

# The Two Truths of the *Sa lam rang 'grel* by mNyam med

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## 0. Introduction

The theory of the two truths, an absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*, *don dam bden pa*) and a conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*, *kun rdzob bden pa*), was important in the Bon tradition as well as in Buddhism. In another paper I have outlined the history of the theory of the two truths in the Bon religion, and I pointed out the following two characteristics:<sup>1</sup>

- [A] Concerning the theory of the conventional truth, there seems to be no clear agreement among the Bonpo thinkers. Each one presents his own theory.
- [B] Concerning the theory of the absolute truth, there are two traditions: one tradition does not admit any subdivision for the absolute truth; the other tradition subdivides it into two.

In this paper, I analyze the theory of the two truths in the *Sa lam rang 'grel* by mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1356-1415).<sup>2</sup> In addition to this text, he also composed a commentary on the *bDen gnyis* of Me ston Shes rab 'od zer (1058-1132 or 1118-1192), the *bDen gnyis 'grel ba*. His explanation of the two truths in this commentary is different from that in his *Sa lam rang 'grel*.<sup>3</sup> In particular his *Sa lam rang 'grel* follows the tradition which subdivides the absolute truth into two, but his *bDen gnyis 'grel ba* belongs to the tradition which does not admit subdivisions for the absolute truth.

The main objectives of this paper are as follows:

- [1] **To summarize the structure of the theory of the two truths of the *Sa lam rang 'grel*.**
- [2] **To examine the origin of the theory of the two truths of the *Sa lam rang 'grel*.**
- [3] **To identify the position of the theory of the two truths of the *Sa lam rang 'grel* in the history of the Bon religion.**

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<sup>1</sup> Kumagai [2009].

<sup>2</sup> For recent studies on mNyam med's life, see Miyake [2002] and Arguillère [2006].

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the detail of the theory in his *bDen gnyis 'grel ba*, see Kumagai [forthcoming].

## 1. Two Truths (*bden pa gnyis, satyadvaya\**)

mNyam med postulates the two truths on the basis of the following four criteria.

[1] Concerning the basic theory (*gzhi*), he postulates the absolute truth by depending on the nature of phenomena (*bon nyid*), and the conventional truth by depending on that which grasps phenomena (*bon can*).<sup>4</sup>

[2] Concerning the result (*'bras bu*), he postulates the absolute truth by depending on the "object of wisdom which grasps things as they are," and the conventional truth by depending on the "object of wisdom which grasps things only to the extent to which they really exist."<sup>5</sup>

[3] Concerning the path of the practice (*lam*), he postulates the absolute truth by depending on "wisdom of the meditative equilibrium of the holy one," and the conventional truth by depending on "wisdom at the post-meditation."<sup>6</sup>

[4] Concerning the object to be refuted (*dgag bya*), he postulates the absolute truth by depending on the explanation of non-discursiveness by the refutation of all discursiveness such as an illusion, and the conventional truth in order to refute real existence and regard it as an illusion.<sup>7</sup>

Other than mNyam med I am not aware of any Indian Mādhyamika or Bonpo thinkers, who give all four of these ways of classifying the two truths. Tre ston rGyal mtshan dpal (14<sup>th</sup> cen.), for example, postulates the two truths from the point of view of the four vehicles, but these are different from the four categories given by mNyam med.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Arguillère [2006: 311.28-30]: *gzhi'i dbang du byas na / bon can la ltos te kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang / bon nyid la ltos te don dam gyi bden pa dang /*

<sup>5</sup> Arguillère [2006: 311.30-32]: *'bras bu'i dbang du byas na / ji lta ba rtogs pa'i ye shes kyi yul la ltos te / don dam gyi bden pa dang / ji snyed pa mkhyen pa'i ye shes kyi yul la ltos te / kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang /*

<sup>6</sup> Arguillère [2006: 311.32-35]: *lam gyi dbang du byas na / 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag gi ye shes la ltos te / don dam gyi bden pa dang / rjes thob kyi ye shes la ltos te / kun rdzob kyi bden pa gnyis su rnam par dbye'o /*

<sup>7</sup> Arguillère [2006: 311.35-38]: *dgag bya'i dbang du byas na / bden dngos bkag nas sgyu ma lta bu la sogs bstan pa'i phyir du kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang / sgyu ma la sogs spros pa thams cad rnam par bkag nas / spros bral ston pa la ltos pa sogs kyi sgo nas / don dam gyi bden pa gnyis su rnam par dbye'o /*

<sup>8</sup> Tre ston gives this classification in his *Bon sgo gsal byed*: [1] the theory of the two truths which is common to all vehicles (*Theg pa thun mongs*), [2] the theory of the two truths of the Śrāvaka and the Hīnayāna (*Rang rtogs Theg dman*), [3] the theory of the two truths of the Bodhisattva and the Mahāyāna (*Sems dpa' Theg chen*), [4] the theory of the two truths of the Mantrayāna (*gSang sngags pa*).

[1] Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 62.7-8]: *yang theg pa thun mongs gis 'khor ba kun rdzob dang / mya 'das don dam du 'dod de /*

Among these four, the two truths postulated in dependence on the "object of wisdom which grasps things as they are" and the "object of wisdom which grasps things only to the extent to which they really exist" are also given in the *bDen gnyis 'grel ba* by mNyam med.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Conventional Truth (*kun rdzob kyi bden pa, samvrtisatya\**)

### 2-1. Theory of the Conventional Truth of the *Sa lam rang 'grel*

#### <Subdivision of the conventional truth>

In his *Sa lam rang 'grel*, mNyam med subdivides the conventional truth into three levels. First he subdivides it into pure convention (*dag pa kun rdzob*) and impure convention (*ma dag kun rdzob*).<sup>10</sup> He further subdivides impure convention into correct convention (*yang dag kun rdzob*) and false convention (*log pa kun rdzob*).<sup>11</sup> Correct convention is further subdivided into individual characteristic (*rang mtshan*) and general concept (*don spyi*).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand false convention is further subdivided into the object of deluded sense cognition (*dbang shes 'khrul pa'i yul*) and the object of deluded mental cognition (*yid shes bslad pa'i yul*).<sup>13</sup>

