

Dge 'dun Chos 'phel and Tibetan Religion in the 21st Century

Prof. Donald S. Lopez

Abstract

Dge 'dun Chos 'phel was one of the most influential Tibetans of the twentieth century. He was born in Amdo in 1903. During his monastic training in the Dge lugs academy, first at Bla brang and then at 'Bras spung, he distinguished himself as a debater, while supporting himself as a painter. He left the monastery in 1934 to accompany the Indian scholar Rahul Sankrityayan, who had come to Tibet in search of Sanskrit manuscripts. Dge 'dun Chos 'phel returned with him to India, where he spent the next twelve years. During this time, he traveled extensively, translated Sanskrit classics into Tibetan, assisted European scholars in their studies, wrote a history of early Tibet, and composed a famous treatise on erotics. In 1945 he helped found the Tibetan Progressive Party, which sought to liberate Tibet from its current government so that it might become a democratic republic within China. Upon his return to Lhasa in 1946, he was arrested on the fabricated charge of counterfeiting currency and was imprisoned until 1949. He died in 1951.

Despite describing himself as a beggar, and traveling alone for much of his life, Dge 'dun Chos 'phel was a well-known figure among the Lhasa literati (both monastic and aristocratic). His fame (and infamy) grew with the publication shortly after his death of the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*, which criticized many of the philosophical traditions of the Dge lugs sect.

In the decades since his death, Dge 'dun Chos 'phel's legacy has grown, both in Tibet and in the West. This essay will trace the trajectory of his influence, from the time of his travels in India up to the present day, and will seek to identify the various roles Dge 'dun Chos 'phel plays in modern imagination.

格敦喬佩與二十一世紀之西藏宗教

Prof. Donald S. Lopez

中文摘要

格敦喬佩是二十世紀中最具影響力的西藏人之一。1903 年生於安多地區，並於格魯派寺院受學，先在拉卜楞寺，後在哲蚌寺；那時他即是以其出色的辯論而出名，同時並以作畫維生。1934 年他離開寺院，而去陪同來到西藏的印度學者羅睺羅·桑克特雅揚在西藏尋找梵文獻。格敦喬佩並隨他回到印度，在那裡度過十二年的時光。在這段期間，他做過廣泛的旅遊；翻譯梵文傳統文獻為藏文；協助歐洲學者進行研究；著作一本西藏古代歷史；並寫了一本著名的情色論著。1945 年，他協助成立了「西藏進步黨」，目的在於使西藏由當時政府的統治中解放出來，而成為中國治下的民主共和體制。他於 1946 年回到拉薩後，馬上被誣陷以製造偽幣的罪名而遭到逮捕，關到 1949 年，他過世於 1951 年。

除了形容他自己是位乞丐，並且在一生的大部分時間裏獨自旅行，格敦喬佩在拉薩的知識份子圈裏（包括僧眾與貴族）是位知名的人物。他死後不久所出版的《龍樹意嚴》，批評了格魯派的許多哲學思想傳統，這本書出版後，他的名氣（以及惡名）更行增長。

在他死後的幾十年間，格敦喬佩的傳奇不論在西藏或西方都持續增長著，此篇論文即是從他的印度之旅那時直到現今而來追尋他的影響軌跡；並試圖標示出格敦喬佩在現代幻想中所扮演的不同角色。

Dge 'dun chos 'phel and Tibetan Religion in the 21st Century

Prof. Donald S. Lopez, Jr.

The Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission graciously invited me to contribute a paper on “religion” to this symposium. When I suggested that I write a paper on Dge 'dun chos 'phel, the organizers asked, quite correctly, how Dge 'dun chos 'phel was relevant to the topic of “Tibetan Religion,” especially in 21st century Tibet. The three volumes of his collected works focus largely on issues other than religion (including history, geography, linguistics, epigraphy, and sexology), he had been a Dge lugs monk, but had lost his vows, and he died in 1951, long before the dawn of the new millennium.

I hope, however, to be able to demonstrate his relevance to the topic of Tibetan Buddhism in the 21st century, but in order to do so, I must travel by a rather roundabout route, beginning not in the 21st century, or even the 20th, but in the 19th, and not in Tibet, or even in India, but yet further south, in Sri Lanka.

The coastal areas of Ceylon had been conquered by the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century and Roman Catholic missions were soon established. The Portuguese were supplanted by the Dutch in 1636, who were in turn supplanted by the British, who brought the entire island under their control in 1815. Under the British, a number of Protestant missions were established in the nineteenth century, seeking to convert the Buddhist populace to Christianity, and they achieved a certain degree of success. In 1862, a Buddhist monk named Gu°nanda had founded the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism and established his own printing press, publishing pamphlets attacking Christianity. A number of Wesleyan converts responded in both speeches and in print. And so in 1873, a public debate between Gu°nanda and a Christian representative, Rev. David de Silva, was arranged. An audience of five thousand surrounded the platform constructed for the occasion.¹ Each side sought to demonstrate the fallacies of the other's sacred scriptures. The debate continued over two days, with Gu°nanda eventually being declared the winner by the acclamation of the audience.

