

Mahāmudrā in India and Tibet

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Contents

Notes on Contributors VII

Introduction 1

Klaus-Dieter Mathes and Roger R. Jackson

- 1 The *Samādhirājasūtra* and “Sūtra Mahāmudrā”: A Critical Edition and Translation of Verses 1–118 from Chapter 32 of the *Samādhirājasūtra* 10
Paul Thomas
- 2 *The Seven Siddhi Texts (Grub pa sde bdun)*: Remarks on the Corpus and Its Employment in Sa skya-Bka’ brgyud Mahāmudrā Polemical Literature 90
Adam C. Krug
- 3 *Mahāmudrā* and *Samayamudrā* in the Dunhuang Documents and Beyond 123
Jacob P. Dalton
- 4 A Neglected Bka’ brgyud Lineage: The Rngog from Gzhung and the Rngog pa Bka’ brgyud Transmission 142
Cécile Ducher
- 5 ‘Jig rten gsum mgon’s *Dgongs gcig* on the Relation between Mahāmudrā and the Six Yogas of Nāropa 170
Jan-Ulrich Sobisch
- 6 The Definitive Meaning of *Mahāmudrā* according to the Kālacakra Tradition of Yu mo Mi bskyod rdo rje’s *Phyag chen gsal sgron* 185
Casey A. Kemp
- 7 Mahāmudrā as the Key-Point of the Third *Dharmacakra* according to the *Sixty Verses on Mahāmudrā* by Zhwa dmar Chos grags ye shes 204
Martina Draszczyk
- 8 Mi bskyod rdo rje on the Question of What Remains (*lhag ma, avaśiṣṭa*) 237
David Higgins

- 9 Maitrīpa's *Amanasikāra*-Based Mahāmudrā in the Works of the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje 269
Klaus-Dieter Mathes
- 10 Assimilating the Great Seal: the Dge lugs pa-ization of the *dge ldan bka'brgyud* Tradition of Mahāmudrā 302
Roger R. Jackson
- Index 329

Maitrīpa's *Amanasikāra*-Based Mahāmudrā in the Works of the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje

Klaus-Dieter Mathes

1 Introduction

In his cycle of *amanasikāra* texts, Maitrīpa (986–1063) combines the tantric Mahāmudrā teachings of Saraha, Nāgārjuna,¹ and Śavaripa with a particular form of Madhyamaka philosophy, called *apratiṣṭhāna* (“non-abiding” or “non-foundation”), which aims at radically transcending any conceptual assessment of true reality. This goal is achieved by “withdrawing one’s attention” (*amanasikāra*) from anything that involves the duality of a perceived and perceiver. At the same time, the adept experiences “luminous self-empowerment,” Maitrīpa’s final Mahāmudrā understanding of *amanasikāra*. Considering this double meaning, the term *amanasikāra* is best rendered as “non-conceptual realization.”²

Through its blend of Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā, Maitrīpa’s *amanasikāra* cycle plays a crucial role as one of the main sources of Bka’ brgyud lineage instructions. Throughout the collected works of the eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554) the influence of Maitrīpa’s *amanasikāra*-based Mahāmudrā can be discerned. Mi bskyod rdo rje even insists that Apratiṣṭhāna Madhyamaka forms the main basis for the view of the two truths in the Mar pa Bka’ brgyud schools.³ In this context, in his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* Mi bskyod rdo rje explicitly mentions Sahajavajra’s commentary on Maitrīpa’s *Tattvadaśaka*, one of the main philosophical texts in the *amanasikāra* cycle. Further works from the *amanasikāra* cycle that figure in the writings of Mi bskyod rdo rje are the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*, the *Amanasikārādhāra*, the *Tattvaratnāvalī*, the *Mahāyānaviṃśikā* and the *Pañcākāra*. Moreover, the Karma pa also refers to the *Caturmudrānvaya*. The latter text is probably not by Maitrīpa, but it nonetheless plays a key role in the *amanasikāra* cycle by preparing the doctrinal

1 It goes without saying that the tantric Nāgārjuna is meant here, who lived much later than the author of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*.

2 See Mathes 2015: 1.

3 I.e., the Bka’ brgyud schools going back to Mar pa Lo tsā ba Chos kyi blo gros (11th cent. CE).

ground for Maitrīpa's equation of Mahāmudrā with non-abiding, and thus *amanasikāra*, in his *Sekanirdeśa*, another important text from the cycle.

2 Three Types of Madhyamaka-based Mahāmudrā

In the introduction to his *Madhyamakāvatāra* commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje closely links his Mahāmudrā tradition with Madhyamaka, which, like many other Bka' brgyud masters, he traces back to two main sources, the teachings of Nāropa (11th century) and Maitrīpa. The latter source is said to consist mainly of Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle. Mi bskyod rdo rje further explains that Maitrīpa taught his cycle after having internalized the meaning of the Madhyamaka maintained by Saraha the Elder, Saraha the Younger, Nāgārjuna (fl. 200 CE),⁴ and Candrakīrti (c. 600–c. 650),⁵ and goes on to list three Tibetan interpretations of Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* based Mahāmudrā (i.e., his *amanasikāra* cycle), in terms of (1) Mantra Madhyamaka, (2) Sūtra Madhyamaka, and (3) Madhyamaka of Alikākāra–Cittamātra.⁶

While the first two traditions were completely transmitted and practiced by Mar pa Lo tsā ba Chos kyi blo gros and Mi la ras pa (both 11th century CE), it was mainly the middle one, Maitrīpa's cycle transmitted as Sūtra Madhyamaka, that Sgam po pa (1079–1153) emphasized and spread. Sgam po pa called it *mahāmudrā*, but, Mi bskyod rdo rje warns that this term is normally reserved for the wisdom of bliss and emptiness in Mantrayāna. Related to the issue of Sūtra Mahāmudrā, Sgam po pa is said to have actualized the state of the natural mind (*tha mal gyi shes pa*), which he calls the actualization of the *dharmakāya*. This led him to the famous statement that thoughts appear as *dharmakāya*.⁷ For Mi bskyod rdo rje, this amounts to the realization that thoughts do not exist as anything other than their true nature (*dharmatā*):

Once [Sgam po pa] had realized that phenomena (*dharmin*) such as sprouts or concepts, are nothing but their *dharmatā*, he used the verbal

4 This is the time frame of the early Nāgārjuna, who is mainly intended here. It should be noted, though, that according to Tibetan tradition the early and tantric Nāgārjuna are the same person.

5 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i kar ṭi ka*, 7.19–21: *sa ra ha che chung dang | slob dpon klu sgrub dang zla grags bzhed pa'i dbu ma'i don thugs su chud nas gzhan la ston par mdzad pa mnga' bdag rgyal ba mai tri pa ste | lugs 'dī dbu ma'i chos skor la yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor zhes grags la* |. First paraphrased by Seyfort Ruegg 1988: 1255.

6 Seyfort Ruegg 1988: 1255–1256.

7 Seyfort Ruegg 1988: 1257–1258.

convention that thoughts appear as *dharmakāya*⁸ and recommended that even somebody who has a very good experience of the secret tantric wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness is in great need of this view and meditation [of thoughts appearing as *dharmakāya*] as a remedy to remove the remaining latencies of mental fabrication and negative states. This is because all hindrances are eradicated by it, just as in the case of the omnipotent white medicine. This is [Sgam po pa's] special instruction.⁹

Mi bskyod rdo rje here comes to the defense of Sgam po pa's Sūtra Mahāmudrā and his allusion to the simile of the omnipotent white medicine (*dkar po gcig thub*), a controversial concept that was notably criticized by Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1151).¹⁰ Still, Mi bskyod rdo rje continues with the more moderate and accommodating remark that in these instructions, the calm abiding and deep insight of Sūtra Mahāmudrā should not be mistaken for the exemplifying and actual wisdoms of unsurpassable Mantrayāna:

In this Dharma system [of Sgam po pa], calm abiding and deep insight [tend to] be overstated as the exemplifying and actual wisdoms, which are known as the third and fourth empowerments explained in the unsurpassable Mantra[yāna]. Whatever experience of calm abiding and

8 Mi bskyod rdo rje's reluctance to endorse Sgam po pa's "thoughts appear as *dharmakāya*" must be seen against the background of the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*-based distinction between the buddha-kāyas and the impure adventitious mind, or "all-ground wisdom" (*kun gzhi ye shes*) and "all-ground consciousness" (*kun gzhi rnam shes*). In line with this distinction, in his *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentary Mi bskyod rdo rje criticizes those followers of Mahāmudrā whose confusion, he says, is a hundred thousand times greater than the assertion that the *ālayavijñāna*, when purified, becomes the fruit of the mirror-like wisdom. Mi bskyod rdo rje's distinction also translates into his interpretation of buddha nature, which certainly does not belong to sentient beings according to him. Sentient beings merely consist of the six cognitive domains, which resemble those of a buddha. Mi bskyod rdo rje equates buddha nature with the *dharmakāya*, asserting that it only acts in relation to the six cognitive domains, like milk diffused within water. (See Mathes 2008: 55–65.)

9 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i kar tī ka*, 10.3–8: *chos can myu gu dang rnam rtoḡ sogs de dag de'i chos nyid las gzhan du ma grub par rtoḡs pa na rnam rtoḡ chos skur shar ba zhes tha snyad mdzad nas | gsang sngags kyi bde stong dbyer med kyi ye shes sogs kyi nyams myong ches bzang bzang po skyes pa la'ang da dung spros pa'i bag nyal dang | gnas ngan len yod pa sel byed kyi gnyen por lta sgom 'di nyid cher dgos par sngags te | 'dis dper na sman dkar po chig thub dang 'dra bar sgrib pa thams cad rmeg nas sel bar byed pa'i phyir zhes gdams pa yin no |* First translated by Seyfort Ruegg 1988: 1258.

10 See Jackson 1994: 3–6.

deep insight may have arisen in one's mind-stream, it cannot eradicate indisputably most of what must be abandoned, i.e., the three hindrances. Thus, when one reaches conclusive certainty about the meaning of signs [and words] in this Dharma system, this is praised as the supreme progress of realization.¹¹

Interestingly, Mi bskyod rdo rje then turns the tables on Sa skya Paṇḍita, claiming that it is in fact the latter's method of producing the soteriologically relevant wisdom through causing the disciple's subtle wind to enter the central channel (and not Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā) that is insufficient:

Master Phag [mo] gru [pa] (1110–1170), for example, once boasted that he found the wisdom of the path of seeing at the feet of Sa skya [Paṇḍita] through [his] subtle winds having been caused to enter the central [channel] and co-emergent joy having been caused to manifest. Later on, he offered this realization at the feet of Master Sgam po pa, and all this previous experience fell off [like] a husk. [It only seems that] he had been made to find the wisdom of the path of seeing. Such a [pointing-out by Sgam po pa] should be correctly known as the particular profundity of the very heart of Dharma. With this in mind, it is said in the works of the great Victorious One from 'Bri gung (1143–1217):

The Mahāmudrā of our tradition is beyond the four joys, superior to luminosity, and not touched by the three great ones (i.e., Great Madhyamaka, Mahāmudrā, and Rdzogs chen¹²).¹³

11 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i kar ṭi ka*, 10.8–12: *chos tshul 'di la brgyud pa rin po che 'di pa dag gi lugs kyi sngags bla med nas bshad pa'i dbang gsum pa dang bzhi par grags pa'i dpe don gyi ye shes su rlom pa'i zhi lhag gi nyams ci rigs rgyud la skyes pas sgrib gsum gyi spang bya cher cher brtsad nas drungs 'byin par mi nus la | de las chos tshul 'di brda don dpyis phyin pa'i rdo rus gtugs par gyur na rtogs pa'i bogs dbyung mchog tu bsngags te |*.

