



WE STAND WITH THE DALAI LAMA

**VOICES OF DEFIANCE: A COMPILATION OF
ARTICLES WRITTEN IN THE WAKE OF THE
RECENT SOCIAL MEDIA DEFAMATION OF
HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH DALAI LAMA**

TIBET RIGHTS COLLECTIVE




Tibet Rights Collective is a Delhi-based group that aims to increase access to information about Tibet's politics, culture, traditions, and language. We focus on bringing Tibet and Tibet-related issues and events onto social media through audio-visual content.


Our vision is to evolve into a strong knowledge provider and educate the world on matters related to Tibet's present situation through combining data, research, audience engagement and thought; and disseminate information on policy changes at a global level that affect Tibet.


TRC runs social media and communications campaigns on various themes touching upon various aspects of Tibet to raise awareness and invite public attention towards the Tibetan cause.

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CONTENTS

Foreword Dibyesh Anand

Introduction Tibet Rights Collective

Acknowledgement

1. **The Defamation of the Dalai Lama: An Intercultural Analysis** **01**
Tenzin Dorjee
2. **The Geopolitical Violence of Translating the Dalai Lama** **04**
Dawa Lokyitsang
3. **An Anguish, An Everlasting Trauma: The Dalai Lama Is A Leader Of The World** **07**
Tenzing Dhamdul
4. **China, Tibetans & Epistemic Violence: How Media Marginalise, Misrepresent Voices** **11**
Lobsang Kyizom

CONTENTS

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 5. We Need to Think about the Dalai Lama's Actions Very Carefully
<i>Joshua Brallier Shelton</i> | 14 |
| 6. The Dalai Lama You Never Knew
<i>Tashi Rabgey</i> | 18 |
| 7. The Dalai Lama and his Joking Tongue
<i>Shelly Bhoil</i> | 24 |
| 8. Can We Allow the Dalai Lama to Be a Good Enough Refugee?
<i>Tenzin Dickie</i> | 30 |
| 9. The Facts behind His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Viral Video!
<i>Tsewang Gyalpo Arya</i> | 34 |
| 10. Beyond the Headlines – Malicious Campaign To Discredit Dalai Lama
<i>Dhardon Sharling</i> | 38 |

CONTENTS

11. As Hate and Fear Take Grip, World Needs a Moral Idol Like the Dalai Lama <i>Pema Dhondup Gakyil</i>	44
12. Stop Sensationalizing the Dalai Lama's Innocent Interactions A Tibetan's Perspective <i>Jigme Ugen</i>	49
13. Dalai Lama Vilified by Viral Video <i>Dolma Tsering</i>	61
14. Speaking for the Dalai Lama and Tibet's Repressed <i>Benedict Rogers</i>	64
15. Campaign against Dalai Lama has Deeply Hurt Tibetans' Sentiments <i>Kaveri Gill</i>	69
16. How to Judge the Dalai Lama Incident <i>Tenzin Dorjee</i>	72

FOREWORD

Resisting the Erasure of Tibetans from Global Public Discourse

The last decade of 20th century and the first few years of the 21st century was a period when Tibetan cause was rather popular in the Western public discourse. The Dalai Lama, who received Noble Peace Prize in 1989, was a global icon. China, after the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989, was a defensive authoritarian power. Several popular books were written about Tibet as a special place, almost Shangri-La like, even as academic work often critiquing this exoticisation. The focus of much of protests in solidarity with Tibet was on 'save Tibet. Pro-Tibet organisations and support groups were mostly led by white Westerners and exile Tibetans had very limited say other than be seen as victims needing saviours. Academic study of Tibet and Tibetans was also dominated by white Westerners with very few opportunity for Tibetan scholars to emerge in their own right.

There has been a conspicuous transformation in pro Tibet activism in recent years. Tibetan exiles are more active, more visible, and increasingly in leadership position in organisations. The focus has shifted from 'Save Tibet' to 'Free Tibet'. Tibetan scholars are gaining prominence too. Exiled Tibetans are, thus, becoming co-producers of knowledge and actions rather than passive victims needing external saviours. As a scholar of Tibet and geopolitics for more than two decades, I have witnessed this transformation and played a small part in it by never speaking on behalf of Tibetans but speaking with Tibetans and using my privileges to provide more visibility for Tibet and Tibetans.

Despite these developments, when the manufactured scandal involving the Dalai Lama broke out in April 2023, we were reminded of how vulnerable Tibetans remain in the global public discourse. In a contested world where fake news and character assassinations are common, the selective and false narrative peddled by a video alleging misbehaviour by the Dalai Lama is not surprising. What is shocking is the way in which mainstream media picked up

the story manufactured on social media and reported it as “news” and thus shaped the public discourse. For the first few days, neither Indian nor Western media that were whipping this up and creating a news story bothered to speak to, or quote, any Tibetan or Tibet expert.

What disappointed me was also a silence amongst large parts of Tibet related scholars. In the first week when ‘news’ was not, I hardly saw Tibet related academics speaking out against this ‘story’. The time for speaking out is not when a crisis abates but when we still have a chance to push back against a lethal narrative.

Imagine a news story about women that cites only men as experts. Or a news story about USA that only cites non-Americans as experts. Imagine a story about racism in the USA that only platforms white people. When you pause and imagine, you’d see how problematic it is. Yet, Indian and Western media houses were comfortable in ‘reporting’ and generating ‘discussions’ without having any Tibetan presence. Even the discussions and debates on social media mostly showed zero humility or acknowledgement that on a matter that involves a person who is sacred to Tibetans, voice of Tibetans should be sought out and heard.

However, after an initial shock of a week or so after the mediatised scandal, Tibet scholars and activists made strong interventions that went some way in repairing the damage. The collection here, that includes Tibetans as well as non-Tibetans, is for all to read and reflect upon. Each piece is written with hurt; hurt that media and public did not hesitate to try to destroy the reputation of the Dalai Lama even when it should have been obvious to anyone with some fairness and objectivity about the video clips being fishy. Each piece is written with defiance; defiance in the face of blatant disregard that shapers of global public discourse were showing when completely ignoring the existential crisis Tibetans face due to Chinese colonisation and precarious exilic condition.

While you read this collection, please ask yourself one simple question – what does it tell you about the nature and fairness of Indian and Western media and social media debates when a figure who is a matter of life and death for Tibetans and Tibetan movement is unfairly attacked and yet Tibet-

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-an voices are mostly ignored? If you are reading this collection, you are likely to share the disquiet the contributors and I feel. Can you now promise to speak out, and speak up, next time a similar campaign is waged to seek to silence Tibetans or hurt their cause?

Thank you

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Professor Dibyesh Anand is the Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Westminster, UK. A professor of international relations, he is the author of monographs "Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination", "Tibet: A Victim of Geopolitics", and "Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear" and has spoken about, and published extensively on, varied topics including postcolonial politics and international relations, Tibet, China-India border dispute, Hindu nationalism, Islamophobia, and colonial practices of postcolonial states. He is the Co-Chair of Westminster's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, the Chair of London Higher's EDI Network as well as of International Studies Association's LGBTQA Caucus. Dibyesh is passionate about challenging the divide between academia and activism and is on twitter @dibyeshanand.

INTRODUCTION

It was disheartening to see the world attacking His Holiness the Dalai Lama, an enduring symbol of hope, compassion and kindness, not just for Tibetans, but the whole world for an innocent interaction which was grossly misinterpreted and mistranslated. The world rushed to judgement and baseless accusations were hurled at him without even any attempt to understand the larger context of the exchange, based solely on a footage selectively edited and cut short to suit a narrative. New social media accounts were created and defamatory headlines, social media posts and news reports flooded the stage overnight with no questions asked or no Tibetan engaged. For China, this became an opportunity to hurl more abuse targeting at His Holiness, someone the Chinese Communist Party has constantly tried to malign, and further discredit the Tibetan movement.

It was a difficult time for the Tibetans across the world, who were shocked, pained and shaken to the core. Gradually, Tibetans, Tibet scholars, supporters and groups came forward to speak up and share their views on the issue online. Social media posts explained the cultural, societal and situational context and the phrase 'Che La Sa' (Eat My Tongue) in Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Many Tibetans joined Twitter and used the medium as a site to refute the false claims put forth by bots. Led by the very articulate Jigme Ugen la, YouTubers shared videos which were powerful expressions of the love and respect Tibetans share for their leader. They were here to defend their leader and tell their part of the story; to fight back, together, with a sense of determination and unity.

Protests were organised **across the world** by Tibetans and supporters of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, expressing solidarity and calling on the media to apologize to him. Thousands of people took to the streets to peacefully protest in support of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India, USA, Canada, Australia and others.

White Khata Movement, an initiative initially formed by a group of 10 Tibetan monks & later joined by Tibetan masses who are followers of HH the Dalai Lama in Bylakuppe, later spread to other parts of the world. In what was a powerful use of symbolism and expression of dissent, they used 'white scarf' – a part of Tibetan culture that represents purity, compassion and innocence - to send their message to the media houses and the world at large.

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A [Change.org petition](#) was started by Tibetan Cancer Society requesting the media outlets and social media influencers to remove the tailored videos and urging them to exercise restraint. With around 60,000 signatures, the campaign garnered huge support. Scholars of Tibetan Studies issued statements criticizing and condemning the “distasteful media coverage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s exchange” and expressing solidarity with the Tibetan community inside and outside Tibet whose sentiments were hurt.

Due to the controversy, Tibetans in Chinese-ruled Tibet were able to see [images](#) of the Dalai Lama to which they reacted with pure joy, faith, and respectful bow. Beijing calls him a separatist and his image is banned in Tibet. Keeping a picture of the Dalai Lama is considered a crime in occupied Tibet.

This booklet stems from the belief and understanding that archiving is a strong act of protest and resistance. This is a compilation of some of the articles published by Tibet scholars, activists and Tibetans across the world, addressing the issue from different perspectives. These articles are honest expressions of multiple emotions that the authors, and Tibetans as a community went through – despair, trauma, belief, hope, determination, fury and disbelief to name a few. For Tibetans in Exile- a population driven away from their own homeland, this is an assertion of their self-determination and their reverence for their leader.

Lakshmi P

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to extend our heartfelt acknowledgments to all the contributors of this compilation, who gave us their kind permission to republish the articles. Their insightful articles have contributed to a meaningful dialogue and will enrich the understanding of the complex issues surrounding this incident.

It was Dr Dhardon Sharling la with whom we shared the initial thought of bringing out such a compilation. Her words of encouragement played an instrumental role in inspiring and enlightening us about the importance of this project. We are truly honored and privileged to have Professor Dibyesh la's support and contribution to this project. Knowing how valuable your time is, we are humbled that you provided a thoughtful and engaging foreword for our compilation, Dibyesh la.

This is a thank you note to all those who stood with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet and Tibetans across the world during the tough times.

This is a reminder to the world that our voices matter and no matter how the tide turns, we shall stand firm.

THE DEFAMATION OF THE DALAI LAMA: AN INTERCULTURAL ANALYSIS

Dr Tenzin Dorjee

This article originally appeared in *Tibetan Review* dated 29th April 2023.

Last week on social media, a cropped video went viral depicting His Holiness the Dalai Lama kissing an Indian boy and saying “suck my tongue.” The video lacked any context which quickly led to the kneejerk hyper-sexualization of its content and outlandish accusations of child abuse. Contextual misappropriation and a lack of cultural sensitivity contributed to the defamation of a beloved global icon. Unfortunately, in an epic failure of journalistic ethics, major media outlets across the globe neglected to interview the subjects in question, and amplified the distorted images. When the Dalai Lama’s press office apologized for the furor, the global press lacked the cultural competency to decode the apology. It chose to capitalize on sensationalism instead.

The interaction took place on February 28 in Dharamsala at a livestreamed charity event (archived on the official website). During a Q & A period, the boy asked the Dalai Lama if he could offer him a hug. The 87-year-old leader sought the help of his aides twice to understand the boy before welcoming him onstage, and teasing him in a grandfatherly way. Both the boy and his mother were exuberant in media interviews shortly thereafter.

As a Tibetan-American Buddhist and intercultural communication scholar, I teach my students that contextual misappropriation distorts communication. The social media and news reports perversely misconstrued and misplaced the Dalai Lama’s interaction with the boy as a sexual encounter. Unfortunately, even some child rights advocates also rushed to frame the incident as abuse.

According to Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), human behaviors often violate each other’s expectations, which is true and rampant in an intercultural setting. The video clip violated the cultural expectations of many worldwide. Studies overwhelmingly show negative evaluations of such violations. This week protests erupted globally against defaming the Dalai Lama. Today (April 21), the Dalai Lama delivered a keynote speech on compassion, altruism, and wisdom of interdependent origination at the Global Buddhist Summit in New Delhi to tackle global challenges and praxis.

Communicative meaning is socially encoded and decoded in a given socio-linguistic community. The Dalai Lama’s statement as made in English — “Suck my tongue” —

caused much confusion since the verb “suck” in English has an explicit sexual connotation, but nobody bothered to check the meanings of the Tibetan word “hJibs” (Phonetics: Jib) for “suck” which is devoid of any negative or sexual implications. In the Tibetan language, when a mother breastfeeds her child, she says “Jib Dang” meaning “Suck it” which conveys a sense of nourishing or feeding.

Our culture also has healers called Jib Gyab Khan (“Suckers”). Years ago, I recall a rabid dog bit some local Tibetans in south India. They went to see a known healer “sucker” believing that poison would be literally sucked out of their systems via a cone-shaped pipe or direct kiss on the body.

Tibetans stick out their tongues as a sign of respect. Tibetan elders often tease their grandkids, coaxing them for kisses at each feeding. When eating tsampa (roasted barley flour), they may say “Dang po O chig tre dang” (“First, give me a kiss”) gesturing to their cheeks, their nose, and their lips, before sticking out their tongues in jest to finally say, “Da na la gas med. Nga’ che le za” (“Now, I have nothing to give you. Just eat my tongue”). Considering the intergenerational context, public setting, and how he said it, the Dalai Lama clearly meant no harm.

Tibetan humor is often lost in translation. But it is one of the few things that has kept us alive in the face of the ongoing cultural genocide in Tibet. The Dalai Lama is the exceptional leader who has dismissed formality by puckering his lips, tugging on beards, and making fart jokes. His self-deprecating humor brings levity into people’s lives, and hope to a world in despair.

Sadly, further confusion occurred when the Dalai Lama’s Office issued an apology over the incident because norms for apologizing vary widely across cultures. In collectivistic Asian cultures, members apologize easily in crisis or conflict situations, out of relational concerns to give face to others. In other words, offering an apology does not necessarily entail one is guilty of wrongdoing as is assumed in individualistic Western cultures.

The character defamation brought on by this episode has utterly shocked Tibetans, whom all wish we could have been as fortunate as that little Indian boy. The Dalai Lama should not have to apologize for anything. It is he who deserves the apology.

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THE GEOPOLITICAL VIOLENCE OF TRANSLATING THE DALAI LAMA

Dawa Lokyitsang

This article originally appeared in *The Geo Politics* dated 25th April 2023.

How do you translate intimacy? Recent news involving the Dalai Lama interacting with an Indian boy at a public event on Feb. 28, 2023 shocked the world. Over a month after the event, media everywhere ran suggestive headlines generating a firestorm of public responses on children's rights and condemning the Dalai Lama as a pedophile. His guilt was proclaimed triumphantly as truth, but based on what evidence? A sharply cut video entirely devoid of cultural or geopolitical context.

To the Tibetan community, the accusations against the Dalai Lama made little sense. The Dalai Lama has a long history of looking after the welfare and safety of Tibetan children since his arrival in 1959 as a refugee in India. After sixty-four years working tirelessly and selflessly on their behalf and for the Tibetan people, this is the first time such dangerous accusations are headlining in the media.

I am a Tibetan scholar of Tibet. My doctoral research is on the Dalai Lama's development of schools for Tibetan refugee children in India. The human cost of the invasion and war in Tibet devastated Tibetans and their families, leaving many children orphaned. Schools became an avenue for the Dalai Lama to safeguard the lives of these orphans, shielding them from the precarity of refugee life. In the absence of parents, the Dalai Lama offered children his protection and guidance — becoming their “mother, father, guardian, and teacher” in the process, according to the words of a former orphan I interviewed. He offers them his time, attention, and affection during his frequent visits to school, and stressed the importance of love, compassion, and care for others for Tibetans to survive together as a people.

Tibetans are not only aware of, but have grown accustomed to and feel blessed by, such emblematic affection from the Dalai Lama. Watching outsiders, including the world's media, sexualize this affection and proclaim it to be problematic was disorienting and distressing. We responded with fury tempered by compassion. Here is why: The interaction we saw in the full, unedited video tracked with our own experiences. This was familiar affectionate behavior between Tibetan grandparents and grandchildren. My personal experience growing up in Dharamsala confirmed this. As a child, elders in the community who interacted with me in the role of grandparents often gave into my demands for sweets and offered genuine verbal and physical affection, including kissing on the lips and sticking out one's tongue.

But which translation of affection is valid? Translation matters, they have the potential to heal or cause violence.