This was not the first time that Buddhists and Christians had debated over the primacy of their respective faiths. In 1550, Francis Xavier had discussed the dharma with a Zen abbot in Japan. Around 1600, Matteo Ricci was denouncing Buddhism, in Chinese, to Buddhist monks in China. And in 1717, another Jesuit, Ippolito Desideri was living in the great monastery of Sera, where he debated with monks about the doctrine of rebirth and whether there can be creation without God. However, these three Jesuits were missionaries whose missions would ultimately fail; these lands were not conquered by Europe or converted by the Catholic church. But

in the nineteenth century, Ceylon was a British colony, and Guṅnanda's denunciation of Christianity had strong, and far-reaching, ramifications. It would be a key moment in the history of modern Buddhism.ⁱⁱ

What is this Buddhism, and in what sense is it modern? Modern Buddhism shares many of the characteristics of other projects of modernity, including the identification of the present as a standpoint from which to reflect upon previous periods in history and to identify their deficiencies in relation to the present. Modern Buddhism rejects many of the ritual and magical elements of previous forms of Buddhism, it stresses equality over hierarchy, the universal over the local, and often exalts the individual above the community. Yet, modern Buddhism does not see itself as the culmination of a long process of evolution, but rather as a return to the origin, to the Buddhism of the Buddha himself. There is certainly criticism of the past, but that critique is directed not at the most distant Buddhism, but the most recent. Modern Buddhism seeks to distance itself most from those forms of Buddhism that immediately precede it, that are even contemporary with it. It is ancient Buddhism, and especially the enlightenment of the Buddha 2500 years ago, that is seen as most modern, as most compatible with the ideals of the European Enlightenment that occurred so many centuries later, ideals such as reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism, tolerance, freedom, and the rejection of religious orthodoxy. Indeed, for modern Buddhists, the Buddha knew long ago what Europe would only discover much later. Its widespread acceptance of modern Buddhism, both in the West and in much of Asia, is testimony to the influence of an array of figures from a variety of Buddhist lands.

Several features of the debate in Ceylon bear identification as we begin to sketch the contours of modern Buddhism. First, Guṅnanda was clearly an educated monk, who not only knew his own scriptures, but had studied the Bible as well. The leaders of the various modern Buddhist movements in Asia would be drawn from the small minority of learned monks, and not from the vast majority who chanted scriptures, performed rituals for the dead, and maintained monastic properties. Second, the Buddhism that was portrayed in the debate, and in modern Buddhism more generally, tended to be that of scholastic doctrine and philosophy, rather than that of daily practice. Buddhism was portrayed as an ancient and profound philosophical system, fully the equal of anything that had developed in the Christian West. Indeed, Buddhism came to be portrayed—whether that portrayal was made in Sinhalese, Chinese, or Japanese—as a world religion, fully the equal of Christianity in antiquity, geographical expanse, membership, and philosophical profundity, with its own founder, sacred scriptures, and fixed body of doctrine.

But it is important not to lose sight of the more direct historical effects of the

1873 debate in Ceylon. Five years later, an embellished account of the debate was published in Boston, entitled, *Buddhism and Christianity Face to Face*, by James M. Peebles. It was read by Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, a journalist and veteran of the American Civil War. In New York City in 1875, Olcott and Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian émigré, had founded the Theosophical Society. The goals of their Society were “to diffuse among men a knowledge of the laws inherent in the universe; to promulgate the knowledge of the essential unity of all that is, and to determine that this unity is fundamental in nature; to form an active brotherhood among men; to study ancient and modern religion, science, and philosophy; and to investigate the powers innate in man.” The Theosophical Society was one of several responses to Darwin’s theory of evolution during the late nineteenth century. Rather than seeking a refuge from science in religion, Blavatsky and Olcott attempted to found a scientific religion, one that accepted the new discoveries in geology and archaeology while proclaiming an ancient and esoteric system of spiritual evolution more sophisticated than the physical evolution described by Darwin.

Madame Blavatsky claimed to have spent seven years in Tibet as a initiate of a secret order of enlightened masters called the Brotherhood of the White Lodge (said to be located in Shigatse), who watch over and guide the evolution of humanity, preserving the ancient truths. These masters, whom she called Mahatmas, lived in Tibet but were not themselves Tibetan. In fact, the very presence of the Mahatmas in Tibet was unknown to ordinary Tibetans. The Mahatmas had instructed her in the ancient truths of the mystic traditions or Theosophy, which her disciple A. P. Sinnett referred to as “Esoteric Buddhism,” of which the Buddhism being practiced in Asia, including Tibet, was a corruption. Despite its unlikely beginnings, the Theosophical Society would play a profound role in the formation of modern Buddhism.

By 1878 Blavatsky and Olcott had shifted their emphasis away from the investigation of psychic phenomena toward a broader promotion of a universal brotherhood of humanity, claiming affinities between Theosophy and the wisdom of the East, specifically Hinduism and Buddhism. And inspired by Olcott’s reading of the account of Guṇanda’s defense of the dharma, they were determined to join the Buddhists of Ceylon in their battle against Christian missionaries. They sailed to India, arriving in Bombay in 1879, where they proclaimed themselves to be Hindus. They proceeded to Ceylon the next year, where they both took the vows of lay Buddhists. Blavatsky’s interest in Buddhism remained peripheral to her Theosophy. Olcott, however, enthusiastically embraced his new faith, being careful to note that he was a “regular Buddhist” rather than a “debased modern” Buddhist and decried what he regarded as the ignorance of the Sinhalese about their own religion. As one of the founding figures of modern Buddhism, he identified his Buddhism with that of the

Buddha himself, “Our Buddhism was that of the Master-Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom Religion of the Aryan Upanishads, and the soul of the ancient world-faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Olcott took it as his task to restore true Buddhism to Ceylon and to counter the efforts of the Christian missionaries on the island, publishing in 1881 *A Buddhist Catechism*, modeled on works used by the Christian missionaries. Olcott shared the view of many enthusiasts in Victorian Europe and America, who saw the Buddha as the greatest philosopher of India’s Aryan past, and his teachings were regarded as a complete philosophical and psychological system, based on reason and restraint, opposed to ritual, superstition, and sacerdotalism, demonstrating how the individual could live a moral life without the trappings of institutional religion. This Buddhism was to be found in texts, rather in the lives of modern Buddhists of Sri Lanka, who, in Olcott’s view had deviated from the original teachings. This would not be his only contribution to modern Buddhism.

