

# **The Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554) on the Relation between Buddha Nature and its Adventitious Stains\***

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## **국문요약**

고전 이후의 티벳의 여래장 논쟁 가운데, 제 8대 까르마빠(Karmapa) 미피도르제의 견해가 가장 돋보이는데, 이것은 그가 ‘유정의 마음의 흐름은, 붓다

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들이 갖춘 속성의 미세한 씨앗의 의미에서 조차, 여래장을 포함하지 않는다'고 단호하게 부인한 것으로부터 기인한다. 한 개인의 심신의 집합체는 단지 객진번뇌들로만 구성되어 있다. 모든 것에 편재하지만 존재론적으로 별개인 붓다가 이러한 객진번뇌들에 의해 덮혀 있는 것이다. 결과적으로 '속'(俗)과 '성'(聖)은 각각 '모든 것의 기반이 의식'(kun gzhi rnam shes)와 '모든 것의 기반이 되는 지혜'(kun gzhi ye shes)라는 서로 다른 기반을 두고 있으며, 이 두 범주는 조낭빠 논사들이 전형적으로 사용하는 것이다. 『입중관론』 주석의 서문에서 미피도르제는 또한 '생각들이 법신으로서 나타난다'는 마하무드라 가르침에 대한 일반적인 해석을 비판하여 그 둘이 본질적으로 하나라는 가능성을 배제하였다.

나는 이 논문에서 여래장에 대한 미피도르제의 견해를 이해하는 것을 촉진하고자 노력할 것이고, 이는 그가 객진번뇌와의 관계에서 여래장을 어떻게 묘사했는가를 괴로자와 쇠누빨(Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal, 1392-1481)과 뿔뽀빠 세랍겔첸(Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, 1292-1361)과 비교를 통해 행할 것이다. 이를 위해서 미피도르제의 저작들인 『입중관론』과 『현관장엄론』 주석서들(서문, 『귀쑤오피남쎄』, 『착가첸뽀되뽀』, 그리고 타공(他空)에 관한 독립적인 저작인 『우마쎄뽀마외썰릭빠르체외되뽀』에 중점적으로 다룰 것이다. 괴로자와 쇠누빨의 깔라짜끄라 주석서인 『귀쑤쌍와』에 대한 미피도르제의 리뷰에 특별한 관심을 가질 것인데, 이것에 기반하여 미피도르제는 붓다와 다른 개별적 마음의 본성이라는 의미에서 여래장을 부정하기 때문이다.

주제어: 고전 이후의 티벳의 여래장 논쟁, 불성, 타공(他空), 제 8 대 까르마빠 미피도르제, 괴로자와 쇠누빨, 뿔뽀빠 세랍겔첸

Accepting the possibility of enlightenment as a fundamental Buddhist axiom, one has to either explain the causal process of its production, or accept its primordial existence, for example in terms of a buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*). The latter also applies, of course, when buddhahood is not taken to be produced from scratch. The way this basic issue is addressed is an ideal touchstone for systematically comparing various masters and their philosophical hermeneutical positions in the complex landscape of Tibetan intellectual history. The diversity of views on buddha nature has its roots in the multilayered structure of the standard Indian treatise on buddha nature, the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Depending on whether one follows the original intent of the Tathāgatagarbhasūtras (which can be identified in the earliest layer of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*), or the Yogācāra interpretation of the latter in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, buddha nature can refer to either an already fully developed buddha, or the naturally present potential (*prakṛtisthāgotra*) or natural luminosity of mind, i.e., sentient beings' ability to become buddhas. While some saw in such positive descriptions of the ultimate only synonyms for the emptiness of mind,<sup>1)</sup> or simply teachings of provisional meaning,<sup>2)</sup> the Jo nang pas, and many bKa' brgyud pas and rNying ma pas as well, took them as statements of definitive meaning.<sup>3)</sup> Among the latter,

1) This mainly is the position of rNgog Blo ldan shes rab (1059-1109), who claims in his *Theg chen rgyud bla'i don bsdu pa*, 5b3: "The mental continuum, which has emptiness as its nature, is the [buddha] element (i.e., buddha nature)." (... *stong pa nyid kyi rang bzhin du gyur pa'i sems kyi rgyud ni khams yin no*). A similar line of thought is followed by the dGe lugs pas, for whom emptiness is what is taught in the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha* (see Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 402).

2) This is, for example, the position maintained by Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) and Bu ston Rin chen 'grub (1290-1364) (Seyfort Ruegg 1973, 29-33).

i.e., those for whom buddha nature is more than just emptiness, there was disagreement about the relationship between such a positively described buddha nature and its adventitious stains, which include all ordinary states of mind and the world experienced by the latter.

For my analysis of Mi bskyod rdo rje's view on the relation between buddha nature and its adventitious stains I have chosen his *Abhisamayālamkāra* commentary, the *rGan po'i rlung sman*,<sup>4)</sup> which contains a critical review of 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal's (1392-1481) *rGyud gsum gsang ba*; the *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*; the *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgron 'bum* and Mi bskyod rdo rje's independent work on *gzhan stong*, the *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol legs par phye ba'i sgron me*. While these texts have in common that they endorse a robust distinction between buddha nature and the adventitious stains, the respective *gzhan stong* ("other empty") views underlying this relationship slightly differ, or are not mentioned in explicit terms. The homogeneous clear-cut distinction between impure sentient beings and a pure mind, *dharmadhātu*, or buddha nature is strikingly similar to what we find in the relevant works of the third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339).<sup>5)</sup> Even though Rang byung rdo rje does not explicitly mention the word *gzhan stong* in his mainly Yogācāra-based presentation

3) For rNgog Blo ldan shes rab and some dGe lugs pas, too, buddha nature has definitive meaning on the grounds that it is a synonym of emptiness (see Mathes 2008:26-27; and Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 402) .

4) This is how the author originally referred to his work, even though it appears in the Collected Works in the less irreverent title *Sublime Fragrance of the Nectar of Analysis* (Higgins and Draszczuk 2016, vol. 1, 12).

5) I.e., the *Zab mo nang don* and its autocommentary, the *sNying po bstan pa*, the *Dharmadhātustava* commentary, and the *Rang byung rdo rje'i mgur rnam*s. See Mathes 2008, 51-75.

of buddha nature, Karma Phrin las pa's<sup>6)</sup> (1456-1539) and Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas's (1813-1899) description of Rang byung rdo rje as a *gzhan stong pa*<sup>7)</sup> is at least understandable on the grounds that Mi bskyod rdo rje uses this label for a doctrine similar to Rang byung rdo rje's.<sup>8)</sup> In order to further contextualize Mi bskyod rdo rje's distinction between buddha nature and adventitious stains I have also consulted relevant passages from his commentaries on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* and the *dGongs gcig*.

The way Mi bskyod rdo rje defines buddha nature in relation to its adventitious stains can be best understood and described by comparing it with the way gZhon nu dpal and the Jo nang pas do. Mi bskyod rdo rje thus takes issue with gZhon nu dpal's full equation of buddha nature with the nature of an individual mind-stream. He also rejects the Jo nang pa's view of buddha nature as a permanent entity.<sup>9)</sup> As we will see, Mi bskyod rdo rje's view on the said relationship is noticeably Yogācāra-influenced, whereas for the Jo nang pas the basis of negation is an eternal ultimate, one that is not subject to the three times.<sup>10)</sup> According to Mi bskyod rdo rje's student

6) See Karma 'Phrin las pa: "Dris lan yid kyi mun sel zhes bya ba lcags mo'i dris lan bzhugs", 91, 1-4. For the Tibetan text and an English translation, see Mathes 2008, 55 & 441.

7) See Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas: *Shes bya kun khyab mdzod*, vol. 1, 460, 2-13.

8) The fact that the relation between buddha nature and its adventitious stains is only occasionally labelled *gzhan stong* by Mi bskyod rdo rje is not very telling, since in his *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ma'i srol* the main topic is the said relation, and Mi bskyod rdo rje refers to it as *gzhan stong* merely in the title.

9) Sa bzang Mati paṅ chen (1294-1376) explains in his *Nges don rab gsal* (122, 6 - 123, 5) that buddha nature is permanent because of not being conditioned, and an entity in view of its ability to fulfill a function, namely to bring the needs for oneself and others to perfection.

