectarian teachers rejected labels.” While these observations are useful as an exaggerative caricature of extreme positions (and in a milder form might even well represent certain features of the exchange between Mi pham and Rab gsal), they should not lead to an overly generalized perception of the respective scholars. Also, one has to bear in mind the provisional nature of Smith’s essays, which were written quickly and without access to substantial academic sources.¹⁶ In view of the lack of other reference material, Smith relied heavily on the oral explanations of his teacher Sde gzhung Rin po che (Deshung Rinpoche) (1906–1987)¹⁷ for writing these essays. Deshung Rinpoche, as Smith explains, “was an authority on the nonsectarian (*ris med*) movement in which his practice was rooted.”¹⁸ This personal connection may explain the overall fondness for the *ris med* network that is expressed in these essays. Also on other occasions, when, for example, general lines of development are interspersed with more detailed narrative information – such as the remark on the close friendship and mutual visits of Mi pham and Rab gsal – we can, perhaps, hear the voice of Deshung Rinpoche. The result is that a lot of the information presented in Smith’s essays – as valuable as it is as a first orientation – is not backed up by any reference and cannot be verified. At the same time, this very information formed the basis and general approach of much of the further research in this area.

A certain kind of “unctuousness” and “speculation” in Smith’s essays was therefore criticised by Dieter Schuh, who wrote introductions to the works of Mi pham (in 1973) and Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (in 1976).¹⁹

¹⁵ Smith 2001: 245.

¹⁶ In the 2001 preface to the compilation of the earlier essays, Smith described the intent and circumstances under which these introductions were composed in the following way (p. XII): “They reflect personal concerns about where our understanding of textual accessibility was going and the quest for filling in gaps in our knowledge of the field. They had to be written within a day or two since the reproductions had already been completed. There was little time to mull over the ideas and conclusions. There were no specialized libraries that could be used to check the Tibetological facts in Delhi in those years.”

¹⁷ For an extensive biography of this famous Tibetan master, see Jackson 2003.

¹⁸ Smith 2001: XIII.

¹⁹ I.e., Schuh 1973 and Schuh 1976. In the latter (p. XXIII), Schuh criticises Smith severely for his style of presentation and the lack of references: “Unglücklicherweise sind

Schuh, too, is not concerned about the content of the debates, but his careful reconstruction of Mi pham's life, achieved through investigating Bdud 'joms' biography of Mi pham and the colophons of Mi pham's works, sheds further light on the general development of the debates. Most significant is his assessment of the background of the debates. Schuh understands *ris med* not only as a religious, but also as a political movement: a group of politically weak, mainly Rnying ma dominated *religiosi* that tried to establish itself as a counterbalance to the Dge lugs superiority. This, in turn, explains the notable interest in Rnying ma writings and, in particular, the concern with regard to Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* from the Dge lugs side.²⁰

In the 1980s, details about Mi pham's life and his work *Mkhas 'jug* were elaborated by Steven D. Goodman.²¹ The same compendium contains a study of Mi pham's commentary on the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra* by Kenard Lipman.²² Later, Franz-Karl Ehrhard provided further details on Mi pham's philosophical stance in his short article on Madhyamaka in the Rnying ma school.²³ While these studies did not provide any significant details of the controversies proper, they were important for introducing Mi pham's thought to a larger audience.

The last few decades, then, have been marked by a growing interest in Mi pham's philosophy, and have resulted in the translation of several of Mi pham's important works.²⁴ The debates, too, have gained more attention. In 1998, Paul Williams devoted a monograph to the study of the controversy between Mi pham and Brag dkar Sprul sku Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin snyan grags, limited to the discussion of the status of "reflexive awareness" (*rang rig / svasaṃvedana*).²⁵ Noteworthy is that Williams

die Angaben von SMITH häufig unzuverlässig, wie überhaupt seine Darlegungen durch ein Übermaß an phantasievoller, spekulativer Überschwenglichkeit, durch ungewöhnliche Leichtfertigkeit bei der Auswertung von Quellen und häufiges Fehlen von Quellennachweisen ausgezeichnet sind."

²⁰ Cf. Schuh 1976: XXXf. and also 1976: LVII.

²¹ I.e., Goodman 1981.

²² See Lipman 1981.

²³ See Ehrhard 1988.

²⁴ Of these many translations, I will only mention some that are most important for Mi pham's understanding of Madhyamaka and as such for the debates: Mi pham's commentary on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* by the Padmakara Translation Group (Padmakara 2002), his commentary on the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra* by Thomas Doctor (Doctor 2004), the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, his innovative commentary on the BCA, and thus origin of the debates, translated into French, by Stéphane Arguillère (Arguillère 2004) and – probably the most important – the *Nges shes sgron me*, Mi pham's presentation of Madhyamaka, by John Pettit (Pettit 1999).

²⁵ Cf. Williams 2000a.

did not consult the texts of Brag dkar Sprul sku, but construed his position solely on the basis of the presentation of his opponent Mi pham.²⁶

John Pettit, in his 1999 translation of Mi pham's *Nges shes sgron me* and detailed study of Mi pham's Madhyamaka thought,²⁷ provides much information about Mi pham's life, his Madhyamaka way of thought, and its background. Although Pettit is not concerned with the debates as such, he relates Mi pham's philosophy to the trends of other leading scholars, such as Go rams pa and Tsong kha pa, and thus touches on various important issues of the debates. Less significant for the study of the debates, but crucial as an enquiry into the ideas of Mi pham, is Douglas Duckworth's recent work on Mi pham's ideas of the reconciliation of buddha-nature (*tathāgarbha*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*), as well as an insightful review of this study by Dorji Wangchuk.²⁸ Duckworth further wrote on central topics in Mi pham's Madhyamaka thought in three recent articles and an introduction to his life and works.²⁹

²⁶ It seems that Brag dkar Sprul sku's works were simply not available to Williams, although Matthew Kapstein, in his review of Williams' study, remarks that Williams could have seen these works at the Oslo University library (cf. Kapstein 2000: 107). A few remarks about the consequences of ignoring Brag dkar Sprul sku's works seem called for. In Williams' presentation, the Dge lugs opponent Brag dkar Sprul sku is represented only to the extent that his adversary Mi pham acknowledges him. In parts where Mi pham gives verbatim quotes of his opponent, this is not especially problematic, but there are other parts where Brag dkar Sprul sku can only be heard through the paraphrase of his opponent; still other parts of Brag dkar's work Mi pham simply did not regard worth mentioning. Moreover, Mi pham, in his answer, only referred to Brag dkar Sprul sku's first criticism, while he did not regard the other two polemical letters by Brag dkar Sprul sku to be worth an answer (more information about the historical development will be provided in Chapter One). In sum, there is considerable textual material from Brag dkar Sprul sku that does not appear in Williams' study, thus probably leading to a distorted picture. One example shall suffice to demonstrate my point. In his introduction to the arguments, Williams points out the great respect shown by Mi pham to his opponents, manifested in mentioning the opponent's full name and provenance, and describing him as "one of clearly renowned understanding" (Williams 2000a: 108). This is then contrasted with Brag dkar Sprul sku's seemingly poor manners: "He does not refer to Mi pham by name, but speaks of 'a certain contemporary author of a commentary to the Bodhicaryāvatara' [...]" (Williams 2000a: 109). While this is indeed the case in later parts of the work – and one must acknowledge a more critical tone on Brag dkar Sprul sku's side in general – we also have to admit Brag dkar Sprul sku's first address of Mi pham as "the virtuous 'Jam dbyangs rnam rgyal from Eastern Tibet (*mdo khams*), who has some confidence in the explanation and realisation of the [Buddha's] teaching" (*Blo gsal dga' ba'i gtam* 400.3: *bstan pa la bshad sgrub kyi spobs pa cung zad dge ba mdo khams pa 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal*). This address is found at the very beginning of Brag dkar Sprul sku's work, a part that is not found in Mi pham's text.

²⁷ I.e., Pettit 1999.

²⁸ I.e., Duckworth 2008 & Wangchuk 2012.

²⁹ All of the three articles were published in 2010 in the *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, see Duckworth 2010a, 2010b, and 2010c, respectively. For his introduction to the life and works

By far the most important recent research in this field is Karma Phuntsho's study "Mipham's Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness" (published in 2005),³⁰ which draws from an enormous range of textual sources, including many of the works that were produced in the development of the controversies. In his work, Karma Phuntsho gives "a selective discussion of the major themes in Mipham's writings that pertain to his understanding of Emptiness and his disagreements with that of the Gelukpas."³¹ The study has a clear focus on the Madhyamaka philosophy of Mi pham, which is then contrasted with the Dge lugs viewpoint. The desire to clarify the development of Mi pham's ideas is the predominant focus in Karma Phuntsho's work, an intention he explicitly expresses at the end of his introduction:³²

It was one of Mipham's dying wishes to write a definitive exegesis on Madhyamaka but his failing health did not permit him. This work, being a digest or a compilatory treatise (*thor ba sdud pa'i bstan chos*) in nature, can be seen as a humble attempt on my part to actualize, as it were, this unfulfilled wish. It is my modest hope that through this selective discussion of Mipham's qualms about the Gelukpa understanding of Emptiness, we will be able to capture Mipham's philosophical mood and improve our knowledge of this extraordinary polymath, who still remains a personal enigma.

While Karma Phuntsho is among the first to have studied the contents of debates in detail, his work does not focus on the development of a specific exchange of viewpoints. Rather, he provides a bird's eye perspective in which general key topics in Madhyamaka philosophy are discussed as they were relevant to Mi pham's thought. The textual material produced in the controversies thus becomes a convenient source for clarifying these topics, but is not the primary focus of investigation.

Viewing the previous research as a whole, it is obvious that, despite the very different nature of the individual studies, the focus on Mi pham's side is consistent in the research on the debates between him and his opponents. In Smith's work, it took the form of a general solidarity with Mi pham's intellectual milieu (a solidarity that strongly influenced later scholarship); in Williams' study, the opponent is only heard through the report by Mi

of Mi pham, see Duckworth 2011.

³⁰ I.e., Phuntsho 2005.

³¹ Phuntsho 2005: 19.

³² Phuntsho 2005: 20.

pham; and in Karma Phuntsho's case, his primary intention was to clarify Mi pham's Madhyamaka philosophy. And while the controversies have indeed received increasing attention of the Western academic community in recent years, a "study of one defined controversy," as Gene Smith had called for,³³ still remained a desideratum. The present enquiry, then, can be seen as a modest attempt to address this gap.

Scope and approach

A guiding idea in determining the approach of the current study was to take the notion of "debate" seriously, meaning that controversies are approached as a dynamic exchange between different agents located and developing in space and time. Every single debate between Mi pham and individual opponents can be regarded as an example for a specific form of polemical discourse, a debate conducted through the composition and exchange of texts.

From the outset, it was clear that an in-depth treatment of all disputes is far beyond the scope of a single monograph. It seemed therefore only sensible to limit the investigation to the exchange between Mi pham and one single opponent. Among the controversies involved, the debate between Mi pham and Dpa' ris Rab gsal can be deemed ideal for such a case study: counting from Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* to the last short reply that Mi pham sent to Rab gsal, it involved altogether the composition of six treatises and – in terms of the number of texts exchanged between the two authors – may well be seen as one of the most extensive examples of polemical exchange in the whole history of Tibetan scholastics. This case therefore provides a unique opportunity to observe dynamic features of dialogical interaction where arguments, but also merely rhetorical polemics, develop over several stages. It also seems to have reached a natural end, with the critiques becoming shorter in the later phase of the exchange. The other disputes, in contrast, ended more abruptly with Mi pham's refusal to answer again, or answer at all, and did not develop extended lines of argumentation, as was the case with the earlier debate. Further, the outstanding role of this particular debate as an expression of Tibetan scholastic thought is commonly accepted in Tibetan intellectual circles, where it became known as "the encounter of tiger and lion of the Gsar [ma] and the Rnying [ma] [tradition]" (*gsar rnying gi stag seng gdong thug*).³⁴

³³ See Smith 2001: 232.

³⁴ See Khu byug 2004: 374.

The main vantage point for the observation of this debate was to trace its dynamic development over all textual sources produced to express and further the debate. Based on a careful and close reading of these sources, a comprehensive and systematic account of the debate was aspired to, which included all individual lines of argumentation and followed them across the body of texts. In this study, this attempt is undertaken in Chapter Five, where detailed summaries of the individual texts and the issues they discuss are provided. Owing to the often extremely condensed presentation of arguments in the original texts and the sheer mass of issues, these summaries are limited to a very dense depiction of the matters involved.³⁵ They allow, however, a grasp of the main issues and permit connections between the separate passages in the individual texts to be established. This is further aided by overview charts provided in Chapter Six, which facilitate a quick understanding of the connections of the individual passages. Together with the structural outlines in Chapter Seven, these three chapters form the third part of this study, a section that – due to its highly technical and terse nature – is intended to be an analytical tool to further concrete research with the texts under consideration, rather than an informative account for the uninitiated.

Chapter Four, in contrast, prepares the debate for a general audience. While it also takes the form of an overview, it provides a detailed account of the key issues of the controversy, which are related to four different passages of the BCA: Topic I concerns the interpretation of BCA IX.1, Topic II that of BCA IX.78. Both of these topics pertain mostly to personal differences in the literal interpretation of the respective passages, and are thus treated rather briefly. In contrast, Topic III, connected to BCA IX.41-49, and Topic IV, connected to BCA IX.2, are both related to fundamental differences in the respective scholastic traditions concerning the understanding of core concepts of Madhyamaka philosophy, which are discussed at great length. For each topic, its respective background is outlined and followed up by an investigation into the dynamic development of the debate. Chapter Three introduces the textual sources and provides a short overview of the individual texts. Together with Chapter Four, this section forms the main part of the study, a presentation of the content of the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal as embodied in the texts they wrote to each other.

³⁵ In the production of these summaries, the focus was solely on the exegetical and philosophical issues. Other elements, such as the rhetorical polemics indulged in, have been omitted, even though they are an integral and continuous part of this form of debate. The specific issue of the role of rhetorical polemics in *dgag lan* debate will be treated in a separate investigation, see Viehbeck (forthcoming), “The Yogi and the Scholar: Rhetorical Polemics as Frame and Framework.”

As indicated earlier, this particular debate is part of a whole series of controversies between Mi pham and several scholars from the Dge lugs school, and is also related to the tradition of *dgag lan* debate in general, of which it is one of the most famous examples. These issues are addressed in the very first section of the present study, a section intended as a more general introduction to the debate. Chapter One reconstructs the historical development of the overall controversies by using information provided in the introductory parts and colophons of the critical treatises that were composed in the development of the debates. Chapter Two then establishes the wider background of the debate by discussing its place and relevance in the history of *dgag lan* debate in general and by exploring the social conditions of its emergence. This chapter also addresses the question of a possible religio-political background of the debates as suggested by the previous research of Smith, Schuh, and others.

Remarks on method and procedure

As mentioned above, the present study is based almost entirely on the investigation of texts.³⁶ While there are various other sources for the debates – bits and pieces in hagiographies, innumerable oral accounts with a varying degree of depth and elaboration – this choice is a very obvious one: why resort to other, rather limited, accounts about the debates when the actual debates are preserved and can be approached first-hand in the form of texts? In working with these texts, it was clear right from the start of this project that co-operation with native Tibetan scholars would be crucial for various reasons: the language of the texts is rather recent and differs considerably from older forms of Tibetan, and frequently involves regionally specific idioms; the content of the texts is vast, spanning the entire spectrum of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy; their style of presentation often reminds one of actual debates, held in monastic courtyards. Taking these factors together, it seemed obvious that support from native Tibetan scholars who had grown up with a language that is close in terms of space and time to that of the texts under consideration, who, in their education, had received a broad overview of the main issues in Tibetan philosophy, and who were familiar with the manner of their presentation owing to daily participation in courtyard debate, would be beneficial for understanding these texts.

³⁶ On a field trip in 2009, I also visited the places where the texts were written, and conducted a couple of interviews with local informants, but in this endeavour, too, the guiding principle was information gained from texts.

While such forms of co-operation have become common practice in the field of Tibetology in recent years, a few reflections on the nature of this enterprise might not be out of place, at least as an attempt to declare the contribution of these very scholars to the present study and to reflect about my interaction with them.

In preparing this study, I read all of the main texts together with scholars from traditional Tibetan monastic institutions. In my search for suitable candidates, determining factors were knowledge of the subject matter and the avoidance of preconceived sectarian biases, as well as certain practical considerations. My initial plan was a clear-cut division: all texts by Mi pham had to be studied primarily with proponents of his own Rnying ma tradition, all of Rab gsal's texts with members of the Dge lugs tradition. Once put into practice, this idea was proven wrong. Although the presumed sectarian bias was indeed noticeable in cursory encounters with proponents of the respective traditions – a typical consequence of the disclosure of my research interest was being asked who, in my opinion, was doing better in the debates – all scholars I worked with more closely were remarkably unbiased in their approach, and emphasised the study of the other tradition in order to obtain a more precise picture of the debates. In practical terms, the sectarian affiliation of any of these scholars seemed rather irrelevant, while exposure to the texts during academic training, and personal interests, turned out to be decisive factors for the ability to cope with the material. While the relevant texts are not a standard part of education in any of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, they are taught from time to time by scholars with an affiliation to the Rnying ma school, a practice that also results in a more common knowledge of the debates among students of the institutions of this school. As far as personal interests are concerned, special mention must be made of Mkhan po Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug, a graduate of Rnam grol gling's Snga 'gyur rnying ma Institute, who has developed an outstanding grasp of the texts and whose expertise was most influential and beneficial for my own understanding of them. This entailed a very strong presence of scholars from the Rnying ma tradition among my co-operation partners, a fact that certainly added to the accentuation of this side of the controversies.

In most cases, a text was read not only with one, but with several scholars. The following list provides a clear account of which text was read with which scholar, as well as that scholar's academic affiliation:³⁷

³⁷ The full names of the relevant texts, bibliographic details, and a discussion of their contents will be provided below.

- *Nor bu ke ta ka* (Mi pham) with: Mkhan po Nyi ma rgyal mtshan ('Bri gung bka' brgyud College, Dehra Dun; graduated from Rdzong gsar bshad grwa, Bir)

- *Rigs 'phrul dpyid kyi pho nya* (Rab gsal) with: Bsod nams dbang ldan (Tre hor khams tshan, Se ra byes Monastery, Bylakupe)

- *'Jam dpal dbyangs kyi dgongs rgyan rigs pa'i gzi 'bar gdong lnga'i sgra dbyangs* (Rab gsal) with: Dge bshes Ya ma rin chen and Bsod nams dbang ldan (both Tre hor khams tshan, Se ra byes Monastery, Bylakupe); Mkhan po 'Chi med lhun grub (Rnam grol gling Monastery, Bylakupe; graduated from Snga 'gyur rnying ma Institute, Rnam grol gling); Mkhan po Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug (Rin chen dpal ri Monastery Balambu, Kathmandu; graduated from Snga 'gyur rnying ma Institute, Rnam grol gling)

- *Gzhan gyis brtsad pa'i lan mdor bsdus pa rigs lam rab gsal de nyid snang byed* (Mi pham) with: Mkhan po 'Chi med lhun grub and Mkhan po Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug

- *Shes ldan yid kyi gdung sel rigs lam ga bur chu rgyun* (Rab gsal) with: Mkhan po 'Chi med lhun grub and Mkhan po Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug

- *Yang lan* (Mi pham) with: Mkhan po 'Chi med lhun grub and Mkhan po Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug

In reading these texts, all participants agreed that it would be better to deviate from the typical Tibetan format of teaching, which – in the context of text explanation – is based largely on a monologue by the teacher. Rather, it was agreed that we discuss the texts in a more dialogic format, focussing on the passages that I found especially important or difficult. The understanding of a particular text passage resulted therefore from a complex interplay between myself and various experts – and, in this regard, conversations with scholars from the Western academic world must also be pointed out as influential factors. While it is thus impossible to point to any single specific influence for the reading of a particular text passage, I hope I have done at least some justice to my main co-operation partners by mentioning them here.

The way we engaged in concrete discussion of the texts was often very much like a reading class in the context of a Western university, while, of course, the scholars in question came from a quite different context. Dorji Wangchuk, a scholar who knows both the Western and the Tibetan academic contexts, described the distinctive features of the latter in the following way:³⁸

³⁸ Wangchuk 2007: 15f. His description of the Tibetan intellectual milieu is especially relevant, as he graduated from the very same institution as two of my main co-operation partners.

Ideally the priority of a Tibetan monastic seminary is to train monks and nuns in such a way as to equip them with qualities of erudition, personal integrity, and conscientiousness (*mkhas btsun bzang gsum*); and with the competence to engage in exposition, spiritual practice, and beneficial tasks (*bshad sgrub las gsum*). Erudition is attained through learning, contemplation, and meditation (*thos bsam sgom gsum*); personal integrity through the practice of the three trainings (*bslab pa gsum*), namely, higher ethical-moral discipline, higher concentration, and higher insight; while a scholar with conscientiousness can be expected to carry out the tasks of exposition, disputation, and composition (*'chad rtsod rtsom gsum*), and thus contribute to the preservation and propagation of the Buddhist teachings so as to put salvific means at the disposal of other sentient beings. The pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake, permissible in western academia, would probably be seen as inadequate, although here too there are several Buddhist (particularly Mahāyāna) concepts with which one could legitimise one's unquenchable thirst and quest for knowledge.

In a traditional Tibetan Buddhist institution of learning, knowledge is acquired and transmitted within a religious framework. In my personal experience, this context was most noticeable outside the very concrete work with texts. Matters of personal religious conviction were discussed frequently between sessions of reading and could also be used as a kind of threshold: every teacher would first check the ambition and motivation of a student before agreeing to teach him or her. During the discussion of the texts, however, the realm of personal religion receded more into the background. These intricacies of exegetical and philosophical argumentation that drew on an immense development of Tibetan scholastic history were, I felt, issues that my monastic colleagues, too, would rather approach with a certain intellectual distance than purely from a perspective of personal religious experience. Concepts and arguments were ascribed to specific individuals or traditions, and they were investigated with regard to their origin, their scholastic background, and development. Thus, while being immersed in concrete textual work, I had the impression that the way these allegedly alien scholars approached intellectual controversies was actually quite similar to the way the respective texts would be discussed in a Buddhological seminar at a Western university – despite the medium, which was in this context entirely Tibetan.

A last point that is noteworthy with regard to co-operation with native scholars is indeed one of difference, namely of social and economic backgrounds. One of the many aspects that I found were well understood in Donald Lopez' thoughtful account of his experiences in the co-operation with Tibetan scholars is the notion of privilege.³⁹ As a Western student, an "inji" (*dbyin ji*), one is outside the social structure of Tibetan society, a factor that is greatly reinforced by the assumed and factual wealth associated with people from the West in general (but also with Chinese, Malaysians, or Taiwanese). Certainly, Tibetan scholars see clearly the immense effort it takes for a Western student to gather the financial means and freedom from work and social commitments necessary for a longer stay in their scholastic community – and usually this is interpreted as proof of genuine interest on the part of the student. However, being able to do so is also seen as a privilege that is out of reach for most Tibetan students, and even for renowned scholars. A Western student, therefore, is often placed in a double role: that of a student – even though different – and that of a sponsor. Based on the earlier privileges, he or she is also treated in a privileged way as a student. While students within the native community, even as a group, sometimes find it difficult to persuade a teacher to fit an extra class into his tight schedule, Western students often manage to get private classes from the best (and busiest) scholars. While this situation usually leads to a further upgrading of the student's position in the Western academic world – privileged access to knowledge in research results in a better (published) outcome, which can eventually lead to tenure – the condition of the co-operating native scholar is often left basically unchanged, despite occasional donations and other small services, such as English classes or help with translations. Certainly, only limited change can be brought about to this situation on the level of individual research, but it is to be hoped that awareness of this problem will start a process of transformation, so that laments like that of Dge 'dun chos 'phel over his "co-operation" with the Russian Tibetologist George Roerich will, indeed, only be relics reminding us of an approach that became obsolete long ago:⁴⁰

³⁹ See Lopez 1995: 272ff. While the times have certainly changed since Lopez' stay in Mundgod, his descriptions corresponded very well to my own experiences in the monasteries in Bylakupe and elsewhere.

⁴⁰ Tib.: *shes brtson thos pa can gyi nyam chung gi kha stabs* | |
blun po nor rkyal khur ba'i dbang shed kyis bcom ste | |
chos mthun bkur sti'i bzhugs gral go log tu bsdebs nas | |
seng ge khyi yi g.yog tu 'gyur tshul 'di skyo ba | |.

Tibetan text and translation according to Lopez 2009: 68f. For the background of Dge 'dun chos 'phel's comment, see Lopez 2009: 5.

The talents of a humble scholar, seeking only knowledge
Are crushed by the tyranny of a fool, bent by the weight of his
wealth.

The proper order is upside down.

How sad, the lion made servant to the dog.

Part I

Context of the controversies

Chapter 1

Historical development

The reconstruction of an event or a series of events that might be called “historical” is of course problematic. The term suggests that we are concerned with incidents that *really* happened and that are – at least to some extent – independent of the respective perceiver. In actuality, however, historical descriptions are a highly selective process, where the credibility of one specific piece of information is weighted against that of another. A common strategy is to assume that reliability rises with the number of sources and their diversity (i.e., an event that is confirmed by two or more sources, ideally of *different* origins, is more likely to have actually happened than an event attested by a single source or sources of a common origin).

As for the present case, such an endeavour is first of all limited by the scarcity of information. A historiographical work that deals with the precise course of events is not known. Some information can be gained from the scattered remarks in various hagiographies (*rnam thar*), encomia, etc.¹ While these reports are often very vague themselves, one also has to be aware of the genre-immanent shortcomings when using such texts as historical sources in general. This means that, for example, the account of the Dge lugs monks’ attempt to kill Mi pham through sorcery and exorcism and the latter’s triumph over it, presented in a biography by one of his staunch followers, Mkhan po ‘Jigs med phun tshogs,² could be regarded

¹ Pettit 1999: 22 gives a short survey of the available accounts of Mi pham’s life, with regard to both traditional Tibetan *rnam thars* and accounts by Western scholars. He also provides a translation of one important biography of Mi pham, *Gangs ri’i khrod kyi smra ba’i seng ge gcig pu ‘jam mgon mi pham rin po che’i rnam thar snying po bsdus pa dang gsung rab kyi dkar chag snga ‘gyur bstan pa’i mdzes rgyan*, written by Mi pham’s main disciple Mkhan po Kun dpal (see Pettit 1999: 23ff.).

² See below, p.73.

as a precise record of a historical incident or – and I would say this is more credible for a Western academic audience³ – is to be seen as a quite typical element of this specific kind of literature, concerned with depicting the person under consideration as an ideal role model, rather than recording minute events in history. That said, one should not be misled into thinking that *rnam thars* do not contain historical elements. A similar problem arises with oral accounts, which are often closely related to their scriptural counterparts.⁴

The debates that erupted after Mi pham's composition of his *Nor bu ke ta ka* lasted for a period of almost thirty years and involved scholars from all over Tibet, who engaged in both personal and written exchanges with Mi pham. With regard to the personal encounters there is hardly any documentation. Some scanty remarks, however, can be found in the different *rnam thars*. Most importantly, a debate between Mi pham and a scholar of the New Translation (*Gsar ma*) tradition, 'Ja' pa Mdo sngags, is mentioned. It is said that the latter was critical of Mi pham's explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka* and hence a debate lasting several days developed, with Mi pham's teacher Dpal sprul acting as a referee.⁵ Referring mostly to Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's biography of Mi pham, Karma Phuntsho mentions personal debates with various other scholars, of which, however, further details are unknown.⁶ While this shows clearly that disputes were perceived as a central element in Mi pham's life, the content and historicity of the encounters mentioned remain uncertain.

³ Here, of course, the expectations of the audience matter: what a Western academic audience might regard as credible differs greatly from what a Tibetan traditional scholar or a non-academic reader might expect and accept.

⁴ Influence can occur in both ways, i.e., an oral account might be the base for a later textual record, or a written *rnam thar* inspires oral narratives about the person in question.

⁵ See Schuh 1973: XXXI and the episode concerned in Mkhan po Kun dpal's *rnam thar* in Pettit 1999: 30f.

⁶ See Phuntsho 2005: 53f. Referring to Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs' praise of Mi pham, *Kun mkhyen mi pham rgya mtsho la gsol ba 'debs tshul g.yul las rnam par rgyal ba'i rnga sgra*, Karma Phuntsho lists the following figures as debate partners of Mi pham: Mongolian Dge bshes Blo bzang phun tshogs, Bum gsar Dge bshes, Gung thang 'Jam pa'i dbyangs, Rnga ban Kun dga', Nor bu bstan 'dzin, and Khang dmar Rin chen (see also *Mi pham gsol 'debs* 105 and 109f.). Matthew Kapstein further reported a local story from 'Go log, according to which Mi pham engaged in a personal debate with the A mdo scholar 'Ba' mda' Dge legs rgya mtsho (1844–1904). Unlike the other accounts, this depicts Mi pham as being defeated in debate (see Kapstein 2001: 308, esp. n.21). According to yet another account, presented by the famous Rnying ma scholar Mkhas Btsun bzang po (and translated by Jeffrey Hopkins), Mi pham did not engage in personal debate with any other scholars apart from 'Ja' pa Mdo sngags: "Ja-ba Do-ngak was the only person who actually met in debate with Mi-pam-gya-tso." (Mi-pam-gya-tso 2006: 25).

As concerns the debates in written form, the available *rnam thars* provide, again, only very little information. Yet here we are in a better position, as the texts themselves can be used as a source. The colophons, as well as the introductory parts of the texts concerned, give details such as the date and place of the composition of a certain text, the text it argues against, its date of reception, etc. Certainly the authors differ in their perception of the quality of a certain work (usually arguing that their own writing is better than that of their opponents), but there seems to be no reason to question the factuality of the basic developments of the debates that can be reconstructed according to the works exchanged among the different parties of the debate.

As stated in the colophon of his work,⁷ Mi pham started to write his *Nor bu ke ta ka* on the first day of the seventh Tibetan month (*ston ra ba*) of the Earth-Tiger year and completed it on the thirteenth day of the same month, i.e., September 9, 1878.⁸ His work bears the full title *Shes rab kyi le'u'i tshig don go sla bar rnam par bshad pa nor bu ke ta ka* ("Nor bu ke ta ka: A Detailed Explanation for an Easy Comprehension of the Words and Meaning of the Chapter of Insight") and is thereby clearly disclosed as a commentary on the ninth chapter of the BCA. Mi pham points out that he had received explanations about the BCA from his master Dpal sprul and that he had also read all available Indian and the major Tibetan works on this topic.⁹ Also the *rnam thars* suggest that the content of his commentary is related to explanations of his master with whom Mi pham had studied the ninth chapter of the BCA over a period of five days.¹⁰ A place of composition

⁷ See *Nor bu ke ta ka* 94.5ff.

⁸ According to Schuh 1973: 115.

⁹ See *Nor bu ke ta ka* 94.5ff. For a commentary on Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*, see *Nor bu'i sgron me*, the work of his student Padma rnam rgyal, the fourth Zhe chen rgyal tshab.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Pettit 1999: 24. The issue of the relation between Mi pham's commentary and Dpal sprul's explanations has already been touched upon elsewhere (see Viehbeck 2009a: 4, n. 9). While Dpal sprul's explanations obviously influenced the writing of his disciples (sometimes probably even to the degree that their works might be seen as mere notes of the master's voice), there is no extensive written commentary by Dpal sprul. There is, however, a *sa bcad*, a detailed structural outline of the BCA, that is attributed to him (see Viehbeck 2005: 91–157, for this outline; this work also translates and investigates a rather short *sgom rim* text on the BCA that Dpal sprul had written). Assuming that this attribution is correct, it can thus be used as a criterion to determine the relationship between Dpal sprul's approach to the BCA and the ones proposed by his students. A comparison shows that Mkhan po Kun dpal's structure (see *Kun dpal 'grel pa* 1–21) follows rather strictly the *sa bcad* of Dpal sprul, while Mi pham deviates from this, not only with regard to the designation of the various chapters, but also – at least occasionally – in the way the BCA is structured. Surely, Mi pham's views on the BCA are heavily influenced by his master; his commentary, however, seems to be more than just a record of his teacher's words.

of Mi pham's commentary is not mentioned and remains unclear; we can, however, safely assume that it was composed somewhere in the wider area of Sde dge.¹¹

About ten years afterwards it was attacked with a critical letter, *Zab mo dbu ma'i gnad cung zad brjod pa Blo gsal dga' ba'i gtam* ("Advice that Pleases a Clear Mind: A Short Statement of the Essential Points of Profound Madhyamaka"),¹² written by Brag dkar Sprul sku Dpal ldan bstan 'dzin snyan grags (1866–1928), a Dge lugs scholar residing at Blo gsal gling college of 'Bras spungs, one of the three major Dge lugs monasteries in Central Tibet. According to its colophon, Brag dkar Sprul sku composed his work at 'Bras spungs at the age of twenty-three,¹³ so about 1888/9. This work seems to have reached Mi pham immediately since he responded to it in 1889. Mi pham's work is called *Brgal lan nyin byed snang ba* ("Illumination of the Sun: An Answer to an Objection")¹⁴ and addresses his opponent and his critical work by their full names.¹⁵ Mi pham wrote his reply "quickly in the break of practice sessions of ten days," starting on the fourth day of the fourth Tibetan month of the Earth-Ox year, and completing it on the thirteenth day of the month,¹⁶ i.e., June 11, 1889.¹⁷ Again, an exact location of composition is not mentioned, but in the colophon the following comment is found: "Also this [was accomplished by] a Rnying ma monk called Mi pham rnam rgyal who had slept a few years in the midst of solitary mountains. At that time he was residing at a mountain that was white in all directions, carrying a long and ragged mane."¹⁸ Here, sleeping is used as a synonym for

¹¹ In interviews with scholars of the local monasteries conducted in September 2009, different opinions were mooted in this regard. Rdzogs chen Rin po che Bstan 'dzin lung rtogs nyi ma (a scholar who also wrote an extensive history of the Rdzogs chen tradition, see *Rdzogs chen chos 'byung*) argued that a copy of the BCA, as a work belonging to the Sūtra portion of the Buddhist teaching, was only available at Rdzogs chen Monastery at the time Mi pham wrote his commentary, while the other monasteries of the Rnying ma school focused mainly on collections of tantric works. Mkhan po Padma rdo rje from Zhe chen Monastery thought that the *Nor bu ke ta ka* was composed somewhere in the Rdza chu kha valley, even though he was unsure about the precise location. According to Mkhan po Bzang stobs from 'Ju Me hor Monastery, Mi pham wrote his *Nor bu ke ta ka* at 'Ju Me hor Monastery, but the woodblocks used to print it were carved at Rdzogs chen.

¹² For bibliographical details, see *Blo gsal dga' ba'i gtam*.

¹³ Cf. *Blo gsal dga' ba'i gtam* 432.4.

¹⁴ For bibliographic details, see *Brgal lan nyin snang*.

¹⁵ See *Brgal lan nyin snang* 101.1f.

¹⁶ See *Brgal lan nyin snang* 188.5f.

¹⁷ According to Schuh 1973: 116.

¹⁸ *Brgal lan nyin snang* 188.4f.: 'di yang rnying ban mi pham rnam rgyal zhes bya ba lo shas dben pa'i ri sul na nyal zhing | skabs 'dir phyogs kyi mtha' gru dkar ba'i ri la gnas shing ral pa'i zar bu ring po dang ldan par gyur pa.

resting in meditation and Mi pham is obviously referring to a period of intensive religious practice in solitude. According to Schuh, Mi pham was staying in retreat at a place called Dkar mo stag tshang (“The White Tiger Nest”) during the years 1881–1893.¹⁹ This is a complex of caves in the Rong me valley located near, and affiliated with, Rdzong gsar Monastery, south of Sde dge. The time of composition, as well as Mi pham’s description of his abode – a white mountain, where he was abiding in retreat, his hair wild like a lion’s mane, – clearly point to this place.

Brag dkar Sprul sku further wrote a second letter against Mi pham, which developed as a by-product of the first and summarises its essential points.²⁰ It is entitled ‘*Jam dbyangs rnam rgyal gyi ‘dod tshul la klan ka bgyis pa zab mo’i gtam*’ (“Profound Advice: Criticising the Viewpoint of ‘Jam dbyangs rnam rgyal”).²¹ This was followed by a third work called *Mi pham rnam rgyal gyis rtsod pa’i yang lan log lta’i khong khrag ‘don pa’i skyug sman* (“Emetic that Brings out the Inner Blood of Wrong Views: A Further Answer to the Objections of Mi pham rnam rgyal”),²² a title that suggests that it contains harsh polemics against Mi pham. The colophons of neither of these latter responses mention a date or place of composition. It is likely that both of these treatises were composed at ‘Bras spungs, since at least Brag dkar Sprul sku’s last work was recorded by a monk from ‘Bras spungs.²³ This work mentions further that it was written “several years” (*lo du ma*) after Mi pham’s answer had been received.²⁴ In a later letter, directed at another opponent, Mi pham mentioned that he had received – among others – two letters from Lhasa, to which he did not reply.²⁵ It may well be that this refers to Brag dkar Sprul sku’s later two treatises.

In 1897, nineteen years after the composition of the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, Mi pham was further criticised by Dpa’ ris Blo bzang rab gsal, a Dge lugs scholar residing at the great monastery of Sku ‘bum in A mdo, the birth-place of Tsong kha pa, close to present-day Xining. Rab gsal started his dispute by sending Mi pham a short verse composition called *Rigs ‘phrul dpyid kyi pho nya* (“The Cuckoo: Magic for [Entering] Reasoning”).²⁶ The

¹⁹ Schuh 1973: XXXII.

²⁰ See *Skyug sman* 452.3.

²¹ For bibliographical details, see *Zab mo’i gtam*.

²² For bibliographical details, see *Skyug sman*.

²³ Cf. *Skyug sman* 742.1

²⁴ See *Skyug sman* 740.6.

²⁵ See *Rab lan* 193.3f.

²⁶ For bibliographical details, see *Pho nya*. The title is very condensed and its precise meaning open to interpretation. My reading is based on a line in the text itself, where Rab gsal is clearly referring to the title; see *Pho nya* 365.5: *rigs lam phyogs kyi ‘jug pa mang ‘phrul mtsho byung rol pa’i blo gros spros* | .

name certainly plays upon the function of the text: the Tibetan expression *dpyid kyi pho nya* (“messenger of the spring”) is commonly used as a poetic way of denoting a cuckoo bird (who announces the spring by its characteristic cry); here, however, the messenger reveals something else, namely the beginning of an extended debate. Rab gsal also made this clear at the end of his work, where he wrote that these verses were intended as a “mere preparation” (*sbyor ba tsam*) for the actual debate.²⁷ The colophon explicitly mentions Mi pham as the target of this letter. It was composed at the “Great Dharma Centre Sku ’bum byams pa gling” on the third day of the third Tibetan month of the Fire-Bird year (1897).²⁸ The actual criticism followed later in the same year and is entitled *’Jam dpal dbyangs kyi dgongs rgyan rigs pa’i gzi ’bar gdong lnga’i sgra dbyangs* (“The Lion’s Melody, Radiance of Reasoning, an Adornment of Mañjuśrī”).²⁹ Again, Mi pham’s *Nor bu ke ta ka* is pointed out as the target of its refutations. The work was also completed in Sku ’bum, on the fifth day of the ninth Tibetan month.³⁰ As Mi pham expounds in the introductory part of his answer to this criticism,³¹ he only received this text over five years later, in the twelfth month of the Water-Tiger year, thus at the beginning of the Gregorian year 1903. Again, explicit mention is made of Rab gsal³² and the work he had written. Mi pham explains further that he had also received three other critical letters: two from the direction of Lhasa (*lha ldan phyogs*) and one from Byang kha.³³ As already mentioned, the earlier may well refer to the two letters that Brag dkar Sprul sku had sent from Lhasa. The whereabouts of the letter from Byang kha, its composer, or its content, remain unknown. Mi pham did not respond to these three letters, since they “focused mainly on the scriptures and [contained] many lines of pseudo-reasoning.” He did, however, single out Rab gsal’s work as worth replying to, as it “investigates mainly

²⁷ See *Pho nya* 365.6.

²⁸ See *Pho nya* 365.6f.

²⁹ For bibliographical details, see *’Ju lan*.

³⁰ See *’Ju lan* 420.5ff.

³¹ See *Rab lan* 193.2f.

³² Even though Mi pham spells Rab gsal’s native area as Dpal ri instead of Dpa’ ris (see *Rab lan* 193.2).

³³ See *Rab lan* 193. 3. The designation “Byang kha” is rather problematic. Literally it translates as “The Northern District.” It could refer to an area in the Byang thang region (on this usage of Byang kha, see Vitali 2003: n. 4 and 5, and Bellezza 2010: n. 148), or, and I think this is more likely, it refers to a region in the Northern direction seen from Mi pham’s perspective. Thus, it might refer to a location in the A mdo province.

through reasoning.”³⁴ Mi pham finished his response, entitled *Gzhan gyis brtsad pa'i lan mdir bsdus pa rigs lam rab gsal de nyid snang byed* (“Illuminator of Suchness: A Path of Reasoning, a Short Answer to the Objections of Others”),³⁵ on the eighth day of the fourth Tibetan month of the Water-Rabbit year (1903), after eighteen days of writing during the breaks of his practice sessions, in an impaired state of health.³⁶ Although the title indicates brevity, the work stretches over 272 pages. Mi pham’s work reached Rab gsal quickly, on the eighth day of the seventh Tibetan month in the same year.³⁷ Rab gsal also wrote a polemical letter in reply to it, the *Shes ldan yid kyī gdung sel rigs lam ga bur chu rgyun* (“Camphor Stream: A Path of Reasoning that Eliminates the Mental Suffering of an Intelligent Person”)³⁸ dated the third day of the twelfth Tibetan month of Water-Rabbit year, thus at the beginning of 1904, according to the Gregorian calculation. According to its colophon, it was composed in Dpal ldan bshad sgrub gling, a debate college of Sku ’bum. Mi pham confirmed the reception of this work, together with two verses by Rab gsal and a present of silk, in the Wood-Snake year (1905). His short note was composed in the same year and accompanied by presents of silk, the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* and other *sūtras*. A precise date and location are not specified.³⁹ This mutual exchange of presents, as well as the often amicable tone of the disputes, suggests a mutual attitude of general respect and appreciation. Mi pham further wrote an actual answer to the criticism made by Rab gsal. This short text has no proper title; the date and place of composition are not mentioned.⁴⁰ With this, the dispute between Mi pham and Rab gsal comes to an end, a debate that, in view of the number of texts exchanged directly between two opponents, is most likely the most extended example for this type of debate in the history of Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion in the twentieth century.

Another critical work, called ‘Ju mi pham ‘jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho’i rtsod yig gi lan blo dman snying gi gdung sel ga bur thig pa’i spun zla

³⁴ See Rab lan 193.3–194.1: *snga ma rnams lung tsam gtso bor byas shing rigs pa ltar snang ba mang bas re zhiḡ lan gyi spros pa dgos pa med par mthong nas ma byas la | de dag gi nang na rab gsal gyi rtsod lan ‘di phal cher rigs pas dpyad pa byas shing gzhan gyi drod nyul ba tsam du mthong nas ‘di la bsten te chags sdang sogs rkyen du mi ‘gyur bar nyams mtshar tsam du lan cung zad brjod na [...]*.

³⁵ For bibliographical details, see Rab lan.

³⁶ See Rab lan 463.2ff.

³⁷ See Ga bur chu rgyun 430.6.

³⁸ For bibliographical details, see Ga bur chu rgyun.

³⁹ Rab gsal’s two verses, as well as Mi pham’s confirmatory note, are contained in Mi pham’s *Gsung ’bum* as an appendix to his Rab lan; see Rab lan 463.5ff.

⁴⁰ This text is also appended to Mi pham’s Rab lan (pp. 464.4ff.). In the following, we refer to it as *Yang lan*.

("Brotherly Companion, a Drop of Camphor that Eliminates the Cardiac Suffering of a Person of Little Intelligence: An Answer to the Critical Letter of 'Ju Mi pham 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho"),⁴¹ was written by Ldan ma Blo bzang chos dbyings (1890–1949), who – just like Brag dkar Sprul sku – was associated with 'Bras spungs monastery in Central Tibet. A date of composition of this text is not mentioned, and Mi pham did not write an answer to it. If the life dates mentioned in Blo bzang chos dbyings' short biography⁴² are correct, he probably wrote his criticism only at the end of Mi pham's life, or even after his death (1912). The text itself mentions the debate between Mi pham and Brag dkar Sprul sku and also Mi pham's *Brgal lan nyin byed snang ba*,⁴³ but not the debate between Mi pham and Blo bzang rab gsal. Its title, however, clearly alludes to Rab gsal's second critique. Whereas the title of Rab gsal's letter uses the metaphor of a *stream* of camphor that can eliminate the *mental* suffering of an *intelligent* person, Blo bzang chos dbyings presents his work as a *drop* of camphor that removes *cardiac* suffering of a *dull* person. One can therefore safely assume that he had also knowledge of Rab gsal's works. Blo bzang chos dbyings also authored another polemical text on key points of Madhyamaka philosophy, titled *Brgal lan legs pa'i gtam 'byed*.⁴⁴ While it is concerned with similar issues as were the earlier debates, it seems to be addressed to Go rams pa and his followers, rather than to Mi pham.⁴⁵

In his last letter to Mi pham, Rab gsal mentioned that he had seen another critical work addressed to Mi pham, called *Rgol ngan 'joms pa'i rdo rje pha lam*.⁴⁶ Apart from the name and a short remark about its erudition, no further information is provided. Mi pham also seems to have taken no special note of this work.

In the more than thirty years from the beginning of the debates with Mi pham's composition of the *Nor bu ke ta ka* and their end with Mi pham's

⁴¹ For bibliographical details, see *Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla*.

⁴² See earlier, p.13.

⁴³ See *Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla*: 131.

⁴⁴ For bibliographical details, see *Legs pa'i gtam 'byed*.

⁴⁵ Karma Phuntsho's exposition (Phuntsho 2005: 53, which in turn refers to the earlier remarks of Smith 2001: 328) seems to suggest that both of Blo bzang chos dbyings's letters were written to refute Mi pham. While such can be indeed confirmed for the *Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla* (see p. 131.14ff.), a cursory review of the *Legs pa'i gtam 'byed* did not reveal any direct reference to Mi pham, but to Go rams pa and his followers (see ff. 2a3f. and 29a1).

⁴⁶ See *Ga bur chu rgyun* 428.5f. Since Rab gsal is located north of Mi pham, it could be that it was this letter Mi pham was referring to when he mentioned another letter from "The Northern Region" (Byang kha). Without any further information, however, this is highly speculative.



Figure 1.1: Geographical extension of the controversies provoked by Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*. Source of original map: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Historic_Tibet_Map.png [accessed August 06, 2011] Arrows indicate origin and target of a text. Their length signifies variation in text size; the arrows are, however, not to scale to the precise relations. Details of the respective texts are given in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Texts exchanged in the controversies

No.	Author	Text	Location	Year
1	Mi pham	<i>Nor bu ke ta ka</i>	?	1878
2	Brag dkar Sprul sku	<i>Blo gsal dga' ba'i gtam</i>	'Bras spungs	1888/9
4	Brag dkar Sprul sku	<i>Zab mo'i gtam</i>	'Bras spungs ^(?)	?
5	Brag dkar Sprul sku	<i>Skyug sman</i>	'Bras spungs ^(?)	?
6	Rab gsal	<i>Pho nya</i>	Sku 'bum	1897
7	Rab gsal	<i>'Ju lan</i>	Sku 'bum	1897
8	Mi pham	<i>Rab lan</i>	?	1903
9	Rab gsal	<i>Ga bur chu rgyun</i>	Sku 'bum	1904
10	Mi pham	<i>Yang lan</i>	?	1905 ^(?)
11	Blo bzang chos dbyings	<i>Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla</i>	'Bras spungs	?

death,⁴⁷ several scholars from various institutions were affected. Most important for the present investigation are the exchanges in textual form, as they allow for a detailed reconstruction of the development of the debates. Altogether eleven proper letters or treatises⁴⁸ and two short notes give ample witness of the controversies. Surely, more works must have been involved. Mi pham mentioned another letter from Byang kha, Rab gsal a work named *Rgol ngan 'joms pa'i rdo rje pha lam* of which we have no further information.⁴⁹ However, while the one or other letter may have been written against Mi pham by a little-known author whose works remained unnoticed, we can assume that the majority of the textual material is known and extant today. As these texts show, the present debate with its involvement of (at least) three major scholastic centres in three different cultural regions must be seen as a pan-Tibetan issue. Mi pham, as the most important philosophical exponent of his tradition in recent times, represents the various scholastic institutions of the Rnying ma school, that began to flourish in the nineteenth century in the area of Sde dge, the cultural heart of Kham province. All three of his opponents, mentioned above, belonged to the Dge lugs school. The educational home of Brag dkar Sprul sku and Blo bzang chos dbyings is 'Bras spungs, one of the three great monastic centres of the Dge lugs school in Central Tibet. Blo bzang rab gsal, on the other hand, was located in Sku 'bum, one of the most important institutions of the Dge lugs school in A mdo. For their debate, remarkable distances had to be covered. While a personal encounter was therefore – at least in many cases – out of question, an exchange of texts could be facilitated through the employment of messengers, who embarked on the tedious journey, instead of their principals. The medium of *dgag lan* texts thus offered a platform for negotiating philosophy on a highly interregional level, as illustrated on the map in fig. 1.1.

⁴⁷ This is an end only in terms of a direct exchange between Mi pham and his opponents. The issues that were raised in those debates had considerable influence on later disputes and continue to be discussed to the present day, as will be shown in the following chapter.

⁴⁸ Note that I did not distinguish between “letters” and “treatises” in my descriptions. In a way, the works under consideration are both: they are intended as a personal reply to a specific text of the opponent. On the other hand, their sheer size (some of them contain hundreds of pages) makes them appear to be “treatises” rather than “letters.”

⁴⁹ As speculated earlier, it is possible that the letter Mi pham mentioned is identical with the *Rgol ngan 'joms pa'i rdo rje pha lam*.

Chapter 2

Literary and socio-historical background

The debates between Mi pham and his Dge lugs opponents did not emerge upon a blank slate. They occurred in a specific historical setting and can be viewed as a product of the interplay of various (religious, sociological, political, etc.) factors, and also the debates had certain historical repercussions. This *horizontal* perspective of investigating the socio-historical background of the debates, and, in particular, the question of how religio-political issues may have played a role in the debates, is the topic of the second part of this chapter.

Apart from that, the debates can also be situated in a *vertical* line of development, as an example of a specific type of discourse and a literary genre they are part of. Rooted in the rich Indian tradition of religious-philosophical disputation, the phenomenon of debating in Tibet is an integral element of monastic scholarship as it developed on the plateau. In the course of monastic education, specific types of debates are utilised as a heuristic method that facilitates a student's entrance into the intricacies of Buddhist philosophical thought.¹ Beyond the frame of everyday monastic courtyard debating, debates between different factions and schools serve not only as a pedagogical means, but often exhibit a more antagonistic nature.² While Tibetan history is full of accounts of – at times very fierce – personal disputations, there are no records informing us about the exact

¹ See Dreyfus 2003b for a detailed description of the role of debate in the monastic education system.

² This does not imply that the debates in the courtyard of monastic institutions are always free from a sense of rivalry. In every debate, competitiveness and the notion of winning and losing are of importance, but it makes a difference as to whether a debate is

development of these. As opponents were not always proximate in terms of space and time, debates also materialised in the form of polemical texts, composed to refute a (living or dead) opponent, and came to form an independent genre of Tibetan literature. It is as examples of this specific type of literature and debate that the controversies around Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* are analysed in this study. To place the debates in the line of the general development of the genre of which they are one of the most important manifestations is the task of the first part of the present chapter. In the process, we will also investigate the connections to earlier disputes that are made in the course of the debates, and the repercussions of these debates on later controversies.

The controversies in the history of *dgag lan* debate

“Polemics” as a literary genre

The categorisation of Tibetan literature as “polemical” entails some ambiguities. Donald Lopez, in his seminal article about this very genre of literature, suggested “polemics” as the translation of the Tibetan term *dgag lan*.³ Of course, as José Cabezón has pointed out, there are various terms in Tibetan that denote a type of literature that might be called “polemical”:⁴

The indigenous Tibetan nomenclature used to designate a literary work as polemical is twofold: (a) terms that are used to refer to works that bring forth charges (of inconsistencies, fallacies, etc.) against opponents, and that therefore initiate polemical exchanges, and (b) terms that are used to refer to works that respond to the charges made by others. As examples of the former – what we might call the accusatorial moment that initiates a polemical exchange – we find terms like “debate/dispute/argument” (*rtsod pa*), “disputational document or record” (*rtsod yig*), “refutation” (*dgag pa*), “record of a refutation” (*dgag yig*) “adversarial speech” (*rgol ngag*), and “critique/repudiation” (*sun 'byin*). As examples of the latter

part of a daily routine, where one argues for hours with members of the same monastic community who basically share the same views, or whether one enters a debate on a specific occasion with an opponent who belongs to another religious order, and thus has a very different viewpoint.

³ Lopez 1996: 218; cf. p. 222, n.2 for the rationale behind the translation “polemics,” contrasted with the meaning of “apologetics.”

⁴ Cabezón & Dargay 2007: 12.

terms – the terms used to designate the responsorial moments in polemical exchanges – we find words like “response to a dispute/argument” (*rtsod lan*), “countering/overturning an argument” (*rtsod spong*, *rtsod bzlog*), “response to a refutation” (*dgag lan*, honorific *gsung lan*), and “rebuttal” (*brgal lan*).

The latter type of polemical literature – the responsorial moment of a polemical exchange – can be clearly defined. It usually focuses on one specific text that is regarded as an objection to one’s own position. As an answer to these objections, this type of literature then tries to disprove the objections of the other party. As its main aim is the attempt to ward off the opponent’s attack, the nature of this latter type of literature is *entirely* polemical.⁵

More ambiguous, however, is the determination of the first kind of this literature – the initiating moment of a debate. The goal of a text might be to directly and explicitly criticise certain positions of another party and thus start a polemical interchange. More often, though, critical elements appear in a certain text whose overall agenda is a different one. Despite the general non-polemical nature of the text, an opponent might focus on the polemical elements and regard the whole text as a “disputational document” (*rtsod yig*) that criticises his own positions, and might see himself forced to provide a “response to the objections” (*rtsod lan*). Thus, what is seen as the initiating moment of a debate depends on the viewpoint of the reader or recipient. This ambiguity can also be perceived in the case of Mi pham and his opponents: although it contains some polemical elements, Mi pham clearly marked his *Nor bu ke ta ka* as a commentary (*rnam bshad/vyākhyā*) to the BCA, and, as such, it can hardly be seen primarily as a “disputational document.”⁶ From his point of view, a debate was initiated by the Dge lugs scholars who criticised his commentary through var-

⁵ Disproving the opponent might also make it necessary to restate one’s own position and thereby also help to sharpen a certain point of view, but the main aim of this literature is generally not the – pedagogically easily approachable – exposition of a certain doctrinal system, as it is, for example, for other genres, such as doxographical texts or “stages of the doctrine” (*bstan rim*) literature.

⁶ The inclusion of polemical elements in a commentary is not surprising at all. Rather, as Vasubandhu laid out in his *Vyākhyāyukti* – a standard work for exegetical practice, commonly referred to also by later Tibetan commentators – the polemical format is one of the five aspects a good commentary should pay attention to. In relation to the text it comments on, a commentary has to clarify: 1) intention (*dgos pa/prayojana*), 2) summarised meaning (*bsdus pa’i don/piṇḍārtha*), 3) meaning of the words (*tshig don/padārtha*), 4) connections (*mtshams sbyor/anusandhi*), 5) response to objections (*brgal lan/codyaparihāra*); see Verhagen 2005: 574f.

ious *rtsod yig*, which again led to Mi pham's answers to these objections.⁷ The view changes when the events are described from the viewpoint of Mi pham's opponents. Here, Mi pham is seen as the aggressor who was criticising doctrines of the Dge lugs school with his *Nor bu ke ta ka*, criticism to which the Dge lugs scholars were then responding.⁸

Not only does this suggest that the role of the aggressor in a debate is an unpopular one, but it further makes clear that the genre-determination of a certain text might be unclear: a text might be composed, for example, primarily in the form of a commentary, but could nevertheless function also as a polemical text.⁹

⁷ This view is clearly expressed in the way Mi pham relates to texts of his opponents. In the response that he sent to Brag dkar Sprul sku, Mi pham explains that he composed the work as "an answer to the people who say that the commentary on the chapter of insight of the BCA that I (i.e., Mi pham) have written is incorrect" (*spyod 'jug shes rab le'u'i 'grel pa bdag gis bris pa de la mi 'thead par smra ba'i lan*), cf. *Brgal lan nyin snang* 98.1–2. A similar passage is also found in the response to Blo bzang rab gsal: "Now, in the present days, someone from Dpal ri [sic], called Blo bzang rab gsal, who is known as the lord of the logicians, proclaimed a refutation of the words and the meaning of the *Sher 'grel ke ta ka*" (*'dir deng sang gi skabs na rigs pa smra ba'i dbang phyug tu grags pa dpal ri pa blo bzang rab gsal zhes bya bas | sher 'grel ke ta ka'i tshig dang don la dgag pa brjod pa*); cf. *Rab lan* 193.1–2. Mi pham implies that the debate was started by Rab gsal who criticised Mi pham's commentary in the work he sent, a text that Mi pham continually refers to as "*rtsod yig*," the initiatory moment of a debate.

⁸ This perception is made explicit in Ldan ma Blo bzang chos dbyings' criticism of Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* when he describes the development of the earlier controversies. It was Mi pham who first criticised the thought (*thugs bzhed*) of Tsong kha pa in the form of "sarcastic refutations" (*zur za'i dgag pa*). These refutations were then responded to by Brag dkar Sprul sku; cf. *Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla* 131.14–19. Here, Mi pham is depicted as the aggressor, while the Dge lugs scholars appear merely as the defenders of their master Tsong kha pa. This view of the events is also suggested by the choice of the titles used for the works of the Dge lugs scholars. Blo bzang chos dbyings' text, for example, is described as "an answer to the disputational document (*rtsod yig*) of 'Ju Mi pham 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho" (*'ju mi pham 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho'i rtsod yig gi lan*); cf. *Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla* 128.1.

⁹ Another famous example for such a double function is Go rams pa's *Lta ba ngan sel*. Formally composed as a commentary on difficult points (*dka' 'grel/pañjikā*) of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Go ram pa's work offers considerable criticism of traditional Dge lugs views. To Dge lugs scholars such as Rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, it appeared as "a denigration of Lord Tsong kha pa that is beyond measure" (*rje tsong kha pa la skur ba dpag tu med pa*), that has the character of a "pseudo-refutation" (*dgag pa ltar snang*); cf. *Go lan* 354.15–17. As such, Go rams pa's work was seen as an attack on the Dge lugs tradition, against which Rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan had to defend his tradition by writing a response, his famous *Go lan*.

The ambiguity with regard to the initiating moment of a controversy may be the reason that TBRC in its classification of texts as "polemic" is focused more on the responsorial moment of controversies, also represented in its choice of the name variants for "polemic":

Polemical literature in Tibet

An extended history of the genre of polemical literature remains to be written, but José Cabezón, in the introduction to his translation of Go rams pa's *Lta ba'i shan 'byed*, provides us with an "impressionistic" overview of this literature as it developed in Tibet. In the following, I will highlight some cornerstones of this development in order to understand the place of the disputes around Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* in the line of polemical literature and debate.¹⁰

Surveying polemical literature as a whole, three general topics that served as focal points of discussion can be distinguished: practices, texts, and doctrines. When Buddhism took hold in Tibet, controversies about the right *practice* of religion arose not only between established practices, often associated with the Bon tradition, and the Buddhist newcomers, but also within the Buddhist tradition itself. Cabezón mentions the ordinance (*bka' shog*) of the Pu hrangs-king Ye shes 'od (late tenth, early eleventh centuries) as what could probably be called "the earliest polemical document in the history of Tibetan literature."¹¹ The short work expresses a concern about the way Buddhism is practiced by tantrikas (*sngags pa*) in rural areas, and condemns certain practices in ritual, such as sex, killing, human sacrifice, etc. The *Bka' chems ka khol ma*, which was discovered by Atiśa (b. 972/982), shares these worries about the proper practice of Buddhism, but also addresses the issue of proper belief, that is, of Buddhist doctrine. In the following centuries, doctrines were to become the focus of the majority of controversies, which does not mean that the question of right practice was completely off the agenda. Even six centuries after the composition of Ye shes 'od's text, the Rnying ma scholar Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624) regarded the work as a criticism of the practices of his own school and felt inspired to respond to it. The most famous controversy about proper practice in the last few centuries developed only recently, in the 1970s, and is still very much a hot topic, namely the issue of the prac-

brgal lan, *dgag lan* and *rtsod lan* (c.f. http://www.tbrc.org/#library_topic_Object-T102 [accessed February 11, 2011]).

¹⁰ Cf. Cabezón & Dargyay 2007: 18ff. Although different aspects are emphasised, my description follows, to a large extent, the elaborations of Cabezón.

Reference must also be made to Karma Phuntsho's embedding of the debates. Karma Phuntsho is interested in the debates between Mi pham and the Dge lugs pa insofar as they relate to Madhyamaka, and situates them among the more general developments of Madhyamaka thought in India and Tibet, a line of development he traces back to pre-Nāgārjunian times; cf. Phuntsho 2005: 40–54.

¹¹ Cabezón & Dargyay 2007: 21. For a translation of this ordinance, see Karmay 2003.

tice of the Dge lugs Dharma protector (*chos skyong, srung ma*) Rdo rje shugs ldan.¹²

After Ye shes 'od, it was the celebrated translator Rin chen bzang po (958–1055), who, being under the patronage of the former, initiated the criticism of tantric *texts*. In his own ordinance, Pho brang Zhi ba 'od (second half of the eleventh century), the grand nephew of Ye shes 'od, claims that many of the texts that were central to the Rnying ma tradition were not authentic, meaning that they were not translations from texts originating from India.¹³ This accusation of the apocryphal nature of the Rnying ma tantras eventually led to their exclusion from the Buddhist canon that was compiled by Bu ston (1290–1364).¹⁴ The question of authenticity was also carried forward to other tantric traditions such as the Hevajra-tantra, central to the Sa skya tradition, as well as to the overall body of Gter ma literature, and, in turn, evoked the expected disapproval from their followers, which manifested itself in the production of polemical literature by both sides.

In the debates about Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*, questions about the acceptance of practices and general bodies of texts play a minor role; rather, their focus is on specific *doctrines*, a topic that became more important with the sophistication and differentiation of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but that was also crucial to its very beginnings. Even though its exact development (and some say even its historicity in general) is left obscure, the so-called "Great Debate" – the debate that allegedly was held at the monastic centre of Bsam yas at the end of the eighth century – forms a seminal moment in the way the historical development of doctrinal controversies in Tibet is imagined.¹⁵ While the Tibetan sources report a "classical" debate between two parties, headed by a judge, the Chinese sources from Dunhuang describe, rather, a kind of interrogation, polemical questions that were put to one party, and its subsequent replies. Both sources, however, agree on the subject matter of the debate: the question about which way to awakening is preferable, the "gradualist" (*rim gyis pa*) way that emphasises the practice of the six *pāramitās* and the soteriological value of certain concepts such as compassion, or the "simultaneist" (*cig car ba*) way that views

¹² For the background of this controversy and its development, see Dreyfus 1998 and Brück 2001.

¹³ An edition and translation of this work is provided in Karmay 1980.

¹⁴ Dates according to TBRC, http://www.tbrc.org/#library_person_Object-P155 [accessed February 11, 2011].

¹⁵ The standard source for a detailed discussion of the development, background, and content of this controversy is Seyfort Ruegg 1989a.

any conceptual state of mind as an obscuration on the path to buddhahood. The respective views were represented by the Indian scholar Kamalaśīla on the one side and the Chinese Ch'an master Hwa shang Mahāyāna on the other. In this constellation, it is clear that the two masters not only stood for their individual views, but for a more Indian or a more Chinese implementation of Buddhism in Tibet in general. Most of the Tibetan sources inform us about the victory of Kamalaśīla and a subsequent decree of Khri srong lde btsan, the judge of the debates and ruler of Tibet, which established the view of Nāgārjuna and the practice of the six *pāramitās* as the proper system for Buddhism under his reign. Thus, the Indian interpretation of Buddhism in Tibet was enforced, while the Chinese tradition and its representative Hwa shang Mahāyāna were banned from the country. Leaving questions of historical accuracy aside, it was this image of the debates that was most influential in the remembrance of later Tibetan generations. In the following centuries, Hwa shang Mahāyāna became the archetype of an erring and allegedly losing opponent, and various scholars accused their opponents of adhering to a "Hwa shang view" (*hwa shang gi lta ba*), a view that was deemed to be nihilistic.¹⁶ The idea of a possible presence of such a wrong view is also reflected in the interpretation of the story of "Hwa shang's lost shoe." It is said that the defeated Hwa shang left behind one shoe when he left the debate arena, which in turn was seen as an omen that proponents of his view would still be present – left over – or come back to Tibet in later times.¹⁷ In the present debates, too, this topic resonates strongly, as Mi pham is accused repeatedly by his Dge lugs opponents that he adheres to a Hwa shang type of view.

While the beginning of the "later diffusion" (*phyi dar*) was marked by questions about proper practice and texts that were discussed by the rulers and their followers in West Tibet, soon a shift of interests evolved. With Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab's establishment of Gsang phu Monastery in 1073 in Central Tibet, the foundation was laid for a more detailed commitment to Buddhist philosophy and the reassessment of its doctrines. Famous for his criticism of Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka and innovations in Pramāṇa theory is Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109–69),¹⁸ an early abbot of Gsang

¹⁶ According to Cabezón, an analogous development can be observed for Kamalaśīla (Cabezón & Dargyay 2007: 21): "[...] just as Hwa shang becomes the paradigmatic 'other,' Kamalaśīla becomes in some ways the paradigmatic defender of the faith [...]." As such, Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākramas* serve to a certain extent as role models for later polemical literature.

¹⁷ On the symbolism connected with Hwa shang's shoe, see Lopez 1996: 223, n.5.

¹⁸ For an example of his criticism, see his *Dbu ma shar gsum*, edited by Helmut Tauscher (Tauscher 1999).

phu, who was criticised by later scholars for his stance. Sa skya Paṇḍita's (1182–1251) *Tshad ma rig gter*, for example, can be seen as such a criticism. In Sa Paṇ's other works, such as his work on the three vows, the *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, too, the polemical element is very much present. His criticism of the Mahāmudrā tradition of the Bka' brgyud school is eminent, but also the disagreement on the subject of the three vows between him and his contemporary 'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217), the founder of the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud sect.¹⁹

In the fourteenth century, two of the most prominent figures step onto the stage of polemical exchange, prominent not so much because of their own polemical verve, but rather, as Cabezón rightly notices, for being “the object of others’ polemics.”²⁰ The first, Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361), the father of the Jo nang tradition, is known for his interpretation of emptiness as “empty of what is other” (*gzhan stong*), which established an – often seemingly irreconcilable – division among Tibetan Mādhyamikas into followers of the *rang stong* or *gzhan stong* traditions, respectively. The second, Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419), is probably the most influential of all Tibetan philosophers. His approach is generally distinguished by the rigorous employment of logic, even for such lofty subjects as the determination of the absolute (*don dam/paramārtha*), an approach that was preserved and refined by his immediate disciples, such as Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen (1364–1432) and Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438), and later scholars of the Dga' ldan (later Dge lugs) tradition that he founded.

Dol po pa was criticised by Sa skya masters, such as Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367–1450), Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros (1349–1412), and Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–89). Also Tsong kha pa, who was a student of Red mda' ba, is known to have refuted Dol po pa, a criticism that – with the growth of power in the Dge lugs tradition – only became stronger in the subsequent generations of scholars, and can be seen as a contributing factor that led to the conversion of Jo nang monasteries into Dge lugs institutions and the ban of Jo nang texts under the rule of the fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), a fate that the Jo nang pas shared with the Bka' brgyud tradition.²¹

¹⁹ This is reflected in the later commentarial literature of 'Jig rten mgon po's central work on the three-vow theory, the *Dgongs gcig*; see, e.g., Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grag pa's commentary *Dgongs gcig dka' 'grel mun sel sgron me* (for an edition and translation, see Viehbeck 2009b).

²⁰ Cabezón & Dargyay 2007: 30.

²¹ It is difficult to determine the exact relation between philosophical dispute and po-

As much as Tsong kha pa's innovations were celebrated in his own surroundings, they were objected to by scholars of other traditions, the Sa skya school in particular. This, in turn, led to the expected counteractions and the production of a considerable corpus of polemical literature between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. As for the most famous critics of Tsong kha pa, Stag tshang lo tsā ba (b. 1405), Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507), Go rams pa, and the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–54) must be mentioned. Stag tshang's criticism was then objected to by the First Paṇ chen bla ma Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662), 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa (1570–1662), and Phur lcog Ngag dbang byams pa (1682–1762). Rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1469–1544/6), the composer of the *yig cha* of the Se ra byes college, responded to the other three critics of Tsong kha pa mentioned, Shākya mchog ldan, Go rams pa, and Mi bskyod rdo rje.²² Responses to Go rams pa were further written by 'Jam dbyangs dga' ba'i blo gros (1429–1503) and Lcang lung Paṇḍita (1770–1845). The philosophical controversy between the Dge lugs tradition and – mainly – scholars of the Sa skya school was not followed by a large-scale confinement of their tradition, as was the case for the Jo nang school, but individual authors, such as Go rams pa and Shākya mchog ldan, were suppressed under the rule of the Dga' ldan pho brang.

The nineteenth century was marked by the controversies between Mi pham and several scholars, mainly from the Dge lugs tradition, events whose exact developments have already been discussed in the last chapter. Many of the doctrinal and hermeneutical issues that were discussed for centuries by earlier scholars surface here again, and add to a general divide between the Dge lugs school and non-Dge lugs traditions in scholastic matters.

Some centuries later, the Dge lugs stance of Madhyamaka was even criticised from inside the Dge lugs tradition, when the famous A mdo libertine Dge 'dun chos 'phel (1903–1951) passed down his *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*.²³ Dge 'dun chos 'phel's work was deemed close to views associated

litical persecution. It may well be that the earlier disputes between Dge lugs and Jo nang scholars established the other party in each case as *paradigmatic other* and that, in this way, the debates about doctrinal issues might have paved the way for the later events.

²² Rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan's responses are available in a recent compilation that gathers all three texts into a single volume, cf. *Gsung lan shā lan go lan*.

²³ There is some ambiguity regarding the date of composition of the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* and its authenticity. Its colophon reports that it was composed by Dge 'dun chos 'phel's student Zla ba bzang po after the death of his master in the twelfth Tibetan month of the Iron Hare year, so at the beginning of the year 1952 according to Gregorian calculation. The Rnying ma master Bdud 'joms Rin po che is stated to have been the sponsor of the

with the Rnying ma tradition and viciously rejected among orthodox Dge lugs circles, for example, by Dze smad Rin po che (1927–96) and his former teacher Rdo sbis Dge bshes Shes rab rgya mtsho (1884–1968), which again led to further defending and attacking of the different positions.²⁴

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the corpus of polemical literature expanded rapidly, making it difficult to keep track of all its developments. In recent times, polemical discourse has also discovered Tibetan-language periodicals, as well as the internet, as suitable media.²⁵

In the current state of research on polemical literature, evaluating its overall development appears a very bold and speculative venture. Nevertheless, I will dare to make a few – tentative – remarks in this regard. Reviewing the corpus of literature that the TBRC database lists under the rubric “polemic,” and comparing it with the dates of the individual works or the dates of their authors, at least gives us an idea of the development

undertaking. In contrast, Bla chung a pho, a friend of Dge 'dun chos 'phel, mentions that blocks of the *Klu sgrub dongs rgyan* had been ordered by the Tibetan minister Ka shod pa prior to Dge 'dun cho 'phel's death. Scholars are also divided about the question of the authenticity of the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*. Some assert that it is an original work of Dge 'dun chos 'phel, while others regard it as highly corrupted by Rnying ma ideas, the latter opinion being prominent among orthodox Dge lugs circles. For a brief discussion of these issues, see Lopez 2006: 116–120. In this volume, Lopez also offers an excellent translation of the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*.

²⁴ For an overview of Dge 'dun chos 'phel's critics, see Lopez 2006: 230–244. Thub bstan blo gros' *Ddag lan mun sel sgron me* may serve as an example for defending Dge 'dun chos 'phel. According to the TBRC database, this work refutes attacks on the Madhyamaka writings of Mi pham and Dge 'dun chos 'phel; cf. TBRC, http://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W25117 [accessed February 13, 2011]. It was attacked later by Blo bzang chos grags in his *Ddag lan mun sel sgron me la rnam par dpyad pa log rtog nyes rdul sprug pa'i rnga yab*; see *Rnga yab*.

²⁵ Cabezón mentions different examples from the journal *Jangzhon*. Another example would be a debate amongst Dge lugs and Rnying ma scholars about the relation between the view of Hwa shang and the view of the Rnying ma tradition, which erupted recently and is still evolving. The position of the Rnying ma scholars is laid out in two texts, *Rnying mas hwa shang gi lta ba rgyun skyong byas yod med skor la dpyad pa* by Thub bstan nyi ma (2002) and *Rtlog grol bshad pa'i sgra dbyangs la dpyad pa phyogs zhen dri ma 'khrud pa'i a ru ra* by Go jo Bkra shis rdo rje (2004), published in the magazine *Padma'i rang mdangs* in 2002 and 2004, respectively. One example of the Dge lugs counterposition is Yon tan rgya mtsho's *Byis pa'i lab rdol 'joms byed rtog grol bzhad pa'i sgra dbyangs*, published in *Cang shes rmig sgra* 4/5 (2002/2003). Much of my – at present very limited – knowledge of this controversy is based on communication with Yon tan rgya mtsho of Se ra byes Monastery, Bylakupe, one of the Dge lugs scholars involved in this debate.

A particular popular portal, also for the exchange of polemics, among the younger generation of Tibetan scholars is Kabhda, cf. <http://www.khabdha.org> [accessed February 13, 2011].

of the genre in terms of quantity.²⁶ TBRC's list hardly contains any examples of polemical literature before the end of the fourteenth century, which seems to imply that there were only a few works of this genre composed in this period, or that existing works were lost, or, probably, both. The situation changes clearly with the fifteenth century, where several works are listed. The figures go down for the sixteenth century and remain stable for the following period, including the eighteenth century. Then, the numbers rise again in the nineteenth century, a development that culminates in the twentieth century with an enormous production of polemical literature.

How can this development be interpreted? Two points seem significant: the rise of polemical literature in the fifteenth century, and its enormous growth, starting with the nineteenth century. In both periods, major conflicts were taking place – the controversy between Sa skya and Dge lugs scholars in the fifteenth century, and the controversy between Dge lugs scholars and Mi pham in the nineteenth century – and it seems plausible to think of these debates as initiating moments that entailed subsequent controversies, thus leading to the growth of polemical literature. Such an explanation can, of course, only be applied to a part of the literature and – most importantly – does not concern the beginning of a controversy.²⁷ Exploring the conditions for the start of a debate remains the task of further research; in the case of the debates on Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*, these conditions will be dealt with in the second part of the present chapter.

In terms of content and character, it may be useful to view the overall development of polemical literature as a continuous process of differentiation that evolves from the coarser to the more subtle: from debates about the right tradition (Bsam yas) and religion (*chos* vs. *bon*) in the first propagation (*snga dar*), through questions about the right practice (critique of

²⁶ For a list of these works, see http://www.tbrc.org/#library_topic_Object-T102 [accessed February 14, 2011]. Some features of this list must be remarked upon: first, as noted above (p.42), it includes only works that have a clearly polemical character, typically the responsive moment of a controversy, while works that are only partly polemical, such as commentaries, are not included. Second, TBRC's list is certainly not complete, and the paucity of early works of the genre might simply be the result of the loss of these works. Furthermore, one has to consider that, in many cases, TBRC gives only the life dates of the author, but not the date of composition of the respective work. In these cases, only a likely period of composition can be estimated. Scholars of polemical texts often composed several polemical treatises. The inclusion of a single productive polemicist in the TBRC database then changes the picture of an entire century.

²⁷ A closer look at the individual texts of TBRC's list indeed confirms that a large part of polemical literature is connected in one way or another to earlier disputes, but, especially in the twentieth century, fresh disputes, such as the Rdor rje shugs ldan controversy, have arisen as well.

māntrika practice by Ye shes 'od and Atiśa) and texts (the exclusion of the Rnying ma tantras from the *Bka'* 'gyur) within the Buddhist tradition in the second propagation (*phyi dar*), to questions about the right doctrines between adherents of different schools (e.g., the Sa skya-Dge lugs controversy) and questions about the right doctrines among scholars of the same school (e.g., certain Dge lugs scholars that belonged to different colleges; the debate between Mi pham and Rdo grub Dam chos) at the climax of Tibetan scholasticism. As such, every debate can be read as a communication, where one side criticises and excludes the other (religion, tradition, practice, text, doctrine, etc.) and by that very act constitutes the borders of its own system. In the course of Tibetan scholasticism, these systems split and differentiate, forming new units that act as references for the identity of their adherents.

Connections to earlier controversies

In view of the lack of detailed studies in the field of polemical literature, drawing precise connections in terms of similarities of positions and arguments between the debates under consideration and earlier controversies is rather tedious. However, the participants of the debates make reference to earlier developments and ascribe to themselves and their opponent(s) a place in the larger context of philosophical controversies in Tibet. It is on these contextualisations, found usually as an introductory framework to the content proper of a text, that we will focus in the following.

In the introductions of two of the texts that Dge lugs scholars sent to Mi pham in order to criticise him, explicit reference is made to some of the earlier debates. Rab gsal, in his first critique,²⁸ begins by establishing Tsong kha pa, the founder of his native tradition, as an incontestable authority, who was not only predicted by “trustworthy scriptures and excellent beings,”²⁹ but also lived up to their expectations. Nevertheless, so Rab gsal stated, he was criticised by Stag tshang Shes rab rin chen, the famous first critic of Tsong kha pa, described above. The reason for his criticism is obvious: he could not see the greatness of Tsong kha pa as he “had a mind that is afflicted by the defect of Timira,”³⁰ a disease where one’s vision is disturbed by apparently existing, but actually non-existent hairs – a typical example of someone whose perception is not to be trusted. Those of sharp faculties (*dbang rnon*), on the other hand, certainly understood the

²⁸ See 'Ju lan 370.4–371.3.

²⁹ 'Ju lan 370.4: *yid ches pa'i lung dang skyes bu dam pa*.

³⁰ 'Ju lan 370.6: *rab rib kyi skyon chags pa'i blo ldan*.

profundity of Tsong kha pa's findings. Nowadays, however, Rab gsal continues, there is a composer of a commentary of the ninth chapter of the BCA who has all sorts of flaws. Mi pham is described as "short-tempered" (*blo sna thung*) and "having a partial view" (*phyogs re'i mig can*);³¹ he "criticises any text of his own or another's [tradition] without consideration and, in particular, he is clueless with regard to the path of reasoning [...]."³² This suggests that Mi pham, just like Stag tshang Lo tsā ba earlier, is unjustly criticising Tsong kha pa. For Rab gsal there is a clear distinction among Tibetan thinkers: as Tsong kha pa is the benchmark for what is right, everyone who follows in his tradition can be established as a proper heir of Buddhist thought, while everyone who is in contradiction to Tsong kha pa must inevitably be wrong.

A similar division is made by Ldan ma Blo chos, who, in the introduction to his own critique of Mi pham, sums up the development of philosophical controversies in Tibet in the following way:³³ Initiated by Nāgārjuna, the second Buddha, the Madhyamaka tradition was spread by masters of the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika traditions and was flourishing in

³¹ Cf. 'Ju lan 371.1.

³² 'Ju lan 371.1–2: *gya tshom du rang gzhan gyi gzhung gang la'ang skyon brjod cing | khyad par rigs pa'i lam la rgyus med pas [...]*.

³³ The following alternates between summary, paraphrase, and exact translation of Blo chos' account. For the sake of transparency, I provide the whole passage in Tibetan: *sangs rgyas gnyis pa'i mtshan don ldan du 'dzin pa'i 'phags mchog klu sgrub kyis yod med kyi mtha' thams cad bkag nas | dbu ma'i shing rta srol phyé ba'i rtsa ba shes rab sogs rigs tshogs kyi bstan bcos chen po drug mdzad do | | de yi rjes su 'brangs te thal rang gi slob dpon chen po rnams kyis 'phags pa yab sras kyi dgongs pa rang rang gi lugs su bkral te | bstan pa'i snying po dbu ma'i lugs bzang mi nub pa'i rgyal mtshan chen po 'phags yul du ci yang bsgrengs so | de nas rim gyis thugs bskyed dag pa'i shugs dang smon lam rlabs po ches gangs ri'i ljongs 'dir bsam bzhin skye ba bzhes pa'i sems dpa' chen po rnams kyi sprul pa'i rnam par rol pas 'ga' zhig lo tsā ba dang | | gzhan dag rgyal po sogs kyi tshul 'dzin te | rgyu 'bras kyi theg pas bsdu pa'i zab rgyas chos kyi phung po rnams skad gnyis mtshams sbyar gyis legs par bsgyur | gangs ljongs kyi lha lam du sangs rgyas gnyis pa mkhan slob kyi nyi zla dus gcig shar te | sngar 'gyur theg pa'i padmo'i 'dab brgya 'god pa'i tshal du bshad sgrub kyi zil mngar la ngoms par med pa'i skal pa mchog gi rigs kyi bu'i bung ba'i tshogs dag ci dgar rol cing rang gi mngon par shes pa'i so sor rang rig gi glu dbyangs len te | ljongs 'di'i phra ba'i rdul phran tshun chad lha brgya'i gtsug gis btud pa'i mchod rten du bsgyur to | | de ltar na'ang gdul bya rnams kyi dang mos kyi stobs rim gyis bri bas phal cher yang dag pa'i lam la rgyab kyis phyogs shing | 'ga' zhig rang lta mchog 'dzin gyis gsung rab la dbang za ba dang | la la ni hā shang sogs kyis log pa'i lta ba la sbyar te | lta ba ci yang yid la mi byed pa dang | spyod pa phyin drug la zhe rtsis med pa'i lta spyod log pa rnams kā ma la shi las sun phyung | chos gsang ba bla med du gyur na | gang zag kyang gsang ba bla med kyi rnal 'byor pa 'gyur bas thun mong ba'i lam gyi rim pa dang | rdo rje'i theg pa'i lam gyi mthar thug snga phyi rgyu 'bras kyi rim pa 'dod bzhin | rgyu med kyi 'bras bu zab mo'i lam 'di kho bos rnyed nas khyod la sbyin no | | zhes pa'i 'gal 'du'i phung po dag dpal mar me mdzad kyis sun phyung nas mdo sngags kyi bka' mtha' dag gang zag gcig 'tshang rgya ba'i gdams ngag tu 'char ba'i bka' gdams kyi bstan pas gangs ljongs mdzes par byas so | | slar yang dam pa'i nyi ma de dag nub ri'i phrag tu zhar nas sngar gyi log rtog rnams sha khon gyis le lan bda' ba bzhin du ljongs 'di'i blo dman yongs la cig car bsal nas rmongs pa'i mun chen thibs kyis dkrigs pa'i tshe | 'jam dpal gzhon nur gyur pa*

India. Then, gradually, it came to Tibet, where “the collections of the profound and vast Dharma [...] were translated well,” thanks to the combined efforts of translators and rulers. Even though Buddhism was able to establish itself in the tradition of the Early Translation (*sngar 'gyur*) with an abundance of followers, thus being likened to “a gathering of bees,” “the strength of the interest of the disciples gradually diminished and hence the majority turned away from the correct path: some took their own view to be the highest, and pretended it was the sermon of the Buddha, others came into contact with wrong views such as [that of] Hā shang [...]. These people of wrong views and practices were refuted by Kamalaśīla.” Further, Atiśa criticised those who took up the path of the Vajrayāna without basing themselves on the ordinary path (of proper discipline etc.) first, and “adorned Tibet with the Bka' gdams pa teaching.” Later, this teaching was obstructed by “the mistaken people from earlier times” (*sngar gyi log rtog rnams*). At that stage, it was time for Tsong kha pa to point out the correct path once again. He and his followers succeeded, but soon afterwards “the black banner of the proponents of wrong [positions] was woven by the three, Go, Shag, and Stag,” i.e., the famous Sa skya critics Go rams pa, Shākya mchog ldan, and Stag tshang lo tsā ba. Of course, the followers of the Dge lugs tradition did not allow these wrong views to prevail; hence Rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 'Jam dbyangs dga' ba'i blo gros, and Paṇ chen Chos rgyan “cut [these wrong views] with the sharp knives of scriptures and reasoning and knocked them down.” In the present day, Ldan ma Blo chos continues, there is again a detractor of

tha mal pa'i rnam pas sangs rgyas nyid dang mtshungs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi mdzad pa ston pa'i lung bstan pa bzhin 'jam mgon bla ma shar tsong kha pa de nyid kyis yang dag pa'i chos kyi sgra chen por bsgrags te | rnam par dkar ba'i 'phrin las kyis srid gsum dog por byas pas 'di las gzhan du smra ba rnams kyis bzod pa'i go cha 'dor ba bzhin du sbrul dang ma ghi rtsi ltar rang gi ngang gis ldog ste | cang mi smra ba'i brtul zhugs bzung ngo | | slad mar rje yab sras re zhig dgongs pa chos dbyings su thim rjes bde gshegs kyi mtshan nas smos te phyogs sngar bkod pa la'ang 'jigs med kyi spobs pa bdud kyis byin pa'i go shag stag gsum gyis log par smra ba'i ba dan nag po g.yo ba nyid | 'jam dpal dbyangs rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan dang | byams mgon mi yi rnam par shar ba'i 'jam dbyangs dga' ba'i blo gros dang | snang mtha'i mgon po paṇ chen chos rgyan rnams kyis lung rigs kyi ral gri rnon pas bcad cing sgyel te | ming tsaṃ du lhag pa la'ang log par smra ba'i mtshan ma btāb ste bzhaḡ go | | deng dus kyi skabs 'dir sngar 'gyur theg pa'i ring lugs 'dzin pa rnams kyi nang nas rgyal mtshan gyi tog ltar spobs pa mtho ba'i mkhas pa'i mdun sar 'jigs pa med pa'i mi pham rnam rgyal gyis rje rang lugs kyi thugs bzhed thal 'gyur ba'i dam bca' chen po brgyad kyis rtsa ba shes rab kyi dka' gnad gsal bar mdzad pa la | zur za'i dgag pa rnams kyi brgal lan brag sbrul [sic] rin po che nas gnang ba la slar yang brgal lan nyin snang grags pa'i bstan bcas zhig byas te | rje nyid kyis zla ba'i zhabz kyi lugs bzhin mtha' gzhan rigs pa dri ma med pas bkag rigs pa de dag kyang tshig zin gyis snyon med du gsal bar thon pa'i 'phags pa yab sras sangs rgyas skyangs dpal ldan zla ba'i gzhuḡ rnams drangs nas bka' drin bla lhag tu stsāl ba la | khyod kyis 'khyog bshad kyis gzhuḡ de dag log par bkral te | (Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla 129.20–132.2).

the Lord Tsong kha pa. This time it is the “fearless” Mi pham, who composed “sarcastic refutations with regard to the positions (*thugs bzhed*) of the Lord [Tsong kha pa]’s own tradition that clarify the difficult points of the *Prajñā[nāma]mūla[madhyamakakārikā]* by way of the eight great theses of the Prāsaṅgika [tradition].” Mi pham’s criticism was answered by Brag dkar Sprul sku, to whom Mi pham responded with his *Brgal lan nyin snang*. In Blo chos’ conclusion, the problem is that Tsong kha pa follows the scriptures of Candrakīrti, Buddhapālita, and ultimately Nāgārjuna in a correct way, while Mi pham “expounds these scriptures in a wrong way, by [giving] crooked explanations.”

While Ldan ma Blo chos’ account is much more elaborate than that of Dpa’ ris Rab gsal, we can see that Blo chos too, draws a clear-cut line between what is right and what is wrong among Tibetan philosophers. In its Madhyamaka stance, Tibetan philosophy goes back to the Indian master Nāgārjuna, and for Ldan ma Blo chos the right interpretation and preservation of Nāgārjuna’s ideas is essential. In India, Nāgārjuna’s thought was disseminated by the masters of the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika traditions, and when Buddhism spread to Tibet, it was masters such as Kamalaśīla and Atiśa who carried on Nāgārjuna’s heritage. Through this line of transmission, Madhyamaka philosophy came to Tsong kha pa, who “spread it as the great sound of the correct Dharma,”³⁴ and – at least for followers of the Dge lugs tradition – it is in his native tradition that this “correct Dharma” is preserved.

Since this lineage of transmission is “correct” and “pure,” it exposes itself to infiltration and attack, and must therefore be defended. In Ldan ma Blo chos’ account, first Kamalaśīla had to ward off Hwa shang and others of wrong views and conduct. After him, it was Atiśa who had to fight misguided tantrikas. Even though each of them succeeded, new times brought new dangers to the correct lineage of the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet. Again, Tsong kha pa is described as the benchmark, who, just as his predecessors, was able to ensure the continuation of the proper understanding of Nāgārjuna – in his case against “the mistaken people from earlier times,” referring probably to the aforementioned followers of the mistaken Hwa shang and certain tantrikas. After Tsong kha pa, a new threat arose with various Sa skya scholars. For Ldan ma Blo chos, Tsong kha pa embodies the standard of Tibetan philosophy, and hence any criticism of him endangers the preservation of Nāgārjuna’s thought. Tsong kha pa’s own followers therefore fought back against the criticism from the Sa

³⁴ *Ga bur thig pa’i spun zla 131.6: yang dag pa’i chos kyi sgra chen por bsgrags te |.*

skya side; in more recent times, scholars such as Brag dkar Sprul sku have guarded Tsong kha pa's heritage against the qualms raised by Mi pham.

In Ldan ma Blo chos' description, the lineage of proper transmission is thus contrasted with a lineage of "impure transmission," or threat to the former. In this lineage, Mi pham is placed in a line with Hwa shang, certain misguided tantrikas, their successors, and the critics of Tsong kha pa from the Sa skya tradition.

Turning to the texts that were exchanged between Mi pham and Dpa' ris Rab gsal – the major object of this study – we find two recurring elements in the content proper of the debates that also locate Mi pham in this lineage: the claim that Mi pham's position resembles that of Hwa shang, and the claim that his interpretation would conflict with that of Tsong kha pa.

In both philosophical discussion and purely rhetorical polemic,³⁵ Rab gsal accuses Mi pham of adhering to a Hwa shang view,³⁶ of basing his arguments on the same scriptures as Hwa shang,³⁷ and of "coming from China in the guise of a present-day monk."³⁸ Further, Mi pham "is also not to blame [for adhering to the Hwa shang view], since he received his (i.e., Hwa shang's) old boot as a reward."³⁹ All these examples are intended to indicate a strong connection between Mi pham and Hwa shang, a figure that, in the development of Tibetan philosophy, "has become the quintessential philosophical other."⁴⁰

The second issue, the question of whether Mi pham contradicts Tsong kha pa, is another prominent theme in the debates. Rab gsal uses Tsong kha pa as *the* authority in all philosophical matters;⁴¹ for him, the Dge lugs founder (and also his heirs) assures the proper transmission of the lineage coming from India through masters such as Atiśa and 'Brom ston.⁴²

³⁵ I suggest that the polemical treatises considered in this investigation (and, by extension, also other works of that genre) show a clear distinction of two levels of polemics: formal discussion, where each accusation must be not only concrete and specific, but also backed up by proper argumentation, and, secondly, rhetorical polemics, commonly enjoyed for the use of often offensive language. For the relation between those two elements, see Viehbeck (forthcoming), "The Yogi and the Scholar: Rhetorical Polemics as Frame and Framework."