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[2] Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 61.2-5]: *rang rtogs theg dman gnyis kyis bzhed kyis bem po rig pa dang shes pa'i rgyun rnams ni / bshig pa dang gzhom pas kun rdzob yin la bem po'i rdul phran cha med dang shes pa'i skad gcig cha med ni / bshig pa dang gzhom pa dor bas don dam yin.*

[3] Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 61.7-8]: *sems dpa' theg chen gnyis ni / spyod pa dang thabs kyi cha ni kun rdzob bo // sgom pa dang lta ba'i cha ni / don dam du 'dod te /*

[4] Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 15-16]: *gsang sngags pas skyed rim kun rdzob / rdzogs rim don dam du 'dod de /*

<sup>9</sup> *bDen gnyis 'grel pa* [4b1-2]: *gang zag gi rtog pa la sogs / gnas lugs ma rtogs pa'i shes pa'i mthong tshul la kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang / ji lta ba rtogs pa'i ye shes la sogs gnas lugs rtogs pa'i shes pa'i mthong tshul la don dam gyi bden par rnam par bzhag pa'i phyir ro /*

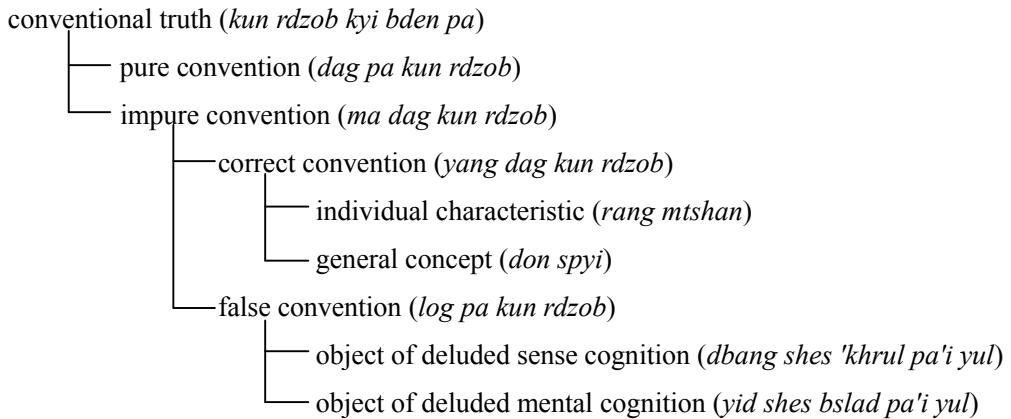
<sup>10</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.30-31]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi la gnyis te / dag pa kun rdzob dang / ma dag kun rdzob bo /*

<sup>11</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.6-7]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi la gnyis te / yang dag kun rdzob dang / log pa kun rdzob bo /*

<sup>12</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.16-17]: *de dag ni shin tu mang bar gnas kyang / rang mtshan dang don spyi'i sgo nas gnyis su bsdu pa'o /*

<sup>13</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.23-25]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi'i dbye ba ni / dbang shes 'khrul pa'i yul zla ba gnyis snang dang / dung ser snang la sogs dang / yid shes bslad pa'i yul la / rmi lam gyi snang ba la sogs rnams so /*

### ***Subdivision of the Conventional Truth in the Sa lam rang 'grel***



#### **<Definition of the conventional truth>**

In his *Sa lam rang 'grel*, mNyam med defines the conventional truth (*kun rdzob kyi bden pa*) to be "that whose essential nature is to appear with characteristics" (*mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa*).<sup>14</sup>

He defines the pure conventional truth (*dag pa kun rdzob bden pa*) to be "that which is without any habitual tendency but whose essential nature is to appear with characteristics" (*bag chags ci rigs dang bral zhing mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa*).<sup>15</sup>

He defines the impure conventional truth (*ma dag kun rdzob kyi bden pa*) to be "that which has the appearance of habitual tendency and whose essential nature is to appear with characteristics" (*bag chags mngon gyur dang 'grogs pa gang zhid / mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa*).<sup>16</sup>

He defines the correct conventional truth (*yang dag kun rdzob kyi bden pa*) to be "that whose essential nature is to appear with characteristics in a conventional and non-deluded mind" (*tha snyad pa'i blo ni ma 'khrul pa ru mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa*).<sup>17</sup>

He defines false convention (*log pa kun rdzob*) to be "that which is established in

<sup>14</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.27-29]: *mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de dag gi tha snyad du kun rdzob kyi bden pa'i mtshan nyid du gsungs so //*

<sup>15</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.32-34]: *bag chags ci rigs dang bral zhing mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de / dag pa kun rdzob bden pa'i mtshan nyid do /*

<sup>16</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.4-6]: *bag chags mngon gyur dang 'grogs pa gang zhid / mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de / ma dag kun rdzob kyi bden pa'i mtshan nyid du gsungs so /*

<sup>17</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.8-10]: *tha snyad pa'i blo ni ma 'khrul pa ru mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de / yang dag kun rdzob kyi bden pa'i mtshan nyid du sngon gyi mkhas pas 'jog ste /*

deluded cognition but which has no ability to function according to the characteristics with which it appears" (*'khrul pa'i shes ngor grub cing mtshan mar snang tshul ltar don byed nus pas stong pa*).<sup>18</sup>

Here we should notice that mNyam med regards the first four kinds of convention as truths but he does not regard false convention as a truth.

