

# Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and the ‘West’

## Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche lose credibility in support of Aung Suu Kyi of Burma

a reproach by Lama Tendar Olaf Hoeyer

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche defends Aung Suu Kyi and attack the ‘West’ in general for our continuing attempts at colonialism and cultural imperialism, as he sees it.

How is this possible? You may read his letter to Aung Suu Kyi here:

[www.tilogaard.dk/Dzongsar\\_Khyentse\\_on\\_Aung\\_Suu\\_Kyi\\_and\\_the\\_West\\_24\\_november\\_2018.pdf](http://www.tilogaard.dk/Dzongsar_Khyentse_on_Aung_Suu_Kyi_and_the_West_24_november_2018.pdf)

### An out of place criticism

Much of what he writes, is after all true in a certain sense. Particularly so regarding *Buddha-dharma* becoming watered down in the West. His letter though, indicate undoubtedly that the Teaching of Buddha is also watered down by some Asian Dharma-teachers, who are actually supposed to refrain from such. Well, that may be so. Most of his letter is a rough generalisation of people in the West and about our culture here having the power to reshape Asia in a bad way. This is not entirely true. It might only be true in a figurative sense. That Asia have adopted Western culture to such a degree, that this – in such an adapted way – now Asian culture is in fact destroying former Asian values. Just like it has also happened in the West to our own past. But this is not, what he writes. Instead, he blames the West for things, that Asia itself is copying and developing in their very own way – how may we in the West have a responsibility for, what other peoples chose to do by them selves?

The imperial powers of Europe have long time ago had to give up their empires, and most people from here in the West have never participated in those empires and their adventures in Asia. It is not us in the West that rule Asia. It is the capitalist demons, that have conquered the whole world. That these demons took power first in the West, does not relieve anyone in Asia from responsibility in regard to, what happens there. The diagnosis is not correct. As it happens, the patient is indeed sick, but the disease is not ‘Western influence.’ The West was just the first place for the disease to infect people. Besides, imperialism is not any particular ‘Western’ phenomenon, but a global problem.

The great majority of people in the West are not imperialists. Neither do they nourish any ambition about reshaping Asia in Western cultural context. In our eyes, it is up to them. It is very few people indeed here in Europe, that have forefathers who took part in the imperial powers' occupation of Asian countries for quite some time ago. So Khyentse Rinpoche's criticism is not fitting. At the same time the question rises, why he wants to cultivate such a prejudice? The only answer, that I can imagine, is that it is the easiest way to describe a complicated process, even it is in fact a lie about, what is actually happening.

Instead, he ought to criticise the Asians for the way in which they implement both inventions, that originally was made in the West, and the political, economic and cultural institutions, that they have developed further, after the European empires left Asia long time ago. It is a choice of the Asians to go for chewing gum and wear jeans. It was not decided in Copenhagen, Denmark. It is not useful to criticise the West for moral shortcomings of Asians. That also people of the West have committed moral faults, cannot mean that Europeans cannot criticise Aung Suu Kyi. This issue is not about East or West. It is about your own ethics and morality, and about being responsible for your own actions.

As it happened, Genghis Khan never had to answer for the millions of people, that he murdered. Nor the European colonists in America who, when they did not directly kill people, their carried diseases did, and if that was not enough, the original peoples' slavery for the colonists would kill them off in great numbers. It is a miracle that original people of America and Australia still exist. And a great luck that there are Chinese people around at all, because Genghis Khan's first plan was to kill them all, so the flat lands of Northern China would serve as grassing fields for the Mongols' herds.

These crimes against humanity have nothing to do with the geographical origin of the various people, but it is all about their military power and desire to rule others and their greed for confiscating the possessions of strangers and rob them of their life and freedom. Some of these actual historic criminals have been punished, when there was a law against their actions and a possibility to prosecute, whether in Asia or America and Europe. But most of them got away with it, very rich and powerful, in both Asia and Europe. What is completely wrong is exactly imperialism. And the principle, that power is righteous. Of course it is not. And it is wrong everywhere, all over the planet.