10) Mathes 2004, 285-94.

gTsong lag phreng ba (1504–1566) his master received *gzhan stong* teachings from Chos grub seng ge, and upon the latter’s request, Mi bskyod rdo rje espoused a *gzhan stong* view and commented on the *Abhisamayālamkāra* in the tradition of Jo nang pas and Zi lung pa (i.e., Shākya mchog ldan, 1428-1507). This was Mi bskyod rdo rje’s first work written in the years 1529-31.<sup>11)</sup> The value of this information is very limited, however, as it is unlikely that a realized master and head of a school, such as Mi bskyod rdo rje, is requested to uphold a particular view, at a time, that is, when he had already been capable of writing a nearly 1,400 page-long philosophically dense commentary on the *Abhisamayālamkāra*. Moreover, the *gzhan stong* views of the Jo nang pas and Shākya mchog ldan differ in so many points that it is difficult to see how Mi bskyod rdo rje could have written his commentary along the lines of both. Later, when Mi bskyod rdo rje criticized *gzhan stong* in his *Madhyamakāvātāra* commentary, he refuted the *gzhan stong* views of the Jo nang pas and Shākya mchog ldan separately, and it is possible that he did not argue against his own early *gzhan stong* view, or rather, a more moderate version of it, which he then preferred not to call *gzhan stong*.<sup>12)</sup>

11) Rheingans 2017, 96-97.

12) It should be noted, that while he claims in his *Abhisamayālamkāra* commentary that the buddha qualities of the *dharmatā* are not “empty of an own nature” (*rang stong*), he maintains in his *Phyag rgya chen po’i sgros ’bum*, in a more conciliatory fashion, that *dharmatā*, too, is *rang stong*, *dharmatā* only being *gzhan stong* in relation to the “phenomena” (*dharmin*) of adventitious stains. Again, in his *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba’i srol*, Mi bskyod rdo rje never claims that buddha nature or the ultimate is not empty of an own nature.

## The Position of Mi bskyod rdo rje in Comparison to That of gZhon nu dpal

While gZhon nu dpal regarded buddha nature and adventitious stains as not ontologically different, any more than ocean water and its waves are, to use his favored example from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*,<sup>13)</sup> the Jo nang pas maintained a clear-cut distinction between the two,<sup>14)</sup> as for example indicated by the fourth simile in the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, namely a gold nugget that is immersed in excrement.<sup>15)</sup> Similarly to the Jo nang pas, Mi bskyod rdo rje pointedly differs in his *rGan po'i rlung sman* from gZhon nu dpal in denying that the mind-stream of sentient beings contains a buddha nature, not even one in the sense of subtle seeds of buddha qualities. The entire repertoire of one's psycho-physical aggregates (*skandhas*) consists of nothing but adventitious stains. What is covered up by them is an all-pervading but ontologically separate Buddha.<sup>16)</sup> Consequently the 'profane' and 'sacred' also have different foundations, the 'all-ground consciousness' (*kun gzhi*

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13) See Mathes 2008, 241 & 366.

14) In his Fourth Council, Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1361) described the two truths as two great kingdoms (Stearns 1999, 129) and objected to the notion that "concepts and groups of consciousness, are the buddha body of reality if realized, but are the stains if not realized." (Stearns 1999, 162).

15) See Takasaki 1966, 272.

16) Mi bskyod rdo rje, who claims to follow Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339), thus takes the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as implying that sentient beings do not possess their own buddha qualities. The latter rather are possessed by the Tathāgata, who is a Buddha endowed with both purities; "nature" (*garbha*) in turn refers to the fact that all sentient beings are pervaded by the Tathāgata's tantric form-*kāyas*, and that his *dharmakāya* of luminosity is inseparable from the suchness of sentient beings. See Mathes 2008, 55.

*rnam shes*) and ‘all-ground wisdom’ (*kun gzhi ye shes*),<sup>17)</sup> two categories that are typical of the Jo nang pas.

Mi bskyod rdo rje’s differences to gZhon nu dpal become most clear in his *rGan po’i rlung sman*. In it, he describes gZhon du dpal’s position as an objection:

According to your proposed way of [explaining] how buddha nature exists in sentient beings, sentient beings, being husks, do not exist, whereas buddha nature does exist. If you explain the way [buddha] nature is sifted out in such a way, i.e., as being in a mutual relationship of kernel to husk, it would then be proper to take a vase as the quintessence of a rabbit’s horn, inasmuch as these two would [also] be in a mutual [relationship of] existence and non-existence, but this would be nothing else than a non-relation.<sup>18)</sup>

A comparison with my analysis of gZhon nu dpal’s *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* commentary (Mathes 2008) shows that Mi bskyod rdo rje’s description is accurate. gZhon nu dpal thus takes adventitious stains and buddha nature not as separate things, comparing their relationship instead to that of waves

17) In his commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, Mi bskyod rdo rje explains the *Mahāyānasamgraha* distinction between the *ālayavijñāna* and the pure *dharmadhātu* by making use of the terms *kun gzhi rnam shes* and *kun gzhi ye shes* (Mathes 2008, 61).

18) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *rGan po’i rlung sman*, 978, 1-3: *khyed kyis sems can la bde gshegs snying po yod tshul sems can shun pa med pa la sangs rgyas kyi snying po yod pa de nyid phan tshun snying po dang shun par ‘brel ba tshul gyi snying po’i ‘dzag (text: bdzag) lugs de ltar du ‘chad na | ‘o na ri bong gi rwa’i snying por yang bum par ‘jog rigs te | de gnyis phan tshun yod med du gnas pa dang ‘brel med par mtshungs pa’i phyir* | Parts of this have already been translated in Mathes 2008, 416.



and the ocean.<sup>19)</sup> In other words, buddha nature itself manifests as defilements, in the same way—to use gZhon nu dpal’s example—as the property of heat is not different from that of hot iron. This is clear from gZhon nu dpal’s commentary on the transformation of the basis in *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* II.1, where he explains that in ordinary sentient beings buddha nature functions as a basis which manifests all defilements. When purified, it no longer functions as a basis of defilements. The two modes of buddha nature are only differentiated on the basis of whether they possess stains or not. gZhon nu dpal thus repeatedly endorses the equation of buddha nature with the *ālayavijñāna* in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (even though he takes the *ālayavijñāna* only as a reflection of buddha nature), and not the clear-cut distinction in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* between an impure *ālayavijñāna* and a pure *dharmadhātu*, the latter distinction being the preference of Mi bskyod rdo rje (see further down).<sup>20)</sup>

Mi bskyod rdo rje contends that if gZhon nu dpal was right, buddha nature would wander in *samsāra* and natural luminosity (which is normally equated with buddha nature) become impermanent:

Moreover, if natural luminosity was firmly part of the state of *samsāra*—[*nota bene*] a *samsāra* that is impermanent—if [buddha nature] was constantly and firmly part of it, it would have to be so as something impermanent. Therefore, [this position] is inappropriate, since [buddha nature] would have to be part of the *samsāric* stream through equal entailment.<sup>21)</sup> Moreover, it would in this

19) Mathes 2008, 241-42.

20) Mathes 2008, 417f.

case absurdly follow that natural luminosity was impermanent, and that buddha nature was wandering around in the nine levels of the three world realms and the five world realms.<sup>22)</sup>

In fact, in his commentary on the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* (contained in the introduction to the second chapter of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*), gZhon nu dpal explains that even *dharmatā* possesses the nature of momentariness, in the sense of being the continuity of the stainless true nature of mind.<sup>23)</sup> Definitions of *dharmatā* or buddha nature as being unconditioned are explained as follows:

With “unconditioned” it is taught that buddha nature is not artificially (Tib. *’phral du*) conditioned by adventitious causes and conditions but rather is permanent in the sense that it has ever been contained in its own sphere. This is taught by way of the nine examples, such as the body of the Tathāgata inside a lotus. With “the quality of being without effort” is taught permanence, in that the wisdom of the Buddhas remains present as long as space [exists, namely]

21) In the sense that when there is *saṃsāra*, there is also buddha nature and vice versa. I thank David Higgins for this clarification.

22) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *rGan po’i rlung sman*, 995, 4-6: *gzhan yang rang bzhin ’od gsal ’khor ba’i gnas skabs la brtan par ’jug na | ’khor ba ni mi rtag (text: brtag) pa yin la | de la de rgyun brtan par ’jug na mi rtag par ’jug dgos pa las ’os med te ’khor ba’i rgyun khyab mnyam du ’jug dgos pa’i phyir | de lta na rang bzhin ’od gsal mi rtag par thal dang | de las gzhan yang | sangs rgyas kyi snying po khams gsum sa dgur ’gro ba lngar ’khor dgos par thal ba dang ...* A critical edition and translation of the full text will be published by David Higgins.