#### <Word meaning of the conventional truth>

Concerning the word "convention" (*kun rdzob*), "*kun*" means the "all appearances," and "*rdzob*" means "that which is untrue and deceptive."<sup>19</sup> The word meaning of convention (*kun rdzob*) is "that which has no essence if examined [logically] and which cannot withstand the power of logic if examined logically" (*brtag cing dpyad na snying po med pa'i phyir na yang kun rdzob ces bya la / rigs pas dpyad na rigs pas sbung mi bzod pa*).<sup>20</sup>

The word meaning of the pure conventional truth is the "pure conventional truth without any obscurity" (*sgrib pa ci rigs kyis dben zhing dag pa kun rdzob yin pa*).<sup>21</sup>

The word meaning of the correct conventional truth is the "conventional truth which appears to be true for ordinary people whose cognition is non-deluded" (*so so'i skye bo'i shes pa 'khrul par med pa la bden par snang ba'i kun rdzob*).<sup>22</sup>

The word meaning of false convention is "convention which appears to truly accord with the object but which in fact is antithetical to the real object" (*don bzhin bden par snang yang don las log pa'i kun rdzob*).<sup>23</sup>

#### <Other explanations of the conventional truth>

mNyam med explains the pure conventional truth to be "the various bodies, wisdom, and deeds of the enlightened one, which appear to other people" or "various appearances in wisdom at the post-meditation of bodhisattva."<sup>24</sup> He also explains the object of deluded

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<sup>18</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.21-22]: *'khrul pa'i shes ngor grub cing mtshan mar snang tshul ltar don byed nus pas stong pa ni / log pa kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid du gsungs so /*

<sup>19</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.28]: *kun ni snang ba ji snyed pa / rdzob ni mi bden bslu ba ste /*

<sup>20</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.28-30]: *brtag cing dpyad na snying po med pa'i phyir na yang kun rdzob ces bya la / rigs pas dpyad na rigs pas sbung mi bzod pas na kun rdzob ces brjod pa'o /*

<sup>21</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.36-313.2]: *gsum pa nges tshig ni / sgrib pa ci rigs kyis dben zhing dag pa kun rdzob yin pas na / dag pa kun rdzob ces brjod cing tha snyad 'dogs so /*

<sup>22</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.17-19]: *ci'i phyir yang dag kun rdzob brjod ce na / so so'i skye bo'i shes pa 'khrul par med pa la bden par snang ba'i kun rdzob yin pa'i phyir na de skad brjod do /*

<sup>23</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.25-27]: *gsum pa nges tshig ni / don bzhin bden par snang yang don las log pa'i kun rdzob yin pas na / log pa'i kun rdzob ces brjod cing tha snyad btags so /*

<sup>24</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.34-36]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi ni / sangs rgyas kyi gzhan snang du shar ba'i sku*

sense cognition to be the "double appearance of the moon, the conch which appears as yellow and so on."<sup>25</sup> He explains the object of deluded mental cognition to be "appearances in a dream."<sup>26</sup>

## 2-2. Origin of the Theory of the Conventional Truth of the *Sa lam rang 'grel*

### <The subdivision of the conventional truth into three levels>

mNyam med subdivides the conventional truth into three levels. However, this method is not attested in the texts of previous Indian and Tibetan Mādhyamika, or Bonpo thinkers. mNyam med is similar to Me ston, in that he subdivides the conventional truth into the pure conventional truth and the impure conventional truth, and then he further subdivides the impure conventional truth into correct convention and false convention.<sup>27</sup> Thus, mNyam med seems to have adopted Me ston's way of subdividing the conventional truth into two levels. He then developed this theory, in which he further subdivided false convention into two.<sup>28</sup>

In another treatise, the *bDen gnyis 'grel ba*, mNyam med subdivides false convention into "that which appears to deluded sense organs" and "that which appears to one perceiving a deceptive object."<sup>29</sup> However, he does not subdivide the correct conventional

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*dang ye shes 'phrin las sna tshogs dang / g-yung drung sems dpa'i rjes thob la gang snang ba'i snang ba rnam so /*

<sup>25</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.23-24]: *dbang shes 'khrul pa'i yul zla ba gnyis snang dang / dung ser snang la sogs dang /*

<sup>26</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.24-25]: *yid shes bsalad pa'i yul la / rmi lam gyi snang ba la sogs rnam so /*

<sup>27</sup> Concerning mNyam med's explanation, see Arguillère [2006: 312.30-31]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi la gnyis te / dag pa kun rdzob dang / ma dag kun rdzob bo /* and also Arguillère [2006: 313.6-7]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi la gnyis te / yang dag kun rdzob dang / log pa kun rdzob bo /*

Concerning Me ston's explanation, see the *bDen gnyis* [A2a2, B2a6]: *kun rdzob dbye ba gnyis su 'dod // dag pa dang ni ma dag pa'o //* and also the *bDen gnyis* [A2a3, B2b1-2]: *ma dag kun rdzob rnam gnyis te // log pa dang ni yang dag go //*

<sup>28</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.23-25]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi'i dbye ba ni / dbang shes 'khrul pa'i yul zla ba gnyis snang dang / dung ser snang la sogs dang / yid shes bsalad pa'i yul la / rmi lam gyi snang ba la sogs rnam so /*

<sup>29</sup> *bDen gnyis 'grel pa*, v. 33-34 [6b6-7a2]: *dang po ni / kun rdzob dbye ba gnyis su 'dod / ces bya'o / gnyis pa ni / dag pa dang ni ma dag pa'o / zhes pa gang zhe na dag pa kun rdzob dang / ma dag kun rdzob gnyis so / zhes bya'o /*

*bDen gnyis 'grel pa*, v. 33-34 [7a6-7b1]: *dang po ni ma dag kun rdzob rnam gnyis te / zhes pa / ma dag kun rdzob la dbye na gnyis te / zhes bya'o / gnyis pa ni / log pa dang ni yang dag go / zhes pa gang zhe na / log pa kun rdzob dang / yang dag kun rdzob gnyis so /*

*bDen gnyis 'grel pa*, v. 41-43 [7b2-3]: *mig skyon can la mig yor la sogs dbang po la skyon zhugs pa'i snang ba dang / smig rgyu la chur snang ba la sogs yul la skyon zhugs pa'i dbang gi snang tshul rnam bon can / khyod dbang po dang yul la skyon med pa'i gang zag la ltos te log pa kun rdzob tu rnam par bzhag ste /*

truth in the *bDen gnyis 'grel ba*, so the overall way of subdivision is different from what we find in his *Sa lam rang 'grel*.

### <An original definition of the conventional truth>

mNyam med's definitions of the subdivisions of the conventional truth<sup>30</sup> are not attested in the previous texts of Indian or Tibetan thinkers.

