



How is Consciousness (*rnam shes*) Related to Wisdom (*ye shes*)? The Eighth Karma pa on Buddhist Differentiation and Unity Models of Reality¹

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Abstract

This study examines how Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), the Eighth Karma pa of the Karma Bka' brgyud lineage, articulates and defends a key distinction between consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*). The first paper focuses on the author's clarification of the distinction both as an accurate account of the nature and structure of human consciousness and as an indispensable principle of Buddhist soteriology. Arguing that human beings have two "concurrent but nonconvergent" modes of awareness, conditioned and unconditioned, Mi bskyod rdo rje urges the practitioner to discern amidst the adventitious flux of dichotomic thoughts an innate nondual mode of awareness that is regarded as the ground and goal of the Buddhist path. That the recognition of their difference is the key to realizing their underlying unity is central to the Karma pa's response to the perennial Buddhist problem of reconciling two divergent Buddhist models of reality: [1] a differentiation model based on robust distinctions between conventional and ultimate truths or realities (*saṃvṛtisatya* versus *paramārthasatya*) and their associated modes of cognition and [2] an identification (*yuganaddha*) model of the two realities (*satyadvaya* : *bden gnyis*) which emphasizes their underlying unity. This article concludes with an annotated translation and critical edition of a short text by the Karma pa on the subject entitled "Two minds in one person? A Reply to the Queries of Bla ma Khams pa" (*bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*).

Key words: Tibetan Buddhism, Bka' brgyud, Kagyu, Mi bskyod rdo rje, consciousness, wisdom, *jñāna*, mind, Buddhist philosophy of mind, Buddhist models of reality, two truths, ultimate truth, contextualism

¹ This article constitutes the first of a two-part study of Mi bskyod rdo rje's views on the *rnam shes/ye shes* distinction. Part Two, which deals with certain polemical issues in Mi bskyod rdo rje's justification of the distinction, will appear in the next issue of this periodical. The author would like to take this opportunity to offer sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this study.

Słowa kluczowe: buddyzm tybetański, Bka' brgyud, Kagyu, Mi bskyod rdo rje, świadomość, mądrość, jñāna, umysł, buddyjska filozofia umysłu, buddyjski model rzeczywistości, dwie prawdy, prawda ostateczna, kontekstualizm

The relationship between consciousness (Skt. *Vijñāna*, Tib. *rnam shes*) and wisdom (*jñāna* : *ye shes*) has been the focus of much discussion and debate in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism. Perhaps few scholars in the history of Buddhist thought have given more detailed and nuanced attention to clarifying the nature of this relationship and its soteriological ramifications than Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), the Eighth Karma pa of the Karma kaṃ tshang lineage. In his many and varied treatments of this issue, Mi bskyod rdo rje comes up against the perennial problem of how to understand and reconcile two traditional Buddhist models of reality and cognition. One is a *differentiation* model based on robust distinctions between conventional and ultimate truths or realities (*samvṛtisatya* versus *paramārthasatya*) and their associated modes of cognition. The other is an identification or unity (*yuganaddha*) model of the two realities (*satyadvaya* : *bden gnyis*) and their associated modes of cognition. In Buddhist scholasticism, the differentiation model was typically aligned with a strongly innatist view of the ultimate (buddha nature, the nature of mind, or the nature of reality) which underscores its “sublime otherness” (*gzhan mchog*) from all that is conventional and adventitious. This model has figured in a wide range of canonical Buddhist distinctions between innate and adventitious modes of reality and their associated prediscursive and discursive modes of cognition.²

By contrast, the identification or unity model, predicated on the acceptance of a prediscursive dimension of human experience which is the source of all conditioned and unconditioned phenomena, has drawn attention to the pervasiveness of the ultimate and its immanence within the conventional in order to indicate how the ultimate permeates the mind-streams of individuals in bondage. The unity model has found expression in a variety of Madhyamaka and tantric formulations, such as the nonduality (*advaya* : *gnyis med*) or coemergence (*sahaja* : *lhan cig skyes pa*) of the two truths or realities, the unity of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa (*'khor 'das zung 'jug*), the inseparability of manifestation and emptiness (*snang stong dbyer med*), and the unity of thoughts and *dharmakāya*.

Tibetan scholars have devoted considerable attention to the issue of how to reconcile and coordinate these differentiation and unity models within pertinent traditional Buddhist theoretical contexts such as buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), the two truths (*satyadvaya*), the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), the two modes of emptiness (*rang stong* and *gzhan stong*), the hermeneutics of the three turnings of the *dharmacakra*, and the related hermeneutical distinction between definitive meaning

² On Rnying ma treatments of these distinctions, cf. Higgins D., *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet: Investigating the Distinction between Dualistic Mind (sems) and Primordial Knowing (ye shes)*, Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 78, Wien 2013. On Bka' brgyud treatments, cf. D. Higgins, M. Draszczyk, *Mahāmudrā and the Middle Way: Post-classical Kagyü Discourses on Mind, Emptiness and Buddha-nature*, 2 vols. Wien 2016 (in press).

(*nītārtha*) and provisional meaning (*neyārtha*). The aim of this paper is to explain how Mi bskyod rdo rje could be both an advocate of robust soteriological distinctions between innate and adventitious modes of reality and cognition (differentiation model) and at the same time a proponent of the Mahāmudrā view of the unity (*zung 'jug*) nonduality (*gnyis med*) or inseparability (*dbyer med*) of the ultimate and conventional. It is argued that his attempts to resolve this antinomy were guided by his philosophical Madhyamaka ambition to chart a middle course between the two metaphysical extremes of absolutism (known as the extreme of eternalism or existence) and nihilism (the extreme of annihilation or nonexistence). With this trajectory in sight, the Karma pa shows how the meditator on the path must distinguish adventitious from innate modes of cognition in order to discern the mind's preconceptual nature from the flux of superfluous mental and affective activities that reify and obscure it. But to the extent that the meditator realises a "unity beyond extremes" wherein superfluous thoughts and feelings are recognised as distortive (conventional) manifestations of the abiding (ultimate) nature of mind and reality, the former are resolved into the latter and both are understood to be alike in remaining beyond discursive elaboration (*spros bral*).

1. The doctrinal background of the two models

Let us begin by sketching in rough strokes some Indian antecedents of the two models and the problem of reconciliation they brought into play. One highly influential precedent for the differentiation model was Asaṅga's **Mahāyānasamgraha* I.45–48,³ where the author drew a sharp distinction between unconditioned supramundane mind (*lokottaracitta*) and the conditioned substratum consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), thereby specifying an innate, unconditioned mode of cognition that is prior to and a precondition of the eight modes of consciousness (*kun gzhi tshogs brgyad*) as elaborated in the Yogācāra psychology. By contrast, influential examples of the identification model that are encountered in the *Laṅkāvatāra* and **Ghanavyūha* sūtras explicitly identify buddha nature with the substratum consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).⁴ One

³ Cf. R. Davidson, *Buddhist Systems of Transformation: Āśraya-parivṛtti/parāvṛtti Among the Yogācāra*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Berkeley: University of California 1985, p. 215; K. Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within, Gö Lotsawa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, Boston 2008, p. 58. Sthiramati draws a similar distinction between *ālayavijñāna* and the supramundane gnosis (*lokottarajñāna* : *jigs rten las 'das pa'i ye shes*) which fundamentally transforms or sublates (*parāvṛtti*) it in his commentary on *Triṃśikā* 29–30. Cf. *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (ed. S. Lévi, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences historiques et philologiques 245, vol. 1: The text, Paris 1925), p. 44; R. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p. 218 and n. 28. On replacement and elimination models of fundamental transformation (*āśrayaparivṛtti*), cf. H. Sakuma, *Die Āśrayaparivṛtti-Theorie in der Yogācārabhūmi*. Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien 40, 1–2, Stuttgart 1990.