My PhD is in anthropology. Cultural anthropologists have long stressed the messiness of translating across cultures. One example is Brown University anthropologist Catherine Lutz's book "Unnatural Emotions", about the emotional life of the Ifaluk people who live on a Micronesian atoll. The title is ironic. Ifaluk emotions are unnatural only from a Western perspective, not from an Ifaluk one. Similar reads of the Dalai Lama's actions were also made by outsiders who described it as 'weird' and 'disturbing,' centering their own lens over Tibetan ones.

In order for an outsider to understand the cultural nuances of Ifaluk or Tibetan emotions, one needs to spend time learning through cultural immersion. This sort of cultural knowledge is what Tibetans were trying to share in explaining the Dalai Lama's conduct.

Another example is that of Tom Brady, who faced similar media outrage over a picture of him kissing his son. The picture sparked a slew of suggestive media headlines as well as social media criticism that deemed the act inappropriate and concluded that Tom Brady was a pedophile. It did not seem to matter that the kiss was between a father and his son, nor that such displays of affection are normative behavior for families across cultures and around the world.

Both of these cases highlight how this issue is not just about translating culture, but is more importantly about current politics. Not only did the news about the Dalai Lama generate massive traffic for media and social media platforms, it also became an instant opportunity for bot accounts to espouse Chinese propaganda on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Capitalist and imperial interests began aligning and targeting the Dalai Lama, a figure who the Chinese government has continually tried to malign ever since his arrival in India.

We still do not know who created and circulated the initial edited video. What we do know is how it was covered by the media and their reluctance to engage Tibetans.

In exile, hurt by attacks on the Dalai Lama's character, old Tibetan women recorded videos shedding tears and pleading to the Tibetan public to protect the Dalai Lama.

Tibetans responded by protesting against the media. In the Indian regions of Tawang, Ladakh, Spiti, and Darjeeling, Himalayan peoples joined Tibetans in these protests. Ladakh and Tawang are Indian border regions that China has been

seeking to claim due to these regions' shared histories with pre-invasion Tibet and long relationships with the previous Dalai Lamas. Protesters condemn the media for defaming the Dalai Lama and call out China for its explicit weaponizing of the clip.

In colonized Tibet and in China, images of and discussions about the Dalai Lama are banned. Having a photo of him can get you arrested, imprisoned, or worse. However now, the Chinese government is allowing media critiques of the Dalai Lama to circulate. But any governmental expectations that the video and coverage of it would disturb Tibetans are thwarted. Tibetans are reporting they are happy to see videos of the Dalai Lama without restrictions.

While news about the Dalai Lama has been presented explicitly through the lens of culture and sexuality, there has been little acknowledgement of its geopolitical significance. Like other communities around the world, Tibetans are also addressing issues around sexual abuse and consent in our communities, including by figures of authority. But this is not the right moment nor the right person for that discussion.

Instead of this fabricated outrage, Tibetans are focused on life and death events. Chinese officials are arresting Tibetans who speak out in support of the Dalai Lama, while reports of teachers and students taunting Tibetan children at schools in the West are growing. These are real-life ramifications of this transnational event. Impacts on the lives of Tibetan people living under Chinese rule and across the world should be considered. For that, alongside cultural translation of acts of affection, we need geopolitical analysis of political violence.

Dawa Lokyitsang is a Tibetan-American Ph.D. candidate in Cultural Anthropology. Her dissertation is about the establishment of sovereignty in exile by the Tibetan refugee collective following China's invasion of Tibet in 1959. As such, her scholarship sits at the intersection of Asian imperial-colonialisms, anti-colonial nationalism, and Indigenous sovereign-futurisms.

AN ANGUISH, AN EVERLASTING TRAUMA: THE DALAI LAMA IS A LEADER OF THE WORLD,

Tenzing Dhamdul

This article originally appeared in *Tibet Rights collective* dated 02nd May 2023.

“Someone who has little knowledge,
Will find fault with those who understand.
All look with awe on expensive belongings,
But who would notice a piece of burning wood?”

An excerpt from ‘The Elegant Saying of Sakya Pandita’, Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltzen who was a prominent Lama in the Sakya sect of Tibetan tradition of Buddhism and was the teacher of Goden Khan (Grandson of Genghis Khan) during the 13th Century.

This proved out to be true in light of the recent viral doctored clips of His Holiness the Dalai Lama interacting with a child. This clip was created by vested interest groups, individuals and even from Beijing according to some credible sources. This whole incident opened a Pandora’s box about Tibetans and His Holiness at large with it having geopolitical significance but hitting closer to the heart this time. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe stated “A man sees in the world, what he carries in his heart” This very heart which we all hold close and dear was deeply hurt and ravaged by the slippery slope that saw us prioritize sensationalism over good research.

It was at 10th April early Monday morning, when I received a call from a friend in Dharamshala who told me the seriousness of this edited and modified video of His Holiness, leading me to look into this. While confirming its validity through Tibetan media sources who had released this video on 28th February (with Voice of America Tibetan being the video source which was then doctored by groups who had vested interest in it) an apology letter by His Holiness through his social handles was released to quell down the unwarranted furore this was generating. However, instead more people jumped in and band wagoned on this false narrative, with Cardi B, Joe Rogan and many others joining the fray – making the heart weep. In my lifetime I have personally not seen such huge numbers of my fellow sisters and brothers weep both publicly and privately. “We are so hurt as a community because when it comes to His Holiness, it's a matter of life and death. I wish I could just put the past few days away into oblivion, but I can't. It will haunt me forever. All I can muster at the end is that I am Tenzin Thinley, a Tibetan raised under His Holiness the Dalai Lama's grace, I will hold onto that with unending gratitude. I wish to make

him proud.” Says Tenzin Thinley, a Tibetan refugee born and brought up in India.

Since Monday, it was not only Tibetans but millions of people who had found courage, inspiration, motivation, love, peace, belief, happiness and compassion through His Holiness were thrown in complete disarray not because the doctored video was released (the original video including interviews with the child and his parents was released on the day of the event itself, on 28th February) but because various news outlets and social influencers in our contemporary world without a second thought rushed to criticize His Holiness and his actions here. Many even took to liberty in naming him a “Pedophile” notwithstanding its ramifications. Venoms were spewed here and news outlet and individuals sensing that they could make a quick buck out from it spun various narratives on it without taking any due insights from the very people who were there and present during the event. I even witnessed how a public media personality in USA was saying that this incident had happened in Tibet, illustrating how little these very proponents questioning His Holiness knew about the current plight of Tibetans.

Since 1949, when the People’s Republic of China (PRC) starting invading Tibet illegally – grossed of Tibetans were forced to fled their own country with 1959 being a watershed year when His Holiness along with thousands of Tibetans given asylum in India by the Government of India. Tibet continues to remain illegally occupied by the PRC even now, with Tibetans facing duress and suppression day in and day out. It is the least free region of the world according to the latest 2023 report by Freedom House.

Millions of people have been traumatized, etching an everlasting scar, possibly passing it onto generations to come. A recent video by a Tibetan student in Belgium, Tenzin Nordon who is 14-year-old has become viral. In the video she confesses that she was publicly humiliated by her own teacher in front of her class mates who not only stated that The Dalai Lama is a “Pedophile” but even went to length to show the doctored clip to her class mates drawing more jeers and racist slurs to her. This highlights the need of accepting heterogeneity in our world. “I feel like the need of the hour is for the world to not restrict inclusivity to trying cross-culture food & traveling new places. It is equally important for people to be more inclusive of cross-culture traditions and customs” says Tenzin Saldon, who is one among many Tibetans bringing the truth about this whole incident in the social media platforms.

People from around the world especially in India, where His Holiness has been residing since 1959 have come out in huge numbers, calling out for the truth. Many

have utilized social media as an agency while a plethora of them have also taken to the streets and called out those who instigated and disseminated this misinformation. People from the Himalayan belt bordering Tibet occupied China from Arunachal Pradesh to Ladakh to Sikkim to Himachal Pradesh, all the way from Leh to Tawang – stretching 1000's of KM, have come out demanding the truth to be told and be accountable for deceiving the people. A particular slogan that has been synonymous with this movement is “Shame Shame, Media Shame” particularly targeting NDTV which was synonymous with Tibetans then but not anymore now. The Tibetan diasporic community throughout the world with India having the largest demography of this Tibetan community also demonstrated and sought truth and justice by holding peaceful protest in varying means utilising every agency they could. I only wonder if this were to happen with any other Community or Religion what would the consequences be then? Peace protest? Certainly not.

Being a Tibetan I felt wronged, even questioning my existence as a Tibetan and whether being a Tibetan mattered in this world. However, the overwhelming solidarity shown by my fellow sisters and brothers of this beautiful and magical world made it clear to me that we are not alone, making me remember this quote by Marcus Aurelius “We are each of us Stronger than we think”.

People who researched and looked into this incident have come forward apologizing, verifying and even bringing out statements, the latter which even included the Government officials of the Indian government. “The victim here is His Holiness the Dalai Lama” said the Sikyong (President) of the Tibetan Government in Exile, Penpa Tsering La at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia. Mr. O.P. Tandon, who is a founding trustee of FNVA and former Registrar of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) made it clear to me how people are “Finding sinful action out of a divine person”.

This episode and saga even continued after His Holiness the Dalai Lama graced and blessed the Global Buddhist Summit in New Delhi, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from 20th-21st April and organized by the International Buddhist Confederation and the Ministry of the Culture, India. Clearly indicating the many steps that humanity as a whole must still take if it yearns to create a free and fair world. “We believe this violation is a reminder of the need for critical thinking, kindness, and respect for our beautiful differences” says Tenzin Chonyi who along with her colleagues led a peaceful movement at New York.

My humble plea as a Tibetan Refugee and a follower of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is when such a magnanimous leader not only to us Tibetans but to the whole world

with millions of followers being the victim here could apologise, why can't you (those who created this undesired ruckus) do the same? Several entities have already come forth bringing the truth with many who spread this disinformation also apologising, yet we still await the same from many. I furthermore sincerely request those who provide such information and influence people to take a step back next time, learning from this debacle before trying to jump the gun over such concocted news which smears a whole community and deeply impacts the lives of millions of people, forever traumatizing them.

Never hesitate to reach us Tibetans and the masses, we are free to access, unlike the PRC where millions of our own Tibetan sisters and brothers under the illegal occupation remain inaccessible even now in such modern times.

The North Remembers.

Tenzing Dhamdul is a Tibetan refugee born in India and currently is a Research Associate at the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternates (FNVA), New Delhi. Recipient of the prestigious Sikyong Scholarship in the year 2015 - being the 1st Tibetan boy to receive it. Completed B.A at the Hindu College, Delhi University and the M.A. Politics at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Many of his writings have been published in various newspapers and sites including The Caravan Magazine, The Taipei Times, The Taiwan Times etc. He is Interested in East Asian politics and governance particularly Tibet and its relations with China.

CHINA, TIBETANS & EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE: HOW MEDIA MARGINALISE, MISREPRESENT VOICES

Lobsang Kyizom

This article originally appeared in *The Quint* dated 30th April 2023.

The Dalai Lama Row caps one of many Beijing's sustained disinformation campaigns against the Tibetans.

The media coverage of the disinformation campaign against His Holiness the Dalai Lama's innocent interaction with a child shows how quick and easy it is for the media and the world to dismiss and wrong the already marginalised Tibetans. First, it exposed the fallacies of news media in the social media age—impulsive to publish the next big story on trend, compromising its responsibility of fact-checking for the ultimate 'scoop'.

One of the earliest sources of the widely circulated video was published on 8 April by a Twitter account that is only nearly two months old. The purported online backlash was incited by shares and reposts from other accounts, Wumaos, foreign CCP beneficiaries, and Chinese state associates, grossly misinterpreted by an injudicious audience through their narrow socio-cultural perspective.

Furthermore, the official apology published by the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama which came from his holiness's magnanimity of spirit, has been abused to show him in a negative light.

Secondly, the media's framing of this event reflects its inherent bias and its disregard for Tibetan voices. The coverage of the purported online backlash did not attempt to analyse the source or understand the cultural context and failed to include Tibetan perspectives from the diaspora.

HOW MEDIA PAINTS A CONTORTED PICTURE OF THE TIBETANS

Even to this day when the online narrative surrounding the event has become somewhat sympathising towards His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans, for leading global media such as the BBC to publish a vaguely titled article on Tibet's precolonial time inferring "slavery" in Tibet — a popular propaganda narrative used by the Chinese government to justify its colonial occupation of Tibet, is irresponsible.

The same article questions the veracity of legitimate concerns raised by the

Tibetan leadership about the Chinese involvement in the disinformation campaign. The fact that the BBC published this story without mentioning another related incident that occurred the previous day is intriguing: a Tibetan teacher was detained in Tibet for vocalising his happiness at seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the said manipulated video on Chinese social media. This is significant because China typically bans anything related to His Holiness in Tibet.

In her proclaimed debut novel “We Measure the Earth with Our Bodies.” Tsering Yangzom Lama (2022) probes into the issue of epistemic violence when Dolma, one of the protagonists, confronts a professor of Tibetan studies over his subtle justification of Tibet’s occupation by alluding to the difficult life in precolonial Tibet:

If other countries could modernize on their own, isn’t that also our right?... I think you underestimate the agency of six million people... you are an expert speaking about a colonized country. Can’t you see how much power you have to shape the discourse? Much more than any Tibetan. To the academy, to the wider public outside my community, you are seen as the objective, enlightened arbiter of truth... you can draw a veil over the politics, call the occupation by another name or ignore it completely, studying only the pieces of us that risk nothing for you. But the occupation doesn’t begin and end on the edges of my country. It lives in the words you select when you write about us. (Lama 2022).

DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE DALAI LAMA DOES LITTLE TO MALIGN HIS IMAGE

Epistemic violence is defined as the one stemming from knowledge. This violence can be inflicted upon individuals or groups and is rooted in the pre-existing power dynamics and inequalities in society. In such cases, knowledge, or rather our interpretation of it, is said to become an enabler of domination by legitimising domineering practices.

Every day, Tibetans living in exile assume the responsibility of safeguarding our history and asserting our right to self-determination, even as we face personal challenges in rebuilding our lives. It is infuriating to learn about the epistemic injustice that Tibetans have suffered after losing our ancestral homeland to the colonisers.

From such abstruse forms of colonial enabling in Tibet to the self-censorship or marginalisation of Tibetan voices in media as made clear by recent events

surrounding the disinformation campaign against the Dalai Lama, the case of Tibet's colonisation has evolved from that of illegal occupation to one of the contentious "internal" politics of Beijing.

The silver lining of this unsuccessful disinformation against His Holiness the Dalai Lama was that the manipulated video was made available to be watched on Chinese social media in Tibet. Contrary to the expectations of the Chinese government, Tibetans were not deceived but overjoyed to see the video of their beloved guru freely after so long.

The vehement malignment of our most-revered spiritual leader has caused profound distress for Tibetans around the world but it is also this difficult time that has revealed the faith of the Tibetans, the Himalayan communities, Buddhist devotees, and Tibet supporters around the world. His Holiness Dalai Lama is a uniting force for the Tibetans galvanising those in the diaspora to overcome petty politics and regional factionalism.

Yet, among the ones who are still persistent with the disinformation campaign is the former editor of Global Times, Hu Xijin who has published his propaganda piece on the website raising questions about His Holiness the Dalai Lama's personal life. Recent social media posts by Chinese government affiliates like Hu Xijin and other propaganda actors also feature short clips of the Dalai Lama's interaction with British amputee, Tilly Lockett and Lady Gaga that had been edited to build upon the false narrative and misrepresent His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Ironically, it is propaganda actors such as Hu Xijin whose own personal life is marred with controversy and serious allegations.

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WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT THE DALAI LAMA'S ACTIONS VERY CAREFULLY

Joshua Brallier Shelton

This article originally appeared in *Tricycle* dated 17th April 2023.

When I first heard about the Dalai Lama's recent encounter with a young boy, my heart dropped. At first, I couldn't bring myself to watch the video. I thought about what the boy must've experienced, and I knew this would be devastating for the already vulnerable Tibetan community.

I'm a doctoral candidate in Buddhist studies and masculinity studies at Northwestern University and a practicing Buddhist. I speak Tibetan and have lived, researched, and practiced in Dharamsala, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives. Throughout my life, I've deeply valued the Dalai Lama's impactful work for peace, nonviolence, religious tolerance, and environmental justice.

The idea that the Dalai Lama had harmed a child conflicted with everything I knew about him, but I also knew the incident required serious examination. Since the news broke, I've been reflecting on what happened, and I've decided that it's important to unpack its nuances for an Anglophone audience in a measured way.

Before doing so, I want to acknowledge that the Dalai Lama's actions in the video were downright weird and deeply uncomfortable to watch. He made a child uneasy, and the significant power differential between the two made this episode especially troubling. Simply hearing that "the Dalai Lama asked a boy to 'suck his tongue'" was enough to make my stomach turn.

However, after watching the video myself—the full 1:59 version, not the widely circulated edited one—I also believe that what transpired resists easy categorization and comparison to instances of sexual misconduct among Western religious leaders, which no doubt leaped to the minds of many readers.