Why does Dzongsar Khyentse not provide a general criticism of imperialism? Why does he blame us in Europe for what our irresponsible forefathers did against their just as olden fellow human beings some long time ago? Can we Danes not criticise the French, because King Godfred once upon a time burned down Paris and slaughtered the French army? Undoubtedly there are some American generals, who ought to stand trial for their crimes against humanity in the Vietnam war. But that does not free Aung Suu Kyi for her ethical and political responsibility in Burma (Myanmar).

How could there be a connection between these two events, that somehow free Aung Suu Kyi from her responsibility, inactivity and silence? The only thing, that I can find, is that both events are examples of something rotten, bad morality and neglect of responsibility. Besides, it appears that both the American Generals and Aung Suu Kyi will never be prosecuted and presented before a judge. It is not in any way fair, but the consequence of the laws in both USA and Burma. Khyentse Rinpoche does not provide a connection between these two events, that free Aung Suu Kyi for her responsibility.

The European empires did a lot of damage in Asia, though the little kingdom of Denmark, from where I come, does not really share in any of that damage done. I can mention 21 other European nations, that did not do any damage either nor subjugated anyone in Asia. Instead they let their urge for empire hurt their neighbours, or they conquered territories in Africa. Denmark cultivated its imperialism in the Caribbean, on the Faero islands and Greenland. Had we had the opportunity and power, we would properly had been just as bad as the English, French and Dutch were in Asia. But it did not happen. Neither was it the Danish Air-force nor other European powers that bombed Laos during the Vietnam war. As a Danish citizen and a European, I do not sympathise with the generalisations of Khyentse Rinpoche. They appear completely out of place. They also imply a collective responsibility, that I do not think earn any merit. Europe is over 30 very different nations.

What Khyentse Rinpoche blames the West, could as well be said about the Tibetans. If the Tibetans had the power, they would also subjugate the Chinese and kill the ring leaders, when they rebelled against such an unjust occupation. In fact, the former kings of Tibet did exactly that, when they were powerful enough over 1000 years ago. In this way, I think Khyentse Rinpoche's criticism does not hit its target. Also, I do not

think that he provides any justification for Aung Suu Kyi's lack of action to benefit the Rohingyas, nor for her outspoken nationalism in the multinational state, that Burma is.

Her silence cries to the sky. It may be that the English ought to admit the Rohingyas into England and provide them with asylum, because the British empire was to some degree responsible for at least some of the Rohingyas coming to Rakhine state in the first place. But when the killing goes on in Aung Suu Kyi's own country and she is taking part in government and a million people is exiled, she has a duty to resist and cry out. A common compassionate human obligation, if she has a heart and can recognise and find it. Of that reason her silence cries to the sky. Even she did not kill nor expel anyone herself, she appear as a deplorable person in an ethical sense, because she did not act, and she said nothing. And this is her tragedy. Everywhere she was appreciated as a person of integrity with moral stamina and irreproachable ethics. Until the Rohingya crisis happened and she failed.

It is true that the government of the UK does not recognise their part of responsibility for the problem, while this does not prevent them from criticising Aung Suu Kyi. But even if the UK has failed to some degree, you cannot say, that therefore Aung Suu Kyi has not failed – nor that she has no responsibility. Again, there is no connection between these two events.

As I said before, it is not Aung Suu Kyi personally, that has indulged in a killing spree on the Rohingyas and driven them out of the country. Of course it is the Burmese military and some local fascists that are behind it all. And it is also the army that is the administrative authority for exactly that area, where the Rohingyas used to live, before their escape to Bangladesh.

But Aung Suu Kyi does partake in the government, and she is the unofficial prime minister of the country. Naturally, the political situation in Burma is complicated and it is the military, that holds the real power in Burma. Also, there is a clear reactionary nationalist movement in the country these days with militant Buddhist monks (?) and a hysterical mass mobilisation against the Muslims and the other minorities in Burma.

But it is also such a situation, that summons a man – or a woman – to disavow and to act. Khyentse Rinpoche does not write about that. He has

another objective, that does not appear honourable, even he himself appears convinced about it.

