

A *Gzhan stong* Interpretation of Tantric Visionary Experiences: Nya dbon kun dga' dpal's "Explanation of the Ornament of Luminosity"¹

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The notion that all buddha qualities are permanently present in an ultimate that is only empty of everything else, i.e., the “other” in “empty of other” (*gzhan stong*) not only finds support from sūtric sources, such as the Tathāgatagarbha literature and the Maitreya Works,² but also from tantric literature. In the eyes of the Jo nang pas, the case for *gzhan stong* is particularly strengthened by positive descriptions of the ultimate in the Kālacakra literature, in the context of visionary experiences called “reflections of emptiness” (*śūnyatābimba: stong nyid gzugs brnyan*), which reveal inherent features, that is, ones of which the ultimate is not empty.³ Following the Tibetan translation, I take here Skt. *bimba* in the sense of *pratibimba*. The term *śūnyatāpratibimba* for *stong pa nyid kyi gzugs brnyan* is attested, for example, in Ratnākaraśānti's *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*, although in the slightly different context of the third of the four Yogācāra levels of meditation, where it is synonymous with *śūnyatāpratibhāsa*.⁴ These reflections of emptiness are beyond the conceptually

¹ Improvements to my English by Philip H. Pierce (Kathmandu) and Michele Martin (Buddhist Digital Resource Center) are gratefully acknowledged. In this chapter I present results from my FWF (Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung) project “Emptiness of Other in the Early Jo nang Tradition.” (project number P 32016).

² Following the Tibetan doxographical distinction between Sūtra and Tantra, which also includes the respective Indian commentaries in the Bstan 'gyur.

³ This is clear from Dol po pa's or his close disciples' interlinear glosses in the Jo nang revised translation of the *Śrīlaghukālacakratāntra* (LKCT) and the *Vimalaprabhā* (VP). In VP on LKCT 2.108, the reflections of emptiness are glossed as the “basis of emptiness” (*stong gzhi*), the “ultimate” (*don dam*), and *gzhan stong*. See *Dus 'khor mchan 'grel, bar cha*, 145₁₀₋₁₃: “Here, at the border of the reflections one should cultivate the path of smoke and the rest in empti[ness] through the guru's ascertainment (*śaḍaṅgayoga*), i.e., according to the stages to be explained. The reflections^a (the basis of empti[ness], the ultimate, *gzhan stong*) are the reflections of the [emptiness replete with] all aspects. Their ultimate limit is intended. (*stong pa la du ba sogs lam bla ma'i nges pa (yan lag drug gyi sbyor ba)'i dbang gis zhes pa 'chad par 'gyur ba'i rim pas gzugs brnyan mtshams su bsgom par bya'o || gzugs brnyan (stong gzhi don dam gzhan stong) rnam pa thams cad pa'i gzugs brnyan te de'i mthar thug par bsam mo |*). The Tibetan and English in round brackets are glosses.

^a The Sanskrit for all occurrences of *gzugs brnyan* here is *viśva* (VP, vol. 1, 228₂₆₋₂₇). The reference to the signs of smoke and so forth makes it clear that the “reflections of emptiness” are being referred to.

⁴ The term is found on fol. 11a5 of the lone Sanskrit manuscript. My thanks to Prof. Luo Hong (Chengdu), who provided me the relevant passage. Luo Hong is currently preparing a critical

constructed duality of a perceived object and perceiving subject, and have been compared to the magical reflection a young maiden sees in a divinatory mirror. Giacomella Orofino (1994b:615) proposes a close etymological connection between *pratisenā* and *pratibhāsa* and thus, going by Ratnākaraśānti, *pratibimba*. The reflections of emptiness emerge from space already during the initial practice of complete sense deprivation in Kālacakra's *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, when non-conceptual wisdom first has contact with a tiny part of *dharmatā*.⁵ They are the ten signs, which are metaphorically described as smoke, a mirage, a firefly, a lamp, a flame, the moon, the sun, darkness, a digit of the moon,⁶ and the great drop, in which there is a clear reflection of everything.⁷ These signs are very unusual like a prognostic reflection or a precursor of immanent realization. As such, they are the very *dharmatā* itself, and so exist ultimately for the Jo nang pas.⁸ Rma ban chos 'bar, who translated the *Sthitisamāsa* together with the Indian *paṇḍita* Dhariśrījñāna chose Tib. *stong nyid*

edition of this text for publication. See also LKCT 5.113a (as quoted in VP), where *bimba* is used in the sense of reflection: “[The divine *mudrā* is] like a reflection in the mirror.” (*ādarśabimbopamā*).

⁵ 'Od gsal rgyan, 25₁₀₋₁₃: “If someone says that in this case you must clearly state what luminous smoke, etc., and their experiencing subject are in your tradition, the following lion roar rises: The experiencing subject (of a yogin of withdrawal, who has a beginner's continuum), i.e., the nonconceptual wisdom of the truth of the path, directly sees a tiny part of *dharmatā* (the object).” (*gal te de ltar na khyed kyi phyogs la du sogs 'od gsal yul can dang bcas pa gang zhig yin gsal bar brjod dgos so | zhe na | (so sor sdud pa'i rnal 'byor pa las dang po pa'i rgyud kyi) yul can lam bden mi rtog ye shes kyis (yul) chos nyid cung zad mngon sum du mthong ba yin no | zhes seng ge'i sgra sgrog go |*)

⁶ SUT 137₁₅₋₁₆: “Digit of the moon refers to the light of lightning.” (*kaleti vidyudābhāsaḥ*).

⁷ See *Sekoddeśa*, v. 26 (SU 133₁₅₋₁₆): *dhūmamarīcikhadyotadīpajvālendubhāskaraiḥ^a | tamaḥ kalā mahābindur viśvabimbaṃ prabhāsvaram*. ^a The instrumental does not fit and is not adopted in Nāropa's commentary.

⁸ 'Od gsal rgyan, 30₁₀₋₁₅: “If one wonders then whether it is not appropriate to call the smoke etc. signs, because they are aspects of *dharmatā*, there is no mistake. Because they are a prognostic precursor of attaining the fruit of true reality very fast, or because they are signs of the unmistakable path they are called signs. Or rather they are thus called on the grounds of being the signs for the vital breath having entered the central [channel], but they are not thought to be signs, which are not true reality.

Venerable Nāropa said: “Because they are a prognostic precursor of the fruit of reality, they go by the name characteristic sign.” (*'o na du sogs de dag la rtags zhes pa mi 'thad par 'gyur te | chos nyid kyi rnam pa nyid yin pa'i phyir ro snyam na | skyon med de | de kho na nyid kyi 'bras bu ches myur du mthong ba'i snga ltas yin pas sam | lam ma nor pa'i rtags yin pas rtags zhes sam | srog rlung dbu mar chud pa'i rtags yin pas de skad bshad kyi | de kho na nyid ma yin par de'i rtags zhes pa ni dgongs pa ma yin te | rje nā ro pas | de kho na'i 'bras bu'i snga ltas su gyur pa'i phyir mtshan ma'o zhes so |*; SUT 136₁₆: *tattvaphalasya pūrvarūpatvān nimittaiḥ*)

dnegos po for *sūnyatābimba*, understanding something more concrete like “entities of emptiness” or “emptiness in its actuality.”⁹

As one of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan’s (1292-1361) direct disciples, Nya dbon Kun dga’ dpal (1285-1379) commands high authority within the Jo nang tradition. Like Dol po pa, he received a traditional education at Sa skya. He then travelled around for further studies at many of the great Sa skya, Bka’ gdams, and Bka’ brgyud centers of learning in Dbus and Gtsang, and eventually became the tenth throne holder of Jo nang Monastery. Dol po pa gave him the Kālacakra empowerment and guiding instructions on the related *śaḍaṅgayoga*, along with transmissions and teachings on the Bodhisattva Trilogy (*sems ’grel skor gsum*)¹⁰ and the ten sūtras of definitive meaning.¹¹

Nya dbon Kun dga’ dpal’s “Explanation of the Ornament of Luminosity” (*’Od gsal rgyan gyi bshad pa*) is the *locus classicus* for the Jo nang interpretation of the reflections of emptiness. The text was made available for the first time in volume 32 of the Jo nang dpe tshogs Series, where it covers the first 44 pages. It contains in a smaller font Nya dbon’s own explanatory glosses in round brackets.¹² Notwithstanding its initial topical outline (*sa bcaḍ*), the structure of the *’Od gsal rgyan gyi bshad pa* is convoluted. Only the first three quarters of the text deal with tantric *gzhan stong*, while the last quarter presents the usual Jo nang arguments for following the tenth-level Bodhisattva Maitreya, the third-level Bodhisattva Aṣaṅga, and the third *dharmacakra* when it comes to the interpretation of sūtras.¹³ Not having been introduced to this structure of the text in the beginning, the presentation of sūtric *gzhan stong* in the last quarter comes as a surprise. The actual end of the text on the reflections of emptiness is thus not easy to find. This is unfortunate as it contains crucial information on Nya dbon’s sources for his distinction between provisional and definitive meaning, namely the commentaries of Puṇḍarīka, Vajragarbha (10th-11th cent.),¹⁴ and Vajrapāṇi on the *Kālacakra*, *Hevajra*, and *Cakrasamvara*. This

⁹ See SS 14a₂, where *sūnyatābimba*- is part of a quotation from *Sekoddeśa*, v. 146c-147b. For the Tibetan translation *stong nyid dnegos po* see Derge Bstan ’gyur, 2227, fol. 186b, and Peking Bstan ’gyur, 3071, fol. 105a.

¹⁰ The trilogy of texts known as the *Sems ’grel skor gsum* comprises the *Vimalaprabhā* (Peking Tanjur no. 2064), the *Hevajrapañḍārthaṭīkā* (Peking Tanjur no. 2310) and a *Cakrasamvara* commentary (Peking Tanjur no. 2117) (see Stearns 1999:178). According to tradition, they have been written, in respective order, by the Bodhisattvas Puṇḍarīka, Vajragarbha, and Vajrapāṇi.

¹¹ On the ten sūtras of definitive meaning, see Mathes and Sheehy 2019:4 & 18 (fn. 24). For bibliographical details on Nya dbon, see <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Nyawon-Kunga-Pel/3673>. Accessed on May 4, 2022.

¹² According to Khenpo Tsuldan via Wechat on May, 21, 2022 from ’Dzam thang, A mdo.

¹³ *’Od gsal rgyan*, 36₁₋₃.

¹⁴ Sferra 2009:93.

colophon-like end of the tantra section in the middle of the text also contains the advice that when analyzing tantras, one should rely on the writings of the three protecting lords (Kalki Yaśas, Puṇḍarīka, and Vajrapāṇi), glorious Vajragarbha, Saraha, Indrabhūti, Nāropa, and Kālacakrapāda.¹⁵ Two pages earlier Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle is also mentioned.¹⁶ The lowest common denominator is a *gzhan stong* distinction into two types of emptiness in Mañjuśrī[yaśas]'s¹⁷ *Svadarśanānūmatoddeśaparīkṣā*, which is presented here together with Nya dbon's glosses in round brackets:

The analysis of *skandhas*, (*dhātus*, and *āyatanas*, through listening, reflecting, and meditating by Mādhyamikas on the vehicle of characteristics) results in an (analytical) emptiness. Like a banana tree, it lacks (any) essence¹⁸ (that withstands analysis). The emptiness replete with all supreme aspects (reflections of emptiness, such as smoke, and so forth) is not like a banana tree with no essence (inasmuch as it withstands analysis in an investigation of the ultimate and because it is *dharmatā*, which the meditative wisdom of the Noble Ones in Mahāyāna directly sees).