In interpreting what happened, we need to take a slower approach that incorporates Tibetan voices, avoids reducing what happened to a familiar script without thinking holistically about who the Dalai Lama is in context, and elevates the stories of survivors of sexual misconduct in religious settings more broadly.

Western media regularly disregard Tibetans' own views and interpretations of their community. This story was no exception. Coverage followed a predictable format, with most stories outlining the incident in brief, salacious terms before elevating

decontextualized voices of moral outrage.

Some pieces did offer up paltry explanations of Tibetan cultural context, but these often had the effect of furthering the neo-Orientalist presumption that Tibetans are unthinking and uncritically religious while implying that the “secular” West is intellectually and morally superior.

This is obviously not the case. Sexual misconduct is a deeply human problem, tied to hegemonic masculinity and the perverse manipulation of asymmetric power imbalances. It happens everywhere. Recently, both Tibetan men who are survivors of sexual misconduct in monastic settings and Tibetan Buddhist women have been bravely telling their own survivor stories.

In the West, we’ve been inundated with scandal after scandal of priest and youth pastor sex abuse in Christian contexts, which created an opening for a too-easy comparison in this case. One of the many problems with such a straightforward comparison, however, is that this was a singular event in a public setting, which is atypical in cases of sexual predation on children.

Numerous studies have shown that child abuse overwhelmingly occurs over a longer period of time, often in the context of a relationship. Predators typically build trust and then remove children to private settings to commit abuse, which is not what happened in this case.

One of my Tibetan friends observed that shameful desires are rarely, if ever, enacted in a televised setting broadcast to countless viewers; we tend to hide our prurient desires behind closed doors. It’s worth noting that the Dalai Lama has evinced a playful personality consistently throughout his life. In the video, he is laughing and smiling, displaying no embarrassment or shame.

I do not mean to erase or dismiss what unfolded in the video, or to suggest that elderly people aren’t capable of abuse. But I do think that the context reveals clues as to the Dalai Lama’s intention: in my view, this was not a man acting out of a perverse desire, but a non-native English speaker who, in trying to be lighthearted, made a mistake in judgment that crossed vast cultural horizons.

That said, as generations of gender scholars have pointed out, the long history of senior men abusing their power necessarily raises suspicions about patterns of behavior. A single event can signal a more expansive environment of abuse behind closed doors, and I acknowledge this wholeheartedly. Vigilant attention is necessa-

-ry to protect children from abuse.

But to me, this video is not evidence of a child abuser driven by a craven desire. True to his longstanding playful character, he was being jocular, following a Tibetan cultural script between grandparents and grandchildren that begins with a hug, moves to a kiss, and ends with a tongue grab. He clearly knows he made a mistake in discernment and has issued an apology. We should not jump from the display of one weird, inappropriate, or objectionable event to the imputation of an entire problematic character.

I also want to highlight the importance of context in interpreting the Dalai Lama and his actions. Countless Tibetans and other Buddhists encounter him as a living Buddha, who has diligently strived over the course of many lifetimes to purge his mind of all sensuous desires ('dod chags) and attain boundless equanimity. For people who understand him this way, it is unthinkable to consider him as acting out of a craven desire.

When others see this video, however, they witness an elderly religious titan violating the boundaries of an innocent boy. I cannot appeal to Buddhist discourse or Tibetan history to speak to this audience, but I can point to two things. First, the boy's and his mother's comments afterward were joyful.

Second, I suggest looking at the strange timing of this disclosure—fully two months after the event, and not by the boy's family or friends. The Dalai Lama is a highly charged political figure, subject to decades of attack and slander by the Chinese government. It's worth querying who might have a stake in defaming him—and strategically editing the video.

As a scholar of masculinity and religion, I devote myself to uncovering the ways that male power becomes entangled in practitioners' sincere religious aspirations, cultivating environments in which men eroticize and abuse that power in perverse and nauseating ways.

Though the recent incident was unsettling, it does not rise to this level. Instead of leaping to the conclusion that the Dalai Lama is an abuser, we could be taking this opportunity to listen to the many, many voices of women coming forward to speak about the pervasive problem of sexual abuse by Vajrayana Buddhist teachers—including right here in the US—voices that are routinely dismissed.

I conclude this reflection with a call for patience. My plea is to look at the Dalai

Lama not in the narrow frame of one mistake, but in the wider frame of his countless contributions to the world, with an awareness of how context filters our understanding of events.

Joshua Brallier Shelton is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Religious Studies at Northwestern University. His dissertation research considers the gendered dimensions of tantric ritual, narrative, and ideology in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, with particular interest in the role of masculinity in tantric Buddhist subject formation.

THE DALAI LAMA YOU NEVER KNEW

Tashi Rabgey

This article originally appeared in [Medium](#) dated 05th April 2023.

Until recent weeks, the thought of having to defend the moral character of the Dalai Lama would have seemed absurd. Ever since he led the Tibetan people in his 20s through the shattering aftermath of China's invasion of Tibet, he has been one of the world's most enduring symbols of moral leadership. He has lived his entire life in the public eye as a hardworking global champion of peace and nonviolence. Even now in his twilight years, he continues to spread his message of compassion and kindness every passing day.

Yet recently, along with Tibetans around the world, I felt an urgent need to speak up on the Dalai Lama's behalf as the global media rushed to publish sensational headlines suggesting indecent behavior. With little heed to due diligence, media organizations pounced on an opportunity to cast an incriminating spotlight on an awkward public encounter with a young boy in India. The televised event took place on stage in Dharmasala on February 28th. A month and a half later, a selectively edited video surfaced online accompanied by salacious text that created the impression of sexual impropriety. Overnight, defamatory headlines appeared in respected publications world-wide and public slander exploded online with allegations of sexual abuse.

The viral video was in fact a short clip from a much longer interaction that was extraordinary for very different reasons. With his mother and grandfather seated on stage beside the Dalai Lama, the young boy first receives an affectionate bump on the forehead for formally presenting gifts on behalf of the honorary guests assembled. The Dalai Lama then looks up and reflects out loud that this exchange brings to mind his early childhood with his late brother Lobsang Samten — his one designated friend and playmate during an otherwise isolated childhood as a spiritual leader-in-training that began at the age of four. He proceeds to demonstrate how he and his brother once tussled with their heads.

Later in the program, the young boy approaches the microphone once more and requests a hug from the Dalai Lama. While the mother feigns exasperation and the audience is amused, the Dalai Lama acquiesces with a warm embrace. Then the 87-year-old awkwardly makes an attempt at a jocular display of affection. He first requests a peck on the lips and then — to the shock of the world — he blithely sticks out his tongue and says in his halting English, "suck my tongue."

Seen through the norms of our hypersexualized global culture, the video of the interaction is uncomfortable to watch. Even though the boy and his mother have both given media interviews expressing joy in having had this encounter with the Dalai Lama, the viral video depicts an imbalance in power that leads viewers to associations with well-known histories of child abuse in many religious contexts. There is also a slow-motion uncertainty as both the Dalai Lama and the boy seem not to know how to conclude this awkward performance of affection. Then by sticking out his tongue, the Dalai Lama reaches back to a gesture of play from his Tibetan traditional culture that can only be seen as bizarre for the rest of the world.

But for Tibetans from the Dalai Lama's generation — those like my parents who had spent their formative years in an isolated Tibet — the episode was utterly free of any suspicion of abuse. In a traditional culture that does not sexualize the tongue, they could not discern what the world found offensive in this video. It was bewildering for them to learn that this innocuous encounter had turned the world's opinion against the Dalai Lama. Many of the Tibetan elders who were asked to watch the video — from New York to Ladakh — did not hear a lewd request, but rather a kindhearted tease to a young boy. He was being asked to “chele sa” (eat my tongue) as was the way grandparents expressed to small children, “That's it — all I have left to give you is my tongue.”

Taken out of both cultural and situational context, this tragic collision of norms points to a vast cultural gap. What looks disturbing through one cultural lens is seen as entirely innocent through another. Together with the information economy of the digital media and the herd mentality that comes with our short modern attention span, this presented a perfect storm for discrediting the symbol of the Tibetan movement.

The point of the viral video clip, it goes without saying, was to damage the image of someone China's leaders have long publicly reviled and quietly feared. Since the Tibetan government was declared to continue in exile in India in 1959, an ongoing campaign has been conducted to malign the Dalai Lama as a respected public figure and the symbolic leader of Tibet.

This time, the attack on the Dalai Lama struck a chord. Within ten days of the public uproar, the BBC ran a breathless story on the Dalai Lama incident reigniting “Tibet's ‘slave’ controversy.” While the term ‘slave’ appears in the sensational headline, the author buries inside the article an oblique acknowledgement of common knowledge that slavery did not exist in Tibet. Rather, Tibet's society was comprised of people working on “estates owned by nobles, monasteries or the state” to whom

taxes were paid. This desultory revelation, along with historian Tsering Shakya's commentary on the absence of enslavement in Tibetan society, comes after a BBC shout-out to the Chinese government for recently creating 'Tibetan Serf Emancipation Day.' Chinese nationalist propaganda has now been dignified in mainstream media as "a long-running controversy over Tibetan history."

The startling uptick in anti-Tibet political sentiment converges with an underlying bias in the global public discourse that has contributed to the traction of the recent controversy surrounding the viral video. With the issue of Tibet stereotyped as a politically correct and hackneyed cause célèbre of global celebrities, and the Dalai Lama himself typecast as a globe-trotting religious figure carrying a message many see as naïve and underwhelming against the hard-nosed political challenge of the rising superpower of China, the real moral and political stakes of the question of Tibet have long been eviscerated by the chattering classes.

For Tibetans everywhere, this episode has felt like a collective near-death experience. Never before had it been so clear how little the Dalai Lama was understood. Over decades in exile as the world's most famous refugee, he has often been depicted as a caricature: so much was projected onto him and so often his name was invoked and used for the interests of others — vast and small, institutional and geopolitical. And at the end of his astonishing life, the world seemed ready to abandon him without a second glance.

For Tibetans, the Dalai Lama was never the two-dimensional figure who appeared on magazine covers or who smiled back from billboards. We all grew accustomed to his buoyant manner of speech as he spoke to thousands in packed arenas in his lurching, disconnected English sentences, often punctuated by his laughter at his own linguistic limitations.

But in the world of his native Tibetan language, the Dalai Lama appeared as an entirely different person. In Tibet, he was legendary by his early 20s. No one could remember a rising intellectual star who shone so brightly and at the same time possessed the ineffable qualities to carry the weight of a nation on his shoulders. From my youth, I remember how he spoke with transcendent grace at lightning speed, in thrilling glass-cut paragraphs, with the kind of precise, incisive clarity that left no doubt that his was the sharpest mind in the room. Even today, when he speaks in Tibetan, the Dalai Lama's voice drops several registers and his personality transforms. His lighthearted demeanor is gone. In its place is a gravitas and unyielding focus that shows us that the suffering of others is fiercely present in his heart. All through his lifetime, he has commanded authority not only because

of his political and spiritual inheritance but also because of his ability to convince a tired and beleaguered people to join him on his personal moral journey.

It has been in the Tibetan language that the Dalai Lama has transmitted a set of instructions on finding a pathway through an indifferent world as a dispossessed people. Even under brutal and paralyzing oppression, he modeled a vision of forgiveness as a form of empowerment. It was a lesson that both defined the Tibetan movement and touched the struggles of dispossessed people in every forgotten corner of the world.

I have seen this in my fieldwork as a researcher of territorial autonomy and self-governance. I saw it in the eyes of the Kurdish community organizer I met in a tiny nonprofit office just over an hour away from Mosul, Iraq, during the height of the suicide bombings. He had been working in obscurity painstakingly translating the Dalai Lama's works into the Kurdish language. "This," he said, "is what our people need to know." He proudly showed me his manuscript.

I also saw it in the Karen spiritual leader I met deep inside the war-torn Karen state, in what had been the world's longest-running insurgency in modern times before a ceasefire was established in their armed conflict against the Myanmar government. After a day of sitting in meditation alongside a thousand meditators, he called me in so he could recount the importance of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan cause for his own reimagining the Karen fight for self-determination.

And I felt this in the intensity of the Sahrawi law student I met in the Moroccan-occupied territory of Western Sahara. He had been missing classes and was on track to drop out because he spent all of his time at bloody protests that went unnoticed by the world. As he pressed a book about the Sahrawi people into my hands, he said that knowing how the Dalai Lama had made the Tibetan struggle visible to the world gave him a reason to continue to fight for his people — through law instead of violence on the streets. He now felt less alone.

In other words, what the Dalai Lama passed on to Tibetans has spawned a movement of movements, teaching the dispossessed everywhere to see themselves not as victims, but as empowered by their own intrinsic seeds of potential in an interdependent reality that is in a constant state of motion and change. His model has shown a vision of how to inhabit this imperfect world, how to transcend the staggering injustices of global politics and the arbitrariness of history, and how to honor and remain committed to goals that cannot be completed in a lifetime.

Nowhere has this wisdom spread so far or flourished so deeply as in Tibet itself. In the three decades that I have been working inside Tibet, I have witnessed the bright faith of Tibetans grow only more self-assured and more determined. For every self-immolator who perishes calling for the long life of the Dalai Lama, there are countless other Tibetans who grow even more determined to choose a life-affirming path for remaking the Tibetan world.

They teach the Tibetan language at night when they are barred from teaching during the day. They travel as far as needed to provide decent healthcare to all remote Tibetan communities when the state apparatus has long called it quits. They convince their communities to join them in protecting the land and the wildlife even when it requires putting their lives on the line. Tibetans inside Tibet, in other words, are doing the hard work of preparing themselves to become the best stewards of their homeland when no one else seems to believe in their capacity to self-rule.

This Tibetan determination has been fueled by a resolute faith in the vision of the Dalai Lama. It was not surprising when Tibetans in Tibet reacted with joy when the decades-old ban on the Dalai Lama's image was suddenly lifted so that the viral video and the international condemnation could circulate in the Chinese cybersphere. Overnight, the viral video garnered over 180 million views inside the PRC. But for Tibetans in Tibet, the storm of global moral censure simply underlined how little the Dalai Lama was understood, even internationally.

For Tibetans in exile as well as the peoples across the Himalayas, this global controversy has brought them closer not only to the Dalai Lama but also to each other as a struggle. For the first time, mass rallies and demonstrations in support of the Dalai Lama have spontaneously broken out from Ladakh to Sikkim to the disputed territory of Arunachal Pradesh. The global condemnation may have caused a collective near-death experience for many Tibetans. But it also created a new sense of time and space across all Tibetan and Himalayan communities — inside and outside Tibet — that is giving rise to a regeneration of the Tibetan political movement.

The question that remains is what the symbol of the Dalai Lama and his ideas will mean for the rest of the world. One of the tragedies of his defamation is that it grows out of a caricature that was manufactured by those who never understood him or had any sense of the true measure of his life. Will the Dalai Lama be seen through their cynical eyes and be projected as a declining global celebrity open for ridicule as media clickbait? Or will the world find the decency to rise above its

worst impulses and honor a life that has been given entirely to the task of growing the best of ourselves as living beings on this planet?

After all, this global moral crisis in truth illuminates less about the character of the Dalai Lama than it does about ourselves and the kind of human community we are choosing to become.

Tashi Rabgey is a Research Professor of International Affairs at the Elliott School where she directs the Research Initiative on Multination States (RIMS) and the Tibet Governance Lab. Rabgey's primary research focuses on asymmetric governance, territoriality, and the problems of contemporary statehood in the People's Republic of China.

THE DALAI LAMA AND HIS JOKING TONGUE

Shelly Bhoil

This article originally appeared in *The Australia Today* dated 01st April 2023.

Involuntarily exiled from their homeland, living on borrowed land, interacting in borrowed tongues, Tibetans are a translated community who have incurred many losses.

Not only have they lost their de facto independent nation despite their legal right to self-determination but also several cultural practices once integral to their lives in Tibet but no longer doable in host countries.



Image: His Holiness the Dalai Lama taking part in a group photo with participants of the 25th Shoton Festival and Middle Way Approach Conference at the conclusion of their meeting in the courtyard of the Main Tibetan Temple in Dharamsala, HP, India on April 7, 2022. (Photo by Tenzin Choejor) / Source: Dalai Lama – Facebook

One such instance of loss and grave mistranslation, with epic proportions for the emotional well-being of both Tibetans and a little Indian boy, is a video clip of an innocent interaction between the boy and 87-year-old Dalai Lama, lifted out of context to frame him as a paedophile.

The tailored video crops out the boy's mother, who is qualified enough to protect her child, seated close to the Dalai Lama. The manipulated video also omits the Dalai Lama's struggle with comprehension of the English word 'hug' when the boy asks him for one; the Dalai Lama's long pause searching for the English equivalent of the Tibetan word 'eat' before he mistranslates it as 'suck'; and the boy's sticking out his tongue following which the Dalai Lama immediately pulls back his own tongue and gestures the boy to not take him seriously by playfully tapping on his shoulder because sucking the tongue was never the Dalai Lama's intention.

The footage sinisterly pulled out from a month-old telecast of a public event on the Dalai Lama's official social media itself, intentionally leaves out the entire context of the event and the boy's interview by expressing the interaction as an 'overall positive experience'.

