

A Late Proponent of the Jo nang gZhan stong Doctrine: Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho (1880–1940)

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1. *The resurgence of Jo nang scholasticism*

Although the doctrines and leading early figures of the Jo nang tradition have been the focus of increasing scholarly attention over the past thirty years, much has yet to be written about developments in the tradition during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The goal of this paper is to shed light on this later period by focusing on one particular Jo nang thinker, Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho (1880-1940). In order to contextualize his distinctive view and style, I will begin by sketching the historical evolution of the Jo nang tradition across Central and Eastern Tibet, and by providing some biographical and doctrinal information about Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's main teacher, 'Ba' mda' Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho (1844-1904).

The Jo nang came to prominence as a distinct tradition of Tibetan Buddhism during the fourteenth century, after Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1361) had settled in the valley of Jo mo nang. This site, located in gTsang, had been a well-known place for retreat at least since the time of Kun spangs thugs rje brtson 'grus (1243-1313), who founded the first monastery there and is credited with having gathered and merged seventeen different instruction lineages of the completion stage of the *Wheel of Time Tantra (Kālacakratāntra)*, the sixfold *vajrayoga (rdo rje rnal 'byor yan lag drug pa)*.² It was precisely through this practice that Dol po pa gained the realization on which he based his particular understanding of emptiness.³ Presenting the relative and the ultimate

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² See Henning 2009, 238-239.

³ See Stearns 2010, 16-18.

respectively as the object of consciousness and the object of wisdom, he maintained that relative phenomena are empty of a true, intrinsic essence (*rang gi ngo bo bden pas stong pa*), whereas the ultimate truth is empty of other (*gzhan stong*) in the sense of being empty of relative adventitious stains but not of its true, intrinsic essence (*rang rang gi ngo bo bden pas mi stong pa*).⁴ This position became the hallmark of Dol po pa's tradition, which he referred to as Great Madhyamaka (*dbu ma chen po*).⁵ The Jo nang trace the sources of this doctrine along two parallel

⁴ See Dol po pa, *bDen gnyis gsal ba'i nyi ma*, 110-110.: "The first [point, the actual defining characteristics of the two truths.] Any object of consciousness, being fundamentally empty of a true intrinsic essence, is the defining characteristic of the relative truth. And any object of the genuine wisdom of the Noble Ones, being fundamentally not empty of its true, intrinsic essence, is the defining characteristic of the ultimate truth." *dang po ni/ rnam shes kyi yul gang zhig /gshis la rang gi ngo bo bden pas stong pa ni/ kun rdzob bden pa'i mtshan nyid dang / 'phags pa'i ye shes dam pa'i yul gang zhig /gshis la rang rang gi ngo bo bden pas mi stong pa ni/ don dam bden pa'i mtshan nyid de/*. And *Ibid.*, 110.-110.: "Since the relative does not actually exist, it is self-empty, and it appears to consciousness, but not to wisdom. And since the ultimate does actually exist, it is not empty of self [but] empty [of] other, and it appears to wisdom, but never to consciousness." *kun rdzob ni/ don la med pas rang stong dang / rnam shes la snang gi ye shes la mi snang ba dang / don dam ni/ don la yod pas rang gis mi stong pa gzhan stong dang / ye shes la snang gis [em. gi] rnam shes la gtan nas mi snang ba yin te/*. See Mathes 1998, 459.

⁵ According to Broido 1989, Dol po pa referred to his Great Madhyamaka as a view (*lta ba*), based on a rather experiential perspective, in opposition to the more rigid category of tenet system (*grub mtha'*), based on logical and philosophical arguments. Moreover, Broido noted that Dol po pa never used the term *gzhan stong* in reference to a view or to a tenet system. Although Broido's distinction between these two categories makes sense, I believe they are often loosely adopted by Tibetan scholars. Moreover, while I could find only one case where Dol po pa referred to the Great Madhyamaka as a view (see Dol po pa, *bDen pa gnyis kyi rnam par dbye ba'i 'ja' sa*, 287), there are instead a number of instances in which he referred to it as a textual tradition (*gzhung lugs*). In his *Fourth Council (Bka' bsdu bzhi pa)*, as well as in other texts, Dol po pa also referred to his doctrine as that of Tāranātha (*rdzogs ldan gyi chos*), the Age of Perfection, and to his commentarial tradition as the Kṛtayuga Tradition (*rdzogs ldan gyi lugs*). Favoring a doxographical perspective, Dol po pa took the *Wheel of Time Tantra* as textual basis, and, applying plainly dogmatic criteria, grouped the entirety of the Buddhist teachings into four qualitatively different ages. Of course, he maintained that the Age of Perfection represented the highest of the four. See Kapstein 2000, 110-116; Mathes 2008, 75-78; Stearns 2010, 94-95, 135-137. Tāranātha (1575-1634) was probably the first of the Jo nang pas to refer to their own doctrine as Empty of Other Great Madhyamaka (*gzhan stong dbu ma chen po*). Buchardi 2007 (10-12) points at him as an example of a scholar who used the term *gzhan stong* as meaning both tenet system and practice tradition (*sgom lugs*), and to define the Empty of Other Madhyamaka (*gzhan stong dbu ma*) as a view and meditation (*lta sgom*). A more extensive look at Tāranātha's collected works reveals that he used the terms Great Madhyamaka, Empty of Other, and Empty of Other Great Madhyamaka interchangeably and referring

lineages originating in India: the meditative tradition (*sgom lugs*) of the five treatises of Maitreya and the 'Bro lineage of the *Wheel of Time Tantra*. These two are respectively known as the *sūtra* and the *mantra* lineages.⁶

The Jo nang pas prospered in Central Tibet until the mid-seventeenth century, when, after the death of Tāranātha (1575-1634) and the reunification of Central Tibet under the power of the Fifth Tā la'i bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682), all their monasteries within that region were gradually converted into dGe lugs institutions.⁷ However, their tradition managed to survive and recover in A mdo, where a series of monasteries had been founded starting from the early fifteenth century in the areas of 'Dzam thang and rGyal rong. The tradition later flourished in rNga ba and mGo log as well.⁸ In particular, gTsang ba dgon, in 'Dzam thang, became during

to either a view, a tenet system, both (*lta grub*), or a view and meditation. Later Jo nang scholars followed the example of Tāranātha.

⁶ In *The Lamp of the Moon: Doctrinal History of the Jo nang* (*Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*), mKhan po Blo gros grags pa clearly distinguishes these two lineages (see *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 5-19) and reconstructs their development from India into Tibet. For a translation of relevant passages from this text, see Sheehy 2007. For a more detailed account of the Jo nang mantra lineage, see Sheehy 2009a.

⁷ In the mid-seventeenth century, the regions of dBus and gTsang were unified under the power of the dGe lugs tradition and the Fifth Tā la'i bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682). One of the key figures behind the dGe lugs political agenda of that time was bSod nams chos 'phel (1595-1657), the treasurer of dGa' ldan pho brang, who requested the military support of Gushri Khan (1582-1655) and the Qoshot Mongols against the ruler of gTsang, Karma bstan skyong dbang po (1605-1642). In 1642, after the order of bSod nams chos 'phel, Gushri Khan led his armies to defeat the ruler of gTsang and eventually enthroned the Fifth Tā la'i bla ma as the new King of Tibet. Politically bound to the former regime of gTsang, and holding a doctrinal view that was in sharp contrast with that of the dGe lugs pas, the Jo nang pas found themselves in a very unfavorable position. Their main monastic seat in gTsang, rTag brtan dam chos gling, was effectively converted into dGe lugs in 1658, when it was renamed dGa' ldan phun tshogs gling. This happened also due to the insistence of the dGe lugs 'Jam dbyangs sPrul sku (1635-1723), the First rJe btsun dam pa, who was the son of the Tüsheets Khan Gombodorj (1594-1655), and who had been recognized as the rebirth of Tāranātha. Eventually, all the Jo nang monasteries of gTsang followed the same fate as rTag brtan dam chos gling. See Karmay 1998, 504-517; Bareja-Starzyńska 2009-2010; Sheehy 2010; Stearns 2010, 72-80; Schaeffer 2013.

⁸ One of the first Jo nang monasteries in Eastern Tibet, Chos rje dgon, was founded in 'Dzam thang around 1425 by Drung dka' bzhi ba Rin chen dpal (1350/1351-1435), also known as Ratnaśrī. He was born in rGyal mo tsha ba rong, but studied in gTsang under the guidance of one of Dol po pa's main disciples, Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1306-1386). In the later part of his life, Rin chen dpal was urged by his master to leave for the East in search of a proper location for a new monastery. Once arrived in 'Dzam thang, he converted the local Bon pos and founded Chos

the course of the eighteenth century the new monastic seat of the Jo nang sect.⁹ The heirs of Dol po pa were eventually able to keep his legacy alive even during the turbulent times of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Thanks to the great efforts of personalities such as Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa (1920-1975) and Ngag dbang yon tan bzang po (1928-2002),¹⁰ around fifty Jo nang monasteries are currently

rje dgon. According to the Jo nang pas, the founding of this monastery had been foreseen by Dol po pa himself. Notably, Rin chen dpal authority was recognized by the Ming 明 imperial court, and he was granted the title of Hongjiao Chanshi 弘教禪師. For a detailed account of the history of Chos rje dgon between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century, see Sperling 2009, 158-166. See also Gruschke 2008, 71-73. For the history of the Jo nang monasteries in the area of 'Dzam thang, see Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 104-516. For the history of the main Jo nang monasteries in the area of rNga ba, see *ibid.*, 516-533.

⁹ The monastery of gTsang ba was established after the settlement of Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal (1691-1728) in 'Dzam thang. Born in gTsang, he surprisingly received his Jo nang training in that region when all the Jo nang monasteries were supposed to have been already officially converted since years. In fact, as it turns out reading Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal's biography by Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, as well as those of his relatives and former lineage holders Blo gros rnam rgyal (1618-1683) and Cha lung ba Ngag dbang 'phrin las (1654-1723), the Jo nang pas endured the dGe lugs intervention and continued to teach their doctrine and practices in gTsang at least until the late twenties of the eighteenth century. Blo gros rnam rgyal and Ngag dbang 'phrin las also travelled as far as Mongolia to transmit their teachings and visited 'Dzam thang, where Blo gros rnam rgyal spent about eleven years. Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal studied with Ngag dbang 'phrin las and, among others, the Fifth Pañ chen Blo bzang Ye shes (1663-1737). He left for the East in 1714, and, in 1717, he reached the area of Yar thang, in mGo log, establishing the monastery of mDo sngags bshad sgrub gling. On the same year, Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal arrived in 'Dzam thang, where the Fifth Chos rje rGyal ba lhun grub grags pa (1674-1736) offered him his own quarters as a present. See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 67-75, and 170-171. See also Gruschke 2008, 72-76, and Sheehy 2010 and 2011.

¹⁰ Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa and Ngag dbang yon tan bzang po were respectively the ninth and the tenth *vajracārya* of gTsang ba monastery. The main teachers of Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa were 'Dzam dngos Kun dga' ngag dbang (1873-1936), Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho (1880-1940), Ngag dbang rdo rje bzang po (1893-1948), Ngag dbang bstan pa gsal byed (1878-1953), and Ngag dbang smon lam bzang po (1887-1952). The most important works of Blo gros grags pa include the *Great Exposition on gZhan stong* (*gZhan stong chen mo*; the full title reads *rGyu dang 'bras bu'i theg pa mchog gi gnas lugs zab mo'i don rnam par nges pa rje jo nang pa chen po'i ring lugs 'jigs med gdong lnga'i nga ro*), and the *Doctrinal History of the Jo nang* (*Jo nang chos 'byung*). The latter, together with its *Supplement* (*Lhan thabs*), constitutes the most comprehensive and up to date historical source on the Jo nang school. Many of the works of mKhan po Blo grags were transcribed by his most important disciple, Ngag dbang yon tan bzang po, who supported his guru during the hardships of the Cultural Revolution. Later he had a key role in the revival of

thriving in Eastern Tibet, in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan 四川 and Qinghai 青海. Outside Tibet, one monastery was founded in Shimla, in India, twenty years ago. A few years later, a further monastery was founded in Nepal.¹¹ The Jo nang tradition is now enjoying a certain degree of popularity among Chinese Buddhists,¹² and a handful of its adherents have started to transmit their teachings in the West.¹³

the Jo nang tradition. In fact, between the end of the eighties and the early nineties, Yon tan bzang po had several meetings with the Tenth Paṅ chen (1949-1989), Nga phod ngag dbang 'jigs med (1910-2009), and the then President of the Buddhist Association of China, Zhao Puchu 赵朴初 (1907-2000). These contacts allowed him to obtain some support for the reconstruction of monasteries and for the reprint of several texts. Two of the main students of Yon tan bzang po are the present *vajracārya* of gTsang ba monastery, sPrul sku 'Jigs med rdo rje (b. 1944), sPrul sku 'Jam dbyangs blo gros, and mKhan po Kun dga' shes rab gsal byed (b. 1936). For a detailed biography of Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, see Kun dga' shes rab gsal byed 2014. For more details about his works, see also Sheehy 2007, and Duckworth 2008. For a biography of Ngag dbang yon tan bzang po, see "Juenangpai Ji Juenang Disishiliu Dai Fawang Zhizun Shangshi Awang Yundeng Sangbu Lüezhuan."

