

Dzongsar Khyentse on Aung Suu Kyi and the West

a letter of support from Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche rips the west over
hypocritical treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi.

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Renowned Tibetan Buddhism teacher Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche has let ripped western institutions over what he calls as "blatant double standards" over their treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi, the first and incumbent State Counsellor of Myanmar, a position akin to a prime minister. His complaints were over the spate of withdrawals of international awards to the Burmese politician, such as those from Amnesty International as well as honorary citizenship from Canada.

While acknowledging that he does not condone the Burmese military treatment of the Rohingyas, Rinpoche nevertheless lambasted these western institutions as purveyors of "...colonial structures and world-view ... imposed on us (Asians) and that persist to this day."

He praises Aung San Suu Kyi for standing up to this hypocrisy and implores Asians to "... to restore the dignity of our own great eastern wisdom traditions and legacies."

Here is his letter in full:

Dear Honourable Aung San Suu Kyi,

In these difficult times, I am moved to write to you to express my deep respect and appreciation for all you have done over so many years to fight for your people's freedoms, and especially for your great courage and perseverance in upholding your principles through nearly 15 years of house arrest.

You remain in my mind a true heroine of this age, more than worthy of the Nobel Prize and other honours you have received. And so, I am also writing to tell you that I have been appalled in recent months at the removal of many of those awards - from the cities of Edinburgh, Oxford, Glasgow and Dublin to your honorary Canadian citizenship.

Those shocking actions against you reveal a blatant double standard.

Without doing anything and just eight months into office, President Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet no one demanded it be taken away after he killed thousands of civilians in Mid-east drone strikes and bombings. In fact, de-

nuclearizing North Korea will do more for world peace than anything Obama ever did, making Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un far worthier of a Nobel Prize.

[To this day, Kim Jung-Un has not removed any nuclear weapons at all, and Trump is a compulsory liar and a joke. So far, it has all been a public relation stunt without content. In fact, Kim Jung-Un is expanding his military and remains a terrible dictator, that put Koreans in concentration camps in great numbers. None of these two persons merit any prizes. Obama did not change much, but at least he tried... This comment is by Lama Tendar Olaf Hoeyer.]

More subtly, however the hypocrisy of taking away awards is a sign of the insidious colonialism that continues to strangle Asia and the world. We Asians have been taught to disparage our own noble traditions and instead to treasure western values, literature and music, to chew gum and wear faded jeans, to embrace Facebook and Amazon, and to ape western manners and institutions.

We are badgered to feel guilt for the European Holocaust of World War 2, while our own holocausts are conveniently forgotten and buried in the dustbin of history. How many westerners mourn the 15 million displaced and million killed in Britain's partition of India, or the five million civilians killed in Korea and Vietnam?

Who recalls that the US. dropped two million tons of bombs on Laos between 1964 and 1973. almost equal to all the bombs it dropped on Europe and Asia during all of World War 2 - making Laos the most heavily bombed country in history relative to population size. And how quickly have we forgotten the genocidal holocausts of the 16th to 18th centuries that killed an estimated 130 million native Americans - more than 90% of indigenous peoples there. We non-westerners have considerable cause for grievance against those European invaders who now claim moral authority over our lives.

Today, we are so infatuated with the west and so immersed in the western mindset that such criticism is seen as almost sacrilegious. So, I must add that nothing I am writing to you here signifies any lack of appreciation for the west's great contributions to human civilisation. From superb music, art and literature to brilliant scientific and medical breakthroughs to philosophies like anarchism, the creations of the west are astounding.

But watching the self-righteous western actions against you in recent months. I have become convinced it is finally time to tell the truth about the colonial structures and world-view they imposed on us and that persist to this day. Above all, it is time to restore the dignity of our own great eastern wisdom traditions and legacies.

[How can ethnic cleansing and genocide express 'the dignity of our great eastern wisdom traditions and legacies'? There is a giant hole in Dzongsar Khyentse's form of argument here.]

Many mistakenly think the “colonial” era of western invasion and control is long past, since most Asian and African countries won apparent political independence

more than half a century ago. But as “post-colonialists” rightly note, the economic and political structure of the colonial era continues to shape life around the world. In fact, western ideologies, lifestyles and systems of morality are now more deeply, subtly and dangerously entrenched than ever. Alien to the profound wisdom traditions of the east, today's colonial legacy continues to eat away at and destroy our own heritage.

For instance, we once knew how to respect and live in harmony with nature. Today, we have been swallowed into the western capitalist system together with its greedy materialism, traffic jams, pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and voracious resource consumption. If that system is not even serving the west and is literally destroying the planet, why should it serve the east?

And to prop up that system, the west is so proud of its supposed “human rights” and “democracy” that we are blindly supposed to imitate. But it is only its limited individual rights the west cares about and those mostly for the rich and powerful. The US and most other western constitutions give no protection to social rights like the right to a job, housing, education, health care and safe drinking water.

And when it suits, the west blatantly violates its vaunted individual rights. Writing this supposedly exercises my right to free speech. But free speech is a hoax if listeners are intolerant and if they label, stigmatise and demonise the writer. In fact, “the tyranny of the majority” these days includes so-called “liberals” who on US campuses now regularly shut down views they do not agree with, especially if those views might offend some groups.

And that is so ironic, because western liberals' current obsession with identity politics plays right into the hands of their professed enemies. In the words of ultra-rightist Steve Bannon: “The longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush [them].”

