

# Dharmakīrti's Notion of Permanence and Its Impact on the Tibetan Buddhist Doctrine of Buddhahood

by  
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## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine Dharmakīrti's notion of permanence (*nitya*), as found in his *Pramāṇavārttika* II 204cd, and its impact on the Tibetan Buddhist doctrine of Buddhahood.<sup>1</sup> As is well known, Dharmakīrti holds the view that whatever exists is momentary (*yat sat tat kṣaṇikam eva*), which literally means that everything is impermanent. This view is accepted by later Indian commentators, as well as by many of his Tibetan successors like Sa skya paṇḍita (1182–1251) and Glo bo mkhan chen (1456–1532), who belong to the Sa skya pa.<sup>2</sup>

However, Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419), the founder of the Dge lugs pa, and his followers have a different opinion. They consider that Dharmakīrti himself admits the existence of the permanent when he says: “Wise men speak of the thing that itself does not disintegrate as the permanent” (PV II 204cd: *nityaṃ tam āhur vidvāṃso yaḥ svabhāvo na naśyati*). Moreover, the Dge lugs pa scholars assert that to be permanent (*rtag pa*) does not necessarily mean to be always existing (*dus thams cad pa*), and hence that there are permanent entities that exist only temporarily (*res 'ga' ba*). Such an idea of permanence is peculiar to Tsong kha pa and his followers, and it plays an important role especially in their analysis of Buddhahood or the Nature Body (*svābhāvikakāya*; *ngo bo nyid sku*) of a Buddha.

In what follows, I would like to discuss how Dharmakīrti's notion of permanence has survived in the Dge lugs pa's exposition of Buddhahood. After a short remark about the Indian concept of permanence, I will give an analysis of the Dge lugs pa's idea of permanence, together with the interpretation of *Pramāṇavārttika* II 204cd as found in the *Dbu ma rgyan zin bris*, Tsong kha pa's memorandum on the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*.<sup>3</sup> I will then move on to examine the Dge lugs pa's analysis of the Nature Body, which is given in their commentaries on Chapter VIII of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.

## 1 The concept of permanence in India

The concept of permanence (*nitya*) is found in ancient Indian thought. For instance, Patañjali (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE), in his *Mahābhāṣya*, defines permanence in several ways. Patañjali says that

<sup>1</sup> The Dge lugs pa's concept of “permanence” (*rtag pa*) is briefly discussed in Nemoto 2009. The aim of this paper, then, is to show how the concept plays an important role in their analysis of Buddhahood.

<sup>2</sup> See Dreyfus 1997: 79ff.; Nemoto 2011: 368f.

<sup>3</sup> The title of the text is given as: *Dbu ma rgyan gyi zin bris rjes rang gis gnam ba*, which means “A memorandum on the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* given by the Lord [Tsong kha pa] himself,” so that we may tentatively assume that the text was written by Tsong kha pa himself.

the term *nitya* is applied to immovable (*kūṭastha*), or invariable things (*avicālin*); and he says that it also means continued repetition (*ābhikṣṇya*).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he remarks: “That in which its identity is not destroyed is also permanent” (*tad api nityam yasmimś tattvaṃ na vihanante*).<sup>5</sup> We notice here that what is expressed by the last definition is almost the same as what Dharmakīrti says in *Pramāṇavārttika* II 204cd. It is highly likely that Dharmakīrti was fully aware of the definition of permanence as found in the *Mahābhāṣya*.

In Buddhism, specifically in the Abhidharma tradition, factors (*dharma*) are classified into two categories, the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) and unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*), of which unconditioned factors are considered to be permanent.<sup>6</sup> Vasubandhu's *Abhidharma-kośa* teaches that there are three unconditioned factors: space (*ākāśa*), extinction through discernment (*pratisaṃkhyānirodha*), and extinction not through discernment (*apratisaṃkhyānirodha*). According to Yaśomitra's commentary, these three factors are “permanent since they do not pass through the [three] time periods [of future, present, and past]” (*adhvasaṃcārābhāvāt nityāḥ*).<sup>7</sup>

In the Mahāyāna tradition, the concept of permanence plays an important role, especially in the doctrine of Buddhahood and the Buddha Body. The *Uttaratantra* says that Buddhahood (*buddhatva*) is permanent and already present in every sentient being.<sup>8</sup> Concerning this, the *Vyākhyā* explains that Buddhahood is “permanent because it is free from origination” (*utpādavigamān nityam*).<sup>9</sup> In the same vein, Vasubandhu's *Sūtrālamkārahāṣya* states that a Buddha's Nature Body is essentially permanent (*prakṛtyā nityatā svābhāvikasya*).<sup>10</sup> According to Sthiramati's commentary, this is because the Nature Body

