

Polemical Abhidharma: The Eighth Karmapa's *Abhidharmakośa* Commentary's Unique Characteristics, Context, and Reception ¹

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Introduction

The Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje's (1507–1554) *Abhidharmakośa* commentary the *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi 'grel pa rgyas par spros pa grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, henceforth *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* [A Detailed Commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa: The Spontaneous Accomplishment of Glory*] has not been studied academically until now.² The *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* is one of the most extensive Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries with many unique characteristics and deserves academic attention. Therefore, this paper seeks to study this commentary by discussing its unique characteristics along with its context and reception. In this way, this paper will help provide a better overview of the largely neglected but significant Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentarial literature.

Authored by Vasubandhu around the fourth or fifth century,³ the *Abhidharmakośa* is considered the highest achievement of the Vaibhāṣika school and presents its philosophical theories.⁴ It is also considered to be the quintessence of the seven scriptures of Abhidharma (*mngon pa sde bdun*).⁵ Furthermore, the *Abhidharmakośa* is the

¹ I am grateful to my primary supervisor Dr. Jim Rheingans for giving me encouragement to write this paper and providing constructive feedback which improved the paper. I would also like to express my gratitude to Khyentse Foundation for financial support in my study for a Master of Philosophy at the University of Sydney to write a thesis related to this topic.

² From the title of the commentary, it is also possible that the Eighth Karmapa could have also meant his commentary to serve as a commentary to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, not simply the *Abhidharmakośa*. Therefore, the title of the commentary can also be translated as *A Detailed Commentary on the Abhidharmakośa: The Spontaneous Accomplishment of Glory*. He also asserts that he has drawn materials from *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and elaborated on them. This is discussed below.

³ See Cox (2004).

⁴ Mejer (1991: 5–6).

⁵ Seven scriptures of Abhidharma according to Sarvāstivāda are *Jñānaprasthāna* by Kātyāyanīputra, *Prajñāptiśāstra* by Maudgalyāyana, *Prakaraṇapāda* by Vasumitra, *Sangītiparyāya* by Mahākauṣṭhila (Tibetan tradition) or by Śāriputra according to

main and most widely studied Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika treatise in the Tibetan monastic institutes.

The *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*) composed by 'Gos lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392–1481) reports that the *Abhidharmakośa* was translated into Tibetan in the period of early diffusion (*bstan pa snga dar*) in Tibet, but its teachings began to be promulgated only in the eleventh century during the later diffusion by Paṇḍita Smṛti.⁶ Consequently, the composition of its Tibetan commentaries appears to have started in Tibet after the 11th century and includes mChims 'Jam pa'i dbyangs' (13th century) commentary, arguably the most authoritative *Abhidharmakośa* commentary.⁷ Intensive study of the *Abhidharmakośa* is also likely to have started towards the end of the 11th century in Tibet at scholastic seats such as gSang phu.⁸

The Author and Textual sources

A Brief Information of the Eighth Karmapa

Living in the 16th century during the era of scholastic efflorescence in Tibet, the Eighth Karmapa has been regarded by the followers of the bKa' brgyud pa school both as a scholar and highly realised master (*mkhas sgrub*). Furthermore, he was recognised by all religious traditions as a major scholar who engaged in intellectual debate with scholars of other schools including the dGe lugs pa scholar Se ra rJe btsun.⁹

Mi bskyod rdo rje was born in 1507 which corresponds to the year of the fire hare of the Tibetan calendar. He is believed to have said 'I am the Karmapa' immediately after his birth although various sources report differently the number of repetitions and words spoken.¹⁰ The

Chinese tradition, *Vijñānakāya* by Devakṣema, *Dharmaskandha* by Śāriputra (Tibetan tradition or by Maudgalyāyana according to Chinese tradition, and *Dhatukāya* by Purna (Tibetan tradition) or Vasumitra (Chinese tradition). Frauwallner (1995) provides a summary of the seven scriptures of Abhidharma.

⁶ 'Gos lo tsā ba; Roerich, Goerge N. trans. (1976: 346). See mChims 'Jam pa'i dbyangs, trans. Coghlan (2018: 15–17) for the discussion with regard to the transmission of *Abhidharmakośa* in Tibet.

⁷ The first Tibetan commentator of the Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* is not yet ascertained although mChims 'Jam pa'i dbyangs was not the first one to comment on it. mChims 'Jam pa'i dbyangs, trans. Coghlan (2018: 20) also asserts that first Tibetan commentator of the *Abhidharmakośa* is not yet known.

⁸ Kapstein (2014: 64) notes that five major subjects including Abhidharma were studied at the Tibetan monastic center of learning Sangphu. One can assert with some certainty that Abhidharma mainly refers to *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidharmasamuccaya* in Tibetan scholastics tradition as observed by Kramer (2018: 310).

⁹ Rheingans (2017: 106), in the footnote, mentions the debate between them on the understanding of emptiness (*stong pa nyid*). Cf. Ruegg (1998:1271).

¹⁰ Rheingans (2017:73).

recognition of the Eighth Karmapa was rigorously undertaken beginning seven days after birth, and again after the emergence of a new claimant to the title of Karmapa in around 1508.¹¹ After resolving the controversy concerning the reincarnation, he was enthroned as the Eighth Karmapa in 1513.¹²

His early education started with rGyal tshab Rin po che.¹³ The Eighth Karmapa mentions that he had studied grammar, astrology, poetry, and philosophy from many masters with much persistence. He shares that he dreamt of alphabets and vowels (*dbyangs gsal*) with the rays of the sun and moon pervading the whole sky which he understood as an omen that he would obtain the capacity to teach the dharma in accordance with scripture.¹⁴

The Eighth Karmapa had four main masters who were known as *rje btsun chen po rnam pa bzhi*: (i) Sangs rgyas mnyan pa bKra shis dpal 'byor (1445/1457–1510/1525); (ii) bDud mo ma bKra shi 'od zer (b. 15th century, d. c.1545); (iii) mKhan chen Chos grub seng ge (b.15th century); and (iv) Karma 'phrin las pa I Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1456–1539).¹⁵ He received the teachings on the *Abhidharmakośa* and other Buddhist philosophical texts from Karma 'phrin las pa during his stay with him for three years.¹⁶ He was intelligent and so industrious that he barely took recess even for tea during his study.¹⁷

Rheingans suggests that, according to the colophon, Karma 'phrin las pa influenced the Eighth Karmapa to compose his own *Abhidharmakośa* commentary.¹⁸ In addition, the composition of commentaries on Vinaya is also reported to have been motivated by Karma 'phrin las pa.¹⁹

It was the motivation of the Eighth Karmapa to write a commentary on four of the five major subjects of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.²⁰ One major motive behind this enterprise may have been to provide the bKa' brgyud pa school with scholarly texts of their own system when other scholastic traditions already had philosophical texts of their own.

¹¹ Rheingans (2017: 73,74).

¹² Rheingans (2017: 77).

¹³ Rheingans (2017: 84).

¹⁴ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar rje nyid kyis rnam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa* fol.5a–5b (p.338–339): *re zhig rang gi rmi lam gsal ba nal /dbyangs gsal yig gzug nyi zla'i 'od 'bar ba/ /nam mkha'i khams kun khyab pa gsal bar mthong / /deng sang gtsug lag gzhung la ma rmongs par/ /dam chos gsung rab bzhin du ston nus pa'il /stas su 'gyur ram snyam pa'i the tshom skyes.*

¹⁵ See Rheingans (2017: 86).

¹⁶ Reingans (2021: 95).

¹⁷ Rheingans (2017: 99)

¹⁸ Reingans (2021:124).

¹⁹ Reingans (2021:119).

²⁰ Rheingans (2017: 03). With the exception of Pramāṇa, he has commented on four other subjects: Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, Abhisamaya and Vinaya.

The dGe lugs pa, for example, had texts expounded principally by Tsong kha pa (1357–1419).

The Eighth Karmapa acknowledges the arousal of wisdom within him to unmistakably interpret the intended meaning of the *Abhidharmakośa* independent of other masters.²¹ From an emic point of view, this sort of statement by masters is made to subjects who have complete faith and who would receive them as truth though it may sound egotistical to outsiders.