¹¹ The monastery of rTag brtan phun tshogs chos gling, in Shimla, was originally dGe lugs. Around 1997, the current Tā la'i bla ma presented it to the Ninth rJe btsun dam pa, and appointed him as the representative of the Jo nang tradition in India. The monastery in Nepal, rTag brtan shes grub chos gling, was founded in the early 2000s by sPrul sku bKra shis rgyal tshan, in Pharping.

¹² Two of the most notable Jo nang exponents who have gathered a relevant number of Chinese students are sPrul sku 'Jam dbyangs blo gros and mKhan po Chos kyi dbang phyug. The former has been studying mainly as a student of Yon tan bzang po and was enthroned as a *sprul sku* at gTsang ba monastery. He has now well-established contacts with the Chinese academic environment, and is involved in several projects in 'Dzam thang. These include the construction of an imposing Kālacakra *maṇḍala* palace and the development of professional schools, where children are being taught Tibetan and Chinese language and are given the opportunity to study traditional arts and medicine. mKhan po Chos dbang, who is a student of mKhan po Sangs rgyas rin chen, spends most of his time between his monastery, dGon pa la kha, and the city of Xi'an 西安, where most of his Chinese students reside. Like 'Jam dbyangs blo gros, he is also very fluent in Chinese and involved in a number of projects aimed at improving local education. Moreover, it is worthwhile mentioning Jinding si 金顶寺, a monastery located in the city of Baoji 宝鸡, in Shanxi 陕西. This represents a unique example of a Chinese monastery following the Jo nang tradition. Jinding si was founded in 2001 by a Han Chinese, Master Minghshu 明舒, who was first ordained as a Chan 禅 monk, but became a direct disciple of sKal ldan rgya mtsho at Chos sgar monastery in 'Dzam thang in 1993.

¹³ Among the very few Jo nang pas who are actively trying to establish their teaching outside Tibet and China, there are mKhan po 'Jam dpal blo gros (mKhan sprul rin po che) and mKhan po Chos kyi snang ba. Born in mGo log, mKhan po 'Jam dpal blo gros has studied in monasteries belonging to different traditions. He eventually found his main guru in the Jo nang Ngag dbang blo bzang 'phrin las (1917-1999),

In the early nineties, Matthew Kapstein recovered and made accessible the collected works of Dol po pa, Tāranātha, 'Ba' mda' Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho (1844-1904), and a number of important texts by Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa. Since then, Western and Chinese scholars have made notable progress in the study of the history and the doctrine of the Jo nang,¹⁴ and the availability of major Tibetan works of the tradition has steadily increased due to a series of publications undertaken by its current exponents.¹⁵ Several key presentations of the *gzhan stong* doctrine have attracted the attention of contemporary scholars, focusing mainly on the early phase of this tradition in Tibet and its possible Indian Buddhists antecedents, whereas the later transmission and developments of the Jo nang philosophical system from the downfall in gTsang up to the present days remain little explored. If we consider the period following the middle seventeenth century on the basis of the textual sources currently available, there is a conspicuous absence of doctrinal

at Chos thang monastery, and practiced Kālacakra in a three years retreat under his supervision. In 1997, he received the title of "Nonsectarian Scholar" (*chos lugs ris med kyi mkhan po*) from Ngag dbang blo bzang 'phrin las. In 2000, mKhan po 'Jam dpal blo gros left for India, and finally settled in Australia in 2003. Since then, he has founded the Rimé Buddhist Institute, published several books, and focused on the transmission of the practice of Kālacakra, giving teachings in various countries in Europe, America, and Asia. In the summer semester of 2016, mKhan po 'Jam dpal blo gros spent three months teaching as a visiting professor at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies of the University of Vienna. During this period, he kindly read the *gzhan stong* works of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho with me, and shared his knowledge of the subject. As for Chos kyi snang ba, he has been a student of Yon tan bzang po. In 1997 he became the abbot of the Jo nang monastery in Shimla, and held this position until the enthronement of mKhan po Kun dga' 'tshams chung, in 2013. Since then, he has started to give teachings and bestow empowerments abroad.

¹⁴ Assuming that most of the readers are somehow familiar with the main English publications, I would like to draw the attention to the studies by Chinese scholars as well. Relevant publications include: She Wanzhi 余万治 and A Wang 阿旺 1990 and 1991, focusing on the history of Chos rje monastery and its relationship with the Ming 明 court; Xu Decun 许得存 1993a, the Chinese translation of Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa's *Doctrinal History of the Jo nang*; Pu Wencheng 蒲文成 1993, which is a broad study of the Jo nang from the origin in central Tibet up to nowadays; She Wanzhi 余万治 1991, Xu Decun 许得存 1993b, Shi Da 史达 2006, and Huang Yingjie 黄英傑 2008, discussing the Jo nang *gzhan stong* doctrine.

¹⁵ In particular, it is worthwhile mentioning the *Jo nang dpe tshogs*, published by Mi rigs dpe skrun khang since 2007, the *Jo nang mdo sngags rig pa'i dpe tshogs*, published by Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang in 2009, and the *Jo nang e wam shes rig dpe tshogs*, also published by Mi rigs dpe skrun khang since 2012. Moreover, the proceedings of the annual Jo nang debate meetings are being published yearly, mainly in the form of questions and answers (*dris lan*).

treatises earlier than those authored by 'Ba' mda' Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho and Blo bzang mchog grub rgya mtsho¹⁶ in the second half of the nineteenth century. Living Jo nang masters explain this *lacuna* by noting that the primary focus of Jo nang adepts during these centuries was practice rather than scholarship. Thus, it is regarded as a period that produced many realized meditators, but no renowned scholars. It is not unlikely that relevant texts dated to this period will eventually emerge from A mdo, but the fact that none of them found their way into the present monastic curricula makes it unlikely that these works would be particularly innovative or influential. As the writings of the two above-mentioned scholars opened the way for more Jo nang authors, such as 'Ba' mda' dGe legs' disciple Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho and Blo gros grags pa, it is possible to trace the resurgence of the Jo nang scholasticism to the middle of the nineteenth century. Significantly, this period also overlaps with the advent of the nonsectarian (*ris med*) movement in Khams.

An in-depth study of the mutual influence that Jo nang pas from A mdo and Khams pa advocates of ecumenism may have had on each other goes well beyond the scope of the present paper. Still, a preliminary survey of mKhan po Blo gros grags pa's history of the Jo nang tradition provides a clear indication that a series of fruitful exchanges took place during that time. It turns out that many of the *vajra* masters of gTsang ba monastery,¹⁷ such as Ngag dbang chos 'phel rgya mtsho (1788-1865),¹⁸ Ngag dbang chos kyi 'phags pa (1808-1877),¹⁹ Ngag dbang chos 'byor rgya mtsho (1846-1910),²⁰ and Kun dga' mkhas

¹⁶ According to mKhan po Blo grags (*Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 306-309), Blo bzang mchog grub rgya mtsho was a young monk when dPal sprul rin po che went to 'Dzam thang, around 1854. Therefore, he must have been more or less a contemporary of 'Ba' mda' dGe legs. mKhan po Blo grags recounts that Blo bzang mchog grub spent several years studying at 'Bras spungs, where he eventually attained the title of *dge bshes*, and hence became commonly known as Dza 'go dGe bshes. According to Sheehy 2007, his *Jo nang System of Tenets (Jo nang grub mtha')* is now included among the curricular material of several Jo nang monasteries. The collected works of Dza 'go dGe bshes have been published by Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang in 2012, and his *Miscellaneous Writings (gSung thor bu)* have been recently made available by the Jonang Foundation on BDRC's website (www.tbrc.org).

¹⁷ The following four are, respectively, the first, second, fourth, and fifth *vajracarya* of gTsang ba monastery in 'Dzam thang.

¹⁸ For a biography of Ngag dbang chos 'phel rgya mtsho see Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 181-188.

¹⁹ For a biography of Ngag dbang chos kyi 'phags pa see *Ibid.*, 188-195.

²⁰ For a biography of Ngag dbang chos 'byor rgya mtsho see *Ibid.*, 201-207.

grub dbang phyug (1862-1914),²¹ as well as 'Ba' mda' dGe legs himself, shared a relationship with key figures of the nonsectarian movement like 'Jam mgon Kong sprul (1813-1899) and rDza dPal sprul rin po che (1808-1887). In fact, most of these Jo nang scholars spent years at dPal sprung and rDzogs chen studying with Kong sprul and dPal sprul, who also visited 'Dzam thang respectively around 1848²² and 1854.²³

One of the most fascinating figures in this later phase of the Jo nang tradition was in fact Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho. Before presenting a brief biography of him and laying out the main characteristics of his doctrinal approach, it is necessary to say a few words about his main teacher, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs.

2. 'Ba' mda' Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho²⁴

'Ba' mda' dGe legs was considered to be an emanation of Nā ro pa (1016-1100), Kun dga' grol mchog (1507-1566), and Tāranātha, but also of Candrakīrti (c.570-c.650), who is significantly regarded by the dGe lugs pas as the key figure of their Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tradition. Moreover, Blo gro grags pa recounts that, when in meditative equipoise, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs could remember one of his previous lives as 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa (1648-1721/22) at Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil, one of the largest dGe lugs monasteries in A mdo.²⁵ Born in the village of 'Ba' mda', not far from 'Dzam thang, Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho spent some of his formative years²⁶ in the regions of rDza chu kha and sDe dge, in Khams. In that period, he seems to have focused on the exoteric study of the Five Classes of Great Scriptures (*gzhung chen bka' pod lnga*), usually considered as the core of the dGe

²¹ For a biography of Kun dga' mkhas grub dbang phyug see *Ibid.*, 207-218.

²² *Ibid.*, 184 and 189-190.

²³ *Ibid.*, 190. See also Ricard 2017, 24-25 and 56-57.

²⁴ For a biography of 'Ba' mda' dGe legs see *Ibid.*, 412-424. See also Kapstein 1997, 462-467, and Cabezon 2015.

²⁵ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 412-413, and 419. For an historical account of Bla brang monastery, see Nietupski 2011.

²⁶ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 413-414. According to Blo gros grags pa, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs left 'Dzam thang when he was seventeen years old and returned at the age of twenty. Therefore, he must have studied in Khams approximately between 1861 and 1864. It must be noted that while Blo gros grags pa counts people's age according to the Tibetan custom, namely, that of taking one person's year of birth as the year one, I present these data following the Western age reckoning.

lugs scholastic curriculum.²⁷ Although this same curricular model is currently adopted also by Jo nang monasteries in A mdo, it is not clear when they began following it.²⁸ It is worth noting, however, that in the biography of one of the earliest Jo nang exponents in 'Dzam thang, the First Chos rje rGyal ba bzang po (1419/1420-1487),²⁹ the Five Classes of Great Scriptures are already listed among his subjects of study. 'Ba' mda' dGe legs pursued these studies at Ser shul, the largest dGe lugs monastery in rDza chu kha, and at rDzogs chen, where, in particular, he received teachings on the *Sūtras on the Perfection of Insight* (*Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*) from mKhan po A dkon (dKon mchog 'od zer; c.1837-c.1897), the abbot of the Śrī Siṃha college. Even though there is no precise information about who his main dGe lugs teacher was, Blo gros grags pa informs us that 'Ba' mda' dGe legs continued to study the literature of that tradition on his own³⁰ and had recurring pure visions where he could discuss difficult points of the scriptures with 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and Thu'u bkwan.³¹ Whoever ignited his interest in the dGe lugs scholastic curriculum, it is clear, as Matthew Kapstein has noted, that 'Ba' mda' dGe legs "adheres, throughout almost all of his commentarial writing on non-tantric subjects, to the dGe lugs pa tradition of Bla brang."³²

At rDzogs chen, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs studied with dPal sprul rin po che as well. Then, he moved to dPal spung, where he was trained by Kong sprul in the Six Dharmas of Nā ro pa (*nā ro chos drug*). 'Ba' mda' dGe legs subsequently developed a profound affinity with the bKa' brgyud teachings and, in the later part of his life, became the *vajracārya* of g.Yu thog, a monastery belonging to this tradition, where he founded a retreat centre and lived his last years. It is worthwhile noting that, as g.Yu thog is located about ninety kilometers from 'Dzam thang, a good relationship has grown between this Karma bKa' brgyud monastery and the Jo nang institutions of the region. In fact, many of g.Yu thog's current *mkhan pos* have received part of their education at Jo nang monasteries in 'Dzam thang, such as Chos thang and gTsang ba. In about 1864, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs left the area of sDe

²⁷ The Five Classes of Great Scriptures are those of Pramāṇa, Madhyamaka, Prajñāpāramitā, Abhidharma, and Vinaya. For more details about the curricular models of the dGe lugs pas and of other traditions, see Dreyfus 2003, 98-148. For a study on the recent adaptations of the monastic curricula of non dGe lugs institutions, see Pearcey 2015.

