AN ENTRANCE TO THE PRACTICE LINEAGE AS EXEMPLARY IN KAH THOG DGE RTSE MAHĀPANDITA’S COMMENTARY ON SA SKYA PANDITA’S SDOM GSUM RAB DBYE¹

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Introduction

Dge rtse Mahāpandita ‘Gyur med tshe dbang mchog grub (1761–1829) was a Rnying ma scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, who was the first of the Dge rtse incarnation lineage in Kaḥ thog monastery in Khams in eastern Tibet.² Apart from his having produced the Sde dge edition of the Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum,³ little is

1 I would like to thank Loppon Urgyen Tenphel for reading the ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod with me. I express my deep gratitude to Dr. Jann Ronis who provided me with instructions, suggestions, comments, answers to my numerous questions, since I initially began my work on Dge rtse Mahāpandita. I also would like to thank Professor Matthew Kapstein for giving me comments on my conference paper of the Second ISYT, and Joshua Shapiro for giving me valuable comments, suggestions and for correcting this essay. Also, I thank Marc-Henri Deroche for correcting the essay.

2 For biographical information on Dge rtse Mahāpandita and the first four Dge rtse incarnations, see ‘Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan 1996 and Ronis 2009. Eimer and Tsering 1981 identifies Dge rtse Mahāpandita in the list of abbots of Kaḥ thog monastery.

3 The twenty-sixth volume of the Sde dge edition of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum of Dge rtse Mahāpandita’s own work, entitled Bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa thams cad kyi sning po ri s 'dzin pa'i sde snod rdo rje theg pa snyag 'gyur rgyud 'bum rin po che'i rtogs pa brjod pa lha'i rgya bo che lha b'i gtam (henceforth Rnying ma rgyud 'bum dkar chag lha'i rnga bo che), in which, as Thondup notes, Dge rtse Mahāpandita writes a history of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum and its dkar chag. See Thondup 1997: 182. For a brief biography of Dge rtse Mahāpandita based on ‘Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan’s Kaḥ thog pa'i lo rgyus mdar bsad and for an analysis of Dge rtse Mahāpandita’s Rnying ma rgyud 'bum dkar chag, which is the fourth chapter of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum dkar chag lha'i rnga bo che, see Achard 2003: 43-89. Ronis 2009 also includes a study of the biography of Dge rtse Mahā-pandita. For descriptions of the twenty-one different editions of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum including the Sde dge edition and the catalogues of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum by 'Jigs med gling pa and Dge rtse Mahāpandita, see ‘Hub bstan chos dar 2000, cf. Achard 2002: 63, n. 4, and Achard 2003. For an historical analysis of the transmission and the doxographical structures of the nine extant editions of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum and comparisons between the Gting skyes, Mtshams brag and Sde dge edition of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum, see Derbac 2007 and the THL Tibetan Literary Encyclopedia. A concordance of the various editions of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum are found in Cantwell, Mayer, and Fischer 2002, cf. Cantwell and Mayer 2007. For the Sde dge edition’s relationship to ‘Jigs med gling pa’s edition of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum, see Achard 2005, and also van Schaik 2000: 5. The Rnying ma rgyud 'bum dkar chag lha'i rnga bo che is also included in the Gting skyes edition: see Cantwell 2002: 375, and Cantwell and Mayer 2006: 13, n. 13. Dorje and Kapstein point out that Dudjom Rinpoche’s The Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism derives in part from Dge rtse Mahāpandita’s Rnying ma rgyud 'bum dkar chag lha'i rnga bo che. See Dorje and Kapstein 1991: 398.
known to us about either Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita or his works. The majority of his Collected Works, in ten volumes, has yet to be studied. Doctrinally speaking, his position is the Great Madhyamaka of other-emptiness (gzhan stong dbu ma chen po), which he elucidates in various doxographical texts. His work also brings together the major practice lineages (sgrub brgyud shin rta brgyud) of Mantra-yāna in Tibet, such as the Jo nang, the Bka’ brgyud, the Sa skya, the early Dge lugs, the Rnying ma, and Zhi byed. As such, his ecumenical view anticipates the non-sectarian movement (ris med) in Khams in the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

This paper will address Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita’s commentary on Sa skya Paṇḍita’s Sdom gsum rab dbye, entitled The Unconditioned Storehouse that Dispels the Debates [caused] by the Sdom gsum rab dbye on the Early Translation School (henceforth ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod’). In particular, the essay will analyze the differentiation between the view of Madhyamaka and that of Mantrayāna as it appears in the commentary. Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita’s discourse touches upon a number of related issues in affirming the superiority of Mantrayāna over the Sūtric path. For example, he discusses the three wisdoms that arise from study, reflection and meditation (thos bsam sgom gsum) in relation to their efficacy in bringing about ultimate realization. He also defends the authenticity of the tea-chings of the Chinese monk Hwa shang, in service of mounting a broad defense of Rnying ma teachings.

Why Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita composed his ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod’

Sa skya Paṇḍita’s Sdom gsum rab dbye addresses the three vows of prātimoksa, bodhisattvä, and mantra. The work also contains Sa skya Paṇḍita’s numerous criticisms about problematic practices amongst his fellow Tibetans, as explained by Rhoton in his scholarship on the text. According to Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita, Sa skya Paṇḍita explicitly

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4 Among Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita’s works, two texts on the creation stage are translated into English. See Guenther 1987 and Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2006: 97-151.

5 Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita’s gzhan stong doctrine is articulated in the following texts: Bde gshegs snying po’i rgyan, Ngos don dgongs gsal, Rton pa bzhis ldan gyi gm gnam, Sangs rgyas gnyis pa’i dgongs pa’i rgyan, and the first chapter of the Rnying ma’i rgyud ‘bum dkar chag ba’i rgya bo che. For scholarship on Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita and gzhan stong, see Burchardli 2007, which situates Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita’s position amongst various forms of gzhan stong. Duckworth 2008 also looks at Dge rtse Mahāpanḍita’s gzhan stong doctrine.

6 The Gdams ngag mdzod compiled by Kong sprul (1813–1899) encompasses the practice lineages of Tibetan Buddhism; also see Smith 2001: 264.

7 The entire title of the text is Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba’i bstan bcos chen pos snga ‘gyur phyogs la rtseg pa spong ba ‘dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod.

made a point of addressing certain practices, including Rdzogs chen, Mahāmudrā, the teaching-cycle of the non-mental engagement (yid la mi byed pa),9 the traditions of blessings (byin rabs brgyud pa’i bka’ srol),10 the stage of transferring blessings (byin rabs ‘pho ba’i rim pa), the teaching of pure vision (dag snang) and the oral transmission (snyan nas brgyud pa’ichos skor), the Lama’s quintessential instruction (man ngag), the single-lineage (gcig brgyud),11 the uncommon profound meaning of Mantra (gsang sngags kyi zab don thun mong ma yin pa rnyams), the explanation which relies on the meaning (don la rton pa’i bshad pa), the creation stage of non-elaboration (bskyed pa’i rim pa spros med) [of Śamatha], and the profound completion stages of non-characteristics (mtshan ma med pa’i rdzogs rim zab mo) [of Vipaśyanā].12

One consequence of Sa skya Paṇḍita’s Sdom gsum rab dbyes was that it provoked longstanding, negative opinions about Rnying ma tantric practices amongst Tibetans. For Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, the purpose of the ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod, as indicated in the title, is to dispel those objections to Rnying ma practices that were generated by the Sdom gsum rab dbyes.13 Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita acknowledges that there are statements capable of generating doubts about the Rnying ma tradition in the Sdom gsum rab dbyes. Nevertheless, Dge rtse Mahā-pañḍita does not directly criticize Sa skya Paṇḍita for these statements, but rather criticizes the interpreters of the Sdom gsum rab dbyes who have mistakenly understood Sa skya Paṇḍita’s intention to have been to discredit Rnying ma teachings and practices. He suggests that these interpreters have misused Sa skya Paṇḍita’s treatise in the service of harming the Rnying ma pas.

Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita first explains why Sa skya Paṇḍita needed to compose the Sdom gsum rab dbyes. Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita sets the scene by describing some of the Tantric practices present in Tibet shortly after the later diffusion of Buddhism. Amongst Rnying ma practices, whose Tantric teachings were themselves unmistaken,
some people misunderstood them and therefore improperly practiced them. Sa skya Pāṇḍita thus wrote his treatise to rectify this situation.

For Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, Sa skya Pāṇḍita’s seeming criticisms of rNying ma practices were only on the level of words and were not meant to convey a literal criticism of the practices. Critics of the Rnying ma pas who subsequently relied on Sa skya Pāṇḍita’s words did not fully understand his intent. What Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita claims to do in his own commentary to the Sdom gsum rab dbye is to carefully examine Sa skya Pāṇḍita’s text and establish its author’s actual intention.

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita’s hermeneutical strategies and means of proof

As mentioned earlier, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita does not criticize Sa skya Pāṇḍita. To the contrary, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita uses Sa skya Pāṇḍita’s controversial treatise to support his own view on tantra. Unlike other interpreters, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita emphasizes Sa skya Pāṇḍita’s status as a Tantric practitioner and tries to show that Sa skya Pāṇḍita’s views on tantra and the path to ultimate realization are entirely in accord with his own views. The following sections of the essay examine the ways in which Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita skillfully manages his task of defending Rnying ma tantric practices.

There are four components to his defense. First, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita appeals to the Four Reliances (rton pa bzhi) as hermeneutical devices for interpreting Sa skya Pāṇḍita’s Sdom gsum rab dbye. For example, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita shows how a literal reading of the Sdom gsum rab dbye could lead to incorrect conclusions.

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17 Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita (ibid.: 113.5-7): gong du brjod pa de dag gi don gyi gnas la nor ba mi srīd kyang tshig gi spros pa dang phyag len cung zad zor yang du mziad pas mdo sngags thun mong ba’i shing rta chen po’i lugs sred las bag bsam g.yel ba ltar gyur pa gzigs nas chos kyi rje dpal idan sa skya pa dus skabs der gams can gyi lhongs ’dir bstan pa’i bdag por nithun snaang du grib pas yongs su grags pa’i gzhung lugs chen po rnam la thos bsam gyis ’jug pa’i shing rta’i srok mi ngams pa la dgyang nas rab dbye’i bstan bcos ’di nyid brtseams pa .... “Although there are not mistakes in the reality of these [teachings] mentioned earlier [such as the Mdo, the Sgyu ’phrul, Phyag chen and Rdzogs chen], the elaboration of words and practice was made a little simple. Therefore, Sa skya Pandita considered the Great Chariot traditions of the common sūtra and mantra to be slightly neglected. At that time, here in the Snowy Land, the Lord of Dharma, glorious Sa skya pa, was commonly known as the owner of doctrines; therefore, having intended not to damage the tradition of the Great Chariot that [one] enters the widely known great textual traditions through studying and reflection, he composed this very treatise of the [Sdom gsum] rab dbye.”

18 Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ibid.: 112.4-114.3.

19 Cf. Sa skya Pandita, Sdom gsum rab dbye, III. 650-660, where Sa pan himself states that he is endowed with vast knowledge of almost all of the teachings of Buddhism, including Mantra. See Rhoton 2002: 181-182, 328-329.
Sdom gsum rab dbye’s words distorts Sa skyā Paṇḍita’s, as I have already begun to discuss.

The second component of his defence is an appeal to reasoning (yukti, rigs) and scripture (āgama, lung). In terms of scriptural proof, Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita shows us his vast knowledge of Īndic sources by frequently quoting sūtras, tantras and śāstras. The third component of his defence is an effort to authenticate the Rnying ma path’s Īndic origin. This method of authentication applies in particular to his defence of Chinese Buddhist lineages, whose origin Dge rtse Mahā-panḍita traces back to India.

Finally, the fourth component is a specification of Rnying ma practices that exist in other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, with a particular emphasis applied to defending the Rnying ma gter mas.

To begin with, Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita repeatedly applies the Four Reliances20 to his interpretation of the Sdom gsum rab dbye.22 Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita quotes the Sūtra of Repaying Kindness (Toh. 353), which states two of the Four Reliances to be as follows:

Abide by the doctrinal content, but do not abide by following the letters.
Abide by gnosis, but do not abide by following consciousness.23

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21 For various sources for the Four Reliances, see Mochizuki Bukkyo Daijiten 1967: 1719-1720, s.v. 印法（インド 十）, for example. The categories appear in the Vimalakirtinirdesaśītra, for example. See Vimalakirtinirdesaśītra (ed. Taisho Daigaku 2004: 484): arthāpratīṣṭhānaṇātā na vyāmānapratīṣṭhānaṇātā jñānapratīṣṭhānaṇātā na viśijñānapratīṣṭhānaṇātā nītīarthāsātṛatapratīṣṭhānaṇātā na nēgārthāasārtvāt vahihinveśeṇāḥ | dharmatvapratīṣṭhānaṇātā na pugadalṛṣṭya pulaṃbhī | don la rton gyi tshig ‘bru la mi rton pa | ye shes la rton gyi rnam par shes pa la mi rton pa | nges pa’i don gyi mdo sde la rton gyi drang bai’i don kun rdzob la mgon par ma zhen pa | chos nyid la rton gyi gang zag tu lta ba dmigs par ‘dzin pa la mgon par ma zhen pa | । “To rely on the doctrinal content, but not to rely on the words; to rely on gnosis, but not to rely on consciousness; to rely on the sūtra of definitive meaning, but not to adhere to the relative truth of provisional meaning; to rely on the reality, but not to adhere to the view of the individuals, who grasp at referential objects.” Also see Waldschmidt 1950–51: 238, 292, in the sentences, 24.2.3.52, with the Sanskrit word pratisaraṇa.

22 It is worth remarking that Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita’s entire discourse revolves around the Four Reliances, which teach that one must rely on gnosis (jñāna, ye shes) rather than on consciousness (vijñāna, rnam shes). In accordance with this “reliance,” Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita’s treatise shows that the way to attain gnosis is through Mantrayāna. One should therefore enter Mantrayāna from the very beginning, since Mantrayāna is unexcelled, and without it one cannot attain the ultimate fruition. See Dus ma byas kyi gan mdo zod, 147.3–6: des na theg pa chen po ni geṣg nyid de ... theg chen geṣg po de la’ang rgyu dang ’bras bu’i theg pa gnyis su dbyes ba’i skabs ’bras bu’i theg pa bla na med pa de nyid ... bla na med pa’i theg pa geṣg gang yin pa der gsal ’jug dgos te thob bya’i mthar thug ruza pa sangs rgyas kyi go phang de nyid lam bden mthar thug theg pa mchog nyid las ‘byung dgos pa yin na der ma zungs pa ’bras bu’i mthar thug pa thob par mi nus pa’i phyi rul | Sangs rgyas gnyis pa’i gongs pa’i rgyan, A. vol. 2, fol. 159a3, p. 353.3: ’phags pa’i rtsogs pa’i sugs la ma brten par sgra ji bzin pa rtsogs par mi nus pa ... .

23 Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, Dus ma byas kyi gan mdo zod, 115.7-116.1: drin lan bsab pa’i mdo las don la gnas kyi yi ge’i rjes su mi gnas । ye shes la gnas kyi rnam par shes pa’i...
Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita uses this principle in his interpretation of both the Śdom gsum rab dbye and the Rnying ma tantric path at large, as will be explained below.

