

The two Karmapas met in France

in order to get to know each other

a paper by Lama Tendar Olaf Hoeyer



The official picture from their meeting in October 2018.

Karmapa Thrinley Thaye Dorje and the 'alternative' Karmapa Ogyen Thrinley Dorje met in France to get to know each other and seek a way to develop cooperation.

This is remarkable and quite unexpected. The meeting took place without warning nor any particular occasion, besides their mutual wish to meet. Most likely, this happened so in order to prevent any outsiders from intervening or disrupt the meeting. We are many, that have expected and wished for this to happen for a long time, so they can overcome the schism within the Karma Kagyü tradition since 1992. Who else can accomplish that? This is the first time, that they meet.

They have spent some days for their talks in an undisclosed location in France and have now issued an official statement:

“We are both very pleased to have had this opportunity to meet and get to know each other in a peaceful and relaxed environment. We both had this wish for many years, and we are gratified that this wish has now been fulfilled.”

“The purpose of our meeting was primarily to spend time together, so that we could establish a personal relationship. We were able to talk together freely and to learn about each other for the first time. We were thus able to begin what we expect will develop into a strong connection.”

“While we were together, we also talked about ways that we could work to heal the divisions that have unfortunately developed within our precious Karma Kagyu lineage in recent years. We view it as our duty and responsibility to do whatever we can to bring the lineage together.”

“This undertaking is critically important for the future of the Karma Kagyu lineage as well as for the future of Tibetan Buddhism and the benefit of all sentient beings. We therefore ask everyone within [the two branches of] the Karma Kagyu community to join us in our efforts to strengthen and preserve our lineage. We view it as our collective responsibility to restore harmony to our tradition, which is a lineage of wisdom and compassion.”

(Signed by) both Karmapas.

Mutual recognition

Very deep divisions have developed within Karma Kagyü since Situ Rinpoche broke up the union and sold out to the Chinese in 1992, so this enterprise will not be easy in any way.

For instance, what will Ogyen Dorje do to the enormous Chinese influence on his part of Karma Kagyü? Has he really dropped the Chinese connection? What about the Karma Kagyü monasteries in Tibet proper? They will get into trouble with the Chinese authorities, if and when they are under the influence of Lamas residing in – and sympathetic to – India (or USA). The government of China have for years hoped and waited for Ogyen Dorje to return for residence at Tsurphu Monastery in Tibet. That hope have presumably evaporated now. The Chinese do not like to lose face, so maybe they will not go public about anything, but their policies towards Karma Kagyü will most likely change now.

It could be that Ogyen Dorje have realised, that the Chinese is already at work to gain complete control with the whole monastic settlement in Tibet, excluding any influence from abroad. So in this way, he will not lose anything after all.

But he is still on very good terms with all the important individuals among the 'continental' Chinese Buddhists, and also a friend of many Taiwanese Buddhist leaders and politicians. And these Chinese individuals all share in the divisions of Karma Kagyü and stand to lose face by a reconciliation. They will therefore oppose this development. What will Ogyen Dorje then do?

Now, Thaye Dorje does not suffer this kind of problems, though he is supported by other Buddhist organisations on Taiwan. But his supporters on the island have been much more discreet than the very active and one-eyed supporters of Ogyen Dorje on Taiwan under the leadership of the misguided politician and former Kuomintang minister Chen Luan. It all means trouble without any obvious solutions.

Well of course, time will show. But any real reconciliation and union of the two branches of Karma Kagyü appear utmost difficult on this background, if not completely impossible. A simple and mutual recognition of each of the two branches appear much more realistic and probable. You can say, that by actually meeting and going along nicely with each other, the two Karmapas have thereby in fact recognised each other, at least *in principle*.

So it is a beginning. Maybe this will lead to an actual reconciliation or maybe only a mutual recognition as described, but if so, there will be a range of practical consequences, for instance in regard to Rumtek Monastery. But also other relationships will develop like mutual recognition of Tulkus, formal educations and academic degrees and also exchange of Dharma-teachers.

