

# **The Transplantation, Development and Adaptation of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism in Britain**

David Neil Kay, BA (Hons)

**Submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**St Martin's College  
Lancaster University**

**December 2000**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite the advances of scholarly research into the nature and development of British Buddhism, its Tibetan and Zen forms remain a neglected area. This study analyses the transplantation, development and adaptation of the two largest Tibetan and Zen organisations currently active: the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC).

To account for their current identity, practice and position within the British religious landscape, the historical and ideological trajectories of the groups are outlined and the factors influencing their transplantation explored. The dynamics of history and identity construction are also considered. To ensure that the diversity of practice within Buddhist organisations is not overlooked, the attitudes and beliefs of individual group members are examined. Indeed, the dialectical relationship between group leadership and membership, and between text and context, are major theoretical concerns.

Part One surveys the available literature, identifying the main scholarly perspectives to be explored and tested throughout. A survey of Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain is provided in order to place the groups within their broader contexts.

Part Two examines the indigenous Tibetan context of the NKT before charting its emergence in Britain and outlining the contours of its sense of self-identity. The NKT, it is argued, is rooted firmly within traditional *Gelug* exclusivism whilst simultaneously reflecting and reacting against the conditions of modernity.

Part Three outlines the historical and ideological growth of the OBC within the context of the biography of its western founder and her relations with traditional Japanese *Sōtō* Zen. The influence of trans-cultural processes on the OBC's transplantation in Britain are acknowledged, but caution is exercised with respect to the applicability of the 'Protestant Buddhism' thesis.

Part Four concludes the study by reflecting upon recent developments within the NKT and OBC, speculating about possible future directions and returning to the framework adopted in Part One to structure a comparative discussion.

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## DECLARATION

Material from Part II has been published separately as 'The New Kadampa Tradition and the Continuity of Tibetan Buddhism in Transition', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 12 (1997), 277-293.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BCA	Buddhist Churches of America.
COI	Community of Interbeing.
CPMT	Council for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.
EST	English Sangha Trust.
<i>FM</i>	<i>Full Moon.</i>
<i>FMJ</i>	<i>Full Moon Journal.</i>
FPMT	Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.
FWBO	Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.
<i>HGLB</i>	<i>How to Grow a Lotus Blossom.</i>
IMI	International Mahayana Institute.
IZA	International Zen Association.
Jap.	Japanese.
<i>JOBC</i>	<i>Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives.</i>
<i>JSA</i>	<i>Journal of Shasta Abbey.</i>
<i>JTHBA</i>	<i>Journal of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey.</i>
<i>JTHP</i>	<i>Journal of Throssel Hole Priory.</i>
<i>JZMS</i>	<i>Journal of the Zen Mission Society.</i>
NBO	Network of Buddhist Organisations.
NKT	New Kadampa Tradition.
NRM	New Religious Movement.
OBC	Order of Buddhist Contemplatives.
SGI	Soka Gakkai International.
Skt.	Sanskrit.
SSC	Shugden Supporters Community.
<i>TBOL</i>	<i>The Book of Life.</i>
<i>THPN</i>	<i>Throssel Hole Priory Newsletter.</i>
TTP	Teacher Training Programme.
WCF	Western Ch'an Fellowship.
<i>WWG</i>	<i>The Wild, White Goose.</i>
<i>ZIEL</i>	<i>Zen is Eternal Life.</i>
ZMS	Zen Mission Society.

## **PART I**

### **REVIEW AND CONTEXTUALISATION**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BUDDHISM IN BRITAIN: REVIEW AND CONTEXTUALISATION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Alongside the growing interest in Buddhism as a religious option among British people and the increasing diversification of British Buddhism in the latter half of the twentieth century, a substantial amount of scholarly research has been undertaken into the nature and development of Buddhism in a British cultural context. The literature reflects the diversity of practice and indicates the analytical complexities encountered in the study of the importation and transplantation of a religious tradition into a new cultural environment. Any study of contemporary British Buddhism must thus take its point of departure from the groundwork laid down by previous studies.

For the purposes of analysis, I have divided my review into three separate but inter-related sections. The first section 'Buddhism and British Culture', reviews the literature on the differing levels of Buddhism's relationship with British culture and the transformations resulting from this contact; the second 'The Transplantation Process', examines the numerous other conditions besides cultural interactions that affect the transplantation of an incoming religious tradition; and the third 'Policies and Patterns of Adaptation', examines the issue of the conscious and deliberate adaptation of Buddhism by Buddhist groups within a western cultural context.

Throughout these sections I will make special reference to Tibetan and Zen forms of Buddhism in Britain. Scholars have noted that whilst there are discernable

continuities between individuals and groups, Buddhism in Britain remains characterised by great and enduring diversity. The Tibetan and Zen traditions of Buddhism are very different culturally, historically, doctrinally and practically, and such traditional differences inevitably influence the way they react to and develop within new cultural contexts. The discussion will thus underline areas of particular interest to the development of Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain.

Finally, I will move on to contextualise the groups under analysis within wider religious landscapes. I will discuss the contours of the British Buddhist landscape and comment specifically upon the presence of Tibetan and Zen schools and organisations, situating the groups of this study alongside them. This will set the scene for the subsequent analysis of the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) and Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC).

## 1. BUDDHISM AND BRITISH CULTURE

### 1.1. THE IMPACT OF BUDDHISM ON BRITISH CULTURE

One way in which scholars have considered the interaction of Buddhism with British culture, is to assess the impact of Buddhism on British cultural life beyond the boundaries of religious communities themselves. Puttick argues that 'the influence of Buddhism on contemporary life is in excess of the numbers involved'<sup>1</sup> and in support of this, refers to eminent philosophers, scientists and psychologists whose theories have been influenced by the Buddhist *weltanschauung*.<sup>2</sup> This view is shared by Scott who considers that,

Buddhism's biggest role in the 21st century might not necessarily be in terms of its numeric advancement, but in this contribution to the wider climate, debates and culture.<sup>3</sup>

There is some disagreement however, about the extent of Buddhism's influence on British society. Waterhouse is dubious about such claims commenting that 'We simply do not know how influential Buddhism has been'.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding the absence of research into the *extent* of the influence, the fact that Buddhism *has* influenced British culture is undeniable, and I would suggest that the capability of events within the Buddhist community - such as the *Dorje Shugden (rDo rje shugs ldan)* dispute of 1996<sup>5</sup> and the allegations concerning sexual manipulation and

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Puttick, "Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the West?" *The Growth and Appeal of Buddhism in Britain*, *Religion Today*, 8.2 (1993), 5-10 (p. 6).

<sup>2</sup> She refers, for example, to the philosopher Jacob Needleman, the scientists Fritjof Capra and David Bohm, and the psychologists Erich Fromm and Abraham Maslow.

<sup>3</sup> David Scott, 'Modern British Buddhism: Patterns and Directions' (unpublished paper, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Helen Waterhouse, *Buddhism in Bath: Authority and Adaptation* (Leeds: Community Religions Project Monograph Series, University of Leeds, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> This dispute will be discussed in detail later.

the abuse of authority within the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) in 1997<sup>6</sup> - to generate headline coverage in Britain's broadsheet newspapers, is an indication of Buddhism's potential and actual penetration of secular British life. It should also be remembered that the impact of Buddhism on British cultural life should be seen within the broader context of the West's ongoing encounter with oriental thought generally. According to Clarke, this encounter has become increasingly amplified throughout the twentieth century extending beyond the realm of 'popular religious quests' into wider fields of intellectual endeavour including inter-religious dialogue, philosophical enquiry, psychology and scientific and ecological speculation.<sup>7</sup>

## **1.2 THE APPEAL OF BUDDHISM**

Another way in which scholars have discussed the interaction of Buddhism with British culture, is to consider the appeal of Buddhism as a religious option for British people.

### **1.2.i. British Buddhists**

Scholars assessing the western attraction to the Buddhist path sometimes distinguish between the experience of the western Buddhist 'convert' on the one hand, and sociological accounts of membership of new religious movements on the other. It is argued that westerners who turn to Buddhism do not fit the prevailing sociological models of conversion to new religious movements (NRMs) which describe

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<sup>6</sup> These allegations were given prominent coverage in *The Guardian*, October 27 1997. Interestingly, the journalist Madeline Bunting who exposed this 'sex and suicide scandal' was also the first to publicly expose the controversial nature of the NKT.

<sup>7</sup> J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997).



membership in terms of a 'deviant cult response' to personal and social discontinuities. Finney is critical of sociologists who discuss Zen Buddhism in America in these terms and argues that whilst such explanations may help elucidate the recruitment of *some* Buddhists, they provide only a partial and limited account.<sup>8</sup> His account of Zen practitioners is more akin to Volinn's proposed model of membership of eastern meditation groups in America which is characterised by 'a going towards [rather] than a fleeing from [...] a going towards a sought after experience'.<sup>9</sup> Studies of Buddhism in Britain echo Finney's assessments of American Buddhists. For example, Puttick describes British Buddhists as 'active seekers' as opposed to 'passive converts', and the research findings of Tucker,<sup>10</sup> Waterhouse and others all attest to the high educational levels of British Buddhists and the discriminating and reasoned manner in which they negotiate their spiritual paths. Waterhouse's discussion of the importance of 'personal authority' to British Buddhists in the legitimisation of their religious beliefs and practices, is especially pertinent to this debate.

### **1.2.ii. Difference and Discontinuity**

Sociological theories of NRM membership and recruitment are nevertheless considered to have some applicability to the western Buddhist experience; hence Finney argues that prevailing 'deviance' explanations 'suffer not so much from being irrelevant as from being incomplete' (p. 381). Studies of Buddhism in Britain have taken as axiomatic the view that changing social and cultural conditions in the host

<sup>8</sup> Henry C. Finney, 'American Zen's "Japan Connection": A Critical Case Study of Zen Buddhism's Diffusion to the West', *Sociological Analysis*, 52 (1991), 379-396 (p. 379).

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Volinn, 'Eastern Meditation Groups: Why Join?' *Sociological Analysis*, 46 (1985), 147-156 (p.148).

<sup>10</sup> Hilary Claire Tucker, 'Opening the Mind to a Closed Alternative: A Sociological Study of Western Commitment to a Tibetan Buddhist Group' (unpublished M. Litt thesis, Lancaster University, 1983).

society over the last hundred and fifty years have favoured the emergence of Buddhism, and that whilst the British experience may be characterised primarily by an active 'going towards' movement, there is also a fair amount of 'fleeing from' involved as well. That is, Buddhism's appeal can be explained in part by its perceived differences and discontinuities with elements of British culture and religion with which people have become dissatisfied or disillusioned.

There is general agreement that the most important cultural pre-condition paving the way for the successful growth of Buddhism in Britain, has been the decline in the authority of the Christian church. The initial appeal of Buddhism in Victorian Britain is placed by Clausen<sup>11</sup> and Almond<sup>12</sup> within the context of a 'period of doubt' whereby the rise of rationality, science, historiography and Darwinian evolutionary theory, undermined the position of Christianity in Britain and Europe prompting disillusioned Europeans to look elsewhere for intellectual and spiritual inspiration. Buddhism was appealing largely because of its perceived differences to Christianity including, amongst other things, the fact that it was non-theistic, non-dogmatic and emphasised spiritual autonomy above faith in an external saviour figure. Dissatisfaction with Christianity and the 'more inspiring, nourishing, and intellectually convincing alternative'<sup>13</sup> of Buddhism, is still cited as a major reason for its appeal and growth. Clarke discusses the appeal of non-Christian religions in terms of a growing intellectual and psychological inability to take the Judeo-Christian notions of God, sin and salvation seriously. He argues that new religious forms

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Clausen, 'Victorian Buddhism and the Origins of Comparative Religion', *Religion*, 5.1 (1975), 1-15.

<sup>12</sup> Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> Puttick, p. 6.

including Buddhism, fulfil the modern desire for 'a non-hierarchical, non-sacramental, free-thinking, undogmatic and quasi-scientific approach to religion that is relevant [and] can be experimented with'.<sup>14</sup>

Buddhism is also seen as a religion providing modern man with answers to the spiritual despair ensuing from rampant industrialisation, rationalism, secular-materialism and consumerism. Baxter explains Buddhism's success in terms of the alternative it offers to the perceived options of modern western culture, namely 'the supernaturalist theistic religions on the one hand, and the assumptions of secular materialism on the other'.<sup>15</sup> Puttick also considers that modern city life may have prompted an interest in Buddhism in the same way that emerging cosmopolitan communities boosted the early growth of Indian Buddhism.

### **1.2.iii. Compatibilities and Continuities**

Besides accounting for its success in terms of the 'alternative' it offers to features of British religion and culture that are regarded as alienating, some scholars emphasise how perceived compatibilities and continuities between Buddhism and more valued elements of British society have been an equally important condition.<sup>16</sup> With respect to the earliest encounters for example, it is well documented how the appeal of Buddhism lay equally in its perceived *similarities* with aspects of Christianity for which British Victorians retained an affection, such as the figure of

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<sup>14</sup> P.B. Clarke, 'The Appeal of Non-Christian Religions in Contemporary Britain: Part II', *Religion Today*, 8.2 (1993), 1-4 (p. 3-4). Whether Buddhism actually offers this or not is another matter. The point is that many people perceive it in this way.

<sup>15</sup> John Baxter, 'The Sangha Comes West', *Theology*, 89 (1986), 173-178 (p. 176).

<sup>16</sup> For comparative purposes, see Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992). Tweed argues that, whilst Americans during this period were often opposed to the dominant political, economic and social forms, their attraction to the 'alien intellectual landscape' of Buddhism did not lead to unqualified dissent. They had, rather, 'an ambivalent relation to the prevailing religion and dominant culture' and should be seen as 'cultural consenters as well as cultural dissenters' (pp. xxi-xxii).

Christ and his moral code. According to Clausen, the fact that,

Buddhism, like Christianity, had an attractive personal founder who had led a life of great self-sacrifice [...] should not be underestimated among the reasons for the appeal of Buddhism in Victorian England and America.<sup>17</sup>

The early appeal of Buddhism is also explained in terms of its perceived compatibility with both the rational/scientific outlook on the one hand, and the romantic outlook on the other. Baumann maintains that the earliest German Buddhists were predominantly rationalists who praised Buddhism 'as a scientific and analytical religion which did not contradict the findings of modern science'.<sup>18</sup> Whilst Buddhism facilitated the western rationalist's critique of Christianity, for the romantic who was alienated both from traditional Christianity *and* the scientific alternative, it provided 'a source of spiritual renewal'.<sup>19</sup> According to Batchelor, the rationalistic and romantic attitudes underlying the appeal of Buddhism in the Victorian period should also be seen as persisting 'psychological strata within the western mind'<sup>20</sup> informing the existential engagement with Buddhism today. Modern Buddhist exegetes and practitioners from within a variety of contemporary traditions, still appeal to the 'fit' between Buddhism and the rationalistic critique of Christianity, and modern developments in psychology, science and environmentalism are regularly cited as movements that are entirely compatible with the Buddhist framework.<sup>21</sup> Buddhism

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<sup>17</sup> Clausen, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Baumann, 'Culture Contact and Valuation: Early German Buddhists and the Creation of a "Buddhism in Protestant Shape"', *Numen*, 44 (1997), 270-295 (p. 279).

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (London: Aquarian, 1994), p. 252.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>21</sup> A cursory glance through the catalogue of Wisdom Books, one of the world's largest suppliers of Buddhist books in English, reveals the ongoing concern of Buddhist writers to present Buddhism as a religion that embodies an environmental ethic and which anticipates the findings of modern psychology and science.

continues to appeal to westerners because of its perceived continuities with valued currents in western cultural life.

#### **1.2.iv. Zen and Tibetan Buddhism**

The attraction to Zen and Tibetan forms of Buddhist practice in the latter half of the twentieth century is often explained in terms of their perceived differences and compatibilities with western religion and culture. Ellwood argues that the growth of Zen in America after the war expressed the widespread cultural alienation of Americans who sought discontinuity with their society and rebelled against it by embracing alternative faiths and cultures.<sup>22</sup> Zen was an attractive alternative because of its perceived continuities with anti-structural ideals of spontaneity, experience and freedom. The growth of Zen since the 1960s is accounted for in terms of the social and religious unrest favouring the emergence of new religious movements generally, although its perceived continuities with psychotherapy and the human potential movement are singled out by Layman as particularly significant.<sup>23</sup> Counter-cultural trends are also considered central to the emergence of Tibetan Buddhism, which has been 'presented to westerners as a possible way forward in a dark and troubled world'.<sup>24</sup> The exotic sensuality of its rituals and symbology and the profundity of its religious philosophy, it is claimed, make Tibetan Buddhism a 'vibrant alternative' to western cultural, philosophical and religious traditions. At the same time however, the appeal is explained in terms of the common ground between western and Tibetan Buddhist traditions especially in the areas of science, medicine and psychological

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<sup>22</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

<sup>23</sup> Emma McCloy Layman, *Buddhism in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Inc., 1976).

<sup>24</sup> June Campbell, *Traveller in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), p. 28.

theory, and modern movements concerning the issues of gender, race, peace and the environment. According to Campbell,

any religious tradition from a different culture, in order to find relevance in the minds of new converts, would have to contain concepts or symbols which would be in some way recognisable, so that the meanings arising out of particular representations and texts would be different enough, but not so totally alien as to be dismissed out of hand. What is interesting about the Tibetan tradition for westerners is that it contains *both* features [...] the familiar philosophical base *and* the absolutely alien iconography.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.2.v. 'Conversion' or 'Creation' ?

The manner in which westerners have adopted Buddhism, involving the interplay between discontinuity *and* continuity with elements of western religion and culture, also raises questions about the nature of the religion being embraced. Rather than being predisposed towards Buddhism because it fulfils their spiritual needs, it is argued that westerners interpret or 'read' Buddhism selectively in ways acceptable to them. The 'Buddhism' of westerners therefore, is not so much a religion they have *converted to* but something they have *created* during the process of conversion. Batchelor describes this succinctly:

There are as many kinds of Buddhism as there are ways the fragmented and ever-changing European mind has to apprehend it. In each case 'Buddhism' denotes something else.<sup>26</sup>

Chryssides also notes how the cultural and religious baggage westerners take into their new faith problematises the nature of 'Buddhism':

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> *The Awakening of the West*, p. 274.

The religion to which they convert is [...] not a 'pure' form [...] but the immigrant religion overlaid with western modes of thinking.<sup>27</sup>

This process is not unique to the reception of Buddhism in Britain but characterises the transplantation process of any religion into a new cultural context. As Pye argues,

The Transplantation of Religion involves a complex relationship between tradition and interpretation, or in other words, an interplay between what is taken to be the content of the religion and the key factors in the situation which it is entering.<sup>28</sup>

Closer scrutiny of the appeal of Buddhism to westerners thus leads us onto a deeper level of the interaction of Buddhism with British culture; a level where British culture impacts upon and transforms Buddhism. The dynamics of these subtle cultural relationships have been the subject of considerable research.

### 1.3. THE IMPACT OF BRITISH CULTURE ON BUDDHISM

In an article about the presence of Indian religions in the West, Hardy maintains that western cultural history is 'the appropriate overall framework of reference for analysis' because these modern 'Indian' religious movements 'are primarily mirrors in which we can (and must) see ourselves, and not invaders from an alien world'.<sup>29</sup> With respect to the development of Buddhism in Britain, scholars have found his observations equally applicable; 'Buddhism' should be considered not

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<sup>27</sup> George Chryssides, 'Britain's Changing Faiths: Adaptation in a New Environment', in *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945*, ed. by Gerald Parsons (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 55-84 (p. 71). The 'pure' religion mentioned here refers to the Buddhist tradition as it exists in its indigenous context before it is transformed by the values and attitudes of the western Buddhist convert. Chryssides is not making a value judgment about pure or impure forms of Buddhism.

<sup>28</sup> E. M. Pye, 'The Transplantation of Religions', *Numen*, 16 (1969), 234-239 (p. 236).

<sup>29</sup> Friedhelm Hardy, 'How "Indian" are the New Indian Religions of the West?', *Religion Today*, 1.2/3 (1984), 15-18 (p. 15).

simply as an external phenomenon imported from abroad, but as 'something that has evolved from within our own culture'.

Mellor's work on the development of Buddhism in Britain has most clearly articulated the assumptions of cultural translation theory.<sup>30</sup> He considered 'Buddhism' as a 'problematic category' for the analyst rather than as a label for 'readily identifiable phenomenon of Eastern origin [...] merely transferred into a Western context',<sup>31</sup> because its transplantation into British society has occasioned 'a series of sophisticated religious and philosophical interactions'.<sup>32</sup> As religions are always embedded in socio-cultural realities, they should be studied with reference to the cultural contexts in which their ideas and practices are expressed. The British religious and cultural context must thus be central to studies of British Buddhism.

Mellor traces the development of Buddhism in England and locates it within the context of broader cultural and religious discourses such as those of Theosophy, modernity and Protestant Christianity. English expressions of Buddhism he maintains, have absorbed elements of the discourses that form part of their 'enunciative field' and consequently reveal continuities with wider western religious and cultural trends. The continuities between English Buddhism and Protestant Christian religious discourse such as the prevalent individualism and rejection of religious form as an 'empty category', are seen as particularly striking. Mellor acknowledges that the different Buddhist groups of his study relate to Protestant Christian discourse in very different ways with, for example, the British *Theravāda* Sangha representing a far

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<sup>30</sup> Philip Mellor, 'The Cultural Translation of Buddhism: Problems of Theory and Method Arising in the Study of Buddhism in England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 1989) and 'Protestant Buddhism? The Cultural Translation of Buddhism in England', *Religion*, 21 (1991), 73-92.

<sup>31</sup> 'Protestant Buddhism?', p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Cultural Translation of Buddhism', p. 339.



more sophisticated position vis-a-vis western individualism and religious ritual than the FWBO's wholesale acceptance of the former and rejection of the latter. Nevertheless, since both groups have absorbed elements of a Protestant Christian nature, he believes the specific character of Buddhism in England 'can be elucidated in the light of an awareness of the liberal Protestant trend'.<sup>33</sup> Hence, rather than talking about the 'transference' of Buddhism from eastern contexts to a British cultural context, he characterises this development as one of 'cultural translation':

Buddhist groups in England are a 'significant cultural development' [...] not because they divert Western culture into new religious channels, but because they explore the existing channels in new ways.<sup>34</sup>

In many ways, Mellor's thesis is an extension and refinement of previous analyses of the initial reception of Buddhism by Victorian Britain. Almond examines how Buddhism was 'created' rather than 'discovered' via a process of textualisation and imaginative interpretation.<sup>35</sup> He situates Victorian discourse about Buddhism within the broader context of discourse about the East and examines how it reflects the dynamics of 'Orientalism', defined and analysed by Said as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.<sup>36</sup> Victorian interpretations of Buddhism, Almond argues, passed through a 'conceptual filter' made up of western images of the oriental way on the one hand, and Victorian concerns and values on the other:

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>34</sup> 'Protestant Buddhism?', p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> Similar arguments are advanced by Clausen, 'Victorian Buddhism and the Origins of Comparative Religion', Douglas Brear, 'Early Assumptions in Western Buddhist Studies', *Religion*, 5 (1975), 136-159 and Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and its Western Interpreters* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978), p. 3.

The Victorian world in all its diversity, confident of its cultural hegemony, was incorporated, and crucially so, in its interpretation of Buddhism.<sup>37</sup>

Bell is critical of accounts like Almond's that explain the nineteenth-century reception and rendering of Buddhism as a project dominated by westerners. The introduction of Buddhism into Britain she argues, has always been a process of 'active collaboration between Britons and Asian Buddhists, collectively and individually'.<sup>38</sup> She is also critical of Mellor's claim that the nature of British Buddhism can be elucidated in terms of Protestant Christian discourse, disagreeing in particular with his characterisation of the FWBO as a movement that is 'highly suspicious of ritual'.<sup>39</sup> The broadly Protestant character of British Buddhism is taken as axiomatic by a number of scholars, sometimes too uncritically. For example, Waterhouse's suggestion that Buddhism in Bath displays 'broadly Protestant tendencies'<sup>40</sup> is neither situated within a thorough survey of the available theoretical literature nor is it grounded within field work itself beyond a number of passing remarks concerning the laicised orientation of the groups under study. A scholarly account of British Buddhism that subjects the Protestant thesis to critical scrutiny is long overdue, and this is something I will attempt as part of my analysis of the OBC.

Bell is in agreement however, with Mellor's general theoretical statements about the relationship between Buddhism and British culture. In her article on change and identity in the FWBO, she considers elements of the FWBO's ideology and organisational structures in light of the contemporary social theory of Giddens, who

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<sup>37</sup> Almond, p. 141.

<sup>38</sup> Sandra Bell, 'Buddhism in Britain: Development and Adaptation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 1991), p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Sandra Bell, 'Change and Identity in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 17 (1996), 87-107 (p. 91).

<sup>40</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 240.

characterises the conditions of modern society as constitutive of 'high modernity'.<sup>41</sup> 'High modernity' refers to the 'essentially post-traditional'<sup>42</sup> character of modern society that has been brought about by the pace and scope of contemporary social change. In particular, it refers to the 'reflexivity' that has been injected into modern life, whereby most aspects of pre-established social activity have become susceptible to 'chronic revision' in the light of new information. According to Giddens, the reflexivity of high modernity extends into the realm of personal identity because in the context of a post-traditional order, external authorities become suspect and unreliable and the 'self' becomes a 'reflexive project' that has to be 'routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual'.<sup>43</sup> Bell argues that within a society characterised by social and individual reflexivity, one would expect to find 'symbolic communities' that are dedicated to the project of personal self-discovery, and she analyses the FWBO as a vivid example of such a religious movement. The FWBO's philosophy and concomitant institutionalisation of personal growth,

chimes with several broad currents in Britain's atomised and pluralist, late twentieth century society; a society increasingly and generally more subjective and oriented to the inner life of the individual.<sup>44</sup>

Whilst disagreeing with Mellor's 'Protestant Buddhism' thesis Bell thus considers that 'his portrayal of the FWBO as being in tune with high modernity is sustainable'.<sup>45</sup>

Waterhouse has also noted the affinity between contemporary Buddhist practice and features of modernity, in this case pointing to the importance of personal authority to

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<sup>41</sup> Bell relies here on the theories of Anthony Giddens as found in his *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Giddens, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> 'Change and Identity', p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

British Buddhists who live in a modern society in which all external authorities have been challenged and undermined. A similar line of enquiry albeit with a strongly philosophical emphasis, has also been adopted by Smith who argues that an understanding of the 'elective affinity' between certain Buddhist philosophical ideas and features of late modern British society, can facilitate our understanding of the transference of Buddhism to, and its continued existence in, a 'de-universalized' western society.<sup>46</sup>

The cultural and religious baggage that westerners carry into their Buddhist practice and the ramifications this has for the nature of 'Buddhism', has also been an area of discussion with reference to Zen and Tibetan forms of Buddhism in the West. Scholars have noticed for instance, how the Zen of the 1950s American 'beat generation', was a highly selective reading that ignored the structured, disciplined, meditative and ritual aspects of Zen in order to provide 'both an expression and a legitimation of their dissatisfaction and their "hip" way of life'.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the opposite mode of 'Square Zen', entailing the wholesale appropriation of Asian Buddhist forms by westerners, has been analysed as a style of practice that is equally informed by the cultural baggage of its proponents. Alan Watts argued this, adopting a Jungian approach towards the western practice of Zen. To understand Zen fully, he argued, western man 'must understand his own culture so thoroughly that he is no longer swayed by its premises unconsciously'.<sup>48</sup> It is because westerners lack this understanding that Zen has taken the forms it has; 'Beat Zen' being the Zen of 'displaced' Christians seeking justification for caprice and social criticism, and

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<sup>46</sup> Simon G. Smith, 'Western Buddhism: Tradition and Modernity', *Religion*, 25 (1996), 311-321.

<sup>47</sup> Ellwood, p. 145.

<sup>48</sup> Alan W. Watts, 'Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen', *Chicago Review*, 12.2 (1958), 3-11 (p. 6).

'Square Zen' being the Zen of 'unconscious' Christians seeking 'a more plausible authoritative salvation than the Church or psychiatrists seem to be able to provide'.<sup>49</sup>

Jung's theories on the problems raised by westerners embracing eastern religions<sup>50</sup> are drawn upon extensively in Bishop's study of the fantasies of Tibetan Buddhism in the western cultural imagination.<sup>51</sup> His 'imaginative analysis' approaches the religion as 'a place within the imaginative terrain of the West' (p. 25) rather than as an abstract system. Analysing the West's relationship with Tibetan Buddhism from a modified Jungian perspective, he considers the nature of the 'depth imagination' of the two cultures and the 'archetypal significance' of Tibetan Buddhism for the West. He believes that Tibetan Buddhism 'has a great capacity to engage with the darkness and depths of the psyche' (p. 19) but that its potential value has been undermined because its appropriation by westerners has been highly *selective*, involving the avoidance of the 'dark corners' of the western psyche. Many westerners in the twentieth century, Bishop argues, feel spiritually 'orphaned' because the Divine Father or 'senex' archetype of their own culture,

either stands discredited to a greater or lesser extent (due to ecological disregard, the arms race, global poverty, spiritual bankruptcy, aggressive paranoia), or is absent ('God is dead'; impotent; sick; insane).<sup>52</sup>

The modern western embrace of Tibetan Buddhism thus represents 'the Divine Father whom one *wishes* were one's own, or whom one aspires to be' (p. 130).

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> A useful summary of Jung's views on this subject can be found in J. Borelli, 'Jung's Criticism of Yoga Spirituality', in *Jung and Eastern Thought*, ed. by H. Coward, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 79-92.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Bishop, *Dreams of Power: Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination* (London: The Athlone Press, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

The archetypal significance of Tibetan Buddhism for the West is that it 'has allowed many to re-establish a deep and sacred connection with a critical archetypal figure of our time' (p. 130) connecting the West both to the 'ancients of its psychological past' and providing hope for the future. The problem however, is that modern westerners do not approach Tibetan Buddhism as an 'imaginative whole'. The avoidance of the 'dark corners' of the western psyche, with respect to the senex archetype in western culture, causes westerners to by-pass the ambivalence of the Tibetan Buddhist senex archetype and embrace 'only one half of the fantasy [...] either the good or the bad Father' (p. 52). The power of Tibetan Buddhism to be 'a vessel for imaginative work' with respect to the western senex pathology, is thus significantly diminished and its transplantation into the West has become a highly selective, idealised affair that ignores the 'shadow side' of Tibetan spirituality:

Partisans of Tibetan Buddhism frequently seem blind to the dark side of this immense structure: to its oppressive and chaotic hierarchy, its historical justifications of gross inequalities of power, wealth, and human dignity [...].<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 94. In a similar vein, but with reference to the practice of Japanese Zen Buddhism by westerners, Brian Victoria has commented upon 'the resistance on the part of Westerners to confront the dark side of their tradition', such as the use of Zen teachings to promote Japanese nationalism, military endeavour and anti-Semitism (Brian Victoria and others, 'Yasutani Roshi: The Hardest Koan', *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 9.1 (1999), 60-75 (p. 62).

## 2. THE TRANSPLANTATION PROCESS

As Mellor argues, an awareness of the subtle manner in which Buddhism interacts with the British religio-cultural context, should be central to the study of Buddhism in Britain. The value of this approach lies in the recognition that 'Buddhism', rather than being a simple signifier of phenomena existing 'out there' in the East, is in many ways a relative category rooted in the historical and cultural circumstances of the West. By considering Buddhism as a 'pre-determined intellectual formation' instead of something that is inseparable from its cultural expressions, the observer of contemporary Buddhism would over-simplify the transplantation process since he would remain unaware of 'the range of relationships between English Buddhism and both Western and Eastern culture'.<sup>54</sup> Awareness of the relationship between Buddhism and British culture also provides a basis for identifying and explaining continuities that may exist between different Buddhist forms in Britain.

However, an appreciation of religious and cultural relationships, though illuminating, does not explain the total transplantation process. Cultural translation may be crucial to the successful transplantation of a Buddhist tradition in an alternative cultural context, but this can occur in varying degrees and with differing levels of awareness. It can, for example, occur at a largely unconscious level or it can be pursued self-consciously by Buddhist groups as part of their policies of adapting and making Buddhism meaningful for westerners. Furthermore, it is by no means the only condition affecting the successful transplantation of Buddhism in Britain. In this section I will outline some of the most important factors and conditions that shape the

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<sup>54</sup> 'Protestant Buddhism?', p. 89.

transplantation process *as a whole*.

## 2.1. MATERIAL CONDITIONS

All studies of Buddhist groups in Britain emphasise the importance of material conditions to their successful transplantation and growth. At its most basic level this refers to a group's ability to attract committed supporters who will become financial sponsors, but it extends to the process of institutionalisation whereby an efficient legal, organisational and administrative structure is created 'in order to "crystallize" the more or less sporadic gatherings and to gain a lasting footing.'<sup>55</sup> Different Buddhist groups develop their own unique financial mechanisms which often reflect the nature of their tradition. The FWBO's emphasis on developing profitable businesses and Right Livelihood cooperatives, for example, reflects its lay orientation and concomitant desire to be financially self-sufficient, whilst the British *Theravāda* Sangha adopt a more traditional attitude - albeit adapted, since lay donations are not based on the ideology of merit-making - towards lay-monastic relations. The British *Theravāda* Sangha also receives financial support from supporters in the indigenous context of its tradition (i.e. from lay patrons in Thailand), as does Soka Gakkai International UK (i.e. from SGI's Japanese headquarters).<sup>56</sup> For groups that do not have the good fortune of receiving such support from within their indigenous traditions, the skilful mobilisation of available resources becomes all the more crucial to their success. This could involve developing fund-raising initiatives and exploiting

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<sup>55</sup> Martin Baumann, 'Creating a European Path to Nirvana: Historical and Contemporary Developments of Buddhism in Europe', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 10 (1995), 55-70 (p. 63).

<sup>56</sup> Although it is unlikely that the financial assistance received by the British *Theravāda* Sangha from its Thai patrons is as extensive as that received by the SGI-UK from Japan.



the financial rewards of registering as a charity, on an organisational level, to making advantageous use of the state benefits system on an individual level.<sup>57</sup>

Studies also demonstrate the importance of clear institutional and administrative structures to the success of Buddhist groups. Mellor discusses how the emergence of the English Sangha Trust (EST) and FWBO, from within a British Buddhist context dominated by the London Buddhist Society, involved various attempts to control existing institutional sites and create alternative sites for the dissemination of Buddhist discourse. The establishment and growth of these alternative institutional structures not only facilitated further 'discursive separations', but gave the EST and FWBO the credibility and authority to disseminate their own particular understandings of Buddhism. Waterhouse also illustrates how 'religious and agency authority structures operate alongside each other'<sup>58</sup> within British Buddhist groups. This parallel structure is vital for dealing with religious matters on the one hand, whilst dealing with financial and organisational considerations, on the other, as groups seek to make their 'religious goods' available to others. Towards this end, the larger Buddhist organisations seek to generate publications and often establish their own publishing companies.<sup>59</sup>

## 2.2. TRANS-CULTURAL PROCESSES

Recent research has indicated that in order to fully understand the transplantation process of Buddhist traditions in the West, the observer must also take

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<sup>57</sup> Waterhouse explores the issues raised by the fact that many of the residents in the NKT centre in Bath rely upon the state benefits system for their economic support (*Buddhism in Bath*, p. 144).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>59</sup> The Buddhist groups at the centre of this study have all created their own publishing companies in the form of Tharpa Publications (NKT), Wisdom Publications (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition) and Shasta Abbey Press (OBC).

important trans-cultural processes into consideration. The transplantation of certain Buddhist traditions in western countries, it is argued, is affected significantly by the transformation those traditions have already undergone within indigenous contexts resulting from the impact of western cultural, political and ideological forces in Asian countries - particularly in the South and Far East - since the late eighteenth century. The transformation of Buddhism in indigenous contexts resulting from its encounter with the West is referred to by scholars as Buddhist 'reformism' or 'modernism', and sometimes as 'Protestant Buddhism'.<sup>60</sup> These terms imply the incorporation by Asian Buddhists, of scientific, rationalistic, humanistic and Protestant Christian values - such as anti-clericalism and anti-ritualism - into their traditional Buddhist frameworks. The transplantation process involves trans-cultural constituents whenever Buddhist forms that have been transformed in this way are then imported to the West. The nature of Buddhism in the West, then, may not only be conditioned by the religio-cultural baggage informing the western converts' interpretation of eastern Buddhist traditions. As some traditions - or strands within traditions - may already have been transformed through their encounter with western forces, the transplantation process can take on greater complexity.

Trans-cultural processes have not however, been central to the transplantation of all Buddhist traditions in the West because not all forms of Buddhism have been

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<sup>60</sup> The term 'Protestant Buddhism' was first coined by Gananath Obeyeskere in 'Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon', *Modern Ceylon Studies*, 1 (1970), 43-63. The term has been taken up and applied by other scholars since with reference to modern Buddhist movements in eastern contexts, and by Mellor with reference to Buddhism in Britain. Mellor maintains that the emergence of Buddhism in a Protestant shape is a development that has taken place primarily upon British shores through the process of 'cultural translation'. Bell's research into the British *Theravāda* Sangha indicates that Mellor's understanding of this *Theravāda* movement is one-sided. Although she does not refer to developments in South East Asian countries as 'Protestant' in nature she does argue that the successful transplantation of *Theravāda* Buddhism in Britain has involved, not only its 'cultural translation' into a British context, but also important trans-cultural processes that are rooted in Asian Buddhist modernist movements.

dynamic of cross-cultural processes'.<sup>63</sup> She considers the emergence of British Buddhism within a broad context arguing that its progress in the new western context has always been 'contingent upon what was happening in the old' (p. 42), and criticises Clausen's and Almond's accounts of the early reception of Buddhism in Britain because they overlook the reciprocal cross-cultural nature of the process. By restricting themselves to the British Victorians' rendering and 'reconstruction' of Buddhism, they ignore the fact that Asian Buddhist modernists 'both contributed to and were influenced by that rendering' (p. 33) becoming 'equal and active participants in a two way process' (p. 13). In this way, the western scholarly 'reconstruction' of Buddhism and the indigenous South East Asian *Theravāda* Buddhist reform movements, evolved through a complex process of mutual influence and modification. Bell argues that this pattern continued to characterise the development of Buddhism in Britain throughout the twentieth century. In support of her thesis, she examines how the successful establishment of a monastic *Sangha* in Britain depended both upon its strong links with forest hermitages in Thailand and upon various modern reforms in indigenous *Theravāda* contexts. The lay meditation and nuns' movements in South East Asian Theravadin countries, for example, are seen as important precedents that have enabled the British *Theravāda* Sangha to put down roots in Britain by emphasising lay meditation and innovating in the area of female ordination. Bell thus concludes that for *Theravāda* Buddhism to be successfully transplanted in Britain, certain conditions 'had to be met in both the indigenous setting and the host setting' (p. 376). The transplantation process thus involves 'contingent patterns that flow in both directions between Asian and Western cultures as they interact' (p. 2).

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<sup>63</sup> 'Buddhism in Britain', p. 2.

The 'intricacies of trans-cultural processes'<sup>64</sup> to which Bell refers, are also taken into account by Sharf who traces the modern emphasis on inner experience and meditation within the Buddhist reform movements of South East Asia and, especially, of Japan. According to Sharf, the historical and cultural processes that gave rise to the recreation of *Theravāda* Buddhism in a Protestant shape during the colonial period of South Asia, can also be observed behind the modern construction of 'Protestant Zen' in Japan. The architects of Buddhist modernist discourse in Japan emerged out of the historical and ideological ferment of the Meiji period (1868-1912). During this period Japan experienced dramatic social change resulting from rapid westernisation, modernisation and industrialisation, and Buddhism became the subject of critique and persecution by a government intent upon modernising the country. In response, there arose a vanguard of modern Buddhist leaders who reformed Buddhism along modernist lines and defended it against government censure.

The successful polemic of Meiji 'New Buddhism' was developed by apologists of Japanese Zen in their own way. This emergent modernist Zen discourse was also heavily influenced by the Kyoto school, a new Japanese philosophical movement that drew upon both Asian and western resources and which maintained that Japanese culture and religion is characterised by its 'direct' or 'unmediated' experience of reality. Sharf maintains that this emphasis on 'experience' can be traced directly back to the writings of western scholars of the late nineteenth century who were also attempting to defend religion from the 'onslaught of Enlightenment values'.<sup>65</sup> By privileging experience, then,

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<sup>64</sup> 'Buddhism in Britain', p. 376.

<sup>65</sup> For example, William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and Rudolf Otto's conception of the 'numinous' experience in *Idea of the Holy* (1917).

the Japanese, like their Western mentors, sought to naturalise the category 'religion' - if religious traditions were predicated upon an ineffable, noetic and mystical state of consciousness, then they could not be rejected as mere superstition, infantile wish-fulfilment, or collective hysteria.<sup>66</sup>

According to Sharf, the earliest proponents of Zen in the West, such as Shaku Soen Roshi (1859-1919) and his lay student D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966), were modernist Japanese intellectuals. Zen appeared in the West at the right historical moment because its purported anti-intellectualism, anti-ritualism and iconoclasm, and its emphasis on the unmediated experience of ultimate truth, confirmed and hardened the 'hermeneutic of experience' characterising western scholarship of religion at the turn of the century. Western scholarship of Buddhism was subsequently characterised by the assumption that the 'essential core' of the religion should be understood as 'a private, veridical, ineffable experience inaccessible to empirical scientific analysis'.<sup>67</sup> The 'Zen' that so appealed, then, was the modernist - or 'Protestant' - form emerging from the New Buddhism of the Meiji period. Hence,

those aspects of Zen most attractive to the Occident - the emphasis on spiritual experience and the devaluation of institutional forms - were derived in large part from Occidental sources.<sup>68</sup>

Sharf maintains that this version of Zen 'is not Zen at all, at least not the Zen practised by the "masters of old"'.<sup>69</sup> The writings of Suzuki and others responsible for the western interest in Zen do not represent traditional - i.e. pre-Meiji - Zen theory and practice, and their status and influence within the established Japanese *Rinzai* and

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<sup>66</sup> 'Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited', p. 45.

<sup>67</sup> 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', p. 135.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>69</sup> 'Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited', p. 51.

*Sōtō* Zen sects has been negligible. Traditional Zen monasticism still flourishes in Japan and it 'continues to emphasize physical discipline and ritual competence, while little if any attention is paid to inner experience'.<sup>70</sup>

### 2.3. THE NATURE OF THE INCOMING TRADITION

Among the most important conditions influencing the transplantation process is the shape and nature of the incoming tradition; that is, the traditionally Buddhist forms and structures that have developed over the centuries in Buddhist countries quite independently of western cultural contact and influence. Baumann acknowledges the role of indigenous features, observing how transplantation processes illustrate 'the close interrelation of dispositions of the host culture and particular preconditions of the imported religious tradition'.<sup>71</sup> The precondition he singles out as most important to a tradition's successful transplantation is its degree of flexibility with regard to its willingness to adapt within the new socio-cultural context. Flexible traditions are successful in new cultural contexts because they intentionally seek strategies of adaptation and creative innovation, whereas inflexible traditions which prioritise the conservation of traditional forms are less successful. The success of the NKT, as an 'inflexible' organisation that has emerged from the conservative strand of *Gelug* Buddhism, challenges this assertion as does Bell's comment that,

It would [...] be wrong to conclude that the conservative nature of the *Theravāda* was an obstacle to its cross-cultural transmission; for [...] it was the absence of the symbols of *Theravāda* identity and their discourse

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<sup>70</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', p. 249.

<sup>71</sup> Martin Baumann, 'The transplantation of Buddhism to Germany: Processive modes and strategies of adaptation', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 6.1 (1994), 35-61 (p. 58).

concerning 'pastness' that thwarted the project in its earliest phase.<sup>72</sup>

Baumann's distinction between flexible and inflexible traditions provides a potentially useful model for examining the development of Buddhism in Europe, a point reinforced by Waterhouse who notes that some schools of Buddhism 'lend themselves more readily to transmission across cultures than others'.<sup>73</sup> His illustrations, however, raise practical and theoretical problems for his approach. He characterises the traditions propagated by Europeans as 'flexible' because they generally 'aim to create a European or Western Buddhism'<sup>74</sup> whilst those of ethnic migrant groups are 'inflexible' or 'stiff'. This is far too simplistic to be of any practical analytical value since European Buddhist forms themselves range widely across the flexible/inflexible spectrum. Furthermore, the distinctions he makes between the 'dispositions of the host culture' and the 'preconditions of the imported religious tradition', collapse because the flexible nature of the 'imported' tradition here refers to nothing other than the 'disposition' of Europeans to develop skilful methods of mediating the path.

Bell provides a more satisfying example of how the 'particular preconditions of the imported religious tradition' can facilitate its transplantation into an alternative cultural context. Besides the importance of modern movements in indigenous contexts which create the conditions for Buddhism's successful development in Britain, she argues that the traditional character of Thai forest monasticism has made it a particularly suitable form of *Theravāda* Buddhism to import. This combines the

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<sup>72</sup> Sandra Bell, 'British Buddhism and the Negotiation of Tradition' (unpublished paper, 1997).

<sup>73</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 228.

<sup>74</sup> 'The transplantation of Buddhism to Germany', p. 58.

strict adherence to the *Vinaya*, a very conservative form of legal authority, on the one hand, with the charismatic authority that arises out of the disciplined life and which enables a degree of flexibility and adaptability, on the other. This synthesis equips the British *Theravāda* Sangha with 'the potential for resilience and continuity without compromising its ability to adjust to new conditions' indicating that forest monks may be 'the ideal transmitters of *Theravāda* Buddhism across cultures, particularly when they are Western forest monks making a return journey'.<sup>75</sup>

Bell makes a similar point with reference to the transmission of Tibetan *Vajrayāna* Buddhism into western cultural contexts which is, she maintains, facilitated by the 'shamanic' nature of the charismatic authority possessed by Tibetan Tantric teachers.<sup>76</sup> She bases her ideas upon Samuel's distinction between the 'shamanic' and 'clerical' complexes within Tibetan Buddhism and in particular, his contention that *lamas* in Tibet 'function as shamans, and they do so through the techniques and practices of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism'.<sup>77</sup> Bell argues that the success of the Tibetan *lama* Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987) as 'an expert cultural broker and innovator' in America derived from his status and expertise within the shamanic complex of Tibetan Buddhism:

The shaman is [...] particularly well placed and equipped to negotiate the boundaries between different mundane worlds, such as those that are perceived to exist between traditional Tibetan society and modern American societies.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> 'Buddhism in Britain', p. 292.

<sup>76</sup> Sandra Bell, "Crazy Wisdom," Charisma and the Transmission of Buddhism in the United States, *Nova Religio*, (1998), 55-75.

<sup>77</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> "Crazy Wisdom," p. 61.



Waterhouse examines how the transplantation and adaptation of all Buddhist traditions is inevitably shaped by indigenous processes, emphasising the importance of examining British Buddhist groups within the context of their 'root' traditions. She argues that British Buddhism will always be diverse because the diverging authority sources called upon by different schools to authenticate their practices in indigenous settings are transferred along with the schools to Britain and 'inevitably influence the changes which can be made and the ways in which they are legitimised'.<sup>79</sup> She also illustrates how indigenous forces of a different nature can affect the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism specifically through her examination of the impact, upon *Karma Kagyu* (*Karma bKa`brgyud*) Buddhists in Britain, of the dispute regarding the identity of the *Karmapa* which has de-stabilised the *Karma Kagyu* tradition at its highest levels.<sup>80</sup> Disagreement and factionalism within the exiled *Karma Kagyu* Tibetan community, she observes, has generated discord between different *Karma Kagyu* centres in Britain. An understanding of the transplantation of *Karma Kagyu* Buddhism in Britain therefore requires an appreciation of indigenous religio-political disputes between high level Tibetan representatives within this lineage. My discussion of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) and the NKT will illustrate that an appreciation of divisions within indigenous Tibetan Buddhist contexts is equally vital to our understanding of the transplantation of *Gelug* Buddhism in Britain.<sup>81</sup> Conflict and division, of course, are aspects of incoming Buddhist traditions that could potentially hinder their successful transplantation in the

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<sup>79</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 201-211.

<sup>81</sup> These ideas were initially developed in my 'The New Kadampa Tradition and the Continuity of Tibetan Buddhism in Transition', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 12 (1997), 277-293.

West. The fact that these indigenous features have not retarded the development of Tibetan Buddhism in Britain so far is perhaps a reflection of the western capacity to ignore the 'shadow' side of Tibetan spirituality.

Samuel also examines how indigenous forces shape the development of Tibetan forms of Buddhism in western cultural contexts.<sup>82</sup> International networks of Buddhist centres developed by Tibetan refugee *lamas* in the West, he argues, represent the extension and endurance of a traditional pattern within Tibetan Buddhism rather than being a modern, 'western' development. In the pre-modern period, individual *lamas* working within a de-centralised and entrepreneurial context, would establish networks extending over long distances and travel between them in ways analogous to today's 'globe-trotting' *lamas*. Whilst acknowledging the considerable differences between traditional and modern networks, Samuel concludes that there is much 'continuity between patterns of Buddhist social organization in pre-modern Tibetan societies and those found among modern Tibetan-derived Buddhist groups'. Tibetan Buddhism's success in its new global context thus appears to have been facilitated by the suitability of Tibetan modes of social organisation within the conditions of modernity and globalisation.

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<sup>82</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, 'Tibetan Buddhism as a World Religion: Global Networking and its Consequences' (unpublished paper, 1995).

### 3. POLICIES AND PATTERNS OF ADAPTATION

Analyses of the relationship between Buddhism and British culture discussed earlier describe the nature of British Buddhism mainly in terms of unconscious processes and inevitable transformations resulting from the importation of a religious tradition into a new, and ever-changing, cultural context. However, it is also recognised that Buddhist groups are sensitive to the manner of their insertion into the British cultural environment, conscious of the fact that the successful transmission of their tradition requires 'some form of cultural mediation, or significant perspectives on culture'.<sup>83</sup> One of the most important conditions affecting the successful transplantation of a Buddhist tradition is its attempt to make itself comprehensible and relevant within the new socio-cultural context through the adaptation of traditional forms and the creation of new forms. Buddhist groups are aware of this and develop deliberate, consciously worked out policies and methods for the purposeful adaptation of Buddhism in Britain.

The extent to which groups are aware of the influence of British cultural and religious trends as they formulate their policies of adaptation, appears to vary. Baumann discusses, for example, how 'unavoidable ambiguities' - inevitable misunderstandings which occur when foreign ideas are interpreted using concepts from the host culture - can be consciously adopted and supported by Buddhist groups as an adaptation strategy to facilitate their acceptance and growth.<sup>84</sup> Mellor also found that the British *Theravāda* Sangha is self-conscious and discriminating in its

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<sup>83</sup> Mellor, 'The Cultural Translation of Buddhism', p. 21.

<sup>84</sup> 'The transplantation of Buddhism to Germany', p. 42.

relationship with British culture and religion. By contrast, he maintains the FWBO is 'firmly in line' with wider religio-cultural trends, in spite of its rhetoric that claims otherwise.<sup>85</sup> The consciously worked out policies Buddhist groups develop towards the adaptation of Buddhism for a British cultural context, and the manner in which these are implemented, has also become a major area of concern within the academic discussion of British Buddhism.

### 3.1. POLICIES AND PATTERNS

The historical diffusion of Buddhism across cultures and the transformations resulting from its interaction (conscious or unconscious) with alternative socio-religious structures has occasioned considerable discussion within the study of the dynamics of religion.<sup>86</sup> It is often the case that both scholars *and* practitioners of British Buddhism appeal to these historical precedents when explaining and legitimising adaptations that are made in Britain. Green for example, points to Buddhism's 'inherent flexibility and [...] ability to adapt readily to new sociocultural conditions'<sup>87</sup> and Wilson justifies the synthesis of Buddhism and science with the view that the *Buddhadharma* is always 'adapted by a judicious assimilation of indigenous traditions'.<sup>88</sup> For Buddhist groups themselves however, the logic of history

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<sup>85</sup> Mellor's article 'Protestant Buddhism?', which characterised the FWBO as a form of Buddhism that reflects strongly 'Protestant' tendencies, was criticised in the subsequent issue of *Religion* by the FWBO's Liaison Officer (Dharmachari Kulananda, 'Protestant Buddhism', *Religion*, 22 (1992), 101-103) and later by Sangharakshita, founder of the FWBO, in his book *The FWBO and 'Protestant Buddhism'* (Glasgow: Windhorse, 1992).

<sup>86</sup> Numerous studies on the cross-cultural diffusion of Buddhism could be mentioned here, but by way of illustration I will mention only two: the study of the establishment of Indian Buddhism in Tibet by David L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors* (London: Serindia Publications, 1987) and the study of the diffusion of Chinese Buddhism, via Korea, to Japan by J. H. Kamstra, *Encounter or Syncretism: The Initial Growth of Japanese Buddhism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967).

<sup>87</sup> Dierdre Green, 'Buddhism in Britain: Skilful Means or Selling Out?', in *Religion, State and Society in Modern Britain*, ed. by P. Badham (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 277-291 (p. 278).

<sup>88</sup> Martin Wilson, *Rebirth and the Western Buddhist* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987), p. 77.

and the claim that Buddhism is 'inherently' adaptable is not usually a sufficient basis for developing a policy of adaptation. The need for suitable forms of expression on the one hand, and the demands of the tradition on the other, have to be held in a creative tension. Buddhist groups are concerned to show that any adaptations of traditional forms are consistent with, and are legitimated or authorised by their tradition, and that innovations remain authentically 'Buddhist'. Therefore studies of the policies of Buddhist groups towards adaptation, have necessarily involved an analysis of the attitudes Buddhist groups adopt towards the concepts of 'tradition' and 'authority'.

Mellor considers British Buddhism as 'a creative development centred around the concepts of modernity and tradition'.<sup>89</sup> Drawing upon Weber's typology of authority and contemporary social theory, he explores the concept of tradition as a form of legitimation for religious activity, comparing this with the anti-traditional approaches of charismatic authority and modernism. Within the context of British Buddhism, the British *Theravāda* Sangha developed an approach based on traditional authority, taking the forest monastic tradition of Thailand as their 'pristine' or 'normative model for self-definition' (p. 355). The FWBO by contrast, developed an anti-traditional, 'essentialist' approach based on Sangharakshita's charismatic authority which encourages rupture with eastern traditions rather than continuity with them. These divergent attitudes towards the significance of traditional authority have engendered fundamentally different understandings of what Buddhism is and how it should be presented in the West. The British *Theravāda* Sangha emphasise continuity with the Thai tradition as a source of authority and constraining force on

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<sup>89</sup> 'The Cultural Translation of Buddhism', p. 16.

alterations to traditional forms, and so adopt a cautious approach towards adaptation. Innovations such as changes in monastic attire, ordination for women and the postulancy programme, have been developed strictly within traditional *Theravāda* norms and in consultation with the representatives of the lineage in Thailand. The FWBO by contrast, does not identify Buddhism with any one of its traditional manifestations but seeks instead to separate the 'essential principles' of Buddhism from its eastern cultural forms and present it in a form that is self-consciously western. This Buddhist 'essence' is articulated by Sangharakshita whose claim to charismatic authority enables him to see his own understanding of Buddhism as authentic 'regardless of tradition, seen as peripheral' and 'adapt Buddhism to Western circumstances in a radical manner' (p. 179). The separation of religious form from content and the internalisation of religious significance underpins the FWBO's dissolution of traditional lay/monastic distinctions and its de-emphasis of ritual action. The FWBO's radical emphasis on individualism, its rejection of religious form as an 'empty category', and its evolutionary perspective of history are all seen by Mellor, as indicative of the influence of Protestant Christian and modernist perspectives.

Bell also considers adaptation within the British *Theravāda* Sangha and the FWBO in light of their approaches to traditional and charismatic authority. Her analysis is more subtle than Mellor's, however, because she recognises that there is a 'synthesis' of traditional and personal charismatic authority within the British *Theravāda* Sangha that both allows for innovation (e.g. the nuns' order) whilst ensuring the 'cautious manner' of its implementation. Waterhouse argues that because Mellor restricts his analysis of Buddhism to the level of public discourse, he is unable

to recognise the significance of the *Theravāda* monks' charismatic authority in the lives of British lay Buddhists.<sup>90</sup> Another reason why Mellor overlooks this is that his analytical centre of gravity lies firmly within British cultural patterns and their influences, whereas Bell adopts a cross-cultural perspective and so considers the nature of the incoming tradition (in this case the Thai forest monastic tradition) as a central factor in the transplantation and adaptation process.

Waterhouse explores the concepts of authority and adaptation through her case study of Buddhist groups in Bath:

An understanding of the authority structures underlying contrasting forms of Buddhist practice is [...] fundamental to an understanding of the ways in which Buddhism is adapting [...].<sup>91</sup>

Adaptations made by Buddhist groups she argues, are tempered and legitimated by the authority sources of their 'root' traditions. Different Buddhist schools authenticate their practices with recourse to different authority structures and this ensures that whilst the adaptation process among British Buddhist groups may be similar, leading to 'changes which are broadly Protestant in nature' (p. 27), it is not identical. Waterhouse found that whilst British Buddhists situate themselves within particular schools and adhere to their traditional authority structures, they hold this in tension with the authority of their own personal experience which is particularly important for authenticating their religious practice. This emphasis has a traditionally Buddhist basis but should also be seen within the context of modernity wherein any authority 'is authoritative only in so far as the individual chooses that it should be so at any

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<sup>90</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>91</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 1.

given time` (p. 225).

In her study, Waterhouse identifies four types of authority sources that are recognised by British Buddhists observing that, whilst all acknowledge sacred texts and personal experience as authoritative, there is considerable disagreement in their attitudes towards the value of both tradition and faith in exemplary teachers. The perception that Buddhism is a rational-scientific system encouraging `personal investigation of the truth` rather than `blind faith`, has since its earliest reception in Britain been a factor behind its appeal and growth. Waterhouse observes how,

As an increasing number of forms of Buddhism become popular, the tension between faith in a teacher and personal experience becomes of more immediate concern.<sup>92</sup>

The emergence of Tibetan and Zen forms of Buddhism in particular, have raised the contentious issue of the role of faith within spiritual practice because within these traditions the reliance of the disciple upon the wisdom and authority of the teacher is considered vitally important. The authoritative spiritual guide is regarded as the living representative and embodiment of ultimate truth which, it is believed, has been transmitted to him via an unbroken lineage that can be traced directly back to the Buddha:

[...] the image of the unbroken transmission of wisdom is perhaps more central to Tibetan Buddhism than to any other psycho-spiritual or religious group, with the notable exception of Zen.<sup>93</sup>

The dangers of uncritically transposing the traditional authority structures of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>93</sup> Bishop, p. 100.



Tibetan and Zen forms of Buddhism into western cultural contexts is an issue of considerable theoretical and practical interest. The central issue of concern is that the importance attached to 'faith' and 'trust' in the spiritual master carries with it the potential for abuse, a concern that has been born out by a number of sexual and financial scandals within Buddhist organisations involving the abuse of authority by both Asian and western teachers.<sup>94</sup> In response to these issues, the concept of spiritual authority has itself become an area of adaptation within Tibetan and Zen contexts. The authority of the teacher, and the importance of developing faith, are rarely questioned as vital constituents of the religious path, but there have been attempts to adapt both the institutional contexts of the master-disciple relationship and the attitudes of disciples entering such relationships.<sup>95</sup> There is, for example, much discussion about the importance of carefully and deliberately examining teachers before making a commitment to them<sup>96</sup> and how, even then, one should retain a 'healthy skepticism'.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.2. THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY

All Buddhist groups in Britain seek to make their teachings and practices comprehensible and relevant to British people and to this extent are involved in a project of adaptation. As Batchelor notes, adaptation is 'not so much an option as a matter of degree' and even the most conservative of Buddhist teachers at the

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<sup>94</sup> Two excellent books which examine the issues raised by transposing the practice of *guru*-devotion from a Tibetan into a western context are Stephen T. Butterfield, *The Double Mirror: A Skeptical Journey into Buddhist Tantra* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1994) and June Campbell's *Traveller in Space*.

<sup>95</sup> It is now common for Buddhist organisations in America to create institutional safeguards against power abuse and publicly state that such abuses will not be tolerated.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Shenpen Hookham, 'In Search of the Guru', in *Sharpham Miscellany: Essays in Spirituality and Ecology*, ed. by John Snelling (Totnes: The Sharpham Trust, 1992), pp. 99-112.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Collcutt, 'Epilogue: Problems of Authority in Western Zen', in *Zen: Tradition and Transition*, ed. by Kenneth Kraft (London: Rider and Co. Ltd, 1988), pp. 199-207 (p. 204).

traditional pole of the spectrum must make modifications 'simply in order to be understood in the modern West'.<sup>98</sup> At the same time Buddhist groups are concerned to show that their adaptation of traditional forms and creation of new forms are authentic expressions of the *Buddhadharma*. Some groups, like the FWBO, eschew reliance on particular eastern traditions legitimating adaptations with direct reference to the essential principles of Buddhism. Most groups share this emphasis on the 'essentials' of Buddhism, but appeal simultaneously to the sources of authority that operate within the particular eastern traditions to which they are connected in order to legitimate any adaptations or cultural omissions. For all groups engaged in the project of adaptation however, the question of authenticity is always a central concern.

The authenticity or inauthenticity of contemporary adaptations has also been a concern for certain scholars of Buddhism, a fact that is worth exploring further because of the methodological issues it raises. Green considers the adaptation of Buddhism in Britain in terms of Pye's study of the concept of 'skilful means'.<sup>99</sup> Based upon the central philosophical distinction between conventional and ultimate truths, this *Mahāyāna* Buddhist concept understands all forms of Buddhist teaching and practice as 'provisional devices' formulated in terms of the karmic conditions - intellectual, spiritual, socio-cultural etc - of their recipients. This concept is often referred to by contemporary Buddhist groups to sanction adaptations because it provides philosophical legitimation for the development of new forms in changing socio-cultural conditions. Pye argues that the concept lies behind Buddhism's strength as a 'cultural force' since it works creatively within alternative thought-structures

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<sup>98</sup> *The Awakening of the West*, p. 337.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: Duckworth, 1978).

towards the Buddhist purpose of enlightenment. According to Pye, Buddhism utilises other systems without losing sight of its own central meaning:

the normative discernment of skilful means entails an interpretative activity *within the tradition* [...] <sup>100</sup>

It is this point that Green takes up as she attempts to assess adaptations within British Buddhism. Her spectrum model ranges from tradition-oriented groups that make no attempt to adapt, to groups whose various techniques of adaptation are regarded by Green as *authentic* expressions of skilful means, or interpretative activities *within the tradition*, to groups whose adaptations cannot be seen as genuine cases of skilful means because 'they have stepped outside of the tradition altogether, so that there is little truly Buddhist meaning left in them' (p. 283). Green includes the SGI amongst the contemporary groups that are 'selling out' to western culture in this way, a claim that is by her own admission contentious and which has since been challenged by Waterhouse.<sup>101</sup> Green is aware of the philosophical and epistemological problems of attempting to evaluate the authenticity of new or adapted forms of Buddhism. Such assessments raise the question of, 'What is the essence of Buddhism and what are merely cultural accretions?' (p. 283) and she is suspicious of essentialist positions arguing that 'it is notoriously difficult to isolate an essence when the particulars themselves are so varied' (p. 279). In the final analysis however, Green herself accepts an essentialist perspective, arguing that a form of Buddhism that lacked the concepts of rebirth and *nirvana* 'is no longer Buddhism', and unfavourably evaluating

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<sup>100</sup> Pye as quoted in Green, 'Buddhism in Britain: Skilful Means or Selling Out?', p. 282 (Green's emphasis).

<sup>101</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 26.

certain contemporary manifestations in light of it.

In an article about the controversial Japanese cult Aum *Shinrikyō*, Pye outlines the methodological distinction between an operational definition of religion which is 'the starting point for a non-evaluative description [...] a working definition for the purposes of study', and a normative definition which 'establishes an evaluatory norm for the recognition of religion, and [...] is the starting point for an evaluatory appraisal'.<sup>102</sup> He maintains that, provided the specialist can make this distinction, he can cross the boundaries of his discipline in extreme cases and engage in critical, evaluatory discussion without compromising his academic integrity. Whilst he argues that from the viewpoint of the historical and comparative study of religion, 'Aum *Shinrikyō* is certainly a religion' (p. 262), he goes on to reject its claim to be a Buddhist religion. He finds the goal and teachings of Aum *Shinrikyō* to be un-Buddhist from the viewpoint of skilful means because - as with Green's view of certain British Buddhist groups - there is no evidence of 'the important regulatory feature of leading back towards central Buddhist conceptions' (p. 267). He also finds the movement un-Buddhist from the perspective of the history of Buddhist ideas arguing that,

without wishing to offer a normative definition about what authentic Buddhism must be like, the historian of religion can nevertheless provide some discerning differentiation.<sup>103</sup>

Unfortunately Pye does not develop this point beyond his comments about Aum

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Pye, 'Aum *Shinrikyō*. Can Religious Studies Cope?', *Religion*, 26 (1996), 261-270 (p. 262).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

*Shinrikyō*'s eclecticism and 'opportunist scooping' of Buddhist ideas.<sup>104</sup>

According to the distinctions outlined by Pye, from the point of view of the academic study of religion, Green's assessments of British Buddhism and Pye's own evaluation of Aum *Shinrikyō* seem to be methodologically unsound. Firstly, their appeal to the concept of skilful means to make a scholarly distinction between authentic and inauthentic expressions of Buddhism is problematic. Since skilful means is a religious concept from *within* the Buddhist tradition, its suitability as a paradigm for academic analysis must be regarded as highly questionable. Green and Pye's use of the concept in this way confuses the crucial distinction between the operational and normative perspective, a point well illustrated by Sharf:

Historians of Buddhism must be particularly circumspect in wielding the hermeneutic of *upāya* [i.e. skillful means] [...] Scholars must be wary lest such patently 'theological' strategies come to substitute for critical historiographic and ethnographic reconstruction.<sup>105</sup>

Secondly, whilst rejecting both the feasibility and methodological advisability of establishing a normative definition of 'what authentic Buddhism must be like', both Green and Pye come very close to doing this. Other scholars have in similar ways maintained that there are criteria for assessing the validity of new interpretations of Buddhism in the West.<sup>106</sup> Unlike Green, Pye is careful not to offer a specific

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<sup>104</sup> Pye's 'scientific' assessment of Aum *Shinrikyō* is not shared by Robert J. Lifton who has been conducting research into Aum *Shinrikyō* since 1995. In a recent interview about the movement he defended Aum's 'Buddhist' credentials which '[...] were largely taken from the Tibetan tradition' and maintained that 'it's not Buddhist compassion, certainly - but you can't say it's not Buddhism' (interview published as 'From Mysticism to Murder', *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 7.2 (1997), 54-59 and 90-97 (p. 56 and p. 97)).

<sup>105</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', pp. 267-268.

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Karel Werner, 'Authenticity in the Interpretation of Buddhism', in *The Cardinal Meaning: Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics: Buddhism and Christianity*, ed. by M. Pye and R. Morgan (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1973), pp. 161-193.

normative definition of Buddhism himself against which Aum *Shinrikyō* can be measured, but his claim that the academic specialist has a responsibility 'to point out the implausibility of particular claims when interpretation is strained beyond widely perceived coherence',<sup>107</sup> suggests he has specific criteria in mind. It is certainly the case that the provision of 'discerning differentiation' by a religious historian, whenever new Buddhist currents emerge that depart from ancient traditions, need not compromise his academic integrity. However, this is not the case here because Pye's assessment of Aum *Shinrikyō*'s 'Buddhist' identity as 'implausible' and 'incoherent' indicates that a normative definition of Buddhism *is* informing *his* evaluation. Interestingly, this essentialist perspective underpinning Pye's treatment of Japanese Buddhism has been criticised elsewhere by Kamstra who maintains, as I have done here, that 'a historian of religion as such is not supposed to be engaged in essences of religion.'<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Pye, 'Aum *Shinrikyō*', p. 268. This is indicated also by Pye's provocative claim that 'Just because someone or some group claims to be Buddhist, the claim is not necessarily plausible.' (Ibid).

<sup>108</sup> J. H. Kamstra, 'Skilful Means as a "Germinative Principle"' [Review article of Pye's *Skilful Means*], *Numen*, 27 (1980), 270-277 (p. 277).

#### 4. CONTEXTUALISING THE NKT AND OBC

It is beyond the confines of this thesis to present a detailed historical survey of the transplantation of Tibetan and Zen forms of Buddhism in Britain. The purpose of this section is simply to sketch the contours of the broader British Buddhist environment, and the specifically Tibetan and Zen contexts in which the groups of this study have developed.

##### 4.1. THE BRITISH BUDDHIST CONTEXT

Charts which illustrate the institutional growth of British Buddhism and the distribution of groups by school between 1981 and 1994 can be found in Waterhouse.<sup>109</sup> She identifies two trends from the data: firstly, the marked increase in the number of groups practising Tibetan Buddhism since 1991, a development that can be attributed mainly to the energetic expansion of the NKT following its creation in that year; and secondly, the reduction in the number of groups identifying themselves as non-sectarian or multi-traditional. Estimates of the numbers of British Buddhists belonging to the larger organisations, and the difficulties of calculating such figures, are also discussed by Waterhouse. There are between two and three thousand members of the FWBO, over six thousand formal members of the SGI-UK (upto four thousand of whom are active) and between two and three thousand active members of the NKT.<sup>110</sup> These are the three main Buddhist movements operating in

<sup>109</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, pp. 16-19.

<sup>110</sup> According to the NKT's written responses to the allegations made against the organisation by *The Guardian* journalist Madeline Bunting in July 1996, 'Those who regularly attend - i.e. on a weekly basis - do not exceed more than 3,000 people worldwide' (Letter dated 3 July). Whilst it has expanded into North America and Europe, the NKT remains predominantly British in its institutional spread and membership.

Britain at the moment both in terms of institutional representation and active membership, and their dominance has become the subject not only of academic analysis but of discussion by concerned members of the wider British Buddhist community.<sup>111</sup> In spite of the recent increase of groups following Zen Buddhist traditions, no single Zen organisation even closely approximates the average size of these groups. The largest, the OBC, had twenty four groups in 1997 (making up 29.3% of all Zen groups and 2.5% of all groups) and estimated its numerical size at approximately one thousand, which is not even a third of the size of the larger organisations. Even an outside estimate of the total number of *all* British Zen Buddhists in 1997, a figure I would place between two and three thousand, is still significantly lower than the estimated size of the larger Buddhist groups.

The groups of the present study represent the largest Tibetan and Zen Buddhist organisations, institutionally and numerically, that are currently active on the British Buddhist landscape. This fact alone, in light of the general absence of studies on Tibetan and especially Zen Buddhism in Britain, justifies an in-depth analysis of their historical and ideological development. It is profitable to study the NKT and OBC together because they illustrate how two very different traditions of Buddhism, Tibetan *Gelug* and Japanese *Sōtō* Zen, have transplanted and adapted themselves to the West. The growth and development of these groups displays points of similarity and contrast and, furthermore, exemplifies many of the processes that have characterised the development of other forms of Buddhism in Britain. An analysis of

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<sup>111</sup> Ken Jones, the British representative of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, recently wrote an article about the three movements called 'Many Bodies, One Mind: Movements in British Buddhism', *New Chan Forum*, 13 (1996). This is critical of their alleged ideological uniformity, their ambitious evangelicalism and their exclusivism.



the NKT and OBC will therefore contribute to our understanding of the nature of the transplantation and adaptation process as a whole. Before we turn our attention to outlining their growth and development it will be useful to take a closer look at their more immediate Tibetan and Zen Buddhist contexts.

#### 4.2. TIBETAN BUDDHISM IN BRITAIN

The distribution of Tibetan Buddhist groups by school in 1981, 1991 and 1997 is indicated in Charts 1 to 3.<sup>112</sup> The first Tibetan Buddhist school to establish itself in Britain was the *Karma Kagyu* branch of the *Kagyu* tradition. In 1967, the charismatic and unconventional *lama* Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, along with Akong Rinpoche, founded Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Dumfriesshire. This was one of the first Tibetan Buddhist centres in the West and it continues, under the direction of Akong Rinpoche and Lama Yeshe Losal, to promote a wide range of religious, cultural and humanitarian activities. Whilst it has developed a small network of local meditation groups, Samye Ling functions as a retreat centre for a much broader clientele, appealing to individuals of differing Buddhist and non-Buddhist orientations. The *Kagyu* school remained the dominant Tibetan tradition in Britain until the 1990s, when it began to be over-shadowed by the *Gelug* through the energetic activities of Geshe Kelsang's NKT. The *Kagyu* nevertheless continues to be well represented today mainly by the Shambhala Study Groups, which follow the style of practice developed by Trungpa following his 1970 move to America and creation of Vajradhatu (now known as Shambhala International); by groups affiliated to the Dechen Community, which is headed by the English *lama* Ngakpa Jampa Thaye

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<sup>112</sup> These figures are based mainly on Buddhist Society listings.

(David Stott) under the guidance of his Tibetan teacher Karma Thinley Rinpoche; and by groups connected to Lama Chime Rinpoche, who established Marpa House in Saffron Walden in 1973.

The first British centre for the study and practice of *Gelug* (*dGe lugs*) Buddhism was the Manjushri Institute in Ulverston, established in 1976 as part of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), an international network of centres founded by Lamas Thubten Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche. Although their organisation became the major *Gelug* network in the West, its presence in Britain remained small and in 1997 it was represented in only three localities. Its relatively marginal institutional representation can be explained largely in terms of a conflict that developed during the 1980s between students at the Institute and its FPMT-appointed Tibetan teacher Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, on the one hand, and the central FPMT administration, on the other. This resulted in the eventual appropriation, by Geshe Kelsang and his students, of the Manjushri Institute property and the creation of a separate network which in 1991 became known as the New Kadampa Tradition. In 1981, only one of the four *Gelug* groups in Britain was affiliated primarily with Geshe Kelsang, a representation that had risen to nine groups out of thirteen in 1991. The NKT has expanded rapidly during the 1990s and it now dominates the Tibetan Buddhist landscape in Britain (making up 94.4% of all *Gelug* groups and 74.6% of all Tibetan groups in 1997). The only other significant *Gelug* representation in Britain are a number of groups connected to Geshe Damcho Yonten, the earliest of which, the Lam Rim Buddhist Centre in Gwent, was established in 1978.

The next best represented Tibetan tradition in 1997 was the *Nyingma* (*rNyingma*) school. In terms of its institutional representation, the *Nyingma* in Britain has seen a fair amount of fluctuation, from having six groups in 1981 to having only three in 1991 before enjoying a renewed period of growth and, in 1997, being represented in fourteen different localities. This school has been represented mainly by groups connected either to the Tibetan *lama* and author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* Sogyal Rinpoche, or by groups associated with the British *lama* Rigdzin Shikpo (formerly known as Michael Hookham). Sogyal Rinpoche began teaching in England in 1974 and established the Rigpa Fellowship in London in 1981 to unite his growing network of European and American centres within a single organisation. Rigdzin Shikpo has been the Director of the Longchen Foundation since it was created by Chogyam Trungpa in 1975 as a vehicle for disseminating *Nyingma Dzogchen* (*rDzogs chen*) teachings. *Dzogchen* teachings are also the focus of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's *Dzogchen Community* network which has a small representation in Britain.

The *Sakya* (*Sa skya*) school has, of all the Tibetan Buddhist traditions in Britain, fared least well, and in 1997 was still represented in only five localities. All of these groups belong to the *Sakya* wing of the Dechen Community and are under the guidance of Ngakpa Jampa Thaye. The combined *Kagyu-Sakya* focus of the Dechen Community is a reminder that, whilst it may be convenient to distinguish between the different Tibetan schools for comparative purposes, in reality the boundaries between the schools are often more fluid than the charts below suggest. In practice, the founding *lamas* of many of the groups in Britain, and consequently the groups

themselves, combine teachings and practices taken from different Tibetan lineage-traditions. This reflects the traditional situation of Tibetan Buddhism which, as Samuel makes clear, was much more diffuse, de-centralised and differentiated than has commonly been understood:

while it is customary to speak of the four main `schools`, `orders`, `traditions` or even `sects` of Tibetan Buddhism [...] these terms may imply a hierarchical structure and a degree of coherence and exclusivity which did not in fact exist.<sup>113</sup>

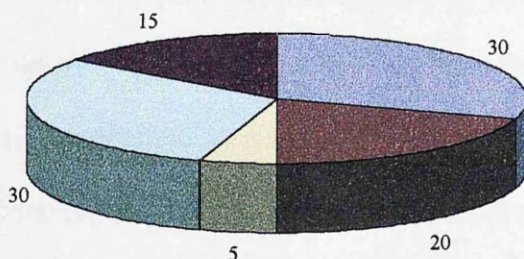
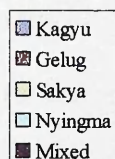
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<sup>113</sup> `Tibetan Buddhism as a World Religion`.

**Chart 1****Tibetan Buddhist Groups by School - 1981**

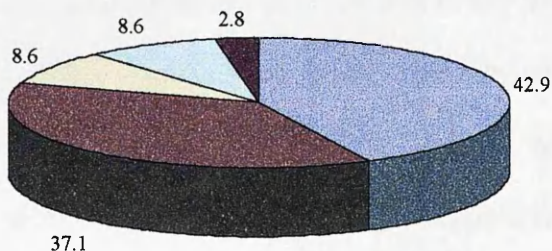
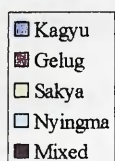
Total No. of Groups - 20

Percentages

**Chart 2****Tibetan Buddhist Groups by School - 1991**

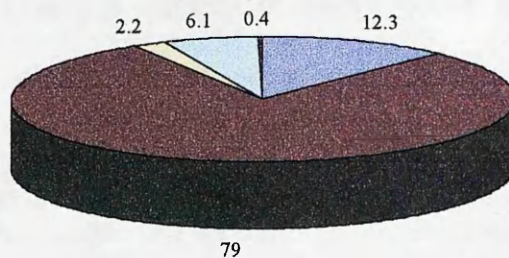
Total No. of Groups - 35

Percentages

**Chart 3****Tibetan Buddhist Groups by School - 1997**

Total No. of Groups - 228

Percentages



### 4.3. ZEN BUDDHISM IN BRITAIN

Whilst Zen Buddhism currently represents only a small section of British Buddhism, it is nevertheless a varied and growing sector. Charts 4 to 6 indicate the distribution of Zen Buddhist groups by school in 1981, 1991 and 1997.<sup>114</sup> They indicate that, whilst the Japanese *Sōtō* school has been the dominant tradition in terms of institutional representation, in recent years the Zen landscape has become more diverse, with substantial inroads being made by Chinese *Ch'an* and Vietnamese *Thien* schools, and with a significant increase in groups defining their lineage-tradition as mixed (most commonly a *Sōtō-Rinzai* combination). Although the Japanese *Rinzai* school has been a minority presence during this period, this was actually the first Zen school to become established in Britain, primarily through the activities of the lay scholar D.T. Suzuki and the founder and President of the Buddhist Society Christmas Humphreys (1901-1983). Suzuki, who is described by Sharf as 'the single most important figure in the spread of Zen to the West',<sup>115</sup> was the first to provide a substantial body of accessible, English-language literature on Zen, an area which was still largely untouched by western Buddhist scholarship at the turn of the century. Humphreys became Suzuki's agent in Britain, arranging for the British publication of his books and organising his visits to England during the 1930s and 1950s. He also became a proponent of *Rinzai* Zen himself, re-naming his meditation class as the 'Zen Class' and composing a number of books which recycled Suzuki's modernist interpretation of Zen but which nevertheless reflected his own unique approach,

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<sup>114</sup> The figures for 1981 and 1991 are based upon Buddhist Society listings. The data for 1997 is based upon an independent research project into the shape and nature of institutional Zen Buddhism in Britain conducted by myself during 1997.

<sup>115</sup> 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', p. 116.

described by Furlong as 'Christmas Zen'.<sup>116</sup> For a long time the Zen Class represented the only organised Zen activity in Britain, although Humphreys' students were becoming increasingly exposed to alternative perspectives and many actively sought different ways of expressing their Zen practice, for example by pursuing a more traditional regime in Japan.

The institutional flowering of Zen beyond the confines of the Buddhist Society began during the 1960s when a handful of alternative groups, such as Douglas Harding's Sholland Trust and the *Rinzai* Hannya Temple, were established in the south of England. Developments that occurred during the 1970s were more significant, inasmuch as they represented the beginnings of the earliest institutional Zen networks. In 1972, Dr. Irmgard Schloegl and Peggy Kennett, two former members of Humphreys' Zen Class, returned to Britain having endured prolonged periods of training in Japan and established groups of their own. Whilst Schloegl's career as a *Rinzai* teacher began under the auspices of the Buddhist Society and with the full support of Humphreys, Kennett's career as a teacher of *Sōtō* began in conflict with the British Buddhist establishment which apparently never accepted her claims to be a Zen master. Her successful introduction of *Sōtō* in Britain was made possible by the prior development, both in Japan and in California, of a firm American following, and by the emergence in Britain of alternative sites of Zen activity, one of which, the Mousehole Buddhist Group in Penzance, provided an alternative avenue for her to organise visits and mobilise support. In 1972, she established Throssel Hole Priory in

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<sup>116</sup> Monica Furlong, *Genuine Fake: A Biography of Alan Watts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1987), p. 51. Humphreys' works on Zen (such as *Zen* (Aylesbury, Bucks: The English Universities Press Ltd., 1962)) are replete with quotes taken from H.P. Blavatsky's works, thus reflecting his life-long commitment to Theosophy.

Northumberland as the British base of her Zen Mission Society (later re-named as the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives). Not only was this the earliest institutional establishment of *Sōtō* Zen in Britain, it was also the first site of organised Zen activity in the north of England as well as the first British monastic community in the Zen tradition.

During the next ten years, Schloegl and Kennett consolidated their presence as Zen teachers and gradually expanded their institutional representation. When Humphreys died in 1983, all Zen activities at the Buddhist Society came under Schloegl's direction. Whilst 'traditionalising' Buddhist Society activities, she retained certain features of Humphreys' approach, such as his emphasis on intellectual study as a preliminary to meditation practice, and current members of her network continue to feel a strong sense of continuity with 'Christmas Zen'. Schloegl ordained as a *Rinzai* nun in 1984 and is now known as Ven. Myoko-ni. Although it has the deepest roots in British society, her network is the smallest of those currently active, with a representation in only six localities (making up 66.7% of all *Rinzai* groups but only 7.3% of all Zen groups). During the first decade of the OBC's British development, consolidation and stability were emphasised more than institutional expansion, the movement's main period of growth coming during the mid-1980s. In 1991 it was represented in twenty three localities (making up 72% of all *Sōtō* groups and 56.1% of all Zen groups) and by 1997, this had increased to twenty four groups (64.9% of all *Sōtō* groups and 29.3 % of all Zen groups).

Two further Zen networks of Japanese origin also emerged during the 1980s. The first of these, the Zen Practice Centre Trust, grew out of a series of European



tours made by the American teacher Genpo Merzel Sensei in the early 1980s. In 1984, Genpo Merzel, the second American Dharma-successor of Taizen Maezumi Roshi (1930-1996), left the Zen Centre of Los Angeles 'to devote himself completely to the international community of students he named "Kanzeon Sangha"'.<sup>117</sup> Maezumi Roshi embodied three different lineages including both the *Sōtō* and *Rinzai* branches of Zen, and hence the Kanzeon Sangha defines itself as a *Sōtō-Rinzai* combination. The growth of the British arm of the network has been slow and sporadic and in 1997, was comprised of only seven local groups (8.5% of all Zen groups). The second network to emerge during this period was the International Zen Association (UK), which grew out of the 'missionary' activities of Jean Baby and Nancy Amphoux, two of the senior French disciples of the Japanese *Sōtō* teacher Taisen Deshimaru (1914-1982). The IZA-UK is affiliated to the Association Zen Internationale (AZI),<sup>118</sup> an international network that was created by Deshimaru in 1970 and which has its headquarters in the Loire Valley at the temple La Gendronniere. The growth of the IZA-UK has been steady and in 1997, it was represented in eleven localities (making up 29.7% of all *Sōtō* groups and 13.4% of all Zen groups).

The 1990s saw a number of interesting developments with the emergence of two new networks of non-Japanese origin. The first of these, the Western Ch'an Fellowship (WCF), has its roots in the innovative Western Zen Retreats organised in Wales by Dr. John Crook from around 1984. With an academic background in psychology, Crook believed that a western form of Zen should combine traditional

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<sup>117</sup> Taken from 'An Introduction to Genpo Roshi' on the Kanzeon Sangha International WWW Page (<http://www.neis.net/kanzeon/Genpo.html>). For a detailed 'insider's' account of Maezumi Roshi's Zen Centre Los Angeles, see David L. Preston, *The Social Organization of Zen Practice: Constructing Transcultural Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>118</sup> Originally it was known as the 'Association Zen d'Europe'.

teachings and practices with western psychological techniques and theories. In 1987, he became a disciple of the Chinese *Lin Chi* (Jap. *Rinzai*) Master Sheng Yen (b. 1931), and from 1989 began to offer a programme of more orthodox *Ch'an* retreats alongside his Western retreats. From this time there was a proliferation of local *Ch'an* meditation groups around Britain and the gradual development of an organisational structure to unite them. When the WCF became a constitutional reality in 1997, it was represented in nine localities (making up 11% of all Zen groups). The second network to develop in recent years is comprised of groups dedicated to practising the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926), a *Lam Te* (Jap. *Rinzai*) master in the *Lieu Quan* school of the Vietnamese *Thien* (Jap. *Zen*) tradition. During the 1960s, Thich Nhat Hanh was active in the Buddhist peace effort in Vietnam and founded the Tiep Hien Order ('Order of Interbeing'), a self-consciously eclectic movement 'based on the principles of Engaged Buddhism which emphasises social responsibility and peacework'.<sup>119</sup> He later settled in Bordeaux, France and since the early 1980s, has taught widely in Europe and America. The Order of Interbeing subsequently developed into an international organisation with groups and practice centres in over twenty countries. Although there have been disciples of Thich Nhat Hanh in Britain since the early 1980s, there was no significant institutional growth until the early 1990s. In 1993, this emerging network of individuals and groups became known as 'The Community of Interbeing' (COI), and by 1997, there were fourteen groups (17% of all Zen groups) following Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on mindfulness and social engagement. The non-sectarian Amida Trust, which was founded in 1987 by David Brazier and known until 1996 as the Quannon Trust, also has a loose affiliation with Thich Nhat Hanh

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<sup>119</sup> 'Thich Nhat Hanh', in *The Community of Interbeing Manual of Practice*, Section E (June 1996).

and the COI. This organisation, which specialises in the interface between Buddhism and western psychotherapy and 'in developing humanitarian projects on Buddhist principles to help overcome suffering in the world',<sup>120</sup> was represented in four localities in 1997.

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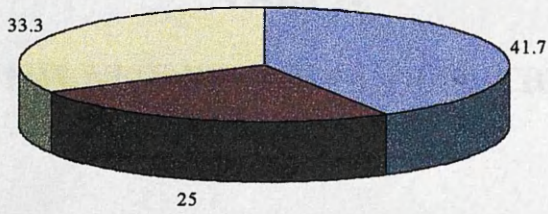
<sup>120</sup> Taken from 'What is Amida Trust?' on the Amida Trust WWW Page (<http://www.cyberus.ca/vellino/amida/home.html>).

**Chart 4**

**Zen Buddhist Groups by School - 1981**

Total No. of Groups - 12

Percentages

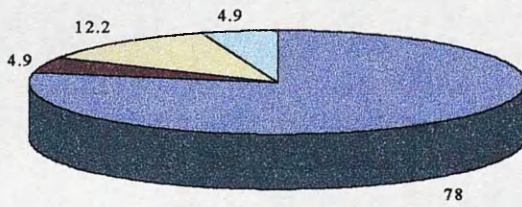


**Chart 5**

**Zen Buddhist Groups by School - 1991**

Total No. of Groups - 41

Percentages

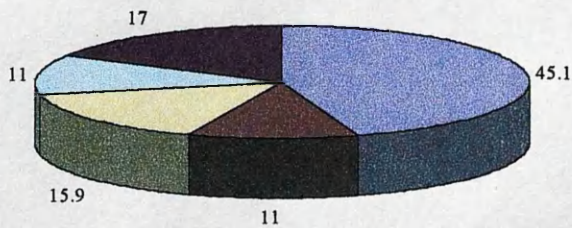


**Chart 6**

**Zen Buddhist Groups by School - 1997**

Total No. of Groups - 82

Percentages



## **PART II**

### **THE NEW KADAMPA TRADITION**

**CHAPTER TWO**

**THE NEW KADAMPA TRADITION:**

**BACKGROUND AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT**

This chapter examines the transplantation of the *Gelug* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism in Britain by detailing the emergence and development of the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT). Throughout this analysis I will relate the historical and ideological development of the NKT to previous discussions concerning the nature of the transplantation process.

**1. PRELIMINARY COMMENTS**

**1.1. THE NKT AND THE FPMT**

The NKT's historical and institutional roots in Britain go back much further than 1991, the year when its Tibetan founder, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (b.1931), announced its official creation. The emergence of this group, in particular, must be considered within the context of another contemporary western *Gelug* movement called the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). Geshe Kelsang was originally brought to Britain to teach at an FPMT centre called the Manjushri Institute but he split away from this organisation to develop a parallel network of his own which he later unified and gave 'a distinct identity within the wider Buddhist world'<sup>1</sup> as the NKT. The FPMT will be referred to throughout this

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<sup>1</sup> James Belither, 'Modern Day Kadampas: The History and Development of the New Kadampa Tradition', *Full Moon Journal* [previously known as *Full Moon*], 1 (1997), p. 61. *Full Moon* is the journal of the NKT.

thesis in two main ways: firstly, as the immediate historical backdrop necessary for understanding the development of the NKT; and secondly, the two movements will be discussed in a comparative light. Though similar in many ways, these international Buddhist networks are also very different and a comparative analysis will help illuminate the nature of Tibetan, and particularly *Gelug*, Buddhism both in Britain and in the West generally.

## 1.2. AVOIDING THE WESTERN THEORETICAL BIAS

Some recent accounts of contemporary Buddhism have criticised a perceived 'theoretical bias' pervading the scholarly treatment of Buddhism in western societies. This term refers to the tendency of observers to focus narrowly on the western-convert appropriation and experience of Buddhist traditions to the exclusion of certain historical and cross-cultural factors that must be considered if the presence and development of Buddhism in the West is to be fully understood. Bell, as we have seen, is critical of accounts which detail the reception of Buddhism by nineteenth century Britain because they over-emphasise its 're-construction' by British Victorians and ignore how its arrival actually involved the collaboration of Britons and Asian Buddhists. Finney also claims that the prevailing sociological assessments of Zen in America are necessarily limited because they overlook 'the prolonged process of culture contact and diffusion'<sup>2</sup> which largely accounts for its presence there.

Although Tibetan Buddhism in Britain remains a significantly neglected area, what has been written by observers so far indicates that this field of inquiry has often

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<sup>2</sup> Finney, p. 391.

displayed a western theoretical bias.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, this bias is also rife in the perceptions of many western Buddhist practitioners whose understanding of the traditions they espouse is often simplistic, idealistic and uninformed about how broader historical and 'oriental' contexts continue to exert a normative influence on their development in the Occident.<sup>4</sup> This study will thus provide a much-needed theoretically balanced analysis of a high-profile contemporary Tibetan Buddhist movement. The emergence, development and self-identity of the NKT will be situated throughout within its appropriate historical, cultural and ideological contexts.

### 1.3. REDRESSING THE IMBALANCE

The NKT's public participation in a controversial campaign mounted against the Dalai Lama during 1996, resulted in harsh criticism from many British Buddhists, media agencies and even academics. Since the Dalai Lama commands widespread respect and admiration in the West, both as a religious leader and champion of an oppressed nation, it is unsurprising that public allegations of human rights abuses by *him* have met with hostility. It is arguable that the censure elicited, however, has also been informed by the idealistic and 'one sidedly bright'<sup>5</sup> images of Tibetan Buddhism that characterise the western imagination. The great difficulty many British Buddhists

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<sup>3</sup> Accounts of Tibetan Buddhism in Britain have tended to concentrate on the motivation and participation of westerners (e.g. Tucker's 'Opening the Mind' and Peter Connolly, 'Buddhism in Britain', *Religion Today*, 2.2 (1985), 3-6). Also those which examine the Tibetan traditions themselves have focused only on their histories in the West, ignoring the continuing importance of their broader historical and cross-cultural contexts (e.g. Ian P. Oliver, *Buddhism in Britain* (London: Rider, 1979) and Jeffrey Somers, 'Tibetan Buddhism in Britain', *Religion Today*, 6.3 (1991), 1-3. Recent research, however, (e.g. Waterhouse's *Buddhism in Bath* and Samuel's 'Tibetan Buddhism as a World Religion') has endeavoured to adopt a more balanced, cross-cultural perspective suggesting that this situation may be changing.

<sup>4</sup> Many western Buddhists who are critical of the NKT have referred to it as a 'new cult movement' led by a 'fanatical leader' or 'rogue geshe' who has departed from acceptable standards of *Gelug* behaviour. Such views betray a 'western bias' inasmuch as they idealise *Gelug* Buddhism and erroneously imply that no reference to the broader *Gelug* context is required in order to understand the NKT.

<sup>5</sup> Bishop, p. 73.



have had in coming to terms with the campaign and the media's portrayal of the NKT at the time as a dangerous and 'cultish' organisation, as opposed to a movement that is representative of certain currents *within* Tibetan Buddhism, resonate with the findings of Bishop who claims to have consistently encountered 'a bewilderment and sometimes a hostility whenever Tibetan Buddhism is mentioned in tones which are less than sacrosanct' (p. 46). Bishop considered his study to be a corrective to the critically imbalanced one-sidedness of western images that deny 'Tibetan Buddhism's dark and messy aspects' (ibid). The following discussion of the NKT proceeds in a similar vein, bringing a much-needed historical and cross-cultural perspective to bear upon the idealised fantasies that have been manifested both in the attitudes of NKT members and in the criticisms levelled at the movement from external sources.

#### **1.4. HISTORY CONSTRUCTION IN NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

The dynamics of history construction in new religious movements have been examined by Coney.<sup>6</sup> A history, she argues, is not 'a narrative whole, a complete and unexpedited version of events' but, rather, a socially negotiated and partial representation of the past that is subject always to revision and modification. History construction involves the highly selective ordering and reordering of social memory and the equally important process of collective forgetfulness or 'social amnesia'. Emerging new religions in fact, 'contain a diverse set of individual, public and "small group" histories' which appeal to each other for legitimation and reinforcement or compete for dominance. Specific elements of the history of a movement are

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<sup>6</sup> Judith Coney, 'Making History: Memory and Forgetfulness in New Religious Movements', (unpublished paper, 1997).

remembered, concealed or forgotten for a variety of reasons, both accidental and deliberate. Memories can be retrieved and evoked through structures intended to facilitate recall such as myth, artefact and ritual. They may vanish due to the turnover of a group's membership or because 'there is simply too much information to remember'. They can also be consciously erased through the re-alignment and control of the group's leadership as it strives to repress 'an uncomfortable Other' or iron out discontinuities 'in favour of a strong, continuous storyline':

Most often, what is forgotten is forgotten because it no longer fits in with the current version of events, especially one constructed by an elite group. Sometimes, indeed, unwelcome memories are systematically destroyed by leaderships. In such situations, whether deliberately manufactured or the result of 'drift', human beings no longer have the ability to retrieve the memories, since they cease to make collective sense.

Leaderships exclude memories by expelling individual malcontents or by simply not referring to unwelcome historical facts until they 'cease to be part of the group repertoire of memories'. Changing the name of the leader or group also allows memories associated with previous designations to fade whilst promoting the creation of new memories. The project of deliberately excluding histories, however, is not always completely successful. Repressed memories 'can return to haunt the margins of a discourse and continue, despite their apparent absence, to influence its structure'. Alternatively, competing versions of events may only become submerged within the dominant account 'as if they are remembered but not articulated', and may later 'rise again to the surface of the collective memory'. Contemporary religious movements, Coney concludes, thus present an opportunity 'to witness at close quarters the ways in which human beings selectively and collectively create histories':

[...] emerging religions - whose direction is not yet clearly articulated, whose leadership often behaves in inconsistent ways, who often undergo radical change and discontinuity, and who take time to establish coherent identities - provide perfect conditions for charting the dynamics involved in the formation of history.

She also considers that these processes are best exemplified within groups that have undergone periods of conflict, discontinuity and schism.

Broader socio-historical studies of established religious traditions support Coney's belief in the value of studying history construction in new religious movements. Faure's cultural critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism, for example, deconstructs 'the ideological presuppositions at work in the notion of tradition' and argues that the classical orthodoxy constitutes 'an amnesia, an active forgetting of origins, a repression or scapegoating of doctrinal features and historical figures'. Like Coney, Faure argues that would-be historians of religion should avoid replicating the orthodox view in their own writings 'and try, on the contrary, to reveal and deepen the inner divide'.<sup>7</sup>

The project of analysing history construction in contemporary religious movements, however, raises a number of tricky methodological issues for the researcher. Scholars contribute to the making of histories 'through the ways in which we too select what we deem to be relevant, what fits in with our intellectual presuppositions, and the points we are trying to make'.<sup>8</sup> Academics often predetermine their results by refusing to accord legitimacy to, and thereby excluding, certain versions of events or classes of respondents. Scholarly accounts may also be

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Coney, 'Making History'.

'structured in line with the assumptions of prevailing discourses'.<sup>9</sup> Pertinent in this respect is Faure's critique of the way in which western scholars have projected their own Protestant anti-ritualistic views onto the study of the development of medieval Chan/Zen Buddhism.<sup>10</sup> The researcher of memory and history construction in contemporary religious movements also faces a problematical ethical issue, one that requires great sensitivity and tact:

By what right do we rummage around, attempting to trace these social processes by uncovering memories which have been forgotten in a NRM, usually for good reason?<sup>11</sup>

### **1.5. HISTORY CONSTRUCTION IN THE NKT**

The NKT is a religious movement in which the dynamics of history construction, as outlined by Coney, are well exemplified. Multiple 'histories' exist on an individual and public group level both inside and outside the movement. As the pre-history of the group is rooted in conflict and schism, the social organisation of memory and forgetfulness, especially by the group's leadership, is particularly striking. Accounts of current and former members either reinforce or contradict and compete with each other. They diverge widely over points of historical detail and often interpret the same events and processes in very different ways, reflecting a wide range of personal experience, depth of involvement, bias, opinion and loyalty. At the level of public discourse, the history and identity of the NKT has also, during the course of its development, undergone considerable realignment. Such revision and reconfiguration of the past, of course, is commonplace within religious movements

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 307.

<sup>11</sup> Coney, 'Making History'.

which are more concerned with issues of identity and ideology than with notions of historical veracity. This study is thus not only concerned with outlining the historical emergence of the NKT onto the British Buddhist landscape, but also with examining the range of `histories` that exist both inside and outside the NKT, and the manner in which the movement`s leadership has constructed a dominant group history.

It is important that the observer looking at the NKT today accounts for the substantial pre-history of the movement`s emergence in Britain, examining carefully the forces that influenced Geshe Kelsang`s thought and the direction of his centres in the years preceding the NKT`s announcement in 1991. Otherwise there is a danger that the pre-history of the group might be (mis)-placed within a narrative of continuity; that is, understood as if the features characterising the organisation today were *always* part of its outlook. Such anachronistic readings of the group`s history are not uncommon among both NKT disciples and non-NKT Buddhists alike, who often place the group`s history into a simplified teleological narrative, albeit for quite different personal and ideological reasons. The creation of an overarching narrative of continuity has also been a key concern of the NKT`s leadership. Other disciples nevertheless retain a greater awareness of the complexities of the group`s historical emergence in spite of the leadership`s attempts, at the public level of discourse, to eradicate certain `unwelcome memories` of discontinuity and conflict.

### **1.5.i. Individual Teleological Narratives**

Individuals who are most likely to place the NKT`s emergence within an overarching narrative of continuity, fall within two main groupings: on the one hand, certain long-standing students within the FPMT whose dealings with Geshe Kelsang

and the Manjushri Institute terminated in the early 1980s; and, on the other, current NKT disciples whose involvement does not pre-date the formation of the organisation in 1991. Both groupings tend to lack an adequate awareness of the historical development of Geshe Kelsang's emergent network during the 1980s, and their very different backgrounds and personal experiences ensure that their assessments are poles apart.

The conflict between Geshe Kelsang and the FPMT in the early 1980s provoked feelings of anger and bitterness among many FPMT students, feelings that remain unabated today. The intensity of their opinions must be understood in light of the personal, material and financial resources some of these individuals invested into the early development of Manjushri Institute, and their loyalties to Lama Yeshe's vision of the centre within the FPMT. They often explain the emergence of the NKT in terms of the ambition for power and prestige that, they believe, motivated Geshe Kelsang's earlier attempts to 'seize control' of the Institute and eventually 'steal' it from its mother organisation. The origin of this drive for power is variously explained: as a result, for example, of the excessive devotion he received, upon arriving in England, from naive and indiscriminating western practitioners; or as a product of his 'extreme envy' of Lama Yeshe, who was formerly a junior student to him in *Sera Je* monastery but who had now become the key personality behind a growing world-wide network of centres. The emergence of the NKT is thus described as the growth of a 'personality cult', orchestrated by a 'totally unscrupulous rogue geshe' through the 'cynical manipulation' of students and the 'transference of [their] loyalty and devotion' via the practice of *guru* devotion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Taken from personal communications with FPMT members between May and September 1995.

