"Rong-ston on Buddha-Nature: A Commentary on the Fourth Chapter of the Ratnagotravibhāga (vv.1.27–95[a])"

Christian Bernert

Magister der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)
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Foreword and acknowledgements

This work is, to me, a perfect example for dependent arising (Skt. *pratīyāsamutpāda*) and I feel very fortunate to have been able to spend all this time “producing” it. Many people, many events, and many states of mind contributed and worked together, assisting me in the process.

First of all I would like to thank my parents for their generous support over the years to which I owe my entire education, and for their continuous encouragements; I am very grateful to them.

My interest in the studies of religions in general and in Buddhist studies in particular manifested itself in the year 2000, after an extended visit to India and Nepal with its many sacred Buddhist sites. Subsequently I enrolled at the University of Vienna to study comparative religions and Tibetan and Buddhist studies, and at the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu where I spent several of my summer holidays studying traditional Buddhist treatises with Tibetan scholars. One of the texts I encountered in Nepal was to become the subject of this present work. I am therefore particularly indebted to Khenpo Dr. Ngawang Jorden who introduced me to this text and with whom I had the opportunity to spend many hours discussing the various questions that came up in the course of my research. Also, I would like to thank him for letting me use his yet to be published dissertation.

In the years 2004 and 2005 Prof. Klaus-Dieter Mathes from the University of Hamburg was a visiting professor at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies in Vienna. As I was already looking for a suitable subject for my M.A. thesis at this time and my interests concurred with Prof. Mathes’ fields of research, I asked him to be my advisor to which he kindly consented. Initially, I chose a religious biography of a Tibetan master from the last century as the subject of this M.A. thesis. After a few months of research however, I found this enterprise to exceed the scope of my abilities and decided to drop it, with both reluctance and a sense of release at the same time. With Rong-ston’s commentary on a classical treatise on buddha-nature I soon found a more suitable subject. I want to thank Prof. Mathes for
his patience and for supporting me in pursuing my personal interests, as well as for his able guidance and his many suggestions and corrections that helped me produce this work.

From the outset of my journey into the world of Tibetan Buddhism literature until today, I have had the opportunity to study the Tibetan language under a number of teachers both native speakers and western scholars. All of them played their part in this puzzle and I want to express my gratitude towards all of them, mentioning in particular Genla Jamyang Zangpo, Dr. Horst Lasic, Dr. Helmut Tropper, and Dr. Junjie Chu. My understanding of the Sanskrit language, though only rudimentary, I owe to Prof. Karin Preisendanz—I hope to nurture the seeds she sew in my ālayavijñāna.

I am thankful to Prof. Max Deeg, Prof. Johann Figl, Prof. Birgit Heller, and Dr. Hans Gerald Hödl for teaching me the basics and methodology of religious studies. I would also like to thank Dr. Kazuo Kano for kindly allowing me to use his dissertation closely related to my subject, Dr. Mamoru Kobayashi for sending me his articles, Karen White and Eugene Romaniuk for helping me polish my English, Mag. Markus Viehbeck and Dr. Anne MacDonald for their useful suggestions, as well as Barbara Schaffer to whom I could always run when I was troubled by the Sanskrit and who has been supporting me all along.

Last but not least, I want to thank Geshe Sherab Gyaltse Amipa for introducing me to Tibetan Buddhism in general and to the teachings of the Sa-skya tradition in particular. His teachings and his presence have always been a great source of inspiration to me.

It is evident that this work is, in fact, a work in progress. There are bound to be mistakes (for which I want to apologise at this place), and I certainly could have continued correcting it ad infinitum. At best, I hope it can contribute to our understanding of a chapter of the Tibetan Buddhist religion. At least, I hope not to distort my author’s views in presenting my necessarily limited understanding of his treatise.
Introduction

Set within the broader framework of Buddhist world view, the fundamental concern of the *Tathāgatagarbha* literature is to show that all sentient beings, without exception, can attain freedom from every kind of suffering and unease, and, ultimately, actualise the state of a fully awakened buddha. According to these scriptures, all sentient beings are by their very nature either empowered to attain buddhahood, or essentially already buddhas (depending on the interpretation). This innate quality of all sentient beings is given the name “buddha-nature” (*Skt. tathāgatagarbha*; *Tib. de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po*).

This doctrine has played an important role in the history of Buddhism. Although rudimentary elements of this doctrine can be identified already within the Pāli canon,¹ those passages relating to the natural luminosity of the mind, which is said to be temporarily stained by adventitious mental afflictions, required the emergence of the Mahāyāna movement before developing into a fully fledged doctrine in its own right. Since it is supported by a number of sūtras² and śāstras (i.e. the Buddhist canon composed of the Buddha’s sermons and the Indian commentarial literature), it can be regarded as a third school of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, the other two being Madhyamaka and Yogācāra.³ However, the concept of buddha-nature reached its apogee not in India but in East Asia and Tibet where it became a cornerstone for Buddhist philosophy and religious practice. In Tibet, in particular, this concept was treated diversely by many scholars, all of whom were ambitious to fit it into the

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¹ For example in AN I.v, 9: “This mind, O monks, is luminous! But it is defiled by adventitious defilements.” (After Mathes 2008: ix.) See also Takasaki 1966: 34–35.

² A prevalent doxographical classification of Buddhist sūtras distinguishes between the so called “three turnings of the Dharma-wheel” (a concept introduced in the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra*). Scriptures of the first turning fundamentally discuss the four noble truths as expounded in Nikāya Buddhism which represents the common ground for all traditions and the basic framework for all Buddhist teachings. Sūtras from second turning emphasise the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as expounded in the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, and those of the third teach the about the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), the latter two being classified as belonging to the Mahāyāna corpus. The sūtras on buddha-nature are generally regarded as belonging to the third turning.

³ As Seyfort Ruegg (1969: 2) remarks, the language used in the *tathāgatagarbha* treatises differs noticeably from that of the other two schools, and even comes suspiciously close to that of the Vedānta. Indeed, a number of modern scholars have accused this doctrine to be alien to Buddhist thought, an accusation refuted by others. For a collection of articles on this topic see Hubbard and Swanson 1997.
philosophical framework of their own respective schools. Rong-ston Shes-bya kun-rig (1367–1449) of the Sa-skya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism figures among the most influential of these scholars. In general, his commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga, the main Indian śāstra on buddha-nature, and in particular, a translation of his exposition of the subject by means of ten categories, will be the focus of this work. In the first chapter I will introduce the doctrine of buddha-nature, giving a brief account of its sources and formation. The second chapter will deal with the main treatise on buddha-nature, the Ratnagotravibhāga. Here, I will present the text itself, discuss the question of its authorship, as well as its transmission in India and early reception in Tibet. This chapter will also include a brief overview of previous studies on the Ratnagotravibhāga and the doctrine of buddha-nature. The third chapter will be devoted to the author of our treatise and his presentation of the subject. The final and main part of the work will consist of an annotated translation of a selected passage of his abovementioned commentary. Throughout this work I have used the transliteration system of Turrell Wylie for the Tibetan.\footnote{Cf. Wylie 1959.}
1. The doctrine of buddha-nature

1.1. Overview:

The expression *tathāgatagarbha* is a Sanskrit compound consisting of the terms *tathāgata* (an epithet of the Buddha) and *garbha* which can signify “womb” (or simply “inside, interior”) and “embryo” (and semantically related concepts such as “essence”, “offspring” and so forth), as well as “to contain” when used at the end of a *bahuvrīhi* compound.5 According to Zimmermann, this last option is precisely the intended meaning *tathāgatagarbha* had in its earliest instances in the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, which he renders with “[sentient beings] contain a *tathāgata*.”6 For later treatises however, the *tatpurusa* interpretation of the term seems to be suitable in most cases. According to this interpretation, beings can be said to have the *garbha* of a *tathāgata*.7 This twofold interpretation of the term is also reflected in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, the main śāstra on the subject, which supports both concepts as we shall see below.8

Why teach buddha-nature?

Schmithausen has argued that Buddhist philosophical theories, in many cases, have their roots in spiritual practices, rather than in mere theoretical considerations.9 One fact supporting his theory in the case of the doctrine of buddha-nature would be that the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*,10 the earliest sūtra to mention the term *tathāgata-garbha*, illustrates the presence of buddha-nature in sentient beings by means of the nine similes, without giving theoretical explanations for this statement. Rather, it is

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5 In the last case, the first part of the compound denotes what is being contained in the subject the whole compound refers to. Cf. Zimmermann 2002: 40–41.
8 It is interesting to note that the Tibetan translators rendered *garbha* in this expression with *snying po* (“essence, heart, core”), leaving no room for the “womb” meaning of the term. Chinese translators, on the other hand, usually used the term *tsang* (“storehouse”), which could be an indication for the promixity between the concepts *tathāgatagarbha* and *ālayavijñāna* as attested in the *Lankāvatārasūtra* for example. Cf. Sefort Ruegg 1969: 501–505.
9 Schmithausen illustrates this by showing how the Yogācāra doctrine of “Mind Only” (*cittamatrā*), the doctrine of the momentariness of all phenomena, as well as the “Mahāyāna illusionism,” all have been mentioned at their earliest instances in contexts related to spiritual practices and mystical experiences. Cf. Schmithausen 1973.
10 See below for a short analysis of this sūtra.
presented as being the buddha’s own realisation, or as his special vision. In the Śrīmālādevīśūtra—another fundamental scripture for the formation of this doctrine—the tathāgatagarbha is said to be a profound teaching beyond the reach of the intellect and accessible a tathāgata alone. Along these lines, the Ratnagotravibhāga states that the ultimate truth of the buddhas (which in this context stands for the buddhas’ realisation that all beings have buddha-nature) can be understood by faith alone. All of this, following Schmithausen, would indicate that some sort of spiritual experience must have predated the formulation of the buddha-nature theory. Furthermore, the Ratnagotravibhāga itself gives pedagogical legitimisation for the formulation of this doctrine. We read that buddha-nature has been taught in order to eliminate five faults or obstacles on the path, namely: the feeling of discouragement (līnaṃ cittam), contempt against inferior beings (hīnasattvavajñā), holding the untrue [to be true] (abhūtagrāha), disparaging the true nature (bhūtadharmāpavāda), and attachment to the self (ātmasneha). These are the practical reasons for introducing this concept into the doctrinal system. In this way, the doctrine of buddha-nature can be viewed as being directly relevant for Buddhist practice.

1.2. Sources

1.2.1. The sūtras:

With the emergence of the Mahāyāna movement, between 300 and 400 years after the Buddha’s passing, the spiritual goal to be achieved by the followers of the Buddhist path was no longer reserved for the ordained members among his followers, but (in theory) made accessible to all, monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen alike. In a fundamental scripture of the Mahāyāna, the so-called Lotussūtra (Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra), the principal spiritual ideal of the arhat is replaced by that of the

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13 Cf. RGV I.153.
15 This opposition ordained-lay excludes a third category of vow-holders called gomin, which, being of marginal importance, has been left out for convenience sake. Gomins have a somewhat ambiguous status, being celibate and wearing religious robes, without, however, holding the vows of novices or fully ordained monks. On this see Sefort Ruegg 2004: 24–27.
bodhisattva, who strives not to bring his personal suffering alone to an end, but rather to attain the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings.\textsuperscript{16} Arhatship is presented as an inferior, temporary result offered by the Buddha to the tired spiritual adept, whereas in actuality all beings are to strive for the ultimate goal of buddhahood.

Although the concept of buddha-nature does not appear in this sūtra, its roots can, according to Zimmermann, be traced back to it.\textsuperscript{17} One simile in particular (used in the \textit{Lotusūtra} to illustrate sentient beings’ wish to attain omniscience) shows great similarity with a simile from the later \textit{Tathāgatagarbhasūtra}.\textsuperscript{18}

Another early scripture important in the history of the formation of \textit{tathāgatagarbha} doctrine is the \textit{Avatamsakasūtra}, the earliest portions of which were translated into Chinese in the early third century CE. A key concept found therein is that of the buddha’s gnosis (\textit{buddhajñāna}) pervading and therefore being present in all sentient beings.\textsuperscript{19}

It is in the abovementioned \textit{Tathāgatagarbhasūtra}, dated back to the second half of the third century CE,\textsuperscript{20} that we find the expression “\textit{tathāgatagarbha}” for the first time.\textsuperscript{21} The core of the text consists of the illustration of this concept by means of nine similes.\textsuperscript{22} According to Zimmermann, the idea conveyed by means of these similes is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} In the early scriptures, where the term bodhisattva is mainly used to denote Buddha Śākyamūni when referring to his previous lives, not everyone is encouraged to become a bodhisattva. Of the three goals—arhatship, pratyekabuddhahood and perfect buddhahood—the first is understood to be the most accessible one and the last the most exalted, reserved for rare individuals of superior capacity alone. However, arhats too are noted for their efforts for the benefit of beings. In the \textit{Jinna Sutta} (SN 16.5) for instance, the Buddha praises his arhat disciple Mahākassapa for practising for the welfare and benefit of others. As noted by Rahula (1971: 70), references to the bodhisattva ideal can be found in the Pāli scriptures. They are, however, relatively rare and widely dispersed.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Cf. Zimmermann 2006: 21–23.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} In the simile in question, a wealthy benefactor sews a jewel into man’s coat without the latter’s knowledge. The man then goes on a journey, loses his wealth and lives, ignoring his secret possession, in poverty until his long lost friend reveals it to him. The friend represents the Buddha who has awakened the wish to attain omniscience for all beings.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} This passage is quoted in RGVV I.25 (Cf. Johnston 1950: 22, 10–11).
  \item \textsuperscript{20} The original Sanskrit of this sūtra is no longer extant. The earliest translation of this sūtra into Chinese dates, according to ancient catalogues, from the end of the third century CE. Cf. Zimmermann 2002: 69–74 and p. 77–79.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} For a analysis of this compound see Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 499–516; and Zimmermann 2002: 39–46, for its use in the \textit{Tathāgatagarbhasūtra} in particular.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} The \textit{tathāgatagarbha} present within all sentient beings is said to be similar to: 1) tathāgatas, sitting in putrid lotus flowers; 2) honey, in a honeycomb protected by bees; 3) a kernel, in its husk; 4) a golden nugget, covered in excrement; 5) a hidden treasure, buried underneath a house; 6) the sprout of a tree, in
\end{itemize}
that of fully awakened buddhas being present within sentient beings, without their being aware of it.\textsuperscript{23}

Philosophically, other Mahāyāna sūtras were more important for the formulation of the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} theory.\textsuperscript{24} Of them, the \textit{Śrīmālādevīśimhaṇādasūtra} in particular adds a number of original and relevant points in this regard. In this scripture, translated into Chinese in the first half of the fifth century, the buddha’s \textit{dharma-kāya} (i.e. the buddha’s ultimate, non-dual realisation of reality),\textsuperscript{25} when not free from mental afflictions or defilements (\textit{kleśa}), is referred to as \textit{tathāgatagarbha}. This \textit{garbha} is said to be empty of mental afflictions, while at the same time being endowed with innumerable and inseparable buddha-qualities.\textsuperscript{26} It is also said to be the very basis or support for both saṃsāra (in the sense that its being without beginning serves as a basis for the beginningless cycle of birth and death) and nirvāṇa (in the sense that it is the existence of this \textit{garbha} that is the cause for one’s aspiration towards nirvāṇa).\textsuperscript{27}

Another important canonical source for the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} theory is the Mahāyāna \textit{Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra}.\textsuperscript{28} In it, the terms “self, permanent, blissful, and very pure” (\textit{ātma}, \textit{nitya}, \textit{sukha}, \textit{pariśuddha}) are brought up in relation with the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} —the self referring to the buddha, the \textit{dharma-kāya} being permanent, the \textit{parinirvāṇa} blissful, and the real \textit{dharma} of the buddhas and bodhisattvas very pure.\textsuperscript{29} Also, buddha-nature is termed “self,” a self, however, that is explicitly differentiated from the self as understood by the non-Buddhist schools (\textit{tīrthika}), the existence of which is denied. Later in the text, the whole exposition is unmasked as being merely of a

\footnotesize{the seed; 7) a Tathāgata’s statue, in a tattered rag; 8) the embryo of a future world monarch, in his miserable mother’s womb; and 9) a golden sculpture, in its clay mold. Cf. Zimmermann 2002: 105–144.

\textsuperscript{23} Cf. Zimmermann 2002: 34–39. Some Tibetan authors however, such as 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal (1392–1481) or Rong-ston Shākya rgyal-mtshan (1367–1449), have tended to see in simile 6) and 8), in particular, indications for their being the potential in sentient beings for the development into fully awakened buddhas. On Gzhon nu dpal see Mathes 2008: 8 and 342–343. On Rong-ston see below.

\textsuperscript{24} Takasaki (1966: 32–45) traces a genealogy of the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} theory, taking into account a great number of sources of which I will merely mention the most important ones.

\textsuperscript{25} The definition of \textit{dharma-kāya} varies according to time and tradition. For a detailed analysis of this term and the controversies over it see Makransky 1997. For a brief overview of the buddha-bodies in the Mahāyāna see also Williams 1989: 167–184.


\textsuperscript{28} There exist two Chinese versions of this sūtra, both of which have been translated in the first half of the fifth century. The two Tibetan sūtras of this name have been produced from the Sanskrit and the Chinese, respectively. Cf. Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 10–11.

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Seyfort Ruegg 1973: 81–82.
didactical nature, aimed at converting non-believers, the actual meaning of buddha-
nature being unfathomable.30

Finally, the Anūnatvāpaṇṇatvanirdeśa, another scripture significant for the formation
of the tathāgatagarbha doctrine, teaches the equality of tathāgatagarbha with the
dharmakāya, which in turn is said to possess innumerable inseparable qualities.31 32

The important Lankāvatārasūtra33 is yet another major Mahāyāna sūtra to mention the
tathāgatagarbha. It can, however, be considered to be the first reaction to this
document, rather than a scripture important for its formation. In it, we find buddha-
nature being equated with emptiness on one hand, and with the ālayavijñāna on the
other, aligning it thus with the Yogācāra doctrine.34

1.2.2. The śāstras:

The Tibetan tradition attributes the main śāstras related to the doctrine of buddha-
nature to Maitreya.35 Of them, only the Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra and the Ramagotra-
vibhāga explicitly mention the term tathāgatagarbha, and only the latter is exclusively
devoted to its doctrine.36 However, the influence of this last mentioned work can be
noticed in the case of the other two Maitreya works found in the Cittamātrā section of
the Tengyur. This influence is, according to Mathes, evident in the exposition of the
mind’s natural luminosity and the adventitious nature of mental afflictions in both the
Madhyāntavibhāga and the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga.37

A term closely connected to buddha-nature is gotra to which the Mahāyāna-
sūtrālaṃkāra devotes its entire third chapter. Gotra (Tib. rigs: “lineage, family” also

30 For the translation of selected passages of this sūtra and an analysis of the hermeneutical methods
given therein to understand the concept of buddha-nature see Ruegg 1989a: 19–44.
31 This sūtra (no longer extant in the original Sanskrit) is quoted in RGVV I.1. Cf. Mathes 2008: 7–8.
32 For further sūtras related to this doctrine, especially those quoted in the RGV, see Takasaki 1966: 32–
33. The earliest form of this sūtra was translated into Chinese in the first half of the fifth century. For a
study of this sūtra see Suzuki 1930.
35 The Tibetan tradition attributes five treatises to Maitreya: Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra, Abhisamayālaṃkāra, Madyāntavibhāga, Dharmadharmatāvibhāga, and Ramagotra-vibhāga.
36 In its only passage to mention the tathāgatagarbha, the Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra (IX.37) equates
buddha-nature with suchness.
translated as “spiritual gene”) denotes the spiritual potential or propensity of sentient beings. The Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra asserts the existence of different gotra-s or propensities leading beings to different resultant states, as well as the existence of a certain class of beings definitely cut-off from their spiritual potential. Thus, beings with a śrāvakā gotra can only attain arhatship (as opposed to the full awakening of a buddha), those with a pratyekabuddha gotra only pratyekabuddhahood and so forth, while some are said to be “doomed” to wander eternally in the cycle of existence.

This position—associated with Yogācāra philosophy—is, however, not maintained in the Ratnagotravibhāga. There, we rather read that all beings possess buddha-nature because the gotra “exists.” This gotra is said to be twofold—naturally present in all beings (prакṛtisṭha) and generated (saṃudānīta)—and is explained to be the cause (hetu) for the attainment of buddhahood.

As a whole, the Ratnagotravibhāga (including the vyākhyā) seems to be in favour of the interpretation of buddha-nature as found in the Śrīmālādeviśīṃhasūtra, identifying beings as buddhas obscured by adventitious mental afflictions. A subtle yet clear distinction between buddhas and sentient beings can, however, be made on the basis of stanza I.27. There, we read that all beings are said to possess buddha-nature by virtue of three reasons, one of them being that the result (i.e. the term “buddha”) has been “metaphorically” applied to the gotra. Thus, the term “buddha” in buddhagarbha (and related expressions) would only denote a potential present in beings, as opposed to a fully fledged resultant state merely covered by adventitious defilements. This, as we shall see below, became in important topic of debate for later

38 On the meaning of this term see Seyfort Ruegg 1976.
40 The Abhisamayālaṃkāra, a commentary on the implicit meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā literature and thus associated with Madhyamaka philosophy, similarly rejects a distinction between gotra-s on the ground of the undifferentiated nature of the dharmadhātu. Cf. Seyfort Ruegg 1969, chapter 3.
41 Cf. RGV I.27–28. One isolated stanza (RGV I.41) seems to indicate that, indeed, some beings are without the potential for liberation. Seyfort Ruegg (1969: 280) remarks that this is indeed surprising, as it contradicts its doctrine of tathāgatagarbha and universal awakening. At this point, the vyākhyā explains that such statements are used to convert those opposed to the Mahāyāna. For are translation of the relevant passage see Takasaki 1966: 222–224.
42 The RGV also mentions another type of gotra which functions as a “mine” for the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha). Cf. RGV I.23–24 as well as Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 282–283.
exegetes. It is important to note that throughout the text, *garbha, dhātu* (“element”), and *(prakṛtistha)* gotra are used synonymously to refer to defiled suchness (*samalā tathathā*), as opposed to undefiled suchness (*nirmalā tathatā*) equalled with awakening (*bodhi*).45

While the *Ratnagotravibhāga* played an important role in the history of Tibetan scholarship, it did not receive that much attention on its own home ground, as we shall see below. Takasaki lists four works known only through Chinese sources (*Dharmadhātaviśeṣastra, Buddhagotaśastra, Anuttarāśrayasūtra, and Mahāyāna-śraddhotpādasūstra*) which possess similarities with the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.46 One can consider the first three in particular to be based to a great extent on the presentation of buddha-nature as found in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Since, however, their authorship and originality are uncertain, they can hardly be taken as examples for the continuation of the *tathāgatagarbha* literature in India.

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44 With the exception of the term *tathāgatadhātu* which can refer to the resultant state as well.
45 “Suchness” stands for ultimate reality. This means that as long as mental afflictions (*kleśa*) are present, there is no liberating awakening to the actual state of things. Once freed from those afflictions, awakening is attained. On this, see also below (2.1.).
46 Takasaki 1966: 45–54.
2. The *Ratnagotravibhāga*

2.1. The text of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*

The most important śāstra discussing the *tathāgatagarbha* theory is the *Ratnagotravibhāga* together with its commentary (the *vyākhya*). It is the earliest systematic presentation of this doctrine, composed at latest towards the end of the 5th century by drawing from numerous sources.47 Takasaki has identified nineteen canonical sources for this treatise—including both sūtras and śāstras—and eight unidentified ones.48 The treatise itself is of a composite nature and consists of both verses—kārikā-s supplemented by explanatory verses and quotations drawn from canonical sources—and a prose commentary. Takasaki has identified an original text consisting of 27 verses from the first chapter.49 His theory, however, has been rejected by Schmithausen who assumes that this “Ur-Text” (identified by Takasaki and again reduced to consist of only 15 verses by Schmithausen himself) is only one building block of the original *Ratnagotravibhāga*, which in turn should be identical with the Chinese translation (the original Sanskrit being extant only together with its *vyākhya* and not as a separate text).50

The content of the treatise has been discussed in detail, among others, by Seyfort Ruegg.51 Following his presentation, I will give a brief outline of it here:

The *Ratnagotravibhāga* basically deals with seven vajrapada-s (“adamantine topics”), so called because of their unfathomable nature. Those seven are: the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha), the element (*dhātu*, equivalent to *tathāgatagarbha*), awakening (*bodhi*), the buddha excellences (*guṇa*), and activity (*kriyā*).

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47 The earliest extant Chinese translation was produced between 511 and 515 A.D. by Ratnamati, who had returned from India in 508. Mathes (2008: 1) dates the earliest layers of the RGV back to the third or fourth century, attributing them to Sārmati. On the question of the authorship of this treatise see below.

48 The seven topics presented in the RGV (I. 1–2), for example, are taken from the *Dhāraṇīśvararājasūtra*, and the set of nine similes for buddha-nature from the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* are reproduced and expounded upon in RGV I.95–143 together with its commentary. Cf. Takasaki 1966: 32–33.

49 This text is rendered in its entirety on pp. 393–395.


The first chapter—dealing with the first four topics—is by far the longest of the treatise. After presenting the topical outline of the text, it begins with an analysis of the Three Jewels, establishing buddha(hood) (buddhatva) as the single ultimate refuge for sentient beings. The text then goes on discussing the main topic of the treatise at great length. Having established all beings as buddhagarbha-s,\(^{52}\) the dhātu (i.e. defiled suchness) is explained by means of ten categories and nine similes. To end this section, the reasons for this doctrine are explained.

The second chapter deals with awakening (bodhi)—equated with undefiled suchness—by means of eight categories. Awakening is explained as the result of purification, attained by removing all adventitious mental afflictions from the mind’s nature. (From this chapter onwards, almost no explanatory commentary is given in the vyākhyā.) The third chapter discusses the sixty four buddha excellences (guna) inseparable from undefiled suchness and the fourth covers the thirty two kinds of buddha activities (jinakriyā), which are said to be both effortless and uninterrupted. The final chapter describes the benefits of this teaching, explaining the advantages of adhering faithfully to it, and closes with a dedication of the merit obtained by this exposition.

### 2.2. The question of the authorship of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*

The question of the authorship of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* has remained unsolved to this day. According to the Chinese tradition, Sāramati (fl. about 250 A.D.) is identified as the author of the treatise. The Tibetan tradition, however, attributes the root text to the bodhisattva Maitreya—the future buddha residing in Tuṣita heaven—and the commentary to his human disciple Asaṅga (fl. 4\(^{th}\) century). A Sanskrit fragment of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* in Saka script attributes the text also to Maitreya, indicating that his authorship was probably accepted in India as well.\(^{53}\)

Among modern scholars, Seyfort Ruegg favoured the Tibetan view, evoking, however, the possibility of Sāramati being an epithet of Maitreya.\(^{54}\) Frauwallner, on the other hand, follows the Chinese tradition, making of Sāramati the most important figure of a

\(^{52}\) Or as “containing a buddha” following Zimmermann. Seyfort Ruegg (1969: 249, n.5) remarks that the Tibetan translations state that beings “possess” (can) buddha-nature.


