

On Non-Valid Cognitions in Tibetan Buddhist and Bon po *tshad ma* Traditions

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Introduction

The philosophical reflection and meditational observation of mind and mental world have occupied some of Buddhism's greatest thinkers throughout its extensive history across vast geographical regions. This dedication to rigorous study and careful observation has produced numerous inspired writings and learned treatises filled with insights into emotional and psychological truths. The intimate and sustained preoccupation with the inner worlds of thoughts and emotions is, in part, inspired by the spiritual quest, the question of suffering and liberation from it and its causes, which are fundamental to the Buddhist religion and its associated worldview.¹

Following this noble tradition of inquiry established by Indian intellectual and religious forefathers, Tibetan scholars such as Phywa/Phya/Cha pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109–1169),² mTshur ston gZhon nu seng ge (c.1150–1210),³ and Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan⁴, on the Buddhist side, and 'A zha Blo gros gyal mtshan (1198–1263)⁵ on the Bon po side, reflected and authored works on epistemological issues. Their reflections, particularly on the definitions and

¹ One of Buddhism's most famous works, the *Dhammapada*, begins by emphasizing the crucial importance of the mind in our experience and aspiration for happiness. In his seminal work, the *Catuhśataka* (chapter 12, verse 19), Āryadeva reflects on the differences between various religious traditions of India during his time and concludes that Śākya's teachings are to be appreciated as primarily about the mind, thereby underscoring the importance of the mind. For the English translation of this verse, see Lang 1986: 116–117.

² On the life of Phya pa chos kyi seng ge, see Hugon 2023.

³ On the life of mTshur ston gZhon nu seng ge, see Hugon 2004, pp. vii–viii.

⁴ On the sources of Sapaṇ's life and editions of his works, see Jackson 1987.

⁵ 'A zha blo gros gyal mtshan, was a prominent 12th–13th century Bon master from the g.Yor po region of Lhokha. He received treasure transmissions from major treasure discoverers, such as dPon gsas khyung rgod rtsal and rMa ston shes rab seng ge, and preserved teaching cycles from earlier masters, including gShen chen klu dga' (996–1035). He composed works on cosmology, tantra, and ritual practice. He died at sixty-three with rainbow signs and relics. His main disciples included

classifications of non-valid cognitions, will be documented here. Hence, this study is meant to show the diversity of the views and richness of the tradition on this particular topic.⁶

Tibetan Buddhist *tshad ma*⁷ traditions' studies and writings on mind and mental factors have given rise to the highly influential genre of literature known as *blo rigs* (*Typologies of Mind*), which continues to play an important role in monastic curricula for educating young monks.⁸ Phya pa and Sa paṅ's innovations in this field thus had lasting pedagogical and philosophical implications that resonate to this day.

1. Phya pa and mTshur ston on non-valid cognitions

1.1. The Framework

The scholars whose positions on the non-valid cognitions that were

Tshul khrim rgyal mtshan from Lato, Bru ston 'dul ba rgyal mtshan, and others. This is a summary of his biography by Jean-Luc Achard on the Treasury of Lives. See here: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Azha-Lodro-Gyeltsen/13092>. Accessed on 20.04.2025.

⁶ Although it is a desideratum to explain in detail the provenance and evolution of the ideas connected with the non-valid cognitions treated in various works referred to in this study from the perspective of historical, philological, and philosophical explanations, yet, my aim here is modestly limited to systematically documenting the differences, on the theme of non-valid cognition, between Phya pa's, Sapaṅ's, and Blo gros rgyal mtshan's traditions, and their reception later on among the Tibetan scholastics.

⁷ The Tibetan term *tshad ma* can be understood either narrowly as referring to the means of valid cognition or as valid cognition itself. In this sense, *tshad ma* is a cognitive episode that is trustworthy, normative, and non-erroneous. Alternatively, *tshad ma* can be understood broadly as a discipline. In this general sense, *tshad ma* encompasses diverse topics, such as logic and argumentation, epistemology, metaphysics, prescriptive rules for public dialectics, and more. The term *tshad ma*, as a discipline, is also connected to Buddhist religious beliefs and goals, such as rebirth, the Four Noble Truths, possibilities for cultivating infinite compassion, arguments for the centrality of insight into selflessness as key to soteriological goals, and related matters. Here it is to be understood in both senses.

⁸ For an introduction to the *blo rigs* and their content, see Rinbochay & Napper 1986: 9-39, which includes a lengthy introductory essay on mind in Tibetan Buddhism. When I started to study Tibetan Buddhism in a monastery, the first three texts that I had to learn were a *Summary* (*bsDus grwa*), a *Typologies of Reasoning* (*rTags rigs*), and a work on *Typologies of Cognition* (*Blo rigs*), all from the curriculum of sGo mang monastic college, a branch of 'Bras spung. The *bsDus grwa* is authored by Ngag dbang bkra shis (1678–1738), while the last two works are penned by the famed 'Jam dbyan bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648–1721/1722). This genre, namely the *blo rigs*, appears to be a Tibetan phenomenon, without precedent, for instance, in Indic sources.

severely critiqued by Sa paṇ and influenced the dGe lugs tradition belong primarily to the epistemological traditions of rNgog Lo tsā ba Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109),⁹ Phya/phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109–1169),¹⁰ and mTshur ston gzhon nu seng ge (ca. 1150–1210).¹¹ Despite Sapaṇ's intense criticism of their positions on the pertinent topic, the Tibetan epistemological accounts of invalid cognition, many of these positions are faithfully maintained by influential later scholars belonging to what is now known as the dGe lugs tradition¹² and rNying ma scholars, such as Mi pham rgya mtso (1846–1912).¹³

Go rams pa provides the following account of the definitive enumeration (*grangs nges*) and comprehensiveness of Phya pa's seven typologies of cognition: cognition can either apprehend objects unequivocally or not. The latter is doubt (*the tshom*). Those who apprehend objects unequivocally can be either concordant with the object's mode of existence or not. The latter is erroneous cognition (*log shes*). Cognition whose mode is factual either contradicts superimposition or does not. The latter is non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*). Those that contradict superimposition can be engaged with previously cognized objects or not. The former constitutes post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*). The latter type can be either reliant on instruments or not. Those that are not reliant are factive assessments (*yid dpyod*). The instruments upon which cognitions rely can be of two

⁹ For an account of different schools of *tshad ma* in Tibet, see van der Kuip 1983, and on the four periodization, see van der Kuip 1989. These four periods are: the Ancient Period, the Pre-Classical Period, the Classical Period, and the Post-Classical Period. On the life of rNgog lo tsā ba, see Kramer 2007.

