

***Tathāgatagarbha* from the Perspective of Karma pa
Mi bskyod rdo rje as presented in his *Lamp that
Eloquently Highlights the Tradition of the Gzhan
stong*¹ *Madhyamaka Proponents***

Martina Draszczyk

Tathāgatagarbha is the central theme of Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Lamp that Eloquently Highlights the Tradition of the Gzhan stong Madhyamaka Proponents* [*Dbu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*].² The author here presents and defends the view of buddha nature contained in classic Mahāyāna texts, with special reference to the *Yogācārabhūmi* and to some selected verses of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.

The text was written upon the request of a Sangs rgyas Dpal grub who attended Mi bskyod rdo rje from the latter's 33rd year onward and is one of his biographers. Although no date of composition is given in the text, there is common consensus that Mi bskyod rdo rje composed his *gzhan stong*-related works in his twenties. Thus, one can only assume that Mi bskyod rdo rje wrote this text during this time, and thus prior to Sangs rgyas Dpal grub serving as his attendant. As seen in the title, Mi bskyod rdo rje presents the issue from a *gzhan stong*-perspective, but apart from the title, the term *gzhan stong*, or "other-emptiness" does not appear even once in the entire text. It may further be noted that in his later works Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje was very critical about *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka. This is most famously articulated in his introduction to his commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātāra*, *The Chariot of the Dwags po Siddhas*.³

In the introductory verse of the *Lamp*, Mi bskyod rdo rje indirectly emphasizes that buddha nature can only be accessed by means of direct cognition and not through the process of inference. He thus points to the need for an experience-

¹ *Gzhan stong*, or "other-empty," pertains to the view that the mind is empty of everything which is not its true nature, i.e., empty of all adventitious defilements of *karma* and *kleśas*, with the implication that mind is not empty of its enlightened qualities.

² Hereafter: the *Lamp*.

³ The title is *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal lung dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*. See David Seyfort Ruegg, *A Karma bka' brgyud work on the Lineages and Traditions of the Indo-Tibetan Dbu ma (Madhyamaka)*, *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata Edenda Curaverunt G. Gnoli et L. Lanciotti, Serie Orientale Roma*, Vol. LVI, 3 (Rome, 1988); and Karl Brunnhölzl, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky, Madhyamaka in the Kagyü Tradition*, *Nitartha Institute Series* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2004), pp. 445–447.

Tathāgatagarbha and the inseparability of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*

Mi bskyod rdo rje embeds his exposition on *tathāgatagarbha* in his overall view that in an absolute sense, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inseparable from each other. This also serves as the background for the *mahāmudrā* practice in the Bka' brgyud tradition where the essence of thoughts is realized as the *dharmakāya*. In his introduction to the commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātara*, Mi bskyod rdo rje thus points out that conceptualizations do not exist as anything other than their *dharmatā*.⁹

While sentient beings or *saṃsāric* phenomena are taught to be general imaginations, consciousness, and objects of knowledge, *dharmatā* is equated with buddha nature. This true nature, *tathāgatagarbha*, the *dharmadhātu*, exists as the nature of everything, of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, in an abiding manner, without conceptualizing and conditioning. In this sense, Mi bskyod rdo rje clearly rejects buddha nature as a cause, and the *dharmadhātu* is explained to be not empty as such. When this is comprehended, *saṃsāra*, which is merely a deviation from the true nature of reality, as such is understood as *nirvāṇa*. It is in this sense that the stainless *dharmadhātu* functions as the ground for both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*: When this true mode of being, the *dharmadhātu*, or buddha nature, is realized, this is *nirvāṇa*, whereas, unawareness of this true mode constitutes the adventitious stains, operating on the basis of the *ālayavijñāna*, and is the state of sentient beings, of *saṃsāra*.¹⁰

⁹ Dwags brgyud drub pa'i shing rta, 6b₁₋₂: 'di'i dbu ma'i lta ba rgyud la skyes pa na tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad ces pa dang | chos sku mngon sum du byas zer ba dang | cho can myu gu dang rnam rtog sogs de dag de 'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtogs pa na rnam rtog chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas ... See also Klaus-Dieter Mathes, "Maitrīpa's Amanasikārādhāra [A Justification of Becoming Mentally Disengaged]," *Journal of Nepal Research Center* 13 (2008), pp. 5–32, see p. 65, on Mi bskyod rdo rje's introduction to the commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātara*: "... When you realize that phenomena (*dharmā*), such as sprouts and thoughts, are nothing other than their [respective] true nature (*dharmatā*), you use the verbal convention 'thoughts appear as *dharmakāya*'."

¹⁰ Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me, p. 34₁₇, 35₁: dbu ma pa chen po thogs med zhabs kyis | nges pa'i don gyi dbang du 'khor 'das dbyer med ces bya ba ni | so so skye bo'i 'jug yul la shes bya 'jug byed la shes pa zhes par bstan zhing | 'phags pa rnam kyi khyad par gyi 'jug yul ni chos dbyings dang | 'jug byed ni chos nyid de | don 'di ni chos kyi dbyings kyi ye shes dang gnad geig la ... 'od na so so skye bo'i rgyud la | rgyal tshab byams pas | chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed ces pa'i don ji lta bu zhe na | chos spyi tsam ni shes pa dang shes bya'i dri ma blo bur ba la bshad nas chos nyid ni bde gshegs snying po la bshad do | 'on kyang chos kyi dbyings 'di ni chos nyid thams cad la rnam par rtog pa dang 'du bya ba med par mi gnas pa'i tshul gyis 'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa thams cad kyi rang bzhin du zhugs nas chos dbyings nyid kyis mi stong par bshad pas | don 'di khong du chud pa na 'khor ba nyid mya ngan las 'das pa'o zhes bzhed do |

Mi bskyod rdo rje emphasizes that *tathāgatagarbha* is unconditioned, the naturally pure reality of the *dharmadhātu*, free from causes and conditions since beginningless time. The adventitious obscurations, on the other hand, are presented as being conditioned. And, their being conditioned is again a matter of dependent arising, just as pointed out in the context of Madhyamaka:

... while you Madhyamikas accept as conditioned the clearly evident growth of a sprout, if you maintain, upon analyzing it, that it is merely a matter of dependence without there being any causes and conditions, then this is because all conventional phenomena appear just like dreams, although they are without causes and conditions.¹¹

Even though Mi bskyod rdo rje points out that in the Madhyamaka system both *tathāgatagarbha* and the adventitious stains are, in fact, free from causes and conditions, he at the same time rejects the possible conclusion that one therefore would not need skillful means to purify oneself from the adventitious stains. On the contrary, as long as an ordinary sentient being is within his deluded frame of mind, purifying oneself from obstructions is essential. *Tathāgatagarbha* is nothing but positive qualities and, concordant with this ground, the path consists in bringing together auspicious causes and conditions, i.e., the accumulations of merit and wisdom. But these accumulations should not be taken as causal factors; rather they facilitate the clearing of obscurations that reveals the nature of mind and its attendant positive qualities. This is the only way that “development on the path” is possible.