The sinister intention behind truncating the video becomes more evident from the fact that it was first posted on a series of new (apparently fake) social media accounts: Robert Reed on Youtube Channel, Yin Sun@NiSiv4 on Twitter, and 'Deter Influencers from Child Abuse' (now unavailable) on Facebook.

As reported by Lobsang Yeshe, a former member of the Tibetan Parliament, Yin Sun revealed his dark purpose by boasting on his Twitter account "I ruined his reputation forever" and "I am the First one to have Exposed Dalai Lama as Pedophile in English" on the 9th and 13th April 2023 respectively.



In no time, news channels across the world replicated and amplified the footage without fact-checking, further maligning the Dalai Lama's reputation and inviting the masses' kneejerk reactions with clickbait headlines such as 'the Dalai Lama caught on video kissing boy'.

The public outcry and accusations on the Dalai Lama have made the Tibetan community, what Lhadon Tethong calls, 'heart sick', for the Dalai Lama is their fulcrum, a symbol of their identity given to them through history.

The news channels have also failed the little boy not only by using the video

without his consent but traumatizing his future memory with the imposition of their pornographic sensibility on what he would have cherished as a blissful interaction unless, of course, the boy remembers the Dalai Lama's words to him before their last embrace: "you should look [at] those human beings who create peace, happiness. [You] should not follow those human beings who always kill others."



Image: Protest by Tibetans (Source: Supplied)

Being a scholar in Tibet Studies from India, a victim of pedophilia about which I have spoken [here](#), a mother of a little boy whom I tell about good and bad touch and an immigrant in Brazil who has made embarrassing mistakes of announcing 'padrinho' (godfather) as 'padre' (father) and asking the waiter for 'pau' (penis) instead of 'pão' (bread), I can understand where the Dalai Lama controversy is coming from and where it is going, and I think it is my responsibility to stand up and give my two cents' worth.

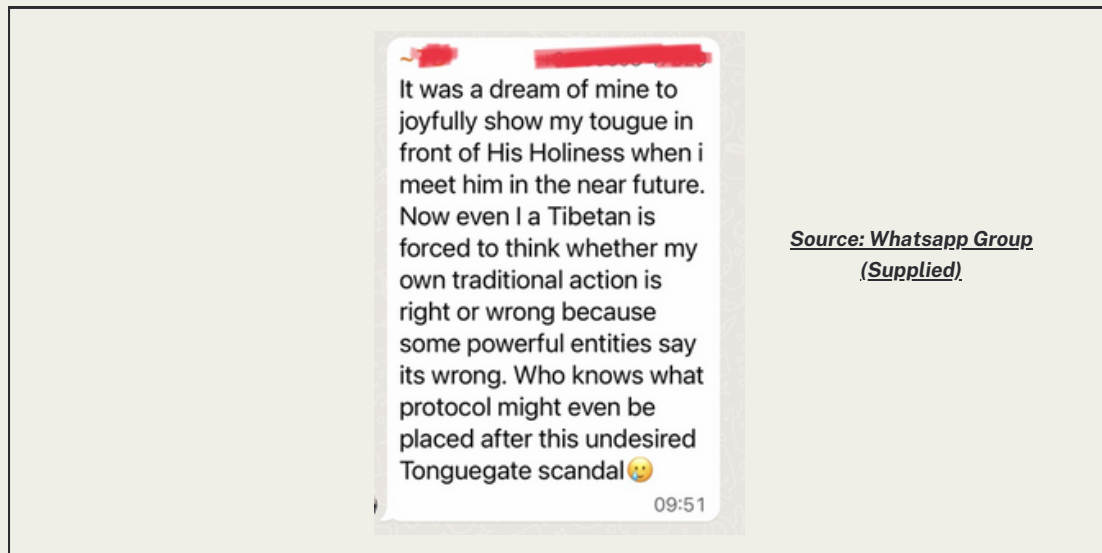
In the olden days, we had child marriages. Now we have child trafficking by people in powerful political and religious positions, which explains why the maliciously clipped viral video doesn't look innocent and triggers anxiety in many of us who are far removed from the context, have no knowledge of Tibetan culture and old traditions, and in whose worlds 'tongue' and 'suck' are overwhelmingly associated with vulgarity.

In the interest of children, while we must not normalize 'sucking the tongue', we must not also commit the crime of penalizing the innocent and normalizing contextual ignorance.

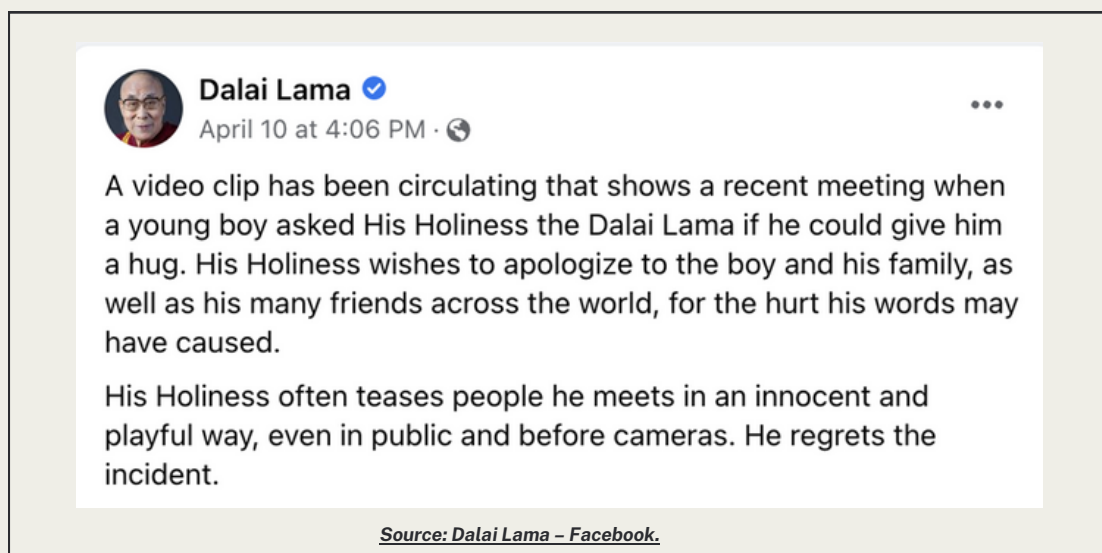
For those of us who are not yet cognizant of the Tibetan perspective, sticking out

#WeStandWithTheDalaiLama

the tongue, as explained by Jigme Ugen in this [video](#), is a Tibetan way of greeting, kissing on children's lips normal among Tibetans, and grandparents asking the kids to 'eat (suck) the tongue' in lieu of candy or after the candy is over a playful gesture.



The Dalai Lama, who had no familiarity with the Western pornographic vocabulary because of his strict monastic life since his childhood, issued an apology as soon as he was made aware of the sexual connotation of his words. The press has again misconstrued his apology for his admission of guilt. On the contrary, the Dalai Lama's apology is his confession about his ignorance of sexualized vocabulary in non-Tibetan cultures and his humility, respect, and compassion towards the world — something we must learn from.



The cultural gap between the Orient and Occident has historically acted as the ideological battleground dividing the world. However, the Tibetan cultural context behind the Dalai Lama's controversial social gesture has escaped Asians too, mostly young Asians.

The continued domination of Westernized cultural norms and vocabulary, fanned by social media, in our day-to-day lives, has eclipsed to us our indigenous cultural gestures where the tongue and suck have many meanings.

For example, in my Indian culture, we have a common gesture called 'jeebh chidhana/dikhana', i.e., teasing or annoying the other with your tongue out. In olden days, parents used pre-mastication methods for weaning babies before blenders came in. Noticeably, our elderly generation who like the Dalai Lama are not familiar with sexual vocabulary in English, have not reacted to the video as others have. Indeed, there is also at play in the public outcry the snobbery of the glamorous English language and the unpardonable meaning of 'suck'. The innocent-sounding phrase in Tibetan 'che le sa' thus became vulgar 'eat my tongue' when translated into English just like some quotidian swear words in English sound disproportionately rude in Panjabi.

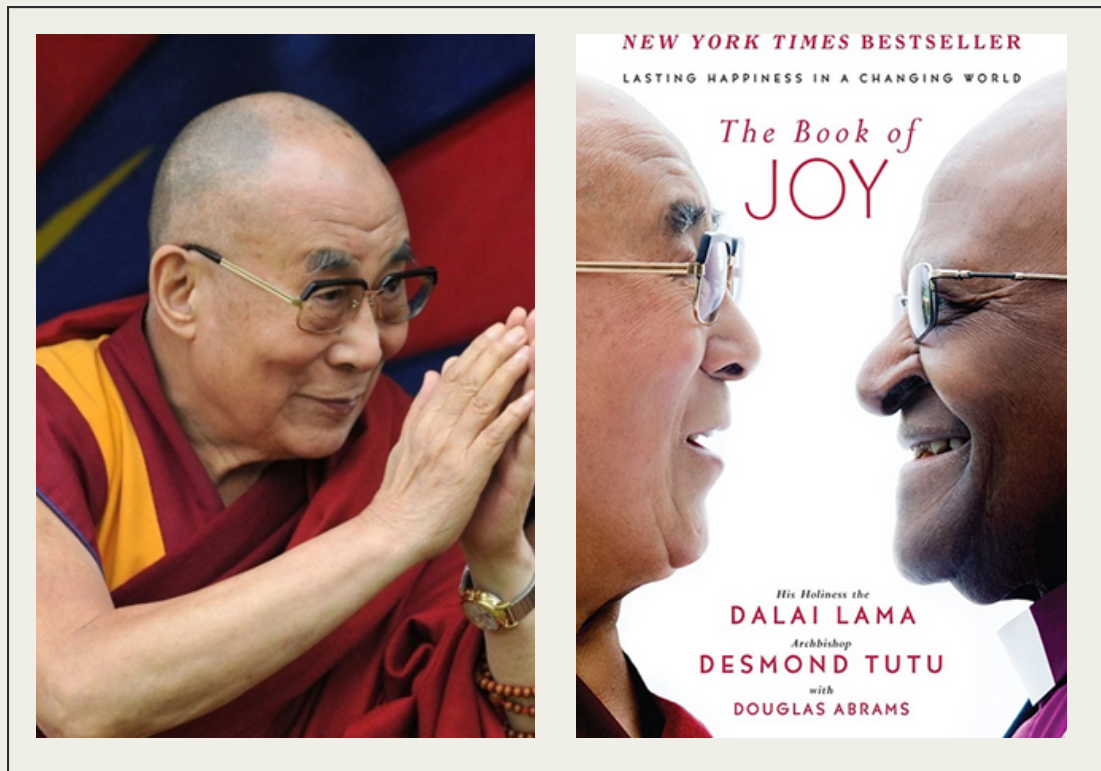
Our sensibilities are indeed fragile to quickly judge and condemn a suspicious act involving a child except that the interaction between the Dalai Lama and the boy was not an act of child abuse until the media made it look so.



The mischief-makers have now targeted a woman, floating a video of the Dalai Lama tickling Lady Gaga's leg for our uncritical consumption. How come they do not juxtapose it with images of the Dalai Lama tickling Desmond Tutu's chin or

pulling the beard of Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev!

Believe it or not, but if there is a laughing Buddha living among us today, spreading cheer and joy, he is the Dalai Lama – always playful with kids, women, men, and animals alike.



As a prescription for us, we who were sickened by the visual violence of the manipulated video clip and who want to protect our children, we could read ‘The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World’ by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu.

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OPINION: CAN WE ALLOW THE DALAI LAMA TO BE A GOOD ENOUGH REFUGEE?

Tenzin Dickie

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Thousands of Tibetans and supporters took part in a peaceful rally in front of France Television in Paris to protest the media coverage of the interaction between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and a young Indian boy from an event in February in Dharamsala. | Photo by Norbu Gyachung

The recent controversy surrounding His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been a sharp reminder to Tibetans of the precarity and powerlessness of the life of a refugee. It's not a lesson we needed. Ours is the inheritance of loss and dispossession. As a people, we know what it's like to lose our land, our home, and our inheritance, to be robbed of our language, our culture, and our future. Stripped thus of any protective cover, we are completely exposed to human nature, vulnerable to the kindnesses and cruelties of the people around us. In our host nations, this vulnerability puts intense pressure on us to be the perfect refugees. Tibetans have risen to this challenge: we have been the great refugee success story. The Dalai Lama has not only been one of the greatest moral leaders that the world has ever seen, he has made the world a genuinely better place with his teachings and his presence. In other words, he has been the perfect refugee. Until last week.

At a public event in February at Tsuglagkhang Temple in Dharamsala, a young Indian boy approached the Dalai Lama onstage. The boy asked for a hug. It seems to me that this was probably in the program and scripted. What happened next was not. The Dalai Lama did not know what the boy meant. English, which he started learning in his twenties, in exile in India, has been failing him in his older age, as our stranger languages do. His aides explained the boy's request to him but it wasn't enough. Then the Dalai Lama's secretary, his nephew Tenzin Taklha, tells him that

the boy is asking if he can give the Dalai Lama a “hug.” Tenzin Taklha says the word “hug” to His Holiness in English. Traditionally Tibetans didn’t use the hug as a loving social gesture; we touched our foreheads together in a forehead kiss or forehead bump.

The Dalai Lama gives his assent and says, “First here” pointing to his cheek. The boy gives him a kiss on his cheek. Then the Dalai Lama says, “Here” pointing to his lips. The Dalai Lama gives the boy a kiss (a peck) on his lips. People clap. The Dalai Lama laughs, and others laugh as well. The Dalai Lama then tells the boy, “Suck my tongue.” I know how it sounds but he clearly didn’t mean it literally; he’s being playful and familial. Both smiling, young boy and old monk, they touch foreheads. It is a genuine moment of connection, of love and compassion.

This innocent interaction has now been perverted beyond belief with the help of Chinese whispers, clickbait charlatans, and well-meaning furious first responders of the internet blinded by moral panic. This last group, the only one acting in good faith, has applied their hypersexualized lens to an innocent exchange, criminalizing a social gesture as sexual and manufacturing a crime where there was none. I’ll be honest. I watched the maliciously edited video first, and even though I understood in my bones that the Dalai Lama meant nothing sexual, that anything approaching violence and abuse would be anathema to this icon of peace, I felt uncomfortable. But later I watched the original longer clip and all I felt was grief. The original video has a quality of innocence that is entirely missing from the manipulated video that’s being shown, with the boy’s face blurred out in a performance of protection.

For that’s what this blurred-out video is doing, performing protection rather than enacting it. And it is this very performance that heightens the impression of wrongness, because of course the blurred face invites a tautology; this child’s face is blurred, so he must be a victim, and therefore there was a crime. It also obscures what actually happened; the Dalai Lama and the boy both stick out their tongues, but there is no tongue action, only a simple forehead touch. This manufacturing of crime, this false allegation—of child sexual abuse, just about the most horrifying accusation there is—has been an unforgivable smear and slander against the Dalai Lama; an unthinkable violence to the boy and his mother, who are being told that contrary to their experience, he was violated and abused; and a new trauma to the Tibetan people.

This was a public event for both Tibetans and Indians, and there were plenty of people on stage, including the boy’s mother and his grandfather. Each and every one of those people on stage and in the audience are being told that they did not

experience their reality in the right way. That the furious first responders of social media, who were not there, who saw only the out-of-context clips maliciously edited to manipulate and incite outrage, know what happened. But what they know is a gross misreading of what actually happened. We have created a sort of palimpsest of our own basest instincts, out of the very real acts of sexual violence that we have suffered and the sexual exposures that we have seen, and misconstrued and misread a completely social gesture as sexual. And the accusation has become a judgment.

Some have even wondered what might have gone on over the years behind closed doors. There's been nothing. For two and a half years in my twenties, I worked as special assistant to the Dalai Lama's representative to the Americas at the Office of Tibet, US. I worked all US visits during that time and was part of his staff entourage on the East Coast. It's one of the great blessings of my life. Once I traveled with him cross-country for almost a month and I got to know his other staff very well. They had worked for the Dalai Lama for years, in some cases twenty or forty years. They knew him intimately, behind closed doors, away from the cameras, and they loved and revered him. No one, unless they are profoundly pure, can inspire and sustain that kind of devotion for decades. And for all that the Dalai Lama has been scrutinized for by the international press since the '70s, for Tibetans, the Dalai Lama has been the focal point of our worship, and our watch, for over eighty years.

He has also been the focal point of an endless Chinese watch, of course. Remember that time it came out that the Dalai Lama's office was being hacked, almost certainly by the Chinese, for months and for years? A Private Office staff told me that they could literally see the files being copied and sent across the ether. That the Chinese were spying on the Dalai Lama in his office and his residence, and clearly had access to everything. If there were any skeletons in the Dalai Lama's closet, the Chinese government would have celebrated Halloween every day.