23) Mathes 2005, 4.

until the end of time. This is taught in the ten presentations of essence, cause, fruit etc.<sup>24)</sup>

In all fairness to gZhon nu dpal, it should be noted that in Sthiramati's *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* the unconditioned aspect of the truth of the path is explained in a similar way, i.e., as not being conditioned by *karmakleśa* defilements.<sup>25)</sup> Moreover, Sajjana or a later scribe remarks in an important note to verse 28 of his *Mahāyānottaraśāstropadeśa*, that the luminous mind is unconditioned in not depending on the coming together of causes and conditions, but he continues with the interesting explanation that “[t]he origination of the [luminous] mind in the succeeding moment depends on

24) DRSM, 83, 11-15: *de yang 'dus ma byas pas ni de bzhin gshegs pa 'i snying po glo bur ba 'i rgyu dang rkyen gyis 'phral du 'dus byas pa ma yin gyi | thog ma med pa 'i dus nas rang gi ngang gis rjes su zhugs pa 'i rtag pa yin par bstan la | de nyid ni padma 'i sbubs na de bzhin gshegs pa 'i sku bzhugs pa la sogs pa 'i dpe dgu s bstan pa yin no | lhun gyis grub pa 'i yon tan gyis ni nam mkha' ji srid du sangs rgyas kyi ye shes rjes su zhugs pa phyi ma 'i mtha 'i bar du rtag par bstan pa yin te | de ni ngo bo dang rgyu dang 'bras bu la sogs pa 'i rnam par bzhag pa bcus bstan pa yin no |* First translated in Mathes 2008, 333.

25) Sthiramati explains: “Now is the truth of the path conditioned or unconditioned? It is conditioned, since it has to be brought forth. It would not be a fault[, however,] if one said that it is unconditioned, in that it is not fabricated by *karmakleśa*-[defilements] and is constituted by the unconditioned” (MAVṬ on III.22b-d (MAVṬ 163, 7-9): *mārgasatyam punaḥ kiṃ saṃskṛtam asaṃskṛtam | saṃskṛtam<sup>a</sup> utpādyatvāt | yadi [karmakleśābhyām anabhisaṃskṛtād asaṃskṛtena ca prabhāvitavād (Yamaguchi: prabhāvitād) a]<sup>b</sup> saṃskṛtam iti bruyān na doṣaḥ syād....*). First quoted and translated in Mathes 2008, 544-45.

<sup>a</sup> The manuscript (NGMPP reel no. A 38/10, 50a7) repeats *saṃskṛtam*, but this is not supported by the Tibetan (see also Yamaguchi 1934, 163, fn. 2).

<sup>b</sup> Cf. Tib. *gal te las dang nyon mongs pas mngon par 'dus ma byas pa dang | 'dus ma byas kyi rab tu phyi ba 'i phyir 'dus ma byas zhes brjod na nyes pa med do*. Peking Tanjur, sems tsam, *tshi*, 113b4-5.

[the mind] that was generated by its (i.e., the mind's) own kind (*sajāti*) in the previous moment."<sup>26)</sup>

To sum up these lines of thought: There is nothing wrong with an unconditioned luminosity of mind, or buddha nature for that matter, that continues in a series of moments. Without access to gZhon nu dpal's *rGyud gsum gsang ba*, however, it is not possible to say whether Mi bskyod rdo rje was also opposed to this moderate form of buddha nature's momentariness.

In his *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, Mi bskyod rdo rje presents buddha nature in relation to the two truths within the system of Śavarīpa, Maitrīpa (986-1063) and Sahajavajra<sup>27)</sup> in accordance with the oral transmission that goes back to Vanaratna (1384-1468),<sup>28)</sup> a tradition, to which gZhon nu

26) See Kano 2016, 227.

27) The text says Śavarīpa and so forth. Mi bskyod rdo rje claims, however, that the view of the two truths in both Sūtra- and Mantra-Madhyamaka is best described in Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle, especially the *Tattvadaśaka* and its commentary by Sahajavajra. See *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 102, 4-11: "The so-called *amanasikāra* cycle of master Maitrīpa elucidates both Sūtra- and Mantra-Madhyamaka. One may wonder, then, what is [his] view of the two truths as it came down to us through the bKa' brgyud [tradition] of venerable Mar pa Lo tsā ba. [The answer is as follows:] The meaning of the commentary by the great master Sahajavajra on Jina Maitrīpa's *Tattvadaśaka* will be sufficiently explained here. In this commentary it is maintained that master Maitrīpa summarized Pāramitā[naya] pith instructions that accord with Mantra[naya]..." (*jo bo mai tri pas yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor bya ba mdo sngags kyi dbu ma gnyis ka'i tshul gsal bar mdzad pa de | rje brtsun mar pa lo tsa ba'i bka' brgyud las 'ongs pa bden gnyis kyi lta ba ji lta bu'o snyam na | rgyal ba mai tri pa'i de kho na nyid bcu pa zhes pa'i 'grel pa slob dpon chen po lhan cig skyes pa'i rdo rjes mdzad pa de nyid kyi don che long 'dir brjod par bya ste | de'ang 'grel pa de las slob dpon mai tri pas | ...sngags dang rjes su mthun pa'i pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag mdor bsdus mdzad par bzhed pas |...*)

28) Mi bskyod rdo rje divides his presentation of Śavarīpa's Mahāmudrā into two parts, his elaborations on buddha nature being in the second part: (1) a presentation in accordance

dpal, too, feels committed. For Mi bskyod rdo rje, buddha nature not only pertains to the ultimate, but also possesses wisdom on the relative level of truth. Taken in this way, i.e., as buddha nature and wisdom, the two truths are inseparable.<sup>29)</sup> How this is to be understood, becomes most clear in the subsequent explanation in this passage from the *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, where the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*'s threefold reason for the presence of buddha nature in sentient beings is elaborated on the basis of RGV I.28 and Asaṅga's preceding commentary verse (i.e., RGV I.27) on it:

Given the embrace and pervasion<sup>30)</sup> by the body of the perfect Buddha,  
The fact that suchness cannot be differentiated  
And the basic potential (or lineage),  
All living beings always possess the essence of a Buddha.<sup>31)</sup>

Given the presence of buddha wisdom in the multitude of sentient beings,  
[Everybody's] natural nonduality of being without stains,

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with the tradition of the *amanasikāra* followers that formerly came to Tibet, and (2) a presentation of the tradition of their later transmissions.

29) "From among the phenomena contained in the two truths, so-called \**sugatagarbha* is taught as an ultimate phenomenon. However, conventionally, relatively, it has the nature of wisdom. This is how [buddha nature] has come to be held in highest esteem as the inseparability of the two truths, for ascertainment by supreme individuals." (*bden gnyis kyis bsdus pa'i chos las bde gshegs snying po zhes don dam pa'i chos su gsungs kyang tha snyad kun rdzob tu ye shes kyī tshul can nyid skyes bu dam pa rnams kyī gtan la dbab bya'i bden gnyis dbyer med nyid la mchog tu bsngags par mdzad pa yin te* )

30) For this translation of *spharaṇa*, see Schmithausen 1971, 142.

31) RGVV, 26, 5-6: *saṃbuddhakāyaspharaṇāt tathatāvyatibhedataḥ | gotrataś ca sadā sarve buddhagarbhāḥ śarīriṇaḥ ||*

And the fact that its fruit has been metaphorically transferred to the buddha potential,

All living beings are said to possess the essence of a Buddha.<sup>32)</sup>

The Tibetan commentators mainly followed rNgog Blo ldan shes rab (1059-1109) in taking the two components of the compound *tathāgata-garbha* in successive order as actual (*lākṣaṇika*) and nominal (*prajñāptika*)<sup>33)</sup> in the first reason. In the second reason both the *tathāgata* and *garbha* are said to be actual, and in the third one the *tathāgata* is said to be nominal and the *garbha* actual.<sup>34)</sup> In other words, while the all-pervading perfect

32) RGVV, 26, 1-4: *buddhajñānāntargamāt sattvarāśes tannairmalyasyādvayatvāt prakṛtyā | buddhe gotre tatphalasyopacārād uktāḥ sarve dehino buddhagarbhāḥ ||*

33) See Ārya Vimuktisena's *Abhisamayālamkāravṛtti* on I.39 and Kano 2003, 109-11.

