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The rÑiñ-ma Interpretations of the Tathāgatagarbha Theory*

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The theory of “Buddha Nature” or *tathāgatagarbha* (henceforth TG)¹ formed an important school of thought in Mahāyāna Buddhism and continues to enjoy popularity in some circles even today, although it has been dismissed by some scholars as non-Buddhist.² It has drawn the attention of several scholars. On the Tibetan front, David Seyfort Ruegg has through a series of publications greatly contributed to the understanding of the TG theory, particularly that of the dGe-lugs-pa tradition. A number of studies devoted to the TG theory from the perspective of the exponents of the *gžan stoñ* (“extrinsic emptiness”)³

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¹ See Michael Zimmermann’s recent study of the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra, the earliest exposition on Buddha Nature in India, where he presents a detailed discussion of the term *tathāgatagarbha* (Zimmermann 2002: 39-50). Note that I use Tathāgatagarbhasūtra as a proper noun referring to this particular *sūtra* and TG *sūtra* as a common noun referring to a *sūtra* which deals primarily with the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine.

² Some modern Japanese scholars have openly dismissed the TG theory as non-Buddhist, an issue which lies outside my present topic. For some details, see Zimmermann 2002: 82-84.

³ A tradition may for polemical reasons label a rival tradition as a proponent of *gžan stoñ* (“extrinsic emptiness”) or *rañ stoñ* (“intrinsic emptiness”). However, as suggested in Kapstein 2000: 121, it would be, from a methodological point of view, sensible to refrain from using labels such as *gžan stoñ* and *rañ stoñ* unless a

theory have also appeared in recent years.⁴ However, much remains to be explored in the works of various Tibetan authors of different traditions and periods.

given tradition prefers to use one of these terms to describe its own conception of emptiness. Furthermore, since we tend to be too generous with the use of the terms *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ*, I would like to make clear from the very outset how rÑiñ-ma scholars understand these terms. For them, a given “x” (no matter what) is said to be *rañ stoñ* if it cannot withstand (*bzod pa*) the logical analysis of Madhyamaka reasoning. A given “x” that can withstand such a scrutiny, which is for them an impossibility, would imply its “true or hypostatic existence” (*bden par grub pa*). Please note that my translation of the technical term *bden par grub pa* or *bden grub* is based on Seyfort Ruegg 1989: 37 where it is explained as “a permanent substantial entity established ‘in truth’, i.e., hypostatically (*bden par grub pa*).” See also Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 320 and Seyfort Ruegg 2002: 296, Indices, s.v. *bden grub*. Hence, if the logical analysis of Madhyamaka reasoning is applied, for example, on a cow or TG, neither of them will be able to withstand the force of logical analysis. A single case of “hypostatic existence” would be sufficient to cause the collapse of the entire Madhyamaka system. Thus, from the perspective of such a scrutiny, a given “x” is always *rañ stoñ*. Further, if a given “x” is empty of a numerically different given “y,” then “x” is said to be *gžan stoñ*. In this sense, a given “x” is always empty of “y” and hence always *gžan stoñ*. For example, a cow is always empty of a bull and so is TG empty of adventitious impure phenomena of *samsāra*. Thus, from this viewpoint, a given “x” can be both *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ*. On the other hand, for Dol-po-pa Śes-rab-rgyal-mtshan (1292-1361), the initiator of the *gžan stoñ* theory, whether or not “x” is *rañ stoñ* or *gžan stoñ* would depend on whether “x” is a conventional phenomenon or absolute reality. If “x” is a conventional phenomenon, it is *rañ stoñ*, and if it is absolute reality, it is *gžan stoñ*. Hence, Dol-po-pa uses the expressions *kun rdzob rañ stoñ* or *kun rdzob stoñ ñid* and *don dam gžan stoñ* or *don dam stoñ ñid* (Ri chos, p. 305.8) and states that the banal (*tha śal*) emptiness (i.e., *itaretaraśūnyatā*) belittled in the Lañkāvatārasūtra is neither of the two (*ibid.*, p. 154.15-155.15). In principle, Dol-po-pa could have described this *itaretaraśūnyatā* (“emptiness of reciprocity”) as *kun rdzob gžan stoñ* in opposition to what he called *kun rdzob rañ stoñ* and *don dam gžan stoñ* but has apparently, for strategic reasons, refrained from doing so. Designating *itaretaraśūnyatā* as *kun rdzob gžan stoñ* would have been self-defeating because then he would have been forced to concede that there is at least one kind of *gžan stoñ* which is unacceptable even by his own standard. Thus, he could consolidate his *gžan stoñ* theory by insisting that only the absolute can be *gžan stoñ* and only *gžan stoñ* can be absolute (*ibid.*, p. 308.12-15).

⁴ See, e.g., Seyfort Ruegg 1963; Broide 1989; Hookham 1991 and 1992; Stearns 1999; Mathes 1998, 2000 and 2002. Note, however, that one may have to be careful not to anachronistically presuppose that one homogenous *gžan stoñ* theory existed at every place and time in Tibet (e.g., see the Si tu’i rañ rnam, p. 266.7-267.2; Smith 2001: 265). In fact, the comparing and contrasting of the various *gžan stoñ* interpretations would shed important light on the history of the concept and might

One important Tibetan interpretation of TG that has been ignored so far is that of the rÑiñ-ma school. The little attention it has received is in the context of studies pertaining to the Tibetan Madhyamaka and rDzogs-chen doctrines.⁵ Can one, however, speak of a single rÑiñ-ma interpretation of TG without the risk of oversimplification? Admittedly, not all rÑiñ-ma scholars interpreted TG in the same way. They may differ in their erudition, style of interpretation and emphasis according to the particular time and place in which they lived. Even one and the same scholar may interpret it differently in different works, or even in different passages of the same work. Nevertheless, despite the differences in details within the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, each of them, including the rÑiñ-ma school, has, in my opinion, its own few archetypical intellectual figures who shape, lead and represent their respective traditions, and whose positions agree at least in substance if not always in every detail. And thus later rÑiñ-ma-pas consider Roñ-zom-pa (eleventh century), Kloñ-chen-pa (1308-1363) and Mi-pham (1846-1912) as their three archetypical intellectual models, and their interpretations of a given doctrine as the “official” rÑiñ-ma position.⁶

Before examining their views, I would like to briefly discuss how some of the leading rÑiñ-ma scholars – whose interpretations of the TG

contribute to a better understanding of the evolution, continuation and reception of such concepts.

⁵ Kloñ-chen-pa’s discussion of TG occurring in the seventh chapter of his Tshig don mdzod is assessed in Germano 1992: 77-82. John Pettit published a translation of Mi-pham’s *Ñes śes sgron me* and its commentary by ‘Khro-chu ‘Jam-dpal-rdo-rje (Pettit 1999a) and also included a translation of Mi-pham’s *g’Zan stoñ señ ge’i ña ro*, p. 359-378.4. See “The Lion’s Roar Proclaiming Extrinsic Emptiness,” in Pettit 1999a: 415-427. The recent doctoral dissertation by Karma Phuntsho also discusses Mi-pham’s stance on the TG theory (Phuntsho 2003).

⁶ One might ask just how authoritative and representative Roñ-zom-pa, Kloñ-chen-pa and Mi-pham were and are for the rÑiñ-ma school. Mi-pham himself considered Roñ-zom-pa and Kloñ-chen-pa as the most authoritative interpreters of the rÑiñ-ma doctrine and he saw himself as the follower of the two. See the *Dam chos dogs sel*, p. 378.5-379.2, the *dBu ma rgyan ’grel*, p. 42.5, the *Ñes śes sgron me*, p. 121.1-2. See also the colophon to his *Roñ zom bla rnal*, p. 61.6: *mtshuñs med ma hā pañḍi ta chen po’i rjes su ’jug par khas ’che ba mi pham rnam par rgyal bas zla tshe bzañ po la bris pa dge’o* ||. The fact that Mi-pham is responsible for the latest systematisation of the rÑiñ-ma doctrine and that he did so primarily by relying on Roñ-zom-pa and Kloñ-chen-pa, is, in my view, sufficient for considering the three as representative and authoritative, as they are indeed perceived by the rÑiñ-ma tradition today. See also Smith 2001: 16.

doctrine are considered authoritative for the rÑiñ-ma school – are portrayed in some secondary literature. Of the major rÑiñ-ma scholars, Roñ-zom-pa has been presented as clearly preferring Yogācāra–Madhyamaka by Georges Dreyfus,⁷ apparently following John Pettit who merely states that Roñ-zom-pa in his Grub mtha'i brjed byañ suggests that the Yogācāra–Madhyamaka is “more important” (*don che ba*).⁸ What the closing phrase of the pertinent statement by Roñ-zom-pa actually says is: “The treatise [or position] of Yogācāra–Madhyamaka appears (*snañ*) to be more significant.”⁹ The statement gives Roñ-zom-pa's personal opinion about the then prevalent two Madhyamaka systems (i.e., Sautrāntika–Madhyamaka and Yogācāra–Madhyamaka) and not his doctrinal affiliation.¹⁰ Kloñ-chen-pa and Mi-pham have been portrayed as exponents of the *gzan stoñ* theory. For example, according to Samten Karmay, Kloñ-chen-pa's stance on the TG theory is identical to that of Dol-po-pa's.¹¹ Similarly, David Germano (apparently following S.K. Hookham) describes Kloñ-chen-pa's comments regarding the doctrine of emptiness and TG as “fairly typical” of the *gzan stoñ* concepts in Tibet.¹² These scholars' impressions are not altogether unjustified because Kloñ-chen-pa's evaluation of TG *prima facie* looks so

⁷ See Dreyfus 2003: 331.

⁸ Pettit 1999a: 90-91, 485, n. 315.

⁹ lTa ba'i brjed byañ, p. 11.11-14: *dbu ma rnam gñis kun rdzob kyi tshul mi mthun pa la | luñ dañ rigs pa gañ che ba ni rgyud dañ mdo sde spyi'i gzuñ dañ | rigs pa spyi'i tshul dañ | dbu ma'i mkhan po gzuñ phyi mo mdzad pa'i slob dpon klu sgrub dañ | ārya de ba'i gzuñ ltar na yañ | rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma'i gzuñ don che bar snañ ño ||.*

¹⁰ If one wishes to speak about Roñ-zom-pa's doctrinal affiliation, then one can safely state that he was, in the first place, affiliated with rDzogs-chen doctrines, and that his method of establishing emptiness is closer to that of the Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka than to any other Buddhist system, regardless of whether or how much access he had to Prāsaṅgika texts. This becomes particularly evident in his Theg chen tshul 'jug and was also the impression of some traditional Tibetan scholars such as Mi-pham (see, for example, the Ñes śes sgron me, p. 75.3-4, the dBu ma rgyan 'grel, p. 309.6-310.1 and the Dam chos dogs sel, p. 378.6) and Blo-bzañ-mdo-sñags Chos-kyi-rgya-mtsho (1903-1957), a dGe-lugs-cum-rÑiñ-ma scholar from Khams, who even went on to prove that Roñ-zom-pa's view is a Prāsaṅgika view (see the lTa ba'i dris lan, p. 70-71). Whether the Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka view was in some form present during the early propagation of Buddhism in Tibet may depend, among other things, on whether Śāntideva was indeed a Prāsaṅgika–Mādhyamika as the Tibetan tradition has perceived him to be.

¹¹ See Karmay 1988: 184-185; cf. Kapstein 1992: 23, n. 1.

¹² See Germano 1992: 78. See also Hookham 1991: 136, 150.

positive that one might assume it to be identical with that of Dol-po-pa's. Even amongst the traditional Tibetan scholars there were figures like Koñ-sprul who preferred to place Kloñ-chen-pa and Karma-pa Rañ-byuñ-rdo-rje (1284-1339) in the group of *gžan stoñ* exponents.¹³ This doctrinal agenda is still continued by living Tibetan exponents of the *gžan stoñ* doctrine. A few modern scholars have designated Mi-pham as an exponent of the *gžan stoñ* theory as well. However, a closer look reveals that in most cases, it is the terminology that has led to this determination; that is, the term *gžan stoñ* has not necessarily been used by these scholars in a strict technical sense. One author who seems to consciously seek to prove Mi-pham a *gžan stoñ* exponent is Paul Williams.¹⁴ Leading rÑiñ-ma teachers of more recent times have also been

¹³ Śes bya rgya mtsho, p. 567.8-10; Smith 2001: 338, n. 888.

