

## China's new directive on controversial Shugden spirit in Tibet in bid to further discredit Dalai Lama

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- The Chinese government has issued a new directive on propitiation of a controversial Tibetan Buddhist spirit in a bid to further discredit the Dalai Lama.
- The document, couched as protecting freedom of religion of the Tibetans under China's Communist Party control, nonetheless uses this pretext to project the Dalai Lama as the wrongdoer. This demonstrates that the Chinese authorities are aligned with protestors in the West who propitiate Shugden and have been denigrating the Dalai Lama when he travels to the U.S. and Europe.
- Describing the Shugden issue as "an important front in our struggle with the Dalai Clique," the document, obtained by ICT, could be the first such set of overt official guidelines from inside Tibet.
- The Dalai Lama has repudiated the propitiation of Shugden (also known as "Dolgyal") for its sectarianism, among other reasons.
- The Chinese authorities for several years have been promoting the propitiation of Shugden inside Tibet as a part of their campaign to undermine the Dalai Lama.
- Following the official advisory, which was circulated last year but has only just reached ICT, two Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region have been imprisoned – one for ten years – for allegedly discouraging propitiation of the Shugden 'protector' spirit in Tibet.

A copy of the document, entitled "[Some opinions on dealing correctly with the 'Gyalchen Shugden' issue](#)" and issued by the General Office of the Communist Party Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region, is translated below from Tibetan into English. It was released on February 20, 2014, but has only just reached ICT due to restrictions on information and the dangers of sending such documents outside Tibet. The document states that the issue "should be given a high degree of importance, and clearly recognized as a deceitful ploy by the 14th Dalai's Clique to split the country." This characterization of the issue indicates that Tibetans who encourage others not to propitiate the spirit in accordance with the Dalai Lama's advice could face criminal charges and imprisonment. The Dalai Lama, who himself had propitiated Shugden at one time, has said that after thorough investigation there were "profound historical, social and religious problems associated with it."<sup>[1]</sup>

In December 2014, a Tibetan man from Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu) named Uyak Tulku Lobsang Tenzin was sentenced to ten years in prison, because he urged residents of his home town to follow the Dalai Lama by not participating in Shugden propitiation, according to Radio Free Asia Tibetan service.<sup>[2]</sup> In early June 2014, four months after the document on Shugden was issued, a 77-year old Tibetan man, Jamyang Tsering, also from Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu) was imprisoned after encouraging a group of students to follow the guidance of the Dalai Lama and to always "hold to their pride in being Tibetan. [...] He had also advised as many people as possible in local gatherings not to worship Shugden."<sup>[3]</sup> According to the same source, Jamyang Tsering, who suffers from abdominal disorders, diabetes, and high blood pressure, among other ailments, was sentenced to a year and a half in prison.

The 'Opinions' document indicates that the Chinese authorities are politicizing an internal Buddhist matter as a divisive weapon in a systematic ideological campaign against the Dalai Lama that attempts to sever connections between Tibetans in exile and those inside Tibet. It can also be viewed as a means of diverting attention from oppressive Communist Party policies against religion by attempting to drive a wedge among Tibetans. In the document, the Party Committee does not only blame the Dalai Lama for "instigating the self-immolations" that have swept Tibet since 2009,<sup>[4]</sup> but it also blames the "Dalai Clique" for using "the Gyalchen Shugden issue to stir up divisions and instability in Tibet."