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita understands the Śdom gsum rab dbye to be an absolutely correct, unmistaken, authentic teaching, which belongs to the long tradition of the Great Chariots of Nāgārjuna and Asanga, which is ultimately the teaching of the Victorious One.\(^{24}\) By relying on the mere words of Sa skya Pandita’s treatise, however, some conceited scholars have not understand its meaning and ultimate intention.\(^{25}\) Consequently, these scholars have “stained” the Śdom gsum rab dbye through their misunderstanding of Sa skya Pandita’s intention.\(^{26}\)

This same logic applies to the whole set of teachings of Mantrayāna of the Rnying ma pa (called the path of means: thabs lam), a set of teachings which is absolutely genuine, authentic, and unmistaken. Some people have mistakenly practiced them, however, without knowing the meaning of the texts wherein they are taught. All of the problems have been caused by those individuals who have misunderstood Rnying ma teachings.\(^{27}\) These mistakes, like the mistakes of those who have misinterpreted Sa skya Pandita’s Śdom gsum rab dbye, are therefore examples of people “following the letters” as opposed to following the doctrinal content.

**Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita’s comments on the Śdom gsum rab dbye III.275-277, and 282abc**

Śdom gsum rab dbye III.275-277 sets forth the claim that the Rnying ma pas regard Yoga, Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga as vehicles, while the Gsar ma pas regard them only as stages of meditation, not as classes of tantra:

Proponents of the early diffusion of Mantra say,

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\(^{24}\) Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, op. cit. 187.5-6.

\(^{25}\) Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ibid.: 113.7-114.3, 187.6-7.

\(^{26}\) Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod, 114.3: skal ba dman pa’i skye bo ’ga’ zhih chos spong ba la skyar ba’i zhar du gzhung ‘di nyid kyang dri ma can du byas so 11.

\(^{27}\) For example, ibid.: 154.6: phyis kyi lo tsā ba ’ga’ zhih gis rdzogs chen rgya gar du ma grags par bsam pa ....
The four tantra classes of yoga [rnal ’byor], great yoga [rnal ’byor chen po], further yoga [rjes su rnal ’byor], and super yoga [shin tu rnal ’byor] are levels of vehicle.

They maintain super yoga [shin tu rnal ’byor] to be best among these. (275–276)

Adherents of the later-diffusion Mantra systems accept yoga, great yoga, further yoga, and super yoga to be stages in meditative concentration, not levels of tantra. (277)

If this system is rightly understood, the theory of the Atiyoga, too, is seen to be a gnosis [ye shes], not a vehicle. (282abc) (Trans. by Rhoton)

In response to this passage, Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita states that some people have misunderstood Sa skya Paṇḍita to have been criticizing the Nine Vehicles of the Rnying ma pa in this passage. Sa skya Paṇḍita, however, did not state that the Nine Vehicles of the Rnying ma pas were mistaken.

Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita explains that the Highest Yogatantra of the four yogas of the Gsar ma pas is divided into three in the Rnying ma’s Nine Vehicles scheme: the profound, the very profound, and the extremely profound. These three correspond to Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga, respectively. Atiyoga is further divided into three: the stages of the profound, the very profound and the extremely profound. These three correspond to the Mind Class (sems sde), the Space Class (klong sde), and the Instruction Class (man ngag sde), respectively. Further, the Instruction Class is divided into four classes: the Outer (phyi skor), the Inner (nang skor), the Secret (gsang skor), and the Even More Secret Unexcelled (yang gsang bla na med pa’i skor). These stages are increasingly vast and profound. In this way, the wisdom of the upper stages refutes that of the lower ones.

For Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, the relationship between gnosis (ye shes) and vehicle (theg pa) is a relationship between the expressed (brjod bya) and the expresser (rjod byed), just like the relationship between the content of Prajnāpāramitā (sher phyin) and the text that teaches it, named Prajnāpāramitā (shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa). To support his reading, Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita quotes the Dignāga’s Aryaprajñāpāra-mitāsamgrahakārikā (Toh. 3809) that states that both

29 Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, ibid.: 153.6-7.
30 Ibid.: 149.3-4.
31 For an extensive exposition of the Nine Vehicles by Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita himself, see the first chapter of the Rnying ma rgyud bum bkra chag bha’i i ring bo che.
32 Ibid.: 151.3-4.
33 Ibid.: 151.7-152.2; cf. Bodhicaryāvatāra, 9.4.
34 Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzad, 153.2-3.
the text and the content (don) to be accomplished are called Prajñā-
pāramitā.\textsuperscript{35} He also quotes the Suvikrāntavitkāmiparipṛchchā Prajñāpārami-
mitāśūtra (Toh. 14) that states that “the gnosis of the Buddha\textsuperscript{36} is the
Mahāyāna.”\textsuperscript{37}

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita gives a clear definition of the “vehicle” as
gnosis in the following statement:

Gnosis is a vehicle. That which becomes a means or a cause of the
realization of gnosis is called a vehicle. Based on the distance to see
gnosis, the causal and resultant vehicles, or the Lesser and the
Great Vehicles are divided.\textsuperscript{38}

By demonstrating this interpretation of gnosis as a vehicle, Dge rtse
Mahāpañḍita aims to show how Sa skya Pañḍita’s Sdom gsun rab
db ye should be read as interpretative (dgongs pa can) and of
provisional meaning (drang don), while those of lower faculty (blo
dman) mistakenly take it to be of definitive meaning (nges don). For
them, “it is necessary to meditate on the meaning of his teaching as
it is.”\textsuperscript{39} Dge trse Mahāpañḍita thus applies the teaching of the Four
Reliances, to rely on the doctrinal content, but not the words.

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita also applies reasoning to explain the
status of the highest Rnying ma Atiyoga as both vehicles and gnosis,
as follows:

It is established through reasoning as well, like a chariot which has a
horse is called a horse-chariot. There is no fault in saying that the
vehicle that is endowed with the gnosis is called the vehicle of
Atiyoga.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{35} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ibid.: 153.3-4; Dignāga, Āryaprajñāpāramitāśāstraḥmahākārikā, Dpe bsdur ma, 1377.4-5: shes rab pa rol phyin ngyis nied || ye shes de ni de bzhiṅ gshogs || bsgrub bya don de dang ldan pas || gzhung la dang la ‘de sgras bstan [Dpe bsdur ma, de’i sgra yin] ||.

\textsuperscript{36} The Stog Palace edition of the Suvikrāntavitkāmiparipṛchchā Prajñāpāramitāśūtra reads “the gnosis of the omniscient”; The Hikata edition reads “all the gnosis.”

\textsuperscript{37} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita (ibid.: 153.5-6): rab risal nnan gnyis thugs pa las || sangs rgyas kyi ye shes ni theg pa chen po’o || ‘Phags pa rab kyi risal gnyis nnuam par gnyon pas zhus pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa bstan pa, S, 41.1: thams cad mkhyen pa’i ye shes ni theg pa chen po’o ||; Suvikrāntavitkāmiparipṛchchā Prajñāpāramitāśūtra, ed. Hikata 1958: 19.18: sarvang jñānaṃ mahāyānam.

\textsuperscript{38} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita (ibid.:153.4-5): ye shes yin na de nyid theg pa’ang yin te ye shes rtogs bzhed kyi thabs sam rgyur gyar pa la theg pa zhes brjod de ye shes mthong ba rje ring la llos nas theg pa che chung rgyu ‘bras kyi theg pa so sor phye ba’i phur v.

\textsuperscript{39} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita (ibid.:153.6-7): chos kyi rje’i drang don dgongs pa con gyi gskyur la blo dman gzhun gnyis nges don du ‘khrul bar mi baa bar ji ltar bka’ stsal pa’i don nyid la mnyam par bzhag dgos so ||. Add: Also see Rnying rgyud dkar chag la’i rgya bo che, A, fol. 112b1-3, p. 224.1-3; B, fol. 260a1-2, p. 521.1; C, fol. 173a3-5, p. 345.3-5; TT, p. 331.