Mi bskyod rdo rje points out that in this process the fundamental change of state where *nirvāṇa* is actualized occurs due to the coming together of the primordial and inconceivable power of wisdom as such and the wisdom as it unfolds on the paths:

It is through the power of both [wisdom that develops on the path and wisdom that is the nature of mind] that consciousness is fundamentally transformed into stainlessness, whereby the wisdom of realization and the *dharmakāya* are of one flavour. Then, as the *tathāgata* is inseparable from the buddha qualities (*yon tan*) which are present primordially as buddha dharmas (*chos*), the aim of oneself and others is perfectly accomplished.¹²

Mi bskyod rdo rje therefore rejects the view of those Mādhyamikas who maintain that since adventitious obscurations do not have an essence, absolute reality

¹¹ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 36¹¹⁻¹⁶; *de ltar dbu ma pa khyed cag myu gu skyes pa mngon par gsal ba la 'dus byas su khas blangs bzhin par | dpyad pa zhugs pa'i tshes rgyu dang rkyen gang yang med par ltos pa tsam la grub |*

¹² *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 15₂–15₈; *dri bral gyi shes pa'i cha la 'ang ye shes kyi cha yod pa gnyis ka'i nus pa las rnam rig de dri med gnas gyur te | rtogs ye chos sku dang ro gcig tu gyur nas | sangs rgyas kyi yon tan ye gdod ma nas gnas pa'i sangs rgyas kyi chos rnams dang tha mi dad par de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyi rang gzhan gyi don phun sum tshogs pa bsgrub pa'i bya ba byed do |*

which is directly ascertained through this process of fundamental change of state does not have an essence either. In his eyes, this position constitutes a mere negation. It does not do justice to absolute reality, which, performing the function of benefiting oneself and others, never comes to an end. Buddha nature is thus held to be permanent not just because it is taken to be unchanging throughout the three phases, but also on account of the continuous manifestation of a buddha's qualities and activities:

Unsurpassable and perfect buddhahood is fully present for the sake of oneself and others in that a *tathāgata* reveals manifold wonders [with] overwhelming and infinite manifestations. Since they are boundless in extent, the qualities and activities of the Buddha are of the nature of being permanent and stable. The venerable Asaṅga, the great Mādhyamika, explained this to be the ultimate truth.¹³

Mi bskyod rdo rje in the *Lamp* alludes to the first chapter of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.¹⁴ First he makes reference to I.28a,¹⁵ "Because the perfect *buddhakāya* radiates," the verse which is considered "the proof" that beings are endowed with *tathāgatagarbha*. Mi bskyod rdo rje takes this as a reference to the *dhātu* buddha nature (*dbyings bde gshegs snying po*) and emphasizes that buddha nature is emptiness, non-arising, the expanse of all *tathāgatas* (*de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi dbyings*) which is directly ascertained (*mngon sum du nges par byed pa*) by means of cognizing awareness (*rtogs rig*). The latter he ultimately holds to be the vajra-like *samādhi* and, correspondingly, the cognizing awarenesses of the ten spiritual levels of a bodhisattava.¹⁶ Moreover, he explains:

In this regard, when there emerges awareness which has primordially existed inseparably from the **sugatagarbha* expanse – wisdom which realizes from [within] the expanse of the profound abode of the *tathāgata* – all seeds of obstructions are abandoned.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., p. 19₂₋₈: *bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ni rang gzhan gyi don mngon par grub pa ste | cho 'phrul bzod par dka' ba zad mi shes pa de bzhin gshegs pas ngo mshar ba du ma ston pa ni phyi ma'i mur thug pa med par mda' bas sangs rgyas kyi yon tan dang mdzad pa rtag pa dang brtan pa'i rang bzhin can 'dī ni don dam pa'i bden pa yin zhes dbu ma pa chen ba thogs med zhabs kyis bzhed do |*

¹⁴ According to Thrangu Rinpoche (b. 1933) who provided a table of contents (*gzhan stong srol 'byed kyi sa bcad*) for the *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*, Mi bskyod rdo rje takes a few key verses of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* as his reference even though he does not explicitly quote or refer to them.

¹⁵ RGV I.28: *sambuddhakāyaspharaṇāt |*

¹⁶ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*, p. 15₁₁₋₁₃, p. 15₉₋₁₀: *rtogs pa'i ye shes nyid kyis gang rtogs par bya zhe na | de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi dbyings mngon sum du nges par byed pa'o | nges byed kyi rtog rig de ni ji srid rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin dngos dang | de dang rjes su mthun par sa dang po nas bcu pa'i bar nges par 'byin pa bcu'i rtogs rig rnams te |*

¹⁷ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*, p. 14₁₄₋₁₇: *de bzhin gshegs pa'i gnas zab mo'i dbyings las rtogs pa'i ye shes ye gdod ma nas dbyings bde gshegs snying po*

This approach of the so-called *dhātu* buddha nature or *dbyings gzhan stong* is slightly different from the so-called *gsal ba gzhan stong* as it is typical for Dol po pa (1292–1361), Tāranātha (1575–1634), or ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul (1813–1899). According to a contemporary Bka’ brgyud teacher, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso (b. 1934), *dbyings gzhan stong* emphasizes that the expanse of the *dharmadhātu* is the inseparability of awareness and emptiness, and “empty of other” in the senses both of being free from all reference points and of being endowed with qualities, above all possessing the quality of wakefulness or luminosity which realizes its emptiness. In the *Sublime Nectar of Fragrance* for example, Mi bskyod rdo rje terms the wisdom of *dharmadhātu* in the context of buddha nature as that which is fully replete with all qualities (*yon tan*).¹⁸ The emphasis in *gsal ba gzhan stong* is that the wisdom of buddha nature is empty of adventitious obscurations, while the wisdom as such, not being empty, exists unobstructedly as the ultimate nature of luminosity with inherent buddha qualities.¹⁹

Thus, the *dharmakāya* is without distinction among all *tathāgatas* who abide in the ten directions and the three times. And the wisdom that is without distinction along with its qualities is also in those who are not free from the chaff of afflictions. Whatever these are [i. e., the qualities of wisdom, they] abide in them [i. e., afflicted beings]. Therefore all phenomena of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* abide in equality. Query: What is this equality? Reply: The ultimate truth is described as *tathāgatagarbha*, and as for *tathāgatagarbha* that is the unsurpassable expanse, it is actualized as the state of wisdom as it is personally realized by each (*pratyātmavedanīya-jñāna*). In the world this has the meaning that the unexcelled complete and perfect buddhas have actually arrived in the heart of awakening (*bodhimāṇḍa*; *byang chub snying po*).²⁰