Systematisation of the bKa' brgyud school is reported to have begun with the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), a process which appears to have been further strengthened by the Eighth Karmapa.²² The Eighth Karmapa can be placed alongside Mi pham and Tsong kha pa as a systematiser of his own philosophical system. This is corroborated by the number of his compositions,²³ and the reception of them by bKa' brgyud pa tradition. Rheingans concludes that the Eighth Karmapa's most outstanding contribution to the Karma bKa' brgyud is in the area of Buddhist scholarship as a highly accomplished scholar, equal only to the Third Karmapa in terms of output and impact.²⁴

Textual Information and Problems Surrounding Sources

In the bKa' brgyud pa tradition, the *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* of the Eighth Karmapa is the most extensive and appears to be the second *Abhidharmakośa* commentary after the first Karma 'phrin las pa's (1456–1539) *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi sbyor 'tik*.²⁵ Karma 'phrin las pa's commentary appears to have been lost. The author of the preface of the Sarnath edition of the Ninth Karmapa's commentary *gZhon nu rnam rol* states that the *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi sbyor 'tik* did not come to his notice.²⁶ However, Rheingans reports, in his publication on Karma 'phrin las pa

²¹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII. *Karma pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i rnam thar rje nyid kyis rnam thos kyi ri bor mdzad pa* Ibid fol. 5b (p.339): *rang lo nyer bdun pa la chos mngon mdzod/ rnam par 'grel tshe slob dpon gzhan dring gil ngag la ltos pa med par bstan bcos de'i/ dgongs don 'khrul med 'byed pa'i shes rab skyes.*

²² Rheingans (2017:111).

²³ Rheingans (2017: 3) reports more than thirty volumes in various spheres of study.

²⁴ Rheingans (2017: 4).

²⁵ dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *gZhon nu rnam rol*, p. vi. The preface to this edition mentions a brief account of *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries by bKa' brgyud pa scholars. Also see Rheingans (2021: 118, 160).

²⁶ dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *gZhon nu rnam rol*, p. xiii: *rje karma phrin las dang / karma nges legs bstan 'dzin dang / khams sprul bzhi pa dang bdun pa'i chos mngon mdzod kyi 'grel pa de rnam phyag dpe dngos su mjal rgyu ma byung bas.*

(1456–1539), that a surviving copy of the treatise is suspected to be in Beijing.²⁷

The Eighth Karmapa's commentary, which took around twelve years to complete, was begun in Kong po in 1532 and completed in 1543.²⁸ He reports that he based his commentary primarily on mChims Nam mkha' grags' (1210–85) *Abhidharmakośa* commentary and on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.²⁹ It is also evident that he referred to the *Abhidharmakośa* commentary of Śākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) from the refutation of the latter's position on Abhidharma points in his commentary. He also refers on occasions to the *Abhidharmakośa* commentary of master Karma 'phrin las pa, who was one of his main teachers and had inspired him to complete his own commentary.³⁰ Rheingans argues that Karma 'phrin las pa influenced the importation of Sa skya pa scholarly knowledge into the Karma bKa' brgyud school.³¹

According to the colophon to Volume II of the commentary, the Eighth Karmapa started to compose his commentary at the age of twenty-six and completed it at the age of thirty-seven at Yar lha sham po mountain in Lo kha. A patron, bSam 'grub bde chen, is reported to have provided the necessities. He notes:

Thus this commentary is completed by the one who has realised the vital and secret points of the boundless aspects of the dharma of Three Baskets which consist of Three Vehicles and experienced the causal and resultant vehicle through mahāyānic ripening and liberation (*smin grol*); who has no hesitation in the explication [of teachings] to others; the subject of the venerable Triple Jewel; the Translator; and

²⁷ Rheingans (2021:118).

²⁸ Rheingans (2017: 101).

²⁹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. I p. 628: *rang lo nyer drug par mchims nam mkha' grags kyi fi ka gzhir byas kyi dgongs pa btus nas*. Here one can speculate that the Eighth Karmapa could have meant the commentary of mChims 'Jam dpal dbyangs since he is also known as mChims Nam mkha' grags according to some scholars such as Nobuchiyo (1992: 193). Moreover, one cannot find surviving copy of mChims Nam mkha' grags's commentary. However, there are also some scholars such as Coghlan (2018:18) who suggests that they were two different personalities in the form of mChims Nam mkha' grags being the teacher of mChims 'Jam dpal dbyangs. Coghlan also believes that both of them composed a commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*. Against this backdrop, further research is necessary to ascertain whether they were the same or different persons.

³⁰ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 39: *bdag nyid chen po Karma phrin las pa'i fi kar*. For Karma 'phrin las pa's scholarly works, also see Rheingans (2021: 109–122).

³¹ Rheingans (2021: 212) mentions that Karma 'phrin las pa studied under several Sa skya scholars. For instance, he studies under Sangs rgyas 'phel in 'Bras yul. See Reingans(2021: 56). Furthermore, he also suggests that Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho, Śākya mchog ldan, and Karma 'phrin las pa gained benefit from each other in Buddhist teachings. See Rheingans (2021: 71).

the Monk of Śākyamuni; [who is] blessed with the name of Lord Karmapa; Chos drub grags pa, who gained victory over all opponents throughout all time at the early age of thirty-seven starting from the age of twenty-six at the neck of Yar lha sham po mountain when the patron of founding the seat bSam 'grub bde chen connected with the necessities according to dharma.³²

The colophon of Volume I mentions that the Eighth Karmapa completed his commentary on the first chapter while in Kong po but suspended writing the commentary for a while, doubting that there would be people enthusiastic about the study of the *Abhidharmakośa*. However, he resumed his work after the advice from his master Karma 'phrin las pa during his visit to central Tibet. The Eighth Karmapa resumed writing his commentary from the second chapter at Nyug rgyal khang near g.Yas ru gtsang 'gram lha khang at the age of thirty-three.³³

According to the colophon to the dPal spungs print, the editor (Jam dbyangs chos kyi rgyal mtshan) was unable to obtain an original text of the Eighth Karmapa's commentary when the block for the print was being prepared. Therefore, the dPal spungs print had to rely on the two manuscripts from dPal spungs and mTshur phu which differed vastly in wording and meaning. However, the colophon says that the dPal spungs print relied mainly on mTshur phu's manuscript which suggests it to be more reliable than the one from dPal spungs. The colophon also mentions some minor additions made to the edition. The editor remarks:

When the block for Mi bskyod rdo rje's *mDzod t̄ik* was being prepared, an original print could not be obtained. Therefore, manuscripts were borrowed from dPal spungs and mTshur phu. However, they were not similar to any great degree in terms of general outline, meaning,

³² Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. II p. 815: *zhes bya ba 'di ni theg pa gsum gyis bsdu pa'i sde snod rin po gsum gyi chos tshul mthas yas pa'i gnad gsang rtogs shing / khyad par rgyu 'bras kyi theg pa chen po mtha' dag gis smin pa dang grol ba'i myong ba phar cher nyams su bstar nas gzhan la smra ba la 'jigs pa thams cad dang bral ba/ rje btsun dkon mchog gsum gyi 'bangs su gyur pa śākya'i dge slong lo tsā ba rgyal ba karma pa'i mtshan gyis byin gyis brlabs pa/ dpal chos grub grags pa phyogs thams cad las dus kun tu sna tshogs par rnam par rgyal ba mi bskyod bzang po dga' ba'i dbyangs kyi rang lo nyer drug pa nas mgo brtsams rang lo so bdun gyi ngo mthong ba na/ gnyan chen po yar la gsham po'i mgul du gdan chags pa'i sbyin pa'i bdag po bsam 'grub bde chen pas chos dang mthun pa'i 'tsho ba sbyar skabs su yongs su rdzogs par grub pa des.*