34) rNgog Blo ldan shes rab: *rGyud bla ma 'i bsdus don*, 29a4 - 29b2: “Pure suchness is the *kāya* of the perfect Buddha. [Its] “embrace and pervasion” (*spharāṇa*) means being pervaded by it (sc. the *kāya*)—pervaded inasmuch as all sentient beings are fit to attain it (i.e., a *kāya* of their own). In this respect, the *tathāgata* [in the compound “*tathāgata-garbha*”] is the actual one, while sentient beings’ possession of his [i.e., the *tathāgata*’s] “nature” (*garbha*) is nominal, because “being pervaded by it” has been metaphorically applied to (i.e., convey the sense of) the opportunity to attain it (i.e., such a *kāya*). With regard to the [reason] “suchness is indivisible”, both the *tathāgata* and sentient beings who possess its nature are actual, because naturally stainless suchness is the nature of the Buddha even when accompanied by stains. Moreover, with certainty it abides in the continuum of sentient beings. With regard to the [reason] “because of the existence of a potential”, *tathāgata* is nominal, because it [i.e., the *tathāgata-garbha*] is the cause of attaining suchness in the [resultant] state of purity—[is, in other words,] the seeds of knowledge and compassion, the mental imprints of virtue, and [thus only] the cause of a *tathāgata*. The only actuality [in *tathāgata-garbha* here] is the “nature” (*garbha*) of sentient beings (i.e., and not that the latter consist of an actual *tathāgata*.” (| *de la rnam par dag pa 'i de bzhin nyid rdzogs pa 'i sangs rgyas kyi sku yin la | de la 'phro ba ni des khyab pa ste | sems can thams cad kyis thob*

buddha body is actual or real, it does not truly constitute the nature of sentient beings, which only have the potential for becoming a Buddha. From the perspective of sentient beings, however, the possession of a potential, which is not really a Buddha is actual. With regard to suchness, both the *tathāgata* and *garbha* are actual because suchness is naturally stainless even when accompanied by adventitious stains. gZhon nu dpal follows rNgog Blo ldan shes rab, except for the second reason, which he explains as follows:

Second, since suchness (which, being the mind's true nature, is without adventitious stains) is not different in either buddhas or sentient beings, it is said to be the *tathāgata-garbha*. The suchness which exists in a Buddha is an actual Buddha. That suchness of sentient beings is a Buddha, is [only] nominal. Therefore, [suchness] abides as [if in] two parts.<sup>35)</sup>

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*tu rung ba'i phyir khyab pa yin no | | phyogs 'di la ni de bzhin gshegs pa ni dngos po yin la | sems can 'di'i snying po can du ni btags pa yin te | de thob pa'i skal ba yod pa la des khyab par btags pa'i phyir ro | | de bzhin nyid dbyer med phyir dang | zhes bya ba ni | de bzhin gshegs pa dang | sems can de 'i snying po cang gnyis ka dngos su yin te | de bzhin nyid dri ma rang bzhin gvis dben pa ni glo bur gyi sgrib pa dang bcas pa'i tshe yang sangs rgyas kyi rang bzhin yin pa dang | sems can gyi rgyud la nges par gnas pa'i phyir ro || rigs yod pa'i phyir na zhes bya ba ni | de bzhin nyid rnam par dag pa'i gnas skabs thob pa'i rgyu dge ba'i bag chags shes rab dang snying rje'i sa bon ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i rgyu yin pas de bzhin gshegs pa zhes btags pa yin la | sems can gyi snying po ni dngos po kho na yin no |)*

- 35) DRSM, 262, 14-17: *sems kyi rang bzhin glo bur gyi dri ma med pa'i de bzhin nyid de ni sangs rgyas dang sems can gnyi ga la khyad par med par yod pa'i phyir de la yang de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po zhes gsungs pa yin te | gnyis pa'o | | sangs rgyas la yod pa'i de bzhin nyid ni sangs rgyas dngos so | | sems can gyi de bzhin nyid ni sangs rgyas btags pa ba'o | | des na de ni cha gnyis su gnas so |*

This interpretation of the second reason must be seen against the background of gZhon nu dpal's theory that suchness is inseparably connected with subtle buddha qualities, which fully blossom naturally within their own sphere when all adventitious stains are removed.<sup>36)</sup>

In line with rNgog Blo ldan shes rab and gZhon nu dpal, Mi bskyod rdo rje takes the first reason in the sense that the *tathāgata* is actual, and the *garbha* nominal. Of interest is the way Mi bskyod rdo rje elaborates on the relation between the actual Buddha and sentient beings: “[The clause] ‘embrace and pervasion by the perfect body of the Buddha’ shows the way in which buddha nature exists, namely by way of the resultant buddha nature being present as buddha activity, which pervades the causal buddha nature of all sentient beings.”<sup>37)</sup> In other words, the resultant buddha nature acts as the actual Buddha on the mind-stream of sentient beings, which are, to be sure, only the natural luminosity called ‘all-ground’, as sentient beings are not real (see below).

In the second reason, Mi bskyod rdo rje confirms that the *garbha* is actual (everybody has suchness as his or her *garbha*/true nature), but falls short of ascribing the status of being actual to the *tathāgata*:

Because the natural luminosity of mind in [all beings] from Buddhas to animals (its very essence being free from all stains [and] unchanging, just like space) abides

36) Mathes 2008, 320.

37) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 116, 18-20: | *zhes pa ni rdzogs sangs sku 'phro ba ste 'bras bu bde gshegs snying pos kyang sems can thams cad kyi rgyu bde gshegs snying po la phrin las khyab par bzhugs pa 'i sgo nas gshegs snying yod tshul bstan nas* |



as [something] inseparable from the basic nature of the mind of sentient beings, all sentient beings possess buddha nature. In this respect, the *garbha* is actual and the *tathāgata* [is labelled] in terms of the basis of the three phases.<sup>38)</sup>

This must be understood against the background that the three phases of buddha nature (i.e., it being impure, partly impure and partly pure, and perfectly pure) pertain to buddha nature itself and not sentient beings. The latter are not real and only a convenient designation introduced because of the necessity to posit a buddha nature of natural luminosity labelled “all ground” (*kun gzhi*).<sup>39)</sup>

Of interest is also how Mi bskyod rdo rje understands the third reason for the presence of buddha nature in sentient beings (“because of the basic potential”). The part of buddha nature which is clarity operates in the six cognitive domains of sentient beings the same way that milk mixes into water:

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38) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 116, 21 – 117, 5: *sangs rgyas nas dud 'gro 'i bar gyi sems gyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba nam mkha' ltar 'pho 'gyur med pa dri ma thams cad dang bral ba 'i ngo bo nyid du sems can gyi sems kyi gshis la dbyer med du gnas pa 'i phyir yang sems can thams cad de bzhin gshegs pa 'i snying po can yin la de la ltos nas snying po ni mtshan nyid pa dang | de bzhin gshegs pa ni gnas skabs gsum du rten gyi dbang las 'gyur te | 'khor bar 'ching byed kyi las nyon dang bcas pa de srid du ma dag pa sems can gyi gnas skabs dang |*

39) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 117, 14-17: “Well then, why are they taken as sentient beings rather than buddha nature? As for the Ādibuddha or primordial sentient beings, they are introduced here because of the necessity to posit a buddha nature of natural luminosity labelled ‘all-ground’.” (*'o na de bzhin gshegs pa 'i snying po las sems can du 'jog pa 'i rgyu mtshan ci zhe na | dang po 'i dus kyi sangs rgyas sam dang po 'i dus nas 'ong ba 'i sems can ni kun gzhi 'i ming gi btags pa 'i rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal ba 'i gshegs snying nyid la 'jog dgos pa 'i dbang las der bzhag pa yin te |*)

The aspect of buddha nature which is its clarity or manifestation operates in an unbiased way throughout beginningless time, like milk in water, on the six cognitive domains of all sentient beings, which are of a similar type to the uncontaminated six cognitive domains of perfect buddhahood. Therefore, all sentient beings possess buddha nature.<sup>40)</sup>

The picture is more than clear. Within sentient beings there is nothing but the six cognitive domains, which resemble those of a Buddha. Buddha nature is here not an integral part of sentient beings but only acts on them, like milk spreading within water. Note that this simile is also used in the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* to illustrate how the enlightenment of the Buddhas enters the *ālayavijñāna* of sentient beings without becoming the *ālayavijñāna*.<sup>41)</sup> In other words, Mi bskyod rdo rje upholds here in the *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* (and also in the *rGan po'i rlung sman* for that matter) the same clear-cut distinction between an impure and pure mind (or sentient beings and buddha nature) as in the relevant texts of Rang byung rdo rje.<sup>42)</sup> Consequently, Mi bskyod rdo rje also interprets in the introduction to his *Madhyamakāvātāra* commentary the popular bKa' brgyud Mahāmudrā teaching that thoughts appear as the *dharmakāya* in the sense that statements to the effect that thoughts appear as the *dharmakāya* reflect a realization that

40) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 119, 5-9: *bde gshegs snying po'i gsal cha'am snang cha de rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi zag pa med pa'i skye mched drug dang ris 'dra ba zhig sems can thams cad kyi skye mched drug gi steng na ris med par thog ma med pa nas chu la 'o ma ltar rjes su zhugs pas sems can thams cad gshegs snying can yin te |*

41) See Mathes 2008, 58-59.

