

# **CONDEMNED TO SILENCE:**

A TIBETAN IDENTITY CRISIS (1996-1999)

© by Ursula Bernis

“Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world . . .”

“Whereas . . . the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration . . .”

from the Preamble of the  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## PREFACE

While gathering material for a book on seminal Buddhist masters of this century I became aware in 1996 that because most belonged to the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and relied on the religious protector Dorje Shugden, they were suddenly at the center of a raging controversy. Told by the Dalai Lama to renounce ties with that venerable tradition they were put into a position of either breaking their vows or facing ostracism from the community. These greatest of masters who included one of the two tutors of the Dalai Lama had been central to the transmission of Buddhism as it traveled from Tibet to India and the rest of the world after 1959. They ensured the integrity of a living wisdom tradition that had been passed on from one adept to another for millennia. I was shocked to hear the ugly allegations against such venerated and highly respected Lamas. I personally knew many of them, had studied with them, and had had a chance to observe them in close proximity over many years. Like most everyone else, I found their gentle kindness, open-mindedness, and inclusive teachings exemplary.

Since every accusation against them contradicted facts, reason, and my own experience, I felt compelled to get to the bottom of the controversy that had generated such extreme views. It was impossible to continue my project without finding an explanation of how such a dramatic shift from the most revered masters to “devil worshipers” could have occurred and, moreover, how it could so completely possess the Tibetan cultural psyche in such a short time.

In the process of my work on this book I found that open debate about the subject was impossible in the exile community and that the conflict was driven by an emotional zeal for the Dalai Lama beyond all rational considerations, suggesting an identity crisis of unexpected proportions. The conditions of exile, the loss of country, home, family and the threat to the established religious world view certainly contributed to the Tibetans’ exaggerated hold onto the one institution left to them, that of Dalai Lamas. However, there seemed something else at work that extended far beyond the Tibetan community to affect Western Tibet supporters as well. They exhibited similarly irrational responses to the conflict. No matter what approach one brought to the subject, all attempts at rational debate became immediately polarized and turned into a series of outlandish accusations none of which held up under scrutiny.

At the heart of the difficulties complicating this investigation were the unique problems deriving from the fact that Tibetan society remains largely an oral culture. I traveled throughout India and Nepal, the longest visit lasting four months, and talked to hundreds of Tibetans and affected Buddhists, gathering their stories and oral testimony. At the same time I collected relevant documentation of government records, published papers, wall posters -- a common form of communication about controversial subjects -- and circulars of the various social organizations that make up the Tibetan administration. This material forms the background for the book.

Since the Tibetan exile government denies the reality of the conflict it has been instrumental in creating, the issue is presented here from three different perspectives: Part I, from the point of view of Tibetans living in India and Nepal most affected by the conflict; Part II, a historical

background and chronological ordering of events surrounding the conflict followed by biographical sketches of the most influential masters of a tradition now being suppressed as a “cult”; and Part III, which examines the issue from an outsider’s point of view. My analysis traces some of the standard accusations to a basic confusion of religious and political issues. It brings to bear the historical and cultural background to show the dynamics of power relations in the exile community and how they get played out in the international arena through the media. Crucial to understanding the emotional involvement in this issue of Western Tibet supporters is their need to uphold at all cost today’s icon of universal goodness, made accessible by the media to a world bereft of deep spiritual meaning. Even though the Dalai Lama’s politics come into critical focus, the book is not intended as an attack on him.

Although I am indebted to many scholars and experts on the subject, it would be a disservice at the time of this writing to acknowledge their individual help publicly. The nature of the issue is so sensitive that they must remain unnamed. Even so, I would like to express here my gratitude for their contribution.

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“By defending those people who are persecuted for their race, religion, ethnicity or ideology, you are actually contributing to guiding our human family to peace, justice and dignity.”<sup>1</sup>

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama  
Dharamsala, Dec. 7, 1998

## INTRODUCTION

Never before in its history has Tibet been lost so thoroughly and seemingly irreversibly to invaders. Even during historical periods of strong outside influence such as the Mongolian and Manchu forces in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>2</sup> Tibet was not as totally occupied as it is now. Until Communist China subjugated Tibet in the middle of this century, it was never under complete control of another nation. This came at a time when the age of colonization had ended for the rest of the world, which makes this immense loss even more tragic. It would be difficult for any people to accept the sad reality of so much destruction and to deal with it rationally. Tibetans who grew up in a country as large as Europe, populated by not more than six million people, found the loss of their country and way of life especially hard to accept. Moving from the Himalayan snow mountain ranges -- and beyond them, the open spaces of the high plateau, which gave an intense sense of personal freedom -- to the stifling heat and congested spaces of overpopulated India with its religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity meant changing to a world as foreign as one can possibly imagine. Today, when the loss of Tibet is becoming ever more apparent to the rest of the world, the hope for Tibetan self-determination is quickly dwindling. Nevertheless, much of the generation growing up in exile courageously holds on to the idea of freedom, even if they see it as deferred to an indefinite future. To think through the many intrinsic contradictions that make up their political and social fabric in exile would only cause deeper suffering and more intense emotional turmoil. By their own accounts, most Tibetans simply rely on the Dalai Lama and go on with their everyday business of life. This attitude is not religious -- as is claimed in the West -- but a desperate solution to an identity crisis of a people in denial. It also explains their often unrealistic political views which are propagated in a larger international context.

The one Tibetan institution believed to be still intact is that of the Dalai Lama. In him religious and political power are fused in a uniquely Tibetan way.<sup>3</sup> Continuing the heritage through

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<sup>1</sup> *Tibetan Bulletin, The Official Journal of the Tibetan Administration*: “I Believe...”, January-February 1999, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> For historical background, see chapters 5 and 6 of *Tibetan Nation*, by Warren W. Smith, Jr., Westview Press, Boulder, 1996; *Tibet Survival in Question*, by Pierre-Antoine Donnet, transl. by Tica Broch, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, chapter two.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the uniqueness of the institution of the Dalai Lama and rule by incarnation, see for example, *Rule by Incarnation*, Tibetan Buddhism and its Role in Society and State, by Franz Michael, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1982; *Tibetan Nation*, p. 107.

incarnation, the institution of Dalai Lama, first established in Tibet in 1642,<sup>4</sup> has become larger than life today in exile<sup>5</sup> with the overwhelming responsibility of bringing an ancient culture into the twenty-first century. The institution of the Dalai Lama in exile has become the very soul of Tibet, the nation, the culture, and the religion. In the face of the severe disruption in Tibetan life not only by political forces but also global cultural change, it has become the source of Tibetan identity *per se*. No other Dalai Lama ever had to carry as heavy a burden of his institution as the current, the Fourteenth. In Tibet, the Dalai Lama was formally the “The Great Owner”<sup>6</sup> of the country, still one of his names today. In religious and political ways he was the head of the government and leader of his people. In exile, without a country and only a handful of people, without a legal mandate or a power base other than a globalized version of Buddhism, his tasks as head of state and government have become almost impossible. Yet he is everything to his people, the one true vestige of a cherished way of life that amounts to what is Tibetan for Tibetans.

Communist China took over Tibet beginning in 1949 with a so-called “peaceful liberation” culminating in complete control in 1959, when the Dalai Lama escaped to India<sup>7</sup> followed by approximately eighty thousand of his people, a number that subsequently increased to an estimated one hundred twenty thousand dispersed around the world. Then only in his early twenties, the Dalai Lama established an administration in exile with the help of his tutors, religious dignitaries, loyal old regime aristocrats, and family.<sup>8</sup> They established an infrastructure in Dharamsala, a small hill station in the foot hills of the Himalayas located in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, assigned to them by the Indian government, to deal with the influx of refugees and to save the largely religious culture of Tibet. Tibetans were granted refugee status in India at the time under an executive order, since India has not ratified the International

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<sup>4</sup> For easily readable Tibetan historical background, see chapter 39, *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture, by Hugh Richardson, Serindia Publications, London, 1998; also *Tibetan Nation*, chapter 5; the Introduction in *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama, The Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection*, Samten Gyaltzen Karmay, Serindia Publications, London, 1988; also “The Sovereign Power of the Fifth Dalai Lama: sPrul sku gZims-khang-gong-ma and the Removal of Governor Nor-bu” in *Memoirs of the Research Department of The Toyo Bunko (The Oriental Library) No. 53*, Tokyo, 1995; also a brief discussion about the institution of reincarnate Lamas that became prominent in the political turmoil of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by E. Gene Smith in the introduction to *The Autobiography of the First Panchen Lama blo-bzang-chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan*, edited and reproduced by Ngawang Gelek Demo, Gedan Sungrab Minyam Gyunphel Series, Volume 12, Jayyed Press, Delhi, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the view of the Dalai Lamas as absolute, which seems to be a modern phenomenon, see also *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951, The Demise of the Lamaist State*, by Melvyn C. Goldstein, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1989. For example, “The current view of the Dalai Lamas is that each was “the absolute ruler of unchallenged authority” whom all Tibetans devoutly obeyed [as quoted from Michael 1982:51, derived from interviews in exile where Tibetans believe it applies to the Dalai Lama]. While this approaches accuracy for the last two decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama’s life (1913-1933), it is not generally true.” p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> *Portrait of a Dalai Lama, The Life and Times of the Great Thirteenth*, Sir Charles Bell, Wisdom Publications, London, 1987, p. 432.

<sup>7</sup> See *My Land and my People*, Memoirs of the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Potala Corporation, New York, Reprint 1977; see also the documentation of the CIA officer who trained the Tibetan Resistance (Chushi Gangdug) who ensured the Dalai Lama’s safe escape, *Tears of the Lotus*, Accounts of Tibetan Resistance to the Chinese Invasion, 1950-1962, Roger E. McCarthy, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Among the many books with details about the early exile days, see for example, *Kundun, A Biography of the Family of the Dalai Lama*, by Mary Craig, HarperCollins Publishers, London 1997; *The Making of Modern Tibet*, by A. Tom Grunfeld, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., New York, London, 1996, chapter ten.

Convention of Refugees.<sup>9</sup> In spite of the political and legal reality that the Dalai Lama and his people are not permitted any political activities in India, their administration in Dharamsala is called a government.<sup>10</sup> It was formally established during the first few days of the Dalai Lama's escape in March 1959 in Tibet *en route* to India. Exile Tibetans consider it the Tibetan government *per se* even though neither India nor any other country recognizes it as such.

In the 1960's most of the older loyalists were pushed out of the Tibetan exile government in Dharamsala while the most important political functions were assumed by the Dalai Lama's family,<sup>11</sup> particularly his older brother Gyalo Thondup. Chinese educated, he seemed to be the only diplomatically trained person then who could present the Tibet problem internationally. Gyalo Thondup had dealt with the Indian government already in 1948 when, unfortunate for its immediate political future, Tibet had failed to recognize Indian independence (1947). He also helped the Tibetan resistance with aid from the CIA.<sup>12</sup> In Tibet, a family member of a Dalai Lama was legally barred from holding office, something that changed in exile, where Gyalo Thondup and others later became ministers.<sup>13</sup> Recently, another brother of the Dalai Lama has claimed that today only three families, including his, run the exile government.<sup>14</sup>

Early on in exile, in 1961, the Dalai Lama began to draft a constitution for a future free Tibet which was adopted in 1963. However, a charter to administer the very different situation in exile was not implemented until 1991.<sup>15</sup> It is a simpler document than the draft constitution and it passed the Assembly of People's Deputies by a simple majority. Hailed as a "leap forward" in democratizing Tibetan politics,<sup>16</sup> it instituted several novel practices for the exile government such as election of ministers (Tib.: kalon) by the people's deputies in their Assembly or parliament. Nevertheless, the preamble states the nature of the government to be the union of religious and political affairs in continuity with the Ganden Potang government of Tibet established by the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1642. The Dalai Lama continues to be its unelected head and the political system remains without institutionalized opposition.

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<sup>9</sup> An instrument developed under the auspices of the United Nations to give legal status to refugees and guarantee their protection and rights.

<sup>10</sup> For more detail on the perception of the precarious legal position of Tibetans in India, see my interview with Samdhong Rinpoche, head of the assembly, page.....

<sup>11</sup> According to Professor Dawa Norbu, Delhi, interview Oct. 24, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> During the cold war, the CIA supported what they believed to be anti-Communist activities among Tibetan exiles. See, for example, John Kenneth Knaus: *Orphans of the Cold War*, BBS Public Affairs, New York, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> This occurred only in the 1990's, when ministers were elected rather than appointed. Much controversy surrounds Gyalo Thondup whom Tibetans believe to be the main architect of the Dalai Lama's plan to integrate Tibet into China under increased cultural autonomy. For some of the many, even violent confrontations surrounding him over the years, see for example, Jamyang Norbu: "The Heart of the Matter," *Tibetan Review*, March 1994.

<sup>14</sup> "...the Tibetan exile government is run by three families, one of which is mine [i.e. the Dalai Lama's or the Yabshi family]..." in an unpublished letter of resignation by Professor Thubten Jigme Norbu, the Dalai Lama's brother, from post as Representative of the Tibetan exile government to Asia (Tokyo) to the Cabinet (Kashag), dated Feb. 6, 1992, with copy to Private Office, the Assembly, the foreign minister and the Tibetan Youth Congress, p. 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> For an outline of the structure see, for example, *Tibetan Parliament in Exile*, published by Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre (TPPRC) in co-operation with Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation, New Delhi, 1996; *The Making of Modern Tibet*, chapter 12; also see the interview with Samdhong Rinpoche, head of the Assembly and co-drafter of the charter, below, in "Exiled from Exile."

<sup>16</sup> *Tibetan Parliament in Exile*, p. 16.

It is commonly known that the Dalai Lama is still the religious and political head of Tibetans, at least in exile, since in the Western press he is usually referred to as “God-King.” The effort to democratize has not extended to separate the domains of religion and politics. Since the Tibetan exile government in Dharamsala is not legitimately a government by legal and international standards, it is difficult to analyze this problematic in an easy or straightforward way. Democratic it is not. The Tibetan people have never been asked to vote on any of the major political decisions concerning the future of their country either inside or outside Tibet.<sup>17</sup> Often not even the Assembly and Cabinet (Kashag) are asked. Even more basic, freedom of speech, the very foundation of democratic striving, is woefully absent among exile Tibetans. Criticism of official exile government business is usually dismissed as being of Chinese origin.<sup>18</sup> China is doing whatever it can to destabilize the exile community, discredit the Dalai Lama worldwide, and silence any criticism of its policies in Tibet.<sup>19</sup> It moves to fan the flames of any internal Tibetan conflict. But Tibetan society today seems to be just as intolerant of internal opposition as the Chinese. Allegations of Chinese interference are widely used by Tibetans as an excuse to silence any opposition.<sup>20</sup>

In an atmosphere where nationalistic and religious fervor for the Dalai Lama are all too often substituted for reasoned debate and political analysis, the dynamics of social groups plays an important role in enforcing policies of the exile government, which itself is denied this role by its host country. The unusual circumstances of exile require atypical solutions to social and political problems. The exile government works through a social organizations which were also common in old Tibet where they did not have the same political functions they acquired in exile. In 1991, the base of representation in the Assembly was divided into regional groups (based on the traditional division of Tibetan geography into three main provinces, Tib.: *chol.ka gsum*, or Cholsum) and religious sects functioning like interest groups. A network of NGO's,<sup>21</sup> made up of different regional sub-groups, social welfare groups, religious organizations, and local chapters of women's and youth groups effectively carry out the exile government's wishes usually in the name of the Dalai Lama.<sup>22</sup> Social pressure to conform to anything interpreted as

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<sup>17</sup> The confusing and much discussed referendum of 1995-7 was never put to a vote. People realized they had no real choice and decided to follow the Dalai Lama's choice, which had already been confirmed by the State Oracle. More detail, see Part II.

<sup>18</sup> This practice has a long history. It was even said of Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's brother, when in 1948 he tried to make clear to the Tibetan government in Lhasa what was in store for them after having escaped to India from the Communist onslaught in Shanghai where he was studying. At the time, India offered help to Tibet but the government in Lhasa did not answer Gyalo Thondup's pleas because they believed he was working for the Chinese. See *Kundun*, page 250

<sup>19</sup> See for example, *The Anguish of Tibet*, edited by Petra K. Kelly, Gert Bastian, and Pat Aiello, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1991; *Cutting off the Serpent's Head, Tightening Control in Tibet, 1994-1995*, Tibet Information Network and Human Rights Watch, New York, 1996; Tsering Shakya: *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, Pimlico, London, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Jamyang Norbu: “Opening of the Political Eye, Tibet's long search for democracy,” *Tibetan Review*, November 1990

<sup>21</sup> Many of them were started by someone prominent in the exile government, as the Women's Association was started in the 1980 by request of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the Tibetan Youth Congress originally upon request of Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's brother, with founding members listed in the TYC brochure as Tenzin Geyche Tethong, Lodi Gyari, Sonam Topgyal and Tenzin N. Tethong, almost all of whom are still powerful players in the Tibetan exile government.

<sup>22</sup> For some of the underlying political dynamics in exile, see, for example, *Illusion and Reality*, Jamyang Norbu, TYC Books, Dharamsala, 1989. “Thomas Merton, the Catholic divine, once observed that nowhere in the world was a leader so loved by his people as the Dalai Lama. It should be the task of government officials to strengthen this bond of affection and loyalty and direct it towards the achievement of our common goal; not pervert it to blackmailing the people into silence. The Chinese are doing their best to turn us into a nation of sheep; it is heartbreaking that the Tibetan government should be attempting



the wish of the Dalai Lama has become intense, especially in the last decade. This type of social control was not exercised in Tibet before 1959 but developed out of the very difficult conditions in exile, where the large number of social groups originated first to help destitute refugees and later to raise funds from international sponsors and donor organizations. Another reason is that the legal status of Tibetans in India is precarious. They are prohibited from engaging in overt “political” activity. Since Tibetans are refugees in India, they do not have their own police or legal system. The Indian police and legal systems have often proven to be corrupt and Tibetans do not trust them. Thus, social pressure is an effective method of control and enforcing directives of the Tibetan exile government. Tibetans are clannish in ways difficult for us to grasp which makes social pressure an effective device. They are primarily still an oral culture and get their information from radio, tapes, and an amazingly accurate grapevine. This makes them extremely vulnerable to rumor mongering. Publications in Tibetan or English are to varying degrees controlled by the exile government which exercises censorship.<sup>23</sup> A free press does not exist among Tibetans themselves, although they have access to the international press. The fear and mistrust that naturally develop among exiles are ever on the rise. This is especially true since more and more Tibetans escaped to India from their Chinese controlled homeland in the 1990's,<sup>24</sup> bringing with them their different use of language and unfamiliar views. The upbringing of Tibetans in Tibet and those in India differs radically, causing even deeper factionalism and paranoia already rampant in the exile community. These factors explain in part why the Dalai Lama's words carry the weight of law and why an indirect remark from him can destroy someone or actually become incendiary.

Until the 1990's the one issue uniting the exile community had been Tibetan independence. The State Oracle advising the Dalai Lama and his government had repeatedly predicted in the 80's early 90's that freedom was waiting just around the corner.<sup>25</sup> This clearly did not materialize. With the official political strategy having changed from independence to returning to Tibet under Chinese control,<sup>26</sup> the institution of Dalai Lama has emerged today as the only unifying factor. Where in the 1980's the Dalai Lama still laughingly responded in the affirmative to the inevitable journalistic question whether he was the last Dalai Lama, in the 90's he answered the same question by emphasizing different type of continuity for the institution. Among the possibilities he mentioned were a Dalai Lama elected like the Pope or incarnated as a woman. The return of

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to hasten the process.” p. 37

<sup>23</sup> Jamyang Norbu: “Opening of the Political Eye, Tibet’s long search for democracy,” *Tibetan Review*, November 1990

<sup>24</sup> For example, the monk population in the big Gelugpa monastic universities, Ganden, Drepung, and Sera doubled in the 90's with an influx of people coming out of Tibet, where religious freedom had increased but the opportunity for thorough Buddhist studies was not available. Tibetan Buddhism has many different sub-sects, but generally four major ones are given: Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelugpa, in order of historical emergence. The Gelugpa order has been the largest group since the 16<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. They focus more on monastic institutions than the other groups and on philosophical studies that culminate in the Geshe degree.

<sup>25</sup> For example, at the Kalachakra initiation His Holiness gave at Varanasi in 1983, he mentioned that Tibetans would regain freedom soon, as soon as five and no longer than ten years.

<sup>26</sup> The Dalai Lama has repeated this in the world press especially since the fall of 1997. Most recently several high ranking members of his exile government confirmed to the international press that the Dalai Lama was even willing to make a public statement in Washington (Nov. 7-10, 1998) admitting Tibet and Taiwan are part of China because the Chinese stated this as a condition for his visit to China. See, for example, the German newspaper “Die Woche,” November 6, 1998. For more discussion, see page...

the Dalai Lama to Tibet became the most important issue for exile Tibetans in the late 1990's.<sup>27</sup> The explanation floated, also in the Western press, was that unless he died and was reborn in Tibet, the Chinese would not accept a future Dalai Lama. Although full of contradictions that leave everyone guessing, this explanation nevertheless points to the need of ensuring the continuity of the institution of Dalai Lama,<sup>28</sup> something that has come to represent the nation in lieu of a country. The clearer it becomes that Tibet is lost, the stronger is the clinging to the institution of Dalai Lama. Hence, Tibetans resist vehemently anything that can be construed as a criticism of his person or administration and react with irrational fury to anything that can be seen as a threat even to his reputation or legacy, let alone his life.<sup>29</sup>

It is not difficult to see that Tibetans are going through the most severe identity crisis in their history. Those living in exile have been displaced from their homeland and those left in Tibet from their culture. The complex set of problems created by all these forced changes in an already complicated society with arcane social practices remain largely inaccessible to the Western mind. Most do not affect us. Yet Tibetans have been a genuine source for spiritual discovery in the last decades for many people around the world, and the Dalai Lama a powerful source of inspiration. There are a number of religious issues embedded in Tibetan political and social problems that take some effort to extricate. The one I found especially striking in its impenetrable abstruseness is the Dorje Shugden<sup>30</sup> protector conflict rooted in the Dalai Lama's restrictions of his practice, which surfaced in 1996 to receive international attention. It exposes the fault lines and depth of the Tibetan identity crisis like few others.<sup>31</sup> Inquiring into the

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<sup>27</sup> According to the head of the Tibetan assembly, Samdhong Rinpoche, in an interview January 12, 1998 in Sarnath. The reason: the Chinese would never accept a Dalai Lama born outside Tibet. However, there are contradictory statements on the issue of the Dalai Lama's rebirth. "The Dalai Lama used the occasion of his 64<sup>th</sup> birthday on Tuesday to announce he will not be reincarnated in Tibet, but in a free country outside Chinese control..." "Dalai Lama Discusses His Rebirth," *Associated Press*, New Delhi, AOL July 6, 1999. See also, Dexter Filkins, "Tibetans Tire of Peaceful 'Middle Way,'" *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1999, "If I die, and the Tibetan people want another Dalai Lama, that person will appear in the refugee community, outside of Tibet." The same article also quotes the Dalai Lama as saying, "After I die – this is not my responsibility, ... let someone else worry about it." While the Chinese view is, "When the Dalai Lama dies, he dies," said Mr. Ma Chongying, the deputy director of the Minority and Religious Affairs Bureau in Tibet. "There will be no replacement." Reporting from Lhasa, Seth Faison: "As Dalai Lama Woos Beijing, Tibetans Pray for His Return," *The New York Times*, November 9, 1998; Seth Faison: "Beyond the Dalai Lama, His Successor Could Be the Solution," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> He said recently, too, "I also believe that the Tibetan people should be able to decide their future, their form of government and their social system," he wrote, adding that no Tibetan is interested in restoring outdated political and social institutions. *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, Hongkong, December 9, 1998, from Dow Jones, a newswire service (+)

<sup>29</sup> For example, the Tibetan Youth Congress, although patriotic in defending the reputation of the Dalai Lama, also advocates political violence and "to struggle for the total independence of Tibet even at the cost of one's life," as stated in TYC's aims and objectives. It is thus in opposition to the Dalai Lama on independence versus autonomy under Chinese rule. Even many monks do not listen to the Dalai Lama's positive advice. In the last two years, the Tibetan population in New York more than quadrupled. Many of them are monks who have left their monasteries without permission from their abbots and religious community to seek material fortune in the West ostensibly for virtuous reasons. The Dalai Lama, in addressing a group of Tibetans in Washington D.C. in November 1998, told them that they should return to their monasteries and that they were merely riding on his robes. Yet, they keep coming.

<sup>30</sup> *Rdo.rje* is Tibetan for the Sanskrit word *vajra*. Anything so designated refers to the state of complete enlightenment, used in the vajrayana vehicle of Buddhism as symbol of the indivisibility of [illusory] body and mind [of clear light] and their ultimate union. Shugden means being endowed with power, force, strength. The name thus means "the one with vajra force," or the force of the Buddha's enlightenment in specific actions. For different historical interpretations of Dorje Shugden at the intersection of Tibetan mix of religion and politics, see Part II, 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>31</sup> To measure how deep the crisis goes, consider the following statement by Ngawang Tenpa, Officer of the Cholsum organization, the largest regional group in Tibetan politics, "It is possible to think of a time when we will make friends with the Chinese, but with these (Dorje Shugden) people -- never," During a conference in Dharamsala, at T.I.P.A., called by United

circumstances for its eruption, I found out more about Tibetans than I had in many years of participating in human rights work and following the teachings of their masters. The Dorje Shugden conflict serves as an example of the ever widening gap between appearance and reality in the increasingly fractious refugee community.

In March 1996,<sup>32</sup> His Holiness strongly advised his followers not to rely on the Dharmapala Dorje Shugden because, according to the prophecies of his oracles, Dorje Shugden harms the institution of Dalai Lama, his life, his government, and the cause of Tibet.<sup>33</sup> Immediately government offices promulgated this advice, stated in no uncertain terms by the Dalai Lama, and turned it into a full-fledged ban.<sup>34</sup> Everyone then, including the Dalai Lama, referred to the conflict as “a ban.” Later, after questions from the international press, the exile government denied that there was a ban and continues to hold this position.<sup>35</sup> At the time, the strong reaction by the exile government<sup>36</sup> to the oracles<sup>37</sup> prophecies and the Dalai Lama’s statements<sup>38</sup> resulted

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Cholsum Organization, August 27-31. On video (in Tibetan) of that conference produced by “Sargyur,” a private Tibetan company in India.

<sup>32</sup> See detailed documentation of these events in Part II below.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the prophecies (*kha.lung*) of the State Oracle Nechung, the Tsangba Oracle, and Tenma, or Tsering Chenga oracles given in 1995 in *Infallible Prophecies of the Tibetan Government Oracles*, published by the Department of Religion and Culture of the exile government, Dharamsala, 1996, in Tibetan; translated excerpts given below, Part II.

<sup>34</sup> The words mostly used are *bkag.sdom.byed.pa* and its synonym *dam.bsgrags.byed.pa* meaning “ban,” “prohibition,” “restriction,” “restraint;” *New Light English-Tibetan Dictionary* compiled by T.G. Dongthog, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA), Dharamsala, 1985, Second Edition, p. 31, p. 352, p. 383, p. 382; also, in Tibetan, one term is used to define the other: *bkag.sdom byed.pa: gang jung byed michog pa'i dam.bsgrags byed.pa*, *Bod Gya Tsig Zoed Chenmo* (The Chinese - Tibetan Dictionary), People’s Publishing House, Beijing, Second Edition, 1996. The word *bkod.doms*, “order to stop,” thus “ban” is used in Resolution No. 21 of the Assembly of Tibetan People’s Deputies prohibiting Dorje Shugden in very strong terms as to “never ever” permit the practice, that is, from now until forever. In addition, Resolution No. 21 refers to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama’s use of the word *bkag.gog*, “order” and “prohibition” “to stop” or “to take out forcibly.” The Private Office of the Dalai Lama in a letter to the abbot of Sermay Monastery in Bylakuppe, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1996 mentions a ban (*bkag.sdom* and *dam.bsgrags bkag.sdom*) by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama to justify the prohibition of Dorje Shugden on the basis of the so-called “prophecies” by government oracles pointing towards danger to the health of the Dalai Lama and the cause of Tibet. On May 8th, 1996 in a public address in Dharamsala (on video tape), for example, the Dalai Lama says, “It has been twenty years since I first mentioned the Dorje Shugden public restriction (*ngas dam.bsdrags byed.pa.yin*). Also, in an address on May 5, 1996, the Dalai Lama say, “It may have been about ten years ago. While giving a lam.rim teaching at Drepung, I once gave my reasons for issuing the ban.” (Tibetan: *dam.bsgrags*); *Select Addresses of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Issue of Propitiating Protector Deities*, Sherig Parkhang, Dharamsala, July 10, 1996, p. 175; and “In this way came the reasons, on account of which I have issued the ban (Tibetan: *dam.bsgrags*) in recent times. In banning [this reliance on Shugden], many came forward and declared that henceforth they will abide by my injunctions....” p. 183. Also, the term *dgag.bya spyi nan shugs cher btsal.rjes* or “strong prohibition emphatically proclaimed” is used in Report No. 28/7.8/1997 by the exile Tibetan version of [India’s most secret police] RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) of the Department of Security in Dharamsala, “Specifically, after issuing an emphatic ban at his [the Dalai Lama] spring teachings of 1996, most of the Tibetans living in exile and within Tibet, who are gifted with intelligence and patriotism, have respectfully complied and appreciatively mended their faith accordingly.” When a Swiss journalist asks the Dalai Lama on camera, “Why this ban?” he answers, “Tibetan Buddhism is such a profound tradition. ...etc.” The Dalai Lama does not deny a ban when asked “Why the ban?” Swiss TV DRS Series “10 vor 10,” “Bruderzwist,” broadcast Jan. 5-9, 1998. Also, the Dalai himself refers to his “restriction” of Dorje Shugden as a “harsh step,” quoted in an Announcement by Kashag (Cabinet), May 22, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> June issue of the Tibetan language magazine *Boed-Mi-Tsa-Dhoen*, for example, on p. 2, the Dalai Lama is quoted as saying in America on May 5th, “I did not encourage anyone to practice Dorje Shugden nor did I ban its worship.”

<sup>36</sup> For example, with statements like, “If Tibetans in general and worshipers of Dholgyal [Dorje Shugden] in particular do not immediately stop worshipping [him], an intolerable time will be upon us. For this reason, we cannot take refuge in the concept of freedom of religion.” Announcement by the Kashag (Cabinet of the Tibetan exile government), May 22, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> As an example of just how important the State Oracle is to the Tibetan exile government, see their website and the detailed account of Nechung, its history, monastery, and even all the successive mediums that served as Nechung’s oracle since 1544, during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s reign, when he first came through a human being in trance, according to the

in forced signature campaigns, where Tibetans were pressured under threat of force or expulsion to sign a document forswearing Dorje Shugden, desecration and destruction of holy images, death threats and threats of violence. Although few violent incidents actually occurred, the campaign of fear and intimidation pressuring Tibetans to give up their age old religious practice to “save” the Dalai Lama and the “cause of Tibet” resulted in dividing the community, ostracism, loss of revenues for monasteries and businesses, loss of opportunities for education, travel, economic advancement, social welfare, and threatens the survival of a religious tradition. Chinese authorities, ever on the lookout to embarrass the Dalai Lama and to disparage his followers, did not waste time in 1996 to seize the issue to serve their divisive ends. They criticized the Dalai Lama for betraying his bodhisattva aims, meant to benefit others without concern for one’s own health and well-being as is befitting a religious person.<sup>39</sup> This was an especially embarrassing charge for someone so widely believed to be a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, Buddha of compassion. The government in exile used the Chinese interference effectively to silence most critics of the ban,<sup>40</sup> conveniently reversing cause and effect by claiming that Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden had caused the conflict and that they were working for the Chinese. This is considered the ultimate betrayal in the Tibetan exile community, the equivalent to high treason.

Dharmapala Dorje Shugden is held in high esteem by many Tibetans as a powerful guardian of religious vows and law. A Dharmapala plays the role of a caretaker or guardian of Buddhist practice. Like parents, he or she is believed to help with establishing conditions conducive for spiritual practice and to avert harm and interferences. The Buddha is the ultimate authority but, just like a president, he or she has aides who work out and enforce the details on the day to day level spanning many degrees in rank. Dharmapalas are also beings on the path to enlightenment. Some of them go back to the time of the Buddha, others evolved in Tibet. Some of the most widely revered Buddhist masters in the last three hundred fifty years of Tibetan history relied on Dorje Shugden as their guardian, including the Dalai Lama until the mid-1970's. They considered him an emanation whose nature is the wisdom of the Buddha Manjushri but appearing mostly in a worldly, fierce way. This century, Kyabje<sup>41</sup> Trijang Rinpoche, one of the two mentors of the Dalai Lama, Kyabje Pabongka Rinpoche and Tomo Geshe Rinpoche were the most renowned and influential masters of the Gelug tradition, the largest order of Tibetan Buddhism. With their fame also spread that of their guardian, Dorje Shugden. He is believed to be extremely powerful, swift, and precise. Although different views about him were known in Tibet, in exile, this Dharmapala became demonized in unprecedented ways even for Tibetans.

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government.

<sup>38</sup> For example, “It will be the last resort if [we] have to knock on [their/your] doors. It would be good if [they/you] can heed this without [us] having to resort to this last step.” The Dalai Lama in a public address March 10, 1996, and on March 21, 1996, “If you wish the speedy death of the Dalai Lama, then I have no objection [to your continuing to rely on Dholgyal (Dorje Shugden)].

<sup>39</sup> Wei Se: “Dalai Disavows Guardian of Buddhist Doctrine,” *China’s Tibet*, No. 6, 1996

<sup>40</sup> In the early days of the conflict, many, especially educated, Tibetans who were neutral concerning this particular protector were vocal in private circles criticizing the exile government’s excesses on political grounds, recognizing that the ban was undemocratic and threatened the future political development of Tibetans and their chance to form democratic habits and institutions.

<sup>41</sup> Tib.: *skyabs.rje*, meaning saving grace or protective lord, an epithet traditionally attributed only to the few Lamas with comprehensive knowledge of different Buddhist traditions, or lineage holders.

The aim was to destroy the practice of Dorje Shugden -- not its possible misuse -- since at no time was any distinction made between relying responsibly on this guardian deity and misuse to which all religious practices are subject.

The source of the demonization was oracles (mediums in trance) of the Tibetan exile government many Tibetans believe to be unreliable. Their prophecies declared Dorje Shugden to be an evil spirit intent on harming the Dalai Lama and the cause of Tibet<sup>42</sup> seen by many as synonymous. The exile government's continuing uncompromising stand on this point polarized the issue and turned any attempt to present a different interpretation, even those made in good faith, into an attack on the Dalai Lama and, hence, a confirmation of the "prophecies." Thus, the Dorje Shugden believed to be evil and the one religious people rely on seem to have nothing whatsoever to do with each other. They are two different beings with each side believing that the other invented its own story of Dorje Shugden. They could not be further apart, one a demon, carrier of seemingly absolute evil, the other believed by most of Tibet's greatest Buddhist masters to be an emanation of the Buddha's wisdom within worldly action. In part, these different views are the result of dragging into the political arena an esoteric religious practice that is easily misunderstood, especially when made public in this way. The difference between the two radically different conceptions of Dorje Shugden also pits two kinds of authority against each other, one religious the other political. Proclaiming Dorje Shugden an evil spirit denies more than two hundred acclaimed Tibetan Buddhist masters -- not counting their tens of thousands of disciples -- their religious qualifications. These are based on the ability to distinguish between good and evil, the very essence of wisdom. From a Buddhist point of view this is clearly absurd. It makes sense only from a non-religious context. Hence, the differences concerning Dorje Shugden have to be considered from a political point of view.

In the summer of 1996, the Tibetan government in exile was accused of human rights violations by many Tibetans and some of their Western supporters. Since then most critics have been pressured into silence. Although two prominent human rights organizations expressed their concerns privately to the exile government, they refused to do so publicly for several reasons including that it could be seen as undermining the efforts of the Dalai Lama and the much larger and more serious issue of improving human rights in Tibet under Chinese control.<sup>43</sup> Amnesty International specified recently that there had been no human rights violations -- torture, death penalty, extra-judicial executions, arbitrary detention and unfair trials -- in the Tibetan exile community as a result of the Dorje Shugden conflict.<sup>44</sup> Since the Tibetan exile government has to function under Indian law, it is clear that it could not use such methods to begin with. The methods Dharamsala has used to pressure Tibetans into giving up one of their cherished religious

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<sup>42</sup> *Infallible Prophecies of the Tibetan Government Oracles*, published by the Department of Religion and Culture of the exile government, Dharamsala, 1996.

<sup>43</sup> I have seen one of the letters shown to me on condition I not disclose it and its source.

<sup>44</sup> "None of the material Amnesty International has received contain evidence of abuses which fall within the violations of fundamental human rights including torture, the death penalty, extra-judicial execution, arbitrary detention or imprisonment or unfair trials." Ngawang Rabgyal, Office of Tibet [New York], in a letter to the editor of *The Nation*, Oct. 5, 1998 (Volume 267, Number 10), p. 2; Tribune News Service, India, July 25, 1998. Perhaps there is a conflict of interest for Amnesty International to investigate human rights cases in the Tibetan exile community. AI, after many years of silence now represent the Dalai Lama's extremely important human rights campaign in Tibet where abuses are rampant. AI also uses the fame of the Dalai Lama for fund raising purposes. For example, an appeal from October 1998 that includes a letter by the Dalai Lama.

practices and the tradition it is meant to protect are based on silencing any genuine disagreement with its policies through a kind of psychological warfare that uses threats against those perceived to disagree with the Dalai Lama, intimidation, and social pressure. How this gets played out in a uniquely Tibetan way in their unusual exile circumstances will, I hope, become clearer in the course of the book.

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## **PART I -- EXILED FROM EXILE**

### **TIBETAN VOICES**

One of the main aims of this book is to give Tibetans a voice, since they cannot speak out in their own communities without facing serious consequences, intense social pressure, threats of violence, slander, and ostracism. In this part of the book are documented the experiences of Tibetans affected by the Dorje Shugden ban. They are excerpts from many informal conversations and formal interviews I conducted mostly from October 1997 to May 1998 in the areas in India and Nepal where Tibetans live in large numbers: Delhi, Dharamsala, sPiti, Kinnaur, Mysore, Mundgod, Goa, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and in Nepal's Kathmandu valley.

In what might be called an ethno-phenomenological approach, I collected additional oral testimony about the conflict from Tibetans and other Buddhists in different parts of the world from May 1996 till the present. For the most part, I have included those parts of the conversations that are representative of many other voices. This is by no means an exhaustive study. Most of the Buddhists who were deeply affected by the ban of their protector practice were too afraid to expose their names to the world. So I am including only some names. Others have been changed or left out altogether. Sometimes I have left out the name of the place for reasons of confidentiality. Each conversation partner told me much about his or her social, religious, political, and family background. I have included some of that information to give the reader an idea of how pervasive the practice was through all levels of Tibetan society and how far-reaching is the despair about the conflict.