\(^{54}\) Cf. Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 46.
distinct school which was to become very influential in the later developments of Mahāyāna philosophy.\footnote{Cf. Frauwallner 1994: 255.}

With regard to Maitreya’s identity, scholars have put forth all possible explanations. Some see in him Asaṅga’s human teacher (Ui, Frauwallner), others a divine source for the latter’s inspiration (Demiéville, Seyfort Ruegg), and others still (Lévi, Obermiller) completely deny his existence, making Asaṅga the sole author of the work.\footnote{Cf. Mathes 1996: 11–17.} This leaves us with dissenting traditional explanations woven into a net of modern theories and explanations, without there being enough historical evidence to form any conclusive opinion. Other, more recent publications (Mathes, Thurman)\footnote{Cf. Mathes 1996: 14–15 and Thurman 2004: xvii–xviii.} defend the traditional Tibetan account in so far as to consider the possibility of yogis acquiring exceptional powers by means of specialised training, enabling them to communicate with transcendent beings like bodhisattvas. This, of course, lies beyond the reach of historical evidence and belongs to the realm of religious belief and practice.

At least, as Mathes points out, it is important to note that the works attributed to Maitreya (in the Tibetan tradition) differ in both form and content from Asaṅga’s writings to a degree that one can hardly attribute them altogether to a single author.\footnote{Cf. Mathes 1996: 14.}

\section*{2.3. The \textit{Ratnagotravibhāga} in India}

According to a most widely accepted Tibetan historiography, the text of the \textit{Ratnagotravibhāga} was lost in India soon after its composition, only to be retrieved in the 11th century under mysterious circumstances, along with the \textit{Dharmadharmatāvibhāga} (another work attributed to Maitreya), by the Indian adept Maitrīpa.\footnote{For Gzhon-nu-dpal’s account see Roerich 1949 (1996): 347–350. Kano (2006: 27–31) mentions another account according to which a certain Anarakśita, disciple of Pandita Maitreyanātha, discovered both texts. This accounts stems from Rong-ston Shākya Rgyal-mtshan’s (the author of our commentary) introduction to his commentary on the \textit{Dharmadharmatāvibhāga}.} This could explain the fact that neither are mentioned in later treatises until this time, nor listed in the Ldan-dkar-ma catalogue (dating from the 9th cent.) which does mention
the other three works attributed to Maitreya. The earliest Indian works to quote or gloss either of these two treatises come from Maitrīpa’s own teachers Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnākaraśānti (both 10th–11th century), who therefore must already have known these texts. In any case, it was mostly due to Maitrīpa’s efforts that these treatises were introduced and spread in scholastic circles. The teachings on buddha-nature as found in the Ratnagotravibhāga proved to be an ideal link between the tantric teachings of the mahāsiddhas, so important at that time, and mainstream Mahāyāna.

Maitrīpa passed on the teachings on the Ratnagotravibhāga and the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga to *Ānandakirti, who in turn handed them over to Sajjana (fl. second half of 11th cent.), the great pāṇḍit from Kashmir and author of one of the two only remaining commentaries on the Ratnagotravibhāga of Indian origin. Kashmir subsequently became an important centre for the study of this treatise and, as it was a platform for Tibetan translation activity, it was from here that the treatise eventually found its way to Tibet.

2.4. The Ratnagotravibhāga in Tibet

Prominent among Sajjana’s disciples, the Tibetans Rngog Blo-ldan shes-rab (1059–1109) and Btsan Kha-bo-che (b. 1021), became known as the founders of the so-called analytical or epistemological school (thos bsam gyi lugs / mtshan nyid lugs) and the meditative school (sgom lugs) respectively. The fact that these two exegetical traditions can be traced back to a common source, namely Sajjana, indicates that they are by no means contradictory by nature. While the former is concerned with analysing the philosophical implications of the Ratnagotravibhāga in order to remove mistaken concepts about the nature of reality, the latter focuses on the “positive”

60 Those works being the Abhisamayālaṃkāra, the Madhyāntavibhāga, and the Mahāyānasūtraśāstra. Cf. Mathes 1996: 163.
61 As Kano (2006: 49) points out, either there was another line of transmission of these texts available at that time which does not pass through Maitripa, or they composed these works only after their common disciple had rediscovered them. See also Mathes 2008: 2–3.
62 He is omitted in Rong-ston’s account of the lineage of those teachings.
63 Those two are Sajjana’s Mahāyānottaratrantraśāstropadeśa - edited by Takasaki in 1974 (Nyoraizō shisō no keisei. Tokyo: Shunjūsha), and Vairocanarakṣita’s Mahāyānottaratrantratippani. Both have recently been edited by Kano (2006) as appendices to his dissertation.
64 For this chapter I follow mainly Mathes’ presentations from 1996 (165–168) and 2008 (25–48), unless otherwise indicated.
aspect of this treatise, i.e. the luminosity of mind serving as a basis for the actualisation of the excellences of a buddha.65

2.4.1. The analytical school of Blo-ldan shes-rab66

Rngog Lo-tsā-ba Blo-ldan shes-rab67 was instrumental in the transmission of this treatise and its study in Tibet, for not only did he work in collaboration with his Indian teacher to produce the only surviving translation of the Ratnagotravibhāga,68 but he was also the author of the first Tibetan commentary on it, i.e. the Theg chen rgyud bla’i don bsdus pa.69

His tradition stands at the origin of the so-called rang stong-Madhyamaka interpretation of buddha-nature. It can, however, for obvious reasons, not be equated with it. Firstly, the whole rang stong versus gzhan stong discussion was a Tibetan invention of a later date,70 and it is just natural for philosophical traditions to evolve over time and in response to new currents of thought. Also, “rang ston” does not equal “rang stong”, as we shall see below. That is, all schools who oppose themselves to the gzhan stong interpretation of buddha-nature cannot be thrown into the same basket.

Taking the Ratnagotravibhāga to be a commentary on the sūtras of definitive meaning (nges don; nītārtha),71 Blo-ldan shes-rab equates buddha-nature, or the “element” (dhātu; khams), with the ultimate—an ultimate, however, which cannot be the object

65 This difference in emphasis, however, led to doctrinal disputes among later Tibetan authors as we shall see below. Cf. also van der Kuijp 1983: 43–44.
66 This tradition will be analysed in more detail since the author of our treatise follows this interpretation quite closely.
68 The work for this translation had been carried out in Kashmir during Rngog’s visit there some time in the late 11th century. In his Blue Annals, Gzhon-nu-dpal reports that six different translations of the RGV had been made. Of them, only the one by Rngog and Sajjana has entered the Tengyur and therefore survived. See Roerich 1949 (1996): 350. For a description of these six translations see Kano 2006: 89–111.
69 This text has been edited by David Jackson and was published 1993 in Dharamsala. The first chapter of this commentary and an analysis of its author’s position and influence on later developments form the main part of Kano’s thesis (2006).
70 Dol-po-pa Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (1292–1361) was the first to use the term gzhan stong in a systematic fashion. See Mathes 1996: 160.
71 The four remaining Maitreya works are regarded by him to be commentaries on sūtras with provisional meaning (drang don; neyartha). Kano (2006: 173) notes that this is probably due to the fact that the RGV is the only treatise among those five to teach the single-vehicle (ekayāna) theory. However, the AA does reject the existence of different gotra-s. Cf. Sefort Ruegg 1969: 189–205.
of conceptual thought (which by definition belongs to the realm of concealing truth).\textsuperscript{72} Equating buddha-nature with the ultimate, it is explained to be emptiness, bringing the teachings on buddha-nature thus in line with Madhyamaka philosophy.\textsuperscript{73} To be more precise, buddha-nature is, for him, the nature of mind which is emptiness, or the absence of the two types of self—the self of person and the self of phenomena\textsuperscript{74} —in sentient beings. Commenting on RGV I.13, he writes:

Awareness of the extent refers to the “vision that a perfect buddha is present in all [sentient beings].” The awareness that the common defining characteristics—the very selflessness of phenomena and persons—are the nature of the tathāgata, [namely] buddha nature, and that [this reality] completely pervades [its] support, [i.e.,] the entire element of sentient beings, is the [awareness of] the extent. Furthermore, the unmistaken awareness of mere selflessness, which exists in all beings, is the awareness of how [reality] is. [...]\textsuperscript{75}

Furthermore, emptiness is understood in the sense of a non-affirming negation (\textit{med par dgag pa}), which means that while it negates the existence of that which does not exist (i.e. the superimposed sense of self), it does not affirm the existence of anything else in its place. Rngog writes:

As to the [buddha] element that has become the conventional object of a nonaffirming negation, it is called the substantial cause that has become the conventional object of a nonaffirming negation; but something that amounts to human effort [as a substantial cause of buddhahood] does not actually exist. As to the conventional object, it has the meaning of a nonaffirming negation—

\textsuperscript{72} The question, whether or not the ultimate can be an object of conventional language became an important topic of debate between later Dge-lugs-pa and Sa-skya-pa scholars. On this question see Tauscher 1995: 291ff. and Sweet 1979.

\textsuperscript{73} This approach follows the interpretation of the doctrine of buddha-nature as found in the \textit{Lankāvatārasūtra} as seen above.

\textsuperscript{74} The self of person refers to the sense of personal identity attached to the five aggregates of human experience (\textit{skandha-s}), and the self of phenomena to a superimposed essence inherent to all elements of existence (\textit{dharma-s}).

\textsuperscript{75} Quoted after Mathes 2008: 27.
namely that anything that is established as an own-being does not exist in reality.\textsuperscript{76}

Crucial for Blo-ldan shes-rab’s presentation of the \textit{dhātu} is his commentary on RGV I.28 which gives three reasons for beings’ possession of buddha-nature. Those three—namely (1) the pervasion of the body of the perfect buddha, (2) suchness (\textit{tathatā}) being without differentiation, and (3) the \textit{gotra}’s presence in sentient beings—are explained to refer to the resultant, the natural, and the causal buddha-nature respectively. By this, Blo-ldan shes-rab essentially means that while the actual buddha-nature pertains to a buddha only, this name (i.e. \textit{tathāgatagarbha}) has been metaphorically applied to sentient beings because they have the potential to attain this aim. The link between those two states is suchness (a synonym for emptiness)—which is the nature of both equally—the full realisation of which results in buddhahood.

This \textit{dhātu} thus becomes the cause for realising buddhahood. This is so, because, firstly, only when emptiness is possible, are all other things possible as well.\textsuperscript{77} But more importantly, Blo-ldan shes-rab explains the \textit{dhātu} to function as the seed for buddhahood because taking it (i.e. the ultimate or emptiness) as an objective support for one’s inferential cognition will result in the actualisation of a buddha’s excellences (\textit{guna}; \textit{yon tan}).

Another fundamental question with regard to the interpretation of the \textit{Ratnagotravibhāga} (and related the question of emptiness being taken as a non-affirming negation) is whether those excellences are newly produced upon the attainment of buddhahood, or only revealed, in the manner of a buried treasure that has merely been unearthed.\textsuperscript{78} Commenting on RGV I.154 and 155—which state that

\textsuperscript{76} Quoted after Mathes 2008: 30.
\textsuperscript{77} To clarify Rngog’s position here, Rong-ston, commenting on RGV I.26, quotes Nāgārjuna’s MMK XXIV.14 where it is explained that without emptiness nothing would be possible, while everything becomes possible when emptiness applies. Cf. Kano 2006: 150.
\textsuperscript{78} Among the nine examples for buddha-nature taken from the \textit{Tathāgatagarbhasūtra} and reproduced in the \textit{Ratnagotravibhāga}, two seem to be in favour of the former interpretation, namely the analogy of the tree growing from a tiny seed and the embryo of a future universal emperor growing in the womb of a destitute woman. According to Zimmermann (2002: 63–64), however, the main focus of those two examples does not so much lie in the aspect of growth, but in the idea that the future result is already contained in the present state.
(a) nothing is to be removed from or added to reality (bhūta - referring here to the dhātu) and (b) that the dhātu is empty of impurities, while not being empty of inseparable qualities—Blo-ldan shes-rab introduces the topic of the two truths. He states that to see reality, one must neither superimpose an ultimate existence of an objective support for defilements ("nothing to add"), nor deny the existence of the objective support for purification on the level of concealing truth ("nothing to remove"). With regard to there being nothing to be added to reality he writes that no excellences need to be added, since the objective support for their attainment is present since beginningless time. This objective support for the attainment of the strengths and so forth—in other words the object focussed on in meditation—is, as seen above, the dhātu or emptiness itself. Thus, for him, "nothing to be added" does not refer to the excellences, but to the cause for their actualisation.

Furthermore, Rngog also follows Asaṅga’s commentary on RGV I.51, where we read that the inseparable qualities pertain to the thoroughly purified state, in contrast to the impurities which appear in the impure and partially purified states only. Commenting on this stanza he writes:

[...] The realization of the ultimate is the cause of all qualities, because all buddha qualities are summoned as if called when you realize the dharmadhātu.  

2.4.2. The meditative school of Btsan Kha-bo-che

Btsan Kha-bo-che was the second major Tibetan heir in Sajjana’s transmission of the Ratnagotravibhāga. Due to the language barrier he was, however, unlike Blo-ldan shes-rab, forced to study under the master with the help of the translator Gzu Dga’-ba’i rdo-rje. Having stayed in Kashmir for a number of years, he returned to Tibet before his compatriot and established a learning centre in Brag-rgya in Yar-stod, Central Tibet.

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81 Quoted after Mathes 2008: 31.
82 Cf. Van der Kuijp 1983: 42.
This tradition takes the Maitreya works in general and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* in particular literally. Here, buddha-nature is positively described in the sense of an “affirming negation” (*ma yin dgag*): the dhātu is indeed empty of defilements, but possesses all the excellences from the very beginning. Shākyamchog-Idan summarises the view of Btsan Kha-bo-che as follows:

[T]he ultimate intent he obtained from having studied the ‘Teachings of Maitreya[nātha]’ [...] was [that of] the inherently pure originary cognitiveness (*rang rig nam dag gi ye shes*) which pervades [everything] from Buddha[s] to sentient beings, and that this very natural luminosity [of mind] is what has been named tathāgatagarbha.83

Relatively little is known of this tradition, the transmission of which has been interrupted at some point according to ‘Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal.84 However, one can see a continuation of its doctrine in the Jo-nang school and the proponents of the *gzhan stong* view.85

### 2.5. Previous studies and the aim of the present work:

The *Ratnagotravibhāga* was first introduced to modern academia by Eugène Obermiller who translated it together with its *vyākhyā* from the Tibetan into English in 1931. The Sanskrit text was edited only 19 years later by E. H. Johnston on the basis of two manuscripts found in Tibet by Rāhula Sāmkṛtyāyana. This text was then translated by Jikido Takasaki in 1966. Later, the root verses were again translated several times from the Tibetan by western Tibetan scholars (most notably by Rosemarie Fuchs (2000), who translated Kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha’-yas’s commentary together with the entire root-text, and by François Chenique (2001) into French, based on both the Sanskrit and the Tibetan versions.)

Among Takasaki’s numerous publications on the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine—most of which have, due to my inability to read Japanese, not been accessible to me—two

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83 Quoted after van der Kuijp 1983: 43.
84 The only teachings from Btsan available today are contained in a collection of instructions compiled by Jo-nang Kun-dga’ grol-mchog (1501–1566). They are, according to Stearns (1999: 42), the earliest extant writings dealing with the *gzhan stong* tradition in Tibet.
monographs represent his major contributions in this field: his study of the Ratnagotravibhāga (1966) including the lengthy introduction, a synopsis of the text, and the abovementioned translation of it together with its vyākhyā,86 and his work on the formation of the tathāgatagarbha theory in Indian Buddhism87 which, unfortunately, is available only in Japanese.

Among Seyfort Ruegg’s valuable contributions to this field, his famous La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra (1969) is the most important, presenting a detailed analysis of the doctrines of gotra, ekayāna, and tathāgatagarbha as found in the Indian commentarial literature, relying to a good extent on Tibetan, and in particular Dge-lugs-pa, interpretation.88 Aside from his papers on this subject,89 another important work by Seyfort Ruegg is his annotated translation of Bu-ston’s mDzes rgyan (1973), a Tibetan commentary on the tathāgatagarbha doctrine from the 14th century consisting mainly of an anthology of canonical excerpts.

Among the more recent important works related to the reception of this doctrine in Tibet in general and within the Bka’-brgyud tradition in particular are Susan Hookham’s (1991)90 work on the gzhan stong interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga and Klaus-Dieter Mathes’ (2008) analysis of ‘Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal’s (1392–1481) mahāmudrā interpretation of the same treatise.91

Also available to me, although not yet published, were the dissertation by Ngawang Jorden (2005) on Go-rams-pa’s understanding of buddha-nature based on his supplement to Sa-skya Paṇḍita’s Sdom gsum rab byed and Kazuo Kano’s (2006) study,

86 De Jong (1968) and Schmithausen (1971) both have contributed reviews of Takasaki’s first mentioned work in which many of the latter’s philological mistakes are corrected.
88 For an extensive review of this work see Schmithausen 1973b.
89 Cf. bibliography.
90 Hookham’s presentation is mainly based on Kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha’-yas’s (1813–1899) commentary on the RGV and oral teachings by contemporary masters. A review of this work has been given by Franz-Karl Erhard (1994) in Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 144, pp. 415–419.
91 The latter includes in part 1 (on the Tibetan historical context) an interesting overview of various positions related to Gzhon-nu-dpal’s interpretation, including among others those of Rngog Blo-idan shes-rab, Dol-po-pa, Sa-bzang Ma-ti pan-chen, and Klong-chen-pa.
annotated translation, and edition of Rngog Blo-Ildan shes-rab’s summary of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, the first Tibetan commentary on this seminal work.\(^{92}\)

Until now, only one study of the Sa-skya school’s understanding of this fundamental chapter of Mahāyāna thought has been written,\(^ {93}\) notwithstanding the fact that this tradition has known a glorious past in terms of scholarly achievements. Among its great luminaries figure such important names as Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’ rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251), Red-mda’-ba gzhon-nu blo-gros (1349–1412), Rong-ston Shes-bya kun-rig (1376–1449), and Go-rams-pa Bsod-nams seng-ge (1429–1489). Among the Sa-skya commentaries on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, it is Rong-ston’s extensive treatise that is regarded as the most important by contemporary scholars of the tradition.\(^ {94}\) The aim of the present work is to help fill the gap in modern academia by providing an annotated translation of a crucial chapter of this treatise, namely its exposition of buddha-nature by means of ten categories.

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\(^{92}\) An important article to be added to this list of monographs would be Dorji Wangchuk’s exposition of the Rnying ma tradition’s interpretation of the *tathāgatagarbha* theory (2004).

\(^{93}\) I refer to Jorden 2003, which has yet to be published.

\(^{94}\) Chos-rgyal ’phags-pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280) and Red-mda’-ba both composed summaries of the treatise. Khenpo Ngawang Jorden pointed out two other Sa-skya commentaries on the RGV to me: the *Rgyud bla ma’i lta* by Ngag-dbang chos-grags (1572–1641) and the *Rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos kyi nges don gsal bar byed pa rin chen sgron* by Gnas-phrug-pa (who lived sometime after Gorampa). Other masters with a Sa-skya background to comment on the RGV were Sa-bzang ma-ti pan-chen (1294–1376) and Dol-po-pa. Since his commentary expounds a gzhan stong position, however, it cannot be regarded as mainstream Sa-skya. For provisional lists of Tibetan commentaries on the RGV see Buchardi 2002: 55–73 and Kano 2006 (Appendix G).
3. Rong-ston and his presentation of buddha-nature

3.1. A short glimpse at the life of Rong-ston Shes-bya kun-rig

Despite the fact that the intellectual luminaries of the Sa-skya Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism have received a relatively modest amount of attention within western academia up until now, we can be thankful to Professor David Jackson for having contributed as much as he did in this field.95

In particular, with regard to the author of the text translated herein, Smra-ba’i seng-ge Rong-ston Shes-bya kun-rig, also known by his ordination name Shākya rgyal-mtshan, Jackson has published a number of historically very insightful papers, the most important of which is the introduction to his edition of a sub-commentary on the Abhisamayālaṃkāra by Rong-ston.96 In this article, Jackson bases his account of Rong-ston’s life on two extensive biographies written by two of the master’s disciples, namely Nam-mkha’ dpal-bzang (fl. 15th century) and Shākya mchog-ldan (1428–1507). More recently, he has published a paper which has as its focus some overlooked details of Rong-ston’s scholastic career.97

In addition to the information taken from Jackson’s research, I will include in my brief summary of this scholar’s life some details found in the short account given in ‘Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal’s Deb ther sngon po (Blue Annals) reprinted in Khentsun Sangpo’s Biographical Dictionary,98 as well as other information gathered from writings of the tradition, to see how Rong-ston was perceived by his own people.

Traditionally, the career of a Buddhist scholar should encompass the three domains of exposition, debate and composition (‘chad rtsod rtsom gsum) called “the three activities of the learned” (mkhas pa’i bya ba gsum). Inspired by this format, my account of Rong-ston’s life will start with these three categories, supplemented by a small section about his activities as the founder of a monastic institution and another one on Rong-ston “the saint,” as he is perceived within his own tradition.

95 See bibliography.
97 Jackson 2007.
98 Khentsun Sangpo 1979: 379–381.
Rong-ston, the student and teacher:

Born in 1367 in Rgyal-mo-rong in Far-Eastern Tibet into a Bon-po family, Rong-ston’s religious path commenced, according to his biographer Shākya-mchog-idan, by studying the Bon-po teachings from a young age. At the age of seventeen, he travelled to one of the greatest centres of Buddhist learning in Central Tibet, namely the seminary of Gsang-phu Ne’u-thog.99 It was there that he received monastic ordination and started his very thorough scholastic training, which would lead to his studying under more than twenty teachers.100

He proved to be such a bright student that he was able to compose his first major commentary, a sub-commentary on the Pramāṇaviniścaya by Dharmakīrti, the age of twenty-one. Yet, it was not until the age of twenty-six that Rong-ston met the most prominent among his teachers, the Sa-skya scholar G.yag-ston Sangs-rgyas-dpal (1348–1414), whose successor he would eventually become. Under him Rong-ston studied extensively the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures along with many commentaries, as well as several treatises on logic and epistemology (tshad ma; pramāṇa),

Among all the subjects he was trained in, which for all great Tibetan Buddhist scholars cover both sūtra and tantra fields of knowledge, he was particularly renowned for his mastery of, and commentaries on the Prajñāpāramitā philosophy of the Abhisamayālaṁkāra.

During his professional career (which Jackson points out as one of the longest of any Tibetan teacher, lasting for about sixty years), Rong-ston’s two main seats in Central Tibet were the Gsang-phu seminary and the monastery of Nālendra (which he founded in 1436).101 Apart from his occasional travels to other seminaries and monasteries in the region, he made three visits to Gtsang which greatly contributed to his fame becoming widespread. These visits (which lead him repeatedly to Sa-skya) consisted mainly of teaching and debating tours, and earned him, among others, the title “Rong-ston Smra-ba’i seng-ge, the Teacher from [Rgyal-mo]-rong, Lion among Expounders.”

99 On the history of this institution see van der Kuijp 1987.
100 For the list of these teachers given by Shākya mchog-idan see Jackson 1988: II–IV.
101 See below for more details on his founding of Nālendra.
Rong-ston was able to confirm his academic status as a *bka’ bcu pa* (“master of ten scriptures”) on these tours,\(^\text{102}\) a challenge that had become a common practice to test the qualifications of advanced scholars in Central Tibet at that time. The ten scriptures in question, which the bearer of this title was supposed to have mastered, covered all major fields of monastic study, namely Prajñāpāramitā philosophy (based on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*), logic and epistemology (*tshad ma; pramāṇa*), Abhidharma, Vinaya, Cittamātra and Tathāgatagarbha-theory (based on the remaining four works attributed to Maitreya), as well as Madhyamaka.\(^\text{103}\)

Assuming that Rong-ston personally taught all the major treatises on which he composed commentaries (making about forty scriptures), we can say that he taught approximately sixty different classes during his long teaching career, to a vast number of disciples.\(^\text{104}\) According to Shākyamchog-ladan, he “had more students who understood philosophical texts than any Tibetan teacher of all time.”\(^\text{105}\) Many of the next generations’ great scholars, of all traditions (including the Bon tradition),\(^\text{106}\) were either direct or indirect disciples of Rong-ston, making him one of the most influential scholars of his time. Among these disciples are included such illustrious names as Mus-chen Sems-dpa’chen-po Dkon-mchog-rgyal-mtshan (1388–1469), ’Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal (1392–1481), Shākyamchog-ladan (1428–1507), and Go-rams-pa Bsod-nams-seng-ge (1429–1489) (who studied under Rong-ston only very briefly), as well as many abbots from various great monasteries and seminars, such as those of Gsang-phu, Ngor, Se-ra, ’Bras-spungs and others.\(^\text{107}\) Even the name of the Mahāsiddha Thang-stong rgyal-po (1361–1485) appears in the list provided by Shākyamchog-ladan among “those who gained faith in the master, having made a connection with him.”

\(^\text{102}\) For an detailed explanation of this title see Jackson 2007.

\(^\text{103}\) Jackson gives the following tentative list of ten treatises based on Rong-ston’s own studies and personal interests: 1) *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*; 2) *Pramāṇaviniścaya*; 3) *Abhidharmasamuccaya*; 4) *Abhidharmakośa*; 5) Vinaya; 6) *Ratnagotravibhāga*; 7–9) possibly the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra, Dharmadharmaṭāvibhāga, Madhyāntavibhāga*; 10) either a Madhyamaka treatise or another Pramāṇa scripture. Jackson 2007: 350.

\(^\text{104}\) Jackson gives a list of twenty-one treatises Rong-ston taught during his career, which he did not compose commentaries on. Jackson 1988: V.

\(^\text{105}\) Jackson 1988: IV.

\(^\text{106}\) Such as Mnyam-med Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (1356–1415), who studied Buddhist philosophy under Rong-ston.

\(^\text{107}\) See the list given by Shākyamchog-ladan in Jackson 1988: VI–VIII.
According to Jackson, not only do almost all dialectical and scholastic lineages from the Sa-skya tradition pass through Rong-ston, but the majority of these lineages from the Bka’-brgyud and Rnying-ma traditions as well.108

**Rong-ston, the debater:**

In his own tradition, Rong-ston is remembered as an undefeated debater.109 By his rivals, however, he was probably remembered mainly for being the first scholar of major influence to directly oppose the ideas of Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang grags-pa (1357-1419), who was to become one of the most important figures in the religious history of Tibet.110 In fact, Shākyamchog-ldan even mentions an account according to which both are supposed to have met and debated in Lhasa, with Rong-ston emerging from this debate as a winner. Although this event is not recorded in Tsong-kha-pa’s own biography,111 one cannot assume that it did not happen. It is, I believe, as much a common practice for followers of religious leaders not to include events in their teacher’s biography, which could “stain” their account, as it is for them to ornament and glorify their masters’ life-stories.

Regardless of whether or not this debate took place, there were other sources of controversy between him and members of the Dga’-ldan tradition, particularly Mkhas-grub-rje Dge-legs dpal-bzang (1385–1438),112 laid out in more detail by Jackson in his recent paper.113 For our purposes, it suffices to say that unfortunate outcomes of events lead to great sectarian disputes between these two schools after Tsong-kha-pa’s passing.