In 1885, he set out on the mission of healing the schism he perceived between “the Northern and Southern Churches,” that is, between the Buddhists of Ceylon and Burma (Southern) and those of China and Japan (Northern). Olcott believed that a great rift had occurred in Buddhism 2300 years earlier and that if he could simply have representatives of the Buddhist nations agree to his list of “fourteen items of belief” (he also referred to them as “Fundamental Buddhistic Beliefs”), then it might be possible to create a “United Buddhist World.” Olcott traveled to Burma and Japan, where he negotiated with Buddhist leaders until he could find language to which they could assent. He also implored them to send missionaries to spread the dharma. Olcott was also the first to attempt to unite the various Buddhisms of Asia into a single organization, an effort that bore fruit long after his death when the first world Buddhist organization, the World Fellowship of Buddhists, was founded in 1950.

On a subsequent journey to Japan in 1898, Olcott was accompanied by a Sinhalese named David Hewavitarne, better known as Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933). He was born into the small English-speaking middle class of Colombo. His family was Buddhist; at the age of nine he sat with his father in the audience of the Panadure debate, cheering for Guṇanda. But like many children of the middle class, he was educated in Catholic and Anglican schools. He met Blavatsky and Olcott during their first visit to Sri Lanka in 1880 and was initiated into the Theosophical Society four years later. In 1881, he changed his name to Anagārika Dharmapāla (“Homeless Protector of the Dharma”) and, although remaining a layman until late in his life, wore the robes of a monk. In 1884, when Blavatsky departed for the Theosophical Society’s headquarters in Adyar, India after a subsequent visit to

Ceylon, Dharmapala accompanied her. Upon his return to Sri Lanka, he became Colonel Olcott's closest associate, although they would later part company, with Dharmapala ultimately declaring that Theosophy was incompatible with Buddhism. Clearly more political than Olcott in both Ceylon and India, he declared that "India belongs to the Buddhas."

In 1891, inspired by Edwin Arnold's account of the sad state of the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, Dharmapala founded the Maha Bodhi Society, whose aim was to wrest Bodh Gaya from Hindu control and make it a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists from around the world, a goal that was not achieved until after his death. Dharmapala achieved international fame after his bravura performance at the World's Parliament of Religions, held in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. His eloquent English and ability to quote from the Bible captivated the audiences as he argued that Buddhism was clearly the equal, if not the superior, of Christianity in both antiquity and profundity, noting, for example, its compatibility with science. While in Chicago, he met not only the other Buddhist delegates to the parliament, such as the Japanese Zen priest Shaku Soen, but American enthusiasts of Buddhism, including Paul Carus.

When Dharmapala stopped in Shanghai in 1893 on his voyage back from the World's Parliament of Religions, he met Yang Wenhui (1837-1911). Yang was a civil engineer who had become interested in Buddhism after happening upon a copy of *The Awakening of Faith*. He organized a lay society to disseminate the dharma by carving woodblocks for the printing of the Buddhist canon (a traditional form of merit-making). After serving at the Chinese embassy in London (where he met Max Müller and his Japanese student, Nanjo Bun'yu), he resigned from his government position to devote all of his energies to the publication of Buddhist texts. Dharmapala was accompanied by the famous Baptist missionary to China, Reverend Timothy Richard, who had also attended the parliament in Chicago. After Dharmapala made an unsuccessful attempt to enlist China monks into the Maha Bodhi Society, Reverend Richard arranged for him to meet with Yang. Yang did not think it possible for Chinese monks to go to India to aid in the cause of restoring Buddhism in India, but he suggested that Indians be sent to China to study the Buddhist canon. Yang and Dharmapala seem to have begun a correspondence that lasted over the next fifteen years, agreeing on the importance of spreading Buddhism to the West. Toward that end, Yang collaborated with Timothy Richard in an English translation of *The Awakening of Faith*, and in 1908 established a school to train Buddhist monks to serve as foreign missionaries, with Yang himself serving on the faculty. Yang's contact with figures such as Muller and Dharmapala had convinced him that Buddhism was a religion for the modern scientific world.

In 1898, the Qing emperor had issued an edict ordering many Buddhist temples (and their often substantial land holdings) to be converted into public schools. Although the order was rescinded in 1905, a number of Buddhist schools and academies for the training of monks were founded on monastery property in an effort to prevent the seizure of the property and the establishment of secular schools. The monastic schools set out to train monks in the Buddhist classics, who would in turn could go out in public and teach to the laity (as Christian missionaries did). Yang's academy was one such school. Although most were short-lived, they trained many of the future leaders of modern Buddhism in China, who sought to defend the dharma through founding Buddhist organizations, publishing Buddhist periodicals, and leading lay movements to support the monastic community. One of the students at Yang's school was the monk Taixu (1890-1947), who would become one of the most famous Chinese Buddhists of the twentieth century.^{iv} New organizations included the Buddhist Pure Karma Society, founded in 1925 in Shanghai, which ran an orphanage and a free outpatient clinic, sponsored public lectures on Buddhist texts, published the *Pure Karma Monthly*, and operated radio station XMHB, "The Voice of the Buddha." The Chinese Metaphysical Society was founded in Nanjing in 1919. Originally, intended for laymen, monks were later allowed to attend, on the condition that they not meditate, recite the Buddha's name, or perform services for the dead. Here Buddhism was presented as a philosophy rather than a religion, and the emphasis was placed not on the recitation of the sutras but on the study of the scholastic treatises, especially those of the Fa-hsiang school.