¹⁰ For a philosophical and historical understanding and introduction to the theory of mind according to Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge, see Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 3–113. The first section is an introductory essay from a philosophical point of view, while the second presents a theory of mind within the context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history. Additionally, see Dreyfus 1997: 373 on Phya pa's typologies.

¹¹ Most likely, the presentation of opponents' positions on non-valid cognitions, such as definitions and divisions, in the *Tshad ma rigs gter* and its' *Rang 'grel* are from the *Shes rab sgron ma*. On the date and authorship of the *Shes rab sgron ma*, see Hugon 2004, pp. viii–xii, and for its relationship with *Tshad ma rigs gter rang 'grel*, see *id.*, pp. xii–xv.

¹² One of the most important early dGe lugs writers on logic and epistemology is dGe 'dun grub pa (1391–1474), who follows the tradition of Phya pa almost verbatim. See dGe 'dun grub pa, the *Tshad ma rigs rgyan* (p. 378). mKhas grub dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438), an early teacher of the dGe lugs lineage, in his *sDe bdun yid kyi mun sel*, gives a different way of typologizing the non-valid cognition, in terms of conceptual cognition and erroneous non-conceptual cognition. For details, see the *sDe bdun yid kyi mun sel* (p. 102). This might constitute a different Tibetan position on how to typologize the non-valid cognition.

¹³ For example, see Mi pham rGya mtsho's *mKhas 'jug sdom byang* (p.4): *yul can blo yi dbye ba la* || *snang la ma nges yid dpyod dang* || *ma rtogs log rtog the tshom dang* || *mngon sum rjes dpag tshad ma gnyis* || *bcad shes dang ni bdun du dbye* ||.

types: experience or reasoning. The former is perceptual valid cognition (*mngon sum tshad ma*), and the latter is inferential valid cognition (*rjes dpag tshad ma*). This account also accords with Phya pa's comment in his *Yid kyi mun sel*.¹⁴

1.2. The Fivefold Classification System

Early Tibetan epistemologists, like Phya pa and mTshur ston, had established a fivefold classification of non-valid cognition that continues to dominate Tibetan monastic philosophical discourse in the tradition that does not follow Sapan's system. This system recognized five distinct categories of invalid cognition:

1.2.1. Factive Assessment (*yid dpyod*)

According to early Tibetan epistemologists, factive assessment is a cognition that determines its object correctly, although it is neither

¹⁴ Go rams pa's account is as follows, see the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 70): *sngon gyi mkhas pa phya pa sog na re | blo rigs thams cad the tshom | log shes | snang la ma nges pa | bcad shes | yid dpyod | mngon sum | rjes dpag tshad ma dang bdun du 'dus pa yin te | blo de la rang yul mtha' cig tu 'dzin mi nus pa dang | nus pa gnyis las | dang po ni the tshom | gnyis pa la yul gyi gnas tshul dang mi mthun par 'dzin pa dang | mthun par 'dzin pa gnyis las | dang po la log shes | gnyis pa la log phyogs dang 'dzin stang mi 'gal bar 'jug pa dang | 'gal bar 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | snang la ma nges pa | gnyis pa la sngar rtogs zin gyi don la 'jug pa dang | sngar ma rtogs pa la 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | bcad shes | gnyis pa la | rgyu mtshan la ma ltos par 'jug pa dang | rgyu mtshan la ltos nas 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | yid dpyod | gnyis pa la myong stobs kyiis 'jug pa dang | rtags stobs kyiis 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | mngon sum tshad ma | gnyis pa ni rjes dpag tshad ma'o ||. Additionally, see Phya pa, *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 9a5-8): *spyir don yongs su gcod pa la gnyis te | dngos 'gal las tha dad du ma phyed pa phyogs gcig ma yin par gcod pa dang | tha dad par gnas pa phyogs gcig tu gcod pa'o || dang po ni | the tshom ste mi rtag par dogs pa nyid na | rtag par yang dogs pas de las tha dad du ma phyed pa'i phyir ro || gnyis pa la'ang gnyis te | shes bya dang mi mthun par yongs su gcod pa dang mthun par gcod pa'o || dang po ni | log shes so || gnyis pa la'ang ldog pa'i zhen pa dang mi 'gal ba dang 'gal ba gnyis las | dang po ni | snang la ma nges pa'o || gnyis pa la'ang rtogs zin pa la 'jug pa dang | sngar ma rtogs pa la 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | bcad pa'i yul can no || gnyis pa la'ang rang gi mtshan nyid mthong bas sgro 'dogs la gnod pa dang | ma mthong bas gnod pa gnyis las | dang po ni | mngon sum tshad ma'o || gnyis pa la'ang rtags kyi rjes su 'brangs pa dang ma 'brangs pa gnyis las | dang po ni rjes dpag yin la | gnyis pa yid dpyod yin te | de ltar na tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo lnga tshad ma'i blo gnyis te blo bdun du grangs nges pa yin no ||. This manner of categorizing cognitions is, according to Phya pa, based on two types of objects: held object (*gzung yul*) and conceived object (*zhen yul*). Alternatively, one can categorize cognition based solely on the different held objects that various cognitions apprehend. See Phya pa, *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 1b5): *dang po'ang gzung yul la ltos nas blo gsum du dbye ba dang | gzung yul dang zhen yul la gnyis ga la ltos nas blo bdun du dbye ba ... ||.***

supported by valid evidence nor does it possess direct epistemic access to its object. This means it constitutes neither inference nor perception—the two classes of recognized valid cognitions. Such cognition is similar to correct presumptions in their epistemic evaluation. According to Phya pa, factive assessment is conceptual cognition (*rtog pa*) that factually determines hidden phenomena that are not cognized and is not supported by the ascertainment of valid reasoning. It comprises three types: that not based on any type of reasoning, that based on unestablished reasoning, and those based on uncertain reasoning.¹⁵

1.2.2. Non-ascertaining Perception (*snang la ma nges pa*)

Non-ascertaining perception is cognition that cannot cancel or undermine the mode of apprehension of cognition contradictory to itself in relation to the same object. In other words, such perceptions do not ascertain or determine their objects; they merely apprehend their objects, or the objects appear to them. According to Phya pa, these are perceptions “in which the specifically characterized phenomena appear and that do not contradict superimposition.” This category comprises three types: non-ascertaining perception due to the lack of an aspect in its object, due to a lack of focused attention, and that which remains undetermined because the causes of error sway it.¹⁶

