

Reflections on Tulku Institution: Technical and Personal

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In my fifty years of approaching the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism I have mostly avoided pinning myself down to a certain type of approach, a method, in order to avoid stereotyping and limitation. It is dangerous to self-define, for we switch hats frequently; even the fancy names “methodology” and “hermeneutics” can box oneself in and become a prison as they suggest by their high vocabulary a privileged perspective, as if we know what we are doing. Several of my now elderly colleagues who were enthusiastic truth seekers in their youth but became disillusioned seem to have come to take a perverse self-defeating enjoyment in enforcing the rules of their chosen box on themselves and others. Trying to control what others think of themselves, they have risked becoming a caricature of themselves.

I risk the same here now that I venture to describe my own approach. I also pass on the warning that I have a strong tendency to see my life as a coherent whole; I tend to absorb prior paradigms into the new ones to the point where my sense of coherence likely distorts and diminishes periods of crisis. Even after considerable change, I do not forswear my former self; I find continuity rather than discontinuity. Thus, even though here I will try to force myself to face contrary evidence by deliberately searching for contradictions and discontinuities, I must fail and will inadequately describe my approach to scholarship, missing what others must find as glaring inconsistencies. Anyway, let me give it a try.

On reflection, it seems that I have used four types of critical approaches: the New Literary Criticism of the 1950s, Marxist Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and Historico-Philosophical Criticism. “Criticism,” of course, does not mean “fault finding” but indicates “an avenue toward heightened awareness.” New Criticism has been my main approach to writing about Buddhism. In the 1950s, New Criticism was a conscious turn away from researchers who felt that literary scholarship should solely focus on historical and sociological concerns and not with the text itself, which they felt

should be left to journalists. The new approach was radical for those who considered attention to the text itself to be beneath rigorous research, an idea that today seems utterly bizarre.

I was educated in New Criticism at Harvard University in 1958-59 in a course taught by Reuben Brower in once-a-week lectures which I always found impenetrable to the point where I left the large, 300-person lecture hall blank, but the twice-a-week sections led by Richard Poirier (later of Rutgers) were fascinating beyond measure. Let me say a little about New Criticism. Brower reflects on his small-unit teaching method in his essay "Reading in Slow Motion" in *In Defense of Reading: A Reader's Approach to Literary Criticism*,¹ in which he admits he cannot stand giving large lectures. He livingly describes his approach as:

"Active amusement," "to stress the play of mind, the play of the whole being, that reading of this sort calls for," and drawing from Coleridge "brings the whole soul of man into activity," and drawing from D. H. Lawrence "offers an appropriate motto for teachers and students of literature: 'If it's never any fun, don't do it!'," and "many if not all of the writers of the past...have assumed reading aloud and a relatively slow rate of intellectual digestion. Literature of the first order calls for lively reading; we must almost act it out as we were taking parts in a play." "Whitehead used to say that the student should feel he is present while the teacher is thinking, present at an occasion when thought is in process." "To translate from Latin and Greek demanded close attention to the printed word, and since the ideas being communicated and the linguistic and literary forms through which they were expressed were often quite unlike those in English, translation compelled the closest scrutiny of meanings and forms of expression in both the ancient and the modern language...One purpose of a course in slow reading is to offer a larger number of present-day undergraduates an equivalent for the older classical training in interpretation of texts."

The translators among us can easily grasp Brower's point that the New Criticism is indeed the old criticism, the way texts were read in classical studies and are still read in translation-intense environments. The focus is on the text—its language, structure, and techniques of expression as tools to express a topic—and indeed even when I use Psychoanalytic or Marxist grids, I employ them to bring

¹ Brower 1962, 3-21.

more focus to a topic within the text rather than the other way around. For me, these grids do not become the focus when the subject matter being studied is Buddhism; rather, for me the grid allows insight into Buddhist views and practices.

The same is true for what I call Historico-Philosophical Criticism, the placement of the text in its philosophical spectrum. I feel we have to be ready to consider, for instance, that the Tulku institution is a projection of a substantially existent self and a projection of permanence as a defense mechanism against the fundamental teaching of impermanence. Similarly, we have to be ready to see that Tulku assignment can function as a means of economic stability and aggrandizement, serving as a power-base of appointed pseudo-aristocratic power through control of resources by estate managers.² Indeed without sociological and anthropological awareness one would be swallowed by the outrageous claims of religious systems, and thus, my mouth watered when I read the list of topics to be offered in this symposium, and as I listened to the presentations, I was so absorbed that it was as if my mind and body were expanding!

Since New Criticism was a conscious turn away from those scholars who felt that literary scholarship should solely be concerned with the historical and sociological concerns and not with the text itself, New Criticism was controversial and was accused of being anti-historical, since it seems to set up a dichotomy between the historical and the immediate, or existential, impact. Indeed, my scholarship may seem to do the same, as I spend so much time with the text, trying to convey its impact as a living, breathing phenomenon. In short, I use a storytelling approach that combines a focus on the text within the larger framework of its historical tradition with materialist exposés of exploitation and sometimes with psychoanalytic revelations of layers of projection and self-deception.

In a history course at Pomfret School, I was absorbed with Marxist attitudes driven by compassion for the downtrodden, and at Harvard I was fascinated with Anthropological relativism born from following out the implications of a brilliant course with Clyde Kluckhohn (famed for his work with Navajos) and Henry Murray (famed for development of the Thematic Apperception Test). Thus, in my youth I had developed a deep and continuing skepticism of church and government. By my college senior year (after a year and half wandering Vermont, Tahiti, and elsewhere), I was set in relativistic nihilism and cynicism. At Harvard, I had a strong, almost violent dissatisfaction with scholarship that cites historical influences

² See Lessing (1942) for his depiction of the Manchu court's jealous hatred of Tulkus in his *Yung-ho-kung*.

on religions as if showing that its attribution of non-contingency to itself also implies that a description of its dynamism is unnecessary; I wanted to scream at professors who neglected the lived impact of systems. I was ripe for an approach that proves effectiveness by way of showing contingency, all the while undermining its absurd claims, such as the Middle Way School.

