


***The Pointed Spear of a Siddha* and its Commentaries: The 'Brug pa bka' brgyud School in Defence of the Mahāmudrā Doctrine**

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s the Mahāmudrā doctrine is the paramount teaching in all bKa' brgyud schools, its establishment and defence represents a crucial point from which to determine the identity of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school and, furthermore, trace the development of the doctrinal positions of its scholars over the last three centuries.¹

Since the first systematised criticism concerning certain features of the Mahāmudrā doctrine was articulated by Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1252), the controversy about the doctrine has played a significant role in philosophical debates among Tibetan scholars.

This paper will provide an overview of the genesis, structure and content of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*,² composed by the Ninth rJe mKhan po of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school in Bhutan, Shākya rin chen (1710–1759), and its commentaries, with special focus on the *Dus kyi pho nya*,³ written by the Sixty-ninth rJe mKhan po dGe 'dun rin chen (1926–1997).

I have identified three chronological layers of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*: The *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* itself, a group of three commentaries from the eighteenth century, and one from the twentieth century.⁴

¹ I will employ the designation of the term “Mahāmudrā doctrine” throughout this paper to refer to the entirety of Mahāmudrā view, the Mahāmudrā meditative system and Mahāmudrā conduct.

² *Phyag rgya chen po las brtsams pa'i dri tshig grub pa'i mdung rnon* (*The Pointed Spear of a Siddha: Queries Concerning [the Doctrine of] Mahāmudrā*).

³ *Phyag rgya chen po las brtsams pa'i dri tshig grub pa'i mdung rnon zhes bya ba'i gsung lan dus kyi pho nya* (*The Timely Messenger: A Response to the Queries Concerning [the Doctrine of] Mahāmudrā Titled 'The Pointed Spear of a Siddha'*).

⁴ The *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* is not included in rJe Shākya rin chen's *gsung 'bum*. I am therefore deeply indebted to the National Library of Bhutan, Thimphu, which enabled me to locate and use two versions of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and also one version each of rJe Yon tan mtha' yas', Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje's and Chos kyi rgya mtsho's commentaries. I am especially thankful for the help and support

The textual analysis is based on a critical edition and annotated translation of rJe Shākya rin chen's seven questions on controversial issues of the Mahāmudrā doctrine and his replies, as presented in his root text, the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*, as well as rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's responses to the questions raised, as displayed in his verse commentary, the *Dus kyi pho nya*. My dissertation sets out to improve our understanding of the history and reception of the Mahāmudrā doctrine in the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school in Bhutan from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.⁵

1. Genesis of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and its Eighteenth-century Commentaries

In order to illustrate the genesis of the production of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and its commentaries from the eighteenth century, two autobiographical accounts of rJe Shākya rin chen's journey to Tibet in 1740, and the colophons and intentional statements of the root text and its commentaries serve as a textual basis.⁶

Three commentaries were written in the eighteenth century:

1. *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i skor las brtsams pa'i dri tshig grub pa'i mdung rnon gyi lan du gsol ba kun rmongs rang blo tshim byed ces bya ba grub dbang rin po ches mdzad pa*⁷
2. *Nges don phyag rgya chen po la dris pa'i gsung lan 'og min ston pa'i zhal lung*⁸

of Yeshe Lhendup from the National Library of Bhutan during my field research in November 2014.

⁵ A critical edition and annotated translation of the *Dus kyi pho nya* form the basis of my analysis of rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's Mahāmudrā interpretation, which I examine in my dissertation (under preparation). I owe my sincere thanks to Sharnon Mentor-King for her careful proofreading of my article.

⁶ Two works elucidate at length rJe Shākya rin chen's travels in Tibet: *Shākya'i dge sbyong shākya'i ming gis mtshon pa bdag nyid lha ldan 'phrul gyi gtsug lag khang chen por phyin pa'i gtam lha mi kun tu dga' ba'i zlos gar sdeb* (201–254) and the eighth chapter of his autobiography *Lhag pa'i bsam pa bskul zhing byang chub kyi spyod pa la 'jug pa'i gtam dam pa'i chos kyi gandi sgra dbyangs snyan pa'i yan lag rgya mtsho* (234–279).

⁷ *Nges don phyag rgya chen po'i skor las brtsams pa'i dri tshig grub pa'i mdung rnon gyi lan du gsol ba kun rmongs rang blo tshim byed ces bya ba grub dbang rin po ches mdzad pa* ('Gratifier of the Confused One's Own Mind: A Reply to the Queries Concerning the [Doctrine of] Mahāmudrā of Definite Meaning, Titled 'The Pointed Spear of a Siddha,' given by Grub dbang Rin po che).

⁸ *Nges don phyag rgya chen po la dris pa'i gsung lan 'og min ston pa'i zhal lung* (The Oral Instructions of the Teacher of the Akaniṣṭha [Realm]: A Reply to the Questions About Mahāmudrā of Definite Meaning).

3. *Phyag rgya chen po las brtsams pa'i dri tshig grub pa'i mdung bsnun la lan du gsol ba gsung rab kun las btus*⁹

The *Rang blo tshim byed*, the first commentary, was written by the Second Dre'u lhas Grub dbang Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje (1721–1769). He reports that rJe Shākya rin chen posed seven questions among a circle of several masters regarding the debate on the Mahāmudrā doctrine, together with a brief explanation of his own standpoint and interpretation.¹⁰

Following that, rJe Shākya rin chen requested that the masters present at that meeting clarify their own Mahāmudrā interpretation in regard to the questions raised. But Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje later admitted that he had not been able to fulfil rJe Shākya rin chen's request during the latter's lifetime.