³³ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. I p. 628: *snyoms 'jug dang po'i 'grel pa rgyas bsdu 'tshams par kong po sdod dus grub pa las/ dus kyi dbang gi 'grel pa byas kyang don gnyen can gyi skye bo mi 'byung bar dogs pa las/ slar dbus su phyin pa na bde bar gshags pa chen po karma phrin las pa zhabs kyi bkas bskul ba brten/ slar g.yus ru gtsang 'gram gyi lha khang dang nye ba/ hor sa skya pa yon mchod kyi gan pa'i pho brang du btab pa'i nyug rgyal khang du rang lo so gsum pa nas gnas gnyis pa'i snyoms 'jug gnyis pa phyin gyi 'grel par bgyis pa la.*

and word. Moreover, the fourth chapter onwards and the first and the second chapters, in particular, were utterly dissimilar and (I, the editor) did not know how great the merit [of the manuscripts] was. Nevertheless, those recognisable missing and excess [parts] were provided with minor additions. The print relied on the mTshur phu edition.³⁴

The colophon shows awareness by the editors of these textual problems. They found the manuscript of mTshur phu had retained the subject matter of the Eighth Karmapa:

However, this manuscript [of mTshur phu] seems to have retained the intended original subject matter without altering and [the manuscript] is extremely excellent. Therefore, the editor makes this supplementary remark for various reasons such as to request (*sgron pa*) [readers] that [this text] should not be taken as something trivial and so that (*ched du*) [its excellent nature] is noted (*shes par bya ba*) as a point (*gnas*) the intelligent people should understand.³⁵

Nevertheless, one is still in need of further evidence, if we ever even obtain such, to support the claim that mTshur phu's print has preserved the intended subject matters of the Eighth Karmapa's commentary. This kind of textual uncertainty is understandable since the print was prepared a few hundred years after the author's passing. Nevertheless, tradition accepts this as the valid words of the Karmapa.

Various Editions of the Commentary

The editions of the *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* are numerous. However, they appear to have been for the most part based on the dPal spungs print which was first prepared in 1925.³⁶ This section will discuss different

³⁴ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. II p. 816: *rgyal dbang bryad pa mi bskyod zhabs kyi mdzod t̄ig 'di nyid spar du brko ba'i gnas skabs su ma phyi spar ma 'dra ni ma rnyed stabs dpal spungs rang du yod pa'i bris ma zhid dang / mtshur phu'i phyang dpe'i khrod nas g.yar ba de gnyis kyang spyi don tshig don sogs gang thad nas khyad che ba lta bus mtshungs pa cher mi 'dug llhag don skabs bzhi pa yan chod dang / de'i nang nas kyang skabs dang po gnyis pa skor ni gtan nas mi mtshungs pa lta bu red 'dug pa bcas legs cha gang che ma shes rung chad lhag dmigs bsal ngo shes rigs kha sab(kha bsab?) phran bu byas te spar gyi ma gzhi ni mtshur phu'i steng nas gzhi bzahag rgyu red song.*

³⁵ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. II p. 816–817. *bris ma 'di' dang po'i skabs kyi rtsom gzhi thugs la gang dgongs ma bcos par gsungs pa lta bu'i shin tu ngo mtshar ba zhid tu 'dug pas 'gang chung du ma song ba dpyod ldan rnam kyis) shes par bya ba'i gnas so zhes ched du sgron pa sogs dgos pa du ma'i slad du zhu dag mkhan pos zhar byung gi 'phros su bgyis pa'o.*

³⁶ Rheingans (2017: 49).

editions, their scope, and context. The titles of the commentary differ slightly among editions.

dPal spungs Print

mNgon pa mdzod kyi 'grel chen grub bde'i dpyid 'jo. New Delhi: T. Tsepal Taikhang, 1975. (Reproduced from a dPal spungs print from Rumtek). The dPal spungs edition has two volumes which run to 1451 folios in total. Printed in 1925, as mentioned above, it is possibly the oldest block print and more reliable in terms of orthography compared to other editions such as the Nitartha International and Lhasa editions discussed below. This paper will mainly utilise this edition. The colophon of the text notes that it has relied on the two different manuscripts of the commentary as mentioned above in the section 'Textual Information and Problems Surrounding Sources.'

The dPal spungs print has also been reproduced at Khren tu'u bod kyi nang bstan dpe tshogs lte ba in Chengdu, the capital of China's Sichuan province.

Nitartha International Print

mDzod t̃ig grub bde'i dpyid 'jo. Kathmandu, Nepal. Nitartha International, 2009. This modern book edition was created under the supervision of dPon slob Rin po che in three volumes totalling 1706 pages.

The publishing note simply mentions that the edition was based on the Delhi edition although it is hard to determine if this is the case. The edition is plausibly based on the dPal spung print from Rumtek which was printed in Delhi. The publishing note also mentions making an emendation of text with corrections provided in parenthesis. However, these are barely noticeable in the text. Despite the addition of some explanations of the terms and footnotes on references, it is not as reliable as the dPal spung edition.

Lhasa Edition

Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi 'grel pa rgyas par spros pa grub bde'i dpyid 'jo (Vol.10 and 11 of the Collected Works of Mi bskyod rdo rje) Lhasa, 2004. Two volumes contain 888 folios or 1776 pages in total. The volumes were published with the funding from the Tsadra Foundation. There is no mention of the text upon which it relied. Moreover, the text has simple and avoidable orthographical errors.

Go che dharmakara Print

mNgon pa mdzod kyi 'grel chen grub bde'i dpyid 'jo. Nangchen, 2021. This edition in digital form was created by Go che dharma kara'i dpe tshogs in two volumes. It does not contain any editorial information including reliance on previous prints. However, it appears more reliable than the Lhasa edition and Nitartha International print in terms of orthography. The texts are also legible. One can assume that this edition might have also relied on the dPal spung print as in other later prints of the *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*.

Unique Characteristics of the Eighth Karmapa's Commentary

This section will explore some unique characteristics of the Eighth Karmapa's commentary in relation to other Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries such as the *mChims mdzod* and in some cases, the Tibetan and English translations of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. This will be discussed briefly in the following four points.

Presentation of the Vajrayāna Point of View

While Tibetan commentators present the philosophical positions of the four schools of Indian Buddhism in their *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries, the Eighth Karmapa goes beyond the general trend by presenting in his commentary some philosophical views of different schools including the Tibetan Vajrayāna system. Mahāyāna viewpoints, including Madhyamaka, are generally found in the Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries but interpretations from Vajrayāna thought are rare. For example, no tantric explanations are found in widely known Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries such as *mChims 'Jam pa'i dbyangs' Chos mngon mdzod kyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i 'grel pa mngon pa'i rgyan*, henceforth *mChims mdzod* [A Commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa: The Ornament of Abhidharma*] and *dGe 'dun grub's* (1391–1474) *Dam pa'i chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi rnam par bshad pa thar lam gsal byed* [A Commentary on the Sublime *Abhidharmakośa* that Illuminates the Path of Liberation].

However, the Eighth Karmapa, apart from explicating the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika and sūtric Mahāyāna positions, occasionally presents interpretations from the standpoint of the Vajrayāna systems (although he refrains from going into detail saying that they should be left secret). For instance, (commenting on verse IV. 55) he explains that karma that could lead to rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence (*'khor ba*) can be deliberately experienced by Vajrayāna practitioners in a visionary experience (*nyams snang*) for the duration of a dream

through yogic power and they can thus get rid the bad karma. The practitioner, the Eighth Karmapa argues, would in this way be prevented from taking rebirth in the six realms.³⁷

Moreover, in the discussion of the mental element (Tib. *yid kyi khams*, Skt. *manodhātu*) as an empowering condition (Tib. *bdag rkyen*, Skt. *adhipati*)³⁸ for the mental consciousness (Tib. *yid kyi rnam par shes pa*, Skt. *manovijñāna*), the Eighth Karmapa asserts that wind and mind (*rlung sems*) serve as an empowering condition for mental consciousness in the Vajrayāna teachings. However, he refrains from delving into detail saying that it should be held in secret from other than the fortunate ones (*skal ldan*).³⁹

In another instance, the Eighth Karmapa, while commenting on verse II. 43bcd, presents a Vajrayāna viewpoint regarding equipoise of cessation (Tib. *'gog pa'i snyoms 'jug*, Skt. *nirodhasamāpatti*).⁴⁰ He explains that equipoise of cessation of *śrāvakas* is attained even by ordinary beings (*so skye*) in the Vajrayāna tradition while it is attainable only by exalted beings (Tib. *'phags pa*, Skt. *ārya*) according to the non-Mahāyāna tradition.⁴¹ He argues that it is not necessary for the person who possesses equipoise of cessation to be a *śrāvaka* similar to a Vajrayāna practitioner who does not need to attain a bodhisattva level (Tib. *sa*, Skt. *bhūmi*) to see realms of Saṃbhogakāya.⁴²

There are instances in other chapters where the Eighth Karmapa provides Vajrayāna interpretations in addition to the Abhidharma

³⁷ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. p. 159–160: *'di dang mthun par sngags bla na med pa'i rdzogs rim gyi skabs su 'gro ba drug tu smin rgyu'i las 'bras thams cad mthong chos myong gyur du byas tel' 'gro ba drug gi gnas sbyong nyams snang la rmi lam gyi tshad tsam du myong nas/ 'gro drug gi skye ba len pa'i las thams cad zad par byed pa'i sngags kyi thabs khyad par can yang yod do.*

³⁸ dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *gZhon nu rnam rol*, p. 129 explains empowering condition as one that does not obstruct the generation of a result and serves as a condition.