²⁸ See Kapstein 1997, 466.

²⁹ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 113.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 415.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 419-420.

³² See Kapstein 1997, 464.

dge and returned to his birthplace, where he continued his Jo nang training, mainly under the supervision of Ngag dbang chos 'phel rgya mtsho and Ngag dbang chos kyi 'phags pa at gTsang ba monastery.³³ After about twenty years, he went to the retreat of bKra shis lha ri and mastered the practice of Kālacakra following the instructions of one of its most renowned practitioners, Ngag dbang chos 'dzin dpal bzang po (?-c.1899), also known as Lha bzo bla ma.³⁴ Later, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs moved his quarters to the hermitage of dGe 'phel and was eventually appointed at g.Yu thog.³⁵

In considering the extensive works of this author, it is rather surprising that one looks in vain for any systematic presentation of the *gzhan stong* doctrine. The reason proposed by contemporary Jo nang exponents is simply that 'Ba' mda' dGe legs passed away before he had the chance to compose such a text.³⁶ Although this could well be the case, it does not really explain why he invested so much energy presenting dGe lugs material in the first place. It seems possible that, in the wake of the ecumenical movement, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs felt the need to update the monastic courses of study in order to revive Jo nang scholasticism. Kapstein suggests that he decided to appropriate curricular sources from Bla brang motivated by the firm belief that he was the incarnation of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, and by a sincere admiration for the dGe lugs scholastic tradition. Without abandoning a *gzhan stong* position, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs would have dealt with it as a rather esoteric doctrine implicitly pervading all the teachings of the Buddha.³⁷

³³ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 414.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 415.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 417, 423.

³⁶ From personal conversations with mKhan po Chos dbang, at dGon pa La kha, and mKhan po Chos bzang, in Chengdu, in 2015. This anecdote is also mentioned in Sheehy 2009b, 2.

³⁷ For a discussion on 'Ba' mda' dGe legs's doctrinal approach, see Kapstein 1997, 463-467. Also Dol po pa and Tāranātha followed similar approaches. According to Kapstein, apart from his qualitative classification of the buddhist teachings, Dol po pa resorted to esotericism maintaining that, whereas the actual intention of the *Sūtras on the Perfection of Insight* is mostly hidden, their essence is the same as that of the *Wheel of Time Tantra*. Kapstein noted that, when commenting on the *Sūtras on the Perfection of Insight*, Dol po pa mostly refrained from forcing his *gzhan stong* view into these texts, but he presented it whenever their unclarity could be taken as implying what he held as the definitive meaning of the discourses of the third wheel of the doctrine, or of the tantras. See *Ibid.*, 457-460. Moreover, Mathes has pointed out how Dol po pa did something similar also in his commentary on the *Highest Continuum (Uttaratantra)*. Distinguishing a common and an uncommon presentation, Dol po pa commented this treatise in accordance with the first mode, without imposing his definitive view, and asserted that, on the relative level, there

According to mKhan po Blo grags, there is no doubt that the view held by 'Ba' mda' dGe legs was in line with Jo nang gZhan stong. In his former life as 'Jam dbyang bzhad pa, he realized the profound mode of abiding by analytical meditation and in accordance with the intention of Nāgārjuna's *Collection of Reasonings (Rigs tshogs)*. Then, as 'Ba' mda' dGe legs, he gained a completely nonconceptual and direct realization of the ultimate as presented by the Jo nang tradition.³⁸ In his historical works, Blo gros grags pa also recalls a significant episode which occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Kun dga' mkhas grub dbang phyug invited 'Ba' mda' dGe legs to give teachings at gTsang ba monastery. On this occasion, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs spent about two months teaching his *Summary of the Six Yogas (sByor drug spyi don)*,³⁹ a text that he had composed to clearly distinguish between emptiness of self (*rang stong*) and emptiness of other in the context of the practice of the completion stage of Kālacakra.⁴⁰ It is also noteworthy that, in this particular text, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs presents specific issues both from the perspective of what he holds as his own tradition (*rang lugs*), which in this context clearly proves to be the one of Jo nang, and from the perspective of other great scholars (*mkhas mchog gZhan dag*), generally corresponding to that of the dGe lugs tradition. In fact, Jo nang mkhan pos agree that the *Summary of the Six Yogas* and others of his works on the *Wheel of Time Tantra*, such as the *Stages of Meditation of Kālacakra (Dus 'khor sgom rim)*⁴¹ and the *Exposition of the Powerful Ten Syllables (rNam bcu dbang ldan gyi*

are buddha qualities and *kāyas* that are produced and conditioned. However, Dol po pa's ultimate view becomes clear in his *Mountain Doctrine (Ri chos)*, where, applying the uncommon presentation, he referred to passages from the *Highest Continuum* discussing an unconditioned buddha-element that is empty of other, completely transcendent, and permanent in the sense of being beyond time. See Mathes 2008, 76-84. Considering Tāranātha, Kapstein noted that he also adopted an approach consistent with that of Dol po pa. For Tāranātha, there is a qualitative distinction between the three wheels of the doctrine, and the Empty of Other Madhyamaka is presented most clearly and explicitly in the discourses of the third wheel. However, he maintained that all the three wheels have a single intention and even in the first and the second wheel it is possible to find passages that clearly teach the Great Madhyamaka. In fact, in his two commentaries on the *Sūtra on the Heart of the Perfection of Insight (Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra)*, Tāranātha made clear that the hidden, definitive meaning of the *Perfection of Insight* is that of the ultimate empty of other. See Kapstein 1997, 460-461.

³⁸ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 420-21.

³⁹ The full title of the text reads: *dPal dus kyi 'khor lo'i rdzogs rim sbyor ba yan lag drug gi spyi don legs par bshad pa rdo rje bdud rtsi'i chu gter*.

⁴⁰ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 421.

⁴¹ The full title of the text reads: *dPal dus kyi 'khor lo'i rdzogs rim sbyor ba yan lag drug gi sgom rim grub pa'i lam bzang sku bzhi'i rgyal sar bsgrod pa'i shing rta*.

rnam bshad),⁴² both implicitly and explicitly teach *gzhan stong*.⁴³ Thus, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs would have presented the emptiness of other only in his esoteric teachings, and, more precisely, in those related to the practice of Kālacakra. Nonetheless, as already mentioned, the living Jo nang tradition maintains that his broader exposition of the doctrine has remained incomplete due to an untimely death.

Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho left no indication that it was his intention to fill gaps left by his teacher, and we also cannot take for granted that he maintained a position identical or consistent with that of 'Ba' mda' dGe legs. Still, it is worthwhile noting that Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's writings build on many of the subjects his teacher dealt with, such as the Collected Topics (*bsdus grwa*) and the *Sūtras on the Perfection of Insight*, and cover what was left out of his master's collected works: an organic presentation of the Jo nang doctrine and the discussion of its most characteristic features. Therefore, we can expect that the study of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's view will yield insights into some of the main philosophical issues that preoccupied both him and 'Ba' mda' dGe legs, and thus increase our knowledge of key developments in Jo nang doctrine during their time.

3. *The Life of Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho*⁴⁴

Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho was born in 1880 in Rab kha, about ten kilometers northwest from 'Dzam thang. His father was mGo log bKra tshe, son of A skyong rGyal mtshan of the A lcags 'bri family, and descendant of Seng ge thar. His mother was gSer bza' Lab sgron. At the age of thirteen, he took up residence at the retreat of bKra shis lha ri and started the preliminary practices of Kālacakra under the guidance of the same teacher who had trained 'Ba' mda' dGe legs, Ngag dbang chos 'dzin dpal bzang po. From him, he received the name Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho. He practiced following the explanations of Ngag dbang chos 'dzin for about three years and experienced signs proving his progress along the path of the *Wheel of Time Tantra*. When he reached the age of seventeen, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho received further instructions for the generation stage and

⁴² The full title of the text reads: *dPal dus kyi 'khor lo'i yang snying rnam bcu dbang ldan gyi don bshad pa rin chen sgron me*.

⁴³ From personal conversations with mKhan sprul rin po che, mKhan po Chos dbang, and mKhan po Rig pa'i rdo rje.

⁴⁴ For a biography of Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, see Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 482-496. See also *Jo nang mdo sngags rig pa'i dpe tshogs*, Vol. 19, 1-4.

gained a stable and vivid experience of the manifestation of several deities. With the passing of time, Ngag dbang chos 'dzin gave him also the empowerments and the instructions for the six branches of *vajrayoga*, starting from the three isolations (*dben gsum*) of body, speech, and mind. Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho first realized the general and particular signs of experience, and then the key points of the practice.⁴⁵ While in bKra shis lha ri, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho also received the reading transmission of all the collected works of Dol po pa from Kun dga' mkhas grub dbang phyug, otherwise known as Ngag dbang don ldan.⁴⁶

In 1899, after the death of Ngag dbang chos 'dzin, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho went to the mountain retreat of dGe 'phel and became a student of 'Ba' mda' dGe legs. He spent about three years studying with 'Ba' mda', focusing in particular on his lengthy commentaries on the *Ornament of Clear Realization* (*Abhismayālamkāra*) and the *Sūtras on the Perfection of Insight*. It was during this period that Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho composed the *General Outline of Collected Topics* (*bsDus grwa spyi zur*),⁴⁷ a work belonging to the indigenous Tibetan genre of Collected Topics, long used in Sa skya and dGe lugs monasteries to debate key points of Buddhist epistemology.⁴⁸ 'Ba' mda' dge legs passed away in 1904, but, around 1908, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho was able to receive the reading transmission of more of his writings from Ngag dbang chos 'byor rgya mtsho, the fourth *vajracārya* of gTsang ba, who had been one of 'Ba' mda' dge legs' closest disciples. From him, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho also obtained several other transmissions,⁴⁹ including that of Tāranātha's commentary on the *Tantra of Tārā Yoginī* (*Tārāyoginītantra*).⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See *Jo nang mdo sngags rig pa'i dpe tshogs*, Vol. 19, 1-2.

⁴⁶ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 482-483.

⁴⁷ The full title reads: *bsDus grwa'i spyi zur gyi don 'ga' zhiig rab tu gsal bar byed pa rin po che'i sgron me*.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the *bsdus grwa* genre, see Tillemans 2016.

⁴⁹ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 485.