Current disciples of Geshe Kelsang whose association with him is relatively recent also tend to place the NKT's emergence within a narrative of continuity that by-passes its actual historical development. This narrative, of course, is of a totally different kind to the approach outlined above. These disciples, who usually have little or no awareness of the early history of the organisation, assume that since Geshe Kelsang is an 'enlightened being', the creation of the NKT had always been his intention. They tend to explain the years preceding 1991 as a period in which he carefully and deliberately planned, prepared and laid the foundations for the later organisation. One practitioner, a disciple since 1992, describes the NKT's emergence in the following way:

To start with no-one really knew who Geshe Kelsang was. But slowly, his disciples began to realise how special he was. And it's only more recently, like in the last two or three years, people [...] realised that he is an enlightened being [...] So it's almost as if he's been working covertly, or under-cover, for a period of time, not giving his true aspect [...] And very patiently, 1977 to 1990, preparing the ground for the NKT and preparing the books very quietly. And then when it was all set it all just came together.<sup>13</sup>

### **1.5.ii. The Dominant Narrative**

This approach to the NKT's historical development reflects the dominant narrative that has been publicly promoted by the leadership of the organisation. The 'official' version of the NKT's history has been reluctant to admit that Geshe Kelsang's thought has undergone considerable development and change during his time in the West. It has also, in Coney's terms, repressed the 'uncomfortable Other' of the Institute's conflict with the FPMT, ironing out the discontinuities in favour of 'a strong, continuous storyline'. Promotional literature produced by the organisation has

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<sup>13</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

tended to concentrate mainly on the organisation's post-1991 development, keeping discussion of its early history brief and in line with its current identity, whilst making no references at all to the FPMT. The most comprehensive and recent overview of the NKT's history to emerge from within the organisation does in fact mention that the Manjushri Institute 'had been established in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe'.<sup>14</sup> Even here however, no reference to the FPMT is made and the impression created is that, having been asked 'to become Resident Teacher', Geshe Kelsang's subsequent assumption of leadership and control of the centre was a natural, unproblematic and seamless progression. The re-naming of the Institute as 'Manjushri Mahayana Buddhist Centre' in 1991, also facilitated the NKT's project of consciously forgetting its FPMT roots. With statements such as the following, wherein the centre's new name is projected onto the past, the organisation has attempted to bury the memories associated with the previous designation beneath the official, revisionist account:

In 1977 Geshe Kelsang was invited to England as the Resident Teacher at the Manjushri Mahayana Buddhist Center in England, where he has remained ever since.<sup>15</sup>

These attempts to write the FPMT out of its group history is an aspect of the NKT's identity that current FPMT members, particularly those who had actively supported the early development of Manjushri Institute, find particularly objectionable. One student reflected upon this in the following way:

There is no acknowledgement of the spiritual heritage of the tradition. That's the place where there is a judgment on my part, where I have difficulty with the ethics of the situation [...] It was founded by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa.

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<sup>14</sup> Belithier, 'Modern Day Kadampas', p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Taken from 'Geshe Kelsang Gyatso' on the NKT's internet website, 1996.



They were the Spiritual Directors and they founded it under the auspices of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. That was the spiritual tradition.<sup>16</sup>

### **1.5.iii. Unwelcome Memories**

The attempts of the NKT's leadership to eradicate unwelcome memories of discontinuity, conflict and schism by promoting a simplified, continuous and sanitized group history have been only partially successful. Whilst the accounts of recently recruited disciples reflect this dominant public-level narrative, it is not always replicated by longer-standing NKT students, many of whom were disciples of Geshe Kelsang at the time of the Institute's secession from the FPMT. Having been involved with the organisation throughout every stage of its early history, these students have a greater understanding of the complexities of its emergence and, in spite of their awareness of the 'official' storyline, tend not to collapse these into a simplified teleological narrative. Although their accounts are naturally biased against the FPMT, a continuing appreciation and respect for the memory and legacy of Lama Yeshe seems to have instilled a reluctance to gloss over their FPMT roots. These students also appreciate that Geshe Kelsang's vision of Buddhism in the West continued to develop significantly during the years following the split, and that the creation of the NKT had *not* always been his intention. Developments in his thought are variously explained as reactions to the earlier schism; to the eclectic attitude of westerners towards Buddhist practice, and to modern developments within the *Gelug* tradition. A senior NKT teacher thus maintains that before 1991,

[...] we would have said we were 'Gelugpas', or belonged to the Gelugpa order of Tibetan Buddhism. But Geshe Kelsang decided it was better to make

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<sup>16</sup> FPMT Interview, July 1995.

a distinction between our own way of doing things and the way of doing things of the Gelugpa. Geshe Kelsang decided a few years ago that it was necessary to make it look different because of the apparent degeneration of Tibetan Dharma.<sup>17</sup>

The memories of other longer-standing NKT disciples, by contrast, do appear to have been successfully buried or submerged within the dominant narrative. One student, a disciple of Geshe Kelsang's since the mid-1980s, thus explains the split with the FPMT using terms that reflect the history and identity promoted by the organisation since 1991:

It seems that in India Trijang Rinpoche wanted Geshe-la to come to England and establish a pure Dharma tradition for western people because he understood that the Dharma had a very limited time left in India. He asked Geshe-la to come here and establish a new tradition. I can't believe that Lama Yeshe didn't know that and so Geshe-la took over at the priory [...] And ever since 1977 Geshe-la has just been planning for and laying the foundations for the NKT as it is today. And you can see, if you look at it, that all the years previous to that were like the foundation, the spade-work [...] Then, when the time was right, the whole thing just exploded.<sup>18</sup>

#### **1.5.iv. Methodological Issues**

Coney's observations concerning the methodological issues raised for would-be researchers of history construction in contemporary religious movements have been born out by the present study. Different students within the NKT, depending upon the depth and level of their involvement, have very different perceptions of the organisation's historical development. Much sensitivity has been required during personal communications with NKT disciples, to gauge the nature of their perceptions; to ensure that my own awareness of processes the organisation has endeavoured to

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<sup>17</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>18</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

forget is not transferred to individuals whose understanding reflects only the dominant account; and to avoid probing too deeply into memories that for others, are either painful and sensitive or which, though not forgotten, have been buried or submerged.

The schism with the FPMT is an obvious aspect of the NKT's development that has raised these issues. The NKT's allegiance to the protector-deity practice of *Dorje Shugden* has also raised similar concerns. The leadership of the NKT has, throughout its emergence and development, endeavoured to conceal the controversial dimensions of this practice from its membership. Consequently, the eruption of the dispute into the public domain during 1996 was the first time most of Geshe Kelsang's disciples became aware of its contentious nature. The research for the present study commenced in 1993, and I quickly acquired a more informed understanding of *Dorje Shugden's* controversial history within the Tibetan Buddhist world than most of the NKT students I was to interview. As I sought to discover their levels of understanding much care was required to avoid disclosing information that the group's leadership had chosen not to reveal. From the perspective of this study, the public eruption of the dispute in 1996 thus had two beneficial consequences: firstly, it solved the dilemma posed by Coney, that researchers may have no business in making public information that elite groups have chosen to repress; and secondly, it allowed me to probe deeper into perceptions of the practice within the NKT and witness the range of organisational and individual responses to the dispute.

## 2. CONTEXTUALISING THE NKT

In Chapter One, I discussed the various factors affecting the transplantation process of an imported Buddhist tradition. I observed how, with respect to Tibetan forms of Buddhism, the nature of the indigenous incoming tradition must be taken into account when analysing the course of its development in the West. I now want to connect my examination of the transplantation of *Gelug* Buddhism and the emergence of the NKT in Britain to this earlier discussion.

The NKT cannot be fully understood by an examination that is restricted to its origins and development in Britain alone; nor can it be appreciated by situating it within a simplified or idealised Tibetan Buddhist context. Its historical and ideological development rather, must be situated within the broader context of *Gelug* Buddhist history during both the pre-modern period and in exile.<sup>19</sup> The emergence of the NKT onto the British Buddhist landscape represents the manifestation, in a western context, of classical and contemporary divisions within the *Gelug* tradition with regard to: i) policies about inter-traditional relations, and ii) the related issue of *Dorje Shugden* reliance. Some discussion of these indigenous forces must precede our analysis of the transplantation process of *Gelug* Buddhism in Britain because many aspects of the NKT's emergence can only be understood within such a cross-cultural perspective. There are of course, many other factors influencing the transplantation process but these can be considered throughout the analysis.

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<sup>19</sup> I am using Samuel's definition of the 'pre-modern' period here, which refers to the period prior to 1950 'when the status of most Tibetan societies was changed drastically as a result of Chinese military intervention and occupation' (*Civilized Shamans*, p. 3).

## 2.1. DIVISIONS WITHIN THE GELUG TRADITION

### 2.1.i. The Gelug Tradition

The *Gelug* (meaning 'Virtuous') tradition is one of the four main traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. It can be traced back to the popular teacher *Tsong Khapa* (*Tsong kha pa*) (1357-1419) and his disciples who were originally known in the early fifteenth century, as the *Gandenpa* (*dGa` ldan pa*) (that is 'those from the monastery of *Ganden*').<sup>20</sup> It is believed that *Tsong Khapa* revived and continued the work of *Atiśa*, the Indian *ācārya* who founded the *Kadam* (*bKa` gdams*) order in the eleventh century.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the *Gelug* order was also known as the 'New *Kadam*' order. The *Gelug* became politically dominant in central Tibet in the seventeenth century through the institution of the Dalai Lamas. Though not the formal head of the *Gelug* order - this position being reserved for the abbot of *Ganden* monastery, known as the *Ganden Tripa* (*dGa` ldan Khri pa*) - the Dalai Lama, as the order's highest incarnate *lama* and as the political head of Tibet, became its most influential and authoritative figure.

### 2.1.ii. Conflict and Division

It is important to understand that, historically, the *Gelug* tradition has never been a completely unified order. Internal conflict and division in fact, has been an enduring feature of *Gelug* history and it has taken philosophical, political, regional, economic and institutional forms which have often interacted.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, during

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of how *Tsong Khapa*'s loose group of disciples became organised into a distinct school, and how rigid sectarian boundaries developed between this and other Tibetan schools from the fifteenth century onwards, see Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 33-41.

<sup>21</sup> The *Kadam* order, it should be noted, was important not only to the emergence of the *Gelug* tradition, but 'has had profound influence - mainly monastic - on all subsequent Tibetan orders' (Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 485).

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of how ideological disagreements between *Gelug* adherents can be affected by regional and political factors see Matthew Kapstein, 'The Purificatory Gem and Its Cleansing: A Late Tibetan Polemical Discussion of Apocryphal Texts', *History of Religions: An International Journal for*

periods when effective leadership has been exercised by the institution of the Dalai Lama, the authority of this figure has never been total and undisputed within the *Gelug*. As a political leader, the Dalai Lama is responsible for the welfare of the Tibetan state and must be sensitive not only to the interests of the *Gelug* school, but also to the broader constituency - which includes other religious schools and aristocratic families - upon which his position rests. As a consequence, his relationship with the *Gelug* monastic establishment, represented mainly by the Three Seats (i.e. *Sera*, *Drepung* and *Ganden*, the three main monasteries of the *Gelug* school), has often been a source of tension and conflict:

'Religion' (and the religious segment) [...] was not the homogeneous entity it is typically implied to be, even within the Gelugpa Sect, and the great Gelugpa monasteries were often at odds with the Dalai Lama's government.<sup>23</sup>

### **2.1.iii. Inclusive and Exclusive Orientations**

My main concern here is to focus upon one particular historical and contemporary division within the *Gelug* tradition: that which has arisen from conflicting interpretations of the position of the *Gelug* school in relation to other Tibetan Buddhist schools. The appropriate policy that should be adopted in relation to other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, has been a bone of contention among *Gelug* Buddhists since early on in the history of the tradition. Dreyfus discusses how sectarian differentiation in Tibet developed between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, against the backdrop of a politically tumultuous social context wherein

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*Comparative Historical Studies*, 28 (1989), 217-244, and also Dreyfus' *Recognizing Reality*.

<sup>23</sup> Melvyn C. Goldstein, 'Religious Conflict in the Traditional Tibetan State', in *Reflections on Tibetan Culture: Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie*, ed. by L. Epstein and R.F. Sherbourne (Lewiston and Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), pp. 231-247 (p. 231).

emergent schools 'would be pitted against other religious groups competing for political influence and economical support'.<sup>24</sup> He traces the emergence of the *Gelug*, as a distinctly separate school, to *Tsong Khapa*'s successors rather than to *Tsong Khapa* himself who developed his nascent following amidst a more eclectic, ecumenical and catholic atmosphere in which doctrinal differences 'were not yet understood to reflect deep sectarian divisions, but rather were taken as differences between teachers and lineages both inside and outside of a given school' (p. 35). Dreyfus' discussion thus sheds light upon the beginnings of an important division within the *Gelug* school, between those who retained *Tsong Khapa*'s ecumenical and open approach and others, like *Tsong Khapa*'s disciple *Kedrubje (mKhas grub rje)* (1385-1438), who became 'quite active in enforcing a stricter orthodoxy, chastising [...] disciples for not upholding Dzong-ka-ba's [*Tsong Khapa*'s] pure teachings' (p. 36).

From this time, as is the case with most religious traditions, there have been those within the *Gelug* who have interpreted their tradition 'inclusively', believing that their *Gelug* affiliation should in no way exclude the influence of other schools which constitute additional resources along the path to enlightenment. Others have adopted a more 'exclusive' approach, considering that their *Gelug* identity should preclude the pursuit of other paths and that the 'purity' of the *Gelug* tradition must be defended and preserved. To many observers and practitioners, 'exclusivism' is dismissed as an unhealthy and restrictive attitude and is often seen as synonymous with 'sectarianism', which in this context means the bigoted and narrow-minded

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<sup>24</sup> *Recognizing Reality*, p. 36.

pursuit and defence of a particular sect's interests, doctrines and identity.<sup>25</sup> For the purposes of this study, it is important to recognise that whilst 'exclusivism' and 'sectarianism' share a similar emphasis on boundary maintenance and purity, they are not synonymous. Conservative and closed orientations may often result in bigoted, intolerant and even violent behaviour between Tibetan Buddhist schools - this fact is amply attested to by accounts of Tibet's religio-political history<sup>26</sup> - but exclusively-orientated individuals and factions do not always, or necessarily, engage in such hostilities. It should also be remembered that when traditions come into conflict, religious and philosophical differences are often markers of disputes that are primarily economic, material and political in nature.

#### **2.1.iv. 'Clerical' and 'Shamanic' Orientations**

The distinction Samuel makes between 'clerical' and 'shamanic' forms of Tibetan Buddhism as represented by the fifteenth century *Gelug* formulation and the nineteenth century *Rimed* (*Ris-med*) (non-sectarian) movement, may help to illuminate the contours of the exclusive/inclusive polarisation running throughout *Gelug* history. The categories 'clerical' and 'shamanic' describe two fundamentally different modalities or orientations within Tibetan religious teachings, rituals and practices: the former being characterised by scholarship, philosophical analysis, celibate monasticism, structure, hierarchy and centralisation; and the latter by the

<sup>25</sup> Dreyfus himself, for example, seems to reject out of hand any religious persuasion that is not of the open and ecumenical atmosphere of the fourteenth century, blaming intellectual stagnation within the Tibetan traditions upon the hardening of their boundaries in relation to each other.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see discussions of Tibetan geo-political and sectarian conflict in Samuel's *Civilized Shamans* and Dreyfus' *Recognizing Reality*. Dhondup's histories of Tibet from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries are also excellent: namely, K. Dhondup, *The Water-Horse and Other Years: A History of 17th and 18th Century Tibet* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1984) and *The Water-Bird and Other Years: A History of the 13th Dalai Lama and After* (New Delhi: Rangwang Publishers, 1986).



communication with alternative modes of reality through *Vajrayāna* (Tantric) ritual, by celibate and non-celibate *lamas* operating in less structured and de-centralised contexts, both for the achievement of enlightenment and the performance of shamanic services for the laity. The original *Gelug* formulation was clerical in that *Tsong Khapa*, the 'reformer' of the monastic order, narrowed down and organised 'all that was essential within Tibetan Buddhism'<sup>27</sup> into a single, structured and linear path emphasising the gradual and philosophical understanding of the enlightened state within an academic and monastic context. Due to its clerical orientation the *Gelug* school tended to be exclusive of other systems thereby encouraging traditional distinctions and sometimes sectarian intolerance.<sup>28</sup> The *Rimed* movement, by contrast, was shamanically orientated. It did not constitute an organised monastic order, nor did it have a definite doctrinal position, but was carried by *lamas* of the *Sakya*, *Nyingma* and *Kagyü* traditions who each promoted 'the specific lineages and practices of their own *gompa* as well as the general Rimed practices' (p. 538). *Rimed lamas* 'were less universally committed to the clerical path of monastic renunciation' and were encyclopedic, seeking to bring together and transmit 'the numerous diverse traditions of Tantric yogic practice that had developed in Tibet over the preceding ten centuries' (pp. 540-541). These practices were not regarded as 'exclusive alternatives',

but as a body of partial descriptions and approaches, each of which might help to provoke the central insight of the shamanic vision. Rather than presenting a unique method for attainment, they made as many different methods as possible available, in a way that was quite unprecedented within Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Civilized Shamans*, p. 543.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel is not saying that *Tsong Khapa* himself was exclusively-orientated or sectarian, but that his systematisation of the religious path lent itself towards these perspectives.

<sup>29</sup> *Civilized Shamans*, p. 541.

In maintaining the validity of all paths this movement was thus radically inclusive, helping 'to break down the sectarian divisions that had developed between different traditions, each progressively entrenched within its own institutional monastic base' (p. 542). Modern forms of the non-*Gelug* orders have all been significantly shaped by *Rimed* and there is, according to Samuel, 'every reason to suppose that this process will continue and be strengthened in years to come' (p. 274).

Whilst the *Gelug* formulation and the *Rimed* movement can be contrasted theoretically in terms of the distinction between clerical and shamanic forms of religion, in practice the situation is more complicated. Samuel maintains that the *Gelug* tradition and *Rimed* movement are actually synthetic positions which combine and reconcile both elements of Tibetan religious life:

both contain shamanic and clerical elements, but the Rimed approach is weighted towards the shamanic side, and the Gelugpa approach towards the clerical.<sup>30</sup>

The *Rimed* movement thus included great scholars, whilst the *Gelug* tradition produced famous Tantric meditators. Just as the *Gelug* tradition has 'for all of its clerical emphasis, offered a range of possibilities involving different mixes of clerical and shamanic Buddhism' (p. 344), both exclusive and inclusive positions concerning inter-traditional relations have co-existed within the school and characterised each stage of its history. We need only examine a few notable examples of this recurring tension here, though, to highlight the appropriate context for understanding the NKT.

#### **2.1.v. The Appearance of Gelug Inclusivism and Exclusivism**

The inclusive orientation which has continually manifested in all schools has

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

within the *Gelug*, traditionally characterised the Dalai Lamas, particularly the Great Fifth (1617-1682)<sup>31</sup> and Great Thirteenth (1876-1933) and the current Fourteenth Dalai Lama (b.1935).<sup>32</sup> These are all renowned for having received religious instruction from *lamas* of other Tibetan traditions such as the *Sakya* and the *Nyingma*. The Great Fifth and Great Thirteenth were even identified as *Terton* (*gTer ston*), or *Nyingma* 'Discoverers of Hidden Treasure', and the current Dalai Lama has gone to great lengths to promote inter-faith activity considering it praiseworthy 'when someone practices all the Sakya, Gelug, Kagyu and Nyingma teachings through listening, thinking and meditation according to his own level of realization'.<sup>33</sup> The political policies of the Dalai Lamas have also been informed by this inclusive orientation. It can be discerned, for example, in the Great Fifth's leniency and tolerance towards opposing factions and traditions following the establishment of *Gelug* hegemony over Tibet in 1642,<sup>34</sup> the Great Thirteenth's modernist leaning

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<sup>31</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama's orientation was generally inclusive but, as Dreyfus observes, he 'nevertheless agreed to a number of measures aimed at curbing the influence of the groups that had opposed the Ge-luk school most openly. The Jo-nang-ba were directly suppressed' (*Recognizing Reality*, p. 37).

<sup>32</sup> The inclusive faction within the *Gelug*, of course, has never been restricted to the Dalai Lamas, as Samuel's discussion of 'shamanic' *Gelug lamas* illustrates. Not all the Dalai Lamas, furthermore, were inclusively-orientated. The seventh Dalai Lama, for example, adopted a purely *Gelug* practice in contradistinction to the eclecticism of the Great Fifth (see Georges Dreyfus, 'The Shuk-den Affair: The History and Nature of a Quarrel', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 21 (1998), 227-270 (p. 261)).

<sup>33</sup> From the unpublished transcript 'An Anthology of Talks Given by H.H. the Dalai Lama Concerning Reliance Upon the Dharma Protectors', trans. and ed. by Tsepak Rigzin and others at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, (1983), 1-46 (p. 14). In a manner that is reminiscent of the *Rimed* approach, the Dalai Lama both encourages individuals to practise the teachings of different traditions whilst seeking 'to maintain purely the terminology exclusive to each tradition' (*ibid*). Thus, the meaning of corruption 'should be understood not as the unbiased, eclectic practice of one individual, but as the mixing and inter-appropriation of transmissions exclusive to each tradition' (*ibid*).

<sup>34</sup> As noted, the generally inclusive perspective of the Fifth Dalai Lama needs some qualification due to certain exclusive policies implemented by him following the victory of the *Gelugpa*-patronising Mongol forces of Central Tibet over the *Karma-Kagyupa* rulers of *Tsang*. This illustrates how the exclusive and inclusive orientations of *lamas* are not absolute and immutable but can be influenced by political circumstance. The inclusivism of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama provides another illustrative example of this. The Dalai Lama, of course, stands within a long tradition of *Gelug* inclusivism, but his attempts to foster unity and openness between the different Tibetan traditions in exile must also be seen as a politically expedient policy.

reforms, which attempted to turn Tibet into a modern state through the assimilation of foreign ideas and institutions (such as an efficient standing army and western-style education); and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's promotion of egalitarian principles and attempts to 'maintain good relations among the various traditions of Tibetan religion in exile'.<sup>35</sup>

This inclusive approach has, however, repeatedly met opposition from others within the *Gelug* tradition whose orientation has been more exclusive. The tolerant and eclectic bent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, for example, was strongly opposed by the more conservative segment of the *Gelug* tradition. These 'fanatic and vociferous Dge-lugs-pa churchmen'<sup>36</sup> were outraged by the support he gave to *Nyingma* monasteries and their 'bigoted conviction of the truth of their own faith'<sup>37</sup> led them to suppress the treatises composed by more inclusively-oriented *Gelug lamas* who betrayed *Nyingma*, or other non-*Gelug*, influences.<sup>38</sup> Similarly the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's political reforms were thwarted by the conservative element of the monastic segment which feared that modernisation and change would erode its economic base and the religious basis of the state.<sup>39</sup> His spiritually inclusive approach was also rejected by contemporaries such as Phabongkha Rinpoche (1878-1943). As the *Gelug* agent of the Tibetan Government in *Kham (Khams)* (Eastern Tibet), and in response to the *Rimed* movement that had originated and was flowering in that region, Phabongkha

<sup>35</sup> Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 550.

<sup>36</sup> E. Gene Smith, 'Introduction' in *Kongtrul's Encyclopaedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture: Parts 1-3*, ed. by Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1970), pp. 1-87 (p. 16).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> According to Smith, the suppressive tendencies of the tradition functioned so thoroughly that a number of *Gelug* works synthesising *Gelug*, *Nyingma* and *Kagyü* teachings are as yet uninvestigated.

<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this see Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 89-138.

Rinpoche and his disciples employed repressive measures against non-*Gelug* sects. Religious artefacts associated with *Padmasambhava* - who is revered as a 'second Buddha' by *Nyingma* practitioners - were destroyed, and non-*Gelug*, and particularly *Nyingma*, monasteries were forcibly converted to the *Gelug* position.<sup>40</sup> A key element of Phabongkha Rinpoche's outlook was the cult of the protective deity *Dorje Shugden* which he wedded to the idea of *Gelug* exclusivism and employed against other traditions, as well as against those within the *Gelug* who had eclectic tendencies.<sup>41</sup>

As with his predecessors, the current Dalai Lama's open and ecumenical approach to religious practice and his policy of representing the interests of all Tibetans equally, irrespective of their particular traditional affiliation, has been opposed by disgruntled *Gelug* adherents of a more exclusive orientation. This classical inclusive/exclusive division has largely been articulated within the exiled Tibetan Buddhist community through a dispute concerning the status and nature of the protective deity *Dorje Shugden*. An outline of the main features of this controversy will facilitate our understanding of the historical emergence of the NKT in Britain.

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<sup>40</sup> Kapstein describes how Phabongkha's visions of *Dorje Shugden* 'seem to have entailed a commitment to oppose actively the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the Bon-po' (p. 231). Samuel also describes how Phabongkha, a strict purist and conservative, adopted an attitude of 'sectarian intolerance' (*Civilized Shamans*, p. 545) and 'instituted a campaign to convert non-Gelugpa *gompa* in K'am to the Gelugpa school, by force where necessary' (ibid., p. 52).

<sup>41</sup> There are actually conflicting views concerning the extent of Phabongkha's exclusivism, and it is important to acknowledge that a different picture is painted by others who maintain that he was not as actively sectarian as is widely claimed. The image presented here is gleaned from Kapstein, Samuel and Dreyfus and Stephan Beyer's *The Cult of Tara: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), as well as from personal discussions with *Gelug* Buddhists.

## 2.2. THE DORJE SHUGDEN CONTROVERSY

### 2.2.i. The Cult of Tibetan Protective Deities

*Dorje Shugden* belongs to the class of beings within the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon known as *Chos skyong* (Skt. *Dharmapāla*), 'protectors of the religious law' or 'Dharma-protectors'. Dharma-protectors are deities who have vowed to serve and protect the Buddha's teachings and its practitioners and they have been an important feature of the religious lives of all Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Whilst different traditions might give greater prominence to some protective deities over others, most deities are generally recognised by all and considered to be divided into two main branches. Firstly, there are 'the powerful, high-ranking deities known as the *'jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma*, i.e. the gods and goddesses who have passed beyond the six spheres of existence'.<sup>42</sup> These supramundane deities are regarded as manifestations of enlightened beings, or Buddhas. Secondly, there is the much lower class known as the *'jig rten pa'i srung ma*, the mundane or worldly deities,

who are still residing within the spheres inhabited by animated beings and taking an active part in the religious life of Tibet, most of them by assuming from time to time possession of mediums who act then as their mouthpieces.<sup>43</sup>

The division between the supramundane and worldly protectors is a fluid, rather than a rigid, system. By virtue of the merits they acquire by protecting Tibetan Buddhism, all the deities within the class of *'jig rten pa'i srung ma* will eventually pass into the rank of the *'jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma*. While the ascent into this class 'is said to be a progress of infinite slowness, if judged by human standards of time',

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<sup>42</sup> Rene De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

the number of the *jig rten pa`i srung ma* by comparison increases rapidly due to the circumstance that many harmful spirits of the class called *nag phyogs gi bdud* [a term referring to unconverted deities and spirits of the dead] are still being conquered and changed into protectors of the Buddhist creed by appropriate ceremonies of the Tibetan Buddhist priesthood.<sup>44</sup>

In accordance with their role as protectors and defenders of the Buddhist religion, the iconography and ritual worship of protective-deities often uses violent, martial and bloodthirsty language and imagery. Most protective-deities, of both the mundane and supramundane classes, are depicted in a wrathful or ferocious form, and the majority of attributes they carry `are arms destined to destroy the enemies of the Buddhist creed, the priests who break their religious vows and renegades`.<sup>45</sup> There are, however, significant differences in the ways in which mundane and supramundane protectors are believed to serve and protect the Dharma. Since mundane protectors, as un-enlightened beings, experience ordinary human emotions like anger and jealousy, they are thought to be partial towards the propitiating individual or group. In this context, the term `enemies of Buddhism` can refer to beings who are `perceived by the person or group as threatening`,<sup>46</sup> such as rival religious schools or impure practitioners within one`s own tradition. Supramundane protectors, by contrast, are impartial because they have the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. They can never be enlisted for the personal advantage of an individual or group and the violence they unleash is `strictly motivated by compassion and aims at benefiting the beings who are its target, much like the actions of bodhisattvas described in the *Mahāyāna* literature`.<sup>47</sup> In this context, the `enemies of Buddhism`

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Dreyfus, `The Shuk-den Affair`, p. 266.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

refers to beings whose actions 'threaten Buddhism as well as their own spiritual welfare'.<sup>48</sup>

### **2.2.ii. Dorje Shugden: Conflicting Accounts**

Within the *Gelug* tradition conflicting accounts about the protective deity *Dorje Shugden* have developed and caused considerable intra-traditional conflict for many years. Whilst there is a consensus that this protector practice originated in the seventeenth century, there is much disagreement about the nature and status of *Dorje Shugden*, the events that led to his appearance onto the religious landscape of Tibet, and the subsequent development of his cult. Two dominant accounts can be discerned.

One view holds that *Dorje Shugden* is a 'jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma (an enlightened being) and that, whilst not being bound by history, he assumed a series of human incarnations before manifesting as a Dharma-protector during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama. According to this view, the Fifth Dalai Lama initially mistook *Dorje Shugden* for the harmful and vengeful spirit of a *trulku* (reincarnate lama) of *Drepung* monastery called *Dragpa Gyaltzen*,<sup>49</sup> who had been murdered by the Tibetan government because of the threat posed by his widespread popularity and influence. After a number of failed attempts to subdue this worldly spirit by enlisting the help of a high-ranking *Nyingma* lama, the Great Fifth realised that *Dorje Shugden* was in reality an enlightened being and began henceforth to praise him as a Buddha. Proponents of this view maintain that the deity has been worshipped as a Buddha ever

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Ngatrul Dragpa Gyaltzen*, a hard-line *Gelug* adherent who was critical of the Fifth Dalai Lama's eclecticism, was the latest in a series of high-status reincarnate lamas beginning with *Panchen Sonam Dragpa*, the first reincarnation of a disciple of *Tsong Khapa's* called *Duldzin Dragpa Gyaltzen*. Devotees who regard *Dorje Shugden* as a Buddha believe that *Duldzin Dragpa Gyaltzen* himself was but the latest in a series of human incarnations of the Buddha *Māñjuśrī*, which stretches all the way back to the time of Buddha *Śākyamuni*.



since, and that he is now the chief guardian deity of the *Gelug* tradition. These proponents claim, furthermore, that the *Sakya* tradition also recognises and worships *Dorje Shugden* as an enlightened being.<sup>50</sup> The main representative of this view in recent years has been Geshe Kelsang Gyatso who, like many other popular *Gelug lamas*,<sup>51</sup> stands firmly within the lineage tradition of the highly influential Phabongkha Rinpoche and his disciple Trijang Rinpoche.

Opposing this position is a view which holds that *Dorje Shugden* is actually a *'jig rten pa'i srung ma* (a worldly protector) whose relatively short lifespan of only a few centuries and inauspicious circumstances of origin make him a highly inappropriate object of such exalted veneration and refuge. This view agrees with the former that *Dorje Shugden* entered the Tibetan religious landscape following the death of *trulku Dragpa Gyaltsen*, a rival to the Great Fifth and his government.<sup>52</sup> According to this view, however, the deity initially came into existence as a demonic and vengeance-seeking spirit, causing many calamities and disasters for his former enemies before being pacified and reconciled to the *Gelug* school as a protector of its

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<sup>50</sup> This claim is widely refuted by *Sakya lamas* themselves. Lama Jampa Thaye, an English teacher within both the *Sakya* and *Kagyü* traditions and founder of the Dechen Community, maintains that 'The Sakyas generally have been ambivalent about Shugden [...] The usual Sakya view about Shugden is that he is controlled by a particular *Mahākāla*, the *Mahākāla* known as "Four-Faced *Mahākāla*". So he is a *'jig rten pa'i srung ma*, a worldly deity, or demon, who is no harm to the Sakya tradition because he is under the influence of this particular *Mahākāla*. *Mahākāla* is a wisdom protector, a generic name for the ultimate wisdom protectors, a Buddha. All the four traditions worship *Mahākāla*, albeit in different forms' (Interview, July 1996).

<sup>51</sup> Examples of such *lamas*, who have taught in the West, include Geshe Rabten, Gonsar Rinpoche, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, Lama Thubten Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe Thubten Loden, Geshe Lobsang Tharchin, Lama Gangchen and Geshe Lhundup Sopa. It should be remembered that their association with this particular lineage-tradition does not necessarily mean they are exclusive in orientation or devotees of *Dorje Shugden*. Some *lamas*, like Geshe Kelsang and the late Geshe Rabten, *have* combined these elements whereas others, like Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche and Lama Gangchen, came into exile with a commitment to the protector practice but not to its associated exclusivism.

<sup>52</sup> Although it is not so categorical in its declarations of how *Dragpa Gyaltsen* died. According to this view, his death - which was by suffocation - may have been by suicide or assassination.

teachings and interests.<sup>53</sup> Supporters of this view reject the pretensions made by devotees of *Dorje Shugden*, with respect to his status and importance, as recent innovations probably originating during the time of Phabongkha Rinpoche and reflecting his particularly exclusive and sectarian agenda.<sup>54</sup> The present Dalai Lama is the main proponent of this position and he is widely supported in it by representatives of the *Gelug* and non-*Gelug* traditions.

### **2.2.iii. Scholarly Accounts: The Elevation of Dorje Shugden**

Scholarly English language accounts of *Dorje Shugden* reliance seem to corroborate the latter of the two positions emerging from within the Tibetan tradition, suggesting that the status and importance of this protective deity has undergone a process of gradual elevation from around the time of Phabongkha Rinpoche. De Nebesky-Wojkowitz presents *Dorje Shugden* as 'a divinity of comparatively recent origin'<sup>55</sup> and as one of the main *Gelug* protectors operating in the worldly spheres.<sup>56</sup> Dreyfus also maintains that the rare references to the deity in texts between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries indicate that *Dorje Shugden* 'was a minor though troublesome deity in the Ge-luk pantheon throughout most of the history of this

<sup>53</sup> Opinions differ within the *Gelugpa* over whether it was a high-ranking *Sakya* or *Nyingma lama* who appeased and converted *Dorje Shugden*.

<sup>54</sup> The Dalai Lama, for example, said that the difficulties experienced by Phabongkha towards the end of his life and the misfortunes befalling his line of reincarnations in India were 'a punishment from the Black and Red protectors (Nechung and Palden Lhamo)' for regarding *Dorje Shugden* as being equal to, or higher than, them ('An Anthology of Talks', p. 28).

<sup>55</sup> *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, p. 134. Many of the deities incorporated as *Dharmapālas* in the Tibetan pantheon existed in India long before Buddhism became established in Tibet; the Hindu deity *Brahma*, for example, has been incorporated as an inferior *Dharmapāla* under the name of *Tshangs pa*. Compared to such deities, *Dorje Shugden* is indeed a relative newcomer.

<sup>56</sup> Scholarly discussions of the various legends behind the emergence of the *Dorje Shugden* cult can be found in De Nebesky Wojkowitz, Chime Radha Rinpoche's 'Tibet', in *Divination and Oracles*, ed. by M. Loewe and C. Blacker (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 3-37, and Stan Royal Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 125-130. All of these accounts narrate the latter of the two positions in which the deity is defined as a worldly protector. The fact that these scholars reveal no awareness of an alternative view suggests that the position which defines *Dorje Shugden* as an enlightened being is both a marginal viewpoint and one of recent provenance.

tradition'.<sup>57</sup> Mumford shows, furthermore, that modern-day *Gelug* and *Sakya* Buddhists in Nepal continue to regard the deity, in his dual capacity as 'a protector of both the kin group and the Buddhist dharma', as a popular *jig rten pa'i srung ma*:

He is extremely popular, but held in awe and feared among Tibetans because he is highly punitive.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst *Dorje Shugden* is 'supposed to have made progress towards Buddhahood',<sup>59</sup> he thus remains intimately involved in mundane realities, his cult taking both a localised and universalised form.

Lama Chime Radha Rinpoche describes *Dorje Shugden* as 'a deity who came to prominence relatively recently'.<sup>60</sup> Within certain sections of the *Gelug* tradition throughout the twentieth century, reliance upon this deity became increasingly central and his status was gradually elevated. According to Dreyfus, this process was intimately bound up with the immense popularity and influence of Phabongkha Rinpoche within the *Gelug*, his strong personal devotion to the deity and the sectarian orientation that he came to adopt in his later years. During the early period of his life Phabongkha's orientation was inclusive, but he adopted a more exclusive and purely *Gelug* approach following a number of signs that his eclectic and open-minded outlook - which included the receiving of *Nyingma Dzog-chen* (or 'Great Perfection') teachings - was displeasing *Dorje Shugden*. His teaching tour of *Kham* in 1938 was a seminal phase, leading to a hardening of his exclusivism and adoption of a militantly sectarian stance. In reaction to the flourishing *Rimed* movement and the perceived

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<sup>57</sup> 'The Shuk-den Affair', p. 244.

<sup>58</sup> *Himalayan Dialogue*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>60</sup> 'Tibet', p. 31.

decline of *Gelug* monasteries in that region, Phabongkha and his disciples spearheaded a revival movement, promoting the supremacy of the *Gelug* as the only pure tradition. He now regarded the inclusivism of *Gelug* monks who practised according to the teachings of other schools as a threat to the integrity of the *Gelug* tradition, and he aggressively opposed the influence of other traditions, particularly the *Nyingma*, whose teachings were deemed mistaken and deceptive. A key element of Phabongkha's revival movement was the practice of relying upon *Dorje Shugden*, the main function of the deity now being presented as 'the protection of the Ge-luk tradition through violent means, even including the killing of its enemies'.<sup>61</sup> According to Dreyfus, the violent imagery used by Phabongkha in his invocations to *Dorje Shugden* are 'more than the usual ritual incitements contained in manuals for propitiation of protectors' (p. 249) and may have concerned 'the elimination of actual people by the protector' (p. 250). It is also clear that, for Phabongkha, the 'enemies' of the *Gelug* refers less to the members of rival schools than to members of the *Gelug* tradition 'who mix Dzong-ka-ba's tradition with elements coming from other traditions, particularly the Nying-ma Dzok-chen' (ibid). The mission of *Dorje Shugden* in this context, then, 'is less to fight other schools than to prevent Ge-luk practitioners from mixing traditions and even visiting retribution on those who dare to go against this prescription' (ibid).

Reliance upon *Dorje Shugden* as a guardian of *Gelug* orthodoxy and exclusivism was thus promoted widely by Phabongkha during the 1930s and 1940s, and in this way, a formerly marginal practice became a central element of the *Gelug* tradition. The rise in the popularity and importance of the deity was also accompanied

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<sup>61</sup> Dreyfus, 'The Shuk-den Affair', p. 248.

by the gradual elevation of his ontological status. The first step in this process appears to have been the development of a prophetic tradition that,

the guardian-deity *rDo rje shugs ldan*, 'Powerful Thunderbolt', will succeed *Pe har* as the head of all *'jig rten pa'i srung ma* once the latter god advances into the rank of those guardian-deities who stand already outside the worldly spheres.<sup>62</sup>

It seems that during the 1940s, supporters of Phabongkha began to proclaim the fulfilment of this tradition and maintain that the Tibetan government should turn its allegiance away from *Pe har*, the State protector, to *Dorje Shugden*.<sup>63</sup> The next stage in the status elevation process was Phabongkha's claim that *Dorje Shugden* has now replaced the traditional supramundane protectors of the *Gelug* tradition such as *Mahākāla*, *Vaiśrāvāṇa* and, most specifically, *Kālarūpa* ('the Dharma-King'), the main protector of the *Gelug* who, it is believed, was bound to an oath by *Tsong Khapa* himself. This stage was reflected in the exalted way Phabongkha now addressed *Dorje Shugden* as 'the Protector of the Tradition of the Victorious Lord *Māñjuśrī* (i.e., Dzong-ka-ba)' and as 'the Supreme Protective Deity of the Ge-den (i.e. Ge-luk) Tradition'.<sup>64</sup> He now maintained that, whilst *Dorje Shugden* 'assumes the pretense of

<sup>62</sup> De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 134.

<sup>63</sup> Since the time of the 5th Dalai Lama, *Pe har* has served as the traditional Dharma-protector of the Tibetan State. *Pe har* has been, and continues to be, consulted by the Dalai Lama and his government on affairs of State through the protector's chief medium who is known as the *Nechung* (*gNas chung*) Oracle. The importance of oracle-priests in the processes of political decision-making may provide a context for understanding the claim that *Dorje Shugden* should replace *Pe har* as the State protector. According to ex-monk and popular Buddhist author Stephen Batchelor, such a shift in Dharma-protector allegiance would have given supporters of *Dorje Shugden* a degree of political influence (Interview, June 1994). If the view that he was the chief Dharma-protector in Central Tibet had gained a wider acceptance, it would have been '*Rdo-Rje-Sugs-Ldan* rather than *Pe Har* himself who functions as the State Oracle at *Nechung*' (Chime Radha Rinpoche, p. 31). According to some commentators, *Dorje Shugden* worshippers within the *Gelug* continue to harbour aspirations for political power. The most recent declaration of the Dalai Lama regarding *Dorje Shugden* propitiation, as we will see, has thus been interpreted by some as an essentially political statement.

<sup>64</sup> Dreyfus, 'The Shuk-den Affair', p. 247.

being a worldly boastful god` he is in fact `beyond the world`,<sup>65</sup> that is a fully enlightened being. This claim seems to have enabled Phabongkha to legitimate *Dorje Shugden`s* `spectacular promotion in the pantheon of the tradition`,<sup>66</sup> without sacrificing the partiality and prejudice of the deity`s violent action which was so vital to his vision of *Gelug* revival and survival. The view that *Dorje Shugden* `is ultimately a fully enlightened buddha who merely appears as a mundane deity`,<sup>67</sup> was promoted even more forcefully by Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1981), a devoted disciple of Phabongkha`s who also became a hugely influential *Gelug lama*. Trijang Rinpoche was appointed Junior Tutor to the Dalai Lama in 1953, and his later pre-eminence as the main source of teaching for the *Gelug* tradition-in-exile `further strengthened the position of Pa-bong-ka`s lineage as embodying the central orthodoxy of the tradition`.<sup>68</sup> According to Dreyfus, whilst Trijang`s view of other schools was more moderate than Phabongkha`s, with the devotional element taking precedence over the sectarian in *Dorje Shugden* propitiation, he continued to regard the deity as a severe and violent punisher of inclusively-orientated *Gelug* practitioners.

#### **2.2.iv. The Deity Disputed**

Whilst certain sections of the *Gelug* school were unconvinced by and disagreed with the elevation of *Dorje Shugden`s* importance and status under Phabongkha and Trijang Rinpoche, there was no open conflict or controversy. There was, as Dreyfus observes, `enough room in the tradition to accommodate several views` and other prominent *lamas* such as Ling Rinpoche, the Senior Tutor to the

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<sup>65</sup> Phabongkha Rinpoche as quoted in Dreyfus, `The Shuk-den Affair`, p. 240.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Dalai Lama, 'offered an alternative to those who did not completely share Tri-jang's orientation'. The issue of relying upon *Dorje Shugden* did not become a subject of open dispute and contention until the mid-1970s, until which time the *Gelug* tradition seemed 'strong and united in its admiration of its great teachers, the Dalai Lama and his two tutors'.<sup>69</sup>

The young Fourteenth Dalai Lama was introduced to the practice of *Dorje Shugden* reliance by Trijang Rinpoche prior to the exile of the Tibetan Buddhist community in 1959. After some years in Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama became aware that his practice was in conflict, firstly with the State protector *Pehar*, and later with the main protective goddess of the *Gelug* tradition and Tibetan people *Palden Lhamo* (*dPal ldan lha mo*) who, as a *jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma* (an enlightened protector), objected strongly to *Dorje Shugden*'s pretensions.<sup>70</sup> He did not, however, voice his doubts about the merits of *Dorje Shugden* reliance until 1978 following the publication of a sectarian text by the *Gelug lama* Zimey Rinpoche (1927-1996).<sup>71</sup> This text, which is variously known as *The Yellow Book* or *The Oral Transmission of the Intelligent Father*, enumerates a series of stories that Zimey Rinpoche had heard informally from Trijang Rinpoche about 'the many Ge-luk lamas whose lives are supposed to have been shortened by Shuk-den's displeasure at their practicing Nyingma teachings'.<sup>72</sup> The text asserts the pre-eminence of the *Gelug* school which is

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>70</sup> See 'An Anthology of Talks', pp. 9 and 16. *Palden Lhamo* is seen, not only as the chief guardian goddess of the *Gelug* tradition, but also as the patron-deity of Tibet who is 'very much connected with the cause of Tibetan independence and the protection of Tibet from foreign invaders' (Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (London: Hurst, 1994), p. 131).

<sup>71</sup> The Dalai Lama maintains that, whilst he initially kept his reservations to himself out of his sensitivity to those within the *Gelug* who were committed to *Dorje Shugden*, the appearance of this text, and the conflicts it had stirred up between the traditions-in-exile, gave him no choice but to speak out.

<sup>72</sup> Dreyfus, 'The Shuk-den Affair', p. 256.

symbolised and safeguarded by *Dorje Shugden*, and presents a stern warning to those within the *Gelug* whose eclectic tendencies would compromise its purity.<sup>73</sup> This publication provoked angry reactions from members of non-*Gelug* traditions setting in motion a bitter literary exchange.<sup>74</sup> According to Kapstein,

While the status of the protective deity was the ostensive topic of debate initially, all aspects of sectarian rivalry have since been brought into play.<sup>75</sup>

The Dalai Lama's reaction to the *Yellow Book* was extreme. Besides feeling personally betrayed by Zimey Rinpoche, he considered the book to be 'an attack on his role as the Dalai Lama, a rejection of his religious leadership by the Ge-luk establishment, and a betrayal of his efforts in the struggle for Tibetan freedom'.<sup>76</sup> He intervened in the dispute by publicly rejecting Zimey Rinpoche's 'awful book' as an 'insidious act of carelessness'<sup>77</sup> which could only damage the common cause of the Tibetan people because of its sectarian divisiveness. In a series of talks he sought to

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<sup>73</sup> The book was published in 1973 but not circulated publicly until 1975. The full Tibetan title of Zimey Rinpoche's text translates as 'Account of the Protective Deity Dorje Shugden, Chief Guardian of the Gelug Sect, and of the Punishments meted out to Religious and Lay Leaders who incurred His Wrath'.

<sup>74</sup> The main participants in this exchange were a *Gelug* disciple of Zimey Rinpoche called Yonten Gyaltso and the *Sakya* scholar T.G. Dhongthog, who composed at least three rejoinders to Zimey Rinpoche's position, one of which was entitled *The Rain of Adamant Fire: A Holy Discourse Based Upon Scriptures and Reason, Annihilating the Poisonous Seeds of the Wicked Speech of Dzeme Trulku Lobsang Palden* (Gangtok: Sherab Gyaltzen, 1979). Full bibliographical details of this dispute can be gleaned from Kapstein's 'The Purificatory Gem', p. 231. The factionalism and sectarianism that has been associated with *Dorje Shugden* reliance and debate within monastic contexts, it should be noted, does not necessarily filter down to the popular levels of Buddhist practice. As Mumford observes, whilst *Nyingma* Buddhists in Kathmandu 'think of Shug-Idan as their enemy, sent against them by the rival sect', the situation is quite different in the villages where 'these sectarian differences are not well understood'. Thus, 'In Gyasumdo the lamas are all *Nyingmapa*, yet most of them honor Shug-Idan as a lineage guardian picked up in Tibet in the past by their patriline' (p. 135).

<sup>75</sup> 'The Purificatory Gem', p. 231. Having defended the enlightened status of *Dorje Shugden*, the *Gelug* scholar Yonten Gyaltso thus presented an extended critique of the teachings of the *Nyingma* tradition generally, singling out *Dzogchen* practices in particular as inauthentic and misleading. In addition to this, he specifically criticised the wisdom of the influential *Nyingma lamas* Chatral Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987), to whom Dhongthog's arguments had been attributed in pro-*Shugden* circles.

<sup>76</sup> Dreyfus, 'The Shuk-den Affair', p. 257.

<sup>77</sup> 'An Anthology of Talks', pp. 11-13.



undermine the status elevation of *Dorje Shugden* by reaffirming the centrality of the traditional supramundane protectors of the *Gelug* tradition and maintaining that 'there is no need of a protector other than these for the Gelugpas'.<sup>78</sup> He also vehemently rejected *Dorje Shugden*'s associated sectarianism, emphasising that all the Tibetan traditions are 'equally profound dharmas' and defending the 'unbiased and eclectic'<sup>79</sup> approach to Buddhist practice as exemplified by the Second, Third and Fifth Dalai Lamas. The dispute strongly reinforced his suspicions that *Dorje Shugden* reliance was in conflict with *Pehar* and *Palden Lhamo*, the deities who represent the interests of Tibetans generally, and he imposed partial restrictions on *Dorje Shugden* propitiation. Reliance on *Dorje Shugden* in private was acceptable so long as he was not propitiated as 'the Lord of the Dharma Protectors',<sup>80</sup> but the practice was considered 'improper for a member of staff who was working for me and the Tibetan Government'<sup>81</sup> and was not to be publicly promulgated by the collective religious bodies like the monasteries and their colleges. The issue of relying on the protective deity *Dorje Shugden* thus became a major source of tension and division within the Tibetan Buddhist community-in-exile, and the *Gelug* tradition in particular. The Dalai Lama's pronouncements were resisted by many individuals and groups, such as the re-established *Ganden Shartse* Monastery in Mundgod (South India), for whom *Dorje Shugden* reliance was a central part of their spiritual lives.<sup>82</sup> Many of these, of course,

<sup>78</sup> From the unpublished transcript 'Advice Concerning the Dharma Protectors', trans. and ed. by Tsepa Rigzin and others at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, (1986), 1-7 (p. 1).

<sup>79</sup> 'An Anthology of Talks', pp.12-14.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>82</sup> *Ganden* Monastery has two main colleges, *Jangtse* (*bYang rtse*) and *Shartse* (*Shar rtse*), both of which have been re-established in South India. In Tibet, *Dorje Shugden* reliance was traditionally associated with *Shartse* college, and this association has continued in exile. This practice was also very popular in the *Je* (*bYes*) college of *Sera*, which is where Geshe Kelsang Gyatso studied as a monk prior to coming into exile in 1959.

as sympathisers and apologists of the Phabongkha tradition, were already critical of the Dalai Lama's inclusive orientation and impartial religious policies.<sup>83</sup>

These tensions continued to simmer beneath the surface of the Buddhist community-in-exile until the spring of 1996, when this conflict of authority erupted in a very public way following the renewed attempts of the Dalai Lama to subdue *Dorje Shugden* propitiation among government employees and *Gelug* monasteries in India. Within a matter of weeks, this protracted Tibetan Buddhist dispute, described by Batchelor as 'a well-guarded Tibetan secret',<sup>84</sup> had become the subject of heated debate between both Tibetan and western Buddhists, and it was even making broadsheet newspaper headlines in Britain. So much attention was generated by this arcane conflict in Britain mainly because of the NKT's decision to enter the dispute in an uncharacteristically pro-active and public way. The recent development of the *Dorje Shugden* dispute, and the NKT's participation in it, will be discussed later.

### **2.2.v. Religious and Political Dimensions of the Dispute**

The *Dorje Shugden* dispute has both religious and political dimensions although the two are closely related. The first religious dimension concerns the broader *Gelug* debate between inclusive and exclusive interpretations of the *Gelug* tradition, the contours of which were outlined earlier. During the twentieth century, in contradistinction to the open and eclectic approach to spiritual practice adopted by

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<sup>83</sup> The furore created by the Dalai Lama's pronouncements was not confined to the major monastic centres of the *Gelug* tradition, but impacted also upon the lives of many lay devotees. Mumford describes the reactions of Tibetan villagers living in Nepal to the statement as it filtered up the Himalayan trail: 'How can these villagers abandon so easily the guardian protector they inherited from their own fathers? I asked Lama Dorje of Tshap village if he could forsake Shugs-Idan. "I'm afraid to," he replied [...] the older punitive image of the lineage god [thus] continues in the internal dialogue of these Tibetan villagers' (p. 135).

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Batchelor, 'Special Report: Trouble in Shangri-La', *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 6.1 (1996), 119-120 (p. 119).

inclusively orientated figures such as the Great Fifth, Great Thirteenth and Fourteenth Dalai Lamas, *Dorje Shugden* came to represent *Gelug* purity, supremacy and exclusivism. This religious debate also has strong political undercurrents. Whilst the conservative elements of the *Gelug* monastic establishment have often resented the inclusive and impartial policies of the Dalai Lamas towards rival Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Dalai Lamas have in turn rejected exclusivism on the grounds that it encourages sectarian disunity and thereby harms the interests of the Tibetan state. In rejecting *Dorje Shugden*, the present Dalai Lama is thus speaking out against an orientation towards *Gelug* practice and identity that he considers spiritually harmful and, especially during Tibet's present political circumstances, nationally damaging.

Another important doctrinal issue concerns the question of whether *Dorje Shugden* devotees are relying upon - or 'taking refuge' in - an unreliable and capricious worldly deity or an enlightened Buddha. The distinction, from the viewpoint of the practitioner's spiritual welfare, is vital:

Asking a local deity for assistance and 'going for refuge' to the Buddhist deities are qualitatively different processes [...] The beginning practitioner is enjoined to reject any reliance on the worldly gods in favor of the Three Jewels of Buddhism.<sup>85</sup>

To take refuge in a worldly deity is to abandon taking refuge solely in the Buddha 'and thus to abandon the very definition of being a Buddhist'.<sup>86</sup> In a talk given to a gathering of Tibetan and western disciples, the Dalai Lama thus explained that if one places worldly protectors and, in particular, *Dorje Shugden*, amongst the ranks of the

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<sup>85</sup> Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, pp. 166 and 178.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Williams, 'Dorje Shugden', *The Middle Way*, 71 (1996), 130-132 (p. 130).

merit field, 'there is the danger of losing one's refuge'.<sup>87</sup>

On a specifically political level, it has been suggested that the Dalai Lama, in rejecting *Dorje Shugden*, is speaking out against a particular quasi-political faction within the *Gelug* tradition-in-exile who are opposed to his modern, ecumenical and democratic political vision and who believe that the Tibetan government,

should champion a fundamentalist version of Tibetan Buddhism as a state religion in which the dogmas of the Nyingmapa, Kargyupa [*sic*] and Sakyapa schools are heterodox and discredited.<sup>88</sup>

According to this interpretation, the Dalai Lama's wish to reform Tibetan politics-in-exile by establishing a modern and democratic system is being resisted by an ultra-conservative wing of the *Gelug* tradition. This faction is afraid that a democratically-run assembly would erode the influence that the *Gelug* monastic segment has traditionally wielded over Tibetan affairs<sup>89</sup> and implement a modern, pluralist and secular political vision that is fundamentally at odds with its own.<sup>90</sup> According to Sparham, *Dorje Shugden* has become a political symbol for this 'religious fundamentalist party'. Consequently, the Dalai Lama's rejection of *Dorje Shugden* should be interpreted, not as an attempt to stamp out a religious practice he disagrees

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<sup>87</sup> 'Advice Concerning the Dharma Protectors', p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Gareth Sparham, 'Why the Dalai Lama Rejects Shugden', *Tibetan Review*, 31.6 (1996), 11-13 (p. 12). Sparham's political reading of events in India is shared by other learned observers of Tibetan affairs, such as Dr. Paul Williams of Bristol University who describes the dispute as 'a controversy between Traditionalists and Modernists' ('Dorje Shugden', p. 130).

<sup>89</sup> For a clear discussion of the traditional role played by the *Gelug* monastic leadership of the three main monasteries in the Tibetan religio-political process see the introductory chapter of Goldstein's *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*. Goldstein argues that intra-religious conflict between the *Gelug* monastic system and the Dalai Lama's government, at varying levels, contributed to the ultimate downfall of the twentieth century Tibetan religio-political state. Sparham is interpreting the recent *Dorje Shugden* dispute in similar terms: that is, as a religio-political confrontation between traditionalists and modernists.

<sup>90</sup> Sparham summarises the vision of Tibet that is held by this 'emerging political party' as one in which 'the final arbiters of Tibet's destiny should be monks, that the future government of a free Tibet should uphold its own particular version of religious truth taught [...] by Tsongkhapa, that the future government [...] should fund particular monasteries [...] in opposition to modern secular education' (p. 12).

with, but as a political statement:

he has to say he opposes a religious practice in order to say clearly that he wants to guarantee to all Tibetans an equal right to religious freedom and political equality in a future Tibet.<sup>91</sup>

Dreyfus considers that, whilst the political dimension of the *Dorje Shugden* practice forms an important element of the dispute, it does not provide an adequate explanation for it. Locating the dispute firmly within the religious context of the debate between exclusively and inclusively orientated *Gelug* adherents, he argues that *Dorje Shugden* is 'less the spirit of the Ge-luk political resentment against a strong Dalai-Lama than the spirit of a religious resentment against a perceived threat to the integrity of the Ge-luk tradition'.<sup>92</sup> He also maintains that, to understand the Dalai Lama's extreme reaction to the *Yellow Book* and *Dorje Shugden* propitiation during the 1970s, we must first understand the ritual basis of the institution of the Dalai Lama. This complex ritual system, developed originally by the Great Fifth and reiterated by the present Dalai Lama, rests upon 'an eclectic religious basis in which elements associated with the Nying-ma tradition combine with an overall Ge-luk orientation' (p. 269). The purpose of the system is to portray the Dalai Lama's rule as a re-establishment of the early Tibetan empire by re-enacting its perceived religious foundation. This involves the promotion of teachings and practices, such as the devotion of *Padmasambhava*, that are central to the *Nyingma*, 'the Buddhist school that for Tibetans has a close association with the early empire' (p. 260). The present

<sup>91</sup> 'Why the Dalai Lama Rejects Shugden', p. 13. Paul Williams also maintains that the *Dorje Shugden* ban is not simply an issue of suppression of religious freedom, but is primarily a political act: 'there is a significant dimension of political power involved in the dispute [...] I know of no cases in the whole history of Tibetan Buddhism where a tradition or practice has been suppressed on the basis of purely religious factors' ('Dorje Shugden', p. 130).

<sup>92</sup> 'The Shuk-den Affair', p. 269.

Dalai Lama has endeavoured to implement this ritual system in exile by developing the *Nyingma* side of his religious repertoire, introducing *Nyingma* rituals at his personal *Namgyel* monastery and by encouraging the collective worship of *Padmasambhava*. This final measure, which he regards as an important means of restoring 'the synergy that existed between this figure and the Tibetan people, thus strengthening the power of the gods appointed by Guru Rin-bo-che [*Padmasambhava*] to protect Tibetans from dangers' (p. 262), has been resisted by more exclusively orientated segments of the *Gelug* who have boycotted the ceremonies. Within this context, the Dalai Lama opposes the *Yellow Book* and *Dorje Shugden* propitiation because they defy his attempts to restore the ritual foundations of the Tibetan state and disrupt the basis of his leadership, designating him as an 'enemy of Buddhism' and potential target of the deity's retribution.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FOUNDATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE MAHAYANA TRADITION AND MANJUSIRI INSTITUTE

#### 1. THE EMERGENCE OF THE FPMT

##### 1.1. LAMAS YESHE AND ZOPA RINPOCHE

The FPMT is one of the longest running international networks of Tibetan Buddhist centres and certainly the largest organisation promoting the teachings of the *Gelug* tradition in the West. Though officially founded in 1975, FPMT sources trace its origins back to 1965<sup>1</sup> when the Tibetan founders of the organisation, Lamas Thubten Yeshe and Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, first came into contact with westerners interested in the Buddhist spiritual path.

Lama Thubten Yeshe<sup>2</sup> was born in 1935 near Lhasa and entered the *Je* college of *Sera* monastic university at the age of six, where he lived and studied the subjects of the *geshe* (*dge bshes*) curriculum<sup>3</sup> until the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1959.<sup>4</sup> With thousands of other Tibetan refugees Lama Yeshe escaped to India and resumed his monastic studies in the North East Indian settlement camp of Buxaduar. It was here that he met Lama Zopa Rinpoche, a young reincarnate *lama* who was born in

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<sup>1</sup> 'Handbook for the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition', FPMT Central Office, California (July 1989).

<sup>2</sup> For an extended presentation of Lama Yeshe's biography, see Vicki Mackenzie, *Reincarnation: The Boy Lama* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> The *geshe* degree is the academic qualification that scholarly monks within the three main *Gelug* monastic universities work towards over a period of approximately seventeen to twenty years. The higher status of *geshe lharampa* (*dge bshes lha rams pa*) involves a further eight to nine years study.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of twentieth century Tibetan history, and detailed coverage of the events leading upto the seizure of control in Tibet by Chinese military forces, see Goldstein's *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*.

Nepal in 1946. Although he was recognised as the reincarnation of a Nepalese *Nyingma* lama,<sup>5</sup> Lama Zopa Rinpoche entered one of the Tibetan monasteries associated with the famous Tromo Geshe Rinpoche (1865-1937)<sup>6</sup> and ordained as a *Gelug* monk. In exile Lama Zopa continued his studies under Geshe Rabten<sup>7</sup> who later sent him to study with Lama Thubten Yeshe, an old student of his from *Sera Je*. A close teacher-disciple relationship quickly developed between the two of them.

## 1.2. EARLY WESTERN FOLLOWERS

Samuel has observed how the conversion of westerners to Tibetan Buddhism was not, in the early years, a deliberate policy pursued by the Tibetan government-in-exile.<sup>8</sup> It was a development, rather, that depended upon westerners forging links with individual *lamas* independently of the Dharamsala administration. In 1965, Lamas Yeshe and Zopa met their first western disciple, a wealthy woman of Russian descent called Zina Rachevsky. Having read Lama Anagarika Govinda's *The Way of the White Clouds*,<sup>9</sup> she had travelled to India in search of Tromo Geshe Rinpoche, and it was at a branch of his monastery in Darjeeling that she met Lamas Yeshe and Zopa who were also spending some time there.<sup>10</sup> She became an enthusiastic disciple of the

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<sup>5</sup> Lama Zopa Rinpoche is believed to be a reincarnation of the Sherpa *Nyingma lama* Kunsang Yeshe who was known as the Lawudo Lama and was popular in the Solo Khumbu region of Nepal.

<sup>6</sup> Tromo Geshe Rinpoche is also well known among western Buddhists as the teacher of the Austrian *lama* Anagarika Govinda, one of the earlier authors of books on Tibetan Buddhism and founder of the German movement known as the Arya Maitreya Mandala (AMM).

<sup>7</sup> Geshe Rabten (1920-1986) is also a very well-known *Gelug lama* in the west who, besides writing a number of popular books, founded the Tharpa Choeling Centre for Higher Buddhist Studies (now known as Rabten Choeling) in 1977 as a focal point for Tibetan refugees in Switzerland and as a monastery for western Buddhists, the first of its kind in Europe.

<sup>8</sup> 'Tibetan Buddhism as a World Religion'.

<sup>9</sup> First published in 1966.

<sup>10</sup> Apparently, Zina Rachevsky originally mistook Lama Zopa for Tromo Geshe Rinpoche, an understandable error in light of the fact that, having stayed in this famous *lama's* *Dungkar* monastery in Southern Tibet, he had also become known as Tromo Rinpoche.



*lamas* and, in 1969, the three of them moved to Nepal where they founded the Nepal Mahayana Gompa Centre (now known as Kopan Monastery) on land purchased by Zina at the top of Kopan hill, Kathmandu. Within a couple of years, though, Zina Rachevsky passed away in retreat<sup>11</sup> and was unable to witness the international expansion of a movement she had helped to begin and which continues to honour the role she played in bringing *Gelug* Buddhism to the West.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kathmandu was one of the most popular sites along the 'hippy trail' for those westerners who, dissatisfied and disillusioned with their own cultural and religious traditions, sought exotic alternatives and new spiritual experiences in the East. In 1970, Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche gave their first Kopan meditation course, attended by about twenty students. By 1974, interest in the now-famous Kopan courses was so great that attendance had to be restricted to about two-hundred, and the *lamas* opened Tushita Retreat Centre in Dharamsala in 1972 to provide for the overflow of serious meditators. Lama Zopa also opened a school, the Mount Everest Centre for Buddhist Studies, for Sherpa children in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal. The school was later moved to Kopan Monastery where children, mainly Nepali, have continued to receive a closely supervised monastic education.

### 1.3. THE CREATION OF WESTERN DHARMA CENTRES

In 1974, the International Mahayana Institute (IMI) was established at Kopan

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<sup>11</sup> A French boy was later recognised by Sakya Trinzin, the head of the *Sakya* school, as Zina Rachevsky's reincarnation. This appears to be the first recorded instance of a reincarnation of a westerner to a westerner within a Tibetan Buddhist framework. For further details of this see Vicki Mackenzie, *Reborn in the West: The Story of Western Men and Women Reincarnated as Tibetan Lamas* (London: Thorsons, 1997).

when fourteen western monks and nuns received ordination. Most western students, however, did not ordain but returned to their home countries. These students soon realised the need for their own western Dharma centres and started meetings and meditation groups. In 1974, the *lamas* gave their first tour of the West taking in America, Australia and New Zealand. The energy and enthusiasm generated by their annual tours boosted the development of their fledgling network and, by 1975, nine centres had been started. The ordained members of the IMI were assigned posts in the new centres to help them become established, and Lama Yeshe invited Tibetan *geshes* to become resident teachers in the larger ones. Kopan Monastery remained the spiritual and organisational hub of the movement, as well as being a place for Tibetan *geshes* to acclimatize to western ways by teaching students and learning some English.

#### **1.4. THE CREATION OF THE FPMT**

At the end of 1975, Lama Yeshe called his emerging international network the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.<sup>12</sup> He also decided that the FPMT needed an infrastructure that would co-ordinate and unite its member centres. To fulfil this purpose, he created the Council for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (CPMT), a body constituted of senior students and directors of the FPMT's centres who would meet annually to discuss projects and formulate guiding principles on the basis of Lama Yeshe's talks.<sup>13</sup> He also established the Central Office to

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<sup>12</sup> Prior to this Lama Yeshe's emerging network was known as 'The Yeshe Foundation'.

<sup>13</sup> The first meeting of the CPMT was held at Manjushri Institute, England, in 1978 and was attended by twenty-five delegates. The CPMT began to develop a basic outline for centre development in the 'CPMT Guidelines', later developed further in the 'Handbook for the FPMT'.

facilitate communication between the *lamas* and the centres and among the centres themselves, and to implement the decisions of the CPMT. The Central Office was based at Kopan until 1982 when, for obvious practical reasons, it was moved to Lama Tzong Khapa Institute in Italy.<sup>14</sup> By the late 1970s, then, the FPMT had evolved from being a loose federation of scattered groups into an organisation with an emerging infrastructure, a council to discuss its direction and develop policies, and an administrative HQ, carrying the authority of the *lamas*, to co-ordinate and direct its various departments.

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<sup>14</sup> The Central Office, which was re-named as the FPMT International Office in 1996, is now based in Soquel, California.

## 2.THE CREATION OF MANJUSHRI INSTITUTE AND THE FPMT IN BRITAIN

### 2.1. BRITISH BEGINNINGS: THE MANJUSHRI INSTITUTE

The idea for a centre in Britain first developed in around 1974 among Lama Yeshe's British students. Lama Yeshe gave their idea a name, the Manjushri Institute, and for the next two years, the foundations of a permanent British FPMT centre were laid. The growing interest initially generated through introductory Buddhist seminars and newsletters, was consolidated when Lamas Yeshe and Zopa visited Britain in 1975 as part of their second world tour and staged a well-attended residential course at a college in London. The success of this event 'created the firm conviction that a substantial centre would be of immeasurable benefit in the U.K'.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, Lama Yeshe's main British disciples began the search for a suitable, spacious and reasonably priced property. In the meantime the Institute based at this time in London, and without a permanent base of its own, generated a broader basis of support by inviting popular Tibetan teachers, like Geshe Rabten and Geshe Tsultrim Gyaltzen, to give courses.

In 1976, a mock-gothic mansion called Conishead Priory in Ulverston, Cumbria, was discovered and its size - and perhaps more importantly its price<sup>16</sup> - made it the ideal choice for a residential Buddhist centre. The approval of the *lamas* was sought, the funds were raised and the priory was purchased. The Manjushri Institute was registered as a charitable organisation, with Lama Yeshe as its Spiritual

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<sup>15</sup> *Mandala*, 3, (1988), p. 6. *Mandala* is the journal of the FPMT.

<sup>16</sup> The priory was marketed at the remarkably low price of £70, 000.

Director and the promotion of 'the Buddhist Faith and human growth, meditation and spiritual development in accordance with Buddhist principles throughout the United Kingdom'<sup>17</sup> as its stated objectives. The first event held at the priory was a twenty-three day meditation course given by the *lamas* and it was attended by seventy students, twelve of whom stayed on afterwards to form the nucleus of an early community.

## 2.2. EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTE

The most pressing task for the Institute's nascent community was the restoration of the building and surrounding gardens which were in a severe state of disrepair and neglect. One of the main problems the community faced was the question of financing. Due to Conishead Priory's historic importance, the Institute received financial support in this from various government agencies.<sup>18</sup> The centre also developed various business initiatives, such as a cafe, printing press, and mail order bookshop, as well as generating capital by renting parts of the building out for other groups to conduct workshops on Buddhist and non-Buddhist subjects such as yoga, whole food cooking, T'ai ch'i and psychotherapy.<sup>19</sup> These courses, which would also be attended (and sometimes taught) by priory students, were also a way of fostering links between the Institute and the wider community.

In addition to the immediate practical and financial concerns, the centre also needed to develop a viable management structure and find a style of community living

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<sup>17</sup> The Manjushri Institute, charity registration no. 271873, Trust Deed, July 1976, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Such as the Historic Buildings Council and the Manpower Services Commission.

<sup>19</sup> Business ventures were also set up outside of the priory to fund the Institute, such as 'Lotus Trading' which was established in London in 1980.

that was workable. One of the early community members recalls that,

the initial, or big, problems at the beginning were, 'What does it mean? What kind of community are we trying to create here?' People used to anguish over this [...] Literally under one roof we had monks, nuns, lay people, lay married people, and children. And that's just crazy. But it hadn't really been thought out. It was early days. All these people were thrown together.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the inevitable teething problems, however, the community was united by its common interest in the Buddhist teachings. Initially the education programme was the responsibility of an IMI nun dispatched from Kopan who would lead *pūjās* and arrange courses by visiting teachers but by 1977, the Institute had its own resident teacher, a Tibetan monk called Geshe Kelsang Gyatso.

### 2.3. THE ARRIVAL OF GESHE KELSANG GYATSO

Snellgrove's observation that the success of Tibetan Buddhism in the West derives largely from the physical presence of Tibetan *lamas* is pertinent to our understanding of the FPMT.<sup>21</sup> The successful development of FPMT Dharma centres was, and continues to be, greatly assisted by the presence of Tibetan *lamas* whom Lama Yeshe - and now Lama Zopa - would install as resident teachers.<sup>22</sup> In 1976, Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche visited Geshe Kelsang Gyatso in Mussourie, India, and invited him over to Manjushri Institute. Born in Tibet in 1931, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso was a contemporary of Lama Yeshe's studying for his *geshe* degree at *Sera Je*

<sup>20</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Geshe Kelsang, April 1995.

<sup>21</sup> *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 520.

<sup>22</sup> These tended to be *geshes* from *Sera* monastery who were old friends and classmates of Lama Yeshe. In more recent years the FPMT has employed younger *geshes* who have been brought up within, and have graduated from, the re-established monastic institutions in exile. The FPMT's links with *Sera Je* in particular have remained very strong, especially since 1991 when Lama Osel Tendzin, Lama Yeshe's young Spanish reincarnation, was admitted there to begin his monastic training.

monastery before coming into exile. During his time in exile, he engaged in meditational retreat in Nepal, Dalhousie and Mussourie and, when not in retreat, he was 'trying to help families by performing healing rituals and special *pūjās*'.<sup>23</sup> He was, by all accounts, a very well respected scholar and meditator within the exiled Tibetan *Gelug* community. Manjushri Institute was a centre for which Lama Yeshe and Zopa had grand designs and they apparently sought the advice of the Dalai Lama when choosing Geshe Kelsang to fill the responsible position of overseeing its spiritual development. He accepted the invitation, moved into Conishead Priory in 1977 along with his translator, and began to teach the students 'a vast range of texts and courses covering all aspects of sutra and tantra'.<sup>24</sup> Part of the 'General Programme' of Buddhist studies developed by Geshe Kelsang was a three-year course of study which was examined and resulted in the General Diploma in Applied Buddhist Studies.

#### 2.4. THE 'JEWEL IN THE CROWN' OF THE FPMT

Following the first international CPMT meeting, held at Manjushri Institute in 1978, Lama Yeshe decided to move Wisdom Publications to Ulverston to take advantage of the Institute's energy, facilities and manpower. Until this time, Wisdom, the publishing arm of the FPMT, had been based in Delhi.<sup>25</sup> Over the next four years, books by both Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche<sup>26</sup> and Geshe Kelsang<sup>27</sup> emerged from

<sup>23</sup> Taken from an interview conducted with Geshe Kelsang Gyatso following his expulsion from *Sera Je* in the autumn of 1996, and posted on the Internet discussion forum known as BUDDHA-L, 24 November 1996.

<sup>24</sup> *Wisdom: Magazine of the FPMT*, (May 1983), p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Created in around 1975 at Kopan, Wisdom was originally known as 'Publications for Wisdom Culture'.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Lama Yeshe's *Silent Mind, Holy Mind* in 1978, and Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche's *Wisdom Energy 2* in 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Namely, *Meaningful to Behold* in 1980 and *Clear Light of Bliss* in 1982.

the Cumbrian base. Lama Yeshe then decided, in 1979, to set up a Geshe Studies Programme at Manjushri Institute and he installed another Tibetan *lama*, Geshe Jampa Tekchog, to direct it. In 1982, Geshe Tekchog moved on to become the abbot of the FPMT's first monastery, Nalanda, in France, and Geshe Konchog Tsewang replaced him as the Geshe Studies teacher. This was the first, and the most successful Geshe Studies Programme instituted within the FPMT, and its creation at the priory precipitated an influx of IMI members from around the world, boosting the size and energy of the community and giving it an international quality. The ten-to-twelve year programme was 'modelled on the education programmes of the three great monastic universities of the Gelug tradition of Tibet',<sup>28</sup> although it was abbreviated and modified for westerners, being open to both lay practitioners, monks and nuns. The purpose of the programme, which was recognised and validated by the Dalai Lama, was to meet the 'great demand for Dharma teachers in the West today'.<sup>29</sup>

A parallel educational structure thus developed at the Institute, with the Geshe Studies Programme, on the one hand, and Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's General Programme, on the other. The courses offered by the different *geshes* complemented each other inasmuch as the students would attend teachings and classes given by both without any contradiction. The programmes differed, however, in one important

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<sup>28</sup> 'Manjushri Institute College of Buddhist Studies: Prospectus 1982', (Priory Press, 1981), p. 21. The programme began with a three-year period of preliminary training in Buddhist logic, philosophy, and psychology before proceeding with a seven-year study of the five major Indian philosophical treatises, and their Tibetan commentaries, that form the basis of the traditional *geshe* curriculum (for a brief discussion of which, see Samuel's *Civilized Shamans*, p. 513).

<sup>29</sup> 'Manjushri Institute College of Buddhist Studies: Prospectus 1982', p. 21. 'The yearly exams were conducted by the Gelugpa Society, 'the organization responsible for examining students in the Tibetan monasteries and for granting the *geshe* degree' (ibid). No-one, to my knowledge, ever completed the FPMT Geshe Studies Programme. The programme never ran its full course in any of the centres where it was taught. It had more success at Manjushri Institute than anywhere else, however, both in terms of numbers (upwards of fifty students took part in the early years of the programme) and in terms of duration (it ran until the late 1980s, making it the longest running Geshe Programme in the FPMT).



respect: only Geshe Kelsang's General Programme included courses on Tantric Buddhism and attendance upon these required the reception of a Tantric empowerment.<sup>30</sup> The Institute also organised extended visits by other well-known Tibetan *lamas* over the summer months, such as Song Rinpoche (1905-1984),<sup>31</sup> Geshe Rabten, Geshe Lhundup Sopa<sup>32</sup> and the Institute's Spiritual Directors Lamas Yeshe and Zopa.

By the end of the 1970s, then, Lama Yeshe's vision of Manjushri Institute as the spiritual and educational hub of the FPMT had crystallised. According to a disciple of his from this time, Lama Yeshe intended the Institute to,

become the central monastery of the FPMT [...] a place for training monks [...] And he had views of it being one of the early jewels of the FPMT crown. At this time it was the biggest centre the FPMT had.<sup>33</sup>

The Institute was 'intended to be the pioneer among the western centres [...] the model on which FPMT centres would pattern themselves'.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.5. MANJUSHRI LONDON

Another important development towards the end of the 1970s was the creation of a second British FPMT centre called Manjushri London. The centre itself was founded in 1978 and the first meeting was inaugurated by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and

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<sup>30</sup> Empowerment ceremonies forge a close and powerful bond between the *lama*, as Tantric master, and his students. The particularly close relationship that developed between Geshe Kelsang and his disciples at the Institute strongly influenced how the later dispute with the FPMT unfolded.

<sup>31</sup> Song Rinpoche was one of the most highly revered *lamas* within the *Gelug* tradition.

<sup>32</sup> Geshe Sopa is currently the abbot of the Deer Park Buddhist Centre which he founded in around 1975 in Wisconsin, USA. His students and his centre have always had a close relationship with with the FPMT.

<sup>33</sup> FPMT Interview, July 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Taken from the larger FPMT report upon which 'A Report on Recent Events at Manjushri Institute' (discussed in detail below) was based.

Geshe Damcho Yonten from Lam Rim Buddhist Centre, Wales. For the first couple of years, Manjushri London had neither a teacher nor its own premises. In 1981, though, Lama Yeshe provided Manjushri London with a resident teacher, Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, and in 1982, the centre obtained its own property near Finsbury Park. This enabled the London centre, which had emerged as a branch of Manjushri Institute, to develop its own momentum and grow, offering a teaching programme and planning a city outreach policy. Again, the presence of the Tibetan *lama* was crucial to the centre's success:

Geshe-la's teachings brought more new students and this allowed us to break even with the costs.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Robin Bath, 'The Making of Jamyang Meditation Centre', Jamyang Meditation Centre Archive, no. HI-001T (1993).

### 3. GESHE KELSANG GYATSO: TEACHING AND ORIENTATION

#### 3.1. CONTINUITY AND CONSERVATION

The continuity of Geshe Kelsang's teaching with that of mainstream *Gelug* Buddhism has been observed by Waterhouse in her discussion of the NKT:

NKT doctrine is not different from that of mainline Gelugpa and as such is available in English language summaries written by Tibetan teachers [...] There is nothing remarkable in the texts which Geshe Kelsang has chosen to make commentary on.<sup>36</sup>

The doctrinally conservative nature of his teachings and the traditionally structured and direct style in which they are presented in his texts, reflects his background within the rigorous scholastic and academic training system of *Sera Je* monastic university, where he studied for and obtained his *geshe* degree.<sup>37</sup> His strongly 'clerical' orientation also reflects the approach of Trijang Rinpoche and Phabongkha Rinpoche, the two main *Gelug lamas* through whom he traces the lineage of his teachings. The clerical orientation of Phabongkha Rinpoche has been succinctly described by Samuel:

P'awongk'a Rimpoch'e was not an originator of new teachings or approaches. His significance for the Gelugpa was as a transmitter and codifier of the Gelugpa tradition. He stood for a strict and pure continuation of the tradition of Tsongk'apa as it had developed in the great Gelugpa monasteries of central and east Tibet.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 151.

<sup>37</sup> As Samuel states, 'If the Gelugpa are the most clerical of Tibetan Buddhist orders then the *geshe* [...] were the most clerical people in the Gelugpa system' (*Civilized Shamans*, p. 337).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 545.

This characterisation of the 'root guru'<sup>39</sup> of Geshe Kelsang's root *guru* Trijang Rinpoche could equally be applied to Geshe Kelsang himself, for whom the faithful transmission and continuation of the tradition as it was taught to him, has been much more important than adapting the teachings or innovating new ones for westerners. His allegiance to the protective deity *Dorje Shugden*, also traced back through Trijang Rinpoche and Phabongkha Rinpoche, forms another key element of his clerical and exclusive outlook.

### 3.2. DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

The clerical and exclusive character of Geshe Kelsang's thought, however, was not static and fixed throughout his career. His concern with the conservation and preservation of the tradition of *Tsong Khapa* became increasingly urgent during his time in the West and his exclusivism hardened and intensified. This was expressed through the growing prominence of *Dorje Shugden* reliance in his centres; a narrowing down of legitimate authority; an increase in structured study; an emphasis upon boundary maintenance and purity; and the eventual creation of the NKT in 1991, an event marking the public separation of his growing network of Dharma centres from the Tibetan Buddhist - and, more specifically, the *Gelug* - mainstream. The heightening and intensification of his clerical and exclusive orientation must be seen within the context of the various forces impacting upon him during his time in Britain. Primary among these were certain indigenous processes within Tibetan Buddhism,

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<sup>39</sup> Within Tibetan Buddhism, particularly outside the *Gelug* tradition, it is common for individual practitioners to study with, and collect Tantric lineages from, *lamas* of several different schools. At the same time, however, it is normal practice 'to have one "root guru" or "root lama" (*tsawe lama*) in a particular tradition around whom one's practice was centered' (Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 597).

and a range of other factors arising during the transplantation of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.

### 3.3. SUMMARY

Since the teachings and practices outlined in Geshe Kelsang's texts are mostly in line with the presentations of other Tibetan *Gelug* teachers, there is no need to discuss them in detail here. The following analysis of his thought will thus concentrate, not on the content of the teachings, but on the clerical style in which they are articulated and the degree of inclusivism or exclusivism that can be discerned behind them. This thesis argues that, in order to understand Geshe Kelsang's thought, we must situate him within two main contexts: the indigenous Tibetan Buddhist context of the *Gelug* tradition, on the one hand, and its western transplantation and development, on the other. When he came to Britain as the resident teacher of Manjushri Institute he did so as a clerically orientated Tibetan *geshe* who, through the line of Phabongkha Rinpoche, had inherited a particularly exclusive version of *Gelug* Buddhism, symbolised and safeguarded by *Dorje Shugden*. At the time of his arrival and settlement in the West, the nature of Phabongkha's exclusivism, and the practice of relying on *Dorje Shugden*, was being heatedly contested within the exiled Tibetan community, with the Dalai Lama taking a decidedly anti-Phabongkha and anti-*Shugden* stance. Information about the controversy filtered through to the West and, unlike Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche who assimilated the Dalai Lama's recommendations, Geshe Kelsang became more firmly entrenched in his position as an apologist of the Phabongkha tradition. Alongside these indigenous forces, the

increasingly clerical and exclusive orientation of his teachings was influenced by factors arising during the transplantation process itself. Institutional conflicts and power struggles, of the kind that have accompanied the development of other Buddhist organisations in Britain, clearly had a profound effect on him. His ability to witness at close quarters the way in which westerners have approached their Buddhist practice, and also the manner in which other Tibetan *Gelug* teachers have presented *Tsong Khapa*'s tradition in the West, also led to shifts in the emphasis and orientation of his thought.

## 4. GESHE KELSANG'S EARLY THOUGHT

### 4.1. EARLY SOURCES

The sources available for examining the early thought and orientation of Geshe Kelsang are his initial publications: *Meaningful to Behold: The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (1980) and *Clear Light of Bliss: A Commentary to the Practice of Mahamudra in Vajrayana Buddhism* (1982). These texts, like most of his subsequent works, are edited transcripts of oral teachings delivered at Manjushri Institute. The former is a commentary to *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), the classical *Mahāyāna* Buddhist treatise by the eighth-century Indian scholar *Śāntideva*. The latter text is a commentary to the generation and completion stages of Secret Mantra or Tantra.

### 4.2. A GELUGPA TEACHER

Geshe Kelsang's reliance upon the commentaries and texts of *Tsong Khapa* and other prominent *Gelug* figures, his prayers of homage and request to the lineage of *Gelug gurus*, and his commitment to the *Prāsaṅghika Madhyamaka* school of philosophy, all single him out as a representative of the Tibetan *Gelug* tradition. These elements of his presentation remained constant throughout his teaching career and can be discerned in all of his publications up to the present time. The way in which he has understood and articulated his relationship with the religio-political world of Tibetan Buddhism and the contemporary *Gelug* sect has, by contrast, undergone significant changes during his time in the West. During the early period of his thought, Geshe

Kelsang situated himself firmly within the context of the *Gelug* sect by invoking the authority of its two most influential figures: the Dalai Lama and the abbot of *Ganden* monastery (a position held at that time by Ling Rinpoche (1903-1983)).<sup>40</sup> *Meaningful to Behold* was thus dedicated 'to the long life of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and all the other great lamas of the four Tibetan traditions',<sup>41</sup> and *Clear Light of Bliss* included a foreword by 'Yong-dzin Ling Rinpoche, Ninety-seventh Holder of the Throne of Ganden, [and] Tutor to His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama'.<sup>42</sup> During the later period of his thought, Geshe Kelsang's perception of himself and his centres vis-a-vis the contemporary *Gelug* sect changed dramatically, and he came to believe that he could only uphold the tradition of *Tsong Khapa* purely by separating from the degenerate world of Tibetan, and specifically *Gelug* Buddhism. This shift was reflected in a number of revisions he made to the later editions of his texts following his creation of the NKT, such as the omission of the above references to modern *Gelug* authority figures.

### 4.3. CLERICALISM

Samuel has observed how, whilst there is a considerable range of variation between the styles of *Gelug lamas* teaching in the West, on the whole they have tended to be more conservative and traditional than their Tibetan contemporaries emerging from within the *Rimed* movement who have been more unconventional and willing to make 'original and creative adaptations of their Tibetan training'.<sup>43</sup> Figures

<sup>40</sup> A biography of Ling Rinpoche can be found in Graham Coleman, *A Handbook of Tibetan Culture: A Guide to Tibetan Centres and Resources throughout the World* (London: Rider, 1993), pp. 263-264.

<sup>41</sup> *Meaningful to Behold* (Ulverston: Wisdom Publications, 1980), p. viii.

<sup>42</sup> *Clear Light of Bliss* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1982), p. vi-vii.

<sup>43</sup> *Civilized Shamans*, p. 349.



like Geshe Rabten and Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, whose teachings emphasise the clerical and traditional *Gelug* training they received in Tibet, contrast sharply with *Rimed* representatives like Sogyal Rinpoche, Tarthang Tulku and, most famously, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, whose shamanic orientation enabled him, in Bell's terms, to become 'an expert cultural broker and innovator'.

The style of Geshe Kelsang's early texts place him firmly at the clerical end of *Gelug* Buddhism. Both texts present a concise, straightforward and academic exposition of the teachings and practices he received during his training in Tibet. Whilst he differed from other *Gelug* teachers in the early emphasis he placed on teaching Tantric meditation to westerners, his presentation in *Clear Light of Bliss* nevertheless reflects the traditional *Gelug* view that Tantric practice should only be engaged in following extensive academic, philosophical and moral training (p. ix). With regard to the presentation of the teachings, an awareness of and sensitivity to his western context can be discerned. Whilst Tibetan illustrations and stories abound in his texts, he attempts to relate the teachings to westerners by using analogies they can relate to, such as the comparison of a Tantric trainee who lacks *bodhicitta* with 'a person who uses pound notes to light his cigarette or a Rolls Royce to cart manure'.<sup>44</sup> His sensitivity towards his western context in terms of presentation does not, however, extend to changing the substantive content of the teachings. He acknowledges that westerners may find certain aspects of Buddhist doctrine, practice and cosmology difficult to accept, but is unwilling to adapt or de-literalise such problematic areas to make them more acceptable. On the subject of rebirth, for example, he emphasises

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<sup>44</sup> *Meaningful to Behold*, p. 91. 'Bodhicitta' refers to the altruistic aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

that western trainees must 'come to understand and at least tentatively accept the existence of past and future lives'.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, he argues that the difficulties westerners have in accepting stories about *Bodhisattvas* stem from the fact that they 'have not yet experienced the taste of the mahayana dharma'.<sup>46</sup> The emphasis again is upon westerners making the effort to appreciate and assimilate the teachings rather than adapting them to fit their rationalistic sensibilities.

#### 4.4. DEGREES OF INCLUSIVISM AND EXCLUSIVISM

*Meaningful to Behold* and *Clear Light of Bliss* incorporate both inclusive and exclusive elements. Geshe Kelsang's early inclusivism is indicated by his references to various practices that are 'recommended by the lamas of all four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism'<sup>47</sup> and by his veneration of the great *lamas* of other schools, such as 'the fully enlightened Indian master Guru Padmasambhava'.<sup>48</sup> Both texts also include an extended notes section and bibliography, listing the resources that he found useful in writing his commentary and referring the reader to other authors for wider reading and edification. These sections include texts by Buddhist authors, both of *Gelug* and non-*Gelug* schools<sup>49</sup> and other non-Tibetan traditions (e.g. *Theravāda* and *Zen*), as well as works by western translators and academics.<sup>50</sup> The General Diploma taught by Geshe Kelsang also recommended a wide selection of books and these were stocked by the Manjushri Institute bookshop.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> Geshe Kelsang refers, for example, to the work of Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, a *lama* in the *Karma-Kagyū* tradition.

<sup>50</sup> Such as Edward Conze, H.V. Guenther, Jeffrey Hopkins, Robert Thurmann and W.Y. Evans-Wentz.

Such inclusive features notwithstanding, the early texts indicate that Geshe Kelsang's primary orientation was exclusive. This is expressed through his discussion of how the perfection of effort can be increased through the power of steadfastness. In this section he encourages students to commit themselves to their chosen practice and follow it exclusively of others:

It is very unskilful to neglect one path in favour of another, only to abandon that path in order to begin a third. This erratic type of behaviour creates unwholesome imprints on our mind leading to a future inability to complete our practices of dharma [...]. This is an important point because nowadays many students practice like this. They jump from one meditation to another and therefore never accomplish anything.<sup>51</sup>

His critique in this passage of students who 'jump from one meditation to another' is probably an allusion both to Tibetan practitioners within the *Rimed* movement who follow multiple lineages of practice, and to western trainees encountered at Manjushri Institute who adopted a similar approach to their Buddhist training.

To understand how Geshe Kelsang's exclusive orientation was reflected in *Clear Light of Bliss*, it is useful to compare aspects of his commentary on the Gelug tradition of *Mahāmudrā* with a recently published commentary by the Dalai Lama.<sup>52</sup> Although the textual basis of both commentaries is the same,<sup>53</sup> and in spite of the fact that Geshe Kelsang and the Dalai Lama both received the lineage of teachings from Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche,<sup>54</sup> certain aspects of their discussion are quite different in

<sup>51</sup> *Meaningful to Behold*, p. 197.

<sup>52</sup> H.H. the Dalai Lama and Alexander Berzin, *The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Both rely upon the First Panchen Lama *Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen*'s root text and auto-commentary to *Mahamudra*, entitled *A Root Text for the Precious Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra: The Main Road of the Triumphant Ones* and *'A Root Text for the Gelug/Kagyu Lineage of Mahamudra': A Lamp for Further Illumination* respectively.

<sup>54</sup> The Dalai Lama, like Geshe Kelsang, identifies Trijang Rinpoche as his 'root guru' (*The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra*, p. 170).

emphasis. The Dalai Lama argues for a radically inclusive position that seeks to harmonise and reconcile the teachings and meditational practices of the different Tibetan traditions. He is particularly concerned to show that there is no ultimate contradiction between the gradual, logical and rationalistic approach of the *Prāsaṅghika Madhyamaka* school of philosophy as transmitted by the *Gelug* tradition, on the one hand, and the more imaginative, immediate and experiential approach of the *Dzogchen* system of the *Nyingma* tradition, on the other.

According to Samuel, the more 'clerical' elements of the *Gelug* tradition have opposed *Dzogchen* because of 'its tendency to use positive imagery to describe the state of Enlightenment',<sup>55</sup> a tendency that derives largely from the greater emphasis placed within the *Nyingma* upon *Yogacara* conceptualisations of the path rather than the *Madhyamaka*. By reconciling and affirming the value of the different conceptualisations of enlightenment found within *Gelug* and *Dzogchen* teachings, the Dalai Lama situates himself firmly at the shamanic and inclusive end of the *Gelug* tradition. Geshe Kelsang's commentary, by contrast, is more clerical and exclusive. In it he maintains that 'pure' practitioners within *all* the Tibetan Buddhist traditions uphold the *Prāsaṅghika Madhyamaka* view of emptiness and that, without this view, 'there is no chance of their attaining liberation or enlightenment, no matter how much they meditate'.<sup>56</sup> There is no explicit mention here of *Nyingma* Buddhism, but the hardline approach taken towards the *Prāsaṅghika Madhyamaka* school clearly rules *Dzogchen* out as a valid or legitimate path to enlightenment. Coupled with this is his emphasis upon the importance of refuting 'mistaken or misleading teachings' (p. 153).

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<sup>55</sup> *Civilized Shamans*, p. 464.

<sup>56</sup> *Clear Light of Bliss*, p. 192.

According to Geshe Kelsang,

The ugly, unfortunate result of not understanding pure Dharma and of following misleading teachings that pretend to be pure Dharma is sectarianism. This is one of the greatest hindrances to the flourishing of Dharma, especially in the West. Anything that gives rise to such an evil, destructive mind should be eliminated as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.<sup>57</sup>

Again, no explicit mention is made to *Dzogchen* teachings, but in light of his assertion that the *Prāsāṅghika Madhyamaka* is the purest view and 'the ultimate intention of Buddha himself' (p. 190), another refutation of *Dzogchen* is implied. The view of sectarianism presented here contrasts sharply with that of the Dalai Lama who, in his commentary, stresses the importance of adopting an attitude of impartiality and respectful belief in the value of 'all the Buddhist lineages of Tibet - Sakya, Kagyu, Nyingma and Gelug - and likewise respect for Bon [the indigenous religion of Tibet] and all the other religions and spiritual traditions we find in the world'.<sup>58</sup> Rather than holding their own views 'as being the only ones proper and everything else as being at fault', Buddhist practitioners can 'broaden and deepen our understanding and practice of whatever is our main tradition' by studying and practising 'as widely as we can the various traditions of Buddhism':

For example, if Gelug practitioners study a dzogchen text, they gain a special and unique understanding of the Nyingma teachings on the basis of their Gelug training that can further enhance their Gelug studies and practice. The same is true of dzogchen practitioners who study a Gelug text, and so forth.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.154.

<sup>58</sup> *The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra*, p. 261.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

## 5. PROBLEMS AT THE PRIORY AND THE 'BIG SPLIT'

In the late 1970s, problems were beginning to emerge at the priory. By 1984, the situation had become so dire that the Institute opted out of the FPMT framework altogether, a development sometimes referred to within the FPMT today as the 'big split'. The period between 1979 and 1984 was crucial to the development of *Gelug* Buddhism in Britain, changing the fortunes of the FPMT in this country and laying the early foundations for the development of the NKT.

### 5.1. EARLY CONFLICTS

In 1979, a situation of conflict developed between Lama Yeshe and the Institute's Resident Teacher Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, when the latter decided to open up a Buddhist centre in York under his own spiritual direction rather than under the auspices of the FPMT. The Madhyamaka Centre was opened at the request of some of Geshe Kelsang's students in January 1979 with a dedication ceremony and film about the Dalai Lama. Lama Yeshe and the CPMT objected to this development because they felt Geshe Kelsang was creating the potential for disharmony and was 'splitting the energies' that he should have channelled into the Institute. Their concerns were based upon the experience of Chenrezig Institute in Australia whose teacher, Geshe Loden, had recently split away from the FPMT to develop his own Buddhist network. Although Geshe Kelsang maintained that the 'opening of the Centre in York caused not one moment of confusion or disharmony',<sup>60</sup> he was asked to resign so that a more

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<sup>60</sup> Taken from 'Eradicating Wrong Views' (dated 27 October 1983), a letter written in response to an FPMT report concerning the deteriorating situation at Manjushri Institute called 'A Report on Recent Events at Manjushri Institute' (dated 1 October 1983). Both of these documents were sent to all FPMT centres around

suitable *geshe*, one committed totally to FPMT objectives, could take over as Resident Teacher. This prompted a response from the Institute's students, many of whom had developed a stronger connection with Geshe Kelsang, their daily teacher, than with Lamas Yeshe and Zopa who visited the priory only rarely.<sup>61</sup> They petitioned Geshe Kelsang to continue teaching them and it was on this basis that he decided to stay.

## 5.2. RESISTANCE TO CENTRALISATION

This marked the beginning of a rapidly deteriorating relationship between Geshe Kelsang and his students at the Institute, on the one hand, and Lama Yeshe and the FPMT administration, on the other. Lama Yeshe's project of defining and implementing an efficient organisational and administrative structure within the FPMT carried the potential for friction at a local level. The organisation's affiliated centres had initially been largely autonomous and self-regulating, but towards the late-1970s were increasingly subject to central management and control. The problems at Chenrezig Institute resulted from this centralising trend and in turn they reinforced for the FPMT administration the importance of developing a clear organisational structure.

The conflict that was to develop between the FPMT and Manjushri Institute might have been avoided altogether if the centre had been under the direction of a student with a strong commitment to Lama Yeshe's vision, or if Lama Yeshe had

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the world, as well as to the Office of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala.

<sup>61</sup> It is important not to over-simplify the situation at the Institute in terms of the student's allegiances to the Tibetan *lamas*. From the students' point of view, the conflict was primarily a campaign for greater autonomy from the FPMT organisation, and not a rejection of the spiritual authority of Lama Yeshe. The exclusivism that is encouraged by Geshe Kelsang today was introduced only gradually at the Institute. Most of the longer-standing students continued to feel respect and devotion towards Lamas Yeshe and Lama Zopa for many years after the dispute.

moved the Central Office to Ulverston instead of to Italy in 1982. The management committee at the Institute, however, though originally directed by one of Lama Yeshe's closest disciples,<sup>62</sup> had since 1981 been made up principally of Geshe Kelsang's close students who were known as the 'Priory Group'. The Priory Group became increasingly dissatisfied with the FPMT's increasingly centralised organisation. Directives from Central Office came across as distant and authoritarian<sup>63</sup> and they were often in conflict with how the Priory Group perceived the Institute's interests at a local level. The FPMT's designs to use Conishead Priory as an asset to provide funds for projects elsewhere within the FPMT network, for example, and the legal-financial liability Manjushri Institute had for Wisdom Publications, were considered to be particularly unreasonable strains which threatened the Institute's existence.<sup>64</sup> These formed part of a more general malaise with the situation, however, summarised by one NKT disciple, a member of the original Priory Group, in this way:

This was what was so difficult in the early years, the feeling that people here didn't really have any control over what was going on. And yet, year by year, we were left to run the place. We were here holding the place up, building it with our hands, trying to financially keep it going, keep the central heating running [...] And yet someone else, who had no connection, could say to us, 'Right this is going to happen there, or that lama's leaving and this one's coming and you've got to pay for this translator to fly in' [...] People got fed

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<sup>62</sup> This disciple was one of the co-founders of the Institute and the Director of the FPMT's Central Office from 1987 to 1997. In 1981 Lama Yeshe asked him to become the Director of Lama Tsongkhapa Institute, Italy, due to an internal crisis there. This move left Lama Yeshe with a leadership at the Institute that was not strongly committed to his vision creating the conditions for the ensuing conflict of authority to develop.

<sup>63</sup> This has been verified by an FPMT student from that time who has a detailed understanding of the dispute: 'Some of the letters that I've seen that [Central Office] wrote were insensitive, and not skilled in the ways of man-management. [They] didn't really know how to deal with people several thousands of miles away. They sounded as if [they] were issuing orders' (FPMT Interview, July 1995).

<sup>64</sup> The problems with Wisdom Publications not only concerned the financial liability incumbent upon the Institute. Following the publication of *Meaningful to Behold* and *Clear Light of Bliss*, Geshe Kelsang refused to offer further publications to Wisdom. He began to object - as did Geshe Konchog Tsewang - to the FPMT policy that the teachings given by the *geshes* in its centres should be offered to Wisdom for publication, arguing that 'these teachings are Manjushri Institute teachings, not FPMT teachings' ('Eradicating Wrong Views') the profits of which should go to the Institute rather than to the FPMT.



up with being told what to do by somebody else who didn't seem to have any particular awareness or connection [...] On one hand we were running a very viable and big centre, one of the earliest centres in the West. And at the same time there was the feeling that someone else was telling us what to do. And that just didn't work. There were two things going on that were not compatible really. So in the end we parted company.<sup>65</sup>

### 5.3. CALLS FOR INDEPENDENCE

The Priory Group thus became increasingly unresponsive to directives coming from Central Office. By 1983, its desire for limited autonomy had evolved with the backing of a large section of the Institute's community, into a campaign for full-blown independence. The FPMT administration opposed the Priory Group's drive for self-determination, rejecting its objectives as a 'narrow' distortion of the Institute's original purpose within Lama Yeshe's 'universal' and inter-connected network. One FPMT student from that time describes the conflict like this:

The whole dispute took off with, essentially, Geshe Kelsang saying, 'I'm staying here for the concerns of my students who have asked me to stay; my students who have put in all this energy in creating this building, all this effort', and Lama Yeshe saying, 'Look, what I'm about is creating a world-wide organisation for the preservation of the *Mahāyāna* tradition in all countries under the auspices of the Dalai Lama and I want you to be part of this team working for the same thing. And I don't want you to go out on a limb. And what you have in England is a centre which I see as part of something much bigger; it is a part of a bigger plan. It isn't just a monastery; it's part of a bigger whole, it's part of my mandala.' This was the whole essence of the dispute.<sup>66</sup>

Lama Yeshe's attempts to reassert his authority over the Institute in 1983 were unsuccessful and there was an open conflict of authority between the Priory Group

<sup>65</sup> NKT Interview, October 1995.