³⁹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 1 p. 151: *gsang sngags su ni yid shes kyi bdag rkyen rtsa 'khor bzhi sogs kyi rlung sems na da sogs kyi byed par bzhed pa ni ches lkal ldan bdag gi spyod yul las gzhan du gsar bar bya'o.*

⁴⁰ Buswell, Robert E., and Donald S. Lopez (eds.) 2013 under entry '*nirodhasamāpatti*' explain the term as following: '*Nirodhasamāpatti* engenders a state of suspended animation: the meditator remains alive, but all physical and mental activities cease for a fixed, but temporary, period of time.'

⁴¹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 1 p. 308: *so skye la nyan thos kyi 'gog snyoms mi skye ba theg dman gyi lugs la yin kyang / gsang sngags bla med du ni so skye la nyan thos kyi 'gog snyoms kyi ting nge 'dzin skye ba yod de.*

⁴² Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 1 p. 308: *gsang sngags bla med kyi rnal 'byor pa/ dang por yul lnga so so sdud nas de bzhin gshegs pa lnga'i stong gzugs la sems zin pa tsam na mchog gi spul sku dang longs sku'i zhing khams mthong bar bshad kyang gang zag de chos rgyun gyi ting nge 'dzin thob pa dang / sa thob pas ma khyab pa bzhin yin la.*

understanding. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to thoroughly examine the two large volumes in this regard.

Elucidation of the Tibetan *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*'s Condensed Points

With the extensive treatment of condensed points and the elucidation of ambiguous terms of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, it is clear that the Eighth Karmapa's commentary *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* did not shy away from engaging with points that seemed obscure or irrelevant to other Tibetan commentators. Although it warrants further research it appears that the *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* is even more detailed and polemical than the *mChims mdzod* in terms of refutation of others' positions, the establishment of one's standpoint, and elimination of objections to one's stance (*dgag bzhag spong gsum*).

As is often the case in Tibetan commentarial traditions, The Eighth Karmapa's commentary serves as a commentary on a commentary ('*grel pa'i 'grel pa*), namely Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, since he gives a fuller explanation of ideas expressed in a condensed manner in the *Bhāṣya*. He admits that he painstakingly strove to draw material from *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and elaborated on them:

Up to [this point] in the second chapter, the explanation of the first and the second chapter completed earlier are further explained elaborately, drawing a majority of the detailed content from the auto-commentary (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*). Moreover, disregarding the hardships [involved in doing it], [I] completed the explanation by extending the words of the two commentaries (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and *mChims Nam mkha' grags'* commentary) starting from the final parts of the second chapter.⁴³

The following juxtaposes explanations of sentient beings and the physical world created by karma at the beginning of the Karma Chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and the Eighth Karmapa's *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* and shows how he elucidates the Indian material. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* reads:

If [the physical world and the inner sentient beings] are generated from karma, and if asked why the karma of sentient beings generate exceedingly and seemingly happy [states with] saffron and

⁴³ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 1 p. 628: *de phyin gyi gnas gnyis par sngar gyi gnas dang po dang gnyis pa'i 'grel pa gang zin las/ rgyas par 'grel zhing rang 'grel gyi don zhib cha phal mo che drangs te legs par bshad yod cing / gnas gnyis pa'i gsham tsam nas dka' tshogs la ma bsams par 'grel bshad gnyis kyi tshig sna bsrings te legs par bshad zin pas.*

sandalwood, but not with their bodies, [I answer] a mixture of karma of sentient beings creates forms which are similar to a wound with seemingly pleasurable wealth as its counteragent. Both [sentient beings and the physical world as results of] a non-mixture [of karmas] of gods are seemingly pleasurable.⁴⁴

The above-mentioned explanation, which appears somewhat obscure in Tibetan, is further elucidated by the Eighth Karmapa as follows:

An inferior body of a leper in a good dwelling where saffron is grown and a superior body in a bad dwelling full of poison and thorns are the results of the mixture of wholesome and unwholesome karma. And seemingly happy sentient beings and the physical world of the Form Realm are the results of wholesome [action] while both the [bad] body and the dwelling in lower realms are the results of unwholesome [action].⁴⁵

In the Eighth Karmapa's explanation of the creation of the physical world and inner sentient beings, the idea that a mixture of good and bad karma produces mixed results is further explained. For example, the result of mixed karma presented in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* is provided with the illustration of a leprous body and a pleasant environment by the Eighth Karmapa. This point is further elucidated by the analogy of a superior body in an environment covered with poison and thorns. However, the *mChims mdzod* avoided the use of these metaphors and treatment on this issue.

As noted above, the Eighth Karmapa's commentary in the form of two volumes in 1451 folios appears more extensive than the *mChims mdzod* which is widely regarded as authoritative in the Tibetan scholastic traditions. To cite an instance, the Eighth Karmapa discusses at length the refutation of the Vātsīputrīya thesis of revealing action as a movement. It is argued that action cannot move from one point to another since it momentarily perishes as a result of being impermanent. The Eighth Karmapa's discussion of this is more elaborate than that of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and the *mChims mdzod*.

⁴⁴ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Tibetan), p. 331: *gal te las las skyes nas (na?) ci'i phyir sems can rnam kyī las dag gis gur gum dang / tsan dan la sogs pa ches dga' dga' lta bur skyes bar 'gyur la/ de dag gi lus ni mi yin zhe na/ sems can 'dren mar byed pa rnam kyī las de lta bu dag kho na gang rma lta bur gyur pa'i lus dag dang de'i tshē gnyen por gyur pa longs spyod dga' dga' lta bu dag kyang skye'i' lha 'dren mar byed pa ma yin pa rnam kyī ni gnyī ga yang dga' dga' lta bu dag yin no.*

⁴⁵ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 3–4: *de'ang snod gur gum la sogs skye ba'i yul legs po la/ lus dman pa mdze can lta bu dang / yang lus bzang po la snod dug dang tsher mas gang ba lta bu ni 'dres ma'i las bsags pa dang / snod bcud thams can dga' dga' lta' dug pa gzugs na spyod pa rnam ni ma 'dres par dge ba kho na'i 'bras bu dang / ngan song gi lus dang yul gnyis ka ma 'dres par mi dge ba'i 'bras bu'o.*

The Eighth Karmapa further deals with the metaphors used in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* to establish the point that phenomena (*dnegos po*) perish on their own and do not need to depend on other causes of destruction ('*jig rgyu don gzhan*) to perish. However, the Vātsīputrīyas argue that some things, such as firewood, are destroyed upon contact with fire, not by themselves. Hence, other causes of destruction are proposed.

To counter this argument, Vasubandhu responds by asking Vātsīputrīyas whether their position is similar to a lamp and the wind and to the sound of a bell and a hand. However, Vasubandhu does not explain these metaphors further and they remain obscure to some extent. The Eighth Karmapa elaborates and argues that a lamp stops burning on its own and is not extinguished by wind. A lamp stops burning, it is argued, due to a mere cessation of the later continuum of the lamp. In a similar fashion, the sound of the bell also ceases on its own, failing to produce a later continuum of the sound, while a hand serves merely as an obstructive condition for it.⁴⁶ Therefore, the Eighth Karmapa appears to suggest that if things do not have an inherent quality of self-disintegration, then they would not be destroyed even by outer destructive circumstances.