However, at the time of the enthronement of the Second Khri sprul 'Jigs med seng ge (1742–1789) in 1764, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje was again requested by contemporary scholars to fulfil his promise. Finally, he composed the commentary at his monastic seat Dre'u lhas in Tibet in 1765. His commentary contains the root verses by rJe Shākya rin chen, though only summarized in prose.¹¹

About the background of this author: Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje was considered the second incarnation of the renowned “divine madman” (*smyon pa*) 'Brug pa Kun legs (1455–1529); and as John A. Ardussi has pointed out, was one of the most important figures on the Tibetan side in the political and religious “rapprochement between Bhutan and Tibet.”¹²

Beginning with Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal's (1594–1651) flight to Bhutan, the subsequent wars and, finally, Tibet's intervention in the Bhutanese civil war from 1732 to 1735, relations between Tibet and Bhutan remained generally highly tense and severely damaged.

Despite the official end of the civil war in Bhutan, the regent, the

⁹ *Phyag rgya chen po las brtsams pa'i dri tshig grub pa'i mdung bsnun la lan du gsol ba gsung rab kun las btus* (*An Anthology of Scriptural Sources: Replies to the Queries Concerning the [Doctrine of] Mahāmudrā Titled 'The Pointed Spear of a Siddha'*).

¹⁰ The colophon does not provide any composition date of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*, but states that the work was written at Shri Nā landā Monastery near sPu na kha. It could probably be assumed that the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* was set down formally in writing not before 1754, because Shri Nā landā Monastery was consecrated only in 1754; see rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *lHo 'brug chos 'byung* (329.3–4).

¹¹ See Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje, *Rang blo tshim byed* (2r1–v3; 24r6). For a brief account of the biography of the Second Khri sprul 'Jigs med seng ge, see rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *lHo 'brug chos 'byung* (296.1–297.8).

¹² Ardussi 1999: 64.

Tenth sDe srid Mi pham dbang po, was forced to flee to Tibet in 1736, where his subsequent meetings with important political and religious leaders—such as the Seventh Dalai Lama bsKal bzang rgya mtsho (1708–1757), Pho lha nas bSod nams stobs rgyas (1689–1757), the Seventh rGyal dbang 'Brug chen dKar brgyud 'Phrin las shing rta (1718–1766) and Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje—became stepping stones for improving relations between Tibet and Bhutan.

In the light of this mutual religious and political “rapprochement,” Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje was cordially invited to Bhutan in 1739, where he became acquainted with both the later Ninth rJe mKhan po Shākya rin chen and the Thirteenth rJe mKhan po Yon tan mtha' yas (1724–1784); the latter became a close disciple of both rJe Shākya rin chen and Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje.

In 1740, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje returned to Tibet with the first exchange group of Bhutanese students, among them rJe Shākya rin chen and rJe Yon tan mtha' yas.¹³ They visited many sacred places, such as bSam yas, Rwa lung, Rwa sgren and gDan sa thel, and not only received teaching from masters of different traditions, but also studied intensively, for example at 'Bras spungs. rJe Shākya rin chen reports at least twice about receiving also Mahāmudrā related instructions in his autobiographical writings.¹⁴

In the descriptions of the Mahāmudrā debate contained in the introductory parts and colophons of the different works, the exact place and date of the initial meeting of Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje, rJe Shākya rin chen, rJe Yon tan mtha' yas and other masters, which led to the production of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* text and its commentaries, is not textually identified. But presumably this encounter took place either during the joint travels of these masters or during Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje's sojourn in Bhutan.

The *Og min zhal lung*, the second commentary, was composed by rJe Yon tan mtha' yas. His extensive prose commentary includes also the original root verses of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*.

The third commentary, the *gSung rab kun btus*, was written by sPa gro chos rje Chos kyi rgya mtsho of the gZar chen family line, whose members generally resided at their traditional monastic seat, bSam gtan chos gling, in the village of gZar chen kha near sPa gro. He was the grandnephew of the Fourth rJe mKhan po Dam chos pad dkar (1639–1708).

The family line of Chos kyi rgya mtsho originated from the

¹³ See Ardussi 1999: 68–78. Yon tan mtha' yas' extensive studies with Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje are reported in the *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang ngag dbang yon tan mtha' yas kyi gsang gsum mi zad rgyan gyi 'khor lor rnam par rol pa'i rtogs pa brjod pa skal bzang mos pa'i padmo rgyas byed ye shes 'od stong 'phro ba'i nyi ma*; see *ibid.*: 79, n. 33.

¹⁴ See, for example, the *Gandi sgra dbyangs rgya mtsho* (271; 273–274).

Mahāsiddha sPyil dkar ba (1228–1300), a disciple of rGod tshang pa (1189–1258), who belonged to the upper branch of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud (i.e. *stod 'brug*). This family line was established by the sixteenth century (or possibly earlier) at gZar chen kha.¹⁵ Family members were principal allies of Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, for which reason they received a tax dispensation.¹⁶

Like Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje, Chos kyi rgya mtsho wished to compose a short summary of his Mahāmudrā interpretation to honour rJe Shākya rin chen, who by then had already passed away.¹⁷ This prose commentary sporadically includes single lines of the root verses and summarized root verses in prose.