**Rong-ston, the writer:**

Jackson gives us two lists of Rong-ston’s writings: one by Shākyamchog-ldan included in his biography of the master and the other, more recent one, compiled by

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112 On the name given to this school and Mkhas-grub’s Sa-skya background see van der Kuijp 1985: 33–35.
Khenpo Appey Rinpoche and others. Depending on the source, Rong-ston is said to have authored forty-one or forty-three major sub-commentaries and nineteen minor treatises, as well as many smaller works such as praises, sādhanaś, personal communications and so forth. All in all, Rong-ston authored about three hundred works which are said to have filled either thirteen or twenty volumes.114 Among his most important compositions are his commentaries on the Abhisamayālaṃkāra as well his commentaries on the treatises attributed to Maitreya (one of which is the focus of the present work).

Unfortunately, only about half of his oeuvre is available to us today. And of these, Jackson notes, many are still difficult to access.

**Rong-ston, the founder:**

One of Rong-ston’s most significant achievements was his founding of the monastic institution of Nālendra in 'Phan-yul (Central Tibet) in the year 1436. Jackson points out 115 that this was assisted by the loss of power of his former patrons, the Phag-mo gru-pa.116 Until 1434, Rong-ston lived and taught either near their main seat, Sne-gdong near Lhasa. When, due to internal struggle for power, the Phag-mo gru-pa clan started to collapse and the political conditions got unstable (this continued until they eventually had to cede their sovereignty over Tibet to the Rin-spungs-pa clan), Rong-ston was invited to take up alternative residence in the 'Phan-yul valley, to the north of the capital. In 1435 he was offered a piece of land there by a local lord and soon the construction work on Nālendra began. Due to his fame and excellent reputation, Rong-ston’s efforts were greatly supported by the local nobility, as well as by monastic communities of the area. After serving as an abbot for about eight years, Rong-ston appointed his disciple Dwags-po pañ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal (1399–1458) as his successor in 1442, but continued teaching at Nālendra until just a few days prior to his passing.

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114 Jackson 1988: XIV. See also Chogay Trichen 1983: 30.
116 In the 14th century, the Phag-mo-gru-pa clan took over the sovereignty over Tibet from the Sa-skyapa-pas, which lasted until internal instability lead to their collapse in 1434.
In a short account of Nālendra, the late Bco-brgyad khri-chen, Mkhyen-rab legs-bshad rgya-mtsho (1920–2007), states that, from the time during which Rong-ston served, to the time of the seventh abbot, between two and three thousand monks were usually in residence there. This number later varied, depending on the political stability of the region. In 1959, just prior to the take-over by the Chinese communists, the monks residing in Nālendra were said to have numbered seven hundred.

**Rong-ston, the mystic and saint.**

Traditionally, Rong-ston is regarded as an emanation of the future Buddha Maitreya, who resides in the Tuṣita heaven. He himself is supposed to have declared several times that his next incarnation will not take place in the human realm, but that he would rather be reborn as a god in the realm of Tuṣita.

Rong-ston is also believed to be the reincarnation of several pañḍitas from India, such as Kamalaśīla and Haribhādra, with both of whom he shares academic interests.

With regard to his spiritual practice, 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba mentions that he exerted himself in the path of “pacification” (zhi byed), the instructions on which he had received from his principal teacher G.yag-ston. From his intensive practice, which he was able to maintain while appearing to engage continuously in the activity of teaching, several signs of realisation are said have occurred. He was, for instance, able to see the

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117 This master, who served as the last abbot of this monastery before the cultural revolution, was recognised as the eighteenth incarnation in the line of Mkhyen-rab chos-rje (1436–1497), the eighth abbot of Nālendra.
120 This paragraph might not add anything to our understanding of the historic person Rong-ston as such, but it is important in order to understand how he was and still is perceived in his own tradition. Descriptions of a master’s inner signs of realisation and outward performances of miracles are as commonly intertwined with accounts of historically verifiable events in Tibetan religious biographies, called rnam thar, as they are in hagiographies of saints of other religious traditions.
121 Chogay Trichen 1983: 30
122 Khentsun Sangpo 1979: 381: rgyun ldan du gsung ba la \ nga khams pa phob phob 'di dra mi byed par \ dga’ ldan du lha'i bu bdud rtsi 'thung ba zhitig byed gsung bas da lta dga’ ldan na bzhugs par nges so \| 123 Kamalaśīla was a master of the Svātantra Madhyamaka philosophy and author of the Madhyamakāloka (Dbu ma snang ba, Derge no. 3887), which Rong-ston studied at Gsang-phu; and Haribhādra was (like Rong-ston) an important commentator on the Abhisamayālaṃkāra.
125 A tantric practice introduced to Tibet by the master Pha-dam-pa Sangs-rgyas (b. 11th cent.).
colours of the five wind energies (rlung lnga) individually, and it is recorded that a fallen-off toe-nail of his transformed itself into a relic-like item.\textsuperscript{127} He was also able to foretell precisely the age at which he would pass away, namely eighty-three.\textsuperscript{128} All of these are considered to be great signs of spiritual accomplishment, indicating that Rong-ston had reached the sixth level of realisation (bhūmi).\textsuperscript{129}

One can confidently say that Rong-ston Shes-bya kun-rig was one of the most outstanding Tibetan scholars of his time. He became known as one of the "six ornaments of Tibet,"\textsuperscript{130} which refers to the six most illustrious teachers of the Sa skya tradition, after its five founding masters.\textsuperscript{131}

\subsection*{3.2. Rong-ston’s presentation of buddha-nature}

\subsubsection*{3.2.1. Introduction}

In the list of Rong-ston’s teachers provided by Shākya mchog-Idan, only one of them is mentioned as his teacher for the “Five Dharmas of Maitreya” (rje bstun byams pa’i chos lnga), namely Karma Dkon-mchog gzhon-nu (b. 1333),\textsuperscript{132} a disciple of the fourth Karma-pa Rol-pa’i rdo-rje (1340–1383). This master stood in the lineage of the meditation tradition (sgom lugs) of the Ratnagotravibhāga.\textsuperscript{133} Certain teaching records (gsan yig), however, also state that he received the reading transmission (lung) of Rngog’s commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga by one of his principal teachers,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{127} Khentsun Sangpo 1979: 380: ’phral du chos bshad pa kho na la brtson pa ltar mdzad kyang rnal ’byor la rgyan du gnas pas rlung lnga’i kha dog kyang so sor gzigs/ zhabs kyi mthe bong gi sen mo zhiig thung ba n~a leibs su gyur \end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Khentsun Sangpo 1979: 380,
\item \textsuperscript{129} Chogay Trichen 1983: 30.
\item \textsuperscript{130} The six are: (Rong-ston’s teacher) G.yag ston Sangs rgyas dpal (1350–1414) and Rong-ston Smra-ba’i Seng-ge (1367–1449), known for their mastery of the sūtra teachings; Ngor-chen Kun-dga’ bzang-po (1382–1456) and Rdzong-pa Kun-dga’ rnam-rkyal (1432–1496), known for their expertise in the tantras; and (Rong-ston’s students) Go-rams-pa Bsod-nams seng-ge (1428–1489) and Shākya mchog-Idan (1428–1507) masters in both the sūtras and the tantras. See Chogay Trichen 1983: 30.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Cf. Jackson 1988: III.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Cf. Jackson 1988: III.
\item \textsuperscript{133} This lineage, as discussed above, goes back to Sajjana’s Tibetan disciple Btsan Kha-bo-che. Dga'-ba rdo-rje, Btsan’s translator, had composed his own commentary on the RGV based on Sajjana’s teachings, based on which the third Karmapa Rang-byung rdo-rje (1284–1339) wrote a summary, which Karma Dkon-gzhon in turn composed a commentary on. Cf. Mathes 2008: 33.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
G.yag-ston Sangs-rgyas-dpal (1348–1414). With regard to his study of Blo-ldan shes-rab’s treatises, he is said to have studied “many exegetical traditions of the Sva̱tantrika Madhyamaka transmitted by Rngog Lo-tsa̱-ba” under Rkong-ston Blo-gros dbang-phyug.

Rong-ston composed exegetical treatises on all five Maitreya texts and, as mentioned above, was particularly renowned for his explanations of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra, on which he is reported to have authored seven commentaries. His commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga was composed at Gsang-phu (the date of composition is not given in the colophon). In his exposition, he follows Blo-ldan shes-rab’s analytical tradition of bringing the teaching on buddha-nature in line with the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness. Another important feature of his commentary is, as I will try to show below, his use of Asaṅga’s vyākhyā which he follows verbatim in many places. However, he persistently reinterprets and to greater part omits all passages and quotations in favour of a gzhan stong interpretation of buddha-nature. This comes without surprise considering his education at the monastery of Gsang-phu Ne’u-thog, the famous learning centre established by Rngog Legs-pa’i shes-rab (student of Atīśa and Blo-ldan she-rab’s paternal uncle) in 1073. On the other hand, it would be at odds with the exegetical tradition of the meditation school to which his teacher of the treatises attributed to Maitreya, namely Karma Dkon-gzhon, belonged. As stated above, the analytical school of Rngog followed by Rong-ston and the meditative school of Btsan both go back to Sajjana and are thus complementary according to Shākya mchog-ldan. However, the differences lying in those two approaches gave rise to doctrinal controversies already prevalent at Rong-ston’s time, which eventually lead to the rang ston vs. gzhan stong debate.

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134 This is reported by the Fifth Dalai Lama and Zhu-chen Tshul-khrims rin-chen. Cf. Kano 2006: 218.
135 Jackson 1988: II
136 Cf. Jackson 1988: V.
137 Kano (2006: 218) notes that he probably composed this commentary in the 1380s, around the time he was engaged in the study of Rngog’s tradition.
138 Unfortunately no commentary by this master is available to us today. Mathes notes, however, that his RGV commentary has been supplemented by Karma Phrin-las-pa’s (1456–1539) notes, inserted as corrections in the text. This text—also unavailable to us—is mentioned next to Gzhon-nu-dpal’s RGV commentary in Kong-sprul’s presentation of the meditative school of Btsan. From this, Mathes concludes that looking at Gzhon-nu-dpal’s commentary would help understand this tradition of which no written commentary has turned up so far. Cf. Mathes 2008: 33.
139 Cf. van der Kuijp 1983: 43.
In order to fathom Rong-ston’s final understanding of buddha-nature it would be necessary to read all his major treatises and especially those of later date, including his tantric commentaries (as can be seen with the example of Dol-po-pa as we will see below). Since this task is yet beyond my scope and certainly beyond the scope of this present work, I limit myself to his presentation of buddha-nature as found in his commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Considering his concise manual on the stages of meditation related to this treatise, however, we can estimate that his view on the subject did not substantially change. In this short text, the short title of which is “Ornament to Maitreya’s Intent” (*Mi pham dgongs rgyan*), he summarises the content of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*:

The substantial cause for the attainment of perfect awakening is the defiled *dhātu*. Once the defilements have been purified, undefiled suchness is obtained, this is awakening. From the attainment of awakening, the excellences, such as powers and so forth, are obtained, and one accomplishes others’ benefit [by means of] enlightened activities. This teaching subsumes the whole meaning of this [treatise].\(^{140}\)

In the following, I will try to present Rong-ston’s interpretation of buddha-nature systematically, at times contrasting his views on the main topics with those of other influential scholars.

### 3.2.2. The buddha excellences and the dharmakāya

To be sure, an important doctrinal claim of Dol-po-pa’s brand of *gzhan stong*, namely the presence of the *dharmakāya* and the buddha excellences (*guṇā*) in sentient beings, is explicitly rejected by Rong-ston. For Dol-po-pa, the teachings on the *tathāgatagarbha* represent the crucial bridge between sūtra and tantra. He thus presents his final view of buddha-nature in accord with the *mantrayāna* teachings in general and with the *Kālacratantra* in particular, rather than with the common

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\(^{140}\) MG: 105.4–6: rdzogs pa’i byang chub thob pa’i rgyu’i nuy len ni dri bcas kyi khams yin la \ dri ma sbyangs nas dri med de bzhin nyid du gyur pa thob pa ni byang chub yin la \ byang chub thob pa nas stobs sogs kyi yon tan bnyes te \ gzhan don phrin las ’grub ces pa ni \ ’di’i don thams cas bsdu s te bstan pa’o\.
interpretation as found in treatises such as the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.\(^{141}\) In his “extraordinary” presentation (in accord with the tantras), he distinguishes between two sets of buddha bodies (*kāya*-s) and excellences, one pertaining to ultimate truth and the other to the level of concealing truth.\(^{142}\) While the former are present in all sentient beings’ ultimate nature since beginningless time, the latter are to be generated on the path and are therefore, in the final analysis, not really existent.\(^{143}\)

Commenting on RGV I.51 (and following Asaṅga’s *vyākhyā*) Rong-ston states that in the impure state adventitious defilements cover the *dhātu*, while in its purified state alone it is endowed with the excellences.\(^{144}\) He then goes on saying:

> Explaining that “naturally endowed” means to be endowed from the beginning is simply wrong. In brief, when the *dhātu* is free from defilements it inherently possesses the excellences, similar to fire which naturally possesses heat. This is called “naturally endowed.”\(^{145}\)

Thus, for Rong-ston, the buddha excellences are not present in sentient beings. They are, however, inseparable from the perfected state and in this way are called “naturally endowed.”

The stanzas RGV I.154–155, so crucial for the *gzhan stong* interpretation of buddha-nature, state that nothing needs to be added to the *dhātu* since, while empty of adventitious defilements, it is not empty of inseparable qualities. Rong-ston’s take on this fundamental passage is the following:

\(^{141}\) Dol-po-pa’s understanding of buddha-nature seems not to be fully revealed in his RGV commentary. Rather, as Mathes (2008: 76) remarks, his ultimate *gzhan stong* view is fully laid out in his *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho* which, in turn, repeatedly quotes the RGV.

\(^{142}\) To be more precise, Dol-po-pa identifies the fruit of dissociation (i.e. the ten strengths, the four fearlessnesses, and the eighteen exclusive features of a buddha) as the unproduced excellences present in all beings. That which is produced on the level of concealing truth is the fruit of maturation (i.e. the thirty-two major and minor marks). Cf. Mathes 2008: 81–82.


\(^{144}\) Note that regarding this crucial point, both commentaries directly contradict the verses of the root text, which do not differentiate between the three states at this point.

\(^{145}\) LS: 56,5–6: *rang bzhin gyis ldan zhes pa’i don dang po nas ldan par ’chad pa ni nor ba kho na’o mdom na khams dri ma dang bral ba na me la tsha ba rang chas su ldan pa bzhin du yon tan rang chas su ldan pas na de la rang bzhin gyis ldan zhes bya’o*
Also, the meaning of “not empty of unsurpassable qualities” must be explained as “not empty of unsurpassable qualities, [i.e.] the two types of selflessness.” But to maintain that [it means] “not empty of the excellences such as the powers and so forth” is not acceptable.  

He could not be more explicit. It is in this way that, for Rong-ston, the dhātu is related to the philosophical view of emptiness which does not superimpose a self to either the person or phenomena. Since those two types of self do not exist there is nothing to be removed from the dhātu, and since, on the other hand, it by nature lacks the two types of self nothing needs to be added to it either.

Regarding the dharmakāya, Rong-ston, referring back to Blo-lidan shes-rab’s commentary on RGV I.27–28, remarks that it is the essence of beings only nominally, since their actual essence is the gotra, which is the potential to attain the ultimate result. He writes:

[...] while the dharmakāya is the actual Tathāgata, [saying it is] “the essence of sentient beings” is nominal, and since it is attainable by sentient beings it is said to be pervasive.  

Further below in the commentary he again explicitly states that the term dharmakāya exclusively applies to the thoroughly purified state alone, while gotra pertains only to the impure state of ordinary beings and to the partially purified state of bodhisattvas. Of the three aspects of buddha-nature—dharmakāya, suchness, and gotra—only suchness actually pervades all states:

The first two (i.e. ordinary beings and bodhisattvas) do not participate in the dharmakāya, while the latter (i.e. buddhas) do not participate in the gotra. Therefore natural suchness manifests [in all three].

In the commentary [of Asaṅga it is stated that] the pure suchness of all phenomena is that which is taught to be the general characteristic. 

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146 LS: 97,3–4: bla na med pa’i chos kyi mā stong pa’i don yang / bla na med pa’i chos bdag med gnyis kyi mā stong pa la bshad par bya ba yin gyi / stobs sogs kyi yon tan gyzs mā stong pa la ‘dod pa ni mi ’thad do  
147 LS: 34,2: chos sku ni de bzhin gshegs pa dangos yin la / sms cu gyi snying po ni btags pa ba yin zhing / sms cu rnam s kyi thob tu rong ba’i phyir khyab par bshad pa’o
3.2.3. The dhātu as a cause

The dhātu’s most prominent feature, according to Rong-ston, is its function as a cause for achieving perfect awakening. By taking it as the focal object for the one’s meditation practice—which is called “individual correct mental engagement” (so so rang gi tshul bzhin yin la byas pas)—it becomes a cause for buddhahood. Since the dhātu, as seen above, by nature lacks the two types of self, fully realising its nature is tantamount to achieving the ultimate result. By realising that the person (gang zag) is empty of a self the obscuration of defilements (nyon mongs pa’i sgrīb pa) is removed, and by realising that all phenomena are devoid of self one removes the obscuration of knowledge (shes bya’i sgrīb pa). Along these lines, Rong-ston, commenting on RGV I.26 which identifies the dhātu as the cause for the achievement of the Three Precious Jewels, writes:

In this way, since one is liberated when the dhātu is realised, the dhātu is the object (gnas) to be realised. When it is not realised, however, one will not be liberated. [...] since this dhātu is the seed for beyond-worldly qualities the Three Precious Jewels arise based on total purity from defilements [achieved] by means of individual correct mental engagement. Thus it is the cause.

In other words, by focussing on the dhātu one achieves perfect purity which in turn is the basis for the Three Precious Jewels to arise. This understanding is in line with Rngog’s presentation of buddha-nature in terms of a non-affirming negation summarised by Mathes in the following way: “The buddha nature or element, which is repeatedly said to be the emptiness of each mindstream, can become the objective support of inferential cognitions that negate without affirming anything. As such it becomes the substantial cause for the attainment of buddha qualities.”

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148 LS: 52,3–4: chos sku la ’jug pa snga ma gnyis dang rigs la phyi ma med pas rang bzhin de bzhin nyid kyi s ’jug pa ste k ’grel par chos thams cad de bzhin nyid rnam par dag pa spyi’i mthstan nyid bstan pa gang yin pa de la zhes pa’o
149 LS: 32,1 & 3–4: ’di ltar khams ni rto gs bya’i gnas te kham rto gs na grol bar ’gyur la m ri togs na mi grol bas so [... ] khams de ni ’jig rten las ’das pa’i chos kyi sa bon yin pas so so rang gi tshul bzhin yin la byas pas dri mas rnam par dag pa la brten nas dkon mchog gsum ’byung bas rgyu’o
150 LS: 96, 2–3.
3.2.4. The *gotra* and the luminous nature of the mind

As seen above, the *gotra*—the third aspect of the *tathāgatagarbha*—exclusively relates to sentient beings in the impure state and to bodhisattvas who have partially purified the *dhātu* from adventitious defilements. The *gotra* has a twofold nature representing: (a) sentient beings’ fundamental potential for perfect awakening called naturally abiding *gotra* (*prakṛtisthagotra; rang bzhin gnas rigs*), and (b) its activated form which becomes the cause for the actualisation of buddhahood called the accomplished or generated *gotra* (*samudāniṭagotra; bsgrubs pa [las gyur pa]'i rigs*). Following Rngog Blo-ldan shes-rab, Rong-ston therefore calls the *gotra* the “causal *sugatagarbha*” (*'bras bu'i bde gshegs snying po*).

In his commentary on RGV I.40, Rong-ston defines the natural *gotra* as being composed of both aspects of the mind, namely cognisance (*rig pa*) and emptiness (*stong pa*):

> For those who maintain that the naturally abiding *gotra* is the unconditioned *dharmatā* only, an awakening through conditions does not make sense. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain [that the natural *gotra* comprises] the cognitive aspect [of mind] as well. Consequently the cognitive aspect creates the appropriating cause of the buddha-wisdom. Moreover, if it (i.e. the cognitive aspect) were not empty of an own-being it would not change, and on that account it would not make sense to nurture it [through conditions].

> For this reason, since the result arises from the mind qualified by being empty of an own-being, it is necessary to maintain the non-differentiation of expanse and cognisance.152

In other words, a twofold nature of the *gotra* is necessary for it to be awakened on one hand and for there being room for change (and eventually the actualisation of buddhahood) on the other hand.153

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152 LS: 46.6–47.3: *rang bzhin gnas rigs 'dus ma byas chos nyid 'ba' zhiig tu 'dod pa la ni rkyen gyis sad pa'i don med pas rig pa'i cha'ang 'dod dgos so ī des na rig pas ni sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kyi nyer len gyi rgyu byed la ī de yang rang bzhin gyis mi stong na mi 'gyur bas rkyen gyis gsos btab par mi rung ngo ī des na rang bzhin gyis stong pas khyad par du byas pa'i sems las 'bras bu 'byiung ba'i phyir ī dbyings rig dbyer med pa 'dod dgos so ī*

153 The second aspect relates to Nāgārjuna’s teaching in MMK XXIV.14. See also n.77.
The view Rong-ston refutes here is based on Rngog Blo-ldan shes-rab’s position which equates the naturally abiding gotra with emptiness. It found its followers among the Dge-lugs-pa school and has been formulated, among others, by Rong-ston’s younger contemporary Mkhas-grub-rje (1385–1438), a disciple of Tsong-kha-pa (1357–1419):

Voidness (śūnyatā) which is void of the citta established in reality (sems bden par grub pas stongs pa) is what we call the citta’s naturally pure (prakṛtipariśuddha) dharmatā. The citta’s naturally pure dharmatā in the condition (avasthā) which is not free from the adventitious impurities (āgantukamala) we call the tathāgatagarbha, or the prakṛtisthagotra [...].

In other words, the naturally abiding gotra and tathāgatagarbha are synonymous for Mkhas-grub-rje and both refer to the mind’s mere emptiness.

From Rong-ston’s commentary on two later verses one can infer that he too maintains a non-separation of gotra and tathāgatagarbha, albeit in a different manner:

(1) Commenting on RGV I.41, he states that it is the Mind-only school which separates the gotra and the tathāgatagarbha claiming that some beings, although possessed of the garbha, lack the cause for liberation. Refuting the idea of the so-called cut-off gotra, Rong-stong says that such statements found in the sūtras are intended to convert those opposed to the Mahāyāna teachings and are thus not of definitive meaning.

(2) In a second step he also refutes the assertion of the Ratnagotravibhāga belonging to the Mind-only school. In his commentary on I.87b he writes that since in this treatise there is no nirvāṇa apart from buddhahood, it cannot belong to the Cittamātra corpus.

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155 Quoted after Seyfort Ruegg 1968: 505.
156 To justify this statement, he calls the Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra to witness. Indeed, in the third chapter of this treatise (III.11) we read of some beings lacking the cause for liberation (i.e. the gotra), while IX.37 states that all beings possess the [tathāgata]garbha.
157 Seyfort Ruegg has shown in various places that Yogācāra treatises do accept the idea of there being three gotra-s (or four, if those of uncertain gotra are counted separately), as well as a class of beings with a cut-off gotra, implying the existence of three definitive vehicles (i.e. śrāvaka-, pratyekabuddha-,
In his commentary on the third chapter of the *Mahāyānasūtraalankāra*, Rong-ston discusses the *Ratnagotravibhāga*’s stance on buddha-nature in a section on the Madhyamaka’s interpretation of the *gotra* and says that in this treatise, the *gotra* equals the *sugatagarbha* of sentient beings’ continuum. He further argues that sometimes the *sugatagarbha* is explained from the point of view of *dharmin* or “bearer of the quality” (*chos can*), which he explains to be the mind’s cognitive aspect (*sems rig*) and mere luminosity (*gsal tsam*). In other words, the mind’s cognitive aspect or luminosity has emptiness as its nature. On can therefore speak of the non-differentiation of “awareness” and emptiness (*rig stong*) or luminosity and emptiness (*gsal stong*) with regard to the mind’s nature and this is indeed what Rong-ston does in his commentary on RGV I.64.

One has to note, however, that since the cognitive aspect of mind is contrasted with the unconditioned *dharmanatā*, the former should be accepted as conditioned. I could not identify any passage in the course of my research where Rong-ston addresses this point directly. On the other hand, he writes about the *dhātu*:

The nature of the mind which is emptiness, is similar to the element of space [in that it] has neither a substantial cause nor an assisting condition, nor the combination of both. Therefore, it has no arising in the beginning, no disintegration in the end, and no abiding in between. [...] Therefore this *dhātu* is not conditioned by causes and conditions, and is established as emptiness free from elaborations. But bodhisattva-vehicles) leading to three corresponding definitive results (i.e. arhatship, pratyekabuddhahood, and buddhahood). See for example Seyfort Ruegg 1976.

158 In other words, it is the causal *sugatagarbha* as explained in his commentary on RGV I.28.

159 In general, the term *chos can* (Skt. *dharmin*) denotes the bearer of a specific characteristic or *dharma*. In particular, it can refer to the subject of a syllogism. In my translation, I usually rendered *chos can* with “subject.” When it is used to mark the subject of a syllogism, however, I kept the Sanskrit term to mark this subject.


161 See also below (3.2.4.).

162 LS: 60,5–61,1: *sems kyi rang bzhin stong pa nyid ni nam mkha’ ltar nyer len gyi rgyu med cing than cig byed pa’i rkyen med de de gnyis tshogs pa’ang med cing des dang po skye ba dang mthar ’jig pa dang bar du gnas pa’ang yod pa min no | [...] zhes gsungs pas kyang khangs ’di rgyu rkyen gyis dus ma byas shing stong nyid spros bral du grub bo |
I take this to mean that in this case dhātu refers to the natural tathāgatagarbha, i.e. unconditioned suchness, while the gotra does have a conditioned aspect to it which is the cognitive aspect of mind.

3.2.5. Rong-ston and the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā

In many places, Rong-ston follows the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā up to the point of giving the same quotations to support specific claims with authoritative scriptures. However, some passages of the root text and the vyākhyā are clearly in favour of the gzhan stong interpretation of buddha-nature. In those cases, Rong-ston either interprets the meaning of given passages in light of the Madhyamaka view or simply leaves them out. (Of course, it would have been extremely redundant for him to reinterpret every controversial passage once his position has been clearly laid out.)

For instance, on RGV I.50, in the chapter on the all-pervasive nature of the dhātu, the vyākhyā quotes the Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeshapravartaka:

“[...] living beings and the Absolute Body are not different from each other. [...] These two are non-dual by meaning, and different merely by letters.”

Since this quote goes against Rong-ston’s explanation given on RGV I.28—namely that the dharmakāya is the essence of beings only nominally—he chose to ignore it.

Rather, he chose to elaborate on the simile of the all-pervasive nature of space given in the root text. After explaining how the naturally pure expanse (i.e. suchness), on account of being pervasive to all dharmin-s on one hand and its undifferentiated nature on the other, is neither a singular phenomenon nor multiple in nature, he goes on to say:

While the example of space pervading all forms [of vessels] should be applied to the naturally pure characteristic pervading all [states], it should not be

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164 It has to be noted that a similar point was made already in relation to RGV I.48, where Asaṅga’s commentary also quotes the same scripture. Commenting on this stanza, Rong-ston refers back to Blo-lidan shes-rab’s explanation of the gotra being the actual essence of sentient beings. Cf. LS 53,6–54,1. Therefore, it would have been redundant to repeat the same arguments.
applied to the total purity from adventitious [defilements] pervading all [states].  