### <Relationship between the subdivisions of the conventional truth and the expression "ability to perform a function">

mNyam med regards the "inability to perform a function" (*don byed nus pas stong pa*) to be the definition of false convention.<sup>31</sup> Indian Mādhyamika thinkers such as Jñānagarbha (8<sup>th</sup> cen.),<sup>32</sup> Śāntarakṣita (ca. 725-788),<sup>33</sup> and others presented this terminology as a means of distinguishing false convention from correct convention. In the Bon religion, this method had already been adopted in the *Theg 'grel* (11<sup>th</sup> cen.<sup>34</sup>),<sup>35</sup> the *Bon sgo gsal byed* of

<sup>30</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.27-29]: *mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de dag gi tha snyad du kun rdzob kyi bden pa'i mtshan nyid du gsungs so //*

Arguillère [2006: 312.32-34]: *bag chags ci rigs dang bral zhing mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de / dag pa kun rdzob bden pa'i mtshan nyid do /*

Arguillère [2006: 313.4-6]: *bag chags mngon gyur dang 'grogs pa gang zhig / mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de / ma dag kun rdzob kyi bden pa'i mtshan nyid du gsungs so /*

Arguillère [2006: 313.8-10]: *tha snyad pa'i blo ni ma 'khrul pa ru mtshan mar snang ba'i yin lugs dang ldan pa de / yang dag kun rdzob kyi bden pa'i mtshan nyid du sngon gyi mkhas pas 'jog ste /*

Arguillère [2006: 313.21-22]: *'khrul pa'i shes ngor grub cing mtshan mar snang tshul ltar don byed nus pas stong pa ni / log pa kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid du gsungs so /*

<sup>31</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.21-22]: *'khrul pa'i shes ngor grub cing mtshan mar snang tshul ltar don byed nus pas stong pa ni / log pa kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid du gsungs so /*

<sup>32</sup> *SDVP*, v. 12 (Eckel [1987: 163.20-25]; *Tohoku* [No. 3882, 6b5]): *yang kun rdzob ni rnam pa gnyis su bstan te / snang du 'dra yang don byed dag // nus pa'i phyir dang mi nus phyir // yang dag yang dag ma yin pas // kun rdzob kyi ni dbye ba byas // (k. 12) zhe bya ba'o //*

<sup>33</sup> *SDVP*, v. 12 (*Tohoku* [No. 3883, 26b7-27a1]): *yang kun rdzob ni rnam pa gnyis su bstan te zhes bya bas ni bye brag tu rtogs par bya ba kho na'i phyir gzhan rnam pa gnyis su bstan to // don byed dag nus pa'i phyir / yang dag pas so / mi nus phyir yang dag pa ma yin pas so // kun rdzob kyi ni dbye ba byas // zhes bya ba ni grangs bzhin du sbyar bar bya'o //*

<sup>34</sup> In other papers such as Kumagai [2010a] I wrote that this treatise was rediscovered in the 13th or 14th centuries, but in fact it probably dates from the 11th century. According to Karmay [1972: 152-153], three Buddhists rediscovered hidden treatises including the *Theg 'grel*, but they are all Bonpo texts, so they gave them away to the Bonpo Lung ston 'Od 'bar (gNyen ston gZi brjid). These teachings were transmitted from Lung ston 'Od 'bar to Gyer ston Khro gas, and then from Gyer ston Khro gas to Lung bon lHa gnyan (b. 1088) and Mi la ras pa (b. 1040-1123). Therefore we must assume that the *Theg 'grel* was rediscovered in the 11th century. I am grateful to Professor Katsumi Mimaki of Kyoto University who gave me the useful information. See Mimaki [2010 : 330-331].

<sup>35</sup> The *Theg 'grel* presents the "ability to perform a function" (*don byed nus pa*) as a valid way of distinguishing the [conventional truth which is] not determined as deceptive (*bslu bar ma nges pa*) from the conventional truth determined as deceptive (*slu bar nges pa'i kun rdzob*):

*Theg 'grel* [443.1-2]: *rang gi mtshan nyid ni / res shig pa'i tshad mas grub cing res shig pa'i don byed*

Tre ston,<sup>36</sup> etc. Me ston too presented this theory, but only to then refute it.<sup>37</sup>

### <False convention and false conventional truth>

mNyam med regards the pure conventional truth, the impure conventional truth, and the correct conventional truth to be "truths" (*bden pa*). On the other hand he regards false convention, such as "a double appearance of moon," or "a conch which appears as yellow and so on" to be convention but not the conventional truth.<sup>38</sup>

This argument is attested in the controversy between the Sa skya pa and dGe lugs pa, where Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367-1449) refuted the position of Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419), who did not regard false convention as the truth.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that mNyam med does not adopt the theory of his master Rong ston but rather that of Tsong kha pa.

### <The word meaning of the subdivision of the conventional truth>

mNyam med explains the word meaning of false convention to be "convention which appears to accord truly with the object but which is really the opposite of the real object" (*don bzhin bden par snang yang don las log pa'i kun rdzob*).<sup>40</sup> The source of his explanation seems to be the *PrasP* of Candrakīrti (ca. 600-650), where Candrakīrti regards the conventional truth as "that which obscures totally" (*samantād varaṇaṃ, kun nas sgrib pa*) and "that which obscures the real state of all existence" (*sarva-padārtha-tattvāvacchādana, dngos po'i de kho na nyid la kun nas 'gegs par byed pa*).<sup>41</sup>

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*nus pa ni / bslu bar ma nges pa'o / res shig pa'i tshad mas grub cing don byed nus pas stong pa ni / bslu bar nges pa'i kun rdzob bo /*

<sup>36</sup> Tre ston used the term: "ability to perform a function" (*don byed nus pa*) in order to differentiate the non-deceptive conventional truth (*mi slu ba'i kun rdzob*) from the deceptive conventional truth (*slu ba'i kun rdzob*).

Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 59.7-8]: *mi slu ba'i kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid / 'khrul pa'i ngo bor snang zhing / snang tshul bzhin du don byed nus pa /*

Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 58.22-23]: *de la slu ba'i kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid ni / 'khrul pa'i ngo bor snang zhing / snang tshul bzhin don byed mi nus pa /*

<sup>37</sup> *bDen gnyis* [A2b3-4, B3a2-3]: *don byed nus dang mi nus sogs // kun rdzob dbye ba'i khyad par 'dod // skye ba med dang sgyu mar mtshungs // brtag na khyad par yod ma yin //*

<sup>38</sup> Arguillère [2006: 311.10-12]: *zla gnyis dung ser sogs kun rdzob kyi bden pa ma yin par thal / yin lugs dang ldan pa ma yin pa'i phyir / zhe na 'dod de / kun rdzob yin kyang bden pa ma yin pas so /*

<sup>39</sup> *Rigs lam kun gsal* [4b1-2]: *'ga' zhig log pa'i kun rdzob bden pa zhes bzhag par mi rung ste / log pa yin na bden par 'gal ba'i phyir ro zhes 'dod pa ltar na kun rdzob bden pa zhes gzhas par mi rung ste / kun rdzob yin na bden par 'gal ba'i phyir ro //*

<sup>40</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.25-27]: *gsum pa nges tshig ni / don bzhin bden par snang yang don las log pa'i kun rdzob yin pas na / log pa'i kun rdzob ces brjod cing tha snyad btags so /*

<sup>41</sup> *PrasP*, chap. 24, v. 8 (La Vallée Poussin [1913: 492.10-11]): *samantād varaṇaṃ samvṛtiḥ / ajñānaṃ hi*



### 2-3. The Position of the Theory of the Conventional Truth of the *Sa lam rang 'grel* in the History of Bon

As we have seen, mNyam med postulates the two truths on the basis of four criteria: basic theory (*gzhi*), the result (*'bras bu*), the path of the practice (*lam*), and the object to be refuted (*dgag bya*). Among these four, concerning the path of the practice (*lam*), he postulates the absolute truth by depending on "wisdom of the meditative equilibrium of the holy one," and the conventional truth by depending on "wisdom at the post-meditation."<sup>42</sup> A similar differentiation of the absolute from the conventional truth in terms of these two types of knowledge was given by Me ston.<sup>43</sup> In fact, mNyam med even referred to Me ston's presentation of this distinction in his other treatise, the *bDen gnyis 'grel ba*.<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned above, mNyam med develops Me ston's subdivision of the conventional truth. Me ston subdivides the conventional truth into pure convention and impure convention, and then further subdivides impure convention into correct convention and false convention.<sup>45</sup> mNyam med adopts Me ston's subdivision and further subdivides false convention into "that which appears to one who has deluded sense organs" and "that which appears to one who has deluded mental cognition."<sup>46</sup>

mNyam med gives the definition of false convention as "that which has no ability to perform a function,"<sup>47</sup> in order to differentiate it from the correct conventional truth. In the

*samantāt sarva-padārtha-tattvāvachhādanāt samvrtir ity ucyate /*

Tohoku [No. 3860, 163a5]: *kun nas sgrib pas na kun rdzob ste / mi shes pa ni dngos po'i de kho na nyid la kun nas 'gegs par byed pa'i phyir kun rdzob ces bya'o //*

<sup>42</sup> Arguillère [2006: 311.32-35]: *lam gyi dbang du byas na / 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag gi ye shes la ltos te / don dam gyi bden pa dang / rjes thob kyi ye shes la ltos te / kun rdzob kyi bden pa gnyis su rnam par dbye'o /*

<sup>43</sup> *bDen gnyis* [A1b1-3, B1b2-4]: *phyi nang snod bcud 'khor 'das kun // 'di ltar snang ba'i bon rnams kun // bden pa gnyis su rnam par gnas // shin tu gcig min tha dad min // ldog pas byas min rtogs pa yi // shes pa gnyis ltos rnam par dbye //*

*bDen gnyis rang 'grel* [5b3-4]: *gang zag gis rtog pa la sogs pa'i shes pa la ltos nas kun rdzob tu bzhag la / sangs rgyas kyi rtogs pa yang dag pa la ltos nas don dam du bzhag pa'o /*

<sup>44</sup> *bDen gnyis 'grel pa* [4b1-2]: *gang zag gi rtog pa la sogs / gnas lugs ma rtogs pa'i shes pa'i mthong tshul la kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang / ji lta ba rtogs pa'i ye shes la sogs gnas lugs rtogs pa'i shes pa'i mthong tshul la don dam gyi bden par rnam par bzhag pa'i phyir ro /*

<sup>45</sup> *bDen gnyis* [A2a2, B2a6]: *kun rdzob dbye ba gnyis su 'dod // dag pa dang ni ma dag pa'o //*

*bDen gnyis* [A2a3, B2b1-2]: *ma dag kun rdzob rnam gnyis te // log pa dang ni yang dag go //*

<sup>46</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.23-25]: *gnyis pa mtshan gzhi'i dbye ba ni / dbang shes 'khrul pa'i yul zla ba gnyis snang dang / dung ser snang la sogs dang / yid shes bslad pa'i yul la / rmi lam gyi snang ba la sogs rnams so /*

<sup>47</sup> Arguillère [2006: 313.21-22]: *'khrul pa'i shes ngor grub cing mtshan mar snang tshul ltar don byed nus pas stong pa ni / log pa kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid du gsungs so /*

Bon tradition, this explanation is adopted in texts such as the *Theg 'grel*<sup>48</sup> and Tre ston's *Bon sgo gsal byed*.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand Me ston refutes this approach.<sup>50</sup> Concerning this point mNyam med's *Sa lam rang 'grel* thus follows the tradition of the *Theg 'grel*.

### 3. Absolute Truth (*don dam bden pa, paramārthasatya\**)

#### 3-1. Theory of the Absolute Truth of the *Sa lam rang 'grel*

##### <Subdivision of the absolute truth>

mNyam med postulates two types of absolute truth. According to him, the absolute truth is completely non-discursive, so it has neither number nor subdivision. Nevertheless its number and subdivision are explained provisionally in order to lead sentient beings.<sup>51</sup> This explanation accords with what is found in Tre ston's *Bon sgo gsal byed*.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, it is different from that of Me ston who refutes the possibility of subdividing the absolute.<sup>53</sup>

mNyam med subdivides the absolute truth as follows.