The knowable object (the great emptiness replete with all supreme aspects) seen here (in the *yoga* of withdrawal, and so forth), which is without arising (from causes and conditions) and without ceasing (or destruction), is the emptiness of empty things (that will be directly seen by the genuine yogin). (But if) *skandhas* (*dhātus* and *āyatanas*) are analyzed (through listening, reflecting, and meditating by Mādhyamikas on the vehicle of characteristics), (since they do not exist as anything at all, they are not objects of knowledge in the sense of a positive determination, but rather objects of knowledge attested only from an analysis of the negandum. This approach) is not¹⁹ (the emptiness of the view.)²⁰

¹⁵ 'Od gsal rgyan, 35₁₈-36₁.

¹⁶ 'Od gsal rgyan, 33₁₃.

¹⁷ The first Kalkin and father of Puṇḍarīka.

¹⁸ I.e., it reveals that the *skandhas* lack (any) essence. According to Mkhas grub rje, though, this first emptiness does not refer to the analyzed object, but to a nihilistic type of emptiness (*chad stong*), which is the result of an incorrect determination that the *skandhas* do not exist at all (see Cabezón 1992:29).

¹⁹ The root text reads: “*Skandhas* are, [then,] not analyzed.” “Is not” (*min*), positioned at the end of the Tibetan sentence, forms with the glosses a subsequent sentence.

²⁰ 'Od gsal rgyan, 16₅₋₁₄: (*mtshan nyid theg pa'i dbu ma pas*) *phung po* (*kham skye mched sogs la thos bsam gyi rigs pas*) *rnam* (*par*) *dpyad* (*dpyad pa'i*) *stong pa nyid* (*de*) *ni* || *chu shing ji bzhin* (*dpyad bzod kyi*) *snying po* (*ci yang*) *med* (*la*) || (*stong gzugs du ba sogs*) *rnam pa kun gyi mchog ldan pa'i* || *stong pa nyid de* (*ni chu shing ltar snying po med pa*) *ltar 'gyur ba min* (*te don dam dpyod pa'i rigs pas dpyad bzod cing theg chen 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag ye shes kyis mngon sum*)

Nya dbon further comments in a long subsequent gloss:

This is because an empti[ness] that is arrived at through a mere analysis of such an object of negation, cannot be directly and clearly seen by anyone, because it is a non-affirming negation. There is pervasion. For when we have a mental state that grasps a non-affirming negation, it follows that [the latter] is a concept. When the meditative wisdom of the Noble Ones in Mahāyāna directly and clearly sees [something], it follows that it is a genuine affirming negation. For many Indian experts explain that if something is a genuine affirming negation, then it has an established quality, and also because this is the intent of the stainless Buddha words and treatises.²¹

In other words, the first type of emptiness applies to the relative truth of the *skandhas* and so forth and is a non-affirming negation, while the emptiness replete with all supreme aspects is an affirming negation implying ultimate qualities that are likened (starting with smoke) to the reflections of emptiness. It should be noted that for the Jo nang pas non-affirming and affirming negations correspond to *rang stong* and *gzhan stong*, respectively.²²

This interpretation is challenged among others by the Dge lugs pas, for whom the emptiness of *skandhas*—their complete non-existence—is, like a banana plant, without essence, i.e., wrong. The emptiness replete with all supreme aspects, however, follows from a correct assessment of the *skandhas* as dependent arising and emptiness.²³ In other words, everything, including what smoke and the rest stand for, is dependent arising and empty of an own nature, i.e., *rang stong* in the sense of only negating inherent existence. What seems to support Dge lugs *rang stong* is the way *Vimalaprabhā* on v. 1.1 takes *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* 1.17 as teaching four distinct

du gzigs pa'i chos nyid yin pa'i phyir ro) || (*rgyu rkyen las*) *skyes pa med pa 'gag (pa'am 'jig pa) med pa'i* || *shes bya (rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid chen po) gang zhig (sor sdud sogs kyi skabs) 'dir (mngon sum du gsal bar) mthong ba* || (*de ni*) *stong pa'i dngos po (ste yang dag pa'i rnal 'byor gyis mngon sum du mthong rgyu yod pa)'i stong pa nyid (yin gyi mtshan nyid theg pa'i dbu ma pas)* || *phung po (khams skye mched) rnams (la thos bsam gyi rigs pas legs par) rnam (par) dpyad pa (na cir yang grub pa med pas yongs gcod du shes bya min gyi | dgag bya rnam par dpyad pa tsam gyi shes bya yin zhes 'dod pa lta ba'i stong nyid) min (te).*

²¹ 'Od gsal rgyan, 16₁₄₋₁₈: (*de 'dra'i dgag bya rnam par dpyad tsam gyi stong pa de ni gang gis kyang mngon sum du gsal bar mthong mi srid pa'i phyir te | med dgag yin pa'i phyir ro | khyab pa yod de | med dgag 'dzin pa'i blo yin na rnam rtog yin pa'i khyab pa'i phyir te | theg chen 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag ye shes kyi mngon sum du gsal bar gzigs na ma yin dgag mtshan nyid pa yin pas khyab cing* || *ma yin dgag mtshan nyid pa yin na sgrub pa'i chos yin par rgya gar mkhas mang gis bshad cing | bka' bstan bcos dri ma med pa rnams kyi dgongs don yin pa'i phyir ro).*

²² See Dol po pa: *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*, 175₁₄₋₁₅.

²³ According to Khenpo Tamphel, Vienna. See also Cabezón 1992:29.

kāyas. The verse, translated against the backdrop of its overall Yogācāra context, reads as follows:

*svābhāvikaḥ saśāṃbhogo nairmāṇiko 'paras tathā /
dharmakāyaḥ sakāritras' caturdhā samudīritaḥ // (AA 1.17)²⁴*

Its essence, its enjoyment and its manifestation[s] as well,
With its activity the *dharmakāya* is proclaimed to be fourfold.²⁵

This translation takes into account that the first three terms are adjectival in form, which is typical of their usage in the Yogācāra context. Sanskrit *samudīritaḥ* is a past participle congruent in gender and number with *dharmakāyaḥ*, wherefore it is the *dharmakāya*, which has been taught in its *svābhāvika-*, *saśāṃbhoga-*, and *nirmāṇa-kāya* aspects. Together with its activity (*sakāritras'* is also adjectival) it is fourfold. The *dharmakāya* thus is understood in its inclusive sense of being the total result of the Mahāyāna path. However, Haribhadra (late eighth century)²⁶ takes this verse as teaching four *kāyas*. The *dharmakāya* is in that case the embodiment of wisdom on the level of relative truth, as distinct from the *svābhāvikakāya*, which is its mere emptiness.²⁷ The mere fact that the *Vimalaprabhā* operates with four *kāyas* along the lines of AA 1.17 does not necessarily mean that it is following Haribhadra's Madhyamaka interpretation of the Yogācāra *trikāya* system. It only means that a set of four *kāyas* is needed to relate to sets of four, such as the states of erotic union, deep sleep, dreaming, and being awake:

Here, the fourfold pure mind-vajra is the defining characteristic of the four *kāyas*. The mind that is the non-existent mind of the fourth, the nature of the female organ and the male organ completely tainted by the stains of desire, which are difficult to repel, is the *svābhāvikakāya*, [the one only possessed by] “the Omniscient One.” The mind of the non-existent mind of the deep sleep [state], which is overpowered by darkness, is the *dharmakāya*, “the wisdom body.” The mind of the non-existent mind of the [state] of dreaming about non-existing existents, which is generated by the vital breath (*prāṇa*), is the *saśāṃbhogakāya*, “the sun-body.” The mind of the non-existent mind of the

²⁴ AA 5₁₃₋₁₄.

²⁵ See also Makransky 1997:164.

²⁶ Makransky 1997:6.

²⁷ Makransky 1997:164-167.

waking [state], in which one discriminates entities in terms of many conceptualizations, is the *nirmāṇakāya*, “the eyes [wide open] like a blossomed lotus.”²⁸

To be sure, nowhere in the *Vimalaprabhā* is the *svābhāvikakāya* taken in Haribhadra’s sense as exclusive emptiness.²⁹

In the main part of his *Ornament of Luminosity*, Nya dbon takes issue with three wrong notions on the reflections of emptiness, namely that they are (1) mistaken appearances (*’khrul snang*), (2) the truth of the path, and (3) that their perceiving subject, the eye of flesh,³⁰ is the truth of cessation.³¹ The “eye of flesh” is the first of the five so-called Tathāgata eyes through which the yogic visions of the reflections of emptiness take place. The remaining four are the divine eye, the buddha eye, the eye of insight (*prajñā*), and the eye of wisdom (*jñāna*).³²

²⁸ VP, vol. 1, 45₂₉-46₃: (*iha caturvidhaṃ cittavajraṃ viśuddhaṃ catuḥkāyalakṣaṇaṃ bhavati | durvārārāgamalāvaliptobhayendriyātmakaturyacittābhāvacittaṃ svābhāvikakāyaḥ sarvajña iti | tamobhibhūtasuṣuptacittābhāvacittaṃ dharmakāyo jñānakāya iti | prāṇotpāditasadasat svapnacittābhāvacittaṃ sambhogakāyo dinakaravapur iti | anekavikalpabhāvasaṃjñājāgraccittābhāvacittaṃ nirmāṇakāyaḥ padmapatrāyatākṣa iti |*)

²⁹ What comes close to it (even though it can be easily taken in a *gzhan stong* sense) is an introductory verse to chapter four (VP, vol. 2, 149₁₄₋₁₅): “Inseparable from emptiness and compassion, free from passion and passionlessness, neither *prajñā* nor *upāya*, this is the supreme *svābhāvikakāya*.” (*śūnyatākaruṇābhinno rāgārāgavivarjitaḥ | na prajñā nāpy upāyo ’sau kāyaḥ svābhāviko ’paraḥ |*)

³⁰ Note the *māṃsacakṣus* always occurs in the singular, probably to distinguish its function from the one of ordinary eyes.

