

DOXOGRAPHY AND PHILOSOPHY: THE USAGE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF  
SCHOOL DENOMINATIONS IN RED MDA' BA GZHON NU BLO GROS'  
ORNAMENT OF THE PROOFS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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**W**orks of the genre *grub mtha'* (*siddhānta*) have already been the object of many studies and translations. *Grub mtha'* and *siddānta* are now familiar notions within both Tibetan studies and Buddhist studies, respectively. Consequently, it is not my point here to add another presentation of what a *grub mtha'* is. I rather propose to emphasize the philosophical usage and philosophical significance of certain categories that were fashioned within this genre (and have been used in other genres) to designate doctrinal positions, namely those terms that single out school denominations.<sup>1</sup> Tibetan *grub mtha'* texts present various positions and schools, but mainly focus on the four well-known philosophical schools of *Vaibhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika*, *Cittamātra* and *Madhyamaka*.<sup>2</sup> Those positions or schools are sometimes designated as *siddhānta classification* or *doxographical categories*.<sup>3</sup> Numerous studies have

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<sup>1</sup> The term *school* is a convenient designation and does not presuppose any historical institutionalization of these movements or any self-identification of the authors said to belong to these schools.

<sup>2</sup> There has been a considerable amount of work done to discuss the precise name Tibetan authors give to these schools or their sub-schools, since the way a school is named indicates what philosophical doctrine it is taken to represent, and consequently how it is "ranked" in each author's classification (it may of course also be a mere conventional usage with no special significance). For example, Ye shes sde talks about *Rnam par shes pa tsam* (*vijñāptimātra*) where Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po talks about *rnal 'byor spyod pa* or *sems tsam pa* (*yogācāra* or *cittamātra*). See, respectively, Ruegg 1981 and Mimaki 1977, and the diversity of names that appears in this volume's article by S. Kumagai. I will use the four names of *Vaibhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika*, *Cittamātra* and *Madhyamaka* as a convenient convention to designate the four schools in the general discussion of the problem, even if some authors use different names in their classifications. I leave aside sub-categories such as *mdo sde spyod pa* or *thal 'gyur pa* since these would neither add to nor change my argument.

<sup>3</sup> Such expressions are largely used in Western scholarship when dealing with philosophical texts to designate those schools and positions, such as in Cabezón 1992: 141, Dreyfus and McClintock 2003: 2, and Vose 2009: 10. They have also been employed in other fields of Tibetan studies, such as in Tantric studies (Weinberger 2010 *passim*), Rnying ma pa studies (Germano 2005: 7), or (as expected) in the history of text transmission and canonization (Cantwell 2002: 366). One will also find these expressions employed on internet, on the website of the Tibetan and Himalayan Library, for example, which suggests their widespread employment. These terms have clearly gained usage in Western scholarship well beyond studies on *grub mtha'*, hence I believe that such a phenomenon deserves the attention of scholars working in the field.

shown that these denominations are not historically accurate and result from a desire for categorization that arose subsequent to the arrival in Tibet of a huge body of texts. From this perspective, these denominations are regarded as ways to create order and hierarchy within the dense forest of Buddhist literature and philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The fact that some *grub mtha'* texts have been used in monasteries as introductory manuals to philosophy may be taken as evidence of their playing such a function.<sup>5</sup>

School denominations also appear outside of those texts that properly belong to the *grub mtha'* genre.<sup>6</sup> We find these denominations being used throughout Tibetan doctrinal literature, in treatises pertaining to *Pramāṇa* or *Madhyamaka* as well as to *Cittamātra*<sup>7</sup> and *Prajñāpāramitā*,<sup>8</sup> and even to tantric works.<sup>9</sup> It seems that such a usage of these denominations outside of works properly called *grub mtha'*, despite being obvious for any scholar involved in Tibetan studies, has attracted rather scarce remarks. These non-*grub mtha'* texts are thus the focus of the present paper. I want to show that school denominations can function as more than just labels for classifying opinions, and are used for purposes beyond the desire to

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<sup>4</sup> Or they provide a worldview in which the reader can orient himself. See Hopkins (1996: 182-183): "Though one of the purposes of such presentations of tenets undoubtedly is to create a hierarchical structure that puts one's own system at the top, this genre of literature functions primarily to provide a comprehensive worldview." Cabezón 1990 develops the idea that *grub mtha'* categories produced a "canonization of philosophy" by setting forth four schools circumscribing the field of Buddhist philosophy. Any doctrine outside of these four was to be considered non-Buddhist. The interpretation given in the present article takes a more internalist approach by trying to understand how these categories were fashioned to function as elements of an argument within the texts themselves. This approach emphasizes the dynamic, argumentative, and epistemic aspects of these categories over their classificatory aspect.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, the *Grub mtha' rnam bzhag rin chen phreng ba* of Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po is used as a *yig cha* in 'Bras spungs sgo mang. See Mimaki 1977: 58.

<sup>6</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I consider texts to belong to the *grub mtha'* genre if they display the term *grub mtha'* in their titles.

<sup>7</sup> It is useless to cite examples for *Pramāṇa* or *Madhyamaka* commentaries using school denominations since the practice is so common. As for commentaries on *Cittamātra* texts, one observes this usage in Mipham 2004: 59-65, Rong ston 2008: 37 or the text below.

<sup>8</sup> Many commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* show a preoccupation with different schools and positions. See for example G.yag ston's *Bang mdzod* vol. 2: 43-44, where he presents the conceptions of *Vaibhāṣikas*, *Cittamātras*, and *Mādhyamikas* concerning the presence in different meditational and soteriological states of capacities and qualities (such as faith, attention, pleasure, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> For example Mkhas grub nor bzang rgya mtsho in his commentary of the *Kalacakra tantra* refutes the views of *Vaibhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika*, and *Vijñānavāda* proponents to preserve the *Mādhyamika* view (of Candrakīrti) as the ultimate one, above which no higher tantric view should be placed. See Khedrup Norsang Gyatso 2004: 570-573.

create a worldview or order. They also participate in authentic philosophical inquiries.<sup>10</sup>

Hence there are two issues here. On the one hand, the categories of *Vaibhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika*, *Cittamātra* and *Madhyamaka* are widely used in Tibetan doctrinal literature, even beyond *grub mtha'* texts. On the other hand, they are referred to by Western scholarship in certain ways, ways that naturally condition our contemporary understanding of their function. I therefore want to discuss both the ways in which they have been referred to in Western scholarship and how school denominations function in Tibetan texts. My goal is to open the possibility of an authentically *philosophical* interpretation of these categories, rather than an historical (even pseudo-historical) or a classificatory interpretation.

I will proceed in two parts. First I will discuss the term *doxography* and its derived forms, forms that have come to be associated with school denominations. Second I will present an example of a philosophical work that, to my mind, accurately illustrates the argumentative strategies that school denominations enable Tibetan authors to use.

#### *Grub mtha' categories and the term doxography*

Up to this point, I have retained the Tibetan term *grub mtha'* without translating it into English, for fear of complicating the problem even before laying it out. The term *grub mtha'* generally designates a genre of Tibetan literature that presents the doctrines of a given

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<sup>10</sup> I draw here a distinction between worldview and philosophy. I am conscious that such a distinction is controversial, and that it itself presupposes a certain philosophical orientation. The distinction runs contrary to a certain common contemporary opinion that interprets "philosophy" to be no more than a possible worldview, one among others. It could be argued that philosophy cannot be reduced to a worldview, however. First, one could argue that the procedures and means by which philosophy is practiced (rational inquiry, patient investigation of concepts, questioning presuppositions and common prejudices, including one's own, etc.) set it apart from what are commonly called "worldviews." Worldviews, in contrast, whether secular or religious, are commonly either accepted on the basis of being transmitted and widely acknowledged, or on the basis of personal taste. They are not subject to procedures as are philosophical tenets. Second, one can make the point that philosophy aims to attain the root of being, from which it can properly build its reflection. This is what Plato was after with his proposition that philosophy, contrary to mathematics, is capable of going beyond given hypotheses (it is *anhypothetical*) and of founding its own principles (*Republic*, VI, 510b). Heidegger also reacted firmly against the idea that philosophy was a mere *Weltanschauung* (see *Basic Concepts*, chapters 1-2, in particular p. 2 and 11-12). The idea of the proper task of philosophy expresses, I think, what is at stake in the present paper. I will try to show that school denominations are not merely used to make neat classifications of doctrines that enable students to organize into boxes what would otherwise be a troubling chaos. Rather, these denominations serve as shortcuts to circumscribe positions so as to investigate what there is, what exists really.