Thus, *tathāgatagarbha* is equated with the expanse of emptiness, which remains invariant and indistinguishable throughout the three phases of impure sentient

dang tha mi dad du yod pa'i rig pa ldang ba de'i tshe sgrib pa'i sa bon thams cad pa spangs te |

¹⁸ *Dpyad pa bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*, p. 984₃: *chos kyi dbyings kyi ye shes de ni | sangs rgyas snying po de'i rang bzhin dang gnas lugs dang rang gi ngo bo mi 'dor ba'i yon tan yong su rdzogs pa de yin pa'i phyir ro |*

¹⁹ See Karl Brunnhölzl, *Gone Beyond: The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, The Ornament of Clear Realization, and its Commentaries in the Tibetan Kagyü Tradition*, vol. 1 (Ithaca, N. Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2010), p. 131.

²⁰ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 17₁₆–18₆: *chos kyi sku de ni phyogs bcu dang dus gsum na bzhugs pa'i de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad dang dbye ba med cing | dbye ba med pa'i ye shes yon tan dang bcas pa de na nyon mongs pa'i sbubs dang ma bral ba rnams la'ang de nyid gang yin pa de gnas so || de bas 'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa'i chos thams cad mnyam pa nyid du gnas pa la | mnyam pa nyid gang zhe na don dam pa'i bden pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po la brjod kyi | de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po bla na med pa'i dbyings la so so rang rig gi ye shes kyi go 'phang mdzad pa de ni | 'jig rten khams su bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas rnams byang chub snying por mgnon par gshegs zhes pa'i don to |*

beings, of both, impure and pure sentient beings, and of pure beings. According to this interpretation, buddha nature is the inseparability of awareness and emptiness, i.e., mind is non-arisen, is empty, yet is realized through natural luminosity (*rang bzhin 'od gsal ba*). In other words, there is an unimpeded direct realization, mind being aware of its true nature, of buddha nature as a direct, yogic knowing free from dualistic abstractions. Emphasis is on this inner quality of self-awareness (*rang rig; svasaṃvedana*) that is free from proliferations, certainly not just in the sense of a personal awareness, in that a person is just a self-deceiving mental construct, but in the sense that the non-deluded mind is distinctly aware of its true nature (*pratyātmavedanīyajñāna*).²¹ Along with the all-pervading sameness of non-arising there is thus this notion of distinct and individual luminous self-awareness. As Mi bskyod rdo rje puts it:

Concerning liberation, the mastery of self-aware wisdom regarding the **sugatagarbha* of one's own mind-stream is liberation. In contrast, the transition from self-clinging to selflessness is not liberation, because becoming liberated through mere non-existence is equivalent to a hare's horn.²²

A corresponding explanation is found in Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, where the *dharmatā*, empty of all adventitious stains, is equated with the *dharmadhātu* and identified, in turn, with the wisdom of a buddha which, from the point of view of its being aware in its own right is the personally experienced wisdom which is aware of itself. This emptiness and wisdom is called the non-arisen emptiness and wisdom.²³

²¹ Oral communication with Khenpo Chödrag Tenphel. This view is somewhat different from the traditional Indian understanding of *pratyātmavedanīyajñāna* which takes it as personally realized wisdom. It reflects a view maintained in the meditation practice oriented Bka' brgyud pa tradition. Regarding the traditional Indian view see for example Matthew T. Kapstein, "We are all Gzhan stong pas – Reflections on *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence* by Paul Williams (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1998)," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 (2000), pp. 105–125, see pp. 112 f., where he quotes from the *Majjhimanikāya* I.265, defining the Pāli equivalent *paccattaṃ veditaḥ* rendered as "personally realized."

²² *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba 'i srol legs par phye ba 'i sgron me*, p. 41₁₇₋₁₉: *thar pa gang yin pa ni rang rgyud kyi bde gshegs snying po la rang rig ye shes kyi dbang bsgyur ba ni thar pa yin la | bdag 'dzin bdag med du 'gro ba ni thar pa min te |*

²³ *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa 'i lung ...*: 345₃₋₄: *ye shes de glo bur ba 'i chos thams cad kyi stong pa 'i chos nyid de chos kyi dbyings yin pa dang | de rang nyid la rang rig pa yang yin pas so so rang rig pa 'i ye shes zhes pa 'i yul can rnam dag de nyid yin no | de lta bu 'i stong nyid dang ye shes de la ni ma skyes pa 'i stong nyid dang ye shes su brjod de |*

Tathāgatagarbha, the essence of the Three Jewels

Mi bskyod rdo rje alludes to the second verse of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.28b, “because suchness is undifferentiated,”²⁴ or indivisible in sentient beings and buddhas, as scriptural support for the topic of *tathāgatagarbha* as the absolute nature of the Three Jewels. In his *Sublime Nectar of Fragrance*, he states:

As buddha nature as such is the true nature that is primordially liberated, it is the infallible refuge and validity. It abides in all times and occasions without departing from itself.²⁵

Accordingly, in his *Lamp*, he says:

It was taught that the *tathāgatagarbha* was initially not contaminated by stains, and that subsequently, there is no abandoning of the multitude of stains. Therefore, the *tathāgatagarbha* is the Three Jewels. It has the capacity to confer, temporarily, the accumulation of merit and wisdom and, ultimately, the virtue of self-occurring wisdom.²⁶

Tathāgatagarbha as the actual nature of the Three Jewels is equivalent to buddhahood, the *dharmakāya* under the aspect of benefit for oneself, because proliferations are at peace and the multitude of buddha qualities spontaneously present. The *dharmakāya* being primordially free from birth, death, and transition is free from everything conditioned. Furthermore, the term *dharmakāya* is used because its nature being self-awareness, its realization does not depend on any extraneous factors, i. e., on the mindstream of another *tathāgata*. Therefore, all teachings are merely skillful means. Buddhahood manifests due to mind’s innate wisdom and the function to give rise to the state of a buddha lies exclusively and individually in buddha nature.²⁷

²⁴ RGV I.28.2 *tathatāvyatibhedataḥ* |

²⁵ *Dpyad pa bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*, p. 986₄₋₅; *sangs rgyas kyi snying po de nyid gdod ma nas thar pa dam pa'i bdag nyid yin pas mi bslu ba'i skyabs dang tshad mar gyur pa yin no* | ‘*di dus dang rnam pa thams cad tu 'di nyid las ma g.yos par gnas pa la* | ...