³⁶ Cf. 'Ju lan 398.1.

³⁷ Cf. 'Ju lan. 404.2.

³⁸ 'Ju lan 404.2–3: *rgya nag nas da lta rab byung gi gzugs kyis byon pa*.

³⁹ 'Ju lan 398.1: *lham lus pa bgo skal du thob pa'i phyir le lan bda' ba'ang med do* | . Rab gsal's remark is certainly meant as irony and refers to the commonly known story that Hwa shang had left one boot in the debating yard upon his defeat by Kamalaśīla. See earlier, p.45.

⁴⁰ Cabezon & Dargay 2007: 20.

⁴¹ See, e.g., 'Ju lan 370.4–5, 373.1, 380.6, 389.3, 395.6.

⁴² Cf. 'Ju lan 416.5–417.1.

Mi pham, on the other hand, is depicted as being in contradiction to the Dge lugs leader.⁴³ In both cases, i.e., the charges that Mi pham adheres to the Hwa shang view or contradicts Tsong kha pa, the implications are the same: if either of the accusations could be established, Mi pham clearly would have overstepped the bounds of proper philosophy.

How does Mi pham then react to these charges, and how does he place himself and his opponents within the larger context of philosophical controversies in Tibet? Mi pham is clearly in a much more defensive position. In his texts we do not find any attempts to locate the opponent within a long tradition of mistaken understanding; instead, Mi pham is occupied with warding off the charges made against him. In an elaborate way he argues that his position is not that of Hwa shang, and, in view of the lack of concrete texts from the Hwa shang tradition, also asks for more care when accusing someone of holding the view of Hwa shang.⁴⁴ Further, he denies that he contradicts the position of Tsong kha pa. Mi pham joins his Dge lugs opponents in praising their leader⁴⁵ and refers to certain texts by Tsong kha pa in order to prove the ultimate consensus between himself and the Dge lugs founder.⁴⁶ Mi pham thus makes clear that he accepts Tsong kha pa's authority; he argues that, rather than his contradicting Tsong kha pa, it is the "present holders of the lineage of Lord [Tsong kha pa],"⁴⁷ or,

⁴³ This position of Rab gsal is implicit throughout the whole discussion, but also made explicit on various occasions: Rab gsal accuses Mi pham of being pretentious when praising Tsong kha pa, that his praise is only an attempt to "avoid being intimidated by ill-considered talk" (*mis kha nyen pa 'gog pa*), since he criticised Tsong kha pa strongly in his *Nor bu ke ta ka*; cf. *Ga bur chu rgyun* 434.2–3. He also accuses Mi pham of not trusting Tsong kha pa's information about the tradition of Hwa shang; cf. *Ga bur chu rgyun* 441.6 and 460.6.

⁴⁴ Mi pham's argumentation against the Hwa shang charge pervades all of the texts concerned; two passages in which Mi pham argues against a simplistic conception of the Hwa shang position are particularly noteworthy. In *Rab lan* 366.1ff., Mi pham brings up the scarcity of information about the Hwa shang position; the little information that exists in the form of "mere sayings" (*gtam rgyun tsam*) is simply not enough to provide a clear picture of what Hwa shang actually thought. Further, in *Rab lan* 423.1ff., Mi pham pleads for reconsideration and care with the Hwa shang label; neither is it the case that any state of not grasping anything (*cir yang ma bzung ba*) could simply be associated with the view of Hwa shang, nor can the view of Hwa shang be considered in every respect an "annihilationist view" (*chad lta*).

⁴⁵ For an expression of Mi pham's great admiration of Tsong kha pa, see foremost *Rab lan* 456.2–457.1.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Rab lan* 416.5–421.4, where Mi pham mentions Tsong kha pa's *Shog dril*, *Lam gtso rnam gsum*, his commentaries on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and his "later compositions" (*phyis rtsom*) in general. According to Seyfort Ruegg, the term *phyis rtsom* refers to Tsong kha pa's *Rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*, i.e., his commentary on the MMK, and his *Dgongs pa rab gsal*; (Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 156, n. 30).

⁴⁷ *Rab lan* 420.6: *deng sang rje'i brgyud 'dzin rnam*s.

even more pointedly, the “present people that assert to hold the lineage of Lord [Tsong kha pa], the Mahātma,”⁴⁸ who do not understand the intention of their founding master, and hence see a contradiction between him and Mi pham. Mi pham emphasises the ultimate unity of himself and Tsong kha pa, and thus places himself – along with Tsong kha pa – in the lineage of proper transmission of Buddhist thought. According to him then, it is only those who do not see this unity who have gone astray from the proper path.

On the other hand, Mi pham also has to acknowledge certain differences between his tradition and that of Tsong kha pa. Mi pham describes this disparity as a “difference insofar as the position (*bzhed tshul*) of the earlier Tibetan [thinkers] (*bod snga rabs pa*) and of the later scholars (*phyis kyi mkhas pa*) is slightly different.”⁴⁹ Among Tibetan Madhyamaka philosophers, a common classification is that one either belongs to the tradition of “the ones from earlier times” (*snga rabs pa*) or the tradition of the “ones from later times” (*phyi rabs pa*). “Snga rabs pa” denotes the *rang stong* branch of Madhyamaka that developed *prior* to Tsong kha pa, including scholars from the Sa skya, Rnying ma, and Bka’ brgyud traditions, while the tradition that is based on Tsong kha pa’s interpretation is termed “Phyi rabs pa.”⁵⁰ Mi pham explains the differences between himself and Tsong kha pa as a result of the affiliation with these two disparate traditions, the Phyi rabs pa tradition that Tsong kha pa founded, and the Snga rabs pa tradition, in which Mi pham places his own philosophy. This identification with the Snga rabs pa tradition, to which Mi pham frequently refers, has a clear advantage.⁵¹ even in the case of – as Mi pham would say, superficial – disparity between his and Tsong kha pa’s thought, it is not the result of a critique of Tsong kha pa, but only of the affiliation of his own school. Mi pham explains that he “was born in this life at the feet of the teaching of the Earlier Translation (*snga ’gyur pa*)” – the Rnying ma tradition – and that he “received the nectar [of the teaching] from the mouths of great holders of the teaching.” Hence, devotion arose in him and he “simply was not caught by the demon of terrible destruction, that means, an evil attitude of

⁴⁸ *Rab lan* 194.3: *deng sang rje bdag nyid chen po’i brgyud pa ’dzin par khas ’che ba dag*.

⁴⁹ *Brgal lan nyin snang* 98.2–3: *bod snga rabs pa dang phyis kyi mkhas pa dag gi bzhed tshul cung zad mi ’dra ba’i khyad par*.

⁵⁰ Cf. Phuntsho 2005: 245, n. 72, for a short explanation of the ideas held in common by Snga rabs pa scholars.

⁵¹ In the texts exchanged between him and his Dge lugs opponents, references to Mi pham’s identification with the Snga rabs pa tradition are abundant. Two passages are particularly noteworthy: the beginning of Mi pham’s *Brgal lan nyin snang* (ff. 98.2ff.) and the beginning of his second letter to Dpa’ ris Rab gsal (*Yang lan* 464.6f.).

disparaging the profound long-standing tradition of the Highest (i.e. the Buddha),” but his “explanations follow the earlier highest [masters].”⁵² Thus, Mi pham establishes his position on firm ground; as a disciple of the Rnying ma tradition, and, as such, being affiliated with the Snga rabs pa tradition of Tibetan Madhyamaka, his thought does not deviate from the lineage of the proper transmission of Buddhism, even though it might not be in line with the philosophy of Tsong kha pa in every aspect. Put in this context, difference is natural, and not a deviation from the proper way, as Mi pham points out: “[my] view is in accordance with the Tibetan Snga rabs pa [tradition] and some people who belong to the Phyi rabs pa [tradition] announce it to be a ‘private Dharma’.”⁵³

We have seen how the Dge lugs scholars Ldan ma Chos dbyings and Dpa’ ris Rab gsal use references to earlier controversies to distinguish a proper transmission of Buddhist thought from its improper counterpart. In their view, Tsong kha pa and his followers assure the continuation of the earlier, while any deviation from Tsong kha pa’s thought – such as the philosophy of Mi pham or earlier misguided scholars – is perceived as a threat to this transmission. Mi pham, on the other hand, takes a defensive position. He tries to refute the charges made against him and establishes his own thought as part of his own Rnying ma school and the Snga rabs pa interpretation of Tibetan Madhyamaka.

Impact of the debates on later controversies

As noted above, the enormous growth in the production of polemical literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries makes it difficult to keep track of all its developments. While the debates around Mi pham’s *Nor bu ke ta ka* have had their impact on a number of these controversies, I will focus only on a single, particularly well-known example. Dge ’dun chos ’phel with his *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* is probably the most famous critique of his own Dge lugs tradition in the twentieth century. Even though his work does not make any direct reference to the debates surrounding Mi

⁵² Cf. *Brgal lan nyin snang* 98.3–4: *bdag ni skye ba ’dir snga ’gyur pa’i bstan zhabs su skyes shing bstan ’dzin chen po rnams kyi zhal gyi bdud rtsi nod pa las snga ’gyur gyi bstan pa dang de ’dzin la gus pa yar ’phel du gyur pa las | dam pa’i ring lugs zab mo sun ’byin gyi blo ngan phung khrol ngan pa’i gdon gyis ma zin tsam gyi dvang [sic] ba gtso bor byas nas gzhung lugs kyi bshad pa cung zad re byas pa rnams sngon gyi dam pa dag gi rjes su brjod pa yin la |*.

⁵³ *Yang lan* 464.6–465.1: *lta ba ni bod snga rabs pa dang mthun pa dang | phyi rabs pa kha cig gis sger chos su bka’ stsal pa*.

pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*, certain parallels suggest a connection between the two controversies.⁵⁴

Just as in the earlier debates, the issues under discussion centre on the specific manners of interpretation of two different Tibetan Madhyamaka traditions, the Snga rabs pa and the Phyi rabs pa traditions. Dge 'dun chos 'phel frequently refers to the Snga rabs pa tradition and defends it against his native Phyi rabs pa tradition and its founder Tsong kha pa.⁵⁵ As a consequence, Dge 'dun chos 'phel's work addresses many of the topics that were discussed earlier by Mi pham and his opponents, and, before them, among Dge lugs and mainly Sa skya scholars in the period between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries: the reliability of conventional valid cognition (*tha snyad tshad ma*); a too narrow or too broad determination of the negandum (*dgag bya*); a literal understanding of the Madhyamaka principle that things are "neither existent nor non-existent" (*yod min med min*) versus an interpretation through the insertion of qualifiers/specifiers; a conception of emptiness as being free from two (*yod, med*) or four extremes (*yod, med, gnyis, gnyis min*); the role of assertions (*dam bca', khas len*) in Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka; the scope of logic; etc.⁵⁶

Based on the similarity of certain ideas, Donald Lopez refers to the famous Sa skya trio Stag tshang lo tsā ba, Go rams pa, and Shākya mchog ldan as precedents for Dge 'dun chos 'phel's views.⁵⁷ Surely we can add Mi pham to this list of Snga rabs pa philosophers, as Dge 'dun chos 'phel – growing up in the same area as Dpa' ris Rab gsal, one of the main opponents of Mi pham, and studying at 'Bras spungs, the monastic institute

⁵⁴ The name of another, yet still missing piece of Dge 'dun chos 'phel titled *Nor bu ke ta ka'i skor* led to some speculation as to whether this might be directly connected to Mi pham's work, or another work by Sum pa mkhan po also named *Nor bu ke ta ka*; see Seyfort Ruegg 1989b: 309f. This assumption is based on the similarity of the titles alone, with no other hints indicating such a connection. It seems that this work was among several original manuscripts of Dge 'dun chos 'phel that Kirti Rinpoche was able to locate, see Kirti Rinpoche 2013: 11.

⁵⁵ See, for example, his defense of the Snga rabs pa tradition in *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* 97.15ff., 98.20ff., and 129.5ff. (Lopez 2006: 55, § 32, 56, § 33, and 76, § 115). While criticism of Tsong kha pa is expressed throughout the whole work, explicit reference to the Phyi rabs pa tradition is only made occasionally, see, e.g., *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* 129.6 and 167.9 (Lopez 2006: 76, § 115 and 103, § 198).

⁵⁶ Many of the topics just mentioned permeate Dge 'dun chos 'phel's work and reappear at different stages. A particularly pointed passage in his critique of the – traditional – Dge lugs approach to identifying the negandum is *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* 100.8ff. (for a translation, see Lopez 2006: 57, § 37ff.); for his opinion on "neither existent nor non-existent" (*yod min med min*), see pp. 95.21ff. (Lopez 2006: 54, § 29ff.); on assertions in Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, see pp. 105. 12ff. and 111.18ff. (Lopez 2006: 60, § 51ff. and 64, § 77ff.); on his critique of the insertion of qualifiers, see pp. 119.21ff. (Lopez 2006: 70, § 96ff.).

⁵⁷ See Lopez 2006: 242f.

of Brag dkar Sprul sku and Ldan ma Chos dbyings, Mi pham's two other Dge lugs opponents – must have been aware of the controversies surrounding Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*.⁵⁸ Moreover, parallels between Dge 'dun chos 'phel's work and the texts of Mi pham are not limited to specific philosophical ideas alone, but can also be observed in the sources that are consulted to verify these ideas.⁵⁹

Obviously, Dge 'dun chos 'phel was in a state of abeyance and held both Tsong kha pa and Mi pham – two of the greatest masters of quite divergent schools – in great esteem, as expressed in one of his last wishes before his death that a poem of each of the two masters should be read to him.⁶⁰ That Dge 'dun chos 'phel was seen as holding an arbitrary position between Tsong kha pa and Mi pham is also illustrated by an anecdote related by his student, friend, and companion Shes rab rgya mtsho.⁶¹

One day, as an aside to the accounts of the Lamas, I asked [Dge 'dun chos 'phel]: “Who of the two, Lord [Tsong kha pa], the Mahātmā, and the Dharma Lord Mi pham, is wiser?” He said: “I have thought this issue over many times. Those two are very similar: their minds are emanations of the Buddha and both

⁵⁸ As indicated earlier, much more research on the positions of the individual philosophers is necessary to determine the exact relations between earlier and later scholars, in order to see which of the earlier ideas were taken over by later scholars, such as Mi pham and Dge 'dun chos 'phel, and which were modified or refuted. Such a comprehensive approach is clearly beyond the scope of this study, which focuses solely on the discussion of these fundamental Madhyamaka topics within the framework of the controversies surrounding the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, described in detail in Chapter Four.

⁵⁹ E.g., while objecting to the Dge lugs determination of the negandum (*dgag bya*), Dge 'dun chos 'phel quotes two verse lines from Lcang skya Rol pa rdo rje's (1717–1786) *Lta mgur: snang ba ling ling 'di rang sor bzhaḡ nas | dgag rgyu rwa can zhig 'tshol bar 'dug ste |* (cf. *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* 102.2f. and 121.12f., or, Lopez 2006: 58, § 41 and 71, §99, respectively), a passage that is widely known among Snga rabs pa scholars, and which was also quoted by Mi pham in the earlier debates (cf. *Rab lan* 194.5). Further, Dge 'dun chos 'phel, just like Mi pham, refers to Tsong kha pa's *Shog dril* as a text where Tsong kha pa formulates his thoughts in a way that Dge 'dun chos 'phel and Mi pham, respectively, could agree with; cf. *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* 114.3 and 135.16 (Lopez 2006: 66, § 81 and 81, § 124) and *Rab lan* 287.6 and 416.6, respectively.

⁶⁰ See Lopez 2006: 45.

⁶¹ Dge 'dun chos 'phel *rnam thar* 377.19–378.9: *nyin gcig bla ma rnam kyī lo rgyus 'phros zhig la kho bos | khyed kyis rje bdag nyid chen po dang | chos rje mi pham gnyis su mkhas dgongs kyī yod zhus pas | go de ngas bsam blo mang po btaḡ rgyu byung | khong gnyis thugs sangs rgyas kyī rnam 'phrul la 'jam dpal zhal gzigs pa 'dra 'dra red | deng sang gnyis ka bzhuḡs yod na rtsod pa zhig mdzad na rje rin po che gra [sic] skor rgyun ring mdzad tsa rje mkhas pa mi yong ngam snyam gyi yod | rtsa ba 'i rig pa 'i rtsal dang | go stobs bshad stangs sogs mi pham 'jigs gi | gzhan gyis go na dgongs pa 'gal yong | ngas ngo ma bshad ni yin gsungs |*.

had visions of Mañjuśrī. If both were present today and engaged in debate, Lord [Tsong kha pa] would probably come out as the wiser, as the Precious Lord [Tsong kha pa] had engaged in academic training for a long time. That is what I think. With regard to skill in acute intelligence, ability to understand, way of explanation, and so forth, Mi pham is terrific. But if others hear this, they could well object. This is truly what I say.”

In the present context, Shes rab rgya mtsho’s question is even more interesting than Dge ’dun chos ’phel’s pointed answer. The question suggests that the two masters, Tsong kha pa and Mi pham, could be compared in terms of their intellectual achievements, that – ultimately – there is a struggle of supremacy between these two scholars. It seems that Shes rab rgya mtsho – just like Mi pham’s direct opponents – does not view the tensions between Mi pham and the Dge lugs school in their specific historical context, as a debate between contemporary figures, but shifts the tensions back in time and conceptualises them as a struggle between Mi pham and Tsong kha pa.

As mentioned earlier, Dge ’dun chos ’phel’s work was criticised rather strongly by orthodox Dge lugs scholars such as Dze smad Rin po che and Dge ’dun chos ’phel’s teacher, Rdo sbis Shes rab rgya mtsho (not to be confused with his aforementioned friend who bears the same name). The most fundamental point of criticism made by later scholars was to question the authenticity of the work in general. According to its colophon, it was composed by Dge ’dun chos ’phel’s student Zla ba bzang po, who belonged to the Rnying ma tradition, but based on the oral instructions of Dge ’dun chos ’phel. Bdud ’joms Rin po che, another famous Rnying ma scholar, is reported to have financed the whole undertaking and also added three verses of his own to it.⁶² Some scholars thus did not regard the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* as a proper work of Dge ’dun chos ’phel, but rather as a “mixture” that was deemed to be greatly influenced by Rnying ma ideas.⁶³ Dge ’dun chos ’phel’s friend Hor khang Bsod nams dpal ’bar writes in this regard:⁶⁴

Concerning whether or not the *Adornment for Nāgārjuna’s Thought* is an actual composition of that excellent being, there

⁶² See Lopez 2006: 116–120.

⁶³ Cf. Lopez 2006: 241, n.11.

⁶⁴ Quoted according to Lopez’ translation; cf. Lopez 2006: 119–120. Unfortunately, the Tibetan original was not available to me.

is a difference of opinion between the Dge lugs and the Rnying ma. Some say that it is not the statements of Dge 'dun chos 'phel and that it is a mixture, with a great deal added to Zla ba bzang po's notes. Others identify it as an actual composition of Dge 'dun chos 'phel.

Also, defenders of Dge 'dun chos 'phel's work noticed a connection to traditional Rnying ma ideas. Thub bstan blo gros in his *Dgag lan mun sel sgron me* refutes not only attacks on the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*, but also attacks on the thought of Mi pham. Further, Blo bzang chos grags, in his criticism of the *Dgag lan mun sel sgron me*, links the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* to Mi pham's philosophical stance.⁶⁵

This suggests that salient issues of the previous controversies resonate in Dge 'dun chos 'phel's work, as it has been conceived of by both his supporters and opponents. The controversies connected to Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* are, then, not only a logical continuation of the discussions of earlier scholastics, but they also provide an important impetus for the ways Madhyamaka thought has been discussed in the twentieth century and continues to be in the twenty-first.

Delineating the contemporary conditions of the controversies

The historical setting

In the seventeenth century, the political and religious landscape of Tibet underwent profound changes. An alliance of the Dge lugs school together with its leader, the Dalai Lama, and the influential political forces of Central Tibet won the support of the Qoshot Mongols under Gushri Khan, who effectively pushed back the opposing ruler of Tsang together with his Karma Bka' brgyud affiliates. In 1642, the Mongol leader formally established the fifth Dalai Lama as the supreme authority of all of Tibet, who would rule the country together with a regent (*sde srid*), responsible for the

⁶⁵ The precise relation between the issues criticised in the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* and in Mi pham's works would require a close comparative study of the respective works. See *Rnga yab* p. 10f. and p. 17, for instance, where a connection between the thought of Mi pham and Dge 'dun chos 'phel's work is implied. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain a copy of the *Dgag lan mun sel sgron me*; information on its content is provided by the TBRC database: http://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W25117 [accessed February 17, 2011].

political administration.⁶⁶ Even though the relationship and the mutual degree of influence between the regents and the Dalai Lamas changed during the following centuries, the principle alliance between the Dge lugs school and the political rule of Tibet endured until the invasion of the Chinese forces in the twentieth century. During this period, the Dge lugs school could foster its primacy not only in terms of political influence, but also in the development of philosophical ideas and religious practices. Given the special role ascribed to the Dge lugs school in the Tibetan world, the other schools are often depicted as forming a conjoined opposition against an all-too-mighty other:⁶⁷

The dominant Ge-luk school established its institutions, philosophy, and religious practices as normative, ignoring the other schools, who resented the political dominance of the Ge-luk as well as its intellectual and religious hegemony. Those following non-Ge-luk traditions were also unhappy at the restrictions imposed on them by a government that claimed to oversee the entire religious life of Tibet but was partial to the Ge-luk school. In this way the gap between the Ge-lug and the other schools broadened into the great divide that still separates the two sides today.

The primacy of the Dge lugs school did manifest itself also in forms of concrete suppression and censorship of other religious traditions. Common examples are the forceful conversion of many monastic institutions in Central and West Tibet – especially from the Jo nang and Bka' brgyud tradition – to the Dge lugs school, the ban on the writings of the Jo nang tradition, the ban on individual authors of the Sa skya school, such as Go rams pa and Shākya mchog ldan,⁶⁸ but also the non-acceptance of certain works within tantric literature and texts that were revealed as *gter ma* in the Rnying ma school. While these effects were more drastic in Central and West Tibet, they diminished in the areas where the influence of the Dga' ldan pho brang was weak, in particular in Eastern Tibet. There, the nineteenth century saw a rising interest in religious and cultural matters, which, under the label "*ris med* movement," had been pointed out as the general background of the debates by earlier scholars such as Gene Smith and Dieter Schuh. Not only did 'Ju Mi pham share the geographical area

⁶⁶ See Shakabpa 1984: 100ff.

⁶⁷ Dreyfus 2003b: 29.

⁶⁸ Cf. Cabezón & Dargyay 2007: 31f.

of origin with this “movement,” but, as many of his teachers, such as Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (1813–1899), ‘Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po (1820–1892), and Rdza Dpal sprul (1808–1887), constituted its main figures, Mi pham was also seen as an intellectual heir to its ideas, a claim that will be investigated in more detail below.

For the greater part of his life, Mi pham remained in the territory of Sde dge, a kingdom in the Khams area in Eastern Tibet. Different from the exclusive affiliation between the political power and the Dge lugs school in Central Tibet, the rulers of Sde dge had connections to various religious traditions, most importantly to the Sa skya school, but also to Rnying ma and Bka’ brgyud institutions. Noticeably, they were not associated with any institution of the Dge lugs school.⁶⁹

Tibet as a whole experienced an increasing interest on the part of alien forces from the latter half of the nineteenth century onward. “The Great Game” between the imperial powers Russia, China, and Britain also had concrete effects on the plateau. Notable among these are the exchange between the Russian Czar (Nicholas II) and the Dalai Lama that was established through Dorjiev, a Buriat Mongol who went to Lhasa to study Buddhism, the efforts of the British to establish trade agreements with the Tibetans, which culminated in the advance of the Younghusband Expedition to Gyantse and further to Lhasa in 1904, and the Chinese invasion of Tibet under Chao Erh-Feng, who wanted to reclaim Chinese dominance in Tibet and reached Lhasa in 1910.⁷⁰ Though on a smaller scale, the independent kingdom of Sde dge, too, was pressed by foreign rulers. In 1862, the warlord Mgon po rnam rgyal subdued Sde dge and ultimately gained control over most of the Khams area, the fruit of a military campaign that was started about twenty-five years earlier in the Nyag rong territory.⁷¹ Even though Mgon po rnam rgyal acted with immense brutality in the newly conquered territory, the image of a powerful and straightforward warrior figure also found sympathisers among the local population.⁷² He was able

⁶⁹ See Hartley 1997: 57ff. Here and in the following, I refer extensively to the work of Luran Hartley who has summarised all available earlier sources on the often misty history of Sde dge. I am very grateful that she provided me with a copy of her thesis.

⁷⁰ See Richardson 1984: 73ff. For details on Chao Erh-Feng’s advance through Eastern Tibet to Lhasa, see Sperling 2003.

⁷¹ For details, see Tsering 1985.

⁷² As Tashi Tsering describes, Mgon po rnam rgyal became a popular figure throughout the Khams region. His life was preserved in the form of folk stories and many people thought that killing him would have a bad effect on the country. People swore by his name and the particular Nyag rong hair style was adopted in the wider region; see Tsering 1985: 196 and 213f. For an understanding of the image of criminals within Tibetan society, see Lama Jabb’s fascinating account of banditry in A mdo (Jabb 2009).

to win the support of the local *religiosi* and, reportedly, even monks from the Sde dge monasteries enrolled in his forces. The Rnying ma tradition, for example, was suspected of having had secret agreements with Mgon po rnam rgyal,⁷³ and also in the case of the Sa skya school a close connection between Mgon po rnam rgyal and its tradition was perceived.⁷⁴ Upon the intrusion of Mgon po rnam rgyal and his forces, many people left the area and sought refuge in Lhasa.⁷⁵ Whether the Lhasa government was moved by the plight of the arriving refugees, instigated by the Chinese Ambans, afraid of the growing power of Mgon po rnam rgyal, or simply interested in increasing its own sphere of influence remains unclear. In any case, the authorities in Central Tibet agreed to send troops to Sde dge at the beginning of 1863. Recruiting more men on their way, they fought against the Nyag rong army for two years and ended its reign with the utter extermination of Mgon po rnam rgyal and his forces in 1865.⁷⁶ With its victory, the Central Tibetan government could – at least formally – integrate Sde dge under its jurisdiction, a state of affairs that was not to change until 1908, when Sde dge was captured by Chao Erh-Feng.⁷⁷ While the troops from Lhasa succeeded in freeing the area from the brutal leadership of Mgon po rnam rgyal, their presence led to new problems: instances of looting and violence against the local population during the war, as well as punishment of the religious specialists suspected of having cooperated with the Nyag rong leader were reported.⁷⁸ Some Dge lugs institutions also used the newly-acquired power in the area to continue earlier conflicts. As the Dge lugs monastery 'Ba' Chos sde had been at war with an affiliate of the Bka' brgyud monastery Dpal spungs in 1848, several Dge lugs centres called for the destruction of Dpal spungs and distribution of its property after the success of the troops from the Dga' ldan pho brang against the Nyag rong leader.⁷⁹ The king of Sde dge, 'Chi med rtag pa'i rdo rje, however, seemed to enjoy good relations with the forces from Lhasa. Since they had

⁷³ Cf. Petech 1973: 121.

⁷⁴ See Tsering 1985: 213.

⁷⁵ Also 'Ju Mi pham left the troubled area along with the fleeing nomads and spent one year on a pilgrimage in Central Tibet with his uncle; see Schuh 1973: XXVIII.

⁷⁶ See Shakabpa 1984: 187 and Tsering 1985: 209.

⁷⁷ Cf. Hartley 1997: 11.

⁷⁸ Cf. Tsering 1985: 210; Petech 1973: 121 mentions in particular a "widespread purge of rNin-ma-pa elements."

⁷⁹ See Hartley 1997: 45. According to Smith 2001: 249, it was Kong sprul's skill as a physician that saved Dpal spungs, as he was able to cure a severe disease of the opposing Dge lugs leader. A more detailed account of Kong sprul's role in the warfare is found in Schuh 1976: LXVIII. Not only did Kong sprul act as the personal physician of the Central Tibetan general Phu lung ba, but he was also instructed to conduct rites for the success of

rescued him and his mother from abduction by Mgon po rnam rgyal, he offered the Central Tibetan authorities an enormous amount of his wealth. His connection to Central Tibet was further consolidated through his marriage to the daughter of a general of the Lhasa troops in 1870.⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the Nyag rong affair, things came to a head between the Lhasa-affiliated king and the local chieftains, a development in which the king asked the Chinese governor in Sichuan for help.⁸¹ While it is not clear why the king turned towards the Chinese officials despite his close relations to the Central Tibetan government, it shows that Sde dge increasingly depended on outside forces. However, the king's call for support backfired; the arriving Chinese forces were cornered by the chieftains and the local population and forced to agree to detain the king of Sde dge. While 'Chi med rtag pa'i rdo rje and his wife died in prison in Chengdu about 1898, one of his sons, Rdo rje seng ge, was chosen as his successor.⁸² As Lauran Hartley points out, many details of these events mentioned in the sources remain unclear. In any case, there seem to have been two factions competing for the rule of Sde dge: King 'Chi med rtag pa'i rdo rje and his son Rdo rje seng ge on the one side, and the king's wife and his younger son 'Jam dpal rin chen on the other. Both parties seem to have used their connections to the Central Tibetan government, as well as to Chinese officials, according to their needs, and did not rely on a single outside force in an exclusive way. Ultimately, the power struggle in Sde dge ended with the arrival of Chao Erh-Feng's troops, who seized Sde dge in 1908.⁸³

A religio-political background for the controversies?

As is commonly known, Tibetan society is characterised by an intricate fusion of religious and political power. Religion pervades all aspects of life in Tibet, and so does the authority of its leaders. Political leaders, on the other hand, always sought to secure their status by forming an alliance with religious leaders and thus contributed to the latter's power.⁸⁴ Even

the Central Tibetan troops and also to use divination in order to determine the next move of the Nyag rong forces. Thus, Kong sprul obviously could gain the complete trust of the Central Tibetan troops.

⁸⁰ Cf. Hartley 1997: 16f.

⁸¹ Hartley 1997: 25ff.

⁸² Cf. Hartley 1997: 27f.

⁸³ Hartley 1997: 50ff.

⁸⁴ See Brück 2008 for an extensive treatment of the complex and close interweaving of religion and politics in Tibetan societies, and, on various aspects of these matters, Cüppers 2004.

though the present debates are about a religious or philosophical subject – the highly specialised interpretation of a fundamental Indian text – they took place in a certain historical setting, of which they are both a product and a driving force. For an attempt to relate the development of the historical events described above to the outbreak of the controversies between Mi pham and his Dge lugs opponents, two aspects in these events appear of particular importance.

First, one has to note that Sde dge was neither an uncontested nor unimportant place. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, various outside forces tried to expand their rule to the formerly *de facto* independent kingdom: Mgon po rnam rgyal with his invasion in 1862, his death at the hands of the Central Tibetan troops in 1865, and their subsequent – at least nominal – rule, until the capture of the kingdom by Chao Erh-Feng in 1908. This state of affairs leads to the assumption that any authority within the territory of Sde dge must have been of interest also to the different external factions. We will discuss below whether Mi pham can be regarded as such an authority.

Secondly, as indicated earlier, the far-reaching dominance of the Dge lugs school over vast areas of the Tibetan cultural region led to a situation where all other religious traditions were seen as united in their opposition to the Dge lugs school. This opposition was also expressed in geographical terms, when Central Tibet, the heart of Dge lugs power, was contrasted with other Tibetan areas, such as Eastern Tibet, in particular, the area of Sde dge, where the Dge lugs school was rather weak in comparison to the other traditions.⁸⁵ In the nineteenth century, this very area saw an increasing religious activity manifesting itself in the composition, collection, and printing of numerous important Buddhist treatises, the conference and exchange of Buddhist teachings, and the foundation of institutions for the study and practice of Buddhism. This was instigated by a network of teachers from various traditions, notably with the strong participation of the Rnying ma school and apparently almost no involvement of members of the Dge lugs tradition. Summarised as “*ris med* movement,” a label coined by Gene Smith and fortified in most related research ever since, this network did entail a division of Tibetan Buddhists in Dge lugs and non-Dge lugs. As such, it also had a political dimension to it, which is commonly perceived as the background against which the debates between Mi pham

⁸⁵ This geographical tension is also visible in the efforts of important scholars, such as Kong sprul or Mchog gyur gling pa, who tried to establish Eastern Tibet as a destination for pilgrimage, in addition to the traditional locations in Central Tibet. On their pilgrimage guide and the twenty-five religious sites in Eastern Tibet, see Gardner 2009.

and various Dge lugs scholars developed. This perspective is emphasised in particular by Dieter Schuh, who reflects on the nature of *ris med* in his introduction to the works of Mi pham.⁸⁶ While he acknowledges a claim for “equality of the different Buddhist sects and their practices for attaining liberation” as the key feature of the religious view put forth by this “eclectic movement,” he points out that power politics, rather than “benevolent tolerance,” were at the core of its formation. Since religion and politics are so closely connected in a Tibetan context, the activities in Eastern Tibet must also be conceived as an attempt of the rather weak Rnying ma pa to strive for a more balanced situation against the overall power of the Dge lugs school. This in turn also explains the interest in Rnying ma writing and the fervour with which several Dge lugs scholars reacted to Mi pham’s commentary. In this view, a fundamental aspect in the formation of *ris med* is an opposition between the Dge lugs school and the other Tibetan traditions, first and foremost the Rnying ma school.⁸⁷ This relation is then also reflected in the debates, where Mi pham is conceived of as a

⁸⁶ In the German original, the crucial passage summarised above reads as follows (Schuh 1973: XXXf.): “Den Hintergrund für die nun anhebende Diskussion zwischen Angehörigen verschiedener Sekten bildete eine geistige Bewegung, die ihren Ausgang von den *rNin-ma-pa* in Osttibet genommen hatte und die die Gleichberechtigung der verschiedenen buddhistischen Sekten und ihrer Praktiken zur Erlangung der Erlösung als wesentliches Prinzip eigener religiöser Anschauung in den Vordergrund stelle. Daß diese eklektische Bewegung ihren Ausgang gerade von den *rNin-ma-pa* nahm, die nach den Verfolgungen des 17. Jahrhunderts und der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts im 19. Jahrhundert in eine Phase der Wiedererstarkung eingetreten waren, legt den Schluß nahe, daß es diesen Bestrebungen, die wegen der Verflechtung von Politik und Religion in Tibet politische Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen mußten, zumindest unterschwellig um die Schaffung eines Gleichgewichts zwischen den politisch schwachen *rNin-ma-pa* und der politischen Stärke der *dGe-lugs-pa*-Sekte ging. [...] Damit ist schon angedeutet, daß es sich nicht etwa um eine Bewegung zur Ausbildung einer wohlwollenden Toleranz zwischen den Sekten handelte, sondern daß sie als Doktrin in Erscheinung trat, von der wir annehmen können, daß ihre Grundzüge mit altem Lehrgut der *rNin-ma-pa* vereinbar waren. Hervorzuheben ist hier, daß diese geistige Strömung eine besondere Interessennahme der *dGe-lugs-pa* an den literarischen Erzeugnissen der *rNin-ma-pa* zur Folge gehabt haben muß, die in dem nun ausbrechenden Streit um *Mi-phams* Interpretation sichtbaren Ausdruck fand.”

⁸⁷ This strong division of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in Dge lugs pa, on the one hand, and *ris med* proponents on the other, is stressed by various scholars. According to Samuel, for example, the two parties form a polarity, where the Dge lugs stresses “academic, scholarly, monastic, and clerical” pursuits, whereas *ris med* stands for a “yogic, shamanic, and visionary” approach to religion (Samuel 1993: 546f.). A similar distinction between the Dge lugs and the non-Dge lugs traditions in general is drawn by Sweet 1979: 79f. While even the texts investigated in the current study draw heavily on a “yogi versus scholar divide,” it is important to understand this for what it is, namely, an exaggerated and simplistic caricature.

proponent of *ris med* in conflict with the non-*ris med* Dge lugs pa.⁸⁸ While this general view is adopted in common perceptions of the debates, some thoughts on the character of *ris med* and Mi pham's connection to it are called for to nuance our understanding of the context of the debates.

Mi pham and the “*ris med* movement”?

Ju Mi pham is commonly – and in a rather undifferentiated way – associated with the “*ris med* movement.”⁸⁹ A closer look at the nature of *ris med* will, however, reveal that this assumption must be treated with caution. Early researchers on *ris med* (here I am referring mostly to the works of Smith and Schuh)⁹⁰ readily spoke of the developments in the nineteenth century as having formed a “movement.” This term was introduced rather uncritically, but it carried the danger of evoking the picture of a clearly demarcated social group with a conscious, well-defined, and unified agenda, a notion that was fortified in later depictions.⁹¹ While the situation was certainly more complex and it seems more appropriate to think of *ris med* as an intricate network of individuals with varying agendas, we will employ these two principal perspectives – inquiries into the social structure as well as the ideological principles of *ris med* – as an instrument to reflect about Mi pham's relation to that network.

⁸⁸ See also Schuh 1976: LVII, where he points out the social relevance and political implications of *ris med*: “Die Zusammensetzung und geographische Verbreitung der *Ris-med*-Bewegung des 19. Jahrhunderts macht folgendes deutlich: Als primär von den religiös erstarkten *rNin-ma-pa* getragene Bewegung implizierte sie ideologisch begründete und sozial konsequenzenreiche Postulate der politisch schwachen und unbedeutenden Gruppen gegen die politisch starken (*Sa-skya-pa* in *sDe-dge*, *dGe-lugs-pa* in Zentraltibet). Als Bewegung von Osttibet präsentierte sie sich als Forderung der religiösen Provinz gegen das Haupt- und Mutterland des tibetischen Buddhismus, gegen Zentraltibet.”

⁸⁹ Phuntsho 2007: 193 should be mentioned as an exception to this pattern; more on that below.

⁹⁰ Cf. Smith's earlier articles, which were compiled in Smith 2001: 13–31, 227–233, 235–272, and Schuh's introductions to the works of Mi pham and Kong sprul, respectively: Schuh 1973 and Schuh 1976. Reference must also be made to Ringu Tulku 2006, a monograph dedicated to the *ris med* philosophy of Kong sprul, written from the perspective of a modern *ris med* master.

⁹¹ See Gardner 2006: 112ff., who argues that the idea of a well-defined *ris med* movement is essentially a fantasy of Western scholars and translators. While his discussion of the term and its development addresses many crucial aspects, I think that it will be fruitful for further research to consider more carefully the role that Tibetan Buddhists played in shaping its meaning – for example, the late Sde gzhung rin po che (1906–1987), the teacher of and a main source of information for Gene Smith, who, in turn, was among the first to introduce *ris med* as a topic to Western academia.

The term “*ris med*” (or its synonym “*phyogs med*”) has been explained and translated in various ways: nonsectarian (Smith), eclectic (Schuh), universalistic (Seyfort Ruegg), ecumenical (Pettit).⁹² Commonly perceived as the core of the *ris med* ideal, if such can be postulated at all, is the notion that all Buddhist traditions developed valuable and workable ways to approach the Buddhist goal, that is, awakening, even though the individual expressions of these respective ways may show considerable differences. This idea is most pointedly grasped by the definition of *ris med* that was given by Schuh, according to which “*ris-med* refers to the postulate of practicing the cults of different schools without the judgemental preference of individual schools or groups of Lamaism.”⁹³

This attitude was also perceived in an effort to collect and preserve the manifold character of Tibetan religion, expressed most prominently in Kong sprul’s “Five Treasures” (*Mdzod lnga*),⁹⁴ but also the mutual transmission of practices.⁹⁵ While the early *ris med* masters were thus active in different religious traditions, this did not lead to an abandonment of the distinction of these traditions or prohibit affiliation with one primary tradition. The bulk of Kong sprul’s compilations, for example, is concerned with teachings from various traditions, but his endeavour nevertheless shows a special focus on the teachings of his own Bka’ brgyud tradition and related doctrines.⁹⁶ More recent proponents of *ris med*, in particular, emphasise that the mutual appreciation of, and respect towards, the variegated approaches to the Buddhist path does not lead to an undifferentiated mixture of the various traditions. That means that the *ris med* ideal of tolerance towards other schools should not be seen as being in conflict with one’s identification as belonging to a certain tradition.⁹⁷ How this lofty ideal was

⁹² See, e.g., Smith 2001: 235, Schuh 1973: LVII, Pettit 1999: 97, and Seyfort Ruegg 1989b: 310. The latter suggested also the adjectives “unbounded,” “all-embracing,” “unlimited,” and “impartial.”

⁹³ Quote translated by the author; the German original (Schuh 1976: LVI) reads as follows: “Hiernach bezeichnet *ris-med* das Postulat der Praktizierung der Kulte verschiedener Schulen ohne die wertende Bevorzugung einzelner Schulen oder Gruppen des Lamaismus.” Note the dated designation of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as “Lamaism.”

⁹⁴ For a description of the content of these “treasures,” see Smith 2001: 262ff.

⁹⁵ See Schuh 1976: LVII.

⁹⁶ As its name indicates, one of the treasures, the *Bka’ brgyud sngags mdzod*, is devoted entirely to the esoteric teachings of the Bka’ brgyud tradition. His own doctrinal background surely had effects also on his other collections; the extent of this influence, however, needs to be clarified by further research.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Barron 2003, where this distinction between a general *ris med* attitude and the self-identification as a member of a certain tradition is reported in the explanations of recent *ris med* masters. It would be interesting to investigate the relation between

to put into practice is clearly demonstrated by Mkhan po Kun dpal's observation of the teaching style of his master Rdza Dpal sprul, conceived of as one of the most famous early proponents of *ris med*.⁹⁸

On this basis, when asked, "How should this text (the Bodhi-sattvacaryāvatāra) be explained?", I (Khenpo Kunpal) heard him say, "It should be explained to the followers of the Sakya School according to the commentary of the venerable Sönam Tsemo; to the followers of the Genden School with the commentary of Darma (Rinchen), to the followers of the Kagyü School with commentaries such as that of Pawo Tsug lak Trengwa and others; and to the followers of the Old School – and (in particular) for the Śrī Siṃha (Shedra) of the ancient Dzogchen (monastery) – according to their own tradition of the Old School."

As this example shows, respect towards other traditions was considered to be crucial. The differences that developed in the individual schools – in this case the various ways of interpreting the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* – were accepted and appreciated as valuable forms to fit the respective and differing needs of the disciples. Thus, the individual traditions were cherished without equipping them with an exclusive claim to truth. How, then, does Mi pham relate to such an ideal?

As indicated above, another valuable perspective could be to address the social structure of *ris med*. It is assumed that various Buddhist masters shared and actively promoted the *ris med* ideal just described, and hence can be viewed as forming an – at least in some respects – coherent group. This view of *ris med* as a social phenomenon was stressed by Dieter Schuh,

those two kinds of identification – as *ris med pa* and as belonging to a certain tradition – in more detail. The identification as *ris med pa* was certainly more significant in the nineteenth century (indicated, for example, by reports that *ris med* proponents were criticised by Pha bong kha pa Bde chen snying po (1878–1941), and it seems that, for the early masters, it also implied engaging in and uniting the practices of different religious schools. Later *ris med* proponents, however, seem more inclined to emphasise identification with one specific school, whereas the *ris med* ideal is understood as a sign of general tolerance, that – as a typical Buddhist ideal – became very much *en vogue*, to the extent that many Tibetan masters describe themselves as "also being a *ris med pa*," in addition to their clear affiliation with a certain school. See, e.g., Ringu Tulku 2006: 1, where he reports that all prominent lamas he had confronted with the question of their adherence to the *ris med* ideal answered affirmatively.

⁹⁸ Kretschmar 2004: 37f.

who spoke of the *ris med pa* as a (political) group or social movement.⁹⁹ The early *ris med* masters Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po (1820–1892) are commonly accepted as the founding fathers of this development, and are seen as constituting its core, together with numerous masters in their vicinity, such as Rdza Dpal sprul (1808–1887), but also later scholars, such as Mi pham himself.

Being a direct disciple of those early masters, Mi pham obviously had strong personal connections to the *ris med* network; it therefore seems legitimate to count him as a member of this social group – and he was most likely also perceived in this way by his Dge lugs opponents. In certain aspects, however, Mi pham differed greatly from the ideals and practices of his forebears. Karma Phuntsho points out:¹⁰⁰

Notwithstanding the common assumption that he was an advocate of the ecumenical movement (*ris med pa*) which his teachers initiated, Mipham was a staunch proponent of the rNying ma doctrine, and repeatedly refuted other schools igniting new doctrinal controversies. It still remains a perplexing question whether Mi pham was a *ris med pa* in the same way as Kong sprul and dPal sprul.

Throughout his many commentaries on the classical corpus of Indian Buddhist literature, Mi pham tried to establish a specific Rnying ma view; indeed, his contribution to the Rnying ma's own philosophical tradition might be counted as one of Mi pham's greatest merits. Shaping the face of Rnying ma philosophy, Mi pham obviously regarded it as necessary to distinguish its view from those of other traditions or scholars. He therefore vigorously engaged in what might be called "boundary work," the delineation of the (perceived) correct view of his own tradition, placed in contrast to the false views of others (often derived from the Dge lugs tradition, or certain aspects of the *gzhan stong* doctrine). Thus, polemical elements can be found in various writings of Mi pham, and also, in particular, in the case of his commentary on the BCA. In this text, as will be shown later in detail, Mi pham explicitly refers to interpretations commonly accepted in the Dge lugs tradition by such masters as Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen or even Tsong kha pa himself and refutes them. In doing so, Mi pham clearly deviates from the advice of his master Dpal sprul, who suggested regarding all the different interpretations of this text that had developed in the various

⁹⁹ See Schuh 1976: LVII.

¹⁰⁰ Phuntsho 2007:193.

schools as viable.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, it would be mistaken to conclude that there was a generally inimical attitude against other traditions, such as the Dge lugs, from the instances of criticism Mi pham expressed in the process of concrete textual interpretation. According to Karma Phuntsho, the enduring discussions with scholars of the Dge lugs tradition should not be interpreted as intolerance against their tradition *per se*, but rather as an attempt to clarify the respective positions.¹⁰²

As for Mi pham, it is clear that his idea of *ris med* is not of one uniform tradition for all Tibetan Buddhists but of a harmony with differences, a unity within diversity. He encouraged a *ris med* wherein all traditions adhere to their own doctrine and respect others. For him, sharp philosophical discussions and criticisms could go on, but in a friendly social atmosphere with mutual respect. This is the *ris med* attitude he adopted when he argued against such opponents as dPa' ri Blo bzang Rab gsal.

Famous for showing his *ris med* stance is a short work by Mi pham, in which he expresses his general tolerance and equanimity towards the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁰³ Written in the form of a short piece of advice that is meant to tease others (*mtshar gtam*), this work jokingly describes the qualities and possible pitfalls of the four major Tibetan Buddhist traditions – Sa skya, Rnying ma, Bka' brgyud, and Dge lugs – thus putting them all on the same level. In the course of the work, Mi pham repeatedly emphasises that one should not engage in an inimical attitude towards other traditions and that one's identification with a certain school should not lead to intolerance.¹⁰⁴

Even though one adheres to one's own tradition, it is important that there is no aversion towards other traditions.

¹⁰¹ In a personal interview in September 2009, Rdzogs chen Rin po che Bstan 'dzin lung rtogs nyi ma, one of the main teachers of Rdzogs chen Monastery in the Sde dge area, who had written an extensive history of the Rdzogs chen tradition and the figures connected to it, also emphasised that Mi pham must be distinguished from earlier *ris med* masters, owing to his focus on his own tradition and the criticism he expressed with regard to others.

¹⁰² Phuntsho 2007: 193.

¹⁰³ See *Mtshar gtam*. An English translation of the work was produced by Adam Pearcey from Lotsawahouse, see <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/nyingma-masters/mipham/satirical-advice-four-schools> [accessed December 28, 2011].

¹⁰⁴ *Mtshar gtam* 393.3: *rang phyogs la zhen po yod kyang | gzhan phyogs la sdang ba med pa zhi gal che ste |*.

At the very end of the tractate, Mi pham even describes himself as someone who acts as a common base for identifying with all four individual schools.¹⁰⁵ Thus, Mi pham seems to have inherited the *ris med* ideal in the form of a general acceptance of the various schools from his teachers; nevertheless he differs from them, as he places more emphasis on the establishment of a specific Rnying ma outlook, formulated often in sharp contrast to the views of other schools. Despite these differences, Mi pham clearly has a close connection to the *ris med* network, in terms of both his belonging to *ris med* as a social group and the ideas it characterises.

When *ris med* is employed as a general background against which the debates developed – as is done, for example, by Dieter Schuh, who was quoted above – a tension between Mi pham, depicted as a figurehead for *ris med*, and his non-*ris med* Dge lugs opponents is stressed. This tension was also perceived within the tradition, as expressed in one account by a follower of Mi pham. Karma Phuntsho writes:¹⁰⁶

mKhan po 'Jigs med Phun tshogs, a staunch follower of Mi-pham in modern Tibet, recounts in his biography of Mipham, *Sound of the Victorious Battle Drum*, how the monks of the three dGe lugs pa seats in central Tibet attempted to vanquish Mi-pham through sorcery and exorcisms. Mipham however triumphed unharmed through his spiritual powers and the sorcery and exorcism are said to have rebounded onto the performers themselves, bringing abnormal diseases and death.

For the present purpose it is not necessary to evaluate the historical credibility of this account. More importantly, it shows that Mi pham's tradition depicts him as being in large-scale opposition to the entire Dge lugs school – symbolised by the members of its three most important monasteries. In the light of such descriptions, it would make much sense to place the debates within the general tensions between the Dge lugs and the non-Dge lugs traditions that developed in the nineteenth century, evoked also through the former's attainment to political power. The exact relation between Mi pham and individual Dge lugs masters, as well as the Central Tibetan government in general, requires, however, more careful research.

¹⁰⁵ See *Mtshar gdam* 394.3: *ces sa rnying bka' dge bzhi'i yin pa yod pa'i ma tis | | grogs kyi ngor rtsed mor bris |*. "Ma ti" – referring to Sanskrit *mati* (intelligence, thought, etc.) – is one of the names of Mi pham and it is therefore Mi pham himself who identifies with the four schools. The translation of this work cited above seems to have misunderstood this sentence, relating it to the person who requested the advice instead of relating it to Mi pham.

¹⁰⁶ Phuntsho 2007: 192.

An indication that the tension between him and the Dge lugs school was not as drastic or long-lasting as, for example, that between the latter and the Jo nang tradition or certain Sa skya scholars, is that the Central Tibetan government even supported the printing of Mi pham's collected works.¹⁰⁷

Mi pham as a person of authority

Above, a possible religio-political background of the debates was discussed in terms of a general tension between Mi pham and his Dge lugs opponents, which is also connected to the formation of the *ris med*. Another way of looking for the involvement of religio-political aspects in the disputes is to explore Mi pham's status within the society of Sde dge, a territory that was contested in the late nineteenth century by various forces, among them also – most notably – the Central Tibetan government affiliated with the Dge lugs school. Since the Dga' ldan pho brang tried to extend its influence to Sde dge, any person of authority in this area must also have been of importance to it. The following section will therefore examine whether Mi pham can be regarded as such a person, and, if so, in what way he was connected to the political authorities.

While Mi pham was never formally recognised as a reincarnated religious master, he acquired remarkable fame and influence. At the height of his career he also acted as a personal teacher of the king of Sde dge, whom he instructed on governance in 1895.¹⁰⁸ This was also the time when the two sons of the earlier king were struggling for the Sde dge throne, the older Rdo rje seng ge, who was affiliated with his father, and the younger 'Jam dpal rin chen, associated with his mother. It is known that Mi pham was teaching 'Jam dpal rin chen, who therefore must have been considered the ruler, at least in 1895. As both of the competing factions used their connections to the Central Tibetan government, as well as to the Chinese rulers, to foster their power, Mi pham's affiliation with 'Jam dpal rin chen must also have had consequences for his relations with the Central Tibetan or Chinese forces, respectively. However, 'Jam dpal rin chen's exact political relations with the outside parties at this particular point in time are unclear; hence, any conclusions on Mi pham's association with either of these must remain tentative.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ See Schuh 1973: XXXV.

¹⁰⁸ See Schuh 1973: XXXII. These teachings of Mi pham are preserved in his work *Rgyal po'i lugs kyi bstan bcos*, which has partly been translated by Luran Hartley; see Hartley 1997.

¹⁰⁹ Evaluating various sources, Luran Hartley suggests that some of the most influential religious teachers in Sde dge were on good terms with the Central Tibetan government; see Hartley 1997: 84.

In any case, Mi pham's privilege of acting as a tutor to the king shows that he had gained a special status among the various religious teachers in Sde dge. Whether Mi pham used this connection to influence political issues, too, is difficult to determine. Certainly, important religious figures in general had considerable power with regard to worldly matters, as well as religious ones, as the following account by William Rockhill, who travelled through Khams in 1889, demonstrates:¹¹⁰

From Jyékundo to Ta-chien-lu, a distance of about 600 miles, I passed forty lamaseries, in the smallest of which there were 100 monks, and in five of them from 2000 to 4000. Although the greater part of K'amdo is not under their direct rule, they are everywhere the *de facto* masters of the country. In their hands is nearly all the wealth of the land, acquired by trading, donations, money-lending, and bequests.

That such descriptions of the power of monks also apply to Mi pham and his teachers was something believed by Gene Smith, who described their influence as "tremendous," elevating them to a status of "temporal authority."¹¹¹ It is doubtful that Mi pham actually practiced direct political power. Luran Hartley has investigated Mi pham's treatise on governance in this regard, and comes to the conclusion that political involvement on the part of Mi pham cannot be assumed from this work. This was further corroborated in interviews she had with lamas of this area.¹¹² A similar view was also put forth by Ringu Tulku, a contemporary *ris med* master, as quoted by John Pettit. The latter further suggests that no political agendas were involved in the formation of Mi pham's critical interpretations.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Rockhill 1891: 215.

¹¹¹ Cf. Smith 2001: 249: "During the postwar period, 'Jam dbyangs Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–92) and Kong sprul had tremendous influence in Sde dge. They quickly gained the respect of the Lhasa generals posted in the east and were the moral leaders for the distressed people of Sde dge. In 1870 a princess from the ancient house of Ra ga shar (Mdo mkhar ba) arrived in Sde dge as a bride for the heir. This alliance led to one more troubled generation, during which Mkhyen brtse and later Mi pham would be forced to exercise much temporal authority."

¹¹² See Hartley 1997: 81f.

¹¹³ See Pettit 1999: 21: "He did not have time to be a politician, though he did write a manual on statecraft (*nītiśāstra*, *rgyal po'i bstan bcos*) for the benefit of his aristocratic disciples. Ann Helm's collaborator Ringu Tulku, like other contemporary lamas of the Nyingma tradition, discounts the idea that Mipham was one of the real temporal powers in sDe dge. [...] Even though his excellence as a teacher evidently made his counsel much valued by the rich and powerful in sDe dge, Mipham does not seem to have been exceptionally indebted

Even though Mi pham probably did not directly engage in political matters, we must acknowledge his special position among the political rulers in Sde dge.

Closely connected to his prominence among the worldly leaders is, of course, also his success in the religious and philosophical domain. With his enormous literary output,¹¹⁴ he established himself as an expert in virtually all fields of Tibetan knowledge. Especially important is that Mi pham also prevailed in areas which traditionally were not within the focus of the Rnying ma school. His interest in logic and philosophy, fields that, in the past, had been dominated by scholars of the Dge lugs and Sa skya schools, contributed greatly to his fame.¹¹⁵ While Mi pham was cherished by most followers of his own school,¹¹⁶ we can safely assume that his endeavours must also have raised the suspicions of scholars of other traditions. The story of the alleged attempt to kill Mi pham, told by Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, may be recalled in this context.¹¹⁷

Clearly, Mi pham was able to establish himself as a person with extraordinary authority in the religious and philosophical realms, and also must be regarded as having wielded considerable political influence – or at least as having been able to do so. Whether it was this position that enabled him to express his criticism of other viewpoints in the first place, or whether his status should be seen as a product of his criticism, remains an open question. Further, it would be far too limited to explain the interest in Mi pham's writings and the fierce reaction they evoked, especially from the Dge lugs camp, as a strategic attempt to diminish his authority based purely on political grounds, i.e., to pave the way for spreading the power of the Dga' ldan pho brang. In this historical setting, however, Mi pham is

to those persons for material support. Like Mipham himself, the Sde dge aristocracy were supporters of the ecumenical (*ris med*) trend fostered by Mipham's teachers. This also suggests that Mipham's controversial philosophical positions were probably not influenced by the political agendas of aristocratic factions who favored one or another of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions."

¹¹⁴ See Phuntsho 2007 and Duckworth 2011, for an overview of Mi pham's oeuvre.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Schuh 1973: XXIX. We should note that, with regard to the BCA in particular, Mi pham's teacher, Dpal sprul, initiated an unprecedented and widespread interest in this work in the Rnying ma tradition that was then continued by Mi pham in the debates with other schools; see Viehbeck 2005: 13.

¹¹⁶ As noted in the respective colophons, Mi pham wrote many of his philosophical works at the request of his teachers, such as the famous 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po. But even within the Rnying ma tradition, these works were not unanimously accepted, as shown for example by the different approach in commenting upon the Indian scriptures that was taken by Mkhan po Gzhan dga' (1871–1927); see Smith 2001: 232.

¹¹⁷ See above, p.73.

also a political figure and we can assume that religious-philosophical and religious-political factors interacted in a very complex way.

Political motives? – Turning to the texts

We have delineated the general historical background of the debates above, and further implied that these are embedded in developments on a level that might be termed “political,” even though it is difficult to point out concrete connections between the debates and politics. Turning to the texts that were exchanged within these debates, we will, however, discover that no explicit traces of political factors can be found.

Mi pham is rather discreet about the motives for writing his commentary. Its title indicates that his work was intended to facilitate “easy comprehension” (*go sla ba*) of the content of the BCA.¹¹⁸ In one of the opening verses, Mi pham explains the means he employs in his endeavour: by following the scriptures of the Buddha and through reasoning, one will be able to abandon all paths that are “crooked” (*gya gyu*) and “partial” (*phyogs 'dzin*).¹¹⁹ Thus, as is typical for a writer on Buddhist doctrine, Mi pham establishes his work as a correct and unbiased understanding of the original scriptures of the Buddha, undefiled by personal idiosyncrasies. In the colophon, Mi pham further points out the sources of his commentary. He mentions the explanations he has received from his teacher Dpal sprul on the subject matter, but also that he has seen and understood not only all Indian commentaries on the BCA available in Tibet, but also the majority of the Tibetan commentaries.¹²⁰ Again, this explanation underlines the unbiased nature of Mi pham’s commentary. It is well founded in the author’s own tradition, but also in sources outside his school: the Indian scriptures that are commonly regarded as authoritative by Tibetan philosophers, and also the interpretations of commentators from other Tibetan Buddhist schools.

As will be shown below, in the discussion of the content of the debates, Mi pham’s commentary does indeed make direct reference to other works

¹¹⁸ The full title of Mi pham’s commentary reads: *Shes rab kyi le'u'i tshig don go sla bar rnam par bshad pa nor bu ke ta ka*.

¹¹⁹ See *Nor bu ke ta ka* 2.2–3:

*'on kyang dam pa'i lung gi rjes 'brangs te | |
dngos stobs rigs pa'i sgo nas mkhas pa'i lam | |
mthong tshe phyogs 'dzin gya gyu'i bgrod pa kun | |
rab spangs dogs med zhi ba'i gnas 'dir rgyu | |.*

¹²⁰ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 94.5–6: *gnas lnga rig pa'i pañ chen dpal gyi mtshan can las tshul 'di'i bshad khrid legs par nos shing | bod du bzhuks pa'i rgya 'grel thams cad dang | bod kyi mkhas pas brtsams pa'i legs bshad phal che ba kun kyang mthong zhing | de dag gi don legs par blo la 'char bar byas pa.*

on the BCA, most importantly to the works of certain Dge lugs scholars whom he strongly criticises. This criticism is, however, not presented randomly or formulated in a general way – so as to be interpreted as a general disdain of the others’ tradition – , but always related to concrete textual interpretation.

For the Dge lugs scholars, on the other hand, this criticism of what they regarded as the firmly established words of their masters could not go unanswered. As shown already, scholars such as Dpa’ ris Rab gsal and Ldan ma Blo chos placed their own tradition in a long and undefiled line of explanation that goes back ultimately to the historical Buddha.¹²¹ Mi pham, in contrast, is considered an intruder, a threat to this authoritative transmission of ideas. While such remarks could be made with regard to Mi pham’s undertaking in general, every argument against Mi pham’s interpretations was nevertheless conceived of as needing to be backed up by a concrete proof employing reasoning or authoritative scriptures, as exemplified by Dpa’ ris Rab gsal’s criticism.¹²² Similar to what is found in Mi pham’s works, there is no plain and general rejection of the other based on the fact that he belongs to a different socio-religious or political faction. Bearing in mind the general tension between non-*ris med* Dge lugs and *ris med* that was depicted as a possible background, one could expect that this distinction would be referred to in the development of the debates. A search through the writings of Dpa’ ris Rab gsal, however, fails to corroborate this assumption; the term “*ris med*” appears nine times in Dpa’ ris Rab gsal’s three letters to Mi pham, but never to designate a group of political opponents.¹²³

Confronted with strong criticism from the Dge lugs camp, Mi pham stresses in his answer that his commentary was never intended as a criticism of the Dge lugs school; as proponents of his own tradition lacked trust in the instructions of their forebears, he composed manuals that expounded their tradition – including his commentary on the BCA. Naturally, these treatises were dispersed all over the country, and thus also found their way to the great Dge lugs centres, whose members then re-

¹²¹ See pp.50ff.

¹²² See below, Chapter Five.

¹²³ In Rab gsal’s works, the term *ris med* is mostly used in a very general sense, i.e., meaning “all, without distinction, without bias.” Only once (*Ga bur chu rgyun* 433.6–434.1) does the term seem to refer to *ris med* as the specific group in the nineteenth century, but in this case, too, *ris med* is not depicted in a negative way.

garded the works as being aimed at their tradition.¹²⁴ While his works clearly refer to the interpretive positions of other schools, Mi pham explains his criticism of these views as an indispensable boundary work, needed to clearly delineate the borders of his own tradition. These works were, however, as Mi pham repeatedly emphasises, not written out of aversion (*sdang ba*), but based on reasoning.¹²⁵ Further, Mi pham explains that it was not his own wish to engage in these debates, but that he was requested to do so by his comrades and patrons.¹²⁶

Stressing one's pure motivation when engaging in dispute with others appears to be an integral part of the debates, an aspect that is highlighted by both factions. Dpa' ris Rab gsal, for example, presents his criticism of Mi pham as a corrective that should merely prevent others from following the wrong path.¹²⁷ This very idea is then taken up (and also quoted) by Mi pham in his later answer: most important is that one refrains from a biased attitude, but investigates honestly in search for complete liberation. Thus, a line of reasoning able to refute a wrong view can act as a "medicine that eradicates a disease," and thus benefits all sentient beings.¹²⁸

Such noble motives certainly have to be placed in context. Buddhism as a whole teaches the ideals of kindness and equanimity to others; the critical letters exchanged – being conceived of as Buddhist teachings themselves – cannot deviate from this pattern. Further, in logical debate as it was practiced in Tibet, an argument had to be established by solid proof – and mere adherence to a certain religious or political faction was not accepted as a valid reason for criticism. These principles pertain to the form taken by the concrete criticism, while other, probably less noble, reasons may have played a role in engaging in debate in the first place.

¹²⁴ See *Rab lan* 458.1–3: 'di phyogs pa phal cher dus dbang gis rang lugs kyi bla ma gong ma'i man ngag la'ang yid mi ches pa 'ga' zhig byung bas rang lugs kyi 'dod tshul brjod pa'i yig cha phran bu rnams phyogs phyogs su rang shugs kyi song bas phyogs bzhi'i dge 'dun gyi sde phal mo che thugs cung zad ma rangs par rtsod pa'i tshul du bzung bar song ba la | .

¹²⁵ Cf. *Rab lan* 458.3.

¹²⁶ See *Rab lan* 462.5–6.

¹²⁷ See 'Ju lan 412.2ff.

¹²⁸ Cf. *Rab lan* 195.2–5: bdag gis kyang chags sdang gi kun slong med par rnam grol lam gnad 'tshol ba'i bsam pas bod snga phyi'i mkhas grub rnams kyi dgongs pa'i zhe phug brtags pa'i ched du cung zad re smras pa la sdang zhugs med par dpyad na su la phan cha med snyam zhing | [...] lam yang dag dang mi mthun pa'i smra ba byung na | gang su zhig gis bkag kyang | yang dag rigs pas de ltar grub pa zhig na nad 'byin pa'i sman bzhi du blta yis log par sun ci phyin du mi bgyi ste | bdag cag rnams rnam grol don gnyer ston pa gcig gi bstan pa la zhugs pa yin pas nga khyod kyi lugs zhes ris su chad pa ci yang mi dgos pa'i phyir ro | | .

Part II

**Main part: the debate between
Mi pham and Rab gsal**

Chapter 3

Textual sources

The debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal is documented well by the numerous texts they exchanged during their extended dispute. These texts begin with Mi pham's commentary on the BCA, followed by Rab gsal's preparatory notification and actual criticism, Mi pham's answer, Rab gsal's response to it, and lastly Mi pham's final answer, as has already been outlined above in the description of the historical development of the debates. This material also provides the basis for the discussion of the content of the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal that is presented in the following chapter. While this will focus on selected key issues and individual lines of argumentation, the present chapter introduces these works as a whole, and thus provides a more general frame for the placement of the specific issues which will follow later.

In the preparation of the textual material, emphasis was laid on philological accuracy. To this end various editions of these works have been consulted.

Editions

The textual situation for the works of Mi pham and the works of Rab gsal that were used in this study is quite similar. In both cases, the relevant works are contained in their authors' Collected Works (*gsung 'bum*), which exist in the form of a relatively old block-print collection. This again formed the basis of various newer editions of the Collected Works or individual works published in India or China. In all cases, differences between the text version in the Collected Works and recent editions consist mostly of (attempted) corrections of perceived faults in the block-print – often the

addition of vowels left out, the alteration of individual letters, or the clarification of illegible letters. Further, obvious typing errors also occurred during the digitisation of the block-print. We can therefore safely assume that the newer editions rely mostly on the older block-print as their template.

In the process of preparing the textual material, a number of these newer editions have been consulted. Deviations from the block-print version have been adopted in the case of meaningful corrections of obvious mistakes, or when clarification of illegible letters in the block-print has been undertaken – the latter being a frequent problem with the block-prints of Rab gsal's works. Thereby, variants of the preferred reading are given in parentheses after the respective word, pointing to its source by a defined abbreviation (A, B, or C, see explanations below). Variant readings with regard to the Tibetan letters *pa* and *ba* have not been taken into consideration, as the distinction of these letters is often not possible in the block-print version. The page numbers given refer to the pagination of the block-print (A in the case of Mi pham, C in the case of Rab gsal). Digitised versions of both the block-print of Mi pham's works and that of Rab gsal are easily available through the text collection of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC).

The works of Mi pham

Until the present day, the most authoritative source for Mi pham's works is the edition of his Collected Works in twenty-seven volumes issued under the direction of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and edited by Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimey in Paro during the years 1984–1993.¹ This edition gathers the block-prints of Mi pham's works from various presses.² As mentioned in the table of contents (*dkar chag*), Volume 14 (*ca*), the volume that

¹ A scan of this edition can be obtained through TBRC, see http://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W23468 [accessed January 06, 2011]. There are some efforts to produce a new, more extensive, version of Mi pham's Collected Works. On a field trip in the Khams area in 2009, I was able to obtain a preliminary version of an edition of Mi pham's Collected Works produced at the Lnga rig nang bstan slob grwa in Bla rung. This version consists of 42 volumes altogether and apparently includes previously unpublished material from hand-written manuscripts. Another modern edition of Mi pham's works in 63 volumes was issued from Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang in 2012.

² In an online introduction to the catalogue of Mi pham's works, a member of the Toyo Bunko Library provided an overview of the development of the block-print edition of Mi pham's work (www.toyo-bunko.or.jp/Database/tibetan_resources/mipham_intro.pdf; accessed on January 15, 2007; see Toyo Bunko Library). Unfortunately, this website is not available any longer.

contains all the works directly involved in the controversy, is produced from block-prints carved at Sde dge dgon chen (abbreviation A).

While producing a digital version of the relevant works, this version was collated with a more modern edition of the works, issued at the Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang in 1993 (abbreviation B).

Additionally, a third version of the works has been consulted only for the passages actually quoted in the present study. This was published by the Nyingmapa Student's Welfare Committee of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath in 1993 and has been reprinted in several editions since then (abbreviation C):³

A 'Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho, *'Jam mgon mi pham rgya mtsho gi gsung 'bum*. 27 volumes, ed. by Lama Ngodrup & Sherab Drimey, Paro, 1984–1993, see MPSB.

B 'Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho, *Shes rab le'u'i tshig don go sla bar rnam par bshad pa nor bu ke ta ka*. Ed. by Padma tshul khrim. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1993, see *Sher 'grel ke ta ka*.

C 'Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho, *Brgal lan rnam gsum dang sher 'grel ke ta ka*. Ed. by Orgyan bstan 'dzin *et al.* Sarnath: Nyingmapa Student's Welfare Committee, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1993, see *Brgal lan rnam gsum*.

The works of Rab gsal

All the works of Rab gsal consulted in this study are contained in his Collected Works (*gsung 'bum*), of which the most authoritative edition and source for all later editions is the version printed from the block-prints from Sku 'bum monastery (abbreviation C).⁴

In the preparation of the digital version of the relevant works, this edition was collated with two more recent editions. In 1991, a modern book version of Rab gsal's Collected Works was published in China. As stated in its introduction, it is based on the Sku 'bum block-prints, which were compared with Rab gsal's original manuscripts (*ma yig*). It does not, however, specify which of the works were compared with the handwritten originals.

³ Another modern edition of the relevant texts was produced by the Yeshe De Project under the direction of Tarthang Tulku in 2004 (see Yeshe De Project 2004); this was, however, not taken into consideration in the present study.

⁴ The block-prints for this version are still stored at Sku 'bum monastery close to Xining, as I was able to confirm during a field trip in 2009. Ordering a print directly from the printing press at Sku 'bum would be difficult, perhaps impossible; a scan of this print can, however, be easily acquired from TBRC, see http://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_Object-W00EGS1017359 [accessed January 06, 2011].

Though this edition helps to clarify illegible letters in the original, it has also added numerous spelling mistakes (abbreviation B).

The works used in the present study also appeared in a compilation of texts published in Delhi in 1969 (abbreviation A). A comparison with the Sku 'bum edition shows that the Delhi edition is also based on the Sku 'bum prints.⁵ For the passages quoted in this study, all three of these editions have been taken into consideration:

A Dpa' ris Blo bzang rab gsal, *'Ju lan Ga bur chu rgyun*. Ed. by Byams pa chos rgyal, Delhi, 1969, see *'Ju lan Ga bur chu rgyun*.

B Dpa' ris Blo bzang rab gsal, *Dpa' ris Blo bzang rab gsal gyi gsung 'bum*. Ed. by Sun Wun Cing. Pe cin: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1998 (1st ed. 1991), see RSSB B).

C Dpa' ris Blo bzang rab gsal, *Gsung 'bum, Blo bzang rab gsal*. Sku 'bum: Sku 'bum par khang, 199?, see RSSB (C).

The individual texts

In the following, a general overview of the individual works involved in the controversy is given. The texts are presented according to their chronological appearance. The structural outlines (*sa bcad*) used and produced for this presentation are provided in Chapter Seven.

Nor bu ke ta ka

Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka* is a commentary (*rnam bshad/vyākhyā*) on the ninth chapter of the BCA, the chapter seen as fundamental for the understanding of Madhyamaka philosophy. As the full title indicates, Mi pham wrote this commentary to facilitate easy comprehension of this chapter: *Shes rab kyi le'u'i tshig don go sla bar rnam par bshad pa nor bu ke ta ka* ("Nor bu ke ta ka: A Detailed Explanation for an Easy Comprehension of the Words and

⁵ Gene Smith has noted that the Delhi edition represents "a copy made from a rare print of the A mdo A rig Dgon chen edition" (Smith 2001: 328). It seems that this assumption is based on a verse added to the last text in this compilation, where the A rig dgon chen is mentioned (see *Ga bur chu rgyun* 470.3). The formulation in the respective verse is not entirely clear; it could mean either that the text was prepared at A rig dgon chen, or that this monastery acted as the sponsor of its production. In a similar verse, added to the other major work in the compilation, the *'Ju lan*, A rig dgon chen is clearly denoted as the sponsor (*'bri rko rgyu sbyor*) for the carving of the block-prints of the text, see *'Ju lan* 421.4. We can therefore assume that the later text, too, was sponsored by A rig dgon chen, but that it was actually printed at Sku 'bum, where the block-prints are also housed at present. A definitive answer in this matter would, however, require closer investigation.

Meaning of the Chapter of Insight”). According to its colophon, this work was composed at the repeated request of his spiritual friend “Su ka ma.” Mi pham explains further that he based his commentary on the teachings he had received from his master Rdza Dpal sprul, all Indian commentaries that are available in Tibet, and also the majority of the Tibetan works on the BCA.⁶

Mi pham’s commentary is divided into two parts.⁷ First, “the way insight must be generated” (*shes rab bskyed dgos tshul*) is described, followed by an “explanation about the perfection of insight itself” (*shes rab phar phyin nyid bshad pa*). While the former is related only to the very first verse of BCA IX, the latter makes up the main part of Mi pham’s work and comprises all other verses of the ninth chapter. The main part is again divided into two sections: “determining the basis as empty of true [establishment]” (*gzhi bden stong du rnam par gzthag pa*) and “establishing the path as selfless” (*lam bdag med du gtan la dbab pa*). In terms of size, these two sections split Mi pham’s commentary evenly into two halves. The first covers BCA IX.2–57 and consists of explanations of the principle of *satyadvaya*, on the types of persons by whom this is realised, and on the way in which this is done; it further examines objections to the relevant explanations and the scriptures in which these are laid out. Among these, Mi pham’s commentary on BCA IX.2 is especially significant. His explanations of this single verse are by far the most extensive in the whole ninth chapter. Here, he delineates in detail his understanding of *satyadvaya*, which is formulated in sharp contrast to the standard interpretation in the Dge lugs tradition.

The second half of Mi pham’s work covers BCA IX.58–168. In its “establishment of the path as selfless by reasoning” (*lam bdag med du rigs pas gtan la dbab pa*), it discusses two types of selflessness: that in connection with a person (*gang zag gi bdag med*) and that in connection with phenomena (*chos kyi bdag med*). The first is further subdivided into “refuting [grasping] an innate self” (*lhan skyes kyi bdag dgag*) and “refuting [grasping] an imagined self” (*kun btags kyi bdag dgag*). The second consists of the “four applications of mindfulness” (*dran pa nye bar bzhag pa bzhi*), that is, a reflection on the nature of the body (*lus*), sensations (*tshor ba*), mind (*sems*), and phenomena (*chos*). All these explanations are interspersed with possible objections

⁶ See *Nor bu ke ta ka* 94.5–6: *ces pa’ang dge ba’i bshes gnyen su ka ma nas [C las] yang nas yang du bskul bar mdzad pa’i rkyen byas nas | gnas lnga rig pa’i pañ chen dpal gyi mtshan can las tshul ‘di’i bshad khrid legs par nos shing | bod du bzhugs pa’i rgya ‘grel thams cad dang | bod kyi mkhas pas brtsams pa’i legs bshad phal che ba kun kyang mthong zhing | de dag gi don legs par blo la ‘char bar byas pa.*

⁷ For a structural outline of the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, see Chapter Seven.

from non-Buddhist or Buddhist opponents and the subsequent refutation of these objections. Mi pham's commentary ends with a short explanation of the function or benefit of realising emptiness (*stong nyid rtogs pa'i byed las*).

As can be seen from the structure of Mi pham's commentary, it frequently addresses objections by various opponents and refutes these. This emphasis on the "refutation of objections" (*rtsod spong*) is, however, not a specific feature of Mi pham's style of annotation, but is determined by the content of the BCA, which consists largely of a defence or vindication of the author's position regarding the doctrine of emptiness. While this type of polemic is therefore part of *any* commentary on the BCA, Mi pham's commentary appears especially evocative of controversies, since it frequently mentions divergent positions, also with regard to passages where Śāntideva's own view is to be established. The treatment of these varies. A different reading may simply be mentioned as an alternative, or it may be dismissed with great vigour. It may be formulated as a general (and rather anonymous) opinion, or as a specific reading by another interpreter of the BCA. In fact, all four principle passages of Mi pham's commentary that Rab gsal criticised contain such divergent interpretations, which Mi pham contrasted with his own understanding. That such is indeed specific to Mi pham's style of annotation is shown, for example, by a comparison with the commentary of Mkhan po Kun dpal, another student who received his explanations on the BCA from Rdza Dpal sprul.⁸ While both commentaries are closely related, and Kun dpal often follows his senior, Mi pham, Kun dpal abstains from this sort of remarks that are likely to alienate other interpretations. In the passages of Kun dpal's commentary that accord to the four sections Rab gsal criticised in Mi pham's commentary, Kun dpal often simply took over the precise wording of Mi pham or paraphrased him very closely, but left out the passages that he deemed especially polemical.⁹

⁸ See *Kun dpal 'grel pa* (for a translation, see Padmakara 1999). On the relation between those two commentaries and Rdza Dpal sprul's explanations, see above, p.31 and Viehbeck 2009a: 4, n. 9.

⁹ For Kun dpal's commentary on the first issue (BCA IX.1), see *Kun dpal 'grel pa* 618ff. Here, Kun dpal follows Mi pham in his interpretation of *yan lag* as related to all five perfections preceding insight (*shes rab*), and not exclusively to meditation (*bsam gtan*) that immediately precedes insight, but he is rather careful and explicitly mentions Mi pham as the basis for this explanation. With regard to the second issue (BCA IX.78), Kun dpal simply skips the passage of Mi pham's idiosyncratic remarks that Rab gsal regarded as controversial; see *Kun dpal 'grel pa* 684f. The same strategy is also used in the third topic (BCA IX.41–49), where Kun dpal leaves out the defamatory remarks regarding the interpreta-

In his later response to Rab gsal's criticism, Mi pham explains that his interpretations were not intended as a criticism of other traditions, but as a guideline for his own school. Under the influence of the age of degeneration, some followers of the Rnying ma tradition had lost faith in their tradition and so Mi pham wrote his commentary to clarify the position of the Rnying ma school. Naturally, his writings were also brought to other places, and scholars of the Dge lugs school regarded them as an attack on their positions.¹⁰ In the light of the explicit criticism that is expressed in certain passages of his commentary, such remarks, however, seem questionable.

Pho nya

The first work that Rab gsal wrote about Mi pham's commentary was a short letter called *Rigs 'phrul dpyid kyi pho nya* ("The Cuckoo: Magic for [Entering] Reasoning"). This letter is written entirely in verse, containing twenty-two ślokaś of four lines each. In the first half of these verses, Tsong kha pa, as well as the Dge lugs tradition that he founded, are praised for their accomplishments. The second half, in contrast, is more critical. Rab gsal warns of the dangers of understanding Buddha's teaching wrongly,

tion of this passage in the Dge lugs school made by Mi pham, but, otherwise, follows him almost word-by-word; see *Kun dpal 'grel pa* 654ff., in particular, 662. With respect to the last issue (BCA IX.2), Kun dpal paraphrases the essential content of Mi pham's commentary, but again, skips certain passages, in particular, Mi pham's explanation of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika traditions, which contain severe criticism of the conception of emptiness in the Dge lugs tradition; see *Kun dpal 'grel pa* 621ff.

¹⁰ See Rab lan 458.1–3: 'di phyogs pa phal cher dus dbang gis rang lugs kyi bla ma gong ma'i man ngag la'ang yid mi ches pa 'ga' zhiḡ byung bas rang lugs kyi 'dod tshul brjod pa'i yig cha phran bu rnam phyogs phyogs su rang shugs kyis song bas phyogs bzhi'i dge 'dun gyi sde phal mo che thugs cung zad ma rangs par rtsod pa'i tshul du bzung bar song ba la |. A similar statement is also reported by Kun dpal in his biography of Mi pham (Pettit 1999: 26): "At that time the Lord Protector, the Vajra-holder mKhyen brtse Rinpoche, commissioned me to write some textbooks for our tradition. In order to fulfill the command of the lama and cultivate my own intellect, and with the Buddha's teaching uppermost in mind, I wrote some textbooks on the cycles of sūtra teachings etc. In those texts my explanations rather emphasized our own tradition. The scholars of other schools heard that there was a refutation [of their own system], so of course letters of refutation arrived here from all directions. As for my own motivation, I have been impelled only by the command of my lama and by the fact that nowadays the Early Translation teaching is not much more than a painting of a butter lamp. Aside from imitating other systems, there are very few who even wonder what the philosophical system of our school is, much less ask about it. Thus, I have hoped it would be of some benefit to write. Otherwise, I haven't even dreamed of reviling other systems or praising myself."

and presents himself as a guardian of the proper transmission of Buddhism. He explicitly mentions the Rdzogs chen tradition on two occasions, but is careful not to offer direct criticism. The letter does not contain any concrete reference to the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, but in its colophon, Mi pham, here addressed as a proponent of Rdzogs chen, is indicated as the recipient. There,¹¹ the letter is presented as a “mere preparation” (*sbyor ba tsam*) for the actual debate, a function that fits well with its title *pho nya* – a messenger.

Rab gsal’s announcement does not include any concrete philosophical content and hence can be neglected as far as the development of arguments in the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal is concerned. For the sake of completeness, it is, however, included in the present overview.

Ju lan

Rab gsal’s actual criticism of Mi pham’s *Nor bu ke ta ka* followed swiftly. Its full title reads *Jam dpal dbyangs kyi dgongs rgyan rigs pa’i gzi ’bar gdong lnga’i sgra dbyangs* (“The Lion’s Melody, Radiance of Reasoning, an Adornment of Mañjuśrī”). The *Ju lan* has a threefold structure. It begins with a brief introduction to the background of the debate, in which Mi pham is placed in one line with earlier critics of the Dge lugs tradition. This “starting of the discussion” (*gleng bslang ba*) is followed by the main part of the treatise, which discusses the “issues that are raised” (*bslang ba’i don*). Rab gsal concludes his work with a short conciliatory “summary” (*mdor bsdu ba*), in which he acknowledges the differences between his own and Mi pham’s tradition, and even praises Mi pham. The major portion of Rab gsal’s work is devoted to the main part, which contains discussions on four passages altogether in Mi pham’s commentary. These four passages are grouped into two categories, based on the type of principal mistake that Rab gsal detects in Mi pham’s explanations. The first category is “faults of great impudence” (*spyi brtol che ba’i nyes pa*). As the name and Rab gsal’s elaborations indicate, this contains faults that are to be seen more as mere personal idiosyncrasies, rather than an – allegedly – incorrect interpretation that is established in the respective tradition. Rab gsal sees such a mistake in two passages of Mi pham’s commentary: the first in relation to BCA IX.1, the second in relation to BCA IX.78. In his outline, Rab gsal points to these passages simply by quoting a few syllables from the root text. Obviously, these two issues are seen to be less important than the following topics and

¹¹ See *Pho nya* 365.6f.

hence are discussed in less detail. The first issue is the shortest of all and covers about one twelfth of the main part, the second is twice as long.

The second category is called “faults that are raised after investigation” (*brtag zin bslang ba’i nyes pa*), a label that suggests that a certain reading of the BCA – according to Rab gsal – is erroneous, even though it has been reached through sustained reflection and is an interpretation that is also backed up by the respective philosophical tradition. This applies to two passages, Mi pham’s commentary on BCA IX.41–49 and that on IX.2. Both of these issues pertain to fundamental questions in the doctrine of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka: the first to the problem of the realisation of emptiness by Śrāvaka- and Pratyekabuddha-Arhats, the second to the conception of *satyadvaya*. The first topic is just as long as the two topics of the earlier category; the second is twice as long and takes up half of the whole main part.

Clearly, Rab gsal’s presentation follows a hierarchical structure. The four topics are not discussed according to their chronological appearance in Mi pham’s commentary, but according to their philosophical impact. Here, personal misinterpretations seem less important than divergent readings based on doctrinal differences. Among the latter, the discussion of the concept of *satyadvaya* is treated with particular care, since this idea lies at the very core of Madhyamaka philosophy, the view that is commonly accepted as the climax of Buddhist thought among all Tibetan philosophers. While the first three topics are closely related to the literal interpretation of the corresponding passage of the BCA, the fourth topic is of a more general nature and takes the respective verse of the BCA as the point of departure for discussing key issues in the understanding of Madhyamaka philosophy.

In the investigation of these four topics, Rab gsal always uses the same structure. Every topic starts with a presentation of Mi pham’s position, which is then followed by Rab gsal’s refutation. The earlier may contain literal quotes from the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, as well as broader or narrower paraphrases. In the first category, “faults of great impudence,” this part is simply labelled “describing [Mi pham’s] position” (*’dod pa brjod pa*). In the second category, Mi pham’s position is presented as “stating the opponent’s position” (*phyogs snga bkod pa*). This more formal expression also seems to indicate that this category concerns established doctrinal positions. In all cases, the presentation of Mi pham’s position is kept to a minimum. Rab gsal’s refutation (*dgag pa*), in contrast, is rather detailed and includes various different issues. With the exception of the last topic, where the discussion of the question of whether the absolute (*don dam*) is an object (*yul*)

of mind (*blo*) and words (*sgra*) is marked as a separate item, these sections of Rab gsal's extended criticism are not further subdivided in the form of a formal structural outline (*sa bcad*). However, a separation of different issues is often indicated by certain linguistic, stylistic, and structural means. For example, Rab gsal very frequently uses the particle *yang* ("further") to introduce a new section. Furthermore, verses, often in the form of "intermediate verses" (*bar skabs kyi tshigs bcad*), mark the end of a certain issue.¹² Also, passages devoted to merely rhetorical polemics (often completely unrelated to the exegetical and philosophical issues at stake), are typically found at the end of an individual discussion.¹³ These larger thematic units can sometimes be broken down into individual lines of argumentation. The identification of these separate lines, however, depends to a great extent on the analysis of the respective content.¹⁴ A single argument may contain different elements, depending on the nature of the accusation. It seems that the various refutations Rab gsal put forth can be organised according to four principle forms of contradiction that he finds in Mi pham's explications: contradictions to the authoritative scriptures, to be established by quotations from the respective literature; contradictions to logic, which usually involves reasoning that indicates an unwanted consequence that should follow from a certain statement or position; self-contradictions, i.e., contradictions to other statements one has made; and contradictions to grammatical rules. At times, Rab gsal also adds short passages where he presents his own position on a certain issue. The overall style of the *'Ju lan* is extremely dense. Often, arguments are put forth in such a condensed way that Mi pham's more elucidating answer is needed to unravel their content.

Rab lan

Mi pham received Rab gsal's criticism only five years later, but then replied rather quickly with a work called *Gzhan gyis brtsad pa'i lan mdor bsdus pa rigs lam rab gsal de nyid snang byed* ("The Illuminator of Suchness, a Path of Reasoning: A Short Answer to the Objections of Others"). Although the title describes Mi pham's answer to be brief, his work stretches over 272 pages.

¹² Such verses are commonly used as a break between passages of prose; see also the explanation on *bar skabs kyi tshigs su bcad pa* in the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*.

¹³ For the role of these passages and the relation between philosophical discussion and merely rhetorical polemic, see Viehbeck (forthcoming), "The Yogi and the Scholar: Rhetorical Polemics as Frame and Framework."

¹⁴ While the structural outline (*sa bcad*) in Chapter Seven provides a coarse structure of the *'Ju lan*, a detailed structure is found in the respective summary in Chapter Five.

Unusually for a text of this size, Mi pham's reply does not use any kind of formal outline (*sa bcad*).¹⁵ It starts with an introductory section, where Mi pham elaborates the background of the debate, just as Rab gsal did before. Mi pham reports on other critical letters and highlights Rab gsal's work as one that "investigates mainly through [correct] reasoning" – as opposed to relying solely upon scriptural citations and fallacious lines of reason. Regarding Rab gsal's criticism as a mere test, Mi pham describes his answer as "teasing remarks" (*nyams mtshar*), which are not intended to lead to any form of attachment or aversion (*chags sdang*).¹⁶ While Mi pham emphasises his esteem for Tsong kha pa, the founder of the Dge lugs tradition, he makes clear, already at this stage, that he does not approve of the understanding of emptiness put forth by Tsong kha pa's followers. This section sets the stage for the later discussion and occupies only the first couple of pages of Mi pham's work. The vast majority of his text is devoted to the "actual subject" (*dnegos don*), the meticulous discussion of the criticism put forth by Rab gsal. For this, Mi pham follows Rab gsal's text in a very strict way. For the larger part of the work, Mi pham simply provides literal quotes of the passages of Rab gsal's work, which – apart from a few exceptions – are pursued in their chronological order. Hence, while Mi pham does not set up a structure of his own, the organisation of his work corresponds largely to the structure laid out by Rab gsal. Considering the importance that is given to the individual issues, it seems obvious that Mi pham also agrees in principle with Rab gsal's hierarchical set-up of the four topics. The first topic is discussed very briefly, in only two and a half pages. The second topic occupies about sixteen pages, while the third topic is a little more than twice its size, a relation that was also given in Rab gsal's work. Particular emphasis is placed on the fourth topic, which is discussed in almost two hundred pages, thus making up a little less than three-quarters of the main part. Clearly, for Mi pham the discussion of the principle of *satyadvaya* and related problems forms the core of the controversy with his Dge lugs opponent.

A difference in focus among the topics is also apparent in the way Rab gsal's criticism is investigated. In his discussion, Mi pham follows the typical practice of presenting first the position of his opponent and then pro-

¹⁵ His work can, however, be structured according to the individual issues it discusses; see the detailed summary of the *Rab lan* summary in Chapter Five.

¹⁶ See *Rab lan* 193.3–194.1: *snga ma rnams lung tsam gtso bor byas shing rigs pa ltar snang ba mang bas re zhiig lan gyi spros pa dgos pa med par mthong nas ma byas la | de dag gi nang na rab gsal gyi rtsod lan 'di phal cher rigs pas dpyad pa byas shing gzhan gyi drod nyul ba tsam du mthong nas 'di la bsten te chags sdang sogs rkyen du mi 'gyur bar nyams mtshar tsam du lan cung zad brjod na [...].*

viding an answer to it. Only within the first topic, the issue that is treated in least detail, does Mi pham summarise and paraphrase the positions of Rab gsal. Within the other three topics, statements of the opponent's position consist always of literal quotes from the *'Ju lan*. While larger parts of Rab gsal's explanations on the first topic are consequently condensed and do not reappear as a literal quote in Mi pham's reply, the major part of Rab gsal's refutation concerning the second topic is included in Mi pham's text. With regard to the third and fourth topics, every one of Rab gsal's words is quoted by Mi pham. This procedure demonstrates the great precision with which Mi pham handles the criticism of his opponent.