42) For a detailed comparison of gZhon nu dpal's and Rang byung rdo rje's positions, see Mathes 2008, 125-29 & 415-20.

thoughts do not exist as anything else than their *dharmatā*.<sup>43)</sup> The *dharmatā* of thoughts, to be sure, only refers to thoughts' emptiness and not their *dharmakāya*.

## The Position of Mi bskyod rdo rje in Comparison to That of the Jo nang pas<sup>44)</sup>

In Mi bskyod rdo rje's critique of gZhon nu dpal, especially when he shows the undesired consequence that buddha nature ends up being impermanent, one gets the impression that he goes as far as endorsing the *gzhan*

43) See Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i kar fi ka*, 10, 2-5: "When the Madhyamaka view of this [*mahāmudrā* system] has arisen in the mind-stream, the natural mind is said to have been actualized and the *dharmakāya* to have been made directly [manifest]. When one realizes that "phenomena" (*dharmā*), such as sprouts and thoughts, are nothing other than their [respective] true nature (*dharmatā*), one uses the verbal convention 'thoughts appear as the *dharmakāya*.'" ('*di'i dbu ma'i lta ba rgyud la skyes pa na tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad ces pa dang | chos sku mngon sum du byas zer ba dang | chos can myu gu dang rnam rtog sogs de dag de'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtogs pa na rnam rtog chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas* ). First translated in Mathes 2008, 65.

44) It has been repeatedly claimed that the Jo nang pa's *gzhan stong* or "Great Madhyamaka" cannot be treated as, and thus compared to, philosophical tenets. See Mathes 1996, 156, where I reported Broido's (1989:87) notion that Dol po pa follows a *rang stong* tenet while maintaining a *gzhan stong* view. Brunnhölzl (2004, 513) claims further (without reference to Broido) that it is only the view, which Dol po pa calls *gzhan stong* or "Great Madhyamaka," for this includes in a broad sense what is experienced in meditative equipoise. Dol po pa mostly refers to his "Great Madhyamaka" as a textual tradition (*gzhung lugs*), though (Brambilla: *forthcoming*). Moreover, Buchardi (2007, 10-12) observes that Tāranātha (1575-1634) uses the term *gzhan stong* as meaning both philosophical tenet and meditation tradition (*sgom lugs*).

*stong* position of the Jo nang pas. But even though Mi bskyod rdo rje maintains slightly different *gzhan stong* views over time, all of them differ from that of the Jo nang pas, or at least do not explicitly endorse the Jo nang position that buddha nature is an ultimate, permanent entity, permanent in the sense of not belonging to the three times of past, present and future. In his *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgros 'bum*, Mi bskyod rdo rje distinguishes the two modes of emptiness (i.e., *rang stong* and *gzhan stong*) with regard to one's own mind in its mode of arising nakedly as stainless awareness: from the point of view of the *dharmin* (i.e., adventitious stains) it is *gzhan stong*; and from the point of view of *dharmatā* it is *rang stong*: "Thus, in the sūtras and tantras of the illustrious one it is taught, that one's own mind in the mode of arising nakedly as stainless awareness is *gzhan stong* from the point of view of the *dharmin*, and *rang stong* from the point of view of *dharmatā*. Thus its emptiness is of two kinds."<sup>45)</sup>

The same distinction between *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* is also found further down in the *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgros 'bum*, where Mi bskyod rdo rje insists that natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) is *rang stong*, but also *gzhan stong* with regard to phenomena not belonging to it:

As to reaching, for a moment, the state of clarity without a reference point or basis, the natural awareness of such [a state] becomes "empty of itself" (*rang stong*), i.e., of its own nature. Moreover, this [awareness] itself is [also] taken

45) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgros 'bum*, 54, 3-6: *des na bcom ldan 'das kyi mdo rgyud rnams las | chos can gyi cha nas rang sems rig pa dri med gcer bur thon tshul la gzhan stong dang | chos nyid kyi cha nas rig pa dri med gcer bur thon tshul la rang stong ste de'i stong pa nyid gnyis pa'o |*

as a non-empty basis and [thus] the emptiness of being empty of other (*gzhan gyis stong pa*) phenomena. This is not like an ox being empty of a horse.<sup>46)</sup>

The point here is that the *mahāmudrā* terms ‘naked awareness’ and ‘natural awareness’ simply describe non-conceptual realization without an ontological commitment that would deserve the predicate ‘not empty of an own nature’. It is, however, empty of other, namely that, which is not found in such a naked awareness: adventitious stains. While this type of *gzhan stong* is fully endorsed, and thus the favored view in the *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgron 'bum*, Mi bskyod rdo rje criticizes Jo nang *gzhan stong* a little further down in the same text:

The first assertion<sup>47)</sup> is the position of the Jo nang pas. [It is wrong] for the following reason: If emptiness existed in such a way as something truly established, what sort of non-empty thing do we get from that? Therefore, even though one viewed and cultivated emptiness as a remedy for misled clinging to all phenomena as [if they were] entities with real characteristic signs, that would not be a remedy—[would not be] to abandon actual phenomena—inasmuch as [emptiness] itself would be truly established.<sup>48)</sup>

46) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgron 'bum*, 185, 11-14: *thang cig gsal yang gtad med gzhi med du 'gro ba ni de ltar gyi tha mal gyi shes pa de nyid kyang kho kho rang gi ngo bo rang stong du 'gro ba las kho nyid mi stong par gzhir byas nas chos gzhan gyis stong pa'i stong nyid ba lang rtas stong pa ltar ma yin la |*

47) I.e., the one made by the *gzhan stong* Mādhyamika in favor of truly established emptiness. See Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgron 'bum*, 71, 18-19: *stong nyid bden grub gzhan stong dbu ma pa |*

48) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgron 'bum*, 72, 1-4: *'dod pa dang po ni jo nang pa dag gi bzhed pa ste | de ltar na stong pa nyid bden grub par yod na de las mi stong pa ci zhig*

In other words, Mi bskyod rdo rje rejects a substantialist notion of emptiness, or any other ultimate category of things permanent for that matter. It is true that in his *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol* Mi bskyod rdo rje describes the refuge to the Three Jewels as “permanent”, “enduring”, and “eternal”, but these attributes are not combined with “entity” (*dngos*). Moreover, permanence is here taken as one of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*'s four “perfections of the qualities” (*guṇapāramitā*) of the *dharmakāya*. We thus find in the *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol*: “Not clinging to the nefarious deceptions of the impermanent world and not conceptualizing the permanence of *nirvāṇa* as one [thing] is the meaning of permanence.”<sup>49)</sup> The meaning of the perfection of permanence in this context becomes clear in the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*: “Attaining the perfection of permanence should be seen as the fruit of a [form of] meditation based on great compassion, inasmuch as [bodhisattvas] are possessed of the desire to continuously benefit people as long as *samsāra* lasts.”<sup>50)</sup>

The way the four perfections are presented,<sup>51)</sup> or explained away by

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*yod pas | chos thams cad la dngos po mtshan 'dzin phyin log gi gnyen por stong nyid lta  
sgom byas kyang stong pa nyid de nyid dngos bden du grub pas dngos chos spong byed kyi  
spang gnyen du mi 'gyur ba'i phyir |*

49) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol*, 33, 6-8: 'jig rten mi rtag mngon par bslu ba la mi zhen cing mya ngan las 'das pa rtag pa la gcig tu mi rtog pa ni rtag pa 'i don te |

50) RGVV, 32, 3-5: *mahākaraṇābhāvanāyāḥ satatasamītam ā samsārāt sattvārthagodhāpaliguḍḍhatvān<sup>a</sup>  
nityapāramitādhiḡamaḡ phalaḡ draṡṡavyam |*

<sup>a</sup> Johnston: *-godhāpariṡuddhatvān*; see Schmithausen 1971, 143

51) Especially in view of RGV I.34-35, in which four *dharmas* (devotion, insight, meditation, and mercy) are causes of the four perfections.

taking “self” (*ātman*) as the “lack of a self” (*nairātmya*),<sup>52)</sup> conveys the idea of a *dharmakāya* in continuous flow. In other words, it is one thing to follow the Jo nang pas and take the ultimate *dharmakāya* as a permanent entity, but an entirely other one to posit it as a permanent refuge as in the following: “Therefore, as for the permanent, enduring and eternal refuge, the potential of the [Three] Jewels definitely exists in the ultimate *dharmakāya* itself.”<sup>53)</sup> Moreover, it is even likely, that Mi bskyod rdo rje takes the notion of a permanent ultimately existing refuge as a provisional teaching even in his *dbu ma gzhan stong* text. The quotation, which is from the explanation of the third reason for the presence of buddha nature in sentient beings (namely that they possess a potential), is introduced with the telling phrase “Therefore, in this system, the final refuge exists ultimately.”<sup>54)</sup> In other words, an ultimately existing refuge would be admitted only in this system and thus does not reflect Mi bskyod rdo rje’s final Madhyamaka view of the two truths being inseparably united into a pair (which excludes