²⁶ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 17₂₋₇; *des ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ni thog mar dri mas gos pa dang | rjes su dri ma'i tshogs spangs pa yang med do zhes bstan nas de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ni dkon mchog gsum nyid yin te* | *gnas skabs su bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs dang | mthar thug rang byung ye shes kyi dge legs sbyin par nus pas so* |

²⁷ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 19₁₈–20₃; *de nyid la spros tshogs ye nas zhi zhin sangs rgyas kyi yon tan rgya mtsho lhun grub tu gnas la* | *de nyid rtogs par byed pa'i rtogs rig yul can de ni spros pa'i tshogs gzhan la rag ma las pa* | *ngo bo nyid kyis rang rig pa'i phyir rang rig dag pa nyid kyi dag pas gzhan la mi ltos pa de ni lugs bla na med pa ste* | and: p. 20₁₉–21₁; *sangs rgyas rang gi ye shes rang las rkyes te rang gis mnga' dbang du mdzad pa ni de bzhin gshegs pa gzhan gyi rgyud la rag ma las pa'i phyir* |

^{Dbu} *ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 21₁₉–21₃; *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po de mngon du byas pa'i sangs rgyas rnam kyi cho 'phrul ni dri ma med pa'i ye shes kyi bdag nyid can yod pa yang ma yin* | *med pa yang ma yin* | *yod med gnyis ka las*

Likewise, *tathāgatagarbha* is indistinguishable from the Jewel of the Dharma, i. e., the yogic valid cognition of self-awareness.²⁸ It is for this reason, that a non-affirming negation which an ordinary person arrives at by means of an analytical approach cannot be equated with absolute reality, it rather being an intellectual construct about reality, but not reality as such. Thus, Mi bskyod rdo rje criticizes Madhyamaka masters who postulate the not finding of anything as ultimate reality.²⁹

Whatever is a mode of abiding that can be inferred through words, utterances, speech, definitions, conventions and signs, is not any part of the ultimate. And however much effort [is expended] through the capacity of the minds of intellectuals, and the analysis as to non-existence and existence and neither existence nor non-existence is of a limited scope. Through the power of “arriving at reality”³⁰, the welter of incorrect concepts, sources of *karma* and afflictions, cease in what is inconceivable and inexpressible by concepts. At the time when they have ceased, self-occurring wisdom gives rise to the insight of distinct awareness as to [the mode of] abiding and appearing, of phenomena and their nature, without attachment or impediment.³¹

Dharma in its actual sense is thus yogic direct valid cognition as it occurs on the path of seeing. The insight free from attachment and obstruction is the *tathāgata* as such. It is brought about through the power of training in correct mentation (*tshul bzhin gyi yid la byed pa rnal 'byor gyu mthu*) which is not associated with the *ālaya*-consciousness, the afflictive mind, the senses or conceptual knowledge; it is without arising and ceasing. Therefore, this profound actuality is not acces-

gghan du'ang min par | de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyis ni rang rig par rig cing zhi ba'i bdag nyid du gnas la |

²⁸ Dbu ma gzhon ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me, p. 21₁₉–21₃; de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po de mngon du byas pa'i sangs rgyas rnams kyi cho 'phrul ni dri ma med pa'i ye shes kyi bdag nyid can yod pa yang ma yin | med pa yang ma yin | yod med gnyis ka las gghan du'ang min par | de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyis ni rang rig par rig cing zhi ba'i bdag nyid du gnas la |

²⁹ Ibid., p. 22_{14–16}. See for Candrakīrti's view on not finding anything as ultimate reality Anne Macdonald, “Knowing Nothing: Candrakīrti and Yogic Perception,” *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophische-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 794, ed. Eli Franco and Dagmar Eimer (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. 2009), pp. 133–168.

³⁰ 'rnal 'byor' in the sense of meditation practice with regard to the ultimate nature.

³¹ Dbu ma gzhon ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me, p. 22₁₈–23₆; sgra brjod ngag dang nges tshig tha snyad brda rnams kyi sgo nas dpogs par gyur pa'i gnas lugs gang yin pa de ni don dam pa'i cha ma yin zhing rtog ge'i blo yi nus pas ji ltar 'bad cing | med pa dang yod pa dang yod med gnyis ka ma yin par dpyod kyang nyi tshe ba ste | rnal 'byor gyi stobs kyis bsam med rtog brjod med par las dang nyon mongs pa kun 'bung ba tshul bzhin ma yin pa'i rtog pa'i tshogs 'gog ste | de 'gog pa las de tshe rang byung gi ye shes kyi chos dang chos nyid kyi gnas snang so sor rig pa'i shes rab chags thogs med par skye'o |

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³² Ibid., p. 21₁₉–21₃; de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po de mngon du byas pa'i sangs rgyas rnams kyi cho 'phrul ni dri ma med pa'i ye shes kyi bdag nyid can yod pa yang ma yin | med pa yang ma yin | yod med gnyis ka las gghan du'ang min par | de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyis ni rang rig par rig cing zhi ba'i bdag nyid du gnas la |

³³ Ibid., p. 22_{14–16}.

³⁴ Dbu ma gzhon ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me, p. 21₁₉–21₃; de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po de mngon du byas pa'i sangs rgyas rnams kyi cho 'phrul ni dri ma med pa'i ye shes kyi bdag nyid can yod pa yang ma yin | med pa yang ma yin | yod med gnyis ka las gghan du'ang min par | de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyis ni rang rig par rig cing zhi ba'i bdag nyid du gnas la |

³⁵ Dbu ma gzhon ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me, p. 22₁₈–23₆; sgra brjod ngag dang nges tshig tha snyad brda rnams kyi sgo nas dpogs par gyur pa'i gnas lugs gang yin pa de ni don dam pa'i cha ma yin zhing rtog ge'i blo yi nus pas ji ltar 'bad cing | med pa dang yod pa dang yod med gnyis ka ma yin par dpyod kyang nyi tshe ba ste | rnal 'byor gyi stobs kyis bsam med rtog brjod med par las dang nyon mongs pa kun 'bung ba tshul bzhin ma yin pa'i rtog pa'i tshogs 'gog ste | de 'gog pa las de tshe rang byung gi ye shes kyi chos dang chos nyid kyi gnas snang so sor rig pa'i shes rab chags thogs med par skye'o |

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sible by an ordinary person.³² The skillful means which are employed on the path of dharma practices, i. e., causes and conditions, do in fact not newly develop anything. They merely provide the circumstances so that what is there primordially can come to light.³³