Aung Suu Kyi has failed morally and ethically, because she did not disavow and speak out loudly and explicitly against the killings and expulsion of innocent people. By her passivity she has earned responsibility and lost her good reputation. It cannot be excused, even it may be explained by the political complications of Burmese society. But Aung Suu Kyi does not deserve praise nor recognition for nothing. And Khyentse Rinpoche is not providing some unknown merit, that might cause praise and honour. Because there is no merit.

It does appear, that Khyentse Rinpoche has lost his temper and got angry with long gone and dead Western imperialists. He seems angry with ghosts from the past. And blind to what is happening in Burma right now. He only mentions the Rohingyas in one short sentence with just a faint trace of sympathy.

Rather, Dzongsar Khyentse ought to criticise the imperial tendencies of the Tibetan exile government and 'parliament.' Against the wishes of the Tibetan peoples, they aim to create a new Tibetan empire, if they could get rid of the Chinese occupation. Tibet is not a very large national entity, but many nations, each of which wants to become independent countries. They do not want to be ruled by a central Tibetan government. They want self-rule over their own territories.

Khyentse Rinpoche is from Bhutan, that only narrowly escaped such an earlier Tibetan imperialism at the time of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and by the following wars between Tibet and Bhutan. Only by their good luck did Bhutan remain independent.

It is very difficult to evaluate, just how great a responsibility the 'West' has for the development of things in Asia today. By the very existence of the 'West,' our nations of course exercise an influence on Asia. But Asia has adopted the ideas of the 'West' about capitalism, communism, technology and science and made all of it their own. They have made their own stock exchanges, universities and bureaucracies. Development is by and large in their own hands. The European imperialism is all in the past, and hurrah for that. Why is it, that Khyentse Rinpoche has not yet

discovered this fact. USA actually lost the Vietnam war. What many perceive as a 'Western' influence in Asia, is in fact a very Asian culture such as only Asians can make it with chewing gum, jeans, iPhones and pop music. And a very repressive exploitation of the underclass peoples in the Asian societies.

In this way, the criticism of Dzongsar Khyentse does not hit its target. On the contrary, he appears to be a confused person, that we must presume, is incapable to counsel and teach people from the 'West.' As it is, he shows no respect for people from here, unless they are artists, scientists or anarchist philosophers. He has simply made a terrible analysis, that falls back on himself by its simplified outlook, and it will destroy the good reputation, that he has enjoyed so far. It was already under attack by his apology for Sogyal Rinpoche, even Sogyal was a sexual predator, a very bad character and an abuser of power.

### The Bhutan born Nepalis

There was a hope, that exactly Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche would be a modern cosmopolitan, who would bridge East and West. Now it seems, that he does not even comprehend, what is going on in the 'East.' Unless of course his letter is all about, that he does not really appreciate the many Bhutan born Nepalis, that were expelled from Bhutan, even though their ancestors were invited to settle there by a king of Bhutan in the past. We are talking about more than 100.000 people, that are mostly Hindus in regard to their religion. But first of all, they are fellow human beings. It is yet one more of the oppressed refugee peoples of this world, that everybody has forgotten about. Khyentse Rinpoche does not write about them at all, but they might be exactly whom, he is thinking of. Just like the Rohingyas, they languish in refugee camps in Nepal, robbed of their rights in their own native country.

Was it by any chance because of the British imperialists, that some Nepalis were invited to Bhutan in order to settle and cultivate the land? Had the independent king of Bhutan no power to rule in his own country back then? Was it therefore due to the English imperialists, that these Nepalis' descendants were expelled from Bhutan in 1989? (Many years after India had gained independence. So the English imperialists were long gone.)

Are Bhutan then in no way responsible for the fact, these 'evacuated' Bhutan born Nepalis now live in refugee camps in Nepal? Or is there a coincidence in Khyentse Rinpoche's thoughts about Burma and Bhutan

in regard to ethnic cleansing of national minorities? Does he cultivate such thoughts because he is from Bhutan? Was the former Ottoman Turkish empire in 1915 then also not responsible for the genocide of the Armenian people? Where does this line of thinking stop?