Arguably, the exchange between these Bhutanese and Tibetan masters from the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school regarding Mahāmudrā teachings and practices has contributed to a newly awakened interest in defining a purified "Bhutanese" and "Tibetan" understanding of the Mahāmudrā doctrine, be it in contrast or agreement with each other.

rJe Shākya rin chen states in the beginning of his work that he composed the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* because the Mahāmudrā teachings, "the ambrosial liquid, which is not contaminated by the venomous water of dogmatic conceptualizations, is nowadays polluted by the dust of confusion."¹⁸

In sum, the discussion of rJe Shākya rin chen's seven questions gained wider dissemination within the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school due to the historical circumstances of harmonization between Bhutanese and Tibetan masters during this time.

rJe Shākya rin chen's seven questions and answers may therefore be considered the fundament for a newly articulated defence and consequently, understanding of the Mahāmudrā doctrine within the two branches of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school.

¹⁵ See Ardussi 1977: 162–163, n. 39. At least two documentations of the genealogy of the gZar chen family line are available; see Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *Ri khrod mdzes rgyan* (vol. 2: 160–173), and, regarding the early genealogy of the family line, see the biography of rJe Dam chos pad dkar, the *mTshungs med chos kyi rgyal po rje btsun dam chos pad dkar gyi rnam par thar pa thugs rje chen po'i dri bsung* (3r3–4r6).

¹⁶ See Aris 1979: 173.

¹⁷ See Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *gSung rab kun btus* (1r2–2r1).

¹⁸ rJe Shākya rin chen, *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* (1r2–3): *gang dag gshegs pa'i lam gsang phyag rgya che* || *rtog ge'i dug chus ma bsad bdud rtsi'i chab* || *deng sang rmongs pa'i rdul gyis rnyog mthong nas* || *drungs byed dri tshig ke ta ka 'di sbyin* ||.

2. *rJe dGe 'dun rin chen and His Commentary on the
Grub pa'i mdung rnon*

The latest commentary, the *Dus kyi pho nya*,¹⁹ was composed by the Sixty-ninth rJe mKhan po dGe 'dun rin chen in the twentieth century. This work is written completely in verse and contains the original root verses of rJe Shākya rin chen.²⁰

rJe dGe 'dun rin chen was a remarkable scholar and *yogin* from the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school in Bhutan (i.e. *lho 'brug*), appointed to the post of *rje mkhan po* from 1990 to 1996. The appointment as *rje mkhan po* is determined by the erudition and level of realisation of its candidates and not by recognition as incarnation.²¹

As an exception however, a separate *sprul sku* lineage was created for rJe Shākya rin chen, who was such an outstanding person in the religious community of eighteenth-century Bhutan; his present incarnation is named Ngag dbang bsTan pa'i nyin byed (b. 1997) and resides at Shri Nā landā Monastery.

Similarly, an incarnation lineage was created for rJe dGe 'dun rin chen; the current incarnation, Ngag dbang Yon tan rgya mtsho, was officially recognized among different claimants.²²

Among the Bhutanese, rJe dGe 'dun rin chen is revered under his moniker "dGe bshes Brag phug pa" (rDzong kha: "Bya phugp"): "Ge bshes" due to his erudition; and "Brag phug pa," firstly, because of his birth in a "miraculously arisen cave" at sTag tshang near sPa gro, and secondly, because of the meditative realisation that he is said to have developed during meditation retreats.²³

¹⁹ I thank Dorji Wangchuk for initially drawing my attention to this work several years ago.

²⁰ Unfortunately, the colophon of the *Dus kyi pho nya* does not provide the date of composition. The "Timely Messenger" is intended to illuminate and recall the correct understanding of the Mahāmudrā doctrine in this eon of strife (*kaliyuga*). The ornamental title does not refer either to Yamāntaka, the "messenger of death" (or its retinue), or the designation of the fifty-second year of the *rab byung* cycle, the male earth-horse year (*sa rta'i lo*); see the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (vol. 2: 1268).

²¹ Constitution of Bhutan, art. 3, sec. 4; see Constitution Drafting Committee 2008: 10.

²² Ngag dbang Yon tan rgya mtsho's father, Rin chen mkha' 'gro, kindly provided me with a copy of the official recognition certificate from the dPal ldan 'brug gzhung sprul sku ngos 'dzin tshogs chung, issued on July 22, 2015. In addition, I met another claimant of rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's incarnation, Thub bstan shes rab 'od zer, on November 9, 2014 at Shri Nā landā Monastery.

²³ rDo rje slob dpon Kun legs, *Dwangs shel me long* (27–28). The hagiography contains an intriguing poem, composed by rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, in which he designates himself as a *brag phug pa*, together with a list of instructions on view, meditation and conduct (*lta sgom spyod gsum*) of such cave hermits, see *ibid.* (57–59), which I translate in my dissertation (under preparation). The author of the

In his colophon of his commentary, rJe dGe 'dun rin chen informs the reader that he is nowadays quite concerned about people who do not understand the crucial points of the Mahāmudrā doctrine correctly: He laments that even after the root text of rJe Shākya rin chen had been perfectly elucidated in rJe Yon tan mtha' yas' commentary, this seems to be insufficient.²⁴

His verse commentary paraphrases a great number of positions, which are explained in the commentary of rJe Yon tan mtha' yas.

rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's motivation to record and transfer his knowledge was certainly focused on his disciples within Bhutan, in a mostly traditional monastic setting, as documented in his colophon of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*, the colophons of several of his other works and also in his hagiography. This can especially be observed in his activities as (initially) teacher and (later) head of the rTa mgo bshad grwa from 1970 to 1980, and the establishment of the new Pha jo sdings bshad grwa in 1981.