Furthermore, with regard to stealing property from a dead monk, the Eighth Karmapa provides a detailed description of how to determine an owner of property in contrast to Vasubandhu. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* explains:

To take the goods, the robes, etc. of a deceased monk, is to take what is not given by the Sangha of the parish, in the case when an ecclesiastical action has not been done; in the opposite case, this is to take what is not given by all the disciples of the Buddha.⁴⁷

The Eighth Karmapa further remarks:

If [property] is stolen from the dead monk [and] if the [monk] had performed ordination-related activities (*gsol ba'i las*), [it is] stolen

⁴⁶ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 8–9: *slob dpon gyis dpyad pa 'di ltar mdzad del gang zhig yod na 'byung ba de ni de'i rgyu can yin pa'i ma khyab pa'i phyir/rlung dang 'brel bas mar me 'jig mod kyil 'jig pa de ni rlung dang 'brel bas byas pa min te/ mar me skad cig ma nyid du khas blang pa'i phyir 'jig pa rgyu med can du 'dod pa yin pas/ mar me de ni skyes nas 'jig pa'i phyir/ rang zhig pa yin la/rlung dang 'brel ba'i phyir skad cig ma phyi ma gzhan ma skyes na mi snang ba yin gyil/ des bshig pa'i phyir ni ma yin no/ de bzhin du dril bu'i sgra skad cig mar 'dod pa yang lag pa dang 'brel bar yod na 'jig mod kyil/ de ni des byas pa ma yin gyil/ skad cig ma yin pa'i phyir/ dril bu'i sgra ni rang zhig la/ des gegs byas pa'i phyir gzhan ma skyes nas mi snang ba yin gyil/ des shig pa'i phyir ni ma yin no.*

⁴⁷ Vasubandhu; Poussin, La Vallée; Pruden, Leo M. (trans.) 1991. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, vol. II p. 651.

from the spiritual community inside [the community demarcated by one] boundary. This is because the Teacher (Buddha) commanded that [the property] be owned by the spiritual community belonging inside the boundary. Moreover, if the death [of the monk] happens in between the boundaries [of communities], [the property is] owned by [by the community] which is closer [to the monk's body]. If the distance is equal [from the two boundaries where the monk's body lies], [it is] owned by the [community] towards which the head [of the monk's body] is pointing. If a [person] has not performed ordination-related activities, [the property] would be [considered] stolen from all the disciples of the Buddha.⁴⁸

The Eighth Karmapa also elucidates some terminologies which appear ambiguous in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. With regard to the former or latter letters that become an actional path (Tib. *las kyi lam*, Skt. *karmapatha*) in lying, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* identifies only letters or syllables of a word.

2. Discourse (ii.47a-b) is sometimes made up of numerous syllables. Which will be the course of action? Which will be lies? The last syllable, which is *vijñapti* and which is accompanied by *avijñapti*. Or rather, the syllable whose hearing causes the meaning to be understood. The preceding syllables are a preparation for the lie.⁴⁹

However, the Eighth Karmapa recognises both words and syllables. Adding 'words' by the Eighth Karmapa arguably makes sense since the understanding of meaning usually arises from words, not letters alone. He remarks:

If asked which of the former or latter words become the actional path since a word is formed by many letters, [response:] a revealing form of a final word along with a non-revealing form becomes the actional path. Because former words and letters are the preparatory [phase]. Or the actional path would be a word from which the meaning is understood since the actional path is established with regard to the [arousal] of understanding in the listener. Former letters are

⁴⁸ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 194–195: *dge slong shi ba'i nor 'phrog na gsol ba'i las byas pa yin na chos can/ mtshams kyi nang du gtogs pa'i dge 'dun las 'phrog pa yin tel/ mtshams nang du gtogs pa'i dge 'dun gyis dbang bar ston pas bcas pa'i phyir/ yang mtshams gnyis kyi bar du shi na/ gang nye ba de dbang ba yin/ nye ring mnyam na mgo nang du bstan pa de dbang ba yin no/ lgsol ba ma byas pa zhig yin na ni sangs rgyas kyi slob ma thams cad las ma byin par blang pa yin no.*

⁴⁹ Vasubandhu; Poussin, La Vallee; Pruden, Leo M. (trans.) 1991. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, vol. II p. 652.

preparatory and latter [letters] along with non-revealing forms are [part of the] concluding phase.⁵⁰

In this way, some points, which are left brief in the *Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya*, are elaborated further and treated more extensively by the Eighth Karmapa allowing for a more accessible interpretation. This treatment of points in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* indicates that the Eighth Karmapa, as admitted, certainly consulted the *Bhāṣya*. Due to the limited transmission of Abhidharma materials to Tibet and available Tibetan translations, one can assume that many of the more obscure Indian contexts were not applicable or not readily understandable to Tibetan interpreters and scholars.⁵¹

Polemical Nature of the Commentary

The Eighth Karmapa's commentary is highly polemical in nature and engages in refutation of others' points and in defense of his own position (*dgag sgrub*) on Abhidharma concepts. This is especially the case with the Sa skya scholar Śākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) who composed an *Abhidharmakośa* commentary *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi dka' ba'i gnas rnam par bshad pa'i bstan bcos* [*A Commentary on the Explanation of the Difficult Points of the Abhidharmakośa*].

Cabezón and Dargyay argue that polemical writing serves to make a sectarian distinction among philosophical systems in order to place one's philosophical system in an unrivalled position through the refutation of the positions of others.⁵² While this could be applicable to some extent in the context of the Eighth Karmapa's polemical *Abhidharmakośa* commentary since he wrote it in an era marked by sectarian divisions, the Eighth Karmapa does cite other reasons such as concern with the understanding of the *Abhidharmakośa* in Tibet. The Eighth Karmapa asserts that he composed the commentary to preserve the *Abhidharmakośa* teachings. He declares:

⁵⁰ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 196–197: *yi ge mang po las tshig tu 'gyur na tshig snga phyi gang las lam du bzhag ce nal ngag tha ma rig byed dang rig byed min pa dang bcas pa las lam du bzhag ste/ tshig dang yi ge snga ma rnams sbyor ba yin pa'i phyir/ yang na don gang las go ba'i ngag las lam du 'gyur tel/ nyan pa pos rtogs pa la bltos nas las lam du 'jog pa'i phyir rol yi ge snga ma sbyor ba dang / phyi ma rig byed min pa dang bcas pa mjug yin no.*

⁵¹ Kragh (2002: 124, 143) is of the view that Tibetans had to depend on the *Abhidharmakośa* and its commentaries to understand Abhidharma since earlier Abhidharma texts such as Seven Scriptures of Abhidharma (*mNgon pa sde bdun*), with the exception of the *Prajñaptiśāstra* (Tib. *gDags pa'i bstan bcos*) by Maugalayana, were not translated into Tibetan. Moreover, one is in need of further research as to whether Tibetans had used Indian Abhidharma materials.

⁵² Cabezón and Dargyay (2007: 6).

Alas, this precious teaching is the refuge of sentient beings.
Concerned that [it] would be lost, [I] analysed this Abhidharma text...⁵³

In general, engaging in debates on Abhidharma theories among Tibetan commentators of the *Abhidharmakośa* appears uncommon. The Eighth Karmapa's commentary stands apart in the way that he engages in a debate over the Abhidharma understanding with Tibetan scholars, particularly Śākya mchog ldan. The polemic way of writing seems to have been a trait of the Eighth Karmapa's as is evident from his commentaries on other treatises such as the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*.⁵⁴ The Eighth Karmapa is generally polemical in his Madhyamaka commentary as well and known for his strong language. Instances of the Eighth Karmapa's polemics are reported in the discussion of Vajrayāna points directed towards rNying ma pas as well.⁵⁵

Debates of the Eighth Karmapa presented in his commentary follow the three aspects of a syllogism (*tshul gsum*) that are used in the Tibetan debate (*rtsod pa*). Even some explanations are presented in the form of debate and dealt with extensively.