³¹ *’Od gsal rgyan*, 2₁₈₋₂₀: *gnyis pa la lnga ste | gzhan lugs mi ’thad pa’i cha dgag ... dang po la gsum ste | stong gzugs ’khrul snang yin pa dgag | stong gzugs lam bden yin pa dgag | yul can sha’i mig ’gog bden yin pa dgag pa’o |*

³² See SUT 142₁₃₋₁₇: “Here, at first, the beginner yogin sees the variegated reflection with the eye of flesh, without [the involvement of any] supernatural cognition. Then, within the range of supernatural cognition, he sees with the divine eye. After that, he sees with the buddha eye within the range of being free from passion. Within the range of a bodhisattva he sees with the eye of insight; and then again after that with the eye of wisdom he sees within the range of perfect Buddha—being free from the limitations of any range. Thus eyes of flesh and the rest are called the five eyes of a Tathāgata, with regard to the vision of emptiness.” (*atra prathamam māṃsacakṣuṣādikarmiko yogī viśvabimbam abhijñānam antareṇa paśyati | tato divyacakṣuṣābhijñāvadhivaśāt | tato buddhacakṣuṣā vītarāgāvadhivaśāt | tataḥ prajñācakṣuṣā bodhisattvāvadhivaśāt | tato jñānacakṣuṣā samyaksambuddhāvadhivaśāt sarvopādhivinirmuktiḥ | evaṃ tathāgatasya pañcacakṣuṣī māṃsādīny uktāni śūnyatādarśanaṃ prati |*

The Reflections of Emptiness Are Not Mistaken Appearances

In a rather unusual step, Nya dbon attributes the position that the reflections are mistaken appearances to a concrete person, namely the great Sa skya master Bu ston Rin chen 'grub (1290-1364).³³ Nya dbon's main argument against this position is that smoke and the rest are signs that one is unmistaken and on the profound path of the Kālacakra completion stage:

On the profound path of the sixfold *vajrayoga*, the yoga of a beginner's sense withdrawal—a beginner whose practice accords with the teaching of the lama—is supposedly not the yoga of reality, namely the non-conceptual, profound completion stage, the essence of all tantras, inasmuch as smoke and the other luminous signs, which are directly and nakedly seen by the beginner are supposedly mistaken appearances, and thus mistaken cognition. This is said in the glorious tantra (that the perception of deities is twofold, direct or inferential. Through those instances that are direct—the union with true reality—many *sambhogakāyas* appear, like stars in the sky) and (its related) commentary:³⁴

As for direct [perception], because of one's connection with true reality there are many *sambhogakāyas*, like stars in the sky.³⁵ (LKCT 4.232b)

[The many *sambhogakāyas*] perceived by the eye of flesh and so forth are what (the directly seen) threefold world and the three times are. (Their immovable and movable material forms do not exist as they appear to.) They are like a dream and an illusion (of horses and elephants; they do not exist as things that are external horses, elephants, and so forth). Here, the beginner

³³ 'Od gsal rgyan, 3₉₋₁₀: "In the practice manual composed by the venerable Dharma master Bu ston it is said that one should not become attached to them, inasmuch as they are non-existent appearances, like a dream, illusions, and the like. Thus they are but mistaken appearances. (*chos rje bu ston gyis mdzad pa'i khrid yig tu rmi lam sgyu ma sogs bzhin med pa snang ba yin pas zhen par ma byed ces gsungs pas de ltar na 'khrul snang las ma 'das pas* |)

³⁴ 'Od gsal rgyan, 3₁₂₋₁₉: *zab lam rdo rje'i rnal 'byor yan lag drug gis dpal ldan bla ma'i gsung bzhin nyams su blangs pa'i las dang po pa'i so sor sdud kyi rnal 'byor de | rgyud thams cad kyi snying po rdzogs rim zab mo rtog pa dang bral ba de kho na nyid kyi rnal 'byor ma yin par 'gyur te des mngon sum du rjen cher gyis mthong ba'i du sogs 'od gsal de dag 'khrul snang yin pas 'khrul shes yin pa'i phyir | | ji skad du | dpal ldan rgyud rtsa (ba las | lha'i dmigs pa gang yin mngon sum dang ni rjes su dpag pa rnam pa gnyis su 'gyur pa ste | mngon sum dag ni de nyid sbyor bas mkha' la skar ma bzhin du du ma longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku | zhes pa dang | de'i) 'grel (ba'i thad) du*

³⁵ LKCT 4.232 (VP vol. 2, 249₁₉): *pratyakṣaṃ tattvayogād uḍur iva gagane 'nekasambhogakāyam* |. No glosses in the 'Od gsal rgyan. Translated from the Sanskrit.

yogin first sees the manifold with the eye of flesh, without the supernatural perceptions.³⁶ (VP on 4.232b)

Nya dbon then quotes verse lines 54a-55a from the introduction of the *Vimalaprabhā*:

The reality that is the yoga of the completion stage (ultimate deities, the emptiness replete with all supreme aspects) is free from the thoughts of the letters *hūṃ*, *phaṭ* and so on taught on the creation stage. This is the practice of true reality (according to the profound completion stage), and there is no other (creation stage, and so forth). Through these signs of smoke and the rest— [that³⁷ is, by conveying the winds into the central channel through breath control—the yogin attains supreme unchanging bliss.]³⁸

After a few more quotes in support of the advanced tantric context in which the reflections of emptiness are experienced, Nya dbon states that they cannot be mistaken appearances and mistaken knowledge, unless such yoga was but a beginner's outward looking consciousness.³⁹ Next, Nya dbon presents and explains the two verses 235 and 252 from Kambalapāda's *Ālokamālā*, which Nāropa quotes in his commentary on *Sekoddeśa* v. 27⁴⁰ in the context of explaining how to meditate on the reflections of emptiness. Nāropa and Nya dbon profit here from Kambala's example of smoke following fire. It is very unlikely, though, that Kambalapāda had the ten signs of *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* in mind. Nya dbon's important glosses are presented in round brackets as in the Tibetan text:

³⁶ VP, vol. 2, 249₂₄₋₂₆: *māṃsādicakṣurgrāhyaṃ māyāsvapnasadr̥śaṃ tribhavaṃ tryadhvani | atra prathamam māṃsacakṣuṣā yogī ādikarmiko viśvam paśyaty abhijñābhir vinā | 'Od gsal rgyan, 3₂₁₋₄₁: sha la sogs pa'i mig gis bzung bar bya ba (ste mngon sum du mthong ba'i) srid pa gsum dang dus gsum (gyi brtan pa dang g.yo ba'i dngos po'i rnam pa rnam ni snang ba ltar brtan g.yo'i dngos po 'di rnam su med pa dper na) rmi lam dang sgyu ma('i rta glang la sogs su der snang yang phyi rol gyi rta glang sogs kyi dngos por med pa) dang mtshungs pa'o || 'dir dang po las dang po pa'i rnal 'byor pas (mngon par shes pa med par sha'i mig gis sna tshogs mthong ngo |)* The last round brackets are mistakenly inserted. The content is not a gloss but part of the *Vimalaprabhā*.

³⁷ The content of the square bracket has not been quoted by Nya dbon.

³⁸ VP, vol. 1, 6₁₅₋₁₇ & 19: *utpattikramam uktaṃ hūṃphaṭkārādikalpanārahitam || utpanna-kramayogas tattvaṃ tattvasya sādhanam nānyat | dhūmādinimittena [prāṇāyāmena madhyavāhena || ... sukham yogī prāpnoti...]*. First translated by Newman 1987:233. The verse numbering follows Newman. 'Od gsal rgyan, 4₁₋₄: *bskyed pa'i rim par gsungs pa'i hūṃ dang ni | phaṭ yig la sogs rtog pa dang bral ba || rdzogs pa'i rim pa'i rnal 'byor (don dam gyi lha rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid) de nyid de || de nyid kyi ni sgrub thabs (rdzogs rim zab mo las) gzhan (bskyed rim sogs) yod (pa) min | du ba la sogs mtshan ma rnam dang ni |*

³⁹ 'Od gsal rgyan, 4₁₃₋₁₅.

⁴⁰ See SUṬ 138₁₃₋₁₇.

The yogin (of withdrawal) who has gained the manifestation (of the luminous reflections of emptiness) must know (these genuine) signs of transformation. (These signs) are the unmistakable (genuine signs) of (having quickly attained the supreme) accomplishment. It is like smoke (taken as a sign for establishing the presence) of carbonization (fire).⁴¹ ĀM 235

What then follows is verse 252, in which Kambala takes issue with being too much fixated on emptiness. Following from that, Nya dbon distinguishes an analytical emptiness from the type realized through direct seeing, which is related to the ten signs of smoke, and the rest. By quoting verses 235 and 252 together, Nāropa and Nya dbon suggest that Kambala was aware of this second type of emptiness, and that Kambala had it in mind when criticizing analytical emptiness:

For those who behold emptiness, emptiness renders the eyes stiff, it causes their heads to fall forward and it makes their minds and mental faculties (which are contained in outward-facing false imagining) numb (or obstructed).⁴² ĀM 252

Nya dbon's commenting gloss on this verse is as follows:

Through types of meditation such as sense withdrawal one sees emptiness. Yet this emptiness is not the mere analytical empti[ness] of *skandhas* and so forth; rather, it is the emptiness of direct seeing. It is the same as the “perceptible emptiness” in the tantras and the Bodhisattva Trilogy.⁴³

⁴¹ 'Od gsal rgyan, 4₁₇₋₂₁: (...stong gzugs 'od gsal gyi) snang ba thob pa'i (so sor sdud kyi) rnal 'byor pas (...) gzhan du (gyur pa'i yang dag pa'i) rtags ('di) ni shes bya ste | (rtags de mchog gi dngos) grub (myur du thob) pa'i 'khrul ba med pa rnam | (ste mi 'khrul pa'i rtags yang dag go | dper na) lam nag (ni me ste de yod pa dag) gi ni (sgrub byed du) du ba (rtags su bkod pa) bzhin ||. Lindtner's (1985:201-202) edition and translation differs slightly: “Here, however, a yogin having gained insight must know that the marks inevitably follow perfection, as smoke [follows] fire.” (jñeyāny atra tu liṅgāni labdhālokena yoginā | siddher avyabhicārīni dhūmavat kṛṣṇavartmanah ||).

⁴² 'Od gsal rgyan, 4₂₃₋₅₂: mig dag rangs par byed pa dang | mgo bo dud pa nyid dang ni || (kha phyir ltas kyi yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtag pas bsod pa'i) sems dang sems byung nub pa ('am 'gag pa) dang || stong nyid mthong ba'i stong pa nyid ||. My translation follows Lindtner (see 1985:206-207). His Sanskrit is as follows: *karoti stabdhatām akṣṇoḥ śīrasaś cāvanamratām | staimityaṃ cittacaittānām sūnyatā sūnyatekṣiṇām ||*.

⁴³ 'Od gsal rgyan, 5₂₋₄: ces pa ni so sor sdud sogs bsgoms pas stong nyid mthong la | stong nyid de yang phung po sogs rnam dpyad kyi stong pa tsam ma yin gyi mngon sum du mthong pa'i stong pa nyid yin ces pa ste | rgyud dang sems 'grel rnam su dmigs bcas stong pa nyid ces gsungs pa dang don gcig go |.

Nya dbon then deals with the possible objection that such a yoga of directly seeing emptiness involves ordinary perceptions with “the eye of flesh” and based on them mistaken forms of mental consciousness. His answer consists of five quotations from Indian Kālacakra texts, which deal with the initial *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* of sense withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*).⁴⁴ The first two quotes of the reply are from the *Vimalaprabhā*:

With regard to the subjects of the reflections of emptiness, five other/superior ones, eyes (eye of flesh) and so forth (it is said that once supernatural perception is attained, there are ears of flesh, etc.) that engage with objects.⁴⁵ VP on 4.116

Here, the beginner yogin first sees the manifold (forms of the reflections of emptiness)⁴⁶ with the eye of flesh, without the supernatural perceptions. Then, within the range of supernatural cognitions, he sees with the divine eye.⁴⁷ VP on 4.232

The second pair of quotes is from Nāropa’s *Sekoddeśaṭīkā*, with reference to the *Vimalaprabhā* on 5.116 and Vajrapāṇi’s *Cakrasaṃvara* commentary:⁴⁸

Here (in order to see emptiness), the radiance of one’s own mind is first seen with a Tathāgata’s eye of flesh.⁴⁹ VP on 5.116

Sense withdrawal means that instead of consciousnesses engaging their external cognitive objects through the respective sense faculties, the consciousnesses of the eyes and so forth engage the inner cognitive objects through the respective divine sense faculties. Since emptiness is perceived internally, all entities are seen in empti[ness] without being conceptualized. Like a maiden seeing magical reflections. This is the yoga limb of sense

⁴⁴ See *’Od gsal rgyan*, 5₆₋₁₉. The quotations are translated in the following from their Indian original, and the comments in round brackets are from Nya dbon.

