



# SACRED AUTHORITY AND STATE POWER: THE FUTURE OF THE DALAI LAMA INSTITUTION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

PART ONE:

THE DALAI LAMA  
AND CHINA'S REINCARNATION POLITICS



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# OVERVIEW

**The Dalai Lama's 90th birthday on 6 July 2025 marks a critical juncture in Tibetans' existential struggle to protect their national, religious and cultural identity. As Tibetans prepare to celebrate this milestone with a 'Year of Compassion', China is waging a systematic campaign to eliminate the spiritual leader's influence and control Buddhist institutions in Tibet and even beyond its borders.**

These efforts extend beyond Sino-Tibetan relations, representing a flashpoint at a time of broader geopolitical contests over international order. Multiple intersecting crises, including China's expanding techno-authoritarianism, an aggressive Russia, a new administration in the U.S. and unchecked corporate tech power, present unprecedented threats to freedom, justice and democratic norms.

The 14th Dalai Lama has safeguarded Tibet's national, cultural, and religious identity throughout his 65-year exile during the most difficult and dangerous period in Tibet's two-millennium history. He has transformed Tibetan Buddhist principles into both a secular and spiritual force, while

becoming the first Dalai Lama to transition from head of state to champion democratic governance in exile. Despite China's attempts to isolate Tibet, his influence continues to inspire new generations within Tibet who seek freedom and political change.

Traditional Tibetan governance uniquely interweaves religious and political authority, based on the belief that leaders are enlightened beings who choose reincarnation to serve humanity. The current Dalai Lama has established frameworks to ensure institutional continuity. But Tibetan exiles must now reimagine succession planning without access to their sacred landscape - the mountains that serve as pilgrimage sites and the oracle lakes where visions of future leaders were traditionally sought - against a backdrop of geopolitical competition, regional stability concerns and evolving power relations with China.

While unprecedented global attention focuses on the potential reincarnation of a 15th Dalai Lama, Tibetans face a Chinese leadership that simultaneously promotes "unyielding Marxist atheism" while planning to install its own chosen



successor. Beijing views the succession as a "protracted war," regarding control over Tibet's religious elite as crucial to maintaining its grip on this strategically vital region.

The implications extend beyond a single contested religious succession. The Dalai Lama's spiritual authority resonates throughout the Indian and Nepalese Himalaya, including Bhutan and Ladakh; across Mongolia and the Central Asian Russian Republics of Tuva, Buryatia and Kalmykia; across Asia, and in Europe and America.

China's multi-dimensional approach to controlling Tibet and the Dalai Lama's succession presents complex challenges, but is countered by the global influence of the Dalai Lama and civilisational power of Tibetan Buddhism together with the resilience of Tibetans in protecting their culture. This also lends the administration in exile an element of strategic leverage in efforts to engage China.

At the heart of Asia, Tibet has an often overlooked strategic significance. In addition to the challenges faced by the Tibetan side in preparing for an uncertain future in a rapidly changing geopolitical

landscape, the situation also demands new forms of multilateral engagement from neighbouring countries, Buddhist regions, and likeminded governments to counter China's aggressive counter-influence operations and extraterritorial strategies targeting the Dalai Lama, his supporters and Tibetan Buddhism. This report details these threats both within and beyond China's borders, drawing on regional stakeholders' expertise to recommend countermeasures.

What hangs in the balance extends far beyond Tibet's future—it tests the international community's resolve to safeguard pluralism against transnational authoritarian networks whose reach increasingly transcends borders through disinformation, economic coercion, and digital control mechanisms. At this pivotal moment of systemic global instability, the Dalai Lama institution and Tibetan Buddhism represent a vital and socially progressive force, offering practical guidance on compassionate education systems, ethical leadership, and sustainable resilience at a time when alternative frameworks are most needed to navigate a fractured global order.



# INTRODUCTION



Sikyong Penpa Tsering presents traditional offerings to the Dalai Lama during the Day of Miracles teaching at the Tibetan temple in Dharamsala, India on 14 March 2025.  
Image: Tenzin Choejor/OHHDL



# THE DALAI LAMA'S SUCCESSION: RELIGIOUS TRADITION MEETS GEOPOLITICS

The publication of the Dalai Lama's new book in March documenting seven decades of struggle with China for his land and people seemed to take China by surprise. The book had been kept under wraps until its publication on 11 March, and China's Foreign Ministry responded immediately, reiterating its position that the Dalai Lama is an "anti-China separatist" and that his reincarnation is a matter for the atheist Chinese Communist Party, not the Tibetans.<sup>1</sup>

In his book, 'Voice for the Voiceless', the Dalai Lama makes it clear that his successor will be born outside China, and that the campaign for the freedom of the Tibetan people will continue no matter what, even after his death. He notes that as early as the 1960s, he had issued a formal statement that the question of whether the Dalai Lama institution should continue or not is a matter for the Tibetan people to decide.<sup>2</sup>

The Dalai Lama acknowledges that given his age, it is understandable that many Tibetans are concerned about the future. In an authoritative statement in 2011, he said that when he is "about 90" he will consult the high lamas of all Tibetan traditions and the Tibetan public, and if there is a consensus that the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue, then formal responsibility for the recognition of the 15th Dalai Lama should rest with the Gaden Phodrang Trust (the Office of the Dalai Lama).

In the first week of July, just before his 90th birthday, leaders of Tibetan Buddhist schools in exile and other Tibetan lamas will convene in order to address those questions. The meeting is expected to issue a resolution in support of the continuation of the institution.

Tibetans consider the Dalai Lama to be a living Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara or Chenresig – someone who has consciously chosen to be reborn in order to help all sentient beings<sup>3</sup> – borne out by the Dalai Lama's achievements in this lifetime in Buddhist scholarship, secular education and science. While the Dalai Lama has spoken in the past of a possible end to the system of reincarnate lamas, he has not done so in the last few years. Instead, there has been an outpouring of reverence and love, with prayers for the Dalai Lama's long life and the wish for his 'return' expressed in 'tenshug' gatherings bringing together Tibetans and Buddhists from across the world.

Today, the Dalai Lama's spiritual authority spans the Indian and Nepalese Himalayas, including Nepal, Ladakh, Sikkim, and Bhutan; traditionally Buddhist countries including Vietnam, Japan and Myanmar; and the central Asian Russian republics of Tuva, Kalmykia and Buryatia. It encompasses India, home to the Dalai Lama and around 65,000 exile Tibetans, as well as Mongolia, the largest free country with a majority Tibetan Buddhist population in the world. Nobel

Peace Prize Laureate the Dalai Lama has taught metaphysics to crowds of tens of thousands in football stadiums in Europe and the U.S., met Presidents at the White House, Popes and Prime Ministers, and numbers many Chinese in China among his devotees.

Religious preparations for the future are being advanced in exile for the first time, separated from a Tibetan landscape where mountains are a site of pilgrimage and visions of future religious leaders are sought in 'oracle' lakes connected to important Buddhist spiritual protectors.

But Tibetans face formidable obstacles and pressures. Many Tibetans – including some Buddhist lamas - have urged the Gaden Phodrang to issue clear-cut plans for a succession process in advance, to enable time to prepare. Others are concerned that China will likely exploit an interregnum period, during which a child is selected and educated. They fear it could deepen divisions, weaken exile institutions and diminish Tibetan influence in the absence of a leader who has become a symbol of Tibet, embodying both Tibetan people's aspirations and an advanced spiritual civilisation.

In his book, the Dalai Lama appears to sound a cautionary note when he warns of mistakes made and political infighting among Tibetans during the crucial period between the death of his predecessor, the 13th Dalai Lama, and the birth of Communist China in 1949. "While the storm was gathering around Tibet, the ruling elite, including my two successive regents, were largely preoccupied with political infighting," the Dalai Lama writes, adding that important opportunities were lost in proving Tibet's independent status on a global stage. "So, by the time the People's

Liberation Army was at the door in 1950, Tibet was completely unprepared, and it was too late."<sup>4</sup>

Today, the geopolitical landscape Tibetans face as they negotiate a way forward is no less formidable. The challenges for Tibet are magnified in an environment of multiple interconnected existential threats from nuclear tension, climate catastrophe, great power conflicts and genocide. Governments have often failed to grasp Tibet's strategic significance. At the heart of Asia, it is a fulcrum for a complex network of political, religious, historic and cultural forces.

With the intention of ending international support for Tibet and preventing the emergence of a leader of similar stature, China has intensified a counter-influence operation against the Tibetan leader that has global implications. Seeking to project its power beyond PRC borders, Buddhism is used as a tool in Xi Jinping's main foreign policy vehicle, the Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at countering the influence of Dharamsala and India, where Buddhism originated. In exile in India, Tibetans are vulnerable to an unfolding relationship between Beijing and Delhi, facing each other across the world's highest and largest plateau now bristling with weaponry.

While the US adopted legislation in 2020 rejecting any foreign interference in the selection of the next Dalai Lama, China has signalled its intention to escalate its extraterritorial interventions over reincarnation by making it illegal for incarnate lamas to be born outside the PRC. This paves the way for heightened pressures on foreign governments to acknowledge PRC authority and not Dharamsala's, over the

future of the Dalai Lama institution. It also signals risks for Tibetans and Buddhists not just within PRC borders but internationally in the diaspora(s) and in countries particularly vulnerable to China's pressure as part of broader patterns of intensified transnational repression, both digital and physical.

In a particularly disturbing example of cross-border security cooperation, in March, a prominent Tibetan abbot died suddenly in Vietnam after being detained in a joint operation by Chinese and Vietnamese security agents.<sup>5</sup> Humkar Dorje, a 56-year old reincarnate lama and head of a monastery in Tibet, had been known for his dedication to Tibetan Buddhism, language and culture. Tibetan sources reported that he had resisted efforts to host China's official Panchen Lama at his monastery.

As China seeks to lead "great changes unseen in a century", Xi Jinping has developed elaborate plans to achieve global political, economic and energy dominance. To do so, China's control over Tibet is critical, and today's Chinese Communist Party leadership follows Mao's approach that the Dalai Lama and the religious elites are an essential 'bridge' to ensuring control over the population in an area of high political importance.

Tibetan exiles confront elaborate plans developed over several decades by the PRC to counter the Dalai Lama's influence, which is a matter of core concern to its national security. Policies targeting religion are backed up by both dystopian high-tech and grass roots methods to ensure compliance. AI-driven surveillance systems deployed in Tibet originate in PLA joint operations doctrine, in which cities and towns are treated 'like a battlefield' (in official

terminology). Since 2011, the posting of Party cadres in every village in rural areas of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) to monitor families and neighbourhoods may emerge from China's anxieties over maintaining control at the time of the Dalai Lama's demise.