Even just a mutual recognition by the two branches of Karma Kagyü will be difficult, though not entirely impossible. But there are great difficulties ahead. For instance did Thaye Dorje appoint himself as a Karmapa without any help from anybody, a fact that Shamarpa just recognised, while Ogyen Dorje did not declare himself a Karmapa as a little child – according to his own words, he has no recollection of his previous life – but he was appointed by Situ Rinpoche to this 'posting.' That is why he is called the 'Chinese' and the 'alternative' Karmapa. While Shamarpa has called Thaye Dorje the 'classical' Karmapa for a reason. Like all the previous Karmapas, he declared himself to be the Tulku of the 16th Karmapa – in fact his very first words in this life. In this way he is 'classical' – and he was recognised by his regent the 14th Shamarpa and the 16th Karmapa's organisation and legal representation, which is how this business traditionally has been conducted. Only twice were the Tulkus of Karmapa challenged in the past, but at both instances the matter was settled by the authenticity of Karmapa himself.

On this background, it will be difficult to put the two Karmapas on the same footing. That is maybe not required either by a mutual recognition. But there will be many people that will see this as a problem. However, we may presume that the two Karmapas will themselves find a formulation, that they both can agree upon and find useful. Maybe they have more surprises in store for us.

Difficult reactions

This development will be very difficult to accept for a lot of people in Karma Kagyü and among the Tibetans, who have supported with exclusiveness and extremism, only one of the Karmapas. Such people in condemning the other Karmapa and his followers and being in denial of any quality present in the other, will be indeed surprised, confused and in want of an exit. Even just by a mutual recognition of the two Karmapas, these people will now find themselves thoroughly embarrassed and in grief. It will not be easy for them at all to give up their mistaken views. Then of course, they may become Gelugpas. Maybe they should have made that choice to begin with.

We will know more, when and if the two Karmapas shall unravel *Rumtek Monastery* (the picture to the right) and end the present court trial about the ownership. This will be interesting.



Once again, particularly Ogyen Dorje surprises. It is in no way clear, what the reaction of the Chinese and the Tibetan exile government will be. The reactions from the two Karmapas supporters is not a given either, because many negative feelings have been cultivated and encouraged along the way – very much in contradiction of the *Buddhadharma* of *Buddha Sakyamuni*.

In the usual media that the Tibetan exile government use for communication, there is no opinion given yet. There probably will come a statement from the Dalai Lama at some point of time. He almost have to react. As the highest spiritual prince from Tibet, he has to approve and praise the reconciliation between the two Karmapas. When he does that, he will also recognise Trinley Thaye Dorje as an authentic Tulku of the previous 16th Karmapa, which he has so far abstained from doing.

(Allegedly because no one asked him to do so. Shamar Rinpoche thought it unreasonable and wrong to apply for such recognition from Dalai Lama, because recognition and enthronement of Karmapas is an internal matter for the Karma Kagyü. In the Tibet of Old, there was only one incident where the Dalai Lama intervened in such matters. The powerful minister *Lungshar* had his little son appointed to the title of the 16th Karmapa, in spite of the protests of Situ Rinpoche of that time and the previous Karmapa's organisation. As it happened, the little boy soon died from a tragic accident in Tsurphu Monastery. Then the 'classical' 16th Karmapa was universally recognised in Tibet and ascended his throne in Tsurphu in 1930. This unlucky intervention is the only event, where the government of Dalai Lama was directly involved and used force to serve its intentions. This happened while the 13th Dalai Lama was in power of an independent kingdom of Tibet.)

The two Karmapas have walked the first steps in order to reunite the Karma Kagyü tradition again. And aim to stop the mutual ignorance of the two branches of Karma Kagyü. This is very praiseworthy and good.

The next steps will be much more difficult, because now we will experience the negative reactions from particularly the people of Palpung Monastery in Kham. Palpung is Situ Rinpoche's monastery and it is the people there, that is the centre of bad politics, the poisoned atmosphere and they, who invited the Chinese to mingle in the appointment procedures of the new Karmapa. Because of this, everything will now backfire and it will become difficult for them in regard to the Chinese communists. Therefore they will be grumpy and cross. They were never really for reconciliation. They thought that they were in control. But it was always the Chinese who ruled, and they still do so in Palpung.