Followers of Shugden – led by Westerners from the “New Kadampa Tradition” (“NKT”) now operating as the International Shugden Community - have organized strident demonstrations against the Dalai Lama in global capitals where he travels.<sup>[5]</sup>

Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet, said: "This document on Shugden opens up a new front on the cultural battleground targeting Tibetans for their loyalty to the Dalai Lama, in a political environment that is already deeply oppressive. It also provides confirmation that the Shugden supporters in the West are aligned with the Chinese Communist government's agenda on Tibet, which threatens the very survival of Tibetan religion and cultural identity."<sup>[6]</sup>

Some counties in the Tibet Autonomous Region have followed the guidelines in imposing similar regulations. A harsh new set of regulations in Driru (Chinese: Biru), Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) prefecture included one provision that stated there will be punishments for "those who stir conflicts among monastics and lay believers over belief in [...] Shugden out of malevolence."<sup>[7]</sup> The same ban has been imposed in Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu), an area that has been subject to a dramatic tightening of security and on the “frontline” of the ‘patriotic education’ campaign as Tibetans continue to resist repressive measures imposed after protests that began in March 2008.<sup>[8]</sup>

Inside the PRC, officials have long used Shugden propitiation to create divisions between Tibetans, often encouraging Tibetans to propitiate Shugden and offering financial inducements to do so, as part of their objective of undermining the Dalai Lama. Shugden statues have been installed in monasteries in different parts of Tibet, often against the will of resident monks.<sup>[9]</sup>

In some cases, even small monasteries connected to Shugden have had large amounts of funding from the government compared to much larger monasteries with a higher population of monks where Shugden is not propitiated. In 2008, thousands of yuan were allocated to a relatively small monastery in Amdo which propitiates Shugden. In contrast, the much larger monastery across the river, Takstang Lhamo, had its school closed down and struggled for funding after monks participated in a peaceful demonstration, asserting their Tibetan identity.<sup>[10]</sup>

In one small monastery in Chamdo, the entire population of 21 monks was forced out when they refused to install a statue of Dorje Shugden. According to Tibetan sources, the authorities then appointed eight other monks and the statue was installed.<sup>[11]</sup> Last year, also in Chamdo, a young Tibetan stabbed himself to death when police attempted to detain him over the dismantling of a Shugden statue six years ago, according to a report by Radio Free Asia.<sup>[12]</sup>

Similar incidents of resistance to the imposition of Shugden statues have been reported across Tibet. A Tibetan prominent in the Western Shugden movement, Gangchen Lama, urged monks to be ‘patriotic’<sup>[13]</sup> and to show loyalty to the PRC, on a visit to Gangchen monastery in Shigatse, the Tibet Autonomous Region. Subsequently, local government officials arrived at the monastery to instruct monks to propitiate Shugden and to respect Gangchen; monks who did not were threatened with arrest, detention and imprisonment.<sup>[14]</sup>

Gangchen Lama is a frequent and regular visitor to China and Tibet who has applauded the Chinese authorities for improving conditions in Tibet and keeping Tibetan culture and spirituality alive.<sup>[15]</sup> The “Dolgyal Shugden Research Society” states that: “Gangchen has proven a useful tool for the Chinese in their attempts to reshape Tibetan religion into what they consider a more ‘culturally acceptable’ form: on meeting the Chinese Panchen Zuma or ‘False Panchen’ Lama,<sup>[16]</sup> whose first official photos on his investiture coincidentally featured him seated before a somewhat overbearing image of Dorje Shugden, Gangchen stated: ‘It was my long-cherished dream to meet his [the Tenth’s] incarnation. Now, my dream has come true, and I was glad to see that the 11th Panchen Erdeni is wise and benevolent.’”<sup>[17]</sup>

The new opinion on Shugden is in the context of a harsh political climate in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas. Campaigns directed against the Dalai Lama's influence, Tibetan culture

and religion, mean that in recent years almost any expression of Tibetan identity not directly sanctioned by the state can be branded as 'separatist', and penalized by a prison sentence, or worse. Communist Party officials in Tibet Autonomous Region have been punished for taking part in 'separatist' activities linked to the Dalai Lama, following scrutiny by a disciplinary official work team linked to Xi Jinping's politicized drive against corruption. The developments follow stern warnings of "punishment" for Tibetans "who have fantasies about the 14th Dalai Clique," effectively acknowledging the Chinese authorities' failure to eradicate loyalty to the religious leader in exile, even among Party members.<sup>[18]</sup>