I tried to include voices from a cross-section of Tibetan society. However, the religious and intellectual elite most qualified to explain the reasons for the conflict to the world is not represented directly by interviews. It is not even clear at the moment how many of the leading Gelugpas still rely on Dorje Shugden. In the emotional atmosphere of the "war of words," they were accused of cowardice and their silence interpreted as betrayal. I have good reasons to believe it was out of respect for His Holiness and religious concerns. With their silence they resisted participating in the split created by the ban and refused to disgrace the Buddha Dharma they are trying to preserve for future generations.

Since my Tibetan is not adequate to conduct lengthy and detailed conversations such as these, I had to rely on translators. Many exile Tibetans who know English do not know Tibetan well enough to understand the intricacies of the language, the religious terms or the language of official documents. My concern was that a translator should master the Tibetan language rather than have flawless English. Both of my main translators were well educated in Tibetan and also knew English quite well. But since the English needed editing, I often used my own terms<sup>45</sup> and expressions for words not precise enough in the original. For this reason the truly authentic Tibetan voice comes through only sketchily, a common problem when working with translation. I noted whenever the discussion was originally in English.

I would like to provide a glimpse of the complexities of Tibetan culture in its mixture of religion and politics and how many-sided is the issue that brought the uniquely Tibetan identity crisis into focus for the rest of the world and the many different levels on which it gets played out. I intentionally did not order the content of the interviews around categories of my choosing in the hope that the authenticity of the Tibetans' concerns comes through more clearly this way.

I would like to point out to the reader unfamiliar with Tibetan culture that Tibetans do not complain in public. It is very difficult to get them to express their thoughts and feelings to begin with, especially to a stranger from another country. It simply is not done in Tibetan culture. So whatever deeply troubles them is expressed in a most understated and indirect way. The following testimony, even though a barometer for the Tibetan exile society's feelings about the current identity crisis, has to be seen in the context of this type of extreme understatement of the inner turmoil that is tearing people apart in that community.

Tibetans do not answer specific questions, I learned. They almost never answer with a straight "yes" or "no." This is culturally determined. Whatever I asked concerning the subject of Dorje Shugden, the answer came as a long story or as a great deal of accumulated reflections and doubts. After a while I gave up trying to elicit responses to specific questions. I was trying to document the conflict and what Tibetans most directly affected felt about it. They needed to talk. On more than one occasion people broke into tears sobbing that they had no one to whom to tell their story. To see old monks cry like that, especially those who had safeguarded His Holiness out of Tibet in 1959, was more than disconcerting.

I talked to hundreds of people and became aware of their exaggerated fears that contradict the media image of happy Tibetans. One of these fears, I discovered, was of their beloved leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This greatly surprised me. Why would Tibetans be so afraid of someone they believe so literally to be an incarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of compassion? This became one of the most puzzling questions that led me to uncover many contradictions in the Tibetan exile society.

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<sup>45</sup> For example, in India, where Hindus worship many gods and deities, the Tibetan word "*chos.skyong bsten.mkhan*," (literally, someone who relies on Dorje Shugden) is usually translated with "devotee" or "worshiper." This is common in India, where many gods are worshiped and their followers are called devotees. To a Western, especially a non-religious, person that common Hindu usage has very different connotations from what is meant by Buddhists. The Indian usage in a Western context easily gives the mistaken impression of a separate cult, or a tradition based solely on the Dharmapala, which is not at all the case here.



Aside from their intense fears, what also struck me was that almost all of the people I talked to were upright, strong people -- good citizens, we would say -- who had served either the exile government or the Tibetan community at large for decades on a day-to-day basis with hard work, devotion, loyalty, and innovations. The older Tibetans had been the backbone of the exile community in the sixties and seventies and many of them had put together its social infrastructure in the first place. They are for the most part capable, hard working people with many community leaders other Tibetans turn to for help in times of need. It is literally unbelievable that now they all allegedly receive money from China for spying and creating conflict in the Tibetan community. To anyone who knows these people and their demonstrated loyalty to the Dalai Lama, it seems pathetic, even silly, to allege they have become a security risk intent on harming the life of the Dalai Lama -- the most devastating accusation for any Tibetan.

My aim in this section is to document how Tibetans feel about the identity crisis occurring in their communities in exile not establish the truth about the ontological status of Dorje Shugden. That would be beyond the scope of all but a handful of realized, spiritual masters. Religious truth cannot be legislated or established by a general survey, by voting, giving opinions, or by recounting one's personal experiences. It is not a political subject. Whom we choose to believe as acting solely on religious grounds is up to each individual, the reader as well as those whose feelings and statements are recorded here.

In order to familiarize the reader with the political status of exile Tibetans in India and the administrative system they have constructed, the first interview presented is with Samdhong Rinpoche, advisor to the Dalai Lama and senior most government official since 1991. It touches on the subject of the relationship between religion and politics in the Tibetan exile government and starts this section to aid the reader in following with greater ease the grievances voiced by Tibetans affected by the ban. At the end of this section I include the views of two non-Tibetans whose close affiliations with the culture and language qualify them to add their own unique perspective. Since their presentations might be more systematic, the reader would perhaps benefit from reading them first. However, I have included them at the end since this section is meant to give voice to Tibetans.

### **From Conversations and Interviews**

Interview in English with Samdhong Rinpoche, Chairman of the Assembly since 1991 and co-drafter of the Charter for the Tibetan exile government. For more than twenty years he has also been the Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, which is affiliated with Sanskrit University at Varanasi, India. He has consistently been devoted and loyal to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Sarnath, January 12, 1998:

Q: How can a government that mixes religion and politics actually become democratic? Is the Tibetan exile government at the moment more interested in preserving the Ganden Potang government<sup>46</sup> or in democratizing and trying to find an appropriate government for, one hopes, a

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<sup>46</sup> The government established by the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1642 uniting religion and politics and under which he united greater Tibet as a country along the lines of the old empire that fell apart in the tenth century with the end of the Yarlung royal

future free Tibet. Can you say something about that?

A: As far as the Tibetan government in exile is concerned, the direction in which it is moving is quite transparent. And there is no room for any confusion. The Charter for the Tibetans in exile which was drafted by His Holiness and placed before the 11th Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies was of a secular character. His Holiness clearly mentioned that the nature of the polity of the Tibetans in exile would be secular. When it was put before the Assembly to be adopted, the Assembly was divided and there was less reasoning and more emotions. The people were carried away by emotion and we were not able to adopt it. That was in 1991, when the Charter was presented for the first time. I was not able to convince the people to adopt the word "secular" [in the Preamble] because they understood secular to mean anti-religion or opposite of religion. Particularly the English word "secular" translated into Hindi gives it a sense of indifferent attitude towards religion. So that was not really pleasant. And therefore we lost by two or three votes; 22 were in favor of secularism and 24 against. So we removed the word "secular" and substituted it with the combination of Dharma and politics as we used to in Tibet: *chos.srid zung.'drel*. Thus, *chos.srid zung.'drel* was reinstated. Then it went to His Holiness for his consent. He did not insist upon restoring the word "secular" because he sensed the emotion of the members of the Assembly and he respected that. At the moment in the first article the nature of polity is given as a combination of Dharma and politics, but the composition or constitution of the charter is a completely secular one.<sup>47</sup> And we are now working under that charter. Since we have a combination of Dharma and politics I now have to defend the religious polity. This is not a big problem since the rest of the charter is a secular one. And the words "combining religion and politics" do not cause any particular problem in carrying out its mandate. His Holiness has a very clear vision that a future Tibet must have a secular kind of governance. That is not because he is against religious tradition but because he thinks it is appropriate for the people and the rest of the world. The entire world is now in the fashion of secularism. The world at large may not understand the religious polity and it may be misused by irreligious people in the name of religion, if you have a combination of religion and politics. On the other hand, the religious institutions might become more powerful and overshadow state affairs as we have experienced in the past. I personally believe very strongly that religion and politics can never be combined properly.

Q: Do you feel it is never appropriate or just not in this particular historical period?

A: Actually it is only a lack of information and education among the people. Otherwise I personally feel that a secular government can serve and preserve more appropriately and more powerfully religious traditions. I think that a secular government was never meant to be an anti-religious government and a secular government can do a lot of things for the preservation of

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dynasty.

<sup>47</sup> However, in August 1998, a Committee for Protection of Tibetan Religious and Political Affairs (*bod kyi bsren.sring srung.skyob las 'gul tshogs.chung*) was formed in Dharamsala with all the powerful Tibetan regional and social organizations such as Ü-Tsang Cholka (Province), Domeh Cholka, Dodeh Cholka, Tibetan Youth Congress, Tibetan Women's Association as constituents under the direction of Tashi Wangdu, a capable and well-respected Kalon (*bka'.blon*) or Cabinet member of the Tibetan exile government for many terms. This Committee is concerned with removing any perceived threat to the Ganden Potang government's union of church and state since of which the institution of Dalai Lama is the essence or central pillar.

cultural and religious traditions. I am a very firm believer, and His Holiness too, that Tibet's identity is inseparable from its religious tradition. That is the essence of Tibetness: it is our culture and our religion. The preservation of culture and religion is the first and foremost responsibility of the Tibetan government in exile or the Tibetan government in Tibet, whatever it may be. His Holiness gives political sovereignty secondary importance to the preservation of religion and cultural heritage, because our religious tradition and our religiosity, our religious mind and the culture, which is a manifestation of our religious mind, are very, very important for the entirety of humanity. It does not belong to the Tibetans alone, it belongs to the universe and we have a sense of universal responsibility to preserve it. For that purpose His Holiness is ready to give up the demand for complete independence. He is more concerned with the preservation of religious tradition and culture and for that purpose a secular government can work more effectively and more appropriately.

Now I am coming back to the combination of religion and politics and how it works in the government in exile. Our policies are based on religious mind or on the basic principle of religion and that does not mean it is Buddhism or Hinduism or any -ism. We say the eternal Dharma. The eternal Dharma subscribes to truth, non-violence and equality. Truth and non-violence and equality is the essence of the eternal Dharma and that is the commitment of our polity. The Tibetan polity's first and foremost commitment is to the truth, non-violence, and equality. For "equality" we sometimes use the word "democracy" and sometimes we use the word "equality,"<sup>48</sup> according to the context. These three are the basic structure of our polity. This has been the essence of eternal Dharma. Dharma and polity become one and the religious mind is governing the provision of our polity. And here you should not understand that the religious institutions have something to do with politics. No religious institution has anything to do with politics. The religious institution is an institution, not a religion. We only refer to the religiosity of the religion, not the organization of the religion. So this is my summary.

There is a second thing which many people question and many people argue: if you have a polity governed by religiosity, how it can be a popular democracy? In that matter I am very clear that a proper democracy is only possible if the polity comes out of religiosity, a religious mind. Otherwise, if your polity is based on negative emotions or negative thoughts which are based on a kind of selfish motivation or competition or very strong nationalism, which can go to any extent to preserve and promote its self-interest, that is not a proper democracy. That democracy can become very corrupt, which is what we are witnessing in Pakistan and India and elsewhere. In the name of democracy all kinds of corruption and atrocities are going on. We don't want that kind of democracy. A genuine democracy can only be established if the people of the community or the country by and large are religious-minded and pure-minded.

Q: In the present form of the exile government, what in your view are the checks and balances on power? What is the relationship between India and the exile government and its legal basis,

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<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the Tibetan word for democracy was changed in 1993-4, upon Samdhong Rinpoche's suggestion, from mang.tso (*dmangs.gtso*), (as listed in *The New Light English-Tibetan Dictionary*, T.G. Dongthog, Dharamsala, 1973) to mang.tso (*mang.gtso*), meaning majority. Samdhong Rinpoche had argued at the time that the Communists were using the former word for "the people," and since the deputies in the exile society were elected by majority, the system should become known as "majority." Mechanisms for protecting minority viewpoints are difficult to find in theory or practice.

since on the one hand India does not accept the exile government as a government, so to speak, yet, at the same time, India is very accepting?

A: That problem we cannot solve as long as we are based in India. The Indian government is so tolerant and helpful just to ignore the existence of the Tibetan government-in-exile. Otherwise, legally and politically we cannot exist in India. The Indian government does not recognize the Tibetan government-in-exile and yet this is just a bluff. Within the working relationship, they recognize everything.

Q: They recognize your institutions and they give your government the responsibility for taking care of the Tibetans?

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes. In other countries, for example, this would be very difficult. In India we use our own letterheads with the name of the government-in-exile. On these letterheads we correspond with the government of India. The government of India accepts them and responds, only not addressing us as “government-in-exile.” They do not recognize any institutions. They only recognize the institution of Dalai Lama and his representative. On that basis we are working the entire administration of the government-in-exile, everything which the government of India supposedly does not know. So we say the government of India shuts one eye and opens one eye as far as Tibetan affairs are concerned. They are so tolerant.

As far as checks and balances are concerned, I have to make certain clarifications. Tibetans in exile in India have to abide by Indian civil law as well by Indian criminal law. We are not above the law. We are not outside the law. Whosoever is in India has to abide by Indian law and there cannot be a separate legal system within the legal system of India; that is very clear. Therefore the government in exile cannot have an independent judiciary system. Because that judiciary might legally clash with Indian law, we don't have an independent judiciary system as such. We have one only insofar as it fits into Indian law of arbitration.

As refugees, the Tibetans in India are legally protected by an executive order alone. India is not signatory to the International Convention of Refugees and the country itself does not have any laws concerning refugees. If the government policy changes, our position is very weak. If one day a government takes the decision not to accept Tibetans as political refugees then we cannot go to the court of law because there is no legal protection.

The Tibetans or any other refugees which are accepted by the government of India legally have all the fundamental human rights which are enshrined in the Indian constitution, except the political rights of voting and standing for election. This is clarified by a Supreme Court order. When Prime Minister Li Peng was visiting India about 50 Tibetan demonstrators were imprisoned by the police on the charge they were doing some demonstration and burning the Chinese flag and so on. On this charge they were detained. Some people went to the Supreme Court and it gave the order that the Tibetan refugees living in India have all the fundamental human rights enshrined in the Indian constitution and laws except the political rights. Under that order they had to release immediately all detainees and that order still stands and is one of the legal protections. Therefore freedom of press, of religion, and of association, which are also

enshrined in our charter, are protected in India by Indian laws; that is one of the guarantees. And anyone who thinks there is a violation of these rights can go to the Indian courts of law and seek redress and remedy for that.

Coming back to checks and balances in the exile government, certain disputes cannot be taken to an Indian court of law. For example, political discrimination or decisions of our government cannot because they don't recognize the exile government. Therefore, in lieu of the independent judiciary we have a Justice Commission provided in the Charter. For its jurisdiction, we had to find some room in Indian law which we found under the provision of arbitration. Arbitrators can be appointed by anyone and they have the power to maintain judgments. Those judgments can be challenged in an Indian court. But unless challenged in an appropriate court, their orders will be held as good as an order of a court of law. If looked at from the Indian point of view it is arbitration within the Indian provision of law, and from our side it is an independent judiciary to protect the provisions of the Charter for the Tibetans in exile. If any interpretation of our charter is disputed we can go to the Justice Commission and we can debate it there.<sup>49</sup>

Q: What about criminal cases?

A: Yes, criminal cases would have to go to Indian courts. No criminal case can be dealt with by the Justice Commission, only civil disputes and especially disputes within the Tibetan administration and in the interpretation of the Charter.

So the rest of the checks and balances are in our Constitution.<sup>50</sup> Our Charter is neither a presidential nor parliamentary system. It is in-between. There is a second handicap and we don't have political parties at the moment.

Q: You can't really talk about democracy unless you have opposition parties. This is a fundamental aspect of democracy.

A: Yes, that may be, but we have to interpret it in a different way. The opposition parties are necessary but not indispensable. The Assembly in exile is the highest decision-making body. It is represented by the provinces and the religious traditions and some other people. It is an elected body of forty-six members which really represents and is answerable to the people. At the moment, that decision-making body has the role to act as the ruling party and the rest as opposition party. Both of these roles have to be performed by the same representatives. As a ruling party the assembly has to make all the policies and programs for the government and they are binding on the government. The Kashag [Cabinet] is elected by the Assembly and it stays in office as long as it enjoys the confidence of the Assembly. The members of the Kashag have the right to sit and speak in the Assembly, but they don't have the right to vote. The executive [the

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<sup>49</sup> Three Justice Commissioners serve on the Justice Commission. They are not really judges, Samdhong Rinpoche pointed out. At the time of this interview, the background of the Chief Justice, for example, was having served in the Assembly but with no special training in law. The three Commissioners make decisions in consultation with three permanent juries who work in an advisory capacity, according to Samdhong Rinpoche. The legal aspect of the government-in-exile is greatly complicated by the fact that Tibetans are subject to the Indian legal system.

<sup>50</sup> The constitution for a future free Tibet was drafted in the first years of exile. The charter is only valid for life in exile.

Dalai Lama]<sup>51</sup> and the Kashag are answerable, accountable and responsible to the Assembly, which has the power to dissolve the Kashag at any time or to replace any particular Kalon [minister] at any time by majority vote. The legislative is more powerful than the executive body and the executive does not have any kind of veto power. Whatever decisions the legislative makes are binding on the executive.

Q: In practice, does it work that way?

A: Yes, exactly in that way, exactly in that way.<sup>52</sup>

Q: What is His Holiness' structural place in this?

A: He holds two very important positions, one is the head of state and the other is the head of the government. And as the head of state all executive decisions and their implementations are done in his name on behalf of him. He is working on the advice of the Kashag (Cabinet) which he can accept or not. But His Holiness answers to the Assembly, his advice is not binding. If his actions are contrary to the Assembly's decisions then they will not recognize them. He cannot do that.

Q: And you said he does not have veto power?

A: He has veto power in a sense. Any decision, any resolution that is adopted by the Assembly is sent to him for his assent. Unless he gives his assent, it cannot become a law. He can voice his disagreement with a piece of legislation within two weeks and send it back to the Assembly with his reasons and comments for reconsideration. And for that he can address the parliament in person or he can send a message through the speaker or in writing to the parliament. If the Assembly agrees with his suggestions it may amend the legislation. If it does not agree with his suggestions, it can send the same decision back again to His Holiness. At that time he has only two options, either he accepts it or declares a referendum. That is the final measure. The result of a referendum would be binding on the Assembly as well as His Holiness. None of the

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<sup>51</sup> The executive as an unelected branch of government is meant only for the period in exile, as is the Charter as a whole. The Dalai Lama has stated that he would not play any role in the future government of Tibet. The traditional political position of Dalai Lama he maintains only in exile until Tibet is free, he has said. Then, "I will most likely remain a public figure who may be called on to offer advice or resolve some particularly significant and difficult problems which could not be overcome by the existing government of political mechanisms." *Tibet's Parliament in Exile*, Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre (TPPRC) in co-operation with Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation, New Delhi, 1996, p. 30. For the duration of exile, however, the Charter cannot be changed. This provision of the Charter I take to mean that, in principle, the system cannot be changed, although it contains provisions for amending it. A Council of Regency, also a provision in the Charter, will take over the executive functions should the Dalai Lama pass away in exile.

<sup>52</sup> Three months before this interview, Samdhong Rinpoche had characterized the workings of the Tibetan exile government in a very different way. In an interview with the Tibetan language newspaper *Tibetan Times*, Dharamsala, in October 1997, circulated widely on audio tape in the exile community, he explained the *de facto* workings of the Assembly as ineffective, giving his reasons for this obliquely, in typical Tibetan manner. He said that the last six years of his tenure as the head and speaker of the Assembly have been ineffective and nothing but a power struggle without achieving any aims. People do not vote on issues but only look at who is presenting them. This is just a continuation of the old way without any change. Once representatives are in the assembly, "it seems to be very difficult to continue to be honest, and if you are against the prevailing winds or flow of the river you lose your seat." Their independent judgment becomes undermined and they are subject to a strong force from behind, "like cement or concrete," he said.

institutions are above the referendum.

Q: And have you had a case in which His Holiness did not accept a decision twice?

A: Not yet, it is only a provision in the charter. We have not used it.

Q: Do you think it will ever happen?

A: His Holiness is by nature very democratic. He always goes by the majority<sup>53</sup> consensus of the Assembly. I don't expect during this present Dalai Lama to be any confrontation between him and the Assembly, because he is very flexible. He always goes by reason and his reasons are powerful and that can convince the Assembly, and otherwise he will be reconciled with the Assembly's decision.

So even without opposition parties, the entire Assembly is performing the role of the opposition. It has been quite effective and powerful, because the Kashag [Cabinet] and the executive have no power in the Assembly. When the entire parliament stands for some issue, there cannot be a division. On the other hand, with a multi-party system, whether the party members consciously agree or do not agree they have to follow the party whip and that is also one kind of repression. We do not recognize it as such, but it is one form of repression. I agree with Jaiprakash Narain who, in his later age, recommends a party-less democracy. It is one of the most powerful ideas of democracy and I am very much convinced by it. For quite some time I used to argue that without a multi-party system there cannot be a proper democracy. But now I am more experienced with the nature of people in India and also with the Tibetan community. The multi-party system may not be very suitable for us. In India it is the greatest failure. For the 50 years since independence at any time the ruling party did not get more than 22% of the votes. And recently, party discipline mostly goes against the conscience of the people. The party as a whole makes other decisions and its members have foregone their right to speak and act. They have to agree to party discipline. That is one kind of repression. Also, the power-seekers are not principled to stay with one party but change parties like an overcoat. This has caused kinds of instability. In our case there is no such struggle because we have a party-less democracy. My objection to the multi-party systems in the US and England, for example, is that public opinions are not generated by the public. Public opinions are enforced by the party, and powerful propaganda and advertising brainwash the people. Therefore the basic right of the people's conscience is always damaged. We are very much against the Communist system of brainwashing. I personally feel that brainwashing is one of the most insufferable crimes against humanity, against basic dignity and basic individual freedom. But in the so-called-multi-party democratic countries the brainwashing takes place in a different way. It always goes on. It goes on through education, through workshops, through governments, through electronic media, through print media and Internet and what not, all kind of bombardment of advertisement makes you almost mad and reduces you to a helpless creature. You have to surrender your own power of thinking and guide it or abide by one of the powerful media. That is the worst result of multi-

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<sup>53</sup> Here is an example of where Samdhong Rinpoche's understanding of the notion of democracy is essentially rule by majority. See note # 46 (???? check) above.

party democratic systems and market-oriented economies. They have taken away basic human values and human individual freedom which they are never able to protect.

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An interview in English with Geshe Cheme Tsering. He received an Acarya degree from Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies, Sanskrit University, Sarnath, where he studied in the Nyingma Division and a Lharampa Geshe<sup>54</sup> degree from Ganden Shartse, 1996. Delhi, October 22, 1997:

Q: What has the ban of Dorje Shugden done to you personally, to your life?

A: It is interesting how reality shatters your imagined perception. My perception of the inside workings of the Tibetan exile government has completely changed. My experience of this ban also has changed my perception of how His Holiness works within Tibetan society. It also changed my perception about how Western Buddhist centers and supporters of Tibet receive and give and gather information.

The Tibetan exile government is now perceived as experimenting with a democratic form of government. The long term aim is to transform Tibet itself into a democratic country. But when it gets challenged to test the democratic principles, it does not stand up to the challenge at all. This was demonstrated by how they handled the ban. Usually in democratic countries issues are introduced through the parliamentary process and then taken up by the upper house and then the President. In this case and in many other cases it was brought up unilaterally by the Dalai Lama himself. In 1995 the oracles (mediums) advised him that continued worship of Dorje Shugden is not constructive for the Dalai Lama or the Tibetan government's work towards freedom. On March 10th and 21st, 1996, he publicized these oracular prophecies in a public teaching. Neither the Assembly, the Cabinet nor the heads of the four Tibetan Buddhist traditions, not even the head of the Gelugpas were consulted. After the announcement was made, it was endorsed by the Cabinet and the Assembly and became policy. That is how the Tibetan government works. Before we did not know these things, because we were not inside the problem. Now we are. So this is not theoretical to us.

When His Holiness first proclaimed the ban, he took the oracles as reference. "There is indication that it is harmful to me and Tibetan society, a negative effect for Tibetan society, if Dorje Shugden worship is continued." That is how he first put it in 1996. This theme was immediately taken up by the Tibetan government and its various branches around the world. When His Holiness was asked by an Indian journalist, the reason for the ban he said was, "Buddhism is a very profound religion and the worship of Dorje Shugden is denigrating Buddhism to the level of spirit worship." He also said that, "Worshippers of Dorje Shugden have been sectarian throughout history," when asked by a Western journalist about the reason for the

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<sup>54</sup> A Geshe degree culminates Buddhist philosophical and doctrinal studies in a Gelugpa monastic university. It is roughly a Buddhist equivalent to the Christian doctor of divinity. Lharampa is the most advanced of the Geshe degrees awarded each year to very few monks.



ban. Here he opted for ecumenical unity between different Tibetan traditions: “The worship of Dorje Shugden is against the ecumenic spirit.” On more than one occasion in the US and in Switzerland he even prohibited Western Buddhists [who rely on Dorje Shugden] from attending his initiations and teachings. From this and many other observations we have made one can say that whenever he makes announcements and gives reasons, they are more based on the expediency of the moment than a solid foundation applicable in the West and East both. First he said worship of the deity in Tibetan society is not good. If that is so, then why prohibit Westerners from worshipping Dorje Shugden? Going through all these reasons, His Holiness has given different ones everywhere. He has not given reasons that hold ground or have meaning everywhere. This has changed my perception about His Holiness.

Outside, His Holiness projects a picture of a very compassionate society and since he is a winner of the Nobel peace prize, people embrace that view of Tibetan society. But in reality I now find that what His Holiness tells the world about the need for compassion and loving kindness bears no relation to the actual way in which he treats his own critics in Tibetan society. Some of the Tibetan public in Dharamsala is clearly showing that they do not want to be a part of this ban anymore, since they have seen its destructive effect among Tibetans. If we look to the private observations of lower ranking Tibetan government employees, this much is evident.<sup>55</sup> The Dalai Lama on the other hand has taken every opportunity, such as ordination of monks, public teachings in Dharamsala and those like his recent Kalachakra initiation near Darjeeling, to keep public indignation against devotees of Dorje Shugden at the boiling point. He misses no opportunity in these and other Tibetan gatherings to express openly that he is against the worship of Dorje Shugden. Unlike other politicians, this has very serious repercussions in Tibetan society. Once the Dalai Lama expresses his displeasure at someone, no matter who he is or however great his or her contribution to Tibetan society has been in the past, that person becomes a pariah overnight in Tibetan society. The key Tibetan policy makers know this very clearly. Front-ranking Tibetan intellectuals fought against this trend but have now come to the conclusion that at least in this generation the Dalai Lama has absolute hold over the Tibetan public and honest disagreement or dissension stand absolutely no chance. This is one of the reasons why my perception of His Holiness’ actions outside and inside Tibetan society has changed.

Those in the Western world that are sympathetic to Tibet but have no exposure to Tibetan society at the family, government, or monastic level, do not have this understanding. Unlike any democratic society, the exile Tibetan community is a unique entity in itself. At the top level you have a handful of Tibetans who are intimately aware of shifts in international politics. This is mainly represented by the Private Office of the Dalai Lama. Below these people and far less powerful is the Tibetan exile government. In this government also, the key policy decisions are more often made on direction by the Private Office of the Dalai Lama rather than through parliamentary procedures or the wishes of the people. Below the government are sixty percent of Tibetans who are older -- monks and lay people alike -- largely unexposed to modern education,

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<sup>55</sup> I tried to get documentation to back up these statements. I talked to quite a few people who held the same views, but especially those living in Dharamsala did not want to go on record to corroborate them publically. When confronted, lower ranking government officials stated that since it was a religious issue, they did not know enough about it to give an opinion. See, for example, Part II, February 15, 1999.

their mind frame stuck in ancient Tibet. This proportion of Tibetan people demonstrate no personal initiative to explore new ideas or methods or policies regarding the future of Tibet. Individually they are very efficient in meeting their personal necessities. They have almost blind faith in the Dalai Lama. This faith retains complete reliance on the Dalai Lama. When very carefully examined, this exposes two fundamental defects: (1). As far as the future of Tibet is concerned, at a subconscious level, they do not want to take any initiative or personal responsibility. (2). This lack of personal confidence breeds a hollow but inescapable blind trust that if they rely on the Dalai Lama, everything will be fine. Given these factors this mass of Tibetan people is an ideal and willing tool to propagate whatever policy or pronouncement the Tibetan government deems fit. The remaining 30 or 40% of Tibetans are the younger ones, most of whom are not well acquainted with or sufficiently grounded in their mother culture. So they really do not have a reference point to evaluate a modern society, outside society. Those who have sufficient knowledge of Tibetan society and the outside world have no voice in the Tibetan government to bring in fresh air. Some of these enterprising Tibetans started Tibetan political parties, but they became the target of intense public indignation and had to abandon their efforts. Others tried to express their view through the written media. They were either beaten by the mob or threatened within an inch of their lives. A few others started a newspaper of their own. It was so successful that it brought down the circulation of other Tibetan newspapers. However, a public rebuke by the Dalai Lama of this newspaper during a teaching in Dharamsala forced its closure. This is where the Tibetan exile community stands more than four and a half decades after they lost their independence to China.

Q: But how did the ban affect you personally?

A: Ever since 1962, when I joined the Tibetan school in Shimla in northern India until my graduation as Geshe Lharampa from Ganden Shartse in southern India in 1996, I have been an exemplary student. I always obtained A grades. Especially in south India I made more than my share of contribution towards the cause of Tibet and development of the monastic college. The Tibetan exile government is well aware of all these. I was even being considered for the post of official translator for the Dalai Lama at that time. I have never had any connections with China or Taiwan. This fact can be easily verified by anyone. After I voiced my disagreement against this ban in April 1996, however, the Tibetan exile administration in Dharamsala has used every conceivable method to destroy my credibility. For example, the Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament, Samdhong Rinpoche, in June 1996 spread the word in south India that I was holding two different passports. In New Delhi the Head of the Foreigners Registration Office tried to summon me twice, through notices, in an effort to revoke my permit to stay in India. The Bureau of the Dalai Lama in Delhi expressly sent its liaison officer more than once and told the concerned officers in the external affairs office of India that they must not renew my identity certificate [the yellow book issued to Tibetans in lieu of a passport]. None of these however succeeded. Most recently I have learned that the local foreigners registration office in Mundgod has been petitioned by front organizations of the Tibetan government in Dharamsala that they must not renew my RC [Registration Certificate]. This was in July 1997. This is just one part of the harassment that Dharamsala is subjecting me to. If I were to go to Dharamsala on my own, chances are that I would meet not only with public hostility but quite possibly I may be manhandled and beaten without mercy. But Dharamsala is not any exception in this respect. In

any other Tibetan settlement in India, I am a marked man. If I were attacked in any of these settlements, no Tibetan would come to my defense -- would dare to come to my defense.

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An abbot of a Gelugpa monastery, an incarnate Lama, a Geshe, well educated, in his seventies, very gentle, soft spoken, kind and warm. He did not know me and I had no introduction. I did not really know who he was when I met him in a public place of the monastery until I found out his name later on. We talked in Tibetan and after just a few minutes he took me into another room where we could speak in private. He trusted me that quickly with a subject everyone was afraid to talk about openly. The monastery has given up performing Dorje Shugden rituals officially or in groups, but many of the monks still continue privately. He did not want his name to be used publicly; October 6, 1997:

Q: How has the ban affected you?

A: It has caused us great difficulties. We are at crossroads. The dilemma is whether to follow His Holiness and throw away our commitments to our root Gurus or to keep that commitment and displease His Holiness. This dilemma has caused untold inner turmoil. We lost our peace of mind. Often I cannot sleep; my mind is always on this subject. The inner turmoil prevents any kind of deep Dharma contemplation for which the mind has to be calm.

Those of us who live in India have considered escaping the difficulties created by the conflict. For example, if we want to attend His Holiness' teachings, he says those who rely on Dorje Shugden cannot come. This is a source of deep hurt and stigma. If we went back to Tibet, we could not be sure that our freedom of religion would be upheld there. If we went to other countries, we could not be sure that we could continue to practice the same way as now because of so many different circumstances. So the ban has created many complications. It has even caused madness.

Q: How will this affect the future of the Gelug tradition?

A: It will weaken it because there is no trust among Gelugpas anymore. Some will follow the Dalai Lama and some their root Guru. Naturally there will be some fighting and hence more mistrust. In one way or another, everyone within the Gelug tradition will break their damtsig,<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tib.: *dam.tshig* which cannot easily be translated. This term covers commitment, word of honor, vow, promise, pledge. For the traditional Buddhist relationship between master and disciple, see Tsong Khapa: *The Fulfillment of All Hopes*, Guru Devotion in Tibetan Buddhism, translated by Gareth Sparham, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 1999. Damtsig is understood on different levels. The strength of keeping or breaking it determines a relationship and the success of joint endeavors. Perhaps some 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans of a certain group, ready to die for honor and their word, would still have understood something of its meaning. Tibetans believe damtsig carries their good fortune even across many life times and the word keeps recurring throughout the Dorje Shugden affair as one of its main components. I am including the following explanation by the first Panchen Lama Losang Chökyi Gyaltzen's of damtsig between master and disciple to give the reader an idea about how central it is in Tibetan Buddhism and how severe are believed to be the results of breaking it. The passage deals with the relationship between the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Guru, the First Panchen Lama, when the Ganden Potang government confiscated land

their sacred word and commitments. Conflict arises between parents and children, husband and wife, Ganden Jangtse and Shartse, which were so close before and had good relations. They now oppose each other and so much conflict has sprung up between them.<sup>57</sup> For example, Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche<sup>58</sup> told many people not to rely on Dorje Shugden. Now these people say instead of offering tormas<sup>59</sup> to the protector, we offer him shit. This kind of hatred creates so much bad karma. Serkong Rinpoche and his father (the great adept, Serkong Dorje Chang) had a falling out over this issue and separated. Up in sPiti, they now call Serkong Tsenshab by the name of his father, Serkong Dorje Chang.<sup>60</sup> This is how the Gelugpa tradition is changing. These days we have to be like the Gelugpas during the Kagyu wars,<sup>61</sup> when Geshe wore hats that were red on the outside with the yellow hidden on the inside. When they were caught wearing yellow hats, they would be punished. During that time, many Gelugpas went far east to Kham and caused the tradition to flourish there. It is still a Gelugpa stronghold today.

Today, the situation is like this: Dorje Shugden followers say bad things about the Dalai Lama and this creates more conflict and more discrimination against Dorje Shugden followers. This

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belonging to Tashi Lhunpo Monastery founded by Gendundrup later retrospectively called the First Dalai Lama. “In order for the Fifth Dalai Lama’s activities to flourish more vastly, he was invited to Tashi Lhunpo. At the time I had the extraordinary wish to offer all my possessions, inner and outer, completely. Some, overwhelmed by desire, said, ‘The ocean, mountains, and earth are not mine, but whoever has not repaid kindness, those are my great burden.’ Then they took over the estate [of Tashi Lhunpo] taking it as their due and evicted us who were innocent of accusations. At that time I was seeing supplicants at Shigatse. Some who were impartial, upon hearing this, quoted from Sakya Pandita, ‘Some who are beyond shame in their hearts make much of their own bad speech. Some of the lesser ornamented of Kanzi beat the victory drum for the murder of their father.’ I, myself, felt no malice, disturbance, unhappiness or resentment. Yet since it was such a great breach of samaya (*dam.tshig*), I felt compassion and some trepidation for them. That is because, as it says in the *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* in which the meaning of tantra is summarized, ‘Never disturb the mind of your master! If a fool does so, he will definitely suffer hells. Whatever hell sufferings are explained, like those of Avici [the worst], whoever abuses his master will abide there,’ it is said correctly. Even the mahasiddha Jigme Lingpa, one with control over the arising of psychic energy and so forth, as soon as he heard he was amidst two people who had been present at a breach of the fifth commitment (*dam.tshig*) at the ganachakra ritual, he left to go elsewhere, teeth chattering. The great mahasiddha of Oddiana [Padmasambhava] as well, when going toward the sector of hell for the sake of sentient beings a follower of Chag Lotsawa, who had broken damtsig with his master, came for audience he [Padmasambhava] criticized him and would not meet him. Approaching that person’s village the precious mahasiddha [Padmasambhava] said, ‘If unable to bear even seeing someone with broken damtsig what need to mention meeting and talking to them. To avoid seeing their village on the way, veil your eyes! Do not meet or talk for even a moment with any yogi who has broken damtsig! Act in accordance with all of this!’ This comes from his [Padmasambhava] biography. Thus, those previous great mahasiddhas exhibited great fear at even meeting those who had breached damtsig with other Lamas. That is why (I felt as I did).” *The Autobiography of the First Panchen Lama, Blo-bzang Chos-kyi rGyal-mtshan*, (*chos.smr.ba'i dge.slong blo.bzang chos.kyi rgyal.mtshan gyi spyod.tshul gsal.bar ston.pa nor.bu'i phreng.ba zhes.byab.bzhugs.so*), People’s Library of Tibet, (*bod ljongs mi.dmangs dpe.skrun.khang*), 1990, p. 163-4.

<sup>57</sup> Jangtse and Shartse are the two main colleges of Ganden Monastery.

<sup>58</sup> A Lama from Ganden who earlier strongly relied on Dorje Shugden but already in the 1980’s, when he was religious advisor to His Holiness and after the Dalai Lama had started to restrict Dorje Shugden practice, changed to become one of the strongest anti-Dorje Shugden advocates. Serkong Tsenshab was the son of the great adept Serkong Dorje Chang, a famous Gelugpa Lama from the last century who, during that incarnation disrobed and engaged in consort practice -- legitimately, everyone seems to agree.

<sup>59</sup> Ritual cakes

<sup>60</sup> sPiti, one area in India’s present day Himachal Pradesh, where many people relied on Dorje Shugden, is where Serkong Tsenshab went on a virtual crusade to get people to stop relying on this protector. Serkong Dorje Chang was widely considered one of the most highly realized Gelugpa Lamas. For those who know the different levels, it is unthinkable to call the son by the name of the father.

<sup>61</sup> In the early 17th century just before the Fifth Dalai Lama took control of Tibet the ruler of Tsang, a follower of the Kagyu tradition attacked Gelugpa monasteries. This was one of his reasons for the Fifth Dalai Lama’s political take-over. See for example, Warren W. Smith, Jr.: *Tibetan Nation*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1996, chapter five, especially pp. 105-8.

becomes a cycle of ever larger and deeper conflicts. Like two stones hitting one another -- one needs to worry about fire. Neither side is willing to change. Personally, I am worried that the conflict will escalate into a larger one, since both sides are dug in. They will die for their positions. In future, this might split the Tibetan community. Dharamsala<sup>62</sup> says there are just a few Dorje Shugden followers, but this is not true. There are so many, about one third of all Buddhists who really practice (not of the general population) rely on Dorje Shugden. Because Tibetans don't have the freedom, they are afraid to speak out.