Controlling any future Dalai Lama is central to the PRC's 'Sinicisation' policy that enforces a Chinese cultural nationalism in direct confrontation with Buddhist belief and practices. Prominent monk and scholar Go Sherab Gyatso, who is serving ten years in prison for his writing, described the process as a "cataclysm of forced cultural integration". Tibetans can be tortured, imprisoned or killed for expressions of loyalty to the Dalai Lama or keeping his image. A Tibetan in India described the experience of bearing witness to China's policies in Tibet from exile as akin to "a mother whose arms were amputated, watching my child being taken away, drowning in the river before my eyes."<sup>6</sup>

China's policies in Tibet emerge from the PRC's imperatives, notably, its control over the borders (border incursions have tripled since Xi came to power, and China has constructed settlements and military installations in Bhutan); expansion of mining based on the rich resources on the Tibetan plateau including more than 85% of the PRC's hard rock lithium deposits which are crucial to China's supremacy in EVs and renewables; and control over Tibet's water, the headwaters of Asia's major rivers, which are critical for addressing China's scarcity, and vital for billions of people downstream.

The global profile and popularity of the Dalai Lama presents a complex challenge to the PRC. Although the matter of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation was not discussed during



formal dialogue between Beijing and the Dalai Lama's envoys between 2002-2012, Party commentators now say that global communications work for the CCP on the matter of the succession will be "a protracted war". It is seen as a matter of core importance linked to China's claim of sovereignty over Tibet and territorial imperatives.

But China's success is not assured. Beijing has acknowledged some political vulnerabilities over its control of the plateau and fears future unrest, even despite decades of harsh policies. Despite strenuous efforts to replace loyalty to the Dalai Lama in Tibetan hearts and minds with allegiance to the Chinese Party-state and to obliterate Tibetans' memory of a



Despite the dangers and restrictions of practising their religion, in September 2023, tens of thousands of Tibetans gathered at a sacred mountain in the grasslands of Dzoeg in Tsoe City, Gannan, Gansu in the eastern Tibetan region of Amdo for a religious empowerment. The Kalachakra ceremony was conferred by the young Seventh Gungthang Rinpoche, who is the reincarnation of a well known Tibetan lama who endured years in prison during the Cultural Revolution and survived to lead a revitalisation of Buddhism across Tibet during the period of relative liberalisation that followed. The current incarnation, the Seventh, has devotees across Tibet and also in China. Photograph circulated on Tibetan social media.

separate independent history, Tibetans inside Tibet continue to protect and defend the core values of their culture and national identity.

The Dalai Lama institution has a critical role in balancing conflicting interests, preserving resilience in vulnerable communities and as a bulwark against Chinese expansionism as the world grapples with the threats to national security, democracy and the international legal order represented by China and a hostile axis of authoritarian states. In his lifetime, his global influence gives the exile

administration a strategic leverage and legitimacy that China lacks.

Focusing particularly on India and Nepal, this paper sets out the international context of the future of the Dalai Lama institution and Tibetan Buddhist civilisation, detailing the significant threats and challenges to its survival but also strengths and strategies on the Tibetan side. A separate paper focuses on the situation in Mongolia, following the recognition of a child as the Mongolian spiritual leader the Bogd Lama or Jebtsumdampa by the Dalai Lama.

**This report, accompanied by a summary briefing, is in four parts, as follows:**

- Part One: The Dalai Lama and China's Reincarnation Politics covers the evolution of China's policies on reincarnation and Buddhism and the underlying strategic imperatives for Beijing. It outlines the position of the Dalai Lama and the strength of his global influence in the context of the future of Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama institution.
- Part Two: The International Dimensions of Reincarnation explores how the PRC combines economic heft with a Chinese version of Buddhism to project sharp power and fulfill its strategic ambitions, with particular focus on the frontlines of China's extraterritorial pressures in India and Nepal.
- Part Three: Return of the Bogd Lama and developments in Mongolia
- Part Four: Recommendations and strategic guidelines for international engagement, drawing upon the knowledge and experience of key stakeholders across the region, religious and secular, in making suggestions and recommendations for countering threats and protecting Tibetan agency over a critical five-ten year period.

## BACKGROUND TO THIS BRIEFING PAPER

**Sacred Authority and State Power: 'The Future of the Dalai Lama Institution in a Global Context'** by Kate Saunders covers new developments in policy and impacts, involving interviews in the field in India, Nepal and Mongolia. The paper is intended to stimulate broader discussion incorporating suggestions emerging from conversations with individuals on the frontlines of China's transnational repression. The report was undertaken in partnership with Czechs Support Tibet.



# 1. CURRENT CONTEXT AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS



During an inspection tour of Xining in summer 2024, Xi Jinping visited a monastery which is the site of one of the most significant meetings between the Tenth Panchen Lama who died in 1989 and Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun, one of the leaders of Mao's revolution. Image from Chinese state media.

**In summer 2024, the Dalai Lama was recovering from knee surgery in New York, where his temporary residence of a Manhattan hotel covered in scaffolding became a pilgrimage site for Tibetans. Coinciding with his stay in the U.S., China's leader Xi Jinping visited Tibetan children at a Chinese boarding school in Xining, emphasizing the CCP's 'Sinicisation' agenda that compels Tibetans to conform to a nationalist Chinese identity while threatening to eviscerate their own. During his inspection tour, Xi also visited a temple connected to the Tenth Panchen Lama, invoking his father's historical connection to Tibet's religious leadership.**

Xi Jinping's visit to Tsongkha (Hongjue) monastery during his trip to the capital of Qinghai was freighted with political symbolism. It was the site of one of the most significant meetings between Communist Party's leadership and a Tibetan Buddhist leader in 1951. That Chinese leader, who developed a close bond with the Tenth Panchen Lama, was one of Mao's leaders of the revolution Xi Zhongxun, Xi Jinping's father, then Communist Party's deputy secretary of the Northwest Bureau.<sup>7</sup>

The Tenth Panchen Lama died in 1989 after making one of the most far-reaching critiques of the Communist Party ever submitted to the leadership.<sup>8</sup> His official successor, installed by the PRC in 1995 while the child recognised by the Dalai Lama was 'disappeared', not to be seen since, is a pivotal figure in China's plans to control the future succession of the Dalai Lama.

During the same month as Xi Jinping's Qinghai visit, China's Panchen Lama Gyaltsen Norbu travelled under tight security to Tibetan areas of Qinghai.<sup>9</sup> Shortly afterwards powerful policy chief and ideologue Wang Huning visited Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), also in Amdo, and Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) in Kham, areas with a history of protest and pride in Tibetan national identity.<sup>10</sup>

The timing of the visits seemed indicative of an intensified focus on controlling Tibet at the highest levels within the PRC. It also exposed China's uncertainties over the future.

Chinese officials at a Beijing press conference in June 2024, at a time when the Dalai Lama's health was a focus of international media and public interest, addressed how China would 'respond' to the Dalai Lama's reincarnation plans – representing an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the Dalai Lama's strategic ambiguity regarding his succession. (A Chinese academic responded with the official position, which is that China controls the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama within the PRC.)<sup>11</sup>

The timing of leadership visits to Tibet and the press conference on 28 June indicated further intensification of CCP preparations for the future linked to perceptions of the Dalai Lama's health. China's diplomats have long made efforts to ascertain the health of the Dalai Lama to gain advance notice of any developments to factor into their elaborate policy planning for the future.<sup>12</sup>

In a further indication that China has heightened preparations for the future, a month after Xi Jinping's visit to Xining, direct

contact was made with Tibetan exiles “in a third country”, according to the Sikyong (Prime Minister) Penpa Tsering of the exile Tibetan administration. Notably, the Sikyong said that the “back channel” talks were initiated by the Chinese side,<sup>13</sup> and that the Tibetan side had “no expectations”.<sup>14</sup>

While according to Indian analyst Jayadeva Ranade, the talks occurred in Kathmandu and were at a low level,<sup>15</sup> this was nevertheless a significant admission. There have been no formal talks between the Dalai Lama’s representatives and the United Front Work Department since 2010. While saying that no results could be expected immediately, the Sikyong’s comments seemed indicative of a reinvigorated approach by the exile Tibetan administration.<sup>16</sup> Tibet analyst Robert Barnett wrote: “Beijing, the exiles argue, now finds itself under pressure to reach a deal with the exiled Tibetan religious leader, the 89-year-old Dalai Lama, before his health declines further. If so, this would be a 180-degree reversal from the previous dynamics of the dispute, when it was the exiles who were urgently, even desperately, seeking a settlement before time runs out.”<sup>17</sup>

There is no question that continued control of Tibet is of the highest importance to Xi Jinping’s leadership as a matter of national security and sovereignty. The ‘conflict’ between China and the Dalai Lama and his supporters “is not an ethnic issue, nor a religious issue, but involves the major principle of China’s sovereignty”, Party-affiliated scholars emphasised at the June meeting.<sup>18</sup>

China’s sovereignty claim is based on false assertions of historic ownership over Tibet, a previously independent country before its

military annexation in 1949-50. Tibet has never been a part of China although it has not always been independent in the modern legal sense of the term, and over the centuries subject to varying degrees of Mongol, Manchu, or British authority or influence.<sup>19</sup>

A bipartisan Act signed into law by President Biden in July 2024 acknowledges this, strengthening Dharamsala’s position, by stating that the PRC now has sovereignty over Tibet only by virtue of its “effective control” since the 1950s, and not because of a prior historical claim. The ‘Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act’ rejects as inaccurate China’s claims that Tibet has been part of China since “ancient times”, saying that this inaccuracy has held back dialogue with the Dalai Lama.<sup>20</sup> The act also calls upon the Chinese government to stop propagating such disinformation about Tibet’s history.<sup>21</sup>

The Resolve Tibet Act highlights a political weakness in China’s position which is increasingly targeted by Tibetan exiles and their supporters. Its significance in countering China’s inconsistent narratives on their control over Tibet<sup>22</sup> was highlighted by a U.S. Congressional delegation to India in June 2024, at the same time as Xi Jinping was visiting a Tibetan school and temple in Xining. The delegation to India, including long-time friend Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, met the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala and Prime Minister Modi in Delhi.<sup>23</sup>

The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala seeks a negotiated solution with China on Tibet’s future and urges international governments to pressure Beijing “to reengage in dialogue with HH



## 2. THE DALAI LAMA AND TIBETAN REINCARNATION

**The Buddhist belief that all sentient beings are entwined in a cycle of birth, death and rebirth takes on a distinctive form in the Tibetan tradition with the explicit recognition of the rebirths of accomplished religious teachers or scholar adepts, referred to in the West as ‘reincarnate’ or ‘incarnate’ lamas. <sup>24</sup> Tibetans refer to reincarnate and other senior lamas with the respectful title of ‘Rinpoche’ or ‘precious one’, or as a ‘tulku’ (Tibetan: trulku, sprul sku), a term that can be translated as “the manifested body, created body” or as simply incarnation, reincarnation, or rebirth (erroneously rendered in Chinese as ‘Living Buddha’ or ‘huofu’.)**

The tulku system of consciously directed reincarnation is unique to Tibetan Buddhism and to Himalayan and other regions that share the culture of Tibetan Buddhism.