Furthermore, *tathāgatagarbha* is indistinguishable from the Jewel of the *Śaṅgha*, the quality of realization and liberation. Everything adventitious, i. e., the senses, karma, afflictions and suffering, is non-existent as to its nature because the causes which trigger off these results, i. e., the saṃsāric mind (*citta*) and the *caittas*, are non-existent, subsiding with the attainment of the path of seeing in the expanse of the nature of mind.³⁴ This is why the adventitious afflictions which occur simultaneously with luminosity do not affect mind's luminosity.³⁵ The *Śaṅgha*'s realization as it is (*ji lta ba rtogs pa*) is the realization of *tathāgatagarbha* in the respective mindstream of the noble one. The realization which knows the variety (*ji snyed pa*) is knowledge about *tathāgatagarbha* in all sentient beings. Thus, omniscience is not about knowing the phenomena of relative reality as these comprise nothing but illusion.³⁶ Relative phenomena are not suitable as ob-

³² Ibid., p. 23₁₋₁₄: *shes rab chags thogs med par skye ba de ni de bzhin gshegs pa nyid yin te | ci'i phyir zhe na | tshul bzhin gyi yid la byed pa rnal 'byor gyi mthu las skyes pa de ni ma rig pas kun nas slong bar mi byed cing | de'i gnas kyis kun gzhi'i sems dang | nyon mongs pa'i yid dang | yul la rnam par rtog pa'i shes pa dang 'brel ba med pa'i phyir ro | tshul bzhin gyi yid la byed pa gang yin pa ni skye ba med cing 'gags pa med pa ste | don zab mo 'di ni so so skye bo'i yul min no |*

³³ Ibid., p. 25₁₋₂: *sngar yod kyi rgyu phyis mngon gsal du 'char ba'i thabs la brtson pa'i don no |*

³⁴ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 26₁₋₅: *sems yid rnam shes las nyon mongs sdug bsngal rnams ni blo bur ba ste | rgyu dang rkyen las grub pa med pa'i phyir nyon mongs pa rnams la ngo bo med pa ste | glo bur nyon mongs pa skyed byed kyi rgyu yod na ngo bo yod par 'gyur la | skyed byed kyi rgyu med de | glo bur ba nyid la rgyu med pas ngo bo yod par mi rung ngo |*

³⁵ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 26₁₃₋₂₇: *des na de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ni ji lta ba bzhin 'gro ba thams cad la yod pa ste | de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ni bdag med pa'i bdag gi mind gu rtogs shing | de yang thog mar bdag rnam pa gnyis la | phyis nas 'jigs pa ma yin te | ye gdod ma nas zhi ba'i rang bzhin yongs su dag pa'i phyir ro | des na rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba dang glo bur nyon mongs pa gnyis ni zag pa med pa'i dbyings su lhan du 'khod rung zhing | glo bur ba'i nyon mongs pa ni rang bzhin 'od gsal dang reg tu mi rung la | rang bzhin 'od gsal nyon mongs pa dang reg tu mi rung zhing | rang bzhin 'od gsal ba nyid la ni gsal byed gzhan mi dgos la | nyon mongs pa'i shes pa nyid ni | nyon mongs pa nyid kyis nyon mongs par 'gyur la | rang bzhin 'od gsal bas ni nyon mongs pa la rtog cing 'dzin par mi byed do |*

³⁶ The author criticizes the idea of what Sara L. McClintock has termed "total omniscience," the "simultaneous and continuous knowledge of all things whatsoever in past, present and future." This view, defended by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, influenced many Tibetan Buddhist views of omniscience, for example Tsong kha pa. On three types of omniscience see Sara L. McClintock, *Omniscience and the Rethoric of Reason: Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla*

jects of knowledge for noble ones, because they are non-existent.³⁷ However, the all-knowing state tracks all phenomena and is unimpeded.³⁸ In this sense the all-knowing state is aware of relative phenomena as dependent arising.³⁹

Mi bskyod rdo rje goes also into the topic of *tathāgatagarbha* as a potential (*gotra*, *rigs*). With reference to *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.28cd,⁴⁰ and using the example of the gigantic cloth which covers all world systems, he uses the fact that sentient beings develop in different ways as a proof that they are endowed with stained *tathāgatagarbha* which is indistinguishable from the *dharmadhātu*.

He points out that those who train on the *śrāvaka*- and *pratyekabuddhayāna* are more remote from the state of awakening than the bodhisattvas, even though the support for their training is at all times their potential of *tathāgatagarbha* and that this is nothing else but the nature of the path itself.

Therefore the ultimate refuge is the permanent, stable and lasting ultimate *dharmakāya*, *tathāgatagarbha*, the ultimate nature of the Three Jewels. This is what is to be adopted whereas what is to be relinquished are the adventitious obscurations, i. e., the imagined (*parikalpita*) nature, and the other dependent (*para-tantra*) nature.⁴¹ With this remark, Mi bkyod rdo rje is following the lead of Dol po pa and his way of teaching the *gzhan stong* view by way of the three natures.

on Rationality, Argumentation, and Religious Authority, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010).

³⁷ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 27₆₋₁₀: *ji lta ba rtogs pa ni 'phags pa rnams rang rgyud kyi de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po nyid rtogs pa la bya la | ji snyed pa ni 'gro ba gzhan bde gshegs snying po rgyud ldan du rtogs pa la thams cad mkhyen pa zhes bya zhing | kun rdzob kyi khrul pa mkhyen pa la ni ma yin te | kun rdzob kyi 'khrul pa mkhyen pa la ni ma yin te | kun rdzob kyi 'khrul pa ni shes bya la rnam pa thams cad du med pas | 'phags pa rnams kyis de ni mkhyen gzigs kyi yul du mi 'os te | yul med pa'i phyir ||*

³⁸ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 27₁₇₋₂₀: *rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa nyid ni chos thams cad kyi rjes su 'gro zhing thogs pa med la | der zhen pa dang mtshan mar med pas na chags pa med pa'o |*

³⁹ Interpretation by Khenpo Chödrag Tenphel.