The exile Tibetans are supposed to be democratic, but they are not. For example, in the monasteries, if someone goes against the abbot, he is suspended. The Tibetan government acts the same way. Their structure and actions are the same as that of a monastery.<sup>63</sup> The Tibetan government is not true, not honest. They have democracy on their tongue but do not act on it. I am only saying this because I am really fed up with their actions and all of these conflicts they have created. I am speaking from my heart, not merely complaining. We lost our leader and we have no others. Everyone is too scared.

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Jamphel Yeshe, sixty-year-old President of the Dorje Shugden Society, summarized and wrote down his life's contributions upon request from a Dorje Shugden support group. What follows is an extract from the translation of an unpublished biographical statement.

From September 1997, the Tibetan community has been circulating my dossier (one among ten others) published by the Security Bureau of the Tibetan exile government. Like a "wanted poster," it was put up repeatedly on walls of Tibetan settlements around India and Nepal. This poster gives basic information about my whereabouts and that of my family. It also gives defamatory, wrong information about my person, falsely accusing me of working for the Chinese government, the worst possible disgrace for a Tibetan in exile. This and other defamatory acts that aim at ostracizing me and my family from society have been very painful and changed my life radically. Even worse than the death threats against me were the threats against my wife, who had to leave as a result. I had to send the children abroad for safety reasons. When my six-year-old daughter playfully answered the telephone, anonymous callers told her, "We will kill your Daddy." This traumatized her so severely that she would check on me constantly, try to close all the doors, and prevent me from going outside. We have all been separated from each other for quite some time now, mother and father from children, husband and wife from each other. In addition, my business is boycotted by Tibetans who believe the distortions of the exile government, and my economic base is disappearing. I am alone and isolated from others in my already isolated exile society.

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<sup>62</sup> Dharamsala has become synonymous with the Tibetan government in exile. Tibetans usually refer to Dharamsala when they talk about the people in power. This does not necessarily seem to refer to His Holiness the Dalai Lama directly, even though it is his administration that is under discussion. Tibetans try to avoid blaming the Dalai Lama at all cost. Thus, criticism is usually aimed at "Dharamsala." It is a generic term for the Tibetan power structure.

<sup>63</sup> A monastery is by definition structured hierarchically. It is strictly based on seniority and the authority of the elders, and membership is voluntary. He is saying that this is the wrong model for the structure of a government, particularly on that claims to be democratic and to represent all people.

I am listing here my small contribution to social and public life since coming into exile, in order to set the record straight. Soon after I escaped from Tibet in the middle of 1959, I served as a group leader in Dalhousie for several years. Under my care were about eighty old people who were part of a temporary settlement of five hundred Tibetans. At the same time I was in charge of the Dalhousie branch of Ganden Shartse monastery. I acted as its treasurer for several years. After that, I served the Dalhousie branch of the Cholsum Organization, the largest umbrella of all Tibetan regional and social welfare organizations.

While studying in Varanasi at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, I contributed to many activities of the Institute. I was also an active member of the freedom movement from its inception at Varanasi. This organization became part of the backbone of the Tibetan exile administration. I served this organization in various capacities also in Dharamsala and Delhi. From 1975, I served the Gelugpa Cultural Society as a representative of Ganden Shartse and was active in exploring the possibility for a joint Mönlam Festival<sup>64</sup> of all Buddhist traditions. In 1979 the Great Prayer Festival was celebrated by monasteries belonging to the Gelug, Sakya, Nyingma, and Kagyu traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, presided over by the two Tutors of His Holiness, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche and Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche as well as many abbots, tulkus, monks, scholars and prominent lay people. This was the most special event in the history of the Gelugpa Cultural Society.<sup>65</sup>

During my long stay in Delhi, I have tried to perform social services for different kinds of Tibetans according to my capacity. My personal name, Jamphel Yeshe or Chatreng Yeshe, is well known for my contribution in the Tibetan community. I have made continued efforts to request members of my own community and other countries to support Tibetans in need and the Tibetan cause in general. I received a medal of appreciation from Amdo Jamyang, the camp leader at the time of Majnuka Tilla in Delhi, for helping raise fund for the Tibetan school at that camp. My own regional group, the Chatreng Association, has acknowledged my contribution to developing its organization and helping its members. I also tried to find a way to build a residence for His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Delhi, since he does not have a place of his own to stay on his many visits to and through the Indian capital on his way abroad. But since I am merely an individual without means, I made an impassioned appeal and detailed proposal to the Tibetan Women's Association. But the plan never materialized. His Holiness still has to stay in hotels when he comes to Delhi.

For all my life in exile, I have had the welfare of Tibetans and the idea of freedom constantly on my mind. As is well known in the Tibetan community, I worked towards that end in many

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<sup>64</sup> The Great Prayer Festival was instituted by Je Tsong Khapa in the fourteenth century to commemorate the great miraculous deeds of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. It was traditionally a Gelugpa-dominated occasion and took place in Lhasa the first month of the Tibetan year.

<sup>65</sup> While in Tibet the Great Prayer Festival, originated by Je Tsong Khapa in the fifteenth century, traditionally included everyone, today there are several such festivals organized under the same name and in the same style by different religious groups in the exile community and at different times of the year. With the split in the Gelug tradition forced by the exile government, there are now also separate Gelugpa Mönlam Festivals. In addition, Tibet House in New York, for example, calls its yearly fund raising event, held around the traditional Tibetan new year, also Mönlam Chenmo Festival, while in the year 2000 The Great Prayer Festival will be celebrated in Washington D.C. at the time of the Dalai Lama's birthday with a million visitors expected to participate in the festivities.

different ways. All of this is destroyed now by the defamation campaign against me and my family. Because of death threats, I cannot go anywhere alone. I have to live in constant fear of losing my life, my family, my community, my access to religion, my livelihood, -- in short, everything that is dear to me and makes my life worth living.

From an interview with Jamphel Yeshe, Delhi, October 1997: When we first escaped to India, it was because of our religious faith. We also had the strong hope to return to a free Tibet. For more than thirty years we held the hope we will get freedom for our country. But that has changed completely now and not only because the Chinese are so intransigent. Even the hope for future freedom has been dashed because of the exile administration's more recent policy.<sup>66</sup>

Q: How has the ban affected you personally?

A: Since the ban we have endless inner turmoil, day and night. My situation is not exceptional. Each and every Tibetan Buddhist who is not able to relinquish faith in his or her<sup>67</sup> Guru is in the same situation. Since the ban was imposed by the Tibetan exile government, families have broken down in every Tibetan community. Children broke relations with their parents and teachers and students have stopped speaking with each other. These things happened because the Tibetan exile government started a signature campaign against our faith. We were asked to sign a list swearing that we will give up our reliance on the Dharmapala (Dorje Shugden) for this and all future lives. These lists were passed around very publically so everyone could see who signed and who not. When the government stopped the Women's Association and Youth Congress continued to push people to sign. Through the public nature of this campaign we have been completely marginalized. As the president of the Dorje Shugden Society, it was my duty to inform all Tibetans about the situation.

If a Tibetan speaks out, the automatic reaction now is to find out whether or not he relies on Dorje Shugden. If he does, then as a Tibetan I should not have any contact with him, according to the Tibetan exile government. Because of the atmosphere of distrust created this way, I have lost many of my former friends and business contacts. They all know I rely on Dorje Shugden. It has become a trend within the Tibetan exile community for people to declare openly that they want to go after me and finish me. Threats are also made openly against my colleagues in the Society and we experience this prevailing atmosphere of fear and distrust as a great burden.

I am a family man, I have three children. My oldest son is twelve years old, the second son nine years, and my daughter is six years old. The two older children were in school at the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) in Dharamsala. I and my family received many explicit death threats. I found out through reliable sources -- I can't tell you who -- that an ex-military man and a member of the Tibetan parliament from Rajpur was discussing my two sons and their

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<sup>66</sup> With the five-point peace plan delivered in Washington, D.C., in 1987 and incorporated into the Strasbourg Proposal delivered to the European Parliament in Strasbourg 1988 the Dalai Lama outlined a strategy for a Tibet under Chinese suzerainty. Today this plan is formulated as "the Middle Way approach" to the political status of Tibet asking for cultural autonomy rather than political. The conclusion, the goal of Tibetan independence has been sacrificed in the process but this was not entirely clear to Tibetans until the 1990's. Tibetans believed in the 1980's that the Dalai Lama's long term strategy was independence and the Strasbourg proposal was just a temporary solution.

<sup>67</sup> I am using "his or her" because the Tibetan was not gender specific as it would seem if I used only "his."

whereabouts in school in Dharamsala and my involvement with the Dorje Shugden Society with other Tibetans from a military background.<sup>68</sup> He said they were well trained and that he and his colleagues would do whatever was necessary and whatever the Tibetan exile government wanted them to do against the Dorje Shugden people.<sup>69</sup> So I took my children out of the school in Dharamsala and sent them to a safe place in another country. The perception was that anyone who wanted to attack us was free to do so. The threat letters I received included statements like, “We will not spare your wife and children.”<sup>70</sup>

My wife and I received many threatening phone calls, and even our six year old daughter. When asked for a name, the answer was only “I am a man.” Once, when they called, the child answered the telephone, as she often did, and the person on the other end told her, “There are fifteen of us here in Delhi and we will kill you and we will kill your father. We will destroy you.” My daughter was very upset. She went to close all the doors and told me to stay inside. Early in the morning she would come to my bed and touch me. When I moved, she shouted, overjoyed, “Daddy is still alive.”

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Mrs. Pema is the wife of the retired schoolteacher Dr. Thubten. It is not clear why people call him doctor. He had been a monk earlier and holds a Geshe Lharampa degree from Ganden Shartse (1958). He escaped from Tibet in 1959 and joined the teacher training program in Dharamsala. From 1963 he worked for the Indian government for 29 years in the Central Tibetan School system in Mussoorie, in South India, in Dalhousie and Shimla. In 1991 the family bought a small piece of land in the Clementown Tibetan settlement near Dehradun and built a house there. They have a daughter age twenty-two. Mrs. Pema says she was introduced to the Dorje Shugden practice by her husband but has become a strong believer herself now. She is crying as soon as she starts to talk and intermittently breaks into uncontrollable sobs. She is clearly still traumatized from the events which happened a year ago and again several months ago. I talked to Mrs. Pema’s nephew, a monk at Ganden, independently at another time. He had been locked inside the house during the arson attempt and confirmed her story. I met Mrs. Pema unexpectedly in Delhi in October 1997; her husband was somewhere in Delhi in an undisclosed place, so I could not interview him.

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<sup>68</sup> Many Tibetans have joined the Indian army as part of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police after the CIA supported Khampa resistance ceased to be active. They have their own units, their own uniforms with their symbols but do not wear them publically. Suitable in high altitudes, they had hopes of helping free Tibet. They were used in the Bangladeshi war, in the front lines, according to Tibetans. They are trained in the Dehradun-Rajpur area, the foothills of the Himalayas of U.P. in India. See, for example, A. Tom Grunfeld: *The Making of Modern Tibet*, p. 162.

<sup>69</sup> For Tibetans who firmly believe that the Dalai Lama’s life is threatened by those who rely on Dorje Shugden, these sentiments, and the willingness to act on them, are completely credible.

<sup>70</sup> One such letter says (in translation): “To Tashi Dolma [Jamphel Yeshe’s wife], from D.P. Gyatso. According to what I heard, your president husband, Chatreng Yeshe, has engaged in many plans regarding the Dalai Lama. Moreover, it is also said that you are going on a film shooting about the Dalai Lama, [*Seven Years in Tibet*] This being the case you are not permitted to participate in this filming. If you go, I will not spare you easily. We are youths of Darjeeling Voluntary Youth. If you don’t believe it, you can come to Darjeeling anytime. Do you understand, slut. Secretary of Youth Group, Darjeeling, Kalimpong. P.S. Some of us are now in Delhi. You have to inform Chatreng Yeshe.”



Mrs. Pema: My husband knows much about Dorje Shugden because he is a Geshe Lharampa and earlier had studied the subject extensively. He explained the history to people who had not even heard about Dorje Shugden before and were told all kinds of misinformation. So after that people were saying he is not obeying the Dalai Lama. October last year (1996) we came to Delhi for religious observances and left our daughter and nephew in the house [in Clementown near Dehradun]. On November 7, 1996, a group of people came and locked the house from the outside with the children inside and then threw stones at it and tried to set the house on fire. Luckily only the curtains caught fire through the open windows, the house did not burn because it is made of concrete. The children were able to stop the fire from spreading inside but men with masks had poured kerosene over the front door before they ignited it. For two hours they pelted the house with stones and shouted obscenities, including references to Dorje Shugden in Amdo dialect. Kalsang, my daughter, was finally able to open the door from the inside with a hairpin. She called us in Delhi. When we went to talk to the police, they told us that they could not protect us and that we should leave for a while because our lives were in danger there. They assured us that the house would be under police protection. So we left for Delhi.

On June 29, 1997, our house in the Clementown settlement was attacked again. We got a call saying that if we wanted to save any of our possessions we better come back immediately. When we got there, we went to the police station for help. They accompanied us and left two policemen with us while we looked through the house to see what could be salvaged. We found the door had been broken down and everything was destroyed with broken china everywhere. Thirty years of hard work went into this house. Fifteen to twenty minutes after the other policemen had left, a group of seventy to ninety Tibetans came and bombarded the house with stones again for two hours. The two policemen left for our security ran away. After some time twenty to twenty-five different policemen, some with two or three stars, came from Dehradun. A journalist took pictures. The crowd took his camera and injured his hand.<sup>71</sup> Two or three women held back a policeman while the Tibetan men kept attacking the house. Leading officers finally told us to take our possessions and to leave since the crowd would kill us and they would not take any responsibility. I told them I did not want to leave the house. If I cannot have religious freedom, I will die for it.

We asked the police for a written statement saying that they could not protect us, but they refused. They only said that if we did not leave, the mob would kill us. Then a policeman came with a truck and took us away for protection. We were kept in police custody for five hours. A friend and the driver who had brought us from Delhi were hurt and did not receive medical attention. Then the local police brought our belongings, saying that we had to vacate the house. They did this as a favor to us since the mob was threatening to burn down everything. Since most of the things were broken, like the TV and refrigerator, we told them they are of no use anymore, that they should have left them to burn.

Q: Why did you not initiate legal action?

A: We don't know anything about Indian law and if we try to complain or file a case, there is a

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<sup>71</sup> This is documented in a number of different articles in the local Hindi language press. See Part II, Nov. 8-9, 1996.

bribery system. We don't have any money. A complaint will take a long time. Besides, the Clementown police were bribed by Tibetans. The truck the police had loaded our things on and sent us away from the settlement was paid for by the police with money they received from the government in exile. They have made our life like hell.

Now we live in Delhi where we have to pay rent. We lost everything and my husband is too old to start over again. The people in Clementown want to kill him. Only because of the religious ban did we have trouble there, after we had lived there peacefully for five years. My daughter did not sign the petitions to give up Dorje Shugden. There were ten to fifteen families in Clementown who relied on Dorje Shugden. We were the only one that did not sign the petition. My husband was a disciple of Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche and had strong faith in him. So there was no question of giving his signature. My husband taught Tibetan children for thirty years. Many of them now hold office in Dharamsala and they turned against him like this. Everywhere he went he used to get respect from former students -- thousands and thousands. Now everything is destroyed, is finished. We are refugees a second time, once from Tibet and once from India.

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## PART II

In this section I will present the documentation for the interviews of Part I. It is not a history, since that would require a different kind of research possible here, which would have to include Tibetan texts, both published and unpublished.<sup>1</sup> The material presented here is meant to contribute to the discussion with information not available now or not taken into consideration. The Dorje Shugden conflict is so emotional because it directly involves the Dalai Lama myth. For that reason it is extremely difficult to get reliable, objective information. It is also the reason why I have resorted to this very tedious method of presenting basic information. I hope this will provide a body of facts with the least interpretive overlay. Since the Tibetan exile government denies there is a ban or that anything discriminatory occurred against Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden, there is nothing much to present from their side in terms of facts. Unproven allegations and defamations against Dorje Shugden practitioners spread on behalf of the exile government will be discussed in Part III, particularly in the section “War of Words.” In what follows, I am listing only the events for which there is documentation or reliable eye witnesses. Thus, it is by no means a complete or exhaustive chronicle. In order to better understand the unprecedented eruption of the Dorje Shugden conflict in 1996, I will first provide some historical background going back to the time when a highly realized master, Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, first arose as a Dharmapala in the seventeenth century.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE EVENTS OF 1996

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has said on many occasions<sup>2</sup> that he considers himself particularly close to the Fifth Dalai Lama and to the Thirteenth and that he will complete what his predecessors started. Specifically, he has referred to a ban (*bkag.sdom*) he claims the Fifth and Thirteenth Dalai Lamas have imposed on Dorje Shugden as justification for asking Buddhists to stop this practice now and for proclaiming so widely his oracles’ “prophesies”

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<sup>1</sup> A uniquely Tibetan genre is “pe.bum” not much known or commented on in the Western context, since it was to a large extent governed by the rules of the oral transmission aspect of Buddhist lineages. It is a collection of texts about a practice by different authors which includes hand written, unpublished material of oral advice and explanations that pertained to secret mantra (vajrayana) practices, etc., which often held the key to the success of a practice, lineage, history. In Tibet, such a collection was not easily available or not published in the common sense of that word. Today, some have been published but are circulated mostly among those people who have been initiated into the practice. For example, according to oral sources, the texts concerning the practice of Dorje Shugden according were collected in Tibet by Tagri Dorje Chang by request of the Regent Radreng Rinpoche. I could not find written confirmation of this. There is reference in the below edition that the Mongolian Lobsang Tayang had collected many of the texts. The “pe.bum” from Tibet was expanded by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche and the two volume ‘jam.mgon bstan.sung rgyal.chen rdo.rje shugs.ldan rtsal kyi be.bum bzhugs.so, published by Gurudeva Rinpoche in Delhi, first early sixties, and this expanded version in 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous times to Tibetans. For example, “I have come to be counted among the line of the Fifth Dalai Lama. I feel a definite karmic connection with my predecessor. It is my mandate to complete what was in practice during the Fifth Dalai Lama and my predecessor. This is my responsibility.” In public, March 21, 1996, Dharamsala, quoted by the Kashag in an announcement of May 22, 1996. He also stated this in many Western interviews, most recently on CNN, Jan. 3, 1999, 10:30 pm EST; and “This much I can say. Through previous lives I do believe there is some special connection between my being and the Tibetan nation. My spiritual work and the freedom of Tibet are inextricably linked. And I feel, with some confidence, some connection with previous Dalai Lamas, particularly the Fifth and Thirteenth Dalai Lamas.” Fourteenth Dalai Lama in, *The Spiritual Tourist: A Personal Odyssey through the Outer Reaches of Belief*, by Mitch Brown, Bloomsbury: New York and London, 1998, p.122.

concerning the danger to his life and the cause of Tibet allegedly coming from Dorje Shugden. Since the Fourteenth Dalai Lama identifies himself so closely specifically with these two of his predecessors, I will start out with some relevant points concerning this historical identity.

### ➤ Seventeenth Century

In explanation of their anti-Dorje Shugden activities, Tibetans like to give as a reason that Dorje Shugden was surrounded by conflict from the very beginning.<sup>3</sup> The beginning was in 1654 or 1656.<sup>4</sup> Scholars disagree about the historical origin of Dorje Shugden<sup>5</sup> as a protector largely

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<sup>3</sup> The Fourteenth Dalai Lama himself refers to a “conflict between the [Fifth] Dalai Lama and Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen,” with reference to the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama and his *Secret Visions*, quoted in the Kashag Announcement of May 22, 1996. He also refers to conflict between deities from that time in a public teaching on March 10, 1996, Dharamsala.

<sup>4</sup> Some texts, Gene Smith, for example, cite 1654, others in 1656, Yamaguchi based on the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama and Jamyang Shepa (*Tibetan Chronological Tables of 'Jam-dbyangs bzad-pa and Sum-pa mkhan-po*, translated by Alaka Chattopadhyaya, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies Samath, Varanasi, 1993, p. 237.) The discrepancy arises not only from the usual difficulties of establishing correct dates in the Tibetan historical context (for these difficulties and some corrections of earlier chronologies see Chattopadhyaya in the introduction to the *Tibetan Chronological Tables*) but also from the different interpretations of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's subsequent incarnation(s) of which there are several versions. This has caused some confusion exacerbated by mistaking historical references and time with religious accounts, as so often happens in the domain of Tibetan history. See, for example, Dreyfus: “The Shuk-den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel.”

<sup>5</sup> From the beginning the continuity of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was obscured by official sources, because he is believed to have been assassinated. “Again, in the fifteenth year of the term Regent Sonam Chopel, also known as Sonam Rabten, in the Fire-Monkey year of the 11<sup>th</sup> Sexagenary Cycle, in 1656, the reincarnate Lama of Drepung Zimkhang Ghongma known as Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, was unjustly assassinated out of jealousy by stuffing a silk scarf into his throat. Immediately thereafter, [the deceased] transformed into a malevolent force known as Dhol Gyalpo, creating great havoc upon those of Ganden Potang [the estate of the Dalai Lamas at Drepung Monastery of which Sonam Chopel, the Regent believed to be responsible for Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's death, was the main administrator during the Fifth Dalai Lama's time as well as the name for the government founded by him]. When this continued time and again, following order of the Dalai Lama, the Sakya Dagchen [ruling head of the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism] Sonam Rinchen brought Dhol Gyalpo under covenant, becoming what is known as Dorje Shugden who is nowadays propitiated as protector deity by most of the patrons and masters on the Gelug side.” Dujom Rinpoche: *Crystal Mirror: A Short and Lucid History of Tibet, the Land of Snows*, (*gangs.cen bod.chen.po'i rgyal.rabs bsdu sgal.du bkod.pa sngon.med dvangs.shel 'phrul.gyi me.long zhes.byab ba bzugs*), a text completed in 1961 but not published until 1978 for censorial reasons involving the exile government in Dharamsala. The place of publication of this text was withheld, page 373 or folio 508. This account is of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen having turned into a worldly spirit, something which is not accepted by those who rely on him as a Dharmapala.

The historian Sumpa Khenbo denies that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen could have turned into such a spirit, “That the particular Tibetan king [i.e. *rgyal.po* spirit] is the incarnation of *gZim.khang gong.ma* [resident of the Upper House, i.e. Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen] as said by Grags.rgyan is nothing but a biased statement.” (*Tibetan Chronological Tables*, p. 248) Desi Sangye Gyatso, the Regent of Tibet after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1682-1703) wrote that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was first a candidate for the incarnation of the fourth Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso, and that “later he became impure.” This was the “official” government's version, perhaps an attempt to justify why they did not look for the incarnation of such a highly evolved, famous Lama. It is not tenable from a religious point of view for someone like Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen to have “become impure,” if indeed this Lama was as highly realized as reported by religious people not involved in politics.

In 1657, when the Regent Sonam Choephel, who is believed to have killed Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, died, there was talk for the first time of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen having arisen as a *rgyal.po* spirit, a class of beings considered very dangerous because they are the result of monks who have broken their vows. Other learned Tibetans have argued that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was highly realized and could not have taken rebirth as such a spirit. (See, for example, Pabongka Rinpoche in the introduction to the *rkang.so*). Sumpa Khenbo (1704-1788) writes that Sonam Choephel (Regent from 1641-1657 when he died), “Due to much devotion to dGe-lugs he assumed the role of the protector of the religion and the savior of the dGe-lugs-pa as per popular belief. I think this is true.” (*Tibetan Chronological Tables*, p. 238). Dreyfus claims this is an ironic remark. However, there is no indication why it should be interpreted this way. Regent Sonam Choephel would by current standards be called a Gelugpa zealot in the sense that he focused on the worldly supremacy of Gelugpa power in his aid to the Fifth Dalai Lama and the warfare accomplishing this aim, with his family engaging in “one of those frequent and unrewarding campaigns the Dge-lugs-pa regime thought necessary to undertake against Bhutan as the bastion of the older sects.” (Richardson: *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, p. 450). His death was kept secret for a year and perhaps he haunted those who had participated in the assassination.

because religious accounts in Tibetan Buddhism often do not follow historical time. As already mentioned, it is beyond the scope of this book to give a detailed historical analysis of this period. Since the Tibetan belief system is unique and historical knowledge mixed with religious presuppositions<sup>6</sup> difficult for us to unravel, some points about religion need to be mentioned here. As is widely known, Buddhists believe in reincarnation. Tibetans claim to be able to trace incarnation lines across life times. They instituted this belief in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on a large scale,<sup>7</sup> first as a system to extend social influence, then to absorb older religious lineages and their supporting families,<sup>8</sup> and then for political legitimation starting in 1642 when the Fifth Dalai Lama established the Ganden Potang government.<sup>9</sup> It was a turbulent

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One version of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's story is that he reincarnated as a Chinese Emperor. The belief among Tibetans is that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen did, but not immediately. He took birth as the Ching Emperor Qianlong (ascended throne in 1736), active during the time of the seventh and eighth Dalai Lamas and who was patron and disciple to the great Tibetan scholar Changya Rolpa'i Dorje. This belief might be based on a prediction the first Panchen Lama Lobsang Chokyi Gyaltsen made to his young disciple, Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, that in future he would be born in the land of Manjushri (Tibet was considered the land of Avalokiteshvara and China the land of Manjushri) in order to benefit a great number of beings, when there was no Dharma in that land and that he would light the torch of Dharma there which will blaze forever. Quoted in *'jam.mgon bstan.sung rgyal.chen rdo.rje shugs.ldan rtsal kyi be.bum bzhugs.so*, Vol. 1, Guru Deva Losang Tenzin, Delhi, 1983, p. 17.

The version believed by religious Gelupas who rely on Dorje Shugden as Dharmapala is that after his death Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen went to the heavenly realms of the devas and emanated from there as the Dharmapala Dorje Shugden. (See, for example, .....verse from kangso) After the remains of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen were cremated the smoke went straight up into the sky, a sign that the deceased was taking rebirth in the heavenly realms. However, Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's main attendant got disturbed and prayed to his ascending master not to leave matters without clarification and without revealing the truth of the shameful acts against him. According to oral history, a shaft of the smoke separated and went horizontally towards Lhasa and the Potala Palace while the main column continued to move straight up skyward.

As in many Tibetan incarnation stories historical time inconsistencies are not explained. They do not have to fit a historical chronology since Buddhists believe that enlightened beings can go to many different worlds even simultaneously to aid others. Almost all incarnation lineages have huge gaps in historical time and are usually not stated in chronological order.

Particularly since Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden as a Dharmapala see him in the nature of Manjushri, the action of taming and bringing under oath, which is necessary only of worldly spirits, does not apply to Dorje Shugden. Hence, the importance of a historical dates fades under this account.

Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen himself wrote poetic verses mentioning that in future he will incarnate everywhere, not only in Tibet (stated in the introduction to the *be.bum*). A more recent scholar, one of this century, Kachen Sopala from Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, claims that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen reincarnated in the incarnation line of Ngari Tulkus. The present Ngari Rinpoche is the brother of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

<sup>6</sup> Consider, for example, the unusual type of power exercised by the highest political authority of a country to forbid a Buddhist master from reincarnating in a particular lineage, "...the Dalai Lama forbade any further reincarnation of that line [Zhwa-dmar-pa of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism now believed to incarnate in Situ Rinpoche, *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, FN #6, p. 359] and also confiscated the Zhwa-dmar-pa's property, including the monastery of Yangs-pa-can, which was conveyed to the Dge-lugs-pa monastery of Kun-bde-gling..." *ibid.*, p. 358, probably in 1793

<sup>7</sup> The Panchen incarnations of Tashi Lhunpo; the Dalai Lamas ('bras-sprungs gzims-khang óg-ma lineage); the Panchen Sönam Dragpa incarnations ('bras-sprungs gzims-khang gong-ma lineage); dben-sa sprul-sku (Tsang); skyid-shod zhabs-drung (Bhutan's incarnations of Padma Karpo); khalkha rje-btsun dam-pa (Mongolia's highest official incarnation), for example. See Introduction by E. Gene Smith to *The Autobiography of the First Panchen Lama blos-bzang-chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan*, pp. 11-12

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3; for example, "The rebirth of the First Dalai Lama as the son of Grub-chen Kun-dga-rgyal-mtshan resulted in the end of a hereditary line of Shangs-pa Bka'-brgyud-pa lamas. This process continued until recent times; the 6<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama brought the Dge-lugs-pa considerable leverage with his branch of the Gnyos, the descendants of Padma-gling-pa, the chief lamas of the Mtsho-sna area." *ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>9</sup> It is reverse reasoning to claim that the process using lines of incarnation to legitimate political power, which resulted in the institution of Dalai Lama that unifies religion and politics, was sanctified by Tsong Khapa just because one of his disciples, Gendundup, was posthumously called the first Dalai Lama, as does Gareth Sparham in his introduction to *The Fulfillment of All*

time culturally and politically and full of conflict.<sup>10</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama actively participated<sup>11</sup> in helping the Mongolian armies defeat the forces of the King of Tsang who had openly discriminated against and persecuted Gelugpas.<sup>12</sup> There was violent conflict at the inception of the Dalai Lama's political institution and the Ganden Potang government. Yet Tibetans do not, on those grounds, deny its legitimacy today, even after the loss of their country. The doctrine of non-violence currently associated with Tibet was championed first in exile in India, although "violent rites" continue to be performed.<sup>13</sup>

It is believed that Dorje Shugden arose in the form of a Dharma protector after his immediate predecessor, believed to have been the most renowned, learned Gelugpa master of his time, Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen (1619-1654), had been assassinated.<sup>14</sup> Buddhist ontology distinguishes between different levels of existence, between gross and subtle material bodies. While human beings and most animals have gross material form, the majority of beings have subtle energy bodies invisible to common perception of the material senses. All Buddhist protectors and most other helpful beings in the Buddhist pantheon are believed to have such subtle mental energy bodies invisible to the physical eye. Dorje Shugden is one of those materially invisible forces believed by those who rely on him to be in the same continuity as Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, the accomplished master whose actions were considered beyond evil intent.<sup>15</sup> Buddhists also believe

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*Hopes*, a text by Je Tsong Khapa he translated. The institution of Dalai Lama was created in 1642 and Je Tsong Khapa passed away in 1419. In other words, it was the Dalai Lamas who appealed to the religious authority of Tsong Khapa to help establish their own power.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *Tibetan Nation*, chapter 5

<sup>11</sup> Including violent rituals, in 1641, for example, "The Dalai Lama sees in his vision that a large human head with a macabre face rises in front of the offerings on the altar; it opens its mouth wide, and numerous human heads fall into it like grains into a bag. The Dalai Lama remarks that this vision is a sign of success concerning the objective of the rite which is the victory of Gushri Khan and his forces over the King of Tsang in 1642." *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, p. 15, but it is not until 1653, after his return from China that "... he perceives that he has in fact become Guru drag-dmar [a wrathful aspect of Padmasambhava, p. 54] and is so big that his head reaches the heavens. Due to the accomplishment of his meditation, he makes the remark that he has gained some confidence in performing a 'violent rite'..." p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Tibetan Nation*, chapter 5; Introduction to TAOTFPL, p. 3; *Tibetan Chronological Tables*, p. 221: an entry for 1618 by Jamyang Shepa reads "Se-ra and 'Bras-spung gling were destroyed in the seventh Hor month," and by Sumpa Khenbo, "The army of g'Tsang destroyed the monasteries of Se-ra and 'Bras-spung and murdered many a thousand."

<sup>13</sup> In 1995, for example, against Dorje Shugden in the presence of the Dalai Lama; and many government sponsored exorcism rituals during 1996/7 in the Tibetan settlements in South India as well as Nepal, according to eye witnesses.

<sup>14</sup> See Dujom Rinpoche: *Crystal Mirror: A Short and Lucid History of Tibet, the Land of Snows*, (*gangs.cen bod.chen.po'i rgyal.rabs bsdu sgal.du bkod.pa sngon.med dvangs.shel 'phrul.gyi me.long zhes.bya.ba bzhugs*), a text completed in 1961 but not published until 1978 for censorial reasons involving the exile government in Dharamsala. The place of publication of this text was withheld, page 373 or folio 508. Also, "Although it is not stated in the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama, according to common tradition, it is believed that Dakpa Gyaltsen was killed by stuffing his mouth with scarves." Fourteenth Dalai Lama in a talk, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978.

<sup>15</sup> See for example the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's statement, "It is my view that Tulku Dakpa Gyaltsen's instinctive behaviour and ways of thinking were good. I have looked at his Collected Works which also contain his secret biography. He seems to have been good in his studies and to have a gentle subdued mind. In his biography there are a few Guru Yoga texts, one of which has Buddha Shakyamuni in the center and around him: Guru Rinpoche [Padmasambhava] (9<sup>th</sup> century) surrounded by the Guru lineage of the Nyingma Order, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo (1092-1158) surrounded by the Guru lineage of the Sakya order; Marpa (1012-1097), Mila (1052-1135) and Dwagpo (1079-1161) surrounded by the Guru Lineage of Kagyud order; Je-Rinpoche [Tsong Khapa] (1375-419) and his two spiritual sons surrounded by the Gurus of Gelug order;... teachings of past Sakya, Gelug, Kagyud and Nyingma masters are summarized and it is explained that one should pay homage and recite eulogies through recollecting their qualities. At the conclusion, he explains that a boundless crime based on contemporary sectarianism produces causes to be thrown into bad realms and that he had written this Guru Yoga deliberately to avoid such negative results. Having seen that, I thought it was good. Usually, Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden] is considered a biased deity, since there was this account in the Collected Works of Dakpa Gyaltsen, I thought it was good." From the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's talk on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978.

that everything is caused. Thus, for an individual to be reborn as a wrathful being, like a protector, he must meet a violent death.<sup>16</sup> This is considered one of the conditions. However, the main cause is a promise Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen had made in a previous existence when he was one of Je Tsong Khapa's principal disciples. This was a pledge to take care of his master's illustrious doctrine when the need arose.<sup>17</sup> An exclusively religious explanation of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen turning into a Dharma protector seems to see the violent death merely as a condition of a larger viewpoint where revenge has no place.

Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's religious successor lineage is impressive. It included one of the most famous Indian secret mantra adepts (mahasiddha) of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Virupa,<sup>18</sup> and the great Tibetan masters Sakya Pandita Kungo Gyaltsen (1182-1251), Buton Rinchen drup (1290-1364),<sup>19</sup> and Panchen Sonam Dragpa (1478-1554).<sup>20</sup> Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was strictly a religious personage and not involved in politics. Until 1641, the Fifth Dalai Lama considered Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen next to him in rank.<sup>21</sup> They were both from Drepung monastery and both were disciples of the First Panchen Lama Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen,<sup>22</sup> who had given both their vows.

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<sup>16</sup> Conversely, anyone dying a violent death is likely reborn as an angry spirit. Since Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was a highly realized master, it is impossible for him to have been reborn as an angry spirit. Since his nature was goodness, the wrathful appearance is considered merely an external show to help those who are threatened or fearful. Hence, he was reborn as a Dharma protector, not as a harmful spirit, it is argued.

<sup>17</sup> The religious history of Dorje Shugden, his incarnations and deeds, are explained in *dge.lden bsten.pa bsrung.wa'i lha mchog.sptul.pa'i chos.rgyal chen.po rdo.rje shugs.lden.rtsel kyi ksang ksum rmat.du byung.ba'i rtogs.pa brjot.pa'i ktam.du by.ba dam.chen rgya.mtso dgyes.pa'i rol.mo shes.by.a.wa bshugs.so*, edited by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche

<sup>18</sup> About his feats see, *Masters of Enchantment, The Lives and Legends of the Mahasiddhas*, translated by Keith Dowman, Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont, 1988, pp. 35-9

<sup>19</sup> For a short biographical sketch, see Dratshadpa Rinchen Namgyal: *A Handful of Flowers, A Biography of Buton Rinchen Drub*, translated by Hans van den Bogaert, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> According to the following sources: lineage prayer of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen composed by the first Panchen Lama Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen, *'jam.mgon bstan.sung rgyal.chen rdo.rje shugs.lden.rtsal kyi be.bum bzhugs.so*, Vol 1, Delhi, 1983, pp. 131-8, with Sakya Pandita not included; *dge.lden bsten.pa bsrung.wa'i lha mchog.sptul.pa'i chos.rgyal chen.po rdo.rje shugs.lden.rtsel kyi ksang ksum rmat.du byung.ba'i rtogs.pa brjot.pa'i ktam.du by.ba dam.chen rgya.mtso dgyes.pa'i rol.mo shes.by.a.wa bshugs.so*, edited by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche; *dge.lden bsten.srung dkra.lha'i gyal.po srid ksum skye tgu'i srok bdag dam.lden bu.bshin skyeng.ba'i lha.mchok sprul.pa'i rgyal.chen rdo.rje shugs.lden rigs lnga.rtsal gyi sger.bskang rgyas.pa phyoks las mam.par rgyal.ba'i rnga tbyangs...bshugs.so*, by Pabongka Dechen Nyingbo; Heart Jewel, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, Tharpa Publications, London, 1991, pp. 81-90; Introduction to TAOTFPL, p. 11. It must be pointed out that religious successor lineages of famous Tibetan Buddhist masters are complicated. Not everyone agrees to the same predecessors. In that sense not one lineage is indisputable. Even the Dalai Lama's contains discrepancies when seen strictly from the point of view of historical succession and he usually makes a point to identify himself with the Fifth and the Thirteenth Dalai Lamas. To complicate matters, these lineages are often considered on the basis of any one continuity, body, speech, mind, or action, and there can be more than one incarnation of a famous master at the same time.