[1] Based on the explanation in the *Theg 'grel*, mNyam med subdivides the absolute into the absolute of profound word (*zab mo gtam gyi don dam*) and the absolute known in

<sup>48</sup> The *Theg 'grel* presents the "ability to perform a function" (*don byed nus pa*) as a means of distinguishing [convention which is] not determined as deceptive (*bslu bar ma nges pa*) from the convention determined as deceptive (*slu bar nges pa'i kun rdzob*):

*Theg 'grel* [443.1-2]: *rang gi mtshan nyid ni / res shig pa'i tshad mas grub cing res shig pa'i don byed nus pa ni / bslu bar ma nges pa'o / res shig pa'i tshad mas grub cing don byed nus pas stong pa ni / bslu bar nges pa'i kun rdzob bo /*

<sup>49</sup> Tre ston gives the term: "ability to perform a function" (*don byed nus pa*) as a way to differentiate non-deceptive convention (*mi slu ba'i kun rdzob*) from deceptive convention (*slu ba'i kun rdzob*).

Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 59.7-8]: *mi slu ba'i kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid / 'khrul pa'i ngo bor snang zhing / snang tshul bzhin du don byed nus pa /*

Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 58.22-23]: *de la slu ba'i kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid ni / 'khrul pa'i ngo bor snang zhing / snang tshul bzhin don byed mi nus pa /*

<sup>50</sup> *bDen gnyis* [A2b3-4, B3a2-3]: *don byed nus dang mi nus sogs // kun rdzob dbye ba'i khyad par 'dod // skye ba med dang sgyu mar mtshungs // brtag na khyad par yod ma yin //*

<sup>51</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.15-18]: *yang dag par spros pa thams cad kyis dben pas grangs dang dbye ba la sogs med kyang / gdul bya drangs pa'i slad du grangs dang dbye ba yang tha snyad dang brda ru gsungs te /*

<sup>52</sup> See Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 60.10-11]: *don dam bden pa la gnyis te / zab mo rtags kyi don dam dang / 'jig rten grags sde'i don dam mo //*

<sup>53</sup> *bDen gnyis rang 'grel* [11b5-12a1]: *rnam grangs don dam pa'i bden pa dang / de ma yin pa gnyis su 'dod pa dang / skye ba med pa dang / rang bzhin med pa la sogs bshad pas so / zhe na / de ni gdul bya drangs pa'i don yin te / mdzub mo'i rtse mo la zla ba med kyang / byis pa la mtshon nas bstan pa dang 'dra'o /*

*bDen gnyis rang 'grel* [12a3]: *sangs rgyas kyi (sic, read kyis) sems can drangs don du don dam pa'i skad ston pa yin te / don du kun rdzob bo /*

the world (*'jig rten grags sde'i don dam*).<sup>54</sup> According to mNyam med, the absolute of profound word is "emptiness appearing to wisdom which grasps things as they are," and the absolute known in the world is "emptiness appearing with general characteristic in the devoted conduct."<sup>55</sup>

[2] From the point of view of the word (*brjod byed tshigs*), he subdivides the absolute into the uncategorized absolute (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam*) and the categorized absolute (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam*).<sup>56</sup>

[3] From the point of view of the meaning (*brjod bya'i don*), he subdivides the absolute into the absolute which refutes all discursiveness (*spros pa'i phyogs mtha' dag bkag pa'i don dam*) and the absolute which partially refutes discursiveness (*spros pa'i phyogs re bkag pa'i don dam*).<sup>57</sup>

#### <Definition of the absolute truth>

mNyam med defines the absolute truth (*don dam gyi bden pa*) to be "that whose essential nature is to be unestablished in accordance with its characteristics" (*mtshan mar ma grub pa'i yin lugs dang ldan pa*).<sup>58</sup>

#### <Word meaning of the absolute>

According to the *Sa lam rang 'grel*, the word meaning of the absolute (*don dam*) is the "absolute object of phenomena" (*bon can gyi mthar thug gi don yin pa*) or the "profound object to be thought and performed by excellent saints" (*'phags pa dam pa rnams kyi dgongs spyod zab mo'i yul yin pa*).<sup>59</sup>

### 3-2. Origin of the Theory of the Absolute Truth of the *Sa lam rang 'grel*

<sup>54</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.18-19]: *Theg 'grel las / zab mo gdam gyi don dam dang / 'jig rten grags sde'i don dam gnyis su rnam par bshad /*

<sup>55</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.19-21]: *de ni stong nyid ji lta ba'i ye shes la mngon du 'char ba dang / mos spyod la don spyir 'char ba lta bu'o /*

<sup>56</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.21-22]: *yang na brjod byed tshig gi sgo nas / rnam grangs pa dang rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam gnyis so /*

<sup>57</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.22-24]: *brjod bya'i don gyi sgo nas / spros pa'i phyogs re bkag pa dang / phyogs mtha' dag bkag pa'i don dam zhes grags so /*

<sup>58</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.10-12]: *mtshan mar ma grub pa'i yin lugs dang ldan pa don dam gyi bden pa'i mtshan nyid du gsungs so //*

<sup>59</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.24-26]: *gsum pa nges tshig ni / bon can gyi mthar thug gi don yin pa'i phyir dang / 'phags pa dam pa rnams kyi dgongs spyod zab mo'i yul yin pa'i phyir / don dam zhes brjod do /*

mNyam med's explanation of the two types of absolute truth seems to be influenced by previous Indian Mādhyamika and Bonpo thinkers.

### <Relationship between discursiveness and the subdivision of the absolute truth>

From the point of view of the meaning mNyam med subdivides the absolute into the "absolute which refutes all discursiveness" and the "absolute which partially refutes discursiveness."<sup>60</sup> In Indian Buddhism, the Mādhyamika thinker Bhāviveka similarly subdivided the absolute into the "non-discursive absolute" and the "discursive absolute."<sup>61</sup>

### <Categorized absolute and uncategorized absolute>

From the point of view of the word, mNyam med subdivides the absolute truth into the categorized absolute and the uncategorized absolute.<sup>62</sup> This explanation was given by the late Indian Mādhyamika thinkers such as Bhavya<sup>63</sup> and others.<sup>64</sup>

### <Absolute of profound word and absolute known in the world>

Basing himself on the *Theg 'grel* mNyam med subdivides the absolute truth into the absolute of profound word (*zab mo gtam gyi don dam*) and the absolute known in the world (*'jig rten grags sde'i don dam*).<sup>65</sup> This way of subdivision is also adopted in the *Bon sgo gsal byed* by Tre ston rgyal mtshan dpal (14<sup>th</sup> cen.).<sup>66</sup> It thus seems that among Bonpo thinkers the *Theg 'grel* was regarded as the common source for the subdivision of the