\textsuperscript{40} ibid.: 153.7.
The Sdom gsum rab dbyé III.255

Sdom gsum rab dbyé III.255 addresses the position that there is no difference between the view of Madhyamaka and Mantrayāna in the following statement:

If there existed any theory higher than the elaborationlessness [spros bral] of the Perfections system,
that theory would become possessed of an elaboration.
If they are elaborationless,
They are without difference. (Trans. by Rhoton)  

Dge rtse Mahāpaññita refutes the position, seemingly articulated in the Sdom gsum rab dbyé, that there is no difference in view between Madhyamaka and Mantrayāna, and holds the position that there is a difference in view between them. This position does not originate with Dge rtse Mahāpaññita, however, but rather constitutes the Rnying ma pas’ unbroken position throughout the ages. As Rhoton has noted, Gō rams pa makes clear that Rnying ma pas maintain that each one of the Nine Vehicles has its own unique view (lta ba). Dge rtse Mahāpaññita explains that although Sa skya Paṇḍita asserted the two meanings of the view in Sūtric and Tantric context respectively, later interpreters failed to see that:

[People] did not understand that the Lord of Dharma asserted the two occasions of how the view is placed: 1) an occasion in which he placed emptiness being the mere freedom from elaboration as the view of the general phenomena, and 2) the other occasion in which he placed the gnosis of reality in [one’s own] experience as the view of uncommon Mantra. The later people who were very much accustomed to logic analysed that the view of Sūtra and Mantra are one and the same, having been based on the word of “view” (lta ba). Because of that, [they] considered the experiential gnosis (nyams myong gi ye shes) to be mere freedom from elaboration of the non-implicative negation (med dgag gi spros bral tsam). While the gnosis of empowerment [de kho na nyid kyi ye shes] should be directly experienced, they maintained that it should be part of conceptual analysis, having been depending on a mere name of the “view.” Therefore, having blocked a little bit the profound vital point of Vajrayāna, [they] did not consider the

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41 Dge rtse Mahāpaññita, ibid.: 114-5; Rhoton 2002: 129, 308; Dge rtse Mahāpaññita also quotes this verse in ibid.: 123.4: dbu ma las lhag lta yod na || lta de spros pa can du ’gjur ||. The wording of this slightly differs from that of Rhoton’s edition, however. In the passage (ibid.: 114.5-6) Dge rtse Mahāpaññita quotes the same wordings of the Sdom gsum rab dbyé as in the Rhoton’s edition; ibid.: 123.7.

42 Rhoton 2002: 189, n. 56; in the first chapter of the Rnying ma rgyud ‘bum dkar chag lha’i rnyag bo che, Dge rtse Mahāpaññita explains in detail the Nine Vehicles system, in which each one of the vehicles has its own ultimate truth. He refutes each position in succession as he ascends the scale, until he reaches the highest vehicle, i.e., the Instruction Class of Rdzogs chen.
conceptual analysis to be the means to realize the view.\(^43\)

For scriptural proof, Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita cites the *Cakrasamvara-guhyaśīntyantrarāja*, which states that Vajrayāna is superior in its pith-instruction on the fifteen points, including the view.\(^44\) Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita states that as for the “freedom from elaboration” (*spros bral*), only the name is the same in the Causal Vehicle of Sūtra and the Resultant Vehicle of Mantra, while the intention is different between the two.\(^45\) Here again, Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita questions the doctrinal content (or intention), but not the word. According to Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, *spros bral* in the Sūtric system means not having any theses at all, or emptiness of non-implicative negation (*stong nyid med dgag*). In the Mantrayāna, however, *spros bral* is great bliss and reflexive awareness (*so so rang gi rig pa*).\(^46\)

This differentiation of the doctrinal content of *spros bral* is a focal point in Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita’s reply to a question about whether the gnosis at the time of empowerment is the same as or superior to the view that arises out of study:

> The author of this treatise (i.e., Sa skya Paṇḍita), too taught that the emptiness measured by studying and reflection is the poisonous view of the Causal [Vehicle]. The view of studying and reflection is

\(^{43}\) Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, *ibid.:* 114.6-115.2: *chos kyi rjes stong nyid spros bral* tsam la *chos spyi i lta ba bzhag pa'i gnas skabs* *geg dang* \| *nyams nyong de kho na nyid kyi ye shes la gsgang sngags thu tong ma yin pa'i lta bar bzhag pa'i gnas skabs* *gnyis* so *sor bzhed pa ma rtogs pa dang* \| *phyis kyi rigog ge la ches gongs pa dag gis* *lta ba zhes pa'i tshig* 'di la brten nas mlo sngags gnysis ka'i lta ba *geg tu dpayud* \| *des nyams nyong gi ye shes kyang med dgag gi spros bral* tsam du *bsam* \| *lta ba'i ming tsam la brten nas dbang gi yi shes mngon sum nyams su* *nyong byar yol bzhin du rtog dpayod yan lag tu dgos par'ad pas rdo rje theg pa'i zab gnad* *ta cung zad begrigs* *te rtog dpayod de lta ba rtogs pa'i thabs yin pa la ma bsams so* ||

\(^{44}\) Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, *'Dus ma byas kyi* gan *mdzod*, 133.3-5; *Cakrasamvaraguhyaśīntyantrarāja*, Q, fol. 16a3-5; S, fol. 465a2-4, p. 929.2-4. However, the use of the scriptural proof of the *Cakrasamvaraguhyaśīntyantrarāja* in order to prove the superiority of the view of Mantrayāna does not originate with Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita. 'Jigs mes gling pa in his *Rtogs pa brjod* pa cites the same passage from the *Cakrasamvaraguhyaśīntyantrarāja*. Furthermore, the textual evidence suggests the possibility that Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita quoted the citation directly from the *Rtogs pa brjod* pa of 'Jigs med gling pa, *Rtogs pa brjod* pa, fol. 278a-6, p. 553.4-6. Also see *Rtogs pa brjod* pa, fol. 107b4-108b2, pp. 216.4-218.2. *Cakrasamvaraguhyaśīntyantrarāja* (Q, fol. 16a3; S, fol. 465a2) reads *nyan thos la sogs theg chen*, whereas *'Dus ma byas kyi* gan *mdzod* and *Rtogs pa brjod* pa reads *nyan thos la sogs theg chung*. Also see a parallel in the *Kṣīṇyon ṛgyud* 'bum dkar chag *lha'i rnga bo che* has different enumerations with the seventh difference being the level (*bhīmi, st*) and the eleventh difference being the benefits of oneself and others. See *Kṣīṇyon ṛgyud* dkar chag *lha'i rnga bo che*, A, vol. 7, fol. 47a2-4, p. 95.2-4; B, fol. 44a6-7, p. 87.6-7; C, fol. 77b3-5, p. 154.3-5; TT, vol.1, 189-190. Also, the term *rdzogs pa* *chen* *po* is found in the *Cakrasamvaraguhyaśīntyantrarāja*, Q, 15b7; S fol. 464b4-5, pp. 928.4-5: bskyed dang *rdzogs sogs mi gnas shing* \| *rdzogs pa* *chen* *po* *bskyed* *dang* *rdzogs sogs* *mi gnas* *shing* \| *rdzogs pa* *chen* *po* *bskyed* *dang* *rdzogs* *sogs* *mi gnas* *shing* ||

\(^{45}\) Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, *ibid.:* 124.1-2.

\(^{46}\) *Ibid.:* 123.7-124.1.
An Entrance to the Practice Lineage

not sufficient for the experience, because the view that is to be 
experienced as the gnosis at the time of empowerment is of the 
same essence as the gnosis on the level of the Buddha.47

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita differentiates between the emptiness reached 
by studying and reflection and the emptiness experienced in 
meditation, and he believes that Sa skya Pañḍita would have assert-
ted the same position, even though Sa skya Pañḍita used the same phrase “freedom from elaboration” for both Sūtra and Mantra.