In other words, natural purity (i.e. suchness) pervades all dharmin-s, but the state of total purification of the adventitious defilements, i.e. the dharmakāya, does not pervade ordinary sentient beings or bodhisattvas. This directly contradicts the quotation given in Asaṅga’s commentary.

Another example for Rong-ston’s procedure is his commentary on RGV I.61–63 which establishes the nature of the mind as luminosity devoid of mental afflictions within the chapter on the dhātu’s immutability. On RGV I.62, Rong-ston defines the nature of mind as being emptiness free from elaborations on account of it not being conditioned by causes and conditions. Neither the root text nor the vyākhyā mention emptiness at this point. Again, on RGV I.63 which defines the mind’s nature as luminosity, Rong-ston comments:

The nature of the mind, the very luminosity-emptiness, is similar to space [in that] it does not change into something else.

On the next stanza he then omits the quotation from the Gaganagañjāparipṛcchā given in Asaṅga’s commentary in support of the root verses, which explains the nature of the mind as luminosity owing to it being untainted by defilements. In this way he adds a crucial detail—namely the nature of the mind to consist of both luminosity and emptiness—necessary for his particular non-gzhan stong interpretation of buddha-nature. This luminosity (’od gsal), as seen above, is also the called the cognitive aspect (rig cha) of mind which Rong-ston identifies as one part of the naturally abiding gotra all beings are said to be endowed with.

3.2.6. Summary

165 LS: 55.4–5: nam mkha’ gzugs can thams cad la khyab pa’i dpes kyang spyi’i mtshan nyid rang bzhin rnam dag gis thams cad la khyab pa la sbyar bar bya yi | glo bur rnam dag gis thams cad la khyab pa la sbyar bar bya ba ma yin no

166 LS: 61.2: sens kyi rang bzhin ’od gsal stong pa nyidgang yin pa de ni nam mkha’ bzhin du gzhan du ’gyur ba med de

To sum up: Rong-ston’s position regarding buddha-nature as expressed in his commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* follows Rngog Blo-ldan shes-rab’s analytical tradition in that he brings it in line with the Madhyamaka view of the ultimate. Since this would be the claim of other later Tibetan exegetes (such as Dol-po-pa) as well, one has to be more specific. In his view, the qualities the *tathāgatagarbha* is said to be endowed with are the two types of selflessness, as opposed to the fully fledged strengths and fearlessness of a buddha as Dol-po-pa claims (or their subtle form, which would be Gzhon-nu-dpal’s take on this issue). Thus the buddha’s *dharma-kāya* and sentient beings’ *gotra* are mutually exclusive terms.

Following Rngog, Rong-ston lays out three distinct usages of the term “*sugatagarbha.*” It can relate to: (a) a resultant aspect which is the actual buddha-nature, called *dharma-kāya*; (b) natural suchness (i.e. emptiness) pervading ordinary beings’ minds and buddhas alike; or (c) sentient beings’ potential to attain buddhahood, i.e. the *gotra.* Unlike Rngog (and his heirs in the Dge-lugs-pa tradition), however, Rong-ston accepts buddha-nature to comprise in its causal aspect—more precisely, as the naturally abiding *gotra*—not only the unconditioned *dharma-tā* equivalent to emptiness, but the cognitive aspect of mind as well. One might want to interpret this as the remains of Rong-ston’s inheritance from his affiliation with Btsan Ka-bo-che’s meditation tradition, which emphasises the luminous aspect of the mind. Being as firmly grounded in scholastic training as he was, however, I would rather think that this was for him a question of proper reasoning and not an attempt to reconcile differing views.

Be that as it may, Rong-ston was certainly one of most influential Tibetan luminaries, to honor the *Ratnagotravibhāga* as a fundamental śastra by composing a detailed commentary on its meaning.
4. Translation of Rong-ston’s commentary on RGV I.27–95[a]

4.1. Notes on the translation

Aside from the Sanskrit edition of the text by Johnston, the most notable academic publications in European languages relating to the root verses of the Ratnagotravibhāga (including the vyākhyā) are Takasaki’s English translation based on the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese, and the publications by de Jong and Schmithausen including numerous annotations and corrections. The translation of the root verses in this present work is primarily based on the Tibetan\textsuperscript{168} to agree with Rong-ston’s commentary. Whenever I found deviations in meaning from the Sanskrit I noted them in the footnotes, referring back to the above mentioned articles as well as Takasaki’s translation. Footnotes also include significant terminological differences with Takasaki.

Regarding Rong ston’s commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāga entitled Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos legs par bshad pa, I have had three editions at my disposal: (the sigla used throughout the translation are given first)

- G: Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma’i bstan bcos legs par bshad pa. A detailed exegesis of the Uttaratantraśāstra (Ratnagotravibhāga) by Ron-ston Śes-by-a-kun-rig. Reproduced from a rare manuscript from Jakhar Tshang. Gangtok, 1979: (G). This is a manuscript of 96 folios (192 pages) written in dbu med script.


\textsuperscript{168} I used Nakamura’s edition of this text. Cf. Nakamura 1967.
Since this last publication was the first edition I had access to, my translation was, at the beginning, based on this version. I did, however, manage to acquire the other two editions later, the first from University of Vienna and the second from the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu. The latter turned out to offer the most correct reading. As I did not intend to produce a critical edition of this commentary, it was not necessary for me to collate the three editions. Whenever I found the meaning of a passage altered by the readings found in the other editions, the variants got marked and indicated at in a footnote. Since the edition from Skye-dgu-mdo has the best reading of the text and is widely available today (via the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre, New York) I found it sensible to base the page references throughout my translation on this edition. A partial facsimile reproduction of this edition is given in appendix III.
4.2. The translation

The extensive explanation of the dhātu

This first chapter [of the individual explanation of the four last Vajra Points] has five divisions: (1) the explanation that all sentient beings have buddha-nature (sangs rgyas kyi snying po), (2) determining the dhātu by means of ten categories (rnam gzhag), (3) explaining the way the essence (snying po; garbha) is obscured by defilements [by means of nine analogies], (4) the explanation of the person who realises (rto gs pa) this dhātu, and (5) the purpose of explaining the dhātu.169

1. The explanation that all sentient beings have buddha-nature (buddhagarbha)

Concerning this first chapter:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{rdzogs sangs sku ni 'phro phyir dang ||} \\
\text{de bzhin nyid dbyer med phyir dang ||} \\
\text{rigs yod phyir na lus can kun ||} \\
\text{rtag tu sangs rgyas snying po can || (I.28)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sangs rgyas ye shes sms can tshogs zhugs phyir ||} \\
\text{rang bzhin dri med de ni gnyis med de ||} \\
\text{sangs rgyas rigs la de 'bras nyer btags phyir ||} \\
\text{'gro kun sangs rgyas snying po can du gsungs || (I.27)}
\end{align*}
\]

All embodied beings are permanently endowed with the buddhagarbha, due to the pervasion171 of the body of the perfect buddha, because suchness is without differentiation, and because the gotra is present [in sentient beings].

All migrators are said to possess the buddhagarbha, because the buddha's wisdom is present in the multitude of sentient beings, this stainlessness is non-dual by nature, and its fruit has been “metaphorically” applied to the buddhagotra.172

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169 The translation covers points (1) and (2) of this chapter.
170 As Takasaki (1966: 197, n. 2) and Chenique (2001: 99) both point out, the order of this and the following verse in the Sanskrit text are reversed in the Tibetan versions. For further details consult Takasaki. I have kept the order as given in the Tibetan text, since I am following Rong-ston’s commentary.
In terms of defiled suchness (dri bcas de bzhin nyid; samalā tathatā), what is the meaning of the statement “all sentient beings possess the tathāgatagarbha,” found in many sūtras? 173

All beings possess the tathāgatagarbha because (1) the dharmakāya of the perfectly awakened ones pervades, (2) because [sentient beings] are endowed with suchness which is inseparable from the naturally pure aspect of the suchness of the dharmakāya, and (3) because the gotra of the dharmakāya, [i.e.] the potential (nus pa) of the dhātu, exists.

Because of these three reasons it is said that all embodied beings are permanently endowed with the buddhagarbha.

Mahā174 states that these three [reasons refer] to the resultant, the natural, and the causal sugatagarbha (bde gshegs snying po) respectively:

The first (i.e. the resultant sugatagarbha, dharmakāya) is explained [thus]: while the dharmakāya is the actual tathāgata, [saying it is] “the essence of sentient beings” is nominal, and since it is attainable by sentient beings it is said to be pervasive.

The second (i.e. the natural sugatagarbha, suchness) is explained as actually being the essence of both the tathāgata and sentient beings. From the point of view of the naturally pure suchness alone, it exists in both.

With regard to the third (i.e. the causal sugatagarbha, gotra), it is explained that since it is the cause of that Tathāgata, it is named after it, but [in this case] it is the actual “essence of sentient beings.”175

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172 Takasaki (1966: 197) reads: “Its result manifests itself on the Germ of the Buddha; […]” Takasaki bases this reading on the Chinese version, stating himself that it is difficult to identify it with the Sanskrit reading. See also Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 273 and Mathes 2008: 11.

173 For a sūtra reference see TGS 248b2–6, for sāstra see MSA 9.37. See also Takasaki 1966: 31–45.

174 “Mahā” refers to Rngog Blo-ldan shes-rab, “the great translator from Rngog” who, in addition to a translation of the RGV accomplished in collaboration with the Indian scholar Sajjana, also composed an important commentary on it entitled Rgyud bla ma’i don bsdus pa. Cf. Introduction. For an edition and translation of the first chapter of this treatise see Kano 2006.

175 For Rngog’s explanation of the three aspects of the tathāgatagarbha see Kano 2006: 331–332 (transl. 444–446), and Mathes 2008: 28.
Further commenting on this, [another translation of RGV I.27 reads]:

"The buddha’s wisdom abides inside sentient beings’ aggregates. That [wisdom] is by nature non-dual and undefiled. Having given the buddhagotra the name of the result, it is said that all embodied beings [are] buddhagarbhas."

Further, since it is explained in the commentary [by Asaṅga] that “these three are explained below, following the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra,” it is said below:

Its own-being is the dharmakāya,

suchness, as well as the gotra.

These are to be known by means of three, one, and five examples respectively.

[35] This is in connection with the nine examples [used] for the [tathāgata]garbha.

As for “the dharmakāya of realisation pervading all sentient beings” in the extensive explanation of the commentary [by Asaṅga], the meaning of “dharmakāya of the tathāgata suffuses all sentient beings” is further [explained] in the commentary [on verse I.147]:

In reference to the meaning of “the dharmakāya pervades the element (khams, dhātu) of all sentient beings without exception,” [the fact] that these sentient beings are endowed with the tathāgatagarbha is explained by means of these three examples, i.e. the body of a buddha (abiding in a putrid lotus), the honey (hidden by the bees), and the husk (enclosing a seed).

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176 sems can phung po’i nang na sangs rgyas ye shes gnas || de ni rang bzhin gnyis med phyir na dri ma med || sangs rgyas rigs la ’bras bu mam par brtags nas ni || lus can thams cad sangs rgyas snying por brjod pa yin ||. This alternative translation is given in Bu-ston’s mDzes rgyan, 17b2–3. For a translation of this passage see Seyfort Ruegg 1973: 102.


178 RGV I.144

179 For their analysis from the TGS see Zimmermann 2002: 34–39.

180 This refers to RGV I.145, where the dharmakāya is explained to have two aspects: (1) the perfectly pure aspect, and (2) its natural outflow, i.e. the teaching. The perfectly pure aspect of the dharmakāya is the dharmadhātu, which is the domain of non-conceptual wisdom - it is the truth to be realised. The dharmakāya’s second aspect is the natural outflow of this realisation, namely the teaching given to the various types of disciples according to their needs and capacities. See also Takasaki 1966: 284–285.

181 Skt. pariṣṭharaṇa; Tib. ’phro ba.

182 See Johnston 1950: 70,16–18; Nakamura 1967: 137,20–22; and Takasaki 1966: 286
In addition to this, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* is cited as a scriptural source:

Just as space is accepted to be all-pervasive at all times,
Likewise this [transmutation] is accepted to be always all-pervasive.
Just as space pervades all forms,
Likewise this [transmutation] also pervades
the multitude of sentient beings.\(^{183}\)

The meaning of those [lines] is:

“The naturally pure aspect [of the dharmakāya] pervades all sentient beings,” means
that [it is] the cause for attaining the transmutation of the basis of both the dharmakāya
of realisation and the teaching [aspect of the] dharmakāya.\(^{184}\)

Concerning the meaning of “suchness being without differentiation:”

Because [all phenomena] are empty of a true essential nature (*bden pa’i ngo bo nyid*),
[suchness] is explained as being indivisible because it pervades the entire basis and result, as well as everything outside and inside.

Concerning “the gotra pervades:”

The potential of the mind which is to be awakened by means of [certain] conditions is
the cause for taking hold of the buddha’s wisdom. [36] As it is said:

[...] the undefiled knowledge present in embodied beings is similar to honey
[...]\(^{185}\)

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\(^{183}\) MSA IX.15. The ninth chapter of the MSA gives an analysis of a buddha’s awakening in general, and
an explanation of the “transmutation of the basis” (Skt. *āśrayaparīvṛtti*, Tib. *gnas gyur*) in particular.
This transmutation is achieved when the obscuration of mental afflictions (hindering liberation) and the
obscuration to knowledg (hindering omniscience) are completely abandoned. In his MSABh
Vasubandhu adds that the transmutation of the basis equates buddhahood, the pervasion of which is
explained in verses IX.4 and 6. He further states that the reason for buddhahood’s pervasion of sentient
beings in particular, is the “perfection of (a buddha’s) acceptance of all beings as himself.” Cf. Thurman

\(^{184}\) Seyfort Ruegg has shown how, in the RGV, the “basis” refers to the *dhātu* or defiled suchness, while

\(^{185}\) RGV I.104. The whole stanza reads: *ji ltar sbrang rtsi srog chugs bye ba khrag khrig stong bsgrips*
*sbrang rtsi don gnyer mis | sbrang ma de dag bsal te ji ltar’i do ba bzhin du sbrang rtsi’i bya byed pa |
Explaning the *dhātu* to be purified and explaining that the function of the *gotra* is to see the faults of suffering and the benefits of happiness, is the function of precisely this [verse?].

Here, [with regard to] the meaning of “the *dharmakāya* pervades,” the ascertainment that enlightened activities pervade is not acceptable because it is in contradiction with the [abovementioned] meaning derived from the scripture of the *Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra*.

Therefore, the naturally pure [aspect of the *dharmakāya*] refers to that which is encompassed by mental continuums only, while suchness pervades all inner and outer [phenomena]. For this reason there is no fault of repetition.

Suchness and the naturally pure aspect [of the *dharmakāya*] exist in the manner of the excellences and that which possesses these excellences. Furthermore, it says in this text: “the excellences are naturally pure.”

“The suchness of the buddha is present in all sentient beings without differentiation” means that the suchness of the tathāgata is undifferentiated in all sentient beings. In the commentary [of Asaṅga this is illustrated] by [using] the one example of gold.

“Undifferentiated suchness” means that the suchness of the tathāgata is [equal to the suchness of] these sentient beings. As a quotation in support [of this]:

> Even though suchness is undifferentiated in all, having become purified it is the Tathāgata.

Therefore [37] all living beings possess its essence (*garbha*).
That is to say, in dharmatā, [i.e.] the emptiness of own-being, there is no difference [with regard to sentient beings and the Tathāgata].

“The gotra which generates the three types of buddha-bodies is present in sentient beings,”¹⁹⁰ means that the gotra of the tathāgata is present in all sentient beings.

In the commentary, the remaining five examples—the treasure, the tree, the precious statue, the universal emperor, and the golden sculpture—refer to the existence of the gotra which generates the three types of buddha-bodies.

This dhātu of the tathāgata is taught to be the essence of all sentient beings.

In the Mahāyānābhidharmasūtra¹⁹¹ it is stated:

The dhātu which exists since time without beginning
is the basis of all phenomena.
Due to its existence all modes of existence,
as well as the attainment of nirvāṇa come about.¹⁹²

The brief and extensive explanations explained that [sentient beings] possess the [Tathāgata]garbha for three given reasons. [This presentation] is most agreeable and undoubtedly his (i.e. Maitreya’s) very intention.

2. Determining the dhātu by means of ten categories

This second division has three [subdivisions]: a brief explanation by means of summarizing terms, an extensive exposition, and a summary.

2.1. A brief exposition by means of summarizing terms

\[ ngö bo rgyu 'bras las ldan 'jug pa dang \]

¹⁹⁰ Here, Rong-ston paraphrases the meaning of RGV I.150 along with its commentary by Asaṅga. See Johnston 1950: 72; Nakamura 1967: 137–139; and Takasaki 1966: 290.
¹⁹¹ This text, important for the formation Vijñānavāda, is no longer extant in either Sanskrit, Tibetan, or Chinese. Cf. Takasaki 1966: 290, n. 175.
Essential nature,\textsuperscript{193} cause, result, function, connection,\textsuperscript{194} manifestation, states, all-pervasiveness, unchangeability, and inseparable excellences.\textsuperscript{195}

With regard to these [ten points] one should know that the intended meaning [is that] of the ultimate expanse (\textit{dbyings}).\textsuperscript{196}

The last five issue from [the first five] one by one [respectively].

2.2. Extensive explanation

This second [part] has eight points:

(1) The meaning of essential nature and cause, (2) the meaning of result and function, (3) the meaning of connection, (4) the meaning of manifestation, (5) the meaning of states, (6) the meaning of all-pervasiveness, (7) the meaning of unchangeability, and [38] (8) the meaning of inseparable excellences.

2.2.1. The meaning of “essential nature” (\textit{ngo bo}) and “cause” (\textit{rgyu})

For this first [presentation] there are two [points]: a common explanation and an individual exposition.

2.2.1.1. Common exposition

\begin{verbatim}
rin chen nam mkha’ chu dag bzhin ||
rtag tu rang bzhin nyon mongs med ||
chos mos lhag pa’i shes rab dang ||
ting ’dzin snying rje las byung ba || (I.30)
\end{verbatim}

Just as a jewel, space and water are pure,
the essential nature of the \textit{dhātu}
in terms of \textit{dharmakāya}, suchness and \textit{gotra}]

\textsuperscript{193} The term \textit{svabhāva} has two Tibetan equivalents, namely \textit{ngo bo} and \textit{rang bzhin}. Since the focus of this work is the Tibetan text, I decided to maintain this distinction by rendering the first with “essential nature” and the second with “own-being.”

\textsuperscript{194} Takasaki (1966: 199) reads “union.”

\textsuperscript{195} Takasaki (1966: 199) associates “immutability” with the qualities, making it “unchangeable qualities”.

\textsuperscript{196} This whole verse is included in Rong-ston’s commentary.
is ever naturally free of mental afflictions. [They] arise from adherence to the teachings, superior supreme knowledge, meditative concentration and compassion.

The essential nature:

The essential nature of the three points (i.e. the dhātu in terms of the dharmakāya, suchness and the gotra) has both an individual and a general characteristic.

The individual characteristics of the dharmakāya, suchness, and the gotra are like a jewel, space, and water [respectively]. With regard to the general characteristic, just as the three examples are by nature pure, similarly [these three are] by nature permanently free of mental afflictions.

The cause:

[The dharmakāya, suchness, and the gotra] arise from the adherence to the teachings of the great vehicle, from superior supreme knowledge, from meditative concentration and from great compassion [respectively].

In what manner are they the causes for the three points?

Because they are the causes of the dharmakāya endowed with four excellences, for the purification of the defilements [covering] suchness, for the purification of the defilements [covering] the actualised gotra,197 and for increasing the potential [respectively].

197 The text reads: yon tan bzhī ldan gyi chos ska dang | de bzhin nyid kyi dri ma sbyong ba dang | mngon du byed pa’i rigs kyi mi byong ba dang | nus pa’ phel ba’i rgyu yin pas so | mi byong ba (“not purifying”) does not seem to make sense in this context. Although all other editions of this text available to me have the same reading, it is probably a typing fault. This was further confirmed in a meeting with the Venerable Khenpo Appay Rinpoche in Kathmandu in August 2006. Being careful enough not to give a definite alternative reading of this passage, Appay Rinpoche confirmed the possibility of reading the text as translated above, in which case it has been amended to conform to the foregoing statement (de bzhin nyid kyi dri ma sbyong ba dang | mngon du byed pa’i rigs kyi dri ma byong ba dang [...]). Alternatively, omitting the negation particle mi one would read mgon du byed pa’i rigs kyi byong ba dang [...] (“the purification through the actualised gotra”).
2.2.1.2. Individual explanation

This second [part] has two: the explanation of the essential nature and the explanation of the cause.

2.2.1.2.1. Explanation of the “essential nature”

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mthu dang gzan du mi 'gyur dang} & \\
brlan pa'i ngo bo rang bzhin phyir & \\
'di dag nor bu rin chen mkha' & \\
chu yi yon tan chos mthun nyid & (1.31)
\end{align*}
\]

Due to the essential nature\(^{198}\) of power, not changing into something else,\(^{199}\) and being moist -
Those [three, i.e. the dharmakāya, suchness and the gotra] correspond to the excellences of a wishfulfilling jewel, the sky, and water.\(^{200}\)

The individual characteristics of the three objects:

The dharmakāya of the tathāgata [is like]\(^{39}\) a wishfulfilling jewel, for it is endowed with the power to accomplish the aspirations [of sentient beings]. Suchness [is said to be like] the sky because it does not change into something else. The gotra, due to its nature of being moist, [that is] due to its compassion for sentient beings, has a feature in common with the attributes of water.

The general characteristic of these three objects corresponds to all three examples since all are pure by nature. From the explanation of the general and individual corresponding features in the root [text], it is evident [that they] mutually supplement [each other].

2.2.1.2.2. Explanation of the “cause” (rgyu)

This second [point] has three [subdivisions]: (1) that which is to be abandoned, (2) the antidote, and (3) the temporary result.

\(^{198}\) Tib. \textit{ngo bo rang bzhin}; Skt. svabhāvatah
\(^{200}\) Cf. Mathes 2008: 395
2.2.1.2.2.1. That which is to be abandoned (*spang bya*)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{chos la khong khro bdag lta dang} & || \\
\text{'khor ba'i sdu gbsngal gyis 'jigs dang} & || \\
\text{sens can don la ltos med nyid} & || \\
\text{'dod chen mu stegs nyan thos dang} & || \text{(I.32)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{rang 'byung rnams kyi sgrib rnam bzhi} & || \\
\text{dag rgyu lhag par mos pa}^{201} & || \\
\text{sogs pa'i chos ni rnam bzhi nyid} & || \text{(I.33)}
\end{align*}
\]

(1) Enmity towards the Dharma,  
(2) a view [asserting the existence of a] self,  
(3) being frightened by the sufferings of samsāra, and  
(4) being without concern for the purpose of sentient beings:  
These are the four types of obscuration of  
those afflicted by] great desire,\textsuperscript{202}  
tīrthikas, śrāvakas, and pratyeka[buddhas].  
The causes for [their] purification are the four aspects  
[mentioned above, namely:]  
exceptional adherence [to the Dharma] and so forth.

In general, there are three types of sentient beings: those who desire existence (*srid pa*), those who desire to be free from existence, and those who desire neither of these two.\textsuperscript{203}

With regard to the [obscurations] to be abandoned present in the [mental] continuum of these supports:

Those who are hostile to Mahāyāna teachings [are obscured by] the obscurations of great desire, which is the desire for existence itself.  
Those who view a self in phenomena, although they wish to be free from existence, engage in [a path which] does not have the [correct] means. [Thus they are obscured by] the obscurations of the tīrthikas.

\textsuperscript{201} Nakamura (1967: 53,3): *lhag par smos pa.*  
\textsuperscript{202} Tib. *'dod chen* ; Skt. *icchantika*  
\textsuperscript{203} While Rong-ston does not really elaborate on these three types, Asaṅga gives a detailed description of them in RGVV I.33. Interestingly, Rong-ston identifies those three types of beings as the supports for the four types of obscurations to be abandoned (*rten de dag gi rgyud la yod pa'i spang bya la [...]*). Asaṅga, on the other hand, identifies “those who desire neither existence, nor the release from it” as those of the highest faculty, firmly rooted in the Mahāyāna. In other words, the bodhisattvas who remain fixed neither in samsāra, nor in nirvāṇa. See Johnston 1950: 28,14–18; Nakamura 1967: 55,1–6; and Takasaki 1966: 204. See also this commentary on RGV I.66–72.
Those who, with regard to themselves alone, are frightened by the sufferings of cyclic existence and those who are without concern for the purpose of sentient beings, gradually enter the [correct] means [for those who] desire freedom from existence. [These beings are obscured by] the obscurations of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas [respectively].

[40] These are the four types [of obscurations which are to be abandoned].

2.2.1.2.2.2. The antidote (gnyen po)

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{theg mchog la mos sa bon shes rab ni} \\
&sangs rgyas chos bskyed ma dang bsam gtan gyi \\
&bde ba’i mngal gnas snying rje’i ma ma can \\
gang yin de dag thub pa’i rjes skyes sras
\end{align*}
\]

Whoever is endowed with
(1) the seed of adherence to the supreme vehicle,
(2) supreme discriminating knowledge, the mother giving birth to the qualities of a buddha,
(3) the blissful womb of meditative concentration, and
(4) the nurse, which is compassion -
those are heirs, born in the succession of the Sage.

The causes for attaining the dharmakāya of utmost purity endowed with four qualities (i.e. great purity, great self, great happiness, great permanence) are:

1) exceptional adherence to the Mahāyāna of the bodhisattvas’ lineage, who have no desire for either samsāra or nirvāṇa;
2) the pāramitā of supreme knowledge which realises the non-existence of a self;
3) the meditative concentration of ‘space treasure’; and
4) the cultivation of great compassion.

\[\text{204} \text{ Takasaki (1966: 206) “On account of the origination of the Buddha’s Doctrine [...].” Schmithausen (1971: 142) corrects this mistaken reading.}\
\[\text{205} \text{ Lit. “sons” (Skt. putra; Tib. sras)}\
\[\text{206} \text{ Takasaki (1966: 206, n. 62) takes this verse to be a quotation from an older source. As this verse indeed hints at the buddha qualities’ production, Schmithausen (1971: 142–143) agrees that this assumption is not unfounded.}\
\[\text{207} \text{ This particular type of meditative concentration enables the bodhisattva to extract from space, for the benefit of beings, whatever resources are necessary. In his commentary on the MSA, Thogs-med bzang-po writes (RP: 63b3): nam mkha’ mdzod kyi ting nge ’dzin thob nas sams can rams la yo byad rin che ba dpag tu med pa’i char ’bebs pa yo byad la dbang [...]. This control over resources is included in the ten types of controlling powers (vaśīṭā) the bodhisattva attains on the eighth stage (bhūmi) of the path. See Thurman 2004: 58, n. 11.}\

55
In this regard, through the qualities of adherence and so forth, pertaining to the bodhisattva’s mental continuum, the four obscurations of his own mental continuum, which are similar to those present in the abovementioned four types of persons, are abandoned. Although the bodhisattva does not actually abandon the obscurations of the mental continuum of the four types of persons mentioned earlier, such as those with great desire and so forth, since these obscurations are predominant in the persons with strong desire etc., it is explained in that way.