number of Indian, and sometimes Tibetan, schools of thought (even including, periodically, Chinese schools of thought).<sup>11</sup> It is often translated as, or equated with, *doxography*.<sup>12</sup> By derivation, the categories used in this genre to classify doctrines under the name of a school (the school denominations) are called *doxographical* (or *doxographic*) *categories*. I believe that interpreting the categories shaped in this genre in light of the notion of doxography may convey a misrepresentation of the function that school denominations play in some Tibetan texts. This is why it seems important to me to first reflect upon the meaning and usage of the word *doxography*. For clarity's sake, I will address the general question of the translation of *grub mtha'* by *doxography*, even though I am primarily interested in the "doxographical categories" present in these works and how these categories are used outside of these works.

It is important to be aware of the scope of the word *doxography*, as it has been the object of several studies in recent decades.<sup>13</sup> The term *doxographus* was coined in 1879 by Hermann Diels, the great German classicist, to name compositions by ancient writers that reported the opinions of other philosophers. Doxographies are works concerned with the *doxai* or *gnômai* (opinions), or the *dogmata* (principles or tenets) of philosophers. However, what is designated as *doxography* is only one of several genres of ancient Greek and Latin literatures that treat the opinions of past and present philosophers. Others include histories of sects (*peri tôn philosophôn haireseôn*), biographies of philosophers (*peri biôn*) and successions of philosophers (*diadochai*).<sup>14</sup> Students and scholars of Tibetan and Indian Buddhism

<sup>11</sup> As, for example, in Thu'u bkwan 2005.

<sup>12</sup> It is not always clear if scholars interpret *grub mtha'* to be roughly equivalent to doxography, translate it thusly for principled reasons, or out of convention. Hopkins directly associates the genre of doxography and the genre of *grub mtha'*, even though he translates the latter by "presentation of tenets": "the genre of doxography called 'presentations of tenets' (\*siddhāntavyavasthāpana, *grub mtha'i rnam bzhag*)" (Hopkins 1996: 170). Lopez cautiously defers to what he considers the common translation: "In Tibetan Buddhist scholastic literature there is a genre called *grub mtha'*, often translated as 'doxography'" (Lopez 1998: 170). Mimaki seems to offer a more straightforward translation of *grub mtha'* as *doxography*: "Dans la littérature tibétaine il existe un genre littéraire appelé « doxographie », *grub mtha'* en tibétain" (Mimaki 1994: 115). Whether these examples constitute genuine translations or not, the mere association of *grub mtha'* with the idea of doxography is what I want to investigate here.

<sup>13</sup> See Brancacci 2005. What follows might seem problematic to some Greek and Latin scholars working on doxography and philosophy, since I am focusing on the opposition between philosophy and doxography. As Brancacci underlines, recent researches have pursued a contrary ambition, to understand doxographical and paradoxographical genres as genres "of philosophical writing itself" (VIII). But I think that there is a genuine difference between interpreting school denominations in Tibetan texts as doxographical categories versus philosophical categories. The difference between doxography and philosophy should therefore be maintained in our context. I will return to this matter in the conclusion.

<sup>14</sup> Gueroult 1984: 47-48.

should therefore be careful translating *grub mtha'* / *siddhānta* as *doxography*, since the word *doxography* was first used to describe a specific genre of Greek and Latin literature. The word *doxography*, when used in Tibetan studies, is twice etic. It was coined outside Greek and Latin literatures (by Diels) to describe a phenomenon in them, and was secondly transferred to another field of studies (Tibetan studies). The fact of its being an etic category is not in itself problematic. It is the lack of awareness of the proper usage of the word that leads to difficulties. For example, it may happen that the ancient genre of the succession of philosophers (*diadochai*) fits some Tibetan *grub mtha'*s better than does the genre of doxography.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, we should be aware that Greek doxographies were different from what we would call philosophical works. Doxographies such as the *Opinions of philosophers* by the Pseudo-Plutarch, or parts of the famous work of Diogenes Laertius, treated the history of a problem or the doctrines of philosophers in a very superficial way and often without concluding with a definitive answer. They were effectively manuals for non-philosophers—or, to put it more bluntly, manuals devoid of philosophy (if we understand philosophy to mean the genuine treatment of a problem with an analysis of its components, its presuppositions, and its possible answers, that leads to a dynamic clarification or even resolution of the problem). Generally, doxographies were digests providing the tenets of a school or of an individual philosopher—the conclusions or “dead thoughts” as Hegel would say,<sup>16</sup> since the life of the thinking process was missing, and only the inanimate results were given. In a sense, we could say that they were no more, and maybe no less, philosophical than is a *Dictionary of Philosophy from A to Z*.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible to argue that *grub mtha'* works are also simplified summaries of problems and doctrines. But whatever might be the case for *grub mtha'*, the categories fashioned within them such as *Vaibhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika*, and so on were extracted and used in independent works and commentaries that used these denominations in order to arrive at determinate conclusions. What we call *doxographical categories* were not necessarily used to provide a digest of the doctrine of a school, but rather to treat a question and

<sup>15</sup> Because the *diadochai* genre is characterized as focusing on the successive generations of philosophers linked to each other by way of a teacher-pupil relationship (Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 3, p. 126), Thu'u bkwan's *grub mtha'* corresponds well to this genre. Indeed he presents not only the main teachings of each school in Tibet, but also a brief account of their foundation and sometimes also their lineage of masters and disciples. See, for example, his treatment of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud pa and the Jo nang pa. The structure of Thu'u bkwan's *grub mtha'* also reminds one of the mixed genre represented by Diogenes Laertius' *Lives, Doctrines, and Maxims of Famous Philosophers* in which, as the title indicates, both the doctrines and the lives of philosophers were presented.

<sup>16</sup> Preface to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

<sup>17</sup> Gueroult 1984: 49-50.

arrive at a solution. Hence again, the terms *doxography* and *doxographical* may turn out to be misrepresentations of what is actually happening in some Tibetan texts.

In a theoretical reflection concerned with the distinction between philosophy and doxography, where doxography plays the role of the “other” to philosophy, the question of the definition of philosophy inevitably comes to mind. This is obviously a tricky question since there are as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers. One’s preferred definition inevitably goes back to one’s own understanding of one’s philosophical training and practice.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, when applied to Buddhist texts, *philosophy* shares the same etic character as does *doxography*. Rather than focusing on what philosophy is, I therefore choose to describe philosophy, in contrast to *doxography*, as “the genuine treatment of a problem with an analysis of its components, its presuppositions, and its possible answers, that leads to a dynamic clarification or even resolution of the problem.” For our purposes, such a description, while not aspiring to be a full-fledged definition, is sufficient.<sup>19</sup> I believe that it should not jeopardize the overall project of the paper, which aims at distinguishing two ways of relating to past doctrines.

To summarize, I am proposing two points for consideration. First, the term *doxography* may not be the best term to translate *grub mtha’*. Other genres of Greek literature may better map onto Tibetan *grub mtha’*. Second, interpreting certain Tibetan texts from the perspective of doxography may prevent us from seeing the philosophical significance of those texts. This is why I will use the phrase *school denominations* rather than the phrase *doxographical categories*. The expression *school denominations* entails less presuppositions and leaves the door open to an interpretation of those categories as functioning either doxographically or philosophically.<sup>20</sup>

*Red mda’ ba’s Ornament of the Proofs of Consciousness and his  
philosophical usage of school denominations*

Being clear about the meaning of the word *doxography* does not tell us why we should restrain from its usage in Tibetan studies. I want to now present a text by Red mda’ ba that will illustrate how interpreting school denominations to be functioning as doxographical categories is to miss the point of the text in question.