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita further affirms that having abandoned the 
emptiness of nothingness (ci yang med pa’i stong pa nyid), one medi-
tates on the emptiness that is more profound than that. The former 
is referred to as the self-emptiness that analyses aggregates (phung 
po rnam dpyad kyi rang stong); the latter is “the other mode of empti-
ness which is more profound than self-emptiness.”48 The other mo-
de of emptiness applies to the Mantrayāna, where “the secret” or 
“the great secret,” as the synonym of the ultimate emptiness, is 
taught by Vajradhara. This ultimate emptiness is not “self-
emptiness” (rang stong).49 Although Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita does not 
explicitly use the word “other-emptiness” (gzhan stong) for the 
“other mode of emptiness,” it is implied in this context. Thus, while 
the name spros bral is shared in both the Causal Vehicle (rgyu’i theg 
pa) and the Resultant Vehicle (’bras bu’i theg pa), the intention of the 
term is different in the two vehicles. This distinction between the 
meanings of spros bral corresponds to the distinction between the 
two modes of emptiness (rang stong and gzhan stong).

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita’s Thesis 

on the Three Wisdoms (thos bsam sgom)

It is of paramount importance for understanding Dge rtse 
Mahāpañḍita’s works to bear in mind his thesis that one can attain 
the ultimate realization exclusively through meditation prac-
tice (sgom), and not through studying and reflection (thos bsam). This 
thesis gives a theoretical foundation for the whole practice of the 
path of Mantrayāna. It might be surprising that in the ‘Dus ma byas 
kyi gan mdzod, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita actually uses the Sdom gsum

47 Ibid.: 125.1-2: bstan bcos ‘di nyid mdzad pa pos kyang | thos bsam gyis gzhal ba’i stong 
nyid la rgyu dus kyi lta ba dug can du gsungs nas | des nyams myong gi go ma chod 
padbang gi ye shes la nyams su myong bya’i lta ba sangs rgyas kyi sa’i ye shes dang 
ngo bo gcig par brzhed ’dag pa’i phyir ro \.
48 Ibid.: 131.3-4: zhes ci yang med pa’i stong pa de spangs nas slar de las zab pa’i stong pa 
nyid la gongs su yod par gsungs pa’i phyir dang khyad par gsang sngags kyi theg pa bar 
hlas len brzhin du phung po rnam dpyad kyis rang stong khe na las ches zab pa’i stong pa 
nyid kyi thub gzhin ni ’dod pa la tshar na ....
49 Ibid.: 131.7-132.1: khyad par rdo rje ‘chang chen pos rgyud sde rin po che rnas su 
gsang ba zhes pa dang | gsang chen zhes pa la sogs pas stong nyid mtar thug gi rnam 
grang gsungs pa gang yin pa rang stong la dgongs pa ni ma yin ....
rab dbyed as a scriptural proof to establish his thesis on thos bsam sgom. Dge rtse Mahāpandita quotes the verses III.127bc and 128 of the Sdom gsum rab dbyed for this purpose:

... and wishes to cultivate the Mantra system,
one must unerringly obtain the four initiations.
One should cultivate in meditation
The two processes without mistake
And become well versed in the Great Seal,
The gnosis that arises from these. (Trans. by Rhoton)\(^{50}\)

To that, Dge rtse Mahāpandita comments as follows:

Since Sa skya Pandita taught thus, he did not accept that the prerequisites of studying and reflection are indispensable with respect to the gnosis of Mantra.\(^{51}\)

Dge rtse Mahāpandita further argues:

Furthermore, [at the time of the causal vehicle] it is necessary to know that it is intended that the beginners will realize [the innate gnosis (lhan skyes kyi ye shes)] in the manner of vague meaning, initially having relied on studying and reflection. It is necessary to accept that the view of general phenomena through studying and reflection is realized in the mode of inference. When one who realized it enters into Mantra, by relying on a means (thabs) such as the time of empowerment and so forth, the meditative absorption of the direct experience arises. When the meditative absorption arises, the previous theoretical understanding, which abided in the manner of a seed, jumps up to the experiential wisdom. On the other hand, even though one does not go through studying and reflection, when one enters Mantra, one will be liberated through the direct realization of the wisdom of the unmistaken view through the means of the third empowerment, for example. It is indisputable that this is the distinguished feature of this swift path of Vajradhara, because we can know that through the biography of the Siddhas of the noble country such as Indrabhūti and here in Tibet also, the Venerable Mi la ras pa (1052/1040-1135/1123) and Gling ras\(^{52}\) (1128-1188) together with their followers. The essence of the assertion of this very treatise [i.e. the Sdom gsum rab dbyed] also is definitive in this regard.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{50}\) Rhoton 2002: 112.
\(^{51}\) Dge rtse Mahāpandita (ibid.: 126.3-4): ... zhes gsungs pas sngags kyi ye shes de la thos bsam gyi rgyu tshogs med ka med kyi yan lag tu bzhed pa ma yin no 11.
\(^{52}\) TBRC P910.
\(^{53}\) Dge rtse Mahāpandita (ibid.: 126.5-127.3): ... zhes gsungs pas sngags kyi ye shes du na dbang dus sogs kyi thabs la brten nas mngon su ma nyams nyung gi tshul du gnos pa de nyid nyams nyung gi ye shes su na 'phar ba zhiig la ’dod gnos shing | gzhani du thos bsam sngon du ma song ba
Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita argues that Sa skya Paṇḍita affirmed that the gnosis that arises in the practice of the Mantrayāna does not resort to that which arises out of preliminary study and reflection. Therefore one should strictly follow the method of Mantrayāna, such as the empowerments and so forth.

Although Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita does not completely reject studying and reflection for the sake of the beginners, he believes that the best thing to do for the attainment of the ultimate realization is to enter the extraordinary Mantrayāna, as exemplified in the hagiographies of Indrabhūti and Mi la ras pa. This position seems to be in agreement with David Jackson’s understanding of Sa skya Paṇḍita as someone who gained “direct experience” and who was “a highly accomplished practitioner of tantric meditation.”

One can see that Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita is concerned with Sa skya Paṇḍita in the Tantric context, a context which might normally be ignored when studying Sa paṇ’s work.

Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita affirms the same position in his Khrom thog sprul sku’i dris lan du gsol ba, where he quotes the Sdom gsum rab dbye III.110:

Thus none of the adepts was liberated through singular techniques. They were all liberated by the dawning of the gnosis that issues from initiation and the two processes. (Trans. by Rhoton) 

Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita comments as follows on this verse:

Therefore, since the self-arisen gnosis of the view is generated in mind by relying on the swift path of empowerments and two stages [of creation and completion], the primal cause for accomplishing the supreme accomplishment is not asserted to be only study and reflection.