2.2.1.2.2.3. The temporary result
From the four causes of (1) the seed of the father king, (2) his pure queen, (3) her faultless womb, and (4) a special nurse that brings him up, there emerges a son with the capacity to become the king’s successor. In the same way, one who is endowed with: (1) the seed of buddhahood, which adheres to the supreme vehicle, (2) supreme knowledge realising the non-existence of a self, the mother which gives birth to the qualities of a buddha, (3) dwelling in the blissful womb of meditative concentrations such as the “space treasure” etc., and (4) the cause which develops the realisation, the nurse which is compassion, such a person is an heir born in the footsteps of the Sage and becomes capable of being his successor.\(^\text{208}\)

2.2.2. The meaning of “result” (‘bras bu) and “function” (las)
For this second point, \(^{[41]}\) the meaning of “result” and “function,” there are two parts.

2.2.2.1. Common exposition

gtshaw bdag bde dang rtag nyid kyi ||
yon tan pha rol phyin pa ’bras ||
sduṅ bsngal yid ’byung zhi thob par ||
’dun dang smon pa’i las can no || (I.35)

The result is the perfection of the excellences of purity, self,\(^\text{209}\) happiness, and permanence. The function is [feeling] discontent

\(^{208}\) LS (40,6) and K (87,14) both read gdung ’tshob. G (41,3) has gdung ’tsho ba.

\(^{209}\) Tib. bdag; Skt. ātman. Takasaki (1966: 207) “unity.”

56
with suffering and unsatisfactoriness,\textsuperscript{210} and the longing and aspiration to obtain peace.\textsuperscript{211}

The result:
The body of the Tathāgata\textsuperscript{212}—[i.e. having reached] the perfection of the four excellences of purity, self, happiness, and permanence—is the result of the four [abovementioned causes], [namely:] adherence to the Dharma and so forth.

If it is asked how these four results are the results of the three points (dharmakāya, suchness, and gotra): \textsuperscript{213}

From the dharmakāya of previous buddhas stems the teaching of Dharma, from that stems adherence to the Dharma, and from that arises purity. Therefore purity is the cause and the result of the dharmakāya. From supreme knowledge having suchness as its object, arises the true self. Therefore it is presented as the result of suchness, the object. The result of the gotra: since the two perfections of true happiness and true permanence arise from meditative concentration and compassion, they are the result of the gotra.

The function:
To possess the function of feeling discontented with the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of saṃsāra and the longing desire and the aspiration to attain the pacification of suffering and unsatisfactoriness, i.e. nirvāṇa. [This] is the function of the actual awakening of the gotra.

Furthermore, the awakening of the gotra manifests because of the predominant condition of the dharmakāya [of the buddhas] and by the power of being endowed with the naturally pure dhātu. For these reasons it is presented as the function of these (i.e. dharmakāya and the existence of the dhātu) as well.

\textsuperscript{210} When the general condition of saṃsāra is explained, I decided to use “suffering and unsatisfactoriness” to translate sdug bsngal, since the meaning would not be totally covered by using one term alone. However, when later in the text obvious sufferings are mentioned, such as those of aging, sickness, and death, and the like, I use “suffering” alone.

\textsuperscript{211} See also Mathes 2008: 403.

\textsuperscript{212} de bzhin gshegs pa’i sku is here synonymous to chos sku.

\textsuperscript{213} Here, Rong-ston follows Rngog’s exposition very closely. Cf. Rngog’s don bsdus pa (Kano 2006: 332–333; transl. 447)
2.2.2.2. Individual explanation

For the individual explanation, there is the explanation of the “result” and the explanation of the “function.”

2.2.2.2.1. Explanation of the “result”

This first part has two subdivisions: [42] a brief exposition and a detailed explanation.

2.2.2.2.1.1. Brief exposition

'di dag 'bras ni mdoor bsdu na ||
chos kyi sku la phyin ci log ||
rnam pa bzhi las bzlog pa yi ||
gnyen pos rab tu phye ba nyid || (I. 36)

In brief, the result of these [qualities] is divided by means of the antidotes which counteract the four types of mistaken [views] with regard to the dharmakāya.\textsuperscript{214}

The four mistaken [views] and their opposites, the four unmistaken [views]: Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas regard the aggregates as having four [attributes, namely] impurity and so forth. The antidote to this is that the dharmakāya is endowed with the four [attributes of] purity and so forth. While only the buddha himself possesses these four excellences of purity etc., others do not. In this way, arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and even bodhisattvas who have obtained powers\textsuperscript{215} have the four characteristics of condition, cause, coming into being, and disintegrating, which are hindrances for the attainment of the excellences of the Tathāgata’s dharmakāya.

\textsuperscript{214} Takasaki (1966: 208) reads: “Because of the change of value in the Absolute Body, the result of these [4 causes] are, in short, [the Purity, etc.] represented as the Antidote to the four kinds of delusions.” See also Mathes 2008: 403.

\textsuperscript{215} Tib. dbang thob pa’i byang sems. According to Thurman (2004: 58), the powers referred to here are the ten masteries, or controlling powers, taught in the DBhS in the context of the eighth bodhisattva stage. In this case “bodhisattvas who have obtained powers” would refer to those abiding on the eighth stage onward. Basing himself supposedly on the Lankāvatārāśūtra, Takasaki (1966: 214, n. 109) remarks that this expression is an epithet for bodhisattvas in general. However, in his Studies in the Lankāvatārāśūtra Suzuki confirms the attainment of what he calls “the tenfold Self-mastery” by bodhisattvas on the eighth stage. See Suzuki 1999: 210. (De Jong (1968: 44) remarks that the quote Takasaki bases his assumption on actually comes from the Lalitavistara.)
Of these, the “condition” is the ground of the imprints of ignorance, and is similar to ignorance. The “cause” is uncontaminated karma caused by that condition, and is similar to formative factors (’du byed; samskāra). The “coming into being” is the coming into being of the three bodies of mental nature which have the two [abovementioned] as condition and cause, and it is similar to the three realms of existence which have acquisition as their condition. The “disintegration” is the completely inconceivable death and transference conditioned by those bodies, and is similar to aging and death conditioned by birth.

Arhats and so forth [i.e. pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas], all three do not obtain [true] purity, because there is no abandonment [of the hindrances] due to the imprints of ignorance. Conditioned by that ground the true self is not obtained, since they have subtle application of the conceptual elaborations of [grasping] signs. In dependance on uncontaminated karma caused by these subtle signs, the aggregates of mental nature arise. Therefore the [true] happiness of cessation is not attained. And as long as these [aggregates] do not cease, [they] are not free from inconceivable death and transference. For this reason, [true] permanence is not obtained.

In the Dpal phreng [gi mdo] (Skt. Śrīmāladevisṃhanādasūtra) it is stated:

Bhagavan, just as for example the three realms of existence arise, produced through the cause of contaminated karma and conditioned by grasping, likewise Bhagavan, the three bodies of mental nature of arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas who have attained powers arise, produced through the cause of uncontaminated karma and conditioned by the ground of the imprints of ignorance.

216 LS (42,4) and G (42,6) both read zag med kyi las. K (89,11) has bag med kyi las.
217 The “three bodies of mental nature” refer to the mental bodies of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas. The detailed explanation follows below.
218 This passage follows closely Asaṅga’s RGVV I.3 where the steps of the process which hinder the attained of the dharmakāya are related to specific links of the twelve links of dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda) which binds beings to samsāra. See Johnston 1950: 32,14–33,3; Nakamura 1967: 63,8–17; and Takasaki 1966: 214–216.
220 The passage I found in D is identical, except for the following terminological differences:
And so forth, [this] appears extensively.

In this regard, in the auto-commentary of the [Dbu ma la] ’jug pa,\textsuperscript{221} in the Snying po mchog,\textsuperscript{222} as well as in others places, the ground of the imprints of ignorance is explained as being the hindrance for completely cutting through knowable objects.\textsuperscript{223} The essential nature [of the ground of the imprints of ignorance] is the imprints of the mental afflictions. Since they act as the basis for the obscurations, they are explained to be the “ground.”

The conceptual elaborations of [grasping at] signs is the subtle clinging which is the activator of uncontaminated karma.

In the \textit{Blo gros rgya mtshos zhus pa’i mdo} (Sāgaramati\textit{paripṛcchāsūtra}) it is stated that the virtuous roots of those skilled in means (i.e. bodhisattvas) are labelled “mental afflictions.”\textsuperscript{224} Explaining [this] to be the subtle clinging to phenomena has the same meaning.

In the ’\textit{Bum tikā}\textsuperscript{225} [44] it is stated:

That which is explained as the cooperative condition\textsuperscript{226} of uncontaminated karma, this is precisely the ground of the imprints of ignorance.\textsuperscript{227} The karma

\begin{itemize}
\item [LS: mi rig pa’i bag chags kyi sa, D: mi rig pa’i gnas kyi sa; LS: zag ma med pa’i las, D: zag pa ma mchis pa’i las; LS: yig kyi rang bzhin gyi las, D: yid kyi las. Especially the first of these terminological differences is noteworthy. According to Seyfort Ruegg (1969: 182), the term \textit{mi rig pa’i gnas kyi sa} (avidyāvāsanabhūmi), used in the ŚMS refers to a plane of existence (consisting of those subtle imprints) to which arhats and pratyekabuddhas would “retreat”, instead of reaching the definitive release of nirvāṇa. The LAS, on the other hand, uses \textit{mi rig pa’i bag chags kyi sa} (avidyāvāsanabhūmi), which is the term Rong-ston uses in his quotation from the ŚMS. He therefore either had an edition different from Derge, Peking, or Narthang (I checked all three), or else he quoted from memory and switched terminology. I would exclude the possibility of him deliberately altering the wording from the printed or written Kangyur out of personal preference.
\item [221] Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya by Candrakīrti, D 3862.
\item [222] I was unable to identify this text.
\item [223] This means it is a hindrance for gaining omniscience.
\item [224] Here, Rong-ston refers to a quote from the Sāgaramatiparipṛcchāsūtra found in Asaṅga’s commentary. For this quote see Johnston 1950: 47,7–16; Nakamura 1967: 91,11–93,3; and Takasaki 1966: 245–246.
\item [225] This probably refers either to the \textit{shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa ’bum pa rgya cher ’grel ba} (D 3807), or to the \textit{shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa ’bum pa dang | khri bryegad stong pa’i rgya cher bshad pa} (D 3808), both by Danṣṭrāsena. Rong-ston himself composed a commentary on the Śatasahasrika-Prajñāpāramitāsūtra entitled \textit{Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa stong phrag breg ya pa’i rnam ’grel}, called ’\textit{Bum tikā}. However, it seems unlikely that he would quote himself here.
\item [226] \textit{lhan cig byed rkyen}
\end{itemize}
of the noble bodhisattvas’ uncontaminated intention which possesses the condition of the imprints of ignorance is uncontaminated karma.

The body of mental nature is the result produced through the cause and condition taught above, appearing as an unobstructed body, which is similar to mind.

The inconceivable death and transference is the intentional discarding and taking up of the body of mental nature.

2.2.2.1.2. Extensive explanation

de ni rang bzhin dag phyir dang ||
bag chags spangs phyir gtsang ba yin ||
bdag dang bdag med spros pa dag ||
nye bar zhi ba dam pa’i bdag || (I.37)

yid kyi rang bzhin phung po dang ||
de rgyu log phyir bde ba nyid ||
’khor ba dang ni mya ngan ’das ||
mnyam pa nyid du rtogs phyir rtag || (I.38)

That [dharmakāya] is pure due to its natural purity and because of having discarded the imprints.

It is the supreme self\textsuperscript{228} because conceptual elaborations in terms of self and non-self are thoroughly pacified.\textsuperscript{229}

It is happiness because the aggregates of mental nature and their causes are reversed.

It is permanence because saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are realised as equal.

The general characteristic of the Tathāgata’s dharmakāya is its naturally purity. Its special characteristic is its freedom of adventitious defilements along with their imprints. For these [two] reasons it is the “perfection of true purity.” In terms of its general characteristic, it is empty of an essential nature (ngo bo) of defilements. This is a [characteristic] it has in common with every mind which is pure and impure due to

\textsuperscript{227} K (90,14–15) reads ma rig bag chags kyi sa de nyid do ||. LS (44,1) and G (44,3) both have ma rig bag chags kyi de nyid do ||.

\textsuperscript{228} Tib. dam pa’i bdag; Skt. paramātma. Takasaki (1966: 218): “highest Unity.”

\textsuperscript{229} On this verse see also Schmithausen 1971: 143 and Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 369.
defilements.\textsuperscript{230} While this is the case, with regard to the special characteristic, it is [also] free of adventitious defilements. This is a special feature common only to a mind free from contamination.

Due to the thorough pacification of the entirety of conceptual elaborations concerning the two [types of self]\textsuperscript{231}, the self of person imputed by the tīrthikas and the self of phenomena imputed by the śrāvakas, it is the "perfection of true self."\textsuperscript{232} In this regard, to the non-existence of a self, [the term] "self" has been given, which is similar to [the expression] \textsuperscript{[45]} "abiding in the manner of non-abiding."\textsuperscript{233}

Due to the abandonment and absence of the aggregates of mental nature and their causes, the ground of the imprints of ignorance, and erroneous uncontaminated karma, it is the "perfection of true happiness" itself.

Not conceptualising samsāra and nirvāṇa to be accepted and rejected separately, due to realising [them] as equality, it is the "perfection of true permanence."

\begin{quote}
bdag sred ma lus shes rab kyis bcad de ||
sems can sred phyir brtse ldan zhi thob min ||
de ltar blo brtse byang chub thabs brten nas ||
'phags pa 'khor ba'am mya ngan 'da' mi 'gyur || \textsuperscript{(I.39)}
\end{quote}

[Though] having completely severed all attachment to a self

\textsuperscript{230} LS (44,4–5) and G (45,1) read: dri mas dag ma dag gi sms thams cad [...]. K (91,5) has: dri mas ma dag pa'i sms thams cad [...].

\textsuperscript{231} Nakamura’s (1967: 67,4) edition of the corresponding passage from the RGVV reads: rgyu rnam pa gnyis kyi bdag gis pha rol tu phyin par rig par bya ste l. Based on the Sanskrit (Johnston 1950: 34,13–14: dvāḥhyāṃ kāraṇāḥhyāṃ ātmāparāmitā veditavyā l), I think that Nakamura, against the Derge variants, did not edit this passage correctly. However, the edition of the RGVV available to Rong-ston probably had exactly this reading. Since there is a mention of "two types of self" according to this reading (rnam pa gnyis kyi bdag), Rong-ston identifies them as shown above. Asaṅga in his commentary, however, mentions the two reasons (rgyu rnam pa gnyis kyi) for which the dharmakāya is to be known as the perfection of self (bdag gyi pha rol tu phyin par rig par bya), namely the removal of the concepts of self and no-self. See also next footnote.

\textsuperscript{232} Here, Rong-ston deviates from the root text as well as Asaṅga’s commentary which identify the two hindrances to the attainment of the true self as (1) the tīrthikas’ concept of a self, and (2) the śrāvakas’ concept of non-self. (Nakamura 1967: 67,4–6: […] mu stegs kyi mtha' dang bral bas bdag gi spros pa dang bral ba'i phyir dang / nyan thos kyi mtha' spangs pas bdag med pa'i spros pa dang bral ba'i phyir ro l. Note that Nakamura reads: bdag gis spros pa.) He precisely follows Rngog’s interpretation of the verse. Cf. Kano 2006: 335 (transl. 451).

\textsuperscript{233} This comment, referring to bodhisattva’s way of abiding in the manner of abiding neither in the extreme of samsāra, nor in that of nirvāṇa (cf. RGVV I.39), comes from RGVV I.36: bdag med pa nyid bdag tu byas pa ste l ji skad tu mi gnas pa'i tshul gyis gnas pa zhes gsungs pa lta bu'o l. See Nakamura 1967: 61,3–4; Johnston 1950: 31,16; and Takasaki 1966: 211. In my opinion, Takasaki’s translation of this passage lacks in clarity at this regard.

62
by means of supreme knowledge,  
those endowed with affectionate love do not attain peace  
out of the strong desire to [help] sentient beings.

Thus, having relied on intelligence and affectionate love,  
the means [for attaining] awakening,  
the noble ones remain neither in saṃsāra, nor in nirvāṇa.

The cause for realising saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as equal is twofold: means and supreme knowledge. These two are the root for the unsurpassable awakening.

If it is asked in what ways they are the root:

It is so because the supreme knowledge which realises the non-existence of a self has severed all attachment to a self without remainder. In this way, the intellect or the supreme knowledge becomes the means for [attaining] unsurpassable awakening. The dharmin, the noble bodhisattva, does not dwell in saṃsāra because he has firmly established that supreme knowledge which realises the non-existence of a self in [his] mental continuum.

That bodhisattva endowed with affectionate love does not attain nirvāṇa, [i.e.] the peace which would interrupt the benefit of others, out of strong desire. [That is to say] he does not give up sentient beings out of compassion. In this way, affectionate love becomes the means for [attaining] unsurpassable awakening. This noble bodhisattva will not abide in nirvāṇa because he has firmly established great affectionate love and compassion in [his] mental continuum.

2.2.2.2.2. Explanation of the meaning of “function”

[46] The explanation of the meaning of “function” has two [subdivisions]: Establishing the existence of the function of the gotra by means of [excluding] the opposite (ldog pa), and establishing [it] by means of positive concomitance and excluding [the] opposite (rjes su ’gro ldog gnyis).

2.2.2.2.2.1. Establishing the existence of the function of the gotra by means of [excluding] the opposite (ldog pa)

gal te sangs rgyas khams med na ||
sdug la’ang skyo bar mi ’gyur zhing ||
mya ngan ’das la ’dod pa dang ||
If the buddhadhātu were not existent,  
There would be no aversion to suffering,  
And [beings] would neither desire a state beyond sorrow (nirvāṇa),  
Nor [develop] the effort and the aspiration towards it.

For an eternalist, if the buddhadhātu were not present in sentient beings, nobody would ever feel aversion to the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of saṃsāra because [its] awakening would be impossible. Also, the desire which is the mind’s inclination to attain nirvāṇa, exerting effort in the search for the means to attain [it], as well as the aspiration thinking: “May I attain [it]!” would not come about.

This [verse deals with] the resultant aspect [of the presence of the dhātu]: aversion\textsuperscript{234} to the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of saṃsāra, and desire for nirvāṇa.

With regard to the following [verse, i.e. I.41]:

The cause for the aversion [towards saṃsāra] is to see the fault of the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of saṃsāra, and the cause for the desire [to attain nirvāṇa] is to see the benefits of the happiness of nirvāṇa. This is the distinction of the function of the previous and the following ślokas (I.40–41). These [two] are actually also the function of the accomplished gotra.\textsuperscript{235}

Furthermore, the naturally abiding gotra\textsuperscript{236} arises from being nourished\textsuperscript{237} by the [necessary] conditions. In this regard one should not be confused.

Hence [Asanga states] in the commentary:

The gotra of purity, which is the buddhadhātu, calls forth the twofold function for sentient beings, even when they are fixed in falsehood.\textsuperscript{238} \textsuperscript{239}

\textsuperscript{234} LS (46,3) and K (92,17) both read skyo ba. G (46,7) has skyob (“to protect”).
\textsuperscript{235} bsgrubs pa’i rigs (Skt. samudānītagotra). This is the second aspect of the gotra, the first being
\textsuperscript{236} LS (46,5) and G (47,1) both read rang bzhin du gnas pa’i rigs. K (93,3) has rang bzhin gyis gnas pa’i rigs.
\textsuperscript{237} LS (46,5) and K (93,4) both read gsos pa. G (47,1) has gsol ba, “to request, to wear, to offer.”
\textsuperscript{238} Tib. log pa nyid du nges pa’i sens can; Skt. mithyātvanīyata. The technical translation is taken from Edgerton 1953 (vol. 2): 432.
\textsuperscript{239} Johnston 1950: 36,2–3; Nakamura 1967: 69,13–14; Takasaki 1966: 221
For those who maintain that the naturally abiding gotra is the unconditioned dharmatā only, [47] an awakening through conditions does not make sense. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain [that the natural gotra comprises] the cognitive aspect (rig pa’i cha) [of mind] as well. Consequently the cognitive aspect creates the appropriating cause of the buddha-wisdom. Moreover, if it (i.e. the cognitive aspect) were not empty of an own-being it would not change, and on that account it would not make sense to nurture it [through conditions].

For this reason, since the result\(^{240}\) arises from the mind qualified by being empty of an own-being, it is necessary to maintain the non-differentiation of expanse and cognisance (dbyings rig dbyer med).

2.2.2.2.2.2. Establishing [it] by means of positive concomitance and [excluding] its opposite (rjes su ’gro ldog gnyis)

\[\begin{align*}
\text{srid dang mya ngan ’das la de’i} & \parallel \\
\text{sdug bde’i}^{241} & \text{ skyon yon mthong ba ’di} \parallel \\
\text{rigs yod las yin gang phyir de} & \parallel \\
\text{rigs med dag la med phyir ro} & \parallel \quad (1.41)
\end{align*}\]

Seeing the faults of the suffering of [cyclic] existence and the benefits of nirvāna’s happiness stems from the existence of the gotra. Why? Because it is not present in those without gotra.\(^{242}\)

Relying on a holy being, living in a favourable country, having performed virtues in the past, and making pure aspirations: a person endowed with [these] four wheels sees the faults of the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of this existence, and the benefits of the happiness of nirvāna. This [seeing results] from the existence of a gotra and its awakening. But, it is not the case that there are no causes and conditions for the awakening of the gotra. Why? Because, if [for] you the gotra exists even without causes and conditions for its awakening, [it follows that it] exists before its awakening

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\(^{240}\) The result being the dharmakāya endowed with the two purities.

\(^{241}\) Nakamura (1967: 69,20): sdug bde

\(^{242}\) This statement contradicts RGV I.28, where we read that all beings possess the buddhagarbha due to three reasons, the gotra being present (in them) being one of them. This apparent contradiction is addressed and resolved by Rong-ston, following Asanga, in the commentary below.
even in those attached to falsehood, who possess the gotra of not passing beyond sorrow (i.e. who will not attain nirvāṇa). But it doesn’t.

By being connected to the four wheels (i.e. relying on a holy being, etc.), even for those attached to falsehood the functions [of the gotra] will arise from the time of the gotra’s awakening, having produced adherence to the ground of any of the three vehicles.

In the Ye shes snang ba rgyan gyi [48] mdo (Jñānālokālaṃkārasūtra) it is stated:

After that, the light of wisdom of the Tathāgata’s sun will strike even the bodies of those sentient beings who have become constantly fixed in falsehood. This will benefit them and when the cause of future [happiness] has correctly arisen, [it will cause] the virtuous qualities to thoroughly increase.243

In regard to “after that” mentioned [above]: The sun, for example, having first gradually illuminated the high mountains and so forth, later on also illuminates the lower regions of this world. Likewise [the Tathāgata’s sun] will benefit in the first instance those endowed with a gotra fixed in [one of] the three vehicles, and then those endowed with an uncertain gotra.244 After that, it accomplishes the benefit of sentient beings attached to falsehood too.

However, one may wonder why it is stated in the Myang ‘das chen po’i mdo (Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra) that those constantly attached to falsehood possess the quality of not passing beyond sorrow at all. This is [a statement] of provisional meaning [given] with a [certain] intention.

The purpose is to utterly terrify those who are hostile towards the Mahāyāna by saying [they] will never be liberated. Having [achieved that], the basic intention [is that] of

243 This quote, attributed by the Chinese tradition to the Avatamsakasūtra, is taken from the RGVV. See Johnston 1950: 36–37; Nakamura 1967: 71,6–8; and Takasaki 1966: 223, n. 177. The passage from the IAĀ 285b6–7: de’i og tu de bzhin gshags pa nyan ma’i dkyil ‘khor hi ye shes kyi ’od zer dag than sens can log pa nyid du nges pa’i sens kyi rgyud dang ldan pa nams kyi lus la ‘bab par ‘gyur zhing/ de dag la ma’ ong pa’i rgya yang dag par skyped pas phan ’dogs pa dang/ dge ba’i chos nams kyi yang dag par ‘phel bar yang byed do ||.

244 LS (48,4) and K (94,13) both have [...] dang ma nges pa’i rigs can [...]. This passage is omitted in G.
reversing [their path]. It is stated with the [hidden] intention of another time (i.e. long time), since they will not [be liberated] for a long time.\textsuperscript{245}

With regard to the refutation of the explicit meaning: because of the existence of the naturally, totally pure [aspect of the] gotra, [49] it is not right [to say that] those attached to falsehood never become purified.

Why? Considering the fact that all sentient beings without distinction have the aptitude for complete purity the Bhagavān said:

\begin{quote}
Although it [i.e. samsāra] is without beginning, it has an end.

[That which is] naturally pure and
has the quality of being permanent,
is externally obscured by a cover without beginning
and cannot be seen,
just as a golden statue that is covered.\textsuperscript{246}
\end{quote}

In this way, the [assertion] of sentient beings with a cut-off gotra is negated by means of scripture and reasoning. With regard to the naturally abiding Mahāyāna-gotra, this is called the dharmadhātu of the mind associated with defilements. In the Mngon rtogs rgyan (Abhisamayālaṅkāra) it is said:

\begin{quote}
[…] the foundation of accomplishment,
[which has] the nature of the dharmadhātu […].\textsuperscript{247}
\end{quote}

Therefore there cannot be beings with a cut-off gotra.

In the [Theg pa chen po] mdo sde’i rgyan (Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra) the sugatagarbha and the gotra are taught as being separate. While the sugatagarbha is explained to be present in all sentient beings, beings with a cut-off gotra are [also] taught to exist.\textsuperscript{248}

\textsuperscript{245} Again, Rong-ston follows Asaṅga’s RGVV very closely here. See See Johnston 1950: 37,8–9; Nakamura 1967: 71,14–15; and Takasaki 1966: 224. According to Takasaki (1966: 40) the idea of this teaching being a skilful means to convert others to the Mahāyāna stems from the Mahāyāna-Mahāparinirvānasūtra. See also Seyfort Ruegg 1969: 10–11.

\textsuperscript{246} This quote, the origin of which remains untraced, comes from Asaṅga’s commentary. (Obermiller’s attribution of this passage to the SMS could not be confirmed.) See Johnston 1950: 37,8–9; Nakamura 1967: 71,14–15; and Takasaki 1966: 224.

\textsuperscript{247} AA I.6b (D: 2a2–3): sgrub pa yi ni rten gyur pa | chos kyi dbyings kyi rang bzhin dang |; K (95,8) reads sgrub pa yin […]. See also AA I.40 (D: 3b2)
Therefore, to maintain that the sugatagarbha and the gotra are distinct is the view\textsuperscript{249} of the followers of the Cittamātra [school].

2.2.3. The meaning of “connection” (ldan pa)

The third point, the meaning of “connection” has two [subdivisions]: a brief exposition and a detailed explanation.

2.2.3.1. Brief exposition

\begin{align}
\text{rgya mtsho che bzhin dpag med pa' } \text{t} \text{\textsuperscript{250}} &= \text{||} \\
\text{yon tan rin chen mi bzad gnas} &= \text{||} \\
\text{dbyer med yon tan dang ldan pa' } \text{t} &= \text{||} \\
\text{ngo bo nyid phyir mar me bzhin} &= \text{||} \quad (1.42)
\end{align}

Similar to the great ocean, it is an inexhaustible repository of jewels, the excellences of which are immeasurable. Because its essential nature is endowed with inseparable excellences, it is similar to a butter lamp.