<sup>4</sup> MBh I, 6.17f.: *nityaparyāyavācī siddhaśabdaḥ / katham jñāyate / yat kūṭastheṣv avicāliṣu bhāveṣu vartate /* (“The word *siddha* is a synonym of *nitya*. How is it understood? It is used to refer to things which are immovable and invariable”); MBh I, 7.3f.: *ayaṃ khalv api nityaśabdo nāvaśyaṃ kūṭastheṣv avicāliṣu bhāveṣu vartate / kiṃ tarhi / ābhikṣṇye 'pi vartate /* (“Furthermore, the word *nitya* is not always used to refer to things which are immovable and invariable. Then what does it mean? It is also used to refer to continued repetition”).

<sup>5</sup> MBh I, 7.22.

<sup>6</sup> AK I 48b: *nityā dharmā asaṃskṛtāḥ /* (“Unconditioned factors are permanent”).

<sup>7</sup> AKV I, 90.23: *asaṃskṛtā eva nityā ity avadhāraṇam / adhvasaṃcārābhāvāt nityāḥ /* (“It is ascertained that only unconditioned [factors] are permanent. [They are] permanent since they do not pass through the [three] time periods [of future, present, and past]”).

<sup>8</sup> UT 84.7ff. (II 29): *acintyaṃ nityaṃ ca dhruvam atha śivaṃ śāśvatam atha praśāntaṃ ca vyāpi vyapagatavikalpaṃ gaganavat / asaktaṃ sarvatrapratighaparūṣasparśavigataṃ na drśyaṃ na grāhyaṃ śubham api ca buddhatvam amalam //* (“Buddhahood is inconceivable, permanent, stable, quiescent, everlasting, calm, all-pervading, free from conceptualization, and akin to space; it has neither attachment nor hindrance in all respects and is devoid of rough sensation; it cannot be perceived or grasped; furthermore, it is auspicious and immaculate”).

<sup>9</sup> UT 84.20 (II 34).

<sup>10</sup> MSABh 46.12ff. (ad MSA IX 66): *teṣu ca triṣu kāyeṣu yathākramaṃ trividhā nityatā veditavyā yena nityakāyās tathāgatā ucyante / prakṛtyā nityatā svābhāvikasya svabhāvena nityatvāt / asraṃsanena sām̐bhogikasya dharmasām̐bhogāvicchedāt / prabandhena nairmāṇikasyāntardhāya\* punaḥ punar nirmāṇadarśanāt /* (“It is to be understood with respect to these three bodies, respectively, that there are three types of permanence, on account of which Tathāgatas are said to have permanent Bodies. [1] The Nature Body is essentially permanent because it is permanent by nature. [2] The Enjoyment Body is [permanent] in terms of non-cessation because its enjoyment of good qualities is devoid of interruption. [3] The Manifestation Body is [permanent] in terms of continuity because, after having hidden itself, it displays manifestation repeatedly.”) \**-ntarvyaye*; read *-ntardhāya* in accordance with Lévi's note.

is free from origination and cessation.<sup>11</sup> Thus, apart from the fact that the Buddha teaches the doctrine of impermanence of all conditioned phenomena, these Buddhist thinkers hold that there do exist unconditioned factors, which are permanent.

## 2 Dignāga and Dharmakīrti on permanence

But turning to the *pramāṇa* school, we find that both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti take a different position on the issue. It is true that Dignāga speaks of permanent things, such as space, when he gives examples of various formulations. This, however, does not mean that Dignāga himself acknowledges the existence of the permanent. For example, let us look at the following formulation given by Dignāga:<sup>12</sup>

(Proposition:) Sound is impermanent.

(Reason:) Because it is produced by human effort.

(Similar example:) Whatever is produced by human effort is impermanent, just like a pot.

(Dissimilar example:) Whatever is permanent is not produced by human effort, just like space.

One may suspect that the last statement presupposes the existence of permanent entities. But Dignāga clearly says that the sentence showing a dissimilar example should be interpreted as a non-affirming negation (*prasajyapratishedha*), and not as an implicative negation (*paryudāsa*), so that the sentence does not imply the existence of permanent entities.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, he says that a dissimilar example is established without needing to accept the existence of permanent entities. It seems that Dharmakīrti takes a similar position on this issue.<sup>14</sup> He says:

<sup>11</sup> VBh D 138a7f.: *de la rang bzhin rtag pa ni chos kyi sku ste / chos kyi sku ni rang bzhin gyis skye 'gag med pa'i rang bzhin yin pa'i phyir ro //* (“Among them, what is essentially permanent refers to Nature Body, since Nature Body is an entity that is free from origination and cessation by nature”).