<sup>21</sup> "From this time [1634] through the iron-serpent year (1641) the incarnated lama of the gZims-khang-gong, next to me in rank, continued to attend the smon.lam." Yamaguchi quotes from the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, in "The Sovereign Power of the Fifth Dalai Lama," p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> It might be relevant to point out here that the first Panchen Lama (the forth in the Tibetan count) Lobsang Chokyi Gyaltsen (1567-1662) was the most important master of his times. He had been abbot of all three monastic universities, Sedegasum, and Tashi Lhunpo, a greatly accomplished vajrayana master, author of many texts, some still recited daily by all Gelugpas. He ordained the forth and Fifth Dalai Lamas as well as Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen and was Guru to both. It is said that he loved Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, who was not involved in politics, especially for his purely religious practice. The first Panchen Lama had a great deal of religious influence in Mongolia prior to the Fifth Dalai Lama's political take over. He created good relations with both the Mongols and Manchus and caused the Gelugpa tradition to flourish peacefully. It is said that he helped Tibet both in the religious and political sphere. He influenced Kushu Tenzin Chokyi Gyalpo, a Mongolian renowned for spreading the Gelug tradition in Mongolia. This laid the groundwork for the later more political success of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

Their personal histories had been intertwined in previous lives as well.<sup>23</sup> One problem seems to have been that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was very popular also with Mongolians<sup>24</sup> who played a large role in Tibetan political affairs at the time. Thus, he could easily have been perceived as a threat to those who had established political power with Mongolian backing.<sup>25</sup>

It was an important time for building the Tibetan national identity under the idea of a strong, unified central government “at Lhasa, which was enhanced by measures to demonstrate the continuity of the new regime with the religious rule of the great kings of the seventh to ninth centuries. Court ceremonial and pageantry, the building of the magnificent palace on the Potala hill underlined that theme; and the cult of the Dalai Lama as the embodiment of ‘Phags-pa Spyan-ras-gzigs (Avalokitesvara) was, perhaps, developed at this time.”<sup>26</sup> Political power was being compressed into an institution of a single authority<sup>27</sup> that could not tolerate competition in any domain. “For the Dalai Lama to become the supreme religious authority in all Tibet, it was imperative that only a single incarnate lama in the person of the Dalai Lama preside over ‘Bras-spungs monastery from his headquarters at the dGa’-ldan Palace.”<sup>28</sup> Ganden Potang (Palace), the name of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s residence at Drepung monastery, was later given to the Tibetan government, i.e. the Ganden Potang government. He did not take up residence in the newly enlarged Potala Palace still towering over Lhasa today until 1659. From oral accounts it is known that the steady stream of Mongolians passing the “Lower Residence” (i.e. that of the Dalai Lama) at Drepung monastery to make offerings to Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen at the “Upper Residence” was a constant annoyance to politically ambitious officials.<sup>29</sup> At the same time the Fifth Dalai Lama stabilized and increased his power, especially during the years between 1642 and 1653,<sup>30</sup> when he popularized his identification with Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of

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<sup>23</sup> A previous incarnation of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, Panchen Sonam Dragpa, a great master, writer, abbot of all monastic universities in turn, vajrayana adept, whose textbooks are still today used at Drepung, had been the teacher of two Dalai Lamas, yet the Fifth Dalai Lama disliked him and criticized him openly. Yamaguchi, claims that the Fifth Dalai Lama plagiarized his “Chronicle of Tibet” from Panchen Sonam Dragpa. *Ibid.*, p. 11. Thus, the Fifth Dalai Lama seems to have had difficulties with the lineage of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen through more than one life time.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>25</sup> Although most Tibetans believe that Gusri Khan handed over Tibet to the Fifth Dalai Lama, not everyone agrees with how the sovereignty of the Dalai Lama’s power was established. See, for example, “Sovereign Power of the Fifth Dalai Lama,” and “The Dissemination of the Belief in the Dalai Lama as a Manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara,” by Ishihama Yumiko, *Acta Asiatica* 64 (1993), pp. 38-56.

<sup>26</sup> *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, p. 390.

<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s assumption of political power see, “The Sovereign Power of the Fifth Dalai Lama: sPrul sku gZims-khang-gong-ma and the Removal of Governor Nor-bu,” by Professor Zuiho Yamaguchi, in *Memoirs of the Research Department of The Toyo Bunko* (The Oriental Library) No. 53, Tokyo, 1995

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>29</sup> “...it seems that there were two residence, (*bla-brang*), the so called lower residence of the Dalai Lama and the upper residence of those of the lineage of Tulku Dagma Gyaltsen, both of whom seem to have been quite famous. As a result of this it seems certain there were petty conflicts between the staff of the two residence.” Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *ibid.*, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978

<sup>30</sup> “...in the years between 1642 and 1653 the Dalai Lama took various actions presenting himself to the populace as a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara. Since Avalokiteshvara was believed already before the establishment of the dGe-lugs-pa school to be the bodhisattva charged with converting Tibet, it is beyond doubt that the faith engendered in the minds of both the nobility and the general populace as a result of the Dalai Lama’s actions served to gradually enhance the power of the Dalai Lama and rears him to a position on a different level from that of the regent and Gusri Khan and his descendants. Ever since then, right up until the present day, the Dalai Lama has continued to exert enormous influence over the people of Tibet as a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara.” “On the Dissemination of the Belief in the Dalai Lama as a Manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.” pp. 54-5; and “This consolidation of religious and secular power in a single figure was an important moment in Tibetan history, a consolidation that received strong ideological support through the promotion of the cult of Avalokitesvara.”



compassion special to Tibet, and the seminal king Songtsen Gampo credited with bringing Buddhism to Tibet. It was not until the eleventh century that the earlier Buddhist kings were identified with bodhisattvas.<sup>31</sup> Although in Tibetan religious history many Buddhist masters were celebrated as incarnations of Avalokitesvara,<sup>32</sup> this deity was now cultivated to legitimate the Tibetan national identity and attached as such to the lineage of the Dalai Lamas. To mark his accession as sovereign, the Fifth Dalai Lama also wrote a history of Tibet<sup>33</sup> in 1643, a text he

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*Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Princeton University Press, Princeton 1997, Introduction by Donald S. Lopez Jr., p. 31; see also the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, "...the lineage of the Dalai Lamas, which can be traced back to the Tibetan King, Choegyal Trisong Deutsan and even further to a relationship with Gyalpo Kunchog Bang." In a talk on July 13, 1978 in explanation of why the protector Nechung is more important for the Dalai Lama to cultivate than Dorje Shugden.

<sup>31</sup> "In Tibet's religious development the eleventh century was a formative period for subsequent religious movements and especially for the legitimation of the territory of larger Tibet (three provinces) by the Gelugpas in the seventeenth century. For the first time, the myth of associating the early kings -- still identified with "the Divine Rulers of the old beliefs," i.e. Bön (Richardson, p. 198) -- with important bodhisattvas was read back into history and carried forward from then on, "...Srongs-btsan sgam-po, Khri-srong lde-btsan and Ral-pa-can, who were acclaimed as 'manifestations' of Avalokitesvara, Manjushri and Vajrapani respectively. Srongs-btsan sgam-po, the most fearful warrior of all the kings, was not the 'manifestation' of the gentle benevolent Avalokitesvara, the Lord of Compassion." *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, Samten Karmay, Introduction pp. 1-2. It stands to reason that the Avalokitesvara myth, as the legitimation for power, was projected backwards into history, since the ancient myths of origin did not get absorbed into Buddhism until this period. According to the indigenous belief system, "the kings were descendants of the Phyva gods," ... who were "above all, warriors who lead the army in person and engaged in battle." *ibid.*, p. 1. In the myth of origin of the Tibetan people most widely told today, a rock demon (brag srin.mo) copulated with a monkey (spt'u) believed to have been a 'manifestation' of Avalokitesvara. They engendered the Tibetan people which places Avalokitesvara at their very inception. See, for example, Sakyapa Sonam Gyaltzen: *The Clear Mirror*, translated by McComas Taylor and Lama Choedak Yuthok, Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, 1996, Part I, in particular, chapter five. Later the myth (perpetuated in the rgyal.rabs.ksal.ba'i me.long) gets transferred to King Songtsen Gampo as the (religious) father of Tibet. According to some scholars, it is highly unlikely that that Lord, or jo.wo, had at the time of his flourishing anything to do with Avalokitesvara. *Die Werke des Regenten Sans Rgyas Rgya Mcó (1653-1705)*, Eine philologisch-historische Studie zum tibetischsprachigen Schrifttum, Kristina Lange, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 1976, p. 149, FN 28, (my translation). See also, "The Royal Way of Supreme Compassion," by Matthew Kapstein, *ibid.*, p. 70, where the source for the nationalistic Avalokitesvara myth is given as the "treasure" text (gter.ma), the Mani Bka' 'bum, from the twelfth and thirteenth century. The indigenous beliefs, now collected under the name Bön, have very different myths of origin. See for example, Philippe Cornu: *Tibetan Astrology*, Shambala, Boston, 1997, p. 20. This book contains a very readable introduction to the psychic-spiritual milieu of everyday Tibetan life lived until the Communist invasion. Today some of it continues but strangely fragmented and part of a new politicized overall setting. Also, *Drung, Deu and Bön*, by Namkhai Norbu, for an overview of the indigenous belief system of pre-Buddhist Tibet which continued to evolve in close proximity to Buddhism.

<sup>32</sup> From a translation of the "Annals of 'Gos lo-tsa-ba" composed by the Tibetan scholar and translator "Gö Lotsawa Shönnu Pal between 1476 and 1478, "Just as the Bodhisattva Manjushri took over China, in the same manner the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Arya Avalokitesvara protected this country of Tibet." *The Blue Annals*, George N. Roerich, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, Reprint of the Second Edition, 1996, p. 10006. Then the author lists many Tibetan adepts of Avalokitesvara (Book XIV).

<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed philological analysis of the role this text plays in rewriting history to justify Gelugpa power over larger Tibet (the three provinces) aided by establishing incarnation lineages to legitimate political power locally in various areas of Tibet, see *Die Werke des Regenten Sans Rgyas Rgya Mcó*, especially the section "Über die Schriften des Regenten," pp. 124-144. The Fifth Dalai Lama's writings also show his understanding of the political need to invoke the identity of the earlier Tibetan kings with ancient Bön practices that still form the basis for political institutions like the State Oracle, for example. In speaking of the Tibetan kings before Buddhist advent in the 7<sup>th</sup> century -- Songtsen Gampo is traditionally counted as the thirty-third Tibetan king -- the Fifth Dalai Lama writes, "...and for twenty-seven generations of kings politics was protected by the drung, [legendary narratives], deu [symbolic language of signs, like geomancy, divination, etc.] and Bön [shamanic rituals and knowledge]." *Drung, Deu and Bön*, Introduction, p. xix. The Fifth Dalai Lama had to unify politically all the different strands of religion. "He was born in a Rnying-ma-pa family and is widely believed in Tibet to have been for all his life a secret supporter of the unreformed sects," says Richardson in *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, p. 354, and most Tibetans believe he did not only support but practiced them. The *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama* testify to that even though they seem much more to belong to the Bön tradition which forms the foundation for the uniquely Tibetan conception of "power relations." In addition, to the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent Sangye Gyatso were attributed Sanskrit names and their elaborate lineages indicating that "with these fictitious religious-mythological genealogies the origin of their ancestors was not only to be found in the Tibetan ancient history but also anchored in the Indian Buddhist tradition in order to let their ancestry appear as noble as possible." *Die Werke des*

supposedly plagiarized from Panchen Sonam Dragpa,<sup>34</sup> a predecessor of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen. It stands to reason that the perceived rivalry between the two incarnate Lamas at Drepung did not originate with Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen,<sup>35</sup> although, according to some sources, he had been a candidate for the Fifth Dalai Lama<sup>36</sup> while others say the candidate had been a member of Dragpa Gyaltsen's family.<sup>37</sup>

If Yamaguchi is correct in his analysis of the texts that the Fifth Dalai Lama later rewrote his autobiography<sup>38</sup> to reflect history in a more favorable light, and if it is true that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was assassinated, it is not hard to imagine that official references to his popularity and deeds would be erased, minimal or negative. It is historical fact that no official search for an incarnation was undertaken. The main source of information for this time was the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama. We know that texts were removed from libraries because of the Fifth Dalai Lama's disapproval.<sup>39</sup> Such attention to "official" versions of the historical events of the time could explain why Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's incarnation would immediately be called into question and continued to be so by the Ganden Potang government,<sup>40</sup> although it is hard for

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*Regenten Sang Rgyas Rgya Mc'o*, pp. 121-2, (my translation).

<sup>34</sup> See above, Note 17.

<sup>35</sup> The current view of the Tibetan exile government as brought into a Western context by George Dreyfus in "The Shukden Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel" of attributing the rivalry solely to Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen, I believe serves a political agenda rather than representing any form of scholarship, neither the academic critical version nor the Tibetan one that takes into consideration the appropriate Buddhist distinctions, i.e. as between the two truths, literal and interpretive, etc.

<sup>36</sup> "The bKa'-brgyud-pa sect had already tried to make out the child as a reincarnation of one of their own lamas before he was recognized as that of the Fourth Dalai Lama, but this was not all. There was also another more serious candidate for the reincarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama among the dGe-lugs-pas themselves. This was Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan (1619-54), who was presented as a possible reincarnation before being finally recognized as the reincarnation of Pan-chen bSod-nams grags-pa (1478-1554), the teacher of the Third Dalai Lama." Samten Gyaltsen Karmay in the Introduction to *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, p. 3

<sup>37</sup> Yamaguchi in "The Sovereign Power of the Fifth Dalai Lama," p. 12; Yamaguchi then says, "From the very outset the presence of this incarnate lama [Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen] weighed heavily on the Fifth Dalai Lama."

<sup>38</sup> Yamaguchi, *ibid.*, p. 17; also see a detailed discussion of this problem in *Die Werke des Regenten Sang Rgyas Rgya Mc'o*. Even though the Tibetan word *mam.thar* is often translated with autobiography, this is a misnomer. A *nam.thar* of a Tibetan Lama was written by one of the aides in his close proximity because Lamas usually did not praise themselves. Thus, it is likely that events were included or omitted from the Fifth Dalai Lama's biography in accordance with how the writer of the times tried to portray events. There are discrepancies between different versions, according to Lange's philological studies, and many texts, also those of the regent, are believed to have been co-authored. Interestingly, the Ganden Potang, house or residence of the Fifth Dalai Lama at Drepung monastery, became a printing house.

<sup>39</sup> On grounds, in part, that the author belonged to the Karmapa school, the principal opponents of the Fifth Dalai Lama in his defeat of the Tsang King with the help of Gusri Khan, claims Hugh Richardson, *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, p. 80; and, "...since there exist no records of events in Tibet around 1642 other than the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography," *The Dissemination of the Belief in the Dalai Lama*, p. 39, which, moreover, Yamaguchi claims was revised after the Regent Sonam Choepel and Gusri Khan had passed away.

<sup>40</sup> Apparently changing texts to fit officially established views was not uncommon in Tibet. Even the one historical precedent the Dalai Lama cites again and again from Changya Rölpa'i Dorje to justify his Dorje Shugden policy appears to be based on one such case. The incident he refers to is narrated in Changya's biography of Trichen Ngawang Chogden. [(+) needs exact textual reference] An evil monk spirit (*rgyal.'gong*) from Dragsob (*brag.sob*) who was invoked by some active Lama retired from his monastic office (*bla.zur*) and a Khamtsen at Ganden. They built a wayside shrine for this spirit in the circumambulation path of Ganden. Trichen Ngawang Chogden declared this unsuitable. He said that since the time of Je Tsong Khapa and his disciples no worldly spirits were worshiped at his [Ganden] monastery and that in future this would also not be permitted. When that spirit was invoked through an oracle, he said that since the Trichen Rinpoche had said this, he had no choice but to leave and he excused himself and left for Taktse-Shöl. The Lama retired from his monastic office who had relied on that evil spirit died soon after as punishment by Kalarupa [one of Je Tsong Khapa's protectors]. There is no reference to Dorje Shugden in this passage. The evil monk spirit (*rgyal.'gong*) was continued to be worshiped as a local deity at the place where he came from. The same incident is referred to by the master Tuken in his biography of Changya. (Tib.: *thu'u-bkwan*)

Western people to understand why this old feud would be revived some three hundred fifty years later by the exile version of the Ganden Potang government and with similar intensity and vigor, especially when the Buddhist world view that government claims to preserve stresses the illusory nature of phenomenal reality. It would also be plausible that accounts of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's lineage, legacy, and religious accomplishments would be subject to distortions, different interpretations, some of which were adopted as "official" while others circulated more secretly, orally, and through less widely published sources kept carefully in the form of prayers and sacred texts.

After Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen's passing away, the Fifth Dalai Lama and some of his officials were convinced that he had come back as an harmful spirit.<sup>41</sup> Why would they, if Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen had not died a violent death?<sup>42</sup> Many inauspicious signs and events occurred and one would expect Buddhists, who believe in cause and effect and that results are particularly swift if actions involve a realized being, to conclude that these ill omens had to do with killing a holy being. But the government believed them to be caused by an evil spirit instead and employed the highest vajrayana practitioners of the time<sup>43</sup> to perform exorcism rituals to destroy that spirit. They could not, it is told, and the Sakya Lamas involved in the exorcism rituals told the Fifth Dalai Lama that they were not dealing with an ordinary spirit.

The Fifth Dalai Lama, according to oral history, accepted this and composed several verses in praise to Dorje Shugden in which he acknowledged his mistake of having misjudged Dorje Shugden's appearance<sup>44</sup> and the disturbances stopped.

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(1737-1802). See *Collected Works of Thu'u-bkwan Blo-bzang-chos-kyi-nyi-ma*, Vol. 1 (Ka), edited and reproduced by Ngawang Gelek Demo with Introduction by E. Gene Smith, Delhi, 1972). There the Lama retired from monastic office, *bla.zur*, is changed to retired throne holders, *khri.zur*, in the plural; the evil monk spirit, *rgyal.'gong*, to Dholgyal (Dorje Shugden); and Trichen Ngawang Chogden to Trichen Dorje Chang. "So in the past some Ganden Throneholders relied upon Dholgyal and inauspicious things occurred. Thus the great Throneholder Vajradhara destroyed the shrine [referring to the above incident about the local evil monk spirit] ... and expelled him from the monastery ... the account was told." From the grammatical mistakes Tibetan experts believe the blocks of this text were manipulated even before it was printed. The Dalai Lama refers to Tuken's version and not to the original by Changkya. The exile government's special committee charged (after 1996) with the task of finding textual legitimation for the ban and informing the Dalai Lama either did not or did not want to find this discrepancy.

<sup>41</sup> As already mentioned, Buddhism teaches that someone with high realizations cannot fall back into the dark stages of evil spirits. Thus, the ripening karma of a realized person being murdered is in accordance with Buddhist explanation of karma as well as his bearing this suffering while generating only virtuous intentions to benefit others (i.e. to protect the Buddha's doctrine) rather than reacting to harm others.

<sup>42</sup> Some people claim Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen committed suicide, another most improbable act for a Buddhist master of that caliber, especially one accomplished in secret mantra where the body is seen as the deity. Suicide would amount to killing a Buddha for such a person.

<sup>43</sup> The Fourteenth Dalai Lama mentions in his talk on July 13, 1978 that according to common knowledge, Rigdzin Terdag Lingpa of Mindol Ling and Rigzin Pema Trinley of Dorje Drag performed two fire rituals simultaneously, one at E-WAM and the other at the Potala, which were deliberately aimed to annihilate Dhol Gyalchen [i.e. Dorje Shugden].

<sup>44</sup> For those not familiar with Buddhist doctrine and at the risk of stating the obvious, the issue is religious power derived from the perspicacity to "see" the nature and appearance of subtle mental energy beings. If a Buddhist practitioner cannot distinguish between the subtle appearance of a Buddha and a demon, he or she could not possibly have the direct realization of the nature of reality. There are many interesting stories in Buddhist history concerning the distinction between appearance and reality, for example, the famous one about Upagupta who prostrates to Mara, the Buddhist incarnation of evil, whom Upagupta asks to manifested the appearance of the Buddha, with Upagupta claiming he prostrated to the Buddha, not to Mara. See, John S. Strong: *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta, Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, Chapter five.

## PROPITIATION OF SHUGDEN BY THE GREAT FIFTH DALAI LAMA<sup>45</sup>

HUM!

Though unmoving from the spontaneous, primordial sphere,  
Your ferocious power is swifter than lightning,  
You're fully endowed with confidence to judge right and wrong  
Invited with faith, may you please come to this place!

Wearing monk's robes, adorned with a golden domed hat,  
Right hand holding a club and left, a human heart,  
riding various mounts of dragon, Garuda and so forth  
You, who subdue the various demonesses of the charnel grounds, I praise!

I arrange favorite animals and various offering substances.  
I reveal and confess not reversing my image of you  
As a mundane spirit  
Because of being somewhat clouded by my own interest.

Now, as I respectfully praise you with body, speech, and mind,  
Bring about the good and avert the faulty  
For us, the masters, disciples, patrons and entourage,  
And cause the spiritual and temporal to flourish like the waxing moon.

Furthermore, in accordance with our prayers to swiftly achieve  
All our wishes, bestow effortlessly supreme accomplishments!  
And, as all needs and wishes arise from the wish-fulfilling jewel,  
May we always be nurtured by the Three Supreme Jewels!

This brief praise, propitiation and dispatching activity is a praise of the manner in which you revealed very strong miraculous signs of invulnerability to the power of indisputably great tantrikas<sup>46</sup> who tried to subdue you by burning you in the fire of a tantric ritual.<sup>47</sup>

At Sakya, to the south of Lhasa, the great master Dagchen Sonam Rinchen is said to have given Dorje Shugden his name, which means “vajra force,” referring to an unadulterated, pristine spiritual force, and officially recognized him as a powerful religious protector.<sup>48</sup> Those who believe Dorje Shugden to be a worldly spirit say that he was put under oath (under covenant) by this great master, an act believed to turn a spirit into a servant of the Buddha Dharma. However, those who rely on Dorje Shugden as a Dharmapala take the promise Duldzin Dragpa Gyaltsen

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<sup>45</sup> *Jam.mgön rgyal.wa'i bsten.srung rdo.rje shugs.lden kyi 'phrin.bchol bhjoks.bsdu*, published by Seramey, p. 14

<sup>46</sup> The different vajrayana masters from the Kagyu, Sakya, Nyingma traditions performing the exorcism rituals.

<sup>47</sup> The Tibetan exile government has publicized that these verses are not to be found in the collected works of the Fifth Dalai Lama or in his autobiography. In “A Reply to the Government,” the author queries, “By this you mean to say he did not compose this prayer or you did not see it? There are many other works composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama that are not in his collected works. (For example, *rang.rnam pö.tang.por*)” p. 85

<sup>48</sup> *Shung.len drang song gen.bo'i pel.tam*, by Losang Chompel, A Reply to the Government, Dorje Shugden Society, 1997, second edition, p. 65

had made to Pehar (to act as special guardian of Je Tsong Khapa's doctrine in the future when the need arose) as the main component initiating the series of events that caused him to arise eventually, more than two hundred years later, in the form of Dorje Shugden.<sup>49</sup> In other words, he was not subdued like a worldly spirit would need to be but manifested the different Buddha activities (*'phrin.las*), which include wrathful acts, out of his own determination and high spiritual accomplishments. Properly naming this force and marking that event with a ceremony called enthronement is giving it its proper recognition. This has been confused with the act of subduing a worldly spirit. The different beliefs about Dorje Shugden depend not so much on historical records but on the differing interpretations of the relationship between reality and appearance.

It is perhaps more fruitful to ask the question why it was at this particular time that Tulku Dragpa Gyaltzen is believed to have fulfilled the promise he had made long ago in a previous life. Why was the Gelugpa tradition at that moment perceived by some Tibetans to be in danger as to require another guardian exclusive to its tradition? Why did the historical circumstances come together for this to occur when the Gelugpas supposedly celebrated their greatest victory? What was the tension between the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Gelugpa tradition that he felt such animosity towards its monks of whom he was one?

One possible interpretation is that the Fifth Dalai Lama represented less the purely religious Gelugpas, since he seems to have largely preferred to practice according to his own visions based on a Nyingma version of Tibetan Buddhism, and represented more the Gelug tradition as a political-administrative power base. This is not the example Je Tsong Khapa had shown his followers. He had resisted political involvement and rejected direct association with the Chinese emperor.<sup>50</sup> But a fair ruler of a country has to represent all religious traditions which reduced the Gelugpas to the role a majority political party plays in support of its leader. Dorje Shugden does not need to be looked at as a political rival to the institution of Dalai Lama, as he oddly was again recently, but simply as a guardian of one particular religious tradition whose concern is purely religious in the sense of protecting the Dharma from declining into mere political or worldly involvement. According to this interpretation, Dorje Shugden had to arise at the time when the Ganden Potang government was established since with it arose the greatest danger for Gelugpas: to lose their religious tradition to mere political and social involvement. Today that

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<sup>49</sup> "Remembering the promise Tulku Dragpa Gyaltzen had made [some two hundred years and several life times earlier when he was Je Tsong Khapa's disciple, Duldzin Dragpa Gyaltzen] he went to Pehar-chok (*pe.har lcog*) [the sacred residence of the protector Pehar] and said to Nechung Chögyal [emanation of Pehar] that he remembered his earlier promise (*dam.bca*) or word of honor and asked what he should do to pursue it. [That protector had come to Tulku Dragpa Gyaltzen and reminded him of his promise, saying "Now is the time" and "The time has come."] The protector answered that he would offer his blessings and active support (*'phrin.las*) to that end. After that, because of Nechung's blessings, people came to Lhasa from all directions and especially from the Kham region and made more offerings to Tulku Dragpa Gyaltzen than to the Fifth Dalai Lama. ... The upper and lower residence were considered almost equal. Moreover, during the Great Prayer Festivals, Tulku Dragpa Gyaltzen's throne near the Fifth Dalai Lama's in the front row was slightly higher. All these factors made Desi Sonam Chöphel and the attendants of the Fifth Dalai Lama envious of him and they were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Suddenly, at the age of thirty-eight, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the fourth month of the fire monkey year (1656), Tulku Dragpa Gyaltzen fell sick. Taking advantage of the situation sDe-pa Nor-bu and Desi Sonam Chöphel on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the fifth month tried to murder him unsuccessfully with weapons. It had no effect on him. Therefore, he murdered him by stuffing a cloth into his throat." *Bstod-'grel dam.can rgya.mtsho dgyes.pa'i rol.mo*, Kathmandu, 1997, p. 137-38.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, *Tibetan Nation*, p. 103.

danger is even greater because since the advent of modernity religion is defined almost exclusively in sociological terms and whatever religious knowledge does not fit the social parameters of the moment becomes eclipsed. The loss of the inner core of meaning is what a Buddhist protector is believed to guard against since he or she is entrusted with the continuity of a wisdom tradition.

➤ Two hundred years later

During this time there seems to have been no record of much conflict surrounding Dorje Shugden. Its practice was not very public.<sup>51</sup> Until Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941) taught widely, no Gelugpa who relied on Dorje Shugden had become as famous.

➤ Turn of the Century

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1933) attempted to reform his country in many different respects, from the military to political and social practices.<sup>52</sup> He strengthened the institution of Dalai Lama to an unprecedented extent. Even the Fifth Dalai Lama had his regent deal with affairs of state for long periods of time, while the Thirteenth took complete control of the political side of the Ganden Potang government. As one of the reform measures, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had all the oracles tested and dismissed the frauds.<sup>53</sup> According to oral sources, he is said to have banned all oracles for a certain period of time. Tibet had a complicated system of protective deities and local spirits that came through oracles in trance.<sup>54</sup> Their power and ability to assist was believed to range widely with some being Buddhist protectors and forces under their control as well as other worldly spirits from ancient and pre-historic times. During the Thirteenth' moratorium, even the State Oracle was silenced because Nechung, a protector subdued by Padmasambhava and established as a Tibetan national protector by the Fifth Dalai Lama,<sup>55</sup> had given false prophecies through the oracle in trance.<sup>56</sup> At no time did the Thirteenth

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<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to say how wide spread it was during that time. One reason, which remains valid till today, is that Dorje Shugden is also considered a special protector of the most secret practices contained in the Ganden Oral Tradition (Ganden Nyen Gyü or Ganden Kagyü), “a system of tantric practices first conceived and taught by the great Je Rinpoche, Tsongkapa [1357-1419]...also known more fully, as the Ganden Oral Tradition of Mahamudra or, concisely, as the Gelukpa Mahamudra.” *Enlightened Beings, Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition*, by Janice D. Willis, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 1995, Introduction, p. xiv. Since Gelugpas strictly practice sutra and keeping monks' and lay people's vows, i.e. vinaya, on the outside, that is, publically, and tantra on the inside, privately, the esoteric side of Gelugpa practices are not as publicly known or discussed as they are in other Buddhist traditions. Hence, Dorje Shugden also was not discussed openly until brought into the public arena.

<sup>52</sup> For background to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, see *Portrait of a Dalai Lama*, by Sir Charles Bell.

<sup>53</sup> *The Water-Bird and Other Years*, a History of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and After, K. Dhondup, Rangwang Publishers, Delhi 1986, p. 62

<sup>54</sup> See *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, for example; also *Portrait of a Dalai Lama*, p. 43-6

<sup>55</sup> According to Ngari Khentul Rinpoche, in an interview, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1998; Thurman: *Worlds of Transformation, Tibetan Art of Wisdom and Compassion*, Tibet House New York, Publishers, New York, 1999, p. 399, where states that Peihar was brought from Samye to the Ganden Potang Government; see also *The Guardian Deities of Tibet*, by Labrang Kalsang, transl. by Pema Thinley, Little Lhasa Publications, Dharamsala, 1996. It includes the “government approved” protectors -- the author headed the government team instructed to find any textual references critical of Dorje Shugden, who is obviously not included in the book. In keeping with appropriation of early Tibetan history of the Ganden Potang government, Nechung is presented as the protector closest to the Tibetan government even before the Fifth Dalai Lama's time. He also presents Nechung as one of the Red and Black Dharma protectors traditionally held to be Chamsing and Palden Lhamo, according to many oral sources. In exile Chamsing was substituted with Nechung as the Red Protector of the two. (p. 79-80) It was at this time that [Fifth Dalai Lama] that the Náchung (gNas-chung) Oracle was attached to the famous monastery of Drepung (hbras-spungs) and recognised as the State Oracle of Tibet. It was regarded as the highest authority and its advice was sought whenever there was a difficulty in finding the reincarnation or Tulku (sprul-sku) of a high Lama (as in the case of the Dalai Lama and of Tomo Geshe Rimpoche),

Dalai Lama close Trode Khangsar<sup>57</sup> in Lhasa, a residence of Tulku Dragpa Gyaltzen the Fifth Dalai Lama had authorized to be turned into a special protector temple for Dorje Shugden. The biography of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama does not mention any ban of Dorje Shugden or his oracle. On the contrary, it mentions advice given by Dorje Shugden through the oracle at Tromo Dungkar Gonpa which the Thirteenth Dalai Lama appreciated and followed.<sup>58</sup> The Thirteenth Dalai Lama was ultimately unsuccessful in banning oracles.<sup>59</sup>

➤ 1918

By this time, Pabongka Dechen Nyingbo had become extremely famous as the greatest lam.rim teacher of his times with tens of thousands of disciples at all the great Gelugpa monasteries throughout Tibet. “Phabongka was famous for his view that lamas should not become involved in politics, ...” demonstrated by the fact that he reportedly declined to take over as Regent of Tibet when asked by Radeng Rinpoche before Taktra Rinpoche accepted the regency.<sup>60</sup> Pabongka Rinpoche was known to rely on Dorje Shugden. Up until this time, the practice existed quietly and was not as widely known as it is today. With Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), Tomo Geshe Rinpoche (1866-1936), and later Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1981), the three greatest Gelugpa masters of our times, and with an estimated eighty percent of Tibet belonging to the Gelugpa tradition, a great number of people became spiritually connected (through *dam.tshig*) with these masters and through them with Dorje Shugden.

➤ 1922

According to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s autobiography,<sup>61</sup> Dorje Shugden came spontaneously through the Tromo Dungkar Gonpa Oracle in trance<sup>62</sup> in front of Tomo Geshe Rinpoche, whom

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or whenever a political decision of great importance was to be made.” p. 181, *The Way of the White Clouds*, Shambala Boston, 1970. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama states, “Since the time of the Victorious Gedun Gyatso, the second Dalai Lama, Nechung has been one of the two state protectors referred to as the Red and Black protectors, who have had special connection with Tibet’s Ganden Potang government.” From a talk about gods and protectors at Mundgod, India, June 25, 1980. Although the Ganden Potang government was established by the Fifth Dalai Lama, and not the second, this shows that Nechung became a government protector through the Dalai Lama.

<sup>56</sup> For example, a victory against the British promised by Nechung in 1888 did not occur. Tibetans suffered a devastating defeat. See *The Water-Bird and Other Years*, p. 19-29; and another British military invasion in 1904, p. 20. See also *Portrait of a Dalai Lama*, p. 437. Later, Nechung is also believed to have prescribed the wrong medicine which caused the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s death. p. 440

<sup>57</sup> “...he [the Thirteenth Dalai Lama] did not ban Gyalchen’s [i.e. Dorje Shugden] performance from Lhasa Trode Khangsar...” Fourteenth Dalai Lama, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978

<sup>58</sup> *‘phags.pa ‘jig.rten dbang.phyug gi rnam.sprul rim.byon gyi ‘khrungs.rabs deb.ther nor.bu’i ‘phreng.ba.bzhugs.so*, compiled by Phurchog Yongzin Thubten Jampa Tsultim Tenzin, Dharamsala, 1984, pp. 621, 630 and 648.

<sup>59</sup> The Fourteenth Dalai Lama states that “many deity-mediums were banned” during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978) while Dharamsala officials have repeatedly claimed that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama prohibited the propitiation of Dorje Shugden, implying that it was only he, when, according to many other oral sources all oracles were officially banned for a time, although propitiation continued secretly, according to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

<sup>60</sup> *A History of Modern Tibet*, 1913-1951, p. 362; also Pabongka Rinpoche is not mentioned -- as he no doubt would have had he been as important a political figure as he was as a religious one -- by two people who had been in Tibet at the time and were writing from their own observation and first hand oral accounts: Hugh Richardson and his *Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture* and Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa in his *Tibet A Political History*, Potala Publications, New York, 1984

<sup>61</sup> p. 620 and p. 649

<sup>62</sup> Usually a special ceremony with offerings and rituals was required to invite a protector to come through an oracle in trance. Only in the presence of very rare, advanced masters or at a time of extreme danger does the spirit take possession of the medium uninvited.

the Thirteenth Dalai Lama is said to have called a manifestation of Je Tsong Khapa.<sup>63</sup> The protector informed Tomo Geshe Rinpoche that there was danger from foreign aggression toward Tibet. Dorje Shugden advised renovating two stupas, the eastern and western one. Upon receiving the message, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama immediately renovated the great golden stupa at Ganden and the Potala in Lhasa.<sup>64</sup> The Thirteenth Dalai Lama praised Tomo Geshe Rinpoche for having helped to avert a possible national crisis.<sup>65</sup>

➤ 1951 - 1975

The Dalai Lama was introduced to the practice of Dorje Shugden and continued to make offerings and perform rituals.

“When I went to Tomo, I had to stay at Domo<sup>66</sup> Dungkar Monastery, where there was a tradition of summoning the wrathful and peaceful aspects of Gyalchen through the medium of a monk. The medium himself wasn’t a particularly good scholar, but when the deity was summoned he seems to have given clear prophecies, which was much appreciated. It had so happened that I had left Lhasa for Tomo rather hurriedly and the mediums of Nechung and Gadong were not among the entourage. In those days, I did not have a close connection with either Nechung or Gadong, such that I would summon them in my private apartment, except that they were invoked during the summer, winter and annual ceremonies. In any case, until then I had been a growing child and it goes without saying that I could not think independently about deity devotion; in fact I could not even think about things in general that much. However, it was on that occasion that neither Nechung nor Gadong were with me, although it was a crucial juncture in negotiations between Tibet and China. Among the officials there were those who wanted me to return to Lhasa and those who wanted me to go to India and so it became very difficult for me to decide.

At this crucial point there was, for one thing, a good monk medium nearby and for another, my strong faith in Je Pabongkapa because of which I felt a close bond with him. Also, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche had a strong affection for me and this was a further cause. Anyway, with the coincidence of many causes I finally had to summon Gyalchen in my apartment at Tomo. While summoning him, monks chanted the Hundred of Deities of the Joyous Land (dga’a-ldan lha-gya-ma) to the tune of the Sangphu Monastery. In the course of the actual [trance] performance the medium wore yellow robes, chögö and namjar, and a pandit’s hat in which he looked quite eminent. Facing toward me, he prostrated like a felled tree. When asked for predictions and advice, he answered fairly clearly. Once he said, “I have just come from Tushita after enquiring of

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<sup>63</sup> Reportedly after having met with Tomo Geshe Rinpoche to his attendants when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama stayed in Tomo (Chumbi) on his way back from exile in Darjeeling, India, in 1912.

<sup>64</sup> This incident would seem to contradict a statement of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978) that “in particular the Gyalchen medium was banned quite strongly” during the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s time.

<sup>65</sup> It probably refers to the Chinese, but it is also possible that the predicted danger was from Japan then at the height of its aggressive expansionism. Japanese armies were in Siberia at the time after having defeated the Russians. But an earthquake devastated Tokyo in 1923 and threats from the United States helped hasten the decline of Japanese expansionism.

<sup>66</sup> Also spelled “Tomo” or “Tromo.”



Je Rinpoche.” [Je Tsong Khapa believed to be in Tushita with Maitreya Buddha] Everything seemed to be fairly well resolved. Then, while [planning to] return from Tomo to Lhasa my intention to propitiate Gyalchen increased and consequently I summoned the wrathful Shugden in the main hall of Dungkar Monastery and I offered him a new costume. This is how my relationship with Gyalchen developed at the beginning.”<sup>67</sup>

After returning from Tomo in 1951, the Dalai Lama continued to consult Dorje Shugden through the Choekhor Yangtse oracle. Offering ceremonies were continued until 1975, when after some inauspicious dream he remembered Nechung’s admonition while in trance to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama of having failed to cultivate Dorje Dragden, the protector of whom Nechung is considered a speech emanation.<sup>68</sup> The Fourteenth Dalai Lama then mentions that Dorje Dragden (later the aspect of Nechung) has had a long standing relationship with the lineage of the Dalai Lamas and, like the Fifth, traces it all the way back to the ancient imperial leaders of Tibet<sup>69</sup> reviving this political link with the ancient empire as additional legitimation for the institution of Dalai Lama at a time when his stated task is modernization.

➤ 1978

Specifically, on July 13, 1978, the Dalai Lama states that his relationship with Dorje Shugden was a mistake, because it did not follow the “path shown by the previous Dalai Lamas,” and “I was cultivating a relationship with a new deity who had no responsibility to the Tibetan government<sup>70</sup> and no relationship with the lineage of the Dalai Lamas.” He does so in a talk already quoted at his residence in Dharamsala, India, to a group of people comprising the Ven. Lobsang Nyima, the Abbot of Namgyal Monastery,<sup>71</sup> Geshe Loten, monk officials and twenty two senior monks of Namgyal Monastery, five senior monks of Nechung Monastery, two teachers of the Dialectic School, two monk-representatives each from the branches of the Upper and Lower Tantric Colleges at Dharamsala, and Rato Kyongla Tulku and Nyagre Kelsang Yeshe, both resident in America, who were admitted by special permission.

