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CARMEN MEINERT

1. Object of research

The 9th century treatise bSam gtan mig sgron [Torch of the Eye of Meditation], composed by gNub chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, is the only known work which discusses in detail the four Buddhist approaches prevalent during the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet, namely the discussion of (1) the gradual path, known as Rim gyis pa, (2) the sudden approach of Chinese Meditation Buddhism known as Cig car ba, (3) the Mahāyoga tradition, and (4) the rDzogs chen teachings. The author aims at distinguishing these four schools in the four main chapters of the bSam gtan mig sgron...
in order to clarify the misunderstandings about some of their apparent similarities\(^3\). His analysis is undertaken in the light of the soteriological idea of “non-conceptuality” (*rnam par mi rtog pa*). Therefore, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes quotes extensively from canonical scriptures and also from texts which are now only preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts in order to exemplify “non-conceptuality” according to the understanding of each particular school.

The Japanese scholar Ueyama Daishun already pointed out that in the eighth and ninth centuries in the Sino-Tibetan border regions, e.g. in Dunhuang as one geographical junction in the encounter between Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism, the *Āryāvīkālapraveśanāmadhāraṇī [The Supreme dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-Conceptuality]* has been widely known and was of particular regional importance in the spread of Buddhism from Central Asia to Tibet\(^4\). This short *sūtra* is a teaching attributed to the historical Buddha on how to give up clinging to discursive thoughts in order to enter into the “non-conceptual sphere” (*rnam par mi rtog pa’i dbyings*).

The *Āryāvīkālapraveśanāmadhāraṇī* and gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes likewise emphasise the importance of the understanding of “non-conceptuality”. In this initial approach the present paper shall open a window to develop our insight into the important but difficult *bSam gtan mig sgron* through a structural analysis which, however, does neither claim to be final nor complete. Thus, in order to analyse the structure of its’ four main chapters as a possible soteriological path in itself, that is from Rim gysis pa to Cig car ba, Mahāyoga, and finally to rDzogs chen\(^5\), this paper


\(^5\) In his unusual doxographical description ranging from Rim gysis pa to rDzogs chen gNubs seems to omit Anuyoga as a link between Mahāyoga and rDzogs chen intentionally even though he briefly distinguishes the essence of Anuyoga in regard to the other traditions in his concluding remarks (*cf. SM*: 490.6-491.3, 492.4-6, 493.5-6).
proposes to understand it through the fourfold correct practice as it is also taught in the Āryāvikaprapraveśanāmadhāraṇī. There, this fourfold practice is described in terms of: (1) “perception” (dmigs pa), (2) “non-perception” (mi dmigs pa), (3) “non-perception of perception” (dmigs pa mi dmigs pa) and (4) “perception of non-perception” (mi dmigs pa dmigs pa). Even though the Āryāvikaprapraveśanāmadhāraṇī is not the first and only place where a fourfold correct practice is discussed⁶, this paper claims that gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes was familiar with such a fourfold structure in arranging his treatise. Therefore, in the present paper the fourfold correct practice as it is also exemplified in the Āryāvikaprapraveśanāmadhāraṇī is used as such an example of that practice and as a bridge to demonstrate how to enter into the “non-conceptual sphere”. Having analysed the insight into “non-conceptuality” according to this fourfold practice, we shall compare it to the understanding of “non-conceptuality” in the four different schools as described in the bSam gtan mig sgron. This structural analysis of the bSam gtan mig sgron may shed new light on distinguishing the traditions of Rim giys pa, Cig car ba, Mahāyoga and rDzogs chen as distinct approaches on the Buddhist path. It will furthermore highlight some philosophical differences between the apparently similar foundations of Chinese Meditation Buddhism (Cig car ba) and Tibetan rDzogs chen.

2. The Āryāvikaprapraveśanāmadhāraṇī

2.1 Dunhuang manuscripts and canonical versions

The Āryāvikaprapraveśanāmadhāraṇī played an important role in the spread of Buddhism from Central Asia to Tibet. D. Ueyama even argues

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that the knowledge of Sanskrit originals and the philosophical discussions on how to enter into a “non-conceptual” state may have even motivated further translations of the text in the Sino-Tibetan border regions such as in Dunhuang. Within the corpus of Dunhuang manuscripts we find one Chinese and two Tibetan translations. The Dunhuang Chinese translation is entitled the *Ru wu fenbie zongchi jing* [The dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-Conceptuality] (jiang 23) preserved in the Beijing National Library, and S. tib. 51 and S. tib. 52 preserved in the British Library in London. Moreover, the Āryāvikalпapraveśanāmadhāraṇī was translated around the same time, that is the 9th century, into Tibetan by the prominent translators Jinamitra, Dānaśīla, and dKa’ ba dpal brtsegs. Their translation 'Phags pa rnam par mi rtog par 'jug pa zhes bya ba’i gzungs was then included in the *tripiṭaka*.