⁵⁰ The *Tantra of Tārā Yoginī* was one of the latest Highest Yoga Tantras (*anuttarayogatantra*) to be introduced into Tibet. No original Sanskrit text is available. The Tibetan translation of the text is not included in any edition of the *bKa' 'gyur*, but it is contained in the collected works of Tāranātha together with seven other relevant texts: the commentary to the Tantra, the history of its transmission, and the instructions for the practice and the rituals related to this wrathful eight-armed Tārā. Tāranātha received the transmission of the *Tantra of Tārāyoginī* from the Indian Mahāsiddha Buddhaguptanātha around 1594. For a history of the *Tantra of Tārāyoginī* see Tāranātha's *sGrol ma'i rgyud kyi byung khungs gsal bar byed pa'i lo rgyus gser gyi phreng ba* and its translation in Templeman 1981. See also Roth 2008. For a biography of Buddhaguptanātha, see Tāranātha, *Grub*

At the age of twenty-nine, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho settled in the monks' quarters of gTsang ba. He soon began to gather a group of students, including Ngag dbang blo gros tshul khrim, who would have later become a leading teacher at Chos thang monastery. Among other subjects, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho taught Collected Topics, Abhidharma, Prajñāpāramitā, the *Wheel of Time Tantra*, and Dol po pa's *General Commentary on the Doctrine (bsTan pa spyi 'grel)*.⁵¹ He remained based in 'Dzam thang for the next fifteen years, during which he received the reading transmission of all the collected works of Tāranātha from Kun dga' mkhas grub dbang po, and the two became close friends. Moreover, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho received empowerments and instructions from the rNying ma Nyag bla gter chen, Lha tshe dge slong, and Khams sangs gter ston. During these years, he composed some of his major works,⁵² such as *Removing the Anguish of Holding to Extremes (mThar 'dzin gdung 'phrog)*⁵³ and the *Illuminating Light Summary (sPyi don rab gsal snang ba)*.⁵⁴

Around 1925, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho moved back to bKra shis lha ri, where he spent most of his time.⁵⁵ When some of his works, such as *Removing the Anguish of Holding to Extremes*, were included in the curricula of a few monasteries in mGo log, they drew the attention of a prominent dGe lugs master, A mdo dge bshes 'Jam dpal rol pa'i blo gros (1888-1936).⁵⁶ It is not clear whether the two ever met or whether they were just in epistolary contact, but, according to Blo gros grags pa, A mdo dge bshes expressed his glowing appreciation of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's writings and tried to convince him to go to Lha sa to teach the *Wheel of Time Tantra*, offering a full sponsorship. Apparently, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho declined this generous offer. At

chen buddha gupta'i rnam thar rje btsun nyid kyi zhal lung las gzhan du rang rtoḡ gi dri mas ma sbags pa'i yi ge yang dag pa.

⁵¹ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 485-486

⁵² *Ibid.*, 486.

⁵³ The full title reads: *Kun mkhyen jo nang pa chen po'i dgongs pa gzhan stong dbu ma'i tshul legs par bshad pa mthar 'dzin gdung 'phrog*,

⁵⁴ The full title reads: *Kun mkhyen jo nang pa'i bzhed dgongs dbu tshad kyi gzhung spyi dang gung bsgrigs te dpyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba.*

⁵⁵ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 487.

⁵⁶ A descendant of gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes (ninth century), A mdo dge bshes was mainly trained in the dGe lugs tradition, but had a special relationship with the rNying ma as well: he studied with 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820-1892) and was considered as the emanation of dPal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po (1808-1887). He was also one of the main teachers of the Chinese monk and translator Fazun 法尊 (1902-1980). For more details about A mdo dge bshes, see Bde legs rab rgyas 2004. For more details about Fazun, see Tuttle 2005 and Sullivan 2007.

the age of fifty, he built a new retreat hut in Rwa 'ob, settled there, and started to teach many students. Occasionally, he visited gTsang ba monastery to give teachings and, later, he moved to its upper retreat center, where he resided for a few years.⁵⁷

In 1935, after a battalion of the Red Army passed through the area of 'Dzam thang during its Long March,⁵⁸ Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho left for mGo log. There, he met the Ninth Paṅ chen, Blo bzang thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma (1883-1937), and received from him the transmission of the *Prayer of Sambhala* (*Sham bha la'i smon lam*).⁵⁹ At the same time, he obtained from Khra dge slong Tshul khriṃs dar rgyas the transmission of the *Ocean of Clouds of Praises of Mañjuḥoṣa* (*'Jam dbyangs bstod sprin rgya mtsho*), by Tsong kha pa (1137-1419).⁶⁰ This was possibly the only occasion on which Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho traveled outside the reaches of 'Dzam thang. By the end of 1935, he headed back to his retreat in Rwa 'ob where he continued giving teachings to whoever came to visit him. In 1937, Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, who was then seventeen years old, came to meet Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho at his retreat and commenced studies under his guidance.⁶¹ In the same period, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho established a contact with A gter dpa' bo chos dbyings rdo rje (1895-1945), a renowned *gter ston* from mGo log, who is said to have revealed scriptures recognizing him as the rebirth of great teachers from the past: the Mahāsiddha Kambalapāda (tenth century)⁶² and Tsong kha pa's main disciple, rGyal tshab dar ma rin chen (1364-1432). Current proponents of the Jo nang tradition maintain that Tshogs gnyis was also a rebirth of Nya dbon kun dga' dpal (1285-1379), one of the direct students of Dol po pa. Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho passed away in the leap year of 1940. Blo gros grags pa relates that, when his physical remains were cremated, a great, bright halo appeared in the sky, myriad rainbows pierced the retreat from all directions, and a luminous path made of five-colored spheres rose

⁵⁷ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 488-490

⁵⁸ For a detailed account of the Red Army's passage through the regions of rGyal rong and rNga ba, see Li and Akester 2012.

⁵⁹ The full title of this brief text, composed by the Third Paṅ chen Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes (1738-1780), reads: *Sham bha lar skye ba'i smon lam/ dpal ldan dang po'i ring lugs ma/*.

⁶⁰ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 491.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 491-492.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 492-493. The Tibetan text reads *lwa ba*. This seemingly refers to the Mahāsiddha Kambalapāda, known in Tibetan as Lwa ba pa, La ba pa, or Wa ba pa. Together with Niguma, he is considered as a key figure in the early transmission of the Six Dharmas of Niguma (*ni gu chos drug*). See Tāranātha, *Zab lam ni gu chos drug gi gzhung 'khrid ma mo'i lhan thabs kha skongs*, 1001-1002..

above his hut.⁶³ For his disciples, these were clear signs that Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho had finally reached the pure land of Sambhala.⁶⁴

4. *The Conciliatory Approach of Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho.*

In the course of his life, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho composed a substantial corpus of texts, comprising altogether thirteen volumes. The corpus covers a broad range of subjects including the Empty of Other Madhyamaka (*gzhan stong dbu ma*), Pramāṇa, Collected Topics, his commentaries on the *Sūtras on the Perfection of Insight*, and the practices and rituals of the *Wheel of Time Tantra*. Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's collected works are currently available in their original *dbu med* edition through the digital archive of the Buddhist Digital Research Center (BDRC). Only three of his texts have been republished in 2009 in a revised *dbu can* edition: *Removing the Anguish of Holding to Extremes*, the *Illuminating Light Summary*, and *Dispelling the Darkness of Partiality* (*Phyogs lhung mun sel*⁶⁵).⁶⁶ These three represent a significant

⁶³ See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *Jo nang chos 'byung zla ba'i sgron me*, 494-496.

⁶⁴ See *Jo nang mdo sngags rig pa'i dpe tshogs*, Vol. 19, 3-4.

⁶⁵ The full title reads: *Kun mkhyen chen pos mdzad pa'i grub mtha'i rnam bzhag don gsal gyi 'grel ba phyogs lhung mun sel*.

⁶⁶ While *Removing the Anguish of Holding to Extremes* and *Dispelling the Darkness of Partiality* are included in the collected works of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, the *Illuminating Light Summary* is not. The original *dbu med* edition of the latter is available on BDRC's website (www.tbrc.org) as a separate text. These three works have been published in 2009 by Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang in its Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa series under the title *Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho'i dbu ma gzhan stong phyogs bsgrigs*. The publication was made possible by Douglas Duckworth in collaboration with the Jonang Foundation. In the same year of 2009, Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang published these three works also in the nineteenth volume of its *Jo nang mdo sngags rig pa'i dpe tshogs*, a collection of texts by Tāranātha, 'Ba' mda' dGe legs, and Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho. These two editions from 2009 are mostly identical. *Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho'i dbu ma gzhan stong phyogs bsgrigs* contains a short introduction by Michael Sheehy, where he points out the diversity of *gzhan stong* interpretations within the contemporary Jo nang and briefly outlines the relationship between 'Ba' mda' dGe legs, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, and Blo gros grags pa. Moreover, Sheehy distinguishes the view of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho from that of Blo gros grags pa on the basis of a note that Phan bde rgya mtsho, the present *sprul sku* of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, wrote for him. However, both the transcription and the translation given by Sheehy are problematic. The transcription with corrections noted reads: *ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho dang ma ti rin po che gnyis kyi gzhan stong gnyis kyi mi 'dra ba'i gnad de gang yin zhes pa la/ spyir khongs gnyis kyi dgongs pa mthar thug 'gal mi srid kyang / gnas skabs gsungs tshul la/ ma tis bde gshegs snying gi ngo bo de nam yang stong nyid dang rten 'grel [correct: 'brel] ma yin par gsungs la/ tshogs gnyis rgya mtshos ni/ thun*

example of late Jo nang philosophical literature and are studied by present day Jo nang pas as the main *gzhan stong* works by this scholar.

In *Removing the Anguish of Holding to Extremes*, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho follows the example of other great Jo nang scholars such as Dol po pa⁶⁷ and Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1306-1386)⁶⁸ and presents the Empty of Other Madhyamaka according to the three-fold structure of ground (*gzhi*), path (*lam*), and result (*'bras bu*). Notably, he divides the ground section into the two rubrics of the 'ground of relative phenomena' (*kun rdzob rnams kyi gzhi*) and the 'ground of *dharmatā*, i.e., wisdom' (*chos nyid ye shes kyi gzhi*). This text also includes a presentation of the two truths and a concise commentary on Maitreya's *Highest Continuum* (*Uttaratantra*).

Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's *Illuminating Light Summary* is organized into sixteen chapters providing further elucidation of key points already treated in *Removing the Anguish of Holding to Extremes*, and thus offers a particularly cogent example of the author's views. In particular, the main issues discussed concern whether *dharmatā* is dependent arising (*rten 'brel*), whether it is truly established (*bden par grub*), whether it is an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag*) or a nonaffirming negation (*med dgag*), how it is free from elaborations (*spros bral*), and how, in the meditative equipoise of the noble ones (*'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag*), it appears as endowed with all the supreme aspects (*rnam pa thams cad pa*). It is worthwhile mentioning that, in this text, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho analyzes also key differences in the ways Nya dbon pa and Tāranātha present the path of preparation (*sbyor lam*).

mong gi bshad ltar bde gshegs snying gi ngo bo yang stong nyid dang rten 'grel [correct: 'brel] *min* [correct: yin] *par gsungs bas gtso bo mi 'dra sa de de yin snyam*/. I translate Phan bde rgya mtsho's words as follows: "What is the key point regarding the difference of the respective *gzhan stong* [positions] of the two Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho and Ma ti Rin po che? In general, their final intentions cannot be contradictory. However, considering [their] provisional (*gnas skabs*) way of teaching, Ma ti asserts that the essence of buddha nature is never emptiness and dependent arising, whereas Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho asserts that, according to the common explanation, even the essence of buddha nature is emptiness and dependent arising. Therefore, [I] think that the main point in which they differ is this." Although I have no access to the original handwritten note by Phan bde rgya mtsho, the negation in the assertion of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho must be either a writing mistake or a transcription error. If it weren't so, Phan bde rgya mtsho's words would be contradictory. Misled by that reading, Sheehy is correct, but he misses to make the necessary conjecture.

⁶⁷ See Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*.

⁶⁸ See Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *gZhi lam 'bras bu'i ngo sprod yang dag don gsal sogs*.

As for *Dispelling the Darkness of Partiality*, it constitutes possibly the only known commentary on a particular work by Dol po pa, which Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho refers to as *The Clear Meaning of the Presentation of the Tenets Systems* (*Grub mtha'i rnam bzhag don gsal*). Dol po pa's text, which in fact consists of a concise exposition in verses of the various views of Buddhists and non-Buddhists, does not appear in his collected works under this or any another title, but is included in his biography by Kun spangs chos grags dpal bzang po (1283-1363).⁶⁹ As noted by Stearns, Kun spangs pa mentions that Dol po pa had been insistently invited to China by the Yuan 元 emperor Toghon Temür (Huizong 惠宗, 1320-1370), and, although he never managed to honor this request, he did compose that text specifically for the sovereign.⁷⁰

Throughout these works, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho exhibits a strong inclusivist⁷¹ tendency towards dGe lugs positions. Because this approach profoundly shaped his unique perspective on Jo nang doctrine, in the remainder of this paper I will attempt to highlight its main features and provide a few relevant examples. Of course, the details of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's doctrine require a more comprehensive investigation and will be the subject of future publications.

