

Target Audience: Christian US Americans (18 and over, Protestant or Catholic)

Most media outlets today are filled with news of the troubled US economy, our current Presidential election, and the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. So it is not surprising if Americans are not aware that there is another struggle taking place – a struggle that could have drastic implications for democracy and religious freedom the world over.

Ever since 1997, a group of Buddhists who practice devotion to the protector deity Dorje Shugden have been gradually ostracized in a surprising mix of religion and politics. A recent referendum in 2008 added fuel to the fire when the Dalai Lama, otherwise known as “a simple Buddhist monk” asked Shugden practitioners to leave Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Shugden practitioners have been further ridiculed and refused service in shops, chased out of temples and required to carry identification cards. The reasons given vary from non-verifiable historical accounts of esoteric Buddhist doctrine, consultations with oracles, and even the interpretation of dreams.

Buddhism operates on a different set of assumptions about the universe than most ancient religions. It does not acknowledge the existence of a supreme being as a given fact. Put simply, this world and the universe we live in are part of an endless cycle of existence that continues ad infinitum until we liberate ourselves. However, Tibetan Buddhism in particular allows for the possibility of deities that can impact our lives, helping us achieve

liberation. Some Tibetan Buddhists choose to offer prayers to Dorje Shugden, the Dharma Protector.

Americans are in a unique position to understand and appreciate this conflict. Even if they are not Buddhist, Americans should condemn the Dalai Lama's actions against Shugden practitioners. Freedom to worship as we choose is one of the founding principles of our democracy. Some argue that American values cannot be applied in all situations. But don't the basic values of human dignity and choice apply everywhere? Why should Shugden practitioners be denied services (including health care) simply because of their faith?

The Dalai Lama argues that Shugden practitioners are trying to create a secularization of Buddhism, making this a political issue. However, by banning the practice of Shugden worship, the Dalai Lama himself is making this a political issue because he believes Shugden threatens the consolidation of power he has enjoyed for so long. The Dalai Lama also claims that Shugden practitioners are threatening the unity of the Tibetan people and the struggle against China. Yet, how can a people remain united against the Chinese when their own leader is causing division amongst his people?

Americans should step up to the plate and become familiar with this issue because the last thing we need is another religiously-driven conflict in the world. The sooner we can get the Dalai Lama to back down from his oppression, the better. Visit the West Shugden Society website [www.westernshugdensociety.org](http://www.westernshugdensociety.org) and add your name to the petition to peacefully object to the Dalai Lama's actions.

**Persuasion Analysis #1**

**Topic: Pro Dorje Shugden**

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**Issue & Synopsis:**

The issue I am dealing with in my message is the Dalai Lama vs. Dorje Shugden controversy. Since 1996, the Dalai Lama has been opposed to the worship of Dorje Shugden, a protector deity in Tibetan Buddhism. A subset of Tibetan Buddhists feel strongly that it is their right to practice this worship and propitiation, and that the Dalai Lama is abusing his religious position for political means. The controversy actually dates back to the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617-1682), but protests in recent months by the Western Shugden Society, aided by multimedia attacks, have brought the issue in more focus on the world stage. The Western Shugden Society uses terms like “persecution” and “witch hunt” to describe the Dalai Lama’s “campaign of intimidation, humiliation, and ostracism” toward worshippers of Dorje Shugden.

**Central claim of the argument of this assignment:**

Religious freedom and choice are everyone’s right, therefore Americans should be supportive of Shugden practitioners to have the right to worship as they desire.

**Target Audience:**

Christian US Americans (18 and over, Protestant or Catholic) - hereafter referred to as “Americans” for brevity. In general, this group is not likely to have much knowledge or understanding of Buddhism, let alone the various forms of Buddhism and the variants developed in Tibet as the statistics below will demonstrate. This can be used to my advantage

because the depth and breadth of the Shugden controversy gets extremely bogged down in arcane terms and mystical concepts that most Americans may write off, or simply misunderstand. It is better to approach the topic from other angles that relate more to their experience as Christians and Americans

According to the 2001 ARIS study of 50,000 Americans, the number of people who identified as Christian was 76.5%. Other religious groups (including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others) totaled 3.7%. Non-religious individuals totaled 14.1% and 5.4% refused to answer. Of the 3.7% representing non-Christian religions, only 0.5% identified as Buddhist.<sup>1</sup>

These statistics support two points important to this persuasive message. First, that Americans are not likely to be Buddhist in the first place. Second, due to the small percentage of Buddhists in the US, Americans are not likely to even know a Buddhist personally (and therefore be influenced by their views). Thus, the number of Americans who have any direct stake in the happenings within the Buddhist religion is minimal.