In Central China, however, the Āryāvikalпapraveśanāmadhāraṇī did not have the same lasting impact. The text was only translated in the eleventh century by Dānapāla (施輝, active in Kaifeng from 982 to roughly 1017) under the title *Foshuo ru wu fenbie famen jing* [The sūtra of Entering into the Dharma Gate of Non-Conceptuality taught by the

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7 Ueyama/Eastman/Broughton 1983: 35.
9 Ueyama/Eastman/Broughton 1983: 32-33. D. Ueyama (loc. cit.: 38-40) first published jiang 23; I am preparing an English translation of jiang 23 and a structural analysis of the text. The *Catalogue of the Tibetan Manuscripts from Tun-Huang in the India Office Library* by Louis de la Vallée Poussin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, 24-25) gives for the Tibetan versions S. tib 51 and 52 the title *rNam par mi rtog pa ’jug pa zhes bya ba’i gzungs*. D. Ueyama noted that he did not yet identify S. tib. 52. I was not able to look at the Tibetan originals myself so far.
Apparently, the Buddhist traditions in Central China were not aware of the regional importance of this text in the Sino-Tibetan border areas and Tibet. Furthermore, the Chinese translation in the Dunhuang manuscript *jiang 23* is very close to the Tibetan canonical version, whereas in the later Chinese translation Dānapāla either provided a rather free translation or used a different Sanskrit original. In our discussion we shall therefore pay attention to *jiang 23* and the Tibetan canonical version likewise.

### 2.2 Influence of the Text in Tibet

In the literary history of Buddhism in Tibet the contents of the *Āryāvīkālpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī* is a recurring theme. Shortly after the translation of the text into Tibetan, none other than the Indian scholar Kamalaśīla wrote a commentary to the *Āryāvīkālpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī*, namely the ‘Phags pa rnam par mi rtog par ’jug pa zhes bya ba’i gzungs kyi rgya cher ’grel pa [Extensive Commentary to The Supreme dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-Conceptuality].’ Kamalaśīla is said to have been the advocate of a gradual path towards awakening in the great debate of bSam yas that apparently took place in the late eighth century. Unlike his

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12 “’Phags pa rnam par mi rtog par ’jug pa zhes bya ba’i gzungs kyi rgya cher ’grel pa [Extensive Commentary to The Supreme dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-Conceptuality]”, by Kamalaśīla, in: *TT*. 105, no. 5501, f. 146b.6-174b.1.

opponents in the Chinese School of Meditation Buddhism who are said to have quoted the text to emphasise their subitist outlook, Kamalasila interpreted the text to support his view of a gradual path.

Apart from this immediate historical connection, the contents of the Aryavikalpapraveasanamadharanī is a central theme in a scholastic treatise of the yogacāra school, namely in the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga [Discrimination of dharma and dharmatā]15. A later commentary of Mi pham Rin po che to this yogacāra text explicitly states that the passage in the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga on “non-conceptual wisdom” (rnam par mi rtog pa’i ye shes) summarises systematically the essence of the Aryavikalpapraveasanamadharanī16. The Dharmadharmatāvibhāga as a scholastic work

debate ever actually took place, a symbolic meaning was attached to it in the course of Tibetan history that gave rise to discussions up to the present. Concerning the arguments of Heshang Moheyan and of Kamalaśīla cf. Dunwu dacheng zhengli jue [Ratification of the True Principle of the Mahāyāna Teachings of Sudden Awakening], P. chin. 4646 (copy edited by Rao Zongyi (Jao Tsung-I) in: “Wangxi Dunwu dacheng zhenglijue xushuo bing jiaoji [Preface and Notes to Wang Xi’s Dunwu dacheng zhengli jue (Ratification of the True principle of the Mahāyāna Teachings of Sudden Awakening)]”, in Chongji xuebao Chung Chi Journal 9/2 (1970), 127-148) and “sGom pa’i rim pa [Stages of Meditation (Third Bhāvanākrama)]”, by Kamalaśīla, translated by Prajñavarma and Ye shes sde, in: TT. 102, no; 5312; 60b.8-74b.4.

14 Cf. e.g. the Tibetan manuscript on Chinese Meditation Buddhism P. tib. 116: VIa, 153.2-3 and Vimalamitra’s Cig car ’jug pa rnam par mi rtog pa’i bsgom don [The Meaning of ‘Non-Conceptual’ Meditation in the School of Simultaneous Entry] (in: TT. 102, no. 5306, 11b.3).