While the dGe lugs milieu of 'Ba' mda' dGe legs is somehow puzzling and incomplete, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's biography provides more precise information about his contacts with figures from this tradition. At the outset, it is interesting to note that Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho established such connections only in the later part of his life, between 1925 and 1935, after he had already composed his main writings. Actually, it was precisely due to his literary production that Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho drew the attention of dGe lugs personalities such as A mdo dge bshes. It is hence not unreasonable to assume that this influence might have come first directly from 'Ba' mda' dGe legs and then from his disciple Ngag dbang chos 'byor rgya mtsho. All these elements reinforce the supposition that Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's works reflect the unwritten *gzhan stong* position of 'Ba' mda' dGe legs, which possibly culminated in a further attempt to relate the *rang stong* model to the Jo nang system.

⁶⁹ See Kun spangs chos grags dpal bzang po, *Chos kyi rje thams cad mkhyen pa'i skyes rabs khyad par du 'phags pa*, 270-275.

⁷⁰ See Stearns 2010, 29-31.

⁷¹ Here, I follow Paul Hacker's definition of inclusivism as consisting in "claiming for, and thus including in, one's own religion, what really belongs to an alien sect." In this sense, inclusivism means to accept an opposing doctrine as subordinate or as a preliminary step towards one's own tenet. See, for example, Hacker 1995, 244. For a discussion about interreligious inclusivism in the broad Buddhist context, see Kiblinger 2004 and 2005.

One could say that a degree of inclusivism is already essential to the *gzhan stong* view in that *rang stong* must be accepted in order to account for the mode of being empty which characterizes relative phenomena and adventitious stains. That is, *gzhan stong pas* do not reject the *rang stong* view, but, restricting the scope of self-emptiness to the relative, recognize and emphasize its value as a necessary preliminary step leading to the definitive understanding of the ultimate. However, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho moved towards an even more inclusivist Jo nang *gzhan stong* position by accepting that not only the relative, but also *dharmatā*, the ultimate truth, can be discussed in negative terms, and by adopting a number of positions which are distinctively *rang stong*, if not specifically dGe lugs. In fact, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho consistently selects and depicts key issues by first confining the *rang stong* understanding of such specific matters to the mere provisional level or to a given perspective, which cannot but be lower than that of the wisdom of the noble ones' meditative equipoise. Thereby, he shows how, within that framework, typical dGe lugs positions could be accepted by the Jo nang pas as well. Afterwards, he proceeds with what he considers the definitive explanation of the same topic, portraying his view in line with that of Dol po pa, or at least according to his own interpretation of Dol po pa's words.

Depending on how it is applied, inclusivism can be perceived as either an appreciative or pejorative way of incorporating another's doctrine. An appreciative approach acknowledges the validity and distinctiveness of a given position and seeks to coordinate and reconcile it with other valid viewpoints. From this standpoint, the doxographical reframing and distorting reinterpretation of someone else's position for the sake of validating and even valorizing one's own position is nothing more than misappropriation. I submit that while Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho limits the *rang stong* view to a perspective which is essentially lower than that of Great Madhyamaka, he shows a profound understanding and a frank appreciation of that position, to such extent that one could question whether his true goal was that of skillfully defending *gzhan stong* from its detractors or making the whole *rang stong* system more palatable for the Jo nang. Although it is likely that most dGe lugs pas would not be particularly flattered by Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's efforts, there is little doubt that his inclusivist strategy offered him the best possible prospect of reconciling the Jo nang *gzhan stong* and the dGe lugs *rang stong* doctrines, thus facilitating productive intersectarian dialogue rather than fueling heated polemics as had been all too common in preceding centuries. In fact, this scholar's distinctive style in dealing with opposing views is that of taking into consideration a specific doctrinal point which is normally held by Jo nang as a mistaken dGe lugs theory,

or vice versa, and, instead of refuting it, showing how it could become a common ground.

The conciliatory approach of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho becomes clear in his *Removing the Anguish of Holding to Extremes*, where he distinguishes three perspectives one can adopt to define *dharmatā*, the ultimate truth:

Hence, there are three different modes of asserting *dharmatā*, luminosity, the essence of emptiness, from the perspectives of three different subjects. [This is] because there are the [following] three [perspectives].

[1] In view of how [*dharmatā*] manifests for the nonconceptual wisdom of the noble ones, it is claimed to be, among other things, the indistinguishability of ground and result, as well as the completely pure *dharmatā* [which is] the nature of the ground [and] inherently possesses all [the qualities of] separation [and] maturation such as the ultimate [ten] strengths, the suchness of sentient beings which is also the suchness of the Noble Buddhas, and that which transcends dependent arising.

[2] In view of how that emptiness, which is the object of such wisdom, manifests as the object of another reasoning consciousness, it is claimed to be, among other things, an object of knowledge, an element, a sense-base, a universal, a particular, one, not contradictory, a nonentity, a nonaffirming negation, and the absence of the true [existence] which is the *negandum*.

[3] In view of how it appears as an object of intellect, namely, as a term or a concept, the *dharmatā* manifesting for such [mind] is claimed to be, among other things, dependent arising, a conceptual imputation, and a different delimitation of a single essence with the *dharmins*.⁷²

The first, higher perspective is thus that of the nonconceptual wisdom of the noble ones. This, for Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, is essentially the view of Great Madhyamaka. On the basis of a direct, nonconceptual experience, *dharmatā per se* is realized as possessing all buddha

⁷² Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho: *mThar 'dzin gdung 'phrog* (A), 183-183: *des na chos nyid 'od gsal stong pa nyid kyi ngo bo yul can mi 'dra ba gsum gyi sgo nas khas len tshul mi 'dra ba gsum yod de/ 'phags pa'i ye shes rnam par mi rtog pa'i ngor 'char tshul la ltos nas gzhi 'bras dbyer med dang gzhi'i rang bzhin rnam dag gi chos nyid la yang don dam pa'i stobs sogs bral smin thams cad rang chas su yod pa dang sems can gyi de bzhin nyid de sangs 'phags kyi de bzhin nyid kyang yin pa dang rten 'brel las 'das pa sogs su khas blangs pa dang / ye shes de'i yul gyi stong nyid de rigs shes gzhan gyi yul du 'char tshul la ltos nas shes bya dang khams dang skye mched dang spyi dang bye brag dang gcig dang mi 'gal ba dang dangos med dang med dgag dang dga' [em. dgag] bya'i bden med sogs su khas blangs pa dang / sgra dang rtog pa rnam kyi blo'i yul du snang tshul la ltos nas de'i ngor shar ba'i chos nyid rten 'brel dang rtog btags dang chos can dang ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad pa sogs su khas blangs pa dang gsum yod pa'i phyir rol/.*

qualities and completely transcendent in that it goes beyond dependent arising. This is the actual, nonrepresentational ultimate (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*). On the other hand, both the second and the third perspectives present only the representational ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*). In fact, although these latter two still deal with the same topic, they do it only indirectly, being conceptually determined, and entailing descriptions that are in line with *rang stong* positions. In the second perspective, *dharmatā* is the object of wisdom but is analyzed through the filter of a separate reasoning consciousness, and is thereby understood only in negative terms, as the nonaffirming negation held by *rang stong pas*. In the third perspective, *dharmatā* is taken only as a conceptual or linguistic construct, and therefore reduced to an intellectual postulate. Here, ultimate truth is equated with dependent arising and only conceptually distinguished from the relative, just as in the dGe lugs tenet system.

Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho further stresses the provisional validity of presenting *dharmatā* as a nonaffirming negation when he discusses the way it is posited from the perspective of negating the *negandum* (*dgag bya bkag phyogs*). At the beginning of his *Illuminating Light Summary*, he explains:

First. The analysis about how, in regard to all phenomena, there is no consummate emptiness which is essentially other than that very absence of true establishment, [i.e.,] the *negandum*.

The subject (*dharmin; chos can*): that absence of true establishment in regard to what is apprehended in the clinging mode of ignorance, the belief that all phenomena from form to omniscience are real.

[Predicate:] there is no emptiness, mode of abiding of phenomena, which is essentially other than it, [i.e., their absence of true establishment]. [This is] because [of the following reasons].

[1] An emptiness [of phenomena] that is subtler than [the one taught] from the perspective of negating the *negandum* in the the middle discourses, [i.e., the *Sūtras on the Perfection of Insight*, has not been taught in the last wheel together with Mantra[yāna].

[2] In the teachings of the Great Omniscient Dol po pa, the fundamentally existing relative or the relative fundamentally existing has been said to be the subtle self of phenomena. However, it has not been said that [there is] any self of phenomena which is subtler than that, and the fundamentally existing relative has the same meaning as the truly established relative and the inherently established relative. If that is so, also the subtle selflessness of phenomena, which is the negation of the subtle self of phenomena, must be the absence of

inherent establishment [of] form and so forth, or that very absence of true establishment [of] form and so forth.⁷³

In this passage, the fundamentally existing relative (*kun rdzob gshis la yod pa*), the relative fundamentally existing (*gshis la kun rdzob yod pa nyid*), the truly established relative (*kun rdzob bden par grub pa*), and the inherently established relative (*kun rdzob rang bzhin gyis grub pa*) are all synonyms for a mode of (wrongly) apprehending relative phenomena as truly existent or truly established. Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho calls it 'subtle self of phenomena' (*chos bdag phra ba*), whereas its negation, the absence of true existence of relative phenomena, would be their 'subtle selflessness' (*bdag med phra mo*). Although Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho here claims that this was taught by Dol po pa as well, in fact, the term 'subtle self' does not occur even once in Dol po pa's collected works. Rather, the distinction between a 'subtle' and a 'coarse selflessness' (*bdag med grags*) turns out to be more typical of dGe lugs treatises. For example, as noted by David Seyfort Ruegg, it is discussed by the Second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po (1728-1791), in his *Jewel Garland of Tenets Systems (Grub mtha' rin chen phreng ba)*. According to this dGe lugs scholar, the 'coarse selflessness' would be the emptiness of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, whereas the 'subtle selflessness' would be the absence of an actual real self.⁷⁴ Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho uses the expression 'subtle selflessness' only to stress the fact that Dol po pa never taught any self of phenomena which goes beyond the one representing the impossibility of an actual true existence of relative phenomena, which corresponds to the *negandum*. Moreover, when Dol po pa, in his *Autocommentary to the Fourth Council (bKa' bsdu bzhi pa'i rang grel)*,⁷⁵ lists, among other things, the relative, the selves of persons and phenomena,

⁷³ Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho: *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 194-195: *dang po/ chos thams cad kyi steng gi dgag bya bden grub med pa de nyid las ngo bo gzhan du gyur pa'i mthar thug gi stong nyid med tshul la dpyad pa ni/ gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar gyi chos thams cad bden 'dzin ma rig pa'i zhen stangs su bzung ba ltar gyi bden grub tu med pa de chos can/ khyod las ngo bo gzhan du gyur pa'i chos rnam kyis gnyis lugs stong nyid med de/ dgag bya bkag phyogs nas bka' bar ba sher phyin las phra ba'i stong nyid zhig 'khor lo phyi ma sngags dang bcas pa las ma gsungs pa'i phyir dang / kun mkhyen dol po pa chen po'i gsung rnam su/ kun rdzob gshis la yod pa'am gshis la kun rdzob yod pa nyid chos bdag phra ba yin par gsungs kyi/ de las phra ba'i chos bdag gang yang ma gsungs shing / kun rdzob gshis la yod pa ni kun rdzob bden par grub pa dang kun rdzob rang bzhin gyis grub pa dang don gcig nyid yin la/ de yin na chos bdag phra ba bkag pa'i chos kyi bdag med phra mo yang / gzugs sogs rang bzhin gyis grub pa med pa'am gzugs sogs bden par grub pa med de nyid yin dgos pa'i phyir dang / ...*

⁷⁴ See Ruegg 2002, 228-229. See also, as pointed out by Ruegg, dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po, *Grub mtha' rin chen phreng ba*, 105.