His *gsung 'bum* consists of ten volumes with one hundred and twenty-eight works and covers all relevant topics of Tibetan scholasticism, debate, meditative and ritual practices.

Several of rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's works have already received wide academic appreciation outside of Bhutan: first and foremost, his history of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school, the *dPal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhing lho phyogs nags mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung bla gsar ma ba'i rgyan*, but also his hagiography of 'Brug pa Kun legs, the *Chos rje kun dga' legs pa'i rnam thar grub pa'i rtogs brjod*, and his biography of Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, the *dPal 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen chos kyi rgyal po ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar rgya mtsho'i snying po*.

Additional works of rJe dGe 'dun rin chen that are not contained in his *gsung 'bum*, including direct instructions (*gzhal gdams*) to his disciples on a great variety of topics, poems of spiritual realisation and autobiographical notes, are found in his hagiography.

It is important to bear in mind that rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's thinking was strongly influenced by the *ris-med* scholars. His non-sectarian monastic education took place not only in Bhutan but also in central Tibet (dBus gtsang) from 1952 to 1956, where he studied and received teachings chiefly from rNying ma masters such as bDud 'joms 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje (1904–1987) and students of mKhan po gZhan dga' (1871–1927), such as Rwa hor dPal ldan chos kyi grags pa

hagiography, the *rTogs brjod mdor bsdus dwangs shel me long*, rDo rje slob dpon Kun legs, is the present *rdo rje slob dpon*, one of the five *slob dpon*s of the central monastic body (*gzhung lhan tshogs*) in Bhutan. He was rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's disciple during his higher monastic education at the rTa mgo bshad grwa.

²⁴ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (499.2–500).

(b. 19th century–1960) and other second-generation disciples of the great rNying ma scholar 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846–1912).²⁵

This influence is visible, for example, in rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's attempt to harmonise the teachings of the "second and third turning of the wheel of the Dharma" (*chos 'khor gnyis pa/gsum pa*) and his adoption and use of certain technical terms, some of which had been newly introduced in Tibetan philosophical debates by 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho.²⁶

3. Structure and Content of the Grub pa'i mdung rnon and its Commentaries

The *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and its commentaries are considered works of some polemical character due to their being responses to the disputed questions about the Mahāmudrā doctrine (*dgag lan*, honorific: *gsung lan*) and also belong to the questions-and-answers genre (*dris lan*, honorific: *zhus lan*).²⁷

It has already been observed that numerous works with explanatory character about the Mahāmudrā doctrine were written in the form of questions from disciples, together with answers from

²⁵ rDo rje slob dpon Kun legs, *Dwangs shel me long* (36–40). The natural closeness of the 'Brug pa and rNying ma schools regarding the monastic education of many higher ranking Bhutanese scholars often resulted in doctrinally blurred boundaries between the schools and therefore should be kept in mind when employing terms as "non-sectarian" or "inter-sectarian."

²⁶ This has already been illustrated in the textual analysis of rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's *dBu ma'i bsdus don lta ba'i me long* in my M.A. thesis ("Spiegel der Sichtweise: Die Kernpunkte [der Philosophie] des Mittleren [Weges]" (*dBu ma'i bsdus don lta ba'i me long*): Eine kurze Abhandlung über das Madhyamaka rJe dGe-'dun-rin-chens (1926–1997), dem 69. rJe mKhan-po von Bhutan," Universität Hamburg, 2012: 63–91). For example, rJe dGe 'dun rin chen adopts 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho's twofold systematisation of conventional valid cognition (*kun tu tha snyad pa'i tshad ma: amvyavahārikapramāṇa*) into ordinary perception (*tshu rol mthong ba: arvāgdarśana/aparadarśana*) and pure perception (*dag pa'i gzigs pa: *śuddhadarśana*). As a result, through 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho's concept of pure perception, phenomena like the existence of innumerable buddha-fields in one atom or the visualizations in the generation stage of tantric meditations can be explained more precisely. For the examination of this concept and its theory and 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho's contributions to Buddhist logic and epistemology, see Wangchuk 2009.

²⁷ For an overview of the polemical literary genre in Tibet, see Cabezón and Dargay 2007: 11–33. For a discussion about text genres/text types and some research approaches for the categorization of Tibetan literature, see the contributions in Rheingans (ed.) 2015; for an introduction into the current state of research, see *ibid.*: 1–22.

masters.²⁸

Additionally, a number of works with polemical, or in our case at least confutative character, have been authored in the form of questions and answers, in most cases, from one master as a response to another master's (real or fictional) questions.²⁹

As mentioned before, the first systematised criticism concerning certain features of the Mahāmudrā doctrine was articulated by Sa skya Paṇḍita, mainly in the third chapter of his *Doms pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba* and his *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal ba*, and to a lesser extent in his *sKyes bu dam pa rnams la spring ba'i yi ge* and *Phyogs bcu'i sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnams la zhu ba'i 'phrin yig*.³⁰ Another brief work, the *rTogs ldan rgyan po'i dris lan*, clearly illustrates Sa skya Paṇḍita's conception of the "correct" Mahāmudrā doctrine, as he answers five questions on Mahāmudrā to a student named rTogs ldan rgyan; its topics overlap with the topics discussed in the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*.³¹

After the zenith of the highly polemical debates in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the controversial issues of the Mahāmudrā doctrine had from the viewpoint of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school mainly been solved by their eminent master Pad ma dkar po (1527–1592) and his spiritual son mKhas dbang Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645).³² Accordingly, rJe Shākya rin chen's explicit motivation to re-

²⁸ For a brief overview of different important Mahāmudrā works that were written in the form of questions and answers, see, for example, Rheingans 2008: 72–74.