In fact, they have been sharing this maliciously edited video all over Tibet. But in an unexpected turn, Tibetans on the plateau are rejoicing over this video, because they are finally able to see their spiritual leader whose image has been banned for the last half-century. This underscores how little the Chinese government knows Tibetans, and also the fact that many cultures do not share the same sexual vocabulary. When I was growing up in Dharamsala, young men and young women held hands not with each other but with their friends. There was nothing sexual or romantic about it. And any sort of sexual or romantic kiss in public was verboten in the traditional Tibetan culture — it was simply unthinkable. The problem with the

Dalai Lama is that after a lifetime of adapting so much to exile, he has still not adapted himself completely to the tyranny of Western norms.

This was the Dalai Lama's mistake. But after all, the refugee can never be perfect. His very state is a state of being in the wrong. Throughout history, the refugee, the exile, has often been a scapegoat.

In particular, the burden of perfection is a problem that has bedeviled Tibet from the beginning. Our problem was not being an independent nation in the right way, or not being invaded in the right way, or not engaging in nonviolent protest in the right way. What I slowly learn is that these issues are only raised in cases where there's no will to act, only the faintest half-hearted impulse toward justice that's quickly squashed because it's more convenient.

The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott talked about the "good enough mother," the mother who fails her child in manageable ways so that the child can learn. The perfect mother, after all, is an impossible illusion. So, I ask, why can't the Dalai Lama be a good enough refugee? Why can't he fail us in manageable ways? After all, we fail him often enough, and this latest failure is one of epic proportions. Can we relieve the pressure on each other to be the perfect refugee, the perfect exile, the perfect immigrant, the perfect person? Can we just fail each other in manageable ways, and can we forgive each other for being human?

Tenzin Dickie is a writer, translator and editor.

THE FACTS BEHIND HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA AND THE VIRAL VIDEO

Tsewang Gyalpo Arya

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The video footage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama kissing a boy, which went viral in April, was greatly sensationalized by certain sections of the media. Unfortunately, many commented hastily, which further created a lot of misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

President (Sikyong) Penpa Tsering and the Tibetan Parliament-in-exile of the Central Tibetan Administration, and many authorized representatives from monastic, bureaucrat, and civil society have issued statements and clarifications on the incident. Some thirty-five imminent academic scholars of Tibetan studies have also issued a statement denouncing the aspersions cast on His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Starting from Ladakhis, Arunachalis, and Tibetans, people around the world protested the way some sections of the media misinterpreted and questioned His Holiness the Dalai Lama's integrity. As a Tibetan bureaucrat working closely with the Administration, let me further share this explanation along with links to the videos and the clarifications that came thereafter.

The short video, which went viral initially, was manipulated and concocted by a party with a vested interest to malign and defame His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The actual event happened in February, but the purported video came only in the first week of April. It spread widely in Tibet and China, so we know who is behind this despicable and nefarious act. Tibetans in Tibet and Chinese devotees in China, who were not allowed to keep Dalai Lama's photo and denied any opportunity to see and hear His Holiness all these years, were delighted and were happy to see him fine and healthy. Far from what the CCP agents hoped, it had the opposite effect.

Mr. Jigme Ugen, a Tibetan living in the U.S., explains how the incident happened with the full footage of the video and the hidden hand of China sensationalizing the Dalai Lama's innocent interaction with the child. It came out later as another Chinese conspiracy to vilify His Holiness the Dalai Lama and undermine the Tibetan struggle for freedom and justice in their homeland.

We could never doubt the sanctity and compassion of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is the icon of peace and non-violence. For Tibetans and Himalayan Buddhists around the world, he is the manifestation of Avaloketishvara, the Buddha of compassion and patron deity of Tibet. Hasty and salacious disrespectful comments

especially by media and film stars, are unfortunate and blasphemous.

For those who had seen only the cut-piece manipulated video and the vicious comments, they should watch the full footage of the video to see in what context His Holiness had kissed the boy. It is also good to hear what the boy and his mother had said just after the incident. We all must remember that it all happened before many people, before live video cameras, and before the parents of the boy. We must also understand His Holiness and His innocent jovial nature before making any unilateral judgment.

It is equally important to understand Tibetan culture before making any comments. Here is the explanation of what “eating tongue” means in Tibetan family culture. It is widely shared on social media.

“Eat my tongue, the Tibetan phrase “Che Le Sa”- a key point missing: In Tibetan culture, it is common to see the old grandparents not only give a pop kiss to the small children but also give a small candy or piece of food to children from their mouths – directly mouth to mouth. This may not be the norm in (your) other culture, but this is commonly done. After the elder gives a pop kiss and a candy, since there is nothing left in their mouth, nothing left to give, they will say the phrase “OK, now `eat my tongue` (not `suck, ` as His Holiness misspoke due to his less proficient English). The Tibetan phrase is `Che le sa`. They say “I’ve given you all my love and the candy so that’s it – all that’s left to do is eat my tongue.” And it is a playful thing that the children know. This is not really done in the Lhasa region (capital of Tibet) so much, but it is more common in the Amdo region (where HH is from). However, it is definitely a Tibetan custom.”

With the brutal invasion of Tibet in 1950, China did everything since then to legitimize its occupation of Tibet and Sinicize Tibet. But the Tibetans never gave up, Tibetans` spirit of freedom and their identity remained strong and unvanquished. The sole reason for this Tibetan unity and strength is the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Now with this fake and purported cut-piece video, the CCP regime is attacking the core of Tibetan faith and identity by trying to malign His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and jeopardize the Tibet movement.

Another reason for the CCP to come up with this despicable ploy is that on March 8 His Holiness recognized a boy as the 10th Jetsun Dhampa Huthukthuk, one of the highest Mongolian Buddhist lamas, at a religious function in Dharamshala, India. Around 600 Mongolians and many Tibetans attended the sacred function. Mongols and Tibetans have a deep historical, religious, and cultural relationship. In fact, the

9th Jetsun Dhampa Huthukthuk escaped China and sought refuge in India along with the Tibetans.

Despite Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution proclaiming religious and cultural rights to the minority nationals, the CCP regime had denied the Tibetans, Uyghur, Southern Mongolians, Falungong practitioners, and Christians the right to practice their faiths and religions. More than 6000 monasteries were destroyed in Tibet since the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Even now, the destruction of monasteries and religious monuments is going on in places like Larungar, Yachengar, and Drago in Tibet. Larungar and Yachengar were known as Buddhist teaching centers where both Tibetans and Chinese practiced together peacefully under Tibetan masters. The CCP leadership found this close association of Tibetans and Chinese as a threat to the regime and closed the centers and forcefully dispersed the practitioners to their respective places. We could well see who is the separatist.

The CCP leadership, who does not believe in religion, promulgated the Religious order no. 5 in 2007 to assert absolute authority to select and appoint reincarnation of Tibetan and Mongolian lamas. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognized a boy as the reincarnation of the 9th Jetsun Dhampa Huthukutu Rinpoche of Mongolia, China felt insulted and eclipsed. Its rage and fury burst out to attack and undermine the integrity of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The despotic communist regime could not bear to see the growing influence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They also could not tolerate the close and ancient religious and cultural ties between Mongols and Tibetans being revived and coming alive. The communist leadership sees these developments as a serious threat to the existence of the CCP regime. Here also we must note who is the separatist.

We all must take into account the above facts to see who is behind this viral video and what is their ultimate object. Tibetans, Mongols, Chinese, people along the Himalayan borders, and the international community revere and hold His Holiness in the highest esteem and this keeps them united and strong. The CCP's ultimate objective is to attack and destroy this common icon of faith and respect and create division among the followers. This is what the fake viral video is all about. Proper understanding of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings and his contribution toward world peace and his message of non-violence is very important. Hasty and impulsive comments will only land us playing into the enemy's hand and only benefit the one who wants to divide us. Let us all, therefore, not fall into the trap of the CCP's false and fake news.

#WeStandWithTheDalaiLama

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OPINION: BEYOND THE HEADLINES – MALICIOUS CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT DALAI LAMA

Dr. Dhardon Sharling

This article originally appeared in **NDTV** dated 28th April 2023.

Preface

As a communication scholar, my research focuses on analyzing the public discourse events of the Dalai Lama. To accomplish this, I employ digital ethnography and rhetorical analysis to study his rhetoric and the events in which he participates. Effective analysis of public events requires attention to language, gestures, and subtle cues, as well as an understanding of the contextual and cultural frameworks that shape them. To gain a comprehensive understanding of a recent event featuring the Dalai Lama, I watched the entire proceeding, recognising that nuanced interactions can be lost in brief or manipulated clips. In this article, I provide insights into the interaction between the Dalai Lama and a young boy that took place during a public event on February 28, exploring what happened, why it happened, the aftermath, and the lessons learned. By offering a deeper analysis, I aim to enhance the reader's comprehension of the intricate nature of human communication, particularly in the current era where digital mediation is omnipresent.

What Happened

On February 28 in Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama met with a group of over a hundred Indian high school students. The public event was organised by the M3M Foundation at the temple of the Dalai Lama, and media personnel were present. During the event, attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions. A young boy, whose family had organised the event, asked if he could hug the Dalai Lama, causing some amusement in the room. Initially, the Dalai Lama was unsure of the request, but his aides translated it for him. The boy's mother, who was one of the organisers, appeared taken aback and subtly indicated that the question was inappropriate. The boy hesitated briefly before asserting, "It's a question."

The Dalai Lama granted the boy permission to approach him on stage and indicated that he could give him a kiss on his right cheek. Following the kiss, the boy hugged the Dalai Lama, who jokingly pointed to his mouth, indicating that the boy could kiss him there, prompting more laughter and applause. The Dalai Lama then quipped, "And suck my tongue," but immediately retracted it with a humorous expression. He then patted the boy's left shoulder with his right hand, causing the

boy to chuckle. The Dalai Lama then advised the boy to follow good people who promote peace and happiness rather than those who cause harm. The boy nodded in agreement, and the Dalai Lama allowed him to hug him once more. As the boy embraced the Dalai Lama, he playfully tickled the boy's armpit with his right hand, eliciting laughter from the boy and the audience.

After the event, the boy, along with his family and other students, took a group photo with the Dalai Lama. In the picture, the boy sat in front of the Dalai Lama, beaming. Later, both the boy and his mother engaged with the media in the temple courtyard. The boy shared his experience of feeling positive energy, while his mother conveyed her gratitude for the opportunity to get blessings from the Dalai Lama.

The Misrepresentation

The exchange involving a kiss between the Dalai Lama and the young boy has received a lot of attention, but what stands out to me is the Dalai Lama's open embrace of the child. As someone who operates in multiple worlds, cultures, and intellectual spaces, the Dalai Lama's embrace can be seen as an act of endearment from a Tibetan perspective. However, from a Western perspective, it may be perceived as incongruent with notions of propriety, boundaries, and gender consciousness. Nevertheless, when viewed within the context of the six-minute interactional framework, it becomes clear that the Dalai Lama operates on a different level within his own world of meaning-making. Playfulness and humour have been integral to his character throughout his 87 years of living a public life.

Moreover, the Dalai Lama is a multifaceted personality who possesses a scientific mind but lives in a rarefied realm that is far removed from the cynicism of our daily lives.

The word "suck" can be misunderstood due to language and translation incompetency. The Dalai Lama has limited proficiency in English and primarily thinks in Tibetan. He meant that now that the boy had kissed his cheek and lips, they could embrace their tongues as a friendly gesture. The Dalai Lama does not live in a hyper-sexualised world and is unaware of the sexual connotation of the word "suck" and an embrace involving tongues, which can lead to oversights. It's worth noting that the Dalai Lama's knowledge about the social world is limited to his interactions with people and the texts he reads, most of which are spiritual and esoteric. He doesn't have the luxury of keeping up with the capitalist world that thrives on material and sensorial pleasures, and we cannot expect him to understa-

-nd the world of hashtags, bots, and click baits. What actually happened was that the Dalai Lama drew on a storehouse of cultural gestures to break the ice and facilitate his universalist message, consistent with his character as an elderly figure. This incident has been grossly and cynically misrepresented with a perverse intention to cause negative downstream effects.

Not A Sexual Abuse

On April 23, RAHI Foundation, an organisation based in New Delhi that has been supporting women and survivors of incest and child sexual abuse for over 25 years, released a statement in collaboration with a group of female survivors opposing any suggestion of sexual abuse by the Dalai Lama on a child. The statement emphasised the nature of child abuse and warned against making assumptions based on the interaction, stating: “At no instant did we believe it was sexually motivated. For some of us, it went out of line. Others felt it was so much in character with the way the Dalai Lama is – playful, loving, and caring.” Meanwhile, scholars of Tibetan studies expressed dismay over the media’s coverage of the interaction, particularly the claims of sexual misconduct. They warned that doing so would diminish the “voices of survivors who have courageously shared their stories and shined a light on systemic abuse, both in religious and many other contexts.”

The Aftermath

The original footage of the Dalai Lama’s speech to Indian students, which was 50 minutes long and included staff and attendees in graduation gowns, was broadcast on February 28 by the VOA Tibetan Service. However, the video did not attract any criticism until weeks later when a 50-second clip was sliced out and reposted on various social media platforms and fed to the media. This manipulated clip showed a close-up of the Dalai Lama and a child’s blurred face, creating the impression that the Dalai Lama forced the child to kiss him and suck his tongue. The clip was also enhanced with synthesised English voiceovers, which obscured the original conversation.

Tibetan researcher and former member of the Tibetan Parliament in exile, Lobsang Yeshe, traced the origin of the manipulated clip to three different accounts, including a Twitter account named ‘Yin Sun@NiSiv4,’ which uploaded the video on April 8 with a caption that read: “Pedo-Dalai Lama kissed an Indian boy at a Buddhist event and even tried to touch his tongue, the boy then resisted. What a disgusting scene”. The same account tweeted on April 10 that they had “ruined the

Dalai Lama's reputation forever".

The India-based Digital Forensics Research & Analysis Center (DFRAC) discovered that Chinese state actors, affiliates, agents, and paid bots worked together to manipulate a video clip, causing it to go viral and target both the Dalai Lama and the Global Buddhist Summit. In the days leading up to the summit, the amplifiers of the hashtag #DalaiLamaGoOut worked hard to make it trend in China and India, given that the latter was hosting the summit.

Lessons Learned

This incident offers valuable insights that are particularly relevant in today's fast-paced culture of rapid technological advancement and consumerism. By reflecting on the entire episode, we can glean important takeaways that could help us navigate the challenges and complexities of communication in a digitally-mediated world. With the increasing prevalence of technology in our lives, it's crucial that we remain mindful of the impact it has on how we communicate with one another. By being more aware of the potential pitfalls and opportunities of digital communication, we can better equip ourselves to use technology in a way that fosters positive and productive interactions. In today's era of instant information, it is crucial to exercise caution and discernment about the sources and accuracy of the information we consume and share. It is all too easy for false information to spread quickly and cause harm, especially when emotions are involved. As responsible information consumers, we must take the initiative to verify the credibility of our sources and question any content that appears dubious or too good (or bad) to be true. This can involve fact-checking with trustworthy news outlets, seeking out multiple sources, and critically evaluating the content and context of the information we come across. Furthermore, we must also be mindful of the potential for media manipulation by bad actors and actively work to combat it. In the case of the doctored video clip, it was intentionally created to fabricate a false narrative about the Dalai Lama and incite public outrage that could harm his image. Essentially, it is up to each one of us to be responsible and play our part in creating a safer and more trustworthy media landscape. By doing so, we can combat misinformation and work towards a more informed and just society.

This incident also highlights the importance of cultural relativism. The Dalai Lama's gesture was inspired by his belief in the "oneness of humanity" and his conviction that "true love is the absence of judgment". To fully understand this interaction, it is crucial to consider the complete meaning-making process involved, and analyse it in terms of interactional framing. We need to recognize that divergent interpreta-

-tions can arise not only from cultural misunderstandings but also from a lack of understanding of the cultural frameworks within which the interaction occurs. This incident underscores the need for sophisticated societies to appreciate nuanced, complex, and sometimes incongruous but well-intentioned gestures that may be personal and subjective or deeply cultural. By recognising and respecting cultural differences and nuances in communication, we can avoid misunderstandings and conflicts and foster greater understanding and empathy across cultural divides.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this entire incident serves as a powerful reminder of the Dalai Lama's global impact as an icon of peace and an advocate for the rights of oppressed people. He is an ardent champion of gender justice and female leadership and a tireless advocate for the welfare of children. When he received the prestigious Templeton Prize in 2012 from the John Templeton Foundation, he donated a significant portion of the prize money (\$1.5 million) to support the Save the Children Fund in India. This donation helped improve children's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities and provided crucial aid during natural disasters and other crises. It is indisputable that the Dalai Lama is among the most influential champions of children's well-being.

Despite the media storm and the subsequent backlash, the Dalai Lama has remained steadfast in his beliefs and practices. His conscience remains clear, and his actions unblemished. His participation in the recent Global Buddhist Summit in Delhi exemplifies his continued efforts to spread his message of peace, compassion, and wisdom. In his address, he emphasised the importance of practicing inner development, particularly focusing on wisdom and compassion, to increase one's courage. His teachings and actions have established him as a significant figure in the global spiritual community, inspiring countless people worldwide to lead more meaningful and fulfilling lives. The Dalai Lama's unwavering commitment to his principles and his extraordinary dedication to serving humanity remain an enduring testament to the power of faith, compassion, courage, and resilience. No matter how vile and organised a malicious smear campaign may be, it cannot diminish his influence or the impact of his life's work.

