



Background Info “Shugden Devotees” Demonstrations

A conflict between the Dalai Lama and a group of Buddhists has been in the works for years – these Buddhists are aligned with a fundamentalist group of Tibetan Buddhists. In 2014, demonstrations in opposition to the Dalai Lama took place in the USA and Europe, including the Dalai Lama’s visit to Frankfurt in May.

In the 90s, the Dalai Lama expressly requested his students to discontinue the „Dorje Shugden cult“, which is essentially worshipping a protective spirit existing only in Tibetan Buddhism. The following reasons provide insight into the Dalai Lama’s request:

1. He sees the danger of Buddhism, which is in its essence wisdom and compassion, being reduced to merely worshipping spirits like in this cult.
2. The Dalai Lama perceives the Shugden worshippers to be a sect which destroys harmony in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition due to its dogmatism. Therefore, this cult stands against a modern, open Buddhism.
3. The conflict, which dates back to 17th century, has a political dimension: In ancient Tibet, a particularly conservative faction of a politically influential Gelug school used the Shugden cult in order to expand their power over other traditions. Although important teachers of the Dalai Lama belonged to this Gelug School, the Dalai Lama perceives his institution as cross-traditional and also personally received important teachings from other schools of Tibetan Buddhism; therefore he does not except the dominance of the Gelugs even to this day.

Who is backing these protestors?

Essentially, the protestors are members of the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT). To organise the protests, the NKT has continued to found new front organisations disguising the background of the protestors. The International Shugden Community (ISC) is already the third one like this. Those operating the Shugden website do not have an imprint, operate anonymously („domains by proxy“), and do not mention a person who is in charge of dealing with the press.

More about the demonstrators’ three main claims:

Claim: „The Dalai Lama lies.“

Response: The demonstrators have not conclusively explained the origin of the supposed lies. The claim appears to be related to the Dalai Lama’s statement that Shugden is a destructive entity. The protestors worship Shugden like a Buddha, whereas the Dalai Lama is of another opinion.

DALAI LAMA IN HAMBURG

23.-26. AUGUST 2014



Tibetisches Zentrum
Event gGmbH

Claim: „The Dalai Lama is false.“

Response: All authorities on Tibetan Buddhism and the vast majority of Tibetans acknowledge Tenzin Gyatso as the official Dalai Lama. The opposing faction repeatedly claims in public without justification that the Dalai Lama is false.

Claim: „The Dalai Lama suppresses religious freedom.“

Response: The Dalai Lama has recommended discontinuing this cult practice which precisely means that he does not accept those who continue practicing Shugden as his students. Since the Shugden devotees do not acknowledge the Dalai Lama as an authority, they could simply ignore his advice. The devotees could continue practicing Shugden privately or in certain temples, for example monasteries in India and the communities of NKT in the West – and this is happening.

Claim: „The Dalai Lama has forbidden the Shugden practice.“

Response: The Dalai Lama, in his role as a spiritual teacher, is not in a position to forbid practices. In general, the practice of Shugden is actually not forbidden in Tibetan communities in exile, although practicing it entails some restrictions. Nonetheless, some Gelug monasteries have decided against this practice based on a democratic consensus by the ordained community. Hence, the practice is not permitted in these monasteries.

More info:

The Dorje Shugden Conflict – An Interview with Tibetologist Thierry Dodin: http://info-buddhism.com/Dorje_Shugden_Conflict_Dalai_Lama_protests_Thierry_Dodin.html

A quick note on Dorje Shugden (rDo rje shugs ldan) by Prof. Paul Williams: http://info-buddhism.com/dorje_shugden_note_Paul_Williams.html

Statement of the Deutsche Buddhistische Ordensgemeinschaft (DBO, German Buddhist Monastic Association) 2014: http://buddhistische-ordensgemeinschaft.de/dbo_statement-shugden-protests-Dalai-Lama.htm

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