Also, learning from the Kalmyk Mongolian Geshé Ngawang Wangyal techniques for generating compassion and indeed being deeply challenged by them, I became fascinated with the possibility of positive motivation, and I have concentrated on this, despite others' calling it elitism, ever since. Frankly, I often find little worth reporting when corrupt motivations and actions are uncovered—what else is new! Yet, I continue to be aware of corruption lest I be gulled by it. I choose to concentrate on possibilities of genuine other-interest, despite my context of skepticism.

I consciously seek to give the ideal, and sometimes actual, system a voice by using whatever literary skills I have, all within recognizing that “giving the system a voice” is itself a literary device that claims more than it can deliver. This voice led to my book *Meditation on Emptiness*, which begins with an introduction detailing thirty-two perspectives on the Middle Way School that differ from what was known about the Geluk system outside the Inner Asian sphere at that time. In this book, I sought to avoid the cultural imperialism of claiming a privileged perspective as an observer with a special methodology. I also sought to avoid comparing too many systems—in order to allow the reader to gain entry into a system without excessive comparisons, no matter how relevant. For instance, I read the entirety of Taktsang's *Knowing All Tenets*³ (purloined by someone else on film from a Japanese university), but I decided to only include bits of it in *Meditation on Emptiness*, not wanting to over-complicate the story.

I am a storyteller, utilizing these various critical attitudes over the course of several volumes to present a multi-layered glimpse of several aspects of a dynamic culture. I am not an exclusivist; I am in the cafeteria, grabbing sustenance from here and there. Look at the somewhat wide variety of my writings and the very wide scope of engagement of my twenty Ph.D. students (twenty-five including those who graduated after my retirement). I am still the delighted

³ Taktsang Sherap Rinchen (*stag tshang lo tsā ba shes rab rin chen*, b.1405), *Explanation of “Freedom from Extremes through Knowing All Tenets”*: *Ocean of Eloquence* (*grub mtha' kun shes nas mtha' bral grub pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos rnam par bshad pa legs bshad kyi rgya mtsho*).

and enthusiastic auditor of T.R.V. Murti's class at Harvard on the six schools of Indian philosophy.

1. *The meaning of "Tulku"*

Let us take a look at what typical Tibetan monastic texts say about the meaning of Tulku (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*). The topic appears in the treatment of the bodies of a Buddha which are variously enumerated as one, two, three, four, or five.⁴ These are more extensive or condensed forms of each other and thus do not indicate a difference of meaning.

one: body of attributes⁵

two: body of attributes and form body

three: body of attributes, enjoyment body, and emanation body (the last two being included within form body above)

four: nature body, pristine wisdom body of attributes, enjoyment body, and emanation body (the first two being included within body of attributes above)

five: nature body, pristine wisdom body of attributes, actual enjoyment body, imputed enjoyment body (such as the body of a tenth ground Bodhisattva), and emanation body (the middle two being included within enjoyment body above).

In an earlier work I rendered Changkya's presentation blended with oral teaching from the magnificent storytelling former abbot of the Gyümé Tantric College Ngawang Lekden this way:⁶

When Bodhisattvas arrive at the end of the continuum of still being a sentient being with obstructions yet to be removed, their body ornamented with a similitude of the marks and beauties of a Buddha becomes a Buddha's enjoyment body. Through the power of former wishes and without any intellection, various emanation bodies are issued from the enjoyment body, appearing simultaneously in countless lands throughout the ten directions and aiding sentient beings in

⁴ Changkya Rölpai Dorjé (*lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje, 1717-1786*), *Clear Exposition of the Presentations of Tenets: Beautiful Ornament for the Meru of the Subduer's Teaching* (*grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa gsal bar bshad pa thub bstan lhun po'i mdzes rgyan*), 506.7ff.

⁵ *chos sku, dharmakāya*.

⁶ Adapted from Hopkins 1996 (1983), 121ff.

accordance with their interests, dispositions, and beliefs. One does not first become a Buddha and then think about what needs to be done; one responds immediately and without thought or striving to the needs of all sentient beings. The enjoyment body and emanation bodies are achieved simultaneously because (1) both are fruits of training in the equality of cyclic existence and peace; (2) both are fruits of training to produce pure lands for enjoyment and emanation bodies in order to provide bases for sentient beings to gain enlightenment; and (3) both are fruits of training in wisdom and method such that at the time of highest enlightenment there are no obstructions with respect to the perfection of all qualities.

An enjoyment body abides in a Highest Pure Land (*'og min, akaniṣṭha*). Highest Pure Lands are above the seventeen types of lands in the Form Realm and thus are called 'Highest' (literally, 'not below').⁷ Each Buddha has their own Highest Pure Land produced by their limitless collections of merit and wisdom as vast as space; it is achieved from a portion of their wisdom and is not composed of particles of matter.

An enjoyment body is said to have five qualities:

1. An enjoyment body is impermanent, but it continuously displays the same type of body ornamented with the marks and beauties of a Buddha; therefore, it is immortal.
2. An enjoyment body continuously speaks the same type of doctrine, that of the Great Vehicle, and thus is a body that enjoys or uses the Great Vehicle doctrine as opposed to the emanation bodies which abide in Pure Lands and preach both Lesser Vehicle and Great Vehicle doctrines.
3. An enjoyment body continuously displays the activities that arise from wisdom and compassion.
4. These activities of body, speech, and mind are performed without striving.
5. Though an enjoyment body does not exist as many different personal continuums, it displays many emanation bodies.