The ARIS study did not distinguish between *types* of Buddhism. For some perspective, I consulted a 1995 study published by Encyclopedia Britannica, titled “Worldwide Adherents of All Religions by Six Continental Areas”. While their figures encompass the world *six years prior* to the ARIS study, the ratios demonstrated are applicable

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<sup>1</sup> *American Religious Identification Survey* (ARIS), by Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Retrieved 9/24/08 from [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research\\_briefs/aris.pdf](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris.pdf)

here. Of an estimated 323,894,000 Buddhists around the world, 56% identified as Mahayana, 38% as Theravada (Hinayana), and 6% as Tantrayana (Lamaism).<sup>2</sup>

It is reasonable to expect a similar ratio in American Buddhists. According to the ARIS study, 0.5% of Americans identify as Buddhists, yet only approx 6% of *that* small amount (0.003%) are Lamaists, the category that includes Tibetan Buddhists. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life study on Religious Affiliation from February 2008<sup>3</sup> shows a similar result. Of the 0.7% US Buddhist population noted in that study, less than 0.3% were Tibetan Buddhists.

Again, all this goes to support my case that a) Americans, in general, are not Buddhist; b) Americans are not exposed to Buddhist concepts, and c) if they are, Americans are probably not exposed to Tibetan Buddhism, except via media outlets.

### **Other demographics**

The Pew Forum study also noted that “immigrants are disproportionately represented” among Buddhists in the US. Likewise, “Buddhism in the US is primarily made up of native-born adherents, whites and converts. Only one-in-three Buddhists say they are converts to Buddhism.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Age**

Median age for US Americans in 2006 was 36.4. The total number of people 18 and older was 225,663,000, with approximately 109,777,000 males, and 115,885,000 females.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.zpub.com/un/pope/relig.html> Lamaism includes (Vajrayana/Tibetan/Tantric)

<sup>3</sup> Conducted May 8 and Aug 13, 2007 among a representative sample of more than 35,000 Americans.

<sup>4</sup> Accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

## Income

Mean income for US households in 2005 was \$73,304, with a wide distribution.

### Household Income (in thousands)<sup>5</sup>:

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Under \$10,000         | 4,055  |
| \$10,000 to \$14,999   | 2,890  |
| \$15,000 to \$19,999   | 3,709  |
| \$20,000 to \$24,999   | 4,056  |
| \$25,000 to \$29,999   | 4,113  |
| \$30,000 to \$34,999   | 4,183  |
| \$35,000 to \$39,999   | 3,813  |
| \$40,000 to \$44,999   | 3,844  |
| \$45,000 to \$49,999   | 3,644  |
| \$50,000 to \$59,999   | 6,693  |
| \$60,000 to \$74,999   | 9,061  |
| \$75,000 to \$84,999   | 4,861  |
| \$85,000 to \$99,999   | 5,610  |
| \$100,000 to \$149,999 | 10,327 |
| \$150,000 to \$199,999 | 3,457  |
| \$200,000 to \$249,999 | 1,355  |
| \$250,000 and above    | 1,747  |

### Family Size (in thousands)<sup>6</sup>

|                           |             |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Two persons               | 34,454      |
| Three persons             | 17,525      |
| Four persons              | 15,075      |
| Five persons              | 6,863       |
| Six persons               | 2,307       |
| Seven or more persons     | 1,179       |
| <b>Average per family</b> | <b>3.13</b> |

<sup>5</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance 2005, Current Population Report, P60-231; (released 29 August 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, May 2007. Table 68.

## Political Party

A recent Gallup poll (Sept 8 through 11, 2008) showed that 32% of Americans identify as Republican, 35% as Democrat, and 31% Independent.

## Influence on US Adult Political Thinking - (adapted from Pew Forum study on Religion)

|     |                     |
|-----|---------------------|
| 14% | Religious beliefs   |
| 13% | Education           |
| 34% | Personal experience |
| 19% | Media               |

The Pew study confirmed strong links between political views and religious affiliation in the US, despite the figures above, mostly in terms of how conservative or liberal respondents were. It also confirmed the link between intense religious affiliation and attitudes toward social and political view. The more religious tend to be more conservative, and more Republican.