The Eighth Karmapa's refutation of Śākya mchog ldan's interpretation of Abhidharma theories is spread throughout his commentary. For instance, the Eighth Karmapa refutes Śākya mchog ldan's understanding that the Buddha obtained the vow of concentration (*bsam gtan gyi sdom pa*) only during his six years of austerity before his enlightenment. The Eighth Karmapa argues that the Buddha was said to have obtained it from Ālāra Kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputra who were his non-Buddhist teachers even before he started his six years of austerity. He rebukes Śākya mchog ldan by saying that it simply demonstrates his failure to have even heard of the Buddha's life story of twelve deeds (*mdzad pa bcu gnyis*).⁵⁶ This kind of harshly critical language is not generally found in the Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries although one can see them frequently in the debate of other theories such as Madhyamaka.

⁵³ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 50: *kye ma/ bstan pa rin chen 'di ni 'gro ba'i mgon/ /nub par 'phangs nas dben pa'i ri sul du/ /rnam g.yeng spangs nas blo gros nus pa mchog ldad pas gsos nas mngon pa'i gzhung 'dir dpyad*. It appears that the mountain referred to is Yar lha sham po which he mentions in his colophon. See the translation of colophon.

⁵⁴ This was pointed out by Brunhölzl (2010:72).

⁵⁵ Rheingans (2017:16). See Brunhölzl (2004) for Madhyamaka commentary.

⁵⁶ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 81: *gzhan yang dka' ba spyad pa'i tshes bsam gtan gyi sdom pa thob bya ba de ni bdag nyid sangs rgyas kyi mdzad pa bcu gnyis rnam thar tsam yang ma thos so zhes gzhan la gsal bar ston pa'i gtam ste/ rengs byed bu lhag spyod las bsam gtan gyi sems thob par bshad pa dang / sgyu rtsal shes kyi bu ring 'phur las srid rtse'i sems thob par bshad pas dus de dang de rnams su bsam gtan gyi sdom pa thob pa yin la*.

The Eighth Karmapa expresses his dissatisfaction towards Śākya mchog ldan's understanding of *Abhidharmakośa* in these words:

Śākya mchog ldan, who is a great Paṇḍita
[and who] has become old, also engaged in the strenuous activity of
[study and composition] of this *śāstra*.
However, [his] eye of seeing accordingly [the meaning of the *Abhidharma-*
kośa] has become weak.
If I [the Eighth Karmapa] explain with my honest mind,
[understanding] would arise in the mind of the knowledgeable one [Śākya
mchog ldan].
Others do mere reading,
and although [they] put efforts in analysing the [*Abhidharmakośa*'s] mean-
ing of root text and commentary,
the *Abhidharmakośa* has become merely a name since the darkness that cov-
ers it is thick.⁵⁷

The Eighth Karmapa adopts a dialectical tone throughout his commen-
tary. He uses the patterns of Tibetan courtyard debate (*rtsod pa*) with
the explicit mention of the basis of debate (*rtsod gzhi chos can*), predicate
(*bsgrub bya'i chos*), and reason (*rtags*) and explicitly utters '*khor gsum* (a
logical term to indicate an opponent's inability to defend his thesis). In
the following argument, he presents the components of debate:

A mother and a child who is in the womb (basis of debate) would
possess non-dharma (predicate) since both of them turn into a cause
of suffering for each of them (reason).⁵⁸

In the refutation of the opponent's position, he also adopted the
method of dialectical consequence (Tib. *thal ba*, Skt. *prasaṅga*).⁵⁹ In these

⁵⁷ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 87: *pañ chen chen por gyur pa śākya mchog /bgres por gyur pa des kyang bstan bcos 'di'i/ /phyogs la ngal zhing dub pa'i las mdzad kyang / lji bzhin phyed pa'i spyen ni btang snyoms gyur/ /bdag blo gzu bos cung zad brda sprad na/ /mkhyen can de yi thugs la 'char bar 'gyur/ /gzhan dag rnams kyis rtsa 'grel klog tsam las/ /don la dpyod pa'i ngal ba bsten na yang / /de la sgrub pa'i mun pa stug pa'i phyir/ /chos mngon mdzod ces ming gi lhag mar gyur. The Eighth Karmapa appears to imply that Tibetan commentators of the *Abhidharmakośa* have failed to understand it properly although he does not specify and mention their names.*

⁵⁸ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 193: *ma dang bu lto na yod pa dag kyang chos can/ chos ma yin pa dang ldan par 'gyur tel phan tshun sdug bsnal gyi rgyu mtshan du gyur pa'i phyir.*

⁵⁹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 193: *gcer bu pa rnams gsud de ma zhu bas shi na yang chos can/ zas sbyin pa la srog gcod kyi ltung ba dngos 'byung bar thal/ gsod pa'i blo sngon du ma song yang 'chi bar bya ba chos min gyi rgyu yin pa'i phyir*

ways, he maintains a dialectical tone throughout his commentary in contrast to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, and the *mChims mdzod*.

Presentation of bKa' brgyud pa Positions

The Eighth Karmapa also presents the viewpoint of bKa' brgyud pa school in his commentary. Apart from some mention of *rang lugs* by Śākya mchog ldan in his commentary indicating presentation of some Sa skya pa standpoints, it is arguably not a norm in Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries, including the *mChims mdzod*, for scholars to present the viewpoints of their own philosophical system.⁶⁰ Their own interpretations of emptiness, for instance, are strongly posited resulting in debates among Tibetan scholars of different traditions. However, while the presentation of their own position (*rang lugs*) by Tibetan scholars is widely found in Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna treatises, it is uncommon in other commentarial genres such as in the case of the *Abhidharmakośa*.

In contrast to the general trend, the Eighth Karmapa presents many positions of the bKa' brgyud scholastic tradition. Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug highlights the positions of the bKa' brgyud pa sect expounded by the Eighth Karmapa's commentary such as the identification of the object of offering (*mchod yul*) in the verse of offering (*mchod brjod*) in the *Abhidharmakośa*. This is discussed in the following paragraphs of this section.⁶¹ He also mentions that the Eighth Karmapa offers his unique interpretation with regard to the *prātimokṣa* vow and its aspect of revealing and non-revealing form among others.⁶²

Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug goes on to mention that the Eighth Karmapa has offered interpretations that are beyond the intellectual domain of Tibetans.⁶³ His assertions sound plausible when one considers the unique interpretations presented by the Eighth Karmapa. For instance, the Eighth Karmapa argues that the *prātimokṣa* vow should have both the aspect of revealing and non-revealing form. Other commentators, such as mChims 'Jam pa'i dbyangs, do not state

⁶⁰ Śākya mchog ldan. *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi dka' ba'i gnas rnam par bshad pa'i bstan bcos bye brag tu bshad pa'i mtsho chen po*, vol I, p. 425: *rang lugs rnam par dag pa ni*. Here he presents his explanations and understanding on Buddhist cosmology.

⁶¹ Chos kyi dbang phyug, Zhwa dmar VI, *mNgon pa mdzod kyi spyi don dbyig gnyen bzhed pa*, p.461: *mchod brjod skabs su mchod yul ston pa dang*.

⁶² Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 461: *so sor thar dang de yi sdom pa dang // de yi steng nas rnam rig yin min dang*.

⁶³ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 462: *de dag so so'i skabs su bod spyi yil /spyod yul las brgal 'bur dod mang du mdzad*.

this explicitly.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Eighth Karmapa asserts that the *prātimokṣa* vows are not lost through death according to 'Dri gung 'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217). He remarks that although Sakya Paṇḍita had made extensive attempts to refute this position of 'Dri gung 'Jig rten mgon po, a thought to cultivate seven abandonments (*spong bdun*)⁶⁵ remains even in successive lifetimes.⁶⁶ The thought to cultivate seven abandonments, according to the Eighth Karmapa, has causal potential to propel the rebirths of gods and humans with eighteen freedoms and possessions (*dal 'byor bco brgyad*) whether it is termed a vow or not.⁶⁷ The Eighth Karmapa seems to assert that the thought to cultivate seven abandonments that remains intact in successive lives fulfils the role of *prātimokṣa* vows.