12 Seyfort Ruegg 1988: 1259. Khenpo Tāmphe explains that Mahāmudrā cannot be grasped within the conceptual framework of the three great ones. See also Higgins and Draszczyk 2016: vol. 1, 115 n. 299.

13 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i kar ṭi ka*, 10.12–21: *dper na rje phag gru sngar sa skya pa'i sku bdun du rlung dbu mar chud de lhan cig skyes dga' mngon du mdzad nas mthong lam gyi ye shes brnyes par rlom pa zhiḡ | phyis rje sgam po pa'i drung du rtogs 'bul mdzad pas sngar gyi nyams de thams cad shun par bud nas gdod mthong lam gyi ye shes brnyes par mdzad pa lta bu ni chos kyi gnad 'di'i zab khyad yang dag par shes dgos so || 'di lta bu la dgongs nas rgyal ba 'bri gung pa chen po'i gsung rab nas | kho bo'i lugs kyi phyag rgya chen po ni dga' ba bzhi las 'das pa | 'od gsal las khyad par du 'phags pa | chen po gsum gyis ma reg pa | zhes gsungs te |*.

In his answer to a question by Gling drung pa La dor ba, Mi bskyod rdo rje refers to the same statement by 'Bri gung pa in support of Sgam po pa's Mahāmudrā being neither identical to nor different from both worldly and transmundane empowerment:

As for Bka' brgyud Dwags po Lha rje's (i.e., Sgam po pa's) Mahāmudrā, neither identity with, nor difference from, both the worldly and transmundane fourth empowerment in the tantra sections applies. 'Jig rten gsum gyi mgon po 'Bri gung pa said: "The Mahāmudrā of our tradition is beyond the four joys, superior to luminosity, and not touched by the three great ones." Even the Great Brahmin Saraha said that the innate co-emergent Mahāmudrā, i.e., the purpose of the dohās, cannot be realized through the fourth empowerment. This is because in the *Dohās for the People* (i.e., *Dohākoṣa*, lines 10d–11c) it is said: "Some are engaged in explaining the meaning of the fourth. Some develop concepts about the element of space. Still, others develop views on emptiness. In general, they stand in contradiction."¹⁴

Mi bskyod rdo rje leaves no doubt, however, that the Tibetan Sūtra Madhyamaka reception of Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle, which Sgam po pa calls *mahāmudrā*, does not replace tantric Mahāmudrā. In the *Shing rta chen po*, Mi bskyod rdo rje concisely presents his understanding of the two truths in Madhyamaka. Here, in opposition to what seemed to have been common practice in Tibet in his time, he stresses that Mahāmudrā realization requires the tantric context of empowerment:

These days, Mahāmudrā realization
In the mountain solitude of Tibet
Is the current discursive awareness only.
It depends on the study and reflection on scriptures and reasoning

14 Mi bskyod rdo rje: "Gling drung pa la 'dor ba'i dris lan," 2b2–6 (p. 314): *bka' brgyud dwags po lha rje ba'i phyag rgya chen po ni rgyud sde las 'byung ba'i 'jig rten dang 'jig rten las 'das pa'i dbang bzhi pa dang gcig mi gcig bstun tu yod pa min te | 'jig rten gsum gyi mgon po 'bri gung* [em., text: *khung*] *pas | dga' ba bzhi las 'das pa | 'od gsal las khyad par du gyur pa || chen po gsum gyis ma reg pa zhes gsungs pa ste | bram ze chen po sa ra has kyang gnyug ma lhan cig skes pa phyag rgya chen po do ha'i don ni dbang bzhis pas rtogs par mi nus zhes dmangs do har | la la bzhi pa'i don 'chad pa la zhugs | la la nam mkha'i khams la rtog* [em., text: *rtogs*] *par byed | gzhan dag stong nyid lta bar byed pa ste | phal cher mi mthun phyogs la zhugs pa yin | zhes 'byung ba'i phyir*. For the quotation from the *Dohākoṣa*, see Shahidullah 1928: 128–129.

And arises in the mind-stream
Thanks to pointing-out [instructions] by the lama.

...

As for Mahāmudrā realization,
It is the distinguishing feature of Great Yoga.
Other than occurring after accomplishment
Through the three empowerments,
Vows, and conduct,
How Mahāmudrā could be known
Through verbally or symbolically pointing out
That one's mind is merely emptiness?¹⁵

Still, in support of Sgam po pa's strategy of widely propagating a *Samādhirājasūtra*-based Mahāmudrā,¹⁶ Mi bskyod rdo rje refers to the same passages from Jñānakīrti's *Tattvāvatāra* and Sahajavajra's **Tattvadaśakaṭikā* as does 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481).¹⁷ As I have already shown

15 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Shing rta chen po* 532.6–533.3: *deng sang gangs ri'i khrod 'di na || phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa ni || da lta'i 'gyu 'gyu'i rig tsam 'di || lung rig thos dang bsam pa la || la ltos bla mas ngo sprad pas || de ltar rgyud la skyes pa de | ... | phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa ni || rnal 'byor chen po'i khyad chos yin || de ni dbang dang sdom pa dang || spyod pa rnam gsum la sogs kyis || bsgrub nas 'byung ba ma gtogs pa || rang sems stong pa nyid tsam du || ngo sprod pa'am brda sprod kyis || phyag rgya chen po ga la shes |.*

16 It is not clear how Sgam po pa reads Mahāmudrā into the *Samādhirājasūtra*, but Sahajavajra quotes in his commentary to the *Tattvadaśaka* a group of verses from the *Samādhirājasūtra* (xxxii.92–97b), which back up his Mahāmudrā pith-instructions to the effect that characteristic signs (*nimittas*) or notions (*saṃjñās*) do not arise and are pure. Sahajavajra further points out that the inconceivable nature of this purity is equally expressed in SRS xxxii.98–105 and *Sekanirdeśa*, verse 30 (see Mathes 2015: 114, 232–236).

17 See Seyfort Ruegg 1988: 1259–1260; and 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, 632.6–633.4: "Moreover, Dwags po Rin po che said to Phag mo gru pa: 'The basic text of this Mahāmudrā of ours is the *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* (*Ratnagotravibhāga*) by the Venerable Maitreya.' Phag mo gru pa in turn said the same thing to Rje 'Bri gung pa, and for this reason many explanations of the *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* are found in the works of Rje 'Bri gung pa and his disciples. In this connection, the Dharma master Sa skya pa (i.e., Sa skya Paṇḍita) maintains that there is no conventional expression for *mahāmudrā* in Pāramitāyāna, and that the wisdom of *mahāmudrā* is only the wisdom arisen from initiation. But in the *Tattvāvatāra* composed by the master Jñānakīrti it is said: 'As for someone with sharp faculties who practises the *pāramitās* diligently, by performing the meditations of calm abiding and deep insight, he [already becomes] truly endowed with the *mahāmudrā* [while] in the state of an ordinary being; [and this] is the sign of the irreversible [state attained] through correct realization.' And the **Tattvadaśakaṭikā* composed by Sahajavajra clearly explains a wisdom that realizes suchness as possessing the following three particular [features]: in essence it is Pāramitā[yāna], it accords with Mantra[yāna] and its name is '*mahāmudrā*.' Therefore Rgod tshang pa, too, explains that Rje Sgam po

elsewhere, Gzhon nu dpal identifies Mahāmudrā instructions in non-tantric sources such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* or the Maitreya works.¹⁸ In his *Dgongs gcig* commentary, however, Mi bskyod rdo rje seems to express his concern about Gzhon nu dpal's position on this matter, as he accuses the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi grags pa (1453–1526) of uncritically following Gzhon nu dpal:

Later on, Yid bzang rtse ba (i.e., Gzhon nu dpal) said: “The Mahāmudrā maintained by the lord Nāropa is the Mahāmudrā of bliss and emptiness. The Mahāmudrā maintained by master Maitrīpa is the Mahāmudrā of the true nature [of mind]. The Mahāmudrā of bliss and emptiness is good Mahāmudrā. The Mahāmudrā of the true nature depends on it, and thus is a little inferior.” Not being independent (*tsho zin*) himself, our Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi grags pa imitates him (i.e., Gzhon nu dpal).¹⁹

Mi bskyod rdo rje presents the transmission of this Mahāmudrā, which, as a Madhyamaka system based on freedom from mental fabrication, does not require tantric empowerment, as follows:

pa's Pāramitā[yāna] Mahāmudrā is [in line with] the assertions of the master Maitrīpa.” (*de yang dwags po rin po ches dpal phag mo gru pa la | 'o skol gyi phyag rgya chen po 'di'i gzhung ni bcom ldan 'das byams pas mdzad pa'i theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos 'di yin zhes gsungs shing | dpal phag mo gru pas kyang rje 'bri gung [text: khung] pa la de skad du gsungs pas | rje 'bri gung [text: khung] pa dpon slob kyi gsung rab rnam su theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bshad pa mang du 'byung ba de yin no | 'di la chos rje sa skya pas pha rol tu phyin pa'i lugs la phyag rgya chen po'i tha snyad med cing | phyag rgya chen po'i ye shes gang yin pa de ni dbang las skyes pa'i ye shes kho na yin no zhes bzhed mod kyi | slob dpon ye shes grags pas mdzad pa'i de kho na nyid la 'jug par | pha rol tu phyin pa la mngon par brtson pa'i dbang po rab ni | zhi gnas dang lhaq mthong bsgoms pas so so'i skye bo'i gnas skabs nyid na phyag rgya chen po dang nges par ldan pa yang dag par rtags pas phyr mi ldog pa'i rtags nyid dang | zhes gsungs la | de kho na nyid bcu pa'i 'grel pa [text: 'brel ba] lhan cig skyes pa'i rdo rjes mdzad par yang | ngo bo pha rol tu phyin pa | sngags dang rjes su mthun pa | ming phyag rgya chen po zhes bya ba'i khyad par gsum dang ldan pa'i de bzhin nyid rtags pa'i ye shes gsal bar bshad do | de bas na rje sgam po pa'i pha rol tu [text: du] phyin pa'i phyag rgya chen po ni mnga' bdag mai trī [text: trī] pa'i bzhed pa yin par rje rgod tshang pas kyang bshad do |.) First translated, in collaboration with Gendun Chopel, by Roerich 1949–1953: 724–725.*

18 See Mathes 2008.

19 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dgongs gcig lta sgom spyod pa'i tshogs kyi kar ṭik smad cha* (= vol. 2), 304.2–6: *dus phyis yid bzang rtse pa'i gsung gis | rje nā ro pa bzhed pa'i phyag chen de bde stong phyag chen yin la | jo bo mai tri pas bzhed pa'i phyag chen de gnas lugs phyag chen yin zhing | bde stong phyag chen ni phyag chen bzang po yin | gnas lugs phyag chen ni de la ltos te cung zad dman pa'o zhes 'chad la | nged kyi zhwa dmar ba chos kyi grags pas kyang rang tsho ma zin nas de'i rjes zlos byed |.*