¹⁵ As Phya pa states in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 10a7–8): *yid dpyod ni rtog med ma yin te rtog pa yin la | de'ang the tshom ma yin te nges pa yin zhing | de'ang log par nges pa ma yin te shes bya dang mthun par nges pa yin la | de'ang sngar rtogs zin pa ma yin te ma rtogs pa'i lkog gyur sgra mi rtag pa la sogs pa yid dpyod yin la | de'ang phyogs chos dang khyab pa tshad mas nges pa la rten nas nges pa ma yin pas | de la gsum ste | sgra mi rtag pa lta bu rtags dang rtags ltar snang ba gang la'ang ma rten par nges pa rgyu mtshan med pa'i yid dpyod do | mig gi gzung bya lta bu ma grub pa'am | gzhal bya lta bu ma nges pa la brten nas nges pa phyogs chos dang khyab pa dngos po la med pa rtags su bzung nas bsgrub bya bden pa nges pa log pa'i rgyu mtshan can gyi yid dpyod do |*. He defines factive assessment as ‘the defining character of factive assessment is [a conceptual cognition] determining a hitherto not cognized object, without reliance upon a reason ascertained by valid cognition.’ See the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 10b2-3): *yid dpyod kyi mtshan nyid ni | sngar ma rtogs pa'i don bden pa rtags tshad mas nges pa la ma brten par nges pa |*. Additionally see gZhon nu seng ge, *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.24-25): *des na yid dpyod kyi mtshan nyid ni rtags kyi rgyu mtshan la ma brten par sngar ma rtogs pa'i rkog gyur la don dang mthun par nges pa'o |*. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 247-256 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 197-201 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here.

¹⁶ As Phya pa states in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 9b8–9): *snang la ma nges pa ni gnyis te | yul rnam pa dang mi ldan pas snang yang ma nges pa dang | yul la yid ma gtad pas snang yang ma nges pa'o | | 'khrul pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis zil gyis mnan pas snang yang ma nges pa dang gsum mo | | ,snang la ma nges pa'i mtshan nyid ni | don rang gi mtshan nyid snang ba dang bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs dang mi 'gal ba... |*. Also, see gZhon nu seng ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.21-23): *rang gi mtshan nyid snang pa'i don la sgro 'dogs*

1.2.3. Post-knowledge Cognition (*bcad shes*)

These are those that determine objects previously apprehended by valid cognition. Although they apprehend their objects correctly, they contribute no element of novelty or freshness to the epistemic life of the subject who possesses them. According to Phya pa's tradition, this type of cognition may be both perceptual and conceptual. For Phya pa, post-knowledge cognition encompasses engaged perception, engaged memory, and subsequently arisen ascertainment, which is capable of inducing determination regarding the object cognized.¹⁷

1.2.4. Erroneous Cognition (*log shes*)

Erroneous cognitions are those whose mode of apprehension contradicts the mode of existence of their object. They may be either conceptual or non-conceptual, arising either from contradictory reasoning (*'gal ba'i rtags*) or from faulty faculties (*dbang po skyon can*). Phya pa defines it as 'determining the object erroneously,' comprising two types: erroneous cognition that apprehends superimposition and that which determines wrongly.¹⁸

1.2.5. Doubt (*the tshom*)

dang mi 'gal ba'o ||. See Hugon & Stoltz (2019: 227-237) for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz (2019: 195-196) for a critical edition related to the passage cited here.

¹⁷ As stated in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 11a3): *bcad pa'i yul can ni | sngar rtogs pa la zhen pa 'dren nus kyi mngon sum 'jug pa dang | dran pa'i rtog pa 'jug pa dang | rjes su skyes pa'i nges shes rnams yin no* ||. Additionally, see gZhon nu seng ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.23-24): *sngar rtogs pa'i byed pa ma nyams pa'i don la sgro 'dogs dang 'gal bar 'jug pa'o* ||. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 239-246 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 196-197 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here.

¹⁸ Additionally, Phya pa includes inferential knowledge as erroneous since it apprehends an object (*gzung ba*) that is superimposed, namely the object universal. As stated in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 11a1-2): *log shes la gnyis te | sgro btags 'dzin pa dang | zhen yul la phyin ci log tu nges pa'o* || *dang po ni | zla ba gnyis la sogs par snang ba'i rtog med 'khrul pa dang | rjes dpag dang | yid dpyod dang | rtog pa bcad pa'i yul can dang | the tshom dang | log par nges pa rnams kyi 'ang don spyi 'dzin pa'i cha nas gzung ba sgro btags la dmigs pa'i log shes yin no* || *zhen yul phyin ci log tu nges pa ni sgra rtag par zhen pa la sogs pa'o* || *log shes kyi mtshan nyid ni | don phyin ci log tu yongs su gcod pa'o* ||. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 257-264 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 201-202 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here. Additionally, see gZhon nu seng ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 26): *rang yul sgro 'dogs pa zhes bya ba yin* ||.

Doubts may be either dormant or explicit. This type of cognition is characterized by indecisive wavering, whether manifest or implicit. Although Phya pa did not precisely formulate a definition for doubt (*the tshom*), he comments that it is a cognition that is not distinguished from direct contradiction and whose mode of apprehension involves more than one possibility.¹⁹

This early Tibetan systematization represented an attempt to create a comprehensive taxonomy that could account for all possible mental states that failed to qualify as valid cognition (*tshad ma*).²⁰ This approach also reflects a commitment to exhaustive categorization that was characteristic of the scholastic method. The system was designed to provide clear pedagogical tools for understanding the various ways in which cognition could fail to achieve epistemic reliability.

2. Sapaṇ's Critique

2.1. The Fundamental Challenge

Sa paṇ devotes the second chapter of the *Tshad ma rigs gter* and its *Rang 'grel* to an analytical and reflective study of various categories of mind, focusing primarily on mistaken and erroneous minds—the non-valid cognition (*tshad min gyi blo*).²¹

Sapaṇ's systematic account of non-valid cognition—encompassing its definition, various modalities, their bases, and their interrelations—is based on sections from the *Chapter on Inference for Oneself* of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, the *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā*, the *Pramāṇavinīścaya*, and the *Hetubindu*, where invalid reasonings are presented and taught. The analysis of non-conceptual non-valid cognitions, conversely, is based on the presentation of pseudo-perception (*mngon sum ltar snang*) in preceding Indian works. The chapter is also inspired primarily by—

¹⁹ As stated in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 9a6): *dnegos 'gal las tha dad du ma phyed pa phyogs gcig ma yin par gcod pa dang | ... dang po ni | the tshom ste mi rtag par dogs pa nyid na | rtag par yang dogs pas de las tha dad du ma phyed pa'i phyr ro | |*. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 265-271 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 201-202 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here. gZhon nu seng ge gives the following definition of doubt in the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 26): *yul la rtse gnyis su 'jug pa'am/ mtha' gzhan srid par dogs pa dang bcas pa ste... | |*.