Similar to Rab gsal's work, the four topics can be further subdivided into thematic units and individual lines of argumentation. In most cases, Mi pham follows precisely the divisions indicated by Rab gsal. After providing the corresponding quote from Rab gsal's text, Mi pham may answer the issue by a single answer, or break it up into several issues, depending on the complexity of the problem. Mi pham's answers take various forms; naturally, they depend on the respective criticism. To an accusation that his explanations would not be in accord with the authoritative scriptures, for example, Mi pham would reply by quoting scriptures that support his position. A way to solve self-contradictions is to put the respective statements in context, which may include extensive clarifying explanations about one's position. The indication of unwanted logical consequences may be countered by clarifying the initial position, or, as Mi pham often chose to do, by showing that the very reasoning that Rab gsal used in his accusation could be turned against him. In fact, this aspect of giving back the very criticism that was stated by his opponent seems to be a special feature of Mi pham's answering technique in regard to both philosophical discussion and merely rhetorical polemics. While the chronological presentation in Rab gsal's work is followed rather strictly as far as the exegetical and philosophical discussion is concerned, themes of merely rhetorical polemics may be taken up at any stage of Mi pham's response.

Mi pham concludes his work with a series of auspicious and summarising verses.

Ga bur chu rgyun

Mi pham's answer reached Rab gsal precisely three months after it was composed. Within another five months' time, Rab gsal replied with a work called *Shes ldan yid kyi gdung sel rigs lam ga bur chu rgyun* ("The Camphor Stream: A Path of Reasoning that Eliminates the Mental Suffering of an Intelligent Person").

Like Rab gsal's earlier criticism, it is characterised by its terse composition; also, its formal structural outline (*sa bcad*) is kept to a minimum of divisions.¹⁷ Rab gsal starts his works with a larger section of introductory and general remarks in which he discusses the background and development of the debate. Here and in Rab gsal's later explanations, passages of prose are often interpolated with "intermediate verses" (*bar skabs kyi tshigs bcad*). Together with a series of concluding verses at the very end, this section constitutes the framework for the main part of Rab gsal's work, labelled "detailed explanation" (*bye brag tu bshad*). The main part accounts for a little more than two-thirds of the *Ga bur chu rgyun* and is further divided into four sections. Unlike Rab gsal's earlier criticism, which was organised by topics related to the *content* of Mi pham's commentary, the distinction of these four sections is based mainly on the type of mistakes that are pointed out. Rab gsal describes his approach in the following way:¹⁸

Here as well, I abandoned the hardship of writing a text in [strict] order similar to [the meticulous order required in] a child's training of reading; just like one measures the extension of a plain from a high peak, I grouped [issues of] a similar kind together and split [the issues] up into four categories: contradictions to what has been claimed; mistakes [made by] not realising; eliminating mistakes [caused] by wrong conceptions; and the way the [different] Dharma traditions (*chos tshul*) come down to a single essence.

It seems that, by "writing a text in [strict] order," Rab gsal is referring to the method chosen by Mi pham. In his reply, Mi pham quoted almost the entire text of Rab gsal's first criticism and followed its structure strictly. This approach was objected to by Rab gsal, who accused Mi pham of providing an answer consisting mainly of a repetition of his, Rab gsal's, own words.¹⁹ In contrast, Rab gsal decided to look upon Mi pham's text as a whole and to draw together similar issues from different stages of the text. Often, the respective issues are not indicated by a literal quotation from Mi

¹⁷ For its brief structural outline (*sa bcad*), see Chapter Seven.

¹⁸ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 432.2–3: *de yang byis pa klog slob pa ltar mthar chags su bri ba'i* [B *bris pa'i*] *ngal ba spangs te | mthon po'i rtse nas thang gi tshad gzhal ba ltar rigs mthun pa rnams phyogs su bsdeb ste don tshan du bcad nas 'jug pa ni | khas blangs dang 'gal ba dang | ma rtogs 'khrul ba'i nyes pa dang | log par rtog pa'i nyes pa bsal ba dang | chos tshul snying po gcig tu 'bab pa'i tshul dang bzhi'o |* |.

¹⁹ See *Ga bur chu rgyun* 431.3: *rtsod yig phon che ba la kho bo'i* [B *bos*] *yi ge rnams rdzogs par bris | nyams* [C *nyam*] *sad pa'i ku re bris pa khon* [B 'khon] *'dzin gyi thugs dog pas phyir klog* [A *slong*, C *klog?*] |.

pham's text, but by a short summarising remark. While Mi pham's chronological approach, together with its literal quotes, made it very easy to understand at which issue Mi pham's answer is precisely aiming, the lack of these features account for the difficulties in the comprehension of Rab gsal's answer.

About half of the main part is devoted to the first section, "contradictions to what has been claimed" (*khas blangs dang 'gal ba*). As the name indicates, this section concerns inconsistencies among various statements made by Mi pham. Rab gsal points not only to contradictions among statements of various stages of the *Rab lan*, but also some between this text and his earlier *Nor bu ke ta ka*. Rab gsal's explanations in this section are particularly terse, often limited to the mere mention of the fact of a contradiction. The section can be further divided into topical units marked by "intermediate verses" (*bar skabs kyi tshigs bcad*). Although these units do not follow the earlier distinction of the four topics strictly, they are clearly influenced by this pattern. Each unit contains several individual lines of argumentation, which can be distinguished by an analysis of its content.

The second section, "mistakes [made by] not realising" (*ma rtogs 'khrul ba'i nyes pa*), occupies only about one-sixth of the main part. Here, Rab gsal discusses Mi pham's exposition of three passages, where he assumes that Mi pham had misunderstood certain facts mentioned in his earlier criticism. Rab gsal's explanations in this section are among the most detailed and clearest of his entire work. The individual passages are separated by verses and also marked by numbers.

The third section is nearly twice as long as the earlier. Its task is described as "eliminating mistakes of wrong conceptions" (*log par rtog pa'i nyes pa bsal ba*). Even though it is also structured by the interpolation of verses, the individual units seem not to share any strong linking element. Rather, the whole third section appears as a gathering of various kinds of mistakes that Rab gsal spotted among Mi pham's extensive explanations.

The fourth and last section of the main part, called "the way the [different] Dharma traditions come down to a single essence" (*chos tshul snying po gcig tu 'bab pa'i tshul*), is extremely short. In only four verses of four lines each, Rab gsal calls for the ultimate unity and harmony of the various different traditions in Tibetan Buddhism.

As also seen in Rab gsal's earlier work, his general style is marked by density and a fondness for the composition of verses.

Yang lan

Mi pham's answer to Rab gsal's reply is rather short. In the block-print edition, it amounts to only nine pages (in comparison to over 270 pages of Mi pham's earlier reply). The text has no proper title and is found as an attachment to Mi pham's *Rab lan*, described as "the later [letter] that is to be presented to the supreme scholar Blo bzang rab gsal."²⁰ Since no further reply from Rab gsal is known, it is not certain whether the letter actually reached its destination.

Despite its brevity, the letter is divided into two sections, with the first one exceeding the size of the second only by a little.²¹ The first section contains several short discussions of issues that have been taken from different stages of Rab gsal's *Ga bur chu rgyun*. Clearly, Mi pham regards these issues as being of minor importance; he concludes this section by stating: "so much for the joking requests with regard to topics of minor significance."²²

The second section, in contrast, is concerned with "topics of greater significance" (*don che ba*). Most of the issues discussed in this section pertain to the conception of *satyadvaya*, which, for Mi pham, obviously constitutes the core of his debate with Rab gsal. Even though the individual presentations in this section are more elaborate than in the earlier section, they are still very terse and contain only a few brief quotes from Rab gsal's work. In its density, Mi pham's answer is quite similar to Rab gsal's earlier works and cannot be compared to the extremely detailed investigation applied in his first reply to Rab gsal.

Mi pham concludes his letter with a series of verses, conciliatory and complimentary in nature and directed at Rab gsal, and with this also the debate between both scholars comes to an end.

²⁰ See *Yang lan* 464.4–5: *mkhas mchog blo bzang rab gsal mdun phul rgyu rjes ma'o* | |.

²¹ For the detailed structure of the *Yang lan*, see its detailed summary in Chapter Five.

²² *Yang lan* 468.1: *don chung rtsed zhus de tsam la* |.

Chapter 4

Issues of controversy and their development

The texts exchanged between Mi pham and Rab gsal discuss a wide range of topics, from rather trivial issues such as mistakes in spelling or grammar, to the most essential matters like the nature of reality; from mistakes that are considered as personal idiosyncrasies, to substantial differences between established scholastic traditions.

The development of the debate is fundamentally determined by Rab gsal's first criticism. In this text, the *'Ju lan*, Rab gsal raises the issues that have to be addressed not only in Mi pham's direct answer, but that also continue to be discussed in Rab gsal's reply and Mi pham's further answer. As already described in the earlier chapter, Rab gsal organises his accusations into four topics, divided into two categories: "faults of great impudence" (*spyi brtol che ba'i nyes pa*), comprising topics I and II, and "faults that are raised after investigation" (*brtag zin bslang ba'i nyes pa*), containing topics III and IV. Each of these topics is related to a specific passage of the BCA. In his answer, the *Rab lan*, Mi pham almost always follows the text of Rab gsal precisely and hence also its structure. While the later works, Rab gsal's *Ga bur chu rgyun* and Mi pham's short reply, use a different meta-structure, the issues discussed are very often grouped together according to the fourfold thematic outline introduced in Rab gsal's first text.

Due to its overarching importance for all texts involved, this structure is also adopted in the present overview. While the aim of this chapter is to offer a comprehensive presentation of the content of the debate as it evolved, it does not aspire to include *all* individual lines of argumentation. Unlike the following chapter, it focuses solely on the main issues within a certain topic. The selection of these issues is based on the respective context

and the weight that is ascribed to them in the individual texts. While subplots of a more secondary nature are neglected, this presentation allows us to monitor the main threads of the debate and the dynamic intellectual sparring it involved. Thereby, the discussion of the selected topics is followed through its various steps – from Rab gsal’s *Ju lan* to Mi pham’s *Yang lan*. As described in the earlier chapter, the presentation of the individual topics and the relation between them is rather clear in the first step of the debate, that is, Rab gsal’s *Ju lan* and Mi pham’s *Rab lan*. In contrast, the later works, i.e., Rab gsal’s *Ga bur chu rgyun* and Mi pham’s *Yang lan*, often merely hint at a position stated earlier, and it is thus sometimes extremely difficult to know at precisely which passage a certain criticism is aiming. In view of this situation, the presentation of the content shows a clear focus on the first step of the debate, and only includes discussions from the second step when the relation between an earlier and later statement is clear.

The individual discussions are highly technical and often assume a tremendous prior knowledge of the problems involved and their background in Tibetan scholasticism. Before discussing a certain topic, the following presentation will therefore first establish the necessary background: the general context of a certain passage in the BCA, and its place in Tibetan scholasticism, particularly within the Dge lugs tradition, which then helps to contextualise the statements in Mi pham’s *Nor bu ke ta ka* and to understand why these were attacked by Rab gsal. A synopsis at the end of each topic will then tie these various layers together.

Topic I: the interpretation of BCA IX.1

The first of the four issues is concerned exclusively with problems that arise in the interpretation of BCA IX.1:¹

The Sage taught this whole entourage (*parikara*) as having insight as its aim.

Therefore, one should generate insight with the wish for the cessation of suffering.²

imaṃ parikaraṃ sarvaṃ prajñārtha hi munir jatau |

¹ The counting of the verses of the BCA follows Oldmeadow 1994.

² For my translation of the root text I used the explanations in Prajñākaramati’s commentary (BCAP), as well as its translation by Peter Oldmeadow (1994). The translation of the term *parikara* is in particular problematic. In his commentary (as edited by La Vallée Poussin), Prajñākaramati gives the following explanation regarding the literal meaning of

tasmād utpādayet prajñāṃ duḥkhanivṛttikāṅkṣayā | |³

yan lag 'di dag thams cad ni | | *thub pas shes rab don du gsungs* | |

*de yi*⁴ *phyir na sdug bsngal dag* | | *zhi bar 'dod pas shes rab bskyed* | |⁵

With this verse, the famous ninth chapter of the BCA opens. It points out the importance of insight (*prajñā*) – the perfection (*pāramitā*) that forms the main subject of the chapter and gave it its name. Insight is explained as a means for ending suffering – the overall goal of Buddhism – and other preparatory means, i.e., “this whole entourage (*parikara*),” are also explained as “aiming at” insight. But what precisely is meant by “entourage” and what is its relation to insight? This needs further annotation, which it received in the Indian as well as in the Tibetan tradition. Scholars of all Tibetan Buddhist schools regard Prajñākaramati’s commentary as the most eminent Indian work on the BCA, and it is for this reason that it is used here to outline some principle issues concerning the interpretation of this verse.⁶ In his *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (BCAP), two different ways of interpretation are laid out. The first relates *parikara* to all five perfections and establishes insight as the primary aspect (*pradhāna*) among the other perfections.⁷ Here, all five perfections act as a cause (*kāraṇa*, *hetu*) for gnosis (*jñāna*) or the awakening of a complete Buddha (*saṃbuddhabodhi*);⁸ but

parikara: ***parikaram*** *iti parivāraṃ paricchedaṃ saṃbhāraṃ iti yāvāt* (BCAP 344.7–8); here and below, bold print marks elements of the original text in the commentary. Considering that this passage seems to point out the mere literal meaning of the term (and as we can see in the course of the BCAP such a mere gloss of a certain word is a very typical feature of Prajñākaramati’s commentary) and comparing it with the Tibetan translation of this passage, I share Oldmeadow’s doubt (1994: 4, n.4) that *paricchedaṃ* might better be changed to *paricchadaṃ*. Thus, Prajñākaramati explains *parikara* (entourage) as retinue (*parivāra*), following (*paricchada*), and gathering or collection (*saṃbhāra*). BCAP 350.8 explains *kāṅkṣā* (wish) as desire (*abhilāṣa*) and wish or will (*chanda*); BCAP 350.6–7 glosses *niṛvṛtti* (cessation) as extinction (*nirvāṇa*) and pacification (*upaśama*).

³ Cf. BCAP 344.4–5.

⁴ *yi* D: *yis* P.

⁵ Cf. BCA (D, fol. 30b7–31a1; P, fol. 35a3–4); for the Tibetan text of the BCA, the Derge as well as the Peking edition were compared.

⁶ Dietz (1999: 35ff.) gives an overview of the ten Indian commentaries that are contained in the Tibetan *Bstan 'gyur* and characterises the BCAP as the most important among them. In the course of the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal, both scholars refer repeatedly to the Indian commentaries to support their respective interpretations. Thereby, the references to the BCAP outnumber by far the references to the other commentaries, showing evidently that both scholars accept Prajñākaramati as the primary Indian authority on the BCA.

⁷ Cf. BCAP 344.11–13.

⁸ Cf. BCAP 344.14–345.5.

only if they are accompanied by insight do they “reach the state of [being] a cause of that (highest gnosis) and receive the title ‘perfections’.”⁹ Even though insight is explained as the primary aspect and as the “eye” or leader (*netra*) of the other perfections, complete awakening cannot be accomplished without them.¹⁰ “For this reason,” so Prajñākaramati summarises, “the **entourage** of generosity (*dāna*) etc. is established as **having insight as its aim**.”¹¹ A second interpretation explains *parikara* as denoting *śamatha* that was laid out in the preceding chapter. Here, *śamatha* is explained as the cause of generating insight (*prajñā*) and hence to have insight as its aim.¹²

A look at Rgyal tshab’s commentary on the BCA gives an impression of the standard interpretation of this passage in the Dge lugs school, that is, Rab gsal’s scholastic background.¹³

Like Prajñākaramati, Rgyal tshab points out two ways of explaining “entourage” (*parikara*). It can either refer exclusively to *śamatha* – which is explained in the chapter of concentration (*dhyāna*) – or to all the five perfections that are explained in the preceding chapters.¹⁴ Among these two possibilities, Rgyal tshab shows a clear preference: according to a certain interpretation, “the earlier (way of relating *parikara* to *śamatha*) is also possible, but it is good if it is explained here according to the latter (way of relating it to all five perfections).”¹⁵ A major issue in Rgyal tshab’s expla-

⁹ BCAP 345.9–10: *taddhetubhāvam adhigacchanti | pāramitānāmadheyam ca labhante |*.

¹⁰ Cf. BCAP 345.17–346.4.

¹¹ BCAP 346.4: *tasmād dhānādiparikaraḥ prajñārtha itī siddham | |*.

¹² For this second interpretation, see BCAP 348.4–349.5.

¹³ Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen (1364–1432) was a direct disciple and one of the two main followers of Tsong kha pa, the founder of the Dge lugs school. As such, his scholastic interpretations – including his commentary on the BCA – have shaped the view of future generations fundamentally. For his dates, see TBCR, http://www.tbrc.org/#library_person_Object-P65 [accessed March 03, 2011]. In his commentary *Spyod ’jug rnam bshad rgyal sras ’jug ngogs* (‘*Jug ngogs*) Rgyal tshab’s explanations of the ninth chapter of the BCA are very closely related to his teacher Tsong kha pa’s work on the very same chapter, called *Spyod ’jug shes rab le’u’i tikka blo gsal* (*Blo gsal*). The colophon of the *Blo gsal* does not mention an author, but suggests that it contains Tsong kha pa’s elaborations that were later written down by one of his disciples; cf. *Blo gsal* 36b5ff. This idea is shared by Seyfort Ruegg, who also mentions another work, the *Shes rab le’u’i zin bris*, which also contains explanations of Tsong kha pa on the ninth chapter of the BCA that were written down by his disciple Rgyal tshab; see Seyfort Ruegg 2004: 337, n. 33. In the present investigation, Rgyal tshab’s ‘*Jug ngogs* and Tsong kha pa’s *Blo gsal* are used as representatives for the standard tradition of textual exegesis of the ninth chapter of the BCA in the Dge lugs school. For a translation of Rgyal tshab’s commentary, see Sweet 1977.

¹⁴ Cf. ‘*Jug ngogs* 206.12–14.

¹⁵ ‘*Jug ngogs* 206.14–15: *snga ma yang rung mod kyang ’dir phyi ma ltar bshad na legs so |*. Note that this passage is a literal quote from *Blo gsal* 2b1–2.

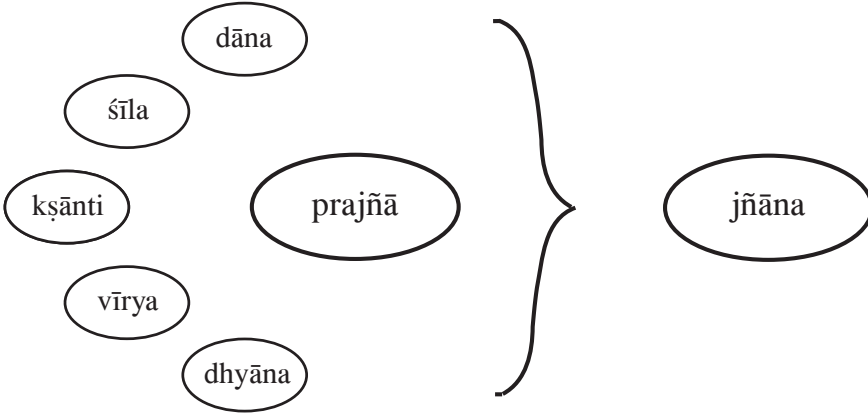


Figure 4.1: Interpretation I: *parikara*/all five earlier perfections, together with *prajñā* cause *jñāna*

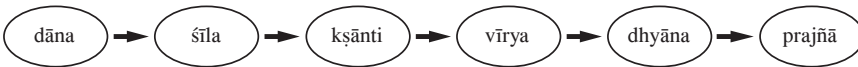


Figure 4.2: Interpretation II: each perfection acts as a cause for the following perfection; *parikara* refers only to the subject of *dhyāna*

nation is the question of whether the accumulation of merit (*bsod nams kyi tshogs*) is a prerequisite for developing insight. He emphasises that merit is not needed for the insight that corresponds to the realisation of Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas; it is, however, needed to attain omniscience, the state of a Buddha.¹⁶

Both of these issues, the two ways of interpreting *parikara* and the question of the importance of the accumulation of merit, will reappear in the controversies on this verse.

Mi pham's explanations of BCA IX.1 in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*

In his commentary, Mi pham distinguishes, in general, two different ways of explaining the relation between the other five perfections and insight. One way is to explain it as cause and effect (*rgyu 'bras*), whereby each earlier perfection serves respectively as the cause of the later one.¹⁷ Applying this model to the root text would imply that the phrase “having insight as its aim” (*shes rab don du*) is to be understood in such a way that the causal string of each perfection, being the cause of the later one, leads eventually to the generation of insight, and in this sense “aims” at insight. Mi pham mentions this interpretation only in passing, and focuses on a second alternative, according to which the other perfections and insight are related as “support” (*grogs*) and “supported” (*grogs can*): the “aim” (*don*) of the perfections is still connected to insight, but rather than inducing the generation of insight, the perfections are a support (*grogs*) in accomplishing the overall goal of the Buddhist path, omniscience. Among all perfections, insight occupies the leading role in this endeavour. Insight is the primary cause of ultimate gnosis (*mthar thug pa'i ye shes*), a goal that is not within the scope of the other perfections unless insight acts as their leader.¹⁸ Mi pham likens this relationship to the example of a king and his troops: just as the troops follow their king to accomplish the goal of winning the battle, the

¹⁶ Cf. 'Jug ngogs 207.10–12: “For the extinction of the seed of obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrib*) alone, one need not be adorned by limitless accumulations, but [such] is needed for the extinction of the seed of obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*)” (*nyon sgrib kyi sa bon zad pa tsaṃ la tshogs mtha' yas pas brgyan pa mi dgos kyang | shes sgrib kyi sa bon zad pa la dgos*). Note that in the Dge lugs tradition, it is accepted that Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas have abandoned only obscuration of afflictions, whereas a Buddha has abandoned both, obscuration of afflictions and obscuration of knowables.

¹⁷ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 2.5–6: ‘*di la sbyin sogs snga ma snga ma rgyur byas nas shes rab skye bas na rgyu 'bras kyi tshul du bshad pa'ang yod mod |*.

¹⁸ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 3.1–2: *phar phyin gzhan gyis de mi nus par ma zad phar phyin lnga po de dag shes rab kyi bzang nas gdod phar phyin gyi ming thob cing sangs rgyas su bgrod pa yin te |*.

other five perfections support insight in accomplishing buddhahood.¹⁹ As shown, Mi pham has decided on one of the two ways of interpreting *parikara* that were explained by Prajñākaramati and Rgyal tshab, a choice that he makes explicit in his further explanations:²⁰

There is also [the interpretation of] relating ‘**this whole entourage**’ to concentration (*bsam gtan*, *dhyāna*) – explained immediately before this [present] chapter – but it must be related to all perfections [...].

Rab gsal’s criticism in the ‘*Ju lan*

Rab gsal organises his criticism of this passage in five sections. The last one deals with the specific usage of the particle *tsam*, meaning roughly “only/simply.” Even though the polemics on this point are carried forward to the following texts, this matter is of limited importance for the interpretation of BCA IX.1 and therefore will not be dealt with in more detail in the current presentation. The other four sections are related to the following three issues in interpreting BCA IX.1.: (1) the relation between the other five perfections and insight, (2) the meaning of “*yan lag*” (*parikara*), and (3) the interpretation of “*don*” (*artha*).²¹

Rab gsal accuses Mi pham of denying the generation of insight through the other perfections, such as generosity²² – an accusation that Rab gsal seems to derive from Mi pham’s neglect of the position that views earlier perfection in relation to later perfection as cause and effect. According to Rab gsal, it is commonly accepted that insight is what is brought forth by generosity and the other perfections. To refute such a position would not only contradict the BCA itself and the Indian commentaries, but also certain passages of the *Nor bu ke ta ka*.²³ Mi pham’s explanation, emphasising the role of insight and explaining the other five perfections as “co-emerging support” (*lhan cig pa’i grogs*) of insight, would engender its own problems: since means (*thabs*), i.e., generosity etc., and insight are

¹⁹ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 2.6–3.2.

²⁰ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 3.4–5: *yan lag ‘di dag ces pa le’u ‘di’i gong du bshad ma thag pa’i bsam gtan la sbyar ba yod kyang phar phyin kun la sbyor dgos shing* | [...].

²¹ For an overview of Rab gsal’s criticism, see the detailed summary of the ‘*Ju lan* in Chapter Five.

²² Cf. Rab gsal’s summary of Mi pham’s position, ‘*Ju lan* 371.6–372.1: ‘*dir sbyin sogs las de nyid rtogs pa’i shes rab skye ba la sbyar ba dang* | *yan lag bsam gtan la byed pa mi rigs shing* | *sbyin sogs kyis sangs rgya ba’ang mi ‘thad zer ro* |.

²³ The passage containing Rab gsal’s position is ‘*Ju lan* 372.1–372.1 (JL I.1a, according to the outline of the summeries presented in the following chapter).

accepted as mutually supporting each other, Rab gsal argues, the role of insight would be turned upside down.²⁴ In contrast, Rab gsal points out that the perfections must be accomplished in a fixed order (*go rim nges pa*) in one line (*dkyus gcig*),²⁵ meaning one after the other – a process that culminates in the generation of insight and requires the development of the earlier perfections as a cause.

This more general question of the relation between the perfections also affects the literal annotation of BCA IX.1, in particular the interpretation of “*yan lag*” and “*don*.” As mentioned before, Prajñākaramati and Rgyal tshab set forth two traditions of interpreting *yan lag*. The former explains it as referring to all perfections other than insight, the latter as referring only to *śamatha*, the subject of the chapter of concentration (*dhyāna*), which directly precedes insight. In his explanations, Mi pham dismissed the second interpretation, an action that is now the target of Rab gsal’s objections: after all, the second interpretation was mentioned by Prajñākaramati, the main Indian authority on the BCA.²⁶ According to this second interpretation, the “aim” (*don*) of *śamatha* is to generate insight, an understanding Rab gsal again backs up by quoting the BCAP.²⁷ Here, *śamatha* is explained as the cause that brings forth, and thus “aims” at, insight. Both of these issues of literal annotation, viz. to relate *parikara* to *śamatha* and to relate “aim” to the generation of insight through *śamatha*, are plausible when the relation between the perfections is seen as one of cause and effect. This is, of course, in contradiction to Mi pham’s commentary. He interpreted *yan lag* as referring to all perfections as a support in accomplishing the highest goal of insight, awakening. Rab gsal accuses Mi pham of relating the “aim” (*don*) mentioned in the BCA to a (separate) aim gained through insight, while it should be understood as the very generation of insight that is brought about by *śamatha*.²⁸

Mi pham’s reply in the *Rab lan*

Mi pham defends his commentary by pointing out that the two ways of explaining the relationship between the perfections – insight and the other perfections as supported (*grogs can*) and support (*grogs*), or earlier and later perfections as cause and effect (*rgyu ’bras*) – do not conflict with each other; hence, there is no need to exclude either alternative.²⁹ A twofold interpreta-

²⁴ Cf. ‘Ju lan 374.1–3 (JL I.3).

²⁵ ‘Ju lan 373.2.

²⁶ For Rab gsal’s criticism, see ‘Ju lan 373.1–5 (JL I.1).

²⁷ ‘Ju lan 373.6.

²⁸ ‘Ju lan 374.3–4 (JL I.4).

²⁹ See *Rab lan* 196.1–3 (RL I.1).

tion is also the key to solving the apparent contradictions in understanding the meaning of “aim” (*don*). Both explanations are possible: one can either say that the other perfections aim at or support the achievement of awakening through insight, or the aim can be the generation of insight alone. The BCAP passage that Rab gsal quoted is taken from the specific context where the aim is related to the generation of insight (i.e., the alternative explanation that relates *parikara* to *śamatha*) and therefore does not refute the earlier interpretation, Mi pham counters.³⁰ In this interpretation, he explains further, the “aim” is not the separate aim of insight as Rab gsal criticised, but it is the common aim of all perfections.³¹

Even though Mi pham refers to Prajñākaramati’s alternative explanation (of relating *parikara* to *śamatha*) in order to point out the different possibilities of understanding the “aim” (*don*) of the “entourage” (*parikara*), he does not answer Rab gsal’s accusation that *parikara* should be related to *śamatha*.

Rab gsal’s reply in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

In Rab gsal’s answer to Mi pham’s reply, the whole issue is brought quickly to an end. If Mi pham had admitted that *parikara* could be also understood as a cause (for the generation of insight) in the first place, runs Rab gsal’s accusation of Mi pham, a debate would not have been necessary.³² Rab gsal’s main concern here seems to be that Mi pham’s explanations focussing on the importance of insight play down the role of the other perfections. He refers again to Prajñākaramati’s commentary to point out that insight is based on the accumulation of merit, which includes the first three of the perfections.³³ With that, the discussion regarding the interpretation of BCA IX.1 come to an end and Mi pham does not mention this topic in his second reply to Rab gsal.³⁴

³⁰ *Rab lan* 196.5–197.2 (RL I.2).

³¹ *Rab lan* 197.4–5 (RL I.3b)

³² Cf. *Ga bur chu rgyun* 434.4 (GC I.2c).

³³ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 434.5. Here, Rab gsal seems to refer to BCAP 344.14–345.6, where Prajñākaramati describes how the individual perfections act as a cause of the attainment of unexcelled gnosis (*anuttarajñāna*). This passage also explains the division of the perfections among the two kinds of accumulations (*saṃbhāra*): the first three perfections, namely, generosity (*dāna*), discipline (*śīla*), and forbearance (*kṣānti*), are part of the accumulation of merit (*punyasamḥāra*), while the last two, viz. concentration (*dhyāna*) and insight (*prajñā*), belong to the accumulation of gnosis (*jñānasamḥāra*). The fourth perfection, perseverance (*vīrya*), is needed for both accumulations.

³⁴ The only issue connected to this chapter that appears in Mi pham’s second reply is the polemic about the understanding of the particle *tsam* “only/simply.” As indicated

Synopsis

In his outline, Rab gsal classified this topic under the rubric “refuting faults of great impudence” (*spyi brtol che ba’i nyes pa dgag pa*). This suggests that the errors that Rab gsal found in Mi pham’s commentary on this passage of the BCA are not based on fundamental doctrinal differences between the traditions of the two, thus on established “errors,” but that these are – in Rab gsal’s eyes – merely personal idiosyncrasies, caused, for example, by a lack of thorough investigation or proper knowledge of the commentarial tradition. Rab gsal expressed this idea succinctly in his taunting verses at the end of the first (and major) point of criticism:³⁵

Through the magical display of negative thought that is content within itself

The Indian texts as well are abandoned along with the Tibetan ones.

Then both are gone; trapped (*rgyar chud*) in the conduct

Of Devadatta, [you] should regard [him] as the second Teacher.

With the clear intention of highlighting the role of insight in the accomplishment of buddhahood, Mi pham explained that all other perfections are a “support” (*grogs*) of insight. He contrasted this interpretation with another one that views earlier and later perfections as cause and effect (and therefore gives more importance to the other perfections that act as a cause of insight), but paid no further attention to it. Rab gsal seemed to have understood Mi pham’s preference for the earlier and his disregard of the later model as an utter refutation of the interpretation that relates all perfections as cause and effect (*rgyu ’bras*), a view that would play down the role of the other perfections and focus on the importance of insight alone. In his criticism, Rab gsal referred to various texts that lay out the legitimacy of explaining the perfections as cause and effect. The whole issue

earlier, it is not of direct relevance for the interpretation of BCA IX.1 and therefore has not been treated in more detail.

³⁵ *Ju lan* 373.4–5:

phug tu ’tshengs pa’i ngan rtog cho ’phrul gyis | |
’phags yul gzhuang yang bod kyi zhar la spangs | |
da ni gnyis med de ba datta yi | |
bslab pa’i rgyar chud ston pa gnyis par ’jal | |

In this verse, Rab gsal compares Mi pham’s way of interpretation to the behaviour of Devadatta, the Buddha’s cousin, who intrigued against the Buddha for his personal gain.

is effectively resolved by Mi pham's clarifying reply pointing out that both interpretations are valid.

Connected to these two different ways of understanding the relationship of the perfections are two different interpretations of the literal explanation of "entourage" (*parikara*) and "aim" (*artha*). Viewing the perfections as cause and effect, *parikara* can be explained as being related to *śamatha*, the practice immediately preceding insight. Here, *śamatha* acts as a cause of insight and thus has insight as its "aim." Rab gsal pointed out this understanding to counter Mi pham's commentary that related *parikara* to all perfections, which support insight in its striving for awakening and thus have insight as their "aim." Again, Mi pham resolved the controversies with regard to the interpretation of "aim" (*artha*) by pointing out the possibility of two different, but not contradictory interpretations. The question of the interpretation of *parikara*, on the other hand, was left open. Mi pham clearly refuted the possibility of relating *parikara* to concentration (*dhyāna*) in his commentary, and did not reply to Rab gsal's criticism that pointed out the validity of such an interpretation as indicated in Prajñākaramati's BCAP.

All in all, the controversies that developed in relation to this topic appear not to be based on fundamental differences. Rather, Rab gsal's criticism seemed to have been instigated by the phrasing of Mi pham's commentary, a phrasing that sounded unfortunate to his opponent's ears, as it would belittle the importance of the other perfections attested in various scriptures.

Topic II: the interpretation of BCA IX.78

The second topic deals most prominently with the interpretation of BCA IX.78, in particular its third verse line, but touches also on problems that appear in the explanations of the two preceding verses. The wider context of this passage is the defence of the doctrine of selflessness, which was established earlier in BCA IX.58–70, against possible objections. BCA IX.76 deals with the doubt that the postulated non-existence of a self is incompatible with the Buddhist principle of compassion towards other beings. After all, as BCA IX.76ab argues, "If a being does not exist, for whom is compassion [to be developed]?"³⁶ The answer is given in BCA IX.76cd: a

³⁶ BCAP 486.5: *yadi sattvo na vidyeta kasyopari kṛpeti cet* | . The commentary explains *kṛpā* (compassion) as *karuṇā*, the standard term in Buddhist doctrine that is usually translated as "compassion."

self is surely imagined by delusion (*moha*), but as such it is accepted for the sake of a certain result (*kārya*), namely the attainment of buddhahood, for which the development of compassion is necessary.³⁷ This, quite naturally, leads to the next objection, presented in BCA IX.77a: “Whose result is it? There is no being.”³⁸ As a self does not exist, there is no one who could attain a result and hence, the answer to the earlier objection is doubtful. In his answer in BCA IX.77bcd, Śāntideva agrees that this is true with regard to the absolute level (*paramārthataḥ*),³⁹ but argues further that the delusion of [the achievement of] a result (*kāryamoha*) – on the conventional level (*saṃvṛteḥ*)⁴⁰ – is accepted as a means towards the Buddhist goal. He concludes in BCA IX.77cd: “But for the sake of pacifying suffering the delusion of a result is not averted.”⁴¹ Prajñākaramati’s commentary then lists the doubts to which the next verse of the BCA is the answer. An opponent might question the use of the meditative cultivation of selflessness, arguing that one also has to accept the delusion of a self (*ātmanamoha*) if one accepts the delusion of a result (*kāryamoha*), since the former is the cause of the latter and both are equally erroneous states of mind.⁴² This then leads to the focus of this topic, BCA IX.78:

But egoism,⁴³ which is the cause of suffering, is increased due to the delusion of a self.

Objection: Because of that, however, it cannot be averted. [Response:] The best is the meditative cultivation of selflessness.⁴⁴

duḥkhaḥetur ahaṃkāra ātmanamohāt tu vardhate |

³⁷ Cf. BCAP 487.13 ff., for Prajñākaramati’s explanations on this part of the verse, or, respectively, Oldmeadow 1994: 165f., for a translation of this part.

³⁸ BCAP 489.7: *kāryaṃ kasya na cet sattvaḥ*.

³⁹ BCAP 489.11.

⁴⁰ BCAP 489.19.

⁴¹ BCAP 490.3: *duḥkhavyūpaśamārthaṃ tu kāryamoho na vāryate |* .

⁴² BCAP 490.17–18: *kāryamoho ‘vidyāsvabhāvo ‘pyupagamyate | tathaiṣvātmanamoho ‘pi taddhetu-tvāḍ astu |* .

⁴³ Here, egoism – as a translation of the technical term *ahaṃkāra* (Tib. *nga rgyal*) – is not applied in its everyday usage of the term, as an excessive preoccupation with oneself, but as denoting the basic notion of the existence of oneself as a coherent personality and one’s identification with it.

⁴⁴ As before, the translation of individual terms is based upon Prajñākaramati’s commentary. The BCAP (491.5–6) explains *ātmanamoha* (delusion of [believing in] a self) as an “erroneous view of [seeing] a self in what is not a self” (*anātmany ātmaṃviparyāśadarśana*). Further, *bhāvanā* (meditative cultivation) is glossed with *abyāsa*, denoting a repeated practice, which is said to be *varam* (best), or paramount (*uttamam*); cf. BCAP 492.12. For a translation of the relevant part of the BCAP, see Oldmeadow 1994: 169–173.

tato 'pi na nivartyaś cet varam nairātmyabhāvanā | |⁴⁵

*sdug bsngal rgyu yi nga rgyal ni | | bdag tu*⁴⁶ *rmongs pas 'phel bar 'gyur |* |

de las kyang bzlog med ce na | | bdag med bsgom pa mchog yin no | |⁴⁷

In the first two verse lines, Śāntideva counters the earlier objection by pointing out that delusion of a self (*ātmamoha*) leads to egoism (*ahaṃkāra*), which is a cause of suffering. While the root text does not specify any details of the relation between the “delusion of a self” and “egoism,” Mi pham and Rab gsal had very different ideas in this regard, as will be shown below. These two verse lines are followed by the next, in this case extremely condensed, objection “Because of that, however, it cannot be averted.” The terseness of this line provides ample opportunity for interpretation; hence, it is not surprising that it became the major issue in the disagreement between Mi pham and Rab gsal on this topic. According to Prajñākaramati, the subject is egoism (*ahaṃkāra*), which cannot be averted for a certain reason, namely, “that,” i.e., “seeing a self” (*ātmaadarśana*).⁴⁸ In Sanskrit, the reason is indicated by the ablative case ending, which is translated in Tibetan with the particle *las*. The use of this particle includes a range of various functions, of which the indication of a reason is a rather special case, but is commonly found in this usage in texts translated from Sanskrit. As will be shown later, this ambiguity of the grammatical function enabled Mi pham to interpret this verse line in a very distinct way and therefore led to friction among the Tibetan interpreters. The opponent’s objection is then followed by Śāntideva’s answer in BCA IX.78d, which presents meditative cultivation of selflessness (*nairātmyabhāvanā*) as the “cause of the cessation of egoism” (*ahaṃkāranivṛttihetu*).⁴⁹

In the Dge lugs tradition, as shown in Rgyal tshab’s commentary, the issues of BCA IX.78 are connected to an earlier verse of this chapter, namely BCA IX.26.⁵⁰ There, the conceptualisation (*kalpanā*) [of things] as truly es-

⁴⁵ Cf. BCAP 491.3–492.11.

⁴⁶ *tu* D : *du* P.

⁴⁷ Cf. BCA (D, fol. 33b6–7; P, fol. 38b2–3)

⁴⁸ Cf. BCAP 492.9–10: *tato 'py ātmaadarśanād api na nivartyo nivartayitum aśakyah | ahaṃkāraś ced yadi |*. Here, Prajñākaramati clearly understands egoism (*ahaṃkāra*) as the subject, which is described as “*nivartyah*,” meaning that it “cannot be averted.” The reason for this – indicated by the ablative case ending – is “seeing a self” (*ātmaadarśana*).

⁴⁹ Cf. BCAP 492.13.

⁵⁰ At this stage, both Rgyal tshab (*Jug ngogs* 248.17–8) and Tsong kha pa (*Blo gsal* 24a2) refer back to BCA IX.26. The relevant quote was apparently overlooked in Sweet’s translation, cf. Sweet 1977: 236.

tablished (*satyataḥ*) was described as the cause of suffering.⁵¹ According to Rgyal tshab, it is in this way that the objection raised in BCA IX.78c must be understood. Rebuffing the earlier statement that suffering is stimulated through the delusion of a self, an opponent counters:⁵²

Objection: Through that, i.e., the averting of such a delusion (of a self), **however**, grasping as truly [established] (*bden 'dzin*) **cannot be averted**; one is not able to avert it, and even if one averts it once, it appears again, like the *skandhas* of samsaric existence, and therefore does not become utterly exhausted.

While Rgyal tshab shares Prajñākaramati's basic grammatical construction of the verse line, in the sense that for both scholars, the ablative case ending – or the particle *las* in Tibetan – indicates a reason, he has a different understanding of the content of this reason. According to Rgyal tshab the pronoun “that” in BCA IX.78c must be read as “the averting of the delusion of a self.” In this interpretation, the opponent in the BCA concedes that it is possible to avert the delusion of a self, but counters that such does not suffice for averting “grasping as truly [established]” (*bden 'dzin*), which is seen as the cause for suffering. Unlike Prajñākaramati, for whom “that” refers to “seeing a self” (*ātma darśana*) as the active cause that prevents averting egoism (*ahaṃkāra*), Rgyal tshab explains the pronoun as an *antidote* to the delusion of a self, which, however, does not constitute a sufficient cause for averting another kind of grasping, namely grasping phenomena as truly established.

Mi pham's explanations of BCA IX.78 in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*

In his commentary, Mi pham explains BCA IX.78ab as follows:⁵³

Self-grasping or **egoism** that thinks “I am,” which is **the cause of all suffering of saṃsāra, is increased, due to the delusion of holding a self to exist**. [...] If this delusion does not exist, one

⁵¹ Cf. BCA IX.26cd: *satyataḥ kalpanā tv atra duḥkha hetur nivāryate* | | (BCAP 405.10).

⁵² 'Jug ngogs 248.20–249.3: *kho na re de 'dra ba'i rmongs pa ldog pa de las kyang bden 'dzin ldog pa med pa ste* | *ldog mi nus la lan cig ldog kyang 'khor ba'i phung po ltar slar yang 'byung bas gtan zad du 'gyur ba med do zhe na* |. Note again that Rgyal tshab's commentary is very close to the way Tsong kha pa explains this passage; cf. *Blo gsal* 24a3.

⁵³ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 60.6–61.1: *'khor ba'i sdug bsngal thams cad kyi rgyur gyur pa'i bdag tu 'dzin pa'am* | *nga'o snyam pa'i nga rgyal ni bdag yod du bzung ba'i rmongs pas 'phel bar byed de* | [...] *rmongs pa de med na bdag tu mi 'dzin la* | *bdag 'dzin de med na 'khor bar 'khor zhing skye bar mi 'gyur te* |.

does not grasp at a self, and if that self-grasping does not exist,
one will not circle and be born in *saṃsāra*.

Here, Mi pham clearly points to a causal relationship between the “delusion of a self” and “egoism,” whereby the former acts as a cause of the latter. Mi pham does not expound further on his exact understanding of “delusion of a self” and “egoism,” but, in view of his earlier and later explanations, it is clear that both refer to the concept of a self as inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*).

Above, two different ways of unwrapping the terse objection of BCA IX.78c were explained, one by Prajñākaramati and another by Rgyal tshab. Mi pham presents yet another way of reading this verse line:⁵⁴

Objection: Just like you are not able to turn the mind away from an imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*), you **also cannot turn** the mind, the subject, **away from that**, i.e., an inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) self, as [this self] is since time without beginning connected to the innate disposition.⁵⁵

Mi pham does not understand the particle *las* as an indicator for a reason as did both Prajñākaramati and Rgyal tshab. In combination with the verb *zlog pa* – “to avert, to turn away from,” etc. – he interprets it as a preposition that expresses the relationship between a subject and its corresponding object. The phrase “*de las*” thus indicates the object – i.e., “that” (*de*) – from (*las*) which the subject, i.e., one’s mind, cannot turn away.

In his interpretation, the opponent’s objection carries the doubt that the conception of an imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*), that is, the conscious acceptance of the notion of a self, which was implied earlier in BCA IX.76 and 77 as necessary to develop compassion and strive for the result of the Buddhist path, viz. awakening – and the conception of an inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) self, i.e., the innate belief in a self as a coherent and enduring entity, are similar cases: just as one cannot avert one, one can also not avert the other.

⁵⁴ Nor bu ke ta ka 61.1–2: *kho na re | ji ltar khyod btags pa'i bdag las blo ldog par mi nus pa de bzhin rang bzhin gyis grub pa'i bdag de las kyang yul can blo gtan du bzlog pa med de thog med nas gshis la zhugs pa'i phyir ro zhe na |*.

⁵⁵ Here, I differ from my earlier translation of the verb *zlog pa* as “to avert.” For Mi pham the relationship between the subject of the verb, i.e., the mind (*blo*), and its respective object, i.e., an imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*) or an inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) self is important: the mind cannot avert this object, or, to be more close to the Tibetan construction, the mind cannot turn away from (*las*) this object.

Countering this objection, Mi pham explains in the following how these cases are different. In the domain of how things appear to ordinary beings, there is no reasoning that would allow to refute appearances that are based on a “mere imagination” (*btags pa tsam*); “grasping as inherently established” (*rang bzhin gyis grub par 'dzin pa*), on the other hand, can be abandoned by “**meditative cultivation of selflessness**” or, as Mi pham paraphrases this expression from the root text, “a mind that realises the mode of existence of things” (*dnegos po'i gnas tshul rtogs pa'i blo*).⁵⁶ It is therefore that this method is suggested in Śāntideva's response in BCA IX.78d.

At the end of his commentary on BCA IX.78, Mi pham returns to the issue of interpreting the controversial line of BCA IX.78c:⁵⁷

Here, in relation to the words “*de las kyang bzlog*,” a great many ways of explanation appeared, presuming that the expression “*de las*” [would refer] to the antidote that averts self-grasping or the cause of self-grasping etc., but [then], a suitable connection [in the text] is difficult. If, however, it is here (in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*) interpreted (*sbyar ba*) as “*yul de dag las kyang*,” similar to the excellent scriptures of the Noble Land, the meaning is logical. This thought (*snyam pa*) is my idea (*rnam rtog*) alone.

This very last sentence already indicates that Mi pham's interpretation of this verse line is somewhat unusual. He explicitly rejects two other ways of understanding the phrase “*de las kyang bzlog*.”⁵⁸ One reading mentioned by Mi pham as false, is to relate “*de las*” to the “cause of self-grasping” (*bdag 'dzin gyi rgyu*). As shown above, Prajñākaramati paraphrased the pronoun *de* (Skt. *tad*) with “seeing a self” (*ātmadarśana*), which – as indicated by the ablative case in Sanskrit – is seen as the reason or cause of egoism (*ahaṃkāra*). It seems that Mi pham in his commentary – of course, without

⁵⁶ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 61.2–3: *de gnyis mi mtshungs te btags pa tsam rten nas 'byung ba'i dbang gis snang ba la so skye'i ngor mi snang bar sgrub byed kyi rigs pa med la bzlog kyang mi dgos mod | rang bzhin gyis grub par 'dzin pa ni dnegos po'i gnas tshul rtogs pa'i blo bdag med bsgoms pas spongnus te |*.

⁵⁷ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 61.5–6: *de las kyang bzlog ces pa 'dir | de las [C las om.] zhes pa bdag 'dzin zlog byed kyi gnyen po dang | bdag 'dzin gyi rgyu sogs su rloms nas 'grel tshul ches mang ba zhig byung yang 'brel 'grigs pa dka' la | 'dir 'phags yul gyi gzhung bzang bzhin du yul de dag las kyang zhes sbyar bar byas [C bar byas om.] na don du 'thad do snyam pa kho bo gcig pu'i rnam rtog go |*.

⁵⁸ In the present context, I use the Tibetan expression untranslated in order not to exclude any of the different interpretations by Prajñākaramati, Rgyal tshab, and Mi pham explained above.

mentioning it, and probably also without being fully aware of it – rejects exactly the interpretation that Prajñākaramati suggested.⁵⁹

The second reading that Mi pham refutes is to relate “*de las*” to the “antidote that averts self-grasping” (*bdag 'dzin zlog byed kyi gnyen po*). In Rgyal tshab’s explanations, the pronoun “that” was elaborated as denoting “the averting of the delusion of a self.” This antidote to self-grasping was, however, described to be insufficient for averting grasping [phenomena] as truly established (*bden 'dzin*). Again, Mi pham does not mention a specific proponent of the position he refutes, but it obviously corresponds to the position taken by Rgyal tshab.

Mi pham ends this passage of his commentary by pointing out that the way of explanation he suggested is “my idea alone,” but that it is, nevertheless, in accordance with the Indian scriptures.

Rab gsal’s criticism in the ‘Ju lan

Clearly, Rab gsal is provoked by Mi pham’s critical remarks on other ways of interpreting BCA IX.78c. In his refutation of Mi pham’s commentary, Rab gsal quotes exactly this part of Mi pham’s explanations as the position of his opponent that is the object of his attack.⁶⁰ While there is a clear focus on the interpretation of this particular verse line of the BCA, Rab gsal expands his criticism also to its surrounding commentary. Not only does Rab gsal refute aspects of Mi pham’s commentary on the other verse lines of BCA IX.78, but also on its two preceding verses and more general problems that occur in the interpretation of this passage. As shown in the summary of the ‘Ju lan,⁶¹ Rab gsal’s analysis of this topic can be grouped into nine sections, each of which contains one or more lines of criticism. For the sake of clarity, I will limit myself to the controversies that are directly relevant to the interpretation of BCA IX.78c, which can be seen as the core of this topic.⁶²

⁵⁹ Mi pham describes the two other ways of interpretation with the Tibetan word *rlom pa*, which has a clear pejorative meaning, indicating that the other commentaries are not seen as a mere alternative, but as a wrong way of reading. Given that Prajñākaramati is unanimously accepted as the Indian authority on the BCA and in this function also referred to in Mi pham’s explanations, it seems unlikely that Mi pham would directly attack Prajñākaramati. However, the position that Mi pham attacks seems to be exactly that of Prajñākaramati, even though Mi pham does not specify its proponent by name.

⁶⁰ The passage that Rab gsal quotes corresponds to *Nor bu ke ta ka* 61.1–6.

⁶¹ Cf. Chapter Five.

⁶² Of the topics mentioned in the summary of the ‘Ju lan in Chapter Five, the present discussion includes only JL II.1a, II.2b, II.4, and II.9b. Accordingly, the further development of these controversies in the subsequent texts, i.e., *Rab lan*, *Ga bur chu rgyun*, and *Yang lan*, is also confined to these chosen issues.

Rab gsal starts his refutation with a discussion of Mi pham's specific understanding of the grammatical construction of BCA IX.78c. As shown above, Mi pham read the particle *las* in combination with the verb "to avert, to turn away" (*zlog pa*) as an indicator of a disjunction between the subject and an object. Such an interpretation, argues Rab gsal, is wrong for various reasons. One reason is that of context and consistency. Only one verse earlier, in BCA IX.77d, the same verb, "to avert, to turn away" (*zlog pa*), appears. In Mi pham's commentary to this verse, the verb *zlog pa* was not understood as an action where one's mind turns away from a separate object. Since the two passages are so closely related, both must be read in the same way – to construe one passage in one way and the next in another way is illogical, a "bad proclamation" (*ngan skad*), thus Rab gsal rebukes Mi pham.⁶³ Another argument is that Mi pham's interpretation is not supported by the Indian scriptures.⁶⁴ Rab gsal quotes passages from the commentaries of Prajñākaramati and Kalyānadeva to show that neither of them understands the grammatical construction of BCA IX.78c as a disjunction of the subject from an object. Mi pham's idiosyncratic interpretation of this passage is therefore – as Rab gsal calls it – a "raising of denials that burden the scriptures of the great *paṇḍitas* of the Noble Land with the defilements of one's own faulty explanations."⁶⁵

Apart from the grammatical construction of BCA IX.78c, Mi pham's way of literal paraphrasing, of adding content to the terse formulation of this verse line, is another object of Rab gsal's criticism. In Mi pham's way of reading BCA IX.78c, this verse line carries the objection that the conception of an imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*) and an inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) self are similar cases: just as one cannot turn the mind away from the earlier, one also cannot turn the mind away from the latter. The answer to this objection then points out that these are indeed different cases. Since there is no reasoning that would refute appearances that are based on a "mere imagination" (*btags pa tsam*) with regard to the perception of ordinary beings, they cannot be negated; appearances as inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) phenomena, on the other hand, can be negated. For Rab gsal, the assumed dissimilarity of these two kinds of appearances is based on the question whether the respective appearances can be negated within in the domain of ordinary beings' perception or not. Rab gsal therefore counters that there is also no reasoning that would

⁶³ Cf. 'Ju lan 376.2–3.

⁶⁴ For this argument, see 'Ju lan 376.3–6.

⁶⁵ 'Ju lan 376.5: *rang gis nyes bshad kyi dri ma 'phags yul paṇ chen gyi gzhuṅg la 'gel ba'i bsnyon gdeng ba.*

prove that appearances as inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) phenomena are not perceived by ordinary beings, and hence, Mi pham's claim of the dissimilarity of the two cases is impaired.⁶⁶

While Rab gsal refuted the grammatical construction, as well as the understanding of the general content of Mi pham's interpretation of BCA IX.78c, he did not set forth his own reading of this verse line. This is, however, presented in another discussion, Rab gsal's critique of Mi pham's commentary on BCA IX.78ab. Here, Rab gsal attacks – among other things – the causal relationship between the “delusion of a self” (*bdag tu rmongs pa*) and “egoism” (*nga rgyal*) that Mi pham suggested. He argues that both delusion and egoism – as understood by Mi pham – refer to self-grasping, and so it would not necessarily be the case that the former is the cause of the latter, but that this relationship could be also reversed.⁶⁷ In contrast, Rab gsal then presents his own interpretation of this part of the BCA. It seems that, according to his understanding, “delusion” (*rmongs pa*) refers to the self-grasping with regard to *phenomena*, while “egoism” (*nga rgyal*) refers to the self-grasping with regard to persons. Reading BCA IX.78ab in this way, the causal relationship between the earlier, i.e., delusion, and the later, i.e., egoism, can be accepted. As Rab gsal explains, the objection raised in BCA IX.78c must be read accordingly:⁶⁸

Objection: Through that, i.e., the averting of self-grasping with regard to a person, **however**, self-grasping with regard to phenomena **cannot be averted**.

Rab gsal shares Rgyal tshab's understanding of the grammatical construction, according to which the earlier averting of self-grasping is not a sufficient cause for averting the later kind of grasping. Their literal rephrasing of the verse line, however, differs. Rgyal tshab formulated the opponent's objection as a tension between “the delusion of a self” and “grasping as inherently established,” for Rab gsal, it is the averting of “self-grasping with regard to a person,” which does not suffice for averting “self-grasping with regard to phenomena.” While it is quite likely that Rab gsal is aiming at a similar interpretation as Rgyal tshab, he does not say so explicitly, and

⁶⁶ 'Ju lan 378.2 (JL II.2b). Rab gsal's position is supported by Tsong kha pa's comments in his *Dgongs pa rab gsal*, which emphasise that the perception of all ordinary beings is tainted by grasping phenomena as truly established; see Tauscher 1995: 208.

⁶⁷ 'Ju lan 379.2–3: *bdag yod du bzung ba'i rmongs pa de bdag 'dzin yin nam ma yin pa dang | bdag gnyis kyi khyad par dpyad de phyi ma snga ma'i rgyur yang zlog go |*.

⁶⁸ 'Ju lan 379.5–6: *kho na re | gang zag gi bdag 'dzin bzlog pa de las | yang chos kyi bdag tu 'dzin pa bzlog pa med do zhe na |*.

will be criticised for this deviation from the authoritative reading of his scholastic forebear by Mi pham.

In accordance with his reading of BCA IX.78c, Rab gsal's interpretation of Śāntideva's response in BCA IX.78d is also related to the grasping of phenomena.⁶⁹

The best is the meditative cultivation of the perfection of insight that realises the selflessness of phenomena.

Referring to several scriptural sources, Rab gsal emphasises that self-grasping with regard to phenomena creates the basis for self-grasping with regard to persons.⁷⁰

At the very end of his discussion of this topic, Rab gsal comes back to the point of departure of this controversy, Mi pham's critical statements on the explanation of BCA IX.78c. Rab gsal points out that Mi pham's remarks show an obvious contradiction: on the one hand, Mi pham said that his specific interpretation of this verse line is "my idea alone," on the other hand, it should be "in accordance with the Indian scriptures."⁷¹ Naturally, so Rab gsal argues, it can only be the one or the other.⁷²

If this thought that holds [such an interpretation as] correct is yours alone, then it would not exist in the mind of the commentators of the Noble Land.

Mi pham's reply in the *Rab lan*

Describing his specific understanding of the grammatical construction of BCA IX.78c as "my idea alone," Mi pham seemed to be fully aware that his interpretation is somewhat unusual. In his answer to Rab gsal's criticism, he does not make any attempt to reconcile his peculiar reading with that of the Indian commentators quoted by Rab gsal. Instead, Mi pham chooses to disagree, but points out that his diverging interpretation as such does not constitute a fault, as long as there is no conflict with regard to the overall meaning.⁷³

⁶⁹ 'Ju lan 379.6: *chos kyi bdag med pa rtogs pa'i sher phyin bsgom pa mchog yin pa*.

⁷⁰ 'Ju lan 378.5–381.1 (JL II.4).

⁷¹ Cf. Nor bu ke ta ka 61.6: 'dir 'phags yul gyi gzhung bzang bzhin du yul de dag las kyang zhes sbyar bar byas [C bar byas om.] na don du 'thad do snyam pa kho bo gcig pu'i rnam rtog go |.

⁷² Cf. 'Ju lan 383.5–6: 'thad 'dzin gyi blo de khyed gcig pu'i yin na | 'phags yul gyi 'grel byed dag gi thugs la med par 'gyur la |.

⁷³ Rab lan 198.3–4: gzhung so sos 'chad tshul mi 'dra ba byas kyang don la 'gal ba med na snga ma kho na bskyar zlos ma byas pa tsam zhig gis skyon ci la 'go |.

Individual texts use different ways of explanation, but why should one be tainted by a fault simply because one did not repeat solely the earlier [way of explanation] as long as there is no contradiction with regard to the meaning?

Mi pham treats this whole issue rather briefly. He does not further explain the reason for his specific interpretation, nor does he respond to Rab gsal's accusation that his grammatical understanding in this verse line should be identical to the similar case two verse lines earlier.

Regarding the content-related issues of BCA IX.78c, Mi pham points out that Rab gsal's refutation is based on a misunderstanding. He agrees with Rab gsal's objection that there is no reasoning that could refute that phenomena appear as inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) to ordinary beings, but, he continues, "there is a proof [showing] that [phenomena that appear as inherently established] are not established in the way they appear [...]"⁷⁴ As Mi pham explains, his claim of the dissimilarity of the two kinds of appearances was not based on the mere fact that they appear or do not appear in the perception of ordinary beings, as Rab gsal assumed, but on whether their manner of appearance is in accordance with their mode of existence. With this clarification by Mi pham, Rab gsal's objection is deprived of its basis and this specific controversy is effectively resolved.

One of the most detailed answers in this discussion is devoted to Rab gsal's criticism of Mi pham's interpretation of BCA IX.78ab and the presentation of his own reading of the whole verse that Rab gsal added. Rab gsal's argument was that, in Mi pham's understanding, both "delusion of a self" (*bdag tu rmongs pa*) and "egoism" (*nga rgyal*), that were mentioned in BCA IX.78ab, refer to the same thing, namely self-grasping. Since both are the same, a causal relationship between them cannot be established, Rab gsal pointed out. In his response, Mi pham first confirms that he indeed intended the relationship between delusion and egoism to be one of cause and effect. He seems to accept Rab gsal's reasoning that a causal relationship cannot be established between identical things, but points out that such is not the case with regard to the objects of the present discussion, i.e., delusion of a self, which was also referred to as "self-grasping" in Mi pham's explanations, and, on the other hand, egoism.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Rab lan 199.5: *snang ba ltar ma grub pa'i sgrub byed yod pas [...]*.

⁷⁵ Rab lan 201.6–202.2: *gong ltar bshad tshul de ni de byung gi 'brel yin kyang khyod kyis brjod pa'i skyon de ga la yod de | [...] bdag 'dzin ni lta ba'i cha dang | nga rgyal ni nga rgyal bdun gyi nang tshan du bshad pa ltar byas na mi 'thad pa gang yang med do |*.

Even though the way of explanation as [given] above refers to a causal relation, where is the fault that you mentioned? [...] If one follows [the system of explanation] according to which self-grasping is explained as a part of the view and egoism as a division of the seven [types of] egoism,⁷⁶ then there is not anything that is improper.

In the following, Mi pham introduces a couple of other valid ways of interpreting this passage.⁷⁷ His point in doing so seems to be to advocate a general openness towards different ways of understanding, rather than a restriction to one exclusive reading. Nevertheless, he continues with a criticism of Rab gsal's interpretation that reads this passage as an issue between self-grasping with regard to phenomena (*chos kyi bdag 'dzin*) and self-grasping with regard to persons (*gang zag gi bdag 'dzin*).⁷⁸ In the Dge lugs scholastic system, grasping phenomena as such (*chos tsam*) is regarded as valid cognition (*tshad ma*); only grasping as truly established (*bden grub*) is what is to be abandoned. Mi pham therefore argues that Rab gsal has to add the specification "truly established" (*bden grub*) to his reading of this passage.⁷⁹ As seen earlier, Rab gsal's Dge lugs forebears Tsong kha pa and Rgyal tshab clearly related this passage of the BCA to the conceptualisation of things as truly established. Under the pressure of his own scholastic tradition, it is hardly surprising that in his later answer, Rab gsal has not anything to add to this accusation.

Further, Mi pham criticises the causal relationship between self-grasping with regard to phenomena (*chos kyi bdag 'dzin*) and self-grasping with regard to persons (*gang zag gi bdag 'dzin*) asserted by Rab gsal. He argues that such a causal relationship would imply a temporal sequence, where first the *skandhas*, i.e., the phenomena that form the basis for the imagination (*gdags gzhi*) of a person, are grasped, following which a person is

⁷⁶ These seven types are: egoism (*nga rgyal*), egoism of superiority (*lhag pa'i nga rgyal*), egoism exceeding egoism (*nga rgyal las kyang nga rgyal*), egoism of thinking "I exist" (*nga'o snyam pa'i nga rgyal*), manifest egoism (*mngon pa'i nga rgyal*), egoism that assumes [only] slight [inferiority] (*cung zad snyam pa'i nga rgyal*), erroneous egoism (*log pa'i nga rgyal*), see *Dung dkar tshig mdzod: nga rgyal bdun*.

⁷⁷ For these alternative interpretations, see *Rab lan* 202.3–203.4.

⁷⁸ For Mi pham's criticism of Rab gsal's position, see *Rab lan* 203.4–204.6.

⁷⁹ At the end of his criticism, Mi pham comes back to this issue and confronts Rab gsal again with the premisses of his own philosophical system: "You should investigate: is it not [your] belief that there is nothing unsuitable if [appearances] are grasped on the conventional level as mere *skandhas* or carriage or 'I,' if [they] are not grasped as truly established (*bden grub*)?" (*Rab lan* 204.5–6: *bden par ma bzung na tha snyad du phung po dang shing rta dang nga tsam bzung na mi rung ba med ces 'dod pa min nam dpyod cig* |).

grasped. This would lead to the unwanted consequence that a situation is imaginable where one only grasps the *skandhas*, but not a person.⁸⁰ At the end of this passage, Mi pham puts his criticism into perspective.⁸¹

Thus, I did not say that there is a fault in stating a relation of “[one] does not arise if [the other] is not present” in the sense that self-grasping in regard to persons does not arise if grasping the *skandhas* is not present. Instead, I gave an answer in the form of teasing remarks (*nyams mtshar*) with regard to your own refutation of others from the perspective of causal relation; this was done to show [what is possible when using] a logical approach.

As indicated earlier, Mi pham seems to accept different interpretations of BCA IX.78ab, but demonstrates that he, too, can criticise Rab gsal’s reading, just as Rab gsal objected to his commentary.

The last of Rab gsal’s complaints, the apparent inconsistency between Mi pham’s description of his explanations as “my idea alone” and his claim that they would be in accordance with the Indian scriptures, is resolved quickly. Mi pham clarifies that by calling his interpretation that of “me alone” he did not mean to exclude the earlier Indian masters, but simply wanted to point out that he is the only one with such an interpretation in this current time and place.⁸² Such a position can certainly be accepted by Rab gsal, and hence the discussion ends with this reformulation of Mi pham’s original intention.

Rab gsal’s reply in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

Of the four topics that were regarded as central for the presentation of this topic, only two are further discussed at this stage of the controversies:

⁸⁰ In his earlier criticism of Mi pham’s explanations (*Ju lan* 382.6f.), Rab gsal emphasised that self-grasping is an error that deviates from the mode of existence *since time without beginning*. This is in contradiction to the consequence of the present statements that a situation becomes possible where one does not have self-grasping with regard to persons since time without beginning, so Mi pham argues; cf. *Rab lan* 204.1–2: *thog med nas gang zag gi bdag tu ’dzin pa can ma yin pa’i skabs kyang yod pa sogs rang gis gzhan la gang ’phel ba dang gang gis ’phel ba mi ’thad pa sogs skyon brjod pa yang dran par byos shig |*.

⁸¹ *Rab lan* 204.4–5: *des na phung por ’dzin pa med na gang zag gi bdag ’dzin mi ’byung ba’i med na mi ’byung gi ’brel ba brjod pa la skyon brjod pa ma yin kyang | gzhan la de byung gi ’brel ba’i thad nas khyed rang gis brgal ba la nyams mtshar du lan bstan pa rigs pa’i rnam ’gyur du byas so |*.

⁸² *Rab lan* 214.2: *de’i shugs kyis da lta yul dus res ’ga’ ba ’di na kho bo ’ba’ zhig gis gsal bar brjod do zhes don gyis shes shing | [...]*.

Mi pham's specific understanding of the grammatical construction of BCA IX.78c and Rab gsal's alternative interpretation of the whole verse. In both cases, Rab gsal finds contradictions in Mi pham's explanations.

Concerning the first, Rab gsal argues that there is an irreconcilable gap between Mi pham's interpretation in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, a commentary explicitly criticising other explanations, and his later explanations in the *Rab lan* – Mi pham's answer that Rab gsal addresses consistently with the short title *Zab snang* – which claimed that there is no contradiction to the meaning of the Indian commentaries.⁸³

In the *Sher tika* [you] had explained that it is not correct to interpret the phrase “*de las kyang bzlog*” as the “averting of self-grasping” (*bdag 'dzin bzlog pa*), but here in the *Zab snang* [you] said that [this interpretation] is possible since it arrived at the intention of Kalyānadeva and Prajñākaramati. Thus, [your statements] are exposed as a direct contradiction.

Mi pham does not attempt to refute these accusations in his second answer. The most central issue of this topic ends with Rab gsal's exposition of the disapproving nature of Mi pham's commentary. There, he clearly had criticised alternative interpretations of BCA IX.78c, a fact that can not be done away with the reconciling remarks made later in his *Rab lan*.

Another contradiction is seen in Mi pham's discussion of Rab gsal's way of interpreting BCA IX.78. On the one hand, Mi pham did indeed point out an unwanted consequence of Rab gsal's position; on the other hand, Mi pham stated that he did not want to criticise a causal relationship between the two kinds of self-grasping, so Rab gsal argues.⁸⁴

[You] said that if [the conceptions of] the two [kinds of] selves arise in a sequence, it follows that there is an ordinary being, who has the earlier [kind of self-grasping], but does not have the latter [kind of self-grasping]. Right afterwards [you] stated that [you] did not say that there is a fault in [claiming] a causal relationship of the two [kinds of] selves, but that [you] showed [what is possible when using] a logical approach according to the earlier [kind of relationship].

⁸³ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 435.6–436.1: *sher tika tu de las kyang* [A kyang om.] *bzlog ces pa bdag 'dzin bzlog par sbyar ba mi rigs zhes bshad kyang* | *zab snang 'dir dge ba lha dang sher 'byung gi dngos par song bas rung zhes dngos 'gal du bud* |.

⁸⁴ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 436.3–4: *bdag gnyis rim can du 'byung na snga ma yod la phyi ma med pa'i so skye yod par thal zer* | *de'i rjes de ma thag tu bdag 'dzin gnyis kyi de byung gi 'brel ba la skyon brjod pa ma yin kyang sngar ltar rigs pa'i nram 'gyur byas gsung* |.

In his earlier letter, Mi pham had already referred to his criticism of Rab gsal's position as "teasing remarks" (*nyams mtshar*), rather than a serious attack. It seems to be for this reason that Mi pham does not give Rab gsal's present objection any more attention and does not comment on it in his last letter.

Rab gsal then defends his earlier position of a causal relationship between self-grasping with regard to phenomena (*chos kyi bdag 'dzin*) and self-grasping with regard to persons (*gang zag gi bdag 'dzin*). Just like the mind, so Rab gsal argues, the two kinds of self-grasping arise from their respective four conditions;⁸⁵ if Mi pham's reasoning did indeed apply, then this would also pertain to the mind, which also has its causes, just like self-grasping, and it would lead to the absurd consequence that there would be sentient beings (*sems can*) who do not have a mind (*sems*).⁸⁶

Mi pham's reply in the *Yang lan*

Of the controversies that were discussed in relation to this topic, it is only the last issue that is taken up again in Mi pham's second answer. Mi pham agrees that self-grasping – just as the mind – arises from its four conditions, but, Mi pham argues, there is, nevertheless, a difference between Rab gsal's example of mind and self-grasping: within the four conditions it is never the case that mind is not present; it is, however possible that self-grasping with regard to persons is not present, while self-grasping with regard to phenomena is present, just like a certain mental image is present now, but was not present yesterday – even though the image of yesterday as of today is mental.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ This refers to the four conditions for the emergence of mind and mental factors mentioned in the *Abhidharmakośa* and its commentary (II.64a): the causal condition (*hetu-pratyaya/rgyu rkyen*), the immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya/de ma thag pa'i rkyen*), the referential condition (*ālambanapratyaya/dmigs rkyen*), and the dominant condition (*adhipatipratyaya/bdag rkyen*); see AKBh 101. For a translation of this passage, see La Vallée Poussin 1991: 305.

⁸⁶ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 436.4: 'o na sems dang bdag 'dzin gnyis rnam de dang de'i rkyen bzhi las skye phyir sems med pa'i sems can dang | bdag 'dzin med pa'i so skye khyod kyis khas longs shig |.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Yang lan* 465.5–466.1: sems dang bdag 'dzin rkyen bzhi las skyes kyang | rkyen bzhi'i nang na [C nas] sems med pa mi srid pas sems med [AC sems med om.] sems can sogs mi srid la | de bzhin rgyu 'bras thams cad spyir thog med nas rgyun gyis 'jug kyang | bdag 'dzin gnyis po lhan cig thog med nas rgyun chags su 'jug pa min par | snga ma'i tshe phyi ma med pa srid kyang rung zhes smras te | bum 'dzin gyi dus su snam 'dzin nges par yod mi dgos pa bzhin yang |.

Synopsis

The point of departure of the controversies in this topic is Mi pham's critical commentary on the interpretation of, and, in particular, the grammatical construction of BCA IX.78c. In his explanations, Mi pham explicitly objected to other interpretations and contrasted them with his own understanding of this passage. This he called "the idea of myself alone," a phrasing that suggests that Mi pham was aware of the idiosyncratic nature of his way of reading.

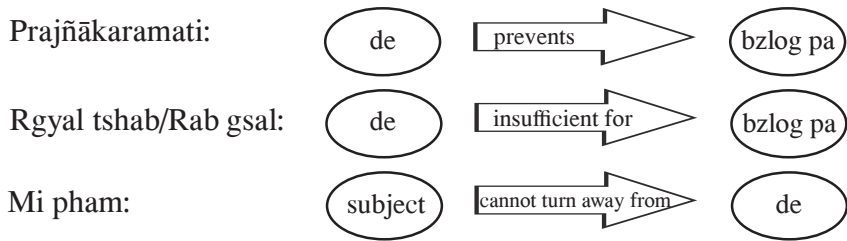


Figure 4.3: Varying interpretations of BCA IX.78c: *de las kyang bzlog med ce na*

Although Rab gsal's refutation extended also to the commentary on the textual surroundings, including the other verse lines of BCA IX.78, but also its two preceding verses, the main issues remained Mi pham's critical remarks and his interpretation of BCA IX.78c. Along with the earlier topic, the discussion of this second topic is listed under "refuting faults of great impudence" (*spyi brtol che ba'i nyes pa dgag pa*). Again, Rab gsal's criticism seemed not to be instigated by major doctrinal differences, but by the provocative phrasing found in Mi pham's commentary. To Rab gsal, this was merely a "reflection of a picture of crooked stubbornness and confusion" (*'gal 'khrul gya gyu'i ri mo gzugs brynan*),⁸⁸ a "raising of denials that burdens the scriptures of the great *paṇḍitas* of the Noble Land with the defilements of one's own faulty explanations,"⁸⁹ a "chatter, that has no basis,"⁹⁰ etc. By referring to the respective passages in the authoritative

⁸⁸ Cf. 'Ju lan 376.2: *'gal 'khrul gya gyu'i ri mo gzugs brynan*.

⁸⁹ 'Ju lan 376.5: *rang gis nyes bshad kyi dri ma 'phags yul paṇ chen gyi gzhung la 'gel ba'i bsnayon gdeng ba*.

⁹⁰ 'Ju lan 377.3: *long gtam rtsa ba med pa*.

commentaries of Prajñākaramati and Kalyānadeva, he pointed out that Mi pham's interpretation is not backed up by the Indian tradition. Mi pham, on the other hand, argued that divergence from the Indian commentaries does not, in itself, constitute a fault, as long as there is no contradiction in meaning. In his response, Rab gsal did not give in to Mi pham's attempt to reconcile his peculiar way of reading with more traditional interpretations. He pointed out that it was Mi pham who had refuted the others in the first place, and hence would contradict himself by claiming consensus with regard to the meaning. Again, refuting this objection seems difficult, and, instead, Mi pham opted to not mention this issue at all in his last letter.

While discussing Mi pham's commentary on BCA IX.78ab, Rab gsal set forth his own understanding of the complete verse. In analogy to Rab gsal's criticism of the content of his reading, Mi pham turned against Rab gsal's interpretation. In the course of the controversies, Mi pham referred to a couple of valid readings of this passage, and it seems obvious that he also accepted other possibilities of interpretation, not only the one he suggested. Even though he pointed out that his criticism of Rab gsal's understanding was intended as "teasing remarks" (*nyams mtshar*), rather than as a fully developed attack, arguments on this matter were exchanged and continued up to Mi pham's last letter.

Clearly, the main reason for this debate was Mi pham's refutation of other explanations in his *Nor bu ke ta ka*. While the acceptance of other interpretations in his later answer suggests that Mi pham's earlier remarks were not intended as strictly as their phrasing might imply, they provided Rab gsal with an opportunity for criticism against which Mi pham could defend himself only with difficulty.

Topic III: the interpretation of BCA IX.41–49

The question of the general context of this passage of the BCA is already part of the controversies that developed about its interpretation. In the Dge lugs tradition, as expressed in Rgyal tshab's commentary, the section of the verses BCA IX.41–57 is labelled "proving that even for someone who wishes mere liberation, realisation of emptiness is necessary."⁹¹ According to this view, the respective verses show that Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas also need to attain complete understanding of emptiness in order

⁹¹ 'Jug ngogs 230.14–15: *thar pa tsam thob par 'dod pas kyang stong nyid rtogs dgos par bsgrub pa*. For a translation of the relevant passage of Rgyal tshab's commentary, cf. Sweet 1977: 208ff.

to achieve their desired soteriological goal, which is the state of an Arhat. Yet, in the outline of Rdza Dpal sprul, according to whose explanations Mi pham composed his commentary on the ninth chapter of the BCA, the very same passage “proves that the Mahāyāna is the highest.”⁹² As the title indicates, this tradition reads this passage of the BCA as a proof that the Mahāyāna is supreme to the Hīnayāna,⁹³ the path of Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas. As will be shown below, this supremacy is established in one way in terms of the complete realisation of emptiness (the Mahāyāna) as opposed to an incomplete realisation of emptiness (the Hīnayāna). Even though Mi pham uses slightly different titles in his own outline, the content of his commentary follows closely the ideas expressed in the outline of his master.⁹⁴

The passage under consideration starts with the objection of a (Hīnayāna) opponent, questioning the need for the realisation of emptiness to achieve the goal of liberation in BCA IX.41ab: “Liberation is [achieved] because of seeing the truth. Why [should it be achieved] through seeing emptiness?”⁹⁵ As Prajñākaramati’s commentary explains,⁹⁶ the “truth” that was mentioned refers to the “Four Noble Truths” (*catvāri āryasatyāni*), a core piece of Buddhist doctrine, emphasised particularly in the Hīnayāna tradition. Countering this objection, Śāntideva answers in BCA IX.41cd that the path of emptiness was established by the scriptures as a prerequisite for awakening: “Since the scriptures say that there is no awakening without this path.”⁹⁷ This is followed by a discussion of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna scriptures, which continues until BCA IX.44. Śāntideva’s main aim in this passage is to point out that the same arguments his (Hīnayāna)

⁹² *Spyod ’jug sa bcad* 142.4: *theg chen mchog tu sgrub pa*. For an edition and translation of Dpal sprul’s detailed outline of the BCA, see Viehbeck 2005: 86ff.

⁹³ Note that the distinction Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna is not used as a self-evident categorisation, but as a distinction that followers of the Mahāyāna, such as Śāntideva and his Tibetan successors, use to distinguish their specific tradition from other Buddhist traditions. Often, as here in the BCA, it is employed in a polemical context, e.g., to defend Mahāyāna doctrines against possible objections from other Buddhist traditions.

⁹⁴ In Mi pham’s outline, BCA IX.41–53, called “abandoning objections with regard to the Mahāyāna, the means of expression” (*rjod byed theg chen la rtsod spong*), belongs together with its preceding passage, BCA IX.6–40, “abandoning objections with regard to emptiness, the object to be expressed” (*brjod bya stong nyid la rtsod spong*), and its subsequent section, BCA IX.54–58, a “summary of their content” (*de dag gi don bsdu ba*), to the overall section “abandoning objections” (*rtsod spong*), i.e., a passage that defends the tenets and scriptural tradition of the Mahāyāna; cf. the *sa bcad* of the *Nor bu ke ta ka* in Chapter Seven.

⁹⁵ BCAP 425.15: *satyadarśanato muktiḥ śūnyatādarśanena kiṃ* | .

⁹⁶ BCAP 425.16.

⁹⁷ BCAP 426.14: *na vinānena mārgaṇa bodhir ity āgamo yataḥ* | | .

opponent uses to establish the authenticity of the literary corpus of his tradition equally apply to the Mahāyāna literature.⁹⁸ BCA IX.45ab addresses the issue of the beginning of this passage, the need to realise emptiness, from another angle: “The teaching has its root in monkhood, and precisely monkhood hardly exists.”⁹⁹ Śāntideva argues that the teaching, that is, the doctrine of the Buddha, is based on monkhood. Among the various types of monks, this statement refers to the highest form of monkhood, a monk that is “without *kleśas*” (*bhinnakleśa*), as Prajñākaramati points out.¹⁰⁰ Such a state then “**hardly exists**, i.e., is not right without seeing emptiness, is not logical just because of seeing the truth.”¹⁰¹ And, just as true monkhood is not possible without realising emptiness, the same applies to the achievement of the Buddhist goal, that is, *nirvāṇa*, as BCA IX.45cd continues: “For those whose minds contain references, *nirvāṇa*, too, hardly exists.”¹⁰²

While the earlier verses of this passage form the basis of understanding the latter verses, their *literal* interpretation was not a point of discussion between Mi pham and Rab gsal. The later part of this passage is a different matter, and it is for this reason that the following verses are also quoted in their Tibetan translation.

In BCA IX.46ab, Śāntideva addresses a possible objection of his opponents:

Objection: Liberation is due to the abandoning of *kleśas*. Response: Then it must be immediately after that.

kleśaprahāṇān muktiś cet tadanantaram astu sā |¹⁰³

nyon mongs spangs pas grol na de'i | | *de ma thag tu der 'gyur ro* | |¹⁰⁴

Others might argue that liberation (*mukti*) is gained by dispelling the *kleśas*, which is brought about by seeing the Four Noble Truths.¹⁰⁵ In this case, Śāntideva counters, in the rephrasing of his commentator, “**it must**

⁹⁸ This passage is not of special importance for the later controversies, and therefore not presented in more detail. For Prajñākaramati's commentary on this passage, see BCAP 427ff., or, for a translation, Oldmeadow 1994: 103ff.

⁹⁹ BCAP 435.10: *śāsanam bhikṣutāmūlam bhikṣutaiva ca duḥsthitā* | .

¹⁰⁰ Cf. BCAP 436.13: *tatrāpi bhinnakleśo bhikṣuḥ pradhānam | tasyaiveha grahaṇam | tadbhāvo bhikṣutā* | .

¹⁰¹ BCAP 436.17–437.1: [...] *duḥsthitā* | *śūnyatādarśanam antareṇāsamañjasā kevalasatyadarśanato na yucjate* | .

¹⁰² BCAP 438.5: *sāvalambanacittānām nirvāṇam api duḥsthitam* | | .

¹⁰³ BCAP 438.9.

¹⁰⁴ BCA (P, fol. 37a3; D, fol. 32b3).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. BCAP 438.10–11: *yadī cāryasatyadarśanataḥ kleśāḥ prahīyante | tato vimuktir upajāyate* | .

be, i.e., liberation must come to be, **immediately after that**, i.e., right immediately after the abandoning of *kleśas*.¹⁰⁶ That liberation is not achieved immediately after abandoning the *kleśas* is proven in the other half of this verse, BCA IX.46cd:

And for those a capacity of *karman* is seen, even though it is without *kleśas*.

drṣṭaṃ ca teṣu sāmārthyam niḥkleśasyāpi karmanāḥ | |¹⁰⁷

nyon mongs med kyang de dag la | | *las kyi nus pa mthong ba yin* | |¹⁰⁸

Śāntideva argues that, even though the *kleśas* are abandoned, there is still “a **capacity**, a potential (*śākti*), that brings forward a[nother] fruit.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, as *karman* is not completely extinguished, this cannot be true liberation. For whom is this the case? Which state of mind does Śāntideva refer to exactly? According to his commentator Prajñākaramati, this refers to people who are devoid of *kleśas*, and, specifically, to Arhats, such as Maudgalyāyana or Aṅgulīmāla.¹¹⁰ As will be seen later, the Dge lugs tradition strongly objects to relating this passage to Arhats, and the question of to whom Śāntideva is referring in his explanations can be seen as the key problem in the controversies between Mi pham and Rab gsal.

The following verses in the BCA dwell further on the issue of whether liberation is possible for those people who have abandoned *kleśas* – be they true Arhats according to the understanding of Prajñākaramati and later Mi pham, or be they Arhats in name only, as understood in the Dge lugs tradition. BCA IX.47ab addresses a possible objection:

Objection: It is ascertained that desire, the cause, does not exist at that time.

tṛṣṇā tāvad upādānaṃ nāsti cet saṃpradhāryate |¹¹¹

*re zhiḡ nyer len sred*¹¹² *pa ni* | | *med ces nges pa nyid ce na* | |¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ BCAP 438.11–12: *tadanantaram kleśaprahāṇāt samanantaram evāstu sā muktir bhavatu* |.

¹⁰⁷ BCAP 438.14.

¹⁰⁸ BCA (P, fol. 37a3–4; D, fol. 32b3).

¹⁰⁹ BCAP 438.16–17: *sāmārthyam phaladānaṃ prati śaktiḥ* |.

¹¹⁰ BCAP 438.15–16: *teṣu prahīṇakleśeṣu [prahīṇakleśeṣu] āryamaudgalyāyanāryāṅgulīmāla-prabhṛteṣu* |.

¹¹¹ BCAP 439.16.

¹¹² *sred* : D *sred*; P *srid*.

¹¹³ BCA (P, fol. 37a4; D, fol. 32b3).

An opponent might argue that for those people who have abandoned *kleśas*, desire (*trṣṇā*), which is “the cause of rebirth” (*punarbhavopādāna*),¹¹⁴ does not exist at the present moment; hence, they are actually liberated and not subject to rebirth. This objection is then rebutted in the latter half of the verse, BCA IX.47cd:

[Response:] Why does desire not exist for them, though it is non-afflicted, like delusion?¹¹⁵

kim akliṣṭāpi trṣṇaiśāṃ nāsti sammohavat satī | ¹¹⁶

sred ¹¹⁷ 'di ¹¹⁸ nyon mongs can min yang | | *kun rmongs bzhin du ci ste med* | | ¹¹⁹

Śāntideva counters that even though those people have abandoned *kleśas*, desire might still be present in them, but in a “non-afflicted” (*akliṣṭa*) form. An example of such a form of desire is delusion (*moha*). In BCA IX.48, the existence of desire in such people is proven through the existence of its cause, feeling (*vedanā*):

Desire has feeling (*vedanā*) as its cause and feeling is present in them.

A mind that contains references has to abide somewhere.

vedanāpratītyā trṣṇā vedanaiśāṃ ca vidyate | ¹²⁰

sāmbanena cittena sthātavyaṃ yatra tatra vā | | ¹²¹

tshor ba'i rkyen gyis sred pa yin | | *tshor ba de dag la yang yod* | |

dmigs pa dang ni bcas pa'i sems | | 'ga' zhig la ni gnas par 'gyur | | ¹²²

¹¹⁴ Cf. BCAP 440.1–2.

¹¹⁵ In the present Sanskrit text of the BCA, it is clear that it is desire (*trṣṇā*) that exists “for them” (*eṣāṃ*). This last expression shows the genitive plural case ending of the masculine form of the pronoun *idam*; it is not possible to relate the pronoun to desire. In the Tibetan translation, however, the corresponding expression for “*trṣṇaiśāṃ*” is “*sred 'di*,” a formulation that suggests that the pronoun 'di (this) would refer to *sred pa* (desire). This interpretation was chosen by both Mi pham and Rab gsal, and probably by most of the readers of the Tibetan translation of the BCA. As will be shown later, such a reading of the line had further consequences for the way this passage is understood in the Dge lugs tradition.

¹¹⁶ Cf. BCAP 440.5.

¹¹⁷ *sred* : D *sred*; P *srid*.

¹¹⁸ 'di : P 'di; D *de*.

¹¹⁹ BCA (P, fol. 37a4; D, fol. 32b3–4).

¹²⁰ Cf. BCAP 440.9.

¹²¹ BCAP 441.8.

¹²² BCA (P, fol. 37a4–5; D, fol. 32b4).

Śāntideva argues against those who deny the existence of desire in people, who have abandoned the *kleśas*, but not realised emptiness, that the presence of desire can be concluded through the presence of its cause, that is, feeling (*vedanā*). The only method to overcome this and achieve liberation is seeing emptiness, but when the mind clings to an object such as the Four Noble Truths, liberation is doubtful.¹²³ This thought is continued in BCA IX.49:

Without [seeing] emptiness the mind that is suppressed rises again

Just as in non-perceptual concentration (*asaṃjñīsamāpatti*). Therefore, one should cultivate emptiness.

vinā śūnyatayā cittaṃ baddham utpadyate punaḥ |

*yathāsaṃjñīsamāpattau bhāvayet tena śūnyatām |*¹²⁴

stong nyid dang ni bral ba'i sems | | 'gags pa slar yang skye 'gyur te | |

*'du shes med pa'i snyoms 'jug bzhin | | des na stong nyid bsgom par bya |*¹²⁵

As Prajñākaramati points out, a mind that did not realise emptiness is not liberated, but rises again, “even though it vanished for a short while due to the power of concentration.”¹²⁶ To illustrate this process, the example of non-perceptual concentration (*asaṃjñīsamāpatti*) is mentioned.

The promulgation of emptiness as the only method to achieve liberation that is expressed in this verse can be seen as the culmination and common aim of the preceding verses. Beginning with BCA IX.45, various consequences of lacking the realisation of emptiness are pointed out: inability for monkhood and *nirvāṇa*, the presence of *karman*, the presence of desire – although “non-afflicted” –, the presence of feeling (*vedanā*), and a mind that contains references. But to whose state of mind do these descriptions refer exactly? In Prajñākaramati’s commentary on BCA IX.46cd, Arhats such as Maudgalyāyana or Aṅgulīmāla are explicitly mentioned as the object of the explanations.¹²⁷ The question of whether attributes like the presence of *karman* and desire can be reconciled with the state of a true

¹²³ See Prajñākaramati’s explanations in BCAP 441.9–13, or a translation of this passage in Oldmeadow 1994: 120.

¹²⁴ Cf. BCAP 441.14–15.

¹²⁵ BCA (P, fol. 37a5–6; D, fol. 32b4–5)

¹²⁶ Cf. BCAP 441.17–18: *samādhībalāt kiyatkālaṃ nivṛttam api*.

¹²⁷ Cf. BCAP 438.15–16.

Arhat – and Śāntideva’s intention was thus indeed to relate this whole passage to Arhats – or whether such was not the case, forms the core issue of the controversies that developed between Mi pham and Rab gsal about this passage.

Interpreting this passage in the Dge lugs school – scholastic background

As indicated above, in the Dge lugs tradition the passage under discussion is read as a proof that Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas need to have an understanding of emptiness in order to attain their desired goal, arhatship. The discussion in the BCA, beginning with IX.41, is seen as an argument between a Śrāvaka opponent, who questions the doctrine of emptiness and claims that “**liberation**, the result of an Arhat, is attained **because of** cultivating a direct **perception** of the sixteen aspects of the Four Truths, such as impermanence etc.”,¹²⁸ and Śāntideva, who, as a proponent of the Mahāyāna, counters that “even for the attainment of the result of a Śrāvaka- or Pratyekabuddha-Arhat the realisation of emptiness is definitely necessary.”¹²⁹ In the Dge lugs interpretation, verses BCA IX.45–49 are therefore related to states that are achieved by the path of the Four Truths, but do not necessitate a realisation of emptiness. That means that the subjects of these descriptions are Śrāvakas who did not attain arhatship, since they did not make use of the path of emptiness.¹³⁰ This general view also has consequences with regard to the literal annotation of individual verse lines. Discarding all *kleśas* is asserted to result in achieving the state of an Arhat. Since this passage is understood as not referring to Arhats, the *kleśas* mentioned in BCA IX.46 must be specified as “*manifest (mngon gyur) kleśas*.” According to this reading, Śāntideva is said to refute the assumption that abandoning only manifest *kleśas* would result in liberation, since those adepts still have *karman* for further rebirth, although they are devoid of manifest *kleśas*.¹³¹ At this stage, Rgyal tshab’s commentary makes reference to another reading of this passage by “some commentaries and Tibetans” who relate it to Arhats. Although this is also the

¹²⁸ Cf. ‘Jug ngogs 230.15–18: nyan thos sde pa kha cig na re **bden pa** bzhi’i rnam pa mi rtag sogs bcu drug mngon sum du **mthong ba** goms pas **grol** ba dgra bcom pa’i ‘bras bu thob par ‘gyur gyi | chos thams cad bden pas **stong** pa **nyid mthong bas ci zhig bya** dgos pa med cing mi rigs so zhe na |.

¹²⁹ ‘Jug ngogs 231.9–10: nyan rang dgra bcom pa’i ‘bras bu thob pa la yang stong nyid rtogs pa nges par dgos par thal |.

¹³⁰ ‘Jug ngogs 233.20–234.1: nyan thos ‘phags pa chos can | dgra bcom pa mi thob par thal | stong nyid rtogs pa’i shes rab lam du mi byed pa’i phyir |.