<sup>18</sup> See Bugault 1994: 19-21.

<sup>19</sup> Roughly one could say, inspired by Aristotle, that a definition provides the essence of a thing, while a description only offers a list of more or less salient features, without attempting to account for every one of them or even for the unity which binds together the salient features.

<sup>20</sup> For a critique of the translation of the term *siddhanta* by *doxography* from a different point of view, see Mestanza 2005: 85-86.

Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros (1349-1412), the great Sa skya pa scholar, is famous for his exegesis of *Mādhyamika* texts and for being one of Tsong kha pa's most influential masters.<sup>21</sup> Over the past thirty years, new texts of his have emerged that shed new light on his work and personality.<sup>22</sup> Among these, the *Rnam rig grub pa'i rgyan*, or *Ornament of the Proofs of Consciousness*,<sup>23</sup> is a very particular, and in a sense very puzzling work in the Tibetan philosophical scene. As its title suggests, it is a defense of the *Vijñānavāda* or idealist position, which the author tries to establish as the definitive position. Nowhere does Red mda' ba refer to *Madhyamaka*, nor hint at the idea that the *Vijñānavāda* position is not the ultimate one, despite the fact that the *Vijñānavāda* position is so often subservient to the

<sup>21</sup> "He appears to have been the foremost master of the Prāsaṅgika tradition at this important point of transition from the pre-classical to the classical period of Tibetan philosophical thought. And it is to him that is indeed ascribed the re-establishment and explication of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka after a period of relative eclipse" (Ruegg 2000: 60). Especially renowned is his commentary on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātāra*, the *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i de kho na nyid gsal ba'i sgron ma*. Its fame may be explained by the relative scarcity of other commentaries on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* before Red mda' ba. I could not locate more than five commentaries on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* written before him: *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bsdus don ldeb* by 'Chus dar ma brtson 'grus, *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i rgya cher bshad pa gsung rab rgya mtsho'i de kho na nyid rab tu gsal ba* by Skyabs mchog dpal bzang (interestingly among the masters of Red mda' ba according to the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center), *Dbu ma 'jug pa'i dka' gnad* by Grags pa seng ge, *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i mchan bu* by Byang chub brtson 'grus (no longer available), and *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i ũka* by Ye shes 'byung gnas (no longer available). This is very limited compared to the number of commentaries on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* written before Red mda' ba (the first ninety volumes of the *bka' gdams gsung 'bum* alone includes eight of them) and compared to the number of commentaries on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* written in the one hundred years after his death (for instance those by Tsong kha pa, Rgyal tshab dar ma rin chen, Dge 'dun rgya mtsho, Rong ston, Go rams pa, Shākya mchog ldan, Mi bskyod rdo rje, and Pañ chen bsod nams grags pa). Red mda' ba may be credited for the reputation the *Madhyamakāvātāra* enjoyed from then on and for its being counted among the small number of works that were to be studied, and even better commented upon, by any scholar worthy of the name. In this commentary and others, he appears as a fierce opponent of the *gzhan stong* views (see Cabezón and Dargyay 2007: 97-105, and 299-300, n. 121). His strong opposition to Jo nang pas articulated to his commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* made him some sort of a representative of a "pure Prāsaṅgika" view (easier to support with Candrakīrti than with other later Indian *Madhyamika* authors), and eventually closer to Tsong kha pa than to other Sa skya pa scholars such as Rong ston or even Go rams pa. See on all these topics Roloff 2009: 15-25 and on the relationship between Red mda' ba and Tsong kha pa see Thurman 1989: 59, 74.

<sup>22</sup> His *gsung 'bum* in nine volumes has recently been published. See Red mda' ba 2009. The newly available commentaries on tantric works and on the *Abhisamayālamkāra* will certainly help us better understand those of his positions on these topics that have been the objects of controversy. See Jinpa 2009 for his position on the *Kālacakratāntra* and Roloff 2009: 221 for his disagreement with G.yag ston over a topic in the *Abhisamayālamkāra*.

<sup>23</sup> Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros, *Rnam rig grub pa'i rgyan*, in *Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros kyi gsung skor: The collected works of Red-mda-wa gzhon-nu-blo-gros*. Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs slob nyer khang, 1999, 87-122.

*Mādhyamika* position in Tibetan philosophical treatises. This is perplexing not only because Red mda' ba is remembered as a champion of a strict interpretation of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamaka*, and consequently a scholar who would not be expected to nuance his rejection of any trace of idealist thought,<sup>24</sup> but also because by Red mda' ba's time in Tibet the *Mādhyamika* position had already become dominant and was largely positioned at the pinnacle of all doctrinal systems, even if the actual content of the position called *Madhyamaka* varied significantly between thinkers.<sup>25</sup> A defense of *Vijñānavāda* would therefore not be expected to be found in a Tibetan text from this time, even less so in a text signed by Red mda' ba.<sup>26</sup> Although it is important to know towards which ultimate position his treatise aims at so as to understand the logic of his argument, the ultimate intention of Red mda' ba in composing such a text is not the focus of the present paper, but rather the way in which he uses the names of different philosophical schools to complete his project.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Candrakīrti indeed spent some time refuting the *Vijñānavāda* position in the sixth chapter of his *Madhyamakāvātāra* §45-97. See Candrakīrti 1907: 135-202 and Huntington and Wangchen 1989: 162-168. A vivid illustration of such a strong commitment to *Madhyamaka* coupled with the rejection of *Vijñānavāda* is expressed at the very beginning of Red mda' ba's commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* where he explains that Candrakīrti was born to refute Bhāvaviveka and reinforce Buddhapālita's position, which corresponds unmistakably to what the Buddha meant. Red mda' ba adds: "in particular, it is by relying on the *sūtra* of the ten grounds [*Daśabhūmikasūtra*] that [Candrakīrti] wrote this *Entrance into the Middle* with its commentary in order to complete the reasonings of [Nāgārjuna's] *Root of the Middle* and to enter into the system of the *Madhyamaka* by refuting those who assert that what the *sūtras* of the *Mahāyāna* mean is consciousness-only" (*khyad par du dbu ma rtsa ba'i rigs pa'i kha bskang ba'i phyir dang/ theg chen gyi mdo sde'i dgongs pa rnam par rig pa tsam du smra ba bsal nas dbu ma'i lugs la 'jug par ya ba'i phyir/ mdo sde sa bcu pa la brten nas dbu ma la 'jug pa 'grel pa dang bcas pa 'di mdzad do/*). See Red mda' ba 1983: 28.

<sup>25</sup> Even an author such as Dol po pa, known for his originality in Tibet, considered the *Mādhyamika* position to be the ultimate one. However, the way that he understood *Madhyamaka* had little to do with the actual texts of Nāgārjuna, and was actually closer to some *Cittamātra* positions. It is true that he used the name *dbu ma chen po* (*Mahāmādhyamaka*), and not just *dbu ma*, to differentiate his interpretation from other *Madhyamaka* interpretations. See Stearns 2010: 93. As with Dol po pa's, *Madhyamaka* at times became almost a mere label, a name covering doctrines that had little to do with actual *Mādhyamika* positions. What is interesting in the present case is that Red mda' ba not only avoids assuming the *Mādhyamika* position, but he even avoids using the name *Madhyamaka*.

<sup>26</sup> It is possible, of course, to suspect that Red mda' ba is not the author of the text. The colophon is perfectly clear on the matter, however, and the style of the composition does not seem to differ radically from other famous works attributed to Red mda' ba.