¹⁴ See Williams 1998 (particularly, p. 199-216). For reviews of Williams 1998, see Kapstein 2000, Tatz 2001: 78-79. A few words should be said here regarding Paul Williams' study of "auto-perception" (*rañ rig: svasaṃvedana/svasaṃvitti*) and his attempt to connect it with the controversial issue of *gžan stoñ*. To agree with Mi-pham's understanding or interpretation of "auto-perception" is one thing and to understand his position accurately is yet another matter. In my view, Williams seems to have missed the point regarding the controversial issue of "auto-perception," particularly in regard to Mi-pham's stance on this issue. If he had studied Mi-pham's interpretation of "means of valid cognition" (*pramāṇa*), he would have seen why the theory of "auto-perception" was crucial for Mi-pham. According to him, the whole theoretical structure of perception and inference developed by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti would collapse without the theory of "auto-perception." Mi-pham insists that as long as one accepts conventional valid cognition (*tha sñad tshad ma*), one must accept "auto-perception," at least on the conventional level, just as one accepts "perception of others" (*gžan rig*). Thus, without a clear concept of Mi-pham's background and his view on *pramāṇa*, any study of Mi-pham's view on "auto-perception" is destined to be less than successful. A proper assessment of Mi-pham's understanding of Madhyamaka would have revealed that for Mi-pham, there is no phenomenon that can withstand (*bzod*) the Madhyamaka logical analysis, and this includes "auto-perception." The Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas (such as Candrakīrti and Śāntideva) do refute the Yogācāra notion of "auto-perception" but, for Mi-pham, this is done so in the context of establishing absolute reality or "that which is free from manifoldness" (*niṣprapañca*). However, even Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas should, according to Mi-pham, have no problem in accepting "auto-perception" on the conventional level, just as they have no problem accepting "perception of others." For Mi-pham, anything that can be attested by means of conventional valid cognition is acceptable on the conventional level. If a thing is impossible even on the conventional level, then it should be something like a "permanent sound" (*sgra rtag pa*) or a "rabbit's horn" (*ri boñ gi rwa*). But, for him, neither is "auto-perception" like a "permanent sound" nor did Candrakīrti and Śāntideva consider it to be so. However, Tsoñ-kha-pa believed that Candrakīrti and

presented as proponents of the *gžan stoñ* theory. Cyrus Stearns' *The Buddha from Dolpo*, which greatly contributes to the understanding of Dol-po-pa's life and thoughts, tends to oversimplify the rÑiñ-ma explanation of the TG theory. For instance, Stearns, relying on verbal communication with sDe-gzung Rin-po-che (1906-1987), maintains that rÑiñ-ma teachers such as bDud-'joms Rin-po-che (1904-1987) and Dil-mgo mKhyen-brtse (1910-1991) were proponents of the *gžan stoñ* doctrine.¹⁵ I am not aware of any textual evidence that would suggest that these teachers were proponents of the *gžan stoñ* doctrine, at least not in Dol-po-pa's sense. Both bDud-'joms Rin-po-che and Dil-mgo mKhyen-brtse, in fact, speak about the oneness of emptiness and appearance or the compatibility of the Middle and Last Cycles of Buddha's teachings.¹⁶

Śāntideva held "auto-perception" to be impossible even on the conventional level. This is the point of departure of the actual issue and the controversy took place within the contextual framework of Pramāṇa and Madhyamaka, which were seen by Mi-pham as complementing and strengthening rather than as excluding or nullifying each other. Hence, bringing in rDzogs-chen and *gžan stoñ* issues in this context is unwarranted. If Williams had studied rDzogs-chen or the rÑiñ-ma interpretation of TG, he would have realised that for the rÑiñ-ma-pas (including Mi-pham), there is a strict distinction between mind (*sems*) and gnosis (*ye śes*). The expression *so sor ran gis rig par bya ba* (*pratyātmavedanīya*) which actually means "accessible to personal experience only" or "to be known directly and introspectively," an idea also acceptable to Candrakīrti or Śāntideva, has also been taken out of context by Williams. Unless we understand the methods of interpretation systematized by Mi-pham, we will never fully comprehend the way he conceives Pramāṇa, Madhyamaka, TG and rDzogs-chen or his conception of their intricate relationship with one another. And unless we have a clear picture of how Mi-pham understood *ran rig* in these systems, we shall only have a fragmentary and distorted idea of Mi-pham's stance on *ran rig*.

¹⁵ See Stearns 1999: 215, n. 137-138.

¹⁶ bDud-'joms Rin-po-che explicitly states: "Thus, by clinging to and postulating one of the positions of appearance and emptiness, one would not be able to avert the erroneous (lit. "bad") views that hold on to the extremes. Therefore, it is necessary to properly establish the sphere of reality (*dharmadhātu*), the union of appearance and emptiness [or] the ultimate [and] actual absolute truth, as the equality of [saṃsāric] existence and [nirvānic] calmness" (bsTan pa'i rnam gžag, fol. 109b2-4: *des na snañ stoñ gañ ruñ re'i phyogs su žen ciñ bzuñ bas ni mthar 'dzin gyi lta ba ñan pa bzlog mi nus pas | chos dbyñs snañ stoñ zuñ 'jug mthar thug rnam grañs ma yin pa'i don dam srid źi mñam ñid du legs par gtan la 'bebs dgos śiñ* |). Dil-mgo mKhyen-brtse likewise considers the Middle and Last Cycles as complementary, for he explains absolute reality as "the ultimate of what is to be established in a way that the purports of the Middle and the Last Promulgations become

One notices a general tendency among modern scholars to associate, in addition to the above-mentioned rÑiñ-ma teachers, rÑiñ-ma doctrines with *gžan stoñ* teachings.¹⁷ These scholars can be grouped into three: (a) those who are obviously predisposed to the *gžan stoñ* theory, (b) those who are opposed to the *gžan stoñ* doctrine and (c) those who are too generous with the use of the term *gžan stoñ*.¹⁸ One of the reasons why the rÑiñ-ma position on TG has remained somewhat elusive appears to

entwined as one and is the finale of the ocean-like systems of *sūtra* and *tantra*” (bDud rtsi'i snañ ba, fol. 71a6: 'khor lo bar mtha' dgoñs pa gcig dril gyis gan la dbab bya mthar thug pa mdo snags grub mtha' rgya mtsho'i skyel so yin la). See also the Zil gnon dgoñs gsal (fol. 178a6-b2) where Dil-mgo mKhyen-brtse speaks about the union (*zuñ 'jug*) of the “primordial purity” (*ka dag*), which is equated with “freedom from the eight extremes of manifoldness” (*spros pa'i mtha' brgyad las 'das pa*), and the “immanently present” (*thun grub*) Buddha bodies (*sku*) and gnosis (*ye śes*) constituting the TG, and his 'Jam dpal dgoñs rgyan (fol. 239a2-b5), where TG (among several other terms) is indicated as a synonym of the emptiness of the Middle Promulgation. See also his rDo rje mdud grol (fol. 136a5-b4 & 150a3-4) where he explains the view of Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka in the same way Mi-pham does.

¹⁷ According to Karmay, who relied on the Italian edition (1973) of *The Religions of Tibet*, Tucci maintains that the doctrines of rDzogs-chen and of the Jonañ-pas were developed from the Hva-śaṅ's doctrine of TG (see Karmay 1988: 87). This claim, however, does not appear in the later English translation of the book. S.K. Hookham describes rDzogs-chen as typically *gžan stoñ*-type teachings and claims that giving it a *rañ stoñ* gloss is the attempt of the present Dalai Lama “to abate the long standing hostility” towards rDzogs-chen and to protect it “from the ravages of the ‘exclusive Rangtongpa’” (Hookham 1991: 16; see also Hookham 1992: 151-152, n. 4). For reviews of Hookham 1991, see Ehrhard 1993 and Griffiths 1993. See also Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 87.

¹⁸ See, for example, Smith 2001: 231, where it is stated that “Mi pham's open advocacy of the Gzhan stong was another red cape, and the bulls were not slow to charge,” and *ibid.*, p. 327, n. 788 where both the sToñ thun señ ge'i ña ro (p. 563-606.5) and the gŽan stoñ señ ge'i ña ro (p. 359-378.4) are said to be works on the *gžan stoñ* theory. It is of course true that Mi-pham wrote on the *gžan stoñ* theory and even defended it and can be thus called a “*gžan stoñ* sympathiser.” He, however, did not consider himself a *gžan stoñ pa* (Dam chos dogs sel, p. 378.5-379.1: ñams mtshar tsam du bris pa yin na yañ || rañ bzos bde gšegs dam chos bsad mi ruñ || 'chal ñag soñ na rgyal ba rñams la bšags || rañ bzos bšad na ci yañ zad mtha' med || bdag la gžan stoñ sgrub pa'i khur kyañ med || roñ kloñ rnam gñis klu sgrub gzuñ dañ mthun || dman pa bdag kyañ rtse gcig der 'dun kyañ || ma bris dbañ med pha rol tshig gis bskul ||). Surprisingly, although the Ñes śes sgron me is the *locus classicus* for the rÑiñ-ma position regarding the issue of *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ*, John Pettit, in his study of this work, seems to be uncertain about Mi-pham's position (Pettit 1999a: 114-124). However, cf. Pettit 1999b.

be the complexity of the matter itself which forbids a simplistic expression of it in terms of *rañ stoñ* or *gʒan stoñ*. In the following passages, I shall present (a) the early Tibetan background of the TG theory, (b) a brief historical sketch and (c) a general profile of the rÑiñ-ma interpretation of the TG doctrine, and (d) finally my assessment of the rÑiñ-ma stance on the TG theory in India and Tibet,¹⁹ and thereby demonstrate how complex and distinctive the rÑiñ-ma interpretation of TG actually is. Nonetheless, although I shall strive to describe their interpretation accurately, some of my observations will remain tentative. It is, however, not my intention to discuss here whether the rÑiñ-ma interpretation is in keeping with the TG theory as originally conceived in India.

2. EARLY TIBETAN BACKGROUND OF THE TG THEORY

Although some of the important Indian sources, particularly treatises (*śāstra*) such as the Ratnagotravibhāga (or Uttaratantra), were translated only in the eleventh century during the early gSar-ma era, the *sūtras* dealing with the TG doctrine were translated during the first period of translation.²⁰ The TG doctrine was thus known to Tibetans from the early stages of the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet. Furthermore, the term TG or its semantic equivalent **sugatagarbha*²¹ can

¹⁹ Given the space limitations for this article, I have refrained from translating all my citations. Also note that I have not aimed at being exhaustive as regards the indication of primary and secondary sources.

²⁰ See Seyfort Ruegg 1973: 23-26, where the titles of Indian sources on the TG doctrine are listed, almost all of which are recorded in the IDan dkar ma catalogue.

²¹ The term **sugatagarbha* is said not to be attested in Sanskrit (Seyfort Ruegg 1973: 6, n. 2; Karmay 1988: 184, n. 47). However, the term *bde gśegs sñiñ po* does occur in the Tibetan translations of the Aṅgulimāliyasūtra (P fol. 174a5; D fol. 166b2: *bde gśegs sñiñ po theg pa che las skyes* ||) and Ghanavyūhasūtra (P fol. 62b1; D fol. 55b1: *bde gśegs sñiñ po dge ba'an de* ||; cf., however, Taishō 747a7) for which the Sanskrit is not extant. (I thank Kazuo Kano for these references.) This may represent a “correction” that was made in the course of the text’s transmission. Given that the terms *bde bar gśegs pa* and *de bʒiñ gśegs pa* are susceptible to confusion, particularly when they are contracted to *bde gśegs* and *de gśegs*, respectively, it is easy to imagine that the latter might have been corrected to the former in these texts. On the other hand, it is also possible that *sugata* was indeed in the original reading, used *metri causa* for *tathāgata*, because the Chinese translation of the Aṅgulimāliyasūtra (Taishō 531a7) presents the character for Buddha (i.e., *fo*) instead of the usual characters for *tathāgata* (i.e., *jou lai*).

be found in several rÑiñ-ma *tantras* belonging to the Mahāyoga,²² the Anuyoga²³ and the Atiyoga²⁴ classes, although the number of occurrences is relatively small. It also appears in some of the earliest indigenous Tibetan works such as the lTa ba'i khyad par by Ye-śes-sde,²⁵ the Thabs śes sgron ma by dPal-dbyaṅs²⁶ and the bSam gtan mig sgron by gNubs-chen Saṅs-rgyas-ye-śes.²⁷ Yet even though the TG theory has certainly been present from early times in the rÑiñ-ma literature, it seems to have played quite an insignificant role and never gained prominence or an independent status, in the way it was conceived, for instance, in the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra. Rather, the rÑiñ-ma-pas incorporated it into the system of Madhyamaka, which was portrayed as the predominant system in Tibet already during the imperial period, for

²² For examples, see the *Guhyagarbha, p. 159.1; 348.4: *e ma'o bde gśeḡs sñiñ po las || rañ gi rnam rtog las kyis sprul ||*. See also the Glañ chen rab 'bog, p. 257.4-5; 260.1-6; 283.7-284.5.

²³ The Kun 'dus which belongs to the Anuyoga class also mentions the term **sugatagarbha* (p. 31.1-2): *skye med ye śes ñid kyi dbyiṅs || gdod nas bder gśeḡs sñiñ po las || rnam rtog glo bur las kyis bsgribs || de ñid 'gro mgon skyabs chen yin ||*. See also *ibid.*, p. 146.1-2.

²⁴ The term TG or **sugatagarbha* also occurs in Atiyoga or rDzogs-chen *tantras* such as the rDor sems me loñ (p. 207.1-2) which states: *'jig rten gyi khams kyi sems can thams cad la | de bzin gśeḡs pa'i sñiñ po rañ chas su til 'bru la mar gyis khyab pa bzin du gnas so ||*. See also the Srog gi 'khor lo, p. 599.2-3 (also cited in the bSam gtan mig sgron, p. 292); bDe ba'i myu gu, p. 630.6-7; Ye śes gsañ rgyud, p. 760.2.

²⁵ lTa ba'i khyad par (P fol. 258a7-b3; D fol. 218b4-7): *'phags pa [= 'phags P] duñ phreñ gi mdo las kyañ | de bzin gśeḡs pa'i sñiñ po gsal bar ma gyur pa'i [= ba'i P] tshe ni kun gzi zes bya'o || gsal bar [= par P] gyur pa de'i tshe ni chos sku zes bya ba gsuñs so || ... don bsdus pa zes bya'i bstan bcos las kyañ chos sku zes bya ba la | chos ni thog ma med pa nas rigs su gyur pa de bzin gśeḡs pa'i sñiñ po la bya ste | sems can thams cad kyi rañ bzin no || de ni yañ dag pa ma yin pas bsgribs pas dri ma can du gyur te | gañ gi tshe sbyor ba sñon du btañ nas 'khrul pa dañ bral ba de'i tshe rañ bzin du 'gyur ro || rañ bzin du gyur pa de ni chos kyi sku zes bśad do ||*.