¹³¹ ‘Jug ngogs 234.9ff. or Sweet 1977: 214f., respectively, for a translation of this passage.

intention of Prajñākaramati, as was shown earlier, Rgyal tshab vehemently opposes this way of reading.¹³²

The Dge lugs understanding of this passage also affected the interpretation of the following verse, BCA IX.47. In the first part of it, the opponent counters that desire, the cause of further rebirth, is not present in the adepts who practice the Four Noble Truths. The second part is Śāntideva's reply to that, which we have translated above (p.129) in the following way:

[Response:] Why does desire not exist for them, though it is non-afflicted, like delusion?

kim akliṣṭāpi tṛṣṇaiśāṃ nāsti saṃmohavat satī | |

sred 'di nyon mongs can min yang | | kun rmongs bzhin du ci ste med | |

Rgyal tshab's interpretation of this verse differs considerably. It was already noted (p.129) that Rgyal tshab does not relate the pronoun *'di* (*eṣām*) to the adepts, as the Sanskrit text suggests, but directly to desire (*sred pa/tṛṣṇā*). Further, the particle *yang* (*api*) is not understood in its restricting function – which we translated as “though” –, but as an indicator of an inclusion. Translating the verse line according to this interpretation leads to a different rendering:

[Response:] Why is there not also this desire that is non-afflicted, similar to delusion?

Rgyal tshab explains this line in the following way:¹³³

You must accept **also this desire that is non-afflicted** according to the explanations in the Abhidharma for the mental continuum of the person who is believed to be an Arhat – **why is there not** an afflicted and a non-afflicted [sort] according to the explanations in the Abhidharma with regard to desire as well, **similar to** the acceptance of both an afflicted and non-afflicted [sort] for **delusion**, i.e., not-knowing, in the Abhidharma.

¹³² 'Jug ngogs 235.13–16: 'grel pa 'ga' zhig dang bod rnams nyon mongs med kyang me'u dgal gyi bu dang 'phags pa sor 'phreng can la sogs pa la sngon so skye'i dus su bsags pa'i las kyi 'bras bu sdug bsgal 'byin pa mthong bas de ma thag tu grol ba ma yin no zhes pa ltar mi bya ste |.

¹³³ 'Jug ngogs 236.2–6: khyod dgra bcom par 'dod pa'i gang zag de'i rgyud sred pa 'di mngon pa nas bshad pa ltar gyi **nyon mongs can min yang** | mngon pa nas **kun rmongs** ma rig pa la nyon mongs can yin min gnyis su 'dod pa **bzhin du** sred pa la yang mngon pa nas bshad pa ltar gyi nyon mongs can yin pa gcig dang min pa gcig kyang **ci ste med** de 'dod dgos so |

In Rgyal tshab's view, Śāntideva is implying that the opponent, who is rooted in the Abhidharma explanations, has to accept two kinds of desire, one that is afflicted and one that is non-afflicted – just as such is accepted in the Abhidharma tradition with regard to delusion – and points out that the non-afflicted type of desire is present in the adepts who understood the Four Truths, but did not realise emptiness. Rgyal tshab emphasises further that this differentiation of afflicted and non-afflicted desire is acknowledged in the opponent's own tradition, but not in the way desire is understood in his (and Śāntideva's) – Prāsaṅgika – system.¹³⁴ The adept in question then, is described as having abandoned one (the afflicted) kind of desire, the desire that derives from grasping a self as a self-sufficient entity, but not another (the non-afflicted) kind of desire, the desire that derives from grasping a self that is inherently established (*ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa*).¹³⁵

Therefore, [Śāntideva's statement] says: even though the manifest desire that derives from self-grasping that conceives a person to be self-sufficient, substantially existent (*rdzas yod*), is abandoned **at that time, why is there not the desire** that derives from the view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*'jig lta*) that conceives a person to be inherently established (*ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa*) [...].

Clearly, an adept who views a person as inherently established cannot be an Arhat. Rgyal tshab once again opposes the position that understands this passage as referring to Arhats and understands the intention of this passage to be that “Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas lack the realisation of the selflessness of phenomena.”¹³⁶ According to him, this passage shows that also Śāntideva, “this Ācārya” (*slob dpon 'di*), accepts that grasping persons and phenomena as truly established (*bden 'dzin*) is a form of *kleśa*, that is, obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrub*), a thought that is explained in more

¹³⁴ 'Jug ngogs 236.6–8: *gzhung des ni sde pa gnyis dang theg chen pa la thun mong du grags pa ltar gyi nyon mongs can ma yin pa'i sred pa [srid pa] yod par stan gyi rang lugs kyi sred pa la nyon mongs can yin min gnyis su 'dod pa gtan min par shes par bya'o* | .

¹³⁵ 'Jug ngogs 236.8–11: *des na gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod du 'dzin pa'i bdag 'dzin gyis drangs pa'i sred pa [srid pa] mngon gyur ba re shig spangs kyang gang zag ngo bo nyid kyis grub par 'dzin pa'i 'jig ltas drangs pa'i sred pa [srid pa] ci ste med ces pa yin pas* | [...]. This very same sentence is also found in the *Dgongs pa rab gsal*, Tsong kha pa's commentary on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and one of the most influential texts for the understanding of Madhyamaka philosophy in the Dge lugs tradition; see *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 61.4–6.

¹³⁶ Cf. 'Jug ngogs 237.7: *nyan rang la chos kyi bdag med rtogs pa med pa*.

detail in Tsong kha pa's *Dgongs pa rab gsal*.¹³⁷ Even though this text is a commentary on Candrakīrti's famous *Madhyamakāvatāra*, it contains a detailed discussion of the present passage of the BCA, which must be regarded as the basis for Rgyal tshab's explanations of the relevant part of the BCA.¹³⁸ In his commentary on *Madhyamakāvatāra* I 8d,¹³⁹ Tsong kha pa discusses the realisation of Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas and that of Bodhisattvas.¹⁴⁰

Thus, Bodhisattvas outshine Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas also through their generation of mental power (*blo'i stobs*), only after having seized the *dūraṅgamābhūmi*; on the sixth *bhūmi* and below, it is not the case that [those] outshine [them] through [their] mental power.

Proving that the realisation or "mental power" of Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas and of Bodhisattvas is the same prior to the seventh *bhūmi* implies that Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas also have an understanding of emptiness. Tsong kha pa further points out that the Prāsaṅgika system classifies grasping as truly established (*bden 'dzin*) as obscuration of afflictions and accepts that this kind of grasping, together with its seeds, is abandoned by Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas, too.¹⁴¹ In the Dge lugs tradition, the question of the realisation of emptiness by Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas and the distinction between obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrib*) and obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*) are key issues for their understanding of the Prāsaṅgika approach, a philosophical view that the Dge lugs

¹³⁷ *Jug ngogs* 237.10–12: *gang zag dang phung po bden 'dzin nyon mongs su 'dod pa slob dpon 'di'i yang bzhed pa yin te rgyas par shes par 'dod na rje nyid kyis mdzad pa'i dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad chen mo las shes [shas] par bya'o |* |.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 50ff., for Tsong kha pa's interpretation of *Madhyamakāvatāra* (MAv) I 8d, and 58ff., for his explanations of the current passage of the BCA. See also Hopkins 1980: 145ff. and 154ff., for a translation of the respective passages.

As shown, the earlier passages of the *Jug ngogs* are often closely related to the formulations in the Tsong kha pa's *Blo gsal*. The *Jug ngogs'* explanations of the present passage, however, are closer to Tsong kha pa's *Dgongs pa rab gsal* and are often mere literal quotes of this work. However, the exact relation between those three texts needs more investigation and lies outside the scope of the present study.

¹³⁹ See MAv 19.

¹⁴⁰ *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 51.16–18: *de ltar na sa ring du song ba kho na nas bzung nas | byang sems kyis rang gi blo'i stobs bskyed pas kyang | nyan rang rnam zil gyis gnon gyi | sa drug pa man chad du ni blo'i stobs kyis zil gyis gnon pa ma yin no |* |.

¹⁴¹ *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 52.10–13: *lugs 'dis ni | gang zag bden 'dzin thams cad nyon mong can gyi ma rig par bzhed la | de slar mi skye ba'i tshul gyis spong ba la | de dag gi sa bon zad dgos shing | spangs pa de yang dgra bcom pa gnyis dang thun mong ba yin pas | bden 'dzin gyi sa bon spong ba ni shes sgrib spong ba min no |* |.

school, in particular, emphasises as the highest among the various Buddhist systems. The most prominent manifestation of the Dge lugs appreciation of the Prāsaṅgika approach is a work called *Dka' gnad/gnas brgyad*, a text that defines the eight characteristics of the Prāsaṅgika approach from a Dge lugs viewpoint.¹⁴² In the sixth chapter of this work, the Prāsaṅgika tradition is distinguished by its assertion that the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas' realisation of emptiness extends to phenomena (*dharmā*) and is not to be limited to persons, as the Svātantrika tradition claims.¹⁴³ There, understanding the emptiness of phenomena is described as a prerequisite for attaining the state of an Arhat,¹⁴⁴ the issue that is debated in the controversies concerning the present passage of the BCA. In chapter seven,¹⁴⁵ the Svātantrika approach is characterised as one that accepts grasping [things] as truly established (*bden 'dzin*) and the seed of this grasping as obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib/jñeyāvaraṇa*), while the Prāsaṅgika tradition asserts the very same to be obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrib/kleśāvaraṇa*). Since Arhats are held to have abandoned obscuration of afflictions, this classification implies that Arhats have also abandoned grasping [things] as truly established (*bden 'dzin*), and hence have understood emptiness.¹⁴⁶ While these characteristics are presented in a systematic way in the *Dka' gnad/gnas brgyad*, they also appear in Tsong kha pa's *Dgongs pa rab gsal*. Here, Tsong kha pa refers to the present passage of the BCA as a proof of his own position in the interpretation of *Madhyamakāvatāra* I 8d, which argues that Śrāvaka and Pratyekabuddha-Arhats do indeed realise emptiness. While explaining BCA IX.41–48 in detail, Tsong kha pa opposes the position of "some commentators and Tibetans," which relates this passage to Arhats who have abandoned all *kleśas*.¹⁴⁷ If one understood this passage as referring to Arhats, it would not only deprive Tsong kha pa of an argument

¹⁴² This work (of which different versions exist) consists of Tsong kha pa's oral instructions, that were written down by his disciple Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen. For an introduction and translation of this text, see Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 139ff.

¹⁴³ See Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 227, for a detailed annotated translation of this chapter. Further, Lopez 1988 deals with the different stances taken by Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti on the question of the realisation of emptiness by Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 230: "If *dharmas* having no self-nature are not understood, it is not possible either to maintain that *nirvāṇa* will be achieved." See also Seyfort Ruegg's explanation of this in n.137.

¹⁴⁵ Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 234ff.

¹⁴⁶ Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 247, in particular.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 60.1–4: *gzhung de rnams ni de ltar bshad dgos kyi* | 'grel pa 'ga' zhiig dang bod rnams | *nyon mongs med kyang mau gal gyi bu dang* | 'phags pa sor 'phreng can la sogs pa la sngon so skye'i dus su bsags pa'i **las kyi** 'bras bus sdug bsngal 'byin pa **mthong bas** | de ma thag tu grol ba ma yin no | | zhes pa ltar mi bya ste |.

in favour of his interpretation of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, but it would also criticise two of the cornerstones of the Dge lugs understanding of the Prāsaṅgika tradition. There is no need to investigate Tsong kha pa's explanation of this passage in more detail, as the important aspects have already been discussed in the presentation of Rgyal tshab's commentary, which follows the model of his master very closely, at times even literally. It is, however, important to consider the immense doctrinal background that is connected to this specific passage of the BCA.

Mi pham's explanations of BCA IX.41–49 in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, for Mi pham the general purpose of this passage of the BCA is to point out that the spiritual aim of the Hīnayāna tradition, attaining the state of an Arhat, is not ultimate in nature, but is surpassed by the state of a complete Buddha, the spiritual goal that is promoted in the Mahāyāna tradition. Here, the difference between these two states is discussed in terms of a complete realisation of emptiness or the lack thereof. According to Mi pham, Śāntideva's descriptions of religious adepts who have not realised emptiness do indeed refer to true Arhats. These are said to have not abandoned "undefiled *karman*" (*zag med kyi las*) and rebirth in a "mental body" (*yid kyi lus*). They therefore need to enter the Mahāyāna doctrine to gain a *complete* understanding of emptiness and achieve ultimate liberation.¹⁴⁸ At the end of his explanations of the crucial passage BCA IX.46–48, Mi pham explicitly opposes the position which denies that Śāntideva's explanations refer to Arhats, a position taken in the Dge lugs tradition. He further criticises certain features of the literal interpretation of this passage, features that go hand in hand with this general stance, and that have already been pointed out in the presentation of Rgyal tshab's commentary:¹⁴⁹

In regard to this [passage, i.e., BCA IX.46], some texts explain that it should be understood as "**Objection: Liberation is due**

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 42.3–5: *zag med kyi* [C *kyis*] *las dang* | *yid kyi lus bsam mi khyab 'gyur gyi* 'chi 'pho ba rnam ma spangs pas grol ba gtan du ba min la | *phung po phra ba rgyun kyang mi 'chad par gdod theg chen du 'jug dgos te* | *spang* [C *spangs*] *bya shin tu phra ba mi spong ba'ang chos bdag med rdzogs par rtogs shing bsgom pa med pa des na'o* |.

¹⁴⁹ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 42.4–6: 'di la **nyon mongs** mngon gyur tsam **spangs pas grol na** zhes sbyar dgos kyi | *dgra bcom pa la sbyar ba mi 'thad ces dpe la lar bshad kyang rang gi zhe 'dod dang mthun par khrid pa tsam ste* | *pha rol pos kyang mngon gyur tsam spangs pas grol bar mi 'dod bzhin du thal ba de 'dra 'brel med du 'gyur zhing* | *dgra bcom maud* [B *mong*, C *mod*] *gal lta bu la sbyar te rgya 'grel thams cad zhal 'chams par bkral zhing rigs pas kyang grub pa'i gzhung gi gnad chen po yin pas pra yas par mi bya'o* |.

to the abandoning of only manifest (*mngon gyur*) *kleśas*,” and that it is not right to relate it to Arhats. But [such an interpretation] only pulls [the original text] into harmony with one’s own wishes. As not even the opponents believe that one is liberated by abandoning only manifest [*kleśas*], such a consequence [as formulated above] would bear no relation [to the point in question]. That [this passage] refers to Arhats such as Maudgalyāyana is explained equally by all Indian commentaries, and it is proven by reasoning as well. As this is an important point of the scripture, one should not speculate about it.

In the Dge lugs tradition, this passage of the BCA does not refer to true Arhats, and hence the *kleśas* that are accepted as being abandoned by an adept who has not realised emptiness are limited to mean “manifest *kleśas*,” as we have seen in Rgyal tshab’s commentary on BCA IX.46. Here, Mi pham criticises this position for various reasons. First of all, such an interpretation would be in contradiction to the authoritative scriptures, i.e., the Indian commentaries. But it would also contradict logic: restricting the *kleśas* that were mentioned in the opponent’s objection in BCA IX.46a to manifest *kleśas* would mean that the opponent accepts that one is liberated by abandoning manifest *kleśas* alone. Such is not accepted by the opponent, as Mi pham points out.

The next aim of Mi pham’s criticism is the distinctive interpretation of BCA IX.47ab that was adopted in the Dge lugs tradition. As shown in Rgyal tshab’s commentary, Śāntideva’s explanations were understood as referring to two different kinds of desire, one that is afflicted and another that is non-afflicted. While it was accepted that the adepts under consideration had abandoned afflicted desire, the one associated with grasping a self as a self-sufficient entity, they were said to still have non-afflicted desire, which was explained as grasping a self that is inherently established (*ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa*). Mi pham first quotes the relevant passage that is found in both Rgyal tshab’s commentary and Tsong kha pa’s *Dgongs pa rab gsal*,¹⁵⁰ almost literally, in order to refute it later:¹⁵¹

Further, [this passage of the BCA] was explained [in the following way]: “Even though manifest **desire** that derives from

¹⁵⁰ See ‘Jug ngogs 236.8–11 and *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 61.4–6.

¹⁵¹ Nor bu ke ta ka 42.6–43.2: yang gang zag rang rkya thub pa’i bdag ‘dzin gyis drangs pa’i *sred pa* mngon gyur re zhig spangs kyang | gang zag ngo bo nyid kyis grub par ‘dzin pa’i ‘jig ltas drangs pa’i *sred pa ci ste med* ces bshad sbyar mdzaad kyang | skyes bu gcig gi rgyud na dus mnyam pa’i bdag ‘dzin du mas drangs pa’i *sred pa du ma yod pa ‘gal la* | *phyi mas drangs pa’i rten ‘brel bcu gnyis kyi nang tshan du gyur pa’i sred pa la nyon mongs can min pa* [C la add.] *ci ste yod* |.

self-grasping which [conceives] a person to be self-sufficient is abandoned **at that time, why is there not the desire** that derives from the view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*'jig lta*) that conceives a person to be inherently established (*ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa*)?" It is, however, contradictory that there are various desires deriving from various [kinds of] simultaneous [forms of] self-grasping in the [mental] continuum of a single person; how should there be something non-afflicted with regard to the desire that derives from the later [kind of self-grasping], which is a part of the twelve [links of] dependent origination?

Again, the Dge lugs interpretation is criticised for two reasons. Mi pham argues that it is illogical to accept various desires, deriving from different kinds of self-grasping, in a single mental continuum. Further, he points out that the latter kind of desire, referred to in the Dge lugs tradition as "non-afflicted," cannot be non-afflicted, but – as a part of the twelve links of dependent origination – must be afflicted. Mi pham then continues his criticism of the Dge lugs interpretation of this passage with some particularly trenchant remarks:¹⁵²

The statement "**though non-afflicted**" was made in a general, without applying any specification; and by force of the expression (*tshig gi nus pas*) "**like delusion**," it was explained that there is a desire which is non-afflicted. But why should [this passage] indicate that there is an afflicted desire, since this does not lie in the meaning of the words? Further, simply a statement of the thesis "**why does not exist**" was given, preceded by the example and the removal of qualms.¹⁵³ But there is no place or time at which such unrelated words, which are faulty in relation to both, to the thing which exists and to the proof of [its] existence, appeared in the teachings of the Ācārya, the Mahātma.

¹⁵² Nor bu ke ta ka 43.3–5: *khyad par gang yang ma sbyar bar* [C ba] *spyir nyon mongs can min yang zhes dang | kun rmongs bzhin du zhes pa'i tshig gi nus pas sred pa nyon mongs can min pa zhig yod par bstan gyi | nyon mongs can gyi sred pa zhig yod par ci la ston te yi ge'i don la ma zhugs pa'i phyir | de'ang dpe dang dogs sel sngon du song nas ci ste med ces pa'i dam bca'i tshig tсам zhig bstan gyi | yod rgyu ci zhig yin dang yod pa'i gtan tshigs gnyis ka nyams pa'i ngag 'brel med de 'dra slob dpon bdag nyid chen po'i gsung la 'byung ba gnas med cing skabs med do |*.

¹⁵³ This refers to the example of delusion (*saṃmoha/kun rmongs*) mentioned in BCA IX.47d and the qualms of the opponent that were raised in BCA IX.47ab and refuted in 47cd.

Mi pham emphasises that the expression “though non-afflicted” in BCA IX.47c must be understood as a general statement, and not – as Rgyal tshab suggested – as a specific determination according to the Abhidharma tradition.¹⁵⁴ As in his earlier statement, he again opposes the position that this line of the BCA indicates the acceptance of two kinds of desires, one that is afflicted and one that is non-afflicted, according to the Abhidharma tradition. Instead, he argues that Śāntideva’s explanations refer only to non-afflicted desire. The Dge lugs understanding, which includes afflicted desire, is seen as an untenable deviation from the intention of Śāntideva, here called “the Ācārya, the Mahātma.”

As shown, Mi pham’s commentary explicitly criticises the Dge lugs interpretation of this passage of the BCA in terms of both its general aim and function, and of its resulting literal interpretation, and it is this disapproval of Mi pham’s that forms the focal point of Rab gsal’s later criticism.

Rab gsal’s criticism in the *’Ju lan*

Rab gsal begins his criticism with a statement of the “opponent’s position” (*phyogs snga*), for which he quotes the passage of the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, where Mi pham refuted the general idea that this passage does not refer to Arhats, as well as the specific interpretation of *kleśas* in BCA IX.46a as manifest *kleśas*, as a deviation from the authoritative Indian tradition.¹⁵⁵ In the course of Rab gsal’s refutation, Mi pham’s other critical remarks on the Dge lugs interpretation of BCA IX.47 are also addressed. Among the various issues raised in the development of the controversies, we will focus on the following three main aspects: the general problem of the context and aim of this passage, i.e., whether Śāntideva’s explanations refer to (true) Arhats or not, and the two problems of literal interpretation that are connected to the general perception of this passage, i.e., Mi pham’s criticism of the Dge lugs interpretation of the *kleśas* in BCA IX.46a as manifest and the assertion that BCA IX.47cd refers to two kinds of desire (*sred pa*), one that is afflicted and one that is non-afflicted, which should be accepted in the Abhidharma tradition.

The first problem is mainly addressed in the first two sections of Rab gsal’s criticism. In the first section, he quotes passages from Prajñākaramati’s commentary, as well as from Mi pham’s *Nor bu ke ta ka* which – according to Rab gsal – imply that the religious adept under consideration grasps [things] as truly established (*bden ’dzin*) and hence cannot be a true

¹⁵⁴ See above, p.132, and *’Jug ngogs* 236.2–6.

¹⁵⁵ I.e., *Nor bu ke ta ka* 42.4–6, see earlier, p.136.

Arhat.¹⁵⁶ This thought is continued in the second section,¹⁵⁷ where Rab gsal accuses Mi pham that he as well – in his explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*¹⁵⁸ – would regard worldly meditation as the example, mentioned in BCA IX.49c, and the path that is endowed with the aspects of the truths as it is explained in the Abhidharma – or, more precisely, the state of mind that is attained through this path – as what it serves as an example for (*dpe can*).¹⁵⁹ If such is true, then Śāntideva's descriptions refer to a worldly religious adept, but not to a true Arhat, Rab gsal concludes.

Later in his criticism,¹⁶⁰ Rab gsal addresses the issue of whether the *kleśas* mentioned in BCA IX.46a should be interpreted to refer exclusively to manifest *kleśas*. It is in this discussion that Rab gsal points out clearly which religious adepts he has in mind with regard to this passage. Referring to a quote of the *Āryadhyāyitamūṣṭisūtra* ('*Phags pa bsam gtan pa'i dpe mkhyud kyi mdo*) in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, he explains that these adepts are known as Arhats according to the Abhidharma tradition. Since they perceive phenomena as truly established, it is, however, not accepted in the Prāsaṅgika tradition that they have completely abandoned the *kleśas* that are explained in the Abhidharma tradition.¹⁶¹ Rather, the *kleśas* that are abandoned by such practitioners are limited to manifest *kleśas* alone.

With regard to the general issue of relating this passage to Arhats, Rab gsal acknowledges that such is accepted in the Indian commentaries on BCA IX. 46d, but opposes this interpretation as one that contradicts the root text of the BCA.¹⁶²

In the Indian commentaries too, “seeing a capacity of *karman*” (BCA IX.46d) is related to Arhats. But as [such] is against the connection between the earlier and later [verses] of the root text, the Omniscient Lord (i.e., Tsong kha pa) did not accept it

¹⁵⁶ Cf. 'Ju lan 384.4–385.6 (JL III.1).

¹⁵⁷ 'Ju lan 385.6–386.3 (JL III.2).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 35.3–6.

¹⁵⁹ 'Ju lan 385.6: 'jig rten pa'i bsam gtan ni dpe dang | mngon pa nas bshad pa'i bden rnam can gyi lam ni dpe can du byed pa.

¹⁶⁰ 'Ju lan 387.3ff.

¹⁶¹ 'Ju lan 387.3–4: da ni mngon 'gyur pa zhes gsungs pa'i dgongs pa zab mo sbran par bya ste | bsam gtan dpe 'khyud kyi mdo tshig gsal du bkod pa'i dgongs pa ltar | mngon pa nas dgra bcom par grags shing 'dir de dag gi don bsodus pa bden grub tu dmigs pa dang bcas pa des lugs 'dir mngon pa nas bshad pa'i nyon mongs de dag spangs pa ma yin te |.

¹⁶² 'Ju lan 389.3–4: rgya 'grel dag tu'ang las kyi nus pa mthong ba dgra bcom la sbyar ba rtsa ba'i gong 'og gi 'brel dang 'gal ba'i phyir na | rje thams cad mkhyen pas ji bzhiin rang lugs su ma mdzad de | lung rnams ni sgra ji bzhiin yin min dpyod pa'i gzhi yin zhing | dri ma med pa'i rigs pas gtan la 'beb par [A pa] dgongs pa'i phyir |.

in this way in his own tradition, as he was of the opinion that the scriptures are the basis of investigating whether [the meaning] is literal or not and that [the meaning] is to be established by immaculate reasoning.

Rab gsal argues that even the authoritative Indian scriptures must be investigated as to whether they have to be understood literally or whether they point to a meaning that is different from the literal one. This is the task of reasoning, which outshines the mere reference to authoritative scriptures.¹⁶³

Therefore, even to say that [such] was explained by many Indian scriptures is not a compelling reason.

The overall context of this passage is also an issue in the final discussion of the last two sections on this topic.¹⁶⁴ Here, Rab gsal points out that this is the context where it is proven that Arhats need to realise emptiness. The *kleśas*, such as desire and so on, are the opposite of the realisation of emptiness; *karman* then arises from these *kleśas* and leads to further rebirth. For a true Arhat, however, the first element of this sequence of consequences, the presence of desire, is not given.¹⁶⁵ Seeking support from Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakavatāra*, he reiterates his position of reading this passage as a proof that suchness (*de nyid*) is not realised by the opponents' understanding of the Four Truths that is based on the Abhidharma, but that these still grasp things as truly established and hence develop desire etc.¹⁶⁶

The first aspect of the literal interpretation, the meaning of the *kleśas* mentioned in BCA IX.46a, has already been addressed in the general discussion about the role of this passage. Even though the second problem, the interpretation of BCA IX.47, is discussed extensively by Rab gsal, we will limit our presentation to a single issue, namely Mi pham's criticism of the Dge lugs interpretation that this verse makes reference to two different desires accepted in the Abhidharma tradition, one that is afflicted and one that is non-afflicted. In the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, Mi pham criticised this position by arguing that one cannot accept "various desires deriving from various

¹⁶³ 'Ju lan 389.5: *des rgya gzhung mang pos bshad zer ba yang sgrub byed du mi che ste* |.

¹⁶⁴ 'Ju lan 393.6–394.2 (JL III.6f) and 395.1–396.2 (JL III.7f).

¹⁶⁵ 'Ju lan 393.6–394.1: *'dir stong nyid rtogs dgos par bsgrub pa skabs su babs pas de'i ldog phyogs nyon mongs dang* | *des dbang gis bsags pa'i las dang* | *'bras bu skye srid 'byung ba'i tshul dpyad pa 'brel la* | *mo'u 'gal gyi las de lta bu la sred pa'ang mi dgos pas* [...].

¹⁶⁶ 'Ju lan 395.3–4: *khyod kyis bden pa mthong bas de nyid rtogs pa'i go mi chod pa dang* | *gzugs tshor bden par dmigs nas 'jug pas slar yang sred pa 'dod chags 'dren pa dang* | [...].

[kinds of] simultaneous self-grasping in the [mental] continuum of a single person.”¹⁶⁷ Rab gsal counters this accusation, arguing that there is no such fault, since the two desires mentioned are not manifest; Mi pham’s criticism would, however, backfire on certain aspects of his own doctrinal system.¹⁶⁸

Since self-grasping and desire are not ascertained as manifest, there is no fault. But, as *ālaya* and *kliṣṭāmanas* are accepted in this tradition of yours, mentioning such a fault [means] giving up [any sense of] shame within the community of scholars.

Rab gsal understood Mi pham’s remarks as an argument against the simultaneous presence of two different cognitive modes in a single mental continuum, and introduces a new topic by countering that this is also in contradiction to the simultaneous presence of *ālaya* (“basis consciousness”) and *kliṣṭāmanas* (“afflicted consciousness”) – two types of consciousness that are commonly accepted in Yogācāra works apart from the six types of consciousness connected to the individual senses¹⁶⁹ – that Mi pham accepts.

In his later explanations,¹⁷⁰ Rab gsal opposes Mi pham’s criticism that BCA IX.47cd teaches only the presence of non-afflicted desire, but not also of afflicted desire, as claimed in the Dge lugs tradition.¹⁷¹ Rab gsal’s argument is that by applying the particle “this” (*di*)¹⁷² to “desire,” its correlative – “that” (*de*) desire – is also implied, the earlier being non-afflicted and the latter afflicted.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Nor bu ke ta ka 43.1: *skyes bu gcig gi rgyud na dus mnyam pa’i bdag ’dzin du mas drangs pa’i sred pa du ma yod pa ’gal la* |.

¹⁶⁸ Ju lan 390.3: *bdag ’dzin dang sred pa mngon gyur par ma nges pas ’dir skyon du mi ’gyur mod | khyed cag lugs ’dir kun gzhi dang nyon yid khas blangs pas de ltar skyon brjod pa mkhas pa’i mdun sar ngo tsha spangs pa ste* |.

¹⁶⁹ These six types of consciousness are: eye consciousness (*mig gi rnam shes*), ear consciousness (*rna ba’i rnam shes*), nose consciousness (*sna yi rnam shes*), tongue consciousness (*lce’i rnam shes*), body consciousness (*lus kyi rnam shes*), and mind consciousness (*yid kyi rnam shes*); see *Dung dkar tshig mdzod:tshogs drug phyir ma spro*.

¹⁷⁰ Ju lan 392.3–393.2 (JL III.6c).

¹⁷¹ See earlier, p.138, and Nor bu ke ta ka 43.3–5.

¹⁷² As explained earlier (see p.129, in particular), Rab gsal, as well as Mi pham, understand the pronoun “this” (*di*) to be related to “desire.”

¹⁷³ Cf. Ju lan 392.6–393.1: *sred ’di zhes bkar* [? A pa gal, BC bkal] *te khyod kyiis ’dod pa’i nyon mongs can min yang | kun rmongs bzhin zhes pha rol po la grags pa’i dpe bstan pa’i phyir | ’dir pha rol pos med zer rgyu’i sred pa zhiq bstan la | ’di zhes pa’i nye tshig gis zlas drangs pa’i sred pa | kho’i ’dod pa ltar gyi nyon mongs can yin par yang bstan pas* [...].

Mi pham's reply in the *Rab lan*

In his response, Mi pham does not deal with the arguments concerning the general question of relating this passage to (true) Arhats, which Rab gsal set forth in the first two sections of his criticism in great detail. As a mere summary, Mi pham replies that he indeed shares the understanding that worldly meditation (*'jig rten pa'i bsam gtan*) is the example, and the path that is endowed with the aspects of the [Four] Truths (*bden rnam can gyi lam*) is what it serves as an example for (*dpe can*) in this passage of the BCA. There is, however, no need to specify this path as the one that is “explained in the Abhidharma” (*mngon pa nas bshad pa*) – as Rab gsal suggested – , for it would be a great depreciation of the Abhidharma tradition to assume that its practitioners necessarily cannot attain true realisation.¹⁷⁴

This vindication of the Abhidharma tradition is continued in the next section. Rab gsal pointed out that the passage of the BCA – similarly to the quote from the *Āryadhyāyitamūṣṭisūtra* – refers to “Arhats as known in the Abhidharma,” who have only abandoned manifest *kleśas*. Mi pham, in contrast, emphasises the falsity of this position.¹⁷⁵

Similarly to the statement in the *Āryadhyāyitamūṣṭisūtra*, statements in some sūtras that exist in Tibet nowadays make it clear that an Arhat who did not attain realisation has self-conceit (*mngon pa'i nga rgyal*). Applying [such] to all practitioners of the path that is explained in the Abhidharma, and [thus] depreciating [the Abhidharma tradition] in a terrible way, is, however, utterly improper.

Mi pham clarifies that Arhats without realisation are not Arhats, even in the Abhidharma tradition. These have “self-conceit” (*mngon pa'i nga rgyal*), meaning that they imagine having attained a state that they actually have not attained. Such adepts also have not practised the path of the Four Truths properly, since this practice does indeed lead to true realisation, as Mi pham emphasises. It is these adepts that appear as the opponents of the teachings of emptiness in the beginning of this passage (BCA IX.41). The later explanations, BCA IX.45ff., then refer to true Arhats, who – owing to their realisation – would not oppose emptiness.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Rab lan* 216.4–6 (RL III.1).

¹⁷⁵ *Rab lan* 219.3–5: *bsam gtan dpe mkhyud kyi mdo nas gsungs pa de dang 'dra bar deng sang bod du bzhugs pa'i mdo 'ga' zhig las gsungs pa rnams ni rtogs pa ma thob pa'i dgra bcom pa mngon pa'i nga rgyal can yin par gsal la | mngon pa nas bshad pa'i lam nyams su len tshad la sbyar nas skur 'debs mi bzad pa byed pa shin tu mi rigs te |*.

¹⁷⁶ *Rab lan* 219.2–222.2 (RL III.2a).

Earlier, Rab gsal justified the Dge lugs deviation from the Indian commentarial tradition, which relates BCA IX.46d to Arhats, as an interpretation that is based on reasoning and not simply on scripture. Mi pham accepts Rab gsal's general argument and acknowledges the role of reasoning in understanding the meaning of the scriptures.¹⁷⁷ He implies, however, that the true reason for Rab gsal's position is simply that confirmation of the Dge lugs interpretation cannot be found in the Indian tradition, and mocks Rab gsal for placing his own understanding above that of the Indian masters.¹⁷⁸

Having got no opportunity to say “not explained in various Indian texts,” [you] claim that the great masters who composed the Indian texts did not know that [such an interpretation] is against the connection between the earlier and later [verses] of the root text, and hence their mere scriptures are not appropriate as a refuge.

In the two answers related to the general embedding of this passage of the BCA,¹⁷⁹ Mi pham rejects Rab gsal's position that a true Arhat has no desire and resulting *karman*. Even though there is no further “nourishment” (*gsos 'debs*), no propelling effect with regard to the future, after the state of an Arhat has been attained, the present body of this Arhat is the result of desire and hence also the *karman* that ripens in this body is based on earlier desire, Mi pham explains.¹⁸⁰ At the very end of the discussion of this topic, Mi pham clarifies again the varying positions on the general role of this passage:¹⁸¹

We, the followers of the Snga rabs pa [tradition], maintain that the specific path of seeing the truth, as it is explained in the Abhidharma, counts as the realisation of suchness, whilst you

¹⁷⁷ Rab lan 227.6: *lung don rigs pas dpyad nas rigs pas 'thad pa yang dag pa mthong na rigs pa dbang btsan dgos par bshad pa ltar bdag cag gis kyang de ltar 'dod nas dpyad pa la zhugs pa yin no |*.

¹⁷⁸ Rab lan 227.1–2: *rgya gzhuung du mar ma bshad ces brjod rgyu ma rnyed nas | rgya gzhuung rtsom pa'i pañ chen de rnam kyis rtsa ba'i gong 'og gi 'brel dang 'gal ba ma mkhyen pas de dag gi lung tsam skyabs su mi rung bar khas blangs |*.

¹⁷⁹ Rab lan 242.5–244.4 (RL III.6f) and 250.2–251.6 (RL III.7f).

¹⁸⁰ Rab lan 242.6–243.1: *dgra bcom thob zin nas sred pas gsos 'debs dgos pa ma yin gyi | sku tshe de'i lus 'phen byed kyi sred pas sngar gsos btab pa'i rten de la rdzogs byed kyi las smin pa yang sngar sred pas gsos ma btab par mi 'gyur te |*.

¹⁸¹ Rab lan 250.6–251.2: *snga rabs pa'i rjes 'brangs bdag cag gis ni mngon pa nas bshad pa ltar bden pa mthong ba'i rang lam gyi de nyid rtogs pas go chod par sgrub la | khyed cag gis mi chod par bsgrub la | bdag cag gis stong pa nyid rdzogs par rtogs pa theg chen gyi rtogs rigs thun mong min par sgrub | khyed cag gis rdzogs par rtogs kyang nyan rang dang thun mong ba'i lam du sgrub la |*.

maintain that it does not count [as such]. We maintain that the complete realisation of emptiness is the mode of realisation peculiar to the Mahāyāna, whilst you maintain also complete realisation [of emptiness] as path that is shared in common with Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas.

As Mi pham's rhetoric suggests, the diverging approaches to the perception of this specific passage of the BCA are part of fundamental doctrinal differences between Mi pham's Snga rabs pa and Rab gsal's Phyi rabs pa traditions.¹⁸² The divide between Mi pham's and Rab gsal's interpretations is not the result of personal choice, but is institutionalised, having its basis in the respective religious affiliation of the candidates.

With regard to the literal interpretation of BCA IX.47cd, Mi pham clarifies that his initial criticism in the *Nor bu ke ta ka* was not intended to refute the simultaneous presence of different cognitive modes as Rab gsal had understood Mi pham to be saying.¹⁸³ Rather, Mi pham was objecting to the Dge lugs understanding that relates this passage to two different desires that derive from two different types of self-grasping. He emphasises that there is only the desire that arises from the innate view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*'jig lta lhan skyes*), but no desire that would arise from other types of the view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*'jig lta*).¹⁸⁴ Mi pham then contests Rab gsal's defence of the Dge lugs interpretation, in which Rab gsal pointed out that the two desires are not specified as manifest (*mngon gyur*), implying that the two desires are not actually present as two simultaneous modes. Mi pham argues that this specification is not necessary – it would follow from the context that the BCA speaks about manifest desire. Further, a simultaneous presence of different cognitive modes is not at all contradictory, but is commonly assumed in various contexts, not only with regard to *ālaya* and *kliṣṭamanas*, but also for the group of the six types of consciousness (*tshogs drug*) that are commonly accepted, explains Mi pham in defence of his tradition.¹⁸⁵

Mi pham also opposes Rab gsal's later explanations, in which the latter expounded the Dge lugs acceptance of two desires as based on the

¹⁸² For the distinction of Snga rabs pa and Phyi rabs pa scholars among Tibetan Mādhyamika, see earlier, p. f.

¹⁸³ *Rab lan* 228.1–229.2 (RL III.4b).

¹⁸⁴ *Rab lan* 228.1–2.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Rab lan* 228.4–5: *kun gzhi dang nyon yid du ma zad tshogs drug gi shes pa la'ang 'dzin stangs mi 'dra ba du ma mngon gyur dus mnyam du yod pa sus kyang mi khegs mod bkag don kyang med la* |.

correlation of the two pronouns “this” (*’di*) and “that” (*de*).¹⁸⁶ He quotes the relevant passage of Rab gsal’s text and points out that these explanations do not add any new information to what was said earlier. Rab gsal’s elaborations allegedly displayed, however, the fault that desire, specified as “this desire” (BCA IX.47c), is described as being both afflicted and non-afflicted.¹⁸⁷ Mi pham obviously misunderstands the attributes “afflicted” and “non-afflicted” to be related to one single desire, a mistake that – among other issues – will be addressed in Rab gsal’s response.

Rab gsal’s reply in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

As Mi pham before, Rab gsal also gives a summarising answer to the general problem of the context and role of this passage and the question of whether it refers to Arhats or not. Instead of a detailed treatment of every single line of argument given in the earlier texts, he points to some inconsistencies he finds in Mi pham’s writings. One contradiction is that Mi pham explained in the *Rab lan* that the *karman* of the religious adept under consideration is the result of *earlier* desire, while in other passages he had spoken of desire – even though non-afflicted – that is present *now*. He reproaches Mi pham, saying that the latter’s explanations of the exact understanding of the desire that is mentioned in BCA IX.47c are unclear: do these explanations refer to desire as a part of the twelve links of dependent origination – and as such to afflicted desire – or to non-afflicted desire? According to Mi pham’s position, so Rab gsal argues, the abandonment of desire would entail the requirements for complete buddhahood, i.e., the abandonment of obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*), and not only of obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrib*), which is accepted as sufficient for attaining the state of an Arhat.¹⁸⁸

In contrast, Rab gsal offers a lengthy discussion¹⁸⁹ of the status of *ālaya* and *svasaṃvedana* (“self-awareness”),¹⁹⁰ an issue that is not connected di-

¹⁸⁶ *Rab lan* 238.4–242.1 (RL III.6c).

¹⁸⁷ *Rab lan* 241.3–5: yang *sred* ‘*di* zhes pa’i nye tshig gis zlas drangs pa’i sred pa | phyir rgol ba’i ‘dod pa ltar gyi nyon mongs can yin par yang bstan pas zhes smos pa phyir rgol gyi ‘dod pa ltar gyi nyon mongs can yin pa dang min pa gnyis ka yin zer ba ‘di spar mar ‘dug pas tshig chad pa ‘dra min na dngos su bsnyon dor gyi gtam ya mtshan pa dngos so | |.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Ga bur chu rgyun* 437.1–3: sher fika tu dgra bcom pa’i rgyud kyi sred pa zhes dang | sred pa nyon mongs can min pa ci ste med ces bris kyang | zab snang ‘dir [B ‘di] da lta’i sred pa med kyang sngar gyi sred pas gsos btab ces kyang bris | yang ‘di ltar [C star] | yan lag bcu gnyis kyi sred pa nyon mongs can yin pa bden | ‘on kyang sred pa nyon mongs can min pa yod zer | ‘o na da lta’i sred pa zhes ci la sbyar | khyod ltar na sred pa spangs pa la [B las] sangs rgyas dgos pas | [...].

¹⁸⁹ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 438.3–439.2.

¹⁹⁰ Self-awareness, sometimes also translated as “reflexive awareness,” refers to a cognition that is conscious about its content.

rectly to the present passage of the BCA, but that was introduced by Rab gsal while refuting Mi pham's criticism of the Dge lugs interpretation of BCA IX.47cd. Since this topic is not central to the passage under discussion, we will not deal with it in more detail. Rab gsal's commitment to this problem is, however, easily explained: the rejection of *ālaya* and *svasaṃvedana* is one of the key doctrines in the Dge lugs understanding of the Prāsaṅgika view, expressed, for example, in the first chapter of the *Dka' gnad/gnas brgyad*.¹⁹¹ Mi pham's position¹⁹² of accepting *ālaya* and *svasaṃvedana* with regard to the conventional level must, therefore, have appeared rather offensive to his Dge lugs opponent.

Under the heading “eliminating wrong conceptions” (*log rtog bsal ba*),¹⁹³ Rab gsal exposes Mi pham's accusation that Rab gsal's earlier explanations assumed the desire mentioned in BCA IX.47c to be both afflicted and non-afflicted as being based on a misunderstanding.¹⁹⁴ He makes clear that the attributes “afflicted” and “non-afflicted” refer to two different desires, as indicated by the correlative “this” (*di*) and “that” (*de*). As this interpretation is – at least for Rab gsal – obvious from his earlier explanations, he mocks Mi pham with irony for having misunderstood his clear descriptions.¹⁹⁵

The two, [desire] that is afflicted and [desire] that is not-afflicted according to the position of the opponent, have a different basis. It appears, however, that [you] did not understand [this] with [your] great power of comprehension.

Clearly, this last issue is of minor importance, and it is therefore not surprising that Mi pham does not continue this specific discussion in his

¹⁹¹ See Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 159ff.

¹⁹² This position of Mi pham is commonly known, it is also explicitly formulated, for example, in *Nor bu ke ta ka* 22.2–3: “It must be understood that all existing lines of reasoning that negate *svasaṃvedana* negate [it] with regard to the absolute level, similar to the reasoning that negates the *skandhas* etc., but it is not the case that it is utterly non-existent in the sense that it is negated with regard to the conventional level. It is said that in this tradition [of the Prāsaṅgika], *svasaṃvedana* is also not assumed with regard to the conventional level, but in this [tradition of the Prāsaṅgika, *svasaṃvedana*] is [actually] neither negated nor established on the conventional level, it is only the case that it is negated with regard to the absolute level.” (*rang rig 'gog pa'i rigs pa ji snyed pa thams cad phung sogs 'gog pa'i rigs pa bzhin du don dam par 'gog gi tha snyad du bkag pa'i gtan med ma yin par shes dgos shing | lugs 'dir tha snyad du'ang rang rig kun gzhi khas mi len zer yang 'dir tha snyad du ni dgag pa'ang med la sgrub pa'ang med kyi [C kyi om.] don dam par bkag pa kho na yin no |*)

¹⁹³ Cf. *Ga bur chu rgyun* 455.6.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Ga bur chu rgyun* 459.2ff. (GC III.1h).

¹⁹⁵ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 459.3–4: *pha rol pas 'dod pa ltar gyi nyon mongs can yin min gnyis gzhi tha dad kyang go stobs che bas ma shes par snang la |*.

last answer. But, although the other topics – the general conception of this passage of the BCA and its relation to Arhats, and the status of *ālaya* and *svasaṃvedana* that appear in the course of the controversies – pertain to fundamental doctrinal questions, none of these issues is taken up in Mi pham’s last answer. It seems that, for Mi pham, these differences were established in the doctrines of the respective religious traditions – as he pointed out in his earlier response¹⁹⁶ – and hence could not be easily changed even by continued debate.

Synopsis

The central issues in the controversies connected to this topic are the questions of the overall role of the passage BCA IX.41–49 and whether the descriptions of religious adepts lacking a realisation of emptiness found in the later part of this passage, BCA IX.45–49, refer to (true) Arhats or not.

In the Dge lugs tradition, represented by Rgyal tshab’s commentary on the BCA, but also by Tsong kha pa’s *Dgongs pa rab gsal*, which discusses the relevant verses of the BCA in detail, this passage was read as a proof that realisation of emptiness is required for attaining the state of an Arhat. As such, this passage became important for key elements in the Dge lugs conception of Prāsaṅgika doctrine, such as the realisation of emptiness of Śrāvaka- and Pratyekabuddha-Arhats and the distinction between obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrib*) and obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*), presented systematically in the *Dka’ gnad/gnas brgyad*, the standard definition of Prāsaṅgika thought as it is conceived in the Dge lugs tradition.

Mi pham, in contrast, read this passage as a proof of the supremacy of the Mahāyāna over the Hīnayāna tradition, whereby the latter’s inferiority is established as a lack of (complete) understanding of emptiness. Śāntideva’s descriptions of religious adepts that lack this realisation in BCA IX.45–49 must therefore refer to Arhats, an interpretation that is also supported by the Indian commentaries. According to Mi pham, the Dge lugs understanding of this passage is seen as a misinterpretation that neglects the Indian tradition to save its own doctrinal stance:¹⁹⁷

The section of these verses of the “Chapter of Insight” (i.e., the ninth chapter of the BCA) is important as a source for the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas’ lack of complete realisation

¹⁹⁶ See earlier, p.144.

¹⁹⁷ *Rab lan* 250.5–6: *sher le’i tshigs bcad ‘di skabs nyan rang la stong nyid rdzogs par rtogs pa med pa’i khungs su che bas rang lugs kyi khas blangs la gnod dogs* [C dwogs] *pas don gzhan du ‘dren pa’i ‘chad tshul gsar pa zhib mdzad pa.*

of emptiness. Therefore, since [you] worried about harm for the position of your own tradition, [you] created a new way of explanation that pulled [the original] to a different meaning.

Mi pham thus attacked the Dge lugs interpretation explicitly in his commentary on the BCA. In so doing, he addressed not only the general issue of whether this passage refers to Arhats or not, but also refuted specific ways of literal interpretation of certain verses that had been chosen in the Dge lugs tradition, most importantly in connection to BCA IX.46 and 47.

Naturally, this disapproval of Mi pham's formed the main subject of Rab gsal's criticism, who had to rebuke Mi pham's remarks in order to defend the tradition of his forebears. In his perception, Mi pham's explanations are merely "a slipping out of harsh words (*brdab tshig*) that – driven by the wind of conceptions and bad *karman*"¹⁹⁸ – have pursued a dwelling in the Crushing Hell (*bsdus 'joms dmyal ba*),¹⁹⁹ "aimless gossip,"²⁰⁰ "a [piece of] *Bi sha tsi*"²⁰¹ advice that is neither Indian nor Tibetan,"²⁰² etc. He even extended his criticism to Mi pham as a person, whom he described as a "great drunkard"²⁰³ and "possessed by the demon of terrible hatred."²⁰⁴

Among the various issues raised in the controversies, Mi pham's argument that the Indian tradition, too, relates this passage to Arhats (as shown in Prajñākaramati's commentary on BCA IX.46) is of particular importance. Rab gsal did not deny that the Indian commentaries related this passage to Arhats, but he confined the role of scriptural authority: all scriptures must be investigated as to whether they have to be understood literally, or whether they point to a meaning that is different from the literal one, a task that can only be accomplished by the use of reasoning. While Mi pham, in turn, accepted Rab gsal's argument in general, he was doubtful about its underlying motivation, suggesting that Rab gsal simply wanted to save his own tradition.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. 'Ju lan 384.5: *rnam rtog las ngan rlung gis bdas* [AC *brdas*] *pa'i brdab tshig shor ba*.

¹⁹⁹ This is one of the eight hot hells, see *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*: *bsdus 'joms*. Here, this description simply seems to refer to the most miserable state imaginable.

²⁰⁰ 'Ju lan 390.4: *gtad so med pa'i 'chal gtam*.

²⁰¹ Even though slightly different in spelling, this seems to be identical with *bi sha tse*, a disease that causes paralysis of the hand; cf. Goldstein: *bi sha tse*. This might allude to Mi pham's own physical condition; he often complained about being troubled by physical impairment. See, for example, *Rab lan* 463.2.

²⁰² Cf. 'Ju lan 393.4: *rgya min bod min gyi bi* [B *bu*] *sha tsi'i gdams pa*.

²⁰³ 'Ju lan 386.5: *ra ro ba chen po*.

²⁰⁴ 'Ju lan 392.5: *zhe sdang mi bzad pa'i gdon gyis brlam pa*.

All in all, it seems that both parties persistently insisted on their respective points of view, positions, which were – by both parties – not considered a mere personal choice, but as being based on the firm ground of the respective religious traditions. Other than with regard to the earlier topics, Rab gsal classified the aspects he criticised in Mi pham’s commentary as “faults that are raised after examination” (*brtag zin bslang ba’i nyes pa*), thus assuming that the criticism that Mi pham stated against the Dge lugs interpretation was preceded by a process of thorough investigation. In his response, Mi pham described the exegetical differences as being based on the religious affiliations, that to the Snga rabs pa tradition in the case of Mi pham, and that to the Phyi rabs pa tradition in the case of Rab gsal. For both philosophers, understanding the opponent’s position as a part of a larger tradition did, however, not imply that this position was acceptable.

While this is the case for the general issue of relating the relevant passage of the BCA to Arhats, it is also true for the question of the status of *ālaya* and *svasaṃvedana*, a topic that is not directly connected to the current passage of the BCA, but that was introduced into the discussion on it and received much attention, owing to its importance in doctrinal terms.

Topic IV: issues related to BCA IX.2

Unlike the earlier three topics, this section is not committed primarily to the specific interpretation of a certain passage of the BCA. Instead, a passage from Śāntideva’s work serves as a departure point for a more general discussion. In his outline, Rab gsal refers to the issues at stake as “[faults] that are connected to the principle (*tshul*) of *satyadvaya*.”²⁰⁵ The concept of “*satyadvaya*” is arguably the most central element in Madhyamaka philosophy (as indicated, for example, by the production of secondary literature dealing explicitly with this idea).²⁰⁶ In the secondary literature, *satyadvaya* is commonly translated as the “two truths” or “two realities,” thus emphasising either its epistemological or ontological aspect. Since both aspects

²⁰⁵ ‘Ju lan 384.3: *bden gnyis kyi tshul du ’brel ba*.

²⁰⁶ For the Dge lugs conception of *satyadvaya*, Newland 1992 and Tauscher 1995 are most important. Mention must also be made of Sonam Thakchoe’s work about the differences of this central idea between the thought of Tsong kha pa and Go rams pa (Thakchoe 2007). Mi pham’s approach to *satyadvaya* can be found within more general works on his Madhyamaka philosophy, such as Pettit 1999, Phuntsho 2005, Duckworth 2008, and 2011. Further, I have dealt with Mi pham’s presentation of *satyadvaya* as it is found specifically in the *Nor bu ke ta ka* – although briefly – in two earlier articles, see Viehbeck 2009a and Viehbeck 2012.

are important in the present discussion, I refrain from translating this technical term and will use the Sanskrit term in order to accommodate all possible conceptions associated with it.²⁰⁷ In the BCA, the concept of *satyadvaya* is introduced and most concisely formulated in BCA IX.2:

saṃvṛti (conventional) and *paramārtha* (absolute),²⁰⁸ these are considered as the two *satyas*.

Reality (*tattva*) is not the sphere of mind (*buddhi*); mind is said to be *saṃvṛti*.²⁰⁹

saṃvṛtiḥ paramārthaś ca satyadvayam idaṃ matam |

buddher agocaras tattvaṃ buddhiḥ saṃvṛtir ucyate | ²¹⁰

kun rdzob dang ni don dam ste | | 'di ni bden pa gnyis su 'dod | |

don dam blo yi spyod yul min | | blo ni kun rdzob yin par brjod | ²¹¹

In the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, Mi pham's commentary on this specific verse is the most detailed among all verses of the BCA. It starts with a succinct explication of Śāntideva's words and proceeds with a more general introduction to the fundamental features of Mi pham's Madhyamaka thought (issues that are, of course, all related to the principle of *satyadvaya*, discussed in BCA IX.2). Thereby, Mi pham presented his ideas often in sharp contrast

²⁰⁷ Tauscher 1995: 200–214 gives a detailed discussion of these two aspects and of the problem of rendering *satya*. As I have stated elsewhere (Viehbeck 2012: 301ff.), Mi pham clearly distinguishes two models of establishing *satyadvaya*: one describes the two *satyas* from an ontological perspective, as mode of existence (*gnas tshul*) and mode of appearances (*snang tshul*), the other endorses an epistemological perspective, conceiving the two *satyas* as authentic or inauthentic cognition. See also Duckworth 2008: 6ff. and Duckworth 2010c, for further explanation on these two models.

²⁰⁸ See Viehbeck 2012: 298f.), for a discussion of the problems involved in rendering these technical terms. In the following discussion, these two terms are commonly used to denote a certain level of conversation, i.e., they are used to distinguish whether a statement has been made with a view to an ordinary, commonsense way of describing the world, referred to as *kun rdzob* (*saṃvṛti*) or, synonymously as *tha snyad* (*vyavahāra*), or whether a statement refers to the true nature or reality of things, being then denoted as *don dam* (*paramārtha*). In the later discussion, I will use the tentative translation “conventional” for *saṃvṛti* or *vyavahāra*, and “absolute” for *paramārtha*, even though I am aware that this rendering excludes other meanings of the terms.

²⁰⁹ There is a slight discrepancy between the Sanskrit version and the Tibetan version. While Sanskrit *tattva* is usually rendered in Tibetan as *de nyid*, the Tibetan text reads *don dam* at this point, which is the Tibetan equivalent of Sanskrit *paramārtha*. The Dunhuang version of the BCA (cf. Saito 1993: 2) also shows *don dam* in the respective passage.

²¹⁰ Cf. BCAP 352.3–4.

²¹¹ BCA (D, fol. 31a1; P, fol. 35a4).

to the way these doctrinal issues were accepted in the mainstream Dge lugs tradition, and was therefore attacked by Rab gsal.²¹² Considering the importance of Madhyamaka thought as the supreme philosophical system accepted by all Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the extent to which the two adversaries discussed this fourth topic, in particular, is not surprising. Rab gsal devoted nearly half of his first criticism to the discussion of this topic; this is actually exceeded by Mi pham, whose answer to these issues stretches over two hundred pages, three-quarters of his first reply to Rab gsal. The extension of this topic poses – even more than is the case with the earlier topics – the problem of how its content can be summarised in a reasonable way. In order to decide which individual issues form the core elements of the present topic, I have relied upon Rab gsal's treatment of this topic. In his criticism, Rab gsal formulated the "opponent's position" (*phyogs snga*), a position that is drawn from Mi pham's statements in the *Nor bu ke ta ka* and which formed Rab gsal's principal target, in the following fashion:²¹³

In the *Ṭikka* (i.e., the *Nor bu ke ta ka*)²¹⁴ it is stated: non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) is the mere nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute (*don dam*), and emptiness that is free from all extremes is the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute proper. In the Svātantrika scriptures, explanations are given emphasising the former, and in the Prāsaṅgika scriptures, [explanations are given emphasising] the latter. The way of existence of things, *paramārthasatya*, is free from all extremes of existence, non-existence, etc., and hence not the sphere (*spyod yul*) of mind (*blo*), since mind and words (*sgra*) are conventional (*kun rdzob*), but are not absolute (*don dam pa*).

²¹² Stated succinctly, one can say that Mi pham's principle critique of the (present) Dge lugs stance of Madhyamaka was that the Dge lugs approach is similar to that of the Svātantrika tradition. Certainly, this must have appeared as a very strong accusation to a philosophical tradition, such as the Dge lugs school, that heavily emphasises the superiority of their own Prāsaṅgika tradition to the Svātantrika; cf. Viehbeck 2012: 308.

²¹³ 'Ju lan 396.5–6: *ṭikkar* | *bden med ni rnam grangs pa'i don dam tsaṃ dang* | *mtha' kun dang bral ba'i stong nyid ni rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam nyid yin la* | *rang rgyud pa'i gzhuṅg du snga ma dang* | *thal gyur ba'i gzhuṅg du phyi ma nyid rtsal du bton nas bshad la* | *dnogs po'i gnas lugs don dam pa'i bden pa ni* | *yod med sogs kyi mtha' kun dang bral bas blo yi spyod yul min te* | *blo dang sgra ni kun rdzob yin gyi don dam pa ma yin pa'i phyir ro* | | *zhes zlos so* |. Note that Rab gsal's summary of Mi pham's position is a very close paraphrase of statements in the *Nor bu ke ta ka* and also includes literal quotes.

²¹⁴ Rab gsal addresses Mi pham's commentary on the BCA consistently as "*ṭikka*" or "*ṭika*," thereby obviously referring to the Sanskrit word *ṭikā*, which is commonly used to denote a commentary on another text.

Among the many explanations that Mi pham gave in the *Nor bu ke ta ka* (and which are also addressed in the following controversies), Rab gsal chose this as expressing the core of his opponent's view. Altogether, it comprises four principal issues.

Firstly, Mi pham's refutation of a certain conception of emptiness and, secondly, his proposition of an alternative view, both of which issues aim at a correct conception of emptiness. In the summary of his adversary, Mi pham is said to oppose the position that mere non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) is the ultimate form of emptiness. Instead, he views this non-existence as a provisional conception of emptiness, here denoted as the "nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute." Ultimate emptiness, the "actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute," in contrast, should be free from all proliferations (*spros pa*) and all four extremes, i.e., the extremes of existence, non-existence, both, and neither.

The third issue discusses how emptiness is conceived of in the two principal traditions of Madhyamaka thought, i.e., the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika.

The last issue concerns the interpretation of the latter part of BCA IX.2 and the question of whether the absolute can be described as an object of mind (*blo*) and words (*sgra*), or not.

A review of the relevant passages confirms that these four issues can be seen as the key elements of the controversies, and it is for this reason that the following presentation of the fourth topic will focus solely on these selected problems.²¹⁵ It will start with an – admittedly brief – glance at the (mainstream) viewpoint on the particular topic in the Dge lugs tradition, and then contrast it with Mi pham's explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, and continue with the development of the debates proper.

Emptiness as non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*)

Madhyamaka philosophy is intrinsically connected with the idea that all phenomena (*dharma*) are empty (*śūnya*), and hence its proponents are synonymously called Mādhyamika, Śūnya(tā)vādin, or Niḥsvabhāvavādin.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ This choice, of course, excludes certain topics that are also of importance to the Madhyamaka stance of the two adversaries, and that occur during the development of the controversies; here, mention must be made of the following issues in the 'Ju lan: the "ceasing of mind" (*sems bkag*) at the time of awakening, starting with pp. 406.5–407.2 (JL IV.10); the status of *śaśamavedana* and *ālaya*, starting with pp. 407.2–408.3 (JL IV.11); the relation between self-grasping (*bdag 'dzin*) with regard to a person and self-grasping with regard to phenomena, starting with p. 408.3–6 (JL IV.12); the difference between the Sūtra and the Mantra traditions, starting with pp. 408.6–409.6 (JL IV.13).

²¹⁶ On these terms, see Seyfort Ruegg 1981: 1–3.

There are, however, considerable differences concerning the precise understanding of emptiness. The premise that something is empty leads to the question of what exactly it is empty of or what is negated – or, using the (Tibetan) technical terminology: what is the object of negation/the negandum (*dgag bya*) of Madhyamaka analysis? The specification of, and answer to, this question became a central issue in the Dge lugs school. Its founder, Tsong kha pa, considered the identification (*ngos 'dzin*) of the negandum to be of the utmost importance for the correct understanding of emptiness.²¹⁷

In order to be sure that a certain person is not present, you must know the absent person. Likewise, in order to be certain of the meaning of “selflessness” or “the lack of intrinsic existence,” you must carefully identify the self, or intrinsic nature, that does not exist. For, if you do not have a clear concept of the object to be negated, you will also not have accurate knowledge of its negation.

According to Tsong kha pa, analytical reasoning and meditative practice in the Madhyamaka tradition must first have a clear understanding of the negandum, that is, an inherent nature or essence (*ngo bo*) that is conceived as “truly established” (*bden grub*), in order to counteract and refute this conception.²¹⁸ Among the two commonly accepted ways of refutation – a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*) and an implicative negation (*ma yin dgag*) – the Dge lugs tradition accepts the former as corresponding with the highest form of *paramārtha(satya)*.²¹⁹ Emptiness or *paramārtha(satya)* – as understood in the Dge lugs tradition – can thus be summarised as the “non-existence of a truly established essence in the form of a non-implicative negation” – or, in the Tibetan terminology, a “*bden med med dgag*.”²²⁰ This

²¹⁷ *Lam rim chen mo* 169.6–9: *gang zag 'di mi 'dug snyam du nges pa la med rgyu'i gang zag de shes dgos pa ltar | bdag med pa dang rang bzhin med pa zhes pa'i don nges pa la'ang med rgyu'i bdag dang rang bzhin de legs par ngos zin dgos te | dgag par bya ba'i spyi legs par ma shar na de bkag pa'ang phyin ci ma log par mi nges pa'i phyir te |*. Translation according to Cutler 2002: 126; see also Wayman 1978: 188f.

²¹⁸ For an extensive discussion on the conception of the negandum (*dgag bya*) in Tsong kha pa's writings, see Tauscher 1995: 75ff.

²¹⁹ See Tauscher 1995: 296f. and 308f., for a discussion of these two types of negation in this context. Tauscher 1995: 291–326, especially 323, explains the distinctions of *paramārtha(satya)* in relation to these negations as found in the works of Tsong kha pa.

²²⁰ Newland, in his fundamental study on the concept of *satyadvaya* in Dge lugs Madhyamaka, presents this aspect as common to the various types of emptiness that can be distinguished: “All of these emptinesses are non-affirming negatives that are mere absences of inherent existence.” (Newland 1992: 160)

conception of emptiness is also employed by Rgyal tshab in his commentary on BCA IX.2:²²¹

Moreover, if the conventional is empty of true [establishment], then the acceptance of this very emptiness of true [establishment] (*bden stong*) as *paramārthasatya* can in no way be disproven. If this were not the case, then the conventional would become truly established (*bden grub*).

Again, emptiness as a mere absence of a truly established essence (*bden grub kyi ngo bo*) is described as *paramārthasatya*, and it is precisely this conception of the ultimate emptiness or absolute as *bden med med dgag* that became the object of the controversies between Mi pham and Rab gsal.

Mi pham's explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*

In his commentary on BCA IX.2,²²² Mi pham elaborates on how the absolute in general can be divided into a nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) and an actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute, whereby the former is only a preparatory step in realising the latter, ultimate form of emptiness:²²³

Also, with regard to the absolute, the emptiness of a mere non-implicative negation (*med dgag tsam*), i.e., the non-existence of arising and the non-existence of abiding, etc., that negates arising and abiding, etc., is only a door for entering the great emptiness that is free from the four extremes (i.e., existence, non-existence, both, and neither). That is why the terms “nominal absolute” or “concordant absolute” are used.

This earlier, provisional form of the absolute is emphasised in the Svāntarika tradition, which does not, however, conceive of this “mere non-existence” as the ultimate absolute:²²⁴

²²¹ 'Jug ngogs 210.4–6: *gzhan yang kun rdzob bden pas stong pa yin na bden stong nyid don dam bden par khas blangs pa la gnod pa cung zad kyang med la de min na kun rdzob bden grub tu 'gyur te* | .

²²² For a more extensive explanation on this part of Mi pham's commentary, see Viehbeck 2012: 299ff.

²²³ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 4.5–6: *don dam pa de la'ang skye ba dang gnas pa sogs bkag pa'i skye med dang gnas med sogs med dgag tsam gyi stong pa ni stong nyid chen po mtha' bzhi dang bral ba la 'jug pa'i sgo tsam yin pas rnam grangs pa'i don dam mam | mthun pa'i don dam zhes brda mdzad de* | .

²²⁴ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 5.1–2: *rang rgyud pa'i gzhung thams cad du ni | mdo dang bstan bcos su gzugs sogs med par bkag pa'i rnam pa thams cad | bden yod tsam 'gog pa'i med rkyang rnam grangs pa'i don du bsha'd pa mdzad nas | de las slar med pa nyid kyang gnas lugs mthar thug gi don du mi bzhed de* | .

In all Svātantrika scriptures, all incidences (*rnam pa*) of negating form (*gzugs*) etc. as non-existent in the *sūtras* and *śāstras* are explained as sheer non-existence, which negates merely the existence of true [establishment], in the sense of the nominal [absolute]. Beyond that, non-existence itself is not assumed in the sense of the ultimate mode of existence.

Even though Mi pham does not formulate his thoughts as a direct criticism of the Dge lugs tradition, his conception of the absolute sharply contrasts with the way in which it is conceived in his opponent's tradition. For Mi pham, emptiness or the absolute in the form of *bden med med dgag* refutes only the extreme of existence and corresponds to the merely provisional nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, an absolute that is not accepted as the ultimate absolute in the Svātantrika tradition, let alone in the Prāsaṅgika tradition, which – according to Mi pham – focuses right from the start on the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute, refuting all four extremes.

Rab gsal's criticism in the 'Ju lan

Naturally, Mi pham is extensively criticised for his categorisation of emptiness in the form of *bden med med dgag* as a provisional concept. Among the many lines of criticism Rab gsal brings forth, I will focus only on five major issues,²²⁵ which include contradictions of various kinds, viz., to the scriptural tradition, to Mi pham's other statements, and to logic, as well as the refutation of possible objections.

Rab gsal starts his criticism by arguing that Mi pham's explanations are not confirmed by the Indian scriptural tradition.²²⁶ He resolutely denies that there could be an absolute that goes beyond the non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*).²²⁷

An absolute, an ultimate mode of existence (*gnas lugs*), that exceeds emptiness of true [establishment] or selflessness, does not exist.

Such, as Rab gsal elaborates, is proven by the scriptures, which unanimously teach the realisation of selflessness as the ultimate antidote against *saṃsāra*. This is true not only for the *sūtra* and *śāstra* literature, such as the

²²⁵ In the summary of the 'Ju lan, these topics are JL IV.1a, 1b, 1d, 2a, and 9a.

²²⁶ See 'Ju lan 396.6–397.3 (JL IV.1a).

²²⁷ 'Ju lan 396.6–397.1: *bden stong dang bdag med pa las lhag pa'i gnas lugs mthar thug don dam pa ni med de* |.

Prajñapāramitāsūtras and the corpus of argumentative works on Madhyamaka (*Dbu ma rigs tshogs*), but also for the tantric literature of various kinds, from which Rab gsal quotes short passages in order to prove his point.²²⁸

Mi pham's position would further contradict other statements in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, as Rab gsal points out by quoting Mi pham's explanations on BCA IX.45cd:²²⁹

You said, "A method for the complete renunciation (from *saṃ-sāra*) other than just seeing the object as empty is not possible" [...].

In yet another passage, Mi pham explicitly advocated emptiness in the form of a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*) when emptiness is taught to others:²³⁰

In the context of teaching emptiness, the negation of form (*gzugs*) etc. is nothing but a non-implicative negation.

According to Rab gsal, these two passages show a clear contradiction to the position that *bden med med dgag* would not be the ultimate form of emptiness.²³¹

Another issue is that Mi pham's position would lead to certain logical contradictions.²³² If, according to Mi pham, both taking a self to be non-existent or taking it to be existent led to the respective extremes, then there would be only the option of not grasping anything at all, that is, the nihilistic position that is associated with the character Hwa shang Mahāyāna, as Rab gsal concludes:²³³

Thus, you explained that one falls into the extreme of non-existence when one grasps a self as non-existent, and into the extreme of existence when one grasps it as existent. In that

²²⁸ 'Ju lan 397.1–3.

²²⁹ 'Ju lan 397.3–4: *khyod kyis* [...] *yul stong par mthong ba kho na las gzhan rtsad nas ldog thabs mi srid de zhes dang* | [...]. Here, Rab gsal quotes *Nor bu ke ta ka* 35.5.

²³⁰ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 7.1: *stong pa nyid ston pa'i skabs su gzugs la sogs pa dgag pa ni med dgag kho na yin te* |.

²³¹ Cf. 'Ju lan 397.3–5 (JL IV.1b).

²³² See 'Ju lan 397.6–398.1 (JL IV.1d).

²³³ 'Ju lan 397.6–398.1: *de ltar na khyed cag gis bdag med par bzung na med mtha' dang yod par bzung na yod mthar ltung bar bshad pas de lta na gnyis ka min par bzung na gnyis min gyi mthar ltung ba'i phyir* | *de'i phyir gang du'ang 'dzin pa med pas ha shang ma hā ya na'i rjes su song ba la the tshom med de* |.

way, one falls therefore into the extreme of neither [existence nor non-existence] being the case (*gnyis min*) when one grasps [a self] as neither [existent] nor [non-existent]. For this reason, there is no grasping of anything and hence there is no doubt that [you] follow [the tradition of] Hwa shang Mahāyāna.

A more technical problem with regard to logical issues employed in the discussion is the law of double negation, i.e., the principle that a negation of a negation leads to the positive that was negated in the first place.²³⁴ Since Mi pham had accepted this law in another context in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*,²³⁵ Rab gsal demands that he should also accept it in the present context. If, however, non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) is seen as an extreme and hence negated, then one would naturally arrive at true establishment (*bden grub*):²³⁶

As [something] would be truly established if it does not exist in the form of the non-existence of true establishment and [something] would also be truly established if it is not not-truly established, you are sharpening the weapon that kills you yourself.

In a later part of his criticism,²³⁷ Rab gsal addresses a possible objection to the Dge lugs understanding of emptiness. An opponent might use the famous verse BCA IX.35²³⁸ as a counter-argument against the Dge lugs position:

When neither being (*bhāva*) nor non-being (*abhāva*) abides before the mind

Then, as there is no other possibility, it is without reference, completely pacified.

yadā na bhāvo nābhāvo mateḥ saṃtiṣṭhate puraḥ |

²³⁴ See 'Ju lan 398.2–3 (JL IV.2a).

²³⁵ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 23.6.

²³⁶ 'Ju lan 398.2–3: *rang gsod pa'i mtshon cha rang gis brdar ba ste | bden med du med na bden grub dang | bden grub ma yin pa min na'ang bden grub tu 'gyur ba'i phyir |*.

²³⁷ See 'Ju lan 405.2–5 (JL IV.9a), for the complete argument.

²³⁸ According to legend, it was during the recitation of this verse that Śāntideva rose to the sky, disappearing from the sight of his audience. Thus, the narrative is closely connected to the philosophical content of the respective verse, which propagates the dissolution of all mental references; cf. Pind 1983: 173f.

For a detailed discussion of this verse, including its various Tibetan interpretations, see Williams 2000b: 21ff.

tadānyagatyabhāvena nirālambā praśāmyati | |²³⁹

gang tshe dngos dang dngos med dag | *blo yi mdun na mi gnas pa* | |

de tshe rnam pa gzhan med pas | | *dmigs pa med par rab tu zhi* | |²⁴⁰

Clearly, this verse negates non-existence as a mental object for someone who has realised emptiness. An opponent might therefore argue that the Dge lugs understanding of emptiness as non-existence (of true establishment) is in contradiction to Śāntideva's explanations. As Rab gsal points out, such an objection is based on a misinterpretation of this verse: in this verse a specific point in time was mentioned, and it would be misleading to think that non-existence was a mental object before this point in time and ceased to be later. Rather, non-existence – or emptiness – appears as a distant object at first – in the context of study and reflection (*thos bsam*) –, whereas later – by means of (*śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*) meditative cultivation – dualistic appearances (*gnyis snang*) are gradually cleared away: the experiencing mind and its object are not separated, but emptiness is experienced in a non-dual (*gnyis su med pa*) and direct way, Rab gsal elaborates, thus explaining his position on the process of realising emptiness.²⁴¹

Mi pham's reply in the *Rab lan*

Mi pham's answers to Rab gsal's criticism concerning this fourth topic tend to be much more detailed than those concerning the earlier topics; they often contain lengthy explanations of his stance on a particular problem of Madhyamaka thought. Naturally, the present summary can only cover limited aspects of these topics.

Mi pham's first answer²⁴² counters the first two of Rab gsal's accusations mentioned above, and his more detailed treatment of it is especially noteworthy: Mi pham devotes almost forty pages especially to showing that his view on emptiness is in accordance with the Indian scriptures. Mi pham agrees with Rab gsal's principle objection, that there is no absolute "that exceeds emptiness of true [establishment] or selflessness." This thought is also expressed in the passages from the *Nor bu ke ta ka* that Rab

²³⁹ Cf. BCAP 417.13–14.

²⁴⁰ Cf. BCA (D, fol. 32a4; P, fol. 36b3)

²⁴¹ Cf. 'Ju lan 405.2–4: 'o na sngar mdun du gnas la phyis mi gnas pa zhig tu thal | gang tshe zhes dus ngos bzung ba'i phyir | | des na 'di ltar | sngar thos bsam gyi dus na yul yul can rgyang [A rgyangs] chad 'brel med pa ltar snang | de nas zhi lhag gis rim gyis gnyis snang sbyangs te | sems dang gnyis su med pa lta bu dang gnyis su med pa'i snang ba 'byung ste |.

²⁴² See *Rab lan* 254.1–292.6 (RL IV.1a).

gsal quoted in his second objection to show that Mi pham as well pro-
pounds emptiness in the form of *bden med med dgag* and hence contradicts
his later explanations. For Mi pham, this apparent contradiction seems to
be based on a misunderstanding of his precise position, which he clari-
fies in what follows. According to him, it is important to distinguish two
different ways of conceiving the absolute: one takes the emptiness of elimi-
nating only limited extremes, namely the conception of true establishment
(*bden grub*), as the ultimate absolute, whereas the other takes ultimate emp-
tiness to refer to the elimination of *all* extremes and proliferations (*spros pa*).
According to the latter approach, one understands all phenomena to be de-
void of an inherent nature (*rang bzhin*), but then proceeds to a state that is
free from references. This kind of absolute is the object of non-conceptual
gnosis (*mi rtog pa'i ye shes*) alone. In the former approach, one refutes the
extreme of true establishment (*bden grub*), but then remains at a conceptual
state, grasping the characteristic (*mtshan ma*) of non-existence.²⁴³ Mi pham
emphasises that he had thus never opposed the non-existence of true es-
tablishment (*bden med*) in general, but only a view of ultimate emptiness
that involves proliferations:²⁴⁴

It was never said, in general, that the meaning of non-existence
of true [establishment] (*bden med*), emptiness, or selflessness
does not refer to the mode of existence (*gnas lugs*). However,
we did not proclaim anew that the views that contain prolifer-
ations (*spros pa*), that did not refute the entire proliferations, are
not the ultimate emptiness that is explained in the *Mother* (i.e.,
the *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*), since this was declared by
the Teacher, the Bhagavan, together with his followers. Hence,
we proclaim such by following the Teacher.

According to Mi pham, this position is also attested in the Indian scrip-
tural tradition. Countering Rab gsal's first objection, in which he claimed

²⁴³ Rab lan 257.1–2: 'dus byas 'dus ma byas kyi chos thams cad rang bzhin med par shes nas dmigs
pa'i spros pa kun las 'das pa'i de kho na nyid kyi yul can rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes la reg pa dang |
der ma son par bden grub tsam khegs [C kheg] kyang de nyid la dngos po med pa'i mtshan mar zhen
nas spros pa nyi tshe ba bkag tsam gyi stong nyid la [C stong nyid la om.] stong nyid mthar thug [C
thug om.] tu 'dzin pa'i go tshul gnyis yod pas na | [...].

²⁴⁴ Rab lan 257.2–4: spyir bden med dang stong nyid dang bdag med kyi don gnas lugs ma yin no
zhes nam yang mi brjod kyang | spros pa mtha' dag ma khegs pa'i spros pa can gyi lta ba de dag yum
nas bshad pa'i stong pa nyid mthar thug pa ma yin zhes bdag cag gis gsar du smras pa ma yin te | ston
pa bcom ldan 'das rjes 'brangs dang bcas pas gsungs pa yin pas bdag cag ston pa'i rjes su 'brangs nas
de ltar smra'o | | .

that Mi pham would be in contradiction to the scriptures, Mi pham provides an extensive list of altogether more than one hundred and fifty passages from numerous scriptures to prove his understanding of ultimate emptiness or the absolute as being beyond proliferations (*spros pa*) and conceptualisation (*rtog pa*). Following the sequence of Rab gsal's criticism, these passages are listed in the following order: Prajñāpāramitā-literature (pp. 257–259), other *sūtras*, mainly from the last cycle of teachings, (pp. 259–280), *śāstra*-literature in its historical order (pp. 280–287), *tantras* (pp. 288–291), tantric literature in the form of *dohās* (pp. 291–292).

The distinction of two different ways of conceiving the absolute is also important in Mi pham's response²⁴⁵ to Rab gsal's accusation that Mi pham's position would equate to the nihilistic position of Hwa shang. As Mi pham points out, there are different approaches to eliminating extreme positions. Among those, the (Dge lugs) approach of countering the extremes of permanence and annihilation (*rtag chad*) through the realisation of the non-existence of true establishment (*bden grub pa med pa*) and the existence [of things] on the conventional level (*tha snyad du yod pa*), however, refers to the mere nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, corresponding to the merely conceptual state of post-concentration (*rjes thob*). At this stage, even a proponent of Madhyamaka has to accept claims or assertions (*khas len*),²⁴⁶ and hence the existence of a self is simply negated; it cannot be described as being neither existent nor non-existent.²⁴⁷ With regard to the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute, however, both existence and non-existence are seen as mere imaginations (*btags pa*). This form of the absolute refers to a state that is devoid of any assertions (*khas len*), proliferations (*spros pa*), or references (*dmigs pa*), accessible only to non-conceptual gnosis (*rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes*). Since none of the modes of cognition (*'dzin stangs*) of the four extremes is present at this stage, it can be correctly described as

²⁴⁵ Cf. *Rab lan* 295.4–302.5 (RL IV.1c).

²⁴⁶ Here, the debate pertains to another “hot topic” in Madhyamaka philosophy, the question of whether, and when, proponents of Madhyamaka are allowed to, or should, accept claims or assertions (*khas len*). For a general introduction to this problem in Madhyamaka philosophy, see Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 105ff. The same study discusses also the varying positions that were taken in this regard by different Tibetan philosophers, see Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 159ff. Cf. also Seyfort Ruegg's earlier article on this topic, Seyfort Ruegg 1983.

²⁴⁷ See *Rab lan* 294.4–6: yang rnam grangs pa'i don dam gyi dbang du byas te | bden grub med pa dang | tha snyad du yod pas mtha' gnyis la mi gnas pa'i dbu mar bzhed pa rnams rtag chad kyi mtha' phra ba 'gog tshul la je zab tu song bas lugs gsum po de la des so 'i ngos skal gyi rtag chad kyi mtha' mi sel zhes rnam pa kun tu mi brjod mod | 'on kyang bden med dang tha snyad kyi snang ba zung du sbyar bas mtha' gnyis sel tshul 'di rjes thob shes bya 'byed pa'i shes rab kyi dpyad nas khas len dang bcas pas | spros [A spros] pa dang bcas [A gcas] pa yin zhing | de'i ngor bdag yod pa min med pa min zhes rnam pa kun tu [AC du] mi smra ste bdag med pa 'ba' zhig tu smra'o | |.

the refutation of all four extremes.²⁴⁸ Mi pham further points out the logical faults that would occur if the refutation of all extremes were related to a state that contains assertions (*khas len*), and criticises the position of limiting emptiness solely to the refutation of the concept of true establishment (*bden grub*), but leaving other proliferations (in relation to the other extremes) untouched.²⁴⁹ He concludes his answer by countering that his understanding of the “Great Madhyamaka, that is free from extremes” is “established as the unsurpassed long[-standing] tradition of the Jina” and hence cannot be equated with the supposedly nihilistic tradition of Hwa shang, as Rab gsal had alleged.²⁵⁰

Rab gsal’s second objection concerning inconsistencies in logical matters is rebutted rather briefly.²⁵¹ As above, Mi pham points to a clarification of the level on which a certain statement is made. For him, the law of double negation is clearly located on the merely conventional level, and cannot be applied to capture ultimate reality: “[Principles like the law of double negation] are taught simply as an introduction to the language of [pointing out] illogical consequences (*thal ngag*) for beginners. [They] are valid [in this context], but if it were easily possible to fathom suchness (*de kho na nyid*) which is beyond being an object of expression (*smra brjod*) and logic (*rtog ge*) merely by something like that [...],”²⁵² then, continues Mi pham, referring to various quotes from Indian treatises, it would not make sense to point out the difficulty of realising the absolute, since it could be easily understood by everyone who knows logic. On the conventional level of the ordinary “ways of the world,” however, logical principles have to be accepted and statements made accordingly.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Rab lan 295.1–4: *gnas lugs don dam pa’i bden pa mthar thug rnam grangs ma yin pa mnyam bzhas rnam par mi rtog pa’i ye shes kyi spyod yul ji lta ba bzhi mthar thug dpyod pa’i rigs shes kyiis dpyad na | bdag yod med gnyis ka rtog pas btags pa tsam las rang gi ngo bo nyid ma grub par mtshungs pa’i phyir | gnyis ka mgo mnyam du dmigs su med par ‘gyur te | [...] spros pa zhi ba’i dbang du byas na bdag yod med kyi khas len gang yang med pas lugs des gnyis ka min par bzung bar ‘gyur ro zhes brgal du med de dmigs pa med pa la | mtha’ bzhi’i ‘dzin stangs gang yang med par ‘dod pa’i phyir tshul des mthar ‘dzin phra ba thams cad cig char gcod nus so | |.*

²⁴⁹ Rab lan 296.1–301.2

²⁵⁰ Rab lan 302.2–3: *de ltar gong du lung dang de’i don bzhi rigs pa’i lam nas go bar bshad pa ‘di dag gis mtha’ bral dbu ma chen po zhes gang smras pa de dag rgyal ba’i ring lugs bla na med par grub pas na | ‘di ‘dzin pa po thams cad ha shang gi lhwam lus pa’i bgo skal len pa sha stag ma yin te |.*

²⁵¹ Rab lan 303.4–305.2 (RL IV.2a).

²⁵² Rab lan 303.5: *blo gsar bu ba dag gi thal ngag kha byang gi ched tsam du bstan pa ni bden na yang | de tsam zhig gis de kho na nyid rtog ge dang smra brjod kyi yul las ‘das pa bde blag tu gzhal nus na | [...].*

²⁵³ Rab lan 304.5–6: *‘on kyang tha snyad gzhal ba’i skabs su yod pa’ang min med pa’ang min zhes pa lta bu khas len thams cad bral ba smra don med do | |.*

But, in the context of fathoming the conventional, it does not make sense to propound freedom from all assertions (*khas len*), stating, for example, that [something] is neither existent nor non-existent.

Rab gsal's discussion of the possible objection that may be raised by an opponent to his conception of emptiness is addressed later in the corresponding passage of Mi pham's reply.²⁵⁴ Rab gsal emphasised that BCA IX.35 should not be understood as indicating a general disappearance of non-existence in the process of realising emptiness, but rather that this non-existence is realised in a non-dualistic (*gnyis med*) way, and hence ceases to be a distant object. Rab gsal's main argument was that it is unreasonable to understand BCA IX.35 in such a way that non-existence was described as abiding before the mind first, but ceases to do so at a certain point. Mi pham responds by using the very same argumentation against Rab gsal. Also, according to Rab gsal's interpretation, says Mi pham, certain perceptions are accepted as being there first, but as ceasing at a certain point:²⁵⁵

How do you explain it? Do you not also accept that dualistic appearances abide before the mind first, but do not abide later, or claim that true establishment (*bden grub*) abides as the referential object (*dmigs yul*) before a mind that grasps true [establishment] first, but does not abide [there] later, when non-existence of true [establishment] is realised?

Mi pham then continues this discussion by pointing out various flaws in Rab gsal's conception of realising emptiness.

Rab gsal's reply in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

Although Rab gsal continues to criticise Mi pham strongly for his stance on emptiness, substantial arguments about the discussions of the current investigation are rare. Most important is Rab gsal's reply to the first issue, Mi pham's refutation of conceiving emptiness as *bden med med dgag*, which he also backed up by quoting an enormous corpus of literature.

According to Rab gsal,²⁵⁶ the root of Mi pham's erroneous understanding is to be found in a misinterpretation of a specific passage of Kamalaśīla's

²⁵⁴ For Mi pham's discussion of this objection, see *Rab lan* 374.5–377.1 (RL IV.10a).

²⁵⁵ *Rab lan* 374.6–375.1: *khyod kyis ji ltar 'chad | khyod kyis kyang gzung 'dzin gnyis su snang ba blo yi mdun du sngar gnas la | phyis mi snang bar 'dod pa dang | sngar bden 'dzin can gyi blo'i mdun na bden grub dmigs yul du gnas la | phyis bden med rtogs tshe mi gnas par khas mi len nam |*.

²⁵⁶ See *Ga bur chu rgyun* 445.5–446.2 (GC I.6k).

Madhyamakāloka. The passage Rab gsal refers to was also quoted by Mi pham, among numerous other textual examples that he provided to support his position. While this passage explains that a certain kind of non-existence of arising – specified in the text as “this non-existence of arising” (*skye ba med pa 'di*) – is not to be considered as the true absolute, Rab gsal clarifies that this statement of Kamalaśīla does not speak of non-existence in general, but refers only to a particular kind of non-existence, an understanding of non-existence that is brought about by reasoning. The passage must therefore refer to a “conceptual reasoning consciousness” (*rig shes rtog bcas*) and hence is clearly related to the context of the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, but not the ultimate absolute.²⁵⁷ For Rab gsal, the important point seems to be that the distinction between the nominal and the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute is established only on the basis of the perceiving mind, and he presents this as the key for understanding all the quotes that Mi pham had mentioned.²⁵⁸

Based on this [conceptual state of] mind, even freedom from proliferations is the nominal absolute, which is only free from one aspect of proliferations. Considering it in this way, the scriptures fit well with each other.

Mi pham would certainly agree that any conceptual notion of non-existence does not accord fully with the ultimate absolute. For him, however, the distinction of nominal and actual absolute is not limited to the realising subject, but could also be applied to the realised object.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Cf. *Ga bur chu rgyun* 445.5–6: *da ni khyed rang rnams 'khrul gzhi dbu ma snang ba'i tshig la brtseg par bya ste | de nyid du | skye ba med pa 'di yang don dam pa dang mthun pa'i phyir don dam pa zhes bya'i dngos su ni ma yin te | don dam pa ni spros pa thams cad las 'das pa'i phyir | zhes par snang mod de ni rang 'grel du | gtan tshigs kyis skye ba med pa zhes sogs gsung [A gsungs] bas rig shes rtog bcas rnam grangs pa'i don dam skabs yin te |*

²⁵⁸ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 446.1–2: *spros bral kyang blo de la bltos te spros pa phyogs gcig tsam dang bral ba'i rnam grangs pa'i don dam du byas na gzhung rnams legs par gung 'grig go |*

²⁵⁹ See *Rab lan* 337.1ff., for Mi pham's explanations on the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) and actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute with regard to both subject and object: “In this context, we as well believe that the designation of actual and nominal absolute – in terms of averting or not averting dualistic appearances – is suitable with reference to the subject. Regarding the object, the two, being free from the sphere (*spyod yul*) of limited proliferations (*spros pa*) and being free from all spheres of proliferations, are explained as the difference of the two absolutes [...].” (*'di skabs yul can gyi dbang du byas na gnyis snang log ma log gi sgo nas rnam grangs min pa dang yin pa'i don dam gyi tha snyad [B snyan] kyang 'thad par bdag cag gis kyang 'dod de yul gyi dbang du byas na spros pa nyi tshe ba'i spyod yul dang bral ba dang | spros pa'i spyod yul mtha' dag dang bral ba de gnyis la don dam gnyis po'i khyad par du bshad cing | [...]*).

Mi pham's reply in the *Yang lan*

While Mi pham gives no direct answer to Rab gsal's stance on the scriptures Mi pham had quoted, he continues his criticism of viewing emptiness as a mere negation in different passages of his reply. At the beginning of "issues of major significance" (*don che ba*),²⁶⁰ for example, he emphasises again that "mere emptiness" cannot account for a unity of the two *satyas*.²⁶¹

If the mere emptiness among the two *satyas* that are distinguished as different in essence were the ultimate absolute, then an indivisible essence of the two *satyas* would be neither the absolute nor the conventional.

Rab gsal, too, proclaimed the unity of the two *satyas* as the essential principle in understanding emptiness. For Mi pham, on the other hand, this was precisely what could be endangered by stressing the negational aspect of emptiness. As Mi pham further elaborates at the end of his letter,²⁶² this could lead to a nihilistic understanding of emptiness. He concludes, however, that Rab gsal – in his second letter – also highlighted the unity of the two *satyas*, an "emptiness that arises as cause and effect" (*stong nyid rgyu 'bras su 'char ba*), and thereby indeed arrived at an understanding of emptiness that could eliminate all extremes.²⁶³ While the issue of varying emphasis on the negational moment in conceiving emptiness remains unresolved, both adversaries could at least agree that the unity of the two *satyas* is essential.

Synopsis

With its discussion of the concept of *satyadvaya*, the second verse of the ninth chapter of the BCA became of the utmost importance for understanding the principle issues of Madhyamaka philosophy. Later generations of Indian as well as Tibetan thinkers placed this verse at the centre of their respective interpretation of Madhyamaka thought and used it to argue for

²⁶⁰ See *Yang lan* 468.1–4 (YL II.a).

²⁶¹ *Yang lan* 468.2–3: *bden gnyis ngo bo tha dad du phyed ba'i stong rkyang de 'ba' zhiig don dam mthar thug yin na | bden gnyis ngo bo dbyer med don dam ma yin par 'gyur la | kun rdzob kyang min par 'gyur ro |* .

²⁶² *Yang lan* 470.2–4 (YL II.g).

²⁶³ See *Yang lan* 470.3–4: *a mtshar rtsed mo lags te | stong nyid rgyu 'bras su 'char yod [B tshul] go zhiig bden gnyis ngo bo dbyer med du rtogs na | de 'dra'i rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid kyis chad mtha' sel bar the tshom ga la yod |* .

their position. It figures prominently in all related philosophical controversies in Tibet, and a major part of the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal is also connected to this single verse.