⁴⁵ VP, vol. 2, 210₁₀: *śūnyabimbe viṣayeṣu pravṛttir anyaiś cakṣurādibhiḥ pañcavidhair*. *’Od gsal rgyan*, 5₆₋₈: *stong pa’i gzugs kyi yul can rnam la mig gzhan (sha’i mig) la sogs (pa mngon par shes pa thob par la sha’i rna ba sogs kyang ’dod gsungs) pa rnam lnga po rnam kyis rab tu ’jugs pa’o* |.

⁴⁶ Jo nang Phyogs las rnam rgyal: *Dus ’khor mchan ’grel, smad cha*, 143₁₄: (*stong gzugs kyi rnam pa*).

⁴⁷ VP, vol. 2, 249₂₅₋₂₆: *atra prathamam māṃsacakṣuṣā yogī ādikarmiko viśvaṃ paśyaty abhijñābhir vinā | tato divyacakṣuṣā paśyaty abhijñāvidhivaśāt* |.

⁴⁸ I.e., the Peking Tanjur no. 2117.

⁴⁹ SUT 123₁₃₋₁₄: *tatra prathamam svacittābhāso māṃsacakṣuṣā tathāgatasya drśyate*.

withdrawal, inasmuch as the reflections of the buddhas of the three realms are seen.⁵⁰

The last of the five quotes is from the part of *Sekoddeśa*, which illustrates the yogic visions of the reflections of emptiness with the example of a maiden seeing magical reflections in a divinatory mirror:

(Apart from her eye of flesh), she sees neither with other (somebody else's) (watery) eyes, nor does she see with her own (watery) eyes.⁵¹

This means that she only sees with her own inwardly looking eye of flesh, which also sees the reflections of emptiness. Nya dbon concludes that when it comes to direct perceptions of the reflections of emptiness, no ordinary consciousness or sense perceptions are involved.⁵² Further down, he explains that the direct valid cognitions of the sense faculties in Kālacakra are only similar in name to the Pramāṇa system, and in reality yogic direct cognitions, as “the eye, which sees the reflections of emptiness with the eye of flesh [but] without sense perception⁵³ is taken as the direct cognition of the sense faculties.”⁵⁴ The idea here is that you can still “see” with your eye of flesh when in complete dark retreat. Such a tantric interpretation of direct valid cognition is already observed in the *Dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i nges don gyi dka'i gnas rnam 'grel pa* of Dharmesvara, who was a son of Yu mo Mi bskyod rdo rje (b. 1027):⁵⁵

Somebody may say: “In Āryadeva's explanation the [first] two direct cognitions and inferences are refuted in the Mantra system as valid cognitions. Does this not contradict [Pramāṇa]?” There is no contradiction. In this text, ordinary persons ascertain objects of sense perception when looking inwardly.

⁵⁰ SUṬ on v.27 (SUṬ 123₁₇₋₂₁): *iha pratyāhāro bāhyarūpādiviṣayeṣv apravṛttiś cakṣurādīndriyaiś cakṣurvijñānādīnām adhyātmani viṣayeṣu pravṛttir divyacakṣurādīndriyaiś cakṣurvijñānādīnām iti adhyātmani śūnyatālabhanenākālpitaṃ sarvabhāvadārśanaṃ śūnye pratisenādarśanaṃ kumārikāyā iveti pratyāhārāṅgaṃ traidhātukabuddhabimbadarśanād.*

⁵¹ SU 134₁₁: *na paśyati anyacakṣurbhīyāṃ svacakṣurbhīyāṃ na paśyati* | *'Od gsal rgyan, 5₂₀₋₂₁: (sha'i mig las) mig gzhan (skye bo gzhan) gyis (chu bur gyi mig gi) ni mi mthong ste || rang gi (chu bur gyi) mig gis kyang mi mthong |.*

⁵² See *'Od gsal rgyan, 5₂₁₋₂₃: de bas na du sogs de dag (mngon sum du mthong ba'i shes pa de) tha mal gyi sgo lnga'i dbang shes 'di dang | de'i yid shes 'di gang yang ma yin par ches gsal lo |.*

⁵³ Lit. “the first [type of] direct cognition.”

⁵⁴ *'Od gsal rgyan, 29₁₇₋₁₈: dang por mngon med par sha'i mig gis stong gzugs mthong ba'i mig de la dbang po'i mngon sum zhes bzhaḡ.*

⁵⁵ For the life of Yu mo Mi bskyod rdo rje, see Hatchell 2014:27-28.

The bodhisattva's intent is that there are direct perceptions had by those like learning yogins who have entered the path.⁵⁶

A little further on in the same text, Dharmesvara writes that

The first two direct cognitions, those of the sense perceptions and the mental consciousness are taught as being the uncommon subjects of experiencing the reflections of emptiness, and the latter two direct cognitions, those of the yogin and self-awareness, are subjects of the view and path of definitive meaning.⁵⁷

Now Nya dbon argues that if the reflections of emptiness were the mistaken appearances of a beginner, they must be either the mistaken relative truth or the correct relative truth. In order to refute the first option, Nya dbon quotes and comments on *Sekoddeśa* vv. 28-29 and 33, as well as the original *Kālacakratantra* (as quoted in the *Vimalaprabhā*) and a passage from the *Vimalaprabhā* on v. 1.2:

As for the (perception of and the) meditation on non-existent (“not existing as anything ultimately,” or “completely empty”) phenomena,⁵⁸ (this is a negating meditation, but) for yogins (of the ultimate profound completion stage such a negative) meditation is not (acceptable), inasmuch as the reflections of emptiness⁵⁹ (smoke and the other luminous signs) (in the intermediate space during day and night yoga) are seen without having imagined them (conceptually fabricated them in a visualizing meditation). (The reflections of emptiness which appear) to the mind (of such a yogin) are neither a

⁵⁶ *Dus 'khor dka' gnas* 391₁₃₋₁₇: 'phags pa'i lha yis bshad pa las ni | mngon sum gnyis dang rjes su dpag pa sngags la tshad mar bkag pa yin pas | de dang 'gal zhes na | mi 'gal te | gzhung de ni phal pa rnams kyis tshur rol mthong ba'i dus kyi dbang po'i shes pa'i yul yin pa nyid du nges la | byang chub sems dpa'i dgongs pa ni | rnal 'byor pa lam la zhugs pa slob bzhin pa'i mngon sum du 'gyur pa la gsungs te |. I thank Filippo Brambilla for this reference.

⁵⁷ “*Dus 'khor dka' gnas*” 391₆₋₉: [... dbang po'i mngon sum dang | yid kyi mngon sum dang | rnal 'byor gyi mngon sum dang | rang rig pa'i mngon sum mo | zhes gsungs pas |] snga ma gnyis ni stong pa nyid kyi gzugs kyi yul can thun mong ma yin pa nyid du ston la | phyi ma gnyis ni nges don gyi lta ba dang lam gyi yul can no |.

⁵⁸ Nya dbon has *chos* for *bimba*, which means that he does not take *ābhāve bimbe* in the sense of reflections of emptiness, as Nāropa does in his commentary. See SUT 142₂₃: “Having through withdrawal seen in the cloudless sky the non-existent (in the sense of being like a dream, an illusion and the like) reflections...” (*abhāve nirabhre gagane svapnamāyādisadṛṣe bimbe pratyāhāreṇa dṛṣṭe*).

⁵⁹ Tib. *stong* in the sense *stong gzugs*.

(conditioned) entity nor a non-entity (not existing, in the sense of a mere negation).⁶⁰ SU 28

It should be noted that Nya dbon reads here “non-existent phenomena” (*med pa'i chos*) for *abhāve bimbe*, which means that he does not take *abhāve bimbe* in the sense of non-existent reflections, i.e., the visions of *śaḍaṅgayoga*, as Nāropa does in his commentary,⁶¹ but as an analytical meditation of negation. In this way, Nya dbon does not have to deal with the reflections being qualified as “non-existent,” which would not fit his agenda of proving that the reflections are not mistaken appearances. The 'Od gsal rgyan continues with *Sekoddeśa*, v. 29:

Just as (for example) a maiden (clearly) sees in a divinatory mirror a magical reflection that has arisen from nothing (not arisen at all, the reflection of a non-physical thief); the yogin of true reality (directly) sees in the (intermediate) space (reflections of emptiness of aspects of) past and future phenomena, as (, for example, the previously mentioned vision of a magical reflection).⁶² SU 29

If (a yogin of sense withdrawal etc. should) see real forms (only, entities such as mountains and houses), why does he not (directly) see his own face (intestines, etc.)? (For he should see them). But if (the yogin was to only directly) see unreal forms, why does (the yogin) not directly see a hare's horn, etc.? (For he should see them).⁶³ SU 33

⁶⁰ SU 133₁₉₋₂₀: *abhāve bimbe bhāvanā sā yogināṃ na bhāvanā | bhāvo 'bhāvo na cittasya bimbe 'kalpitadarśanāt ||* 'Od gsal rgyan 62-7: (*don dam par ci yang med do zhes sam thams cad stong pa'o zhes sogs med pa'i chos la (dmigs nas) sgom pa (de) ni || (chad sgom yin gyi rdzogs rim zab mo mthar thug gi) rnal 'byor (pa) rnams (ni) de ('dra'i chad) bsgom ('thad pa) min || (nyin mtshan gyi rnal 'byor gyis bar snang) stong par (lta stangs bcas te bsgoms pas rtog pas ma bzos shing) ma brtags (pa'i du sogs 'od gsal) mthong ba'i phyir (na de 'dra'i rnal 'byor gyi) || sems la (snang ba'i stong gzugs de rnams 'dus byas kyi) dngos (po) dang (dngos med de bkag tsam gyi) dngos med (gang yang) min (no) |*

⁶¹ See SUṬ 142₂₃ quoted above.

⁶² SU 134₁₋₂: *pratīsenām ivādarśe paśyēt kumāry avastujām | tathātītānāgataṃ dharmam yogya ambare 'py paśyati ||* 'Od gsal rgyan, 67-11: *ji ltar (de dper na) me long pra la (em., text las) ni || dngos med las skyes (zhes pa ni gtan nas ma skyes zhes pa'i don de rdzas su med pa'i rkun po'i gzugs brnyan) bu mo (gzhon nu ma)s (gsal bar) mthong || (pa bzhin du bar snang gi nam) mkha' la de (kho na) nyid kyi rnal 'byor pas || 'das dang ma 'ongs (kyi) chos (kyi rnam pa'i stong gzugs rnams dper sngar smos pa'i pra la mthong ba) de bzhin || (du mngon sum du mthong ngo)^a zhes pa dang |*

^a The closing bracket should be moved back two syllables, because Tib. *mthong ngo* is part of the root text.

