Statements From Academic Scholars Regarding the Controversy Surrounding the Protests Against the Dalai Lama

**1. Nathan W. Hill,** Lecturer in Tibetan and Linguistics at London University SOAS’ (School of Oriental and African Studies), in [an article by The Foreigner](http://theforeigner.no/pages/news/distance-from-dalai-lama-protests-among-differing-opinions/) (May 8, 2014):

“This accusation makes no sense,” states Dr Hill. “The Dalai Lama is not head of any state; he has no military or police at his command; he has no political jurisdiction over which he can exercise suppression.”

“Some members of the Gelug sect left the authority of the Dalai Lama in order to follow what they see as a purer form of religion. These people may not be very popular in other parts of the Gelug sect, but their human rights have not been violated nor their freedoms suppressed; even if some people did want to suppress or silence the pro-Shugen side, they simply have no means of doing so,” Dr Hill concludes.

**2. Tibetologist** [Thierry Dodin stated in an interview about the Shugden conflict](http://info-buddhism.com/Dorje_Shugden_Conflict_Dalai_Lama_protests_Thierry_Dodin.html) (May 8, 2014):

“It is true that the cult is shunned by the community. But the claim that its remaining followers are systematically discriminated on the basis of an official directive cannot go unchallenged, if for no other reason than the fact that they themselves choose to live in groups largely cut off from the rest of the community.

As always in socio-political conflicts, unfortunate incidents did in fact occur here and there. Still, it would be unfair to make the Dalai Lama responsible for the actions of a few overly-zealous individuals. He neither called upon anyone to carry out such actions nor approved of these actions in retrospect. Moreover, such incidents have been wildly exaggerated by Shugden propagandists in terms of their frequency and gravity. Yes, there have certainly been social tensions, but violence has been the exception. The tensions have instead been released in heated debates, demonstrations and boycotts.   And if one takes into account that the problem has been in existence since the 17th century and already led to severe tensions in old Tibet, even local wars, one must say that overall this conflict has been quite peacefully managed in the last 30 years.”

**3.** [Matthew Bell](http://www.pri.org/people/matthew-bell) stated in PRI's “The World”, “[Breakaway Buddhists take aim at the Dalai Lama](http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-10-31/breakaway-buddhists-take-aim-dalai-lama)”, that Tibet scholar Robert Barnett said that Shugden practitioners in the Tibetan exile community have faced persecution. (In an email from Nov. 5th 2014 to ISC campaigner “IndyHack” Barnett corrects this: “I did not use the word ‘persecution’, which was added by the journalist, but he was summarizing my remarks about the existence of discriminatory practices, for which I think the word harassment is more appropriate.”) According to Bell, Barnett also said that the Dalai Lama’s administration hasn’t dealt with that very well. About the protests Bell quotes Barnett:

“What we’re really seeing is the streets of America being used by a new form of Buddhism to try to promote itself and to consolidate its own followers by asking them to do these rather unusual, unorthodox [and] social difficult practices of attacking [the Dalai Lama] … We see this being done under the name of human rights, which is not really quite what is at issue here.”

**4. Paul Williams,** Bristol-based specialist remarked in a Guardian interview on the Shugden controversy in 1996:

*“The Dalai Lama is trying to modernize the Tibetans’ political vision and trying to undermine the factionalism. He has the dilemma of the liberal: do you tolerate the intolerant?”*[[61]](http://info-buddhism.com/dorje_shugden_controversy.html#Notes-DS)(Bunting 1996, see also Mills : 2000, page 68)

**5. John Makransky,** about the cross-cultural confusion in the Dorje Shugden issue:

»A stunning recent example of this: some Tibetan monks who now introduce Westerners to practices centred on a native Tibetan deity, without informing them that one of its primary functions has been to assert hegemony over rival sects! The current Dalai Lama, seeking to combat the ancient, virulent sectarianisms operative in such quarters, has strongly discouraged the worship of the “protector” deity known as Dorje Shugden, because one of its functions has been to force conformity to the dGe lugs pa sect (with which the Dalai Lama himself is most closely associated) and to assert power over competing sects. Western followers of a few dGe lugs pa monks who worship that deity, lacking any critical awareness of its sectarian functions in Tibet, have recently followed the Dalai Lama to his speaking engagements to protest his strong stance (for non-sectarianism) in the name of their “religious freedom” to promulgate, now in the West, an embodiment of Tibetan sectarianism. If it were not so harmful to persons and traditions, this would surely be one of the funniest examples of the cross-cultural confusion that lack of critical reflection continues to create.«

(Makransky, John (2000). Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars, John J. Makransky, Roger Reid Jackson, p. 20, in Introduction to Contemporary Academic Buddhist Theology; Its emergence and rationale)

**6. Jans Hartmann**, University of Munich: <http://info-buddhism.com/Dalai_Lama-Shugden_Cult-Conflict-Hartmann.html>

“In the West, this dispute feeds on the fact that the followers of Dorje Shugden have found their declared enemy in the person of the Dalai Lama. This enables them to generate media attention and effective public appeal. If a spiritual figure of such prominence as the Dalai Lama is accused of religious suppression, one can be sure of public interest…

“…it is apparent from this story that two essential elements accompany the Shugden cult to this day, namely a potential aggressiveness and a latent opposition to the Tibetan government and to the person of the Dalai Lama. These elements have led in the past to repeated conflicts between the followers and opponents of Shugden in the Gelugpa School.”

**7. Jonathan Gold**, a professor of religion and scholar of Buddhism as quoted in the Princetonian newspaper, in “[Group to protest Dalai Lama talk at Princeton next week](http://dailyprincetonian.com/news/2014/10/group-to-protest-dalai-lama-talk-at-princeton-next-week/)”:

“Jonathan Gold, a professor of religion and scholar of Buddhism, explained that the main conflict between the Shugden practitioners and the Dalai Lama is that Shugden practicioners protect the teachings of the Gelug by keeping out people who are not strict Gelug Orthodox practicioners, he said.

“Shugden’s symbolism has traditionally been very offensive, even threatening to the Dalai Lama, Gold said.

“More specifically, Gold noted that the Shugden reject the Dalai Lama’s choice to encompass multiple Buddhist practices under the umbrella of Tibetan Buddhism.

“Gold also noted that the Dalai Lama does not have the authority to ban or to legitimize any practice.

“The Dalai Lama is just a religious leader. He cannot control their ability to travel or to stop them from practicing their religion,” Gold said.

“However, he said, Shugden practitioners are misinformed in their consistent statement that the Dalai Lama is preventing them from exercising their rights. Gold said that the Dalai Lama, though exiled from Tibet, has made its exiled population a more democratic society.

“The Dalai Lama, Gold said, works around the world to promote liberal values, and restricting the Shugden practitioners in the way that they claim would directly go against his values.

**Robert Barnett from Columbia University** commented in a Facebook comment on the protests, stating that “issuing a religious ruling is not a question of human rights or an abuse” and that the allegation to be the “false Dalai Lama”

“… has little or no historical or factual foundation, has no connection whatsoever to human rights issues, and is morally repugnant and offensive. In addition, it is of absolutely no relevance to western Shugden practitioners or to practitioners of their religion, since they do not follow the Dalai Lama. Instead, it represents a decision by them and their leaders to revive an earlier legacy of extreme and aggressive sectarianism within Tibetan history, which is associated with the promotion of acute division, bitterness, and violence. This aspect of the Shugden campaign is certain to provoke conflict and enmity within the Tibetan community, and most observers will understandably conclude that it was and is designed to do so.”