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Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond

Kālacakra in Transition

From the Apocalypse to the Promotion of World Peace

KATJA RAKOW

In 1999 a book was published in Germany which caused quite a fuss in the German-speaking Buddhist scene. The book, written by Victor and Victoria Trimondi, was titled *The Shadow of the Dalai Lama: Sexuality, Magic and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*.¹ The authors promulgate the bold statement that the current Dalai Lama and the Government of Tibet in Exile – based on the Vajrayāna system that aims at a “mytho-political accumulation of power”² – seek to gain universal control and to establish a global Buddhocracy. The entire book follows a line of argument commonly used in conspiracy theories. Arguing in a manner typical of conspiracy theories the authors accuse the Dalai Lama of being a powerful manipulator who obscures his true intentions behind a façade of an ever-smiling and kind spiritual master. They justify their argumentation by a literal reading and

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- 1 VICTOR and VICTORIA TRIMONDI (“Victory of the three Worlds”) are pseudonyms of Herbert and Maria Röttgen. For details concerning the meaning of the pseudonym see ULRICH DEHN, “Das Feindbild tibetischer Buddhismus,” in “*Wenn Eisenvögel fliegen...*” *Der tibetische Buddhismus und der Westen*, eds. ULRICH DEHN and CHRISTIAN RUCH (Berlin: EZW, 2006), 62-70, and JENS SCHLIETER, “Wer hat Angst vor dem Dalai Lama? Victor und Victoria Trimondis Der Schatten des Dalai Lama (1999) als spiritualistische Verschwörungstheorie,” *Transformierte Buddhisten* 01 (2008): 54-81. The German title of the book is *Der Schatten des Dalai Lama. Sexualität, Magie und Politik im tibetischen Buddhismus*. The first edition (1999) was issued by the German publisher Patmos, the second edition (2002) – meanwhile out of print – was published by Trikont Verlag, which was co-founded by Herbert and Maria Röttgen. An English translation of the book (2003) by MARK PENNY is available on the following webpage: <http://www.iivs.de/~iivs01311/SDLE/> (accessed November 27, 2008).
 - 2 VICTOR and VICTORIA TRIMONDI, “17. Conclusion,” *The Shadow of the Dalai Lama: Sexuality, Magic and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism* (2003), paragraph 1. URL: <http://www.trimondi.de/SDLE/Part-2-17.htm> (accessed November 27, 2008).

a *pars-pro-toto* interpretation of certain sections of the *Kālacakra Tantra* (*dus kyi 'khor lo*).³

The Wheel of Time Tantra is considered to be one of the highest and most esoteric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Indeed, some parts of the *Kālacakra* scriptures describe a future Buddhist holy war eradicating the forces of evil and leading to the dawn of a golden Buddhist age. The mythical kingdom of Śambhala plays a crucial role in this apocalyptic vision of the Wheel of Time Tantra. According to the sources, Śambhala was the place where the *Kālacakra Tantra* was preserved and taught to the inhabitants of the kingdom. Furthermore, Śambhala will be the place from which the spiritual and earthly revival originates after the apocalyptic battle.

Based on a literal and decontextualized interpretation of the sources, the Trimondis claim to be able to reveal the hidden agenda of the Dalai Lama and the Government of Tibet in Exile. According to the authors, they aim at the conquest of the world and the eradication of all non-Buddhists in this very world. In the Trimondis' reading Śambhala is equated with Tibet and therefore the myth of Śambhala lies simultaneously at the centre of Tibetan history and is its ultimate goal.⁴

Victor and Victoria Trimondi are former sympathizers of Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama. They sought a religion promoting gender equality and incorporating "the Eros into the sacred space."⁵ They thought they had finally found what they were searching for in Tibetan Buddhism and especially tantrism. Yet, after an intensive study of the Buddhist tantric systems and the politics of the Dalai Lama, they – disappointed and deceived, as they recollect in an interview – turned their back on Tibetan Buddhism. As they declare, they had only discovered "the exploitation of women [...], the oppression of dissenters, despotism, intolerance, obsessive craving for power, demonization and fear as political means."⁶

Nowadays the Trimondis are among the main opponents of Tibetan Buddhism in the German-speaking countries. Taking this into account, it may not be surprising that their description of Tibetan Buddhism and one of its important tantric scriptures and systems is far from being neutral or balanced. There are three strategies of argumentation that can be outlined

3 For an analysis of Trimondi's argumentation in the light of conspiracy theories see SCHLIETER, 68.

4 See TRIMONDI, "17. Conclusion," <http://www.trimondi.de/SDLE/Part-2-17.htm> (accessed November 27, 2008), paragraph 16.

5 See the transcript of an interview with the Austrian TV station ORF from February 1999 on Trimondi's homepage: <http://www.trimondi.de/interv02.html> (accessed January 19, 2009), paragraph 2. Translation by the author.

6 *Ibid.*, paragraph 6. Translation by the author.

in their presentation of the material. The first is the literal interpretation of the textual sources. Secondly, single aspects of certain tantric concepts and practices are projected on the whole of Tibetan Buddhism through a distorting generalization. And thirdly, any sound historical contextualization is missing. In contrast, from the perspective of socio-cultural anthropology, the Kālacakra Tantra as a set of concepts and practices is comprised of and interpreted by the epistemological possibilities and socio-historical conditions of its respective times and places. Different social agents in different historical, geographical, and social settings interpreted the Wheel of Time Tantra in a variety of ways. An analysis therefore requires a careful consideration of the respective historical and social context.