²⁹ An extensive example of a polemical work in the form of one hundred and eight questions and answers is Shākya mchog ldan's *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye pa'i bstan bcos 'bel gtam rnam par nges pa legs bshad thur ma* (*The Collected Writings of gSer mdog pañ chen Shākya mchog ldan*. 24 vols. Delhi: Nagwang Topgyel, 1995, vol. 6: 443–652 [W23200]).

³⁰ See D. Jackson 1994: 159–160. Singular criticism on different aspects of the Mahāmudrā doctrine and practices, such as Maitrīpa's *amanasikāra* teaching cycle, was already present before the time of Sa skya Paṇḍita, for example in the works of 'Brom ston rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1005–1064); see D. Jackson 1994: 55–58.

³¹ For the translation of the *rTogs ldan rgyan po'i dris lan* and the analysis of Sa skya Paṇḍita's concept of a "correct" Mahāmudrā doctrine presented in this work, see Stenzel 2014. In addition, an alternative translation and investigation of the *rTogs ldan rgyan po'i dris lan* together with five brief works from the *Sa skya bka' 'bum* by Sa skya Paṇḍita, Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216) and 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280) display their respective understanding of a "correct" Mahāmudrā doctrine; see Arca 2015: 127–171.

³² See Pad ma dkar po in his *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod* and mKhas dbang Sangs rgyas rdo rje in his *Phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag gi bshad sbyar rgyal ba'i gan mdzod ces bya ba'i bstan bcos la rtsod pa spong ba'i gtam srid gsum rnam par rgyal ba'i dge mtshan*. For a systematical outline of academic research on Mahāmudrā, including Padma dkar po, see R. Jackson 2011. In addition, two recent publications deal with Padma dkar po's interpretation of single key terms in the Tibetan Mahāmudrā transmission; see Higgins 2011 and Scheuermann 2011.

address a discussion on Mahāmudrā in a time of a general “consolation” of positions in the different Tibetan schools has to be examined.³³

The *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* is divided into seven chapters, each dealing with a specific controversial topic; neither the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* nor the *Dus kyi pho nya* provide a topical outline (*sa bcad*).

In this section, I shall briefly sketch an outline of the seven disputed topics and their relation to the overall controversy on the Mahāmudrā doctrine.³⁴

1. *Khungs la dris pa'i lan zhus pa'i skabs* (441.1–449.2)
2. *Man ngag gi gzhung la dris pa'i lan zhus pa'i skabs* (449.2–460.6)
3. *lTa ba la dris pa'i lan zhus pa'i skabs* (460.6–471.5)
4. *sGom pa la dris pa'i lan zhus pa'i skabs* (471.6–483.5)
5. *sPyod pa la dris pa'i lan zhus pa'i skabs* (483.5–487.4)
6. *'Bras bu la dris pa'i lan zhus pa'i skabs* (487.4–492.3)
7. *Bla ma'i mos gus la dris pa'i lan zhus pa'i skabs* (492.3–497.6)

1. The first question thematises the scriptural authenticity of the Mahāmudrā doctrine as being grounded in both the Indian sūtric and tantric scriptures.³⁵ In particular, the scriptural authenticity of a “sūtric Mahāmudrā” tradition, which enables disciples to practice Mahāmudrā without requiring formal tantric initiations, is discussed as defence to the main criticism uttered by Sa skya Paṇḍita, who rigorously rejected the idea that Mahāmudrā could be taught as a path outside the *niruttarayogatantra* section of the Mantrayāna. This “sūtric Mahāmudrā” tradition is said to have been first propounded by sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079–1153).³⁶

³³ Ruegg 2000: 6, for example, has identified this period in his systematisation of the history of Madhyamaka philosophy in Tibet as, “the post-classical scholastic period (mainly sixteenth century onwards): a period of philosophical consolidation and elaboration (sometimes but by no means always epigonal) comprising continued textual-exegetical and systematic-hermeneutical activity, largely within the bounds of the various established *chos lugs*.”

³⁴ Throughout this paper, the reading follows my critical edition of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and *Dus kyi pho nya* that will be included in my dissertation (under preparation). The page numbers in this section refer to rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya*.

³⁵ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (441.1–2, rJe Shākya rin chen): *thog mar phyag rgya chen po'i khungs* || *mdo dang sngags gnyis gang yin 'dri* ||.

³⁶ Later Tibetan scholars have interpreted this kind of Mahāmudrā differently, for example, as a “sūtric Mahāmudrā” or as a practice that stands completely outside the sūtric or tantric path as a third approach. For a brief discussion of sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen's position and the difficulty of completely reconstructing it, see Sobisch 2011: 221–225. On Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas' position, see Matthes 2007: 545–546. The scriptural authenticity of the Mahāmudrā doctrine is

2. In the second of rJe Shākya rin chen's questions, he addresses the doctrinal, transmissional, and therefore exegetical authenticity of the Mahāmudrā doctrine. This makes up the second longest section of the work.³⁷ Accordingly, the long and short transmission lineages of Mahāmudrā and their content are examined, focusing also on controversies regarding the rank of different sets of quintessential instructions (*man ngag*) in the hierarchy of Buddhist canonical scriptures, such as Maitrīpā's *amanasikāra* teaching cycle³⁸ and sKyob pa 'Jig rten gsum mgon's (1143–1217) exegetical tradition of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.