[Read the translation »](#)

### Footnotes

**[1]** His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Advice Concerning Dolgyal (Shugden)  
<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/his-holiness-advice>

**[2]** Radio Free Asia cited a Tibetan source saying that Tenzin was detained "sometime in June [2014]" in Lhasa, where he had retired after working as a driver and tour guide. The same source said: "At some point, he returned to Dzogang county in Chamdo and began to advise the lay public and the monastic community to obey the instructions of the Dalai Lama and abandon worshipping Shugden, as this would be in the best interest both of individuals and the community." Radio Free Asia report, 'Another Tibetan is Jailed For Discouraging Worship of a Controversial Deity', December 17, 2014

**[3]** Radio Free Asia report, 'Elderly Tibetan is Jailed For Discouraging Worship of Controversial Deity', December 12, 2014. The same report quoted a Tibetan source saying that Tsering suffers from abdominal disorders, diabetes, and high blood pressure, among other ailments, and that: "He himself says he has done nothing wrong and has no regrets. His only concern is for his wife, who is 86 and was left behind in [the regional capital] Lhasa after he was detained."

**[4]** More than 130 Tibetans have set fire to themselves in one of the biggest waves of self-immolation as political protest worldwide. ICT factsheet: <http://www.savetibet.org/resources/factsheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/>

**[5]** ICT statement on Shugden demonstrators: <http://www.savetibet.org/the-international-campaign-for-tibets-statement-on-the-shugden-demonstrators/> The New Kadampa Tradition currently operates as the International Shugden Community. Even former members of the community have condemned the demonstrators. The following statement was released by ex-practitioners, who describe themselves as 'survivors' of what is recognized as a cult: "We, the undersigned, as former members of the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT), and ex-practitioners of Dorje Shugden, are appalled and saddened that those who were once our NKT sangha now demonstrate against and defame His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Inaccuracies and distortions of what we know to be the truth have been published as fact. The New Kadampa Tradition currently operates as the 'International Shugden Community' (ISC). Many allegations and insults are made against His Holiness which are completely unwarranted. At demonstrations and on numerous web sites and Facebook pages, the NKT/ISC viciously attacks the reputation of His Holiness. We have tried to address inaccuracies with the group, but without success. We believe it is time to speak out with one voice." The full statement is published at: <http://buddhism-controversy-blog.com/2014/09/26/revised-declaration-from-new-kadampa-survivors-concerning-the-demonstrations-against-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama/>, posted on September 26, 2014

**[6]** Among other inaccurate claims made by Western Shugden groups is the accusation that the Dalai Lama has 'banned' Shugden propitiation. As Robert Thurman writes: "The worship of their chosen deity was not 'banned' by the Dalai Lama, since he has no authority to 'ban' what Tibetan Buddhists practice. 'Banning' and 'excommunicating' are not Tibetan Buddhist procedures. Although they are Buddhists who should focus on emulating the Buddha, members of the cult are free to

worship their chosen “protector deity,” whom they call Dorje Shugden, as much as they like.” (‘The Dalai Lama and the Cult of Dolgyal Shugden’, by Robert Thurman, <http://tibet.net/dolgyal-shugden/the-dalai-lama-and-the-cult-of-dolgyal-shugden/>).