The distinction of two “truths” or “realities” – *saṃvṛtisatya* and *paramārthasatya* – that this verse introduces was understood in various ways. Within the Dge lugs tradition, for example, *paramārtha* – the “absolute” – was conceived of as a lack or negation of a truly established essence (*ngo bo bden grub*) of *saṃvṛti* – the “conventional.” Of the two possible ways of negation, a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*) was seen to correspond to the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) or ultimate (*mthar thug pa*) absolute.

It is precisely this conception of the highest form of emptiness or the absolute as *bden med med dgag* that Mi pham criticised in his *Nor bu ke ta ka*. In this work, he divided the absolute into two kinds, a provisional form of the absolute, termed “nominal” (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, and an “actual” (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute. For him, the conception of emptiness as a “mere non-implicative negation” (*med dgag tsam*) eliminates only the extreme of existence (*yod mtha'*) and conforms to the earlier, provisional form of the absolute, while the actual absolute must go beyond that and transcend all four extremes of existence, non-existence, both, and neither. Mi pham did not formulate his explications as a direct criticism of the Dge lugs tradition, but it is clear that he was aiming specifically at the established doctrinal position of this school.

In his attempt to defend the doctrines of his native tradition, Rab gsal accused Mi pham of various contradictions: his position was not in accordance with the authoritative (Indian) scriptures, it contradicted other statements by Mi pham himself, and it deviated from the laws of logic and led to a nihilistic view.

Mi pham’s reply to the first accusation is especially remarkable: quoting more than one hundred and fifty passages from numerous scriptures, he tried to prove that in the Indian scriptures too, emptiness was not described as a mere negation. In his later reply, Rab gsal countered this evidence by arguing that all these scriptures refer to a particular context, namely when the absolute is fathomed by an intellectual process of reasoning. Depending on this particular state of mind, only the nominal absolute can be approached. This would, however, not affect the established doctrine of the Dge lugs school that views the absolute in general as a mere absence of an established essence (*ngo bo bden grub*).

In his approach to the other objections made by Rab gsal, Mi pham argued for a distinction of levels. In a certain context, for example, when teaching emptiness, this emptiness may very well be described as a negation and also formulated by closely following logical principles. This form

of emptiness pertains to the nominal absolute. Ultimately, however, emptiness goes beyond the limitations of language and logic, and is, as such, not restricted to a mere negation of existence, but is free from all kinds of proliferations.

Both Rab gsal and Mi pham distinguish between nominal and actual absolutes to delineate different levels of the absolute. However, while for Rab gsal this distinction seems important only for distinguishing different *modes* of cognising emptiness, for Mi pham *any* cognition that views emptiness as a mere negation is not getting at the ultimate absolute. The main difference between Mi pham and Rab gsal is to be seen in the way they emphasise the negational aspect of emptiness, and as this issue is firmly established in the respective doctrinal positions, it is not easily resolved.

Ultimate emptiness and freedom from extremes

The first issue was mainly concerned with Mi pham's opposition to viewing mere non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) as the ultimate form of emptiness and the controversies that evolved out of this; the second issue, in contrast, focused on Mi pham's alternative conception of the ultimate absolute as being beyond all extremes.

It is commonly accepted that Madhyamaka philosophy should culminate in a view that neither tends to the extreme of annihilation (*chad mtha'*), nor to the extreme of eternalism (*rtag mtha'*). This position is expressed by the fundamental Madhyamaka statement that things are "neither existent nor non-existent" (*yod min med min*).²⁶⁴ Following Tsong kha pa, this formulation is, however, not to be understood literally: applying such contradictory qualities as "existent" and "non-existent" to a single logical subject is not possible, as these qualities are said to be mutually exclusive (*phan tshun gzhan sel ba*).²⁶⁵ Tsong kha pa solves the apparent contradiction by adding a specification: "neither existent nor non-existent" is rightly understood as "neither existent on the absolute level nor non-existent on the conventional level."²⁶⁶ While for Tsong kha pa and his followers this represents a

²⁶⁴ This statement is found in various *sūtras*, such as the *Ratnakūṭa* (cf. Frauwallner 1994: 167) or the *Śālistambasūtra* (cf. Cabezon & Dargyay 2007: 80, 287), and the relevant passage of the latter *sūtra* is commonly cited in the Madhyamaka-related *śāstras*. In this regard, Seyfort Ruegg mentions the *Jñānasārasamuccaya* ascribed to Āryadeva, Bhāviveka's *Madhyamakaratantrapradīpa*, Jitāri's *Sugatamatavibhaṅgakārikā* (*bhāṣya*), Advayavajra's *Tattvaratnāvalī*, and the *Subhāṣitasamgraha* ascribed to Sarahapāda (Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 143).

²⁶⁵ See, e.g., Tsong kha pa's *Gser phreng* as quoted in Tauscher 1995: 60.

²⁶⁶ Tsong kha pa's general understanding of *yod min med min* is discussed extensively in Tauscher 1995: 56ff.

correct concept of the unity of the two *satyas*, which avoids leaning towards either extreme, Mi pham confronts the Dge lugs tradition with a different understanding.

Mi pham's explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*

As shown earlier, Mi pham distinguishes between a nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) and actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute, whereby the latter corresponds to the ultimate absolute as it is also conceived of in the Prāsaṅgika tradition. The characteristic approach of the Svātantrika tradition, in contrast, is based on the temporary emphasis on the nominal absolute, and thus on a perception of the two *satyas* as separate. Even though there is no arising of appearances on the absolute level, appearances cannot be denied on the conventional level. Appearances are established, since a cognition that investigates the conventional recognises their “own-characteristics” (*rang mtshan*). If appearances are negated, one must then add that this is done with regard to the ultimate level. The approach of the Svātantrika can thus be summarised in the following terse formula: “non-existent on the absolute level, undeceptively existent on the conventional level.”²⁶⁷ Following Mi pham, the “middle of extremes,” as posited in the Dge lugs tradition, corresponds only to the provisional approach to the absolute mentioned in the Svātantrika scriptures, an approach that is not tenable with regard to ultimate reality.²⁶⁸

But, considering the two characteristics of existence and non-existence separately, in the way that [things] “exist on the conventional level and do not exist on the absolute level,” is not established with respect to the ultimate mode of existence.

The Prāsaṅgika tradition with its direct approach to the ultimate absolute therefore refutes the establishment of things by way of their “own-characteristic” – even on the conventional level – and thus argues against a separate conception of the two *satyas*.²⁶⁹ As Mi pham points out, appear-

²⁶⁷ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 5.3–5: *de lta na'ang gnas skabs lam gtan la 'bebs pa'i skabs su don dam par skye ba med kyang kun rdzob tu skye ba ltar snang ba 'gog mi nus pas chos rnams ni kun rdzob tu rang gi mtshan nyid 'dzin par tha snyad dpyod pa'i tshad mas grub cing | de snang ba ltar don dam par ma grub pas dgag bya la don dam gyi khyad par sbyar te don dam par med la kun rdzob par bslu med du yod do zhes 'chad par byed de | de ltar bden gnyis so so rang sa na ma nyams par bzahag pa 'di lta bu ni las dang po pa'i blo ngor cis kyang bde ba yin te |*

²⁶⁸ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 5.6: *'on kyang gnas lugs mthar thug pa'i dbang du na kun rdzob tu yod pa dang | don dam par med pa zhes yod pa dang med pa'i mtshan nyid gnyis so sor phyogs su chad de gnas pa ma yin te |*

²⁶⁹ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 6.2: *'di ltar kun rdzob tu rang mtshan gyis grub pa de'ang bkag pas bden gnyis so sor 'dzin pa khegs te.*

ances and emptiness can ultimately not be separated from each other.²⁷⁰

Precisely, the form etc. of whatever appears is empty, and, although it is empty, this itself appears as form etc.

For Mi pham, authentic Prajñāpāramitā culminates in the realisation of the coalescence or unity of appearances and emptiness (*snang stong zung 'jug*). Only a view that unites appearances and emptiness conforms to the absolute mode of existence (*don dam pa'i gnas tshul*). This view must abandon all forms of grasping, that is, negation as well as affirmation (*dgag sgrub*), and thus be free from any assertions (*khas len*). Freedom from proliferations (*spros bral*) means that not only the extreme of eternalism, but all four extremes (*mtha' bzhi*), i.e., existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, and neither existence nor non-existence, are equally eliminated.²⁷¹

Rab gsal's criticism in the 'Ju lan

Rab gsal's most important criticism of Mi pham's concept of the absolute and the abandonment of all extremes is found in two sections of his work dealing almost exclusively with this particular issue.²⁷² In addition to the central arguments of these two sections, one passage that exhibits Rab gsal's position on the abandonment of extremes, and another one that refutes possible objections to this position, is included in the current presentation.²⁷³

Rab gsal starts the first section of criticism by briefly pointing out what he regards as the central issue in the understanding of *satyadvaya*. Most important according to Rab gsal is the "inseparable unity ('du 'bral med pa) of the non-existence of an object on the absolute level and its existence on the conventional level," as it is also the "intention of various *sūtras* and *tantras*."²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Nor bu ke ta ka 5.6–6.1: *gang snang ba'i gzugs la sogs pa 'di nyid stong zhing | gang stong bzhin pa de nyid gzugs sogs su snang ba yin*.

²⁷¹ Nor bu ke ta ka 6.1–3.

²⁷² 'Ju lan 398.5–400.1 (JL IV.3) and 403.3–404.3 (JL IV.7).

²⁷³ 'Ju lan 402.2–5 (JL IV.5d) and 404.3–4 (JL IV.8a).

²⁷⁴ 'Ju lan 398.5–6: *yul don dam par med pa dang | tha snyad du yod pa 'du 'bral med pa ni | [...]* mdo rgyud du ma'i dgongs pa yin kyang [A byang] |. For the complete argument, see 'Ju lan 398.5–6 (JL IV.3a).

According to Rab gsal, this is not fulfilled by Mi pham's concept of the absolute. He charges that Mi pham's way of refuting the extreme positions would even prevent Mi pham from being a true Mādhyamika.²⁷⁵

You will also not be a Mādhyamika, as you do not abide in the middle, since if one abides there, you accept [this] as an abiding in the extreme of neither [existence nor non-existence].

Rab gsal shows that, for Mi pham, the middle between existence and non-existence would still be an extreme position; for him, any form of "abiding" (*gnas pa*) must be abandoned, and thus he could also not accept "abiding in the freedom from the four extremes."²⁷⁶

This criticism is continued in the next argument,²⁷⁷ where Mi pham is attacked for his – allegedly – overly broad approach to the abandonment of extremes. Rab gsal says of Mi pham that he does not just refute what actually is an extreme position, but that, according to him, "all statements of existence are accepted as the extreme of existence and all statements of non-existence as the extreme of non-existence."²⁷⁸ Thus, Mi pham's refutation of extremes would also pertain to what is, according to the Dge lugs tradition, a correct conception of *satyadvaya*.

Mi pham's concept of the ultimate absolute as the abandonment of all four extremes is also the target of a later section in Rab gsal's work.²⁷⁹ Here, Rab gsal uses Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, one of the most influential works for the Madhyamaka understanding of the Indian tradition, to show contradictions to the position of Mi pham. *Madhyamakāvatara* IV.140/141 and its commentary discuss the differences between grasping an imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*), that is, a self to which are attributed certain qualities, such as being eternal, etc., and innate ego-grasping (*lhan skyes pa'i ngar 'dzin*), which means our automatic conception of "I exist." Candrakīrti explains that both kinds of self-grasping are unconnected and,

²⁷⁵ 'Ju lan 399.1: *khyed cag dbu ma par yang mi 'gyur te | dbus la gnas pa med pa'i phyir | der gnas na gnyis min gyi mtha' la gnas par 'dod pa'i phyir ro |* .

²⁷⁶ Rab gsal argues that abiding in the freedom from the four extremes would still lead to an abiding in the extreme of non-existence, if one accepted Mi pham's criticism of conceiving emptiness as abiding in freedom from true establishment (*bden grub*). In saying this, Rab gsal implies, of course, that abiding in freedom from true establishment is equivalent to abiding in freedom from all four extremes: see 'Ju lan 399.1–2: *mtha' bzhi dang bral ba la gnas na'ang med mtha' la gnas par 'gyur te | bden grub dang bral ba la de'i phyir | der thal | bden med la gnas pa bkag pa'i phyir |* . For the complete argument, see 'Ju lan 398.6–399.2 (JL IV.3b).

²⁷⁷ 'Ju lan 399.2–3 (JL IV.3c).

²⁷⁸ 'Ju lan 399.2: *yod zer tshad yod mtha' dang | med zer tshad med mthar khas blangs pa*.

²⁷⁹ 'Ju lan 403.3–404.3 (JL IV.7).

hence, uprooting the concept of an imagined self would not help to eliminate innate ego-grasping, the cause of suffering, just as much as it would not help a person who is afraid of the presence of a snake in his or her home to know that there is no elephant inside the house.²⁸⁰ For Rab gsal, the important point in this passage is that Candrakīrti propagated the *elimination* of the existence of an innate conception of a self as a means to overcome suffering, just as, in the example, conceiving the *non-existence* of a snake is presented as a means of dispelling the fear of the presence of a snake. With his concept of abandoning *all* four extremes, Mi pham would, however, cause unnecessary trouble, according to Rab gsal.²⁸¹

Explaining that there is no snake there in order to eliminate the fear of a snake is exactly right. But, if one says that not anything, existence of a snake, [its] non-existence, both, and neither, is the case, then – alas! – deep madness arises; thinking that one has fallen again into this severe [form of madness], one does not know what to do, and, hence, is afraid [...].

In the last passage of this section,²⁸² Rab gsal concludes that, for Mi pham, any mental activity is seen as a hindrance to awakening and – as before – accuses him of being a follower of the tradition of Hwa shang.²⁸³

Since you accept any mental activity to be self-grasping, an obscuration that hinders the path [to awakening], there is no doubt that you arrived from China in the guise of a present-day monk.

This charge is further backed up by the claim that Mi pham has based his views on the same scriptures as Hwa shang did, prior to him. With this allegation of an affinity between Mi pham and Hwa shang, the second section of Rab gsal's criticism closes.

A concise explanation of Rab gsal's own understanding of the refutation of extremes is found in a passage between the two sections of criti-

²⁸⁰ Cf. MAvBh 264f.

²⁸¹ 'Ju lan 403.5–6: sbrul gyi 'jigs pa sel phyir sbrul med par bstan pa nyid legs kyi | sbrul yod pa dang med pa dang gnyis ka dang gnyis min gang yang min zhes smras na | kye ma gting nas smyo langs pa drag po zhig dang yang phrad snyam nas ci bya gtol med du phyir zhing 'jigs pas [...].

²⁸² 'Ju lan 404.2–3 (JL IV.7c).

²⁸³ 'Ju lan 404.2–3: gang yid la byed kyang bdag 'dzin lam la gegs byed kyi sgrib par 'dod pa'i phyir na khyed rgya nag nas da lta rab byung gi gzugs kyis byon pa gor ma chag go |.

cism.²⁸⁴ As Rab gsal points out, a subject- and an object-based perspective must be distinguished for the refutation of extremes. Thus, he explains:²⁸⁵

The following presentation must be made: [with regard to the object,] emptiness is free from the extreme of annihilation, but not a mere refutation of that. Existence on the conventional level is free from the extreme of existence, but not a mere refutation of that. [With regard to the subject,] the mind that realises non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) does not refute the extreme of annihilation of non-existence on the conventional level. The mind that realises [things] to be existent on the conventional level refutes directly (*dnegos*) the extreme of annihilation and implicitly (*shugs*) the extreme of permanence.

According to Rab gsal, a combination of two distinctive types of realisations is essential in the process of eliminating extreme positions, a postulation that forms the main target of Mi pham's later criticism.

In the later part of the 'Ju lan,²⁸⁶ Rab gsal addresses a possible objection to his position and clarifies his own understanding of the process of realising emptiness. An opponent, says Rab gsal, might think that the Dge lugs conception of abandoning extreme positions entails "clinging" (*zhen pa*):²⁸⁷

Objection: Should not also clinging (*zhen pa*) in the form of the thought "A self does not exist. It exists on the conventional level" be averted?

As Rab gsal points out by referring to passages from Pramāṇa scriptures, such is not the case: direct (*mngon sum*) perception is – *per definitionem* – free from conceptualisation (*rtog pa*), and hence there is also no "clinging" (*zhen pa*), or – more technically – no determining cognition (*zhen rig*) involved in the direct realisation of emptiness.

²⁸⁴ 'Ju lan 402.2–5 (JL IV.5d).

²⁸⁵ 'Ju lan 402.3–4: *stong nyid chad mtha' dang bral ba yin yang de bkag tsam ma yin | tha snyad du yod pa | yod mtha' dang bral ba yin | de bkag tsam ma yin | bden med rtogs pa'i blos tha snyad du med pa'i chad mtha' ma khegs | tha snyad du yod par rtogs pa'i blos chad mtha' dngos dang | rtog mtha' shugs la khegs pa'i rnam bzhas [B gzhas] byed dgos la |*.

²⁸⁶ 'Ju lan 404.3–4 (JL IV.8a).

²⁸⁷ 'Ju lan 404.3: *kho na re | bdag med do | | tha snyad du yod do snyam du zhen pa'ang mi zlog gam zhe na |*.

Mi pham's reply in the *Rab lan*

Mi pham's response to the individual passages varies in length; quite naturally, he particularly emphasises the arguments directly attacking his position. Introducing his criticism, Rab gsal mentioned the "inseparable unity" (*'du 'bral med pa*) of the two *satyas* as a key to their correct understanding. While Mi pham agrees on the principle of a unity of the two *satyas*, he doubts that such could indeed be achieved by the approach of the Dge lugs tradition, which he rebukes with a rather incisive comment:²⁸⁸

We believe very much that [this (unity of the two *satyas*)] is the intention of various *sūtras* and *tantras*; we accept [this unity] in the form of a coalescence (*zung 'jug*) of emptiness and dependent origination, indivisible in nature, and hence do not accept it in such a way as to regard it as the coalescence of a non-existent rabbit's horn and an existent bull's horn [...].

Mi pham's remarks address an issue that can be seen as the heart of his criticism of the Dge lugs understanding of *satyadvaya*, which he mentions repeatedly in various contexts in his letter to Rab gsal.²⁸⁹

As shown earlier, the Dge lugs tradition places great emphasis on the delineation of the negandum (*dgag bya*) of Madhyamaka analysis, which it defines as a "truly established essence" (*bden grub kyi ngo bo*) of appearances – something that is completely non-existent, just like (the commonly used example of) a rabbit's horn. This truly established essence is neither perceived by an analysis that investigates the true nature of things, nor by an investigation of the conventional, and can therefore be utterly negated. The appearances themselves, on the other hand, are conceived of by ordinary, conventional perception, and must therefore be regarded as existent.²⁹⁰ For Mi pham, this approach entails a concept of the two *satyas* as separate, which – according to him – is based on a wrong understanding

²⁸⁸ *Rab lan* 309.2–3: *mdo rgyud du ma'i dgongs pa yin par bdag cag gis shin tu yang 'dod de | bdag cag gis stong rten 'byung zung 'jug ngo bo dbyer med du 'dod kyi | ri bong gi rwa med pa dang | glang gi rwa yod pa gnyis zung 'jug tu byed pa lta bur ni mi 'dod pas [...]*. For the whole response on that issue, see *Rab lan* 309.1–5 (RL IV.2e).

²⁸⁹ See, for example, right at the beginning of his work, where this concept is described as a common misunderstanding of later Dge lugs scholars, *Rab lan* 194.3–4: *deng sang rje bdag nyid chen po'i brgyud pa 'dzin par khas 'che ba dag gis kun rdzob rnams rang gi ngo bos mi stong par dgag bya yan gar ba bden grub kyi stong par bzhed pa mang bas stong nyid ma yin dgag tu song zhing | [...]*.

²⁹⁰ For a detailed exposition of the concept of the *dgag bya* in the Dge lugs tradition, see Tauscher 1995: 73ff.

of emptiness, i.e., that the conventional appearances themselves are not empty of their respective essence (*rang gi ngo bo*), but what is to be negated is a *separate* truly established essence (*bden grub kyi ngo bo*) of these appearances.²⁹¹

Turning to Rab gsal's criticism that Mi pham could not be counted as Mādhyamika and would be unable to achieve abiding in the freedom of the four extremes, Mi pham counters by distinguishing different levels, a strategy we have already encountered in the discussion of *bden med med dgag*. As Mi pham points out, the emptiness he refers to is located on the level of the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute, whereas his opponent's criticism refers to the level of the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute.²⁹²

In the context of the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, both we and others indeed accept such a way of eliminating the two extremes. You, however, believe merely that to be the ultimate mode of existence, whereas we believe that merely that is not the ultimate mode of existence, but that one enters the ultimate actual (*rnam grangs min pa*) absolute based on that, and we accept precisely this actual absolute as the ultimate mode of existence.

The mere middle between existence and non-existence refers only to the provisional nominal absolute, while the actual absolute is free from all extremes and conceptions. Mi pham then clarifies the meaning and usage

²⁹¹ Most famous in this regard is the statement "A vase is not empty of a vase, but of true [establishment]," that Tsong kha pa defended against criticism, arguing that a different concept of emptiness would lead to the utter non-existence of appearances. Cf. *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 259.16–260.3: *bum pa bum pas mi stong par bden pas stong pa ni | gzhan stong yin pas bum pa bum pas stong pa ni rang stong yin no zhes smra ba ni gtan nas mi rigs te | bum pa bum pas stong na bum pa la bum pa med dgos na | rang la rang med na gzhan su la yang med pas bum pa gtan med par 'gyur ro |*. That Tsong kha pa's idea of the negandum (*dgag bya*) would lead to an understanding of emptiness in the form of *gzhan stong* was, indeed, one of the charges brought by Mi pham. Karma Phuntsho presents a selective list of these accusations from a variety of Mi pham's works, which include – most prominently – the conclusions that the Dge lugs understanding of the negandum would result in an emptiness as an implicative negation (*ma yin dgag*), a *gzhan stong* type of emptiness, and an emptiness that is segregated from appearances; cf. Phuntsho 2005: 79–91. For Mi pham's criticism of the Dge lugs conception of the *dgag bya*, drawn in particular from Mi pham's commentary on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, see also Pettit 1999: 146ff.

²⁹² *Rab lan* 311.1–2: *rnam grangs pa'i don dam gyi skabs su mtha' gnyis sel tshul de 'dra rang gzhan gnyis kas 'dod mod | khyod kyis [C kyi] de tsam gnas lugs mthar thug tu 'dod la | nged cag gis de tsam gnas lugs mthar thug ma yin kyang de la brten nas mthar thug rnam grangs min pa'i don dam la 'jug par 'dod cing | rnam grangs min pa'i don dam de nyid gnas lugs mthar thug tu 'dod pa*.

of the term “abiding” (*gnas pa*). Even with regard to the actual absolute one uses the expression “to abide in the absolute” or “to abide in freedom from extremes.” In this case, actual abiding – as a conceptual state of mind – is not involved, as Mi pham explains:²⁹³

The statement “to abide in this (absolute)” expresses that one abides in not-abiding in any extreme; in actuality, however, it has the same meaning as “there is not any abiding at all.”

According to Mi pham, one can hence very well speak of abiding in the absolute; this, however, is a mere linguistic convention, and should be distinguished from abiding as a conceptual grasping of certain characteristics, a state of mind of which he disapproves, and which was the departure point of Rab gsal’s criticism.²⁹⁴

Rab gsal’s next objection, viz. that, according to Mi pham, any statement of existence or non-existence would also entail the respective extreme, is countered again with a distinction of levels.²⁹⁵ Mi pham points out that he never made the type of general statement that Rab gsal accused him of; he did say, however, that the refutation of extremes in the context of the nominal absolute is not sufficient for the context of the actual absolute that is free from proliferations.²⁹⁶

I said: in the context of investigating the conventional, non-existence on the level of true establishment and existence on the conventional level are not extremes, but indeed eliminate their respective extremes. However, it is not possible to eliminate all extremes of grasping characteristics of conceptualisation by this [means] alone. Hence, in the context of accomplishing the actual (*rnam grangs min pa*) absolute, which is free from proliferations, it is necessary to abandon even the subtle extremes of existence and non-existence of grasping characteristics.

²⁹³ Rab lan 314.5–6: *de la gnas zhes brjod pa ni mtha’ gang du’ang mi gnas pa la gnas zhes brjod kyi dngos su na gnas pa gang yang med pa dang don khyad med par song ste |*.

²⁹⁴ Rab lan 318.4–5: *bden med la gnas pa ni bden med med dgag la der zhen pa’i mtshan ma’i rtog pas gnas par smras mod kyi | mtha’ bral la gnas pa’ang de dang ’dra bar med mtha’ la gnas par ga la ’gyur te | spros bral la dgag sgrub kyi mtshan mar ’dzin pa gang yang yod par bsgrub [C sgrub] tu med do |* |. For Mi pham’s complete answer, see Rab lan 311.1–318.5 (RL IV.3a).

²⁹⁵ Rab lan 319.2–320.4 (RL IV.3b).

²⁹⁶ Rab lan 319.3–4: *tha snyad dpyod pa’i skabs su | bden grub tu med pa dang | tha snyad du yod pa mtha’ ma yin gyi rang gi ngos skal gyi mtha’ sel byed yin mod kyi | de kho nas rnam par rtog pa’i mtshan mar ’dzin pa’i mtha’ thams cad sel mi nus pas | rnam grangs min pa’i don dam spros bral sgrub pa’i skabs su mtshan mar ’dzin pa’i yod pa dang med pa’i mtha’ phra ba’ang spong dgos zhes brjod pa yin no |* |.

Mi pham continues to maintain his stance he had already explicated in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, namely, that an understanding of the middle between extremes, as emphasised in the Svātantrika scriptures or the Dge lugs tradition, does not apply to the actual absolute.

In the next section of criticism against Mi pham's concept of the actual absolute as freedom from *all* extremes, Rab gsal pointed out that the Indian masters, such as Candrakīrti, had also spoken of emptiness as a negation – in the case of the *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, the refutation of innate ego-grasping (*lhan skyes pa'i ngar 'dzin*), likened to the example of the existence of a snake. As earlier, Mi pham's main argument is that Rab gsal's criticism confuses the levels on which these statements are made:²⁹⁷

Not distinguishing between the perspective of establishing the sphere (*spyod yul*) of utterly non-conceptual freedom from proliferations, i.e., concentration (*mnyam bzhaḡ*), and the sphere of insight (*shes rab*) that distinguishes the knowables, i.e., post-concentration (*rjes thob*), [you] took those two to preclude each other, and thereby totally forsoak all points of profundity.

According to Mi pham, Candrakīrti's statement refers to the level of post-concentration (*rjes thob*). Here, a conceptual consciousness conceives the absolute as a nominal absolute, i.e., as a mere negation of a self. This corresponds to our ordinary conventions about phenomena – an area where the refutation of the other extremes does not apply.²⁹⁸

On the conventional level, we claim only selflessness and non-existence of true establishment, whereas the other three alternatives are never applied. [...] Furthermore, in the context of explaining the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, too, true [establishment] is accepted as non-existent, whereas the other alternatives are not applied. These [assertions], however, pertain to the manner in which assertions [are accepted] on the conventional level.

²⁹⁷ Rab lan 358.6–359.1: *mnyam bzhaḡ spros bral rnam par mi rtog pa'i spyod yul gtan la 'bebs pa dang rjes thob shes bya rnam 'byed kyi shes rab kyi spyod yul cha ma phyed par de gnyis kyi don 'gal bar bzung nas zab mo'i gnas thams cad mtha' gcig tu spangs te*. See Rab lan 358.4–360.3 (RL IV.8a), for the complete discussion.

²⁹⁸ Rab lan 359.3–5: *bdag cag gis ni tha snyad du bdag med dang bden med 'ba' zhig tu khas len gyi mu gzhan gsum nam yang mi sbyar ro | | [...] der ma zad rnam grangs pa'i don dam bshad pa'i skabs su yang bden med du khas len gyi mu gzhan mi sbyor kyang de dag kun rdzob tu khas len tshul du gtogs pa yin no | |*.

The same, then, is true of the example of the existence of the snake that was mentioned in Candrakīrti's work. According to Mi pham, this example is located purely on the conventional level, where the question of existence or non-existence can be answered in a clear and definitive way, without applying the other alternatives. Mi pham explains:²⁹⁹

The example of the existence or non-existence of a snake is an investigation of existence or non-existence on the conventional level. Thus, when a snake is perceived by valid cognition (*tshad ma*) at a certain place, then it is correct to say unequivocally "it exists," and "it does not exist" if it is not perceived. There is, however, no point in considering the other alternatives.

Just as assertions are made with regard to our ordinary conventional way of perceiving the world, claims of existence and non-existence are also accepted with regard to the nominal absolute. The actual absolute, on the other hand, is beyond any claims, and it is for this reason that *all* assertions and extreme positions must be left behind in this context. As Mi pham emphasises, this process of refuting the respective extremes does not lead to the acceptance of its opposite, but simply to a state that is without any assertions.³⁰⁰

Therefore, in the context of establishing the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, selflessness is asserted. In the context of the latter (i.e., the actual) absolute, it is not asserted. Why, then, should averting the earlier assertion (of selflessness) necessarily lead to the opposite, the existence of a self, since both self and selflessness are equally unperceived?

The argument of the distinction between the level of the conventional – which includes also the nominal absolute – and the level of the absolute is also applied in the last passage of this section of criticism.³⁰¹ Rab gsal

²⁹⁹ Rab lan 360.3–4: *sbrul yod med kyi dpe ni | tha snyad du yod med dpyad pa yin pas | phyogs gang du sbrul tshad mas dmigs na yod ces dang | ma dmigs na med ces mtha' gcig tu brjod rigs kyi mu gzhan sbyar don med do |* . For Mi pham's complete answer, see Rab lan 360.3–365.4 (RL IV.8b).

³⁰⁰ Rab lan 365.1–2: *de lta bu'i phyir na rnam grangs pa'i don dam gtan la 'bebs pa'i skabs su bdag med khas blang ba | don dam phyi ma'i skabs su khas ma blang bas snga ma'i khas len pa bzlog nas bdag yod du ldog dgos pa ci zhig yod de | bdag bdag med gnyis ka mgo mnyam du mi dmigs pa'i phyir ro |* .

³⁰¹ For this passage, Rab lan 365.4–368.4 (RL IV.8c).

accused Mi pham of viewing any mental activity as a hindrance to awakening, and, hence, of adhering to the nihilistic position of Hwa shang. Mi pham clarifies his position, pointing out that proliferations in the form of a clear distinction of phenomena are accepted on the level of the conventional; only the ultimate absolute is beyond any proliferation. The important point is that these two levels do not contradict each other.³⁰² Rab gsal's claim of a similarity between the positions of Mi pham and Hwa shang in that both base their view on the same corpus of scriptures is exposed as speculation. As Mi pham explains, no evidence showing which scriptures Hwa shang used remains, nor in which way such might have been interpreted. In view of the lack of any proof, one can simply not tell whether those two traditions are similar or not.³⁰³

While Mi pham gives – at times – very detailed answers to rebutt Rab gsal's objections to the explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, Rab gsal's presentation of his own position on the refutation of extremes is treated with less emphasis. In his response,³⁰⁴ Mi pham follows the distinction between the perspective of the object and of the subject suggested by Rab gsal earlier. With regard to the object, says Mi pham, Rab gsal's concept of the elimination of extremes through emptiness, on the one hand, and conventional existence, on the other, is deficient, since each of these two elements refutes only one extreme, but not the extremes of annihilation and permanence together.³⁰⁵ With regard to the subject, Rab gsal explained that the mind that realises non-existence of true establishment does not refute the extreme of annihilation. It is for this reason, says Mi pham, that the mere refutation of true establishment was not accepted as the “middle” or ultimate emptiness in his tradition:³⁰⁶

This very claim that – from the perspective of the mind, i.e., the subject, – a mind that realises non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) does not refute the extreme of annihilation, was well said. We also said that this (mind) does not refute the extreme of annihilation, and thus the middle is not fulfilled solely by a mind that grasps [the middle] as merely that (non-existence of true establishment).

³⁰² *Rab lan* 365.4–366.1

³⁰³ *Rab lan* 366.1–3.

³⁰⁴ *Rab lan* 352.3–354.3 (RL IV.6b).

³⁰⁵ *Rab lan* 352.4: 'on kyang de gnyis re res rtag chad mi khegs par khas blangs pa 'dis chog 'dug gi.

³⁰⁶ *Rab lan* 352.5–6: yul can gyi blo'i ngos nas bden med rtogs pa'i blos chad mtha' ma khegs par khas blangs pa de nyid legs par smras pa ste | kho bo cag gis kyang des chad mtha' mi khegs pas de tsam zhig tu 'dzin pa'i blo de kho nas dbu ma'i go mi chod par smras pa yin no | |.

While Rab gsal described the realisation of existence on the conventional level as being able to refute the extreme of annihilation directly and the extreme of permanence indirectly, Mi pham points out that the realisation of the coalescence of emptiness and appearances or the “realisation that dependently arising phenomena are without an essence (*ngo bo*), like an illusion or a reflection,” can refute both extremes together, thus rendering Rab gsal’s concept of a direct and indirect refutation of extremes superfluous.³⁰⁷

The last issue of the current topic is Rab gsal’s refutation of a possible objection to his position.³⁰⁸ Rab gsal anticipates that an opponent might criticise the Dge lugs approach of eliminating extremes through “non-existence on the absolute level and existence on the conventional level,” since it would appear to involve “clinging” (*zhen pa*) or determining cognition (*zhen rig*), and explained that such is not the case in *direct* (*mngon sum*) perception of emptiness. Mi pham dismisses this refutation, countering that the absence of determining cognition (*zhen rig*) is not specific to the direct cognition of emptiness, but is common to all kinds of direct cognition.³⁰⁹

There is nothing special about this mere absence of determining cognition when emptiness is realised directly; all [kinds of] direct cognition are, in a similar way, free of conceptualisation.

For Mi pham, the important point in a direct realisation of emptiness – conceived of as free of all proliferations (*spros bral*) – is, however, that it is not only free of determining cognition (*zhen rig*), but from any kind of subject-object dichotomy. This sort of understanding of emptiness must be cultivated already at the stage of conceptual reflection about the absolute, so that what one understands intellectually and what one later realises directly – in a process that is beyond a dualistically operating mind – are the same.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Rab lan 352.6–353.1: *tha snyad du yod pas chad mtha’ dngos su khegs shing | rtag mtha’ shugs la khegs pa spyir [AC spyin] de ltar yin te | brten nas ’byung ba’i chos ngo bo nyid med pa sgyu ma dang gzugs brnyan lta bur zung ’jug tu rtogs na dngos shugs sbyar kyang rung la ma sbyar kyang mi rung ba med de |*.

³⁰⁸ For Mi pham’s complete reply in this matter, see Rab lan 369.4–371.5 (RL IV.9a).

³⁰⁹ Rab lan 370.1: *stong nyid mngon sum rtogs tshe zhen rig dang bral ba tsam ’di’i khyad chos ci yang ma yin te | mngon sum thams cad de ’dra’i rtog bral yin no | |*.

³¹⁰ Rab lan 371.3–5: *bden med spros bral mngon sum rtogs pa’i gnyis su med pa’i blo’am ye shes de la zhen rig gi rtog pa dang bral bar ma zad | rnam par rtog [B rtogs] pa’i gzung ’dzin gang yang med pa dang | dbu ma yin pa dang | rnal ’byor mngon sum gyi tshad [C tshan] mas de kho na nyid rtogs pa yin par bsgrub nus te | thos bsam gyis de gtan la ’bebs pa’i skabs su’ang de ltar bsgrub pa de mngon sum rtogs pa yin pas thos bsam sgom gsum ya ma bral ba dang | go don rtogs don mtshungs par gyur pa yin no | |*.

Rab gsal's reply in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

Although remarks on the current issue, the correct understanding of emptiness, are found throughout Rab gsal's second criticism, these are often very brief and formulated in such a way that a concrete connection to a specific earlier discussion cannot be established with certainty. Further, Rab gsal's criticism often aims at pointing out inconsistencies between individual statements or positions found in Mi pham's texts, rather than continuing the central theme of the earlier discussions.

In one sentence of his response to the first section of Rab gsal's criticism, for example, Mi pham also made a distinction between the two *satyas* similar to the conception of "non-existence on the absolute level and existence on the conventional level."³¹¹ Since he repeatedly disapproved of this position with regard to the Dge lugs stance on understanding *satyadvaya*, a direct contradiction is laid open, according to Rab gsal. Rab gsal's actual argument is very short, but he added some polemical remarks to it, implying that Mi pham adhered to a nihilistic view.³¹²

At the end of his reply to the second section of criticism, Mi pham countered Rab gsal's accusation of a similarity between his tradition and that of Hwa shang Mahāyāna by arguing that such is – in view of the lack of the latter's scriptures – pure speculation. Rab gsal seems to assume that Mi pham suggested that there are no Hwa shang scriptures in general, and refers to different sources that testify their existence. This criticism is found – formulated in a very similar way – in two separate passages of the *Ga bur chu rgyun*, once in the first section, which reveals inner contradictions in Mi pham's statements,³¹³ and once in the third section, which aims at eliminating wrong conceptions.³¹⁴ The content, however, is the same in both sections, and Mi pham answers them together with a brief remark in his later reply.

While the two earlier issues are limited to criticising specific statements by Mi pham, an expression of Rab gsal's understanding of emptiness is found in a passage that is not directly related to the topics discussed earlier.³¹⁵ Here, Rab gsal emphasises that his view of emptiness, too – differ-

³¹¹ The passage that Rab gsal quotes is *Rab lan* 309.4–5: *don du skye ba med kyang skye ba ltar snang*.

³¹² For Rab gsal's complete criticism, see *Ga bur chu rgyun* 441.1–3 (GC I.5m).

³¹³ See *Ga bur chu rgyun* 441.6–442.3 (GC I.5o). It is, however, not clear which "inner contradiction" Rab gsal is pointing at.

³¹⁴ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 460.6–461.3 (GC III.2c).

³¹⁵ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 441.3–6 (GC I.5n).

ent from what Mi pham had assumed – arrives at a true unity of the two *satyas*:³¹⁶

We say: due to the reason that things are empty of true establishment, arising etc. exists; and due to the reason that arising and ceasing exist, [things] are devoid of true [establishment]. Consequently, the meaning that [things] arise out of emptiness and that emptiness appears as cause and effect is well explained; hence, the important point of the coalescence of the two *satyas* is not cast away.

Mi pham's reply in the *Yang lan*

Even though the two objections that Rab gsal raised with regard to inner contradictions in Mi pham's writings did not contribute to the clarification of the larger issue at stake in the earlier discussion, Mi pham considered it necessary to reply to them.

The motive behind his answer to Rab gsal's first objection seems obvious. Mi pham does not address the inconsistency between different statements that Rab gsal pointed out, but focuses solely on Rab gsal's polemical remarks accusing Mi pham of nihilism. For Mi pham, Rab gsal's taunting comment is merely a "teasing remark" (*mtshar gtam*) and – taking it that way – he replies by making even harsher comments about doctrines that are accepted in the Dge lugs tradition.³¹⁷ While this mocking exchange of polemics led away from the original discussion, Mi pham classified it, nevertheless, as one of the "issues of major significance" (*don che ba*). Obviously, even if presented in the form of a joke, the accusation that Mi pham and his Rnying ma tradition adhered to a nihilist view is considered important.

The issue of the existence of Hwa shang's scriptures is considered of "minor significance" (*don chung ba*) and categorised accordingly.³¹⁸ Mi

³¹⁶ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 441.4–5: *kho bo cag dngos po bden grub kyis stong pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis skye ba sogs yod la | skye 'gag yod pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis bden par med ces smra'o | | des na stong nyid dag las rab tu skye ba dang stong pa nyid rgyu 'bras su 'char ba'i don legs par bshad pas bden gnyis zung 'jug gi gnad ma bor la |*.

³¹⁷ See *Yang lan* 468.6–469.2 (YL II.c): *khong mtshar gtam la dgyes tshul mdzad pas | don du med pa'i gral mgor bzhugs sogs gsungs pa la mtshar zhus | khyed ni tshig gi rtog chen mdzad pa 'di 'dra'i thugs dam la sku tshes ril por brtson pa mi lhod pa'i klog pa ba ya mtshan can zhig legs [B lags] pas | don du med pa'i tshogs dbus der spyang drangs nas zhig pa dngos por gyur pa'i khri la bzhugs su gsal zhing | med dgag stong rkyang gi chos 'khor rgya chen po bskor bar mdzad pa la | ming rkyang btags yod tsam gyi stong 'bul khri 'bul phul bar dgyes par bzhes shig |*.

³¹⁸ *Yang lan* 467.1–2 (YL I.j).

pham clarifies that he was simply pointing out that the scriptures of Hwa shang are no longer extant nowadays, and thus it is difficult to determine the exact position taken by Hwa shang. Mi pham says that Rab gsal, in contrast, states repeatedly that the Hwa shang scriptures exist, but is not able to deliver their intention.³¹⁹

Mi pham's response to Rab gsal's emphasis on the unity of the two *satyas* for a correct understanding of emptiness was already mentioned above.³²⁰ While both adversaries disagree on the role and the emphasis that is placed on the negational moment in understanding emptiness, it is at this point of the unity of the two *satyas* that they find common ground, and it is therefore not surprising that Mi pham explicitly quotes Rab gsal's earlier position and asserts that it is fully capable of eliminating not only the extreme of permanence (*rtag mtha'*), but also the extreme of annihilation (*chad mtha'*).³²¹

Synopsis

As commonly accepted, Madhyamka philosophy culminates in a view that escapes both the extreme of eternalism (*rtag mtha'*) and the extreme of annihilation (*chad mtha'*). In their precise understanding on how this can be achieved, however, Tibetan philosophers disagreed.

In the Dge lugs tradition, the fundamental Madhyamaka statement that things are "neither existent nor non-existent" was interpreted – in order to follow logical principles – by adding certain specifications: understood correctly, it means that things are "neither existent on the absolute level nor non-existent on the conventional level." For Mi pham, in contrast, this view is based on a conception of the two *satyas* as separate, and conforms to the way emptiness is approached in the Svātantrika tradition with a – temporary – emphasis on the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute. A direct approach to the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute – the characteristic of the Prāsaṅgika tradition, as it is seen by Mi pham – goes beyond the dichotomy of existence and non-existence and is free of all modes of grasping (*'dzin stangs*), assertions (*khas len*), proliferations (*spros pa*) with regard to all four extremes, existence, non-existence, both, and neither, and thereby realises the unity or coalescence of the two *satyas*.

³¹⁹ Yang lan 467.1: *ha shang gi gzhuṅg yod ces snga phyir* [B *phyi*] *lan gnyis de'i dgongs rdzogs lta bur ma bskyal kyang* |.

³²⁰ See above, p.165.

³²¹ See Yang lan 470.3–4: *stong nyid rgyu 'bras su 'char yod* [B *tshul*] *go zhiṅ bden gnyis ngo bo dbyer med du rtogs na | de 'dra'i rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid kyis chad mtha' sel bar the tshom ga la yod* |. Here, the first part is a direct quote of *Ga bur chu rgyun* 441.4.

Rab gsal argued that the Dge lugs interpretation of the unity of the two *satyas* as non-existence on the absolute level and existence on the conventional level is not an invention of his own tradition, but corresponds to the intention of authoritative scriptures. For him, the combination of two types of cognitions is essential: while the realisation of non-existence on the absolute level does not refute the extreme of annihilation, the elimination of this extreme is effectuated by the realisation of existence on the conventional level. Mi pham's demand to go beyond this concept would, according to Rab gsal, inevitably lead to a nihilistic position – similar to that of Hwa shang Mahāyāna – where any mental activity is seen as a hindrance to awakening.

With regard to this issue, too, both positions seem to be firmly established in the doctrinal background of the two adversaries. In its approach to the unity of the two *satyas*, the Dge lugs tradition emphasised logical principles, while for Mi pham, the absolute is ultimately beyond logic and language. Both, however, agreed that the realisation of a unity of the two *satyas* is of the utmost importance; in his last letter, Mi pham made some conciliatory remarks to the effect that Rab gsal's concept of the two *satyas* would also be capable of refuting both the extreme of permanence (*rtaḡ mtha'*) and the extreme of annihilation (*chad mtha'*).

Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika

The classification of Indian Madhyamaka as Svātantrika or Prāsaṅgika is known to be problematic. Ostensibly not an Indian invention, this distinction reflects an attempt to systematise an intricate tradition made by Tibetan doxographers in the eleventh century.³²² While all later Tibetan philosophers readily use this distinction in their categorisation of their

³²² Cf. Dreyfus & McClintock 2003, for discussions of the differentiation of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika traditions from various perspectives, and – more recently – Seyfort Ruegg 2006: 324ff., who lists seven criteria for the distinction of the two Madhyamaka traditions. The question, that of course arises, is to what extent this Tibetan categorisation is useful or harmful when one investigates the Indian tradition. In contrast to more sceptical voices, Seyfort Ruegg has argued in favour of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction as a hermeneutical tool, even for approaching the Indian tradition, provided that its limitations are considered: "Recognition of the constraints and limitations of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction as applied in the sources need not lead inexorably to the conclusion that it is arbitrary historically and worthless philosophically, that it has neither descriptive (taxonomic and doxographic) nor analytical and heuristic usefulness. Provided it is handled with due care, and with an appreciation of its historical limits, it can prove interesting even for the study of the Indian sources, in spite of the fact that the distinction as such has not been mentioned there." (Seyfort Ruegg 2006: 345)

Indian predecessors, as well as a means of self-identification and delimitation of their own doctrinal space, the role they ascribe to this distinction varies. Tsong kha pa, the founder of the Dge lugs tradition, is particularly famous for conceiving of a fundamental difference between the two Madhyamaka traditions and emphasising the supremacy of the Prāsaṅgika. This is expressed *inter alia* in the *Dka' gnad/gnas brgyad*, a work that formulates the “eight difficult points,” i.e., the eight core characteristics of the Prāsaṅgika tradition.³²³ For other Tibetan scholars, such as Rong ston (1367–1449) and Go rams pa (1429–1489), the differences are minor and consist only in methodological issues.³²⁴ The exact characterisation of each of these two Madhyamaka traditions, as well as the general problem of the nature of their differences, have been issues of dispute throughout Tibetan history and were naturally also a “hot topic” in the debates between Rab gsal and Mi pham discussed here.

Mi pham's explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*

As has already been explained above in the two sub-sections of the fourth topic, Mi pham distinguished between a nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) and an actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute. He characterised the former as a provisional approach to emptiness that conceives of the two *satyas* as separate, resolving the statement that things are “neither existent nor non-existent” by adding specifications, interpreting it as “neither existent on the absolute level, nor non-existent on the conventional level.” Mi pham described this approach as the – temporal – focus of the Svātantrika tradition and his explanations further implied a resemblance to the way emptiness is conceived in the Dge lugs tradition. The latter absolute, in contrast, was

³²³ As pointed out by Lopez, the establishment of the Prāsaṅgika view as *the* pivotal system in Tibetan philosophy was, to a large extent, influenced by Tsong kha pa: “The primacy of the Prāsaṅgika view was firmly established for the Tibetan tradition by Tsong-kha-pa, the founder of the Ge-luk (*dGe-lugs*) order, in works such as the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*Lam rim chen mo*), the *Essence of the Good Explanations* (*Legs bshad snying po*), and the *Great Commentary on (Candrakīrti's) 'Supplement'* (*'Jug dik chen mo*). In these works he presents both the central issues and most intricate points of the Prāsaṅgika school with a precision and style unmatched in Buddhist literature. Thus, it can be said that from the time of Tsong-kha-pa, if not before, the Prāsaṅgika school was the dominant philosophical system in Tibet.” (Lopez 1987: 22) However, even though the Dge lugs school achieved a hegemonic status with regard to its political power, and thus its philosophical ideas had a great impact on Tibetan philosophy as a whole, there were still philosophers who had a quite different opinion on the nature of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction.

³²⁴ Dreyfus 2003a: 318–328 and Cabezon 2003: 289ff. give an overview of the respective positions.

depicted as a direct approach to the ultimate union of the two *satyas* emphasised in the Prāsaṅgika tradition, but also shared – ultimately – by the Svātantrikas. While Mi pham used the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction (a distinction that was commonly accepted in his philosophical milieu) and aligned it with two different approaches to the absolute, he relativised the differences between these traditions by pointing to their common ultimate aim. In the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, he explained that:³²⁵

Profound scholars, such as Bu ston and others, indeed proclaimed (*mdzad*) that the Prāsaṅgika-Svātantrika distinction is only a personal invention of the Tibetans and that it did not develop in India.³²⁶ Even though there is not any difference with regard to the ultimate meaning, there is a difference owing to ways of explaining the scriptures. [...] Therefore, there is not any difference with regard to the ultimate intention of those great charioteers of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika [traditions], but [these] are merely [different] ways of explanation, insofar as they emphasise the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) or the actual (*rnam grangs min pa*) absolute.

As expected, Mi pham's focus on the common intention of both traditions, but also his depictions of the individual approaches was troublesome for his Dge lugs opponent, whose tradition emphasises more the difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika tradition, as well as the supremacy of the latter.

Rab gsal's criticism in the 'Ju lan

In Rab gsal's letter, four passages are found that specifically address the aforementioned topic. The first two criticise Mi pham's explanation of the Svātantrika tradition, the third his depiction of the Prāsaṅgika tradition, while the last one discusses the question of whether both traditions share a common aim or not.³²⁷

³²⁵ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 6.3–5: mkhas mchog bu ston la sogs pas ni thal rang gi khyad par 'di bod [C bad] kyi rtog bzor zad de | rgya gar du ma byung bar mdzad mod | mthar thug gi don la khyad par ci yang med kyang gzhung 'chad tshul gyi dbang du khyad par yod de | [...] des na thal rang gi shing rta chen po de dag mthar thug gi dgongs pa'i gnad la khyad par ci yang med kyang rnam grangs dang rnam grangs min pa'i don dam rtsal du bton te 'chad tshul tsam yin te |.

³²⁶ As noted in Viehbeck 2012: 305, this sentence has been interpreted in different ways in the secondary literature. There, I also refer to passages of Bu ston's writings that might be the basis for Mi pham's assessment of his view.

³²⁷ These passages are 'Ju lan 397.5–6 (JL IV.1c), 400.6–401.2 (JL IV.4e), 401.2–3 (JL IV.4f), and 401.3–5 (JL IV.5a), respectively.

In the first argument,³²⁸ Rab gsal accuses Mi pham of contradicting his own assertions. To prove that also in the Svātantrika tradition “non-existence itself is not assumed in the sense of the ultimate mode of existence,”³²⁹ Mi pham quoted a certain passage from the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra* – a Svātantrika text – where arising, as well as the non-existence of arising, is negated.³³⁰ This passage, according to Rab gsal, points to the elimination of all extremes, and hence contradicts Mi pham’s explanation that the Svātantrika emphasises the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute that was said to refer to the refutation of the extreme of existence alone.

This very same argument is brought forth in a later section of the work.³³¹ Again, Rab gsal refers to the relevant passage of the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra* to show that the Svātantrikas accept the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute, and that such was also claimed by Mi pham. This, says Rab gsal, is in direct contradiction to Mi pham’s other statements.³³²

You said: the Svātantrikas accepts only the nominal [absolute]
and the Prāsaṅgikas only the actual.

While one would expect that Rab gsal was mostly offended by Mi pham’s equation of the Svātantrika approach with that of the Dge lugs tradition, Rab gsal confines his criticism of Mi pham’s exposition to the inconsistencies presented above.

Also with regard to Mi pham’s description of the Prāsaṅgika tradition, Rab gsal points out contradictions between earlier and later statements.³³³ In the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, Mi pham stated that the Prāsaṅgikas do not bifurcate the absolute.³³⁴ According to this statement, writes Rab gsal, it would follow that the Prāsaṅgikas accept “non-establishment on the absolute level” (*don dam par ma grub pa*) as ultimate emptiness.³³⁵

³²⁸ ‘Ju lan 397.5–6 (JL IV.1c).

³²⁹ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 5.2: *med pa nyid kyang gnas lugs mthar thug gi don du mi bzhed de* |.

³³⁰ I.e., MA 71ab:

skye ba la sogs med pa’i phyir | |

skye ba med la sogs mi srid | |.

³³¹ Cf. ‘Ju lan 400.6–401.2 (JL IV.4e).

³³² ‘Ju lan 400.6: *khyod kyi rang rgyud pas rnam grangs tsam dang* | *thal ’gyur bas rnam grangs ma yin pa tsam ’dod zer bas*.

³³³ This is discussed in ‘Ju lan 401.2–3 (JL IV.4f).

³³⁴ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 6.5–6: *des na thal ’gyur ba’i skabs ’dir zung ’jug spros pa dang bral ba’i dbu ma chen po nyid rtsal du ’don pas ’di’i lugs la rnam grangs dang rnam grangs min pa’i don dam gnyis su dbye ba med par shes par bya’o* |.

³³⁵ ‘Ju lan 401.2–3: *de’i don dam par ma grub pa mtha’ bzhi dang bral ba’i stong nyid chen por ’dod par thal* | *rnam grangs par mi ’dod pa de’i phyir* |.

It follows that those (Prāsaṅgikas) accept non-establishment on the absolute level as the “Great Emptiness” (*stong nyid chen po*), which is free of the four extremes, since they do not accept it as the nominal (absolute).

Rab gsal’s conclusion assumes, of course, that the Prāsaṅgikas accept non-establishment on the absolute level. But if they do accept it, then they have to accept it as ultimate emptiness, since they do not distinguish between provisional and ultimate emptiness. That the Prāsaṅgikas accept non-establishment on the absolute level as ultimate emptiness contradicts, however, another statement of the *Nor bu ke ta ka* (already quoted in the first criticism of this section), where Mi pham pointed out that “non-existence itself is not assumed in the sense of the ultimate mode of existence.”³³⁶

Rab gsal’s last criticism³³⁷ with regard to the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction attacks Mi pham’s statement that “there is not any difference with regard to the ultimate intention of those great charioteers of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika [tradition].”³³⁸ According to Rab gsal, this position obliterates the differences between the two traditions. If one claims that there is a shared ultimate intention of these two, then one could also claim the same for other Buddhist traditions, such as the Cittamātrins, Sautrāntikas, and Vaibhāṣikas. Further, quarrels between the thought of Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti would be meaningless, since their intention would have been the same anyway. A third unwanted consequence of Mi pham’s position pointed out by Rab gsal is that a commonly accepted characteristic used to distinguish both traditions, viz. the question of whether the establishment (of appearances) by an “own-characteristic” (*rang mtshan gyis grub pa*) on the conventional level is to be accepted or not, would be irrelevant.³³⁹

Mi pham’s reply in the *Rab lan*

In his response to Rab sal’s criticism, Mi pham seizes the opportunity to further clarify his own understanding of the respective positions of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika traditions, about which he elaborates at some

³³⁶ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 5.2: *med pa nyid kyang gnas lugs mthar thug gi don du mi bzhed de |*.

³³⁷ Cf. *Ju lan* 401.3–5 (JL IV.5a).

³³⁸ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 6.4–5: *thal rang gi shing rta chen po de dag mthar thug gi dgongs pa’i gnad la khyad par ci yang med*.

³³⁹ Cf. *Ju lan* 401.5: *mkhas pa’i rjes su zlos te kun rdzob tu rang mtshan gyis grub pa ‘dod mi ‘dod gyi khyad par smras pa’ang don med du ngal bar zad do |*.

length. The current presentation will, however, focus on the actual answers to the arguments brought forth by Rab gsal.

In the first criticism, Rab gsal indicated a contradiction between Mi pham's explanations linking the Svātantrika approach to the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute alone, and other explanations pointing to the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute. Mi pham answers by clarifying his position:³⁴⁰ both traditions, Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, arrive at a common intention, the actual absolute, which is free from proliferations. Their approach, however, is different, as the Prāsaṅgika focuses on this ultimate absolute instantly, while the Svātantrika develops this understanding in a gradual way. Mi pham explains that:³⁴¹

In the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika texts both [kinds of] absolute are stressed and the meaning of freedom from proliferations [is explained] instantly or step by step. [Thus, these are] merely [different] ways of explanation, but ultimately they have the same intention in the form of freedom from proliferations itself. As [this is our] belief, the fault [you mentioned] does not apply.

In his response to Rab gsal's second accusation, which was aimed at the very same issue as the first one, Mi pham responds in a slightly different way.³⁴² In both traditions, Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, concepts of existence and non-existence are refuted *one after another* by applying different lines of reasoning to the phenomena appearing, but the meaning of freedom from proliferations *cannot* be accomplished *in one instant*. While both traditions appear to be similar in this regard, one must distinguish between them, since the Svātantrika tradition accepts assertions (*khas len*) with regard to the absolute, while the Prāsaṅgika does not.³⁴³ Mi pham's thought here seems to be that any specific process of eliminating extremes must proceed in a gradual manner – also in the Prāsaṅgika tradition. There is, however, a difference in this process between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika insofar as assertions (of any kind) are involved or not. While the Śvātantrikas

³⁴⁰ For Mi pham's complete answer, see *Rab lan* 292.6–293.4 (RL IV.1b).

³⁴¹ *Rab lan* 293.1–2: *thal* [A *thel*] *rang gi gzhung du don dam gnyis po rtal du bton nas spros bral gyi* [C *gyis*] *don rim dang cig car gyi 'chad tshul tsam las mthar thug spros bral nyid du dgongs pa gcig par 'dod pas skyon 'di* [C *de*] *mi 'jug ste* |.

³⁴² *Rab lan* 333.6–338.4 (RL IV.4e), q.v. for the complete passage.

³⁴³ *Rab lan* 333.6–334.1: *thal rang su'i lugs la'ang ji ltar snang ba'i dngos po rnam la mtha' bzhi skye 'gog dang gcig du bral la sogs pa'i rigs pa'i sgo nas dmigs pa rnam re re nas 'gog pa la spros bral gyi don cig char sgrub ma nus pas thad kar bltas na yul bkag tshul khyad med pa lta bur snang yang | mthar rang lugs la don dam pa la* [C *la om.*] *khas len yod med kyi 'jog mtshams 'di la gtugs nas khyad 'byed dgos te* |.

accept the assertion of non-existence on the absolute level and existence on the conventional level with regard to the nominal absolute, they do not accept this absolute to be the actual absolute. Therefore, writes Mi pham, one could say that the Svātantrikas accept both absolutes:³⁴⁴

Taking both, non-existence on the absolute level and existence on the conventional level, as an inseparable unity, [the Svātantrikas] focus on [the nominal absolute] that contains assertions (*khas len*) in every aspect and accomplish it. However, they do not take this nominal absolute that contains assertions (*khas len*) to be the ultimate mode of existence, and, ultimately, assert it (i.e., the ultimate mode of existence) to be without proliferations. But, since [the Svātantrikas] accomplish mainly just this earlier absolute, one may ask which of the two absolutes is not accepted in the Svātantrika tradition? [The answer is:] [We] believe that they accept both.

Following Mi pham, the difference between both traditions thus lies in their pedagogical approach: while the Svātantrikas conceive of the realisation of the nominal absolute as an indispensable step for the realisation of the actual absolute, and in this sense proceed in a gradual way, the Prāsaṅgikas focus on the latter absolute right away. The final aim, however, remains the same for both traditions, and there is thus no contradiction in saying that the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute is accepted equally by the Svātantrikas.

Further, Mi pham deals with the contradictions that Rab gsal mentioned with regard to the earlier's explanations of the Prāsaṅgika tradition in his extensive presentation of his view of the Prāsaṅgika.³⁴⁵ In his criticism, Rab gsal established the Prāsaṅgika view of emptiness as “non-establishment on the absolute level” (*don dam par ma grub pa*). For Mi pham, in contrast, inserting specifications, such as “on the absolute level,” corresponds to the approach of the Svātantrika tradition, but not that followed by the Prāsaṅgika.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Rab lan 334.6–335.2: *don dam par med pa dang | tha snyad du yod pa gnyis 'du 'bral med par bzung nas rnam pa kun tu khas len dang bcas pa rtsal du bton nas bsgrub mod kyi rnam grangs pa'i don dam khas len dang bcas pa de mthar thug gi gnas lugs su ma bzung bar mthar thug spros med du bzhed kyang | don dam snga ma nyid gtso bor bsgrubs pas rang rgyud pa'i lugs la | don dam gnyis po gang khas mi len zhes 'dri na | gnyis ka khas len zhes 'dod de |*.

³⁴⁵ Rab lan 338.4–348.5 (RL IV.4f).

³⁴⁶ Rab lan 338.4–5: *thal 'gyur ba'i gzhung du ni | 'jug par don dam gtan la 'bebs byed mtha' bzhi'i skye ba 'gogs pa'i rigs pa gsungs pa des [B nges] kyang rang rgyud pa ltar don dam par skye ba bkag nas tha snyad du skye ba yod par 'dod [B 'don] na thal rang gi khyad par phyed ba med par 'gyur ro |*.

With regard to the Prāsaṅgika scriptures, the reasoning of the “arising and ceasing according to the four alternatives” (*mtha' bzhi'i skye ba 'gogs pa*), which establishes the absolute, is mentioned in the [*Madhyamaka*] *avatāra*. If this also refuted arising on the absolute level and accepted the existence of arising on the conventional level, similar to the Svātantrika [tradition], then there would be no distinction between the Prāsaṅgika and the Svātantrika.

As he has already done in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, Mi pham accuses the Dge lugs tradition of pursuing a line that does not accord with the procedure of the Prāsaṅgika tradition in its approach to emptiness, but rather corresponds to the way emptiness is established – provisionally – by the Svātantrikas. According to him, the Prāsaṅgikas, in contrast to the Svātantrikas, do not add a specification when they refute arising by various lines of reasoning. By this means, they arrive directly at the unity of the two *satyas*, which, according to Mi pham, is the essential point in understanding emptiness. Mi pham explains:³⁴⁷

Thus, if one investigates by way of [the reasoning of] the four alternatives, then arising is established to be non-existent not only on the absolute level, but also on the conventional level. In this way (*'di ltar*), this reasoning establishes these dependently arising appearances which exist undeceptively as having a nature (*rang bzhin*) that has been without arising and ceasing since time without beginning. Hence, [this reasoning] goes beyond the mere non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) of the nominal [absolute] and teaches the actual absolute, the indivisibility of the two *satyas*, freedom from proliferations, the *dharmadhātu* itself.

In what follows, Mi pham supports his view of the Prāsaṅgika tradition by referring to various passages of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* and its auto-commentary, a text that is also accepted in the Dge lugs tradition as the most important Indian authority on the Prāsaṅgika position. Thus, Mi pham counters Rab gsal's criticism by showing that his argumentation is based on a wrong understanding of the Prāsaṅgika view of emptiness.

³⁴⁷ Rab lan 339.4–5: *de ltar mtha' bzhi'i tshul gyis dpyad na skye ba ni don dam par ma zad | tha snyad du yang med par gtan la phab pa'i rigs pa des 'di ltar rten 'byung gi snang ba bslu med du yod pa 'di rnams ye nas skye ba dang 'gag pa med pa'i rang bzhin du gtan la phab [AC phe] pa yin pas | rnam grangs pa'i bden med tsaṃ las 'das te rnam grangs min pa'i don dam bden gnyis dbyer med spros bral chos kyi dbyings nyid du bstan pa yin no | |.*

Rab gsal's last accusation concerns the question of to what extent Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika can be claimed to be similar. In his answer,³⁴⁸ Mi pham reiterates his position that both traditions are similar in certain aspects and, most importantly, in their ultimate aim:³⁴⁹

Both Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas are equally Mādhyamikas that establish all inner and outer phenomena as lacking true establishment (*bden med*) by means of reasoning, and, on the ultimate level, they also equally accept freedom from proliferations. Hence, it is accepted that the intentions of those two are ultimately identical, since [they both] teach dependent arising and emptiness, the non-dual door to peace.

Mi pham denies Rab gsal's accusation that this position would wipe out the legitimate differences between these and other Buddhist traditions, as well as the differences between the two themselves. According to him, the differences Rab gsal saw jeopardised by Mi pham's position are well established. This, however, does not change his opinion that the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika aim at a common goal and, in this regard, are similar. Using the phrasing of Rab gsal's earlier criticism, Mi pham turns the former's words against him:³⁵⁰

Therefore, pointing out (*'phen pa*) such a consequence (*thal ba*) is merely to state without [any established] tradition. A basis other than that is directly discarded by valid cognition (*tshad ma*).

As Rab gsal had done, Mi pham also attacks his opponent by arguing that his accusations are without any basis.

Rab gsal's reply in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

Again, the issues at stake pertain to several objections raised in Rab gsal's response. There is, however, no substantial continuation of the earlier discussion.

³⁴⁸ Rab lan 349.2–350.6 (RL IV.5).

³⁴⁹ Rab lan 349.3–4: *thal rang gnyis kas phyi nang gi chos thams cad gtan tshigs kyi sgo nas bden med du gtan la phab pa'i dbu ma pa yin par 'dra zhing | mthar thug spros bral kyang 'dod par 'dra bas | de gnyis mthar thug gi don la dngos pa gcig par 'dod de | zhi sgo gnyis su med pa rten 'byung dang stong pa nyid bstan pa'i phyir ro |* |.

³⁵⁰ Rab lan 350.1: *des na de 'dra'i thal ba 'phen [A 'phan] pa ni lugs med pa'i smra ba tsam las rten gzhan tshad mas dngos su bsal lo |* |. As often, Mi pham uses expressions from Rab gsal's criticism in his response. This phrase, for example, is found in 'Ju lan 401.4: *lugs med pa las rten gzhan tshad mas gsal lo |* |.

It seems that the assessment of the distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika is firmly established in the doctrinal background of the respective traditions. While the Dge lugs school claims that there is a major difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, Mi pham – with Go rams pa *et al.* – views these differences as superficial and concerning mainly pedagogical matters. In view of these fundamental differences, there is no common ground.

Synopsis

Since the eleventh century, Tibetan philosophers have been using the distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika to systematise the Indian Madhyamaka tradition, and also to demarcate their own doctrinal space. The role they ascribe to this distinction, however, varies. While earlier Sa skya scholars, such as Rong ston and Go rams pa, perceived it as concerning mainly methodological issues, the Dge lugs tradition, beginning with its founder Tsong kha pa, emphasised a fundamental difference between both traditions and established the supremacy of the Prāsaṅgika.

While Mi pham uses this distinction to delineate two different approaches to the absolute, he followed his intellectual predecessors by emphasising their common ultimate aim. For Mi pham, the Svātantrika is characterised by a – temporary – focus on the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute that entails a separation of the two *satyas*, conceiving of things as “neither existent on the absolute level, nor non-existent on the conventional level.” In so doing, Mi pham ascribed to the Dge lugs stance on *satyadvaya* a close connection to the way emptiness is approached through the methodology of the Svātantrika tradition, a tradition from which the Dge lugs school tries hard to distance itself. For Mi pham, however, this approach is only of provisional importance. Ultimately, the Svātantrika, too, arrives at understanding emptiness or the absolute to be free from all proliferations and extremes, a realisation, which the Prāsaṅgika tradition aims at from the very beginning.

While Mi pham ascribed to the Dge lugs school a close resemblance to the Svātantrika tradition, this specific aspect, did not figure prominently in the later discussions. Instead, Rab gsal decided to directly criticise Mi pham’s explanations of the two approaches, often by pointing out contradictions between individual statements. He also attacked Mi pham for playing down the fundamental difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika that is accounted for in his school.

In his answer, Mi pham seized the opportunity to further clarify his understanding of the two traditions, giving lengthy explanations of this

matter. As before, he pointed out that a difference between them is legitimate, but only of a superficial nature; their ultimate aim is the same.

It seems that, owing to the heavy doctrinal weight that is connected with this issue, progress in the sense of an approximation of claims was not possible; instead, the debate remained restricted, for the most part, to the repetition of established doctrinal positions.

The absolute as an object of mind (*blo*) and words (*sgra*)

Until now, we have discussed the different concepts of the absolute set forth by Mi pham and Rab gsal, as well as the perspectives of the two Mādhyamika traditions, the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika, in this matter. The last of the four issues of this fourth topic pertains to another “hot topic” in Madhyamaka philosophy specifically, but also in the Buddhist tradition as a whole. Buddhist scriptures, especially of the *Prajñāpāramitā* genre, describe the absolute (*paramārtha*) as inconceivable and beyond the scope of linguistic expression. On the other hand, it is commonly accepted, and also communicated in the literary corpus of Buddhism, that the Buddhist path leads to a realisation of the absolute and that this path uses oral or written instructions as guidance. In his seminal paper on this problem, Seyfort Ruegg summarised this tension in the following way:³⁵¹

In other words, if the *paramārtha* is altogether unthinkable and unknowable, is not absolute reality in its function as the base or ground of spiritual practice – i.e. the *prakṛtisthagotra* or *tathāgatagarbha* – cognitively quite inaccessible also? And in this case are we not faced with a curious and rather paradoxical situation in which an absolute that is immanent in all beings from the soteriological point of view would nonetheless be altogether transcendent from the gnoseological point of view?

As Buddhism developed, different scholars took diverging stances on this matter, especially in the Tibetan tradition. In arguing for the respective positions, the second half of BCA IX.2 was frequently mentioned, which was translated above as follows:

Reality (*tattva*) is not the sphere of mind (*buddhi*); mind is said to be *saṃvṛti*.³⁵²

³⁵¹ Seyfort Ruegg 1971: 494.

³⁵² Note again, that the Sanskrit text reads *tattva* (reality), while the Tibetan translation reads *don dam* (*paramārtha*/absolute). Both words, however, are used synonymously, denoting absolute/ultimate/true reality.

This passage seems to state clearly that the absolute or reality as such is beyond cognition and hence it was used by Tibetan philosophers – in particular by those belonging to other schools than the Dge lugs – as an argument for the inconceivable and inexpressible nature of the absolute. Scholars from the Dge lugs tradition, in contrast, objected to this, insisting that this passage should not be interpreted in a literal way, as Sweet explains:³⁵³

The Geluk view, exemplified by Gyaltschap (*Rgyal Tshab*) and Tsgonkhapa [sic], holds that the second half of this stanza should not be taken in its literal sense, because if ultimate truth were not the object of some type of intellectual understanding, it would be unknowable, and it would therefore follow that all religious practice aiming at the realization of the ultimate would be in vain. The earlier Sakya and later Nyingma commentators dissented from this line of interpretation, arguing that ultimate truth “cannot be objectified by the mind because it transcends all discursiveness (*prapañca*),” although these commentators do affirm a non-intellectual intuition of the ultimate.

The passage Sweet quoted as representative for the view of the Sa skya and Rnying ma commentators stems from Mi pham’s *Nor bu ke ta ka*³⁵⁴ and, as expected, this position was sharply criticised by Rab gsal. As noted by Sweet, the Dge lugs tradition opted against a literal understanding of this passage. In his commentary, Rgyal tshab clearly refutes the position that the absolute is not a knowable (*shes bya*). As he points out, the basis of dividing (*dbye gzhi*) the two *satyas* is knowables.³⁵⁵ Following this definition, both *satyas* are knowables and hence a literal interpretation of the BCA is contradictory.³⁵⁶

Therefore, explaining the intention of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to be that *paramārthasatya* is not a knowable (*shes bya*) and is not realised by any [kind of] mind is explaining wrongly.

³⁵³ Sweet 1979: 79–80.

³⁵⁴ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 8.4–5.

³⁵⁵ Cf. ‘Jug ngogs 208.14–17: *shes par bya ba yang zhes pas shes bya dbye gzhi [...] bstan to | |*.

³⁵⁶ ‘Jug ngogs 208.17–18: *des na don dam pa’i bden pa shes bya ma yin pa dang blo gang gis kyang ma rtogs pa spyod ‘jug gi dgongs par ‘chad pa ni log par ‘chad pa’o | |*.

Understanding the BCA in a literal way, according to Rgyal tshab, would mean that no mind whatsoever could realise the absolute. This interpretation would lead to certain unwanted consequences, such as that a mind would not be present when one meditates on the absolute.³⁵⁷ Following Rgyal tshab's view, the absolute is only excluded as an object for a dualistic (*gnyis su snang ba*) mind; it is, however, known by direct valid cognition (*mngon sum tshad ma*).³⁵⁸

Mi pham's explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*

In contrast, Mi pham favoured a literal interpretation of this passage. As the absolute is utterly beyond the limitations of ordinary language and mind, it is rightly described as *not* being the object of mind, thus Mi pham in his commentary on BCA IX.2cd:³⁵⁹

Therefore, **the absolute**, the mode of existence, is free from all extremes of existence, non-existence, both, and neither, and hence **is not the sphere (*spyod yul*) of mind (*blo*)**, since **mind** and words (*sgra*) **are conventional (*kun rdzob*)**, but are not absolute (*don dam pa*).

Mi pham is well aware of the controversies that developed regarding the interpretation of this passage. He knows the objections raised by Dge lugs scholars against the position of their opponents, as well as their specific solution to understanding this passage. For him, the issue between both parties is simply a matter of “mere designation” (*ming tsam*), and hence only superficial in nature:³⁶⁰

Moreover, one may apply a specification [interpreting this passage] as “[the absolute] **is not the sphere of a dualistic mind**”

³⁵⁷ For Rgyal tshab's criticism of his opponent's position, see 'Jug ngogs 209.9–210.7, or, respectively, Sweet 1977: 173f., for a translation.

³⁵⁸ Cf. 'Jug ngogs 210.12–14: *rang nyid dngos su rtogs pa'i blo mngon sum tshad ma de la rang nyid gnyis su snang ba'i sgo nas de'i spyod yul du 'gyur ba min pa gang zhig rang 'jal ba'i mngon sum tshad ma des shes par bya ba yin pa'o* | . A similar description of the process of realising emptiness was also given by Rab gsal in the earlier discussions, see p.159 and p.172.

³⁵⁹ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 7.6: *de phyir dngos po'i gnas tshul don dam pa ni yod pa dang | med pa dang | gnyis ka dang | gnyis min gyi mtha' kun dang bral bas na blo yi spyod yul min te | blo dang sgra ni kun rdzob yin gyi don dam pa ma yin pa'i phyir ro* | .

³⁶⁰ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 9.1–2: *gzhan yang bden gnyis kyi dbye gzhi shes bya min par 'gyur ba sogs kyis gnod pas blo gnyis snang gi spyod yul min zhes khyad par mdzad na'ang | 'di ni ming tsam gyis ngal ba ste* | .

since [a literal interpretation] is invalidated by [arguments] such as that the basis of dividing the two *satyas* would not be knowables (*shes bya*), but this is a difficulty of mere designation.

Whether the absolute can be called a “knowable” (*shes bya*) depends on how one uses this designation, and what is implied by this usage. On the level of ordinary conventions (*tha snyad*), one could also say that the absolute is a knowable, given that the subject of the process of knowing to which one is referring is non-dualistic gnosis (*ye shes*) and its object the *dharmadhātu*. In an absolute sense, however, such an interpretation is misleading, since this type of understanding does not operate within the dichotomy of subject and object. Mi pham explains:³⁶¹

On the conventional level, taking the concentration (*mnyam bzlag*) of the Āryas as the subject and *dharmadhātu* as the object, it is possible to say that [the absolute] is an object of cognition/a knowable (*shes bya*). On the absolute level, however, are the words not directly and indirectly contradictory if one says that this (i.e., the absolute) is an object of grasping (*gzung bya*) or an object of cognition (*shes bya*) for the concentration that is without grasped [object] and grasping [subject]?

For Mi pham, the solution to this problem lies in the usage of the designation “object of cognition/knowable” (*shes bya*). Describing the absolute as knowable in terms of a negative determination (*rnam gcod*), that is, in a mere apophatic way, is possible, and does not contradict a positive determination (*yongs gcod*) that conceives the absolute as not being a knowable.³⁶² Claiming that the absolute could be established as a knowable in a

³⁶¹ Nor bu ke ta ka 9.3–4: *tha snyad du ni 'phags pa'i mnyam bzlag yul can dang | chos kyi dbyings yul du byas pa la brten nas shes bya yin no* [C no om.] *zhes brjod rung gi | don dam par gzung 'dzin med pa'i mnyam bzlag gis 'di gzung bya'am shes bya yin zer na tshig de dngos shugs* [C *shug sa*] *mi 'gal lam* |.

³⁶² Using Mi pham's definition from his commentary on the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra*, Karma Phuntsho explains these two kinds of determination in the following way (Phuntsho 2005: 170): “Negative determination is a process where ‘the nature of a thing is known [indirectly] through the elimination of what are not the thing’ and positive determination is where ‘the nature of a thing is [directly] affirmed and by doing so, what are not the thing are eliminated.’” See also Mi pham's *Rgyan 'grel* 229.3–5: *de la rnam bcad yongs gcod kyi tshul mdor bsodus su brjod na | de min bsal ba'am gzhan sel ba'i tshul gyis 'di dag gi tha snyad byed ste | sel tshul la bum med lta bu med dgag gi gzhan sel dang | bum min lta bu ma yin dgag gi gzhan sel gnyis yod la | de'ang rang min pa bsal ba'i tshul gyis de'i ngo bo shes par bya ba rnam bcad dang | rang gi ngo bo sgrub pa'i tshul gyis rang min mtha' dag bsal ba yongs gcod de* |.

positive sense, i.e., in the form of a positive determination, however, would reduce the absolute to an ordinary thing (*ngos po*).³⁶³ Thus, for Mi pham both ways of describing the absolute are possible, and a debate between the two parties, in which one claims the absolute is not a knowable (*shes bya*), while the other refutes this position, is unnecessary.³⁶⁴

Why do the two proponents of the [respective] position trouble about the designation each from their own [position] (*so so nas*)? They should rely on the meaning!

While Mi pham here appears as a mediator between the two extreme positions that developed in this regard in the history of Tibetan scholastics, he was harshly attacked for his statements by Rab gsal, who read Mi pham's explanations as a refutation of his (Dge lugs) tradition.

Rab gsal's criticism in the 'Ju lan

Among the various issues raised in the fourth topic of the debate, the discussion of the present question seemed to be particularly important to Rab gsal. In the overall outline of his work he mentioned this issue as a separate sub-item, which he subdivided further into two aspects: According to Rab gsal, Mi pham's – alleged – position that the absolute is not an object of mind and words contradicts, firstly, other statements within his work, and, secondly, the authoritative Indian scriptures (*lung*).³⁶⁵

Obviously, the departure point of this discussion is not formed by the differentiated explanations given by Mi pham on this issue as we have seen earlier; rather, Rab gsal reduces Mi pham's position to the plain statement that the absolute is not an object of mind (*blo*) and words (*sgra*).³⁶⁶

Rab gsal starts by pointing out the contradictions between this position and several other statements found in Mi pham's *Nor bu ke ta ka*. Of those, a closer look at a few selected discussions will be sufficient to understand Rab gsal's principal method of argumentation, as well as Mi pham's response to it.

In one passage of the *Nor bu ke ta ka*,³⁶⁷ Mi pham mentioned "insight

³⁶³ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 9.4–5: *yang bden gnyis kyi dbye gzhi shes bya yin pas don dam shes byar khas blangs pa de yang rnam gcod du yin la | 'dir shes bya min pa ni yongs gcod du yin pas mi 'gal te | yongs gcod du'ang shes byar khas len na stong nyid ngos por zhal gyis bzhes par 'gyur bas | [...]*.

³⁶⁴ *Nor bu ke ta ka* 9.5: *phyogs smra ba gnyis so so nas kyang ming la ngal bas ci bya ste don la rton par bya'o | |*.

³⁶⁵ See 'Ju lan 409.6: *da ni don dam sgra dang blo'i yul min zer ba la | rang tshig dang | lung tshig dang 'gal ba'i tshul lo | |*.

³⁶⁶ As noted earlier in Rab gsal's presentation of the "opponent's position" ('Ju lan 396.5–6), Rab gsal solely refers to Mi pham's explanations given in *Nor bu ke ta ka* 7.6.

³⁶⁷ I.e., *Nor bu ke ta ka* 3.6.

that realises suchness” (*de kho na nyid rtogs pa’i shes rab*). Therefore, Rab gsal concludes, a mind (*blo*) that realises the absolute does exist, which in turn is in direct contradiction to the position that the absolute is not a knowable (*shes bya*).³⁶⁸

Mi pham further proposed that not just the Āryas, but also ordinary beings have to meditate on the ultimate actual absolute (and not only on the nominal absolute).³⁶⁹ Rab gsal argues that this statement clearly shows that the absolute is accepted as an object for both Āryas and ordinary beings, and therefore must be acknowledged to be an object of mind (*blo*), too.³⁷⁰ As before, Rab gsal’s point is that any mention of the realisation of the absolute contradicts the claim that the absolute is not a knowable (*shes bya*) or an object of mind.

Rab gsal then turns to the question of whether or not the absolute is an object of words (*sgra*). His accuses Mi pham:³⁷¹

On top of the unbearable load of not accepting [the absolute] to be an object of mind, the contradiction of not accepting [the absolute] to be an object of words, [heavy like] the weight carried by a Gandhahastin,³⁷² is also added. [...] Tell [me], this sound of your statement “Great Emptiness” (*stong nyid chen po*), the designation of what is it?

According to Rab gsal, using an epithet for the absolute, such as “Great Emptiness,” involves capturing the absolute with a linguistic expression and, hence, the absolute must also be accepted as an object of words.³⁷³

At another stage, Mi pham stated that emptiness was explained in the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras.³⁷⁴ Given Mi pham’s position that the absolute is not an object of words, it would absurdly follow that the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras are not words, Rab gsal reproaches his opponent.³⁷⁵ As above, Rab gsal

³⁶⁸ For this particular argument, see ‘Ju lan 409.6–410.1 (JL IV.14a).

³⁶⁹ Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 7.4–6.

³⁷⁰ See ‘Ju lan 411.1–4 (JL IV.16a).

³⁷¹ ‘Ju lan 412.1–3: *blo’i yul du khas ma blang ba’i* [B *blangs pa’i*] ‘*gal khur ma bzod pa’i steng du* | *slar yang sgra’i yul du khas ma blang ba’i* [B *blangs pa’i*] ‘*gal ’du spos kyi glang pos theg tshad cig kyang ’gel te* | [...] *khyod kyis stong nyid chen po zhes brjod pa’i sgra de gang gi ming yin pa smros dang* |.

³⁷² A Gandahastin, literally “fragrant elephant,” seems to denote an elephant of special qualities, in particular, an enormous strength. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (VII.31), such an elephant is said to have ten times the strength of an ordinary elephant.

³⁷³ ‘Ju lan 412.1–3 (JL IV.17b).

³⁷⁴ I.e., *Nor bu ke ta ka* 33.

³⁷⁵ Cf. ‘Ju lan 412.6 (JL IV.19a).

argues that emptiness or the absolute is described in Buddhist literature and hence must be accepted to be an object of words.

With regard to the second subject, that is, the contradictions between Mi pham's (alleged) position and the scriptures (*lung*), Rab gsal continues with his principal line of argumentation.

In the first unit of this discussion,³⁷⁶ Rab gsal mentions various cases where a teaching of the absolute is mentioned explicitly in certain scriptures, or where such is accepted implicitly. According to him, this is enough to prove that the scriptures present the absolute as an object of mind and words.

The same reasoning is applied at the very end of this section.³⁷⁷ Here, Rab gsal quotes various passages from Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, a work that is – as was pointed out before – commonly used as the major authority on understanding Madhyamaka philosophy. The passages cited by Rab gsal mention a mind or intellect that realises the absolute, as well as a (written or oral) teaching of emptiness or the absolute, and are therefore presented as a proof that even the most authoritative scriptures accept the absolute as an object of mind and words.

Similarly to the earlier discussions, Rab gsal also addresses a possible objection that an opponent might make against the charges he directs at Mi pham. He relates this objection to the arguments of the first unit, which concerns the contradictions between Mi pham and the scriptural tradition. However, as it applies also to Rab gsal's other lines of reasoning, it is discussed in more detail at the very end of this presentation.³⁷⁸ Typically for his style, he presents both objection and answer in a very terse manner.³⁷⁹

Objection: Those presentations [that describe the teaching and realising of the absolute] are on the conventional level, hence, they will not give rise to a fault in the way it has been explained.

Response: You said that existence on the conventional level does not constitute existence (in general). Hence, we say that in this case, [you] are not able to avert the fault by this [argument].

³⁷⁶ 'Ju lan 413.2–414.3 (JL IV.20).

³⁷⁷ 'Ju lan 415.5–416.4 (JL IV.23).

³⁷⁸ In Rab gsal's work, this passage is found between the two discussions presented above, see 'Ju lan 414.3–4 (JL IV.21a).

³⁷⁹ 'Ju lan 414.3–4: *kho na re | rnam bzhaḡ de rnam kun rdzob tu yin pas ji skad bshad pa'i skyon du mi 'gyur ro zhe na | kun rdzob tu yod pas yod par mi 'gyur zhes khyed cag gis smras pas | de lta na des skyon spong mi nus so zhes kho bo cag smra'o |* .

Earlier, Rab gsal used the fact that the scriptures mention the realisation of the absolute and also teach emptiness as a proof against the position that the absolute is not an object of mind and words. A (fictive) opponent now might counter this argument – as implied by Mi pham’s explanations in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*³⁸⁰ – by distinguishing between the level of ordinary conventional ways of communication and the absolute level. The scriptures talk about the absolute and its realisation in a merely common-sense way; this does, however, not imply that they can truly express the absolute in an ultimative and definitive way. Rab gsal counters that such a response will only create other problems: in the tradition of Mi pham – Rab gsal assumes – existence on the conventional level is not accepted as existence *per se*. Therefore, Mi pham would not be able to give the response mentioned above in the first place. Here, Rab gsal’s reasoning depends on certain assumptions about his opponent’s position, a move that will be sharply attacked in Mi pham’s answer.

Mi pham’s reply in the *Rab lan*

Among the responses to Rab gsal’s various points of criticism, Mi pham’s answer to Rab gsal’s first criticism, presented earlier, already shows the essential issue that Mi pham repeatedly emphasises in his other answers.³⁸¹ According to Mi pham, Rab gsal’s accusations are based on a lack of differentiation between the level of ordinary conventions and the absolute level of true investigation, a fault for which Mi pham offers pointed words.³⁸²

Further, you are someone who is skilled in showing his own hidden fault (*rang mtshangs*) by words that dispute in a careless manner without distinguishing the way of accepting [a certain position] in terms of the two [different] senses: that the absolute is not an object of realisation for a referential (*dmigs pa*) subject (*spyod yul can*) and that a realisation [of the absolute]

³⁸⁰ In his explanations on this matter, Mi pham also distinguished between the conventional and absolute levels: while one can call the absolute an object with regard to the earlier level, it would be contradictory to do so on the latter level. Cf. *Nor bu ke ta ka* 9.3–4: *tha snyad du ni 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhas yul can dang | chos kyi dbyings yul du byas pa la brten nas shes bya yin no* [C no om.] *zhes brjod rung gi | don dam par gzung 'dzin med pa'i mnyam bzhas gis 'di gzung bya'am shes bya yin zer na tshig de dngos shugs* [C shug sa] *mi 'gal lam* |.

³⁸¹ See *Rab lan* 396.5–387.3 (RL IV.15a).

³⁸² *Rab lan* 396.5–6: *de yang khyod ni don dam pa ni dmigs pa'i spyod yul can du rtogs bya min pa dang kun rdzob tha snyad kyi dbang du byas te rtogs pa yod pa'i don gnyis kyi dbang du byas pa'i khas len tshul shan ma phyed par bab col du rgol ba'i tshig gis rang mtshangs* [B *mtshang*] *ston pa la mkhas pa zhig ste* |.

exists with regard to the level of *saṃvṛti*, the conventional (*tha snyad*).

As already mentioned in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*, Mi pham explains that, on the level of ordinary conventions, one can very well say that the absolute is realised. The important point is, however, that it is not realised by a referential or dualistic mind. Clarifying these issues effectively solves the present debate, a dispute, says Mi pham, that is based solely on a differing usage of the term “mind” (*blo*):³⁸³

The mind for which it is established that [the absolute] is not an object of words and mind is referential (*dmigs pa can*), whereas the mind that realises *paramārthasatya* is non-referential (*dmigs pa med pa can*). Therefore, this is merely a dispute about words, based merely on the designation of “mind” (*blo*), without understanding the essential issue (*don gyi gnad*).

This clear differentiation between a non-referential mind that realises the absolute and a referential mind that does not is pointed out at various stages in Mi pham’s response.

In his second criticism, Rab gsal mentioned that Mi pham’s statement that the absolute is realised by ordinary people and Āryas contradicts the position that the absolute is not a knowable (*shes bya*). As above, Mi pham answers by blaming Rab gsal for not being able to distinguish correctly between the conventional and the absolute levels, for having “a hidden fault (*mtshangs*) of not knowing the distinction of the two *satyas*.”³⁸⁴ He clarifies his position, according to which the absolute can be described as an object of both ordinary people and Āryas, and explains the two different ways in which these beings know the absolute:³⁸⁵

We accept this absolute, non-existence of true establishment, freedom from proliferations, as an object of the minds of both

³⁸³ Rab lan 397.1–2: *sgra blo’i yul min par bsgrub [C sgrub] pa’i blo de dmigs pa can yin la | don dam bden pa rtogs pa’i blo de dmigs pa med pa can yin pas blo’i ming tsam la brten nas don gyi gnad ma go ba tshig gi rtsod pa tsam du zad do |* .

³⁸⁴ Rab lan 408.4: *bden gnyis kyi rnam dbye la mi mkhas pa’i mtshangs shig*. See Rab lan 408.2–409.4 (RL IV.18), for the complete answer.

³⁸⁵ Rab lan 408.5–6: *don dam bden med spros bral de skye ‘phags gnyis ka’i blo’i yul du bdag cag gis khas blangs te | so skye dbu ma pa rnam kyis don [B don om.] spyi’i tshul gyis nyams su myong | ‘phags pa rnam kyis de’i ngo bo mngon sum rtogs par ‘dod de |* .

ordinary people and the Āryas, and believe that ordinary Mādhyamikas experience [the absolute] in the manner of a general object (*don spyi*) [and] the Āryas realise its essence (*ngo bo*) directly.

The important point is, however, that the absolute cannot be experienced by a referential mind, only by the highest gnosis (*ye shes*) that is beyond references, according to Mi pham.³⁸⁶

As to whether the absolute is an object of words, Rab gsal said of Mi pham that, while the latter uses phrases like “Great Emptiness,” he is not even aware that these make the absolute an object of linguistic expression. Mi pham responds to this criticism with an extensive description of his understanding of the absolute as the coalescence of appearances and emptiness that is free of assertions (*khas len*) and proliferations (*spros pa*). According to Mi pham, it is important that those descriptions of the absolute are limited to develop a certain understanding (*nges shes*) of the absolute, whereas a direct understanding of freedom from proliferations cannot be framed in dualistic language.³⁸⁷

The experience of only this much can be indicated by the path of words; the way of experience that conforms to freedom from proliferations, however, cannot be indicated and taught by words.

Thus, words can very well point the way leading to an understanding of the absolute, but they cannot substitute the direct experience of it. Further, Mi pham uses this answer as an opportunity to show that his understanding of the absolute is in accordance with the position of the Dge lugs founder Tsong kha pa and refers to various texts to prove this point.³⁸⁸

Rab gsal’s next criticism in this regard argued that the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras are accepted as teaching the absolute, and hence prove it as an object of words. At this stage of the dispute, Mi pham obviously assumed that his earlier responses could also answer this accusation, and therefore he did not engage in an extensive reply. He simply repeats succinctly the essence of his earlier answers:³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ Rab lan 409.2–3: *gong du bshad zin pa ltar dmigs med spros bral de nyid dmigs pa can gyi blo’i yul min pa’i don yin pas | dmigs pa’i mtha’ dang bral ba’i ye shes dngos sam rjes mthun pa’i yul du cis mi ‘gyur |*.

