On the Commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*  
by Dol po pa

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**Introduction**

I refer to the commentary on the *Dharmadhātustava* by Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292-1361) in the last volume of this Journal\(^1\) and make it clear that this text is one of important texts for him to establish the theory of other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) or the great Madhyamaka (*dbu ma chen po*) in the Jo nang pa\(^2\). Though it is not so cited as the five Treatises of Maitreya, he seems to acknowledge the reason why he must depend on it. Though the authorship of Nāgārjuna is doubted on the ground of reference to the tathāgatagarbha idea, this is convenient for Dol po pa who wants to establish the great Madhyamaka mixed the Madhyamaka idea with the Yogacāra idea or the tathāgatagarbha idea. That is to say, he uses it in order to prove that the idea of tathāgatagarbha is also taught in the Madhyamika literature of Nāgārjuna.

Then which text does he depend on to establish his original idea? As the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is cited most frequently in his *bDen gnyis gsal ba'i nyi ma*\(^3\), it seems to be most important text in his great Madhyamaka. I consider his commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*\(^4\) attributed to Maitreya here\(^5\).

**Background of the Commentary**

In the collected works of Dol po pa there is a commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāgakārikā* of Maitreya, the *Theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos kyi 'grel pa legs bshad nyi ma'i 'od zer*\(^6\). Because it is compiled also into the collected works of another great scholar of Jo nang pa, Tāranātha\(^7\), it is clear that this commentary is one of the important texts in the Jon ang pa school.

In the biography of Dol po pa it is said that he received teaching of the five Treatises of Maitreya from Skyi ston 'Jam dbyangs grags pa rgyal mtshan at Sa skya in 1312, he went to the monastery of rTa nag and studied them about three months in 1313 and he returned
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to Jo nang and taught them in 1326⁸. Though it needs more detailed studies, this commentary seems to have been written around 1326.

The reason why he wrote the commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is said in the colophon of the *Nyī ma'i 'od zer*:

In response to the supplication of two upholders of Tripiṭaka, dPal ldan brtson 'grus and Phun tshogs dpal, [he] composed [this commentary] at the hermitage in glorious Jo nang, from place to place with no particular destination and with four kinds of impartial reliance. Accomplish the teaching and the benefit of sentient beings extensively!

This commentary was written at the temple in Jo nang by request of his two students, dPal ldan brtson 'grus and Phun tshogs dpal (1304-1377). So the purpose of writing does not seem to come from his original motivation to express his own interpretation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, but from his intention to teach it.

Therefore he explains the root verses in the style of adding sufficient words and never relates his original idea, the great Madhyamaka nor the other-emptiness. He does not refer also any previous commentaries on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. It is well known that the commentary by Asaṅga, the *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*avyākhyā, comes next to the *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* of Maitreya in the tanjur of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Of course Dol po pa knows it, but he does not refer to it in his own commentary, so he seems to write it as a commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāgakārikā*, one of the five *Treatises of Maitreya*.

**Contents of the *Nyī ma'i 'od zer***

As regard to the style of this commentary Dol po pa classifies the structure of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and gives the heading with the detailed synopsis⁹ to each verse in accordance of the traditional way of the Tibetan Buddhist treatises. After headings with an emphatical particle “*ni*”, he begins to explain root verses and ends with words “it is said (*zhes pa'o*).” He does not spread the explanation to the theory of other-emptiness and we can merely know how he reads the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and understands its structure with the help of its synopsis.

On its structure he classifies the *Ratnagotravibhāga* into four in the beginning of the text:

[0] There are four purposes of the explanation to the *Mahāyānottaratantra* in accordance with the commentary of the glorious, Asaṅga. They are the meaning of the compatible title with purpose,
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general homage to accomplished master with the great purpose, the treatise itself with the highest purpose and the manner to translate its purpose properly.

They are [1] the title of text, [2] honorific verse, [3] text itself, and [4] the colophon. The contents of the Ratnagotravibhāga are explained in the third and he classifies it into three:

[3] Then the treatise itself with the highest purpose should be explained by three purposes, that is to say, the definition of the body, detailed explanation of its branches and the perfect act.

The first purpose is the introduction of the text (1.1-3(10)). It indicates that the structure of the text consists of the seven adamantine subjects (vajrapada), namely Buddha, the doctrine (dharma), the community (saṅgha), the essence, the supreme enlightenment, the properties and the act(11). The second purpose is the contents of these seven adamantine subjects and they are divided into two, the three highest branches to be obtained and the four branches of the basic manners to obtain. The former corresponds to the first chapter of its Chinese translation (1.4-22) and the latter consists of the main part of the text. The third purpose is the conclusion of the text (5.16-28).