²⁰ For an account of what constitutes *tshad ma* for Sapaṇ's adversaries, see the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 69): *bden pa'i don rtogs zhes bya ba yin no | |*. This, according to mTshur ston is in accord with Śaṅkarānanda. Sapaṇ criticized it in the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 233). For Sapaṇ's account, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (pp. 234–235).

²¹ Valid and non-deceptive cognition (*tshad ma* and *mi slu ba'i shes pa*) is discussed in the latter half of the eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters of the *Tshad ma rigs gter* and its *Rang 'grel*.

though not through adopting the expressed views, but through critical engagement with them—the works of Tibetan authors whom Sapaṇ criticized without reservation.²²

Sapaṇ's approach to the established framework of non-valid cognitions proposed by Phya pa and mTshur ston was comprehensive in its scope and severity. He argued that the epistemologists whose works elicited his critique are blind to the main categories of non-valid cognition, while adding different categories where none are needed.²³ His criticisms target three classes of non-valid cognitions among the five accepted and espoused by his philosophical adversaries: factive assessment (*yiḍ dpyod*), non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*), and post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*). Regarding the remaining two categories of non-valid cognition—doubt (*the tshom*) and erroneous cognition (*log shes*)—Sapaṇ agrees essentially with his opponents, although differences exist in details.

The author begins his critique by questioning the very coherence of the fivefold system. As he states in the root text:

"Most Tibetan scholars accept five categories of non-valid cognition: factive assessment, Non-ascertaining perception, Post-knowledge cognition, Erroneous cognition, and Doubt."²⁴

This seemingly neutral observation sets the stage for his systematic assessment of three of these five categories.

²² For the general accounts of the sources, see Go rams pa, the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 15): *rab byed gnyis pas ni yul can gyi blo la tshad ma dang tshad min gnyis las | dang po ni | rab byed tha ma bzhi'i skabs su 'chad pas | 'dir tshad min gyi blo ni mdo dang | rnam 'grel nges kyi rang don le'u dang | gtan tshigs thigs pa'i gtan tshigs ltar snang ston pa'i skabs rnams dang | gzhan don le'u'i phyogs chos can gyi gtan tshigs dgu 'chad pa'i skabs kyi gtan tshigs ltar snang bdun po rnams kyi gtan tshigs ltar snang gsum la brten pa'i tshad min gyi blo bstan pa dang | mngon sum ltar snang gyi skabs su rtog med mngon sum ltar snang gi rnam gzhas gsungs pa rnams la bod snga rabs pa rnams tshad min gyi blo lngar grangs nges par 'dod pa rnams bkag nas tshad min gyi blo gsum du grangs nges pa'i tshul dang | de dag so so'i mtshan nyid dang | dbye ba la sogs pa bstan no | |*.

²³ For Sapaṇ, the most important category of non-valid cognition is non-cognizing cognition, which his adversaries failed even to recognize. See Sapaṇ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 84): *bod rnams kyis tshad ma ma yin pa'i gtso bor gyur pa ma rtogs pa'i blo phar dor nas | don med pa la tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo lngar phyed bar zad do | |*.

²⁴ The *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.1d–2a. The number should be read as the text between line numbers *d* and *a* of the first and second verse from the second chapter of the *Tshad ma rigs gter*. This is based on my critical edition. For details, see Jamtsho 2023. Sapaṇ says that some paṇḍits are supposed to have denied any typologies of non-valid cognition due to the infinite number, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 72): *paṇḍita 'ga' zhig mtha' yas pas dbye ba med do zhes zer ro | |*.

2.2. The Critique of Factive Assessment

Sapaṅ's most sustained criticism targets the category of factive assessment (*yiḍ dpyod*). For Sapaṅ, a non-valid cognition called factive assessment is pure fabrication, resulting from the fertile imagination of those who promote the idea. Neither mind nor mental factors (*sems dang sems byung*) exist that fit the description of factive assessment as accounted for by epistemologists. He generally criticizes this category and examines the particular instances provided by his adversaries, demonstrating their inability to withstand thorough and searching criticism.

His analysis proceeds through a series of logical dilemmas designed to demonstrate the internal contradictions of this category. In the root text of the *Tshad ma rigs gter*, Sapaṅ presents the following analysis:

"If factive assessment relies not at all upon reasons, then it constitutes merely a thesis held without proof, thereby becoming a doubt. If it depends upon reason, that reason must be either valid or one of three invalid types."²⁵

This argument creates a logical trap: if factive assessment operates without reasons, it cannot be distinguished from doubt; if it operates with reasons, those reasons must be either valid (making the cognition valid) or invalid (placing it in one of the established categories of invalid reasoning). Sapaṅ continues:

"If the reasons underlying the two reasoned factive assessments are not subsumed under the three invalid categories, then the number of

²⁵ He begins by examining the fundamental nature of factive assessment, arguing that if it is merely *belief* in a proposition without grounding in perception or reasoned arguments, it cannot be distinguished from doubt, even when its content happens to be veridical, since a mental cognition that lacks support in reasoned thought or unimpaired perception cannot be factually concordant in its epistemic quality—even if it holds something factually true, this constitutes mere belief lacking cognitive penetration of the object. Alternatively, if factive assessment depends on reasoning, that reason must conform to one of the four allowable forms of reasoning in the Buddhist *tshad ma* tradition, meaning any cognition resulting from these various reasons belongs to a different, already established class of cognition than what proponents propose. See *Rigs gter rang 'grel*, (pp.72-73). In a striking misinterpretation, this very verse, which constitutes Sa paṅ's refutation of factive assessment, is cited as evidence supporting this category of non-valid cognition by a recent dGe lugs writer. For details, see Napper & Rinpochoy 1986: 98 and fol. 6a of the Tibetan text included in that publication.

invalid reasons becomes four. If the factive assessment based on reasons is not invalid cognition, then it constitutes a third valid cognition."²⁶

Furthermore, since the definitive enumeration of non-valid cognition according to early scholars comprises five categories, Sa-pan's analysis forces proponents to accept an additional category called 'erroneous factive assessment' (*log pa'i yid dpyod*), which he argues is logically implied by their position's structure, thereby disrupting the established epistemological framework. Sapaṇ extends his analysis to scriptural authorities and resulting cognitive states based on them, arguing that not all scriptures are equally authoritative even when attributed to figures of authority, identifying four types of cognitions arising from hearing scriptures: valid cognition from rationally supportable content, erroneous cognition from logically refutable content, and both doubts and non-cognizing cognition from scripture lacking rational support.²⁷

This analysis demonstrates that factive assessment either collapses into existing categories or creates unwanted proliferation of basic epistemological categories. Sapaṇ's conclusion is unequivocal: after a lengthy examination of this category, he concludes that nothing in reality, experience, or authoritative sources corresponds to or fits this description.²⁸

²⁶ Sapaṇ specifically addresses the two internal categories of factive assessment based on uncertain and unestablished reasons detailed in *Shes rab sgron ma*, pp. 24-25, noting that these faulty reasons produce cognitions that are non-cognizing and indecisive, respectively. See Table 2 for the relationship between these reasons and their corresponding cognitions. He demonstrates that accepting factive assessment leads to serious, illogical consequences including the necessity of admitting a fourth distinctive invalid reasoning, the problematic creation of a third group of valid knowledge disrupting established and accepted dyad classification, inferential knowledge ceasing to be truly valid, the ascertainment being unable to undermine superimposition, and the inability to account for doubt as a separate category of invalid cognition see *Rigs gter rang 'grel*, (p. 73): *gnyis pa ha cang thal ba ni* |.