Modern Buddhism did not come to Tibet. There were no movements to ordain women, no publication of Buddhist magazines, no formation of lay Buddhist societies, no establishment of orphanages, no liberal critique of Buddhism as contrary to scientific progress, no Tibetan delegates to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, no efforts by Tibetans to found world Buddhist organizations. Tibet remained relatively isolated from the forces of modern Buddhism, in part because it had never become a European colony or come under direct European domination. Christian missionaries never became a significant presence, Buddhist monks were not educated in European languages, European educational institutions were not established, the printing press was not introduced. Indeed, due in part to its relative isolation, many, both in Asia and the West, considered Tibet be a pure abode of Buddhism, unspoiled by the forces of modernity.

What then, does the history that I have recounted, beginning with a debate that occurred in Sri Lanka in 1873 have to do with Tibetan religion, especially in the 21st century? In an effort to begin to answer this question, let me read from a Tibetan text. It says, *Lo lnga bcu tsam gyi gong du singlar ye shu pa dang | sang rgyas pa*

gnyis la rtsod pa shin tu che ba zhid byung | de'i skabs dge slong gu'aratna bya ba des pha rol po rnam tshar bcad nas stong phrag mang po ye shu lugs su zhugs pa slar nang par tshud.^v That is, “Only fifty years ago a great debate took place between a Christian and a Buddhist in Sri Lanka. On that occasion, a monk called Gu'aratna annihilated the opponents and admitted many thousands who had converted to Christianity back to Buddhism.” These words, describing the Panadure debate (although getting the name of Gu'nanda and the date of the debate—it had occurred 66 years earlier—wrong), were written by Dge 'dun chos 'phel, probably in 1939, when he will living in Sri Lanka. His statement offers an opportunity to consider whether there was at least one Tibetan who might be counted as a modern Buddhist.^{vi}

Dge 'dun Chos 'phel had been born in Amdo, perhaps in 1903. His father, a Rnying ma lama, died when he was seven. Shortly thereafter, he was identified as a Rnying ma sprul sku but was never formally invested because the *bla brang* had been depleted in the period between incarnations. His obvious intellectual gifts led him to enter the local Dge-lugs monastery, before moving in 1920 to Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil, where he quickly gained notoriety as an unusually skilled and unconventional debater, so unconventional in fact that some sources suggest that he was invited to leave the monastery for critical remarks about the *yig cha*. Regardless of the specific reason, he clearly left under unfavorable circumstances; we find in his collected works a *ka rtsom* condemning the monks of Bla brang. In 1927 he set off for Lhasa and enrolled in Sgo mang *grva tshang* at 'Bras spung. He completed the curricula in *tshad ma*, *phar phyin* and *dbu ma*, before abandoning his formal studies in 1934 to accompany pandit Rahul Sankrityayan (1893-1963) in his search for Sanskrit manuscripts in the monasteries of southern Tibet. Dge 'dun chos 'phel ended up accompanying Pandit Rahul to Nepal and then on to India, where he was to spend the next twelve years.

He was extremely active during this period, both in his scholarly and personal pursuits. He traveled extensively, often alone, through India and Sri Lanka, studied Sanskrit, Pali, and English, gaining some facility in each. He translated the *Dhammapada*, *akuntala*, and the *Gītā* into Tibetan and is said to have translated the *Pram'avarattika* from Sanskrit into English, although this translation is not extant. He met and became friends with George Roerich and assisted him in the translation of the *Deb ther sngon po*, the *Blue Annals*. While in India he also was given access to several Dunhuang manuscripts on the Tibetan dynastic period as well as Tang historical records, which he used as the basis for his unfinished history of early Tibet, the *Deb ther dkar po*, the *White Annals*. He visited and made studies of most of the important Buddhist archaeological sites in India, writing guidebooks to the holy places of Buddhism. He also spent a good deal of time studying Sanskrit erotica and

frequenting Calcutta brothels, producing a sex manual which circulated widely among Lhasa society in manuscript form, the *'Dod pa'i bstan bcos*.

He spent the last two years of his travel abroad, from 1945-46, in Sikkim, where he became involved in discussions with a small group of Tibetans who would become the ill-fated Tibetan Progressive Party. The very name of the group raises some interesting issues. Its logo, designed by Dge 'dun Chos 'phel, featured a hammer and sickle and a Gandhian spinning wheel, with the name of the organization in both Chinese and Tibetan. In Chinese, it was Xizang gemingdang. *Xizang* is a standard Chinese name for Tibet, literally translated as “western treasury.” *Gemingdang* usually translates as “revolutionary party.” In Tibetan, however, the name was much less threatening, it was called the *Nub bod legs bcos kyi skyid sdug*, which means the “Association for the Improvement of Western Tibet.” In Tibetan, it is thus a friendly society rather than a party, dedicated to improvement rather revolution. However, the otherwise innocuous Tibetan name is betrayed by the term Nub Bod, “western Tibet,” a term that connotes nothing in Tibetan other than the Chinese designation of the country. The founder of the group was a great admirer of Sun Yat-sen and his political philosophy and had translated some of Sun's writings into Tibetan. The group advocated the same changes to occur in Tibet that had occurred in China with the fall of the Qing, believing that the present form of government in Tibet was totally unsuited for the modern world. He sought the help of the Kuomintang in creating an autonomous Tibetan republic, organized along democratic lines and under the overall control of the Republic of China.

Dge 'dun Chos 'phel had become increasingly critical of the government of Tibet and of the corruption and political machinations of the Dge lugs pa monasteries, and so found kindred spirits in the Tibet Improvement Party. He believed that major reforms, if not revolution, were necessary in Tibet and proposed that monks be paid salaries rather than being allowed to own estates and that they be required to study and prohibited from engaging in commerce. Late in 1945, the founder of the society asked Dge 'dun Chos 'phel to return to Tibet, not by the usual route but through Bhutan and then east and north along the Anglo-Tibetan border. He was asked to disguise himself as a monk-beggar on pilgrimage and to make maps of the area.