16 Cf. Klaus-Dieter Mathes, Unterscheidung der Gegebenheiten von ihrem wahren Wesen (Dharmadharmatāvibhāga), Swisttal-Ödendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1996, 215. The commentary of Mi pham Rin po che consulted by K. Mathes was prepared on the basis of the block prints from Kathmandu and Rumtek. K. Mathes provides the facsimile in the annex. For the passage in question compare this facsimile: “Chos dang chos nyid mam par ’byed pa’i tshig le’ur byas pa’i ’grel pa ye shes snang ba rnam ’byed [Commentary to the Verses of the Discrimination of dharma and dharmatā. Discrimination of Primordial Wisdom andAppearances]”, by Mi pham Rin po che (1846-1912), in: Mathes 1996, annex, f. 16a.1. Moreover, K. Mathes (1996: 83-84 and 138-139) also provides a transliteration and translation of Vasubandhu’s commentary to the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga that in some cases even uses the same vocabulary on the two main topics of the Aryavikalpapraveasanamadharanī, that is on “abandoning marks” (mtshan ma spong ba)
is more systematic and also offers a more affordable vocabulary than the sūtric text. Therefore, we shall also pay attention to the relevant passages of the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga in our discussion of the fourfold correct practice as it is taught in the Āryāvikalpapraśeṇānāmādhāraṇī.

2.3 Fourfold correct practice

In demonstrating how to enter into the “non-conceptual sphere,” the Āryāvikalpapraśeṇānāmādhāraṇī focuses on two corresponding methods, namely the method of “abandoning marks” (mtshan ma yongs su spong ba) of the conceptual framework and the method of “correct practice” (yang dag par sbyor ba)\(^{17}\). The approach of “abandoning marks” is described in a fourfold way, namely as the abandoning of marks of (1) “own nature” (rang bzhin), (2) “antidotes” (gnyen po), (3) “thusness” (de kho na nyid), and (4) of “realisation” (thob pa)\(^{18}\). However, in the context of the present research we shall only focus on the method of

and on “correct practice” (yang dag pa’i sbyor ba). These equivalents will also be proved in my English translation of the Tibetan text of the Āryāvikalpapraśeṇānāmādhāraṇī. It will soon be published together with my translations of Kamalaśīla’s commentary and Vimalamitra’s Cig car ’jug pa rnam par mi rtog pa’i bsgom don in the anthology Studies on the Āryāvikalpapraśeṇānāmādhāraṇī in the Sino-Tibetan Series of Wisdom Publications in cooperation with Tam Chek-wing, Henry Shiu and Shen Weirong.

\(^{17}\) For the Tibetan cf. “’Phags pa rnam par mi rtog pa’i bsgom don” in: TT. 32, f. 2b.3-3b.1 (abandoning marks) and f. 5a.3-6b.2 (correct practice); for the Chinese cf. jiāng 23, l. 17-25 (abandoning marks) and l. 83-125 (correct practice) (hereafter the Tibetan version is referred to as TT. 32, p. x and the Chinese version is referred to as jiāng 23. l. x). In Kamalaśīla’s commentary to the Āryāvikalpapraśeṇānāmādhāraṇī the discussion on “abandoning marks” and on “correct practice” (mtshan ma yongs su spong bar yang dag par sbyor ba) is the most relevant (Luis O. Gómez, “Indian Materials on the Doctrine of Sudden Enlightenment”, in: Lewis Lancaster/Whalen Lai (ed.), Early Ch’ān in China and Tibet, Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983[b], 408). Cf. “’Phags pa rnam par mi rtog par ’jug pa zhes bya ba’i gzungs”, in: TT. 105, f. 156a.5-163b.8. My above mentioned translation of the Tibetan text will also provide a structural analysis of the Āryāvikalpapraśeṇānāmādhāraṇī.

\(^{18}\) The abandoning of these four marks in the Āryāvikalpapraśeṇānāmādhāraṇī corresponds to a similar passage in the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga on abandoning the marks of (1) “non-conducive” (mi than pa’i phyogs), (2) “antidote” (gnyen po), (3) “suchness” (de bzhin nyid), and (4) “realisation” (rtogs pa). Cf. “Chos dang chos nyid rnam par ’byed pa’i gzhung”, in: TT. 108, f. 49b. Thanks to Henry C. H. Shiu for the discussions on this point.
“correct practice”. If we apply the vocabulary of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* it is described as the following fourfold practice: (1) “perception” (*dmigs pa*), (2) “non-perception” (*mi dmigs pa*), (3) “non-perception of perception” (*dmigs pa mi dmigs pa*), and (4) “perception of non-perception” (*mi dmigs pa dmigs pa*). The *Āryāvikalpa-praveśanāmadhāraṇī* applies such a fourfold correct practice to the practice about form and to the practice about omniscience, which respectively pertain to the “marks of own nature” in the case of form and to the “marks of realisation” in the case of omniscience. In order to demonstrate this gradual path of cognition we shall, however, merely look at the practice about form as one example of this structural process.