The Sdom gsum rab dbye III.111df, also quoted by Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, reads as follows:

54 Jackson 1990: 52, 56, 57-59.
55 Rhoton 2002: 110, 300; Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, Khrom thog sprul sku’i dris lan du gsol ba: 192.6-7; Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, ’Dus ma byas kyi gan mchod: 127.3-4.
56 Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita, Khrom thog sprul sku’i dris lan du gsol ba: 192.7-193.1.
It is through the sustaining power of initiation and the correlations established in the cultivation of the two processes that one realizes Gnosis and becomes liberated. (Trans. by Rhoton)\textsuperscript{57}

To that, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita comments as follows:

Therefore, it is indisputable that [Sa skyā Pañḍita] taught that one can be liberated through relying on only the experience of the primordial wisdom of Mantra.\textsuperscript{58}

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita further denigrates the emptiness that is realized (as a mere concept) at the time of study and reflection by appealing to Śākya mchog ldan (1428-1507):

Śākya mchog ldan says that “the emptiness at the time of studying and reflection is not the true abiding mode [of the reality], because it is explained that since its subject is nothing other than concepts, its cultivation is poisonous.”\textsuperscript{59} Thus, [Śākya mchog ldan] explained that the view to be experienced, which is the self-arisen gnosis (rang byung gi ye shes), is free from repairment (bzo bcos bral).\textsuperscript{60}

Thus Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita tries to affirm that the ultimate intention of Sa skyā Pañḍita with respect to gnosia is in accord with his own thesis on thos bsam sgom gsum:

Therefore, the view that is analysed through studying and reflection is a mere theoretical understanding, but not the abiding mode [of the true reality] as it is. The view that is experienced at the time of empowerment is the abiding mode [of the true reality] as it is: the self-arisen primordial wisdom. This is the unmistaken assertion of the Venerable Sa skyā [Pañḍita] together with his followers, [and] should be known as the definitive [meaning] by a pure mind straight-forwardly.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{The Sdom gsum rab dbye III.167-175}

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita goes on to discuss Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 167-175 with respect to the Chinese monk Hwa shang’s practice and its relationship to Rdzogs chen and Mahāmudrā:

From [stanza] “the present-day Great Seal and the Great Perfection (rDzogs-chen) of the Chinese tradition …”\textsuperscript{62} up to [stanza] “Are

\textsuperscript{57} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod, 128.4-5; Rhoton 2002: 110, 300.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.: 128.5.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.: 129.6-130.1. The quoted Śākya mchog ldan’s text is yet to be identified.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.: 130.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.: 130.3-4.
\textsuperscript{62} Translated by Rhoton 2002: 118.
virtually [the same as] the Chinese religious system.” (Trans. by Rhoton)

It is widely understood that Sa skya Paṇḍita rejected Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen because of their resemblance to the Chinese monk Hwa shang’s system of practice that was defeated by Kamalaśīla at the Bsam yas debate in the eighth century. To the contrary, Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita argues Sa skya Paṇḍita merely reserved the practice of Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen to those who are of sharp-faculty. If one does not restrict these practices to select practitioners, then the gradualist path cannot be established as an authentic alternative.

[Sa skya Paṇḍita’s] intention (dgongs gzhi) is to establish the followers of the Great Chariot, i.e., the tradition of the gradualist (rim gys pa’i lugs), as authentic. [Sa skya Paṇḍita’s] speech is interpretative (dgongs pa can) because although it is unmistaken that what is known as the simultaneist (cig car ba) is of definitive meaning, [he] refuted whosoever, be sharp or dull, enters that path, because it is the path of only those of the sharp faculties.

What sometimes goes wrong is an individual’s understanding of (simultaneist) teachings like those of Hwa Shang, but never the teachings themselves, Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita continues:

The immature of the later period, who knew only the Tibetan alphabet ka kha, and so forth, considered Hwa shang’s teaching wrong and erroneously originated from heretics and barbarians.

In order to dispel this wrong notion, Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita investigates whether the teachings of the Chinese mkhan po (Hwa Shang) are correct or not in two steps. First, he explains that Chinese Buddhism originated in India and possesses unbroken transmissions of Buddhist doctrines. Second, he explains that there are no faults in Hwa shang’s tradition, specifically.

Dge rtse Mahāpaṇḍita accounts for the three traditions of Buddhism (Vinaya, Mantrayāna, and Pāramitāyāna) in China that were
transmitted from India as follows. First is the Vinaya tradition that is in accord with the explanation of Dge ‘dun go cha and Kumārajīva. Second is the Mantrayāna tradition, with the three lower Tantras (kriyā-, caryā-, yoga-) transmitted to China but not the Highest Yoga Tantra. Third, the Pāramitāyāna traditions, which are further divided into three. First, the lineage of the vast conduct (rgya chen spod pa’i brgyud pa) that follows Maitreya-Asaṅga and the Last Turning of the Wheel of the Teachings, as well as the Chinese translator Xuang zang (玄奘). This lineage corresponds to Yogācāra. Second, the lineage of the profound view (zab mo lta ba’i brgyud pa) that follows Mañjuśrī, Nāgārjuna, Bhāviveka, and Candrakīrti, and corresponds to Madhyamaka. The third is the sgrub rgyud don gyi brgyud pa.

With respect to the lineage of the profound view in China, Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita discusses a Chinese monk of this lineage named Tī ce dashi who classified the Buddha’s teachings as the five periods and eight entrances into the teachings (五時八教). This monk composed many treatises on the Prajñāpāramitā, the Lotus Sūtra and so forth. The eight entrances of teachings are 1) the entrance to the simultaneous (頓教, gcig car ’jug pa’i sgo), 2) the entrance to the gradual (漸教, rim gyis ’jug pa’i sgo), 3) the entrance to the uncommon secret (秘密教, gsang ba thun mong min pa’i sgo), 4) the entrance to the indefinite (不定教, ma nyes pa’i sgo), 5) the entrance to the Tri-piṭakas (三藏教, sde snod kyi sgo), 6) the entrance to the common teaching (通教, rigs pa’i sgo), 7) the entrance to distinct or gradual teaching (別教, rnam par dbye ba’i sgo), 8) the entrance to the total perfection (圓教, yongs su rdzogs pa’i sgo). As we see here, Tī ce dashi (and by extension Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita) understands both the simultaneous and the gradual means to be part of the profound view of the Pāramitāyāna.

The third lineage of the Pāramitāyāna-traditions, that of the sgrub rgyud don gyi brgyud pa, is identified with the following: “practice lineage” (tsung men, zong men 宗門), the lineage of the Buddha’s teaching (bka’ pa’i brgyud pa), the lineage of the blessing of practice (nyams len phyin brlabs brgyud pa), and the Mahāmudrā of the unity

Ibid.: 156.5.
68 Ibid.: 156.5-6; note that the Hevajratantra (Taisho no.892) translated into Chinese in the mid-eleventh century.
70 Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, ibid., 158.1.
71 Tī ce daishi is might be referred to the Chinese Tiantai master Zhiyi (智顕, 538–597), because of the doctrinal affiliation with the category of “the five periods and the eight entrances into the teaching.” Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, ibid.: 157.4-158.1; Cf. Thuken Losang Chökyi Nyima 2009: 360-362; Yu-Kwan 1993: 1; Liu, Ming-Wood 1994: 197-217.
72 Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, ibid.: 157.3-158.1.
73 Dge rtse Mahāpāṇḍita, ibid.: 156.4-157.1.
74 See Meinert 2004: 44, n. 86.
of awareness and emptiness (rig stong phyag rgya chen po), which is also known in Tibet as snying po don gyi bstan pa or snying po don gyi brgyud. This teaching lineage is traced back to Nāgārjuna. In this sgrub brgyud don gyi brgyud pa, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita places Chinese Chan Buddhism, which originated from the Indian master Bodhidharma (ca. 440 CE. - ca. 528 CE.) and included Hwa shang, into this tradition. Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita describes how Bodhidharma taught Mahāmudrā to his Chinese disciples and repeatedly stressed the importance of the practice of meditation, disregarding study and reflection:

There was a risk that [Bodhidharma’s] way of showing his teaching might not be transmitted (lit. “get lost”) to the theoretical understanding of those who are irresponsive (dred po). [His way of teaching] was not like [the way of learning] the Tibetan alphabets ka kha. The quintessential instruction of Mahāmudrā was bestowed in the way that, to the symbols (brda) [a master] shows [students], they reply with answers, by means of which [the master] makes [students] think of the meanings. It is not a mere theoretical understanding of the explanatory tantra, in which, when the insight arisen from reflection (bsam byung gi shes rab) grows up, [students] enter meditation. [In this Mahāmudrā quintessential instruction], having turned inwards, one applies oneself to the only meaning of meditation (sgom). This story is in agreement with what Great Lord [Atiśa] taught:

“[One] won’t know [the truth of reality] through studying, but will know [it] through meditation.”