Dge 'dun Chos 'phel performed the task, finally arriving in Lhasa after twelve years abroad, in early 1946. He does not seem to have known that the maps and notes he had made were intended ultimately for the Kuomintang and sent them back to Kalimpong through the British postal service to India, rather than by personal messenger. Some sources contend that the package was intercepted by Hugh Richardson, the British trade representative in Gyantse, who in turn alerted the police

in Kalimpong.

In Lhasa, Dge 'dun Chos 'phel worked with one of his former classmates at 'Bras spungs, Dge bshes Chos grags on a Tibetan dictionary. In late July, the government decided to place him under arrest, informing him only that charges had been brought against him for distributing counterfeit currency. He maintained his innocence throughout his interrogation and but was incarcerated in the prison at Shol.

He was released in 1949, just a year before the Chinese invasion. By all accounts, he emerged from prison a broken man. Though supported by friends, he became increasingly addicted to alcohol and opium. His writings had been confiscated and he showed no interest in reviving his many projects, although he dictated what would be his most controversial work, the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* to his disciple Zla ba bzang po. He developed a severe cough which never improved and died of undetermined causes in October, 1951.

It was during the years that he spent traveling in India and Sri Lanka that Dge 'dun chos 'phel encountered many of the constituents of modern Buddhism, writing about them in his travel journals. There one finds scathing criticisms of the avaricious European colonial powers, speculations on the compatibility of Buddhism and science, and even an assessment of Madame Blavatsky, noting her influence on Sinhalese Buddhism in general and on Anag'rika Dharmap'la in particular. He writes:

The minds of Sinhalese monks are narrower than the eye of needle, but nowadays many of them praise her. Dharmap'la, the restorer of ġ'ipātana [Sarnath], is said to have initially become interested in the Buddha through her. It fascinates all the westerners because she explains her religion by stitching it together with the views of modern science. There were foreigners who in the past did not believe in the supernatural. Not only did she demonstrate magic to them but she applied scientific principles to such things as transforming matter through magical powers. That mode of explanation seemed to impress everyone. However, if it were explained to us [Tibetans] who are not familiar with the assertions of science, it would only confuse us."^{vii}

Dge 'dun chos 'phel did not simply come in contact with modern Buddhism; he took up at least some of its causes. In describing Bodh Gaya in his *Lam yig*, he writes:

Then, because of the troubled times, the place [Bodh Gaya] fell into the hands of *turthika* [i. e., Hindu] yogins. They did many unseemly things such as building a non-Buddhist temple in the midst of the st'Opas, erecting a statue of Śiva in the temple, and performing blood sacrifices. The *up'saka* Dharmap'la was not able to bear this. He died as a result of his great efforts to bring lawsuits in order that the Buddhists could once again gain possession [of

Bodhgaya]. Still, despite his efforts in the past and the passage of laws, his noble vision has not yet come to fruition. Therefore, Buddhists from all of our governments must unite and make all possible effort so that this special place of blessings, which is like the heart inside us, will come into the hands of the Buddhists who are its rightful owners.^{viii}

Here Gendun Chopel belatedly adds a Tibetan voice in support of the goals of Dharmapala's Maha Bodhi Society, founded almost fifty years earlier. Adopting the stance of a modern Buddhist, he calls on Tibetans to join with Buddhists from around the world in the crusade to return the most sacred Buddhist site to Buddhist control. In doing so, Dge 'dun chos 'phel allied himself with the ideals of one of the founding figures of modern Buddhism.

Among the defining elements of modern Buddhism is a criticism of European colonialism and the claim of the compatibility of Buddhism and Western science (both of which appear prominently in the works of Dharmapala). Each of these are to found in the writing of Dge 'dun chos 'phel. Let me focus especially on his comments on Buddhism and science.

The domain in which modern Buddhists most consistently proclaimed the superiority over Christianity was that of science. The compatibility of Buddhism and science has been asserted by such disparate figures as Dharmapala in Sri Lanka, Taixu (1890-1947) in China, and Shaku Soen (1859-1919) in Japan. The focus is again on the Buddha himself, who is seen as denying the existence of a creator deity, rejecting a world view in which the universe is controlled by the sacraments of priests, and setting forth instead a rational approach in which the universes operates through the mechanisms of causation. These and other factors make Buddhism, more than any other religion, compatible with modern science and hence able to thrive in the modern age. Despite general agreement that the Buddha had long ago anticipated the discoveries of modern science, modern Buddhists were not unanimous in their views of science. Some predicted that the East would receive technology from the West and the West would receive spiritual peace from the East, because the West excelled in investigating the external world of matter while the East excelled in investigating the inner world of consciousness. One finds here yet another characteristic of modern Buddhism. It had become a commonplace of European colonial discourse that the West was more advanced than the East because Europeans were extroverted, active, and curious about the external world, while Asians were introverted, passive, and obsessed with the mystical. It was therefore the task of Europeans to bring Asians into the modern world. In modern Buddhism, this apparent shortcoming is transformed into a virtue, with Asia, and especially Buddhism, endowed with a peace, a contentment, and an insight that the acquisitive and

distracted Western mind sorely need.

It is impossible to understand the phenomenon of “Buddhism and science” without considering the formation of the categories of religion in general and Buddhism in particular during the colonial period. The more positive portrayals of Buddhism during the Victorian period saw the Buddha as the greatest philosopher of India’s Aryan past and Buddhism as a complete philosophical and psychological system, based on reason and restraint, opposed to ritual, superstition, and priestcraft, and thus standing in sharp contrast to the spiritual and sensuous exoticism perceived by the British in colonial India. The Buddha was called a rationalist, and his four noble truths—suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to that cessation—were said to anticipate the medical model of sickness, diagnosis, prognosis, and cure.