Generally speaking, conceptual thinking — which is itself cause for the appearance of duality — arises when thusness is not cognised. Thus, the manifestations of cause and effect appear, yet they are not inherently existent. Only when those manifestations do not appear anymore as seemingly inherently existent then the nature of all *dharmas* comes to light and “non-conceptual wisdom” may be cognised. Concerning the above-mentioned fourfold correct practice, the four steps in this process of entering into the “non-conceptual sphere” are described as follows:

(1) In the first step of “perception” one cognises all *dharmas* as the manifestation of “mere cognition” (*rig pa tsam*), that is, all *dharmas* are an expression of one’s own mind. Even though conceptual thinking still arises, one does not mistake it for existent, but rather takes it as “mere cognition”. The *Āryāvikalpa-praveśanāmadhāraṇī*

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19 Cf. “Chos dang chos nyid rnam par 'byed pa'i gzhung”, in: *TT*. 108, f. 50a.6. The equivalent passages in the Tibetan and Chinese version of the *Āryāvikalpa-praveśanāmadhāraṇī* are in *TT*. 32, f. 5a.3-6b.2 and in *jiang* 23, l. 83-125. However, in these translations the *Āryāvikalpa-praveśanāmadhāraṇī* does not use those pithy designations of the fourfold practice, as the *Āryāvikalpa-praveśanāmadhāraṇī* itself is of rather denotive character and instead gives lengthy explanations of how to give up different kinds of concepts — which, nonetheless, correspond to the essence of the four correct practices.

20 Cf. *TT*. 32, f. 5a.3-5b.4 (practice about form) and f. 5b.6-6b.2 (practice about omniscience) and *jiang* 23, l. 83-101 (practice about form) and l. 106-121 (practice about omniscience).

21 Cf. *TT*. 32, f. 5a.3-5 and *jiang* 23, l. 83-88. For the term “practice of perception” (*dmigs pa'i sbyor ba*) in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* cf. “Chos dang chos nyid rnam par
describes this first step as follows: If one takes form as existent, then one is still practising in the conceptual sphere\(^{22}\).

(2) In the second step one cognises the “non-perception” of objects, to which the ordinary apprehension generally adheres. External dharmas are non-existent because in the first step of “perception” the “mere cognition” already emerged as an object. Therefore, to speak with the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī, form is also non-existent. And if one takes non-form for true, one is again practising in the conceptual sphere\(^{23}\).

(3) In the following step of “non-perception of perception” one trains oneself in the non-perception of the perception that “mere cognition” is non-existent. Since cognition is not possible without an object, cognition itself is also impossible\(^{24}\). In the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī it is explained: If the bodhisattva engages in the notion that form is mere-cognition, he engages in conceptualization. If he just as he engages in the non-existence of form similarly engages in the non-existence of cognition manifesting in from, he engages in conceptualization\(^{25}\).

(4) In the final step of “perception of non-perception” one perceives neither an apprehending subject nor an apprehensible object. As subject and object are not of separate natures, non-duality may be realised\(^{26}\). This is said to be non-dual thusness, the nature of reality beyond any designations. Again, in the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī this final step in this perceptual process is expressed as follows: In regard to not perceiving any dharma apart from cognition, the bodhisattva neither completely sees the absence of phenomena in

\(^{22}\) Cf. TT. 32, f. 5a.3-4 and jiang 23, l. 85-86.

\(^{23}\) Cf. TT. 32, f. 5a.5-6 and jiang 23, l. 88. For the term “practice of non-perception” (mi dmigs pa’i sbyor ba) in the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga cf. “Chos dangchos nyid rnam par ’byed pa’i gzhung’”, f. 50a.6.

\(^{24}\) For the term “practice of non-perception of perception” (dmigs pa mi dmigs pa’i sbyor ba) in the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga cf. “Chos dangchos nyid rnam par ’byed pa’i gzhung’”, f. 50a.6.

\(^{25}\) Cf. TT. 32, f. 5a.6-7 and jiang 23, l. 91-92.

\(^{26}\) For the term “practice of perception of non-perception” (mi dmigs pa dmigs pa’i sbyor ba) in the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga cf. “Chos dangchos nyid rnam par ’byed pa’i gzhung’”, f. 50a.6.
regard to that cognition nor apart from cognition. In regard to the non-existence of cognition manifesting in form and to that cognition he neither completely sees them as same nor as different. Just this very non-perception of an apprehending subject and an apprehensible object, or of mere cognition and form, is “non-conceptual wisdom”.

In this fourfold investigative practice phenomena are simply a feature of this very perceptual process itself. And to summarise again, this process to non-conceptual wisdom leads through the fourfold cognition that (1) all dharmas are manifestation of one’s own mind, (2) that the external world is inherently non-existent, (3) that “mere cognition” is non-existent and (4) that cognisable objects and cognition are non-dual. Now, we shall look at the understanding of “non-conceptuality” according to the system of Rim gyis pa, Cig car ba, Mahāyoga and rDzogs chen in the four main chapters of the bSam gtan mig sgron in order to compare it to the four steps of entering into the “non-conceptual sphere” as they were just described according to the Āryāvikalpapravesanāmadhāraṇī.

