

Rangtong and Shentong - Rime Approach

This article presents the **Rimé approach** to the *Rangtong* and *Shentong* philosophical views within Tibetan Buddhism.

Ringu Tulku describes *Rangtong* and *Shentong* like this in a conference presentation:

There has been a great deal of heated debate in Tibet between the exponents of Rangtong (Wylie, Rang-stong) and Shentong (Wylie, gZhen-stong) philosophies. The historic facts of these two philosophies are well known to the Tibetologists. This is what Kongtrul has to say about the two systems:

"Rangtong and Shentong Madhyamika philosophies have no differences in realising as 'Shunyata', all phenomena that we experience on a relative level. They have no differences also, in reaching the meditative state where all extremes (ideas) completely dissolve. Their difference lies in the words they use to describe the Dharmata. Shentong describes the Dharmata, the mind of Buddha, as 'ultimately real'; while Rangtong philosophers fear that if it is described that way, people might understand it as the concept of 'soul' or 'Atma'. The Shentong philosopher believes that there is a more serious possibility of misunderstanding in describing the Enlightened State as 'unreal' and 'void'. Kongtrul finds the Rangtong way of presentation the best to dissolve concepts and the Shentong way the best to describe the experience."

From: The Rimé Movement Of Jamgon Kongtrul The Great (<http://bodhicharya.de/EN/rime.html>), 7th CONFERENCE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TIBETAN STUDIES, June, 1995.

In a little more detail, Ringu Tulku describes *Rangtong* and *Shentong* like this in the introduction to his book on Jamgong Kongtrul's Ri-me philosophy:

In particular, there has been a great deal of heated debate in Tibet between the exponents of Rangtong and Shentong Madhyamaka. The lineages, philosophies, and debates of these two schools are discussed later in this book. In relation to this discussion of nonsectarianism, here is a quote from Jamgön Kongtrul summarizing the relationship of these two systems:⁴

"For both Rangtong and Shentong Madhyamaka, all phenomena included in the relative truth are emptiness, and there is the cessation of all fabricated extremes in meditation. Their views do not differ on these points. However, in relation to post-meditation, to clearly distinguish the tenet systems, merely in terms of the way they use terminology, Shentong says that the dharmata, or

true nature, is there, and Rangtong says the dharmata is not there. In the ultimate analysis, using the reasoning that examines the ultimate, Shentong says nondual primordial wisdom is truly established, and Rangtong says primordial wisdom is not truly established. These two statements delineate their main differences."

So, their difference lies in the words they use to describe the dharmata and primordial wisdom. Shentong describes the dharmata, the true nature, as ultimately real, while Rangtong philosophers fear that if it is described in that way, people might understand it as the concept of a soul or atma. The Shentong philosophers think there is a greater chance of misunderstanding if the enlightened state is described as unreal and void. Their debates rest on how to phrase the teachings to have the least danger of misinterpretation. Kongtrul finds the Rangtong presentation best for dissolving concepts, and the Shentong presentation best for describing the actual experience.

From: Chapter I of *The Ri-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great: A Study of the Buddhist Lineages of Tibet*, Shambhala Publications (2006), pp9-10.

See also

- [Rangtong](#)
- [Shentong](#)
- [Rimé movement](#)

External links

- Chapter 1 of: *The Rime Movement of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great* (https://info-buddhism.com/Rime_Movement-Ringu_Tulku.html) offered online with kind permission from Ringu Tulku

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