⁴ On this interpretation and some of its Tibetan adherents such as the bKa' brgyud scholars 'Gos lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal and 'Ba' ra ba rgyal mtshan dpal bzang, cf. K. Mathes, *A Direct Path...*, p. 18, 117 and 464 n. 612. 'Gos lo tsā ba noted (*ibidem*, pp. 341–342) that the equation of *ālayavijñāna* with *tathāgatagarbha* is based on the acceptance of two aspects of the former: a stained *ālayavijñāna*, which needs to be reversed in order to attain Buddhahood, and a purified *ālayavijñāna* taken as an unconscious

may also mention here a parallel unity or nondifferentiation model of truth/reality, which was widely adopted in many non-tantric and tantric discourses emphasising the nonduality of the two realities (*bden gnyis gnyis med*), the inseparability of appearance and emptiness (*sngang stong dbyer med*), and unity of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and coemergence of mind and wisdom.⁵

Faced with the task of reconciling these seemingly incommensurable ontological and soteriological paradigms, leading post-classical Bka' bryud thinkers such as Mi bskyod rdo rje adopted different versions of *soteriological contextualism*, a term I have elsewhere coined to describe the view that the sense, relevance and efficacy of soteriological models can only be understood relative to the context(s) in which they are employed.⁶ From this perspective, the differentiation and unity models, with their seemingly oppositional categories and metaphors – the first positing a basic difference between conventional and ultimate and comparing it to the sky and its clouds, the second positing their essential equality as illustrated by the ocean and its waves – came to be regarded not as contradictory but as complementary, relating as they do to different contexts of salvific theory and praxis. According to Mi bskyod rdo rje, an aspirant on the Buddhist path should conceptually distinguish what is to be abandoned (“adventitious mind”, *glo bur gyi sems*) from what is to be realised (“innate mind”, *gnyug ma'i sems*). But this path is said to lead beyond such oppositional constructs, culminating in the disclosure of a nondual nonconceptual wisdom (*nirvikalpajñāna*) of the undifferentiated nature of things (*dharmadhātu*) which recognises all spiritual countermeasures (*gnyen po*) as being of the same unborn (*skye med*) and prediscursive (*spros braḷ*) nature as what they are meant to counteract.⁷ This is the view of unity (*zung 'jug*), which is generally identified as a hallmark of Mahāmudrā teachings. In this view, the Buddhist path is ultimately self-undermining insofar as the conceptual distinctions which are necessary to realise nondual nonconceptual wisdom necessarily consume themselves at the time of its realisation.⁸

vijñāpti or subtle inward mind, which 'Gos lo identifies with the *dharmadhātu*. Based on the identification of the ālayavijñāna with the *tathāgatagarbha*, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* interprets āśrayaparāvṛtti as the transformation or purification of the seventh consciousness (*manas*), which liberates the pure ālayavijñāna. Cf. W. Lai, *The Meaning of "Mind-Only" (Wei-Hsin): An Analysis of a Sinitic Mahāyāna Phenomenon*, "Philosophy East and West" 1977, vol. 27, no. 1, p. 67 f. In a similar vein, the **Ghanavyūhasūtra* states (D 110, 55b₁; L 113, 85a₆₋₇): "The Tathāgata taught **sugatagarbha* using the term *ālaya* [*vijñāna*]." *bde gshegs snying po dge ba'ang de* || *snying po de la kun gzhi sgras* | *de bzhin gshegs pa ston pa mdzad* |

⁵ These models and their doctrinal sources are examined in D. Higgins, M. Draszczyk, *op.cit.*

⁶ For a general account of contextualist views, which have been gaining popularity in contemporary philosophy, cf. A.W. Price, *Contextuality in practical reason*, Oxford 2008.

⁷ Shākya mchog ldan had similarly maintained that while realisation of the unity of the two truths, and of appearance and emptiness, was the goal of the Buddhist path, it is nonetheless necessary to balance the divergent perspectives of consciousness and wisdom while on the path. Likewise, the second 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (a contemporary of Mi bskyod rdo rje) used Yang dgon pa's distinction between *mahāmudrā* in its modes of abiding (*gnas lugs phyag chen*) and delusion (*'khrul lugs phyag chen*) to underscore the need to discern the irreducible unity of the common ground (*mahāmudrā* in the abiding mode) from the reifications which distort and conceal it (the mode of delusion). On their interpretations, cf. D. Higgins, M. Draszczyk, *op.cit.*

⁸ Post-classical Mahāmudrā exegetes were keenly aware that the method of radical negation employed in Madhyamaka must be self-consuming: since conceptual reasoning is by definition conditioned

2. Karma Bka' brgyud assimilations of the differentiation model

The Eighth Karma pa's views regarding wisdom (*ye shes*) and the nature of mind (*sems nyid*, *sems kyi rang bzhin*) and how they differ from consciousness (*rnam shes*) and dualistic mind (*sems*) are indebted to the works of his Karma kaṃ tshang predecessors, particularly the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje. In general, Bka' brgyud exegetes deployed a varied repertoire of distinctions between mind and the nature of mind drawn from a diverse body of texts and commentaries belonging to the Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna and Siddha genres. Tibetan terms variously used to describe the nature of mind – some of which were translations of Indic terms, others Tibetan neologisms⁹ – include mind as such (*sems nyid*), natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*),¹⁰ natural mind (*rang bzhin gyi sems*), the beginningless nature of mind (*thog*

and adventitious, and therefore not beyond the scope of its own critical surveillance, it must at some point deplete or consume itself, as suggested by a well-known analogy from the *Kaśyapaparivarta* of the *Ratnakūṭa* that Kamalaśīla famously cited as follows: “The characteristic of discerning the real (*bhūtapratyavekṣa*) is here [in the *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*] considered to be mental nonengagement (*amanasikāra*). That [discernment] has the nature of being conceptual, but it is burned away by the fire of innate wisdom arising from it, just as a fire kindled by rubbing two pieces of wood burns these very pieces.” *Nirvikalpapraveśadhāraṇīṭkā*, P: no. 5501, 157b₅₋₆: *yang dag par so sor rtog pa'i mtshan ma ni 'dir yid la mi byed par dgongs so || de ni rnam par rtog pa'i ngo bo nyid yin mod kyi | 'on kyang de nyid las byung ba yang dag pa'i ye shes kyi mes de bsregs par 'gyur te | shing gnyis drud las byung ba'i mes shing de gnyis sreg par byed pa bzhin no ||* Kamalaśīla presents the same example in *Bhāvanākrama* III (ed. G. Tucci in: Tucci G., *Minor Buddhist Texts, Part III, Third Bhāvanākrama*, Roma 1971) and makes reference to the *Ratnakūṭa*: “[...] *nirvikalpe ca bhūtajñānāgnau samutpanne sati kāṣṭhadvayanig harśasamjātavahninā tatkāṣṭhadvayadhavat sāpi paścāt tenaiva dahyata evety uktam āryaratnakūṭe |*” Note that the same concept, *mutatis mutandis*, occurs in non-Buddhist works such as the *Ātmabodha* by Śaṅkara st. 5; *Parātrīṃśīkātattvavivaraṇa* by Abhinavagupta, ed. R. Gnoli, *Il Commento di Abhinavagupta alla Parātrīṃśīkā (Parātrīṃśīkātattva-vivaraṇa) traduzione e testo*, Roma 1985, pp. 98, 161; *Tantravaṭadhānikā* by Abhinavagupta, cf. F. Sferra, *La Tantravaṭadhānikā* di Abhinavagupta [in:] *Le Parole e i Marmi: studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70° compleanno*, R. Torella (ed.), Serie Orientale Roma XCII. vol. 2, Roma 2001, 2001, pp. 755 and 767 for additional references.

⁹ Some of these are included in a list of synonyms (*ming gi rnam grangs*) for the beginningless nature of mind (*sems nyid thog med*) given by Karma phrin las pa in his *Zab mo nang don nyin byed 'od kyi phreng ba*, 17₆–18₂: “As for its quasi-synonyms, which are said to be limitless, they include natural awareness, fresh mind, innate mind, Mahāmudrā, supreme bliss, *nāda*, invincible *hūm*, space-pervading space *vajra*, *tathāgatagarbha*, energy current of wisdom, central channel of wisdom, invincible seminal nucleus and Prajñāpāramitā [goddess] from the standpoint of the perfections.” *de la ming gi rnam grangs su ni | tha mal gyi shes pa | sems so ma | gnyug ma'i yid dang | phyag rgya chen po dang | bde ba chen po dang | nā da dang | gzhom med kyi hūm | mkha' khyab mkha'i rdo rje dang | de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po | ye shes kyi rlung dang | ye shes kyi rtsa dbu ma dang | gzhom med kyi thig le dang | pha rol tu phyin pa'i phyogs las shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin ma zhes sogs rnam grangs mtha' yas pa gsungs so ||* Dwags ram pa adds to the list these synonyms, many of which are found in the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Laghukālacakratantra*: supremely unchanging bliss supreme (*mchog tu mi 'gyur ba'i bde ba chen po*), coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes sbyor pa'i ye shes*), great compassion (*snying rje chen po*), primal buddha (*dang po'i sangs rgyas*), original protector (*thog ma'i mgon po*), **sugatagarbha* (*bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po*), great seminal nucleus (*thig le chen po*), *de kho na nyid* (thusness), utterly pure mind (*rnam par dag pa'i sems*). Cf. *Zab mo nang don sems kyi rnam par thar pa'i gsal ba'i rgyan*, in Rang byung rdo rje's RDSb vol. 12, 45₆–47₂.