²⁷ For detailed arguments, analysis, and conclusions reached by Sapaṇ, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (pp.73-77): *rang gi lung la drang don nges don gnyis* | *gzhan gyi lung las 'thad mi 'thad gnyis las* | *dper na bden pa bzhi dang bdag med gnyis la sogs pa sgrub byed yod na tshad ma yin te...* | | *khrus dang dka' thub kyi sdiḡ pa 'dag pa la sogs pa gnod byed yod pas log shes* | *sgrub byed gnod byed gnyis ka med pa'i lung las gzhi grub pa rnam the tshom* | *ma grub pa ma rtogs pa nyid de* | |, *tshad ma ma yin pa'i lung las 'jug ldog ni* | *the tshom gyi sgo nas byed par gsungs pas mi 'gal lo* | |.

²⁸ Go rams pa, in his abridged commentary, characterizes Sapaṇ's examination as a 'refutation of the nature of factive assessment' (*yid dpyod rang gi ngo bo dag*), indicating that no genuine mental episode corresponds to how Tibetan authors define factive assessment, see Go rams pa, *Rigs gter gsal byed*, p. 401. For a later

2.3. The Problem of Non-ascertaining Perception

Sapaṇ's critique of non-ascertaining perception reveals a fundamental disagreement about the nature of perceptual cognition itself, between him and his epistemological adversaries. Regarding non-ascertaining perception, Sapaṇ argues that not all of its instances constitute non-valid cognition as his opponents claim. For Sapaṇ, all perceptions (*mngon sum*) of ordinary beings are, by definition, valid cognition that are non-ascertaining and indeterminate in nature and function.

The root text makes this position explicit:

"If non-ascertaining perceptions do not constitute valid cognition, then all perceptions become non-valid cognition, because determination regarding perception has been refuted."²⁹

Sapaṇ takes particular issue with a category of non-ascertaining perception attributed to unclear aspects of the object (*yul gyi rnam pa mi gsal ba*). He notes that his opponents failed to distinguish between unclear objects (*yul mi gsal ba*) and cognitive failure to illuminate (*blos gsal mi nus pa*). He engages in extensive criticism, employing both authoritative scriptural testimonies and reasoned analysis, to demonstrate the inadequacies and illogical consequences of his adversaries' positions. This confusion leads to the inappropriate inclusion of valid perceptual cognitions, that is, the non-ascertaining perception, within the category of invalid cognition.³⁰ For Sapaṇ, any perception (*mngon sum*)

defence of *yid dpyod*, identification of its plausible sources in authoritative Indian sources, see 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's *Blo rig rnam gzhaḡ* (pp.114-116).

²⁹ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.10a-d.

³⁰ The author adds a separate section in the *Rang 'grel* where he refutes a subdivision of non-ascertaining perception due to the lack of vividness of the object. He identifies this as a case of confusing what is not vivid from the aspect of the object (*yul mi gsal ba*) with the subject's inability to illuminate (*blos gsal mi nus pa*). This can be illustrated, for example, by a visual consciousness, based on a correctly functioning visual organ that apprehends a vase, will apprehend the momentary changes of the vase, but the conceptual thought immediately arising may not be able to determine the momentariness of the vase, albeit correctly identifying the vase. This is due not to the unclarity of the object, but rather to the mind's inability to differentiate the series of moments correctly under the influence of attachment to permanence. As stated in the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 79): *de ni yul mi gsal bas ma yin gyi 'dra ba gzhan 'byung la sogs pa 'khrul pa'i rgyu mtshan gyi sgo nas blos gsal bar 'dzin ma nus pas gzhan sel gyi sgo nas nges par bya ba la dgongs so* | |. This position is also advocated by gZhon-nu-seng-ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 22).

is by definition a valid and non-mistaken cognition. The ascertainment and determination are not its inherent or innate features.³¹

2.4. Criticism of Post-knowledge Cognition

Sapaṅ's analysis of post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*) reveals what he considers a fundamental category error in early Tibetan epistemology. Post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*), though it exists, does not require a separate category since it can be integrated into the main class of non-valid cognition—namely, non-cognizing cognition (*ma rtogs pa'i blo*)—which Sapaṅ's opponents, unfortunately, failed to acknowledge and register. Otherwise, this leads unnecessarily to the proliferation of basic categories. The inclusion of some perceptual and non-conceptual cognition under this rubric constitutes a cardinal mistake for a Buddhist epistemologist, according to him, since post-knowledge cognition must by nature be conceptual.

His critique concerns the claim that post-knowledge cognition can be both perceptual and conceptual. Sapaṅ demonstrates the logical impossibility of this position through a detailed analysis of the temporal, modal, and objective characteristics of these cognitive types:

"Perception is non-conceptual and [apprehends] present [objects]; post-knowledge cognition constitutes memory of past [objects]. [Since these are] incompatible in terms of their objects, temporal framework, and mode of apprehension, how can a common locus exist [between them]?"³²

³¹ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 4.5c-d: *mngon sum rtog bral ma 'khrul ba* | | *nyid kyis tshad mar grub pa yin* | |. While delineating this class of non-valid cognition, early Tibetan thinkers, in Sapaṅ's assessment, inappropriately included what is not inherently invalid cognition within this category. For Sa paṅ, valid cognition does not necessarily determine its object, whereas his opponents maintain that valid cognition must determine its object. Both parties agree that there exists a correct perception that does not ascertain its objects, but their agreement ends there. For Sapaṅ, this necessarily constitutes a type of valid cognition, while he characterizes his Tibetan opponents as viewing it otherwise. According to them, any unmissaken perception that fails to ascertain and determine its objects is non-ascertaining and therefore invalid cognition. For Sapaṅ, perception neither ascertains nor determines; it merely apprehends its object within perceptual ken. While perception may induce cognition that ascertains or determines, neither function applies to perception itself directly. For discussions of the philosophical arguments and reasons behind the inclusion of some perceptions among non-valid cognitions in Phya pa's tradition, and the discrimination between perception simpliciter and valid perception, see Dreyfus 1997: 365–396. For a later rebuttal of Sapaṅ's critique, see 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's *Blo rig rnam gzhaḡ* (pp.116–117).