The process of recognising reincarnate lamas has never been divorced from politics. In traditional Tibet, the search for reincarnations of important lamas, who were often abbots of monasteries, became a means of determining succession to

spiritual and institutional leadership positions. It was a concept that combined religious with political authority, a process that is now being played out on a global stage.

Of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Karma Kagyu school headed by the Karmapa was the first reincarnation lineage, before the Gelugpa school of Buddhism (to which the Dalai Lama belongs). Since then the leadership of all major Tibetan Buddhist schools have determined succession through incarnation.

Tibetans believe that if they have attained a high enough level of spiritual realization (Tibetan: rtogs pa) they can to an extent control their own rebirth, which is determined by their actions, or karma, in current and previous lives and their state of mind at the time of death. The identification of a reincarnate tulku is carried out using various esoteric rituals and procedures, including interpretations of predictions left by the previous incarnation about the circumstances of his or her rebirth; dreams and experiences of disciples of the teacher who has died; consultation with oracles and other forms of divination, and testing the proposed child candidate to see whether he (or in

rare cases, she) recognises objects belonging to the previous incarnation.<sup>25</sup>

The 14th Dalai Lama, identified at the age of two in 1937, and Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Panchen Lama currently in custody after he was 'disappeared' at the age of six in 1995, were identified according to these methods.<sup>26</sup> Today, hundreds of 'tulkus' live not only in Tibet but in different areas across the Himalayas, in India, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, and Nepal, while others have been reborn in the West.

In 2011, the Dalai Lama made a formal declaration on his own reincarnation, which serves as a definitive statement of his authority and a denial of any CCP legitimacy in the process.<sup>27</sup> In the statement, described in Tibetan as a 'gal che'i bka' yig' or 'important proclamation', the Dalai Lama said that "when he is about 90", he will consult "the high Lamas of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Tibetan public, and other concerned people who follow Tibetan Buddhism, and re-evaluate whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue or not. On that basis we will take a decision."<sup>28</sup> According to the Gregorian calendar the Dalai Lama will be 90 on 6 July 2025 (although according to the Tibetan calendar he already reached this age on 11 June 2024).

Because the purpose of his reincarnation is to continue the work of his present life, the Dalai Lama would need to be reborn in a free country, and not the PRC. (China says it is illegal for any future Dalai Lama to be born anywhere outside the PRC).

As a progressive moderniser, the Dalai Lama has warned against setting too much store on the 'tulku' system in the 21st

century, referring to the dangers of 'fake lamas' and vested interests compromising Tibetan Buddhism from within. Although he has not said this recently, in the past the Dalai Lama has suggested that the tradition of recognizing reincarnate lamas "may have had its day".<sup>29</sup> He has pointed out that that the reincarnation system has never existed in India, and there are no recognized reincarnations of great Indian Buddhist masters like Nagarjuna, or the Buddha himself,<sup>30</sup> although the concept of spiritual masters being reborn to help end suffering is consistent with the compassionate approach of Buddhism.<sup>31</sup>

Samdhong Rinpoche, head of the Gaden Podrang office with authority over a future reincarnation process and a reincarnate lama himself, has also in the past suggested that in many ways the tulku system is an institution that has outlived its purpose. Other Tibetan lamas and educators raise questions about the class system created around tulkus, in which small children can grow up within a bubble of unquestioning veneration. The Ven Tenzin Priyadarshi, who heads the Dalai Lama Center for Ethics in Massachusetts, writes: "When tulkus are recognised repeatedly within the same family, succession becomes a long-term business plan and a strategy for maintaining power and influence. To the system's credit, a tulku is expected to repeat the prescribed course of studies and spiritual training in each lifetime. Their previous accomplishments may put them on a fast track, and some indeed outshine their predecessors. The problems arise among those who rest on the laurels of past lives."<sup>32</sup>

In the last five years, however, there has



been a renewed focus on the continuation of the Dalai Lama institution along traditional lines. For the first time in Tibet's 2000-year history, this requires balancing religious protocols, such as protector rituals and divinations conducted in exile, with complex secular and political considerations.

For instance, access to the holy 'oracle lake' of Lhamo Lhatso is under China's territorial

control in Jiaca (Gyaca) county in Lhokha (Shannan) in the TAR. Traditionally, monks of the Gelugpa school have sought visions in the lake to assist in the discovery of the Dalai Lama. The lake is connected to the protector spirit Palden Lhamo, who ensures the well being of Dalai Lamas.<sup>33</sup>

In 1935, a vision in the lake led a search committee to the home of the current Dalai Lama in Amdo in eastern Tibet. Half a



For the first time in Tibet's history, the Dalai Lama has ensured that nuns have the opportunity to become scholars and to receive the highest form of scholarship in Tibetan Buddhism, the Geshe-Ma degree. The Dalai Lama waving to the crowd gathered at the Drepung Lachi monastery courtyard as he arrives for the ceremony to award nuns the first Geshe-ma degrees at Drepung Lachi in Mundgod, Karnataka, India, on 22 December 2016. Image: Tenzin Choejor/OHDL



century later in October 1994, monks conducted religious ceremonies on a ridge overlooking the same sacred lake, reciting prayers to induce visions regarding the location of the Panchen Lama. They were rewarded with a rainbow that apparently led them towards the home of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the son of semi-nomadic parents in Lhari, Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) in the TAR.<sup>34</sup>

In an elaborate act of political theatre signaling intent to appropriate rituals at the heart of Tibetan tradition for CCP objectives, the state-installed Panchen Lama Gyaltsen Norbu visited Lhamo Lhatso in 2018 to hold a 'blessing ceremony'.<sup>35</sup>

While the Dalai Lama and other leaders of religious schools are in exile, there are similar ways of upholding religious ritual; for instance consecrating a lake in India for the same purpose.

In a monastery in the TAR, the Chinese authorities have installed a Tibetan boy as Regent - a figure that has traditionally overseen a period of interregnum while a reincarnate lama receives a religious education. The Dalai Lama's office could equally appoint its own regent or council of regents from among trusted religious figures in exile.<sup>36</sup> The Dalai Lama has demonstrated flexibility in religious matters, such as declaring that Tibetans do not need to be physically present to receive spiritual transmissions from him. He made this announcement at a Kalachakra religious empowerment in Bodh Gaya in India, after China locked down Tibet and began to prevent Tibetans from travelling to his teachings in exile.<sup>37</sup>

The influence of Tibetan lamas has extended beyond Tibet's borders for

centuries. Mongol Khans and emperors in Peking sought to learn from Tibet's advanced civilisation, while the Tibetan language was the lingua franca of Inner Asia, with its texts tied to trade, politics and international exchange.

In more than 65 years in exile, the Dalai Lama has amplified and developed this influence on a global stage, and has reshaped and expanded his role as Tibetan Buddhist leader. He presents Tibetan Buddhism as a means of engagement with, rather than detachment from, the world's problems. As the preeminent symbol of Tibetan Buddhist culture at a time when it faces its deepest threat he has demonstrated the value of his culture to a world beyond the plateau and the PRC.

"People all over the world increasingly look to our culture and religion for inspiration, not because it includes prayers and rituals like making offerings or performing prostrations and so on but because it deals with cultivating the mind. It explains how to enhance our sense of love and compassion. I feel it is important to put these methods into practice," the Dalai Lama said in his Losar (Tibetan New Year) address on 10 February 2024. "The classic treatises studied in the great monastic universities of Tibet such as Sera and Drepung present a thorough understanding of the workings of mind and emotions. It's because this understanding contains methods for tackling mental problems in practical ways that it is so valuable. We have preserved not only the words of explanation, but also the ways to implement them through a combination of study and practice."<sup>38</sup>

A Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, the Dalai



Lama has engaged in dialogue for decades with leading scientists on issues of human consciousness, cosmology and quantum physics. Promoting interfaith dialogue across religious divides, the Dalai Lama teaches that compassion is a universal human value that can be nurtured through education and training, and is the basis for his propagation of 'secular ethics'. (He outlined the concept in his book 'Beyond Religion'.)

This has led to initiatives such as Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEE Learning), an education program developed for international use, conveying a universal, non-sectarian, and science-based approach to bringing the ethical development of the whole child into education, adopted by various universities and schools in more than 59 countries.<sup>39</sup>



Scientists and monks discussing secular ethics with the Dalai Lama during the final session of the Tibet Emory Symposium at Drepung Loseling monastery in Mundgod, Karnataka, India on 20 December 2016. The Dalai Lama has engaged in dialogue and research with scientists for decades and developed a concept of secular ethics. Image: Tenzin Choejor/OHHDL

## DHARAMSALA'S POSITION AND FUTURE PLANNING

The Dalai Lama's 2011 statement set out the following points as the procedure for recognizing His Holiness the Fifteenth Dalai Lama, if it is decided that the institution should continue:

- The primary responsibility for the recognition process will rest with the officers of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Gaden Phodrang Trust, headed by close aide and former Kalon Tripa (Prime Minister) 86 year old Samdhong Rinpoche. The Gaden Phodrang, which was the name of the Dalai Lama's residence in Drepung monastery, Lhasa, refers to the system of religious and political authority following the Fifth Dalai Lama's consolidation of power in the 17th century. Its foundation involved an expansion of the Gelugpa, or Yellow Hat, school of Tibetan Buddhism, to which the Dalai Lama belongs.
- They are expected to consult:
  - The heads of the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Tibetan public, and other followers of Tibetan Buddhism;
  - Religious figures described by the Dalai Lama's office as "reliable, oath-bound Dharma Protectors." This means they are linked to the Dalai Lama's lineage, and predecessors may have played a role in the recognition of the 14th Dalai Lama. This would include the medium for the State Oracle Nechung Kuten.<sup>40</sup>
  - Prominent religious figures in the exile community, such as Ling Rinpoche, Yangden Rinpoche and Kundeling Rinpoche <sup>41</sup> and other scholars and monks are likely to have special responsibilities within India and globally.<sup>42</sup>
- The recognition process should follow traditional methods, seeking advice and direction from these concerned parties.
- Any candidate chosen by the Chinese government or for political ends will not be recognized.
- The Dalai Lama intends to leave clear written instructions outlining the legitimate process for recognizing his reincarnation.
- The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) headed by Sikyong Penpa Tsering is the legitimate democratic authority in exile assuming political responsibility over the process.