In Asia, despite (or perhaps because of) the European disparagement of the contemporary state of Buddhism in Asia, Buddhist elites very quickly adopted claims for the compatibility of Buddhism and science and made them their own. By the time that the claims of affinity between Buddhism and science began to be made at the end of the nineteenth century, science had come to carry connotations of authority, validation, and truth separate from and in some cases in conflict with those of the Christian church. It is therefore unsurprising that Buddhist leaders in Asia would point to the scientific aspects of Buddhism in an effort to trump the charges of idolatry and superstition leveled at that time by Christian missionaries. They argued that the Buddha knew long ago what the science of the Christian west was only now discovering, whether it be the mechanisms of causation that rely on no god, the analysis of experiences into their component parts, the subtle disintegration of matter that results from impermanence, or the existence of multiple universes. The assertion of affinities between Buddhism and science, which began as a counterattack against the criticisms leveled against Buddhism by Christian missionaries and European colonial officials, became, and continues to be, a central constituent of modern Buddhism. Dge 'dun chos 'phel's discussion of Buddhism and science must be understood within this historical context. He writes in the final chapter of his travel journals, the *Gser gyi thang ma*:

No matter what aspect is set forth in this religion taught by our Teacher [the Buddha], whether it be the nature of reality, how to progress on the path, or the good qualities of the attainment, there is absolutely no need to feel ashamed in the face of the system of science. Furthermore, any essential point [in Buddhism], can serve as a foundation for science. Among the foreigners, some of the many scholars of science have acquired a faith in the Buddha, becoming Buddhists, and have even become monks. . . .

For example, scientists say, “In the next moment immediately after any object comes into existence, it ceases or dissolves. These collections of disparate things disperse like lightning.” Consequently, the first moment of a pot does not persist to the second moment, and even the perception of a shape does not exist objectively apart from the power of the mind or of human language. Moreover, when examined as above, even colors are merely the ways that a wave of the most subtle particles moves. For example, regarding waves of light, there is not the slightest difference in color whatsoever in the particles that are the basis for that color; it is simply that 800 wavelengths in the blink of an eye appear as red and 400 appear as yellow. Furthermore, they have invented another apparatus for seeing things that move too quickly to be seen, like drops of falling water. Something that lasts for one blink of an eye can be easily viewed over the duration of six blinks of an eye. More than ten years have passed since they made a viewing apparatus that is not obstructed [in seeing] things behind a wall or inside of a body. All of this is certain. They have also made a machine by which what is said in India can be heard in China in the following moment. Because they are able to show in China a film of something that exists in India, all the people can be convinced. To see this with one’s own eyes is the final proof that all things run on waves of electricity.

Many great scholars of science have made limitless praises of the Buddha, saying that two thousand years ago, when there were no such machines, the Buddha explained that all compounded things are destroyed in each moment and he taught that things do not remain even for a brief instant, and subsequently we have actually seen this using machines. The statement by Dharmakīrti that “continuity and collection” do not exist ultimately can be interpreted in various ways, but in the end one can put one’s finger on the main point. Similarly, because white exists, black can appear to the eye; there is no single truly white thing that can exist separately in the world. Having newly understood this, some people have been saying it for about fifty years. However, our Nṅṅrjuna and others understood precisely that in ancient times. They said also that all these external appearances do not appear outside of the projections of the mind. Whatever we see, it is seeing merely those aspects that the senses can handle, a reflection. The thing cannot be seen nakedly. Because these were not in the least familiar to other [systems] like Christianity, scientific reasoning is considered to be something that did not exist previously. However, for us, these are familiar from long ago. Furthermore, they are amazed by the explanations in the Anuttarayoga

Tantras of actually seeing the formations of the channels and drops of the body. Yet, to be excessively proud, that is, to continually assert that even the smallest parts of all the explanations in our scriptures are unmistakable, only seems beautiful temporarily; it is [in fact] pointless recalcitrance. . . .

As it says on the pillar at Zon de above Gro tshang, “Like the light-rays of the sun and moon in the vastness of space, may the teachings of the Buddha and my reign remain equally for tens of thousands of years.” Please pray that the two, this modern system of science and the ancient Buddha’s teachings, abide together for tens of thousands of years.^{ix}

Apart from the references to dated technology, much of what Dge 'dun chos 'phel says here sounds both fresh and familiar. Indeed, he articulates, over sixty years ago, many of the points being made in current discussions of Buddhism and science.

I stated earlier that modern Buddhism did not come to Tibet. This is a statement that requires some qualification, for in the first half of the twentieth century, there were repeated efforts to bring Tibetan Buddhism into Buddhist movements in China that can be regarded, in retrospect, as modernist.

It is important to recall that despite a long history of relations, dating back to the eighth century, Tibetans and Chinese did not always regard each other as members of the same religion. The standard Chinese term for Tibetan Buddhism, *lama jiao*, the teachings of the lamas, is, of course, well known. The degree to which Tibetans regarded Chinese monks as Buddhist is a more complicated issue. The great Dge lugs scholar, Thu'u bkvan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802) in famous *grub mtha'* (*Grub mtha' thams cad kyi khungs dang 'dod tshul ston pa legs bzhad shel gyi me long*) devotes an entire chapter to China. It is entitled *Ma h' tsi na'i yul du rig byed dang grub mtha' 'byung tshul*. Here he describes the religions of China (among which he includes Christianity^x), and devotes a long section to *Nang ba sangs rgyas pa'i chos lugs byung tshul*;^{xi} he clearly regards Chinese Buddhism as “Buddhist” and traces its connections to India. Yet, in the twentieth century, the sixth (or, by Chinese reckoning, the ninth) Pan chen Lama, Blo bzang thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma (1883-1937), referred to Chinese Buddhism by simply translating the Chinese term *fo jiao* into Tibetan, hence *bu ja'o*. Similarly, Chinese Buddhist monks have generally been called *hwa shang* in Tibetan, rather than *dge slong*, and Chinese Buddhist monasteries have been referred to as *hwa shang dkon*.