<sup>66</sup> FPMT Interview, July 1995.

and the FPMT administration.<sup>67</sup> Geshe Kelsang and his students were now intent upon securing fundamental alterations in the nature of the Institute's relationship with the FPMT, and ultimately in separating the two altogether.<sup>68</sup> Towards this end they put pressure upon Lama Yeshe - in his capacity as Spiritual Director of the Trust - to authorise certain constitutional modifications that would give the Priory Group greater legal representation with respect to the Institute's future development.<sup>69</sup> Lama Yeshe reluctantly agreed to this and, in February 1984, meetings between representatives of both 'sides' were arranged and mediated by the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in London.<sup>70</sup> These meetings resulted in an agreement 'to resolve the dispute and improve communication'<sup>71</sup> between the Institute and the FPMT. Towards this end the existing Trustees of the Institute - mainly FPMT representatives - resigned and a new set, representing both 'sides' equally, were appointed through a mutually acceptable mechanism. According to the agreement, the new Trustees were to pursue talks that would separate Wisdom Publications from the Institute and produce a new constitution enabling the Institute to remain within the FPMT whilst ensuring the

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<sup>67</sup> Lama Yeshe tried to reassert his authority by appointing new Directors to replace the Director that had been appointed - against FPMT policy - by the Priory Group. These were prevented from taking up the Director's post upon their arrival at the priory in May 1983. The priory was now totally self-governing.

<sup>68</sup> Although the resolution that was brought about early in 1984 involved both sides agreeing to create a constitution that suited the interests both of the FPMT and the Institute, it is quite clear, from the statements made by Geshe Kelsang in 1983 and events subsequent to the February agreement, that the Priory Group was interested only in securing complete independence from the Foundation.

<sup>69</sup> The methods used by the Priory Group in pressing Lama Yeshe to make these constitutional concessions were extreme, involving the threat that unless their conditions were met then certain illegalities of the existing Trustees would be publicly exposed. These methods caused great resentment within the FPMT administration which agreed to the demands 'simply because the alternative of a legal battle between Tibetan Buddhists, in full public view, would be extremely damaging to the Buddha Dharma, and the image of Tibetan people and their cause' ('Report on Recent Events at Manjushri Institute' as quoted in 'Eradicating Wrong Views'). According to Geshe Kelsang, the Priory Group 'also realised that it would not be good to initiate legal proceedings' (ibid), but these measures were rationalised as 'wrathful' rather than unethical.

<sup>70</sup> The involvement of representatives of the Dalai Lama in the affairs of the Institute was provided for in the original Trust Deed.

<sup>71</sup> *Wisdom: Magazine of the FPMT*, 2 (1984), p. 49.

autonomy it desired.<sup>72</sup>

#### 5.4. SEPARATION FROM THE FPMT

The dispute between the Institute and the FPMT, however, was never resolved. In the wake of Lama Yeshe's death in March 1984 the FPMT administration quickly lost interest in what became seen as a fruitless case. The Institute was no longer, from the FPMT's perspective, the dynamic and spiritual hub of the organisation that it once was. This was partly because the conflicts there had prompted many of Lama Yeshe's closest students to move away to different parts of the network, but there were other reasons. Most of the monks and nuns within the IMI, for example, had already moved away from the Institute to continue their studies in the newly created Nalanda monastery and Dorje Palmo nunnery in France.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, although the legal-financial connection still needed to be severed, Wisdom Publications had, for pragmatic reasons, already moved its offices away from the Institute to London in 1982. These developments appear to have both provided the Priory Group with extra legitimation for their claim to self-determination, whilst also enabling the FPMT administration to prioritise the development of the rest of its network and, in many ways, to consign Manjushri Institute to its past. From this time, then, Manjushri Institute began to develop primarily under the guidance of Geshe Kelsang and without reference to the FPMT.<sup>74</sup>

The meetings between the appointed Trustees continued for many years but

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<sup>72</sup> The agreement was drawn up and signed to by all parties on 14 February 1984. It was also agreed that the new constitution should be completed and implemented by mid-1985.

<sup>73</sup> Founded in 1981-1982.

<sup>74</sup> This was indicated, for example, by the Institute's removal of the FPMT letterhead and logo from its stationary, pamphlets and booklets.

they could not agree upon a constitution that suited all parties. The determination of Geshe Kelsang and the Priory Group to separate from the parent organisation was uncompromising, and this was a position that only hardened during the following years making the negotiations little more than a meaningless ritual. In 1991, through the successful exploitation of a legal loop-hole, the assets of Manjushri Institute finally fell under the sole control of the Priory Group.<sup>75</sup> Within a year the Institute had a new name, Manjushri Mahayana Buddhist Centre, and a new constitution that embodied the objectives of the NKT, Geshe Kelsang's new Buddhist movement. These objectives, as will become clear, are very different from those of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa as they were established in the Institute's original Trust Deed and as they continue to be manifested throughout the FPMT network.

## 5.5. UNDERSTANDING THE DISPUTE

The conflict that developed between Manjushri Institute and the FPMT needs to be understood within two related contexts. Firstly, the dispute has a practical and institutional dimension. Tensions inevitably arise within international Buddhist organisations when local 'Dharma communities', such as the Manjushri Institute, are centrally governed. These tensions are likely to be most acute during the early years of the network's development, when the nature and shape of authority structures within the institution are originally being hammered out and implemented. Furthermore, whilst arising initially from organisational developments these conflicts

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<sup>75</sup> The FPMT administration, it seems, could have challenged this move and the legal case against the Priory Group, which was considered to have unlawfully appropriated the assets of Manjushri Institute from the FPMT, was researched. By this time, however, the Institute was a remote concern and so 'They let it go. The view was that they'd be wasting a lot of money and time, and be running the risk of adverse publicity that would not really serve anybody' (FPMT Interview, July 1995).

have, in the case of the Institute and the FPMT, precipitated further shifts. The subsequent development of the structures of both the FPMT and NKT were greatly influenced by this conflict. The main lesson the FPMT seemed to learn concerned the importance of effective communication within a centralised organisation. The dispute prompted 'a deep analysis of the dynamics of a worldwide Dharma organisation, inter-personal relationships and long - and short - range communication'.<sup>76</sup> The FPMT's publications began to include articles outlining the 'lines of communication and authority within the organization'<sup>77</sup> and during the following years the 'Handbook for the FPMT' was drafted to explain the purpose and shape both of the network and of its member centres.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the structure and organisation of the NKT was later developed - either consciously or unconsciously - in light of the Institute's struggles with the FPMT. The proud boasts of NKT students today about the de-centralised nature of the organisation and the autonomy given to its centres should all be understood within this context.<sup>79</sup>

The second, and equally significant context within which the dispute should be placed is cross-cultural. Samuel has noted that international networks of Buddhist centres are liable to fragmentation and break-up because they are total entities 'composed of sub-units of markedly different type and structure'.<sup>80</sup> The resident *geshes* are important 'sub-units' within the FPMT and as long as Tibetan teachers continue to be brought into the organisation there will always be the potential for

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<sup>76</sup> *Wisdom: Magazine of the FPMT*, 2 (1984), p. 49.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>78</sup> The first draft of the FPMT Handbook appeared in February 1987. I will later demonstrate how parts of the 'Handbook' were formulated to ensure that the problems experienced with Manjushri Institute are not encountered again.

<sup>79</sup> These claims will be discussed in more detail later.

<sup>80</sup> 'Tibetan Buddhism as a World Religion'.

disruption because there is, as we have seen, 'more than one way of being a *geshe*'.<sup>81</sup> The problems the FPMT administration had in getting the Tibetan teachers in its centres to accept the 'Geshe Agreement' during the late 1970s illustrates this.<sup>82</sup> Not all of the *geshes* shared Lama Yeshe's vision of *Gelug* Buddhism in the West or understood themselves to be part of it. This was the case with Geshe Loden, the teacher at the Chenrezig Institute in Australia, who opted out of the organisation in 1979 and subsequently established his own network of Centres.<sup>83</sup> It was also the case with Geshe Kelsang who, when presented with a Geshe Agreement at the time of the Madhyamaka Centre dispute, refused to sign it and claimed that 'I have had nothing to do with the FPMT before or after 1979'.<sup>84</sup> Whilst the FPMT's structures now ensure a degree of stability, senior students within the organisation have informed me that, even today, it is misleading to think of its teachers as 'FPMT *geshes*'. These *lamas* come to the West with various personal agendas and ideological perspectives and 'probably consider themselves to be autonomous, within the limits of the contract they are these days requested to agree to'.<sup>85</sup>

Lama Yeshe and Geshe Kelsang represented very different positions within their indigenous *Gelug* context in terms of the classical division between 'inclusive'

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<sup>81</sup> *Civilized Shamans*, p. 337.

<sup>82</sup> This was part of the FPMT's attempts to develop its infrastructure. By this time, Lama Yeshe had 'started to do things like get contracts from people who work for the FPMT' and as part of this 'he asked a number of teachers to sign a contract stating their relationship with the FPMT' (FPMT Interview, July 1995). Nowadays the acceptance by Tibetan teachers of the Geshe/Teacher Agreement is a prerequisite of their being given a position in an FPMT centre. This outlines their responsibility 'for the successful development and harmony of the students within the Foundation as an international whole as well as in the particular centre where they are residing' (*Handbook for the FPMT*, p. 65).

<sup>83</sup> The first of these, the Tibetan Buddhist Society, was established in Melbourne in 1980. Geshe Loden and his network have retained a friendly and cooperative relationship with the FPMT.

<sup>84</sup> 'Eradicating Wrong Views'. It appears that the other resident *geshe* at the Institute, Geshe Jampa Tekchog, was also unwilling to sign the contract. In light of what close students of his have told me about him and his relationship with the FPMT, it is quite likely that Geshe Konchog Tsewang didn't sign one either.

<sup>85</sup> Personal communication, July 1997.

and 'exclusive' orientations, as outlined earlier. Their differing orientations were carried with them from Tibet into exile, and later informed their conflicting visions of how *Gelug* Buddhism should be presented in the West. Although Lama Yeshe never encouraged the abolition of religious differences and followed the tradition of *Tsong Khapa* strictly, his orientation was more 'inclusive' than 'exclusive'. His Buddhist interpretation of Christmas, published as *Silent Mind, Holy Mind* (1978), provides a good illustration of how he, like the Dalai Lama, went 'beyond the traditional confines that so often separate religions'.<sup>86</sup> His inclusivism was also expressed through the global, ecumenical and liberal nature of his Dharma network. According to Samuel's distinction, Lama Yeshe was more 'shamanic' than 'clerical' in that he never completed his *geshe* degree and favoured non-traditional methods of presenting teachings that were often frowned upon by his more conservative peers. By contrast, Geshe Kelsang was more 'exclusive' and 'clerical' in orientation. The founding of Madhyamaka Centre independently in 1979 provided the earliest indication that he did not share Lama Yeshe's inclusive vision, and his early teachings were exclusive in tone. Also, whereas Lama Yeshe was flamboyant and unconventional, in a style reminiscent of the Tibetan 'crazy *siddhas*',<sup>87</sup> Geshe Kelsang has always favoured traditional and academic styles of behaviour and presentation.

Lama Yeshe's and Geshe Kelsang's differing ideological perspectives provided the conditions for the organisational dispute between the Institute and the FPMT to escalate. Geshe Kelsang was already predisposed to support his students in

<sup>86</sup> *Wisdom: Magazine of the FPMT*, 2 (1984), p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> According to Samuel, the 'saintly madman' belongs firmly within the shamanic modality of Tibetan religious life: 'Often rough and crude in their behavior, with no respect for conventional social standards, these lamas are nevertheless respected for their attainment and their magical power' (*Civilized Shamans*, p. 304).

their struggle with the FPMT administration because the organisation was inspired by a vision that he did not totally agree with. This indicates how practical and organisational conflicts can be exacerbated when communities contain Tibetan *geshes*, and especially when strong *guru*-student bonds have been established, such as at Manjushri Institute where Geshe Kelsang was the only resident teacher to bestow Tantric empowerments. The statements he made during the dispute reflected his differing ideological position. His criticisms of Lama Yeshe and the FPMT, for example, would often be couched in terms of the destruction of the 'purity' of the Dharma. According to Geshe Kelsang, the creation of the central governing organisation of the FPMT by Lama Yeshe had 'mixed the Dharma with politics' and thereby destroyed it:

It is the FPMT organisation which makes Lama Yeshe's Dharma work impure. However [...] it must be said that Lama Yeshe himself also mixed Dharma and politics and this is principally what makes his Dharma work impure.<sup>88</sup>

The notion of 'purity' was to become one of the defining characteristics of Geshe Kelsang's presentation of Buddhism in Britain through the NKT. Whilst it would be inaccurate to suggest that the same degree of exclusivism characterising his vision of Buddhism in the West today also characterised his vision in 1983, the purity/impurity polemic he employed during the dispute does indicate a leaning towards the clerical and exclusive pole. This orientation lent support to the unfolding conflict and it appears, in turn, to have been hardened by it.

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<sup>88</sup> 'Eradicating Wrong Views'.



## 5.6. PRACTITIONER RESPONSES

This was a very difficult period both for the students living at the Institute and also for those within the FPMT administration, and it has clearly left some deep emotional scars.<sup>89</sup> One of the main problems the students had at the time of the dispute was that of divided loyalties. Even though the dispute was primarily organisational and did not necessarily entail any breaking of spiritual bonds between the students and the *lamas*, to support Geshe Kelsang or Lama Yeshe still implied a rejection of the other on some level:

When Geshe Kelsang Gyatso openly disagreed with Lama Yeshe [...] many students were shocked. It seemed to them that they were required to choose between the two lamas. Most students regarded both Lama Yeshe and Geshe Kelsang Gyatso as their Spiritual Guides.<sup>90</sup>

Another problem the students experienced was that of reconciling the contradiction between their images of Tibetan *lamas* as 'highly realised' beings and the apparent state of conflict that had developed between them:

There was disbelief among most of the students as to how can two lamas appear to be disagreeing in this way, what does this mean?<sup>91</sup>

The mental anguish experienced by many of the Institute's students at the time of the dispute, clearly resulted largely from the same kind of idealistic images and fantasies of Tibetan Buddhism that Bishop has observed within western Dharma communities.

Students today are often unwilling to admit that there was actually any conflict

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<sup>89</sup> Many students nowadays are reluctant to discuss this period and the explanations of those who will are often loaded with a bias that tends to vindicate or vilify Geshe Kelsang, depending upon the nature of their involvement.

<sup>90</sup> FPMT interview, July 1995.

<sup>91</sup> FPMT Interview, July 1995.

between Geshe Kelsang and Lama Yeshe at all, and they will tend to talk of the conflict as one that was solely between the western students. One of Geshe Kelsang's disciples, in discussing the dispute, said 'I only mean it administratively. I don't mean it on a lama level'<sup>92</sup>, and a disciple of Lama Yeshe from that time also maintains that,

I've never heard Lama Yeshe or Geshe Kelsang criticise each other [...] These criticisms were being tossed about, not by the lamas, but by the students.<sup>93</sup>

The way in which these students have rationalised the conflict could be seen as a reflection of the western inability to bear with contradiction and ambivalence within the Tibetan Buddhist system. Alternatively, their statements could be interpreted as the desire of mature western students not to speak ill of their teachers. These particular students have been part of the Buddhist 'scene' since the early days of Tibetan Buddhism in Britain and are well-grounded in its etiquette, comportment and protocol. In contrast to the statements made by long-standing disciples of Geshe Kelsang and Lama Yeshe, the statements of more recent disciples concerning the early disputes carry a different import. One disciple of Geshe Kelsang who had no direct experience of the dispute himself but knew a little of it, explains how,

Geshe Kelsang came over in 1977 and there was some kind of a split. But I can't imagine for an instant that there was ever any friction between Lama Yeshe and Geshe Kelsang. Two highly realised beings aren't going to fall out over a thing like that. They know what's going on.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> NKT Interview, October 1995.

<sup>93</sup> FPMT Interview, April 1995.

<sup>94</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CRYSTALISATION OF THE NKT

#### 1. THE INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT OF MANJUSHRI INSTITUTE

From 1984 the Manjushri Institute continued to develop independently of the FPMT framework. Although Geshe Konchog Tsewang continued to teach Geshe Studies to students there, the main source of authority at the Institute was Geshe Kelsang.<sup>1</sup> Of the two, it was Geshe Kelsang who had always taken the greater interest in the running and direction of the Institute and most of the students there - though close to both *geshes* - were closer to him.<sup>2</sup>

According to students who were there during this period, there were no dramatic changes at the Institute which continued to develop along much the same lines as before. Although it was now self-governing, no longer referring to the overarching FPMT framework, life at the Institute continued to reflect the kind of approach that had been established within FPMT centres. The students at the Institute may have felt stifled by the FPMT's organisation but most continued to share Lama Yeshe's liberal, progressive and inclusive vision of bringing *Gelug* Buddhism to the West. The atmosphere after the split, a disciple of Geshe Kelsang's from that time recalls, was 'sombre', but otherwise she was,

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<sup>1</sup> Some FPMT students today present the split as a Geshe Kelsang driven campaign, pure and simple, but this is a misrepresentation. Although it is clear that Geshe Kelsang was, along with the Priory Group, the main player in the dispute, the decision to campaign for self-determination also received the support of Geshe Konchog Tsewang.

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, Geshe Kelsang had been at the Institute much longer than Geshe Konchog who only arrived in 1982. Secondly, Geshe Konchog's study programme was more specialised and didn't reach as wide an audience as Geshe Kelsang's more generalised programme. And thirdly, as noted, of the two *geshes* it was only Geshe Kelsang who taught Tantra at the Institute. The commitments entailed in receiving Tantric teachings from Geshe Kelsang were much deeper than the type of relationship most students had with Geshe Konchog.

not aware of any obvious changes at Manjushri Institute resulting directly from its new, independent status [...] There was still an attitude of openness at the priory. Almost every student took direction from both Geshe Kelsang and Geshe Konchog.<sup>3</sup>

The 'Manjushri Institute for Buddhist Studies Handbook' (1984), printed shortly after the split from the FPMT, indicates how little life at the Institute had changed. This paints a picture of a community practising *Gelug* Buddhism under the guidance both of its resident *geshes* 'and of visiting fully qualified Buddhist masters'. The booklet advertises courses in 'related subjects' like yoga and western psychology, and boasts that,

the Institute library has more than 3,000 books: over a third are on buddhism and the others cover aspects of religion, philosophy and psychology.

The only obvious difference between this and earlier publications emerging from the Priory Press is that the Institute is described as 'a free association of individuals' rather than as a member of the FPMT. Whilst the booklet acknowledges that the Institute was founded by Lama Thubten Yeshe, it does not mention the FPMT organisation or suggest that the Institute belongs, or ever has belonged, to a larger Dharma network.<sup>4</sup> The revisionism characterising the presentation of the NKT today can thus be traced back to this time.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Geshe Kelsang, July 1995.

<sup>4</sup> This is in marked contrast, for example, to the 'Manjushri Institute College of Buddhist Studies Prospectus 1982' which both carries the FPMT logo and identifies the Institute as 'a member of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition'.

## 2. GESHE KELSANG'S EXCLUSIVISM HARDENS

Over the subsequent years, Geshe Kelsang's exclusive orientation appears to have hardened. We can only speculate about the reasons for this but the rift with the FPMT certainly seems to have been a contributory factor. Some students also suggest that the successive deaths of major *Gelug* lineage-holders in the early 1980s, particularly those of his root-guru Trijang Rinpoche (d.1981) and also of Song Rinpoche (d.1983), had heightened Geshe Kelsang's awareness of the fragility of *Tsong Khapa's* tradition in the modern era and given him a growing sense of his own responsibility in preserving it. He thus began to encourage a more exclusive developmental model in his centres, encouraging them to practise only Buddhist, and specifically *Gelug*, teachings. This was not always favourably received within the centres, as the following explanation of the process by a member of Vajravarahi Centre in Preston indicates:

Our first centre was a bit of a mixed bag. Because there were people who were just interested in Buddhism and people interested in different kinds of meditation and esoteric ideas who would come along. And they were trying to bring all these things in [...] And it was all a bit of a mish-mash. And then we got an instruction from Manjushri Institute. Geshe-la thought it would be better if we decided to concentrate our efforts just on being a Buddhist centre and promoting the Buddha's teachings. So that caused a little bit of a stir. There were some people who said, 'Well, that's not very religious'. They thought it was sectarian, keeping all these other things out, when they weren't doing any harm. But looking back on it it was definitely the right thing to do because all these other things just dilute your energy. If you want to achieve enlightenment you've got to concentrate on one thing. So that weeded out a few people. But the people who were left were a stronger group. That would have been about 1985-1986.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996. A similar 'tightening-up' process, occurring at around the same time, has also been described by ex-students of Chenrezig Centre, Lancaster. This process was explained by one student as Geshe Kelsang's attempt to 'protect and preserve the purity of the lineage'. As with Vajravarahi Centre it caused a split in the group between those who wanted to retain its openness to different philosophies and practices, and those who embraced the more narrow, specifically *Gelug* Buddhist approach (Informal discussions, May and July 1996).

The increasingly focused approach encouraged by Geshe Kelsang in his centres did not at this stage entail an absolute commitment to him at the expense of other *lamas* and visiting Buddhist teachers were still welcomed. These were mainly highly-regarded *Gelug lamas*, such as Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Geshe Rabten. Occasionally even famous non-*Gelug* Buddhist teachers visited the Institute.<sup>6</sup> This indicates how Geshe Kelsang's increasing *Gelug* exclusivism needed to be balanced against the material needs of the Institute which generated a significant portion of its capital by organising external courses. It also suggests that the hardening of his approach was not easily assimilated by the Institute's students. The history of the Institute was rooted within that of the FPMT and the approach that characterised this organisation had left an enduring legacy among its students. Many students at the Institute, for example, still liked to travel to India and Nepal to meet different *lamas* and receive various Tantric empowerments, a pursuit that was common among FPMT students and was encouraged by the organisation.<sup>7</sup> Geshe Kelsang discouraged this because he felt it distracted from the education programmes at the Institute but in spite of his voiced objections many students saw no contradiction and continued to go. Over the years he would become increasingly exasperated with the enduring FPMT-style of practice within the Institute. It was an obstacle to the successful implementation of his own approach, and illustrates the point made by Waterhouse that religious authority 'has to be recognized as well as claimed'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Manjushri Institute received visits from famous teachers like Maezumi Roshi (1984), Ajahn Sumedho (1987), and Thich Nhat Hanh (late 1980s).

<sup>7</sup> Lama Yeshe created the 'Enlightened Experience Celebrations' in the early 1980s for western students in the FPMT to spend time in India and Nepal receiving teachings from high *lamas* like the Dalai Lama.

<sup>8</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 30. There are other reasons why it took time for Geshe Kelsang's wishes to be understood and implemented at the Institute. One student from those days describes him as a charismatic teacher who *could* have made successful demands of his students, but who was reluctant to impose something that would feel 'artificial': 'he wanted the initiative for changes being made, as much as possible,

Due to its history and the orientations of its students, the development of Manjushri Institute was thus quite different from that of Geshe Kelsang's other centres. His students outside of the Institute did not share its FPMT legacy to the same degree, were more focused upon his spiritual direction and were thus more receptive to his increasing exclusivism. It was within these centres, particularly the Madhyamaka Centre in York, that the distinguishing features of the NKT's emerging identity were originally developed and implemented. Although it is described today as the 'Mother Centre' of the NKT, when the NKT was actually created in 1991, Manjushri Institute by all accounts, had some catching up to do.

### 3. THE GROWTH OF MADHYAMAKA CENTRE

#### 3.1. EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Madhyamaka Centre was founded in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, but it was moved to York shortly afterwards. The group was led by an experienced lay Buddhist who was one of Manjushri Institute's original community members. He taught basic, practical Buddhism which drew heavily upon his personal experience and the teachings of different traditions. One of the centre's early students recalls that the group 'was very open and members all felt that they had the freedom to investigate other spiritual traditions'.<sup>9</sup> Geshe Kelsang was not automatically embraced as the centre's spiritual guide but was regarded in the same light as the other *Gelug* teachers who visited the centre, such as Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, Song Rinpoche and Tsenshap Serkong Rinpoche (1914-1983).<sup>10</sup>

The students of Madhyamaka Centre were mostly unaware of the furore that its creation was causing within the FPMT and the Manjushri Institute. In fact, the status of the centre from the viewpoint of its members, does not seem to have been an issue at all. The original teacher of the centre maintains that,

I must admit, at that time it didn't feel to me to be uncomfortable, or it didn't feel like it was an issue of, 'Well, what is this centre to be?' [...] It was just a matter of, 'Well, Geshe-la wants to develop something in York. Fine.'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Geshe Kelsang, July 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche, for obvious reasons, never visited the centre.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Geshe Kelsang, April 1995.



### 3.2. DEVELOPMENT UNDER NEIL ELLIOTT

The character of the group changed and its status became more defined, however, from 1983 onwards. Growing interest generated by an extended three month visit to York by Geshe Kelsang and sustained by the popular teaching visits of Neil Elliott, an enthusiastic monk from Manjushri Institute, had enabled the group to secure its own premises. When Madhyamaka Centre became residential, Elliott was invited to become its resident teacher and a sizeable community emerged under his guidance. Elliott is described by students from this period as a complex, extroverted and 'all-pervasive' character and he was by all accounts, a powerful, charismatic and inspirational teacher.<sup>12</sup> He was also a very committed disciple of Geshe Kelsang. Through him the loci of spiritual authority was shifted heavily towards Geshe Kelsang and the openness of the centre was gradually replaced by a more focused and committed approach. Elliott also wanted the centre to grow and expand and he attracted many newcomers, some of whom 'became quickly, ardently, deeply involved'.<sup>13</sup> A noticeable division eventually began to develop between these young, highly motivated and strongly committed students and the centre's older students, who preferred the more open style of teaching and practice presented by its original teacher. In 1986, the group actually split along these lines when Elliott received permission from Geshe Kelsang to move Madhyamaka Centre to Kilnwick Percy Hall, a mansion in Pocklington on the outskirts of York. The older students objected to this, feeling that a move out of the city would make the centre inaccessible and

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<sup>12</sup> According to one student from that time Neil Elliott's dramatic and humorous style of presentation owed much to Lama Yeshe's influence.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Geshe Kelsang, July 1995.

most severed their connections. When Madhyamaka Centre moved to its new home in 1986, it did so as a young, energetic and committed unit.

The growth of Madhyamaka Centre reflected Geshe Kelsang's developing thought but it was unique among his centres due to the scale of its development. The move to Pocklington enabled the centre to develop a large lay and monastic community with a full-time teaching programme equal to Manjushri Institute in size and scale but surpassing it in terms of the discipline and commitment of its students to Geshe Kelsang. Manjushri Institute and Madhyamaka Centre continued to develop quite independently of each other and students from the Institute recall how they were always impressed on the occasions the communities did come together by the energy, seriousness of purpose, and levels of devotion the Madhyamaka students exhibited. Unlike the Institute, Madhyamaka Centre provided Geshe Kelsang with the conditions to express his particular vision of Buddhism. According to one of its current students,

Before the NKT had officially begun [Madhyamaka Centre] was a kind of proto-type of the NKT.<sup>14</sup>

The personality, conviction and charisma of Elliott was central to the development of Madhyamaka Centre and, subsequently, to the growth and expansion of the NKT. Geshe Kelsang relied upon his western 'heart disciple' and future spiritual successor to develop a style of practice that expressed his understanding of Buddhism in a way that was attractive and appropriate for western students. Many of the distinguishing features of the NKT today, such as its study programmes and its

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<sup>14</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

energetic will to expand, were originally inspired by him in York, becoming normative for all of Geshe Kelsang's centres in 1991.

The following account is based on a personal interview with Geshe Kelsang, which took place in York, UK, in March 2009. The account is presented in a narrative form, and is intended to provide a detailed description of the events leading up to the establishment of the Buddhist Centre in York, UK, in 1991.

The first Buddhist Centre in York, UK, was established in 1981. It was the first of a series of Buddhist Centres that Geshe Kelsang has established in various parts of the world. The Centre was established as a result of Geshe Kelsang's visit to York in 1980, where he gave a series of talks on Buddhist philosophy.

The following section describes the establishment of the Buddhist Centre in York, UK, in 1991. This was a significant event in the history of the Buddhist Centre in York, as it marked the beginning of a new phase in the Centre's development. The Centre was established as a result of Geshe Kelsang's visit to York in 1990, where he gave a series of talks on Buddhist philosophy.

The Buddhist Centre in York, UK, has since grown into a major centre for Buddhist practice and study. It has provided a home for many practitioners, and has been instrumental in the development of the Buddhist community in York. The Centre has also been involved in a wide range of social and educational activities, and has played a significant role in the development of the city.

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#### 4. DORJE SHUGDEN RELIANCE IN GESHE KELSANG'S CENTRES

Geshe Kelsang's increasingly exclusive approach to Buddhism in the West was most clearly manifested through his popularisation of the *Dorje Shugden* protective-deity practice in his centres. The opening up of this practice to his students prompted another serious dispute in 1986, this time with the Office of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, a conflict that would lead to a further hardening of Geshe Kelsang's position.

##### 4.1. PROTECTOR PRACTICES IN THE FPMT

*Dorje-Shugden* reliance at Manjushri Institute was originally introduced not by Geshe Kelsang, but by Lama Yeshe when the Institute was first created. Whenever a new FPMT centre was set up, Lama Yeshe provided a Dharma-protector practice most suitable to it and he gave Manjushri Institute the practice of *Dorje Shugden* because of the connection that was thought to exist between this deity and the tradition of *Tsong Khapa* and *Mañjuśrī*.<sup>15</sup> Although he nominated a particular protector for each centre, Lama Yeshe like other *lamas*, marginalised the importance of protector practices for westerners generally, in recognition of the fact that many have found this peculiarly 'Tibetan' and arcane dimension of Tibetan Buddhism either difficult to integrate or tangential to their main practices of mind-transformation. Protector practices have always therefore, been kept quite low-key within the FPMT, for the most part limited to the private sphere of practice for those with Tantric commitments. This approach reflects that of the Dalai Lama who, when questioned about the relevance of protector practices for westerners in 1984, maintained that too

<sup>15</sup> Apparently, Lama Tsongkhapa Institute in Italy was also given the same practice.

much emphasis was placed on these deities in Tibet and that their usefulness is limited to practitioners experienced and adept in Tantric visualisation practices:

You see, as a Buddhist, we don't need any further protector than the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.2. REACTIONS TO THE DALAI LAMA'S PRONOUNCEMENTS

When Geshe Kelsang first arrived at Manjushri Institute, he maintained the centre's commitment to the *Dorje Shugden pūjā* and he did so in the customarily discreet manner of other FPMT centres, performing it in his room with only the ordained *Sangha* members present. He was already a committed *Dorje Shugden* devotee, like numerous other *Gelug geshes* who were from the monastic college of *Sera Je* (or, especially, *Ganden Shartse*) or who had connections with Trijang Rinpoche or Song Rinpoche, the main propagators of this practice in the modern era.<sup>17</sup> It is well known, for example, that Geshe Rabten, another graduate of *Sera Je*, had a strong commitment to *Dorje Shugden* and Lama Zopa Rinpoche also received the Life Entrustment initiation into the practice from Song Rinpoche. It is considered highly inadvisable to break these commitments and so there was nothing unusual about *Gelug lamas* continuing to propitiate *Dorje Shugden* even after the Dalai Lama had

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<sup>16</sup> Jose Ignatius Cabezon, *Bodh Gaya Interviews: His Holiness the Dalai Lama* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1988), p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> Of the two monastic institutions where *Dorje Shugden* reliance was prominent, *Ganden Shartse* seems to have had the strongest allegiance. Trijang Rinpoche, Song Rinpoche and Zimey Rinpoche all had strong connections with *Ganden Shartse* as students and later, in exile, as resident teachers. *Ganden Shartse* has also been the monastic base in exile for the main oracle of *Dorje Shugden*, Venerable Choyang Duldzin Kuten Lama. Consequently, when the dispute erupted in 1996, the main resistance to the Dalai Lama's pronouncements came from *Ganden Shartse* rather than *Sera Je*.

spoken out against it in 1978, especially since his original comments against the practice had allowed for its continuation in private.<sup>18</sup>

Lamas Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche first came to the West before the Dalai Lama had spoken out against *Dorje Shugden* reliance and it is unlikely, in light of the FPMT's stated objectives to develop in line with his authority, that the practice would have been introduced otherwise. As the Dalai Lama's views slowly filtered down to the level of western Dharma-circles, the FPMT began to implement his advice by de-emphasising *Dorje Shugden* and strongly promoting *Palden Lhamo*, the chief guardian goddess of the *Gelug* and patron-deity of Tibet.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, in the early 1980s, Geshe Kelsang began to open the practice out to the wider community of Manjushri Institute. He transferred the monthly protector *pūjā* to the main *gompa* making it open to those who felt inclined to attend and he requested Song Rinpoche, who visited the Institute in around 1983, to offer the *Dorje Shugden* Life Entrustment initiation to a restricted group. A few students had heard rumours that the practice was dangerous and linked to sectarianism but Geshe Kelsang reassured them that *Dorje Shugden* is simply a powerful protector for *Gelug* Buddhists but who is otherwise not harmful.

Most students at this time did not experience the opening up of the protector practice by Geshe Kelsang as a symbolic event with implications on an ideological

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<sup>18</sup> It should be remembered that *Dorje Shugden* reliance need not necessarily entail a commitment to an exclusive interpretation of *Gelug* Buddhism. The role of protective deities can be interpreted in different ways depending upon the context, and *Dorje Shugden* has no doubt been seen as a powerful Dharma-protector both by inclusively and exclusively-orientated Buddhists, as well as by the most 'sectarian' practitioners within the *Gelug* tradition. I am arguing here that *Dorje Shugden* reliance, as presented by Geshe Kelsang, is bound up with his exclusive interpretation of *Gelug* Buddhism. Other *lamas* may have understood the practice differently.

<sup>19</sup> Lama Zopa probably continued to propitiate *Dorje Shugden* privately for some years. Statements emerging from within the FPMT indicate that, in line with the Dalai Lama's more recent declarations, Lama Zopa has now broken this commitment altogether.

level and, when Song Rinpoche warned that it was inappropriate to take the initiation unless one was committed to the *Gelug* tradition, this was not understood as restrictive. The open and inclusive style of Buddhist practice still characterised the approach of the Institute's students. Also, to most students the protector *pūjā* was a loud and colourful ritual, which enabled them to spend time near the *geshes* but which was otherwise largely incomprehensible because the lengthy ritual was done in Tibetan and no commentary was offered to it. Nevertheless, the fact that Geshe Kelsang was beginning to promote this practice openly may indicate how *his* thought was developing. It is highly probable, given the traffic of Tibetan *lamas* passing through the Institute, that Geshe Kelsang soon became aware of the Dalai Lama's views on *Dorje Shugden*. The promotion of the practice at this time was not necessarily a direct challenge to the Dalai Lama's pronouncements<sup>20</sup> but it does indicate how his authority was regarded by Geshe Kelsang in a different (perhaps less absolutist) way than the FPMT. It may also be significant that he started to encourage this practice within the community just as the conflict with the FPMT, an organisation which he considered to be destructive of the 'pure Dharma', was gathering momentum. The invitation to Song Rinpoche to grant the Life Entrustment may also be significant. This *lama*, as well as being regarded as one of the most highly realised teachers within the *Gelug*,<sup>21</sup> was also one of its most clerical and exclusively-orientated.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The fact that the Life Entrustment was offered only to a restricted group of students (probably those with a Highest Yoga Tantra empowerment); was conducted in Tibetan without commentary, and was, at this stage, restricted to the Manjushri Institute community only, meant that Geshe Kelsang was conducting the practice loosely within the guidelines laid down by the Dalai Lama.

<sup>21</sup> A fact that offered the students taking the Life Entrustment further reassurance about the practice.

<sup>22</sup> The following quote illustrates Song Rinpoche's exclusivism: 'the right way to practice is not to mix different traditions together but to follow precisely the tradition that suits oneself best. Things get spoilt when you mix them up [...] You should follow just one path. If you combine techniques from different

### 4.3. DORJE SHUGDEN'S INCREASING PROFILE

In the spring of 1986, Geshe Kelsang decided to teach and grant *Dorje Shugden* initiations at Manjushri Institute and Madhyamaka Centre where it had already been introduced by Neil Elliott. By advertising the courses publicly, Geshe Kelsang was taking the new step of opening the practice out beyond his two main centres although this development was entirely in line with the more exclusive approach he had recently encouraged. Students at the Institute and in York were pleased that they were going to finally receive a translation and commentary to a practice they had been doing for years in Tibetan and understood very little about.

The publicity from that time describes *Dorje Shugden* as 'one of the principal protectors' of *Tsong Khapa's* tradition, and as 'a wrathful emanation of Buddha *Mañjuśrī* who acts as a protector for dharma practitioners'.<sup>23</sup> The teachings concentrated on the lineage and status of *Dorje Shugden*, disappointing some who were hoping for more explanation about the purpose of the practice and the meaning of the ritual. They also reflected the exclusivism associated with *Dorje Shugden* reliance inasmuch as Geshe Kelsang reinforced the warning that initiation into the practice required a single-pointed commitment to the *Gelug* tradition. Again, not all the students at the Institute appear to have experienced this as a significant movement towards exclusivism, integrating the practice without changing their generally inclusive orientation. Others did recognise the increasing exclusivism and embraced it, whilst some felt uncomfortable with it and didn't:

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traditions your mind might become unbalanced' (*Wisdom: Magazine of the FPMT*, 2 (1984), p. 59).

<sup>23</sup> 'Madhyamaka Centre Programme', April-September 1986.



Geshe Kelsang warned that the practice should not be seriously entered upon by anyone who was not at the stage in his or her practice when he or she could promise to stay entirely within [the] Gelugpa. This meant that it was inappropriate to practise protector and seek inspiration from other traditions. Personally, I didn't feel I could make that commitment.<sup>24</sup>

There was of course, least ambiguity and resistance to the practice in the centres focused primarily on Geshe Kelsang which were already developing in an exclusive way. The practice was embraced with particular enthusiasm by the highly motivated students of Madhyamaka Centre who quickly fused it with their strongly committed approach to Buddhist activity. It is no coincidence that Madhyamaka was the first of Geshe Kelsang's centres to establish a separate 'Protector *gompa*'.

#### 4.4. CONFLICT WITH THE DALAI LAMA

Geshe Kelsang's decision to encourage *Dorje Shugden* reliance on a wider level was resisted by some students who had (through their connections with other *lamas*) become acquainted with the Dalai Lama's specific objections to the practice. It was also resisted by the Office of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala which wrote to advise Geshe Kelsang of the Dalai Lama's position with regard to this practice and sent copies of the talks he had given in India throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s for distribution amongst the students intending to receive the *Dorje Shugden* initiation. Geshe Kelsang, however, decided not to heed the advice and delivered his teachings to students who had not received copies of the Dalai Lama's talks. In addition to this, he appears to have expelled from the Institute those students who tried to publicise the controversy surrounding the protector practice. Consequently,

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Geshe Kelsang, July 1997.

the majority of students who adopted the *Dorje Shugden* practice at this time were unaware of its contentious dimensions. From this period until 1996, awareness of the controversy surrounding the practice was kept to a minimum within Geshe Kelsang's centres due to a policy of silence adopted by him and his senior students, whereby information would be withheld and discussion discouraged.

His decision to directly disagree with the Dalai Lama on this issue was not unprecedented. It was expressive, rather, of the classically recurrent conflict within the *Gelug* tradition with respect to inclusive and exclusive orientations and of the specific manifestation of this conflict in the modern era around *Dorje Shugden* propitiation. Geshe Kelsang was in no way a lone dissenter on this issue; the position he adopted represented that which was held by a sizeable segment of the Tibetan *Gelug* community-in-exile. Not only was his connection with *Dorje Shugden* very strong but he was committed (like many *Gelug lamas*) to its associated exclusivism, a perspective antithetical to the inclusive and eclectic approach encouraged by the Dalai Lama.

#### 4.5. RESPONSES TO THE CONFLICT

The students who became aware of this conflict reacted to it in different ways. Some were unable to reconcile it with their idealised images of the Dalai Lama's authority within a homogenous *Gelug* system. Others, by contrast, had a more grounded understanding of the Tibetan system and assimilated the disagreement whilst retaining their devotion for both Geshe Kelsang and the Dalai Lama. Also, at this stage Geshe Kelsang's exclusivism had not reached the extremes that characterise

it today. He and his centres were still self-consciously *Gelug* in their identity and they continued to receive visiting teachers of the *Gelug* tradition, although these were decreasing in frequency. Furthermore, his centres - with the possible exception of the Madhyamaka Centre - continued to venerate the Dalai Lama and support Tibetan cultural and political activities. In the years leading up to the creation of the NKT in 1991, however, the character of Geshe Kelsang's centres would undergo further shifts that many of his students would find increasingly difficult to assimilate.

The dispute with the Office of the Dalai Lama appears to have led to a further hardening of Geshe Kelsang's exclusivism. The content of the Dalai Lama's talks, in particular, would have been anathema to Geshe Kelsang. In these talks the Dalai Lama not only undermines the practice of *Dorje Shugden*, but also discredits Phabongkha Rinpoche, the main *lama* through whom Geshe Kelsang traces his lineage, *and* encourages an 'unbiased and eclectic' approach to Buddhist practice. The combination of these perspectives appear in light of the subsequent shifts encouraged in his centres, to have strained Geshe Kelsang's personal devotion for the Dalai Lama towards breaking point.

## 5. THE CRYSTALISATION OF THE NEW KADAMPA TRADITION

### 5.1. GESHE KELSANG'S SCOTTISH RETREAT

Early in 1987, Geshe Kelsang entered a three year meditative retreat in Dumfries, Scotland. He invited a *geshe* from *Ganden Shartse* monastery in South India, Geshe Losang Pende, to teach the General Programme in his absence whilst Geshe Konchog Tsewang continued to run the Geshe Studies Programme. During this period Geshe Kelsang's centres continued to receive visiting Tibetan *Gelug* teachers, including Jamyang Rinpoche and Geshe Tamdrin Gyatso (b.1922), another *Ganden Shartse* graduate whom Geshe Kelsang had installed as resident teacher at his Spanish centre, Instituto Dharma.<sup>25</sup> The visit of Lama Zopa Rinpoche to Manjushri Institute in 1988, is significant, indicating the ongoing devotion of the students for this *lama* and their desire to leave the negativity of the schism with the FPMT in the past. More significant to our understanding of the development of Geshe Kelsang's thought and the direction of his centres though, were the visits in 1988 and 1990, of Venerable Choyang Duldzin Kuten Lama, the oracle of *Dorje Shugden*.

### 5.2. THE ORACLE

As is the case with most protective deities, *Dorje Shugden* is believed to take possession of more than one human medium. The most popular and famous human mouthpiece for this deity (both in Tibet and in exile) was probably the figure known as Ven. Kuten Lama (b. 1917). As a young monk, Kuten Lama studied in a branch

<sup>25</sup> Geshe Tamdrin Gyatso became resident teacher there in 1987 but has played no part in Geshe Kelsang's centres since the creation of the NKT in 1991.

monastery of *Ganden Shartse*, in the region of *Phagri*, that had been founded by Geshe Palden Tendar, whilst also making occasional visits to a monastery established by Tromo Geshe Rinpoche. Both of these figures were closely associated with the cult of *Dorje Shugden*, especially the latter, who despite living as a solitary Tantric hermit and thus representing the shamanic modality of Tibetan religiosity, nevertheless adopted an attitude of sectarian intolerance towards non-*Gelug* traditions.<sup>26</sup> From the age of seventeen, Kuten Lama began to experience a number of violent seizures and, after a period of careful observation and examination by the high *lamas* of *Ganden Shartse* (including Trijang Rinpoche, Song Rinpoche and Zimey Rinpoche) it was finally determined that the possessing being was *Dorje Shugden*.<sup>27</sup> For the next twenty years, he served as the oracle of the *Dharmapāla* both for monastic and lay Buddhists who sought divine assistance. From 1950, he resided in *Lhasa* and was able 'to contribute to many people fleeing successfully to India'<sup>28</sup> before fleeing into exile himself in 1959, accompanied by Zimey Rinpoche and guided safely away from danger through oracular divination. Kuten Lama first settled in a refugee camp in Buxaduar before moving to Mundgod in the South of India, taking up residence at the re-established *Ganden Shartse*. Whilst his duties as an oracle became 'a sort of side activity'<sup>29</sup> to his main responsibilities as the secretary of a monastic co-operative society, he continued to fulfil this important spiritual function for the exiled Tibetan community.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 605.

<sup>27</sup> 'Autobiography of Venerable Choyang Duldzin Kuten Lama' (Manjushri Institute, 1988), p. 4. It was at this point that he became known as Kuten Lama, '*kuten*' meaning 'the body that holds the *Dharmapāla*'.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

During his trips to Britain, Kuten Lama visited all of Geshe Kelsang's centres - at this time there were about a dozen - in order to enhance their commitment to *Dorje Shugden* and perform special rituals 'dedicated for the success of each centre and for the spread of the Dharma in the West'.<sup>30</sup> His visits are significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, as well as being the oracle of *Dorje Shugden*, Kuten Lama also happens to be Geshe Kelsang's uncle. An understanding of the centrality of *Dorje Shugden* reliance to Geshe Kelsang would be incomplete if, alongside exclusively-orientated interpretations of *Gelug* Buddhism, the importance attached to 'continuity' in Tibetan kinship systems was not also acknowledged as an important determining factor.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, Kuten Lama's associations with the re-established *Ganden Shartse* monastery, a connection that is also noticeable in Geshe Kelsang's choice of *geshes* to visit and teach in his centres, is significant. The links with *Ganden Shartse* would have connected Geshe Kelsang with the main source of resistance within the exiled *Gelug* community in India to the Dalai Lama's pronouncements on *Dorje Shugden* reliance. Thirdly, Geshe Kelsang's period of retreat was also a time in which he worked out and gradually introduced in his centres the foundations that characterise the NKT today. It is unlikely that he would have embarked upon the process of constructing and implementing a distinct identity for his centres without employing the assistance of oracular divination.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Middle Way*, 63.4 (1989), p. 244.

<sup>31</sup> A discussion of the importance of 'continuity' as a structural principle of Tibetan societies can be found in Samuel's *Civilized Shamans*, especially Chapter 8.

### 5.3. THE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME

The first major development that took place during Geshe Kelsang's retreat was his introduction of the 'Teacher Training Programme' (TTP) at the Manjushri Institute, a course of study that reflected the programmes being taught by Neil Elliott at Madhyamaka Centre. It required the kind of focused approach that Geshe Kelsang expected from his York students but which some students at the Institute seemed to lack due to their more open and inclusive orientation. By introducing the programme, he expressed his growing exasperation with his Manjushri students and an intention to bring them into line with the style of practice found elsewhere. One long-standing disciple at the Institute reflects upon the changes brought about in the students' practice by the introduction of the TTP in the following way:

I don't know whether it changed people's meditation practices. But what it did change for most of us was going from a passive to an active involvement.<sup>32</sup>

Another student also explains how it prompted a deepening of commitment:

Basically there was a hardening up of expectations and commitments [...] the fact that you had to be there everyday, you had exams, revision classes, tests for your revision of knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

Geshe Kelsang's call for greater discipline and commitment from his students at the Institute was successful in part because they were afraid that following his retreat, he may decide not to return to the priory.

The TTP differed from earlier programmes taught by Geshe Kelsang at the Institute both in terms of its scope, duration and level of commitment required.

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<sup>32</sup> NKT Interview, October 1995.

<sup>33</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

Originally designed as a seven year course, it embraced a wider range of subjects and texts than the General Diploma and required a commitment to the programme's three-fold purpose:

(1) to improve students' knowledge and experience of the dharma, (2) to produce qualified and experienced dharma teachers, and (3) to benefit many sentient beings through the flourishing of buddhadharma.<sup>34</sup>

The subjects taught included topics that had previously been the preserve of the Geshe Studies programme. Thus, whilst students were encouraged to attend other teachings 'to gain greater understanding and receive oral transmissions', there was actually little need to attend the Geshe Studies programme. In spite of this increased emphasis on traditional *geshe* curriculum subjects, students maintain that Geshe Kelsang's presentation was far more accessible than the Geshe Studies programme. They also maintain that the scope of the TTP - the emphasis of which, like that of the earlier General Diploma, remained upon the teachings of the *Sūtras and the Tantras* - surpassed the Geshe Studies programme inasmuch as it presented a complete, systematic and practical path to enlightenment.

The TTP also differed from earlier study programmes in that it revolved around commentarial materials produced exclusively by Geshe Kelsang in the form of published texts and unpublished transcripts. Whilst there was continuity at Madhyamaka Centre in terms of the structure and discipline of the TTP, students there recall the textual emphasis as a novel development:

When we started Gen-la [Neil Elliott] taught twice a day [...] But the main thing he was teaching was a whole commentary, he wasn't just giving us the

<sup>34</sup> 'Teacher Training Programme at Manjushri Institute' (programme from 1988), p. 1.



book, because there wasn't a book! But when the books were written that all ceased [...] So the emphasis went from the actual teachings of Gen-la to the books themselves.<sup>35</sup>

The publication of teachings had always been a feature of Geshe Kelsang's life in Britain and in 1985, Tharpa Publications was set up by a disciple of his primarily for this purpose. This activity became particularly important to him now and was to play a central part in his unfolding vision of the NKT.<sup>36</sup> By giving his study programmes a textual basis, Geshe Kelsang not only provided accessible materials to enhance the focus and commitment of his students, but also laid down structures through which spiritual authority could later be concentrated exclusively in him. At this stage the students within his network were not required to rely on him exclusively; many students clearly did, but he had not yet made it an absolute requirement within his centres. His perspective had yet to harden further and the decisive shift appears to have taken place shortly after he came out of retreat.

#### 5.4. GESHE KELSANG'S TEXTS, 1984-1988

Three new texts by Geshe Kelsang were published between 1984 and 1988: *Buddhism in the Tibetan Tradition: A Guide* (1984), *Heart of Wisdom: A Commentary to the Heart Sutra* (1986), and *Universal Compassion: A Commentary to Bodhisattva Chekhawa's Training the Mind in Seven Points* (1988). The latter texts were based upon oral commentaries delivered by Geshe Kelsang at Manjushri Institute since

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<sup>35</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>36</sup> Of the eighteen books Geshe Kelsang has, to date, published, fourteen have appeared since the time of his retreat.

1984, and the lineage of the teachings in both cases are traced back to *Tsong Khapa* through Trijang Rinpoche and Phabongkha Rinpoche.

The orientation and style of these texts is continuous with Geshe Kelsang's earlier publications. The inclusion of notes and bibliographies referring to other *Gelug* authors and the continuing appearance of the dedication to 'the long life of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and all the other great lamas of the four Tibetan traditions'<sup>37</sup> in later editions of *Meaningful to Behold*, all indicate his continuing inclusivism and self-identity as a member of the contemporary *Gelug* sect. Whilst these texts are, for convenience, divided into chapters, the commentaries continue to be organised and presented in a traditionally clerical way according to highly structured textual outlines. The wish to contextualise the teachings through western-based analogies and examples is still very much in evidence but Geshe Kelsang continues to show little interest in the project of adaptation. In certain respects, if anything, his teachings become even more uncompromising and literalistic than before. For example, compared to Geshe Rabten and Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey's *Advice from a Spiritual Friend: Buddhist Thought Transformation* (1977),<sup>38</sup> a commentary upon the same mind training exercises outlined in *Universal Compassion*, Geshe Kelsang places a greater emphasis upon ideas like karma and rebirth, the six realms of existence and the notion that, through meditating on taking and giving, physical illness can be cured:

It is very difficult for the medical profession to cure cancer, but if someone with cancer purifies the negative actions that cause its development, he or she

<sup>37</sup> *Meaningful to Behold*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Tharpa Publications, 1989), p. ix.

<sup>38</sup> First published in India by Wisdom Publications.

can be cured. The practice of taking and giving is extremely helpful in all cases of degenerative illness.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, there are aspects of these texts which suggest a heightening in Geshe Kelsang's sensitivity to the western cultural context, especially to the complex process of religio-cultural dissent and consent that characterises the western embrace of Buddhism. They respond in particular, to the widespread disenchantment with science and secular materialism on the one hand, compared with the continuing normativity of scientific discourse, on the other. In *Heart of Wisdom* for example, the fundamentally flawed human tendency to locate the source of suffering and happiness in external conditions, rather than within the mind, is identified as a delusion that has been compounded for westerners by scientific and materialistic views of the world. Simultaneously however, the text appeals to the authority of modern science to validate Buddhist teachings on mind training.<sup>40</sup> In such ways he tailors his presentation to reflect stereotyped western images of Tibetan Buddhism as a 'spiritual science' or 'sacred technology'.<sup>41</sup>

Two themes that were beginning to characterise Geshe Kelsang's presentation during the mid-to-late 1980s and which later became defining features of the NKT, can also be discerned in *Universal Compassion*: an emphasis upon spreading Buddhism, and the importance of relying upon Dharma-protectors. Unlike the discussion of *Geshe Chekhawa* in *Advice from a Spiritual Friend*, Geshe Kelsang presents this famous *Kadampa geshe* as a missionary figure who spread the study and

<sup>39</sup> *Universal Compassion* (London: Tharpa Publications, 1988), p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Phillip Wood's 'Preface to the First Edition', (London: Tharpa Publications, 1986), pp. x-xi.

<sup>41</sup> For an informative discussion of how westerners have interpreted Buddhism, especially in its Tibetan form, as an eminently rational, scientific and empirical religion, see Bishop's *Dreams of Power*.

practice of mind training throughout Tibet. Since *Geshe Chekhawa's* root text on mind training encourages *Mahāyāna* trainees to make offerings to protective deities in order to be free from interferences to their practice, it is no surprise to find comment upon such practices in both *Advice from a Spiritual Friend* and *Universal Compassion*. There is a noticeable difference, however, in the emphasis placed upon protector deity reliance in the two commentaries, with Geshe Kelsang going into more detail about their function and importance.

### 5.5. RADICAL EXCLUSIVISM

After Geshe Kelsang had emerged from his retreat in 1990, he began to introduce new and radically exclusive policies within his centres. He had come to believe by this time, that he had a central role to play in the preservation of *Tsong Khapa's* tradition in the modern age. The substance of the various reforms he implemented therefore, was that the students within his centres were now to rely exclusively upon him for their spiritual inspiration and welfare. He was gravely concerned that the purity of *Tsong Khapa's* tradition was being undermined by the lingering inclusivism of his western students, many of whom continued to seek spiritual inspiration from non-*Gelug* sources. This was something he had been outspoken against for some years but he now acted more forcefully in his opposition to it by discouraging his students from receiving guidance from teachers of other traditions or from reading their books. Consequently, the library at Manjushri Institute which was well known for its vastness and diversity, and which had been a testimony to the inclusive orientation of the Institute's students, was gradually purged. This

began with non-*Gelug* books being removed but as Geshe Kelsang's vision crystalised, even books by *Gelug* teachers became unacceptable to him and the library disappeared altogether. He thus became convinced that the Tibetan *Gelug* tradition as a whole no longer embodied *Tsong Khapa*'s pure teachings and that he and his disciples must therefore separate from it. From this point onwards Tibetan *Gelug lamas* would no longer be invited to teach within his network. This perceived degeneration extended to include its highest-level *lamas* and so even veneration of the Dalai Lama was now actively discouraged.

Owing to the extent of their exclusivism, these measures were resisted throughout Geshe Kelsang's network. In particular, the removal of pictures of the Dalai Lama from the *gompas* and shrines of Geshe Kelsang's centres was found particularly disturbing as one NKT disciple recalls:

There was a time when centres were not encouraged to have pictures of the Dalai Lama. We used to have pictures of the Dalai Lama and so on a lot in the centres [...] A lot of people had a great affection for the Dalai Lama, and respect. They asked about it, and some people were unhappy about it. It was explained that the Dalai Lama is not our guru. We have received no teachings from him [...] Geshe Kelsang is our root guru. There was some unhappiness. One or two members didn't like it and couldn't come to terms with it, but not many [...] I think this was a potentially disruptive moment.<sup>42</sup>

By this stage however, the authority of Geshe Kelsang was at its pinnacle and he was unambiguous and uncompromising about the reforms he wanted to implement. Furthermore the reforms, though extreme, resonated with the exclusive approach to practice that was already being adopted by most of his centres. There was predictably, most resistance to the reforms at the Manjushri Institute, particularly amongst the

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<sup>42</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

students who were closest to Geshe Konchog Tsewang. However, these students were a minority whose numbers dwindled even further when following his retreat, Geshe Kelsang became outspoken against the Geshe Studies Programme and made the pursuit of his new programmes compulsory. As it was no longer possible for students to follow the programmes of both *geshes*, the basis of Geshe Konchog's teaching programme at the Institute was undermined and in 1991, he retired to *Gyuto* monastery in Assam, India.

## 5.6. INFLUENCES

It is worth considering at this point, the possible influences upon Geshe Kelsang that may have prompted him to adopt such a radical position following his retreat. It is evident that his outlook had become increasingly exclusive throughout the 1980s but the reforms he introduced in 1990 were discontinuous in terms of their degree. Until this time he may have disapproved of the inclusive approach to spiritual practice adopted by western students but he did tolerate a certain level of openness. Also, though critical of certain strands within his tradition, he still self-consciously identified his centres as 'Gelug' and as part of a broader grouping of Tibetan and western elements loosely united by their doctrine and devotion to the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama's decision in the late 1980s, to make his views about *Dorje Shugden* reliance publicly known, may have contributed to Geshe Kelsang's decision to break away completely from the *Gelug*, prompting him to reassess his relationship

with the Dalai Lama and defend his own position.<sup>43</sup> According to one NKT disciple, *Dorje Shugden* reliance became increasingly important in Geshe Kelsang's centres,

in response to the fact that things were appearing in print, in certain English language publications, which seemed to present one, or a view of this protector practice, which was regarded as not quite fair, distorted.<sup>44</sup>

Unsurprisingly, then, one of the first texts published by Geshe Kelsang following his creation of the NKT in 1991 was his commentary to *Dorje Shugden* reliance, now promoted as the 'essential' practice of the NKT.<sup>45</sup>

Geshe Kelsang's teaching tour of North America, following his return from retreat in 1990, is seen by some students as *the* significant formative event that led to his adoption of a radically exclusive position. During his tour of America he visited centres of other *Gelug lamas*<sup>46</sup> and was apparently very shocked by what he observed. He found that there was a widespread tendency amongst western students to combine the teachings and practices of different Tibetan traditions and that, following the advice of the Dalai Lama, Tibetan *Gelug lamas* themselves were tolerating and sometimes encouraging this. In particular, the observation that *Dzogchen* techniques were being combined with *Gelug* practices appears to have provoked a particularly strong reaction from Geshe Kelsang.<sup>47</sup> As a clerically and exclusively orientated *lama*, Geshe Kelsang would have been most vehemently opposed to the influence upon the

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<sup>43</sup> Not only were the transcripts of the Dalai Lama's talks on *Dorje Shugden* becoming more widely available to westerners (by this time they could be obtained through the FPMT's Manjushri Centre, London or from the Office of Tibet) but his views were also published in 1988 in Cabezon's *Bodh Gaya Interviews*.

<sup>44</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>45</sup> *Heart Jewel: A Commentary to the Essential Practice of the New Kadampa Tradition of Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Tharpa Publications, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Such as the centre under Geshe Lhundup Sopa's guidance in Wisconsin.

<sup>47</sup> Some disaffiliated students also maintain that Geshe Kelsang's teachings had started to speak out explicitly against *Nyingma*, and especially *Dzogchen*, practices at this time. This is denied by current NKT students who are sensitive to the charge of 'sectarianism'.

*Gelug* of the *Nyingma*, the tradition which is furthest from *Tsong Khapa*'s structured system both philosophically and in terms of its meditational technique.<sup>48</sup>

To summarise, the creation of a text-based programme of study formed part of the gradual hardening of Geshe Kelsang's approach and indicates that he was beginning, during the time of his retreat, to conceive of a distinct structure and identity that would unite his various centres. But it was not until some time after he had returned from his retreat in 1990, that he introduced the radically exclusive reforms that characterise the NKT today. It appears to have been his tour of America that cemented this way forward for Geshe Kelsang, convincing him that the purity of *Tsong Khapa*'s tradition was under threat from all sides and that its preservation in the modern world required extreme measures. The purpose and character of his emerging 'New Kadampa Tradition' had thus been defined and largely implemented by the end of 1990. It should also be noted that there were important practical and material conditions that enabled his vision to be implemented. Earlier studies indicate that the success of Buddhist organisations depends largely upon their control of influential institutional sites for the propagation of Buddhist discourse, and this is equally true here. As noted earlier, the Manjushri Institute legally remained part of the FPMT until late 1990 when the assets of the Institute finally fell under the control of the Priory Group. The flowering of Geshe Kelsang's ideological vision in 1990 therefore, dovetailed with the Priory Group's successful attempts to secure the institutional basis

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<sup>48</sup> This has been confirmed to me by disciples of Geshe Kelsang. One student, a nun living at Madhyamaka Centre, commented that 'Many people nowadays teach Dzogchen, which implies that liberation is emancipation from conceptual thought. Geshe Kelsang maintains *Tsong Khapa*'s view that realising emptiness [...] is a non-affirming negation reached through a process of logical reasoning that eventually becomes direct intuition' (NKT Interview, February 1994).



of Manjushri Institute. Once the material basis had been secured, the ideological vision embodied within the NKT could unfold unimpaired.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CREATION AND IDENTITY OF THE NKT, 1991-1996

#### 1. THE CREATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NKT

In the spring of 1991, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso established the 'New Kadampa Tradition', an event celebrated in the pages of *Full Moon* magazine as 'a wonderful new development in the history of the Buddhadharma'.<sup>1</sup> The NKT was created to unite the centres already under his spiritual direction - at that time there were approximately eight residential centres and twenty non-residential branches - within a common organisation. This organisation would enable the centres to 'cooperate in spiritual matters on a more formal basis' whilst providing them with 'a distinct identity within the wider Buddhist world'.<sup>2</sup> Geshe Kelsang reflected upon the distinctive features of the NKT at the time of its creation in the following way:

We are Je Tsongkhapa's pure followers. We are a little bit different from other centres, from the point of view of programme, subjects, how to study, practice, pujas, chanting, way of thinking and so forth. We particularly emphasise three study programmes which do not exist at other centres.<sup>3</sup>

He also created the 'Education Council of the NKT', a body which included himself, his spiritual successor Gen. Thubten Gyatso [aka Neil Elliott], and the Education Programme Coordinator of each affiliated NKT centre. The purpose of the council was to provide spiritual assistance for NKT centres, ensure the purity and authenticity of their education programmes, co-ordinate special events and oversee the setting of

<sup>1</sup> James Belither, 'The New Kadampa Tradition: A New Development', *Full Moon* [hereafter referred to as *FM*], 3 (1991), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Full Moon Journal* [hereafter referred to as *FMJ*], 1.1 (1997), p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> 'Challenging the Eagles', *FM*, 3 (1991), p. 2.

examinations. It was also to provide resources for the promotion and opening of new centres throughout the world, especially outside the United Kingdom, by operating the fund-raising arm of the NKT called the 'New Centres Development Fund'.

Geshe Kelsang announced the creation of the NKT to his centres by sending them a letter inviting them to become members of his 'world-wide family'<sup>4</sup> and outlining the conditions of affiliation:

Geshe Kelsang sent a letter to all the centres asking them if they wanted to be part of the tradition. If they did then Geshe Kelsang wanted them to accept a couple of things, such as that Geshe Kelsang would be the Spiritual Director; that when Geshe Kelsang dies it will be Gen. Thubten Gyatso; and he also said that when *he* dies it will be Losang Wangchuk; that the study programme would be the NKT study programme; that each centre would appoint a Director and Education Programme Co-coordinator.<sup>5</sup>

In 1992, these conditions were formalised when the NKT became a charitable company and its member centres adopted a common constitution, reflecting their shared and exclusive endeavour to preserve and promote,

the pure tradition of Mahayana Buddhism derived from the Tibetan Buddhist meditator and scholar, Je Tsongkhapa, introduced to the West by the contemporary Tibetan Buddhist lama, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche, and embodied in the three study programmes: the General Programme, the Foundation Programme and the Teacher Training Programme.<sup>6</sup>

By the close of 1992, the NKT was established both ideologically, structurally and legally, its centres being united by their 'shared devotion to our precious Founder' and 'a strong commitment to practicing the pure Dharma he has taught us'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Belithier, 'The New Kadampa Tradition: A New Development', p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>6</sup> The New Kadampa Tradition, charity registration no. 2758093, Memorandum and Articles of Association, October 1992, clause 3.

<sup>7</sup> 'Over the Moon', *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 46.

The creation of the NKT in 1991 certainly marked a 'new development in the history of the Buddhadharma' inasmuch as it drew together within a single organisation, with a distinct identity and structure, the individual units that looked primarily towards Geshe Kelsang for spiritual guidance. As my prior examination of the early history of the organisation in Britain makes clear, though, the 1991 declaration was in many ways simply the culmination of a line of development that can be traced back to the early 1980s. Furthermore, to fully understand both the early history and the later identity of the NKT, we must situate both within the broader historical and cross-cultural context of *Gelug* Buddhism, the divisions between exclusive and inclusive *Gelug* orientations, and specifically the manifestation of this debate through the practice of *Dorje Shugden* propitiation.

## 2. REACTIONS: ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION

Although most of his centres accepted the terms of affiliation, there was a degree of resistance amongst the students of some, and at least one centre decided to sever its association with Geshe Kelsang completely due to its inability to accept his new and radical exclusivism.<sup>8</sup> One of the students of this centre explained their reasons for breaking the connection with Geshe Kelsang in the following way:

The first letter was to do with the fact that if anything happened to Geshe Kelsang we were to sign up to say that our main teacher would be Neil Elliott. And we couldn't sign it [...] We disagreed with the idea that we all had to do a programme of study [...] And we had a lot of trouble when they burnt all the books in the library [...] We also had a problem with the narrowness and the conservative nature of the NKT. I can see why he's done it [but] I can't cope with people who say 'This is the only way'. I just couldn't be a part of it.<sup>9</sup>

Most NKT students recall the creation of the organisation in much fonder terms than this, stressing that the new and exclusive emphasis upon the authority of Geshe Kelsang and his study programmes gave the centres an energy and focus that was previously lacking, eliminating the confusions, conflicts and disagreements that are inherent to a more open and inclusive approach:

It caused some bad feeling and people left in a huff, but in the end it was the right decision. For example, we're setting up a centre in Blackburn now and we're not having half the problems that we had in Preston, because in a way you're a bit more blinkered. And in some ways that's a good thing because it stops you from straying off into blind alleys. Having seen what went on in Preston I know what to avoid, what's important, and so we're just concentrating on that and it does save a lot of aggravation.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The centre in question was Amitayus Centre in Nantwich, Cheshire.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Geshe Kelsang, August 1995.

<sup>10</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

### 3. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE NKT

A senior member and long-standing monk of the NKT explains the organisation's structure of authority in the following way:

The NKT hierarchy is Geshe Kelsang; and then there's a successor, someone who will be the spiritual director of the NKT after Geshe Kelsang passes away; and then there's everybody else, all on the same level really.<sup>11</sup>

Within the NKT, much emphasis is attached to the value and importance of lay religiosity and in this respect, the organisation reflects the broadly 'Protestant' character of its western cultural context. Except at the very highest levels of the organisation, positions of responsibility, teaching and leadership are as likely to be filled by lay practitioners as they are by monks or nuns.<sup>12</sup> The democratised and laicised nature of the organisation is one of the ways in which Geshe Kelsang is believed to have adapted *Gelug* Buddhism, the most clerical and strictly monastic of all the Tibetan traditions, for the West:

Geshe-la has said many times that he wants successful Teachers from amongst nuns, monks, lay women and lay men [...] anyone looking at Kadampa Buddhism can feel that there are role models for practicing Dharma purely in any life situation. I believe Geshe-la has been very skillful in developing this aspect of Kadampa Buddhism, which is one of the reasons why it is proving so successful in the West.<sup>13</sup>

Within the NKT, the appropriateness of lay practice applies not only to the *Sūtra* stages of the path, but also to Tantric practice, the form of practice that, according to *Tsong Khapa*, should not be undertaken without a solid grounding of academic study

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<sup>11</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>12</sup> A discussion of how NKT students make the decision to ordain or remain as lay practitioners can be found in Waterhouse, *Buddhism in Bath*, pp. 138-142.

<sup>13</sup> Nick Gillespie, 'Mining the Good Heart', *FM*, 11 (Winter 1994), p. 21.

and celibate monastic discipline. The democratised nature of the movement is also reflected in the fact that men and women are regarded as completely equal and are both equally likely to assume positions of leadership and responsibility. The question of gender within the NKT has been more fully examined by Waterhouse.<sup>14</sup> She found that, since the majority of male and female NKT monastics receive only the lower form of *gets`ul* ordination, the issues raised by the absence of an available equivalent of the *gelong* (full monastic ordination) for women do not arise and hence `nuns are not discriminated against at this time` (p. 175). One NKT monk also informed me that Geshe Kelsang deliberately places more emphasis upon the *Bodhisattva* vows (rather than the vows of monastic ordination) in order to cut across the traditional hierarchies (including gender-based distinctions) that are irrelevant to Buddhist practice in the West:

Geshe Kelsang nowadays isn't really emphasising the vows of ordination that monks and nuns take too publicly, because we're a mixed community, lay and ordained, married and single, monks and nuns together. So the actual vows we judge ourselves by in terms of seniority are the Bodhisattva vows, not the Pratimoksa vows, the vows of individual liberation [...] So from the public point of view it's more like, 'How long have you been ordained as a Bodhisattva?'. You don't know that, because there's no way of telling.<sup>15</sup>

Although there are no formal hierarchies within the movement beyond the leader and his nominated successors, NKT centres nevertheless operate according to clear and centrally defined organisational and administrative structures. There is a uniform set of designated roles and responsibilities that, according to NKT guidelines, ensures the smooth and successful running of centres. The division of labour is

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<sup>14</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, pp. 175-177.

<sup>15</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

predicated upon 'the complete separation of the spiritual and secular',<sup>16</sup> an organisational model which reflects Geshe Kelsang's emphasis on preserving the 'purity' of the teachings by not mixing them with worldly, financial or political affairs. There are three basic positions of responsibility: the Resident Teacher and the Education Programme Co-ordinator, who jointly oversee the centre's spiritual growth, and the Administrative Director, who takes care of its legal, financial and material concerns.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the larger residential centres also have Branch Co-ordinators to supervise the early growth of their satellite branches. The ideal pattern of development, though, is for new groups to become independent quickly, with a core of committed students who can take on the main roles of responsibility and begin the process of obtaining charitable status, raising funds and eventually becoming residential themselves. For a discussion of the manner in which NKT centres market and finance themselves, see Waterhouse, *Buddhism in Bath*, pp. 142-147.



#### 4. THE RHETORIC OF DE-CENTRALISATION

When discussing the organisation of the NKT, disciples of Geshe Kelsang dwell at length upon its de-centralised and reflexive nature. This 'extremely flexible'<sup>18</sup> organisation is described as 'a loose federation of independent centres'<sup>19</sup> which are 'continuously changing in flavour and character'<sup>20</sup> and which 'have no fixed structure or shape and are in no way exclusive'.<sup>21</sup> Geshe Kelsang is believed to 'encourage looseness and reject centralisation' and so the NKT is not understood as 'a rigid structure, a "movement" in the strict sense of the word'<sup>22</sup> because there is 'no central organisation controlling [the centres]'.<sup>23</sup> These views are interesting in light of the fact that, doctrinally, ideologically and organisationally, the NKT is one of the most uniform and centrally administered organisations on the British Buddhist landscape. Comments about its de-centralised and non-controlling nature clearly need to be understood against the background of the earlier conflict between the Manjushri Institute and the FPMT. When praising Geshe Kelsang's vision of the NKT, the organisational feature most often singled out is the fact that, whilst his affiliated centres are united spiritually through their shared constitution, they remain legally and financially independent:

The thing about the NKT is that, although it has a constitution setting out in detail its aims and objectives, all the centres that are under the banner of the NKT are autonomous, which in the previous organisation they hadn't been. And that makes quite a difference.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication, June 1996.

<sup>20</sup> 'Over the Moon', *FM*, 7 (Spring 1993), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication, June 1996.

<sup>23</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>24</sup> NKT Interview, October 1995.

This organisational structure also means that within the NKT 'there's no mixing of politics and religion, or money and religion'.<sup>25</sup> The mixing of religion, politics and money was one of the main charges that Geshe Kelsang levelled against Lama Yeshe during the earlier dispute. As we have seen, the NKT has striven to consciously forget this conflict by writing the FPMT out of its historical narratives. The way in which the NKT understands and articulates itself organisationally can thus be understood as an example of how repressed memories 'can return to haunt the margins of a discourse' and continue to influence its structure.

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<sup>25</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

## 5. A PURE LINEAGE

Waterhouse rightly observes that a fundamental element of the NKT's self-identity is 'the notion of the purity of Geshe Kelsang's lineage and the importance of maintaining that purity in practice'.<sup>26</sup> According to the literature of the organisation, Geshe Kelsang united his centres as the NKT 'in acknowledgment of their pure lineage from Je Tsongkhapa and the other great Teachers of the Kadampa Tradition in Tibet'.<sup>27</sup> The explicit constitutional aim of the organisation is to preserve and promote this pure lineage as it has been handed on by Geshe Kelsang via the organisation's three-tier study structure. This is based exclusively upon the 'authentic Dharma' contained in his texts, believed by members of the NKT to embody the 'pure authentic lineage'<sup>28</sup> in its entirety. If asked to identify its defining characteristic, most students within the NKT would probably echo the sentiments of the teacher of Tushita Centre, Blackburn:

The NKT is pure Buddhadharma; it isn't invented in any way, it's just as if Buddha Shakyamuni revealed it [...] So I guess you could say from that point of view that there is nothing better to be found. And that is the defining characteristic of the NKT: it's pure Dharma, everything else is a distraction. That's the core of it, the important thing about it. Everything else is just the icing on the cake.<sup>29</sup>

The lineage represented by Geshe Kelsang is considered to be 'pure' and therefore powerful because it has not been mixed with or diluted by the teachings of other traditions:

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<sup>26</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 151.

<sup>27</sup> *FM*, 4 (April 1992), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> 'Perfect Dharma Jewels', *FM*, 3 (1991), p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

You may have one pure tradition and another pure tradition. If you mix them what you get is a mish-mash without any purity and you have destroyed two traditions. So we're very strict on keeping the purity of the tradition. There is nothing invented and nothing taken away. It's completely pure so we can rely on it.<sup>30</sup>

Geshe Kelsang is believed to have faithfully represented the teachings he received from his root *guru* Trijang Rinpoche, who in turn faithfully transmitted the teachings of his root *guru* Phabongkha Rinpoche 'and so on all the way back to Buddha Shakyamuni'.<sup>31</sup>

The lineage is considered to have two aspects: the lineage of teachings or scripture, and the lineage of experience or realisation 'where you actually realise it yourself, realise what those teachings are about in your own mind, actually have spiritual realisations'.<sup>32</sup> Geshe Kelsang is considered to be a 'lineage holder' or 'lineage *guru*', a highly realised meditational master who combines both aspects of the lineage within himself and who thus has the authority to transmit it to others. Disciples in the NKT believe that, for the lineage to continue into the future, they must also combine both types of lineage themselves. The NKT teaches that to obtain the lineage of realisation, one's practice of the lineage of scripture must, like Geshe Kelsang's, be pure and completely unmixed with other spiritual teachings and practices.

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<sup>30</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>31</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>32</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

## 6. CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY BUDDHIST PRACTICE

### 6.1. A DEGENERATE AGE

Nattier divides conceptions of time and history within the Buddhist tradition into two basic categories: the cosmological, which focus on 'the origin, duration and destruction of the universe as a whole', and the Buddhological, which view the evolution of the cosmos 'in terms of the appearance, or non-appearance, of enlightened beings'.<sup>33</sup> Within both types of time scheme, an oscillating system involving alternating periods of improvement and degeneration is described. Whilst there is no unanimity between the textual sources on the exact way in which the schemes fit together, there is a consensus that the universe is currently in the lower reaches of an extended period of decline. Within the Buddhological framework, this decline is attributed both to 'internal' causes, that is to the failings of Buddhists themselves, and to 'external' causes, that is to the actions of those outside the Buddhist community (e.g. the persecution of Buddhism by secular authorities). According to Nattier, the anticipation of the disappearance of Buddhism within a finite number of centuries has, within much of South, Southeast and Inner Asian Buddhism, led to the adoption of,

a fierce conservatism, devoted to the preservation for as long as possible of the Buddha's teachings in their original form [...] this historical outlook views change of any kind as being - by definition - change for the worse. Thus the impulse to preservation (and, accordingly, the tendency to deny any change that may actually have taken place) is both understandable and expected.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), pp. 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

The view of time and history presented by Geshe Kelsang and the NKT is traditional in its depiction of a universe oscillating between periods of relative progress and decline. Most attention is given to a specifically *Gelug* framework which sees *Tsong Khapa* as 'the Second Buddha'<sup>35</sup> appearing to reform and restore the pure teachings of Buddha *Śākyamuni* at a time when they had fallen into decline. History subsequent to *Tsong Khapa* is seen as one of progressive degeneration again, and modern practitioners are encouraged to view their spiritual guide as 'like a second Buddha for us, showing us the path and leading us to liberation and enlightenment'.<sup>36</sup>

When discussing the 'internal' causes for the decline and demise of Buddhism, the scriptures most commonly single out factors like the lack of diligent meditation, carelessness in transmitting the teachings, the appearance of false Dharma and the excessive association with secular society. There is no doubt that, for Geshe Kelsang and the NKT, the decline of Buddhism in the modern world can be attributed to failings such as these within the Buddhist community. The organisation has, in fact, been outspoken in its criticism of the groups it holds responsible for the modern degeneration of Buddhism, and the two main groupings singled out are western Buddhist practitioners, on the one hand, and the contemporary *Gelug* sect of Tibetan Buddhism, on the other.

Although Geshe Kelsang's use of the doctrine of decline is traditional in many respects, the emphasis that he has placed upon the modern degeneration of Buddhism is unusual. Other *Gelug lamas* have not dwelt upon this image to the same degree,<sup>37</sup> or

<sup>35</sup> *Great Treasury of Merit* (London, Tharpa Publications, 1992), p. 166.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>37</sup> The Dalai Lama has even rejected the idea that we are living in a time of decline altogether, affirming that this is 'an epoch of virtue, of mutual aid, of better observance of the Scriptures, a fortunate period' (Jean-Claude Carriere, *Violence and Compassion: His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Jean-Claude Carriere* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 7).

used it so explicitly as part of an overall critique of contemporary Buddhist, and specifically *Gelug*, belief and practice. Geshe Kelsang's use of the image of degeneration is not surprising in light of the strand of *Gelug* Buddhism that he represents, a current that has defined itself as a bastion of purity against other elements within the tradition that corrupt the teachings with their open eclecticism. His exaggerated perception of the widespread decline of *Gelug* Buddhism has instilled a 'fierce conservatism' and urgency into the NKT's self-identity as an embodiment and protectorate of *Tsong Khapa's* pure tradition.

## 6.2. CRITIQUE OF WESTERN INCLUSIVISM

From an NKT perspective, the responsibility for the modern degeneration of Buddhism lies, in part, with western practitioners whose habitually open and eclectic orientation towards spiritual practice, is believed to have damaged the transformative power of the various Buddhist traditions in the West:

Often western Buddhists study under more than one tradition. They think it's great, but I think it's very dangerous. They just pick: 'I like this from the Cambodian; I like this from Zen; I like this from the Tibetan tradition'. And they hurl it all in and they come up with a sort of western soup. And what they've done [...] is they have made a nice tasty soup from bits and pieces from all over the place. But if you do this [...] the power of the Dharma is broken, it's destroyed [...] I think it's the biggest threat westerners have.<sup>38</sup>

The inclusivism of westerners is also believed to pose a specific threat to the continued existence of *Tsong Khapa's* pure tradition:

Geshe Kelsang fully believed the Ganden tradition was in danger of disappearing because westerners might mix up traditions, and have an unclear

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<sup>38</sup> NKT Interview, October 1995.

idea of what tradition is and what they should be doing.<sup>39</sup>

Geshe Kelsang's books and study programmes are thus believed to have been 'specially written for people in degenerate times'<sup>40</sup> because their structured, systematic and focused nature skilfully responds to the 'handicap' of the western mind which 'is fickle and finds it difficult to accept tradition' and is 'always wanting to choose bits from here and there, to be eclectic'.<sup>41</sup>

NKT students are often aware of and sensitive towards criticisms levelled against the organisation from outside which reject its approach as unhelpfully restrictive, and can offer well versed and articulate defences of their more focused orientation. In turn, though critical of western Buddhist practice generally, they rarely single out specific organisations as examples of impure practice.<sup>42</sup> This is partly out of a concern not to speak ill of other Buddhists and partly out of a self-professed ignorance of other Buddhist traditions, a common trait amongst NKT students and natural consequence of the exclusive approach encouraged by Geshe Kelsang. When asked how their tradition compares with other Buddhist traditions, a common NKT response thus emphasises that,

I don't know about any other kind of Buddhism, so it's difficult for me to put it in any kind of comparative terms.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Samten Kelsang, 'The Kadampa Way of Studying', *FM*, 10 (Summer 1994), p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> 'Tara Makes Everyone Gentle', *FM*, 5 (Summer 1992), p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Only one NKT student interviewed during the course of my research was critical of another contemporary Buddhist organisation in Britain. He cited the perceived eclecticism of the FWBO as an impure form of Buddhism.

<sup>43</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.



### 6.3. CRITIQUE OF THE TIBETAN GELUG SECT

The one tradition that Geshe Kelsang is explicitly outspoken against, however, is the modern *Gelug* sect of Tibetan Buddhism. During his teachings at both the NKT Spring Festivals of 1994 and 1995,<sup>44</sup> he maintained that contemporary *Gelug* Buddhism was in a state of 'serious degeneration':

Je Tsongkhapa's tradition in Tibet is called 'Gelug'. Nowadays in the Gelug tradition there has been a serious degeneration. I myself came from Sera monastery [...] We had a very extensive studying programme, philosophical teachings etc. We had *no* programme on Lamrim study or meditation, no Lojong study programme and almost no signs of Vajrayana Mahamudra. Many Tibetan scholars who practised Lamrim sincerely were regarded as being of low intelligence. They study philosophical teachings and try to obtain special positions such as geshes and many other degrees. That is their main aim, the primary attainment being their position. This clearly indicates that Kadam Dharma has degenerated.<sup>45</sup>

This critique is echoed by practitioners throughout the organisation who regularly define the NKT's purity in contradistinction to the impurity of modern *Gelug* Buddhism. The excessive involvement in Tibetan political affairs by monks, and the preponderance of worldly and materialistic motivations, are often cited as causes of degeneration. The tendency of *Gelug* practitioners to 'mix their tradition with other traditions'<sup>46</sup> and the absence of a balanced combination of intellectual study and meditational practice within the sect, are also emphasised.

The creation of the NKT in 1991 was thus a schismatic event, marking the formal separation of Geshe Kelsang and his network of centres from the degenerate religio-political world of Tibetan *Gelug* Buddhism. It was prompted by his radically

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<sup>44</sup> During these teachings, both of which I attended, Geshe Kelsang gave almost identical explanations of the modern decline of the *Gelug* sect.

<sup>45</sup> Geshe Kelsang teaching at the NKT Spring Festival, May 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Personal communication, May 1995.

exclusive belief that the *Gelug* sect itself had now become a major threat to the continuation of *Tsong Khapa*'s tradition in the modern world, and that he could protect the purity of the teachings only by severing all connections with it. In terms of his criticisms of *Gelug* belief and practice, Geshe Kelsang is firmly rooted within the exclusively-orientated strand of the *Gelug* tradition, particularly as it was represented by Phabongkha Rinpoche. The extremes to which *Gelug* exclusivism have been taken through the establishment of a new and independent religious movement, though, can be seen as an innovation or departure from tradition.

Within the NKT, statements declaring the organisation as a modern and 'western' form of Buddhism abound. In defining the movement in this way, the organisation is not simply maintaining that it represents Buddhism adapted for westerners. It is also striving to underline its separation from the Tibetan *Gelug* sect and emphasise the point that the West - via the NKT - is now the guardian and custodian of the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa* in the modern world. From an NKT viewpoint, Geshe Kelsang has played a unique role in the transmission of *Tsong Khapa*'s pure teachings and the organisation and study structures he has created in the West, are now believed to protect and preserve a tradition that is all but lost in its indigenous eastern context. The continued existence of 'the real living fragile body of Je Tsongkhapa's tradition', one student maintains, 'seems to depend solely on the accumulated realizations in the minds of a few (perhaps only one) great Teachers'.<sup>47</sup>

Another describes how,

Until recently Tibet was the special place where the innermost essence of Buddha's teachings were preserved, but now it seems that the centre of

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<sup>47</sup> *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 45.

Buddhism will be in the West. From this centre, however, Buddhism will spread all over the world. Geshe-la predicted that there will be NKT Centres in every country.<sup>48</sup>

Geshe Kelsang has also underlined the separation between himself and the wider *Gelug* sect through making a number of revisions to the later editions of his earlier publications. Dedications to the long life of the Dalai Lama found in editions of *Meaningful to Behold* prior to the creation of the NKT, for example, are omitted from the fourth edition published in 1994. Revisions made to the list of *Mahāmudrā* lineage *gurus* in the second edition of *Clear Light of Bliss*, published in 1992, are equally revealing. In the first edition, the lineage breaks into two branches from the time of *Panchen Losang Chogyen* (1570-1662) before recombining in Phabongkha Rinpoche, who is followed by Trijang Rinpoche and Ling Rinpoche, the ‘holder of this mahamudra lineage’ and ‘current holder of the throne of Ganden’.<sup>49</sup> In the second edition, by contrast, a simplified lineage is presented which excises one of the two earlier branches and omits Ling Rinpoche altogether, replacing his name with that of ‘Dorjechang Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche’ [i.e. Geshe Kelsang]. Furthermore, whilst Ling Rinpoche’s foreword to the first edition is retained in the second, his title of ‘Ninety-seventh Holder of the Throne of Ganden [and] Tutor to His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama’<sup>50</sup> is omitted. Long-standing disciples of Geshe Kelsang have not been able to offer a clear explanation of why he has made these revisions. One possible explanation for the simplification of the lineage has been offered by Paul Williams. He suggests that, by retaining the lineage branch which includes the names

<sup>48</sup> ‘Go West Young Man’, *FM*, 7 (Spring 1993), p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> *Clear Light of Bliss* (1982), p. iv.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii. Trijang Rinpoche’s position as ‘the Junior Tutor of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama’ (*ibid.*, p. 12) is also omitted from the second edition.

of several Panchen Lamas, Geshe Kelsang may be creating a lineage and identity that is more closely aligned with the Panchen Lamas and their perceived rivalry with the central government of the Dalai Lamas.<sup>51</sup> Geshe Kelsang's reasons for omitting Ling Rinpoche from the lineage, and for dropping the reference to his position within the *Gelug* hierarchy as the *Ganden Tripa* as well as all references to the Dalai Lama, are more obvious.<sup>52</sup> These omissions enabled him to disassociate himself from the two main authority figures within the *Gelug* monastic system, whilst promoting himself as the principal authentic disciple and direct lineage descendent of Trijang Rinpoche and Phabongkha Rinpoche. These changes must also be seen against the backdrop of the unfolding *Dorje Shugden* dispute of the 1970s and 1980s. Ling Rinpoche, who was from *Drepung* monastery, was not a devotee of *Dorje Shugden* and at the time of the dispute he naturally sided with the Dalai Lama.<sup>53</sup> Geshe Kelsang was delivering the oral teachings on which *Clear Light of Bliss* is based at the Institute in 1980 at around the same time that the dispute was unfolding in India, and he was probably unaware of these developments as the first edition of the text was under preparation. His exclusion of Ling Rinpoche from the lineage in the second edition, his omission of references to the Dalai Lama and the direct close association he draws between himself and Trijang Rinpoche, thus represent a reaction to the *Dorje Shugden* dispute and reflect a reformulated understanding of the pure lineage and of his role as its present holder.

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<sup>51</sup> Personal communication, September 1995. The Panchen Lama is revered as the second greatest and most influential incarnate *lama* within the *Gelug* school after the Dalai Lama. For a discussion of the conflict between the Ninth Panchen Lama and the government of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama during the early twentieth century see Goldstein's *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, pp. 110-120.

<sup>52</sup> I am again indebted to Paul Williams and Stephen Batchelor for their helpful insights regarding the possible reasons behind these textual revisions.

<sup>53</sup> There was also a very close friendship between the Dalai Lama and Ling Rinpoche.

Waterhouse found that NKT practitioners in Bath reacted to Geshe Kelsang's emphasis upon maintaining the purity of the tradition in different ways; some believe the NKT is the only pure path available, whilst others take a more liberal position that acknowledges the existence of other pure lineages and traditions. My findings corroborate the point that there are a range of attitudes within the NKT concerning the relative merits of their tradition vis-a-vis other Buddhist schools. At the more liberal end of the spectrum and representing the party-line of the organisation,<sup>54</sup> are attitudes such as the following:

Geshe-la has nothing but respect and admiration for all the other traditions. They're all legitimate ways of attaining enlightenment. But if you mix them up, if you start with one and then go to another one, and another, you end up just running between them rather than actually making progress with one. So Geshe-la has said it's far more important to forget about the others. They're all legitimate and they're all authentic and will lead you to enlightenment, but if you're studying this one then just study this one.<sup>55</sup>

Whilst the predominant view of the contemporary *Gelug* sect is very negative and critical, even here more moderate views are represented within the NKT. One student attempts to soften the NKT's critique of the *Gelug* by emphasising that Geshe Kelsang,

has always made it clear that this [i.e. the degeneration of Tibetan *Gelug* Buddhism] is only according to common appearance, to what you can see when you go around the monasteries. We don't know what people are doing privately. But on the surface, in terms of the public image of the monasteries, the combined study and meditation is gone. So this is the main reason of Geshe Kelsang's for saying 'Now we are a distinct tradition'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> At least to the extent that this is represented in Geshe Kelsang's texts. The response of the interviewee here reflects the teaching of his teacher who states that 'At the same time as cherishing our own tradition, we should respect all other traditions, and the right of each individual to follow the tradition of their choosing' (*Understanding the Mind* (London: Tharpa, 1993), p. 167).

<sup>55</sup> NKT Interview, January 1996.

<sup>56</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

At the other end of the scale, there is a sector of the NKT's membership which does consider that 'the NKT is now the only pure tradition of Buddhadharma in the world'.<sup>57</sup> One of the most extreme representatives of this position describes his understanding of the NKT in the following way:

Shakyamuni has said that the Dharma will die out, particularly Tantra will become like a candle flame in the wind. And that's definitely the way the Dharma is going. Dharma as far as Tibet is concerned is, if it is not already dead, it is seriously on its way out. That's the reason for the importance of the NKT [...] There is an urgency coming from the fruition of the prophecy [...] Spiritually times are becoming rapidly degenerate. It's almost as if the gangplank is being widened a little bit for people to get on the last ship. The NKT is without doubt that final flickering of the candle flame and is the only pure Dharma. This is the only place you can get it, via the NKT. The only place you can get pure Dharma teachings in their entirety. I avoid comparing Buddhism with Christianity like the plague, but it is like Noah's Ark to me. That's the only way I can describe it. This is a select club, really, and the only one worth joining.<sup>58</sup>

#### 6.4. A GOLDEN AGE

Two traditional images that are drawn upon extensively in the construction and articulation of the NKT's self-identity are: firstly, the disciplined orthodoxy of the eleventh century *Kadam* order of *Atiśa*; and, secondly, the later reforming activity of *Tsong Khapa*. Geshe Kelsang explains that he named his organisation the 'NKT' because the title 'reminds us of the ancient followers of the Kadam tradition [...] and encourages us to try to follow them'.<sup>59</sup> *Tsong Khapa*'s reforming activity is mobilised in that Geshe Kelsang is considered to have done in the twentieth century West what *Tsong Khapa* did in fifteenth century Tibet: that is, revitalise, re-establish and re-package the pure teachings of the Buddha in a time of widespread degeneration and

<sup>57</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>58</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>59</sup> 'Challenging the Eagles', p. 2.

decline. Geshe Kelsang himself draws this parallel between himself and the founder of *Gelug* Buddhism:

Je Tsongkhapa arranged Buddha's teachings in a very special way so that they can easily be studied and practised, and I have done the same for western practitioners.<sup>60</sup>

The title 'New Kadampa Tradition' is thus appropriated and used to indicate that the modern *Gelug* sect itself has degenerated and become a source of contamination. Traditionally, this title has functioned as a synonym for 'Gelug' but Geshe Kelsang employs it to evoke only the discipline and purity of both the early Tibetan *Kadam* masters and of *Tsong Khapa* and therefore in contradistinction to the contemporary, and by implication corrupt, *Gelug* sect.

An article by Gen. Thubten Gyatso in *Full Moon* is the clearest presentation of how the NKT understands its self-identity and significance within the history of the Buddhist world.<sup>61</sup> This identifies *Tsong Khapa* and Geshe Kelsang as the two great reforming figures since the time of the historical Buddha, appearing during different periods of degeneration to restore his pure doctrine and give it a new and meaningful presentation:

People call Je Tsongkhapa the Second Buddha, not because he replaced Buddha Shakyamuni but because he restored the essential doctrine of Buddha and showed how it could be practised in impure times. From this viewpoint, we have to say that Geshe Kelsang Gyatso is the Third Buddha, because he has once again restored the essential purity of Buddha's doctrine and shown how to practise it in extremely impure times.

The article is also aware that the title 'NKT' may lead to misinterpretations in the

<sup>60</sup> 'Accepting Defeat and Offering the Victory', *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> 'On Training as a Teacher', *FM*, 9 (Spring 1994), pp. 28-31.

minds of those who understand the term to be synonymous with '*Gelugpa*', and it thus seeks to clarify and underline the organisation's distinct, independent and unique identity:

The name 'New Kadampa Tradition' is new. The previous followers of Je Tsongkhapa are known as the 'New Kadampas', or the 'New Kadampa Lineage', but they are never referred to as the 'New Kadampa Tradition'. This is our copyright!

The tradition established by Geshe Kelsang is thus considered continuous with the tradition originated by *Tsong Khapa* in terms of the content of the teachings but different and distinct in terms of its special new presentation. Gen. Thubten Gyatso refers to this distinct presentation as 'the doctrine of Good Fortune' to stress how fortunate NKT students are to have received *Tsong Khapa*'s pure teachings in impure times. This sense of good fortune is felt by many NKT students who describe England as 'a spiritual paradise'<sup>62</sup> or Ulverston as 'the Western Pure Land'<sup>63</sup> and maintain that, whilst it is generally true that we are living in degenerate times, 'for the direct disciples of Geshe-la it is as if we are living in a golden age'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *FM*, 8 (Autumn 1993), p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> Samten Kelsang, 'The Kadampa Way of Studying', p. 10.



## 7. NKT EXCLUSIVISM

### 7.1. RELYING UPON THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE

The importance of cultivating a mind of faith and devotion in a qualified *guru* or *lama* is a fundamental element of all Tibetan Buddhist belief and practice especially in personal Tantric practice where the *guru* may be explicitly combined and identified with the *yidam* (meditational deity). The *Lamrim* teachings of the *Gelug* tradition,

expound at length how it is important to see all lamas, and in particular one's personal 'root lama' or *tsawe lama* as the Buddha, more specifically as the Buddha's Tantric form, Vajradhara. This applies especially to the lama who gives one Tantric teachings.<sup>65</sup>

Teachings on *guru* devotion and *guru-yoga* naturally form an important element of the texts composed by Geshe Kelsang, and his general presentation of this concept is rooted firmly within traditional Tibetan outlines of the *guru*-disciple relationship. His teachings on this subject have, nevertheless, changed and developed during his time in the West and they now incorporate a number of unusual features. The main shift in his thought occurred with the creation of the NKT. Discussions of the *guru*-disciple relationship appearing in his publications from this time reflect an exclusivism that did not characterise his earlier presentation and which is uncommon within traditional Tibetan contexts.

Geshe Kelsang's texts list the traditional qualities that should be possessed by the ideal spiritual teacher and he encourages students to check these qualifications

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<sup>65</sup> Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 252.

thoroughly before relying upon someone as a spiritual guide. This attitude of critical inquiry should be retained throughout a person's spiritual career:

Time and time again [the Buddha] reminded his disciples not to accept his teachings out of blind faith, but to test them as thoroughly as they would assay gold. It is only on the basis of valid reasons and personal experience that we should accept the teachings of anyone, including Buddha himself.<sup>66</sup>

Since the creation of the NKT in 1991, this teaching on the importance of personal authority in negotiating the Buddhist path has been overshadowed by an emphasis upon developing 'unwavering faith and confidence' in the *guru* and eliminating the doubts that undermine faith:

If we have strong faith in the Teacher or Buddha we will believe the teachings, even if we do not fully understand them.<sup>67</sup>

The exclusive emphasis on the authority of Geshe Kelsang is also reflected in the texts. This is most clearly illustrated by revisions made to *Clear Light of Bliss* on the subject of *guru* devotion. The earlier view that practitioners 'must depend upon the advice of experienced guides - fully qualified spiritual masters - and meditate according to their instructions' is now replaced with the narrower claim that they must 'rely upon a qualified Spiritual Guide and practise precisely according to his or her instructions'.<sup>68</sup> According to Geshe Kelsang, the student must now 'be like a wise blind person who relies totally upon one trusted guide instead of attempting to follow a number of people at once'.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Clear Light of Bliss* (1982), p. 144 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1992), p. 154).

<sup>67</sup> *Understanding the Mind*, p. 78.

<sup>68</sup> *Clear Light of Bliss* (1982), p. 180 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1992), p. 190).

<sup>69</sup> *Guide to Dakini Land* (London: Tharpa, 1991), p. 17.

The emphasis Geshe Kelsang placed in his earlier texts upon adopting an exclusive approach to one's tradition and spiritual practice, is continued in his publications following the creation of the NKT. This teaching has changed drastically however, because it now takes place within the organisational and ideological context of the NKT and it has been combined with the innovative view that one should rely exclusively upon only one trusted spiritual guide. Whereas the injunction about committing oneself to a single tradition was previously an attempt to encourage students to practise only the teachings of *lamas* within the *Gelug* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, it now becomes an injunction to practise only within the NKT:

Experience shows that realizations come from deep, unchanging faith, and that this faith comes as a result of following one tradition purely - relying upon one Teacher, practising only his teachings, and following his Dharma Protector. If we mix traditions many obstacles arise and it takes a long time for us to attain realizations.<sup>70</sup>

Hence, the traditional exclusivism that was always represented by Geshe Kelsang has been taken to a new and innovative extreme. Similarly, whilst the teaching that students should only rely upon teachers who 'share the same lineage and view as our principal Spiritual Guide'<sup>71</sup> is not an uncommon view within Tibetan Buddhism, where *lamas* will often encourage students to study under others who have a similar orientation to themselves, this teaching has a very specific and untraditional meaning within the context of the NKT. Since students within the organisation have only one spiritual guide, who is also regarded as their collective root *guru*, the injunction to study only under teachers who 'share the same lineage and view' as the root *guru* is in

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<sup>70</sup> *Great Treasury of Merit*, p. 31.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

practice an injunction to study only under Geshe Kelsang and teachers who have trained under him. Even the most exclusively orientated *Gelug lamas*, such as Phabongkha Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche, do not seem to have encouraged such complete and exclusive reliance in their students as this. The most common scenario within a Tibetan Buddhist context, rather, is for individual practitioners to study with a number of *lamas* – often (especially outside the *Gelug* tradition) from several different orders - whilst having one root *guru* in a particular tradition 'around whom one's practice was centered'.<sup>72</sup>

## 7.2. EXTERNAL CRITICISM

Waterhouse found that sectarian statements between Buddhist groups often stem from divergent attitudes towards authority sources and in particular, disagreement over the role of 'faith' within practice. She illustrates this by examining how contrasting attitudes of different group members towards the role of faith within Buddhist practice leads to sectarian statements, with *Theravāda* practitioners accusing NKT followers 'of blindly following their teacher without a critical questioning attitude'.<sup>73</sup> Sectarian criticism of the NKT is not limited to those individuals and groups who are sceptical about the role of faith in Buddhist practice. Western Buddhists practising in the Tibetan tradition are often critical of the NKT, not because of its emphasis on faith in the spiritual guide (which is a traditional practice shared by all Tibetan traditions) but because of the exclusivity of its reliance on Geshe Kelsang. They regard the NKT as a narrow distortion of the history and

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<sup>72</sup> Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 597.