## Race (in thousands)<sup>7</sup>

|                                          |             |
|------------------------------------------|-------------|
| White                                    | 239,746,254 |
| Black or African American                | 38,342,549  |
| American Indian and Alaska Native        | 2,902,851   |
| Asian                                    | 13,159,343  |
| Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander | 528,818     |

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<sup>7</sup> Source: US Census Bureau, Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin Status: 2000 to 2006

## Occupation

### Employment by industry and occupational group<sup>8</sup>

|                                                  |            |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting      | 385,730    |
| Mining                                           | 644,070    |
| Utilities                                        | 542,230    |
| Construction                                     | 7,671,680  |
| Manufacturing                                    | 13,960,700 |
| Wholesale trade                                  | 5,964,920  |
| Retail trade                                     | 15,642,700 |
| Transportation and warehousing                   | 5,306,240  |
| Information                                      | 3,019,040  |
| Finance and insurance                            | 5,990,930  |
| Real estate and rental and leasing               | 2,143,100  |
| Professional, scientific, and technical services | 7,519,060  |
| Management of companies and enterprises          | 1,915,250  |
| Admin/support, waste management and remediation  | 8,506,680  |
| Educational services                             | 12,455,550 |
| Health care and social assistance                | 16,006,410 |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation              | 1,923,380  |
| Accommodation and food services                  | 11,341,810 |
| Other services (except public administration)    | 3,881,410  |
| Federal, state, and local government             | 9,533,390  |
| Other services (except public administration)    | 3,881,410  |

## Educational Attainment

According to the US Census Bureau, in 2006, 85% of American males are likely to have a high school or higher education, though 29.2% of males had college or higher. 85.9%

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<sup>8</sup> US Dept of Labor 2007 Study of Occupational Employment <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.t02.htm>

of American females had high school or higher, and 26.9% were college graduates or higher.<sup>9</sup>

So, at best, less than 30% of my target audience would be exposed to the more challenging ideas that come when enrolled in higher education – ideas such as conflicts overseas and religious secularism. Interestingly, according to the Pew Forum study, “25% of Buddhists have obtained a post-graduate education, compared with only about one-in-ten of the adult population overall.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Religious Perceptions & Attitudes**

If attitudes are a function of belief, which in turn are a function of values, then this message must appeal to the values of the target audience. I will treat religious perceptions and attitudes in general terms first, then look at the more specific attributes of those perceptions that may impact the subject of the Dalai Lama and the Shugden controversy. The first question we must ask is: “What are Americans’ perceptions and attitudes toward religion?”

For this section, I must again turn to some illuminating quotes from the February 2008 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (emphasis mine).<sup>11</sup> According to the study, “most Americans have a non-dogmatic approach to faith.” “Most Americans agree with the statement that many religions – not just their own – can lead to eternal life.” “Most Americans also have a non-dogmatic approach when it comes to interpreting the tenets of

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<sup>9</sup> Table 218 Educational Attainment by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex: 1960 to 2006

<sup>10</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

<sup>11</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

their own religion. For instance, more than *two-thirds of adults* affiliated with a religious tradition agree that there is *more than one true way to interpret* the teachings of their faith, a pattern that occurs in nearly all traditions. The exceptions are Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, 54% and 77% of whom, respectively, say there is only one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion."

I found it significant that "... those who believe Scripture represents the word of God are roughly evenly divided between those who say it should be interpreted literally, word for word (33%), and those who say it should not be taken literally (27%). And more than a quarter of adults – *including two-thirds of Buddhists (67%)* and about half of Jews (53%) – say their faith's sacred texts are written by men and are not the word of God."

"The diversity in religious beliefs and practices in the U.S. in part reflects the great variety of religious groups that populate the American religious landscape. The survey finds, for example, that some religious groups – including Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and members of historically black and evangelical Protestant churches – tend to be more likely to report high levels of religious engagement on questions such as the importance of religion in their lives, certainty of belief in God and frequency of attendance at religious services. Other Christian groups – notably members of mainline Protestant churches and Catholics – are less likely to report such attitudes, beliefs and practices. And still other faiths – including Jews, *Buddhists*, Hindus and Muslims – *exhibit their own special mix of religious beliefs and practices.*"

Further, 90% of Buddhists agreed there was more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion. I hope to exploit some or all of these attitudes about choice, freedom, multiple interpretations, etc. All of these point to what we've come to know as a very dynamic characteristic of American belief.