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52) RGVV, 31, 13-16: “The Tathāgata, however, has attained through his genuine wisdom the highest perfection, namely the lack of a self in all phenomena. This lack of a self, as seen by him, namely as having the defining characteristic of a non-self, is not false. Therefore, [only this much] is accepted as a self at any time: a self that is nothing but the lack of a self.” (*tathāgataḥ punar yathābhūtajñānena sarvadharmānairātmyaparapāram abhiprāptaḥ | tac cāsya nairātmyam anātmalakṣaṇena yathādarśanam avisaṃvāditvāt sarvakālam ātmābhipreto nairātmyam evātmeti<sup>a</sup> kṛtvā |*)

<sup>a</sup> Johnston: *evātmani*; see Schmithausen 1971, 143

53) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol*, 29, 2-4: *des na rtag pa dang brtan pa gyung drung gi skyabs ni mthar thug chos sku nyid la dkon mchog 'di'i rigs ni nges par yod pa yin la |*

54) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol*, 28, 6-7: *des na lugs 'di la ni mthar thug gi skyabs don dam par yod cing |*

something ultimately existing). This can be gathered at least from his commentary on the *dGongs gcig*, where Mi bskyod rdo rje explains that the doctrine of an unconditioned, steady and everlasting buddha nature is intentional (i.e., a teaching of provisional meaning, *neyārtha*):

Moreover, because all phenomena are emptiness, [the Buddha] was thinking of the cause of the major and minor marks of a Buddha, which exists in the mind streams of sentient beings, as something belonging to the category of mere dependent arising, when he taught an unconditioned, steady and everlasting buddha nature, a wholesome [buddha] element and the like.<sup>55)</sup>

It should be noted, that this does not prevent Mi bskyod rdo rje from positively referring to merely relational *gzhan stong*. We thus find in his *dGongs gcig* commentary the following passage:

Even though the basis of emptiness is taught as *gzhan stong* (in the sense of the mind not being *rang stong*), it is not the case that the final emptiness of all phenomena being empty throughout beginningless time is not taught as the Middle [Way here]. Therefore the final meaning of the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* remains [rooted] in Great Madhyamaka, where [everything] is empty throughout beginningless time.<sup>56)</sup>

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55) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dGongs gcig sor byang sngags kyi tshoms kyi kar ṅī ka*, 247, 1-4: *yang chos thams cad stong pa nyid yin bzhin pa las | sangs rgyas kyi mtshan dpe sogs kyi rgyu rten cing 'brel 'byung tsam du rigs kyi ming can zhig sems can gyi rgyud la yod pa de la dgongs te bde gshogs snying po 'dus ma byas pa dang rtag brtan dang khams dge ba la sogs par yang gsungs so |*



The difference to the Jo nang position of an ultimately permanent entity is also made clear in Mi bskyod rdo rje's *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, where the momentariness of buddha nature is only excluded from the point of view of not being newly brought forth from external causes. Moreover, buddha nature is explicitly denied the status of being fundamentally established:

[Buddha nature] thus undergoes neither decrement nor increment and is in steady continuance from [the state of] sentient beings until buddhahood. Therefore, this very [buddha nature] is posited even as the ground for all phenomena of the two truths, bondage and liberation, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, the naturally present and the adventitious. Since it is not the case that it has been newly brought forth from causes (in the sense that it has not come down to us from beginningless time), it is not taught as being momentary. Still, this does not [exclude] the meaning that conventionally it is momentary, brought forth by causes and conditions. Query: Well, when the ground of all phenomena is all-pervasively present indiscriminately in buddhas and sentient beings, is it not nevertheless necessary that it is fundamentally established? [Reply: No,] for if there were such an established phenomenon, the undesired consequence would be that this phenomenon and all individuals which are endowed with it [constituted] a self and were truly existent.<sup>57)</sup>

56) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dGongs gcig chos 'khor dang rten 'brel gyi tshoms kyi kar ṭī ka*, 19, 3-6: *stong gzhi sems rang stong du ma yin par gzhan stong du bstan pa yod kyang | mthar thug chos thams cad gdod nas stong pa 'i stong pa nyid dbu mar mi ston pa yod pa ma yin pas | dgongs pa nges 'grel gyi mthar thug gi mdo don yang | gzod nas stong pa 'i dbu ma chen po nyid du gnas pa yin te |*

A further difference to the Jo nang pas is Mi bskyod rdo rje's view of the two truths that neither hinders the other. In the *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgras 'bum* (i.e., the text in which he also endorses moderate *gzhan stong*, where even *dharmatā* is *rang stong*) we find:

Therefore, one's mind, i.e., [buddha] nature, luminosity and natural awareness, being [thus] established as purity in terms of cause, path and fruit, the two truths [are as follows:] The innate nature of mind, i.e., a "phenomenon" (*dharmā*) free from hindrances is the relative truth. Innate [awareness] free from elaboration, i.e., the *dharmatā* free from hindrances, is the ultimate truth. They are one, the one not hindering [the other], like water poured into water.<sup>58)</sup>

This is similar to Rang byung rdo rje's presentation of the two truths in his auto-commentary on the *Zab mo nang don*, where the relative and ultimate truths are both included within buddha nature. This does not refer to the ordinary relative truth, however, but only to the stainless forms of

57) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 118, 11-18: *zhes pa'i tshul gyis sems can nas sangs rgyas kyi bar bri gang med pas rgyun brtan pa'i phyir 'ching grol 'khor 'das gnyug ma glo bur bden gnyis kyi chos thams cad kyi gzhi yang 'di nyid 'jog la 'di thog ma med pa nas ma 'ongs pa las gsar du rgyus ma bskyed pas skad cig ma min par gsungs kyang tha snyad du rgyu rkyen gyis bskyed pa'i skad cig ma yin pa'i don ni ma yin la | 'o na chos thams cad kyi gzhi sangs rgyas dang sems can ris med pa'i kun khyab tu bzhugs na'ang gzhi grub dgos pa ni ma yin te | de ltar grub pa'i chos shig yod na chos de dang de gang la ldan pa'i gang zag thams cad bdag dang bden grub par thal ba'i skyon du 'gyur ro |*

58) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgras 'bum*, 152, 1-4: *des na rang sems snying po 'od gsal ba tha mal gyi shes pa rgyu lam 'bras bur rnam dag sgrub pas gnyug ma sems nyid chos can sgrib bral kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang gnyug ma spros bral chos nyid sgrib bral don dam gyi bden pa gnyis gcig go gcig gis mi 'gegs par chu la chu bzhag pa ltar ...*

consciousness—that is, to mere appearance as such. To be sure, for Rang byung rdo rje and Mi bskyod rdo rje this does not mean equating buddha nature and *ālayavijñāna* as in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*.<sup>59)</sup> This is clear from the following passage from Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentary:

Some foolish [scholars] say that the omniscient Karma pa, the glorious Rang byung [rdo rje] maintains as the intention of the *Mahāyānottaratantra* (i.e., the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*) that the *dharmadhātu* inasmuch as it is the mind of sentient beings, inseparably possesses buddha nature. This genuine [master] does not maintain that! In his auto-commentary to the *Zab mo nang don* he distinguishes two aspects, i.e., purity called mind and impurity called mind. Having explained that sentient beings (*sems can*) are those with impure intentions (*sems pa*),<sup>60)</sup> he explains that sentient beings understood in such a way do not possess the *dharmadhātu*. Those sentient beings are taken as the adventitious stains, which are produced by the false imagining of being in error about the *dharmadhātu*.<sup>61)</sup>

59) Mathes 2008, 66-67.

60) The definition is heightened by a play on the pair of words *sems pa* (intention) and *sems can* (mind/intention possessor).

61) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Sher phyin mngon rtogs rgyan kyi bstan bcos rgyas 'grel*, 125b1-4: *blun po la la zhig sems can gyi sems kyi chos dbyings la bde gshegs snying po de dbyer mi phyed pa 'i tshul gyis yod pa ni theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma 'i dgongs par thams cad mkhyen pa karma pa dpal rang byung gis bzhed pa yin no zhes zer ro || dam pa de nyid ni de ltar bzhed pa ma yin te | zab mo nang don gyi rang 'grel du dag pa la sems su brjod pa dang | ma dag pa la sems su brjod pa zhes rnam pa gnyis su dbye bar mdzad de | ma dag pa 'i sems pa can de la sems can du bshad nas de lta bu 'i sems can la chos kyi dbyings med par bshad pa dang | sems can de nyid chos dbyings las phyin ci log tu gyur pa 'i yang dag pa ma yin pa 'i kun rtog gis bskyed pa glo bur ba 'i dri mar bzhag go |*

As to the pure mind [here], it has been called natural awareness, the primordial protector, the primordial Buddha and so forth, and taught as inseparably possessing the buddha qualities. In this way, it is also a potent [buddha] nature. In this case, what does pure refer to? It is the so-called natural luminosity of mind. Luminosity has the meaning of the natural purity of an [otherwise impure,] faulty mind. Even though it is taught that sentient beings possess such a naturally pure [buddha] nature, this [should] not be [taken] literally. But naturally pure [buddha] nature, once taken as a basis, [is seen to] possess impure sentient beings as what is to be purified. In this sense it is taught that sentient beings possess a buddha. Even though sentient beings exist as what is to be purified, they are the dependent [nature], through the power of delusion. In terms of definitive meaning, even what is to be purified, i.e., the adventitious stains have never existed in the first place.<sup>62)</sup>

Rang byung rdo rje bases this distinction between an impure and pure mind on *Mahāyānasamgraha* I.45-48, where a totally impure *ālayavijñāna* is distinguished from the pure *dharmadhātu*. Mi bskyod rdo rje's recon-

62) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Op. cit.*, 125b4-126a1: | *dag pa'i sems de ni tha mal gyi shes pa dang | dang po'i mgon po dang | dang po'i sangs rgyas sogs su mtshan gsol nas de nyid la sangs rgyas kyi yon tan rnams dang dbyer mi phyed pa'i tshul can yin par gsungs pa dang | de lta bu ni snying po go chod po yang yin la | de lta gyi tshes dag pa'i sems de gang la bya zhe na | sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba'o zhes pa de yin la | 'od gsal ba'i don yang phyin ci log gi sems de rang bzhin gyis dag pa'i don yin no | | rang bzhin gyis dag pa'i snying po de lta bu sems can la yod par gsungs pa yang sgra ji bzhin pa ma yin gyi | rang bzhin 'od gsal gyi snying po gzhir bzung nas de la ma dag pa'i sems can sbyang byar yod pa la sems can la sangs rgyas yod do zhes gsungs pa yin la | sems can sbyang byar yod pa yang gzhan dbang 'khrul ba'i dbang gis yin gyi | nges pa'i don du ni sbyang bya glo bur gyi dri ma yang gdod ma nas yod pa ma yin no |*

struction of this position is clearly Yogācāra-influenced. Further down, in his *Abhisamayālamkāra* commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje refers to this Yogācāra doctrine as *gzhan stong*:

In the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, too, the *dharmatā* of the perfect [nature] has been taught as being emptiness. This is very true. But was it then taught as *rang stong*, and not as *gzhan stong*? This is not the case. In the [*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*] *sūtra* it is taught: “The mind is not mind, the nature of mind being luminous.” Thus, being *rang stong*, the adventitious mind does not exist. Inasmuch as natural luminosity is *gzhan stong*, it is taught that so-called luminosity is not empty. Venerable [Maitreya] said [in *Ratnagotravibhāga* I.155c]: “[Buddha nature] is not empty of [its] unsurpassable qualities.” Thus it is taught that these qualities of the unsurpassable *dharmatā* are not empty of an own nature.<sup>63</sup> This meaning has been clearly [enunciated] by Mañjuśrī[yaśas in the *Svadarśanānumatoddesaparīkṣā*]: “*Skandhas* are, upon analysis, merely empty. They are, like a banana tree, without an essence. The emptiness endowed with the best of all aspects is not like that.” *Skandhas* and so forth thus are the imagined [nature]. And if one analyzes all dependent phenomena in terms of their own nature, [they are found] to be wholly empty [of] an own nature (i.e., *rang stong*). For example, it is like a banana tree, which is without an essence. The perfect [nature], i.e., the emptiness endowed with the best of all aspects cannot be analyzed in the usual way. However much one analyzes, it does not become empty of an own nature, because it is [never] anything other than such a supreme wisdom. This is what is taught.<sup>64</sup>

63) My translation requires to read *rang gi ngo bos* instead of *rang gi ngo bo*.

It could be argued that the way luminosity is explained as *gzhan stong* here, namely in the sense that buddha qualities are not empty of an own nature, does not differ from the Jo nang position. The perfect nature has not been restricted to its unchangeable aspect, however, and nowhere is it said that it transcends time, as was stated, for example, by Sa bzang Ma ti pan chen, a heart disciple of Dol po pa. Moreover, Mi bskyod rdo rje (in his own presentation of *gzhan stong*) never describes the basis of negation, i.e., that which is *gzhan stong* for Mi bkyod rdo rje, as a permanent entity (*rtag dngos*). But when Mi bskyod rdo rje describes and criticizes the Jo nang pas in his *Madhyamakāvātāra* commentary, he uses this controversial attribute:

As for the Jo nang pas, they explain that on the level of relative truth, [everything] is *rang stong*, because of being empty of a respective own nature, while supreme<sup>65</sup>) wisdom (*shes pa*), [i.e.,] the permanent entity [known as]

64) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *Sher phyin mngon rtogs rgyan kyi bstan bcos rgyas 'grel*, 173a6-b5: | yum gyi mdor yang yongs grub kyi chos nyid stong nyid du gsungs pa shin tu yang bden pa 'thad de | de ltar gyi tshe de rang stong du gsungs kyi | gzhan stong du ma gsungs so zhe na | de ni ma yin te | mdor | sems ni sems ma mchis pa ste | sems kyi rang bzhin ni 'od gsal ba'o | | zhes bstan pas | glo bur ba'i sems rang stong yin pas ma mchis pa dang | rang bzhin 'od gsal gzhan stong yin pas 'od gsal ba'o zhes mi stong par bstan pa dang | rje btsun gyis | bla med chos kiyis stong ma yin | | ces chos nyid bla na med pa gang yin pa'i chos de rang gi ngo bo mi stong par gsungs la | don de gsal bar | 'phags pa 'jam pa'i dpal gyis | phung po rnam dpyad stong pa nyid | | chu shing bzhin du snying po med | | rnam pa kun gyi mchog ldan pa'i | | stong nyid de ltar 'gyur ma yin | | ces phung po sogs kun btags pa dang | gzhan dbang gi chos thams cad rang gi ngo bo la rnam par dpyad pa na | rang gi ngo bo stong pa nyid de | dper na chu shing snying po med pa bzhin yin la | yongs grub rnam pa kun gyi mchog dang ldan pa'i stong nyid de ni spyir dpyad mi nus pa dang | ji ltar dpyad kyang rang gi ngo bos stong pa de ltar 'gyur ba ma yin te | de lta bu 'i ye shes mchog de nyid las gzhan du mi 'gyur ba'i phyir zhes gsung ngo |

buddha nature, which is not empty of its respective own nature on the level of ultimate truth is [explained] as *gzhan stong* in the sense of being empty of other, relative phenomena. The Mādhyamikas maintaining *gzhan stong* are taken [to belong to] Great Madhyamaka, while those maintaining *rang stong* are taken as being poisonous. Such an explanation is a deprecation of the Jina's Prajñāpāramitāsūtras.<sup>66)</sup>

In this respect it should be noted that in his *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, Mi bskyod rdo rje takes issue with Dharmakīrti's presentation of the two truths (and thus the latter's Sautrāntika/Yogācāra ontology of particulars):

As for myself, I profess to emulate the great master Candrakīrti and the way he corresponded to the world. How do you propound [this view]? Regarding phenomena which are what is to be known, when they are in accordance with what is accepted in the world, there is no more than the two truths. This is because as for phenomena, other than the two true and false are not possible. Moreover it is said that from the time of the perfect Buddha until Nāgārjuna, i.e., in a time where most people were mature individuals, these fortunate beings, comprehended the nature of the two truths just through the presentation of the two truths. Nowadays the people lack the capacities of faith, insight and

65) For *gzhan mchog*.

66) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i kar ũka*, 634, 16-20: *yang jo nang pa ni kun rdzob bden par rang rang ngo bos stong pas rang stong dang | don dam bden par rang rang ngo bos mi stong pa'i gzhan mchog gi shes pa bder gshegs snying po rtag dngos de kun rdzob pa'i chos gzhan gyis stong pa gzhan stong du bshad nas | gzhan stong smra ba'i dbu ma pa ni dbu pa chen po dang | rang stong smra ba'i dbu ma pa ni dbu ma'i bstan pa dug can du byed pa'o zhes zer ro || 'di ltar 'chad pa ni rgyal ba'i yum don la skur pa btap pa yin te |*

effort; even masters of great intellect such as Dharmakīrti are mentally obscured regarding the nature of the two truths, so what to say about other obscured people?<sup>67)</sup>

Just as in his commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātāra*, Mi bskyod rdo rje excludes in this passage a Yogācāra-based *gZhan stong*, unless the distinction between the imagined nature as non-existent and the dependent nature as existent is not maintained anymore.<sup>68)</sup> It is interesting that Tāranātha (1575-1634) follows this strategy in his *gZhan stong snying po*, but only after having established the Yogācāra distinction between the imagined and dependent on the level of relative truth.<sup>69)</sup> This then is the difference between the above-quoted *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* passage and the *gZhan stong snying po*.