On each chapter of the Ratnagotravibhāga Dol po pa explains as it follows:

[3.2.2] Then, with regard to chapters to obtain transcendent purity from something to exist and to accomplish the three jewels, the detailed explanations of the branches of four chapters as the manners to obtain them are three, the general teachings, their essences and their benefits.

The first is an outline (1.22-26(12)). The second is divided into four, the purpose of the essential nature (dharma-dhātu(13)) to be considered, the purpose of the enlightenment to be essence of consideration, the purpose of the properties as the branches of consideration and the purpose of the acts to consider and this means the title of the first four chapters. The third corresponds to the fifth chapter therefore Dol po pa puts the last chapter in a different level from other four chapters.

Therefore the substantial content of the first chapter named “the matrix of the Tathāgata” begins with 1.28:

[3.2.2.1] Because it is said on the reality (tathatā) with defilements that all beings possess the matrix of the Tathāgata, the purposes of the essential nature to be considered at first are eight, the manner to pervade the essential reality (1.28), the summary of its pervading (1.29), the detailed explanation (1.30-94), the contexts summarized with the explanations (1.95), the teaching through illustrations like the contexts (1.96-152), the manner to consider by a faith in the meaning of teaching (1.153), recognition of the emptiness to be considered (1.154-155) and the purpose of
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explanation with them (1.156-167).

The third is further divided into eight, the purpose of the purification through the essence and causes (1.30-34), the purpose accomplished through the results and the acts (1.35-41), the purpose with accumulation of properties (1.42-44), the purpose to enter with distinction of persons (1.45-46), the purpose to distinguish only names of occasions (1.47-48), the purpose to go everywhere like space (1.49-50), the purpose without changes at any time (1.51-83) and the purpose without distinction of properties (1.84-94). The second chapter named “the enlightenment” is divided into three:

[3.2.2.2.2] Then, with regard to the results to accomplish every place in the undefiled elements of Buddha or Bhagavat after separating of essential nature from defilement, the purposes of the enlightenment as an essence to be considered are three, the summary of distinction of the purposes to be explained, the teachings to collect the manners of the summarized explanation and the detailed explanation connected with them.

And in the last heading Dol po pa classifies this chapter into seven, the purposes of cause as the essence after obtaining purity (2.2-7), the purposes of the result separated from defilements (2.8-17), the purposes of the function as the benefits of one’s own and others (2.18-28), the purposes possessing the properties of its reliance (2.29-37), the purposes of the manifestation by the distinctions of three kinds of body (2.38-61), the eternal of being as far as (2.62-68), the inconceivable of being as it is (2.69-73).

On the third chapter named “the properties of the Buddha” it is said:

[3.2.2.2.3] Then, with regard to the superior properties collected by separation from staying at the enlightenment and the results of maturities, the purposes of properties as branches to be considered are two, distinction of numbers connected with two kinds of body and their properties to be distinguished.

Dol po pa defines the properties as the results of maturities and explains them with the distinction between the visible body (rūpakāya) and the absolute body (dharmakāya). And he analyses this chapter into four, the summary connected with the purposes of illustrations (3.4), the detailed explanations to put in order them (3.5-26), manners to be considered from the scriptures to teach them (3.27) and the teaching to conclude the purpose of the illustrations (3.28-39). Further he classifies the detailed explanations into two, the properties of results separated from the existence in the absolute body of the absolute truth for one’s own benefits (3.5-16) and the properties of results in the maturities of the visible body for
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benefits of others (3.17-26). The former is taught as the ten powers (3.5-7), the forms of intrepidity (3.8-10) and the eighteen exclusive properties (3.11-16) and the latter as the thirty-two marks of the Buddha (3.17-26).

On the fourth chapter named “the acts of the Buddha” it is said:

[3.2.2.4] Then, with regard to the accomplishment of Jina’s acts without effort and uninterruptedly after being able to obtain the properties, the manners to consider the purpose of the acts are two, to manifest the manners without effort nor interruption and to make certain them with illustrations.