The Eighth Karmapa also further contends that Vasubandhu has slightly hinted in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* that the *upāsaka* vow of exalted beings (*'phags pa*) would not be lost following death and would remain intact in successive lives. However, Vasubandhu denied it to be a vow obtained through formal undertaking (*yang dag par blangs pa*) fearing that this understanding could be beyond the intellectual capacity of the *śrāvaka* vehicle. The Eighth Karmapa concludes by asserting that, as is the case in exalted beings, the *prātimokṣa* vow should not be lost even in ordinary beings (*so so skye bo*) following death. He contends this understanding is the intention of Buddha and of 'Dri gung 'Jig rten mgon po, who was recognised as an emanation of Nāgārjuna.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 55: 'di pa rnams kyi 'dod pa spyod pa spong ba'i gtso bor gyur pa'i lhag pa'i tshul khrins 'di la sdom pa so sor thar ces bya'o/ 'di la rig byed dang rig byed ma yin pa gnyis ka yod do.

⁶⁵ Three unwholesome actions of body and four unwholesome actions of speech.

⁶⁶ Sobisch (2002:40) mentions that the reason for Sakya Paṇḍita to declare that *prātimokṣa* vows are lost following death was a response to 'Dri gung 'Jig rten mgon po who understood otherwise.

⁶⁷ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p. 108–109: *skyob pa 'bri gung 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po'i zhal snga nas/ so sor thar pa'i sdom pa 'chi 'phos pas mi gtong zhes seng ge'i bsgrags pa las/ bdag nyid chen po sa skya paṇḍitas bkag rgya cher mdzad mod kyang / don la bye smras rtogs btags kyi sdom pa rnam rig min pa'i gzugs su yod bya ba ni don la mi gnas/ spong bdun spong ba'i sems pa rgyun chags bcas pa'i kha na ma tho ba dang bcas pa tshe rabs brjes kyang dran pa dang shes bzhin gyis ma nyams par yod na.*

⁶⁸ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 2 p.109: 'phags pa la 'chi 'phos pas dge bsnyen gyi sdom pa mi gtong ba zhiq yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa yin pa de mkhas mchog dbyig gi gnyen gyis zur tsam 'grel pa mdzad kyang / yang nyan thos sde gnyis kyi blor ma shong dogs nas/ de'i sdom pa ni yang dag par blangs pa las byung ba'i sdom pa ni ma yin nol /zhes 'chad dgos byung ba yin nol /des na 'phags pa la tshe rabs brjes nas kyang so thar sdom pa mi gtong bar grub na so skye la 'ang 'chi 'phos pas so thar gyi sdom pa mi gtong bar grub pa 'di ni ston pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas dang mgon po klu sgrub kyi rnam par 'phrul pa skyob pa 'bri gung 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po'i dgongs pa yin no. Sobisch (2002:329) mentions that the First

Although 'Dri gung and Karma bKa' brgyud are different traditions within the broader bKa' brgyud tradition with their own discrete ways of interpretation, the former is said to have some influence on the latter.⁶⁹ The acceptance of 'Dri gung 'Jig rten mgon po's position by the Eighth Karmapa can probably be taken as one example of influence. In what can be possibly taken as one evidence of influence, Rheingans reports that the Eighth Karmapa spent some time in 'Dri gung and engaged with the Single Intention (*dGongs gcig*), a popular teaching of the 'Dri gung tradition, by writing a commentary on it.⁷⁰

Moreover, the Eighth Karmapa identifies the teacher (Buddha) with the *dharma*kāya form of the Buddha as the object of offering (*mchod yul*) in the following verse of offering in the *Abhidharmakośa*.⁷¹ The *Abhidharmakośa* I, 1abc states:

The one who has destroyed all the darkness
and who liberated sentient beings from the swamp of saṃsāra
[I] pay homage to the teacher (*ston pa*) [who teaches] according to
the meaning...⁷²

The Eighth Karmapa reasons that the *saṃboga*kāya is not known to the Vaibhāṣika school while the body of Prince Siddhārtha is not accepted as a *nirmāṇa*kāya since it is considered the result of karma and afflictive emotions (*las nyon gyi rnam smin*).⁷³ This position is not discussed or held by the *mChims mdzod* and the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. However, Si tu Paṅ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1700–1774) appears to suggest this understanding of the Eighth Karmapa as the intended meaning of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and other Indian *Abhidharmakośa* commentaries such as Pūrṇavardhana's commentary.⁷⁴

Karmapa saw 'Dri gung 'Jig rten mgon po as Nāgārjuna and narrates another story in which he was identified with Nāgārjuna.

⁶⁹ Sobisch (2002:329).

⁷⁰ Rheingans (2017: 102).

⁷¹ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 1 p. 9: *ston par gyur pa ni yang dag pa rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas tel de yi rang bzhin yang nges par na chos kyi sku 'ba' zhig ste.*

⁷² Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*, p. 2: *gang zhig kun la mun pa gtan bcom zhing // 'khor ba'i 'dam las 'gro ba 'drangs mdzad pa// don bzhin ston pa de la phyag 'tshal nas// chos mngon mdzod kyi bstan bcos rab bshad bya.*

⁷³ Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 1 p. 9: *longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku ni sde pa la ma grags shing / sde pas bdud rtsi gang la thob pa'i lus rten rgyal bu don grub kyi khog pa lta bu yang sprul pa'i skur mi 'jog ste las nyon gyi rnam smin du 'dod pa'i phyir ro.*

⁷⁴ Si tu Paṅ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, *chos mngon pa mdzod kyi tshig don rnam par 'grel pa brgya byin thog pa'i nor bu'i 'od snang*, p. 4: *'di thad kyi kar fik grub bde ni shing rtar 'phros don du bye smra'i sde pas ston pa sangs rgyas kyi mtshan gzhi lam bden la byed pa dang / longs sprul khas mi len pa dang / _slob mi slob kyi dge 'dun yang lam bden la 'jog pa dang / shes sgrib khas len pa dang / de'i mtshan gzhi mi shes pa'i rgyu bzhi sogs la*

The Ninth Karmapa endorses this position and Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug further promotes it as their own tradition (*rang lugs*) in his analysis of the identification of the object of offering.⁷⁵ The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and the *mChims mdzod* simply identify the term 'teacher' with the Buddha and do not make the distinction of *dharma-kāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*. However, Śākya mchog ldan discusses this point in a way similar to the Eighth Karmapa's exposition.⁷⁶

Reception of the Eighth Karmapa's *Abhidharmakośa* Commentary

The Eighth Karmapa's commentary appears to be the most extensive available *Abhidharmakośa* commentary in the bKa' brgyud pa school. Its authority, at least in the Karma bKa' brgyud pa scholastic tradition, is supported by the fact that the following generation of scholars including the Ninth Karmapa and Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630) speak of him highly in their commentaries. While veneration is an overall convention in most Tibetan traditions, a high degree of veneration can indicate some genuine appreciation as well.

The Ninth Karmapa praises the Eighth Karmapa's *Abhidharmakośa* commentary in the following verse:

The fearless lord and the conqueror Mi bskyod [rdo rje]
knows [the *Abhidharmakośa*] without relying on others
and composed this extensive commentary.
[I] praise every word and meaning [of his commentary] with im-
mense veneration.⁷⁷

Moreover, the Ninth Karmapa relied heavily on the Eighth Karmapa's commentary and he frequently quotes it in his *Abhidharmakośa* commentary.

Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug urges the followers of Karmapa to engage in the study of the Eighth and the Ninth Karmapa's

byed pa rnams bshad pa ni/ mdzod rang 'grel dang / gang spel sogs rgya 'grel rnams kyi dḡongs pa ji lta ba bzhin du snang ngo.

⁷⁵ Chos kyi dbang phyug, Zhwa dmar VI, *mNgon pa mdzod kyi spyi don dbyig gnyen bzhed pa*, p.32: 'o na 'di skabs kyi mchod yul gyi ston pa de'i rang bzhin nam tshul ji lta bu zhig ce na/ 'di skabs kyi mchod brjod kyi yul du gyur pa'i rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas de'i tshul lam rang bzhin ni nges par chos kyi sku zhing tu 'jog pa yin te

⁷⁶ Śākya mchog ldan. *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi dka' ba'i gnas rnam par bshad pa'i bstan bcos bye brag tu bshad pa'i mtsho chen po*, p. 4–5.