⁷ For Jamyang Shepa's lengthier description of complete enjoyment bodies see Hopkins 2003, 997-1000.

It is said that even though the display of emanation bodies is an enjoyment body, emanation bodies are not enjoyment bodies but are of the same continuum as an enjoyment body.

Through the force of compassion and wishes over countless eons the ultimate wisdom itself appears in the aspect of a body. Each of the parts of the body directly realizes all phenomena and proclaims inconceivable intonations of doctrine; mind and body are no longer separate phenomena. Not only is the enjoyment body an appearance of pristine wisdom itself, but also the pure innumerable phenomena that a Buddha realizes from their own viewpoint are the entity of this wisdom itself. In dependence on others, a Buddha also perceives impure phenomena which have as their final cause afflictive ignorance (the conception that phenomena inherently exist) and non-afflictive ignorance (the appearance of these phenomena as if inherently existent).

Based on the accumulation of inconceivable merit for inexpressible eons and based on repeated, inconceivable, powerful wishes while a Bodhisattva, an enjoyment body continuously displays countless emanation bodies that appear in accordance with the dispositions of beings and act for the sake of furthering their aims of attaining high status as humans and as gods and attaining the definite goodness of liberation and omniscience. Spontaneously and without thought, a Buddha, like a wish-granting jewel, achieves the aims of beings but does not stir for an instant from the sphere of the final nature of phenomena.

There are three main types of emanation bodies:

1. artisans, such as a guitarist, goldsmith, or scribe
2. constructions, such as a tree or a deer
3. supreme beings, who display the twelve activities of a Bodhisattva who becomes a Buddha.

Responding to sentient beings' needs throughout time and space, emanation bodies appear, perform their task without effort, and are withdrawn. Sentient beings' noticing or not noticing them as such depends on their fortune which is formed through the potencies established on the mind by virtuous and non-virtuous deeds. As long as space exists, the various activities of a Buddha, arising from great compassion, come into existence spontaneously and continuously.

With that uplifting introduction, let us come back to earth and take a

slow look at another Tibetan textbook, Jamyang Shepa's *Eloquent Presentation of the Eight Categories and Seventy Topics: Sacred Word of Guru Ajita*.⁸ It is a reformulation of the often cryptic poetry of Maitreya's *Ornament for the Clear Realizations*⁹ into the prose of definition, divisions, and boundaries so that students can get a handle on the plethora of topics, ideal for our purposes here. Jamyang Shepa cites Maitreya's *Ornament*, I.17:¹⁰

Nature, complete enjoyment,
And likewise the others—emanation
And body of attributes as well as activities—
Are expressed as the four aspects.

Based largely but not exclusively upon the commentaries by Āryavimuktasena¹¹ and Haribhadra among the twenty-one commentaries spawned in India on Maitreya's *Ornament*, Jamyang Shepa presents a definition of a fruit body of attributes (*'bras bu'i chos sku*): "A final quality attained through the force of having accumulated the two collections [of merit and wisdom]."¹² From the above-cited stanza Jamyang Shepa draws out the divisions:

When [bodies of attributes] are divided, there are four because there are the four:

1. nature bodies (*ngo bo nyid sku, svabhāvikakāya*)
2. pristine wisdom bodies of attributes (*ye shes chos sku, jñānadharmakāya*)
3. complete enjoyment bodies (*longs sku, sambhogakāya*)
4. emanation bodies (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*)

"Body of attributes" also indicates pristine wisdom body of attributes.

When Denma Lochö Rinpoché, a Great Assembly Tulku (*tshogs chen*

⁸ *dngos po brgyad don bdun cu'i rnam bzhag legs par bshad pa mi pham bla ma'i zhal lung.*

⁹ *mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan/ shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gi bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan shes bya ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa, abhisamayālaṅkāra/ abhisamayālaṅkāra-nāma-prajñāpāramitopadeśasāstrakārikā.*

¹⁰ I.17:

/ngo bo nyid longs rdzogs bcas dang/ /de bzhin gzhan pa sprul pa ni/ /chos sku mdzad pa dang bcas pa/ /rnam pa bzhir ni yang dag brjod/

¹¹ Vasubandhu's student Āryavimuktasena is not to be confused with Bhadanta Vimuktasena.

¹² *bla brang* edition, 29b.4: *tshogs gnyis bsags stobs kyis thob pa'i mthar thug gi yon tan de/ 'bras bu chos sku'i mtshan nyid/*

sprul sku) of Losaling College, taught this book upon my invitation at the University of Virginia, he addressed the issue of how the term “body of attributes” (*chos sku, dharmakāya*) is used in two ways:

Is a complete enjoyment body a body of attributes? In general it is, but within a division into the three bodies—body of attributes, complete enjoyment body, and emanation body—a complete enjoyment body is not *that* body of attributes, but it is the general body of attributes.

We can see from this that complete enjoyment bodies and, by extension, also emanation bodies (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*) are divisions of bodies of attributes (*chos sku, dharmakāya*) in its wider sense. Therefore, an emanation body is a body of attributes, a *dharmakāya* in this broader sense.

Jamyang Shepa cites the description of emanation bodies¹³ in Maitreya’s *Ornament for the Clear Realizations*, VIII.33:¹⁴

Those bodies simultaneously bringing about
 Various benefits for transmigrating beings
 As long as mundane existence lasts
 Are the Subduer’s emanation bodies of uninterrupted
 continuum.

The Khalkha Mongolian scholar Ngawang Palden’s *Meaning of the Words*¹⁵ fleshes out this stanza as:¹⁶ (words appearing in Maitreya’s *Ornament* are in bold)

Those form **bodies simultaneously bringing about the various benefits** of high status and definite goodness for pure and impure **transmigrating beings** without intimacy [for some] and alienness [for others] **as long as mundane existence lasts are the emanation bodies of a Subduer,**

¹³ See also Jamyang Shepa’s description of emanation bodies in Hopkins 2003, 1000-1002.