<sup>12</sup> See Katsura 2004: 143, n. 16: *sādharmyeṇa tāvad anityaḥ śabdaḥ prayatnāntarīyakatvāt / yad dhi prayatnāntarīyakam tad anityam dṛṣṭam yathā ghaṭa iti / vaidharmyeṇa nityam aprayatnāntarīyakam dṛṣṭam yathākāśam iti /*

<sup>13</sup> PSV<sub>K</sub> 148b2f. (cf. Iwata 2004: 99; Katsura 2004:153): *de lta na snga ma la ni ma yin la phyi ma la ni med par dgag pa yin no zhes smras pa yin no // de ltar na rtag pa khas ma blangs kyang chos mi mthun pa'i dpe grub pa yin no //* See Katsura 2004: 153, n. 26: *evaṃ ca pūrvatra paryudāsaḥ uttaratra tu prasajyapratishedha ity uktāḥ / evaṃ ca nityānabhayupagamasyāpi vaidharmyadrṣṭāntaḥ siddhaḥ /*

<sup>14</sup> See Sa paṅ's comments on this issue. *Rigs gter rang 'grel* 100.26ff.: *chos kyi grags pas skabs 'ga' zhig tu nam mkha' rtag par gsungs pa ni / ṭī ka byed pa kha cig na re rdul phran dang / nam mkha' rtag par gsungs pa la sogs pa rang nyid mi bzhed pa de dag phal che ba gzhan gyi bsam pa la dper brjod pa yin no // zhes gsungs la / de ltar yang 'gal ba med kyi 'on kyang mi rtag pa log pa tsam la rtag par sgro btags nas gsungs kyi rtag pa nyid ni ma yin te /* (“Concerning the fact that Dharmakīrti in some places speaks of the permanence of space, a certain commentator [*lit.* a certain author of the *ṭīkā*] explains as follows: ‘Most of the statements about the permanence of atoms, space, and so forth, which are not acknowledged by himself, are what illustrate [permanence] in accordance with the thoughts of others.’ Although there is no contradiction in such an explanation, [we think that] he speaks of them by reifying permanence upon the mere absence of impermanence, and that he never [speaks of] permanent things themselves”).

*nityaṃ tam āhur vidvāṃso yaḥ svabhāvo na naśyati ||*

*tyaktvemāṃ hrepaṇīm dṛṣṭim ato nityaḥ sa ucyatām | (PV II 204cd–205ab)<sup>15</sup>*

Wise men speak of the thing that itself does not disintegrate as the permanent. For this reason, after rejecting this shameful view, you must say that it [i.e., *pudgala*] is permanent.

Dharmakīrti here refutes the Vātsīputrīya's notion of the *pudgala*, the personal entity that performs action and that receives pleasure and pain. The Vātsīputrīya school asserts that the *pudgala* is neither permanent nor impermanent.<sup>16</sup> Dharmakīrti then argues that, if the *pudgala* were not impermanent, it would be free from disintegration, which implies that the *pudgala* is permanent since wise men consider that which does not disintegrate to be permanent.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Dharmakīrti applies hypothetical reasoning to refute the Vātsīputrīya's view. He never questions whether permanent entities really exist or not.

### 3 Tsong kha pa on permanence

Tsong kha pa, however, regards the passage in question as conveying Dharmakīrti's own view on permanence. According to Tsong kha pa, Dharmakīrti not only affirms the existence of permanent entities but also gives the clear definition as approved by wise men (*mkhas pa rnams*), which is contrasted with the one accepted by foolish men (*skye bo blun po*). Let us first examine the foolish men's view on permanence. Tsong kha pa summarizes their view as follows:

*de yang rtag par 'dod phyin chad dus snga ma {na}\* yod tshad gang yin dus  
phyi ma na'ang yod par 'dod pa ni / mu stegs kyi 'dod pa'i rtag pa'i don yin  
la / skye bo blun po'i rtag par 'dzin tshul yang de yin te rtag pa'i don 'di ltar  
byed pa ni rang sde la bye brag tu smra ba ma gtogs pa / mdo sde pa dang  
sems tsam pa dang / dbu ma pa su yang mi 'dod do || (Dbu ma rgyan zin bris  
13b4ff.) \*ni Zhol; read na.*

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Vetter 1984: 104.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Thar lam gsal byed* 187a4f.: *gnas ma bu pa na re / kho bo cag la nyes pa med de / gang zag de rtag mi rtag gang du yang brjod du med par 'dod pas so zhe na /* ("The Vātsīputrīya says: There is no fault in our opinion, since we assert that the *pudgala* cannot be expressed as either permanent or impermanent").