Thinking of this [Sūtra Māhamudrā], Rgod tshang pa (1189–1258) and his disciples said: “The ones who initiated this Mahāmudrā teaching were the Great Brahmin [Saraha] and Nāgārjuna – the Great Brahmin having taught Mahāmudrā in an affirmative way, and the protector Nāgārjuna under the aspect of negation.”²⁰

Whether Mi bskyod rdo rje was critical of Sūtra Mahāmudrā or not, it should be noted that he sees the *via affirmativa* of Saraha and the *via negationis* of Nāgārjuna as complementary approaches to ultimate reality. This requires accepting the goal of Nāgārjuna’s *via negationis* to be a state that is truly free from any mental fabrication because positive descriptions of the ultimate are merely inadequate attempts to express the ineffable. In other words, the ultimate, and emptiness for that matter, can only be truly realized in the absence of constructing a cognitive object that involves duality. In his *Shing rta chen po*, for example, Mi bskyod rdo rje takes emptiness to be truly beyond mental fabrication, and not suitable to manifest as a cognitive object. This being the case, any mental engagement (*manasikāra*) is pointless, realization being found only by refraining from it (*amanasikāra*). In the *Shing rta chen po* we find:

The emptiness beyond action, agent, and object is without a perceived [object] because it is impossible that [this emptiness] attains the status of a manifest object, which is wrongly [superimposed] by devout meditation. The darkness of wrong superimposition is removed at its root [only] through the genuine sun of wisdom. When reaching such a state, one does not find anything apart from mere natural luminosity, however much one engages in the mental fabrication of cognition’s perceived and perceiver. According to the Victorious Mother of the Perfect Buddhas (i.e., the Prajñāpāramitā texts), it is said that mental engagement is unvirtuous. With this in mind, the great master Maitrīpa has found such a realization, or rather, the yoga of *amanasi*[*kāra*] [described] in [his] *amanasikāra* cycle.²¹

20 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dbu ma la 'jug pa'i kar ṭī ka*, 11.19–12.1: *don 'di la dgongs nas rgyal ba rgod tshang pa chen po yab sras kyi kyang | phyag rgya chen po'i chos 'di mgo 'don mkhan bram ze chen po dang | klu sgrub gnyis yin | bram ze chen pos phyag rgya chen po sgrub phyogs nas bstan | mgon po klus dgag phyogs nas bstan pa yin | ces gsungs so* |. See also Seyfort Ruegg 1988: 1260.

21 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Shing rta chen po* 521.1–4 (fol. 4b): *bzung med bya ba byed pa dang || las las grol ba'i stong nyid de || mos nas bsgoms pas log pa yi || gsal snang 'char ba'i yul nyid du || yong ba'i go skabs yod min dang || log pa'i sgro skur mun pa rnams || yang dag ye shes nyi ma yis || rtsad nas sel bar byas phyir ro || 'di lta'i skabs su sleb pa na || rang bzhin 'od gsal 'ba' zhiḡ*

The fact that Mi bskyod rdo rje refers here to Maitrīpa shows that for him *amanasikāra* is not only the withdrawal of one's attention from anything that involves a perceived object and a perceiver, but is also luminous self-empowerment.²² A little later in the *Shing rta chen po*, Mi bskyod rdo rje also describes positively what is beyond mental fabrication:

It has been made clear in this tradition that freedom from any knowing, which clings to the extremes of mental fabrication, is non-dual wisdom.²³

It should be noted that in this philosophical project of uniting Nāgārjuna's *via negationis* with Saraha's *via affirmativa* it is essential to reject any form of superimposition or misplaced denial, especially when approaching true reality through inferential analysis. Following this line of thought, Mi bskyod rdo rje criticizes any attempt to conceptually construe existence, even on the level of relative truth.²⁴ In his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, therefore, he takes issue with Tsong kha pa (1357–1419):

Regarding such explanations, the great Shar Tsong kha pa [argues that] because conventional valid perception establishes the relative, it is not empty of an own nature. Yet, while the presence of an object that has not been imputed amounts to an autonomous existence as relative truth, the emptiness of being empty of an own nature is the ultimate truth. This places him outside of the excellent Madhyamaka system, which perfectly distinguishes [and is represented by] all those of earlier generations who maintain that ultimate and relative truths are of one essential nature – the glorious Saraha, the noble Nāgārjuna, the master Śāvari[pa], the master Buddhapālita (c. 470–c. 550), Candrakīrti, and the great master Maitrīpa.²⁵

las || blo yi gzung dang 'dzin rgyu yi || spros pa yid la byed rgyu zhig || gang ltar byas kyang ma myed pas || rdzogs sangs rgyas kyi rgyal yum las || yid byed mi dger gsungs pa yang || 'di yi don la dgongs sam snyam || slob dpon chen po me tri pas || yid la mi byed chos skor gyi || a ma na si' rnal 'byor yang || 'di lta'i rtogs pa myed nas yin |.

22 See Maitrīpa's final analysis of the term *amanasikāra* in the *Amanasikārādhāra* (AMĀ 497.6–7): “[The letter] *a* stands for the word ‘luminous,’ and *manasikāra* for the word ‘self-empowerment’ (*svādhiṣṭhāna*). It is both *a* and *manasikāra*, so we get *amanasikāra*.” (*a iti prabhāsarapadam | manasikāra iti svādhiṣṭhānapadam | aś cāsau manasikāraś cety amanasikārah |*). See Mathes 2015: 247.

23 *Shing rta chen po*, 524.6 (fol. 6a): *spros mtha' 'dzin pa'i shes kun dang || bral la gnyis med ye shes zhes || lugs 'dir gsal bar byas pa yin |.*

24 See also Higgins and Draszcyk 2016: vol. 1, 239–240.

25 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 112.1–8: *shar tsong kha pa chen pos | kun rdzob tha snyad pa'i tshad mas grub pa'i phyir rang rang ngo bos mi stong yang*

In this, Mi bskyod rdo rje also aligns himself with Rong zom Chos bzang (1012–1088) and Atiśa (982–1054), and specifies, in accordance with Rong zom:

Obviously the great Paṇḍita Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, too, taught following the way in which the venerable Maitrīpa and the glorious Atiśa had ascertained the objects of knowledge [known as] the two truths. In his *Lta ba'i brjed byang*²⁶ [he explains that] even though the phenomena of the two truths occur in mutual dependence and are thus without superimposition and misplaced denial, manifold superimpositions and misplaced denial arise as common defining properties for the appearances of just these interdependent conditions.²⁷

To refrain from any reification is indeed the way Maitrīpa and his disciple Rāmapāla understand Apratiṣṭhāna Madhyamaka. In his commentary on *Sekanirdeśa*, verse 29ab, where Maitrīpa defines *mahāmudrā* as “to not abide in anything,”²⁸ Rāmapāla explains:

“In anything” means “in dependently arisen *skandhas*, *dhātus*, *āyatanas*, and so forth.” “Not to abide” means “not to become mentally engaged,” “not to superimpose.”²⁹

In other words, the yogin simply refrains from projecting wrong notions, which usually include independent existence, onto anything arisen in dependence, whether *skandhas*, *dhātus* or *āyatanas*. To what extent this reflects Rong zom's

brtags bzhag min pa'i yul gyi sdod lugs tshugs thub kyi grub pa'i kun rdzob bden grub par rang gi ngo bos stong pa'i stong nyid don dam bden pa yin la | don dam bden pa de dang kun rdzob ngo bo gcig yin par 'dod pa thams cad sngon rabs byon pa'i dpal mgon sa ra ha dang | 'phags pa klu sgrub zhabs dang | rje btsun sha ba ri dang | slob dpon sangs rgyas skyangs dang | zla ba grags pa dang | mnga' bdag mai tri pa chen po dag gis legs par phyed pa'i dbu ma'i lugs bzang po las phyi rol du gyur pa'o |.

26 Rong zom chos kyi bzang po, *Sbrul nag po'i stong thun*. In *Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung 'bum*, vol. 2, 66–69. At the end of this short discourse, Rong zom pa mentions that this example goes back to Dharmabhadra. (Thanks to Martina Draszczyk for this reference.)

27 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 112.9–13: *des na jo bo mai tri pa dang dpal ldan a ti sha de dag gis shes bya bden gnyis ji ltar gtan la dbab pa de ltar pa ṇḍi ta chen po rong zom chos bzang gis kyang bshad par snang ste | des byas pa'i lta ba'i brjed byang las | bden gnyis kyi chos ltos nas 'byung tsam la sgro skur med kyang | ltos 'byung gi rkyen 'di pa tsam gyi snang ba'i mtshan nyid la sgro skur sna tshogs byung ba yin te |.*

28 See Mathes 2015: 107.

29 See Rāmapāla's commentary on *Sekanirdeśa* 29a (not to abide in anything; *sarvasmīn apratiṣṭhānam*) as follows: *sarvasmīn iti pratīyasamutpannaskandhadhātāvāyatanāḍau | apratiṣṭhānam amanasikāro | nāropah* (SNP 192.5–6).

understanding of *apraṭiṣṭhāna* is another question. Based on her study of Rong zom, Almogi (2010: 135) translates *sarvadharmāpraṭiṣṭhānavāda* as “the strand which maintains that all phenomena have no substratum whatsoever.” Since for Mi bskyod rdo rje there is nothing whatsoever that exists independent of designation (including on the level of relative truth), the two understandings do not contradict each other, reflecting as they do a strong form of anti-foundationalism. From the object side, everything is without a foundation; from the subject side, i.e., when glossed as *amanasikāra*, *apraṭiṣṭhāna* is best taken in its primary sense of “non-abiding.”

3 Mi bskyod rdo rje on Sūtra Mahāmudrā

As we have seen above, Mi bskyod rdo rje does not fully endorse Sgam po pa's Sūtra Mahāmudrā (or rather Sūtra Madhyamaka-based Mahāmudrā) or his equation of thoughts with the *dharmakāya*. In this context, Mi bskyod rdo rje also warns that calm abiding and deep insight tend to be overstated as the exemplifying and actual wisdoms of empowerment. Related to this is the question of whether buddhahood can be reached on the sūtra path of *pāramitās* at all. In his *Dgongs gcig* commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje attributes such a position to Maitrīpa:

Master Maitrīpa said: “I have decided that buddha[hood] is not attained through Pāramitāyāna. Why was it necessary then to teach so many Pāramitā[yāna] treatises? They were taught as mere steps on the path for those who have not entered the secret Mantrayāna, but one must rely on the Mantrayāna to become fully awakened.”³⁰

To reach a compromise between this exclusively tantric view and Nāropa's position, Mi bskyod rdo rje states that the above-mentioned emphasis on the Mantrayāna path only refers to an easy and fast buddhahood, but not buddhahood as such. He thus continues in his *Dgongs gcig* commentary:

30 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dgongs gcig sor byang sngags kyi tshoms kyi kar ṭi ka* (= vol. 3), 276.8–12: 'on kyang nangs kyi kham che ba jo bo mai tri pa'i zhal nas | pha rol tu phyin pa'i theg pa'i sgo nas sangs rgyas mi thob ces rang du kha tshon gcod | 'o na phar phyin gyi gzhung 'di tsam zhiḡ bstan pa la dgos pa ci yod byas pa la | gsang sngags kyi theg pa la mi 'jug pa rnam kyi lam stegs tsam du bstan pa yin gyi | 'tshang rgya ba la sngags kyi theg pa la bsten dgos zhes gsungs |.