⁶³ SU 134₉₋₁₀: *yadi paśyati sadrūpaṃ svamukhaṃ kiṃ na paśyati | yadi paśyaty asadrūpaṃ śaśaṅgamaṃ katham na ca ||* 'Od gsal rgyan 611-14: *gal te (sor sdud sogs kyi rnal 'byor pas ri khang*

As the glosses restrict the negation of seeing something real to ordinary mundane entities, the real existence of extraordinary reflections is not ruled out. Nya dbon further adduces the following line from the original *Kālacakratāntra*, as quoted in the *Vimalaprabhā* on 4.110:

(The luminous reflection directly seen by the yogin of) withdrawal is Mahāmudrā. She⁶⁴ is the defining characteristic (nature) of the empty (the true nature pervading everything unanimated and animated). (She is like unconditioned) space.⁶⁵

These quotations refute that the reflections of emptiness are a mistaken relative truth. What follows are quotations dealing with the ontological status of the reflections. The first quote is from the *Vimalaprabhā* on v. 1.2:

(The luminous reflections of emptiness) are not entirely non-existent (or nothing at all), because the yogin (directly) experiences them for himself.⁶⁶

Next come two lines from *Vimalaprabhā* on v. 1.1, which are shortly after the above-mentioned crucial *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* verse 1.17, which supposedly establishes that the *Vimalaprabhā* presupposes a *rang stong* view:

Here, again, the reflections have a nature that is emptiness and compassion—that is, the (primordially) pure (*dharmatā*-)mind (as taught in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*: “A natural luminosity consisting of another mind, different from the mind as *dharmatā* is not taught”). This is like the magical reflection seen by a maiden, which does not have the defining characteristic of matter (consisting of external atoms), because they do not consist of (external)

khyim sogs ltar dngos por yod pa'i gzugs (kho na) mthong (dgos) na || bdag gi gdong pa (dang nang khrol sogs) ces (mngon sum du) mi mthong || (ste mthong dgos par 'gyur ro) 'on te (cir yang grub pa) med pa'i gzugs (kho na rnal 'byor pas mngon sum du) mthong (dgos) na || ri bong rwa sogs (rnal 'byor pas mngon sum du) ji ltar (mthong pa) min || (te mthong dgos par 'gyur ro ||) zhes so |

⁶⁴ I.e., Mahāmudrā is here Viśvamātr.

⁶⁵ VP, vol. 2, 205₉: *pratyāhāre mahāmudrā ākāṣe śūnyalakṣaṇam* |. The Tibetan does not have locative particles for *pratyāhāre* and *ākāṣe*. 'Od gsal rgyan, 6₁₅₋₁₇: so sor sdud pa ('i rnal 'byor gyis mngon sum du mthong ba'i 'od gsal gyi gzugs ni) phyag rgya che || (-n mo ste de yang 'dus ma byas) nam mkha' (ltar brtan g.yo kun la khyab pa'i chos nyid) stong pa'i (rang bzhin) mtshan nyid do.

⁶⁶ VP, vol. 1, 47₂₃: *na sarvābhāva iti yogisvasaṃvedyatvāt* |. 'Od gsal rgyan, 6₁₈₋₁₉: ('od gsal stong gzugs) thams cad dngos po med pa ('am cang med) ni ma yin te | rnal 'byor pas (mngon sum du so so) rang rig pa nyid kyi phyr ro |.

atoms. (They are the reflections seen by the eye of flesh, and so forth, but) they do not have the defining characteristic of non-matter because reflections of emptiness⁶⁷ exist.⁶⁸

In reading the *dharmatā*-mind of *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* 13.9cd into the pure mind (and thus the reflections of emptiness), and changing the final causal clause from “because they are found in the empty” to “because reflections of emptiness exist,” Nya dbon wants us to understand that the reflections of emptiness pertain to, and indeed are, the existing *dharmatā*, and thus the ultimate truth of the Yogācāra system.

Two further quotes from the *Vimalaprabhā* equate the reflections of emptiness with technical terms that can be related to the ultimate:

Here, so that yogins (when in profound meditative equipoise) destroy (concepts that)⁶⁹ cling to (two) sides, *vajrayoga* is [explained as] being without (clear-cut) partiality (towards either means or insight). It is neither permanent nor annihilated. [Its nature] transcends mundane examples (that could illustrate how it is). Like a magical reflection in a maiden’s mirror, it is something in which intellectual assessments, (thoughts) of (clinging to) existence and non-existence, are completely abandoned. It is not posited by one’s own mind, but directly perceived. It is an object of belief, possesses all [supreme] aspects, and arises from (connecting with yogic gazing into) space. (Even though one looks at it, “arisen from space” is not taught in the sense of having arisen from causes and conditions). It is the wholly good (in the beginning, middle, and end) and possesses the full cognitive power (of virtuous *dharmatā*. Being completely aware of self and other, according to the teaching “Who has all awareness of self and other,”⁷⁰ it possesses full

⁶⁷ The Sanskrit and all the Tibetan canonical versions of the *Vimalaprabhā* read: “because they are found in empti[ness]” (*śūnye vidyamānatvāt; stong pa la yod pa’i phyir*). By contrast, all the available extracanonical Jo nang manuscripts read “because reflections of emptiness exist” (*stong pa’i gzugs yod pa’i phyir ro*).

⁶⁸ VP, vol. 1, 43₂₄₋₂₅: *iha punaḥ śūnyatākaruṇātmakasya bimbasya viśuddhacittasya kumārikāpratisenopamasya na rūpalakṣaṇam paramāṇor abhāvāt; nārūpalakṣaṇam, śūnye vidyamānatvāt* | ‘*Od gsal rgyan*, 6₂₀₋₇₁: ‘*dir yang* | *stong pa nyid dang rnying rje’i bdag nyid kyi gzugs* | (*mdo sde rgyan du* | *chos nyid sems las gzhan pa’i sems gzhan ni* | | ‘*od gsal ma yin rang bzhin la brjod do* | | *zhes gsungs pa ltar gdod nas*) *rnam par dag pa’i (chos nyid kyi) sems gzhon nu mas pra phab pa lta bu ni* | (*phyi rol kyi rdul phran ’dus pa’i*) *gzugs kyi mtshan nyid ma yin te* | (*phyi’i rdul phra rab med pa’i phyir ro*) | | (*sha’i mig sogs kyi mthong rung gi gzugs yin gyi*) *gzugs med pa’i mtshan nyid ma yin te* | *stong pa’i gzugs yod pa’i phyir ro*.

⁶⁹ The Sanskrit has “all” instead of the gloss, i.e., all clinging.

⁷⁰ See *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* (MNS 111) 10.13a: *ātmavitparavitsarvaḥ*. According to Candragomin, this refers to the *vajra*-like *samādhi*. See Wayman 2006:111.

cognitive power). It abides within the nature (of the mind as the essence or *dharmatā*) of all sentient beings. It is the joy co-emergent (in sentient beings without beginning. From beginningless time, it has been co-emergent with the mind of sentient beings as its nature or *dharmatā* that does not change. Ever since there has been the mind of sentient beings, its nature, which is its *dharmatā*, has not changed). [It⁷¹ is beyond logical reasoning and example. An example of it would be something simultaneously existent and non-existent, because [its nature] is heterogeneous.]⁷²

What is taught as ultimate truth is beyond the world. It is [taught] in order that [one may] realize the accomplishment of transmundane Mahāmudrā replete with all supreme aspects. It is direct, the radiance of yogins' own minds, and manifests in the sky like a magical reflection [seen] by a maiden in a mirror, or the like. It bestows the desired fruit, which is the mind of wisdom whose bliss is unchanging.⁷³

⁷¹ The Sanskrit syntax requires including the last two sentences in square brackets, which are not quoted by Nya dbon. The Tibetan sentence remains intact without quoting them.

⁷² VP on 1.1 (VP, vol. 1, 43₁₀₋₁₄): *ihāsya vajrayogasya niranvayasya śāśvatocchedavarjitasya lokopamām atikrāntasyāstināstibuddhiparityaktasya kumārikāyā ādarśapratisenāvat svacittā-kalpitasya pratyakṣadr̥ṣṭasya pratyayārthasya sarvākārasya gaganodbhavasya samantabhadrasya sarvendriyasya sarvasattvātmani sthitasya sahaḥjānandasya* ^{(a)hetudr̥ṣṭānta-vivarjitasya bhāvābhāvaikatavavaidharmyād dr̥ṣṭānto bhavati}^a *sarvapakṣagrahavināśāya yoginām.* ^a Not translated

'Od gsal rgyan, 7₁₋₁₂: 'dir rnal 'byor pa rnam kyī (mnyam bzhaḡ zab mo'i skabs su) phyogs (gnyis) su 'dzin pa ('i rnam rtog) nyams par bya ba 'i slad du | rdo rje 'i rnal 'byor (thabs sam shes rab kyī) ris (so sor chad pa) med pa | rtag pa dang chad pa spangs pa | (ji lta ba bzhin mtshon nus pa 'i) 'jig rten pa 'i dpe las 'das pa | yod pa dang med (par 'dzin) pa 'i (rnam rtog gi) blo yongs su spangs pa | gzhon nu mas me long la pra phab pa bzhin rang gi sems kyis ma brtags pa mngon sum du mthong ba | yid ches pa 'i don can | rnam pa thams cad pa | nam mkha' (la lta stangs bcas pa) las byung ba (ste mthong ba 'i yang na nam mkha' las byung zhes pa rgyu rkyen las ma skyes zhes ston pa 'o) | (thog mtha' bar) kun tu bzang po (te dge ba chos nyid kyī) | dbang po thams cad pa ('am bdag rig gzhan rig thams cad pa zhes gsungs pa ltar rang gzhan thams cad rig pas dbang po thams cad pa 'o) | sems can thams cad kyī (sems kyī) bdag nyid (te rang bzhin nam chos nyid) | du gnas pa (thog ma med pa nas sems can rnam dang) | lhan cig skyes (te sems can gyī sems nam grub dus na de 'i chos nyid du grub pa 'i rang bzhin du 'gyur med) pa 'i dga' ba ('am bde ba 'o) zhes dang |.

⁷³ VP on 1.1 (VP, vol. 1, 42₂₂₋₂₅): *yaḥ paramārthasatyena deśitaḥ, sa lokottarasarvākāra-varopeta-mahāmudrāsiddhisādhanāya svacittaparikalpanādharma-rahitaḥ pratyakṣaḥ svacittapratibhāso yoginām gagane pratibhāsate kumārikāyā ādarśādaḥ pratisenāvad iti | iṣṭārthaphaladaḥ phalam akṣarasukhaṃ jñānacittam |.* 'Od gsal rgyan, 7₁₂₋₁₇. The Tibetan does not have glosses and does not differ from the Sanskrit.

Nya dbon's concluding statement—"This and other very explicit passages invalidate..."⁷⁴—logically refers to the previously stated positions that the reflections of emptiness are either mistaken or correct relative truth. The last quote in particular directly equates the reflections with ultimate truth. After more quotations from Raviśrījñāna's *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, Nāropa's *Sekoddeśaṭkā*, and the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*, Nya dbon asks again, how the reflections of emptiness could be mistaken appearances:

If this is so, are [the reflections of emptiness] by their nature the mistaken consciousness of the person producing the appearances? Or are they something completely non-existent such as two moons appearing to a mistaken consciousness? Or do aspects with another quality (different from these two) appear to the [yogin]? This must be analyzed. The first two are not acceptable.⁷⁵

After a few quotations in support of excluding the first two positions, which are largely similar in content to the ones already adduced above, Nya dbon discusses the third option. This other quality, then, is either *dharmatā*, in which case smoke and the rest are an essential part of the ultimate and thus not a mistaken appearance, or else a quality arising as an aspect of the perceiving intellect, but this latter has been already refuted above.⁷⁶ Nya dbon quotes again Nāropa's *Sekoddeśaṭkā* in support:

⁷⁴ 'Od gsal rgyan, 7₁₇₋₁₈: zhes sogs ches gsal bar gsungs pas gnod do |.

⁷⁵ 'Od gsal rgyan, 8₁₁₋₁₃: yang de lta na | snang mkhan gyi 'khrul shes nyid kyi bdag nyid yin nam | 'khrul shes de la snang ba'i zla gnyis lta bu gtan med gcig yin nam ci | (de gnyis gang yang ma yin pa'i) chos gzhan zhig gi rnam pa de la snang ba yin brtag dgos so || dang po gnyis ka mi 'thad de |.