¹⁴ VIII.33: */gang gir srid pa ji srid par/ /'gro la phan pa sna tshogs dag /mnyam du mdzad pa'i sku de ni/ /thub pa'i sprul sku rgyun mi 'chad/*

¹⁵ *Explanation of (Maitreya’s) Treatise “Ornament for the Clear Realizations” from the Approach of the Meaning of the Words: Sacred Word of Maitreya-nātha* (bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa’i rgyan tshig don gyi sgo nas bshad pa byams mgon zhal lung, 2014b), 96a.4ff.

¹⁶ Words appearing in Maitreya’s *Ornament* (2014a) are in bold: *gzugs sku gang gis srid pa ji srid par dag ma dag gi 'gro ba la mngon mtho nges legs kyi phan pa sna tshogs nye ring med par dus mnyam du mdzad pa'i sku de ni thub pa'i sprul sku ste de'ang rgyun ma chad pa yin no/*

which, moreover, are **of uninterrupted continuum**.

This stanza in Maitreya's text is rich with meaning and not at all cryptic. With Ngawang Palden's brief commentary we learn that emanation bodies impartially aim to bring about the benefits of high states within cyclic existence and the definite goodness of liberation from the entire round of uncontrolled rebirth as well as the final definite goodness, attainment of the omniscience of Buddhahood. Emanation bodies also appear continuously as long cyclic existence lasts in the sense that though individual ones may be withdrawn, new ones are emanated.

One might expect Jamyang Shepa to craft a definition of an emanation body based on the evident richness of this stanza, but he does not, instead devising one that at first blush is more cryptic than the source text: a final form body that is posited from the factor of not possessing the five certainties. Harkening back to earlier material, the reference is to attributes only of a complete enjoyment body. Here is Denma Lochö Rinpoché's explanation of the five certainties of a complete enjoyment body:

1. time (*dus nges pa*)
2. place (*gnas nges pa*)
3. body (*sku nges pa*)
4. doctrine (*chos nges pa*)
5. retinue (*'khor nges pa*)

The time is said to be certain because a complete enjoyment body lasts as long as cyclic existence is not emptied of sentient beings. A complete enjoyment body always stays only in the Heavily Adorned Highest Pure land (*'og min stug bkod pa, akaniṣṭha*); therefore, the place is certain. Certainty of body refers to the fact that a complete enjoyment body only displays the thirty-two marks and eighty beauties of a Buddha and does not itself display any other type of body. Certainty of doctrine is that a complete enjoyment body only teaches Great Vehicle doctrine, never Lesser Vehicle doctrine. Its retinue is certain because a complete enjoyment body is surrounded only by Bodhisattva Superiors, not by Bodhisattva common beings, Hearers, or Solitary Realizers.

Denma Lochö clarifies why Jamyang Shepa specifies "final":

It is called a *final* form body because a tenth ground Bodhisattva can emanate bodies that are similar to this and

might be mistaken for them, but such are not emanation bodies.

Jamyang Shepa adds:

The two—this [emanation body] and body emanated by a complete enjoyment body—are equivalent.

From these details, we learn that emanation bodies are emanated by complete enjoyment bodies but are not complete enjoyment bodies. A further terminological point is that even when a complete enjoyment body emanates an emanation in a Highest Pure Land, it is *called* a complete enjoyment body, but it actually is not a complete enjoyment body.

How many types of emanation bodies are there? Typical to this genre, Jamyang Shepa laconically says:

When divided, there are three, consisting of artisan emanation bodies, incarnation emanation bodies, and supreme emanation bodies.

Denma Lochö Rinpoché brings the line to life:

An emanation body of a Buddha that is displaying skill in the arts is an artisan emanation body. For example, the king of artisans (*bzo ba'i rgyal po*) named Vishwakarma (?) (*'bi sho skor ma*) was particularly skilled in making religious statues and so forth; it was he who made the statue of Jowo Rinpoché in Lhasa.

Incarnation emanation bodies are those that take rebirth in various forms for the sake of taming sentient beings. For instance, before the Buddha came to this continent he took rebirth in the Joyous Pure Land (*dga' ldan, tuṣita*) as Dampa Tokkar (*dam pa tog dkar*). Buddhas also take rebirth in the form of, or having the appearance of, animals such as deer, and these are also incarnate [or birth] Emanation Bodies. Any form except that of an artisan or supreme emanation body would fall into this category.

A supreme emanation body is one that tames trainees by way of showing the twelve deeds [descent from the Joyous Pure Land, conception, birth, mastery of the arts, sporting with the retinue, renunciation, asceticism, meditation under the tree of enlightenment, conquest of the array of demons, becoming a Buddha, turning the wheel of doctrine, and

nirvana (passing away)]. Among the many activities, the supreme is that of speech, and thus because this type of emanation body turns the wheel of doctrine for each and every trainee who has the lot to receive it, it is called supreme.

We can conclude from this description that the Tulkus of the Inner Asian Buddhist cultural region are not the third, supreme emanation bodies, because they do not display the twelve deeds, but they could be either or both of the other two—artisans and reincarnate emanation bodies.

A quick scan of the Tibetan authors whose works I have translated reveals that many of them were Tulkus, ranging from Jamyang Shepa to his incarnation Könchok Jikmé Wangpo to Changkya and so on, including Gendun Chöpel. Frankly, I never paid attention nor cared whether those authors were Tulkus or not; my concern was with the content of their writing.