³² See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.12a-d and the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.80): *mngon sum ni ngo bo rtog bral* | *yul rang mtshan* | *dus da ltar ba* | 'dzin stangs gsal ba ma 'dres pa 'dzin

His systematic comparison showing the incompatibility of perception and post-sknowledge cognition across four dimensions can be tabulated as follows:

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Perception</i>	<i>Post-knowledge cognition</i>
Nature (<i>ngo bo</i>)	Non-conceptual (<i>rtog med</i>)	Conceptual (<i>rtog pa</i>)
Object (<i>yul</i>)	Particulars (<i>gsal ba</i>)	Object universal (<i>don spyi</i>)
Temporal Dimension (<i>dus</i>)	Present (<i>da lta ba</i>)	Past (<i>'das pa</i>)
Mode of Apprehension (<i>'dzin stangs</i>)	Vivid and unmixed (<i>gsal zhing ma 'dres pa</i>)	Unclear and mixed (<i>mi gsal zhing 'dres pa</i>)

Table 1.

3. Sapaṇ's System

3.1. The Threefold Classification

Having critiqued three of the five typologies of non-vlaid cognition propounded by Phya pa and his associates, Sapaṇ proposes a simplified system. The author proceeds by presenting his preferred definition of non-valid cognition and different methods for categorizing and classifying it.³³ For Sapaṇ, all non-valid cognition can be classified as either non-cognizing cognition, erroneous cognition, or doubt. These three categories are studied through their defining properties or characteristics, subdivisions, examples, and relations to various invalid reasonings.

Sapaṇ advocates the following three categories of non-valid cognitions. The second and third categories are equally accepted by his opponents:

pa yin la | bcad shes ni ngo bo rtog pa | yul sgra don | dus 'das pa | 'dzin stangs mi gsal ba 'dres pa 'dzin pas mngon sum yang yin la | bcad shes kyang yin no zhes bya ba'i gzhi mthun mi srid de |. The position that advocates a perceptual post-knowledge cognition is also found in gZhon-nu-seng-ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p.24). For a later rebuttal of Sapaṇ's critique and defence of the Phya pa's tradition, see 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's *Blo rig rnam gzhag* (pp.119-120).

³³ For details, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 83).

3.1.1. Non-cognizing Cognition (*ma rtogs pa'i blo*)

Non-cognizing cognition constitutes the most extensive class of non-valid cognition. These cognitions lack epistemic value in the sense of providing additional or new information about phenomena not previously cognized. They are devoid of apprehending their object as 'that' or 'not that' (*de dang de min 'dzin pas stong*).³⁴

Non-cognizing cognition can be divided as follows:

1. Not engaged with the object (*yul la ma zhugs pa*)
2. Engaged yet not finished (*zhugs kyang ma rdzogs pa*)
3. Finished yet not cognized (*rdzogs kyang ma rnyed pa*), which can be further divided as a) Due to a lack of object to be cognized (*rtogs bya'i yul med nas*), b) Due to the cognition being tampered (*rtogs byed kyi blo bslad nas*), and c) Due to not being a feasible object (*shes byed kyi yul ma yin nas*). The last is further divided into i) The remoteness of space (*yul gyi bskal ba*), ii) The remoteness of time (*dus kyi bskal ba*), and iii) The remoteness by nature (*rang bzhin gyi bskal ba*)³⁵

3.1.2. Erroneous Cognition (*log shes*)

Erroneous cognitions are those whose mode of apprehension contradicts the mode of existence of their object. They may be either conceptual or non-conceptual, arising either from contradictory reasoning (*'gal ba'i rtags*) or from faulty faculties (*dbang po skyon can*).³⁶

Erroneous cognition can be divided as follows:

1. Conceptual erroneous cognition (*rtog pa log shes*), which can be further divided as, a) Erroneous conception with regards to the aspect (*rnam pa la log par rtog pa*), for example, mistaking a rope for a snake, b) Erroneous conception concerning time (*dus la log par rtog pa*), for example, thinking of the present blue colour

³⁴ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.19b–c.

³⁵ The not-engaged cognitions are those that have not been able to engage the object in any cognitively viable way. Sapaṅ gives the example of the cognition of someone who knows nothing of logic concerning the three features of correct reasoning, or the cognition of someone who doesn't know the linguistic sciences about the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar. The not-completed analysis refers to that cognition which is still in the process of accessing the object and thus has not yet cognized it. The third group of non-cognizing cognition comprises those that lack an object to be cognized, are unable to cognize due to a fault with the cognition, and do not cognize the object simply because the object is not appropriate. For the details, see Sapaṅ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 85). Additionally, see Go-rams-pa in his *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 79–90).

³⁶ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.20b–c.

as the one from yesterday, and c) Erroneous conception concerning the object (*yul la log par rtog pa*), for example, thinking of the two species of trees as instantiating an identical universal.

2. Non-conceptual erroneous cognition (*rtog med log shes*), which is further divided as a) Erroneous sense consciousness (*dbang shes bsblad pa*), for example, a visual consciousness apprehending two moons, and b) Erroneous mental consciousness (*yid shes bsblad pa*), for example, a mental consciousness during a dream state.³⁷

3.1.3. Doubt (*the tshom*): Doubts may be either dormant or explicit. This type of cognition is characterized by indecisive wavering, whether manifest or implicit.³⁸

Doubt can be divided as follows:

1. Explicit doubt (*the tshom mngon 'gyur*), wondering whether liberation will be attained through fire-offering, which is further divided into a) Equally proportioned doubt (*the tshom cha mnyam*), a doubt that wonders whether the sound is permanent or impermanent, b) The doubt which apprehends predominantly (*shas cher 'dzin pa*). This is subdivided as i) Factually concordant doubt (*the tshom don 'gyur*) and ii) Factually not concordant doubt (*the tshom don mi 'gyur*).
2. Dormant doubt (*the tshom bag nyal*).³⁹

3.2. The Primacy of Non-cognizing Cognition

Sapaṇ identifies a cardinal problem associated with early Tibetan epistemological scholars' systematic approach to studying non-valid cognition: their collective failure to understand non-cognizing cognition, which should serve as the primary category.⁴⁰ Sapaṇ's emphasis on this particular typology of non-valid cognition underscores the important principle that all instances of non-valid cognition are non-

³⁷ For details, see Sapaṇ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (pp.85–86). Additionally, see Go-rams-pa, the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 80). For a comparison between Sapaṇ's position and that of early Tibetan theorists, on erroneous cognition, see the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.25–26).

³⁸ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.21b–c.