²⁶ Thabs śes sgron ma (P fol. 286b8-287a1; D fol. 385a1): *bde gśeḡs sñiñ po sems kyi rañ bzin la || yun riñ dus nas rmoñs pa'i sems can rnams || bdag tu 'dzin pa'i sems rgyud so sor snañ || rañ bzin ñid ni rgyal ba'i chos skur geig ||*.

²⁷ See the bSam gtan mig sgron, p. 292. However, as already discussed in Karmay 1988: 184, the term *bde gśeḡs sñiñ po* occurs only within a citation from the Srog gi 'khor lo. It should be noted that the bSam gtan mig sgron (p. 137) also cites a passage from the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra, which, however, does not include the term TG. Note also that the term TG is recorded in the Mahāvyutpatti (no. 699), but only as the name of a Bodhisattva. However, the five kinds of spiritual disposition (*pañcagotra*), related to the TG theory, are recorded there (Mahāvyutpatti, no. 1261-1265).

example, in the report about the royal decree according to which only Nāgārjuna's view, propagated mainly by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, was to be followed.²⁸ Nevertheless, while the acceptance of the Madhyamaka notion of being "free of manifoldness" (*nisprapañca*) never waned in the rÑiñ-ma philosophical system, the TG theory gradually gained importance over the centuries and thus had an ever increasing impact on the thoughts of the school. The increase in popularity of the Ratnagotravibhāga must have contributed to this shift in the importance of the TG theory in the rÑiñ-ma tradition.

3. A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE TG THEORY IN THE RÑIÑ-MA SCHOOL

I shall attempt here to give a brief outline of rÑiñ-ma authors whose works may shed light on the way the TG teaching was perceived in each period of time in the rÑiñ-ma history. It is the allusions to the TG theory by Ye-śes-sde, dPal-dbyaṅs and gNubs-chen Saṅs-rgyas-ye-śes that give us some idea as to how it was received during the imperial period. The *Theg pa chen po rnal 'byor gyi tshul la 'jug pa* by A-ro Ye-śes-'byuñ-gnas (tenth century?), which is at present only available embedded in a recent commentary (written ca. 1934), does not mention the term TG. However, A-ro's view of emptiness or absolute truth seems to be similar, if not identical, to that of Roñ-zom-pa's. Noteworthy is his notion of the equality of *samsāra* and *nirvāna*²⁹ and the way he establishes "freedom from manifoldness" by negating all extremes,

²⁸ See the dBa' bzed, p. 88; the Ñaṅ ral chos 'byuñ, p. 407.1-3; Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 2-3, n. 2. Some Tun-huang materials (Tun hoñ śog dril, p. 200, Pelliot Tibétain 112.1) also state that Madhyamaka views are regarded to be of definitive meaning (*nītārtha*). It should be noted that the Madhyamaka system as such has, however, never been given hierarchic precedence over tantric systems or Atiyoga (or rDzogs-chen) in the rÑiñ-ma doxographical literature nor has rDzogs-chen been considered a substitute for the Indian Madhyamaka. It is interesting to note that dPal-maṅ dKon-mchog-rgyal-mtshan (1764-1853) stated that Padmasambhava "without doubt" maintained the view of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka (Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 22-23, n. 41). The *Man ṅag lta phreñ*, attributed to Padmasambhava, is designated a text of "Mantra-Madhyamaka" (*snags kyi dbu ma*) by Śākya-mchogldan (Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 55-56, n. 117). I have not been able, however, to find such a designation in the rÑiñ-ma literature.

²⁹ *Theg rnal 'grel pa*, p. 133.3-134.5; 156.3-159.2.

including even the “middle” position.³⁰ Roñ-zom-pa’s extant writings give us a glimpse of how the TG theory was perceived by a rÑiñ-ma scholar of the eleventh century. The writings of Ñaṅ-ral Ñi-ma-’od-zer (1136-1204) may be able to tell us how the idea of TG was perceived by himself or his contemporaries. His Chos ’byuñ, however, does not disclose much. It simply states that nine hundred years after the Buddha’s passing away (*parinirvāṇa*), Aśaṅga and his brother (i.e., Vasubandhu) came to interpret the teachings of the Last Cycle as having a definitive meaning.³¹ However, his notion of absolute and conventional truth revealed in a verse of obeisance indicates that his view was in tune with the Madhyamaka concept of “freedom from manifoldness.”³² The twelfth-century work *Theg pa spyi bcis* by Kaḥ-thog Dam-pa-bde-gśegs (1122-1192) does not mention the term TG, but uses terms such as “genuine [or] actual universal ground” (*rnal ma don gyi kun g’zi*), *Prajñāpāramitā*³³ and the “indivisibility of the [two] truths” (*bden pa dbyer med*) with no qualitative differentiation.³⁴ In the twelfth/thirteenth century, we have the doxographical work *bsTan pa’i sgron me*³⁵ by Rog Śes-rab-’od (1166-1244), in which the TG theory is brought in connection with the rDzogs-chen doctrine.³⁶ Rog clearly connects the Last Cycle of the Buddha’s teachings (usually those dealing with the TG doctrine) with Yogācāra doctrines and the Middle Cycle of Buddha’s teachings (dealing with the *Prajñāpāramitā*) with the teaching of “freedom from manifoldness.”³⁷ Further, mKhas-pa lDe’u, who postdates 1261, makes **sugatagarbha* an object of his reverence.³⁸ He also describes TG as “[characterised by] nonduality of clarity and emptiness” (*gsal ston gñis med*).³⁹

³⁰ *Theg rnal ’grel pa*, p. 135.1-140.4.

³¹ Ñaṅ ral chos ’byuñ, p. 87.3-5.

³² Ñaṅ ral chos ’byuñ, p. 1.9-10: *don dam spros bral mkha’ ltar dag pa la || kun rdzob rten ’byuñ tshogs snañ sgyu ma ltar ||*.

³³ *Theg pa spyi bcis*, p. 27.12.

³⁴ *Theg pa spyi bcis*, p. 29.4-7: *bden gñis dbyer med ces kyañ bya || byañ sems dbyer med ces kyañ bya || dbyer med lhun grub ces kyañ bya || zuñ ’jug chen po ces kyañ bya || mñam rdzogs chen po ces kyañ bya ||*.

³⁵ The *bsTan pa’i sgron me* is described in Martin 1997: 38, no. 40.

³⁶ *bsTan pa’i sgron me*, p. 226.6-227.6; Karmay 1988: 184, n. 49.

³⁷ *bsTan pa’i sgron me*, p. 18.3-19.1.

³⁸ lDe’u chos ’byuñ, p. 182.3-4. For a description of the lDe’u chos ’byuñ, see Martin 1997: 44, no. 55.

³⁹ lDe’u chos ’byuñ, p. 182.12-13: *sañs rgyas ’byuñ ba’i rañ gi sems bde bar gśegs pa’i sñiñ po can |*; p. 183.8-10: *bde gśegs sñiñ po skad pa | rañ gi sems sañs rgyas*

In the fourteenth century, Kloñ-chen-pa offered one of the most sophisticated interpretations of the TG theory in Tibet, and it has since served as the standard for the later rÑiñ-ma interpretations. Although he assessed TG quite positively, he did not deviate from the rDzogs-chen concept of emptiness beyond all extremes. Of the rÑiñ-ma scholars after Kloñ-chen-pa, some tended to lean more towards the Last Cycle of the Buddha's teachings (dealing with TG) whereas others attempted to balance the Middle and Last Cycles. However, to the best of my knowledge, no rÑiñ-ma scholar has ever considered only one of these two Cycles as purely definitive by dismissing the other as purely provisional. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rÑiñ-ma interpretations of TG can be found in the writings of scholars such as Lo-chen Dharma-śrī (1654-1717), particularly in his dPag bsam sñe ma (composed in 1708), Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu (1698-1755) and 'Jigs-med-gliñ-pa (1730-1798). The rÑiñ-ma understanding of TG in the nineteenth century is documented in the works of dPal-sprul Rin-po-che (1808-1887), rGyal-sras gZan-phan-mtha'-yas (b. 1800) and rDzogs-chen mKhan-po Padma-badzra (1806?-1884).⁴⁰

The interpretation of TG by Mi-pham is a landmark in the rÑiñ-ma history. Mi-pham's line of interpretation was continued by his direct and indirect disciples, notably, mKhan-po Kun-bzañ-dpal-ldan or Kundpal (1872-1943), Že-chen-rgyal-tshab 'Gyur-med Padma-rnam-rgyal (1871-1926), Kaḥ-thog mKhan-po Nus-ldan-mkhyen-btse'i-blo-gros,⁴¹ Bod-sprul mDo-sñags-bstan-pa'i-ñi-ma (1900/1907-1959) and Glag-bla bSod-nams-chos-'grub (1862-1944). The most recent rÑiñ-ma interpretations of TG can be found in writings such as the bsTan pa'i rnam gZag by bDud-'joms 'Jigs-bral-ye-śes-rdo-rje and in several works by Dil-mgo mKhyen-brtse.

4. THE CONTOUR OF THE RÑIÑ-MA INTERPRETATIONS OF TG DOCTRINE

There may be indeed anomalous interpretations of the TG theory within the rÑiñ-ma school that need to be studied closely. In this regard, the interpretation of TG doctrine by rÑiñ-ma scholars such as

su rtogs pa la bya'o || gsal stoñ gñis med dam | bde ba gsal ba mi rtogs [= rtog] pa gsum du śes pa de | bde bar gśegs pa'i sñiñ po'o ||

⁴⁰ The dates for mKhan-po Padma-badzra are in accord with those given in the rNam thar ñuñ ñu (p. 8.17-13.8) composed by dBañ-chen-dar-rgyas.

⁴¹ Kaḥ thog lo rgyus, p. 151.1-20; cf. Legs-bśad-'byor-ldan, *ibid.*, p. 149.19-150.21.

Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu (1698-1755) – who was responsible for revitalising the *gžan stoñ* doctrine⁴² and for converting Si-tu Chos-kyi-'byuñ-gnas (1699-1776)⁴³ into a *gžan stoñ* proponent – and Lo-chen Dharma-śrī (1654-1717) can be of particular interest. I have not been able to study Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu's stance on the issue.⁴⁴ As for Dharma-śrī's evaluation of TG, it is so positive that it might even seem to convey the impression that he was a *gžan stoñ* exponent.⁴⁵

In general, the understanding of emptiness (or “freedom from manifoldness”) seems to directly affect the way in which TG is understood. For example, I have come to see that even amongst rÑiñ-ma authors, those who understand the “freedom from manifoldness” of the Middle Cycle as the “indivisibility of the two truths” have a balanced approach towards the Last and Middle Cycles whereas those who understand the “emptiness” of the Middle Cycle as “mere emptiness” tend to tilt con-

⁴² See Smith 2001: 20-21.

⁴³ Si tu'i rañ rnam, p. 266.7-267.2; 'Das rjes rnam thar, p. 726.7-727.2; Smith 2001: 20, 90. However, compare Si-tu's bKa' 'gyur dkar chag (p. 68.8-75.2) where he discusses the issue of definitive and provisional meaning.

⁴⁴ Cf., however, Smith 2001: 265, where Koñ-sprul's view of *gžan stoñ* doctrine is contrasted with that of Kaḥ-thog Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu. Whether Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu's interpretation of TG theory is identical with that of Dol-po-pa is yet to be seen.

⁴⁵ However, unlike Dol-po-pa, Lo-chen Dharma-śrī considered the Middle Cycle to be of definitive meaning even though “a mixture of definitive and provisional meaning” or “of temporary definitive meaning” and the Last Cycle to be of definitive meaning (dPag bsam sñe ma, fol. 138a4-6: *bar tha gñis drañ ñes gañ yin la bžed pa mi mthun pa mañ yañ | bar pa ñes don dañ phyi ma drañ don du gsal bar ston pa'i mdo sde'i luñ med ciñ | nad pa'i sman dañ yi ge slob pa'i dpe'i dgoñs don dañ yañ 'gal bas | rañ lugs ni bar pa drañ ñes phyed ma'am gnas skabs pa'i ñes don dañ | tha ma ñid ñes don du 'dod de |*). Particularly noteworthy is his attempt to resolve the apparent tension between Kloñ-chen-pa's description of Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka as the pinnacle of the non-tantric systems on the one hand and his positive evaluation and emphasis of the TG doctrine of the Last Cycle on the other, by explaining them to be of two different cases, namely, (a) “the case of identifying by means of study, [the view that] has to be ascertained” (*thos pas gtan la dbab bya ños 'dzin pa'i skabs*) and (b) “the case of [actually] ascertaining [it] by means of practice [and] experience” (*sgom pa ñams myoñ gis gtan la 'bebs pa'i skabs*), respectively (dPag bsam sñe ma, fol. 184b2-185a2). Some later rÑiñ-ma scholars such as Bod-sprul who preferred Mi-pham's balanced approach were apparently certainly ill at ease with those rÑiñ-ma interpretations that came dangerously close (from the perspective of the *rañ stoñ* exponents) to that of Dol-po-pa's ('Jam dbyañs dgoñs rgyan, p. 93.4-7).

siderably towards the Last Cycle and thus appear to come precariously close to Dol-po-pa's interpretation. Hence, the prominence rÑiñ-ma scholars give to the Middle and Last Cycles seems to depend on how they understand emptiness. Mi-pham seems to be one of those scholars who made great effort to counterbalance the tendentially increasing weight given to the Last Cycle, by emphasising the "indivisibility of the two truths," which according to him is also accentuated by Prāsaṅgika–Mādhyamikas. One may say that in general the rÑiñ-ma-pas throughout their history seem to have had either a balanced approach to the Middle and Last Cycles or tended to tilt towards the Last Cycle, though hardly ever to the degree Dol-po-pa does. The weight was also seldom concentrated only on the Middle Cycle by a total removal of weight from the Last Cycle.