In his 2011 statement, the Dalai Lama opened up the possibility of a successor being recognised before he dies, although he has not referred to this in more recent years, indicating that preparations for a traditional reincarnation are taking precedence. He said that it is possible for a lama to “appoint a successor who is either his disciple or someone young who is to be recognized as his emanation. Since these options are possible in the case of an ordinary being, an emanation before death that is not of the same mind-stream is feasible. In some cases one high Lama may have several reincarnations simultaneously, such as incarnations of body, speech and mind and so on.”<sup>43</sup>

The first type of ‘emanation’ is equivalent to the Tibetan concept of a ‘ma-dhey tulku’, meaning that the Dalai Lama could recognize someone with special qualities beneficial to the circumstances before he dies.<sup>44</sup> The Tibetan leader gives the example of Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje (1904-87), who was appointed as the head of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism by the Dalai Lama in the early 1960s.<sup>45</sup>

Tibetan Buddhists believe that ordinary sentient beings cannot generally manifest an emanation before death, but that superior Bodhisattvas, who Buddhists believe can manifest themselves in hundreds or thousands of bodies simultaneously, can do so.<sup>46</sup>

Unusually some prominent commentators in the Tibet world – while recognizing that the Dalai Lama has authority to decide – have urged the Dalai Lama to consider appointing a ‘madhey tulku’ rather than focusing on the

traditional reincarnation of a child.<sup>47</sup>

The Dalai Lama says that given the current circumstances, his reincarnation would not be born in the PRC. Following its 2007 ruling that Tibetans cannot reincarnate without government permission, more recently China has broadened its focus to ban any involvement in the Dalai Lama’s succession outside Tibet and China. While it is a brief that in practice will be impossible to fulfil, China is concerned about the precedent of two previous Dalai Lamas who were born outside what now constitutes Tibet; the Sixth Dalai Lama in Tawang in present-day Arunachal Pradesh in India and the Fourth in Mongolia.

China’s announcement that it would be illegal for any successor to the Dalai Lama to be born outside the PRC came at around the same time as the U.S. Tibet Policy and Support Act, which threatens sanctions for any foreign entities who seek to interfere in established religious precedents.<sup>48</sup>

In religious terms, Tibetans have overseen these matters for centuries and the Dalai Lama and his Private Office have presided over the cultivation of young religious teachers and scholars in order to ensure cultural continuity, but they remain vulnerable to powerful political pressures. Tibetans worry about the political uncertainties of an interregnum period once a child is recognised but while he or she receives an education. China sees this as a strategic advantage.<sup>49</sup> As part of their efforts to counter this, and consolidate institutions in exile that risk divisions, Dharamsala has been actively working with young generation religious figures with large followings across Asia and the West to ensure transmission of

Buddhist teachings and to deepen solidarity and support for Tibetans during this period.

The Dalai Lama has often cautioned against engaging in too much discussion about his personal future, saying: “What is important are [Tibetan Buddhist] teachings, the institution of Dalai Lama comes after that,”

he says.<sup>50</sup> He has reassured Tibetans of his good health, that matters are in hand, changes are possible in the PRC and that there is no need for immediate concern. At recent prayer ceremonies for his long life, he has affirmed that he will live well past the age of 100.<sup>51</sup>

## THE QUESTION OF RETURN TO TIBET

*“Everyone called for the release of Mandela not simply for Mandela to be released from prison, but because this would bring about change in South Africa. This is the same reason that the Tibetan self-immolation protesters have called for the Dalai Lama to be allowed to return [to Tibet].”*

Jamyang Norbu, ‘Make it a burning issue’ blog, 5 November 2012

In 2008, the overwhelming call from Tibetans who risked their lives in hundreds of protests that swept across the plateau was for the Dalai Lama to return home. From 2009, more than 158 Tibetans set fire to themselves in one of the largest waves of self immolation as political protest.<sup>52</sup> Many intended their actions to be understood as an act of religious dedication to the Dalai Lama.<sup>53</sup>

Tibetans were expressing not only a wish for the return of a beloved leader, equating his return with the survival of their civilisation and national identity, but for the longed-for change that his presence might catalyse. “The belief in or admiration for the Dalai Lama is different among the elderly, the youth, and teenagers,” said one Tibetan netizen. “Maybe older people have a firm belief in the Dalai Lama. However, the premise of young people’s belief in or love for the Dalai Lama is whether he can change the status quo in Tibet [...] Young

Tibetans are seeking new ways to bring about this change, apart from the ‘pure faith’ of their parents.”<sup>54</sup>

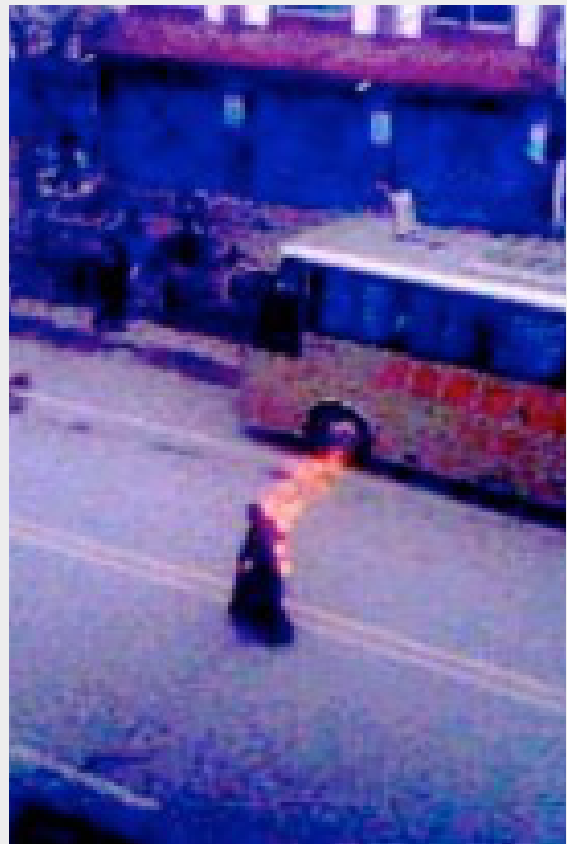
The Dalai Lama has often said that he wishes to return home at least once in his lifetime. “I had hoped that I would be able to go back at least once before I die,” he writes in his new book, ‘Voice for the Voiceless’. “This is looking increasingly unlikely.”<sup>55</sup> When he spoke about going home in the past, it seemed he was not proposing a permanent return even if this were to be possible, as in other statements he refers to India as his spiritual “second home” since escaping from Tibet in 1959.<sup>56</sup>

Tibetans close to the religious leader believe that his comments can be understood in a personal, religious and political context. In personal terms it is natural that he would want to return to the country of his birth and be reunited with his people. There could also be a spiritual

dimension unknown to outside observers and an intention to keep hope alive inside Tibet.<sup>57</sup> In political terms, his comments could underline an openness to dialogue with the Chinese government on a way forward.

A major focus of the Dalai Lama's life in exile has been dialogue with Chinese people. In the formal talks between his envoys and Chinese officials represented by the United Front Work department, the possibility of the Dalai Lama making a pilgrimage to the holy site of Wutai Shan in China was discussed.<sup>58</sup> The late former Special Envoy to the Dalai Lama Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari (1949-2018) writes in his memoir about substantive meetings with PRC counterparts in April 1998 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, focusing on the possibility of the Dalai Lama making a pilgrimage to Mount Wutai that would afford the opportunity to meet with the then President Jiang Zemin. "While the main purpose of such a visit was, of course, the proposed meeting, His Holiness's wish to make a pilgrimage to Mount Wutai is also very genuine," wrote Lodi Gyari. "When he was in China in 1954-55, he tried to visit, but poor road conditions and inclement weather precluded the trip."

Mount Wutai has been one of the most important pilgrimage destinations for both Tibetan and Chinese Buddhists for hundreds of years. It has a special connection with the Dalai Lamas, in particular after U.S. Ambassador to China William Rockhill trekked there for five days to meet the 13th Dalai Lama in 1908. But according to Lodi Gyari, "the major stumbling block for His Holiness visiting the PRC has always been Beijing's precondition that he publicly state that Tibet was always a part of China."<sup>59</sup>



This iconic image depicts the monk Tapey, who walked out of his monastery, Kirti in Ngaba, Amdo, on 27 February 2009 and set himself on fire. Tapey was responding to the cancellation of a prayer ceremony by the Chinese authorities. He became the first of a wave of more than 158 self immolations that swept across Tibet. Image shared by Tibetans on social media.





There was an outpouring of mourning when 25-year old Tibetan singer and pop star Tsewang Norbu, who had over half a million followers on Weibo and was beloved for his music in Tibet and China, set himself on fire on 25 February 2022 in Lhasa. His last social media post, written on the day of his self-immolation, was expressing gratitude to his fans for their comments and messages about his most recent song. Known as the Tibetan 'Justin Beiber', Tsewang Norbu sung in Tibetan, English and Chinese. Norbu's father, Choegyen, committed suicide three months later after being threatened and harassed by the Chinese police.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE - THE TIBETAN DIASPORA

While the Dalai Lama indicated in his 2011 statement that he would consult with religious leaders and make a statement when he is “about 90”, discussions on the future have been ongoing for some years among religious and lay Tibetans in exile. A ‘special meeting’ called in 2008 set a precedent for consultation by the exile administration with Tibetans based in exile – and the few voices that reach such exile forums from Tibet – on the future of the Tibetan struggle and the institution of the Dalai Lama and its relationship with Tibetan people.

The ‘special meeting’ called by the Dalai Lama in September 2008 brought together Tibetan exile leaders with prominent figures including the late Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama’s brother who was involved in dialogue with China from the 1970s onwards. It was followed by a number of religious and secular conclaves (with several in 2019 pre COVID pandemic) of religious leaders and lay Tibetans in India and elsewhere.