With respect to my living teachers, I have had nineteen Tibetan and two Mongolian teachers of Inner Asian Buddhism:

1. Geshé Ngawang Wangyal of the Gomang College of Drepung Monastic University
2. Geshé Lhundub Sopa of the Jé College of Sera Monastic University
3. Khensur Ngawang Lekden, abbot emeritus of the Tantric College of Lower Lhasa and geshé in the Gomang College of Drepung Monastic University
4. Geshé Gendun Lodrö also of the Gomang College of Drepung Monastic University
5. His Holiness the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso
6. Khensur Lati Jangchup Tsultrim Rinpoché, abbot emeritus of and geshé in the Shartsé College of Ganden
7. Khetsun Sangpo Rinpoché, a Nyingma Lama
8. Geshé Tadrin Rapten
9. Dr. Yeshé Donden
10. Khensur Denma Lochö Rinpoché, abbot emeritus of the Namgyal College and geshé in the Losaling College of Drepung
11. Khensur Yeshé Thupten, abbot emeritus of and geshé in the Losaling College of Drepung
12. Khensur Jampal Shenphen, Throne-Holder of Ganden (head of the Gelukpa order), abbot emeritus of the Gyümé Tantric College, and geshé in the Jangtsé College of Ganden
13. Gen Losang Tenzin of the Gomang College of Drepung Monastic University

14. Gen Losang Gyatso of the Losaling College of Drepung Monastic University and Principal of the School of Dialectics, Dharmasala
15. Geshé Thupten Gyatso of the Gomang College of Drepung
16. Geshé Palden Drakpa of the Losaling College of Drepung
17. Geshé Yeshé Thapkhé of the Losaling College of Drepung
18. Khensur Könchok Tsering of the Shartse College of Ganden
19. Lodrö Gyaltsen of Jonang Sé Monastery in Amdo Province, Tibet, then residing in Taiwan
20. Khenpo Tsultrim Dargyé Rinpoché of Jonang Lungkya¹⁷ Monastery in Gadé, Golok in Amdo Province, Tibet
21. Delek Rapgyé,¹⁸ professor at a university in China

Of these twenty-one, one is nonsectarian, the Dalai Lama; one is Nyingma, Khetsun Sangpo; three are Jonang, Lodrö Gyaltsen, Tsultrim Dargyé Rinpoché, and Professor Delek Rapgyé; and sixteen are Geluk. Three are Tulkus recognized by the Tibetan government—the Fourteenth Dalai Lama; Khensur Lati Jangchup Tsultrim Rinpoché; and Khensur Denma Lochö Rinpoché. A reincarnation of the third, Khensur Ngawang Lekden, has been recognized as born in Ladakh in his twenties after having become a monk at Gomang College in Mundgod, South India; he is now called Tenpa Phuntsok Rinpoché; I have not met him though we have corresponded a few times. Khenpo Tsultrim Dargyé Rinpoché is a Tulku (I do not know the recognizing body), and I seem to remember that the renowned scholar Delek Rapgyé is not a Tulku. Again, frankly, I have never been concerned with whether a teacher is a Tulku or not. Even concerning the Dalai Lama, I originally presumed that a governmentally appointed reincarnation could not possibly avoid the pitfalls of such an appointment but was slowly shown to be wrong in 1972 during sixteen days of four- to six-hour lectures on Tsongkhapa's *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by the sheer content of his speech, the nitty-gritty detail.

I met with the Tulku Trijang Rinpoché, the Dalai Lama's Junior Tutor (older than the Senior tutor but second to be appointed and thus Junior) only once. Sitting across from each other in a window seat with a small table between us, he took my left hand and read my palm. He warned of a serious, life-threatening illness which we determined would be when I was fifty-one but said that if I survived it, I would have a fairly long life. Some time thereafter I had my only sit-down audience with the Tulku Ling Rinpoché. As I was leaving,

¹⁷ *lung skya*.

¹⁸ *a khu bde legs rab rgyas*.

out of the blue he said that if I ever underwent an interference I should use such-and-such mantra. I learned how to pronounce the mantra and put it in mind but never really practiced it the way I have practiced several others. When in 1991, in my fifty-first year the doctors had given me up for certain death that evening, I realized in the midst of bodiless immersion in golden light and near failure to recognize the sky's pronouncement of "Paul Jeffrey Hopkins" that Jeffrey is the main name that I was dying, and I began bodilessly reciting the mantra. As a doctor said, "We don't know what brought you back."

There are a couple others in my life that I suspect were Tulkus. In my childhood, there was an old man, much younger than I am now, a boxer who, upon being seriously knocked unconscious, revived and became an insurance salesman out of Utica, NY. He himself bought a lot of insurance before having a heart attack; in recovery he moved a couple of blocks from my home to become my childhood mentor. In many ways, he shaped my life with his life stories and with his occasional encouragement to finish anything and everything that I started. I stuttered a lot, and over and over again he told me how in his fantasy when he would get angry he would wrap a telephone cord around the other person's neck. A couple of times, he told me he would teach me how to fight, and one day outside by their kitchen and dining room he told me to put up my dukes, but when I did, he laughed and laughed right in my face. I suspect that he was a reincarnate emanation body, a Tulku.

There also was a clam-digging drunk, whom we fifteen year olds called Digger; he usually sat at the end of a bar in Bristol, Rhode Island. One night, I looked at him from the other end of the bar slobbering into his beer, moaning and talking to, well, no one, and I thought with unforgettable deep determination, "I am not going to end up like him." And I did not. I suspect that he was a reincarnate emanation body, a Tulku, revealing to me the path I was on.

As for an artisan emanation body I have suspected that Elvis Presley was. He commanded the world's attention and then showed the hollowness and corruption of fame—bloated addiction to chow, drugs, and still more adoration. He showed what it means to be a star, "star" being a designation in the entertainment world quite like Tulku, beautifully compelling with impossible expectations. Consider the Tulku who found the Fourteenth Dalai Lama as a child, Radreng Rinpoché, who though he had been Regent, was miserably executed by the Tibetan government, unless you believe those who claim he volunteered to die.