The Dalai Lama also tells other Gelugpas (not Sakyas) in small groups and individuals privately not to rely on Dorje Shugden. For example, at the Ashoka Hotel in Delhi he told Gelek Rinpoche, Dagyab Rinpoche, Jamphel Yeshe, and others present not to practice Dorje Shugden. Privately, for example, he told the late Madame Ansermet, a disciple of Geshe Rabten, to stop

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<sup>67</sup> From the talk of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama on July 13, 1978

<sup>68</sup> According to Ngari Khentul Rinpoche

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, see also this section, Note #24

<sup>70</sup> In the “fulfillment/restoration” (kang.so) ritual of Dorje Shugden, composed by Pabongka Rinpoche, one of the concluding verses impels him to fulfill the wishes of the Ganden Potang government. dbang.phyug brgyud.lden dga’.lden pho.brang pa’i / mnga’.thang chab.srid spel.wa gang.su dag / bsam.don zhi.drag bya.ba kang.brtsams kyang / bde.blag sgrub.mdzed srung.mar nga’.gsol.lo (p. 69) Whoever works for the reign and temporal power of the Ganden Palace [government], endowed with the eight sovereign powers, we enthrone you as the protector who grants easy accomplishments of whatever they wish and whatever peaceful or wrathful activities they begin!

<sup>71</sup> Since Namgyal Monastery traditionally has performed all the rituals for the Dalai Lama and his rule, it is more closely tied to the government than others. Monks are required to pass special entrance examinations to show that they are capable of handling the heavy burden of memorizing rituals and their lengthy and complex performances, etc.

her Dorje Shugden practice.<sup>72</sup> There are many other such individual accounts told to me on condition of not mentioning names or specifics.

➤ late 70's:

The Dalai Lama forbids the recitation of the primary prayer, common to all Gelugpa (Lama Chöpa, composed by the First Panchen Lama), in front of the stupa at Bodh Gaya, the Buddha's place of enlightenment. Names of some outstanding masters of this lineage, such as Pabongka Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche, are removed from common (lineage) prayers and paintings.

➤ 1980:

A small temple for performing the monthly Dorje Shugden rituals was completed at Sera. The Dalai Lama confiscated it and did not permit it to be used as a place of worship. Later it was turned into a monastery office.

When Geshe Rabten visited Sera in April 1980, he sponsored a Dorje Shugden ritual in a large temple together with Zong Rinpoche. A huge number of monks attended. The Dalai Lama, when informed of this, was reportedly furious and went to visit Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, for the first time in several years, to complain. "Geshe Rabten does not listen to me," he is reported to have said to Trijang Rinpoche. Geshe Rabten then received a letter from Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche informing him that his efforts at Sera had been correct and done for the right reasons but that it would be good to apologize to the Dalai Lama anyway, because the Dalai Lama was also Geshe Rabten's spiritual master.

➤ mid 1980's

The Dalai Lama orders the removal of a Dorje Shugden statue from the main prayer hall of Ganden Monastery before entering to impart teachings.<sup>73</sup> When told that it was bolted to the ground, he reportedly advised to get a chain saw.

➤ 1994-95

As a result of the Third Forum in Beijing in 1994, a new anti-Dalai Lama campaign is formulated. With the Panchen Lama fiasco in 1995, the Chinese launch unprecedented attacks even on the religious qualifications of the Dalai Lama. This had never occurred before. The Chinese resolved even to remove his name from history.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Daughter of the famous Swiss conductor, she had been instrumental in bringing Buddhism to Europe, building a monastery for Tibetans at Rikon and at Lake Geneva in Switzerland. She also helped organize the Dalai Lama's first religious teachings in the West, in 1977 at Tharpa Choling, now Rabten Choling, in Mont-Pelerin, Switzerland. Mme. Ansermet, then a Buddhist nun, told me this personally.

<sup>73</sup> Two monks who actually removed the statue are still at Ganden Jangtse, Serkong Labrang. It is widely known who they are. On December 29, 1997, I went to see each of them to ask for a detailed account. Both of them are quite old now. Each refused to talk and said he knew nothing. They did not have to say anything, their terrified faces told me a lot.

<sup>74</sup> For the background and historical unfolding of the unprecedented anti-Dalai Lama stand the Chinese government had developed at this time, see *Cutting off the Serpent's Head, Tightening Control in Tibet, 1994-1995*, Tibet Information Network and Human Rights Watch, New York, 1996. At this time (1994-5) there is no reported conflict concerning Dorje Shugden among exile Tibetans. However, later Tibetans bring this new, unparalleled harsh Chinese stand against the Dalai Lama into proximity with the Dorje Shugden Society which did not form until May 1996. See below document from the Cholsum Organization, February 1998.

➤ 1995

Two oracles recently arrived from Tibet, who work for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile government, give “prophesies” about Dorje Shugden connecting him and Buddhists who rely on him with the Chinese. One is the Tsangpa oracle, for many years an officer in the People’s Liberation Army [of China] and the other, an woman oracle of the deity Tsering Chenga, from Eastern Tibet had been a member of a drama troupe of Chinese training.

➤ May 14, 1995

Prophesy (*kha.lung*) through the Tsangpa Oracle requested by the Private Office of the Dalai Lama,<sup>75</sup>

“It is important that Tibetans should observe their commitments (*dam.tsig*) which is their obligation. Particularly, the issue of Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden] is a bad omen. In this direction, we, the formless, are aware that it does not harbor good. This should definitely be stopped (*mtshams.’jog*) in the region of Tibet. With respect to the issue of the unity of religion and politics [of Tibet] and the Ganden Potang government in particular, Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden] cannot demonstrate even a grain of benefit. He can never bring happiness for Tibet [or Tibetan people?].

➤ June 14, 1995

Prophesy (*kha.lung*) through the Tsangpa Oracle requested by the Cabinet of the exile government:<sup>76</sup>

“An important current issue is that if you continue to go through the motions of government service as if it were punishment instead of serving the Ganden Potang government with total loyalty it is possible that this may pose a serious threat to the well being of Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso [the Dalai Lama]. A grave issue has arisen concerning the administration of the Ganden Potang. One thing that I, the Tsangpa Dhunghoed Chan, have to say about this explicitly is that [Tibetan] worship of deities has now reached a critical stage. It is extremely sad that Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden] the Chinese spirit is being worshiped.

Even though [Gyalchen] angers Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso [the Dalai Lama], there are those who worship him [Dorje Shugden] and who revere him in secret. Not only are there such worshipers in Tibet, there is deep reverence for him even among government employees. This is very harmful. That he is of great harm has already been said by Dorje Dragden [Nechung].

In this regard there is a popular perception that there is acrimony between Dorje Dragden [Nechung] and Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden]. That can never be true. For the success of Buddhism and the Ganden Potang government, Dorje Dragden continues to extend to me

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<sup>75</sup> *Prophesies of the Tibetan Government Oracles*, published by the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Administration of the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, 1996, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> *Prophesies of the Tibetan Government Oracles*, pp. 14-17.

complete support and since I too am to pursue this path completely, [I have to point out] that if the Cabinet and the People's Deputies [Assembly] do not strictly decide this issue and adhere to it, even though Buddhism may spread and even though the causes for the speedy freedom for Tibet may have begun [to grow], Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden] is sowing dissension [among Tibetans] by employing Chinese spirits and [furthermore] taking advantage of being a formless entity to vocalize and spread misinformation and thereby supporting China. This is a grave matter.<sup>77</sup>

We recommend rituals toward the well being of Gyalwa Rinpoche [the Dalai Lama]. Nevertheless, it is our serious concern that there needs to be strict adherence to the wishes of His Holiness and internal unity. Whether it be the People's Deputies or an ordinary Tibetan, it is unacceptable for anyone to engage in partisan politics.

Of the honest guidelines stipulated by [His Holiness] in this regard, the most important is that regarding the worship of deities. If the common Tibetans and the government employees in particular do not heed those guidelines, there will be great loss for all."<sup>78</sup>

In one trance ceremony of Tsering Chenga, the female oracle tells that Dorje Shugden prevented her from raising the Tibetan flag on the Potala in Lhasa<sup>79</sup> implying that Dorje Shugden works for the Chinese.

➤ also 1995

The Dharamsala government<sup>80</sup> performs massive exorcism rituals against Dorje Shugden. For some the Dalai Lama is present.<sup>81</sup> It is said that for thirteen days after the Tibetan new year

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<sup>77</sup> Interesting to note here is that the Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden strongly favor Tibetan independence. Thus, it is difficult to reconcile that they would be working for the Chinese who are so adamantly against Tibetan independence. It is almost as if someone were trying on purpose to divide the Tibetan people along these lines, zeroing in on the deepest karmic weakness of the Ganden Potang government brought forward into the twentieth century. One has only to ask, in whose interest would such a division be?

<sup>78</sup> When in 1995 someone claims that the seeds of freedom for Tibet are flourishing when the Chinese have vowed to wipe out even the name of the Dalai Lama from history seems a blatant contradiction. In fact, this sounds so absurd that one must conclude something else entirely must be going on here. I think it is that the demonization of the Dalai Lama by the Chinese which started in 1995 is passed right on to Dorje Shugden. Perhaps he is strong enough to carry such a heavy burden. Who is to say which would be a greater loss to the tradition of Buddhism, a Dalai Lama shouldering the blame for the loss of Tibet, no doubt unjustly, or Dorje Shugden and the split banning him has caused within Buddhism? All we know for certain is that the demonization of Dorje Shugden split the Tibetan community. It drive underground many genuine Buddhist practitioners and their practices, leaving in the larger public view mostly those who know how to play their political card correctly.

Another interesting point about this "prophesy" is the claim that acrimony between Nechung and Dorje Shugden is impossible. This is a statement from an ultimate and exclusively religious point of view also held by Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden. Clearly there is a danger to the Ganden Potang government of the Dalai Lama. The Chinese have been working hard to destroy it for the last fifty years. Blaming Dorje Shugden for the actions of the Chinese makes the issue a political one. Dorje Shugden is -- even for the government protector through this oracle -- a matter of politics. The issue the oracle points out it is about the [deposed] Tibetan government, that is, the institution of the Dalai Lama. It is political, especially when it concerns the Chinese.

<sup>79</sup> Some of the prophesies of these oracles are published by the exile government's Department of Religion and Culture, 1996: *gzung.bstun bod.skyong lha.srung khag.gi rdo.rje bka'.lung bzhus.so //*

<sup>80</sup> Most government rituals are performed by Namgyal Monastery, special to the Dalai Lama and Tibetan government. In the course of the ban, other monasteries were also asked by the government to perform anti-Dorje Shugden rituals, often without the participating monks knowing specifically who had ordered them.

<sup>81</sup> See above reference, the Dalai Lama's statement of March 21, 1996

celebrated in spring 1996, the government did rituals against Dorje Shugden.

➤ Winter session 1995/6 of the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies as quoted in a letter by the Private Office of the Dalai Lama to the abbot of Sermey Monastic College, March 30, 1996, "In his address to the winter session of the Tibetan People's Deputies, His Holiness reiterated the labors of his predecessor [regarding a ban of Dorje Shugden]. He also observed that it will not be a healthy practice to seek a spiritual relationship with His Holiness and then violate it. He has never made such a statement in the past. Given the recent volatile history of Tibetans, there is an unmistakable hint of exasperation if we are to go by the urgency of his talks. This is intolerable."

➤ March 1996

The only successful independent Tibetan newspaper<sup>82</sup> in Dharamsala, *Mangtso* (Democracy), which had criticized corruption in Dharamsala, stops publishing in response to an accusation by the Assembly with the Dalai Lama present that the paper "plays into the hands of the Chinese."<sup>83</sup> Tibetans regard this as a most serious charge, the equivalent of treason. *Mangtso* had been the most widely read Tibetan newspaper ever and was financially almost self-sufficient at the time it closed down, according to one of its main editors. The newspaper's staff received many death threats while in print.<sup>84</sup> When the Dalai Lama<sup>85</sup> expressed disapproval with the paper, it closed. But at no time did the editors give this as the reason.<sup>86</sup> The information circulated in 1996 as far as the Internet insisted that the paper closed down because of insufficient funds.

➤ March 2-4, 1996

"In his inaugural address to the Congress of the Cholsum (three provinces of Tibet) Organization,<sup>87</sup> the Dalai Lama referred to his recurring sore throat. ... this is an indication that

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<sup>82</sup> Independent publications are usually sidelined and pressured into closing. All publications, including the *Tibetan Review* and *Tibet Times* are government sponsored and/or subsidized. "The launch of *Tibet Times* was more or less timed to fill in the void left by the sudden closure of *Mangtso* in 1996." "The Independent Thrust:" *Tibetan Bulletin*, Jan.-Feb. 1999

<sup>83</sup> According to a government official whose name must remain unmentioned.

<sup>84</sup> The information about death threats and circulation comes from Lhasang Tsering, in a conversation in Dharamsala, Dec. 8, 1997

<sup>85</sup> Even before the critical remark in the meeting with deputies and others present, the Dalai Lama did not give *Mangtso* any interviews, something resented by some Tibetans in view of the fact that he did to a great variety of Western magazines including *Playboy*, high fashion magazines like *Vogue*, which declared him Special Fashion Editor of a 1993 issue, many small local Western papers, and Chinese students.

<sup>86</sup> Tibetans are often pressured into something called "self-censorship" and "self-responsibility" to conveniently relieve the government of any responsibility for questionable activities. Tibetans participate in this to protect the reputation of the Dalai Lama. Self-censorship under pressure in the name of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan unity is a common Tibetan method -- perhaps inherited from the Communists -- even among the best educated intellectuals like the editors of *Mangtso* who clearly believe that criticism is part of the democratic process and, hence, something more anti-Chinese than all the demonstrations of single-minded patriotism. See, for example, Jamyang Norbu and Lhasang Tsering in *Tibet, the Issue is Independence*, edited by Edward Lazar, Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1994.

<sup>87</sup> The Cholsum Organization has a complicated history not too many Tibetans clearly understand. For reference to Cholsum Organization in Tibet, see Dawa Norbu: *Tibet, the Road Ahead*. This Cholsum Organization formed in exile under the guidance of Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's most politically active brother. Educated Tibetans believe he started it as a frontal organization for his political interests. Nothing has been written about it, as far as I know, so sources other than oral ones are difficult to find. In recent years, another organization was started, the United Cholsum Organization. It has taken the role of policing conflicts such as the Dorje Shugden one and to take control of Tibetans social relations by whipping up emotions, often using the name of the Dalai Lama.

he does not wish to speak on this anymore, since no one is paying heed.”<sup>88</sup> In response, Cholsum passed a resolution that its members would stop the practice of Dorje Shugden and the Dalai Lama remarked to members of the Cholsum Congress on March 4<sup>th</sup>, “It is good that paying attention to my health you have passed a resolution regarding this matter. Danger to health does not exclusively mean an armed attack. This type is extremely rare in Tibetan society. If there is continued indifference to my injunctions, then there would not be any point in my continuing to live silently as a disappointed man,” quoted in the letter by the Dalai Lama’s Private Office.

## THE ERUPTION OF THE CONFLICT IN 1996

The Dalai Lama’s statements during his public teachings March 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 1996 (excerpts quoted below) mark the beginning of what commonly was called “the ban.” In the course of 1996, all governmental, regional and social groups passed resolutions which amounted to a creed-like confession of faith and loyalty oath in one. They were circulated in all the Tibetan communities and people were pressured into signing them, often under threat. Then these signed statements were offered to the Dalai Lama sometimes on special occasions. It was clearly meant to please him. The signed petitions also given to the government officials most instrumental in implementing the ban in order to establish closer bonds with those in power. Tibetans were compelled to prove that they were “clean.”

➤ March 10, 1996,

During a religious discourse on the step-like path to enlightenment (lam.rim) in Dharamsala, circulated by the exile government’s Department of Information and International Relations, the Dalai Lama stated more publicly than ever before that there was discord between deities. This served as the reason for his ban of Dorje Shugden which, he says later (March 21, 1996), was already proclaimed by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama on the basis of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s secret visions. “I have repeated time and again that sometimes there is discord between [Tibetan] deities. These statements I have made in the past still remain unchanged. I hope no one will imagine that there has been change in this regard.”<sup>89</sup> He claims that Dorje Shugden is in discord with government approved protectors. “Whether outside of Tibet or within it, a deity in discord with [government deities] whose relationship with the origin of this [exile] government at the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama [is discordant] – whatever may be the ultimate reality – this is serious in the context of the common cause of Tibet. Therefore, unless I remind you once again there are those who pretend they have not heard it. It will be the last resort if [we] have to knock on [their/your] doors. It would be good if [they/you] can heed this without [us] having to resort to this last step.”<sup>90</sup>

In the same talk, the Dalai Lama says, “Some people assume that I am saying this [not to rely on Dorje Shugden] from an interpretive point of view and not a definitive [literal] one.”<sup>91</sup> They act

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted in a letter by the Private Office of the Dalai Lama to the abbot of Sera Mey, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1996.

<sup>89</sup> From a translated transcript of the public address to Tibetans during the lam.rim teachings March 19, 1996.

<sup>90</sup> For a Tibetan, this is very strong language. The phrase “it would be good, if...” is culturally understood to be an order with a strong warning of very serious consequences if not followed.

<sup>91</sup> The distinction between definitive and interpretive meanings of Buddhist texts is an important, much debated philosophical one pertaining to Tibetan Buddhism. It is used to distinguish scriptural meanings dealing directly with the

as if they knew what I mean. This is wrong.<sup>92</sup> This is very important for all of you to know. Some were telling me not to say this, I am not saying it without thinking,” and, “...I am saddened when requested not to address this topic.” It must be difficult for the millions of people familiar with the image of an ever laughing Dalai Lama to imagine the depth of desperation he seems to suffer as a result of the loss of his country and his inability to bring a happy conclusion to the “cause of Tibet” in spite of his super human efforts. This despair is obvious when the Dalai Lama says, in the same talk, “I am insisting on this labor [of working for the cause of Tibet] in the hope that at this bleakest point in the history of Tibetans I can share the suffering of my people and provide them some hope. Do you understand?”<sup>93</sup>

In the same address, the Dalai Lama also exhorts Tibetans inside Tibet to give up Dorje Shugden. But to them he offers a chance for explanation, something denied those in exile, “Whether in Central Tibet, or Dotoed (Kham) or Domed (Amdo), if there is unreasonableness in what I have said repeatedly, you can give reasons and we can discuss it. In the absence of such reasons, indifference to this talk will affect the cause of Tibet in general; I as a private individual have nothing to lose.” At no time was the Dalai Lama or his government open to discussing the issue. None of the reasons put forth have been accepted or even considered. “It is certainly possible that some of you senior (spiritual masters, practitioners, monks and lay people) have become unchangeable, like twisted tree trunks. It makes no difference to me. Those of you who are studying in the monastic colleges/universities, or wherever you live, think carefully. It is better not to be mistaken from the beginning. There are many young incarnate Lamas [at this teaching today].<sup>94</sup> You too should think very carefully from the beginning. To rectify [a mistake] once it has been made is difficult. It is not good. The same goes for those in Tibet.”

➤ March 21, 1996

From a translated transcript: At a religious gathering, in the main temple in Dharamsala, in preparation for an empowerment of the meditational deity (*vid.dam*) Tamdin (Hayagriwa),<sup>95</sup> the Dalai Lama states publically that Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden are not permitted to attend. It is the first time that the Dalai Lama publicly bars people from attending empowerments. The reasons he gives are two-pronged. According to government oracles, Dorje

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Buddhist notion of emptiness from all other texts requiring interpretation. It is usually not applied the way the Dalai Lama does here, i.e. to give an order to his subjects. The Dalai Lama asks for his words to be taken literally and tells those who try to find an honorable space for disagreement when they interpret the Dalai Lama’s words on the subject of Dorje Shugden they presume they know what he thinks. And obviously, nobody can presume to know what anyone else thinks, let alone someone considered to be a Buddha.

<sup>92</sup> In other words, the ban is not “advice” open to interpretation. It is to be taken literally. Otherwise the interpreter would assume he or she is capable of second guessing the mind of the Dalai Lama, something considered especially sacrilege among religious Tibetans.

<sup>93</sup> It is understandable that Tibetans listening to such intense emotional appeals from the most important person in their lives became whole heartedly motivated to act against anyone disagreeing with the Dalai Lama. He had already pointed them out a long time ago. Only now they were clearly identified as standing in the way of achieving freedom, the “Tibetan cause.”

<sup>94</sup> At this point, the Dalai Lama pointed directly at the thirteen year old incarnation of his Tutor, Yongdzin Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche. Tibetan culture holds as extremely rude the gesture of pointing directly at someone, especially in public. It is cause of great embarrassment and shame.

<sup>95</sup> From a translated transcript of the address during the teachings; all of the points discussed here from March 10<sup>th</sup> and March 21<sup>st</sup> were quoted and circulated in an announcement by the Kashag (Cabinet of the Tibetan exile government) on May 22, 1996; also video taped, available at the Dorje Shugden Devotees Charitable & Religious Society, Delhi.

Shugden is connected with Chinese deities or spirits. This endangers the cause of Tibet he says. He tells that they had done many prayers for the cause of Tibet the previous year and also mentioned Dorje Shugden by name in their exorcism. Since the deity of empowerment that day was the same as had been used for the exorcism against Dorje Shugden, the Dalai Lama clarified this conflict of interest which points far beyond this particular situation to an irreconcilable conflict within the conception of the “cause of Tibet” itself.

The Dalai Lama gives as religious reasons for barring Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden that their participation would harm his life and health. He quotes a common Tibetan saying, “Giving innumerable empowerments, [did you] fill the world with ruinous practitioners?” This refers to practitioners not able to keep properly the bond (dam.tsig) between spiritual master and disciple and why, therefore, the master must test the disciple before bestowing an empowerment. “This will affect the life span of the spiritual master as well,” the Dalai Lama points out and praises those former practitioners of Dorje Shugden who have given up and “become pure.” To those who might not have given up but refuse to leave he says, “...not only will it not benefit yourself but in the worst case may even become the cause of shortening the life of the Dalai Lama. If you wish the speedy death of the Dalai Lama, then I have no objection.”

Perhaps it needs pointing out here that Buddhist masters can and should exclude those unprepared for a specific empowerment. On these grounds, the exile government and most supporters of the ban claim that the Dalai Lama is perfectly justified in barring disciples from initiations. Although this is true, other Tibetans attending public teachings and empowerments by the Dalai Lama are usually not examined for their religious qualifications as a precondition to attend. Considering that the Dalai Lama is also the head of government, which gives him a unique status among Tibetan Lamas, the unprecedented exclusion of a segment of the Tibetan population from attending even his general discourses -- when declared non-Buddhists are permitted to attend even his most esoteric Buddhist rituals<sup>96</sup> -- also means that they are excluded from being Tibetan. The Dalai Lama’s teachings are also mass social events that galvanize Tibetans in part designed to strengthen their sense of nationhood in exile. The Dalai Lama’s public exclusion set an example for his followers. How widespread the need to exclude Dorje Shugden followers from Tibetan society became can be seen from the subsequent reactions by all Tibetan governmental and social groups.

Almost every Tibetan has taken an empowerment from the Dalai Lama. Thus the channels for the emotional appeal were well established. The perception of Tibetans was that if they did not give up Dorje Shugden, they would cause the death of the Dalai Lama. The emotional appeal was direct. It was unmistakably clear to them. If religious concerns was the source, the following problem should have been addressed. A large number of Tibetans had made similar commitments (dam.tsig) to other realized spiritual masters. Buddhism teaches to see them as equal regardless of their social or political standing. Violating the vowed relationship with those masters would also shorten their lives or cause their death. This is the fundamental moral dilemma.

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<sup>96</sup> See below Part III, (+) the case of the Kalachakra initiation in Bloomington, Indiana, August 1999, for example.



The Dalai Lama also appealed to the pre-Buddhist belief system still alive among Tibetans. “During my visit to Hunsur [settlement in South India] the previous year, poor and helpless people have been told [through divination] that their illnesses have been brought about by Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden]. I felt this was repugnant. Others have reported dreaming of a bearded monk strangling them. This is a very clear indication that [Dorje Shugden] is a spirit, far from being a deity.” Dorje Shugden is here declared a harmful, evil spirit on the basis of uneducated people’s dreams and local divinations while hundreds of highly educated and realized masters saw him as a powerful protector of religious actions and vows.

➤ March 30, 1996

The Private Office of the Dalai Lama sends a letter to the abbot of Sera Mey Monastic College where at least two thirds of the monks rely on Dorje Shugden. It quotes the relevant passages of the Dalai Lama’s speeches about the ban of Dorje Shugden, adding that “this [reliance] becomes cause for instability within the Gelugpa order [of Tibetan Buddhism].” After pointing out that some “individuals have actually urged His Holiness to desist from raising this issue since, according to them, this is causing more harm than good in Tibetan communities,” the letter quotes widely from the Dalai Lama’s speeches in political and social fora, such as the Chamber of the Tibetan People’s Deputies and the Congress of the Cholsum Organization, where he spoke against the protector. Referring to the Dalai Lama’s urgent statements from March 21<sup>st</sup> it says, “Please consider this as important and make each member understand it. Make them aware that in this extremely sad situation of Tibetans, at this point in our history, no one should stubbornly hold onto their individual convictions at the cost of our cause and people.”

“As to the essence of this decree, we urge you to wholeheartedly set this matter straight, in contrast to mouthing deference as in the past. Unable to bear the urgency of this situation, we at the Private Office have not choice but to send this circular.”....

“Therefore, under the auspices of all former abbots, disciplinarians, incarnate Lamas and Geshes, an announcement should be made of these talks by His Holiness regarding the worship of deities in such a way that no one can have the excuse of not having heard it. In addition, ensure total implementation of this decree by each and everyone. With the additional assistance by the house masters, also ensure the explicit announcement of this decree to all ordinary monks [in the monastery]. In implementing this policy, if there is anyone who continues to worship Dholgyal [Dorje Shugden], make a list of their names, house name, birth place, class in the case of students, and the date of arrival in case of new arrivals from Tibet. Keep the original and send us a copy of the list. Please share this responsibility and submit a clear report on the implementation of this circular.”

In response to such instructions from the Private Office and other government departments, signatures of monks were collected swearing to give up their protector practice now for all times. The petitions asked for names, birth place, father’s name and other personal detail. Videotapes, audio cassettes, written material with His Holiness’ emotional appeals from March 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> were distributed throughout all settlements around India and Nepal to persuade everyone to give up Dorje Shugden. It was a systematic effort more thorough than any other ever made by Tibetans in exile.

➤ April 5th, 1996

Around eight in the morning, the first statue of Dorje Shugden was desecrated, broken, and thrown down the side of the mountain into a garbage heap. Some accounts say it was later dumped into a river. This statue was consecrated by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, Tutor of the Dalai Lama, and presented to the nunnery in Dharamsala which he helped start. A nun in fervent compliance with the Dalai Lama's wish had "volunteered." The desecration set off shock waves of different kinds in the Tibetan exile community. Others followed the example reminiscent of actions many believed only the Chinese had done in their homeland.

➤ April 6, 1996

A circular by the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies specifies "the need to announce that people should stop the tradition of worshipping Gyalchen Shugden..."<sup>97</sup>

➤ April 9, 1996

The Tibetan Freedom Movement is one of the "non"-governmental organizations.<sup>98</sup> It is the duty of this organization to collect taxes for the government. Every Tibetan is obliged to pay one rupee per month recorded in the "green book" (*rang.dzen lag.deb*). The Tibetan Freedom Movement responds to a government circular (April 6, 1996), "Since it is important to purge worshipers of Shugden within our own membership...we found no one [who relies on Dorje Shugden] and we solemnly declare the henceforth in the future also there will be no one in our membership who will worship [this deity]. (5 signatures and seal of the organization)

➤ April 14, 1996

The Guchusum Movement of Tibet<sup>99</sup> in a letter to the Assembly of the Tibetan Peoples' Deputies, "As per your decree of April 6, 1996, banning the worship of Dholgyal Shugden among the public, we have convened a special meeting...to purge any member who worships Shugden in this Association. We solemnly declare that through this purge among our standing committee members there is not one who is or will worship Shugden. Moreover, in the future also we will abide by this decree." (11 signatures and seal of the organization)

The cover letter to the announcement is addressed "to all patriotic members of this Association." It states that the organization resolves to purge all members in compliance with the addresses of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the decree of the Chamber of the Tibetan People's Deputies banning the worship of Gyalchen Shugden. The Association further states that "...far more

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in a letter by the Tibetan Freedom Movement to the Assembly.

<sup>98</sup> Although the Tibetan exile government consistently denies that these types of social groups work for the government, it is clear from looking at their functions that, in fact, they do. For example, Tashi Angdu, the President of the Cholsum Organization, the largest regional association with the most political clout, confirmed the close collaboration between the social-regional groups and the exile government, "The nature of our work and views of our government are the same. We do not do anything which contradicts the views of the government." Interview, Beat Regli: "Discord in Exile," a mini-series of "10 vor 10," DRS Swiss Television, January 7, 1998. Members of the exile government are also active in various social groups and attend meetings. The Committee for the Protection of Tibetan Religious and Political Affairs, for example, is a minister of the exile government.

<sup>99</sup> Formed after the demonstrations in Lhasa starting in 1987 and subsequent repressive actions by the Chinese by those who escaped from that persecution.

significant [than achieving our common interests of “obtaining freedom for Tibet which is the duty ordained by history,]” are the decrees of the Dalai Lama and the exile government. These two are indispensable for obtaining our aims.” The announcement ends with an exhortation, “Even if it were a member who does not worship Shugden, in view of the welfare of the six million Tibetans, they should still declare that they will abide by this resolution in the future. [Signed] declarations to this effect should be received at this office before the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tibetan month (May 31, 1996).

➤ April 18, 1996

From a “Special Notice to Doctors and Staff Members” issued by the Department of Health of the Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, (signed by Assistant General Secretary and seal of the Department of Health)

“As we all know, our exile government oracles pointed out repeatedly and in naked words that the worship of Dorje Shugden poses danger to the well being of the Dalai Lama, besides posing danger to the cause of Tibet.... Regarding this, all government employees in Dharamsala have already passed resolutions in favor or it. Since it concerns the cause of the Tibetan people and above all His Holiness well being, we cannot leave it as it is. Therefore, if we do not have among us anyone who worships Dorje Shugden, we should resolve not to worship Shugden in the future. Whereas if there is anyone who worships Dorje Shugden, they should repent the past and stop worshipping. They must submit a declaration that they will not worship in the future. In case there is anyone who does not abide by the addresses of His Holiness to give up Shugden worship, then, since there is nothing more important than the well being of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan cause, such person should submit their resignation. There is no other alternative for such a person. We should also take stringent responsibility to urge relatives who worship Shugden to abandon this worship. At the gathering of the relevant staff members, make this announcement and make sure that no one comes up with excuses of not having heard it. We also request you to send us the signed resolution at once from each and everyone.”

➤ April 23, 1996

From a declaration of the Toepa Welfare Association of the Tibetan government-in-exile, Office of the Executive Committee, Dharamsala, “In compliance with this address [March 21, 1996] by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and in compliance with the oracles of our government,...in compliance with the decree of the Chamber of Tibetan Peoples’ Deputies of April 6, 1996 banning the worship of Shugden, and mindful of this decree of our government, we hold this special convention..... Most of our members have not worshiped Shugden in the past and... we the subjects of His Holiness belonging to this Association solemnly declare that we shall have nothing to do with this deity. We hereby also resolve to expel anyone [from our membership] who worships Dholgyal [Dorje Shugden]. To this resolution we put our signatures...”

➤ May 1, 1996

In preparation for the proclamation of the ban by officials from the exile government at Ganden Monastery in the south of India the following warning preceded the announcement. The

government officials in a dramatic show of force came to the monastery with a large Indian state police escort. Thus flanked, the monastic administration under instructions from Dharamsala through a former highly respected abbot read the following resolution in order to silence any questions during the government's announcement on the issue:

“Whereas an announcement is going to be made at the behest of the Tibetan exile government, and whereas we want this announcement to be accomplished with satisfaction, we have called an extended meeting of the two abbots, former abbot Lati Rinpoche, the administrators of the great assembly (lachi) of Ganden monastery, the chanting master of the joint assembly (lachi), the administrators of the two colleges [Jangtse and Shartse] of Ganden, the chanting masters of these two colleges, and the masters of the twenty three houses of Ganden, this day of May 1, 1996 unanimously resolve that

“If during the announcement there is any action on the part of anyone that will smear the reputation of Ganden Lachi that person will be expelled from the monastery. Likewise, anyone who supports him, voices opinions or asks questions will be expelled from this establishment.

“Moreover, the mentor of the said offender shall make a very elaborate gift of tea and bread to the entire monastic establishment.”<sup>100</sup>

The announcement shows that the government had anticipated widespread disagreement with the ban and that monks might publically disagree. The show of force was not only to silence the monks but also a statement of determination. But to other Tibetans it carried the humiliating message that Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden are violent. It confirmed to them something they believed the oracles had meant with the projected threat to the Dalai Lama's life.

➤ May 5, 1996

Wall posters went up attacking the young incarnations of two of the most acclaimed and famous Buddhist masters, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche the Tutor of the Dalai Lama and Kyabje Zong Rinpoche. They were from Ganden monastery and known to have relied on Dorje Shugden. They had made his practice known to large numbers of people.

A highlighted area on top of the poster reads, “Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Religious and Political Leader of Tibet.” The notice from two hundred fifty-five members of the “Secret Society of External and Internal Enemy Eliminators reads:” “Anyone who goes against the policy of the government must be singled out one-pointedly, opposed and given the death penalty. ... The previous incarnations of Trijang Rinpoche and Zong Rinpoche have gone against the repeated advice of the Dalai Lama to leave the practice of Dorje Shugden.<sup>101</sup> If the current incarnations do not stop practicing and continue to contradict the words of the Dalai Lama, not

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<sup>100</sup> An elaborate offering of tea and bread to two to three thousand people adds up to a substantial sum of money. Punishing another for one's actions is a type of social control usually practiced among Communists.

<sup>101</sup> This statement that the Dalai Lama would “advise” his own Guru to leave a religious practice integral to the lineages of which he was at the time the most prominent representative is preposterous and shows a complete lack of knowledge and respect for any religious considerations.

only will we not be able to respect them and oppose them single pointedly, but their lives and activities will definitely be destroyed. This is our first warning.”

The two Rinpoches mentioned are age thirteen and eleven respectively. The threats to their lives deeply shocked many people around the world. The two young Lamas had to leave the country for safety reasons. With it they also left behind their traditional studies not available as completely anywhere else in the world as currently in the exile communities in India. Thus, the threats to the lives of the young Lamas immediately confirmed the second threat to their lives’ work.

➤ May 10-11, 1996

The resolution of the special session of the Tibetan Youth Congress, Dharamsala, claims “...negligence on the part of the public toward these addresses [March 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>] with active propagation of this worship on the part of some [spiritual masters], and whereas this negligence is beyond tolerance anymore...” The Tibetan Youth Congress is a nationalistic organization that has not ruled out force in its pro-independence stand. In this it has clashed with official policy of the exile government and His Holiness’ stand on non-violence. Focusing more on the political side of issues and down playing religion, their patriotism is of a different, more aggressive kind. A statement like the above from the TYC carries more weight than from other organizations in its implicit call to fight because of the TYC’s long term activism in Tibetan society and use of violence. It is currently the largest “non-governmental” organization with over sixty chapters around the world. Although claiming to be funded by membership fees and other fund raisers, members nevertheless get funds from the exile government for taking care of elderly or other types of social work.

According to the brochure of the Youth Congress, it was founded in 1970 by Tenzin Gyeche, still Private Secretary of the Dalai Lama, and other prominent figures in the exile government was and inaugurated by the Dalai Lama. Aside from the struggle for total independence even at the cost of one’s life mentioned in the aims and objectives of the TYC, it calls on members to “dedicate oneself to the task of serving one’s country and people under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Spiritual and Temporal Ruler of Tibet and to promote and protect national unity and integrity by giving up all distinctions based on religion, regionalism and status.” Further, “Being a national movement, activities of TYC are not restricted just to its members, but, also receive the active support of all Tibetans – young and old, men and women, monks and lay. Furthermore, TYC commands a large following inside Tibet. ... From its very inception TYC emerged as an active force with clear aims and objectives. It also served as a catalyst to bring about certain reforms and changes within the Tibetan community so as to enhance the development of a truly democratic society. TYC, therefore, sees itself as an instrument to fulfill the wishes of the Tibetan people.” Political activities to keep alive the question of Tibetan independence in the international arena include, “making direct and indirect representations at various international forums regarding China’s invasion and continued occupation of Tibet and initiating and organizing different activities such as peace marches, public demonstrations, picketing & fasting to internationalize the issues related to China’s occupation of Tibet.” Clearly, Tibetans seen to interfere or harm this cause, i.e. Tibetan independence, would be perceived as betraying the very basis for the existence of such an

organization and thus as serious adversaries. From the resolution:

1. Since there is nothing more important [for Tibetans] than the cause of Tibet and the health of the Dalai Lama, the participants solemnly agree to abide by these addresses of His Holiness the Dalai Lama;
2. Upon arriving back at our respective areas, after showing the video clip of this talk to local Youth Congress members and announcing the resolution of this Congress, the local representatives will solemnly declare that they will abide by these addresses of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and will report back within two weeks from this date on the progress made in this direction;
3. When it is confirmed there is no one in the Tibetan Youth Congress membership worshipping Dholgyal, we will gradually present the [said] video clip to the public, announce our policy on this issue and especially urge the Tibetan youth to evaluate their decisions in this regard;
4. Even in places without Youth Congress branches, the nearest Youth Congress affiliate will try to urgently promote this message by presenting the [said] video clip, etc.;
5. This Congress urges the Cabinet, the Chamber of Tibetan People's Deputies, the Religious and Educational Council, and the Ministry of Home Affairs [of the Tibetan exile government] to implement this policy in their respective areas of responsibility;
6. This executive committee will likewise announce its policy to all Tibetan monasteries and urge that everyone must abide by the address of the Dalai Lama;
7. Together with documents pertaining to this ban on the worship of Dholgyal, this Congress will urge each and every spiritual master, including Geshes, that in the interest of the health of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan independence they should stop worshipping Dholgyal;
8. If anyone in the Youth Congress membership is found to still worship Dholgyal, that member will be immediately expelled from Tibetan Youth Congress membership;
9. This Congress will also urge all other Tibetan organizations not to enroll anyone into their membership who venerates and worships Dholgyal.<sup>102</sup>

The Youth Congress rose to the challenge and took up the issue and even officials of the Tibetan exile government privately admitted two years later that excesses had occurred, especially from groups like the Tibetan Youth Congress and the Tibetan Women's Association. The type of social pressure exercised by these groups was reminiscent of methods used in Tibet most Tibetans thought they had escaped.<sup>103</sup> By the end of May, the family of the president of the newly formed Dorje Shugden Devotees Charitable and Religious Society had received death threats by phone and threatening letters written by D.P. Gyatso, President, Secret Youth Group, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and a Volunteer Youth Group. Whether or not these were actual organizations or in any way related to the Tibetan Youth Congress could not be established.