Before the 2008 meeting, Tibetans in exile barely engaged with the issue of a future beyond the 14th Dalai Lama. But now the subject of the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation has become a matter of intense concern among Tibetans and international governments given China’s extraterritorial interventions and the existential danger to their cultural and religious identity.

The most detailed discussion of future

scenarios so far among the diaspora was held in 2022-23 across multiple locations including Washington D.C., Paris, New York, Delhi, and Dharamsala, bringing together Tibetan community leaders, activists, scholars, students, professionals, parliamentarians, artists, and religious leaders to envision possible futures for Tibet by 2040.<sup>60</sup> The succession of the Dalai Lama emerged in the discussions as a critical pivot point to shape Tibet’s trajectory through 2040. The scenarios suggest that the Dalai Lama has provided clear guidance about his reincarnation, though the specifics are described by ‘Future of Tibet’ participants as “general in nature.”

The scenarios present dramatically different potential outcomes, ranging from a smooth transition with clear guidance (in the “Hanging in There” scenario) to a deeply fractured situation with five competing Dalai Lama reincarnations claimed by different regions (in the “Final Chapter” scenario). These variations highlight how the succession question intersects with broader geopolitical dynamics, particularly India-China relations, and internal Tibetan unity. The document suggests that key preparations still need to be made, including developing clear communication strategies and securing formal stances from foreign governments regarding the recognition of the next Dalai Lama. According to the Tibetans involved, this emerges as one of the most crucial challenges facing the Tibetan leadership as they attempt to maintain legitimacy and unity

through the sensitive transition period.

Even so, the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama was once a taboo subject, and to an extent still is among many Tibetans.<sup>61</sup>

“Traditionally, it is taboo to speak on the reincarnation of a lama who is still alive,” observed the monk who serves as the medium for Dharamsala’s State Oracle, Nechung Kuten. “But because of the Chinese government’s pressure, the world is eager to know.”<sup>62</sup>

Traditionally rituals performed for recognition of the Dalai Lama have been performed in secret. When the current 14th Dalai Lama was recognised, historians record that the Lhasa government expressed gratitude to the Regent and the ministers “for fulfilling their responsibilities by performing the esoteric, exoteric, and secret duties in the intervening period.”<sup>63</sup>

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Exile communities have passed resolutions heavily in favour of the continuation of the Dalai Lama lineage and supporting his authority. A gathering of Tibetan religious leaders in exile in 2019 produced the ‘Dharmshala Declaration’ reiterating that: “The authority of decision concerning the way and the manner in which the next reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama should appear solely rests with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama himself. No government or otherwise will have such authority. If the Government of the People’s Republic of China for political ends chooses a candidate for the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan people will not recognise and respect that candidate.”<sup>64</sup>

Increasingly, Himalayan Buddhist organisations are supporting CTA endeavours in making public affirmations of the Dalai Lama’s authority over his own reincarnation to counter political interference from the PRC. Representing a low-key endorsement by the Indian government, a religious council in 2021 funded by the Indian Ministry of Culture brought together lamas and Buddhists from different parts of India and the Himalayas who affirmed the right of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhists to determine their own future.<sup>65</sup> More recently, 46 Indian MPs signed a statement supporting the rights of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan people to determine his reincarnation.<sup>66</sup>



## A SECULAR DEMOCRACY IN EXILE

*“Recently, many have been talking, deliberating, and discussing succession, reincarnation, and the post-Dalai Lama era. While this discourse is sometimes necessary—especially in light of the PRC’s campaign regarding a post-Dalai Lama era—it is often shunned by many in the Tibetan community, which merits understanding. Many seem to ‘miss the forest for the trees’; a similar saying among us Tibetans would be ‘casting aside the root to merely grasp the branches.’ [...] This reflects the larger political vision that the Dalai Lama, with the support of Tibetans and friends of Tibet, has been able to establish: the CTA and its democratic institutions.”*

- Tenzin Dhamdul for the Delhi-based thinktank Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives <sup>67</sup>

In 2011, the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso became the first such leader of the Gaden Phodrang to relinquish his political role as head of state, making way for a secular democracy in exile. Despite appeals at the time by Tibetans to uphold his overall authority,<sup>68</sup> the Dalai Lama chose to deepen and strengthen exile democratic leadership and institutions. He had previously referred to his own institution being both a great strength as “the rallying point of the Tibetan spirit”, but also a weakness in the sense of “the Tibetan people’s dependence on one man and on one institution [becoming] a hindrance to the growth of Tibetan democracy.” <sup>69</sup>

This development has become an important signifier of Tibetan identity, contrary to the system of authoritarian rule in Tibet, as the Dalai Lama has kept his word in allowing exiles to vote for their own political leaders. Reflecting the commitment to self reliance and sense of “universal responsibility” emphasised by the Dalai Lama, Tibetan writer Namloyak Dhungser observes, “Buddha does not save people; people need to save themselves”. <sup>70</sup>

The Dalai Lama said in his statement: “If such a Dalai Lama with a unanimous mandate to lead spiritual affairs abdicates the political authority, it will help sustain our exile administration and make it more progressive and robust. Similarly, the international community, which supports the Tibetan cause, will commend the Dalai Lama’s sincerity for the complete democratization of the Tibetan polity. [...] It will fully expose the falsehood and lies of the Chinese government that there is no Tibet problem except the issue of the Dalai Lama’s personal rights.” <sup>71</sup>

The Tibetan democracy in exile has not been without its challenges. Differences between the current Sikyong Penpa Tsering and previous incumbent Lobsang Sangay have led to long-standing divisions in the exile diaspora. The Dalai Lama had to step in to resolve a four-month impasse and ensuing political vacuum in the Tibetan Parliament in 2021. A walkout in the Kashag, the Tibetan cabinet, last year highlighted continuing splits in the 45-member body. <sup>72</sup>

The Vision Paper of the Tibetan Parliament in exile (2021-26) does not directly refer to the Dalai Lama succession issue other than to refer to China's politicisation of the reincarnation process. It states that the CTA is focused upon finding "a non-violent, mutually beneficial, negotiated and lasting situation to the Sino-Tibet conflict through

the Middle-Way policy", which it defines as offering "a middle way between the historical status of Tibet as an independent state and the present status of Tibet under the illegal occupation of the PRC." <sup>73</sup>

# 3. CHINA'S STRATEGY: POLICY EVOLUTION AND CONTROL MECHANISMS

## OVERVIEW

**A Party state that promotes atheism might be expected to end the institution of the Dalai Lama, but the opposite is the case. Buddhist institutions are the bedrock of Tibetan cultural identity, and the Chinese Communist Party continues to follow Mao's position <sup>74</sup> that to consolidate its authority it must control and co-opt Tibetan Buddhist leadership, and none more important than the Dalai Lama.<sup>75</sup> Beijing's approach has evolved from attempted cooperation in the 1990s to increasingly aggressive control mechanisms, reflecting both the Party's insecurities and its broader geopolitical ambitions.**

Chinese leaders express outrage when the Dalai Lama suggests that he may not reincarnate at all. This position requires that Chinese officials embrace all of the ritual and ceremony involved in selecting a reincarnation, even if they manufacture the result, which they did to install another important religious figure, an official

Panchen Lama in 1995. Former TAR governor Padma Choling even accused the Dalai Lama of "profaning" Tibetan Buddhism in his statement about the possibility of recognizing emanations.<sup>76</sup> The Dalai Lama says that if China is so concerned, it should focus first on finding the reincarnations of Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping.

Chinese officials still acknowledge the important influence of reincarnate lamas in Tibetan society. "Living Buddhas are not only the spiritual leaders in Tibetan areas, but they also represent advanced culture and the spirit of the times," stated a paper produced for the Gansu Provincial Education Department. "One effective method of governance, among others, is to give play to the sacred place of the Living Buddha among the Tibetans." The same paper, by a Chinese author Liu Shuguang at the Marxism Institute of Gansu Minorities' Teachers College, acknowledges the continued influence of the Dalai Lama among "lower-level Living Buddhas", saying that "upper-level Living Buddhas (for example, the Dalai [Lama] and the Panchen [Lama]) can exert various kinds of



influence, such that the affairs of Tibetan areas will often glisten with the presence [translated from the Chinese as shadow or reflection] of a high-level Living Buddha.”<sup>77</sup>

This position has required the Chinese Communist Party, which demands devotion to the Party above normal religious priorities, to embrace not only the concept of the religious and political tradition of the reincarnate lama or tulku, but also the process of their identification including interpretations of visions and predictions, consultation with oracles and forms of divination, among other means.

In the past, there was a tacit understanding that Tibetans would seek advice from the exiled Dalai Lama about the selection of reincarnate lamas. But this policy ceased in 1995 when the Chinese authorities chose their own candidate as Panchen Lama and abducted the boy recognised by the Dalai Lama. Since then China has institutionalized its control through imposing measures that criminalise any individual or entity other than the Chinese state from identifying or selecting the reincarnation of a Tibetan lama. “The reincarnation issue has never been a purely religious affair or the Dalai Lama’s personal affair,” claims Party mouthpiece *Global Times*. “It is a significant political event for Tibet, showing the central government’s sovereignty over the autonomous region.”<sup>78</sup>

The 14th Dalai Lama’s global stature and influence present a complex challenge for the CCP. From meeting Mao Zedong and Communist Party leaders in the 1950s as a teenager, the Dalai Lama has met scores of notable figures and world leaders including almost every sitting U.S. President since his

first US visit in 1979 (he has not met Donald Trump).

Xi Jinping wants to prevent the emergence of any other Tibetan leader of such stature and undisputed legitimacy, and his global ambitions for a “new era” of Chinese power magnify the challenge. Party commentators deploy the language of the battlefield when describing their approach to the Dalai Lama’s succession, focused on countering and eradicating the Dalai Lama’s influence in Tibet and beyond. Global communications work by the CCP after the passing of the Dalai Lama will require “a protracted war”, said an official from state media.

China’s policies emerge partially from a failure to secure the allegiance of some senior reincarnate lamas in Tibet. The 17th Karmapa escaped into exile as a teenage boy because he was denied access to his teachers and reluctant to be subdued by intensive ‘patriotic education’. The official imposition of another important leader in Tibet, the Panchen Lama, and the abduction of a boy recognised by the Dalai Lama in 1995, has not been a smooth process for Beijing. Their official candidate is not fully trusted by officials, nor is he accepted by Tibetan people as the authentic leader. (The prize for China would be for the Dalai Lama to recognise the Chinese candidate as the legitimate Panchen, which he cannot do because he has already recognised Gedhun Choekyi Nyima).