### **Attitudes toward Buddhism, the Dalai Lama and Dorje Shugden specifically**

One critical point about Buddhism must be stressed before we address attitudes toward Buddhism. If there is one central point on which all forms of Buddhism agree, and which sets it apart from all other world religions, it is that *Buddhists do not believe in an omnipotent creator being*. Likewise, concepts such as “eternal life” and “salvation” have completely different meanings in Buddhism, and are not truly transferrable. In fact, as part of a discussion on Buddhism, they can never shake the Western denotative meaning. According to the Pew Forum study, “62% of Buddhists believe in nirvana, the ultimate state transcending pain and desire in which individual consciousness ends.”<sup>12</sup> Further, while some Buddhists believe in concepts such as heaven and hell (36% and 26% respectively), the concepts differ greatly from Christian ideas, and Protestant Christians tend to be more sure of the existence of these places (84% and 74% respectively).<sup>13</sup>

Because the Dorje Shugden controversy involves concepts such as spirits and, some would say, the supernatural, it is worth looking at perceptions of these things in the US. The

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<sup>12</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

<sup>13</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

Pew study found that “79% of all Americans agree that miracles still occur today as in ancient times”, but that the “intensity with which people hold these beliefs varies considerably”.<sup>14</sup> It also notes that “68% believe angels and demons are active in the world”. Though, for Buddhists, “56% **do not** believe that angels and demons are active in the world”.

The media often make outrageous claims calling the Dalai Lama a “god-king” when in fact he is neither a god, nor a king. Many people in the target group have a sense of the Dalai Lama as the leader of all branches of Buddhism. This is verifiably not true. As previously noted, Tibetan Buddhism is one of many branches, some of which have significant variations in practice. Zen Buddhists do not recognize the Dalai Lama as their leader any more than Protestants recognize the Pope as theirs. Still, this misunderstanding prevails.

Most westerners are exposed to too much of the “feel good” Buddhism of Deepak Chopra and other modern gurus to know anything about serious philosophical conflicts within the religion. Westerners may have a hard time believing that such a schism as the Shugden controversy is occurring in Buddhism today.

To most people in the target group, the Dalai Lama’s designation as a Nobel Peace Prize winner puts any attack on his character in doubt, building strong ethos for him and anyone within his control. As the leader of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama’s narrative as a young boy fleeing Chinese oppression creates substantial sympathy within the target group because they too have fought Communism and, more recently, terrorism. These

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<sup>14</sup> Pew Forum “Summary of Key Findings” accessed at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> 9/24/08

characteristics of strong ethos, and a hero narrative, also need to be addressed in the persuasive message.

As for attitudes toward Dorje Shugden, this was the most difficult thing to gauge without significant resources and surveys. I am counting on the target group's overall ignorance on this topic (lack of any map for this territory), and the aim of my message is mostly to *inoculate* them against competing claims from my own position. In a situation such as this, with such a complex, foreign, and subtle controversy, and given the shortness of the message I must construct, the best I can do is plant a seed that will perhaps germinate later as the audience comes across future media reports.

### **Audience response expected**

The intended *attitude changes* are sought via motive appeals to make the audience aware of Dorje Shugden practitioners and the discrimination they have faced. By being aware, the audience will have sympathy towards them. The audience will recognize the parallels in my analogy and feel sympathetic concerning past rifts in Christian history, suppression of under-represented groups and persecution throughout American history.

The intended *behavior change* is that the audience will think about this subject a bit more, and maybe even stand up for Dorje Shugden practitioners in some way. Since my message is brief and can not go into subtle detail about the controversy, I am reinforcing the behavior outlined in my demographic findings, namely that my target audience is not very

knowledgeable on this subject, and first impressions will count, but they will most likely respond favorably.

### **Applying the Toulmin model**

After my intro in paragraph one, my data and background are presented in paragraphs two and three. First there's background on the issue itself, then a bit more background on Buddhism (all of which is verifiable independently). The central claim, in paragraph four, is that religious freedom and choice are everyone's right. The warrant, though not explicitly stated, but hinted at, is that the plight of Dorje Shugden worshipers is similar to the challenges Americans have had with religious freedom. Rebuttals are addressed in paragraph five, and include the belief by some that American values shouldn't be applied everywhere; that Dorje Shugden represents a secularization of Tibetan Buddhism; and that this is a political issue conjured by the Shugden community. The final paragraph asks the audience to support the Shugden position. I purposely stayed away from using qualifiers in this message.

### **Approach to evidence**

The approach to evidence is mostly rational because I am asking the listener to consider specific examples of injustice (ostracism, ridicule, refused service). My appeal is likely to be processed through the central channel of the elaboration likelihood model because these rational appeals touch on tangible feelings or experiences the audience may have had themselves.

## Logos

In addition to the appeals to ethos and pathos already cited, I make two appeals to logos in my message. First, that religious freedom is a universal right, and second, regarding the contradiction of a united Tibetan people who are now being split by the Dalai Lama's policies.