<sup>73</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 236.

practice of *Tsong Khapa*'s original *Gelug* formulation:

There is a problem in calling the movement the 'New Kadampa Tradition' because it ignores the history of Tibetan Buddhism. The 'New Kadampa Tradition' is the name that Tsong Khapa gave to the Gelugpas. The Kadampas were a very open-minded and non-sectarian set of practitioners, and all schools have been influenced by them [...] Tsong Khapa studied Buddhism from all the schools. Consequently, the Gelugpa lineage has Nyingma and Sakyapa teachings in it, going far back [...] So of all the names to choose this seems like the least appropriate [...] Buddhism is a rich tradition because of its diversity. Yes, it may be good to stay rooted in one tradition. But you should stay in your tradition *and* go elsewhere. This is the safer way to practise.<sup>74</sup>

This is the style of practice that is encouraged by the Dalai Lama and which has been promoted within the FPMT. According to one FPMT monk,

Generally the way it is practised is that Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa and the other geshe I have studied with, they encourage you to study with their colleagues and their teachers [...] They recognise diversity in people's minds and in terms of the students benefits it is good to have more than one interpretation so you can make your own mind up.<sup>75</sup>

Waterhouse disagrees with the criticism that NKT students blindly and unquestioningly follow their teacher, arguing that members of the organisation actually balance the authority of Geshe Kelsang for their practice against their own personal experience of the truth of the teachings. My own research into the NKT corroborates this view. Much significance is undoubtedly attached throughout the organisation to the cultivation of pure faith and commitment. Many students appear to develop a deep faith in Geshe Kelsang very quickly, some maintaining that even before seeing or meeting him in person 'I knew for sure that that I had found my

<sup>74</sup> Personal communication, June 1995.

<sup>75</sup> FPMT Interview, March 1997.

Spiritual Guide and my tradition'.<sup>76</sup> One student maintains that,

I think it's a waste of time saying 'check up'. If I don't have time to practise Dharma, then I certainly don't have time to check up all the time. If I come up against anything - and I'm still waiting to find something that makes me really doubt Buddhism - *then* it's the time for me to check up.<sup>77</sup>

Others assert that their faith in Geshe Kelsang is not blind or uncritical but is based on sound reasons and experiential confirmation 'just as Buddha had directed his disciples'.<sup>78</sup> A number of students express the view that 'doubt' is fundamental to the NKT because Geshe Kelsang wants people to 'realise Buddha's message themselves so they can protect themselves and don't have to rely on other external persons'.<sup>79</sup> Practitioners within the NKT, then, are clearly not uniform in their attitudes towards authority sources; most combine both types of authority identified by Waterhouse, with some attaching greater significance to personal experience and others to faith in the spiritual guide. Perhaps the most common approach is the line encouraged by Geshe Kelsang himself in his more recent publications, wherein practitioners are encouraged to substitute critical inquiry for wholehearted faith and commitment once they have decided upon their spiritual guide and tradition.

### 7.3. PURE PRACTICE

In order to obtain spiritual realisations and to ensure that the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa* remains in the world, NKT students are encouraged to 'practise purely'. This means that they must not mix their spiritual practice - their study, meditation or

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<sup>76</sup> 'Go West Young Man', p. 45.

<sup>77</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>78</sup> *Full Moon*, 12 (Spring 1995), p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> NKT Interview, July 1996.

*sādhana* recitation and visualisation exercises - with worldly/political activities or with other, non-NKT spiritual teachings. The books and *sādhana* s prepared by Geshe Kelsang upon which all NKT practice is based, and the infrastructure of the NKT organisation itself, are considered to have placed a boundary around *Tsong Khapa*'s pure tradition, the survival of which depends entirely upon a widespread diligence in boundary maintenance. An article in *Full Moon*, which takes the form of a debate between 'freethinkers' and 'traditionalists', distinguishes between 'the living tradition, which is essentially a transmission of spiritual experience, and the external structure which ought to facilitate this transmission'.<sup>80</sup> The external organisation, that is the NKT, is itself regarded as 'an actual spiritual tradition' that must be purely preserved to keep the 'inner tradition' alive:

It is the shell of tradition which, if preserved purely, makes the wealth of spiritual knowledge of the past accessible to us [...] The boundaries of a tradition give our spiritual practice focus and power. However, if it is corrupted by people with bad motivation, it becomes the death of tradition.<sup>81</sup>

As part of the emphasis on pure practice, students within the NKT are discouraged from attending teachings or reading books by other Buddhist teachers and authors:

If we follow these spiritual programmes we will steadily progress towards enlightenment, but if we try to do everything ourself and read many different books from many different traditions we will just get confused.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> 'Searchlight', *JM*, 8 (Autumn 1993), p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 'Wisdom', *JM*, 14 (Winter 1995), p. 7. This exclusivity of texts even extends to English-language translations of Phabongkha Rinpoche's teachings. According to one NKT student, Phabongkha's published discourse on the *Lamrim* teachings *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, ed. by Trijang Rinpoche and trans. by Michael Richards (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1991), is not used within the NKT because 'the translation of one of the verses of the root text is not correct and so the value of the book is limited' (Personal communication, March 1994).

The exclusive reliance on Geshe Kelsang encouraged within the NKT is transferred to his texts with the claim that they are 'scriptures, an emanation of the mind of the holy being'<sup>83</sup> and are therefore to function 'as the teacher from now on'.<sup>84</sup> Promoting his books as the spiritual guide is also an effective way in which he makes himself available to students throughout the growing NKT network, wherein direct and personal contact with the *lama* - which, as we have seen, has been vital to the growth of Tibetan forms of Buddhism in the West - is very rare:

Geshe-la has said, 'Well, you don't have to see me. You've got my books, that's me'. He actually said to me in an interview once, 'When I'm not here these [books] are me, they're me speaking. You don't need [the physical] me'. So this explains, as much as traditional Buddhism, the great reverence that practitioners in the NKT are exhorted to show towards Geshe-la's books and sadhanas because Geshe-la has said, 'This is me'.<sup>85</sup>

Most NKT students agree with the exclusive approach encouraged by Geshe Kelsang and believe that, to make progress spiritually, they must rely purely upon one teacher and one tradition. As Waterhouse observes, though, the prescription against reading non-NKT literature is not universally followed by all members. One student continues to read books by other teachers but avoids the confusions and contradictions this is believed to create because 'what I do now is I filter them as I'm reading them'.<sup>86</sup> Another maintains that, whilst he relies mainly on Geshe Kelsang, 'sometimes it's good to have a second opinion':

I do read other books on Buddhism now and again, but my main practice is New Kadampa Buddhism, so these are the books I really put all my energies

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<sup>83</sup> *FM*, 14 (Winter 1995), p. 41.

<sup>84</sup> NKT Interview, January 1996.

<sup>85</sup> NKT Interview, January 1996.

<sup>86</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.



into in the practice [...] Being involved in the NKT, I wouldn't disapprove of going to another teacher. The Dalai Lama is going to Manchester and I wouldn't mind too much going to see him teach.<sup>87</sup>

Other students are stricter in their exclusivism than this and completely bracket out all non-NKT materials from their range of spiritual resources. In explaining their reasons for doing so, however, they often assert that this in no way involves the forfeiture of their personal authority. One student describes how she has 'never felt any inclination to look, study or even read a book on any other tradition',<sup>88</sup> and another maintains that,

I don't feel that it's insular. No one has ever said, 'Don't read this or that'. It's just that Geshe-la's books are such a nice parcel, why would you want to look anywhere else? That's how I see it. And I still look at things on TV to do with other religions.<sup>89</sup>

#### 7.4. PURE TRANSMISSION

If the objective of an NKT student is to become a pure container for Geshe Kelsang's teachings, the aim of an NKT teacher is to function as a pure 'channel' in transmitting the teachings to others. The ideal teacher is someone who, whilst developing a range of effective presentational techniques, faithfully passes on the content of the teachings without colouring them in any way by their own personal ideas, preconceptions or prejudices. One NKT teacher describes his role as 'a talking book'<sup>90</sup> in the following way:

It's a bit like a parrot in a way, teaching a parrot to talk [...] We're a telephone

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<sup>87</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>88</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>89</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>90</sup> Gen. Thubten Gyatso, 'Notes on Teaching Skills', (1992), p. 34.

in a way, or loud speakers, and Geshe-la's teachings come through your mouth. We only say what we've read, so it's not as if we're doing very much really except presenting Geshe-la's ideas. It's like a mouthpiece really.<sup>91</sup>

Other teachers emphasise the importance of becoming an effective 'conduit' by 'getting yourself out of the way'.<sup>92</sup> The importance of faithfully transmitting Geshe Kelsang's texts helps to explain the emphasis upon thorough textual study, discussion and memorisation exercises on the Foundation and Teacher Training Programmes:

We should reach the point where we are able to repeat what Geshe-la says, almost line-by-line, certainly paragraph by paragraph [...] Otherwise what we are teaching is just our opinion of the Dharma. Because the books are there in our mind, we will feel Geshe-la is teaching from within us [...] We can dress our teaching up in Western idioms, but we must make sure that the meaning is exactly what Geshe-la has given us [...] Every NKT Teacher must give exactly the same explanation, otherwise the NKT will disintegrate.<sup>93</sup>

Whilst personal experience of the teachings is considered important, the dominant view within the NKT is that the main qualification of a teacher is their purity of faith and discipleship. An individual's lack of experience or 'realisations' is not an obstacle because 'all you need to become a teacher is to have faith in Geshe Kelsang and know your Dharma a little bit'.<sup>94</sup> The *guru-yoga* of *Tsong Khapa*, a practice which involves visualising and absorbing with the *guru* in the aspect of *Tsong Khapa*, is thus regarded as the core component of an NKT teacher's preparations.<sup>95</sup>

If you have a close relationship [with your *guru*] then you can be used in that way to benefit others. As part of our tradition this is true. People will do *Heart*

<sup>91</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>92</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>93</sup> 'Notes on Teaching Skills', pp. 3-5.

<sup>94</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>95</sup> In the NKT this practice is combined with the protector deity practice of *Dorje Shugden*. They are presented together as the 'essential practice' of the organisation in the *Heart Jewel sādhana*.

*Jewel*, absorb Geshe Kelsang, feel he is one with them, and then it's Geshe Kelsang who is going to do the teaching [...] The important thing is that the only way you can be a good teacher is to become a good disciple [...] Of course, many teachers have many good qualities, but the main qualification is reliance on the spiritual guide. We are not qualified to teach on our own.<sup>96</sup>

One teacher considers that, through practising *guru-yoga* 'we act like an oracle'<sup>97</sup> for Geshe Kelsang to give the teachings. According to Gen. Thubten Gyatso, then, 'there is only one teacher in the NKT, Geshe Kelsang; all the other NKT Teachers are his emanations'.<sup>98</sup> A consequence of this view is that 'giving teachings is like receiving them'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>97</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>98</sup> 'On Training as a Teacher', p. 31.

<sup>99</sup> 'A Day in the Life of Kelsang Lhamo', *FM*, 9 (Spring 1994), p. 15.

## 8. THE MISSIONARY IMPERATIVE

The NKT's self-identity as a source of pure Buddhism in a world of decline and degeneration has instilled a missionary drive within the organisation. The purpose of the NKT, as it has been conceived by Geshe Kelsang, is to ensure the continuation of *Tsong Khapa's* pure tradition by spreading it all over the world through the creation of Dharma centres and the training of teachers:

It is vitally important that Dharma flourishes throughout the whole world. The main purpose of developing the New Kadampa Tradition is to accomplish this. During my life I shall have laid only the basic foundations, but later generations need to develop these more and more until the New Kadampa Tradition flourishes in every single country of the world. This is our main aim; this is our job.<sup>100</sup>

NKT students in Britain who have encountered Geshe Kelsang's 'doctrine of good fortune' have a responsibility to 'help spread his precious teachings to every corner of the world',<sup>101</sup> either by establishing and teaching in centres overseas, sponsoring and translating his books in non-English languages, or just by supporting the growth of new centres financially. The expansion of the NKT is even likened by one student to the growth of the early Christian church.<sup>102</sup>

According to NKT literature, whilst Buddha *Śākyamuni*, *Tsong Khapa* and Geshe Kelsang 'have all introduced the same Dharma into the world' the uncommon contribution of the latter has been 'to lay down the structures to ensure that this precious Dharma will spread throughout the world':

With the founding of the NKT [...] there is for the first time in human history

<sup>100</sup> 'The Importance of Developing New Dharma Centres', *FM* (Summer 1992), pp. 3-4.

<sup>101</sup> 'Over the Moon', *FM*, 8 (Autumn 1993), p. 46.

<sup>102</sup> 'Establishing the NKT in Spain', *Full Moon*, 8 (Autumn 1993), p. 9.

the prospect of Buddhism becoming a global religion with pure Centres and pure practitioners in every country of the world.<sup>103</sup>

The publishing activity of the organisation is regarded as another key mechanism of growth. Since one of the most common ways in which people are attracted to the NKT 'is through reading Geshe-la's books', it is considered imperative to publish them in every language and 'get them into every book shop in the world' thereby 'paving the way for future Dharma Centres'.<sup>104</sup> Much emphasis is also given to equipping NKT teachers with effective presentational techniques. Training in teaching skills within the organisation originally took the form of occasional short courses run by Gen. Thubten Gyatso, but it has now been integrated as a regular component of the Teacher Training Programme with the emphasis being placed upon 'identifying aspects of physical and verbal behaviour that impede effective teaching, and finding specific methods to avoid them'.<sup>105</sup> A number of passages in a booklet by Gen. Thubten Gyatso entitled 'Notes on Teaching Skills' are revealing about the organisation's missionary ambitions.<sup>106</sup> NKT teachers are encouraged to skilfully use humour, repetition and 'inspirational raves', and to develop their abilities in rhetoric, delivery and 'all other skills such as body language, eye contact, how we dress, how we present ourselves, times to smile or not'. They should 'not worry about converting people at the beginning' but concentrate on building up a supportive environment and friendly rapport with their group:

<sup>103</sup> 'Over the Moon', *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 46.

<sup>104</sup> 'Tharpa Publications: A Rising Sun of the NKT', *FM*, 7 (Spring 1993), p. 33.

<sup>105</sup> 'A Guide to Becoming a Qualified Teacher at Manjushri Mahayana Buddhist Centre', undated pamphlet.

<sup>106</sup> This booklet, originally published in 1992, is an internal document and is not made available to the public.

To start with we need to agree with people, to show that we understand where they are at, not to resist them or argue with them. If we have a wild horse, the best way to tame it is to mount it, to go with it [...] If we feel that the Teacher understands us and is sympathetic to us, we will naturally feel close to him or her, and keep coming back.

The will to grow and expand is another element of the NKT's self-identity that has met with criticism from non-NKT Buddhists. Ken Jones is critical of the 'unhealthy' dominance of the FWBO, SGI-UK and NKT on the British Buddhist landscape, characterising these movements as 'forceful and extrovert organisations where recruitment of new members is a major activity'.<sup>107</sup> A short critique of the NKT written by the disaffected member Edward Reiss also claims that the methods of recruitment outlined in 'Notes on Teaching Skills' are 'deceptive', and argues that a deliberate aim of group meditation within the organisation is to 'induce a pleasant trance-like state, in which the critical faculties are dimmed' so that the meditator 'becomes increasingly suggestible to group doctrine'.<sup>108</sup> In a rejoinder to this, Geshe Kelsang replies that every organisation 'tries to attract more people with appropriate publicity, showing its special good qualities', and that Gen. Thubten's advice 'is free from any intention to trick or manipulate people' and has been quoted out of context.<sup>109</sup>

The NKT has become sensitive to outside criticism on the subject of expansion and maintains that its emphasis on spreading NKT Buddhism 'is not empire building'<sup>110</sup> but stems from a pure motivation to benefit others. The growth of the NKT according to one student, 'is not something I see coming from the NKT's side':

<sup>107</sup> 'Many Bodies, One Mind: Movements in British Buddhism.'

<sup>108</sup> 'The New Kadampa Tradition' (unpublished paper, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> Document dated 9 June 1995.

<sup>110</sup> 'Over the Moon', *Full Moon*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 46.

It has to come from the student's side. People have to be interested in it to request a teacher. That's when one gets one sent. The NKT don't just get a map of the world and stick a pin in it and say, 'We'll send a teacher there' [...] I think there is a policy to support growth. But it's not like missionary activity, because the whole essence of Buddhism is that it is requested.<sup>111</sup>

It is clear that the rapid expansion of the NKT since 1991, both in Britain and around the world, has resulted from a combination of both pull and push factors, as the student quoted above suggests. However, the low-key style of proselytization she claims characterises the organisation, clearly understates the 'push' element of the equation. Indeed, during 1995, a map of the world replete with pins indicating the presence of teachers and centres, *was* displayed in the vestibule of Manjushri Centre to indicate the global expansion of the NKT and to encourage students to contribute to the organisation's fundraising endeavours. The notice read:

Teachers are giving up many of their comforts and conveniences of living in a country where the Dharma is already established in order to bring the Dharma to the lives of people all around the world. As NKT disciples we have a great responsibility to support these precious Teachers. The NKT cannot become global without the help of its disciples.

The growth of the NKT is celebrated within the 'Centrepiece' section of *Full Moon*, and some editions of the magazine have been devoted entirely to the transplantation of NKT Buddhism overseas.<sup>112</sup> The 'explosion of the Dharma' around Europe and North and South America is energetically reported and the progress towards the eventual goal of creating an NKT centre in every British town is charted.

Following the creation of the NKT in 1991, when there were approximately

<sup>111</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

<sup>112</sup> For example, the Autumn 1993 edition concentrated on 'NKT Buddhism in the Spanish World' whilst the Winter 1995 edition focuses on the growth of 'Kadampa Buddhism in America'.

eight residential centres and twenty non-residential branches under Geshe Kelsang's guidance represented in Britain and four other countries, the number of NKT centres began to rise dramatically. By the end of 1995, there were approximately forty-four residential centres and two hundred non-residential branches represented in eighteen countries and by the summer of 1997, this number had risen again to approximately sixty residential centres and two hundred and seventeen non-residential branches.<sup>113</sup> The overseas growth of the NKT has concentrated mainly on North America and Spain, although substantial inroads have been made into South America, Australia and the rest of Europe. In all cases the growth of NKT centres has been greatly facilitated by the tours made by Geshe Kelsang and his former spiritual successor Gen. Thubten Gyatso, with the activities of the latter, in particular, generating surges of enthusiasm and galvanizing energy for expansion at a local level. Geshe Kelsang has recently decided to spend most of his time in America in order to consolidate and expand the movement there. The number of NKT centres around the world provides a fair reflection of the pace and the extent of the movement's growth. They are not necessarily an accurate indicator, however, of the NKT's size in terms of its membership. According to NKT sources in July 1996, the number of individuals who regularly attend NKT activities does not exceed more than 3,000 people worldwide.

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<sup>113</sup> Including twenty-seven residential centres in the UK (out of a hundred and seventy centres) and thirty-three residential centres outside the UK (out of a hundred and seven centres).



## 9. ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE

Due to its emphasis on maintaining the purity of the teachings by not mixing them with worldly or political concerns, the NKT has displayed little interest in 'engaged Buddhist' activities. The organisation is believed to have a beneficial influence on society, but the main way in which this is achieved is through the growth of Dharma centres since 'the experience of pure Dharma is the only effective method to solve human problems'.<sup>114</sup> NKT centres are characterised as 'Bodhisattva communities'<sup>115</sup> which are slowly transforming the wider world into a 'Bodhisattva society'<sup>116</sup> by making the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa* available. Students who have attempted to stir the NKT into a more direct form of social engagement than this have met opposition from others within the organisation. An article in *Full Moon* encouraging centres to practise 'sustainable Dharma' by making the pure teachings of the NKT 'also an example of how to sustain and benefit the lives of all beings - humans, animals and plants - we depend upon',<sup>117</sup> prompted a critical response from another student who, in the following issue, maintained that 'we shouldn't waste our time and energy in futile pursuits' such as 'rearranging the furniture of samsara' but should concentrate instead on training the mind and purifying karma.<sup>118</sup> This particular disagreement of opinion also surfaced during the NKT Spring Festival at Manjushri Centre in 1995. During a question and answer session at the end of a talk by the senior monk Samten Kelsang, one student raised his concern and disappointment that the NKT centres he had visited in Britain were not living in an

<sup>114</sup> *FM*, 9 (Spring 1994), p. 41.

<sup>115</sup> Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 'The Bodhisattva Family', *FM*, 7 (Spring 1993), pp. 4-6.

<sup>116</sup> Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 'Building a Bodhisattva Society', *FM*, 7 (Spring 1993), p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> 'Putting Dharma into Practice - for 100 Aeons?', *FM*, 13 (Summer 1995), p. 38.

<sup>118</sup> *FM*, 14 (Winter 1995), p. 43.

environmentally sound way. In reply, Samten emphasised that there are two levels of suffering, the superficial level and the underlying causes, and that,

Buddhism is concerned more with trying to remove the underlying causes of suffering [...] We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that what we are really trying to do is eliminate the underlying causes of pollution etc, and the only way to do this is through Dharma practice and educating others.<sup>119</sup>

During the first seven years of its development,<sup>120</sup> the NKT displayed no interest in inter-faith activities or dialogue with other Buddhist groups.<sup>121</sup> This deliberate distancing and separation from other groups was another consequence of the great emphasis attached to preserving the purity of the tradition. When asked about the reasons behind the organisation's decision not to participate in forums of dialogue such as the Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK), students replied that such activities would be 'a distraction from the main aim of attaining enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings' and that, even though Buddhists engaging in dialogue may think they are talking about 'neutral' issues, the eventual result of interaction with other Buddhist teachers and traditions would be the degeneration of the teachings:

You might not notice it, but some degeneration is going to creep into your understanding of the teachings. You're going to get confused.<sup>122</sup>

Having experienced cross-Buddhist dialogue in the past, one senior teacher within the organisation had come to believe very strongly that such activities are meaningless,

<sup>119</sup> Taken from a talk given on 27 May 1995.

<sup>120</sup> During 1998 the NKT's policy on inter-Buddhist dialogue changed when the organisation made an application to join the NBO. This development will be discussed later.

<sup>121</sup> Although, as Waterhouse observes, individual NKT practitioners - usually those on the fringes of the movement - sometimes maintain connections with other Buddhist groups.

<sup>122</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

confusion-creating and even un-Buddhist:

Insofar as an organisation helps to get the Dharma across, pure Dharma, that's fine. But if it's something else, to build bridges between Buddhist societies and so forth, the question is, 'Well what does that do?'. I don't see any need to forge some kind of links as if there's something to be learned from that. There's nothing to be learned from that actually. All the methods to solve problems are found in the Dharma.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE IDENTITY OF THE NKT (2)

#### 10. DORJE SHUGDEN RELIANCE

##### 10.1. CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES

A key component of the NKT's self-identity is its emphasis upon *Dorje Shugden*. Reliance upon this protector which had become increasingly central in Geshe Kelsang's centres during the 1980s, is defined as the 'essential practice' of the NKT. His commentary to the protector practice in *Heart Jewel* (1991) is based upon the teachings and writings of Trijang Rinpoche. Whilst the continuities with the tradition of practice established by Phabongkha Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche are unmistakable, Geshe Kelsang nevertheless deviates from this tradition in significant ways.

In line with the Phabongkha tradition, Geshe Kelsang presents *Dorje Shugden* as the principal protector of *Tsong Khapa's* tradition, maintaining that he has now replaced the traditional supramundane protectors such as *Mahākāla* and *Kālarūpa*. He also affirms the enlightened nature of the deity, portraying *Dorje Shugden* as an emanation of Buddha *Māñjuśrī*. Phabongkha's combination of this protective deity with *Gelug* exclusivism is also continued by Geshe Kelsang who, during the Spring Festival in 1995, emphasised that *Dorje Shugden's* protection and blessings will only be received by students who practise Kadampa Buddhism purely, without mixing. In many respects the view of *Dorje Shugden* within the NKT represents a traditional

strand of *Gelug* thought and practice.

In other respects however, Geshe Kelsang has veered from the traditional position. The *extent* of his exclusivism has gone much further than that of Phabongkha and Trijang Rinpoche and this has had an important effect upon the way in which *Dorje Shugden* is understood. Whilst Phabongkha's revival movement was spearheaded *within* the *Gelug* school, Geshe Kelsang's view of the decline of 'pure' *Gelug* practice led him to adopt a more radical position and opt out of the *Gelug* altogether. He thus claims that the NKT has only been able to re-establish and propagate the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa* throughout the West through the power of the deity:

Fortunately, we have re-established, in the West, in this country, Kadampa Buddhism. It has been re-established through the power of Duldzin Dorje Shugdan. The Dharmapala has renewed Kadampa Buddhism. But, for specific reasons, he changed the place where Kadam Dharma will flourish. So the best ability to re-organise and re-establish the precious qualities of Kadampa Buddhism comes, or came, from the blessings of Duldzin Dorje Shugdan.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst his exclusivism is more extreme than that of his predecessors, the sectarian excesses of Phabongkha have not been replicated in Geshe Kelsang's public level teachings. In this respect he is closer to Trijang Rinpoche who prioritised the devotional element of the practice. The traditionally violent imagery is retained in the NKT's ritual invocations which request *Dorje Shugden* to offer protection against the 'malevolent humans and non-humans who would despise or harm pure practitioners'<sup>2</sup> and 'subdue immediately all traitors, enemies and obstacles who cause harm or

<sup>1</sup> Geshe Kelsang teaching at the NKT Spring Festival at Manjushri Centre, 27 May 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Melodious Drum Victorious in all Directions: The extensive fulfilling and restoring ritual of the Dharma Protector, the great king Dorje Shugdan, in conjunction with Mahakala, Kalarupa, Kalindewi and other Dharma Protectors* (London: Tharpa, 1993), p. 32.

injury'.<sup>3</sup> Such references to the 'enemies of Buddhism' here, however, must be seen within the context of Geshe Kelsang's commentary which does not ascribe the same kind of violent partiality to *Dorje Shugden* that was present in Phabongkha's texts:

Dorje Shugdan does not help only Gelugpas; because he is a Buddha he helps all living beings, including non-Buddhists.<sup>4</sup>

Phabongkha's punitive characterisation of the deity does not form a part of Geshe Kelsang's presentation either. The *Dorje Shugden sādhana* does contain passages wherein the practitioner restores broken commitments by confessing to having 'mixed and polluted' the pure teachings with 'incomplete or false teachings',<sup>5</sup> but there are no passages akin to those in Phabongkha's texts which state that the deity will cause madness or shorten the lives of those with inclusive tendencies.

The final way in which Geshe Kelsang's presentation of *Dorje Shugden* differs is in terms of the deity's ontological status. Phabongkha and Trijang Rinpoche both promoted *Dorje Shugden* as a fully enlightened being who assumes the appearance of a worldly and boastful deity. A sectarian element to a protector practice, we will remember, only makes sense if the deity is regarded as a mundane and therefore partial being. This being so, Trijang Rinpoche's de-emphasis of the sectarian element is understandable in light of the increased emphasis he gave to *Dorje Shugden*'s enlightened nature. Geshe Kelsang takes the elevation of *Dorje Shugden*'s ontological status another step further, emphasising that the deity is enlightened in both essence *and* appearance:

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Heart Jewel*, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> *Melodious Drum*, pp. 41-42.

Some people believe that Dorje Shugdan is an emanation of Manjushri who shows the aspect of a worldly being, but this is incorrect. Even Dorje Shugdan's form reveals the complete stages of the path of Sutra and Tantra, and such qualities are not possessed by the forms of worldly beings.<sup>6</sup>

For such an unequivocal affirmation of the enlightened nature of the deity to remain doctrinally consistent, there is no room for a sectarian element.

In his general discussion of the nature and importance of protector deity reliance, Geshe Kelsang offers a much simplified account of a very complex and diverse aspect of traditional Tibetan Buddhist belief and practice. In particular, no distinction is made between mundane and supramundane protectors; *all* protective deities, rather, are defined as supramundane beings who function to remove the obstacles that impede spiritual progress:

Though there are some worldly deities who are friendly towards Buddhism and who try to help practitioners, they are not real Dharma Protectors. Such worldly deities are able to increase the external wealth of practitioners and help them to succeed in their worldly activities, but they do not have the wisdom or the power to protect the development of Dharma within a practitioner's mind [...] It is clear therefore that all actual Dharma Protectors must be emanations of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas.<sup>7</sup>

Geshe Kelsang's aim in simplifying the subject in this way may have been the adaptation of a culturally alien practice for the West. Equally important though, is the fact that a simplified outline enabled him to gloss over the historical and contemporary disagreements surrounding *Dorje Shugden* reliance.

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<sup>6</sup> *Heart Jewel*, p. 94.

<sup>7</sup> *Heart Jewel*, pp. 73-74. This outline can be compared with the Dalai Lama's more detailed discussion of supramundane, mundane, regional and local protective deities in *Bodh Gaya Interviews*, pp. 76-78.

## 10.2. PROTECTOR RELIANCE IN THE NKT

The *sādhana*s which combine the *guru-yoga* of *Tsong Khapa* with the practice of relying upon *Dorje Shugden* are, as Waterhouse observes, the most commonly performed *sādhana*s within the NKT. Many individual practitioners have received the *Dorje Shugden* empowerment and accepted a daily commitment to perform the *Heart Jewel sādhana*, and the practice is also performed on a daily and monthly basis in the NKT's residential centres.<sup>8</sup> The importance of receiving the empowerment and practising protector reliance daily was explained by Geshe Kelsang during the 1995 Spring Festival:

This empowerment establishes a special connection between you and the Dharma protector. From now on, if you rely sincerely on Duldzin Dorje Shugdan he will care for you in a special way [...] He will pacify the obstacles and establish the necessary conditions. By receiving his blessings you can increase your Dharma realisations [...] By relying sincerely on this Dharmapala your Dharma path will be greatly successful [and] your teachings will be very beneficial. All Dharma practitioners should therefore make a commitment to recite *Heart Jewel* sadhana everyday.<sup>9</sup>

As Geshe Kelsang's uncle and 'the Oracle of the Dharma Protector of Kadampa Buddhism',<sup>10</sup> Kuten Lama has been an important figure in the NKT. Oracular divination seems to have been influential in Geshe Kelsang's decision to create the NKT and the visits of the oracle around the period of the organisation's formation certainly galvanized the energy of the centres and enhanced their

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the practice of *Heart Jewel* in the NKT see Waterhouse's *Buddhism in Bath*, pp. 167-170. The other NKT *sādhana*s which combine both practices are *Wishfulfilling Jewel* and *Melodious Drum*, and to practise these a Highest Yoga Tantra empowerment is required. The latter *sādhana* is performed monthly in Dharma centres on a day known as 'Protector Day', and the *pūjā* lasts for around four hours.

<sup>9</sup> Geshe Kelsang teaching at the NKT Spring Festival at Manjushri Centre, 27 May 1995.

<sup>10</sup> 'Invocation Ceremonies with Ven. Kuten Lama', undated NKT flyer advertising the oracle's presence at the Spring Festival, 1996.



commitment. His subsequent visits from *Ganden Shartse* monastery in India were also big events and he attracted large gatherings of NKT disciples wherever he went. In April 1996, the teacher at the Chenrezig Meditation Group in Lancaster talked enthusiastically about the visit of Kuten Lama to the Spring Festival where he would invoke *Dorje Shugden*. Such invocations, she maintained, 'are the nearest thing we get to a Buddha' since the protector 'enters the oracle who is his voice box and speaks directly to us'. She explained that, whilst the deity takes possession of the oracle, questions would be asked on both the spiritual and material issues affecting Manjushri Centre. The importance of the subsequent tour the oracle was expected to make around the NKT's residential centres in Britain was also stressed 'because invocations bring enormous blessings upon the centre'.

Oracular divination, nevertheless, was never a regular feature of the NKT's spiritual activities and has not received any detailed coverage in Geshe Kelsang's texts. There are a number of possible explanations for the generally marginal position occupied by the oracle in the organisation. Firstly, a pragmatic reason is that Kuten Lama's monastic base is in South India, making him inaccessible to the daily life of the western-based NKT. The self-identity of the NKT as an independent and 'western' Buddhist movement offers a second explanation. The organisation's relationship with Kuten Lama, and through him with the re-established *Ganden Shartse* monastery, problematised its self-proclaimed separation from the degenerate religio-political world of Tibetan Buddhism, and as a consequence the profile of the oracle within the NKT was kept low. The fact that, whilst Kuten Lama was allowed to give religious discourses in NKT centres during his 1996 visit no translation from the Tibetan was

provided, underlines the point that the ongoing relationship with the oracle posed an ideological complication for the organisation. Thirdly, one senior student ascribes Kuten Lama's low profile to Geshe Kelsang's attempt to make Buddhism more accessible to the West by gradually dispensing with the 'culturally exotic' phenomena of oracular divination altogether. Finally, the oracle may have been marginalised by Geshe Kelsang because his presence raised a doctrinal ambiguity for the NKT. According to traditional Tibetan teachings, none of the high-ranking supramundane protective deities 'would condescend to interfere with more or less mundane affairs by speaking through the mouth of a medium'.<sup>11</sup> The notion of oracular divination may thus have been problematised for Geshe Kelsang in light of his portrayal of *Dorje Shugden* as a fully enlightened being.

### 10.3. EXTERNAL CRITICISM

The controversy surrounding *Dorje Shugden* reliance has been a potential threat to the NKT's stability since the practice was popularised during the mid-1980s. Geshe Kelsang and his network of centres have received criticism from other westerners practising in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition who, having become aware of the contentious dimensions of the practice, have most commonly sided with the Dalai Lama.

The dispute first threatened to become public in Britain in 1985 when the Buddhist Society's journal *The Middle Way* published a book review by the *Nyingma* teacher Michael Hookham which commented upon the contentious dimensions of

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<sup>11</sup> De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 409.

*Dorje Shugden* reliance.<sup>12</sup> In the review, Hookham praises the Dalai Lama's inclusive patronage of the *Nyingma* school and criticises the animosity of Phabongkha Rinpoche whose practice of invoking *Dorje Shugden* 'for the purpose of destroying the *Nyingma* tradition', in spite of being condemned by the Dalai Lama, 'still seems to have staunch adherents in some quarters'. This article appeared in print at around the same time that Geshe Kelsang was beginning to raise the profile of *Dorje Shugden* reliance in his main centres, and Manjushri Institute remonstrated indignantly with the Buddhist Society about its negative portrayal of the practice.

In 1995, the dispute resurfaced again in the form of a lengthy polemical debate on the Internet.<sup>13</sup> The discussion by NKT Buddhists of the *Dorje Shugden* teachings and empowerments granted at the NKT Spring Festival by Geshe Kelsang, provoked criticism from western representatives of various Tibetan Buddhist traditions who, following the line of the Dalai Lama, objected to the propagation of the practice because of its associated sectarianism. The ensuing exchange in effect, re-enacted the earlier Dharamsala dispute as defences of the treatises composed by the opposing sides of that earlier conflict were articulated in a way that interestingly, even imitated the style of traditional Tibetan polemics. The defence, by a senior disciple of Geshe Kelsang, of a tract by 'the great scholar Yonten Gyatso', in which *Nyingma* teachings are described as 'not pure Buddhadharma', *Dzogchen* is deemed 'un-Buddhist' and the wisdom of *lamas* like Dudjom Rinpoche is called into question, was taken as evidence by NKT critics of the 'sectarian' nature of the movement. The fact that no explicit criticism of other traditions can be found in Geshe Kelsang's public level

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<sup>12</sup> Hookham's review of the Dalai Lama's *Kindness, Clarity and Insight* appeared in *The Middle Way*, 60.1 (1985), 46-47.

<sup>13</sup> This debate took place on Usenet between May-June 1995.

teachings was not accepted by them as evidence of non-sectarianism:

One can be a sectarian in one`s heart and never utter one word. If your master accepts the Yellow Book, and if he accepts Yontan Gyasto`s [*sic*] reasonings above, that is all the proof we need.<sup>14</sup>

#### 10.4. INTERNAL AWARENESS

Following the dispute between Geshe Kelsang and the Dalai Lama on the *Dorje Shugden* issue in 1986, the leadership of the movement adopted a policy of silence with respect to the contentious dimensions of the practice, withholding information and discouraging any discussion of it. The importance attached within the NKT to following the teachings of only one *guru* and remaining within the boundaries of one`s spiritual tradition also effectively insulated many members from hearing about the controversy from external sources. Awareness within the NKT about this issue up until 1996 was consequently very limited, partial and rarely well-informed. Those who were aware that the practice was contested among the different Tibetan traditions often dismissed such disagreements as irrelevant distractions and maintained that, since they form part of the degenerate world of `Tibetan` Buddhism, they are `not an issue for the NKT`.<sup>15</sup>

The policy adopted by the NKT`s leadership to withhold information and limit awareness about *Dorje Shugden`s* contentious nature has also provoked external criticism. Many outside the organisation argue that Geshe Kelsang has acted improperly and unethically by allowing many of his disciples to commit themselves to a controversial practice without being in possession of all the information they require

<sup>14</sup> Taken from an entry dated 3 June 1995.

<sup>15</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

to make a reasoned and informed choice:

The hub of the whole issue for me is the fact that anyone can worship whatever they want, but they should be doing this with some knowledge about it. If the practice is controversial, then new practitioners should be made aware that it is controversial.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, June 1995.

## 11. ADAPTATION WITHIN THE NKT

### 11.1. ADAPTATION

The NKT's public-level policy towards adapting Buddhism for the West is stated in the preambles to the texts of its founder who is, of course, the legitimating source of authority behind all adaptations. These claim that Geshe Kelsang,

bridges perfectly the ancient wisdom of the Buddhist faith as practised in his birthplace, Tibet, and the concerns and everyday preoccupations of people in the West.<sup>17</sup>

He is considered 'ideally placed' to present Buddhism in a form accessible to westerners because his traditional scholarship and deep meditative experience of the teachings combine with 'a thorough understanding of our western way of life'.<sup>18</sup> The 'essence' of the teachings, it is claimed, is exactly the same as Śākyamuni Buddha's and *Tsong Khapa's*, but they have been presented 'in a form suited to Western thinking and living'.<sup>19</sup> To underline this essentialist perspective, a distinction is often drawn by Geshe Kelsang and his followers between 'Tibetan' Buddhism and the Buddhism represented by the NKT which is variously defined as 'western', 'Kadampa' or simply 'Mahayana' Buddhism.

The main adaptation instigated by Geshe Kelsang is the emphasis he has placed upon translating the traditional Tibetan texts and *sādhana s*, as well as his own English-language commentaries, into the vernacular of his devotees around the world. Prior to the creation of the NKT, Tibetan language classes were offered in the larger

<sup>17</sup> *A Meditation Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Tharpa, 1993), backflap.

<sup>18</sup> *Introduction to Buddhism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Tharpa, 1993), p. x.

<sup>19</sup> *FM*, 12 (Spring 1995), p. 44.

centres within his network and *pūjās* were performed using the Tibetan script and accompanied by traditional musical arrangements. Since 1991, the study and ritual use of Tibetan has been gradually phased out and the musical style has also been modernised:

The advent of these new tunes marks the beginning of a new era in the development of the NKT, helping to make Buddhism more accessible and meaningful for this and future generations of Western practitioners.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst most students have embraced these changes as a necessary part of the transition of Buddhism to the West, some have decidedly mixed feelings about chanting prayers in the vernacular:

I found it strange doing all the practices in English because we'd always done it in Tibetan, which I liked. I liked the sound of it, and the idea that the language was uncorrupted and pure [...] But I can understand now why it is important to have it all translated into English. Because many people are more interested in being Tibetan than being Buddhist. There was definitely an element of that up at Manjushri.<sup>21</sup>

Geshe Kelsang is also believed to have adapted traditional patterns of Tibetan Buddhist practice through his emphasis on sexual equality, the importance of lay practice and the role of the Dharma centre as opposed to the monastery, and by de-emphasising the use of oracular divination. The style of his books and the study programmes he has devised are also cited as major adaptations for the West. The author himself claims that his publications are 'aimed specifically at the twentieth century reader, which makes them much easier to understand and relate to than does a

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<sup>20</sup> 'Music from the Sky', *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

traditional presentation'.<sup>22</sup> Practitioners within the organisation readily reiterate this point and praise his texts as modern, accessible and compatible with the customs and culture of the West. There is no doubting that Geshe Kelsang's presentation of the traditional *Gelug* doctrine is clear, comprehensive and well-structured and that his followers experience it as such. The style of his presentation since creating the NKT, however, retains all of the clericalism, literalism and conservatism of his earlier publications. Although he continues to use western analogies and illustrations, some of the statements emerging from within the organisation concerning the 'modernised' and 'westernised' nature of his presentation - such as the claim that his books address the pace of life on the streets of New York city<sup>23</sup> - seem somewhat exaggerated.

As an alternative to the traditional methods of study within *Gelug* Buddhism, the NKT study programmes represent a more significant adaptation. Unlike the traditional *geshe* degree, which was open only to male monastics, the NKT programmes are open to all including committed lay and female practitioners. The study of the *Vinaya* has not, as a consequence, been included as a subject on the programmes and the more technical and analytical dimensions of the *geshe* degree have also been omitted since 'they do not have immediate application'.<sup>24</sup> The exclusive reliance upon commentarial materials produced by Geshe Kelsang is also unusual. The lively tradition of combative and dialectical argumentation and debate within the *Gelug* monastic system has also been eclipsed by a milder emphasis on group 'discussion', the purpose of which is the elimination of doubt and the mutual reinforcement of NKT doctrine and identity.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Wisdom', p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> 'Chakrasambhara in Hell's Kitchen', *FM*, 14 (Winter 1995), 18-19.

<sup>24</sup> 'New Kadampa Tradition: Foundation Programme in Mahayana Buddhism', undated pamphlet, p. 9.



The NKT's conscious rejection of the 'Tibetan' designation and attendant claim to represent a 'western' form of Buddhism reflects two aspects of its self-identity: firstly, it forms part of its critique of the degeneration of Tibetan *Gelug* Buddhism and its self-identity as a bastion of *Tsong Khapa*'s pure tradition in the modern world; and secondly, it reflects the belief that Geshe Kelsang has adapted culturally alien forms of practice for the West. In a number of significant ways, as we have seen, the NKT does indeed represent an adapted form of Buddhism. However, as Waterhouse has pointed out, in respect of its doctrine, practices, mythology, symbolism and iconography, the Buddhism that is represented by the NKT remains recognisably Tibetan in feel and character:

Since this is the case the 'essential Buddhism' which Geshe Kelsang has presented to the west must be essential *Tibetan* Buddhism unmixed with other versions of Buddhism and also, to a degree, unmixed with the tendency of many westerners to present traditional Buddhist teachings as symbolic and not literal.<sup>25</sup>

## 11.2. CONSERVATION

The traditional character of the NKT stems from the fact that, alongside its concern to make Buddhism accessible to westerners, there is an equal if not greater emphasis upon conserving the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa*. Through writing his books and founding the NKT Geshe Kelsang is believed to have transmitted a pure lineage to the West 'without adding anything, or taking anything away',<sup>26</sup> and created the structures to ensure its continuation in the future. NKT disciples are keenly aware of their responsibility to maintain the purity of this tradition by practising NKT

<sup>25</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 178.

<sup>26</sup> Taken from a teaching at Chenrezig Meditation Group, Lancaster, on 16 November 1995.

Buddhism exclusively or purely, that is without mixing the teachings with other spiritual paths, politics or worldly activities. This emphasis on preserving and protecting the tradition, and the antipathy towards 'mucking the Dharma up or messing with it',<sup>27</sup> ensures that the project of adapting Buddhism for the West is treated with caution. One student maintains that, whilst the 'cultural wall paper' of Buddhism can be 'changed or beautified or made more culturally acceptable', this must not extend to altering *Tsong Khapa's* pure tradition which 'needs to change us if it is to survive, not the other way round'.<sup>28</sup> Another rejects the idea that the traditional iconography used in the organisation's *thangka* paintings should be westernised, maintaining that 'we would be better off accepting the guidelines Buddha has given and concentrate on developing faith in these images and allowing them to perform miracles for us'.<sup>29</sup> The relative conservatism of Geshe Kelsang's presentation is also often compared with that of other Tibetan *lamas* in the West who are considered to have over-adapted and thereby destroyed, the purity of their respective traditions. According to one student, Geshe Kelsang is 'interested in pure transmission, not, for example, in interpreting Dharma through Western psychological or philosophical systems'.<sup>30</sup> Chogyam Trungpa is sometimes singled out as an example of a *lama* whose 'skilful' adaptation of Buddhism for the West went too far. One student emphasises that unlike Trungpa, Geshe Kelsang refuses to de-literalise or omit certain teachings from his presentation - such as the existence of different realms of existence - just because westerners find them difficult to accept. Another explains how Geshe

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> 'Over the Moon', *FM*, 11 (Winter 1994), p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> 'User Friendly Dharma', *FM*, 5 (Summer 1992), p. 8.

Kelsang's commitment to maintaining the purity of his lineage tempers the project of adaptation within the NKT:

In a sense it's all very conservative, with a small 'c'. There's no radical re-writing to make it available and attractive to new-age Californians. There's no radical re-working to make it available as a therapist's tool. These of course are skilful means that Tibetan lamas have engaged in. For example, Trungpa Rinpoche presented a whole secular course of meditation, Shambhala, [which was] very skilful and helped many people. Geshe-la isn't on that end of the spectrum. Geshe-la is very conservative.<sup>31</sup>

### 11.3. CONSERVATION THROUGH ADAPTATION

An interesting aspect of the NKT's approach is that an aim of Geshe Kelsang's main adaptations, alongside his wish to make Buddhism more accessible to westerners, is conservation. This dynamic of conservation through adaptation is rooted in his critique of contemporary Tibetan *Gelug* practice and of western eclecticism and the belief that he has re-established the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa* in the West. The adaptation of using the English language and of abandoning the study and ritual use of Tibetan, for example, not only makes the practice of Buddhism by westerners easier but also reinforces the belief that *Tsong Khapa*'s pure tradition is now located and conserved in the West through the NKT's English language publications and will be transmitted to future generations primarily by westerners. In a similar way, the NKT study programmes were not only formulated to make the study and practice of Buddhism structured, systematic and therefore clear and accessible to westerners. The explicit objective of the programmes, which were 'specifically written for people in degenerate times', is the protection and preservation of *Tsong Khapa*'s pure tradition. By focusing upon one teacher and restricting the practice of

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<sup>31</sup> NKT Interview, May 1996.

Highest Yoga Tantra to that of the meditational deity *Vajrayoginī*, the programmes counteract the dangerous tendency of western practitioners to follow multiple teachers, mix spiritual lineages and accept more Tantric commitments than they can realistically handle.<sup>32</sup>

So what he's done is narrow the field of Buddhist practice down and it's very simple and straightforward [...] So all his books are, basically, Lamrim and a very narrow field of Tantra.<sup>33</sup>

Practitioners within the NKT commonly formulate the Buddhist path in terms of the dictum 'one *guru*, one *yidam* and one Dharma-protector'. This represents a point of contrast with Buddhist practice within the wider Tibetan Buddhist world and within western-based organisations like the FPMT. Comparing the style of practice within the two organisations, a senior member of the FPMT comments that, whilst the NKT formulation may not be illegitimate Buddhistically, it is uncommon:

In general that is all that is needed, however in practice an individual may rely on more than one *guru*, *yidam* and protector. In the FPMT students are encouraged to make use of as many of the three as they need.<sup>34</sup>

Geshe Kelsang considers the open and inclusive approach to Buddhist practice described here to be incompatible with the continuation of the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa*, and it is for the purpose of protecting and preserving this tradition that he formulated the NKT study programmes.

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<sup>32</sup> Geshe Kelsang's emphasis on *Vajrayoginī* as the main Highest Yoga Tantra *yidam* for NKT practitioners represents another point of continuity with Phabongkha Rinpoche who broke from tradition by promoting this primarily *Sakyapa* meditational deity within the *Gelug* rather than the more usual *Gelug* deities such as *Guhyasamāja*, *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Kālacakra* and *Vajrabhairava*. The NKT teaches that western practitioners have a strong karmic link with *Vajrayoginī* and that it is presently easier to obtain spiritual realisations with her than it is with other *yidams*.

<sup>33</sup> NKT Interview, October 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication, February 1997.

## 12. CRISIS AND RESPONSE: THE DORJE SHUGDEN AFFAIR

### 12.1. THE CONTROVERSY EXPLODES IN INDIA...

The recent history of the NKT has been characterised by conflict and controversy resulting from its participation in a western-based campaign mounted against the Dalai Lama concerning his opposition to *Dorje Shugden* reliance among *Gelug* refugees in India. This conflict of authority which had been simmering beneath the surface of the exiled Tibetan community since the late 1970s, erupted publicly in the spring of 1996 when the Dalai Lama began to voice his opposition to *Dorje Shugden* reliance with a greater sense of urgency. He began to state in more explicit terms, that the continued reliance on this protector not only harms the individual propitiator but also endangers the person of the Dalai Lama and undermines the political cause of Tibet. His government-in-exile thus initiated a programme to subdue *Dorje Shugden* propitiation among government employees and *Gelug* monasteries. In response, *Dorje Shugden* supporters in India created an organisation, the Dorje Shugden Devotees Charitable and Religious Society,<sup>35</sup> to protest against the Dharamsala administration and canvas international support for their campaign. The Dalai Lama's pronouncements, they claimed, actively suppressed their spiritual traditions and violated their right to the freedom of religious expression. The suggestion that the Dalai Lama himself might be guilty of human rights abuses against people who have suffered greatly at the hands of the Chinese generated interest beyond the Tibetan community and the dispute was taken up by Indian media

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<sup>35</sup> According to the second press pack released by the Shugden Supporters Community on July 10 1996, this organisation was formally registered in Delhi on May 23 1996.

agencies.<sup>36</sup> The interest of the British media was also awakened when British Buddhists joined the fray taking the dispute with the Dalai Lama onto the streets during his visit to England in 1996.<sup>37</sup>

## 12.2. ...AND IN THE WEST

The cause of *Dorje Shugden* supporters in India, and the reputation of devotees around the world, was taken up by sympathetic westerners who formed a pressure group, the Shugden Supporters Community (SSC), and mounted a campaign to coincide with the Dalai Lama's European tour of 1996. The campaign generated media attention through issuing news releases and press-packs including documentary 'evidence' of the Dalai Lama's undemocratic actions and human rights abuses.<sup>38</sup> It also organised public demonstrations both before and during his visits to England and Switzerland<sup>39</sup> and participated in debates on various Internet discussion forums.<sup>40</sup> The NKT played a leading role in this campaign. Geshe Kelsang encouraged his disciples

<sup>36</sup> The story was covered both by *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times of India* during May and June of 1996.

<sup>37</sup> During the Dalai Lama's visit to England, for example, there were leading articles on the campaign in *The Guardian* (July 6 and 15), *The Independent* (July 15) and *The Daily Telegraph* (July 17) besides BBC television and radio coverage.

<sup>38</sup> The SSC alleged, for example, that under the order of the Dalai Lama and his administration the houses of *Dorje Shugden* devotees were searched and images destroyed; that Tibetan government employees had been dismissed because of their religious persuasions; that the children of *Dorje Shugden* worshippers had been refused admission in government supported schools; and that a forced signature campaign declaring renunciation of the practice had been instigated within monasteries and government departments. These allegations were all strenuously denied by the Kashag, the Cabinet of the Tibetan Government in Exile, in a number of statements.

<sup>39</sup> Demonstrations were held in London on 7 June at the Office of Tibet and 16 July at the Buddhist Society, in Switzerland on 14 July and in Kathmandu and Delhi on 7 July. Their participants - who never numbered more than a couple of hundred - would perform the *Dorje Shugden pūjā*, chant slogans and carry placards bearing anti-Dalai Lama statements such as 'Your smiles charm, your actions harm'.

<sup>40</sup> These debates took place on discussion groups ('newsgroups') within an area of the Internet called Usenet. The main newsgroups used were 'alt.religion.buddhism.tibetan' and 'talk.politics.tibet'. However, because these newsgroups were swamped with contributions a new newsgroup, 'alt.religion.buddhism.nkt', was created. This created further debate itself because supporters of the campaign felt that their cause was being trivialised and wrongly labelled as an NKT-based endeavour.

to participate in the SSC demonstrations in June outside the Office of Tibet and the Buddhist Society in London. Furthermore, he also made the uncharacteristic decision to grant newspaper and BBC radio interviews himself in which he passionately condemned the Dalai Lama's pronouncements.<sup>41</sup> For these activities the NKT received harsh criticism and the SSC was presented by the media as a front for the NKT to pursue a 'smear campaign' aimed at sabotaging the Dalai Lama's morally impeccable image in the West without implicating itself.<sup>42</sup> The NKT and SSC rejected this charge claiming they were separate groups with overlapping interests.<sup>43</sup> According to NKT sources the weekly attendance of three-thousand people at NKT activities made it a tiny contingency of the SSC which represented 'the union of many groups and individuals who worship Dorje Shugden throughout the world (4 million people altogether)'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Geshe Kelsang was interviewed for *The Independent* (July 15) and for the 'Sunday' programme on BBC Radio 4 (July 14).

<sup>42</sup> It was even suggested by some that the NKT was being supported in its activities by the Chinese government, a charge that the organisation strenuously denied and for which I myself have never seen any supporting evidence.

<sup>43</sup> In support of the NKT, the SSC's directory of supporters (listed in the second press pack released on July 10) does include monasteries in India *and* other non-NKT western-based centres, such as those associated with Gonsar Rinpoche, Gelek Rinpoche, and Lama Gangchen (the 'Healing Buddha'). The listing of western-based groups may, however, have been misleading. Contact details were not provided and it is not clear that all of the groups consented to being represented. British disciples of Lama Gangchen informed me, for example, that although he remained a committed devotee of *Dorje Shugden*, he did not express his support for the campaign and was shocked to hear that he had been listed as a supporter. Lama Gangchen has since been criticised by Tibetan sources, however, for his 'alleged divisive activities' with reference both to deity worship and also for the pledge of support he has offered to the Chinese government's choice of Panchen Lama ('Gangchen Lama Stoops to Win Chinese Heart, Exile Tibetans Cry Foul', *Tibetan Review*, 32.6 (June 1997), p. 15). In November 1995 the Chinese appointed Gyaltzen Norbu as the Tenth Panchen Lama in defiance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the candidate appointed by the Dalai Lama in May of that year. The Dalai Lama's young candidate subsequently went missing and has since been held under Chinese government control as 'the world's youngest politico-religious prisoner' (*Tibetan Review*, 32.5 (May 1997), p. 10).

<sup>44</sup> Taken from '22 Points of Clarification' released on alt.religion.buddhism.tibetan on 23 July 1996. The figure of four-million adherents is considered, by academic observers, to be a gross exaggeration. *Dorje Shugden* has undoubtedly been a popular protective-deity among Tibetan people for centuries. The majority of *Dorje Shugden* devotees, however, have regarded this deity as a worldly being, depending upon him for mundane and practical affairs, and not as an enlightened Buddha as the SSC claim. Furthermore, although *Dorje Shugden* has had wide support within the *Gelug* monastic system, it is unlikely that he has been the main protector-practice for more than a significant minority.

### 12.3. NKT WITHDRAWAL

The NKT withdrew from the campaign completely and the office of the SSC ceased to function shortly after the Dalai Lama's return to India. Geshe Kelsang's students maintained that they had done all they could to further the cause of Tibetan *Dorje Shugden* worshippers and now felt that the campaign had to be fought mainly in India. The organisation's rhetoric of eschewing political involvement was invoked and the issue was dropped as quickly as it had been taken up. The western manifestation of the dispute thus simmered down, although the potential for it to be re-ignited would remain as long as *Dorje Shugden*'s western followers and the Dalai Lama remained irreconciled. This, of course, depended largely upon events within the Tibetan exile community where the conflict between the staunch *Dorje Shugden* faction of the *Gelug* and the administration of the Dalai Lama showed no signs of abating. The most recent developments in the *Dorje Shugden* controversy, as played out both in India and in the West, and the extent of the NKT's involvement in them, will be discussed later. We will concentrate here on the significance for the NKT of the initial outbreak of the dispute in 1996.

### 12.4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISPUTE

The eruption of the *Dorje Shugden* controversy in 1996 was the first time this dispute along with the deep-seated divisions it exposes, had been expressed publicly and in a western context. The significance of this has been analysed by commentators mainly in political terms in that images of conflict and disunity harm the Tibetan cause whilst any suspicion raised about the Dalai Lama's moral character plays



directly into the hands of the Chinese. It is also seen as significant in terms of its detrimental impact both on the 'peace-loving' image of Buddhism in the West and on the western Buddhist community itself which generally holds the authority of the Dalai Lama in the highest esteem.<sup>45</sup> I want to focus here, however, upon the significance of the NKT's involvement in this dispute in terms of its stability, public image and self-identity.

#### **12.4.i. Internal Stability**

On one level, the organisation's participation in the campaign was a pragmatic response to counteract the potentially negative effect of the Dalai Lama's pronouncements on its internal stability and future growth. The public manifestation of the dispute was the first time that the majority of NKT members, many of whom had commitments to practise *Dorje Shugden* reliance daily, became aware of its controversial nature. This situation of heightened awareness demanded that the organisation's leadership adjust its policy and publicly defend its 'essential practice' and reputation. Speaking to *The Independent*, Geshe Kelsang thus stated that,

If [the] Dalai Lama [is] right, then up to now, this practice we have done for 20 years, everything [is] wasted: time lost, money lost, everything lost. That is the big issue.<sup>46</sup>

The raised awareness about this controversy did not appear to cause great fragmentation within the NKT's membership. NKT disciples were generally receptive to the main criticisms of the Dalai Lama by the SSC campaign - namely, that his

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<sup>45</sup> One of the first things that the participating organisations of the Network of Buddhist Organisations did following its creation in 1994, for example, was to invite the Dalai Lama to give teachings in the UK in 1996.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Brown, 'Battle of the Buddhists', in *The Independent's* 'Section Two' supplement, 15 July 1996, p. 2. He also said 'Our motivation is completely pure, so we will risk everything' (Speaking on BBC Radio 4's 'Sunday' programme, 14 July 1996).

pronouncements against *Dorje Shugden* reject his root *guru* Trijang Rinpoche and abandon his spiritual lineage - because they resonated with the NKT's central emphases upon faithfully following the pure lineage-tradition of one's spiritual guide.

One student thus maintained that,

Geshe Kelsang is teaching what his root guru taught him, and this is what you [are supposed to] do. The Dalai Lama, though, is rejecting the teachings he received from his root guru, and this is not what you [are supposed to] do.<sup>47</sup>

Criticisms of the Dalai Lama's eclecticism and 'mixing of politics with Dharma' were equally well assimilated by students who had adopted the NKT view that Geshe Kelsang alone has revealed the Buddha's path 'completely unmixed with other paths'.<sup>48</sup> The majority of NKT students thus supported the SSC campaign and many participated in it actively by writing letters of protest or by attending street demonstrations.

A number of students were clearly distressed about being in conflict with the Dalai Lama. For some, the respect and admiration they felt for him could not be reconciled with the pro-active stance Geshe Kelsang had taken. Others severed their connections with the NKT completely after re-appraising their spiritual loyalties in light of information that was now circulating in the public domain on the history and nature of the controversy. Most of those who were upset or troubled by the dispute, however, seemed to successfully resolve their concerns and remain committed NKT practitioners. Some did this by marginalising the importance of the controversy and prioritising their spiritual practice:

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<sup>47</sup> Personal communication, June 1996.

<sup>48</sup> *FM*, 9 (Spring 1994), p. 9.

At the moment I've put it on the back-burner, because it doesn't affect us really. So I don't need to get too involved in that. I'll go and protest with other people, but it doesn't really matter to me. The important thing is to be able to practise Dharma.<sup>49</sup>

A degree of discomfort was evident even amongst the students who were most active and supportive of the SSC campaign. They resolved their primary allegiance to Geshe Kelsang with their continuing respect for the Dalai Lama by considering that 'there must be some wisdom in his pronouncements that we, as ignorant human beings, do not understand'.<sup>50</sup> One student interpreted the Dalai Lama's actions as a 'skilful means', designed to turn people towards the NKT, the only source of pure Buddhism remaining in the world:

The Dalai Lama, irrespective of what he is doing, is an emanation of Chenrezig. So you have to ask why, because he's obviously acting in an appropriate manner. It challenges you to understand what's going on. My understanding is that the Dharma is dead, as far as Tibet is concerned and the rest of India is having the same problem [...] So the Dalai Lama is acting like a doctor in a hospice, nursing it to its death [...] He has thrown down the challenge and given people the opportunity to focus in on what is left of the Dharma, which is essentially the NKT. That must be the case, for Geshe-la to openly agree with people going down to London last week [...] At the end of the day it is too easy to talk about conflict between the Dalai Lama and Geshe Kelsang. It's absolute nonsense. Geshe Kelsang is an emanation of Heruka and the Dalai Lama is an emanation of Chenrezig. They are in essence the same entity, how can they argue with themselves? All that is just a smokescreen.<sup>51</sup>

Many claimed that their spiritual practice and faith in Geshe Kelsang was ultimately strengthened in the crucible of conflict. Participating in the SSC's public demonstrations became for some, a test and expression of faith and those who decided

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<sup>49</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication June 1996.

<sup>51</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

not to travel to the London demonstration experienced feelings of guilt and regret:

I believe that Geshe-la wanted people to go down to London so he could gage what kind of commitment they had [...] I still feel very guilty about not going, because I didn't ask at work if I could have the day off [...] I don't think they'd have let me have it, but I didn't ask and feel really guilty about that.<sup>52</sup>

#### **12.4.ii. Bad Press**

The NKT's involvement in the dispute also had ramifications for its public image given the general popularity enjoyed by the Dalai Lama among Buddhists, non-Buddhists and media agencies. As Waterhouse observes, the organisation is 'very good at marketing its product'.<sup>53</sup> It advertises its teachings and classes using various forms of media, including the local and national press.<sup>54</sup> In a 1995 edition of *Full Moon*, a student enthused about the advantages of informing newspapers and radio stations of centre activities:

don't give up on putting out press releases. You never know when the karmic conditions will be ripe for a media explosion!<sup>55</sup>

This statement turned out to be rather portentous in light of the national media coverage of the NKT's activities of 1996. However, the attention attracted at this time bore little resemblance to the positive, promotional kind of which the organisation had hitherto been accustomed. The SSC and the NKT were successful in their attempts to court the British media, but the publicity they generated backfired on them and their allegations against the Dalai Lama were never really taken seriously. A brief analysis

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<sup>52</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>53</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 142.

<sup>54</sup> For example, a general interest article about the NKT, entitled 'Buddhists at peace amid Gothic glory', appeared in *The Daily Express*, 2 July 1996, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> *FM*, 13 (Summer 1995), p. 31.

of the media coverage of the *Dorje Shugden* dispute in Britain, echoes the findings of previous research into journalistic bias towards 'new religions' in America and Australia, the key points of which are neatly summarised by Richardson:

the media are often not an objective, passive medium in social conflicts, but instead promote an ideologically dominant status quo, hegemonic approach to issues [...] media become actively involved in creating an unfavourable and deviant image of social movements and their members (especially leaders) [...] on many occasions media appear to function as 'moral entrepreneurs' [...] and as institutions of social control that marginalise, delegitimise and discredit oppositional movements.<sup>56</sup>

The British media were generally dismissive of the claims being made against the Dalai Lama by the SSC and a lot of critical attention was directed towards the NKT itself. Articles in *The Guardian* and *The Independent* negatively portrayed the NKT as a 'cultish' movement that demands 'slavish devotion' to Geshe Kelsang and which cynically manipulates both its followers and the state support system in order to fund its expansion drive.<sup>57</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* also bluntly expressed its a priori disapproval and rejection of the NKT's claims:

As if Chinese brutality were not enough, the Dalai Lama is also facing protests from a Cumbrian-based Buddhist sect which claims that he is persecuting worshippers of a deity called Dorje Shugdan. We are reluctant to enter into a controversy over a god who sits on a snow lion surrounded by boiling blood. Suffice it to say that the New Kadampa Tradition, which has made the accusations, has yet to substantiate them.<sup>58</sup>

Bias expressed by the British media may thus have had an adverse effect on the NKT's future growth in spite of the adage that 'there is no such thing as bad press'.

<sup>56</sup> James T. Richardson, 'Journalistic Bias Towards New Religious Movements in Australia', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 11 (1996), 289-302 (p. 290).

<sup>57</sup> For example, see Madeline Bunting's 'Shadow Boxing on the Path to Nirvana', in *The Guardian's* 'Outlook' supplement, 6 July, pp. 26-27, and Brown's 'Battle of the Buddhists', in *The Independent*.

<sup>58</sup> 'Welcome, Your Holiness', *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 1996.

### 12.4.iii. Identity Issues: Ambiguity and Resolution

According to Geshe Kelsang's students the main reason for the NKT's participation in the campaign was to put pressure on the Dalai Lama to lift his ban on *Dorje Shugden* reliance and re-establish religious freedom in the exiled *Gelug* community in India.<sup>59</sup> The SSC maintained that it was staging protests in the West on behalf of Tibetan worshippers of *Dorje Shugden* who are 'our spiritual brothers and sisters',<sup>60</sup> and NKT students joined the campaign out of a sense of 'spiritual solidarity':

People are suffering and we hope the demonstration will bring encouragement to them. People in India are having a hard time [...] There is a karmic link between members of the NKT and those people in India.<sup>61</sup>

When rationalised in this way, the NKT's activity seems to represent a reversal of its self-proclaimed separation and independence from the religio-political world of Tibetan Buddhism. However, Geshe Kelsang's students insisted during the campaign that the NKT's participation in no way indicated a substantive change in its self-identity, emphasising that once the Dalai Lama lifted the ban, the *temporary* alliances established with *Dorje Shugden* supporters in India and around the world would terminate and the NKT would 'get back to normal':

I don't think it's the NKT getting back into the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. I think this is very specific, it's just one issue. And when the *Dorje Shugden* issue is dealt with all this will go away. In one of the meetings we had Geshe Kelsang said, 'This is the single issue politics'. It really is. As soon as the Dalai Lama says, 'Okay', to his own people, 'you can practise *Dorje*

<sup>59</sup> A letter from the NKT Secretary published in *The Guardian* (11 July 1996), for example, affirms the NKT's support for the SSC campaign against the Dalai Lama's government which 'is denying its own people within the Tibetan community in India the fundamental right of religious freedom'.

<sup>60</sup> Taken from '22 Points of Clarification' released on alt.religion.buddhism.tibetan on 23 July 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Personal communication, June 1996.

Shugdan`, things will get back to normal.<sup>62</sup>

These claims notwithstanding, the NKT's participation in the campaign indicated a relationship with *Gelug* Buddhism that was more complicated than its rhetoric of discontinuity and separation suggested, and again the importance of adopting a cross-cultural approach to understanding Tibetan forms of Buddhism in the West is underlined. The NKT's activity threw into relief the *ideological* continuities that exist between the NKT world-view and the perspective of *Dorje Shugden* worshippers in India. It also betrayed the *actual* links between the NKT and the exiled *Gelug* community which at that time endured through the figure of Kuten Lama. As the oracle of *Dorje Shugden*, Kuten Lama indirectly linked the NKT with *Gelug* Buddhists in India because he served both groups. This connection to the exiled *Gelug* community must be acknowledged as an important impetus behind the NKT's participation in the campaign. The visit of Kuten Lama to England during 1996 illustrates this because his presence became seen as an `exile` by some making the campaign more relevant to NKT students whose real responsibility to *Dorje Shugden* devotees in India was made apparent.

As noted earlier, Kuten Lama was a popular figure in the NKT despite his marginal involvement at the level of religious discourse and practice. Consequently, his decision (upon returning to India towards the end of 1996) to sever his connection with the NKT and affirm his support for the Dalai Lama, was met by Geshe Kelsang's students with shock and sadness. This development was, like the resignation and disrobing of Gen. Thubten Gyatso earlier in the year, a significant blow to the

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<sup>62</sup> NKT Interview, July 1996.

organisation.<sup>63</sup> However, on another level this development partially resolved the ambiguity in the NKT's self-identity caused by its complicated relationship with the *Gelug* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. In separating himself from the NKT, the oracle simultaneously severed the organisation's links to the exiled *Gelug* community, thereby bringing the NKT's self-proclaimed separation and independence from *Gelug* Buddhism to completion in all but an ideological sense. The same point could also be made about the declaration of Geshe Kelsang's expulsion from *Sera Je* monastic university, issued in the autumn of 1996, for his 'blatantly shameless mad pronouncements' against the Dalai Lama.<sup>64</sup> Geshe Kelsang responded to this vitriolic declaration by re-affirming the NKT's complete independence from the Tibetan *Gelug* tradition in exile:

I am not upset. I had already stopped my affiliation with Sera-Je twenty years ago and have no intention of renewing it. So, I feel this doesn't make any sense.<sup>65</sup>

There was also a perception within the NKT that the oracle's renunciation of the movement actually resolved a further *doctrinal* ambiguity concerning the NKT's central practice of *Dorje Shugden* reliance. Although NKT students were shocked by Kuten Lama's renunciation of their organisation, they also rationalised the separation philosophically. Their opinions on this issue revealed an awareness of the traditional teaching that high-ranking or supra-mundane protectors (like *Dorje Shugden*) do not

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<sup>63</sup> I have not been able to discover from NKT sources the reasons behind Gen. Thubten Gyatso's resignation from the NKT, although non-NKT sources have suggested that he was forcibly removed due to a breach of his monastic vows. Whatever the reason, the important role he played in the growth and development of the NKT, and the affection and respect for him among NKT students, made his departure a very important event.

<sup>64</sup> Sealed by the General Assembly of *Sera Je* Monastery and issued on 23 August 1996. A copy of this document can be seen in *Snow Lion*, 11.4 (Fall 1996), p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Taken from an interview with Geshe Kelsang posted on BUDDHA-L, 24 November 1996.



condescend to interfere with worldly affairs by speaking through human mediums. The marginal position of Kuten Lama within the context of the NKT's spiritual activities also made it easier for students to relativise his importance within the framework of the organisation. We observed earlier that *Dorje Shugden*'s ontological status underwent a gradual process of elevation from the time of Phabongkha Rinpoche. It may well be the case that the gradual apotheosis of *Dorje Shugden* has finally come to fruition within the NKT.

### 13. A REJECTION OF MODERNITY?

A number of scholarly accounts of British Buddhism maintain that the conditions of modernity are reflected in contemporary Buddhist practice. In particular, it is argued that the reflexivity of individual identity and the importance of personal authority that characterise post-traditional British society are reflected in Buddhist practice on both an individual and social level. According to Waterhouse, these processes can equally be observed within the NKT insofar as members of this organisation (like practitioners within other contemporary Buddhist groups) balance the authority of their own personal experience against the traditional authority structures that are offered. To acknowledge the NKT's 'fit' with modernity, however, provides only a partial explanation of the nature of this movement. Certain aspects of its organisational and ideological structure lend themselves to quite a different interpretation, suggesting that the NKT may actually represent an alternative, critical and reactionary response to modernity.

This way of understanding the movement was first suggested to me by a former follower of Geshe Kelsang who had renounced her discipleship at the time of the NKT's formation, finding the radical new exclusivism of the organisation unacceptable. She had made sense of her own experience of the organisation by drawing upon her expertise as a lecturer of sociology and had found Robert Jay Lifton's *The Protean Self* particularly insightful.<sup>66</sup> Lifton examines how people behave, experience and express themselves in the late twentieth century, focusing upon their varied responses to the unpredictability, uncertainty and fragmentation of modern society. He maintains that personal identity, or the 'self', has responded to

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<sup>66</sup> *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993).

historical dislocation and social uncertainty in two main ways: through proteanism or fundamentalism. The 'protean self' refers to the self's resilience under modernity, its fluidity and many-sided ability to engage effectively, in a spirit of exploration, experiment and improvisation, with the restlessness and flux of contemporary society. With respect to the holding of ideas, the protean self is sceptical and distrustful and 'tends to settle for a pluralistic spirituality that allows for doubt and uncertainty and includes a stress on personal responsibility' (p. 127). To describe the evolution of this modern 'self of many possibilities', Lifton invokes the myth of Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms, as a metaphor 'sufficiently rich to suggest the blending of radical fluidity, functional wisdom, and a quest for at least minimal form' (p. 5). Fundamentalism or totalism, by contrast, represents an opposite response to the same historical forces, reacting against modernity, proteanism and 'the fear of chaos' through 'the closing off of the person and constriction of the self-process' and the demand for 'absolute dogma and monolithic self' (pp. 10-11):

While proteanism is able to function in a world of uncertainty and ambiguity, fundamentalism wants to wipe out that world in favor of a claim to definitive truth and unalterable moral certainty.<sup>67</sup>

Religious and political fundamentalist movements of the late twentieth century, Lifton maintains, 'are generally called forth by a perception that sacred dimensions of self and community are dying or being "killed"' (p. 162). Fiercely defending their 'sacred, literalized text in a purification process aimed at alleged contaminants' (p. 161), such movements generally condemn pluralism and cultural complexity, distrust intellectual and spiritual suppleness and seek to eliminate spontaneity and unpredictability.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

Obsessed with chaos and the loss of control, they immerse the self in 'all-or-none ideological systems and behavior patterns' creating a 'mentality of absolute certainty' (p. 161) and providing a protecting, sheltering canopy against protean experimentation, fragmentation and despair. Whilst it may help to sustain the self in the short term, Lifton regards fundamentalism as an ultimately counterproductive response to the conditions of modernity because it 'creates a thwarted self, never free of actual or potential fragmentation' (p. 202). By contrast, he considers proteanism to be 'not only desirable but necessary for the human future' because it 'presses toward human commonality, as opposed to the fixed and absolute moral and psychological divisions favored by fundamentalism' (p. 11).

The disaffected disciple mentioned above interpreted the NKT as a fundamentalist movement which caters to individuals who are 'tortured by choice and confusion', but whose organisational and ideological exclusivism 'in which everything is decided for the member' is fundamentally at odds with her own personal, protean quest:

What it has to offer to the West is a lack of confusion, and westerners are tormented by confusion. Geshe Kelsang believes that there must be no confusion in the religion whatsoever. And any confusion that can come from the Tibetans must be taken out. What is being offered to westerners is no confusion. To me, that seems no different to fundamentalist Christianity [...] To me, my religion is about where does the confusion come from and [what does it] indicate. Confusion is part of the growth process. And if you remove confusion you have a childish religion [...] I wish to be an adult [and] deal with my own confusions as an adult [...] I don't want somebody else sorting out my confusion by not letting me read books that might contradict it.<sup>68</sup>

Although this account reflects the highly subjective feelings and memories of a

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<sup>68</sup> Interview, August 1995.

former and disaffected disciple, the theoretical framework through which she has made sense of her experiences is in many ways pertinent to our understanding of the NKT. This movement, like those outlined by Lifton, emerged from a perception that the 'pure tradition' was degenerating and dying out in the modern world. The perceived cause of this was, at least in part, precisely the kind of protean inclusivism and pluralism that modern fundamentalist groups stand in opposition against. Geshe Kelsang is believed to have re-established the pure tradition through his English-language commentarial texts and the NKT study programmes. These books present a narrow, simplified and literalised reading of the Tibetan *Gelug* tradition and are, in turn, relied upon literally and exclusively by many devotees out of a concern to preserve the pure lineage. The homogenous organisational structure, the concern to establish a uniformity of belief and practice throughout the movement, and the emphasis on following one tradition coupled with a critique of more open and eclectic approaches towards spiritual practice, all resonate with Lifton's characterisation of modern fundamentalism.

Evidence for the mode of being described by Lifton as the 'fundamentalist self' can also be found among the accounts of individual NKT members. These are often critical of the dislocated and individualistic nature of contemporary society and portray the NKT as a favourable alternative and counterbalance to the conditions of modernity. According to one student, Dharma centres are crucial during 'a time when traditional concepts of community and society seem to be breaking down, when relationships are becoming increasingly disharmonious, when crime and hostility are rising'.<sup>69</sup> Another maintains that,

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<sup>69</sup> 'Over the Moon', *FM*, 7 (Spring 1993), p. 46.

Living in a community fulfils social needs I think all of us have and which are almost impossible to fulfil in an increasingly fragmented and individualistic society.<sup>70</sup>

The primary metaphor that is used within the organisation for describing the NKT is that of the family. This image fosters cohesion within and commitment to the group and powerfully evokes the traditional qualities that are considered lacking within modern society. The NKT is thus presented as 'a global family',<sup>71</sup> its members are 'the sons and daughters of the same father [Geshe Kelsang]', and events such as the spring and summer festivals are 'family reunions'.<sup>72</sup> Manjushri Centre is the 'mother centre' of the organisation and when residential centres create satellite groups they become 'parents' and perhaps even 'grandparents'.<sup>73</sup> This manner of self-presentation represents a point of contrast with the FWBO which criticises the collective mentality of the group, including the traditional family structure, as a constraining force on the development of the individual. Bell characterises the FWBO as a 'symbolic community'<sup>74</sup> and Mellor refers to it as 'a community of individuals',<sup>75</sup> both emphasising how this organisation is concerned primarily with individuality and personal self-discovery.

One disciple's view that the NKT provides 'a true refuge for those lost in the wilderness of this uncertain world'<sup>76</sup> is mirrored by the 'conversion' stories of others within the movement. These sometimes take the form of a reaction to historical and

<sup>70</sup> 'Why Community?', *FM*, 7 (Spring 1993), p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> See the NKT website at <http://www.webcom.com/~nkt>.

<sup>72</sup> *FM*, 6 (Winter 1992), pp. 41 and 45.

<sup>73</sup> These images are frequently invoked within the 'Centrepiece' section of *Full Moon*.

<sup>74</sup> 'Change and Identity', p. 88.

<sup>75</sup> 'The Cultural Translation of Buddhism', p. 321.

<sup>76</sup> *FM*, 8 (Autumn 1993), p. 33.

social uncertainties:

You just need to watch the news or go outside and look at the environment. It's getting worse isn't it? Countryside is destroyed. That makes me want to turn to something, and that something is Dharma. You can't escape the terrible things. There's nothing much you can do so you want to turn to something.<sup>77</sup>

A more common life-trajectory presented by NKT practitioners, however, describes a transition from the uncertainties of spiritual pluralism - that is, of 'drifting in and out of various Buddhist schools'<sup>78</sup> but finding only confusion - to encountering the NKT which offers the certainty of spiritual progress via a pure tradition, a structured path and an exclusive form of commitment:

for many of us Americans, discovery of Dharma, and particularly Geshe-la's teaching, had come only after years and years of dabbling in all sorts of religious, new age, metaphysical and psychological teachings. They all seemed beneficial at the time, but never gave us that full sense of being on a real 'path' [...] I know for myself that having a teacher, a study program, and a specific daily practice has helped me tremendously. In many ways, I've made more progress in the last year than in the nearly 30 previous years of self study.<sup>79</sup>

These accounts chime with the fundamentalist conversion narratives outlined by Lifton:

Fundamentalism announces to the self that its restless protean search for larger meanings and, above all, for immortality systems is over [...] Conversion delivers one from chaos [...] personal perceptions of chaos, along with anxiety over one's own elements of proteanism, can lead directly to fundamentalist conversion.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> NKT Interview, June 1996.

<sup>78</sup> *FM*, 13 (Summer 1995), p. 34.

<sup>79</sup> 'From Dilettante to Disciple'; *FM*, 14 (Winter 1995), p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> *The Protean Self*, pp. 170-172.

#### 14. SUMMARY

In creating the NKT, Geshe Kelsang was reacting to the perceived degeneration of Tibetan *Gelug* Buddhism, on the one hand, and the spiritual inclusivism (or protean openness) of western practitioners, on the other. His critique of contemporary *Gelug* practice represents a traditional position of *Gelug* exclusivism that has a long history in Tibetan Buddhism, both in the pre-modern and modern periods. His critique of western inclusivism also emerges from the transportation of this traditional approach to the modern West. In light of these historical and cross-cultural continuities between the NKT and exclusively-orientated strands of *Gelug* Buddhism, it would be foolish to interpret the organisation simply as a late twentieth century reaction to the vagaries of modernity. Lifton's theories nevertheless remain helpful to our understanding of the NKT and its members. Geshe Kelsang's traditional exclusivism as we have seen, has certainly been hardened by his experiences and observations of the modern West. The notion of the 'fundamentalist self', furthermore, sheds light on why some people convert to this form of Buddhism and how the organisation functions for them.<sup>81</sup> A number of the NKT's longer-standing disciples themselves believe that the appeal and success of the organisation derives from a felicitous convergence between Geshe Kelsang's very conservative and traditional presentation of Buddhism, on the one hand, and the desire among westerners for a meaningful alternative to spiritual pluralism, on the other:

Geshe-la has said, 'Westerners have been confused and they have come to me over a period of years [...] They want this systematic exposition of the

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<sup>81</sup> A similar point is made by Finney who argues that, whilst sociological accounts of American Zen as a deviant cult response to personal strains and social discontinuities are incomplete, they are nevertheless useful in explaining patterns of recruitment and commitment.



teachings. They want to take it seriously. They want something very authentic. So here it is. 'Geshe-la hasn't made something new up. Although it says 'New Kadampa Tradition' it's actually old [...] It's very modern, in the way that it presents itself, and its systematic exposition [...] but at the same time it's very conservative [...] So it has these two qualities. Unless these qualities are attractive and helpful for people, then the NKT would not have spread so quickly.<sup>82</sup>

According to one student, Geshe Kelsang's conservatism resonates with the psychology of many westerners today, a psychology that no longer shares the exploratory and experimental disposition of westerners during the late 1960s and early 1970s:

Now westerners have a different mentality. They don't have the same emotional turbulence or experience as they had twenty years ago. Nowadays, then, Dharma is very conservative. 'Back to basics' is right for this generation. When the first lamas came over to the West, they were usually outrageous characters, such as Lama Yeshe and Akong Rinpoche. They were the hippies of their culture, and we were the hippies of our's. The next generation, though, are more traditional and conservative.<sup>83</sup>

The view of the NKT presented here is of a contemporary Buddhist movement that is rooted firmly within traditional *Gelug* exclusivism but which simultaneously reflects and reacts against the conditions of modernity. The capacity of Tibetan forms of Buddhism to function in this way for westerners has also been observed by other scholars. It was noticed, for example, by Tucker in her sociological study of Manjushri Institute during the early 1980s. She argued that American studies characterising Tibetan Buddhist groups as 'monistic movements' (that is as movements which embrace the relativism and subjectivism underpinning modern culture) may have over-simplified the reality. The community at Manjushri Institute,

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<sup>82</sup> NKT Interview, January 1996.

<sup>83</sup> Personal communication, July 1995.

she discovered, contained dualistic elements: whilst reflecting modern relativism and subjectivism through its emphasis on such things as scientific methods, individual responsibility and personal authority, the belief system and learning process being advocated was ultimately fixed, absolute and non-negotiable. She concluded that educated westerners are attracted to Tibetan Buddhism because it addresses their concerns with 'subjective reality, relativism and moral ambiguity' in an apparently open and scientific manner, whilst actually offering them 'wisdom in place of uncertainty [...] a secure but credible form of absolutism'.<sup>84</sup>

amongst those individuals who have enjoyed the benefits of modern culture and have turned to movements which embrace relativism and subjectivism which underpin it, some may be searching seriously, nonetheless, for meaningful 'closure' in the form of a reasoned absolutism on which to base their lives.<sup>85</sup>

Bishop's archetypal analysis which interprets the concern of westerners with issues of order, guidance and continuity as an expression of the perceived chaos and absence of authority in their own culture, also points to the reactive nature of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.

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<sup>84</sup> 'Opening the Mind', abstract.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

## 15. THE FPMT RE-VISITED

The conflict with the Manjushri Institute was a substantial setback for the FPMT. The dispute deprived the organisation of one of its most vital nerve-centres at a time when Lama Yeshe's global vision was being consolidated and it was a particularly painful loss to those who formed the 'wider Manjushri Institute community', that is the 'several thousand people who have attended courses and visited the Institute [...] friends, parents and sympathisers'.<sup>86</sup> The eventual appropriation by Geshe Kelsang and his disciples of valuable FPMT assets and the differing vision to which they have been put, is also considered by many FPMT students as offensive to Lama Yeshe's memory. The amicable departure of Geshe Loden from Chenrezig Institute is often cited as a precedent that Geshe Kelsang ought to have followed:

If Geshe Kelsang had said, 'Okay, I don't agree with FPMT anymore, I don't agree with what they're trying to do', and moved to York where there was a centre, and have taken his students with him, in my view that would have been totally acceptable [...] You know, they'd say good luck to you. Where it went wrong was that they hung on to this building which was designed as the jewel in the crown of something much bigger which was founded by Lama Yeshe.<sup>87</sup>

The dispute was a problem, however, from which the network generally - which in 1984 was comprised of thirty-three centres and eight other projects spanning thirteen countries - could assimilate and quickly recover. This dispute was, in any case, overshadowed by the death of Lama Yeshe, the FPMT's founder and Director, in March 1984. According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, although Lama Yeshe had been suffering from a heart condition for many years, his death resulted primarily from the

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<sup>86</sup> Taken from the FPMT 'Report on Events at Manjushri Institute', 1983.

<sup>87</sup> FPMT Interview, July 1995.

disharmony and division within FPMT centres.<sup>88</sup> Since then the passing of Lama Yeshe continues to be linked, in the minds of many FPMT students, to the 'inauspicious' behaviour of the Manjushri Institute:

The great beings, it is said, live for as long as the meritorious energy of the trainees remains strong. When the meritorious energy wanes, they pass away [...] In Europe there was a bickering in one of his Dharma centers, even squabbling over property rights. As the scriptures put it, it was a bad omen, '...like a vulture in a peacock garden'.<sup>89</sup>

Just as the NKT's self-understanding was influenced by the conflict between the Institute and the FPMT, the FPMT's organisational structure as outlined in the 'Handbook for the FPMT' has clearly been shaped by the same event differently interpreted. Directives laid down for the internal running of FPMT centres reflect the contentious dimensions of the earlier conflict. Centre Directors thus have a responsibility 'to carry out Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's vision' and 'promote awareness of the FPMT within the centre's community'. Permission must be sought from Central Office to open new centres and it is understood that any new branches 'would be a part of the FPMT and as such subject to all the FPMT policies and conditions'. It is also understood that the copyright of any oral and textual teachings given at FPMT centres 'will be owned by the Centre' and the legal constitutions of FPMT centres should reflect the following:

<sup>88</sup> See Lama Zopa Rinpoche's tribute to Lama Yeshe in *Wisdom: Magazine of the FPMT*, 2 (1984), p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> Taken from 'Remarkable Meetings with Lama Yeshe' by the popular Buddhist author Glenn H. Mullin in *Mandala*, (September-October 1995), p. 25. Also, Vickie Mackenzie says this about Lama Yeshe's death: 'Were we not worthy, not doing enough? We didn't know. Certainly there had been some dissent from the Manjushri Institute, Lama Yeshe's centre in Cumbria, England, which had upset him.' (*Reincarnation: The Boy Lama*, p. 67).

The centre is a part of the FPMT and shall be protected from becoming a part of another organisation, under another Spiritual Head or from being taken over by those who would want to follow a direction contrary to that given by Lama Yeshe or Lama Zopa Rinpoche.<sup>90</sup>

Lama Yeshe had made provisions for the continuity of his organisation by creating the Board of Directors in 1983, the FPMT's main authority and decision-making body. Lama Zopa Rinpoche inherited the role of Spiritual Director in 1984 and one of the most pressing tasks he faced was that of finding his predecessor's reincarnation. After conducting traditional divinations and consulting the Dalai Lama, he finally announced that Lama Yeshe had taken rebirth in the West in the form of a Spanish boy called Osel Hita Torres.<sup>91</sup> In 1991, at the age of seven, Lama Osel (re)-entered *Sera Je* monastic university in South India to begin a course of study, combining traditional Tibetan monastic and modern western elements that would groom him for (re)-assuming his position at the helm of the FPMT. The future of the FPMT is considered to be bound up with the success of this 'exciting experiment in education'<sup>92</sup> because,

if Lama were to grow up at Sera and complete a geshe degree there, the potential for him to break down old barriers, synthesize many forces and cultures, and spread the Dharma to different peoples, would be much greater.<sup>93</sup>

In the meantime the FPMT continues to grow and develop under the guidance of Lama Zopa Rinpoche in a way that is considered to be faithful to Lama Yeshe's original 'big vision'. The vision of an inter-connected network, developing in a self-

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<sup>90</sup> 'Handbook for the FPMT', (1989), pp. 44-57.

<sup>91</sup> Born on 12 February 1985, to students of Lama Yeshe from his Spanish Centre O. Sel. Ling.

<sup>92</sup> *Mandala*, (July-August 1996), p. 30.

<sup>93</sup> *Mandala*, (September-October 1995), p. 28.

conscious and reflexive way, wherein each centre shares a common purpose and sense of responsibility for the whole, is still very much in place. Projects originally implemented or conceived of by Lama Yeshe, such as his plan to build a large statue of the Buddha *Maitreya* in *Bodhgayā*, are still given priority within the FPMT. The growth of the organisation has taken place under the guidance and patronage of eminent Tibetan *geshes* and *lamas*, and particularly the Dalai Lama who continues to represent its highest source of inspiration, authority and legitimation:

His Holiness is the greatest source of inspiration for the Foundation and therefore service to His Holiness must be one of our primary activities [...] The Spiritual Director of the Foundation [...] takes it upon himself to keep His Holiness apprised of our works and seeks guidance from His Holiness for the development of the Foundation.<sup>94</sup>

The FPMT remains self-consciously *Gelug* in identity, its study programmes receiving authentication and certification from the Gelugpa Society, the organisation responsible for the awarding of *geshe* degrees within the *Gelug* tradition. Strong links are maintained with Tibetan communities-in-exile, especially *Sera Je*, and support is offered for Tibetan cultural and political causes. Rather than seeing this as purely 'political', the FPMT endorses such activity as the work of Dharma. In terms of its relationship with other groups in the West, the FPMT is a firm advocator of the Dalai Lama's inclusive and inter-faith approach. Jamyang Centre has thus been very supportive of pan-Buddhist initiatives such as the Network of Buddhist Organisations and the Western Buddhist Teachers Conferences in Dharamsala. FPMT Dharma

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<sup>94</sup> 'Handbook for the FPMT', (1989), pp. 16-17.

centres also provide 'temporal benefits such as massage and yoga therapy',<sup>95</sup> and projects such as Maitreya Leprosy Centre in *Bodhgayā* and FPMT hospice centres in Australia also aim to actualise Lama Yeshe's wish that his network should impact beneficially upon its wider society. Such engagement in social welfare activity is also in line with the explicit recommendations of the Dalai Lama. Newsletters from Jamyang Centre thus include messages from him encouraging the FPMT to develop its work in the social domain using the Buddha's message and techniques 'as a service to others' in areas like education, health and community problems.<sup>96</sup> The variegated FPMT network is thus very different from the NKT which has separated and defined itself against broader Tibetan currents, has shown little interest in dialogue or social engagement, and which emphasises the creation of Dharma centres for Buddhist education and propagation only, according to the spiritual direction of a single teacher. It could be argued that the FPMT is substantially older than the NKT and that, in time, the latter will become more like the former in terms of its shape and range of activities. In light of the very different ideological visions propelling the two organisations, though, such a convergence seems unlikely. Indeed, in at least one respect, that of educational structure, the opposite seems to be the case. Throughout the FPMT's development, individual centres and *geshes* have enjoyed a significant amount of latitude and autonomy in terms of their spiritual programmes. The organisation has, however, recently attempted to introduce a greater degree of centralisation, standardisation and uniformity into its educational activities. According

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>96</sup> 'Jamyang Newsletter', July-September 1995.

to the FPMT's current Education Programmes Project Manager,

A homogenous, structured education program throughout the FPMT has been desired for a long time. A homogenous education structure enables teaching staff to be replaced without the program breaking down. Materials generated in one center have a direct relevance to the need for materials in other centers. Students can study at different centers and still complete a program. We can create teachers who will be able to teach in the programs of all the centers.<sup>97</sup>

In 1993, having worked upon a basic model devised by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the education department introduced the Basic Programme of Buddhist Studies to the CPMT and a number of centres began to implement it. One of the aims of the first FPMT education conference, hosted by Jamyang Centre in 1996, was to develop guidelines for implementing this programme more widely within the organisation.<sup>98</sup> In 1998, a revised version of the Master's Programme, a study programme initially devised by Lama Yeshe in 1983 for the training of Buddhist teachers, was implemented at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy. It is hoped that this seven-year course will also be made available in other FPMT centres in the future.

The NKT's exclusive and focused vision generates rapid expansion and it became, in the space of six years, a network that in terms of the number and distribution of its member centres, far exceeded the FPMT. We must exercise caution, however, when making such comparisons. The FPMT does not share the same energetic will to expand that drives the NKT, but follows a different model of growth which emphasises the consolidation of existing centres more than the generation of

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<sup>97</sup> Personal communication, February 1997.

<sup>98</sup> For an account of the education conference, see *Mandala*, (January-February 1997), 36-41.



new ones.<sup>99</sup> The FPMT's rate of growth in terms of centres established around the world is thus much slower than that of the NKT. In 1984, there were thirty-three FPMT centres and eight other projects represented in thirteen countries, and by the close of 1996 this had risen to sixty-one centres and nineteen other projects in nineteen countries. In terms of the numbers of individual students active around those centres, however, the NKT still has a long way to go before it matches the size of the FPMT. In 1988 - when it had only forty-one centres and six other projects in fourteen countries - FPMT sources estimated that upto twenty-thousand students were connected to the network.<sup>100</sup>

With respect to the development of *Gelug* Buddhism in Britain, however, the NKT overshadows the FPMT both in terms of the distribution of its centres and the number of its practitioners.<sup>101</sup> The conflict with the Manjushri Institute may not have caused any lasting damage to the development of the FPMT internationally, but the loss of this institutional power-base has seriously impaired its growth in Britain:

the FPMT has a very small representation in England now. Compared to what it is in Australia, for example, it's nothing.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Whilst the majority of the NKT's centres are made up of small groups meeting weekly in rented rooms, most FPMT centres are large, well-established communities based within and around their own permanent properties.

<sup>100</sup> *Mandala*, 3 (October 1988), 8-9.

<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately I don't have accurate figures for the numbers of FPMT and NKT Buddhists in Britain. From conversations with NKT and FPMT representatives, and from comparing the representation of the organisations in terms of the numbers and type of their centres, I would guess that there are roughly three-to-four hundred FPMT Buddhists compared to over two thousand NKT Buddhists active in Britain.

<sup>102</sup> FPMT Interview, July 1995.

One student explains the FPMT's growth in Britain as a 'dependent arising' requiring certain conditions like a good institutional basis, believing that the Manjushri Institute would have provided this:

a large building, and particularly a prestigious building, like Conishead Priory [...] is a very good condition for growth and the cause may be things like people's karma [...] And so for a long time I think the FPMT lacked conditions for growth [...] So if Conishead Priory had remained an FPMT centre it would have been a condition for a lot more activity and probably a lot more would have happened out of that, satellite centres and the like.<sup>103</sup>

Following the split, the FPMT in Britain was left with the comparatively small Manjushri Centre, London. Although it had developed initially as a branch of Manjushri Institute, most of the students there at the time of the conflict 'were unaware of the situation, as [Manjushri London] had its own identity, centre and was a separate charity anyway'.<sup>104</sup> It continued to develop as the FPMT's British base and in 1990, it changed its name to Jamyang Meditation Centre in order to distinguish itself clearly from the Institute.<sup>105</sup> Geshe Wangchen taught at the centre until he retired through illness in 1988 and since 1994, Geshe Tashi Tsering (b.1958), a *lharampa geshe* from *Sera Me* monastic university, has been Jamyang's resident teacher. In 1995, Jamyang entered a new chapter of its history by purchasing much larger premises, the Kennington Courthouse, in South London. Since moving to the Courthouse early in 1996, students have been renovating the building and extending

<sup>103</sup> FPMT Interview, March 1997.

<sup>104</sup> Personal correspondence with the ex-Director of Manjushri London, July 1995. The older students at Manjushri London were, of course, aware of the situation; some were even involved in the negotiations with the Priory Group. The conflict seems to have had quite an impact on a number of the London students. It appears to have left some with a distrust of organisations, as the independent creation of Saraswati Buddhist Group in South Petherton by ex-students of Manjushri London in 1994 indicates.

<sup>105</sup> *Jamyang* is the Tibetan form of the Sanskrit *Manjushri*.

Jamyang's teaching programme and city outreach activities. The move to the Courthouse is indicative of how the FPMT's fortunes in Britain are changing and it is likely that as Jamyang's activities increase it will become the basis for the creation of further satellite centres. In fact, the FPMT in Britain had already moved beyond a single locality base in 1988 when Shen Phen Thubten Choeling, a retreat centre in Herefordshire, was donated to the London centre and a third FPMT centre was recently inaugurated in Leeds.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Jamyang Centre Leeds was inaugurated as an FPMT centre early in 1997.

## **PART III**

### **THE ORDER OF BUDDHIST CONTEMPLATIVES**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE ORDER OF BUDDHIST CONTEMPLATIVES: BACKGROUND AND EARLY PERIOD, 1962-1976

This chapter examines the early stages of the transplantation of Japanese *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism in Britain by detailing the emergence and development of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC), the first Zen movement to firmly establish itself on British shores. As with the examination of the NKT, I will relate the historical and ideological development of the OBC to earlier discussions about the dynamics of the transplantation process.

#### 1. PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

##### 1.1. HISTORY CONSTRUCTION IN THE OBC

The project of piecing together the history of the OBC is, like that of the NKT, fraught with difficulties and Coney's observations about the dynamics of history construction in new religious movements are equally relevant. The OBC, like the NKT, contains a diverse set of histories ranging across the individual, 'small group' and public levels of the organisation. The evolution of this movement has witnessed similar patterns of identity construction involving the selective evocation, ordering and re-ordering of social memory and the attendant (though perhaps more subtle) process of social amnesia or forgetfulness. As with the NKT, shifts and developments in the self-identity and worldview of the OBC have been accompanied by the

leadership's revision, modification and conscious forgetting of earlier narratives and themes. In particular, the changing of group names - or the simple non-reference to earlier designations - to reflect shifts in identity has been an important technique of forgetfulness for both organisations. The OBC has also been rocked, furthermore, by internal conflict and instability during its development, to which its leadership has responded in similar ways to that of the NKT. Although the initial styles of the two founder figures towards dealing with conflict were quite different, their later attempts to 'iron out' or de-emphasise discontinuities 'in favour of a strong, continuous storyline' are strongly reminiscent of each other. As a consequence, there is little to suggest, in recent historical accounts emerging from within either movement, that conflict, dispute and instability formed even a small part of their evolution and development.

## 1.2. CONTEXTUALISING THE OBC

To understand the transplantation of Japanese *Sōtō* Zen via the OBC we must be knowledgeable about the indigenous tradition because, as will become apparent, Kennett's interpretation of *Sōtō* Zen is in many respects reflective and representative of the traditional and normative Japanese approach. Besides the normative influence of incoming indigenous traditions, however, the transplantation process is affected by conditions in the host culture and also by trans-cultural processes. To understand the important role played by conditions in the host culture, we must be sensitive in the first instance, to the manner in which Kennett's cultural baggage - as an educated English woman, a disaffected Anglican and a passionate believer in sexual equality -

shaped her interpretation and presentation of the *Sōtō* Zen tradition. The reception of Kennett's presentation by western sympathisers of a similar cultural hue - that is her resonances with, and appeal to, practitioners within the OBC compared to the strong, and often negative, reactions of her critics - must also be considered throughout. To appreciate the influence of trans-cultural processes on the development of the OBC, we must return to those modern developments in Zen which resulted from the impact of western cultural and political forces in Japan.

### 1.3. SUMMARY

Finney argues that an understanding of the emergence and development of American Zen requires an institutional, cross-cultural, and historical explanation:

The American Zen studied here has been *imported*, more-or-less intact, from another culture through a prolonged process of culture contact and diffusion. It has not sprung up *simply* (and certainly not *only*) as a result of a small group of marginal Americans' responses to personal strain [...] The institutional emergence of American Zen is but the most recent chapter of the historical process of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism's cultural diffusion from one culture to another over three millennia.<sup>1</sup>

His 'culture diffusion model' which attempts to adequately account for American Zen's institutional and organisational origins 'and the impact those origins may have on its subsequent development' (p. 381), is supported by Melton and Jones who argue that,

the emergence and penetration of American culture by the new religions can be seen as part of the century-long trend of migration by Japanese religions to the West. A new phase of that penetration occurred coincidentally at the same

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<sup>1</sup> 'American Zen's "Japan Connection"', pp. 391-392.

time that America was experiencing a period of social unrest, but had no essential connection to it.<sup>2</sup>

Although Finney was unable to refine his discussion of Zen in America by incorporating the findings of recent scholars (such as Sharf and Faure) on Japanese Zen modernism, his model of transplantation nevertheless remains a convincing account and represents the nearest equivalent to what the present study of British Zen is aiming to achieve.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Gordon Melton and Constance A. Jones, 'New Japanese Religions in the United States', in *Japanese New Religions in the West*, ed. by Peter B. Clarke and Jeffrey Somers (Folkestone, Kent: Japan Library, 1994), pp. 33-53 (p. 36).



## 2. SOTO ZEN BUDDHISM IN BRITAIN AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE ZEN MISSION SOCIETY

### 2.1. PEGGY KENNETT: EARLY INFLUENCES AND DIRECTIONS, 1924-1962

I do not intend to simply reproduce the biography of Peggy Teresa Nancy Kennett (1924-1996) here because extended discussions of her life can be found elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> The focus, rather, will be upon the aspects of her life that were formative to her thought as a Zen teacher and which help to illuminate the nature and development of her religious movement.

