

Mi bskyod rdo rje on the Question of What Remains (*lhag ma, avaśiṣṭa*)

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Abstract

What, if anything, remains upon ascertaining emptiness (Pāli: *suññatā*, Sanskrit: *sūnyatā*)—the lack of intrinsic essence of all phenomena—and what is this remainder like? The problem of the remainder (Skt.: *avaśiṣṭa*; Tib.: *lhag ma*) has preoccupied Buddhist thinkers from the time of the Pāli canon down to the present day. The wide-ranging Buddhist interpretations of the remainder, which all turned on a famous passage from the *Cūḷasuññatasutta* (*The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness*) of the *Majjhimanikāya*, and the divergent Tibetan assimilations of them, provided raw materials for scholars of all traditions to evaluate different lines of response to an overlapping set of key soteriological problems that had long been discussed and hotly debated by Buddhist scholars. This lecture will examine how the problem of the remainder offered scholars of the Tibetan Bka' brgyud tradition a fruitful interpretive paradigm for differentiating between affirmative (cataphatic) *gzhan stong* and negative (apophatic) *rang stong* strains of Buddhist thought and practice. In particular, it will focus on how the Eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554) sought to reconcile these divergent Indian and Tibetan interpretations of the remainder and position his own tradition's viewpoint in relation or reaction to these.