This article discusses different interpretations of the central parts of the Kālacakra Tantra through the course of history ranging from apocalyptic scenarios to the fostering of world peace. In each of the following examples attention is directed to the particular historical, geographical, and social settings in order to carefully contextualize each of the different interpretations of the Kālacakra Tantra and the myth of Śambhala. First, a short exposition of the emergence of the Kālacakra in the eleventh century in North India is provided. The focal points of this part will be the historical circumstances and the eschatological horizon of the Kālacakra, which is connected with the myth of the legendary kingdom of Śambhala. Second to be addressed is the revival of the myth of Śambhala due to a geopolitical crisis in Central Asia at the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, the discussion will focus on recent events of public Kālacakra teachings in the West conducted by the current Dalai Lama. The analysis will consider the presentation of the Kālacakra to large lay and partly non-Buddhist audiences, and the emphasis on the promotion of world peace.

The Emergence of the Kālacakra Tantra

The Wheel of Time Tantra emerged in northern India in the eleventh century.⁷ Indian Buddhism was subject to two significant threats at that epoch. On the one hand, Buddhism – in comparison with different flourishing Hindu sects – became gradually rarified and disengaged from the immediate interests of the common masses. Indian Buddhism therefore underwent

⁷ Based on a careful analysis of the Kālacakra sources Newman argues that the basic texts of the tantric system originated in the early decades of the eleventh century CE. See JOHN NEWMAN, “The Epoch of The Kālacakra Tantra,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41 (1998): 319-49.

an increasing loss of its social base.⁸ On the other hand, in the early eleventh century the first Turkic invasions and increased Muslim migration occurred. Traces of these historical circumstances can be found throughout the Kālacakra scriptures. These scriptures are considered to be among the main sources for Buddhist interpretations of Islam. The descriptions of Muslim religious beliefs and practices picture Islam as the antithesis of Buddhism. In other words, Islam is portrayed as a barbaric religion of savage behavior, violence, and iconoclasm.⁹

Furthermore, as John Newman states, the Kālacakra Tantra adopted and transformed the Hindu myth of *Kalkī*.¹⁰ Kalkī, the tenth and last incarnation of Viṣṇu, will appear at the end of the current Kali Yuga when evil has almost entirely eclipsed good. According to the myth, the Brahman warrior Kalkī will be born in a village named Śambhala.¹¹ It is predicted that he will lead an army of Brahmans and will “annihilate the outcastes and barbarians, establishing a new golden age of righteousness, prosperity, and social order.”¹²

The Wheel of Time Tantra adapted the Hindu myth of Kalkī to current religious and political conditions. In the Buddhist reinterpretation it is said that the Buddha taught the Kālacakra Tantra at the request of Sucandra, the ruler of Śambhala.¹³ Śambhala is a legendary kingdom situated somewhere north of India and the Himalayas. It is described as a beautiful realm where prosperity and happiness reign and all its inhabitants strive to attain enlightenment. According to the sources, the Wheel of Time Tantra was preserved in the kingdom of Śambhala and passed down to its successive rulers.¹⁴ The seventh *Dharmarāja* (*chos rgyal*) of Śambhala, King Yaśas,

8 Cf. RICHARD S. COHEN, “India,” *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. I, ed. by ROBERT E. BUSWELL (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson & Gale, 2004), 359.

9 Cf. JOHN R. NEWMAN, “Islam in The Kālacakra Tantra,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (JIABS) 21/2 (1998): 311-71.

10 JOHN NEWMAN, “Eschatology in The Wheel of Time Tantra,” in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. DONALD S. LOPEZ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 285.

11 WENDY DONIGER O’FLAHERTY, *Hindu Myth. A Sourcebook translated from the Sanskrit* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982), 237.

12 NEWMAN, “Eschatology in The Wheel of Time Tantra,” 284-85.

13 According to the sources, King Sucandra wrote down the teachings he had received from the Buddha in the manifestation of Kālacakra. This text was regarded as the “root tantra” and therefore entitled *Kālacakra mulatantra* (*rtsa rgyud*). Sometimes this text is referred to as *Paramādibuddha* (*mshog gi dang po’i sangs rgyas*). For further details see JOHN NEWMAN, “The Paramādibuddha (the Kālacakra Mulatantra) and its Relation to the Early Kālacakra Literature,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 30 (1987): 93-102.

14 Concerning the succession of the Śambhala rulers see LUBOŠ BĚLKA, “Kalachakra and the Twenty-Five Kulika Kings of Shambhala: A Xylograph from Prague,” *Religio: revue pro religionistiku* 15/1 (2007): 125-38.

unified all the Brahman families of Śambhala within one single Buddhist *vajra* clan (*rdo rje rigs*) and on that occasion taught an abridged version of the Kālacakra Tantra to all of them.¹⁵ He was therefore given the title Kalkī. The Tibetan term is *rigs ldan*, which means “chieftain”.¹⁶ Henceforth, every king of Śambhala was wearing the title Kalkī. It is foretold that the last Kalkī of Śambhala at the end of the current age of degeneration will assemble a great army headed by the kings of Śambhala and the Hindu gods. Under the command of the Buddhist Kalkī the barbarian forces will be conquered and a new age of perfection will begin. In this predicted golden age Buddhism will flourish, righteousness will reign, and all people will live long and happy lives.

It is clear from the aforementioned that in the Buddhist refashioning of the prophetic Hindu myth the Brahmanic hero Kalkī is replaced by a Buddhist *Cakravartin*.¹⁷ According to the Buddhist version the army of Śambhala in alliance with the subordinated Hindu gods will defeat the barbarian forces (*kla klo*) and their barbarian dharma (*kla klo'i chos*), which threatened the continuance of the Buddhadharma. In both cases – in the Hindu myth and in the Buddhist adaptation – the figure of Kalkī bears eschatological traits. He is depicted as a warrior hero in an apocalyptic battle destroying the old order and establishing a new golden age.