However, in spite of the increasing tendency to evaluate TG positively, the main-stream rÑiñ-ma-pas generally never went so far as to interpret it as a "hypostatic existence" (*bden par grub pa*). Their interpretation of the TG teaching has been consistent with the following ideas expressed in the Man ñag lta phreñ attributed to Padmasambhava, which probably presents a collection of extracts from various Mahāyāna scriptures:⁴⁶

- All phenomena are intrinsically empty (*svabhāvaśūnya*).
- All phenomena are primordially pure.
- All phenomena are completely luminous.
- All phenomena are by nature [characterised by] *nirvāna*.
- All phenomena are perfectly awakened from the beginning.⁴⁷

This synthesis of ideas seems to have guided the rÑiñ-ma scholars, particularly Kloñ-chen-pa and Mi-pham, to accept the positive theory of the TG even as the Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka came to be regarded by them as the pinnacle of the *sūtra* systems,⁴⁸ and the notion of "free-

⁴⁶ These do not seem to be exact quotes, but rather paraphrases. Roñ-zom-pa (lTa phreñ 'grel pa, p. 340.6) explains these lines as "occurring in miscellaneous scriptural authorities" (*luñ thor bu rnam nas 'byuñ ba*).

⁴⁷ Man ñag lta phreñ, fol. 416a8-417a2: *chos thams cad ni ño bo ñid kyis stoñ pa'o* || *chos thams cad ni gzod ma nas rnam par dag pa'o* || *chos thams cad ni yoñs kyis 'od gsal ba'o* || *chos thams cad ni rañ bñin gyis mya ñan las 'das pa'o* || *chos thams cad ni ye nas mñon par rdzogs par sañs rgyas pa'o źes gsuñs so* ||. Cf. also the Theg chen tshul 'jug, p. 450.11-13.

⁴⁸ See the Yid bñin mdzod, p. 55.3; Yid bñin mdzod 'grel, Vol. *wam*, p. 643.2-4; Theg mchog mdzod, vol. *e*, fol. 64b1-2 & 64b4-5 and Grub mtha' mdzod, p. 108.4-5. Mi-pham too saw the view of Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka as the highest in the *sūtra* system (bKa' brgyad rnam bñad, p. 35.4-5; Yid bñin grub bsdus, p. 483.3).

dom from manifoldness” as identical with the rDzogs-chen notion of “primordial purity” (*ka dag*).⁴⁹ According to Roñ-zom-pa, the Madhyamaka notion of “absolute reality” is also shared by the Vajrayāna system. He states:⁵⁰

As for the Mādhyamikas, [they] maintain that even mind is in reality no real entity and that from the highest perspective, all phenomena are primordially unborn, without essential nature and are characterised by the pacification of all [extremes of] manifoldness. Also the position of the tantric treatises [regarding] the characteristics of absolute reality is similar to that [of the Madhyamaka system].⁵¹

⁴⁹ According to Kloñ-chen-pa, the rDzogs-chen approach of establishing “freedom from extremes” is to a great extent similar to that of the Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka (Chos dbyiñs mdzod ’grel, fol. 76b1-2: *rañ bzin rdzogs pa chen po ’di’i lugs kyis mtha’ bral la sogs pa’i mjal tshul phal cher dbu ma thal ’gyur dañ mtshuñs pa las | dbu mar stoñ stoñ po nam mkha’ ’dra ba rtsis g’zir byed pa ste | ’dir ni rig pa ka nas dag pa rjen zañ ñe ba ma grub la mi ’gag pa tsam de la g’zir byas nas | de dañ de’i ñañ las sar ba’i chos rñams mtha’ grol nam mkha’ ltar ’jal ba ste |*). Likewise, Mi-pham does not distinguish between the “freedom from manifoldness” established by Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka and the “primordial purity” established by the rDzogs-chen system (see the Ñes śes sgron me, p. 88.6-89.1: *ka dag bdar śa chod pa la || thal ’gyur lta ba mthar phyin dgos || spros bral tsam gyi cha nas ni || de gñis khyad par med do gsuñ ||*; the dBu ma rgyan ’grel, p. 46.3-4). Cf. also the Ñes śes sgron me, p. 119.6: *spros bral dbu ma chen po dañ || ’od gsal rdzogs pa chen po gñis || don gcig min gi rnam grañs te || de las lhag pa’i lta ba med ||* (cf. the English translation of this verse in Pettit 1999a: 237). See also the Ñes śes sgron me, p. 84.6: *rdzogs chen yod min med min ni || mtha’ bzi’i spros dañ bral ba yin ||* (Pettit 1999a: 205).

⁵⁰ lTa ba’i brjed byañ, p. 9.21-24: *dbu ma pa ni yid kyañ don dam par rdzas su med de yañ dag par na chos thams cad gdod ma nas ma skyes pa ño bo ñid med pa | spros pa thams cad ñe bar zi ba’i mtshan ñid du ’dod do || gsañ sñags kyi gzuñ yañ don dam pa’i mtshan ñid de dañ mthun par ’dod de |*. See also the lTa ba’i brjed byañ, p. 20.22-21.2 and lTa phreñ ’grel pa, p. 321.7-9: *dbu ma pas rten ciñ ’brel te ’byuñ ba’i tshul rtogs pas ni | rañ rig pa’ de ñid kyañ | rgyu dañ ’bras bu’i dños po’i bdag ñid thob pa’ myed par rtogs te | spros pa thams cad las yoñs su ’das par rtogs so ||*. See also *ibid.*, p. 20.16-18.

⁵¹ Roñ-zom-pa, however, sees the Madhyamaka notion of “freedom from manifoldness” as a strength but its inability to dispense with the concept of “true conventional” reality (*tathayasamvṛti*) as a weakness which hinders its proponents from establishing the equality (*mñam pa ñid*) of all phenomena (Theg chen tshul ’jug, p. 476.17-21).

5. TG IN THE WRITINGS OF ROÑ-ZOM-PA, KLOÑ-CHEN-PA AND MI-PHAM

Before we evaluate the rÑin-ma stance on the TG doctrine in India and Tibet, let us briefly look at how much the three scholars upon whom I rely were themselves concerned with the theory. The term TG does not appear in any of the titles of works attributed to Roñ-zom-pa.⁵² Nevertheless, he discusses the term and concept of TG in several of his extant writings such as the dKon mchog 'grel, Dam tshig mdo rgyas and Theg chen tshul 'jug.⁵³ In the dKon mchog 'grel, he explains the term **sugatagarbha* (= TG) in the following manner:⁵⁴

[Being endowed with] **sugatagarbha* is, as commonly known, maintained to be the sentient beings' possessing of the cause for awakening [or their] possessing of the seed of non-tainted [phenomena]. According to the profound [system], the very nature of the mind being awakened, it is [called] the Awakened [= Buddha] Nature.⁵⁵

In particular, Roñ-zom-pa's Rañ byuñ ye śes seems to be, at least in content, a treatise on the TG theory from a tantric perspective.⁵⁶ Just as the Ratnagotravibhāga seeks to establish that all sentient beings possess TG, the Rañ byuñ ye śes seeks to "show that the ordinary minds of worldly sentient beings (*pr̥thagjana*) possess 'self-occurring gnosis'" (*so so skye bo'i tha mal pa'i śes pa rañ byuñ gi ye śes can du ston pa*).⁵⁷

⁵² See Roñ-pa Me-dpuñ's list of Roñ-zom-pa's writings in Almogi 1997: 242-248 (Appendix A); Almogi 2002: 75-80.

⁵³ The term TG or rather its semantically equivalent terms can be found explicitly mentioned in several of Roñ-zom-pa's writings. For examples, see the dKon mchog 'grel, p. 81.17-18 (*sems can gyi sems rañ byuñ gi ye śes kyi sñiñ po can yin pa*); *ibid.*, p. 127.13 (*bde bar gśegs pa'i sñiñ po*); Dam tshig mdo rgyas, p. 370.10 (*de bzin gśegs pa'i sñiñ po can*); *ibid.*, p. 382.12 (*byañ chub kyi sñiñ po can*); gSuñ thor bu, p. 107.1 (*sems can thams cad byañ chub kyi sñiñ po can*); *ibid.*, p. 111.22-23 (*so so skye bo'i tha mal pa'i śes pa rañ byuñ gi ye śes can du ston pa*); Grub mtha'i brjed byañ, p. 220.8 (*ye nas byañ chub kyi sñiñ po can*); Theg chen tshul 'jug, p. 545.1-14; and Rab gnas cho ga, p. 181.19-20 (*'gro ba ris drug tha mal pa thams cad ni | byañ chub kyi sñiñ po can gyi rañ bzin yin la*).

⁵⁴ dKon mchog 'grel, p. 127.13-15: *de la bde bar gśegs pa'i sñiñ po zes bya ni | thun moñ du grags pa sems can rñams byañ chub kyi rgyu can zag med kyi sa bon dan ldan pa'o || zes 'dod do || zab mo ltar na sems kyi rañ bzin ñid byañ chub yin pas byañ chub kyi sñiñ po'o ||*.

⁵⁵ A similar explanation is also given in the Theg chen tshul 'jug, p. 545.1-14, where the term *kun gzi* (*ālaya*) is explained according to both the common and uncommon Mahāyāna systems (Karmay 1988: 179; Schmithausen 1995: 335f.).

⁵⁶ See the gSuñ thor bu, p. 111.21-130.6.

⁵⁷ gSuñ thor bu, p. 111.22-23, 113.13.

Roñ-zom-pa also states that he wrote this treatise specifically “so that [people can] grasp [this teaching on ‘self-occurring gnosis’] as being of definitive meaning” (*ñes pa’i don du bzuñ bar bya ba’i phyir*).⁵⁸ As already mentioned (cf. p. 178f.), the term **sugatagarbha* (= TG) does occur in the rÑiñ-ma *tantras* belonging to the Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga classes, if rather infrequently. Yet other terms such as “self-occurring gnosis” (*rañ byuñ gi ye śes: svayambhūjñāna*) or *bodhicitta* (i.e., in its most absolute sense) are more prevalent or preferred in the early rÑiñ-ma literature. One notices, however, that Roñ-zom-pa’s interests rest primarily on the tantric and particularly rDzogs-chen idea of “self-occurring gnosis” and not directly on TG as such. For example, if Roñ-zom-pa at all cites a TG *sūtra*, he seems to do so only because it contains the term or idea of “self-occurring gnosis” and not because it propagates the TG theory. This may explain why he hardly cites TG *sūtras* or passages containing the term TG. Thus, my impression is that he sought to interpret the TG theory in the light of “self-occurring gnosis” and not vice versa as was apparently the case with Dol-po-pa.

Kloñ-chen-pa is supposed to have written one general commentary on all five works of Maitreya, called the Rin chen them skas (including root-verses and auto-commentary), which unfortunately is lost.⁵⁹ No commentary on the Ratnagoṭravibhāga is listed in the catalogues to Kloñ-chen-pa’s works. However, a commentary on the Ratnagoṭravibhāga has recently been discovered; it was authored by a certain Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med and has the title Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos kyi ñes don gsal bar byed pa’i rin po che’i sgron me (= Rin chen sgron me). Some Tibetan scholars have, since the appearance of the commentary, assumed Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med to be Kloñ-chen-pa. I have not yet seen any argumentation supporting the attribution of the Rin chen sgron me to Kloñ-chen-pa or for considering this Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med (there is said to have been more than one author at around this time with the same name) and Kloñ-chen-pa to be one and the same person. The Rin chen sgron me is probably not penned by Kloñ-chen-pa.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Kloñ-chen-pa’s presentation of the TG

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 119.6-8, 129.8-9.

⁵⁹ See the Dad gsum ’jug ñogs, p. 101.18-20 and the mThoñ ba don ldan, p. 214.7-9.