Venerable Nāropa explained that even those who have entered through the gate of Pāramitāyāna do attain buddhahood. The difference between it and the secret Mantra[yāna] is that the latter is an easy and fast support. Therefore, Master Maitrīpa taught that there is no buddhahood on the path of *pāramitās* itself. Nāropa may say that there is, but the easy and fast buddhahood of secret Mantra[yāna] must be attained [on Mantrayāna] right from the beginning. Therefore, it is greatly praised in the subsequent tradition of Mar pa and his spiritual sons. This is what my [spiritual] father Ras pa chen po said.³¹

In his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, Mi bskyod rdo rje goes one step further and states that Maitrīpa's claim that one can only reach the eleventh level (*bhūmi*) on the tantric path, is a statement with an intention, and so it has a provisional and not a definitive meaning:

Maitrīpa's statement that the eleventh level can certainly not be reached from the ten levels of the sūtra path, in other words, the eleventh level of Tantra[yāna] can certainly not be reached on the sūtra path, is a statement with an intention. Because if it were not so, Maitrīpa would refute himself. In the famous texts of his well-explained *amanasikāra* cycle, the buddha[hood] of the sūtra tradition is explained extensively. From among these treatises, in the *Tattvaratnāvalī* in particular, there are many presentations of the three vehicles and the four positions. Mahāyāna has two parts, the Pāramitāyāna and the Mantrayāna. The causal vehicle consists of the Sautrāntika, the Yogācāra, and the two Mādhyamika [tenet systems]. In the fruitional vehicle there are the two positions of the Yogācāras and the Mādhyamikas. After having taught them extensively, [Maitrīpa] quotes the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* presentation of the three *kāyas*.³² He does not explain the treatises of secret Mantra[yāna].³³

31 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dgongs gcig sor byang sngags kyi tshoms kyi kar ṭi ka* (= vol. 3), 276.12–18: *jo bo nā ro pa'i zhal nas | pha rol tu phyin pa'i theg pa'i sgor zhugs pas kyang sangs rgyas thob ni thob ste | gsang sngags dang gnyis kyi khyad ni bde bar skyob pa dang | myur skyob kyi byed pa yin zhes gsungs so || zhes bshad pas | jo bo mai tri pas ni phar phyin rang lam gyi sangs rgyas med par gsungs la | nā ro pas yod kyang des gsang sngags bde myur gyi sgrub pa'i sangs rgyas gdod thob dgos pa'i phyir | rje mar pa yab sras lugs phyi ma nyid la ches bsngags pa yin ces kho bo'i pha ras pa chen pos gsungs |*

32 I.e., *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, vv. VIII.1, 12, 33.

33 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 350.14–351.5: *rje btsun mai tri pas ni | mdo'i lam gyi sa bcu las bcu gcig pa gtan thob mi nus zhes pa'ang mdo'i lam gyis sngags kyi sa bcu gcig pa gtan mi thob zhes dgongs pa la yin mchis te | de lta ma yin na mai tri pa rang la'ang mi rung bar 'gyur ba'i phyir te | nyid kyi legs par bshad pa'i a ma na si'i chos*

One could add here that Maitrīpa quotes the **Nayatrāyapradīpa*, which makes it clear that the sūtra and tantra paths share the same goal:

It has the same goal [as Pāramitāyāna], but is free from confusion,
 Rich in [skillful] means, and without difficulties.
 Moreover, it is [only] fit for those with sharp faculties.
 The treatises of Mantra[yāna] are thus superior.³⁴

This leads to the question of whether the practice of *amanasikāra* that is related to the view of non-abiding and Mahāmudrā in Maitrīpa's *Sekanirdeśa* and Rāmapāla's commentary on it (see above) also leads to buddhahood. In his *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, Sa skya Paṇḍita insists on a strict tantric context of Mahāmudrā practice that (implicitly) includes taking the three levels of vows, and empowerment:

A monk without vows,
 A bodhisattva who has not generated [*bodhi*]citta,
 And a Mantra[yāna] practitioner without empowerment –
 These three are plunderers of the Buddha's teaching. (III.159)

Even if they cultivate Mahāmudrā,
 Their meditation will only be a suspension³⁵ of thought;
 The wisdom arisen from the [creation and completion] stages
 Is not known [to them] as Mahāmudrā. (III.160)

bskor du grags pa rnam su mdo'i lugs kyi sangs rgyas yod pa rgyas par bshad cing | khyad par bstan bcos de dag las | de kho na nyid rin po che'i phreng ba zhes bya ba der theg pa gsum dang | gnas pa bzhi'i rnam bzahag mang du byas par theg pa chen po la gnyis te | pha rol tu phyin pa'i theg pa dang | sngags kyi theg pa gnyis gnyis su byas shing | rgyu'i theg pa la mdo sde pa dang | rnal 'byor spyod pa ba dang | dbu ma pa gnyis dang | 'bras bu'i theg pa la'ang rnal 'byor spyod pa ba dang | dbu ma la gnas pa gnyis yod pa sogs rgyas par gsungs pa'i mjug sdud du | mdo lugs kyi sangs rgyas sku gsum gyi rnam gzhag mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan las byung ba'i | gang gis srid pa ji srid bar|| zhes sogs drangs nas | 'dir kho bos gsang sngags kyi gzhung ma bshad do zhes 'byung la |.

34 TRĀ 351.25–26: *ekārthatve 'py asaṃmohād bahūpāyād aduṣkarāt | tikṣṇendriyādhikārāc ca mantrasāstraṃ viśiṣyate ||*. First translated in Mathes 2015: 74.

35 I.e., reading *kha 'tshum* instead of *kha 'tshom*. I am indebted to Michele Martin for this emendation. It better fits the context, as Sa skya Paṇḍita criticized a type of blank *mahāmudrā* without any thoughts.

A fool's cultivation of Mahāmudrā
Has been taught to be the cause for going mainly to the animal realm.³⁶
(111.161ab)

Mi bskyod rdo rje must have had these lines in mind when he wrote in his *Dgongs gcig* commentary:

Some say, that even though fools do not fall into lower realms when they meditate on the Mahāmudrā that is explained in the unsurpassable Mantra[yāna], those who meditate on the natural mind of you Dwags po Bka' brgyud pas, this mental non-engagement you call Mahāmudrā, will fall into lower realms. Well then, it is obvious that the learned master Nāgārjuna, and even the perfect Buddha said that *mahāmudrā* and *prajñāpāramitā* are *amanasikāra*, and encouraged many wise and foolish ones to meditate [on it]. Therefore, Nāgārjuna, the perfect Buddha, and others, would be false friends, because in *Hevajratantra* [1.8.44ab] it is said: "The whole world should be meditated upon [in such a way] that it is not produced by the intellect," and [in his *Caturmudrānvaya*] Nāgārjuna said:³⁷ "Homage to you [the Buddha], who is without imagined thoughts, whose intellect is not based [on anything], who is without recollection, who does not become mentally engaged, and who is without any cognitive object." There is much more in the Bka' 'gyur and the treatises.³⁸

The *Hevajratantra* (1.8.44ab) is also quoted in the *Amanasikārādhāra*, where Maitrīpa argues on the basis of these two lines that *amanasikāra* is

36 Sa skya Paṇḍita, *Sdom gsum rab dbye* 111.159–61b (Rhoton 2002: 303): *dge shyong sdom pa med pa dang || rgyal sras sems bskyed ma thob pa || sngags pa dbang bskur med pa gsum || sangs rgyas bstan pa'i chom rkun yin || phyag rgya chen po bsgom na yang || rtoḡ pa kha 'tshom nyid bsgom gyi || rim gnyis las byung ye shes la || phyag rgya chen por mi shes so || blun po phyag rgya che bsgom pa || phal cher dud 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs |*

37 In fact, Nāgārjuna quotes the *Jñānālokāṃkāra* in his *Caturmudrānvaya*.

38 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dgongs gcig 'bras bu'i tshoms dang gsung bzhi bcu pa'i kar ṭi ka* (= vol. 5) 237.17–238.3: *de la kha cig sngags bla med nas bshad pa'i phyag chen de blun pos sgoms na ngan song du mi lung kyang | khyod dwags po bka' brgyud pa'i tha mal shes pa yid la mi byed pa la ming phyag chen du btags pa de bsgoms pas ngan song du lung bar 'gyur ro zhe na | 'o na slob dpon klu sgrub dang rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyis kyang yid la mi byed pa de phyag rgya chen po dang sher phyin du ming btags nas mkhas blun mang po la sgom du bcug snang bas rdzogs sangs dang klu sgrub sogs kyang log pa'i bshes gnyen du 'gyur te | dgyes rdor las | gang phyir yid kyis mi sgom par || 'gro ba thams cad sgom par bya || zhes dang | klu sgrub kyis | kun tu rtoḡ pas ma brtags par | | rab tu mi gnas pa yi yid || dran pa med cing yid byed med || dmigs pa med la phyag 'tshal 'dud || ces 'byung ba sogs bka' bstan bcos mtha' klas pa nas 'byung ba'i phyir spros pa chog go |*

understood by implication.³⁹ The verse quoted in the *Caturmudrānvaya* is from the *Jñānālokāṃkārasūtra*, which plays an important role in Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra*-based Mahāmudrā. In his commentary on the *Sekanirdeśa*, verse 36, Rāmapāla establishes an essential link between Mahāmudrā and the abandoning of characteristic signs through *amanasikāra*. He does so based on the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*, an earlier non-tantric *dhāraṇī* text in which four groups of wrong projections – the characteristic signs of the ordinary phenomenal world, remedies, true reality, and the fruit – are abandoned through the practice of *amanasikāra*.⁴⁰ As already noted above, here the term *amanasikāra* not only stands for mental non-engagement, but also for “luminous self-empowerment.”

This blend of sūtra and tantra in the *amanasikāra* cycle is also a topic in Mi bskyod rdo rje's *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*:

The so-called *amanasikāra* cycle of Master Maitrīpa elucidates both Sūtra- and Mantra Madhyamaka. One may wonder then, what is the view of the two truths as it came down to us through the Bka' brgyud [tradition] of Venerable Mar pa Lo tsā ba. [The answer is as follows:] The meaning of the commentary by the great master Sahajavajra on Jina Maitrīpa's *Tattvadaśaka* will be roughly explained here. In this commentary, it is maintained that Master Maitrīpa summarized Pāramitā[yāna] pith instructions that accord with Mantra[yāna]. Therefore, the Dharma to be known and ascertained by those seeking liberation, is true reality, or the nature of the three *kāyas*, which embody the true nature of phenomena. Another name for it is *prajñāpāramitā*. Venerable Maitreya said [in *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.14]:

The synonyms of emptiness are, in brief,

Suchness, the limit of reality,

Signlessness, the ultimate,

And the “source of buddha qualities” (*dharmadhātu*).