[50] Just as the vast and extensive vessel of the great ocean contains immeasurable [quantities of] jewels and water, likewise the dhātu of the Tathāgata, which is the vessel of adherence, is the repository of the immeasurable jewel-[like] excellences of supreme knowledge and meditative concentration, and the inexhaustible waters of compassion.

The connection [of the dhātu] with the result: Because it is endowed with the inseparable excellences of the first five types of supernatural knowledge (mngon shes),\textsuperscript{251} of uncontaminated wisdom, and of abandonment,\textsuperscript{252} it is similar to the three inseparable characteristics of a butter lamp.\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{248} Rong-ston refers here to MSA III.11, where it is mentioned that some beings lack the cause for liberation; and to MSA IX.37, where it is stated that all beings possess the [tathāgata]garbha.

\textsuperscript{249} Lit.: tradition (lugs)

\textsuperscript{250} Nakamura (1967: 71,18): dpag med pa. RGVV (D: 94b5): dpag med pa'i.

\textsuperscript{251} This refers to: 1) divine eye (lha'i mig eye); 2) divine ear (lha'i rna ba); 3) knowledge of other's minds (gzhan gyi sems shes pa); 4) recollection of past abodes (lives) (sngon gyi gnas rjes su dran pa); 5) miracle (rdzu 'phrul). See MSA VII.1 (Thurman 2004: 55); as well as Nyānatiloka (1999:13–15): “Abhiññā.”

\textsuperscript{252} On “abandonment” refer to the commentary on verse I.44.

\textsuperscript{253} These three qualities are light, warmth and colour (see I.44).
Here, the cause is the connection with the gotra, and the result is both the connection with the dharmakāya\textsuperscript{254} and the connection with suchness.

2.2.3.2. Extensive explanation

chos sku rgyal ba’i ye shes dang ||
thugs rje’i khaps ni bsdus pa’i phyir ||
snod dang rin chen chu yis ’di ||
rgya mtsho dang ni mtshungs par bstan || (I.43)

Because it comprises the causes\textsuperscript{255} for the dharmakāya, the Conqueror’s wisdom, and compassion, it is taught to be comparable to the ocean, Due to [its being] a vessel [containing] jewels and water.

In [this] explanation, with regard to the causal connection [of the dhātu]:

(1) As to the cause for attaining the dharmakāya of the Tathāgata, which is the cultivation of adherence to the Mahāyāna Dharma, it is similar to a vessel because within it are contained the jewels of supreme knowledge and meditative concentration, and the waters of compassion.

(2) The causes of the Conqueror’s wisdom, which is the cultivation of supreme knowledge and meditative concentration, are similar to jewels. This is because just as jewels do not conceptualise and possess great power, through supreme knowledge one does not conceptualise the two types of self, and the power of meditative concentration and the five types of supernatural knowledge are inconceivable.

(3) The cause [of the Tathāgata’s] dhātu of great compassion, which is the cultivation of great compassion, is similar to water [51] because it has the natural single taste of extreme moisture with regard to all beings.

Accordingly, these three points are taught as being similar to a great ocean.

The individual similarities for the resultant connection:

\[ \text{dri med gnas la mngon shes dang} \]
\[ \text{ye shes dri med de nyid dang} \]

\textsuperscript{254} LS (50,3) and G (50,5) both read chos sku’i ldan pa; K (96,8) has chos sku’i bden pa.
\textsuperscript{255} Lit. “elements” (Skt. dhātu; Tib. khaps). According to Takasaki (1966: 225, n. 194), in this case dhātu is to be taken as hetu, cause.
Since the supernatural knowledges, stainless wisdom, and suchness are totally inseparable on the stainless basis, \[\text{these} \] properties are comparable to the light, the warmth, and the colour of a butter lamp.

The five types of supernatural knowledge (mngon shes) in the expanse, which is the state free from the stains of the two obscurations, correspond to the illumination of a butter lamp, because they destroy the darkness which is opposed to the experience of the respective objects.

Uncontaminated wisdom corresponds to [its] warmth, since it consumes the entire ‘fire-wood’ of karma and mental afflictions.

The undefiled transmutation of the basis corresponds to [its] colour. Due to the abandonment of the obscuration of mental afflictions it is stainless, and due to the abandonment of the obscuration of knowledge it is pure. Since both are adventitious, they are not the own-being \([\text{of the } dhātu]\). Thus it is luminous.

The general similarities are similar to the inseparability of a butter lamp and the illumination of the butter lamp. This is because the stainless expanse and these seven characteristics of the mental continuum of a no-more-learner are completely inseparable.

2.2.4. The meaning of “manifestation” (jug pa)

2.2.4.1. Brief exposition

In regard to the [brief] exposition:

\[so \text{ so‘i skye }‘phags rdzogs sangs kyi \]

\[de \text{ bzhin nyid dbye‘i }‘\text{jug pa las} \]

---

256 Takasaki (1966: 227, n. 206) remarks that here, following the RGVV, āśraya (Tib. gnas) is to be understood as synonymous with dhātu (which is the word used in the Chinese version at this place). The “undefiled basis” is therefore, according to him, the dharmakāya. This understanding is in line with Rong-ston’s commentary.

257 Tib. gnas gyur pa dri ma med pa

258 LS (51,4) and G (51,6) both read: mar me dang mar me’i snang ba […]. K (97,8–9) has: mar mar me dang mar me’i snang ba […].

259 These seven are the five types of higher knowledge, uncontaminated wisdom, and the twofold abandonment.
The perceiver-of-suchness taught
the buddha-nature (jinagarbha) to sentient beings,
based on the different manifestations of suchness260
of ordinary beings, noble ones, and perfect buddhas.261

Buddha-nature (lit. “essence of the victorious one”) is taught to be present in sentient beings.

By whom? By the buddha who sees reality.

How? [From] the point of view of the divisions of the manifestations of suchness of the possessors of the quality:262 ordinary beings, noble ones [on the path of] learning, and perfect buddhas.

Where? [52] In the Prajñāpāramitā[śūtras] and so forth.

For what purpose? For the purpose of generating non-conceptual wisdom.

For whom? It is taught for bodhisattvas.

The last three [statements] are taken from the commentary [of Asaṅga].263

2.2.4.2. Extensive explanation

Ordinary beings have mistaken [views],
those who have seen the truth have reversed [them],
and the Tathāgatas [see things] as they are,
without mistake and without mental elaborations.

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261 Schmithausen (1971: 147) translates RGV 45a: “(Der jinagarbha ist gelehrt worden) als unterschiedlich auftretend, [insofern er] die Soheit der Weltmenschen, der Heiligen und der vollkommen Erleuchteten [ist [...]”
262 chos can (Skt. dharmin): in this case chos (rendered as “quality”) stands for suchness (Tib. de bzhin ncid, Skt. tathāta), which is present in ordinary sentient beings and buddhas alike.
What are the three manifestations?

The manifestation by:
1) Ordinary beings with perception (’du shes), mind (sems), and wrong views (ita ba phyin ci log);
2) Noble ones [on the path of] learning who, having seen the truth, turned away from being mistaken, and [no longer] have mistaken views; and
3) Tathāgatas, who, having abandoned the two types of obscurations together with their imprints, see things as they really are, without mistake (phyin ci ma log pa) and free from [conceptual] elaborations (spros pa med pa).

The first two do not participate (’jug pa) in the dharmakāya, while the latter do not participate in the gotra. Therefore natural suchness manifests [in all three].

In the commentary [of Asanga it is stated that] the pure suchness of all phenomena is that which is taught to be the general characteristic.264

2.2.5. The meaning of “states” (gnas skabs)

2.2.5.1. Brief exposition

ma dag ma dag dag pa dang ||
shin tu rna m dag go rim bzhin ||
sems can byang chub sems dpa’ dang ||
de bzhin gshegs pa zhes brjod do || (I.47)

Impure, impure and pure, and completely pure.
[These three states] are called sentient being,265 bodhisattva and tathāgata respectively.

[Objection:] If there is the distinction of suchness into three [states], it follows that suchness is multiple.

[Response:] Dharmatā (chos nyid), which is classified into three from the [point of view of the] three states of the possessors of this quality, is not differentiable from the

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265 As Schmithausen (1971: 148) remarks, the Skt. reads sattvadhātu, not just sattva (Tib. sems can). Thus he renders this passage with: “[Je nachdem, ob der jinagarbha] (a) unrein, (b) [teils] unrein und [teils] rein und (c) vollkommen rein ist, wird er respektive ‘sattvadhātu’, ‘bodhisattvah’ und ‘tathāgatah’ genannt.”
point of view of its natural purity. Therefore there is no contradiction. Thus it is
taught.

This dhātu is given the name “dhātu of sentient beings” in its defiled, impure state.
In the state of being impure due all the discards [to be abandoned on] path of
cultivation, and pure through the various discards of the [paths of] seeing and
cultivation, [53] it is given the name “bodhisattva.”

It is called “tathāgata” in the state in which the two types of obscurations are
completely purified along with their imprints.

While it is differentiated into three [states] due to the three states of possessors of this
quality, there is no distinction from the point of view of [its] natural purity. Therefore,
[these statements] do not contradict [each other].

2.2.5.2. Extensive explanation

ngo bo nyid la sogs pa’i don ||
’di drug gis ni bsdus pa yi ||
khams ni gnas skabs gsam dag tu ||
ming gsam gyis ni bstan pa nyid|| (I.48)

The dhātu, which is summarised by means of these six points:
essential nature and so forth,
is explained according to the three states
by means of three names.

The dhātu, taught by the Bhagavan in many divisions of [his] teachings and
summarized by these six topics, essential nature and so forth, is divided into three
states. The purpose of [this] is that it is taught by means of three particular names due
to the three [types of] subjects (chos can; dharmin).

In a sūtra of this [section] the dharmaṃkāya itself is referred to as “dhātu of sentient
beings,” as well as “bodhisattva” and “perfect buddha.” Thus it is stated in [Asaṅga’s]
commentary, that the dhātu of sentient beings and the dharmaṃkāya are not different.270

266 LS (52,6) and G (53,2) both read: sgom spang kun; K (99,3) has: sgom spong kun.
267 mthong sgom gyi spang bya ci rigs pa
268 The complete list is given in Asaṅga’s commentary: essential nature, cause, fruit, function,
269 This refers to the Anūnatvāpūrṇatvānirdeśasūtra quoted by Asaṅga. See Johnston 1950: 41,1–5;
In the sūtra which relates to the Vajra Points, too the so called “dhātu of sentient beings” is an expression for buddha-nature (tathāgatagarbha), and the so called “buddha-nature” stands for the dharmakāya, and so forth. Therefore, even the so called dharmakāya is taught to exist in all [beings].

Some scholars say that Mahā’s (i.e. Blo-Ildan shes-rab’s) explanation of the gotra as being the essence of sentient beings, and so forth [54] is a self-fabricated [doctrine]. This is not acceptable because if it were a self-fabricated [doctrine], it would follow that the repeatedly recurring expression “dhātu of sentient beings” is a self-fabricated [doctrine as well].

2.2.6. The meaning of “all-pervasiveness”

The meaning of "all-pervasiveness" has two [subdivision], a brief exposition and an extensive explanation.

2.2.6.1. Brief exposition

\[
\begin{align*}
ji \text{ ltar } & \text{ rtog med bdag nyid can} || \\
nam \text{ mkha’ kun tu rjes song ltar} & || \\
sems \text{ kyi rang bzhin dri med dbyings} & || \\
de \text{ bzhin kun tu ’gro ba nyid} & || \quad (1.49)
\end{align*}
\]

Just as space, which is by nature without discrimination, pervades everything,
Similarly the mind’s nature, the undefiled expanse, is all-pervasive.

Why is [there] a distinction [with regard to] the states only and not [with regard to] the nature?

\[270\] This refers to another quotation from the Anūnātavāpurṇatvanirdeśasūtra in Asaṅga’s commentary: sattvadhātur nānyo dharmakāyah | sattvadhātur eva dharmakāyah | dharmakāya eva sattvadhātuḥ | advayametadarthena | vyacchanamātrabheda iti ||. See Johnston 1950: 41,15–17; Nakamura 1967: 79,1–3; and Takasaki 1966: 234.
\[271\] Dhāranīśvara[rājasa]ūtra, see RGV I.2.
\[272\] Rong-ston refers again to Blo-Ildan shes-rab’s commentary on RGV I.28, where buddha-nature is explained in view of its three aspects, namely the resultant dharmakāya, natural suchness, and the causal gotra. The latter is said to be the actual essence of sentient beings, while the first is only nominally attributed to them. See Kano 2006: 331–332 (transl. 444–446).
\[273\] Tib. rtog med; Skt. nirvikalpa. When relating directly to mind, this term is often best rendered with “non-conceptual.” In this case however, following Takasaki (1966: 233), I chose to render it as “without discrimination,” since this seems to be more appropriate in this context.
[This] is taught because the general characteristic, [i.e.] the naturally pure [aspect], pervades the three states. Just as space, which is by nature is without discrimination, pervades all vessels—whether made of clay, copper, or gold—so too, the naturally pure expanse, which is the nature of the mind, primordially free of defilements, similarly like space, pervades all three states.

2.2.6.2. Extensive explanation

de’i spyi’i mtshan nyid nyes pa dang ||
yon tan mthar thug khyab pa ste ||
gzugs kyi rnam pa dman pa dang ||
bar ma mchog la nam mkha’ bzhin ||  (I.50)

The general characteristic pervades the faulty [ones], [Those possessing] excellences, and [those who have] reached the end.
It is like space [which pervades] the various types of forms, inferior, middling, and superior [equally].

The naturally pure expanse is present in all three states, [i.e.] the pure [state], the impure, and so forth. Since it is the general characteristic [of the dhātu], it pervades all states, [i.e.] ordinary beings possessing faults, bodhisattvas endowed with excellences, and buddhas who have reached the ultimate state of pure excellences.

It is similar to space which, for example, pervades all three vessels, those made of an inferior kind of material - clay, [those made of a] middling [kind] - copper, and [those of a] supreme [kind] - gold. Furthermore, [55] while the space in the three vessels is just space without distinction, [it] is not the same [space]. Similarly, while the naturally pure dharmatā of the three subjects (chos can) is only that which is without the distinction of different gotras, it is [also] not the same.

Some say that an indivisible, single dharmatā pervades all [three] subjects.\(^\text{274}\) Since this is similar to saying “there is a universal, permanent, indivisible, single [principle] which pervades everything manifest,”\(^\text{275}\) it must be refuted using the logic refuting

\(^{274}\) LS (55,2) and G (55,5) both read: chos nyid cha med cig chos can thams cad la khab par [...]. K (101,9) has: [...] chos thams cad la [...].

\(^{275}\) The concept of a universal, permanent principle pervading all manifest phenomena is found in the Sāṃkhyya idea of prakṛtiḥ ("nature"), representing the universal ground for all phenomenal manifestation. Cf. Frauwallner 2003 (vol. I): 225ff. For a refutation of this view by Dharmakīrti see
universals.276 Even those who claim the substantial [existence] of universals are like them.277

Although there is a distinction between defiled suchness and undefiled suchness, due to the difference of subjects who are pure or impure due to [the presence or absence of] defilements, there is no [distinction to be made] from the point of view of the essential nature (ngo bo). Still, due to the difference of subjects, who are pure or impure due to [the presence or absence of] defilements, [suchness] it is not a singular [entity] either.

While the example of space pervading all forms [of vessels] should be applied to the naturally pure characteristic pervading all [states], it should not be applied to the total purity from adventitious [defilements] pervading all [states].278

2.2.7. The meaning of “immutability”

The meaning of “immutability”279 has two [points]: a brief exposition and an extensive explanation.

2.2.7.1. Brief exposition

nyes pa glo bur dang ldan dang ||
yon tan rang bzhin nyid ldan phyir ||
ji ltar suga bzhin phyis de bzhin ||
’gyur ba med pa’i chos nyid do || (I.51)

278 K (101,11) spyi ’gog pa’i rigs pa sbyar nas dgag par bya’o || [...]; G (55,5): skye ’gog pa’i [...] ; LS (55,3): skya ’gog pa’i [...]. Here, my translation follows K, G and LS (LS erroneously reading skya), however, would prefer: “[...] must be refuted using the logic of the refutation of arising [of phenomena].” Based on the teaching of the non-arising of all phenomena as expounded in the Prajināpāramitā literature, this topic constitutes the first chapter of Nāgarjuna’s famous Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. A famous example for this type of refutation used in Madhyamaka reasoning can also be found in the Madhyamakāvatāra by Candrakīrti (MA VI.8–36), were the author uses the four-limbed reasoning (catuskoti) to refute the four possible dialectical positions concerning the arising of phenomena.
279 LS (55,5) reads: mi ‘byung ba’i don, which is obviously a mistake.
Because it is adventitiously associated with faults,
and because it is naturally endowed with the excellences,
it is later just as it was before.
[This is] the immutable dharmatā (i.e. nature of phenomena).²⁸⁰

If the properties of the excellences did not pervade the three different states, then the [dhātu] would be endowed with faults in the two impure states. [56] And in the thoroughly purified state, having become free from faults, [it] would be endowed with newly [created] excellences. Therefore, one may wonder whether the dharmatā is not immutable, since it would become pure from a previously impure [state].

[Response:] In the state of ordinary beings dharmatā is said to be impure, due to it being associated with the faults of adventitious defilements. In the state of noble ones [on the path of] learning, it is said to be pure and impure²⁸¹ due to having abandoned the defilements to be abandoned [by means of the path] of seeing and because the defilements to be abandoned [by means of the path] of cultivation are not [yet] abandoned.

In the state of buddhahood, it is said to be thoroughly purified because the excellences which are free from defilements are undifferentiable and inseparably endowed, in the manner of a nature and that which possesses this nature.

The defilements are said to be adventitious because they exist in an obliteratorable way.
The excellences are explained to be naturally endowed due to being endowed in an unobliteratorable way.

Further below, it says that it is similar to a precious jewel, its radiance, colour, and shape, because they are inseparable.²⁸²

Explaining that “naturally endowed” means to be endowed from the beginning is simply wrong.

²⁸⁰ Takasaki (1966: 234) renders dharmatā (Tib. chos nyid) with “character.”
²⁸¹ dag la ma dag pa. Compared to the state of ordinary beings, where the dharmatā is totally covered, it is said to be pure, since by reaching the first bhūmi upon entering the path of seeing, the bodhisattva perceives suchness for the first time directly. This seeing is the result of the bodhisattva’s elimination of mental afflictions. Since, however, the imprints of these afflictions remain to be purified through the path of cultivation, the bodhisattvas’ state is said to be impure.
²⁸² RGV III.37: guṇā dvātrimśaditye dharmakāyaprabhāvitāḥ | maṇiratnaprabhāvarṇasāṁsthāna-vadabhedatāḥ ||. The second half of this stanza is quoted below.
In brief, when the dhātu is free from defilements it inherently possesses the excellences, similar to fire which naturally possesses heat. This is called “naturally endowed.”

One may say:

[Objection:] In that case it follows that dharmatā changes, because: [57]

a) it changes from previously not being endowed with excellences, into being endowed with excellences later, and

b) it changes from previously possessing defilements, into being free from defilements later.

[Response:] From the point of view of the basis, [i.e.] the subject (i.e. the possessor of dharmatā), there is the difference of being pure or impure due to defilements, and being or not being endowed with excellences. But since the own essential-nature (rang gi ngo bo) of the dharmatā is later just as it was before, it does not change.

It is like, for example, [the sky]: although the sky changes from a previous [state] of having clouds into a later [state] free of clouds, the essential nature (ngo bo) of the sky before and after is not different.

Previously, in the state of being endowed with defilements, [the dhātu] does not have the excellences; and later, it is endowed with the excellences.

Similarly, with regard to a jewel for example, if an expert in jewels, although [it may be] covered with dirt when not purified, purifies it from the dirt, it possesses the radiance, the colour and so forth, of the jewel in an undifferentiable or inseparable way.

Just as it is stated:

[...] because [the 32 properties of the dharmakāya] are indivisible [from it], as with the jewel, its radiance, colour, and shape.284 285

283 This simile is used by Candrakīrti in his commentary on MMK XV.2ab which refutes the possibility of a created or fabricated own-being (svabhāva). Cf. Mathes 2008: 352.
284 RGV III.37cd: nor bu rin chen ’od mdog dang || dbhyis bzhin bbye ba med phyir ro ||
285 Here, the example means that there are no excellences perceivable in the unpurified state. Once the dhātu has been purified and the dharmakāya is attained however, these excellences are inseparable from this purified state, i.e. the dharmakāya, just as radiance, colour, and shape are not separable from a diamond, once it is cut and polished.
2.2.7.2. Extensive explanation
The extensive exposition has three parts: (1) immutability in the impure state, (2) immutability in the partially purified (dag la ma dag pa) state, and (3) immutability in the utterly pure (shin tu rnam dag) state.

2.2.7.2.1 Immutability in the impure state
This first part has four subdivisions: (1) a brief exposition, (2) a detailed explanation, (3) a summary, and (4) the explanation of the corresponding features of the analogy and the meaning of destruction (’jig pa’i dpe don gyi chos mthun bstan pa).

2.2.7.2.1.1. Brief exposition
This first subdivision has two parts: (1) the exposition of not being sullied by wrong-doing; and (2) the exposition of not being sullied by production and disintegration.

2.2.7.2.1.1.1. The exposition of not being sullied by wrong-doing

\[
\begin{align*}
ji \text{ ltar nam mkha’ kun song ba} & || \\
phra \text{ phyir nye bar gos pa med} & || \\
de \text{ bzhin sens can thams cad la} & || \\
\text{gnas’di nye bar gos pa med} & || \quad (I.52)
\end{align*}
\]

Just as all-pervasive space is never sullied due to its subtlety, Similarly this [dhātu] present in every sentient being is never sullied.

Even though space pervades material objects, it is completely unsullied by forms due to its subtlety which stems from not having a physical form. Similarly, although this [naturally] abiding dhātu pervades all sentient beings, is not sullied by their mental afflictions because it is naturally pure.

2.2.7.2.1.1.2. The exposition of not being sullied by production and disintegration

In regard to this second part:
Although in all worlds containing [beings], [phenomena] arise and disintegrate in space [itself] is not sullied by the arising and disintegration [of phenomena]. Similarly, although the aggregates, constituents and sources [of perception], characterised by faculties of sentient beings arise and disintegrate in the unconditioned expanse of phenomena (chos dbyings; dharmadhātu), the expanse [itself] is not sullied by [this] arising and disintegration.

In this regard, the four elements and space, [making] five, are the examples. Improper mental activity (tshul bzhin min pa’i yid byed); karma and mental afflictions; aggregates, constituents and sources [of perception]; death and aging; and the expanse: these five are the meaning [related to the five examples]. From these, the four elements are [used as] examples for both production and disintegration, and space is [used as] an example for not having both production and disintegration.

2.2.7.2.1.2. Extensive explanation

The second [subdivision], the extensive explanation, has two parts: (1) not being sullied by wrong-doing (nyes pa), and (2) not being sullied by production and disintegration.

2.2.7.2.1.2.1. Not being sullied by wrong-doing

In regard to the first part:

\[
\begin{align*}
ji \text{ ltar} & \ 'jig \ rten \ thams \ cad \ du \ |
\text{nam} \ mkha' \ la \ ni \ skye \ zhing \ 'jig \ |
de \ bzhin \ 'dus \ ma \ byas \ dbyings \ la \ |
\text{dbang} \ po \ rnams \ ni \ skye \ zhing \ 'jig \ |
\end{align*}
\]  

(I.53)

Just as worlds, in every instance, arise and disintegrate in space, Similarly the sense faculties arise and disintegrate in the unconditioned expanse.\textsuperscript{286}

\textsuperscript{286} Tib. 'dus ma byas dbyings ; Skt. asamskṛta-dhātu. Takasaki (1966: 236) “Innate Essence.”

\textsuperscript{287} Nakamura (1967: 83,1): kyi.
Just as space has until now never been burnt by fires, Similarly this [dhātu] is not burnt by the fires of death, sickness, and aging.

Just as space has until now never been burnt by the three fires of the end of time and so forth, [59] similarly this dhātu is not burned by the fires of death, sickness, and aging.

2.2.7.2.1.2.2. Not being sullied by production and disintegration

The second part has three [subdivisions]: (1) analogy and meaning, (2) joining the analogy with its meaning, and (3) The explanation of the corresponding features [of the analogy and the meaning] (chos mthun bshad pa).

2.2.7.2.1.2.2.1. Analogy and meaning

In regard to the first [subdivisions]: [289]

sa ni chu la chu rlung la ||
rlung ni mkha’ la rab tu gnas ||
mkha’ ni rlung dang chu dag dang ||
sa yi khams la gnas ma yin|| (I.55)

de bzhin phung po khams dbang rnams ||
las dang nyon mongs dag la gnas ||
las dang nyon mongs tshul bzhin min ||
yid la byed la290 rtag tu gnas || (I.56)

tshul bzhin ma yin yid byed ni ||
sems kyi dag pa la rab gnas ||
sems kyi rang bzhin chos mams ni ||
thams cad la yang gnas pa med || (I.57)

Earth rests upon water, water upon air, and air upon space. Space does neither rest upon the element of air, nor upon those of water or earth.

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288 See RGV I.65.
289 In this chapter the analogy of the world’s creation is used to illustrate the dhātu’s unconditioned purity. For a brief presentation of Buddhist cosmogony in general see Khongtrul 1995: 107–111.
Similarly the aggregates, the constituents, and faculties\textsuperscript{291} rest upon karma and mental afflictions. Karma and mental afflictions always rest upon improper mental activity.\textsuperscript{292}

**Improper mental activity rests upon the purity of the mind.**

*The nature of the mind, however, does not rest upon any phenomenon whatsoever.*

The earth *maṇḍala* is based on the water *maṇḍala*, that water is based on the wind *mandala*, and this wind is based on and depends on space. Space [however], does not depend on the elements of wind, water, and earth.

Likewise, the five aggregates, the eighteen constituents [of perception], and the six faculties together with their [respective] objects contained by a person, [all] depend upon karma and mental afflictions. Karma and mental afflictions depend upon improper mental activity. Improper mental activity depends entirely upon the natural purity of the mind. The properties which are the nature of the mind [however] do not depend in any way upon improper mental activity and so forth.

\textbf{2.2.7.2.1.2.2.2. Joining analogy and meaning}

In regard to the second [subdivisions]:

\begin{verbatim}
sa dang ’dra bar phung po dang ||
skye mched khaps rnams shes par bya ||
chu khaps dang ’dra lus can gyi ||
las dang nyon mong shes bya ste || (I.58)
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
tshul bzhin ma yin yid byed ni ||
rlung gi khaps dang ’dra bar blta ||
rang bzhin nam mkha’i khaps bzhin du ||
de gzhi can min gnas pa med || (I.59)
\end{verbatim}

The aggregates, the sources [of perception], and the constituents should be understood to be similar to earth. Karma and mental afflictions of embodied beings should be understood to be similar to the element of water.

\textsuperscript{291} Tib. ‘phung po kham dbang; Skt. skandha-dhātv-indriya. Takasaki (1966: 236): “all the component elements [of Phenomenal Life].”

\textsuperscript{292} Tib. tshul bzhin min yid la byed pa; Skt. ayoni-manaskāra. Takasaki (1966: 236): “Irrational Thought.”
Improper mental activity should be viewed as being similar to the air element. The [mind’s] nature, like the element of space, is without basis and without support.