⁶⁰ It seems that this attribution is based on the following faint similarities. (1) Doctrinally, like Kloñ-chen-pa, Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med (the author of the commentary) explicitly interprets TG as having a definitive meaning. This is evident also from the title and the following remarks in the author’s colophon: “Thus I

doctrine can be found in varying detail in his existing works, particularly in the Grub mtha' mdzod,⁶¹ Śiñ rta chen po,⁶² Yid bžin mdzod

have taken this trouble to explain this treatise [i.e., the Ratnagotravibhāga] according to the scriptures containing a definitive meaning” (Rin chen sgron me, p. 678.1-2: *de slad gzuñ 'di nes don gsuñ rab bžin || rnam par bkrol ba'i nal ba 'di byas so ||*). (2) Chronologically Kloñ-chen-pa and Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med can be designated to the same period. If Bu-ston's discussion with this Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med led him to write his *De bžin gšegs pa'i sñiñ po gsal žiñ mdzes par byed pa'i rgyan* in 1359 (Seyfort Ruegg 1966: 152; 1973: 4-5, n. 3, 149, n. 2) and if Kloñ-chen-pa and Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med were one and the same person, it would pose no chronological problems, for Kloñ-chen-pa (1308-1363) too was a contemporary of Bu-ston (1290-1364). (3) There is a vague similarity in the titles of the commentary by Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med, the Rin po che'i sgron me, and Kloñ-chen-pa's lost general commentary (*spyi don*) on the so-called “Five Works of Maitreya” (*byams chos sde lña*) called Rin po che'i them skas. (4) There is also a certain similarity between the personal names Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med and Tshul-khrims-blo-gros (one of the several names of Kloñ-chen-pa). (5) Both Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med and Kloñ-chen-pa studied in gSañ-phu Ne'u-thog seminary. Thus, the above factors, coupled with the earnest desire to find lost works of Kloñ-chen-pa, may have caused the attribution of the commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga to Kloñ-chen-pa. On the other hand, several factors indicate why Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med and Kloñ-chen-pa could not have been one and the same person. (1) Kloñ-chen-pa referred to himself by way of different names in different works and his multiple names have all been recorded in his biography (Dad gsum 'jug ñogs, p. 110.5-21). He personally mentioned his multiple names and gave reasons as to why a certain name was used in a certain context (Chos dbyiñs mdzod 'grel, fol. 209b1-6). If Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med had indeed been one of Kloñ-chen-pa's names, one would expect to find it at least in one of these records. This, however, is not the case. It is of course possible that not all of his names were recorded. (2) Kloñ-chen-pa's lost Rin chen them skas is explicitly stated to be a general commentary to the “Five Works of Maitreya” whereas Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med's Rin chen sgron me is said to elucidate the definitive meaning of the Ratnagotravibhāga only. A commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga is not mentioned in the catalogues of Kloñ-chen-pa's writings. One cannot of course rule out the possibility that some of his works were not listed in the catalogue. (3) I am unable to detect any striking stylistic or terminological peculiarity of Kloñ-chen-pa's in Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med's Rin chen sgron me. Of course an author's style of writing does not always remain static, and we lack an indisputable commentary by Kloñ-chen-pa on a major Indian *śāstra* with which we could compare the style and terminology of Blo-gros-mtshuñs-med's commentary. (4) The commentary does not provide the names of any Tibetan teacher or work in the verses of obeisance (*mchod brjod*), the concluding verses (*mjug rtsom*) or the body of the work that might give us some hints regarding the author's rÑiñ-ma affiliation. Although a conclusive statement cannot be made at this stage, my impression is that the commentary was most probably not written by Kloñ-chen-pa.

⁶¹ See the Grub mtha' mdzod, p. 161.3-190.2.

⁶² Śiñ rta chen po, Vol. ña, p. 310.3-350.2.

'grel,⁶³ *Sems ye brtag pa* and *Tshig don mdzod*.⁶⁴ References to TG or **sugatagarbha* and closely associated ideas can also be found in several of his other writings.⁶⁵

The most important works on the topic by Mi-pham are his annotated commentary to the *Ratnagotravibhāga*⁶⁶ as well as his *sToñ thun señ ge'i ña ro*, *gĴan stoñ señ ge'i ña ro* and *Ñes śes sgron me*. Mi-pham's *sToñ thun señ ge'i ña ro* is actually a discourse on *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.28, which presents the three logical arguments that seek to prove that all sentient beings possess Buddha Nature. The "official position" of the rÑiñ-ma school on TG may be said to be spelled out in this work.⁶⁷ The *gĴan stoñ señ ge'i ña ro*⁶⁸ is a brief excursus on the doctrine of extrinsic emptiness. It seems to be merely the cornerstone for a larger work that Mi-pham had envisioned but did not develop on paper beyond

⁶³ *Yid bzin mdzod 'grel*, Vol. *e*, p. 9.1-23.2 (chapter one), Vol. *wam*, fol. 151b1-155b5 (chapter eighteen). See also *Yid bzin mdzod*, p. 3.2-5.6, 70.5-75.1.

⁶⁴ *Tshig don mdzod*, chapter two (*sañs rgyas kyi sñiñ pos khyab tshul*), fol. 40a6-45a3. Cf. Germano 1992: x & 78.

⁶⁵ For examples, see his *Phyogs bcu'i mun sel* (fol. 57b5-58b2 & 316b3-318a6); *Śiñ rta bzañ po* (particularly, p. 50.4-54.2); *Chos dbyiñs mdzod 'grel*, *sGyu ma ñal gso* and *Rañ byuñ rdo rjer dri ba*.

⁶⁶ An annotated commentary (*mchan 'grel*), does not normally go into the details of doctrinal positions. Yet mKhan-po Kun-bzañ-dpal-ldan, one of Mi-pham's important students, who prepared the rGyud bla'i mchan 'grel for printing after his teacher's death (colophon, p. 556.6-557.1), notes that Mi-pham's rGyud bla'i mchan 'grel clearly presents his own position without falling into either of the extremes of "appearance" or "emptiness," although he had used the Indian commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (attributed to Asaṅga) and Tibetan commentaries (on the same work) by Dol-po-pa (1292-1361), Thogs-med-bzañ-po (1295-1369), Red-mdā'-ba (1349-1412) and Roñ-ston (1367-1449). See the compiler's colophon, p. 554.5-555.3: *de la spyir phyag mchan yod rigs rnams gañ la gzigs pa'i rgya bod kyi 'grel pa rnams rañ rañ gi mjug tu gsal ba las 'dir yañ | 'phags pa thogs med dañ | dol po | rgyal sras thogs med | red mda' ba | roñ ston rnams kyi 'grel pa phyag mchan du gsal na yañ | dños don du rañ gar thad ka'i 'grel bar [= par] gañ yod mchan du btab pa lta bu ma yin par rgyal tshab chen po ñid kyi dgoñs par gañ 'byor gyis | gnad don sñiñ po snañ stoñ phyogs su ma lhuñ ba'i rañ lugs gsal por bkod 'dug par gzur gnas dpyod ldan rnams kyi 'grel pa de dag la žib par gzigs rtog mdzod dañ gsal par [= bar] rtogs ñes yod pa lags so ||*.

⁶⁷ *sToñ thun señ ge'i ña ro*, p. 563-606.5. Unlike some of Mi-pham's other works, the *sToñ thun señ ge'i ña ro* was revised by the author himself; he did this in 1891 (*lcags [mo] yos*), twenty-four years (*lo skor tshar gñis*) after it was first composed (see author's colophon, *sToñ thun señ ge'i ña ro*, p. 606.1-5).

⁶⁸ *gĴan stoñ señ ge'i ña ro*, p. 359-378.4.

some preparatory notes. There is neither an author's colophon nor mention of the date of composition. The verses of introduction and conclusion (*thog tha'i tshigs su bcad pa rnam*s) were composed and inserted by Že-chen-rgyal-tshab (1871-1926).⁶⁹ Nothing is said about the title but it is probable that the title *gŽan stoñ khas len señ ge'i ña ro* too was assigned by him and not by Mi-pham.⁷⁰ Although Mi-pham did not recognise the *gŽan stoñ* view as such, he went on to defend it in his *Dam chos dogs sel*.⁷¹ One can find further references on the TG in Mi-pham's writings on *Madhyamaka*, *Prajñāpāramitā* and *rDzogs-chen*. His *Ñes śes sgron me* is a rÑiñ-ma classic in which the key doctrinal positions on the theory and praxis of the rÑiñ-ma school including the issue of *rañ stoñ* and *gŽan stoñ* are clearly presented.⁷²

⁶⁹ 'Jam-dbyaṅs Blo-gros-rgya-mtsho alias Že-chen-rgyal-tshab Padma-rnam-rgyal (1871-1926), who was largely responsible for the compilation of Mi-pham's works, reports (*gŽan stoñ señ ge'i ña ro*, colophon, p. 378.2): "[It is evident that Mi-pham] had prepared a brief [draft] merely as a seed [or] basis for [the actual] composition" (*rtsom gži'i sa bon tsaṃ mdor bsdus gnañ 'dug pa*). Cf. Pettit 1999a: 427.

⁷⁰ This work has already been translated into English. See Pettit 1999a: 415-427.

⁷¹ See the *Dam chos dogs sel*, p. 369.3-375.2.

⁷² *Ñes śes sgron me*, p. 71.1-123.5. The importance of the *Ñes śes sgron me* is demonstrated by the number of commentaries written on it thus far. (1) The earliest commentary of the *Ñes śes sgron me* is perhaps the *Blo snañ sgo 'byed* (see bibliography) by mKhan-po Kun-bzañ-dpal-ldan (1872-1943). Cf. Pettit 1999a: 462, n. 12. (2) The second commentary is by Kaḥ-thog-mkhan-po Nus-ldan-mkhyen-brtse'i-blo-gros (Kaḥ thog lo rgyus, p. 151.15; Pettit 1999a: 8), which I have unfortunately not seen. (3) The third commentary called *Ñes śes rin po che'i sgron me'i rnam bśad 'od zer dri med* is by Khro-chu 'Jam-dpal-rdo-rje (or simply 'Jam-rdor). The text was published by rÑam-grol-gliñ Monastery, Mysore; a translation can be found in Pettit 1999a: 241-413. (4) The fourth commentary is by Khañ-dmar Rin-chen-rdo-rje who served as the sixth abbot (between 1940 and 1943) of Khams-bye bŚad-grwa at rDzoñ-gsar (rDzoñ-gsar lo rgyus, p. 199.2): *ljags rtsom | tshad ma rigs gter gsal byed dañ mi pham ñes śes sgron me'i 'grel pa sogs yod do* ||). I have not seen this work either. (5) The fifth and most recent commentary is by Slob-dpon Theg-mchog, a Bhutanese scholar currently based at rDo-grub Monastery in Gangtok. This commentary entitled *Ñes sgron śan sbyar lha rña'i sgra* (Pettit 1999a: 8, 462, n. 11), contains mainly citations from authoritative scriptures (*luñ*) rather than logical argumentations (*rigs pa*).

6. ASSESSMENT OF THE RÑIÑ-MA STANDPOINT ON THE TG THEORY

Louis de La Vallée Poussin seems to have been the first Western scholar to show that already in the Pāli sources “rationalist” and “mystic” positions existed. Not only did the adherents of the two positions debate, but some sources also attempted to reconcile the two.⁷³ Lambert Schmithausen has similarly distinguished two conceptions of liberation and awakening in early Buddhist canonical sources, designating them “positive–mystical” and “negative–intellectualist.”⁷⁴ In the Tibetan context, Seyfort Ruegg has often used the terms “apophatic and negative” on the one hand and “cataphatic and positive” on the other to describe the *rañ stoñ* and *gʒan stoñ* theories, respectively.⁷⁵ Thus, following Schmithausen’s terminology, Indian Mahāyāna scriptures such as the Prajñāpāramitā and the Madhyamaka “scholastic corpus” (*rigs tshogs*) of Nāgārjuna, said to belong to the Middle Cycle according to the Tibetan tradition, are “negative-intellectualist,” whereas the TG *sūtras* and the “hymnic corpus” (*bstod tshogs*) attributed by the Tibetans to the same Nāgārjuna are “positive–mystical.” But how do the Tibetans perceive these two trends in the Indian scriptures? Do they see them as incompatible and mutually exclusive, and thus opt for one by rejecting the other? Or do they choose one, not by rejecting but by allotting the other to a subordinate position, in the sense of Paul Hacker’s “inclusivism” as defined by Schmithausen?⁷⁶ Or, do they reconcile and harmonise the two trends by considering them complementary?⁷⁷

⁷³ See de La Vallée Poussin 1936-37: 189ff. and Schmithausen 1981: 214.

⁷⁴ Schmithausen 1981: 223-224, 247; Seyfort Ruegg 1989: 8-9, n. 6 & 9.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Seyfort Ruegg 1989: 10.

⁷⁶ Whenever I speak of Paul Hacker’s “inclusivism” I mean his theory of “inclusivism” as defined by Schmithausen, that is, as “a method of intellectual debate in which the competing doctrine, or essential elements of it, are admitted but relegated to a subordinate position, or given a suitable reinterpretation, and which aims not so much at reconciliation but at prevailing over the other doctrines or its propounders” (Schmithausen 1981: 223). This definition is also cited in Seyfort Ruegg 1989: 9, n. 9. For more details on “inclusivism,” see Oberhammer 1983 and Halbfass 1995: 10-12.

⁷⁷ Following Paul Hacker’s theory of “inclusivism” as defined by Schmithausen, I distinguish the “inclusivistic” approach from the “reconciliatory” or “harmonising” approach and consider them to be diametrically opposed to each other. Thus, a tradition that attempts to reconcile *rañ stoñ* and *gʒan stoñ* doctrines by treating them as equal and complementary is said to follow a “reconciliatory” or “harmonising” approach whereas a tradition that subordinates either one by interpreting it to have only a provisional sense, is said to follow an “inclusivistic” approach.