The martial character of this part of the Wheel of Time Tantra seems to contradict the Buddhist principle of nonviolence. This has led later interpreters and commentators to stress the allegorical nature of the Kālacakra. The source for such an interpretation lies within the structure of the tantra itself. The Wheel of Time Tantra is divided into three main parts: the Outer, the Inner, and the Other Kālacakra.¹⁸ The Outer Kālacakra (*phyi'i dus 'khor*) delineates the external time cycles of the world and the cosmos. The Inner Kālacakra (*nang gi dus 'khor*) describes the inner time cycles of the person and the Other Kālacakra (*gzhang gyi dus 'khor*) deals with the initiations and the stages of generation and completion. One of

15 The abridged version of the *Kālacakra mūlatantra* is known as *Kālacakra laghutantra* (*bsdus pa*) or *Śrī Kālacakra*. Cf. NEWMAN, “The Paramādibuddha,” 94.

16 For a discussion of the aspects of meaning of the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms see JOHN R. NEWMAN, “A Brief History of the Kalachakra,” in *The Wheel of Time. The Kalachakra in Context*, eds. GESHE LHUNDUB SOPA, ROGER JACKSON and JOHN R. NEWMAN (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1991), 83 n. 4, and KARÉNINA KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, “Utopian Thought in Tibetan Buddhism: A Survey of the Śambhala Concept and its Sources,” *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions*, Vol. 5/6 (1992/93): 81 n. 12.

17 Cf. JOHN R. NEWMAN, “A Brief History of the Kalachakra,” 79.

18 For further details see GESHE LHUNDUB SOPA, “The Kalachakra Tantra Initiation,” in *The Wheel of Time. The Kalachakra in Context*, eds. GESHE LHUNDUB SOPA, ROGER JACKSON and JOHN NEWMAN (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1991), 93.

the distinctive features of the Wheel of Time Tantra is the emphasis on the identity of the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the individual human being. The kingdom of Śambhala and the apocalyptic scenario are described in the first part, the Outer Kālacakra. Following the macrocosm-microcosm homology, the actual war could be interpreted as a struggle between enlightenment and ignorance. The struggle therefore is not taking place in the external world but in the body of the practitioner.¹⁹

It is clear from the above that the Kālacakra scriptures mirror historical events such as the first Muslim raids into northwest India and the decreasing importance of Buddhism. The ongoing competition between Buddhism and different flourishing Hindu sects is reflected in an attempt to subordinate the Hindu clans and their gods under the overarching rule of the Buddhist Kalkī. Therefore the Kālacakra can be seen as a timely response to the historical, religious and social tensions of that time, which are inscribed in the textual corpus of the tantric system. Although Buddhist scholars and commentators emphasize the symbolic nature of the Wheel of Time Tantra, the tantric system and the myth of Śambhala show a political connotation right from its time of emergence. During the course of history this political dimension of the Kālacakra has been revived and adapted to serve contemporary political purposes.

Political Reinterpretations of the Myth of Śambhala

Among the people of Tibet and Mongolia the common notion can be found that the kingdom of Śambhala is a paradise in the confines of the world, hidden in the remote valleys of the Himalayas or somewhere north of Tibet.²⁰ In addition to that notion the eschatological horizon of the Kālacakra Tantra and the myth of Śambhala have fuelled political debate in the Tibetan and Mongolian context at the turn of the twentieth cen-

19 See JOHN NEWMAN, "Eschatology in The Wheel of Time Tantra," 284-89.

20 Some Tibetan texts from the genre of itineraries or guides (*lam yig*), as e.g. Manlungpa's *Shambhalai Lamyig* (*sham bha la'i lam yig*), describe the journey to the kingdom of Śambhala as a physically accomplishable trip to a land in the confines of this world whereas in later works the journey turns into a spiritual rather than a physical path. For further details and a list of the different guide books to Śambhala, see KARÉNINA KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, "Utopian Thought in Tibetan Buddhism," 78-96. Tibetan and Mongolian prayers (*smon lam*) for rebirth in Śambhala emphasize the notion of paradise in the idea of Śambhala. See for example KARÉNINA KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, "Ein mongolisches Wunschgebet um Wiedergeburt in Śambhala," *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher*, Neue Folge, Band 13 (1994), 158-74.

tury. The Buryat Mongolian Agvan Dorjiev (1854-1938), for example, convinced the thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1933) that the Russian Empire was Śambhala and the Czar was the ruler of Śambhala. Protection from the imperial grasp of the British Empire, Dorjiev argued, could therefore only be found in czarist Russia. Furthermore the political dimension of the myth of Śambhala has been used by the Mongolians in different ways. For instance the Mongolian national hero Sukhbaatar (1893-1923), leading the Mongolian People's Party to regain independence in the early twentieth century, composed a marching song promising his soldiers rebirth as the warriors of the king of Śambhala.²¹ During the Japanese occupation of Mongolia in the 1930s the Mongolians were told that Śambhala could be found in Japan.²²

As noted before, the Kālacakra Tantra had a political connotation right from its inception. The previously mentioned examples from the turn of the twentieth century show a revival and reinterpretation of the myth of Śambhala induced by new historical and geopolitical circumstances.