⁷⁶ 'Od gsal rgyan, 9₆₋₁₂: "Or if it is the third reasoning, tell me [how] smoke and the rest are the aspects of which other quality? If you say they are the aspects of *dharmatā*, then they are either aspects like in their presentation of being an essential part of this quality, or a presentation of what has arisen as the aspects of that intellect itself, which manifests this quality. It must be one of them. In the first case, [the position] that smoke and the rest are mistaken appearances falters (because they are then taken to be an essential part of *dharmatā*). If it is as in the second, this stands immediately refuted by the previous [first case]. In brief, a beginner's yoga of withdrawal is supposedly a mistaken consciousness because the luminosity appearing to a beginner would be but ordinary mistaken appearance." (yang brtag pa gsum ltar na | du sogs de chos gzhan gang gi rnam pa yin smos shig | chos nyid kyi rnam pa yin no zhe na | chos de'i cha shas la de'i rnam par bzhas pa lta bu'i rnam pa yin nam | chos de snang mkhan gyi blo de nyid de'i rnam par skyes pa la de'i rnam par bzhas pa gang rung gcig yin dgos la | dang po ltar na du sogs 'khrul snang yin pa nyams so || (chos nyid kyi char khas blangs pa'i phyr ro ||) gnyis pa ltar na | gong de ma thag par bkag zin to || mdor na las dang po pa'i sor sdud kyi rnal 'byor de log pa'i shes par 'gyur te | kho la snang ba'i 'od gsal de tha mal gyi 'khrul snang kho na yin pa'i phyr |).

While entities of the past and so forth, which consist of aggregated atoms do not exist, something that is characterized by appearance does exist.⁷⁷ The world, for example, sees objects (such as horses and elephants) even though they do not consist of real entities (of external horses, elephants and so forth). This is just like the case of illusions, dreams, and magic. It has been taught in the verse starting with “[Yet, even though] it does not exist.”⁷⁸ This arising of non-conceptual and unmistaken wisdom is replete with all aspects. Because it perfectly serves the purpose of beings, it is like a wishfulfilling jewel.⁷⁹

From this *Nya dbon* concludes:

This teaches in a straight forward way that the object exists ultimately, the subject being unmistaken wisdom.⁸⁰

The *'Od gsal rgyan* then continues with further quotations from Nāropa's commentary on *Sekoddeśa* vv. 32 and 27 (in this sequence). The latter covers nearly four pages (138-141) in Francesco Sferra's *Sekoddeśaṭīkā* edition. *Nya dbon* copies the passage starting with Nāropa's quote from *Prajñāpāramitā* (SUT 138₅) until the concluding remark after the twenty *dohā* verses, of which some are from Saraha (SUT 141₂₁). Whether this is what Nāropa intended or not, *Nya dbon* takes the reflections of emptiness in the same way as luminosity and the like, namely as positive description of an ultimate that lies beyond the relative truth of conceptual duality and the four extremes of the Madhyamaka tetralemma. To give a few examples of the quotes in this passage, Nāropa first adduces a list of *samādhis* from the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* to illustrate the *Sekoddeśa*'s (v. 27)

⁷⁷ *Nya dbon* has *don dam du* for *arthaḥ* and reads: “..., ultimately the luminous nature exists.”

⁷⁸ The verse continues: “The manifestation of a phenomenon is observed. It is like a wishfulfilling jewel, that fulfills the hopes of limitless beings.” SU 134₅₋₆: *asati dharminī hy eṣa dharmotpādaḥ pradṛśyate | cintāmaṇir ivānantasattvāsāparipūrakaḥ ||*.

⁷⁹ SUT 145₆₋₁₃: *vastuno 'nusandohātmakasyātītāder abhāvato 'rthaḥ pratibhāsalakṣaṇo 'sti | loka eva nirvastuko 'py artho dṛṣṭo yathā māyāsvapnendrajālam | amum evārtham āha — asatītyādi (SU 31) | sa ca nirvikalpakād abhrāntajñānotpādaḥ | sarvākārajagadarthasampādatvāc cintāmaṇir iva |*.

'Od gsal rgyan, 9₁₅₋₂₀: *dngos po rdul phran tshogs pa'i bdag nyid (du gyur pa'i) 'das pa la sogs pa'i dngos (por) med (cing) don dam du gsal ba'i bdag nyid yod pa | dper na 'jig rten pa nyid kyis (phyi rol kyis glang la sogs pa'i) dngos po med kyang (rta glang la sogs pa'i) don mthong ba sgyu ma rmi lam mig 'phrul bzhin no | don 'di nyid gsungs na med pa'i zhes pa la sogs pa'o || rnam par rtog pa dang bral zhing 'khrul pa med pa'i ye shes skye ba de yang rnam pa thams cad pa ste | 'gro ba'i don phun sum tshogs (em., text: 'tshogs) pa nyid kyis phyir yid bzhin gyi nor bu lta bu'o |*

⁸⁰ *'Od gsal rgyan*, 9₂₀₋₂₁: *zhes pas yul don dam du yod la yul can ma 'khrul ba'i ye shes dngos su gsungs pa'o |*

meditation on the reflections in emptiness. In a gloss on his quote of Nāropa, Nya dbon remarks:

The more than 120 [*samādhis*] mentioned are taught in terms of visual appearances, gazes like the *samādhi* that realizes the ultimate, and some are taught in terms of activity. All, however, are of the same category (“taste”) in that they are non-conceptual *samādhis* of the clear reflections of emptiness. This is the true intent of the Bodhisattva Trilogy and the great Nāropa.⁸¹

Nāgārjuna’s *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, v. 1, which Nāropa adduces without comment is taken as follows by Nya dbon:

They (yogins of withdrawal and the rest) whose (profound Prajñāpāramitā) state of mind (in non-conceptual meditative equipoise) has transcended existence and non-existence (and so forth—whatever one becomes attached to and grasps) and (thus) is without a basis (that one becomes attached and clings to)—those (in meditative equipoise) (need to) meditate (not by cultivating negating or conceptual meditation but) on the profound (i.e., transcending existence and nonexistence) meaning of characteristic signs (smoke and the rest), with a focus free of (clinging on luminous reflections of emptiness, wherever they may be, external [or] internal).⁸²

By contrast, the plain verse from the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* reads as follows:

They whose state of mind has transcended existence and non-existence
 And is without a base
 Meditate on the profound meaning of conditioned [existence] (*pratyaya*:
rkyen)

⁸¹ 'Od gsal rgyan, 10₁₃₋₁₆: (*brgya nyi shu lhag gsungs pa rnams phal cher mthong snang gi sgo nas dang | spyi gtsug lta ba'i ting nge 'dzin lta bu'i lta stangs dang | la la byed las kyi sgo nas bstan gyi | thams cad stong gzugs gsal ba'i rnam par mi rtog pa'i ting nge 'dzin du ro gcig par sems 'grel skor gsum dang nā ro chen po'i dgongs pa yang dag pa*).

⁸² 'Od gsal rgyan, 10₁₇₋₂₂: (*sor sdus sogs sher phyin zab mo'i rnal 'byor pa) gang rnams kyi (mnyam bzhag rnam par mi rtog pa'i) blo (de ni mngon par zhen nas bzung ba'i) rten (de yul) dang bral (ba'i phyr na) || yod (pa) dang med (pa sogs gang du'ang mngon par zhen nas 'dzin pa) las rnam par 'das || (shing yod pa dngos po dang med pa dngos med yin pa las rnam 'das pa'i) zab mo (stong gzugs 'od gsal de phyi nang sogs gang du'ang) dmigs (shing 'dzin pa) med pa'i mnyam bzhag) de rnams kyis || (du sogs) mtshan ma'i don ni (chad sgom dang rtog sgom sogs mi bsgom pa'i tshul gyis) rnam par bsgom || (par bya'o)*).

Without a focus/objectification.⁸³

Three of Nya dbon's most striking moves are (1) turning Madhyamaka meditation into a non-conceptual one; (2) reading the reflections of emptiness into Skt. *pratyaya* (Nya dbon must have followed the Tibetan of SUṬ, which reads *mtshan ma* instead of *rkyen*); and (3) splitting up Tib. *dmigs med* ("without a focus") into a focus on the reflections (*dmigs*), one without (*med*) clinging. This changes Nāgārjuna's apophatic approach into a cataphatic one. Yet, one could argue, deconstructing all misguided reifications with Madhyamaka reasoning, a tantric yogin with privileged direct access to emptiness thereby gains access to a transcendent ultimate of the sort positively described in Nāgārjuna's "Collection of Praises" (*bstod tshogs*).⁸⁴

Of particular interest is Nya dbon's comment on the second to last of the twenty *dohā* verses quoted by Nāropa:

When one is free from the concepts of the manifold—does not pay attention to them—

When the eyes are fixated on the intermediate space,

Then the tenfold path is clearly manifested.

All great yogis are attentive to this.⁸⁵

The third line in the Tibetan translation of Nāropa's commentary, which Nya dbon copied, differs:

Wondering whether they are the worlds of ten directions,⁸⁶

Nya dbon's gloss on the third line:

(With their eye of flesh, some beginner yogins see the reflections of emptiness, which are all aspects of the world in the ten directions) and **wondering whether they are the worlds in the ten directions** (for a subsequent knowledge gained by these visions). (In the extensive and middle Prajñāpāramitā, it has been said, "With their eye of flesh the great bodhisattvas see from a distance of a hundred *yojanas* the trichiliocosm." Likewise, beginner yogins, some with a special eye of flesh, see the reflections of emptiness and countless world realms. Even without supernatural knowledge,

⁸³ YṢ 4₁₋₂: *astināstiviyatikrāntā buddhir yeṣāṃ nirāśrayā | gambhīras tair nirālambaḥ pratyayārtho vibhāvyaṭe ||*

⁸⁴ See Mathes 1996:161.

⁸⁵ SUṬ 141₁₂₋₁₅: *vihaviappavivajjia cō antarāla jāi ṇaṇa kio | phud patihāsai dahavihamagga taḥim yoisara saalāi lagga ||*

⁸⁶ SUṬ 318₂₂: *phyogs bcu'i 'jig rten dag ni yin nam snyam |*

some yogins see in the beginning the reflections of emptiness with their eye of flesh. Once supernatural knowledge is attained, they see both types of forms, the reflections of emptiness and the many worlds and so forth, with their divine eye.⁸⁷

In other words, the relative is still seen by means of supernatural knowledge when the ultimate is realized. In this, Nya dbon differs from Dol po pa, who explains in the *Bden gnyis gsal ba'i nyi ma* that the relative no longer appears after the ultimate has become manifest.⁸⁸

Nya dbon then deals with the objection that the *dohā* songs do not address a beginner's encounter with the reflections of emptiness. Responding to that, Nya dbon quotes Nāropa's concluding remark after the twenty *dohās*:

Here, through the favour of the great master, I illustrated [my] understanding of the intermediate space for those who possess spiritual merit. The masters of yoga teach this in vajra songs with words about the relative and ultimate.⁸⁹

It should be noted that for Nāropa the intermediate space (*antarāla*) is the part of empti[ness], space (*sūnya ākāśe*), in which the reflections of emptiness manifest.⁹⁰ Nya dbon comments on Nāropa as follows:

This is when luminosity is explained starting with the signs of the first [yoga] branch of withdrawal. With regard to withdrawal, there is no distinction between the first branch of withdrawal of great *siddhas* and that of beginners. Not the slightest qualitative difference between the smoke, etc., of great

⁸⁷ 'Od gsal rgyan, 14₃₋₁₀: (*las dang po pa'i rnal 'byor pa 'ga' zhig gi sha'i mig gis phyogs bcu'i 'jig rten khams kyi rnam pa thams cad pa'i stong gzugs mthong pa la des drangs pa'i rjes shes kyi*) *phyogs bcu'i 'jig rten dag ni yin nam snyam* | (*pa 'byung zhing yum gyi mdo rgyas 'bring las | byang sems chen po'i sha'i mig gis dpag tshad brgya nas stong gsum gyi 'jig rten gyi khams mthong ba yod do* | | *zhes gsungs pa ltar las dang po pa'i rnal 'byor pas sha'i mig khyad par can 'ga' zhig gis stong gzugs dang phyogs bcu'i 'jig rten gyi khams dpag med mthong la | rnal 'byor pa 'ga' zhig gis dang por mngon shes med par sha'i mig gis stong gzugs mthong zhing mngon shes thob nas lha'i mig gis stong gzugs dang 'jig rten khams du ma sogs las gzugs gnyis ka mthong ngo* | ...).