Dr. Dhardon Sharling is a second-generation Tibetan who was born in exile after her grandparents were forced to flee Tibet following its illegal occupation by China in 1959. She was the youngest member of the Tibetan Parliament in exile from 2011-2016, and served as Secretary of the Department of Information and International Relations of the Central Tibetan Administration from 2016-2019.

OPINION : AS HATE AND FEAR TAKE GRIP, WORLD NEEDS A MORAL IDOL LIKE THE DALAI LAMA

Pema Dhondup Gakyil

This article originally appeared in [News 18](#) dated 28th April 2023.

Haters of the Dalai Lama, judging him with a picture or a small clip they saw, must understand that they are not hurting an old spiritual man but the very manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva who represents compassion. In other words, for us Tibetans, he is our god. Now, imagine any other religious figure of any faith or their messiah being trashed like that for nothing.

There are also those that call themselves atheists and see an old lustful man in that video or the picture. Ask yourself as an atheist, like we Buddhists do, because Buddhism is an atheistic religion that does not have a creator and is based on logic, reasoning and learning, which leads to acceptance and practice. Did you atheists try to find out the entire story behind the picture or the doctored video?

I've been waiting in India to begin a documentary series project: Search: Finding the Dalai Lama for nearly a month now. It is an attempt that started more than a decade ago. So, it's not just a passion project but an attempt to tell the world about the genesis of the Dalai Lama lineage. How? Why? When? All these questions about the Dalai Lama institution will be dramatized and answered, not to propagate but to let the world learn that the core purpose of the Dalai Lama lineage is to spread compassion and peace in the world. The current Dalai Lama is the 14th. Obviously, there were 13 before him.

“As long as space endures, as long as sentient beings remain, until then may I too remain and dispel the miseries of the world.”

Some days ago, an “almost sensational” news grabbed the world. What happened? That was the reaction I got when a friend frantically called and another passed me a clip of a video going viral. Some lowlifes had used publicly available footage of a Dalai Lama event and doctored it to narrate a story of child abuse!

Media, as usual, grabbed it and spread it further. People started churning out blogs for their subscribers. I had watched that event live and although I did feel many would misunderstand the gesture, I forgot about it because it was not a big deal for us Tibetans. I still kiss my grown-up daughter on her lips when I say goodbye.

I know the West would show disapproval but she is my only daughter and she is who

I care about the most, not anyone else.

My affection and care are pure. His Holiness's gesture to the boy was far more than that. Just the mere fact that the kid got close and hugged him is considered a blessing that none of us Tibetans would ever get, not only in this life but in many others. So, you see, those who spewed hate and continue to do so, have no idea how much they have hurt us. Yet, we remain non-violent. Well, that is what His Holiness has taught us. He says the enemy is your best teacher. They allow you to use your compassion. You can practice it, otherwise, even compassion remains a theory, he says.

A young boy in attendance, at a public event organised by his parents, who are seated next to the Dalai Lama, asks His Holiness for a hug. His Holiness calls him up. They hug. They bond. His Holiness then begins his playful self. After a kiss on the cheek, he says now you can kiss my lips. That barely happens and he continues the jest asking the kid to suck his tongue. My mother used to do that to us when we were kids. It means that she has given us everything and is left with nothing but her tongue to satisfy our hunger. Was my mother abusing us? It is foolish to even contemplate that. Perhaps, if she was alive and did that in public today to her grandkids, she would be called a child abuser and separated from her family. Ridiculous!

The incident happened a month ago. Suddenly, news reports and online trolls began to appear which had nothing but dark intentions to malign him. The President of the Central Tibetan Administration said at a press conference that they found the source to be people that are 'Pro-China' propagandists.

I believe him.

But the damage was done. Hate was so toxic that I was shocked like all Tibetans and literally couldn't work for a few days. A person working with me on the documentary, calling it a 'spiritual journey', throughout our development phase up to this moment, suddenly had an opinion too. He decided to pull out and said, "Pema, no one wants to be attached with the Dalai Lama anymore. These people are working in the media and have an image to protect!" I felt the world must be coming to an end. There's so much fear and hate here.

Avalokiteśvara and gods must be crazy, I said to myself, for them to manifest or send such precious souls on earth for us humans to hate and destroy over and over. They should leave us alone and watch from their abode in comfort. We will destroy

ourselves with our hateful skills. Perhaps then they could think of a different beginning.

My parents came into exile through Mustang, Nepal. So, I bought my mother's ashes there with the belief that she could feel she has reached home in some way. Every Tibetan lives with that hope. Someday, they will return home to Tibet with His Holiness. This hope keeps us believing in peace and non-violence. After two generations of living in exile, frustration and anger does build up, especially when helplessness is seen as a disability.

A child was born in 1391 to a nomadic family. The same night bandits looted them. The mother hid her newly born child under a rock to protect him. The next day, when she returned, a miracle was seen. A big raven was protecting the child from predators! This supernatural birth incident aside, the child showed extraordinary spiritual desire and became a scholar of repute eventually. His ordained name was Gedun Drubpa.

When the time for his passing came, his desire to continue serving all sentient beings emerged in the form of his prayer, "Like me, the countless living beings have been wandering in cyclic existence. Many times, they have been parents to me and shone radiant kindness upon me. How unworthy not to respond to their sorrow. For the sake of all living beings, I must strive in the practice of bringing enlightenment."

Two years after his passing, a child was born in a small village who remembered everything about Gedun Drubpa's life. This mystical relationship to the previous life compelled Gedun Drubpa's students to bring the child to the Tashi Lhunpo monastery, which was built by their master and tested him. The child recognised people and objects clearly from his previous life. This is the genesis of the lineage that eventually came to be known as the Dalai Lama lineage.

The fifth Dalai Lama, Lobsang Gyatso, became the spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet in 1642 with the support of his die-hard Mongolian followers. Actually, it is a perfect story of compassion in action with clear tangible results. Who doesn't know about Chengiz Khan, the great conqueror? But do you know that his grandson, Altan Khan, became a devotee of the third Dalai Lama and he actually gave the title

'Dalai Lama' to his master and converted his entire nation to Buddhism? Imagine the world's most powerful force at one time becoming peaceful and non-violent forever. Isn't that something everyone would want eventually for the entire world?

Tibet-India-China geopolitics will remain unresolved as long as Tibet is occupied. So, the Dalai Lama matters not only for the big world peace picture that Tibetans see but for India, it is national security.

The entire communist regime in China is struggling to defeat this simple monk. They've learned it is impossible to win morality with guns or wealth so they use propaganda. Their goal is to control the next Dalai Lama. After the present Dalai Lama passes, the Chinese Communist Party has declared that they will find and install the next.

An atheist government claiming to know about spiritual succession is a joke. Yet, we have seen governments bend backwards for economic and other reasons to accommodate China and the ridiculous demands they make. 'You can't meet the Dalai Lama. Don't grant him a visa. Don't release his film and whatnot.' Can you now see the big picture of why misleading propaganda is their new weapon?

I set out to make a film on such an institution and lineage not because I have the enormous resources required or I can do it alone, but because it should be made. The world should see how such a lineage has contributed to peace not only in Tibet, Mongolia and China but also around the world now. If there's one spiritual figure that can stand on its moral authority in the present day and time, it is the Dalai Lama. The world needs such a moral idol now and will need him even more in the coming time when hate and fear take a further grip on our lives.

His Holiness says all actions should be judged by a person's motivation. "If you are truthful and honest with yourself, then you will be a truly happy person." He laughs pulling the long beard of an Indian sadhu and hugs him at the end. That is what happened in that incident too. The Dalai Lama's motivation was pure. Check your motivation next time before judging and commenting on anything anywhere, even online. You will be a happy person.

Pema Dhondup is a second-generation Tibetan born and raised in India. He saw a development need in Tibetan media and, along with his wife Yangchen Dolkar, launched the first-ever video news magazine titled SARGYUR, The News, in 1994. Soon he mobilized Tibetan journalists and formed the Tibetan Journalist Association of which Pema was elected its first President. He is known for the movie 'The Man from Kathmandu' (2020).

STOP SENSATIONALIZING THE DALAI LAMA'S INNOCENT INTERACTIONS | A TIBETAN'S PERSPECTIVE.

This is the transcript of a Youtube video published by **Jigme Ugen** on his Youtube channel.

Part 1

It is absolutely baffling and heart-breaking to watch a manipulated viral video, edited and cleverly spliced without the beginning and end to negatively change the context of an innocent and playful interaction between His Holiness the Dalai Lama with a young Indian student. Now we do live in a new era of synthetic media, but if you're willing to open your mind and make decisions without assumptions and even Fact Check the quality of the tailored information that you have received, then I encourage you to watch this video till the end, where I will pull the full, unedited interaction between His Holiness and the young Indian student for the context to the video online. The woman sitting on the stage there is the boy's mother. Here's the boy breaking a coconut as an auspicious tradition, as His Holiness was returning back to his residence. You probably did not see any of these. You were not meant to see any of these. So please remember them as you watch the unedited video later.

Tashi Delek, My name is Jigme and I'm a Tibetan. What makes the world beautiful is how we are able to share our differences in cultural practices, beliefs and traditions. We have learned to grow in that global diversity and inclusion while trying to understand and acknowledge the various perspectives and approaches to cultural patterns for religions, and social classes while learning to respect and appreciate different cultural etiquettes, especially around kindness, curiosity and respect. Every day before I left my house, my now deceased father and I would touch our foreheads, kiss on our lips before waving goodbye. That tradition lasted for 31 years of my life. In our Tibetan culture, touching our foreheads and kissing signifies the recognition of our proximity and spirituality. My parents never said I love you, like many Tibetan parents, but they never needed to because our unique customs, beliefs and our ancient traditional practices of mutual love will constant reminders and part of our daily lives, whether it be stretching out our arms and bowing to welcome strangers, or touching a friend's shoulder or holding their hands in public. As a sign of friendship or sticking out our tongues, as a sign of respect. Now these practices might seem backward and weird in today's world, but they are our social norms, our social behaviors. It is what defines us as Tibetans and our ways of life. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a Tibetan Buddhist monk, has been in the eyes of the world since birth for 87 years, living a pure monastic life of celibacy.

A spiritual guru of an entire religion, considered a living Buddha of compassion or Chenrezig, the patron saint of Tibet, he has attended Nirvana, a state of freedom from all sufferings that we as Buddhists believe can only be achieved by removing all personal wishes and overcoming negative emotions. They say that the deepest lines on His Holiness's face are his laugh lines. He brings joy, laughter and mutual enrichment to our world, selflessly and tirelessly, promoting religious harmony and peace forever. On the global stage, on any platform, he treats every religious or political leaders, celebrity or any member of the audience, young or old, with banter and playfulness. He's celebrated and loved for his teaching of compassion, forgiveness, contentment and tolerance. He's appreciated for introducing the world with the joys of living, the Tibetan way of life, our cultural practices, beliefs and traditions. It seems like many people in these turbulent times being forced in an environment where we are meeting people virtually or making E connections, have completely forgotten what human connection means in our Tibetan culture. Our elder, especially our grandparents who really didn't have much to give or offer, would affectionately make fun of a child when they ask for something. A child could ask them for a candy or some pocket change and the elder will lovingly barter for affection and then trap you with a joke or a Riddle, first, give me a kiss on my cheek, I need you to touch your forehead on my forehead, let's touch our noses, give me a kiss, I gave you everything, so the only thing left for me is for you to eat my tongue. So, the child probably never gets the candy or money, but gets a beautiful lesson on life, love and family. That is exactly what His Holiness tenderly did to the child, the boy who asked for a hug. He gave him as much love, affection and kindness as one would receive from a Tibetan family. The viral video doesn't show His Holiness, holding the child's hand on to his cheeks and praying with the child and giving him personal advices before tickling him with his larger-than-life laughter. Now that is exactly how our elders in our communities show affection with our children. It is what a 87 year old did to a child. This show of physical love and emotion is what defines us as Tibetans and are simple ways of life and love.

Now, His Holiness is not fluent in English. He's a self-taught English speaker. If there were words lost in translation when he said "suck my tongue" (Chele sa) eat my tongue. Absolutely yes it was. There were words lost in translation. I vividly remember watching this video. Oh, to the people who are saying that this video was hidden and it just came out, well it was a global live telecast from outside the Tsukla Khang, the main temple in Dharamsala where His Holiness was addressing over 120 Indian graduate students about valuing empathy, inclusion and trust. This happened on February 28th, 2023. That was a month ago, more than a month ago. So, the bigger question is why is an edited version of this video surfacing now?

Let's put a pin to that for now.

So, I vividly remember watching this video and like many Tibetans, I was a bit envious and happy for this student for receiving such reverence and love. In fact, when you watch the unedited video later, you will also notice a Tibetan gentleman taking a photo to capture this beautiful interaction. At moments like this, we Tibetans say 'Kyapsuche' is a small prayer of veneration to thank and cherish His Holiness as playful nature. And for the person receiving this personal good gesture and acts of kindness, of having good karma from their previous life.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not only the religious leader of the Tibetan people, but he's the manifestation of the Tibetan nation and his peaceful and honest struggle against a cruel, despotic and totalitarian colonial power.

Now why was a live telecast of an event that happened more than a month ago, was tailored and viciously marketed a week ago? So, on March 23rd, 2023, his holiness the Dalai Lama named and formerly enthroned the 10th reincarnation of Kalkha Jetsun Dhampa Rinpoche as the spiritual leader of Mongolia, he was enthroned as one of the highest Buddhist leaders the head of the Gelukpa Buddhist School in the landlocked nation of Mongolia. The ceremony in Dharamsala was attended by over 600 Mongolians and over 5000 monks and nuns. This event immensely provoked the rage of the CCP which has been doing everything. The CCP has been doing everything to control and stop the spread of Buddhism.

This ceremony shook them to speculate that the now retired Dalai Lama still continue to remain as a political religious force to reckon across Buddhist nations including Tibet. The CCP dictator Xi was supposedly stumped since their worst nightmare had turned into a reality. CCP has been brutally obsessed with making sure that Buddhist leaders were elected through Communist Party regulations. And they are overly obsessed with the selection of the next Dalai Lama, the 15 Dalai Lama, to be selected and approved with the CCP's blessing. So literally, a week after this ceremony, the video clip surfaced. The timing was once again like clockwork to sway the public's opinion about Tibet and His Holiness. It was, of course, sensationalized into a clickbait story with leading titles and fake descriptions and an edited video.

They say that the most successful propaganda is the one which does not pose as such. It deeply saddens and breaks our hearts reading horrifying comments and appalling accusations against his holiness the Dalai Lama, orchestrated by a network of disinformation by various trolls, paid media and so-called influencer,

clearly led and paid by the CCP, who have successfully weaponized social media at an unprecedented global scale. I'm sure those same trolls will be commenting on this video as they should. That's what they are paid for, and I look forward to that. According to the research from Miburo, a firm that tracks foreign disinformation operations, at least 200 so-called influencers are operating in 38 different languages.

Connected to the CCP government and Oregon, its state media Freedom House, a nonprofit political advocacy group, found that Beijing's media influence efforts are heavily seen in 16 of the 30 countries across the globe. So please join us to combat this disinformation with your own researches kept with open minds and clear hearts. Before I show you the unedited clip as my final words, I would like to remind.

The CCP, their lap dogs, and their delusional sympathizers about what His Holiness the Dalai Lama means to us. Every Tibetan yield their sword would readily sacrifice themselves before forsaking him. Let me say that again. Every Tibetan yield their sword will readily sacrifice themselves before forsaking His Holiness the Dalai Lama. And to my fellow Tibetans, we may lose our patience with this sad circus.

And at times we want to shout explicit lines at them, but we must rise above it. We know they are wrong, they have been wrong, and they have continuously tried and failed to control or influence the narrative of our people and dictate our history. We may be standing alone in our expressions, but we stand with pride in our identity of peace, loving Tibetans under the wisdom and leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Remember, we stood alone when our country was ruthlessly invaded and we faced the genocide. We stood alone as millions of Tibetans were massacred and, it continues, we stood alone when our ancient monasteries and our cultures were destroyed, we stood alone.

Last 160 Tibetans burned their bodies calling for freedom. We continue to stand alone but united, and together we know we will stand a day longer than the CCP. Long live His Holiness the 14 Dalai Lama of Tibet. Long live His Holiness the 14 Dalai Lama of Tibet. Bodgyalo.

Part 2

Tashi Delek, my name is Jigme. This is a follow-up to my last video. Today I'm here to share new information, video footage, and updates surrounding the manipulated viral video of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I hope you were able to watch to the end so that this information will help you process to find your own truth. Video footage of a different interaction between His Holiness and the Indian student with another beautiful and humorous exchange between the two that we had not seen before. Interviews with the student and his mother immediately following the event, and then individuals and accounts responsible for manipulating the video and how they made it so viral. Community reactions and eventually a call to action. So away from the bots and trolls spewing hate and horrifying comments, there are people who are sincerely confused and alarmed, even concern for the welfare of the boy and his family. We see you and we hear you. Child Abuse and neglect a serious global problems Outrage over sexual abuse in religious institutes are not new as high-profile crimes occur against children on a daily basis. Child abuse should never be tolerated, but His Holiness is act of kindness, humor and grandfatherly affection towards the young student should not be compared to that.