Tibet – A Pawn on the Imperial Chessboard in the Great Game

To highlight the different historical, political and social factors at play, attention must be paid to the case of Agvan Dorjiev and his political utilization of the myth of Śambhala in promoting a rapprochement between Tibet and Russia. The events in question took place in the context of the so-called Great Game at the height of the imperialist era. The Great Game was the geopolitical contest between the British and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.²³ The imperial Russian expansion came into conflict with the increasing British dominance of the occupied lands of the

21 Cf. EDWIN BERNBAUM, *The Way to Shambhala. A Search for the Mythical Kingdom beyond the Himalayas* (New York: Anchor Books, 1980), 18. NICOLAS ROERICH mentions a Mongolian song about Śambhala in his book *Shambhala: In Search of the New Era*. It is possible that Roerich refers to the song composed by Sukhbaatar. See NICOLAS ROERICH, "Shambhala, the Resplendent (Talai-Pho-Brang, 1928)," in *Shambhala: In Search of the New Era*, ed. NICOLAS ROERICH (Rochester: Inner Traditions International 1990 [1930]), 2.

22 KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, "Utopian Thought in Tibetan Buddhism," 87.

23 For further details concerning the epoch of the Great Game, see KARL E. MEYER and SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK, *Tournament of Shadows. The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Counterpoint: Washington D.C., 1999); TATIANA SHAUMIAN, *Tibet. The Great Game and Tsarist Russia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) and

Indian subcontinent and their growing imperial interests in the Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau. The relationship between the two antagonistic forces was marked by rivalry, exploration, and espionage. In this context Tibet became a “mere pawn on the imperial chessboard.”²⁴

In the nineteenth century, the situation of Tibet was precarious. The Chinese supremacy over Tibet started to decrease due to loss of power and fragmentation of the Qing dynasty.²⁵ But the sovereignty of Tibet was not only contested by Chinese interference but also by intrusions of Dogras from Kashmir (1842) and raids of Gurkhas from Nepal (1854) as well as by British interests.²⁶ Through the annexation of Assam in 1826, the agreement with Bhutan in 1865, and the establishment of the British protectorate over Sikkim in 1890 the British Empire was closing in on the Tibetan border. Although Great Britain had different agreements with China which obliged Tibet to cooperate with the British, the Tibetan government increasingly refused to follow a Chinese dictate. Besides their endeavors the British were still failing to successfully install diplomatic contact with the Tibetan government and to establish trading connections with Tibet. They increasingly feared that the region would fall under Russian influence. These fears were further fuelled by the more advantageous position of Russia. Different ethnic groups in the Russian Empire like the Kalmyks, Buryats, and Tuvans were followers of Buddhism in its Tibeto-Mongolian form.²⁷ The large Gelugpa (*dge lugs pa*) monasteries in central Tibet attracted monks, lamas and pilgrims from these remote regions in Russia.²⁸ Moreover, the czarist government pursued a tolerant policy towards (among others) the Buddhist minorities in order to open and maintain trading options in Central Asia. In 1741 Czarina Elizabeth

NIKOLAI S. KULESHOV, *Russia's Tibet File* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1996).

24 TSERING SHAKYA, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows. A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (London: Pimlico, 1999), xxiv.

25 Tibet was annexed to the Qing-Empire in 1793, but the Chinese supremacy soon began to decrease. See KARÉNINA KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, *Kleine Geschichte Tibets* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006), 129-35.

26 The Dogras first established their authority over Ladakh and Baltistan in 1984 and expanded from there with the intention to gain control over the wool trade by conquering the wool producing areas in West Tibet. See K. WARIKOO, “Ladakh's Trade Relations with Tibet under the Dogras,” *China Report* 26 (1990): 133-44.

27 For details on the early history of ethnic Buddhism in Russia, see the study of ELENA A. OSTROVSKAYA, “Buddhism in Saint Petersburg,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 5 (2004): 19-95, <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/toc.html> (accessed January 10, 2009).

28 See KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, *Kleine Geschichte Tibets*, 137.

Petrovna granted Buddhism the status of an officially accepted religion²⁹ and the czarist government appointed the Bandido Chambo Lama (*pan di ta mkhan po blama*) in 1766 as religious and secular leader of the Buryat Buddhists.³⁰ Financially and administratively supported by the Russian authorities Buddhism flourished in the Transbaikal region until the 1930s.

Agvan Dorjiev – Tibet’s Emissary to the Czar³¹

Agvan Dorjiev, born in 1854, was a Buryat Mongolian who belonged to the Buddhist minority settling east of Lake Baikal. The Transbaikal was appertained to the Russian Empire and Dorjiev therefore was a Russian citizen. At the age of nineteen Dorjiev left for Tibet for the first time. He went back to Tibet in 1880 to study at the Gomang College of the Drepung monastery. In 1888 he took his geshe examinations, which he passed with the highest honors and was awarded with the Lharampa degree. In the same year Dorjiev became a tutor to the young thirteenth Dalai Lama. Over the years Dorjiev and the Dalai Lama developed a close and lasting friendship. In the politically tense situation at the end of the nineteenth century he convinced the thirteenth Dalai Lama of the possible advantages of an alliance with the Russian Empire. The Dalai Lama was afraid of a British annexation of Tibet that would eventually lead to the destruction of their Buddhist culture. Although both empires, Britain as well as Russia, were Christian nations, Dorjiev was able to point out that Russia was known for her tolerance towards Buddhists.

“Because she herself is an enemy of Great Britain, Russia will come to the assistance of the Land of Snows to prevent her being devoured by the British [...].

29 The official recognition of Buddhism included exemption from charge and military service, support of Buddhist religious institutions as well as the permission to send missionaries among the followers of non-Christian local forms of religion and Islam in East Siberia and the Transbaikal region. Cf. DITTMAR SCHORKOWITZ, *Staat und Nationalitäten in Russland: Der Integrationsprozess der Burjaten und Kalmücken, 1822-1925* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001), 59.

30 Cf. SCHORKOWITZ, 60.

31 For a detailed account of the life of Agvan Dorjiev see JOHN SNELLING, *Buddhism in Russia. The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa’s Emissary to the Tsar* (Shaftsbury, Rockport, Brisbane: Element, 1993) as well as the autobiography of Dorjiev translated and published by THUPTEN J. NORBU, “Dorjiev: Memoirs of a Tibetan Diplomat,” *Hokke-bunka kenkyū* 17 (1991): 1-105.