<sup>27</sup> I can offer two possible hypotheses, but neither is conclusive. It may be that this work was a presentation of the *Vijñānavāda* position and that it only aimed at coining the best arguments possible (or the best presentation of arguments already well-known). It may also be that this was composed during a time when Red mda' ba was close to Jo nang pa positions, which could be understood as interpreting *Madhyamaka* on the lines of *Vijñānavāda* (see footnote 25). Some biographies indeed state that he was once enamored with Jo nang pa views before coming back to more "orthodox" *Mādhyamika* positions. See Cabezón and



A look at the general outline of the text already reveals the philosophical usage of school denominations. The central notion of the text is *dbu ma'i lam* (*madhyamā pradīpad*), or the Middle Way. This topic opens the philosophical discussion after the homage and acts as the touchstone of the correct doctrine. Red mda' ba states:

What is imputed as self and phenomena does not exist.  
 The incorrect conceptions exist.  
 The perspective of Consciousness[-only] which rejects  
 permanence and annihilation  
 Is the Middle Way.<sup>28</sup>

The treatise tries to prove that the Middle Way means *Vijñānavāda*, that is to say that the Middle Way rejects two extremes. The first extreme is superimposing something not existing (namely external things believed to exist independently from consciousness) and the second extreme is negating something actually existing (namely negating the existence of consciousness). Hence the entire treatise is a proof that idealism is a middle way. Idealism does not negate too much (it keeps consciousness), but does negate enough (it rejects things external to consciousness). In terms of schools, the treatise refutes non-Buddhist positions as well as the *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* schools, all of which suffer from the fault of superimposition. The treatise then rejects a position representing negation akin to the *Mādhyamika* school, although the name *Madhyamaka* is never used, probably because an actual refutation of *Madhyamaka* would have been too shocking at the time in Tibet.<sup>29</sup> What is most important is that each of these schools is reduced to a specific position such that they constitute a coherent moment in the development of the argument. Here, because the topic under discussion is ontology (the question is about what really exists, so it can be understood as an investigation of being), the schools are only brought into discussion from the perspective of their ontological or metaphysical commitments. Their positions on practice, ethics, hermeneutics, Buddhahood, and so on are left aside.

The first remark that we can draw from the structure concerns the significance of such abstracted positions. The schools are not

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Dargyay 2007: 295 n. 106. Unfortunately, the text does not contain any hint that would help us to either decide between the two hypotheses or think of others.

<sup>28</sup> Red mda' ba 1999: 94: *bdag dang chos su btags pa med/ yang dag ma yin kun rtog yod/ rtag dang chad pa spangs pa yil rnam rig tshul 'di dbu ma'i lam/*

<sup>29</sup> *Madhyamaka* was already taken by the large majority of the intellectuals of the time to be the highest view. It is significant, for example, that *Cittamātra śāstras* were almost never commented upon (with the exception of the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, on which Red mda' ba himself wrote a commentary). Furthermore, figures of the *Mādhyamika* school such as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti were also considered to be Tantric authors who wrote several Tantric *śāstras* and *sādhanas*, by which they acquired an even higher status. The case was different for Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, who did not enjoy such a religious aura.

addressed for the totality of their theoretical and practical systems, as complex historical realities with a variety of characteristic features, but in the specificity in which they can relate to the problem at hand.<sup>30</sup> The treatments of the schools are partial ones, and could even be interpreted as historical distortions. This partiality may be damaging from a historical point of view, but it is not so from a philosophical point of view. The specific interest of a philosophical approach is not the opinion or position of some individual or group as such (which is justifiably the focus of a history of ideas). Rather, what is at stake is what should be considered to be right or true about a specific topic that is addressed universally. By universality I mean the mode through which an issue can be analyzed, elaborated, and given an answer (or even solved), abstracted from its mere historical, contingent conditions. A universal treatment should be capable of being transferred to other times and places without losing its power to “make sense.” The universality of the object of philosophical inquiry goes hand in hand with the universal quality of the subject of the inquiry—any good-willing soul who earnestly engages with the intellectual issues in play without taking the attitude that the issues are merely tokens of the past. In the text under consideration, schools are not addressed in a temporal fashion, but are rather elevated to a universal significance, such that their positions can be examined for the sake of resolving the problem that is the primary focus of the philosophical investigation. The primary focus of the investigation is *not*, after all, the position of the school *per se*. This is why the *partiality* of the treatment is not damaging. This partiality marks the abstraction from temporal conditions or from an historical perspective. It consequently opens the possibility for a philosophical perspective.<sup>31</sup> This is the reason why, in speaking about this treatise,

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<sup>30</sup> It was already noticed by Mimaki that the structure and classifications of *grub mtha'* works are the results of the conceptions of the author regarding the highest position – generally the *Mādhyamika* position, although in this case it is the *Vijñānavāda* school. See Mimaki 1982: 52 and Mimaki 1994: 118.

<sup>31</sup> This does not mean that the Buddhist tradition did not also, at times, consider these schools from a historical point of view. It is precisely the case when hermeneutical strategies are used to elaborate a coherent interpretation of seemingly contradictory passages: the particularity of the moment is recognized, together with the particularity of the interlocutors especially those to whom the Buddha speaks, so as to explain that passages contradicting the actual intention of the Buddha are just adapted to the (weaker) faculties of the disciples and should be interpreted by taking into account the historical circumstances of the utterance of the discourse. This exegetical strategy is different from a philosophical strategy since it only intends to conciliate contradictory scriptural passages, even though this strategy is itself intimately connected with a determination of the intention of the Buddha in which these contradictions are resolved. The determination of the ultimate intention can itself be the object of a philosophical strategy, which is concerned with the actual truth of a position, not its convenient meaning for spiritual or intellectual growth in relation to the historical circumstances of the utterance. Thus my point is not to separate philosophical and historical perspectives, since connections between the two

I will consider the terms school and position to express the same thing.<sup>32</sup>

With this in mind, we can now turn towards the order in which the schools are presented. As many scholars have already pointed out,<sup>33</sup> one of the techniques of *grub mtha'* literature is to create a hierarchy between schools by ordering them so that the final school is the true system. What I want to look at now is how this happens, concretely, inside of Red mda' ba's work (which is not a *grub mtha'* and in which the *Mādhyamika* school does not occupy the final position).

The treatise progresses by investigating each school successively. The argumentation first presents a school, then refutes it, before finally passing on to the next school. This successive progression itself can be either non-accumulative or accumulative. It is non-accumulative when a position is investigated and then entirely refuted without keeping any theoretical gain from the position. As such, the treatise does not really *progress* since it does not acquire anything, but only rejects a position (which, one could argue, is some sort of a progress).<sup>34</sup> A treatise can also have an

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can operate, but only to distinguish their goals and functions. On the lack of historical perspective in *grub mtha'*, see the very brief remarks in Conzort and Preston 2003: ix-x.

<sup>32</sup> I distinguish the philosophical perspective from the perspective of a witness who would just observe a philosophical position from outside, but would never even consider assuming it (even if it were to refute it — refutation itself presupposes that the position to be refuted is in some sense at least possible to assume, which is why one endeavors to lay out arguments to prevent such an assumption). A historian (even a historian of ideas), *as a historian*, does not engage arguments for their truth value, but rather for their historical significance, as explanations of an historical phenomenon or as elements participating in a historical process. That is why I do not consider historians to be engaging their objects in the same universal way that philosophers do, who are interested in the truth value of those arguments, whether those arguments were part of a historical sequence or not. Universality is thus directly related to the idea of truth, precisely because an utterance is said to be true not because it can be explained as resulting from the combination of different conditions of one human being or historical sequence, but because it is true by itself and for any other human being thinking it. It may first sound odd that partiality enables universality, but this is consistent with the nature of concepts. Partiality here means abstraction from some features: the usage of schools is partial because it only takes into account some features of that school, specifically its ontological commitments. The generality of a concept is increased with the loss of its specific features. In technical terms, the less detailed the intension of a concept is, the greater its extension becomes (more actual instances can be subsumed under that concept). For example, the intension of the concept of *being* is very poor, therefore I can subsume under it the totality of phenomena. But if I add to the intension of *being* a specificity such as *being human*, its extension is reduced significantly to those entities who are human beings. This is why the universality of the position is directly related to the partiality of the representation of the position. For the present purpose, I do not distinguish between universality and generality.

<sup>33</sup> Mimaki 1994: 118; Hopkins 1996.