A certain mutual recognition seems to have occurred, however, also in the early twentieth century, where once again Taixu was a key figure. Holmes Welch describes his vision:

[H]e wanted to unite the component parts of Buddhism itself. He felt that it

would be incomplete without its Tantric component, which he therefore decided to revive. He planned to modify it and then combine it with the existing schools so as to produce a new, unified Buddhism, both esoteric and exoteric, in which adepts who knew the secrets of Tibetan lamas would live the pure life of Chinese monks. That is why, for example, although lamas are permitted to eat meat, the food served at his Tibetan College was strictly vegetarian.^{xii}

One should note that Welch, writing in 1968, still refers to Tibetan monks as “lamas,” suggesting that his own view of the status of Tibetan Buddhism was traditionally Chinese.

Gray Tuttle has noted in his recent dissertation that, “Although Taixu had little success in spreading Buddhism to other countries, he was more successful in supporting Chinese Buddhists in bringing other ‘Buddhisms’ (Japanese, Tibetan, and Sri Lankan) back to China.”^{xiii} In 1925, Taixu’s student Dayong (born Li Jinzhang, 1893-1929), who had already been to Japan to study esoteric Buddhism, led a twenty member expedition, which called itself the “Team to Study the Dharma Abroad in Tibet” (Liu Zang xuefa tuan) to Dar rtse mdo, where they studied at the Dge lugs monastery of Lnga mchod.^{xiv} Many more monks would follow them to Tibet, some because they felt that Tibet possessed a full transmission of the vinaya (a motivation similar to that of Kawaguchi Ekai), but many more because they believed that Tibet had the most complete esoteric tradition, certainly more complete than that of Japan.^{xv}

While Chinese monks were studying in Tibet in 1925, the Pan chen Lama was in China, where he gave Amit>yus initiations in Shanghai and Hangzhou. He was only one of several Tibetan teachers, or more accurately, teachers of Tibetan Buddhism, to preach the dharma in China. Others included Bai Lama, Rdo rje khrid pa, and Nor lha Qutughtu. The most successful of these Tibetan teachings was certainly the K>lacakra initiation that the Pan chen Lama gave in Beiping in 1931, with an audience estimated between 60,000 and 100,000.^{xvi}

It would be a gross simplification to attribute Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism during this period to something as nebulous as “modern Buddhism.” Many of the disciples of Taixu shared their teacher’s vision of an ecumenical Buddhism, that drew the best aspects of the dharma together in order that Buddhism be recognized as the best of all religions for the modern world. It is highly doubtful, however, whether the Pan chen Lama, or even many in his large audiences, shared this view. He was invited to perform ceremonies, as Tibetan lamas had done for Chinese, Mongol, and Manchu rulers, for centuries, in order to protect the state. 1931, the year of the Pan chen Lama’s first K>lacakra (he also gave the initiation in Nanjing in 1933), was the year that Japan invaded Manchuria. It should also be noted that at

least one of the reasons for the Pan chen Lama's presence in China was his dispute with the Dalai Lama over a variety of matters, none of which had anything to do with Buddhist modernism.

Tibet and China obviously have long and complicated histories of the dharma, with many points of both contact and contestation. Scholars have often marveled that Tibet could remain apparently oblivious to Buddhism for so long, as it thrived all around them for centuries, in India to the south, in Gandhara and Kashmir to the west, in Khotan to the north, and in China to the east. During this time of Buddhist efflorescence, the Tibetans only report that a sÒtra (in fact, the *KṛāavyÒha*) and a stÒpa fell from the sky on to the roof of king Tho tho ri gnyan btsan, yet no one could tell him what they were. Eventually, Khri srong lde btsan married Princess Wencheng, who not only brought the Jo bo rin po che to Lhasa, but supported Chinese monks like Wangzhao as they passed through Tibet on their pilgrimage to India. At the end of the next century came the Bsam yas debate and after that the suppression of Buddhism by Glang dar ma and the plunge into the dark period. This was followed by the so-called *phyi dar*, the latter dissemination of the dharma, generally said to have begun upon Rin chen bzang po's (958-1055) return from his sojourns in Kashmir. These are all events deeply encrusted by myth, and scholarship suggests that none of these events took place quite in the ways that the various chronicles and *chos 'byung* represent them.

Yet these are all culturally charged moments in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, which retain their potency and their currency centuries later. Thus, writing in his *Lam yig* in 1942, Dge 'dun chos 'phel, describing the work of Dharmapala and the Maha Bodhi Society, could state, "*slar yang rgya gar du bstan pa phyi dar gyi mgo btsams so*" "the latter dissemination of the teaching has begun again in India."^{xvii} It would have been difficult for him to imagine that a very different *phyi dar* would come to India some twenty years hence, led by the Dalai Lama himself.