Let me tell you a few other Tulku stories. In the 1970s, I was studying from time to time with Geshé Rapten in his dirt-floor hut

with a single center-pole, on the level above where I lived in Dharamsala looking down and over to the temple complex, the Private Office, and the Dalai Lama's home. One day, Geshé Raptan related to me that he never wanted to get involved in identifying a reincarnation but was eventually bothered by dreams of his late teacher and was driven to search for him. He just plain did not want get involved in the Tulku stuff, but he felt compelled to do so and did indeed search for his teacher, and to his satisfaction found him, and the boy was installed.

In New Jersey, there was a Tulku from Kumbum serving the Mongolian community who told me that he did not believe in any Tulku except His Holiness the Dalai Lama!

Another Tulku, at our own monastery, remarked that if he was the incarnation of anything, it was of darkness.

Then again, there was the abbot of a tantric college who was a geshé but not a Tulku who before he was appointed Throne-Holder of Ganden (the head of the Gelukpa order), he—a bit like Rodney Dangerfield—joked that people like him were not getting any respect in this life, but once people of their training were reborn as little children, they would be instituted as Tulku and get plenty of respect no matter how stupid they were!

During my stay at Gomang College in Mundgod, South India, I was shocked to observe a senior scholar taking blessing from a boy Tulku on the walkway by rubbing his head into the boy's stomach. It has seemed to me that recognition as a Tulku could easily be fraught with danger, either from becoming arrogant, "I am the great one," or from loss of faith, "If they bow down to stupid me, the whole religion must be dumb."

My cook up on that hill overlooking Upper Dharamsala used to be the Dalai Lama's Tutor Ling Rinpoché's horse tender. He talked about Tulkus as if they were his substantially existent self, but then again warned about how the people had ways of taking care of ones that did not toe the line.

Despite the high-falutin' nature of Tulkus there is also something ridiculous, much like Hollywood "stars," who are inflated to the celestial firmaments so that we can catch their fall—pointing, laughing, and gawking as they fall all the way, whether through age, corruption, or moral affliction. The fallen become objects of gossip—the Tulku addicted to gambling; the Tulku addicted to booze; the Tulku having sex with students—the gossipers drooling over the details. I am reminded of the Tibetan Opera in which Gyalwa Rinpoché is jokingly treated as a buffoon inflated beyond all measure like the Emperor With No Clothes, the very name "Gyalwa Rinpoché" being pronounced with slimy sarcasm and gestures of mock respect,

much as we mockingly use the words "Congressman," "Senator," and "President" in comedy and satire.

On the other hand, I am reminded of a friend who said that some Tibetans put up with fallen Tulkus because they, like fallen Catholic priests (but perhaps not sex offenders), can still perform essential rites. But on still a third hand, there are Tibetans who laugh at the gullible foreigners who lap up the fallen "high lamas'" presence, splashing them with adoration and contributions.

The Tulku institution is ubiquitous in the Inner Asian Buddhist cultural region. Do religious groups in Tibet make themselves significant by having a Tulku? As a late Geshé said about his colleague's search for one, "They need a Tulku." It is like big and little groups in the US needing a president. I like being President of the UMA Institute for Tibetan Studies.

I am deliberately bringing up these cross-cultural comparisons as a prod to colleagues who sometimes criticize others for not including more history and anthropology in their scholarship, but who themselves speak as if they were without any biography, any history. Life-story becomes stylized as academic theorizing that emphasizes history and contingency but without revealing any personal source. We need to keep in mind Carl Jung's statement that most theory is subjective confession.

Similarly, when we go overseas we sometimes tend to see our own culture either in an entirely favorable light or in an entirely unfavorable light. Often our culture is put forward as an example of transparency and fairness, and the old government of Tibet, for instance, is treated like an abysmal failure despite three centuries of relative success. When Americans like myself are overseas, we need to remember that in America we do not even try to provide equal education, equal justice, and equal representation, and that democracy remains a pretended goal, not something achieved or even actually aimed at; in fact it is aimed around—consider gerrymandering. However, when we do take notice of our own inequities, we compare American behavior to Tibetan Buddhist ideals, with the result that Tibetan society is misrepresented as an ideal Shangri-la. When we exaggerate Tibetan culture into being a Shangri-la, this leaves Tibet vulnerable to the innumerable revelations of the emotions of lust and hatred inevitably present throughout the world. Even worse, such simplistic exaggeration prevents noticing the evidence of the heights of Tibet's cultural achievements. My favorite counter-story is of a burly Tibetan man who upon returning to his seat at a religious lecture found his place taken, pulled out a knife, and stabbed the fellow who had taken it.

That sounds like a US freeway gun attack, the difference being the weapon!

Given the huge discrepancy between (1) the doctrinal teaching that emanation bodies are emanated by complete enjoyment bodies and are themselves instances of bodies of attributes (*chos sku, dharmakāya*) and (2) the behavior of many recognized contemporary Tulkus, it is not surprising that a group of laypersons a few decades back approached the Dalai Lama's Tibetan Affairs secretary in his Private Office to request that the practice of recognizing Tulkus be stopped. I was told that the deeply experienced secretary turned his head slightly toward the Dalai Lama's residence and said, "What are you going to do about him?" That was the end of the meeting.

I too have been vexed by this same discrepancy and one day—most likely in 1972—asked the Dalai Lama just what Tulkus are. He replied that the bottom line for being appointed a Tulku is that the person's rebirth is motivated by compassion. Perhaps noticing the puzzlement on my face about the obvious failures, he added that when a horse runs through a field, some flowers are knocked down.