Also the stainless teachings of the Buddha still flourish in Russian-controlled Torgut and in Buryat[ia].”³²

Dorjiev, who was familiar with the Kālacakra Tantra and the prayer for rebirth in Śambhala (*sham bha la'i smon lam*),³³ explained that the mythical kingdom in the north of the Himalayas, the kingdom of Śambhala, was actually the kingdom of Russia. Therefore the Russian Czar, equalized with the ruler of Śambhala, would protect the Buddhist teachings.³⁴ Another Kalmyk Lama named Dambo Ul'janov even suggested in a book that the Romanovs were direct descendents of Sucandra,³⁵ the King of Śambhala, and that Kalāpa, the capital of Śambhala, was to be Moscow.³⁶

Dorjiev obviously must have been convincing, because in 1898 on behalf of the Dalai Lama he traveled to Europe and eventually met with Czar Nicholas II. Two years later Dorjiev went on an official mission as emissary to the Russian Czar. He carried a letter from the Dalai Lama, which he handed over to the Czar at Livadia Palace, the czarist Summer Residence in Odessa. In 1901 he went on a second official mission to the Czarist court. Both missions were supposed to establish regular connections between the Russian Empire and the Land of Snows as well as to seek help in case of British interventions in Tibet. However the Russian response was mostly noncommittal due to their unwillingness to risk their insecure relations with the British Empire.

It was this very official mission of Agvan Dorjiev to the Russian court which sealed the destiny of Tibet in the early 20th century. The British considered Dorjiev to be a mere Russian agent rather than a Buddhist scholar who acted upon Czarist advice.³⁷ The news of Dorjiev's meeting with the

32 These words of Dorjiev are cited in SNELLING, 36.

33 See NORBU, 15 and 24.

34 See KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, “Utopian Thought in Tibetan Buddhism,” 86 and RAM RAHUL, *The Government and Politics of Tibet* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1969), 111.

35 Cf. ALEXANDR ANDREEV, “Agvan Dorjiev and the Buddhist Temple in Petrograd,” *Chö-Yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion & Culture*, Year of Tibet Edition (Dharamsala: Gangchen Kyishong, 1991), 216. KOLLMAR-PAULENZ has mentioned the book of Dambo Ul'janov. The book was titled *Predskazanie Buddy o dome Romanovykh I kratkij očerk moich putešestvij v Tibet v 1904-1905gg* and published in St. Petersburg in 1913. Cf. KARÉNINA KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, “Sambhala, eine tibetisch-buddhistische Utopie,” in *Tibetan Studies*, Vol. 1, eds. HELMUT KRASSER et al. (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 539 n. 26.

36 Cf. KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, “Utopian Thought in Tibetan Buddhism,” 86 and SCHORKOWITZ, 283.

37 The image of Agvan Dorjiev in the early Western literature therefore was quite distorted. He mostly was portrayed as an agent of Czarist imperialism. See the respective quotations

Czar on behalf of the thirteenth Dalai Lama convinced Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, of serious negotiations between Russia and Tibet. He even conjectured some kind of a secret treaty, which threatened the security of British interests in India.³⁸ These suspicions prompted the British invasion into Tibet, which came to be known as the Younghusband Expedition of 1903/04. The plan to seek help from the Russian Empire to prevent British interference in Tibet turned out to produce quite the opposite of the intended aims.

The British were convinced that the Russians controlled all of Dorjiev's actions. However, Dorjiev had his own agenda. As the historian Helen S. Hundley pointed out:

“[A]t the time of the ‘Great Game’ none of the players could imagine that non-Europeans could have their own agendas or that a citizen of an empire would not share the same goals as those of their mother country.”³⁹

Dorjiev envisioned a pan-Buddhist, pan-Mongolian movement merging all Buddhists from the Baikal region to Tibet into one state.⁴⁰ Referring to the political conditions of that time, he recommended that this expanded Buddhist world would unite under the Russian empire. He assumed that with their increased physical size and numbers Buddhists could expect greater security in the Russian empire. His utilization of the myth of Śambhala has to be seen in this context.⁴¹

In 1909 Dorjiev got permission from the Czar to build a large Buddhist temple in Saint Petersburg. Some sources state that it was dedicated to the Buddhist deity Kālacakra.⁴² The first service on February 21, 1913, hap-

in NORBU, 5-6.

38 Cf. SHAUMIAN, 46-87.

39 HELEN S. HUNDLEY, “Tibet’s Part in The ‘Great Game’,” *History Today* 43/10 (1993): 45.

40 Pan-Mongolism was quite popular among some educated Buryats. Cf. ROBERT W. MONTGOMERY, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy. The Buryats and Their Language* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 25.

41 *Ibid.*, 47. W. A. UNKRIG makes a similar statement on the aims of Dorjiev in a letter to Dr. R. LOEWENTHAL from the December 17, 1954, quoted in ROBERT A. RUPEN, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1964), 106-7.

42 Dorjiev himself mentioned in his autobiography, that he conducted ceremonies for different tutelaries and he named Kālacakra as one of them. See NORBU, 40. John Snelling reports that the temple “is believed to have been dedicated to Kalachakra.” See SNELLING, 160. Alexandr Andreev states that on the final consecration of the temple on August 10, 1915 special rites dedicated to the tantric deity Kālacakra were conducted. Cf. ANDREEV, 214. The International Kalackara Network lists the Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg as one of the special Kālacakra places. For further details see the URL <http://kalachakranet>.

pened to be held during the festivities that marked the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty.⁴³ But the dream of an alliance of Russian Buddhist communities with the Tibetan Buddhists under Czar Nicholas II ended just four years later with the Russian Revolution in 1917. In the aftermath of the upheavals the Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg was partly destroyed by Red Army soldiers.