One may say that the Jo-nañ-pas have followed the “positive–mystical” trend and the main-stream Sa-skyapas the “negative–intellectualist” one, and that both of them have taken an “inclusivistic” approach in Paul Hacker’s sense. That is, the teachings of “intrinsic emptiness” of the Middle Cycle are admitted by the Jo-nañ-pas but are relegated to a subordinate position in being considered to be of provisional meaning,⁷⁸ and similarly, the teaching of TG of the Last Cycle is admitted by the main-stream Sa-skyapas but relegated to a subordinate position in being considered to be of provisional meaning, at least in the context of establishing the view according to the *sūtra* system.⁷⁹ Furthermore, it could appear that mKhas-grub-rje, who speaks for the main-stream dGe-lugs-pas, attempts to reconcile and harmonise these two currents. But what he actually attempted was to offer a reductionistic reinterpretation of the teaching of TG by emptying it of its contents such as the attributed inherent excellent Buddha qualities and refilling it with the mere absence of a “hypostatic existence” (*bden par grub pa*) of the mind, while still retaining the term TG. It is true that mKhas-grub-rje did not denounce or downgrade the doctrine of TG. He even considered Mahāyāna scriptures such as the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra to be similar to or consistent (*phyogs mthun*) with the scriptures of the Middle Cycle (such as the Prajñāpāramitā *sūtras*) and as containing a definitive meaning. The purport of the Ratnagotravibhāga – which is said to mainly explain the purport of Mahāyāna *sūtras* such as the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra – is considered by him to be or “exist as a *prāsaṅgika*

⁷⁸ Dol-po-pa subordinates the *rañ stoñ* teaching of the Middle Cycle in two ways: (a) The impermanent conventional phenomena (including even those belonging to the path) taught as *rañ stoñ* in the Middle Cycle are factual (*don la gnas*). But this *rañ stoñ* is, according to him (Ri chos, p. 155.10-12), *kun rdzob rañ stoñ* (or *kun rdzob stoñ ñid*) and does not meet the standards of what he calls *don dam gzan stoñ* (or *don dam stoñ ñid*), because only what is absolute can be *gzan stoñ* and only what is *gzan stoñ* can be absolute (ibid., p. 308.12-15). (b) Permanent and absolute phenomena are actually *gzan stoñ* and hence of definitive meaning. Hence, teachings of the Middle Cycle such as “*dharmadhātu* is empty of *dharmadhātu*” (*chos kyī dbyiñs ni chos kyī dbyiñs kyis stoñ*) should be interpreted in a provisional sense (Ri chos, p. 279.6-9: ‘*khor lo bar ba’i [= pa’i] gzuñ gzan dan gzan du yañ | rañ stoñ ma yin pa la rañ stoñ du gsuñs pa thams cad drañ don dgoñs pa can ñid du khoñ du chud par bya ste | legs par rnam par phyē ba’i man ñag thun moñ ma yin pa’i sgron me la brten nas so ||*). See also ibid., p. 284.9-16. Cf. Stearns 1999: 3.

⁷⁹ sDom gsum rab dbye, verses 1.138-142 in Rhoton 2002: 58 (translation), 285 (text). See also Stearns 1999: 269-270, n. 129 and Jackson 1987: 267, 336.

purport” (*dgoñs pa thal ’gyur du gnas*).⁸⁰ However, it turns out that for him TG is nothing but a specific cause (*rgyu*) of Buddhahood which he interprets as “the emptiness [of the mind], that is, the mind’s being empty of hypostatic existence” (*sems bden par grub pas stoñ pa’i stoñ ñid*).⁸¹ Therefore, unlike Seyfort Ruegg who views this as a harmonisation of the two trends,⁸² I believe mKhas-grub-rje’s approach fulfils the definition of “inclusivism,” since, although he does not, at least in letter, subordinate the doctrine of TG, in spirit he has reduced it to the mere absence of “hypostatic existence” of the mind. Thus, in fact, all three – the main-stream Sa-skyapas, the Jo-nañ-pas and the main-stream dGe-lugs-pas – have sought to resolve the apparent tension between the “positive–mystical” and “negative–intellectualist” antitheses in Indian Buddhism by adopting an inclusivistic approach, but each has done so in a quite distinct manner.

How do the rÑiñ-ma-pas deal with the Indian “positive–mystical” and “negative–intellectualist” currents, and with the *rañ stoñ* and *g’zan stoñ* issues in Tibet? They do so in two different manners, the first relating to the “positive–mystical” and “negative–intellectualist” currents, the second to the *rañ stoñ* and *g’zan stoñ* issues. In the former case, they attempt to reconcile and harmonise the “negative–intellectualist” current in India as represented by the Prajñāpāramitā literature and the Madhyamaka “scholastic corpus” with the “positive–mystical” current as represented in the TG *sūtras*, the “hymnic corpus” and in works such as the Ratnagotravibhāga and the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā belonging to the Maitreya–Asaṅga complex. The contents of these two currents of Indian Buddhist teachings are not re-interpreted by them, nor is the content of one given a subordinate position by designating it as of provisional meaning. The excellent qualities attributed to the TG are also not reduced to mere absence of “hypostatic existence” but their teachings are accepted literally. For them, the difference between the

⁸⁰ rGyud sde spyi rnam, p. 96.13-23: *rgyud bla ma ... rañ lugs la rje rin po che’i b’zed pas | bka’ bar pa’i phyogs mthun gyi mdo | bde g’segs sñiñ po’i mdo ... la sogs pa’i dgoñs pa gtso bor ’grel la | dgoñs pa thal ’gyur du gnas śiñ | ’phags pa thogs med kyis kyañ thal ’gyur du bkral bar b’zed ... |*

⁸¹ rGyud sde spyi rnam, p. 52.1-8: *bde bar g’segs pa’i sñiñ po ni | ... sems bden par grub pas stoñ pa’i stoñ ñid de la sems kyi chos ñid rañ b’zin rnam dag ces bya ste | de yañ glo bur gyi dri ma dañ ma bral ba’i gnas skabs kyi sems kyi chos ñid rañ b’zin rnam dag de la bde bar g’segs pa’i sñiñ po’am | rañ b’zin du gnas pa’i rigs | zes bya’o ||*

⁸² See Seyfort Ruegg 1968: 506; Seyfort Ruegg 2000: 81.

two currents lies in the degree of emphasis. That is, the “negative–intellectualist” current emphasises the aspects of emptiness (*stoñ pa’i cha*), whereas the “positive–mystical” its aspect of luminosity (*gsal ba’i cha*). The teachings of emptiness and luminosity, being the two aspects of one reality,⁸³ are both of definitive meaning.⁸⁴ For example, Roñ-zom-pa, while commenting on the terms *gsaṅ ba sñiñ po*, *de kho na ñid* and *ñes pa* contained in the longer title of the *Guhyagarbha, explains “reality” (*de kho na ñid*) from both an ontological and epistemological point of view and considers both the ontological and epistemological “reality” to be “definitive,” which he regards as “definitive meaning.”⁸⁵

⁸³ The theories of one universal ground (*g’zi*), one vehicle or way (*lam*) and one goal (*bras bu*) all seem to be based on the theory of one absolute reality, a doctrinal premise also accepted by the rÑiñ-ma-pas. They therefore cannot and do not apply numerical or qualitative distinctions to absolute reality taught in the various systems of Mahāyāna (be it the TG School, Prāsaṅgika–Madhyamaka or the rDzogs-chen system) that explicate or presuppose the “indivisibility of the two truths.” Thus from the ontological perspective, the actual *nītārtha* of the special Mahāyāna teachings is the “indivisibility of the two truths” regardless of what terminology (be it “TG” or “freedom from manifoldness”) one may employ to designate it. The “indivisibility of the two truths” is obviously equated by Roñ-zom-pa with TG (gSuñ thor bu, p. 30.5-7): “Thus the mode of the indivisibility of the two truths or even the mode of the two truths accepted [by some] which is the pureness sphere of reality (*dharmadhātuvīśuddhi*) should be considered to be the nature of all phenomena, namely TG” (*de bas na bden pa gñis dbyer med pa’i tshul dan | bden pa gñis su ’dod pa’i tshul ñid kyañ | chos kyi dbyiñs rnam par dag pa gañ yin pa de ñid | de b’zin g’segs pa’i sñiñ po chos thams cad kyi rañ b’zin yin par gzuñ dgos so* ||). Kloñ-chen-pa (Yid b’zin mdzod, p. 74.1-3) considered both “TG” and the “freedom from manifoldness” of the Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka to be synonymous (*miñ gi rnam grañs*). Similarly, Mi-pham explicitly equated TG with the indivisibility of the two truths in his *Ketaka*, p. 30.4: *don du khams bde g’segs sñiñ po’am yañ dag pa’i mtha’ chos kyi dbyiñs snañ stoñ zuñ du ’jug pa’i de b’zin ñid*. According to Mi-pham, the uniqueness of the Prāsaṅgika approach is that it seeks to establish the indivisibility of the two truths from the very outset (dKa’ gnad ci rigs, p. 550.3: *thal ’gyur bas bden gñis dbyer med kyi chos dbyiñs tha sñad kun bral ñid dan po nas gtan la ’beb par byed do* ||).

⁸⁴ For Kloñ-chen-pa’s statements, see the Śiñ rta chen po, Vol. ña, p. 685.6-688.2. Mi-pham’s theory of “conventional valid cognition based on pure perception” (*dag pa’i gzigs pa la brten pa’i kun tu tha sñad pa’i tshad ma*), which can be traced back to certain ingenious ideas of Roñ-zom-pa, is indispensable for resolving problems such as the apparent tension between the Middle and Last Cycles, and the difficulty in considering the epistemic gnosis to be of definitive meaning. However, these issue are beyond the scope of this article.

⁸⁵ dKon mehog ’grel, p. 57.5-8: *chos thams cad kyi de b’zin ñid ni rtag tu ji ltar [= lta] ba b’zin ñid de | ’di la ’gyur ba med pas de kho na ñid ces bya’o || de rtogs pa’i*

In addition, absolute reality, often referred to as “self-occurring gnosis,” is also considered to be of definitive meaning.⁸⁶ The two currents are hence viewed as complementary.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, in spite of this approach which may be seen as characteristic for the rÑiñ-ma position as a whole, my impression is that Ron-zom-pa inclines more towards the

ye śes kyañ don mthun par skye ste | 'di la bslu ba med pas de kho na ñid ces bya'o
 ||; *ibid.*, p. 57.21-24: *ñes pa źes bya ñes pa'i don te | 'di ltar rgyal ba rnam kyī dgoñs*
pa brgyud de drañ ba'i tshul gyis 'gro ba chud mi gson pa'i thabs su gsuñs pa lta bu
tsam ma yin gyi | ñid kyis ji ltar thugs su chud pa'i don skal ba ldan pa rnam la
tshig gzugs por bstan pa yin pas ñes pa źes bya'o ||.

⁸⁶ See the gSuñ thor bu, p. 119.5-7, which states: “Thus, even the mind (*sems*) of ordinary sentient beings possesses “self-occurring gnosis” (*svayambhūjñāna*). As for this teaching, [it] is not [an indirect] statement of intention (*abhīprāya*) [i.e., of provisional meaning] but [is] taught in a straightforward manner and hence the purport too should be known to be definitive” (*de ltar na so so skye bo tha mal pa'i śes pa'añ rañ byuñ gi ye śes can no || źes gsuñs pa 'di'añ dgoñs pa'i tshig ma yin te | gzugs por gsuñs pa ñid yin pas | don 'di yañ mtshan ñid pa yin par śes par bya'o* ||). See also, *ibid.*, p. 123.21-124.3.

⁸⁷ Mi-pham often attempts to strike a balance between the views expressed in Nāgārjuna's treatises and those of the Maitreya–Asaṅga complex. Nāgārjuna is seen as the elucidator of the profound aspect (*zab pa'i cha*) and Asaṅga as the elucidator of the aspect of vastness (*rgya che ba'i cha*) of the Buddha's teachings. See the dBu ma rgyan 'grel, p. 13.6-14.1, 48.3-4; Ñes śes sgron me, p. 82.5: *klu sgrub lugs dañ byams pa'i gzuñ || phan tshun bu ram sbrañ rtsi bźin* ||. See also the sToñ thun señ ge'i na ro, p. 564.4-565.3: *de yañ ston pa bde bar gśegs pas gsuñ gi skabs la lar stob sogs kyī yon tan ye ldan du bstan pa'i cha nas bde bśegs sñiñ po'i ño bo gsal bar mdzad | la lar stobs sogs kyī yon tan ye ldan du bstan pa'i sgo nas bde gśegs sñiñ po'i ño bo gsal bar mdzad de | de gñis 'gal med zuñ du 'jug pa dgos kyañ | bden gñis dbyer med pa'i gñad zab pa las śin tu zab pa la yid ches rñed pa'i dbañ gis la las bde gśegs sñiñ po ño bos mi stoñ pa'i rtag par blta | la las ni stoñ rkyañ tsam la bzuñ nas sku dañ ye śes kyī yon tan 'bral med ye ldan du bźag tu med pa'i chad lta skur 'debs kyī phyogs la gñas par gyur ...* |. And also *ibid.*, p. 586.2-6: *des na 'khor lo bar par bstan pa'i stoñ pa ñid dañ | tha mar bstan pa'i sku dañ ye śes dag snañ stoñ zuñ du chud par bya dgos pas | 'khor lo bar pa dañ tha ma'i ñes don gyi skor rnam dbye gsal [= bsal] med par gñis ka ñes don du kun mkhyen kloñ chen rab 'byams kyis bźed pa 'di kho na ltar gzuñ bar bya ste | de gñis gcig ñes don byas na gcig drañ don de lta bu la rgyu rgyud kyī don du byas nas rdo rje theg pa'i man nag gi gñad 'byuñ bas sañs rgyas kyī bstan pa de dag gñad gcig tu 'bab par śes par bya dgos śiñ | mthar thug gi don 'di la klu thogs rnam gñis sogs 'phags pa rnam dgoñs pa gcig ste chos dbyiñs bstod pa dañ sems 'grel la sogs pa dañ | rgyud bla ma'i 'grel pa sogs kyis gsal bar rtogs pa'i phyir ro* ||. Further see the rGyud bla'i mchan 'grel, p. 371.5-372.4, 381.2-382.5; Tshig bdun rnam bśad, p. 321.6-323.5.