3. The bSam gtan mig sgron

3.1 The Topic of ‘Non-conceptuality’

The composition of the bSam gtan mig sgron by gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes is to be understood in the broader historical context of the eighth and ninth centuries. The debate of bSam yas that is said to have taken place in the late eighth century between Kamalaśīla, the Indian advocate of a gradual path, and Heshang Moheyan, a Chinese Meditation master rather favouring the subitist approach, is according to the historical data one of the major events giving evidence for the development of Chinese Meditation Buddhism in Tibet during those early times. Moreover, from other Dunhuang manuscripts we also know about the spread of the Mahāyoga tradition. gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes’ treatise

27 Cf. jiang 23, l. 96-97 and TT. 32, f. 5b.1-2.
28 Cf. footnote 13 above and the two text Dunwu dacheng zhenglijue and sGom pa’i rim pa.
**bSam gtan mig sgron** is the only known work which discusses in detail the differences between the four prevalent traditions in the eighth and ninth centuries, namely Rim gyis pa, Cig car ba, Mahāyoga and his own tradition of rDzogs chen. He clearly saw the potential that the teachings of these different schools may be intermingled, and thus states:

In [writing] the **bSam gtan mig sgron**, I gave a detailed description [of the Cig car ba tradition], because I fear that one mistakes [the meaning of the] Cig car ba to be similar to rDzogs chen30.

Furthermore, he may have had an actual syncretistic movement in mind which fused elements of both traditions alike, namely those of Cig car ba and rDzogs chen31. In the **bSam gtan mig sgron**, he clearly refers to contemporaries who neither understood the meaning of Cig car ba nor of rDzogs chen, yet simply mistook their own erroneous view to be rDzogs chen32. Therefore, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes was concerned to distinguish the doctrinal differences of the four above-mentioned schools. He undertook his analysis in the light of the soteriological idea of “non-conceptuality” (rnam par mi rtog pa) and said:

In regard to the benefit of myself and others to thoroughly comprehend the authoritative scriptures about ‘non-conceptuality’ in each vehicle (of Rim gyis pa, Cig car ba, Mahāyoga and Atiyoga) […]33

However, how does gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes analyse the view of “non-conceptuality” according to each of the four schools? The title of this treatise, **Torch of the Eye of Meditation** (*bSam gtan mig sgron*),

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33 **SM**: 12.5-6: / de nas bdag gzhan gyi don du gnas der las brtsam pa ’ang theg pa so so’i mi rtog pa’i gzhung gzhi [= bzhit] legs par khong du chad pas/ […]. A later interpolation (SM: 12.1-2) lists the four vehicles (theg pa bzhit) as [s]toni’ tson/ mahā/ a nī [= ti].
may give a hint as it is also understood in the broader context of “non-conceptuality.” At the very beginning of the book, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes makes reference to this title as follows:

Even though nature did not vacillate from the condition
Of primordial spontaneous presence,
If it is not seen, nature manifests [as if] dual;
I pay homage to what has become this very condition [of primordial spontaneous presence].

Thence, this meditation called the “eye of the yogi”, and which is the king of direct transmission making one definitively understand the spontaneously Great Perfection (rdzogs chen), [namely] the ground-of-all, the awakened mind

The “eye” (mig) of the “yogi” (rnal ’byor pa) who practices “meditation” (bsam gtan) recognizes the direct transmission of rDzogs chen. Its very essence is the “condition of primordial spontaneous presence” (gdod nas lhun gyis grub pa’i ngang). This condition is twofold: it is empty in nature, nonetheless it is also luminous in nature and is the ground of all which has the potential to allow phenomenal world arise effortlessly. Therefore, within this process of cognition “meditation” (bsam gtan) is of primary importance. However, bsam gtan is here not to be misunderstood in its ordinary meaning of being a specific meditation about something, but rather is to be understood in a much broader sense: bsam gtan is here — as Herbert Guenther has already put it — part of the process of “spiritual maturity”. In this process, the human being is cured of the feeling of being separated from the world — a feeling that originates in believing in the “conceptual aspect” (rtog pa) of experience

Moreover, H. Guenther also brought attention to the term bsam gtan in a similar context dealing with rDzogs chen teachings and gave the following definition:

34 SM: 2.1-3: / gdod nas lhun gyis grub pa’i ngang/ rang bzhin ngang las ma g.yos kyang/ ma mthong rang bzhin gnyis su snang/ de nyid ngang gyur bdag phyag ’tshall/ de la kun gzhi byang chub kyi sens lhun gyis rdzogs pa chen po gtan la dbab pa’i man nag gi rgyal poi/ rnal ’byor pa’i mig zhes bya ba’i bsam gtan ’di […].
The term *bsam-gtan* applies to this ‘setting’ of an as yet preconscious intending, which gradually becomes frozen into the customary subject-object division, on any level where the noetic-noematic ['mind' (*sems*)] correlation is in its formation. [...] 