2. *Getting personal*

I have been moved to read about the harrowing events of the present Kalu Rinpoché's Tulku servitude. How his exalted stature as a star Tulku began comfortably while his manager was still alive but afterward turned into a form of economic servitude under his new manager and into enforced sexual enslavement by other monks, who obviously have no respect for the supposed hierarchy. What are the parallels here in the US? Professional athletes owned by clubs. Salaried upper level managers in corporations. Sex workers enslaved by pimps. Think about his new manager's brandishing a knife and threatening to kill him and replace him with someone else if he did not cooperate. In how many so-called professions does this happen in the US? "Approve what we are doing, or we will throw you out on the streets, and you will never get a job again!" Think about life-threats and more against whistle-blowers. His honesty, as well as Elijah Ari's openness, have caused me to open up a little about my own history.

In my own case, I was born in the Lying-in Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, of which I have only memories implanted by my mother. Her green metal bed with me in a bassinette to her left, and a family friend called Uncle Gris (Boynton) who stood at the foot of her bed and announced singing to the tune of a popular musical: "Paul Jeffrey Hopkins is a very famous kid, Paul Jeffrey Hopkins is a

very famous kid." When she related this throughout her life, she was always greatly astonished, "I don't know why he did this."

Here are several snippets from my fifty or so pages of actual childhood memories, that I titled *Reborn in America*:

My first meditations were in the crib. I would be lying there in a neutral state of awareness but then suddenly, much like a wave coming over me, I would remember who I was. It was much like "aha," and then I would be fully present. I remember this happening many times. When I say "this" I mean the change from mere awareness as a person to being a specific person, realizing that I had ended up this way in a new body.

Often in my crib in my upstairs room while still less than a year old, I would be lying on my stomach, and I would visualize or contact a plane of slightly greenish yellow light that passed on a vertical axis down through my mattress. Not quite vertical, a little slanted. I frequently went into that state; it was my chief meditation.

One day when I was sleeping in my first room in my parent's house—the position of the bed was such I may have been in the crib—I woke up running through a field of spearheads or knife heads so that whenever I stepped down, four or five knife heads would go all the way through my foot. With each step, that was happening. That memory remains very vivid for me. I have a sense of pale yellow light associated with it. In Buddhist cosmological lore there is a plain of razors, and of course, this is what I identify as the plain of razors. It is supposedly passed through when one comes out of one of the hot hells.

One funny memory I have is of being set on the toilet in the upstairs bathroom and looking at the toilet paper and realizing this was fantastic paper for texts, since Tibetan texts are written on paper about that size. Long and narrow.

One day, when I was lying on my back in the crib and with my head toward one of the two doors and my feet toward a set of built in drawers, I set my mind in a state of what I would now call emptiness and clarity and rose in an ideal body. I was greatly surprised, because the body that I rose in—in sitting posture—was a smoky pink. I was really

surprised by the lack of brightness to that body. This kind of practice is called deity yoga in Buddhist tantra.

At an earlier time, I was on my stomach with my head to my left side and my hand in front of me. This was during a state of neutral selfhood. I came to, realizing that this was *my* hand in front of me; I stared at that hand that was so small and wrinkled but not old. I couldn't control my hand at all, but I realized that it was mine.

Later, I had gotten so that I could control my legs to some extent. I exercised by moving my left leg out to the side while lying on my stomach. I did this in a few series of six repetitions when my mother was present. My intention was that she notice that I was conscious since I did it a specific number of times, but she did not. I was as if in a prison being held incommunicado.

I remember being in my crib once and deciding that I didn't want people to know that I was fully aware because I would be recognized as a reincarnation, a Tulku, and I felt that would just be terrible. But later on, after I had spent a long time staring at the ceiling of the room and the light fixture, which was a round, flower-like, bronze fixture, and being bored, I decided that indeed I would like to be recognized so I could get rid of the extreme boredom. Boredom may be what caused me to meditate so much during that period.

One day in kindergarten when the teacher, Mrs. Gardner, was about to teach the alphabet and I had a pen and paper, I wrote out the Tibetan alphabet in rows. An interesting thing to me now is that I wrote the capital letters which were used in books, rather than the cursive form used in correspondence. Perhaps I didn't know the cursive form in my past life—which would not be amazing since most scholars did not even know how to write. It was considered a distraction from scholarship. I don't know what she did with that piece of paper. I remember reflecting that the Tibetan letter “sa” ས་ is somewhat similar to the English s, and the letter “ga” ག་ is similar to g.

Left out of that series of memories is being called into a hallway outside the kindergarten room, where my father, mother, Mrs. Gardner, and maybe someone else were. They were conveying with some urgency to me that my alphabet paper had been shown to

“brown” which I took to be some authority (but later in life understood to be Brown University) but no one there identified it as a recognizable alphabet. I was thus saved, by truth or artifice, downright lie, from having to be a freak.

My most striking experiences in kindergarten were being taught things like “The house is red.” The teacher had taught us $1 + 2 = 3$, so we knew what the equals sign meant. She had said it meant exactly equivalent, but even this gave me a lot of trouble since in Tibetan logic $1 + 2$ are not exactly the same as 3, since $1 + 2$ is a *different* expression from 3. Anyway, she said that that the house is red means the house equals red, which I thought was utterly ridiculous and completely stupid, and of course, it is. One *might* argue about whether $1 + 2$ is exactly the same as 3, but it can't be argued that a house is exactly the same as red. It was like being reborn in a land of stupidity.

Can you imagine having a sense of the full presence of a mature adult and being subjected to schooling in America? I wasn't so bored in kindergarten, but in first grade it was terrible—Dick and Jane and Spot, horrible. I vividly remember being so bored, sitting in the middle front with this dumb book in my hands. Ugh! One day, sitting on the far left in the front, I was meditating on myself as having a back face which was brilliant yellow. I had managed to make it bright, and I was really surprised when the girl behind me didn't see it. It turns out that the back face of the four-faced deity Kalachakra is yellow.