The case of Agvan Dorjiev clearly shows an interpretation of the myth of Śambhala with political connotations. The tolerant policy of the Russian empire towards the Buddhist minorities of the Buryats and Kalmyks, their strong connections with the Tibetan monastic institutions, and the need of the Tibetan government for support against the British Empire – in the perception of Agvan Dorjiev – were all factors that nourished hopes for a pan-Buddhist world under the aegis of the Russian Empire. The myth of Śambhala served as an interpretative pattern and therefore was hoped to offer a religiously legitimized solution by translating a current and politically tense situation into a well-known mythical context.

Public Initiations into the Kālacakra Tantra in the West

During the last decades a number of high-ranking teachers of all the Tibetan Buddhist schools have performed initiations into the Kālacakra around the world. The Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg is just one of the places where Tibetan Buddhist teachers offer those initiations to mainly Western adherents.⁴⁴ The fourteenth Dalai Lama is without any doubt the most prominent of these teachers. The first Kālacakra mass initiation ever conducted in the West took place in Madison, Wisconsin, in the USA in 1981. But even the preceding initiations into the Kālacakra Tantra conducted by the present Dalai Lama in Lhasa in 1954 and 1956 were considered to be huge events.⁴⁵

org/kalachakra_tantra_places.html (accessed February 28, 2009). For more information on the history of the temple, the restoration and its current use visit the following web-pages: <http://dazan.spb.ru/> and <http://www.marhotin.ru/eng/> (accessed November 27, 2008).

43 See OSTROVSKAYA, 39.

44 Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche has given the Kālacakra teachings in the St. Petersburg temple in 2003 and 2005.

45 See URBAN HAMMAR, “Dalai Lama and the modern Kalacakra initiations,” paper presented at the conference “Ritual Practices in Indian Religions and Contexts” in Lund (2004), 4. <http://www.teol.lu.se/indiskareligioner/conference04/13996670/panel2hammer.pdf> (accessed March 03, 2009).

Although the Wheel of Time Tantra is considered to be one of the most advanced tantric teachings of the highest tantra class (*anuttarayoga tantra*), it is offered to the general public. This contradiction may at first sight seem rather irritating in the light of the esoteric character of those Anuttarayoga tantras and their required preliminary practices and preparations. Yet there is a sort of ‘mass initiation’ in the Kālacakra scriptures themselves when King Yaśas taught an abridged version of the Kālacakra Tantra to all the inhabitants of the kingdom of Śambhala and thereby unified all the Brahman families within one single Buddhist *vajra* clan. Although public tantric initiations could be found as early as in the eleventh century,⁴⁶ the mass initiations into the Kālacakra Tantra are probably a recent phenomenon.⁴⁷ The ninth Panchen Lama (1883-1937) conducted altogether nine Kālacakra initiations in China from 1926 to 1936 to thousands of attendants.⁴⁸ As Fabienne Jagou points out, he performed these initiations to raise funds for his monastery in Tibet. The Kālacakra was considered to be one of the most powerful initiations and was also the most rewarding financially.⁴⁹ A huge initiation was held in Peking in 1932 for about 60,000 Chinese and Mongolian participants including the seventh Changkya Khutuktu (*lcang skya hu tuk tu*) from Mongolia. On this occasion the Panchen Lama conducted the Kālacakra explicitly for peace in that area.⁵⁰

Taking that into consideration, the present Dalai Lama and his huge public teachings termed ‘Kālacakra for World Peace’⁵¹ seem to have a predecessor in the ninth Panchen Lama. In the official statements of the organizing committees of these events a strong emphasis could be found on the benefit for all participants of the event, regardless of their religious affiliation or non-affiliation and their level of participation in the initiation.⁵² Yet the Dalai Lama stresses the importance especially of the preliminary teachings as well as the limitations for different groups of partici-

46 See the example of Ralotsawa Dorjedrak (*rwa lo tsa ba rdo rje grags*) and his public presentations of the Vajrabhairava system in the eleventh century in Tibet. RONALD M. DAVIDSON, *Tibetan Renaissance. Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 136.

47 HAMMAR, 4.

48 FABIENNE JAGO, *Le 9e Panchen Lama (1883-1937): Enjeu des relations sino-tibétaines* (Paris: École française d'Extrême Orient, 2004), 117-26 and HAMMAR, 10.

49 JAGO, 124-26.

50 In September of 1931 Japan launched an attack on Manchuria and parts of Inner Mongolia and occupied that region.

51 The number of participants is ranging from 1,500 to 200,000, depending on where the initiation is given. Usually the largest teachings were performed in Tibet and now in India.

52 See for example the statement on the official website for the initiation in Graz http://www.shedrupling.at/KC/deu/deu_ikal/init.html (accessed March 03, 2009) and Toronto

pants. In an interview from August 2002 in Spiti, India, he declared that a practitioner needs a “good knowledge of Buddhadharma and especially Tantrayana [to] understand these rituals” and that the “Kalachakra is a teaching meant for Buddhists.”⁵³ Therefore only a selected few are able to participate in the initiation as an actual initiation into the tantric practice of the Kālacakra. For the majority of the participants taking part in the initiation, this is considered to be a blessing.⁵⁴

It is worth mentioning that there are differences in the Kālacakra initiations performed in the West and in India. According to the Dalai Lama, he conducts the complete initiations only in places where many young lamas will receive it because of their future role as teachers of the tantric system. In the West he usually only bestows the basic initiations and those initiations, which are the maturing factors for the practice of the completion stage.⁵⁵