⁸⁸ Mathes 1998:464.

⁸⁹ SUT 139₇₋₈: *ihāntarālāvagamo mahāguruprasādataḥ puṇyavatām udāhṛtaḥ | ayaṃ hi yogīśva-ravajragītitaḥ pracakṣyate samvṛtinirvṛtipadaiḥ* |.

⁹⁰ SUT 138₃₋₅: “Focused on the intermediate space, with half-opened eyes, one should meditate on the reflection, the manifold reflection. This dream-like reflection in the empty space beyond perceived and perceiver is not followed and [belongs to the sphere of] yogic direct cognition.” (*anantarālāvalambitayā 'rddonmīlitalocanābhyāṃ sūnya ākāśe grāhyagrāharahite yan nānukalpitaṃ svapnavad bimbaṃ yogipratyakṣaṃ tad bimbaṃ viśvabimbaṃ bhāvayed* ...).

siddhas and the smoke, etc., of beginners has been taught. In the same way, there is no qualitative difference between *dharmatā* directly seen by a beginner and *dharmatā* directly seen by a buddha.⁹¹

The Reflections of Emptiness Are Not the Truth of the Path

In the following relatively short paragraph Nya dbon confronts the idea that the reflections of emptiness belong to the path:

(The Dharma master called Bla ma Dam pa bsod nams, and others,) among them a number of (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga* practitioners), agree that smoke and the rest are the truth of the path because they are natural appearances of the perceiving intellect, and these are the truth of the path.⁹²

In his rejoinder, Nya dbon first leads us to Nāropa's commentary on *Sekoddeśa*, v. 93, which is on the sequence of *karmamudrā*, *jñānamudrā*, and *mahāmudrā*:

I do not see how this works, as Nāropa says: “From the word *ādi* follows [the notion] that through the perception of the reflections of smoke and the rest— i.e., the *dharmamudrā*, which is prior to *mahāmudrā*—[the subtle defilements are destroyed...],”⁹³ and “through familiarization with the subsequent *mahāmudrā*, the so-called manifold reflection, [the most subtle hindrances together with their imprints are uprooted...].”⁹⁴ Here, she, i.e., Mahāmudrā, [is mentioned] on the occasion of explaining the *dharmadhātu* itself, which is replete with all supreme aspects.⁹⁵

⁹¹ 'Od gsal rgyan, 14₂₃-15₆: *yan lag dang po so sor sdud kyi rtags nas brtsams te 'od gsal 'chad pa'i skabs yin la | so sor sdud la grub chen rnam kyi dang po so sor sdud kyi yan lag dang | las dang po pa'i dang po so sor sdud kyi yan lag ces so sor phye ba med cing | las dang po pa'i du sogs dang grub chen gyi du sogs rnam ngo bo bzang ngan cung zad kyang med cing ma gsungs so || dper na sa dang po pas mngon sum du mthong ba'i chos nyis dang | sangs rgyas kyis mngon sum du gzigs pa'i chos nyid kyi ngo bo la bzang ngan gyi khyad par med pa bzhin no |*

⁹² 'Od gsal rgyan, 16₂₃-17₂: (*chos rje bla ma dam pa bsod nams kyi mtshan can dang | gzhan*) yang (*sbyor drug pa*) kha cig du sogs de rnam las bden yin te | mthong mkhan gyi blo'i rang snang yin la | de lam bden yin pa'i phyir |

⁹³ SUT 177₁₂₋₁₃: *ādīśabdān mahāmudrāyāḥ pūrvarūpadhūmādibimbadharmamudrālambena [mṛḍukleśakṣayād ...]* . The Tibetan translation of the text in brackets was not quoted by Nya dbon.

⁹⁴ SUT 177₁₃₋₁₄: *paścādrūpaviśvabimbākhyamahāmudrābhyāsenā [mṛḍumṛdusavāsanāvaraṇāpācayād ...]* . The Tibetan translation of the text in brackets was not quoted by Nya dbon.

⁹⁵ 'Od gsal rgyan, 17₃₋₆: *thad par ma mthong ste | rje nā ro pas | dang po'i sgra las phyag rgya chen mo'i gzugs snga ma du ba la sogs pa'i gzugs chos kyi phyag rgya'i dmigs pa yis | zhes sogs*

In its anthropomorphic form, *mahāmudrā* is Viśvamāṭṛ, the consort of Kālacakra. She, and thus the *dharmadhātu*, is replete with all aspects belonging to the ultimate. Nya dbon further underlines this with a sentence from the original *Kālacakrantra*, the *Ādibuddha* (as quoted in the *Vimalaprabhā* on v. 4.110):

In withdrawal there is Mahāmudrā, who is the defining characteristic of the [reflection of] empti[ness] in space.⁹⁶

Based on similar passages from the *Vimalaprabhā*, the *Sekoddeśaṭīkā*, and the *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, Nya dbon concludes:

Since these objects are thus explained as *dharmatā* (as the genuine *dharmadhātu*), it is very clearly established that they are not the truth of the path.⁹⁷

The Five Eyes Perceiving the Reflections of Emptiness Are Not the Truth of Cessation

Once the reflections of emptiness are accepted as ultimate truth that exists inherently (as maintained by the Jo nang pas), the question arises whether the perceiving subject of the vision also belongs to the truth of cessation (which amounts to the ultimate in this context here) or not. The refutation of Jo nang *gzhan stong* by the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554) mainly consists in showing that neither of these options is tenable. In the case of belonging to the ultimate, one ends up maintaining non-Buddhist positions,⁹⁸ and in the second case of not belonging, a

dang | gzugs phyi ma sna tshogs gzugs ces bya ba phyag rgya chen po goms pa yis | zhes gsungs la | 'dir phyag rgya chen mo yang rnam kun mchog ldan gyi chos dbyings nyid la 'chad pa'i skabs so |.

⁹⁶ VP, vol. 2, 205₁₉: *pratyāhāre mahāmudrā ākāṣe śūnyalakṣaṇam |.*

⁹⁷ 'Od gsal rgyan, 17₂₀₋₂₂: *de ltar yul de dag chos nyid du (dam chos dbyings su) bshad pas de dag lam bden min par ches gsal bar grub po |.*

⁹⁸ “Grub mtha' smra ba'i bzhi'i rtse mo,” 360₄₋₆: “If the ultimate truth is realized by an ultimate self-arisen being by way of a self-arisen ultimate, that does not depend on the realization of relative truth. In that case, if you assert [the realization of the ultimate] in line with the tenets of those maintaining a permanent self, namely that according to non-Buddhists a permanent self-arisen being realizes it through Vedic (*rigs byed?*) means of cognition arising [in it] by itself, or else that [according to] the Vaiśeṣikas a produced being does not realize it (*gal te don dam bden pa de don dam pa'i rang byung skyes bus don dam bden pa de rang byung gi tshul rtogs pa de kun rdzob kyi bden pa rtogs pa de la mi ltos so | de lta na ni phyi rol pas rtag pa rang byung skyes bus rang byung gi rigs byed tshad mas rtogs kyi de lta ma yin pa'i bye brag pa skyes bu byas*

realization of the ultimate is considered impossible because the realizing subject of the relative truth and the independent ultimate cannot enter into a relationship of support (*rten*) and supported (*brten*).⁹⁹ In other words, an inherent existence on the part of the object would exclude any form of dependence, even conceptual ones.¹⁰⁰

Nya dbon rules out the first possibility and opts for the second, starting the discussion with an objection to the position maintained by fellow Jo nang pas, namely that the subject part of the vision belongs to the ultimate:

(The great sons of the great omniscient dharma master: Bla ma Kun spangs chos grags pa, Bla ma Sa bzang lo tsā ba, Bla ma Jo nang Lo tsā ba, and so forth) say that since *dharmatā*-smoke and the remaining signs are seen through the five types of eyes starting with *dharmatā*-eye of flesh, both the object and subject parts of smoke, etc. are only *dharmatā*, the truth of cessation. This is true since based on the statement, “With superior (*gzhan*) eyes one sees superior (*gzhan*) forms,”¹⁰¹ what is [here] called *gzhan* is the ultimate reality of *dharmatā*.¹⁰²

Nya dbon replies:

This obviously does not make sense. The five types of eyes explained here would not arise gradually, given that *dharmatā* is [unchangeable] suchness.¹⁰³

pa can gyis mi rtogs zhes (em., text: *shes*) *rtag bdag smra sogs kyi rnam gzhas ji lta ba khyed cag 'dod na...*

⁹⁹ “Grub mtha’ smra ba’i bzhi’i rtse mo,” 359₆-360₂: “If within the ultimate or relative truths the independent existence of anything was possible, nobody at all could realize the ultimate truth. Without the support of a subject on the relative level (which is not needed when the ultimate exists independently), the ultimate *dharmatā* could not be realized. This is because the supported *dharmatā* cannot be fully realized without having secured a support on the relative level (*don dam bden pa kun rdzob kyi bden nyid las rang dbang du grub pa’i chos shig yod srid na don dam pa yi bden pa gang de gang zag sus kyang rtogs par mi nus te chos can kun rdzob la ni mi rten par chos nyid don dam pa’i don rtogs par mi ’gyur pa ste | rten kun rdzob par ma bzung bar brten pa chos nyid la dmar ’jus byar mi rung ba’i phyir |*).

¹⁰⁰ See Westerhoff 2020:229.

¹⁰¹ Not identified, but SU 34ab (SU 134₁₁) is similar: “She sees neither with the eyes of others, nor with her own eyes.” (*na paśyaty anyacakṣurbhyāṃ svacakṣurbhyāṃ na paśyati*).