(In general, the Karma Kagyü tradition in the areas of Kham and Amdo was traditionally governed from Palpung. Karmapa is just a symbol in these lands.)

Situ Rinpoche is not likely to say anything about the reconciliation. He will surprise, if he does. Eventually, he must say something, but his position is uncertain.

Finally, we must consider, that any real reunion of Karma Kagyü will be very difficult indeed, if we do not find common ground in regard to the Chinese communist party and the Chinese Empire. There is a constant flow of money from them to the 'cooperative' Lamas and Tibetans – and conversely both ill will and hindrances to the opposite, even prison and 're-education camps' – which is the local designation for concentration camps. When people 'disappear' in the Tibetan lands, they end up in these camps. In Tibet the situation is dangerous, partly because of religious politics, partly due to imperialism and immigration of Han-Chinese to the Tibetan lands, but also because of misuse of power by those in power, whether Chinese or Tibetan. This may lead to a full scale sell out of all our values. The Tibetans are well known for bending to the source of money and power. Particularly so in a one-party state with imperial ambitions, that does not tolerate any opposition. So, what to do?

Karma Kagyü on the other hand, is not the core of a rebel movement nor the origin of Tibetan nationalism and does not serve the wish for a Tibetan Empire, like certain other groups do. *But Karma Kagyü and the notion of freedom is closely connected.*

So, the two Karmapas may very well work something out in India and abroad – and maybe settle the status of Rumtek Monastery. After all, this is just a single monastery in a very large world. But in Tibet, the Chinese have initiated a large scale offensive this year to gain absolute control of all kinds of religion. Their intent with all the Tibetan Buddhist traditions is to subordinate them to the Han-Chinese Buddhist Traditions, while the communist party is to control everything from the top governance to the everyday dealings in the individual institutions everywhere. The best known examples of this policy is what happened last year and on into 2018 in *Lharung Gar* and *Yarchen Gar* in the Kham area. There is not much the Karmapas can do about all this. Particularly so, because the Chinese policies are often a self-contradiction. For instance, formally the Chinese are anti-imperialist, but as a matter of fact they conduct imperialist policies in Mongolia, Tibet and Sinkiang. The Empire is allegedly ruled by law and the courts of law, but in reality it is the communist party that rule. So the

normal checks and balances of power, that we are accustomed to in the West, does not apply in the Tibetan lands. Also, there are disrespect of ethnicity – both Tibetans and Chinese think of themselves as better and somehow more noble than the other.

The challenges, that the Karmapas will meet in the rest of the world, will be something completely different. But the Chinese government will try to combine the activities of the Karmapas here in the West with what happens in India, Tibet and China. Courage and resilience is asked for in great measure in order to resist such Chinese pressures. On the other hand – as good Buddhists – the Karmapas should support both the rule of law and the aspirations of compassion in society in general, no matter who hold the reins of power. The times are very difficult,

The Karmapas are much better suited to meet these challenges, when they are in respect of each other and aim to unite their organisations, or at least to bring them in harmony. This is also a good thing for the other Tibetans to observe in order to preserve and vitalise all the Buddhist traditions of Tibet.

Links:

Read the original letter here:

www.tilogaard.dk/Trinley_Thaye_Dorje_og_Ogyen_Trinley_Dordje_faelles_udtalelse_11_oktober_2018.pdf

Chinese ‘soft power’ policies to control Dharma in the World:

www.tilogaard.dk/Market_ch_Buddhist_soft_power_30_May_2014_EN_Final_V4_.pdf

Read also about Chen Luan:

www.tilogaard.dk/Who_is_Chen_Luan.pdf

Why two Karmapas? Read the paper here:

www.tilogaard.dk/Two_Karmapas.pdf

On Tilogaard’s website, you will find many other papers about the two Karmapas in the PDF format. Look it up here:

www.tilogaard.dk/english/html/download_tilogaard_as_pdf_files.html

Read also about Ogyen Dorje accused of rape and missing alimony (2021):

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/woman-marriage-relationship-buddhist-1.6031624>