³⁹ For our author, any conceptual cognition that holds some remote propositions (*lkog 'gyur la 'jug pa*) is an instance of doubt if it is not supported by any reasoning whatsoever or if the reason is uncertain, or not induced by perception, even if the content or the object of the cognition is true. The cognition does not necessarily need to be explicitly indecisive to be counted as doubt. See Sapaṇ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 86), and Go-rams-pa, the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (pp.80–82) for the details. For a comparison between Sapaṇ's position and that of early Tibetan theorists, on doubt, see the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.26).

⁴⁰ See footnote number 18.

valid because they lack the epistemic efficacy and functional ability of valid cognition to cognize their respective objects. The root text expresses this principle succinctly:

“Non-cognizing cognition is devoid of cognizing [the object] as either that or not that.”⁴¹

This definition captures the essential feature of epistemic failure: the inability to make novel cognitive contact with objects. Non-valid cognition, such as post-knowledge cognition, despite having a factually concordant or veridical mode of apprehension (*'dzin stangs don mthun*), is subsumed under non-valid cognition because it lacks any novel epistemic dimension since its object has already been cognized by another cognitive event. It merely remembers (*dran pa*) what has already been cognized by preceding valid cognition. Doubts and erroneous cognitions can also be subsumed under this category. Indeed, this category appears equivalent in extension to the category of non-valid cognition itself. As stated in the *Tshad ma rigs gter*:

“They (i.e., the non-valid cognition) are classified according to their mode of engagement, but if subsumed by nature, they are one.”⁴²

3.3. Integration with Invalid Reasoning

One important contribution Sa paṇ makes in this chapter is establishing an explicit relationship between types of conceptual thought resulting from three invalid reasonings and the three categories of non-valid cognition that he favors. Sa paṇ establishes the following correspondence between conceptual cognition induced by invalid reasoning and types of invalid reasoning:⁴³

⁴¹ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.19b-c.

⁴² See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.18d-19a. See Sa paṇ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.84): *ngo bo'i sgo nas bsdu na log rtog dang the tshom gnyis kyang ma rtogs pa nyid yin pas tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo gcig tu 'du ste* |. Likewise, Sa paṇ summarizes his position as follows in the 2.22d-23a: *tshad ma min pa gsum po yang* | | *ma rtogs pa las don gzhan min* | |, “Similarly, the three non-valid cognitions are not different entities from non-realizing cognition.” The translation in the footnotes are mine, unless, mentioned otherwise.

⁴³ For the details of this formulation and the textual sources, see Sa paṇ in his *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.84): *de lta bu'i tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo gsum dang gtan tshigs kyi skyon gsum rigs pa'i gnad gcig ste* | *phyogs la mthu med som nyi dang* | | *mi 'dod 'dod pa'i nges sgrub byed* | | *ces gsungs pa ltar* | *gtan tshigs ma grub pas bsgrub bya la mthu med pa ltar ma rtogs pa la'ang blo gang du'ang 'jug pa'i mthu med do* | | *ma nges pas yin nam ma yin som nyi skyed pa ltar* | *the tshom yang gnas lugs las mtha' gzhan du dogs par byed la 'gal bas gang mi 'dod pa bsgrub pa ltar log rtog gis kyang gang ma yin pa de rtogs par byed do* | |. The same points are reiterated with an even more explicit relation drawn between faulty reasoning and non-valid cognitions, see Sa paṇ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.365): *ma grub pas chos can gyi steng du the tshom yang bskyed mi nus so* | | *ma nges pas the tshom tsam bskyed cing* | *'gal bas mi 'dod pa'i nges pa dang* | *yang dag gis 'dod pa'i nges pa bskyed pa yin te* | *m khas pa rnams kyi gtsug gi nor bus* | *phyogs*

<i>Invalid Reasonings</i>	<i>Non-valid Cognitions</i>
Non-established reason (<i>ma grub pa'i rtags</i>)	Non-cognizing cognition (<i>ma rtogs pa'i blo</i>)
Uncertain reason (<i>ma nges pa'i rtags</i>)	Doubt (<i>the tshoms</i>)
Incompatible reason (<i>'gal ba'i rtags</i>)	Erroneous cognition (<i>log shes</i>)

Table 2.

The author does not argue that every instance of non-valid cognition results from invalid reasoning. Post-knowledge cognition determining the impermanence of sound (*sgra mi rtag pa nges pa'i bcad shes*), mere wavering of thought regarding the spiritual efficacy of fire offering, and visual consciousness of two moons due to diseased faculties illustrate different categories of non-valid cognition that are certainly not the products of invalid reasoning or evidence.

4. The Bon po Tradition on Non-valid Cognition

The following presentation of non-valid cognition from the Bon tradition draws upon a comprehensive treatise entitled *Tshad ma'i snying po de kho na nyid kun las btus pa rig pa'i gter mdzod*.⁴⁴ This epistemological treatise was composed at the behest of a certain Rong ston seng ge and represents a significant contribution to the early Bon po's epistemological literature. Given the limited scholarly engagement with this text in contemporary academic discourse, a detailed examination of its structural organization, chapter divisions, and their content remains a desideratum.

Through numerous citations, it becomes evident that Blo gros rgyal mtshan's principal authority regarding non-valid cognition derives from an earlier Bon po treatise, the *rNam 'byed 'phrul gyi lde mig*, traditionally attributed to Bla chen dran pa nam mkha'.⁴⁵ Specifically, Blo gros rgyal mtshan draws upon the third chapter of this work, titled

la mthu med som nyi dang || *mi 'dod 'dod p'ai nges sgrub byed* || *ces gsungs pa ltar ro* ||.

⁴⁴ The relative obscurity of this work within both traditional and modern scholarship underscores the need for systematic investigation of Bon contributions to Indo-Tibetan epistemological discourse. I would like to thank my friend Sonam Palden for introducing me to this work in early 2023.

⁴⁵ The historical provenance and authorial attribution of the *rNam 'byed 'phrul gyi lde mig* remains a subject requiring further scholarly investigation, which falls outside the scope of the present study. For information on his life, see <https://treasuryoflives.org/bo/biographies/view/Drenpa-Namkha/6681>. Accessed on 20.04.2025.

*'Jal byed rgyas par bshad pa.*⁴⁶ Given the *rNam 'byed*'s composition in verse form, which renders precise interpretation challenging without exegetical commentary, this article relies primarily upon Blo gros rgyal mtshan's prose work as the most accessible and early source for understanding the Bon po position on this epistemological topic.