³⁸⁷ Rab lan 419.5: *‘di tsam zhig myong ba de [C de’i] tshig gi lam nas mtshon nus kyi | spros bral rjes mthun pa myong tshul ni tshig gis mtshon nas bstan mi nus te |*.

³⁸⁸ For the complete response, see Rab lan 418.6–427.2 (RL IV.20b).

³⁸⁹ Rab lan 430.3–4: *sher mdo sgra yin kyang des mi dmigs pa’i stong nyid bstan gyi | dmigs pa can gyi stong nyid sgo du ma nas rigs pa’i rnam grangs du mas ‘gog par mdzad pas [...]*.

Even though the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras are words, they teach a non-referential emptiness, but refute a referential emptiness in different ways with various kinds of reasoning [...].

As earlier, Mi pham certainly agrees that there are texts that teach the absolute, but, Mi pham emphasises (alluding to the conception of emptiness of his opponent), they do not teach a referential emptiness.³⁹⁰

This general response by Mi pham is also continued with regard to the objections that Rab gsal made concerning the second issue, the contradictions between Mi pham's position and the scriptures (*lung*).³⁹¹ While Mi pham gave individual answers to each of the references to the scriptures mentioned by Rab gsal, he essentially repeats what he already stated:³⁹²

We accept that a teaching of emptiness that is devoid of references exists, but we did not say that there is no teaching of emptiness.

Even though there is a teaching of the absolute, the absolute can only be indicated, but not shown directly by the usage of words. In its essence, the absolute is beyond the limitations of logic and linguistic conventions, and for this very reason it is described as being indescribable. Mi pham explains:³⁹³

One cannot express or conceptualise (*brtag pa*) emptiness, the mode of existence, the definitive meaning, in the form of being (*ngos*) or non-being (*ngos med*), any [alternative] of the extremes of affirmation and negation, or of both and neither; hence, it is said to be, in fact, inexpressible and not the object of conceptualisation.

Describing the absolute as indescribable is still a description, albeit a negative one, and so it might be used as an argument against the position that the absolute is not an object of words. Mi pham addresses this possible objection and points out that such a negative determination (*rnam bcad*) is not problematic, as he had also explained earlier.³⁹⁴ The important point

³⁹⁰ *Rab lan* 430.3–4 (RL IV.21c).

³⁹¹ For Mi pham's reply, see *Rab lan* 433.2–442.2 (RL IV.22).

³⁹² *Rab lan* 435.4: *kho bo cag gis dmigs pa med pa'i stong nyid bstan pa yod par 'dod kyi | stong nyid bstan pa med ces ma smras so |* .

³⁹³ *Rab lan* 438.4–5: *nges don gnas lugs stong pa nyid ni | dngos dngos med dam dgag sgrub kyi mtha' gang rung ngam | gnyis yin gnyis min gang du'ang brtag pa dang brjod par mi nus pa'i phyir brjod du med pa dang rnam par rtog pa'i yul ma yin pa nyid du brjod pa yin [C yid] no |* .

³⁹⁴ See above, p.196.

is that one comes to an understanding of the meaning that is indicated by those – limited – expressions.³⁹⁵

As Rab gsal's quotes from the *Madhyamakāvatāra* in the next criticism aimed at the same issue, Mi pham does not repeat his explanations once again. According to Mi pham, he has sufficiently defended his position against Rab gsal's attacks and – considering the lack of any new evidence for Rab gsal's point – does not see any need for an elaborate answer.³⁹⁶

Because of the earlier explanations (i.e., Mi pham's earlier answers), there is no need to give even a tiny bit of an answer to what was explained in this context. Therefore, [Rab gsal's accusations] will fade away by themselves, will dissolve by themselves, in the sphere of the Great Emptiness³⁹⁷ that is free from extremes. Hence, there is no need to make any effort [for an answer]; how wonderful!

When Rab gsal countered a possible objection to his arguments in the last discussion presented above, he assumed that, according to Mi pham, existence in general is not established by existence on the conventional level. Now, Mi pham clarifies that such a position is indeed held by other Snga rabs pa philosophers, the tradition Mi pham is generally associated with,³⁹⁸ but that he differs from the opinions of his comrades on this specific issue:³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Cf. *Rab lan* 439.6–440.2: *de'i phyir brjod med bsam med rtog med* [C ces add.] *spros med ces* [C ces om.] *bstan pa'i tshe | brjod med ma yin te brjod med ces kha nas brjod du yod pa'i phyir dang | bsam med ma yin te | bsam du yod pa'i phyir dang | rtog med ma yin te | rtog med du rtog pa'i phyir dang | spros med ma yin te | spros med du spros pa'i phyir zhes pa lta bur go na | brjod med sogs kyi sgras rnam bcad dang gzhan sel la yang go ba tshul bzhin mi skye na | tshig de dag gis bstan don go ba ga la srid de |*.

³⁹⁶ *Rab lan* 452.4–5: *gong du bshad pa de dag gis 'di skabs su gang bshad pa dag la lan gyi rnam pa rdul tsam zhig bstan ma dgos pas mtha' bral stong chen gyi dbyings su rang yal rang grol du gyur pa'i phyir 'bad pa ci yang brten ma dgos pa ni ya mtshan no |* | . Cf. *Rab lan* 452.4–5 (RL IV.26a), for the complete discussion.

³⁹⁷ Note that this mention of "Great Emptiness" (*stong chen*) is certainly also a hint at the earlier discussion. While Mi pham had used this expression in the *Nor bu ke ta ka* to describe his view of emptiness (see earlier, p.155), Rab gsal also referred to it in his later criticism (see earlier, p.198).

³⁹⁸ For the distinction of Snga rabs pa and Phyi rabs pa scholars among Tibetan Mādhyamika, see earlier, p.56.

³⁹⁹ *Rab lan* 442.4–6: *snga rabs pa phal mo* [B mo om.] *ches tha snyad du yod pas yod go mi chod la | don dam par med pas med go chod ces 'dzer | phyi rabs pa phal gyis kun rdzob tu yod pas yod go chod la | don dam par med pas med go mi chod zer | bdag cag gis ni de gnyis ka ltar mi smra ste | tha snyad du yod pas tha snyad du yod pa'i go chod la don dam par yod pa'i go mi chod | don dam par med pas don dam par med pa'i go chod la tha snyad du med pa'i go mi chod | don dam par med pa dang tha snyad du yod pa gnyis dngos po rnam kyi steng na 'gal med don gcig tu 'char ba'i go tshul yod par smra'o |* | . See *Rab lan* 442.3–443.3 (RL IV.23), for Mi pham's complete answer on this issue.

Most Snga rabs pa say that existence on the conventional level does not count as existence and that non-existence on the absolute level does count as non-existence; most of the Phyi rabs pa say that existence on the conventional level does count as existence, and that non-existence on the absolute level does not count as non-existence. We do not propound according to either of them: existence on the conventional level counts as existence on the conventional level, but does not count as existence on the absolute level; and non-existence on the absolute level counts as non-existence on the absolute level, but does not count as non-existence on the conventional level. [Thus,] we say that there is a way of understanding that both non-existence on the absolute level and existence on the conventional level appear with regard to things as a single meaning that is without contradiction.

As Mi pham clarifies, Rab gsal's refutation of the objections against his accusations was based on a wrong assumption. Given that Mi pham's actual position on this matter differs from what Rab gsal proposed, the former concludes that he could effectively refute Rab gsal's criticism by means of the very objection that Rab gsal mentioned – and that Mi pham had indicated already in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*:⁴⁰⁰

Henceforth, I never said that conventional existence does not constitute existence (in general). Why should I therefore not be able to abandon the fault [that you mentioned]?

Although it would appear that Rab gsal's specific argument in this discussion is invalidated, the issue of whether existence and non-existence on the conventional and absolute levels count as existence and non-existence in general will be disputed *in extensio* in the following controversies.

Rab gsal's reply in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

As shown in Rab gsal's earlier criticism, the issue whether the absolute should be regarded as an object of mind and words or not is of particular importance to Rab gsal. It is therefore not surprising that he also continues to discuss this issue in his second critical treatise, even though Mi pham

⁴⁰⁰ Rab lan 442.6: *de'i phyir kun rdzob tu yod pas yod par mi 'gyur zhes nam yang ma smras pas skyon spang ci ste mi nus* | .

had made clear that – under certain premises – he, too, accepts that the absolute can be described as an object of mind and words. Rab gsal's further critique pertains to all three principal subjects that were discussed earlier: contradictions between different statements of Mi pham, contradictions to the scriptures, and the refutation of objections.

One passage in Rab gsal's reply is particularly important, as it touches the general purport of all of Mi pham's answers on this issue.⁴⁰¹ In his literal interpretation of BCA IX.2cd in the *Nor bu ke ta ka*,⁴⁰² Mi pham had stated that the absolute is not an object of mind and words. In his reply to Rab gsal, however, he stated the opposite and hence must be accused of a direct contradiction. Further, Mi pham's explication that this passage of the BCA should be read in such a way that it negates the absolute as the object of a *dualistic* mind, is, according to Rab gsal, a deviation from the principal stance on this matter of Mi pham's own Snga rabs pa tradition.⁴⁰³

In the *Sher ſika* [you] had explained that *paramārthasatya* is not the object of words and mind. Here (in the *Rab lan*) [you] said that it is an object of words and mind. Thus, a direct contradiction is laid open. Being unable to maintain the tenets of earlier Tibetans (*bod snga ma*) by continuous effort, [you] follow the later Tibetans (*bod phyi ma*), saying that [*paramārthasatya*] is not the object of a dualistic mind (*gnyis snang can gyi blo*).

While Mi pham tried to mediate between the different doctrinal positions on interpreting BCA IX.2cd and explained them as a dispute of words alone, this very attempt is attacked by Rab gsal. For him, Mi pham not only contradicted himself, but also betrayed his doctrinal roots. Rab gsal concludes this line of argumentation by emphasising that the authoritative scriptures also support his way of reading this particular verse of the BCA and thus offers a general criticism of Mi pham's answers on the second subject, the contradictions between his position and scriptural authority.⁴⁰⁴

By far the most extensive response in Rab gsal's *Ga bur chu rgyun* is devoted to the third subject of the present discussion, the refutation of a

⁴⁰¹ See *Ga bur chu rgyun* 448.4–6 (GC I.7a).

⁴⁰² See *Nor bu ke ta ka* 7.6.

⁴⁰³ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 448.4–5: *sher ſika tu don dam bden pa sgra dang blo'i yul min par bshad | 'dir sgra dang blo'i yul yin zhes dngos 'gal du bud | 'bad 'bad nas bod snga ma'i grub mtha' bskyangs ma nus | gnyis snang can gyi blo'i yul min zhes bod phyi ma'i rjes su 'brang ngo | |*.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 448.5: *spyir blo'i yul yin pa rigs par ma zad [A brad] lung shin tu gsal ba | rgyan las | rnam par mi rtog blo can gyi | | zhes dang | stong pa nyid dga' mchog gi blo | | zhes sogs shin tu mang ba yig tshogs che bas su zhig dbri |*.

possible objection to Rab gsal's first criticism: From Rab gsal's concrete rebuttal of the objection that the descriptions of the absolute are only made on the conventional level (and hence do not establish the absolute as an object of words on the absolute level), the discussion had developed towards principal doctrinal positions on the question of whether existence and non-existence on the conventional and absolute levels count as existence and non-existence in general. In his answer,⁴⁰⁵ Rab gsal clarifies that such was not his intention. Instead, he wanted to point out that, if one accepts emptiness to be free from proliferations *and* to be an object of words and thoughts *on the conventional level* – as Mi pham does – then such should also be accepted in general.⁴⁰⁶

I said: "If it is not contradictory that emptiness is – on the conventional level – free from proliferations and that it is an object of words and conceptualisation (*sgra rtog*), then it is also possible that those two [qualities] (i.e., being free from proliferations and being an object of words and conceptualisation) are not contradictory in general." A true answer to that never appeared.

The principal issue Rab gsal is aiming at, namely whether the acceptance of something on a certain level also implies its acceptance in general, pertains also to the answer Mi pham had given on the specific issue of existence on a certain level. Mi pham's response further touched general doctrinal positions in this regard, and Rab gsal therefore continues to discuss Mi pham's answer by pointing out five logical faults that would follow from Mi pham's position that existence on a certain level does not imply general existence.⁴⁰⁷

Mi pham's reply in the *Yang lan*

Of the two issues under discussion, Mi pham considers only the latter one. While he tried to mediate between the established positions on the interpretation of BCA IX.2cd, Rab gsal accused him – again – of contradicting himself and of betraying his own Snga rabs pa tradition. It is therefore not

⁴⁰⁵ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 464.2–465.4 (GC III.3b).

⁴⁰⁶ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 464.2–3: *kho bos* [A 'os] | *stong nyid kun rdzob tu spros bral dang* | *sgra rtog gi yul yin pa mi 'gal na* [A na om.] | *spyir yang de gnyis mi 'gal bar rung ngo zhes smras pa la lan rnal ma zhig ma byung mod* |.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ga bur chu rgyun* 464.6ff.

surprising that Mi pham refused to add further explanations on this particular topic.

As in Rab gsal's response, the issue of accepting existence on a certain level and its general implication is given particular attention, and Mi pham discusses this at the very end of his short answer under "issues of major significance" (*don che ba*).⁴⁰⁸

Just as Rab gsal earlier defended his position that existence on the conventional level implies existence in general by attacking Mi pham, Mi pham defends his position, which sharply distinguishes between the levels on which a certain assertion is made, and attacks Rab gsal in return. Obviously, the issue is important not only for the concrete discussion of the refutation of a particular objection to Rab gsal's position, but also since it concerns established doctrinal positions. These, however, cannot be easily changed and, like other, similar issues, this particular question remains unresolved.

Synopsis

The tension between descriptions of the absolute (*paramārtha*) being inconceivable and beyond the scope of linguistic expression on the one hand, and, on the other, the principal claim that the absolute can be realised by following the Buddhist path, using oral or written instructions as guidance, is fundamental in Buddhist scholasticism. In the doctrinal positions that developed concerning this problem, the second half of BCA IX.2 was of particular importance. Understood literally, this verse clearly stated that the absolute is *not* an object of mind, and it is this position that was taken in the Snga rabs pa tradition of Tibetan Madhyamaka philosophy, to which Mi pham belongs. In the Phyi rabs pa tradition, headed by Tsong kha pa and his Dge lugs school, such an interpretation was strongly refused; instead, this tradition argued that both *satyas* must be knowables (*shes bya*). The passage of the BCA must be interpreted so that the absolute is only excluded as an object for a *dualistic* (*gnyis snang*) mind.

In his commentary, Mi pham clearly followed in the footsteps of his predecessors and opted for a literal interpretation of the respective verse line. However, he also declared that – on the level of ordinary conventions – it is possible to describe the absolute as a knowable (*shes bya*), and hence as an object of mind. For him, the controversy is only superficial and merely a matter of designation.

⁴⁰⁸ See *Yang lan* 470.4–471.1 (YL II.h).

Rab gsal's criticism seemed to aim only at a simplified version of Mi pham's complex explanations, namely, the plain interpretation that the absolute is *not* a knowable. Viewing it as a direct attack on the doctrines of his own school, Rab gsal objected to Mi pham's position by pointing out contradictions between this position and the authoritative Indian scriptures, and also other statements of the *Nor bu ke ta ka*. In his reply, Mi pham pleaded again for a more nuanced picture. On the level of ordinary conventions, the absolute can indeed be described as a knowable (*shes bya*); however, it is not the object of a referential (*dmigs can*) or dualistic (*gnyis snang*) mind. For Rab gsal, these concessions exhibit again the contradictory nature of Mi pham's explanations; furthermore, he also interpreted them as a betrayal of Mi pham's own doctrinal background. In view of these entrenched positions, Mi pham did not take up this particular issue in his last letter.

While it seems that Mi pham tried from the very beginning to mediate between the traditional positions on this important question, stances taken in the Snga rabs pa and the Phyi rabs pa traditions, Rab gsal was not willing to take a step in this direction. In view of this situation, both parties stuck to their original positions without modifying these in any substantial way in the ongoing discussion.

Part III

Supplementary material

Chapter 5

Detailed summaries of the exchanged texts

The present chapter is an attempt to provide a comprehensive and systematic account of the debate between Mi pham and Rab gsal that includes all important individual lines of argumentation and follows them across the body of texts that appeared in the development of the dispute. To this end, structured summaries of these texts have been produced, which make the connections between individual arguments visible. Clearly, this kind of formalised presentation of the debate can only provide a simplified and ordered picture of the lively exchange between the two opponents, and has to neglect more “messy” features, such as the wide range of polemical allusions, side blows, and teasing remarks.¹ As earlier in the discussion of the content of the debate, the particular focus of the following summaries is on the exegetical and philosophical argumentation.

The individual texts are structured on different levels. In some cases, an explicit structural outline (*sa bcad*) is provided in the texts, and hence is also taken over in the summary (printed in normal type characters). Based on this coarse structure, the debate is organised according to larger thematic units (marked by Roman numerals). These are further subdivided into individual sections (marked by Arabic numerals) and individual lines

¹ Kenneth Liberman’s remarks with regard to the messiness of personal debates can also be applied to the present debate, only that in this case the texts themselves constitute the actual debate and not an idealisation (Liberman 2004: 29): “The Tibetans’ texts themselves are idealizations of debates and discussions about debates; what occurs in actual debates is much more dynamic, multiply determined, and even messy. This messiness is not only offensive to Tibetologists, who have a modernist European preference for definitive and static accounts, they can be offensive to Tibetan philosophers as well.”

of argumentation (marked by letters).² To distinguish the added structure from the explicit structural outline (*sa bcad*) of the respective texts,³ the numeration of the former is printed in bold characters:

1.1.1. Structural outline (*sa bcad*) as provided in the texts

Topic I Large thematic units (added)

I.1. Subdivisions of thematic units (added)

I.1. (a) Individual lines of argumentation (added)

A major difficulty in the understanding of a particular line of reasoning is to know to precisely which passage in the earlier texts it refers. These connections are therefore made explicit whenever these are clear. In some cases, particularly in the later texts of Mi pham and Rab gsal, references are ambiguous and can refer to more than just one passage. In these cases, the likely references are given and marked accordingly. The page numbers of references follow the respective block-print editions (A for Mi pham's texts, C for Rab gsal's texts; see Chapter Three. An overview chart showing the connections between the individual passages is provided in the following chapter.

Intended as a working tool for further, more specialised, research in one particular issue within the overall debate, the presentations are kept rather terse. Further, as references to Mi pham and Rab gsal and their respective texts appear over and over, the following system of abbreviations is used:

MP = Mi pham

RS = Rab gsal

NK = *Nor bu ke ta ka*

JL = *'Ju lan*

RL = *Rab lan*

GC = *Ga bur chu rgyun*

YL = *Yang lan*

'Ju lan

Opening verses [368.5–370.2]

Introductory remarks [370.2–4]

0. (1) Raising the discussion (*gleng bslang ba*), (2) the issues that are raised (*bslang ba'i don*), (3) summary [370.4–418.5]

² For an overview of the set-up of the individual texts, see also Chapter Three.

³ The explicit structural outlines (*sa bcad*) of the individual texts are also given separately from the added structure in Chapter Seven.

1. Raising the discussion (*gleng bslang ba*) [370.4–371.5]:

Background and development of the debates: Even though Tsong kha pa and his heirs are widely known for their innumerable qualities, they were – falsely – attacked by Stag tshang pa Shes rab rin chen. Nowadays, it is MP with his NK who contradicts the tradition of Tsong kha pa. His explanations will be refuted in the following.

2. The issues that are raised: (1) refuting faults of great impudence (*spyi brtol*), (2) refuting faults that are raised after examination (*brtag zin bslang ba'i nyes pa*) [371.5–416.4]

2.1. Refuting faults of great impudence (*spyi brtol*): eliminating misconceptions with regard to (1) the meaning of “*yan lag*” etc. and (2) the meaning of “*de las kyang bzlog*” etc. [371.5–384.3]

Topic I: the interpretation of BCA IX.1 [371.6–375.5]

2.1.1. Eliminating misconceptions with regard to the meaning of “*yan lag*” etc.: (1) describing [MP’s] position, (2) refuting it [371.6–375.5]

2.1.1.1. Describing [MP’s] position [371.6–372.1]:

In the NK (referring to 2.5–3.6), it is said that it is not correct to interpret the generation of insight (*shes rab*) as being effected by generosity etc. and to relate “*yan lag*” to concentration (*bsam gtan*). Further, it is said that awakening due to generosity (*sbyin pa*) etc. is not logical.

2.1.1.2. Refuting it (i.e., MP’s position) [372.1–375.5]

I.1. Relation of the six perfections (*pāramitās*) and the meaning of “*yan lag*” [372.1–373.5]:

(a) It is clear through the explanation in the BCA, and also implied by the *sa bcad* of the NK (2.5), that insight (*shes rab*) is the object that is brought forth, and generosity etc. is the agent that brings forth. Such an understanding is supported by various Indian scriptures, the BCA itself, various commentaries on the BCA and also NK 93.5, thus contradicting the earlier explanations. The scriptures agree that the perfections are accomplished in a fixed order, one after the other. [372.1–373.2]

(b) Owing to the connection of earlier and later chapters, “*yan lag*” must be related to concentration (*bsam gtan*). This is also supported by Prajñākaramati’s explanation and the general proceeding of the text. [373.2–5]

I.2. NK 3.4 and the meaning of “*don*” [373.5–374.1]:

In NK 3.4., MP mentions that the other perfections were explained as the support (*grogs*) of perfecting abandonment and realisation (*spangs rtogs*) through insight (*shes rab*). This shows a wrong interpretation of “*don*,” which must be related to insight, as it was also explained by Prajñākaramati and MP himself.

I.3. Relationship between the other five perfections and insight [374.1–3]:

By explaining also “*yan lag*” as co-emerging support (*lhan cig pa'i grogs*), the support that consists in generosity etc. is simply explained as support, and since co-emerging means and insight are each other's mutual support, the role of insight would be turned upside down.

I.4. The interpretation of “*don*” [374.3–4]:

The example of a king and his troops used in NK 2.6 ff. indicates that “*don du*” is understood as a (separate) “desired aim/goal” (*'dod don*) of the king, which exemplifies insight, whereas “*don*” must be understood as the goal that is to be accomplished by *śamatha*, (i.e., the aim is insight itself).

I.5. The usage of the particle “only/simply” (*tsam*) [374.4–375.5]:

In the statement “insight is only/simply (*tsam*) explained as the main aspect” (NK 3.5), it appears that MP takes away the vital essence of the earlier words by the particle “only/simply” (*tsam*). [374.4–5]

MP's repeated emphasis on insight as the main aspect is superfluous. In the context of the first two *pādas* of BCA IX.1, the cause is related to the other five perfections and the result to insight, whereas in the latter two *pādas*, the cause is related to insight and the result to omniscience. [374.5–375.5]

Topic II: the interpretation of BCA IX.78 [375.5–384.3]

2.1.2. Eliminating misconceptions with regard to the meaning of “*de las kyang bzlog*” etc.: (1) describing [MP's] position, (2) refuting it [375.5–384.3]

2.1.2.1. Describing [MP's] position [375.5–376.2]:

Quotation of NK 61.1–6, the commentary on BCA IX.78, where MP delineates the difference between grasping an imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*) and an inherently established self (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa'i bdag*). He refers to the belief in a self (*bdag tu lta ba*) as an erroneous state of mind (*sems gol ba*). In particular, he points out that the pronoun “that” (*de*) in BCA IX.78c must be understood as “that object” (*yul de*).

2.1.2.2. Refuting it (i.e., the opponent's opinion) [376.2–384.3]

II.1. The interpretation of “that” (*de*) in BCA IX.78c [376.2–378.1]

(a) In the BCA, its commentaries, and also earlier in the NK, it is not specified that “that” (*de*) must be related to “object” (*yul*). In particular, such an interpretation deviates from Prajñākaramati's BCAP and also the two ways of explanation mentioned by Kalyānadeva. [376.2–6]

(b) Explanation of Kalyānadeva's two ways of interpretation. [376.6–377.5]

(c) Further passages from the BCAP that refute MP's interpretation. [377.5–378.1]

II.2. MP's explanations in NK 61.2–3 [378.1–4]

MP's explanations in NK 61.2–3 about the dissimilarity of grasping an imagined or an inherently established self show three faults:

(a) There is a mistake in grammar: there are two objective (second) cases (*las kyi sgra*) – *snang ba la* and *ngor* – of which one is redundant. [378.1–2]

(b) MP's thesis of the dissimilarity of grasping an imagined or an inherently established self is impaired, since there is no reasoning that proves that the latter does not appear to ordinary beings (while MP claimed such with regard to the earlier, i.e., grasping an imagined self). [378.2]

(c) If one understands that there are different states, in terms of both kinds of appearances being in general averted or not averted, there is a contradiction between earlier and later statements in the NK: explanations of the extinguishing of conventional appearances at the stage of a Buddha (e.g., NK 29.6) vs. the mention of a twofold ultimate knowledge (*mtshar thug gi mkhyen gnyis*) (NK 3.1). [378.2–4]

II.3. MP's explanation on selflessness in NK 61.3 [378.4–5]

In NK 61.3, MP mentions “meditative cultivation of selflessness” (*bdag med bsgom pa*). This is contradictory, because any possible negation (of a self) – *ma yin dgag* or *med dgag* – would lead to an extreme position, as accepted in NK 7.2, where MP explains that all notions of negation and affirmation (*dgag sgrub*) must be destroyed.

II.4. The relation between the “egoism” of self-grasping and the “delusion” of self-grasping, mentioned in NK 60.6–61.1 [378.5–381.1]

In NK 60.6–61.1, MP mentions that self-grasping (*bdag tu 'dzin pa*) or “egoism” (*nga rgyal*) is increased by the delusion (*rmongs pa*) that a self exists. Further, he explains that self-grasping does not occur when the delusion (of a self as existing) is not present. This relation between the two, where the latter does not occur when the former is not present, is investigated: self-grasping and delusion can either be related in such a way as to (a) having the same identity (*bdag gcig 'brel*), or (b) having a causal relationship (*de byung 'brel*).

(a) If both are the same, it does not make sense to say that one is increased by the other, as explained earlier in NK 60.6. [378.5–379.2]

(b) As a delusion that takes a self to be existent is itself self-grasping, there is no difference between the former and the latter and the causal relationship could be reversed. [379.2–3]

(c) Instead, BCA IX.78 must be commented upon in the following way: self-grasping with regard to phenomena (*chos kyi bdag 'dzin*) is explained as increasing suffering (BCA IX.78ab). Here, an objection might be raised:

only self-grasping with regard to persons is averted, not that with regard to phenomena (BCA IX.78c). The answer to this objection is as follows. The best is the meditative cultivation that realises selflessness with regard to phenomena (BCA IX.78d). As proven by various scriptural sources, the important point is that self-grasping with regard to phenomena creates the basis for self-grasping with regard to persons. [379.3–381.1]

II.5 The status of viewing buddhahood as an object of attainment [381.2–382.2]

In NK 60.2, MP mentions “delusion” (*rmongs pa*) that views *nirvāṇa* – on the mere conventional level – as something to be attained. This is explained as “subtle obscuration of knowables” (*shes sgrib phra mo*) (NK 60.3), which is not abandoned until the stage of a Buddha (NK 60.2); only at this stage, the “hope to attain the result” (*'bras bu'i re 'dod*) ceases (NK 60.5). With regard to these statements, there are various contradictions:

(a) It follows that there is no valid cognition that views *nirvāṇa* – on the conventional level – as something to be attained, since such a view would entail ignorance (since MP calls this a “delusion”). This is in contradiction to other statements, where MP mentions that happiness and suffering are “undeniable” (*bsnyon med*) for an ordinary mind (NK 58.5) and that the respective – conventional – appearances are “genuine” (*mi bslu ba*) (NK 59.5). [381.2–4]

(b) If conventional existence is established only from the perspective of ignorance, then a rabbit’s horn, too, would exist on the conventional level. [381.4–5]

(c) Such a view is in contradiction to BCA IX.108b. [381.5]

(d) It further contradicts later statements explaining that conventional existence is not invalidated by conventional valid cognition. [381.5]

(e) If the view that buddhahood is something to be attained is obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*), then it follows that *bodhicitta* and compassion, too, are obscurations to awakening. [381.5–382.2]

II.6. MP’s explanations in NK 60.1–2 [382.2–6]

In MP’s commentary of BCA IX.77cd, the objection of an opponent is raised: “As there is nothing to attain (*thob ba med pa la*), what is then the use of your training in the path etc., hoping to attain [the result]? Isn’t it delusion what is to be removed at all times?” (NK 60.1–2).

(a) The first part of this objection, “hoping to attain [the result] while there is nothing to attain,” is without a connection, since it was proven earlier that there is nothing to attain with regard to the absolute level, but that there is with regard to the conventional level. Hence, the objective case (*las kyi sgra*) at *thob pa med pa la* is without a connection. [382.3]

(b) Also the latter part is contradictory: The question “isn’t it delusion, what is to be removed at all times?” implies the answer: “Yes, delusion is what is to be removed.” This response would render the opponent’s earlier doubts, “What is then the use of your training in the path etc.?,” superfluous. Furthermore, a change of the end of the objection from “*ma yin nam*” to “*ma yin pa’i phyir*” would render the later explanations (BCA IX.77d) meaningless. [382.3–6]

II.7. MP’s explanation in NK 61.4 [382.6–383.2]

In NK 61.4, MP calls the belief in a self a *temporary* (*re zhig*) erroneous state of mind. This does not make sense, because the innate (*lhan skyes*) belief in a self deviates from the mode of existence since time without beginning (*thog med nas*).

II.8. MP’s explanation in NK 61.4. [383.2–4]

In NK 61.4, MP said that the mode of existence of things (*dnogs po’i gnas tshul*) is the nature of the mind (*sems kyi gshis*). This contradicts not only the explanations of the twenty-one kinds of emptiness in the *sūtras* and *śāstras*, but also MP’s own writings.

II.9. Ceasing of mind (*sems ’gags pa*) [383.4–384.3]

(a) In the course of the present explanations, MP mentions “non-abiding *nirvāṇa*” (*mi gnas pa’i myang ’das*). If he accepts the existence of non-abiding *nirvāṇa* at the stage of awakening, then this is in contradiction to other passages (e.g., NK 74.6), where MP claims the ceasing of mind (as the existence of non-abiding *nirvāṇa* implies the existence of a mind that experiences this state). [383.4–5]

(b) Further, MP’s statements in NK 61.6 that his way of interpretation is “in accordance with the Indian scriptures” and that it is “my (i.e., MP’s) thought alone” are in contradiction. [383.5–384.3]

2.2. Refuting faults that are raised after examination (*brtag zin bslang ba’i nyes pa*): (1) [faults that are connected to] the context of *dūraṅgamā* (the seventh *bhūmi*) and (2) [faults that are] connected to the principle (*tshul*) of *satyadvaya* [384.3–416.4]

Topic III: the interpretation of BCA IX.41–49 [384.3–396.2]

2.2.1. [Faults that are connected to] the context of *dūraṅgamā* (the seventh *bhūmi*): (1) stating the opponent’s position (*phyogs snga*) and (2) the actual refutation [384.3–396.2]

2.2.1.1. Stating the opponent’s position (*phyogs snga*) [384.3–4]:

Quotation of NK 42.4–6, where MP criticises other ways of interpretation that explain the *kleśas* mentioned in BCA IX.46a as “manifest *kleśas*” (*nyon mongs mngon gyur*) and do not relate the respective passage (BCA IX.45c–49c) to Arhats.

2.2.1.2. The actual refutation [384.4–396.2]

III.1. Relating BCA IX.45–49 to Arhats [384.4–385.6]

The passage from BCA IX.45c–49c has to be related to Arhats as they are explained in the Abhidharma (and hence are not real Arhats); this has to be the case for two reasons:

(a) Explanations in Prajñākaramati’s commentary [384.6]

(b) MP’s explanations in NK 35.3–6 [384.6–385.6]

III.2. Interpreting BCA IX.45c–49c [385.6–386.3]

(a) For this passage, it is proven in MP’s commentary (NK 35.3–6) that MP regards the “meditation of worldly people” (*’jig rten pa’i bsam gtan*) as the example (mentioned in BCA IX.49c), and the path that is endowed with the aspects of truths that are explained in the Abhidharma (*mngon pa nas bshad pa’i bden rnam can gyi lam*) as what it serves as an example for (*dpe can*). [385.6]

(b) The “clinging to the existence of an object” (*yul yod pa zhen pa*) (that MP mentioned in NK 35.5, while explaining BCA IX.45cd) must be understood as grasping [things as] truly established (*bden ’dzin*). Otherwise, it would contradict MP’s earlier commentary (NK 35.4–5). Thus, it is correct to explain that this path abandons coarse manifest *kleśas* that are explained in the Abhidharma, but not subtle self-grasping. [385.6–386.3]

III.3. MP’s explanation in NK 36.5 [386.3–387.3]

(a) MP’s statement (NK 36.5), namely that the opponent in question understands that a permanent, partless, or independent (*rtag gcig rang dbang ba*) self does not exist, but that subtle ego-grasping (*ngar ’dzin*) is not caused to be abandoned by that understanding, is without any connection, since the opponent does not distinguish between subtle and coarse kinds of ego-grasping. [386.3–4]

(b) These explanations (of the upper NK passage) show that MP also accepts that the meditative cultivation of coarse selflessness abandons coarse manifest *kleśas*, but not subtle ones. [386.4–387.3]

III.4. Explaining the specification “manifest” (*mngon gyur pa*) [387.3–390.6]

Explaining the intention of the specification “manifest” (*mngon gyur pa*) of the *kleśas* (mentioned in BCA IX.46a):

(a) As known from the *Āryadhyāyitamūṣṭisūtra* that is quoted in the *Praśannapadā*, there is a kind of Arhat known in the Abhidharma; these Arhats perceive things as truly established (*bden grub*) and have not abandoned the *kleśas* that are explained in the Abhidharma. It is to this kind of Arhat that the passage of the BCA is related. As shown by various lines of reasoning,

these Arhats have only abandoned manifest *kleśas*, but not the seed of the *kleśas*. [387.3–388.1]

(b) Such an interpretation is also in line with MP's explanations in NK 36.5–6, and the commentaries of the BCA by Prajñākaramati, Kalyāṇadeva, and Vibhūticandra. [388.1–389.3]

(c) In the Indian commentaries, “seeing a capacity of *karman* (*las kyi nus pa*)” (BCA IX.46d) is related to Arhats. As such an interpretation contradicts the earlier and later text of the BCA, this was not adopted by Tsong kha pa. One must investigate whether certain statements are to be interpreted or to be understood literally; it is not a proof of a certain interpretation to say that such was stated by many Indian texts. Furthermore, the objection of a deviation from the Indian commentaries could also be raised with regard to MP's commentary on BCA IX.1. [389.3–390.2]

(d) In NK 43.1, MP refuted the Dge lugs interpretation (cf. *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 61.4ff.) that the Arhat under consideration abandoned the desire (*sred pa*) that derives from grasping a permanent self, but not the desire that derives from grasping a self as inherently established (*ngo bo nyid kyi grub pa*), arguing that it is contradictory that there should be different kinds of desire deriving from different kinds of self-grasping within the mental continuum of a single person. This fault does not apply, because self-grasping and desire are not ascertained as manifest (*mngon gyur pa*). Additionally, a similar fault would apply for MP's tradition, which accepts *ālaya* and *kliṣṭa-manas* and hence two different cognitive modes (*'dzin stangs*) that are simultaneously present in a single mental continuum. [390.2–6]

III.5. MP's criticism in NK 43.1f. [390.6–391.6]

(a) In NK 43.1f, MP criticised the Dge lugs interpretation (cf. *Dgongs pa rab gsal* 60.15ff.) which explains BCA IX.47c as referring to two kinds of desire (*sred pa*), one that is afflicted (*nyon mongs can yin pa*) and another that is not afflicted (*nyon mongs can min pa*). MP argued that the desire under consideration is part of the twelve links of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and as such cannot be non-afflicted. Such an accusation does not apply, since the Dge lugs tradition accepts that desire is afflicted; “non-afflicted” was mentioned in relation to the way it is explained in the *Abhidharma*. [390.6–391.1]

(b) In this regard, MP criticised the Dge lugs interpretation further (NK 43.2), arguing that the opponent under consideration does not accept a desire that derives from “the view of the transitory [collection to be the self]” (*'jig lta*). This accusation is refuted by referring to different passages of the *Abhidharmakośa*. [391.1–3]

(c) According to MP's view, buddhahood (*sang rgyas*) would be necessary for the attainment of complete liberation (*rnam grol*). [391.3–4]

(d) In the scriptures of the Mahāyāna, up to seven different situations that are devoid of mind (*sems med*) are listed. MP's understanding of buddhahood would add an eighth situation to this list. [391.4–5]

(e) The Śrāvakas believe that the Buddha experienced suffering; using MP's logic, MP should accept that the Buddha did not attain complete liberation (*rnam grol*). [391.5]

(f) As proven in the BCAP, there is no doubt that liberation is attained by seeing *paramārthasatya* (*don dam pa'i bden pa*). [391.5–6]

(g) Even though all hope of objecting is lost for MP, the discussion is continued. [391.6]

III.6. MP's explanations in NK 43.3–5 [391.6–394.2]

(a) In NK 43.3, MP explained that the desire (*sred pa*) mentioned in BCA IX.47c should be understood without applying any specification (*khyad par gang yang ma sbyar ba*). This is in contradiction to his explanations in NK 42.1–2, where he himself added a specification. [391.6–392.2]

(b) MP's explanations singling out Arhats also indicate a desire of persons who did not attain arhatship. Because of the later passage (i.e., BCA IX.47c, *nyon mongs can min yang*), it would follow that for these people, too, a desire that is not brought forth by self-grasping exists. [392.2–3]

(c) MP's refutation of the Dge lugs interpretation (NK 43.4–5) resembles an "adornment of lies" (*snyon dor gyi rgyan*). Therefore, the Dge lugs understanding is explained again: "this desire" (*sred pa 'di*), mentioned in BCA IX.47c, is understood as non-afflicted (*nyon mongs can min*), as it is accepted by the opponent (i.e., the Abhidharma tradition). By specifying "this" desire, also its correlative, "that" desire, is indicated, which is afflicted, as it is accepted by the opponent. [392.3–393.2]

(d) The inclusive particle (*'ang sgra*) in this verse line indicates that both the desire that is mentioned and the example that is mentioned in the next verse line are twofold. [393.2–3]

(e) If a desire (*sred pa*) that is non-afflicted is accepted, then such should also be accepted for egoism (*nga rgyal*). Desire – as understood in the Prāsaṅgika tradition – cannot be "non-afflicted," as it is proven in the scriptures. [393.3–6]

(f) This is the context of the BCA, where the need to realise emptiness is established. In this context, *kleśas*, which are the opposite of an understanding of emptiness, and *karman*, which is accumulated owing to these *kleśas*, are investigated. Desire (i.e., a *kleśa*) should not be present for the *karman* of a true Arhat. MP mixed the aspects of obscuration of afflictions (*nyon*

sgrib) and obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*) and explained the latter half of this passage (i.e., BCA IX.45–49) in a way which implies that Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas need complete realisation of emptiness. Such an explanation goes far astray from the words and meaning of the BCA. [393.6–394.2]

III.7. MP's explanation in NK 42.2–3 [394.2–396.2]

(a) The usage of the inclusive particle (*'ang sgra*) in MP's statement suggests that an afflicted desire is also included. Following the interpretation of MP's tradition, the inclusive particle should be connected directly to desire (*sred pa*), but not to its attribute. [394.2–4]

(b) The connection between the existence of delusion (*kun rmongs*) and the existence of desire (*sred pa*) that MP mentioned in this passage is not established, as it is not certain that the latter exists even though the former exists. [394.4–5]

(c) In MP's explanations, example (*dpe*) and object to be established (*bsgrub bya*) are related in a wrong way. [394.5–6]

(d) It is contradictory that, in MP's explanations, delusion is explained as the example, but then also used as the reason (*rtags*). [394.6–395.1]

(e) MP's thought seems to be that the example, delusion (*kun rmongs*), is included in obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*), and therefore he has assumed the same for what it serves as an example for (*dpe can*), i.e., desire (*sred pa*). Such a relation between example and what it serves as an example for is not necessary. [395.1]

(f) MP takes out a middle part of the text, whereas the whole passage of the BCA should be explained in a stringent line. The intention of this part of the BCA is connected to a passage of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, which also explains that reality is not perceived by seeing the truth (*bden pa*) that is explained in the Abhidharma. [395.1–396.2]

Topic IV: issues connected to BCA IX.2 [396.2–416.4]

2.2.2. [Faults] with regard to the principle (*tshul*) connected to *satyadvaya*: (1) stating the opponent's position (*phyogs snga*) and (2) refuting it [396.2–416.4]

2.2.2.1. Stating the opponent's position (*phyogs snga*) [396.5–6]:

Summary of important aspects in MP's commentary on BCA IX.2: lack of true establishment (*bden med*) is the mere nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, emptiness that is free from all extremes is the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute (cf. NK 4.5ff.); the Svātantrika texts emphasise the former, while the Prāsaṅgika texts emphasise the latter (cf. NK 6.4ff.); quotation of NK 7.6, where the absolute is said to be not the sphere (*spyod yul*) of mind (*blo*).

2.2.2.2. Refuting the opponent's position [396.6–416.4]

IV.1. Is the lack of true establishment (*bden med*) the ultimate emptiness? [396.6–398.2]

(a) There is no absolute that goes beyond the emptiness of true establishment (*bden stong*) and selflessness (*bdag med*). According to the textual traditions of both Sūtra and Mantra, self-grasping is the ultimate root of *saṃsāra* and gnosis that realises selflessness is its antidote. This is proven in all scriptural sources: the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras, the commentaries of their intent, i.e., the argumentative works of Madhyamaka (*dbu ma rigs pa'i tshogs*), as well as in the texts of the Mantra tradition. [396.6–397.3]

(b) MP contradicts himself, since in NK 35.5 and NK 7.1 he as well propounded lack of true establishment (*bden med*). [397.3–5]

(c) To prove that “non-existence itself is not assumed as the ultimate absolute” (NK 5.2), MP quoted a passage from the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra*, a Svātantrika text. This passage refers to the freedom from all four extremes, and hence contradicts NK 6.4ff., where it is said that the Svātantrika texts emphasise the nominal absolute (which is only free from the extreme of existence). [397.5–6]

(d) For MP, an acceptance of any position (existence, non-existence, both, and neither) would be regarded as settling on an extreme. Since MP, then, is without grasping anything, there is no doubt that he follows the view of Hwa shang. [397.6–398.1]

(e) Also Prajñākaramati proclaims the non-existence of an inherent nature (*rang bzhin med pa*). [398.1–2]

IV.2. Contradictions to logic [398.2–5]

(a) The law of double negation, which MP accepted in NK 23.6, falls back on MP himself: if there is no non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*), then there is true establishment, and if the negation of true establishment is negated, then it leads to true establishment. [398.2–3]

(b) MP has no sound knowledge of the various principles of logic. [398.3–4]

(c) MP's position is in contradiction to a passage from the *Vigrahavyāvartini*, where it is indicated that the averting of the non-existence of an inherent nature (*rang bzhin*) leads to its establishment. [398.4–5]

(d) MP is accused of not understanding the non-contradiction between the “way of refuting an inexpressible self (*brjod med kyi bdag*)” and the “establishment of the five [kinds of] knowables (*shes bya lnga*).” [398.5]

IV.3. The meaning of “abiding in the middle” (*dbus la gnas pa*) [398.5–400.1]

(a) The correct position is the unity of non-existence on the absolute level and existence on the conventional level, which is approved by various scriptures. [398.5–6]

(b) MP, however, is not a Mādhyamika, since, if one abides in the middle of the two extremes of existence and non-existence, MP would say that one abides in the extreme of neither existence nor non-existence. Further, for MP, even abiding in the freedom of the four extremes would be abiding in the extreme of non-existence. This follows because MP has this viewpoint concerning freedom from true establishment (*bden grub*), which again is proven, as MP refutes abiding in non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*). [398.6–399.2]

(c) MP accepts every statement of existence as the extreme of existence and every statement of non-existence as the extreme of non-existence; this is also his understanding of a certain *sūtra*-passage. [399.2–3]

(d) In two passages from the (*Prajñāpāramitā*)*sañcaya(gāthā)* (*Sdud pa*) and the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, non-abiding and abiding are mentioned. For MP, non-abiding, just like abiding, would have to be abandoned. [399.3]

(e) Exemplified by a passage from the *Sūtrālaṅkāra*, all scriptures show that existence, references, meditative cultivation, [the concept of] a result, etc., are not refuted. [399.3–4]

(f) To negate all this, contradicts also MP's own words, who – in NK 6.1 – mentioned the direct realisation (*mngon sum du byas pa*) of the *dharmadhātu* that is free from the 32 superimpositions (which in turn seems to imply the acceptance of existence). [399.4–400.1]

IV.4. Śrāvakas', Cittamātrins', and Mādhyamikas' realisation of emptiness; MP's understanding of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika tradition [400.1–401.3]

(a) According to MP, Śrāvakas who take a personal self to be non-existent and phenomena to be existent by way of an inherent nature (*rang bzhin gyis*) would fall into the extremes of existence and non-existence. [400.1]

(b) As proven by a passage from the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*, also in the Cittamātra tradition, emptiness and selflessness is accepted as the highest path (which in turn seems to imply a contradiction to MP's conception of the absolute). [400.1–2]

(c) As proven by a passage from the *Kaśyapaparivarta* and the earlier quote, both Cittamātrins and Mādhyamikas accept what is the middle of two extremes as the middle, while MP also accepts a fifth extreme that is different from the four extremes. [400.2–4]

(d) Passages from different scriptures (*Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Sūtrālaṅkāra*, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*) show that both Cittamātrins and Svātantrikas explain an emptiness that is free from all extremes in their respective scriptures. [400.4–6]

(e) In the NK, MP stated that the Svātantrikas accept only the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute and the Prāsaṅgikas only the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute (referring to NK 5.2 and 6.5), and that the former absolute is a door for the latter (NK 4.6). But the Svātantrikas also accept the latter absolute, which is proven in NK 5.2, where MP quotes the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra*. The same is also proven through logic. [400.6–401.2]

(f) MP has stated in NK 6.6 that the Prāsaṅgikas do not bifurcate the absolute. Accordingly, it follows that they accept non-establishment on the absolute level (*don dam par ma grub pa*) as the great emptiness, since they do not accept it as the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute. But MP cannot agree to that, as he had stated in NK 5.3 that non-existence is not accepted as the ultimate absolute. [401.2–3]

IV.5. MP's statement in NK 6.4–5 that there is no difference between Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas with regard to their ultimate intention; refutation of extremes in relation to the subject and the object [401.3–402.5]

(a) MP's assumption of a shared ultimate intention of Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika in NK 6.4–5 entails three logical faults:

- A shared ultimate intention would also follow for Cittamātrins, the Sautrāntikas, and the Vaibhāṣikas.
- The debates between Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti would be superfluous.
- As would be the difference of accepting or not accepting an establishment by a *svalakṣaṇa* (*rang mtshan gyis grub pa*) on the conventional level. [401.3–5]

(b) In the scriptures, different explanations with regard to the absolute are found; in terms of the ceasing or not ceasing of dualistic appearances, the differentiation of nominal and actual absolute can be *also* related to the subject (and not just to the object). [401.5–402.1]

(c) MP is not even able to explain his own position clearly, which should be explained in the following way: non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) is merely free from the extreme of existence (*yod mtha'*), and existence on the conventional level is merely free from the extreme of non-existence (*med mtha'*). As such is also the case for the other two extremes, one arrives at the Great Madhyamaka that is not limited in its freedom from all extremes, and hence is the actual absolute. [402.1–2]

(d) Summary of RS's position: it is important to distinguish the perspective of the object and of the subject. With regard to the object, emptiness is free from the extreme of annihilation, but is not a mere refutation of that. Conventional existence is free from the extreme of existence, but is not a mere refutation of that. With regard to the subject, the mind that realises non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) does not refute the extreme of annihilation (*chad mtha'*). The mind that realises existence on the conventional level refutes directly the extreme of annihilation and indirectly the extreme of permanence (*rtag mtha'*). By different lines of reasoning it is proven that all phenomena are inherently (*rang bzhin gyis*) non-existent since time without beginning. Hence, all phenomena are established as the middle of the base. [402.2–5]

IV.6. Discussing MP's explanation in NK 27.1–2 [402.5–403.3]

(a) In the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Candrakīrti argues against an opponent that the opponent's understanding of selflessness is insufficient, implying that his own Madhyamaka understanding of selflessness is sufficient. It would follow that Candrakīrti's statement is incorrect, as the mode of existence (*gnas tshul*) would not even be realised by the Madhyamaka understanding of selflessness. MP has to accept this reason, as he stated in NK 27.1–2 that an understanding of non-existence (or selflessness) is required for a (further) understanding of the mode of existence. [402.5–403.1]

(b) The earlier part of NK 27.1–2, where the need to realise the non-existence of an inherent nature (*rang bzhin*) is stated, is similar to the explanations given to the opponent (in the earlier passage of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*). Hence, this contradicts MP's statement (in NK 6.6) that the Prāsaṅgikas do not bifurcate the absolute. [403.1]

(c) In the second part of the statement from NK 27.1–2, MP mentioned that “only this non-existence alone is not the mode of existence” (*med pa nyid de tsam kho na gnas lugs ma yin*). This accumulation of the particles “nyid,” “tsam,” and “kho na” is criticised; MP should rather state openly that non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) is not the mode of existence. [403.1–3]

IV.7. In which context is freedom from all four extremes accepted? [403.3–404.3]

(a) MP contradicts Candrakīrti's explanations (in the *Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya*), which state that the abandonment of a permanent self (*rtag bdag*), i.e., an imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*), does not impair (innate) ego-grasping (*ngar 'dzin*), (since for MP not only the existence of a self, but all four extremes must be refuted). [403.3–5]

(b) Furthermore, MP's understanding of the absolute as free from all four extremes also contradicts the example of the snake mentioned in this passage of the *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*: while an understanding of the non-existence of the snake suffices to avert fear, MP claims that the snake neither exists, nor does it not exist, nor are both cases valid or neither of the two, and hence he only raises new fear. The same problem would also occur if one claims that the other extremes are refuted after the snake's non-existence has been pointed out first. [403.5–404.2]

(c) There is no doubt that MP adheres to a Hwa shang view, since he relies on the scriptures that support the Hwa shang position, and as he accepts any kind of mental activity as self-grasping and a hindrance on the path to awakening. [404.2–3]

IV.8. Direct realisation of emptiness [404.3–405.2]

(a) An opponent – such as MP – might object, asking whether it is not the case that *clinging* (*zhen pa*) to selflessness and the conventional existence of things is averted, too. But, as proven in passages on direct (*mngon sum*) realisation in the Pramāṇa scriptures, there are no conceptualisations (*rtog pa*) when emptiness is realised directly, and thus there is no contradiction of its realisation through valid cognition (*tshad ma*). [404.3–4]

(b) There is a spelling mistake (*rtogs* instead of *rtog*) in a quote MP mentioned (NK 28.6f.), implying that MP is confused with regard to the meaning of “realisation” (*rtogs pa*) and “conceptualisation” (*rtog pa*). [404.4–5]

(c) In the example of the mind that is like a fire that burns an erroneous conception from the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, the object that is burned and the agent that burns are different; that the agent burns itself is also refuted. In addition, in the example of a fire that arises from rubbing two sticks, too, the agent and the object of burning are different. (This seems to contradict MP's explanation in NK 86, that the realisation of selflessness also averts the conception of selflessness itself.) Rather, a gradual development of “listening, reflection, and meditative cultivation” (*thos bsam sgom*), culminating in the direct realisation of suchness, should be accepted. [404.5–405.2]

IV.9. Realisation of absence of being (*dnegos med*) [405.2–406.5]

(a) Referring to BCA IX.35ab, an opponent might object that absence of being (*dnegos med*) is also averted as an object of mind. But this would mean that absence of being appeared to the mind earlier, but not later, since in the BCA a specific point of time was mentioned. This is misleading; rather, it should be understood in the following way: earlier, at the time of listening and reflection, object and subject appear distant, but later, owing to *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, dualistic appearances are purified and non-dualistic appearances arise, (implying that non-existence is still present for

the mind, but not as a distant object). This process is described in detail, using an explanation from the Cittamātra tradition. [405.2–5]

(b) According to MP's position (expressed in NK 28), it would follow that the mind for which an object is not present would have a non-existent object, since this would be accepted as the meaning of BCA IX.35d. But this, too, cannot be accepted, because in BCA IX.61cd, the existence of an object of knowledge is regarded as necessary in order to speak of knowing. Another possibility for an opponent would be to argue that mind does not exist either. But then, mind and its object would be equally non-existent, and it would not make sense to discuss whether one exists for the other. MP therefore adheres to a nihilistic view, "where everything, cognition and its objects, dissolves into great emptiness, i.e., nothingness," and both perception through valid cognition and valid cognition itself would be negated. This view is seen as most evil and to be in contradiction to the authentic scriptures, where it is said that the qualities of a Buddha are established by correct reasoning and the two accumulations. [405.5–406.5]

IV.10. Ceasing of mind (*sems bkag*) at the time of awakening [406.5–407.2]

While the Śrāvakas' view of the annihilation of matter and mind when there is no remaining *karman* is refuted, MP claims that one moves to the "sphere of non-perception," free from matter and mind, at the stage of awakening (referring to NK 74f.). Such a view further contradicts the transformation of ordinary consciousness into gnosis.

IV.11. The status of *svasaṃvedana* and *ālaya* [407.2–408.3]

MP refutes the things that should be accepted, such as the two *satyas* (referring to NK 73), while he accepts things that should be refuted, such as *svasaṃvedana* and *ālaya* (referring to NK 22). The acceptance of the *ālaya* is wrong for various reasons:

- It follows that the Śrāvakas also accept the *ālaya*, since it is mentioned in the scriptures known by them.

- Hence, it follows that the difference entailed by the *ālaya* being accepted by fewer people than it is the case with ordinary consciousness does not exist, since all people accept the *ālaya*.

- The differentiation between people who accept the *ālaya* and people who do not accept the *ālaya* made by Asaṅga in his five treatises on the levels (*Sa sde*) would be illogical.

- A similar differentiation in the *Don gsal* (prob. referring to the commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* by Haribhadra; MP seems to refer to this text as *Don gsang*) would also be useless.

- Accepting the *ālaya* contradicts the *ālaya*'s characterisation as interpretable (*drang don*) in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*; furthermore, if one accepts something of interpretable meaning, then it follows that the Cittamātrins could also accept certain *sūtra*-passages mentioning an independent self etc. in a literal way, which contradicts the explanation that those passages are of indirect intention (*gzhug pa ldem dgongs*).

Further, *svasaṃvedana* is not accepted by everybody, which is shown by a passage of the *Pramāṇavārttika* (where *svasaṃvedana* is established against the opinion of an opponent). There are also various ways (other than by means of the notion of *svasaṃvedana*) to explain experiencing, mentioned in the *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* and the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra*.

IV.12. Self-grasping with regard to a person (*gang zag gi bdag 'dzin*) and self-grasping with regard to phenomena (*chos kyi bdag 'dzin*) [408.3–6]

MP's view that self-grasping with regard to a person is a division of self-grasping with regard to phenomena (expressed in NK 40.4–5) is an utter invention, which leads to several absurd consequences:

- It follows that grasping a certain phenomenon as permanent (*rtag pa*) etc. would be self-grasping with regard to phenomena, and grasping a human being as permanent etc. would be self-grasping with regard to a person.

- It follows that the parts of a certain category would be exchangeable.

- It follows that the priority with regard to what is abandoned – self-grasping with regard to a personal self or phenomena – by Śrāvakas and Bodhisattvas is turned upside down.

- It follows that the differentiation of the two kinds of obscuration (*sgrib gnyis*) is mixed up.

IV.13. Difference between the Sūtra and Mantra traditions [408.6–409.6]

(a) The similarity of the coalescence of *satyadvaya* in both the Sūtra and Mantra traditions presented in NK 7.4 contradicts the statement of the difference in methods of these two traditions (also NK 7.4). [408.6–409.1]

(b) Stating RS's position: there is no difference between the two traditions as far as emptiness is concerned, but there is a difference in the way things are perceived as empty (*stong tshul*). [409.1–2]

(c) According to MP, the conception of *satyadvaya* in both the Sūtra and Mantra, as well as in all the tenet systems, is similar; hence it follows that all these traditions are similar with regard to basis (*gzhi*), path (*lam*), and result (*'bras bu*); this is a position that contradicts the Indian scriptures. [409.2–3]

(d) MP said (referring to NK 39) that “the Great and the Lower Vehicle are not differentiated by [their] methods;” this, too, contradicts the Indian scriptures. [409.3–6]

2.2.2.2.*.⁴ The statement that “the absolute is not the object of mind and words” (NK 7.6): (1) the way (*tshul*) it contradicts [MP’s] own statements and (2) the statements of the scriptures [409.6–416.4]

2.2.2.2.*.1. The way it contradicts [MP’s] own statements [409.6–413.2]

IV.14. MP’s statement “the absolute is not an object of mind and words” (NK 7.6) – contradictions with regard to his other statements [409.6–410.4]

(a) The statement contradicts NK 3.6, where it is explained that one “should diligently bring forth this insight of realising suchness,” since it follows from this latter statement that a mind (*blo*) that realises the absolute exists, as insight (*shes rab*) that realises the absolute was mentioned. [409.6–410.1]

(b) It follows that the absolute is not an object of yogis of whatever realisation, since those yogis are conventional. This follows, because MP stated in NK 7.6: “[...] because mind (*blo*) and words (*sgra*) are conventional, but are not the absolute.” If this is accepted, then it contradicts the explanations about persons who realise the two *satyas*, mentioned in the outline in NK 4.1. [410.1–2]

(c) It follows that a mind or words that enter emptiness do not exist, since this mind or words are “merely imaginations by names and concepts” (*ming dang rtog pas btags tsam*). This follows, because these are not established through own-characteristics (*rang gi mtshan nyid*). This again contradicts the conclusion that a realisation of suchness exists, which is proven by other statements (NK 2.2 and 2.2–3), where MP explained that suchness (*de nyid*) is seen. [410.2–4]

IV.15. Contradictions in MP’s concept of the coalescence of appearances and emptiness [410.4–411.1]

There are three passages from the NK that contradict MP’s concept of the coalescence of appearances and emptiness (*snang stong zung ’jug*), as the aspect of appearing is missing:

- In NK 3.1, omniscience (*rnam mkhyen*) that realises the way things are (*ji lta ba*) is described as “ultimate gnosis of the twofold knowledge.”

- In NK 5.1, “insight that is distinguished through the mere non-existence of things on the absolute level” is mentioned.

- In NK 5.3–4, it is explained that “appearances of arising on the conventional level cannot be negated while determining the path.” This implicitly means that appearances are refuted in the context of non-training (i.e., *mi slob pa’i lam*).

⁴ Here, a new section is started, but without assigning it a corresponding number in the structural outline.

Also, the aspect of emptiness is not established, since it is in contradiction to NK 5.2, where MP explained that the mode of existence is beyond non-existence.

Hence, MP's idea of coalescence does not destroy negation and affirmation (as MP claimed in NK 7.2).

IV.16. Further contradictions with regard to MP's concept of the absolute [411.1–5]

(a) MP accepts the absolute as an object of mind as well, since he mentions the absolute as an object of both ordinary people and Āryas. This is proven in NK 7.4–6, where MP speaks about the need for even ordinary beings to meditate on the ultimate absolute, which is free from all extremes. This again contradicts the reason given by MP in NK 7.6: the absolute is not an object of mind, because it is free from all extremes.

In other passages of the NK (NK 6.1, NK 6.2, NK 33.3), too, the realisation of the absolute by Āryas is mentioned. Furthermore, MP's explanations of the realisation and complete realisation of emptiness by the Śrāvakas and Bodhisattvas in NK 40 suggest that the absolute is an object of mind. [411.1–3]

(b) MP explained that the result (*'bras bu*), i.e., awakening, is brought forth without depending on means, such as compassion, etc. (and hence neglects the level of the conventional). [411.3]

(c) MP's statement in NK 40.2 that "all paths come down to omniscient gnosis, which is the realisation of emptiness" contradicts his quotation from the *Pitāputrasamāgamanaśūtra* in NK 4.2, which mentions the importance of both of the *satyas*, the absolute and the conventional. [411.3–5]

IV.17. Is emptiness an object of mind and words or not? Further contradictions in the NK [411.5–412.4]

(a) In NK 10.1 and 61.4, MP mentioned the realisation of the mode of existence (*gnas tshul*) – or emptiness – by mind. This is in contradiction to a passage in NK 8.1., where MP explained that phenomena that are the object of mind and words cannot withstand investigation if they are investigated. This also applies to emptiness (and hence is in contradiction to the earlier passages). One may counter this criticism by arguing that emptiness is not the object of mind and words (which would also contradict the first two NK passages mentioned). [411.5–412.1]

(b) In addition to denying that emptiness is an object of mind, MP also denies that it is an object of words. But to what does MP's expression "great emptiness" (NK 4.5–6) then refer? [412.1–3]

(c) In NK 6.1–2, MP stated that "Śāntideva focuses on suchness," (which also implies that emptiness is an object of words). [412.3–4]

IV.18. Further contradictions in the NK [412.4–6]

(a) The outline in NK 11.6–12.1 refers to emptiness as an “object of expression” (*brjod bya*) and to the Mahāyāna tradition as its “expresser” (*rjod byed*). In the actual explanation in NK 32.6–33.1, a Śrāvaka opponent is said to object, doubting the benefit of seeing emptiness. MP, in contrast, had argued (probably referring to NK 10) that there is no claim of the existence of a mind that sees emptiness. [412.4–5]

(b) In this passage, both the Śrāvaka opponent and the Mahāyāna proponent say that one is liberated after having seen the truth. MP, however, claims that one is liberated even though a mind (*blo*) that sees the truth does not exist, and thus creates a new tenet system. [412.5–6]

IV.19. Further contradictions in the NK [412.6–413.2]

(a) In the NK, MP explained that emptiness is explained in the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* (NK 33). It follows that the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* are not words (since MP stated earlier that emptiness is not an object of words). [412.6]

(b) In NK 93.6, MP explains that emptiness is taught to the beings (thus also contradicting his earlier statements). Here, MP was not able to change the root text. [412.6–413.2]

2.2.2.2.*.2. The way it contradicts the statements of the scriptures [413.2–416.4]

IV.20. Is the absolute an object of mind and words? – Discussing the scriptures [413.2–414.3]

MP’s position that emptiness is not an object of words is in contradiction to several passages from the scriptures:

(a) In the *Lalitavistara* it is shown that emptiness is difficult to understand, but was taught nevertheless (and hence is an object of words). [413.2–4]

(b) It follows that a passage from the *Ratnakūṭa*, where it is said that the Buddha did not teach a single word, would have to be taken literally, since a teaching of emptiness does not exist. [413.4]

(c) If there is no teaching of emptiness, then it would be also illogical to call the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* the king of all *sūtras*, owing to its extensive teaching of emptiness. [413.4–5]

(d) The distinction of *sūtras* in provisional (*drang don*) and definitive (*nges don*) meanings would make no sense, since there would be no *sūtras* that teach both *satyas*. [413.5]

(e) With regard to Candrakīrti’s statement “one should understand the definitive meaning which is endowed with the meaning of emptiness,” it would follow that the definitive meaning cannot be understood, since it

would not be possible to express the definitive meaning through words. [413.5–6]

(f) A statement in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* that mentions “the best of the ones that propound” would make no sense, since being the best has been explained as being able to propound emptiness. [413.6]

(g) Furthermore, the mention of “different aspects” in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, which refers to the different aspects in the sense of provisional and definitive meaning, does not make sense. [413.6]

(h) As proven by several quotes from various scriptures, the absolute is accepted as an object of words and mind. [413.6–414.3]

(i) MP does not even understand the meaning of the title of the *Uttaratantra* and the *Corpus of Argumentative Works on Madhyamaka* (*Dbu ma rigs tshogs*). [414.3]

IV.21. The status of conventional existence (*kun rdzob tu yod pa*) [414.3–415.1]

(a) To the earlier accusations, one might reply (as suggested in NK 73.4) that all the establishments of emptiness are carried out on the conventional level and, thus, the fault mentioned earlier (i.e., that, according to MP’s viewpoint, there is no teaching of emptiness whatsoever) does not apply. MP, however, cannot refute these accusations, because he has also said that conventional existence does not entail existence (and hence, a teaching of emptiness does not exist). [414.3–4]

(b) The earlier thought is continued: if *paramārthasatya* exists on the conventional level (*kun rdzob tu*), is it then free from all extremes or not? According to the first possibility, it follows that it is not an object of words or mind, since it is free from all extremes (as MP stated in NK 7.6). If MP accepts this conclusion, then it contradicts his statement (NK 9.3) that the absolute is a knowable (*shes bya*) on the conventional level. Furthermore, the distinction of the two *satyas* would be non-existent, and it would contradict MP’s explanations in NK 9 that the basis of the distinction (*dbye gzhi*) of the two *satyas* and its nature (*dbye ngo*) are assumed with regard to the conventional level. [414.4–5]

(c) For the reasons mentioned above, MP’s “Great Madhyamaka” (*dbu ma chen po*) neither exists on the conventional nor on the absolute level, and also cannot be explained on either level. [414.5–415.1]

IV.22. Further contradictions concerning MP’s position that the absolute is not an object of words and mind [415.1–5]

(a) It follows that emptiness is an object of inference (*rjes dpag*), since it is hidden (*lkog gyur*). This is accepted even by the Lokāyata tradition (*rgyang*

'phen pa) (whereas MP holds the view that emptiness is not an object of mind). [415.1]

(b) It follows that the non-existence of an inherent nature (*rang bzhin gyis med pa*) of a thing is not eliminated by valid cognition (*tshad ma*), since it is the correct probandum (*bsgrub bya*). Further, there is a contradiction between MP's view and the scriptures of the Pramāṇa tradition, as proven by two passages from the *Pramāṇavārttika*. [415.2]

(c) MP's view is in contradiction to two passages from the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* that mention the cognition (*dmigs pa*) of emptiness; according to MP, Bodhisattvas would attain awakening without meditating on emptiness. [415.2–3]

(d) With regard to the 173 applications (*sbyor ba*) (mentioned in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*), MP does not engage in the meditative cultivation of the aspects of the absolute (*don dam pa'i rnam pa*) (as MP holds that this is not an object of mind). [415.3–4]

(e) Four passages from the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* refute MP's view. [415.4]

(f) MP mentions "omniscience" (*rnam mkhyen*), but does not even know its three aspects. [415.4–5]

(g) MP makes careless statements, without pondering on the way of perfecting (one's realisation of the mode of existence) by the perception of the (173) aspects (mentioned above). [415.5]

IV.23. Further arguments against MP's view: proof from the *Madhyamakāvatāra* [415.5–416.4]

(a) In several passages from the *Madhyamakāvatāra* a mind that realises emptiness is mentioned and emptiness is described. MP, on the other hand, cannot describe emptiness. [415.5–6]

(b) Another passage of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* explains that emptiness will not enter the mind of others; according to MP, however, emptiness will also not enter one's own mind. [415.6–416.1]

(c) A prayer in the *Madhyamakāvatāra* mentions that one proceeds to awakening after emptiness is realised. Following MP would delay the path to awakening (due to MP's view that emptiness is not an object). [416.1–2]

(d) The chapter is concluded with four "teasing" (*nyams mtshar*) verses. [416.2–4]

3. Summary [416.4–418.5]

(a) Tsong kha pa is praised: his teachings are the essence of the Bka' gdams pa masters Ātiśa and 'Brom ston, and his view of the three aspects of listening, reflection, and meditative cultivation is in accord with the scriptures, and ultimately goes back to the Jina. [416.4–417.3]

(b) In this present time of degeneration, the Dharma people engage in debate for the wrong reasons. It is important to practice and not to mix the different religious traditions. [417.3–6]

(c) In this matter, one could elaborate more, using sources from all scriptures and philosophical traditions, but, for the time being, it shall not be continued. [417.6–418.5]

Auspicious verses [418.5–420.5]

Colophon [420.5–421.6]

Rab lan

Opening verses [192.1–193.1]

Introduction [193.1–195.5]

Background and development of the debates: various polemical letters were received. Among those, RS's letter has been singled out as worthy of reply, since it investigates mainly through reasoning. While Tsong kha pa is to be praised, the present followers of his tradition misunderstand his intention, as shown by their conception of the Madhyamaka negandum (*dgag bya*). As Tsong kha pa shares the idea of the coalescence of appearances and emptiness, earlier and later Tibetan traditions agree in their key points. In view of the sectarian attitude of present scholars, an answer could lead to further partition. But just as RS replied to the NK, as explained in JL 412.2–3, an answer to RS is presented here, without any motivation of attachment or aversion.

Actual Subject (*dnegos don*) [195.5–461.1]

Topic I: the interpretation of BCA IX.1 [195.5–198.1]

I.1. Relation of the six perfections (*pāramitās*) and the meaning of “*yan lag*” [195.5–196.3]

- Objection [195.5–196.1]: summary of JL I.1 (372.1–373.5)

- Answer [196.1–196.3]:

There are two different ways of explanation: one explains that each of the perfections is the result of the preceding one, the other explains the first five perfections as co-emergent supports or associates (*lhan cig byed pa'i grogs*) of insight, i.e., the sixth perfection. Since these two ways do not conflict with each other, RS's objection has no basis.

I.2. NK 3.4 and the meaning of “*don*” [196.3–197.2]

- Objection [196.3–5]: quotation of most of JL I.2 (373.5–374.1)

- Answer [196.5–197.2]:

There are two ways of explanation: one explains “aiming at” (*don du*) as “aiming at the generation of insight,” the other explains it as “aiming

at or supporting the perfection of abandonment and realisation through insight.” Now, it is the context of explaining the verse according to the second way of explanation; this cannot be refuted by a scripture (i.e., the quote from Prajñākaramati’s BCAP) which explains the verse according to the first way of explanation. There is no correct reasoning that the explanation of “*don du*” as “support” (*grog su*) is not possible.

According to a passage by Śāntarakṣita (*Madhyamakālaṅkāravṛtti*), there are two ways of explanation: one where insight precedes [the other perfections], and one where it comes afterwards. This is accepted also by Tsong kha pa; RS’s approach of clinging to only one way of explanation is too narrow.

I.3. Relationship between the other five perfections and insight; the interpretation of “*don*” [197.2–5]

- Objection [197.2–3]: summary of JL I.3 (374.1–3) and JL I.4 (374.3–4)

- Answer [197.3–5]:

(a) Means (*thabs*) and insight (*shes rab*) are each other’s mutual support, but this does not undermine the establishment of insight as the main aspect of the path. Also, according to RS’s explanation that the means enact the *generation* of insight, means and insight are each other’s mutual support, because the means only deserve the meaning “perfections” if they are accompanied by insight. [197.3–4]

(b) There is no need to single out the “desired aim/goal” (*’dod don*) of the king; the goal that is to be accomplished is accomplished by the king together with his entourage; by that alone the example fits. [197.4–5]

I.4. The usage of the particle “only/simply” (*tsam*) [197.5–198.1]

- Objection [197.5]: quotation of the first part (374.4–5) of JL I.5 (374.4–375.5)

- Answer [197.5–198.1]:

Particles such as “only” (*kho na*) or “only/simply” (*tsam*) are connected to the speaker’s intention and can be used, for example, as a “preclusion” or “negative determination,” where the object under discussion is not endowed with something (*mi ldan rnam gcod*), or a preclusion, where the object under discussion is endowed with something else (*gzhan ldan rnam gcod*). Here, the particle “only/simply” (*tsam*) is used to exclude everything that is not the main aspect.

Topic II: the interpretation of BCA IX.78 [198.1–214.3]

II.1. The interpretation of “that” (*de*) in BCA IX.78c [198.1–199.2]

- Objection [198.1–3]: summary of JL 2.1.2.1 and II.1a (375.5–376.6)

- Answer [198.3–199.2]:

(a) Regarding JL II.1a, it must be said that the individual texts have different ways of explanation, but as long as there is no contradiction in meaning, a fault does not arise. [198.3–4]

(b) Quotation of the beginning of JL II.1b; according to Kalyānadeva's commentary, which RS explains in JL II.1b, the delusion of [the attainment of] the result (*'bras bu'i rmongs pa*) is accepted as a delusion. This contradicts RS's later accusation (JL II.5e), where RS refutes this very same idea. [198.4–199.2]

II.2. MP's explanations in NK 61.2–3 (a, b) [199.2–6]

- Objection [199.2–4]: quotation of JL II.2ab (378.1–2)

- Answer [199.4–6]:

(a) The *la*-particle is the locative (seventh) case and connected to “appearances” (*snang ba*). The *ra*-particle is connected to “the perception of ordinary beings” (*so skye'i ngo*) and indicates for whom [these appearances] do not appear. The two case-particles have a different subject, and so there is no redundant use of the objective case (*las kyi sgra*). [199.4–5]

(b) There is no logical proof that an inherently established self does not appear in the perception of ordinary beings, but there is a proof that it does not exist in the way it appears. Hence, dependently arising appearances (e.g., an imagined self), and appearances that appear to be inherently established while they are not (e.g., an inherently established self), are different. [199.5–6]

II.3. MP's explanations in NK 61.2–3 (c) [199.6–200.3]

- Objection [199.6–200.1]: quotation of JL II.2c (378.2–4)

- Answer [200.1–3]:

As known from the scriptures, dualistic mind ceases, but non-dualistic gnosis exists; hence, twofold ultimate knowledge exists at the stage of a Buddha.

II.4. MP's explanation of selflessness in NK 61.3 [200.3–6]

- Objection [200.3–4]: quotation of JL II.3 (378.4–5)

- Answer [200.5–6]:

All notions of negation and affirmation need to be destroyed with respect to meditative concentration (*mnyam bzhaḡ*); however, such was never claimed with regard to the certain knowledge of the stage of post-concentration (*rjes thob*).

II.5. The relation between the “egoism” of self-grasping and the “delusion” of self-grasping, mentioned in NK 60.6–61.1 [200.6–204.6]

- Objection [200.6–201.6]: quotation of JL II.4a (378.5–379.2) and parts of JL II.4b and JL II.4c (379.2–381.1)

- Answer [201.6–204.6]:

(a) The earlier explanations (NK 60.6–61.1) indeed imply a causal relationship: “egoism” (*nga rgyal*) is increased by self-grasping (or the delusion of self-grasping). As self-grasping is part of the view (*lta ba*), and egoism (*nga rgyal*) of self-grasping is a division of the seven kinds of egoism, RS’s accusation (of the identity of these two) does not apply. [201.6–202.3]

There are also other possible explanations that use a causal relationship, which shows that RS’s accusation does not apply. [202.3–203.4]

(b) RS’s position, according to which self-grasping with regard to phenomena is the cause of self-grasping with regard to persons, is investigated. When grasping phenomena is applied to grasping the *skandhas*, is it a grasping of the *skandhas* as “mere *skandhas*” (*phung po tsam*), or as truly established (*bden grub*) *skandhas*? In the Dge lugs system, the first is regarded as valid cognition, hence the second must be the issue at stake. Here it can be argued that there must be a sequence where first one grasps the *skandhas* as truly established and afterwards a person as truly established, with the former acting as a cause for the latter. Such a sequence is not validated by experience, and it would further imply that there is a state where one grasps the *skandhas*, but not a person, which again means that there is a state where one does not have *primordial* grasping of a person. Such logical problems are not pointed out as a criticism of a causal relationship between grasping with regard to the *skandhas* and self-grasping with regard to a person, but as teasing remarks (*nyams mtshar*) to RS’s objections. [203.4–204.6]

II.6. The status of viewing buddhahood as an object of attainment [204.6–209.1]

- Objection [204.6–206.1]: quotation of JL II.5 (381.2–382.2)

- Answer [206.1–209.1]:

RS’s second accusation (JL II.5b) does not make sense: the non-existence of a rabbit’s horn is proven by conventional valid cognition (*tha snyad tshad ma*), but to prove the non-existence of truly established (*bden grub*) phenomena, absolute valid cognition (*don dam tshad ma*) is needed. There is not anything that can withstand a reasoning that investigates the absolute, and it is from this perspective that phenomena accepted by conventional valid cognition are said to be established for ignorance (*ma rig pa*), or that a corresponding perception is a “false perception” (*mtshong ba brdzun pa*). Furthermore, all dualistic (*gnyis snang*) appearances can be called “false perceptions” (*mtshong ba brdzun pa*); this understanding is also supported by Candrakīrti (*Madhyamakāvatāra*). Accordingly, the earlier passages from the NK can be explained without contradiction. To view *nirvāṇa* as an object of attainment (*’thob bya*) on the conventional level is indeed a conven-

tional valid cognition, but to view *nirvāṇa* as an object of attainment with regard to the absolute level is refuted by an absolute valid cognition.

II.7. MP's explanations in NK 60.1–2 and MP's explanation in NK 61.4 [209.1–210.5]

- Objection [209.1–210.1]: quotation of JL II.6 (382.2–6) and JL II.7 (382.6–383.2)

- Answer [210.1–5]:

(a) The passage (NK 60.1–2) must be understood in the following way: an opponent wants to prove that the hope for an object to be attained on the conventional level does not make sense, if such does not exist with regard to the absolute level. Hence, he asks, “Is it not delusion what is to be removed at all times?,” to which BCA IX.77d is then the answer. The faults mentioned by RS (JL II.6ab) do not apply. [210.1–3]

(b) The innate belief in a self does indeed deviate from the fundamental nature (*gshis lugs*) – or reality – since time without beginning. But this does not contradict the usage of the term “temporary” (*re zhig*); it expresses that it is possible to avert (*ldog tu rung ba*) the belief in the existence of a self eventually, i.e., in the future. [210.3–5]

II.8. MP's explanation in NK 61.4. [210.5–212.2]

- Objection [210.5–211.1]: quotation of JL II.8 (383.2–4)

- Answer [211.1–212.2]

It seems that RS did not understand the meaning of this passage of the NK, which reads: “If the mind is caused to enter the mode of existence of things, then this is the nature of the mind.” It should be understood as saying that the nature of the mind is free from deceptions such as self-grasping, and not separated from the realisation of selflessness. Even if one understands this as RS does, as the mode of existence of external things (*phyi'i dngos po*) being the nature of the mind, his conclusion is false: different kinds of emptiness are explained with regard to the emptiness of certain phenomena, but emptiness itself is always the same, as explained in various scriptures.

II.9. Ceasing of mind (*sems 'gags pa*) [212.3–214.3]

- Objection [212.3–6]: quotation of JL II.9 (383.4–384.3)

- Answer [212.6–214.3]:

(a) RS's earlier objection (JL II.9a) is merely a dispute about terminology. In the NK, only the ceasing of dualistic mind is claimed, whereas the existence of non-dualistic gnosis (*ye shes*) at the stage of awakening is not denied. The difference between mind (*sems*) and gnosis (*ye shes*) is explained in various scriptures and the terminology is used accordingly. [212.6–214.1]

(b) As for the second issue (JL II.9b), the statement “my thought alone” (NK 61.6) means that nowadays MP alone uses this clear way of explanation, which does not contradict the statement that this understanding is in accordance with the Indian commentators. [214.1–3]

Topic III: the interpretation of BCA 41–49

III.1. Interpreting BCA IX.45c–49c [214.3–216.6]

- Objection [214.3–216.4]: quotation of JL III.1 and 2 and the preceding passage (384.3–386.3)

- Answer [216.4–6]:

Indeed, “meditation of worldly people” (*’jig rten pa’i bsam gtan*) is the example (mentioned in BCA IX.49c), and the path that is endowed with the coarse aspects of truth, without realising subtle selflessness, is what it serves as an example for (*dpe can*). But the specification “explained in the Abhidharma” (*mngon pa nas bshad pa*) is not applied. One cannot prove that a person who knows the aspects of truth explained in the Abhidharma is necessarily someone who has not realised subtle selflessness.

III.2. Explaining the specification “manifest” (*mngon gyur pa*) (a, b) [216.6–222.2]

- Objection [216.6–219.2]: quotation of JL III.4ab (387.3–389.3)

- Answer [219.2–222.2]:

(a) There is no reasoning that can prove that there is no chance of attaining higher realisation, even if one practices according to the path of the Abhidharma. Statements such as the one from the *Āryadhyāyitamustīśūtra* refer to Arhats who have “self-conceit” (*mngon pa’i nga rgyal*) (i.e., they think they have attained realisation, while they have not). It is therefore not necessary to apply the specification “as explained in the Abhidharma” (*mngon pa nas bshad pa*). The issue of this context is that Hīnayāna followers, who have self-conceit, who have not realised the truth as it is explained in the Abhidharma, and who have not abandoned the *kleśas*, object to the teaching of emptiness. Those who know the aspects of truth as these are explained in the Abhidharma, and who have realised subtle selflessness, are definitely liberated from *saṃsāra*, and do not object to the teaching of emptiness. [219.2–220.2]

(b) Earlier (in JL III.2b), RS criticised MP’s interpretation, arguing that “grasping as truly established” (*bden ’dzin*) cannot be suppressed by realising coarse selflessness (i.e., the non-existence of a permanent, partless, and independent self). This criticism does not apply, since a mere suppression or weakening of manifest *kleśas*, without abandoning their seeds, is possible, just as described earlier (in JL III.4a) by RS. [220.2–221.2]

(c) RS pointed out the consequence (in JL III.2b) that MP's explanations would entail that grasping as truly established (*bden 'dzin*) arises for Arhats, since in the NK it is supposedly said that grasping as truly established will arise again if the seed, the habitual patterns (*bag chags*), are not abandoned. Such a view is wrong, because the NK does not say that grasping as truly established will arise again. This passage of the BCA proves that Arhats may be reborn in the form of a mental body (*gid lus*) if they do not abandon dualistic grasping. [221.2–5]

(d) Earlier (in JL III.1b), RS criticised MP for explaining first that grasping as truly established (*bden 'dzin*) is not abandoned, and then later relating this passage of the BCA to Arhats. This criticism does not apply, because the earlier passage of the BCA is related to people of self-conceit (*mngon pa'i nga rgyal*), who think they have attained realisation when they have not, and hence object to the teaching of emptiness, while the latter passage of the BCA proves that Arhats who have attained a – Hīnayāna – realisation need to engage further in the Mahāyāna. [221.5–222. 2]

III.3. MP's explanation in NK 36.5 [222.2–225.3]

- Objection [222.2–223.3]: quotation of JL III.3ab (386.3–387.3)

- Answer [223.3–225.3]:

(a) Indeed, the opponent does not distinguish between subtle and coarse self-grasping, but it can be shown through reasoning that he has not abandoned subtle self-grasping. In addition, RS's objection can also be applied to RS's specification "as explained in the Abhidharma," since the opponent does not use this specification either. [223.3–224.2]

(b) RS's answer seems to be driven by anger at the criticism of the Dge lugs interpretation in NK 42.5. But these two cases, the criticism in the NK and RS's refutation, are different. The Dge lugs interpretation of BCA IX.46ab that suggests that someone would be liberated by abandoning only manifest *kleśas* is neither accepted by the opponents in question, nor by valid cognition. With regard to the conclusion that subtle self-grasping (*bdag 'dzin phra ba*) is not abandoned by realising coarse selflessness (*bdag med rags pa*), it can be argued that the opponents also do not accept that subtle self-grasping is not abandoned, but that this is indeed not abandoned can be proven by valid cognition. [224.2–225.3]

III.4. Explaining the specification "manifest" (*mngon gyur pa*) (c, d) [225.3–229.2]

- Objection [225.3–227.1]: quotation of JL III.4cd (389.3–390.6)

- Answer [227.1–229.2]:

(a) It is right to investigate the meaning of the scriptures by reasoning and to state the meaning accordingly. In the case of the interpretation of

BCA IX.1, the commentary in the NK followed the intention of the root text and did not contradict the explanations of Prajñākaramati. [227.1–6]

(b) The point is that desire (*sred pa*) simply arises due to the innate (*lhan skyes*) view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*'jig lta*), but not from something else, such as the concept of a permanent self.

RS's explanation as "non-manifest" desire and self-grasping is not valid. Even though these were not specified as manifest, this is what is meant, as it is clear from the general procedure in the scriptures.

Not only with regard to *ālaya* and *kliṣṭa*manas, but also with regard to the six types of consciousness, different simultaneous cognitive modes cannot be negated. But this does not support RS's thesis that there are two desires that derive from different kinds of self-grasping. [228.1–229.2]

III.5. MP's criticism in NK 43.1f. [229.2–235.1]

- Objection [229.2–230.4]: quotation of JL III.5abcdefg (390.6–391.6)

- Answer [230.4–235.1]:

(a) The Dge lugs interpretation (that was criticised in NK 43.1f.) is invalidated by the root text of BCA IX.47c. As shown by various lines of reasoning, such an interpretation is still wrong, even if "afflicted" (*nyon mongs can*) is specified as "as it is explained in the Abhidharma" (*mngon pa nas bshad pa*). [230.4–231.4]

(b) The passages from the *Abhidharmakośa* back up the understanding that a desire that derives from the view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*'jig lta*) does not exist in the mental continuum of a person who has abandoned all *kleśas* explained in the Abhidharma. RS's position would – among other things – lead to the absurd consequence that the *kleśas* are not averted, even though subtle selflessness has been realised.

In general, the present BCA passage investigates whether the part of afflictions (*kleśa*) of the two obscurations (*sgrib gnyis*) is averted or not. [231.4–232.4]

(c) Nobody claims that buddhahood (*sang rgyas*) is necessary for mere complete liberation (*rnam grol tsam*). Arhatship – or complete liberation – can be achieved by realising subtle selflessness with regard to persons. Buddhahood is, however, needed for ultimate complete liberation (*rnam grol mthar thug*). [232.4–6]

(d) RS's accusation does not apply; his concept of the state of a Buddha is likened to ordinary beings. [233.1–4]

(e) RS's accusation does not apply; the Śrāvakas' belief that the Buddha experienced suffering is wrong. MP, however, accepts the Buddha as having a nature of gnosis, which is the transformation of mind. [233.4–234.4]

(f) That one is liberated by seeing *paramārthasatya* need not be proven with reference to Prajñākaramati; it is obvious in various scriptures. [234.4–5]

(g) RS's objection not only put aside all loss of hope for objecting, but is an inspiration for answers. [234.5–235.1]

III.6. MP's explanations in NK 43.3–5 [235.1–244.4]

- Objection [235.1–237.5]: quotation of JL III.6abcdef (391.6–394.2)

- Answer [237.5–244.4]:

(a) Adding a commentary is not necessary if the words of the root text suffice for correct understanding, but one should not add something that is not taught by the root text. The specification added in NK 42.1–2, however, does not deviate from the meaning of the root text. [237.5–238.3]

(b) Indeed, Arhats are singled out and it is taught that their desire is “non-afflicted” (*nyon mongs can min pa*). This implies that the desire of those who have not attained arhatship is afflicted, but does not imply that their desire is not brought forth by ego-grasping (*ngar 'dzin*). [238.3–4]

(c) RS's attacks in his earlier letter only show his own character. A difference in interpretation is very common among scholars and gives no reason for anger. If an accusation is justified, there is no reason to become angry; if the objection of an opponent can be refuted, it is embarrassing for this tradition and will also help to improve this tradition. Either way, anger is misplaced.

RS's explanation of the Dge lugs way of interpreting this passage does not add any new information, but simply repeats what was stated earlier. It is said that the desire that derives as a correlative from “this desire” (*sred pa 'di*) (mentioned in BCA IX.47c) is not afflicted according to the position of the opponent. In the actual print, both non-afflicted and afflicted are mentioned in this regard, but this must be a printing error. [238.4–242.1]

(d) RS's explanation is doubtful; he seems to suggest that there are two examples, one for existent and one for non-existent *kleśas*. The example for existent *kleśas* is delusion (*kun rmongs*), but what is the other example? [242.1–3]

(e) RS should provide a proof for his conclusion that a “non-afflicted” (*nyon mongs can min pa*) egoism (*nga rgyal*) should also be accepted. [242.3–5]

(f) Realisation of emptiness and its opposite, *kleśas* and so forth, were already discussed earlier in the BCA. For someone who has already attained arhatship, (further) nourishment (*gsos 'debs*) through desire is not necessary, but the present body of the Arhat was attained through earlier desire, and in this sense is based on nourishment through earlier desire.

Following RS's interpretation, the objection of the opponent in BCA IX.47 does not fit the overall line of argumentation.