¹⁰ On this important Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā term, cf. D. Higgins, M. Draszczyk, *op.cit.*, pp. 36, 59, 153, 163, 176, 178, 187 and n. 534, 283, 338 et passim.

ma'i sems nyid), innate mind (*gnyug ma'i yid*), wisdom (*ye shes*), nondual wisdom (*gnyis med kyi ye shes*), naked awareness (*rjen pa'i shes pa*), and coemergent wisdom (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*). Bka' brgyud exegetes used such terms not only to characterise the enduring, nondual character of mind but also to emphasise its primacy, and its distinction from adventitious dualistic mind (*sems*), mentality (*yid*), cognition (*shes pa*) or consciousness (*rnam shes*). These latter terms commonly describe delusive objectifying and subjectivising forms of cognition that Buddhist insight and practices aim to transcend. Mi bskyod rdo rje often registers his concern about the lack of conceptual precision among Buddhist exegetes regarding the proper formulation and use of such distinctions, taking the term *sems nyid* as a case in point. The particle *nyid*, he argues, denotes a basic nature (*chos nyid*) of the phenomenon (*chos can*)¹¹ mind, and is used “in the sense of an ineliminable distinctive feature” (*khyad chos mi spong bar don*) which should never be confused with the conventional condition or characteristics of ordinary mind.

Regarding terms such as *sems nyid* etc., *sems nyid* [combines] a term denoting a phenomenon (*chos can* : *dharmā*) [i.e. mind] and a term that denotes its basic nature (*chos nyid* : *dharmatā*), viz., a distinctive feature (*khyad par gyi chos*) [i.e. the nature of mind]. Here, the term denoting a phenomenon [mind] is qualified in the sense of an ineliminable distinctive feature. In general, this abiding mode¹² of mind (*sems kyi gnas lugs*) is presented both as a conventional mode or characteristic or an ultimate mode or characteristic. Among these [two], mere cognition and mere clarity (*rig tsam gsal tsam*) are the conventional mode. Consequently, although there are many people here in Tibet for whom it is the real abiding mode (*don gyi gnas lugs*) and [who thus] take it as their view and meditation, this is an insuperable mistake!¹³

Mi bskyod rdo rje accorded considerable importance to the distinction between pure mind and impure mind introduced by Karma pa III Rang byung rdo rje on the basis of Mahāmudrā and the Maitreya texts. The Third Karma pa had maintained

¹¹ The Eighth Karma pa here understands the term *chos can*, phenomena, to refer to that which possesses the nature of phenomena.

¹² The term *gnas lugs* renders various Sanskrit terms including [1] *vr̥tta* (appearance, occurred, become, turned, matter, incident, issue, mode of life, state, as e.g., *vastuvr̥tta* : *ngos po'i gnas lugs*, nature of things); [2] *sthiti* (abiding, staying, situation, state, abode, remaining or being in any state or condition); [3] *saṃniveśa* (assembly, situation, open place, foundation); and [4] *saṃsthāna* (being, standing, abiding, standing still or firm, abode, dwelling-place, nature, essence, there-being (Dasein), condition). In the present context, it refers to the prevailing mode or state of mind, as indicated by the alternative defining characteristic (*mnyam nyid*). Cf. Negi 1993–2005 s.v. *gnas lugs*.

¹³ *Dgongs gcig 'grel pa* Ic, in MKsb vol. 4, 1087₆–1088₃; *sems nyid ces bya ba zhes sogs la | sems nyid ni chos can brjod pa'i sgra dang | de'i chos nyid ni khyad par gyi chos brjod pa'i sgra yin pas 'dir chos can brjod pa'i sgras khyad chos mi spong bar don la brjod pa yin no | | spyir sems kyi gnas lugs 'di la kun rdzob kyi gnas lugs sam mtshan nyid dang | don dam gyi gnas lugs sam mtshan nyid gnyis yod pa las | rig tsam gsal tsam ni kun rdzob kyi gnas lugs yin pas de don gyi gnas lugs yin par bod 'dir lta sgom byed pa mang du yod kyang nor ba bla na med pa yin no | | In D. Higgins, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet: Investigating the Distinction between Dualistic Mind (sems) and Primordial Knowing (ye shes)*, Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 78, Wien 2013, it is argued that *sems nyid* was a specialised rendering of *citta* (sometimes also *caitanya*) in cases where the original referred to the nature of mind and not dualistic mind. This along with *ye shes*, one of several terms used to render the Sanskrit *jñāna*, reflect the Tibetan penchant for translating single Indian terms by various Tibetan ones according to context.*

that “the general discourses of all vehicles refer to mind as such (*sems nyid*) but this should be known to be twofold: possessing purity and being impure.”¹⁴ He equates mind possessing purity variously with [1] mind as such (*sems nyid*) as described in Saraha’s *Dohākoṣagīti* 43¹⁵ as the seed of all of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, [2] the buddha quintessence (*buddhagarbha*) as described in *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* 1.55–57¹⁶ by analogy with space which supports the other elements but is itself unsupported by any, and [3] mind’s luminous nature (*’od gsal ba’i sems*) as described in *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* 5b.1–2.¹⁷ His commentators further identify the pure mind with the tantric hermeneutical categories of the ground of the clearing process (*sbyang gzhi*), the first of the four aspects of the clearing process and the continuum (*rgyud* : *tantra*) of the ground or causal phase, and the first of the three continuities (*rgyud gsum*) whose *locus classicus* is said to be the supplemental tantra (*uttara-tantra*) of the *Guhyasamāja*.¹⁸ Such identifications reveal the extent to which Rang byung rdo rje and his successors looked for doctrinal common ground among discourses on the nature of mind found in the sūtras, tantras and Siddha works in order to highlight regions of shared soteriological concern and semantic reference.

Rang byung rdo rje equates the impure mind with the ālayavijñāna, which is taken, following texts such as the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and **Mahāyānasamgraha*, to refer to the source of all obscurations, but *not* of *buddhajñāna* which, conversely, is identified as what destroys the ālayavijñāna.¹⁹ Rang byung rdo rje’s Rnying ma colleague Klong chen rab ’byams pa drew a similar distinction between pure mind (*sems dag pa*) and impure mind (*sems ma dag pa*) and further subdivided pure mind into pure mind as such (*sems nyid dag pa*) and pure mind (*sems dag pa*) in order to underscore how the “pure” applications of ordinary mind – ethical and contemplative

¹⁴ *Zab mo nang don rang ’grel*, 381₃₋₄: *theg pa thams cad kyi spyi skad la sems nyid ces gsungs kyang | dag pa dang bcas pa dang | ma dag pa gnyis su shes par bya |* For a lucid summary of this distinction, cf. K. Mathes, *A Direct Path...*, pp. 57–59.

¹⁵ Note that the original (ed. M. Shahidullah, *Les chants mystiques de Kāṇha et de Sahara: Les Dohākoṣa (en apabhraṃśa, avec les versions tibétaines) et les Caryā (en vieux bengali)*, Paris, pp. 140) has *citta*, while Tibetan Bstan ’gyur editions generally have *sems nyid* (not just *sems* as one might expect). The *nyid* may have originally been added for metrical reasons.

¹⁶ For a translation and discussion of this passage in relation to Rang byung rdo rje’s interpretation, see K. Mathes, *A Direct Path...*, p. 57.

¹⁷ “That Mind is not [dualistic] mind; Mind’s nature is luminous.” The corresponding passage from the Sanskrit is given in L. Schmithausen, *Textgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zum 1. Kapitel der Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* [in:] *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*. Ed. Lewis Lancaster and Luis O. Gómez. Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series 1, Berkeley 1977, p. 41 as lines E.b.1–2 *tathā hi tac cittam acittam | prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā |*. Note, however, that the introductory words *tathā hi* are not rendered in the Tibetan translation.