<sup>34</sup> I could not find a treatise that uses this strategy from beginning to end. It would be quite improbable, since Tibetan Buddhism generally displays a tendency to

accumulative successive strategy when a school is investigated and only one aspect of it is refuted, whereas another aspect is retained as true and taken on to the next level, in which the next school, which possesses the previously retained aspect, is investigated. In an accumulative and successive progression there is a theoretical gain at each level. The schools are thus moments in the demonstration and are used purposively as such. Each school provides a better understanding, although always partial, which explains why the treatise progresses by keeping what is considered true and by eliminating the rest. The dynamic process of the treatise is founded upon this chiaroscuro in which the argument continuously stands.

Such strategies are manifest in Red mda' ba's *Ornament*. What I want to show is that the structure obeys a philosophical or logical frame and not a doxographical one. Each school "fills in" abstract positions that have been established previously, or to speak more accurately, abstract positions that have been established *a priori*.<sup>35</sup> These positions are not presented as items of a historical account. The outline of the structure is as follows:

Announcement of the thesis that Consciousness-only  
(*Rnam rig tsam*) is the Middle Way (*brjod bya*, p. 93).<sup>36</sup>

1. Extreme of superimposition (*sgro 'dogs pa'i mtha'*, p. 95).
  - 1.1. Refutation of the existence of the self (position of non-Buddhists – *bdag tu sgro 'dogs pa'i mtha' spangs*, p. 95).
  - 1.2. Refutation of the existence of phenomena (position of realists – *chos su sgro 'dogs pa'i mtha' spangs*, p. 97).
    - 1.2.1. General refutation of the apprehended and apprehending aspects

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integrate all teachings through hermeneutical strategies and hierarchies. The non-accumulative strategy appears in specific portions of texts, like the refutation of *Cittamatra* by the *Mādhyamikas* in Blo bzang dkon mchog's *Grub mtha' rtsa ba'i tshig tik shel dkar me long*. See Conzort and Preston 2003: 217-221. See also the example in this text below.

<sup>35</sup> One could argue that the history of ideas in Buddhism obeys this logical schema, that the logical schema articulates the structure of reality, and manifests itself by history—a Hegelian reading of the history of Buddhism. But the logical schema of thesis, antithesis and synthesis would not fit Buddhist schools as well as Hegel's reading of the history of Western philosophy, because, for example the *Vaibhāṣika* school is not properly refuted and superseded by the *Sautrāntika* school. As we will see, the relationship between the two is rather understood on the model of the *Sautrāntika* position deepening the consequences of the *Vaibhāṣika* position. Moreover, the Hegelian framework could not overcome the actual history, which is much more complex, diverse and sometimes inconsistent (among authors supposedly from the same "school") than the neat finish of logic would have it. The same remark is often made about Western philosophy as well, of course.

<sup>36</sup> I have reconstructed the outline with the Tibetan headings. They are not necessarily given as such by Red mda' ba at the beginning of each section. Sometimes he formulates the title of the section when he ends it to announce the next one. Sometimes he does not give a title at all, but only states his argument. The page references are those of the Tibetan text in Red mda' ba 1999.

(*gzung ba dang 'dzin pa spyir dgag pa*, p. 97).

1.2.1.1. Refutation of realists upholding the existence of objects external to consciousness (*phyi rol tu don du smra ba dgag pa*, p. 97).

1.2.1.1.1. Refutation of the existence of coarse (*rags pa*) objects.

1.2.1.1.2. Refutation of the existence of subtle (*phra ba*) objects.

1.2.1.2. Refutation of the existence of the consciousness apprehending the object (*'dzin pa'i yul can yang yod pa ma yin*, p. 101).

1.2.1.3. Refutation of the existence of the apprehending and apprehended aspects having the nature of internal consciousness.

1.2.2. Specific refutation of the apprehended and apprehending aspects (p. 102).

1.2.2.1. Refutation of the *Vaibhāṣika* position (*bye brag smra ba dgag pa*, p. 102).

1.2.2.2. Refutation of the *Sautrāntika* position (*mdo sde pa smra ba dgag pa*, p. 106).

2. Extreme of negation: refutation of the [*mādhyamika*] rejection of the existence of consciousness (*skur ba 'debs pa'i mtha' spangs*, p. 113).

3. Final position: to profess that consciousness-only is the spotless Path of the Middle (*rnam par rig pa tsam du smra ba ni dbu ma'i lam rma med pa yin no*, p. 114).

The issue of the text is to determine what really exists. Therefore the text has the most comprehensive scope possible: it concerns what there is in general. As Red mda' ba claims, the *Vijñānavāda* position does not negate what exists (consciousness) and does negate what does not exist (the self and external phenomena). In other words, *Vijñānavāda* sticks to reality. Nothing is left aside. All possible phenomena are considered. This is the first sign of the logical approach of the treatise: it encompasses everything and therefore encloses all possible answers.

This logical approach I would oppose to an empirical one (which parallels, but is not exactly identical, to the opposition between philosophy and doxography).<sup>37</sup> The treatise would have an empirical structure if it would just present schools as they appear through history, as Red mda' ba would have found them in the

<sup>37</sup> I am aware that the multiple senses of the term *logical* may create some confusion. I am obviously not referring to the formal character of logic. The term seems to me convenient in this context because it conveys the idea of the cohesive and totalizing framework of the argumentation, of the necessity of the argumentative procedure, and of the abstracted character of the positions. It could be argued that the term *rational* is more appropriate, but a rational argumentation does not necessarily induce a systematic architecture and could result in probable truths rather than necessary truths. Systematicity and necessity of the argument are two features present in the *Ornament*.

literature available to him. If that were the case, by refuting certain schools and electing only one of them, the treatise would end up with a non-necessary position. The chosen position would simply be the best position or most reasonable position available. By pointing to the logical structure of the treatise, I want to emphasize two features: first that in Red mda' ba's opinion all possible answers to a specific question are being considered at each stage of the argument and second that these answers are mutually exclusive. These two features of the argumentation are meant to guarantee the validity of the argumentative procedure. Thus the elimination of all schools but one necessarily leads to a true position<sup>38</sup>—even if this position is only provisionally true, before being itself reconsidered as a framework for a new question. If we were to interpret each stage of Red mda' ba's argument as if they were syllogisms, we could say that because the premise of each moment is complete the conclusion necessarily follows in each instance. If the premise were not complete, as in the case where only historical schools are presented without considering if they map the totality of all possible positions, only a probable conclusion could be obtained, at best.

This logical framework is apparent throughout the *Ornament*. As indicated above, the scope of the treatise, established at its outset, is the totality of reality. Thus the premise is complete. The argument starts by presenting reality from an ordinary perspective as being two-fold (the falsehood of such a dichotomy will be revealed as the argument unfolds):<sup>39</sup> reality is either I (the self, *bdag*) or what is external to the self (phenomena other than the self, *chos*).<sup>40</sup> At this stage, there is no third ontological category: these two categories are mutually exclusive. Red mda' ba obviously re-appropriates the well-known categories of the non-existence or emptiness of self and phenomena in order to integrate them into the logical process of his treatise. He is not simply duplicating technical terms familiar to

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<sup>38</sup> Given the assumption that the positions selected at the beginning effectively cover the totality of the possible answers and are, in fact, mutually exclusive. The validity of an argument (the rigorous deduction of a conclusion from premises) does not guarantee its soundness (the "truth" of the argument). The latter is obtained only if the premises are themselves true.

<sup>39</sup> This is an important point since it prevents an obvious objection to the completeness of the two positions. In the present case, one could argue that self and phenomena do not constitute the totality of the possible candidates for existence, since consciousness is another answer and is the one finally chosen as the one and only reality by Red mda' ba. But the treatise has to be read in its own progression, not from a synchronic perspective. Each stage of the argument attempts to consider all possible answers from its own perspective. The first moment of the argument considers all possible answers from an ordinary point of view, namely the perspective of childish beings (*byis pa*, Red mda' ba 1999: 95). The idealist position will result from the progressive refinement of the philosophical positions, and not as a point of departure.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 95: "because these unreal constructions are not proven to exist as self and phenomena in the way constructed by childish beings" (*yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa 'di ni byis pas ji ltar kun btags pa ltar gyi bdag dang chos su ma grub pa'i phyir*).