For decades now, the Chinese government has launched one of the most sophisticated cyber warfare and digital espionage operations, targeting His Holiness, the Tibetan community and the Tibetan movement. With this manipulated video, they are actually more successful than their countless attempts in the past. Many people watching this video did not know that the boy's mother was literally an arm's length away. And watching the interaction between His Holiness and her son and that there were over 120 students and other dignitaries in his globally live telecasted event. When I was researching details, I found this next clip-on YouTube. I made calls to reliable sources in Dharamsala who were present that day to confirm and validate the following. So apparently the young Indian student had been selected to offer gifts to His Holiness during the welcome or the opening ceremony. He was already on the Roserum or the stage with his mother who was one of the organizers. You can you can actually see him touch His Holiness, his feet and age all Indian tradition to give respect to elders and seek their blessing. The boy hugs him they he offers the gifts; they touch forehead and there is an affectionate and hilarious interaction between the two. Now the viral video where the student says, can I hug you? Was actually much later at the event during the Q&A the question-and-answer session. So, the student offered His Holiness gifts during the welcome session and they hugged.

But then later on he wanted another hug from His Holiness the second time. Which

also explains why the mother was shocked and was shaking her head literally in disbelief and awe. So again, the clip that you are about to watch was from the earlier part of the day during the opening ceremony.

What an incredibly lucky and courageous boy. Our children, just like us, cannot even look at His Holiness, his face without crying or trembling with joy. Forget asking a hug. And for a second time. Here's the interview with the student immediately following the teaching. As we see his wholeness to hold you and hugged you. So, at that time "You can only feel the positive energy and I just can't express how good it feels. It was amazing meeting His Holiness and I think it's a really great experience meeting somebody with such high positive energy. It's a really nice feeling meeting him and you get a lot of that positive energy. It's not just like that, but once you get the positive energy, I think you're happier and it's a better thing and you smile a lot more. It was a really good experience over all." Kid said to interviewer. The student's mother was also interviewed for her online bio. She holds a grand Dr. of philosophy degree from Russia. A diplomatic member of CDI and studied entrepreneurship at Harvard. She has won many awards and recognitions across the world, and she also dedicates her time educating children. My understanding is that this family has sent a letter to his holiness apologizing for the distress cause. I hope we can respect the privacy of this family as they must be equally overwhelmed. "I'm Dr..... Trustee MCM Foundation. We have been working in Dharamshala on this skill centre which we started last year and since then we were looking at seeking blessings from His Holiness and you know today, we got this opportunity and specially when my family was there with me and the all the students who graduated from IM Power Academy of Skills were also present. We are totally blessed to have got these blessings from His Holiness. He came addressed us in person, taught about peace" taught about peace, that what the world needs and how everyone needs to feel together like brother and sister. And I absolutely cannot, you know, express how I feel getting blessed by him." Mother of the kid said to interviewer.

His Holiness has been living in exile as a refugee for 64 years, hoping to return home someday to Tibet.

He turns 88 years in three months. He can barely walk and is rapidly losing his hearing. Yet after spending his entire life promoting peace, harmony and love, he still continues to share his wisdom and build bridges across all nations and religions to strive for a better world on the concept of universal oneness and human happiness.

It is humanity's greatest fortune to be able to live alongside such a moral leader, and yet there are people who are trying to cancel him. We see them as shining a flashlight at the sun, but it is sad and heart-breaking watching people jump to conclusions after watching 20 seconds doctored video clip with absolutely no context.

A clip that's aggressively promoted by a totalitarian, fascist colonial government desperate to erase an entire population, tarnish the impeccable image of the world's most popular icon, and destroy his beloved country. Ever since he was discovered as the reincarnation at the age of 4, a heavy burden was entrusted on his tiny shoulders, the hope of an entire nation. The Dalai Lama is not just the leader for us Tibetans, but the symbol of Tibet manifested in one person. The manipulated video was first shared by a pro-China account named YinSun@nivsiv4, fake YouTube channel named Robert Reed, and a Change.org petition under a fake organization name. They even put a fake Joe Biden as the creator.

Please make sure to ask these platforms to ban these fake accounts. The video had over 7,000,000 views on April 8th. It is clear that bots were used to amplify this video and to create the appearance of popular support while abusing the algorithms. The accounts were created to discriminate Chinese propaganda and the edited video to look pervasive.

For 60 years, the CCP has banned any and all photos of the Dalai Lama. And the Tibetan flag inside occupied Tibet. It was punishable with up to 10 years in intense slave labour camps. Even trying to search his name online would get one arrested.

For the first time in history, CCP has allowed the Dalai Lama to trend and it has become one of the most searched topics on Weibo. China's biggest social media platform? Of course, it is controlled, and one negative report about around the viral video is allowed. This is how desperate and hard they're trying to tarnish and damage the reputation of His Holiness.

What's worrisome and frustrating is how leading media outlets across the world have been promoting this manipulated video by using clickbait titles and sensational languages to boost their own rating without any investigation, without confirming the sources, and without asking Tibetans. Absolutely unacceptable. I stand with Tibetans and supporters of truth across the world calling on all these journalists and media outlets to immediately remove the manipulated clip.

Stand with the truth and the right side of history. How can one sleep at night after

maligning a cherished leader that has changed the entire landscape of human consciousness with this universally accepted message of peace, love and compassion. If any of so-called journalists have even an ounce of conscience in them, they need to apologize to his holiness, but irony in this is that he has already forgiven them. I highly recommend all of you to listen to the statement from our current Sikyong the president of the Central Tibetan Administration, Mr. Pempa Tsering la and previous Sikyong Dr Lobsang Sangay la.

As I end this video, I want to invite you all to join us to fight child abuse and neglect. Currently about 1 million Tibetan some as young as four years old separated from their families and forcibly placed into Chinese state-run boarding schools, a re-education program to erase Tibetan culture, religion, language and identity to condemn his holiness the Dalai Lama.

Please sign the petition calling G7 leaders to demand China shut the schools down immediately.

May our truth prevail too. Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet, Bod Gyalo.

Part 3

The Chinese government's desperate attempt to malign and disparage the impeccable image and legacy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was a complete failure. Tashi Delek, my name is Jigme and this will be my third and closing video regarding the malicious viral clip with some takeaways when the 22nd clip of an interaction between His Holiness and an Indian boy appeared online almost 40 days after the actual event.

The global media blindly rushed to publish it with sensationalized and clickbait headlines with 0 efforts to confirm the source or investigate the details. Later, when the full version of the video was published, the same media outlets chose to remain silent. Never once did they mention that the boy's mother and grandfather was seated a seat next to His Holiness who was addressing hundreds of students, dignitaries and authorities at a globally live telecasted event.

They failed to mention that the Indian boy had two other interactions with His Holiness prior to him asking for that hug. The boy first broke a coconut, a symbolic Hindu tradition of offering to the gods, and during the welcome session, he touched the Dalai Lama's feet, yet another Hindu tradition to respect an elder because his family and the event's organizers were Hindus. Now, if you haven't seen the entire video, please press pause and please watch it before we continue.

The Dalai Lama is renowned for his mischievous and childish pranks, be it tugging a beard, rubbing bald heads or pulling noses.

Rahi Foundation, the leading organization in India since 1966 that supports survivors of incest and child abuse, wrote a strong statement that at no instant did they believe the interaction between His Holiness and the boy was sexually motivated. They explained the true nature of child abuse and highlighted the dangers of making such an assumption.

Child abuse should never be condoned, as many children suffer abuse at the hands of powerful people and religious institutes. But His Holiness the Dalai Lama's act of kindness, A cultural prank and grandfatherly affection should not be translated into something sinful and immoral as that.

Furthermore, the media completely erased the boy's own narrative of how positive he felt after the event.

It's a really nice feeling meeting him and you get a lot of that positive energy. And completely silenced the boy's mother, who shared her joys of feeling blessed. You know today we got this opportunity and especially when my family was there with me and all the students who graduated from high empower Academy of skills were also present. We're totally, totally blessed to have got this blessing from His Holiness.

She is a grand Dr. of philosophy and has a degree from Harvard and spends her time fighting for women and children's rights. Till date, three months after the actual event, not a single concern has been raised. No complaint or grievance has filed, not by the boy's family or by any of the 150 or so people in attendance because they did not witness any wrongdoing. Really, we are very blessed. Our kids are very blessed that we met him, in fact. The boy's family sent a letter to His Holiness reassuring their fate in him and apologizing for the distress Causeway. But the media and many people across the world simply decided to become the judge, the jury and the executioner after watching a 22 second clip, and then simply moved on to newer, new strengths and hashtags.

Who are we to guess like this mother and her family and dictate how they should respond and react? Well in validating their feelings? Where did we find the privilege to apply a hyposexual lens to an innocent act of kindness and grandfatherly affection into something sinful and immoral?

If only a moment was spent to analyse and research why and who would benefit from branding a global champion of peace and compassion with the worst possible label in human history? The Dalai Lama may belong to the world, but he is ours, and nobody understands him better than us Tibetans. He has no bank account, no private jet or cars.

He doesn't own fancy houses or property. With the help of India as the kind host, he was able to successfully build a strong, cohesive refugee community that was able to keep the spirit and hope of Tibet alive. To this day, he willingly renounced his political power, even forgive his biggest enemy, and seeks to compromise with them yet over the past 64 years the Chinese Communist Party sees him as the biggest threat and has willfully demonized and slandered him, probably because they see his truth and his existence as a bitter reminder to the world of their empire. Built on lies, betrayal and bloodshed. They have launched one of the most sophisticated cyber warfare, espionage, information theft, targeting His Holiness. So if, there was ever even the slightest signs of malfeasance involving His Holiness, The CCP would have made that public a long time ago. The edited video

#WeStandWithTheDalaiLama

was first posted on April 8th, and within hours it received over 7,000,000 views.

This was not a BTS, BLACKPINK or Taylor Swift post. It was from a brand-new fake account with visible ties to China. Clearly, bots were used to amplify this video and to create the appearance of popular support. What the world witnessed and unknowingly participated in was the CCP's cognitive warfare carefully designed to control our mental state and behaviours hence so many people willingly became mouthpieces of an oppressive propaganda against a peaceful leader of a tiny marginalized group of refugees. Now many people have since apologized and many have helped us use their own platforms spread the truth unlike the media outlets are yet to apologize or clarify their disinformation.

The CCP may have disruptive and destructive cyber capabilities, and they may have weaponized social media, but it proved ineffective when they foolishly launched it towards His Holiness.

In occupied Tibet, possessing the Dalai Lama's photo in any form, praying, singing or writing about him is punishable with up to 10 years of sleep Labor camps Last month, for the first time in history, the CCP allowed the Dalai Lama to trend online using the clip and other offensive photoshopped images with hopes that Tibetans there will denounce him. But it backfired. Instead, Tibetans celebrated the rare blessing to see the Dalai Lama's video and photos online without retaliation. The CCP immediately put their Iron Clan.

Meanwhile in the free world they did not foresee the unity of Tibetans across generations determined to change the ugly and false narrative of hate and lust into that of love and affection, unshaken and unwavering, they did not foresee the show magnitude of grassroots mobilization and peaceful protest by millions of people across the world, including the Himalayan, communities in India's disputed borders, defending the truth of power and questioning human morality and the media's integrity.

The CCP may have failed this time, but this wasn't their first attack and it will not be their last because of their interference with the selection of the next 15 Dalai Lama and any religious leader to be approved through the 80s Communist Party rules. They kidnapping of a six-year-old Panchen Lama, our second highest spiritual leader, making him the world's youngest political prisoner. Their draconian policies forcing 168 Tibetans to burn their bodies calling for freedom. They are turning Tibet into the least free country in the world. They're forceful collection of Tibetan DNA's as an additional form of control, and they're abducting millions of Tibetan children

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some as young as four years to re-education camps to brainwash and to erase their cultural language and identity. When they attacked His Holiness the Dalai Lama, they attacked our peaceful and honest struggle for freedom. They attacked our very existence as Tibetans.

China is not just destroying a country, but our entire civilization. So yes, we will carry our pain and our struggle to our healing spaces, and with each passing day, we will continue to grow stronger and more united with renewed purpose, faith and loyalty.

It's been 64 years and the world is yet to answer this one question. Can we count on you to stand and fight with us on the right side of history? Because no matter how much China attacks us, we will not stop resisting and fighting till we fulfill our promise to reunite His Holiness the Dalai Lama with our siblings inside Tibet.

Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet
Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet
Bhoe Gyalo.

Jigme Ugen became the first Tibetan refugee in the world elected as a union labor leader in 2007, the Executive Vice President of SEIU Healthcare Minnesota. SEIU represents over 2.5 million workers across North America. Jigme also serves on the boards for several racial/immigration/environmental justice organizations across the US. He was awarded the Art Takei Leadership award.

In 2013, Jigme co-founded the Tibetan National Congress, an independent Tibetan political party and currently serves as its President. As an activist for Tibet, he has organized several campaigns including the successful 2014 global campaign to boycott the '14th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates' in Cape Town and relocate to Rome, after His Holiness the Dalai Lama was denied visa.

His YouTube account is @RangzenPala.

DALAI LAMA VILIFIED BY VIRAL VIDEO

Dolma Tsering

This article originally appeared in *Taipei Times* dated 18th April 2023.

Sensationalism and disinformation are two sides of the same coin. Sensationalism in news refers to the presentation of news in a way that provokes an emotional response from the audience, thereby often encouraging biases and manipulating the story's truth. Disinformation is false information deliberately created to deceive people.

With the digital revolution becoming the heart of capitalization of viewership, the danger of disinformation without accountability and fact-checking becomes easier.

The recent disinformation campaign used against the 14th Dalai Lama is an example of the dangers of disinformation and sensationalism.

Between Tuesday last week and Saturday, news channels were rampantly broadcasting explosive news titles such as “Dalai Lama Kisses a Boy.”

The story dominated many major social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook.

On Feb. 28, the Dalai Lama addressed 120 recently graduated Indian college students and members of the M3M Foundation at Dharamsala, India. The public meeting was simultaneously broadcast live by several Tibetan media outlets.

During the question-and-answer session, a boy asked the Dalai Lama for a hug. The Dalai Lama did so, with interaction between the Dalai Lama and the boy lasting about a minute.

The Dalai Lama not only gave him a hug, but also tried to play with him by tickling him and touching his forehead, a tradition practiced by Tibetans as a gesture of greeting and best wishes.

At the end of their interaction, he said to the boy: “Now suck my tongue” in a playful manner.

Among Tibetans, this kind of gesture is often used to indicate that this is the end of an interaction — there is nothing more to say or do.

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The entire video in which the Dalai Lama covered important topics such as humanity, the climate crisis and peace of mind barely garnered 5,000 views.

A YouTube channel named OTV, which has 8.9 million subscribers (about half the population of New York), uploaded a video about the same event, attracting only about 3,800 views.

The seconds-long extract was circulated widely, with millions of views accumulated in four days. It was clearly spread to malign the public perception of the Dalai Lama.

The video taken from 17 minutes of original content was cropped from a minute-long segment of interaction between the boy and the Dalai Lama, and then further cut down to a few seconds of video, where the Dalai Lama asks the boy to “suck my tongue.”

The video was further edited with a caption that spells out these one-minute interactions, even blurring the boy’s face to give audiences the false impression that the Dalai Lama made the boy “suck his tongue.”

The boy and his mother, after the event, expressed their gratitude for the Dalai Lama’s blessing. Those who had watched the few seconds of tailored content were outraged. Hateful and xenophobic comments about the Dalai Lama spread like wildfire.

The sensitive nature of sexual harassment against minors, even with no intention of any sexual expression, becomes a perfect weapon for Dalai Lama critics to spread antagonism against him.

Those who reacted harshly, including major media houses such as CNN and the BBC, reacted only to the cropped version, failing to show the full context and thus falling prey to those who edited the video to spread negativity toward the Dalai Lama.

Even though a few media outlets, celebrities and social influencers apologized later for not fact-checking, their judgement resulted from misinformation has caused hatred and social chaos.

It is no secret that the Dalai Lama is often targeted by the Chinese government, which calls him a “splittist,” “a wolf in monk robes” and a “demon,” among other

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things.

The Dalai Lama became the most trending topic on Sina Weibo, China's version of Twitter. China has banned mention of him for decades.

The president of the Central Tibetan Administration, during a news conference on Friday, said that the cropped seconds-long video originated from someone sympathetic to Beijing.

Tibetan Buddhism expert Robert Thurman said that it was part of China's anti-Dalai Lama campaign as a response to the Dalai Lama recognizing a US-born Mongolian boy as the 10th Khalkha Jetsun Dhampa Rinpoche.

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SPEAKING FOR THE DALAI LAMA AND TIBET'S REPRESSED

Benedict Rogers

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A woman holds a sign reading 'We are with his holiness the 14th Dalai Lama' during a rally in support of Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama after a video triggered a backlash on social media in which he asks a boy to suck his tongue, in Paris, on April 22. (Photo: AFP)

A private audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not unlike a private audience with the Holy Father.