¹⁸ According to colophon information appended to this text in different editions of the *Rnying ma rgyud ’bum*, the *Guhyasamāja mūlatantra* (GST) was translated by Vimalamitra and Ska ba dpal brtsegs circa the 8th century, whereas the appended *uttaratantra* (Ch. 18), known in Tibetan as *Gsang ’dus rgyud phyi ma* (“Later *Guhyasamāja*”), was translated later by Buddhaguhyā and ’Brog mi dpal ye shes. Cf. R. Mayer, Pelliot tibétain 349: A Dunhuang Tibetan Text on rDo rje Phur pa. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27/1, 2004, p. 130 n. 4.

¹⁹ *Zab mo nang don rang ’grel*, 382₄₋₅: “[The ālayavijñāna] is the root of all obscurations; it is what is to be destroyed by *buddhajñāna*”...*sgrib pa thams cad kyi rtsa ba sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kyis gzhom par bya ba yin no |*

– that are conducive to goal-realisation differ from the primordially pure nature of mind, which is the state of realisation itself. Rang byung rdo rje also advocated a key distinction between supramundane mind (*'jigs rten las 'das pa'i sems : lokottaracitta*) and mundane mind – the ālayavijñāna with its eightfold consciousness (*kun gzhi tshogs brgyad*) – in his *Zab mo nang don* with reference to **Mahāyānasamgraha* 1.45–48²⁰ as well as in his *Dharmadhātustava* commentary to stanza 46ab, which states that mind is observed to have two aspects, the mundane and transmudane.²¹ The idea that there is a mode of consciousness more fundamental than ālayavijñāna was implicit in the distinction between ālayavijñāna and supramundane mind that was famously elaborated in the above-mentioned **Mahāyānasamgraha* passage (MS 1.45–48).²²

Sthiramati drew a similar distinction between ālayavijñāna and the supramundane *jñāna* (*lokottarajñāna : jigs rten las 'das pa'i ye shes*) which overturns or replaces it (*parāvṛtti*) in his commentary on *Triṃśikā* 29–30.²³ Building on the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje's distinction between pure and impure minds, the Karma pa's commentator Dwags ram pa Chos rgyal bstan pa (1449–1524) had reaffirmed that the so-called pure mind (*dag pa'i sems*) which is identified as the causal continuum (*rgyu rgyud*) of tantrism and pure all-ground wisdom (*dag pa kun gzhi ye shes*) is to be differentiated from the ālayavijñāna, which constitutes impure mind (*sems ma dag pa'i kun gzhi rnam shes*).²⁴ Citing MS 1.45–48 in support of this view, he further notes that “this MS text specifically characterises the ālayavijñāna as the basis of sentient being (*sems can gyi gnas*) but says it is *not* the cause of *nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyu*).”²⁵ But if this is the case, what does produce the qualities of purification (*rnam par byang ba'i chos : vyavadānadharma*)? To this rejoinder, Dwags ram pa answers that “the entire range of qualities of purification depend on the all-ground wisdom (*kun gzhi ye shes*), the aforementioned pure mind.”²⁶ He goes on to criticise certain Sa skya Lam 'bras followers who, having neither seen nor heard the MS passages cited above, assert that the ālayavijñāna is the causal continuum all-ground (*kun gzhi rgyu rgyud*), thereby exhibiting their own hidden flaws (of interpretation).²⁷

²⁰ *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, p. 44; R. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p. 218 and n. 28 and K. Mathes, *A Direct Path...*, p. 58.

²¹ *Chos dbyings bstod pa'i 'grel pa*, 61 ff., which comments on *Dharmadhātustava* 46ab: *sems nyid rnam pa gnyis su mthong | ci ltar 'jig rten 'jig rten 'das ||* For a diplomatic edition of the original Sanskrit text, see *Dharmadhātustava. The Dharmadhātustava. A Critical Edition of the Sanskrit Text with the Tibetan and Chinese Translations, a Diplomatic Transliteration of the Manuscript and Notes*, Liu Zhen (ed.), China Tibetology Research Centre/Austrian Academy of Sciences, Sanskrit, texts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region no. 17. Beijing, Vienna 2015.

²² R. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p. 215 and K. Mathes, *A Direct Path...*, p. 58.

²³ *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (VMS), p. 44; cf. R. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p. 218 and n. 28.

²⁴ *Zab mo nang don sems kyi rnam par thar pa'i gsal ba'i rgyan*, MKsb vol. 12, 107₁–108₁ et passim.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 111₅₋₆: *theg bsdus kyi gzhung 'dis kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa ni sems can gyi gnas khyad par can du brjod la | mya ngan las 'das pa'i rgyu ni ma yin par brjod do |*

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 111₆–112₁: *rnam par byang ba'i chos ji snyed pa ni sngar brjod pa'i dag pa'i sems kun gzhi ye shes la brten pa ste |*

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 114₃₋₄.

It is in the light of such developments that one can assess Mi bskyod rdo rje's own interpretations of Rang byung rdo rje's distinction between pure and impure minds. A striking example is his *Reply to the Queries of Bla ma khams pa Concerning "One Person, Two Minds"* (*Bla ma khams pa 'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*), where he builds upon Rang byung rdo rje's distinction to clarify and validate his own differentiation between innate mind (*gnyug ma 'i sems*) and adventitious mind (*glo bur gyi sems*).²⁸ This short text (edited and translated in the Appendix below) offers a lucid summary of the Eighth Karma pa's views in support of "a certain [unspecified] person's assertion that two minds exist separately and non-convergently within every sentient being."²⁹ We can detect in the Karma pa's affirmative answer – he deems this assertion to be fully "in accord with the enlightened intent of all the buddhas of the three times" – his characteristic blending of the key distinctions concerning buddha nature and the nature of mind that are integral elements of his interpretative standpoint.

To abridge the main points, Mi bskyod rdo rje begins by noting that Rang byung rdo rje explained in his *Zab mo nang don* auto-commentary that mind has both pure and impure modes, and that this is described in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV I.47) according to the three phases of impure, pure-impure and completely pure. As the Eighth Karma pa explains, the pure mode refers to self-aware wisdom free from obscurations (*sgrib bral rang rig pa 'i ye shes*), whereas the "impure" refers to mundane consciousness that is deluded ignorance along with its obscurations (*sgrib bcas rmongs pa ma rig pa 'i rnam par shes pa*). To sharpen the contrast between pure (innate) and impure (adventitious) modes of consciousness, he redeploys a distinction that was widely used by realist Buddhist philosophical schools: "when these are [taken] metaphorically as different 'entities', the former is the substantially existing entity (*rdzas yod kyi dngos po : dravyasat vastu*)³⁰ whereas the latter is a nominally existing entity (*btags yod kyi dngos po : prajñaptisat vastu*). This is because the former is buddha nature – innate, self-originated, and innately undeluded, whereas the

²⁸ Rheingans 2008 contains a short discussion of this text (220–221). The identity of the Bla ma khams pa is unknown, the colophon mentioning only that the text was composed in reply to a question by Bla ru bla ma, uncle and nephew (*bla ru bla ma khu dbon*) (J. Rheingans, *The Eighth Karmapa's Life and his Interpretation of the Great Seal*, unpublished PhD thesis, Bristol, p. 219 n. 9).

²⁹ *Bla ma khams pa 'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, MKsb vol. 3, 220₁₋₂: 'o na sems can thams cad la sems gnyis ma 'dres par so sor yod pa de su zhig gis bzhed snyam na... See also Appendix for translation and edited edition of this text.