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<sup>102</sup> An estimated 60% of Tibetans belong to the Tibetan Youth Congress. Every Tibetan belongs to at least one, but usually more than one of such social organizations. By uniformly taking up the ban, they effectively controlled Tibetan society. Thus, every Tibetan became directly involved in this issue.

<sup>103</sup> One can easily imagine that when a zealous young Tibetan without religious upbringing or interest and without any other politically relevant domain of action pressures a learned, older religious master -- someone who fled Communist rule for religious freedom -- about which part of his religion to practice and which not that two very different worlds collide.

➤ May 22, 1996

The response to the Dalai Lama's addresses of March 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> by the Kashag (Cabinet), "In consideration for the well being of the Dalai Lama, the common cause of Tibet and the edification of the Gelugpa tradition, since it is the responsibility of the government to see to it that these addresses of His Holiness are followed to the letter, we have taken these steps: to be clean followers of Lama Tsong Khapa and to facilitate clear understanding of right and wrong as well as proper appreciation of present and long term benefit, the standing committee of the Peoples' Deputies, the Private Office [of the Dalai Lama], the Information and International Relations Department have distributed tapes and transcriptions of His Holiness' speeches in successive support.... The Cabinet received signed declarations from monasteries, organizations and private individuals, convinced of the detrimental effects both for the public and private individuals through these persuasions, stating their decision to stop worshiping Dholgyal [Dorje Shugden] henceforth. We recognize this gesture of self-responsibility toward our common cause." "Self-responsibility" here is to be understood in the same way as self-censorship under pressure. Many people gave up the practice and signed the petitions simply because they believed the reasons given: harm to the Dalai Lama and to their common cause. Others signed by force of social pressure and out of a sense for self preservation. Sign or face possible expulsion from the monastery, job, welfare organization, or school.

"If worshipping Dholgyal poses a threat to our cause and the well being of His Holiness, there is no benefit in talking about democracy or freedom of religion." This statement was seen by many Tibetans as the equivalent to an "emergency" where the protection of civil liberties is suspended. Since the exile government is not a legitimate government with its own police force, and Tibetans generally do not trust the Indian police, they often take matters into their own hands. The government also makes clear that it acts on the perception of Dorje Shugden as an evil spirit without any regard for large numbers of people<sup>104</sup> who have a very different view of this protector and acted responsibly both in the religious and secular spheres. "His Holiness is the incomparable secular and religious head of this government. In virtue of his religious and political office it is his responsibility and right to guide [us] and restrain harmful factors toward Tibetan governance. How is this against democracy? To make such a complaint is similar to leveling charges of denial of religious freedom by a black magician who is restrained from practicing his art on a subject. Whether this restraint constitutes infringement of (religious) freedom is self-evident to any nation or person."

"In summary, no Tibetan monastic establishment under this exile government is permitted to worship Dholgyal. Given this condition, anyone who continues to worship Dholgyal, indifferent to our cause and threatening the well-being of His Holiness, fervent about freedom of religion [saying] 'we will never change our faith in Dholgyal' – is free, of course, to howl this way. This freedom is also given by His Holiness. However, the perception toward such a person/organization will be decided by the majority of the Tibetan populace. Therefore, at this juncture, irrespective of time or place [including Tibetans abroad], everyone should make common cause

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<sup>104</sup> It was explained to me by many different oral sources that approximately one third of all practicing Buddhists in the Tibetan tradition are connected with Dorje Shugden, either by relying directly or through their spiritual master.

of this issue.”

“Heads of our religious traditions, abbots and reincarnate Lamas, Geshe, representative officers [of the government] and people in areas of responsibility – you are requested to bear the recent addresses of His Holiness about Dholgyal in mind and, just as the body is under the head, bring into the fold everyone under your jurisdiction. Furthermore, since this is liable to be exploited by others, give clear explanations to the public. On the part of the general Tibetan populace, without changing sides and with patriotism in your heart you are urged to come out and express your convictions and use your talent, abilities, and strength as contribution to your exile government.”

➤ May 22, 1996

The same day, the Department of Religion and Culture sent out materials explaining the ban and how it should be enforced through published material, the addresses by the Dalai Lama concerning this subject on audio cassette and video, and a booklet of the oracular pronouncements. The cover letter to Sera Mey Pomra Khangtsen opens as follows:

“As you know, the book titled “Secret Visions of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama stipulates ‘Dholgyal should be banned’.” In conjunction with this, the Great Thirteenth Dalai Lama specifically issued a ban. The government oracles have continually pronounced that the subsequent worship and propitiation of Gyalchen [Dorje Shugden] continues to affect the well being and effort of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, religion and politics of Tibet, freedom and the people of Tibet.”



## **PART III -- ATTEMPTING TO MAKE SENSE**

The Dalai Lama said about the Dorje Shugden conflict, “This is not my issue: it is the issue of Tibetan religion and politics...”<sup>1</sup> I will follow this lead and examine the uniquely Tibetan mix of religion and politics primarily as it pertains to the Dorje Shugden issue in the hope of disentangling some of the religious from the political explanations. Their indiscriminate mix has caused endless confusion and misuse. I see this to be the true source of the problem. Thus, I am treating the Dorje Shugden conflict as the most obvious symptom of a larger identity crisis I believe will not begin to be solved until the currently instituted political practice of merging religion and politics has been adequately scrutinized.

My attempt at clarification tries to show the complex historical juncture in which any Tibetan issue must be considered. Since the Dalai Lama plays such a central role in the lives of Tibetans, especially since coming into exile, and in taking their religious traditions into the twenty-first century, he figures prominently in this writing as well. He has taken an active role in the political future of Tibet and in the social transformation of his people. It should not be surprising that the Dalai Lama, in that context, is a prisoner of historical forces just like everyone else and does not always look as perfect as a religious person sees him or would like him to be portrayed. I hope this will not be interpreted out of hand as demonizing or an out-right attack on the Dalai Lama. At least, it is not my intention.

My approach distinguishes between three different aspects of the Dalai Lama: the religious figure, the politician, and the media created celebrity. The relationship between Buddhist master and disciple is private and cannot be legislated. It resists public discourse beyond the right to freely choose and to maintain such a relationship. This aspect of the Dalai Lama, the object of people’s faith, is not the subject of this book.

As an active public political figure, on the other hand, the Dalai Lama is subject to criticism as are all political leaders whose main function is to compromise and to negotiate between different political factions. I believe criticism in politics is not so much based on morality than on law, contracts, and principles, a distinction also often lost in American politics. Thus, when the Dalai Lama uses his political office to universally institute his personal rejection of a religious practice, as is the case with Dharmapala Dorje Shugden, he lays himself open to such criticism. Historically, Buddhist masters have disagreed on a great number of religious practices, but only the Dalai Lama has the political power to enforce his preferences. The fact that some Tibetans did not go along with this type of politics could be seen as a sign of health rather than weakness.

Finally, the Dalai Lama as pop icon gives him a modern mythical status that seems in seamless continuity with the institutionalized myth at the base of the Tibetan national identity. Even though this modern myth-making has helped turn Buddhism into a household name, globalizing that profound religion within the entertainment driven media culture propagates a new version not necessarily accepted by all practicing Buddhists because it is perceived to be inimical to the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by the Kashag (his Cabinet) in an Announcement of May 22, 1996.

religion's depth dimension. The supreme political status of the Dalai Lamas since the Fifth has naturally lent their religious words different weight from other spiritually equally accomplished Lamas. However, the process of transforming such a religious public figure into an international celebrity also made possible its political appropriation in ways previously unthinkable. Since the Dalai Lama as pop icon is now the most well-known Buddhist leader worldwide, "the face Buddhism wears in the West," the political appropriation of his celebrity status necessarily has far reaching effects on Buddhism too, something not yet adequately thought through.

The Tibetan identity crisis to which the Dalai Lama is responding is largely a result of a society having to face a secular world in which religion does not play the same role as it did in traditional Tibet. To fill the void and in order to meet the many different political and social demands, a new Tibetan self-image had to be constructed. Tibetans in exile are passing through a social mirror stage for the first time in their culture's history.<sup>2</sup> They had no need before to see themselves reflectively through the eyes of another culture – politically the geographical distance helped maintain the isolation and the religious cultural influence extended mostly outward from the center, Lhasa. This self-contained status changed dramatically when Tibetans were thrust into a multi-cultural world. By the 1990's Tibetan culture had increasingly been scrutinized by those intensely interested to the merely curious and from all around the world. Today, Tibetan culture exists more in front of cameras than elsewhere. In this, Tibetans mistakenly see the guarantee for its survival. We know that the self-conscious creation of a public image does not follow the same process as cultural transformation. The gap between them is at the center of the Tibetan identity crisis in which Dorje Shugden has played such a surprisingly prominent role. He has served as scapegoat for all unwanted cultural, political, and psychological baggage. Thus purifying many of the undesirable elements from the newly constructed Tibetan image made it more presentable to the rest of the world. The image of an exotic, yet compassionate, culture was the one commodity Tibetans could trade in the global market place. The need to eliminate important cultural distinctions in the service of a uniform global Tibetan cultural image explains to some extent how Dorje Shugden came to play such a crucial role in the current Tibetan identity crisis.

The success of the process is measured by how thoroughly the Tibetan exile government and the social groups that constitute it pursued -- and continue to do so -- the demonization of Dorje Shugden so that his name elicits instant deep hatred, revulsion, or, at best, anxiety and intense discomfort. Name recognition of Dorje Shugden is now 100% in the Tibetan exile community. Unlike Nechung, the protector who speaks through the State Oracle, whom every Tibetan has heard of since he is also used for functions of state and politics, the name of Dorje Shugden had not been much in public circulation before 1996. There was no reason to do so even by those who relied on this Dharmapala, since the practice was maintained within the religious domain of esoteric Buddhism. It is customary among Gelugpas to discuss such issues only in appropriate fora, not among the public in general as it became routine since Dorje Shugden was made a political issue. I will summarize here, before discussing them in more depth below, the common

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Donald Lopez: Prisoners of Shangrila, who seems to reduce most of what we know about Tibet and Tibetans to this experiment with social change.

reasons the Dalai Lama and his government<sup>3</sup> have given for their ban of Dorje Shugden, which turns out to be far more comprehensive than the usual meaning of that word. These reasons were used to create a universal perception of the evil-spirit-scapegoat. In this they were successful and, solely with this aim in mind, they even have some coherence. However, they have nothing whatsoever to do with a religious explanation or the view of the people involved in the practice of Dharmapala Dorje Shugden and their reasons for relying on him. After stating the most commonly cited reasons, I will abbreviate the most salient reason why the government's do not amount to a satisfactory explanation for a large number of Tibetans.

(1) Claim: Dorje Shugden harms the cause of Tibet. Objection: The cause of Tibet means freedom to Tibetans while their leader has long given it up. It is difficult to see how, then, Dorje Shugden could harm it.

(2) Claim: Dorje Shugden harms the life and health of the Dalai Lama. Objection: The Dalai Lama is a manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion and cannot be harmed by spirits. It is difficult to see how Dorje Shugden, even if he were an evil spirit, could do so, according to Buddhist doctrine.

(3) Claim: Dorje Shugden harms the institution of Dalai Lama. Objection: That institution, i.e. the Ganden Potang government, is history. It lacks any legal basis or official recognition at this point. It exists today only in the person of the Dalai Lama. How can Dorje Shugden then harm that institution? The future of the Dalai Lama's personal religious lineage is put in question only by the Dalai Lama himself, not Dorje Shugden.

(4) Claim: Dorje Shugden is sectarian. Objection: All Tibetan Buddhist traditions are sectarian. There is no reason to single out Gelugpas if it were not for their historical proximity to political power.

(5) Claim: Buddhism degenerates into spirit worship as a result of propitiating Dorje Shugden. Objection: Buddhists who rely on him do not see Dorje Shugden as a harmful spirit but a Dharmapala whose nature is the Buddha of wisdom. If the Dalai Lama were concerned with Buddhism degenerating into spirit worship why is everyone else (including his government) permitted to worship them?

(6) Claim: Precedent: the Fourteenth Dalai Lama cites the Fifth and Thirteenth, as well as two or three other influential Lamas as having banned Dorje Shugden. Objection: The historical references are problematic in each of these cases. At the very least, they are open to interpretation, which still puts in question the Dalai Lama's dogmatic stand.

(7) Claim: Dorje Shugden harms Nyingmapas and practitioners of other traditions. Objection: A Dharma protector of a particular tradition protects that tradition, it does not attack others. This goes for all traditions. Why apply this mistaken view to only one protector?

(8) Claim: Dorje Shugden destroys those who rely on him. Objection: The function of all

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<sup>3</sup> The Dalai Lama has made these points many times, in the press and to individuals. When I interviewed him December 8, 1997, about another matter, he brought up point 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8. However, lacking a coherent framework for making sense of these disconnected fragments, they have been repeated everywhere as if they were facts and understandable on their own terms. Most recently the Dalai Lama mentioned them again in Bloomington, Indiana, August 16, 1999, to the press in preparation for the Kalachakra empowerment and in answer to a journalist's question whether or not Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden were permitted to attend.

protectors is to prevent the practitioner from going against his or her vows and the Buddhist way. If anyone is harmed, the cause is a violation or other negative actions, not the Dharma protector.

I will try to show in this part of the book that the dramatized, widely propagated nature of these claims – especially the most serious ones of harming the cause of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and sectarianism – have no basis in reality. They are for the most part projected fears hardened into political slogans. I think it is preposterous to believe this campaign of hate has anything to do with religion. One has only to look at the other bizarre charges raised indiscriminately and universally against Buddhists who rely on Dharmapala Dorje Shugden, such as murder, assassination attempts and designs on the Dalai Lama and other government officials, treason, and all sorts of betrayals and evil actions -- dealt with below in the section “War on Words” -- to know that the conflict takes place in the vicinity of political wrangling for fame, power, and influence, not religion.

This brings me to the difficulties I found in writing about this issue some of which I would like to touch upon here. For example, the above claims are usually made without any other context than an appeal to the absolute authority of the Dalai Lama. Looked at from another perspective, their fragmentary nature bring into focus the lack of a coherent rational framework.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the

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<sup>4</sup> This becomes particularly clear when examining the apologies by Western scholars of the exile government actions. So far, there has been no serious scholarship on the issue. Dreyfus’ rhetorical strategy (“The Shuk-den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel”) is obvious when he repeats baseless accusations and speculations in the language of fundamentalism: Pabongka and Trijang Rinpoches as charismatic leaders, as though they were the leaders of a cult when they were mainstream Gelugpa scholars and teachers; terms like revivalism applied only to these masters, not the Dalai Lama who is truly reviving older Tibetan shamanistic, religious, and political practices; conservative to denote the religious concern of these Lamas but not to the authoritarian political ways of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, for example. The contradictions abound and Dreyfus even admits that after he has spun his rhetorical spin that he had discovered the proof for what he was saying, a date which supposedly contradicts the time Dorje Shugden was “subdued,” when those who practice Dorje Shugden do not believe he had to be subdued since his actions are believed to be a result of his promise made long before the controversial events (see Part I, FN #80; also Part II, 17<sup>th</sup> Century). Berzin in a talk about Dharma protectors (June 5, 1998 in Munich) reads Dorje Shugden followers’ “fundamentalism” back into Tibetan history of the last three hundred fifty years and that they were against the Fifth Dalai Lama’s “non-sectarianism” -- the project of the Fourteenth. It is a strange line of reasoning to say that the Fifth destroyed or converted many monasteries of other traditions to establish his version of “non-sectarianism” just as it is strange to destroy the Geden Oral Tradition protected by Dorje Shugden in the name of the Fourteenth’ “non-sectarianism.” As is common with Western defenders of a policy from another culture, he is more extreme in his anti-Dorje Shugden stand than the Tibetan exile government. Berzin gives a psychological explanation of the Buddhist reliance on Dharma protectors according to Jung which leaves out any religious dimension whatsoever and the commonly held Buddhist belief of the Buddha’s activities made present in this world in different ways and through different appearances in which protectors also participate. Berzin explains the protector conflict on the basis of his reductive psychological model with pseudo-historical underpinnings. The supposedly protective wrathful forces he portrays this way are very strange indeed and one wonders why anyone would want engage them. It makes their practice a manipulative, worldly activity when the Buddhist explanation of these forces Berzin omits and their engagement are quite a different matter. In the question and answer period after the talk Berzin attacks Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden as distorting the issue by placing them in Western psychological terms, thereby dismissing out of hand any objection a person might have to the official government view. Another such contradiction is when Berzin forgets that the Dalai Lama and the Tibet Lobby rely heavily on the human rights language to bring to the attention of the world the plight of Tibet – especially after the Dalai Lama had given up Tibetan independence formally in 1988 – and says that the human rights language cannot be applied to Tibetan in exile when they are coerced into giving up their religious practice because we have to understand Asian psychology. The point here is not merely to point out the chauvinism in such an approach but to show the lack of rational framework in explaining the conflict. Berzin has been a vocal anti-Dorje Shugden activist since the early eighties and if he -- a Harvard Ph.D. with all the languages that qualify him to do serious research -- has not yet come up with a coherent explanation after crusading against this tradition around the world for almost two decades merely repeating the prevailing prejudices, it points to the possibility that there may not be one.

problematic of the subject matter itself -- demonizing Dorje Shugden to create an effective scapegoat -- limits my approach. Considering the source of the conflict, it is not difficult to see that the subject defies a simple, straight forward analysis. How can one reason about a problematic that has its origin in prophecies from invisible beings speaking through oracles? The situation is so obscured by layers of ancient and modern myths of power that it has so far resisted any reasoned explanation. The irrational response to the ban even by Western Tibet experts in their attempts to justify the Dalai Lama's actions and the mostly emotional content of the Tibetan experience makes the issue even more difficult to analyze.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most disturbing components I found in trying to make sense of this complexly layered phenomenon is the intolerant out of hand rejection of any interpretation other than the official one. This forces anyone open-minded and inclusive into a position of having to disagree with the Dalai Lama instead of merely presenting a different perspective on an issue. It is deeply disturbing that the global Buddhism the Dalai Lama has dedicated his life to constructing rejects so absolutely any interpretation of the most learned Gelugpa Buddhist masters other than that of ignorant devil worshipers. It makes a rational approach practically impossible. Another troubling point I found was that no overall group or organization of "Dorje Shugden followers" existed until in 1996 when the government indiscriminately declared this fictitious entity to be a "cult." This way they lumped together a diversity of people from different geographical and cultural areas and across the social and economic spectrum and labeled them with a word absent from the Tibetan language. There was no such separate group of Dorje Shugden followers until the Tibetan government-in-exile attempted to create one intentionally in order to marginalize them more easily, according to its own documents. This makes writing about them very difficult, especially in any general way as I am doing here, without participating in the government's strategy of casting them out of Tibetan society.

In addition, the most educated Gelugpas affected by the ban remained silent. I respect their contemporary wisdom of refusing to compete in the global market place with discussions about esoteric Buddhist subjects where they are inevitably misunderstood. The government's rejection of any reasoned debate about the subject condemned them to silence. From the beginning of the crisis in 1996 the Dalai Lama was determined to destroy the practice. Whether or not to continue Dorje Shugden was never subject to debate or negotiation. This type of intolerance is foreign to Buddhist principles. While a Buddhist teacher may advise the disciples not to do certain practices for religious reasons, the Dalai Lama's political status empowered his government, made up of many social groups, to enforce it. Hence, since a religious issue was displaced into the political domain in order to destroy a tradition, the official literature on the conflict is full of contradictions and unproven accusations. It is fragmentary and incoherent because it is primarily supported by appeal to authority in an attempt to prove the unprovable, not by facts or reasons. The Dalai Lama himself did not add anything to help find a reasonable approach to this subject. In answer to my repeated request to provide reasons Westerners could understand so that they may judge for themselves why this conflict was occurring, he talked quite emotionally about evil

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<sup>5</sup> Ironically, even though the truth of the Dorje Shugden conflict is stranger than fiction, to date its most accurate rendering, at least from an experiential point of view, can be found in a work of fiction by Salman Rushdie: *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., New York, 1999, in chapters 13 & 14.

spirits, spirit worship, and the mental instability of Western Buddhists,<sup>6</sup> hardly a rational approach.

Thus, I will limit my presentation to providing some historical and cultural background, especially leading up to the identity crisis of the 1990's in exile, in order to contextualize the relevant material. In addition, I will focus on the medium of language in which the creation of the new global Tibetan image meant to replace the old identity plays itself out. I will try to unravel some of the religious and political meanings mixed and confused in key terms and slogans in the vicinity of the Dorje Shugden conflict; point to the use of magical realism in Tibetan political discourse; shed some light on the manipulation of the media in the service of the new Tibetan image; as well as touch on the construct of a global Buddhism currently propagated – a Buddhism determined more by market forces, the norms of the entertainment industry, and by celebrity cults than its Tibetan tradition. In the process, I hope to raise more questions in urgent need of being addressed than provide answers.

### TIBETAN IDENTITY

The Tibetan identity is in crisis and in danger of losing whatever is its Tibetanness. This is the Dalai Lama's stated concern for Tibetans inside Tibet that he says has motivated him to give up independence in favor of "cultural autonomy." Exactly what makes Tibetans Tibetan is hard to define.<sup>7</sup> To an outside observer like myself it would have to include the irrepressible sense of individual freedom, a culture specific religiosity, and the curious ability to inspire the imagination of countless people around the world. In exile, the Dalai Lama, embodying all of these factors, became the very soul of Tibetans, their identity, and, as Avalokiteshvara, Buddha of compassion, their myth of origin.<sup>8</sup> In holding on to the one institution left from the old Tibet, they often do not acknowledge the changed realities the Dalai Lama has to deal with in exile. The myths revived are now in danger of ossifying into a utopian ideology of cultural superiority that sees Tibet not as a country but as the realm for the revival of the spirit, a zone of peace between China and India.<sup>9</sup> Inasmuch as the Dalai Lama is symbolic of the undying flame of Tibet, no matter what the myth, Tibetans believe they owe him absolute loyalty and allegiance now more than ever.

The Dalai Lama is the one correct role model for Tibetans, beyond criticism, beyond reproach. Reflected in the behavior especially of young monks across India is the Dalai Lama's un-Tibetan mix of "simple monk" image and international jet setter. The Mahayana goal of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings is changing to a public persona teaching in the West to make the plight of Tibet known to the world. This striving is pervasive and has become part of the exile cultural fabric reflecting the unconscious identification with the His Holiness and legitimated by his celebrity status, the highest goal visible to the image culture. Many monks

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, December 8, 1997, Dharamsala.

<sup>7</sup> Samdong Rinpoche, for example, defines the Tibetan national characteristics as, "The fundamental characteristic of Tibet as a nation has been peace, compassion, non-violence, and spirituality." *Tibet: A Future Vision*, Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, New Delhi, 1996, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Even Richard Gere, a very public disciple of the Dalai Lama, expresses it this way, "His upholding of our highest ideas of love, compassion, and forgiveness have made him our very soul." Introductory Message to Wisdom and Compassion, *The Sacred Art of Tibet*, Marilyn M. Rhie, Robert A.F. Thurman, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1991, p. 8

<sup>9</sup> In a proposal to the United States Congress in 1987 that served as the basis for the Strasbourg proposal in 1988.

even imitate the emotional range of the Dalai Lama's verbal expressions that glide effortlessly from the deepest low to the highest high in a matter of seconds, his elaborate hand gesturing influenced by Indian body language, their use of his pervasive terms, like universal responsibility and tolerance, to cover their own often un-monk like behavior. The more the Dalai Lama's Western persona as champion of democracy, innovation, non-violence, science, ecumenism, new age universalism and global interrelatedness is perfected and celebrated worldwide, the older the myths seem that are revived by Tibetans in India and Tibet. As Buddhism is transformed into a global phenomenon, pre-Buddhist beliefs are resurrected among exile Tibetans on a larger scale than before.

There are plenty of myths perpetuated within Buddhism as well -- some perhaps more necessary than others. Debunking the myth of Shangri-la<sup>10</sup> has become the academic fashion of the moment. Tibet related intellectuals have found that the West projects its own fantasies, needs and desires onto "Tibet." This is considered unique, as if we did not project our own desires and fantasies onto other countries, like China,<sup>11</sup> for example, or as if Tibetans, Indians, Indonesians, and many others did not project their fantasies of the "American dream" onto the United States, each according to need. Since Tibet is currently fashionable, it is also fashionable to deconstruct it where, strangely, Tibet is assumed to be an empty projection screen, perhaps a synonym of a modernity whose mythic content has been sidelined. Ironically, Tibetan Buddhism originally became so popular because it was a religion with its own world that had not yet been subjugated by the media empire. A window opened on a genuine otherness accessible to Western emotional experiences through the universality of Buddhism. Since it has become a media phenomenon, the Western fascination with Tibet is described almost exclusively as a mere projection of its own spiritual needs and fantasies rather than a legitimate exercise of the cultural imagination in pursuit of something lost from its own history. The search for Shangri-la has become utopian which throws a shadow on the truth of Buddhism and the inner journey its traditional Tibetan versions could provide.

"Shangri-la" is considered a distortion of Shambala, the mythical land<sup>12</sup> of the kings that are also knowledge holders (rigs.ldan) of the Kalachakra tantra. The first king of Shambala to have received the Kalachakra empowerment from the Buddha "returned to Shambala, wrote a long exposition of it, and propagated Kalachakra Buddhism as the state religion."<sup>13</sup> The myth, according to Tibetan sources, tells that the last king of Shambala will defeat the "barbarians" in a great war of apocalyptic proportions after which Buddhism will flourish again for another two millennia. The Kalachakra tantra came to Tibet from India through several transmission lineages from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries long before the Ganden Potang government was established. It was first practiced by the Panchen Lamas, especially the third, and from the eighth Dalai Lama it was performed by Namgyal Monastery, the private monastery of the Dalai

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<sup>10</sup> Started by Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Jonathan D. Spence: *The Chan's Great Continent, China in Western Minds*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1998

<sup>12</sup> Shambala is also identified with Amaravati, South India, and the Tarim Basin of East Turkestan as historical places of origin. See, *The Kalachakra Tantra*, edited and translated by Jeffrey Hopkins, Wisdom Publications, London, 1985, p. 59. There is a vast amount of literature about Shambala, also appropriated by Theosophists.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65

Lamas.<sup>14</sup>

A Dalai Lama gave Kalachakra empowerment to large groups of people traditionally no more than five times, since it is meant for attendees to establish a karmic connection with a future world Buddhist revival believed to be the fated task for Shambala's king. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama has performed Kalachakra empowerment many more times and in different parts of the world from Tibet, India, Mongolia, to the United States and Europe. Hundreds of thousands of people attend these mass events to which Buddhists and non-Buddhists flock. The one in Bloomington, Indiana, in August 1999, was organized by one of the Dalai Lama's brothers, Professor Norbu, with the help of many different groups, including Christian, interfaith and non-religious social groups. Its theme is world peace and to "transform the millennium." "The Kalachakra, the most revered of all Tibetan Buddhist rituals, is open to persons of all spiritual traditions and beliefs,"<sup>15</sup> according to the advertising company handling the publicity for the event, except for Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden. It is clear to anyone from the absolute stand the Dalai Lama has taken for the past three years of refusing anyone who relies on Dorje Shugden to attend his public teachings and empowerments that they are also excluded from the Indiana Kalachakra affair. However, Professor Norbu and his son, organizer of the event, seemed surprised that Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden do not feel welcome, according to an article in the *Village Voice*. As required by public relations,<sup>16</sup> the Norbus contend "that all faiths are welcome at the Kalachakra."<sup>17</sup> A month later the Dalai Lama confirms at a press conference<sup>18</sup> that Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden cannot come to the event open to people

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<sup>14</sup> John R. Newman: "A Brief History of the Kalachakra," *The Wheel of Time, The Kalachakra in Context*, Geshe Lhundup Sopa, et.al, ed. by Beth Simon, Snow Lion Publication, Ithaca, 1985, p. 76. A slightly different overview is presented in Philippe Cornu: *Tibetan Astrology*, Shambala, Boston, 1997, p. 25-30.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Pitts, Senior Vice President and Director of strategic planning at Montgomery Zukerman Davis, Inc., an ad agency in Indianapolis in a press release, PRNewswire, AOL, June 28, 1999. Billboards of the Dalai Lama advertising the Kalachakra line the roads entering Bloomington. With costs as high as \$1,000 per person for a seat on stage and the lowest at \$375, it is still an exclusive event even with transmission over the Internet, unlike that of Billy Graham, the Christian evangelist, in a nearby Indianapolis stadium. His event is free as was the Kalachakra empowerment when given in a religious Buddhist context.

<sup>16</sup> That not all faiths never were welcome in Professor Norbu's Tibetan Cultural Center in Bloomington is clearly shown by the following incident: Thomas Canada, married to an heiress to the Eli Lilly fortune, had offered the land for the Tibetan Cultural Center where the Kalachakra is to be performed in August 1999 to His Holiness the Dalai Lama through his brother Professor Norbu in 1977 but inaugurated by His Holiness in 1979. Thom helped build the stupa and other structures on the land. According to Thomas Canada, when at the end of September 1996 he drove into the Center to show the stupa to Dagom Rinpoche, a popular Lama based in Nepal who is known to rely on Dorje Shugden, Professor Norbu "was standing in front of his residence with his arms folded. I pulled up in my van with the Lama in the passenger seat on the side facing Norbu. He was fuming and glaring at us. I said, Hello Rinpoche. He said, Leave! I said, What? He said, Go away!. I spun my wheels and drove out for the last time." On August 25, 1999, Thomas Canada went to attend the Kalachakra Initiation. He was turned away by a group of armed State Department security guards and local police and told him that he was on a list and could not attend. At night Tibetan voices called expletives from between the trees near his house as well as, "Devil worshiper, we will kill you. You are on the list."

<sup>17</sup> Jason Vest: "Bickering Buddhists," *Village Voice*, July 27, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> *Hoosier Times*, Bloomington, August 16, 1999. The reason usually given for excluding Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden from an empowerment is that they will shorten the Dalai Lama's life if they enter into the Guru/disciple relationship required by the rules of the highest class of Vajrayana. The Kalachakra initiation in Bloomington has been advertised like a secular event without any reference to religious commitments. Looking at it from a rational point of view, there is a double standard here. Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden are held to the rules of the tradition while everyone else is exempted. Traditionally, those who attend an empowerment also take the vows and commitments as part of the religious ceremony. Since the Kalachakra is open to people from all religions as well as atheists they would necessarily break these vows and commitments and shorten the life of the empowering master, the Dalai Lama. If the rules are not applied universally according to the Buddhist texts, it is clearly not a religious issue.



from all faiths and atheists alike.

The myth of the king of Shambala<sup>19</sup> now reigns over vastly larger parts of the world than he does in his mythical kingdom. Professor Robert Thurman, a spokesman for the Dalai Lama, identifies him with the Kings of Shambala not only from the point of view of personal religious practice, as mostly taught in Buddhism, but also in millennial fashion. He outlines Tibetan history through the Kalachakra mandala<sup>20</sup> and criticizes scholars attempting to find a model to cut through the mythic overly to knowledge about Tibet as “driven by their deeply ingrained sense of the intrinsic superiority of the West and the historic inevitability of its form of modernity.”<sup>21</sup> When describing the Kalachakra emblem on a hat a Manchu emperor had offered to a “a high Lama in government service, ...such as the Dalai Lama or the Panchen Lama,” he says, “The Kalachakra or Wheel of Time Tantra ...[is] especially connected with the Tibetan calendar and sense of history or destiny, as it contains the famous prophecy of Shambhala. [The emblem] was regarded as a powerful talisman, signifying that the Ganden Palace government based in the Potala was authorized to maintain Tibet’s connection with the Kalachakra eschatology.”<sup>22</sup> Authorized by whom? The Manchu emperor? The legitimation of the Dalai Lama’s claim to the prophesy of Shambala, that is, to the future world leadership of Buddhism in the form of Shambala’s king victorious in the apocalyptic war with evil -- Thurman here brings here into historical proximity with a Chinese emperor -- is worrisome .

It is however not history in the common sense of that word which is the issue. It is rather a Tibetan identity in search for a country. The Kalachakra myth provides the Dalai Lama, invariably referred to as God King in the press, with a mythical country to his now mythical Ganden Potang government. Yet the Dalai Lama is also hailed as a modernizer. This is just one of the many contradictions inevitably surrounding someone of such legendary status. Most Tibet experts other than Thurman currently claim that the myth of Tibet is merely in the eyes of the beholder. That leaves Tibetans out of the picture altogether and makes totally acceptable the view of the Dalai Lama as modernizer. If, indeed, the myth of Tibet were merely the projection of naive Westerners who have lost the claim to their own imagination as a result of demythologizing Christianity and other Euro-centered religious belief systems, then just look who helps feed that myth! The image of Dalai Lama as a modernizer seems to obscure the wider

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<sup>19</sup> Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche also used “Shambala” to establish a of movement or a Buddhist social organization with Shambala training. It included military drills, Buddhist practice, and a publishing company by that name. However, he is said to have stated explicitly that his source was not the Kalachakra tantra but, according to the editor, Carolyne Rose Gimian, “draws on the ancient primordial wisdom of pre-industrial societies of Tibet, India, China, Japan, and Korea.” *Shambala, The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, Shambala, Boston 1988, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> M. Rhie and Robert A.F. Thurman: *Worlds of Transformation, Tibetan Art of Wisdom and Compassion*, Tibet House New York, Publishers, New York , 1999, pp. 21-39

<sup>21</sup> Thurman: *ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>22</sup> Robert A.F. Thurman, David Weldon: *Sacred Symbols, The Ritual Art of Tibet*, Sotheby’s Rossi & Rossi, New York, 1999. Thurman, as quoted in “Die Macht der Bilder,” *Die Woche*, March 19, 1999, also proclaimed at a Tibet conference in Bonn, Germany, in 1997, that the decadent materialistic West would soon fall apart replaced by Buddhist rule and value system. At the 1999 March 10<sup>th</sup> demonstration in New York, I listened to Thurman summarizing to his audience of wildly applauding Tibetans the same view of a future when Buddhism would be the dominating world religion and everyone would come to them, the Tibetans for advice and teachings. See also a discussion of the Shambala prophesy as “holding a millennial message for all of mankind,” with reference to Thurman, in “Tibet und die New Age-Bewegung,” *Mythos Tibet*, p.189

panorama on this issue.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of whatever modernity the West reads into the exile community on the basis of the Dalai Lama's image, the voice of reason in political discourse and social dialogue is very hard to find. It is conspicuously absent not because it does not exist, but because it is silenced. The ground for the Tibetan identity in exile is the Dalai Lama myth, not a country; a culture, not workable institutions; devoted imitation, not rational discussion; morality play, not analysis and reason. With the Dalai Lama believed to have a monopoly on the truth rather than power, free speech and public debate become superfluous in the exile community, free participation in the political process impossible. In a crisis, a few words by the Dalai Lama repeated as slogans eclipse any rational public discourse.

### SHIFTING POWER BASE IN EXILE – From Politics back to Religion in a new Mix

The cultural and political upheaval for Tibetans in exile since 1959 naturally caused an unsettling identity crisis of unparalleled proportions. The many shifts and changes in their lives brought to the surface old conflicts and created many new ones. The mechanism to deal with them adequately was simply not in place at a time when struggle for survival took precedence over all else. The strategy was to line up everyone behind the Dalai Lama, seen as the single legitimate symbol of the Tibetan nation. The problem however was that without adequate new structures to deal with the changed social and political realities, old habits prevailed. The culture could not transform itself and started to become hollow after only one generation in exile. This merely accentuated the identity crisis erupting for the first time large scale in the 1990's. The Dalai Lama also had to reinvent himself, and the old myth of the Ganden Potang government with the Dalai Lama at its center had to be transformed into a modern one. This became the main Tibetan project in exile. The exile administration started to use the term Ganden Potang government again in the 1990's with the official reinstatement of the union of religion and politics in 1991.

The adoption of the first Charter for the Tibetan exile administration in India in 1991 actually grew out of the political need to include solutions to Tibet's status other than complete independence.<sup>24</sup> The draft constitution for a future Tibet of 1963 was explicitly committed to

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, in the concluding section of an anthology, *Mythos Tibet*, about how the West projects its own fantasies onto Tibet, only the image of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lamas as modernizers is excluded from being examined as a myth. Everything else is considered a projection of our desires to encounter the unknown. This is significant, because a wide range of scholars portray "images" of Tibet, the complexity of its culture still withdrawing from the Western analytical gaze – as if the episteme of our culture were a camera, the eye that mirrors and captures images on blank film. Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther "Mythos Tibet - Zwischen Shangrila und Feudalherrschaft. Versuch einer Synthese," in *Mythos Tibet, Wahrnehmungen, Projectionene, Phantasien*, DuMont, Köln, 1997. Cover: the palace (mandala) of the King of Shambala.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, "Independence has been the mantra to every Tibetan. Tibet's proposed future constitution promulgated in 1965 -- now rendered obsolete -- clearly mentioned the need for Tibetans to strive for independence. This has been diluted to accommodate the Chinese offer to negotiate anything less than independence. The 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies adopted this in the present Charter of Tibetans in exile." Tseten Norbu: "Where are the Conditions for Holding a Referendum?" *The Tibetan Review*, October 1997.

independence on which the Dalai Lama reversed himself in 1987-88 (Five Point Peace Plan and Strasbourg Proposal). The new charter was hailed as a great advance in the experiment with democracy – the only reason given publically for its adoption -- because it increased the number of elected deputies. Yet they insisted on keeping in its preamble the term unity of religion and politics, the defining feature of Tibet's historical Ganden Potang government, as the mandate of the new exile administration. This was out of respect for His Holiness, who accepted the devotion of his subjects without overriding their decision. The Dalai Lama as Dalai Lama is part and parcel of the Ganden Potang government. It must have been inconceivable to the officials to keep one and reject the other. A rejection of the Ganden Potang also meant the rejection of the Dalai Lama, the very symbol of Tibet. Had the Dalai Lama pressed harder for a secular government at the time, as he had initially proposed, the experiment with democracy might have taken a different turn.<sup>25</sup> In this carefully choreographed dance with the Dalai Lama, a conservative element took over foreshadowing the increasingly militant positions Tibetans would take especially on controversial issues. Why did Dharamsala revert to the basis of the Ganden Potang government at a time when it claimed to modernize? In Tibet the main power base for this government was the landed aristocracy, the great monastic universities around Lhasa and the landed Gelugpa monasteries across the country. Where before in Tibet Gelugpas controlled the government, now, in exile, the government controls Gelugpa, and the other religious traditions are demanding a larger share of the political pie. Either way, the unity of state and religion is upheld. The only difference is that today, inside and outside Tibet, the respective governments interfere much more in the religious aspect of the Gelug tradition which has become politicizing it in unprecedented ways. In exile, the person of the Dalai Lama, the power of the name and institution inherited from Tibetan history, as well as the myth carrying his fame have become the power base for exile Tibetans in the absence of a country, independent economic base, legal status to their government in India and abroad.