3. The third question focuses on the Mahāmudrā view (*lta ba*) in relation to the Madhyamaka view. The discussion of the "Three Great Ones" (*chen po gsum*) and their relation to each other within the Tibetan philosophical hierarchy has been one of the essential themes in discussions within Tibet.³⁹

Both schools, the bKa' brgyud pas with their Mahāmudrā doctrine and the rNying ma pas with their rDzogs chen teachings have asserted their chief efforts over the centuries to hermeneutically harmonising their respective paramount doctrine with the Madhyamaka view, essentially in an attempt to avoid the disgrace of being seen by opponents in the Sa skya or dGe lugs schools to be followers of Yogācāra, Hwa shang Mahāyāna or a "Chinese style rDzogs chen."⁴⁰

rJe Shākya rin chen inquires whether or not a philosophical position related to the Mahāmudrā view exists that is superior to the view that was taught in the scriptural sources of the sūtric Madhyamaka tradition.⁴¹

also established as the first topic in Sa skya Paṇḍita's *rTogs ldan rgyan po'i dris lan*; see Stenzel 2014: 203–205.

³⁷ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (449.1–2, rJe Shākya rin chen): *de nas phyag rgya chen po yi* || *man ngag gtso bo gang yin 'dri* ||.

³⁸ For a comparison of different works in the *amanasikāra* teaching cycle as listed in Bu ston rin chen grub's *gsan yig*, the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho's *Phyag chen rgya gzhung*, and by Klaus-Dieter Matthes, with a short summary of the content of the works, see Matthes 2015: 4–22; see also Broido 1987: 55–56. The complete translation and comprehensive analysis of the twenty-six texts of the cycle (listing according to Matthes), especially in respect to the Madhyamaka philosophy of non-abiding (*apratiṣṭhāna*), is found in Matthes 2015.

³⁹ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, for example, speaks in the context of defining his own school of mutual harmony (*nang mthun*) of the *chen po gsum*; see rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *gNam gyi nga ro* (410.5–6): *phyag chen nang mthun yin tsam gyis* || *bka' brgyud zhes su grags na ni* || *phyag rdzogs dbu gsum nang mthun las* || *thams cad bka' brgyud pa ru 'gyur* ||.

⁴⁰ For Sa skya Paṇḍita's designation of Mahāmudrā as a "Chinese style rDzogs chen," see D. Jackson 1994: 67–70; see also Arca 2015: 113–115.

⁴¹ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (460.6–461.1, rJe Shākya rin chen): *de nas phyag rgya chen po yi* || *lta ba'i bzhed tshul mdo lugs kyi* || *dbu ma'i gzhung las gang*

rJe Shākya rin chen, being generally influenced in his thinking by the Sa skya master Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507),⁴² adopts the latter's classification of three categories of Madhyamaka in his argumentation, as does rJe dGe 'dun rin chen in his commentary.⁴³

Generally, the philosophical debates about the juxtaposed positions of a simultaneous/instantaneous (*cig car du*) and gradual (*rim gyis*) path to awakening and respectively the nature of insight have played an important role in the systematisation of Buddhist doctrine as far back as the bSam yas debate.⁴⁴ In this context, Sa skya Paṇḍita's identification of Mahāmudrā as Hwa shang Mahāyāna is rejected.⁴⁵

Further-more, the partial similarity of Mahāmudrā with the *Alīkākāravāda as part of the philosophical tenet of Yogācāra is discussed, but the conclusion that Mahāmudrā is to be categorized within the four tenets as Yogācāra is refused.⁴⁶

bshad pa || *de las lhag pa yod med 'dri* ||. Furthermore, rJe dGe 'dun rin chen discusses in the eighth chapter of his *gNnam gyi nga ro* whether or not a distinction between the views of *phyag rgya chen po* and *dbu ma chen po/zab mo'i dbu ma* exists; see rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *gNnam gyi nga ro* (424.4–5): *de nas gsang sngags theg pa'i mchog* || *phyag rgya chen po'i lta ba dang* || *zab mo dbu ma'i lta ba gnyis* || *khyad par yod dam med pa 'dri* ||.

⁴² rJe Shākya rin chen was considered to be a reincarnation of Shākya mchog ldan and is well known for his compilation of a twenty-four-volume *gsung 'bum* of Shākya mchog ldan, which had been considered lost until its rediscovery in the Pha jo sdings Monastery and reproduced in Thimphu in 1975. In addition, rJe Shākya rin chen composed a detailed biography of Shākya mchog ldan, the *Gangs can gyi shing rta chen po dpal shākya mchog ldan dri med legs pa'i blo gros kyi rnam thar thub bstan gsal ba'i nyin byed*; see Caumanns 2015: 5; 31–33; 31, n. 37.

⁴³ The first two categories of Madhyamaka can be considered sūtric, the third tantric: (1) Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka as the tradition of Nāgārjuna, (2) Svātantrika-Madhyamaka as the tradition of Asaṅga, and (3) tantric Madhyamaka; see Komarovski 2011: 254–257. For the analysis of Shākya mchog ldan's Madhyamaka, see *ibid.* 2011. In addition, for a study of Shākya mchog ldan's understanding of the relation between Madhyamaka and Mahāmudrā, see Draszczyk 2016.

⁴⁴ For an extensive study of these two approaches, the bSam yas debate and its far-reaching influence on Tibetan intellectual history, see Ruegg 1989; see also Arca 2015.