Kennett recalls her school days as an important formative time tracing her beliefs in sexual equality, her disenchantment with Christianity and her initial interest in Buddhism back to this period. At school she was taught 'that women could be anything they wanted' alongside what she describes as 'a blood and guts variety of Christianity'. Her interest in Buddhism, she claims, was a reaction to the 'hellfire and brimstone' of her teachers compared to the serene image of a Buddha statue displayed in the school hall:

If you're listening to blood and guts every morning, and there's something else sitting on the mantle looking good - that's when I got converted to Buddhism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Sandy Boucher, *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating New Buddhism* (London: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 133-145, L. Friedman, *Meetings With Remarkable Women* (Shambhala, 1987), pp. 161-190 and Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1997), pp. 363-371.

<sup>4</sup> Kennett as quoted in Friedman, pp. 171-172.

After the War, Kennett entered higher education studying medieval music at Durham University and obtaining a fellowship at Trinity College of Music, London. She maintained her interest in church music by working as a Church of England organist.

Although she claims to have 'converted' to Buddhism as a child, she remained a committed Christian into adulthood believing that her deep calling was to become an Anglican priest. The Anglican church's policy on female ordination and the sexism Kennett encountered as a church organist<sup>5</sup> contributed further to her growing sense of disillusionment and she eventually renounced Christianity, becoming actively involved with Buddhism which she believed afforded greater respect and opportunity for women. Her initial interest and enquiry was into *Theravāda* Buddhism, at that time the most prominent form of Buddhism in England, and she became involved with the London Buddhist Vihara.<sup>6</sup> The development of the London Buddhist Vihara ran concurrently with that of the London Buddhist Society and the two organisations had overlapping interests and memberships. Kennett was involved with both organisations, having become a member of the Buddhist Society in 1954. She studied and lectured at the society and even wrote for *The Middle Way* on the subject of music and Zen.<sup>7</sup> Her strong personality clashed, however, with some of the society's more prominent members, including its founder and President Christmas Humphreys.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1950s, Zen was very much on the upswing within the Buddhist Society. Kennett's attentions gradually shifted away from *Theravāda* Buddhism and

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<sup>5</sup> According to Kennett 'One parson informed me that the only women he wanted in his church were the ones who cleaned it' (As quoted in Friedman, p. 172).

<sup>6</sup> For an account of the early history of the London Buddhist Vihara see Oliver's *Buddhism in Britain*, pp. 65-74.

<sup>7</sup> Her article 'Music is Zen' appeared in the *The Middle Way*, 34.2 (August 1959), 56-58.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, in a letter to a British disciple (dated September 27 1971), Kennett herself traces this conflict back to petty disagreements about the kind of hats she used to wear when attending Buddhist Society events.

she became an enthusiastic member of Humphreys' popular Zen Class. Biographies of Kennett emerging from within the OBC fail to mention this, for reasons which will become clear. They emphasise only that she was 'introduced to Rinzai Zen by D.T. Suzuki in London'.<sup>9</sup> Kennett was 'greatly impressed'<sup>10</sup> by Suzuki, and her interpretation of Zen, like that of Humphreys, was strongly tinged by Suzuki's modernist reconstruction of a mystical and experiential Zen spirituality.

More important than Kennett's meetings with Suzuki, however, was her introduction in 1960, to *Kōhō Keidō* Chisan (1879-1967), the chief abbot of *Sōjōji*,<sup>11</sup> who was touring Europe and America. *Kōhō* Chisan's tour of the West must be contextualised against the historical and social changes affecting the *Sōtō* sect in the modern period. The upheavals of the Meiji Restoration and the subsequent challenges of the post-war era, particularly the competitive threat of Japan's emerging 'new religions', forced the sect to reform itself, open up to the modern world, and instigate missionary activity, both in Japan and in the West.<sup>12</sup> These 'push' factors combined with important 'pull' factors, including the calls of Japanese emigrants abroad for a priestly representation and the growing western interest in Zen. Furthermore, Japan's 'new and favourable relationship with the United States'<sup>13</sup> in the post-war period provided a favourable climate for exporting its cultural and religious goods.

<sup>9</sup> 'Throssel Hole Priory Guest Information', pamphlet from 1985, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Oliver, p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> One of the two head temples of the *Sōtō* Zen sect in Japan, the other being *Eiheiji*. *Kōhō* Chisan was Chief Abbot there between 1948 and 1967.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion of the development of modern Japanese *Sōtō*, and the reforms the sect has instigated to counteract the upheavals of both the Meiji and post-war eras, see Ian Reader, 'Contemporary Thought in *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism: An Investigation of the Publications and Teachings of the *Sōtō* Sect in the Light of their Cultural and Historical Context' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Melton and Jones, p. 35.

Kennett helped to arrange *Kōhō* Chisan's visit to England and their encounter resulted in his extension of an invitation to her to become his disciple at *Sōjōji*, an offer she readily accepted. The following year she set sail for the East, her departure being recorded in the *The Middle Way*:

Miss Peggy Kennett left for the Far East on December 21st, where she will continue her studies and meditation, and so another member leaves us to seek training in the East.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2. KENNETT IN THE EAST, 1962-1969

When it comes to reconstructing the trajectory of Kennett's life in the East, we are heavily dependent upon her own diaries from this period. These were revised and edited following her return to the West and eventually published in two volumes as *The Wild, White Goose*.<sup>15</sup> These texts reflect Kennett's progress through the Japanese *Sōtō* system, initially as a trainee in one of its principal monasteries and later as a temple priest. We must remember however that, as an autobiographer, Kennett is less concerned with historical accuracy than with providing legitimation and identity for herself and her movement. The autobiographical aims and purposes behind *The Wild, White Goose* will be examined in detail later; for the present, we will concentrate upon abstracting the facts from what is largely in Kennett's own words, 'a work of fiction'.<sup>16</sup>

Kennett had arranged to visit Malaysia for three months *en route* to Japan to give lectures and receive an award for setting a Buddhist hymn to music. She was

<sup>14</sup> *The Middle Way*, 36.4 (1962). Kennett arrived in Malaysia in early January 1962.

<sup>15</sup> The first volume of *The Wild White Goose* [hereafter referred to as *WWG*], entitled *The Diary of a Zen Trainee*, was published by Shasta Abbey Press in 1977, and the second, *The Diary of a Female Zen Priest*, appeared in 1978.

<sup>16</sup> *WWG*, I, p. xi.

surprised to discover upon her arrival in January 1962, that arrangements had been made for her to be ordained into the Chinese *Lin-Chi* school. Before leaving for Japan, she received *bhikṣuṇi* ordination from the Venerable Seck Kim Seng, the Chinese abbot of Cheng Hoon Temple in Malacca, receiving the name *T'su-Yu* ('True Friend'). Upon arriving in Japan in April 1962, she was received by *Kōhō* Chisan and admitted into *Sōjōji*, her ordination name changing to its Japanese equivalent of *Jiyu* ('Compassionate Friend'). The circumstances of Kennett's spiritual career in the East were thus very unusual; few westerners have, like her, 'been formally ordained in both Rinzai and Soto Zen',<sup>17</sup> and her admittance into *Sōjōji* as a western woman in an all-male Japanese monastery, was highly irregular.

A major theme of Kennett's diaries concerns the tribulations of her *Sōjōji* experience. Besides being plagued, throughout her time in Japan, by malnutrition and ill health, she 'had to overcome a great deal of prejudice and opposition as a woman and a foreigner'.<sup>18</sup> Although the difficult conditions depressed and almost overwhelmed her, she eventually accepted them as aspects of her 'personal *kōan*', the daily realities within which enlightenment must be found. Pursuing her training in this vein led Kennett to undergo a number of unusual religious experiences,<sup>19</sup> culminating with the profound *kenshō* (experience of enlightenment) that she claims, opened a new and expanded dimension of being to her:

<sup>17</sup> Rawlinson, p. 363. The others are Sensei Bernard Tetsugen Glassman, Rev. Kongo Langlois and Sensei Dennis Genpo Merzel. Biographies of these figures can be found in Rawlinson.

<sup>18</sup> Reverend Daishin Morgan, 'Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Britain', in *Japanese New Religions in the West*, pp. 132-148 (p. 140).

<sup>19</sup> These experiences, which included hearing voices (*WWG*, I, p. 36), seeing the world 'shimmering with light' (*ibid*) and having a vision of herself as a Japanese monk 'many centuries before this one' (*ibid.*, p. 37), were later interpreted by Kennett in terms of a number of developments in her thought resulting from a series of visions she underwent between 1976 and 1977. The projection of teachings developed later onto earlier experiences will be discussed in more detail later.

Life is opening up so much, so widely, so vividly [...] It's like seeing a huge panorama instead of looking through a keyhole. That's what it's been like since I had this *kenshō*; like looking at a great scene which before was only glimpsed when you raised a curtain a fraction.<sup>20</sup>

This experience, Kennett claims, also qualified her to begin her ascent through the *Sōtō* priestly ranks. She underwent the ceremony of Chief Junior (*shusōshō*), assuming the role of an elder monk who leads and supervises other monks,<sup>21</sup> and later received the Dharma transmission (*denbō*) from *Kōhō* Chisan, becoming his 'true descendant' within the *Sōtō* lineage and having her understanding publicly authenticated.<sup>22</sup> Like the monks training alongside her, she began to 'acquire the working knowledge of ritual procedures essential to their professional careers as priests'.<sup>23</sup> After passing through her ceremonial graduation as a qualified priest,<sup>24</sup> she was installed as the head priest (*shinzan*) of her own village temple in Mie Prefecture<sup>25</sup> where she performed religious ceremonies for the local population 'just as if she were Japanese'.<sup>26</sup> Once she had become established in this role she underwent the necessary ceremonies authorising her 'to be a teacher of Buddhism and an abbess of her own monastery'<sup>27</sup> (*kessei* or *ango*), and later received, from the *Sōtō* Administration Section, 'my teaching certificate ratifying Zenji Sama's True

<sup>20</sup> *WWG*, I, pp. 92-93. Kennett's first *kenshō*, which occurred on October 5 1962, is described in *WWG*, I, pp. 64-69. Elements of this experience are also interpreted through the filter of her later thought. From the Lotus Blossom period onwards, Kennett would also refer to this experience as 'The Penetration of Heaven' *kenshō*.

<sup>21</sup> She underwent this ceremony in January 1963 (*ibid.*, pp. 81-87).

<sup>22</sup> This happened in May 1963 (*ibid.*, pp.120-126). It was not unusual for her to undergo this ritual procedure so early in her monastic career.

<sup>23</sup> T. Griffith Foulk, 'The Zen Institution in Modern Japan', in *Zen: Tradition and Transition*, ed. by Kenneth Kraft (London: Rider and Co. Ltd, 1988), pp.157-177 (p. 165).

<sup>24</sup> In May 1964 (*WWG*, I, pp. 166-170).

<sup>25</sup> The name of her temple was *Unpukuji*.

<sup>26</sup> Rawlinson, p. 365.

<sup>27</sup> Daizui MacPhillamy, 'Synopsis of Volume One', in *WWG*, II, pp. xiii-xiv.

'Transmission'.<sup>28</sup> *Kōhō* Chisan himself recognised Kennett as 'my direct disciple [...] one of my Dharma Heirs',<sup>29</sup> and bestowed upon her the honorific title of *Rōshi* ('elder teacher').

Kennett's training in Japan and the privileges afforded to her by *Kōhō* Chisan, must be understood against the backdrop of the post-war status elevation movement of Japanese *Sōtō* nuns. Spearheaded by the 'Soto Nuns' Organisation' under the leadership of Kojima Kendo, this movement fought for the abolition of discrimination in all matters of ceremonial, teaching qualifications, temple management and suffrage.<sup>30</sup> By the time Kennett arrived in Japan in the early 1960s, the most fundamental issues had been resolved<sup>31</sup> but the nuns had not yet achieved their desired goal of perfect equality 'in which they would be regarded not as secondary or exceptional cases, but as being in the same category as monks'.<sup>32</sup> *Kōhō* Chisan was an enthusiastic supporter of this ongoing campaign for equality and his widely opposed decision to admit Kennett into *Sōjōji* and promote her rise through the priestly ranks, was an important statement in this respect.

Rawlinson correctly observes that the recognition of her inner attainment was just as, if not more, important to Kennett as the formal or external endorsements of

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<sup>28</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 251. Kennett refers to *Kōhō* Chisan throughout her diaries as 'Zenji Sama'. She did not actually receive the certificate giving her the right to do *sanzen* (give instruction as a Zen master) until September 1968. Copies of the various certificates Kennett received during her time in Japan – including certification of her transmission and status as a priest and teacher of Buddhism – have been made available to me by Shasta Abbey.

<sup>29</sup> As quoted in *WWG*, II, p. 36. Copies of letters sent to Kennett from the *Sōtō* Zen Headquarters in Japan and North America that address her as 'Jiyu Kennett *Rōshi*' have been made available to me by Shasta Abbey as evidence of her standing within the Japanese sect.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of this movement, see Kumiko Uchino, 'The Status Elevation Process of *Sōtō* Sect Nuns in Modern Japan', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 10 (1983), 177-194.

<sup>31</sup> In 1951, for example, nuns 'acquired the rights to perform the initiation ceremony and to transmit the teachings of Zen masters; these enabled them to have their own formal nun pupils and nun Zen masters' (Uchino, p. 188).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

her status within the *Sōtō* lineage. Much significance is attached to the ratification of her understanding by the Japanese master Kodo Sawaki (1880-1965), 'the greatest living saint of our school'.<sup>33</sup> Her spiritual kinship and unity with *Kōhō* Chisan is, furthermore, persistently prioritised over the official stature stemming from the relationship. Although Kennett saw him only rarely, having to 'rely on others, some of whom were not well disposed towards her',<sup>34</sup> she paints her relationship with *Kōhō* Chisan in highly intimate terms, mobilising the central Zen symbol of the 'mind-to-mind transmission' to illustrate its deeply spiritual nature.

Another major theme of Kennett's diaries concerns her development of a small, but committed, group of western disciples. *Kōhō* Chisan had asked her (shortly after her arrival in Japan) to deal with the increasing numbers of western visitors to *Sōjōji*, most of whom were tourists from American military bases. Among these, Kennett found a much-needed basis of friendship and support and she developed a regular programme of teaching and meditation to nurture their growing interest in Zen. Whilst her endeavours in this direction were criticised and resisted by some sections of *Sōjōji*, Kennett's project of training westerners had the blessing and support of *Kōhō* Chisan who encouraged her to 'consolidate them so that I may turn them into a firm body that cannot be broken'<sup>35</sup> and later gave her the official title of 'Foreign Guest Hall Master'.<sup>36</sup> He also gave her a certificate nominating her as 'the

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<sup>33</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 87. Kodo Sawaki was the teacher of the Japanese teacher Taisen Deshimaru (1914-1982), founder of the Association Zen Internationale. Kodo Sawaki's image as an 'enlightened' Zen master has recently been re-appraised by Brian Victoria in *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, Inc., 1997). According to this account, Sawaki was a fierce Japanese nationalist who supported, and indeed fought, in the Russo-Japanese war.

<sup>34</sup> Rawlinson, p. 364.

<sup>35</sup> *WWG*, I, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 89.



Buddhist Bishop of London<sup>37</sup> in anticipation of her return to Britain 'where he wanted her to introduce *Soto Zen*'.<sup>38</sup>

During her final years in Japan, Kennett concentrated upon the development of the *Sōjōji* Foreign Section from her own village temple and made plans to return to the West. She united her American disciples and shielded them from the hostile elements of the Tokyo temple by sending out newsletters and running meditation retreats at *Unpukuji*. The fate of the Foreign Section was sealed when, in November 1967, *Kōhō Chisan* died and Kennett 'lost the only real support she had in *Sōjōji* and Japan'.<sup>39</sup> From this time onwards, the development of the Foreign Section took place entirely outside the context of *Sōjōji*; westerners were now 'excluded from the temple',<sup>40</sup> Kennett's title of 'Foreign Guest Master' was deleted from the list of *Sōjōji* office appointments, and she made her final visit there towards the end of 1968. The Administration Section of the *Sōtō* sect also began to display a rather ambivalent attitude towards Kennett during these years. Whilst her progress through the ranks of the priesthood had received all the necessary formal endorsements, when she began to ordain and train western disciples of her own it was reluctant to officially register them.<sup>41</sup> Kennett nevertheless became, 'in spite of appearances', the 'official representative' of the *Sōtō* sect when, just prior to leaving Japan for the West, she,

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<sup>37</sup> *WWG*, I, p. 169.

<sup>38</sup> Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West*, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> Kennett comments upon the ambivalence of the Administration Section herself: 'The Administration Section may or may not have objections to my doing things, I really don't know, but it works awfully hard to make sure that I get everything on time to do them with - even if it makes difficulties about their being registered' (*WWG*, II, p. 250).

received a certificate asking me to become the official pioneer missionary of the *Sōtō* Sect in America and a contract for four years to do this from the Head Office.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.3. NEW BEGINNINGS IN THE WEST, 1969-1976

Kennett's American disciples in Japan had informed her as early as 1965 'that when I leave here there will always be a home for me in America',<sup>43</sup> and they later offered the necessary financial backing for her return westwards. When she finally left Japan in November 1969 to embark upon a lecture tour of the West, then, her first port of call was the West Coast of America, where she could both consolidate and build upon this support. The tour was announced and advertised through the *Unpukuji* newsletter, the distribution of which now extended to friends and sympathisers of Kennett's in western countries:

Rev. Jiyu Kennett has been arranging her lecture tour of the United States, Canada and Great Britain. This tour is under the auspices of the head office of the *Sōtō* Zen Sect of Buddhism.<sup>44</sup>

The perceived hostility and antagonism of the British Buddhist establishment was another factor influencing Kennett's decision to make America her missionary base. The personality conflicts that had emerged in London during the 1950s escalated considerably whilst Kennett was training in Japan. This development began in 1964 following a request made by Christmas Humphreys to *Kōhō* Chisan for a *Sōtō* teacher to be sent to England. When *Kōhō* Chisan offered Kennett, his nominated 'Bishop of London', Humphreys replied that she would not be accepted within the Buddhist

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<sup>42</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 300. A copy of a document from the *Sōtō* Administration in 1969 stating that Kennett 'has the responsibility of being a foreign missionary teacher' can apparently be viewed at Shasta Abbey.

<sup>43</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> Newsletter dated October 4 1969.

Society as a Zen master and specifically requested a Japanese male *Rōshi* instead.<sup>45</sup> In the following year, Kennett was visited by Maurice and Ruth Walshe, also influential within the Buddhist Society. Their impressions 'were not wholly favourable: we thought there were signs of some imbalance'.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, they returned to England confirming the society's rejection of her. In contrast to the enthusiasm and commitment of her American followers, the deterioration of Kennett's Buddhist Society contacts led her to conclude that 'America presents a much cleaner atmosphere than does the present political scene in England' where 'certain selfish people [...] are anxious that the Truth should be what they believe and not what is necessarily True'.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after her arrival in San Francisco, the former Foreign Section of *Sōjiji* decided 'to band together as an actual temple congregation and formally offer me the post of its priest - thus the Zen Mission Society came into being'.<sup>48</sup> Committed to the project of transmitting *Sōtō* monasticism to the West,<sup>49</sup> Kennett set upon creating a disciplined communal environment, ordaining enthusiastic disciples into the priesthood whilst simultaneously building up a supportive network of lay practitioners. Owing to 'the speed at which the congregation was growing',<sup>50</sup> the temple was moved to larger premises in Oakland and then, in November 1970, to

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<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that, alongside his personal views and his fear of being upstaged within the British Zen scene, Humphreys was also assessing Kennett against a *Rinzai* framework, at that time the predominant form of Zen in Britain, and according to this her status as a '*Rōshi*' would indeed be questionable. Differences between *Sōtō* and *Rinzai* Zen on the title '*Rōshi*' will be discussed later.

<sup>46</sup> Personal communication with Maurice Walshe, November 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Taken from a letter to a British disciple dated April 1969.

<sup>48</sup> Jiyu-Kennett, 'The Goose at Rest: 1969-1978', *Journal of Shasta Abbey* [hereafter referred to as *JSAA*], 9/5-7 (1978), p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> In a letter to a British disciple, Kennett states that 'Zen training is so geared that I do not think it can be really and truly successful in its real essence outside the temple atmosphere' (letter dated September 20 1968).

<sup>50</sup> 'The Goose at Rest: 1969-1978', p. 18.

Mount Shasta where Shasta Abbey was founded as the permanent monastic headquarters of the Zen Mission Society (ZMS). This final move was also motivated by the extent of the 'guru hopping' and 'constant jockeying for position of the religious groups'<sup>51</sup> in and around the Bay Area at that time. In this respect Kennett likened herself to *Dōgen*, the founder of the *Sōtō* school, who also, according to tradition, moved his community to the mountains to avoid becoming embroiled in sectarian and political shenanigans:

I took *Dōgen*'s advice in moving to Shasta; it would seem that Kyoto in the 13th century and San Francisco in the 20th had much in common!<sup>52</sup>

A former disciple describes this move as a movement away from the liberal world of 'beat Zen' to 'an area in which a more conservative "square Zen" could be practised':<sup>53</sup>

*Rōshi* Kennett came across as a conservative Theravadin who embraced strict moral and ethical standards [...] The use of drugs, free love, and communal living were widely accepted in those days. It's not surprising that many liberal students who interpreted Zen as a justification for total freedom were 'turned off' to *Rōshi*. *Rōshi* in turn was not fond of the 'beat Zen' attitudes that prevailed among students.

The increased stabilisation of the ZMS resulting from the creation of Shasta Abbey was enhanced by Kennett's innovative decision to introduce a postulancy programme. This aimed to 'weed out' those who, because they did not appreciate the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Kennett's identification with *Dōgen*, and other exemplary representatives of *Sōtō* Zen, was one of the main strategies she mobilised for presenting herself and the ZMS as upholders of the 'pure' tradition.

<sup>53</sup> Taken from J. Budan, 'Memories of *Rōshi* Jiyu Kennett', *Still Point*, 22.4 (July-August 1997), pp. 4-5. *Still Point* is the newsletter of the Dharma Rain Zen Center, Oregon, USA.

seriousness and commitment of the monastic vocation, were liable to 'drop out' of their priestly training. The subsequent years saw the steady consolidation of the abbey and the institutional expansion of the ZMS through the founding of priories in England (Throssel Hole Priory in 1972) and America (Berkeley and Eugene Priors in 1973). These were established largely in response to the needs of the lay congregation, the growth of which was assisted by the publication, in 1972, of Kennett's first text on Zen Buddhism *Selling Water by the River: A Manual of Zen Training*.<sup>54</sup> Released by an independent publisher, this text reached a much wider audience than her later texts which, following the creation of Shasta Abbey Press in 1975, were distributed primarily *within* the ZMS.

Another significant feature of the ZMS's early history was the creation of Kannon Dell in 1975, a separate communal living area for married priests, some of whom had children. Whilst the establishment of a married priesthood reflected the practice of Japanese Zen in the post-Meiji period, Kennett's creation of Kannon Dell was an innovation. During this period articles discussed parenthood as a form of priestly training and examined the problems of raising children in a monastic environment:

Will the children raised in so close a connection with a monastery be equipped to handle the day-to-day world?<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Kennett had actually completed her first book by 1967 whilst she was in Japan. Its original title was *Zen is Eternal Life* and a limited number of copies were printed and distributed among the Foreign Section. It was finally published by Random House as *Selling Water by the River*.

<sup>55</sup> *Journal of the Zen Mission Society* [hereafter referred to as *JZMS*], 7.5 (1976), p. 14.

## 2.4. BRITISH BEGINNINGS

The successful transplantation of *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism in Britain was made possible by the appearance, during the 1960s, of alternative sites of Zen activity outside of the Buddhist Society. In particular, Kennett's contacts with a small, non-sectarian meditation group in Mousehole, Penzance, provided an avenue through which she could organise her return visits to Britain and mobilise support.

Mousehole Buddhist Group is significant in the development of British Zen because it was the first to develop an interest in the *Sōtō* school. According to the group's founder,

The general teaching up to that time was mainly in Rinzai through teachers like D.T. Suzuki, Humphreys, and Irmgard Schloegl [...] There was so little known about *Sōtō* Zen, but I'd always been intrigued by odd references made to it and felt that it would be good, since Suzuki had had a big influence in one side of Zen, to see what the other side was all about.<sup>56</sup>

In 1967, via a fortuitous contact with a Japanese layman associated with *Sōjōji*, the group's founder began corresponding with Kennett and, although his group never affiliated exclusively with her, it helped to organise, publicise and support her first return visit to Britain in the spring of 1970.

During this visit, Kennett lectured and led a number of successful and well-attended *sesshins* (meditation retreats). Following a 'spectacular sesshin'<sup>57</sup> held at a Gloucestershire farmhouse, twelve people took vows of lay ordination and a further five decided to return with Kennett to pursue a monastic vocation at Shasta Abbey. Included among these early British followers were former disciples of both the

<sup>56</sup> Interview dated April 1995.

<sup>57</sup> Personal communication with a former disciple of Kennett's (December 1994).

FWBO's founder Sangharakshita and the Japanese *Rinzai* master Sochu Suzuki, as well as a few dissatisfied members of the Buddhist Society Zen Class.<sup>58</sup>

Following the success of this visit, Kennett decided to return to Britain again in the spring of 1972. Daiji Strathern, one of the British monks at Shasta Abbey,<sup>59</sup> returned to make the practical arrangements and find a suitable base for a permanent monastic training and lay retreat centre. Towards this end, and using funds of his own, he purchased Throssel Hole Farm near Hexham, Northumberland, and launched an appeal to the embryonic British congregation for further financial support. Shortly afterwards, in May 1972, Kennett arrived in England, formed the 'British Zen Mission Society', and led the first *sesshins* at the farm, re-naming it as 'Throssel Hole Priory'. Before returning to America she ordained a few more British disciples, establishing a monastic community at Throssel Hole and appointing Strathern as its prior.

The creation of Throssel Hole Priory was a significant development in the history of British Zen Buddhism. It represented the earliest institutional establishment of *Sōtō* Zen, was the first sign of organised Zen activity in the north of England and was home to the first British monastic community in the Zen tradition. Strathern ran the priory along the lines of Shasta Abbey and was sympathetic to Kennett's project of adapting Zen in a Christian style. The harshness of the physical conditions of the converted farmhouse was matched by his view that 'monasteries are supposed to be

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<sup>58</sup> This includes Daishin Morgan, the current abbot of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, who remembers Humphreys' approach to Zen as being 'largely intellectual with little emphasis on the practice of meditation' ('*Sōtō* Zen Buddhism in Britain', p. 139).

<sup>59</sup> Strathern was another former disciple of Sangharakshita.

rigorous'.<sup>60</sup> According to one long-standing trainee, the priory's lay retreat programme was also highly austere in character:

All of us who used to go there all have our own little horror tales, about the door being open at one end and the snowflakes going through horizontally past your eyes. The *zendō* then was an old barn, and you really knew when that door was open in winter! [...] We didn't question it at all. Having read all those stories of *Bashō* in the twelfth century sitting in the snow we thought, 'This is the way it's meant to be. This is the purity of the faith. This is true Zen. This is proper training'.<sup>61</sup>

Kennett made her third and final visit to Britain in 1973 and she led many successful *sesshins* including a Zen/Catholic inter-religious retreat. She also inaugurated the first issue of the *Throssel Hole Priory Newsletter*, considering that the priory now had 'sufficient members of the priesthood to be able to have a really effective monastery'.<sup>62</sup> Before she returned to America, Kennett and Strathern discussed the feasibility of moving the priory to a location that would, firstly, be more accessible to the lay congregation and, secondly, have larger buildings to accommodate for growth. Owing to financial constraints, though, it was decided that the community would remain on the original site and gradually renovate, re-build and enlarge it. The lay congregation had, in any case, been growing steadily in spite of the priory's relative inaccessibility and the emphasis that Strathern had placed upon 'building a good solid base before we contemplate going out from it'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Interview dated July 1996. Strathern maintains that Throssel Hole, under his direction, was more austere than Shasta Abbey: 'I was a bit eccentric at times. I'd celebrate the Buddha's Birthday by having everyone in the meditation hall for ten hours with one bowl of rice. But I thought that was traditionally quite good Zen in a sense'.

<sup>61</sup> OBC Interview, June 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Throssel Hole Priory Newsletter [hereafter referred to as *THPN*], 1.1 (1973), p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *THPN*, 1.4 (1974), p. 1. Three meditation groups were listed in the newsletter towards the end of 1973, and there were six by mid-1974.



The visit that Kennett had planned for Britain in the summer of the following year did not transpire for a number of reasons. Apart from the pressures of commitments in America, her continuing health problems and the financial cost of another trans-Atlantic trip, a situation of conflict had developed between her and Daiji Strathern. This had its roots in the fact that Throssel Hole Priory was not owned by the ZMS. Shortly after the priory was established, Kennett began to feel that Strathern's personal ownership of the property restricted the control she had over the course of its development. She became unhappy with its location and critical of the way he was running it,<sup>64</sup> and she felt frustrated because 'until its ownership by the Society has been settled, it is extremely difficult for me to run it in the way in which a monastery should be run'.<sup>65</sup> Her decision in the summer of 1974, to open another priory in London, thus had a dual function: whilst making *Sōtō Zen* available to people in the south of England, it enabled Kennett to reassert her authority within the British ZMS.

Another factor behind the cancellation of her 1974 visit was Kennett's perception that the London Buddhist Society was becoming increasingly hostile towards her. Although she gave lectures on *Sōtō Zen* at the Buddhist Society in 1972, she later became convinced that Humphreys had deliberately snubbed her.<sup>66</sup> She also believed that the British release of *Selling Water by the River* was being hampered by influential members of the society. When she visited Britain again in 1973, she decided to concentrate on 'cementing the foundation of my own monastery rather than

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<sup>64</sup> She complained, for example, that he was too austere and 'quietistic' (that is, he was not doing enough to promote the growth of the organisation).

<sup>65</sup> Taken from a letter written by Kennett to a British disciple, dated June 6 1974.

<sup>66</sup> Humphreys had, apparently, asked Kennett to teach at the Buddhist Society Summer School in 1973, and then later withdrawn the invitation.

getting involved any further with the situation in London'.<sup>67</sup> She also began to expect an increasingly exclusive commitment from her disciples, encouraging them to adopt a policy of non-participation with respect to other Buddhist groups - especially the Buddhist Society - and severely chastising those who actively sought and nurtured such links. When Kennett's health suddenly deteriorated early in 1976, the stress caused by the 'disloyalty' of these British students was identified as the primary cause:

No one national or geographical group is exclusively to blame for draining Kennett *Rōshi* in this way [...] There is, however, one form of 'feeding' which has been particularly damaging in recent years and which usually has been done only by residents of the U.K. This takes the form of attempting to induce Rev. Kennett to return to England while at the same time making it clear to her that her teaching would not be completely accepted and that her disciples and friends are making no real attempt to rectify the situation of her being treated as a second-class Buddhist by the established Buddhist groups of England while at the same time these disciples and friends maintain a hypocritical cordiality with such groups and often espouse their attitudes. Such behavior is completely contrary to Buddhism which teaches that one must either accept a teacher openly, honestly, and completely or not consider the person one's teacher at all.<sup>68</sup>

Kennett considered that the Buddhist Society's rejection of her placed 'a tremendous limitation on my usefulness in England' and this was the most important factor behind her decision to settle permanently in America 'where I am most effective'<sup>69</sup> and 'wanted and loved'.<sup>70</sup> She did not want to 'create political friction by being physically present', but nevertheless regarded the creation of the London Zen Priory as an important statement to Humphreys, 'the Pope of Eccleston Square', that

<sup>67</sup> Taken from a letter written by Kennett to a British disciple, dated February 23 1973.

<sup>68</sup> Taken from a letter written by a senior American disciple of Kennett's and distributed among her main disciples in Britain, dated January 16 1976.

<sup>69</sup> Taken from a letter written by Kennett to a British disciple, dated September 27 1974.

<sup>70</sup> Taken from a letter written by Kennett to a British disciple, dated June 6 1974.

‘we are not afraid to be in the metropolis’.<sup>71</sup> This rather confrontational view, coupled with her complaint that the main problem with Throssel Hole was ‘the desire of its inmates to stay in the mountains and not go down to London because of the L.B.S.’,<sup>72</sup> represented an interesting reversal of her earlier praise and imitation of *Dōgen’s* retreat from Kyoto to the mountains.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

### 3. THE IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ZMS, 1962-1976

#### 3.1. MAIN SOURCES

The following analysis of the teachings of Kennett and the ZMS relies primarily upon the publications both of herself and those of her western disciples. Evidence from the literature will also be reinforced with material taken from letters by Kennett to certain British disciples between 1967 and 1977. The manner in which her followers, both monastic and lay, have assimilated her teachings forms another strand of the following discussion. Examination of their essays and journal articles illustrate how her teachings became an institutional and practical reality.

Although parallel developments have naturally occurred on both sides of the Atlantic, this study concentrates upon the assimilation of Kennett's teachings by her British disciples. The main source for examining this will be *The Journal of Throssel Hole Buddhist Priory*. Information from this journal will be supplemented with evidence taken from its 'sister' publications in America and from discussions and interviews with past and current members of the ZMS / OBC in Britain who have intimate knowledge and personal experience of her teachings.

#### 3.2. TEXT AND CONTEXT

An important theme underpinning the discussion of the teachings of Kennett and the ZMS is that of the intimate relationship between text and context. This theme manifests itself in three ways, the first being Kennett's deliberate engagement with the assumptions, misconceptions and concerns of her western disciples. As a western

practitioner herself she was in an excellent position to address the concerns of her followers and was a skilful cultural negotiator. She was aware of the religious and cultural baggage westerners carry with them into their Buddhist practice and of the idealisations and misconceptions that can result, and she sought to meaningfully respond to these.

Secondly, in the same way that Geshe Kelsang's exclusivism was hardened by his experience of western disciples, Kennett's thought also developed in response to the internal dynamics of her religious movement. The dialectical relationship between her thought and processes within her community is most markedly seen with respect to the innovations emerging from her third *kenshō* experience. Whilst the new ideas and practices emerging within the movement at this time were firmly rooted in her personal experiences, they could only be developed and integrated with the cooperation and participation of her close disciples. Consequently, some aspects of her teachings were not successfully taken up into the movement's general canopy of beliefs but became relatively minor ideas. The ZMS's structure of belief has largely developed therefore, through subtle interactions between Kennett and her followers and the degree of 'reinforcement'<sup>73</sup> her ideas received.

Thirdly, the relationship between text and context is manifested through the way in which literature functions within the movement. It is clear that Kennett's texts have played an important role, not only because they express - and occasionally revise - right doctrine and practice, but also because of their inspirational, exemplary and

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<sup>73</sup> This term is used by Rodney Stark in his comparative essay on the subject of religious revelation 'How Sane People Talk to the Gods: A Rational Theory of Revelations', in *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change*, ed. by Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox and Martin S. Jaffee (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), pp. 19-34.

legitimative qualities. The journals also function dynamically within the movement. *The Journal of Throssel Hole Priory*, for example, has been central to its development in Britain, providing a medium through which practical and ideological developments are articulated, a public forum within which tensions and conflicts are expressed and resolved, and the means for a geographically dispersed congregation to maintain communication with the centre and express its collective identity.

## 4. SELLING WATER BY THE RIVER: A MANUAL OF ZEN TRAINING

(1972)

### 4.1. CONTEXT, STYLE AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

This book was released when Kennett was laying the foundations of the ZMS in the West, creating monastic communities both at Shasta Abbey and Throssel Hole Priory, and expanding her basis of lay support on both sides of the Atlantic. It became available, then, at a highly fortuitous time, becoming the main textual resource for the teachings and practices of the ZMS during the early period. As well as providing an accessible introduction to *Sōtō Zen* (with an appeal to a wider audience that has not been matched by any of her subsequent books) the text also reflects Kennett's personal spiritual biography and her sensitivity towards a western readership. Most of the ideas found in *Selling Water* have characterised Kennett's teachings down to the present but, as will become evident, there have also been important shifts and revisions.

### 4.2. THE CONTOURS OF SOTO ZEN TRAINING

The opening chapters place Zen within the broader historical and doctrinal contexts of *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. The shifting understanding of the Buddha from a historical to a 'cosmic' figure, and the development of a pantheon of heavenly Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas*, is discussed. She maintains that, unlike Christianity, the Zen way is essentially intuitive and meditative and thereby requires personal spiritual responsibility. Faith is important, though, because in order to have

this direct, intuitive realisation of universal mind the trainee must have 'a trust in the heart' (p. 18) or 'the heart of faith' (p. 12).

Her outline of Zen training proper begins with a discussion of the foundational *Sōtō* practice of *zazen* or sitting meditation. Following the classical *Dōgenist* view that practice is enlightenment, she maintains that meditation is not limited to seated *zazen* but should be expressed in work, ceremonial and in all of life's daily activities which are all 'means of doing moving meditation' (p. 33). She also reflects upon the phenomenon of *makyō* in Zen training, hallucinations and visions that are caused by over-asceticism or incorrect posture and breathing. Far from being an indication of spiritual development or holiness, *makyō* experiences - which may include seeing Buddhas and holy beings or receiving penetrating insights - are 'abnormal' psychological states, 'figments of an overstrained mind and thus not truly religious' (p. 27). If one becomes attached to *makyō* experiences, they become a serious impediment to authentic spiritual progress and so they should simply be ignored.

In order to 'bring to fruition the seed of Buddhahood', one must realise great compassion, love and wisdom with one's whole being and exhibit these qualities in daily life (p. 19). The final stage of training involves the activation of the 'Heart of Monju' or awakening to Buddhist wisdom. The rediscovery of the 'original true self' requires meditation and 'the intuitive understanding which the teacher is always exhibiting to the pupil' (p. 45). Whilst the role of the teacher is crucial, the trainee always remains responsible for his own realisation:



There is only one way to understand what I have written here and that is to do Zazen and get your own realisation [...] I cannot give you my understanding; you must find your own.<sup>74</sup>

Kennett concludes her discussion of the contours of religious training with two chapters explaining the role of *kōan* study and the meaning of priestly ranks and titles in *Sōtō* Zen. This outline, based upon her experience of *Sōjōji*, reflects the traditional, hierarchical system of *Sōtō* monasticism.<sup>75</sup> Upon returning to the West, Kennett adopted the Japanese model, albeit with a few minor modifications,<sup>76</sup> as the basic framework of ZMS monastic practice. Most of her time is devoted to an examination of the meaning of Dharma transmission. The notion of 'transmission' is central to the identity and legitimation of Zen lineages. At the core of Zen's self-understanding and 'claim to centrality in the Buddhist world'<sup>77</sup> is the story of 'the raising of a flower and a smile' (*nengōmishō*), whereby *Mahākāśyapa* received the essence of the Buddha's teaching in a direct mind-to-mind transmission (*ishindenshin*). The *nengōmishō* image underpins the claim that this essence has been transmitted non-verbally to the present through unbroken lines of successive Patriarchs, and the attendant characterisation of Zen as a 'teaching outside the scriptures' (*kyōgebetsuden*). This belief that the essence of the Buddha's teaching can only be transmitted within the context of the teacher-disciple relationship, underpins a complex ceremonial procedure within Zen schools known as 'Dharma transmission', a ritual and

<sup>74</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 45.

<sup>75</sup> I am not aware of any other English-language publications that outline in a comprehensive way the graduated stages of monastic training within Japanese *Sōtō*. The priestly ranks discussed by Kennett, however, are referred to and examined individually in a variety of publications. The ceremonies of *zuisse* and *shinzan*, for example, are examined by Finney, pp. 384-388, and the ritual of Dharma transmission is examined in Bernard Faure's *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 59-62.

<sup>76</sup> Such as the postulancy programme.

<sup>77</sup> Reader, 'Contemporary Thought in *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism', p. 48.

institutional requirement that preserves the continuity, integrity and viability of the teachings and tradition. According to Zen myth and tradition, transmission is given when the disciple has displayed a sufficient degree of awakening or spiritual realisation. During the ceremony, he is formally received into the lineage of Patriarchs and is accorded the authority to transmit the teachings to others, thus becoming a 'Dharma heir' of his master.

Although *Rinzai* and *Sōtō* Zen both stress the mythic, doctrinal and institutional significance of Dharma transmission, in certain respects their interpretations are very different. In *Rinzai* the Zen master's 'seal of approval' (*inka shōmei*) is traditionally only granted once the disciple has 'finished the great matter' (*daiji ryohitsu*) of his *kōan* study, whereas in *Sōtō* the 'three regalia of transmission' (*sanmotsu*) are given routinely to all monks once they have finished a few years of monastic training and are ready to assume a post as temple abbot (*jushoku*).<sup>78</sup> The routine nature of transmission within the *Sōtō* sect can be traced, in part, to a formalistic attitude that set in following the seventeenth century reforms of *Manzan Dōhaku*, who claimed that Dharma transmission can occur whether or not a disciple is enlightened (*go migo shiho*).<sup>79</sup> *Manzan*'s proposals were resisted by other *Sōtō*

<sup>78</sup> Robert H. Sharf, 'Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 22 (1995), 417-458 (p. 433). The 'three regalia of transmission' refer to three transmission documents: the 'inheritance certificate' (*shiho*), the 'great matter' (*odaiji*) and the 'bloodline of the authentic transmission' (*shoden kechimyaku*). Within the context of *Sōtō* Zen, Dharma transmission (*denbō*) is an institutional prerequisite to becoming the head priest of an affiliated temple and consequently 'virtually all *Sōtō* priests meet this ritual requirement at a relatively early stage in their careers' (Foullk, p. 173).

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of *Manzan*'s reforms to the rules to be observed in Dharma transmission, see William M. Bodiford, 'Dharma Transmission in *Sōtō* Zen: *Manzan Dōhaku*'s Reform Movement', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 46 (1991), 423-451, and Michel Mohr, 'Zen Buddhism During the Tokugawa Period: The Challenge to Go Beyond Sectarian Consciousness', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 21 (1994), 341-372. According to Faure, the development of this paradoxical situation, 'in which the Dharma transmission can take place, whether or not the disciple has reached awakening, provided that he/she has formerly received the ordination ritual correctly' represented 'the transformation of the mystics into *hommes d'appareil*, of personal charisma into institutional charisma' (*Visions of Power*, p. 65).

priests who represented 'a more individualistic tendency'<sup>80</sup> and who argued that 'realization constituted the prerequisite for any real Dharma succession'.<sup>81</sup> Sharf has maintained, contrary to this, that the transmission ceremony has never been more than 'the ritual investiture of a student in an institutionally certified genealogy'.<sup>82</sup> Historical and ethnographical evidence, he argues, clearly indicates both the routine nature of Dharma transmission and the fact that it has had 'little if anything to do with verification of any specific "religious experience"':<sup>83</sup>

The modern notion that Ch'an and Zen monks were required to experience *satori* before they could 'inherit the dharma' is simply inaccurate.<sup>84</sup>

According to Kennett's presentation, Dharma transmission within *Sōtō* Zen is not a 'routine' institutional requirement. It represents, rather, the essentially *spiritual* event of joining the 'apostolic line', and it is dependent upon the disciple's spiritual realisation and maturity which the ceremony serves to confirm and certify.<sup>85</sup> Sharf would probably argue that her presentation reflects modernist images of Zen, confusing 'pious mythology' with 'institutional reality'. Such an assessment, however, would be unfair. The view that spiritual realisation is the essential prerequisite to transmission is, as we have seen, well attested within *Sōtō* history, and it is not unfeasible that Kennett was awarded transmission upon this basis. Furthermore, she clearly situates Dharma transmission within its traditional monastic, institutional and ceremonial context, presenting it as just one of the steps towards

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<sup>80</sup> Faure, *Visions of Power*, p. 66.

<sup>81</sup> Mohr, p. 362.

<sup>82</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', p. 273.

<sup>83</sup> 'Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Re-visited', p. 42.

<sup>84</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', p. 243.

<sup>85</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 64.

becoming a Zen teacher. Her presentation thus brings the theoretical ideal and the institutional reality of Dharma transmission closer together. This can be seen in the later distinction that she makes between two meanings of transmission: the ceremony that 'begins a long process of "apprenticeship" in the priesthood' on the one hand, and 'the Transmission in its deeper meaning' that is made possible by a 'revolutionary spiritual understanding or *kenshō*',<sup>86</sup> on the other.

*Selling Water by the River* is a sound exposition of the self-understanding of *Sōtō* Zen and of the core concepts, teachings and practices that characterise *Dōgen's* approach to religious training. The intuitive realisation of Buddhahood requires an attitude of selflessness and faith in one's inherent enlightenment. Meditative awakening, or wisdom, forms only part of this realisation that must also manifest itself through acts of compassion and love. The master-disciple relationship, *zazen* meditation, preceptual adherence and ceremonial activity are the central religious forms through which faith and wisdom are developed. *Sōtō* Zen, however, is the path of non-attainment, practice and enlightenment are indivisible, and Buddhahood must be exhibited in the midst daily life activities.

Kennett thus provides a comprehensive manual of training and a practical context for understanding the translations of *Dōgen*, *Keizan*, and the ceremonial instructions that are included. Her introductory biographies of *Dōgen* and *Keizan* accurately reflect the classical perception of these figures within the *Sōtō* tradition.<sup>87</sup> She presents *Dōgen* as a 'puritanical father' who emphasised the 'hard way' of

<sup>86</sup> Daizui MacPhillamy, 'A Note on Transmission and Priestly Rank', *JTHP* (July 1978), pp. 10-11.

<sup>87</sup> For extended discussions of the traditional images of *Dōgen* and *Keizan* within the Japanese *Sōtō* school, see Reader's 'Contemporary Thought in *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism' and Faure's *Visions of Power*.

monastic purity,<sup>88</sup> whilst *Keizan* was the 'intuitive genius' who 'exploited the temper of the times' in order to expand *Sōtō* and make it available to a wider Japanese audience.<sup>89</sup> Kennett observes that ceremonial innovation was one method *Keizan* used to expand the base of the *Sōtō* school, and she includes ritual and ceremonial activity as a central component of her own presentation. As discussed earlier, Sharf believes that Zen Buddhism has been widely misunderstood in the West as an iconoclastic, anti-institutional form of spiritual gnosis. Although there are aspects of *Selling Water* that may support his critique, with respect to the formal, institutional and ceremonial dimensions of monastic practice, Kennett's presentation is largely in accord with traditional models of monastic training.

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<sup>88</sup> *Selling Water*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-164.

## 5. KENNETT'S EARLY JOURNAL ARTICLES

### 5.1. CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE EARLY ARTICLES

Kennett's early articles address a religious community in its early stages of development. The journals are published regularly and are primarily distributed internally to members of the congregation.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, her articles tend to be informal and often highly opinionated, and they generally lack the technicality and structure that characterise her textual outlines. Whilst reflecting the normative outline articulated within *Selling Water*, they present the contours of Zen training using a style and terminology that has a more intimate, personal and practical resonance.

### 5.2. 'DOING SOMETHING ABOUT ONESELF'

*Selling Water* describes the motivation for spiritual practice using classical terminology, explaining that Buddhism provides a path to the realisation of Buddhahood and the extinction of suffering caused by desire and delusion. In her articles the discussion of 'why people turn to religion' is less technical and reflects Kennett's interpretation of the 'conversion' process of western Buddhists. The main motivation emerges from a sense of deep dissatisfaction with oneself, the recognition that 'we have made a mess of ourselves'.<sup>91</sup> Kennett sometimes talks of this recognition in terms of an inner prompting of the Buddha within the heart, a 'little

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<sup>90</sup> Unlike some Buddhist movements, such as the FWBO that successfully distributes its magazine *Dharma Life* beyond its internal membership, the production of journals within the OBC is essentially an internal affair.

<sup>91</sup> 'Sange Jūkai Lecture', *JZMS*, 5.2 (1974), p. 9.

voice` which `says you could do better'.<sup>92</sup> When explaining the nature of Zen Buddhist training she commonly refers to it as `doing something about oneself`.

### 5.3. GRASPING THE WILL

A central theme is her democratising and laicising emphasis on personal responsibility and authority. This appears in *Selling Water* in her exhortation to practitioners to `do Zazen and get your own realisation` and is usually expressed in her articles in terms of `grasping the will`. To `do something about oneself` requires personal resolution, determination and action and this is to `take charge of the will`.<sup>93</sup> This theme can also be detected in her emphasis on having faith `in the Buddha within our own hearts`<sup>94</sup> and the attendant view that practitioners must not accept her teachings `on faith` but test their validity through personal experience.<sup>95</sup> Buddhism is thus depicted as `a religion for spiritual adults`;<sup>96</sup> there is no doctrinalising and each individual must accept the responsibility for the karmic consequences of his actions and for the process of `cleaning up the mess`.<sup>97</sup>

### 5.4. THE CLEANSING PROCESS

Faure has examined an important tension within the Zen tradition, contrasting the `rhetoric of immediacy` of orthodox Zen discourse, wherein all meditations - such

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> `Sange *Jūkai* Lecture`, p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> For example, whilst she personally believes in the reality of rebirth, `I will not put my doctrines into somebody else's head. Many Buddhists believe in reincarnation; that is fine. [...] But the Buddha himself made it very clear: "Don't believe this because I believe it. You must prove it true for yourself."` (*The Zen View of Dying* [part 2], *JTHP*, 5.3 (1977), p. 4)

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> `Sange *Jūkai* Lecture`, p. 11.

as scripture, ritual and moral codes - are theoretically disavowed, with the institutional reality of Zen monasticism that has, in practice, always relied upon these traditional religious forms. He also contrasts the doctrine of emptiness that 'seems to block the path to the imaginary' with the ideology of karmic retribution from which 'unfolds an *imaginaire* made up of rebirths and metamorphoses determined by karma'.<sup>98</sup>

Kennett's presentation of spiritual development is structured around this tension between the immediate realisation of Buddhahood and the need to overcome karmic obscurations gradually through a path of moral discipline and character development. She presents Buddhist training as a process of reorientation and cleansing, of effecting a return to the original and natural state of 'adequacy'<sup>99</sup> by 'transcending the egocentric "I" into the real "I" which is the Buddha Nature'.<sup>100</sup> This entails the acceptance of and repentance (*sange*) for previous sin, the resolution not to perpetuate it any longer and the cleansing of karmic suffering inherited from past existences in order to 'become clean and pure and find the Buddha Nature within yourself'.<sup>101</sup> This process begins with the ceremonies of *Jūkai* or lay ordination, the most important part of which is *Sange*, the 'ceremony of contrition' or 'the Buddhist confession',<sup>102</sup> which represents 'the moment when you take charge of your will' and 'accept that you want to do something about you'.<sup>103</sup> Whilst the trainee is purified and released from past sin (*matsuzai*) at the moment of repentance, Kennett stresses that grasping the will and taking the precepts at *Jūkai* is only 'the beginning of the

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<sup>98</sup> *Visions of Power*, p. 11.

<sup>99</sup> 'Sange *Jūkai* Lecture', p. 17.

<sup>100</sup> Taken from her opening address in *THPN*, 1.1 (1973), p. 4.

<sup>101</sup> 'Sange *Jūkai* Lecture', p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.



process by which you learn to do something about yourself'.<sup>104</sup> The trainee remains subject to the karmic momentum of his former errors, delusive habits and opinions that must be continually uprooted or cleansed on a daily basis:

There are no miracles here. I am sorry to put it as bluntly as this, but people do periodically go away from monasteries with the idea that miracles have taken place; in one respect they have, because you have decided to do something about yourself.<sup>105</sup>

In fact, it is only when one begins to earnestly train that one realises 'what a mess you're in and what you've really got to do about it'.<sup>106</sup>

## 5.5. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SHUSHOGI

Kennett's outline of the preceptual path relies heavily upon an important *Sōtō* text called the *Shushōgi*.<sup>107</sup> This text reflects the impact of the Meiji Restoration on the *Sōtō* sect in Japan and the structural and doctrinal reforms that governmental discrimination against Buddhism had stimulated. The state's confiscation of temple estates destroyed *Sōtō*'s traditional basis of economic support compelling it to become less monk-oriented and seek support from a general lay populace that had little understanding of Buddhist sectarian differences. The *Shushōgi* was created to provide a standardised outline of the sect's beliefs and practices that was accessible to lay people. Believing that *zazen* was too difficult for lay Buddhists, its compilers

<sup>104</sup> 'The Zen View of Dying [part 1]', *JTHP*, 5.2 (1977), p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> 'Sange *Jūkai* Lecture', p. 16.

<sup>106</sup> 'The Zen View of Dying [part 1]', p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Though attributed to *Dōgen*, the *Shushōgi* is actually a highly selective compilation and reinterpretation of his writings that was first published in 1881. For an extended discussion of the creation of the *Shushōgi*, the socio-political context from which it emerged and its importance within the *Sōtō* sect historically and today, see Reader's 'Contemporary Thought in *Sōtō* Zen'.

made the practice unnecessary by developing the notion that preceptual observance and *zazen* are one and the same and equally efficacious gateways into *Sōtō*'s 'true transmission'.<sup>108</sup>

Reader's survey of modern *Sōtō* literature indicates that the focus of the modern sect remains that of encouraging its lay followers to adopt the precepts, not to practise *zazen*. He also found that the majority of the sect's ordained priests are not interested in *zazen* either; a situation which reflects both the hereditary nature of temple inheritance and the central function of priests within a Japanese socio-religious context as performers of ceremonies relating to the death process. There is thus a discrepancy between the sect's theoretical and constitutional emphasis on *zazen* and its institutional actuality:

Zen Buddhism, like most Buddhism in Japan, has, partially through its own wishes to expand and partially through the workings of the social and political systems, become to a great extent bound by the parameters of expectations and obligations that do not necessarily concur with its founding ideals.<sup>109</sup>

Kennett's teachings reflect the *Shushōgi*'s central principle that preceptual adherence, like *zazen*, is in itself a complete expression of enlightenment commenting that the daily application of the precepts is itself 'the finding of *Nirvāṇa* within birth and death'.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, in certain important respects she diverges from the teachings of the *Shushōgi* and the contemporary Japanese *Sōtō* sect. Preceptual observance is not promoted (as in contemporary *Sōtō*) as an accessible *alternative* to

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<sup>108</sup> There is therefore no discussion in the *Shushōgi*, or the commentaries to it emerging from within the Japanese *Sōtō* sect, of *zazen* practice which was considered to be 'impractical and unappealing to the age' (Reader, p. 215).

<sup>109</sup> Ian Reader, 'Zazenless Zen? The Position of Zazen in Institutional Zen Buddhism', *Japanese Religions*, 14.3 (1986), 7-27 (p. 27).

<sup>110</sup> 'The Zen View of Dying [part 1]', p. 4.

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<sup>109</sup> Ian Reader, 'Zazenless Zen? The Position of Zazen in Institutional Zen Buddhism', *Japanese Religions*, 14.3 (1986), 7-27 (p. 27).

<sup>110</sup> 'The Zen View of Dying [part 1]', p. 4.

*zazen*. For Kennett, adherence to the precepts and *zazen* meditation are the two complementary co-essentials of the religious path and must be practised in tandem on a daily basis by priests and laity alike. The emphasis on *zazen* within the ZMS reflects both the Japanese Zen modernist and the late-twentieth century western perception of Buddhism as a meditative system that focuses on the soteriological goal of enlightenment.<sup>111</sup>

Against this backdrop, the primary function of ZMS priests in relation to the western laity was never that of performing ancestral or funerary rituals but, rather, of providing religious teaching, spiritual guidance and inspiration.<sup>112</sup> Inevitably this also meant that the basis of the laity's financial support of the ZMS's monastic order was quite different to the ritual basis of economic support found in Japan. Bell found that British *Theravāda* lay practitioners support monks, not on the traditional basis of earning merit for a better rebirth, as is widespread in eastern contexts, but in their capacity as exemplars and teachers of meditation. A similar shift, also rooted in the pre-occupation with meditation, has occurred in the transplantation of *Sōtō* Zen to the West. This shift has been observed in Asai and Williams' study of Japanese American Zen temples and their economics.<sup>113</sup> They found that, unlike Euro-American Zen centres that focus upon meditation and derive their main revenue from programmes

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<sup>111</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century British interest in Buddhism was primarily expressed through the intellectual study of texts and doctrines. According to Bell, meditation is now 'a way of behaving that actually defines Buddhists in Britain. Meditation sustains one's identity as a "Buddhist"; to outsiders, meditation is considered to be what Buddhists essentially do' ('Buddhism in Britain', p. 190).

<sup>112</sup> It is important not to overstate the differences between ZMS / OBC priests and their Japanese counterparts. From the outset, the ZMS emphasised that its affiliated priories were to be seen as 'parish churches' which, in addition to meditation and spiritual instruction, offered their congregations 'such priestly functions as private spiritual counselling, the solemnization of marriages, naming ceremonies, and funerals and memorial ceremonies' (*JTHP*, (August-October 1978), p. 3).

<sup>113</sup> Senryo Asai and Duncan Ryuken Williams, 'Japanese American Zen Temples: Cultural Identity and Economics', in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, ed. by Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), pp. 20-35.

related to meditation and Zen study, Japanese American temples are relatively 'zazenless' deriving their income mainly from the performance of death rites and 'Japanese culture' activities. The fact that religious affiliation is 'not an individual matter but a larger familial and community concern' (p. 21) also explains the stability of membership within Japanese American temples, in contrast to 'the relative instability of membership at Euro-American Zen centers' (p. 23) where affiliation is based upon personal faith in a charismatic teacher or in the efficacy of Zen teachings and meditational practice.

## 6. ASPECTS OF KENNETT'S ZEN

### 6.1. BUDDHISM AND WESTERN CULTURE

Earlier we observed that the relationship between Buddhism and British culture has been analysed by scholars on a number of different levels, ranging from the impact of Buddhism on British society, the appeal of Buddhism and the 'limits of dissent', and the impact of British culture on Buddhism. We also noticed that transformations of Buddhism are not explicable simply in terms of unconscious cultural processes. In addition to cultural interactions on a subtle level - which, scholars argue, lead to transformations that are either 'Protestant' in character or reveal continuities with modernity - Buddhist groups *consciously* develop policies of adaptation to facilitate their acceptance and transplantation. They also exhibit differing degrees of awareness with regard to their relationship with wider religio-cultural trends, some groups being more self-conscious and discriminating than others.

The question of the extent to which Kennett's interpretation and presentation of Zen was informed by unconscious western religio-cultural values is of considerable theoretical interest. Before we speculate about the influence of unconscious cultural forces, however, it is important to examine Kennett's *self-conscious* relationship with her indigenous context, and the deliberate policies she developed for the purposeful adaptation of Zen for the West. A striking feature of her presentation was her awareness of the subtle levels on which Buddhism and western culture interact. She believed that as a westerner herself, she had a grounded understanding of the western

psyche, and often reflected upon her own `conversion` to Buddhism, presuming that her personal experiences had resonance for others. She also attempted to engage with the attitudes, assumptions and idealisations of her disciples which, in her opinion, obstructed their understanding of Zen:

One of the largest problems I have had to contend with since coming to America is the great number of views concerning what Zen is and the popular opinions that have been spawned thereby.<sup>114</sup>

She was undoubtedly a skilful cultural negotiator, enabling her disciples to understand the `cultural baggage` informing their practice and making her presentation effective by responding, in Bishop's terms, to `the pathologies of the West`.<sup>115</sup>

#### **6.1.i. Buddhism and Christianity**

The spiritual biography of Kennett, whose `conversion` to Buddhism was prompted by a growing disillusionment with the Anglican Church, reflects a wider pattern. She was aware of the wider `reactionary` appeal of Buddhism, regularly elucidating key Buddhist concepts in terms of their fundamental - and favourable - differences from Christianity. Her articles in particular speak candidly about the reasons behind her embrace of Buddhism and make explicit references to Christianity against which she airs her grievances without restraint. The `spiritually autonomous` nature of Buddhist morality, for example, is now contrasted explicitly with the heteronomous character of the Christian commandments.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> `The Goose at Rest, Part 2: 1969-1978`, *JSA*, 9/8-10 (1978), p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> *Dreams of Power*, p. 19.

<sup>116</sup> `The Zen View of Dying [part 1]`, p. 3.

### 6.1.ii. Western 'Orientalism'

The term 'Orientalism' has been coined by cultural critics like Said and Bishop to describe the manner in which the East has been organised, restructured and controlled by the western imagination. It refers to the mechanism of defining and interpreting the East - and specifically Buddhism - through a 'conceptual filter' that incorporates and reflects the culture and self-understanding of the West. For Kennett, 'Orientalism' refers to the tendency of westerners to idealise the religion and culture of Japan and uncritically accept the authority of eastern teachers. She regards the idealisation of Asian Buddhist forms as a major obstacle to the spiritual progress of western students generally and to the acceptance of her teachings specifically. Adopting a thoroughly essentialistic perspective, she criticises the basic 'Orientalist' assumption that confuses Japanese culture with Zen, arguing that westerners should positively value their own customs and culture and express Zen in a western style. From a Zen point of view, 'Orientalism' is a hindrance to spiritual understanding; firstly because it is based on a misplaced dualism between East and West, and secondly because the aim of Zen is 'to become yourself' and 'if you become a Japanese you are not yourself'.<sup>117</sup> From Kennett's perspective, however, the most dire consequence of 'Orientalism' is the obstacle it poses to the acceptance of her authority as a western Zen master. To overcome this she appeals to the authority of her own master who, she claims, maintained that,

So long as they want a Japanese teacher, they will never understand Buddhism, for they are in duality in so far as they are seeing Japanese and foreigners as separate in the Buddha Nature instead of one.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Taken from her opening address in *THPN*, 1.1 (1973), p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Kōhō Keidō* Chisan as quoted in *Selling Water*, p. xxv.



Kennett's views on the problems of Orientalism need to be seen against the context of her uneasy relationship with prominent members of the London Buddhist Society, particularly Christmas Humphreys. By the early 1970s, the conflict had become, at least from Kennett's perspective, an ideological dispute concerning the nature of Zen Buddhism and its transplantation to the West.<sup>119</sup> The energy of her rhetoric against 'the Buddhist organizations of London'<sup>120</sup> indicates the effect on her, emotionally and psychologically, of her perceived rejection. In the first *Throssel Hole Priory Newsletter*, she describes the British Buddhist landscape as spiritually sterile and retarded, consisting of monopolising 'debating societies' made up of insincere 'dilettantes' who 'talk about it and toy with it' but are 'absolutely terrified of genuinely learning Buddhism'. The British Buddhist establishment, she claims, is scared by her emphasis on meditation and monasticism, and she interprets its 'faddish' appropriation of oriental culture as a resistance to the existential project of self-transformation. In Kennett's view, the truth of Zen must be expressed within the idiom of one's own culture and cannot be penetrated by following 'spurious oriental teachers' who are 'unsuited to teaching the British Buddhist'. Whilst this critique was initially directed only at the London Buddhist Society, as Kennett's relationship with certain segments of her British congregation deteriorated, she extended it to include *all* British Buddhists.<sup>121</sup> She thus began to contrast the maturity, earnestness and loyalty of her American disciples with 'the insincerity of British Buddhists' against which she had 'revolted' by becoming an American citizen. This provoked various

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<sup>119</sup> I say 'from Kennett's perspective' because, whilst her texts and articles are littered with references to and criticisms of the 'British Buddhist establishment', there is no evidence that the Buddhist Society responded to these or participated, privately or publicly, in any 'dispute' with Kennett.

<sup>120</sup> 'The Cost of Reality', *JTHP*, 3.3 (1975), p. 6

<sup>121</sup> This shift is most evident in Kennett's article 'The Cost of Reality'.

responses in Britain: some accepted and internalised Kennett's assessments, whereas others questioned the relevance of publicly chastising disciples, particularly along nationalistic lines.

### **6.1.iii. Western Intellectualism**

Whilst Kennett's evaluation of western culture is generally positive, one trait she identifies as a major obstacle to Zen training is the western tendency to over-intellectualise. The truth, she emphasises, cannot be realised theoretically but only through practice and experience; *Dōgen's* Zen is 'an intuitive method of spiritual training'<sup>122</sup> not dependent upon words, scripture or theology. Her own presentation reveals a proclivity to avoid philosophical issues and trainees are encouraged to eschew erudition and cultivate the 'heart of faith' or 'intuition', the essential quality required to understand Zen:

I cannot emphasise the danger of book-learning too strongly [...] erudition is a grave hindrance to Zen understanding.<sup>123</sup>

## **6.2. BUDDHISM AND GENDER**

### **6.2.i. Kennett's Experience of Anglicanism**

The primary source of Kennett's discontent with Christianity was the sexual prejudice she encountered within Anglicanism. Although she was 'damaged' by the institutionalised inequality of the church, 'out of it came something good' inasmuch as it 'sent me back to studying my own original religion, Buddhism', thus making

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<sup>122</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 72.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

possible 'the discovery that I was adequate; that I did have a soul in Christian terminology'.<sup>124</sup>

### **6.2.ii. The Role of Women in Christianity**

Kennett's teachings on sexuality in Buddhism are usually set in contradistinction to her understanding of Christian institutions and teachings. In *Selling Water* she compares the Christian church with *Sōtō Zen* wherein 'the ideal is complete sexual equality' and 'women and men can go up the ranks of the priesthood equally' (p. 58). She is far more detailed and direct, though, in her articles. The refusal of the church to allow women into the priesthood now amounts to 'the gravest wrong done to women over the centuries' because it has denied the equality of the male and female soul making it 'impossible for a woman to believe completely in herself'.<sup>125</sup> This denial 'is the prime cause of most of the present-day problems of women'.<sup>126</sup> Consequently the struggle for equal rights must strike at the essentially *spiritual* roots of the problem:

The real quarrel is not with employers who have been brainwashed into this attitude of mind as a result of Christian thinking. It is with the Church and other religious bodies that have refused, over the centuries, to recognise that man and woman are equal on a spiritual level.<sup>127</sup>

### **6.2.iii. Women in Buddhism**

Kennett maintains that the original teachings of the Buddha were, like those of Christ, sexually egalitarian and that discrimination was introduced into the Buddhist

<sup>124</sup> 'Do Women Have the Buddha Nature?', *JSA* (July-August 1981), p. 13 [reprint of an article that originally appeared in *JSA* (January-February, 1976)].

<sup>125</sup> 'Women in Religion', *JZMS*, 7.5 (1976), p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> 'Do Women Have the Buddha Nature?', p. 12.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

tradition only at a later date. Buddhism has fared much better than Christianity on this issue, however, mainly because `there is no such thing as original sin` to tarnish the female soul.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless there *are* differences within the Buddhist world, some traditions being more prejudiced than others:

You should know that it is *Theravāda* Buddhism that puts women down, not *Mahāyāna*. In *Mahāyāna* Buddhism all things are possible; all beliefs are possible.<sup>129</sup>

Although she acknowledges that the historical and institutional reality of the tradition has not always reflected *Dōgen's* ideals, *Sōtō Zen* is regarded as fundamentally egalitarian. *Dōgen* made it `absolutely clear that women`s spirituality is identical with that of men`<sup>130</sup> by teaching that `both male and female are equally sharers of the Buddha Nature`.<sup>131</sup> This certainty of spiritual equality places the female Zen practitioner `in a totally different position from that of the Christian woman`.<sup>132</sup>

#### **6.2.iv. Women in Western Buddhism**

With respect to the role of Buddhist women in the West, Kennett emphasises the importance of following the *essential* teachings of *Śākyamuni* Buddha and *Dōgen*, and of stripping away the layers of cultural prejudice in order to `keep the teaching of Zen in its original purity`.<sup>133</sup> She herself made gender equality an institutional reality within the ZMS from its inception. Male and female priests were

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<sup>128</sup> `Women in Religion`, p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> `Do Women Have the Buddha Nature?', p. 16.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>131</sup> `Women in Religion`, p. 3.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 66.

both called `monks` and no distinctions were made in terms of priestly progression, hierarchy or daily-life activities:

At Shasta there is absolutely no difference in the training of men and women [...] A woman has been the head of our construction department, and a man has been the head of the laundry [...] We insist on there being no distinction on any level.<sup>134</sup>

### **6.2.v. Kennett within a Broader Context**

Kennett's attraction to Buddhism was rooted in her perception that it was, unlike the religion of her birth, doctrinally and practically egalitarian. In this respect her biography reflects a broader pattern of western women Buddhist converts. The British women interviewed by Bell, for example, like Kennett,

wished to take advantage of the fact that, at the `theological` level, Buddhism is a religion with a soteriology that makes no distinction on account of gender.<sup>135</sup>

Her rejection of *Theravāda* Buddhism seems to have been informed by two principal considerations. Firstly, she discovered that significant differences of opinion exist within the Buddhist world, and that the tradition of her choice, the *Theravāda*, was one of the most `conservative`, lacking a legitimate *bhikṣuṇī* order. By contrast, the lineage for the ordination of women has survived within Far Eastern *Mahāyāna* Buddhist traditions.<sup>136</sup> Secondly, a major component of monastic training in Japan,

<sup>134</sup> `Women in Religion`, p. 6.

<sup>135</sup> `Buddhism in Britain`, p. 285.

<sup>136</sup> This does not apply, however, to Japanese Buddhism. Whilst there are ordained women and men in Japan they are not, technically speaking, *bhikṣuṇī* and *bhikṣu* because they do not follow the ordination procedures for *bhikṣuṇī* and *bhikṣu* preserved in the Vinaya or Books of the Discipline for Monks and Nuns' (Nancy J. Barnes, 'Buddhist Women and the Nuns' Order in Asia', in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 259-294 (pp. 287-288). For an overview discussion of female ordination within the Buddhist tradition see *ibid.*, and Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press,

both for monks and nuns, concerns the acquisition of ritual skills and procedures required for the priestly service of the laity.<sup>137</sup> As we have seen, Kennett's 'deep calling' to ordain as an Anglican priest - as opposed to becoming a nun - was frustrated by the policy of the church in the 1950s. *Sōtō* Zen seemed to offer her the opportunity to fully realise her vocation of priestly ordination and service, albeit within a different religious system.

Her interpretation of the teachings of *Dōgen* and the historical position of women within *Sōtō* Zen is supported by the account of Uchino who states that,

*Dōgen* was exceptionally understanding of women and [...] emphasized the equality of men and women in attaining Buddhahood. But these ideas and beliefs were not transmitted to his pupils. His view on women disappeared in the process of the expansion of the *Sōtō* school.<sup>138</sup>

Textual and historical research, however, suggests that Kennett's and Uchino's accounts are incomplete. Faure rejects the idea that *Dōgen*'s teachings are intrinsically egalitarian, maintaining that 'the Chan rhetoric of equality' derived more from the need of economic support from aristocratic noble women than from any doctrinal or theoretical premise such as the *Mahāyāna* principle of non-duality. Whilst he advocated sexual equality in his early years,

once proselytism gave way to the concern for a narrow monastic community, the equality between man and woman - just like that between monk and layman - soon disappeared from *Dōgen*'s discourse [...] like his model

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1993).

<sup>137</sup> In Japan today there are approximately seventy-two monasteries, which together never have more than about a thousand monks in monastic training at any one time, compared with over twenty-thousand ordinary temples, each of which serves around one hundred and fifty families. According to Foulk, 'In the monasteries [monks] acquire the working knowledge of ritual procedures essential to their professional careers as priests' (p. 165).

<sup>138</sup> Uchino, p. 178. Similar observations are made by Paula Arai, 'Monastic Women in Cultural and Historical Context', *Seeds of Peace*, 10.1 (1994), 17-19.

*Śākyamuni*, he remained aware of the dangers of a feminine presence in the samgha.<sup>139</sup>

*Keizan* was more willing to put into practice the theoretical equality of the sexes in *Ch'an* discourse, but even under his spiritual guidance 'nuns were still on the margins of the male monastic community'.<sup>140</sup>

Kennett's discussion of women in *Sōtō* represents a 'feminist revalorization of Buddhism'. This term is used by Gross to describe the project of analysing, in the light of feminist values, the history and conceptual system of Buddhism in order to 'repair' the tradition or bring it 'more into line with its own fundamental values and vision than was its patriarchal form'.<sup>141</sup> In order to construct a 'usable past'<sup>142</sup> for her modern movement, Kennett has presented a highly selective reading of *Dōgen's* doctrine and monastic practice, omitting unhelpful elements. Coupled with her critique of the degeneration of his ideals, and her claim to have re-established his original or 'pure' standard in the West, her articles on women in *Sōtō* attempt to 'revalorise' the tradition inasmuch as they,

explore the contradiction between the egalitarian concepts of Buddhism and its patriarchal history, seeking both to explain that contradiction historically and to rectify that situation in a future manifestation and form of Buddhism.<sup>143</sup>

The self-conscious engagement displayed by Kennett with respect to the problems of gender bias within *Sōtō* is, according to Gross, untypical of the majority of western Buddhists, most of whom are 'ignorant about the androcentric values prevalent

<sup>139</sup> *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 244.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>141</sup> Gross, p. 3.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

through most Buddhist history and hostile to an articulate and self-conscious feminist Buddhist position'.<sup>144</sup>

### 6.3. THE ADAPTATION OF ZEN FOR THE WEST

Kennett was aware of the need to adapt the traditional forms of *Sōtō* Zen for a western cultural context and she consciously developed specific perspectives towards culture, tradition and authority. Her Zen presentation must not, therefore, be explained away as the product of cultural forces of which she was unaware; any assessment of this Buddhist teacher must acknowledge and examine the very *deliberate* nature of her engagement with western culture.

#### 6.3.i. Kennett's Policy of Adaptation

Kennett provides a succinct outline of her policy of adaptation in the opening passages of *Selling Water*, indicating that the project was integral to her presentation from the outset. She adopts a basically non-traditional, 'essentialist' position:

From the moment I arrived in Japan [...] I was constantly told that I must concentrate on the basic Truth and not worry about customs and culture, as the West can only make use of this Truth to build its own form of Zen.<sup>145</sup>

On the basis of this, she chastises the exoticism or 'Orientalism' of westerners, maintaining that the project of building a western form of Zen would be executed most successfully by a western teacher such as herself. She is even critical of *Dōgen*

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 25. Waterhouse also found, like Gross, that the British women of her study adopt a 'complacent' attitude towards male-dominated Buddhist structures, do not see themselves as disadvantaged, 'and are largely unaware of the feminist debates about the status of women within Buddhism that are taking place elsewhere' (*Buddhism in Bath*, p. 232). Waterhouse's assessment is not true of the women within the ZMS / OBC; indeed, Kennett's special emphasis on sexual equality has been an important source of attraction for many.

<sup>145</sup> *Selling Water*, p. xxiv.



for 'attempting to transplant the Chinese form of Zen to Japan'.<sup>146</sup> Rather than importing the traditional religious forms of Japan, Zen must thus be 'reborn in the West'.<sup>147</sup>

First and foremost, we are ourselves British Buddhists; we are not studying Japanese Zen, we are studying British Zen; we are not wearing Japanese robes, we are wearing British robes [...] We are maintaining the spirit of Zen, at the same time expressing it in a British way.<sup>148</sup>

Kennett thus adopts a similar approach to Sangharakshita, founder of the FWBO, towards Buddhism and the adaptation process, legitimating adaptations by direct reference to the essence of *Sōtō* Zen. Religious 'form' is valued positively only where it facilitates the interiorisation of its essential 'content'. This emphasis on the subjective experience of the individual, rather than the external forms, permeates *Selling Water* and is particularly evident in Kennett's interpretation of the *Sōtō* preceptual code the 'outward form' of which is 'transcended' when the individual becomes its 'living embodiment' as a 'spiritually autonomous' moral agent (pp. 54-55). This outlook also underpins her translation of *Sōtō* texts and her interpretation of ceremonial. Rather than translating *Dōgen* literally, she attempts to capture his 'true feeling' and 'religious fervour' (p. 72) and *Keizan*'s ceremonial is presented primarily as an aid for the inner development of the individual:

Each ceremony was designed not only to embody the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha but also to explain them and show their use in everyday life, as well as to indicate the attitude of mind which leads beyond ceremonial as a form and turns it into meditation.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Taken from her opening address in *THPN*, 1.1 (1973), p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 163.

Adaptations and simplifications of *Sōtō* ceremonies are thus legitimated by the view that 'the exact copying of outward form is not nearly as essential as the understanding of the internal spirit' (p. 164).

Whilst Kennett's understanding of Zen and adaptation policy has much in common with Sangharakshita, there are also a number of differences. The main difference concerns the structure of authority within the two movements. Within the FWBO the 'essentials' of Buddhism and the form these should take are articulated by Sangharakshita and legitimated, not by an appeal to continuous tradition, but by his personal claim to possess charismatic authority. Kennett, by contrast, does not legitimate her essentialist approach by rejecting tradition but by appealing both to her continuity with the *Sōtō* tradition and the charisma she inherits by virtue of this association. She maintains, firstly, that the idea of focusing on the essentials to create a western form of Zen was transmitted to her by her teacher *Kōhō Keidō Chisan* (p. vi). By appealing to the authority of her transmission master Kennett simultaneously evokes the powerful image of lineal continuity that provides an important basis to Zen claims of legitimacy. In addition to this, there are other traditional images that she appeals to for legitimation, such as *Keizan* who 'exploited the temper of the times' to make Zen accessible to a wider Japanese population. Like *Keizan*, Kennett claims to be maintaining 'the spirit of the tradition' (p. 164) without being bound by its outward form.

Her status as a Dharma-successor, a teacher with the authority to transmit the truth of Zen to others, also provides her with the personal charismatic authority to identify and separate the essential principles of *Sōtō* Zen from their Japanese cultural

forms. According to Zen belief, the true essence of the Buddha's message is transmitted, not through verbal teaching or scripture, but *experientially* in the direct mind-to-mind contact of master and disciple. The concept of the 'face-to-face transmission' embodies a 'dual matrix' of legitimation that is both historical, through the image of Patriarchal descent, and transcendent, in that the same essence is transmitted and experienced in every encounter.<sup>150</sup> Entry into the Patriarchal line via Dharma transmission imbues Kennett with authority that is simultaneously traditional, emphasising lineal continuity, and charismatic, by-passing tradition through the direct realisation of the Buddha *Śākyamuni's* 'true law'. There is therefore a synthesis of traditional and charismatic authority in Japanese *Sōtō* of the kind that is identified by Bell within the Thai forest monastic tradition.

### **6.3.ii. Kennett's Adaptation of Zen for the West**

During the early period, Kennett attempted to adapt Zen for the West in three significant ways: by removing extraneous Japanese culture from the essential principles of *Sōtō* Zen; by imbibing certain western cultural values into her presentation; and by appropriating Christian religious forms to make the teachings and practices of *Sōtō* accessible, comprehensible and relevant for westerners.

#### **Removing Japanese Culture**

In Kennett's view the establishment of Zen in the West is partly a process of extracting and transplanting the fundamentals and leaving the culturally incidental behind 'so that the mind shall in no way be disturbed by unfamiliar or foreign externalities'.<sup>151</sup> This logic is applied to a number of adaptations, such as the

<sup>150</sup> Reader, 'Contemporary Thought in *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism', p. 51.

<sup>151</sup> 'The Goose at Rest, Part 2', p. 5.

abandonment of the *kyōsaku* (awakening stick) in the meditation hall, the wearing of civilian clothes by monks when outside the monastery grounds, and to minor details of daily life such as the decision to eat with knives and forks instead of chopsticks.

Kennett's claim that 'the West needs to keep the teaching of Zen in its original purity'<sup>152</sup> sometimes has a critical or reformist flavour. In the early period this can be seen most clearly through her teachings on sexual egalitarianism. Her motivation in stripping away Japanese culture here is not merely to establish a more *appropriate* form of *Sōtō* Zen for westerners but to effect a return to a perceived pristine form which has degenerated in Japan.

### **Imbibing Western Cultural Values**

Kennett's appraisal of western culture is generally positive. Zen teaches 'how to become yourself' and since culture forms an integral part of personal identity this realisation must be made through one's indigenous cultural idiom. She thus maintains that the truth or essence of Zen should be expressed in western contexts through the skilful appropriation of western cultural forms and customs. Whilst her authority to identify the essentials of *Sōtō* Zen is sanctioned by tradition and personal charisma, she claims that it is her British identity that qualifies her to marry this essence with suitable cultural forms.

Kennett considers the modern penetration of Japanese culture by western egalitarianism as beneficial for *Sōtō* Zen, enabling more women to realise *Dōgen's* ideal of sexual equality. Another value that dovetails significantly with her understanding of Zen, is that of individualism. She presents her teachings on personal responsibility and authority within Zen as in line with 'the western system of

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<sup>152</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 66.

orientation which trains people to become autonomous in individuation'.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, however, she recognises how excessive individualism might pose an obstacle to the successful establishment of Zen monasticism in the West. She attempts to mitigate against this potential obstacle in *Selling Water*. Whilst maintaining that one can re-discover one's Buddha-nature 'without any outside help' (p. 64) from a priesthood, or even from a Zen master, she nevertheless situates Zen training firmly within the context of temple monasticism. She also simultaneously affirms the values of individualism and monasticism by referring to the monastery as a place where one can 'do something about oneself'.<sup>154</sup> There are some similarities here with the FWBO's concept of '*Sangha*' as a 'community of individuals'<sup>155</sup> intent on personal development.

### Appropriation of Christian Forms

Although disenchanted with Christianity, Kennett nevertheless retained a real affection for her former religion. Her reflections on the position of women in Christianity, where she states that her objection is not with the teachings of Christ *per se* but with later institutional structures, are highly suggestive in this respect. The main strategy she used to adapt Zen Buddhism for a western cultural context, then, was the appropriation of Christian religious forms. This approach can be identified in the organisational, ritual and doctrinal dimensions of the early ZMS.

Upon her arrival in America, Kennett began to self-consciously style her Buddhist monastic movement in a Christian form. She named it 'The Zen *Mission*

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<sup>153</sup> Taken from a letter from Kennett to a member of her British congregation, dated September 1968.

<sup>154</sup> Taken from her opening address in *THPN*, 1.1 (1973), p. 5.

<sup>155</sup> For a discussion of this see Mellor's 'The Cultural Translation of Buddhism' and Bell's 'Change and Identity'.

Society' and favoured the terms 'abbey' and 'cloister' as opposed to 'meditation centre'. The subsequent institutional growth of the ZMS entailed the creation of 'priors' led by senior disciples who acted as 'priors' under her leadership as 'abbess'. Traditional Christian monastic titles were used to describe the various departments of the monastery and the responsibilities allocated to individual monks; 'sacristans' and 'infirmarians', for example, oversaw the activities of the 'sacristy' and 'infirmary'. Monastic attire was also adapted in a Christian style, the traditional Japanese *kimono* being replaced by the cassock, clerical shirt and dog-collar of the Anglican or Catholic priest. Through these adaptations, Kennett maintains, the extraneous culture of Japan was stripped away, enabling the 'essence' of Zen to be transmitted to the West in a more suitable form:

The norm for religious dress in this country is a collar turned backwards and a shirt. Why have we got to go around pretending we are Japanese or Chinese or Thai? [...] We've got to stop worrying about the unessential things and worry about what we're really trying to do.<sup>156</sup>

She also adapted *Sōtō* ceremonial and liturgical practices using Christian ritual forms. In *Selling Water*, she outlines a selection of ceremonies included within the annual calendar of Shasta Abbey based upon the yearly ceremonial programme of *Sōjōji*. She considered that certain Buddhist ceremonies and festivals had a Christian parallel, and so re-structured the traditional ritual calendar accordingly. For example, instead of performing the ceremonial 'Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts' (*Segaki*) in July as is customary in Japan, this ceremony was performed at Shasta Abbey in October on the occasion of Halloween. Similarly, the festival of the birth of the Buddha

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<sup>156</sup> Kennett as quoted in Boucher, pp. 138-139.

(*Hanamatsuri*), which in Japan takes place during April, was celebrated by the ZMS on Christmas Day 'following the old Buddhist custom of adapting religious celebrations to the indigenous holidays of the country'.<sup>157</sup> In this way the cultural resonances of her western disciples for Christian ritual observances were mobilised, effecting a re-definition of religious sentiment from within. The same logic was applied to the utilisation of medieval Christian musical forms for daily scripture-recitation. Prioritising meaning and understanding above sound and repetition, Kennett translated the scriptures into English and, drawing upon her musical training and specialised knowledge of early medieval music, set them to Catholic plainsong. Christian chants were thus used as 'a wonderful bridge', just as Buddhism in the Far East had also, many centuries earlier, 'picked up the old chants of the previous religions'.<sup>158</sup> The chanting of scriptures during morning and evening services, known within the ZMS respectively as 'matins' and 'vespers', was also supplemented by the singing of Buddhist 'hymns' with traditionally Christian melodies to the accompaniment of organ music.

Kennett was not the first to utilise western religious, and in particular musical, forms in this way. Significant figures in the development of American Buddhism, such as Paul Carus and Phillip Kapleau, preceded her in this enterprise,<sup>159</sup> and Japanese-American Pure Land Buddhism has also adapted in similar ways.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>157</sup> *Zen is Eternal Life* (Emeryville, California: Dharma Publishing, 1976), p. 391. *Zen is Eternal Life* appeared as the second and revised edition of *Selling Water*.

<sup>158</sup> Kennett as quoted in Boucher, p. 140.

<sup>159</sup> For a discussion of their attempts to adapt and westernise Buddhism, see Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (London: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1992).

<sup>160</sup> For a discussion of the development and adaptation of American Pure Land Buddhism through the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), see Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977). Interestingly, Kennett's publication, in 1987, of *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, includes hymns that initially emerged from within the BCA, such as those composed by the

Important precedents for these developments, it should also be noted, had already emerged upon the Japanese religious landscape, as Buddhism adapted and modernised itself in line with the pro-western ideology of the Meiji authorities.<sup>161</sup> Although Kennett never refers to these Japanese precedents, they may have provided her with additional legitimation to adapt Zen along Christian lines, thus underlining the role of trans-cultural processes in the transplantation of Zen in the West.

Finally, Christian religious terms were also appropriated to facilitate her presentation of certain Zen Buddhist concepts. She explains the meaning of *nirvāṇa* by quoting the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart,<sup>162</sup> refers to the concept of 'transmission' as a Zen form of 'Apostolic Succession', and finds parallels between the Eastern Orthodox Church and Zen on the subject of *kenshō* experiences. She also uses Christian concepts to explain the doctrine of the Buddha-nature. Although she is careful not to affirm the existence of a permanently existent self, she links this doctrine to the Christian concept of the 'soul'. In another context, Buddha-nature is equated with the 'Holy Spirit':

The Buddha Nature, the Holy Spirit, who cares what you call it, is an exquisite thing. It is there that all these opposites can meet together.<sup>163</sup>

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western minister Rev. Ernest Hunt (1876-1967).

<sup>161</sup> The transformation of Buddhism in its indigenous Japanese context under the influence of western, and particularly Christian, values is discussed by Kashima: 'During this phase of Japanese infatuation with Western ideas, some Buddhist sects inaugurated street preaching, "evangelical" campaigns, sermonizing, and hymnals along "Christian" lines' (p. 153).

<sup>162</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 48. D.T. Suzuki also examines Eckhart's 'close kinship with *Mahāyāna* Buddhism and especially with Zen Buddhism' in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Unwin Hyman Limited, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>163</sup> 'Women in Religion', p. 5.



Following this interpretation the breaking of the moral precepts becomes analogous to sinning against the Holy Ghost.<sup>164</sup> The employment of quasi-theistic terminology was also expressed through her occasional references to the 'Cosmic Buddha', an image representing the personalisation of the impersonal absolute.<sup>165</sup> Although she usually describes Buddhahood in an impersonal way, it is important to acknowledge that this image, a key element of her teaching in later years, was present during the early stages of her thought.

#### 6.4. A PROTESTANT FORM OF ZEN?

Certain aspects of Kennett's thought could easily be interpreted as further supporting evidence for the Protestant Buddhism thesis. She herself acknowledges that western religio-cultural forces of which she is not always aware have influenced her teachings:

That is what comes of being Western; coming out of a Western background. I still tend to be conditioned by that which is my own past.<sup>166</sup>

In particular a strong strand of individualism underpins her presentation, as is evident in the importance she attaches to self-reliance, individual responsibility and personal experience. Her essentialistic and personalistic attitude towards adaptation and religious form is also suggestive of a Protestant outlook. Outward forms, such as the precepts and ceremonies, are deemed of value primarily because they facilitate appropriate psychological attitudes in individual practitioners and, once these mental

<sup>164</sup> 'The *Kyōjūkaimon*, Part 1', *JTHP*, 20.2 (1993), p. 3 [reprint of an article that originally appeared in *The Zen Mission Society Newsletter*, (April 1970)].

<sup>165</sup> In a personal communication with a British disciple (dated February 1968) she also states that through having faith in the Buddha-nature one becomes 'God Incarnate'.

<sup>166</sup> *WWG*, I, p. 122.

states are realised, the external religious forms are 'transcended'. Finally, her critique of Christianity reflects elements of the Protestant critique of Catholicism. She describes *Sōtō* Zen, for example, as a non-doctrinal, intuitive spirituality and compares it favourably to Christianity that is characterised as doctrinaire, judgmental and excessively authoritarian.

According to Mellor, the discourse of the FWBO is 'firmly in line with Western culture' and consequently is 'not a wholly legitimate discourse'.<sup>167</sup> The discourse of the British *Theravāda* Sangha, by contrast, is regarded as more legitimate because it has a self-conscious and discriminating relationship with Protestantism, creating a form of Buddhism 'that is traditional yet sensitive to its local context'.<sup>168</sup> Whilst Kennett's thought reveals a number of significant continuities with Protestant values it would be wrong to regard her teachings as 'illegitimate' because, like the *Theravāda* teachers of Mellor's study, she was also a reflective and discriminating cultural mediator. She was aware of the values her disciples carried with them into their practice and tailored her presentation accordingly through a process of assimilation (of egalitarianism, individualism and elements of Christianity she valued positively) and rejection (of 'Orientalism', intellectualism and aspects of Christianity she viewed negatively).

A number of other factors should make us cautious about using the 'Protestant' designation with respect to Kennett. The democratised and individualistic emphasis of her teachings was always counterbalanced by her commitment to the establishment of a western monastic order, organised along traditional lines with a

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<sup>167</sup> 'The Cultural Translation of Buddhism', p. 340.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

clear hierarchical structure. Whilst the laity was given high priority by Kennett, teaching was to remain the preserve of ordained monks and the ritual protocol of lay-monastic relations was to reflect traditional hierarchies. The importance attached to the laity is, in any case, not necessarily suggestive of Protestant influences. As well as having the explicit textual sanction of *Dōgen*,<sup>169</sup> lay religiosity has come to the fore within the modern Japanese *Sōtō* sect that has involved lay figures both in policy making and doctrinal formulation.<sup>170</sup>

Similarly religious form may have been interpreted in a personalistic way but this did not undermine its importance to the monastic life of the ZMS every aspect of which, on a daily or annual basis, was ritually structured and routinised. It would be quite misleading, in fact, to assume that Kennett's 'utilitarian' understanding of religious form can be explained solely in terms of the influence of western Protestant values. The view that form is ultimately empty and therefore dispensable, is a *Mahāyāna* Buddhist perspective that has a long pedigree and which is reflected clearly within the Zen school which defines itself as 'a transmission outside the scriptures'. Both Faure and Sharf have demonstrated how, in spite of its 'rhetoric of immediacy', Zen is historically a highly institutionalised and hierarchical tradition that is rich in religious ritual. Kennett's teaching on the emptiness of ritual form and the apparent contradiction of the institutional and ceremonial reality of the ZMS, thus reflects an ambiguity inherent within the Zen tradition.

<sup>169</sup> According to Leighton, the emphasis of *Dōgen*'s early writings (that is, from 1227-1243), 'might be said to encompass the extensive elaboration of the universality of the nondualistic buddha nature and the efficacy of zazen as its expression in practice. During this period, *Dōgen* was directing his teaching to all interested sincere practitioners, lay students as well as monks' ('Introduction' to *Dōgen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community*, ed. and trans. by Taigen Daniel Leighton and Shohaku Okumara, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 15).

<sup>170</sup> For a discussion of the emergence of the *Sōtō* lay movement, see Reader's 'Contemporary Thought in *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism'.

Sharf might reply that Kennett's interpretation of ritual action in terms of its ability to bring about a transformative shift in the individual subject's consciousness, indicates a Protestant form of individualism that is absent from more traditional monastic contexts. Indeed, few scholars would question the point that the approach of westerners to Buddhist meditation and ritual is often more soteriological than that of their eastern counterparts. Kennett, however, is careful to ground her experiential reading of ritual within the traditional rhetoric of Japanese Zen. The traditional position states that ritual manifests the inherent enlightenment of all things. From this, Kennett extrapolates the view that ritual action can thereby prompt the subjective realisation of enlightenment that will ultimately transcend ritual form.

Nor is the essentialism characterising her thought necessarily suggestive of Protestant influences either. Pye has shown that the application of an abstracted concept of the 'essence' of Buddhism is not just a feature of western scholarship and practice but is a hermeneutical device rooted in the ancient self-understandings of Buddhist traditions themselves.<sup>171</sup> It is therefore possible to talk of the 'essence of Buddhism as an Asian question'.<sup>172</sup> Kennett certainly regards essentialism as a traditional and authentic perspective with a sound doctrinal basis rooted in Zen Buddhism's self-understanding as a 'mind-to-mind' transmission of the truth. Furthermore, she does not reject traditional authority but, rather, appeals to tradition for legitimation. Her outlook is thus quite different from that of figures like Sangharakshita and D.T. Suzuki who, scholars argue, promote a non-traditional, Protestant-informed essentialism.

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<sup>171</sup> Michael Pye, 'Comparative Hermeneutics in Religion', in *The Cardinal Meaning*, pp. 9-58.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

A final cautionary note concerning the applicability of the Protestant Buddhism thesis to Kennett concerns the nature of her critique of Christianity. Firstly, whilst Buddhism is compared favourably with Christianity this in no way entails an idealisation of the former and demonisation of the latter. Kennett views elements of Christianity positively, and criticises Buddhist history and practice whenever it has deviated from her view of the essentials. Such criticisms of Buddhism could also be viewed, of course, as evidence of Protestant influences. However, her adaptations that draw on Christianity are more suggestive of high-church Anglican or Catholic influences rather than low-church or liberal Protestant traditions. Her modifications of Zen monasticism and ceremonial in particular indicate the influence of her Anglican background. The view that British Buddhists, when criticising Christianity, are really aiming to differentiate themselves from non-Protestant traditions, is therefore not born out in the case of Kennett and the ZMS.

### **6.5. RELIGIOUS INNOVATION AND CHARISMA**

According to Williams *et al*, the most popular explanation for innovative processes in religion is the 'crisis explanation':

Religious individuals and communities experience a crisis with which the existing religious tradition does not allow them to cope, and so they innovate.<sup>173</sup>

Whilst social disruption and personal anxiety are 'ever valid components in the explanation of religious innovation', they consider that 'crisis has been much over-

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<sup>173</sup> Michael Williams, Collett Cox and Martin S. Jaffee, 'Religious Innovation: An Introductory Essay', in *Innovation in Religious Traditions*, pp. 1-17 (p. 7).

used as an explanation'.<sup>174</sup> Finney's 'culture diffusion model' of the transplantation of Zen in America supports this assessment by incorporating important historical and cross-cultural data alongside sociological and social-psychological explanations. He also emphasizes that the strategies adopted by the individual teachers and institutions implanting the new cultural form 'have a profound impact on whether it takes root'.<sup>175</sup> His account thus acknowledges the importance of individual religious genius to the successful growth of specific organisational forms. Williams *et al* also underline the crucial role of religious genius, or in Weberian terms 'charisma', in explaining religious innovation:

it seems impossible to deny the extraordinary talent possessed by certain individuals for creating and communicating new religious symbols, ideas or forms.<sup>176</sup>

Earhart's explanation of the rise of the Japanese new religions also focuses on the role of personal charisma.<sup>177</sup> He argues that, alongside social and personal crisis, the prior historical development of religious traditions and the personal contribution of innovating individuals must also be taken into account.

What emerges very clearly from the previous discussion of the history and worldview of the ZMS during its early period of development, is the role played by the religious genius of Kennett. Whilst crisis explanations may help account for the receptivity of Anglo-American culture towards the ZMS and the cross-cultural diffusion model incorporates the historical and institutional roots of the organisation

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>175</sup> 'American Zen's Japan Connection', p. 394.

<sup>176</sup> Williams *et al*, p. 9.

<sup>177</sup> H. Byron Earhart, *Gedatsu-kai and Religion in Contemporary Japan: Returning to the Center* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

in Japan, in order to understand the specific nature and success of the ZMS, we must also focus upon the personality and charisma of its founder. She possessed in ample measure the 'creativity needed to generate new culture',<sup>178</sup> the characteristic talents that, according to Waldman and Baum, are required by successful 'prophets'. Whilst their ability to attract a following depends on 'many things other than perception of extraordinary personal qualities',<sup>179</sup> they must nevertheless,

be both recognizable through familiar paradigms and also different enough to rework, recombine, and transcend them [...] sensitive, flexible, adaptive, and insightful into their own cultures [and must exhibit] unusual synthesizing abilities, managing to align a number of potentially disjunctive elements.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Stark, p. 23.

<sup>179</sup> Marilyn Robinson Waldman and Robert M. Baum, 'Innovation and Renovation: The 'Prophet' as an Agent of Change', in *Innovation in Religious Traditions*, pp. 241-284 (p. 273).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263-274.

## 7. THE ASSIMILATION OF KENNETT'S TEACHINGS WITHIN THE ZMS

During the early period, the process of assimilation was smooth and successful as Kennett's teachings filtered down to the level of community belief and practice without any sign of resistance. The general congruence between the articles composed by British and American disciples made them easily transposable across contexts. Such mutual borrowing has been an important means of promoting trans-Atlantic unity of identity and experience and continuity of belief and practice within the ZMS as a whole.

The journals played an important role during the ZMS's initial period of growth. Whilst they have always functioned as a vehicle for presenting Kennett's teachings, this was particularly important during the movement's embryonic stage of development. At this time little was known of Kennett and *Sōtō* Zen either in Britain or America. Many of the early journal articles explain the basic principles of the *Sōtō* method and in this way acted as supplements to *Selling Water*. The journals also provided a space for senior monks to respond to the specific spiritual concerns of lay trainees. This pastoral function reflects the broader role the journal played as a bridge of communication between the monastic centre and the wider lay congregation. As the main organ of communication, the journal thus fostered a sense of community and collective identity. In Britain, this was enhanced when articles penned by lay practitioners on aspects of spiritual training began to appear.<sup>181</sup> During the early period when the British congregation was very small, geographically dispersed and unable to support a network of meditation groups, such articles were the only regular

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<sup>181</sup> The first lay article appeared in *JTHP*, 2.6 (1975).



point of contact for some trainees. The journal thus provided lay practitioners with an important forum to share and discuss their experiences of Zen training.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE LOTUS BLOSSOM PERIOD, 1976-1983

#### INTRODUCTION

The next stage of the history of the ZMS was dominated by developments rooted in a prolonged religious experience that happened to Kennett over a period of around eight months, between June 1976 and January 1977. From the viewpoint of the British congregation, this period of change and instability ended in 1982 when Kennett's British monks, having trained at Shasta Abbey for five years, returned to resume their training at Throssel Hole. Described as her 'third *kenshō*', Kennett's experience was recorded and published in 1977 as *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom or How a Zen Buddhist Prepares for Death*. Comparatively speaking, it was a highly unusual experience and it led to a series of doctrinal and practical shifts that were not always accepted uncritically by her disciples. In this section I place Kennett's *kenshō* in a comparative and historical perspective, outline the nature and meaning of her experiences and comment upon the various developments and innovations resulting from them. Following an examination of the manner in which these innovations were received by her disciples - assimilation, rejection or a combination of both - I outline and comment upon the effectiveness of the various strategies she used for resolving conflict and resistance.

## 1. BACKGROUND TO KENNETT'S EXPERIENCE

Kennett's religious experience occurred during a lengthy period of intensive meditation that began in earnest in the spring of 1976. According to Daizui MacPhillamy (a senior disciple who acted as her nurse and personal assistant throughout) she embarked upon her retreat in response to a crisis precipitated by three events: firstly, she fell very ill and was informed by her doctor that she might only have a short time left to live;<sup>1</sup> secondly, the disciple whom she regarded as her chief descendent and future successor wavered in his commitment to her; and thirdly, a 'practitioner of an esoteric Oriental healing art'<sup>2</sup> pronounced that the cause of her illness was her own faulty teachings and lifestyle. Kennett herself explains her retreat as a time of spiritual preparation for her imminent death;<sup>3</sup> her critics, by contrast, describe it as a period of emotional and psychological breakdown and fragmentation.

In a state of physical weakness and mental turmoil, she retired from her duties as abbess of Shasta Abbey and, having appointed a board of directors to oversee the running of the ZMS,<sup>4</sup> she 'meditated with all her remaining strength',<sup>5</sup> undertaking the first part of the retreat at Berkeley Buddhist Priory and the latter part at Shasta Abbey.<sup>6</sup> This was a largely isolated retreat, Kennett permitting visits only from her closest monastic disciples. She even refused, apparently, to see a doctor, 'relying

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<sup>1</sup> Kennett began to fall ill in the autumn of 1975, suffering from water retention, diabetes, high blood pressure and cardiac irregularity.

<sup>2</sup> *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* [hereafter referred to as *HGLB*] (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1977), p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Kennett remained the spiritual head of the organisation during this period and, whilst absent from its daily running, continued to hold the final veto over decisions being made by her representatives.

<sup>5</sup> *HGLB*, p. viii.

<sup>6</sup> This priory was established in Oakland in 1973. At the time of Kennett's retreat Daizui MacPhillamy was the prior of the temple.

solely upon her meditation and a few simple foods and herbs'.<sup>7</sup> However, she did receive a masseur who gave her 'a relaxing form of Oriental massage'<sup>8</sup> twice weekly. Massage formed an integral part of Kennett's retreat because it prepared her, physically and mentally, for her visionary episodes. The manipulation of energy points on the body became an important aspect of her teachings during this period.