Kālacakra and the Notion of World Peace

The public teachings and initiations conducted by the Dalai Lama on request are termed “Kālacakra for World Peace.”⁵⁶ As noted before, the ninth Panchen Lama already had given the initiation explicitly for peace in a time of war. A reason for requesting this initiation today is the perception that the world is in danger and that it is necessary to assemble all the good forces in the world to help in this crisis. The large numbers of visitors of ‘Kālacakra for World Peace’ events clearly show that the highest tantric initiation of Tibetan Buddhism, which is widely considered to be the non-violent and peaceful religion *per se*, seems to be perceived as an appropriate measure and the Dalai Lama as just the right person for that special task. Nevertheless it is noticeable that Kālacakra initiations performed by

<http://www.ctao.org/kalachakra/kalachakra/introduction.htm> (accessed March 03, 2009).

53 See http://www.shedrupling.at/KC/deu/deu_spir/1.html (accessed March 03, 2009), paragraph 6.

54 Cf. DALAI LAMA, “Foreword: Concerning the Kalachakra,” in *The Wheel of Time. The Kalachakra in Context*, eds. GESHE LHUNDUB SOPA, ROGER JACKSON and JOHN NEWMAN (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1991), xviii-xix.

55 See http://www.shedrupling.at/KC/deu/deu_spir/1.html (accessed March 03, 2009), paragraph 45.

56 We can say for sure that the public initiation given in 1985 in Rikon, Switzerland was termed “Kālacakra for World Peace” and every Kālacakra teaching which was since then performed by the current Dalai Lama.

other Tibetan Buddhist masters in the last years do not bear the addition ‘for world peace.’⁵⁷

Considering the historical origins of the Wheel of Time Tantra and especially its rather violent character in the passages of the Outer Kālacakra, the strong emphasis on ‘world peace’ may seem astonishing. Therefore, it is necessary to include some remarks on the aspect of world peace in the teachings of the fourteenth Dalai Lama.

It is well known that the promotion of peace, tolerance and nonviolence are on his main agenda, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.⁵⁸ His role as a political and religious leader and his struggle for independence for the Tibetan people are widely recognized. He is a most sought after interlocutor by journalists, scientists, artists, and increasingly by politicians. Many people in the West even see him not only as a leader in Tibetan Buddhism, specifically of the Gelugpa sect, but as the leader of a worldwide Buddhism.

While the Dalai Lama is presenting specifically Buddhist teachings and initiations for a primarily Western Buddhist or Buddhist-interested audience, most of the time he also holds public lectures aiming at a much wider audience in the supporting program of the event. These public lectures are orientated towards more general topics such as the very basics of Buddhism, the pursuit of happiness, the importance of an interreligious dialogue, tolerance and nonviolence. Comparing the Buddhist teachings presented by the Dalai Lama with his public talks, a fundamental difference in quality can be observed.

For illustration purposes I would like to refer to my own observations during the last visit of the Dalai Lama in 2007 in Hamburg, Germany. His visit lasted seven days and the program was divided into three sections. The first section was comprised of a weekend program termed “Learning Peace – The Practice of Non-Violence.” The second section was a public talk on a Sunday afternoon on the topic “Compassion in a Globalized World”. The third section was a five day course called “Buddhism: Philosophy and Practice” which extensively dealt with the *Four Hundred Verses of the Indian Master Āryadeva*.⁵⁹

57 To name an example, the Kālacakra teachings and initiation given by Sakya Trizin in November 2006 did not mention the addition “for world peace”.

58 Michael Bergunder has pointed out the strong influence of Mahātmā Gāndhī’s concept of *ahimsā* on the politics of the Dalai Lama and the presentation of Tibetan Buddhism in exile. MICHAEL BERGUNDER, “‘Östliche’ Religionen und Gewalt,” in *Religion, Politik und Gewalt*, ed. FRIEDRICH SCHWEITZER (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 136-157.

59 *Catuhṣataka* by Āryadeva.

It is worthy of note that the two-hour public talk was sold out almost immediately, followed by the two day weekend program, whereas the five-day course was far from being sold out at all.⁶⁰ Furthermore, significant differences in the appearance of the audiences could be perceived. The public lecture appeared very much like a social event. The audience consisted mostly of local people from Hamburg and the surrounding areas. They were wearing their best Sunday suits for this rare occasion of seeing the Dalai Lama in person. The public talk was given in English and translated into German. It ended with a resounding applause when five young representatives of five different religions recited an interfaith prayer on stage in front of the Dalai Lama and the assembled audience. Compared to the public talk, the audience during the five-day course consisted mainly of Buddhist practitioners from all over Germany as well as from abroad. Nevertheless, it could be observed that many of the listeners were completely lost in the process of translation: The Dalai Lama read from Āryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses* and commented on it in Tibetan. After ten to fifteen minutes he paused and his explanation was translated into German. After two to three hours there was a break. In this manner the lecture continued till the late afternoon. Undoubtedly, in order to be able to follow his elaborate teachings the participants needed already a very solid understanding of Mahāyāna doctrine.

The same pattern could be found during the Kālacakra teachings in 2002 in Graz, Austria, and in 2004 in Toronto, Canada.⁶¹ The main program, consisting of preliminary teachings and initiations, was accompanied by a large supporting program. It included public lectures, scientific symposia, interreligious dialogues and interfaith services as well as the presentation of awards to the Dalai Lama honouring his commitment to peace.⁶²

It is clear from the above that the fourteenth Dalai Lama is simultaneously a very prominent figure in public discourse on peace and nonviolence

60 The weekend program as well as the public talk were attended by 10,000 visitors. Both program sections were aimed at a more general audience and talks were given in English and translated into German. The five day course on Buddhist philosophy was attended by 6,500 participants. This part of the program was announced as "a very sophisticated" introduction to Buddhist principles.