³⁰ In Sarvastivāda Abhidharma philosophy, substantially existing entities are ultimate simples, anything that cannot be reduced either physically or conceptually into smaller units, such as indivisible particles of matter and indivisible moments of time. By contrast, nominally existing entities are anything physically or conceptually constructed that are therefore imputed and reducible to smaller units. The former are dharmas and possess intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). The latter are not dharmas, being without intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*). Cf. *Abhidharmakośa* 6.4. According to this view, only momentary entities are substantially real, whereas the temporal series formed by them (*santāna*) are only nominally existing. Cf. A. Rospatt, *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness: a Survey of the Origins and Early Phase of this Doctrine up to Vasubandhu*, Stuttgart 1995, p. 97; R.P. Hayes, *Principled Atheism in the Buddhist Scholastic Tradition*, [in:] *Indian Philosophy: A Collection of Readings*, R.W. Perrett (ed.), New York 2001, p. 113 (Originally published in "Journal of Indian Philosophy" 16 (1) 1988). It is worth noting that in Madhyamaka philosophy, all dharmas are nominally existent and none are substantially existent.

latter is the chaff [i.e. superfluous] part – adventitious defilement, innately deluded, and saṃsāric.”³¹

In line with this linguistic convention, he goes on to say that when the sun of non-deluded wisdom which is substantially existent dawns, the dark shroud of the deluded nominally existent consciousness is dispelled. The Karma pa concludes that those who want to awaken to unsurpassed, complete and perfect buddhahood must accept innate mind and reject adventitious mind without mixing or confusing the two. “This is so,” he maintains, “because the goal of complete purification is not attained by any path apart from that and because when one takes as a cause what is not a cause,³² despite one’s exertions, there is only exhaustion that is fruitless [i.e. has no result].”³³

Now, in regard to the authentic or innate mind (*gnyug ma’i sems*) which equated with buddha nature in the mind-streams of sentient beings, the author describes it as a “boundless complex that is indivisible into the categories of ‘consciousness’ and ‘wisdom’.”³⁴ On the other hand, he continues, “the mind of adventitious stains may have been arbitrarily described using the terms ‘wisdom’ or ‘consciousness’: extensively, as the eightfold ensemble (Yogācāra); more concisely as the sixfold ensemble (non-Yogācāra) and, most succinctly, as nothing more than a single complex because it is a limited cognition that sees a limited object of knowledge.”³⁵

3. The problem of reconciling differentiation and unity

At this point, a question unavoidably arises: “if the innate and adventitious minds exist separately but nonconvergently in the continuum of a single individual, does this not contradict [Sgam po pa’s] precept that ‘thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*’?”³⁶ In other words, if ordinary thoughts are fundamentally distinct from *dharmakāya* – as would appear to follow from the sharp distinctions drawn between innate and adventitious mind streams, and between buddha nature and adventitious stains – this would seem at first glance to preclude Sgam po pa’s assertion that thoughts are in essence not different from *dharmakāya*. The ramifications of this question are far-reaching. For if these two central doctrines turn out to be mutually contradictory, does this not

³¹ *Bla ma khams pa’i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, MKsb vol. 3, 221₁₋₃: ‘di nyid kyang tha snyad du dngos po tha dad pa las | snga ma ni rdzas yod kyi dngos po dang | phyi ma ni btags yod kyi dngos po yin te | snga ma ni gnyug ma rang byung lhan cig skyes pa ma ’khrul pa bde gshegs snying po dang | phyi ma ni glo bur gyi dri ma lhan cig skyes pa ’khrul pa ’khor ba shun pa’i cha yin pa’i phyir ro |

³² That is, if one takes the adventitious mind as the cause or basis of awakening.

³³ *Bla ma khams pa’i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*, MKsb vol. 3, 221₅: ...rgyu min la rgyur bzung nas ’bad kyang ngal ba ’bras bu med pa nyid kyi phyir |

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 221₅: ...rnam shes dang ye shes kyi ris su bye ba med pa tshogs mtha’ yas...

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 221₆–222₁: glo bur dri ma’i sems ni ye shes sam rnam shes ming gang rung du brjod kyang rung | mang na tshogs brgyad dang nyung na tshogs drug dang | ches bsdud na tshogs gcig las ’da’ ba med de | shes bya nyi tshes mthong ba’i shes pa nyi tshes ba yin pa’i phyir | |

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 222₁: ’o na gang zag gcig gi rgyud la gnyug ma dang glo bur gyi sems gnyis ma ’dres par so sor yod na rnam rtog chos skur smra ba dang ’gal’ lo zhes na | ^atext: ’ga’

point to a fundamental incompatibility, or even incommensurability, between the differentiation and unity models of goal-realisation?

Mi bskyod rdo rje's response to this quandary, cryptic though it is, gives important clues on the specific type of unity (*yuganaddha*) model he endorses and how it can resolve the apparent inconsistencies: "There is no contradiction," he replies, "because the thoughts of adventitious mind do not exist as fundamentally different from the *dharmakāya* of innate mind, but that mind which exists only as conceptual superimposition, therefore has no independent existence, even *conventionally*, apart from *dharmakāya*. Hence 'thoughts themselves are indeed *dharmakāya*'."³⁷ The author further clarifies this doctrine in his MA commentary: "When this Madhyamaka view [of Dwags po Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā] is born in one's mind-stream, it is called 'eliciting natural awareness' (*tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad*) or 'directly realising *dharmakāya*' (*chos sku mngon sum du byas*). When it is realised that the phenomenal (*chos can*), such a sprout and the thoughts [about it], are not established [as anything] apart from their nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*), this was termed the 'arising of thoughts as *dharmakāya*'. "³⁸ Put simply, thoughts *are dharmakāya* in the specific sense that they are phenomenal (*chos can*) expressions of the nature of phenomena (*chos nyid*): they are discursive superimpositions which both derive and deviate from their prediscursive source.

Returning to the dialogue, Bla ma Khams pa next asks what is meant by "innate mind," to which the Karma pa answers that it is natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) in one's own mind-stream in the present moment. In response to the ensuing question of whether the "two minds" thesis makes claims (in tantric and Siddha discourses) about the inseparability (*dbyer med*) or equality (*mnyam nyid*) of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* problematic, he replies "this is not a problem, because phenomena of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds are both conventionally alike in being separate and nonconvergent", and yet they are inseparable inasmuch as "the very nature of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds is ultimately present as a great openness and equality, inseparable in their freedom from discursive elaborations." To summarise, Mi bskyod rdo rje advocates a model of unity (*yuganaddha*) characterised by an asymmetrical priority relation between the terms of the relation: adventitious mind is inseparable from innate mind insofar as it exists only nominally, that is, as a superfluous superimposition or epiphenomenon that resolves into the innate mind – i.e. its very nature, *dharmakāya* – at the time of goal-realisation. Until such time, these two modes are present *concurrently but nonconvergently* in the mind-streams of sentient beings.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 222₁₋₃: ...mi 'gal te | glo bur gyi sems rnam rtog de gnyug ma'i sems chos sku las rdzas gzhan du med cing rtog pas btags pa tsam du yod pa'i sems de ni chos sku las gzhan tha snyad du 'ang rang dbang pa min pa'i phyir | rnam rtog nyid chos skur gyur to ||

³⁸ Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta, 12₂₋₆: 'di'i dbu ma'i lta ba rgyud la skyes pa na tha mal gyi shes pa mngon du mdzad ces pa dang | chos sku mngon sum du byas zer ba dang | chos can myu gu dang rnam rtog sogs de dag de'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtogs pa na rnam rtog chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas |...

4. Clarifying the relationship between consciousness and wisdom

The Eighth Karma pa elsewhere consecrates considerable attention to another key distinction, between consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*), which played a central role in the Third Karma pa's tantric and non-tantric Mahāyāna exegesis. The sixth chapter of Rang byung rdo rje's *Zab mo nang gi don*, a detailed exposition on body, mind and cosmos according to the Highest Yoga tantras (*bla na med pa'i rnal 'byor gyi rgyud*), is devoted to clarifying the complex relationship between *rnam shes* and *ye shes* and the transition between them.³⁹ The distinction is further clarified in his *Treatise on Distinguishing Consciousness and Wisdom* (*rnam shes ye shes 'byed pa'i bstan bcos*),⁴⁰ which details the fundamental transformation of the eightfold consciousness into the four modes of wisdom as elaborated in *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* IX.67 f. (and IX.42 f.),⁴¹ which was expanded to five in the *Kālacakra* and other Higher Yoga tantras.⁴²

The distinction between *vijñāna* (*rnam shes*) and *jñāna* (*ye shes*) has a long history in Indian Buddhism,⁴³ an early and influential example being its occurrence as the fourth of four “recourses” (*pratisaraṇa* : *rton pa*) of textual hermeneutics – namely, the injunction “to rely on wisdom, not on consciousness” – which were outlined in the *Catuhpratisaraṇasūtra* and widely quoted from the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* onward.⁴⁴ In this regard, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* comments that the four truths are not understood merely through discursive knowledge (*vijñāna*) gained by study and

³⁹ Cf. Rang byung rdo rje, RDSb vol. 7, 355 f.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. 7, pp. 269–276. For a translation of this treatise, along with Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas' commentary, cf. Brunnhölzl 2009.