⁴⁰ *gotratāś ca sadā sarve buddhagarbhāḥ śarīrīṇaḥ ||*

⁴¹ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 28₁₆₋₂₉: *dri bcas de bzhin gshegs snying yin la | de ni chos thams cad kyi dbyings dang dbyer med pa'i rigs ste | don 'di ni stong gsum dar yug chen po'i dpe bshad la | de sgrub pa'i rten ni theg pa gsum gyis zhugs pa'i gang zag rnams te | nyan rang gi tshul la zhugs pa ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i rigs 'di las ches ring pa nyid do | lam gyi ngo bo yang de bzhin gshegs pa'i rigs 'di ste | 'di med na ni de bzhin gshegs pa 'jig rten du byung yang dag pa'i rtsa ba rnam par 'phel ba'i gnas dang 'byung ba'i gzhi med pa'i phyir rdzogs pa'i byang chub la reg par mi 'gyur ro | des na rtag pa dang brtan pa g.yung drung gi skyabs ni mthar thug chos sku nyid la dkon mchog 'di'i rigs ni nges par yod pa yin la | des na rang don chos kyi sku rtogs pa rnams kyis ni chos sku dang dbye ba med pa'i chos rnams ni rang gzhan gyi rgyud la bsdus pa dang | chos kyi sku de dang 'gal bar gyur pa rnams ni rang gzhan gyi rgyud la bsdoms par mdzad de | de'i blang bya de de bzhin gshegs snying dang | dor bya glo bur gyi dri ma kun gtags gzhan dbang rnams te |*

According to the *dharmakāya*, the all-knowing state tracks all phenomena and is unimpeded. In this sense the all-knowing state is aware of relative phenomena as dependent arising.

Tathāgatagarbha

In *The Sublimity of the Dharmakāya*, the all-knowing state tracks all phenomena and is unimpeded. In this sense the all-knowing state is aware of relative phenomena as dependent arising. The all-knowing state is aware of relative phenomena as dependent arising. The all-knowing state is aware of relative phenomena as dependent arising.

⁴² Ibid., p. 29₁₁₋₁₇: *bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po nyid rtogs pa la bya la | ji snyed pa ni 'gro ba gzhan bde gshegs snying po rgyud ldan du rtogs pa la thams cad mkhyen pa zhes bya zhing | kun rdzob kyi khrul pa mkhyen pa la ni ma yin te | kun rdzob kyi 'khrul pa mkhyen pa la ni ma yin te | kun rdzob kyi 'khrul pa ni shes bya la rnam pa thams cad du med pas | 'phags pa rnams kyis de ni mkhyen gzigs kyi yul du mi 'os te | yul med pa'i phyir ||*

⁴³ *Dpyad pa bdu chos nyid yin pa la | ji snyed pa ni 'gro ba gzhan bde gshegs snying po rgyud ldan du rtogs pa la thams cad mkhyen pa zhes bya zhing | kun rdzob kyi khrul pa mkhyen pa la ni ma yin te | kun rdzob kyi 'khrul pa mkhyen pa la ni ma yin te | kun rdzob kyi 'khrul pa ni shes bya la rnam pa thams cad du med pas | 'phags pa rnams kyis de ni mkhyen gzigs kyi yul du mi 'os te | yul med pa'i phyir ||*

According to Mi bskyod rdo rje, the noble Asaṅga and his brother merely labelled buddha nature differently depending on the context: as *tathāgatagarbha* and element-**sugatagarbha* when referring to it in the chaff of adventitious stains, as unfolding potential (*gotra*) and the *dharmakāya* which is in the process of complete transformation, when referring to the aspect of it being able to become free from stains, and as *tathāgata*, *bhagavan*, fully perfected buddha, when referring to it as being free from all stains.⁴²

***Tathāgatagarbha* and its qualities**

In *The Sublime Fragrance of Nectar* Mi bskyod rdo rje equates buddha nature, the *dharmakāya*, with the naturally present potential, where all faults are totally exhausted and all qualities fully perfected, identifying this with primordial buddhahood, the full awakening as such. Therefore, it is not the case that at a later point, when in the state of awakening the adventitious stains of consciousness were purified, there is an improvement for the better. The naturally present potential is understood from the perspective of the power of this wisdom which is present as the abiding condition. The unfolding potential, as the essence of relative consciousness, is the manifesting as the state of awakening of what was not previously awakened. Thus, the unfolding potential – the process whereby buddha nature becomes increasingly manifest due to the gradual purification from stains – is thematized from the perspective of relative consciousness.⁴³ Moreover, Mi bskyod rdo rje explains that buddha nature is inseparable from the *rūpakāya*, the *dharmakāya* and the *mahāsukhākāya* and that this inseparability pertains to any embodied beings in all states, pure and impure.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p. 29_{11–17}: *des na 'phags pa thogs med sku mched ni glo bur dri ma'i sbubs su yod pa'i bde bar gshegs pa la bde gshegs snying po dang / kham bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po zhes m'jod la / de 'bral rung gi cha la rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs dang gnas yongs su 'gyur bzhin pa'i chos sku zhes brjod cing / glo bur gyi dri ma dang bral ba de la de bzhin gshegs pa bcom ldan 'das rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas shes brjod la /*

⁴³ *Dpyad pa bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*, p. 1008₂–1009₁: *rang bzhin du gnas pa'i rigs pa skyon kun zad yon tan yongs rdzogs de nyid yin la | de gdod ma nas sangs rgyas pa | mnon par byang chub pa nyid yin pa la | rnam shes kyi ngor glo bur rnam dag gi sangs rgyas su phyis grub pa'i dus kyang sngar las zang du song ba med cing | ... rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs ni | rnam shes kyi ngo bor glo bur dri ma dag stobs kyi | sangs rgyas kyi snying po'i cha re gsal ba ltar snang be de yin la | de yang rang bzhin gnas rigs ni gnas lugs su zhugs pa'i se shes nyid dbang btsan pa'i ngo nas yin gyi | rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs ni kun rdzob rnam shes kyi ngo bor sngar sangs ma rgyas pa zhig sangs rgyas pa ltar snang pa yin pas drang ba'i don yin pa zhig ...*

⁴⁴ *Dpyad pa bdud rtsi'i dri mchog*: 977_{2–4}: *des na gzugs kyi sku dang chos kyi sku dang bde ba chen po'i sku gsum dbyer mi phyed pa'i sangs rgyas kyi snying po 'di ni dag pa dang ma dag*

In the *Lamp* Mi bskyod rdo rje maintains that the buddha qualities are “spontaneously present”⁴⁵ and the mode of abiding of the whole of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, i.e., *tathāgatagarbha*, is explained as the *dharmakāya*.⁴⁶ Consequently, when the habitual tendencies (*vāsanās*) of the *kleśas* which – as long as they obscure the mind, affect perceptions and activities – are done away with, a *tathāgata*’s activity occurs spontaneously and uninterruptedly, because *tathāgatagarbha* which manifests due to this purifying process is nothing but buddha qualities.⁴⁷ In this context, the term buddha qualities refers to both, the qualities of dissociation, i.e., the ten strengths, the four fearlessnesses, the eighteen exclusive features of the *dharmakāya*, as well as the thirty-two qualities of maturation, the latter belonging to the domain of the relative, the form *kāyas*. While the first are the qualities of the *dharmakāya*, the form *kāyas*, according to Mi bskyod rdo rje, manifest and cease as dependent arising due to the attainment of the permanent genuine entity of the *tathāgatas* functioning as the dominant condition, the completion of their aspiration prayers, and the pure mind streams of those to be guided.⁴⁸