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche has become his own scandal. Either he is very unskilled in political-cultural thoughts, or maybe he is just another nationalist from Bhutan with a grudge towards the Bhutan born Nepalis. Actually, it does not matter much, if he is the one or the other, because he ought to be too good to write such an ignominious letter, that now is everywhere in the public space for everybody to read. Such a shame for himself, Buddhadharma, Bhutan, Burma, the Rohingya refugees and the Bhutan born Nepalis. And for such people in the West, that had confidence in him.

### And now a spiritual bypassing

On the Facebook page of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, there is a link to an article in the India Times. Allegedly, it should explain his approval of Aung Suu Kyi. But I cannot find any practise of ‘maitri’ in it (it is called ‘metta’ in the Pali language, that the Theravada tradition use, but it means the same as Sanskrit maitri, what is mostly translated as ‘loving kindness’ though the meaning is the love of friendship) even the article claims, it is there. It really look like the usual spiritual bypassing, that so many people like to apply to difficult subjects. Of course, theoretically speaking, it is possible that Aung Suu Kyi – hidden from the public and all the media of the world – may induce influence on the military of Burma and limit their assaults by staying on in government.

But it is actually evident, that she by protesting loudly would be able to force political changes. It could be – theoretically – that the military in Burma does not care, what she may think, say or do, but in that case, she is not influencing anyone nor anything in any hidden way, so she could as well speak out loudly. That could make someone on the outside of government wake up. The matter is after all not about some accidental police violence, but about ethnic cleansing of a substantial national minority expelling them from the lands of their ancestors.

For instance would Gandhi have started a hunger strike, if this had happened in his time under his watch. During the partition of India in 1947, Gandhi went to Kolkatta in West Bengal, because certain Hindus

were killing large numbers of Muslims in the city. Gandhi came in very loudly and outspoken and with the focus of the media and started a hunger strike in protest to the killings. That stopped all the murders. This is what is meant with the phrase: moral authority. We do not know, how many lives this action of Gandhi saved, but his action properly cost him his own life. Soon after, he was killed by an allegedly fanatical Hindu.

Nothing indicates, that Aung Suu Kyi is silent, because she practise the love of friendliness, *maitri*. Nor does her silence indicate, that she practise compassion, *karuna* in Sanskrit. Not with the military nor with the Rohingyas. Her conduct indicate, that she as a seasoned politician in a very tight situation have chosen to stay in government as informal leader in order to avoid to give up power to someone else. This policy has cost her dearly and did not prevent the assaults on the Rohingyas. Her silence could even be understood as condoning the policy by the military of ethnic cleansing.

Similarly does Dzongsar Khyentse's expressive support to her indicate, that we must assume, he is condoning the ethnic cleansing in Bhutan in 1989 of the Bhutan born Nepalis. It is not possible to find any honourable aims anywhere, so they both appear wretched. The one for her silence – the other for his unhealthy speech. Khyentse Rinpoche writes in his letter, that "...a guilty person cannot judge [others]..." Even that quote falls back on himself.

Read here about the refugees from Bhutan (Matthew Gindin):

<https://medium.com/MatthewZGindin/the-silent-cost-of-shangri-la-the-human-rights-controversy-in-bhutan-901c4adef14e>

### Update on the Rohingyas

26. November 2018. It is still very difficult for the Rohingyas, that have not yet escaped from Burma. Most of them live in internal temporary refugee camps in the Rakhine state, that is in no way any better than the camps in Bangladesh. So the refugees in Bangladesh resist going back to Burma in the wake of international pressure on Burma. Rohingyas inside Burma still try to escape. The whole situation is in so few words a mess with terrible sufferings as consequence.

Read about it here (RFA):

[www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmars-remaining-rohingya-face-choice-11212018154545.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmars-remaining-rohingya-face-choice-11212018154545.html)

## Postscript

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche has published his letter on Facebook. The Buddhist online magazine 'Buddhist Channel' from Malaysia has also published it, while only the Tricycle Magazine in USA has published a commentary here in the West. Otherwise such reactions happens normally very quickly nowadays. The reason is of course that the letter is very provocative, and at the same time it is mixed in with spiritual bypassing by an acknowledged Buddhist teacher. Add to this, that most of us are reluctant to criticise an otherwise widely acclaimed Tulku such as Dzongsar Khyentse. Until now. Particularly his films has rendered him a good name. But now everything pales. Fame becomes infamy. Why has Dzongsar Khyentse shot himself in the foot? Is this the way in which he will demonstrate maitri? By denigrating intelligent people in the West and praising political idiocy? What has that got to do with 'love of friendship'? Or Bodhicitta?