61 See for example the schedule for the Toronto Kālacakra initiation http://www.ctao.org/kalachakra/kalachakra/Schedule_02042004.pdf (accessed March 03, 2009).

62 In October 2002 he was awarded the Human Rights Prize by the University of Graz, Austria and in April 2004 he received the International Acharya Sushil Kumar Peace Award by the University of Toronto, Canada. For a list with all prizes and honorary doctor titles ever awarded to the Dalai Lama visit the URL http://dalailama.ctao.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=49 (accessed March 03, 2009).

as well as an important teacher in the Buddhist world, especially to followers of Tibetan Buddhism. He attracts two sorts of audiences: to many people, quite aware of him being a Buddhist teacher, he is nevertheless primarily a celebrity with the message of world peace, whereas to others, his importance lies more specifically in his Buddhist teachings. By emphasizing the notion of world peace in presenting one of the most complex tantric systems to a mainly non-Buddhist Western audience, the Dalai Lama creates a scope of reference which is possible to understand for most of the attendants, whether they are Buddhists or not. His message of peace has a universalizing effect on the perception of the very particular setting and the teachings of the Kālacakra Tantra.

The designation of the teachings and the initiation as “Kālacakra for World Peace” was quickly embraced by Western audiences and the media. The official websites of the organizers as well as the press coverage of the events made frequent references to the notion of world peace. The Austrian media referred to the event as a “world peace meeting” rather than a Tibetan Buddhist initiation.⁶³ *The Cincinnati Enquirer* described the endeavor of participants that came to the initiation in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1999 as “seeking world peace,” trying “to spread world peace through meditation, teachings and rituals” and mentioned their wish “to pray for world peace.”⁶⁴ The official website of the “Kālacakra for World Peace Toronto 2004” stated in its introduction:

“For everyone involved, regardless of the level of participation, the Kalachakra serves as a universal prayer for the development of the ethics of peace and harmony within one’s self and humanity.”⁶⁵

Similar statements could be found on the official website of the Kālacakra initiation in Graz. Here the organizers formulated:

63 The Austrian press used the German term “Weltfriedenstreffen”. See for example the statement on <http://presstext.de/news/020122038/kalachakra-online-rasche-und-umfangreiche-information-zum-weltfriedenstreffen/> (accessed March 03, 2009).

64 See the article “Dalai Lama, followers coming to Indiana” from August 13, 1999, http://www.enquirer.com/editions/1999/08/13/loc_dalai_lama_followers.html (accessed March 03, 2009).

65 URL: <http://www.ctao.org/kalachakra/kalachakra/introduction.htm> (accessed March 03, 2009).

“To put it in a much simplified, secular way, the Kalachakra for World Peace is like a 10-day training in individual peace, positive thinking, harmony and tolerance.”⁶⁶

Although the major part of the program consisted of sophisticated Buddhist teachings and rituals it nevertheless led just a minority to take the initiation with the intention of actually practicing the Kālacakra Tantra. For the majority of participants, the reason for attending the initiation may not have been the possibility of gaining a deeper understanding of the elaborate philosophical and complex ritual aspects of the Wheel of Time Tantra; rather it may have been a chance to see one of the world’s most famous proponents of peace and nonviolence who is at the same time a revered Buddhist teacher and for many people an icon of a genuine modern spiritual leader with a message for everyone. The ‘Kālacakra for World Peace’ events could be interpreted as an approach to bring two worlds together: the world of an important Tibetan Buddhist teacher with a legacy to share and the world of a popular advocate of peace with a message to impart.

Conclusion

The outlined examples illustrated different interpretations and adaptations of the Kālacakra Tantra and the myth of Śambhala. Contextualizing each of the examples highlighted the respective historical, geographical and social factors at work. These shaped each of the adaptations and interpretations in a particular way: the specific historical circumstances of Buddhism in North India in the tenth and the eleventh century were inscribed in the textual corpus of the tantric system. The particular situation of Agvan Dorjiev, born as a Russian Buryat and trained as a Gelugpa master in Tibet and appointed to advise the thirteenth Dalai Lama in a politically tense situation, shaped his revitalization and interpretation of the myth of Śambhala. The special situation of the current Dalai Lama as a revered Tibetan Buddhist master, a political leader of an exiled and oppressed people and a famous advocate of peace on the world stage formed his way of presenting Tibetan Buddhism in general and on of its highest tantric systems in particular.

Turning back to the introductory example of Victor and Victoria Trimondi, even their interpretation of Tibetan Buddhism, the Kālacakra

⁶⁶ URL: http://www.shedrupling.at/KC/eng/eng_ikal/short_expl.html (accessed March 03, 2009), paragraph 14.

Tantra, the myth of Śambhala and the role of the Dalai Lama has to be seen as a product of certain historical and social circumstances. In contemporary Western cultures Tibetan Buddhism is mainly perceived as a religion free of the errors attributed to institutionalized religion in general and Christianity in particular.⁶⁷ The Trimondis' interpretation represents a counter-discourse contesting the common notion of Tibetan Buddhism as a possible spiritual alternative for modern Western people.

The examples outlined in the article cover a wide range of interpretations of the Wheel of Time Tantra drawn from different times and places. The synopsis shows that the Kālacakra Tantra as a set of concepts and practices does not have an inherent timeless meaning in itself. On the contrary, different social agents in different historical, geographical and social settings interpreted the Wheel of Time Tantra in a variety of ways. In an active process of adoption and interpretation they revive certain aspects and neglect others; they may even contribute new fields of meaning.

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67 See for example the above mentioned work of Michael Bergunder.

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