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Thar lam gsal byed* 187a5ff.: *gang zag gang de ni chos can / [...] rtag pa yin par thal / bcings grol gyi gzhi gang zhig 'jig med yin pa'i phyir / khyab par thal / rang gi rang bzhin 'jig pa med pa'i chos de la mkhas pa rnams rtag pa zhes brjod pa'i phyir / 'dis 'jig pa log pa'i rang bzhin gcig rtag par 'thad pa bstan nas rtag pa yin na dngos pos khyab pa dang / gzhi ma grub rtag par 'dod pa legs par bkag go ||* ("It follows that the subject, the *pudgala*, is permanent because it is the support for bondage and liberation and because it is devoid of disintegration. It follows that there is entailment because wise men speak of the factor that itself does not disintegrate as the permanent. Through this [statement, Dharmakīrti], by saying that it is proper to consider the nature of the absence of disintegration to be permanence, correctly refutes the assertion that if something is permanent, it must necessarily be a functioning thing, and the assertion that what is not existent [*lit.* 'what is not established as a basis'] is permanent").

Furthermore, with respect to whatever is considered to be permanent, [some people] assert that whatever existed formerly exists at a later time, too. But [what is stated here] is the meaning of “permanence” as asserted by non-Buddhist schools. And this is nothing but the way foolish men apprehend [the meaning of] “permanence.” Apart from the Vaibhāṣika, others in our [Buddhist] schools – the Sautrāntika, Cittamātra, and Madhyamaka schools – never assign such a meaning to “permanence.”<sup>18</sup>

What Tsong kha pa has in mind here is Śāntarakṣita’s argument in the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 2–3,<sup>19</sup> where the unity of permanent entities, as postulated by the Vaiśeṣika and the Vaibhāṣika, is negated. The Vaiśeṣika school asserts *īśvara* to be a single permanent entity. The Buddhist Vaibhāṣika school asserts that unconditioned factors are permanent and indivisible. Both the Vaiśeṣika and Vaibhāṣika schools consider that to be permanent means to be always existent without losing unity or singularity, as represented by Tsong kha pa’s phrase: “whatever existed formerly exists at a later time.” However, according to Tsong kha pa, this is nothing but the way foolish men understand the meaning of “permanence.” He says that such a view on the permanent is not acceptable to the Sautrāntika, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka schools.

Then Tsong kha pa moves on to explain the wise men’s view on permanence. He says as follows:

*des na rnam 'grel las </> gang gi rang bzhin 'jig med pa // de la mkhas  
rnam rtag ces brjod / ces gsungs pa ltar 'jig pa med pa'i chos ni rtag pa'i  
don yin gyi sngar ltar mi 'dod do // (Dbu ma rgyan zin bris 13b6f.)*

Therefore, the meaning of “permanence” is identified with the property of not being subject to disintegration, as stated in the *Vārttika*: “Wise men speak of the thing that itself does not disintegrate as the permanent.” [The meaning of that] stated before is, on the contrary, not accepted [by wise men].<sup>20</sup>

Here Tsong kha pa, citing the passage from the *Pramāṇavārttika*, gives another definition of permanence, which he says is accepted by the Sautrāntika, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka schools. In short, Tsong kha pa says that to be permanent means to not be subject to disintegration. To make this point clear, let us consider the example of “emptiness” (*stong nyid*). By definition, emptiness is immutable and unchangeable. It is not subject

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Thub bstan lhun po'i mdzes rgyan* [cha–ka] 66b1f., 79a2 (Klein 1991: 140); *Gcig du bral gyi rnam bzhag* 21b4f.

<sup>19</sup> MAI vv. 2–3: *'bras bu rim can nyer sbyor bas // rtag rnam gcig pu'i bdag nyid min // 'bras bu re re tha dad na // de dag rtag las nyams par 'gyur // bsgoms las byung ba'i shes pa yis // shes bya 'dus ma byas smra ba'i // lugs la'ang gcig min de dag ni // rim can shes dang 'brel phyir ro //* (“Permanent things cannot have a single nature, since they bring about effects in succession. Suppose that their effects existed at different moments respectively, then the [Vaiśeṣika’s] assertion that they are permanent would be inappropriate. Even those objects known by the cognition arisen from meditation, which are [said to be] unconditioned factors according to the [Vaibhāṣika’s] doctrine, cannot be unitary since they are related to a series of cognitions arising in succession”).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Thub bstan lhun po'i mdzes rgyan* [cha–ka] 80b2f. (Klein 1991: 144); *Gcig du bral gyi rnam bzhag* 21a1f.