There were places in the house where I meditated a few times, when I was very small. There was a place in a room by my father's bedroom, a bathroom they never put in. There was a closet in the eaves—it was a saltbox house—with double doors into the closet. On the left side was a place to hang garments, on the right side were drawers; there was red linoleum inside the closet and behind the drawers in the eaves. I looked at the place several years ago; it was very tiny, but I was small at the time. Before I knew how to walk, I crawled in there once and meditated. Another time, I got a cushion (green with red trim) and, crawling, pushed it in there; I sat on the cushion and meditated on a hand scepter called a vajra at the point between my brows, which then split into two, but then each only produced one after another, going out in the shape of a V. In my forties, while reading about Yoga Tantra I found that there is a meditation in which

this is done, but each of them splits into two which ends up being very complicated. In my version, I was facing the wall of the drawers from the back of the closet, which melted in my imagination, and I extended these vajras out from that place. It seems my mother suddenly remembered that I was in there and was worried and called me out. She, of course, couldn't get back there.

Another time I was outside in my baby carriage—with the half-top shifted to the other end so there was a little light coming in where my head was, but not direct sunlight—I remember the corner of the house—and I started doing breath meditation, breathing in and out several times and then holding my breath more and more; I remember going off into yellow light.

Many years later my mother told me that at one point when I was in my baby carriage out there, I almost died because I stopped breathing. When she got to me, I was sweating a brown sweat; she picked me up and blew on my face. Upon being told, I immediately remembered. It was a very uncomfortable feeling. She was smart to do so because it revived me out of my trance. I can vividly remember inhaling and holding the breath, following my breath and holding it a lot, but I don't remember being picked up. I do remember coming to with her breath blowing on my face.

I talked to my mother about having been a monk in the past, and eventually she called in someone to hypnotize me...He tried to hypnotize me. It didn't work, so he had me move toward the sunroom. As far as I know, that didn't work either. I had to say a little bit about this past life thing—that I was a monk in a monastery, I don't think I told him anything else. I was told to forget it. I pretended that it worked. Near the front door, she paid him, \$15 I think, which was a lot of money then...Anyway, after he left, I told my mother that it didn't work at all; she was fed up. What got through to me from that experience, however, was that she considered this to be serious. She would work on me to forget it, telling me that it was imagination. I remember sitting at my desk in my room in the attic on the third floor, connecting the word imagination with the Tibetan word *tokpa* (*rtog pa*). I used to think, is this imagination? She decisively worked her way into my mind through pressuring me to think it was imagination.

Again, I was manipulated into not being a freak in the American

culture of 1945 but was left conflicted in what became repressed forgetfulness. One more memory from childhood sometime between age seven and ten:

One day I was sitting cross-legged on the floor between the piano bench and the window. I developed an intention to translate some of these great books of my—I didn't use the word religion—into English.

Subsequently, despite repressing these memories, turning into a bit of a juvenile delinquent, and then finding a way out at a liberal prep school where students were treated as human beings, the capacity for memory of some conceptual and nonconceptual states was restored through practicing Tibetan exercises for generating the altruistic intention to become enlightened.¹⁹

Now at age seventy-four I still would not want to be identified as a Tulku despite deeply wanting to continue my study, practice, and work in my next life. The star-like aggrandizement would be an obstacle as would the time-wasting official duties; what I want is not to lose the trained talents that I have now. We all know how quickly those are lost, and I know how I lost them despite having them for a number of years in the current life. What I want is education appropriate to my abilities in these same topics! I don't want to be some manager's puppet and a cog in a temple's or a college's machine used for economic advantage. Also, if anyone thinks in my next life I have any blessings, please read what I wrote in my past life.

3. Conclusion

We have a responsibility as academics and fellow human beings to portray a nuanced picture of Inner Asian Buddhism such as the place of Tulkus, for it matters, impacts actual people. Undermining popular views but not presenting a well-rounded picture should not be an option especially in the searing blaze of over a 150 Tibetans trying and often succeeding to burn themselves to death to preserve their culture. Glorifying Tulkus as descents of the divine does not reflect the varied perspectives within the region, and focusing solely on the abuse does not reflect the productivity of many Tulkus over the at least eight centuries of the existence of this institution.

¹⁹ I have written about my own practice in *Cultivating Compassion* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001); retitled *A Truthful Heart: Buddhist Practices for Connecting with Others* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).

In September 2012, I was part of a group of two senior professors and two top political consultants who visited President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj of Mongolia and his top aide for an hour across from the UN in New York. My first teacher of Tibetan Buddhism was the Kalmyk Mongolian Geshé Wangyal, and I lived in his monastery in a Mongolian community in New Jersey for five years 1963-68. I have used the treatises of several Mongolian scholars written in Tibetan in my scholarship and learned from my Mongolian and Tibetan teachers about the Soviets' murder of over 500 Tulkus, wholesale slaughter—this is why Geshé Wangyal with foreboding left Tibet not long after the Chinese Communist invasion of eastern Tibet in 1950. After a good deal of discussion, the impressive but not at all flashy President Elbegdorj, who had first resisted the Soviets and had twice been Prime Minister only to be removed because of being too intent on uprooting corruption, mentioned that he hoped to reinstate the right of the Mongolian people to appoint Tulkus.

We had already learned about Mongolia's plans to build a new Nalanda, a seminal Indian educational institution whose curriculum and faculty had tremendous influence on the structure and practice of a great many aspects of Inner Asian Buddhism. Of course, given its history of Soviet mass murder of one of its cultural institutions, Mongolia would want and certainly has the right to reinstate it and should! But my advice for this anti-corruption, democratic, freedom fighter is that the great power of Inner Asian Buddhism is its profound educational and meditative systems.

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