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<sup>7</sup> *HGLB*, p. viii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. ZEN BUDDHISM AND MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCE

Before examining Kennett's religious experiences in detail we should consider the place of meditative experience within Zen Buddhism. According to Sharf, the popular view of Zen as an essentially meditative and mystical tradition is a distorted reconstruction which reflects the impact of modernising, westernising and nationalistic forces on Japanese Buddhist intellectuals during the Meiji period. The weight of historical and ethnographic evidence, he argues, reveals that Zen is primarily concerned, not with private ineffable experiences, but with public enactments of awakening or 'ceremonial affirmations of the reality of *nirvāṇa*'.<sup>9</sup> Zen monasticism,

was and continues to be a highly ritualized tradition that emphasizes public performance and physical deportment at least as much as 'inner experience'. Enlightenment is not so much a 'state of mind' as a form of knowledge and mode of activity, acquired through a long and arduous course of physical discipline and study.<sup>10</sup>

A consequence of approaching Zen through a 'hermeneutic of experience' is that technical terms and categories relating to monastic practice 'are frequently presumed to be grounded in a non-conceptual mode (or modes) of cognition'.<sup>11</sup> In particular, the terms *kenshō* (seeing one's nature), *satori* (understanding) and even *makyō* (realm of illusion),

are assumed to designate discrete 'states of consciousness' experienced by Buddhist practitioners in the midst of their meditative practice.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', p. 270.

<sup>10</sup> *Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions*, p. 418.

<sup>11</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', p. 230.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

Such interpretations, Sharf argues, cannot be attested in the pre-modern period. Traditionally these terms denote a monk's understanding and appreciation of key Buddhist doctrines such as 'emptiness' or 'Buddhahood' and there are 'simply no a priori grounds to conceive of such moments of insight in phenomenological terms'.<sup>13</sup> The phenomenological approach may therefore 'reveal more about the dangers of projection and transference in the study of Buddhism than it tells us about Buddhism itself'.<sup>14</sup>

As noted earlier, the modernist, experiential view of Zen gained currency in the West through apologists like D. T. Suzuki. Suzuki placed the mystical experience of *kenshō* at the centre of his Zen exegesis with the result that 'only those privy to a legitimate *kenshō* experience are qualified to speak of Zen'.<sup>15</sup> This view of Zen is promoted in Japan today through lay-oriented organisations such as the *Sanbōkyōdan* ('Three Treasures Association'), a movement described by Sharf as,

a fascinating synthesis of the anti-establishment and anti-clerical ideology of Meiji New Buddhism, coupled with an emphasis on meditative experience and *satori* popularized by Suzuki.<sup>16</sup>

This organisation has also, in spite of its sociologically marginal status in Japan, been very influential in the development of western Zen because a number of key figures in

<sup>13</sup> 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', p. 232.

<sup>15</sup> 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', p. 251. This organisation was founded in 1954 by Hakuun Yasutani *Rōshi* (1885-1973) after he seceded from the *Sōtō* sect. For a detailed discussion of the emergence and nature of the *Sanbōkyōdan* see Sharf's '*Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions*'.

the western transmission are, or have been, affiliated with it.<sup>17</sup> These figures continue to present the essence of Zen 'as rooted in an experience of oneness with all things'.<sup>18</sup>

Sharf's critique of the modern rendering of Zen Buddhism in Japan and in the West has widespread support,<sup>19</sup> but I will only focus here on the work of Bernard Faure. Faure reiterates that mainstream Zen monasticism is 'a far cry' from the mystical, antinomian and anti-ritual teaching presented by Suzuki for western consumption. Furthermore, he argues that this 'deep bias against ritualism' also constitutes 'a basic methodological problem'<sup>20</sup> of western scholarship which, informed by rationalist and Protestant values, has tended to focus on Chan/Zen doctrine and philosophy at the expense of its ritual components. Within a traditional Chan/Zen monastic context, *zazen* meditation should be understood 'not as a form of knowledge (*jñāna*) but rather as a form of ritual activity' (p. 295), whilst,

awakening itself is a ritual reenactment of (or identification with) the Buddha's wakening, a ritual affiliation with the Chan patriarchal lineage, and a sacralization of everyday life.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Chan/Zen masters are not so defined because of their experiential realisation of the truth, but because 'having been socially defined as Chan masters, what they teach has the performative power of being the truth' (p. 22).

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Yamada Koun (1907-1989), Phillip Kapleau (b. 1912), Robert Aitken (b. 1917), Maezumi Taizan (1930-1996) and Eido Tai Shimano (b. 1932).

<sup>18</sup> 'The Zen of Japanese Nationalism', p. 142.

<sup>19</sup> Foulk's 'The Zen Institution in Modern Japan', for example, has called for a re-appraisal of the images of Zen that abound in western scholarship. The work of Reader on the relatively marginal place of *zazen* practice in the Japanese *Sōtō* sect also supports Sharf's observations, as does Robert E. Buswell's *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), which examines the discrepancies 'between Western portrayals of Zen and the testimony of its living tradition' (p. 8).

<sup>20</sup> *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, pp. 284-285.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

Unlike Sharf, however, Faure does not explain the anti-ritual bias characterising modern accounts of the Chan/Zen tradition solely in terms of the influence or projection of western religio-cultural values. He also considers it as an expression of a fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the tradition itself. In theory, the Chan/Zen tradition 'distinguishes itself from other religious trends by its insistence on immediacy and its denial of all traditional mediations' (p. 305), but in practice it accepts and maintains a complex structure of symbolic mediations. In a wide-ranging study, Faure traces this tension throughout representations of Chan/Zen attitudes towards thaumaturgy, relics, death, dreams, sexuality, gods and ritual. He argues that 'classical' Chan/Zen discourse reveals a demythologising tendency - rooted in the *Mahāyāna* philosophy of emptiness and selflessness, and later reinforced by the importation of western rationalism - which has constantly striven to repress and undermine (or 'empty') traditional mediating practices. By focusing upon the persisting significance of the Buddhist 'metaphysics of presence' in Chan/Zen, he exposes 'the limits of ideology, the inverted relation between the doctrine and the values underlying practice' (p. 135), and maintains that this tension is fundamental to the structure of the tradition:

It is not by mere coincidence, nor by deviation (as the advocates of 'pure' Chan would have us believe), that rationalism and occultism, philosophy and ritual, a/theology and i/deology, observance of the precepts and transgression (but also sudden and gradual), coexist in practice, if not always in representation.<sup>22</sup>

Given the 'irrepressible multivocality' of the tradition, he suggests that the demythologising interpretations of modern Chan/Zen scholarship 'are deeply indebted

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 307.



to the tradition itself , and that Suzuki`s anti-ritualism is in certain respects `faithful to the tradition` (p. 285-287) and not simply a modern reconstruction. Faure nevertheless calls upon western scholars to guard against `the dangers of polarization` (p. 30) and correct the `inveterate tendency to project our modern, anti-ritualistic state of mind onto a medieval practice or theory` (p. 297).

### 3. KENNETT'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

#### 3.1. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

In the next section a phenomenological description of Kennett's religious experience is presented, following the guidelines of Yandell who defines such an account as,

one that describes the experience 'from within' or in terms of how things appear to the subject of the experience as she has the experience, without making any commitments to things being, or not being, the way they appear to the subject to be.<sup>23</sup>

An accurate phenomenological description of a religious experience is one that 'expresses its content and reflects its structure' (p. 24). A brief discussion of the kind of structural differences that Yandell and others have observed among religious experiences will facilitate our understanding of Kennett's experience.

#### 3.2. STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

One important structural difference identified by Yandell is that of the 'subject/consciousness/object structure', on the one hand, and the 'subject/aspect structure', on the other. The former are 'perceptual' experiences inasmuch as 'the subject seems to experience something external to themselves - something they are in danger of identifying with themselves' (p. 30). Yandell equates these, typically monotheistic, experiences with Rudolf Otto's notion of the 'numinous' wherein the

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<sup>23</sup> Keith E. Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 17.

subject seems to experience an awesome, holy, mind-independent being 'to whom reverence, awe, recognition of one's guilt, humility, gratitude and worship are appropriate responses' (p. 262). Another experiential modality is that 'having numinous experience involves having imagery (visual and auditory)' which 'mediates numinous content' (p. 263). By contrast the latter, typically non-monotheistic, type of experience 'concerns aspects rather than objects' and is 'introspective' inasmuch as the subject 'recognizes certain things about herself' (p. 43). Some traditions combine both types of experience. Within Advaita *Vedānta*, for example, the experience of *mokṣa* 'either is numinous or involves an awareness of the identity of oneself with qualityless Brahman' (p. 22).

This structural distinction is reiterated by Smart who contrasts the 'numinous' with a kind of experience he describes as 'mystical'.<sup>24</sup> He associates the former most closely with the monotheistic belief systems of the Semitic traditions, and the latter with the non-theistic meditative systems originating in India, particularly Buddhism. Unlike the dynamic and shattering, dualistic and image-rich experience of the numinous, the mystical experience is often quiet, non-dual and empty of images. The mystical perspective, furthermore, encourages self-reliance and meditative realisation of the ultimate truth that lies within, as opposed to worship, prayer and reverential 'dependence on the Other'. Smart also discusses branches of religious traditions 'within which the two strands of religious experience are woven together', but he recognises that the accent of the experience often remains on either the numinous (as in Christian mysticism, where, 'the two are one but the "two-ness" remains') or the

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<sup>24</sup> Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Cross-cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1995), pp. 58-73.

mystical (as in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism where 'God is a being whom we worship, but in such a way that we get beyond the duality').

### 3.3. THE STRUCTURE OF KENNETT'S EXPERIENCE

As it is described by D. T. Suzuki the non-dual and unmediated inner event of *kenshō* or *satori* reflects the main features of Smart's 'mystical' category of religious experience. Along with many other significant figures in the western transmission of Zen, Kennett's understanding of Zen was informed, at least in part, by Suzuki's modernist writings, and she describes her 'great experience'<sup>25</sup> as a *kenshō*. Whilst she inherited the emphasis on *kenshō*, however, her experience and interpretation of it is significantly different from the 'mystical' events described by others. Unlike the accounts of Suzuki *et al* - which, we should not forget, present a species of experience that may itself be unusual within the historical context of Zen monasticism - Kennett's *kenshō* took the form of a prolonged series of 'complete visual and sensory experiences'<sup>26</sup> or 'waking visions',<sup>27</sup> each loaded with imagery and symbolism.

Many of the visionary episodes (there were forty-three altogether) provided her with an experience of, or an insight into, her past lives and in this respect can be regarded as examples of Yandell's category of introspective, 'subject/aspect' experiences. Other visions gave her a deeper understanding of the teachings and her role and purpose as a Zen teacher. Each successive vision - of such things as giant lotus blossoms, towers, columns of light, fountains, heavenly Buddha-lands, Buddhas and lineage-Patriarchs - superimposed itself onto her immediate physical

<sup>25</sup> *HGLB*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Daizui MacPhillamy, 'Foreword' to *HGLB*, p. ix.

<sup>27</sup> Rawlinson, p. 367.

surroundings. She observed, moved, acted and inter-acted within the context of each unfolding vision - by climbing glass mountains, for example, or by travelling to different realms and conversing with celestial beings - but she remained awake and alert throughout, constantly 'aware of things going on around me'.<sup>28</sup> These experiences have more in common with the 'numinous' category inasmuch as their religious content is mediated through symbolic imagery and they involve encounters between Kennett and various, seemingly mind-independent, celestial places and beings. In particular, she experiences an awesome and holy being whom she variously describes as 'the Cosmic Buddha', 'the Lord of the House' or simply 'the Lord', and to whom she relates in a deeply reverential, penitential, humble, obedient and prayerful way. At other times, however, her presentation is ambivalent about the ontological status of the places and beings in her visions that, she explains, are themselves 'empty' or merely symbolic expressions of Buddhahood. This ambivalence is observed both by Rawlinson and Batchelor who describe Kennett's Zen as 'theistic' or 'quasi-theistic' whilst acknowledging that she upholds 'basic Buddhist teachings'<sup>29</sup> - like *anātman* (no-self) and *śūnyatā* (emptiness) - and that the Christian associations are therefore 'more apparent than real'.<sup>30</sup> Kennett's experience, then, may best be understood as a combination of the numinous and the mystical.

In the years following her *kenshō*, Kennett herself drew a distinction between 'imaginative visions' and 'intellectual visions'<sup>31</sup> and this helps us to understand

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<sup>28</sup> *HGLB*, p. 263.

<sup>29</sup> Rawlinson, p. 368.

<sup>30</sup> Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West*, p. 136.

<sup>31</sup> 'The Two Forms of Visions', *JSA* (September-October, 1980), 6-11.

where, in Smart's terms, the 'accent' of her experience lies. Whilst the former 'may include sight, hearing, smell, touch, feeling, certainty, knowledge', the latter are inner experiences and completely absent of imagery. There are some obvious structural similarities between the types of vision identified here and the categories of experience identified by Yandell and Smart. According to Kennett's typology, however, both imaginative *and* intellectual visions are understood as numinous experiences. Thus, even in an intellectual vision,

a person knows for certain that there is something greater than himself with him (or her). I have often had monks say to me: 'I can feel the Lord of the House here. I know He is sitting with me. I haven't seen Him - I just *know*'.

### 3.4. VISIONARY ZEN: TRADITIONAL PRECEDENTS

Batchelor suggests that Kennett's visionary episodes 'are more reminiscent of the experiences of Christian saints than Zen Masters'.<sup>32</sup> When we examine them against her biographical and religio-cultural context - that is, non-phenomenologically - it will become clear that her experiences do indeed display undeniable Christian parallels. However, it is important to note at this stage that, contrary to popular representations of 'Zen mysticism', Kennett's visionary experiences - and also her ambivalence about the status of their content - are *not* unprecedented within the Zen tradition. Significant in this respect is the research of Faure on the ontological status and soteriological value of dreams in traditional Chan/Zen contexts.<sup>33</sup> Within Asian

<sup>32</sup> *The Awakening of the West*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>33</sup> In his study of the Kego master *Myōe*, *Myōe the Dreamkeeper: Fantasy and Knowledge in Early Kamakura Buddhism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), George J. Tanabe also argues that dreams and visions 'are central to the East Asian Buddhist experience': '*Mahāyāna* Buddhism is, among many things it can be, a tradition of the mind's faculty for producing images in both waking life and sleep: a tradition, that is, of fantasy producing visions [...] and dreams [...]. It will be possible to gain a better understanding of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism as a vehicle not only of ideas and institutions but of human (continued...)

cultures dreams are widely regarded in a visionary sense as 'channels of communication with the invisible world'.<sup>34</sup> Faure discovered that, although the Chan/Zen tradition has in theory rejected dreams as illusory and 'deprived the oneirical background worlds [...] of any ontological basis' (p. 214), in practice 'the intermediary world of dreams' has provided an important aspect of its metaphysics of presence and has often 'played a significant role in the life of Chan/Zen communities' (p. 209). By examining the importance of 'dreaming practice' (p. 221) and visionary powers in the daily lives of Chan/Zen masters, he observes 'the persistence, or even the resilience, of the old ontological and cosmological schemes in the dreams of Chan/Zen' (p. 215). He outlines examples of masters experiencing 'all kinds of dreams or visions' during sleep and meditation, including premonitory and revelatory dreams, 'dreams of ascent' to celestial places (usually *Maitreya's Tusita* Heaven), and visions of *Arhats*, *Bodhisattvas* and various deities. It is also important to recognise that dreams played a crucial role in the specific development of *Sōtō* Zen, the tradition within which Kennett received her training. Whilst *Dōgen's* ambivalent attitude towards dreams erred upon the side of orthodoxy, *Keizan* 'lived his dreams' or 'dreamt his life':

Although upholding the *Mahāyāna* tenet of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), Keizan lived in a world impregnated with very real dreams.<sup>35</sup>

His recorded dreams detail encounters with *Arhats* and *Bodhisattvas*, such as *Kannon*, and according to Faure 'one of their functions is obviously to legitimate him and his

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(...continued)

emotion as well only when studies of the fantastic end of the spectrum become more available' (pp. 13-14).

<sup>34</sup> Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 213.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

teaching' (p. 225). Of particular relevance to our examination of Kennett's religious experiences are the visions *Keizan* had of his past lives. These record how, having 'obtained the fruit of Arhatship during the time of the Buddha *Vipaśyin*', he became 'the deity of the Kubara tree' in the Himalayas before appearing in the world 'during five hundred lives [...] to spread the Dharma to help sentient beings'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Keizan* as quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 225-226.



#### 4. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF KENNETT'S EXPERIENCE

##### 4.1. VISIONS 1-14:

##### CLEANSING KARMA AND EXPERIENCING PAST LIVES

Kennett's opening visions are of an immense mountain range flanked by two roads. These represent society's expectations of women (viz. family life) and men (viz. worldly success and power) and the harmful feelings such roles engender (viz. inadequacy and complacency). Inspired by an inner voice she rejects the enticing - but ultimately delusory - roads, choosing to scale the sheer and glassy mountains instead. Religious training is thus seen as the only meaningful option for Kennett.

She next encounters a great black lotus which represents despair and death, and a bright light which represents heaven. Her faith enables her to reject despair and get on with the task of training described here in terms of karmic cleansing:

I tear into my past and drag it naked and trembling into the light. I cleanse my karma of body, mouth and will [...] for that which has not been taken care of since my first *kenshō*.<sup>37</sup>

During this time she is 'given the chance to see my past [...] and to deal with what I had done'. She purifies past wrongdoing both with 'tears of repentance' and overtures of 'actual reparation'; for example, by writing letters of apology and forgiveness. With a 'clean slate' she prepares to 'go quickly into this beautiful heaven' but suddenly realises that, like the abyss, heaven should also be rejected as 'the most dangerous of all opposites' (pp. 26-30).

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<sup>37</sup> HGLB, p. 26.

Her next visions teach her about the `meaning of the kesa` (p. 34),<sup>38</sup> or true monkhood, which she realises concerns `the harmony of body and mind`. To achieve this she `must understand the precepts absolutely` for `the body will not cease from sickness until the mind ceases from evil` (ibid). At this point she petitions `the Lord of the House` (p. 38) or `That Which Is` for instruction. Two dominant themes emerge from the ensuing commentary: the cleansing of karma from this and previous lives, and the need to obey `the will of the Lord`. Whilst on one level a *kenshō* experience `wipes the slate clean`, and preceptual training keeps it clean, the wheel of karma can only be arrested completely by `cutting the roots of karma` (pp. 38-39):

It is not enough to have a *kenshō*; I must go back to the source of the karmic stream; I must return to that source to find out what set it going.<sup>39</sup>

Having `cleaned and purified my karma of this life`, in the following visions Kennett has a number of past-life experiences that enable her to `clean the impregnations that the karma of my past lives has left upon my skhandas [*sic*]`. Cleaning or `converting` inherited karmic propensities is a prerequisite to becoming `one with the Eternal Lord`. The past-life images that flash before her here are also seen by her assistant disciple:

He looks at me and for a fleeting moment sees a very old European Christian monk; he is very happy, he has left behind no unclean impregnations. Behind him is a Chinese Buddhist monk; he too is happy [...] Further and further back I go [...] Down the centuries I have been a monk so many times; fifteen times Christian, fourteen Buddhist, sometimes male, sometimes female.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The *kesa* refers to the monk's robes.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 46. Despite the importance attached to karmic causation, the Mahayanist principle of emptiness and immediacy is also acknowledged in that `since there is nothing from the first, there is nothing clean and nothing that is unclean - I cannot know this, however, until I have first tried to clean it`.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-53.

Having brought an end to 'past karma on the human plane', she goes on to purify 'the karma from lives in the formless realms and from animal lives'. At this point she undergoes a key past-life experience:

This morning I experienced living absolutely a life in which, three thousand years ago, I had been a white tiger, captured whilst eating a heron, by a tribe of Indians whose religious cult was one of tiger worship.<sup>41</sup>

According to Kennett, the tiger's despair, pain and longing for freedom 'echoes through every fibre of me as clearly as it did three thousand years ago'; the emotional and physical difficulties she experienced at *Sōjōji* are now understood, for example, as karmic memories. She cleanses this fundamental karmic stream of 'anything that is not of the Eternal Lord' by encouraging the tiger to forgive its captors.

#### **4.2. VISIONS 15-26: ASCENSION TO THE BUDDHA LAND**

In the next series of visions, Kennett ascends to a heavenly realm, converses with celestial beings and then returns to the human plane with a deeper understanding of her earthly mission and purpose.

Having cleansed the karma of her past lives, Kennett awakens in 'the Buddha Land' where she is welcomed by 'a magnificent, golden being' and filled 'with an energy and a life, a luminescent water of the spirit' (pp. 88-89). In this heavenly place, she finds herself 'seated in a lotus blossom' within an immense sea 'full of lotus blossoms just like mine', each representing the 'flowering' of people who have

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

trained so that `the stem of the lotus pushes upward towards the surface of the sea` (p. 98). In a particularly striking vision, she witnesses *Śākyamuni* Buddha,

become absorbed into the great, golden Cosmic Buddha that I now see in the sky. He is taken into the Cosmic Buddha and yet is separate from Him. He is not the Cosmic Buddha but there is nothing in him that is not of the Cosmic Buddha; the two are inseparable and different.<sup>42</sup>

Later Kennett learns that `the golden figure in the sky` is actually only `an emanation of the Cosmic Buddha` (p. 104).

In a later vision Kennett ascends beyond the Buddha Land itself to `a place where there are golden beings [...] whom I know to be the past Buddhas`. The journey continues to a place in the sky where she can see both `the back of the emanation of the Cosmic Buddha` and the various points in the clouds through which its image is projected. After being `thrilled through and through with liquid light`, she becomes `a real monk` by undergoing a cosmic ordination into the `Monastery of the Lord of the House`. Kennett now realises that her duty `as a new monk in the temple of the Lord` is not to abide in the heavenly place but to fulfil the *Bodhisattva* vow by leading others there. Individuals who `grow their stems` of training so that they reach the Buddha Land must `drink in the Cosmic Buddha through his emanation` and `take their knowledge and certainty of Him back down their stems to this world for the good of all beings` (pp. 104-109).

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-94.

### 4.3. VISIONS 27-38: THE FIVE ASPECTS OF THE MONK

The remaining visionary episodes serve to deepen Kennett's understanding of monkhood and clarify her specific mission. These visions revolve around the sudden appearance of 'five golden columns of light coming out of my body' (p. 111) that represent 'the aspects of the monk and the sunbeams of the teaching' (p. 113). Kennett understands that her mission 'in the monastery of the Lord' (p. 120), is to manifest the five aspects of monkhood so her disciples may strengthen the 'stems' of their training until, like her, they 'blossom'. She is ordered to travel up each column in turn to discover their meaning. In the first she learns of 'how earth penetrates heaven' (p. 111), that the Buddha appears in all things 'if we have the willingness to look' through 'eternal meditation' (pp. 134-136).

As she entered the next columns she was facing another crisis in her organisation, one that had been precipitated by her *kenshō* itself:

There have been those, in the last few weeks, who have been horrified by what I have told them; there have been those who have sworn that I am ruining the teaching, those who have gone away; how sad I am for them.<sup>43</sup>

In response, she 'went again into meditation, even deeper than before' with the result that the visions of the second, third and fourth columns responded directly to the problem of dissension. The second column teaches her of the loving and accepting nature of the Lord, symbolised here as 'the cleansing water of the spirit'. In the third column, she realises a further aspect of eternal meditation: 'heaven penetrating earth; the Dharma constantly given to those willing to receive it' (p. 112). She understands that she can only help her lost disciples 'by staying in meditation so that they may

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

have the opportunity to see the light for themselves' (p. 143). She also has another past-life experience as a tenth-century Tartar betrayed by his best friend. This enables her both to understand the karmic causes of her present predicament and respond meaningfully to it:

I can learn several lessons from his actions and it is for this purpose that the Lord of the House has permitted me to see this past life.<sup>44</sup>

The fifth column of light is 'the axis of the universe' which 'binds all together - heaven, earth, body, mind, darkness, light'. As such it is,

the entrance to heaven and hell [...] the direct route by which we go, in the twinkling of an eye, to the Lord during the first, or Penetration of Heaven, *kenshō*.<sup>45</sup>

Kennett also understands it as 'the stem of the lotus, the physical body, the means by which man may know the Lord'. Returning to the earlier theme of harmonising body and mind, she identifies a series of correspondences between the columns of light and the organs of the human body, explaining that physical illness and disease is always a product of some spiritual deficiency or imbalance. The second column, for example, is linked with 'the area of the intestines and stomach' with the result that,

When I am constantly grieving, worrying or doubting my stomach, spleen, pancreas and intestines become tense and, if I do not learn how to wash all this grief, worry and doubt away by trusting the Lord completely and turning the Wheel of the Law, disease can result.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

#### 4.4. VISIONS 39-43: MAINTAINING THE HARMONY

Kennett's remaining visions elaborate upon earlier themes. She realises that the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path is '*absolute* faith and obedience to the Lord's Will' (p. 161) and reiterates that a person who cleanses his karmic impregnations can, at the moment of death, 'embrace infinity instead of his own delusions' and be 'immediately united with the Lord' (p. 179). Union with the Lord harmonises heaven and earth and body and mind; hence, Kennett believed that her *kenshō* resulted in her complete physical recovery from illness. Practical guidelines are also provided on how to attain and maintain the harmony. In addition to meditation, these include celibacy, vegetarianism and the avoidance of things that cause tensions within the mind and body:

by not indulging the six senses of smell, taste, words, hearing, touch and sight, the harmony of my body and mind will be unimpaired until my work is done and the Lord takes back that which is His own.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

## 5. A KENSHO TYPOLOGY

In light of her experiences, Kennett devised a typology for understanding *kenshōs*.<sup>48</sup> There are, she maintains, three basic types characterised by differing degrees of depth and intensity and experienced sequentially by sincere practitioners as their training matures.<sup>49</sup>

The first type of *kenshō* is the 'Kanzeon' or 'Penetration of Heaven' *kenshō*. Characterised by a 'great flash of deep understanding', this experience most closely approximates the popular descriptions of *kenshō* that can be found elsewhere. Kennett acknowledges that this type,

is the most usual and, to my knowledge, the one upon which most of the present teachers of Zen in the orient and, possibly, those in America too, have their qualifications based.

It was her own experience of this *kenshō* in 1962, she claims, that qualified her as a Zen teacher in the eyes of *Kōhō* Chisan.

Kennett emphasises that, whilst documentation of them is 'extraordinarily scant', there are other types of *kenshō* that can occur and she attempts to provide an accessible explanation of 'the various stages that such later experiences take'. The second type is described as the 'On-Going Fugen *kenshō*'. This experience is 'not associated in the mind with any *one* moment' but consists of 'little flashes' or 'tiny moments' of understanding that occur between the great first and third *kenshōs*.

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<sup>48</sup> Outlined in '*Kenshōs*', Kennett's introduction to *HGLB*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>49</sup> Her early attempts at formulating this typology talk of four major *kenshōs*, but this was reduced to three during the preparation for publication of *HGLB*. This four-fold structure, however, remains influential, and Kennett later draws upon the four *jhānas* of *Theravāda* Buddhism as a parallel model. The fourth *kenshō* that she refers to in unpublished documents of this period is referred to in *The Book of Life* (1979, p. 29) as 'Full Enlightenment or Cosmic Buddha'.



According to Kennett, D. T. Suzuki referred to these as the 'little moments that make one dance'; they are,

the moments that remind you, any time you get really down, that you *have* experienced the Penetration of Heaven *kenshō*.

*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* presents a detailed account of Kennett's experience of the third great type of *kenshō*, the 'Harmonisation of Body and Mind'.<sup>50</sup> This experience occurs to people naturally 'shortly before their death', but it is possible and desirable to experience it within the context of spiritual training. It is not the preserve of special, saintly individuals but is open to anyone 'who is willing to go very deeply into meditation *and* training'. Only ordained priests who are leading a disciplined, focused and celibate lifestyle, however, can achieve this deeper level of training and experience; whilst lay trainees can enjoy the 'Penetration of Heaven', they are not able to experience the higher *kenshōs*.<sup>51</sup> Nor is this experience the 'property' of the Zen Buddhist tradition alone since,

other religious traditions have a similar type of experience to these three *kenshōs* which their adherents understand within their own framework of beliefs.<sup>52</sup>

The sudden or instantaneous first *kenshō*, described as 'a swift comprehension of grace', is contrasted with the gradual and conscientious third, which 'takes place

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<sup>50</sup> *HGLB*, p. 170.

<sup>51</sup> 'If you want to go the whole way, you must become a monk [...] you've literally got to give up everything. You cannot go the whole way unless you completely control [...] sex and anger. These are the two things you really have to give up completely' (Kennett as quoted in Friedman, p. 166).

<sup>52</sup> For comparative purposes Kennett thus includes as appendices sections from Hasidic and Taoist works which, she believes, speak of meditative experiences 'almost identical to mine but in a totally different terminology' (p. 7). She also maintains that parallel works describing these perennial experiences can also be found in mystical forms of Islam and Christianity.

slowly and deliberately with plenty of time to comprehend each step of the way' and which 'starts as a *deliberate* act of will'. The third *kenshō* both reflects and facilitates advanced spiritual development, since the experience of past lives enable the trainee to 'clean up the impregnations [...] left upon his skhandas [*sic*] both in this life and in his previous ones'. It is not, therefore, 'the end of training' but should be regarded as a new beginning for it reveals in greater depth what a trainee must 'do about himself'.

According to Kennett, whilst third *kenshōs* take highly individual forms they are all characterised by certain key features and stages:

I do not doubt that every person *sees* and *experiences* this somewhat *differently* to me, although the *stages* for doing so are *identically* the same. It is the *stages* of this particular path that the reader should carefully study, not so that he can have *my* experience but so that he may have his *own*.

Thus whilst they are not all accompanied by visual experiences it *is* always the case that 'one *feels* what happens during the third *kenshō*'. Re-living past lives - visually, emotionally or both - is presented as a key feature of the experience, although such episodes will evidently reflect the unique karmic continuums of individual trainees.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> According to Kennett, whilst such experiences are a key feature of the third *kenshō*, the arising of such episodes does not necessarily indicate that a third *kenshō* is taking place. A senior monk of Shasta Abbey, writing to a British trainee at this time, explains that a *kenshō* is not a requirement for past-life experience and that 'many people here at the Abbey began to have these experiences whether they had had *kenshōs* or not' (letter dated March 9 1977).

## 6. A CONTEXTUAL EXPLANATION

### 6.1. AVOIDING REDUCTIONISM

Having presented a phenomenological account of Kennett's *kenshō*, we are now in a position to examine it from a more critical and contextual perspective. In doing so, however, we must avoid the temptation to explain it away simply as a product of her religious, social and intellectual environment. Yandell traces the reductionist impulse to a 'vaguely conceived but widely influential assumption',

that the subject of the experience [...] is active in *producing* experience as much as *undergoing* it. Hence, it is claimed, experience can best be seen as more a reflection of the subject than a revelation of any object of the experience.<sup>54</sup>

Whilst accepting that 'other things besides experience may affect the content of the description of an experience by its subject', he maintains that religious experiences are not necessarily imprisoned by religious concepts and beliefs but can and do occur independently and spontaneously. In his attempt to construct a 'rational theory of revelations', Stark also rejects reductionist models, arguing that it is important 'to acknowledge the possibility that revelations actually occur'.<sup>55</sup> In light of these comments we may, without posing a challenge to the integrity of Kennett's experience itself, examine the religio-cultural and doctrinal factors which shaped her account of it.

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<sup>54</sup> *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, p. 194.

<sup>55</sup> 'How Sane People Talk to the Gods', p. 21.

## 6.2. RELIGIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

Batchelor is right to suggest that Kennett's experiences should be situated within the context of the Christian mystical tradition. Her familiarity with the mystical writings of western monasticism is indicated both by her references to Meister Eckhart in *Selling Water* and by journal articles in which she compares and contrasts the stages of the Christian mystical path, as recorded by figures such as St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), with her unique understanding of the series of *kenshōs* experienced by advanced Zen practitioners:

The *kenshō* of Zen and the spiritual marriage of Christianity are identical.<sup>56</sup>

One way in which her presentation reflects the accounts of Christian mystics is in terms of structure. Catholic mystical theology typically divides the spiritual life into three stages: the Purgative Life, the Illuminative Life and the Unitive Life.<sup>57</sup> Whilst the literature is full of 'oscillations between stages'<sup>58</sup> the path is ideally one of movement and progression, from a state of worldly, sinful alienation through a process of purification and contemplation towards increasing holiness and eventual union with the Godhead. Kennett frames her *kenshō* in similar terms, conveying a distinct sense of progression through a number of identifiable stages towards union with 'the Lord'. The early sequence of her visions has a similar resonance to the purgative stage, inasmuch as the purification of past karma is described as a process

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<sup>56</sup> 'A Note from Rōshi Kennett', *JSA* (January-February, 1978), p. 54. According to Kennett, the experience of Bernadette of Lourdes was also 'a classic example of a Buddhist third *kenshō*' ('Correspondence with Christian Monks', *JSA* (March-April, 1981), p. 10).

<sup>57</sup> For a more detailed account of these stages see Michael Cox, *A Handbook of Christian Mysticism* (Great Britain: Aquarian Press, 1986), pp. 28-33.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

of stripping away 'anything that is not of the Eternal Lord'.<sup>59</sup> In the Christian mystical tradition purification 'results in the generation of a specific and pervading realization of the Absolute', a stage paralleled by Kennett's visions of ascending to the Buddha Land. Whilst union with God is the 'ultimate attainment of the Mystic Way', the crowning moment of Kennett's *kenshō* is her cosmic ordination into the 'Monastery of the Lord' which occurs after her ascent to the highest level of the heavenly realms. In Christian mysticism this unitive stage 'always maintains the "otherness" of God and the uniqueness of the creature'.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the 'accent' of Kennett's experience is often on the numinous, as is indicated by statements such as 'I am not the Lord [...] but there is nothing in me that is not of the Lord'.<sup>61</sup>

The images Kennett uses to describe her *kenshō* are also reminiscent of the symbolism found in Christian mystical writings. The opening image of the glass mountain and her references to towers are prefigured by St. John of the Cross in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and St. Teresa of Avila in *The Interior Castle*. Her use of water symbolism also has parallels in St. Teresa - water was 'her favorite element'<sup>62</sup> - and St. John's *The Dark Night of the Soul*, which refers to God's grace as 'the fountain of the sweet spiritual water'.<sup>63</sup> These figures also refer to the final stage of the mystical path as a 'Spiritual Marriage', an image Kennett evokes when describing the fourth column of light.<sup>64</sup> The image of ascending to the clouds, beyond which lies

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<sup>59</sup> HGLB, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Cox, pp. 30-32.

<sup>61</sup> HGLB, p. 164.

<sup>62</sup> Hilda Graef, *The Story of Mysticism* (London: Peter Davies, 1966), p. 239.

<sup>63</sup> As quoted in Cox, p. 168.

<sup>64</sup> HGLB, p. 113.

a reality that 'must not be seen with mortal eyes',<sup>65</sup> is also suggestive of the fourteenth century English mystical treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

### 6.3. DOCTRINAL FACTORS

Another context within which Kennett's experience should be situated is doctrinal. Yandell observes that a religious tradition will typically 'supply forms for its adherents to use in reporting their religious experiences' (p. 193) with the result that 'what counts as a religiously genuine experience in part is decided by whether it is an experience in which the correct doctrine is "seen to be so"'.<sup>66</sup> Stark also argues that religious experiences, even of a revelatory kind, will 'usually be interpreted *in support* of the prevailing religious culture'. This reflects both the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms in dealing with 'the risks involved in uncontrolled mystical activity', and the fact that most people who communicate with the supernatural,

are deeply committed to the prevailing orthodoxy and few are possessed of the creativity needed to generate new culture.<sup>67</sup>

As the founder of the Zen Mission Society, the prevailing religious culture within which Kennett was operating at the time of her *kenshō* was largely self-generated, consisting of her own unique interpretation of *Sōtō* Zen. Her experience was in many ways, an 'orthodox revelation', reflecting and confirming the 'conventional faith' of her organisation. This was, as we have seen, largely in line with the Japanese tradition, but it was also highly idiosyncratic; significant

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> Yandell, p. 293.

<sup>67</sup> Stark, p. 23.

adaptations had been instigated, many of which revealed her increasing proclivity to 'Christianise' the teachings. The traditional themes of her early presentation - such as the cleansing of karma, acceptance, repentance, faith, meditation, preceptual obedience and ceremonial activity - and the non-traditional, predominantly Christian, adaptations are expressed, reaffirmed and 'seen to be so' in her visionary accounts.

## 7. EXPERIENCE AND INNOVATION

The conventional orthodoxy of the ZMS, however, was not simply restated in an unmodified way. Kennett's *kenshō* was a 'novel revelation' inasmuch as it prompted a number of significant doctrinal and practical transformations and innovations. It is important to acknowledge once again that this scenario has traditional precedents. According to Faure, the recorded visions and dreams of Chan/Zen masters 'are not mere doctrinal illustrations' but are 'essentially transformative', prompting doctrinal shifts and modifying social structures:

Some of the most important changes in the history of East Asian Buddhism were the result of dreams.<sup>68</sup>

One element of Stark's theoretical model of how novel religious revelations occur restates the popular 'crisis explanation' of religious innovation:

During periods of social crisis, the number of persons who receive novel revelations and the number willing to accept such revelations is maximized.<sup>69</sup>

Personal and institutional crisis was certainly an important factor behind Kennett's retreat and *kenshō* experience. In the words of her personal assistant,

Faced first with the prospect of imminent death, second with no heir to carry on the teaching, and third with the possibility that everything had been wrong, she decided to meditate as deeply and continuously as possible, to examine every moment of her life and to find out absolutely [...] if all she had learned from her master, all she had done and all she had passed on to her disciples was false.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>69</sup> Stark, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> *HGLB*, p. viii.



A particularly salient aspect of Stark's model for understanding Kennett's *kenshō*, concerns the extent to which rejection or reinforcement influences revelations. The greater the reinforcement received 'the more likely a person is to have further revelations'. Revelations also tend 'to become more novel (heretical) over time':

the interaction between a successful founder and his or her followers tends to amplify heresy [...] the initial revelations will tend not to be too heretical because there is a selection process by which the initial credibility of founders is established. But, once a credible relationship exists between a founder and a set of followers, the stage is set for more daring innovations.<sup>71</sup>

The importance of 'follower-reinforcement' to the unfolding of Kennett's *kenshō* is made clear in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. Whilst some of her closest followers at Shasta Abbey were unwilling to accept the legitimacy of her experiences, she received enough reinforcement to be convinced of the validity of her visions and was encouraged to have more. According to her account, a number of the visions were shared by her followers; they witnessed her past lives, for example, as well as her ascension to the Buddha Land and cosmic ordination. In particular, the monk who served as her personal assistant throughout accompanied Kennett on her spiritual journeys, helped her to interpret what she saw and at certain points, even mediated between her and the Cosmic Buddha.

We will return to the question of the importance of reinforcement when we examine the manner in which Kennett's visionary experiences and doctrinal innovations were received by her wider organisation. Before we do this, though, it will be useful to examine how she 'routinised' the new teachings and practices

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<sup>71</sup> Stark, p. 29.

inspired by her visions in *The Book of Life*,<sup>72</sup> and to reflect upon the nature of the developments and innovations.

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72 Mt Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1979. This book was jointly authored by Kennett and her disciple Daizui MacPhillamy.

## **8. THE BOOK OF LIFE (1979)**

### **8.1. CONTEXT, STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE**

*The Book of Life* presents Kennett's insights into the cleansing of karma, the harmonisation of body and mind, and the attainment of union with the Lord, in a structured and systematic form. The text itself is divided into two main sections 'which may be roughly described as theory and practice respectively' (p. 1). The first part, composed by Kennett, examines how karma disturbs the natural unity of body and spirit, resulting in physical and mental illness. The second part, composed by her disciple Daizui MacPhillamy, presents a method for discovering the spiritual cause and cure of illness which involves the use of *mudrās* or gestures and the application of pressure to points on the body. Kennett refers to the various oriental healing arts - such as acupuncture, acupressure and moxibustion - as 'somewhat corrupted forms of the spiritual exercise here called mudras' (p. 2). She also warns that, whilst the book exposes the limitations of conventional medicine in understanding illness, it should be used as a compliment to, and not a substitute for, medical science.

### **8.2. KENNETT'S EXPOSITION ON THE LAW OF KARMA**

In the first section Kennett explains the principle that 'the payment of karmic debts is inevitable since the Law of Karma is inexorable' (p. 2). She believes that each person's karmic continuum can be traced back to a 'slightly dirtied, or saddened, love' (p. 49), a term she uses to describe the first arising of the egoistical self. The 'so-called individual soul or spirit' of an individual 'returns to the Source' in its entirety

`only if *all* past karma, both of the life-existence just ended, and those life-existences prior to it, has been purified` (p. 4). Usually though, `the purified part of the spirit returns to the Buddha Nature` whilst the rest is `reborn into whatever is a suitable form for its presently unpurified state` (p. 5). Kennett thus attempts `to show people how to bring body and spirit back into harmony from within and bring up future generations without this split ever taking place` (p. 8).

Subsequent sections examine how the disharmony of body and mind can be prevented or overcome through childrearing and the responsible handling of the death process. Kennett maintains that all beings `are *born* in harmony with, i.e. have an intuitive knowledge of, the flow of Buddha Nature`. This is usually destroyed by the age of seven, however, by their karmic inheritance and socialisation by parents and teachers who are themselves `out of harmony with the Buddha Nature`. Parents play an important role in preventing disharmony in their children by leading a harmonised lifestyle, educating them about karma, meditating with them and encouraging them to discover and cleanse the karmic causes of disharmonising character traits. Raising a child in this way enables both parents and child to enjoy a healthy life at the end of which they are `united with the Lord wholly and with all karmic debts cleansed` (pp. 31-35).

People who are sick and dying should be taught about meditation, the need to cleanse karma and the importance of `asking the Will of the Lord of the House with a view to learning all acceptance` (p. 36). A series of eight exhortations, to be read to dying people both before and after clinical death, are provided. Kennett's teachings

here are largely drawn from traditional Zen sources,<sup>73</sup> but she also draws on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. This is unsurprising as in Bishop's terms, it is 'one of the most important Eastern sacred texts to have reached the West in the twentieth century',<sup>74</sup> exerting a tremendous hold on the western imagination. Kennett describes death and rebirth as a gradual process of disincarnation and reincarnation of consciousness or spirit, and her exhortations, like the Tibetan text, present 'a struggle between the voice of omniscience seeking to liberate and the ignorance, confusions and fears of individual consciousness'.<sup>75</sup> The final ingredient of her description of the intermediary realm and guidance for the dead is the quasi-theistic personalism characterising her teachings at this time. Thus, the 'individual' is not only encouraged to recognise the emptiness of self, but is also urged to accept and embrace 'the Lord'.<sup>76</sup>

Kennett also discusses how physical and mental illness can result from the disharmony of body and mind caused by inherited karmic debts. She provides tables which link specific illnesses (e.g. spinal deformity) and weaknesses (e.g. bladder weakness) with types of violent death (e.g. hanging) and uncleansed character traits (e.g. failure to deal with fear). Using them as a 'key as to where to look in one's character for the *cause* of the disharmony of one's body and mind', trainees should clear away their inherited karmic debts and cure themselves 'of the *potential* for illness' (p. 22). A chart showing the range of mental states is also included. Below the 'normal' state of sanity, which contains the 'usual amount of instability, greed, hate

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<sup>73</sup> Faure's *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* examines the Chan/Zen ritualisation of death as part of his exploration of the limits of its orthodox ideology.

<sup>74</sup> Bishop, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> *The Book of Life* [hereafter referred to as *TBOI*.], pp. 39-40.

and delusion', are paranoia, depression, schizophrenia and madness, states resulting from the 'dualistic disharmony of body and mind'. Above sanity are the states of compassion, love, wisdom and 'full enlightenment or Cosmic Buddha' (p. 29), which result from the harmonisation of body and mind. Kennett links this chart to her *kenshō* typology, maintaining that the states of compassion, love and wisdom are achieved with the first, second and third *kenshō*s.

She concludes the first part of *The Book of Life* by addressing the tendency of westerners to mistake their past-life experiences as encounters with spirits, demons or ghosts. Uncleansed karma longs 'for help and reunion with That Which Is' (p. 48): thus,

any person, with a belief in God or the Cosmic Buddha, who believes he has become 'possessed', has only to show these sparks compassion by cleansing them and sending them back to the Cosmic Buddha.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, she discusses the nature of visions. Whilst Zen is cautious about visions during the early stages of spiritual training, they can occur frequently following 'the cleansing of all karmic jangles as a result of seeing Suffering's Cause' (p. 51).

### 8.3. HARMONISING BODY AND MIND

In the second section, MacPhillamy outlines a method for discovering the spiritual cause and cure of physical and mental illness that uses massage to affect energy flows in the body. Kennett used this practice in preparation for the visionary episodes of her third *kenshō*, and encouraged its use among the monks of Shasta Abbey to facilitate their own past life experiences. The bulk of this section presents

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

diagrams indicating the location of energy points on the body and the meridians affected by them, lists of factors (behavioural, emotional and dietary) that are beneficial and harmful to the meridians, and explanations of various sequences of massage, described as 'mudras of harmonisation'. Each *mudrā* - there are forty-three altogether - involves the activation of a sequence of 'mudra points' and is directed towards the restoration of energy-flow through the meridians and the alleviation of particular physical, mental and karmic tensions.<sup>78</sup> The 'Balancing Mudra', for example, affects the heart, liver, lung, large intestine and pericardium meridians. It helps the user to relax, discover the causes of, and cleanse away physical tensions in these areas; mental tensions in the form of insomnia and anxiety; and karmic tensions in the form of 'memories of suffering or causing harm, in this or a previous life, by means of wounds along the lines of flow of this mudra' (pp. 121-123).

The rest of the text provides practical guidelines for choosing and using specific *mudrās* and explains the religio-philosophical foundations of the practice. *Mudrās* should be used when one 'becomes aware of a persistent tension or other sign of some disharmony of body and mind' (p. 67) and wishes to find out its causes and cure. Minor physical and mental tensions are immediately relaxed by *mudrās*, whilst the causes of major tensions – e.g. the persistent breakage of precepts or

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<sup>78</sup> Although the practice outlined in *The Book of Life* is largely an innovation drawing upon multiple sources, there are traditional precedents for this three-fold typology of illness. East Asian medicine understands health and ill-health in terms of the movement and flow of *ki*, and divides ill-health into three major types: illnesses of a physical, psychological and psychotic kind (Margaret M. Lock, *East Asian Medicine in Urban Japan: Varieties of Medical Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 84-85). According to Lock, there is no therapy in the East Asian medical system for psychosis, and so 'historically priests dealt with this type of problem' providing 'shamanistic types of rituals, talismans and herbal medicines' for afflictions often understood as 'spirit possession'. Since Kennett rejects the notion of spirit and demonic possession, interpreting such experiences as past-life episodes, the therapy she devises to alleviate tensions of a spiritual nature is more of an exercise in self-exploration than an exorcism.

repressed emotions - are brought into consciousness, facilitating greater self-understanding and the ability to overcome disharmonising habits and thoughts.

Much of the text is devoted to explaining how *mudrās* can help trainees to ease meridian disturbances `which have their origin in, or are manifested as, karmic memories from earlier in this lifetime or from times prior to this lifetime` (p. 70). When these karmic streams are set to rest `one of the principal purposes of our lives has come to an end`; although vigilance must be exercised against the reappearance of old patterns, one feels `as if a burden had been set down or an old skin shed and a newborn creature emerged` (p. 97).

Karmic memories appear,

as recurrent dreams, waking or dozing visions, or vivid recollections of scenes from past times and places; [...] as strong intuitions of a karmic origin to some current problem, or simply as recurrent physical or mental tensions, pains, etc. which, upon thorough investigation, have no discernible physiological or psychological explanation.<sup>79</sup>

Each trainee must rely upon `his own Heart (or religious intuition)` (p. 88) in deciding when the crucial events of past lives are `ripe` for being explored and accepted. Techniques of `hypnotic regression` and `past-life therapies` should thus be opposed because they `bring these memories to consciousness before they appear naturally` (p. 89).

The role played by harmonising *mudrās* in accepting and cleansing past karma is that they can be employed,

to relax the tensions arising from these karmic memories and thus enable the person to more fully reexperience the important aspects of the events, see

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<sup>79</sup> *TBOL*, p. 71.



through the delusions of pain which beclouded the understanding of the being which experienced them the first time, find compassion for all those involved, and see the pattern which originated in that event and continues into the present life.<sup>80</sup>

Although diagrams and tables are provided to help in deciding which *mudrās* of harmonisation to use and in locating specific *mudrā* points, much of the practice should come intuitively if one meditates and has 'faith in Something greater than oneself' regarding one's hands 'as literally the Hands of God':

What matters is that you enter into the use of these mudras in the mind of meditation and that you trust yourself and the Buddhas (or God or whatever name you use for That Which Is) to guide you to do what is best.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

## 9. SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTS AND INNOVATIONS

### 9.1. KENNETT'S DENIAL OF INNOVATION

*How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* includes, as an appendix, a transcribed exchange in which Kennett is questioned by a group of disciples about the nature and significance of her *kenshō* (pp. 251-267). At one point, she is asked whether the practice of *zazen* is enough 'or are there new practices you advocate undertaking?' She responds by affirming the conventional orthodoxy of the early period and denying that anything has changed:

How do you think this happened to me? I did Zazen; I studied the Scriptures in detail; I followed the Precepts.

Kennett also explains the apparent discontinuities in her teaching from this and the early period as a 'skilful means':

If I had told the British community when I first went over there that Zen led to the equivalent of the spiritual marriage and the realisation of the Cosmic Buddha, half of them would have gone away and said, 'We might as well stay Christian'.<sup>82</sup>

Such statements have to be understood in context. They were largely a situational and strategic response to the negative reactions of a number of disciples towards Kennett's *kenshō*, which threatened to undermine her authority and destabilise her organisation. In reality, it is clear that her experiences resulted in a number of substantial developments, a fact that later statements and publications emerging from within the organisation freely acknowledge:

<sup>82</sup> 'Compassion for the Abbot', *JSA* (May-July 1978), p. 38.

In 1976 she began to undergo another *kenshō* or enlightenment experience [...] This *kenshō* was of profound depth and her teaching developed very significantly as a result, a process that has continued to the present.<sup>83</sup>

Kennett's experience then was both an 'orthodox revelation', reflecting the ZMS's early religious culture, and a 'novel revelation', adapting the existing worldview and inspiring innovations. Before examining the reactions of her disciples in more detail, and the strategies she employed to negotiate conflict and dissension, it will be useful to examine how her experience transformed - and not simply restated - the early teachings.

## 9.2. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EXISTING WORLDVIEW

### 9.2.i. The Cleansing Process

Kennett's early depiction of the religious path as a 'cleansing process' through which one 'does something about oneself' undergoes significant modification. Trainees were previously taught that they would, through *zazen* and preceptual adherence, become aware of and transform the delusive opinions and habits obscuring innate enlightenment. It is now insufficient, however, to simply understand the nature of delusive tendencies in the present; to fully cleanse and transform them one must trace karmic obscurations back to their source. Towards this end trainees are now encouraged 'to concentrate in a slightly different way from that used in pure Zazen', *consciously* entering into thoughts, images, emotions and sensations that they regard

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<sup>83</sup> Morgan, 'Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Britain', p. 141.

as 'intuitively important to follow'.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the cleansing process now involves the vivid re-experience of events from one's present and past lives.<sup>85</sup>

### 9.2.ii. Quasi-Theism and Christian Imagery

A second major development of the existing worldview is the intensified employment of positive and personalistic images to describe Buddhahood. It is important to acknowledge that such expressions of Buddhahood are commonplace within traditional contexts. As Batchelor observes,

Such positive interpretations of Nirvana find their classic expression in the 16th chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* [...] The text abounds in mystic and mythic metaphor, presenting the Buddha not as a mere human mortal but as a shimmering display in historical time of Eternal Buddhahood.<sup>86</sup>

Images of cosmic or heavenly Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas*, presiding over Buddha Lands (*Buddhakṣetra*), abound within the cosmology of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. In popular practice these beings 'are treated as wholly real', rebirth in their Pure Lands 'is ardently sought through faith', and they are believed to help, protect and teach suffering beings 'in dreams and meditative visions'.<sup>87</sup> Kennett's visions, then, are not unprecedented. Furthermore, her experiences can be seen as exemplifying the traditional *Trikāya* or 'Three-body' doctrine of Buddhahood.<sup>88</sup> she first encounters *Śākyamuni* (corresponding to the *Nirmāṇakāya* or 'Transformation-body')

<sup>84</sup> *TBOL*, p. 79. This practice is referred to as 'directed concentration rather than meditation'.

<sup>85</sup> This aspect of the teaching is unprecedented in the early period and is therefore discussed below as an innovation.

<sup>86</sup> *The Awakening of the West*, p. 135.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 128-133. For an excellent overview of the pantheon of Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism see Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>88</sup> Kennett herself employs this model in her article 'Correspondence with Christian Monks', *JSA* (March-April 1981), 4-14, in order to demonstrate the 'Trinityness of both Christianity and Buddhism'.

followed by the Cosmic Buddha (the *Sambhogakāya* or 'Enjoyment-body') which, she understands, is itself an emanation of a more ultimate level of reality (the *Dharmakāya* or 'Dharma-body'). She justifies her approach, furthermore, in Buddhistic terms: since Buddhahood is beyond all dualisms personalistic images are as legitimate - or illegitimate - as any other kind to describe it:

He, She, It is not a being and is not not a being. He has no specific gender, no specific form. He is not emptiness and He is not not emptiness [...] The Lord is not a god and He is not not a god. He is not a saviour; and if, at the moment of death, a person can embrace infinity instead of his own delusions, he is immediately united with the Lord.<sup>89</sup>

The personalistic imagery Kennett evokes to describe Buddhahood must also be understood, however, as an expression of her commitment to Christianity as a suitable form to translate Buddhism in the West. She continues to use traditional terms - *Dharmakāya*, Buddha-nature, etc. - but her preferred manner of referring to ultimate truth is now highly suggestive of a monotheistic, and explicitly Christian, cosmology, including expressions like 'Lord of the House', 'the Lord', 'the Holy Spirit' and even 'God'. She accepts that 'on the shallow levels there are a large number of seeming differences'<sup>90</sup> between 'the Lord' and the Christian concept of God, but she rejects the idea 'that Buddhism is a God-less religion'<sup>91</sup> maintaining that 'in the very deep levels we can see that God and the Cosmic Buddha are identical'.<sup>92</sup>

The attributes she ascribes to 'the Lord' thus carry a strongly Christian resonance, although her discussion encompasses both the numinous and the mystical

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<sup>89</sup> *HGLB*, p. 179.

<sup>90</sup> 'More Correspondence with a Christian Monk', *JSA* (March-April 1980), p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> 'Letter to a Christian Monk', *JSA* (March-April 1979), p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> 'More Correspondence with a Christian Monk', p. 5.

elements of religious experience. `He` is often described as an awesome, transcendent and personal being of `Pure Love` to whom one must respond with love, reverence, humility and obedience without suffering `from the idea that *I* am the Lord of the House`.<sup>93</sup> Simultaneously we are told that `the Lord` manifests deep within the human heart. Obedience to `His will` is therefore not about submitting to an external power, but of being quietly attentive to `That which speaks in the silence and stillness, the “still, small voice”`.<sup>94</sup> The latter description more closely approximates traditional *Sōtō* teachings on inherent Buddhahood, although the personalism and emphasis on `two-ness` remains suggestive of a Christian mystical influence.

Kennett was not the only, or even the first, Zen master in the West to employ `God-language`. Phillip Kapleau used this strategy, as did Taisen Deshimaru, founder of the International Zen Association, according to whom `If you abandon your ego, you become God or Buddha!`.<sup>95</sup> It is important, though, to consider the broader institutional context within which these ideas are conveyed. Wider Buddhist precedents notwithstanding, the `Christianisation` of the ZMS during the early period ensured that Kennett's increased personalisation of ultimate truth would be loaded with Christian associations. This was enhanced, as we have seen, by her intensified employment, during the Lotus Blossom period, of Christian terminology, imagery and symbolism.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, by finding Christian equivalents for such things as *kenshō* and

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<sup>93</sup> *HGLB*, p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> *HGLB*, p. 45.

<sup>95</sup> Taisen Deshimaru, *Questions to a Zen Master* (London: Arkana, 1991), p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> The scenes from Kennett's *kenshō* were thus depicted at Shasta Abbey using stained glass windows in the meditation hall, and a golden statue of the Cosmic Buddha, as `seen` in her visions, was installed on the altar.

past-life experiences, the *Trikāya* doctrine and *zazen* meditation,<sup>97</sup> Kennett is no longer simply *borrowing* from one religious system to make another more acceptable; she appears, rather, to be asserting the deep and essential *identity* of the two traditions.

### **9.2.iii. Further Reinterpretations**

Since sacred canopies are 'woven out of a vast complex of interdependent parts',<sup>98</sup> the transformation of one aspect necessarily prompts changes elsewhere in the system. Kennett's increasing tendency to conceptualise ultimate truth in personalistic terms led to further reinterpretations of the ZMS's conventional orthodoxy. Central among these were the concepts of willingness and faith. During the early period, willingness referred to the ongoing resolution of the trainee to continually accept the personal responsibility of training. This is given a new emphasis in the Lotus Blossom period, and now refers to the determination to accept and obey 'the will of the Lord'. Similarly, whilst Kennett previously emphasised the importance of having faith 'in the Buddha within', she now talks of having unswerving faith 'in the Cosmic Buddha'. The function of ceremonial was also reinterpreted as an activity 'to show a person how to be correct in his daily life in order to find the Cosmic Buddha'; the *gasshō* (a gesture of respect which involves holding the hands up with palms together), for example, now represents and expresses 'the Mind of the Cosmic Buddha'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Zazen* is now described 'as identical with properly done contemplative prayer' ('More Correspondence with a Christian Monk', p. 4) and its purpose is 'to become one with the Cosmic Buddha - or, if you like, have an experience of God' (Kennett as quoted in Friedman, p. 164).

<sup>98</sup> Lester R. Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 1995), p. 152.

<sup>99</sup> 'Udonge: "The Flower of an Udumbara Tree"', *JTHP*, 9.4 (1982), pp. 8-9.

### 9.3. INNOVATIONS

During the Lotus Blossom Period, Kennett also introduced new ideas and practices that were without precedent in the early phase.

#### 9.3.i. The Nature and Importance of Kensho

First and foremost among these are her teachings regarding the nature and importance of *kenshō*. Kennett refers to *kenshō* only rarely during the early period and her understanding of it - that is, as the meditative 'flash of understanding'<sup>100</sup> - reflects the popular modernist view promoted in the West by D.T. Suzuki. Whilst acknowledging that a *kenshō* enhances and deepens a person's training, however, she does not present it as the goal of training, emphasising instead the goal-less character of *zazen*.

Her teachings change radically in the Lotus Blossom Period, *kenshō* no longer being described in nature, as a purely private, mental and immediate experience of reality. We are now informed, furthermore, that there are different types of *kenshō* relating to differing stages of spiritual progress. Other writers acknowledge that *kenshō* experiences can be of different depths,<sup>101</sup> but the creation of a three-fold structure and typology is unusual. Her early accounts of the experience now correspond only to the first level of insight obtained via the 'Penetration of Heaven' *kenshō*. By contrast, later experiences, particularly the third *kenshō*, can be of a very different nature. Kennett's paradigmatic *kenshō* was thus both a sensory, emotional and visual experience; it was mediated through imagery and symbolism; and it was public inasmuch as her closest disciples, in some sense, both witnessed and

<sup>100</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 54.

<sup>101</sup> Phillip Kapleau, for example, talks of different 'degrees of *kenshō*' in *The Three Pillars of Zen* (London: Rider and Company, 1980), p. 239.



participated in it. During the early period, *all* such visual images experienced during meditation are dismissed as *makyō* or 'figments of an overstrained mind'.<sup>102</sup> Her reformulated understanding of *kenshō* now demands that this teaching is revised to distinguish psychologically abnormal and harmful experiences from spiritually authentic and beneficial ones.

Teachings concerning the importance of *kenshō* are similarly transformed. Though Kennett insists that trainees 'must not undertake meditation for the purpose of *having* this type of experience',<sup>103</sup> the third *kenshō* is nevertheless presented as a natural and desirable by-product of sustained training. This experience is also central to her revised understanding of the cleansing process, with its emphasis on re-living past lives:

When we learn to harmonise heaven and earth [i.e. experience the third *kenshō*] we are permitted to go slowly that the way be made plain for us to show all living things. He who would fulfill the Bodhisattva vow *must* reach this stage.<sup>104</sup>

In *The Book of Life*, the complete realisation of love, compassion and wisdom is also made dependent upon one's experience of the first, second and third *kenshō*s (pp. 29-30).

### **9.3.ii. Celibacy**

A second innovation is the teaching that the harmonisation of body and mind via the third *kenshō*, and ultimately full enlightenment, requires total sexual abstinence. During the early period, celibacy was not required of trainee priests, and married couples were accepted for monastic ordination. This relaxed attitude is now

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<sup>102</sup> *Selling Water*, p. 27.

<sup>103</sup> *HGLB*, p. 7.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

reversed, Kennett's *kenshō* proving to her that sexuality is one of the greatest obstacles to advanced spirituality:

He who would harmonise body and mind needs to be celibate in both *body and mind* for at least three years. True marriage, in which sex is not *indulged*, will *not* cause a being to be unable to harmonise body and mind [...] Nor must I satisfy myself through masturbation; the body is the temple of the Lord: I must not rape the Lord at the temple gate. The *only* use of sex is the procreation of children. Sexual indulgence and lust are the desecration of the Lord [...] the laying waste of love, the despoiling of heaven, a wasting of the Lord's gifts.<sup>105</sup>

The monastic policy of the ZMS was thus gradually revised during subsequent years. A formal vow of celibacy was introduced for trainee priests, whilst married couples were no longer eligible as monastic candidates. At first, priests who were already married could retain their ordained status, but they were expected to bring their personal relationships into line with the new guidelines on 'legitimate' and 'indulgent' sexuality. Kennett later decided to ban marriage within the priesthood altogether. She transformed Kannon Dell into a lay retreat facility and asked her ordained disciples to commit themselves to their monastic vocation or to their marital and familial lives. She would later maintain that a role of the Zen master is to de-programme her disciples of their sexuality 'so that what they're looking for is the Eternal rather than a mate'.<sup>106</sup>

### **9.3.iii. Karma and Past-life Experiences**

Kennett's rather idiosyncratic teachings on karma, and particularly her emphasis on past-life experiences, constitute another major innovation of this period. Although she insists her account is verified by traditional Buddhist sources,

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<sup>105</sup> *HGLB*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>106</sup> As quoted in Friedman, p. 187.

containing 'nothing invented or imagined', she nevertheless admits that it 'revolutionizes karmic theory as it is usually taught'.<sup>107</sup> Her interpretation of karma is unconventional in a number of ways. For example, the idea that beings are born for the purpose of purifying uncleansed karma gives the Buddhist concept of *samsāra* an unusually teleological slant. This stems directly from her quasi-theistic vision of ultimate truth that casts 'the Lord' as the controlling force behind the rebirth process. The result is a curious synthesis in which she seems to combine her favoured elements of Christian theism with the Buddhist theory of karmic causality:

At the time of death a being is asked to judge his own life and actions and is not judged by the Lord Who is a Being of Pure Love [...] and, according as a being judges himself [...], so he is shown the place and state of rebirth that is about to take place for the *largest* number of karmic jangles that *he* believes separate him from the Lord.<sup>108</sup>

Also unusual is the claim that the death of one being with unpurified 'karmic jangles' results in the rebirth of multiple beings, and the idea that, due to 'the fragmentation of karma', there are 'stray sparks of karma'<sup>109</sup> floating in the atmosphere which can be picked up by anyone in meditation.

Kennett's emphasis on re-experiencing past-lives remains the most central and innovative aspect of her teachings on karma. The notion that one can see or experience past lives during meditation has, she rightly observes, a long Buddhist pedigree. The memory of previous lives was the first of the 'three knowledges' that the Buddha (according to the traditional biography) experienced prior to attaining enlightenment, and it subsequently appears among lists of supernatural powers or

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<sup>107</sup> *TBOL*, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

knowledges that highly realised meditators and *Bodhisattvas* are believed to possess. Historically, the attitude of the Buddhist tradition towards supernatural powers has been ambivalent.<sup>110</sup> In the *Sōtō* tradition, this ambivalence manifests through the generally negative attitude of *Dōgen* towards thaumaturges, on the one hand, and the more positive appraisals of occult powers emerging from within the lineage of *Keizan*, on the other. In valuing past life experiences positively, Kennett's teachings thus reflect one side of a traditional divide, and specifically represent the lineage of *Keizan*. Her outlook remains unconventional, however, in a number of ways. Firstly, she regards the re-living of past lives not simply as a sign or by-product of advanced meditation, but as a desirable, integral and creative aspect of the cleansing process of individuation. Secondly, and as a consequence of this, the experience of past lives within her movement became commonplace. This, as Harvey observes, is in marked contrast to the Buddhist mainstream:

While Buddhism holds that the existence of rebirth and the efficacy of karma can be confirmed by experiences in deep meditation, most Buddhists have not attained these. They therefore only have *belief* in these principles, not direct knowledge of their reality, and use these beliefs to provide a perspective on life and action in it.<sup>111</sup>

Thirdly, this teaching is again overlaid with a quasi-theistic import. Past-life experiences, we are told, should be regarded as a 'teaching from the Lord', an opportunity to deepen training that must be willingly accepted.

#### **9.3.iv. Harmonising Mudras**

A fourth major area of innovation is Kennett's teaching on the harmonisation

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<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of this, see Faure's *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*.

<sup>111</sup> Harvey, p. 44.

of body and mind and the use of *mudrās* to ease disturbances of a physical, mental and karmic nature. Whilst there is no evidence that these ideas and practices formed part of the early institutional identity of the ZMS, a letter composed during her time in Japan reveals that her personal interest in 'the use to which zazen can be put for the curing of disease, both mental and physical'<sup>112</sup> actually dates back much earlier. Her interest in the oriental healing arts, it should be noted, also coincided with the rise in the West in the late-twentieth century of non-medical, holistic health and psychic healing movements:

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s have witnessed an astonishing resurgence of healing systems that overtly embrace a metaphysical notion of causality.<sup>113</sup>

Senior disciples of Kennett's rightly observe that the oriental healing arts are widely known and applied within eastern Zen temples.<sup>114</sup> She was thus able to observe her fellow monks at *Sōjiji* practising moxibustion and 'holding various places on their bodies'<sup>115</sup> to ease physical and mental tensions. The practice encouraged in *The Book of Life* takes as axiomatic certain ideas that are fundamental to all of these practices, such as the flowing of energy (*ki*) through meridians, but it borrows primarily from *amma*, a massage technique that involves 'the practice of touching points on the body for the purpose of enhancing well-being'.<sup>116</sup> It is a somewhat eclectic spiritual exercise, though, drawing upon and synthesising a variety of sources including the ancient charts of the meridians of *amma*, 'the Buddhist iconography, the

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<sup>112</sup> Taken from a letter dated 19 April 1969.

<sup>113</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Alternative Medicine and American Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1989), p. 91.

<sup>114</sup> For a discussion of the use of East Asian healing practices in Japan, and their application by Buddhist priests, see Lock.

<sup>115</sup> *TBOL*, p. 54.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53. For a discussion of *amma*, see Lock, pp. 179-189.

mudras practiced by the old monks of the Far East, and our own meditation'.<sup>117</sup> These are coupled with her view that the healing process essentially concerns the harmonisation of oneself with 'the Lord', often via the vivid experience of past lives. Many East Asian Buddhists, of course, believe that karma, alongside other factors, plays 'a profound role in the origin and course of a disease'.<sup>118</sup> Kennett attaches much greater significance to such causes, however, and brings her own idiosyncratic interpretation of karma to bear on the subject. Her magico-ritual interpretation of certain *mudrās*,<sup>119</sup> and her view that *mudrās* facilitate union with Cosmic Buddhahood, are also suggestive of Esoteric Buddhist or Shingon influences.<sup>120</sup> The resulting practice of harmonising *mudrās*, then, is in many ways a new invention, reconfiguring traditional elements and adding new features in a syncretic mix.

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<sup>117</sup> *TBOL*, p. 57.

<sup>118</sup> Lock, p. 225.

<sup>119</sup> For example, the Diamond Mudra and the Spiritual Defense Mudra are protection *mūdrās* to be used 'against influence by evil or disturbing external events' (*TBOL*, p. 264).

<sup>120</sup> For a discussion of the use of *mudrās* in Esoteric Buddhism see E. D. Saunders, *Mudrā: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960).

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE LOTUS BLOSSOM PERIOD, 1976-1983 (2)

#### 10. RESPONSES TO INNOVATIONS

##### 10.1. INTRODUCTION

The years following Kennett's religious experiences were the most turbulent and unstable in the historical development of the organisation. During this period, the wider monastic and lay community gradually became aware of the nature of her 'third *kenshō*' and the doctrinal and practical innovations stemming from it. This initially took the form of leakages and rumours resulting from the controversial disrobing and denunciation of Kennett by a number of her closest and most senior disciples. She also began to induct the wider community into her experiences and innovations herself, though, by publishing *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* and *The Book of Life* and by composing numerous journal articles.<sup>1</sup> Practitioners within the wider organisation responded to this information in a number of ways, ranging from wholesale acceptance and assimilation to outright rejection. In this chapter, I outline their responses and examine the decision-making processes through which they assessed the reliability and authenticity of Kennett's experiences and innovations. The work of Waterhouse on the concept of authority in British Buddhism will provide a useful framework for this.

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<sup>1</sup> 1977 to 1982 was the most prolific period of Kennett's life. In addition to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* and *The Book of Life*, she released her two-volume diary of training in Japan, *The Wild, White Goose*, and composed over forty journal articles.

## 10.2. AUTHORITY AND BRITISH BUDDHISM

Waterhouse argues that an appreciation of authority structures is fundamental to understanding the transplantation and adaptation of Buddhism in Britain. She identifies four main categories of authority sources recognised with differing focuses by British Buddhist groups: the authority of teachers as exemplary figures, the Buddha's word as represented in texts, lineage-tradition and personal experience. Changes and adaptations must be legitimated through recourse to the contrasting authorities that different Buddhist schools call upon to authenticate their religious practices. Thus whilst adaptations between schools are similar, due to their shared cultural influences, they are not identical because the traditional authority structures called upon differ.

The appeal to contrasting authorities to authenticate practice and legitimate adaptation can be observed both at the public or organisational level and also at the personal level:

British people who wish to practise Buddhism reach compromise positions on the traditional authority structures which are offered, including the authority of experience.<sup>2</sup>

This point is illustrated most clearly by the Bath *Karma Kagyu* group where, due to a dispute at the highest levels of the lineage, the authorities acknowledged by group members were challenged. Waterhouse found that practitioners responded to the challenge reflexively, negotiating their way through competing claims to authority and finding 'individual assessments about which authority claim should be primary'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> 'Who is the Karmapa? Western Buddhist Responses to a Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority', *DISKUS*, 3.2 (1995).



It is probable, she maintains, that members of all Buddhist groups reach different compromise positions on authority 'but without the challenge of splits and disputes these positions are not tested'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the variety of British Buddhism 'is much more than the variety of organizations and their leaders'.<sup>5</sup>

Waterhouse proposes Rawlinson's distinction between legitimacy and authenticity as another useful model for understanding 'the tensions which exist for practitioners when they accept the reliability of a particular Buddhist path'.<sup>6</sup> Whilst legitimate authority is *external* and stems from 'the formal procedures by which representatives of a tradition are appointed or recognised', authentic authority is *internal* and stems from 'the states of realisation that these representatives have attained and which justify their interpretations of tradition'.<sup>7</sup> Both the representatives of Buddhist schools, when presenting their teachings as reliable, and individual practitioners, when making decisions about the path, rely on a balance of legitimacy and authenticity. Whilst the legitimacy of tradition remains an important test of reliability, Waterhouse argues that western Buddhists, living within a post-traditional order characterised by individual authority and reflexivity, usually give precedence to authenticity, and she suggests that,

as Buddhism in Britain continues to develop, authenticity will increasingly feature as a test of reliability and [...] the understanding of legitimacy which is presented will accommodate that.

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<sup>4</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>6</sup> 'Who Says So? Authority and Representation in British Buddhism' (unpublished paper, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Rawlinson as quoted in *ibid.*

### 10.3. AUTHORITY AND THE ZMS

The successful transplantation and growth of the ZMS can be understood in terms of Waterhouse's work on authority. As we have seen, Kennett legitimated her teachings and adaptations during the early period by appealing firstly, to the authority of her transmission master *Kōhō* Chisan; secondly, to her legitimate position within the *Sōtō* Zen lineage-tradition; and thirdly, to her personal charismatic authority stemming from her direct experience of the truth. American and British practitioners supported the ZMS because, through recourse to a variety of authority sources including that of personal experience, they found Kennett and her adapted form of *Sōtō* Zen to be both attractive and reliable. Different practitioners would probably have attached primary significance to different authorities but this is difficult to detect because they were not tested or challenged in any significant way during this time.

The radical developments of the Lotus Blossom Period, however, disturbed this relative equilibrium. Kennett's 'third *kenshō*' put pressure upon the authority sources recognised by practitioners who now had to re-assess the reliability of the teachings and make important decisions of commitment and discipleship. With reference to a variety of authorities most disciples assimilated the innovations whilst a substantial minority rejected them. To defend her reputation and mitigate against destabilising forces, Kennett developed a number of action strategies, reasserting and reconfiguring the authority sources called upon during the early period whilst calling upon extra, previously unrecognised or latent, authorities. During this period, then, 'authority' was subjected to dispute and contention within the ZMS.

## 11. ASSIMILATION

### 11.1. ASSIMILATION BY KENNETT'S CLOSEST DISCIPLES

Kennett's closest monastic disciples at Shasta Abbey (mainly Americans) were witnesses of and participants in her visions and past-life experiences, their receptivity providing her with the sanction and space to have further experiences of a more complex and daring nature. Due to 'the strength and depth of her meditation', these followers 'began to have similar experiences' of their own, thereby discovering that 'there are many more planes of existence than just the human one'.<sup>8</sup> The re-living of atrocities committed and suffered within Nazi concentration camps appears to have been a particularly common past-life experience, although even more dramatic and significant episodes - including that of the life of Jesus Christ - were allegedly experienced by the abbey's monks. Furthermore, Kennett participated in her disciples' experiences in the same way that they had participated in her's. The fact that they were 'players' in each other's experiences, and the subsequent joint authorship of *The Book of Life*, suggests that her innovative new teachings were not only assimilated as they were being formulated, but were actually developed and articulated in close dialogue with a core of trusted followers.

### 11.2. ASSIMILATION BY THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The first signs of assimilation within the wider community can, predictably, be detected in articles composed by monks. The British monastic community was invited to train alongside Kennett at Shasta Abbey in 1977 and so enjoyed a closer proximity

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from a letter from a senior American disciple to a British trainee (dated March 9 1977).

to the source of the teachings. They were, furthermore, expected to play an important mediating role between her and the British laity. Articles by lay practitioners reflecting the new ideas came later, and their initially sporadic appearance suggests that the lay congregation assimilated the teachings in a more gradual and cautious way.

The earliest article of Kennett's which reflected her new teachings was a commentary on *Keizan's Kyōjūkaimon*, a short text on the Buddhist precepts, and this appeared in *The Journal of Throssel Hole Priory* in the spring of 1977. This article, which teaches the importance of being obedient and humble before 'the Lord of the House' and of cleansing oneself by finding 'the source of the karmic stream',<sup>9</sup> contrasts sharply with an earlier commentary she wrote on the same text.<sup>10</sup> From around this time, articles by British monks and lay practitioners reflecting this new manner of conceptualising Buddhahood and spiritual training also begin to appear. Earlier more traditional ways of describing ultimate reality such as 'Buddha-nature' or 'Buddha-heart', are now increasingly replaced by Kennett's quasi-theistic language of 'Lord of the House', 'Cosmic Buddha' and 'God'.<sup>11</sup> Articles teach that experiential confirmation of the existence of God can be received in meditation, and there are reports of visionary encounters with the Cosmic Buddha by both monastic and lay practitioners.<sup>12</sup> The twin ideas of having 'faith in the Lord' and the willingness to seek and be obedient to His will as it is revealed in meditation or prayer become popular

<sup>9</sup> *JTHP*, 5.1 (May 1977), p. 8 and 4.

<sup>10</sup> 'The *Kyōjūkaimon*', *Zen Mission Society Newsletter* (April, 1970).

<sup>11</sup> The first article by a British monk reflecting these ideas was Daishin Morgan's 'The Devil Can't', *JTHP*, 4.6 (April 1977), 5-7.

<sup>12</sup> British monk Myoho Harris, for example, describes a meditative vision in which the love of the Cosmic Buddha was revealed to her ('Zazen - The Place of No Resistance and No Requests', *JTHP*, 7/10-12 (1980), p. 14).

themes during this period, and one monk aptly characterises the religious path as one of 'seeking first the Kingdom of God'.<sup>13</sup>

Predictably, however, assimilation of these ideas was not always straightforward. One British monk training at Shasta Abbey was clearly challenged by the new teachings:

The most difficult and persistent question I have had to face so far since embarking on Zen training centres on the reality of God's existence. For many years, Buddhism appealed to me mainly because it [...] appeared to be quite rational, there was no God to acknowledge and worship, and no dogma based on fear and superstition, individual experience was sacrosanct, and even renowned Western thinkers like Schopenhauer lavished praise on Buddhism as a philosophical system [...] When I started to train in the Dharma I experienced something akin to a severe cultural shock when I was told that there was, most definitely, a Cosmic Buddha. This was a catastrophe. I had already dealt with God quite efficiently, thank you [...] Perhaps the Cosmic Buddha was not *really* God, but merely a useful symbol? This soothing thought lasted about a week in face of the teaching I was receiving, and eventually I had to concede that the terms 'Cosmic Buddha' and 'God' were indubitably synonymous [...] Still I could not believe in God or the Cosmic Buddha - although I had never doubted the sincerity and honesty of my Teacher (which confused me more). For the last two years, this problem has expressed itself in doubt, despair and at times, cruel cynicism - a slow and quite painful process was under way.<sup>14</sup>

He came to terms with Kennett's quasi-theistic Zen by focusing on the importance of cultivating faith and the willingness to believe in what he has not yet experienced for himself:

I realise now that the other difficulties I experience in training [...] are all born out of this one basic struggle - the seeming inability, but in fact *unwillingness*, to accept that the Cosmic Buddha IS [...] I had been secretly hoping that God would reveal Himself to me in a mystical and tangible manner, thereby making belief unnecessary. But Faith is not subject to our limited opinions or expectations.

<sup>13</sup> 'Training in the World', *JTHP*, 7/7-9 (1980), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Cosmic Buddha IS', *JTHP*, 6/11-12 (1979), pp. 6-7.

Indeed, those who do claim to have had confirmatory experiences of God emphasise that these depend entirely upon faith and should be understood as 'small gifts of grace'.<sup>15</sup>

Alongside these ideas, Kennett's new teachings on karmic cleansing and past lives also begin to appear. Problems encountered in training are now understood as loving teachings from the Cosmic Buddha which reveal layers of self to be cleansed or 'offered up' in the Lord's 'infinite fountain of compassion'.<sup>16</sup> Past life experiences are to be regarded in the same way and whilst there is a reluctance to describe specific experiences in detail, they are nevertheless alluded to as an important aspect of training:

As training deepens, one begins to see the more basic mistakes which are at the root of suffering. Some people around this time start to see karma from past lives which is having consequences in this present life. Memories of past lives arise for the same reason as karma in this life - in order that one may cleanse them and reunite with the Eternal, not to find out who one was or get fascinated by the subject.<sup>17</sup>

Discussion by monks of the practice of harmonising *mudrās* is, in contrast to the other new themes, infrequent. In fact, aside from adverts announcing the publication and availability of *The Book of Life*, only one article in the *Journal of Throssel Hole Priory* specifically outlines and promotes the use of healing techniques 'involving touch and meditation'.<sup>18</sup> Another article in the same edition is decidedly more cautious in its tone towards this practice:

<sup>15</sup> 'On the Point of Faith', *JTHP*, 7/5-6 (1980), p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Koshin Schomberg, 'The Importance of Acceptance in Buddhism', *JTHP*, 6/7-8 (1979), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Jimyo Krasner, 'Cutting the Roots of Karma', *JTHP*, 10.3 (1983), 24-25.

<sup>18</sup> Namely, American monk Isan Sacco's 'The Healing Arts in Zen', *JTHP*, 5.8 (1978), p. 6.

In recent years monks at Shasta Abbey have investigated aspects of various healing arts, both eastern and western [...] The essential point is that these things are an aspect of training, not a substitute for it [...] The monastery which [...] practices physical healing must not drift into becoming a health farm. Everything must come from training, from zazen, and must be done because it is good to do it at the time and not because it has become fascinating in its own right.<sup>19</sup>

The British laity also appeared to display a similar 'coolness' towards this practice, the use of *mudrās* being referred to only once.<sup>20</sup> The basic principles underlying the practice, however, seem to have been assimilated more easily. The characterisation of religious training as a process of harmonising body and mind, and the idea that physical illness has a spiritual basis, for example, are widely accepted even though the use of *mudrās* is not.

### 11.3. AUTHORITY SOURCES

Those who assimilated Kennett's new teachings and practices assessed, and became convinced of, their reliability by appealing to the four main authority sources identified earlier. The authorities of lineage-tradition and scripture, however, were invoked with less frequency than those of the teacher and personal experience suggesting that these trainees, like the Buddhists of Waterhouse's study, valued authenticity above legitimacy.

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<sup>19</sup> Homyo Brazier, 'Editorial: The *Kōan* of Heaven and Earth', *JTHP*, 5.8 (1978), p. 2. British monk Homyo Brazier was a resident trainee during Isan Sacco's stint as prior of Throssel Hole Priory. He quickly became dissatisfied with the teachings and practices Sacco had brought with him from the States, particularly the emphasis on harmonising *mudrās* and past-life experiences, and this ultimately resulted in Brazier leaving the priory. Having disrobed and severed his connections with Kennett's organization, Brazier later went on to found The Amida Trust, an organisation specialising in the interface between Zen and psychotherapy.

<sup>20</sup> L. Kay, 'On Deepening Lay Training', *JTHP*, 8.1 (1981), 17-19.

### **11.3.i. Faith in the Teacher and Personal Experience**

Disciples assimilated the new teachings primarily through recourse to firstly, the authority of the teacher and secondly, the personal authority of their own experience. A number of reasons are given to justify their continuing faith in Kennett. The quality of her teachings during the early period and her skilful adaptations for the West are invoked. The community at Throssel Hole Priory survived the turbulent period immediately following Kennett's religious experiences 'by hanging on to what we had learnt in the past and refusing to listen to hearsay'.<sup>21</sup> Appeal is also made to her personal qualities and experience and the model she offers as a living embodiment of the teachings. Following a visit to Shasta Abbey, a British lay trainee enthuses about how he has received 'an introduction to Buddhist doctrine based on deep experience, which was much richer than any academic exposition'.<sup>22</sup>

Faith was balanced with the authority of personal experience of the teachings, as can be seen in articles recording confirmatory experiences of the Cosmic Buddha or which simply place experience at the centre of training.<sup>23</sup> Appeal was also made to the experience of others within the ZMS. The British monks travelled to Shasta Abbey to train alongside those with more experience, whilst articles by the British laity emphasise the importance of taking refuge in the monastic *Sangha*:

This helps us to develop true humility and to remain grounded in actual experience.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication with a former monk, January 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Reflections on a Visit to Shasta Abbey', *JTHP*, 9.4 (1982), p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> 'all the reading and erudition, all the flowery talk, all the merit, were worth precisely nothing if real experience was not at the centre' (Ibid., p. 20).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 21.



### **11.3.ii. Lineage-Tradition and Scripture**

Occasionally students also called upon Kennett's status within the *Sōtō* Zen lineage-tradition and the authoritative texts of the school. Even when these legitimate forms of authority are invoked, however, the emphasis remains on the authenticity of personal experience. One monk appeals to her authority as a representative of the unbroken transmission from *Śākyamuni* Buddha, for example, but nevertheless asserts that the main criteria for assessing the teaching should be the experience of its exemplars and of oneself:

You can tell the genuine product by careful observation of those who practise a particular Way [...] When I first met my teacher, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, I knew right away that here was somebody with a genuine experience of the Truth [...] The Buddha Nature within me recognized and responded to the Buddha Nature which she so clearly manifested [...] Once you recognise a real teacher you must then follow their teaching in detail if you wish to find what they have found.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Choosing Your Way', *JTHP*, 10.1 (1983), pp. 6-7.

## 12. REJECTION

In *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* Kennett alludes to a number of followers who had rejected her `third *kenshō*` and renounced their discipleship.

### 12.1. CRISIS IN THE ZMS

Although there are no means of accurately quantifying the numbers of her dissenters and critics from this period, the fact that they organised themselves into support groups and independent centres indicates that we are dealing here with a significant minority. The first of these, a support group called `Sorting It Out`, was created in the late 1970s by a former American monk to help disaffected members of the ZMS and other religious groups make the transition back to ordinary life. It dealt with issues like tradition, personal authority and the master-disciple relationship and, according to its founder, over thirty ex-disciples of Kennett and over three hundred practitioners from other religious groups came to it for help.<sup>26</sup>

The crisis that occurred in Britain was, for a variety of reasons, even more disruptive than that in America. Although the American dissenters were numerically greater, the well-established Californian monastic and lay congregation was not severely depleted by their departure. Furthermore, the leadership of the American community, with Kennett at the helm supported by a senior group of dedicated monks, remained largely intact and `in touch` with the wider community. The British congregation, by contrast, was relatively rootless and small, and it was distant - literally *and* figuratively - from Kennett's leadership. It was thus ill-equipped to cope

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<sup>26</sup> I do not know when this group was disbanded, but I have been told that a number of the ex-monks from Shasta Abbey remain in contact with each other and continue to hold annual meetings.

with conflict and fragmentation on anything but a small scale. Reactions to her *kenshō* in Britain, however, were not small scale. A number of key figures behind the growth, development and leadership of the British ZMS renounced their discipleship at this time, creating a sense of confusion, uncertainty and crisis within the community.

In Britain, this period of turbulence began following the return of Daiji Strathern, late in 1976, from a three-month stay in America. Whilst in the throes of her *kenshō*, Kennett had summoned him to Shasta Abbey,

so that he might see for himself what took place and perhaps experience one himself since he had not, as yet, done so, and since the *kenshō* of one person tends to set in motion the *kenshō* of another.<sup>27</sup>

Having inducted him into her new ideas, she expected him to return to Britain and introduce them to others. Strathern, however, did not react to the things he witnessed and read about at Shasta Abbey in the way she had hoped. Rather than providing additional reinforcement to her experiences and innovations, he rejected their authenticity and legitimacy and renounced his discipleship. Since he was a popular figure under whose leadership the British community had grown during the early period, his decision to disrobe naturally aroused great curiosity, doubt and confusion. According to one former monk, Strathern's departure 'shocked the UK community to the foundations' and, since the primary loyalties were with him rather than with Kennett - whom many had never even seen or met - support for the priory 'melted away'.<sup>28</sup> In response, the priory encouraged trainees 'to recognize that they must not

<sup>27</sup> Taken from an open letter written by Kennett to the British congregation, dated September 18 1977.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, January 1997.

depend on the strength or personality of a priest`, and it called upon the remaining faithful for `a deeper spiritual commitment and heavier financial burden`.<sup>29</sup>

Strathern was not the only influential and high profile figure to renounce Kennett in Britain. The meditation group in Mousehole, originally so important to the successful transplantation of the ZMS, also withdrew its support, and there were further secessions from within the monastic community. Most importantly, the prior of the London Zen Priory disrobed and, taking the priory with him, disaffiliated from the ZMS. Renaming it as `The Dharma House Trust` he attempted to establish links, firstly with Taizan Maezumi *Rōshi*, and later with *Sōtō* temples in Japan. In 1978, the Trust moved to Penzance where it merged with the Mousehole Group. Kennett publicly denounced these developments, condemning the creation of the Dharma House Trust as a `take-over bid`.<sup>30</sup> According to its founders, the Trust was simply an alternative centre `for meditation with the emphasis on *Sōtō* Zen training`.<sup>31</sup> Disaffected British disciples did not flock to join the Trust which remained a small and isolated meditation group, focusing on *Sōtō* Zen but without affiliating with a specific teacher or lineage.<sup>32</sup>

## 12.2. OBJECTIONS

### 12.2.i. The Nature of Kennett's `Kensho`

The initial obstacle was the nature of Kennett's *kenshō*. Trainees clearly defined the *kenshō* experience in terms of the mystical `flash of insight` popularised

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<sup>29</sup> *JTHP*, 4.5 (1977), p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> `The Goose at Rest`, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> `The Dharma House Trust` (pamphlet dated 1977), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> The Trust was re-named as the `Whitecross Buddhist Meditation Centre` in 1992, and now embraces *Theravāda* Buddhism as well as Zen.

by Suzuki and others, including Kennett herself in her early publications. In light of this normative understanding, her `third *kenshō*` was deemed for a number of reasons, to be an inauthentic expression of Zen.

Firstly, the status and significance she attributed to her visual and sensory encounters was challenged. Many interpreted these as *makyō* - by-products of sustained meditation that should be dismissed rather than indulged - and they questioned the motives behind her attachment to them:

*Rōshi* would lie down there and they'd give her this massage and she'd start saying `I am now travelling so and so and so and so`. It's nothing to do with Buddhism. You are warned that in meditation you can have *makyō*, you can have all kinds of hallucinations, but you've got to go on beyond that, you've got to drop it. They're not real. But she was making it real. The reason being, in a sense, that it somehow built up her status. Here was this person who was having the world's greatest *kenshō* and was moving on into other realms.<sup>33</sup>

Others, unwilling to accept the spiritual pedigree of her experiences, brought a psychological interpretation to bear and argued that her visions were actually highly symbolic expressions of unresolved personality issues buried deep within her unconscious. From this perspective, by taking her unconscious material literally and `making it fit a saintly Buddhist model`, she did violence to her own aspirations towards personal wholeness and individuation.

Secondly, Kennett's creation of a graduated typology of *kenshōs* was challenged:

I got a letter from her in which she was saying that during this period [...] she had now had the fourth grade of *kenshō* and so on and mine was the second grade. There's no such thing as `grades` of *kenshō*, as such. Some, obviously,

<sup>33</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Kennett's, April 1995. Others have described Kennett's attachment to her visions as a form of `spiritual materialism`.

for all kinds of reasons, are most overwhelming and character changing [...] And you have others who don't quite experience the same because so much of it is based on what, psychologically, has happened to you [...] Now Kennett was having the biggest *kenshō* any westerner had had, in her words [...], and she gives this hierarchy.<sup>34</sup>

Others maintained that, in spite of the typology, her ideas about *kenshō* remained confusing and her use of this term to describe a variety of experiences – e.g. crying fits, emotional outbursts, spiritual breakthroughs and past-life experiences - was arbitrary and unclear.

### 12.2.ii. Past-Lives

Kennett's claim to have experienced past-lives, and the importance she attached to such experiences, posed another major stumbling block. Many criticised her for emphasising as essential an experience that, from a traditional perspective, is neither common nor particularly important to one's spiritual progress. Others acknowledged that past-life experiences could be useful - for example, in understanding and dealing with the deeper layers of self - but objected to the emphasis placed upon them. Recalling how the use of acupuncture for the cathartic experience of past-lives was introduced at Throssel Hole in 1977, a former British monk thus comments that,

It wasn't just presented as a small or subsidiary practice. Rather it was presented as 'this is it, what will revolutionise the practice' and presented as even more important than *zazen*.<sup>35</sup>

There was, more importantly, a widespread scepticism about the authenticity of the experiences that Kennett and her disciples claimed to be undergoing. The

<sup>34</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Kennett's, April 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication, January 1997.

manner in which they became 'players' in each other's past life dramas was challenged from a Buddhistic point of view,<sup>36</sup> and Kennett's belief that stray fragments of karma could linger in the atmosphere in a ghost-like manner was viewed as a lapse into the world of the occult. The use of oriental massage to facilitate past-life experiences made her vulnerable to the accusation that she was inducing these experiences artificially, and rumours circulated within the movement that techniques of auto-suggestion and regression were being employed. Former disciples from this period do not substantiate these rumours, but do maintain that the experiences were expressed within a highly charged atmosphere of intense collective reinforcement. One refers to Kennett as the 'over-consciousness of the group' and describes how the monks of Shasta Abbey 'tuned into' this and participated in a kind of 'collective dream'.<sup>37</sup> The former prior of Throssel Hole also describes how, through this powerful dynamic of reinforcement, increasingly elaborate past-life episodes were constructed in which the monks experienced themselves as important figures like *Bodhidharma*, St. John of the Cross and Jesus:

I went back [to Shasta Abbey] and things were rather different. There was more of a hothouse atmosphere than I remembered. It was overheated [...] Jiyu-Kennett had come across a practice which she believed led to the experience of previous incarnations [...] Maybe it was true. But it got more and more outlandish. Bodhidharma was reincarnated at Shasta Abbey and so was Jesus Christ as well. And this was taken as being literally true [...] If it had

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<sup>36</sup> Critics maintain that these past life dramas became a forum in which Kennett's emotional and psychological problems were expressed. In the drama of the monk who experienced the life and crucifixion of Jesus, for example, those whom she claimed had been Pontius Pilate, Judas Iscariot and Thomas in previous lives were those who, in the present, had expressed some doubt or lack of faith in her teachings. By contrast, the monks who were cast as Jesus' faithful disciples were those who, in the present, were her obedient and faithful followers.

<sup>37</sup> Taken from a letter sent to some British monks in England in early 1980 to help them in their process of disaffiliation from Kennett's organisation.

been said that this person *might* have been that - but that was not what was said. Bodhidharma. Jesus. There were very few pig-sty keepers!<sup>38</sup>

### 12.2.iii. Christian Forms and Theism

A third problematic area was Kennett's increasing reliance on Christian forms and, in particular, her use of quasi-theistic imagery and terminology. One former monk thus recalls that the doctrine,

became more theistic, more magical and more mysterious. I know that after I left I said to one or two people, 'If I'd wanted to be a Catholic I could have gone to a Catholic monastery'.<sup>39</sup>

As the new teachings filtered out into the wider community they also met resistance from lay trainees who questioned the synonymous usage of 'Cosmic Buddha' and 'God' and the Christian resonance behind references to the 'Lord'.

Not all of the disciples who broke their affiliation with Kennett during these testing times found such terminology problematic. Whilst rejecting other elements of her teachings, such as her emphasis on past lives, some were untroubled by her increasing use of personalised and theistic imagery. One former trainee defends her use of 'Cosmic Buddha' Buddhistically, equating it with traditional images of the Buddha *Vairocana*.<sup>40</sup> Another considers how many criticisms levelled against her were unfair and uninformed:

There is a perfectly good way of reading Zen in strongly theistic terms and Jiyu-Kennett isn't the only person to do that. Read the Phillip Kapleau stuff and you find references in that, funnily enough to people's *kenshō* experiences, and nobody complained or condemned him for that. Some

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<sup>38</sup> Interview, July 1996.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, July 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication, January 1997.



condemned him for recording the *kenshō* experiences and putting them in print, but they didn't complain about the nature of them, including references to God, using that type of language. And lots of other Japanese and western *Rōshis* have used concepts of God, and nobody gets upset. Jiyu-Kennett just seemed to strike a chord, trigger something that really alienated or frightened people.<sup>41</sup>

To understand why her theistic language provoked such strong reactions it is important to remember the wider, significantly Christianised, context within which it was being used. According to a former British monk, it was not the *fact* that Kennett used Christian forms but the 'particularly consistent' way in which she used them that many found unacceptable.<sup>42</sup>

#### 12.2.iv. Celibacy and Authoritarianism

Part of the attraction of the ZMS in the early period was its married priesthood, which allowed individuals to commit themselves to both a married and monastic lifestyle. The mandatory celibacy ruling of 1976, and the later edict banning marriage in the priesthood, were met with 'violently mixed feelings'.<sup>43</sup> They put pressure on marriages and ultimately led many individuals to opt out of the organisation, some with and some without their partners. According to one former follower, Kennett,

split up some married couples and made a fuss. She suddenly decided that they had to be 'true' monks now [...] I got a lot of letters from young couples who had matrimonial problems.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Interview, January 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication, January 1997.

<sup>43</sup> J. I. Ford, 'On the Arrangement of Shoes: A Memory of Jiyu Kennett *Rōshū*', *Still Point*, 22/3-4 (1997), p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Interview, April 1995.

Former disciples also recall how she became increasingly exclusive and authoritarian during this period. Alongside her emphasis on having faith in the Cosmic Buddha, she now stressed that faithful acceptance of the teacher's authority was 'the whole essence of the teaching'.<sup>45</sup>

It was the heart of the training to always bow and say 'Yes' - and those who said 'No' were harshly criticized and made to mend their ways quickly or leave quickly. Many left quickly.<sup>46</sup>

One former monk found 'the single-minded devotion' Kennett demanded 'exhausting';<sup>47</sup> another reflects that, despite having 'those first intimations which would become the foundation of my interior life under her guidance', he 'learned much about capricious leadership and the excesses of power that a *rōshi* can exercise'.<sup>48</sup>

In the early 1980s, the related concerns of celibacy and authoritarianism led another of Kennett's priories to sever its formal connections with Shasta Abbey.<sup>49</sup> The Dharma Rain Zen Centre in Oregon was subsequently established as an independent temple by a number of disaffected married priests and lay practitioners. It continues to be critical of Shasta Abbey for being 'insular and isolated from other lineages', for having 'an unhealthy internal environment conducive to abuses' and therefore being 'unsafe to recommend to seekers of the Way'.<sup>50</sup> The identity of the centre nevertheless remains deeply indebted to Kennett and her particular lineage-tradition.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview, April 1995.

<sup>46</sup> I. Sacco, 'Memories of Jiyu Kennett *Rōshi*', *Still Point*, 22/3-4 (1997), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. footnote 37.

<sup>48</sup> 'On the Arrangement of Shoes: A Memory of Jiyu Kennett *Rōshi*', p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Namely, the Oregon Zen Priory.

<sup>50</sup> Kyogen Carlson, 'In Memoriam, Houn Jiyu Kennett', *Still Point*, 22.1 (1997), p. 5.

### 12.3. AUTHORITY SOURCES

Those who rejected the validity of Kennett's teachings also appealed to the main authority sources identified by Waterhouse. The reflexivity of this process is also evident, individual practitioners attaching primary value to different authorities. It is noticeable, however, that dissenters and critics generally attached greater value to the legitimate authorities of lineage-tradition and scripture. Waterhouse states that,

Legitimacy in terms of Buddhist traditions and the consultation of the wise people who represent traditions must be important if a practitioner wants to regard herself as situated within Buddhism.<sup>51</sup>

Since these practitioners were, unlike Kennett's assimilating followers, seriously worried that her experiences and teachings had taken her beyond the Buddhist pale, their demand for legitimate authority and guidance had been heightened.

#### 12.3.i. Lineage-Tradition

A number of practitioners deemed Kennett's experiences and teachings to be invalid by appealing to the authority of the *Sōtō* Zen lineage-tradition. This took two main forms. Firstly, some consulted or aligned themselves with alternative teachers whose legitimacy within the *Sōtō* lineage was considered unquestioned. One British trainee initially sought guidance from Taizan Maezumi *Rōshi* before, shocked and disillusioned by his alcoholism, he travelled to Japan and found a temple 'where the practice is pure, traditional and wholly good'.<sup>52</sup>

The most common way in which traditional authority was invoked was through an appeal to Zen doctrine as popularly understood. Although Kennett's

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<sup>51</sup> 'Who Says So?'

<sup>52</sup> Personal communication, December 1994.

experiences were not unprecedented in *Sōtō Zen*, they could not function for her, as they did for *Keizan*, as a source of legitimation. Dreams and visions do not command the same status and authority in the modern West as they did in medieval Japan and, more importantly, her critics were unaware of the traditional visionary precedents and so argued that they 'didn't make sense according to traditional Zen'.<sup>53</sup> One former disciple, referring to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, states that,

Any rational person versed in Buddhism couldn't really accept it at all. And it was very sad. And it became very hard to justify or defend her when confronted with other Buddhists. You see, I reviewed her other books for *The Middle Way*, but no way could I touch that. What would they say if I tried to review something like this? They'd say, 'Oh yes, very interesting, a fine account of *makyō*'.<sup>54</sup>

Another is suspicious, however, about the project of assessing Kennett's teachings from a traditional doctrinal standpoint. As an academic in the discipline of Religious Studies he is - unlike most Buddhist practitioners - sensitive to the assumptions and biases underpinning modern representations of Zen in the West, and maintains that it is 'patently wrong' to,

measure her teaching by some sort of textual reference, some pure, ascetic, Protestant-type Zen that they particularly like - the Christmas Humphreys generation - and say that this is different and so it can't be valid.<sup>55</sup>

He emphasises that whilst she may not present them in 'the traditional text-book manner', the main elements of her teachings - different realms of existence, Buddha-fields, *Bodhisattvas*, etc - are an 'integral part of Buddhist belief, practice and

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. footnote 37.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, April 1995.