CCP policy analysts describe their approach with two terms, the “late Dalai era”, the present period while the Dalai Lama is alive and has handed over political power to the

Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), and the “post Dalai era”, after the Dalai Lama dies. The intensification of the political struggle of the “late Dalai era” follows the outbreak of hundreds of largely peaceful protests in 2008 and a wave of self-immolations from 2009, which led to a strengthening of the already repressive policies and measures that had sparked the protests. The shift to more extreme measures also followed the Dalai Lama’s handover of power to an elected democracy in exile in 2011.

Policy papers and statements in Chinese official media present what they term a ‘strategic’ and ‘historic’ opportunity to end Western support for Tibet and to fragment the Tibetan exile movement in a “post Dalai Lama era”. They also struggle to grasp the depth and extent of Tibetan solidarity and the strength of their religious and cultural identity. They acknowledge that efforts to influence global opinion so far have failed

because of the strength of support for the Dalai Lama and Tibet on the world stage.<sup>79</sup>

Wang Jiaquan from the Xinhua news agency says in his paper that the Dalai Lama’s passing presents China with an opportunity to “escape its passive situation in communicating on Tibet”, thus acknowledging failures over past decades. “If we seek truth from facts and compare the Dalai clique’s public relations and their media skills, and compare the powerful impacts created by Western media, there is a sense with our Tibet communications that we are being bested and not keeping up with the times”, he writes.<sup>80</sup> In his paper Wang argues for a public relations strategy focused around building the Chinese Panchen Lama to replace the ‘vanished idol’ (the Dalai Lama) and using the situation to strengthen China’s status internationally and begin a ‘new era’ of control over Tibet. He states that as the Dalai Lama ages, “the opportunity [...] is already here”.

## AN 'OFFICIAL' PANCHEN LAMA: CHINA'S STRATEGIES AND WEAKNESSES

One of the main tools of China's strategy to control reincarnation is the promotion of China's Panchen Lama. Xinhua published a blueprint 'Great Public Relations Awareness' to this end, with the main tactic being "image creation" for the Chinese Panchen Lama Gyaltsen Norbu.

Commentators like Wang Yanmin nevertheless indicate that he is no

substitute for the Dalai Lama: "As far back as the 1980s when the Dalai Lama began appearing frequently on the international stage, due to various reasons – in particular the death of the 10th Panchen Lama – we have lacked a Tibetan spokesperson with an image who could compete with him. With the advent of the 'post Dalai era' and the 11th Panchen's majority, our opportunity has arrived."



The official Chinese Panchen Lama meets Xi Jinping, Beijing, 10 June 2015. Chinese state media via Claude Arpi's blogspot.



Failures are also acknowledged, with Wang Yanmin referring to lessons learned by the authorities in the installation of the Chinese Panchen in 1995, inferring that the process did not result after all in “turning the tide of Tibet’s anti-splittist struggle in a direction more beneficial to us.”

In his memoir detailing the dialogue with the Chinese leadership from 2002-2012, the Dalai Lama’s former Special Envoy the late Lodi Gyari referred to Chinese officials’ dilemma over the Panchen Lama. During discussions in April 1998 in Thailand, the Tibetans’ Chinese counterpart Wang Jungfu raised a question about “how to handle the troublesome issue of identifying Panchen Rinpoche’s reincarnation.” He said that “Given that Beijing had already recognised Gyaltsen Norbu as the 11th Panchen Lama, the dignity and prestige of the central government must be considered.”

Lodi Gyari writes that he responded by saying that although he could not make any formal comment, “If His Holiness’s decision were respected [in recognising Gedhun Choekyi Nyima], we could find a creative way to accommodate Gyaltsen Norbu. I concluded with a laugh, saying: ‘Vice Minister, Tibetans have handled very delicate reincarnation issues in the past, and I think we can find a way to handle this one also without anyone losing face.’” Lodi Gyari appeared to be implying that the Tibetan side could make some accommodation in order to make progress in the dialogue, which some have suggested could have involved stating that Gyaltsen Norbu was an ‘emanation’ or could be recognised as a reincarnation, although not as the authentic Panchen Lama.<sup>81</sup>

Wang Yanmin’s paper gives an insight into the strategies that are likely to be adopted by the CCP. First, there will be an attempt to challenge Western governments’ conceptions of the Chinese Panchen’s legitimacy. Wang writes: “For a long time, the Western media have described the 11th Panchen as the government’s ‘political tool’, and therefore our first target will be to break this stereotyped impression”. He acknowledges that this might not even be possible: “Or at the very least, we cannot give the Western agenda this ‘talking point’.”

Wang adds: “Concretely speaking, we must mould him into a spokesman for Tibetans’ interests and a senior lama who promotes Buddhism, and not just a ‘mouthpiece’ for Love the Country, Love the Religion [a Party campaign, which effectively means the central importance of loyalty to the CCP for all religious practitioners]. Such positioning would not only be beneficial to strengthening the Panchen’s authority domestically, particularly among believers in Tibetan areas, but also under conditions when the time is right, there is also the possibility that he could fill the ‘vanished idol’ role created by the West after the Dalai dies. There will be great difficulty in achieving this goal [...]”

Gyaltsen Norbu is central to China’s efforts to control the succession process of the Dalai Lama. Historically, the Panchen Lama has been one of Tibet’s most revered religious figures, with a unique relationship to the Dalai Lama; they are known as the ‘moon’ and ‘sun’. Earlier Panchen Lamas have played a role in the recognition and subsequent education of Dalai Lamas.<sup>82</sup> (When a search party for the present Dalai

Lama passed through Jyekundo, or Yushu, in 1936, they consulted the Ninth Panchen Lama about the child's whereabouts, and he told them accurately where he might be found.)<sup>83</sup>

The Tenth Panchen Lama made one of the most far-reaching critiques of the Communist Party leadership ever made. As early as 1962, he submitted to Mao Zedong a remarkable document detailing the persecution of religion, mass arrests, executions and oppressions in Tibet that followed the 1959 Uprising. His petition was denounced by Mao as "a poisoned arrow shot at the Party". The Tenth Panchen Lama endured 14 years in prison and died in 1989 a few years after his release. Still today, "Tibetans pray with the Tenth Panchen Lama in mind, not the current [official] incumbent," a Tibetan scholar from eastern Tibet observed.<sup>84</sup>

The symbolism of the Chinese Panchen Lama's role in any future succession process was underlined when Gyaltsen Norbu visited the 'oracle lake' of Lhamo Lhatso<sup>85</sup> in 2018, a sacred site connected both to the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, and to the Panchen Lama who was recognised by the Dalai Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.

Tibetans often have to be corralled to welcome China's Panchen, or even paid to receive blessings from him. The going rate is around 100 yuan, about \$14, according to some Tibetan accounts.<sup>86</sup> This is in stark contrast to the welcome accorded to Rinzin Wangmo, the daughter of the Tenth Panchen Lama, to Lhasa during several visits over the past decade from her home in Beijing. On a visit to Shigatse in 2023,

hundreds of Tibetans thronged to greet her, piling her car high with silk blessing scarves. Tibetan feeling towards a religious figure foisted upon them by Beijing is also demonstrated by an absence of Gyaltsen Norbu's photographs in monasteries despite requests by the authorities to display them, or offerings placed only at the image of the previous incarnation.<sup>87</sup>

Those Tibetans who do wish to encounter Gyaltsen Norbu face security restrictions. When Gyaltsen Norbu visited some of the most culturally resilient Tibetan areas of Kardze (Ganzi) and Ngaba (Aba) in the Tibetan area of Kham (Sichuan) in July 2021, he could barely confer simple blessings on local people. "You had to keep your heads bowed, he couldn't give a blessing and nor were people allowed to present him with khatags," said one Tibetan whose relatives went to see him. "He was led through with a heavy police escort and plain clothed policemen. There were a higher number of police buses in the vicinity than usual. It was very disappointing, all of the traditions and practices a lama may do on a visit were not allowed."

Often those Tibetans who wish to gain access to the Chinese-installed Panchen are elder, devout Tibetans who have little alternative given that the Dalai Lama, Karmapa and other prominent reincarnate lamas such as Sakya Trinzin and Kirti Rinpoche are in exile. In Tibetan tradition, the quality of the teacher is an important measure of the pupil, and the respected abbot of Labrang Tashikyil Monastery, Kunkhyen Jamyang Shepa,<sup>88</sup> chose Jamyang Gyatso as the Chinese Panchen Lama's teacher among others, which

reflects well on his student. Reverence for the teachers of a young reincarnate tulku can be transferred to the lama. Tibetans also point out that Gyaltsen Norbu's official role has given him the opportunity to visit numerous monasteries across the plateau and had access to senior scholars and lamas as his teachers in a way that most monks in Tibet do not.<sup>89</sup>

Gyaltsen Norbu's visit to eastern Tibet in summer 2021 coincided with Xi Jinping's 'inspection tour' of Lhasa. While Xi Jinping visited a locked-down Jokhang and military bases close to the Indian border, underlining policy imperatives on Tibet, Gyaltsen Norbu was thousands of kilometers away in the Tibetan area of Amdo, present-day Gansu province, visiting Labrang monastery. A year later Gyaltsen Norbu was sent to new border villages close to India. Chinese state media reported that he travelled to the 'front line', meeting new residents of the villages to "listen to praise on the achievements made under the leadership of the Party" and urging them to "firmly establish the overall concept of national security".<sup>90</sup> While there, China's Panchen Lama also attended a ceremony acknowledging a new reincarnate lama on the Party's official list.<sup>91</sup>

Although Xi Jinping and the Chinese Panchen were in Tibet at the same time without meeting, they have met before. Xi received Gyaltsen Norbu at Zhongnanhai on 10 June 2015, together with three other members of the Politburo.<sup>92</sup> They also met during the 60th anniversary of the "peaceful liberation of Tibet" in 2011, when the then Vice President Xi Jinping presented a khatag at the memorial stupa in Tashilhunpo monastery to the Tenth Panchen Lama. Xi

Jinping's father, Xi Zhongxun, had been close to the Tenth Panchen Lama. In an obituary for the People's Daily after the Tibetan leader passed away in January 1989 in Shigatse, Xi Zhongxun referred to one of their last meetings, when he apparently expressed concern about his health, saying: "I told him that Buddha didn't want him to go yet, nor did Marx want him to go. Who knew that this would be our final parting. Holding the spotless white khata he gave me when we last saw each other and looking toward the western sky, I am filled with great sadness."<sup>93</sup> Xi Zhongxun had also been friendly with the young Dalai Lama when he spent six months in Beijing in 1954. The Dalai Lama presented him with a watch, which Xi's father wore for many years.