¹⁰² ‘*Od gsal rgyan*, 17₂₃-18₅: (*chos rje kun mkhyen chen po’i bu chen | bla ma kun spangs chos grags pa | bla ma sa bzang lo tsā* (em., text: *tstsha*) *ba | bla ma jo nang lo tsā* (em., text: *tstsha*) *ba sogs*) *gzhan dag ni | chos nyid kyi sha’i mig la sogs pa spyang lngas chos nyid kyi du sogs mthong bas | du sogs kyi yul yul can gnyis ka chos nyid ’gog pa’i bden pa kho na yin te | mig gzhan gyis gzugs gzhan mthong zhes sogs gsungs pas | gzhan zhes pa chos nyid don dam pa de kho na la zer ba’i phyir ces so |*

¹⁰³ ‘*Od gsal rgyan*, 18₅₋₆: *mi rigs par mngon te | skabs ’dir bshad pa’i spyang lnga po de rim gyis skye ba min par ’gyur te | chos nyid de bzhin nyid yin pa’i phyir |*

In support of his rejoinder, Nya dbon quotes the description of the five eyes of a Tathāgata in Nāropa's commentary on *Sekoddeśa*, v. 28:

Here, at first, the beginner yogin (who knows others' minds and so forth) sees the variegated reflections¹⁰⁴ (luminous reflections of emptiness) with the eye of flesh, without (any) supernatural cognition. Then, within the range of supernatural cognition (the first such cognition attained among any of the five), he sees (the luminous reflections of emptiness) with the divine eye. After that, he sees with the buddha eye, within the range (of having attained a particular bliss beyond vibration) of being free from the passions (of copulation, craving for the bliss of vibration). Within the range of (noble) bodhisattvas he sees with the eye of insight; and then after that with the eye of wisdom he sees within the range of a perfect buddha, free from any remaining [limitations of range].¹⁰⁵

Referring to Paiṇḍapātika's *Kālacakraḡarbhālaṃkārasādhana* and his lama forefathers Rwa and 'Bro, Nya dbon insists that these five eyes, of flesh and the rest, arise gradually. They are conditioned and achieved through yoga practice. If the eye of flesh which sees smoke and the other luminous signs were the unconditioned truth of cessation, even animals would have these visions:

And that they arise gradually was also taught by Paiṇḍapātika (in his *Kālacakraḡarbhālaṃkārasādhana*). The lama forefathers (of Rwa and 'Bro) maintain this. Conditioned eyes of flesh are not at all possible [then], for (as you maintain) the ordinary beginner's eye of flesh, which sees smoke etc. is the truth of cessation, and [your] reasoning that any eye of flesh is the unconditioned truth of cessation applies equally in each and every case. Moreover, between [on the one hand] beginners who see luminous smoke and,

¹⁰⁴ The same passage in SUT 142₁₄ has *viśvabimba* instead of *viśva*.

¹⁰⁵ VP, vol. 2, 249₂₅-250₁: *atra prathamam māṃsacakṣuṣā yogī ādikarmiko viśvam paśyaty abhijñābhir vinā | tato divyacakṣuṣā paśyaty abhijñāvidhivaśāt | tato buddhacakṣuṣā paśyati vītarāgāvadhivaśataḥ tataḥ | prajñācakṣuṣā paśyati bodhisattvādvadhivaśataḥ | tato jñānacakṣuṣā paśyati samyaksambodhāvadhicittavaśāt sarvopadhivinirmukta iti.*

'Od gsal rgyan, 18₁₀₋₁₈: 'dir dang por (so sor sdud kyi) las dang po pa'i rnal 'byor pa (gzhan sems shes pa sogs kyi)s | mngon par shes pa (gang yang) med pa ('i ba)r (la) sha'i mig gis ('od gsal stong gzugs) sna tshogs mthong ngo || de('i rjes) nas mngon par shes pa (dang po lnga char ram gang rung thob pa)'i mtshams kyi dbang gis lha'i mig gis ('od gsal stong gzugs) mthong ngo || de nas ('khrig pa'i) chags pa ('dzag bde la sred pa) dang bral ba ('dzin pa thob nas 'dzag med kyi bde ba khyad par can thob pa)'i mtshams kyi dbang gis sangs rgyas kyi spyang gyis gzigs so | de nas byang chub sems dpa(' phags pa)'i mtshams kyi dbang gis shes rab kyi spyang gyis gzigs so || de nas yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi mtshams kyi thugs kyi dbang gis ye shes kyi spyang gyis gzigs | lhag ma kun las grol zhing || zhes so |.

[on the other], dogs, pigs, and so forth, there would be no difference in terms of possessing and not possessing the wisdom of directly seeing *dharmatā* anew, because for [the opponents], a conditioned state of mind that directly sees *dharmatā* anew would not (as you claim) exist, and their *dharmatā*-eyes of flesh, etc., would always see *dharmatā*- smoke, etc.¹⁰⁶

The Four Types of Direct Valid Cognition, The Five Eyes, and *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga*

The *'Od gsal rgyan* relates the four tantric forms of direct valid cognition to the six branches of yoga (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) in Kālacakra. As already mentioned above, all four of the tantric direct cognitions correspond to yogic direct cognition. The vision of the reflections of emptiness through the eye of flesh, which is the tantric direct cognition through the sense faculties without external perception, corresponds to the branches of withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*) and meditation (*dhyāna*). The vision of the reflections through the divine eye, which is the tantric direct cognition through mental consciousness, corresponds to vital breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) and retention (*dhāraṇā*).¹⁰⁷

The remaining three of the five eyes of a Tathāgata are not related to the remaining two direct cognitions and two branches of yoga (i.e., *anusmṛti* and *samādhi*). However, it is tacitly assumed that the eyes of a buddha, of insight, and of wisdom are involved in the two last direct cognitions. According to Vajrapāṇi's *Hevajra* commentary, yogic direct cognition is in the third position and corresponds to the fifth branch of yoga, recollection (*anusmṛti*). The fourth direct cognition then is self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) together with the sixth branch of yoga, *samādhi*. According to Nya dbon's lama forefathers, the order of the last two direct cognitions is reversed:

[The first two direct cognitions] are the first two pairs of branches [of yoga]. As for the remaining [two], in Vajragarbha's [*Hevajra*] commentary yogic

¹⁰⁶ *'Od gsal rgyan*, 18₁₉-19₅: *rim gyis skye bar bram ze bsod snyoms pas | (mdzad pa'i snying po rgyan gyi sgrub thabs zhes pa dus 'khor phyogs kyi bstan bcos gcig las) kyang gsungs la | (rwa (em; text: ra) 'bro'i) bla ma gong ma rnams kyang bzhed do | gzhan yang 'dus byas kyi sha'i mig gtan mi srid par 'gyur te | so skye las dang po pa de'i du sogs mthong ba'i sha'i mig de 'dus ma byas 'gog bden yin (par khyed kyis khas blangs) cing | de ltar na sha'i mig gang yin thams cad 'gog bden 'dus ma byas su rgyu mtshan thams cad nas thams cad du mtshungs pa'i phyir ro | gzhan yang du sogs 'od gsal mthong ba'i las dang po pa de dang khyi phag la sogs pa de rnams | chos nyid mngon sum du gsar du mthong ba'i ye shes yod med khyad par med par 'gyur te | de rnams la chos nyid mngon sum du gsar du mthong ba'i 'dus byas kyi blo ni med (par khyed kyis khas blangs shing |) de rnams kyi chos nyid kyi sha la sogs pa'i mig gis ni chos nyid du sogs rtag tu mthong ba'i phyir |*

¹⁰⁷ See next quotation.

direct cognition comes first. The lama forefathers taught that the direct cognition of self-awareness comes first. It is clear that the former examples have the following intent: When one has attained direct cognition, is free from the desire (for the bliss of vibration), and has become a bodhisattva, at that time yogic direct cognition arises even in the tradition of the ordinary [Mahā]yāna. At that time, therefore, it is said that there is yogic direct cognition; (according to the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and its commentaries, there is yogic direct cognition on the path of preparation for the bodhisattvas. This is also maintained by the great Rngog Lo tsā ba, as orally transmitted). This is *anusmṛti*. Through the awareness that is due to experiencing the rising of inseparable bliss and emptiness in one's own continuum, comes the direct awareness of self-awareness. This is *samādhi*.¹⁰⁸

According to the lama forefathers, once one arrests the vital breath, *bodhicitta* becomes stable. Even though it descends, it is drawn back up without being released from the jewel. One's reflexive experience of the *samādhi* of bliss and emptiness is the direct cognition of self-awareness. This is *anusmṛti*. Since the wisdom of realizing inseparable bliss and emptiness and [inseparable] clarity and emptiness arises through meditation, it is classified as yogic direct cognition. This is *samādhi*.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

This overwhelming amount of citations from the literature clearly demonstrates that the reflections of emptiness support a positively described goal in Kālacakra. They are synonymous with Mahāmudrā, natural luminosity, and emptiness replete with all supreme aspects, just to name the most important ones. These visions emerge

¹⁰⁸ 'Od gsal rgyan, 29₁₉-30₄: yan lag dang po gnyis gnyis so | phyi ma la rdo rje snying 'grel du rnal 'byor mngon sum sngon la gsungs la | bla ma gong ma dag rang rig mngon sum sngon la gsungs te | snga ma dpe dag na 'di ltar dgongs par gsal te | mngon shes thob ('dzag bde'i) chags pa (mngon gyur) dang bral nas byang chub sems dpa' par gyur pas theg pa thun mong pa'i lugs kyis yang rnal 'byor mngon sum dus de'i tshe na skye bas | de'i tshe rnal 'byor mngon sum zhes bzhas (ste mngon rtogs rgyan rtsa 'grel ltar na byang chub sems dpa'i sbyor lam na'ang rnal 'byor mngon sum khas blangs dgos par yod cing rngog lo tsā (em; text: tssha) ba chen po yang bzhed de | ngag las shes so ||) rjes dran no | bde stong gnyis med du 'char ba de rang rgyud kyi myong ba'i sgo nas rig pas rang rig mngon sum ste ting nge 'dzin to |.

¹⁰⁹ 'Od gsal rgyan, 30₄₋₇: bla ma gong ma ltar na | srog rlung 'gags pas byang sems brtan te | phab kyang nor bu las phyir mi 'pho bar yar ldog cing | bde stong gi ting nge 'dzin rang gis myong bas rang rig mngon sum ste | rjes dran no | bde stong gsal stong gnyis med du rtogs pa'i ye shes bsgoms pa'i stobs kyis byung ba'i phyir rnal 'byor mngon sum du bzhas ste | ting nge 'dzin to ||.

spontaneously from space without the usual conceptual activity that accompanies ordinary perception. They cannot be cultivated through meditation. *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* only removes the hindrances from them to emerge. It is thus reasonable to follow Nya dbon and exclude the reflections of emptiness from the ordinary “mistaken appearances” of conceptually constructed duality. However, if one does not follow Haribhadra’s lead in relegating positive descriptions of buddhahood to the relative truth of a *dharmakāya* (which consists of wisdom) and one reserves its emptiness of an own nature (i.e., the *svābhāvikakāya*) for the ultimate, then one ends up with the well-known *gzhan stong* position of the Jo nang pas. For Dol po pa and his disciple Nya dbon Kun dga’ dpal, the *svābhāvikakāya* is the *dharmakāya*. Both of them are the emptiness, which is replete with all supreme aspects. And it is these aspects of the ultimate, which are disclosed when non-conceptual wisdom first has contact with *dharmatā*. Nya dbon convincingly argues that the eyes perceiving the reflections of emptiness are not the truth of cessation, but rather related to the non-conceptual wisdom cultivated on the path (even though the reflections themselves are not accepted as the truth of the path). One must conclude, therefore, that conditioned eyes see something unconditioned. Addressing the old difficult question about the relationship between *dharmas* and their *dharmatā*, Nya dbon offers a way how to move from the relative to the ultimate, how to use one’s clouded mind to be free of clouds. While this may pose a problem for some Mādhyamikas, it is perfectly fine for Yogācāras whose non-conceptual wisdom realizes luminous *dharmatā*.

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MSN *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti*

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YṢ *Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā*

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LKCT *Laghukālacakratantra*. See VP

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