All discourses risen from the meditation of the Mahāyāna are nothing other than the abiding mode [of the true reality], because the Blessed One taught that this teaching is far beyond words and letters, not the object of speech and logic, not established through examples and reasoning.
Bodhidharma gave his teaching on Mahāmudrā through signs (brda).\textsuperscript{80} However, among his four Chinese disciples, Huike (慧可, 487-593) alone was able to realize the meaning of his teaching.\textsuperscript{81} Huike accordingly became the second Patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism. With this story, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita illustrates that this way of teaching Mahāmudrā (via signs, brda) is not intended for everybody, but only for those of sharp faculties.\textsuperscript{82}

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita asserts that Kamalaśīla, Hwa shang’s opponent at the Bsam yas debate, took issue with certain of Hwa shang’s teachings, such as his advocacy of mental non-engagement (yid la mi byed) and his disregard for the two accumulations (of merit and wisdom), as developed in the perfections (pāramitā).\textsuperscript{83} In defense of Hwa shang’s teachings, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita explains that what Hwa shang means by mental non-engagement and the disregard of the two accumulations is to practice with “no references” (dmigs med). For Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, there should be no trace of attachment in the ultimate realization. Even the practice of the pāramitās such as generosity and so forth should not, at the ultimate level, entail any referential objects.\textsuperscript{84} Hwa shang’s emphasis on practicing with “no references” was mistakenly understood to mean “disregarding the two accumulations” in toto.

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita explains that Hwa shang’s advocacy of mental non-engagement is meant to be a teaching on non-attachment to emptiness:

Meditation holding onto emptiness, thinking that “all phenomena are emptiness” through the mental consciousness, is not free from the mind clinging to emptiness and possessing the continuum of the five aggregates. Therefore, there is no chance to have awareness of genuine reality.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{80} It seems that Bodhidharma’s way of teaching resembles Zen Koans (公案).

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.: 160.6.

\textsuperscript{82} There are various examples of teachings transmitted through the symbolic signs (brda): Guenther 1996 on Padmasambhava’s teachings; Sanderson (2007) finds a teaching through samketa, which is a Sanskrit equivalent of brda (Mahāvyutpatti 2776), in a much later Kashmirian Saivite source. The Chapter thirty-six of the lo rgyus chen mo of the Mani bka’ bum says that the Tathāgata’s intention cannot be illustrated by means of words and letters, but is experienced through signs (brda) or means (thabs) (Sde dge ed., f. 66b3, kept at the Library of École française d’Extrême-Orient, Paris): rigs kyi bu de brzin gshegs pa’i dgongs pa ruams tshig dang yi ges mtshon par mi nus so || brda’am thabs kyiis nyams su myong bar ’gyur bas || see His Eminence Trinzin Tsering Rinpoche 2007: 175.

\textsuperscript{83} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ibid.: 163.6-164.4; Cf. Seyfort Ruegg 1989: 93-95.

\textsuperscript{84} Cf. for example, there are three kinds of compassion (snying rje) such as compassion focused on sentient beings (sens can la dmigs pa’i snying rje), compassion focused on phenomena (chos la dmigs pa’i snying rje) and compassion without referential objects (dmigs pa med pa’i snying rje).

\textsuperscript{85} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ibid.: 168.2-3: yid kyi rnam par rig pas chos thams cad stong pa nyid do snyam nas de la ’dzin pa dang bcas sgom par byed pa ni stong ’dzin gyi blo dang ma bral zhung phung po Inga’i rgyun dang ldan pas guyang ma’i chos nyid la rig pa’i skabs med....
It is in this context that Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita says that one should not engage in analytical meditation (dpyad sgom)\(^{86}\) in meditative equipoise (mnyam gzhag).\(^{57}\) Those who propound that conceptual analysis is a necessary component of the meditative equipoise of the noble (’phags pa’i mnyam gzhag) deviate from the Buddhist tradition, he argues.\(^{58}\) Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita then quotes Saraha’s view, which, for him, is equal to Hwa shang’s teaching of mental non-engagement.\(^{89}\) In this context, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita also points out that the very reason why logicians generate a mistaken view about Rdzogs chen and Mahāmudrā is grounded in their own clinging to concepts (rnam rtog).\(^{90}\)

He also quotes the Sdom gsum rab dbye III.174-175:

... some, who based themselves solely on texts of the Chinese master’s tradition, changed the name of his system secretly to Great Seal. (Trans. by Rhoton)\(^{91}\)

In response to this accusation, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita comments that later opponents of Hwa shang simply followed what was written in the Rba bzhed (namely this accusation), and repeated the words of the Rba bzhed like an echo even without seeing Hwa shang’s texts.\(^{92}\)

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86 As for the Dge lugs pa’s dbyad sgom being equated with insight meditation (vipaṣyāna, thag mthong), see Geshe Lhundup Sopa 1987: 184-187. According to Guy Newland, the Dge lugs way of approaching emptiness is that “Realization of emptiness depends not only upon prior training in ethics, but upon conceptual mastery of what “emptiness” is and how logic can be used to approach it” (Newland 1996: 204). This approach is what Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita tries to invalidate.

87 Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ibid.: 169.2-3: chos nyid ji lta ba mngon sum du njal bar byed pa ni sgom byung rtog bral gyi shes rab nyid yin pas man ngag rig pa raams kyis mnyam gzhag la dpyad sgom ni mdzad pa ni man ngag gi gnad gshang bla na med pa mkhyen pa yin....

88 Ibid.: 169.3-4: kha cigs ’phags pa’i mnyam gzhag la’ang rtog dpyod dgos par smra ba ni sogs rgyus pa’i lugs las gzhan du gyur pa.

89 Ibid.: 170.1-2: ... zhes pa’ dis ni bsam gîlan mkhan po’i dgongs pa la shin tu ’jug cing tshad mar byed pa’i phyir ro ||.

90 Ibid.: 170.2-3: gzhan yang phyis kyi rtog ge pa mngon pa’i nga rgyal can ’ga’ zhig gis rdzogs chen dang phyag chen gyi man ngag gi dgongs par ’das pa’i rjes mi bcad l ma ‘ongs pa’i mdun ni bsu l da ltar gyi shes pa bzo bcos med par rang babs su ’jog || ces ’byung ba ’di la dus gsum gyi yid kyi las bkag go snyam pas ha shang chen po’i phyogs su ’khrul ba’i rgyu yang rnam rtog thugs zhen ggis ma thongs pas lan ... .

91 Rhoton 2002: 118-119.


The Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 507 and 508

Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 507 is concerned with the gter ma (revealed texts) as follows:

To trace back to Vajradhara
volumes originating from treasure-caches,
teachings pilfered from other systems, (III. 507)
teachings that have been composed [as apocrypha],
those that somebody dreamed,
or those that have been obtained through memorization. (III. 508) (Trans. by Rhoton)

As for the gter ma (revealed texts) of the Rnying ma, some scholars claim that gter mas are only discovered and accepted by the Rnying ma. In order to refute this allegation, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita shows the authenticity of gter mas by referring to Indian sources,99 other Tibetan schools such as the Bka’ brgyud pa, and even to a Dge lug pa scholar.100 Thus, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita states:

Through any stories of the gter mas like these, it would be very absurd that one asserts that all teachings of treasure texts, all Rnying ma pas and gter stons are frauds.101

Other Rnying ma commentators
on the Sdom gsum rab dbye before Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita

Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita is not the first Rnying ma pa to comment on the Sdom gsum rab dbye. Sog bzlog pa (1552–1624),102 for example, comments on the following verses of the Sdom gsum rab dbye: III. 167, 253, 254, 255, 256, 260, 275, 276, 277, 280, 281, 282, 283, 381, 507, 508, 509, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610.103 Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, in contrast, comments on the following verses: III. 110, 111, 127, 128, 167, 174, 175, 257, 258, 259, 260, 276, 277, 280, 281, 282, 283, 381, 507, 508. Therefore, only the following ten verses: 167, 260, 276, 277, 280, 281, 282, 283, 381, 507, and 508 are commented upon by both Sog bzlog pa and Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita.