Buddhist philosophy. Rather, by shaping the investigation of reality in terms of these two categories alone, Red mda' ba opens the way to giving a necessary answer to the issue. The fact of their mutual exclusiveness guarantees that either one of them has to be true or both of them have to be false. In terms of school denominations, this dichotomy divides non-Buddhists, who assert the existence of a self, and Buddhists, who do not assert the existence of a self, but accept the existence of phenomena.<sup>41</sup> The mere usage of a negative term, *non-Buddhist* (versus for example Shivaite, Vedāntin, or Sāṃkhyas), indicates the mutual exclusivity of the two groups.

Part 1.1 rejects the existence of the self<sup>42</sup> by refuting non-Buddhist positions (and probably *pudgalavādin*<sup>43</sup> ones) that assert that the self really exists. Red mda' ba presents twenty possible theories of the self that are supposed to represent all possible positions asserting the existence of the self. He obtains twenty theories by combining each one of the five aggregates (*skandha*), which represent the totality of the elements of an individual, with four possible modes of relationships (identity, submission, possession, inherence) between these aggregates and the self:

The aggregates are not the self and are not of the self.

[The self] does not have the aggregates and in the aggregates

The self does not abide. [...]

One will come up with twenty extreme theories about transitory collections by distinguishing the five aggregates and by applying them [to the five relationships], from form up to consciousness, such as “form is the self, form is to the self, form possesses the self, the self abides in the form, etc.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> That is how Red mda' ba divides the group that makes the mistake of superimposition (*sgro 'dogs pa*): *chos 'di las phyi rol tu gyur pa rnams ni phungs po dang gcig dang tha dad pa'i bdag tu mngon par zhen cingl chos 'di pa bye brag tu smra ba dang/ mdo sde pa dag ni gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'i rang bzhin chos su mngon par zhen par byed del* (*ibid.*: 94). As indicated in footnote 39, these schools map the totality of answers at first sight, even though other schools (*Madhyamaka* and *Vijñānavāda*) will enter the scene later in the treatise, because they seem to propose all possible answers from an ordinary point of view. By refining their positions and progressively eliminating everything that is not consciousness, the idealist position will emerge as the right and only answer. In some ways, the dichotomy holds since at the end the non-Buddhist position is eliminated and the Buddhist one is chosen. However, the Buddhist position is not accepted as such, but is itself investigated to eliminate from the first approximation all wrong elements (such as the realist ones).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: 95-97.

<sup>43</sup> Red mda' ba states that these positions are non-Buddhist, and not that some of them are upheld by the *pudgalavādins*. However, the formulation of the position seems to be close to that of the *pudgalavādins*. See Red mda' ba 1999: 94. Obviously in the present case the historical accuracy is irrelevant to the argumentative progression.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*: 95-96: *phung po bdag gi min/ de la phung med phung rnams la'ang/ bdag gnas ma yin [...]* *de yang phung po lnga'i bye brag gis 'jig tshogs la lta ba'i mtha' nyi shur 'gyur tel/ gzugs bdag yin pa dang/ gzugs bdag gi yin pa dang/ gzugs bdag dang*

Since these twenty theories represent for Red mda' ba the totality of possible ways to establish the existence of the self, by repudiating each one of them he demonstrates the impossibility of asserting a theory about the self.<sup>45</sup> This is a good example of the logical structure of the argument. It also exemplifies a non-accumulative strategy, since the position asserting the existence of a self is simply rejected and no theoretical gain is kept. However, one can speak in terms of progression in the sense that the inexistence of the self is proven.

Since the self has been eliminated (and at the same time as non-Buddhist positions), reality is reduced to phenomena (*chos*). Section 1.2 undertakes to refute the existence of phenomena, a position earlier characterized as being Buddhist.<sup>46</sup> There are many ways in which the existence of phenomena can be argued for, and Red mda' ba shapes his argument according to all of the ways in which he understands that this position can be defended. He categorizes all possible positions on the matter as positions that assert the existence of the apprehended aspect and the apprehending aspect (*gzung ba*, *'dzin pa*),<sup>47</sup> namely the object and the consciousness apprehending the object. This pair is supposed to map the totality of all possible phenomena.

In order to investigate the existence of phenomena, captured by the pair apprehending and apprehended, Red mda' ba first provides a general refutation of their existence (section 1.2.1) and later proceeds to a specific refutation of the *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* positions (section 1.2.2).<sup>48</sup> As we shall see, the refutation of these two schools adds detail to the general refutation. It approaches the realist position from another point of view, but does not fundamentally change the line of argumentation. This is a clear example of the philosophical significance of these two school denominations. They function to fill in abstract positions already delimited.<sup>49</sup> They are not examined in themselves as historical instances.

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*Idan pa dang/ gzugs la bdag gnas so zhes bya nas rnam par shes pa'i bar la de ltar sbyar ba'i tshul gyis so/*

<sup>45</sup> I am not developing Red mda' ba's arguments in detail in this article since I am primarily interested in the form of the argumentative strategy rather than in its content. For a detailed analysis of the arguments, see Harter 2006.

<sup>46</sup> See footnote 41.

<sup>47</sup> *Grāhyakāra* and *grāhakāra* in Sanskrit. Red mda' ba never actually uses *rnam pa* (*ākāra*), "aspect", to characterize this pair, but I do not think that by adding the term aspect I am distorting his argument in any way.

<sup>48</sup> Red mda' ba (1999: 102): *de ltar gzung 'dzin du smra ba la spyir dgag pa smras nas/ de'i 'og tu bye brag smra ba gang dag [...]* *mdo sde pa gang dag [...]* *dgag par bya'o/*

<sup>49</sup> See Stag tshang lo tsā ba 1999, which manifests the same approach. The *dkar chag* and chapters never state the name of a school, but always the abstract position under consideration: "general refutation of the self of individuals", "general refutation of the self of apprehended phenomena," "general refutation of the self of apprehending phenomena," and "establishment of the absence of



The general refutation first treats the “naïve” realist position that asserts the existence of things external to us, which are posited without specific reference to a consciousness (part 1.2.1.1). In this section, phenomena are investigated as they are supposed to be in themselves: it is their internal structure that is the object of inquiry. This section is carefully delimited and divided so as to encompass all possible sorts of phenomena posited as external things. External things are either coarse (objects existing as wholes) or subtle (objects composed of atoms).<sup>50</sup> Red mda’ ba shows that there is no way someone could establish the existence of either coarse or subtle things independent of consciousness. Since there are only two possibilities about the existence of external things and both have been refuted, the conclusion necessarily follows: there is no external thing that can be established in itself without the mediation of consciousness.<sup>51</sup>

Having eliminated both forms of apprehended aspect (1.2.1.1), Red mda’ ba is left with the apprehending aspect (1.2.1.2). Since the action of apprehending is dependent on an object that can be apprehended, and no such apprehended object is possible, the refutation of the apprehended aspect leads necessarily to the refutation of the apprehending aspect.<sup>52</sup> The argument thus comes full circle. Since all phenomena have been divided into apprehended phenomena and apprehending phenomena, and both categories have been negated, the real existence of all phenomena is simply negated.<sup>53</sup> The realist position, which was structured as a position asserting the existence of objective and subjective phenomena, has likewise been rejected. At this point, both the non-Buddhists have been refuted, as well as the realists. Since the realists were first identified with the Buddhists, it seems like Red mda’ ba has also refuted the Buddhist position.

This would be the case if there were no other Buddhist positions. But the previous section does not exhaust all possible realist positions. Instead of positing objects by founding their existence on their own structure, one could still assert that real things exist

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extremes by refuting the two subtle selves.” In some sense, this *grub mtha’* seems closer to a philosophical treatise than to a doxographical digest.