Therefore, (a) the profundity of being free from identifying and differentiating the two truths in terms of what is contained by them – all phenomena (*dharmā*) and the naturally pure nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*) – [and (b) the profundity of being free from] the four extremes of existence, non-existence and so forth, have the nature of non-apprehension,

39 Mathes 2015: 243.

40 In his commentary on SN 36, Rāmapāla offers a nearly verbatim citation from the section of the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* that describes the abandonment of the four sets of characteristic signs through *amanasikāra*. For details see Mathes 2016: 327–331.

understood as any apprehension in what comes with apprehensions as mere appearances that could occur in dependence on existence and non-existence or production and cessation.⁴¹

Sahajavajra's characterization of the *Tattvadaśaka* as a summary of Pāramitāyāna pith instructions that accord with Mantrayāna is already found in 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal's *Blue Annals* (see above), with the difference that Mi bskyod rdo rje does not say here that the summary's name is *mahāmudrā* – which, in fact, corresponds more accurately to what we find in Sahajavajra's commentary.⁴²

It is interesting that Mi bskyod rdo rje quotes the same verse from the *Madhyāntavibhāga* upon which Sahajavajra bases his explanation of the *Tattvadaśaka*'s initial praise of “suchness, which has no association with existence and non-existence.”⁴³ Sahajavajra thus wants us to understand true reality according to this important Maitreya text, which offers a model of reality that differs from Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's *Madhyamaka* in that it positively describes the ultimate in terms of the natural luminosity of mind.⁴⁴ Moreover, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and the related definition of the two truths along the lines of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* – namely as *dharmin* and *dharmatā*, which are neither identical nor different – are fully endorsed here.⁴⁵ Still, the two *vibhāgas* are obviously not considered to represent the Yogācāra

41 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod kyi rnam par bshad pa*, vol. 1, 102.4–20: *jo bo mai tri pas yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor bya ba mdo sngags kyi dbu ma gnyis ka'i tshul gsal bar mdzad pa de | rje btsun mar pa lo tsa ba'i bka' brgyud las 'ongs pa bden gnyis kyi lta ba ji lta bu'o snyam na | rgyal ba mai tri pa'i de kho na nyid bcu pa zhes pa'i 'grel pa slob dpon chen po lhan cig skyes pa'i rdo rjes mdzad pa de nyid kyi don che long 'dir brjod par bya ste | de'ang 'grel pa de las slob dpon mai tri pas | grub mtha' bzhi la grags pa'i tshad mas rab tu mi gnas pa la 'jug pa'i 'thead pa rgya chen pos sngags dang rjes su mthun pa'i pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag mdor bsdus mdzad par bzhed pas | thar pa 'dod pa dag gis shes par bya ba'i chos gtan la dbab bya ni | de kho na nyid dam | chos nyid kyi bdag nyid can gyi sku gsum gyi rang bzhin nam | ming gzhan shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa ste | rje btsun gyis | stong pa nyid ni mdor bsdus na || de bzhin nyid dang yang dag mtha' || mtshan ma med dang don dam nyid || chos kyi dbyings kyi rnam grangs so || zhes bstan pa nyid kyi phyir bden pa gnyis kyi bsdus pa'i chos can gyi chos thams cad rang bzhin gyis rnam par dag pa'i chos nyid las gcig dang tha dad pa dang | yod dang med pa sogs kyi mtha' bzhi dang bral ba'i zab mo'i don can yod med skye 'gag la sogs par ltos 'byung gi rung bar snang tsam du dmigs pa dang bcas la ji tsam dmigs pa de nyid kyi ma dmigs pa'i rang bzhin can yin te |.*

42 See Mathes 2015: 215.

43 For an English translation of the relevant passage, see Brunnhölzl 2007: 142–143.

44 See Mathes 2012: 190–192.

45 In his *Shing rta chen po* (519.3–4), Mi bskyod rdo rje describes the same relationship between the two truths.

tenets of Sākāra- and Nirākāravāda,⁴⁶ for it is said in the following verse of the *Tattvadaśaka* that somebody who wishes to know suchness does not find it in these two tenet systems. Rather, the relationship between *dharmin* and *dharmatā* reflects the one between adventitious stains and buddha nature in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, where buddha nature is taken as “suchness accompanied by stains” (*samālā tathatā*), and buddhahood as “stainless suchness” (*nirmalā tathatā*). This is precisely what is taught in *Tattvadaśaka* 1cd: “Because, when stainless, this very [suchness] has the form of enlightenment in virtue of being realized.”⁴⁷ This and also the doctrinal similarity of Mahāmudrā with the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* (its doctrine of abandoning characteristic signs is crucial to the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, too) establish a close relationship between the Maitreya works and the *amanasikāra* cycle.

Returning to the question of Sūtra Mahāmudrā, Mi bskyod rdo rje further points out that in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* Maitrīpa teaches a sūtra path to buddhahood:

Moreover, [Maitrīpa] explains in his *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana* that there is buddha[hood] in the sūtra-tradition [attained] on the sūtra path. It is said [in the *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*]:

Here, there are two types of sentient beings: those who are [still] learning and those who no longer [need to] learn. For those who are learning and [thus] in a causal state, there is proper intention, the practice of conviction, the practice following the attainment of [bodhisattva]-levels, and finally, gaining power over the following [five concerns: defilements, appearances, deeds (*karman*), means, and causing sentient beings to ripen].⁴⁸ Perfect enlightenment is fully attained [only] after accumulating the two accumulations by performing very pure initial activity (i.e., the first five *pāramitās*). For those who no longer [need to] learn, who have abandoned [all] notions about remedy, reality, and fruit, initial activity unfolds through the power of the impetus of [former] prayers, as in the case of Śākyamuni. [This activity is] uninterrupted and has the defining characteristic of fulfilling the needs of sentient beings through an effortless practice [resulting in a state called] “indivisible union” (*yuganaddha*).

46 I.e., the two common doxographical categories of Yogācāra, according to which phenomenal content is truly established (*sākāra*), or not (*nirākāra*).

47 For a translation of *Tattvadaśaka* 1–2, see Mathes 2015: 211.

48 See KDNT 335:30–31: *tatra vaśitāḥ pañca | tad yathā kleśa upapattiḥ karma upāyaḥ sattvapariṣkāvēvāsthā*.

Since this is taught with respect to the buddha[hood] of the causal vehicle's own path, there is an extensive explanation of buddha[hood] on the path of the causal vehicle.⁴⁹

An important topic related to Sūtra–Mahāmudrā is the question of whether an immediate access to the goal of buddhahood through pointing-out instructions is considered possible. In his analysis of the Indian Mahāmudrā works, Karma Bkra shis chos 'phel, a disciple of Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) calls this a short or fast Mahāmudrā path that is independent of the sūtras and tantras.⁵⁰ It can be combined with the latter two, the result being what Kong sprul calls Sūtra Mahāmudrā and Mantra Mahāmudrā.⁵¹ In the *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* we find in this respect an interesting quote from, and comment on, Maitrīpa's *Pañcākāra*. The quote is at the end of the description of the first deity, and should be taken to apply implicitly to all remaining deities of the *maṇḍala*:

In the *Pañcākāra* from Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle it is said:

[The crown of his head displays a Vajrasattva, for] he has the nature of Vajrasattva, being inseparable from emptiness and compassion. Therefore,⁵² he has the nature of cause and effect and the defining characteristic of emptiness, which is endowed with all supreme

49 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 351.5–16: *yang des mdzad pa'i lta ba ngan sel las mdo'i lam gyis mdo lugs kyi sangs rgyas yod par bshad de | der ji skad du | 'dir sems can ni rnam pa gnyis te slob pa dang mi slob pa'o || de la [em., text: las] lhag pa'i bsam pas mos pa'i sbyor ba dang | sa la zhugs pa'i sbyor ba dang | lnga la dbang thob pa'i mthar thug pa'i bar rgyu'i gnas skabs pa gnas pa'i slob ma rnams shin tu rnam par dag pa las dang po'i cho gas tshogs gnyis bsags nas | yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub yang dag par thob bo || mi slob pa yang de kho na nyid dang 'bras bu rnam par rtog pa ni gnyen po'i phyogs kyi [em., text: kyi] bsal la | shā kya thub pa ltar sngon gyi smon lam gyi shugs kyi nus pas zung du 'jug pa nyid sems can [du 'bad pa med par]† gyi don byed pa ni | mtshan nyid rgyun mi chad par dang po'i las la 'jug go | zhes bya bar gnas so || zhes 'byung bas rgyu'i theg pa'i rang lam gyi sangs rgyas kyi dbang du mdzad nas gsungs pa'i phyir yang rgyu'i theg pa'i lam gyi sangs rgyas yod par ches bzhed pa yin no |.*

† Supplied from KDN 324.15–16.

The Sanskrit of the quote is as follows (KDN 323.25–324.2): *iha hi dvividhā sattvāḥ śaīkṣā aśaīkṣā ca | tatrāśayo 'dhimuktiprayogo bhūmiprapannaprayogaś ca vaśitāptiparyanto hetvavasthāsthitānām śaīkṣānām suviśuddhādikarmavidhānena sambhāradvayaṃ sambhṛtya samyaksambodhisampallābhah | aśaīkṣānām api nīrastapratipakṣatattvapha lavikalpānām śākyamuner iva prañidhānavegasāmarthyād yuganaddhānābhogayogataḥ sattvārthakriyālakṣaṇam avicchinnam ādikarma pravartata eva | iti sthitam | tathā ca |.*

50 Mathes 2011: 104–106.

51 Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas: *Shes bya kun khyab mdzod*, vol. 3, 375f.

52 Tib. *de nyid* is a wrong translation of Skt. *ata eva*. See PĀ 416.33.

aspects. Being unconditioned and having the nature of suchness, he is [also] the *dharmakāya*. Being a mere appearance, he is the *sambhogakāya*. Given that he has the nature of consciousness on the level of the imagined,⁵³ he is the *nirmāṇakāya*. Possessing the single taste of all three *kāyas*, he is the *svābhāvikakāya*.⁵⁴ This is stated [in *Mahāyāna-viṃśikā*, verse 19]: “The unconditioned mind is the *dharmakāya*”; realization is the defining characteristics of the *sambhogakāya*. [Then there is] that: a variety has been emanated (i.e., the *nirmāṇakāya*). The natural one (i.e., the *nijakāya*) is the nature of all [three].”