Intentionally and carefully crafted in the early days of exile from 1962-1967 by the Dalai Lama's brother Gyalo Thondup,<sup>26</sup> His Holiness' persona was hailed as the only savior of Tibet and its cause. The exile government distanced itself early on from politically educated Tibetans, since they had been the elite in Tibet, and replaced them with their servants, according to Professor Dawa Norbu. Since then, not only the old elite but also the young, educated new elite -- especially intellectuals like Jamyang Norbu, Tashi Tsering, Lhasang Tsering, Sonam Chopel, and late K. Thondup, who were pointing in a direction of separating religion from politics -- has been excluded from political power. Instead, officials subservient and loyal to the Dalai Lama's family were said to have the best chance of succeeding in the Dharamsala government. The main focus is on His Holiness. Samdong Rinpoche underscores the savior image of the Dalai Lama when he says that the only reason why Tibetans are tolerated in India is because of "the person, not the institution, of this Dalai Lama."<sup>27</sup> Children growing up in exile were reminded at every moment that their lives, sustenance, livelihood, and education came to them by the

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<sup>25</sup> Not much is published on the history of the government in exile, its shifting emphasis on either religion or politics, or its relationship to the many non-governmental organizations that act on its behalf. For some insight into the workings of the Tibetan exile community, see Tsering Sakya: the Dragon in the Land of Snows, Pimlico, London, 1999; A. Tom Grunfeld: The Making of Modern Tibet, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, 1996; also assorted Tibetan Review issues

<sup>26</sup> According to Demo Rinpoche, in an interview about Tibetan history, New York, February 24, 1998;

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Samdong Rinpoche, Varanasi, January 12, 1998.

kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They were educated into an unquestioned acceptance of his role and so believed this literally as did the older, religious minded Tibetans, whose proximity to the Dalai Lama was now much closer than it had ever been in Tibet. A whole generation grew up in exile believing in the Dalai Lama as a God who provides everything for his children rather than a Buddha, a guide to enlightenment. Developing an idea of the Dalai Lama as God might have been come from the influence of Indian culture on Tibetans as well as the Christian model that played such a large role in the education of the Tibetan elite in exile.<sup>28</sup> The idea that the sole source of every small and big happiness of Tibetan existence is the kindness of the Dalai Lama and that they were deeply indebted to him was thoroughly inscribed into the cultural fabric in exile. In a touching display of submission, the 1999 official Tibetan calendar, published by the Tibetan Medical Institute in Dharamsala, lists December 10<sup>th</sup> as the “coronation day” on which the Dalai Lama was crowned with the Nobel Peace Prize. This idolizing relationship Tibetans developed with the Dalai Lama in exile is quite different from that of the more independent minded people of old Tibet. The image of the sole savior of Tibetans is a construct<sup>29</sup> fashioned out of political necessity with religious content. For political reasons even the accomplishments of other Tibetan Lamas were appropriated by the official religious establishment in Dharamsala. All good things were attributed to His Holiness starting in the 1980's not necessarily out of religious devotion but out of an overriding political urgency. When today the Dalai Lama's representatives lecture other Tibetan Lamas teaching in the West on the kindness of His Holiness, i.e. that they owe him everything since, according to them, Dharma would not exist in the West without the Dalai Lama, they unwittingly tell the story in reverse.<sup>30</sup> Buddhist teachers from Japan, Vietnam, Shri Lanka, etc., and Tibetan Lamas from all schools laid the foundation for Buddhist development in the West. They made possible the later success of the Dalai Lama. A well functioning net of Tibetan Buddhist organizations was already established when the Dalai Lama taught in Europe for the first time. His first visit to the United States was not until 1979.<sup>31</sup> When the Dalai Lama says of himself today, “The institution of Dalai Lama has become the guardian of Tibetan Buddhism,”<sup>32</sup> one wonders why a politicized institution such as that of the Dalai Lama with his Ganden Potang government and its failure to

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<sup>28</sup> Most were educated in the Christian missionary schools in India, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Dehradun. See also below the section on the influence of Christianity on Tibetans in exile in “In Search for a Modern Identity.”

<sup>29</sup> “The Dalai Lama's public persona was built up one grain at a time, like the celebrated mandala, over a period of nearly forty years. By the time I met him back in 1970, he was already highly respected as a great Buddhist teacher and an untiring advocate of non-violence. Since then, like Gandhi and Mother Teresa, he came to epitomize the very essence of humanity itself.” Victor Chan, “The Dalai Lama as Petty Tribalist,” *Chinese Community Forum (CCF)*, an electronic journal, March 25, 1998 (Issue No. 9810) posted on the website of The Government of Tibet in Exile. Victor Chan, a Buddhist and well versed in Tibetan culture, spent more than two years walking and hitchhiking across Tibet collecting material for his *Tibet Handbook: A Pilgrimage Guide*, Moon Publications Inc., Chico, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> The Dalai Lama's representative in Geneva, Chungdak Dawa Koren, for example, in a meeting with Lama Gangchen Rinpoche and group, according to Sharon Dawson, Coordinator of “Help in Action,” in an interview, Delhi, May 18, 1998

<sup>31</sup> “On the Dalai Lama's first trip to New York in 1979, he went to see the Statue of Liberty ... not even recognized by passers-by. He gave talks ... to a total of 1,000 people, without security guards, police escorts, or trailing photographers. Today, ... his fame and his following will draw a more traditional reaction to celebrity. His every move has been mapped out by the State Department. City police officers are blocking off and stationing guards along his itinerary. Photographers, television camera operators and reporters from around the world will be following him. And an estimated 40,000 people are expected at the four major talks ...” Barbara Stewart: “With 13<sup>th</sup> Visit, Dalai Lama has Gone from Obscurity to Celebrity,” *The New York Times*, August 11, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, Torsten Engelhardt, Nina Freytag: “Tibet ein Teil Chinas? Der Dalai Lama,” *Die Woche*, November 6, 1998.

resolve on any level the political task with which it was entrusted should be seen as being any better qualified to serve as guardian of Tibetan Buddhism than the hundreds of other equally realized masters of Tibet's different Buddhist traditions who are working as hard, if not as famously, at the common task of saving their religion outside of the domain of active politics. The carefully crafted image of the Dalai Lama as religious leader the world knows today, popularized with the help of political world leaders and Hollywood since late 1980's, became the repository for all Tibetan aspirations and hope. It provided a model for a new Tibetan self-image and identity.

The basis for the successful Dalai Lama image as the sole savior for exile Tibetans and later its globalized version was to a large extent Tibetan independence but then, in the 1990's after many political failures, it shifted back primarily to religion. In the earlier exile days the Dalai Lama was not permitted to make political statements in India. The world did not acknowledge Tibet's existence as an independent country. He received his first visas abroad in the late seventies only on condition of refraining from engaging in political activities or making political statements. Whatever political aims Tibetans advanced at that time, they had to be hidden behind religious discourse or worked through local organizations. This created a most distressing situation for Tibetans almost forcing the Dalai Lama into mixing his religious and political pursuits in new and unprecedented ways. When exile Tibetans made their first contacts with Tibetans inside Tibet in the late 1970's<sup>33</sup> they became painfully aware of the scope of Chinese destruction in Tibet. The reality hit them that there was almost nothing left of their culture and way of life to which to return. At that point the call for independence became more loudly heard beyond the exile community. The idea of independence became a powerful unifying factor for Tibetans with the Dalai Lama at the helm of this movement. In the eighties, the free Tibet movement gained momentum and became visible worldwide. Tibetans became more vocal and stated their political aims more freely. The Nechung oracle's continued prophecies from the early 1980's onward of freedom and the exiles' speedy return to a free Tibet were taken absolutely literally by almost every Tibetan. Later, in the 1990's, when it became apparent that these prophecies had not come true, the government's oracles started to blame Dorje Shugden for its failure<sup>34</sup> and, with the unfulfilled expectations of the Strasbourg proposal (1988) to open any productive dialogue with the Chinese, the power base shifted back to religion.

When in 1988 the Dalai Lama in a speech to the European Parliament, later called the Strasbourg proposal, reneged on the commitment to independence in favor of Tibet as a zone of peace under the suzerainty of China, most Tibetans were reluctant to criticize this proposal openly, especially since it was presented to Tibetans then as a temporary solution with complete independence still as the final goal. Most Tibetans, especially those who today demonstrate in capitals throughout the world for Tibetan freedom, still explain away the ever widening gap between the Dalai

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<sup>33</sup> The first delegation sent as a fact finding mission from Dharamsala to Tibet, led by Lobsang Samten, the Dalai Lama's brother, started in January 1979, the second, led by the Jetsun Pema, the Dalai Lama's sister, in May 1980, and the last of the series in 1982. These delegations brought back hours of film and video footage and thousands of pictures as testimony to the destruction inside Tibet.

<sup>34</sup> The Dalai Lama himself acknowledged the failure of his Strasbourg proposal to bring the Chinese to the negotiating table. For example, "Although the last few years have been more or less a failure, it does not mean that we have no hope," in an interview, "We Want Genuine Autonomy or Self-rule," *The Times of India*, Delhi, August 17, 1996

Lama's political statements and his people's beliefs in independence on religious grounds. "His Holiness knows best what is needed in the long run," they say, "He knows everything." However, after Strasbourg, the idea of independence as the main focus for Tibetan unity disintegrated and the shift back to religion was the only possibility left to the exile leadership to maintain its control over exile Tibetans everywhere in the world. However, this religion could clearly not be the Gelugpa tradition, the most powerful religion of old Tibet to which the Dalai Lama also belonged. It had to be a new state religion under the leadership of the Dalai Lama and in a form that could be endorsed by the other Tibetan Buddhist schools as well. The older traditions in Tibet (not in exile) had been marginalized by Gelugpa's popularity and political power. This was perhaps more true of Nyingma, which incorporated non-Buddhist practices and beliefs mostly from Bön, than Kagyu and Sakya, although hundreds of Kagyu monasteries had been destroyed or converted to Gelugpa when the fifth Dalai Lama established his rule. The Nyingmapas have long led the vociferous anti-Gelugpa rhetoric. Gelugpas were often totally unaware that there was a Nyingma-Gelug difference, as is often the case for those in the majority. Interesting here is that Nechung is of Nyingma origin, and Dorje Shugden is mostly Gelugpa, although relied on by Sakyas as well. I see the source of the old problematic between Nyingma and Gelug, which is today blown way out of proportion, situated in the cross between religion and political power. I believe the political misuse of religion is the source for sectarian conflict in Tibetan Buddhism rather than their legitimate doctrinal differences, as is implied today in the denigration of the Gelugpa lineage and its masters protected by Dorje Shugden as inherently sectarian. However, the conflict erupted when the shift from a more political focus moved back to a form of religion as the dominant power base, inevitable after all the political failures. To be sure the new form of Buddhism was a politicized version of a religion that did not exist in Tibet.<sup>35</sup> As a power base for the Ganden Potang government and its administration in exile, it had to give at least the appearance of representing everyone even if the integrity of individual traditions had to be compromised.

While the issue of independence had split the exile community in India and Nepal, with many groups and individuals still firmly committed to Tibetan freedom, at least in principle, the Dalai Lama and his project of saving Tibet's unique culture, much of which is religious, was embraced wholeheartedly. Power consolidated in the person of the Dalai Lama became absolute. It was publicly legitimated again and again by ancient protectors<sup>36</sup> speaking through oracles, the

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<sup>35</sup> Barbara Crossette, seven year Asia correspondent for the New York Times, sums up this difference in a book dedicated "To all Himalayan Buddhists who fear the extinction of their culture more than death," "Historically, Buddhism grew and expanded its reach through the support of enlightened (or shrewd) emperors and kings. These realms, while feudal in organization, were not usually intolerant theocracies. Rulers – among them the early kings of Tibet and Nepal – saw in Buddhism not a philosophy with which to garb authority or cloak conquest but a force for civilizing and elevating their courts and the people they ruled. ...With the demise or dilution of the old kingdoms, Tibetans, Ladakhis, and Bhutanese in recent decades have consciously made Buddhism the hall mark of their nationality and sometimes a banner for militancy or even violence that in some few places (at certain overheated moments) approaches religious fundamentalism." : *So Close to Heaven, The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas*, Vintage Books, New York, 1995, p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Even though already pointed out, I think few Western people know or understand the extent of the Tibetan government's reliance on protectors and divination. "The interrelationship among the Tibetan gods are too complicated to be comprehended by a common man but it is in fact the key element influencing all facets of Tibetan life." And, quoting the Dalai Lama from his autobiography, "I seek his [Nechung] opinion in the same way as I seek the opinion of my cabinet and just as I seek the opinion of my conscience. I consider the gods to be my 'upper house.' The Kashag constitutes my lower house. Like other leaders, I consult both before making a decision on affairs of State." P. Stobdan: "Shugden dispute baffles Tibetans," *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi, August 23, 1996.

ultimate court of appeals in which the Tibetan people do not have a voice. Consulting oracles was something the Dalai Lama had strongly criticized early on in his exile days. Attached to it was the advice to give up such practices in favor of more modern ones, like “meditation,” not common among Tibetans for whom “recitation” is the most prominent practice and the rituals connected with their belief system. Most older Tibetans, who considered a little too fast the Dalai Lama’s “modernizing” pace started in the 1960’s -- i.e. his disapproval of the widespread Tibetan practice of relying on major and minor oracles, of making traditional offerings, large monasteries, extensive rituals, etc., which make up a large part of “Tibetan culture” – were now surprised about the renewed popularity of oracles and elaborate government rituals in the 1990’s, their scope and the oracles’ access to the Dalai Lama. Perhaps the earlier advice was meant only for everyone else’s oracles, not necessarily the Dalai Lama’s or those of the government. The following anecdote told by older Tibetans illustrates the point. Sometime in the mid eighties, the Dalai Lama told his religious attendants to stop certain local protector practices specific to each Dalai Lama. Attached to each incarnation of Dalai Lamas is a local protector of the region of his birth place, or birth protector. Thus there are fourteen of those local protectors that require monthly rituals. His Holiness instructed to give up some of them -- on grounds that there were too many -- and to continue only the important ones. When in his dreams different beings were fighting, believed to have been the result of having giving up the rituals for some of the Dalai Lama’s birth protectors, he reinstated them. On the whole, the shift back to religion in the 1990’s, after an earlier disillusionment with “the novelty of modernism wearing thin in Dharamsala,” is also described as “religious fundamentalism [which] began to supersede any idea of learning from the West.”<sup>37</sup>

Globalizing the new image of this politicized Tibetan Buddhism went hand in hand with the celebrity status of the Dalai Lama as a world religious leader. This began in 1989, when the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize, and exploded in the nineties with Hollywood’s help: its celebrities and two movies featuring the Dalai Lama as main hero. The Western image culture as power base has taught Dharamsala to construct a most efficient media machine capable of an exquisite manipulation of the press.<sup>38</sup> Yet the effect of a media driven culture and the celebrity status of their Buddhist leader on Tibetans in India and Nepal, aside from the financial support it generates, is still indirect and by no means the main motivator, as Tibet scholars now seem to imply.<sup>39</sup> The celebrity image imported into the exile community serves to confirm the religiously based “chosen people” status that has been part of the Tibetan national identity for a very long time. Today, Tibetans claim to be special because they are preserving their religious heritage for the world, not for themselves. “In our work and in our cause, we are trying to be very responsible, but the world should also be responsible toward a group of people that is trying to be an example for the world.”<sup>40</sup> This makes the unquestioned epochal shift of globalizing traditional Buddhist language and images so plausible to Tibetans and their

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<sup>37</sup> Jamyang Norbu: “Opening of the Political Eye, Tibet’s long search for democracy,” *Tibetan Review*, November 1990

<sup>38</sup> See for example, Isabel Hilton and her role as a journalist in the selection of the new Panchen Lama: “Spies in the House of Faith,” *The New Yorker*, August 23-30, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> As Donald Lopez suggests in *Prisoners of Shangrila*, especially in chapter seven, “The Prison.”

<sup>40</sup> Rinchen Khandro Choegyal, Education Minister of the exile government and sister-in-law of the Dalai Lama, sums up this attitude. Quoted by Stephen Kinzer: “As the World Heals, Tibet’s Exiles Feel Forsaken,” *The New York Times*, June 24, 1999.

supporters in the West, who seem unaware that Tibetan culture now lives mainly in media images and in decontextualized fragments of the Dalai Lama's speech propagated throughout the world. The sad loss of cultural content was to be expected but taking them to be the sole reality of Tibetan Buddhism even more so.

Returning to the Dorje Shugden issue as example, how could anyone possibly trump the following statement by the Dalai Lama concerning Buddhists who rely on Dorje Shugden made in Germany in May 1998, "Whoever fights against the Shugden spirit defends religious freedom. I compare this definitely to the Nazis in Germany. Whoever fights them, defends human rights, since the freedom of Nazis is not freedom."<sup>41</sup> Since no distinction was ever made<sup>42</sup> between Buddhists who rely responsibly on Dorje Shugden and those who might misuse the practice, the Dalai Lama's statement would thus include all the great masters who believed Dorje Shugden to be a reliable Dharma protector. The mentors of the Dalai Lama himself, who transmitted hundreds and hundreds of the Buddha's teachings to him in a purely religious context would thus be like Nazis, unworthy of freedom. With such statements by the Dalai Lama and the widespread literalist belief in the truth of all his statements regardless of context, how can anyone speak the truth about these outstanding people and be believed? How can such stigma ever be overcome? This much power has the Dalai Lama's speech to silence. In fact, in March 1999 the word in Dharamsala is that Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche incarnated in a ghost. I do not take rumors seriously, but in a still largely oral society they can be looked at as a barometer of the culture. Nobody from the exile government, as far as I know, has publically questioned the offense to the religious sensibilities of the many tens of thousands of Buddhists for whom those included in such statements are revered masters. If anyone did, he or she would be reviled as anti-Dalai Lama. This is one of the sad results of mixing religion and politics in a post-modern world. The Dalai Lama's power is mostly expressed through words and even political statements are believed to be backed by the Buddha's doctrine which values truth.

## EQUIVOCATIONS

Aside from the unique power, credibility and scope of the Dalai Lama's words, in the absence of open discussions, public debate and a free press, the complexities of linguistic conventions easily collapse into ever repeated simplistic slogans. I would like to focus on several terms frequently used in the peculiar religio-political discourse unique to Tibetans that focuses on the Dorje Shugden issue as a symptom of the larger Tibetan identity crisis. The equivocations built into notions like "the cause of Tibet," "freedom," "sectarianism," "authority," "modernization," "accountability," etc., emerge from the unusual mix of religion and politics. A clear example of how this functions is Samdong Rinpoche's use of "democracy" as interchangeable with "equality" such that equality is understood as a function of the religious mind. Considering that

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<sup>41</sup> Ludwig Klemens, *Esotera*, May 1998, p. 82

<sup>42</sup> As far as I know, at least not publically since the crisis erupted in 1996. The idea was to distance the name of the Dalai Lama from all who had relied on Dorje Shugden, including his own spiritual masters, to safeguard it against charges of sectarianism by anti-Gelugpa factions. The Dalai Lama privately told the old manager of Trijang Labrang, who had served the previous Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, that the young incarnation could continue to rely on Dorje Shugden until he, the Dalai Lama, performed a dough ball divination to determine once and for all whether or not Chogtul Trijang Rinpoche could continue to rely. However, even when the manager requested the Dalai Lama to state this publically in order that the death and other threats against the young Lama and the disparaging campaign against his predecessor might stop, the Dalai Lama did not do so.



the Tibetan people have never exercised democratic choices concerning the major political decisions affecting their lives, the substitution of the equality cultivated by a religious mind for “democracy” is very serious, indeed. Thus, an attempt to clarify how religion and politics interact in modern Tibetan discourse becomes all the more important. Since English is the language through which Tibetan political issues are internationalized, I will examine the multiple meanings of the relevant terms that language.

### **Cause of Tibet**

Ask any Tibetan what “the cause of Tibet” means and they will say, freedom or independence.<sup>43</sup>

In general, Tibetans understand it this way. They had come into exile to escape the lack of freedom and oppression in Tibet. Even though they might not have had the same modern sense of nation and state as had evolved in Europe in the last three centuries, Tibetans had a sense of nation, country, and cultural identity tested through repeated experience with Chinese, Manchu, and Mongol aggression and as far back as the empire King Songtsen Ganpo united in the seventh century.<sup>44</sup> Even though most Western Tibet scholars do not seem to make this distinction and apply exclusively modern political concepts in their Tibet analyses, it nevertheless existed. In exile, freedom was the cause, with the Dalai Lama as its symbol, for which so many Tibetans in Tibet had been imprisoned, tortured, starved and 1.2 million said to have died as a result of Communist policies since the uprising in 1959. Although the sibling rivalry in the Dalai Lama’s family, the most important prevailing force in the exile government, reflects the current Tibetan political dilemma with Gyalo Thondup committed to autonomy within China from the beginning and Professor Thubten Norbu to independence, Tibetans did not have any reason to believe that the Dalai Lama was working towards anything less than freedom while promoting a gradual approach of autonomy first with independence to follow. He continued to say in 1996 in answer to the question, “Shouldn’t you demand complete independence for Tibet now?” that “...I think it is not the right time,”<sup>45</sup> implying that when the time was right, independence would move into the foreground again, while saying elsewhere that “in the long run, I feel Tibet, which is a small, [greater Tibet was as big as Europe!] landlocked country, might get some benefits by merging with a big nation.”<sup>46</sup> Few Tibetans, however, doubted their leader’s commitment to complete independence as long term goal and those with the political acuity to anticipate the problem of independence vs. autonomy were sidelined.

In 1994, after the Dalai Lama’s brother and Chief Minister, Gyalo Thondup, had made statements in Canada to the effect that Kham would be excluded from an autonomous Tibetan region within China, the Chushi Gangdug leadership<sup>47</sup> tried to find some political leverage to make sure their birth place was included in the future negotiations about Tibet. Lithang Athar,

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<sup>43</sup> As reported in the Indian press, for example, Prakash Nanda: “Dalai Lam is Oppressing Buddhist Sect,” *The Times of India*, June 27, 1996, “...a spokesman of the Kashag told our Simla correspondent about the controversy. He said, “worshipping of Dorjee Shugden deity has for long had an adverse effect on the overall interest of the Tibetan cause for independence and seen to be harmful to the personal safety of the Dalai Lama by reducing his life-span.”

<sup>44</sup> See for example, Hugh Richardson: *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, Part One

<sup>45</sup> For example, “We Want Genuine Autonomy or Self-rule,” *The Times of India*, August 17, 1996.

<sup>46</sup> From an interview, “When We Return to Tibet I will not Head the State,” *The Asian Age*, New Delhi, September 8, 1996

<sup>47</sup> The following information is a result of many interviews over a period of time with Lithang Athar and Chushi Gangdug leadership, their documentation, etc.

one of the leaders in the Chushi Gangdug guerilla movement that safeguarded the Dalai Lama's escape from Tibet in 1959,<sup>48</sup> had taken the initiative as the representative of the now regional Chushi Gangdug organization to test the political waters. He talked to a representative of the Taiwanese government -- three years before the Dalai Lama went to Taiwan -- and signed a joint proposal that in the future, when the People's Republic of China and Taiwan were united democratically, Tibet would comprise the three provinces (Ü/Tsang, Kham, and Amdo) under the political and religious leadership of the Dalai Lama. He did so not on behalf of the exile government but as leader of the regional Chushi Gangdug group. This so angered the exile government and the Dalai Lama, who internationally preaches forgiveness for even the most radical criminals and mass murderers, that he did not even accept an apology from Athar for having overstepped the boundaries of his authority in his attempt to create political leverage. Athar went to see the Dalai Lama the day after the affair had become known to the exile government to apologize for his mistake, which to an outsider seems to have been more a case of having seriously misjudged the purported democratic nature of the exile government. Although Dharamsala often invokes democratic terms, in practice, an apology in this case, or dialogue, or a discussion was not even under consideration. In a showdown of power, a group of people from the Chushi Gangdug region, some of whom worked in the Tibetan exile government's security office, were now put on a ballot by Dharamsala in a move to force a new election of a "non-governmental" regional group. The ballot was announced -- only verbally to be sure: "Choose between the Dalai Lama and Lithang Athar," even though this clearly was not the issue at all. Clearly, the exile government appointed Chushi Gangdug leaders won by 99% of the vote and Lithang Athar's house in Delhi was vandalized. The Buddha statues and holy items from his altar taken after the glass windows of the altar had been smashed. Chushi Gangdug split into two, some call it a split between old and new Chushi Gangdug, others a split between elected and appointed Chushi Gangdug because a majority of the region still favors Athar and the leadership of the old Chushi Gangdug. To these people, the cause of Tibet unequivocally means complete freedom from Chinese rule.

It is easy to verify that the cause of Tibet means freedom to most exile Tibetans. The Tibetan Youth Congress, for example, is one organization that has never retracted its commitment to Tibetan independence. It is the fastest growing social group among Tibetans claiming at least sixty-one branches worldwide. It is estimated that more than half the exile Tibetans belong to the Tibetan Youth Congress (which includes old and young people) and they are becoming more active in expressing a commitment to independence through hunger strikes, demonstrations and other visible activities. If you ask the old monks and other people who escaped from Tibet to follow His Holiness for the sake of religious freedom, they too say the cause of Tibet means freedom which to them means independence. It has been a rallying point for Tibetans, even if many know that its reality might be far off and that forcing it would be impractical at the moment. Nevertheless, they believe, "that Tibetans must have independence if only for survival as a people."<sup>49</sup> "Even the hope of independence is vital," says Jamyang Norbu, "It must be

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<sup>48</sup> For more background on this movement, see Roger E. McCarthy: *Tears of the Lotus*, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, 1997; Tsering Shakya, Pimlico, 1999, pp. 165-211; Melinda Liu: "When Heaven Shed Blood," *Newsweek*, April 19, 1999; John Kenneth Knaus: *Orphans of the Cold War*, BBS Public Affairs, New York, 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Jamyang Norbu: "The Heart of the Matter," *Tibetan Review*, March 1994, for example.

remembered that it was the hope of independence that kept our exile society strong and united in the difficult early years. Many of the problems our society now faces with religious and political quarrels, decline in school educational standards, the lamentably disgraceful commercialization of our religion, cynicism in the administration, and loss of self respect and integrity among the ordinary people have definite roots in the gradual relinquishing of the freedom struggle by the Tibetan establishment during the last two decades.”<sup>50</sup> Even for the diverse crowd of Western Dalai Lama admirers, the cause of Tibet means Tibetan freedom.

The only different explanation I heard was from the Office of Tibet in London. In answer to the a question concerning the meaning of “the cause of Tibet,” Tseten Samdup in official capacity of the Tibetan exile government wrote, “I think this cannot be explained in simple terms. It is more religious and spiritual debate. I suppose it is the influence of Dorje Shugden and the action that lead to it. From childhood I never heard anything good about Dorje Shugden other than [he is] worshiped for material rewards. It is also to do with trust between the teacher and student or leader and his followers. Dorje Shugden apparently came back to challenge the works of the Dalai Lama, so goes the story. I am sorry for not [being] able to shed more light onto this. Tseten.”<sup>51</sup> Tibetans I asked had never heard this explanation of the cause of Tibet.

## Freedom

The Tibetan freedom movement focuses on a country colonized by an invading power against the will of its people, not the liberation from samsaric suffering. The internationalization of the Tibet issue in the mid-eighties was political and politically motivated, even though Western experts in 1998 still insist that the Dalai Lama engaged in political activities merely as an appendix to his Buddhist teachings during his visits to the U.S.<sup>52</sup> Every time he came to Washington (1987), or Brussels (1988), to make statements aimed at the Chinese concerning the future of Tibet, they retaliated with harsh repression and violence towards Tibetans demonstrating in support of the Dalai Lama, their symbol of freedom. Many died and were imprisoned and tortured as a result.<sup>53</sup> It was the first time pictures and video clips of monks brutally beaten by Chinese police were seen in the Western media and galvanized international support. Although Western support often rallied around human rights in Tibet, the right to self-determination is understood to be an important fundamental right. This applied to Tibetans as well since by many accounts they had been independent when invaded. Freedom still means independence to Tibetans as well as many of their Western supporters. Even as the Dalai Lama started in 1996 to explain in more detail to Tibetans his ambiguous meaning of a “middle way”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Jamyang Norbu: “Rangzen Charter: Appeal to My Fellow Tibetans and Freedom-loving People Everywhere,” *World Tibet Network News*, April 27, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> In an e-mail message to Lory Revere, April, 9, 1997 from Tseten Samdup at [tibetlondon@gn.apc.org](mailto:tibetlondon@gn.apc.org), marked The Office of Tibet, The Office of Tibet is the official agency of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, address, tel., etc.

<sup>52</sup> Lopez.... It is interesting to compare the very different perspectives on the same historical events from the political (Grunfeld) and the de-mythologizing approach to Tibetan issues, for lack of a better word for what Lopez is doing.

<sup>53</sup> For this very complex political dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese with the help of a Tibet Lobby spanning London, Brussels, New York, see, for example, Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, Pimlico, London, 1999, chapter 14; Grunfeld, “The Last Decade: 1985-1995,” *The Making of Modern Tibet*, especially pp. 232-236

<sup>54</sup> From a religious point of view, in this term, which literally translates the Sanskrit *madhyamaka*, resonates what most Tibetans consider the most profound philosophy of Buddhism while it could also mean a way to the “middle kingdom,” an ancient name for China.

navigating between Chinese control and independence in the concept of “greater autonomy,” freedom continues to be the central issue for Tibetans. The Tibetan freedom movement gained worldwide support of unprecedented proportions in the nineties and it is highly unlikely that for those people freedom means a Kosovo style autonomy for Tibet within China.

More than a million people have given their lives for Tibet’s freedom, untold have been tortured, displaced, suffered from near starvation, degraded, discriminated against, humiliated, traumatized. When the Dalai Lama says in 1996, “our definition of freedom is not independence,”<sup>55</sup> it is difficult to imagine what Tibetans feel. Even though the Dalai Lama had spoken of autonomy already since 1988, to most Tibetans it meant independence, although deferred. From 1995 onward, however, the Dalai Lama and his spokes people began to say in English language publications that he had decided to work within a Chinese framework -- i.e. freedom means autonomy, not independence -- already in 1973!<sup>56</sup> This piece of information started to be circulated seriously among the Tibetan people only as recently as 1997, when it was brought up in the Assembly prior to the Dalai Lama’s visit to Taiwan. It seems not yet to have completely penetrated the collective Tibetan psyche, but where it has, it was felt to complete the betrayal of the Tibetan dream.

### **Religious commitment or political allegiance?**

The oracles’ “prophesies” mentioned “cause of Tibet” in tandem with the “health and life of the Dalai Lama,” or his well-being. To most Tibetans they are so closely related to mean almost the same thing. “We will be independent one day,” a woman tells the Associated Press March 10<sup>th</sup> 1999, on the fortieth anniversary of the Tibetan national uprising, “as long as the Dalai Lama is alive, we have hope.”<sup>57</sup> This statement sums up the sentiments of most Tibetans, especially among the still very high percentage of illiterate ones. In that fundamentalist fusion of the cause of Tibet and life of Dalai Lama resonates at the same time what has been lost and the desperate need to preserve whatever is left: the institution of Dalai Lama. Thus, especially on an emotional level, the cause of Tibet has come to mean the preservation of the institution of Dalai Lama. This might be one reason why the government demands of Tibetans to strengthen their relationship with him. As already mentioned, from a religious point of view, a master’s health will suffer as a result of a broken or defiled spiritual relationship. The Dalai Lama himself gave as a reason for prohibiting the practice of Dorje Shugden in his March 22, 1996 teaching the danger to his health. He had threatened then that if they wanted him dead, Tibetans had only to rely on Dorje Shugden. Yet, he also tells people, “My horoscope says I will live until I am more than one hundred twenty, my dreams suggest more than one hundred. I myself believe that I will

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<sup>55</sup> “We want genuine autonomy or self-rule,” *The Times of India*, August 17, 1996; also Samdong Rinpoche: “Freedom in Tibetan language is called ‘rangwang.’ It is something more than mere translation of the English word ‘freedom’ or ‘independence.’ It is an ancient classical word which meant precisely sovereignty, self-control or self-rule. It refers more to self-discipline rather than uncontrolled anarchy.” *Tibet: A Future Vision*, March 18, 1996, p. 8. This is another example of how religious terms have been used in a political context to conflate and confuse the two.

<sup>56</sup> “I sincerely believe that my Middle Way approach will contribute to stability and unity of the PRC. This basic approach was conceived in the early seventies even when there was no immediate possibility of a dialogue with the Chinese leadership as China was then in the midst of the Cultural Revolution. I adopted this approach because I believed that this was to our long-term mutual interest.” Statement by the Dalai Lama after meeting with President Clinton in Washington, November 10, 1998.

<sup>57</sup> Melissa Davis reporting from Dharamsala: “Tibetans Revere Dalai Lama,” *The Associated Press*, NY, March 7, 1999

live into my nineties. As I get older I find my physical health getting better, I think, because of Tibetan medicine, holistic medicine."<sup>58</sup> The Dalai Lama continues to bar those who rely on the protector, for allegedly harming his health and life, from his teachings and initiations worldwide.

The model of a religious relationship is used here in the political context, another source of confusion. While the religious relationship must be voluntary, one of free choice, the political one in the case of Tibetans is not, since the Dalai Lama is the non-elected head of state. Unlike in Tibet and in the early exile days, if a Tibetan today (since the mid-90s) does not attend the Dalai Lama's teachings or a monk is ordained by abbots or other high monastic dignitaries, as was common in the more than two thousand year old Buddhist tradition, rather than the Dalai Lama, it is assumed there is something wrong with that person. The loyalty to the Dalai Lama demanded for social and political reasons is not exactly the traditional religious relationship between Buddhist master and disciple. It is a mixture in which today the allegiance to an absolute ruler prevails. As one Buddhist master expressed it, "It is strange, this devotion to His Holiness. It has nothing to do with the Guru devotion of the Dharma. It is something else, something totally different. It is more like a political feeling. Because of His Holiness receiving international recognition -- the Nobel Peace Prize and so on -- we see him as a great Tibetan hero, a great leader. Religious devotion is now all mixed up with this nationalistic and political feeling for someone like our king. This mixture finally produces something very strange in the mind: a dedication to someone for whom one is ready to criticize and give up everything else, including the Buddha."<sup>59</sup>

As His Holiness stated on many occasions, he plans to live a hundred years -- at least into his eighties. If his health and life were so fragile that "a few people," as the exile government describes the numbers of those who rely on Dorje Shugden, breaking religious commitments with the Dalai Lama could endanger his life, how could it be strong enough at the same time to absorb all the many tens and even hundreds of thousand commitments he asked others to break? He stated early on, in his March 1996 teachings, that people should not worry about breaking their commitments to Dorje Shugden, which is first and foremost a commitment to their Guru and Tsong Khapa's lam.rim teachings, that he, the Dalai Lama, would take care of it. The Buddhist explanation of cause and effect would preclude such individual powers. Each person ultimately has to face the consequences of his or her own actions and broken commitments without fail. This the Buddha taught. It is highly unlikely that the Dalai Lama would demonstrate so unequivocally that he does not believe in karma.

Perhaps, it is a question of spiritual authority: who has more power, the Dalai Lama or the other masters to whom he and Tibetans are bound<sup>60</sup> by vows? Whoever is spiritually more powerful

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<sup>58</sup> Ed Douglas: "The Dalai Lama: The Lost Horizons," *The Guardian*, Saturday May 8, 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Gonsar Rinpoche, Bloomington, July 7, 1998

<sup>60</sup> Dharma, in the general sense of religion, means a binding action -- away from suffering and to virtue and its resultant joys. Bound by vows is to be understood in this sense. Buddhists believe that vows do not only close off the suffering results maturing in the present from past actions, but they also help shape the future. Vows can only be taken in freedom based on a vision of a better or safer future. Hence for a Buddhist to take vows is understood as a way of taking charge of one's future, not a mindless submission to a system or a despot.

can absorb the negativities of the others breaking their vows. Or the good karma of abiding by the vows of the more powerful Guru will override the negative karma of breaking vows with the less powerful. This strange un-Buddhist sounding equation is one possible explanation people are left with in contemplating the existential dilemma the Dalai Lama's "advice" has presented for them. He has not given any other "advice" besides to stop, because allegedly Dorje Shugden harms. No dialogue, no discussion, no reasonable explanation. If on the other hand he were to mean that those who rely on Dorje Shugden do not have virtue, because a commitment to evil cannot make virtue and, as he said in Germany, they are evil like the Nazis, then he would also have to admit that his own heritage is contaminated with this evil. He, too, at one time worshiped this evil spirit as did both his main mentors, Kyabje Ling and Trijang Rinpoches, and almost all of his other Gelugpa mentors from whom he received extensive teachings and vows up till the late 1970's. It would mean that because they were all listening to this evil spirit, the whole Gelugpa transmission lineages that came out of Tibet are contaminated with evil and hence null and void which could be seen as a reason for founding a new Buddhist tradition.

However, those who rely on Dorje Shugden as a valid protector see their commitment first and foremost to the Buddha as embodied by their spiritual master and the Buddha's teachings as preserved in Tsong Khapa's tradition. This is simply the way relying on protectors works for any of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The protector is part of a tradition he or she protects, a tradition embodied by a master believed to be the door to all Buddhist understanding and accomplishments. There is no way a Buddhist can rely on an evil spirit through a legitimate master and the authentic teachings of the Buddha. Tsong Khapa's way of having ordered the stages of the path to enlightenment were, at least in Tibet, considered by all of the major Buddhist traditions to embody authentic teachings of the Buddha. Each tradition necessarily has its own perspective of the Buddha's teachings.

Ironically, it is the Tibetan exile government that sees the cause of Tibet "to rely on pure protectors," as they taught the children in schools in 1996 and demanding political allegiance replace a spiritual bond. The spiritual relationship between master and disciple is necessarily based on choice and freedom. It is used here as a front for the relationship between an unelected political leader and his followers. If the Dalai Lama ran for office today, he would win. Everyone assumes this and it is, no doubt, true. But this is not the point here. The Charter contains a clause that it cannot be changed. As I understand it, although the charter can be amended, it cannot be abandoned or the fundamental structure changed. Thus the Dalai Lama is non-elected head of the government for the duration of life in exile. After Tibetans go back to Tibet, he has said he will give up political power. Given the political realities, one could say that this is not a big sacrifice now.