After Mi bskyod rdo rje has given the reasons why all beings are endowed with *tathāgatagarbha* by referring to *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.28, he also addresses the topic of the essential quality of buddha nature, using *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.35 as a basis.⁴⁹ The true nature is the perfection of purity, permanence, joy, and genuine identity, i.e. *tathāgatagarbha*, while the relative nature is impurity, impermanence, suffering, and selflessness. It is due to this twofold perspective that, according to him, the two extremes of extinction and permanence are avoided.⁵⁰

pa thams cad kyi lus can gang yin te dag pa rnam par grol ba’i lus la sku dang de gnyis rang
bzhin dbyer med kyi tshul gyi snying po yin zhing |

⁴⁵ Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba’i srol legs par phyed ba’i sgron me, p. 19.19: sangs rgyas kyi yon tan rgya mtsho lhun grub tu gnas la ...

⁴⁶ Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba’i srol legs par phyed ba’i sgron me, p. 41.¹³⁻¹⁷

⁴⁷ Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba’i srol legs par phyed ba’i sgron me, p. 18.⁶⁻¹⁵: des na de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po ni yon tan thams cad kyi bdag nyid yin pa’i phyir | sems can thams cad kyi nyon mongs pa’i bag chags kyi mtshams sbyor ba ‘joms pa’i rjes thog tu de bshin gshegs pa’i mdzad pa lhun grub rgyun mi ‘chad pa de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyi spyod yul du ston zhing | de bzhin gshegs pa nyid kyi de’i tshe chos thams cad la dbang bsgyur ba’i stobs kyi chos kyi ‘khor lo nges pa’i don can dang | slob ma sa chen po la gnas pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa rnam skad cig tu ston par nus pa ni de bzhin gshegs pa’i chos nyid do |

⁴⁸ Karl Brunnhölzl, *Gone Beyond: The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, pp. 175 f.

⁴⁹ RGV I.35: śubhātmāsukhanityatva guṇapāramitā phalam | dukhanirviccham prāpticchanda praṇidhi karmakāh || Its fruit is the perfection of the qualities of purity, identity, bliss, and permanence. Its workings are weariness of suffering, striving for peace and wishing for it.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 31.²⁰⁻³²: don dam pa’i bden pa gtsang rtag bde ba bdag dam pa’i pha rol tu phyin pa mngon du rtogs la | snang tshul kun rdzob pa’i sems can gyi kham glo bur ba ni mi rtag pa dang | sdug bsngal ba dang | bdag med pa dang | mi gtsang bar mngon du rtogs te | tshul ‘di gnyis kyi ni rtag dang chad pa’i mtha’ sel lo |

Tathāga

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I.160 relat (prajojana one of thre tics; the oth which occu byed). Thei emptiness a the reader t teaching on

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⁵¹ RGV, I.159–śūnyam sarv ity uktvaivaṇ līnam cittam ātmasnehaś

⁵² Compare Kle Mentally Dis see p. 14.

***Tathāgatagarbha*, a teaching on the expedient or definitive level?**

Finally, Mi bskyod rdo rje turns to the discussion whether the teaching on buddha nature is to be understood on an expedient or definitive level. In this context, authoritative Tibetan masters such as Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) und Bu ston Rin chen Grub (1290–1364) maintain the view that the teaching on *tathāgatagarbha* is to be understood on an expedient level. In the context of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* they refer to verses I.159 and I.160,⁵¹ to substantiate their view.

It was taught: “Like clouds, dreams, delusions is this and that, i. e. all objects of knowledge, empty in every respect.” How can it thus be that the Buddhas here teach all sentient beings are endowed with buddha nature?

It was taught so that those who have [the following] five flaws can overcome them: faint-heartedness, despising lower sentient beings, holding onto what is unreal, disparaging the true qualities, and taking oneself for more supreme.

I.160 relates to five flaws which are to be overcome as a reason or motive (*prayojana*, *dgos pa*) for the need to expound on *tathāgatagarbha*. This need is one of three aspects explained on the basis of classical Madhyamaka hermeneutics; the other two are the intentional ground (*dgongs gzhi*) and the contradiction which occurs when one takes the provisional statement literally (*dnogs la gnod byed*). Their view is that (1) the intentional ground of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is emptiness as taught in the middle cycle of teaching; (2) the motive is to support the reader to overcome the five flaws, and (3) the contradiction between the teaching on buddha nature and on emptiness is contained in verse RGV I.159.⁵²

Mi bskyod rdo rje, however, vehemently rejects the interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha* as being a teaching on the expedient level. He points out that if this were the case, if the nature of mind of sentient beings was not *tathāgatagarbha*, was not the *dharmakāya* endowed with qualities, it would not make sense to speak of the five flaws, because then they would not be mistakes. In this case, sentient beings would have good reasons to feel disheartened in that they would not have the potential for awakening. Moreover, as sentient beings would not be equal in terms of having the same potential, it would not be a mistake to despise those who are in a worse position. When rejecting awakening, one would not fall

⁵¹ RGV, I.159–160:

śūnyam sarvaṃ sarvathā tatra tatra jñeyam meghasvapnamāyākṛtābham |
ity uktvaivaṃ buddhadhātuh punaḥ kiṃ sattve sattve 'sītī buddhair ihoktam ||
līnam cittaṃ hīnasattveṣv avajñābhūtagrāho bhūtagrāhāpavādaḥ |
ātmasnehaś cādhikāḥ pañca doṣā yeṣāṃ teṣāṃ tatprahāṇārtham uktam ||

⁵² Compare Klaus-Dieter Mathes, “Maitrīpa’s *Amanasikārādhāra* [A Justification of Becoming Mentally Disengaged],” *Journal of Nepal Research Center* 13 (Kathmandu, 2008), pp. 5–32, see p. 14.

into the extreme of deprecation, as buddha nature as its ground would not exist. Rather, having confidence in the potential to awaken to buddhahood would not correspond with reality, in other words would not match one's true nature. Therefore, from Mi bskyod rdo rje's perspective, the presentation of these five flaws in itself substantiates the view that the teaching on *tathāgatagarbha* is to be understood on a definitive level.