## Intensify / Downplay

The main intensification technique used is association. I am trying to associate certain concepts such as religious freedom and democracy with the issue at hand – topics that Americans are passionate about. The main downplay technique used is omission. I am purposely omitting statistics about the relative smallness of the Shugden population, evidence that Shugden practitioners were responsible for murders of high-ranking lamas in Dharamsala, India in 1997, and several other subtleties that make this issue more thorny, even for experts in Buddhism. I am also omitting the fact that the Dalai Lama once practiced Dorje Shugden worship, but stopped in 1996. While Shugden supporters often use this as part of their argument against the Dalai Lama, I felt it would only confuse my central argument by including it in such a short message.

My approach here is *pragmatic*. I am far more likely to come across people who either do not care or are just undecided on this issue. It is hard to say I am going to establish “common ground” when the statistics show there are likely to be few Buddhists in the audience. I am trying to use a more concrete example of how religious doctrine can be

interpreted multiple ways, and have steered clear of many of the more nebulous sides of this issue (e.g. Whether or not Dorje Shugden is a worldly spirit or deity)

### **Process Premises**

It would be difficult to argue on the basis of “needs” in this persuasive message. So instead I have focused on emotions, attitudes, and consistency. I want to touch on the hot buttons of independence and freedom of choice that Americans typically have. While it is not easy, by triggering anger about the situation, I can chisel away at their perception of the Dalai Lama as a peaceful figure. This creates cognitive dissonance, and disrupts the consistency Americans are used to when it comes to the image the Dalai Lama projects (smiling, always humble, quiet, kind). I can also appeal to curiosity because, in general, Buddhism still represents something rather exotic to Americans.

### **Type of Organization, and language choices**

My persuasive message follows a basic AIDA format (attention, interest, desire, action). In the beginning I get the audience’s attention by comparing the Shugden issue with other more visible news topics, and include a moderate fear appeal regarding democracy and religious freedom.

I then develop the audience’s interest in the topic by giving them the background and making some statements that attack the ethos of the Dalai Lama. This leads to supporting points that bring the audience to a desire to learn more about the topic. To satisfy that

desire, I give some background on Buddhism (though not too much). This creates additional desire to want to help, so then I attempt to translate their interest into an action: visit the West Shugden web site and support the cause by signing the petition. I took the AIDA approach instead of the Motivation Sequence approach because there is a much less tangible “need” being satisfied in my message. That need may be characterized as a need for consistency, or just a need for religious freedom, but since most Americans are far removed from Buddhism, they have less stake in it, and therefore less need regarding Buddhism specifically.

My message has a grade of 14.32 on the SMOG scale (Simplified Measure Of Gobbledygook, developed by Harry McLaughlin). That places the message in the category of texts readable by people with *some* college. On the Lexile Framework for Reading, it scores a 1410L, which is consistent with a reader who has attended high school and perhaps has some college. These scores are likely skewed by terms like “Shugden” and “Buddhism” which automatically make the reading a bit more difficult.

I’ve made an attempt to bookend the message with topics that are related (conflicts in the world) to offset the possibility of primacy or recency effects. My goal was to make the message effective regardless of which part people remembered.

### **Cultural images and myths**

My approach is invoking the “presence of conspiracy myth” by calling attention to the political nature of this issue, and noting the dubious aspects of the Dalai Lama’s actions

(use of oracles, dreams). Likewise, this leads to Reich's cultural parable of "Rot at the top", where blame is laid on the Dalai Lama for creating this tension. Another myth invoked here, though only slightly, is the "eternal return" myth, in that Shugden practitioners want to return to a time before the persecution of the 1990s.

My approach relies on the American value system. I stress that Shugden practitioners are making an individual choice and should be allowed to do so, which likewise appeals to ethical equality. I am counting on inductive reasoning to take place: Shugden practitioners are being ridiculed, the Dalai Lama is the cause of the ridicule, and the Dalai Lama is wrong to do this because Shugden practitioners have the same universal rights as Americans (generalized conclusion). I am counting on the analogy of American struggles with religious oppression in our early history to create a bond in relation to current events. Another piece of cause/effect reasoning is being worked in: Tibetan unrest is a direct outcome of the Shugden religious conflict, which reminds people of what we've seen in the Middle East.

### **God/Devil Terms**

I make use of charged words like "drastic implications," "ostracized," and "oppression". I thought about including the commonly-cited reference regarding the Dalai Lama as a Nobel Peace Prize winner, but purposely left it out because that title automatically invites admiration and acts as a god term. Instead, I have focused on triggering action based on two particular devil terms "religiously driven conflict" (which conjures ideas about the Taliban and terrorists) and references to refusal of health care (another hot button for Americans today.)