⁴⁵ See rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (465.2–4, rJe Shākya rin chen): *zhar la rgya nag dge slong gis* || *'dod pa'i lta ba de nyid dang* || *dpal ldan dwags po dkar brgyud kyi* || *phyag rgya chen po don gcig ces* || *mkhas pa dag gis gang gsungs pa* || *de lan thams cad mkhyen pa che* || *padma dkar po yab sras kyi* || *rtsod spong ji ltar mdzad pa las* || *lhag pa'i spros pa mi dgos mod* ||.

⁴⁶ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (466.5–6, rJe Shākya rin chen): *gzhan yang rje btsun sa paṅ gyis* || *dkar brgyud pa yi phyag chen de* || *rnam brdzun smra ba'i lugs yin ces* || *gsungs pa 'di la ji skad smra* ||. For an analysis of the subdivisions of Yogācāra in some Indian and Tibetan sources, with special focus on Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (b. 11th century), and for relevant secondary sources, see Almogi 2009: 34; 145–159.

4. In the fourth question it is determined whether the meditative state, in which one has established the correct Mahāmudrā view, is characterized by mentation (*yid la byed pa*) or non-mentation (*yid la mi byed pa*). Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique of a merely non-conceptual meditation method is rejected, because Mahāmudrā meditation is characterized by non-mentation, but also correctly supported by mindfulness (*dran pa*) and vigilance (*shes bzhin*).⁴⁷

Further on, the features of Mahāmudrā meditation are explained in detail, for instance, the relationship between Mahāmudrā meditation, taught in the four *yogas* (*rnal 'byor bzhi*),⁴⁸ and analytical (*dpnyad sgom*) and stabilizing meditation (*'jog sgom*); and its correlation to the generation (*bskyed rim*) and completion phase (*rdzogs rim*) as explained in the *niruttaratantrayoga* section.⁴⁹ This part, relating to Mahāmudrā meditation practices, is the longest section in the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon*.⁵⁰

5. The shortest section of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* is the fifth question, inquiring about the result (*'bras bu*) of the Mahāmudrā conduct (*spyod pa*) in the post-meditative state. The question is raised as to how the great accumulation of merit is perfected, which is in itself the prerequisite for obtaining the two form *kāyas* of the Buddha, if the Mahāmudrā instructions teach that one does not perform adoption or rejection in the post-meditative state.⁵¹

6. The sixth question discusses whether or not a Mahāmudrā meditation perfecting meditative equanimity on the true nature (*gnas lugs*) alone could suffice soteriologically. It further discusses its possible contradiction to the path of skillful means and wisdom, with its two accumulations of wisdom and merit, which are considered necessary in gaining the three *kāyas* as a result (*'bras bu*).⁵²

In this section, Sa skya Paṇḍita's criticism of sGam po pa and Bla

⁴⁷ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (471.6, rJe Shākya rin chen): *de nas lta ba'i rgyun bskyangs tshe* || *yid la byed dang mi byed 'dri* ||.

⁴⁸ The history of the *rnal 'byor bzhi* and its systematisation by Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170) has been studied by Schiller 2014.

⁴⁹ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (476.1–2, rJe Shākya rin chen): *phyag rgya chen po'i nyams len dang* || *theg chen dbu ma'i don sgom pa* || *mtshungs dang mi mtshungs gang yin 'dri* ||.

⁵⁰ The topic of Mahāmudrā meditative practices and stages is also presented in the fourth question in Sa skya Paṇḍita's *rTogs ldan rgyan po'i dris lan*; see Stenzel 2014: 212–215.

⁵¹ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (483.5–484.1, rJe Shākya rin chen): *de nas phyag rgya chen po yi* || *man ngag gzhung las spyod pa ni* || *blang dor med pa nyid du bshad* || *spyod pas blang dor mi byed na* || *bsod nams tshogs chen gang gis rdzogs* || *bsod nams tshogs chen ma rdzogs na* || *gzhan don gzugs sku gnyis mi 'byung* ||.

⁵² rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (487.4–5, rJe Shākya rin chen): *de nas gnas lugs nyag gcig po* || *bsgoms las 'bras bu sku gsum gyi* || *thob tshul ji ltar yin pa 'dri* ||.

ma Zhang Tshal pa on the concept of a “self-sufficient white remedy” (*dkar po chig thub*)⁵³ and the relation between basis (*gzhi*) and fruition (*bras bu*) are discussed.⁵⁴

7. The seventh question examines the role and function of the main teacher (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*), from whom disciples with very sharp faculties (*dbang po rab/dbang po rnon po*) receive the kindness of being introduced to the nature of the mind within the context of the Mahāmudrā instructions (*sems kyi ngo 'phrod*).⁵⁵

It is asked whether this main teacher should be perceived as a perfect *buddha* (*rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas*) or merely as an ordinary spiritual friend (*bshes gnyen phal pa*), because in this eon of strife (*kaliyuga*), the main teacher may have a mixture of virtues and vices.⁵⁶ It is explicitly explained that the main teacher should be perceived as a perfect *buddha* and described how one correctly relates to him.⁵⁷

In sum, this brief overview of the seven questions and answers has shown that the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and its commentaries cover all main topics of the Mahāmudrā controversy.

⁵³ I adopt here the translation of the term *dkar po chig thub* by D. Jackson 1994.