The fourteenth Dalai Lama had little exposure to the elements of modern Buddhism during his time in Tibet. Although modern Buddhism was all around Tibet in the early twentieth century, in India and in China, none of the texts of modern Buddhism seem to have fallen from the sky on to the roof of the Potala. However, very shortly after he went into exile in 1959, the Dalai Lama began to articulate a vision of the role of Buddhism in the modern world that was both consistent with the claims of modern Buddhist leaders of the past, and which would become central to his teachings in the future. For example, in his first book, the *Blo gсар mig 'byed*, published in Tibetan in 1963, he explains why he has written this introduction to Buddhism:

At this time of the twentieth century, an era of chemical and

weaponry—during the Phase of Ethics among the ten periods of five hundred years in the teaching of the fourth leader, the Teacher [↗kyamuni Buddha]—external material culture has and is continuing to develop and expand. At the same time, there is a vital need for similar development and expansion of inner awareness and attitude.^{xviii}

Here, the Dalai Lama—although employing the arcane terminology of ancient Buddhist historiography—articulates one of the fundamental tenets of modern Buddhism: that the West has excelled in investigating the external world of matter, and thus has developed a material technology, while the East excelled in investigating the inner world of consciousness, and thus has developed a spiritual technology, one which the world sorely needs if it is to avoid destruction by the products of industry and the greed that has motivated their production.

Shortly after the death of Dge 'dun chos 'phel in 1951, the Buddhism of Tibet suffered a persecution beyond anything that the evil Glang dar ma could have conceived. Buddhism, and Buddhists, also suffered greatly in China. Yet Buddhism has survived and revived in both lands in ways that would have been difficult to predict during the depths of the Cultural Revolution. In the meantime, modern Buddhism has continued to grow and develop. Although Tibet remained largely missing from the modern Buddhist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tibetans came to play a leading role in modern Buddhism in the last decades of the twentieth century, and now into the twenty-first. There is today no more visible and eloquent spokesman for modern Buddhism than the Dalai Lama, who may indeed live long enough to give the Kṛlacakra initiation in Beijing, leading a latter day Dge 'dun chos 'phel to some day write, *slar yang rgya nag du bstan pa phyi dar gyi mgo btsams so.*"

Notes

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- ⁱ . For a detailed study of the debates, its antecedents, and aftermath, see R. F. Young and G. P. V. Somaratna, *Vain Debates: The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Vienna: de Nobili Research Library, 1996).
- ⁱⁱ . The academic recognition of a phenomenon called Buddhist modernism began in 1966, when Heinz Bechert, in a book entitled *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in der Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus*, used the term to describe tendencies that began in the late nineteenth century when monastic elites in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia sought to counter the negative portrayal of Buddhism by colonial officials and Christian missionaries. See Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in der Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus* Frankfurt/Berlin: Metzner, 1966). In 1970, Gananath Obeyesekere coined the term “Protestant Buddhism,” also to describe Sri Lanka. He argued that local Buddhists had adopted elements of Protestant Christianity in response to colonial and missionary authority. See Gananath Obeyesekere, “Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon,” *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1.1 (1970): 43-63. In the introduction to a recent anthology, I argued that modern Buddhism is a global phenomenon and has, in effect, developed into an autonomous Buddhist school, with its own sacred canon (including works such as Jack Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*) and saints (like D. T. Suzuki). See Donald S. Lopez, Jr. *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), published in the United Kingdom as *Modern Buddhism: Readings for the Unenlightened* (London: Penguin, 2002).
- ⁱⁱⁱ . Cited in Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 96.
- ^{iv} . On Taixu, see in English Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu’s Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001).
- ^v . Dge 'dun chos 'phel, *Rgya gar gyi gnas chen khag la bgrod pa'i lam yig* in Hor khang bsod nams dpal 'bar, ed., *Dge 'dun chos 'phel gyi gsung rtsom*, vol. 2 (Gang can rig mdzod 11) (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990), p. 172.
- ^{vi} . In a 1997 article, Toni Huber discussed Dge 'dun chos 'phel’s affinities with Buddhist modernism as they appear in his *Lam yig*. See Toni Huber, “Colonial Archaeology, International Missionary Buddhism and the First Example of Modern Tibetan Literature” in Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Jes-Uwe Hartmann, ed., *Bauddhavidyāsudhākara: Studies in Honour of Heninz Bechert on His 65th Birthday*, *Indica et Tibetica* 30 (Swisttal-Odendorf: 1997): 297-318.
- ^{vii} . p. 166. For a full translation of his description of Blavatsky, see Donald S.

Lopez, Jr., "A Tibetan Description of HPB," *Theosophical History* 7.2 (April 1998): 84-88.

^{viii}. Dge 'dun chos 'phel, *Rgya gar gyi gnas chen khag la bgrod pa'i lam yig* in Hor khang bsod nams dpal 'bar, ed., *Dge 'dun chos 'phel gyi gsung rtsom*, vol. 3 (Gang can rig mdzod 12) (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990), p. 319

^{ix}. Ibid., pp. 168-173.

^x. Thu'u bkvan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'* (Kansu: Kan su'u mi rigs dbe skrun khang, 1985), p. 420.

^{xi}. Ibid., pp. 418-446.

^{xii}. Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Harvard East Asian Series 33 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) p. 198.

^{xiii}. Gray Warren Tuttle, *Faith and Nation: Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China (1902-1958)*, Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 2002), p. 111.

^{xiv}. See Tuttle, pp. 126-128.

^{xv}. See Tuttle, pp. 147-149.

^{xvi}. See Tuttle, p. 283.

^{xvii}. Dge 'dun chos 'phel, *Rgya gar gyi gnas chen khag la bgrod pa'i lam yig* in Hor khang bsod nams dpal 'bar, ed., *Dge 'dun chos 'phel gyi gsung rtsom*, vol. 3 (Gang can rig mdzod 12) (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990), p. 324.

^{xviii}. Tenzin Gyatso, *Opening the Eye of New Awareness*, rev. ed., translated by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999), p. 21.