If indeed, Aung Suu Kyi was really perceived as exercising a hidden influence on the Burmese military by Khyentse Rinpoche, he ought to have taken that as an example and kept his mouth shut. If indeed, maitri is best practised in hiding and silence, he should have tried it out. Now he has harmed himself and put a question-mark on his character as well as all the East-Asian Buddhism. This is not of benefit to himself. It is not good for East-Asia. Nor is it any good for us in the 'West.' So I will not shut up. We are many that totally disagree with Khyentse Rinpoche. His demonstration of the meaning of maitri is hereby contradicted. It is not love to the people to marry the enemy of the people, like Aung Suu Kyi has done. Her silence cannot be explained away in that fashion. The ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas cannot be explained away nor condoned.

## UN and possibly a genocide

The accusations against Burma's military and thereby also the government of that country and Aung Suu Kyi in particular, is in fact not just about ethnic cleansing, but also about genocide. The conceptual limits for genocide are quite rigid by definition within international jurisprudence. The United Nations has not yet established a court of justice to try the accusations, so maybe these accusations will not be sustained in court. But it is a large number of people, that have been killed by the Burmese military and local fascists. Precisely how many, I do not know. The numbers are kept secret by the authorities. Two journalists from Reuters have been stowed away in prison for more than a year now for reporting on some of these murders. But the UN has established a commission called the 'International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.' In September 2018 the commission published a report ([link below](#)) about the killings. The International Court of Justice have said, that it does not exercise any authority in Burma, because that country is not a party to the treaty about the Court, but it does hold

authority in Bangladesh and thereby the Rohingyas, that are refugees there. In the Tricycle Magazine article, written by the Burma activist Maung Zarni and the journalist and meditation teacher Matthew Gindin, Aung Suu Kyi is described as ‘ethnic nationalist’ (this is a reference to the dominant Barma people in Burma, to whom she belong) and ‘Buddhist chauvinist.’ (Link below.)

The article also points out, that the Rohingyas already were established in Rakhine state, at that time called Arakan, before the Burmese king invaded and subjugated the state in 1785. So the narrative that the Rohingyas in reality were Bengali peasants, that just never went back home, even they were in Burma on a temporally schedule or had settled because of a British imperial invitation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – is not completely true. The English did in fact invite peasant from Bengal, but the Rohingyas were already established in the area before that. Likewise, the British have to recognise that they did indeed persuade the king of Bhutan to invite the Nepalis in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But that of course does not free the kingdom of any responsibility.

And I am still sitting here before the computer gawping. How could Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche make himself write such a letter of prejudice? Well, it may be, that he is yet another an example, that you must be careful about who you receive Buddhadharma teachings from. It might very well become Buddha-drama. So there is no guaranty of quality, if the Dharma-teacher is a renowned Tulku. The title does not mean enlightenment. It just means a ‘spiritual’ prince. This story is yet another example of the terrible character of *samsara*.

Do not let this event make you blind to the qualities of the teachings of Buddha Sakyamuni. Instead, check out your teacher and learn well.

Read the article from Tricycle Magazine here:

<https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/response-dzongsar-jamyang-khyentse-rinpoche/>

Watch the video from the presentation in the UN of the report about Burma:

<http://webtv.un.org/search/marzuki-darusman-chairperson-of-the-independent-international-fact-finding-mission-on-myanmar-on-the-situation-in-myanmar-security-council-8381st-meeting/5853018577001>

Read also the report from the Forbes Magazine here:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/10/01/will-any-action-follow-to-address-the-situation-in-burma/#>

Background paper by Randy Rosenthal in ‘Lions Roar’:

<https://www.lionsroar.com/what-does-buddhism-have-to-do-with-the-ethnic-cleansing-in-myanmar/>