Although since his enthronement Gyaltsen Norbu has met three successive leaders of China,<sup>94</sup> he himself has little political weight. When he appears with senior Party leaders such as the head of the United Front or the TAR Party Secretary he is usually portrayed as a passive figure who is subject to exhortations to follow 'Xi Jinping thought'.<sup>95</sup> The highest position he holds is one of five Tibetans on the CPPCC Standing Committee, with a total of 299 members.<sup>96</sup> Party scholar Xiao Jie was typically dismissive in comments cited by the Global Times: "I don't see him having a more important role ... the policy to separate religion from politics has been successful [in Tibet]. [...] I don't think religious figures will play a major role in [Beijing's] Tibet policies."

[These] are developed under the leadership of the Communist Party – I don't think we need him [in politics]."<sup>97</sup>



Nevertheless Gyaltsen Norbu is a critical figurehead in plans for managing the Dalai Lama's succession. As part of this strategy, CCP propaganda projects Gyaltsen Norbu as more important in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy than the Dalai Lama; for instance, a report in Xinhua in 2005 described him as "the highest ranking figure in Tibetan Buddhism" and the "leader of Tibetan Buddhism".<sup>98</sup>

The CCP authorities have progressively raised Gyaltsen Norbu's profile in the secular as well as the religious sphere. In a visit to sensitive areas close to the Indian border in July (2022),<sup>99</sup> state media depicted Gyaltsen Norbu visiting family homes with large portraits of Chinese leaders on the walls, including two sisters from a village called Yumei who had received a personal letter from Xi Jinping in 2017.<sup>100</sup> Xi Jinping's letter to her family in a remote village, a few kilometers north of the McMahon Line and not far from an Indian village, thanked

them for "protecting the security" of the border area. Yumei became a model village for the hundreds more to be built in the TAR. It is also on the route of a sacred pilgrimage to Mount Kailash.<sup>101</sup>

On a previous visit to the border in 2019, Gyaltsen Norbu visited Jaggang, Ngari (Chinese: Ali) near Demchok in Ladakh, India, one of a number of areas described as 'disputed' by Beijing on the 'Line of Actual Control' (LAC) stretching from eastern Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh in India.<sup>102</sup> A report in the official press indicated that his role now extends beyond religious activities to incorporate 'research'.<sup>103</sup> Gyaltsen Norbu has been photographed at the enormous Zam (Chinese: Zangmu) dam in Lhokha (Chinese: Shannan), the largest hydropower station in the TAR.<sup>104</sup> China regards Tibet's water as a strategic asset and a critical factor in its control of Tibet.<sup>105</sup>

## PRESSURE BUILDS OVER CHINESE PANCHEN INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

China's efforts to create an international profile for their official Panchen were hindered in May 2022 when he was refused permission to visit Nepal. The CCP had planned for him to attend a ceremony in the Buddha's birthplace in Lumbini, but both the U.S. and the Indian government expressed alarm. A visit by China's Panchen Lama would have been a significant propaganda coup for the PRC as part of their effort to dominate India at a symbolic sacred site close to its border, as well as a stepping stone towards further travel outside the PRC for Gyaltsen Norbu.

Instead, Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Lumbini to coincide with Buddha Jayanti day, a festival commemorating the birth of the Buddha. With his visit to the small pilgrimage town close to India's border, Modi highlighted India's intentions to reclaim a sphere of influence from Nepal's northern neighbour.

If the visit to Nepal had been permitted, it would have only been the second visit outside the PRC by China's Panchen. In May 2019, he had made a low-key trip to Thailand, the first time he had ever left China. (This was only noticed after the event, from a posting on an official website for Buddhist affairs and was not widely broadcast by state news agencies.)

In December 2024 there were also rumours that China's Panchen "could add to Nepal's geopolitical challenges", Vice Chair of the Lumbini Trust Lyarkal Lama told the Kathmandu Post. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would not permit him to visit Nepal due to its policy of maintaining neutrality in religious matters, according to three diplomatic sources cited by Anil Giri of the Kathmandu Post.<sup>106</sup>

CCP-aligned Mongolian monks have also invited the Chinese Panchen to visit Mongolia, which would serve the purpose of undermining the Dalai Lama's influence and potentially creating divisions among the Tibetan Buddhist community.

## CHINESE PANCHEN LINKS TO ANTI-DALAI LAMA GROUP

Individuals loyal to a spirit entity known as Gyalpo Shugden (Dolgyal) are used by China to sow divisions and stoke tensions. These followers of an entity banned by the Dalai Lama develop connections to monasteries that may be unfriendly to the Dalai Lama both inside and outside Tibet and China. China's Panchen Lama has been associated with the Shugden sect since his installation, and China aims to make him a rallying point for those who practice Shugden worship. The Dalai Lama has requested those who wish to practice this form of worship not to attend his teachings, as he believes them to be a sectarian divisive force.

Chinese state media reported that in 2015 the 'Chinese Panchen' visited a monastery in Yunnan, Gaden Tsumsenling, that has been linked to the Shugden practice.<sup>107</sup> A Western scholar who has visited the same monastery was told by monks that some

colleges within the monastery involved Shugden worship, but others did not, and that monks from each side did not talk to each other.)<sup>108</sup>

The late Gangchen Rinpoche, who was prominent in the Western Shugden movement, lent useful support to the CCP through his endorsement of Gyaltzen Norbu, thus sanctioning the Chinese Panchen, and the Party's, involvement in the choice of incarnate lamas. Gangchen, who died of COVID in 2020, said that it was his "long-cherished dream" to meet the Tenth Panchen Lama's reincarnation, and that upon meeting him he was glad to see that the 11th 'Panchen Erdeni' "is wise and benevolent".<sup>109</sup>





Crowds of Chinese flock to the Sumtseling temple in Gyalthang (ShangriLa), in Dechen, Yunnan, a hotspot for domestic tourism. The temple is a site of worship of Shugden, an anti-Dalai Lama sect aligned with the CCP, and adorned with images of the Chinese Panchen. Photo courtesy of Vera Hue.

## WITH AN 'OFFICIAL' REGENT, CHINA SEEKS TO ASSERT CONTROL OVER AN INTERREGNUM

Another aspect of Beijing's 'post Dalai Lama' strategy was achieved four years after Gedhun Choekyi Nyima's disappearance, an event virtually unnoticed by the outside world. The Chinese authorities installed a two-year old boy as the Seventh Reting Rinpoche, one of only a few high-ranking personages in earlier days empowered to manage Tibet during the absence or minority of the Dalai Lamas.

Previous Reting Rinpoches have not only been crucial during interregnums of Dalai Lamas, but they have also recognized other incarnate lamas, notably the Ninth Jetsundhampa of Mongolia in 1933 – the predecessor of the child recognized by the Dalai Lama and introduced publicly to devotees in March 2023. China is likely to claim that its official Reting Rinpoche incarnation has the authority to endorse its Dalai Lama candidate not only within the PRC but also beyond its borders.

As Regent of Tibet following the death of the 13th Dalai Lama, the Fifth Reting Rinpoche played a leading role in the search for the 14th Dalai Lama and became one of his senior tutors. Resigning in 1941, Reting Rinpoche was later accused of collusion with the Chinese against the Tibetan government and was arrested in April 1947. He died in prison a month later.

The Sixth Reting Rinpoche was used as a 'patriotic' figurehead by the Chinese government, being appointed to political positions from the age of eight. Imprisoned

during the Cultural Revolution, he was 'rehabilitated' in the late 1970s and awarded several official positions. Like the Tenth Panchen Lama, after his imprisonment he adopted a secular lifestyle and married. He died in 1997.

In 1999, the Chinese state media reported that the search for the Seventh Reting Rinpoche had been completed according to "relevant central and TAR [...] regulations." According to Tibet Daily, the then deputy mayor of Lhasa, Dargye (Chinese Tajie) said that the search had been undertaken by Reting Monastery's Democratic Management Committee, "taking into account a series of signs of the Sixth Reting Rinpoche loving the country and loving religion during his lifetime and his influence on the broad masses of monks and ordinary people." Dargye added that the search had been conducted in accordance with Tibetan Buddhist tradition: "including divination and looking for visions in lakes carried out by senior monks of great virtue from within the region."<sup>110</sup>

Monks at Reting monastery, located in a valley north of Lhasa, protested against Sonam Phuntsog's selection in May 2000,<sup>111</sup> and the Dalai Lama did not endorse the Party's choice. A Western visitor to the monastery was allowed rare access to the boy a year later, and said: "There was quite a tense atmosphere in the monastery, which has around 130 monks [...] We were initially denied [access to Sonam Phuntsog] and told that it was next to impossible to see the



young boy, including for Tibetans, because of fear that someone would harm him. After much persuasion, we were given permission. [...] The little boy was sitting on the throne, with a monk attendant on one side, his father, and police in the room. Another security official followed us in. The little boy looked frightened and had no idea what to do. All the attendants were giving him instructions, 'say hello, give them an offering scarf.' [...] We were not allowed to take photographs of him [...] and there were no photographs of him to buy anywhere either." <sup>112</sup>

In January 2013, the then 16-year old Sonam Phuntsog (Chinese transliteration: Rezhen Solang Puntso) became the youngest member of Tibet's CPPCC. Following his appointment, the teenager told China Daily that he would "keep the Reting lineage of patriotism and the love for the religion". <sup>113</sup> At a meeting in January 2022 emphasising the importance of Sinicisation, China's appointed Reting spoke about "guiding the majority of monks to effectively build Chinese national consciousness." <sup>114</sup>

## CHINA'S POLICY APPROACH: THE 'LATE' AND 'POST' ERAS

The Dalai Lama's actions in 2011 in devolving political power to the exile Tibetan democracy, preparing the way for a new generation of Tibetans to take up the leadership of their community, led to a new phase in policy responses by the CCP. (Also in 2011, the Dalai Lama made his formal 'proclamation' on his own reincarnation).

One Chinese commentator, Wang Yanmin, implies that the Dalai Lama's devolution of political power to a democracy in exile is regarded as strength rather than weakness when he refers to the "Dalai clique's strategy of 'advance by retreat'." In the same way as China accuses the Dalai Lama of 'masterminding' and 'inciting' Tibetan self immolations and unrest from 2008, Wang implies that the Dalai Lama and his Private Office are plotting to undermine the Communist Party leadership and lay the groundwork for the future. <sup>115</sup>

Party commentators deploy the language of the battlefield to describe their political approach to countering and eradicating the Dalai Lama's influence in Tibet.