**[7]** ICT report, November 20, 2014, <http://www.savetibet.org/harsh-new-rectification-drive-in-driru-nuns-expelled-and-warning-of-destruction-of-monasteries-and-mani-walls/>

**[8]** Chamdo is treated by the authorities as “a strategic bridge between the Tibet Autonomous Region and the neighboring provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai.” (Tibet Daily, April 17, 2009). ICT report, December 2, 2009, <http://www.savetibet.org/determination-to-resist-repression-continues-in-combat-ready-chamdo-frontline-of-patriotic-education/>

**[9]** Further information on Shugden is available at the Dalai Lama’s website ([www.dalailama.com](http://www.dalailama.com)), the Central Tibetan Administration ([www.tibet.net](http://www.tibet.net)), and the Tibet Houses ([www.dalailamaprotesters.info/](http://www.dalailamaprotesters.info/))

**[10]** According to Tibetan sources known to ICT, and a French newspaper article ‘Chronicle of oppression in a village in Amdo’, April 8, 2008, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/monde/20080404.OBS8253/chronique-de-la-repression-dans-un-village-d-amdo.html> (in French).

**[11]** Tibetan Review, January 23, 2008, <http://www.tibetanreview.net/new-shugden-image-reigns-as-ancient-statues-stolen-from-monastery/>. The Pashoe Naira monastery in Pashoe (Chinese: Basu) County of Chamdo Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region, located about 300 kms (186 miles) from the prefectural capital, had 21 monks till about 1998, when authorities forced them out after they refused to install the statue. The monastery had no previously history of worshipping Shugden, the report added.

**[12]** Radio Free Asia report, December 12, 2014, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/worship-12122014152106.html>

**[13]** The reference to ‘patriotic’ means that Chinese Communist Party requires monks and nuns to be loyal to the Party state first; political allegiance is an official prerequisite for registration at monastic institution and to be considered by the state as a ‘religious’ person. This is an inversion of the priorities of a Buddhist practitioner.

**[14]** Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (June 2000) *Human Rights Update and Archives ‘Forceful Evacuation in Gangchen Monastery’* <http://www.tchrd.org/publications>. The incident is cited in ‘Dolgyal Shugden: A History: The Real Story behind the Shugden Cult’s Campaign against the Dalai Lama’ by the Dolgyal Shugden Research Society, published by Tibet House, New York, US, 2014, distributed by Hay House, <http://www.amazon.com/Dolgyal-Shugden-The-Research-Society-ebook/dp/B00KSP5K20/>. The same book also reports that similarly, in the autumn of 2005, the monastery of Labrang in Gansu province received an unsolicited proposal from Gangchen for him to fund the construction of a new dormitory for its monks. The offer was accompanied by generous personal donations to the monks themselves. However, the proposal was conditional: in order for it to happen, the monastery would have to agree to the construction of a Shugden shrine within the monastery. Despite pressure from local government officials charged with ‘supervising religious affairs’, the offer was ultimately refused. (TibetInfoNet (31st May 2006) *New details on the Ganden Incident* <http://www.tibetfonet.net/content/update/20>)

**[15]** [http://www.capdpc.org/en/en-lunwenzhy/t20061018\\_164160.htm](http://www.capdpc.org/en/en-lunwenzhy/t20061018_164160.htm)

**[16]** ‘False Panchen’ is the term the majority of Tibetan exiles use to refer to the Chinese candidate,

who was recognised by the government after the arrest of the then five year old child the Dalai Lama had recognised in 1995. Gedhun Chokyi Nyima's whereabouts is still not known, 20 years later, despite requests from numerous governments and official representatives to meet him in order to be assured of his welfare.

**[17]** From the book 'Dolgyal Shugden: A History: The Real Story behind the Shugden Cult's Campaign against the Dalai Lama' by the Dolgyal Shugden Research Society, published by Tibet House, New York, US, 2014, distributed by Hay House, citing Z Yangzoin (July 2005) *Lama Gangchen and his Self Healing Therapy*, China Tibet Magazine,  
<http://www.tibetinform.com/english/zt/people/..%5Cpeople/200402004511164405.htm>

**[18]** ICT report, January 28, 2015, <http://www.savetibet.org/communist-party-officials-punished-for-supporting-dalai-lama/>

<http://www.savetibet.org/chinas-new-directive-on-controversial-shugden-spirit-in-tibet-in-bid-to-further-discredit-dalai-lama/>