⁷⁵ The full title reads *bKa' bsdu bzhi pa'i don bstan rtsis chen po'i 'grel pa*.

consciousness, and so on, he does indeed refer to the misconception of their 'fundamental existence' (*gshis la yod pa*) as the extreme of exaggeration.⁷⁶

It must be noted that here, for Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, the scope of the negation is not phenomena *per se*, but is limited to the misconception of their true establishment. Therefore, within this framework, the *negandum*, true establishment, and the ground of the negation, relative phenomena, are the same for the the Jo nang and the dGe lugs traditions. Ultimately, the Jo nang pas would include also relative phenomena within the category of the incidental stains that must be purified from the ground of the negation, which they equate with buddha nature.⁷⁷ However, as long as it is made clear that *dharmatā* is fathomed through the negation of the self of relative phenomena, the Jo nang pas can agree on it being a nonaffirming negation. Moreover, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho emphasizes that, from this very standpoint, not only the second but even the last wheel of the doctrine does not teach an emptiness (here understood as the true nature or the mode of abiding of relative phenomena) that is subtler

⁷⁶ See Dol po pa, *bKa bsdu bzhi pa'i rang grel*, 40-45. For a translation of these pages, see Stearns 2010, 210-213.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Tāranātha, *sNgon med legs bshad*, 631.-631.: "Therefore, the essence of teaching the selflessness of phenomena through many synonyms is precisely that, in that self-cognizing, unchanging, all-aspected buddha nature, it is not established any phenomenon whatsoever that is an appearing and well-known incidental stain." /*de bas na chos kyi bdag med rnam grangs du mas bstan pa'i snying po ni/bde gshegs snying po rang rig 'gyur med rnam pa thams cad pa de la/ glo bur dri ma shang zhing grags pa'i chos gang yang ma grub pa 'di nyid yin nol*. On the same page (631.), Tāranātha presents also how the Jo nang pas can take relative phenomena as the ground of negation and their true establishment as the *negandum*: "This being so, the mere empti[ness] of true establishment, the *negandum*, of all phenomena such as form, the ground of negation, is accepted as the meaning of selflessness of phenomena. ..." /*des na dgag gzhi gzugs sogs chos rnam dgag bya bden grub kyis stong pa tsam chos kyi bdag med pa'i don du 'dod pa nil...* In their uncommon exposition, the Jo nang pas also distinguish the *negandum* and the ground of negation in relation to the three natures (*trisvabhāva; rang bzhin gsum*). The perfect nature (*pariniṣpanna; yongs grub*), which is equated with the ultimate truth, is then taken as the ground of negation, while the imagined (*parikalpita; kun btags*) and the dependent (*paratantra; gzhan dbang*) natures are the *negandum*. See Dol po pa, *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, 216.-216.: "Ultimately, the empty ground is the perfect [nature], *dharmatā*, the ground which is empty of even the dependent [nature]." /*mthar stong gzhi gzhan dbang gis kyang stong pa'i gzhi chos nyid yongs grub yin pa'i phyir don gcig go*. See also *Ibid.*, 219.-219.: "Hence, also [in] this [passage], it has been said that the perfect [nature, i.e.,] *dharmatā*, which is empty of imagined and dependent [natures], is ultimately existent. Therefore, the ultimate is properly established only as empty of other." /*des na 'di yang kun btags dang gzhan dbang gis stong pa'i chos nyid yongs grub don dam du yod par gsungs pa'i phyir/ don dam gzhan stong nyid du legs par grub bo//*. See also Mathes 2000 and Tillemans 2004.

than relative phenomena's absence of true establishment. For him, the main distinction between the teachings of the middle and the last wheel of the doctrine is in fact drawn on the basis of two different methodological perspectives: that of negating the *negandum* (*dgag bya bkag phyogs*) and that of affirming the distinctive qualities (*khyad chos sgrub phyogs*) which correspond to all the ultimate buddha qualities.⁷⁸ The first of these two perspectives is the way in which *dharmatā* is explicitly taught in the discourses of the middle wheel, while the second coincides with the teaching mode of the last wheel and Mantrayāna.

Still, these two distinguishable modes of discourse and knowledge deal with the same topic: the same *dharmatā*. What changes is the way it is posited. When understood just in an analytical manner, by negating the *negandum*, *dharmatā* is precisely the nonaffirming negation held by *rang stong pas*. Nonetheless, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho points out that this *dharmatā*, which is realized through analysis and hence in a conceptual manner, is not the emptiness of definitive meaning that is nonrepresentational (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i nges don gyi stong nyid*), but just representational emptiness (*rnam grangs pa'i stong nyid*):

Query: That mere selflessness analyzed through the reasoning of dependent arising and so on, [namely, that which] in the *Wish fulfilling Jewel of Madhyamaka* (*dBu ma yid bzhin nor bu*) is referred to [as] 'emptiness analyzed through inferential reasoning,'⁷⁹ is

⁷⁸ See Higgins and Draszczyk 2016 (Vol. 1, 238-242), where it is noted how also the Eight Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554) adopted a similar distinction between a negating and an affirming orientation, that he associated with the Madhyamaka tradition of Nāgārjuna and the Siddha tradition of Saraha. Recognizing the contextual value of these opposing perspectives in that the former is suitable for discarding the reificatory tendencies of the ordinary dualistic consciousness, whereas the latter properly brings to light the prediscursive nature of wisdom, Mi bskyod rdo rje regarded them as complementary. See also Mathes 2008 (354-356), where it is shown how 'Gos lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481) distinguished the methodological approaches of the second and the third wheels of the doctrine, but maintained that they relate to the same reality. For 'Gos lo tsā ba, the second wheel follows the method of nonaffirming negation and establishes through analysis that relative phenomena are empty of an own essence. This is a preparatory step for the teachings of the third wheel, which follow the method of affirming negation and disclose the ultimate truth as experienced in direct cognition. Thereby, apart from the lack of an intrinsic essence of defilements, also the experience of a nonconceptual awareness occurs. 'Gos lo tsā ba refers to this as "awareness-emptiness" (*rig stong*).

⁷⁹ Tāranātha, *dBu ma yid bzhin nor bu*, 94: "The emptiness analyzed through inferential reasoning and also the absence of concepts in which the relative is left as it is (*rang sor 'jog*) perceive mere object-universals and entities. Therefore, [these]

representational emptiness. But why is it said that it is not the emptiness of definitive meaning that is nonrepresentational?

Reply: That [is] the mere nonaffirming negation of refuting the two [types of] self which emerges via inference. [However,] it is said that it is not the emptiness which is the consummate mode of abiding replete with the parts [of] the distinctive qualities, [i.e., all buddha qualities].⁸⁰

The words of sMon lam, a monk currently studying at the monastic college of gTsang ba, in 'Dzam thang, may help us to understand how the Jo nang distinction between representational and nonrepresentational emptiness also relates to the scope of the negation:

The Jo nang pas call 'representational emptiness' that empt[iness] of true establishment, the *negandum*, in regard to form and so on, the ground of negation. And [they] call 'nonrepresentational emptiness' that wisdom which is established inwardly, on the level of the yogic mind, as the leftover [of] the empt[iness] of the relative, the *negandum*, in regard to the ultimate, the ground of negation. That is ultimate truth and also buddha nature.⁸¹

Thus, the emptiness understood by a reasoning consciousness through an analysis that proceeds by negating only the true establishment of relative phenomena, but not phenomena themselves, is representational, or conceptual. On the other hand, the nonrepresentational or nonconceptual emptiness is that which is directly realized by the yogic mind, disclosing itself as the absence of all relative defilements, including phenomena, finally removed from the ground of negation which is then a positively qualified buddha nature.

do not mentally engage solely with the definitive meaning itself." *rjes dpag rigs pas dpyad pa'i stong nyid dang / |kun rdzob rang sor 'jog pa'i rtog med kyang / |don spyi tsam dang dngos la dmigs pa'i phyir/ |nges don de nyid kho na yid byed min/.*

⁸⁰ Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 195.-196.: 'o na dbu ma yid bzhin nor bu las/ *rjes dpag rigs pas dpyad pa'i stong nyid dang / zhes rten 'brel la sogs pa'i rigs pas dpyad pa'i bdag med tsam de rnam grangs pa'i stong nyid yin gyil/ rnam grangs ma yin pa'i nges don gyi stong nyid ma yin par gsungs pa ci yin zhe nal/ de ni rjes dpag gi ngor shar ba'i bdag gnyis bkag pa'i med dgag tsam po del/ khyad chos cha shas rdzogs pa'i gnas lugs mthar thug gi stong nyid ma yin par gsungs pa yin tel/.*

⁸¹ Personal message, May 31, 2017: *gzugs sogs dgag gzhi'i steng du dgag bya bden grub kyis stong pa de la jo nang pas rnam grangs ba'i stong nyid zer gi yod pa dang / dgag gzhi don dam gyi steng du dgag bya kun rdzob kyis stong shul du tshur rnal 'byor ba'i blo ngor grub pa'i ye shes de la rnam grangs ba ma yin pa'i stong nyid zer gi yod pa red/ de ni don dam bden pa dang bde gshegs snying po'ang red lags/.*

In his *Illuminating Light Summary*, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho further discusses the representational emptiness as follows:

In short, representational emptiness consists in [1] the emptiness that is only established in the context of conceptual analysis and inference, and in [2] the emptiness that is only explicitly taught by the middle wheel. [This is] because [of the following reasons].

[1] The former, that selflessness free from elaborations, is not the emptiness appearing as the ultimate one which has all the [supreme] aspects. Moreover, since that inference [of] the subject is conceptual, it is not free from the elaborations of object-universals and the elaborations of dualistic appearances. Therefore, also the emptiness which is the object of that [inference] is not the real [one] which is free from elaborations.

[2] Although the latter, emptiness to the extent that it is explicitly taught in the middle wheel, is subtle selflessness and free from elaborations, it is not the ultimate one which has all the [supreme] aspects.⁸²

Therefore, inasmuch as emptiness, the true nature of phenomena, is understood in an analytical or inferential mode, it entails the medium of its object-universal (*don spyi*) and is realized only indirectly, without the complete abandonment of conceptual elaborations. Moreover, although the second wheel's teachings do effectively discard all elaborations, they explicitly posit *dharmatā* as nothing more than sheer nothingness. In both cases, the ultimate being dealt with is only representational, whereas the nonrepresentational emptiness is the one that is fully qualified with all the ultimate aspects, and is clearly and explicitly taught in the last wheel of the doctrine, from the perspective of affirming its distinctive qualities. Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho explains:

However, that emptiness which is explicitly taught in the middle wheel is not clearly taught in an explicit way in that middle wheel itself as the ultimate one which has all the [supreme] aspects. Therefore, it is explained that the scope of what is taught in that [middle wheel] is not

⁸² Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 197.-197.: *mdor na rjes dpag rtog bcas kyi dpyad ngor grub pa tsam gyi stong nyid dang / 'khor lo bar bas dngos bstan tsam gyi stong nyid ni rnam grangs pa'i stong nyid yin te/ snga ma bdag med spros bral de don dam pa'i rnam pa thams cad par 'char pa'i stong nyid ma yin pa dang / de ma zad yul can rjes dpag de rtog bcas yin pas don spyi'i spros pa dang gnyis snang gi spros pa ma bral bas/ de'i yul gyi stong nyid kyang spros bral mtshan nyid pa ma yin pa'i phyir dang / phyi ma 'khor lo bar ba las dngos su bstan tshod tsam gyi stong nyid ni/ bdag med phra mo dang spros bral yin kyang don dam pa'i rnam pa thams cad pa ma yin pa'i phyir ro//*

[that of presenting such emptiness as] the ultimate one which has all the [supreme] aspects, but in general [emptiness] is the ultimate one which has all the [supreme] aspects.

[This is] because precisely that feature of the mere nonexistence of phenomena from form to omniscience as real entities, [i.e.,] the *negandum*, is established as the ultimate one which has all the [supreme] aspects.⁸³

Hence, it is precisely that nonexistence of phenomena taught in the second wheel that is positively qualified by the third wheel's teachings as what possesses all the ultimate buddha qualities. This corresponds to how *dharmatā* is directly realized by the nonconceptual wisdom of the noble ones in their meditative equipoise, a state that is completely free from elaborations.

Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's conciliatory approach is also conspicuous in his discussion about whether *dharmatā* is dependent arising or not, and about the way it is ultimately established. In both cases, he follows the two steps mentioned above: he first presents the topic in a general way, in line with *dGe lugs* positions, and then gives a definitive explanation of the same issue, this time in line with the Jo nang *gzhan stong* doctrine.

Whether *dharmatā* is equated with dependent arising is a major dividing line between *dGe lugs* and Jo nang thinkers.⁸⁴ Tsong kha pa holds that both the relative and the ultimate truth are dependent arising, whereas for Dol po pa the ultimate completely transcends dependent arising.⁸⁵ In his own style, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho first

⁸³ Ibid., 197.-197.: 'on kyang 'khor lo bar ba las dngos su bstan pa'i stong nyid de/ don dam pa'i rnam pa thams cad par 'khor lo bar ba de nyid las dngos su gsal bar ma bstan pas/ de las bstan tshod de don dam pa'i rnam pa thams cad pa ma yin par bshad pa yin gyi/ spyir ni don dam pa'i rnam pa thams cad pa yin te/ gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar gyi chos rnam dgag bya bden dngos su med tsam gyi cha de nyid don dam pa'i rnam pa thams cad par grub pa yin pa'i phyir te/.