The most striking difference to the Jo nang pas is, however, that in the final analysis, for Mi bskyod rdo rje, the two truths are in indivisible unity (*zung 'jug*) throughout beginningless time. This comes out very clearly from the following passage from Mi bskyod rdo rje's *dGongs gcig* commentary:

67) *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol.1, 68, 10-19: *kho bos ni slob dpon chen po zla ba grags pas 'jig rten gyi ngor rjes brjod mdzad pa de la lad mo ltar 'don pa yin no | de ji ltar 'dod na shes bar bya rgyu 'i chos la 'jig rten grags pa dang bstun na bden pa gnyis las med de | chos la bden rdzun gnyis las mi srid pa 'i phyir | de yang yang dag par rdzogs pa 'i sangs rgyas nas slob dpon klu sgrub yan cad du gang zag smin pa shas che ba 'i dus su skal ldan rnam la bden pa gnyis byas pa tsam gyis bden gnyis kyi tshul khong du chub skad | deng sang gang zag dad pa dang shes rab dang brtson 'grus kyi dbang po nyams pas bden gnis kyi tshul la slob dpon rtog ge pa chen po chos kyi grags pa lta bu 'ang blo gros rmongs na rmongs pa gZhan rnam lta ci smos te |* I thank Dr. Martina Draszczyk for this reference.

68) As in Candrakīrti's auto commentary on *Madhyamakāvātāra* VI.97.

69) See Mathes 2000, 219-20.



Relative truth (*dharmīn*) and ultimate truth (*dharmatā*) are united into an inseparable pair. It is not that first (when not actualized by the insight of seeing reality) they were separate, and later (when they are actualized by this insight) the two are mixed and united into a pair. It is rather that they have been inseparably united throughout beginningless time. This is for the following reason: When the hindrances of a confused mind, which clings to the [two truths] as separate, are cleared away, and [what appears as] separate is realized as non-dual, it is established that [their] unity is actualized in this [realization].<sup>70)</sup>

## Conclusion

What I suggest in conclusion is, that in his young years Mi bskyod rdo rje may have been influenced by his *gzhan stong* teacher Chos grub seng ge, but as we have seen above, the way he presents *gzhan stong* in his *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentary differs from the Jo nang pas in that the basis of negation is not clearly restricted to a transcendent ultimate. In fact, Mi bskyod rdo rje's presentation of buddha nature is similar to the one of Rang byung rdo rje—with the exception that Rang byung rdo rje does not take the buddha qualities of the *dharmatā* as not being empty of an own

70) Mi bskyod rdo rje: *dGongs gcig chos 'khor dang rten 'brel gyi tshoms kyi kar fi ka*, 312, 17-22: *chos can kun rdzob bden pa dang chos nyid don dam bden pa dbyer mi phyed pa 'i zung du 'jug te sngar de nyid mthong ba 'i shes rab kyis mngon du ma byas pa 'i tshe so sor yod la physis des de mngon du byas pa na de gnyis 'dres nas zung 'jug tu gyur pa ni ma yin te | gdod nas zung du 'jug pa dbyer med pa gnas pa de la so so bar 'dzin pa 'i blo 'khrul pas bsgribs pa 'i sgrib pa sangs shing so so ba gnyis su med par rtogs pa na der zung 'jug mngon du byas so zhes rnam par bzhag pa 'i phyir te |*

nature. For both Karma pas, sentient beings do not really possess the naturally pure buddha nature. This idea can be traced back to *Mahāyānasamgraha* I.45-48, a passage that draws a clear-cut border line between the impure mind, or adventitious stains (to use the terminology from the *Ratnagotravibhāga*), and the pure mind (i.e., buddha nature). It is the latter, not sentient beings, which alone possesses the buddha qualities. This position could be also identified in the *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, where Mi bskyod rdo rje uses the example of milk poured into water to illustrate the Buddha's activity within sentient beings. The same metaphor (milk for the pure mind, and water for sentient beings) is also found in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*.

In his *Madhyamakāvātāra* commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje turns against *gzhan stong*, though, and it can be ruled out that he does so only when commenting on Candrakīrti's main Madhyamaka work, for in his *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, Mi bskyod rdo rje clearly endorses Candrakīrti's *Madhyamaka* approach of merely accepting on a relative level what is established in the world (at the expense of Dharmakīrti's Yogācāra ontology). This still allows for the *gzhan stong* of the *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgros 'bum*, in which even *dharmatā* is taken to be empty of an own nature. Such a moderate *gzhan stong* can be easily brought in line with Mi bskyod rdo rje's final Madhyamaka position that the two truths are inseparably united (*zung 'jug*), for this unity does not include the impure relative of the adventitious stains, but only a restricted version of "pure relative truth." Moreover, the initial *gzhan stong* distinction between buddha nature and its adventitious stains is only a necessary propaedeutic for the beginner, and becomes obsolete in Mi bskyod rdo rje's final Madhyamaka ontology.

## 약호 및 참고문헌

### Abbreviation

MAVṬ: *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*

Ed. by S. Yamaguchi. Nagoya: Librairie Hajinkaku, 1934.

See also NGMPP reel no. A 38/10.

RGV: *Ratnagoṭravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*

Ed. by Edward H. Johnston. Patna: The Bihar Research Society,

1950. (Includes the *Ratnagoṭravibhāgavyākhyā*)

RGVV: *Ratnagoṭravibhāgavyākhyā*

— See RGV.

[The manuscripts A and B on which Johnston's edition is based are described in Johnston 1950:vi-vii. See also Bandurski et al. 1994:12-3.]

For an edition of the Tibetan translations of the Tanjur see Nakamura, Zuiho 1967

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Glegs bam bzhi pa. Kathmandu: Karma Lekshay Ling Institute, 2012

- *rGan po'i rlung sman*: “rJe yid bzang rtse ba’i rgyud gsum gsang ba dang paṅ chen shākya mchog ldan gyi bde mchog rnam bshad gnyis kyi mthar thug gi ’bras bu gzhi dus kyi gnas lugs | lam dus kyi rnal ’byor rnams la dpyad pa bdud rtsi’i dri mchog zhes bya ba bzhugs so.” *dPal rgyal ba karma pa sku phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje’i gsung ’bum*, vol. ba, 975-1024. Lhasa: dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib ’jug khang, 2003.
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“Dris lan yid kyi mun sel zhes bya ba lcags mo’i dris lan bzhugs.”  
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Abstract

## **The Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554) on the Relation between Buddha Nature and its Adventitious Stains**

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Among the positions within the post-classical Tibetan *tathāgatagarbha* debates, the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje's pointedly stands out by reason of his categorical denial that the mind-stream of sentient beings contains a buddha nature, not even one in the sense of subtle seeds of buddha qualities. The entire repertoire of one's psycho-physical aggregates consists of nothing but adventitious stains. What is covered up by them is an all-pervading but ontologically separate buddha. Consequently the 'profane' and 'sacred' also have different foundations, the 'all-ground consciousness' (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) and 'all-ground wisdom' (*kun gzhi ye shes*), two categories that are typical of the Jonangpas. In the introduction to his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Mi bskyod rdo rje also criticizes the popular interpre-

tation of the Mahāmudrā teaching that thoughts appear as the *dharmakāya* and excludes the possibility that the two are one in essence.

In the present paper I will seek to further our understanding of Mi bskyod rdo rje's position on buddha nature by looking at how he describes it in relation to adventitious stains in comparison to 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481) and Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1361). The main focus will be his commentaries on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* (introduction), the *Abhisamayālamkāra* (introduction), the *sKu gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, the *Phyag rgya chen po'i sgros 'bum* and Mi bskyod rdo rje's independent work on *gzhan stong*, the *dBu ma gzhan stong smra ba'i srol legs par phyed ba'i sgron me*. Of particular interest will be also Mi bskyod rdo rje's review of 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal's Kālacakra commentary *rGyud gsum gsang ba*, on the basis of which Mi bskyod rdo rje's denial of a buddha nature in the sense of an individual nature of mind that differs from a Buddha is most forcefully made.

**Keywords** : post-classical Tibetan *tathāgatagarbha* debates, buddha nature, *gzhan stong*, Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal, Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan

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