⁴¹ The classification of four states of mind – waking, dreaming, deep sleep and the fourth state – can be traced to the Upaniṣads, and is a major theme of the *Mandukya Upaniṣad*. It has been suggested that the *Kālacakra* association of the first three states with the three *guṇas/doṣas* of Brahmanical Sāṃkhya and Ayurvedic systems – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* respectively – represents one of its many striking similarities with Indian non-Buddhist systems, especially nondual Kāśmīr Śaivaite tantrism. A crucial difference, however, is that the Śaivaite tantras portray the fourth state of self-realisation in which one realises the essential Self (*ātman*) and thereby transcends ignorance, whereas the *Kālacakra* specifies that the fourth state, although nondual at the time of sexual emission, is still tainted by latent tendencies of ignorance, and must therefore be eliminated in order to attain wisdom (*jñāna*) and supreme bliss (*mahāsukha*). Cf. V.A. Wallace, *The Inner Kālacakratānta a Buddhist Tantric View of the Individual*, New York 2001, pp. 36–38, 156–157 et passim.

⁴² Cf. K. Mathes, *op.cit.*, p. 262 f.

⁴³ The reviewer of this paper pointed out that this distinction also has a long history in the Brāhmaṇical tradition and can be traced at least as far back as the epic literature. There, “when *vijñāna* and *jñāna* are opposed, the first is usually the ordinary knowledge, whereas the second is the supramunane knowledge of the true nature of things (*ātman*, God etc.)” (from reviewer's comments).

⁴⁴ The classic study of these four principles, literally “recourses” (*pratisaraṇa* : *rton pa*), is É. Lamotte, *The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism*, “Buddhist Studies Review” 1985, vol. 2, no. 1. There he renders *vijñāna* as “discursive consciousness” and *jñāna* as “direct knowledge”. The fourth recourse was said to encompass the first three: [1] rely on the teachings, not the person; [2] rely on the meanings, not the words; [3] rely on definitive meanings, not provisional meanings.

reflection, but through direct knowledge (*jñāna*) based on meditation.⁴⁵ Mention should also be made of Candrakīrti's distinction in the *Prasannapadā* (on MMK XXV.16) between *jñāna* (*ye shes*) and *vijñāna* (*rnam shes*) which La Valleé Poussin, in his critical edition of MMK, glosses as “intuitif” and “discursif” respectively.⁴⁶ However, as with the parallel distinctions between *sems/sems nyid*, *sems/ye shes* and *sems/rig pa* that are also extensively developed in Rnying ma exegesis, the search for Indian antecedents typically turns up only scattered references, and seldom the kind of rigorous philosophical treatment that such distinctions received in the hands of their Tibetan interpreters, especially those in the Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma schools.

In a number of exegetical contexts, Mi bskyod rdo rje protests that the distinction between ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes* : *vijñāna*) and wisdom (*ye shes* : *jñāna*) was not always adequately drawn in Indian texts, and deems this to be a source of significant confusion. A case in point is his objection in his *Madhyamakāvātāra* (MA) commentary to the tendency he observes in classical Yogācāra-Cittamātra texts (unfortunately these are not specified) to confuse the definitions of consciousness (*rnam shes*) and wisdom (*ye shes*), thereby blurring the difference between them. He hints that this tradition's lack of terminological specificity and vagueness regarding the criteria which are sufficient or necessary for the application of terms referring to dualistic and nondualistic modes of cognition may be attributed to its proclivity to treat mind as a real entity. Of the Alīkākāravāda Cittamātra thinkers, he says “since you did not grasp the essential and specific properties⁴⁷ of what is meant by “apprehended-apprehending” and thus took [it] as the meaning of “consciousness” (*rnam shes*) or “awareness” (*rig pa*), you imputed that which is only [ordinary] knowledge (*shes pa*) to “wisdom” (*ye shes*) and proceeded to aggrandise it to [the status of] a truly established ultimate.”⁴⁸ The author proceeds to offer a genealogical analysis of the roots of this lack of terminological specificity in Indian Cittamātra works, and relates this to the problems faced by Tibetan translators of Buddhist terms for cognition:

Thus, there are limitless terms in Cittamātra texts for [nondual knowledge], some calling it nondual knowing (*gnyis med kyi shes pa*), some calling it nondual wisdom (*gnyis med kyi ye shes*), some calling it mere knowledge without duality (*gnyis su med pa'i shes pa tsam*) and some [others] calling it nondual mind and awareness (*gnyis med kyi blo dang rig pa*). Should one think “what is the point of such occurrences?”, the verbal root *jñā* was rendered as knowledge (*shes pa*) or restricted to transcendent knowledge (*mkhyen pa*),⁴⁹ while the terms *saṃjñāna* and *vijñāna* [etc.] were rendered according to context as correct knowledge (*yang dag par shes pa*), thorough knowledge (*kun nas shes pa*), elevated knowledge (*rab tu shes pa*), consciousness

⁴⁵ This paraphrases the passage from *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BBh, 257) as translated in É. Lamotte, *The Assessment of Textual Interpretation...*, p. 24 n. 43.

⁴⁶ MMK, 533.8–17. We thank Dr Anne MacDonald for first drawing our attention to this passage. Cf. A. MacDonald, *Knowing Nothing: Candrakīrti and Yogic Perception* [in:] *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*, E. Franco, D. Eigner (ed.), Wien 2009, pp. 163–164.

⁴⁷ We have taken *ngo khyad* as a coordinative compound for *ngo bo dang khyad par*.

⁴⁸ *Dwags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta*, 33₁₋₃; *gzung 'dzin gyi don gyi ngo khyad 'dzin pa med pas rnam shes sam rig pa'i don la zhugs pas shes tsam de la ye shes su btags nas de don dam bden grub tu rlom pa...*

⁴⁹ *Mkhyen pa* is the honorific of *shes pa* and refers to the special knowledge of a realised *arhant* or *buddha*.

(*rnam par shes pa*), wisdom (*ye shes*) and so forth. Apart from [such cases], neither the classical scriptures nor the grammatical [treatises] etc. [said] anything at all about the need to lexically delimit cases where “mind” or “cognition” in Cittamātra accounts referred to [ordinary] consciousness (*rnam shes*) and where “mind” or “cognition” in Madhyamaka accounts referred to “wis-dom” (*ye shes*). Therefore, since “consciousness” could have the sense of the term “wis-dom”, while “wisdom” could have the sense of the term “consciousness”, it was not [observed] that the applications of these two definitions are completely in-compatible [with one another].⁵⁰

Mi bskyod rdo rje here identifies semantic vagueness, specifically *critical vagueness*, as a source of certain basic category errors pertaining to the nature and structure of human cognition.⁵¹ His student and secretary Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1566) adds to this assessment his own observation that early Tibetan translators (during the Royal Dynastic Period, ca. 7th–9th c. CE) found it necessary to variously render *jñāna* as *shes pa* (“cognition”) or *rnam shes* (“consciousness”) when describing the cognition of a sentient being, and as *ye shes* (“primordial knowing”) when describing the cognition of a buddha, there being no such difference conspicuous in the original term:

In general, there were imperial edicts requiring scholar-translators to translate the term *jñāna* as *rnam shes* or *shes pa* when referring to the cognition of a sentient being or as *ye shes* when referring to the cognition of a buddha, despite there being no [such] distinction [specified] in the original [Sanskrit] term... Hence, the debate over whether or not buddhas have *jñāna* is a parochial way of thinking. From the standpoint of the *pratyaवेक्षणा*[*jñāna*], they cannot be imputed as *not* having it, while from the standpoint of the *dharmadhātujñāna*, they cannot be imputed as having it.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Dwags brgyud grub pa 'i shing rta*, 34₁₋₁₃: *des na sems tsam gyi gzhung la lar gnyis med kyi shes pa dang | la lar gnyis med kyi ye shes dang | la lar gnyis su med pa 'i shes pa dang | la lar gnyis med kyi blo dang rig pa zhes sogs mtha' klas par 'byung la | de ltar 'byung ba 'i gnaad ci snyam na | jñā zhes pa shes pa'am mkhyen pa tsam la 'jog pa dang | sam jñā na dang bi jñā na zhes 'byung ba yang dag par shes pa dang | kun nas shes pa dang | rab tu shes pa dang | rnam par shes pa dang | ye shes sogs skabs thob kyis sbyar ba ma gtogs sems tsam pa 'dod pa 'i sems sam shes pa la rnam shes zhes nges bzung gi sgra sbyor dgos pa dang | dbu ma pa 'dod pa 'i sems sam shes pa la ye shes kyi sgra sbyor dgos pa 'i nges bzung gsung rab dang sgra rig sogs 'gar yang med do | des na rnam shes kyang ye shes sgra don can yin la | ye shes kyang rnam shes kyi sgra don can yin pas | de gnyis sgra don 'jug pa gtan 'gal ba ni ma yin no ||*