<sup>55</sup> Interview, January 1997.

experience as much for Zennists as for Tibetans'. He also believes that Kennett *deliberately* intended to challenge the prejudices, assumptions and 'hang ups' of westerners, particularly through her employment of Christian terms and symbols. From this perspective she stands firmly within the Zen tradition:

It's the method, not the content. She's using the method of shock tactics, and that's pretty fundamental in Zen. She's just using a particular version of it.

Her students' understanding of Zen doctrine had largely been obtained via her own early writings, however, and it was against this 'textual reference', not just popular representations by figures like D.T. Suzuki, that Kennett's new teachings were assessed. Her early teachings, described as 'straightforward *Sōtō*' and 'meaningful and good', are favourably compared with her later thought, described by one former trainee as 'madness'.<sup>56</sup> The original prior of Throssel Hole recalls how,

We sat and looked at walls, among other practices, at Throssel Hole Priory. At Shasta Abbey they sat and looked at walls, but they had this other practice which I did not believe was real in any sense of the word at all.<sup>57</sup>

### 12.3.ii. Scripture

Critics also invoked the legitimate authority of sacred texts. Waterhouse argues that the idea of scriptural orthodoxy is more important than the actual study of canonical material for most British Buddhists who are 'happy to hear the word of the Buddha indirectly, through the interpretation of others'.<sup>58</sup> This accurately describes the situation of Kennett's disciples, most of whom accessed the Zen scriptural

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<sup>56</sup> Personal communication, December 1994.

<sup>57</sup> Interview, July 1996.

<sup>58</sup> 'Who Says So?'

tradition via popular English-language translations and interpretations, including those of Kennett herself. A small number of British trainees did make a more direct appeal, though, to the authoritative texts of the Zen tradition:

Well, how do you equate Kennett's *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* with, say, the Diamond *Sūtra*, with its talk about the void and the non-concepts and all this sort of thing [...] We'd look over the various *sūtras* and say, 'Well, can we accept this? Is this really Buddhism? What is this about?'.<sup>59</sup>

### 12.3.iii. Personal Experience

Whilst lineage-tradition and scripture were important referents of legitimate authority, personal experience remained central to the decision making process. A letter written by a British trainee to advise an American meditation group experiencing collective doubts about Kennett's new teachings emphasises that,

In these matters you must try and let your own intuition be your guide [...] In Buddhism there is no authority, no ultimate authority, except the intuition of the individual. This is the power, or ability, to transcend the limitations of reasoning, and experience truth for ourselves at first hand [...] So there is no question of having to accept anything on blind faith in Buddhism.<sup>60</sup>

According to a former American disciple, in making his decision to renounce Kennett the perceived discrepancy between her teachings and traditional Zen doctrine was a secondary concern: 'the crucial thing' was that the practice 'didn't feel good'.<sup>61</sup> In response, he 'rooted myself in my own inner teacher much more than following any outside teachings'. Others also describe how they 'found the master inside myself

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Kennett's, April 1995.

<sup>60</sup> Dated February 1978.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. footnote 37.

again<sup>62</sup> and left behind 'tribal thinking' to 'follow my own inner voice'.<sup>63</sup> Their experiences generated various responses to *guru*-based forms of Buddhism, ranging from complete cynicism - because 'when you are with a teacher/guru you routinely deny all your own perceptions'<sup>64</sup> - to healthy scepticism:

it served as a strong reminder that everyone needs to do a reality check once in a while.<sup>65</sup>

As well as relying on the authority of their own personal experience of the teachings, critics also appealed to the experiences of others. Some argued that Kennett herself was 'beyond her own experience'<sup>66</sup> and that she needed to seek the guidance of a teacher, someone who could 'call her on her own shit'.<sup>67</sup> The Lotus Blossom Period was so turbulent in Britain because the experiences of high-profile dissenters were regarded as authoritative to the wider community. Former British and American trainees sought guidance from other spiritual teachers and groups and, as we have seen, formed their own support networks and alternative practice centres.

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<sup>62</sup> 'Memories of Jiyu Kennett *Rōshi*', p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> K. Larson, 'A Flashback', *Still Point*, 22/3-4 (1997), p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. footnote 37.

<sup>65</sup> D. M. Robinson, 'Memories of *Rōshi* Jiyu Kennett', *Still Point*, 22.3 (1997), p. 2. These criticisms of Kennett and life at Shasta Abbey bear many resemblances to Butterfield's critique of Chogyam Trungpa and Vajradhatu. He emphasises the importance of retaining 'fundamental doubt at every stage': 'In spiritual journeying, the shit detector is an absolutely essential piece of equipment. Without it, you could end up a number in the body count of a cult massacre' (p. 245).

<sup>66</sup> Taken from a letter written by a British disciple to Kennett in February 1977.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. footnote 37.

### 13. STRATEGIES

Dissension within the ZMS on both sides of the Atlantic necessitated a response from the movement's leadership. In this section I turn from the personal level of practice to consider the organisational strategies devised by Kennett and senior disciples to defend her reputation and provide assurances of the continuing authenticity and legitimacy of her teachings. A variety of action strategies and arguments were mobilised in an attempt to restore stability to an organisation rocked by conflict and dispute. Some strategies were aimed at the movement as a whole, whilst others were directed specifically at the British community.

#### 13.1. GENERAL STRATEGIES

There were five main strategies that operated on a general level.

##### 13.1.i. Direct Responses

Kennett responded directly to the criticisms levelled against her, privately through personal letters and publicly through ZMS publications and journals. Particularly salient in this respect is an appendix to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* in which she answers questions about her religious experiences (pp. 251-267). This exchange anticipates and responds to the major areas of concern and criticism that were being raised throughout the organisation, and its inclusion within the text should be interpreted as a situational reaction to the wider crisis.<sup>68</sup> This appendix was naturally omitted from the second edition of the text, published in 1993 when the

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<sup>68</sup> In this appendix Kennett fields questions about the visionary nature of her *kenshō*; the authenticity of the past-life experiences of monks at Shasta Abbey; the new rule of celibacy; and the concern that she has changed the teachings.



authenticity and validity of her `third *kenshō*` was no longer disputed within the organisation.

### **13.1.ii. Indirect Responses**

A second strategy was more indirect and entailed the tailoring of journal articles to respond to the challenge posed to Kennett's authority, experiences and teachings.<sup>69</sup> During this period articles that assert the importance of having faith in and commitment to the Zen master abound. They also clarify themes like the nature of the *kenshō* experience and the significance of visions; the importance of past-life experiences; the conceptualisation of ultimate truth in personalistic terms; and the use of Christian concepts to present Buddhist teachings, particularly the equation of `God` with `Cosmic Buddha`.

### **13.1.iii. Name Changes**

Kennett's religious movement underwent a number of name changes during the Lotus Blossom period, beginning in 1976 when the `Zen Mission Society` also became known as the `Reformed *Sōtō* Zen Church`.<sup>70</sup> An important reason for this name change was clearly the reformulation of her thought following her religious experiences, and her wish `to make a firm bond` between the temples and priories under her direction:

She had this thing about changing the name when slightly the direction of things began to change.<sup>71</sup>

The movement's name changed again in 1978 to the `Order of Buddhist

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<sup>69</sup> These will be discussed in more detail later when we examine the strategies of argument.

<sup>70</sup> One former monk states that `For several years there, I thought of it privately as "the holy order of the changing name"' (In Memoriam, Houn Jiyu Kennett *Rōshū*, p. 4).

<sup>71</sup> Interview with a former disciple of Kennett's, April 1995.

Contemplatives of the *Sōtō Zen Church* (OBC), a designation that was firmly in line with Kennett's intensified use of Christian imagery during this period.<sup>72</sup> This name change could also be interpreted strategically as an instance of 'social amnesia' or forgetfulness. Coney observes that it is,

characteristic of a number of NRMs that the name of either the leader or the group changes to suit the new mood of the times. Memories associated with the previous designation tend to recede with its disappearance from usage, and new memories are produced in their stead.<sup>73</sup>

The conflict and disunity experienced by Kennett's movement was at its most intense during the latter stages of, and immediately following, her *kenshō*. By changing its name she may have been attempting, consciously or unconsciously, to erase 'unwelcome memories' of discord, promoting a more stable narrative upon which its future growth could be predicated.

#### **13.1.iv. Institutional Innovation**

The crisis of this period was exacerbated by a lack of communication between the monastic centre and the wider laity, and assessments of the teachings were often made on an insufficient basis of rumours and leakages from disaffected monks. Kennett recognised this unsatisfactory situation and responded to it effectively by re-opening the channels of communication between herself and the laity. More significantly in 1979, she created a new category of lay trainee, the Lay Minister, who had the authority to assume minor roles of spiritual instruction and encouragement, and the responsibility to liaise closely with the abbey. The Lay Ministry was intended to provide an important bridge and point of contact between the monastic and lay communities, and as such it has been central to the stability, growth and development

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<sup>72</sup> I will hereafter refer to Kennett's movement as the OBC.

<sup>73</sup> 'Making History'.

of the OBC. The creation of this programme was therefore a timely innovation and it lends support to the crisis explanations of religious innovation discussed earlier.

### **13.1.v. Tempering Experiential Excesses**

A fifth strategy was Kennett's decision, in the face of criticism, to temper the excesses of mystical activity at Shasta Abbey. Particularly in response to the disrobing of Daiji Strathern, she began to discourage the more unusual kinds of past life experience. The controlling of religious experience by the OBC's leadership reached its fullest expression during the later period of routinisation and consolidation.

## **13.2. STRATEGIES FOR THE BRITISH COMMUNITY**

The critical and disparaging view of British Buddhists held by Kennett during the early period was reinforced during the Lotus Blossom Period. Although there were many American dissenters and critics, she seemed to regard her British dissenters as a more irksome and acute problem. In one letter, she maintains that her British disciples 'have caused me more grief, ill-health and trouble than all the rest of the world put together', adding that within the sixty-strong ZMS monastic community five out of the eight British monks 'have got into serious spiritual difficulties'.<sup>74</sup> Their perceived indiscipline, disloyalty and hostility was interpreted as a reflection of the spiritual immaturity of British Buddhism generally, confirming the wisdom of *Kōhō* Chisan who had instructed Kennett, following her initial rejection by the Buddhist Society, 'never to have any further communication with England'.<sup>75</sup> The differences in calibre between her British and American disciples were now variously explained in terms of

<sup>74</sup> Dated January 16 1977.

<sup>75</sup> Taken from an open letter from Kennett to the British congregation, dated September 18 1977.

national differences of history, social structure and temperament.<sup>76</sup> Such assessments, however, often seemed to compound the problem as the re-appearance of her anti-British rhetoric was widely bemoaned. One former trainee thus insisted that 'this great matter is between individuals and not between something called "British" or "Americans"'.<sup>77</sup>

Due to her belief that British trainees had particular difficulties in assimilating the teachings and somehow posed a unique challenge to her authority, a number of strategies were devised specifically for them.

### **13.2.i. Withdrawal**

An early approach was to distance herself from the British congregation or, in the words of one of her assistants, 'wash her hands completely of England until there is some demonstration of a willingness to trust her'.<sup>78</sup> She was initially unwilling to send any of her senior American monks over to England to take charge of Throssel Hole Priory and also considered restricting the distribution of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* to her American disciples.

### **13.2.ii. Communication**

The decision to withdraw her support and involvement was not really implemented beyond an attitude of 'coolness' towards British affairs, and it seems to have functioned more as a warning than as a policy of action. In reality, there was throughout this period, a steady stream of letters passing between Shasta Abbey and British trainees through which an attempt was made to discuss and resolve areas of

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<sup>76</sup> The authoritarian and exclusive nature of British society, for example, is contrasted with the open pluralism of America, whilst Kennett's practical and faithful American disciples are favourably compared with their intellectually and critically oriented British counterparts.

<sup>77</sup> Taken from a letter dated 9 April 1977.

<sup>78</sup> Taken from a letter dated April 2 1977.

dispute and contention. Kennett even addressed the British congregation as a whole via letters distributed in 1977.<sup>79</sup> The first of these reassured her disciples that she was teaching nothing ‘that is not a part of genuine Zen practice’, and encouraged them to ‘behave like spiritual adults’ by redoubling their efforts in meditation and ignoring damaging rumours. In the second, she blames the rejection of her *kenshō* on the ‘authoritarian’ and ‘witch-hunting’ attitude of British Buddhism. This letter ends by giving the British community an ultimatum:

The true teaching has been twice offered to England and it would seem to have been turned down, so I ask you, the congregation members, to decide - what do you want to happen at Throssel Hole Priory? Do you wish me to send over a qualified priest and teacher from America and, if I do, will you rally around him and not persecute him nor allow others to do so? Will you put your money where your mouth is?

### **13.2.iii. Nurturance**

A third strategy was that of nurturing the British contingent through this turbulent phase. Kennett blamed the disaffection of her senior British monks on their own indiscipline and spiritual immaturity and decided that ‘the only way of getting some real monks for the United Kingdom’<sup>80</sup> was to transfer the remaining faithful to Shasta Abbey to train under her direct supervision alongside the American monastic elite:

*Rōshi* has been able to establish a community of monks who are sufficiently mature in their training to offer genuine assistance to the British community. After a period of training at Shasta Abbey the monks will be able to return

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<sup>79</sup> The first letter appeared in *JTHP*, 4.6 (April 1977) and the second, longer letter was sent out on September 18 1977.

<sup>80</sup> Taken from a letter written by Jisho Perry, one of Kennett’s American assistants, and dated April 2 1977.

with the spiritual background necessary to make a mature monastic community which will be able to flourish and grow in Britain.<sup>81</sup>

A small number of lay trainees were also invited to participate in the Lay Ministry programme to provide a sound basis for its introduction in Britain.

The British laity responded positively to the call for a concrete sign of trust and commitment. Consequently, in place of the absent British monks, she commissioned a rotating system of senior American monks as priors of Throssel Hole and these nurtured the British laity by maintaining the journal and leading retreats. Their leadership and guidance had a stabilising effect on the community, facilitated the assimilation of the new teachings and encouraged growth. Kennett also responded to the show of British support by reestablishing a closer personal bond with her flock:

Jiyu-Kennett has promised that she will write a letter for each issue of the Throssel Hole Priory Journal from now on as well as taking a much more active part in what happens in Britain.<sup>82</sup>

#### **13.2.iv. Acculturation**

Once the initial crisis had subsided and a state of relative equilibrium had been restored, a fourth strategy designed to ensure the continuing stability of the British laity can be discerned. This involved the inclusion, within the journal, of articles and letters reflecting the successful assimilation of Kennett's new teachings by British trainees. During this period, then, the journal served two important purposes. As well as providing a forum for practitioners to share their understanding of the teachings as applied within the context of their lives, it also functioned as a mirror in which the

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<sup>81</sup> *JTHP*, 5.1 (May 1977), p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> *JTHP*, 5.6 (February-March 1978), p. 11.

assimilation of the teachings by individual practitioners was reflected back to the community. This facilitated the process of acculturation by promoting what could be described as a culture of acceptance. The inclusion of regular bulletins providing news of the British monks deepening their training at Shasta Abbey, functioned in a similar way.

## 14. ARGUMENTS

Underpinning the strategies of action, a wide variety of arguments were articulated to defend the authenticity of Kennett's experiences and continuing reliability of her teachings. Waterhouse's thesis on authority structures again provides a useful framework for analysing these. A particularly noteworthy feature of Kennett's reaction to the conflict and dissension of this period was her increased dependence upon the legitimate authorities of lineage-tradition and scripture. This was largely a reaction to the claims of her critics that what she was teaching could no longer be legitimately regarded as 'Buddhism'. There was also a marked increase, compared to the early period, in the appearance of teachings stressing the role of 'faith' in spiritual practice. An appeal to the authority of personal experience, however, remained at the forefront of her presentation and was the bulwark of her defence.

### 14.1. THE PRIMACY OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Kennett appeals to the personal experience of her followers by encouraging them to 'practice the form of Zen meditation suggested herein wholeheartedly and then see if the results are good; that is really the only way that you can know'.<sup>83</sup> The recommendations of the *Kālāma Sutta* regarding personal authority are also cited.<sup>84</sup> She nevertheless asked her British students to rely upon, or have faith in, the experiences of her American disciples until they could experience for themselves how her teaching 'makes Zen warm and alive'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *HGLB*, p. xiii.

<sup>84</sup> 'Announcement', *JSA* (May-June 1981), p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> Taken from a letter sent by Kennett to a British trainee, dated January 16 1977.



Appeal to her disciples' experience was secondary, though, to her emphasis on the authentic authority of her own personal experience of the truth. Responding to the queries of a British trainee, an American monk states that,

*Rōshi's* teaching is not based on the experiences of Buddha or *Dōgen* or *Kōhō Zenji* – it is firmly rooted in her own understanding and experience. It has to be [...] *Rōshi* had never spoken of this [the remembrance of past lives] before because she had up until this present *kenshō* never experienced it and she only speaks from what she herself personally knows to be true.<sup>86</sup>

Kennett claims that, through experience, she knows the reality and love of the Cosmic Buddha. Any Zen master who undergoes this profound experience must, she continues, make it the basis of all their subsequent teaching 'no matter how many people yell that He does not exist and quote their own master's reflective teaching to prove He does not exist'. She thus states that 'as far as I am concerned from here on it is full speed ahead and damn the torpedoes', parrying the criticisms of dissenters through an appeal to their own *lack* of confirmatory experience.<sup>87</sup>

With respect to the perceived clash between her experiences and Buddhist doctrine, Kennett adopts two distinct positions. The first argues that since doctrine is based on the experiences of meditation masters, it is necessarily fluid and changeable.<sup>88</sup> This argument, when taken to its extreme, renders all external formulations superfluous and asserts a form of perennial philosophy:

When the moment of *kenshō* comes there is no doctrine, no theory, no practice, no thing that is debatable or that can be argued about. Thus the

<sup>86</sup> Taken from a letter dated March 9 1977.

<sup>87</sup> 'On the Zen Teaching of So-called "Emptiness"', *JTHP*, 5.6 (1978), p. 11.

<sup>88</sup> 'True Zen Masters are not satisfied to sit back and live off their past training but are constantly going deeper into it. Their explanations will change and expand as their own training deepens. Don't expect the teaching to be something static' (Daishin Morgan, 'A Common Misconception', *JTHP*, 5.6 (1978), p. 6).

Christian and the Buddhist and the Muslim and the Jew, once they know the Ultimate, are beyond such things as theologies, doctrinal disputes and `isms`, and anyone who holds onto such things knows nothing whatsoever of True Religion [...] It is interesting that the Buddhist goes up one side of Mount Sumeru and discovers that the men or women he meets on top came up one side of Mount Carmel or one side of Mount Sion.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to this radical downgrading of external authorities, the second position ascribes positive value to the authorities of tradition and scripture and maintains that Kennett's experiences have not *changed* but merely *confirmed* the traditional doctrines/practices of *Sōtō Zen*.<sup>90</sup>

## 14.2. FAITH IN THE TEACHER

During the early period ZMS teachings focused mainly on the `internal` aspect of faith, that is faith in one's inherent enlightenment. This was given a different emphasis with the appearance of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* that encouraged students to have faith in `the Lord`. The rejection of this text by a number of disciples prompted a further shift in Kennett's thought and, although her rhetoric of not surrendering the will to the master continues, she now began to prioritise the `external` aspect of having faith in the teacher.

A spate of articles dealing with this theme appeared during this unstable period. The first, an article entitled `Blessed Are They That Have Not Seen, Yet Have Believed`,<sup>91</sup> stresses the importance of having `faith in both the teaching and the Teacher especially when they don't conform to our ideas and opinions`. Faith in Kennett should be predicated, it argues, on the authentic authority of her personal

<sup>89</sup> `A Note from *Rōshi Kennett*`, *JTHP*, 5.6 (1978), p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> This will be dealt with later.

<sup>91</sup> Jisho Perry, *JTHP*, 5.4 (1977), 3-8.

experience and the legitimate authority derived from her background within the *Sōtō* Zen lineage-tradition. It criticises those who either 'ran away' or 'asked for proof' and praises those who trusted implicitly in her 'third *kenshō*' :

For those [...] there is no need for further words because that faith is its own reward. Faith is the teaching.

Later articles emphasise that faith in the master, as the representative of the Lord, must replace doubt if the teachings are to be received on their deepest levels,<sup>92</sup> and encourage trainees to follow the master exclusively 'if you wish to find what they have found'.<sup>93</sup> Within the context of training, faith entails 'putting difficult teachings on the back burner'<sup>94</sup> instead of doubting or rejecting them, or accepting the teachings as 'working hypotheses'<sup>95</sup> until they are confirmed through personal experience. Personal experience of the truth of the teachings will, in turn, lead to a deepening of faith. Although these teachings were largely a situational response to a challenge to Kennett's authority, the model presented here reflects traditional Buddhist beliefs about faith (*saddhā*).<sup>96</sup>

### 14.3. LINEAGE-TRADITION

The appeal to legitimate forms of authority became a significant aspect of Kennett's presentation during this period, as she attempted to stabilise an organisation

<sup>92</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Turning Doubt into Faith', *JTHP*, 5.5 (1978), 8-10.

<sup>93</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Choosing Your Way', *JTHP*, 10.1 (1983), p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> Kyogen Carlson, 'On the Point of Faith', *JTHP*, 7/5-6 (1980), p. 13.

<sup>95</sup> 'Taking Refuge in the Sangha', *JTHP*, 6/4-6 (1979), p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> See Harvey, p. 31.

which had seen her legitimacy as a Buddhist teacher challenged and disputed. Her invocation of the authority of the lineage-tradition took a number of forms.

### **14.3.i. Traditional Doctrine and Practice**

Firstly, she denied that her experiences and teachings deviated from or changed the traditional beliefs and practices of *Sōtō Zen* in any way claiming, to the contrary, that they 'proved Buddhist doctrine'<sup>97</sup> and were entirely in-keeping with tradition. Defending the legitimacy of her visions, she argues that 'historically some Zen masters have reported experiences such as this, others have not',<sup>98</sup> whilst experiences of past-lives are 'spoken of by *Dōgen* as an integral part of deep meditation'<sup>99</sup> and 'are very common in Zen temples in the east'.<sup>100</sup> In a letter to the British congregation, she makes the rather astonishing claim that,

The experiences of hearing the voice of the Cosmic Buddha and seeing one's past lives, as well as the temptations of Mara, are part of the history not only of Shakyamuni Buddha's own enlightenment experiences [...] but also of the *kenshō* experience, in varying degrees, of every true Zen Master that there has ever been.<sup>101</sup>

Various Buddhistic defences of Kennett's personified expressions of ultimate truth, referring to the traditional precedents of *Vairocana* Buddha and a host of *Bodhisattvas*, are also presented.<sup>102</sup> One article, however, refers to D.T. Suzuki and Beatrice Lane as examples of, 'Zen masters who personify the Dharma by lovingly

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<sup>97</sup> *HGLB*, p. 267.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>99</sup> Taken from a letter by one of Kennett's assistants and dated March 9 1977.

<sup>100</sup> 'More Correspondence with a Christian Monk', p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Letter dated 18 September 1977.

<sup>102</sup> As, for example, in the editorial of *JTHP*, 10.2 (1983), 2-4. This states that 'To personify the Dharma by giving it a name is not to postulate a personal deity. The *Dharmakāya* is not a being yet is not not a being; it is beyond all duality'.

referring to God'.<sup>103</sup> Some of the sources relied upon as representative of traditional Zen, then, were somewhat less 'traditional' than others.

The perennial philosophy advanced by Kennett also enables her to draw on resources from outside the Zen tradition to provide extra legitimation for her experiences and teachings. Her visions are compared with similar experiences recorded in the hagiography of the Thai *Theravāda* meditation master Phra Acharn Mun,<sup>104</sup> and parallels to her *kenshō* are perceived in a variety of traditions:

All religions, including Christianity and Judaism, speak of these visions and all of them, including Buddhism, divide them into two sorts [...] 'intellectual visions' and 'imaginative visions'.<sup>105</sup>

#### **14.3.ii. An Esoteric Transmission**

Kennett's experiences and teachings are also legitimated through recourse to the authority of her position within the *Sōtō* Zen lineage, derived from her relationship with *Kōhō Keidō* Chisan. The importance of this relationship is reinforced during this period by the inclusion of articles by, and photographs of, *Kōhō* Chisan within OBC journals and publications.<sup>106</sup> In particular, Kennett claims that she has received the teachings on the nature and grades of *kenshō* via an esoteric oral transmission within the *Sōtō* school which, because of governmental authoritarianism, has of necessity treated them with caution and secrecy 'even to the extent of denying their validity'.<sup>107</sup> This claim provided a convenient response to her critics since it was

<sup>103</sup> Kyogen Carlson, 'Birushanofu, the Cosmic Buddha of Zen', *JTHP*, 7/3-4 (1980), p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> Kinzan Learman, 'A Talk Given on Some Aspects of Segaki', *JTHP*, 8.4 (1981), 11-14.

<sup>105</sup> 'The Two Forms of Visions', p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> For example, the new edition of *Selling Water*, entitled *Zen is Eternal Life* (1976), included photos of Kennett and *Kōhō* Chisan at *Sōjōji*.

<sup>107</sup> This claim is made in Kennett's letter to the British congregation, dated September 18 1977.

argued that this secret transmission `has given rise to the situation where students can criticize teachers for not being “traditional” because the student does not know what the real teaching is`.<sup>108</sup> This process, whereby `the *adoption* of something different and new is presented as `a *recovery* of something prior but abandoned` or latent, is a common feature of prophethood referred to by Waldman and Baum as `innovation through renovation`.<sup>109</sup>

### **14.3.iii. A Pure Lineage**

Great emphasis is also given to the fact that her particular line of descent within *Sōtō* includes a number of prominent puritanical reformers such as *Manzan Sohaku* (1636-1715). *Kōhō* Chisan is also cast as a purist who strove to combat laxity and degeneracy within the modern *Sōtō* sect. This pure/degenerate polarity is most fully explored in her two-volume record of training in Japan *The Wild, White Goose*.<sup>110</sup> By aligning herself with a purist or traditionalist strand of *Sōtō* Zen, Kennett invoked a particularly potent form of lineal authority to legitimate her teachings.

The appeal to a pure lineage was particularly important for legitimating the reforms Kennett had implemented within the monastic order. The new rulings regarding celibacy and marriage were justified with the claim that she was `purifying` the practice, re-establishing a pristine model and creating the optimum conditions for successful spirituality:

My own master [...] unlike most of the Japanese priesthood, was himself unmarried, and I understood that this was true of his entire line. He was not happy about priests being married, although marriage [...] had crept into the

<sup>108</sup> `Blessed Are They That Have Not Seen, Yet Have Believed`, p. 8.

<sup>109</sup> `Innovation and Renovation`, p. 262.

<sup>110</sup> This will be discussed in more detail later.

system in the late 1800s, and has done much, in my own opinion, to seriously damage the strict training of the present *Sōtō* school in Japan.<sup>111</sup>

#### **14.3.iv. Links with the Japanese Soto Sect**

During the early period of the ZMS's development, Kennett's historical background within the Japanese *Sōtō* sect naturally provided an important referent of legitimation. In light of the critical stance adopted towards mainstream *Sōtō* during the Lotus Blossom Period period, we may have expected Kennett to distance herself from the Japanese sect, but this was not the case. By contrast, links and associations were actively maintained, sought after and publicised. The appeal to an institutional form of traditional authority, in fact, intensified during this period as she attempted to reassert her credibility as a teacher of Zen by invoking the official arbiters of *Sōtō* orthodoxy and legitimacy.

Kennett invoked the authority of Japanese *Sōtō* initially by claiming that *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* had received an 'imprimatur' from the chief abbot of *Sōjōji*.<sup>112</sup> Visits by Japanese representatives of the *Sōtō* sect to Shasta Abbey were subsequently presented as an endorsement of her status as a teacher and occasions of spiritual bonding. An article from 'the official magazine of Eihei-ji' which comments favourably upon the abbey and recognises Kennett as 'one of the three *Sōtō* Zen *Rōshis* of the second or higher type in this country', was reprinted fully in OBC

<sup>111</sup> 'History, Development and Practice of *Sōtō* Zen', in *Sōtō Zen: An Introduction* (Throssel Hole Priory, 1983), p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> This is first stated in Kennett's letter to the British congregation, dated September 18 1977, and then in her article 'The Goose at Rest: 1969-1978', p. 20. Whilst no formal, written endorsement was received from Japan, Kennett claims that the authorities at *Sōjōji* were satisfied with the content of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*.

journals.<sup>113</sup> It was also emphasised that, in spite of OBC adaptations regarding priestly titles, Kennett `retains her certification as a *Rōshi* from her master [...] as recognised by the Head Office of the *Sōtō* Sect in Japan`.<sup>114</sup> The emphasis during this period, then, was very much upon unity and connection rather than difference and separation:

Throssel Hole Priory is a daughter monastery of Shasta Abbey, Mt. Shasta, California, which is a daughter monastery of Dai Hon Zan *Sōjōji*, Yokohama, and, although we are politically autonomous, both are part of the *Sōtō* Zen Church of Japan.<sup>115</sup>

#### **14.3.v. Legitimate Structures within the OBC**

Finally, in response to the challenge of her British dissenters, Kennett appealed to the authority of legitimate structures within the OBC. Her main critics in Britain were well-respected, high profile monks with leadership roles at both Throssel Hole and the London Zen Priors. Since the loyalties of many were with these influential figures rather than with Kennett (who was conspicuously distant and who many had never even seen or met) her response was to publicly challenge the basis of their authority. Firstly she undermined their *authentic* authority, claiming they were lax and indisciplined trainees with little or no understanding and experience of true Zen. Secondly, she challenged their *legitimate* authority, claiming that since they did not fulfil the formal requirements of an OBC priest or teacher they acted only as legal proxies for her with no authority in their own right. During this period, *The Journal of*

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<sup>113</sup> This article, entitled `Report on the Practice of Buddhism in America`, appeared in *JTHP* (August-October 1978), 10-18. It was `translated from the November 1977 issue of *Sanshō*, the official magazine of Eihei-ji temple in Japan`.

<sup>114</sup> `Announcement`, *JTHP*, 10.1 (1983), p. 4. According to Shasta Abbey sources `Rev. Master Jiyu remained a priest of the *Sōtō* Zen Church of Japan up to her death and paid the dues needed to maintain this` (Personal communication, September 1999).

<sup>115</sup> `Disclaimer`, *JTHP*, 6/1-3 (1979), p. 15.



*Throssel Hole Priory* carried 'Important Public Announcements'<sup>116</sup> and 'Disclaimers'<sup>117</sup> that declared as nil the legitimate credentials of these figures, whilst articles appeared outlining in detail the various priestly ranks recognised within the OBC.<sup>118</sup> The regular progress reports of the British monks at Shasta Abbey, steadily advancing through the various stages of priestly training in order to become 'a fully trained Sangha',<sup>119</sup> asserted the same message about the importance of legitimate authority.

#### 14.4. SCRIPTURE

The authority of scripture also became an important referent during this period. One of her assistants states that Kennett 'has read very few Buddhist scriptures or texts' but, in response to 'those who must have scriptural verification out of the mouth of the Buddha', asked her senior disciples 'to search in the *sūtras* to see if others had written of similar experiences'.<sup>120</sup> The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* is cited as one example of many scriptural accounts that describe 'similar and in many cases identical experiences to *Rōshī*'s, including the various sights such as lotuses, towers, etc'.<sup>121</sup> This assistant also claims that 'nearly every Buddhist *sūtra* I have ever read, and most of the Zen texts, speak clearly of past lives [and] the benefit gained from remembering them'. Journal articles similarly point to scriptural passages that

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<sup>116</sup> *JTHP*, 5.4 (1977), 9-12.

<sup>117</sup> *JTHP* (November-December 1978), p. 20.

<sup>118</sup> Daizui MacPhillamy, 'A Note on Transmission and Priestly Rank', *JTHP* (July 1978), 9-14.

<sup>119</sup> 'Important Public Announcement', *JTHP*, 5.4 (1978), p. 11.

<sup>120</sup> Taken from a letter dated March 9 1977.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, the central text of the Kegon school, is indeed 'primarily an account of fabulous visions backed by an ancient legacy of visions going back to *Śākyamuni* himself' (Tanabe, p. 11).

personalise and personify the Dharma; one article, again quoting the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, states that,

It is clear from this passage [...] that Birushanofu is much more than an abstract impersonal law. In this He embodies everything that God means to many Christians.<sup>122</sup>

Kennett herself appealed extensively to the *Shōbōgenzō*, the prime scriptural authority of *Sōtō* Zen, to legitimate her new teachings. In a series of commentarial articles she presents her ideas on karmic cleansing, past-life experiences and union with the Cosmic Buddha as integral aspects of *Dōgen's* encyclopaedic work.<sup>123</sup> Her commentary on the chapter entitled 'Hossho' is revealing of how this project required a substantial degree of contrivance and creativity of interpretation.<sup>124</sup> Whilst this chapter mentions 'the three types of knowledge',<sup>125</sup> these are in no way central to its main discussion of 'the real nature of phenomena', that is man's inherent enlightenment. Kennett introduces the chapter, however, as 'the only one in which *Dōgen* speaks clearly of the importance and, in fact, the necessity of having insight into one's past lives', and she uses it to criticise the 'many writers on Zen, notably in England, who have gotten angry when it was suggested that one *needs* to study past lives'.<sup>126</sup> The following extract of her commentary reveals how she superimposes her

<sup>122</sup> 'Birushanofu, the Cosmic Buddha of Zen', p. 6.

<sup>123</sup> Seven such articles, each focusing on a different chapter from the *Shōbōgenzō*, appeared in *The Journal of Shasta Abbey* between 1980 and 1982. The English translation used was the two-volume work of Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens, *A Complete English Translation of Dōgen Zenji's Shōbōgenzō (The Eye and Treasury of the True Law)* (Tokyo, Japan: Nakayama Shobo, 1977).

<sup>124</sup> This chapter can be found in Nishiyama and Stevens, II, pp. 63-66. Kennett's commentary to it, entitled 'Dharmata, the Real Nature of Phenomena' appeared in *JSA* (January-February 1981), 4-9.

<sup>125</sup> These are described in a footnote to the translation as the 'remembrance of former births, insight into the future destiny of beings and recognition of the origin of misery and the way to its removal' (Nishiyama and Stevens, II, p. 63).

<sup>126</sup> 'Dharmata, the Real Nature of Phenomena', p. 5.

own ideas onto the primary sources [*Dōgen* is quoted here in bold type and Kennett's ensuing commentary is in parentheses]:

**We learn the innate knowledge by meeting with that innate knowledge** [i.e., by meeting with and feeling, knowing, seeing, hearing, smelling our past lives [...]] These are but the ghosts of the past which have controlled us and will continue to control us if we do not find the source of the misery - that which got this particular karmic stream going]. **We correctly transmit wisdom that is not obtained from a teacher and the natural wisdom that is ours by meeting wisdom and natural wisdom.** [For what is contained in the past is the storehouse of our wisdom, the case histories which show us the pathway [...]] In making our rules of conduct for the future - by not going in the opposite direction of what our past lives teach - we find the cause of our misery [...]] That which caused us to leave our original true nature [...] was so tiny in the beginning. I have sometimes described it as a 'very slightly saddened love'.<sup>127</sup>

Although Kennett makes extensive appeal to Buddhist scripture as a legitimate form of authority, she retains the primacy of experience claiming that the scriptures are 'direct accounts of what happened to real people like us'.<sup>128</sup> The view that scriptures are authoritative - Kennett maintains they should be regarded as 'literally true'<sup>129</sup> - because they are 'outpourings of those who have seen'<sup>130</sup> sanctioned her to adapt the teachings and legitimated the inclusion, in the eyes of her disciples, of her own texts under the rubric of 'Buddhist scripture':

Today, in our lifetime, and in English, Scripture is being written by our Master for the benefit of all beings.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>128</sup> *HGLB*, p. 266.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Homyo Brazier, 'Editorial: Contemplative Life', *JTHP*, 5.7 (1978), p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> 'Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures', *JTHP*, 7/5-6 (1980), p. 9.

### 14.5. OPPOSITION AND AUTHORITY

Finally, Kennett responded to conflict and instability by drawing meaning and strength from trouble and opposition. According to Waldman and Baum, the overcoming of disjunctions provides 'a major source of power' for prophets:

Often the very existence of opposition, resistance, rejection or hostility even comes to be seen as the ultimate proof of legitimacy. The saying, 'A prophet is never welcomed in his own country' is one popular way of turning a necessity into a virtue.<sup>132</sup>

Kennett certainly regarded opposition, rejection and hostility as a sign and confirmation of the legitimacy of her activities and teachings. During the early period, her decision to settle in America was portrayed as the result of an ideological 'martyrdom'; giving up her national identity was 'the price that I must pay' for 'revolting against the insincerity of British Buddhists'.<sup>133</sup> An adapted form of the saying quoted above was also invoked, Kennett stating that 'A prophet is not without honour except in his own town and among his own people':<sup>134</sup>

During my years in Japan I used to dream on occasion of going back to England, of being with my own people again. I went back to England and I found out who my own people were; and they were not in England [...] the place where there has been room for me has been in America.<sup>135</sup>

She also 'turned necessity into a virtue' during the difficult Lotus Blossom period. An article outlining the early development of the ZMS, for example, reflects upon its recent turbulence positively as a period of growth and maturation. This point is

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<sup>132</sup> 'Innovation and Renovation', p. 246.

<sup>133</sup> 'The Cost of Reality', p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> Taken from a letter to a British practitioner, dated June 1974.

<sup>135</sup> 'The Cost of Reality', p. 10.

illustrated with a drawing of a meditating monk surrounded by worldly opponents and distractions:

Please do not think that I consider myself the central figure therein but rather see the `monk` as the temples of Shasta and Throssel, assailed by evil on all sides and continuing to `just sit` no matter what may come. So long as one trainee sits with a pure heart the `temple` will stand firm and strong. Whenever anyone does anything successfully there are some who want to damage it [...] Had it not been for the seeming disasters of those early days we would not now know how to run this Church successfully [...] If everything is always `going right` with a person true spiritual growth is impossible.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> `The Goose at Rest: 1969-1978`, pp. 21-24.

## 15. SUMMARY

The foregoing discussion of the responses Kennett's visionary experiences elicited and the various strategies she devised in reply, reveals much about the internal dynamics of religious movements. Stark's comments concerning the influence of follower-reinforcement and rejection on the innovative experiences of religious founders are strongly born out by the data. Kennett experienced the visions recorded in *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, and articulated the doctrinal and practical innovations stemming from them, in consultation with her closest disciples who provided her with the reinforcement and reification needed to continue. By contrast, the rejection of her by another section of the community prompted her to curtail the excesses of experience/innovation and respond reflexively to the concerns and demands of her disciples. The action strategies and arguments she employed thus reveal how the institutional and ideological development of the OBC was a dialogical process involving both the leadership and wider community in equal measure. This chapter also confirms the view that an understanding of authority structures is essential to understanding the development and adaptation of Buddhism in Britain. Using Waterhouse's model to structure the material, I have portrayed this period of the OBC's development as one in which 'authority' was challenged, problematised and contested. A synopsis of the arguments invoked both by Kennett's assimilating and dissenting disciples, and by Kennett herself in reaction to her critics, reveals how opposing positions were adopted, defended and contested through recourse to the same authority sources differently interpreted.

## 16. TEXT AND CONTEXT IN THE OBC

### 16.1. THE WILD, WHITE GOOSE (1977 AND 1978)

The two-volume text *The Wild, White Goose* purports to be an edited transcript of the diaries maintained by Kennett whilst training in Japan between 1962 and 1969. Although it did not go to press until the late 1970s, it had been written and prepared for publication by the early part of 1974. The bulk of the text thus belongs to the early period of Kennett's thought, reflecting and reiterating the teachings found in *Selling Water*.<sup>137</sup>

The period between 1974 and 1977, as we have seen, was one of radical development, change and instability. Given the pace of change and the ensuing turbulence of this period, it is unsurprising that the publication of *The Wild, White Goose* was delayed for so long. Furthermore, before going to press the text underwent further revision and modification in light of shifts in Kennett's thought. It must thus be seen as a text-in-transition, straddling and reflecting two distinct phases in the development of a movement in which history and identity was being constructed, revised and reconfigured.

### 16.2. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

As we have seen, revision and reconfiguration of the past is commonplace within religious movements which are more concerned with issues of identity and ideology than with notions of historical veracity. The construction of personal history through autobiography similarly involves the selective reconfiguration of memory and

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<sup>137</sup> Though it was first published in 1972, *Selling Water* was also written whilst Kennett was in Japan.

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forgetfulness. Far from being a historian, objectively recollecting and recording an accurate picture of life as it was lived, the autobiographer 'adds to experience itself consciousness of it',<sup>138</sup> retrospectively conferring meaning and purpose onto the past. The autobiographer, according to Gusdorf, distances himself from his life 'in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time',<sup>139</sup> and Olney adds that 'behind every work of literature there is an "I" informing the whole [...] making its presence felt at every critical point'.<sup>140</sup> Mandel also recognises the important role played by the 'response of the subject', or the social context, in the autobiographical enterprise:

The truth of literature is created as much by the reader as by the author.<sup>141</sup>

It is the 'borderland of experience' where the assumptions and values of the author overlap with those of the reader, he argues, that imbues autobiographical statements with power. The close relationship between text and context is also acknowledged by Gusdorf who observes that authors only take themselves as 'narrative objects' when they believe their destinies hold interest for others.

### 16.3. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

It seems reasonable to consider, in light of these observations, that autobiography may furnish religious movements with a particularly effective vehicle

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<sup>138</sup> Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 28-48 (p. 38).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>140</sup> James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Biographical Introduction', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, pp. 3-27 (p. 21).

<sup>141</sup> Barrett J. Mandel, 'Full of Life Now', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, pp. 49-72 (p. 56).

for constructing, mediating and preserving group history and identity. A closer examination of the nature and function of *The Wild, White Goose* reveals that this is indeed the case within the OBC. On the surface the text claims to represent Kennett's personal diary of religious training in Japan.<sup>142</sup> We cannot, however, uncritically accept it as such. According to Gusdorf the author of a private journal or diary, 'noting his impressions and mental states from day to day, fixes the portrait of his daily reality without any concern for continuity'.<sup>143</sup> This may accurately characterise Kennett's original enterprise, but it does not capture the creative process of transforming the diaries into a meaningful narrative for public consumption. *The Wild, White Goose* is neither a faithful record of daily reality, nor is it unconcerned with continuity, but represents a retrospective and purposeful re-ordering of experience. Kennett herself acknowledges that, whilst she wishes to 'preserve the integrity of the circumstances and events of my training', she has given herself 'a certain amount of poetic license in order to give the events a better flow', changing names and dates, inventing characters and conversations, and including 'teachings discovered *later* in conversation form *here* for the sake of making a complete book'. She concedes that, whilst it is rooted in historical fact, the book is largely 'a work of fiction'.<sup>144</sup> *The Wild, White Goose* is thus more properly regarded as an autobiographical text.

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<sup>142</sup> The subtitles to the two volumes are thus, respectively, 'The Diary of a Zen Trainee' and 'The Diary of a Female Zen Priest', and they explicitly take a diary format with individual date entries etc.

<sup>143</sup> 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', p. 35.

<sup>144</sup> *WWG*, I, p. xi.

#### **16.4. KENNETT'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AIMS**

To understand Kennett's aims in composing *The Wild, White Goose* the text must be situated within its two main historical contexts: the Early period and Lotus Blossom period.

##### **16.4.i. Initial Aims**

Kennett's initial aims were to exemplify the early doctrine and practice of the ZMS and to provide both herself and her movement with legitimation.

##### **Exemplification of Teachings**

Her early teachings, as outlined in *Selling Water*, are delineated and expanded within *The Wild, White Goose*. This text also displays her characteristic sensitivity to context, addressing the assumptions and concerns of her western disciples such as the obstacle posed by intellectualism and the issue of drugs and religious experience. The teachings here are imbued with a powerful normative value as they are presented within the exemplary context of Kennett's religious training, the 'borderland of experience' that is shared by her disciples. The authority of the text is further enhanced by her refusal to idealise the past. Annotations that retrospectively reflect upon the mistakes and difficulties she encountered invest the account with additional realism and authenticity.

##### **Personal Legitimation**

The autobiography is, above all, a work of personal legitimation whereby the demands of historical fidelity are subordinated to the author's higher purpose of revealing a sense of unity, progress and even destiny in his life. In *The Wild, White Goose* Kennett traces the progress of her spiritual career within the Japanese *Sōtō*

system, from being the 'untamed goose'<sup>145</sup> of a newly ordained priest to being the 'goose at rest' of a Zen master. Her selection of diary entries, careful structuring of the text<sup>146</sup> and inclusion of annotations providing retrospective reflection upon events, all create a sense of progress and continuity that was not apparent at the time of the events themselves. Her identity as a Zen master with a special role in the development of western Buddhism is also portrayed as the fulfilment of destiny. The claim that as a child she longed to cross the sea and meet 'someone with a smile in his heart that will match the smile in mine',<sup>147</sup> evokes the image of her transmission master. Similarly, whilst in Japan, the sky beckons to her 'as did the sea when I was young',<sup>148</sup> and the restless urgency of 'beating wings' is frequently alluded to until, when she finally leaves for America,

The wings surged with life and I felt my spirit roar into the sky. The eaglet had left the nest; no longer an eaglet but an eagle.<sup>149</sup>

### **Institutional Legitimation**

*The Wild, White Goose* was not simply a work of personal legitimation but also provided the OBC with a broader, legitimating context. Kennett is concerned, in Finney's terms, to display the 'deeply historical roots' of her organisation, distinguishing it from other religious innovations through an appeal to a 'cultural diffusion' model of transplantation. She describes Shasta Abbey as the fulfilment, in the West, of an embryonic movement originating in Japan in the form of *Sōjōji*'s

<sup>145</sup> *WWG*, I, p. xv.

<sup>146</sup> Each volume is broken down into two sections: 'The Layman' and 'The Trainee' in Volume 1, and 'The Parish Priest' and 'The Eternal Bo Tree' in Volume 2.

<sup>147</sup> *WWG*, I, p. 66.

<sup>148</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 193.

<sup>149</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 282.

`Foreign Section`. This historical identification is reinforced with the claim that the abbey `resembles the temple in which I was trained in more ways than one`.<sup>150</sup> More importantly, she portrays her Japanese teacher, *Kōhō Keidō* Chisan, as the founder and inspiration of the movement, and herself as his `favourite disciple`,

the one upon whom he pins most of his hopes for the things that he`s always wanted to do - the opening up to the Truth of foreign countries and the continuation of his line there.<sup>151</sup>

### **Primary Referents of Legitimation**

*The Wild, White Goose*, as a work of personal and institutional justification, attaches great value to the legitimate authority of Kennett`s historical and official background within the Japanese *Sōtō* sect. The text describes her acceptance as a trainee by *Kōhō Keidō* Chisan, before charting her monastic career and subsequent tenure as priest of a Japanese temple. Ceremonial markers of her rise through the priestly ranks are dwelt upon at length, as is her reception of certificates of recognition from the *Sōtō* Administration in Tokyo.

Kennett consistently prioritises connections of a more spiritual or transcendent nature, however, above such historical and official markers. This is most evident in her use of the symbol of the `mind-to-mind transmission`, the main basis of her claim to legitimacy. She describes the ceremony in which she received the transmission from her master as a deeply *spiritual* event, involving `none of those external trappings which ruin religion; just the intense beauty of being together, our hearts One Heart within the Buddha Nature`.<sup>152</sup> Similarly the official stature stemming from her

<sup>150</sup> Taken from the dedication of *WWG*, I.

<sup>151</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 105.

<sup>152</sup> *WWG*, I, p. 124.

relationship with *Kōhō* Chisan is secondary to the highly personal and intimate terms in which it is couched, including a sprinkling of moments where master and disciple communicate telepathically or 'mind-to-mind'.<sup>153</sup> The 'beating wings' Kennett feels urging her to return westwards are also seen as a message from her master,<sup>154</sup> whilst the assistance she received from supportive westerners is portrayed as the providential working of the Buddhas and Patriarchs.<sup>155</sup>

The main referent of authority appealed to, then, was the authenticity of spiritual experience. This could be interpreted in various ways: as a type of 'Protestant' discourse, for example, or as a consequence of the modern emphasis on personal authority. A more mundane explanation might lie in the discrimination and prejudice Kennett received from certain sections of the *Sōjōji* hierarchy during her time in Japan which clearly problematised notions of institutional support and legitimacy.

### **The Reformist Impulse**

This conflict and discord influenced her assessment of mainstream institutional *Sōtō* as corrupt and degenerate. Japanese *Sōtō* is presented by Kennett in a dualistic way: corruption is heavily criticised whilst a small number of exemplary figures or 'saints', who continue to embody *Dōgen*'s pure and anti-institutional ideals, are acknowledged. She seeks to simultaneously disassociate herself from the corruption and politics of institutional *Sōtō* whilst identifying herself with its exceptional individuals foremost among whom, of course, is *Kōhō* Chisan. She thus

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<sup>153</sup> The most significant of these, due to its symbolic resonance with the *nenōmishō* story ('the raising of a flower and a smile'), is when they communicate using a flower (*WWG*, I, pp. 31-32).

<sup>154</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 278.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

vows to maintain their high standards and establish an uncorrupted, non-bureaucratic form of *Sōtō* in the West.

The 'reformist' outlook underpinning Kennett's presentation is, according to Finney, a characteristic feature of the transplantation of Zen in the West:

the transplantation of Zen from Japan to America has involved one of those revitalizations or 'reformations' of religious practice that have been common in the history of both Eastern and Western religions [...] The history of Zen Buddhism in Japan has not been immune to these cycles any more than has Christianity [...] Now the cycle is occurring again, but this time it is circling half the globe.<sup>156</sup>

His main 'evidence' of the decline of Zen in Japan and its reformation in America is 'the difference in daily practice';<sup>157</sup> that is, the central importance attached to meditation and experience in America compared to the ritualism, formalism and relative absence of *zazen* practice in Japan. Whilst he acknowledges that the reformist impulse has many traditional Japanese precedents, his own assessment of the state of modern *Sōtō* is a clear example of what Sharf identified as 'Protestant Zen' discourse.<sup>158</sup> This kind of approach to Japanese *Sōtō* is criticised by Reader:

by idealising Zen as a thought/practice system that focuses on enlightenment, we are disregarding the whole socio-historical context in which it has grown and developed in Japan and are neglecting the general role and function of institutional Buddhism in Japan. A danger of such a lack of understanding is that there exists the potential for friction between those who come seeking Zen and those who institutionally represent it, with the former frequently convinced that the latter have neglected what they believe to be Zen's essence

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<sup>156</sup> 'American Zen's "Japan Connection"', p. 392.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> The main figures Finney refers to as representatives of 'the American Zen Reformation', for example, are Japanese modernist thinkers and their disciples, including Soyen Shaku, D. T. Suzuki, Hakuun Yasutani, Taizan Maezumi and John Daido Looi.

and the latter frustrated at the former's failure to understand the overall position in which they exist.<sup>159</sup>

Whilst Kennett's critique of Japanese *Sōtō*, and her claim to be purifying it in the West, may have 'Protestant' overtones, we must once again exercise caution with this label. Having been part of the *Sōtō* monastic and parish-temple system for several years, she was well aware of the socio-historical context and function of institutional Buddhism in Japan. Her main criticisms of the sect, in contrast to Finney, do not revolve around the absence of *zazen* and meditational experience and 'the preoccupation with ritual prayer-offering'.<sup>160</sup> She is far more concerned, rather, with avoiding the institutional excesses and abuses of power that she witnessed and experienced within *Sōjōji*, and with establishing *Dōgen*'s ideal of sexual egalitarianism. There have been well-established movements, historically and in contemporary times, for institutional reform in these areas of *Sōtō* policy and practice.

#### **16.4.ii. Later Aims**

Before it went to press, *The Wild, White Goose* was revised in light of the doctrinal developments and institutional instabilities of the Lotus Blossom period.

#### **Unification of Doctrine**

Part of Kennett's revisionist impulse involved an attempt to bring her earlier teachings into line with the current ideology of the OBC. Recognising that religious movement's are, in Stark's terms, 'served best by a completed faith'<sup>161</sup> she projected 'teachings discovered later'<sup>162</sup> - such as her ideas about 'the Lord', the importance of

<sup>159</sup> 'Zazenless Zen?', pp. 7-8.

<sup>160</sup> American Zen's "Japan Connection", p. 387.

<sup>161</sup> 'How Sane People Talk to the Gods', p. 29.

<sup>162</sup> *WWG*, I, p. xi.



past-life experiences, and the various grades of *kenshō* - onto the past by carefully knitting them into the autobiographical narrative. Various experiences that she had in Japan are thus retrospectively interpreted in terms of a *kenshō* typology that was devised much later. Reflective annotations are also included providing commentary and reinterpretation of significant events and teachings, and the reader is often referred to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* for further illumination. Indeed, Kennett claims that *The Wild, White Goose* and *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* form a unity and should be studied in conjunction with each other. She imbues her ideological revisions with authority by accrediting them to exemplary figures like her master. At one point, for example, she identifies *Kōhō* Chisan as the source of her experiential and quasi-theistic view of Zen:

The old man said, 'He who meditates runs the risk of being grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha. If you do not wish to know the *Truth* of Buddhism just study the Scriptures and doctrines, lecture and read books. Do not meditate. But, if you meditate, know that you *will* be grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha. The Cosmic Buddha *is*.'<sup>163</sup>

### **Response to Conflict and Dispute**

Besides incorporating changes in OBC ideology Kennett used *The Wild, White Goose* in a strategic way to promote institutional stability. The text includes lengthy passages, for example, which explore the meaning and importance of being faithful and obedient to one's master. Her increased emphasis on an institutional form of legitimate authority during this period is also expressed through the text. Her critique of the Japanese *Sōtō* sect in the main body of the text is thus qualified and softened by later annotations. One states, for example, that,

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<sup>163</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 71.

past-life experiences, and the various grades of *kenshō* - onto the past by carefully knitting them into the autobiographical narrative. Various experiences that she had in Japan are thus retrospectively interpreted in terms of a *kenshō* typology that was devised much later. Reflective annotations are also included providing commentary and reinterpretation of significant events and teachings, and the reader is often referred to *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* for further illumination. Indeed, Kennett claims that *The Wild, White Goose* and *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* form a unity and should be studied in conjunction with each other. She imbues her ideological revisions with authority by accrediting them to exemplary figures like her master. At one point, for example, she identifies *Kōhō* Chisan as the source of her experiential and quasi-theistic view of Zen:

The old man said, 'He who meditates runs the risk of being grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha. If you do not wish to know the *Truth* of Buddhism just study the Scriptures and doctrines, lecture and read books. Do not meditate. But, if you meditate, know that you *will* be grabbed by the Cosmic Buddha. The Cosmic Buddha *is*.'<sup>163</sup>

### **Response to Conflict and Dispute**

Besides incorporating changes in OBC ideology Kennett used *The Wild, White Goose* in a strategic way to promote institutional stability. The text includes lengthy passages, for example, which explore the meaning and importance of being faithful and obedient to one's master. Her increased emphasis on an institutional form of legitimate authority during this period is also expressed through the text. Her critique of the Japanese *Sōtō* sect in the main body of the text is thus qualified and softened by later annotations. One states, for example, that,

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<sup>163</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 71.

In the years which have passed since *Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett*'s arrival in America, some of the events recorded in these diaries have taken on a new perspective. It now appears that almost all the difficulties which she encountered in the Tokyo monastery were caused by the political machinations of only two of the officers [...] Their actions should not give the reader the impression that the majority of the Japanese priesthood is anti-foreign nor anti-*Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett* herself, as later events both in Japan and America have proved. The *Sōtō* Sect authorities provided her with all necessary certification before she came to America and she remains in good standing with them to this day, never having been out of it.<sup>164</sup>

It is only in later years, when the legitimation provided by such trans-Pacific ties and connections was no longer depended upon, that Kennett challenges Japanese degeneracy openly, without softening her critique.

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<sup>164</sup> *WWG*, II, p. 299. This annotation was written by Daizui MacPhillamy.

## 17. THE STORM WEATHERED

By the early 1980s, the storm of the Lotus Blossom period had been successfully weathered and the OBC entered a new period of growth, relative stability and routinisation. New priories were established in America and the abbey certified the Order's first Lay Ministers. Under the leadership of the rotating American abbacy, the British community stabilised and matured. Funds were raised to purchase the priory buildings and grounds from Daiji Strathern and in 1977, Throssel Hole Priory was registered as a charitable trust. Encouraged and sustained by the growth of the British monastic community training at Shasta Abbey (of which it was constantly updated) the lay congregation steadily grew, and by 1981, there were ten meditation groups affiliated to the priory. In 1982, following their completion of a five year training programme at Shasta Abbey and certification as 'Teachers' within the OBC, five of the British monks returned to Throssel Hole. Daishin Morgan, a British monk who had been certified by Kennett as a *Rōshi* or 'Master' in 1981, was installed as its abbot 'and a new period of development began'.<sup>165</sup> The presence of qualified British Zen Teachers and Masters, with the authority to guide, ordain and transmit disciples, marked the beginnings of Throssel Hole Priory's autonomous, and largely self-regulating, development. The growth of the monastic training programme enabled the priory 'to accept more invitations from congregation members to lead outside retreats'<sup>166</sup> and this, along with the introduction of the Lay Ministry programme in 1983, injected a new-found enthusiasm, dynamism and vitality into the laity.

<sup>165</sup> 'Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Britain', p. 141.

<sup>166</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'To all our Members and Friends', *JTHP*, 9.4 (1982), p. 3.

According to Daishin Morgan, the OBC in Britain was entering 'an exciting time of growth in which there are tremendous opportunities for the Sangha as a whole'.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE LATER PERIOD, 1984-1996

#### INTRODUCTION: THE ROUTINISING IMPULSE

Religious movements founded through charisma or revelations 'cannot long sustain constant doctrinal revision', nor can they allow unrestricted revelation, and so, in Weberian terms, they become 'routinised':

as movements grow and develop more ramified organizational structures, pressures build up against further revelations, for organizations are served best by a completed faith.<sup>1</sup>

This accurately describes the historical and ideological development of Kennett's movement towards the end of the Lotus Blossom period and during the later period which was mainly a time of consolidation, stabilisation and routinisation. In 1983, the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives was established as a separate legal corporation from Shasta Abbey. Clear structures of authority, organisation, doctrine and practice were defined and incorporated through the 'Bylaws' and 'Rules'<sup>2</sup> of the Order, formulated by Kennett and her senior disciples,

to govern and bind together in one Sangha the membership who have completed their course of training and the monasteries, priories and meditation groups affiliated with the OBC.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stark, 'How Sane People Talk to the Gods', pp. 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Articles of Incorporation of the OBC' and the 'Bylaws of the OBC', dated January 1983, are the governing instruments of the OBC. The 'Rules of the OBC' were initially formulated in January 1982, although they have been adapted and added to in subsequent years.

<sup>3</sup> 'Bylaws of the OBC', Article 3.

Kennett's later publications also shift away from innovation towards systematisation. The organisational structure of the OBC is elucidated and reaffirmed by articles dealing with monastic discipline and seniority. She also treats OBC doctrine and practice in a more methodical and codified manner. In one article she attempts 'to lay out clearly what are and are not our teachings',<sup>4</sup> summarising the main features of practice for the laity and the priesthood. The thread of articles entitled '...And to the Source Kept True'<sup>5</sup> have a similar resonance to this inasmuch as they clarify and defend the OBC's perspectives on specific aspects of belief and practice. In them she reiterates that her policies towards the translation and adaptation of Buddhist concepts and forms, the significance of visionary experiences in Zen, and the role of women in Buddhism are faithful to the spirit or essence of the Buddha's teachings.

In this chapter I examine the structural, organisational and ideological routinisation of the OBC by summarising the contents of the 'Bylaws' and 'Rules' and surveying the writings of Kennett. Although she was striving to create a 'completed faith', restating and systematising earlier teachings whilst introducing measures to curtail the excesses of religious experience, she nevertheless continued to be a revisionist and religious visionary and so we must also be sensitive to the ongoing development of her thought. I end by measuring and assessing the success of the routinising project, examining the assimilation of her teachings within the Order and commenting upon the relative stability of this period.

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<sup>4</sup> 'What We Teach and What We Practice', *Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives* [hereafter referred to as *JOBC*], 1/2-3 (1986), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> This thread of eleven articles appeared in *JOBC* between 1989 and 1991.

## 1. THE BYLAWS OF THE OBC

In the 'Bylaws' the organisational structure of the Order is delineated, its identity is defined and its main doctrines and practices are summarised.

### 1.1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE OBC

Final and supreme authority within the OBC, both spiritual and temporal, rests with the Head of the Order, 'the sole member and chairman of the Board of Directors'.<sup>6</sup> The first holder of this position, which is held for life, was naturally the Order's founder-figure. Subsequent Heads were to be democratically elected by, and from within, the Order's pool of certified Masters. Although the Head 'must consult with other senior members on major decisions',<sup>7</sup> and must be sensitive to the will of the membership as expressed in meetings, he nevertheless holds 'the right of veto in any vote'.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the power to make decisions affecting the Order as a whole - making amendments to its governing instrument, for example, or revisions to the 'Rules' - rests ultimately with him. Since the investment of so much power and authority in one figure carries with it the danger of abuse, corruption and loss of distinctive identity, a mechanism for the removal of the Head was established, to which the membership has recourse in exceptional circumstances. Kennett also safeguarded the integrity and continuity of her movement by establishing a rule that allows OBC members to resign from, re-unite and re-establish the Order, in the unlikely event that,

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<sup>6</sup> 'Bylaws of the OBC', Article 6, Section 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> 'Bylaws of the OBC', Article 5, Section 6.



after the death of its Founder [...] the Order becomes corrupt to the point that it no longer adheres to one or more of its 4 Founding Principles (viz. 1. the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; 2. the Precepts; 3. the practice of Serene Reflection Meditation; 4. the teachings of its Founder) and acts so as to prevent members from following those Principles and refuses reasoned efforts at reform.<sup>9</sup>

The Order embraces three levels of institutional affiliation: training monasteries (or seminaries), regional priories (or parish churches) and local meditation groups. The emphasis of the monastery, of course, is upon monastic training which is overseen by an abbot, the "father" of all monks in the community'.<sup>10</sup> Kennett was both Head of the Order and abbess of Shasta Abbey during her lifetime but she intended these roles to be separated following her death. The essential difference between the Head and an OBC abbot is the scope of their authority and activity. Within the specific micro-context of a monastery community, the abbot fulfils a similar function to that of the Head; for example, he formulates, modifies and enforces a set of monastery rules to cover issues specific to that community.<sup>11</sup>

Regional priories are created mainly for the benefit of the lay congregation.

Priests who are appointed as OBC `priors` are thus expected to,

make themselves available for spiritual guidance; maintain a regular programme of meditation, services and retreats; lead discussions and give lectures at reasonable intervals; and generally fulfil all the normal priestly functions of their position.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> `Rules of the OBC`, 1982, Section 6.

<sup>10</sup> Daizui MacPhillamy, `How the O.B.C. Works`, *The Journal of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey* [hereafter referred to as *JTHBA*], 24.1 (1997), p. 21. Throssel Hole's change in status, from a priory to an abbey, will be discussed later.

<sup>11</sup> Both Shasta Abbey and Throssel Hole Priory thus have their own sets of rules that are formulated and enforced by their respective abbots, in consultation with senior members of the community.

<sup>12</sup> `Rules of the OBC`, Section 15.

Clustered around the priories at a local level are the Order's affiliated meditation groups, the organisation and running of which is one of the prime functions of the Lay Ministry. Lay Ministers are authorised to give meditation instruction and Dharma talks and to 'encourage other trainees to practice meditation, keep the Precepts, and deepen their Buddhist training'.<sup>13</sup>

The pattern of institutional expansion within the Order, however, has not been identical in Britain and America. Despite its well-established and widespread meditation group structure, the OBC in Britain did not expand beyond Throssel Hole institutionally until the 1990s, with the creation of priories in Reading and Telford.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, two new priories in America were established within three years of the founding of Shasta Abbey, with a further three being established since then. This difference has been explained largely in geographic and demographic terms. The inaccessibility of Shasta Abbey to most of the American congregation created a demand for regional priories to be established elsewhere; the relative accessibility of Throssel Hole to the British laity, by contrast, did not create a similar demand. Instead of establishing and supporting many regional priories, then, the British laity developed a close and active relationship with Throssel Hole alone. These differing patterns of institutional growth have, in turn, shaped the 'character' of the OBC's main sites of monastic activity. Shasta Abbey has been more strictly monk-orientated than Throssel Hole which, although it has functioned as a fully authorised OBC training monastery since 1983, has seen a much higher level of lay activity. There has recently, though, in imitation of the American model of development, been a push

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix 1: Rules for the Lay Ministry, Rule 1.

<sup>14</sup> Founded in 1990 and 1997.

from within the British congregation for more regional priories to meet the need for regular monastic guidance. If the proposed institutional expansion of the OBC around Britain is successful, it is likely that Throssel Hole will, like Shasta Abbey, develop a more rigorous and strictly monastic focus whilst its affiliated priories actively serve the lay congregation. Nevertheless, it is unlikely to relinquish altogether its role as a vital centre of lay activity; indeed, it is felt that Shasta Abbey can learn much from Throssel Hole on the subject of developing healthy monastic-lay relations.

## 1.2. THE IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OF THE OBC

Although the Order is an independent and self-regulating organisation, the definition of its religious identity is based upon the constitution of the Japanese *Sōtō* sect.<sup>15</sup> Kennett defines the 'Serene Reflection Meditation Church' - her preferred translation of '*Sōtō* Zen' during the later period - as 'the transmission of the Right Law of Shakyamuni Buddha, which has been handed down by successive Ancestors, from master to disciples, through direct communication from one heart to another'. The 'fundamental teachings' of the school 'are serene reflection meditation (*shikantaza*), the principle "All beings are at heart Buddha" (*sōkushinzebutsu*) and gratitude', and its main objects of veneration are 'primarily Shakyamuni Buddha and, as its two Founders, Koso Joyo Daishi (Great Master Eihei *Dōgen*) and Taiso Josai Daishi (Great Master Keizan *Jōkin*)'. It is also emphasised that, in accordance with the teachings of the *Shushōgi*, to train within this school 'means to practice serene

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of which, see Reader's 'Contemporary Thought in *Sōtō* Zen Buddhism', Chapter 5.

reflection meditation and keep the Precepts, since their practice embodies enlightenment itself (*shushōf unī*).<sup>16</sup>

The `Bylaws` also outline the main scriptures and ceremonies used within the Order. Here again, notwithstanding Kennett's modifications and adaptations of the traditional forms, there is much continuity with the practice of *Sōtō* monasteries and temples in Japan. The scriptures of the OBC include important *Mahāyāna* texts such as the *Lotus*, *Avataṃsaka* and *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtras*, alongside the specifically *Sōtō* works of *Dōgen* and *Keizan*, as well as selected sayings of other Zen patriarchs, such as the *Hokyozanmai* of *Tōzan* (807-869), the *Shinjinmei* of *Sōzan* (d. 606) and the *Shōdōka* of *Yōka Genkaku* (665-713). The ceremonial observances of the Order are of two types. The year-round schedule of `standard ceremonies` includes memorial days for important patriarchal figures (e.g. *Bodhidharma*, *Dōgen* and *Keizan*), celebrations of the three major events in the life of *Śākyamuni* Buddha (his birth, enlightenment and *parinirvāṇa*), and other observances such as the festival of `Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts` (*O-Bon*). More irregular are the `special ceremonies` that are performed whenever a cause for congratulations or condolence occurs in either the nation (e.g. Remembrance Day and Thanksgiving)<sup>17</sup> or in the Order (e.g. lay and monastic ordinations, abbot installations, marriages, funerals and memorial services). In addition are the daily scripture-chanting services performed in

<sup>16</sup> `Bylaws of the OBC`, Article 17, Sections 2-5.

<sup>17</sup> In Japan, such observances might include a birthday celebration or memorial service for the Emperor. Having no Japanese liturgical precedents for the celebration of western national holidays and events, Kennett decided to adapt western hymns. Thanksgiving, for example, is celebrated with a hymn, the opening lines of which read: `To Thee, Eternal Lord, we raise/In paeans of thanksgiving/Our hearts, and hands, and joy and praise/For giving us our living` (*The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990), p. 301).

OBC monasteries and priories, as in traditional Japanese contexts, three times daily (morning, midday and evening).

## 2. THE RULES OF THE OBC

### 2.1. PURPOSE AND NATURE OF THE RULES

Whilst the 'Bylaws' outline the organisational and doctrinal structures of the Order, the 'Rules of the OBC' concentrate on the roles, behaviour and conduct of its individual members, both monastic and lay. The purpose of the rules is 'to safeguard the training of members, and promote harmony in the Sangha'.<sup>18</sup> In formulating them, Kennett and her senior monastic disciples drew upon a variety of sources, including the guidelines of practice used within the modern Japanese *Sōtō* sect<sup>19</sup> as well as 'the fundamental scriptures of the *Sōtō* Zen Church',<sup>20</sup> such as the monastic rules of *Dōgen* and *Keizan*. Added to these were,

precedents from other widely accepted Buddhist sources, both *Mahāyāna* and *Theravāda*, which are not contradictory to these fundamental scriptures and which prove useful and wise to adopt.<sup>21</sup>

In particular, English-language translations of the *Vinaya* (the rules for monks' conduct) were drawn upon, Kennett all the while emphasising the importance of adaptation:

In the *Vinaya*, there are those laws that are very obviously universal, and then there are those laws which need interpretation in the light of the laws of the

<sup>18</sup> 'Bylaws of the OBC', Article 13, Section 1.

<sup>19</sup> In her article '...And to the Source Kept True: Part 9', *JTHP*, 18.1 (1991), 2-13, which discusses 'when a person is considered to have left the Sangha' (p. 4), Kennett refers to a rule-book produced by the Head Office of the Japanese *Sōtō* sect entitled *Regulations for the Standing of Religious Teachers and Priests of the Sōtōshū* (Tokyo: *Sōtōshū Shumuchō*, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> '...And to the Source Kept True: Part 9', p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

land in which the Sangha finds itself, and those that need adaptation.<sup>22</sup>

The rules are not understood, then, as fixed and final edicts, but as flexible and provisional guidelines that can be changed, adapted or expanded to suit the shifting circumstances of the Order. A supplement added in 1996 outlining the Order's policies and procedures regarding the misuse of power, authority and trust (with specific reference to sexual abuses), provides a good illustration of the adaptability of the rules. This was formulated in response to a number of scandals in America between Buddhist teachers and students,<sup>23</sup> in order to safeguard practitioners and protect the OBC from potentially devastating allegations, litigations and controversy. This principle of flexibility and reflexivity also applies to the local rules of monastery communities, such as 'The Rules of Throssel Hole Priory' which state that,

Rules are made when a situation arises that requires the emphasis of a rule – therefore these rules are *not* a complete description of practice.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.2. PRIESTLY RANKS AND FUNCTIONS

The various ranks and functions of the priesthood within the OBC are explained in the 'Rules', and the differences in their monastic vestments and requisites are outlined. The basic trajectory of the monastic career as it was presented during the early period - whereby the trainee progresses through a sequence of grades, from postulant to teacher, within a regulated time structure - has remained intact

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3. Kennett cites, as an example, the *Vinaya* rule forbidding monks to dig the ground. She maintains that this rule would be impossible to follow in California where 'for reasons of earthquake safety, the building codes require considerable subsurface footing and foundation work before a building can be built' (p. 3).

<sup>23</sup> Such as the ten-million-dollar lawsuit brought against Sogyal Rinpoche in 1995 by a former student alleging 'a pattern of physical, mental, and sexual abuse' (*Tricycle* 4.3 (Spring 1995), p. 98).

<sup>24</sup> 'The Rules of Throssel Hole Priory', 1983 (revised in 1992).

throughout the Order's development and is still in place today. Through the 'Rules', Kennett reinforced this early schema as well as systematising and routinising the modifications made to it during the turbulent Lotus Blossom period; adaptations which included: the use of licences or identification cards, changes in monastic titles that more clearly reflect priestly rank, and the adoption of the rule of celibacy.

The 'Rules' recognise seven ranks of the priesthood, beginning with the postulancy which usually lasts between six months and a year. Priestly training proper begins when the aspirant is ordained, receives a new religious name<sup>25</sup> and is welcomed into the community by formally entering the monk's meditation hall (*sōdō*). After a period of around a year, the junior or novice priest undergoes a short term as Head Novice or Chief Junior (*shusōshō*), during which he has a responsibility 'to lead all trainees and to find wise and compassionate ways of helping others train to the best of their ability while following the busy monastic schedule'.<sup>26</sup> When the trainee has 'demonstrated in his daily life that he knows how to train as a priest'<sup>27</sup> he undergoes the ceremony of Dharma transmission wherein 'the Life Blood of Buddhism is passed on from master to disciple'.<sup>28</sup>

To receive the Transmission is to take the Precepts on a deeper level still and to have one's spiritual maturity and sincerity of purpose acknowledged by one's master.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The family name received by all disciples of Kennett is 'Houn' which translates as 'Dharma Cloud'. In addition to this, ordainees receive a new individual name. During the early and Lotus Blossom periods, new ordainees received traditional Japanese or Buddhist names. During the later period, in line with the Order's policy of adapting foreign names and terms, it has been more common for them to receive western names such as Edmund, Alfred, Gifford, Alexander, Monica, Myfanwy, Adelin and Olwen.

<sup>26</sup> *JTHP*, 14.2 (1987), p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> *JTHP*, 6/4-6 (1979), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> *JTHP*, 7/1-2 (1980), p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> *JTHP*, 12.2 (1985), p. 33.



Following his completion of three years of monastic training, the transmitted monk is certified as a parish priest qualified to run temples, conduct public ceremonies, give pastoral counselling and lead retreats (but not *'sesshins'*). He now swaps the black robes of a junior monk for the brown formal robe of the parish priest and uses the initials 'OBC' after his name. Having completed the priesthood training programme, the trainee now enters the teacher-training programme, certification for which may follow after another two years. Teachers in the Order use the initials 'FOBC' ('Fellow of the OBC') and their rank is indicated by the adoption of a purple *rakhusu* (a symbol of the monastic robes worn around the neck). The final priestly rank of 'Master' is granted when Dharma transmission 'in its deeper meaning' occurs; that is,

when a monk has completed the five year seminary program and has experienced the first or 'Penetration of Heaven' *kenshō* - the moment in training when a person knows absolutely his or her complete oneness with the Lord of the House.<sup>30</sup>

Masters use the initials 'MOBC' ('Master of the OBC')<sup>31</sup> and are qualified 'to ordain, train, and Transmit others as a fully independent Zen Master'.<sup>32</sup> Only two (out of approximately twenty) OBC Masters, however, have given Dharma transmission to their own pupils, a fact reflecting the nature of the Order's institutional growth which, to date, has only two centres of monastic training.

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<sup>30</sup> *JTHP*, 8.1 (1981), p. 24. The Order started to use 'Rev. Master' instead of '*Rōshi*' in 1983.

<sup>31</sup> Use of the initials 'FOBC' and 'MOBC' to indicate rank was introduced in 1987. Since 1979, Teachers and *Rōshi*s/Masters have been addressed within the Order as 'Rev. Teacher' and 'Rev. *Rōshi*/Master'.

<sup>32</sup> 'A Note on Transmission and Priestly Rank', p. 10.

### 2.3. MONASTIC CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE

Whilst acknowledging that the hierarchical nature of Japanese Zen monasticism 'may be disconcerting seen from Western views of egalitarianism', Leighton and Okumura nevertheless defend *Dōgen's* instructions on cultivating deference to seniority 'as guidance for newcomers in the respectful attitude most conducive to harmonious entry into the community.'<sup>33</sup> Kennett also viewed such hierarchical attitudes positively, styling the monastic practice of her Order upon the traditional model. Seniority within the OBC is indicated by differences in priestly titles, vestments and functions, and also in the rules governing the relationships between junior and senior monks. These rules are based upon the spirit of *Dōgen's* essays, 'Regulations for the Study Hall' (*Shuryō Shingi*) and 'The Dharma When Meeting Senior Instructors' (*Taitaiko Gogejarihō*), which provide 'injunctions for the appropriate etiquette when in the presence of senior instructors'.<sup>34</sup> In 'The Rules for Throssel Hole Priory', for example, we find rules stating that novice priests 'may request but not require a senior monk to do anything' and 'may not enter the private room of a senior'.<sup>35</sup> Translations of *Dōgen's* essays on priestly conduct, as found in Kennett's *Zen is Eternal Life*, are also standard reading material for OBC monks.

A Council of twelve senior priests decides upon sanctions against serious infractions of the rules. The Council 'meditates and discusses the question of whether the retention of good standing presents a danger to the well-being and harmony of the Sangha',<sup>36</sup> and reaches decisions on a two-thirds majority. In line with *Vinaya*

<sup>33</sup> *Dōgen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community*, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Section 1.

<sup>36</sup> 'Bylaws of the OBC', Article 13, Section 3.

procedures the transgressor 'can be asked to leave the monastery/priory until a disciplinary council is convened'.<sup>37</sup> Unlike traditional *Vinaya* practice, however, whereby transgressions entailing 'defeat' lead to permanent dismissal from the monastic *Sangha*, within the OBC there is always the possibility of readmission provided that the Head and Council see evidence of 'genuine contrition for wrongdoing':

No one is ever expelled from the OBC and signs of contrition will be credited.<sup>38</sup>

#### 2.4. RULES FOR THE LAY MINISTRY

The Lay Ministry is defined as 'a form through which long-standing members of the congregation can express their deepening commitment to Buddhist training and be of service to others'.<sup>39</sup> Lay Ministers are licensed by the OBC to fulfil a number of important roles, such as organising meditation groups and other congregation activities; giving meditation instruction and rudimentary talks on Buddhism; setting a good example and encouraging others in spiritual training; and performing public ceremonies (e.g. weddings and funerals) when ordained priests are unavailable. Lay Ministers are also authorised to represent the Order in the public domain; for example, by giving talks at schools or attending inter-faith conferences. They may not, however, give spiritual counselling or teach on the finer points of Buddhist doctrine.

In their ministerial and public capacities, Lay Ministers have been central to the development of the OBC. The primary emphasis of the Lay Ministry programme,

<sup>37</sup> 'The Rules of the OBC', Section 4.

<sup>38</sup> 'Bylaws of the OBC', Article 13, Section 3. According to Kennett, this more flexible and lenient approach is 'consistent with the *Mahāyāna* approach to the *Vinaya*' (...And to the Source Kept True: Part 9', p. 10).

<sup>39</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'The Lay Ministry', *JTHP*, 18.3 (1991), p. 24.

though, 'has always been upon the deepening of the individual's practice, since it is from this source that the ability to help others arises naturally'.<sup>40</sup> One long-standing British trainee thus describes the Lay Ministry as 'more than anything else, an acknowledgment of one's own training and commitment to one's practice',<sup>41</sup> and another recalls her decision to enter the Lay Ministry as 'just one more step in training'.<sup>42</sup> According to some, this emphasis on personal spiritual growth and interiority is what distinguishes OBC Lay Ministers from their counterparts in Christianity who also 'take on some of the responsibilities and duties normally reserved for priests'.<sup>43</sup>

The impression I had at first when I first heard of them was that they're a bit like what the Church of England have, rather like a lay reader at church who would do the reading, lead the prayers, carry the chalice, and all that sort of thing. Certainly, within the Buddhist equivalent of that, that is done, but that is not the role of the Lay Minister. The role is quite simply to be an amateur monk [...] it's about deepening your training [...] It becomes a public commitment to say, 'I do what the monks do as far as far as I can within lay life'.<sup>44</sup>

This emphasis on the individual's spiritual development is reflected in the procedure of becoming a Lay Minister. When it was initially introduced, anyone who had formally received lay ordination could apply to join the programme. In 1987, the programme was re-organised and made available by invitation only; that is, when the abbot became convinced of a trainee's sincerity in practice and selfless service to others. The training programme itself, which now lasts for around two years, involves the regular attendance of retreats, instruction in ceremonial procedures and the

<sup>40</sup> 'Throssel Hole Priory Annual Review: 1992/93' (pamphlet), p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> OBC Interview, May 1997.

<sup>42</sup> OBC Interview, June 1997.

<sup>43</sup> OBC Interview, May 1997.

<sup>44</sup> OBC Interview, June 1995.

personal study of OBC textual and commentarial matter. During this time, any doubts or confusions the individual may have about the Order's teachings are ironed out 'so that they can represent it as accurately as possible to others'.<sup>45</sup> The main emphasis, though, is upon meditation, preceptual adherence and 'the deepening of each individual's level of training'.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, there is 'no abstract standard to be reached to "qualify" as a licensed lay minister': the trainee must simply 'be working on their own training in such a way that they are beginning to fulfil their own potential'.<sup>47</sup> The eventual recognition and certification of a Lay Minister is hence a very low-key and personal affair:

What tends to happen is that Rev. Master sends word out that he wants to see you in his office. And he says it's about time you wear your *rakhusu*, and do you feel ready for it yourself. You think for a while, and in the end you think he wouldn't have said so if it's not right. The upshot is you say, 'Yes'. He puts it on you, and hands you a certificate. It's done in silence with your hands in *gasshō*; it's an accepting and a giving. And that's the end of it. Everyone else sees you for the first time with your *rakhusu* and they all say, 'Congratulations, well done'.<sup>48</sup>

The Lay Ministry is also understood as an ongoing programme, with trainees continuing to study the recommended materials and attending special Lay Minister retreats. Failure to do so results in the loss of good standing in the Order and the retraction of their annually renewable licence.

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<sup>45</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'The Lay Ministry', p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> 'The Lay Ministry Programme', *JTHP*, 9.4 (1982), p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'The Lay Ministry', p. 25. This contrasts sharply with the structured training programmes in the NKT which involve regular collective study, the memorization of textual outlines and the sitting of written examinations in which the practitioner's understanding is formally tested and assessed.

<sup>48</sup> OBC Interview, June 1995. Certified Lay Ministers receive a turquoise *rakhusu* and a copy of the 'Lay Minister Manual' which includes sections on: organising, financing and running meditation groups; instructing in meditation; ceremonies that Lay Ministers are authorised to perform; a 'phone ring', including the names and numbers of all the congregation's Lay Ministers; and a recommended reading and tape list.

Whilst it is emphasised that a Lay Minister is 'no different than [...] an ordinary trainee',<sup>49</sup> they nevertheless form a separate and distinct network within the Order's lay congregation. Training with other Lay Ministers and 'spending regular times together at the Priory'<sup>50</sup> is prioritised, and they even have their own monthly journal. As OBC representatives and role models, they are also expected to be particularly conscientious in their adherence to the Buddhist precepts and to commit themselves exclusively to the practice of the Order.

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<sup>49</sup> OBC Interview, June 1997.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Lavin, 'The Lay Ministry Programme', *JTHP*, 12.3 (1985), p. 30.

### 3. KENNETT'S LATER TEACHINGS

#### 3.1. FAMILIAR THEMES

Whilst we are chiefly concerned here with tracing the evolution and development of Kennett's thought, it is important to acknowledge that there was also much continuity and consistency underpinning her thirty-year career as a teacher of Zen. Her later writings embrace a host of familiar themes and endeavour to reiterate the same basic message that characterised her earlier presentation. The areas most commonly dealt with, predictably, remain the practice of meditation, adherence to the moral precepts and the cultivation of love, compassion and wisdom; in other words, the basic elements of her original text *Selling Water by the River*. The centrality of ceremonial activity and scriptural study are also given high priority, as is indicated by the publication during this period of a number of liturgical handbooks<sup>51</sup> and compilations of Buddhist scriptures.<sup>52</sup> Kennett's enduring concern with gender issues, her ambivalence towards the Christian tradition and her sensitivity to the cultural baggage of western converts to Buddhism, also continue to characterise her later presentation.

#### 3.2. FORGOTTEN THEMES

As we have seen, the strategies employed by Kennett in response to the negative reactions of her disciples to her visionary experiences involved the tempering

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<sup>51</sup> Namely *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity* (1987) and *The Monastic Office* (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Namely *The Denkōroku or The Record of the Transmission of the Light by Keizan Zenji* (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1993) and *Buddhist Writings* (Shasta Abbey Press, 1994).

of mystical excesses at Shasta Abbey, and the de-emphasis of practices that were proving difficult to assimilate, specifically the use of *mudrās*. These revisions, which may initially have been intended as a temporary expedient, became an enduring feature of her later presentation. Whilst discussion of harmonising *mudrās* does not disappear completely,<sup>53</sup> mention of them is sufficiently scant for these to constitute an instance of conscious forgetfulness. Kennett is also reticent, in the later period, to describe 'the absolute certainty and knowledge of That Which Is, which comes from meditation' as the *kenshō* experience 'because of the amount of misunderstandings this [term] has brought about'.<sup>54</sup> Forgetfulness with respect to the earlier emphasis on the *kenshō* experience also stems from a general shift in Kennett's perspective concerning the role and regulation of religious experience in Buddhist training.

### 3.3. MAIN AREAS OF CONCERN

The major themes dominating Kennett's later teachings reflect and continue the impulse towards routinisation, systematisation and stability that characterised her presentation following the conflict and instability of the innovative early Lotus Blossom period.

#### 3.3.i. Faith and Experience

One way in which Kennett responded to the conflict and instability of the early Lotus Blossom period was to elevate the role of faith - in the credentials and experience of the Zen master - above the role of personal confirmatory experience of

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<sup>53</sup> Guidelines for the use of *mudrās*, for example, focusing particularly upon the possible hazards of performing *mudrās* on other people (such as the potential for sexual feelings to be aroused), are provided in the 'Rules of the OBC' for monks and Lay Ministers. Harmonising *mudrās* are nevertheless rarely mentioned in Kennett's later journal articles.

<sup>54</sup> 'The Qualifications of a Zen Master', *JOBC*, 2/1-4 (1987), 2-4.



the teachings. During the later period, this shift hardened and the early emphasis on individual authority was almost completely eclipsed by teachings stressing faithful obedience and measures aimed at regulating religious experience within the Order:

Buddhism is a religion - and a religion requires faith and trust, not destructive discussion – it requires faith in the Eternal, faith in the Teaching, faith in its priesthood and trust in one's master. If there is not absolute faith and trust in these, spiritual growth is an impossibility; dabblers who spend their time arguing and discussing points of teaching with others can never soar into the sky as eagles borne on the wings of the Eternal.<sup>55</sup>

Kennett's early characterisation of Zen as 'a religion for spiritual adults' is thus reformulated; instead of signifying the priority of personal authority, 'spiritual adulthood' now describes those who 'understand the position from which the master, as head of the Order, speaks in relation to the horizontal Transmission'.<sup>56</sup>

Although Kennett still describes *kenshō* as a desirable by-product of training, and whilst she continues to offer spirited defences of visionary experiences in Zen, she now adopts a more cautious approach that emphasises institutional stability. Only senior monks have the maturity to pay attention to and learn from visions,<sup>57</sup> and this must take place, furthermore, within clearly demarcated institutional guidelines:

When a True Buddhist believes he has certain knowledge of a communication from That Which Is, a Patriarch or Buddhist Saint he immediately takes refuge in the Sangha which means that he submits the matter to his seniors or fellows who, after deep meditation thereon, assist him by either confirming or denying the authenticity of the communication or advising more meditation on the

<sup>55</sup> 'The Great Heresies, 1', *JOBC*, 1.1 (1986), p. 4. During this period Kennett is increasingly intolerant of those who seek guidance from multiple masters, and demands greater exclusivism from her disciples. Her article '... And to the Source Kept True, Part 5: Concerning "Gyrovagues"', *JOBC*, 5.1 (1990), 2-7, for example, encourages disciples to 'pick a place and stay with it' (p. 5).

<sup>56</sup> 'News from the Tiger's Lair', *JSA* (October-December 1985), p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> '[...] junior monks and laymen are taught to pay no attention to visions: this is because they can get involved with them and then do not know how to handle them' ('The Cost of Reality: Continued from November 1975', *JOBC*, 4.1 (1989), p. 8).

subject [...] the fact that such things have been submitted to the Order is of great importance for the peace of the Order [...] not to mention the spiritual well-being of the person concerned.<sup>58</sup>

These shifts in emphasis are reflected clearly in *Zen is Eternal Life*, the re-named and revised edition of *Selling Water by the River*. When it was initially re-issued, at the beginning of the Lotus Blossom period in 1976, only a number of minor revisions to the beginning and end matter of the text (reflecting Kennett's evolving understanding of ultimate truth) were included.<sup>59</sup> By the time of the third edition in 1987, more significant revisions to the body of the text focusing upon faith and religious experience, become apparent. The original emphasis on the internal aspect of faith is now omitted,<sup>60</sup> for example, whilst the view that the truth can be realised without a master is qualified by a greater emphasis on belief, obedience and formal validation.<sup>61</sup> The original discussion of *makyō*, whereby all sensory and visual episodes experienced in meditation are described as 'figments of an overstrained mind and thus not truly religious', is also completely reformulated in the third edition. Explaining her earlier presentation of this as an instance of 'skilful means', Kennett now draws a distinction between the hallucinations that appear to beginners (*makyō*) and the genuine religious visions that appear to more advanced practitioners. The

<sup>58</sup> 'The Qualifications of a Zen Master', p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> The glossary to the second edition, for example, includes terms like 'Cosmic Buddha', 'The Lord' and 'The Lord of the House' (*Zen is Eternal Life*, 1976, pp. 379 and 403).

<sup>60</sup> The characterisation of 'faith' that is found in the glossary of the second edition, where it is 'not directed to any external deity, doctrines or persons, but rather inward to one's own Buddha Nature' (p. 385), is omitted from the glossary of the third edition (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987, p. 285).

<sup>61</sup> The third edition thus adds that 'The average Westerner is too critical, and too unwilling to give up his negativity and distrust, to make an ideal disciple [...] and it is impossible to teach Zen [...] without complete trust between master and disciple' (p. 45).

emphasis, however, is still very much upon the regulation of religious experience and of having visions 'checked out by a master'.<sup>62</sup>

Following the original publication of her 'third *kenshō*' in 1977, Kennett herself continued to experience many past-life and visionary episodes. She chose not to publicise these 'deeper Truths'<sup>63</sup> immediately, due to the responses her earlier experiences had provoked, but they eventually appeared in the second edition of *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom* in 1993. Whilst this edition presents further defences of the visionary nature of Zen, the more cautious approach towards mystical activity encouraged during the later period is also restated; indeed, we are now informed that even Kennett's experiences cannot simply be accepted but require careful validation through recourse to alternative authorities:

Always she has stressed the need to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha when making decisions, and even at those times when a vision seemed relevant to an ongoing situation, we recognized that our limited understanding of its teaching could be flawed or incomplete and also that it is but one source of information.<sup>64</sup>

The difference between Kennett's earlier and later visions, the text explains, is that the former 'have a theme of turning the author within' enabling her 'to more deeply realize and live at one with the Unborn Buddha Nature', whereas the latter 'are more directed towards teaching her how to live in, and be of help to, the world of everyday life' (p. 177). Some visions help her to 'handle the ongoing residues of her own karma' whilst others 'provide an additional source of inner strength to enable her to weather the trials of daily life' (ibid). The fact that only one past life experience is

<sup>62</sup> *Zen is Eternal Life*, 1987, pp. 30-31.

<sup>63</sup> *HGLB*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1993), p. 260.

<sup>64</sup> *HGLB* (1993), p. 178.

recorded, though, indicates that the focus is not simply upon the personal training and self-transformation of the author - as with the earlier visions - but upon the provision of inspiration and guidance for others. Towards this end the later visions function in three distinct, but inter-related, ways. Firstly, they provide Kennett and her disciples with help and guidance on specific aspects of Buddhist training, such as dealing with past karma, the use of the will, the importance of obeying the master and vegetarianism. Secondly, some visions function prophetically, giving her 'warnings of what may occur if existing tendencies are allowed to go on unchanged' (p. 177) and enabling her 'to take appropriate action to possibly prevent them from happening' (p. 193). A vision in which she is encouraged to pass through a door leading to 'a black emptiness', for example, is interpreted as a warning against forging hasty institutional affiliations (pp. 228-229). Thirdly, whilst all of the visions serve to strengthen faith, some of them function specifically as visions of spiritual recognition and confirmation whereby Kennett's spiritual realisation is 'recognised by churches and religions different to my own' (p. 243).<sup>65</sup> These visions restate her belief that all religions point towards the same essential truth, described here as 'Eternal Life' (p. 187). The most interesting and revealing is her vision of confirmation within Christianity in which, dressed as a bride, she dissolves into an image of Christ:

With arms outstretched I fly straight into the Figure on the Crucifix and we dissolve together into that delicious, golden Water of the Spirit that I experienced in my third *kenshō* when I was enfolded in the arms of Shakyamuni Buddha.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> These include Tendai, Shin and Shingon Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

This presents another vivid illustration of Kennett's continuing affection for the religion of her roots, whilst her interpretation of the vision returns once again to the main source of her disaffection:

I understand the young bride in this vision to be myself [...] being refused my religious rights because of being female. The Eternal welcomed and embraced me in spite of my advanced age and shabby appearance since I had kept myself a virgin and true to my life-long wish to be One with Him.<sup>67</sup>

### **3.3.ii. Adaptation, Essentialism and Exclusivism**

Kennett's later work often returns to the project of adaptation, providing definitive statements of her policy and justifications for the main changes implemented within the OBC. Her early policy towards the adaptation of Zen, an essentialism combining traditional and charismatic elements, remains unchanged in the later period. Kennett's strategies of adaptation, and the main elements of Buddhist doctrine/practice that concern her, also remain unchanged. The project of extracting the essential principles from their Japanese matrix, in order to transplant them in a more appropriate 'western' - and specifically, 'Christian' - idiom, continues to revolve around monastic discipline, sexual egalitarianism, ritual and ceremonial form, and the translation of Japanese and Buddhist terms and concepts. During the later period, she is most preoccupied with outlining and defending the language she uses when referring to ultimate truth. As we have seen, during the Lotus Blossom Period her preferred way of describing this was through terms that carried a quasi-theistic resonance, such as 'Cosmic Buddha', 'The Lord' and even 'God'. In the face of criticism and dissent, she defended her use of such personalistic terms Buddhistically

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 189-191.

and maintained that she was 'not postulating a personal deity or creator-god'.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps in response to the criticism these words had provoked, though, she began to temper her use of personalistic images and by the mid-1980s, was preferring to use terms like 'The Eternal', 'The Unborn', 'That Which Is', 'The Immaculacy of Emptiness' and 'Purity'.<sup>69</sup> Despite being more neutral and not so explicitly theistic, these terms continued to illicit criticism<sup>70</sup> firstly, because they appear to contradict the traditional view that *nirvāṇa* cannot be understood or described in positive terms, and secondly, because Kennett never completely abandoned her personalistic interpretation of ultimate truth, continuing, for example, to refer to 'The Eternal' as 'He'. During the later period, then, she once again had to defend herself from the charge that she was promoting 'the personalist heresy',<sup>71</sup> and she justified her use of positive terminology by appealing to a variety of authorities, including personal experience, her teacher *Kōhō* Chisan, Buddhist scripture and the *Sōtō* Zen lineage-tradition.

By this period Kennett had developed quite a nuanced and sophisticated approach towards adaptation. She acknowledges that 'what is fundamental is as elusive to grasp as the razor's edge of the middle way is difficult to walk' and that the adaptation process is fraught with difficulties:

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<sup>68</sup> 'To Our Readers', *JTHP*, 10.2 (Summer 1983), p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> Kennett still uses terms like 'Lord of the House' and 'Cosmic Buddha' but not as much as before, and she ceases altogether from using these terms synonymously with 'God' and from comparing the similarities between the Buddhist and Christian approaches to ultimate truth.

<sup>70</sup> Criticism has not only been an internal problem for Kennett during the later period. For example, Stephen Batchelor admits that he is 'troubled by Roshi Kennett's quasi-theistic view of the Unborn' (*The Awakening of the West*, p. 373).

<sup>71</sup> '...And to the Source Kept True: Part 6: Concerning What I Shall, Hereafter, Call The Eternal', *JTHP*, 17.4 (1990), p. 2.

Whilst one should always view new ideas, theories and practices with caution, such caution should not be allowed to colour one's thinking and behaviour to such an extent as to paralyse growth with fear [...] and yet one has to be careful not to go overboard in discarding the past for present-day fads and fashions. To get too involved with modern ideas, theories and inventions is just as dangerous as to get stuck in the twelfth, or any other, century.<sup>72</sup>

Whilst Kennett's main strategy remained the appropriation and use of Christian religious forms, during the Lotus Blossom and later periods she decided that certain adaptations initiated during the early period had strayed away from 'the source' or 'middle way' and she thus took a number of backward steps. She abandoned, for example, the Anglican dog collar and clerical shirt and reverted back to using more traditional, Japanese-style robes. Adaptations made to the ceremonial calendar were also re-thought. *O-Bon* continued to be celebrated at the time of Halloween, but *Hanamatsuri* (the festival of the Buddha's birth), which had been celebrated on Christmas Day within the OBC, was moved back to its traditional date in April. Instead, the Order decided (perhaps as a compromise adaptation) to celebrate the festival of the Buddha's enlightenment on Christmas Day 'in addition to the ceremony on December 8, the more traditional date'.<sup>73</sup> Kennett's most significant 'departure from the fundamentals' was her attempt at establishing a married priesthood, a mistake she rectified following her 'third *kenshō*' :

I am trying to keep true to the source as handed down to me by my master and, if someone wishes to be my disciple, I expect that person to keep true to the source in the same way as I have done [...] I accidentally strayed when I thought a married priesthood was possible. When I realised this, I opted for a celibate one.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> '...And to the Source Kept True: Part 2', *JTHP*, 16.3 (1989), pp. 3-4.

<sup>73</sup> *JTHP*, 14.4 (1987), p. 34.

<sup>74</sup> '...And to the Source Kept True: Part 2', pp. 5-6.

Another interesting development in Kennett's thought during the later period is her increasing tendency, when discussing adaptation, to make exclusive claims and sectarian statements. The basis of these statements, the bulk of which are directed towards Japanese *Sōtō*, is formed by the equation she draws between the 'source' or 'essential' principles of Zen and 'pure' Zen. She criticises Japanese *Sōtō* for degenerating, or 'pulling the teachings out of shape',<sup>75</sup> with respect to the practice of marriage within the priesthood, the subordination of women, the widespread concern for ambition and power in its temples and the lack of practising vegetarians. She also criticises American Zen for its 'terrible deviations from the source' concerning sexual relationships between masters and disciples, and for generally 'degenerating into little more than parlour games'.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, Kennett believes that she and her Order are 'keeping true to the source', following the essential teachings or practising a 'pure' form of *Sōtō* Zen. She continues to compare herself with *Dōgen* and to stress that her master, who himself had stayed true to the source when surrounded by corruption in Japan, had instructed her to instigate important reforms and establish a 'pure' form of *Sōtō* in the West. A consequence of this purist self-image was that Kennett's attitude towards a movement aimed at forging closer affiliations between *Sōtō* Zen temples in America and Japan, instigated by the Japanese *Sōtō* sect in the late 1980s, was decidedly 'cool':

Far be it from me to dampen any endeavour at unity, however I think the American temples will have to decide the direction in which they wish to go which may be a rather different one from that of the Japanese [...] My

<sup>75</sup> '...And to the Source Kept True: Part 11: Concerning Beatings, Killings and War', *JOBC*, 6/1-2 (1991), p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> '...And to the Source Kept True: Part 2', pp. 7-8. Kennett may have had the sexual scandals involving Richard Baker *Rōshi* at the San Francisco Zen Center in the early 1980s in mind here.



Transmission Master, *Kōhō Zenji*, from whom we derive our Japanese line, was, of course, unmarried and a non-drinker and *Sōjiji* was strictly vegetarian when I was there [...] Whilst we would love the magnificence of unity with all Zen temples everywhere, this unity cannot be accepted at the cost of our spiritual integrity.<sup>77</sup>

### **3.3.iii. Links with the East**

A new emphasis during the later period is the importance attached by Kennett to linkages and associations with her Chinese *Rinzai* lineage. Although she had (ever since the early period of her settlement in America) kept in contact with the Malaysian temple where she was originally ordained in 1962, these connections did not form an important part of the OBC's public identity until the mid-1980s. During this period, any communications which took place between Kennett and her Malaysian 'uncles in the Dharma',<sup>78</sup> such as the reception of a portion of Seck Kim Seng's ashes for enshrinement at Shasta Abbey, were well publicised in OBC journals. Kennett's increasing reliance on these associations for legitimation is illustrated clearly by her publication of a letter 'from the Archbishop of Malacca and my uncle in the Dharma' who, replying to her request for guidance 'given the prevalent attitude in America of thinking of Buddhist organizations as cults', affirms that 'Shasta Abbey is a bona fide training temple for the Buddhist Priesthood and could in no way be considered as a cult'.<sup>79</sup>

It is significant that Kennett's attempts to strengthen, and demonstrate, the OBC's ties with the Chinese Ch'an tradition coincided with the intensification of her critique of Japanese *Sōtō*. Perhaps she felt, in light of the challenges that she herself

<sup>77</sup> 'The Visit of Two Officials from the Head Office in Japan on 1st. October, 1987', *JOBC*, 2/1-4 (1987), pp. 6-8.