The aspects of obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrib*) have already been already explained; now the context of obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*) has arrived. [242.5–244.4]

III.7. MP's explanation in NK 42.2–3 [244.4–251.6]

- Objection [244.4–246.6]: quotation of JL III.7abcdef (394.2–396.2)

- Answer [246.6–251.6]:

(a) What is included by the inclusive particle (*'ang sgra*) is known by considering the adjoining words, which, in this case, make it clear that delusion (*kun rmongs*) is included. RS's suggestion of attaching the particle directly to "desire" (*sred pa*) is refuted, since this would merely establish desire as afflicted, but not as non-afflicted. [246.6–248.2]

(b) The connection as presented by RS was made up by himself and was never stated in this way in the NK. The explanation of the NK follows the connection that was mentioned in the BCA. [248.2–6]

(c) In the explanations of the NK, delusion (*kun rmongs*) is taken as the example, feelings (*tshor ba*) as the reason, and desire (*sred pa*) as the object to be established; hence, the fault that RS mentioned does not apply. [248.6–249.2]

(d) Indeed, in the root text, delusion (*kun rmongs*) was stated as the example (BCA IX.47d); it is, however, not contradictory that delusion functions in one syllogism (*sbyor ba*) as an example, and yet has a different function in another syllogism. [249.2–6]

(e) It is indeed absurd if example and what it serves as an example for (*dpe can*) must be similar in every respect; on the other hand, it would not make sense to take something as an example if there were no similarity at all. [249.6–250.2]

(f) This passage of the BCA is a significant source to prove that Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas do not have a complete realisation of emptiness. Since such is in opposition to RS's own tradition, he has had to interpret it in another way. The doctrinal differences in this regard between the Snga rabs pa and RS's Phyi rabs pa tradition are as follows: the former accept that suchness is realised by the Abhidharma path, while the latter do not; according to the former, the complete realisation of emptiness is an extraordinary feature of the Mahāyāna; according to the latter, such is also common with Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas. [250.2–251.6]

Topic IV: issues connected to BCA IX.2

IV.1. Is the lack of true establishment (*bden med*) the ultimate emptiness? [251.6–302.5]

- Objection [251.6–254.1]: quotation of JL 2.2.2.1 and IV.1 (396.2–398.2)
- Answer [254.1–302.5]:

(a) Indeed, there is no absolute that goes beyond the emptiness of true establishment (*bden stong*) and selflessness (*bdag med*). Emptiness must be seen as a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*) in order to uproot clinging to true establishment (*bden zhen*), just as explained in the NK passages quoted by RS. However, two kinds of emptiness must be distinguished in this regard. The first understands all things to be without an inherent nature (*rang bzhin*), but is then free from proliferations (*spros bral*); it is the object of non-conceptual gnosis (*rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes*). The second refutes only true establishment (*bden grub*) and then clings to the non-existence of things. In the NK, it is never said that “non-existence of true establishment” (*bden med*), “emptiness,” or “selflessness” (*bdag med*) is not the mode of existence of things, but only that the second kind of emptiness, which clings to the non-existence of things, is not the ultimate emptiness as this is explained in the Prajñāpāramitā literature. This understanding is also well-known in the scriptures. To prove this point, quotes from various sources are given, listed in the following order: Prajñāpāramitā literature (257–259), other *sūtras*, mainly from the last cycle of teachings, (259–280), *śāstra* literature in its historical order (280–287), *tantras* (288–291), tantric literature in the form of *dohās* (291–292). [254.1–292.6]

(b) In both traditions, Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, both absolutes are emphasised, but there is a difference in explanation, such that the meaning of freedom from proliferations (*spros bral*) is approached gradually (*rim gyis*) – in the Svātantrika tradition – or immediately (*cig car*) – in the Prāsaṅgika tradition. The ultimate intention of both is freedom from proliferations (*spros bral*); hence, RS’s objection does not apply. [292.6–293.4]

(c) There are various ways of refuting the extremes of permanence and annihilation: the way of the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntikas, the way of the Cittamātrins, and the way of the Mādhyamikas that is followed with regard to the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute. While their ways of refutation become ever more subtle, they all succeed in refuting the respective concepts of permanence and annihilation. The third way, Madhyamaka, which refutes permanence through the idea of non-existence of true establishment (*bden grub pa med pa*), and annihilation through existence on the conventional level (*tha snyad du yod pa*), refers to a conceptual consciousness at the stage of post-concentration (*rjes thob*), which contains assertions (*khas len dang bcas pa*). For such a consciousness, a self cannot be neither existing nor non-existing, but is simply ascertained as non-existing. But for a reasoning consciousness (*rigs shes*) that investigates the ultimate, which is in

accordance with non-conceptual gnosis (*rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes*), both the existence and the non-existence of a self constitute mere imagination, and, since both are not inherently established, both are equally refuted. As there are not any assertions (*khas len*) for such a consciousness, there is also no contradiction. [293.4–295.4]

Applying the refutation of the four extremes to a position that contains assertions leads to logical faults. Hence, the refutation of all four extremes refers to a position that is devoid of any assertions. [295.4–297.5]

The mere refutation of a truly established essence (*bden grub kyi ngo bo*) of things and the mere conceptual grasping of the non-existence (*bden med du 'dzin pa*) of such an essence is not the correct understanding of ultimate emptiness. Such a position refers to a conceptual state alone and cannot generate non-dualistic gnosis (*ye shes*). Furthermore, if one does not relate non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) to the very appearances, but to a truly established essence (*bden grub kyi ngo bo*) that comes in addition to these appearances, and hence is different from them, then an understanding of non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) will also not influence one's conception of these conventional appearances and the desire or aversion that accompany this. [297.5–301.2]

A fictitious opponent might counter that some concepts, such as that of compassion, are beneficial, and that only the concept of a truly established essence (*bden grub kyi ngo bo*) needs to be abandoned. Such an objection would lead to a wrong understanding of kindness (*byams pa*), which – in the Mahāyāna tradition – is emphasised as being “without reference” (*dmigs pa med pa*). For the Buddha and highly developed beings, any notions of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* etc. do not exist; it would, however, be a great sin to say that they do not have kindness. [301.2–302.2]

Such an understanding is the tradition that goes back to the Buddha and is established through scriptures and logic, but is not the invention of Hwa shang. [302.2–302.5]

IV.2. Contradictions to logic [302.5–309.5]

- Objection [302.5–303.4]: quotation of JL IV.2 and IV.3a (398.2–6)

- Answer [303.4–309.5]:

(a) The topics of logic, such as the law of double negation, which are explained in the *Bsdus grwa* texts, are intended as an introduction to logic for beginners, but it is not possible to grasp ultimate reality with these principles. For would it be possible, it would not have been necessary to explain the great difficulty of understanding ultimate reality in the scriptures. With regard to the conventional level, however, one is bound to the

rules of logic. Hence, it does not make sense to propound the view of “neither existence nor non-existence” with regard to the conventional level; with regard to the conventional level, a thing must be either existent or non-existent. [303.4–305.2]

(b) The logical principles RS mentioned are explained, showing familiarity with this subject. According to MP, these are easy to comprehend, but not of great help for understanding the meaning of the scriptures. [305.3–306.4]

(c) RS’s accusation does not apply for someone who accepts freedom from proliferations. For MP, there is neither averting of non-existence of an inherent nature, nor clinging to a literal understanding of the mere expression “non-existence of an inherent nature” (*rang bzhin med pa*). [306.4–307.1]

(d) RS equates an inexpressible self (*brjod med kyi bdag*) with the inexpressible *dharmadhātu*. But while an inexpressible self is accepted as existent and hence can be refuted by reasoning, the *dharmadhātu* is beyond the sphere of logic.

With regard to the establishment of the five knowables (*shes bya lnga*), mentioned earlier, it is uncertain at which categorisation of the five knowables RS is exactly aiming. There is one specific understanding from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* that is used in the Cittamātra tradition, but there is also another set of five knowables drawn from the *Sūtrālaṅkāra*. [307.2–309.1]

(e) Indeed, the unity of the two *satyas*, the unity of emptiness and dependent origination, is most important. But, accepting the appearances themselves and negating a truly established essence (*ngo bo bden grub*) of appearances, would be like the unification of the non-existence of a rabbit’s horn and the existence of a bull’s horn. [309.1–5]

IV.3. The meaning of “abiding in the middle” (*dbus la gnas pa*) [309.5–323.6]

- Objection [309.5–311.1]: quotation of JL IV.3bcdef (398.6–400.1)

- Answer [311.1–323.6]:

(a) RS’s accusation is refuted: both RS and MP agree on the manner of refuting the two extremes (existence and non-existence) in the context of the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute. The difference is that RS accepts this alone as the ultimate mode of existence, while MP does not, and holds that one must enter the actual absolute on the base of the nominal absolute. Including RS’s next criticism, all conclusions of abiding in the extreme of neither existence nor non-existence and of abiding in the extreme of non-existence are refuted, using the argument that it is clearly stated in the NK that abiding in any extreme is not accepted. [311.1–4]

Then MP's position follows, a position which is supported by quotes of various scriptures. In saying that one does not abide in any extreme, the term "abiding" is used, but merely as a linguistic convention. The object of this non-abiding in any extreme cannot be grasped adequately with words; it is the object of the gnosis of the Āryas (*'phags pa*) alone. Certain knowledge (*nges shes*) of freedom from extremes arises, however, at the stage of an ordinary being, too, generated by the use of scriptures and logic. Hence, even if freedom from all extremes cannot be pointed out directly by scriptures and logic, they are important in bringing about a precise understanding of it. Thus, one can say that freedom from proliferations is not an object of linguistic expression, but it is nevertheless established through the use of scriptures and logic. A fictitious opponent might argue that when one abides in freedom from the four extremes, then one abides in freedom from extremes, which refutes the four extremes in the manner of a negative determination (*rnam bcad*), but this abiding itself is established as a positive determination (*yongs gcod*). This objection is countered by arguing that even though the word "abiding" is used, there is no actual abiding. As seen in various scriptures, expressions such as "inexpressible," "free from proliferations," etc., are used to indicate reality, but not as a positive determination (*yongs gcod*). Understood otherwise, it would be like looking at the finger and not at the moon indicated by the finger. [311.4–318.4]

An actual abiding is the case when one grasps at the characteristic (*mtshan ma*) of non-existence of true establishment, but this does not occur with regard to freedom from proliferations. [318.4–5]

(b) Such a general statement as RS has claimed has never been made. In the context of investigating the conventional, it is accepted that non-existence of true establishment (*bden grub*) and conventional existence are not extremes, but rather eliminate the respective extremes. But this alone cannot eliminate all extremes of grasping at characteristics (*mtshan ma*): in the context of establishing freedom from proliferations (*spros bral*), all subtle extremes of grasping at existence and non-existence need to be abandoned. The meaning of the *sūtra*-passage RS quoted is in accordance with this, and should be explained as the non-existence of proliferations. Otherwise, it would contradict another passage from the *sūtra*. The bifurcation of the subject (in a valid cognition that investigates the absolute and another that investigates the conventional) and of the object (in non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) and existence on the conventional level) in RS's tradition makes it hard to speak of a middle. It would be just like abiding in the middle of a non-existent rabbit's horn and an existing bull's horn. [319.2–320.4]

(c) One has to distinguish the respective levels. When the passages mentioned above speak of abiding, then this is done with respect to the conventional level, but when they speak about non-abiding, then this refers to the absolute level. Hence, it is possible to say that the very thing that is described as imperceptible with regard to the absolute level is perceived with regard to the conventional level. [320.4–321.2]

(d) Again, the respective levels must be distinguished: no one claims that existence etc. is not accepted on the conventional level, but, in the same way, no Mādhyamika claims existence on the absolute level. [321.2–4]

(e) There is no such contradiction, since the earlier explanations were given with regard to the actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute. [321.4–323.6]

IV.4. Śrāvakas', Cittamātrins' and Mādhyamikas' realisation of emptiness; MP's understanding of the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika tradition [323.6–348.5]

- Objection [323.6–325.4]: quotation of JL IV.4 (400.1–401.3)

- Answer [325.4–348.5]:

(a) Indeed, the Śrāvakas' conception of the self of a person being completely non-existent and of phenomena being inherently (*rang bzhin gyis*) existent, is – seen from a Madhyamaka perspective – a falling into extremes. According to RS, however, the aforementioned realisation of the Śrāvakas would be enough to call them Mādhyamikas. If one accepts that Śrāvakas have a complete realisation of emptiness – as RS does according to MP – then there is no need to mention that they are Mādhyamikas, one goes along with the other. [325.4–326.1]

(b) All passages that RS quotes in JL IV.4bcd do not imply a conception of a middle of extremes that is referential (*dmigs pa can*) – as RS claims –, but denote that there is no conceptual reference to a middle. This view is also supported by other passages from the *Kaśyapaparivarta* and explanations of their meaning in Maitreya's *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*. All these passages show that the realisation of the “middle of extremes” is related to the cessation of all dualistic appearances, a view that is in direct contradiction to RS's conception of the “middle” (as the middle between conventional existence (*kun rdzob tu yod pa*) and absolute non-existence (*don dam du med pa*)). [326.1–329.3]

What is called “the middle” must therefore be explained as a state of non-reference to any extreme. The Cittamātrins and Mādhyamikas (mentioned by RS in JL IV.4c) indeed agree on that, but it is RS, rather than MP, who stands in opposition to that. [329.3–6]

RS's conception of the middle as a middle between the concept of non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) and conventional existence (*tha snyad du yod pa*) is a mere designation; in fact, each of the conceptions lacks the other and cannot be combined in a single mind. In contrast, MP uses the term "the middle of the base" (*gzhi dbu ma*) to refer to freedom from proliferations (*spros bral*) and the term "the middle of the path" (*lam dbu ma*) to denote the mind that realises the former. The passage from the *Kaśya-paparivarta* points out the cessation of all dualistic appearances, but for RS this would not be an abiding in the middle, as one part, i.e., the conventional appearances, is missing. RS's conception of the middle could also be realised by ordinary beings; hence they, too, would abide in the middle. [329.6–331.4]

(c) RS categorised the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* as a Svātantrika scripture (JL IV.4d). This is refuted, as it would be strange if a text on the intention of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, written by Maitreya, did not show their ultimate intention (i.e., the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka). Since similar statements are also found in the *sūtras*, it would follow that the Buddha himself was a Svātantrika. An opponent might object that Candrakīrti has proven (in the *Madhyamakavatāra*) that Nāgārjuna accepted that Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas realise emptiness (which seems to be in contradiction to the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*). But neither Nāgārjuna nor Candrakīrti spoke of a *complete* realisation of emptiness by Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas. According to MP's Snga rabs pa tradition, both Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika agree on this point, and the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is not established as a Svātantrika text. [331.4–332.4]

(d) According to the meaning of a non-referential (*dmigs pa med pa*) freedom from extremes, the middle is neither the third nor the fourth extreme, but is simply free from all four extremes. RS's conception of a middle between non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) and conventional existence (*tha snyad du yod pa*), on the other hand, is the fourth extreme, since a middle is accepted that is neither of the two extremes. RS's accusation that MP would accept a fifth extreme by claiming freedom from extremes is rebutted as being merely a problem of linguistic convention; in fact, there is no acceptance of a fifth extreme. [332.4–333.5]

(e) First, a general answer is given: in both the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika tradition extremes are refuted by the use of reasoning in a gradual way; the meaning of freedom from proliferations cannot be realised at once. But in MP's tradition a difference is established insofar as the Svātantrikas accept assertions (*khas len*) on the absolute level, while the Prāsaṅgikas do not. In their final aim, the establishment of freedom from proliferations, both are similar. [333.6–334.5]

Then, the Svātantrika tradition is explained: its scriptures focus mainly on the nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute, it explains Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by employing *svātantra* types of reasoning, and, by grasping things as "non-existent on the absolute level and existent on the conventional level," it refers to a point of view that contains assertions (*khas len dang bcas pa*). In the Svātantrika tradition, this point of view is, however, not accepted as the ultimate mode of existence (*gnas tshul*): the realisation of the nominal absolute is seen as a prerequisite to enter the actual absolute. [334.5–335.4]

Here, a later passage of RS's criticism, JL IV.5b (401.5–402.1), is inserted, where RS explains the difference between the nominal and actual absolute as a difference between the cessation or non-cessation of dualistic appearances, and emphasises that this difference can *also* be related to the subject (implying that there is no need to relate it exclusively to the object). [335.4–336.1]

In a similar way – MP counters – there is no need to exclude either one of the nominal and actual absolutes. It is not contradictory to say that the Svātantrikas accept both. Since this appears in the scriptures, RS's earlier accusation that MP adheres to a fifth tenet (JL 400.6f.; JL IV.4e) is refuted and falls back on RS himself. [336.1–336.4]

Then, RS's proof by means of logic (JL 401.1ff.; JL IV.4e) is addressed. Both absolutes are without contradiction, and hence the acceptance of one does not exclude the other, a position that is further supported by different scriptures. [336.4–337.1]

The next passage gives the actual answer to JL IV.5b (401.5–402.1), quoted earlier. Indeed, with regard to the subject, the difference between nominal and actual absolute can be related to the averting or non-averting of dualistic appearances. In general, there are two ways of establishing *satyadvaya*: in the first model, the mode of existence (*gnas tshul*), i.e., the non-existence of arising, is called the absolute (*don dam*), and the mode of appearance (*snang tshul*) is called the conventional (*kun rdzob*). In the second model, authentic cognition is called the absolute and inauthentic cognition is called the conventional. It is in this second model that nominal and actual absolute is related to the subject, but in the context of establishing the absolute in the Svātantrika scriptures, the first model of designating *satyadvaya* is employed and it is not related to the averting or non-averting of dualistic appearances. [337.1–338.4]

(f) Taking up RS's accusations in JL IV.4f, an elaborate presentation of MP's understanding of the Prāsaṅgika tradition and its focus on the actual absolute is given:

As proven by the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and its auto-commentary, the Prāsaṅgika approach does not apply a specification such that only arising on the absolute level is negated, but simply negates arising in general, on any level. Dependently arising appearances (*rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i snang ba*) exist, but are of a nature that has always been without arising or ceasing. Thus, the two *satyas* are explained as inseparable. [338.4–339.5]

After this, the unwanted consequences of the position that an arising on the conventional level is not negated by an investigation that investigates the absolute are pointed out. The objection of a fictitious opponent that the non-existence of arising on the conventional level would undermine the conventional level is refuted: as shown in the auto-commentary of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, arising cannot be established for any of the two *satyas*. [339.5–340.3]

Referring again to the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and its auto-commentary, conventional appearances are discussed: dependently arising appearances have a nature that has always been without arising. It is in this way that emptiness appears in the form of dependently arising appearances, which is the intention of the fourfold emptiness (*stong nyid bzhi sbyor*) from the famous passage of the *Heart Sūtra* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra*): “Form is emptiness and nothing but emptiness is form,” etc. [340.3–342.2]

Others might object that the unity of the two *satyas* makes their differentiation superfluous. This is refuted, arguing that, with regard to the ultimate reality, there is indeed only the unity of both *satyas*. The two *satyas* are distinguished in the perception of those who have not realised ultimate reality, but ultimately there is only one *satya*, which is the unity of both *satyas*. This view is supported by quotes from various scriptures. [342.2–344.1]

The two *satyas* are established in the following way: referring again to the *Madhyamakāvatāra* and its auto-commentary, *saṃvṛtisatya* is explained as means (*thabs*) and *paramārthasatya* as result (*thabs byung*). Conventional appearances are accepted as they are known in the world, without investigating whether they exist on the absolute level. If those very appearances are investigated by a reasoning that investigates the absolute (*don dam dpyod pa'i rigs pa*), then nothing that is established is found. Thus, the very appearances on the conventional level become the means for realising their absolute nature, which is free from all extremes. [344.1–345.4]

Assuming that the Prāsaṅgika tradition asserts only non-existence of arising (as RS suggested in his objection), and further refutes arising on the conventional level, would lead to total nothingness and further annihilate the difference between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika tradition with regard

to the negandum (*dgag bya*). Hence, when one does not investigate the absolute, then mere appearances in the form of arising and ceasing cannot be refuted. [345.4–346.1]

This, however, does not mean that there is no difference between the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika traditions: the Svātantrikas accept arising on the conventional level as established by valid cognition (*tshad grub*) and think that it also cannot be refuted by an investigation that investigates the absolute; the Prāsaṅgikas, on the other hand, accept that there is nothing that can withstand an investigation that investigates the absolute (*don dam dpyod pa*), but this does not contradict dependently arising appearances. [346.1–5]

The different positions with regard to the acceptance of the conventional valid establishment (*tha snyad tshad grub*) [of appearances] in the Prāsaṅgika tradition, then, are explained. Most Snga rabs pas refute this, while the Phyi rabs pas accept only conventional valid establishment. MP's position, however, is based on Klong chen rab 'byams' explanations in the *Yid bzhin rin po che mdzod*. There are no assertions (*khas len*) with regard to investigating the mode of existence (*gnas tshul*), but there are assertions with regard to the state of post-concentration (*rjes thob*), when one investigates the conventional. As far as these mere appearances in the form of the conventions of the world are concerned, there is a difference between something being established by a valid cognition that investigates the conventional (*tha snyad dpyod byed kyi tshad ma*) or not being established in this way; having no assertions (*khas len*) concerning these appearances, as is done with regard to the absolute, i.e., freedom from extremes, is not appropriate. [346.5–348.2]

In summary, RS's allegation of an apparent contradiction between the acceptance of freedom from the four extremes and the acceptance of non-existence in JL IV.4f is refuted. All lines of reasoning in the Prāsaṅgika scriptures that refute a self do not aim to refute only limited proliferations, but are taught so as to enable the gradual establishment of freedom from proliferations. [348.2–5]

IV.5. MP's statement in NK 6.4–5 that there is no difference between Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas with regard to their ultimate intention [348.5–350.6]

- Objection [348.5–349.2]: quotation of JL IV.5a and beginning of b (401.3–6)

- Answer [349.2–350.6]:

Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas have indeed a common ultimate intention and are similar with regard to their ultimate acceptance of freedom

from proliferations (*spros bral*) and their establishment of all things as non-existent with regard to true establishment (*bden med*). A similarity of both traditions follows also for RS's understanding. Then, the three faults mentioned by RS are addressed:

- RS's first accusation is without a basis, since Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas refute the Cittamātrīn's acceptance of ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes*) as truly established (*bden grub*), and these, in turn, refute the Vaibhāṣikas' and Sautrāntikas' acceptance of material and mental partless entities on the absolute level.

- The debate between Bhāvivēka and Candrakīrti discusses whether the specification "absolute" has to be applied to the object of negation (*dgag bya*) or not (and hence is not superfluous).

- Explaining the difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika as acceptance or non-acceptance of establishment through a *svalakṣaṇa* on the conventional level is not meaningless, but indeed points out their subject of debate.

IV.6. Refutation of extremes in relation to the subject and the object [350.6–354.3]

- Objection [350.6–351.4]: quotation of JL IV.5cd (402.1–5)

- Answer [351.4–354.3]:

(a) RS's presentation of MP's understanding is criticised. The way of refuting the extremes by dividing the two *satyas* cannot refute all proliferations. Furthermore, the proliferations that are to be refuted are related to the object (and not the subject as RS suggested); hence, the *dharmadhātu* is what is free from all four extremes. However, the designations "without proliferations" or "the middle" can be applied to both the object, i.e., the *dharmadhātu*, and the subject, i.e., the mind that realises such. In the contexts of the nominal and actual absolute, there is a difference of subtle and coarse extremes (on the object side), as well as a difference that the former is the object of ordinary consciousness and the latter is the object of gnosis (on the subject side). [351.4–352.3]

(b) With regard to the object, permanence and annihilation are not averted individually by emptiness and conventional existence. With regard to the subject, the mind that grasps non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) does not avert annihilation and, hence, is not sufficient for the middle of the extremes. A mind at the state of the Āryas' post-concentration (*rjes thob*), however, can refute both extremes. In addition, RS's insertion of the specification "*bden grub*" for the refutation of the extremes in his explanations of "the middle of the base" is criticised. [352.3–354.3]

IV.7. Discussing MP's explanation in NK 27.1–2 [354.3–357.4]

- Objection [354.3–355.1]: quotation of JL IV.6 (402.5–403.3)

- Answer [355.1–357.4]:

(a) RS's conclusion does not apply. The realisation of the non-existence of an inherent nature (*rang bzhin*) is not different from the realisation of freedom from extremes. RS might have understood that the realisation of the non-existence of an inherent nature and the realisation of freedom from extremes proceed in a gradual way, but such a sequence is not the case. [355.1–5]

(b) The extremes are indeed refuted in a gradual way when one uses words and logic, but the ultimate aim is the actual absolute, just as explained earlier (in the Prāsaṅgika section, RL 341). [355.5–356.1]

(c) The placement of the particles was intended to express significance and emphasis; this usage is completely in line with the grammatical treatises. Furthermore, there are two ways of understanding non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*): one refers to a mere *med dgag*, the other to freedom from proliferations. The statement in the NK points out that the first kind of *bden med* is not the mode of existence. The reason for this is that such an understanding of *bden med* would not help to avert attachment. The same is true when one thinks that a true establishment (*bden grub*) that is different from the phenomena is refuted. [356.1–357.4]

IV.8. In which context is freedom from all four extremes accepted? [357.4–368.4]

- Objection [357.4–358.4]: quotation of JL IV.7 (403.3–404.3)

- Answer [358.4–368.4]:

(a) RS's accusation is mistaken, because it does not differentiate between the contexts of non-conceptual concentration that is free from all proliferations (*mnyam bzhag spros bral*) and post-concentration (*rjes thob*), which is the object of ordinary consciousness. The view that the mode of existence (*gnas tshul*) is free from all extremes is only held with regard to the absolute level; with regard to the conventional level – where Candrakīrti's statement and example are situated – only freedom from the first extreme, i.e., the negation of the existence of a self or true establishment (*bden grub*), is proclaimed. On the conventional level, the three other alternatives are not applied at all. With respect to the absolute level, that is, the mode of existence, however, none of the extremes is perceived; it is explained as the complete appeasing (*zhi ba*) of all proliferations. In this context, all extremes are refuted in general, without applying a specification. [358.4–360.3]

(b) The example of the existence or non-existence of a snake is located on the conventional level. Hence, if a snake is perceived in a certain place, then it is said that the snake exists, and if it is not perceived, then it is said that it does not exist. In this context, it does not make sense to apply the other alternatives.

Also with regard to the level of the nominal absolute, a snake's existence on the absolute level is negated, but the other alternatives are not applied. The assumption that the negation of non-existence on the absolute level would lead to existence on the absolute level is utterly wrong. This view of emptiness is also proven in various scriptures. [360.3–363.3]

With regard to the non-existence of the snake on the conventional level, however, it is not right to refute this non-existence; the snake is simply non-existent. With regard to the conventional, the same is also true for selflessness. The designated object, "selflessness," is simply a convention that does not exist with regard to the mode of existence. To say that this non-existence is also perceived in a state of non-dualistic perception contradicts the scriptures; for someone who has attained highest gnosis, all proliferations of existence and non-existence cease. [363.3–365.1]

Thus, in the context of the nominal absolute, selflessness is asserted, whereas in the context of the actual absolute it is not, as both self and selflessness are equally not perceived. Thinking that the refutation of the four extremes which is applied in the context of investigating the mode of existence must also be applied to the conventional level is a great mistake: who would say this, when one, for example, investigates whether there is water at a certain place or not? [365.1–4]

(c) Not all mental activity is a hindrance on the path to awakening; one has to distinguish between referring to the conventional level or to the mode of existence. With regard to the conventional level, proliferations of existence and non-existence etc. are not negated, only with regard to the mode of existence. It is thus important to understand these two levels to be without contradiction. [365.4–366.1]

With regard to RS's criticism that MP relies on the scriptures that support the Hwa shang position, it is pointed out that there is simply too little knowledge about the position of Hwa shang for such an accusation. And even if MP and Hwa shang relied on the same scriptures, there are two possibilities: either Hwa shang relied on the scriptures, having understood them correctly, in which case the later accusations against him would be wrong; alternatively, if he relied on the scriptures, having understood them in a wrong way, then it would not follow that one adheres to a Hwa shang position simply by referring to the same scriptures. [366.1–367.3]

It is therefore RS's own fault to see everything that is completely without references (*cir yang mi dmigs pa*) as the tradition of Hwa shang. One has to differentiate between what is termed "mental non-application" (*yid la ma byed pa*) in the Hwa shang tradition, which is actually conceptual, and the way it is understood with regard to non-perception of proliferations. [367.3–368.4]

IV.9. Direct realisation of emptiness [368.4–372.6]

- Objection [368.4–369.4]: quotation of JL IV.8 (404.3–405.2)

- Answer [369.4–372.6]:

(a) RS's explanations of the direct realisation of selflessness are a mere babble (*bshad yam tsam*): nobody claims a contradiction in the realisation of selflessness through valid cognition as RS suggested. Furthermore, the absence of determining cognition (*zhen rig*) in the context of the direct cognition of emptiness mentioned by RS is not something special, but applies to any kind of direct cognition. [369.4–370.1]

In the context of the direct realisation of emptiness, any kind of subject-object duality is absent, but, according to RS, a combination of a mind of selflessness and existence on the conventional level must be present to fulfil the meaning of abiding in the middle. The idea of mere selflessness (*bdag med tsam*) being an object of non-conceptual concentration has already been criticised (RL 328). [370.1–6]

RS's explanation for the direct realisation of emptiness as being free from determining cognition (*zhen rig*) applies to any kind of direct cognition and needs both subject and object, similar to what RS suggested in his criticism of MP below (RL 373.5/JL 405.6 and RL 405.5/JL 410.5–6). [370.6–371.3]

Instead, direct realisation of emptiness is not only free from determining cognition (*zhen rig*), but from all kinds of duality; this view is already established in the context of listening and reflection. [371.3–5]

(b) The spelling mistake RS mentioned was an error of the scribe who wrote the template for the block-print; such a mistake is common in any work. [371.5–6]

(c) The difference of agent and object of burning that RS mentioned is accepted. With regard to the example of the fire that arises from rubbing two sticks, it has to be clarified that the fire burns both sticks, but not itself. But according to RS's understanding of "does not burn itself," only a fire that arises from elsewhere and not from the two sticks should burn the two sticks. The sequence of listening, reflection, and meditative cultivation that RS mentioned should be, however, accepted. [371.6–372.6]

IV.10. Realisation of absence of being (*dnegos med*) [372.6–379.6]

- Objection [372.6–374.5]: quotation of JL IV.9 (405.2–406.5)

- Answer [374.5–379.6]:

(a) According to RS's explanation concerning BCA IX.35ab, too, it would come to be that something is present for the mind earlier, but is not later – only in this case it is dualistic appearances. The same could be argued for true establishment (*bden grub*). [374.5–375.1]

Furthermore, the Cittamātra explanation used by RS poses certain problems for his own position. As he accepts outer objects, but does not accept *svasaṃvedana* (*rang rig*) and views emptiness as a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*), there would be no *vipaśyanā* (*lhag mthong*) that purifies dualistic appearances, since it would be a wrong cognition to view object, i.e., matter, and subject, i.e., mind, as not different, when they are actually different. [375.1–5]

Moreover, any way of reconciling the differences between an existent (*dngos po*) subject, the mind, and a non-existent (*dngos med*) object, a non-implicative negation, would lead to contradictions. [375.5–376.2]

According to RS's explanation, it would follow that the subject perceives only a non-implicative negation that is separate from its basis (*dgag gzhi*) and object of negation (*dgag bya*); thus it would be similar to the direct cognition of something completely non-existent and could not lead to the qualities of awakening. [376.2–377.1]

(b) With regard to RS's accusation, MP's position is clarified: through the unity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* that establishes all phenomena as free from proliferations, i.e., the *dharmadhātu* that does not fall into the extremes of existence or non-existence, all dualistic appearances are purified. Since this is experienced by gnosis (*ye shes*), it does not mean that an experiencing mind does not exist. RS's accusation is therefore without any basis, since a position such as RS assumed for MP has never been proclaimed. [377.1–378.2]

Instead of being wrong, this understanding of highest gnosis (*ye shes*) actually leads to buddhahood and all qualities associated with it; RS, on the other hand, views the Buddha as similar to an ordinary being. [378.2–379.6]

IV.11. Ceasing of mind (*sems bkag*) at the time of awakening [379.6–385.1]

- Objection [379.6–380.4]: quotation of JL IV.10 (406.5–407.2)

- Answer [380.4–385.1]:

The refutation of the Śrāvakas' position is indeed accepted. But in the NK, it is not stated that one is freed from matter and mind at the stage of awakening, rather, that the movements of *citta* and *caitta* are averted.

While these movements are averted, non-dualistic gnosis (*ye shes*), which is completely beyond these movements, exists. [380.4–381.3]

This gnosis should be understood in the following way: it is beyond dualistic conceptualisation (*gzung 'dzin gyi rnam rtog*), it is “the coalescence of space and awareness” (*dbyings rig zung 'jug*); while it does not deviate from equality (*mnyam pa nyid*), it also knows clearly all knowables (*shes bya*), etc. Then, various consequences are pointed out that would occur if this gnosis were not free from *citta* and *caitta*. Gnosis and ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes*) are therefore utterly different, their respective ways of knowing things cannot be compared. [381.3–383.2]

Then the transformation of ordinary consciousness into the different aspects of gnosis is explained. Such a transformation cannot be accepted by those who hold the view that mind (*sems*) is not averted at the stage of awakening (– like RS). There will not be a “moving to the sphere of non-perception, free from matter and mind,” (as RS concluded), instead, there is the coalescence of awareness and emptiness (*rig stong zung 'jug*). [383.2–385.1]

IV.12. The status of *svasaṃvedana* and *ālaya* [385.1–387.5]

- Objection [385.1–386.2]: quotation of JL IV.11 (407.2–408.3)

- Answer [386.2–387.5]:

First, it was never said that the two *satyas* do not exist; instead, the ultimate indivisibility of the two *satyas* was emphasised. RS explained that the *ālaya* should be refuted, but in most *sūtras* and *tantras* the *ālaya* is seen as necessary for proving appearances for the mind; further, RS had also mentioned the transformation of *ālaya* into gnosis earlier (RL 380.2; JL 406.6). In the same way, it was proven by Dharmakīrti that the non-existence of *svasaṃvedana* on the conventional level is not appropriate.

MP's position is that both *svasaṃvedana* and *ālaya* are not established on the absolute level, but cannot be established as non-existent on the conventional level. [386.2–6]

Then the different reasons mentioned by RS are addressed:

- The Śrāvakas quote scriptures that teach the *ālaya*, but this does not mean that they themselves accept it.

- With regard to Asaṅga's differentiation, it is well established that there are both proponents of tenet systems who accept *ālaya* and those who do not accept *ālaya*; there is no point in proving this again.

- The same is true for the *Don gsang* (this should probably be corrected to *Don gsal*, Haribhadra's commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*; also RS refers to this text as *Don gsal*).

With regard to the acceptance of *svasaṃvedana*, it is countered that the *Pramāṇavārttika* is definitely a text that accepts *svasaṃvedana*; the differentiations of various ways of experiencing to which RS was referring are accepted, but these are irrelevant for the present discussion.

In conclusion, all refutations of the *ālaya* are made with regard to the absolute level, not with regard to the conventional level. [386.6–387.5]

IV.13. Self-grasping with regard to a person (*gang zag gi bdag 'dzin*) and self-grasping with regard to phenomena (*chos kyi bdag 'dzin*) [387.5–392.6]

- Objection [387.5–388.3]: quotation of JL IV.12 (408.3–6)

- Answer [388.3–392.6]:

Referring to an earlier passage (RL 335.6), it is countered that there is no contradiction between MP's description and that of RS, since both are possible, depending on the intention of a statement (*brjod 'dod*): if one wants to differentiate between self-grasping with regard to a person and self-grasping with regard to phenomena, which are not a self, then RS's understanding is right, but in general, a person is a division of phenomena and thus the grasping with regard to a person is also a division of grasping with regard to phenomena. Thus, both kinds of self-grasping have different objects of reference (*dmigs yul*), but are similar, as they are both phenomena. Grasping at these is averted when each of them is understood as devoid of an inherent nature; hence, it is not the case that self-grasping with regard to phenomena becomes the cause for self-grasping with regard to a person, and there is also no difference between a coarse or subtle negandum (*dgag bya*) with regard to these two. [388.3–389.5]

All consequences that RS mentioned are based on the thought that the two kinds of self-grasping become mutually exchangeable, since MP accepts a common basis for both, while RS accepts them as distinct. These are simply different ways of thinking, and hence the faults that RS mentioned do not apply:

- Grasping a certain phenomenon as permanent etc. is imagined (*kun brtags*) self-grasping with regard to phenomena, and grasping a human being as permanent etc. is imagined self-grasping with regard to a person; a fault does not apply.

- The objection of the exchangeability of the parts of a certain category is without a basis; it has never been accepted that two kinds of self-grasping are exchangeable.

- The objection of the change of priority with regard to the object of abandonment of Śrāvakas and Bodhisattvas is also baseless.

- The two kinds of self-grasping are well differentiated in terms of object of reference and ways of grasping.

Instead, the accusation RS has made falls back on himself, since he accepts grasping as truly established (*bden 'dzin*) (in regard to both a person and phenomena) as obscuration of afflictions (*nyon sgrib*), and explains grasping as truly established in regard to a person as the root of obscuration of afflictions. [389.5–392.6]

IV.14. Difference between the Sūtra and Mantra traditions [392.6–396.2]

- Objection [392.6–394.1]: quotation of JL IV.13 (408.6–409.6)

- Answer [394.1–396.2]:

(a) There is indeed a difference, with regard to the methods, between the Sūtra and Mantra traditions, but this is not in contradiction to a shared ultimate view of both traditions, which is the coalescence of the two *satyas*. [394.1–5]

(b) If there were such a contradiction, then it would apply equally to RS, who explains that there is no difference with regard to emptiness, but that there is a difference with regard to the way of emptiness (*stong tshul*). [394.5]

(c) It has never been said (in the NK) that all the traditions are equal with regard to base, path, and result, nor has it been accepted that these traditions are similar in the way in which they establish *satyadvaya*. [394.5–6]

(d) The statement “the understanding that the Great and the Lower Vehicle are not differentiated through methods” is a twisted explanation emanating from RS himself; it has never been said (in the NK) that there is no difference with regard to the realisation, when the methods are superior. Rather, a difference with regard to both methods and understanding is accepted. [394.6–395.2]

(e) Then MP’s position is explained. Sūtra and Mantra traditions are similar with regard to their understanding of ultimate emptiness; if one thinks otherwise, one has to accept that a realisation of ultimate emptiness could not be reached by the Sūtra tradition. [395.2–396.2]

IV.15. MP’s statement “the absolute is not an object of mind and words” (NK 7.6) – contradictions to his other statements (a) [396.2–402.1]

- Objection [396.2–5]: quotation of JL IV.14ab (409.6–410.2)

- Answer [396.5–402.1]:

(a) When talking about the absolute being or not being the object of words and mind, two different aspects need to be distinguished. On the one hand, the absolute is not an object of realisation (*rtogs bya*) for a subject that has a referential mind. On the other hand, realisation of the absolute exists with regard to conventional linguistic usage. There is no contradiction between the assumption that there is a mind that realises the absolute

and the statement that the absolute is not an object of words and mind: the absolute is not an object for a referential (*dmigs pa can*) mind; it is, however, realised by a mind that is non-referential (*dmigs pa med pa*). [396.5–397.3]

(b) The statement “mind and words are conventional” (NK 7.6) was made to explain that a referential mind is conventional; it is made from the viewpoint of the subject. In terms of the second of the two ways of establishing *satyadvaya* (that MP explained in RL 337), one can say: a non-referential mind is a subject of the absolute, since mode of appearance (*snang tshul*) and of existence (*gnas tshul*) are concordant; a referential mind is a subject of the conventional, since mode of appearance and of existence are discordant. In this sense, it was said that a conventional subject cannot realise the absolute. It was, however, not said that the yogis do not realise the absolute, even though they are conventional with regard to their aspect of appearance, from the viewpoint of the object in the first way of establishing *satyadvaya*. [397.3–398.3]

(c) MP’s position: it is important to distinguish between the viewpoint of the subject and of the object; from the viewpoint of the object – as proven by quotes from various scriptures – the absolute is said to be beyond mind and words. This, however, does not mean that it cannot be established based on these, and, in this sense, it also can be taught to others. As mentioned above, it is important to understand the following two approaches to be without contradiction: with regard to a referential mind, the absolute is not an object of mind; it is, however, an object of highest gnosis (*ye shes*), and, in this sense, one can say, with regard to the conventional level, that the absolute is realised. [398.3–402.1]

IV.16. MP’s statement “the absolute is not an object of mind and words” (NK 7.6) – contradictions to his other statements (b) [402.1–405.3]

- Objection [402.1–402.3]: quotation of JL IV.14c (410.2–4)

- Answer [402.3–405.3]:

RS’s criticism here is similar to a later passage – JL 17a (411.5–412.1) –, where he uses similar reasoning, which can be summarised in the following way: if one accepts that a subject that is a mere imagination by conceptualisation (*rtog pas btags pa tsam*) and not established through own-characteristics (*rang gi mtshan nyid*) does not realise emptiness, then it will come to be that a mind or words that enter emptiness do not exist.

This, however, was not the intention of the statement in NK 7.6f. It was not said that a subject that is a mere imagination does not realise emptiness, but that – when one investigates an object – it is not the actual absolute as long as there are references (*dmigs pa*). As long as the absolute is captured in a certain expression, it cannot withstand analysis and can be refuted. An

opponent might object that this could also be applied to emptiness, and thus emptiness can be refuted (as does RS in the later passage, JL 17a, pp. 411.5–412.1).

Such an objection is indeed very right if one conceives of emptiness as a mere non-implicative negation (*med dgag tsam*); understanding emptiness as freedom from proliferations that is devoid of references, however, is immune against such an objection. [402.3–403.5]

Then MP's understanding of highest emptiness is repeated: emptiness is only an object of gnosis, not of conceptual consciousness. While it cannot be grasped directly by mind and words, these are used to point out a correct understanding of it, which then can lead to a direct realisation of it through meditative cultivation. These explanations also clarify the statements from the NK about the existence of the realisation of suchness, which RS mentioned in the latter part of his criticism. [403.5–405.3]

IV.17. Contradictions with regard to MP's concept of the coalescence of appearances and emptiness [405.3–407.5]

- Objection [405.3–6]: quotation of JL IV.15 (410.4–411.1)

- Answer [405.6–407.5]:

MP's understanding of the three passages that RS mentioned is pointed out:

- It was never claimed that the ultimate gnosis of the twofold knowledge would *only* be a realisation of the way things are; it also knows all knowables in their extension (*shes bya ji snyed pa*).

- It is important to understand the difference between insight (*shes rab*) that realises non-existence of true establishment (*bden grub*), a non-implicative negation, and non-dualistic gnosis (*gzung 'dzin med pa'i ye shes*) that realises the inseparability of the two *satyas*.

- The explanations in the NK were given with regard to the approach of the Svātantrika, but they do not imply that appearances are refuted in the context of non-training.

Hence, RS's two conclusions, that both aspects of appearances and emptiness are not given in the NK, show only his own misunderstanding.

IV.18 Further contradictions with regard to MP's concept of the absolute (a) [407.5–409.4]

- Objection [407.5–408.2]: quotation of JL IV.16a (411.1–3)

- Answer [408.2–409.4]:

As before, the root of RS's criticism is a conception of the two *satyas* as being in contradiction. Quite to the contrary, MP's position is as follows: the absolute is an object of both ordinary people and Āryas. The former experience it in a general way, while the latter realise it directly. [408.2–409.2]

There is no need to give an explanation concerning every statement mentioned by RS as a proof of MP's contradictory position; instead, MP's position is clarified again. The absolute is not an object for a referential (*dmigs pa can*) mind, it is, however, an object of non-referential (*dmigs pa med pa*) gnosis and a realisation that is in accordance with it. [409.2–4]

IV.19. Further contradictions with regard to MP's concept of the absolute (b) [409.4–413.1]

- Objection [409.4–6]: quotation of JL IV.16bc (411.3–5)

- Answer [409.6–413.1]:

(a) RS's accusation that MP neglects the means that lead to awakening is a lie, provoked by RS's anger about the explanations in NK 39.3–4, where MP criticised the position (of Tsong kha pa) that there is no difference in the realisation of emptiness between Śrāvakas and Bodhisattvas, but that a difference is brought about through the difference with regard to means (*thabs*). But, in the NK, it was not claimed that gnosis does not depend on means. The realisation of the two kinds of selflessness is preceded by the two accumulations, which is then also the cause for the difference of realisation between Śrāvakas and Bodhisattvas. [409.6–411.2]

(b) The statement in NK 40.2 does not imply a contradiction to the passage of the *Pitāputrasamāgamanasūtra* in the way that the conventional is neglected. All authorities agree that there is a progression of the paths that ultimately lead to omniscience. As shown in different Indian texts, there is ultimately only one vehicle (*theg gcig*), since reality is without distinctions (*dbyer med*), is of a single taste (*ro gcig*), etc. Omniscience that realises ultimate reality knows the coalescence of the two *satyas*: the knowledge of the nature of things (*ji lta ba*) refers to the aspect of the absolute; the knowledge of their entirety (*ji snyed pa*) refers to the aspect of the conventional. Hence, both *satyas* are integrated and there is no contradiction to the passage from the *Pitāputrasamāgamanasūtra*. [411.2–413.1]

IV.20. Is emptiness an object of mind and words or not? Further contradictions in the NK [413.1–428.3]

- Objection [413.1–414.1]: quotation of JL IV.17abc (411.5–412.4)

- Answer [414.1–428.3]:

(a) The meaning of NK 10.1 and NK 61.4 is accepted by everybody and is not controversial. The conclusion that emptiness also does not withstand investigation drawn by RS from NK 8.1 refers to the concept of emptiness as a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*); it does not apply to the idea of ultimate emptiness as being free from proliferations and beyond references. A contradiction between statements that explain emptiness as an object of

mind and words, and others that do not, is not the case: emptiness is an object for a non-conceptual mind, but is not an object for a conceptual mind. [414.1–415.5]

Then MP's understanding of ultimate emptiness is repeated: as proven by the scriptures, ultimate emptiness is a direct object only for the Āryas. Ordinary beings achieve a certain understanding of emptiness through inference and the use of reasoning. [415.5–416.5]

Such an understanding is also in line with the view of Tsong kha pa, expressed in the text he offered to Red mda' ba (*Red mda' bar phul ba'i shog dril*) or his commentaries on the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*. In all those texts, Tsong kha pa emphasises the coalescence (*zung 'jug*) of the two *satyas*, and not an understanding of emptiness as only a non-implicative negation (*med dgag 'ba' zhig*), as present-day Dge lugs scholars do. Therefore, it is obvious that there is no difference between the ultimate intention of the Snga rabs pa and the Phyi rabs pa tradition. [416.5–418.6]

(b) RS's objection is countered by explaining again MP's understanding of emptiness: when one investigates things by reasoning, one sees that there is nothing that can withstand reasoning. At that time, one understands the coalescence of appearance and emptiness: exactly what appears is empty and exactly what is empty appears. Meditating on that, certainty of the inseparability (*dbyer med*) of appearances and emptiness will arise, which again leads to a certain knowledge that is free from all assertions (*khas len*). Only this much can be pointed out by the use of words; the actual experience of freedom from proliferations cannot be described. [418.6–419.6]

This understanding of the coalescence of appearances and emptiness is in line with the words of Tsong kha pa. In Tsong kha pa's *Lam gtso rnam gsum*, the aspects of appearances and emptiness are not grasped in an alternating manner; instead, the important point is the inseparability of the two *satyas*, even though this is in contradiction to present-day Dge lugs scholars. The aforementioned *Red mda' bar phul ba'i shog dril* supports this understanding of the actual absolute. [419.6–421.4]

An opponent might object that “not grasping anything” (*cir yang mi 'dzin pa*) that is not preceded by a certain understanding is refuted in Tsong kha pa's writings. MP agrees on this. In the context of the Sūtra, it is important that first a clear understanding through investigation is brought forth. Otherwise, “not grasping anything” is only another conceptualisation and will not bring about the realisation of the mode of existence. The same intention is expressed in a passage of Klong chen pa's *Yid bzhin mdzod*. [421.4–422.4]

Different forms of “not grasping anything” must be distinguished:

- Not every form of “not grasping anything” corresponds to the view of Hwa shang. The Hwa shang tradition neglects means such as compassion, etc. on the path to awakening, and advocates resting in a state of not entertaining any thoughts. From the perspective of the view (*lta ba*), it is wrong to call it a view of annihilation; it can be, however, called this from the perspective of its disregard of means (*thabs*). Grasping non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) alone can also not be called a view of annihilation. But it is right to speak of a view of annihilation when one regards the negation of a negandum (*dgag bya*) that is separated from the appearances as the mode of existence (*gnas tshul*). A “not grasping of anything” which is preceded by an understanding of the mode of existence and that corresponds to ultimate gnosis can never be called the view of Hwa shang or a view of annihilation. [422.4–424.3]

- In the tradition of the Mantra, too, “not grasping anything” is mentioned. Here it is used as a means of concentration, not as a specific view. [424.3–5]

- Using the categories mentioned in Maitreya’s *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, non-grasping is explained in detail (with regard to the context of the Sūtra). Here, true non-conceptual gnosis is pointed out by refuting various kinds of non-grasping that do not correspond to highest gnosis. Furthermore, the distinguishing features and functions of non-conceptual gnosis are explained. This understanding cannot be mistaken for the tradition of Hwa shang. [424.5–427.4]

(c) These earlier explanations also answer RS’s second question about Śāntideva’s approach to suchness (*de nyid*). [427.4–428.3]

IV.21. Further contradictions in the NK [428.3–431.6]

- Objection [428.3–429.1]: quotation of JL IV.18 and 19 (412.4–413.2)

- Answer [429.1–431.6]:

(a) Non-existence of assertions (*khas len*) is not accepted owing to not understanding emptiness, but after investigating all references (*dmigs pa*) and realising that emptiness is beyond references. Nowadays, however, not only Śrāvakas, but also followers of the Mahāyāna seem to be afraid of a correct understanding of emptiness. Emptiness is surely known individually (*rang gis rig pa*), but it is not an object of a referential (*dmigs pa can*) mind. If the absolute contained references and were perceived as such by highest gnosis, then emptiness would become truly established (*bden grub*), just as claimed by the Gzhan stong pas. [429.1–430.2]

(b) According to MP’s tradition, one is not liberated if there is no non-referential mind that sees emptiness. Thus, there is no contradiction to the view of the Śrāvakas or Mādhyamikas. [430.2–3]

(c) The *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* are words indeed, but they teach non-referential (*mi dmigs pa*) emptiness and refute referential (*dmigs pa can*) emptiness. [430.3–4]

(d) The passage RS mentioned refers to non-referential emptiness, not an emptiness that contains references. [430.4–5]

(e) MP's position of emptiness as being devoid of references is repeated and presented as a correct understanding of coalescence. [430.5–431.6]

IV.22. Is the absolute an object of mind and words? – Discussing the scriptures [431.6–442.2]

- Objection [431.6–433.2]: quotation of JL IV.20 (413.2–414.3)

- Answer [433.2–442.2]:

(a) If emptiness is understood as referential (*dmigs pa can*), and in RS's way, as a mere non-existence of true establishment (*bden med med dgag*), then emptiness would be indeed very easy to understand for a conceptual mind, too, and thus the emphasis of its subtlety and difficulty expressed in the *Lalitavistara* would not make sense. In various scriptures, emptiness is described as non-referential and as being beyond conceptions; therefore, it is RS who is in opposition to the scriptures. [433.2–435.3]

(b) It was never said (in the NK) that there is no teaching of emptiness; instead, there is a teaching of emptiness that is devoid of references. The intention of the passage of the *Ratnakūṭa* quoted by RS was also explained by an earlier *sūtra* (referring probably to RL 429.5–6): with regard to suchness, agent, object, and action are not perceived. [435.3–436.1]

(c) As explained earlier (RL 430.3–4), the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* is accepted as the king of all *sūtras*, since it teaches emptiness that is devoid of references. [436.1]

(d) There is no deprecation of the *sūtras* of provisional (*drang don*) and definitive meaning (*nges don*) with regard to MP's tradition. The scriptures that teach emptiness that is devoid of references are of definitive meaning, while those that teach the conventional, which contains references, are of provisional meaning. Further, even the scriptures of definitive meaning will become of provisional meaning as long as one remains in references (*dmigs pa*), as explained earlier (probably referring to RL 315.4–5). There are, however, various faults that follow if one regards emptiness that contains references as the definitive meaning. [436.1–6]

(e) It was never said that the definitive meaning cannot be understood. The reasons that RS mentioned, for instance the inability to express the definitive meaning, i.e., emptiness, by words, are investigated; here, there are different contexts that have to be considered:

- With regard to the general characteristic – or “universal” – (*spyi mtshan*), anything can be expressed, even something that does not exist on the conventional level, like a rabbit’s horn. [436.6–437.2]

- With regard to the own-characteristic (*rang mtshan*), neither emptiness, nor ordinary things like a vase, etc. can actually (*dnegos su*) be expressed by words. This is proven by various quotes from Pramāṇa scriptures. If one focuses on this tradition and explains that emptiness cannot be *actually* expressed, then this negative description of emptiness is still regarded as an object of conceptualisation (*rnam rtog*). [437.2–438.3]

MP’s position is then explained: ordinary things are perceived and described as this and that; hence, they are objects of conceptualisation (*rnam rtog*). Emptiness, on the other hand, cannot be expressed in conventional categories; hence, it is said to be inexpressible (*brjod du med pa*) or to be not an object of conceptualisation. Emptiness can be described by words, but these descriptions are only a door through which one enters the meaning of emptiness. These descriptions lead to an understanding of emptiness as an abstract or general object (*spyi’i don*), its own-characteristic is seen in the context of the direct realisation of emptiness. [438.3–439.3]

The scriptures establish emptiness as an abstract or general object (*spyi’i don*), and, since not anything that contains references is mentioned with regard to this emptiness, it is said to be established as being inexpressible. [439.3–6]

Furthermore, the position that emptiness is expressed simply by saying it is inexpressible is criticised, as such a view misses the intended meaning. Hence, RS’s criticism below that MP is not be able to explain emptiness (JL 415.6) applies to RS himself. [439.6–440.3]

(f) The statements that RS listed earlier (in JL 20fgh) are a proof in favour of MP’s position: it is not refuted that the definitive meaning can be expressed by scriptures, as these statements use words to establish the absolute as inexpressible. [440.3–441.3]

(g) Actually, RS does not understand the name of these treatises, since he considers emptiness to contain references. [441.3–442.2]

IV.23. The status of conventional existence (*kun rdzob tu yod pa*) (a) [442.2–443.3]

- Objection [442.2–3]: quotation of JL IV.21a (414.3–4)

- Answer [442.3–443.3]:

As far as this issue is concerned, there are different positions: for most Snga rabs pa, existence on the conventional level does indeed not count (*go mchod*) as existence, and non-existence on the absolute level does count as non-existence. For most Phyi rabs pa, on the other hand, existence on the

conventional level counts as existence, and non-existence on the absolute level does not count as non-existence. MP's position is that existence on the conventional level counts as existence on the conventional level, but does not count as existence on the absolute level, and non-existence on the absolute level counts as non-existence on the absolute level, but does not count as non-existence on the conventional level. Thus, it has never been said that existence on the conventional level does not entail existence (as RS claimed). [442.3–6]

Further, the absurd consequences of following merely the words of *bsdus grwa* logic are pointed out. [442.6–443.3]

IV.24. The status of conventional existence (*kun rdzob tu yod pa*) (b) [443.3–446.4]

- Objection [443.3–6]: quotation of JL IV.21bc (414.4–415.1)

- Answer [443.6–446.4]:

(a) It is accepted that *paramārthasatya* exists on the conventional level and that it is free from all extremes; it does not follow that the absolute is, in general, not an object of words and mind. It is not an object of a referential (*dmigs pa can*) mind or words, but it is an object of a non-referential mind. As it is not accepted that the absolute is in general not an object of mind, RS's further conclusions are without a basis. [443.6–444.3]

(b) The "Great Madhyamaka" (*dbu ma chen po*), which is free from all extremes, is called the "*dharmadhātu*." As it exists as the nature of all phenomena, there is no such fault as that the Great Madhyamaka does not exist on the conventional level. This suchness (*de nyid*) is what is called "the absolute." [444.3–4]

(c) Further, MP's position is elaborated: as long as one speaks and conceptualises, the absolute will contain references; that is why it is said that it is not possible to *actually* show the absolute by linguistic expressions. This, however, does not mean that the absolute is not an object of personal experience, which arises based on linguistic expression, or a mind that investigates the scriptures well. This understanding is supported by quotes from different scriptures. [444.4–446.4]

IV.25. Further contradictions with regard to MP's position that the absolute is not an object of words and mind [446.4–451.4]

- Objection [446.4–447.3]: quotation of JL IV.22 (415.1–5)

- Answer [447.3–451.4]:

(a) It has already been explained that emptiness is accepted as an object of inference. RS's comparison with the Lokāyata tradition is mistaken: these accept neither inference, nor a hidden object; hence, one cannot say that they accept the conclusion that RS mentioned. [447.3–6]

(b) It is accepted that the non-existence of an inherent nature of a thing is not eliminated by valid cognition. Freedom from extremes is the completion of the meaning of inherent non-existence, and therefore is established by a valid cognition that investigates the mode of existence (*gnas tshul*). Therefore, MP is also able to explain the passages of the *Pramāṇavārttika* that RS quoted in a proper way and does not deviate from the *Pramāṇa* scriptures. [447.6–448.2]

(c) It is accepted that the absolute is perceived – on the conventional level – by non-conceptual gnosis; hence, there is no contradiction to the two passages of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* that RS mentioned. Thus, it is also not the case that the Bodhisattvas do not meditate on emptiness; rather, they understand it through non-conceptual insight (*rnam par mi rtog pa'i shes rab*). [448.2–449.1]

(d) The 173 aspects that RS mentioned are meditated upon in a non-referential way (*mi dmigs pa'i tshul*); by meditating on an emptiness that contains references, one does not arrive at the coalescence of the two *satyas* that is devoid of references. [449.1–5]

(e) MP comments on the four passages of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* that were mentioned. The first passage explained emptiness as being “profound” (*zab mo*). Therefore, a view of emptiness as containing references would actually contradict this passage. Also, with regard to the second passage, a correct explanation of the “eight aspects of profound *dharmatā*” (*zab mo'i chos nyid rnam pa brgyad*) is said to be in accordance with MP's understanding. The same is also true for the other two passages that were mentioned. [449.5–451.2]

(f) This accusation applies to RS himself, as he does not know non-existence of references. [451.2–3]

(g) It is explained that MP pondered intensively on the way of perfecting (realisation of the mode of existence) by the perception of the (173) aspects, which is brought about by non-existence of references. [451.3–4]

IV.26. Further arguments against MP's view: proof from the *Madhyamakāvātāra* [451.4–455.2]

- Objection [451.4–452.4]: quotation of JL IV.23 (415.5–416.4)

- Answer [452.4–455.2]:

(a) An answer to RS's accusations (JL IV.23abc) is not necessary, as they were already answered by the earlier explanations. [452.4–5]

(b) A grammar mistake in one of RS's verses is mentioned. Further, several polemical verses from the beginning of RS's work (JL 369.3–370.2) are quoted. All these verses are not in accord with the spirit of a Bodhisattva,

since they belittle others and praise oneself. In other passages from the beginning of the JL (JL 370.2–4; 371.3–5; 371.1–3), reasons for the refutation of the NK are mentioned. These apply in the same way to the JL. [452.5–455.2]

Addendum (a) [455.2–457.3]

- “Objection” [455.2–456.1]: quotation of JL 3a (416.4–417.3)

- Answer [456.2–457.3]:

MP completely agrees with RS’s praise. It is due to Tsong kha pa’s achievements that nowadays the Dharma is spreading everywhere; Tsong kha pa’s activity is unmatched by any other person. MP prays “from the bottom of his heart and without false praise or dishonesty” that this spreading of the teachings continues.

Addendum (b) [457.3–460.4]

- “Objection” [457.3–458.1]: quotation of JL 3b (417.3–6)

- Answer [458.1–460.4]:

Again, MP agrees with RS’s statements. MP’s intention (when writing the NK) was not to engage in debate with others, but to clarify his own tradition. Also the following letters, the *Brgal lan nyin byed snang ba* and the present letter, were not written with any feeling of aversion against the Dge lugs tradition.

Auspicious verses [461.1–6]

Summarising verses [461.6–462.5]

Colophon [462.5–463.5]

Ga bur chu rgyun

Opening verses [424–426.3]

General introduction (*spyi don*) [426.3–433.1]:

Background and development of the debates: MP seems to have written the NK with good intentions, but his work was strongly criticised by scholars from Central Tibet. First it was assumed that MP did not answer the criticism, as he allegedly focused merely on meditative practise. This, however, turned out to be wrong, as later an answer to RS’s letter arrived. RS wanted to avoid a reply, but as MP said in RL 379.5 that not answering an opponent would be the worst criticism, a reply was necessary. MP’s work shows innumerable flaws, which will be discussed in the following by arranging the respective issues into four categories: contradictions to what has been claimed; mistakes [made by] not realising; eliminating mistakes [caused] by wrong conceptions; the way the [different] Dharma traditions (*chos tshul*) come down to a single essence.

Detailed explanation (*bye brag tu bshad pa*) [433.1–467.5]

1. Contradictions to what has been claimed (*khas blangs dang 'gal ba*) [433.1–449.5]

I.1. MP contradicts qualities he claimed for himself [433.1–434.2]

(a) While MP claimed (in RL 192.3) to have abandoned boasting words, he said in the RL and in the NK that he had found trust in freedom from proliferations and seen the mode of existence (probably referring to RL 446.3, NK 2.2f). [433.1–3]

(b) While MP claimed (in RL 192.3) to have abandoned inciting lies, he ascribed wrong views to RS, claiming that he would view the Buddha as an ordinary person (probably RL 234.3–4) [433.3–4]

(c) While MP claimed (in RL 192.4) to have abandoned praising oneself and blaming others, he regarded the scriptures of others as poison and his own as medicine (probably RL 431.3f). [433.4–5]

(d) While MP claimed (in RL 192.4) that he had abandoned a partial view (*zhen lta*) that sees erroneous talk (*gtam gyi nyes pa*) only in the scriptures of others, he also clings to his own tradition. [433.5]

(e) MP is agitated by the words of others; this contradicts his statement (probably RL 195.2f) that he is without aversion. [433.5]

(f) Since MP used critical words in his reply, there is also a contradiction to his statement (RL 192.4) that aversion did not arise. [433.5–434.2]

I.2. MP's attitude to Tsong kha pa; discussing BCA IX.1 [434.2–435.6]

(a) MP was praising Tsong kha pa (probably RL 456.2ff., RL 194.2, among others) later, while he had slandered Tsong kha pa's explanations earlier, in NK 42.5 and NK 37.1. Thus, his praise is dishonest. [434.2–3]

(b) Furthermore, MP's explanations (RL 194.2–3) exhibit the superficial nature of his praise. [434.3–4]

(c) Stating (in RL 196.1f.) that "*yan lag*" could also interpreted as "cause" (*rgyu*) is a direct contradiction (to MP's earlier explanations in the NK). A debate would not have been necessary, had MP said so in the first place. [434.4–5]

(d) MP's statement (NK 3.1.) that accomplishment comes only from insight, not from the other perfections, is refuted through proof from the scriptures and since it is accepted that the *rūpakāya* is accomplished through merit. [434.5–6]

Further, there are various issues about the relationship among the individual perfections. [434.6–435.6]

I.3. Discussing BCA IX.78 [435.6–437.1]

(a) In NK 61.5 the interpretation of BCA IX.78c as referring to the averting of self-grasping was refuted. This is, however, in direct contradiction

to RL 198.3f, where MP claims to share the intention of Kalyānadeva and Prajñākaramati. [435.6–436.1]

(b) MP mentioned a contradiction between RS’s earlier and later explanations (RL 199.1). This is refuted, since MP did not understand the context and the position of his opponent, which is then explained. [436.1–2]

(c) MP seems to have forgotten that he called RS a (weak) fox earlier (e.g., RL 208.5f., RL 427.1f.), as he criticised RS for the same reason later (RL 454.1). [436.2–3]

(d) In RL 204.1f., MP pointed out an unwanted consequence if one accepts a causal relationship between the two kinds of self-grasping. Immediately afterwards (RL 204.4), however, he explained that he did not intend to criticise a causal relationship.

Both mind and self-grasping arise from their four conditions. Criticising a causal relationship would therefore lead to unwanted consequences. [436.3–437.1]

I.4. Discussing BCA IX.41–49 [437.1–438.3]

(a) In NK 42.1 and NK 42.2, it was said that non-afflicted desire (*sred pa nyon mongs can min pa*) exists for an Arhat, while in RL 243.1ff. it was said that a *present* desire does not exist. [437.1–2]

(b) In RL 230.4 afflicted desire is mentioned, while in RL 242.3 non-afflicted desire was mentioned. But to what is the “present desire” related (since it was earlier said that such does not exist)? [437.2]

(c) According to MP’s position, the abandoning of desire would require awakening, which is in contradiction to the statements of Dharmakīrti and Vasubandhu (discussed in RL 242.4). [437.2–3]

(d) BCA IX.48a, but also the earlier and later verses refer to desire as a branch of the twelve links of dependent origination. MP, however, replied without understanding this. [437.3–5]

(e) In NK 36.5, it was said that the subtle view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*’jig lta*) was not abandoned, while in RL 224.1f. it was assumed that it is abandoned. [437.5]

(f) In RL 224.1f., it was said that one has to accept that subtle self-grasping is abandoned if one accepts that self-grasping is abandoned. Accepting this logic for the case of seeing the truth would mean that the opponent’s objection to emptiness in BCA IX.41b would not make sense. [437.5–6]

(g) Accepting that the view of the transitory [collection to be the self] (*’jig lta*) is abandoned in the [Hīnayāna] tradition would lead to the unwanted consequence that this tradition perceives a mind that grasps a person as inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) as a misconception. [437.6]

(h) MP's verses in RL 225.1–3 contain various inner contradictions. [437.6–438.3]

I.5. Various topics, mainly from discussing BCA IX.2, but also BCA IX.41–49 [438.3–442.4]

(a) MP's understanding in the matter of accepting the *ālaya* is insignificant: he said (RL 386.5) that some people do not accept it, but did not specify who. Furthermore, in RL 228.3ff., he seems to have accepted a statement that should actually be used as a counter-argument against the *ālaya*. [438.3–4]

(b) In NK 22.3, the lack of affirmation and refutation of *svasaṃvedana* is used as an argument for its acceptance; in another context (probably NK 6.6), the lack of distinguishing nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) absolute and actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute is used as an argument for the non-acceptance of this distinction. [438.4–5]

(c) It is said (probably NK 22.5ff.) that the refutation of *svasaṃvedana* in the *Madhyamakāvatāra* is carried out with regard to the absolute level. Thus, one must accept the refutation of “coming and going” and “cause and effect” in the same way. [438.5–6]

(d) If (probably according to RL 375) *so so rang rig pa'i ye shes* is *svasaṃvedana*, then this gnosis itself would become *paramārthasatyā* and thus also something conditioned (*'du byas*), i.e., this very gnosis, would exist with regard to emptiness. Furthermore, *pariniṣpanna* and *paratantra* would exist together. [438.6–439.2]

(e) Mentioning the desire of a certain tradition does not indicate the desire of another tradition (as stated in NK 43.3). Thus, it is contradictory to say that mentioning the desire of an Arhat indicates also the desire of someone who has not attained arhatship (in NK 42.1, MP mentioned the desire of an Arhat, while later in RL 242.6f. he explained that this desire refers to a desire that precedes the attainment of arhatship). [439.2]

(f) MP's explanations (RL 247.5ff.) concerning the placement of the “*ang sgra*” deviate from the scriptures of the grammatical tradition. [439.3]

(g) MP's explanations (RL 212.6ff. and further RL 382.4ff.) concerning the existence or non-existence of mind (*sems*) at the state of awakening are inconsistent. [439.3–4]

(h) MP (in RL 356.4ff.) did not say that non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) is – in general – the mode of existence, but explained that this depends on the state of mind. This would mean that even freedom from proliferations (*spros bral*) is not the mode of existence in general, but depends on the perceiving mind. [439.4–6]

According to that, MP would also establish nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) and actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute only in dependence to the subject. The relations of subject and object in this regard are then further explained. [439.6–440.3]

(i) MP alleged that RS would object his position, since he did not understand the unity of the two *satyas* (RL 254.2ff.). This is a misinterpretation of RS's criticism, which was aimed at the conception of gnosis (*ye shes*) as being without references (*dmigs pa med pa*). [440.3–4]

(j) Furthermore, MP accepted an "aspect" or "form" (*rnam pa*) of freedom from proliferations (probably RL 352.1 or RL 254.3f.), which is in contradiction to other statements, where it is said that freedom from proliferations is without references. [440.4–5]

(k) MP's statement (RL 257.3ff.) that a view that contains references is not the mode of existence shows that he has not understood the position of his opponent: no cognition – be it with or without references – is accepted as emptiness. [440.5–441.1]

(l) MP mentioned repeatedly "non-existence of true establishment" (*bden med*), but also said (probably RL 350.2 or RL 360.1) that one should not apply the specification "truly established" (*bden grub*). [441.1]

(m) Furthermore, this is in contradiction to MP's explanations in RL 309.4f., where he also employed the specification "on the absolute level" (*don dam du*). [441.1–3]

(n) It is contradictory to say "there are no assertions (*khas len*)" and to claim that "there are no assertions" (since this itself is an assertion). That assertions are accepted can be proven by common situations in which assertions are made. Then RS's understanding of the two *satyas* is expressed, which shows that he can explain both to be without contradiction, while MP, on the other hand, arrives at the position of Hwa shang (this passage refers probably to RL 306–309). [441.3–6]

(o) MP doubted the information on the tradition of Hwa shang from Tsong kha pa's scriptures (RL 366.2), but this tradition is also confirmed by Bu ston. In addition, MP's reason for his doubts, i.e., the present-day lack of Hwa shang scriptures, is uncertain. [441.6–442.3]

I.6. Various issues related to BCA IX.2 [442.3–448.4]

(a) The statement "there are no assertions (*khas len*)" has different meanings according to the respective context (whereas MP claimed in RL 295.5 that a certain understanding must be accepted by everybody). [442.3–4]

(b) Whereas MP established *dharmatā* to be not the object of (conceptual) speculation (*rtog ge*) by using the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* (in RL 254.5ff.),

he also said that it needs to be realised by ordinary beings (e.g., RL 312.4, RL 408.5ff.). [442.4–5]

(c) MP assumed (probably RL 318.4f.) that an abiding in the extreme of existence is the case for the abiding in non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*), while such is not the case for the abiding in freedom from proliferations. But also, in this case, abiding in *bden med* must be accepted, which contradicts his other statements (probably RL 311.1ff.). [442.5–6]

(d) It is also contradictory that, for MP, the non-existence of the individual extremes is considered a *med dgag*, while the non-existence of all four extremes is not (probably referring to RL 355.5ff.). This is followed by further criticism of MP's position, contrasted with RS's own view. [442.6–443.5]

(e) MP claimed that he follows Tsong kha pa's explanations (probably RL 421.4ff.), which are in conflict with MP's concept of the "Great Madhyamaka" (*dbu ma chen po*). [443.5–6]

(f) Klong chen pa (in a passage quoted by MP in RL 422.2f.) mistakenly associated the view of Hwa shang with the "peak of existence" (*srid rtse*). At this stage, however, there is still subtle mental activity, while the Hwa shang view proclaims the total non-existence of mental activity. [443.6–444.1]

(g) Earlier, MP defined *paramārthasatya* as the unity of appearances and emptiness, while later he said it is the coalescence of the two *satyas* (e.g., RL 330.4 and RL 342.3). [444.1–2]

(h) There is a contradiction between stating that freedom from proliferations is the actual absolute (e.g., RL 343.3f., RL 403.1f.) and saying that the actual absolute must be connected to the aspect of appearances (e.g., RL 300.2ff., RL 406.5f.). Since freedom from proliferations is without proliferations, there would be a total nothingness similar to MP's statement (in RL 345.5). [444.2–3]

(i) Furthermore, the appearing of non-existence of true establishment (*bden med*) cannot be accepted either, since MP explained (probably referring to RL 328.1ff.) that such corresponds to the nominal absolute, and not to non-conceptual gnosis.

This is followed by explanations of RS's position in this regard: *bden med* is perceived in the context of concentration (*mnyam bzhaḡ*), but not in a dualistic way. While at this stage only emptiness, but not the conventional (*kun rdzob*), is perceived, both are perceived simultaneously at the stage of a Buddha. Further, possible objections to this position are investigated. [444.3–445.3]

(j) According to MP, both appearances that exist on the conventional level, even though they do not exist on the absolute level, and appearances that do not exist on the absolute level, even though they exist on the conventional level, are accepted as the coalescence of the two *satyas*, while they should be separated and the first be accepted as *saṃvṛtisaṭya* and the second as *paramārthasaṭya*. [445.3–5]

(k) The reason for MP's wrong understanding seems to be a misinterpretation of a passage of the *Madhyamakāloka* (which MP quoted in RL 286.1f.). The main point is that nominal (*rnam grangs pa*) and actual (*rnam grangs ma yin pa*) absolute are distinguished based on the perceiving subject. [445.5–446.2]

(l) Further, according to MP (e.g., RL 351.6), *bden med* is only limited emptiness, and hence self-grasping would also be only a limited root of *saṃsāra*. This must be further connected to the appearing aspect, because such was explained (e.g., in RL 349.4) as the “door to peace” (*zhi sgo*). [446.2–3]

(m) According to MP (e.g., RL 319.3f.), *bden med* and conventional existence are both proliferations, and hence do not appear to gnosis. On the other hand, MP explained (e.g., RL 371.3f.) that *bden med* appears to non-conceptual gnosis. [446.3–4]

(n) It seems that MP has not understood the meaning of the term “emptiness.” It denotes the quality that phenomena are empty of true establishment (*bden grub*) (and should not be related to phenomena in a general sense). [446.4–5]

(o) According to MP, the notions of *bden med* and conventional existence are to be regarded as an object of negation (*dgag bya*) of non-conceptual gnosis. This is, however, mistaken, because these notions do not appear to gnosis.

Furthermore, RS's position is pointed out: self-grasping (*bdag 'dzin*) is the root of *saṃsāra*, while insight that realises the non-existence of true establishment acts as its antidote. This is proven in various scriptures of the Buddha. [446.5–448.4]

I.7. *paramārthasaṭya* as an object of mind; an (alleged) grammar mistake in RS's verses [448.4–449.5]

(a) In NK 7.6, MP explained that *paramārthasaṭya* is not an object of mind and words. This contradicts RL 396.5ff., where he stated the opposite. Saying that it is not an object of a dualistic mind (RL 397.2), MP followed the Dge lugs Phyi rabs pa tradition. That it actually is an object of mind is proven not only by reasoning, but also by scriptures. [448.4–6]

(b) The criticism of an abridged form in RS's verses mentioned by MP in RL 452.6f. would apply also to the abridged form "*Sher 'grel*" that he uses (RL 193.2). The abridged form is, however, in accordance with the rules of grammar. [448.6–449.5]

2. Mistakes [made by] not realising (*ma rtogs 'khrul ba'i nyes pa*) [449.5–455.6]

2.1. [449.6–451.1]

II.1. The role of the *Abhidharmakośa*-passages in RL III.5b [449.6–451.1]

In his answer in RL III.5b (RL 231.4–232.4), MP seems to have misunderstood RS's earlier explanations: the two quotations from the *Abhidharmakośa* are not a proof for the explanations of the existence of the forty "latent tendencies" (*phra rgyas*). These forty latent tendencies were mentioned in order to refute MP's statement in NK 43.2, but they are not directly connected to the other quotations from the *Abhidharmakośa*. Also, it seems that MP was angry, as he did not even mention the number forty.

2.2. [451.2–453.1]

II.2. Ceasing and transformation of mind in RL III.5e [451.2–453.1]

In his answer (RL 234.2f.), MP explained that mind (*sems*) does not exist at the time of awakening, as it transforms (into gnosis), just like the seed does not exist when it transforms into a sprout. MP did not understand the meaning of "transformation," which means that someone who is endowed with a certain condition arrives at a more exalted condition, but not that there is no endowment with that condition in general. Otherwise, there would be many unwanted consequences. It would, for example, follow that the five faculties do not exist at the stage of a Buddha, since it is said that they transform.

2.3. [453.1–455.6]

II.3. Issues related to the term "inexpressible" (*brjod med*) [453.1–455.6]

(a) In his answer in RL IV.2d (RL 307.2–309.1), MP listed different possibilities to which the five knowables (*shes bya lnga*) mentioned by RS could refer. Thus, MP seemingly pretends to know, instead of stating openly that he has not understood RS's explanations.

RS's original intention is then explained by referring to the respective passage from 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje's *Grub mtha' chen mo*: an "inexpressible self" (*brjod med kyi bdag*) is accepted (by the Pudgalavādins). This is, however, in contradiction to the acceptance of a set of five knowables, of which one part is "inexpressibles" (*brjod par bya ba min pa*), (as the latter is called "inexpressible," but actually accepted to be expressible as it is a knowable). This "inexpressible knowable" (*brjod med kyi shes bya*) is

emptiness that is free from proliferations, (whereas MP accepts that emptiness is actually not expressible and not a knowable). [453.1–6]

(b) If one accepts that everything that is called “inexpressible” (*brjod med*) is not an object of words and concepts, then it follows that also things like the paths of seeing and meditation or *paratantra* are not an object of words and concepts, simply because they were described as “inexpressible” in the scriptures.

Furthermore, this would also contradict the ordinary usage of the term “inexpressible.” [453.6–454.3]

(c) It seems that MP’s explanations have no aim: in the RL (e.g., RL 439.3ff., RL 441.2.f.) he also said that emptiness is an object of words, but at another stage (RL 437.1ff.) he said that an own-characteristic (*rang mtshan*) is not an object of words. The reason for being an object of words given in the first explanations would, however, also apply to the other explanations. [454.3–4]

(d) Furthermore, in RL IV.2b (RL 305.3ff.), MP regarded certain logical principles as useless. Thus, it seems that MP has not understood the Indian and Tibetan scriptures that propound these principles. [454.4–455.6]

3. Eliminating wrong conceptions (*log rtog bsal ba*) [455.6–467.2]

III.1. Various issues, mainly from the first quarter of the RL [455.6–460.2]

(a) In the RL (e.g., RL 194.2ff.), MP explained that the Dge lugs approach to emptiness as emptiness of true establishment (*bden grub*) leads to a concept of emptiness as an implicative negation (*ma yin dgag*), and assumed – erroneously – a resemblance to the Vaibhāṣikas’ idea of emptiness. MP is confused, since he states that *bden med med dgag* is not appropriate for emptiness, but also states sometimes (e.g., NK 7.1f.) that emptiness is accepted as *med dgag*. Since a *ma yin dgag* is depicted as a wrong conception of emptiness, it follows implicitly that *med dgag* is accepted. Further, MP’s conclusion that emptiness of true establishment would be a *ma yin dgag* is in contradiction to the way negations are explained in the Pramāṇa scriptures. [455.6–456.2]

(b) MP’s explanations concerning the particle “*tsam*” (RL I.4; 197.5–198.1) are mistaken. Usually this particle is used to express a certain size or measurement, whereas MP uses it indifferently. Illustrating his understanding with the expression “*sems tsam*,” MP used it to delineate something by excluding its opposite. Applying this usage to another context would lead to the absurd consequence that the age of perfection (*rdzogs ldan gyi dus*) would become the age where merely the (outer) signs are grasped (*rtags tsam ’dzin pa’i dus*), since it is an age where the signs are grasped, and

since its opposite – that the signs are not grasped – is excluded. Following this logic, also the rules for monks would become confused. [456.2–457.1].

(c) In RL II.2a (199.4–5), MP explained that the *la*-particle which is connected to “appearances” (*snang ba*) is the locative (seventh) case. If this is so, then “appearances” must be regarded as the location and something that exists at this location must be indicated, which, however, is not the case. [457.1–3]

(d) MP’s remarks (RL 209.1) exhibit his boastful character, while such is not the case for RS. [457.3–5]

(e) In RL IV.9b (371.5–6), MP showed no mercy for his scribe, as he is held responsible for a certain spelling mistake. [457.5–6]

(f) In his explanations in RL II.5a (201.6–203.4), MP assumed that the “egoism” (*nga rgyal*) of self-grasping and self-grasping as such are contradictory, but further explained that both relations – that of identity (*bdag gcig ’brel*) or a causal relationship (*de byung ’brel*) – are possible. Thus, it would follow that the two are considered to be both identical and different in nature (*ngo bo gcig dang tha dad*).

In addition, MP’s polemical remarks in three passages (RL 203.4; RL 211.5ff.; RL 208.2) are criticised and turned against MP in a joking manner. [457.6–458.3]

(g) MP’s statements in RL II.9a (212.6ff.), that a dualistic mind does not exist at the stage of a Buddha, could be investigated by asking what the subject or object of such a perception is.

Furthermore, MP claimed (probably referring to RL 233.3ff.) that a Buddha would become an (ordinary) sentient being (*sems can*) if mind (*sems*) were present at this stage. Applying this argument to other contexts exhibits its logical fault. It is also in contradiction to other statements (e.g., RL 212.6ff.), where MP explained that mind is present at the stage of a Buddha, but that it is called “gnosis” (*ye shes*).

That mind has to be accepted at the stage of a Buddha is further proven by scriptures and reasoning. [458.3–459.2]

(h) MP’s answer (RL 241.2ff.) shows that he has not understood the meaning of “deriving as a correlative” (*zlas drangs*), as MP thought that the mention of both an afflicted desire and a non-afflicted desire refers to the same basis, i.e., the same subject. The original intention, however, was that the quote “this desire” (*sred pa ’di*) refers to the desire as it is understood in the Prāsaṅgika tradition, but that by saying “this” (*’di*) also another desire, “that desire” (*sred pa de*), i.e., afflicted desire as it is understood in the opponent’s tradition, is indicated. Those two desires are different and have no common basis. [459.2–460.2]

III.2. Various issues [460.2–463.6]

(a) In RL III.2c (221.2–5), the continued arising of *bden 'dzin* for an Arhat that RS had pointed out as a consequence of MP's explanations was called a lie. Hence, RS establishes again the reasoning of this consequence. [460.2–5]

(b) In RL 386.2, MP denied that he had said that the two *satyas* do not exist. But he also said (e.g., NK 7.6) that *paramārthasatya* is not an object of mind. Hence, if something is not a knowable, how can it exist? MP does not belong to the tradition that accepts that something exists because it exists on the conventional level, hence, how can *saṃvṛtisatya* exist? Furthermore, MP also said (RL 442.4f.) that he does not adhere to either of the two positions in this regard. [460.5–6]

(c) The non-existence of Hwa shang scriptures in the present time, adduced by MP (RL 366.2f.) as a reason, is refuted by referring to various sources (similar to GC I.5o) [460.6–461.3]

(d) MP's remarks (RL 323.5 or RL 400.2f.) that something known as the statement of the Buddha should not be criticised is refuted, arguing that also positions of the Cittamātrins are approved in the scriptures and hence should not be refuted (as suggested for example in RL 349.6). [461.3–4]

(e) MP's remark (RL 406.2) that a mind that realises emptiness is insight (*shes rab*) is refuted by pointing out that "mind" (*blo*) is a much broader term than "insight" (*shes rab*). [461.4–5]

(f) In RL IV.25a (447.3–6), MP refuted the reasoning of RS, arguing that the Lokāyatas, the proponents under consideration, accept neither the object that is to be established (*bsgrub bya*) nor the reason (*rtags*). This is refuted, in turn, by a counter-example. [461.5–462.2]

(g) [The criticism (probably referring to RL 204.2ff.) of] the position that the imagined phenomenon (*gdags chos*), i.e., a self with regard to persons (*gang zag*), does not appear without the arising of the basis of imagination (*gdags gzhi*), i.e., the *skandhas*, shows that the respective scriptures have not been understood. [462.2–3]

(h) As there are doubts regarding the detailed relation of the 173 aspects that were discussed in RL IV.25d (449.1–5), RS explains his view in detail. [462.3–463.1]

(i) It is contradictory to say sometimes that a specification is not applied in the refutation of the extremes of existence and non-existence (e.g., RL 339.1ff., RL 360.1f.), and at other times that existence is not refuted (e.g., RL 345.4ff.) [463.1–2]

(j) Saying (in RL 295.5ff.) that the negation of "both-is-not-the-case" (*gnyis ka min*) must be "both-is-the-case" (*gnyis ka yin*) falls back on MP himself. [463.2–3]

(k) MP does not draw a clear distinction between the positions (of Cit-tamātra and Madhyamaka) in the discussion of the respective scriptures (probably referring to RL 294.2ff., RL 326.1ff.). [463.3–6]

III.3. Various issues from the last quarter of the RL [463.6–467.2]

(a) Tsong kha pa gave various explanations, also of the Snga rabs pa tradition, according to the needs of the students, but these were given with a concealed intention (*ldem dgongs*). Thus, one should not simply take refuge in the scriptures (as MP did with regard to certain works of Tsong kha pa in RL 416.5ff. and RL 421.1ff.), but compare them with his major works. [463.6–464.2]

(b) RS's intention (in JL IV.21ab) was to point out that there is, in general, no contradiction between emptiness being free from proliferations and being at the same time an object of mind and words. MP's answer (RL IV.23), however, had no connection to this issue.

MP's answer shows five faults:

1) Redundancy: the additional application of the specification "on the absolute level" (*don dam par*) or "on the conventional level" (*tha snyad du*) is redundant.

2) Omission: MP did not explain the main issue of this investigation, namely, whether a specified existence or non-existence counts as existence or non-existence in general.

3) Mistake: MP disregarded the context under consideration and talked about the respective function (instead of the general function).

4) Contradiction to what is commonly known: there is no connection if someone, for example, talks about the function of (general) existence, owing to existence at a certain place, and someone else talks about the respective function.

5) Contradiction to what was claimed: (other than claimed), it follows that MP accepts the Phyi rabs pa tradition, as a result of his position with regard to *svasaṃvedana* and *ālaya* (e.g., RL IV.12). Furthermore, it follows that he has not arrived at a new position, since his position is accepted by both Phyi rabs pa and Snga rabs pa. [464.2–465.4]

(c) MP's answer (RL IV.20b; 418.6ff.) to RS's earlier objection concerning the designation of "Great Emptiness" shows that "inexpressible" is regarded as expressible. [465.4–467.2]

4. The way the [different] Dharma traditions (*chos tshul*) come down to a single essence [467.2–5]

In several verses the ultimate unity and harmony of the various traditions is emphasised, culminating in the Madhyamaka view and a gradual approach to buddhahood.

Concluding verses [467.5–470.1]
Colophon [470.1–4]

Yang lan

I. Topics of minor significance (*don chung ba*) [464.6–468.1]

(a) The praise of Tsong kha pa was expressed with honesty, other than RS assumed (in GC I.2a). Since he taught both a Snga rabs pa and a Phyi rabs pa view, Tsong kha pa is not refuted. As RS has stated (GC III.3a), one should not simply take refuge in his scriptures, but investigate them. RS, on the other hand, goes even so far as to equal the teachings of the Buddha with those of Hwa shang (in GC 431.3–4). [464.6–465.3]

(b) While RS contrasted the many qualities of the great monastic centres in Central Tibet with the few qualities of other institutions in other areas (e.g., GC 428.6–429.1; GC 436.5; GC 439.1–2), such cannot be done in a general way. [465.3–4]

(c) Stating that the composition of many works is a sign of not understanding impermanence, let alone the profound meaning (as RS did in GC I.1a), disparages other scholars. [465.4–5]

(d) Indeed (as RS described in GC I.3d), mind and self-grasping arise from their four conditions. The consequences that RS had pointed out do, however, not apply. [465.5–466.1]

(e) RS has misunderstood Klong chen pa's verses (in GC I.6f). [466.1–2]

(f) While certain abbreviations or contracted forms are correct (as RS explained in GC I.7b), such is not the case for the abridged form RS used. It may, however, be a case similar to RS's criticism (GC I.2b) of a "self-appearing" (*rang byung*) *tsam*-particle. [466.2–5]

(g) The consequences that RS pointed out concerning the *tsam*-particle (GC III.1b) are simply wrong. [466.5–6]

(h) RS (in GC 454.1) confused truth of cessation (*'gog bden*) with truth of the path (*lam bden*). [466.6]

(i) In GC I.6b, RS simply assumed that all ordinary beings (*so skye*) are beings of (conceptual) speculation (*rtog ge ba*). One should, however, distinguish between different kinds of beings of speculation (*rtog ge ba*). [466.6–467.1]

(j) RS mentioned the existence of the Hwa shang scriptures on two occasions (GC I.5o and GC III.2c), but did not provide any details about their intention. [467.1–2]

(k) MP admits that he does not know the forty “latent tendencies” (*phra rgyas*) by heart that were mentioned in GC II.1. In contrast to what RS explained, they can, however, be related to the *kleśas* mentioned in passages of the *Abhidharmakośa*. [467.2–4]

(l) Furthermore, in the scriptures various enumerations are mentioned, but no ordinary person can know them all, as RS has stated in GC II.3a (regarding the discussion of the five knowables). [467.4–6]

II. Topics of greater significance (*don che ba*) [468.1–471.1]

(a) The unity of the two *satyas* is accepted as the ultimate absolute. For a consciousness that perceives this, the two *satyas* do not appear in a distinct way (as RS assumed in his criticism, e.g., GC I.6e; GC I.6g; GC I.6i). However, if one accepts mere emptiness (*stong rkyang*) as the ultimate absolute, one cannot establish a perception of the two *satyas* as “inseparable in essence” (*ngo bo dbyer med*) for the stage of a Buddha (as RS did in GC 445.1), and the faults that RS mentioned will indeed occur. [468.1–4]

(b) It is further contradictory to accept that all dualistic appearances are abandoned at the stage of a Buddha and then to say that the gnosis of a Buddha is both dualistic and non-dualistic, conceptual and non-conceptual, (as RS did in GC 445.1–3).

The important point is, therefore, to distinguish between *bden med med dgag* and *bden med spros bral*. [468.4–6]

(c) Just as RS was teasing MP in GC 441.2–3, MP teases RS in return. [468.6–469.2]

(d) Just as RS was criticising MP concerning the understanding of “inexpressible” (*brjod med*) in GC 453.5f., RS’s understanding of *brjod med* can also be criticised in various ways. This is, however, only a matter of words; if one relies on the meaning, then there will not be any dispute. [469.2–5]

(e) By mentioning the insight (*shes rab*) or mind (*blo*) that realises selflessness, a specific consciousness is meant, hence, the fault that RS mentioned in GC III.2e does not apply. [469.5–6]

(f) In the counter-example RS had mentioned in GC III.2f, the proponent accepts both the object that is to be established (*bsgrub bya*) and the reason (*rtags*), other than in the case of the Lokāyatas. [469.6–470.2]

(g) While it was stated earlier (e.g., JL 402.3–4) that emptiness in the form of a non-implicative negation (*med dgag*) is not able to refute the extreme of annihilation (*chad mtha’*), the contrary was said later (e.g., GC 444.6; GC 441.4–5). However, a right understanding of emptiness (as expressed, e.g., in GC 441.4–5) can surely refute the extreme of annihilation. [470.2–4]

(h) Claiming that a specified existence or non-existence counts as existence or non-existence in general (as RS did in GC III.3b) leads to unwanted consequences. In addition, the non-existence of inherent existence (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*), too, should be accepted as counting as non-existence in general. [470.4–471.1]

Concluding verses [471.1–472.1]

Colophon [472.1]

Chapter 6

Overview charts of the texts

The present chapter provides overview charts of all the texts that were summarised in the preceding chapter: *Ju lan* (JL), *Rab lan* (RL), *Ga bur chu rgyun* (GC) and Mi pham's *Yang lan* (YL). The main aim of these charts is to function as a reference tool for scholars working with the relevant texts. One of the trickiest problems in studying these texts, and, in particular, in studying the development of individual lines of argumentation contained within these texts, is their complex intertextual relations. Knowing which earlier passage(s) a current passage is referring to and where the respective issue is picked up again in later texts is crucial. The following charts therefore make these relations as explicit as possible. The middle column presents the outline of the individual texts, following the same structure that was developed in the previous chapter, but keeping descriptions to a minimum. The left column ("References") gives passages of any earlier text referred to in the text under consideration. These references could either be to a complete passage or the main issue of a particular passage – this is frequently the case in Mi pham's *Rab lan*, which follows very closely the structure of Rab gsal's earlier *Ju lan* – or they could refer to a single statement within a larger passage, often not closely connected to the main issue concerned, – this is frequently the case in Rab gsal's later *Ga bur chu rgyun*, which often aims at individual statements made in Mi pham's *Rab lan*. In the case of the former, the passage is given first, followed by the respective page number (e.g., JL II.1b [376.6–377.5]). In the case of the latter, first the precise location – page and line numbers – of the statement is given, followed by the indication of the passage within which it is contained (e.g., RL 204.4 [II.5b]). The right column ("Continuation") shows where a discussion of the current text is taken up again in a later text. While these relations are very clear between Rab gsal's *Ju lan* and Mi pham's *Rab lan*, as the latter

generally follows the former in a strictly chronological way, they are much more difficult to determine for the later texts, both for Rab gsal's *Ga bur chu rgyun* and Mi pham's *Yang lan*, as these later texts do not follow their reference texts chronologically, and often only hint at earlier passages by rough paraphrases and not literal quotes. Therefore, there are sometimes several possible connections to the earlier reference text. In these cases, where the textual relations are not entirely certain, but a guess (with varying degrees of reliability) can be made, the reference is marked by a question mark in parentheses.