<sup>60</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.22-24]: *brjod bya'i don gyi sgo nas / spros pa'i phyogs re bkag pa dang / phyogs mtha' dag bkag pa'i don dam zhes grags so /*

<sup>61</sup> *TJ*, chap. 3, v. 26 (*Tohoku* [No. 3856, Dza 60b4-5]): *don dam pa ni rnam pa gnyis te / de la gcig ni mngon par 'du byed pa med par 'jug pa 'jig rten las 'das pa zag pa med pa spros pa med pa'o // gnyis pa ni mngon par 'du byed pa dang bcas par 'jug pa bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs kyi rjes su mthun pa dag pa 'jig rten pa'i ye shes zhes bya ba spros pa dang bcas pa ste / 'dir de dam bcas pa'i khyad par nyid bzung bas nyes pa med do //*

<sup>62</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.21-22]: *yang na brjod byed tshig gi sgo nas / rnam grangs pa dang rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam gnyis so /*

<sup>63</sup> According to Ejima [1980: 18-34], Bhavya, author of the *MAS*, seems to have lived sometime between the second half of the eighth century and the beginning of the eleventh century. So he is different from Bhāviveka (ca. 500-570), author of the *TJ*.

<sup>64</sup> *MAS*, k. 4 (Ejima [1980: 19]; *Tohoku* [No. 3857, 329b6]): *dam pa'i don ni spros bral te // de yang rnam pa gnyis su bya // rnam grangs kyi ni don dam dang // rnam grangs ma yin don dam mo //*

Other Mādhyamika thinkers such as Bhāviveka and Jñānagarbha also subdivide the absolute truth into two. However they do not use these specific technical terms. Śāntarakṣita gives the term: "the categorized absolute" (*rnam grangs ma yin pa'i don dam pa, aparyāyaparamārtha*) in his *SDVP*, but he does not use the term: "the uncategorized absolute" (*rnam grangs pa'i don dam pa, paryāyaparamārtha*).

<sup>65</sup> Arguillère [2006: 312.18-19]: *Theg 'grel las / zab mo gtam gyi don dam dang / 'jig rten grags sde'i don dam gnyis su rnam par bshad /*

<sup>66</sup> Mimaki and Karmay [2007: 60.9-15].

absolute truth. The *Theg 'grel's* explanation of both subdivisions of the absolute truth is almost identical to what is found in Bhāviveka's *TJ*, so it seems to be strongly influenced by Bhāviveka.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, there is also another tradition, represented by Me ston, which refutes the subdivision of the absolute truth.<sup>68</sup>

### **3-3. The Position of the Theory of the Absolute Truth of the *Sa lam rang 'grel* in the History of Bon**

As mentioned above, there are two different traditions of the subdivision of the absolute truth in the Bon religion: the first is Me ston's tradition, which refutes the subdivision of the absolute truth and admits only a unique absolute truth. The second is the tradition of the *Theg 'grel*, which subdivides the absolute truth into two. mNyam med's *Sa lam rang 'grel* follows the *Theg 'grel's* tradition, but his other treatise, the *bDen gnyis 'grel ba*,<sup>69</sup> follows Me ston's tradition.

## **4. Conclusions**

I here summarize the theory of the two truths in the *Sa lam rang 'grel* of mNyam med.

### **[1] Two truths**

mNyam med postulates the two truths on the basis of four criteria, a scheme not attested in earlier texts. Tre ston also postulated the two truths on the basis of the four vehicles, but his theory is different from mNyam med's.

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<sup>67</sup> *TJ*, chap. 3, v. 26 (*Tohoku*, No. 3856, Dza 60b4-5): *de la gcig ni mngon par 'du byed pa med par 'jug pa 'jig rten las 'das pa zag pa med pa spros pa med pa'o //*

*Theg 'grel* [440.1-2]: *de la gcig ni mngon par 'du byed pa med par 'jug pa'i 'jig rten rten las 'das pa / zag pa med pa spros pa med pa'o /*

*TJ*, chap. 3, v. 26 (*Tohoku*, No. 3856, Dza 60b5): *gnyis pa ni mngon par 'du byed pa dang bcas par 'jug pa bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs kyi rjes su mthun pa dag pa 'jig rten pa'i ye shes zhes bya ba spros pa dang bcas pa ste /*

*Theg 'grel* [440.2-3]: *gnyis pa ni mngon par 'du byed pa dang bcas par 'jug pa bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs kyi rjes su mthun pa dag pa 'jig rten pa'i ye shes zhes bya ba spros pa dang bcas pa ste /*

<sup>68</sup> *bDen gnyis rang 'grel* [11b5-12a1]: *rnam grangs don dam pa'i bden pa dang / de ma yin pa gnyis su 'dod pa dang / skye ba med pa dang / rang bzhin med pa la sogs bshad pas so / zhe na / de ni gdul bya drangs pa'i don yin te / mdzub mo'i rtse mo la zla ba med kyang / byis pa la mtshon nas bstan pa dang 'dra'o /*

*bDen gnyis rang 'grel* [12a3]: *sangs rgyas kyi (sic, read kyis) sems can drangs don du don dam pa'i skad ston pa yin te / don du kun rdzob bo /*

<sup>69</sup> See Kumagai [forthcoming].

mNyam med's explanation of the two truth as the "object of wisdom which grasps things as they are" and the "object of wisdom which grasps things only to the extent to which they really exist" respectively had already been given in Me ston's *bDen gnyis* and *bDen gnyis rang 'grel*, and also in mNyam med's *bDen gnyis 'grel ba*.

## [2] Conventional truth

mNyam med adopted Me ston's subdivision of the conventional truth, and then further developed it.

His explanation of the relationship between the "ability to perform a function" and the subdivision of the conventional truth seems to be influenced by late Indian Mādhyamika thinkers such as Jñānagarbha, Śāntarakṣita and others. Like the *Theg 'grel*, mNyam med's *Sa lam rang 'grel* accepts this definition as a valid way of subdividing the conventional truth.