to disintegration, so that it is permanent. To be sure, the emptiness possessed by  $p$  exists only when the property-possessor  $p$  exists; and the emptiness of  $p$  disappears when the property-possessor  $p$  disappears. But, according to Tsong kha pa, it does not follow that the emptiness possessed by  $p$  is impermanent. He remarks:

*rang bzhin rnam dag gi dbang du byas na chos can snga ma'i stong nyid chos de log pa na ldog pas / chos de med pa'i dus na med pas dus res 'ga' ba yin kyang mi rtag par mi 'gyur te / dgag bya rnam par bcad tsam gyi med dgag yin pa'i phyr dang / khyad gzhi log pa na khyad chos ldog pa'i phyr ro // (Dbu ma rgyan zin bris 14a3ff.)*

With reference to [the emptiness, which is] innately pure, [we can point out the following things]: The emptiness of a property-possessor [ $p$ ] that existed before disappears when the factor [ $p$ ] disappears, and it is nonexistent when that factor [ $p$ ] is nonexistent; therefore, it exists only temporarily. However, it does not follow that it is impermanent because it is a non-affirming negation that is [recognized] merely by eliminating an object of negation, and because [it is natural to say that] the attribute should disappear when the basis of the attribute disappears.<sup>21</sup>

To sum up, Tsong kha pa says that the emptiness possessed by  $p$  is permanent because it is a non-affirming negation (*med dgag*). But what does it mean to be a non-affirming negation? Tsong kha pa uses the term “non-affirming negation” to refer to a thing that is posited as present only by way of eliminating an object of negation (*dgag bya*), without affirming the existence of other factors.<sup>22</sup> The emptiness of  $p$  is recognized only by eliminating an object of negation, that is,  $p$ 's intrinsic existence. Nothing else is affirmed to be present through that process of negation. It is for this reason that emptiness is said to be a non-affirming negation.

This brings us to the second point. The emptiness of  $p$  as such cannot be perceived directly, but it is cognized only by means of eliminating another factor,  $p$ 's intrinsic existence; it has a secondary existence imputed by conceptual consciousness. In other words, the emptiness of  $p$  is a conceptual construct devoid of origination and disintegration. It is true that the attribute, emptiness, disappears when the basis of the attribute  $p$  disappears. But it

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Thub bstan lhun po'i mdzes rgyan* [cha-ka] 81a1f. (Klein 1991: 145); *Gcig du bral gyi rnam bzhag* 21a3f.

<sup>22</sup> 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa defines *dgag pa* and *med dgag*, respectively, as follows. *Bsdus chen gyi rnam bzhag* 28b5 (cf. *Sras bsdu grwa* 295.7ff.): *rang dngos su rtogs pa'i blos rang gi dgag bya dngos su bcad nas rtogs par bya ba'i chos de dgag pa'i mtshan nyid /* (“A negative phenomenon [ $p$ ] is defined as a factor that is recognized only after having directly eliminated its object of negation by the mind that directly knows  $p$ ”); *Bsdus chen gyi rnam bzhag* 31b5f. (cf. *Sras bsdu grwa* 295.14ff.): *rang dngos su rtogs pa'i blos rang gi dgag bya dngos su bcad nas rtogs par bya ba gang zhig / rang dngos su rtogs pa'i blos rang gi dgag bya bkag shul du chos gzhan ma yin dgag dang sgrub pa gang rung mi 'phen pa de med dgag gi mtshan nyid /* (“A non-affirming negation [ $p$ ] is defined as the thing that is recognized only after having directly eliminated its object of negation by the mind that directly knows  $p$ , and that does not make known another factor – whether it is an affirming negative or a positive phenomenon – through the process of negating its object of negation by the mind which directly knows  $p$ ”). See also Klein 1991: 107ff.

is not the case that the emptiness loses its identity over the course of time. Consequently, Tsong kha pa argues, the emptiness of *p* is permanent irrespective of the fact that it exists only at a particular moment.

#### 4 The Dge lugs pa's exposition of the Nature Body

Tsong kha pa applies the same reasoning to other unconditional factors such as *nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa*), extinction through discernment (*so sor brags 'gog*; Skt. *pratisamkhyā-nirodha*), the truth of cessation (*'gog bden*; Skt. *nirodhasatya*), the true nature of things (*chos nyid*; Skt. *dharmatā*), and so on, all of which pertain to religious attainments. Tsong kha pa holds that these factors are permanent even if they may occur only at a particular moment. By now it is not surprising that Tsong kha pa's disciple, Rgyal tshab Dar ma rin chen (1364–1432), offers a similar analysis with respect to a Buddha's Nature Body, which is permanent but not always existent. In his commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, Dar ma rin chen says as follows:

*dag pa gnyis ldan gyi sku de nyid thog ma med pa nas sems can gyi rgyud la med par sangs rgyas pa'i dus 'ba' zhig tu 'byung na mi rtag par 'gyur dgos so snyam pa ni / mkhas rmongs la grags pa'i rtag pa'i khyad par dang / dngos po res 'ga' ba dang 'dus ma byas res 'ga' ba'i khyad par ma phyed pas nongs so // (Rnam bshad snying po rgyan 311b6ff.)*

Someone might claim: “If [a Buddha's Nature] Body endowed with twofold purity is not present in the continuum of sentient beings since beginningless time and will occur only at the moment of enlightenment, then it must necessarily be impermanent.” But this is an error due to confusion between [the concept of] permanence accepted by wise men and that accepted by the foolish, and also it is due to confusion between functioning things occurring at a particular moment and unconditioned things occurring at a particular moment.

Dar ma rin chen interprets the eighth chapter of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* in terms of the fourfold Buddha Bodies, i.e., the Nature Body, the Gnostic Dharma Body, the Enjoyment Body, and the Manifestation Body.<sup>23</sup> He identifies the Nature Body with the twofold purity. The first is the innate purity (*rang bzhin rnam dag*), which again is identified with a Buddha's mind and body being empty of intrinsic existence. The second is the purity from adventitious stains (*glo bur rnam dag*), i.e., the cessation of all obstructions including afflictive obstructions (*nyon sgrib*) and obstructions to the knowable (*shes sgrib*).<sup>24</sup> The Nature Body characterized as such is the quintessence of Buddhahood.

<sup>23</sup> Tsong kha pa, as well as other Dge lugs pa scholars including Dar ma rin chen, accepts Haribhadra's four-*kāya* interpretation, instead of the three-*kāya* interpretation by Āryavimuktisena, Ratnākaraśānti, and Abhayākara Gupta. For further details, see Makransky 1997: 289ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Rnam bshad snying po rgyan 311b5*: *gzugs kyi sku dang ye shes chos kyi sku'i glo bur rnam dag gi khyad par du byas pa'i rang bzhin rnam dag gi cha dang / de'i steng gi glo bur rnam dag gi cha ni 'dus ma byas kyi sku dang / ngo bo nyid kyi sku zhes bya la /* (“The following elements are said to be the Unconditioned Body or Nature Body: the element of innate purity that is characterized by the purity from adventitious stains on the Form Body and Gnostic Dharma Body; and that of purity from adventitious stains on them”).

The point to observe is that the Nature Body is embodied only at the moment of supreme enlightenment; for, otherwise, it would absurdly follow that every sentient being is already enlightened without requiring any effort. Therefore, it must be said that a Buddha's Nature Body is a thing occurring at a particular moment (*res 'ga' ba*). But this fact does not invalidate the assumption that the Nature Body is permanent. In this connection, let us look at the argument given by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648–1721):

*kho na re / ngo bo nyid sku de sems can gyi rgyud la sangs rgyas pa dang dus mnyam par thal / de de'i rgyud la 'byung dus yod pa gang zhig / thog ma med pa nas med pa'i phyir / [...] rtsa bar 'dod na / de res 'ga' bar thal / 'dod pa'i phyir / 'dod na / mi rtag par thal / 'dod pa'i phyir na ma khyab / khyab par thal / res 'ga' ba yin na rang rgyu dang bcas pas khyab pa'i phyir te / rnam 'grel las / res 'ga' ba nyid yin pas na // sdug bsngal 'di rgyu can nyid grub // ces gsungs pa'i phyir na ma khyab ste / res 'gag' ba'i dngos po la rang rgyu dang bcas pa'i don yin pa'i phyir te / (Mi pham zhal lung [skabs brgyad pa] 39b4ff.)*

He [namely, a certain opponent] says: “It follows that the Nature Body occurs in the continuum of sentient beings simultaneously with enlightenment, because there is the moment in which it occurs in their continuum, and because it is not the case that it exists since beginningless time [...] If you accept the root thesis (*rtsa ba*), then it follows that it occurs at a particular moment because you have accepted that [it occurs simultaneously with enlightenment]. If you accept this, it follows that it is impermanent because you have accepted that [it occurs at a particular moment].”

[We reply:] “There is no entailment.”

[The opponent says:] “It follows that there is entailment because if something occurs at a particular moment, it must necessarily be a thing which has a cause, for the *Vārttika* says: ‘It is established that this suffering has a cause since it occurs [only] at a particular moment’.”<sup>25</sup>

[We reply:] “There is no entailment because what is meant here is that, if something is an effective thing occurring at a particular moment, it must be something that has a cause.”