The aggregates, constituents, and sources [of perception] should be understood as being similar to the element of earth. The karma and mental afflictions of embodied beings should be understood as being similar to the element of water. Improper mental activity should be seen as similar to the element of wind. The nature of the mind, similar to the element of space [60] [not depending upon the other elements], does not depend upon improper mental activity and so forth, since it is without the basis of improper mental activity.

2.2.7.2.1.2.2.3. The explanation of the corresponding features (chos mthun bshad pa)

In regard to the third [subdivisions]:

\[
\begin{align*}
    & tshul bzhin ma yin yid byed ni || \\
    & sems kyi rang bzhin la gnas te || \\
    & tshul bzhin ma yin yid byed kyis || \\
    & las dang nyon mongs rab tu phye || (1.60)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
    & las dang nyon mongs chu las ni || \\
    & phung po skye mched khams rnams 'byung || \\
    & de 'jig pa dang 'chags pa ltar || \\
    & skye dang 'jig par 'gyur ba yin || (1.61)
\end{align*}
\]

Improper mental activity rests upon the mind’s nature. Improper mental activity causes karma and mental afflictions to come forth.\(^{293}\)

From water[-like] karma and mental afflictions arise the aggregates, the sources [of perception], and the constituents. Just as this [world is subject to] disintegration and formation, Those [also] arise and disintegrate.

Just as wind depends upon space, similarly, improper mental activity such as clinging to purity, happiness, permanence, and so forth entirely depends upon the nature of the

---

\(^{293}\) Tib. rab tu phye; Skt. prabhava.
mind [which is] emptiness. Just as wind is the support for water, similarly, from improper mental activity, karma and mental afflictions have spread. Just as from the churning of the water mandala the ground of the earth arises, similarly, from the water-like contaminated karma and mental afflictions arise the aggregates, sources [of perception] and constituents. Just as the container of the ground of the earth itself and so forth is [subject to phases of] disintegration and formation, similarly, the impure aggregates, constituents, and sources [of perception] and the like arise and disintegrate.294

Thus, having explained that which has the characteristic of arising [and disintegration], the expanse and space are explained as that which has the characteristic of not arising and not disintegrating:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sems kyi rang bzhin nam mkha’ yi} && \\
\text{khams ltar rgyu med rkyen med de} && \\
\text{tshogs pa med cing skye ba dang} && \\
\text{’jig dang gnas pa yod ma yin} \quad (1.62)
\end{align*}
\]

The nature of the mind is, like the element of space, without cause, without conditions, and without the combination [of those]. [It] has no arising, no disintegration, and no dwelling as well.

The nature of the mind which is emptiness, is similar to the element of space [in that it] has neither a substantial cause nor an assisting condition,295 nor the combination of both. Therefore, it has no arising in the beginning, no disintegration in the end, and no abiding in between.

It is stated in a sūtra [quoted] here [by Asaṅga]:

294 As Takasaki notes, this passage refers to two of the four phases in which the formation and disintegration of the universe are divided. The first being the kalpa of formation (chags pa’i bskal pa), followed by the kalpa of abiding (gnas pa’i bskal pa), which is then is replaced by the kalpa of disintegration (’jig pa’i bskal pa). The last kalpa is termed “empty kalpa” (stong pa’i bskal pa), which ends with the formation of a new universe.

295 The Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo gives following examples to illustrate the function of the “substantial cause” (nyer len gyi rgyu) and the “assisting condition” (lhan cig byed pa’i rkyen): in relation to growth of a sprout, the substantial cause would be the seed, and the assisting condition would be water, manure, warmth and moisture. (Cf. Zhang 1993)
All phenomena are completely devoid of foundation. They possess a foundation devoid of essence, an unstable foundation. The foundation [of all phenomena] is pure, [61] a foundation devoid of foundation.\(^{296}\)

Therefore this dhātu is not conditioned by causes and conditions, and is established as emptiness free from elaborations.

### 2.2.7.2.1.3. Summary

The third [part], the summary, has two [subdivisions]: (1) the exposition of not being sullied by wrong-doing, and (2) the exposition of not being sullied by production.

#### 2.2.7.2.1.3.1. The exposition of not being sullied by wrong-doing

In regard to this first [part]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sem's kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal gang yin pa} & \quad \text{\textcolor{red}{de ni nam mkha' bzhin du 'gyur med de}} \\
\text{de ni nam mkha' bzhin du 'gyur med de} & \quad \text{\textcolor{red}{yang dag min rtog las byung 'dod chags sogs}} \\
\text{yang dag min rtog las byung 'dod chags sogs} & \quad \text{\textcolor{red}{glo bur dri mas de nyon mongs mi 'gyur}} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(I.63)

The mind's nature, which is luminosity, is similar to space, it is immutable.

It does not become afflicted by the adventitious defilements of desirous attachment and so forth, which arise from impure thoughts.\(^{297}\)

---

\(^{296}\) Gaganagañjāparipṛcchā (321a6–321a7): de'i phyir chos thams cad ni rtsa ba yongs su chad pa zhes bya ste | snying po med pa'i rtsa ba | mi gnas pa'i rtsa ba | dag pa'i rtsa ba | rtsa ba med pa'i rtsa ba'o ||

Asaṅga’s quotation from the Gaganagañjāparipṛcchā including this passage is found in his commentary on RGV I.64. See Johnston 1950: 45,8–9; Nakamura 1967: 87,16–18; and Takasaki 1966: 241 (n. 308). The end of this passage differs slightly in Rong ston’s version who has med pa'i rtsa ba (“a non-existent foundation”, or “foundation of non-existence”), instead of rtsa ba med pa'i rtsa ba (“a foundation devoid of foundation”).

\(^{297}\) The second half of this verse reads differently in Sanskrit. Where we find “not afflicted by adventitious defilements” (glo bur dri mas de nyon mongs mi 'gyur) in the Tibetan, the Sanskrit has "to approach, to obtain" (upāti). Takasaki’s translation (1966: 237) reads: “It bears, however, the impurity by stains of desire, etc. which are of accident and produced by wrong conception.” (Emphasis mine.) According to Takasaki, this negative interpretation is usual for the Tibetan tradition. See Takasaki 1966: 237, n. 280 and p. 240, n. 305.

Commenting on this verse, Chenique remarks that while this negative interpretation is the one usually followed in the Tibetan reading, it is the question whether the mind’s nature can or cannot be sullied by the adventitious afflictions, which splits the different schools of thought. (See Chenique 2001: 145, n. 54b)
The nature of the mind, the very luminosity-emptiness, is similar to space [in that] it does not change into something else. That nature does not become afflicted by the adventitious defilements of attachment and the like, which arise from impure thoughts.

2.2.7.2.1.3.2. The exposition of not being sullied by production and destruction

In regard to the second [part]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{las dang nyon mongs chu sogs kyis} & \parallel \\
\text{'di ni mngon par 'grub min te} & \parallel \\
\text{'chi dang na dang rga ba'i me} & \parallel \\
\text{mi bzad pas kyang 'tshig mi 'gyur} & \parallel \\
\end{align*}
\]

(I.64)

It is not brought forth by means of water[-like] karma and mental afflictions, and so forth.

Neither is it burnt by the unbearable fires of death, sickness, and aging.

The nature of the mind is not produced by the water-like collection of karma and mental afflictions, and the wind-like improper mental activity and so forth. Because of being unfabricated, although [one is] burned by the unbearable and violent fires of death, sickness, and aging, [it] does not get destroyed.

2.2.7.2.1.4. The exposition of the corresponding features of the analogy and the meaning of disintegration

In regard to the exposition of the corresponding features of the analogy and the meaning of disintegration:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{dus mtha' dmyal ba tha mal pa'i} & \parallel \\
\text{me gsum 'chi dang na ba dang} & \parallel \\
\text{rga ba'i me gsum rim bzhin du} & \parallel \\
\text{de dang 'dra bar shes par bya} & \parallel \\
\end{align*}
\]

(I.65)

The three fires of the end of time, of the hells, and ordinary fire, should be known to be similar to the three fires of death, sickness, and aging respectively.

298 It is important to note that in order to characterize the nature of mind Rong-ston added the term “emptiness” where the root verse only speaks of luminosity. This is important in order to align this teaching with the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness, following the tradition of Blo-Ildan shes-rab. See part 3.2 of this work.
At the end of time, the fire of the disintegration of the *kalpa* destroys the [material] container-world. The fire of the hell realm creates suffering, and the ordinary [element of] fire brings the formative factors (*'du byed*) to maturation. Similarly, death destroys or disintegrates the aggregates of this life, sickness creates suffering, and aging brings the aggregates to maturation. [62] [Thus] they are to be known as being similar to those three fires.

2.2.7.2.2. Immutability in the partially purified state

[The explanation of] the immutability in the partially purified state has two parts: a brief exposition and a detailed explanation.

2.2.7.2.2.1. Brief exposition

In regard to the first [part]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{skye 'chi na dang rga ba las grol ba} & \| \\
\text{'di yi rang bzhi n ji bzhi nyid rtogs te} & \| \\
\text{skye sogs phongs dang bral yang de yi rgyus} & \| \\
\text{blo ldan 'gro la snying rje skye phyir bsten} & \| \\
\end{align*}
\]

(I.66)

Free from birth, death, sickness, and aging
[a bodhisattva] has realised its nature as it is.
Although free from the miseries of birth, and so forth,
the intelligent one attends\textsuperscript{299} [the world]
because he has generated compassion for beings due to this [realisation].\textsuperscript{300}

A noble bodhisattva is free from birth, death, sickness, and aging because he has directly realised the nature of this *dhātu* exactly as it is. By this [statement] it is taught that [for bodhisattvas] having attained the first [bodhisattva-]stage, there is no birth and death by the power of karma and mental afflictions. Therefore, it is made clear that there are no mental afflictions once the first stage [is attained]. Although [they

\textsuperscript{299} Tib. *bsten*; Skt. *bhajante* (usually “to partake, assume” etc.). It is interesting to note that Rong-ston replaced this verb by *bstan* (to show) in his commentary. The meaning then equals that of RGV I.68.

\textsuperscript{300} The Skt. has *tan nidānam* where the Tib. reads *de’i rgyus*. Schmithausen (1971: 150) translates: “...nehmen die Bodhisattvas, obwohl [bei ihnen] die [normale] Ursache adfür fehlt, [dennoch] aus Mitleid mit der Welt das Ungemach der Geburt usw. auf.”
are] free from the destitution of birth, death, and so forth of saṃsāra, the intelligent bodhisattvas display being born and so forth in saṃsāra for the benefit of others. [They do this] because they have generated compassion for beings caused by that seeing of the dhātu.

2.2.7.2.2.2. Extensive explanation
The extensive exposition has three [subdivisions]: (1) the manner of being untainted by the suffering of birth and death, (2) the manner of being impure by displaying birth and death for others, and (3) the manner of performing conduct for the benefit others.

2.2.7.2.2.2.1. The manner of being untainted by the suffering of birth and death
In regard to the first [subdivision]:

\begin{quote}
\textit{\'phags pas \textit{\text{"{c}hi} dang na ba dang ||}
rga ba\textquotereset{'}i sdug bsgal rtsad nas spangs ||
las dang nyon mongs dbang gis skye ||
de la de med phyir de med || (I.67)
\end{quote}

Noble (bodhisattvas) have discarded the sufferings of death, sickness, and aging from the root.
Birth [occurs] by the power of karma and mental afflictions. Since these are absent for those [bodhisattvas], this [birth] does not occur.\footnote{This stanza is translated in light of Rong-ston’s commentary. However, the Skt. does not allow this reading. Johnston 1950: 46,12: karmakleśavaśāj jātis, tadabhāvān na tesu tat \text{"{t}} Being a neuter demonstrative pronoun, tat cannot refer to birth (jātī), which is feminine. Thus, Schmithausen (1971: 150) reads jātī (Tib. skye) not as “birth”, but as “the arising [of suffering].” Inserting the implied subject “suffering” from the first part of the verse, he translates the second part: “[Das Leid] entsteht [nämlich] aus Taten und Lastern; weil diese [Taten und Laster] bei den Bodhisattvas] (sic) nicht vorhanden sind, ist auch das [Leid] bei ihnen nicht vorhanden.” He adds that although the commentary understands jātī as “birth,” this is probably a mistake indicating a possible difference in authorship.}

The noble bodhisattva, the dharmin, has abandoned the sufferings of death, sickness, and aging from their root because he has directly seen the nature of the dhātu.
For such a noble bodhisattva, the dharmin, this [type of] birth and death which come about by the power of karma and mental afflictions did not occur, [63] because [he] does not have such karma and mental afflictions.
2.2.7.2.2.2.2. The manner of being impure by displaying birth and death for others

In regard to the second [subdivision]:

\[
\begin{align*}
ji \text{ bzhin yang dag mthong ba'i phyir} \parallel \\
\text{skye sogs rnams las 'das gyur kyang} \parallel \\
snying \text{ rje'i bdag nyid skye ba dang} \parallel \\
'chi \text{ dang rga dang na bar ston} \parallel 
\end{align*}
\]

Although they have gone beyond birth and so forth, due to seeing that which truly is just as it is, the personifications of compassion display being born, dying, aging, and becoming sick.

The noble bodhisattva, the \textit{dharmin}, personification of compassion, has gone beyond the suffering of birth and death and so forth, because of perfectly and directly seeing the \textit{dhātu} exactly as it is. Although he is beyond birth and so forth, [he] displays birth, death, sickness, and aging for the benefit of others because he is the personification of compassion.

2.2.7.2.2.2.3. The manner of performing conduct for the benefit of others

The third [subdivision], the manner of performing conduct for the benefit of others, has four parts: (1) the conduct of one who has first given rise to \textit{bodhicitta} (\textit{sems dang po bskyed pa}), (2) the conduct of one who engages in untainted conduct, (3) the conduct of one who is irreversible in all aspects, and (4) the conduct of one who is impeded by one life.

2.2.7.2.2.2.3.1. The conduct of one who has first given rise to \textit{bodhicitta}

The first [part] has two subdivisions: (1) the wonderful conduct of a noble one, and (2) through precisely this [conduct] he becomes the friend of sentient beings.

2.2.7.2.2.2.3.1.1. The wonderful conduct of a noble one

In regard to the first [subdivision]:

\[
\text{rgyal sras 'gyur med chos nyid 'di} \parallel 
\]
Having realised this changeless dharmatā, the heir of the Victorious Ones is seen by those blinded by ignorance as being born and so forth. How wonderful!

Having realised this changeless dharmatā, the heir of the victorious ones abiding on the first [bodhisattva-]stage is free from [the sufferings of] birth and so forth of saṃsāra. Still, he is seen by disciples whose eyes of supreme knowledge are blinded by ignorance as [experiencing] birth, death, and the like. How wonderful!

2.2.7.2.2.2.3.1.2. Through precisely this [conduct] they become friends of sentient beings.

In regard to the second [subdivision]:

\[ \text{'phags pa'i spyod yul thob pa gang} \]  
\[ \text{byis pa'i spyod yul du ston te} \]  
\[ \text{de nyid phyir ni 'gro ba yi} \]  
\[ \text{gnyen gyi thabs dang snying rje mchog} \]  

Having attained the domain of the noble ones, [he] show [himself] in the domain of the childish. Therefore means and compassion of the friends of beings are supreme.

This bodhisattva, the dharmin, is the friend of beings because he displays birth and so forth, even though he has attained the domain of the noble ones. [64] This is because he possesses skilful means for the sake of others as well as supreme compassion. Because of this very [reason, he is called friend of beings].

2.2.7.2.2.2.3.2. The conduct of one who engages in untainted conduct

In regard to the second [part], the conduct of one who engages in untainted conduct:

---

302 Nakamura (1967: 101,1), following most of the editions he used, reads kyi. However, the Derge edition of the RGV has kyis (47b5), which is in line with the Sanskrit avidyāndhair (Johnston 1955: 51,12).
de ni 'jig rten thams cad las ||
'das kyang 'jig rten las ma g.yos ||
'jig rten don du 'jig rten na ||
'jig rten dri mas ma gos spyod || (I.71)

ji ltar padma chu nang du ||
skyes pa chu yis gos pa med ||
de bzhin 'di ni 'jig rten du ||
skyes kyang 'jig rten chos mi gos || (I.72)

In this regard, although [they have gone] beyond all worlds,
[they do] not depart from the world.
[They] act in the world, for the benefit of the world,
unsullied by worldly defilements.

Just as the lotus, growing in water,
is unsullied by the water;
Similarly this [bodhisattva], although born in the world,
is unsullied by worldly phenomena.

This bodhisattva abiding on the second [stage] up to the seventh has gone beyond all the worlds due to his supreme knowledge. Still, he pretends not to depart from the world out of compassion.303

One may wonder: If [he] has gone beyond the world, wouldn’t it contradict [his] not departing from the world? There is no contradiction, because even though he abides in the world for the benefit of the world, [his] activity is unsullied by worldly defilements. Just as a lotus is not sullied by the water, although it grows out of water, similarly, the bodhisattva who has entered the conduct is not sullied by the things of the world, even though he is born in the world.

2.2.7.2.2.2.3.3. The conduct of one who is irreversible in all aspects
In regard to the third [part], the conduct of one who is irreversible in all aspects:

bya ba sgrub la rtag tu blo ||
me bzhin du ni 'bar ba dang ||
zhi ba'i bsam gtan snyoms 'jug la ||
rtag tu snyoms par zhugs pa yin || (I.73)

303 This means, he does not enter the cessation of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, although he has completely relinquished all mental afflictions.
To accomplish [his] task, his fire-like intelligence ever burns, and he constantly enters peaceful mental concentrations and meditative absorptions.

With regard to manner in which the bodhisattva abiding on the eighth [stage] up to the ninth engages his mind at all times effortlessly in acting for the benefit of others, [i.e. his way of] accomplishing the activity of gathering beings to be tamed by means of the four means of gathering [disciples]:

Just as fire naturally ignites on dry fire-wood smeared with butter, similarly [this bodhisattva] has the ability to evenly enter, at all times, mental concentrations and meditative equipoise which pacify selfish efforts as well as all elaborations, because he has gained mastery over the non-conceptual.

2.2.7.2.2.2.3.4. The conduct of one who is impeded by one life
[65] The fourth [part], the conduct of one who is impeded by one life, has five [subdivisions]: (1) Engaging effortlessly in others aims, (2) Engaging in the application of skilful means, (3) Engaging in limitless modes of conduct, (4) Being similar to the buddha [with regard to] the benefit [accomplished for] others, and (5) Being dissimilar to the buddha [with regard to] the benefit [accomplished for] oneself.

2.2.7.2.2.3.4.1. Engaging effortlessly in the aims of others

In regard to the first [subdivision]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sngon gyi } & \text{'phen pa'i dbang dang ni } || \\
\text{rnam rtog}^{307} & \text{thams cad bral ba'i phyir } || \\
\text{de ni lus can smin pa yi } || \\
\text{don du 'bad pa byed ma yin } || \\
\end{align*}
\]

Due to the propelling power of [prayers made in] the past, and because he is [now] free from all discursive thinking, he does not exert effort in order to ripen embodied beings.

---

304 Takasaki (1966: 253): “For bringing about the welfare [to the world] […].”
305 Tib. bsam gian; Skt. dhyāna.
306 Tib. snyoms 'jug; Skt. samāpatti.
In the past, this bodhisattva abiding on the tenth [stage] made the aspiration to effortlessly benefit others. By the propelling power\(^{308}\) of [this aspiration he later] engages [in these very activities], and since he is [now] free from all discursive thinking by having transformed his mind and thoughts, this bodhisattva does not rely on making efforts for the purpose of ripening embodied beings.

### 2.2.7.2.2.3.4.2. Engaging in the application of skilful means

In regard to the second [subdivision]:

\begin{align*}
bs\text{tan dang gzugs sku } &\text{ dag}^{309} \quad \text{dang ni} \\
s\text{pyod dang spyod lam } &\text{ gyis kyang rung} \\
g\text{ang zhig ji ltar gang } &\text{ gis } \text{'dul'} \\
d\text{es de de lta nyid du } &\text{shes} \\
\end{align*}

By means of teaching and form bodies, conduct, as well as physical activities;\(^{310}\)
He knows precisely who is to be tamed, how and by what [means].

By verbally teaching the Dharma according to the interest of those to be tamed, showing various form bodies, and displaying a conduct in harmony with the minds of those to be tamed, as well as [appropriate] physical activities of walking and moving around and so forth, whoever is to be tamed, in whatever manner, and by whatever means, is tamed. This bodhisattva knows precisely the aspects of those means.

### 2.2.7.2.2.3.4.3. Engaging in limitless modes of conduct

In regard to the third [subdivision]:

\begin{align*}
de \text{ltar nam mkha'}i mtha' klas kyi} \\
'\text{gro la}^{111} \quad \text{rtag tu lhun grub par} \\
\end{align*}

---

\(^{308}\) G (65,5) and K (113,5) both read '\text{phen pa'}i dbang. LS (65,3) has '\text{phel pa'}i dbang.

\(^{309}\) Following Rong-ston’s commentary, I translate dag as a plural marker in this case. The Skt. (52,6), however, reads \text{de\textasciitilde{s}an\textasciitilde{y}ā r\textasciitilde{u}pākāy\textasciitilde{bh}yām}, which is problematic (Cf. Schmithausen 1971: 152). Schmithausen favours an alternative reading of this passage (\text{de\textasciitilde{s}an\textasciitilde{a}r}\textasciitilde{u}pākāy\textasciitilde{bh}yām), which would be rendered with: “By means of teaching and the form body [...]”.\(^{310}\)

\(^{310}\) Tib. \text{spyod dang spyod lam}; Skt. \text{cāryā} and \text{īr\textasciitilde{y}āp\textasciitilde{a}tha}. Takasaki (1966: 254) has: “by conduct [of worldly life] or by religious observances.” In addition to the observances of religious mendicants, \text{īr\textasciitilde{y}āp\textasciitilde{a}tha} can also refer to the four positions of the body (i.e. going, standing, sitting, and lying). This is Rong-ton’s understanding of this term here.
Thus, for beings which are limitless like space, one endowed with unimpeded intelligence genuinely engages in benefiting sentient beings, constantly and spontaneously.312

For beings who are [as] limitless [as] space is vast, this intelligent bodhisattva correctly engages [in the practice of accomplishing] the benefit of sentient beings. Furthermore [he] engages [in this practice] at all times, spontaneously, and in an unhindered [66] manner.

2.2.7.2.2.3.4.4. Being similar to the buddha [in regard to] the benefit [accomplished for] others

In regard to the fourth [subdivision]:

byang chub sms dpa'i tshul 'di ni ||
rtse thob de bzhin gshegs rnams dang ||
sems can yang dag sgrol ba la ||
'jig rten na ni mnyam pa nyid || (I.77)

This way of the bodhisattva in post-meditation to genuinely liberate sentient beings in the world, is equal to the tathāgatas' [way].

The ways in which a bodhisattva in [the phases of] post-meditation of the tenth stage truly liberates sentient beings from suffering is equal with the tathāgatas’ way of accomplishing benefit, in the face of the worldly beings to be tamed.313 Here, there is only equality in the way of accomplishing enlightened activity to the face of those to be tamed, but they are not [actually] equal.314

312 Takasaki (1966: 254) gives the translation of the Skt. which has a slightly different reading: “In such a way, he does always, with no effort and with unobstructed Wisdom, bring benefits for the living beings among the worlds, [...].”
313 LS (66,2) and G (66,4) both read: gdul bya’i ’jig rten gyi ngo na don byed tshul. K (114,6) has: gdul bya’i ’jig rten gyi don byed tshul.
314 The explanation for this follows under the next heading.
2.2.7.2.2.3.4.5. Being dissimilar to the buddha [in regard to] the benefit [accomplished for] oneself

In regard to the fifth [subdivision]:

\[\text{de lta mod kyi sa rdul dang ||}
\text{rgya mtsho ba glang rmig rjes kyi ||}
\text{khyad par gang yin sangs rgyas dang ||}
\text{byang chub sems dpa’i khyad de nyid ||} \text{(I.78)}\]

Despite this fact, whatever difference there is between the earth and a particle, or between the ocean and [the water] in an ox’s hoof print, is the difference between a buddha and a bodhisattva.

Although, from the perspective of other [beings] there might be such an equality in the way [buddhas and this bodhisattva] benefit others, the benefit [accomplished for] themselves is not equal. For example, whatever difference there is between the great \text{mandala} of the earth and a minute particle, or between the water of the great ocean and [the water] in the hoof print of an ox, [there is] just as much difference between the excellences of a buddha and [those] of a bodhisattva on the tenth stage.

2.2.7.2.3. The manner of being immutable in the thoroughly purified state

[The explanation of] the manner of being immutable in the thoroughly purified state has three [parts]: (1) identifying the reasons (\text{rta}s), the predicates (\text{bsgrub pa’i chos}), and the meaning (\text{don}); (2) joining the reasons with the predicates to be established; and (3) explaining the meaning of “permanence”\textsuperscript{315} and so forth.

2.2.7.2.3.1. Identifying the reasons, the predicates, and the thesis

For this first part:

\[\text{gzhan ’gyur min bdag mi zad chos ldan phyir ||}
\text{’gro skyabs phyi ma’i mtha’ med mur thug phyir ||}
\text{de ni rtag tu gnyis med mi rtog phyir ||}
\text{’jig med chos kyang ma byas rang bzhin phyir ||} \text{(I.79)}\]

\textsuperscript{315} LS (66,5) and G (67,1) both have \text{rtag}. K (115, 2) reads \text{rta}s.
**skye ba med cing ’chi ba med ||
 gnod med rga ba med pa ste ||
de ni rtag dang brtan phyir dang ||
 zhi ba’i phyir dang g.yung drung phyir ||** (I.80)

[Its] nature does not change into something else, because it is endowed with inexhaustible properties. [It is] a refuge for beings, because it [lasts] endlessly.\(^{316}\)

It is ever non-dual, because it is non-conceptual. It also [has] the property [of being] indestructible, because its nature is uncreated.

This [dhātu] is unborn, undying, unimpaired, and not aging, because it is permanent, stable, peaceful, and changeless.\(^{317}\)

The dharmakāya of utmost purity, the dharmin, is without birth, without death, unimpaired, and without aging, because it is permanent, stable, peaceful, and changeless respectively. [67] The meaning (don) of the four reasons [presented] step by step:

1. It is permanent because it is a nature (bdag nyig) which does not change into something else. [This is] because it is endowed with inexhaustible excellences.
2. It is stable because it is the refuge for beings. [This is] because it remains until the final end.
3. It is peaceful because it is devoid of karma and mental afflictions. [This is] because it has the nature of being permanently non-conceptual.
4. It is changeless because it is indestructible. [This is] because it is the nature which is not made by karma and mental afflictions.

**2.2.7.2.3.2. Joining the reasons with the predicates**

In regard to the second part:

**de ni yid kyi rang bzhin gyi ||
lus kyis skye med rtag pa’i phyir ||
bsam gyi mi khyab bsgyur ba yi ||
 ’chi ’pho brtan phyir de mi ’chi ||**\(^{318}\) (I.81)

\(^{316}\) Tib. phyi ma’i mtha’ med mthug; Skt. anaparāntakoti (lit. “it has no limit in the future”).

\(^{317}\) Tib. rtag pa, brtan pa, zhi ba, g.yung drung ; Skt. nityatva, dhruvatva, śivatva, śāśvatatva

\(^{318}\) Derge’s edition of the RGV (58a4) reads: bsam mi khyab ’gyur ’chi ’pho yis || de ni mi ’chi brtan pa’i phyir ||.
Being permanent,
this [dhātu] is not born from a body of mental nature.
Being stable,
it does not die due to an inconceivable death and transference.