⁵⁴ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (489.1–490.2, rJe Shākya rin chen): *gal te byang chub sems bskyed dang || smon lam dpag med 'debs pa dang || dge ba rdzogs byang bsngo ba sogs || thabs kyi khyad par du ma yis || sgrub par khas len byed ce na || 'o na phyag rgya chen po'i lam || chig chog nyid du ji ltar 'grub ||*. A number of these topics are also presented in the fifth question of Sa skya Paṇḍita's *rTogs ldan rgyan po'i dris lan*; see Stenzel 2014: 215–217.

⁵⁵ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (492.3–5, rJe Shākya rin chen): *de nas brgyud pa rin chen 'di'i || nyams bzhes kun gyi srog snying ni || mos gus kho na yin par bzhed || bla ma mchog la sangs rgyas su || mthong ba'i mos gus dgos so zhes || rnam grangs mang pos rgya cher gdams || gcig ldan dang ni gnyis ldan dang || gsum ldan la sogs bla ma yi || bka' drin thob tshul mang bshad kyang || skabs 'dir rtsa ba'i bla ma ni || phyag rgya chen po'i ngo sprod kyi || bka' drin gang las thob la byed ||*. Sa skya Paṇḍita discusses *sems kyi ngo 'phrod*, for example, in his *rTogs ldan rgyan po'i dris lan* and *bKa' gdams pa nam mkha' 'bum gyi zhus lan*; see Arca 2015: 137–138 and Rhoton 2002: 269, respectively.

⁵⁶ Je Shākya rin chen refers here to *Paramārthasevā*, Toh. 2065 (5a6).

⁵⁷ rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, *Dus kyi pho nya* (496.1–3, rJe Shākya rin chen): *khyad par dus gsum gshegs bzhugs pa'i || sangs rgyas rnams la mchod pa'i sprin || dpag tu med pa phul ba dang || bla ma'i ba spu gcig mchod pa || bsod nams snga mas phyi ma yi || brgya stong bye ba phrag mang po'i || char yang nye ba ma yin zhes || gsungs pa'i dgongs pa gang yin 'dri ||*. The authenticity of the *bla ma* (*slob dpon tshad ma*) is crucial for the validity of the Mahāmudrā “pointing-out instructions” (and of tantric teachings in general). The authenticity of the *bla ma* represents one of the four means of valid cognition (*tshad ma bzhi*) in the *Lam 'bras* tradition. For the examination of the sources of this four-fold scheme in the *Lam 'bras* tradition (*bla ma tshad ma*, *nyams myong tshad ma*, *bstan bcos tshad ma* and *lung tshad ma*), see Sobisch 2015. Sobisch has shown how the authentication of transmission is deepened by the correlation of the four *tshad mas* of teacher, experience, scripture and exposition; see *ibid.*: 468–478. The first chapter of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* discusses *lung tshad ma* and the second *bstan bcos tshad ma*.

4. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and its commentaries serves as an important foundation for researching the late history and reception of the Mahāmudrā doctrine and, thereby, the intellectual history of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school in Tibet and Bhutan from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

The works introduced above address the significant controversy surrounding the Mahāmudrā doctrine, the paramount teaching in all bKa' brgyud schools. They therefore enable us to trace systematically the identity of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school by the interpretation of its highest doctrine.

The analysis will illuminate the approach of two great thinkers in the Bhutanese branch of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school, rJe Shākya rin chen and rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, in defending their interpretation of Mahāmudrā doctrine by strategies of inclusivism, exclusivism and harmonism.⁵⁸

Equally important, the works cover a timespan from a "pre-*ris-med* time" to a "post-*ris-med* time," hence including the important shift in the intellectual history of Tibet that occurred in the nineteenth century.

Additionally relevant in the case of the commentary of rJe dGe 'dun rin chen, is the analysis of his attempt to develop an innovative and well-reasoned interpretation for his own school, and how he thus influenced the religious landscape of twentieth-century Bhutan.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the circumstances of the textual production of the *Grub pa'i mdung rnon* and its commentaries in the eighteenth century,

⁵⁸ For Lambert Schmithausen's interpretation of Paul Hacker's inclusivism as a "method of intellectual debate" that either tries to include the opponent's position by ranking it below one's own or by reinterpreting it in such a way that it fits with one's own interpretation, see Schmithausen 1981: 223; 230; see also Ruegg 1989: 9, n. 9. According to Wangchuk 2004: 191, n. 77, an "inclusive" approach that subjugates the position of the opponent is to be differentiated from a "harmonistic" or "reconciliating" approach that accepts both positions as "equal" or "complementary."

⁵⁹ In my dissertation (under preparation), I consider further works of mostly systematising and doxographical character from rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's *gsung 'bum*, and parts of his hagiography. In addition, rJe dGe 'dun rin chen's prayer for the flourishing and spread of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school, the *dPal ldan 'brug pa'i bstan pa rgyas pa'i smon lam sa bcad dang bcas pa* (rJe dGe 'dun bka' 'bum, vol. 8: 743–752), provides interesting insights into his self-perception and vision of the ideal identity of his school. It will be compared with 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho's similar prayer for the rNying ma school, the *sNga 'gyur bstan pa rgyas pa'i smon lam chos rgyal dgyes pa'i zhal lung* (gSung 'bum Mi pham rgya mtsho. 27 vols. Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimey, 1984–1993, vol. 19: 701–711 [TBRC-23468]).

as displayed before, show the necessity of further studying any possible cross-linked Bhutanese-Tibetan literal productions.

Future research could additionally improve our knowledge of not only the political, but also of the philosophical-doctrinal motivation for the creation of a refined and strengthened identity of the “Bhutanese” ‘Brug pa bka’ bgyud school, following Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal’s establishment of a unified state of Bhutan.

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