We notice that 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa tries to modify the meaning of PV II 179, which explicitly says that suffering has a cause since it occurs only at a particular moment (*res 'ga' ba*). The exact meaning of the verse, according to 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, is that suffering has a cause and hence is impermanent since it is an *effective* thing occurring only at a particular moment (*res 'ga' ba'i dngos po*). Instead of saying that a thing occurring at a particular moment is impermanent, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa suggests the idea that an *effective* thing occurring at a particular moment is impermanent, which implies that there exist permanent, non-effective, and causeless things which occur at a particular moment. What he means to say is that the Nature Body of the Buddha is a permanent (non-effective

<sup>25</sup> PV II 179cd (cf. Vetter 1984: 82): *kādācīkatayā siddhā duḥkhasyāsya sahetutā* //.



and causeless) thing, despite the fact that it is present only at the moment of enlightenment and absent prior to that time. The wise men's definition of the permanent must be recalled here. 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa says:

*res 'ga' mi 'byung la res 'ga' 'byung ba 'di mi rtag pa'i don ma yin par thal /*  
 [...] *mkhas pa rnams res 'ga' ba yin min tsam la mi byed par chos gang gi*  
*rang bzhin la 'jig pa yod med kyis mi rtag par dang rtag par 'jog pa'i phyir*  
*te / (Mi pham zhal lung [skabs brgyad pa] 40a3ff.)*

It does not follow that the meaning of “impermanence” is defined as being present at a certain time and absent at another [...] because wise men posit [a factor] either as impermanent or permanent in accordance with whether or not the factor itself is subject to disintegration, without needing to consider whether or not it is present only at a certain time.

This is a paraphrase of *Pramāṇavārttika* II 204cd. A thing that itself is not subject to disintegration is permanent irrespective of its presence or absence at a certain time. The Nature Body, then, is just the mere absence of intrinsic existence and obstructions; it is a conceptual construct that never arises from causes, and that never undergoes disintegration. Hence, it is concluded that the Nature Body is permanent. This of course does not imply that the Nature Body is always existent, nor does it mean that it is a positive and independent reality (*sgrub pa rang dbang ba'i bden grub*), as conceived of by the Jo nang pa school. Rather, that the Nature Body is permanent means that it is something that is ascertained through a simple negation of disintegration.<sup>26</sup>

## 5 Concluding remarks

This is how the Dge lugs pa scholars interpret the meaning of “permanence” especially within the context of the theory of Buddhahood. They identify the quintessence of Buddhahood with the Nature Body, which again is characterized as the mere absence of intrinsic existence and obstructions. The Nature Body so identified is a conceptual construct imputed on the mere absence of the object of negation. It is free from origination and disintegration so that it satisfies the condition of being permanent.

The important point to note here is that these Dge lugs pa scholars refer to Dharmakīrti's hypothetical definition of permanence in order to justify their theory of Buddhahood. They assume that Dharmakīrti himself admits the existence of the permanent and defines it as

<sup>26</sup> See *Mi pham zhal lung [skabs brgyad pa]* 37b1ff.: *kun mkhyen jo nang na re / rang bzhin rnam dag gi char gyur pa'i ngo bo nyid sku de sgrub pa rang dbang ba'i bden grub yin pa rgyud bla ma dang dus 'khor lugs zer na / 'o na / rtag pa rnams 'jig pa rnam par bcad tsam la mi 'jog par thal / dam bca' 'thad pa'i phyir / 'dod mi nus te / mdo sde pa yan chad kyis mi rtag dngos med pa'i phyir te /* (“The omniscient scholar of the Jo nang [i.e., Dol po pa.] says: ‘The Nature Body which is the element of innate purity is a positive independent reality; this is the doctrine of the *Uttaratantra* and also that of the *Kālacakra*.’ Then it follows that the mere absence of disintegration is not posited as the permanent, because [according to you] your thesis is true. But you cannot accept this because, according to the higher doctrine of the Sautrāntika [Yogācāra and Mādhyamika schools], there does not exist a thing which is both permanent and functioning”).

“the thing that itself does not disintegrate” in its own right. Such a concept of permanence, which goes back to ancient Indian thought as seen in the *Mahābhāṣya*, functions forcefully to explain why the Nature Body is permanent in spite of the fact that it is not always manifested in an individual being.

