



## **Dancing with the Censor: Dondrup Gyal on Buddhism**

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Dondrub Gyal [don sgrub rgyal 19 – 1985] is often described as “the father of modern Tibetan literature”. He was at the forefront of a movement to reclaim and reform Tibetan literature after the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. This reclamation was a delicate act; the ruling Chinese Communist Party was still very suspicious of Tibetan as the language of both “splittists” and “old brains” [glad ba snying pa], and this meant that all published writing in Tibetan was carefully monitored for subversive elements. Dondrub Gyal, like many artists working within this regime, used several techniques to subvert this monitoring of subversive elements: he punned, satirized and was sometimes so obvious with his criticism that he hid his meaning in plain sight.

Yet, despite this critique of the ruling regime Dondrub Gyal did not seek a return to the old Tibet either. Indeed he was very critical of the old regime, and of what he saw as “blind faith”. In works such as *Tulku, A Narrow Path* and his most famous poem *Waterfall of Youth*, he called for a re-assessment of Tibet’s Buddhist heritage, enraging many conservative critics - many of whom dismissed his work as anti-Buddhist - while at the same time amassing a new generation of fans and imitators who read his work as a call to reform. In this paper I will examine these three works attitude to Buddhism, asking whether Dondrub Gyal which parts of Dondrub Gyal’s work were an attempt to bypass the censor, which parts were a call for the reform of Tibetan Buddhism, and which parts, if any, are truly “anti-Buddhist.”