In these excellent explanations, it has been taught that the three *kāyas* from the co-emergent luminosity of one's mind are directly pointed out, which means that it is not as if they are taken as the path and practiced.⁵⁵

This means that Maitrīpa's Vajrasattva *maṇḍala* is not cultivated in the usual creation stage manner but directly pointed out. Here, the adept rather has an immediate access to the *kāyas* of the buddhas. Understood in this way, the common feature of Bka' brgyud Mahāmudrā whereby students can be directly introduced to the luminous nature of mind is implicitly endorsed. In his *Dgongs gcig* commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje characterizes this type of introduction as an immersion in the natural and continuous Mahāmudrā:

53 I.e., taking *kalpita* in the sense of *parikalpitasvabhāva*.

54 This sentence is missing in the Tibetan. See PĀ 417.2: *nirmāṇakāyaḥ kāyatritayaikaarasatvāt svābhāvikakāyaḥ* |.

55 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 203.19–204.9: *rje mai tri pa'i yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor rnam las | rang bzhin lnga pa las | rdo rje sems dpa'i rang bzhin stong pa dang snying rje dbyer med pa'o || de nyid rgyu dang 'bras bu'i bdag nyid rnam pa thams cad kyi mchog dang ldan pa'i stong pa nyid mtshan nyid 'dus ma byas shing | de bzhin nyid kyi bdag nyid yin pa'i phyir [chos kyi sku'o || rab tu snang ba tsam yin pa'i phyir]† longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku'o || brtags pa'i rnam par shes pa'i ngo bo yin pa'i phyir sprul pa'i sku'o || de kad gsungs pas | 'dus ma byas sems chos kyi sku || brtags pa longs spyod rdzogs mtshan nyid || sna tshogs de nyid sprul pa'o || gnyug ma kun gyi rang bzhin no || zhes lung dang bcas te 'byung ngo || de ltar legs par bshad pa de dag gis ni rang sems than cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal las sku gsum lam du byed cing nyams su len pa med ltar ngo sprod pa'i tshul bstan zin to |.*

† Supplied from PĀ 417.7–8.

The Sanskrit (PĀ 416.14–15, 416.32–417.2 and 417.12–13) of the quotation is as follows: *vajrasattvasvabhāvaḥ śūnyatākaruṇābhinnāḥ ata eva hetuphalātmakāḥ sarvākāravaro-petaśūnyatālakṣaṇo 'saṃskṛtatathatātmakatvād dharmakāyaḥ pratibhāsamātrativāt sambhogakāyaḥ kalpitavijñānātmakatvād nirmāṇakāyaḥ kāyatritayaikaarasatvāt svābhāvikakāyaḥ | tad uktam | asaṃskṛtamano dharmo bodhaḥ sambhogalakṣaṇaḥ | tad eva nirmitaś citraḥ nijaḥ sarvasvabhāvataḥ |.*

Then, on the basis of the true nature, [one's mind] becomes naked without being able to engage in any mental activity. The glorious Dwags po Bka' brgyud pas call this the true nature of mind to be seen, actualizing natural *prajñāpāramitā*, or receiving a [pointing-out] introduction through having been introduced to what one has not encountered before – the face of true nature itself. This is labeled “having been immersed into the natural and continuous Mahāmudrā.”⁵⁶

Mi bskyod rdo rje explains that since such pointing-out introductions are common with sūtra and tantra, they differ from the Mahāmudrā of the completion stage of the Unsurpassable Yoga Tantra. The related view and meditation of this practice are then explained to be based mainly on Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle:

Likewise, mere Mahāmudrā like that is not posited as the Mahāmudrā of the completion stage of the Unsurpassable Mantra[yāna]. The way of this view and meditation cannot be compared to the practice of what is common in sūtra and tantra because the great master Maitrīpa emphasized the *amanasikāra* cycle of not becoming mentally engaged, non-arising, and transcending the mind while he abided well by these instructions.⁵⁷

It should be noted that if one understands “not becoming mentally engaged” in the sense of “non-mindfulness,” the three attributes characterizing the *amanasikāra* cycle, mentioned just above, are identical with the last three of Vajrapāṇi's four practices (*dharma*s) pertaining to the identity of the nature of mind and the nature of phenomena. They constitute an instantaneous approach. In his **Guruparamparākrama–Upadeśa*, Vajrapāṇi writes:

56 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dam pa'i chos dgongs pa gcig pa kar ṭi ka las drug pa rten 'brel gyi tshoms kyi ṭi ka chen*, 1341: *de'i tshe gnas lugs kyi steng du yid kyi byed pa ci yang ma btub par rjen cer gyis 'gro ba de la | dpal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud pa dag sems kyi gnas lugs mthong bya ba'am rang bzhin sher phyin mngon du byas zer ba'am | gnas lugs kyi rang zhal sngar 'dri kyi mi phrad pa ltar ngo 'phrod pas ngo sprod thob bo zhes dang | phyag rgya chen po ma bcos rgya 'byams su shor zhes pa'i tha snyad mdzad pa yin la |.*

57 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dam pa'i chos dgongs pa gcig pa kar ṭi ka las drug pa rten 'brel gyi tshoms kyi ṭi ka chen*, 1342: *de ltar na'ang de lta'i phyag chen de tsam la sngags bla med kyi rdzogs rim gyi phyag chen du ni mi 'jog go | lta sgom gyi tshul 'di ni mdo sngags thun mong ba'i nyams su len tshul zla dang bral ba zhig yin te | jo bo chen po mai tri pas yid la mi byed skye med blo 'das a ma na si'i chos skor zhes rtсал du bton te legs par gdams pa de nyid du gnas pa'i phyr |.*

The four *dharma*s (i.e., yoga practices) pertaining to the identity of the nature of mind and the nature of phenomena are mindfulness, non-mindfulness, non-arising, and transcending the mind. They are heard at one and the same time in two ways – profound and manifest. The profound is beyond studying, reflecting, and meditating. It is an expression that denotes instantaneous abiding in an equipoise that is not essentially different from the *dharmadhātu* of all the buddhas of the three times and sentient beings of the three realms.⁵⁸

In his commentary to Saraha's *People's Dohās* (*Dmangs do hā*), Karma Phrin las pa (1456–1539), one of the main teachers of Mi bskyod rdo rje, explains these four *dharma*s, which are indicated by the four letters (*e vaṃ ma yā*), as the means to accomplish the supreme *siddhi* (i.e., Mahāmudrā) in the following way:

First, by way of special instructions, I teach mindfulness, which means cutting [ordinary conceptual] mind from its root. Then, [second,] drinking the juice of not being mindful, that is, of resting in the sphere of mental non-engagement (*a-manasikāra*), one forgets to cling to the notion “mine.” Then, [third,] through special instructions on non-arising, which make one understand the meaning of the single syllable for non-arising, [the privative] *a*, one realizes that the nature of mind has never arisen. Then, [fourth,] through the special instructions on transcending the mind, [which allow one] to pass over into the ultimate, one no longer knows [even] the words or symbols for “non-arising.” This is liberation without expression in word or thought.⁵⁹

58 BhPHTAP (D 286b7–287a2; P 309b5–8): *sems nyid dang chos nyid kyi ngo bo gcig la dran pa dang | dran pa med pa dang | skye ba med pa dang | blo las 'das pa chos bzhi po dus gcig pa las zab pa dang | snang ba'i tshul rnam pa gnyis kyis thos so | de yang zab pa ni thos pa dang bsam pa dang bsgom pa las 'das pa ste | dus gsum du rnam par bzhugs pa'i sangs rgyas rams dang | kham gsum gyi sems can ma lus pa'i chos kyi dbyings kyi ngo bo tha mi dad pa'i skad cig ma gcig la mnyam pa nyid la gnas pa'i tshig bla dags so |* My translation differs from Lopez's (1996: 202–203) only for terminological reasons.

59 Karma Phrin las pa, *Dmangs do ha'i rnam bshad* 101.4–10: *mchog gi dngos grub bsgrub par byed pa'i thabs yi ges nye bar mtshon pa ni bzhi ste | dran pa | dran med | skye med | blo 'das so | de bzhi las dang po sems rtas ba gcod pa dran pa'i man ngag bdag gis ston te | de nas yid la mi byed pa'i ngang du 'jog pa dran med kyi khu ba 'thungs pas nga yir 'dzin pa ni brjed par 'gyur ro | de nas gang gis a skye ba med pa'i yi ge gcig don shes par byed pa skye med kyi man ngag gis sems nyid gdod nas ma skyes par rtogs | de nas mthar thug la bzla ba blo 'das kyi man ngag gis skye med ces bya ba de'i ming dang brda ni mi shes te sgra bsam brjod med du grol ba'o ||*

Karma Phrin las pa follows here Vajrapāṇi's guru Maitrīpa, who argues at length in his *Amanasikārādhāra* that the privative *a* of *amanasikāra* stands for *anutpāda* ("non-arising"), which means emptiness. As we will see further down, in the final analysis for Maitrīpa, the letter *a* becomes luminosity, and *manasikāra* self-empowerment (*svādhiṣṭhāna*).

In the following passage from the *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, Mi bskyod rdo rje adopts a slightly different view on this matter when discussing the common claim of his tradition that Mar pa attained sūtric and tantric Mahāmudrā realization from Maitrīpa and Nāropa respectively:

The arising of Mahāmudrā realization free from elaborations based on karmic appearances and the arising of Mahāmudrā realization free from elaborations based on wisdom appearances differ greatly in terms of being supreme and inferior. In [this context] everyone, the [Bka' brgyud pa] themselves and others, say that lord Mar pa attained accomplishment in [the presence of] both, the lords Nāropa and Maitrī[pa]. [Moreover, they say] that [Mar pa] owes accomplishing insight into emptiness, which is in common with the sūtras, to Maitrīpa and accomplishing the aspect of the means of great bliss, which is specific to the tantras, to Nāropa. However, my all-knowing master [Sangs rgyas gnyen pa] who abides as the essence of the *iṣṭadevatā* says in his profound secret sermon:

It [just] appears that Mar pa, when staying with the noble Maitrīpa, was introduced to the realization of Mahāmudrā based on wisdom appearances and that, when staying with the noble Nāropa, was introduced into the realization of Mahāmudrā based on karmic appearances. [I understand that these] are words appropriate to keep [the meaning] hidden and secret for those who lack good fortune. This is because from the songs of the master Mar pa [we learn]:

In the east, I crossed the Gaṅgā, the waters of realization.
 In the Cemetery of the Quaking Mountain,
 In the hermitage called Ravishing Beautiful Flowers (Phullahari)
 I touched the feet of the master Maitrī[pa].
 He sang a song in praise of the profound tantras
 And I trained in the realization of the Dharma of Mahāmudrā.
 I ascertained the mode of the abiding mind
 And saw the ultimate essence, the uncontrived ground.