It is also interesting to note that the Dge lugs pa carefully avoid the two extreme positions held by other Tibetan thinkers. First, unlike Sa skya paṇḍita and Glo bo mkhan chen, Tsong kha pa and his successors strongly assert that permanent things do exist, as they think that otherwise the state of emptiness and the attainment of Buddhahood would be inexplicable. Secondly, the Dge lugs pa reject the Jo nang pa position that the innate purity of the Nature Body is a positive and independent reality (*sgrub pa rang dbang ba'i bden grub*); the Dge lugs pa say instead that the innate purity is a non-affirming negation imputed on the mere absence of disintegration. Thus, we see that Dharmakīrti's notion of permanence survived in the Dge lugs pa's theory of Buddhahood and enabled them to give the most plausible explanation of the Nature Body without falling into the two extreme positions.

## References and abbreviations

### Works in Sanskrit and Tibetan

**AK** Abhidharmakośa (Vasubandhu). See AKBh.

**AKBh** Abhidharmakośabhāṣya (Vasubandhu): *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, ed. P. Pradhan. Patna 1975.

**AKV** Abhidharmakośavyākhyā (Yaśomitra): *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā by Yaśomitra*, ed. U. Wogiwara. 2 vols. Tokyo 1936 (repr. 1971).

**Bsdus chen gyi rnam bzhag** *Bsdus chen gyi rnam bzhag rigs lam gser gyi sgo 'byed lung dang rigs pa'i gan mdzod blo gsal yid kyi mun sel skal ldan dad pa'i 'jug ngogs* ('Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson 'grus), Bkra shis 'khyil ed. Ba.

**D** Derge (*sde dge*) edition of the Buddhist canon (*tripiṭaka*) in Tibetan.

**Dbu ma rgyan zin bris** *Dbu ma rgyan gyi zin bris rje rang gis gngang ba* (Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa), Zhol ed. Ba. Tohoku No. 5407.

**Gcig du bral gyi rnam bzhag** *Gcig du bral gyi rnam bzhag legs bshad rgya mtsho las btus pa'i 'khrul spong bdud rtsi'i gzegs ma* (A lag sha bstan dar lha rams pa), Collected Gsung 'bum of Bstan-dar Lha-ram of A-lag-sha. (Ka–Na). New Delhi 1971.

**MAI** Madhyamakālaṃkāra (Śāntarakṣita): *Madhyamakālaṃkāra of Śāntarakṣita with his own Commentary or Vṛtti and with the subcommentary or Pañjikā of Kamalaśīla*, ed. M. Ichigo. Kyoto 1985.

**MBh** Mahābhāṣya (Patañjali): *The Vyākaraṇa-mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, ed. F. Kielhorn. 3 vols. Bombay 1880–1885.

**Mi pham zhal lung** *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i mtha' dpyod 'khrul sel gang ga'i chu rgyun mi pham zhal lung* ('Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson 'grus), Bkra shis 'khyil ed. Nya.

**MSA** Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra (“Maitreya”). See MSABh.

**MSABh** Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya (Vasubandhu): *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra: Exposé de la doctrine du Grand Véhicule, selon le système Yogācāra*, ed. S. Lévi. Paris 1907.

- PSV<sub>K</sub>** Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti (Dignāga), Tibetan Peking ed. *gtan tshigs rig pa* Ce. Otani No. 5702.
- PV** Pramāṇavārttika (Dharmakīrti): Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā (Sanskrit and Tibetan), ed. Y. Miyasaka. *Acta Indologica* 2 (1971–72) 1–206.
- Rigs gter rang 'grel** *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi rtsa ba dang 'grel pa* (Sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan). Beijing 1989.
- Rnam bshad snying po rgyan** *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gi bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi 'grel pa don gsal ba'i rnam bshad snying po'i rgyan* (Rgyal tshab rje dar ma rin chen), Zhol ed. Kha. Tohoku No. 5433.
- Sras bsodus grwa** *Tshad ma'i dgongs 'grel gyi bstan bcos chen po rnam 'grel gyi don gcig tu dril ba blo rab 'bring tha ma gsum du ston pa legs bshad chen po mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan skal bzang re ba kun skong* (Thugs sras ngag dbang bkra shis). Beijing 1985.
- Thar lam gsal byed** *Tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i rnam bshad thar lam phyin ci ma log par gsal bar byed pa* (Rgyal tshab rje dar ma rin chen), Zhol ed. Cha. Tohoku No. 5450.
- Thub bstan lhun po'i mdzes rgyan** *Grub pa'i mtha' rnam par bzhag pa thub bstan lhun po'i mdzes rgyan* (Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje), Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje'i gsung 'bum. Cha and Ja. Beijing 1995.
- UT** Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra: *The Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*, ed. E. H. Johnston. Patna 1950.
- VBh D** Sūtrālamkāravṛttibhāṣya (Sthiramati), Tibetan Sde dge ed. *sems tsam* Mi. Tohoku No. 4034.

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