In fact, to rebel against the whole capitalist, liberal-democratic syndrome, China, Vietnam, Laos and North Korea swallowed another western import, communism, which is totally at odds with their own history and culture. No wonder that fake model is collapsing everywhere into the embrace of the very capitalism it sought to bypass.

Even the very word “development” is a western colonial imposition. The industrialised western countries are considered “developed”, while we are supposed to “develop” towards their dysfunctional western ideal. For the west there is only one acceptable direction for the whole world - to be capitalist, “democratic”, individualist, and therefore “developed,” and to recklessly consume more.

In the meantime, our own views and traditions that could literally save humankind are labelled “undeveloped” and “superstitious.” While we are expected to kowtow to western morality, we ignore the profound moral values arising from our eastern wisdom heritage that the colonisers severed, taught us to hate, and supplanted with their own.

And those parts of our tradition the west finds useful are now also colonised and co-opted, entirely missing yoga's profound Indian wisdom heritage. Florida and California now "certify" yoga teachers.

Some western "Buddhist teachers" write books that conveniently bend Buddhist teachings to fit their own rational, scientific proclivities. And self-proclaimed "gurus" edit and plagiarise handy bits of those teachings as their own invention, missing the essence and never acknowledging the source. In fact, Buddhism itself is being colonised and rendered unrecognisable as its extraordinary insights and methods are altered, dismantled and eviscerated to fit western science and self-help fads.

To maintain "objectivity" and be socially accepted, Buddhist academics in suits and ties hide their own affiliation, avoid Buddhist terminology and reserve any display of eastern culture for fancy dress parties. Even eastern teachers now consciously shun Buddhist iconography and imagery and custom-tailor their vipassana and other meditations to suit western secular expectations. More widely, Asian professionals are quick to bow down to western values to dismiss their own traditions as archaic and superstitious, to wrongly equate modernisation with westernisation, and thereby to reap the rewards of being labelled "modern, progressive and open-minded". Without western validation, they see their own accomplishments as worthless.

The irony is that when Japanese, Korean and Chinese musicians learn and play western classical music, they have utmost respect for the integrity of the music as it is and as it was composed. Even in daily life and popular culture, Asians faithfully try to copy the way westerners think, look and act, in sharp contrast too many western scholars manipulate, cherry pick and even alter what they take from the east and then impose their own modified version on us with obstinate moral authority.

This kind of psychological and moralising colonialism is subtle and dangerous, as you yourself have painfully experienced. For the west, the only qualified "victims" are those the west itself has oppressed, and the rest of us are expected to join their chorus of guilt and penance.

We dare not point out that their so-called victims have brutally victimised our people for centuries. To me, the bestowal and removal of your awards typifies the culture of hypocrisy created by that pervasive colonial legacy. Those awards mean nothing beyond another means to colonise us and pull us into the western value system, while they congratulate themselves. In fact, I personally pay the postage for you to send your honorary Canadian citizenship back to Ottawa. You don't need it!

For me, you remain the heroine you truly are. And for so many who dare not speak up but who secretly agree, you personify our own Me Too movement.

None of what I write here justifies wrongs committed by the Burmese military. What I am saying is simply that the western actions against you and the whole historical and ongoing colonial legacy they reflect are wrong. The post-colonial impact of economic domination and ideological imposition is far more harmful to

our peoples and to the planet than anything you have done. A guilty person cannot be a judge and has no credential either to give or remove an award.

As well, nothing I write here denies the suffering of the Rohingya people. But instead of blaming you, will the British at least acknowledge their colonial responsibility for bringing most Rohingyas from Bengal in the 19th and 20th centuries as cheap labour to work the Burmese rice paddies?

If the British really care and want to redress the harm they have done to Burma and the Rohingya, they will migrate the Rohingya to the U.K. and give them citizenship instead of letting them languish in refugee camps. And instead of revoking your awards as they've done, Oxford, Sheffield, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow will resettle the Rohingya there.

Many will label what I am writing to you here as "partisan", "west-bashing" and more. But we have been so deeply twisted by western colonialism for so long that we now have no choice but to break the silence, speak up, and address what has long been taboo. We have long celebrated US and British war victories but do we dare to look at what that western global domination has meant for us?

If we avoid starting this conversation ourselves, and if India, China and others keep sucking up to western models, the only ones who speak up will be those who make no secret of their hatred for the west. Do we really want to leave the playing field open only to ISIS and the worst extremists to call a spade a spade in challenging western arrogance?

And that is why I am writing this to you - because for many of us, you superbly represent that middle way. You have stood strong, held to your principles, fought untiringly for your people and refused to bow to the self-righteous western moralising that now reveals itself in the removal of these awards. In that, be assured you have our admiration and support.

It is more difficult to suggest an effective strategy for a genuine dialogue on the tough issues I am raising here. It seems that the western colonisers will only listen if we have a lot of oil or other resources they need.

Alternatively, we have to seek out westerners' weak spot which appears to be their pride and guilt. These days they do not dare criticise Muslims or Jews for fear of being labelled Islamophobic or anti-Semitic. So perhaps we need to start by coining new words for anti-Buddhist and anti-Asian bias to evoke their guilt and fear of those phobias.

Again, please accept my heartfelt thanks for all you have done and continue to do for your people and for our proud eastern heritage.

Yours sincerely,
Dzongsar Iamyang Khyentse