### **Sectarianism**

The cause of Tibet and the institution of Dalai Lama seem to have become so identified in the minds of Tibetans as to become their sole national identity in diaspora.<sup>61</sup> The Tibetan people

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<sup>61</sup> The Indian press often portrays the Dalai Lama this way, for example, "The widely-respected spiritual leader, the symbol of Tibetan identity over the last four decades..." Vishal Thapar: "Dalai Lashes out at Religious Hypocrisy," *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, November 17, 1997

believe that the Tibetan cause is independence for Tibet. Thus it is difficult to perceive the Dalai Lama as anything else but a symbol of Tibetan freedom, and, no matter what the linguistic acrobatics attempting to prove the contrary, the Dalai Lama is still a symbol of Tibetan freedom for the rest of the world as well. To the Dalai Lama, on the other hand, the “cause of Tibet” seems to mean something else.<sup>62</sup> It means Tibetan “unity.”<sup>63</sup> As pointed out earlier, to Western people the Dalai Lama gives as one of the main reasons for his prohibition of the protector that he is sectarian and that he endangers Tibetan unity. To the Dalai Lama, Tibetan unity seems to mean non-sectarianism understood as a positive entity, a world view, rather than the absence of conflict. This, as everything else, is complicated by the mixture of religion and politics. The non-sectarian unity the Dalai Lama is promoting, understood as a modern synthesis between religion and politics, would necessarily secularize and hence destroy religion on the one hand and result in abolishing political opposition on the other. Separating them, would diminish the Ganden Potang government’s political authority and transform it into a power that would require at least a formal endorsement of force, even if limited by circumstances to use it.<sup>64</sup> This however would be difficult to reconcile with the Dalai Lama’s uncompromising commitment to non-violence. Hence, the basis has to be found in religion. I would like to trace the components of this new “non-sectarian religion” that is turning almost unopposed into a kind of Mahayana fundamentalism.

As already mentioned, *chos.lugs ri.med* is translated not only with non-sectarianism or ecumenism but also with secular ethics,<sup>65</sup> which is clearly misleading in the Tibetan context, since the administrative structure established in 1991 expressly states the government to be both religious and political as exemplified by the Dalai Lama. It precludes secularism altogether. Had the Dalai Lama been really committed to a secular government, he had his chance to use his overwhelming influence in 1991 to establish one and separate religion from politics. He chose not to. Clearly, it would have diminished his influence the majority of Tibetans feel is so important at this difficult historical juncture. Perhaps Samdong Rinpoche expresses the religious basis of the exile government’s charter most clearly, “Our [government’s] policies are based on religious mind or on the basic principle of religion and that does not mean it is Buddhism or Hinduism or any -ism. We say the eternal Dharma. The eternal Dharma subscribes to truth, non-violence and equality. And this has been the essence of eternal Dharma; Dharma and polity

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<sup>62</sup> For a reference to the use “cause of Tibet” in the proximity of “sectarian,” see the Dalai Lama’s address to a group of abbots in 1978, already quoted, giving the reason why he is distancing himself from Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche in anticipation of his critics as saying “It doesn’t matter if the Dalai Lama says that there is no discrimination in his policy towards the cause of Tibet, when, in fact, this is the actual policy or thought at the core of his heart.” p. 8

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, the Dalai Lama’s Private Secretary, Kelsang Gyaltzen, “For the Tibetan people’s fight for survival closed ranks (Geschlossenheit) and unity are very important.” “Anti-Dalai Lama Campaign of Western Shugden Followers,” *Tibet Aktuell*, No. 55, March 1998.

<sup>64</sup> For a lucid discussion of the historical relationships between the Roman empire and the Catholic church, religious authority and political power, see Hannah Arendt: *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Books USA Inc., New York, 1993, pp. 120-8

<sup>65</sup> The Dalai Lama himself calls it this and, for example, his representative, Mrs. Kalsang Takla, Office of Tibet, London, in response to the a demonstration by the Shugden Supporters Community in London, protesting the ban, denies all allegations and explains, “His Holiness is trying to promote secular beliefs in our communities so that all live in harmony. At this point when there are certain sections which advocate sectarian attitudes, it does not help the common cause of Tibet.” Mike Woolridge in a BBC News Bulletin, June 7, 1996.

become one and the religious mind is governing the provisions of our polity.”<sup>66</sup> This is clearly not a government by the people for the people, since most of them could not discern properly when politics uses religion and vice versa. Leadership for that type of system would have to be left up to the vision and insights of the enlightened masters as practiced in Tibet for the last four hundred years. The equivocation built into “cause of Tibet” that confuses so many people means to the Tibetan people the political cause of independence and to the Dalai Lama a new ground of non-sectarian pseudo-religious unity -- perhaps a global Buddhism. The equivocation mirrors the inevitable split between religion and politics in the modern world that the Dalai Lama and his circle desperately try to keep together for the sake of the Tibetan people. It is thus not “unity” understood as secularism but a “non-sectarianism” with its historical precedent in Tibet that seems to be the heart of the meaning of “Tibetan cause” for the Dalai Lama, especially in the context of the Dorje Shugden conflict. Unity here is first religious non-sectarianism and, according to the Dalai Lama, “non-sectarian [among the Tibetan Buddhist traditions Sakya, Nyingma, Kagyu, Gelug] means not only to respect but to practice [them] simultaneously.”<sup>67</sup>

As I understand non-sectarianism, it is the absence of conflict and respect for each other’s right to differ. The freedom to do so can best be guaranteed by a secular state whose legal authority is committed to enforce the law guaranteeing basic rights. It cannot be guaranteed by another religion synthesizing all existing traditions, because that would preclude the freedom of each to choose whether or not it wanted to be synthesized. In a secular state that guarantees religious freedom there would be room for all, the different traditions as well as a fusion, just as today we can still enjoy Mozart or Dufay played on traditional instruments as well as fusion, jazz, pop, whatever. There is room enough for all. It is not necessary to destroy the past to forge a new synthesis. It evolves naturally. This is one important lesson freedom understood as liberty has taught. In the Tibetan context, unless religion and politics can be separated, that freedom will not become a genuine experience.

When I asked the Dalai Lama in December 1997 with which of his many accomplishments he is most pleased, he mentioned the contribution he made to “the unity among the four Tibetan traditions, you know Nyingma, Kagyu, Gelug, Sakya,”<sup>68</sup> which clearly he sees this to be his life’s work. From the point of view of eternal Dharma, all religions and Buddhist traditions are equal. His Holiness is truly committed to making equal all religious traditions especially in his Tibetan sphere of influence where now Bön, a non-Buddhist set of beliefs, is seen to be equal to the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions such that it has served as preliminary instruction to the Kalachakra initiation (New York 1991). Surely, in this context, today, Shakyamuni Buddha would be branded sectarian as well as the many highly revered scholar sages of India, like Aryadeva, etc., all of whom defeated non-Buddhists in debate under the provision that whoever lost had to take on the religious persuasion of the victor. Milarepa in eleventh century Tibet became famous for his fight with the non-Buddhists for dominance of the Mount Kailash area

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<sup>66</sup> Interview Jan. 12, 1998

<sup>67</sup> Interview, December 8, 1997

<sup>68</sup> Interview December 8, 1997. I went to interview the Dalai Lama for a project of famous Buddhist masters I have been working on for several years. I was given an audience and the time for one question that had to be approved in advance by the Private Office. My one question was “Which of your many accomplishments are you most proud or most pleased with?” In the course of answering, the Dalai Lama himself brought up the subject of Dorje Shugden.



with lake Manasarovar -- a millennia old holy place for Hindus, Bonpos, and Buddhists alike.<sup>69</sup> In addition, the most widely accepted Buddhist practices, like taking refuge in the three jewels, for example, could be interpreted as sectarian under the generalized “new age” form of Buddhism now taught since traditionally it involves a commitment not to take refuge in anyone but the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. I am not criticizing non-sectarianism most people understand to mean a mutual respect of each other’s difference and non-interference. I believe that such a non-sectarian approach to religion -- and not the mix of religion, politics, and business common with Tibetans in exile today -- builds important bridges among people as well as mutual understanding, increasing insight into one’s own tradition. However, I think it is not necessary to destroy individual transmission lineages to accomplish this and no new synthesis based purely on Buddhist principles, rather than social-political ones, should find it necessary to do so. Buddhists traditionally believe that discriminatory views of all sorts, including religious sectarianism, prevent higher realizations. Non-sectarianism is already part of traditional Buddhism. While it must be encouraged and protected, it does not have to be newly invented and imposed through political means. There are irreconcilable contradictions built into non-sectarianism understood as a positive entity -- as the Dalai Lama does with his emphasis on practicing all simultaneously -- since anyone who does not agree with its doctrine as the dominant view even for even good reasons would be considered sectarian. The extremist idea that all those who are forced into a group by virtue of arbitrarily declaring a deity in its pantheon evil are therefore evil and do not have any rights, as the Dalai Lama suggested in Germany, sets a dangerous precedent, something not lost on Nyingma and Kagyu practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism.

If one looks at possible motives for the Dalai Lama to have develop this unusual doctrine and what are his aims in promoting it so strongly, the first thing that comes to mind is historical sectarianism. In Tibet it was kept mostly under control in recent history and in exile during the early days when the exile government did not yet exert the tight control it does now, the old wounds broke out into the open. Perhaps the noise was just the clamor of freedom and nothing that could not have been fixed with open debates, teaching and learning the tolerance the Dalai Lama proclaims worldwide to be the prerogative of Tibetan Buddhism. But free speech was not encouraged. The wounds festered. Surely, some of this must have motivated His Holiness to develop his non-sectarian approach which seems more like an ethical humanism he says he considers almost like a religion with great spiritual resources.<sup>70</sup> Instead of developing fora for discussion, control over thought and speech<sup>71</sup> increased in exile using the ubiquitous threat from the Chinese as an instrument to curtail any creative solutions to the many complex problems. The Dalai Lama’s attempts of secularizing Tibetan Buddhism displaced the religiosity into the political domain where the conservative element is getting ever stronger in its control over correct religious views including protectors. “People and deities are exactly the same. There are official deities and unofficial ones. Only the deities recognized by the government are allowed

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<sup>69</sup> See for example, C.M. Bandhari: *A Journey to Heaven, Kailash - Mansarovar*, Devamber Prakashan, Delhi 1998, pp. 57-59 and p. 79.

<sup>70</sup> He has said this on many occasions, for example, in an interview with Professor Robert Thurman, “The Dalai Lama on China, Hatred, and Optimism, *Mother Jones*, November December, 1997

<sup>71</sup> Censorship began to be enforced in the early 1980’s. See, for example, Jamyang Norbu: “Opening the Political Eye,” *Tibetan Review*, November 1990

to be revered. To revere unofficial deities is against the law.”<sup>72</sup>

A step back into history might be required here to find out more about why the Dalai Lama is trying to fix something that many people believe is not broken or not the most urgent problem in need of attention. Many Tibetans do not think of themselves as sectarian, be that Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu, Nyingma. There has been a lot of productive interaction between them, both in Tibet and in exile, and even though the potential of sectarian conflicts is there, they have not been the dominant problem in the exile community. The dominant one is the political status of Tibet, as it would be for any group in exile, and in this proximity of Tibetan independence and sectarianism lies the origin of the Dorje Shugden conflict. The Dalai Lama, immediately after telling me that he is most pleased with his contribution to Tibetan “unity,” goes on to say, “To some people, this is a lot of noise (laughs), especially like Shugden...” And again, after he explains that non-sectarian means to practice the different traditions simultaneously, he tells me that Dorje Shugden, “...this spirit is an obstacle to this promotion [of non-sectarianism].” The reason, this protector is mostly practiced by Gelugpas and, he explains, “the worship of this spirit means you should not touch Nyingma tradition.” I remembered how deeply disturbed I was when reading in the sensationalist *Newsweek* article that first publicized the Dorje Shugden conflict worldwide, “Above all, the Shugdengs are angry that the Dalai Lama is promoting dialogue between the Yellow Hats and another major branch of Tibetan Buddhism, Nyingma, or the Red Hats. The Shugdengs consider it a sin even to talk to Red Hats, or to touch Nyingma religious works.”<sup>73</sup> Of all the lies that were spread through the media, this was most troubling to me because I knew it first hand to be a lie. I had been to Gelugpa monasteries in India that rely on Dorje Shugden with a long tradition of yearly rituals for Padmasambhava performed with Nyingma texts. In fact, many Gelugpa monasteries or temples I have seen, where Dorje Shugden is one of the protective deities, prominently display Padmasambhava statues, something denied by those driving the war of words. These statues have been there for a long time and were never removed. They are still there. I have seen the Nyingma collected works in the residences of Gelugpa Lamas who were known to rely on Dorje Shugden, and I photocopied Nyingma texts for the use of one of them. Here it was again, this time the Dalai Lama himself telling me that “once you touch Nyingma tradition, even one text of Nyingma, in your house, your room, this spirit will destroy you.” I know this to be untrue.

The Nyingma-Gelug differences are doctrinal just like the difference between Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. This does not mean they have to fight each other or denounce one another as sectarian. To exploit doctrinal differences for sectarian ends is unskillful and unacceptable and to impute sectarianism onto doctrinal differences is looking at the problem only from one side. Moreover, charges of sectarianism close off any kind of rational debate and stir up religious sentiments better left alone. The differences between Nyingma and Gelug are fundamental and have a long history<sup>74</sup> that goes back at least to the inception of the Gelug tradition (15<sup>th</sup> century), not only since the arrival of Dorje Shugden (17<sup>th</sup> century). Many people

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<sup>72</sup> Tashi Angdu, General Secretary of Cholsum. Beat Regli: “10 vor 10,” *DRS Swiss TV*, January 7, 1998

<sup>73</sup> Tony Clifton, “Cult Mystery,” *Newsweek*, April 28, 1997

<sup>74</sup> For a concise overview of original Gelugpa philosophical positions that address, long before Dorje Shugden, what they perceived to be misinterpretations of Buddhist traditions in Tibet at the time, see José Ignacio Cabezón: *Buddhism and Language*, SUNY Press, New York, 1994, p. 7-10

of either tradition can accept the genuine differences and respect each other. I cannot go into the history of their differences here, I only want to make one point that might give it added perspective. Some Gelugpas make a distinction between “pure” Nyingmas practicing Buddhism exclusively and those who mix it with non-Buddhist practices.<sup>75</sup> Much of the debates converge on this issue which also has a history going back to the famous Samye debates (8<sup>th</sup> century) and earlier. The most intense discussions have always danced around Dzogchen, which is also considered a pre-Buddhist practice. The main point here is that there is ample precedent to debating doctrinal issues between traditions in order to establish the intellectual limits of Buddhism, whose followers are called “insiders” (nang.pa) in Tibetan. This was an accepted tradition -- starting with the Buddha himself, it is told -- provided participants followed rules for debate accepted by all involved. Since Gelugpas emphasized philosophical argumentation in the form of public debate more than other traditions in Tibet, it is not surprising that they would continue to challenge others’ views in accordance with the mainstream Indian Buddhist tradition of more than a millennium. In other words, it was not solely on the grounds of political and sectarian domination that Gelugpas debated doctrinal positions. Buddhists believe that not only actions, but also knowledge has consequences. Perhaps the belief, inherited from ancient times, that demonstrating truth is itself sufficient to change a person’s mind without recourse to external methods of domination is surprising today. This belief is untenable in the post-modern world where knowledge is believed to be relative in an absolute way. Thus, it is no longer appropriate to challenge non-Buddhists or Buddhists from other traditions to an intellectual debate in the traditional way.

Zemey Rinpoche, a renowned Gelug scholar, found this out the hard way. Unfortunately, he published a book that would have better been left unpublished, especially since the names of other Lamas, like Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, became connected with its devastating political results, even though reportedly he did not have anything to do with its publication.<sup>76</sup> The book purported to show certain consequences of breaking commitments that are believed to have a bearing only on the most advanced practitioners who have recourse to many different types of spiritual remedies. Understood here is that every Buddhist’s realizations depend on how he or she keeps vows and commitments to the Three Jewels made concretely to his or her master and those of the lineage, who are believed to embody the Buddha and his continuity to reach the disciple in the present.<sup>77</sup> If he or she has made a commitment to a specific path to enlightenment

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<sup>75</sup> See explanations of Bön and Nyingma and their relationship by Namkha’i Norbu or Samten Karmay, for example; Philippe Cornu: *Tibetan Astrology*, trsl. From French by Hamish Gregor, Shambala, Boston, 1997, p. 19-20. Also, specifically for this difference and the revival of pre-Gelugpa religious traditions in Tibet from a Nyingma point of view, where the historical difference between Nyingma and Gelug comes into focus and with good references to the Nyingma perspective of Tibetan mythical history, see David Germano: “Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet,” *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet, Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, Melvyn C. Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein, Editors, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998

<sup>76</sup> From reliable oral sources of people close to Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, he did not approve or give permission to publish the “Yellow Book.”

<sup>77</sup> A good characterization of the important concept of lineage in Tibetan Buddhism is as follows, “A lineage is an unbroken transmission of living wisdom. It is living because mastery of the lineage’s practices and techniques, which give rise to that wisdom, is perfectly maintained generation after generation. This mastery is handed down through the ages via a succession of highly-accomplished persons, each able to ensure that the integrity of what he or she has received will be carefully passed on to the most gifted disciples, who in turn will do the same.” Ken Holmes: *His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa KARMAPA Urgyen Trinley Dorje*, Altea Publishing, Forres, 1995, p. 35.

that promises to accelerate his or her progress, then, from a Buddhist point of view, breaking that commitment has consequences -- but only for the practitioner not, as was absurdly claimed, for other sects. The way this book was presented to the public frightened many people for different reasons. It should not have been published or presented to the public, just like the Secret Visions of the fifth Dalai Lama should not have been published, as they are now misused by people unable to distinguish between literal and interpretive knowledge in the Buddhist context.<sup>78</sup> Taken completely out of context, the main aim of Zemey Rinpoche's book was seen as exclusively sectarian and it was banned. This single book and the badly handled controversy it generated in 1976 was the reason for the Dalai Lama's first, less enforced, ban of Dorje Shugden in 1978. The Dalai Lama said at the time that it would not be good for his reputation, if he his name continued to be associated with Gelugpa Lamas alleged to be sectarian. One of them was his own master from whom he felt he had to distance himself in order to save the name of Dalai Lama and his reputation.<sup>79</sup> A whole lineage and a large group of people, i.e. those who rely on Dorje Shugden -- none of whom had a choice in distancing him or herself from the book -- are still blamed for the misunderstandings and emotional reactions this book elicited that were blown way out of proportion for political and historical reasons. A strange contradiction occurs when looking at the Dalai Lama's unforgiving stand, even more than twenty years later, at what I would call a mistake of having published such a book that threatened to harm his reputation while calling on the West to forgive Milosevic for his ethnic cleansing and massacres in Kosovo at a time when they had not yet ceased. "Milosevic, like former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet who is languishing under house arrest in Britain while he fights extradition to Spain on torture charges, should be forgiven for alleged crimes against humanity in Kosovo, he [the Dalai Lama] said."<sup>80</sup>

Why stoke the fire charging a sectarian conflict in 1996 when it had long died down and the ambers were under control? Why add fuel to it rather than calm people's fears with a rational, coherent explanation? Why target only one group when by the new homogenized view of Buddhism every Tibetan tradition is sectarian? Why make sectarianism a bigger issue than it is at a time when Buddhism is quickly disappearing in its authentic forms? Many Tibetans who are neutral about the protector have said that this conflict was truly unnecessary. That is not to deny that there was sectarian strife on all sides. The point is, such conflicts do not get resolved with emotional blackmail, appeal to the survival instinct of a people already pushed against the wall, that is, solely through irrational means.

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<sup>78</sup> See, for example, *Der Schatten des Dalai Lama*, where the authors attribute qualities to the Dalai Lama based on literalizing such texts of tantra and the actions described there. Similarly, when the Secret Visions of the fifth Dalai Lama include as ritual objects the corpse of a baby from an incestuous union of brother and sister, human skin, brains and other innerts, with the Dalai Lama's chief protectress riding across a sea of blood unleashing diseases and other disasters across the world, these fierce or seductive tantric activities are hardly to be taken literally.

<sup>79</sup> His Holiness: "How would the situation seem to others, when a person whom the Dalai Lama had singled-out from among equals and to whom he had given responsibility, write such a book. He is a direct disciple of Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche is my Guru, therefore, a thinking person might say, "Ah.....they belong to the same faction, but they vary only in their degree of frankness. The Dalai Lama's Guru speaks like this and a man to whom the Dalai Lama has given special attention speaks in the same way. It doesn't matter if the Dalai Lama says that there is no discrimination in his policy towards the cause of Tibet, when, in fact, this is the actual policy or thought at the core of his heart" Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche as well as Zemey Rinpoche should have given thought to this, but unfortunately they didn't." Address 1978, p. 8

<sup>80</sup> Simon Gardner: "Interview--Too late for Kosovo Diplomacy--Dalai Lama," *Reuters*, London, AOL, May 9, 1999.

It is clear that for the Dalai Lama, non-sectarianism is built into the “cause of Tibet.” In its name, religion is in the process of being secularized under the banner of “modernization.” Assumed is that modernizing religion modernizes at the same time politics and the social process. This is the blind spot for a government that mixes both. Instead of creating at least the verbal basis for a secular state that would guarantee the freedom of all religious traditions and give people the confidence to follow their own heart and choices, the new religion based non-sectarianism is to serve that role. In the confusion of concepts and equivocation of terms, Gelugpa, the religious and social elite from Tibet is in the way of the new identity. It has to be leveled. In Tibet Gelugpa was landed and many of the landed aristocracy were Gelugpa. Although Gelugpa is still blamed for the loss of Tibet, because allegedly the religious institutions were politically too conservative,<sup>81</sup> today in exile, Gelugpa can no longer be attacked on the basis of its wealth and land holdings. The shift from social and political elitism of historical Tibet’s Gelugpa establishment to sectarianism is a natural one, given that the power base has shifted to religion again in recent years. Sectarianism stands in for elitism now. The fight against sectarianism – a relatively minor problem when compared to other parts of the world – is really anti-elite where the most educated Tibetans, both lay and monastic, were indiscriminately labeled “elitist.” Never mind if some of them were the most knowledgeable people, the reservoir of Buddhist culture supposed to be preserved in exile. Never mind that exercising power does not always mean misuse and that not all powerful Gelugpas misused their power. The elitist charge was politically motivated and well suited to placate Chinese criticism of historical Tibetan excesses as well as the non-Gelugpa Tibetan religious traditions who had been in the minority for so long. What has the Dalai Lama done to merge Kagyu, Nyingma and Sakya? Only Gelugpa was targeted in the process of merging lineages. Rather than lose all of Gelugpa, the Dalai Lama’s main religious power base, those who rely on Dorje Shugden were singled out as they constituted Gelugpa’s elite.<sup>82</sup>

The equivocation between elitism and sectarianism becomes even more visible when put into the larger context of the Dalai Lama’s rapprochement with the Chinese, stated more publically to his own people only in 1996-7.<sup>83</sup> Already early on in his exile years, the Dalai Lama often shocked Western audiences by insisting that there were many similarities between Marxism and Buddhism.<sup>84</sup> Although the Dalai Lama rarely gave details, it was the concern for all living

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<sup>81</sup> It is not true that only the monastic institutions were “conservative” and prevented Tibet from modernizing causing the loss of the country, as most Western scholars and following them Tibetans now too claim. The landed aristocracy, the system, as well as the political maneuver of playing outside forces off against each other to maintain the status quo, are just as much to blame. Tibet was not lost because religious institutions insisted on keeping religious structures but because of Lhasa’s uncommitted foreign policy. The Ganden Potang government played the British off against the Chinese and the Russians while appealing to each for help in times of need. In 1947 the Lhasa government even refused to recognize Indian independence because it preferred the British to present its own interests. This self-centered strategy of playing off both sides against the middle continues even today appealing to the United States and Europe to bring pressure on the Chinese while working through them at the same time and continuing to make contradictory statements about independence to please both. It is the total absence of a rationally implemented (foreign) policy which absolves those in power from accountability I see to be responsible for the loss of Tibet and the failure to find a more conducive solution to the human rights problems there today.

<sup>82</sup> See for example, the Dalai Lama, “The fifth Dalai Lama wrote in his biography that he destroyed [Dorje Shugden]. In spite of this, the worship of Dorje Shugden became very popular especially among the Gelugpa aristocracy.” Interview with well-known, long term Tibet observer, Klemens Ludwig: “Auch im Buddhismus gibt es gute und böse Kräfte,” *Esoteria*, May 1998

<sup>83</sup> Although references to the Dalai Lama’s interest in working with the Chinese to the exclusion of independence appeared earlier in English language publications like the Tibetan Review, few Tibetans can or actually do read them.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, the Dalai Lama’s autobiography, where he admits he was fascinated by Chinese Communism, and “I

beings and their equality that sound so appealing in Mahayana Buddhism and Marxist doctrine alike. It is easy to see that mixing the two would result in a type of Mahayana fundamentalism that takes literally the equality of all sentient beings without respecting their differences -- just as Communism has shown the world -- while creating its own type of elitism by a process of exclusion of those who do not adhere to the new dogma. The difference between the Mahayana equality and the Marxist is that the former is an attitude that necessarily has to be developed in the mind of each practitioner, for the most part an excruciatingly slow process, and cannot be pasted on from the outside -- although Buddhists wished this were possible and pray for everyone actually to participate equally in all good things -- while Marxist equality is a political/economic doctrine that forces equality on people while prohibiting the practice of developing these inner spiritual qualities according to individual disposition. Marxist equality in theory is a result of constant revolution that diminishes the elite in favor of the oppressed. How the Dalai Lama reconciles the necessary violence this practice entails with his non-violent ideology is not clear.

Clear is, that he still maintains his attraction to Marxist views today, even if, as some interpret it, “the Dalai Lama’s statement on the compatibility between Buddhism and Marxism is ... meant for the consumption of a wider Chinese audience.”<sup>85</sup> In answer to the question whether or not he thought that one day the Communist reforms in Tibet would become reversible, the Dalai Lama answered, “Tibet needed reforms. Without Communism several reforms could not have been implemented. The bad thing was only that the Communists exaggerated. As a result, so much unnecessary damage occurred. But, in principle, I support Marxist economic theory. It is wonderful to limit the ruling class, to fight exploitation provided it does not turn into exploitation by the state. When I was in China in 1954, I expressed the wish to join the Communist Party.” The journalists: “And?” The Dalai Lama, “At that time, the Chinese leaders told me, it was not the right time to join the Communist Party. But they offered to let me participate in party conventions.”<sup>86</sup>

In a more general sense, when the Dalai Lama says in his March 10, 1999 address, “The root cause of the Tibetan problem is not the difference in ideology, social system or issues resulting from clashes between tradition and modernity. ... [It] lies in Tibet’s long, separate history, its distinct and ancient culture, and its unique identity,” he also downplays the enormous difference of political systems between traditional Tibet, the aspirations of exiled Tibetans, and Communist

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admit that at the time Marxism and the idea of socialism were fascinating. I also confess that I continue to share many of Marx’s ideas on the economy. I believe that the Marxist economic theory has a very important moral content. The only thing that matters in capitalism is to make money. There is no concern whatsoever as to how it should be spent.” The Dalai Lama in an interview with Adam Michnik: “Dialogue with the Dalai Lama, Mao, Communists and Buddhists,” *Claves de Razón Práctica*, No. 90, March 1999. These views, however, do not prevent the Dalai Lama and his government from raising funds in the capitalist environment, i.e. Apple Computers -- for whom the Dalai Lama served as willing subject for a large scale advertising campaign -- Europe, USA, and, since the Dalai Lama’s visit in 1997, also Taiwan. Neither is that money distributed evenly in the exile community with, on the one hand, those who accompany the Dalai Lama around the world inflating five star hotel bills with expenses for sometimes extravagant personal services, while Tibetans in the settlements and camps, their movement controlled by the exile government and without any farming experience, try to eke out a very difficult existence from the land. For a discussion of Communist views and social practices in the exile community, see also Jamyang Norbu: “Opening of the Political Eye, Tibet’s Long Search for Democracy,” *Tibetan Review*, November 1990.

<sup>85</sup> P. Stobdan: “Shugden Dispute Baffles Tibetans,” *The Hindustan Times*, August 23, 1996.

<sup>86</sup> Interview in one of the biggest German daily newspapers, Torsten Engelhardt, Nina Freytag: “Tibet ein Teil Chinas?” *Die Woche*, November 6, 1998

China. At stake, he says, is the Tibetan cultural identity he wants to preserve. This difference between Tibet and China, he says even the Chinese see as source of all trouble (March 10, 1999 address), is not political but cultural. The word “nation” the Dalai Lama uses in “national identity” amounts to nothing more than an ethnic identity within a large modern state pragmatically indifferent to the political system that governs it. “I do not seek independence for Tibet,” he reiterates. “A just and fair solution to the issue of Tibet will enable me to give full assurance that I will use my moral authority to persuade the Tibetans not to seek separation.” This is a very strong statement promising ultimately to go against the wishes of his own people if they continue to seek freedom for Tibet. Still they have not heard or, perhaps, comprehended this. They continue right after deliverance of the speech, in New York, for example, to march towards the Chinese Mission to the United Nations shouting, “China out of Tibet!” “Tibet for Tibetans!” “Free Tibet now!”

Who is in the way of this much willingness to cooperate with the Communist government in the People’s Republic of China? The old elite, of course. Clearly, Gelugpa is perceived to be representative of the old elite on all fronts, politics as well as religion. It was the Gelugpa elite which established the infra structure to the Tibetan exile government when it was in its modernizing phase in the early 60s and 70’s. It is still the Gelugpa model that attracts Buddhist attention worldwide and is imitated now by the other Tibetan Buddhist traditions as well. The Gelugpa model is a strong monastic presence with expertise in philosophical debate, extensive knowledge, detailed textual analysis of the Buddhist canon, and disciplined, understated behavior while helping practitioners with highly individualized practices and effectively guiding them in the more esoteric meditational exercises. It was successful in helping to establish a version of Tibetan Buddhism credible in the west. When one looks at the strongest criticism leveled against Tibetan Buddhism today, it occurs more in the context of misunderstanding and misuse of the esoteric practices of tantric origin outside the traditional basic Buddhist context on which Gelugpas, for example, insist.<sup>87</sup> Since it is difficult to judge someone’s expertise from a foreign culture across the linguistic gap, monks, as members of an institution that crossed many cultural borders and seemingly living according to vows, have a higher degree of instant credibility,<sup>88</sup> even if some of them turn out to be corrupt, unworthy, unreliable. While in Tibet and earlier in exile the older Tibetan Buddhist traditions favored lay Lamas and practitioners, they now often send monks to teach in the West. The different great Kagyu masters have built large study facilities in exile where a system of studying the Indian root texts with Tibetan commentaries from various traditions has become more popular and widespread than it was in Tibet.

Also from the Gelugpa background the more artistic and spectacular side of Tibetan Buddhism was introduced to the world, with permission from the Dalai Lama: first the Gelug Tantric Colleges traveled to perform their unique sacred chants of intoning several octaves

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<sup>87</sup> See for example June Campbell’s critique., *Traveller in Space* and Trimondis, *Im Schatten des Dalai Lama*

<sup>88</sup> Even Professor Robert Thurman reflects this trend, perhaps for different reasons, when he tells of his own experience, “I was a monk for about four years and then I quit. Then for about ten years I had this theory that monasticism was OK in the old days. I considered that being a monk was old-fashioned and that in the new age we have universities and schools...[this] was my theory until the mid-70s. I suddenly collided in the late 70s with monasticism as an essentially important institution ... that has great power and I came to respect it.” Tina Pang’s interview with Robert Thurman: “In Conversation,” *Oriental Art*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (1998/9), p. 105

simultaneously, then came sacred dance, constructing elaborate colored powder mandalas, and other rituals. Their popularized versions by now have become a new form of entertainment drawing ever wider circles of Tibet supporters. Images of yellow hatted monks have even sold Apple computers, followed in 1997 with their advertisements on giant billboards featuring the Dalai Lama of the “think different” campaign, as well as other advertisers’ appropriation of their popular image. Much of the art which made large exhibitions, like the one called “Wisdom and Compassion, so successful came from what is now called the Ganden Renaissance.<sup>89</sup> “It is best not to call [it] the “Gelugpa” Renaissance, since the powerful spiritual movement of the New Kadampa or Gelugpa order stimulated and sometimes even directly sponsored tremendous creativity in the Sakyapa, Kagyupa, and Nyingmapa orders as well; so it would be misleading to give such broad mass movement the name of one of the orders in particular.”<sup>90</sup> Based on the Gelugpa model, too, Tibetans have done much of their local fund raising, since the monasteries also serve as educational facilities. The previously elite institutions were used in exile to get attention and help from the west,<sup>91</sup> and Tibetans believe they have been “democratized” in the process.

It is perhaps difficult for an outsider to see how systematic has been the effort to level any elite and silence criticism in the process. The Dorje Shugden conflict is just one, even if the most extreme, example of this. Jamyang Norbu points out some of the practices commonly used to this end in the exile community as follows,

[in the 1980's] “Intellectuals were the prime target. A well-organized and extensive official hate-mail campaign was launched against a Tibetan academic in Japan, who was alleged to have criticized the Dalai Lama in one of his books. Hundreds of death-threats were sent to him and letters to the Japanese government and to his university to expel him. For a couple of my plays I was also assaulted by a large Dharamsala mob (with the inevitable contingent from the Women’s Association) and subjected to a “struggle” complete with experienced denunciators and the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution. All these displays of embarrassingly excessive devotion to the Dalai lama, of hysterical patriotism, and of religious fanaticism was actively promoted by the Tibetan government and eagerly taken up by the lumpen element of the society, as a convenient means of gaining political prominence, and removing people more educated or more qualified who stood in their way. ... The cabinet took to censoring books, banning a number of important academic works on Tibetan history. Magazines like *Sheja* began to print nothing but hagiography, propaganda and endless official speeches. Even within government circles criticism was not tolerated, and fault-finding officials were dealt with in a number of ways, one of the more lenient being a transfer to a remote and undesirable

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<sup>89</sup> Rhie and Thurman: *Worlds of Transformation*, Thurman describes Ganden Renaissance art as, “The main characteristic is the full maturity of distinctively Tibetan style of painting and sculpture...(15th century) All the many important influences received from the artistic traditions of Bengal, Bihar, Nepal, Kashmir, Khotan, and China became well integrated within the repertoire of the great Tibetan painting schools of the early 15<sup>th</sup> Century.” p. 32

<sup>90</sup> Rhie and Thurman: *Worlds of Transformation*, p. 31

<sup>91</sup> For a discussion of the curious economically driven revival of religion in the exile community, see also Jamyang Norbu: “Opening the Political Eye,” *Tibetan Review*, November 1990



posting.”<sup>92</sup>

As already mentioned, the old Gelugpa elite in the exile government had largely been replaced in the 1960s. The family of the Dalai Lama, admitting to running the government from behind the scenes for decades, was not aristocratic in origin. They came from a farming and herding background. Yet, whenever something goes wrong in Dharamsala, the old elite from Tibet, which was mostly Gelugpa, after all, is still blamed.<sup>93</sup> To see the anti-elitist trend, one has only to look at the extent to which the Dalai Lama goes in presenting himself as an ordinary person – the Dalai Lama prostrating in his underwear on CNN and the camera following him into the bathroom, the Dalai Lama meditating, eating breakfast, repairing watches, watering flowers, working out on a stationary bike, seeing poor refugees from Tibet, laughing, always laughing to put people at ease who want to approach the Dalai Lama with the serious dignity they think is appropriate for someone of his stature. No longer remote or locked up in his palace, the Dalai Lama often calls himself “a simple monk.” A new, modernized image has been created and attached to the famous name “Dalai Lama” – man for all people. Identified with compassion and kindness, the Dalai Lama must demonstrate this Mahayana ideal extending to everyone, if he wants to maintain his credibility. Thus, the image of Dalai Lama as “simple monk,” man for all people, embraces all -- not just the rich, not just the powerful as in old Tibet, not just Buddhists, not just Gelugpas, not just politicians, not just Tibetans, not just the socially acceptable. This image is coherent and powerful, inspiring equally across all divisions. It is an image that seamlessly merged with the demands of the global celebrity culture. “The meaning of fame has shifted, with celebrities pretending to be just like you and me. Yes, it’s an illusion, but it’s a powerful one.”<sup>94</sup>

In the face of Buddhism’s global image, a Gelugpa trying to uphold the religious tradition transmitted through an authentic lineage would be seen as elitist – because of Gelugpas’ former identification with political power in Tibet -- or as sectarian -- because of a commitment of choice or conscience to a traditional religious way. It is this type of commitment that the Dalai Lama is asking followers of Dorje Shugden to break. In the modernized version, developed since the late eighties, of the religious and political mix, “elitism” and “sectarianism” have become interchangeable. Gelugpas who rely on Dorje Shugden, originally the elite of the elite, turned out to be the most obvious target from the vantage point of the above type of “modernization.” In 1978, the Dalai Lama still said that “Dorje Shugden should only be practiced by highly realized yogis and in secret, otherwise, if they do it like today, then there is more harm than benefit and the result will be more faults than virtue.”<sup>95</sup> It is true that the most highly realized Gelugpa masters, lineage holders, and yogis relied on Dorje Shugden. The Dalai Lama’s statement acknowledges the exclusive aspect of this practice. However, ordinary, uneducated, non-realized people relied on Dorje Shugden by virtue of their spiritual commitment

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. , p. 16

<sup>93</sup> “Not the Dalai Lama is responsible for the lack of reform of his religion, according to David Jackson, who holds a chair of Tibetan Studies at the University of Hamburg. ‘It is the people surrounding him, Tibetan families of the old aristocracy or perhaps members of his own family.’” Spörle and Engelhardt, “Angriff auf eine Legende, *Die Woche*, March 19, 1999

<sup>94</sup> Caryn James: “The Humbling of the Megastars,” *The New York Times*, June 27, 1999.

<sup>95</sup> From the Dalai Lama’s talk about Dorje Shugden, June 13 1978: *A Complete Collection of His Holiness’ Speeches on the Worship of Dorje Shugden in the Past and Future*, Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, Dharamsala, 1996, p. 30

to one of these highly realized yogis. This is the way to rely on any protector. People not yet spiritually accomplished did not rely directly on a Dharmapala but indirectly through the kind of relationship they cultivated with a master who had the qualifications to do so directly. It is this relationship to individual masters that has been sacrificed in the religious “democratization” process where only an absolute commitment to the Dalai Lama largely for political reasons counts anymore. By destroying the relationship with the spiritual master of one’s personal choice, a protector practice also takes on very different meaning; its power diminishes. The strategy to separate one’s enemies from their protectors in order to overpower them is a well known practice and explained in the secret visions of the fifth Dalai Lama.