“negative–intellectualist” trend,⁸⁸ Kloñ-chen-pa more towards the “positive–mystical” one,⁸⁹ and Mi-pham towards reconciliation and harmonisation by striving to balance not only the two trends found in Indian Buddhist literature but also the views of Roñ-zom-pa and Kloñ-chen-pa.⁹⁰

The approach of the rÑiñ-ma-pas to the issue of *rañ stoñ* and *gʻzan stoñ* in Tibet, however, is for the most part “inclusivistic” (in Paul Hacker’s sense). Both the position that views the TG as “hypostatically existent” or not essentially empty (*ño bo mi stoñ pa*) and the position that views the TG as nihilistically empty (*stoñ pa phyañ chad*) or denies its qualities are seen as untenable.⁹¹ For these scholars, it is of course true that a horse is empty of a cow and TG empty of adventitious impur-

⁸⁸ While Roñ-zom-pa explicitly seeks to prove that even the ordinary mind of sentient beings is already characterised by the presence of “self-occurring gnosis” and while the philosophical and doctrinal features central to the TG theory are conspicuous in his writings on rDzogs-chen, he hardly mentions the excellent qualities spontaneously present at the level of the universal ground. However, since the “self-occurring gnosis” equated by him with TG or *bodhicitta* in the rDzogs-chen sense is said to undergo no change at the level of the universal ground (*gʻzi*), the path (*lam*) and the result (*bras bu*), the knowledge we gain about his notion of the ultimate result, for which there exist sufficient materials, will help us understand his notion of TG too. In this regard, the study on the position of Roñ-zom-pa (and other major early scholars) on whether gnosis exists at the stage of Buddhahood being currently conducted by Orna Almogi (University of Hamburg) will be of great interest.

⁸⁹ Kloñ-chen-pa’s interpretation of TG is by and large very positive and suggests that he was mainly combating a reductionistic interpretation of TG. His inclination towards the “positive–mystical” current seems to be the reason why he is often put in a line with Dol-po-pa (see above, n. 8).

⁹⁰ Regarding the understanding of the stage of the Buddha (*sañs rgyas kyi sa*), it is also the view of Rag-mgo-mchog-sprul, the current and twelfth throne-holder of Rag-mgo Monastery in Go-’jo in Khams, that Mi-pham harmonises Roñ-zom-pa’s notion of essence (*ño bo*) “free from manifoldness” with Kloñ-chen-pa’s notion of the aspect of luminous nature (*rañ bʻzin*). See the Luñ gi rgya mtsho, p. 376.4-6, which states: *rañ [= roñ] zom chos kyi bzañ pos ño bo spros bral ka dag gi gnad bʻsad pa dañ | kun mkhyen chen pos rañ bʻzin ʻod gsal lhun grub kyi gnad bʻsad pa dañ | mi pham ʻjam dpal dbyaṅs kyi de gñis kyi gdoṅs gnad gcig tu dril te ʻchad tshul lo ||*.

⁹¹ sToñ thun señ ge’i ña ro, p. 567.2-4: *bde bʻsegs sñiñ po ño bo mi stoñ pa’i bden grub brtag [= rtag?] pa dañ | yon tan med pa’i stoñ pa phyañ chad du ʻdod pa gñis ka sgrub byed med la gnod byed mthoñ žiñ | ño bo stoñ pa dañ rañ bʻzin yon tan ye ldan gyi sñiñ po ʻgro ba’i khams na yod pa la | gnod byed med ciñ sgrub byed yañ dag yod par mthoñ ño ||*.

ities and hence both “empty of other” (*gʒan stoñ*), but this concept of emptiness is so obvious and banal that it has little to do with the Prajñāpāramitā or Madhyamaka notion of “freedom from manifoldness.” Thus, according to them, this notion of *gʒan stoñ* does not fulfil the criterion of emptiness (*stoñ go mi chod*), that is, the Madhyamaka notion of emptiness, and realisation of such an emptiness is of no soteriological relevance or value.⁹² For example, Roñ-zom-pa, explaining the expression “by nature utterly mysterious” (*ño bo ñid kyis rab tu gsañ ba*) appearing in the *Guhyagarbha, states that all phenomena are by nature empty (*ño bo ñid kyis stoñ pa*) but this fact remains a mystery as a result of one mistaking them to be empty of other (*gʒan gyis stoñ pa*). Although Roñ-zom-pa’s expression *gʒan gyis stoñ pa* is not terminological, it does suggest that the concept of such an emptiness was considered by him to be deficient or erroneous.⁹³ Likewise, *rañ stoñ* in the sense of “absence of hypostatic existence” is for the rÑiñ-ma-pas a mere emptiness (*stoñ rkyañ*), and thus can neither be the kind of ultimate emptiness established by the Mādhyamikas⁹⁴ nor be equated

⁹² However, it is also important to look at this issue from Dol-po-pa’s perspective. According to him, *rañ stoñ* does not meet the standards of the actual emptiness (Ri chos, p. 155.10-12), just as *gʒan stoñ* (for his opponents) does not meet the standards of the actual emptiness.

⁹³ dKon mchog ’grel, p. 127.5-7: *chos thams cad ño bo ñid kyis stoñ pa yin pa la | gʒan gyis stoñ par mthoñ nas ji ltar snañ ba rañ gi ño bo ñid kyis stoñ pas ma rtogs pas ño bo ñid kyis rab tu gsañ ño ||*. See the Ñes šes sgron me, p. 77.1: *spyir na gʒan gyis stoñ pa de || stoñ go ñes par mi chod de || rta la ba lañ ma grub kyañ || rta de stoñ bar [= par] ga la ñes ||* (see also Pettit 1999a: 197-198). See also sToñ thun señ ge’i ña ro, p. 590.3: *rañ gi ño bo ma stoñ na chos gʒan gyis stoñ pa yod kyañ stoñ go mi chod de |*. For details, see *ibid.*, p. 589.4-591.4 and gSuñ sgron, p. 437.6-438.1: *chos rañ ños nas ma stoñ pa chos gʒan gyis stoñ pa ni ’jig rten pa’i stoñ tshul yin gyi don dam rnal ’byor pa’i spyod yul ga la yin ste | bum pa yod pa dañ | de la snam bu med pa | gnag gi rwa yod dañ | de steñ ri boñ gi rwa med pa lta bus | kun rdzob tu yod pa’i chos rñams stoñ pa’i go ga la chod |*.

⁹⁴ According to Mi-pham, what a Prāsaṅgika–Mādhyamika like Candrakīrti seeks to establish is “freedom from manifoldness” or the “indivisibility of the two truths,” and he does this by eliminating the last shreds of clinging to the duality or separateness of the two truths (dBu ma rgyan ’grel, p. 62.6). Mistaking the mere absence of “hypostatic existence” for the ultimate emptiness is, according to Mi-pham, like mistaking apes in the forest for celestial beings (sToñ thun señ ge’i ña ro, p. 570.5-571.2). Kloñ-chen-pa as well does not recognise the mere emptiness or absence of self as the final emptiness (Śiñ rta chen po, Vol. ña, p. 330.6-331.1: *khyed kyī bdag med pa dañ | stoñ pa ñid la zen pa’añ bdag dañ mi stoñ pa’i gñen po tsam yin gyi | ñes pa’i don ni ma yin te |*; *ibid.*, p. 332.6-333.2: *’di ltar stoñ pa ñid kyañ snañ ba’i chos can snañ dus ñid nas gcig dañ du mar ’dzin pa’i spros pas stoñ pa dañ |*

with TG.⁹⁵ For them, the notions of *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ* are in the first place merely indicative of two different modes of enquiry, namely, “non-implicative negation” (*med dgag*) and “implicative negation” (*ma yin dgag*), or “negation and assertion” (*dgag sgrub*), which are possible and relevant only in the domain of conceptual thought. Primordial reality as such is, for them, beyond the notions of *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ*, beyond “exclusion” and “inclusion,” beyond negation and assertion, beyond elimination and establishment (*bsal gžag*).⁹⁶ In this way, the rÑiñ-ma-pas relegate the notions of both *rañ stoñ* and *gžan stoñ* to a subordinate position. Therefore, from this perspective, they can neither be designated as exponents of the position of *gžan stoñ* nor as exponents of that of *rañ stoñ*. Yet as a method of enquiry, the rÑiñ-ma-pas, according to Mi-pham, prefer the method of “non-implicative negation” which is indicative of *rañ stoñ*, and thus, from the viewpoint of methodology, they are exponents of the position of *rañ stoñ*.⁹⁷

rañ rañ gi ño bos stoñ pa me loñ gi gzugs brñan lta bu la brjod kyì | mthar thams cad ci yañ med pa dañ dañ po dañ da lta med pa ñid 'khrul par snañ ba ltar ma yin te |.

⁹⁵ sToñ thun señ ge'i ña ro, p. 567.5-572.2, 591.4-593.4. Moreover, for Mi-pham the notion of an impermanent or conditioned TG is unacceptable. See *ibid.*, p. 593.4-600.3.

⁹⁶ See the Ñes šes sgron me, p. 75.2-3: *de gñis blo yis brtag [= btags?] pa tsam || don la gñis kar [= ka?] khas mi len || dgag sgrub gñis dañ bral ba yi || blo 'das gñod ma'i chos ñid yin ||*, and also *ibid.*, p. 119.2: *med dgag ma yin dgag sogs dañ || tha dad dañ ni snañ stoñ sogs || ris su chad pa med pa ste |*. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 111.3-4: *dgag sgrub spros kun bral bas na || gnas lugs don bžin chos kun kyañ || khas blañ rigs pas min [= mi?] grub phyr || gañ du khas ni len mi byed ||* (Pettit 1999a: 196); dBu ma rgyan 'grel, p. 271.2-3.

⁹⁷ Roñ-zom-pa (Theg chen tshul 'jug, p. 458.19ff.), when discussing the rDzogs-chen perception of “deceptive appearances” (*'khrul snañ*), explains that the rDzogs-chen system neither denies the “appearance” (*snañ ba*) as such nor does it hold that it possesses any defining characteristic (*mtshan ñid*). Nobody, according to him, would dispute about the obviousness of “appearance” and hence it is not an issue of philosophical debates (*ibid.*, p. 459.1-2: *thun moñ gi dbañ po'i mthun snañ 'di la snañ mi snañ ni su'añ mi rtsod do*). The philosophical debate is about whether there is anything behind the facade of “appearance” and if so what. In other words, the philosophical debate is about the “being” (*yin pa*) and “existence” (*yod pa*) of the “characteristics” of “appearance” (*ibid.*, p. 461.2: *de'i mtshan ñid ji ltar yin pa dañ ji ltar yod pa la rtsod do*). He then explains how various philosophical systems use the “mode of four [kinds of] negation and assertion” (*dgag sgrub bži'i tshul*) to establish one's own philosophical position and refute the philosophical positions of others. When discussing the Madhyamaka approach of “establishment” and “elimination,” he states that the Mādhyamikas do not propose an implicative negation (*ma yin dgag pa*). See *ibid.*, p. 465.2-5: *de la dbu ma'i tshul*

Yet the approach of the rÑiñ-ma-pas to the Tibetan issue of *rañ ston* and *gʻzan ston* is not always “inclusivistic.” It may be regarded to a limited degree as reconciliatory as well. Kloñ-chen-pa often speaks about the harmony among the various Tibetan traditions⁹⁸ as does Mi-pham. Even though Mi-pham obviously found the position of the Jo-nañ-pas as well as that of the dGe-lugs-pas rather radical, he attempted to reconcile these seemingly irreconcilable positions.⁹⁹ According to him, it is only in their approaches, and not in their intended goal that the Jo-nañ-pas and the dGe-lugs-pas differ. Mi-pham viewed the difference between the Jo-nañ emphasis on the positive aspect and the dGe-lugs stress on the negative aspect as a difference in the strategies (*thabs: upāya*) employed to argumentatively establish (*sgrub*) *nirvāṇa* and eliminate (*ʻjoms*) *saṃsāra*, respectively.¹⁰⁰ Modern scholars such as Schmithausen and Seyfort Ruegg would designate these approaches *via eminentiae* and *via negationis*, respectively, both to be traced already in

las | ji ltar rnal byor spyod pa rnams kyis don dam pa'i mtshan ñid du yod pa dañ yin par lta ba de dag ni | kun du [= tu] brtags [= btags?] pa ste gtan myed do žes myed par ʻgegs par byed | ma yin par dgag par [= pa?] bsgrub par bya ba'i don dam pa ni dbu ma pa mi sgrub bo || and also the Ñes šes sgron me, p. 75.3: *ston tshul kho nar bsams nas ni || dri na med dgag ñid yin te ||* (for the English translation, see Pettit 1999a: 196).

⁹⁸ Hookham 1991: 136.

⁹⁹ Mi-pham's attempt to reconcile the two positions that appear to be diametrically opposed has also been correctly noted in Dreyfus 2003: 321.

¹⁰⁰ dBu ma rgyan 'grel, p. 72.2-4: *'on kyañ med pa dañ yod pa'i phyogs re re rtsal du bton pa'i gzuñ rnams kyañ kun ñon phyogs ʻjoms pa dañ | rnam byañ phyogs sgrub pa'i thabs mkhas khyad par ba yin kyañ | mthar thug gi gnas lugs la de kho na ltar sgrub pa ni ma yin te | dper na | srid pa'i sdug bsñal la ʻjigs pa'i yid dañ | ži ba la dga' ba'i yid gñis | las dañ po pas bskyed dgos pa yin kyañ | byañ sems bdag ñid chen po rnams kyis srid ži mñam pa ñid du gzigs pa'i skabs na | ʻkhor ʻdas la ʻjigs sred kyañ spañ dgos pa bžin no ||*. Cf. Schmithausen 1981: 214, for the following observation on an attempt made in early Buddhism to establish a psychologically plausible relation between the content of liberating insight and its effect: “For it is clear that in principle there are two possibilities (admitting of course of the possibility of the two being combined): in a psychologically plausible process, the cessation of Craving could be achieved either by realizing the negative, disgusting character of mundane existence (i.e., by realizing *duḥkhasatya*), or by realizing the positive, peaceful or blissful character of the cessation of mundane existence (i.e., *Nirvāṇa*, which could easily, and in fact has, become the meaning of *'nirrodhasatya*'). In fact we can find, in the canonical texts, two further types of descriptions or theories of Liberating Insight, each exactly corresponding to one of these two possibilities.”

Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹⁰¹ I do not think that Mi-pham's harmonising attempt was merely a tactful strategy intended to obscure or erase the existing differences. Although often ignored by both the parties, Mi-pham indeed saw a common element upon which they could agree. According to him, Dol-po-pa had accepted the idea that reality as experienced in meditative equipoise is free from manifoldness.¹⁰² Hence, if what one experiences in meditative equipoise is indeed ultimate reality, then even for Dol-po-pa, the highest reality is "freedom from manifoldness." Dol-po-pa indeed explicitly states that in the meditative state (*mñam b'zag*) one abides in the state of "freedom from manifoldness" in accordance with the Middle Cycle and then in the post-meditative state (*rjes thob*) distinctions are made according to the Last Cycle and Vajrayāna.¹⁰³ Similarly, according to Tsoñ-kha-pa, so long as one holds the "appearances [of phenomena characterised by] dependent origination" (*snañ ba rten 'byuñ*) and their emptiness (*ston pa*) apart, one has not yet perfected one's view. One's view becomes only then perfect when the "appearances" [of phenomena] and their "emptiness" are perceived simultaneously. This idea of Tsoñ-kha-pa's was used by Mi-pham to argue that also Tsoñ-kha-pa understood ultimate reality to be characterised by the "union of appearance and emptiness" (*snañ ston zuñ 'jug*) and not by mere absence of "hypostatic existence" as emphasised by most of Tsoñ-kha-pa's interpreters.¹⁰⁴ This "union of

¹⁰¹ See Seyfort Ruegg 1989: 42-43.

¹⁰² dBu ma rgyan 'grel, p. 71.5-6: *rtogs pa'i dbañ phyug dol po pas kyañ | rjes thob śan 'byed pa'i śes rab kyis dpyad tshe | mthar 'bras sku dañ ye śes kyī rañ b'zin bde g'legs sñiñ po ñid rtag brtan źi ba g.yuñ druñ gi bdag ñid mi bslu ba'i bden pa dam pa yin ciñ | mñam g'zag [= b'zag?] la zlo ba'i tshe na spros pa kun bral bsgom par gsuñs pa'añ śin tu gnad zab ciñ |*

¹⁰³ Ri chos, p. 138.20-139.1: *de'i phyir 'khor lo tha ma gñis dañ | rdo rje theg pa'i don gcig mod kyī ñams su len pa na | la zlo ba chos ñid zab mo la 'khor lo bar ba [= pa] dañ mthun par rtog med spros bral du mñam par b'zag nas | rjes thob śan 'byed pa'i tshe chos rñams la yañ dag par so sor rtog pa na 'khor lo tha ma dañ rdo rje theg pa las gsuñs pa b'zin du legs par rnam par phyē ste ño sprad na theg pa chen po'i gsuñ rab thams cad kyī don zab mo ñams su len pa tshañ [= tshañ la] ma nor źiñ yoñs su dag pa ñid du 'gyur ro ||*. See also *ibid.*, p. 255.8-13, 259.20-261.21, 337.21-24.

¹⁰⁴ Mi-pham's attitude toward Tsoñ-kha-pa was a mixture of ambivalence and conciliatoriness. Mi-pham often argued that Tsoñ-kha-pa's ultimate view was that of "freedom from manifoldness" or the "union of emptiness and appearance of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*)."¹⁰⁴ See the Rab gsal brgal lan, p. 289.6-290.1, 416.5-418.6, 420.2-421.4. However, it should also be noted that Mi-pham is somehow more conciliatory toward Tsoñ-kha-pa's views than towards those of most dGe-lugs interpreters, with few exceptions such as lCañ-skya Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje

appearance and emptiness” is, for Mi-pham, identical with “freedom from manifoldness.” Thus, according to him, both Dol-po-pa and Tsoñ-kha-pa, like many other Indian and Tibetan scholars and sages, were referring to one and the same absolute truth upon which, ironically, both vehement disputes and reconciliation hinged.¹⁰⁵

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, let me summarise in a few sentences the rÑiñ-ma position on the doctrine of TG by pointing out its similarities and dissimilarities with other Tibetan interpretations. The rÑiñ-ma-pas seem to agree fully with the Sa-skyapa-pas in their understanding of “freedom from manifoldness,”¹⁰⁶ and in their consideration of the teachings of excellent qualities of TG to be of definitive meaning, they very much agree with the Jo-nañ-pas.¹⁰⁷ In their approval of the teachings of both intrinsic emptiness and the TG to be of definitive meaning,¹⁰⁸ they resemble the dGe-lugs-pas. However, although in letter the rÑiñ-ma position regarding the interpretation of the TG theory is akin to that of the main-stream dGe-lugs-pas, in spirit it is what may seem a combination of the position of main-stream Sa-skyapa-pas and that of the Jo-nañ-pas.

(1717-1786). See the lTa mgrur 'grel pa, p. 838.6-849.5; gSuñ sgron, p. 541.3-4: *dgag pa 'di dag rje bla ma la brjod do sñam du bsam par mi bya ste | de'i dgoñs pa zab pas ñed cag gi yañ bla mar 'dzin pa'i phyir ro* ||. See also *ibid.*, p. 546.3-547.2. The *locus classicus* of Tsoñ-kha-pa's idea of the “union of emptiness and appearance of dependent origination” is his Lam gtso rnam gsum, often cited by Mi-pham. See, for example, Mi-pham's dBu ma rgyan 'grel, p. 71.2-4.

¹⁰⁵ Roñ-zom-pa also speaks about the single taste of the Buddha's teachings; see Wangchuk 2002: 287-288 and Pettit 1999a: 90. The trend can be also found in certain of Kloñ-chen-pa's writings such the bSam gtan ñal gso, p. 23.6-24.1, and its commentary, the Śiñ rta rnam dag, p. 119.3-5, where Prajñāpāramitā, Madhyamaka, Śi-byed, Mahāmudrā and rDzogs-chen are equated. See also the Yid bzin mdzod 'grel, Vol. *wam*, p. 840.2-3. Further see Mi-pham's dBu ma rgyan 'grel, p. 69.5-72.2 and Ñes śes sgron me, p. 93.1-5. Particularly noteworthy in the context of “reconciliation” is Mi-pham's use of the expression *sañs rgyas dan grub thob dgoñs pa gcig* which can be traced back to Sa-paṅ's Thub pa dgoñs gsal, fol. 59a5. Cf. the lTa mgrur 'grel pa, p. 851.4-854.1.

¹⁰⁶ For example, compare Sa-paṅ's statement in his sDom gsum rab dbye, verse 3.255: *pha rol phyin pa'i spro bral las || lhag pa'i lta ba yod na ni || lta de spros pa can du 'gyur || spros bral yin na khyad par med ||* (Rhoton 2002: 129 & 308) and Mi-pham's similar statements in his Ñes śes sgron me (p. 88.6-89.1).

¹⁰⁷ Ri chos, p. 157.20-158.1; Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 503.

¹⁰⁸ Seyfort Ruegg 1968: 506.

Yet, unlike the Sa-skyapas, they do not consider the teachings of TG to be of provisional meaning, and unlike the Jo-nañpas, they neither consider the Middle Cycle to be of provisional meaning nor consider TG to be an entity or reality that is “hypostatically existent.”¹⁰⁹ Unlike the dGe-lugs-pas, they do not consider TG to be merely the absence of “hypostatic existence” of the mind. Although methodologically they favour the *rañ ston* approach and hence prefer to designate themselves as exponents of *rañ ston*, TG – which is equated by them with the “self-

¹⁰⁹ We have seen that Roñ-zom-pa accepts the teachings of TG or “self-occurring gnosis” or the “indivisibility of the two truths” as being of definitive meaning. However, if one were to bring TG or even “freedom from manifoldness” under the lens of Madhyamaka analysis, as apparently done by Roñ-zom-pa, even they would not withstand the “force of logical analysis” (*rigs pa'i dpuñ*). See the gSuñ thor bu, p. 124.6-7: *ye śes de'añ rañ 'byuñ [= byuñ] yin la | rañ 'byuñ [= byuñ] gi ye śes de ñid kyañ yañ dag par ma grub na | 'di'i rol pa'i dkyil 'khor lta ga la grub | ces kyañ rtogs śin goms par byas nas |*; Theg chen tshul 'jug, p. 521.8-10: *spros pa ñe bar zig bsgrub du [= tu]'añ myed pas | myed pa'i myed pa'añ myed ces smos so || de lta mtha' myed na dbus kyañ mi 'grub la dbus la gnas pa'añ mi 'grub bo ||*. It is not yet clear to me whether the Jo-nañpas themselves designate TG as an entity or reality that is “hypostatically existent” (*bden par grub pa*) or whether this is an “(illogical) consequence” (*thal ba*) imputed to them by their opponents. This point, in my view, is decisive for our understanding of the position of the Jo-nañpas. If it is an “(illogical) consequence” that entails from their acceptance of TG as being characterised as permanent (*nitya*), immutable (*dhruva*), blissful (*śiva*), and eternal (*śāśvata*) and even *ātman*, then we shall have to carefully study the Jo-nañpas' explanations. In my view, Dol-po-pa's acceptance of the indestructibility of TG and his assertion that “TG is not empty of its qualities” would not automatically mean that for him TG is a “hypostatic existence.” If Dol-po-pa's acceptance of the indestructibility of TG indeed implies his acceptance of the “hypostatic existence” of TG, then there is no reason why anyone else's acceptance of the “indestructibility” of true reality (*dharmatā*) would not also imply the acceptance of the “hypostatic existence” of true reality. For example, even mKhas-grub-rje accepts the immutability of TG (rGyud sde spyi rnam, p. 52.16-18: *rañ lugs la yañ bde gśegs sñin po dan'no bo ñid sku'i rnam grañs de dag | 'dus ma byas śin dños po med pa | rtag brtan ther zug yin gyi | bden par grub pa ni ma yin no ||*). Similarly, Dol-po-pa's assertion that “TG is not empty of its qualities” does not seem to imply his assertion of the “hypostatic existence” of TG because the word “empty” (*śūnya*) is obviously understood by him as simply “devoid” and not in a Madhyamaka technical sense. In other words, what he seems to be making a case for is only the “presence of the qualities attributed to TG” and not necessarily its “hypostatic existence.” My impression is that Dol-po-pa's acceptance of “freedom from manifoldness in meditative equipoise” rather suggests that Dol-po-pa did not consider TG to be an entity or reality that is “hypostatically existent.” This matter, however, needs to be studied more closely.

occurring gnosis” or universal ground (*gzi*) in the rDzogs-chen sense – is conceived by them as transcending the notions of both *rañ stoñ* and *gzan stoñ*, that is, as being intrinsically empty (*ño bo stoñ pa*), luminous in nature (*rañ bzin gsal ba*) and spontaneously present together with all-embracing compassion (*thugs rje kun khyab*).¹¹⁰

Abbreviations and Bibliography

ABBREVIATIONS

D	<i>The Nyingma Edition of the sDe-dge bKa’-’gyur and bsTan-’gyur</i> . Oakland: Dharma Publication, 1981.
DK	<i>The Collected Writings (bka’ bum) of Dil-mgo mKhyen-brtse</i> . Delhi: She chen Publications, 1994 [cited by number of folios in Arabic numerals].
DzD	<i>mDzod-bdun by Kloñ-chen-pa</i> . Gangtok, Sikkim: Dodrup Chen Rinpoche (repr. Thimphu: National Library of Bhutan).
MK	<i>Mi-pham bKa’-’bum</i> . sDe-dge edition.
ÑG	<i>rÑiñ-ma rGyud-’bum</i> . mTshams-brag edition.
ÑK	<i>Ñal-gso-skor-gsum by Kloñ-chen-pa</i> . Gangtok, Sikkim: Dodrup Chen Rinpoche (repr. Thimphu: National Library of Bhutan).
P	Daisetz T. Suzuki (ed.), <i>The Tibetan Tripitaka</i> (Peking edition). Tokyo – Kyoto: Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute, 1955-1961.
RS	<i>Roñ-zom-chos-bzañ-gi-gsuñ-’bum</i> , Vol. 1-2. Sichuan: Sichron Mi-rigs-dpe-skrun-khañ, 1999.
Taishō	Paul Demiéville et al. (ed.), <i>Répertoire du Canon Bouddhique Sino-Japonais. Édition de Taishō (Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō)</i> . Fascicule Annexe du Hōbōgirin. Paris – Tokyo: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve – Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1978.

¹¹⁰ For example, see Kloñ-chen-pa’s Śiñ rta chen po, Vol. ña, p. 342.1-4: *gdod ma’i sems ñid ’od gsal ba stoñ gsal rañ byuñ ye śes ño bo stoñ pa nam mkha’ lta bu | rañ bzin gsal ba ñi zla lta bu | thugs rje ’i mdañs ’char tshul ma ’gags pa me loñ g.ya’ dag pa’i ños lta bu | chos sku loñs sku sprul gsum gyi rañ bzin | bde bar gśegs pa’i sñiñ po ’khor ’das gañ du’añ rgya chad dañ phyogs lhuñ med pa’i nañ nas | ño bos stoñ pas ’char sgo phye | rañ bzin gsal bas rañ byuñ gi ’od lña yul du snañ | thugs rje rig pa ye śes dpyod byed śes par skyes pa las ’khrul par ’dod de | gsañ sñiñ las | e ma’o bde bśegs sñiñ po las || rañ gi rnam rtog las kyis ’khrul || źes so ||.*

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