To be more precise, *bsam-gtan* characterizes the moment of transition when the latent discriminating determinations, that become an explicating and concentrating attention, begin stirring and are going to move freely in the context of explicit themes such as subject and object, whereby they harden into ‘mind’ (*sems*). This particular transitional moment within experience is termed the ‘spontaneous’ [*lhun grub*] or ‘self-present’ [*rang snang*] or ‘natural’ [*rang bzhin*] setting\(^\text{36}\).

According to this definition, *bsam gtan* is the crucial moment when the “conceptual aspect” of reality arises and thus can also be cut through. This “conceptual aspect” of experience already means a limitation of the openness of being. In regard to perception, this openness means “intrinsic awareness” (*rig pa*) and is identical with the aspect of “non-conceptuality”. Thus in “meditation” (*bsam gtan*) one is able to see through the limiting factor of perception of reality. Or in the words of the *bSam gtan mig sgron* itself: in meditation “the condition of primordial spontaneous presence” is illuminated. Finally, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes distinguishes this meaning of “non-conceptuality” in rDzogs chen meditation in comparing it to the understanding of “non-conceptuality” according to the other three schools. We shall now look at the contents of the four main chapters of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*.

3.2 “Non-Conceptuality” According To The Four Schools

The four main chapters of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, that is chapter four to seven, demonstrate in great detail the respective understanding of “non-conceptuality” of the four above-mentioned schools. In the context of the present research, however, which is merely interested in the fundamental differences and not in particular details, we shall look at the summary in the third chapter of the *bSam gtan mig sgron* which provides a general

idea of the basic differences in the understanding of “non-conceptuality” of these schools.\textsuperscript{37}

gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes states that there are different degrees of insight into “non-conceptuality.” He makes the following comparison:

The differences [of insight into non-conceptuality] are like the steps of a ladder. Just as there are high and low steps of the ladder, there are differences [according to] these four [schools of Rim gyis pa, Cig car ba, Mahâyâyâ, and rDzogs chen in regard to their respective understanding of] non-conceptuality.\textsuperscript{38}

Then, how does gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes grade these different steps of the ladder? We shall look at his explanations one by one.

(1) Concerning Rim gyis pa, it is said that “self-nature” (rang bzhin) is recognized in a step by step meditation. The four kinds of conceptual thinking, namely about signs of “own nature”, “antidotes”, “thusness” and “realisation” are abandoned successively. Therefore, it is said to be a gradual meditation on the “three gates of liberation,” namely on those of “emptiness” (stong pa nyid), “marklessness” (mtshan ma med pa), and “aspirationlessness” (smon pa med pa).\textsuperscript{39}

(2) The Cig car ba teaches from the very beginning “instantaneously” (cig car) the “unborn absolute” (don dam pa ma sykes pa) — beyond any expectation and striving. This means that one shall learn from the beginning that all phenomena are “without a fixed frame of reference” (dmigs su med pa).\textsuperscript{40}

(3) gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes describes the insight gained through the method of Mahâyâyâ as “non-dual non-conceptuality” (gnyis su med pa’i mi rtog pa).\textsuperscript{41} According to Mahâyâyâ texts, “non-dual thusness” (gnyis su med pa’i de bzhin nyid) means that “sphere” (dbyings) and “primordial wisdom” (ye shes) are non-dual. Therefore,
“primordial wisdom” does not even take “sphere” as a “referential object” (dmigs par mi byed pa)\(^42\).

(4) Finally, the result of rDzogs chen meditation is described as “spontaneously present supreme non-conceptuality” (lhun gyis grub pa’i mi rtog pa chen po)\(^43\). In “spontaneously present thusness” the whole phenomenal world is inherently and, perfectly from primordial times, naturally luminous in the completely pure expanse of “intrinsic primordial wisdom” (rang byung gi ye shes). It is the “supreme primordial non-conceptuality” (ye mi rtog pa chen po) in which manifestations are not blocked\(^44\). Therefore, we may label it as the insight into ‘dynamic emptiness,’ which is in its empty aspect “non-existence” (med pa) beyond duality and at the same time in its luminous aspect “intrinsic awareness” (rang rig pa) allowing the kaleidoscope of manifestations arise. Therefore, in rDzogs chen meditation the real issue is not simply a non-referential (mi dmigs pa) situation, but innate and luminous awareness itself.