<sup>50</sup> Red mda’ ba (1999: 97): *phyi rol tu don du smra ba rnams kyi don gyi rnam par rtog pa ni gnyis te/ rags pa dang/ phra ba’o/*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: 101: “Thus, since there are no coarse or subtle things, there are no objects different from consciousness.” (*de ltar na rags pa dang phra ba’i don med pa’i phyir shes pa las gzhan pa’i yul med la*).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*: 101: *yul med pa’i phyir de ’dzin pa’i yul can yang yod pa ma yin te/ de dag ni phan tshun ltos te rnam par ’jog pa’i phyir ro/*

<sup>53</sup> I say *real* because Red mda’ ba concedes at this point that phenomena have some sort of existence, but a merely conceptual one (a nominal or imputed existence): *gzung ba dang ’dzin pa’i tha snyad kyang rnam par rtog pa tsam du zad do/ (ibid.: 101)*. This point leads nicely into the next section, since the recognition of some sort of phenomenological presence of phenomena in our awareness is constitutive of the investigation of the *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* schools. See the next footnote.

through the meditation of consciousness. Since we are aware of the presence of phenomena through perception, one could (and one often does) assert the existence of phenomena based on that perception.<sup>54</sup>

The next step Red mda' ba takes is to refute the Buddhist *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* schools. These schools are still realists, since they want to establish the existence of external phenomena, but they do so by virtue of the conscious perception of external phenomena. Thus the transition from the general refutation (1.2.1) to specific refutation (1.2.2), from what I called “naïve realists” to *Vaibhāṣikas* and *Sautrāntikas* (who could be called “indirect realists”), can be described as an internalization of sorts. Phenomena are no longer things in themselves (whose structures are investigated), but objects as they appear to our awareness.

Notice the transition from 1.2.1 to 1.2.2 and the accumulative and successive progression of the argument. A feature is eliminated (the sheer externality of phenomena) and a feature is preserved (the appearance of phenomena within consciousness), which is the next object to be investigated, which itself will eventually be refuted so that only consciousness remains. Red mda' ba progressively reduces our ontological or metaphysical commitments to the domain of consciousness, and he does so through the usage of school denominations, by passing successively through the realist, and then the *Vaibhāṣika* and the *Sautrāntika* positions.

The *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* schools again serve to circumscribe all logical answers to a given problem. The issue is to explain the appearance of phenomena.<sup>55</sup> The relationship between a phenomenon and the awareness that perceives it has to be either simultaneous (*Vaibhāṣika* position) or successive (*Sautrāntika* position). If a moment of awareness perceives an apprehended aspect, the phenomenon that is posited to be outside of awareness must either precede the moment of awareness or occur at the same time as the awareness. The apprehended phenomenon cannot be subsequent, since the apprehending aspect would occur before what it is supposed to apprehend even exists, which is absurd. Again, the two possible positions to be evaluated are mutually exclusive. The *Vaibhāṣika* position affirms that the apprehended aspect is a

<sup>54</sup> It is the notion of experience (*nyams su myong ba*) which is central to this argument. Even if one demonstrates the metaphysical position of the inexistence of apprehended and apprehending aspects, the phenomenological presence of phenomena in our awareness does not cease. Red mda' ba says just this (p. 95): unreal conceptions (*yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa*) “are not absolutely non-existing to the extent that they are being experienced” (*nyams su myong ba'i ngo bor nam yang med pa ma yin pa*). Terms denoting appearance, perception, and awareness such as (*nyams su*) *myong ba*, *gsal ba*, and *dmigs pa* are numerous in section 1.2.2.

<sup>55</sup> While keeping the term *gzung ba*, Red mda' ba progressively abandons the reference to *'dzin pa* and speaks more of awareness or consciousness (*shes pa*). I speculate that this is a conscious effort to prepare the rejection of the whole structure of apprehending and apprehended aspects.

phenomenon posited outside of consciousness that exists at the same time as the consciousness of it.<sup>56</sup> The idea is that the perceived phenomenon is identical with the apprehended aspect on which awareness directly shapes itself. The *Sautrāntika* position maintains that the external thing is the cause that precedes awareness and projects an apprehended aspect onto awareness.<sup>57</sup> Since Red mda' ba demonstrates that neither of these two explanations works, the entire hypothesis of the existence of external phenomena needs to be abandoned.

A revision of the hypothesis of the existence of external phenomena is made necessary only because all possible realist positions have been presented and have been refuted. The conclusion Red mda' ba arrives at is that there is no other cause of objective appearances other than consciousness itself in the form of the store-consciousness (*kun bzhi, ālayavijñāna*) and its impregnations or predispositions (*bag chags, vāsanā*).<sup>58</sup>

Notice the slow and subtle progress towards an internalization of phenomenal contents. First external objects alone are considered (1.2.1), then two aspects are investigated of which just one is a mental aspect (*Vaibhāṣikas*, 1.2.2.1), then both aspects are mental, albeit with an external object outside of consciousness still postulated as the cause of one of the aspects (*Sautrāntikas*, 1.2.2.2), and finally consciousness alone is kept through a complete relinquishing of the hypothesis of an external object (*Vijñānavāda*, end of 1.2.2.2 and 3). This progress is made possible through an accumulative-successive strategy: first the thing existing externally is rejected while its phenomenal aspect is kept, then the phenomenal aspect as external object is rejected and the mental aspect is kept, then the mental aspect caused by an external thing is rejected and only consciousness is kept. At each successive stage, the position that is saved from refutation in the stage prior is re-investigated and re-divided into what is to be rejected and what is to be kept.

At this point of the treatise, we could say that Red mda' ba reaches the "tip of a needle." Having started with the totality of reality, he is left with consciousness as the only existing entity.<sup>59</sup> Everything else has been eliminated. This "razor-like trend" could

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*: 102: *bye brag smra ba gang dag shes pa dang dus mnyam pa'i don gzung bar smra ba/*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*: 102: *mdo sde pa gang dag shes pa'i snga logs kyi rnam pa gtod byed kyi rgyu gzung bar smra ba/*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*: 113-115 for the formulation of the final and definitive position, although the *alayavijñāna* is only mentioned earlier on page 104.

<sup>59</sup> It should be emphasized that the notion of consciousness reached at this point is different from the notion of self which was refuted in the first place, by the fact that consciousness is not understood to be permanent, as the self is. Consciousness is not a phenomenon either, even though the demonstration of the existence of consciousness-only is obtained through the refinement of the notion of phenomenon. This is because phenomena (in the sense of *chos, dharma*) exist within the structure of apprehended and apprehending phenomena, which Red mda' ba rejects as being a distorted representation of reality.

be pushed further to lead to a final refutation, the refutation of consciousness itself. Such a possibility is the object of the investigation of the last section of the treatise, the refutation of the extreme of negation (section 2). This section of the text clearly targets a *Mādhyamika* position without using the name of the school.<sup>60</sup> The *Mādhyamika* position is used to wrap up the dialectical progress. It represents the final logical step, since everything else has been eliminated. I shall not develop the arguments leading Red mda' ba to reject the “*Mādhyamika* extremism,” which arguments are not original anyway (most of them coming from Vasubandhu and Sthiramati). The point is rather that the *Mādhyamika* position participates in the argumentative strategy by acting as the final logical possibility, the final possible refutation, since everything else has already been refuted.

With *Madhyamaka* we have a nice example of an argumentative strategy that is no longer accumulative. The progression is no longer accumulative because Red mda' ba does not preserve any aspect of the *Mādhyamika* position, but rather dismisses it entirely as a form of nihilism. Nonetheless, the rejection of *Madhyamaka* still constitutes progression in the sense that it enables a final vindication of the *Vijñānavāda* position.

### Conclusion

By introducing the example of Red mda' ba's *Ornament of the Proofs of Consciousness*, this study proposes an alternative understanding of the function of school denominations in Tibetan texts. Its ambition is not to establish one and only one way to interpret the usage of *grub mtha'* works and the denominations that appear within them. These denominations have many functions. They are sometimes used as *doxographical categories* to report opinions of past thinkers,<sup>61</sup> and

<sup>60</sup> There are several hints indicating that the argument attacks *Madhyamaka*. The (rejected) refutation of consciousness proceeds from the reason that consciousness is produced by the process of *pratītyasamutpāda* and therefore does not exist ultimately. The identification of *pratītyasamutpāda* and non-existence is an important feature of *Madhyamaka* (see Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*, 24, 18). Red mda' ba refutes this position with the argument that such a position would be without a support (*rten*, *āśraya*), which is exactly the argument used by Sthiramati to counter *Mādhyamika* arguments at the beginning of his commentary on the *Triṃśika*.