⁷⁷ dBang phyug rdo rje, Karmapa IX, *gZhon nu rnam rol*, p. 3: 'dir ni 'jigs bral ston pa mi bskyod rgyal// de yis gzhan dring med par mkhyen pa dang // brtse ba'i shugs kyis rgyas 'grel 'di mdzad de// tshig don kun la gus pa chen pos bstod.

commentaries.⁷⁸ He also rebukes intellectuals of his religious tradition for abandoning the intended meaning (*dgongs pa*) of commentaries such as the Eighth Karmapa's *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* and relying on various other texts.⁷⁹

The Sixth Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug profusely quotes the Eighth Karmapa's commentary and on many occasions simply uses verbatim whole polemical paragraphs from the Eighth Karmapa's commentary in his own commentary. For instance, he cites the whole rebuttal by the Eighth Karmapa directed towards Sakya Paṇḍita's refutation of the bKa' brgyud pa's contention that the *prātimokṣa* vow is not lost following the death of a person.⁸⁰ This rebuttal is discussed above in the section 'Presentation of bKa' brgyud pa Positions.' The quotation of the Eighth Karmapa's texts strongly indicates that the Sixth Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug holds the commentary of the Eighth Karmapa in high regard. He also refers to the Eighth Karmapa's commentary for further analysis and refrains from transferring passages verbatim on occasion.

Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1700–1774), one of the eminent 18th-century scholars of the Karma bKa' brgyud, refers to the Eighth Karmapa sparingly in his *Abhidharmakośa* commentary *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi tshig don rnam par 'grel pa brgya byin thog pa'i nor bu'i 'od snang* [Commenting on the Words and Meaning of *Abhidharmakośa: A Light of Jewel Wield by Indra*]. He simply says at some points without further elaboration, for instance, that discussion on certain points appears in the *Kar ṅik* (*Abhidharmakośa* commentary of the Eighth Karmapa). He directs the reader to refer to it for detail. This shows some acceptance of the Eighth Karmapa's exposition.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Chos kyi dbang phyug, Zhwa dmar VI, *mNgon pa mdzod kyi spyi don dbyig gnyen bzhed pa*, p. 462: *karma'i rjes 'jug shes 'dod skye bo rnams// rnam bshad so sor 'chad nyan rtsal du thon.*

⁷⁹ Chos kyi dbang phyug, Zhwa dmar VI, *mNgon pa mdzod kyi spyi don dbyig gnyen bzhed pa*, p. 462: *de lta na yang deng sang rang lugs kyi// mtshan nyid smra bar grags pa phal mo ches// rnam bshad rnams kyi dgongs pa bor nas kyang // sna tshogs yig sna rnams la blo rtse gtad.*

⁸⁰ Chos kyi dbang phyug, Zhwa dmar VI, *mNgon pa mdzod kyi spyi don dbyig gnyen bzhed pa*, p. 264: *kho bos bsams na/ skyob pa 'bri gung 'jig rten gsum mgon gyi zhal snga nas/ so sor thar pa'i sdom pa 'chi 'phos pas mi gtong zhes seng ge'i sgra chen po bsgrags pa las/ bdag nyid chen po sa skya paṇḍitas dgag pa rgya cher mdzad mod kyang...* The whole rebuttal is not mentioned here.

⁸¹ Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, *chos mngon pa mdzod kyi tshig don rnam par 'grel pa brgya byin thog pa'i nor bu'i 'od snang* p.23: *kar ṅik du skabs 'dir gzugs rung gzugs kyi mtshan nyid du bshad pa dang rdzas rdul gzugs phung du bsdu ba sogs legs bshad mang du yod kyang 'dir ma smos la.* Mi bskyod rdo rje, Karmapa VIII, *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo*, Vol. 1 p.109 discusses this topic as indicated by Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas.

While the Eighth Karmapa's *Grub bde'i dpyid 'jo* enjoys accolades in the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition, it is hard to say how scholars of other bKa' brgyud schools and beyond received it, since – as mentioned above – all other religious schools have their own commentaries.⁸² It is also plausible that later scholars might not have acknowledged the reference even if they had used the Eighth Karmapa's commentary since current academic conventions were not observed by traditional Tibetan scholars.

Conclusion

The uniqueness of the Eighth Karmapa's commentary in comparison to other Tibetan commentaries is evident in the presentation of Vajrayāna and bKa' brgyud pa viewpoints, in the polemical positions taken, and in the elucidation of points only presented in condensed form in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.

Research on the variations in interpretation and the understanding of the *Abhidharmakośa*, among Tibetan scholars, is almost non-existent. While the Eighth Karmapa's interpretation appears to concur with the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and the *mChims mdzod* in general, some differences especially among religious schools exist. This is demonstrated by the Eighth Karmapa's commentary where he has presented many bKa' brgyud pa positions such as the non-relinquishment of *prātimokṣa* vow through death. Some disparity in the interpretation is also established by his refutations mainly directed towards Śākya mchog ldan. Also, the disputation of other scholars' philosophical positions in his commentaries through dialectics is a rather unusual feature. Given what is known about the Eighth Karmapa's life and his scholarly contributions, the tendency to strongly engage with different viewpoints appears to be an overall feature of his approach.⁸³

Furthermore, while the Eighth Karmapa endorsed the overall intent of the Indian *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, he made that formidable text more accessible to a Tibetan audience. This is illustrated in this article through the juxtaposition of some of the relevant textual material. In contrast to other Tibetan scholars, such as the Ninth Karmapa and dGe 'dun grub, who kept their commentaries concise, the Eighth Karmapa also did not hesitate to discuss cryptic, condensed, and ambiguous points of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and to elaborate on them. For instance, the Eighth Karmapa added 'words' that become the actional

⁸² Other scholars debating the Eighth Karmapa in relation to the Abhidharma theories have not come to my notice.

⁸³ Draszczyk and Higgins (2019: 28) also suggest that the Eighth Karmapa was an intellectual who did not show reluctance in engaging with any kind of opponents or doctrinal topics.

path of lying whereas the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* mentions 'letters' that cause understanding as an actional path of lying. The Eighth Karmapa's addition appears to make some sense since one usually makes meaning out of words. On this account, one can conclude that the Eighth Karmapa's commentary serves to some extent as a commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* making it somewhat unusual in the Tibetan commentarial landscape in relation to Vasubandhu's Abhidharma texts.

The state of the source texts of the commentary presents some challenges for textual studies. We have seen that the available textual sources of Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary rely on two significantly divergent editions.

Although Karma 'phrin las pa's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* is likely to be one of the earliest in the Karma bKa' brgyud, the Eighth Karmapa's commentary seems to be the first extensive commentary in the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition. It sits alongside his other monumental commentaries on Madhyamaka, Vinaya, and the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. The Eighth Karmapa's commentary appears to be the starting point of an independent *Abhidharmakośa* commentarial tradition in Karma bKa' brgyud school: the Ninth Karmapa summarises it and the Sixth Zhwa dmar in turn bases his commentary on the Ninth Karmapa's commentary. The Ninth Karmapa praised the commentary of the Eighth Karmapa and the Sixth Zhwa dmar extolled it as possessing many bKa' brgyud pa interpretations.

As a result, the Eighth Karmapa's commentary enjoyed a reputation as an authoritative text in the Karma bKa' brgyud, at least in the following few generations. The available prints stem from the 20th-century eastern Tibetan center dPal spungs. The great 18th-century scholar and chief hierarch of dPal spungs, Si tu Paṅ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1700–1774), briefly mentions the Eighth Karmapa's commentary in his *Abhidharmakośa* commentary. Also in the 20th century, the Eighth Karmapa's monumental work was considered worthy of the substantial effort and funding required for its printing. Therefore, one can conclude that the two Karmapas' commentaries enjoyed unquestioned acceptance in the Karma bKa' brgyud pa school. The reception of these commentaries by the wider Tibetan Buddhist scholarly community requires further study.

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