4. Comparison of the Four Practices in the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī and the Contents of the Four Main Chapters in the bSam gtan mig sgron

In the fourfold perceptual process, as it is described above according to the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī, insight into “non-conceptuality” is gained gradually through the steps of (1) “perception,” (2) “non-perception,” (3) “non-perception of perception,” and (4) “perception of non-perception.” In order to apply these four stages of understanding of “non-conceptuality” to the above illustrated account of four schools Rim gyis pa, Cig car ba, Mahāyoga and rDzogs chen and to clearly demonstrate how they correspond to each other, we shall look again at gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes’ analysis.

gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes criticises each single school respectively from one step above on the ladder, that is, he disapprove Rim gyis pa from the perspective of Cig car ba, disapprove Cig car ba from the view of


\(^{44}\) SM: 60.2-3, 5. For a translation of this passage cf. also Guenther 1983: 360.
Mahāyoga, and finally disapprove Mahāyoga from the angle of rdZogs chen. Accordingly, (1) the fault of Rim gyis pa is that it is merely occupied with “perception” (dmigs pa) in order to let the experience of “non-perception” (ma dmigs pa) arise. (2) Cig car ba seeks for the unborn absolute, yet it simply corrupts mind as it still has a concept of the unborn. As already mentioned above, the Cig car ba adept learns from the beginning the “non-perception” (dmigs su med pa) in regard to all phenomena. (3) Even though Mahāyoga talks about “non-duality” (gyis su med pa), it does not realise “spontaneously present supreme non-conceptuality” of rdZogs chen. This is so because Mahāyoga gets accustomed to thunyus by virtue of “examining reality” (dngos po gzhal ba) and “different means” (thabs mang po). Therefore, even though Mahāyoga comes close to the rdZogs chen realisation of “spontaneous presence”, it still takes it as an “object of perception” (dmigs pa yod pa) and thus regards it as something supreme or real. (4) According to gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, the supreme realisation of non-duality is only accomplished in rdZogs chen meditation. It refers to the supreme equality of all manifestations of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. At the end of his treatise he summarises it again as follows:

Since the Great Perfection (rdzogs chen) is spontaneously perfected and ultimate thunyus, supreme non-duality is without divisions; thus [the Great Perfection] is the stage of unexcelled primordial wisdom. […]

Now, we shall investigate step by step how gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes’ classification corresponds to the fourfold correct practice of the Āryāvikalpa-prāvanāmadhāraṇi. (1) Regarding Rim gyis pa, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes himself describes it in terms of “perception” (dmigs pa)

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45 SM: 61.2: tsen man rim gyis 'jug pa ni/ sngar bshad pa ltar dmigs pa la sha thang bar 'bad nas ma dmigs pa skye ba dang/ […].


47 SM: 57.3-4: yang de nyid las/ las dang po pas sms dang po bskyed pa nas nye bar brrams te/ chos thams cad dmigs su med pa la/ bslab par bya'o/. Cf. Guenther 1983: 357.

48 SM: 63.2-4; 64.4-5: rnal 'byor chen po nang pas mtsan ma'i ting nge 'dzin las su rung nas rtags thon yang/ lhun grub la dmigs pa yod pa'i phyir/ ma mthong ba nii dper na nii ma'i snying po bchas na/ star mi mthong gi mig jir 'gyur ba bzhin no/.

49 SM: 491.4-5: /rdzogs chen ni lhun rdzogs de bzhin nyid mthar thug nyid pas/ /gnyis med chen po dbye ba med pas/ /ye shes bla ma'i sa yin pas […]/.
pa). This corresponds to the first stage of insight as it is explained in the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī. (2) For Cig car ba gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes demonstrates that this tradition is occupied with the “unborn absolute,” the inconceivable or — to speak in terms of the Āryāvikalpa-praveśanāmadhāraṇī — with “non-perception” (mi dmigs pa). It is the realisation of the non-existence of the external world. (3) According to the bSam gtan mig sgron, Mahāyoga talks about “spontaneous presence” (lhun grub), the supreme realisation of “non-conceptuality” in rDzogs chen, however, still takes it as an “object of perception” (dmigs pa yod pa). It comes close to the realm of “spontaneous presence”, and thus frees from the attachment to the subject-object dichotomy. However, it still regards it as real or supreme. In terms of the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī this would match the third step of “non-perception of perception,” that is a non-perception of the perception of the subject-object dichotomy. (4) Finally, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes argues that only in rDzogs chen “spontaneous presence” is perfected which is “supreme non-conceptuality.” It is the realisation of the empty but luminous nature, or in other words the union of “intrinsic awareness and emptiness” (rig stong). It refers to the equality of all manifestations of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa — not regarding anything as supreme. In regard to the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī this kind of insight is explained as “perception of non-perception,” non-duality of cognisable objects and cognition. Only in realising this final stage one is able to enter into “non-conceptual sphere.” When Mahāyoga talks about “spontaneous presence”, it is the coming into contact of such a realm, whereas rDzogs chen is the realization of such.