<sup>61</sup> See a clear example in the *Bang mdzod* of G.yag ston 1973: vol. 1, 315-317 where G.yag ston successively presents the positions of the *Vaibhāṣikas*, *Sautrāntikas* and *Cittamātras* on the topic of lineage (*rigs*). This seems to be a purely scholarly digression that does not contribute in any way to the development of the commentary on this issue. Another example would be Ye shes sde's *Lta ba'i khyad par* which, according to Ruegg 1981: 228 “ne cherche pas à classer les différents systèmes philosophiques en présence selon un ordre hiérarchique où une doctrine est censée à la fois englober et primer celle(s) qui la précède(nt) ; il se borne à donner une description purement doxographique, généralement sans

sometimes used as *philosophical categories*, when they instantiate abstract positions and participate in the argumentative response to a problem. Sometimes there are “hybrid usages” where these denominations are used loosely to make a point without enclosing all possibilities in a logical framework. My sole claim is that the usage of schools in Tibetan philosophical literature should be evaluated carefully each time it occurs, without necessarily interpreting it as an artificial, pseudo-historical, or polemical exercise. The use of school denominations can also function as a genuine philosophical practice that engages with abstract problems and investigates abstract solutions that happen to be represented by these school denominations.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, the abstract problems, positions, and solutions are primary, and the school denominations are secondary. As a matter of fact, some positions in Red mda' ba's text are not even attributed to any specific school, such as the theories of coarse and subtle objects, for example. Yet these unnamed positions still represent moments in the development of the proof of idealism. This observation reinforces the point being made here. What matters is not the number of schools, but the progression of the argument, which may necessitate more abstract positions than are provided by the number of historical schools available. Unfortunately, Red mda' ba did not have enough schools to fill all his required positions!

The structure of Red mda' ba's work is a logical one, not an historical and not even a pseudo-historical one. Using school denominations is a way to situate one's own philosophical position and not just a way to categorize other people's opinions.<sup>63</sup> Using school denominations as a way to map the possible answers of a philosophical problem and to enclose the totality of the problem within a logical frame enables one to navigate through possible solutions to find the one that responds accurately to the problem, to find one that is *necessarily* true.

I do not have the space to develop the comparison here, but it would be fruitful to analyze the dialectical method of Aristotle in order to further ponder the modality of the approach described in

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porter un jugement de valeur même implicite.” Notice the precise usage of the term *doxographique* here with which the present study agrees.

<sup>62</sup> In some sense, the usage of *-isms* in analytical philosophy is similar to the Tibetan usage of the school denominations that I describe. Analytical philosophers sometimes discuss very specific authors, but other times shape abstract positions (internalist/externalist foundationalism, coherentism, empiricism, pragmatism, consequentialism, etc.) for the sake of their own discussions, without referring to some specific historical expressions of these positions.

<sup>63</sup> See what Thu'u bkwan explicitly says about the purpose of his composition at the beginning of Thu'u bkwan 2005, where he presents Indian non-Buddhist philosophies. Without knowing others' philosophies and systems, he states, one is incapable of asserting the value of one's own, and especially the superiority of one's own! For Thu'u bkwan, the study of the positions of others has an internal value.

this paper. By modality, I mean the qualification of the truth of a statement as being necessary, probable, possible, and so on. Aristotle, in some of his works, proceeds first to give an overview of the state of a question by providing the responses given by previous philosophers.<sup>64</sup> This method, sometimes called “diaporematic,” was not an exercise designed to pay lip service to previous masters, but rather a sincere philosophical attempt to grasp a problem in many of its dimensions and to analyze possible answers to it—so as to evaluate their value, or, if they were not correct, to understand why they were not so. If one of them was chosen as a solution, it was nevertheless only probable, not yet apodictical or necessary, as in a scientific investigation.<sup>65</sup> The modal categories of probability and necessity are not used in Tibetan philosophical literature (nor in Indian philosophical literature for the most part). It would be worth reflecting on this absence and what it entails for Buddhist thought.<sup>66</sup> Yet even though the modality of necessity is not categorized as such Red mda’ ba’s work, for example, it is presupposed by the argumentative procedure. If it were not presupposed, the positive progression of the argument would barely make sense, and that is why I have used this modality in my interpretation of his text. Thus the comparison between Red mda’ ba’s and Aristotle’s ways of appropriating older positions sheds some light on Red mda’ ba’s approach. The comparison reveals his approach to be apodictic while Aristotle’s is not, precisely because he adopts a logical framework rather than an empirical one.

Throughout this paper, there looms the opposition between history and philosophy.<sup>67</sup> In sum, this opposition is necessary in order to understand the philosophical perspective. A philosophical perspective does not understand something from the past as something of the past as such, but rather as something that is still valid in the present should it have some grasp on truth. This does not mean that the study of past philosophical systems and past philosophers precludes the practice of philosophy itself. To the contrary, this whole study is about philosophizing with old materials. But, as we have seen, these old materials have not been taken as representing something past, something that cannot be relevant to the present. They have rather been elevated to the eternal present, not just *my* present (the very short stretch of time and space

<sup>64</sup> See for example his *Metaphysics* B, 1; *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1-2.

<sup>65</sup> This is because a scientific investigation has to start from true (evident) and primary premises, whereas the diaporematic approach starts with the available positions, which are neither evident nor necessarily occupy the totality of possible answers. In the diaporematic approach the premises are not complete. This recalls the discussion above of logical *versus* empirical approaches. The diaporematic approach is only empirical. See Aristotle’s *Topics*, I, 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> On the issue of modality in Indian philosophy see Matilal 1982: 132-155; Kapstein 2001: 136.

<sup>67</sup> I share here the concerns expressed by P. Patil about the “tyranny of social and cultural history” in south Asian religions and Buddhist studies. See Patil 2009: 6, 17.

in which I live), but a universal present, a present that can be extended for eternity to include all possible subjects who would ask the same question.<sup>68</sup> As stated earlier, this process makes room for universality.

Of course, this does not mean that a historical approach to philosophers and their ideas cannot nurture philosophical investigation. A historical approach can show, for example, that a problem has been historically constructed through the specific understanding of certain concepts, which calls into questions our own reception of problems and ideas. Such a historical approach is not only helpful but often necessary to ensure the rigorous and precise distinctions that are so critical to philosophical clarity. Such a historical approach serves philosophical reflection. Yet we should still safeguard the latter from being reduced to a historical approach by maintaining a reference to universal truth, and not just to historical truth.<sup>69</sup> The distinctions between history, history of philosophy, philosophy, and a philosophical investigation of history need be maintained, for fear that they might have a tendency to overlap and cancel out each others' benefits.

Since this study has spent time trying to free some space for philosophy, let us now reflect upon the issue at stake with a philosophical question: why does the status of school denominations in Tibetan texts matter? I do believe that it matters to philosophers, and more generally to anyone who wants to fully appreciate the intellectual strength of the Buddhist tradition. By viewing these treatises as not merely reporting the opinions of previous thinkers, but as using these opinions to address a problem and to answer that problem, we can allow the texts to speak to us in the present, where "speaking" means causing us to fundamentally question our own conceptions and behaviors. It is the only way that these texts can be meaningful with regard to truth and falsehood. Otherwise we would have to leave everything to history. Philosophy would have nothing left to do but to choose between being a history of ideas (and therefore be submissive to the past), or functioning in the present without reference to the past, frightened of past opinions and ignorant of its own history. Thus the way that we understand these past ideas may tell us as much about their content as about our own relationship to the past and to truth.

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<sup>68</sup> See the description by Gueroult 1979: 49-50 of the history of philosophy treated as an object of philosophical activity.

<sup>69</sup> *The Philosophy of Spinoza* by H. A. Wolfson is an excellent example of a study that does just that.

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