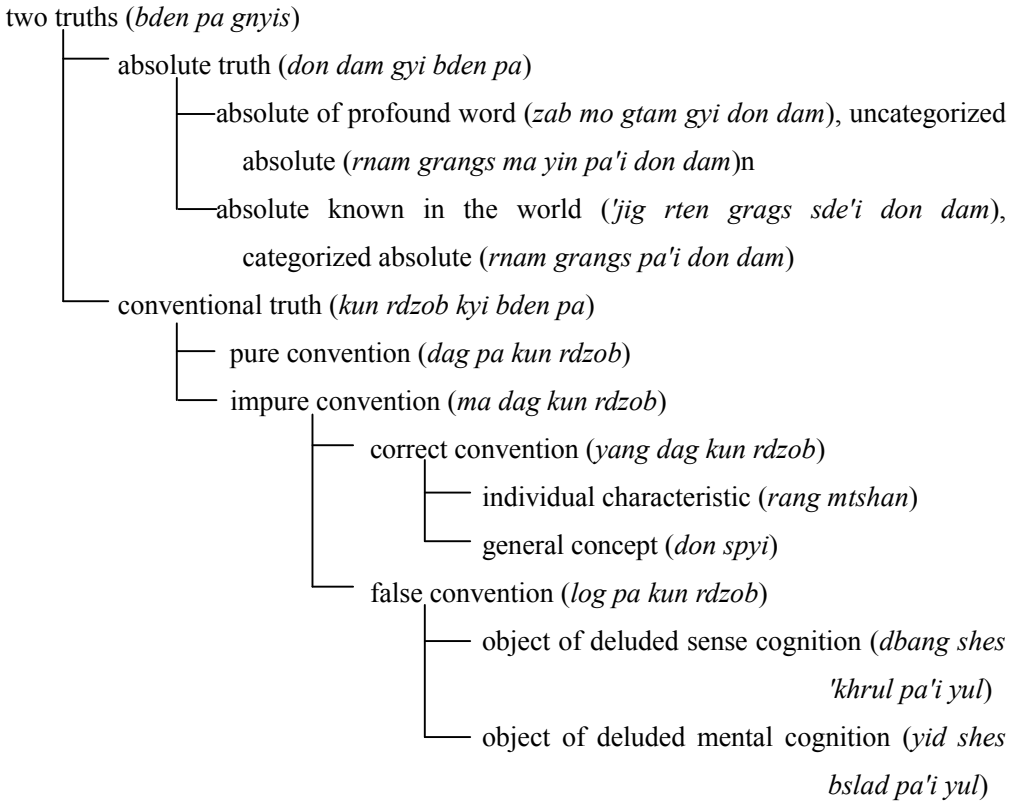
The argument concerning the difference between false convention and the false conventional truth seems to be connected with the controversy between Tsong kha pa and Rong ston. It is important to note that mNyam med adopts the theory of Tsong kha pa, the opponent of his master Rong ston.

## [3] Absolute truth

Concerning the subdivision of the absolute truth into two, mNyam med seems to be influenced by Indian Mādhyamika thinkers such as Bhāviveka. Like the *Theg 'grel*, mNyam med's *Sa lam rang 'grel* subdivides the absolute truth into two. However in his other treatise, the *bDen gnyis rang 'grel*, he follows Me ston's tradition.

Thus mNyam med's *Sa lam rang 'grel* seems to gather and arrange the theories of the two truths espoused by thinkers of Indian Mādhyamika, Tibetan Buddhism, and Bonpo, and then to establish its own theory. Especially the *Sa lam rang 'grel* seems to be influenced in many points by Buddhist Mādhyamika thinkers such as Bhāviveka, Jñānagarbha, and Śāntarakṣita, who in Tibet are regarded as belonging to the *Svātantrika-mādhyamika* school. The *Sa lam rang 'grel*'s classification of the two truths can be seen in the following table.

**The Sa lam rang 'grel's Classification of the Two Truths**



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**PrasP** Candrakīrti: *Prasannapadā nāma Mādhyamikavṛtti*; *dBu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel pa tshig gsal ba*.

**Skt. ed.** La Vallée Poussin [1913].

**Tib.** **D:** *Tohoku* No. 3860; **P:** *Otani* No. 5260.

**SDV** Jñānagarbha: *Satyadvayavibhaṅgakārikā*; *bDen pa gnyis rnam par 'byed pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa*.

**Tib. ed.** Eckel [1987].

**Tib. D:** *Tohoku* No. 3881.

**SDVP** Śāntarakṣita: *Satyadvayavibhaṅgapañjikā*; *bDen pa gnyis rnam par 'byed pa'i dka' 'grel.*

**Tib. D:** *Tohoku* No. 3883; **P:** *Otani* No. 5283.

**SDVV** Jñānagarbha: *Satyadvayavibhaṅgavṛtti*; *bDen pa gnyis rnam par 'byed pa'i 'grel pa.*

**Tib. ed.** Eckel [1987].

**Tib. D:** *Tohoku* No. 3882.

**TJ** Bhāviveka: *Madhyamakahrdayavṛttitarkajvālā*; *dBu ma'i snying po'i 'grel pa rtog ge 'bar ba.*

**Tib. D:** *Tohoku* No. 3856; **P:** *Otani* No. 5256.

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**bDen gnyis** Me ston Sher rab 'od zer (1058-1132 or 1118-1192):

[A] *dBu ma bden gnyis kyi gzhung* in *Sa lam rnam 'byed 'phrul sgron rtsa 'grel theg chen gzhi lam 'bras bu rtsa 'grel dbu ma rtsa 'grel skor gyi gsungs pod bzhungs*, vol. 2 Kha, (Kathumandu, 1991), No. Cha. (5 folios, dBu can script)

[B] *dBu ma bden gnyis kyi gzhung* edited by Yam Lama and Samtin Jansin, Delhi, 1961. (6 folios, dBu med script)

**bDen gnyis rang 'grel** Me ston Sher rab 'od zer (1058-1132 or 1118-1192): *Theg pa chen po dbu ma'i rang 'grel gsal byed sgron ma legs par bshad pa.* This is an



autocommentary by Me ston. A copy of this text was given to me by Dangsong Namgyal a Bonpo monk of Triten Norbutse monastery. It has 94 p. This treatise is listed in the catalogue of Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin, cf. Kværne [1974: 117 (T35-2)].

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