Thus, "singing a song in praise [of the profound tantras]" is the definitive arising of the great reassurance on the completion stage of Illustrious Kālacakra. Therefore, this karmic appearance as such – arising as a support for the production of grasping at elaborated extremes through

the force of delusion – although it appears as a deluding phenomena, being delusion itself, it does not remain as having the abiding nature of the deluding phenomenon. The non-deluding phenomenon itself is co-emergent with it. Therefore, it is similar to the practice of Mahāmudrā, the practice of union with the co-emergent of the glorious Dwags po bka' brgyud as it was presented earlier in the context of calm abiding and deep insight in terms of the causal vehicle. Regarding precisely that, there is the description “delusion appears as wisdom” in the Four Dharmas of Dwags po by master Sgam po pa.⁶⁰

In other words, Mi bskyod rdo rje is convinced that the Mahāmudrā realization Mar pa found in the presence of Maitrīpa is also tantric in nature. To what extent this represents the Kālacakra completion stage is another issue, however. As I have already shown in previous publications, Maitrīpa's empowerment and associated completion-stage practice are based on a different sequence of the four joys – co-emergent joy (*sahajānanda*) being in the third position, and not in the fourth as it is in the Kālacakra system. Maitrīpa thus differs from the majority of scholars, including Nāropa, Kamalanātha, Abhayākara Gupta, Raviśrījñāna and Vibhūticandra. Zhwa dmar Chos grags ye shes manages,

60 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod nam bshad*, vol. 1, 432.13–433.11: *des na las snang gi steng spros bral phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa shar ba dang | ye snang gi steng du spros bral phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa shar ba gnyis la mchog dman ches che ba yin te | rje mar pas rje nā ro mai tri gnyis la dngos grub nod pa na | mai tri pa la mdo dang thun mong ba'i stong pa nyid shes rab dang | nā ro pa la sngags thun mong min pa'i bde chen gyi thabs cha'i bka' drin thob pa yin zhes rang gzhan kun la grags kyang | bdag gi rje btsun thams cad mkhyen pa yi dam lha'i ngo bor bzhugs pa dag gi gsang ba'i gtam zab mo las | jo bo mai tri pa'i drung du rje mar pas ye snang gi steng du phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa ngo 'phrod pa yin la | jo bo nā ro pa'i drung du las snang gi steng du phyag rgya chen po'i rtogs pa ngo 'phrod par gsal zhes skal med la gsang zhing sba bar 'os pa'i mchid mo ste | de'i phyir | rje btsun chen po mar pa'i mgur las | shar dngos grub kyi chu bo gangā brgal || ri rab tu 'khrugs pa'i dur khrod du || me tog mdangs 'phrog gi dgon pa ru || rje mnga' bdag mai tri'i zhabs la gtugs || rgyud zab mo bstod pa klur blangs zhus || chos phyag rgya chen la rtogs pa sbyangs || sems dngos po'i zhugs tshul gtan la phab || gzhi ma bcos don gyi ngo bo mthong || zhes 'byung bas bstod pa glur blangs zhus zhes pas bcom ldan 'das dus kyi 'khor lo rdzogs rim gyi dbugs chen po nges par dbyung bar mdzad pa yin no || des na las snang 'di nyid 'khrul pa'i dbang gis spros pa'i mthar 'dzin bskyed pa'i rten du shar ba de 'khrul chos su snang yang 'khrul pa nyid ltar 'khrul chos kyi gnas lugs su mi gnas par ma 'khrul ba nyid kyi chos de de dang than cig skyes pa nyid kyi dpal ldan dwags po bka' brgyud kyi phyag rgya chen po than cig skyes shyor gyi nyams len gong du rgyu'i theg pa'i zhi lhag gi skabs su bshad pa ltar yin la | 'di nyid kyi dbang du byas na rje sgam po pa'i dwags po chos bzhi zhes par | 'khrul pa ye shes su 'char ba zhes 'byung ba de nyid yin |.*

however, to synthesize Maitrīpa's tradition with the one of Nāropa (who mainly represents Kālacakra).⁶¹

4 The Term *Amanasikāra*

The term that lends Maitrīpa's cycle its name has a long history. From early on, though, the “withdrawal of one's attention” (*amanasikāra*) from something has been combined with the “direction of one's attention” (*manasikāra*) to something else.⁶² In his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, Mi bskyod ro rje thus deals with the objection that Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle excludes any form of mental engagement (*manasikāra*):

Objection: Having taught venerable Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* cycle in particular, does this not contradict the yogas of mental engagement [and] non-engagement? [Reply:] Concerning the term *amanasikāra*, in accordance with the teachings of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, terminating mental engagement with the changing, conditioned *samsāra*, while resting in meditation one-pointedly focused on [one's] mental engagement with unproduced non-abiding *nirvāṇa*, does not contradict the two yogas. This has been stated by the Illustrious One in the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*:

Son of a noble family, what is the reason [the state of] the non-conceptual sphere been called *amanasikāra*? It is in view of [one's] having gone beyond all characteristic signs [created by] conceptual thinking. In other words, the term *amanasikāra* denotes a state in which one has left all conceptual thinking behind.⁶³

61 See Mathes 2015: 312–314.

62 See Mathes 2010: 5f.

63 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 1, 164.16–165.4: *khyad par jo bo mai tri pa'i yid la mi byed pa'i chos bskor bstan pas yid la byed mi byed kyi rnal 'byor 'gal lo snyam na | zhwa dmar cod pan 'dzin pa bzhi pa'i gsung gis a ma na si ka ra zhes pa'i sgra las drangs nas | 'khor ba 'dus byas kyi 'gyur ba'i yid byed 'gog pa dang | de lta na'ang mi gnas mya ngan las 'das pa ma byas pa'i yid byed la rtse gcig par mnyam par gzahag pa rnal 'byor [em., text: 'byor pa] gnyis mi 'gal te | rnam par mi rtog pa la 'jug pa'i gzungs las | rigs kyi bu gang gis na rnam par mi rtog pa'i dbyings la yid la mi byed pa zhes brjod | rnam par rtog pa thams cad kyi mtshan ma las yang dag par 'das na blangs pa'o || de dag gis ni rnam par mi rtog pa thams cad las yang dag par 'das pa bstan [em., text: bsam gtan] par 'gyur te | yid la mi byed pa yi sgra yis so |. The Sanskrit of the quotation from the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*, is as follows (AMĀ 494.3–6): *kena kāraṇena kulaputra-avikalpadhātura amanasikāra ity ucyate | sa rvavikalpanimittasamatikrāntatām upādāyati | etena sarvavikalpasamatikrāmātā darśitā bhavaty amanasikāraśabdeneti |.**

Mi bskyod rdo rje has taken this passage of the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī* from Maitrīpa's *Amanasikārādhāra*, from which he continues to quote Maitrīpa's explanation of *amanasikāra* as both an affirming and non-affirming negation. To partly summarize the long quotation, taken as an affirming negation, *amanasikāra* still allows for an awareness (*vedana: rig pa*) of essencelessness,⁶⁴ while in the case of a non-affirming negation, Maitrīpa offers an interesting analysis of *amanasikāra* as a compound in which the middle word has been dropped:

Amanasikāra means the *manasikāra* for which the letter *a* [in front of it] is the main [focus]. It is a compound in which the middle word is dropped, as in the case of a *śākapārthiva*, a “king [for whom] vegetables [are the main element of his diet].” Accordingly, whatever mental engagement (*manasikāra*) there is, all of it is “*a*,” which has the nature of non-origination.⁶⁵

After his quotation of this grammatical analysis, Mi bskyod rdo rje shares the following comment by Rje La yag pa Byang chub dngos grub (12th century):

In accordance with that, Rje La yag pa says in his commentary on Sgam po pa's four *dharmas*: “As for mental nonengagement, once all mental engagement related to a perceived and perceiver is abandoned, one becomes familiar with true reality. Moreover, since [the letter] *a* [in front] is taken as the main [focus], one abides in the sphere in which nothing arises.”⁶⁶

In other words, the adept becomes mentally engaged with, or rather abides in, non-arising, which for Maitrīpa is luminous emptiness.⁶⁷ A little further down

64 Mathes 2015: 245.

65 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod nam bshad*, vol. 1, 165,8–11: *a yig* [em., text: *yid*] *gtso bor gyur pa'i yid la byed pa ni yid la mi byed pa ste* | *lo ma'i rgyal po bzhin tshig dbus ma phyis pa'i bsdu* [em., text: *bsdus*] *pa'o* || *de dag gis ni yid la byed pa gang yin pa thams cad ni a ste skye ba med pa'i don to* |. The corresponding Sanskrit is as follows (AMĀ 495,2–4): *akārapradhāno manasikāro 'manasikārah* | *śākapārthivavat madhyapadalopī samāsaḥ* | *etena yāvan manasikārah sarvaḥ akārah* | *anutpādātma ity arthaḥ* |.

66 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod nam bshad*, vol. 1, 165,12–16: *'di dang mthun par rje sgam po pa'i chos bzhi'i 'grel par rje la yag pas* | *yid la mi byed pa ni gzung ba dang 'dzin pa la sogs pa'i yid la byed pa thams cad spangs nas* | *de kho na nyid goms par byed pa'o* || *yang na a gtso bo'i phyir thams cad skye ba med pa'i ngang du gnas pa ste zhes dang* |.

67 See Mathes 2015: 247.

in his *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, Mi bskyod rdo rje gives the following summary of, and comment on, the *Amanasikārādhāra*:

In this Indian Dharma tradition of Mahāmudrā-*amanasikāra*, there were noble Śavaripa and venerable Maitrīpa. From among the famous texts in the *amanasikāra* cycle the presence and disappearance of compounds with case endings such as *amanaskāra* and *amansikāra* are briefly explained in Maitrīpa's *Amanasikār[ādhāra]*. Then [Maitrīpa] quotes the *Āryajñānālokāṃkārāsūtra*, which says that the mental factors of mental non-engagement are virtuous, while those of mental engagement are non-virtuous. To refute the qualm that even though [*amanasikāra*] is found in the sūtras, it is not so in the Mantra[yāna], he quotes *Hevajratantra* [1.5.1]: "Neither mind nor mental factors exist in terms of an own-being," [and also *Hevajratantra* 1.8.44ab]: "The whole world should be meditated upon [in such a way] that it is not produced by the intellect (*manas*)." As for *manas* [in *amanasikāra*], it stands here for the very body and mind that obstruct the innate buddha⁶⁸ body and mind, i.e., the illusory body and luminosity. To interrupt the machinery of this body and mind, the going and coming of the immediately preceding condition of mental engagement, which creates the mistaken phenomena of eight [modes] such as looking outward, must be stopped.⁶⁹

It is clear here that the second component of *amanasikāra* (the first one being the negation of ordinary conceptual mind) is not only an abiding in the sphere of nonarising, but the innate buddha body and mind. The *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad* continues with a commentary on Maitrīpa's final analysis of *amanasikāra*:

68 I.e., taking into account of the honorific forms *sku* and *thugs*.

69 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 2, 395.9–396.3: *phyag rgya chen po yid la mi byed pa'i chos tshul 'di la 'phags pa'i yul na dpal sha wa ri dang rje btsun mai tri pa chen po ste | yid la mi byed pa'i chos skor du grags pa rnams las | rje mai tri pa'i yid la mi byed pa zhes pa'i bstan bcos las | yid mi byed pa dang yid la mi byed pa zhes rnam dbye'i bsdu ba yod med yin zhes mdor bstan nas | 'phags pa snang rgyan gyi mdo las | yid la mi byed pa'i chos rnams dge ba'o || yid la byed pa'i chos rnams mi dge ba'o || zhes khungs drangs nas | mdo las de lta yin kyang sngags la de lta ma yin no || zhes dogs pa spang ba'i phyir | he ba dzwa las | ngo bo nyid kyis sems med cing || sems las byung ba'ang med pa'o || gang phyir yid kyis mi bsgom par || gro ba thams cad bsgom par bya || zhes drangs te | yid ni gnyug ma'i sku dang thugs sgyu lus dang 'od gsal ba la sgrib byed kyi lus sems nyid la bzung ste | lus sems de dag gi 'khrul 'khor rgyun gcod byed nyid du kha phyir lta sogs brgyad kyi 'khrul chos skyed byed | de ma thag pa'i yid la byed pa'i rkyen gyi 'gro 'ong 'gog dgos so zhes |.*

In the [*Amanasikārādhāra*] it is said:

Because of that, the words *a*, *manasikāra*, and so forth, refer to the inconceivable state of being luminous and [the one of] self-empowerment, [that is,] an awareness that continues as something not separate from emptiness and compassion, [i.e.,] not distinct (*advaya*) from [the level of] indivisible union.⁷⁰

There is a profound practice of pointing out [what] deception is, namely that the immediately preceding [condition], which creates the entirety of *samsāra*, does not [truly] exist as an immediately preceding mind. This instruction by venerable Sgam po pa is found in detail in the texts of [Karma pa] Rang byung [rdo rje] (1284–1339), the Supremely Victorious One. The innate [buddha] nature, free from adventitious mental engagement is called buddha[hood]. In the *Āṅgulimālīya*[*sūtra*] it is said:

Just as the mixing of water and oil is not observed, so there is no ground for the mixing of defilements and the buddha sphere, even when the latter is covered by ten million of defilements. It is inside the ten million defilements like the lamp inside a vase. Once the vase is broken, the lamp beautifully spreads its light. The teacher of buddha nature is the perfect Buddha.⁷¹

Going by this interpretation, *amanasikāra* stands for (a) the pointing-out instruction that mental engagement (*manasikāra*) does not exist insofar as it is but nonexistent adventitious stains; and (b) the luminous self-empowerment of innate buddha nature. Opposed to Gzhon nu dpal, who regards buddha nature as the mind-stream's individual luminosity and as such not ontologically

70 My translation follows the Sanskrit. (See Mathes 2015: 247).

71 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sku gsum ngo sprod rnam bshad*, vol. 2, 396.3–15: 'dis [em., text: der] ni yid la mi byed pa'i gnas bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i [em., text: pa] 'od gsal ba bdag la byin gyis brlabs pa'i bdag nyid stong pa nyid dang snying rje dbyer med pa zung du 'jug pa gnyis su med pa'i rgyun yang dag par rig pa bskyed par 'gyur ro |†| zhes 'byung bas | 'khor ba mtha' dag bskyed pa'i de ma thag yid de ma thag pa nyid du ma grub pa'i 'khrul mtshang ngo sprod pa'i zab gnad rje btsun sgam po pa'i bzhed pa rang byung rgyal ba mchog gi gsung rab rnam su rgya cher 'byung la | gnyug ma'i snying po glo bur gyi yid byed dang bral ba de nyid la sangs rgyas su brjod de | sor phreng las | dper na chu dang 'bru mar bsres pa mi dmigs pa de bzhin du sangs rgyas kyi dbyings kyang nyon mongs pa bye bas g.yogs mod kyi | nyon mongs pa dang sangs rgyas kyi dbyings 'dres par 'gyur ba'i gnas med do || nyon mongs pa bye ba'i nang na 'dug mod kyi bum pa'i nang na mar me 'dug bzhin du bum pa bcag na mar me rab tu 'bar zhing mdzes te de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ston par byed pa ni rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas so || zhes 'byung ngo |.

† The Sanskrit of this quote is as follows (AMĀ 497.7–9): *etenāmanasikārādipadair acintyaprabhāsvarasvādhiṣṭhānapadaṃ śūnyatākaraṇābhinnayuganaddhāvayavāhisamvedanam āpāditam bhavatīti* |.

different from mind's adventitious stains,⁷² Mi bskyod rdo rje reads into the *Amanasikārādhāra* his clear-cut distinction between buddha nature and adventitious stains, or rather the buddha *kāyas* and ordinary body and mind.⁷³ This means that the entire repertoire of one's psycho-physical aggregates (*skandhas*) consists of nothing but adventitious stains. What is covered up by them is an all-pervading but ontologically separate buddhahood.⁷⁴ This strict distinction⁷⁵ is already found in the works of the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, who bases it on *Mahāyānasamgraha* 1.45–48, where a totally impure *ālayavijñāna* is distinguished from the pure *dharmadhātu*.⁷⁶ This does not translate into an ultimate separation of the two truths (as in the case of the Jo nang pas). For Mi bskyod rdo rje, the two truths are in indivisible unity (*zung jug*) throughout beginningless time. In his *Dgongs gcig* commentary, Mi bskyod rdo rje thus writes:

Relative truth (*dharmīn*) and ultimate truth (*dharmatā*) are united into an inseparable pair. It is not that first (when not actualized by the insight seeing reality) they were separate, and later (when they are actualized

72 Gzhon nu dpal's favored example being the ocean water and its waves as described in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (Mathes 2008: 241, 366).

73 Mi bskyod rdo rje's distinction thus is best illustrated by the fourth simile in the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, namely a gold nugget covered in excrement (see Takasaki 1966: 272).

74 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Sher phyin mngon rtogs rgyan kyi bstan bcos rgyas 'grel*, 125b1–4: "Some foolish [scholars] say that the omniscient Karma pa, the glorious Rang byung [rdo rje] maintains as the intent of the *Mahāyānottaratantra* (i.e., the *Ratnagotravibhāga*) that the *dharmadhātu*, insofar as it is the mind of sentient beings, inseparably possesses buddha nature. This genuine [master] does not maintain that! In his auto-commentary on the *Zab mo nang don* he distinguishes two aspects, i.e., purity called mind and impurity called mind. Having explained that sentient beings (*sems can*) are those with impure intentions (*sems pa*), he explains that sentient beings understood in such a way do not possess the *dharmadhātu*. Those sentient beings are taken as the adventitious stains, which are produced by the false imagining of being in error about the *dharmadhātu*." (*blun po la la zhig sems can gyi sems kyi chos dbyings la bde gshegs snying po de dbyer mi phyed pa'i tshul gyis yod pa ni theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i dgongs par thams cad mkhyen pa karma pa dpal rang byung gis bzhed pa yin no zhes zer ro || dam pa de nyid ni de ltar bzhed pa ma yin te | zab mo nang don gyi rang 'grel du dag pa la sems su brjod pa dang | ma dag pa la sems su brjod pa zhes rnam pa gnyis su dbye bar mdzad de | ma dag pa'i sems pa can de la sems can du bshad nas de lta bu'i sems can la chos kyi dbyings med par bshad pa dang | sems can de nyid chos dbyings las phyin ci log tu gyur pa'i yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun rtog gis bskyed pa glo bur ba'i dri mar bzhaq go |*).

75 See also Higgins and Draszczyk 2016: vol. 1, 271–272.

76 The same passage is also quoted in Mi bskyod rdo rje's commentary on the *Dharmadhātustava* (see Brunnhölzl 2007: 227–228).

by this insight) the two are mixed and united into a pair. It is, rather, that they have been inseparably united throughout beginningless time. This is for the following reason: When the hindrances of a confused mind, which clings to the [two truths] as separate, are cleared away, and [what appears as] separate is realized as non-dual, it is established that [their] unity is actualized in this [realization].⁷⁷

Assuming that Mi bskyod rdo rje was himself aware of these seeming inconsistencies, one could argue that they reflect a perspectivist approach to the two truths. The ultimate analysis of the two truths as being indivisibly united (*yuganaddha*) thus refers to a final state of purification, in which the relative truth of adventitious stains does not occur any more. All that is left then in the ultimate sense is a restricted version of the “pure relative truth,”⁷⁸ because mental engagement with impure *samsāra*, i.e., the immediately preceding condition for deception, is pointed out to not truly exist as an immediately preceding mind.

The initial distinction between mental engagement with *samsāra* and unproduced non-abiding *nirvāṇa* must be seen as a necessary propaedeutic for the beginner, which becomes obsolete in Mi bskyod rdo rje's final Madhyamaka ontology. It is a question of the stages on the path. In final analysis, the inseparable unity of the two truths also requires one to refrain from seeing anything else but emptiness or *dharmatā* in the *dharmakāya*. A beginner, though, needs to be told that the *dharmakāya* is genuine and thoughts are not.

This then explains Mi bskyod rdo rje's clear-cut distinction between the *dharmakāya* or buddha nature and the adventitious stains. Sgam po pa's claim that thoughts appear as *dharmakāya* must also be seen as referring to the ultimate unity of the two truths. In a similar way, Maitrīpa distinguishes an impure category of thoughts from a pure one of luminosity or self-awareness, and even claims in his *Pañcatathāgatamudrāvivarāṇa* that a Madhyamaka tenet is

77 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Dgongs gcig chos 'khor dang rten 'brel gyi tshoms kyi kar ṭi ka*, 312.17–22: *chos can kun rdzob bden pa dang chos nyid don dam bden pa dbyer mi phyed pa'i zung du 'jug te sngar de nyid mthong ba'i shes rab kyi mngon du ma byas pa'i tshe so sor yod la phyis des de mngon du byas pa na de gnyis 'dres nas zung 'jug tu gyur pa ni ma yin te | gdod nas zung du 'jug pa dbyer med pa gnas pa de la so so bar 'dzin pa'i blo 'khrul pas bsgribs pa'i sgrib pa sangs shing so so ba gnyis su med par rtogs pa na der zung 'jug mngon du byas so zhes mam par bzhaḡ pa'i phyir te |.*

78 For the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, whom Mi bskyod rdo rje follows, the relative truth of stainless forms of consciousness, i.e., mere appearance as such, can be included, together with the ultimate, in buddha nature. This is clear from Rang byung rdo rje's auto-commentary on the *Zab mo nang don* and also other texts, such as the commentary on the *Dharmadhātustava* (see Mathes 2008: 66–67).

superior when established on the basis of awareness (*saṃvedana*).⁷⁹ But when confronted with the objection that this is not Apratiṣṭhāna–Madhyamaka, he points out that no ontological status is ascribed to (self-)awareness, since it is simply dependently originated like anything else.⁸⁰

5 Conclusion

On the basis of the *amanasikāra* cycle, Mi bskyod rdo rje combines the *via negationis* of analytic Madhyamaka with a *via affirmativa* of describing non-conceptual types of realization, and relates these with Mahāmudrā experiential terms. His radical non-foundationalism finds perfect support in Maitrīpa’s Apratiṣṭhāna Madhyamaka while still allowing for ontologically unproblematic, positive descriptions of emptiness as luminosity or awareness. This project fully profits from Maitrīpa’s double interpretation of *amanasikāra* as a negation of anything conceptual and as luminous self-empowerment. Based on that, Mi bskyod rdo rje manages to uphold his clear-cut distinction between the buddha *kāyas* and sentient beings. In the end, however, Mi bskyod rdo rje takes the two truths as being inseparably united, for this unity does not include the impure relative of the adventitious stains, but only a restricted version of “pure relative truth.” On the topic of Sūtra Mahāmudrā, Mi bskyod rdo rje comes to the defense of Sgam po pa against the critique of Sa skya Paṇḍita by referring to the *Tattvadaśaka*, its commentary, and Jñānakīrti’s *Tattvāvatāra*, but stays clear of a one-sided endorsement by warning that calm abiding and deep insight tend to be overstated as the exemplifying and actual wisdoms of tantric empowerment.

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79 The Tibetan has self-awareness (*rang rig*) and must have read *svasamvedana*.

80 See Mathes 2015: 99–100.

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 TD: *Tattvadaśaka*. Ed. by Mathes 2015: 485–488.
 TRĀ: *Tattvaratnāvalī*. Ed. by Mathes 2015: 341–369.
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