Mathes, in his *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within*, has shown that the three introductory verses of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and its *Vyākhyā* indicate that their authors must have been familiar with the five principles of Yogācāra hermeneutics. It is for this reason that obviously it is legitimate to interpret the *Ratnagotravibhāga* not just – as was done by Sa skya Paṇḍita and Bu ston – from the perspective of general Madhyamaka hermeneutics, but just as well according to the five principles of Indian Yogācāra, as presented by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti* (VI. 13–16).⁵³ These five are (1) the motives (*dgos pa*); (2) the meaning in short (*bsdus pa'i don*); (3) the meaning of the words (*tshig don*); (4) the connection between the different topics (*mtshams sbyor*) and (5) objections raised by opponents and the rebuttal (*brgal lan*).⁵⁴ The fact that a motive is being mentioned, as in the case of *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.160, is therefore no indication that we are dealing with a teaching on an expedient level. In addition, it is common knowledge that other teachings of the Buddha including those on emptiness were given for a particular purpose, such as to overcome self-clinging. Therefore, there could not be anything definitive about the Buddha's teachings, if stating a motive would automatically qualify a teaching as expedient only.

Furthermore, the position that the teaching on *tathāgatagarbha* is merely to be understood on an expedient level would, according to Mi bskyod rdo rje, discredit the noble Asaṅga, in that it would imply that he was not capable of interpreting the intention of both the Buddha and Maitreya correctly.⁵⁵

Mi bskyod rdo rje concludes:

The relative has primordially been not truly established
And since what temporarily merely appears is but mere appearance,
It is – if investigated – non-arisen, its arising not being established.
Thus, this has been taught to be genuine emptiness.

⁵³ See *ibid.*, p. 427, n. 74: *prayojanam sapindārtham padārthaḥ sānuśādhikāḥ sacodyaparihāraś ca vācyaḥ sūtrārthavādhikāḥ* || See also Peter Skilling, "A Survey of the Vyākhyāyukti Literature," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23/2 (2000), pp. 297–350, see p. 317f.

⁵⁴ See Klaus-Dieter Mathes, "Maitrīpa's *Amanasikārahāra*," p. 14.

⁵⁵ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*, p. 46_{s-s}: *gzhan yang de ltar byas na 'phags pa thogs med la sogs pa 'ang tshad ldan gyi skyes bur mi 'gyur te / bcom ldan 'das dang byams pa sogs kyis gsung dgos pa dang dngos la gnad byed kyī dam pa'i chos rnam lugs 'dir dngos pa can min par bkral bas so /*

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⁵⁶ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*, p. 46_{s-s}: *gzhan yang de ltar byas na 'phags pa thogs med la sogs pa 'ang tshad ldan gyi skyes bur mi 'gyur te / bcom ldan 'das dang byams pa sogs kyis gsung dgos pa dang dngos la gnad byed kyī dam pa'i chos rnam lugs 'dir dngos pa can min par bkral bas so /*

⁵⁷ Already Dol
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tions, 2010),*

The ultimate has primordially been not empty of truth.
Being free from arising and ceasing, it does not abide
Throughout all of the three times.
Moving in the bliss (*sugata*) that does abide in this actuality
Has been taught as the genuine quintessence (*garbha*) of all buddhas.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In his *Lamp*, Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje equates *tathāgatagarbha* with the *dharmadhātu* which is realized through self-aware, self-luminous wisdom. He maintains that there is no dependency on extraneous factors; buddha nature, so to speak, is self-sufficient, bringing about its perfect awakening by means of personally experienced wisdom. *Tathāgatagarbha* is spontaneously endowed with qualities and activities and is permanent in the specific sense that it remains unchanging throughout the three phases and thus its beneficial activities never come to an end. Therefore, the absolute, *tathāgatagarbha*, being effective, i. e. of benefit, for itself and for others, is empty of afflictions, but not empty of qualities. It is from this point of view that the text – despite the fact that the term *gzhan stong* is nowhere to be found – can well be understood as a way of highlighting the intent of the proponents of *gzhan stong* Madhyamaka. Mi bskyod rdo rje, following the lead of Maitreya-Asaṅga with their cataphatic appraisal of the absolute, equates *tathāgatagarbha* with the *dharmakāya*, with the expanse of *nirvāṇa*, and with perfect awakening replete with qualities. To him this is the essential meaning of Madhyamaka, and it is for this reason that he frequently refers to Asaṅga as the Great Mādhyamika⁵⁷. It is against this background that Mi bskyod rdo rje criticizes those Madhyamaka representatives who do not comprehend the meaning of the third dharma cycle and who therefore view *tathāgatagarbha* and its associated buddha qualities and activities exclusively from the perspective of a non-affirming negation.

⁵⁶ *Dbu ma gzhan ston smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*, p. 46₁₆–47₂; *kun rdzob gdod nas bden par ma grub cing | gnas skabs snang ba tsam yang snang tsam nas | brtag na skye ba mi 'grub skye med pa | des ni stong nyid dam pa yin par bstan | don dam gdod nas bden pas mi stong ba | ... sangs rgyas kun gyi snying po dam par bstan |*

⁵⁷ Already Dol po pa labeled Asaṅga as well as Vasubandhu, Dignāga and Nāgārjuna as great Mādhyamikas among others because he considered the *trisvabhāva* theory as characteristic for Madhyamaka. See Cyrus Stearns, *The Buddha from Dölpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltsen* (Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999; here revised and enlarged edition Ithaca, N. Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 2010), p. 93.

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- 'Rgyal ba spyen ras gzigs dbang brgyad pa' rnam thar legs spyad ma'i don 'grel gsal ba'i sgron me'. "bka' 'dbangs mi bskyod rdo rje'i spyad pa'i rabs."

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- Dpal rgyal ba karma pa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsung 'bum 1* (Lhasa, 2004), pp. 150–329.
- “Rje yid bzang rtse ba'i rgyud gsum gsang ba dang / paṇ chen shakya mchog ldan gyi bde mchog nam bshad gnyis kyi mthar thug gi 'bras bu gzhi dus gnas lugs / lam dus kyi rnal 'byor nmams la dpyad pa bdud rtsi'i dri mchog.” *Dpal rgyal ba karma pa sku phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsung bum*. Vol. ba, pp. 975–1024. Lhasa: Dpal brtsegs bod gyi dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, 2003.
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The tathāgata
Buddhi

Imre Han

The tathāgata

The *Avatara* as the term the *sūtra* the famous passage has been circulating which is attested in the *xingxian jing*.

At the beginning of the *Avatara* sūtra, the Buddha illuminates a path to the light of the *tathāgata* from his mouth. In order to reveal a truth about the question of Nature, he declares the *tathāgata* Wondrous (the *dharmakāya*) to which Saṃgha members are as for the body of *tathāgata* in the realm of *tathāgata*; 8. The *tathāgata* of *tathāgata* is associated with *ta* and is discussed. This suggests that a possible *u* in the text, this *sūtra* scripture the *parinirvāṇa*, forever. How