Being peace,
[it is] unimpaired by diseases of subtle imprints.
Being changeless,
[it is] without aging caused by uncontaminated formative factors.319

That dharmakāya of utmost purity, the dharmin, is without the arising of a body of mental nature because it is permanent. It does not die [and take rebirth] through an inconceivable death and transference because it is stable. It is unimpaired even by the disease of the subtle imprints of ignorance because it is peace itself. It is without aging, which ripens the result of uncontaminated formative factors (zag med kyi ’du byed), because it is changeless.

2.2.7.2.3.3. Explaning the meaning of “permanence” and so forth

In regard to the first [subdivision], the brief exposition:

Here, in regard to the unconditioned expanse,320
the meaning of “permanent” and so forth
is to be known by means of two phrases,
and likewise [“stable”, “peaceful,” and “changeless,” by means of] two, two, and two [phrases] respectively.

Laying out the meaning of “permanence”321 and so forth:322

319 Tib. zag med mngon par ’du byed ; Skt. anāsravābhīsaṃskārāh.
320 Tib. ’dus ma byas kyi dbyings la ni ; Skt. asamskṛtapada. Takasaki (1966: 257): “immutable Sphere.”
“[Its] nature does not change into something else [...]”323 is the phrase which shows the thesis (dam bca’), and “because it is endowed with inexhaustible qualities”324 is the explanatory phrase. Through [these] two phrases, the meaning of “permanent”325 is to be known in accordance with the sūtras. Here, the meaning of “permanent” is applied to the unconditioned expanse.

[68] Likewise, “refuge of beings” shows [the thesis], and “[because] it lasts endlessly” is the explanatory phrase.326 Through [these] two phrases, the meaning of “stable”327 [is to be known].

“Non-dual” shows [the thesis], and “non-conceptual” is the explanation328. Through [these] two phrases, the meaning of “peaceful”329 [is to be known].

“Indestructible” shows [the thesis], and “uncreated” is the explanation330. Through [these] two phrases, the meaning of “changeless”331 is to be known.

If, according to what some say, [the thesis] is shown by means of one phrase332 and the explanation is given by means of two phrases each, such as “inconceivable [death and transference]”333 and so forth, it would become three phrases. [This] is in contradiction with: “by means of two phrases each.”334 Also it would not conform to the statement found below:

Because it is endowed with inexhaustible excellences,

it has an immutable identity (bdag).

[This is] the meaning of “permanence.”335

---

321 Again, K (116,6) reads rtags instead of rtag.
322 In the next paragraph the verse Tib.68; Skt.I.79 is analysed.
323 RGV I.79a
324 RGV I.79a
325 RGV I.80b
326 These two are from RGV I.79b.
327 RGV I.80b
328 These two are from RGV I.79c.
329 RGV I.80b
330 These two are from RGV I.79d.
331 RGV I.80b
332 Tib. tshig rkang pa (Skt. pāda), one quarter of a stanza.
333 RGV I.81
334 tshig gnyis gnyis kyis. Here Rong-ston rephrases RGV I.83[a].
335 RGV I.83[b]
2.2.7.2.3.3.2. Extensive explanation

Second, the extensive explanation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mi zad yon tan dang ldan phyir} & \\
gzan 'gyur med bdag rtag pa'i don & \\
mta' yi mu dang mtshungs pa'i phyir & \\
skyabs kyi bdag nyid brtan pa'i don & \text{ (I.83[b])}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{rnam par mi rtog rang bzhin phyir} & \\
gnyis med chos nyid zhi ba'i don & \\
ma bcos yon tan nyid phyir ni & \\
'jig med don ni g.yung drung nyid & \text{ (I.83[c])}\]
\]

Because it is endowed with inexhaustible excellences, it has an immutable nature.\(^{337}\)
[This is] the meaning of “permanence.”
Because it is similar to the uttermost end, it has the nature of a refuge.\(^{338}\)
[This is] the meaning of “stable.”

Because [its] self-nature is non-conceptual, it has the property of non-duality.\(^{339}\)
[This is] the meaning of “peaceful.”
Because the excellences are uncontrived, it is indestructible.
[This is] the meaning [of] “immutability.”

The meaning of “permanent” is that it has the nature of not changing into something else. The explanation of this [is that this is so] because [even in the state] without remainder of aggregates it is endowed with inexhaustible excellences.

The meaning of “stable” is that it has the nature of being a lasting refuge. The explanation of this [is that this is so] because it is similar to the uttermost end.

The meaning of “peaceful” is that since it is free from both karma and mental afflictions, it is the dharmatā (chos nyid).\(^{340}\) The explanation of this [is that this is so] because it is non-conceptual.

\(^{336}\) Stanzas I.83 [b] and [c] are thought of as interpolations by Johnston (1950: 54, n. 7), as well as by Takasaki who does not include them in his translation. However, the Tibetan version follows Ms. B consulted by Johnston in that they are both included in the body of the text.

\(^{337}\) Skt. ananyathātmā; Tib. gzhan 'gyur min bdag.

\(^{338}\) Skt. śaraṇātmā; Tib. skyabs kyi bdag nyid.

\(^{339}\) Skt. advayadharmanā; Tib. gnyis med chos nyid

\(^{340}\) It is interesting to note that the term chos nyid seems to have a different meaning in the root text, where it translates the Sanskrit term dharmatā, as opposed to dharmatā, which seems to be the term
The meaning of “changeless” [69] [is that] it is an indestructible continuum. The explanation of this [is that this is so] because it is the very excellence which is unaltered by contaminated karma.

2.2.8. Explanation of the meaning of “inseparable of excellences”

The eight point, the exposition of the meaning of “inseparability of excellences” has three [subdivisions]: (1) a brief exposition, (2) an extensive explanation, and (3) a summary.

2.2.8.1. Brief exposition

In regard to the first [subdivision]:

\[
\begin{align*}
gang phyir de ni chos sku de ni de bzhin gshegs & \\
de ni `phags pa`i bden pa don dam mya ngan `das & \\
de phyir nyi dang zer bzhin yon tan dbyer med pas & \\
sangs rgyas nyid las ma gtogs mya ngan `das pa med & (I.84) \\
\end{align*}
\]

Why is this [thoroughly purified dhātu] the dharmakāya, the Tathāgata, the truth of the noble ones, and the ultimate nirvāṇa?341

Because, being inseparable from the excellences, like the sun and its rays, there is no nirvāṇa apart from buddhahood.

One might wonder whether others apart from buddhas, [i.e.] śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, also partake in the final nirvāṇa. Since the utterly pure nirvāṇa is a synonym for the dharmakāya of the tathāgata and so forth, it is taught that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas do not partake in the inseparable excellences, which have all the countless aspects and so forth.

Rong-ston refers to in his commentary. Apparently, this stems from the fact that both suffixes, -tā and -tva, are rendered with nyid in Tibetan.

341 Tib. don dam mya ngan `das; Skt. paramārthaṁ nirvāṇa (“ultimate extinction”).

Note that in his commentary on RGV I.84 and I.86, Rong-ston reads ultimate (don dam) either as an apposition to the noble truth (`phags pa`i bden pa) or as an adjective, in which case we could render the expression with “the ultimate truth of the noble ones.” He writes (LS: 69,5–6): khams shin tu rnam par dag pa de ni chos sku dang | de ni de bzhin shegs pa dang | de ni `phags pa`i `gog pa`i bden pa don dam pa dang | de ni mya ngan las `das pas te bzhis po don […]. For a translation of this passage see below.
There is no attainment of the final nirvāṇa apart from [the state] of perfect buddhahood because, just as the mandala of the sun and its light rays are not differentiable, the four excellences are [also] not differentiable.

One may further wonder why this is so.

It is so because the thoroughly purified dhātu and [these] four: the dharma, the tathāgata, the truth of cessation of the noble ones, [i.e.] the ultimate truth,342 and nirvāṇa, have the same meaning.343

2.2.8.2. Extensive explanation

The second [subdivision], the extensive exposition has two parts: (1) an explanation of the first half of the verse, and (2) an explanation of the second half.

2.2.8.2.1. Explanation of the first half of the verse

This first [part] has two [subdivisions]: [70] (1) an explanation of the synonyms by means of definitions and (2) an explanation of the differentiation between the definitions.

2.2.8.2.1.1. Explanation of the synonyms by means of definitions

In regard to the first [subdivisions]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mdor na zag med dbyings la ni} \\
\text{don gyi rab tu dbye ba bzhis} \\
\text{chos kyi sku la sogs pa yi} \\
\text{rnam grangs bzhir ni rig par bya}
\end{align*}
\] (I.85)

In brief, since in regard to the uncontaminated expanse there are four divisions of meaning, it should be known as (having) four synonyms, (i.e.) dharmakāya and so forth.

In brief, the expanse devoid of the contaminations of the two obscurations is to be known as having the four synonyms of dharmakāya and so forth.

One may wonder how this is so. It is so on account of the four divisions of the definition [of the dharmakāya].

342 phags pa’i ’gog pa’i bden pa don dam pa.
343 Lit.: “[...] are subsumed in one meaning.”
2.2.8.2.1.2. Explanation of the divisions of the definition

In regard to the second [subdivision]:

\[
\begin{align*}
sangs rgyas chos dbyer med pa dang & || \\
de rigs de bzhin thob pa dang & || \\
brdzun med slu med chos nyid dang & || \\
gdod nas rang bzhin zhi nyid do & || (1.86)
\end{align*}
\]

The buddha-qualities are inseparable,
Attainment of the gotra as it is,
Not false, undeceiving nature,\textsuperscript{344} and
From the beginning by nature peace.

The expanse devoid of the contaminations of the two obscurations, the dharmin, is called “dharmakāya” because of its abiding inseparably from the all the qualities of a buddha such as the powers and so forth.

It is called “tathāgata” because of having attained the realisation of the gotra of the six sources [of perception],\textsuperscript{345} suchness just as it is.

It is called “the truth of cessation,” [i.e.] the ultimate truth, because it is the pure and ultimate nature, which is neither false nor deceiving.

It is known as “nirvāṇa” because the adventitious defilements [which are placed] on that which is naturally pure from the beginning are pacified.

2.2.8.2.2. Explanation of the second half of the verse

The second [part], the explanation of the second half of the verse, has four [subdivisions]: (1) the meaning of “buddha” and “nirvāṇa” is not different, (2) the inseparability of “liberation” and “nirvāṇa,” (3) the cause for accomplishing the excellences, and (4) the common properties (chos mthun) of the inseparable excellences.

\textsuperscript{344} Tib. chos nyid; Skt. dharmītya.

\textsuperscript{345} Tib. skye med drug gi rigs. The expression “six āyatanas or sources [of perception]” stands here for sentient beings endowed with those sources. Asaṅga’s commentary gives the following quote from the *Ṣāḍāyatanasūtra* which, as Takasaki remarks, is not extant: “[This Germ], having attained the Absolute Essence, has come down since beginningless time from one existence to another existence assuming various forms consisting of six organs of cognition, (i.e. in the form of various living beings).” (Takasaki 1966: 260; Johnston 1950: 55,16–17; Nakamura 1967: 109,6–7.) On the *ṣāḍāyatanasūtra* see also Ruegg 1969: 266.
2.2.8.2.2.1. The meaning of “buddha” and “nirvāṇa” is not different

In regard to the first [subdivision]:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{rnam kun mngon par byang chub dang} \quad & ^{346} \\
\text{dri ma bag chags beas spangs pa} \\
\text{sangs rgyas mya ngan ’das pa ni} \\
\text{dam pa’i don de gnyis med nyid} \\
\end{align*}\]

(I.87[a])

Manifest awakening [in regard to] all aspects and
the abandonment of defilements together with [their] imprints,\(^{347}\)
in the ultimate sense there is no duality
with regard to buddhahood [and] nirvāṇa.

Because the four synonyms, [i.e.] the dharmakāya of the tathāgata etc., are subsumed in one meaning, [71] in the ultimate sense there is no duality with regard to “buddha”—
—who has manifestly and completely awakened to all aspects just as they are and how ever many there are—and “nirvāṇa”—which has abandoned the defilements of the two obscurations together with their imprints. Therefore, as long as buddhahood has not been attained, the ultimate nirvāṇa is not attained [either].

2.2.8.2.2.2. The inseparability “liberation” and “nirvāṇa”

In regard to the second [subdivision]:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{rnam pa thams cad grangs med pa} \\
\text{bsam med dri med yon tan dang} \\
\text{dbyer med mthshan nyid thar pa ste} \\
\text{thar pa gang de de bzhin gshegs} \\
\end{align*}\]

(I.87[b])\(^{348}\)

Liberation, [has as its] characteristic to be inseparable from
the excellences in all [their] aspects,
which are innumerable, inconceivable, and undefiled.
Such liberation is the tathāgata.

The dharmakāya of the tathāgata is:

---

\(^{346}\) My reading follows Nakamura (1967: 109,20). The Derge RGV reads: \textit{rnam kun mngon rdzogs byang chub dang}. This same wording is found in Rong-ston’s commentary as well.


\(^{348}\) This verse is not counted as part of the RGV in Johnston’s edition (1950: 56,14–15 and n. 6), who attributes it to the \textit{Mahāparinirvānasūtra}. Takasaki (1966: 262, n. 471) adds that the place within this sūtra remains untraced.
(1) [endowed with] all aspects because the gotra of excellences is nunimpaired (or complete without anything missing);
(2) not countable or immeasurable, because the divisions of [its] radiance are limitless.
(3) profound and inconceivable for the conceptual intellect because it is impossible to fathom the number and powers [of its excellences]; and
(4) undefiled and pure because the two obscurations are abandoned together with their imprints.

The dharmakāya which possesses the characteristic of [being endowed with these] four inseparably is liberation, [i.e.] the ultimate nirvāṇa.

Because such liberation is the tathāgata, if buddhahood is not yet attained, one does not attain [this liberation].

The nirvāṇa of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is not the ultimate nirvāṇa.

In the Dpal phreng gi mdo (Skt. Śrīmāladevisīṃhanādāsūtra) it was taught:

It is so, because the path is long, a town is magically created for the tired traveller in the middle of an empty plane. Similarly [the nirvāṇa of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas] is an irreversible means for [the followers of] the inferior vehicle of the Lords of Dharma, the perfect buddhas.349

[72] Thus, [the assertion that] the Rgyud bla [ma] belongs to the Cittamātra school is refuted.350

2.2.8.2.2.3. The cause for accomplishing the excellences

In regart to the third [subdivision]:

ji ltar ri mo ’dri byed pa ||

349 This quote actually comes from Asaṅga’s RGVV on I.87 (Johnston 1950: 56,16–17; Nakamura 1967: 111,9–10; Takasaki 1966: 262), where he comments on the following short passage from the ŚMS: nirvāṇam iti bhagavann upāya esa tathāgatānām iti. (D: 264a5: bcom ldan ’das yongs su mya ngan las ’das pa zhes bygi ba ’di ni de bzhin gshegs pa rnams kyi thabs lags so ||.)

350 In other words, if the RGV claims that all beings without exception can attain buddhahood, it cannot be counted as a Cittamātra scripture. Indeed, in scriptures categorized as Yogācāra (or Cittamātra), such as the Sandhinirmocanasūtra or the Madhyantavibhāga and so forth, there is mention of three definite types of gotras leading to three different results, one uncertain gotra, and one class of beings being devoid of any spiritual propensity (agotra). In the scriptures counted among the Madhyamaka literature however, such as the Lankāvatārasūtra or the Madhyamakāvatāra and so forth, these statements are not taken literally. Ultimately, there can be no difference between beings, as all are devoid of own-being. On the meaning of the term gotra according to the different philosophical see Seyfort Ruegg 1976, as well as the first part of his Théorie (1969).
Suppose there were variously skilled painters, those knowledgeable in one area unable to complete another [part].

Further, a mighty king gives them a cloth with the order: “On this [I order] a portrait of mine to be realised by all of you [together].”

Having heard this [order] from him, they set out in their painting work. Among those applying themselves to this, one left alone for another country.

Since this [painter] went to another country [the group] was incomplete, and therefore the painting was not completed in all of its parts. Thus the example is given.

The cause for accomplishing the four excellences is the supreme knowledge realising emptiness endowed with all aspects of the means.352 This is demonstrated by means of the example of the painters.353

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351 Nakamura (1967 : 111,19): des gzhan des 'dzin med par 'gyur || I followed Derge (58b3 and 105a4) in this case, since zin pa seems to be a better rendering for ava-iddhā (“ascertain”, “understand”).
352 Tib. thabs kyi rnam kun dang ldan pa'i stong nyid. The meaning of this is given in the commentary to the next verse.
Suppose there are many skilled painters, certain painters being particularly skilled in [painting] individually different [parts of the body such as] the head and so forth. Those who know [how to paint certain] parts [of the body, such as] the head and so forth, will certainly not finish [the drawing of] other parts, [for] they will not know [how to do it].

Now, [suppose] the ruler of a land, the king, having given to those master painters a painting cloth, instructs them with these words: “All you master painters, complete a portrait of me, the king.” Then the painters, having heard this command of the king, individually set out to execute the task of painting whatever [the part of] the portrait they knew [how to paint]. Among those engaged in painting this portrait, the one who knew [how to paint] the head left for another country. Then, since the artist skilled in painting the head was missing, the painting of the king’s portrait was not completed. This is the example given.

\[
\text{de rnams 'dri byed gang dag yin} || \\
\text{sbyin dang tshul khrims bzod la sogs} || \\
\text{rnam pa kun gyi mchog ldan pa} || \\
\text{stong pa nyid ni gzugs su brjod} || \quad (I.92)
\]

Who are those painters?
[They are] giving, discipline, patience, and so forth. Emptiness endowed with all supreme aspects\(^{355}\) is said to be the form [of the king].

What is illustrated by the artists painting the different parts [of the portrait]?
[They stand for] giving, discipline, patience, [73] diligent effort, and so forth, [i.e.] all the means for accomplishing buddhahood.

In this way, from supreme knowledge which realises emptiness endowed with all supreme aspects of the means, [i.e.] giving and so forth, the excellence of every aspect gets accomplished. [Thus] a buddha’s excellences endowed with all supreme aspects of the excellences, [such as] the powers and so forth, are completed.

\(^{353}\) This illustration is taken from the Ratnacūḍāsūtra (RCP). See Takasaki 1966: 263, n. 484.

\(^{354}\) Lit.: painting.

\(^{355}\) Tib. rnam pa kun gyi mchog ldan pa’i stong pa nyid; Skt. sarvākāravaroṇopād sūnyatā. Takasaki (1966: 264) “non-substantiality endowed with all sorts of excellences.”
Because on the level of buddhahood every single [paramitā, such as] giving and so forth, is absolutely limitless, [they] are immeasurable. Because it is impossible to fathom [their] number and powers, [they] are inconceivable. Because of having cleared the imprints of [their] opposites, [i.e.] stinginess and so forth, they are the culmination of perfect purity.

2.2.8.2.2.4. The common properties of the inseparable excellences
The fourth [subdivision] has two parts: (1) the general common properties and (2) the particular common properties.

2.2.8.2.2.4.1. General common properties
In regard to the first [part]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shes rab ye shes rnam grol rnams} \parallel \\
\text{gsal dang } \text{'phro dang dag phyir dang} \parallel \\
\text{tha dad med phyir } \text{'od dang zer} \parallel \\
\text{nyi ma'i dkyil 'khor rnams dang mtshungs} \parallel
\end{align*}
\]  

(I.93)

Supreme knowledge, wisdom, and complete liberation are similar to the light, the rays, and the orb of the sun due to their clarity, radiance, and purity, and because they are indifferenciable.

The three aspects of (1) the luminosity of the sun, (2) the radiance of [its] light rays, and (3) [its] purity, are possessed inseparably by the mandala of the sun. They are like (1) supreme knowledge which knows [things] as they are, (2) the wisdom which knows [things] in their multiplicity, and (3) the purity of being completely liberated from that which is to be abandoned, because [these] three are possessed inseparably by the undefiled expanse.

2.2.8.2.2.4.2. Particular common properties
In regard to the second [part]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{des na sangs rgyas ma thob par} \parallel \\
\text{mya ngan } \text{'das pa mi 'thob ste} \parallel \\
\text{'od dang } \text{'od zer spangs nas ni} \parallel \\
\text{nyi mab lta bar mi nus bzhin} \parallel
\end{align*}
\]  

(I.94)
Therefore, without the attainment of buddhahood, nirvāṇa is not attained; just as one will not be able to see the sun once the light and the light rays are removed.

Knowing [things] as they are is similar to the luminosity of the sun, for it illuminates the way [things] are just as they are. Knowing [things] in their multiplicity is similar to the sun rays’ radiance, for it radiates onto the appearance of the multiplicity [of things]. Complete liberation is similar to the pure light of the mandala of the sun, for it is pure from the defilements of the two obscurations.

2.2.8.3. Summary.

Therefore, as long as buddhahood—[i.e.] the realisation of a wisdom devoid of attachment and obstruction—is not obtained, nirvāṇa—[i.e.] the abandonment which frees from all obscurations—will not be obtained [either], just as [one] will not be able to see the orb of the sun, after [its] light and light rays have been removed.

For these [reasons] it is taught that there is no final nirvāṇa for śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. However, it is not taught that there is no mere passing beyond sorrow [for them].

2.3. Summary:

The third [subdivision], the summary:

\[
\text{de ltar rgyal ba’i snying po yi ||} \\
\text{rnam gzhag rnam pa bcu zhes brjod || (I.95[a])}
\]

Thus has been expounded presentation of buddha-nature (jinagarbha) in ten points.

Thus, buddha-nature has been expounded by means of a presentation in ten points. This ends the teaching on the presentation in ten points.

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356 LS (73,6) and G (73,5) both read: nyi ma’i ’od gsal. K (122,17) has: nyi ma’i ’od zer gsal.
357 K omits this whole passage.
358 This phrase means it is a wisdom free from the two obscurations of mental afflictions and their imprints.
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**JAĀ**
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Tibetan translation: D 100

**LS**
*Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma ’i bstan bcos legs par bshad pa* (Rong-ston).

**MG**

**MMK**
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**MSA**
*Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*
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- English translation see Thurman 2004.

**NG**
*Mdo sde rgyan gyi rnam bshad theg chen gsal bar byed pa ’i gnad kyi sgron me* (Rong-ston). Rong-ston gsung ’bum vol. JA, text

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Ed. Zuiho Nakamura. Zōwa tainaku Kukyōkichō hôshōron

RP Theg pa chen po mdo sde’i rgyan gyi ’grel pa rin po che’i phreng
da A detailed commentary on the Mahāyānasūtraśālākāra of

ŚMS Śrīmālādevīśimhanāda-nāma-mahāyānasūtra
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TGS Tathāgatagarbhasūtra
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Appendices:

Appendix I -
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Appendix II - Zusammenfassung


Im ersten Teil meiner Arbeit gehe ich auf die ideengeschichtliche Entwicklung dieses Konzeptes ein, indem ich dem Leser, nach einem kurzen Überblick, die kanonischen Quellen, die zur Formulierung dieser Idee beitrugen, vorstelle.


Der vierten und letzte Teil meiner Arbeit besteht aus einer annotierten Übersetzung von Rong-stons Kommentar zum vierten Kapitel des Ratnagotravibhāga.
Lebenslauf

Christian Bernert
1090 Wien, Lustkanlgasse 35/36
Telefon: +43 1 96 802 97
e-mail: shaduramata@yahoo.com
Geb. am 05.07.1977 in Wien
ledig, österreicher
Führerschein B

Ausbildungsweg:

Vorbereitung auf die Aufnahmeprüfung (Univ. f. Angewandte Kunst)
Meisterklasse für Industrial Design, Paolo Piva
seit Juli 2001 International Buddhist Academy (IBA), Kathmandu/NEPAL
seit Oktober 2001 Universität Wien
Indiv. Dipl. Stud. Religionswissenschaft
Schwerpunkt: tibetischer Buddhismus

Bisherige wissenschaftliche Tätigkeiten:

seit Okt. 2007 Werkvertragstätigkeit für das Institut für Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien
• Kollationierung tibetischer kanonischer Blockdrucke
• Digitalisierung und Bibliographierung von Sekundärliteratur zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde,
• Einspeisung von Digitalisaten in ein digitales Archiv

Publikationen: (gemeinsam mit Leger, J.)

• „Studium an der International Buddhist Academy in Nepal.“ In: Buddhismus Aktuell 2/2006, 74 u. 76.
Vorträge:
Dez. 2003 „Metta - Liebende Güte im Theravada Buddhismus“, im Rahmen des Buddhismus Lehrgang an der Universität Wien
Aug. 2007 „The three natures (trisvabhāva) in Yogācāra philosophy.“ International Buddhist Academy, Kathmandu/NEPAL
Aug. 2008 „Sich lösen von den vier Anhaftungen - Buddhistische Meditation und Geistesschulung.“ Sakya Tsechen Changchub Ling, Buddhistisches Zentrum Bad Gams (Stmk/Ö)

Übersetzungstätigkeit:
Englisch-Deutsch für Geshe Sherab Gyaltsen Amipa:
Jun. 2008 Öffentlicher Vortrag: „Vom Umgang mit Emotionen: die Entwicklung von innerem Frieden und Freude in Meditation und Alltag.“ Kurhotel Kipper, Bad Gams (Stmk/Ö)
Jun. 2008 Seminar: „Einweihung und Lehren zur Grünen Tara und ihren 21 Erscheinungsformen.“ Sakya Tsechen Changchub Ling, Buddhistisches Zentrum Bad Gams (Stmk/Ö)

Weitere Praktika:
Sep. 1997 Arte-ORF, Wien  
• Mitarbeit an der Setdeko und Statist bei der Co-Produktion „Je m´appelle Mme. La Valse“  
• Übersetzungen Deutsch-Französisch
• Betondesign und Verarbeitung - praktische Tätigkeit
Jun. 1998 Atelier Dietrich Design, Monfort/Frankreich  
• 2 Projekte: Taucheralarmsystem, tragbarer Kaugummisspender  
• eigenständige Arbeit: Entwurf und Prototypbau eines Stuhls
Jul. 1999 Telefonmarketing, London/England  
• Telefonische Markumfrage im Bereich Software User
• Telefonhotline, Telefonmarketing
Jun.–Aug. 2000 Magistratsabteilung (MA) 48, Wien  
• Abfallwirtschaft
Apr.–Jul. 2004 Gant Store Outlet (Zur Brieftaube GesmbH), Wien  
• Kundenbetreuung, Verkauf
Dez. 2004   Himalayan Arts, Wien
• Kundenbetreuung, Verkauf
Apr.–Jul. 2005  Gant Store Outlet (Zur Brieftaube GesmbH), Wien
• Kundenbetreuung, Verkauf
seit 1995 (laufend)  Zur Brieftaube GesmbH, Wien
• Kundenempfang, Kundenbelieferungen, Warenübernahme, div. Arbeiten zur Unterstützung der Geschäftsleitung

**Fremdsprachen**

• Moderne Sprachen:
  - Französisch - Muttersprache
  - Englisch - fließend mündlich wie schriftlich
  - Tibetisch - Studium seit 2001

• Klassische Sprachen:
  - Tibetisch - Studium seit 2001
  - Sanskrit - Studium seit 2005

**Ehrenamtliche Tätigkeiten**

Winter 2000          Caritas, Wien - Mitarbeiter beim Kanisibus
2001                Caritas, Wien - Karwan Haus

**EDV Kenntnisse**

MS Office, Classical Text Editor (CTE)
None