Preliminary analysis suggests that the Bon po epistemological theories substantially align with the epistemological framework developed by Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge, though a comprehensive comparative study remains necessary to establish definitive doctrinal correspondences and potential innovations within the Bon interpretation of non-valid cognition theory. The work itself is divided into eight chapters, as follows:

1. *Chapter One: Establishing the Nature of the Mere Cognition (Blo tsam gyi rang bzhin gtan la dbab pa'i le'u ste dang po'o*; pp.105–121).
2. *Chapter Two: Exposition on the Nature of Valid Cognition in General (Tshad ma spyi'i rang bzhin bstan pa'i le'u ste gnyis pa'o*; pp.121–144).
3. *Chapter Three: Testimony and Scriptural Authority as Valid Cognition (bKa' dang lung tshad ma'i le'u ste gsum pa'o*; pp.144–148).
4. *Chapter Four: Direct Perception as Valid Cognition (mNgon sum tshad ma'i le'u ste bzhi pa'o*; pp.148–156).
5. *Chapter Five: Inference in General (rJes dpag spyi'i le'u ste lnga pa'o*; pp.148–195).
6. *Chapter Six: Inference for Oneself (Rang don rjes su dpag pa'i le'u ste drug pa'o*; pp.195–206).
7. *Chapter Seven: Inference for Others (gZhan don rjes du dpag pa'i le'u ste bdun pa'o*; pp.207–228).
8. *Chapter Eight: Establishing through the Triad of Definiens, Definiendum, and Basis of Definiens (mTshan mtshon gzhi gsum gyis gtan la dbab pa'i le'u ste brgyad pa'o*; pp.228–252).

Regarding the classification of non-valid cognition, Blo gros rgyal mtshan demonstrates substantial concordance with Phya pa's epistemological tradition in terms of definitional criteria, internal subdivisions, and illustrative examples. However, one significant difference emerges: the inclusion of an additional category of non-

⁴⁶ For details, see the *rNam 'byed 'phrul gyi lde mig* for versified and formal definitions of six types of non-valid cognitions from the Bon po's perspective (p. 50): *snang la ma nges 'dra bas slu* || *the tshom de dang gzhan sems dang* || *yid dpyod lkog tu gyur ba dang* || *sngar bcad rjes su zlos rtogs dang* || *'khrul bas log par rtog pa dang* || *bla brdol don du ma nges pa'o* ||. This whole passage is cited, at respective junctures, by Blo gros rgyal mtshan in the *Rig pa'i gter mdzod*.

valid cognition termed *don la ma nges pa* (“indeterminate regarding the object”).

The author begins his account of the topic by defining non-valid cognition, characterized primarily by its erroneous nature.⁴⁷ The classificatory schema comprises six categories, representing a departure from Phya pa’s traditional framework through the incorporation of the aforementioned additional category. All remaining classifications align with established precedent.⁴⁸

The additional category, *don la ma nges pa*, merits particular attention, given its apparent innovation within this tradition. While analogous formulations such as *don nyid la ma nges pa* and *don ma nges pa* appear in other sources, they seem to function as descriptive terminology denoting the general incapacity of cognitive events to ascertain their respective objects, rather than constituting formal designations for discrete cognitive categories.

On the other hand, Blo gros rgyal mtshan provides a technical definition of *don la ma nges pa* as “cognition that imputes without the appearance of the object” (*yul mi snang ba la blo sgro btags su ’jug pa’o*).⁴⁹ This characterization indicates that the object fails to manifest entirely within this cognitive purview; instead, it represents purely imputational and imaginative cognition. The author delineates three subcategories of *don la ma nges pa*, differentiated according to their causal determinants—both internal and external factors. These manifest when: (1) vital wind (*rlung*) enters the life-channel (*srog rtsa*), (2) consciousness operates under the influence of spirits (*gdon*), and (3) awareness becomes suppressed within dream states (*nan rmis*).⁵⁰

5. Conclusion

This study of non-valid cognitions across Tibetan Buddhist and Bon po *tshad ma* traditions reveals a rich tapestry of epistemological innovation across different lineages. The diverse approaches examined—from Phya pa’s comprehensive classification system through Sa pañ’s systematic critique to Blo gros rgyal mtshan’s Bon po framework—

⁴⁷ See Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rig pa’i gter mdzod* (p.118): *tshad ma ma rtogs pa’i bslu ba’i shes pa’o* | |.

⁴⁸ For Blo gros rgyal mtshan’s account of 1) *snang la ma nges pa*, see pp.118-119, 2) *bcad shes*, see p.119, 3) *yid dpyod*, see pp.119-120, 4) the *tshom*, see p.120, and 5) *log shes*, p. 120 of the *Rig pa’i gter mdzod*. These are mostly identical to Phya pa’s tradition presented earlier.

⁴⁹ See blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rig pa’i gter mdzod* (p.120).

⁵⁰ See Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rig pa’i gter mdzod* (pp.120-121): *gnyis pa dbye ba la | srog rtsar rlung zhugs pas ma nges pa dang | gdon gyis brlams pa las byung ba dang non rmis las byung ste sgro btags ’ba’ zhig go* |.

demonstrate the dynamic nature of their epistemological deliberations.

Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge's foundational contribution established the theoretical groundwork that would dominate Tibetan epistemological discourse for generations. His fivefold classification system represented a systematic attempt to create comprehensive taxonomies accounting for all possible mental states failing to qualify as valid cognition. The sophistication of this framework, with its careful attention to definitional precision and exhaustive categorization, reflects the scholastic method's commitment to rigorous analysis.

Sa paṅ's critique represents an important moment in Tibetan Buddhist epistemology. Through systematic analysis, he demonstrated fundamental problems with established classifications while proposing a more parsimonious alternative. His three-category system provided a framework that was both theoretically more coherent and aligned with Indian Buddhist sources. His methodological innovations revealed important principles: parsimony in theoretical construction, logical consistency in analysis, and authoritative grounding in traditional sources.

The Bon po tradition's contribution through Blo gros rgyal mtshan's work and its sources represents a significant voice in this epistemological conversation. While demonstrating substantial alignment with Phya pa's framework, Blo gros rgyal mtshan's contribution lies in his introduction of distinctive categories that address cognitive states not adequately captured by existing frameworks. This reflects the Bon tradition's integration of physiological and spiritual factors in cognitive analysis.

The comparative examination reveals both continuities and innovations within Tibetan epistemological thought. While all traditions grapple with the fundamental challenge of categorizing cognitive states that fail to achieve epistemic reliability, their solutions reflect different methodological priorities and theoretical commitments. These diverse approaches demonstrate the self-critical and dynamic nature of these traditions.

The lasting influence of these epistemological innovations on subsequent traditions testifies to their strength. This study indicates that the question of non-valid cognition served as a testing ground for broader epistemological theories in Tibet. Through detailed analyses of cognitive failure, these scholars developed nuanced frameworks for understanding the nature of mind, knowledge, and epistemic authority.

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