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the 'Ju lan

References	JL passage	Continuation
	Opening verses [368.5–370.2] Introductory remarks [370.2–4] 1. Raising the discussion (<i>glenḡ bslang ba</i>) [370.4–371.5] 2. The issues that are raised [371.5–416.4] 2.1. Refuting faults of great impudence (<i>spyi brtol</i>) [371.5–384.3] Topic I: the interpretation of BCA IX.1 [371.6–375.5] 2.1.1. Eliminating misconceptions with regard to the meaning of “ <i>yan lag</i> ” etc. [371.6–375.5]	RL IV26b [452.5–455.2] RL IV26b [452.5–455.2] RL IV26b [452.5–455.2]
NK 2.5–3.6	2.1.1.1. Describing [MP’s] position [371.6–372.1] 2.1.1.2. Refuting it (i.e., MP’s position) [372.1–375.5] I.1. Relation of the six perfections (<i>pāramitās</i>) and the meaning of “ <i>yan lag</i> ” [372.1–373.5]	
NK 2.5, NK 93.5	(a) [372.1–373.2] (b) [373.2–5]	RL I.1 [195.5–196.3] RL I.1 [195.5–196.3]
NK 3.4	I.2. NK 3.4 and the meaning of “ <i>don</i> ” [373.5–374.1] I.3. Relationship between the other five perfections and insight [374.1–3]	RL I.2 [196.3–197.2] RL I.3a [197.3–4]
NK 2.6 ff. NK 3.5	I.4. The interpretation of “ <i>don</i> ” [374.3–4] I.5. The usage of the particle “only/simply” (<i>tsam</i>) [374.4–375.5] Topic II: the interpretation of BCA IX.78 [375.5–384.3] 2.1.2. Eliminating misconceptions with regard to the meaning of “ <i>de las kyang bzlog</i> ” etc. [375.5–384.3]	RL I.3b [197.4–5] RL I.4 [197.5–198.1]
NK 61.1–6	2.1.2.1. Describing [MP’s] position [375.5–376.2] 2.1.2.2. Refuting it (i.e., the opponent’s opinion) [376.2–384.3] II.1. The interpretation of “that” (<i>de</i>) in BCA IX.78c [376.2–378.1] (a) [376.2–6] (b) [376.6–377.5] (c) [377.5–378.1]	RL II.1 [198.1–199.2] RL II.1a [198.3–4] RL II.1b [198.4–199.2]
NK 61.2–3	II.2. MP’s explanations in NK 61.2–3 [378.1–4]	

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the *'ju lan* (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
	(a) [378.1–2] (b) [378.2] (c) [378.2–4] II.3. MP's explanation on selflessness in NK 61.3 [378.4–5] II.4. The relation between the "egoism" of self-grasping and the "delusion" of self-grasping, mentioned in NK 60.6–61.1 [378.5–381.1] (a) [378.5–379.2] (b) [379.2–3] (c) [379.3–381.1] II.5 The status of viewing buddhahood as an object of attainment [381.2–382.2]	RL II.2a [199.4–5] RL II.2b [199.5–6] RL II.3 [199.6–200.3] RL II.4 [200.3–6] RL II.5a [201.6–203.4] RL II.5a [201.6–203.4] RL II.5b [203.4–204.6] RL II.6 [204.6–209.1] RL II.6 [204.6–209.1] RL II.6 [204.6–209.1] RL II.6 [204.6–209.1] RL II.6 [204.6–209.1], RL II.1b [198.4–199.2] RL II.7a [210.1–3] RL II.7a [210.1–3] RL II.7b [210.3–5] RL II.8 [210.5–212.2] RL II.9a [212.6–214.1] RL II.9b [214.1–3]
NK 3.1, NK 29.6(?) NK 61.3, NK 7.2 NK 60.6–61.1		
NK 60.6		
NK 60.2, NK 60.3, NK 60.5 NK 58.5, NK 59.5	(a) [381.2–4] (b) [381.4–5] (c) [381.5] (d) [381.5] (e) [381.5–382.2]	
NK 60.1–2	II.6. MP's explanations in NK 60.1–2 [382.2–6] (a) [382.3] (b) [382.3–6] II.7. MP's explanation in NK 61.4 [382.6–383.2] II.8. MP's explanation in NK 61.4 [383.2–4] II.9. Ceasing of mind (<i>sems 'gags pa</i>) [383.4–384.3] (a) [383.4–5] (b) [383.5–384.3]	
NK 61.4 NK 61.4 NK 74.6(?) NK 61.6		

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the 'Ju lan (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
NK 42.4–6	2.2. Refuting faults that are raised after examination (<i>brtag zin bslang ba'i nyes pa</i>) [384.3–416.4] Topic III: the interpretation of BCA IX.41–49 [384.3–396.2] 2.2.1. [Faults that are connected to] the context of <i>dāraṅgamā</i> (the seventh <i>bhūmi</i>) [384.3–396.2] 2.2.1.1. Stating the opponent's position (<i>phyogs snga</i>) [384.3–4] 2.2.1.2. The actual refutation [384.4–396.2] III.1. Relating BCA IX.45–49 to Arhats [384.4–385.6] (a) [384.6] (b) [384.6–385.6]	RL III.1 [214.3–216.6] RL III.1 [214.3–216.6] RL III.1 [214.3–216.6], RL III.2d [221.5–222.2] RL III.1 [214.3–216.6] RL III.1 [214.3–216.6], RL III.2b [220.2–221.2], RL III.2c [221.2–5] RL III.3a [223.3–224.2] RL III.3b [224.2–225.3] RL III.2a [219.2–220.2], RL III.2b [220.2–221.2] RL III.2a [219.2–220.2] RL III.4a [227.1–6] RL III.4b [228.1–229.2] RL III.5a [230.4–231.4] RL III.5b [231.4–232.4]
NK 35.3–6		
NK 35.3–6 NK 35.5, NK 35.4–5	III.2. Interpreting BCA IX.45c–49c [385.6–386.3] (a) [385.6] (b) [385.6–386.3]	
NK 36.5	III.3. MP's explanation in NK 36.5 [386.3–387.3] (a) [386.3–4] (b) [386.4–387.3] III.4. Explaining the specification "manifest" (<i>mngon gyur pa</i>) [387.3–390.6] (a) [387.3–388.1] (b) [388.1–389.3] (c) [389.3–390.2] (d) [390.2–6] III.5. MP's criticism in NK 43.1f. [390.6–391.6] (a) [390.6–391.1] (b) [391.1–3]	
NK 36.5–6		
NK 43.1		
NK 43.1f. NK 43.2		

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the *'ju lan* (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
	(c) [391.3–4] (d) [391.4–5] (e) [391.5] (f) [391.5–6] (g) [391.6]	RL III.5c [232.4–6] RL III.5d [233.1–4] RL III.5e [233.4–234.4] RL III.5f [234.4–5] RL III.5g [234.5–235.1]
NK 43.3, NK 42.1–2	III.6. MP's explanations in NK 43.3–5 [391.6–394.2] (a) [391.6–392.2] (b) [392.2–3] (c) [392.3–393.2] (d) [393.2–3] (e) [393.3–6] (f) [393.6–394.2]	RL III.6a [237.5–238.3] RL III.6b [238.3–4] RL III.6c [238.4–242.1] RL III.6d [242.1–3] RL III.6e [242.3–5] RL III.6f [242.5–244.4]
NK 43.4–5	III.7. MP's explanation in NK 42.2–3 [394.2–396.2] (a) [394.2–4] (b) [394.4–5] (c) [394.5–6] (d) [394.6–395.1] (e) [395.1] (f) [395.1–396.2]	RL III.7a [246.6–248.2] RL III.7b [248.2–6] RL III.7c [248.6–249.2] RL III.7d [249.2–6] RL III.7e [249.6–250.2] RL III.7f [250.2–251.6]
NK 4.5ff., NK 6.4ff., NK 7.6	Topic IV: issues connected to BCA IX.2 [396.2–416.4] 2.2.2. [Faults] with regard to the principle (<i>ishul</i>) connected to <i>satyadvaaya</i> [396.2–416.4] 2.2.2.1. Stating the opponent's position (<i>phyogs singa</i>) [396.5–6]: 2.2.2.2. Refuting the opponent's position [396.6–416.4] IV.1. Is the lack of true establishment (<i>bden med</i>) the ultimate emptiness? [396.6–398.2] (a) [396.6–397.3] (b) [397.3–5] (c) [397.5–6]	RL IV.1a [254.1–292.6] RL IV.1a [254.1–292.6] RL IV.1b [292.6–293.4]
NK 35.5, NK 7.1 NK 5.2, NK 6.4ff.		

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the *Ju lan* (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
NK 23.6	(d) [397.6–398.1]	RL IV.1c [293.4–302.5]
	(e) [398.1–2]	RL IV.1c [293.4–302.5]
	IV.2. Contradictions to logic [398.2–5]	
	(a) [398.2–3]	RL IV.2a [303.4–305.2]
	(b) [398.3–4]	RL IV.2b [305.3–306.4]
	(c) [398.4–5]	RL IV.2c [306.4–307.1]
NK 6.1	(d) [398.5]	RL IV.2d [307.2–309.1]
	IV.3. The meaning of “abiding in the middle” (<i>dbus la gnas pa</i>) [398.5–400.1]	
	(a) [398.5–6]	RL IV.2e [309.1–5]
	(b) [398.6–399.2]	RL IV.3a [311.1–318.5]
	(c) [399.2–3]	RL IV.3b [319.2–320.4]
	(d) [399.3]	RL IV.3c [320.4–321.2]
NK 5., NK 6.5, NK 4.6, NK 5.2 NK 6.6, NK 5.3	(e) [399.3–4]	RL IV.3d [321.2–4]
	(f) [399.4–400.1]	RL IV.3e [321.4–323.6]
	IV.4. <i>Srāvakas</i> , <i>Cittamātrins</i> , and <i>Mādhyamikas</i> ’ realisation of emptiness; MP’s understanding of the Svātantrika and Prāsangika traditions [400.1–401.3]	
	(a) [400.1]	RL IV.4a [325.4–326.1]
	(b) [400.1–2]	RL IV.4b [326.1–331.4]
	(c) [400.2–4]	RL IV.4b [326.1–331.4], RL IV.4d [332.4–333.5]
NK 5., NK 6.5, NK 4.6, NK 5.2 NK 6.6, NK 5.3	(d) [400.4–6]	RL IV.4b [326.1–331.4], RL IV.4c [331.4–332.4]
	(e) [400.6–401.2]	RL IV.4e [333.6–338.4]
	(f) [401.2–3]	RL IV.4f [338.4–348.5]

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the *'ju lan* (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
NK 6.4-5	<p>IV.5. MP's statement in NK 6.4-5 that there is no difference between <i>Prāsaṅgikas</i> and <i>Svātantrikas</i> with regard to their ultimate intention; refutation of extremes in relation to the subject and the object [401.3-402.5]</p> <p>(a) [401.3-5] (b) [401.5-402.1] (c) [402.1-2] (d) [402.2-5]</p>	<p>RL IV.5 [348.5-350.6] RL IV.4e [333.6-338.4], RL IV.5 [348.5-350.6] RL IV.6a [351.4-352.3] RL IV.6b [352.3-354.3], YL IIg [470.2-4](?)</p>
NK 27.1-2 NK 27.1-2, NK 6.6 NK 27.1-2	<p>IV.6. Discussing MP's explanation in NK 27.1-2 [402.5-403.3]</p> <p>(a) [402.5-403.1] (b) [403.1] (c) [403.1-3]</p> <p>IV.7. In which context is freedom from all four extremes accepted? [403.3-404.3]</p> <p>(a) [403.3-5] (b) [403.5-404.2] (c) [404.2-3]</p>	<p>RL IV.7a [355.1-5] RL IV.7b [355.5-356.1] RL IV.7c [356.1-357.4] RL IV.8a [358.4-360.3] RL IV.8b [360.3-365.4] RL IV.8c [365.4-368.4] RL IV.9a [369.4-371.5] RL IV.9b [371.5-6] RL IV.9c [371.6-372.6] RL IV.10a [374.5-377.1] RL IV.10b [377.1-379.6], RL IV.9a [369.4-371.5] RL IV.11 [379.6-385.1], RL IV.12 [385.1-387.5] RL IV.12 [385.1-387.5]</p>
NK 28.6f. NK 86(?)	<p>IV.8. Direct realisation of emptiness [404.3-405.2]</p> <p>(a) [404.3-4] (b) [404.4-5] (c) [404.5-405.2]</p>	
NK 28	<p>IV.9. Realisation of absence of being (<i>dn̄gos med</i>) [405.2-406.5]</p> <p>(a) [405.2-5] (b) [405.5-406.5]</p>	
NK 74f.	<p>IV.10. Ceasing of mind (<i>sems blag</i>) at the time of awakening [406.5-407.2]</p>	
NK 73, NK 22	<p>IV.11. The status of <i>sasam̄vedana</i> and <i>ālāya</i> [407.2-408.3]</p>	

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the *Ju lan* (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
NK 40.4–5	IV.12. Self-grasping with regard to a person (<i>gang zang gi bdag 'dzin</i>) and self-grasping with regard to phenomena (<i>chos kyi bdag 'dzin</i>) [408.3–6]	RL IV.13 [387.5–392.6]
NK 7.4	IV.13. Difference between the Sūtra and Mantra traditions [408.6–409.6] (a) [408.6–409.1] (b) [409.1–2] (c) [409.2–3] (d) [409.3–6]	RL IV.14a [394.1–5] RL IV.14b [394.5] RL IV.14c [394.5–6] RL IV.14d [394.6–395.2]
NK 39	2.2.2.2.* The statement that “the absolute is not the object of mind and words” (NK 7.6) [409.6–416.4] 2.2.2.2.* 1. The way it contradicts [MP's] own statements [409.6–413.2]	
NK 7.6	IV.14. MP's statement “the absolute is not an object of mind and words” (NK 7.6) – contradictions with regard to his other statements [409.6–410.4] (a) [409.6–410.1] (b) [410.1–2] (c) [410.2–4]	RL IV.15a [396.5–397.3] RL IV.15b [397.3–398.3] RL IV.16 [402.1–405.3] RL IV.17 [405.3–407.5], RL IV.9a [369.4–371.5]
NK 3.6 NK 7.6, NK 4.1 NK 2.2, NK 2.2–3 NK 3.1, NK 5.1, NK 5.3–4, NK 5.2, NK 7.2	IV.15. Contradictions in MP's concept of the coalescence of appearances and emptiness [410.4–411.1] IV.16. Further contradictions with regard to MP's concept of the absolute [411.1–5] (a) [411.1–3] (b) [411.3] (c) [411.3–5]	RL IV.18 [407.5–409.4] RL IV.19a [409.6–411.2] RL IV.19b [411.2–413.1]
NK 40.2, NK 4.2	IV.17. Is emptiness an object of mind and words or not? Further contradictions in the NK [411.5–412.4] (a) [411.5–412.1]	RL IV.20a [414.1–418.6], RL IV.16 [402.1–405.3]
NK 10.1, NK 61.4, NK 8.1		

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the *'Ju lan* (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
NK 4.5-6	(b) [412.1-3]	RL IV20b [418.6-427.4]
NK 6.1-2	(c) [412.3-4]	RL IV20c [427.4-428.3]
NK 11.6-12.1, NK 32.6-33.1, NK 10(?)	IV.18. Further contradictions in the NK [412.4-6] (a) [412.4-5]	RL IV21a [429.1-430.2]
	(b) [412.5-6]	RL IV21b [430.2-3]
NK 33	IV.19. Further contradictions in the NK [412.6-413.2] (a) [412.6]	RL IV21c [430.3-4]
NK 93.6	(b) [412.6-413.2]	RL IV21d [430.4-5]
	2.2.2.*.2. The way it contradicts the statements of the scriptures [413.2-416.4]	
	IV.20. Is the absolute an object of mind and words? - Discussing the scriptures [413.2-414.3]	
	(a) [413.2-4]	RL IV22a [433.2-435.3]
	(b) [413.4]	RL IV22b [435.3-436.1]
	(c) [413.4-5]	RL IV22c [436.1]
	(d) [413.5]	RL IV22d [436.1-6]
	(e) [413.5-6]	RL IV22e [436.6-44.3]
	(f) [413.6]	RL IV22f [440.3-441.3]
	(g) [413.6]	RL IV22f [440.3-441.3]
	(h) [413.6-414.3]	RL IV22f [440.3-441.3]
	(i) [414.3]	RL IV22g [441.3-442.2]
NK 73.4(?)	IV.21. The status of conventional existence (<i>kun rdzob tu yod pa</i>) [414.3-415.1] (a) [414.3-4]	RL IV23 [442.2-443.3]
NK 7.6, NK 9.3, NK 9	(b) [414.4-5]	RL IV24a [443.6-444.3]
	(c) [414.5-415.1]	RL IV24b [444.3-4]

Table 6.1: Intertextual connections in the *Ju lan* (cont.)

References	JL passage	Continuation
	IV.22. Further contradictions concerning MP's position that the absolute is not an object of words and mind [415.1–5]	
	(a) [415.1]	RL IV.25a [447.3–6]
	(b) [415.2]	RL IV.25b [447.6–448.2]
	(c) [415.2–3]	RL IV.25c [448.2–449.1]
	(d) [415.3–4]	RL IV.25d [449.1–5]
	(e) [415.4]	RL IV.25e [449.5–451.2]
	(f) [415.4–5]	RL IV.25f [451.2–3]
	(g) [415.5]	RL IV.25g [451.3–4]
	IV.23. Further arguments against MP's view: proof from the <i>Madhyamakāvatāra</i> [415.5–416.4]	
	(a) [415.5–6]	RL IV.26a [452.4–5], RL IV.22e [436.6–440.3]
	(b) [415.6–416.1]	RL IV.26a [452.4–5]
	(c) [416.1–2]	RL IV.26a [452.4–5]
	(d) [416.2–4]	RL IV.26b [452.5–455.2]
	3. Summary [416.4–418.5]	
	(a) [416.4–417.3]	RL Addendum (a) [455.2–457.3]
	(b) [417.3–6]	RL Addendum (b) [457.3–460.4]
	(c) [417.6–418.5]	
	Auspicious verses [418.5–420.5]	
	Colophon [420.5–421.6]	

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan*

References	RL passage	Continuation
	Opening verses [192.1–193.1]	GC I.1a [433.1–3], GC I.1b [433.3–4], GC I.1c [433.4–5], GC I.1d [433.5], GC I.1f [433.5–434.2]
	Introduction [193.1–195.5]	GC I.1e [433.5](?), GC I.2a [434.2–3](?), GC I.2b [434.3–4], GC I.7b [448.6–449.5], GC III.1a [455.6–456.2](?)
	Actual Subject (<i>dingos don</i>) [195.5–461.1]	GC I.2c [434.4–5]
JL I.1 [372.1–373.5]	Topic I: the interpretation of BCA IX.1 [195.5–198.1]	
	I.1. Relation of the six perfections (<i>pāramitās</i>) and the meaning of “ <i>yan lag</i> ” [195.5–196.3]	
JL I.2 [373.5–374.1]	I.2. NK 3.4 and the meaning of “ <i>don</i> ” [196.3–197.2]	
JL I.3 [374.1–3], JL I.4 [374.3–4]	I.3. Relationship between the other five perfections and insight; the interpretation of “ <i>don</i> ” [197.2–5]	
JL I.3 [374.1–3]	(a) [197.3–4]	
JL I.4 [374.3–4]	(b) [197.4–5]	
JL I.5 [374.4–375.5]	I.4. The usage of the particle “only / simply” (<i>tsam</i>) [197.5–198.1]	GC III.1b [456.2–457.1]
	Topic II: the interpretation of BCA IX.78 [198.1–214.3]	
JL 2.1 2.1 and II.1a [375.5–376.6]	II.1. The interpretation of “that” (<i>de</i>) in BCA IX.78c [198.1–199.2]	
JL II.1a [376.2–6]	(a) [198.3–4]	GC I.3a [435.6–436.1]
JL II.1b [376.6–377.5], JL II.5e [381.5–382.2]	(b) [198.4–199.2]	GC I.3b [436.1–2]
JL II.2ab [378.1–2]	II.2. MP’s explanations in NK 61.2–3 (a, b) [199.2–6]	
JL II.2a [378.1–2]	(a) [199.4–5]	
JL II.2b [378.2]	(b) [199.5–6]	GC III.1c [457.1–3]

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL II.2c [378.2–4] JL II.3 [378.4–5] JL II.4a [378.5–379.2], JL II.4b and JL II.4c [379.2–381.1] JL II.4a [378.5–379.2], JL II.4b [379.2–3], NK 60.6–61.1 JL II.4c [379.3–381.1] JL II.5 [381.2–382.2]	II.3. MP's explanations in NK 61.2–3 (c) [199.6–200.3] II.4. MP's explanation of selflessness in NK 61.3 [200.3–6] II.5. The relation between the "egoism" of self-grasping and the "delusion" of self-grasping, mentioned in NK 60.6–61.1 [200.6–204.6] (a) [201.6–203.4] (b) [203.4–204.6] II.6. The status of viewing buddhahood as an object of attainment [204.6–209.1]	GC III.1f [457.6–458.3] GC I.3d [436.3–437.1], GC III.2g [462.2–3](?) GC I.3c [436.2–3](?), GC III.1d [457.3–5], GC III.1f [457.6–458.3]
JL II.6 [382.2–6], JL II.7 [382.6–383.2] JL II.6ab [382.3–6], NK 60.1–2, JL II.7 [382.6–383.2] JL II.8 [383.2–4] JL II.9 [383.4–384.3] JL II.9a [383.4–5] JL II.9b [383.5–384.3], NK 61.6	II.7. MP's explanations in NK 60.1–2 and MP's explanation in NK 61.4 [209.1–210.5] (a) [210.1–3] (b) [210.3–5] II.8. MP's explanation in NK 61.4. [210.5–212.2] II.9. Ceasing of mind (<i>sems 'gags pa</i>) [212.3–214.3] (a) [212.6–214.1] (b) [214.1–3]	GC III.1f [457.6–458.3] GC I.5g [439.3–4], GC III.1g [458.3–459.2], GC III.1g [458.3–459.2](?)

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
Topic III: the interpretation of BCA 41–49		
JL III.1 and 2 and preceding passage [384.3–386.3]	III.1. Interpreting BCA IX.45c–49c [214.3–216.6]	
JL III.4ab [387.3–389.3]	III.2. Explaining the specification “manifest” (<i>mngon gyur pa</i>) (a, b) [216.6–222.2]	
JL III.4ab [387.3–389.3]	(a) [219.2–220.2]	
JL III.2b [385.6–386.3], JL III.4a [387.3–388.1]	(b) [220.2–221.2]	
JL III.2b [385.6–386.3]	(c) [221.2–5]	GC III.2a [460.2–5]
JL III.1b [384.6–385.6]	(d) [221.5–222.2]	
JL III.3ab [386.3–387.3]	III.3. MP’s explanation in NK 36.5 [222.2–225.3]	
JL III.3a [386.3–4]	(a) [223.3–224.2]	GC I.4f [437.5–6]
JL III.3b [386.4–387.3], NK 42.5	(b) [224.2–225.3]	GC I.4h [437.6–438.3]
JL III.4cd [389.3–390.6]	III.4. Explaining the specification “manifest” (<i>mngon gyur pa</i>) (c, d) [225.3–229.2]	
JL III.4c [389.3–390.2]	(a) [227.1–6]	
JL III.4d [390.2–6]	(b) [228.1–229.2]	
JL III.5 [390.6–391.6]	III.5. MP’s criticism in NK 43.1f. [229.2–235.1]	GC I.5a [438.3–4]
JL III.5a [390.6–391.1], NK 43.1f.	(a) [230.4–231.4]	GC I.4b [437.2]

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL III.5b [391.1–3]	(b) [231.4–232.4]	GC II.1 [449.6–451.1]
JL III.5c [391.3–4]	(c) [232.4–6]	
JL III.5d [391.4–5]	(d) [233.1–4]	GC III.1g [458.3–459.2](?)
JL III.5e [391.5]	(e) [233.4–234.4]	GC I.1b [433.3–4](?), GC II.2 [451.2–453.1]
JL III.5f [391.5–6]	(f) [234.4–5]	
JL III.5g [391.6]	(g) [234.5–235.1]	
JL III.6 [391.6–394.2]	III.6. MP's explanations in NK 43.3–5 [235.1–244.4]	
JL III.6a [391.6–392.2], NK 42.1–2	(a) [237.5–238.3]	
JL III.6b [392.2–3]	(b) [238.3–4]	
JL III.6c [392.3–393.2]	(c) [238.4–242.1]	GC III.1h [459.2–460.2]
JL III.6d [393.2–3]	(d) [242.1–3]	
JL III.6e [393.3–6]	(e) [242.3–5]	GC I.4b [437.2](?), GC I.4c [437.2–3]
JL III.6f [393.6–394.2]	(f) [242.5–244.4]	GC I.4a [437.1–2], GC I.5e [439.2](?)
JL III.7 [394.2–396.2]	III.7. MP's explanation in NK 42.2–3 [244.4–251.6]	
JL III.7a [394.2–4]	(a) [246.6–248.2]	
JL III.7b [394.4–5]	(b) [248.2–6]	
JL III.7c [394.5–6]	(c) [248.6–249.2]	
JL III.7d [394.6–395.1]	(d) [249.2–6]	GC I.5f [439.3]
JL III.7e [395.1]	(e) [249.6–250.2]	
JL III.7f [395.1–396.2]	(f) [250.2–251.6]	

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
Topic IV: issues connected to BCA IX.2		
JL 2.2.2.1 and IV.1 [396.2–398.2]	IV.1. Is the lack of true establishment (<i>bden med</i>) the ultimate emptiness? [251.6–302.5] (a) [254.1–292.6] (b) [292.6–293.4] (c) [293.4–302.5]	GC I.5i [440.3–4], GC I.5j [440.4–5](?), GC I.5k [440.5– 441.1], GC I.6b [442.4–5], GC I.6k [445.5–446.2]
JL IV.1ab [396.6– 397.5]		
JL IV.1c [397.5–6] JL IV.1de [397.6– 398.2]		
JL IV.2 and IV.3a [398.2–6]	IV.2. Contradictions to logic [302.5–309.5] (a) [303.4–305.2] (b) [305.3–306.4] (c) [306.4–307.1] (d) [307.2–309.1] (e) [309.1–5]	GC I.6a [442.3–4], GC I.6h [444.2–3](?), GC III.2 [463.2– 3], GC III.2k [463.3–6](?)
JL IV.2a [398.2–3] JL IV.2b [398.3–4] JL IV.2c [398.4–5] JL IV.2d [398.5]		
JL IV.3a [398.5–6] JL IV.3bcdef [398.6– 400.1]		
JL IV.3b [398.6– 399.2]	IV.3. The meaning of “abiding in the middle” (<i>dbus la gnyas pa</i>) [309.5–323.6] (a) [311.1–318.5] (b) [319.2–320.4] (c) [320.4–321.2] (d) [321.2–4] (e) [321.4–323.6]	GC II.3d [454.4–455.6] GC I.5n [441.3–6](?) GC I.5n [441.3–6](?), GC II.3a [453.1–6] GC I.5m [441.1–3]
JL IV.3c [399.2–3] JL IV.3d [399.3] JL IV.3e [399.3–4] JL IV.3f [399.4– 400.1]		
		GC I.6b [442.4–5](?), GC I.6c [442.5–6](?) GC I.6m [446.3–4](?) GC III.2d [461.3–4](?)

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL IV.4 [400.1–401.3]	IV.4. Śrāvakas’ Cittamātrins’ and Mādhyamikas’ realisation of emptiness; MP’s understanding of the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika tradition [323.6–348.5]	
JL IV.4a [400.1]	(a) [325.4–326.1]	GC I.6g [444.1–2](?), GC I.6i [444.3–445.3](?), GC III.2k [463.3–6](?)
JL IV.4bcd [400.1–4]	(b) [326.1–331.4]	
JL IV.4d [400.4–6]	(c) [331.4–332.4]	
JL IV.4c [400.2–4]	(d) [332.4–333.5]	
JL IV.4e [400.6–401.2], JL IV.5b [401.5–402.1], JL 400.6f. [IV.4e], JL 401.1ff. [IV.4e]	(e) [333.6–338.4]	
JL IV.4f [401.2–3]	(f) [338.4–348.5]	GC I.6g [444.1–2](?), GC I.6h [444.2–3](?), GC I.6h [444.2–3], GC III.2i [463.1–2](?)
JL IV.5a and beginning of b [401.3–6]	IV.5. MP’s statement in NK 6.4–5 that there is no difference between Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas with regard to their ultimate intention [348.5–350.6]	GC I.5l [441.1](?), GC I.6l [446.2–3](?), GC III.2d [461.3–4](?)
JL IV.5cd [402.1–5]	IV.6. Refutation of extremes in relation to the subject and the object [350.6–354.3]	GC I.5j [440.4–5](?), GC I.6l [446.2–3](?)
JL IV.5c [402.1–2]	(a) [351.4–352.3]	
JL IV.5d [402.2–5]	(b) [352.3–354.3]	
JL IV.6 [402.5–403.3]	IV.7. Discussing MP’s explanation in NK 27.1–2 [354.3–357.4]	
JL IV.6a [402.5–403.1]	(a) [355.1–5]	
JL IV.6b [403.1]	(b) [355.5–356.1]	GC I.6d [442.6–443.5](?)
JL IV.6c [403.1–3]	(c) [356.1–357.4]	GC I.5h [439.4–440.3]

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL IV.7 [403.3–404.3] JL IV.7a [403.3–5]	IV.8. In which context is freedom from all four extremes accepted? [357.4–368.4] (a) [358.4–360.3]	GC I.5l [441.1](?), GC III.2i [463.1–2](?)
JL IV.7b [403.5–404.2]	(b) [360.3–365.4]	
JL IV.7c [404.2–3]	(c) [365.4–368.4]	GC I.5o [441.6–442.3], GC III.2c [460.6–461.3]
JL IV.8 [404.3–405.2] JL IV.8a [404.3–4], JL 405.6 [IV.9b], JL 410.5–6 [IV.15] JL IV.8b [404.4–5] JL IV.8c [404.5–405.2]	IV.9. Direct realisation of emptiness [368.4–372.6] (a) [369.4–371.5] (b) [371.5–6] (c) [371.6–372.6]	GC I.6m [446.3–4](?) GC III.1e [457.5–6]
JL IV.9 [405.2–406.5] JL IV.9a [405.2–5] JL IV.9b [405.5–406.5] JL IV.10 [406.5–407.2]	IV.10. Realisation of absence of being (<i>drigos mad</i>) [372.6–379.6] (a) [374.5–377.1] (b) [377.1–379.6] IV.11. Ceasing of mind (<i>sems bkag</i>) at the time of awakening [379.6–385.1]	GC I.5d [438.6–439.2](?) GC I.5g [439.3–4]
JL IV.11 [407.2–408.3], JL 406.6 [IV.10] JL IV.12 [408.3–6]	IV.12. The status of <i>samsamvedana</i> and <i>ālaya</i> [385.1–387.5] IV.13. Self-grasping with regard to a person (<i>gang zag gi bdag 'dzin</i>) and self-grasping with regard to phenomena (<i>chos kyi bdag 'dzin</i>) [387.5–392.6] IV.14. Difference between the Sūtra and Mantra traditions [392.6–396.2] (a) [394.1–5]	GC I.5a [438.3–4], GC III.2b [460.5–6], GC III.3b [464.2–465.4](?)
JL IV.13 [408.6–409.6] JL IV.13a [408.6–409.1]		

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL IV.13b [409.1–2]	(b) [394.5]	
JL IV.13c [409.2–3]	(c) [394.5–6]	
JL IV.13d [409.3–6]	(d) [394.6–395.2]	
	(e) [395.2–396.2]	
JL IV.14ab [409.6–410.2]	IV.15. MP’s statement “the absolute is not an object of mind and words” (NK 7.6) – contradictions to his other statements (a) [396.2–402.1]	
JL IV.14a [409.6–410.1]	(a) [396.5–397.3]	GC I.7a [448.4–6]
JL IV.14b [410.1–2], NK 7.6	(b) [397.3–398.3]	
	(c) [398.3–402.1]	
JL IV.14c [410.2–4], JL IV.17a [411.5–412.1]	IV.16. MP’s statement “the absolute is not an object of mind and words” (NK 7.6) – contradictions to his other statements (b) [402.1–405.3]	GC III.2d [461.3–4](?) GC I.6h [444.2–3](?)
JL IV.15 [410.4–411.1]	IV.17. Contradictions with regard to MP’s concept of the coalescence of appearances and emptiness [405.3–407.5]	GC I.6h [444.2–3](?), GC III.2e [461.4–5]
JL IV.16a [411.1–3]	IV.18 Further contradictions with regard to MP’s concept of the absolute (a) [407.5–409.4]	GC I.6b [442.4–5](?)
JL IV.16bc [411.3–5]	IV.19. Further contradictions with regard to MP’s concept of the absolute (b) [409.4–413.1]	
JL IV.16b [411.3], NK 39.3–4	(a) [409.6–411.2]	
JL IV.16c [411.3–5], NK 40.2	(b) [411.2–413.1]	
JL IV.17abc [411.5–412.4]	IV.20. Is emptiness an object of mind and words or not? Further contradictions in the NK [413.1–428.3]	
JL IV.17a [411.5–412.1], NK 10.1, NK 61.4, NK 8.1	(a) [414.1–418.6]	GC III.3a [463.6–464.2](?)

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL IV.17b [412.1–3]	(b) [418.6–427.4]	GC I.3c [436.2–3](?), GC I.6e [443.5–6](?), GC I.6f [443.6–444.1], GC III.3a [463.6–464.2](?), GC III.3c [465.4–467.2]
JL IV.17c [412.3–4]	(c) [427.4–428.3]	
JL IV.18 and 19 [412.4–413.2]	IV.21. Further contradictions in the NK [428.3–431.6]	
JL IV.18a [412.4–5]	(a) [429.1–430.2]	
JL IV.18b [412.5–6]	(b) [430.2–3]	
JL IV.19a [412.6]	(c) [430.3–4]	
JL IV.19b [412.6–413.2]	(d) [430.4–5]	
JL IV.20 [413.2–414.3]	(e) [430.5–431.6] IV.22. Is the absolute an object of mind and words? – Discussing the scriptures [431.6–442.2]	GC I.1c [433.4–5](?)
JL IV.20a [413.2–4]	(a) [433.2–435.3]	
JL IV.20b [413.4]	(b) [435.3–436.1]	
JL IV.20c [413.4–5]	(c) [436.1]	
JL IV.20d [413.5]	(d) [436.1–6]	
JL IV.20e [413.5–6], JL 415.6 [IV.23a]	(e) [436.6–440.3]	GC II.3c [454.3–4](?), GC II.3c [454.3–4]
JL IV.20fgh [413.6–414.3]	(f) [440.3–441.3]	GC II.3c [454.3–4](?)
JL IV.20i [414.3]	(g) [441.3–442.2]	
JL IV.21a [414.3–4]	IV.23. The status of conventional existence (<i>kun rdzob tu yod pa</i>) (a) [442.2–443.3]	GC III.2b [460.5–6], GC III.3b [464.2–465.4]

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL IV.21bc [414.4–415.1]	IV.24. The status of conventional existence (<i>kun rdzob tu yod pa</i>) (b) [443.3–446.4]	
JL IV.21b [414.4–5]	(a) [443.6–444.3]	
JL IV.21c [414.5–415.1]	(b) [444.3–4]	
	(c) [444.4–446.4]	GC I.1a [433.1–3](?)
JL IV.22 [415.1–5]	IV.25. Further contradictions with regard to MP's position that the absolute is not an object of words and mind [446.4–451.4]	
JL IV.22a [415.1]	(a) [447.3–6]	
JL IV.22b [415.2]	(b) [447.6–448.2]	GC III.2f [461.5–462.2]
JL IV.22c [415.2–3]	(c) [448.2–449.1]	
JL IV.22d [415.3–4]	(d) [449.1–5]	GC III.2h [462.3–463.1]
JL IV.22e [415.4]	(e) [449.5–451.2]	
JL IV.22f [415.4–5]	(f) [451.2–3]	
JL IV.22g [415.5]	(g) [451.3–4]	
JL IV.23 [415.5–416.4]	IV.26. Further arguments against MP's view: proof from the <i>Madhyamakāvatāra</i> [451.4–455.2]	
JL IV.23abc [415.5–416.2]	(a) [452.4–5]	
JL IV.23d [416.2–4], JL 369.3–370.2 [Opening verses], JL 370.2–4 [Introductory remarks], JL 371.3–5 [1.], JL 371.1–3 [1.]	(b) [452.5–455.2]	GC I.3c [436.2–3], GC I.7b [448.6–449.5]
JL 3a [416.4–417.3]	Addendum (a) [455.2–457.3]	GC I.2a [434.2–3](?)

Table 6.2: Intertextual connections in the *Rab lan* (cont.)

References	RL passage	Continuation
JL 3b [417.3–6]	Addendum (b) [457.3–460.4] Auspicious verses [461.1–6] Summarising verses [461.6–462.5] Colophon [462.5–463.5]	

Table 6.3: Intertextual connections in the *Ga bur chu rgyun*

References	GC passage	Continuation
	Opening verses [424–426.3] General introduction (<i>spyi don</i>) [426.3–433.1]	YL Ia [464.5–465.3], YL Ib [465.3–4](?)
	Detailed explanation (<i>bye brag tu bshad pa</i>) [433.1–467.5] 1. Contradictions to what has been claimed (<i>khas blangs dang 'gal ba</i>) [433.1–449.5] I.1. MP contradicts qualities he claimed for himself [433.1–434.2]	
RL 192.3 [Opening verses], RL 446.3 [IV.24c](?), NK 2.2f.(?)	(a) [433.1–3]	YL Ic [465.4–5]
RL 192.3 [Opening verses], RL 234.3–4 [III.5e](?)	(b) [433.3–4]	
RL 192.4 [Opening verses], RL 431.3f. [IV.21e](?)	(c) [433.4–5]	
RL 192.4 [Opening verses]	(d) [433.5]	
RL 195.2f. [Introduction](?)	(e) [433.5]	
RL 192.4 [Opening verses]	(f) [433.5–434.2]	
	I.2. MP's attitude to Tsong kha pa; discussing BCA IX.1 [434.2–435.6]	
RL 456.2ff. [Addendum (a)](?), RL 194.2 [Introduction](?), NK 42.5, NK 37.1	(a) [434.2–3]	YL Ia [464.5–465.3]

Table 6.3: Intertextual connections in the *Ga bur chu rgyun* (cont.)

References	GC passage	Continuation
RL 194.2–3 [Introduction]	(b) [434.3–4]	YL If [466.2–5]
RL 196.1f. [I.1]	(c) [434.4–5]	
NK 3.1	(d) [434.5–435.6]	
	I.3. Discussing BCA IX.78 [435.6–437.1]	
NK 61.5, RL 198.3f. [II.1a]	(a) [435.6–436.1]	YL Ib [465.3–4](?), YL Id [465.5–466.1]
RL 199.1 [II.1b]	(b) [436.1–2]	
RL 208.5f. [II.6](?), RL 427.1f. [IV.20b](?), RL 454.1 [IV.26b]	(c) [436.2–3]	
RL 204.1f. [II.5b], RL 204.4 [II.5b]	(d) [436.3–437.1]	
	I.4. Discussing BCA IX.41–49 [437.1–438.3]	
NK 42.1, NK 42.2, RL 243.1ff. [III.6f]	(a) [437.1–2]	
RL 230.4 [III.5a], RL 242.3 [III.6e](?)	(b) [437.2]	
RL 242.4 [III.6e]	(c) [437.2–3]	
RL 224.1f. [III.3a]	(d) [437.3–5]	
	(f) [437.5–6]	
	(g) [437.6]	
RL 225.1–3 [III.3b]	(h) [437.6–438.3]	
	I.5. Various topics, mainly from discussing BCA IX.2, but also BCA IX.41–49 [438.3–442.4]	YL Ib [465.3–4](?), YL Id [465.5–466.1]
RL 386.5 [IV.12], RL 228.3ff. [III.4b]	(a) [438.3–4]	

Table 6.3: Intertextual connections in the *Ga bur chu rgyun* (cont.)

References	GC passage	Continuation
NK 22.3, NK 6.6(?)	(b) [438.4–5]	YL Ib [465.3–4](?)
NK 22.5ff.(?)	(c) [438.5–6]	
RL 375 [IV.10a](?)	(d) [438.6–439.2]	
NK 43.3, NK 42.1(?),	(e) [439.2]	
RL 242.6f. [III.6f](?)	(f) [439.3]	
RL 247.5ff. [III.7a]	(g) [439.3–4]	YL Ilc [468.6–469.2] YL IIg [470.2–4](?)
RL 212.6ff. [II.9a],	(h) [439.4–440.3]	
RL 382.4ff. [IV.11]	(i) [440.3–4]	
RL 356.4ff. [IV.7c]	(j) [440.4–5]	
RL 254.2ff. [IV.1a]	(k) [440.5–441.1]	
RL 352.1 [IV.6a](?),	(l) [441.1]	YL Ij [467.1–2]
RL 254.3f. [IV.1a](?)	(m) [441.1–3]	
RL 257.3ff. [IV.1a]	(n) [441.3–6]	
RL 350.2 [IV.5](?),	(o) [441.6–442.3]	
RL 360.1 [IV.8a](?)	I.6. Various issues related to BCA IX.2 [442.3–448.4]	
RL 309.4f. [IV.2e]	(a) [442.3–4]	YL Ii [466.6–467.1]
RL 306–309	(b) [442.4–5]	
[IV.2cd](?)	(c) [442.5–6]	
RL 366.2 [IV.8c]	(d) [442.6–443.5]	
RL 295.5 [IV.1c]	[IV.7b](?)	
RL 254.5ff. [IV.1a],		
RL 312.4 [IV.3a](?),		
RL 408.5ff. [IV.18](?)		
RL 318.4f. [IV.3a](?),		
RL 311.1ff. [IV.3a](?)		
RL 355.5ff.		
[IV.7b](?)		

Table 6.3: Intertextual connections in the *Ga bur chu rgyum* (cont.)

References	GC passage	Continuation
RL 421.4ff. [IV.20b](?)	(e) [443.5–6]	YL IIa [468.1–4](?)
RL 422.2f. [IV.20b]	(f) [443.6–444.1]	YL Ie [466.1–2]
RL 330.4 [IV.4b](?), RL 342.3 [IV.4f](?)	(g) [444.1–2]	YL IIa [468.1–4](?)
RL 343.3f. [IV.4f](?), RL 403.1f. [IV.16](?), RL 300.2ff.	(h) [444.2–3]	
[IV.1c](?), RL 406.5f. [IV.17](?), RL 345.5 [IV.4f]		
RL 328.1ff. [IV.4b](?)	(i) [444.3–445.3]	YL IIa [468.1–4](?), YL IIa [468.1–4], YL IIb [468.4–6], YL IIg [470.2–4](?)
	(j) [445.3–5]	
RL 286.1f. [IV.1a]	(k) [445.5–446.2]	
RL 351.6 [IV.6a](?), RL 349.4 [IV.5](?)	(l) [446.2–3]	
RL 319.3f. [IV.3b](?), RL 371.3f. [IV.9a](?)	(m) [446.3–4]	
	(n) [446.4–5]	
	(o) [446.5–448.4]	
NK 7.6, RL 396.5ff. [IV.15a], RL 397.2 [IV.15a]	I.7. <i>paramārthasatya</i> as an object of mind; an (alleged) grammar mistake in RS's verses [448.4–449.5] (a) [448.4–6]	

Table 6.3: Intertextual connections in the *Ga bur chu rgyun* (cont.)

References	GC passage	Continuation
RL 452.6f. [IV.26b], RL 193.2 [Introduction]	(b) [448.6–449.5]	YL If [466.2–5]
RL III.5b [231.4–232.4], NK 43.2	2. Mistakes [made by] not realising (<i>ma rtogs 'khrul ba'i nyes pa</i>) [449.5–455.6] 2.1. [449.6–451.1] II.1. The role of the <i>Abhidharmakośa</i> -passages in RL III.5b [449.6–451.1]	YL Ik [467.2–4]
RL III.5e [233.4–234.4]	2.2. [451.2–453.1] II.2. Ceasing and transformation of mind in RL III.5e [451.2–453.1]	
RL IV.2d [307.2–309.1]	2.3. [453.1–455.6] II.3. Issues related to the term “inexpressible” (<i>brjod med</i>) [453.1–455.6] (a) [453.1–6]	YL II [467.4–6], YL II d [469.2–5] YL Ih [466.6]
RL 439.3ff. [IV.22e](?), RL 441.2f. [IV.22f](?), RL 437.1ff. [IV.22e] RL 305.3ff. [IV.2b]	(b) [453.6–454.3] (c) [454.3–4] (d) [454.4–455.6]	
RL 194.2ff. [Introduction](?), NK 7.1f.(?)	3. Eliminating wrong conceptions (<i>log rtog bsal ba</i>) [455.6–467.2] III.1. Various issues, mainly from the first quarter of the RL [455.6–460.2] (a) [455.6–456.2]	
RL I.4 [197.5–198.1] RL II.2a [199.4–5] RL 209.1 [II.6]	(b) [456.2–457.1] (c) [457.1–3] (d) [457.3–5]	YL Ig [466.5–6]

Table 6.3: Intertextual connections in the *Ga bur chu rgyun* (cont.)

References	GC passage	Continuation
RL IV.9b [371.5–6]	(e) [457.5–6]	
RL II.5a [201.6–203.4], RL 203.4 [II.5a], RL 211.5ff.	(f) [457.6–458.3]	
[II.8], RL 208.2 [II.6]		
RL II.9a [212.6–214.1], RL 233.3f. [III.5d](?), RL 212.6ff. [II.9a](?)	(g) [458.3–459.2]	
RL 241.2f. [III.6c]	(h) [459.2–460.2]	
RL III.2c [221.2–5]	III.2. Various issues [460.2–463.6]	
RL 386.2 [IV.12], NK 7.6(?), RL 442.4f. [IV.23]	(a) [460.2–5]	
RL 366.2f. [IV.8c]	(b) [460.5–6]	
RL 323.5 [IV.3e](?), RL 400.2f. [IV.15c](?), RL 349.6 [IV.5](?)	(c) [460.6–461.3]	YL Ij [467.1–2]
RL 406.2 [IV.17]	(d) [461.3–4]	
RL IV.25a [447.3–6]	(e) [461.4–5]	
RL 204.2ff. [III.5b](?)	(f) [461.5–462.2]	YL IIe [469.5–6]
RL IV.25d [449.1–5]	(g) [462.2–3]	YL IIIf [469.6–470.2]
RL 339.1ff. [IV.4f](?), RL 360.1f. [IV.8a](?), RL 345.4ff. [IV.4f](?)	(h) [462.3–463.1]	
RL 295.5ff. [IV.1c]	(i) [463.1–2]	
	(j) [463.2–3]	

Table 6.3: Intertextual connections in the *Ga bur chu rgyun* (cont.)

References	GC passage	Continuation
RL 294.2ff. [IV.1c](?), RL 326.1ff. [IV.4b](?)	(k) [463.3–6]	
RL 416.5ff. [IV.20a](?), RL 421.1ff. [IV.20b](?)	III.3. Various issues from the last quarter of the RL [463.6–467.2] (a) [463.6–464.2]	YL Ia [464.5–465.3]
RL IV.23 [442.2– 443.3], RL IV.12 [385.1–387.5](?)	(b) [464.2–465.4]	YL IIIh [470.4–471.1]
RL 418.6ff. [IV.20b]	(c) [465.4–467.2] 4. The way the [different] Dharma traditions (<i>chos tsul</i>) come down to a single essence [467.2–5] Concluding verses [467.5–470.1] Colophon [470.1–4]	

Table 6.4: Intertextual connections in the *Yang lan*

References	YL passage
GC I.2a [434.2–3], GC III.3a [463.6–464.2], GC 431.3–4 [General introduction] GC 428.6–429.1 [General introduction](?), GC 436.5 [I.3d](?), GC 439.1–2 [I.5d](?)	I. Topics of minor significance (<i>don chung ba</i>) [464.6–468.1] (a) [464.6–465.3] (b) [465.3–4]
GC I.1a [433.1–3] GC I.3d [436.3–437.1] GC I.6f [443.6–444.1] GC I.7b [448.6–449.5], GC I.2b [434.3–4] GC III.1b [456.2–457.1] GC 454.1 [II.3b] GC I.6b [442.4–5] GC I.5o [441.6–442.3], GC III.2c [460.6–461.3] GC II.1 [449.6–451.1] GC II.3a [453.1–6]	(c) [465.4–5] (d) [465.5–466.1] (e) [466.1–2] (f) [466.2–5] (g) [466.5–6] (h) [466.6] (i) [466.6–467.1] (j) [467.1–2] (k) [467.2–4] (l) [467.4–6]
GC I.6e [443.5–6](?), GC I.6g [444.1–2](?), GC I.6i [444.3–445.3](?), GC 445.1 [I.6i] GC 445.1–3 [I.6i] GC 441.2–3 [I.5m] GC 453.5f. [II.3a] GC III.2e [461.4–5] GC III.2f [461.6–462.2] JL 402.3–4 [IV.5d](?), GC 444.6 [I.6i](?), GC 441.4–5 [I.5n](?) GC III.3b [464.2–465.4]	II. Topics of greater significance (<i>don che ba</i>) [468.1–471.1] (a) [468.1–4] (b) [468.4–6] (c) [468.6–469.2] (d) [469.2–5] (e) [469.5–6] (f) [469.6–470.2] (g) [470.2–4] (h) [470.4–471.1] Concluding verses [471.1–472.1] Colophon [472.1]

Chapter 7

Structural outlines (*sa bcad*)

Nor bu ke ta ka

1. lam gyi gtso bo shes rab bskyed dgos tshul bshad pa 2.5–3.6
- 2.(2) shes rab kyi phar phyin nyid bshad pa 3.6–94.1
- 2.1.(2) gzhi bden stong du rnam par gzhag pa 3.6–47.2
- 2.1.1.(3) dngos 3.6–11.6
- 2.1.1.1. rtogs bya bden gnyis ngos bzung 4.1–9.5
- 2.1.1.2. rtogs pa po gang zag gi rim pa bstan 9.5–10.5
- 2.1.1.3. ji ltar rtogs par bya ba'i tshul bshad pa 10.5–11.6
- 2.1.2.(3) rtsod spong 11.6–47.2
- 2.1.2.1.(3) brjod bya stong nyid la rtsod spong 12.1–32.6
- 2.1.2.1.1.(3) gzhi la rtsod spong 12.1–25.4
- 2.1.2.1.1.1. 'jig rten phal pa'i rtsod spong 12.1–4
- 2.1.2.1.1.2.(2) don smra ba'i rtsod spong 12.4–17.2
- 2.1.2.1.1.2.1. lung gi rtsod spong 12.4–14.1
- 2.1.2.1.1.2.2. rigs kyi rtsod spong 14.1–17.2
- 2.1.2.1.1.3.(2) sems tsam pa'i rtsod spong 17.2–25.4
- 2.1.2.1.1.3.1. rnam bden pa'i rtsod spong 17.2–23.2
- 2.1.2.1.1.3.2. rnam rdzun pa'i rtsod spong 23.2–25.4

- 2.1.2.1.2. lam la rtsod spong 25.4–29.5
- 2.1.2.1.3. 'bras bu gzhan don la rtsod spong 29.5–32.6
- 2.1.2.2. rjod byed theg chen la rtsod spong 32.6–46.4
- 2.1.2.3. don bsdu ba 46.4–47.2
- 2.2.(2) lam bdag med du rigs pas gtan la dbab pa 47.2–94.1
- 2.2.1.(2) dngos 47.2–90.4
- 2.2.1.1.(3) gang zag gi bdag med 47.2–61.6
- 2.2.1.1.1. lhan skyes kyi bdag dgag 47.3–48.6
- 2.2.1.1.2.(2) kun btags kyi bdag dgag 48.6–56.3
- 2.2.1.1.2.1. bdag shes par 'dod pa dgag 49.1–55.1
- 2.2.1.1.2.2. bdag bem por 'dod pa dgag pa 55.1–56.3
- 2.2.1.1.3.(2) de ltar bkag pa la rtsod spong 56.3–61.6
- 2.2.1.1.3.1. las 'bras mi 'thad par rtsod pa 56.4–58.3
- 2.2.1.1.3.2. snying rje mi 'thad par rtsod pa 58.3–61.6
- 2.2.1.2.(4) chos kyi bdag med 61.6–90.4
- 2.2.1.2.1.(2) lus dran pa nye bar bzhag pa 62.1–65.2
- 2.2.1.2.1.1. yan lag can med par bstan pa 62.1–64.2
- 2.2.1.2.1.2. yan lag med par bstan pa 64.2–65.2
- 2.2.1.2.2.(4) tshor ba dran pa nye bar bzhag pa 65.2–71.6
- 2.2.1.2.2.1. tshor ba'i ngo bo la dpyad pa 65.2–68.3
- 2.2.1.2.2.2. tshor ba'i rgyu la dpyad pa 68.3–70.2
- 2.2.1.2.2.3. tshor ba'i 'bras bu la dpyad pa 70.2–4
- 2.2.1.2.2.4. tshor ba po la dpyad pa 70.4–71.6
- 2.2.1.2.3.(2) sems dran pa nye bar bzhag pa 71.6–72.5
- 2.2.1.2.3.1. yid shes rang bzhin med par bstan pa 71.6–72.2
- 2.2.1.2.3.2. rnam shes lnga rang bzhin med par bstan pa 72.2–5
- 2.2.1.2.4.(2) chos dran pa nye bar bzhag pa 72.5–90.4

- 2.2.1.2.4.1.(2) chos thams cad skye med du spyir bstan pa 72.6–77.5
- 2.2.1.2.4.1.1. dngos 72.6–73.1
- 2.2.1.2.4.1.2.(2) rtsod spong 73.1–77.5
- 2.2.1.2.4.1.2.1. bsgrub bya mi 'thad pa spong ba 73.2–75.3
- 2.2.1.2.4.1.2.2.(2) sgrub byed mi 'thad pa spong ba 75.3–77.5
- 2.2.1.2.4.1.2.2.1. bden pa med kyang rnam dpyod 'thad pa'i tshul 75.3–76.2
- 2.2.1.2.4.1.2.2.2. bden par grub pa'i rnam dpyod mi 'thad pa 76.2–77.5
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.(3) rgyu 'bras ngo bo nyid gsum la bye brag tu dpyad pa 77.5–90.4
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.(2) rgyu mtshan ma med par gtan la dbab pa 77.5–88.1
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.(2) phyin ci log dgag pa 77.5–87.3
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.1. rgyu med pa dgag pa 77.6–78.6
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.2.(2) rgyu min pa rgyur 'dod pa dgag pa 78.6–87.3
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.2.1.(3) shes ldan dbang phyug rgyu yin pa dgag 78.6–82.2
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.2.1.1. rgyu dbang phyug la dpyad pa 79.1–80.2
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.2.1.2. dbang phyug des bskyed pa'i 'bras bu la dpyad pa 80.2–6
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.2.1.3. 'bras bu skyed tshul la dpyad pa 80.6–82.2
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.1.2.2. shes med bem po rgyu yin pa dgag 82.2–87.3
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.1.2. yang dag pa'i don bstan pa 87.3–88.1
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.2. ngo bo stong pa nyid la gtan la dbab pa 88.1–6
- 2.2.1.2.4.2.3. 'bras bu smon pa med par gtan la dbab pa 88.6–90.4
- 2.2.2.(2) gnyis pa stong nyid rtogs pa'i byed las 90.4–94.1
- 2.2.2.1. rang gi chos brgyad mgo snyoms pa 90.4–91.1
- 2.2.2.2. gzhan la brtse ba rtsol med du 'byung ba 91.1–94.1

Ju lan

1. gleng bslang ba 370.4–371.5
- 2.(2) bslang ba'i don 371.5–416.4
 - 2.1.(2) spyi brtol che ba'i nyes pa dgag pa 371.5–384.3
 - 2.1.1.(2) yan lag sogs kyi don la log rtog bsal ba 371.6–375.5
 - 2.1.1.1. 'dod pa brjod pa 371.6–372.1
 - 2.1.1.2. de dgag pa 372.1–375.5
 - 2.1.2.(2) de las kyang bzlog ces pa'i don la log rtog bsal ba 375.5–384.3
 - 2.1.2.1. 'dod pa brjod pa 375.5–376.2
 - 2.1.2.2. de dgag pa 376.2–384.3
 - 2.2.(2) brtag zin bslang ba'i nyes pa dgag pa 384.3–416.4
 - 2.2.1.(2) ring song gi skabs 384.3–396.2
 - 2.2.1.1. phyogs snga bkod pa 384.3–4
 - 2.2.1.2. dgag pa dngos 384.4–396.2
 - 2.2.2.(2) gnyis pa bden gnyis dang 'brel ba'i tshul 396.2–416.4
 - 2.2.2.1. phyogs snga bkod pa 396.5–6
 - 2.2.2.2. de dgag pa 396.6–416.4
3. mdor bsdu ba 416.4–418.5

Rab lan

No formal structural outline (*sa bcad*) indicated; text follows the structure of the *Ju lan*.

Ga bur chu rgyun

1. khas blangs dang 'gal ba 433.1–449.5
- 2.(3) ma rtogs 'khrul ba'i nyes pa 449.5–455.6
 - 2.1. 449.6–451.1

2.2. 451.2–453.1

2.3. 453.1–455.6

3. log par rtog pa'i nyes pa bsal ba 455.6–467.2

4. chos tshul snying po gcig tu 'bab pa'i tshul 467.2–5

Yang lan

No formal structural outline (*sa bcad*); text distinguishes only between *don chung ba* and *don che ba*.

Abbreviations and bibliography

Abbreviations

IJ Indo-Iranian Journal

JA Journal Asiatique

JBE Journal of Buddhist Ethics

JIABS Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies

JIBS Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies

JIP Journal of Indian Philosophy

JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland

RET Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines

TJ Tibet Journal

WSTB Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde

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Index of passages

BCA

IX.1, 100, 101
 IX.2, 151
 IX.35, 159
 IX.41ab, 126
 IX.41cd, 126
 IX.45ab, 127
 IX.45cd, 127
 IX.46ab, 127
 IX.46cd, 128
 IX.47ab, 128
 IX.47cd, 129
 IX.48, 129
 IX.49, 130
 IX.76ab, 109
 IX.76cd, 109
 IX.77a, 110
 IX.77bcd, 110
 IX.77cd, 110
 IX.78, 110, 111

BCAP

344.4–5, 101
 345.9–10, 102
 346.4, 102
 352.3–4, 151
 405.10, 112
 417.13–14, 159
 425.15, 126
 426.14, 126

435.10, 127
 436.13, 127
 436.17–437.1, 127
 438.10–11, 127
 438.11–12, 128
 438.14, 128
 438.15–16, 128
 438.16–17, 128
 438.5, 127
 438.9, 127
 439.16, 128
 440.5, 129
 440.9, 129
 441.14–15, 130
 441.17–18, 130
 441.8, 129
 486.5, 109
 489.7, 110
 490.17–18, 110
 490.3, 110
 491.3–492.11, 111
 492.9–10, 111

Blo gsal dga' ba'i gtam

400.3, 17

Brgal lan nyin snang

188.4f., 32
 98.1–2, 42
 98.2–3, 56
 98.3–4, 57

<i>Dge 'dun chos 'phel rnam thar</i>	379.6, 118
377.19–378.9, 59	383.5–6, 118
<i>Dgongs pa rab gsal</i>	384.3, 150
259.16–260.3, 174	384.5, 149
51.16–18, 134	385.6, 140
52.10–13, 134	386.5, 149
60.1–4, 135	387.3–4, 140
	389.3–4, 140
<i>Ga bur chu rgyun</i>	389.5, 141
431.3, 95	390.3, 142
432.2–3, 95	390.4, 149
435.6–436.1, 122	392.5, 149
436.3–4, 122	392.6–393.1, 142
436.4, 123	393.4, 149
437.1–3, 146	393.6–394.1, 141
441.4–5, 181	395.3–4, 141
445.5–6, 164	396.5–6, 152
446.1–2, 164	396.6–397.1, 156
448.4–5, 206	397.3–4, 157
448.5, 206	397.6–398.1, 157
459.3–4, 147	398.1, 54
464.2–3, 207	398.2–3, 158
<i>Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla</i>	398.5–6, 169
128.1, 42	399.1, 170
129.20–132.2, 52	399.1–2, 170
131.6, 53	399.2, 170
<i>Go lan</i>	400.6, 186
354.15–17, 42	401.2–3, 186
	401.4, 191
<i>'Ju lan</i>	401.5, 187
370.4, 50	402.3–4, 172
370.6, 50	403.5–6, 171
371.1–2, 51	404.2–3, 54, 171
371.6–372.1, 105	404.3, 172
373.4–5, 108	405.2–4, 159
376.2, 124	409.6, 197
376.5, 116, 124	412.1–3, 198
377.3, 124	414.3–4, 199
379.2–3, 117	<i>'Jug ngogs</i>
379.5–6, 117	206.14–15, 102

207.10–12, 104
208.14–17, 194
208.17–18, 194
210.12–14, 195
210.4–6, 155
230.14–15, 125
230.15–18, 131
231.9–10, 131
233.20–234.1, 131
235.13–16, 132
236.2–6, 132
236.6–8, 133
236.8–11, 133
237.10–12, 134
237.7, 133
248.20–249.3, 112

MA

71ab, 186

Mtshar gtam

393.3, 72

394.3, 73

Nor bu ke ta ka

2.2–3, 77

2.5–6, 104

22.2–3, 147

3.1–2, 104

3.4–5, 105

4.5–6, 155

42.3–5, 136

42.4–6, 139

42.6–43.2, 137

43.1, 142

43.3–5, 138

5.1–2, 155

5.2, 186, 187

5.3–5, 168

5.6, 168

5.6–6.1, 169

6.2, 168
6.3–5, 185
6.4–5, 187
6.5–6, 186
60.6–61.1, 112
61.1–2, 113
61.2–3, 114
61.5–6, 114
61.6, 118
7.1, 157
7.6, 195
9.1–2, 195
9.3–4, 196, 200
9.4–5, 197
9.5, 197
94.5–6, 77, 87

Pho nya

365.5, 33

Rab lan

193.1–2, 42

193.3–194.1, 35, 93

194.3, 56

194.3–4, 173

195.2–5, 79

198.3–4, 118

199.5, 119

201.6–202.2, 119

204.1–2, 121

204.4–5, 121

204.5–6, 120

214.2, 121

219.3–5, 143

227.1–2, 144

227.6, 144

228.4–5, 145

241.3–5, 146

242.6–243.1, 144

250.5–6, 148

- 250.6–251.2, 144
 257.1–2, 160
 257.2–4, 160
 293.1–2, 188
 294.4–6, 161
 295.1–4, 162
 302.2–3, 162
 303.5, 162
 304.5–6, 162
 309.2–3, 173
 309.4–5, 180
 311.1–2, 174
 314.5–6, 175
 318.4–5, 175
 319.3–4, 175
 333.6–334.1, 188
 334.6–335.2, 189
 337.1ff., 164
 338.4–5, 189
 339.4–5, 190
 349.3–4, 191
 350.1, 191
 352.4, 178
 352.5–6, 178
 352.6–353.1, 179
 358.6–359.1, 176
 359.3–5, 176
 360.3–4, 177
 365.1–2, 177
 370.1, 179
 371.3–5, 179
 374.6–375.1, 163
 396.5–6, 200
 397.1–2, 201
 408.4, 201
 408.5–6, 201
 409.2–3, 202
 419.5, 202
 420.6, 55
 430.3–4, 202
 435.4, 203
 438.4–5, 203
 439.6–440.2, 204
 442.4–6, 204
 442.6, 205
 452.4–5, 204
 458.1–3, 79, 89
Rgyan 'grel
 229.3–5, 196

Spyod 'jug sa bcad
 142.4, 126

Yang lan
 464.4–5, 97
 464.6–465.1, 57
 465.5–466.1, 123
 467.1, 182
 468.1, 97
 468.2–3, 165
 468.6–469.2, 181
 470.3–4, 165, 182

General index

- A mdo, 33, 38, 47
- Abhidharma, 132, 133, 139–141,
143, 144, 220–223,
241–243, 245
- Abhidharmakośa*, 221, 243, 279, 285
- Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, 225, 226, 229,
234, 235, 251, 260, 271
- abiding (*gnas pa*), 155, 163, 170,
174, 175, 219, 224, 225,
248–251, 258, 277
- absence of being (*dnegos med*), 203,
228, 258, 259
- absolute (*don dam*) as an object,
199, 207, 232
- absolute as an object, *see also*
paramārtha
- accumulation (*tshogs*), 104
of gnosis, 107
of merit, 104, 107
two kinds of, 107, 229, 265
- actual absolute (*rnam grangs ma
yin pa'i don dam*), *see also*
ultimate absolute, 152,
153, 155, 156, 161, 164,
166–168, 174–177, 182,
184–186, 188–190, 198,
223, 226, 248, 250, 252,
255–257, 263, 266,
275–278
- ālaya*, 142, 145–148, 150, 153, 221,
229, 230, 243, 260, 261,
275, 283
- appearances, 114, 116, 117, 119,
120, 168, 173, 174, 187,
217, 231, 238, 247, 248,
253, 254, 260, 264, 267,
277, 278, 281
- and emptiness, 168, 169, 179,
202, 231, 236, 264, 266,
277
- conventional, 174, 217, 218,
247, 251, 253
- dependently arising, 190,
238, 253, 254
- dualistic, 159, 163, 164, 226,
228, 239, 250–252, 259,
285
- non-dualistic, 228
- Arhat, 91, 126, 128, 130–133,
135–137, 139–141, 143,
144, 146, 148–150,
219–222, 241, 242, 244,
274, 275, 282
- arhatship, 131, 222, 243, 244, 275
- Āryadhyaṅgitamuṣṭisūtra*, 140, 143,
220, 241
- Asaṅga, 229, 260
- assertions (*khas len*), 58, 161–163,
169, 176, 177, 182, 188,

- 189, 202, 246, 247, 251,
252, 254, 266, 267, 276
- Atiśa, 43, 50, 52–54
- Aṅgulīmāla, 128, 130
- ‘Ba’ Chos sde, 64
- basis of distinction (*dbye gzhi*),
234
- basis of imagination (*gdags gzhi*),
120, 282
- Bdud ‘joms Rin po che, 16, 60
- being/thing (*dnegos po*), 203, 259
- Bhāviveka, 187, 226, 255
- Bka’ chems ka khol ma*, 43
- Bka’ ‘gyur*, 50
- Blo bzang chos grags, 61
- Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan,
47
- Blo gsal dga’ ba’i gtam*, 32
- Blo gsal gling, 32
- Bodhisattva, 134, 230, 232, 235,
261, 265, 271
- Bon, 43
- Brag dkar Sprul sku Bstan ‘dzin
snyan grags, 13, 16, 17,
32–34, 36, 38, 53, 54, 59
- ‘Bras spungs, 32, 33, 36, 38, 58
- Brgal lan legs pa’i gtam ‘byed*, 36
- Brgal lan nyin snang*, 32, 36, 53,
272
- ‘Brom ston, 54, 235
- Bsam yas, 44, 49
- Bsdus grwa, 247, 270
- Bu ston, 44, 185, 276
- buddhahood, 45, 105, 108, 110,
146, 218, 222, 239, 243,
259, 283
- Buddhapālita, 53
- Byang kha, 34, 38
- Cabezón, José, 40, 43, 46
- Candrakīrti, 45, 53, 134, 140, 141,
170, 171, 176, 177, 187,
190, 199, 226, 227, 233,
239, 251, 255, 256
- causal relation, 113, 117, 119–123,
217, 239, 274, 281
- ceasing of mind (*sems bkag*), 153,
219, 229, 240, 259
- Central Tibet, 32, 36, 38, 45, 61,
63–66, 272, 284
- certain knowledge (*nges shes*),
202, 249
- Chao Erh-Feng, 63–66
- Chengdu, 65
- ‘Chi med rtag pa’i rdo rje, 64, 65
- Ch’an, 45
- Cittamātra, 225, 229, 248, 259,
283
- Cittamātrin, 187, 225, 226, 230,
246, 250, 255, 282
- clinging (*zhen pa*), 172, 179, 220,
228, 246
- co-operation, 21–23, 25
- coalescence (*zung ‘jug*), 173, 232,
268
- of *satyadvaya*, 181, 182, 230,
262, 265, 266, 271, 277,
278
- of appearances and
emptiness, 169, 179, 202,
231, 236, 264, 266
- of awareness and emptiness,
260
- of emptiness and dependent
origination, 173
- of space and awareness, 260
- cognitive modes (*‘dzin stangs*),
142, 145, 221, 243
- complete realisation of
emptiness, 126, 136, 145,
148, 223, 232, 245, 250

-
- concealed intention (*ldem dgongs*), 283
- concentration (*bsam gtan*), 102, 105–107, 109, 215
- conceptualisation (*rtog pa*), 111, 120, 161, 172, 175, 179, 203, 207, 228, 260, 263, 266, 269
- concordant absolute (*mtshun pa'i don dam*), 155
- conventional existence (*tha snyad du/kun rdzob tu yod pa*), 178, 205, 218, 228, 234, 249–251, 255, 269, 270, 278
- conventions (*tha snyad*), 176, 196, 200, 201, 203, 208, 209, 254
- Dalai Lama, 46, 61–63
- Dbu ma rigs tshogs*, 157, 234
- definitive meaning (*nges don*), 203, 233, 234, 268, 269
- delusion (*rmongs pa*), 112, 117, 119, 129, 132, 133, 138, 217–219, 223, 238–240, 244, 245
- of a result, 110, 238
- of a self, 110–113, 115, 117, 119, 217
- dependent origination (*rten 'brel*), 138, 146, 173, 221, 248, 274
- Deshung Rinpoche, 15
- desire (*sred pa*), 128–130, 132, 133, 138, 141, 142, 144–147, 221–223, 243–245, 274, 275, 281
- afflicted, 137–139, 142, 146, 147, 223, 274, 281
- manifest, 133, 137, 145
- non-afflicted, 129, 130, 132, 133, 137–139, 142, 146, 147, 244, 274, 281
- non-manifest, 243
- two kinds of, 133, 137, 139, 221
- determining cognition (*zhen rig*), 172, 179, 258
- Dgag lan mun sel sgron me*, 61
- Dga' ldan pho brang, 47, 62, 64, 74, 76
- Dge 'dun chos 'phel, 11, 25, 47, 48, 57–61
- Dgongs pa rab gsal*, 134, 135, 137, 148, 221
- Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, 250, 267
- dharmadhātu*, 190, 196, 225, 248, 255, 259, 270
- Dharmakīrti, 260, 274
- dharmatā*, 271, 276
- direct cognition, 179, 258, 259
- Dkar mo stag tshang, 33
- Dka' gnad/gnas brgyad*, 135, 147, 148, 184
- Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, 46
- Don gsal*, 229, 260
- Don gsang*, 229, 260
- Dorjiev, Agvan, 63
- Dpal ldan bshad sgrub gling, 35
- Dpal sprul, 30, 31, 63, 70, 71, 76, 77, 87, 88, 126
- Dpal spungs, 64
- Duckworth, Douglas, 17
- Dunhuang, 44
- dūraṅgamā*, 134, 219
- Dze smad Rin po che, 48, 60
- Eastern Tibet, 12, 62, 63, 66, 67

- ego-grasping (*ngar 'dzin*), 170,
171, 176, 220, 227, 244
- egoism (*nga rgyal*), 110–114, 117,
119, 120, 217, 222, 238,
239, 244, 281, 290, 299
- Ehrhard, Franz-Karl, 16
- emptiness of true establishment
(*bden stong*), 155, 224,
246
- equality (*mnyam pa nyid*), 260
- essence (*ngo bo*), 154, 166, 174,
179, 202, 247, 285
truly established, 154, 155,
166, 173, 174, 247, 248
- existence on the absolute level,
205, 250, 257
- existence on the conventional
level, 169, 172, 175, 179,
180, 183, 189, 199, 200,
204, 205, 208, 225–227,
246, 249, 258, 269, 270
- extreme of annihilation (*chad
mtha'*), 161, 167, 172, 178,
179, 182, 183, 227, 246,
255, 285
- extreme of existence (*yod mtha'*),
156, 157, 166, 170, 172,
186, 224–227, 277
- extreme of non-existence (*med
mtha'*), 157, 170, 225, 226,
248
- extreme of permanence (*rtag
mtha'*), 161, 172, 178, 179,
182, 183, 227, 246, 255
- four extremes (*yod, med, gnyis,
gnyis min*), 58, 153, 155,
156, 161, 162, 166,
169–171, 174, 182, 187,
224, 225, 227, 228, 247,
249, 251, 254–257, 277
- Four Noble Truths, 126, 127,
130–133, 141, 143
- Ga bur thig pa'i spun zla*, 35
- general characteristic (*spyi
mtshan*), 269
- general object (*spyi'i don*), 202,
269
- generosity (*sbyin pa*), 102, 105,
107, 215, 216
- gnosis (*ye shes*), 101, 102, 104, 107,
160, 161, 196, 202, 224,
229, 231, 232, 238, 240,
243, 246, 247, 249, 255,
257, 259, 260, 263–265,
267, 271, 275–279, 281,
285
- Go rams pa, 17, 36, 43, 46, 47, 52,
58, 62, 184, 192
- Goodman, Steven, 16
- grasping as truly established
(*bden 'dzin*), 112, 115,
133–135, 139, 220, 241,
242, 262, 282
- Great Debate, 44
- Great Madhyamaka, 162, 226,
234, 270, 277
- Grub mtha' chen mo*, 279
- Gsang phu, 45
- Gter ma, 44, 62
- Gushri Khan, 61
- Gyantse, 63
- gzhan stong*, 46, 71, 174
- habitual patterns (*bag chags*), 242
- hagiography (*rnam thar*), 29–31
- Haribhadra, 229, 260
- Hartley, Luran, 63, 65, 74, 75
- Hor khang Bsod nams dpal 'bar,
60
- Hwa shang

- position of, 54, 55, 157, 161, 178, 182, 183, 228, 257, 276
- scriptures of, 54, 55, 171, 178, 180–182, 257, 276, 282, 284
- teaching of, 284
- tradition of, 55, 158, 162, 171, 180, 258, 267, 276
- view of, 45, 48, 52–55, 224, 228, 267, 277
- Hwa shang Mahāyāna, 45, 52–55, 157, 158, 162, 171, 178, 180, 182, 183, 247, 257
- Hīnayāna, 126, 136, 148, 241, 242, 274
- imagined self (*btags pa'i bdag*), 87, 113, 116, 170, 171, 216, 217, 227, 238
- impermanence, 131, 284
- implicative negation (*ma yin dgag*), 154, 174, 280
- inexpressible (*brjod med*), 194, 203, 248, 249, 269, 279, 280, 283, 285
- inexpressible self (*brjod med kyi bdag*), 224, 248, 279
- inherent nature (*rang bzhin*), 225
non-existence of, 160, 224, 227, 235, 246, 248, 256, 261, 271
- inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*), 113, 114, 116, 117, 119, 133, 137, 138, 216, 217, 221, 238, 247, 274
- inherently established self (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa'i bdag*), see inherently established
- innate (*lhan skyes*), 87, 113, 145, 170, 171, 176, 219, 227, 240, 243
- insight (*shes rab*), 24, 42, 87, 100–102, 104, 106–109, 118, 176, 197, 215, 216, 231, 237, 264, 271, 278, 282, 285
- and other perfections, 88, 101, 102, 104–109, 215, 216, 236, 237, 273
- generation of, 87, 100, 102, 104–107, 215, 231, 236, 237
- intermediate verses (*bar skabs kyi tshigs bcad*), 92, 95, 96
- investigating the absolute (*don dam dpyod pa*), 239, 249, 253, 254
- 'Ja' pa Mdo sngags, 13, 30
- 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, 47, 279
- 'Jam dbyangs dga' ba'i blo gros, 47, 52
- 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po, 63, 71
- 'Jam dpal rin chen, 65, 74
- 'jig lta (view of the transitory collection to be the self), 133, 138, 145, 221, 243, 274
- 'Jig rten mgon po, 46
- 'Jigs med phun tshogs, 29, 30, 76
- Kalyāṇadeva, 116, 122, 125, 216, 238, 274
- Kalyāṇadeva, 221
- Kamalaśīla, 45, 52, 53, 163, 164
- karman, 128, 130, 131, 136, 140, 141, 144, 146, 149, 221, 222, 229
- Kaśyapaparivarta, 225, 250, 251

- Khams, 38, 63, 75
 Khri strong lde btsan, 45
 kleśa, 127–131, 133, 135, 137,
 139–141, 219–222, 241,
 243, 244, 285
 manifest (*mngon gyur*), 131,
 137, 139, 140, 143,
 219–221, 241, 242
 kliṣṭamanas, 142, 145, 221, 243
 Klong chen rab 'byams, 254, 266,
 277, 284
 Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan, 11, 47, 48,
 57–61
 knowable (*shes bya*), 176, 194,
 196–198, 201, 208, 209,
 224, 234, 248, 260, 264,
 279, 280, 282, 285
 Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas,
 15, 63, 69, 71
 Kun dpal, 70, 88

 Lalitavistara, 233, 268
 Lam gtso rnam gsum, 266
 law of double negation, 158, 162,
 224, 247
 Laṅkāvatārasūtra, 248
 Lcang lung Paṇḍita, 47
 Ldan ma Blo bzang chos
 dbyings, 13, 36, 38,
 51–54, 57, 59, 78
 Lhasa, 33, 34, 63–65
 liberation (*thar pa*), 67, 79,
 125–128, 130, 131, 136,
 222, 243
 Lipman, Kennard, 16
 Lokāyata, 234, 270, 282, 285
 Lopez, Donald, 25, 40, 48, 58
 Lta ba'i shan 'byed, 43

 Madhyamakālaṅkāra, 16, 186, 224,
 226, 230
 Madhyamakālaṅkāravṛtti, 237
 Madhyamakāloka, 164, 278
 Madhyamakāvatāra, 134–136, 190,
 199, 204, 223, 227, 228,
 230, 235, 239, 253, 266,
 271, 275
 Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya, 170, 176,
 227, 228, 230
 Madhyāntavibhāga, 226
 Mahāyāna, 24, 126, 127, 131, 136,
 145, 148, 222, 233, 242,
 245, 247, 267
 Maitreya, 250, 251, 267
 Maudgalyāyana, 128, 130, 137
 Mañjuśrī, 60
 meditation of worldly people
 (*'jig rten pa'i bsam gtan*),
 220, 241
 meditative concentration (*mnyam
 bzag*), 176, 196, 238, 256,
 277
 meditative cultivation (*bsgom pa*),
 110, 111, 114, 118, 159,
 217, 218, 220, 225, 228,
 235, 258, 264
 mental activity, 171, 178, 183,
 228, 257, 277
 mental body (*gid lus*), 136, 242
 Mgon po rnam rgyal, 63–66
 Mi bskyod rdo rje, 47
 Mkhan po Kun bzang dpal ldan,
 see Kun dpal
 Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun
 tshogs, *see* 'Jigs med
 phun tshogs
 Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal
 bzang, 46
 Mkhas 'jug, 16
 mode of appearance (*snang
 tshul*), 252, 263

- mode of existence (*gnas tshul*),
114, 119, 121, 151, 156,
160, 168, 169, 174, 186,
187, 189, 195, 203, 219,
227, 232, 235, 240, 246,
248, 252, 254, 256, 257,
266, 267, 271, 273, 275,
276
- monkhood, 127, 130
- Mādhyaṃika, 46, 145, 153, 170,
174, 191, 193, 202, 204,
225, 246, 250, 267
- Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, 53, 234,
252, 266
- nature of the mind (*sems kyi
gshis*), 219, 240
- negandum (*dgag bya*), 58, 59, 154,
173, 174, 236, 254, 255,
259, 261, 267, 278
- negative determination (*rnam
gcod*), 196, 203, 237, 249
- neither existent nor non-existent
(*yod min med min*), 58,
161, 163, 167, 182, 184
- Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya
mtsho, 46
- Nges shes sgron me, 17
- Nicholas II, 63
- nihilistic view / position, 45, 157,
161, 162, 165, 166, 178,
180, 183, 229
- nirvāṇa, 101, 127, 130, 135, 218,
239, 240, 247
- non-abiding (*mi gnas pa*), 219
- Noble Land, 114, 116, 118, 124
- nominal absolute (*rnam grangs
pa'i don dam*), 152, 153,
155, 156, 161, 164,
166–168, 174–177, 182,
184–190, 192, 198, 223,
224, 226, 246, 248, 252,
255, 257, 275–278
- non-existence of true
establishment (*bden
med*), 6, 152, 153, 156,
158, 160, 161, 167, 172,
176, 178, 190, 201,
224–227, 246, 247, 249,
251, 255, 256, 264, 267,
268, 275–278
- non-existence on the absolute
level, 179, 180, 183, 189,
205, 225, 257, 269, 270
- non-existence on the
conventional level, 172,
177, 205, 270
- non-grasping, 267
- non-implicative negation (*med
dgag*), 154, 155, 157, 166,
246, 259, 264–266, 285
- non-perceptual concentration
(*asaṃjñīsamāpatti*), 130
- non-referential (*dmigs pa med pa*),
201, 203, 251, 263, 265,
267, 268, 270, 271
- not grasping anything (*cir yang
mi 'dzin pa*), 55, 157, 266,
267
- Nyag rong, 63–65
- Nāgārjuna, 45, 51, 53, 60, 251, 252
- object of cognition, *see* knowable
- object of reference (*dmigs yul*),
261
- object of reference (*dmigs yul*), 163
- obscuration of afflictions (*nyon
sgrib*), 104, 133–135, 146,
148, 222, 245, 262

- obscuration of knowables (*shes sgrib*), 104, 134, 135, 146, 148, 218, 223, 245
- omniscience (*rnam mkhyen*), 104, 216, 231, 235, 265
- opponent's position (*phyogs snga*), 91, 94, 139, 152, 219, 223, 224
- own-characteristic (*rang mtshan*),
see also *svalakṣaṇa*, 168, 187, 231, 263, 269, 280
- paramārtha*/*paramārthasatya*, see
also nominal and actual
absolute, 46, 151, 152, 154, 155, 166, 193, 222, 234, 244, 253, 270, 275, 277, 278
as object of cognition and
language, 193, 194, 201, 206, 208, 278, 282
- paratantra*, 275, 280
- pariniṣpanna*, 275
- Pañ chen Chos rgyan, 52
- perfections (*pāramitā*), 88, 101–109, 215, 216, 236, 237, 273
- permanent self (*rtag bdag*), 221, 227, 243
- Pettit, John, 17, 69, 75
- Phuntsho, Karma, 18, 19, 30, 71–73, 174
- Phur lcog Ngag dbang byams pa, 47
- Phya pa Chos kyi seng gei, 45
- Phyi rabs pa, 56–58, 145, 150, 204, 205, 208, 209, 245, 254, 266, 269, 278, 283, 284
- Pitāputrasamāgamanasūtra*, 232, 265
- political aspects, 16, 21, 39, 46, 61–63, 65–68, 71, 73–79
- positive determination (*yongs gcod*), 196, 197, 249
- post-concentration (*rjes thob*), 161, 176, 238, 246, 254–256
- Prajñākaramati, 101, 102, 105–107, 109–116, 125–128, 130, 132, 139, 149, 215, 216, 220, 221, 224, 237, 243, 244, 274
- Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra*, 253
- Prajñāpāramitāsañcayagāthā*, 225
- Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, 35, 198, 202, 203, 224, 233, 251, 268
- Pramāṇa, 45, 172, 228, 235, 269, 271, 280
- Pramāṇavārttika*, 230, 235, 261, 271
- Prasannapadā*, 140, 220
- Pratyekabuddha, 91, 104, 125, 126, 131, 133–135, 145, 148, 223, 245, 251
- probandum (*bsgrub bya*), 223, 235, 282, 285
- proliferations (*spros pa*), 160–162, 178, 254, 255, 257, 258, 278
free from (*spros bral*), 153, 161, 164, 167, 169, 175, 176, 179, 182, 188–192, 201, 202, 207, 246, 248, 249, 251, 254–256, 259, 264–266, 273, 275–277, 280, 283
- provisional meaning (*drang don*), 233, 234, 268
- Prāsaṅgika, 6, 51, 53, 58, 89, 91, 133–136, 140, 147, 148, 152, 153, 156, 168,

- 182–193, 222, 223,
225–227, 246, 250–256,
281
- Pu hrangs, 43
- Qoshot, 61
- rabbit's horn, 173, 218, 239, 248,
249, 269
- rang stong*, 46, 56
- Ratnakūṭa*, 233, 268
- Rdo grub Dam chos, 50
- Rdo rje seng ge, 65, 74
- Rdo rje shugs ldan, 44
- Rdo sbis Shes rab rgya mtsho, 48,
60
- Rdza Dpal sprul, *see* Dpal sprul
- Rdzogs chen, 32, 72, 90
- Rdzong gsar, 33
- reasoning consciousness (*rigs
shes*), 164, 246
- Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros,
46, 266
- Red mda' bar phul ba'i shog dril*, 266
- referential (*dmigs pa can*),
200–203, 209, 250, 262,
263, 265, 267, 268, 270
- Rgol ngan 'joms pa'i rdo rje pha lam*,
36, 38
- Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen, 46,
71, 102, 105, 106,
111–113, 115, 117, 120,
125, 131–137, 139, 148,
155, 194, 195
- rhetorical aspects, 19, 20, 54, 92,
94
- Rin chen bzang po, 44
- Ringu Tulku, 75
- ris med*, 13–16, 62, 66–76, 78
- Rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan,
42, 47, 52
- Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab, 45
- Rockhill, William, 75
- Roerich, George, 25
- Rong me, 33
- Rong ston Shes bya kun rig, 46,
184, 192
- Sa skya Paṇḍita, 46
- śamatha*, 102, 106, 107, 109, 159,
216, 228, 259
- saṃsāra*, 112, 113, 156, 157, 224,
241, 247, 278
- saṃvṛti/saṃvṛtisatya*, 151, 166, 193,
201, 253, 278, 282
- Sandhinirmocanasūtra*, 225
- Śāntarakṣita, 237
- Śāntideva, 13, 88, 110, 111, 114,
118, 126–133, 136, 137,
139, 140, 148, 150, 151,
158, 159, 232, 267
- Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*,
160
- satyadvaya*, 87, 91, 93, 97, 150, 151,
154, 165, 168–170, 173,
180, 182–184, 192, 194,
196, 201, 208, 219, 223,
229–234, 253, 255, 260,
262–265, 276, 282, 285
- two models of, 151, 252, 263
- unity of, 165, 168, 173,
181–183, 185, 190, 230,
248, 253, 260, 262,
264–266, 271, 276–278,
285
- Sautrāntika, 187, 226, 246, 255
- Schuh, Dieter, 15, 16, 21, 33, 62,
67–70, 73
- Sde dge, 32, 33, 38, 63–66, 72,
74–76
- Sde gzhung Rin po che, *see*
Deshung Rinpoche

- Sdom gsum rab dbye*, 46
 Se ra byes, 47
 self-conceit (*mngon pa'i nga rgyal*),
 143, 241, 242
 self-grasping (*bdag 'dzin*), 112,
 113, 117, 119–123, 133,
 138, 142, 171, 217, 221,
 222, 224, 228, 238–240,
 242, 243, 261, 273, 274,
 278, 281, 284, 290
 antidote to, 114, 115
 cause of, 114
 subtle, 220, 242, 274
 two kinds of, 122, 123, 145,
 170, 261, 274
 with regard to persons, 117,
 118, 120, 121, 123, 153,
 218, 230, 239, 261
 with regard to phenomena,
 117, 118, 120, 123, 153,
 217, 218, 230, 239, 261
 selflessness (*bdag med*), 109, 118,
 133, 154, 156, 159, 160,
 176, 177, 217, 224, 225,
 227, 228, 238, 240, 246,
 257, 258, 285
 coarse, 220, 241, 242
 meditative cultivation of,
 110, 111, 114, 217, 218
 subtle, 241, 243
 two kinds of, 87, 265
 Seyfort Ruegg, David, 69, 193
 Shes rab rgya mtsho, 59, 60
 Shākya mchog ldan, 47, 52, 58,
 62
 Sichuan, 65
 Sku 'bum, 33–35, 38, 85, 86
 Sku 'bum byams pa gling, 34
 Skyug sman, 33
 Smith, Gene, 13–15, 18, 19, 21, 62,
 66, 68, 69, 75, 86
 Snga rabs pa, 56–59, 144, 145,
 150, 204–209, 245, 251,
 254, 266, 269, 283, 284
 Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal
 mtshan, 43
 specification (*khyad par*), 120, 138,
 145, 167, 182, 184, 189,
 190, 195, 220, 222, 241,
 242, 253, 255, 256, 276,
 282, 283
spyod yul (sphere), 151, 152, 164,
 176, 193, 195, 223
 Śrāvaka, 91, 104, 125, 126, 131,
 133–135, 145, 148, 222,
 223, 225, 229, 230, 232,
 233, 243, 245, 250, 251,
 259–261, 265, 267
 Stag tshang lo tsā ba, 47, 50–52,
 58, 215
 Su ka ma, 87
 suffering, 36, 100, 101, 110–112,
 171, 217, 218, 222, 243
svalakṣaṇa (*rang mtshan*), *see also*
 own-characteristic, 226,
 255
svaṣaṃvedana (*rang rig*), 16,
 146–148, 150, 153, 229,
 230, 259–261, 275, 283
 Svātantrika, 51, 53, 89, 135, 152,
 153, 155, 156, 168, 176,
 182–193, 223–226, 246,
 250–255, 264
 Sweet, Michael, 194
 Sūtra and Mantra, 224, 230, 262
Sūtrālaṅkāra, 225, 226, 248, 276
 teasing remarks (*nyams mtshar*),
 72, 93, 121, 123, 125, 181,
 213, 235, 239, 285

-
- Thub bstan blo gros, 61
 transmission, 53, 54, 56, 57, 69,
 78, 90
 truly established (*bden grub*), 120,
 154, 155, 158, 160–163,
 166, 170, 220, 225, 239,
 246, 249, 255, 256, 259,
 264, 267, 276, 278, 280
tsam (only / simply), 105, 107, 216,
 227, 237, 280, 284, 289
 Tsang, 61
Tshad ma rig gter, 46
 Tsong kha pa, 17, 33, 46, 47,
 50–60, 71, 89, 93, 102,
 111, 120, 134–137, 140,
 148, 154, 167, 174, 184,
 192, 202, 208, 215, 221,
 235–237, 265, 266, 272,
 273, 276, 277, 283, 284
 twofold ultimate knowledge
 (*mthar thug gi mkhyen*
 gnyis), 217, 238

 ultimate absolute, *see also* actual
 absolute, 155, 156, 160,
 164, 165, 167, 168, 170,
 178, 188, 224, 226, 232,
 285
Uttaratantra, 234

 Vaibhāṣika, 187, 226, 246, 255,
 280
 Vajrayāna, 52
 valid cognition (*tshad ma*), 120,
 177, 191, 218, 228, 229,
 235, 239, 242, 249, 254,
 258, 271
 absolute (*don dam*), 239, 240
 conventional (*tha snyad*), 58,
 218, 239, 240
 direct (*mingon sum*), 195
 Vasubandhu, 274
 Vibhūticandra, 221
Vigrahavyāvartinī, 224
vipaśyanā, 159, 228, 259

 Wangchuk, Dorji, 17, 23
 West Tibet, 62
 Williams, Paul, 16–18

 Xining, 33, 85

yan lag (*parikara*, entourage), 88,
 100–102, 104–107, 109,
 215, 216, 236, 273
 Ye shes 'od, 43, 44, 50
Yid bzhin rin po che mdzod, 254, 266
 Younghusband, Francis, 63

Zab mo'i gtam, 33
Zab snang, 122
 Zhi ba 'od, 44
 Zla ba bzang po, 60, 61