Sog bzlog pa understands that the Sdom gsum rab dbye sees contaminated teachings in both the Gsar ma and the Rnying ma.104 He also points out that past commentators on the Sdom gsum rab

99 Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, ibid.: 184.7.
100 Ibid.: 186.4-6.
101 Ibid.: 186.6.
102 I thank Professor Matthew Kapstein for introducing me to Sog bzlog pa; cf. Karmay 1975: 150-151.
103 Sog bzlog pa, Nges don ‘brag sgra, 493.4-500.3.
104 Ibid.: 493.3-4.
105 Ibid.: 500.2-3; sdom gsum gyi ’grel mzas mkhan po dag gis dgongs pa ‘di ltar du cung ma bkral kyang phyag rdzogs kyi gzhung lugs la nan tan du ma gzigs pa nyid du
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\textit{dbye} have given little examination to the actual textual traditions of Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen.\textsuperscript{106}

‘Jigs med gling pa (1729/1730–1789) likewise defends the Rnying ma pa from criticisms originating in the \textit{Sdom gsum rab dbye}.\textsuperscript{107} In his \textit{Log rtogs bzlog pa’i bstan bcos}, ‘Jigs med gling pa elaborates the extent to which the Bka’ brgyud pas, including Karma pas such as Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), Karma Pakshi (1204–1283), and Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), practiced the Rnying ma teachings.\textsuperscript{109} In this way, ‘Jigs med gling pa faults the exclusive criticism of the Rnying ma pa.

Conclusion

This essay has tried to show how Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita interprets the \textit{Sdom gsum rab dbye} in order to uphold both the \textit{Sdom gsum rab dbye} and the Rnying ma tantric practices as authentic teachings. Having said that, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita’s portrayal of Sa skya Pañḍita demands some contextualization. In the ‘\textit{Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod}, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita attempts to interpret Sa skya Pañḍita’s Tantric view as supportive of Rnying ma tantric teachings. Yet in his \textit{Bde gshegs snying po’i rgyan}, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita opposes scholars including Sa skya Pañḍita who do not consider the original state (\textit{gshis lugs}) to be virtuous.\textsuperscript{111} Further, in his \textit{Rnying ma rgyud ’bum dkar chag lha’i rnga bo che}, Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita disagrees with “some Tibetan scholars” who say that there is no difference in the view between the Pāramitāyāna and Mantra-yāna.\textsuperscript{112} By “some Tibetan scholars,” Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita is likely pointing, albeit implicitly, at Sa skya Pañḍita, without explicitly naming him. It seems that what Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita attempts to draw an attention to in the ‘\textit{Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod} is Sa skya Pañḍita in the tantric context, where he is concerned with achieving

\textit{mngon no} \textsuperscript{111}.

\textsuperscript{106} See \textit{Rtogs pa brjod pa}, p. 219.3-5.

\textsuperscript{107} ‘Jigs med gling pa, \textit{ibid.}, p. 684.3; Karma Pakshi received the Rnying ma teachings such as Great Perfection from Kah thog pa Byams pa ’bum (1179-1252) (\textit{ibid.}: 684.3); Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, \textit{Rnying rgyud dkar chag lha’i rnga bo che}, in A, (vol. 8), fol. 120a5-6, p. 239.5-6; B, fol. 266b2-3, p. 534.2-3; C, fol. 186a3-4, p. 371.3-4.

\textsuperscript{109} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, \textit{Bde gshegs snying po’i rgyan}, 83.2-3: \textit{gshis lugs dge bar bshad mod de tshul la} \textsuperscript{111} sa pañ la sogs bka’ bkyon mdzad mkhan mang \textsuperscript{111}.

\textsuperscript{111} Dge rtse Mahāpañḍita, \textit{Rnying ma rgyud ’bum dkar chag lha’i rnga bo che}, A, fol. 47b5, p. 96.5; B; fols. 44b6-45a1, pp. 88.7-89.1; C, fol. 78b5, p. 156.5; TT, 192.
gnosis through experience. Generally speaking, however, Sa skya Pandita is a rang stong pa in the sūtric context.\(^\text{113}\)

Appendix

An outline (\(sa \text{ bcad}\)) of the ‘Dus ma byas kyi gan mdzod

1. bstan bcos mkhan po’i dgongs pa brtag pa [111.1-114.3]
2. bstan bcos kyi tshig la brten nas gzhan gyi log rtog nram par sel ba
   2.1. bstan bcos kyi tshig la brten nas gzhan gyis dogs pa bslangs pa [114.4]
      2.1.1. dngos su gsal ba’i dgag sgrub yod par ‘dod pa [114.4-155.2]
      2.1.1.1. dbu ma dang gsang snags lta ba khyad par med par ‘dod pa [‘i skyon spong)] [114.5-132.4] Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 255 [114.5-6, 123.4]; III. 127, 128 [126.2-3]; III. 110 [127.3-4]; III. 283 [127.7-128.1, 128.3]; III. 111 [128.3-5];
      2.1.1.2. lta sgom shan ma phye bar ‘dod pa [‘i skyon spong] [132.4-145.2] Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 257-260 [132.4]; III. 258 [132.4-5]; III. 259 [132.5]; III. 260 [132.6-7]
      2.1.1.2.1. rje btsun ‘khrul pa’i dri ma spangs pa grags pa rgyal mtshan [142.1-143.3]
      2.1.1.2.2. Chos kyi rje [Sa skya pandita] [143.3-143.6]

2.1.1.3. rgyud sde gong ma gsum theg pa’i rim par mi ‘dod pa’i skyon spong
      2.1.1.3.1. zhung gis ston tshul [145.2-146.5] Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 280, 281, 282 [145.3-5]; III. 275, 276, 277 [146.2-3]
      2.1.1.3.2. skyon de spyon ba
         2.1.1.3.2.1. spyir theg pa dgu’i grangs la klan ka mi ‘jug
         2.1.1.3.2.2. bye brag a nu a ti gnyis theg pa dang rgyud

2.1.2. zur gyis phog pa yod par ‘dod pa sel ba [155.2-181.7]
   2.1.2.1. rdzogs chen la hwa shang chen po’i chos lugs ’dres par ‘dod pa [sel ba]] [155.2-181.1] Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 167-175 [155.3-4];
   2.1.2.1.1. chos de’i khungs bshad pa [155.7-162.2]
      2.1.2.1.1.1. rgya chen spyod pa’i brgyud pa [157.1-3]
      2.1.2.1.1.2. zab mo lta ba’i brgyud pa [157.3-158.1]
      2.1.2.1.1.3. sgrub rgyud don gyi brgyud pa [158.1-162.2]
   2.1.2.1.2. de nyid skyon med par bstan pa [162.2-181.1] Sdom gsum rab dbye III. 174, 175 [171.4]
   2.1.2.2. ‘bras bu’i mthar thug ’od gsal du mi ‘thad par ‘dod pa [sel

\(^\text{113}\) Dge rtse Mahāpandita, Bde gshegs snying po’i rgyan: 97.1-3: sa pan ngo bo nyid med | rang stong smra ba’i dbu ma’i bzhed na yang | rang bzhed mthar thug bdag med | snying po’i ye shes kyi balugs bshtul rgyas par gsang pas ‘khor lo tha mthar mthun | bston ’drel te | gzhan du brtag gnay ra rje snying ’grel dang | rgyud ’grel lam skor lam ’bras bcas brns kyi | rgyu rgyud lam rgyud ’bras rgyud dbye ba dang | sbyang gzhi shyong bshed sbyungs ’bras rnam gsum dang | rgyu yi rdor ’dzin dang po’i sangs rgyas sogs | rang bzhed snags kyi bskyed rdzogs smin grol lam | ma lus gzhan stong dbu ma las mi gnyis |.
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