⁵¹ As Philip Devos argues, semantic vagueness is an inherent semantic language phenomenon. That is, it is a *language* phenomenon, and not an extra-linguistic one, given that vagueness cannot be imputed to objects or the world. And it is a *semantic* phenomenon, not a pragmatic one (i.e. the intentional use of semantic vagueness, for example the use of “collateral damage” as a euphemism for state-sanctioned manslaughter). Cf. Devos 2003, 123–124. Words are vague when their semantic scope is unclear. This happens in at least these two ways: [1] *vagueness in criteria* – the inherent indeterminacy or uncertainty regarding the criteria used in the application of a word. E.g. what activities are included in “sport”. [2] *vagueness in degree* – the degree or extent that determines when we can or cannot apply words. E.g. when does one become “old”?; how close does someone have to live to be a “neighbour”? Ibid., 124–125. The Eighth Karma pa indeed appears to be claiming that Buddhist terms for cognition, especially as deployed in certain Cittamātra texts, are characterised by criterial vagueness, which is a function not only of their polysemy (multiple possible meanings of a single term) but also their semantic indeterminacy, “a phenomenon in which one single word meaning refers to a segment of reality which is further cognitively divisible and specifiable into smaller and clearer segments” (Devos, *ibid.*, 130).

⁵² *Byang chub sems dpa 'i spyod pa la 'jug pa 'i rnam par bshad pa*, 764.5 f.: *...spyir dznya na 'i sgras sems can gyi shes pa brjod tshes shes pa'am rnam shes dang sangs rgyas kyi shes pa brjod tshes ye shes su bsgyur dgos par lo pan gyis bka' sa bcad pa yin gyi skad dod tha dad med la |...*

In other words, the early Tibetan translators recognised that the polysemy of Indian Buddhist terms for cognition presented early Tibetan translators with a significant problem for translation and understanding so long as the semantic ranges of specific uses of terms were not carefully drawn and the criteria sufficient and necessary for using such terms consistently applied. One way, therefore, that early translators sought to ameliorate this type of semantic indeterminacy was by introducing a number of Tibetan renderings of a single Sanskrit term (*jñāna*, *vidyā* etc.) and employing these variants in translating the terms according to the specific contexts in which they had been used.

For Mi bskyod rdo rje, the distinction between wisdom and consciousness is not only a cornerstone of Buddhist thought and practice in general, but also an indispensable key point in his own Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition's instructions on recognising the nature of mind. The Eighth Karma pa therefore reserved some of his harshest criticisms for those among his coreligionists who had, in his eyes, failed to adequately distinguish the innate and adventitious modalities of consciousness. In the second and final part of this study, I will turn my attention to some of Mi bskyod rdo rje's polemical criticisms of Tibetan scholars, whom he accused of conflating aspects of consciousness with aspects of wisdom.

Appendix

Translation and critical edition of mi bskyod rdo rje's *two minds in one person? A reply to the queries of bla ma khams pa* (*bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: This short text addresses the question of whether a single person has two distinct modes of consciousness. The Karma pa answers affirmatively that a single human being does indeed possess two concurrent yet nonconvergent mind-streams: an innate mind (*gnyug ma'i sems*), which is “innate, self-originated, and innately undeluded” and identified with the ever-present buddha nature, and an adventitious mind (*glo bur gyi sems*), which is identified with adventitious stains. He adds, however, that the difference between them obtains only so long as the innate mind remains shrouded by adventitious mind. In reality, adventitious mind has no autonomous existence apart from *dharmakāya*, its nature being nothing else, and it dissipates into the latter at the time of realisation. This point of clarification enables the author to maintain a strong conventional distinction between innate and adventitious minds while at the same time upholding Sgam po pa's precept that thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*. It also makes room for the Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna principle that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* (and the kinds of minds constitutive of each) are ultimately inseparable, both being beyond elaborations (*spros bral*).

The only known and extant edition of the *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis* was used in preparing the following translation and critical text:

MKsb: *Mi bskyod rdo rje gsung 'bum*, vol. 3, pp. 219–23.

3a. English Translation of *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*

*Two Minds in One Person? A Reply to the Queries of Bla ma khams pa*⁵³

I prostrate to Śrī Mahāmudrā for the sake of conveying this heart-lancet treatise on the unmingled coexistence of two minds in the continuum of all sentient beings.

Now if one thinks about a certain person's assertion that two minds exist separately and nonconvergently within every sentient being, this assertion is identical with the intent of all the buddhas of the three times. This was declared with the same voice by the 'Bri gung pa 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po, and it was also asserted by the Great Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje. According to [his] commentary on the root text of the *Zab mo nang don*, the pure is described as mind and the impure is [also] described as mind.⁵⁴ As for explaining the first of these two, [the *Ratnagoṭṭravibhāga* 1.47] states:

⁵³ This figure's identity remains unknown. See note 28.

⁵⁴ This is a paraphrase of a passage in *Zab mo nang don rang 'grel*, RDsb vol. 7, 382₂₋₃: “[Mind] is explained in many ways among the tantras and treatises. It is described as that possessing purity. In

According to the phases of being impure,
Partly pure and partly impure, and completely pure,
One speaks of a sentient being, a bodhisattva
And a Tathāgata [Thus-gone].

To explain the second, [the *Zab mo nang don* 1.1] states:

As for the cause, it is the beginningless nature of mind,
Although uncurtailed in scope and not falling into bias,
From [the perspective of] its unimpeded play,
It is empty in essence, luminous in nature and
Unimpeded in aspects, manifesting as anything.
[Thus,] it does not recognise itself by itself.⁵⁵ [221]

In terms of this explanation, the first mind is self-aware wisdom free from obscurations. The second is consciousness that is delusional ignorance possessing obscurations.

[Now,] from these being conventionally [taken as] different “entities”, the former is the substantially existing entity (*rdzas yod kyi dngos po : dravyasat vastu*),⁵⁶ whereas the latter is a nominally existing entity (*btags yod kyi dngos po : prajñaptisat vastu*). This is because the former is buddha nature – innate, self-originated, and innately undeluded, whereas the latter is the chaff [i.e. superfluous] part – adventitious defilement, innately deluded, and saṃsāric. Now, in terms of linguistic convention, when the sun of undeluded substantially existing wisdom dawns, the dark shroud of deluded nominally existing consciousness is dispelled. When those who want to awaken to unsurpassed, complete and perfect buddhahood engage in accepting and rejecting these two “minds” [respectively] without mixing them up, by this training, they are fully awakened. This is so because the result of complete purification is not attained by any path apart from that and because when one takes as a cause what is not a cause,⁵⁷ despite one’s exertions, there is only exhaustion that is fruitless [i.e. has no result].

Now, the mind that is buddha nature in the mind-streams of sentient beings is a limitless and immeasurable whole that is indivisible into categories of “consciousness” and “wisdom”. However, the adventitious mind may have been arbitrarily described using the terms “wisdom” or “consciousness”: if [described] extensively, it is

describing the impure as ‘mind’, it is what is called ālayavijñāna.” ...*rgyud dang bstan bcos rnam las kyang mang du gsungs pa ni dag pa dang bcas pa brjod pa yin no | | ma dag pa la sems su brjod pa ni kun gzhi ’i nam par shes pa zhes gsung pa gang yin pa ste |*

⁵⁵ *Zab mo nang gi don*, RDsb vol. 7, 311₁₋₂.

⁵⁶ In *Abhidharma*, the substantially existing entity is any ultimate *simple*, anything that cannot be reduced either physically or conceptually into smaller units, whereas the nominally existing entity is anything physically or conceptually constructed that is therefore superfluous and reducible to smaller units. The former are *dharmas* and possess intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). The latter are not *dharmas*, being without intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*). Cf. AK 6.4. According to this view, only momentary entities are substantially real, whereas the temporal series formed by them (*santāna*) has only nominal existence. Cf. A. Rospatt, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

⁵⁷ That is, “if one takes the adventitious mind as the cause or basis of awakening...”.

the eightfold constellation [of Yogācāra traditions]; if more concisely, it is the sixfold constellation [of non-Yogācāra traditions], and if most succinctly, it is nothing more than a single constellation because it is a partial cognition that sees a partial object of knowledge.