⁸⁴ See Hopkins 2008, 361-362.

⁸⁵ Dol po pa clearly states that the ultimate cannot be dependent arising in his *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, 463.-464.: "Query: in the *Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way* it is said: 'Since there is no phenomenon whatsoever that is not dependent arising, there is no phenomenon whatsoever that is not empty.' Therefore, as whatever is dependent arising is emptiness, whatever is emptiness must also be dependent arising. And since whatever is dependent arising is empty of self, all [types of] emptiness are only the empty of self. Reply: since someone thinks so, it has to be explained that, although such passage says that whatever is dependent arising is emptiness, it does not say that whatever is emptiness is dependent arising. If it is accepted that whatever is emptiness is dependent arising, all the synonyms of the empty ground, such as ultimate, *dharmatā*, [and] authentic limit, are emptiness. Therefore, one would have to accept that they are dependent arising, and even that they are conditioned, impermanent, false, deceptive, and so on." /'o na/ rtsa ba shes

points out that even the Jo nang pas would accept that, in general, *dharmatā* is dependent arising. However, he specifies, this cannot mean that the ultimate arises dependently on causes and conditions. For him, there can only be a logical interdependence: the logical relationship of X existing in dependence on Y that is found by a dualistic, ordinary mind. For example, *dharmatā* can be taken as dependent arising just in the sense of being the object which is logically dependent on wisdom, the subject. This is most evident in his *Illuminating Light Summary*:

Second. The general analysis about whether the ultimate *dharmatā* is dependent arising or not.

The emptiness of form and so forth being empty of inherent existence, [i.e.,] the *negandum*, in general, is dependent arising. [This is] because, although the ultimate, [i.e.,] emptiness, is not the dependent arising [of] causes and conditions, it is established in dependence upon, among other things, *dharmas*, [which are] the empty ground, and wisdom.⁸⁶

Again, just as he presents *dharmatā* as representational emptiness from the perspective of negating the *negandum*, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho does not follow the Jo nang extraordinary presentation wherein the empty ground (*stong gzhi*) is equated with the ultimate truth.⁸⁷ Here, the object to be negated is only the mistaken superimposition of relative phenomena's inherent establishment, and, therefore, the empty ground corresponds to phenomena themselves. Accordingly, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho explains that the ultimate can be conceptually understood as dependent on either such phenomena (being their true nature) or wisdom (being its object). However, for the nonconceptual wisdom, all the relative aspects, the dualistic

rab tu/ gang phyir rten 'byung ma yin pa'i/ chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin pa/ de phyir stong nyid ma yin pa'i/ chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin no/ zhes gsungs pa'i phyir rten 'brel gang yin stong nyid yin pa ltar stong nyid gang yin yang rten 'brel yin dgos la rten 'brel gang yin rang stong yin pas stong nyid thams cad rang stong kho na yin no snyam du 'ga' zhig sems par gyur na de'i phyir brjod par bya ste/ lung des rten 'brel gang yin stong nyid du gsungs pa yin gyi/ stong nyid gang yin rten 'brel du gsungs pa ni ma yin no/ gal te stong nyid gang yin thams cad rten 'brel yin par 'dod na ni/ don dam chos nyid yang dag pa'i mtha' la sogs pa stong gzhi'i rnam grangs thams cad stong nyid yin pa'i phyir/ rten 'brel yin par 'gyur zhing / 'dus byas mi rtag pa brdzun pa bsu ba la sogs par yang 'dod dgos la/.

⁸⁶ Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 199.-199.: *gnyis pa/ don dam chos nyid rten 'brel yin min gyi spyi don dpyad pa ni/ gzugs sogs dgag bya rang bzhin gyis grub pas stong pa'i stong nyid de spyir ni rten 'brel yin te/ don dam stong nyid de rgyu rkyen rten 'brel ma yin kyang / ye shes dang stong gzhi chos can sogs la ltos nas grub pa yin pa'i phyir te/.*

⁸⁷ See note 77.

appearances, and the mental elaborations, including that of *dharmatā* being dependent arising, are completely exhausted:

According to the common path of reasoning of Madhyamaka and Pramāṇa,⁸⁸ that ultimate *dharmatā* is dependent arising, namely, it is dependent[ly] established [in the sense that], in general, it is established in dependence on *dharmas*, [i.e.] the empty ground, and wisdom and so forth. However, for the nonconceptual wisdom of the noble ones, it is not dependent arising. [This is] because, after all the conventional marks [of] experience are exhausted into the *dharmadhātu*, only the own distinguisher of *dharmatā* nakedly appears for the wisdom of the equipoise of the noble ones. [Why?] Because, for such mind of the equipoise, in the ascertainment of that *dharmatā* does not occur even the slightest appearing part which is dependent arising, and, therefore, for that wisdom [of] the equipoise, *dharmatā* is not dependent arising. [Why?] Because for that [wisdom], the elaboration of dependent arising with regard to *dharmatā* has ceased.⁸⁹

To clarify his position, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho argues, with support from the *Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), that, since *dharmatā* is ultimately the consummate, intrinsic nature of phenomena, it can be posited unilaterally (*mtha' gcig tu*) as such, without depending on any other phenomenon:

Being *dharmatā* the ultimate sphere of luminosity, it necessarily follows that it is unreasonable to say it is dependent arising, because, in the excellent discourses of the Omniscient One, his disciples, and the Great

⁸⁸ The Pramāṇa system presupposes the existence of particulars (*sva-lakṣaṇa*; *rang mtshan*) as real entities, whereas this is not accepted by Madhyamaka. These two conflicting systems were integrated in distinct manners by different Tibetan scholars (see, for example, Duckworth 2015b, and Hugon 2015). Although further study is needed to understand how Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho intends to combine the two into a “common path of reasoning of Madhyamaka and Pramāṇa” (*dbu tshad thun mong pa'i rigs lam*), it is here evident that he associates it with the presentation of the mere representational emptiness.

⁸⁹ Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 205.-206.: *don dam chos nyid de dbu tshad thun mong pa'i rigs lam ltar spyir stong gzhi chos can dang / ye shes sogs la ltos nas grub pa'i ltos grub kyi rten 'brel yin kyang / 'phags pa'i mi rtog ye shes kyi ngor rten 'brel ma yin te/ 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhas ye shes kyi ngor myong snang kun rdzob kyi mtshan ma thams cad chos kyi dbyings su zad nas/ chos nyid kyi rang ldog 'ba' zhig rjen char du shar ba yin phyir/ mnyam bzhas gi blo de'i ngor chos nyid de 'jal ba la rten 'brel gyi snang cha cung zad kyang mi 'byung bas/ mnyam bzhas ye shes de'i ngor chos nyid rten 'brel ma yin pa'i phyir te/ de'i ngor chos nyid la rten 'brel gyi spros pa 'gags pa'i phyir/.*

Venerable One,⁹⁰ it is extensively asserted that *dharmatā* is not dependent arising. If [someone maintains this,] there is no pervasion. [This is] because [of the following reason]. The Omniscient One and his disciples asserted that *dharmatā* is not dependent arising. [This] means that [1] the *dharmatā* established by valid cognition does not depend on the coming together of signs of the relative experience for the mind, and [2] it is not that such *dharmatā*, which is the empti[ness] of true [existence], without being something that can be posited unilaterally as the consummate nature of all phenomena, is merely posited in dependence on another phenomenon.

[Why? This is] because [of the following reason.] In the *Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way* it is said that 'nature'⁹¹ is not [artificially] created, nor is it dependent on something else.'⁹² Hence, the emptiness of phenomena is in accordance with what has been asserted [in this passage. That is, it] possesses the two particular [features]: it is not adventitious due to causes and conditions, and it is not dependent, [namely, it is not a] nature posited as such on the basis of a few dependent [things].⁹³

Another fundamental distinction between the positions held by Jo nang pas and dGe lugs pas stems from the discussion about whether *dharmatā* is either ultimately established or not.⁹⁴ Once again, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho tries to clarify and reconcile their opposing views. In his *Illuminating Light Summary*, he begins his response to this issue by listing two points of contrast between these masters, and then covers how these are understood by Tsong kha pa and Dol po pa:

Fifth. The analysis about the general meaning of asserting that *dharmatā*, the sphere of luminosity, is truly established.

⁹⁰ Here, as in most Jo nang works, Dol po pa and Tāranātha are simply referred to, respectively, as the Omniscient One (*kun mkhyen*) and the Venerable One (*rje btsun*).

⁹¹ Both the Tibetan terms *ngo bo* (or *ngo bo nyid*) and *rang bzhin* translate the Sanskrit term *svabhāva*. Taking 'essence' and 'nature' as synonyms, in this paper, I translate *ngo bo* as 'essence', and *rang bzhin* as 'nature'.

⁹² *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XV.2cd: *akṛtrimah svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca*.

⁹³ Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 199.-200.: *chos nyid don dam 'od gsal ba'i dbyings te rten 'brel du khas len mi rigs par thal/ kun mkhyen yab sras dang / rje btsun chen po'i gsung rab rnams su/ chos nyid rten 'brel ma yin par rgya cher gsungs pa'i phyir na ma khyab ste/ kun mkhyen yab sras kyi/ chos nyid rten 'brel ma yin par gsungs pa ni/ chos nyid tshad mas grub pa blo ngor kun rdzob myong ba'i mtshan ma 'dus pa la mi ltos pa dang / bden stong gi chos nyid de chos rnams kyi mthar thug gi rang bzhin du mtha' gcig tu 'jog tu med par chos gzhan zhig la ltos nas bzhag pa tsam ma yin pa'i don yin pa'i phyir tel/ rtsa shes las/ rang bzhin gang yin bcos min dang / gzhan la ltos pa med pa yin/ /zhes chos rnams kyi stong nyid de rgyu rkyen gyis ma bcos pa dang / ltos pa 'ga' zhig la ltos nas rang bzhin du bzhag pa'i rang bzhin ltos pa ma yin pa'i khyad par gnyis ldan du gsungs pa ltar yin pa'i phyir tel.*

⁹⁴ See Hopkins 2008, 331-342.

In general, truly established, ultimately established, thoroughly established, inherently established, established in terms of intrinsic essence, and so on are synonyms.

Most of the greatest scholars such as the venerable guru [Tsong kha pa] Blo bzang grags pa took those [synonyms] as having a different meaning from established as ultimate, established as mode of abiding, established as true nature, and so on. Then, [for them,] that feature of phenomena being empty of being inherently established is not [that of] the former five [synonyms], such as truly established, but it is [that of] the latter three, such as established as ultimate. Therefore, they accepted that, even though it is established as ultimate, it must not be ultimately established, and so on.

The Great Madhyamika Charioteer of the Land of Snow, the Omniscient Jo nang pa, [and his] disciples accepted that the ultimate *dharmatā* is truly established, ultimately established, and so on, and that the relative *dharmins* are not truly established, ultimately established, and so on. In general, [they] distinguished the truly established, ultimately established, thoroughly established, inherently established, established in terms of intrinsic essence, and so on into the two: the truly established mode of abiding and so on, and the truly established which is the *negandum* and so on. Hence, [they] considered the ‘truly established *dharmatā*’ and so on as the former, the truly established mode of abiding and so on, and the ‘not truly established *dharmins*’ as the not truly established *negandum*.

[This is] because [of the following reasons].

[1] If there were the tru[ly] established which is the *negandum*, it would be the one to be found by the insight realizing the ultimate from a perspective associated with [relative] experience. The truly established mode of abiding is the one to be found by the insight realizing the ultimate from a perspective wherein, for [the insight] itself, there is not even the slightest relative experience. And since in the insight realizing the ultimate not even the slightest sign of [relative] experience can arise for the mind, [the Jo nang pas] accepted the tru[ly] established which is the *negandum* as the unestablished basis (*gzhi ma grub*), and the truly established mode of abiding as the established basis (*gzhi grub*).

[2] Now, if a relative phenomenon were to exist as the object found, i.e., what is found for the wisdom of the equipoise of the learners, that could not but become as the self of phenomena, which is the *negandum*. The ultimate emptiness does exist as the object found by the wisdom of the equipoise of the learners, but, apart from being the consummate mode of abiding, it must not become at all as the self of phenomena. Therefore, it has been said that ‘*dharmins*, the relative,

are not truly established; *dharmatā*, being the ultimate, is truly established.⁹⁵

The two sets of terms that are here enumerated by Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho are:

- I. Ultimately established (*don dam par grub pa*); truly established (*bden par grub pa*); thoroughly established (*yang dag par grub pa*); inherently established (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*); established in terms of intrinsic essence (*rang gi ngo bos grub pa*), i.e., independently established.
- II. Established as ultimate (*don dam du grub pa*); established as mode of abiding (*gnas lugs su grub pa*); established as true nature (*chos nyid du grub pa*).

