

RUHR-UNIVERSITÄT BOCHUM

Guest Lecture at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg

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Is the Luminous Nature of Mind Empty of Itself? Mahāmudrā and Emptiness in 15th and 16th Centuries Tibet

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The yoga and meditation techniques of Mahāmudrā, which have recently begun to attract interest all over the world, played an important role in the intellectual history of Tibet, particularly within the Bka' brgyud schools. The methods of employing direct valid cognitions in order to gain immediate access to one's luminous nature of mind prepared the ground for philosophical systems that described the ultimate in positive terms. This approach found doctrinal support in the teachings of the third turning of the wheel of dharma, which is not only based on the doctrine of emptiness, but also distinguishes between the imputed and the real. Some defined this distinction in terms of two modes of emptiness: being "empty of an own-being" (rang stong), and "empty of other" (gzhan stong). This Mahāmudrā-based gzhan stong-philosophy started to become systematically presented in the 15th and 16th centuries, a period during which the Bka' brgyud pas gained increasing economic and political power (even ruling central parts of Tibet). This measure of autonomy afforded them the freedom to formulate and defend their Mahāmudrā philosophy against the earlier critique of Sa skya Paṅḍita (1182-1251) and his followers, who had controlled Tibet throughout the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). The Bka' brgyud pas were subsequently persecuted in the 17th century by the government of the 5th Dalai Lama (1617-1682). Their Mahāmudrā tradition nonetheless survived and spread all over the world, but with diminishing evidence of its rich scholastic and intellectual background.



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