Query: Well then, if the innate and adventitious minds exist separately and non-convergent in the continuum of a single individual, does this not contradict [Sgam po pa's] precept that “thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*”? *Reply:* There is no contradiction because the thoughts of adventitious mind do not exist as substantially other than the *dharmakāya* of innate mind, but that mind which exists only as conceptual imputations therefore has no independent existence, even conventionally, apart from *dharmakāya*. Thus “thoughts themselves are *dharmakāya*.”

Query: What, then, is the innate mind? *Reply:* It is simply this natural awareness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) in one's own mind-stream in the present moment.

Query: How is it now made manifest given that it has gone into the cover of adventitious mind that is deluded and contrived? *Reply:* Having put in place the set of relationships (*rten 'brel*) which separate the pure essence from the dregs so that all the contrived phenomena stemming from the contrived, deluded mind resolve into their source, this set of relationships falls into place naturally on its own.⁵⁸ Then that innate mind which is uncontrived and free from delusion manifests.

Query: Well then, if the two minds exist separately and nonconvergently, isn't it a problem to explain *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as being inseparable or equal? *Reply:* This is not a problem because both phenomena of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds are conventionally equal in being separate and nonconvergent. But as for their inseparability, the very nature of the *saṃsāric* and *nirvāṇic* minds is ultimately present as a great openness and equality, inseparable in their freedom from discursive elaborations.

These words were [conveyed] in answer to questions relating to [the issue of] two minds^[223] posed by Bla ru Bla ma uncle and nephew (*khu dbon*). By the virtue of the composition of [this response] by Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje in Zul phud,⁵⁹ I pray that innate mind may emerge from the sheath of adventitious defilements. One [question] asked. Ask another one!

⁵⁸ Here, the Karma pa seems to be saying that by arranging or putting in place (*bsgrigs*; the *tha dad pa* verb form) the set of interdependent processes (*rten 'brel*) that enable one to separate the pure essence of innate mind from the dregs of adventitious mind, this set of processes falls into place (*'grig pa*; the *tha mi dad pa* verb form) or unfolds naturally on its own. In other words, the voluntary gives way to the involuntary.

⁵⁹ This may refer to Zul phu, the seat of a monastic college (*bshad grwa*) mentioned in 'Gos lo tsā ba's *Deb ther sngon po* (Roerich 1949, 80), which is said to have been founded by the early Vinaya master Bya 'dul 'dzin Brtson 'grus 'bar (1091–1166).

3b. Critical Text of *Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis*

Bla ma khams pa'i dris lan mi gcig sems gnyis gzhugs so || _[220]

sems can thams cad kyi rgyud la sems gnyis ma 'dres par yod pa'i bstan bcos snying gi thur ma 'di brjod pa'i ched du dpal phyag rgya chen po la phyag 'tshal lo || 'o na sems can thams cad la sems gnyis ma 'dres par so sor yod pa de su zhig gis bzhed snyam na bzhed pa de ni dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyi dgongs pa gcig tu gnas pa de 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po 'bri gung pas dbyangs gcig gis gsung la | de nyid karma pa chen po rang byung rdo rjes kyang bzhed de | *zab mo nang don rtsa 'grel* las | dag pa la sems su bshad pa dang ma dag pa la sems su bshad pa gnyis las | dang po 'chad pa na |

ma dag ma dag dag pa dang ||
shin tu rnam dag go rim bzhin ||
sems can byang chub sems dpa' dang ||
de bzhin gshegs pa zhes brjod do ||

zhes dang || gnyis pa 'chad pa na |

rgyu ni sems can thog med pa ||
rgya chad phyogs lhung ma mchis kyang ||
de nyid ma 'gags rol pa las ||
ngo bo stong la rang bzhin gsal ||
rnam pa 'gag⁶⁰ med cir yang 'char ||
de nyid rang gis rang ma rig ||

ces _[221] 'byung ba'i phyir | sems dang po ni sgrib bral rang rig pa'i ye shes dang | gnyis pa ni sgrib bcas rmongs la ma rig pa'i rnam par shes pa'o ||

'di nyid kyang tha snyad du dngos po tha dad pa las | snga ma ni rdzas yod kyi dngos po dang | phyi ma ni btags yod kyi dngos po yin te | snga ma ni gnyug ma rang byung lhan cig skyes pa ma 'khrul pa bde gshegs snying po dang | phyi ma ni glo bur gyi dri ma lhan cig skyes pa 'khrul pa 'khor ba shun pa'i cha yin pa'i phyir ro |

'o na tha snyad du rdzas yod ma 'khrul pa'i ye shes kyi nyi ma shar ba na btags yod 'khrul pa rnam shes kyi mun pa drungs nas 'byin pa'i phyir | bla na med par yang dag par rdzogs par 'tshang rgya bar 'dod pa dag gis sems gnyis po 'di ma 'dres par blang dor du byas nas bslab pa de dag gis mngon par byang chub ste | de las gzhan pa'i lam gang gis kyang 'bras bu rnam par dag pa thob par mi 'gyur ba'i phyir te | rgyu min la rgyur bzung nas 'bad kyang ngal ba 'bras bu med pa nyhid kyi phyir | des na sems can gyi rgyud kyi bdeg gshegs snying po'i sems ni rnam shes dang ye shes kyi ris su dbye ba med pa tswhogs mtha' yas pa dang gzhal du med pa yin la | glo bur dri

⁶⁰ Ms.: 'gal; *Zab mo nang don*: 'gag

ma'i sems ni ye shes sam nram shes ming gang rung du brjod kyang rung | mang na tshogs brgyad dang nyung na tshogs drug dang | ches bsdus na tshogs gcig las 'da' pa med de | shes ^[222] bya nyi tshe ba mthong ba'i shes pa nyi tshe ba yin pa'i phyir |

'o na gang zag gcig gi rgyud la gnyug ma dang glo bur gyi sems gnyis ma 'dres pa so sor yod na nram rtog nyid chos skur smra ba dang 'gal⁶¹ lo zhes na mi 'gal te | glo bur gyi sems nram rtog de gnyug ma'i sems chos sku las rdzas gzhan du med cing rtog pas btags pa tsam du yod pa'i sems de ni chos sku las gzhan tha snyad du'ang rang dbang du grub pa min pa'i phyir | nram rtog nyid chos skur gyur to ||

'o na gnyug ma'i sems ni gang zhe na de ni da ltar rang rgyud kyi tha mal gyi shes pa 'di'o | 'di la 'khrul bcas bcos ma glo bur gyi sems kyi klubs su chud pas da ji ltar mngon du bya snyam na | 'khrul bcas bcos ma'i sems 'di'i bcos chos 'di kun ma bcos ar drungs su bcug pa'i dvangs snyigs⁶² phye ba'i rten 'brel bsgrigs nas rten 'brel de rang babs su 'grig pa na 'khrul bral ma bcos gnyug ma'i sems de 'char ba yin no ||

'o na sems gnyis so sor ma 'dres par yod na 'khor 'das dbyer med dam mnyam nyid du bshad pas skyon no zhe na mi skyon te | 'khor 'das kyi⁶³ sems kyi chos can gnyis ka kun rdzob du⁶⁴ so sor ma 'dres pa mnyam zhing | dbyer med kyang 'khor 'das kyi sems kyi chos nyid don dam par spros bral du dbyer med mnyam pa nyid gdal ba chen por grub pa'i phyir | zhes bya ba 'di bla ru bla ma khu dbon gyis ^[223] sems gnyis la brten pa'i dri lan du | karma pa mi bskyod rdo rjes zul phud du sbyar ba'i dge bas 'gro ba thams cad kyi gnyug ma'i sems glo bur dri ma'i spun nas thon pa'i phyir bsngo'o || gcig gzhus so | yang gcig zhus ||

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D: Derge edition of Bstan 'gyur, *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka*, Taipei Edition, Taipei 1991.

H: *Lhasa edition of the Bstan 'gyur*, Lhasa 1934.

P: Peking edition of Bstan 'gyur. *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka*, Peking Edition, Tokyo/Kyoto 1957.

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⁶¹ Ms.: 'ga'

⁶² Ms.: *snyings*

⁶³ Ms.: *kyis*

⁶⁴ addit. as per *don dam par* on next line.

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Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karma pa VIII.

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