He classifies this chapter into two, the accomplishment of acts without effort and interruption and their illustrations. The latter is explained in order to cause pleasure of the inconceivable fields of the Buddha and is divided into four, distinction by the illustrations in the summary (4.13), each essence connected with its purpose (4.14-76), the conclusion of the chapter with expression of the purpose (4.77-88) and the distinctive explanation in additional summary (4.89-98). And each essence is divided into nine, a resemblance of the Buddha to the form of Indra (4.14-30), a resemblance of the words of the Buddha to the celestial drum (4.31-41), a resemblance of the mind of the Buddha filed with compassion and wisdom to cloud (4.42-52), a resemblance of the Buddha’s apparitional form to the great Brahmā (4.53-57), a resemblance of the expansion of wisdom to the sun (4.58-66), a resemblance of the Buddha’s secret mind to wish-fulfilling gem (4.67-70), a resemblance of the Buddha’s secret words to an echo (4.71-72), a resemblance of the Buddha’s secret body to space (4.73-74) an a resemblance of the Buddha’s manners to enter compassion to the earth (4.75-76).

On the last chapter named “the merits of faith” it is said:

[3.2.2.3] Then, the manner in which those who exceedingly admire the four chapters taught like these obtain the great merits should be explained. They are the teaching by manners of the best praise and their explanations with synonyms.

The former is divided into two, the manner which is difficult to be considered (5.1) and the manners to obtain the benefits that are further divided into means (upāya) (5.2-5) and wisdom (prajñā) (5.6). The latter is divided into the benefits to obtain the ultimate (5.7-8) and the benefits to enter the way that are further divided into the benefits to cause the aspiration to the enlightenment (5.9-10) and the benefits to enter the preparation of the six perfections (5.11-15).
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The last part of the fifth chapter is the conclusion of the text and it is said:

[3.3] Then, the acts of the complete perfection should be explained. They are the detailed explanation of the purposes to be explained (5.16-25) and the summary of the manners to explain (5.26-28).

The former is further divided into three, the manners how this treatise is written (5.16-19), the manners to reject something to damage the teachings (5.20-24) and the manners to praise the merits to be written (5.25).

Conclusion

The Commentary to the Ratnagotravibhāga by Dol po pa is written in a simple style and he only adds sufficient words to the root verses in order to present how he read them. There is no development to argue the theory of “other-emptiness” or to criticize other commentaries in it. However it can be an important commentary to provide his peculiar reading based on his original ideas when we compare it with other commentaries.

Because there are many citations from the Ratnagotravibhāga in his Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho, we must consider also them in order to know how he reads the Ratnagotravibhāga. Because he develops his original idea called “other-emptiness” or “the great Madhyamaka” on the ground of the tathāgata-barbha theory based on the Ratnagotravibhāga in it, this text is, so to speak, “the applied version” of the Ratnagotravibhāga. Through a minute examination to this text it is made clear how he reads the Ratnagotravibhāga in order to establish his original idea. It is also needed to compare his commentary to the Ratnagotravibhāga with others. We must reconsider the heterogeneity of his interpretation against those of commentaries belonging to other schools in Tibetan Buddhism.


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6) gSum ’bum / Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (’dzam thang), Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre, W 21208, Kha 1-97b: Jo nang dpe tshogs / spyi’i deb gnyis: rGyud bla’i fikka, 2007, Pe cin. See...
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10 ) This (1.1-3) means "from the first verse to the third of the first chapter." I follow the way of counting verses by Nakamura 1967.
11 ) Here the Dharmadhātustava 11 of Nāgārjuna is cited. This is the only citation without the Ratnagotravibhāga and this means that he acknowledges its importance to establish his theory of other-emptiness in the early years.
12 ) In this commentary there is no explanation to 1.27. Though the editor of its Sanskrit text acknowledges this verse as a root verse of the Ratnagotravibhāga, it is lacking in its Tibetan translation. This means that it is not acknowledged as the root verse in Tibet. See Nakamura 1967, p. 50, note 4; J. Takasaki, The Ratnagotravibhāga (in Japanese), 1989, Tokyo, p. 251, note 2.
13 ) Dol po pa puts "the matrix of the Tathāgata (tathāgatagarbha)" in this word.
14 ) [3.2.2.1.3.8.2.2.2] corresponds to a commentary to a verse coming between 1.87 and 1.88. Because it is lacking in the Sanskrit version, its editor does not count it as the root verse of the Ratnagotravibhāga. But it is translated in its Tibetan version as the root verse and Dol po pa acknowledges it as the root verse. See Takasaki 1989, p. 305, note 1.
16 ) According to Jeffrey Hopkins, Mountain Doctrine: Tibet's Fundamental Treatise on Other-Emptiness and the Buddha-Matrix, 2006, Ithaca, we can count thirty-seven citations in it. Hopkins 2006, pp. 555-726, adds an English translation of his lTa ngan mun sel zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos and we can count eleven citations from the same text in it.

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