For simplicity, these two sets can be reduced to the twofold distinction between (I) what is ultimately established and (II) what is established as ultimate. Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho shows that, for Tsong kha pa, the two sets of terms are fundamentally different because, while *dharmatā* can be (II) established as ultimate, it is never (I) ultimately established.

⁹⁵ Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 211–213.: *lnga pa/ chos nyid 'od gsal ba'i dbyings bden grub tu gsungs pa'i spyi don la dpyad pa ni/ spyir bden par grub pa/ don dam par grub pa/ yang dag par grub pa/ rang bzhin gyis grub pa/ rang gi ngo bos grub pa sogs don gcig yin la/ rje bla ma blo bzang grags pa sogs mkhas mchog phal cher gyis/ de dag dang don dam du grub pa dang / gnas lugs su grub pa/ chos nyid du grub pa sogs don mi gcig par byas nas/ chos rnams rang bzhin gyis grub pas stong ba'i cha de bden par grub pa sogs snga ma lnga po ma yin kyang / don dam du grub pa sogs phyi ma gsum po yin pas don dam du grub kyang don dam par grub pa sogs yin mi dgos par bzhed la/ gangs can gyi dbu ma'i shing rta chen po kun mkhyen jo nang pa yab sras kyis don dam chos nyid ni bden par grub pa/ don dam par grub pa sogs yin la/ kun rdzob chos can rnams ni bden par grub pa/ don dam par grub pa sogs ma yin par bzhed pa ni spyir bden par grub pa/ don dam par grub pa/ yang dag par grub pa/ rang bzhin gyis grub pa/ rang ngos nas grub pa sogs la gnas lugs bden par grub pa sogs dang / dgag bya'i bden par grub pa sogs gnyis re phye nas chos nyid bden par grub ces sogs ni snga ma gnas lugs bden par grub pa sogs dang / chos can rnams bden par ma grub ces pa sogs ni dgag bya'i bden par ma grub pa la dgongs pa yin te/ dgag bya'i bden grub yod na don dam rtogs pa'i shes rab kyis myong snang dang bcas pa'i sgo nas rnyed rgyu zhig yin la/ gnas lugs bden grub ni don dam rtogs pa'i shes rab kyis rang gi ngor kun rdzob myong snang cung zad kyang med pa'i sgo nas rnyed rgyu zhig yin pa dang / don dam rtogs pa'i shes rab la ni blo ngor myong snang gi mtshan ma cung zad kyang 'char mi srid pas dgag bya'i bden grub ni gzhi ma grub pa dang / gnas lugs bden grub ni gzhi grub par bzhed pa'i phyir dang / yang na kun rdzob kyi chos zhig slob pa'i mnyam bzhag ye shes kyi ngor rnyed rgyu'i rnyed don du yod na/ de dgag bya'i chos bdag tu 'gyur ba las 'os med la/ don dam stong nyid ni slob pa'i mnyam bzhag ye shes kyi rnyed don du yod kyang gnas lugs mthar thug tu 'gyur ba las chos bdag tu rnam pa kun tu 'gyur mi dgos pas chos can kun rdzob bden par ma grub/ chos nyid don dam par bden par grub ces gsungs pa'i phyir ro/.*

In fact, for Tsong kha pa, it is necessary to distinguish two senses of the term 'ultimate' (*paramārtha; don dam*). Ontologically, as all phenomena ultimately lack any existence and essence, there is nothing that can be accepted as (I) ultimately established or real. Emptiness itself cannot be (I) ultimately established. On the other hand, when drawing the distinction between the two truths, the ultimate nature of phenomena is presented as antithetical to their relative nature, and, in this sense, emptiness, the true nature of phenomena, can legitimately be (II) established as ultimate.⁹⁶ As for Dol po pa, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho points out that he drew a further distinction between (I.A) the truly established mode of abiding (*gnas lugs bden par grub pa*) and (I.B) the truly established which is the *negandum* (*dgag bya'i bden par grub pa*). For him, (I.A) the truly established mode of abiding refers only to *dharmatā*, and it can be found only by the nonconceptual wisdom realizing the ultimate in the meditative equipoise, which is a state completely devoid of conceptual elaborations and of even the slightest relative experience. On the contrary, the true establishment of *dharmas*, relative phenomena, is never found by the nonconceptual wisdom of the noble ones, and it can just be taken as (I.B) the truly established which is the *negandum*. Therefore, for the Jo nang, when the first group of terms is understood as referring to *dharmatā* only, it can be equated with the second set. All these terms are consequently taken as synonymous, and hence *dharmatā* can be both (I) ultimately established and (II) established as ultimate. Thus, Tsong kha pa and Dol po pa would agree that there is no problem in taking *dharmatā* as (II) established as ultimate, whereas it is not possible to accept that relative phenomena are established in the same manner as *dharmatā* because this would be tantamount to admitting the existence of a self of phenomena. Moreover, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho equates Tsong kha pa's view, wherein the (I) ultimately established is taken as a 'common assertion of the two truths' (*bden gnyis thun mong gi khas len*).⁹⁷ When clearly set in such framework, Tsong kha pa's position is considered acceptable even for the Jo nang pas.

⁹⁶ See Thupten Jinpa 1998, 283-285.

⁹⁷ Ngag dbang tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, *dPyod pa'i spyi don rab gsal snang ba* (B), 216.-216.: "The Omniscient One, the Great Jo nang pa, [accepted that,] in terms of the common assertion of the two truths, if *dharmatā* is truly established, it must become as the self of phenomena. Nonetheless, although *dharmatā* is the truly established mode of abiding and so on, it must not become the self of phenomena." *thams cad mkhyen pa jo nang pa chen pos/ bden gnyis thun mong gi khas len gyi dbang du byas nal chos nyid bden par grub na chos bdag tu 'gyur dgos kyang / chos nyid gnas lugs bden par grub pa sogs yin kyang chos bdag tu 'gyur mi dgos tel*.

5. *The Legacy of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho*

A detailed comparison between the position of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho and those of other late Jo nang scholars is a *desideratum* for future research. As a prelude to such a study, it is important to note that, despite the fact that the most famous student of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho was mKhan po Blo gros grags pa,⁹⁸ the living Jo nang tradition holds their views as equally valid yet different.⁹⁹ The *gzhan stong* doctrine, as already mentioned, can accommodate a degree of inclusivism in that it requires the acceptance of self-emptiness where relative phenomena are concerned. Blo gros grags pa simply follows this trend by explicitly incorporating the definition of self-emptiness into that of emptiness of other,¹⁰⁰ and mostly refrains from discussing the ultimate truth in *rang stong* terms.¹⁰¹ In this sense, he retains a more conservative view than Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, who dares to include distinctive *rang stong* positions into his ordinary assertion of *dharmatā*. According to the oral accounts of several modern-day *mkhan pos*, this

⁹⁸ See note 10.

⁹⁹ From personal conversations with mKhan po 'Jam dpal blo gros, mKhan po Chos dbang, mKhan po Chos bzang, dGe bshes dNgos grub dpal, dGe bshes Blo bzang chos 'phel, mKhan po Rin chen rgya mthso, and mKhan po Rig pa'i rdo rje.

¹⁰⁰ See Duckworth 2008, 61-62.

¹⁰¹ This, confirmed by discussions with the Jo nang exponents mentioned in note 99, is what emerges from a first superficial reading of Blo gros grags pa's *Great Exposition on gZhan stong*. I have been able to identify just one brief passages where even Blo gros grags pa seems to accept that, in the common presentation, one can explain the representational ultimate (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*) as dependent arising. In this way, Blo gros grags pa leaves some room for an interpretation compatible with that of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, but he does not further discuss this point nor seems to apply the conciliatory approach discussed above. See Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa, *gZhan stong chen mo*, 320-321: *spyir kun rdzob bden pa dang rnam grangs pa'i don dam pa thun mong ba'i tshul la ni rten 'brel stong pa'i thad nas phan tshun gcig gcig gis yin pa yod pa'i don go tshul yod del kun rdzob gzung 'dzin gyis bsdus pa'i chos thams cad spyir rten 'byung sgyu ma lta bu yin pa'i gnad kyis don dam dpyod pa'i blos rigs pa du mas chos rnam bden med du gtan la 'bebs tshe yang gzung 'dzin gnyis bsdus kyi rtog pa'i yul mtha' dag la dmigs nas de ltar dpyod pa kho na yin pas tshul de lugs ltar na blos byas rtog pa'i yul gyis bsdus pa'i gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar mtha' dag stong pa rten 'byung gi don dang rten 'byung stong pa'i don du nges shes khyad par ba 'drong du yod pa'i cha nas snang tshul de lugs kyi bden pa gnyis bsdus mtha' dag stong pa dang rten 'brel phan tshun 'gal med kho nar nges pas bden med kyi chos thams cad la rten 'brel gyis khyab cing rten 'brel gang yin bden grub kyis stong pa yin pas kyang khyab dgos pa'i phyogs nas rten 'brel dang stong pa'i yin pa yod pa'i phyir/. See also *ibid.*, 145-145: *ye gzhi chos dbyings nyid rang lugs la rten 'brel du 'jog pa ma yin tel dbyings de sgra rtog gi ngo tsam du phan tshun ltos grub kyi rten 'brel du 'char rigs kyang don dam gnyis med ye shes kyi ngor ni kun rdzob ltos grub kyi mtshan ma sogs spros pa mtha' dag dang legs par bral ba'i phyir/.**

divergence in the views of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho and Blo gros grags pa reverberated in those of their successors, leading to the two distinct doctrinal lines which exist today.

A central figure in the transmission of the teachings of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho was Ngag dbang blo bzang 'phrin las (1917-1999).¹⁰² Even though he wasn't a student of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho, his main teachers were Ngag dbang bstan pa rab rgyas, who had been a disciple of 'Ba' mda' dGe legs, and Ngag dbang blo gros tshul khrim, who studied directly under Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho. Notably, in his *Jewel Lamp (Rin po che'i sgron me)*¹⁰³ Ngag dbang blo bzang 'phrin las copied and rearranged passages from seven of the sixteen chapters of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho's *Illuminating Light Summary*, adding some minor changes. The late abbot of 'Bro g dge dgon, mKhan po Kun dga' dpal ldan rgya mtsho (1964-2013), and the present head of the monastic college of gTsang ba dgon, dGe bshes Blo bzang chos 'phel, both former students of Blo bzang 'phrin las, stand out among the followers of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho. On the other hand, most of the disciples of Ngag dbang blo gros grags pa are said to adhere to his more orthodox view. Kun dga' shes rab gsal byed (1936), from lCam mda' dgon pa, and mKhan po Sangs rgyas rin chen, from dgon pa La kha, are two great devotees of Blo gros grags pa.

6. Concluding Remarks

The conciliatory approach of Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho is striking in the extent to which it is willing to accept typical *rang stong* positions as analytical preparations for the move into the sphere of the ultimate. The reconciliation of *rang stong* and *gzhan stong* proceeds from the distinction between their different perspectives. That of affirming the distinctive qualities, being consistent with the standpoint of the ultimate wisdom of the noble ones, corresponds with the Jo nang Great Madhyamaka, portraying an ultimate which is endowed with all the supreme buddha qualities, and which utterly transcends relative experience and conceptual elaborations. On the other hand, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho is also open to the provisional adoption of ordinary perspectives wherein the ultimate is not directly realized by nonconceptual wisdom, but rather analyzed by coarser types of mind. These deal with concepts and imputations only, and attempt to define *dharmatā* by merely discarding what it is not. On this level, Tshogs

¹⁰² See Kun dga' dpal ldan rgya mtsho 2005.

¹⁰³ The full title reads: *Kun mkhyen jo nang ba'i bzhed dgongs gzhung chen spyi'i babs bzhin cung zad gsal bar byas pa rin po che'i sgron me*.

gnyis rgya mtsho admits that such representational ultimate can be adequately described by distinctive *rang stong* positions. Accordingly, *dharmatā* can be a nonaffirming negation, and can be defined as dependent arising in the sense of being the object logically established in relation to wisdom, the subject. Moreover, in the ordinary assertion of the two truths, Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho accepts Tsong kha pa's view in that he avoids the ontological qualification of *dharmatā* as truly or ultimately established.

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