By analysing the contents of the four main chapters of the bSam gtan mig sgron — that is the understanding of “non-conceptuality” in Rim gyis pa, Cig car ba, Mahāyoga and rDzogs chen — in the light of the fourfold correct practice as it is explained in the Āryāvikalpapraveśanāmadhāraṇī, the structure of the bSam gtan mig sgron becomes transparent. In the eyes of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes these four traditions clearly describe a soteriological path in itself, that is a path on which one gradually increases insight into “non-conceptuality.” In this kind of interpretation the four traditions may be seen as separate parts of a broader picture, or to use the analogy of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes: they are different steps of one ladder.
5. Critique of Cig car ba according to the bSam gtan mig sgron

In conclusion, we shall summarise again gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes’ view of the differences between Cig car ba (i.e., Chinese Meditation Buddhism) and rDzogs chen as gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes himself explained in the beginning that one reason for writing the bSam gtan mig sgron was the apparent similarity of both traditions. In this own concluding remarks he says:

Regarding the Cig car ba [tradition] its terminology is similar to rDzogs chen. Although it teaches non-activity and non-practice, it speaks of ultimate truth as the ground which is unborn and empty — having in mind the ground which is not arising and is the perfect reality. However, if one investigates this [view], there is [still] effort getting accustomed to the condition of emptiness; it [has the notion of dealing with the two] truths alternately. [The Cig car bas] never practically engage in the non-duality of [the two] truths. Veiled by the own [erroneous] view, the [Cig car bas] need yet to have to enter into non-duality.

According to this criticism Cig car ba does not understand the absolute truth, thusness, but perceives it as the object “empty nature.” gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes therefore classifies it as the understanding of the absolute according to “three essential categories” (ngo bo nyid gsum) in the Yogacāra school as “perfect reality” (yongs su grub pa, parinīṣ-panna). In an earlier classification of the different understanding of “non-conceptuality” according to the various philosophical schools he described that “non-conceptuality which manifests as empty nature is the meditation on the perfect [reality] of the Yogacāra school”52. It is not clear how gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes comes to the conclusion to bring the understanding of the absolute in the Cig car ba tradition together with

50 I am not sure about my translation of this sentence. S. Karmay (1988: 105) choose the following translation which seems to avoid the problem (…bden pa re mos pa …): “[…] If we examine this view, it still hankers after the “truth” and works on becoming accustomed to the state of voidness. […]”.

51 SM: 490.3-5: / ston mun ni rdzogs chen dang skad mthun/ bya ba med bsgrub pa med par ston yang/ /gzhí mi bhyung ba yongs su grub pa la dgongs nas/ don dam pa i bden pa ma skyes stong pa i gzhí la smra ste/ de la ni btags na da dun gden pa re mos pa dang/ stong pa i nga b d ris par byed pa dangl rtsol ba yod de/ bden pa gnyis mad pa la spyod kyang ma myong ste/ rang gi lta bas bsgribs te gnyis med la bzod ’jug dgos so/. Cf. also Karmay 1988: 105.

Yogacāra philosophy. He does not give further evidence to confirm his view. However, as we have seen in the above structural analysis of the contents of the four main chapters of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, it makes perfect sense to place Cig car ba within the broader picture of Buddhist soteriology. Yet, in my view, an assertion like the final one of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes about Cig car ba would call for a more elaborate verification.

### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>BBK</td>
<td>Bukkyō bunka kenkyū sho kiyō 出教文化研究紀要 [Bulletin of the Research in Buddhist Culture],</td>
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<td>SCEAR</td>
<td>Studies in Central and East Asian Religion</td>
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<td>SM</td>
<td><em>bSam gtan mig sgron</em>; cf. gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes</td>
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<tr>
<td>T.</td>
<td>Taishō shinshō daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經 [[Chinese] Buddhist Canon from the Taishō Era], Taibei Reprint</td>
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<td>TT.</td>
<td>Tibetan Tripitaka</td>
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“Chos dang chos nyid rnam par ’byed pa’i gzhung [Discrimination of *dharma* and *dharmatā*]”, attributed to Maitreya, in: *TT*. 108 no. 5523, f. 48b.1-51b.6.

“Chos dang chos nyid rnam par ’byed pa’i tshig le’ur byas pa’i ’grel pa ye shes snang ba rnam par ’byed [Commentary to the verses of the Discrimination of *dharma* and *dharmatā*. Discrimination of Primordial Wisdom and Appearances]”, by Mi pham Rin po che (1846-1912), in: Mathes 1996, annex.


gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (9th century), gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye she rin po ches mdzad pa’i sgom gi gnang gsal bar phyre ba bsam gtan mig sgron [Torch of the Eye of Meditation Elucidating the Very Heart of Meditation, Composed by gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes Rin po che], reproduced from a manuscript made presumably from an Eastern Tibetan print by ’Khor gdon gter sprul ’Chi med rig dzin, Leh: Smartsis shesrig spendzod, Vol. 74, 1974.

“’Phags pa rnam par mi rtog par ’jug pa zhes bya ba’i gzungs [The Supreme dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-Conceptuality]”, translated by Jinamitra, Dānāśīla, and dKa’ ba dpal brtsegs, in: *TT* 32, no. 810, 1a-6b.

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Ru wu fenbie zongchi jing 入法分別總持經 [The dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-Conceptuality], jiang 獻 23, preserved in the Beijing National Library.


'byed pa’i gzhung”, f. 50a.6.
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