<sup>78</sup> 'Important Announcement', *JSA* (October-December 1984), p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> 'What We Teach and What We Practice', pp. 8-9.

was posing to the authority of Japanese *Sōtō*, that another source of legitimate authority was now required to validate the teachings and practices of the OBC. This view is supported by the fact that she appeals to the 'purity' of her Chinese lineage, alongside the example of her 'exceptional' Japanese master, to bolster her critique of Japanese *Sōtō*:

My disciples [...] enjoy full recognition as monastic members of the Sangha in our Chinese line, through Rev. Seck Kim Seng my Ordination Master, by the temple of Kui Shan in mainland China and, as such, are a celibate priesthood and strictly vegetarian [...] Our Chinese line strictly abjures alcohol along with the taking of animal life for the purpose of food [...] it will be difficult for the trainees and priesthood of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives at Shasta Abbey and its priories in both America and England to become fully reconciled with an affiliation that implies a different standard of training to that of our Chinese line and that of *Kōhō Zenji*.<sup>80</sup>

Kennett's growing dependence upon her Chinese *Rinzai* roots is particularly interesting in light of the fact that, during the later period, her general critique of the *Rinzai* tradition seems to continue.<sup>81</sup>

A critique of the Japanese system may have become increasingly important to the identity of the OBC during the later period but this did not stop Kennett from periodically appealing to the legitimate authority of the Japanese *Sōtō* sect. A visit of a couple of OBC monks to *Sōjōji* in 1984, for example, which resulted in the reception of a portion of *Kōhō Chisan*'s ashes for enshrinement at Shasta Abbey, was well publicised in the Order's journals and illustrated with photographs and a copy of

<sup>80</sup> 'The Visit of Two Officials from the Head Office in Japan on 1st. October, 1987', pp. 6-8.

<sup>81</sup> Whilst the critique of *Rinzai* presented in *Selling Water* is tempered in the later editions of the text, Kennett continues to present the 'serene reflection' teachings of *Sōtō* as a superior spiritual technology and explain the growth of *Rinzai* as 'an age of Zen degeneration' ('...And to the Source Kept True: Part 3', *JTHP*, 16.4 (1989), 2-7).

the accompanying certificate of authenticity.<sup>82</sup> Kennett's translations of Buddhist scriptures are also, she claims, sanctioned by the Japanese sect,<sup>83</sup> whilst the scriptures used during OBC monastic ceremonial are all 'included in the official list of Scriptures of the *Sōtō* Zen Church of Japan and, of course, also of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives'.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> 'Important Announcement', *JSA* (October-December 1984), 2-8.

<sup>83</sup> '... And to the Source Kept True: Part 6: Concerning What I Shall, Hereafter, Call The Eternal', p. 2. A number of Kennett's translations thus appear in a compilation of texts used by the *Sōtō* sect and entitled *Sōtōshū Sūtras* (Tokyo: *Sōtōshū Shumuchō*, 1982).

<sup>84</sup> 'New Translations', *JTHP*, 20.3 (1993), p. 2.

#### 4. ASSIMILATION AND STABILITY IN THE LATER PERIOD

A survey of the articles composed by her monastic and lay disciples during the later period indicates that Kennett's desire to make this a phase of consolidation and routinisation was, in the main, realised. These articles display a great deal of coherence and consistency in their elucidation of the contours of Zen training, a presentation that both reiterates the main themes from the early and Lotus Blossom periods whilst reflecting the new emphases of Kennett's later thought. Her movement away from explicitly theistic and personalistic terminology in the later period, for example, is assimilated; thus, the purpose of religious training - usually referred to during the Lotus Blossom period as 'uniting with the Lord' - is now more commonly described as uniting with, following the will of and experiencing in one's life 'the Eternal' or 'The Unborn'. Buddhist training is still described as a process of 'continually trying to do something about yourself'<sup>85</sup> through cleansing the karmic inheritance that 'obscures the face of the Unborn'.<sup>86</sup> The main practices for realising these goals remain those of *zazen*, or serene reflection meditation, and preceptual adherence. A good deal of attention is also given to the significance of ceremonial activity in both monastic and lay contexts. The notion that difficulties encountered in training should be viewed gratefully as opportunities, 'the compassionate workings of the Unborn'<sup>87</sup> that help 'fuel our return to peace of mind and heart',<sup>88</sup> is restated. Kennett's ideas concerning the harmonisation of body and mind and the spiritual or karmic origins of physical disease and mental illness are also reiterated, although this

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<sup>85</sup> Eko Little, 'The Ten Precepts Retreat: the Ceremony of Daily Life' in *Serene Reflection Meditation*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1989), p. 97.

<sup>86</sup> 'And, at Dawn, No Light Shines', *JTHP*, 22.4 (1995), p. 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> 'Study in Detail', *JTHP*, 19.2 (1992), p. 25.

theme continues to be divorced from the unpopular practice of harmonising *mudrās*. British Lay Ministers reflect that, whilst the use of *mudrās* to manipulate energy flows was popular with some when first introduced, and whilst monks may occasionally still use *mudrās* 'to keep fit',<sup>89</sup> *The Book of Life* no longer has this practical application:

At first we tended to think, 'Oh, I'm getting a bit stiff in the shoulders, so I'll go and do a *mudrā* to deal with that'. But there's not much of that done now. In fact, I can't remember when I last actually did a *mudrā* to deal with a spiritual block. So, in a sense, that particular side of the book has fallen out of use, but the information nonetheless is very useful.<sup>90</sup>

Whilst discussion about past-life experiences is also infrequent it nevertheless remains a significant theme, and the appearance of personal accounts of these experiences within the OBC's journals indicates the increased stability enjoyed by the movement during the later period. One monk's discussion of what he describes as 'the concentration camp experience',<sup>91</sup> for example, could not have been printed during the early Lotus Blossom period due to uncertainty and disagreement within the wider congregation at that time about the role and significance of past-life experiences in Zen. Finally, articles continue to elaborate upon the necessary mental attitudes for approaching Buddhist training; namely, acceptance and repentance, willingness and, most importantly, faith.

Routinisation of the OBC worldview during the later period fostered the growth of a stable identity and strong sense of community within the wider congregation, as is illustrated by the emergence of a 'national *Sangha*' consciousness

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<sup>89</sup> OBC Interview, May 1997.

<sup>90</sup> OBC Interview, June 1995.

<sup>91</sup> 'The Truth Holds True for Beings All', *JTHP*, 23.3 (1996), p. 36.

in Britain during the mid-1980s. Whilst differences in opinion continued to exist over elements of OBC doctrine and practice - such as Kennett's emphasis on ceremonial and her use of personalistic imagery - individual practitioners, in most cases, managed to successfully work through their concerns or negotiate compromise positions whilst remaining active and committed members of the Order. In contrast to the conflict and fragmentation characterising the Lotus Blossom Period, then, the later period witnessed the OBC's increasing unification, stability and maturation.

#### 4.1. FAITH AND EXPERIENCE REVISITED

The importance of faith and experience in Buddhist training, and the relationship between them, is as dominant a concern for her disciples during the later period as it is for Kennett herself. The Buddhist path is described as 'the life of faith'<sup>92</sup> and there is widespread agreement that faith, in both its 'internal' and 'external' aspects, forms the basis and backbone of religious training and spiritual growth. 'Faith' continues, during the later period, to embrace various shades of meaning for Kennett's disciples who discuss the importance of having faith: 'that the Eternal or Cosmic Buddha exists, and that we can know Him',<sup>93</sup> in the efficacy of meditation, preceptual adherence and ritual activity; and in the religious experiences and teachings of Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett.

Much significance continues to be attached by trainees to their personal experience of the teachings. The emphasis here, among monks and laity alike, is mostly upon the 'gradual process'<sup>94</sup> of making the Eternal the focus of life, the

<sup>92</sup> Chushin Passmore, 'The Bodhisattva Vows', *JTHP*, 11/3-4 (1984), p. 54.

<sup>93</sup> Jimyo Krasner, 'Right Vision', *JTHP*, 11.1 (1984), p. 23.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

progressive cleansing of karma and the daily re-orientation of life in accordance with 'the still, small voice' of meditation. This approach is in line with the 'Rules of the OBC' which encourage trainees 'to discuss their experiences in training so that these experiences will help others' whilst discouraging discussion of 'the particular details of *kenshō*'.<sup>95</sup> The denial of the higher *kenshōs* to lay trainees does not, as a consequence, act as a dis-incentive to train within the OBC. One trainee, a Lay Minister in the Order, thus explains the goal of her practice in the following way:

I don't meditate for experiences, for flashing lights or voices from the heavens. I don't meditate because I want to be brighter or stronger or top of the class or any of the things that other people go into meditation for [...] I believe that everybody does have the Buddha Nature, always has had, and always was enlightened. But from birth onwards, I have found so much rubbish on top of rubbish throughout my life that what I've done is bury the Buddha Nature. So what I'm doing when I meditate, hopefully, however slowly, is shovelling the shit, uncovering, until that which is within is also without.<sup>96</sup>

Confirmatory experiences of a more irregular and profound nature, however, such as visions, past-life experiences, the 'sudden flashes of understanding or clarity' that may occur early on in training or the 'much deeper understanding or *kenshō* later on',<sup>97</sup> also remain significant. Trainees nevertheless understand that such experiences, though important, are not the goal of practice; they are 'simply possible side-effects of training'<sup>98</sup> or 'gifts from the Eternal'<sup>99</sup> which 'arise naturally if there is something we need to learn from them'.<sup>100</sup> Due to the Order's cautious policy towards religious experiences, practitioners are reluctant to discuss them in any detail, and whilst

<sup>95</sup> 'Rules of the OBC', Appendix 1: Rules for the Lay Ministry, Rule 19.

<sup>96</sup> OBC Interview, June 1997.

<sup>97</sup> OBC Interview, June 1997.

<sup>98</sup> Kinzan Learman, 'Awakening to the Heart of Kanzeon', *JTHP*, 15.3 (1988), p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> Jimyo Krasner, 'Right Vision', p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> Haryo Young, 'The Truth of Being', *JTHP*, 23.2 (1996), p. 24.

personal accounts can be found within the pages of the journals, they are rare. The following account of a British lay trainee's past-life experiences, and his reflections upon their significance, is thus worth quoting at length:

Quite some time ago I was watching a film about the holocaust, and it was where a man in a Nazi uniform was beating up a Jewish boy [...] It struck a chord with me because I felt as though I was part of that. Something told me I was one of those; whether I was the Jew or the Nazi I'm not entirely sure [...] I often wonder whether this was a past-life experience, because the time of it would have been about 1938, and I wasn't born until 1940 [...] Another one. Until about three years ago I was a member of a battle re-enactment society [...] I was playing the role of a Benedictine monk [...] but there was something far deeper going on as well [...] Something told me, 'I've been here and seen this before'. I've probably been some kind of religious in the past [...] I love organ music and when I've been sat there listening to the music my mind has gone back to about the Fifteenth century, the time of the Reformation, and there is a strong thread running that I have been there, in some position where I was able to influence what was going on at the time [...] I've tended to think, if I've been a religious in a former life, why have I ended up living a perfectly normal, mundane life here? Had there been some evil karma built up? I've wondered whether I had been a church man in medieval times and abused my position. Certainly being in the Inquisition was an abusive position [...] It would also make sense if I was a Jew being persecuted, that could well have been a karmic consequence of the other. But at the same time I could say, well that might answer where I am now [...] But now I think, is it that important? The important thing is to do my training and do what I consider to be right action now. What happened in the past, it may be true, it may be useful, I've taken it on board and thought this may well be teaching. But I'm not taking it too seriously because it might also be fanciful imagining [...] I use them as reference points as I go along. It's a case of, 'Oh yes, that's interesting'. Rather like reading a text about something, and thinking, 'Didn't I hear about this somewhere else?', fishing out the reference and then carrying on with the text [...] You've picked up a bit of knowledge in your research that confirms what's in your textbook. Rather like a footnote to your training.<sup>101</sup>

Whilst OBC trainees value their personal experiences very highly, the emphasis, following Kennett's lead, is upon having faith 'even when we are unable to

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<sup>101</sup> OBC Interview, June 1995.



believe<sup>102</sup> and accepting the teachings 'even in the absence of obvious results'.<sup>103</sup> Depictions of the Buddha as a 'pragmatic empiricist who dismisses all doctrine and faith',<sup>104</sup> are criticised, as is a perceived over-emphasis in the West on the value of 'doubt'.<sup>105</sup> Articles also attempt to engage with the cultural and emotional baggage that often makes 'faith' a problematic concept for western converts to Buddhism:

I meet a lot of people who express pain and disappointment over their experience of other religions; they in fact cling to the hurt by being unwilling to trust again the mind of faith. Many people are frightened to trust a religion, a teacher, or their own hearts for fear of going astray. They should ask themselves where are they at the moment? Have they found what their heart truly seeks? If not, then they are going to have to move if they wish to do something about it.<sup>106</sup>

Within the OBC, then, faith in oneself, in the Eternal and in the master and her teachings, are prioritised above personal, confirmatory experiences. Indeed, the mind of faith itself is understood to be 'essential before any real experience of the Truth can be known'.<sup>107</sup>

Everyone knows the Buddha's injunction not to accept anything just because it is said by a teacher, or written in the scriptures, until you have proved it true for yourself [...] It is all very well to go on testing and dipping one's toe in the water [...] but there must come a point (if one is to know for oneself what Buddhism is truly about, if one is to find the Cosmic Buddha) when one lets go of self [...] If we are to see in ourselves and others that which is real, we have to make the leap from seeing with the ordinary eye of the discriminatory mind to seeing with the eye of faith.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Myoho Harris, 'Trust', *JTHP*, 12.3 (1985), p. 12.

<sup>103</sup> Jimyo Krasner, 'Right Vision', *JTHP*, 11.1 (1984), p. 23.

<sup>104</sup> 'A Look at the *Kālāma Sūtra*', *JTHP*, 15.4 (1988), p. 21.

<sup>105</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Bonds of Doubt', *JTHP*, 19.4 (1992), 10-16.

<sup>106</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Adoration of the Buddha's Relics', *JTHP*, 12.4 and 13.1 (1985-1986), p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Adoration of the Buddha's Relics', p. 8.

<sup>108</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Respect', *JTHP*, 11/3-4 (1984), pp. 4-6.

## 4.2. MONASTIC AND LAY FORMS OF TRAINING

Another major preoccupation of OBC trainees during the later period concerns the nature and importance of monastic and lay training. Accounts of lay trainees getting to grips with their 'individual *kōans*' amidst the realities of daily life abound, as do personal reflections by monks about the contemplative vocation. Discussion often focuses upon the relative value of monastic and lay training. The 'concentrated effort that a monastery engenders', the trust that the monastic order is 'founded on a wise monastic rule [...] arranged so as to show us our greater selves', and the master-disciple relationship which encourages 'the letting go of that within us which is holding us back in order to allow that which is most noble and selfless to develop', are some of the reasons given for regarding monasticism as a most efficacious means of uniting with 'the Body of the Eternal'.<sup>109</sup> The monastic life is also valued highly as a source of guidance and inspiration for the laity, a constant reminder 'that there is a way out of our present suffering'.<sup>110</sup> It is consistently stressed, however, that monastic and lay forms of training are equally valid and valuable because the 'sincerity of purpose and resolve'<sup>111</sup> or 'spirit of having left behind worldly concerns'<sup>112</sup> that should underpin both, is much more important than the external forms themselves.

The growth and consolidation of the British lay congregation during the later period led to an increase in articles by lay practitioners focusing upon 'training in the world'. Much attention is given, in particular, to the importance of Buddhist parenting and to the place of sexuality in religious training, especially in terms of its capacity to

<sup>109</sup> Haryo Young, 'Why Monasticism?', *JTHP*, 15.1 (1988), p. 35.

<sup>110</sup> 'Monasticism: A Form of Escapism?', *JTHP*, 17.3 (1990), p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> 'Study in Detail', p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> Haryo Young, 'Why Monasticism?', p. 31.

damage relationships within the *Sangha*. The most common theme, however, concerns the difficult project of training in the absence of the structures, schedules and ceremonial forms that most lay trainees find invaluable whilst on retreat at the monastery.<sup>113</sup> The focus here is upon the ways in which monastic forms - such as bowing, altars and incense offerings, the recitation of verses and scriptures, meditation schedules, formal meals, etc - can be skilfully used to support lay training or otherwise adapted to the demands of lay life. These articles also reflect the OBC's utilitarian approach towards religious form, emphasising fluidity and flexibility and warning against the dangers of attempting to replicate the monastic lifestyle in a worldly context. Monastic aids to mindfulness can be useful but they are not considered absolutely necessary and must not distract one from 'the real work of finding the True Heart: the Eternal in all things'.<sup>114</sup> The most important thing is to 'live in the monastery of our own hearts',<sup>115</sup> turning 'everything we do into an offering to the Lord of the House',<sup>116</sup> whilst skilfully tailoring or adapting selected monastic forms to one's specific needs and circumstances.

### 4.3. ADAPTATION

This essentialist perspective on the utilitarian nature and ultimate 'emptiness' of religious form is also the context in which discussions of adaptation within the Order take place:

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<sup>113</sup> The available evidence of journal articles and personal interviews indicates that most practitioners within the OBC value and appreciate the strong emphasis within the Order upon the formal and ritual style of religious expression. A small minority, however, are clearly troubled by the emphasis on ceremonial; one trainee describes, for example, how 'I have a problem with ceremonies; they press my Religion button' ('A Personal Reflection on the Group's Weekend', *JTHP*, 22.4 (1995), p. 11).

<sup>114</sup> 'A Layman's *Kōan*', *JTHP*, 14.2 (1987), p. 28.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>116</sup> 'The Value of a Meditation Group', *JTHP*, 11.2 (1984), p. 27.

The ultimate authority in the Zen tradition does not lie in the words of the Scriptures but in their essence [...] This essential nature, or Buddha Nature, is the final authority. It was upon this that Shakyamuni relied and it is by trusting ourselves to this source that we become followers of Shakyamuni. Whenever the final authority lies outside a structure, the structure may at times be turned on its head.<sup>117</sup>

To facilitate their presentation of Buddhist themes, Kennett's disciples continue to borrow extensively from the imagery, expressions and textual sources of Christianity, particularly its mystical tradition. The process of cleansing karma and uniting with the Unborn is likened, for example, to the 'purgation or cleansing in preparation for perfect union with the Divine Light (God)' of St. John's *The Dark Night of the Soul*.<sup>118</sup>

Opinions continue to be divided, during the later period, about the value and legitimacy of the Order's use of positive imagery to describe ultimate truth. Whilst a minority continued to use explicitly theistic terminology, most trainees adopted Kennett's more neutral language of 'the Eternal' or 'the Unborn', and others still considered that even these terms were overly suggestive of theism, opting instead for more traditional designations ('Buddha', 'Buddha Nature' etc). Further defences of the use of positive terminology are thus presented during this period. These reject the theistic critique, maintaining that by using terms like 'Cosmic Buddha', 'the Eternal' and 'Him' to describe ultimate truth 'we are not saying that it exists in some sense that is graspable, containable or measurable'.<sup>119</sup> The limitation of language *per se* in the depiction of 'what is essentially ineffable and unknowable by the power of human reason'<sup>120</sup> is emphasised, and the Order's positive terms are defended as flawed, but

<sup>117</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'No Abiding Place', *JTHP*, 16.2 (1989), p. 15.

<sup>118</sup> 'And, at Dawn, No Light Shines', *JTHP*, 22.4 (1995), p. 19.

<sup>119</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'The Birth of the Buddha', *JTHP*, 23.2 (1996), p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> 'This Truth Holds for Beings All', *JTHP*, 23.3 (1996), p. 25.

nonetheless preferable, alternatives to negative terms like 'void' and 'emptiness' which tend to engender despair. A trainee's concern that 'there is a great danger of an attitude of there being a God becoming instilled', thus received the reply that,

if one says nothing, or uses negative terms, one can be misunderstood; and if one says something by writing articles and using positive terms, one can be misunderstood. So there is no way out of this dilemma; we just have to do the best we can and take the consequences for it.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> 'Letters from Readers', *JTHP*, 13.2 (1986), pp. 28-29. From 1985 the Order's journals have included a clarificatory statement for those who 'may consider the use of the word "He" inappropriate', part of which reads 'Whenever "He" is used, please understand that this is meant as He/She/It.'

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**  
**THE LATER PERIOD, 1984-1996 (2)**

**5. GROWTH AND CONSOLIDATION IN BRITAIN, 1984-1996**

During the later period, the development of the Order in Britain was characterised by consolidation, stability and growth. In this respect, it reflected and benefited from Kennett's emphasis upon institutional and ideological routinisation and systematisation. The return of the British monks from Shasta Abbey, fully trained within OBC guidelines to form 'the foundation of a full training monastery at Throssel Hole Priory',<sup>1</sup> marked the beginning of this new and vital period. Their presence stimulated and invigorated the lay congregation which, from a spattering of small and isolated groupings of local activity, soon developed into a thriving, active and unified community operating at both a local, regional and national level. This lay growth, in turn, provided the monastic community with both an enthusiastic recruitment base and a healthy source of financial support. In this way, the traditional, symbiotic interdependence of monks and laity was enlivened and rejuvenated. Central to this period of growth and consolidation was the Lay Ministry, an initiative that had been introduced with the return of the British monks. When outlining the later development of the OBC in Britain, then, we must be particularly attentive to the role of Lay Ministers as mediators, facilitators and organisers.

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<sup>1</sup> 'News of the British Monks at Shasta Abbey', *JTHP*, 7/10-12 (1980), p. 5.

## 6. THROSSEL HOLE PRIORY IN THE LATER PERIOD

### 6.1. CONSOLIDATION OF THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY

Following their return from America, the small British monastic community (at that time around eight strong) grew steadily under the leadership of Rev. Master Daishin Morgan, the abbot of Throssel Hole Priory. By 1996 there were approximately thirty-five monks and postulants in residence, around the same number of trainees as were training at Shasta Abbey. Many of these have now celebrated their tenth and twentieth 'ordination birthdays' and have risen through the priestly ranks to become Teachers and Masters of the Order. In 1997, the OBC's total membership of eighty-four monks and postulants included thirty-two Teachers of whom sixteen were British, and twenty Masters of whom five were British.<sup>2</sup> In terms of monastic training, then, Throssel Hole Priory has gradually acquired a similar profile and significance to that of Shasta Abbey. Incidentally, this situation reflects the structure of Japanese *Sōtō* which also, in the form of *Eiheiji* and *Sōjiji*, has two Head Temples.

Under the guidance of the abbot and other senior priests, the monks at Throssel Hole Priory lead a disciplined and structured communal life of meditation, manual labour, study, lectures and ceremonial observance. Following the traditional *Sōtō* view that 'spiritual cultivation should not be restricted to conventionally "religious" forms but [be] pursued in the midst of everyday activities as well',<sup>3</sup> even seemingly 'ordinary' activities are carried out in a spirit of mindfulness and ritual procedure. Verses are chanted, for example, before washing, teeth-brushing and

<sup>2</sup> 'The Order of Buddhist Contemplatives: December 1997', *JOBC*, 12.4 (1997), 47-50.

<sup>3</sup> Foulk, p. 167.

listening to lectures, and mealtimes in particular are carefully choreographed affairs involving the chanting of prayers, gestures of respectful offering and strict prescriptions for handling one's bowl and utensils. The typical daily schedule includes three or four forty-minute periods of meditation; the chanting of scriptures during morning, midday and evening services; periods of manual labour or 'working meditation'; mealtimes (which are taken in a separate dining area rather than in the monk's meditation hall, as is traditional in Japanese *Sōtō* monasteries); and times set aside for spiritual reading, lectures, communal tea, reflection and relaxation. In addition to this, the priory observes a wide array of daily and monthly ceremonies and a full calendar of annual festival celebrations. Sunday afternoons and Mondays are designated as 'renewal days', when the rigorous daily schedule is relaxed; rising time is later (7.45 am rather than 6 am), there are fewer formal meditation and work periods, and the monks rest, relax and engage in personal activities like writing letters. There are also times, however, when monastic practice becomes more intensive; for example, during the twice-yearly 'monastic searching of the heart retreat (*sesshin*)' the monastery 'is closed to visitors, work projects are set aside and emphasis is placed on meditation'.<sup>4</sup>

According to Rev. Master Daishin Morgan, since the British monks returned from America, there has been 'a marked softening' in the schedule and temper of the monastery which today 'has a gentle rather than an ascetic quality'. He explains this 'as a result of the maturing of the practice':

As community members have increased their faith in the Teaching, and in themselves and their practice, the need for external measures of sincerity, such

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<sup>4</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Britain', p. 143.



as how many hours a day are spent in formal meditation, how ascetic are the physical conditions, how little you eat or sleep - all take second place to truly following the path that leads beyond forms, but which leads through the deepest cleansing of the heart and mind. Outer forms of practice retain their deep significance, but they are no longer relied upon as authenticators.<sup>5</sup>

The `softening` of the monastery`s practice, though, also needs to be understood as an accommodation to the laity. To encourage lay trainees to visit the monastery more regularly, during the later period, the journal has issued assurances that `the amenities at Throssel Hole Priory and its general appearance have improved`.<sup>6</sup>

Offering teaching, spiritual counselling (*sanzen*) and other priestly services (e.g. weddings, funerals and memorial services) to the laity is another important activity of the monastic community. This has taken place mainly at the monastery itself, particularly through its retreat and residential lay training programmes, although it also takes place away from the priory. Following their return from Shasta Abbey, the British monks started to visit, on a monthly basis, the priory`s affiliated meditation groups to give spiritual guidance, encouragement and meditation instruction. As the number of groups increased, this activity was extended through the travelling priest programme. This programme, which involved monks making regional tours of meditation groups, was started as a means of assessing the potential for institutional expansion in Britain; the success of the groups in accommodating and supporting the touring monk would indicate their ability to sustain a new local priory. In addition to this, monks have always travelled out from the priory to lead day and weekend retreats, give public talks and perform priestly functions in lay trainees` homes (e.g. the house blessing ceremony). This activity has also extended beyond

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *JTHP*, 13.2 (1986), p. 31.

Britain; monks from the priory have led retreats in the Netherlands and Germany since the late 1970s.

## 6.2. FINANCING AND MATERIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Within the OBC 'the traditional interdependence of monastic and lay communities'<sup>7</sup> is promoted and implemented. Throssel Hole Priory is thus funded entirely by donations made by its congregation in Britain and Europe, and it enjoys the financial advantages stemming from its status as a charitable trust. As we observed earlier, though, the primary basis of the laity's financial support has never been that of merit-making or priestly ritual performance as is common in eastern contexts. The priory, like that of other Buddhist centres catering to western practitioners, receives its main income for providing lay trainees with religious teaching, meditation instruction, spiritual guidance and encouragement:

The congregation depends upon the monks for spiritual teaching, while the monks depend upon the congregation for their material support.<sup>8</sup>

During the early period, the funds from the embryonic lay congregation were insufficient to support the priory's growing number of monks who, unless they had personal savings or alternative means of support, had to find work in neighbouring villages and towns. In contrast to their monastic counterparts in the NKT, the 'skilful' use of the state benefits system was never an option for ZMS / OBC monks:

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Begging Bowl', *JTHP*, 11/3-4 (1984), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> 'Throssel Hole Priory Annual Review, 1992/93', p. 6.

No person may represent himself or herself as a priest of the Zen Mission Society, Shasta Abbey, whilst living on welfare or dole or any other municipal fund other than a legally obtained scholarship for the purposes of study.<sup>9</sup>

During the critical Lotus Blossom Period, largely in response to ultimatums issued by Kennett to her British followers, the financial situation of the priory improved. Funding was now channelled into three areas: the Scholarship Fund (to cover the costs of the British monastic community at Shasta Abbey); the Priory Fund (to cover the daily running of Throssel Hole, the purchase of equipment, etc); and the Land and Building Fund (to pay for the purchase of the priory and major construction work). The British monks continued to be well supported following their return, enabling the priory to maintain an 'open-door' policy of 'allowing anyone who demonstrates a sincere and earnest desire to train themselves to enter the postulancy'.<sup>10</sup> The expansion of the monastic *Sangha* fostered the growth of the laity which, in turn, provided further financial security, with individual donations and covenants now being boosted by collective fund-raising drives.

An ongoing feature of the history of the Order in Britain has been renovation and construction work, all of which has been done by the priory community. When the decision was made, during the early period, to make Throssel Hole Priory the permanent monastic base of the ZMS in Britain, plans were drawn up to renovate and enlarge the existing buildings. The most pressing undertaking was the construction of a new monastic meditation hall. This project, however, saw numerous setbacks; dependence upon donations from the laity ensured that progress was slow and sporadic, a problem compounded by the conflict and fragmentation of the Lotus

<sup>9</sup> 'Important Public Announcement', *JTHP*, 5.4 (1977), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> 'Scholarship Fund', *JTHP*, 12.3 (1985), p. 28.

Blossom period and the subsequent absence of the British monastic community. Little building work was done during the tenure of the American priests who concentrated, instead, upon stabilising and rebuilding the British congregation, whilst accumulating enough funds for the British monks to oversee the final push towards completion. Following their return there was 'a burst of activity'<sup>11</sup> and the meditation hall, replete with stained-glass windows of *Bodhisattvas* (or, in OBC terminology, Buddhist 'saints'), was finally completed in 1986. An adjoining ceremony hall (*hondō*), which doubles up as a meditation hall for lay trainees, was also completed two years later. Further construction projects have since been undertaken by the community, the main one being the purchase, in 1992, of a building near the priory called Myrtlebank.

The significance of renovation and construction work at Throssel Hole Priory should not be under-estimated. The community strongly believes that alongside the material development of the priory comes a deepening in spiritual training, both for the monastic and lay communities. The completion of the meditation hall thus marked 'the beginning of a deeper expression of practice and training' and ushered in 'an exciting period of growth' because it enabled 'the traditional forms of Zen monastic training to be fully implemented at the Priory'.<sup>12</sup> The monastic community, which had been sharing its meditation hall with lay guests, could now 'devote more time to the more usual monastic schedule', and the laity would 'benefit greatly from sharing in the more intensive contemplative life of the monastery'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 'Building Progress', *JTHP*, 10.3 (1983), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Completion of the New Meditation Hall', *JTHP*, 15.1 (1988), pp. 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> 'The New Meditation Hall', *JTHP*, 15.2 (1988), pp. 31-34.

## 7. THE EXPANSION OF THE OBC IN BRITAIN

Besides teaching the lay congregation Throssel Hole Priory has also endeavoured to establish close and friendly links with its neighbouring community. In 1984, Rev. Master Daishin Morgan gave a well-attended talk in nearby Hexham about the Order's beliefs and practices. This hoped to foster 'mutual understanding and respect' between the priory and the local community so that they could 'live together in harmony, and without suspicion'.<sup>14</sup> Members of the surrounding community have subsequently been invited to visit the monastery and talk informally with its resident monks. This sensitivity to social context is reminiscent of the British *Theravāda* Sangha, a group which, according to Bell, is also 'critically aware of the manner of their insertion into British society'.<sup>15</sup> Both groups share a low-key style of proselytization that has enabled them to distance themselves 'from current preconceived ideas about NRMs and public unease about their recruitment techniques', whilst presenting themselves as 'mainstream representatives of an established world religion, as opposed to the idea of a newly invented, faddish, unstable and exotic cult so feared by a large section of the British public'.<sup>16</sup> Like the British *Theravāda* Sangha, the OBC has 'no clearly defined organised evangelical strategy',<sup>17</sup> adopting instead a more passive and exemplary policy towards proselytization that similarly draws upon traditional *Theravāda* injunctions against teaching without prior invitation:

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<sup>14</sup> *JTHP*, 11.2 (1984), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> 'Buddhism in Britain', p. 164.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

We encourage people not to thrust their belief and practice onto others, nor to feel they must take a hard line. Buddhist training should help one to live peacefully with others, rather than be a cause of conflict. There is a tradition that one must be asked three times before giving the teaching. This means that one only speaks of the Dharma when asked. There should be no attempt to convert those who are content with their beliefs.<sup>18</sup>

On the subject of missionary activity, then, the OBC and NKT are markedly different. The NKT is more akin to the FWBO of Bell's study, a group for which proselytization 'is a major preoccupation' and which similarly adopts a more 'obtrusive' style of promotional activity.<sup>19</sup>

The expansion of the OBC, both in America and in Britain, has thus been gradual rather than explosive, the maturation and spiritual deepening of the Order being considered more important than its outward physical and numerical growth:

groups are not created to try to sell something; the aim is to give maximum benefit to those who genuinely wish to train rather than to obtain large numbers in membership.<sup>20</sup>

The number of meditation groups affiliated to Throssel Hole Priory has risen steadily, from three in 1973, to the current total of twenty eight (including three in the Netherlands and one in Germany). The creation of new groups has never been the result of any kind of organised missionary activity. They are usually created by isolated or small groups of individuals who have developed an interest in the OBC's style of practice, often after an introductory retreat at the priory, and who wish to meditate regularly with others. A characteristically low level of promotional activity, combined with a rigorously contemplative emphasis of practice not immediately

<sup>18</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Britain', p. 146.

<sup>19</sup> 'Buddhism in Britain', p. 170.

<sup>20</sup> 'Groups Weekend 1996', *JTHP*, 23.4 (1996-97), p. 21.

accessible to newcomers,<sup>21</sup> ensures that few meditation groups attract more than ten regular attenders, and most average even less.<sup>22</sup> As is typical of other Buddhist organisations, the development of the OBC in Britain has been characterised by considerable fluctuation at a local group level. The return of the British monastic community nevertheless introduced a greater degree of stability by enabling stronger links to be forged between local groups and the monastic centre.

Following the highly experimental, and short-lived, attempt to establish a priory in London during the 1970s, the institutional expansion of the OBC beyond Throssel Hole did not occur until 1990 when Reading Buddhist Priory was opened. Institutional expansion has been largely understood as a lay initiative with new priories being established only when a meditation group, or groups, 'feels ready to take the next step'.<sup>23</sup> The first cluster of meditation groups to take this further step of commitment were from the south of England. From the mid-1980s, monks from Throssel Hole embarked upon 'Southern Teaching Tours', financed, organised and supported by the meditation groups constituting the 'Southern Sangha'. The potential for a permanent centre, in terms of the spiritual and financial support pledged, was acknowledged as early as 1986 and, two years later, it was announced that a new priory was to be established. The southern groups were consulted with regards to the

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<sup>21</sup> No concessions are made for newcomers with respect to the practice: 'The practice speaks for itself and should not be altered to suit newcomers; if they are put off by some aspects then it is better if that happens at an early stage, so they can either resolve the problem or look elsewhere for something which suits them' (*JTHP*, 23.4 (1996-97), p. 21). This means that, following a brief introductory talk, newcomers join in with the regular programme of two half-hour periods of seated meditation, a ten-minute period of walking meditation (*kinhin*), scripture recitation and other ceremonial. I would suggest that this format, which is typical of other Zen organisations in Britain, is far less accessible to that found within NKT groups, where the meditation period is shorter and often guided, and where the main emphasis is upon the practical Dharma talk delivered by the group's teacher and the ensuing informal discussion.

<sup>22</sup> Most groups claim to have a regular attendance of between four and ten, although the total number of individuals connected to the group or on its mailing list is often much higher.

<sup>23</sup> 'Meditation Group News', *JTHP*, 13.4 (1986), p. 21.

most suitable location and in 1990, Reading Buddhist Priory (with a resident monk from Throssel Hole acting as prior), was opened.

In terms of its institutional growth, the OBC in Britain is currently at an important stage of development. Throughout 1995 and 1996, clusters of meditation groups based in Scotland, East Anglia, the West Midlands and the North West, each launched separate appeals for funds towards establishing new priories. Priors were subsequently founded in Telford, early in 1997, and in Edinburgh a year later, bringing the total number of permanent OBC centres in Britain to four. As noted earlier, this push for regional priories has brought the OBC in Britain closer to the American model of institutional development, and this may have important consequences for the future style of practice at Throssel Hole. The creation of new priories is regarded as 'a splendid symbol of the continuing growth of the Sangha',<sup>24</sup> and it has taken place with the full endorsement and support of Kennett. Concern has recently been expressed, however, that in their eagerness to establish and support regional priories, local groups may be putting themselves and their practice under unnecessary pressure.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 'New Priory in Telford', *JTHP*, 23.4 (1996-97), p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> 'Groups Weekend 1996', *JTHP*, 23.4 (1996-97), p. 22.



## 8. LAY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LATER PERIOD

The OBC's claim that the higher levels of religious experience are unattainable outside the monastic path, diverges from the radical laicisation and 'democratisation of enlightenment' evident in other western Zen movements. However, this does not act as a dis-incentive to lay trainees because the Order's main emphasis is upon the daily actualisation of inherent enlightenment, and because there are types of experience other than the higher *kenshōs* that are open to lay trainees (e.g. visions and past-life experiences). Furthermore, in all other respects, and in common with western Buddhism generally, the validity and importance of lay practice has always been affirmed by the OBC. The clearest expression of this was Kennett's creation of the Lay Ministry, a form through which sincere practitioners could express and deepen their commitment. An examination of lay developments in Britain during the later period illustrates the centrality of the Lay Ministry to the subsequent growth and development of the OBC.

### 8.1. LAY RETREAT AND TEACHING PROGRAMME

The teaching has been made available to the lay congregation in a number of ways. Upon being established Throssel Hole Priory began to offer weekend and week retreats as well as the Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat (*Jūkaizai*), to the laity. Following the return of the British monks in 1982, this programme was expanded. An Introductory Retreat was introduced and day retreats, organised by meditation groups and led by monks away from the priory grounds, became a more regular occurrence. More recently, a number of committed lay trainees participated in the first ninety-day

retreat, a principal aim of which was 'to discover more about the nature of Sangha: of how one can find the deeper teaching within one's relationships with others'.<sup>26</sup> Some retreats are designed to coincide with traditional Buddhist festivals, whilst others focus on specific areas of teaching - such as the life of the Buddha or the texts of *Dōgen* - and give greater emphasis to periods of formal instruction and discussion. Weekend retreats have also been organised in recent years to deal with important issues in lay training, such as sexuality, homosexuality and work. Alongside its retreat programme, the priory has also developed a residential training programme, enabling lay trainees to stay there outside of scheduled times and share in its contemplative life.

Retreat periods provide an opportunity for the laity to train alongside monks, receive teachings and spiritual counselling, and participate fully in the monastic schedule of work, meditation and ceremonial:

Sharing in the contemplative life of the monastery is a very valuable way of deepening one's practice and commitment to Buddhist teaching.<sup>27</sup>

They are also considered important from the perspective of monastic growth and development, since they provide monks with 'an excellent opportunity to share our understanding and explain the Buddha's teaching to others'.<sup>28</sup> Throssel Hole Priory will thus continue to function as the main retreat centre for the OBC in Britain, even though the creation of new priories, with the facilities to offer retreats at a regional level, will enable it to develop a more monastic focus.

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<sup>26</sup> *JTHP*, 23.1 (1996), p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> *JTHP*, 21.2 (1994), p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> *JTHP*, 10.2 (1983), p. 12.

## 8.2. THE LAY MINISTRY

The first British practitioners to train upon this programme did so under monastic supervision at Shasta Abbey. The programme was started at Throssel Hole Priory in 1983, following the return of the monastic community, and the first British-trained Lay Ministers were certified a year later. The programme quickly became very popular, the Lay Ministry growing steadily to eight in 1985, forty in 1992 and fifty in 1997. The Lay Ministry thus represents a sizeable segment of the British lay congregation which, according to recent estimates, is approximately a thousand strong.

Lay Ministers have been vital to the growth and development of the British laity. In particular, they have facilitated an increasing connectivity, both within the lay congregation and between laity and monks, contributing greatly to the emergence of a sense of cohesion and community in the Order. For some, the creation of a collective or communal identity is an essential and explicit element of the programme:

Where the Lay Ministry will lead each one of us is slowly finding out. For me, it is a deeper awareness of the Third Treasure, taking refuge in the Sangha. For a long time, we have relied on the Priory for our spiritual needs; slowly we are beginning to realise the potential of the lay community. By sitting still we start to take responsibility for our lives. By training together we start to take responsibility for the Sangha, to find our own role.<sup>29</sup>

Lay Ministers assume a position of responsibility within the priory's affiliated meditation groups, taking a leading role in their organisation, running and social development. Inter-group connections on a regional and national level are also fostered through the British Lay Ministry network. Lay Ministers liaise closely with

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Lavin, 'The Lay Ministry Programme', *JTHP*, 12.3 (1985), p. 31.

the priory and represent an important bridge between the monastic centre and the wider lay congregation; for example, by mediating news and information in both directions and organising local events which bring monks and lay trainees together (e.g. visits by monks to the local groups or group visits to the priory). They also take collective responsibility for organising larger-scale events that take place away from the priory, such as Congregation Day which has been held at a different venue each year since 1988.

### 8.3. THE MEDITATION GROUP NETWORK

Lay trainees have found it helpful to practise with others and, towards this end, have organised themselves into local meditation groups. During the early period, such groups did not always affiliate exclusively with the ZMS's style of practice; whilst including *Sōtō* Zen meditation in their religious repertoire, they often represented 'a wide range of Buddhist and non-Buddhist points of view'.<sup>30</sup> Kennett's call for a more exclusive form of practice and commitment during the Lotus Blossom period, however, prompted more focused guidelines, the 'true meditation group' now being defined as,

a group [...] comprised of people who look to one Teacher or church for their spiritual guidance - who are, in other words, past the point of 'shopping around' and are getting down to the hard work of training in one discipline.<sup>31</sup>

This emphasis on exclusive affiliation hardened and, with the formulation of the 'Bylaws', became official policy for the Order. In Britain, the question of meditation

<sup>30</sup> *THPN*, 1.4 (1974), p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> 'On Retreats', *JTHP* (November-December 1978), pp. 11-12.

group affiliation has since been clarified further. Two kinds of group are now recognised by Throssel Hole Priory: official affiliates, which consist of experienced meditators and at least one Lay Minister; and 'stage one groups', which are newer to the practice and require further grounding and experience before affiliation proper can be considered.<sup>32</sup>

Meditation groups usually meet weekly, either in members' homes or in rented rooms (often in Quaker Meeting Houses), and include periods of formal religious practice and informal social interaction. Whilst the format may differ slightly between groups, 'thus reflecting the natural evolution of groups in diverse settings',<sup>33</sup> in the main there is considerable uniformity in the structure of group meetings. Much significance has been attached, during the later period, to the cultivation of friendly and social connections within and between groups:

Many of the meditation groups are beginning to organise events that have a primarily social function, in addition to the regular meditation meetings. This is a move well worth encouraging and one that can only serve to bring members closer together.<sup>34</sup>

Monks are also invited to meditation groups periodically, to lead meditation and answer questions relating to doctrine and practice.

Meditation groups have always enjoyed a close and reciprocal relationship with Throssel Hole, sharing in the organisation of outside retreats and teaching ventures and supporting the monks in a variety of financial and practical ways. Of particular importance during the Lotus Blossom period, for example, was the

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<sup>32</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Meditation Groups: The Question of Affiliation', *JTHP*, 18.2 (1991), pp. 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> 'Groups Weekend 1996', *JTHP*, 23.4 (1996-97), p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Socialising Within Training', *JTHP*, 14.1 (1987), p. 5.

organisation of 'work days', whereby groups would labour alongside the priory's severely depleted resident community upon its various building projects. The successful return and continuing growth of the British monastic community nevertheless required a parallel process of growth and development within the lay congregation. The introduction of the Lay Ministry programme proved to be the key factor behind this process. Meditation groups had, until this time, operated largely independently of each other, concentrating on their individual relationships with the priory and the development of the lay congregation at a local level. Through the agency of Lay Ministers, previously disparate groups began to interact and practise with each other and organise regional and national lay events, thereby generating an awareness of how 'the Sangha exists throughout the country'.<sup>35</sup> These developments were significant in a number of ways. Firstly, the growing sense of cohesion and community within the lay congregation promoted the financial and material security of the monastic *Sangha*. Meditation groups now began to unite together in their support of the priory; by passing its begging bowl from group to group, for example, or by collectively providing the new ceremony hall with meditation cushions and benches. Secondly, the growth of the meditation group network provided the foundation for the institutional expansion of the OBC in Britain. The increasing awareness among the groups in the south of England that, collectively, they constituted a 'Southern Sangha', thus made possible the founding of Reading Buddhist Priory in 1990. Thirdly, and most importantly, the strengthening of linkages, both between groups and in their relationship with Throssel Hole, has contributed to the overall health and maturation of the Order. The 'Meditation Groups Weekend',

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<sup>35</sup> *JTHP*, 12.1 (1985), p. 39.

which has been held annually since 1988, provides a good illustration of this. Representation from every meditation group on this 'extremely important occasion' is considered imperative because it is only through such meetings, 'when the Sangha as a whole gets together to discuss current issues of mutual interest', that Throssel Hole Priory can 'respond effectively to lay needs' and the Order can 'survive and grow spiritually'.<sup>36</sup> The direction and growth of the OBC, it is emphasised, is not hierarchically dictated by the monks but, rather, requires dialogue and the acceptance by all of 'a responsibility for the whole':

The relationship within the Sangha is both *vertical* - between you and the teacher, or you and the Priory; and also *horizontal* - that is, between all its members. To make this a reality, there has to be participation and sharing at all levels within the Sangha [...] there needs to be a mutual setting of pace between the Priory and Lay Sangha. Both have an essential contribution to make.<sup>37</sup>

#### 8.4. THE LATER PROLIFERATION OF LAY EVENTS

An appreciation of the increasing prominence of lay activities in Britain can be gleaned by tracing the various lay events introduced since the mid-1980s. The organisation of regional and congregation-wide events reflected and reaffirmed the growing awareness that meditation groups collectively formed a community or *Sangha*, an attitude encouraged by the priory and fostered, in particular, by the enthusiasm and initiative of its Lay Ministry. When such events are held away from the priory grounds, the meditation groups, with Lay Ministers taking a leading role, are responsible for their planning and organisation. Events such as *Wesak* (festival of the Buddha's birth) and Congregation Day, which are held annually at an outside

<sup>36</sup> 'Annual Groups Weekend', *JTHP*, 17.3 (1990), p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> 'Groups Weekend', *JTHP*, 18.1 (1991), p. 25.

venue, are important not only because they allow 'the Lay Sangha to meet and celebrate together' but also because they provide the lay congregation with an opportunity 'to play host to the monastic community in the traditional way'.<sup>38</sup> Other lay events - the Summer Family Camp, for example - are organised by, and held at, the priory. Their organisation, nevertheless, often involves a high degree of lay-input; the Meditation Groups and Lay Ministers Weekends, for example, are scheduled according to lay members' suggestions of topics to be addressed.

Up until the mid-1980s, the events organised for the British laity were restricted mainly to the various retreats offered by the priory, both inside and outside of its grounds. Since 1986 the number of lay events has increased dramatically. This development can be traced back to 1986 when the southern meditation groups organised and held the celebration of *Wesak* at a venue in Birmingham to make the occasion more accessible to the whole congregation. This event marked a new stage of lay growth because it brought, for the first time, the 'sharing and intimacy of training together into a new context outside of the retreat setting'.<sup>39</sup> Since then many more lay events have been organised. In 1988, the first Congregation Day was held at an outside venue, whilst the first Meditation Groups Weekend and Summer Family Camp were held at the priory. In 1994, the growing awareness of issues facing 'the junior Sangha'<sup>40</sup> culminated in the first Young Person's Dharma Weekend at the priory, and in 1995, the first Social Weekend was held.

The various events organised for the lay congregation enumerated here indicate how Throssel Hole Priory, from the mid-1980s, became a centre of lay

<sup>38</sup> *JTHP*, 12.4 and 13.1 (1985-1986), p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> 'Wesak 1986', *JTHP*, 13.2 (1986), p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> *JTHP*, 23.2 (1996), p. 47.



activity. As such it has fulfilled quite a different role to that of Shasta Abbey which has played host to far fewer lay activities. However, as I have mentioned already, the institutional expansion of the OBC in Britain may well prompt a re-evaluation of the role of Throssel Hole and the British pattern may begin, eventually, to more closely resemble its American antecedent.

## 9. THE OBC AND THE BRITISH BUDDHIST CONTEXT

### 9.1. KENNETT'S POLICY ON DIALOGUE

The openness displayed by Kennett towards alternative religious traditions, through her project of adapting Zen for the West and her perennial certainty that experience of the truth transcends external differences, has never furnished her followers with a licence for eclecticism. The opposite, in fact, has been the case; as we have seen, she has always expected her disciples to adopt an exclusiveness of faith, practice and institutional affiliation. The 'Bylaws' thus state that,

No teachings of religions other than those of the Serene Reflection Meditation Church of Buddhism may be practised by members of the OBC or at any affiliated meditation group, parish church or training monastery.<sup>41</sup>

In this respect, the OBC resembles the FWBO, a movement which has, in a similar way, drawn upon multiple Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources in the construction of a distinctive and unique religious and institutional identity. The arguments offered by Kennett in defence of her exclusive policy are also strikingly reminiscent of the NKT. The following statement from the 'Rules of the OBC' would not look out of place in a book by Geshe Kelsang:

Commitment to one form of religious practice is an important aspect of spiritual development. Mixing spiritual practices causes confusion and is potentially dangerous to the spiritual well-being of the person concerned.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Article 17, Section 1.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix 1: Rules for the Lay Ministry of the OBC, Article 3.

The OBC's exclusivism, however, has been 'softer' than that of the NKT. Whilst demanding wholehearted dedication to OBC practice, the 'Rules' state that it is 'both permissible and reasonable' for trainees to study the teachings of and visit 'other churches and religious groups, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist'.<sup>43</sup> Kennett herself cultivated such connections throughout her career, engaging in dialogue with Christian monks and forging friendly links with religious teachers in California.<sup>44</sup>

## 9.2. SHIFTING EMPHASES

The nature and degree of Kennett's exclusivism has, in reaction to certain contingencies and events, shifted and changed throughout the OBC's history. During the early period, she attempted to remove her American disciples from the 'guru-hopping' culture of California, by moving the headquarters of the ZMS to Mount Shasta and by introducing measures to weed out dabblers and dilettantes. In Britain, the perceived hostility of the Buddhist establishment led her to formulate a policy of non-participation in Buddhist Society events. She was also wary of the fact that a number of her early British followers were former disciples of Sangharakshita, of whom she was also critical.<sup>45</sup> British trainees were thus discouraged from, and chastised for, cultivating connections with these groups. The forging of friendly links and associations with British *Theravāda* Buddhists and Roman Catholic priests was, however, fully endorsed and promoted.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> She became a good friend, for example, of the western Sufi teacher Samuel Lewis (Murshid Sam), a biographical sketch of whom can be found in Rawlinson, pp. 396-403.

<sup>45</sup> Kennett's letters to her British disciples criticise Sangharakshita for being 'quietistic' and for handing on a 'sexual transmission'.

During the Lotus Blossom period, the emphasis changed again. The catalyst this time was the crisis of authority that erupted within the ZMS following Kennett's controversial 'third *kenshō*'. In response to this, she strategically reinforced and strengthened her exclusivism, increasing her emphasis on obedience and commitment to the teacher and introducing measures to regulate religious experience. There was also an increasing tendency, from this period, to employ a rhetoric of 'purity' when defining OBC practice, and this provided the basis of her critique of, and distancing from, both Japanese *Sōtō* and wider currents in American Zen. The OBC in America has thus been criticised, in recent years, for being insular and isolationist.<sup>46</sup>

The same charge cannot, however, be levelled against the Order in Britain. During the later period, Throssel Hole Priory has adopted a more enthusiastic approach towards inter-faith and cross-Buddhist dialogue than Shasta Abbey. Linkages and connections have been developed with a variety of Buddhist and non-Buddhist groups, and on various levels of informal and formal dialogue.

### 9.3. INFORMAL LINKAGES AND CONNECTIONS

Notwithstanding its early policy of selective exclusivism, Throssel Hole Priory has always fostered friendly and informal linkages. During the early and Lotus Blossom periods, monks from the priory helped to organise and run an annual Zen-Catholic inter-religious retreat at a Dominican retreat centre. Since their return from

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<sup>46</sup> Former disciple and founder of the Dharma Rain Zen Centre, Kyogen Carlson sensei, thus writes: 'Over the years the Abbey became more insular and isolated from other lineages in this country, which in many opinions, including mine, led to an unhealthy internal environment conducive to abuses [...] Hopefully, in the years to come, her successors at the monastery will be more open and communicative, acknowledge the human failings all teachers are prone to, and allow themselves to experience the wonderful currents of change and growth happening in Buddhist communities all over the country' (*Still Point*, 22.1 (1997), p. 5).

America, the British monks have participated in Christian-Buddhist monastic retreats<sup>47</sup> and a Dominican priest has regularly visited the priory to lecture on Christian mysticism. On a domestic level of Buddhist activity, a particularly warm and reciprocal relationship has been cultivated with the British *Theravāda* Sangha. This has grown out of a perceived 'similarity between Zen and *Theravāda* practice',<sup>48</sup> particularly a shared monastic ethos, although the geographical proximity between the priory and Harnham Buddhist monastery, also situated in Northumberland, has provided the necessary practical conditions for the relationship to develop. Since the late 1970s, monks from both traditions have visited each other's monastic centres, engaged in inter-monastic retreats together and collaborated on issues of mutual interest, such as how to present Buddhist teachings to children. The priory has also fostered friendly connections with other Buddhist groups, including 'our Dharma neighbours'<sup>49</sup> the Kagyu Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Dumfriesshire, the *Theravāda* Birmingham Vihara, Plum Village in Bordeaux (the French headquarters of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing) and the non-sectarian Gaia House and Sharpham Community. Such informal links and connections are also cultivated at a local level of activity between the priory's affiliated meditation groups and groups of other traditions; the Aberdeen Serene Reflection Meditation Group, for example, participates in a joint annual celebration of the Buddha's enlightenment along with the local FWBO and Vajradhatu groups. Relations between the priory and Buddhist Society have also markedly improved during the later period. The passing of

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<sup>47</sup> In recent years, these have been organised both in Britain (at Amaravati Buddhist monastery) and in France.

<sup>48</sup> *JTHP*, 6/11-12 (1979), p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> *JTHBA*, 24.2 (1997), p. 69.

Christmas Humphreys in 1983 was clearly an important factor here. The priory only began submitting material for the 'News' section of *The Middle Way* towards the end of this year and, since then, has been represented at Buddhist Society events such as *Wesak*. In recent years, OBC monks have even given occasional lectures at the Buddhist Society headquarters in Eccleston Square, London.

#### 9.4. FORMAL DIALOGUE

Besides these informal and individual connections, the OBC in Britain has also been active in broader, more formal contexts of inter-faith activity and cross-Buddhist networking. During the later period, monks from the priory have attended a World Religions Day sponsored by the Bahai Church, the International Conference on Eastern Approaches to Self and Mind<sup>50</sup> and various inter-faith meetings organised by the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association and Brahma Kumari community. The OBC in Britain has also been supportive and active in pan-Buddhist umbrella frameworks such as the European Buddhist Union and, particularly, in the Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK). The priory, on behalf of the OBC in Britain, was one of the NBO's initial participating organisations, contributing an article to the opening issue of its journal *Roots and Branches*,<sup>51</sup> and attending the first NBO conference at Amaravati monastery, both of which took as their theme the teacher-student relationship. The decision to join the NBO marked the beginning of the OBC's formal dialogue with other Buddhist traditions in Britain, and it prompted an interesting process of internal discussion wherein 'the joys and hazards of dialogue

<sup>50</sup> Held at Cardiff University in 1986.

<sup>51</sup> Namely, Daishin Morgan, 'The Giving and Receiving of Dharma: The Preceptual Foundations as Practice within the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives', *Roots and Branches*, 1, (Autumn 1994), 9-12.

with other Buddhists<sup>52</sup> have been explored. Dialogue and cooperation are viewed positively, both in terms of the specific development of the OBC and from a wider Buddhist perspective:

we still have a long way to go in the development of the Order and there is much we can learn from the experience of other groups. It will also be to the benefit of Buddhism as a whole if the various groups can learn to take refuge in each other and make the wider refuge of the Sangha a reality in Britain.<sup>53</sup>

Isolation from the rest of Buddhism is considered unhealthy and dangerous because it breeds a 'siege mentality' and 'distorted view of others', hindering progress 'towards the development of a mutually supportive climate'. Enthusiasm towards dialogue, though, is hedged with caution and concern. The need 'to commit ourselves to a single practice' is reiterated, and the importance of being 'well grounded in your own faith' before entering into dialogue, and of taking care 'to not compromise the principles of the Order' is emphasised.<sup>54</sup>

### 9.5. ENGAGED BUDDHIST ACTIVITIES

The 'Rules of the OBC' adopt a rather cautious stance towards 'engaged Buddhist' activities, stating that the exclusively *religious* purpose of the Order's priorities 'must not be diluted by political or social action functions'.<sup>55</sup> This declaration does not reject engaged activity *per se*, but functions as an institutional guideline and safeguard, defining the significance and appropriate context of such activity (i.e. secondary to spiritual affairs and outside the monastery). The support of social

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<sup>52</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'The Joys and Hazards of Dialogue with Other Buddhists', *JTHP*, 22.1 (1995), 5-8.

<sup>53</sup> 'The Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)', *JTHP*, 21.2 (1994), p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'The Joys and Hazards of Dialogue with Other Buddhists', pp. 5-7.

<sup>55</sup> Section 15.

welfare and even political causes has always, in fact, formed an important part of the presentation and identity of the OBC. Kennett considered herself part of the movement for sexual equality whilst training in Japan and also thought seriously (before returning to the West) of opening a school for illegitimate children. She has subsequently been outspoken on a number of social and politically charged issues, including abortion and euthanasia and the American presidential elections. She has been particularly concerned with animal rights and welfare, turning Shasta Abbey into a place of refuge for stray and condemned dogs and cats whilst declaring that,

it is the duty of every Buddhist and, I would imagine, Christian also, to offer a home to at least one animal: this is clearly the law of the Cosmic Buddha.<sup>56</sup>

Throssel Hole Priory has also, alongside its support of activities promoting fellowship, dialogue and exchange between Buddhist organisations, and in line with precedents set by Shasta Abbey, developed an 'engaged Buddhist' profile by supporting social welfare causes, both individually and in conjunction with other Buddhists. In this respect, it reflects a broader pattern within British Buddhism:

Buddhism in Britain has moved beyond the initial stages of transmission and institutionalisation. Engagement with social and political realities reflects a new confidence and maturity. There is a determined will to integrate Buddhism further into the mainstream of British society and to establish its presence as a moral force in the nation.<sup>57</sup>

Following the example of Shasta Abbey, the priory instigated a project in 1978 to take Zen Buddhism into British prisons, sending copies of its journal and other

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<sup>56</sup> 'The Buddhist's Responsibility to Animals', *JSA* (July-August 1980), p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Sandra Bell, 'A Survey of Engaged Buddhism in Britain', in *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. by Christopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), pp. 397-422 (p. 418).



literature to 'give prisoners who wish to do so an opportunity to learn about Zen training' and 'do something positive with their lives'.<sup>58</sup> This activity has continued in a cooperative way since 1985 through the priory's support of Angulimala (Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation). This organisation unites various Buddhist groups in the provision of support, counselling and spiritual guidance for prisoners, and in the process also provides opportunities for inter-traditional retreats and ceremonies, such as the opening of Buddhist shrines in prisons. One of Angulimala's prison chaplains is an OBC monk and, in recent years, Lay Ministers have become more actively involved in its work. Other cooperative ventures supported by the priory include the Buddhist Hospice Trust, the Network of Engaged Buddhists and its offshoot, the (now disbanded) Leeds Network of Engaged Buddhists.

On the subject of education, the priory has expressed its 'commitment to support the teaching of Buddhism in schools as part of the national curriculum'<sup>59</sup> by offering courses and resources for primary and secondary school R.E. teachers.<sup>60</sup> Like Shasta Abbey, it has also provided a home for animals and there is even a special animal cemetery on its grounds. The monastery has endeavoured to use its grounds in an ecologically sound and sustainable way, developing a tree-planting scheme in 1977 that was consciously modelled on E.F. Schumacher's outline of Buddhist economics.<sup>61</sup> This scheme began on a modest scale 'as a Buddhist tree sanctuary',<sup>62</sup> but subsequently became a major project, receiving the financial backing of various

<sup>58</sup> 'Zen Project to Prisons', *JTHP* (June 1978), p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> *JTHP*, 23.2 (1996), p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> The first of these were held at the priory in 1993 'to provide information and support, in a practical and lively way, for those teachers trying to include Buddhism in their Religious Education syllabus' (*JTHP*, 20.3 (1993), p. 34).

<sup>61</sup> E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Blond and Briggs Ltd., 1973).

<sup>62</sup> *JTHP*, 4.5 (1977), p. 21.

Trusts and the Forestry Commission. The priory has organised regular `Tree-planting days` which double up as social occasions for the laity, so that many thousands of trees, of various species, are now spread out over eighteen acres of land.

## PART IV

### CONCLUSION

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### CONCLUSION

A number of scholarly ideas concerning the relationship between Buddhism and British culture and the nature of the transplantation process have been explored, verified and criticised throughout this study. In this concluding chapter, I return to the framework adopted in Chapter One to structure a comparative discussion of the NKT and OBC. Before doing this, though, it will first be useful to bring this historical analysis up to date by commenting upon recent developments within the NKT and OBC.

#### 1. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NKT, 1996-2000

Although the NKT's public image was undoubtedly damaged by media representations of the *Dorje Shugden* dispute, the organisation seemed to emerge from the turbulence of 1996 with a significant degree of internal stability and, in some ways, a clarified self-identity. Students remained philosophical about depictions of the NKT in the British press and maintained that, though generally negative, the articles nevertheless served a useful function by publicly and unambiguously stating that the movement is not a follower of the Dalai Lama and is not a 'Tibetan' organisation. The NKT's embrace of this increased public awareness seemed genuine in spite of the view held by some of its critics that the organisation's past success was attributable, in part, to the positive image of Tibetan Buddhism in the western imagination, an image that is inextricably interwoven with the figure of the Dalai Lama. On a practical level,

following the organisation's withdrawal from the *Dorje Shugden* dispute in 1996 it was, as predicted by the student mentioned earlier, 'back to normal' for the NKT. There have, however, been a couple of notable developments in recent years, the most significant being the organisation's re-entry into the *Dorje Shugden* dispute towards the close of 1997 and its decision to join the NBO in 1998.

### 1.1. FULL MOON RE-LAUNCHED

During the summer of 1997, *Full Moon* magazine was re-launched in a new format as the *Full Moon Journal*, a professionally produced publication which aimed to reflect the international nature of the NKT and 'fulfil the need for a journal that helps us to improve the quality of our life both spiritually and practically'.<sup>1</sup> Since the creation of the NKT up until the close of 1995, *Full Moon* had clearly been important both to the organisation's leadership - as a means of articulating and promoting the NKT's distinct identity and of fostering a sense of unity and community throughout its membership - and to NKT practitioners themselves who used it as a forum for self-expression and communication with others. Production of the magazine was suspended during 1996, presumably because of the demands that the *Dorje Shugden* campaign had placed upon the organisation's time, management and resources. Its re-appearance in 1997 was significant inasmuch as it sent a message of optimism, confidence, durability and stability throughout the organisation, symbolising its withdrawal from uncharacteristic political involvements and entrance into a new period of spiritual growth and development. There was, however, no discussion or even reference to the *Dorje Shugden* dispute that had, only a year earlier, been so all-

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<sup>1</sup> *Full Moon Journal*, 1.1 (1997), p. 3.

absorbing.<sup>2</sup> Whilst this manner of dealing with conflict is fully in line with the leadership's previous handling of such unwelcome memories, it is interesting to observe how quickly the dynamic of conscious forgetfulness can be mobilised in the construction of historical narratives.

If the *Full Moon Journal* had continued as was promised in its inaugural issue, to have been produced bi-annually, it would have provided an invaluable insight into the impact of the *Dorje Shugden* dispute on the NKT's subsequent stability and sense of self-identity. Unfortunately, though, the production of the journal was again suspended - due, apparently, to a lack of time and resources - and no further issues have yet appeared. The first issue of the journal does not reveal any radical discontinuities or shifts in the NKT's self-understanding. Sections are included for articles on holistic health therapies and Buddhist environmentalism, however, and this may suggest a softening in the organisation's approach towards issues that were previously deemed distracting, worldly and tangential to the main purpose of practising and propagating Buddhism. The NKT's decision to join the Network of Buddhist Organisations may indicate a similar shift in its orientation.

## **1.2. DORJE SHUGDEN: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

The NKT's involvement in the 1996 *Dorje Shugden* controversy underlined the difficulties new religious movements face as they seek to maintain a coherent and consistent public-level identity whilst simultaneously responding to shifting contingencies and events in the world around them. At the time of the campaign, the

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<sup>2</sup> Even a historical overview of the NKT by the organisation's secretary, tracing the organisation's development from 1977 to 1997, makes no reference to the campaign.

NKT maintained that its participation did not compromise its self-proclaimed separation and independence from the degenerate religio-political world of Tibetan Buddhism and the temporary and expedient nature of the alliances forged with *Dorje Shugden* devotees in India and around the world were emphasised. This point was subsequently born out by the organisation's rather abrupt and complete withdrawal from the dispute later that year. The oracle's renunciation of the NKT during the dispute, and the media's portrayal of the organisation as a movement that is critical of the Dalai Lama, also ensured that at the close of 1996 the NKT's self-identity as a separate and independent organisation was not only intact but reinforced and strengthened.

The organisation's withdrawal from the *Dorje Shugden* dispute, however, did not last. Towards the end of 1997 the NKT re-entered the campaign when James Belither, the secretary of the organisation, released a booklet entitled 'A Report on the Dalai Lama's Abuses of Human Rights and Religious Freedom'. This document chronicles the alleged abuses by the Dalai Lama and his government of human rights and religious freedom within the Tibetan community-in-exile since 1996. It appears to have been provoked, in particular, by allegations made against *Dorje Shugden* devotees during 1997 following the murder in February of that year of Ven. Lobsang Gyatso (b. 1928), the Principal of the Buddhist Dialectics School in Dharamsala, and two of his students.<sup>3</sup> Ven. Lobsang Gyatso was, like the Dalai Lama, religiously and politically progressive and was outspoken in his criticism both of the conservative elements within Tibetan society and of the *Dorje Shugden* cult. The subsequent investigation by the Indian police linked the murders to the *Dorje Shugden* faction of

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3 An obituary of Ven. Geshe Lobsang Gyatso can be found in *Tibetan Review*, 32.4 (April 1997), 22-23.

the exiled Tibetan community. A number of high profile members of the Dorje Shugdan Devotees Charitable and Religious Society were questioned but later cleared of any connection with the murders.

In 1998 the *Dorje Shugden* dispute was re-ignited in the West when the Dorje Shugden International Coalition was created by western devotees 'to engage in peaceful actions which put pressure on the Dalai Lama to lift the ban on the worship of Dorje Shugden'.<sup>4</sup> The campaign orchestrated by this pressure group followed precisely the same format as that of the Shugden Supporters Community of 1996. Media attention of the Dalai Lama's alleged human rights abuses was generated through the issuing of a number of news releases and press packs. These served as a prelude to a number of public protests, petitions and demonstrations that were staged during the Dalai Lama's visit to America in the spring of 1998. Although the Coalition's directory of representatives indicated a support base that was much broader than the NKT, including Tibetan *Gelug* teachers and their students living both in India and in the West, disciples of Geshe Kelsang were heavily represented and clearly played a leading role in the campaign. The ideological continuities that exist between the NKT and other *Gelug* Buddhists with an allegiance to *Dorje Shugden* were thus once again underlined by this latest episode in the controversy. This time, however, the identity issues raised by the NKT's organisational alliance with non-NKT teachers and groups appears to have been anticipated and reconciled within the mission statement of the Coalition itself which maintains that 'the coalition will

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<sup>4</sup> 'Dorje Shugden International Coalition', undated pamphlet.



dissolve upon the lifting of the ban by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile'.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3. NBO MEMBERSHIP

In the spring of 1998, the NKT made a request to join the Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK) and, following a meeting of its member groups, its request was accepted. This was a significant event, raising issues both for the NBO and its participating organisations as well as for the self-identity of the NKT.

The NBO arose out of an initial meeting of Buddhist groups, convened by Jamyang Centre in 1993, for the purpose of jointly inviting the Dalai Lama to teach in Britain. It quickly expanded beyond this original purpose, though, developing its own identity in 1994 'as a forum for communication and co-operation between the diverse Buddhist organisations around the UK'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, when the Dalai Lama eventually came to Britain in the summer of 1996, only twenty-seven of the forty-three member organisations were signatories to the visit. This lack of internal unanimity with respect to the activities of the NBO is evidence of the enduring diversity and dividedness of British Buddhism. The diversity of British Buddhism notwithstanding, Scott's observation that 'there has been a discernible convergence or moving closer together between Buddhist groupings in this country'<sup>7</sup> is accurate. In light of the fact that over half of the NBO's members supported the visit of the Dalai Lama, Scott's comment

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *Roots and Branches*, 1 (Autumn 1994), inside-cover.

<sup>7</sup> David Scott, 'Ecumenical Convergence Across Modern British Buddhism: Fact or Fiction?' (unpublished paper, 1995).

that 'the Dalai Lama has been instrumental in fostering closer ties across British Buddhist traditions' is also sound.

The founding principles of the NBO state that participation in the organisation 'is open to all UK Buddhist organisations' and that one of its purposes is to 'ensure the diversity of Buddhist views is expressed',<sup>8</sup> irrespective of the specific beliefs and practices held by particular groups. Nevertheless, as a group widely perceived to have sown conflict and disharmony by publicly protesting against the Dalai Lama, the NKT's request for membership posed a challenge to the NBO. A number of its member groups regarded the NKT's activities as incompatible with the NBO's commitment to promoting fellowship, dialogue and harmony, and with the high esteem in which the Dalai Lama is held by many. It was agreed, however, that the gains of the NKT's membership outweighed the losses and so far no former members have opted out of the organisation because the NKT has opted in. This recognition that peaceful coexistence between Buddhist groups is desirable, even though active reconciliation may be unlikely, is a step forward for British Buddhism, one that affirms, in particular, a more realistic view of Tibetan Buddhist traditions among western Buddhist practitioners.

The decision to join the NBO also had implications for the NKT's self-identity which, for the first seven years of its existence, was firmly predicated upon ideas of purity, exclusivism and separatism. This uncharacteristic move towards the British Buddhist mainstream seemed to represent a reversal of its self-proclaimed separation from other western Buddhist groups, and a softening of its hard-line approach towards maintaining the purity of its lineage-tradition. On the surface this development also

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<sup>8</sup> *Roots and Branches*, 1 (Autumn 1994), inside-cover.

appears to support Scott's prediction that the NKT may, like the FWBO, 're-emerge into wider active Buddhist settings'<sup>9</sup> once it has passed through an initial stage of retrenchment, distancing and identity-building. It is too early to tell at this stage, however, whether there have been any significant shifts in the NKT's self-understanding resulting from its willingness to enter a forum of Buddhist dialogue and fellowship. Indeed, the organisation's decision to join the NBO may have had primarily pragmatic and expedient, rather than ideological, motivations. When seen against the backdrop of the 1996 *Dorje Shugden* dispute, it can be understood as an attempt to reclaim some of the credibility that had been lost during the campaign, particularly at the hands of the British media which presented the movement as inward-looking, mind-controlling and 'cultish'. By entering into pan-Buddhist settings, the NKT may be seeking to re-build and re-define its public face in a way found acceptable, in Richardson's terms, to the moral mainstream. This move also suggests a realisation amongst the organisation's leadership that separation from wider Buddhist currents may create more problems than it solves. At the cost of preserving its purity, the organisation has often been viewed with suspicion, criticism and even hostility by other Buddhist groups, and the recent media explosion demonstrated how damaging such external criticism can be. The decision to join the NBO thus illustrates Lifton's observation that, in order to function and succeed, movements which disseminate 'fundamentalist' principles need to cater to varied interests, become more compromising and assimilable, and generally interact 'with the protean currents of the larger society'.<sup>10</sup> There may not have been any substantive

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<sup>9</sup> 'Modern British Buddhism: Patterns and Directions'.

<sup>10</sup> *The Protean Self*, p. 165.

shift in the NKT's self-identity as a pure tradition in a world of degeneration, or in its view that this purity must be preserved through a radically exclusive form of practice. Nor is its participation necessarily indicative of a new, more positive, attitude towards the value of cross-Buddhist dialogue, discussion and fellowship. What this move does indicate, though, is an awareness that a more working relationship with wider currents on the British Buddhist landscape is required. Within the NBO, the NKT has a forum in which it can represent itself to others, and thereby reduce the potential for future misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

#### 1.4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In light of the traditional basis of *Gelug* clericalism and exclusivism underpinning Geshe Kelsang's thought, and the gradual hardening of his exclusive orientation over time in reaction both to indigenous Tibetan and modern western forces, any significant reversals or overhauls in the NKT's self-identity seem, at least for the foreseeable future, unlikely. The organisation's participation in the *Dorje Shugden* dispute and its more recent decision to join the NBO do indicate, however, that the NKT is prepared to respond reflexively to the changing circumstances in which it finds itself, and this quality will be essential to its future growth. Whether or not the latter development has any substantial implications on an ideological level, only time will tell. It is not unfeasible, though, that through participating in broader pan-Buddhist settings the excesses of NKT exclusivism may gradually soften until its initially pragmatic motivation is replaced with an increasingly ideological one.

## 2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE OBC, 1996-2000

### 2.1. KENNETT'S DEATH

On November 6 1996, at the age of seventy-two, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett died of complications from diabetes, from which she had been suffering for many years. The monks at Shasta Abbey and Throssel Hole Priory observed the traditional week-long meditation vigil 'that follows the death of a Great Master and Abbess'<sup>11</sup> and performed weekly memorials during the following seven weeks 'so everyone who wished to could formally say farewell'.<sup>12</sup> Meditating with her body prior to performing the traditional funeral ceremonies left a deep impression on the monks, many of whom testified to her *parinirvāṇa* or entry into 'eternal meditation'.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2. A 'CRITICAL STAGE'

In his study of the emergence and evolution of the Radhasoami tradition in India, Juergensmeyer observes that in the life cycle of new religious movements 'the death of the original central figure usually signals the beginning of a critical stage, and often spells the end of the movement itself'.<sup>14</sup> The main 'point of crisis'<sup>15</sup> at this crucial juncture is that of leadership succession, since the 'crux for the continuance of

<sup>11</sup> Taken from a letter by Daishin Morgan to the congregation and friends of Throssel Hole Priory announcing Kennett's death (November 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Jisho Perry, 'The Funeral Ceremonies for Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett', *Special Memorial Issue of the JOBC*, 11.4 and 12.1 (1996-97), p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> Daishin Morgan, 'Eternal Meditation', *JTHBA*, 24.1 (1997), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Radhasoami Reality: The Logic of a Modern Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Minney, *Of Many Mouths and Eyes* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1975), p. 148.

any kind of institutional religion'<sup>16</sup> is the continuity of religious specialism and authority:

it is only because of succession that a religious movement can become institutionalised.<sup>17</sup>

The presence of clear lines of authority and continuity minimises the potential for disunity and fragmentation, promoting the stability and solidity required for further growth, expansion and institutionalisation.

Juergensmeyer also points out that, once agreement has been reached on the 'heir to the collective memory', other challenges present themselves: namely, the content of the memory itself or 'the need to sort out orthodox from heterodox interpretations of the past'; and 'the challenge of keeping pace with history by assimilating new pasts into the collective memory' (p. 33). These challenges must be successfully negotiated if a religious group is to make the transition from being a *movement* - that is 'a community not yet fully formed' and in 'a state of transition from an old worldview to a new one' - into a *tradition* - that is 'a culturally transmitted view of reality' characterised by 'diversity, identity and endurance' (p. 8).

In the light of these considerations, it will be useful to consider the OBC's responses to the critical stage ushered in by Kennett's death; its initial attempts at negotiating the challenges of succession and authority, continuity of identity and ideology, and the need for continuing reflexivity and adaptability.

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<sup>16</sup> Minney, p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

### 2.3. ROUTINISATION REVISITED

These problems were largely alleviated, in fact, by the guidelines and structures that had been formulated by Kennett herself during her lifetime and, in Juergensmeyer's terms, 'the expansive view' (p. 33) she took of her movement. The later period, as we have seen, was a time of considerable routinisation; clear structures of authority, organisation and ideology were devised to stabilise and consolidate the Order and to guarantee its future continuity and integrity. In the event of the charismatic founder's death, the potential for disagreement in the OBC over succession, identity and doctrine was thus successfully by-passed. Institutional mechanisms came into play immediately as, according to procedures laid down in the 'Bylaws', elections were held to appoint a new abbot for Shasta Abbey and Head of the Order. Kennett had already nominated a successor to her abbacy 'pending his election by the monastic community after her death',<sup>18</sup> and the new Head of the OBC, 'elected with a substantial majority by the members of the monastic Sangha who formed the electorate',<sup>19</sup> was one of her closest disciples and co-author of *The Book of Life*.

Having assumed their positions of responsibility and leadership, the first action of the Order's main figures of authority and influence was to declare their unity and collectively vow to preserve, protect and promote Kennett's teachings and religious order. An article in a special memorial issue of the journal entitled 'Where Do We Go From Here?', to which the Head of the Order and the abbots of Shasta Abbey and Throssel Hole Priory were signatories, states that,

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<sup>18</sup> *JTHP*, 23.4 (1996-97), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* In the event of electing a new Head, only those with the title of 'Master' are eligible to vote.

The Abbey and priories will continue to operate as they have before; the practice remains unchanged; the teaching will have new voices, but its Sound will be the same.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, though, the dangers of becoming too conservative and rigid were recognised, and an additional vow was made to meet the third of the challenges outlined above; namely, to keep the Order alive and vital by remaining responsive to new stimuli and open to further development, change and adaptation:

In putting this into practice, we realize that the spirit of a teaching requires a form in order that it be seen and passed on, and we are mindful that this form can either vitalize or kill the spirit. It can kill it quickly if sweeping and unnecessary changes of form are made, if one chases after the trendy religious fashion of the moment. But it can also kill it slowly if, in the sincere attempt to stay true to the spirit, one holds on so tightly to the form exactly as it existed at the time of the teacher's death that the preservation of the form becomes an end in itself, thus causing it to 'fossilize' for all time and slowly strangle the spirit which it was meant to embody. For this reason we also pledged to maintain an attitude of careful flexibility in regard to our forms of practice.<sup>21</sup>

#### **2.4. STRATEGIES OF UNIFICATION AND CENTRALISATION**

During the immediate years following Kennett's death, a number of strategies were employed by the leadership in the interests of promoting unity and stability and strengthening the foundations of the Order.

The first of these was the highly public manner in which the Head assumed authority and the very deliberate transparency characterising his early running of the Order. This is best illustrated by his article 'How the OBC Works'.<sup>22</sup> This explains that, whereas the operation of the Order previously went unnoticed due to the informal and ad hoc way in which Kennett (because of ill-health) had to make decisions, his

<sup>20</sup> *Special Memorial Issue of the JOBC*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>21</sup> 'Where Do We Go From Here?', p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Daizui MacPhillamy, *JTHBA*, 24.1 (1997), 16-23.



own good health and mobility now `permits these things to be done more publicly`. By reiterating that the Order's structures of authority and organisation were formulated and implemented by Kennett herself, he also reinforces them with the weight of her charismatic authority. A spirit of confidence and trust is promoted, furthermore, through his assurance that, in the interests of staying `true to the source`, authority will never be exercised arbitrarily or in isolation, but always through `mutually interlocking links of refuge-taking` and `the natural checks and balances implied in the division of responsibilities between the various officers of the Order and its communities`.

The second strategy of promoting unity and stability was that of centralisation. In the years following Kennett's death, the leadership introduced various measures aimed at strengthening the connections between the constituent parts of the Order and keeping the channels of communication between the centre and the periphery open and well-lubricated. The relationship between Shasta Abbey and the OBC in Britain and Europe was, predictably, the focal point of these efforts. Without the compelling and unifying authority of its charismatic founder, and with the onset of an authority structure based more upon legal-rational principles,<sup>23</sup> the distance between the American and European congregations might have become a weak link had steps not been taken to bridge it. An awareness of the role played by distance in accentuating earlier periods of conflict and disagreement, may also have made the urge to centralise even more keenly felt. The introduction of centralising measures, however, was not only a `negative` strategy aimed at minimising the potential for fragmentation

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<sup>23</sup> Although this structure is sanctified by Kennett's charismatic authority, it is the office, rather than the person, that now commands respect.

and breakdown. It was also a way of asserting the equality and partnership of the American and European branches in the furtherance of the aims and purposes of the Order.

Three main centralising measures can be discerned. Firstly, the leadership of the Order attempted to bring the American and European congregations closer together by encouraging an increase in the mutual visits and exchanges between senior monks at Throssel Hole Priory and Shasta Abbey. In the summer of 1997, the Head himself visited Britain to provide 'an opportunity for those of us who did not already know him to be able to become acquainted' and thereby 'help foster mutual trust and harmony within the Sangha'.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, and during his visit to Britain, the Head formally conferred upon Throssel Hole Priory the title and status of an 'abbey'. In light of the fact that the priory had, for many years, already been functioning as a full training monastery and sub-registry of the OBC, the significance of this event must be seen mainly in symbolic terms as a public declaration of confidence, unity and partnership. The third centralising measure was the decision to merge the two main journals of the Order - *The Journal of the OBC* and *The Journal of Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey* - into one. There were many sound spiritual and practical reasons for doing this; a greater variety of articles on Buddhist practice, for example, could now be made available. The central motivation, though, was to promote 'a broader international scope'<sup>25</sup> by bringing the OBC's scattered trainees 'from all of our corners [of the globe] into one meeting place':<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 'Visit by the Head of the Order', *JTHBA*, 24.1 (1997), p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> 'To Our Readers', *JTHBA*, 24.2 (1997), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> 'To Our Readers', *JOBC*, 13.1 (1998), p. 5.

'One Journal for One Order' is how the Head of the Order, Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy describes the importance of this event.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It is too early in the Order's post-Kennett development to assess the continuity, or otherwise, of its identity, doctrine and practice. Suffice it to say that all the evidence at this early stage, both from journals and personal communications, is that the spirit of conservation and caution underpinning the mission statement of the OBC's leadership has been carefully fostered and assimilated throughout the organisation. At the time of writing, the Order is still in a period of mourning, and is more concerned with celebrating and preserving the memory and legacy of its founder and figurehead than with exploring new areas of growth, adaptation and development.<sup>28</sup> In the new millennium, the Order will undoubtedly face new challenges and difficulties. One of these, I suspect, will be the problem of retaining its unity and stability in the face of competing interpretations of Kennett's teachings. As we have seen, even during her lifetime there were considerable differences of opinion, within the OBC's membership, concerning such issues as the use of theistic terminology and the importance of ceremonial observance. These differences could, over time, become more accentuated, thereby increasing the risk of a similar kind of splintering and fragmentation that has characterised other Zen groups in the West.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *JTHBA*, 24.2 (1997), p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> The first volume of Kennett's recorded and transcribed lectures thus appeared in 2000 as *Roar of the Tigress: The Oral Teachings of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett: Western Woman and Zen Master* (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press).

<sup>29</sup> The International Zen Association, for example, which has, since the death of its founder Taisen Deshimaru in 1982, splintered into a number of different factions and groups.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND BRITISH CULTURE

The subtle interaction between Buddhism and British culture, a phenomenon described by Mellor as 'cultural translation', has been a major preoccupation of scholars of contemporary British Buddhism and it also features strongly in this study. The theory that contemporary Buddhist practice displays continuities both with Protestant Christianity and the conditions of modernity has been explored throughout. In particular, the view that British Buddhism can be understood as 'broadly Protestant' in character has been subjected to critical scrutiny. Whilst the NKT and OBC both lay great emphasis on the value of lay religiosity, and in this respect could be deemed as displaying 'broadly Protestant' tendencies, I have argued for a more cautious application of the Protestant Buddhism thesis than has been evident elsewhere. Waterhouse, whilst accepting the Protestant Buddhism thesis as axiomatic, nevertheless states in a footnote that 'none of the ideological features of "Protestant Buddhism" are absent altogether from traditional forms of Buddhism'.<sup>30</sup> By placing the traditional forms of Buddhism firmly at the centre of this study, it becomes apparent that features of Buddhist practice which seem to have emerged from cultural translation may in fact have been transplanted as part of the traditional package. This point has been demonstrated most forcefully through my analysis of the OBC, an organisation that displays in abundance the features that Mellor identified as suggestive of Protestant Christian influences. When contextualised against its traditional Japanese *Sōtō* Zen background, the supposedly 'Protestant' features of OBC belief and practice - such as its emphasis on lay religiosity and personalistic

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<sup>30</sup> *Buddhism in Bath*, p. 24.

view of religious form - also turn out to have very traditional eastern precedents. This clearly problematises the application of the 'Protestant Buddhist' designation in this case. This study thus aims to underline the importance of adopting a genuinely cross-cultural approach in the study of Buddhist traditions in transition. The theoretical bias within the study of British Buddhism which places the analytical centre of gravity on British culture must be replaced by a more balanced perspective, one that incorporates the study of traditional Buddhist precedents and influences alongside cultural translation theory.

With respect to the second main strand of cultural translation theory - the widely accepted argument that the conditions of modernity are reflected in contemporary Buddhist practice - this study has again yielded interesting results. Firstly, it is clear that the modern emphasis on individual authority and personal experience, and the concomitant reflexivity of identity, have indeed been reflected in many aspects of NKT and OBC identity, belief and practice, both at the institutional and individual levels. These processes have been most clearly exemplified during times of internal conflict and crisis. During periods of conflict the authority sources called upon to legitimate Buddhist practice, both by individual practitioners and group leaders, have been challenged, tested and re-negotiated. The Lotus Blossom period of the OBC's development, for example, prompted a number of shifts both in individual and group identity as opposing positions on the legitimacy of Kennett's religious experiences were adopted and defended through recourse to the same authority sources differently interpreted. The reflexivity of this process was evident, both in the different assessments of individual practitioners about which authority sources should

be primary, and in the responses of the OBC's leadership to internal conflict and dissension. Individual differences notwithstanding, the authority of personal experience remained central to the decision making process of all practitioners within the OBC. Similarly, whilst the Lotus Blossom period witnessed an increase in her dependence on the legitimate authorities of lineage-tradition and scripture, personal experience nevertheless remained at the forefront of Kennett's presentation.

This study acknowledges that the conditions of modernity are also reflected within the NKT, both in the importance of personal authority to individual practitioners, and in the reflexive manner in which Geshe Kelsang's thought has developed in response to the orientations of his western disciples. I have also argued, however, that an acknowledgement of the NKT's 'fit' with modernity only partially explains the nature of this organisation. Aspects of the NKT's organisational and ideological structure suggest that the movement may actually represent a more critical and reactionary response to the forces of modernity. Geshe Kelsang's concern to establish a uniformity of belief and practice throughout the NKT, his emphasis on following one pure tradition exclusively and his critique of the protean inclusivism of western practitioners, are all suggestive of a response to modernity that has been characterised by Lifton as 'fundamentalist'. Whereas the 'protean' mode of being embraces historical dislocation and social restlessness in a spirit of exploration, experimentation and improvisation, 'fundamentalism' or 'totalism' reacts against uncertainty by creating all-encompassing systems of belief and practice which reject pluralism and unpredictability and offer their members certainty and security. A survey of the organisation's membership has indicated that, for many practitioners,

NKT Buddhism does indeed represent a favourable alternative to the fragmented and uncertain nature of modern society and, in particular, has heralded an end to their protean quest for spiritual fulfilment.

#### 4. THE TRANSPLANTATION PROCESS

Whilst cultural translation theory should be central to any study of the development of Buddhist traditions in Britain, an appreciation of religious and cultural relationships does not explain the total transplantation process. A major aim of this study has been to shed light on the various factors and conditions that, alongside cultural translation, shape the transplantation process as a whole. Three main conditions affecting the successful transplantation of Buddhist traditions in Britain were outlined in Chapter One - material conditions, trans-cultural processes and the nature of the incoming tradition - and these have been explored throughout with reference to the NKT and OBC.

As with other Buddhist groups in Britain, the importance of material conditions to the successful emergence of the NKT and OBC has manifested itself through the struggle for control of institutional sites and the creation of efficient legal, organisational, administrative and financial structures. The early development of the NKT and OBC, both witnessed disputes over institutional sites for the dissemination of Buddhist discourse. The control and appropriation of existing institutional sites and the successful creation of alternative sites of discourse, became central to the unfolding ideological vision of both groups. In the case of the NKT, the effects of the early institutional conflict over Manjushri Institute have been far-reaching. As we have seen, repressed memories of institutional conflict returned later to influence the way in which the NKT has understood and articulated itself organisationally through a rhetoric of de-centralisation. With respect to the legal, organisational and administrative structure of the OBC, the turbulent Lotus Blossom period was much



more important than the earlier disputes over who controlled Throssel Hole Priory. The creation by Kennett of clear structures of authority and organisation was part of a deliberate and systematic attempt to routinise and restore equilibrium to a movement rocked by conflict and instability.

The importance of trans-cultural processes - that is, processes resulting from the prior transformation of Buddhist traditions in indigenous Asian contexts due to the impact of western cultural, political and ideological forces - to the transplantation of Buddhist traditions in Britain have been explored throughout this study. These processes have not been a factor in the growth and development of the NKT because, as noted earlier, Tibetan forms of Buddhism did not generally develop in a modernist direction prior to their transplantation in the West. The impact of western and modernist forces on Japanese Zen Buddhism, by contrast, ensured that the transplantation of the OBC in Britain involved trans-cultural constituents. In particular, Kennett's emphasis upon the spiritual experience of *kenshō* and her personalistic or 'utilitarian' view of religious form reflected the modern (or in Sharf's terms 'Protestant') reconstruction of Zen as an essentially meditative and mystical tradition. It is necessary to re-state here, however, that the 'Protestant Buddhism' designation must be used with caution. The 'irrepressible multivocality' of the Zen tradition that Faure points to, reminds us that the mystical, demythologising and anti-ritual interpretations of modern Zen apologists, all have deeply traditional precedents. It has thus been necessary to counterbalance our discussion of trans-cultural processes in the transplantation of the OBC with an examination of the traditional Buddhist precedents of Kennett's thought.

The importance of understanding how the shape and nature of incoming traditions - that is, the traditionally Buddhist forms and structures that have developed quite independently of western cultural contact - influence and affect the transplantation and development of Buddhism in Britain, has been underlined consistently throughout this study. By situating the OBC within a genuinely cross-cultural context, and by eschewing the theoretical bias that places the analytical centre of gravity firmly upon western culture, a more theoretically balanced perspective has been brought to bear upon the development of Zen in the West and a long overdue critique of the Protestant Buddhism thesis has been provided. The importance of adopting a theoretically balanced approach has been argued most forcefully with respect to the transplantation and development of Tibetan Buddhist traditions in Britain. By situating the development and self-identity of the NKT within its appropriate historical, cultural and ideological contexts, the importance of understanding how broader oriental contexts continue to exert a normative influence on the development of Buddhist traditions in the Occident has been demonstrated. This study has argued that the emergence of the NKT onto the British religious landscape represents the manifestation, in a western context, of classical and contemporary divisions within the *Gelug* tradition with regard to policies about inter-traditional relations and the related issue of *Dorje Shugden* reliance. These divisions have been dwelt upon at length because of their relevance, not only to the study of the NKT, but to the wider fields of contemporary Tibetan religious, cultural and political studies. When this historical and cross-cultural approach to the development of Tibetan Buddhism in Britain is coupled with the findings of cultural translation

theory, the NKT emerges as a contemporary Buddhist movement that is rooted firmly within traditional *Gelug* exclusivism but which simultaneously reflects and reacts against the conditions of modernity.

## 5. POLICIES AND PATTERNS OF ADAPTATION

An appreciation of the policies and patterns of adaptation at work within Buddhist groups is central to our understanding of the successful transplantation of those traditions in Britain and so features strongly in this study. Both the NKT and OBC have been sensitive to the manner of their insertion in western society and have each devised, in Mellor's terms, 'significant perspectives on culture' to facilitate their transplantation.

An analysis of NKT and OBC policies and strategies of adaptation has indicated a number of similarities in their approach. Both groups, for example, adopt an essentialist perspective towards the project of adaptation; each claim to have stripped the 'essence' of Buddhism away from eastern cultural accretions and to have presented it in forms that are meaningful and accessible to western practitioners. The adaptations and innovations made by Geshe Kelsang and Jiyu Kennett have both been legitimated through recourse to the traditional authority structures within their schools. Tibetan and Zen forms of Buddhism, as noted in Chapter One, share a similar emphasis upon the authority of the spiritual guide as a living representative of the ultimate truth that has been handed down via an unbroken lineage. The policy of adaptation within both the NKT and OBC can thus be characterised as an essentialism that combines both traditional and charismatic elements.

Whilst the skilful adaptation of Buddhism by Geshe Kelsang forms an integral part of the NKT's self-identity and claim to centrality in the western Buddhist world, this study has revealed that the organisation places an equal, if not greater, emphasis upon conserving the pure tradition of *Tsong Khapa*. This is rooted in the perception

that both the contemporary *Gelug* sect of Tibetan Buddhism, and the eclectic style of practice adopted by many western Buddhists, represent a serious threat to the continuation of *Tsong Khapa*'s pure tradition in the modern world. Geshe Kelsang's emphasis upon preserving and protecting this pure tradition ensures that the project of adapting Buddhism for the West is treated with a degree of caution within the NKT, and it has led some practitioners to criticise other Buddhist groups for over-adapting, and thereby destroying the purity of, their respective traditions. This study has argued that the NKT's claim to represent a 'western' form of Buddhism thus reflects two aspects of its self-identity: on the one hand, it reflects the belief that Geshe Kelsang has adapted Buddhism in an accessible way for western practitioners; on the other, it reflects his concern to preserve and conserve the pure tradition by separating from the degenerate religio-political world of 'Tibetan' *Gelug* Buddhism. It has also been argued that alongside his wish to make Buddhism more accessible to westerners, the motivation behind Geshe Kelsang's main adaptations of traditional forms is conservation and preservation. By requiring an exclusive commitment to one teacher and limiting the field of Highest Yoga Tantra to one main *yidam*, for example, the NKT study programmes place a boundary around the practice of NKT disciples and in this way protect the tradition of *Tsong Khapa* from external contaminants. The dynamic of conservation through adaptation is a special feature of the NKT's identity that may well accompany the transplantation of other conservative and clerical forms of Buddhism, Tibetan or otherwise, in western societies.

The adaptation of *Sōtō* Zen for the West was from the outset a major preoccupation of Kennett whose intimate awareness of the subtle ways in which

Buddhism and western culture interact, and whose ability to empathise with western Buddhist practitioners, made her a highly skilled cultural negotiator. As a disaffected Christian, Kennett understood the wider 'reactionary' appeal of Buddhism and she catered to this by elucidating key Buddhist concepts in terms of their fundamental differences from Christianity. At the same time she understood that many western Buddhists, like herself, have deeply ambivalent attitudes towards their indigenous Christian backgrounds and seek, in Tweed's terms, to be cultural *consenters* as well as dissenters. Consequently, the main strategy she used for the adaptation of Zen for the West was the appropriation of Christian religious forms. The OBC thus developed as a Zen Buddhist movement that organisationally, ritually and doctrinally reflected the western religious background both of its founder and its members.

Whilst Kennett's essentialist policy and main strategies of adaptation remained unchanged throughout her spiritual career, the project of adaptation within the OBC nevertheless underwent a number of interesting shifts during the Lotus Blossom and Later periods. The visionary experiences that constituted Kennett's 'third *kenshō*' prompted, as we have seen, a number of doctrinal developments and innovations. Of particular interest was her rather unconventional interpretation of karma and past life experiences and her intensified employment of Christian terminology, imagery and symbolism. At times during the Lotus Blossom period, Kennett was no longer simply *borrowing* Christian religious forms to make Buddhism more acceptable and accessible to westerners: she was asserting the deep and essential *identity* of the two traditions. She retracted from this position later by tempering her use of explicitly theistic terminology and by abandoning a number of early adaptations that were now

considered to be 'straying from the source', such as the utilisation of Christian religious holidays for the celebration of key Buddhist festivals. A final noteworthy development in Kennett's thought during the Later period was her increasing tendency, when discussing adaptation, to make sectarian statements about the state of *Sōtō* Zen in Japan which, unlike the OBC, had deviated from the source or essential principles of *Dōgen*. Having weathered the storm of the Lotus Blossom period, during which the legitimating sanction of the official arbiters of *Sōtō* orthodoxy was actively sought and courted, Kennett was now in a much stronger position to publicly articulate her critique of the Japanese sect.

## 6. HISTORY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

### IN THE NKT AND OBC

This study has not only been concerned with examining the historical emergence and ideological development of two Buddhist organisations on the British Buddhist landscape. The dynamics of history and identity construction in new religious movements have also been explored throughout. The NKT and OBC are two contemporary religious movements in which the dynamics of history construction, as outlined by Coney in Chapter Two, are well exemplified. Each group contains a diverse set of 'histories' ranging across the individual, small group and public levels of the organisation. Individual accounts diverge widely over points of historical detail and the same events are often interpreted in very different ways, reflecting a wide range of experience, bias, opinion and group loyalty. At the level of public discourse, shifts and developments in the self-identity and worldview of the NKT and OBC have been accompanied always by the leadership's revision and conscious forgetfulness of earlier narratives. Coney's observation that the dynamics of history and identity construction in new religious movements are best exemplified within groups that have undergone periods of conflict and disunity, has been born out by this study. The leaderships of the NKT and OBC have striven to erase unwelcome memories of the internal conflicts that have rocked both organisations by constructing simplified group histories which iron out discontinuities in favour of a strong, continuous storyline. For both organisations, the changing of group names has been an important technique of burying unwelcome memories and promoting the creation of new ones in their place. The project of deliberately excluding unwanted histories, however, has not been



completely successful in either organisation. Memories that have been repressed at the level of public discourse not only live on at the level of individual group members but can also, as we have seen within the NKT, return to haunt the margins of public discourse and influence its structure.

## 7. CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE NKT AND OBC

The manner in which the respective leaderships of the NKT and OBC have responded to periods of conflict, discontinuity and instability has been an area of considerable interest in this study. Whilst both groups display similar patterns of history and identity construction through their ordering of social memory and forgetfulness, the immediate strategies they adopt for dealing with internal conflict and instability have often been quite different. The main difference is the degree of dialogue that takes place between the leadership and membership of each group, and the channels through which such dialogue occurs.

The NKT's allegiance to the controversial protective deity *Dorje Shugden* has been the main source of potential and actual instability within this group. Prior to the recent public outbreak of this dispute, awareness of the contentious dimensions of the practice within the NKT was extremely limited due to a policy of silence adopted by the group's leadership following a dispute in the mid-1980s between Geshe Kelsang and the Office of the Dalai Lama. This policy of non-discussion resumed following the NKT's withdrawal from its brief, and uncharacteristically pro-active, involvement in the *Dorje Shugden* supporters campaign of 1996. During the campaign itself, as in the general running of the group, the minimal amount of dialogue between the group's leadership and wider membership was mediated by NKT centre directors. At no point in the NKT's development has Geshe Kelsang used either his texts, or the group's periodical publications, as a vehicle for directly addressing and allaying the concerns of the wider membership.

This manner of dealing with conflict and instability is very different from the preferred style of the OBC's leadership. Throughout the development of her Order, and especially during periods of conflict and instability, Kennett engaged in regular and direct dialogue with her wider following. Her publications and, in particular, the Order's quarterly journals have always functioned as a channel of communication between the centre and periphery. This has ensured that, in times of conflict, the leadership of the OBC has been able to skilfully utilise its publications as a vehicle for negotiating, mediating and restoring stability to the organisation. Within the OBC, then, the interplay between text and context has been much more conspicuous, dynamic and vital to the group's stability and growth.

## CONCLUSION

This study has situated the historical and ideological development of the NKT and OBC within their broader British, and specifically Tibetan and Zen, Buddhist contexts. Their emergence and growth has also been analysed against the processes and trends that have characterised the development of other forms of Buddhism in Britain. Scholarly perspectives on the subtle interactions between Buddhism and British culture, and the various other factors and conditions affecting the transplantation process, have been explored, tested and in some cases challenged by the data. A wider range of theories concerning the internal dynamics of new religious movements have also been utilised to make sense of the inner patterns and processes at work within the NKT and OBC. The present study thus has relevance, not only to the field of contemporary British Buddhism, but to the study of contemporary religion generally.

Tibetan and Zen forms of Buddhism are a significantly neglected area within the study of British Buddhism. By taking the largest Tibetan and Zen organisations on the British Buddhist landscape as the focus of research, this study has gone some way towards filling a gap in the literature. Studies of British Buddhism have also tended to concentrate upon the shape and nature of Buddhist organisations at the point of time in which they are studied. This study, by contrast, has provided a detailed analysis of the complex historical and ideological development of two Buddhist movements. It has not been my aim to make broad generalisations about the shape and nature of 'British Buddhism'. The aim, rather, has been to reveal the complex nature of the

transplantation of Buddhist traditions in Britain, and to explore the development and diversity of identity, belief and practice within Buddhist groups.

Whilst I share Waterhouse's concern to explore the diversity of British Buddhism by examining the attitudes of the 'ordinary member', and concur with her critique of studies which overlook diversity by analysing Buddhist groups only at the public level, the dichotomy she draws between ordinary members on the one hand, and group leaders on the other, has not been born out by the present study. A detailed analysis of the NKT and OBC has revealed that the emergence and growth of Buddhist organisations involves a dialectical relationship between group leadership and group membership. The amount of rejection or reinforcement that Geshe Kelsang and Jiyu Kennett received from their followers acted as a constraining or facilitating force on the shape and nature of their Buddhist discourse and ensured that an intimate relationship between text and context developed. This study has argued that an understanding of Buddhist organisations thus requires an analysis not only of group identity at the public level and of the attitudes, beliefs and practices of ordinary group members, but also of the interaction that takes place between the two.

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