There is a similar mix of awe, protocol, formality and security as well as spirituality, informality, humanity and humility. There is a similar blend of being ushered in by time-conscious officials eager to protect their principal's time, followed by the timeless, other-worldly presence of the principal himself.

I have had the great privilege of meeting Pope Francis several times, in private audiences, and then, last month, meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Both men were remarkably similar: generous-spirited, humble and saying much with their eyes but little with their words.

My audience with the Dalai Lama happened to be on the 64th anniversary of his safe arrival in India following his escape from the invasion of Tibet by Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime and its so-called People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Meeting this 87-year-old Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader in his simple residence in McLeod Ganj, in the hills above Dharamshala in northern India will go down as

one of the greatest privileges of my life.

As I was ushered in, I did as I had been advised: I wore my face mask and presented him with a Tibetan prayer scarf. As soon as it was in his hands, it was suddenly upon my shoulders: an intimate gesture of spiritual solidarity.

"This is a prime illustration of cultural misunderstanding — and precisely why we should always take a step back"

I then presented him with my new book, *The China Nexus: Thirty Years In and Around the Chinese Communist Party's Tyranny*, for which I had interviewed His Holiness a year or so ago. As he received it, his eyes settled on the Tibetan flag on the front cover of the book and lit up. He then had no hesitation in posing for photographs holding the book in his hands.

Not long after my visit, a controversy broke out about His Holiness' encounter with an Indian boy. I don't intend to dwell on it, but because it has generated some attention it merits an explanation.

The encounter, for a time, provoked a spiral of commentary on social media. And to an untrained Western eye, with sensitivity to sexual abuse and sensuality, it is understandable that it caused concern. Yet this is a prime illustration of cultural misunderstanding — and precisely why we should always take a step back, take advice, ensure we understand before commenting.

One of my longest and wisest mentors in politics and advocacy has a phrase: "Let us have open eyes, open ears and an open mind, before having an open mouth." She is right, and never more so than in this instance.

First, the boy approached His Holiness and asked him for a hug.

Second, this was all in front of television cameras.

Third, this was all in front of his mother and other relatives.

In other words, nothing was done in secret.

Then let's look at the exchange itself. They hugged. Then His Holiness stuck out his tongue.

Undoubtedly to a Western eye, this looks rather odd. But do a little research into

Tibetan culture, and you will discover quickly that sticking out your tongue in Tibetan is akin to waving or shaking hands as a greeting in Western culture.

Then His Holiness said words which to a Western, over-sexualized, over-sensualized, over-sensitive culture are profoundly shocking: “Suck my tongue.”

Obviously, to a Western audience, those words are disgusting. But again, put them in context.

"The CCP clearly wanted to embarrass His Holiness at a time when he is particularly prominent"

I am told by Tibetan friends that this phrase — literally “eat my tongue” — means something totally different from how it sounds to a Western ear. It is a sign of generosity and compassion.

Elderly relatives, after they have given sweets to kids, add this phrase as a sign that they want to give the next generation everything. Of course, to a Western ear, it's repellent — but we should be slow to judge and quick to try to understand.

And most importantly, we should know that the CCP regime will be quick to make hay — as they have with this fiasco.

Friends have suggested to me that the CCP had the video footage of His Holiness with this Indian boy for some time and was sitting on it, waiting for the day when it would be opportune to release it.

It can be no coincidence that it was released just before His Holiness was due to attend the International Buddhist Summit in Delhi, and soon after His Holiness met the Mongolian boy named the third most important spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism, as well as me and the publisher of my book, Dean Baxendale of Optimum Publishing International.

The CCP clearly wanted to embarrass His Holiness at a time when he is particularly prominent. The video was played widely inside Tibet and China in an effort to discredit His Holiness.

However, the CCP's propaganda effort rather backfired. His Holiness not only attended the summit but addressed it on the last day, and Tibetans inside Tibet were simply delighted to see usually banned images of His Holiness freely.

For the truth is, while Beijing wants to perpetrate the narrative about the Dalai Lama sucking tongues, it's a smokescreen for the regime's atrocities across Tibet for over seven decades.

For 73 years Tibet has been Beijing's laboratory for practices of torture and surveillance and policies of cultural genocide and Sinicization, which it has then applied elsewhere.

The "Sikyong" or prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile, Penpa Tsering — who was in London last week — recently told the US Congress that Tibet is dying a "slow death" under Chinese occupation. If you want to understand the mentality of the Chinese regime, study Tibet.

Over the past year or so, reports have emerged of a new, deeply sinister assimilationist policy inflicted on Tibet — the separation of a million children from their families, without the free consent of their parents. Placed in colonial boarding schools, children aged between six and 18 are indoctrinated in Chinese language, prohibited from practicing Tibetan culture and subjected to a curriculum of political propaganda designed to make them identify as Chinese and as loyal to the CCP. This has impacted almost 80 percent of Tibet's young people today.

According to a Tibetan researcher I met in Dharamshala, this new policy is the third stage in China's Sinicization of Tibet.

"The CCP is a regime conditioned to commit atrocity crimes and it must be called to account"

The first stage involved the Chinese regime grooming Tibetans as their proxies after the invasion and occupation of Tibet, and the second was the establishment of boarding schools across mainland China in the 1980s to prepare Tibetan students for a career as the colonizers' quislings. Those classes involved Chinese language, ideology, and "patriotic education," training Tibetans to become Chinese and to implement the colonial rulers' policies in Tibet.

Today's boarding schools are an extension of this policy, and a model of Beijing's Sinicization campaign that is replicated, with variations, in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and beyond. Xi Jinping's goal is tianxia, "one world under Heaven" — a euphemism for CCP world dominance.

Confucius Institutes, Huawei, Hikvision, TikTok and China's other global institutions

and conglomerates, as well as Beijing's influence in multinational organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, are variations on the theme. The regime's United Front Work Department coordinates all these efforts, to infiltrate, intimidate and influence. The tentacles stretch worldwide, from Lhasa to London, from Kashgar to Kathmandu and from Beijing to Berlin.

So what do we do about it?

First, recover our priorities. What happens in Tibet happens elsewhere in all territories under the CCP's rule, in various ways and forms. The CCP is a regime conditioned to commit atrocity crimes and it must be called to account.

Second, don't be distracted. Of course, headlines about the Dalai Lama asking a young boy to "suck my tongue" are disgusting, disconcerting and destabilizing. But take time to understand the full context and picture — and don't allow the CCP's propaganda machine to succeed.

And third, let's promote accountability. China's invasion of Tibet was illegal, its occupation is unjustified and its atrocity crimes are criminal. Beijing must be held to account. If there is ever to be any compromise between Beijing and Tibet, Xi Jinping must meet His Holiness, the Panchen Lama must be freed and the practice of Tibetan Buddhist culture and religion must be practiced without restriction.

Until those goals are met, I will go on speaking for Tibet, for the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama and everyone else who is repressed in Tibet, until the day comes when Tibetans are free to choose their destiny. Meeting His Holiness and the Sikyong and other Tibetans in Dharamsala inspired me to redouble my efforts.

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CAMPAIGN AGAINST DALAI LAMA HAS DEEPLY HURT TIBETANS' SENTIMENTS

Prof. Kaveri Gill

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A Tibetan girl holds a picture of their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, as they wait for his arrival outside an airport in New Delhi | Reuters

More than a month after the actual event, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has suddenly been taken to task in India and across the world over his supposed questionable public interaction with a child, accompanied by his mother and a large group of students from Delhi. The judgment was made purely on the basis of a calculated short clip of the long meeting, mysteriously circulated on Twitter just weeks after the Tenth Jetsun Khalkha Dhampa Rinpoche and a vast entourage of Mongolian Tibetan Buddhists requested and received the transmission of a deity whom his predecessor was a greatly accomplished practitioner of. Whilst giving the teaching in the Main Temple in Dharamshala on March 8-9, the Dalai Lama specifically mentioned this, although the media coverage that followed this internal Buddhist matter focused only on how the Dalai Lama's recognition of the reincarnated boy affected Mongolian and Communist Party of China (CPC) relations.

Did social media stop to ask who stood to gain by such a blatant attempt to tarnish the unblemished record of the Dalai Lama, as a beacon of non-violent resistance against the most powerful aggressor in the world and every odd? No, because the urge to provide click-bait content and react to it dominates our lives, and this is before the coming takeover of open-source AI. A lifelong proponent of child and youth rights, both Tibetan and non-Tibetan, the Dalai Lama has been extended no

spirit of open-minded enquiry and benefit of doubt on the circus that is social media and the internet today, where trolls and bots have metaphorically hanged, drawn and quartered him on scant evidence and worse, little regard for it when presented *ad nauseum* by Tibetans in some detail via videos and articles.

Nowadays, decolonising and decentering knowledge systems are what takes up much discussion time in classrooms of universities and other fecund intellectual spaces across the globe. Yet, in this instant, what salacious meaning we impute to the body part that is a tongue – unlike a nose or a beard, also known to uniquely and playfully be a part of the Dalai Lama’s interactions – and how we perceive a phrase presented in self-taught broken English by an 87-year-old monastic, must conform to the hegemonic hypersexualised cultural and linguistic understanding of the dominant world. Hasty *a priori* judgements made on the basis of a slice of the actual interaction were not retrospectively reconsidered or apologised for, with scant regard for Tibetan customs and what Tenzin Pema explains as *oothuk* (a forehead to forehead greeting) or *po* (a kiss on the lips between elders and children) or what Tenzin Jigme painstakingly describes is the innocent meaning of *che le sa* (lost in translation as “eat my tongue”, a phrase most commonly used in Amdo, the province to which the Dalai Lama belongs).

Predictably, write ups in the mainstream media inevitably ended with how the Dalai Lama has stoked controversy before, by claiming if the next Dalai Lama were female, she’d have to be attractive, even though the BBC journalist’s intent and ethics with regard to the interview in question were highly suspect. It is as if the only prism through which people and actions are to be judged is a quick, one-size-fits-all MeToo lens. And this must uniformly apply even in countries as diverse as India, where child rights activists came on television to argue for suo moto action against the Dalai Lama, with the onus on him to prove a lack of sexual intent. But one also wonders where these protectors of child rights are when there is across the board silence on the atrocities committed against Tibetan children in Tibet, with one million of them forced into Chinese colonial boarding schools, or when Uighur women and children suffer grave abuses in reeducation camps. It is at such moments of selective and limited outrage that one begins to question the consistency, moral high ground and political expedience of liberals supposedly standing for universal progressive values.

It could be argued that there are enough instances of child abuse in religious institutions, east and west, and the interpretation of the Dalai Lama’s very public and innocent playful interaction was a grave casualty of that inherent mistrust. Herein lies the greatest tragedy, for the Dalai Lama’s first and most sustained

project has been the betterment of Tibetan children in exile, who are seen as the seeds of the future Tibet, and the holistic education of all children and youth, via the promotion of a universal ethics-based curriculum, based on two central tenets of our common humanity and profound interdependence. To sacrifice the Dalai Lama's impeccable credentials on every front over eight decades of a very public life, a Middle Way non-violent David to a brutal expansionist Goliath, on the altar of a false, fickle and morally decrepit social media, is the ultimate folly of an unhinged age.

The sentiments of Tibetans have deeply and rightly been hurt by the way this campaign against the Dalai Lama has been generated and whipped up by social media, including in India, a country Tibetans in exile have thus far loved as their second home. In the wake of this attack, perhaps many of the younger generation will question whether they are truly accepted and belong. Tibet's experience at the hands of China, and that of the Dalai Lama at the hands of the CPC, as the single symbolic and real force between the occupying power and the occupied, should serve as notice to all countries and peoples across the world who stand for the truth. We lose sight of this at our own peril.

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HOW TO JUDGE THE DALAI LAMA INCIDENT

Tenzin Dorjee

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A controversial video of the Dalai Lama kissing a small boy and asking him to suck his tongue touched off a media firestorm last month. Critics in the mainstream media and commentators on social media, jumping to the worst imaginable conclusion, condemned the incident as an act of child abuse. A few observers, including those familiar with the Dalai Lama's impeccable record, suggested waiting for context before rushing to judgment.

But in what contextual framing might such an incongruous act possibly be rendered comprehensible?



Photo credit: Tenzin Choejor, Dharamsala

As someone who grew up in two countries, three cultures, and four languages, I believe there were certain factors missing from the conversation that might have helped illuminate what happened and, more importantly, rule out what did not happen.

For those of us familiar with the Dalai Lama's penchant for impish humor, it was clear that this was a joke gone catastrophically wrong. Though he sits at the pinnacle of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama is famous for his cheeky jokes and childish pranks. Pulling a beard here, slapping a bald head there, he is always trying to squeeze a laugh out of an audience.

In the eighties and nineties, his joyful embrace of irreverent humor and innocent mischief — the willingness to disrupt norms of formality in order to establish a genuine connection with people — fueled some of his unique appeal to many in the West who were breaking away from the more restrictive strictures of their own traditions.

But times have changed, and so have the boundaries of acceptable humor — boundaries that are, by and large, set by the West and accepted by the rest. The Dalai Lama, who has lived in the seclusion of retirement since 2011 and missed the epoch-making cultural events of the last decade, still in some ways operates under the ground rules and normative frameworks of the last century.

The failure to adapt to changing global norms, though, only goes halfway in helping us understand the controversial incident. A kiss between a child and a non-family adult, even when innocent, would raise eyebrows in most places these days. As a world leader, it is only reasonable that people expect him to know better.

However, the Dalai Lama is 87 years old. While he is healthier than many of his peers, there is no denying that his is an age of vulnerability where the gradual decline of one's faculties is the norm rather than the exception. Not only is he hard of hearing, I have learned from reliable sources that his aversion to wearing a hearing aid compounds the problem. In meetings or at public events, he often mishears what a fellow panelist or an audience member is asking, and his assistants can be seen repeating the question to him.

Equally relevant is the sharp decline in his English language competence. When he is in English-speaking settings, he often seems disoriented, struggling to recall simple words that used to be at his fingertips just a few years ago.

In fact, when the boy in the video asked the Dalai Lama, "Can I give you a hug?" it was clear that the latter did not understand the English word "hug." He seemed confused even after his interpreters repeated the question in Tibetan. Given his deteriorating English and poor hearing, it is highly likely that the spiritual leader, who never says no to people, misheard or misunderstood the boy as asking for a kiss. Which would explain why he pointed at his cheek and said, "First here."

How accurate my reading of the situation is, only the Dalai Lama would know. But as an aging senior who has lived his entire life in the public eye without giving anyone a single reason to second-guess his moral conduct, doesn't he deserve some benefit of the doubt in this tragedy of errors?

As someone who grew up in one of the refugee schools run by the Dalai Lama's sisters, I have seen him in action up close and from afar. After a lifetime of studying his work and observing his interactions, in addition to having lived in a cultural milieu where the tongue is only ever associated with food and speech, it could not be more clear that there was no sexual or malign intent in his exchange.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the most celebrated figure is that of the Bodhisattva, defined as a selfless being who unfailingly gives himself to the service of others. The central virtue of the Bodhisattva is his boundless, almost reckless, generosity. Legend has it that the third century Indian Buddhist saint Aryadeva, while en route to a scheduled debate with a Hindu scholar, was waylaid by an old woman who asked him for an eye. Without a moment of hesitation, Aryadeva removed one of his own eyes and gave it away.

Among advanced practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, which follows the Mahayana tradition, this story is held up as a shining example of altruistic behavior to which one should aspire. The Dalai Lama is someone who upholds the Bodhisattva vow, under which he is forbidden to withhold anything he has the power to give when asked. This is a vow he renews daily during his morning meditation routine, as he recommits himself to the oath of indiscriminate generosity. If a Bodhisattva sincerely believed someone is asking them for a limb, let alone a kiss, they very well might try to oblige.

Even so, I understand why many critics and influencers were outraged by the scandalous clip — which first emerged, interestingly, on the Chinese internet. We live today in a world of impressions where digital screens have crowded out physical reality and social context, where intentions don't count, outcomes hardly matter, and optics is everything.

Furthermore, for a whole generation sensitized to the very real problem of sexual abuse in the Catholic church and other institutions, it is easy to misread a puzzling gesture of affection as a certain act of predation, not least because it is statistically safer to err on the side of caution. Our cognitive biases and cultural frames determine what we see. Like in a Rorschach test, people saw what they believed.

If those who rushed to condemn the Dalai Lama had watched ten minutes of the authentic footage rather than the ten-second spliced version, if they had listened to what the boy and his mother had to say in a post-event interview from the same day, if they had considered the possibility that the tongue might not be a sexualiz-

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-ed organ in some cultures outside the West, they might have understood what transpired in that event was the farthest thing from an act of abuse.

But alas this kind of sensitivity to context seems too much to ask of netizens in the decontextualized world of social media and clickbait journalism, where ten-second memes and outrage algorithms defeat truth and complexity on a daily basis.

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TIBET RIGHTS COLLECTIVE



is a Delhi-based group that aims to increase access to information about Tibet's politics, culture, traditions, and language. We focus on bringing Tibet and Tibet-related issues and events onto social media through audio-visual content.