Communications work on Tibet after the passing of the Dalai Lama will require "a protracted war", says one commentator, Xinhua journalist Wang Jiaquan. <sup>116</sup>

The "Late Dalai" period of "anti-secession struggle" is an "acute and complex situation", according to Tibet Daily (6 December 2016). <sup>117</sup>

Chinese commentators concluded after the uprisings in 2008, China's Olympic year, that while the main target of CCP outreach on Tibet had previously been an international audience, they had neglected understanding the 'nationalism' of a younger generation of Tibetans as well as perceptions of Tibet among Chinese people. They point to factors such as a younger generation in China who are more critical in their thinking, and who have more direct

encounters with Tibetans due to increasing numbers of tourists visiting the plateau.<sup>118</sup>

Wang Yanmin uses a Chinese term generally applied to military conflict to underline the need to prepare in dealing with the challenges of the Dalai Lama's succession. What is required is, "intimate contact with the masses [to] carry out full position control (Chinese: quan fangwei zhendi kongzhi)." The task of Public Security agencies will be to gather information on the activities of "splittist elements" who "live among the broad masses" [...] In Tibet [Autonomous Region] and the four provinces' [Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan and Gansu] Tibetan areas, due to special ethnic and religious factors, relying on the masses to conduct position control has ever greater special significance."

Wang Yanmin's master's thesis is published by the Criminology department of the Public Security University of China, denoting that

the topic is perceived not as a matter of religion or culture, but of securitisation. The CCP Chinese Party state defines the distinct and separate sense of ethnic identity and culture as an existential threat to 'social stability' and national security, in effect securitizing Tibetan and Uyghur ethnicity.

More recently, Chinese statements describe the Dalai Lama's passing as a "major challenge" to the CCP (zhongda tiaozhan),<sup>119</sup> and as a "critical period".<sup>120</sup> Other official sources describe the reincarnation of Tibetan religious leaders and the succession of the Dalai Lama as "major political struggles" for "stability maintenance". In April 2020, Liu Zhiqiang, deputy secretary of the party committee in Lhoka (Chinese: Shannan) City, ordered a "focus on dealing with the major political struggles of the 14th Dalai Lama's death and reincarnation" to "maintain stability".<sup>121</sup>



Chinese tourists posing in Tibetan clothes at the palace of the Seventh Dalai Lama in Lithang (Litang), Sichuan, the Tibetan area of Kham. 2025. Photo courtesy of Vera Hue.

## KEY PLAYERS AND INSTITUTIONS IMPLEMENTING 'REINCARNATION POLITICS'

As a result, the planning process for the Dalai Lama's succession and Tibet's future is masterminded at the highest levels of the Party. A well resourced small group comprising around 25 senior Party members has been set up in secret by Beijing to prepare for the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. According to Tibetan sources, the group has access to substantial resources and is under the oversight of Xi Jinping and the powerful political advisor and ideologue Wang Huning, who has been involved in Tibet policy for more than a decade.

It is widely assumed that Wang Huning, Chairman of China's top political advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), is now heading the Central Tibet Work Coordination Group (also known as the Tibet Leading Group), the main coordinating agency on Tibet policy under the CCP.

The Chinese Communist governance system of coordinating groups with specialised tasks – the 'Leading Small Groups' (lingdao xiaozu) – has been developed further under Xi Jinping. The work scope of the Central Tibet Working Group was expanded from the TAR to Tibetan areas of Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai and Yunnan in 2010.<sup>122</sup>

The committee set up to manage the Dalai Lama's reincarnation is termed the 'Preparatory Search Committee'. According to sources, it is based in Lhasa and likely to

be run under the TAR authorities.<sup>123</sup>

A Tibetan source close to the Dalai Lama<sup>124</sup> believes the Chinese authorities set up a separate group with more than 20 members under the United Front Work Department to manage the Chinese Panchen Lama Gyaltzen Norbu and his activities during this crucial period. Both committees are likely to be run by the Party, not the state government, as two of various 'research groups'<sup>125</sup> run under the 'Tibet Leading Group' overseen by Xi Jinping and Wang Huning. At the 'Two Sessions' in Beijing in March 2024 Wang referred to "10 research and inspections in Tibet [Autonomous Region], Xinjiang, and Tibet-related counties in Sichuan Province on promoting the Sinicisation of Tibetan Buddhism."<sup>126</sup>

In the summer of 2023 Wang Huning made an inspection tour of Tibet, visiting the heavily militarised border area of Nyingtri (Chinese: Nyingchi), following a visit by Xi Jinping to the same area two years earlier. Wang Huning emphasised the importance of "unswerving" implementation of Party policy and "stepping up education about ethnic unity [and cultivation of] a growing sense of identity in all ethnic groups with the motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Party, and socialism with Chinese characteristics."<sup>127</sup> Wang Huning has been a prominent head of the Central Policy Research Office under three generations of Party leaders, in charge of ideology, propaganda and Party organisation. He returned to Kham and Amdo on an inspection tour on 1-3 July 2024.<sup>128</sup>

Trusted Xi Jinping ally Zhao Leji is another central figure in implementing China's 'Sinicisation' campaign and its political struggle against 'foreign hostile forces'. Zhao Leji is the new Chairman of the National People's Congress, and the only member in the Politburo with many years of experience working with Tibetans in Qinghai province, which incorporates the Amdo region of Tibet, including the birthplaces of the Dalai Lama and the Tenth Panchen Lama. Chinese state media describe Zhao Leji, Party Secretary of Qinghai between 2003 and 2007, as prominent in efforts to "combat foreign hostile forces, in particular, the 14th Dalai Clique's infiltration and sabotage activities in Qinghai Province".<sup>129</sup>

Zhao previously headed the Central Organization Department and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, becoming the key person behind Xi Jinping's 'anti-corruption' campaign. According to state media, in Tibet, the campaign was used to punish Party members believed to "secretly follow the Dalai Lama and those who secretly hold religious beliefs".<sup>130</sup>

During his tenure in Tibet from 2011-16, the then Party Secretary of the TAR Chen Quanguo implemented tough measures to prevent Tibetans travelling into exile to attend teachings by the Dalai Lama. In the 1990s and 2000s, thousands of Tibetans used to risk capture at the border and hard labour in prison to make the journey to see their religious leader even just once in a lifetime. This changed with the implementation of tougher border controls after the protests and crackdown of 2008, and then in 2012 under Chen Quanguo

when the authorities launched a major operation to detain Tibetans attending a Dalai Lama empowerment in Bodh Gaya, India.<sup>131</sup> While on a much smaller scale, presaging the Uyghur internment camps, many pilgrims were held for weeks or months in military camps or detention facilities upon their return. In 2015, Chen boasted: "In recent years not one person from our Region has gone abroad to participate in 'Buddhist teachings' organized by the Dalai Clique", saying: "There will be severe punishments for Party members and cadres who follow the Dalai Clique, those who support infiltration and sabotage activities, those who leave the country to worship the 14th Dalai, participating in his 'Buddhist teachings,' listen to his sermons, and those who send their relatives and children to be educated in schools run by the 14th Dalai Clique."<sup>132</sup>

The driver of enforcing the Party's policy on reincarnation and a CCP-approved Dalai Lama is the United Front Work Department (UFWD), the Party organisation responsible for managing and influencing people and organisations outside mainland China.

The work of the United Front is led by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and reflects the CCP's global ambitions and perceptions of threats to its domestic and global security. Its mandate covers a broad spectrum of activity, from espionage to foreign interference, influence and engagement, with no clear distinction between overseas and domestic work.<sup>133</sup> It is used to co-opt and remove sources of potential opposition to Party policies and authority.



Under Xi Jinping, united front work has been emphasised more than under any other leader in the post-Maoist period. While the UFWD has always played an important role in Tibet policy, the department has been vested with more power to control the monastic and lay community, evidenced by the tripling of its budget in the TAR in the past five years.<sup>134</sup>

“What does ‘United Front’ mean? ‘Front’ means the political struggle against the Dalai Lama on the side of the Communist Party. ‘United’ means the unity of China and

Tibet [as well as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Xinjiang]. I am not going to do like the proverb ‘Eat medicine for a hundred years only to drink poison on your deathbed,’” wrote Modom Lodro Chotso, describing the rationale of her father in not joining the Chamdo UFWD upon his political rehabilitation after 20 years in prison. Her father explained: “When the Chinese released us from prison<sup>135</sup> they themselves labelled us ‘[...] Lackeys of the Dalai Clique’. That is what I have always been, and what I will be until I die.”

## WHY CHINA WANTS TO CONTROL REINCARNATION

*“Nowadays communism is spreading more and more. [...] It will definitely invade this land of joint spiritual and temporal systems in the future, either from without or within. If we cannot defend our land at that time, all our holy teachers, including the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, will be eliminated without even their names being traceable; properties of Incarnate Lamas and the monasteries, along with their endowment funds, will be completely destroyed; our political system [...] reduced to a mere name; our officials, deprived of their paternal properties and their wealth, and forced to be slaves of the enemy; and my people, subjected to tortures and intimidation day and night. This time will certainly come.”*

- Will and prophecy of the 13th Dalai Lama (1876-1933)<sup>136</sup>

While “the Tibet Question is an issue that touches on China’s core interests”, writes one Chinese commentator from Xinhua, “It is also one that has become known as ‘China’s sore point’ of the twenty-first century.”<sup>137</sup> The Xinhua reporter argues for a new approach to reflect the changed political environment, acknowledging that previous heavy-handed ‘propaganda offensives’ have been counter-productive.

China’s policies in Tibet emerge from the PRC’s pressing strategic and economic imperatives, notably, its control over the borders, now prioritized still further in the context of deepening tensions with India; raising the productivity of the industrial cities of Xi’an, Chongqing and Chengdu at the foot of the plateau; expansion of mining based on the rich resources of the Tibetan plateau (uranium, lithium, copper

and gold)<sup>138</sup> in order to fuel China's economic development, and finally, to address the progressive scarcity of water in the North and North-East of China (which may render Beijing uninhabitable in coming decades) with water sourced in Tibet. As the earth's Third Pole, the plateau is the source of most of Asia's major rivers, with multiple dam building projects impacting millions of people downstream. For the first time, China's dam-building is now reaching upriver to the sources of Asia's great wild rivers in landscapes that were previously among the least disturbed habitats on earth. The planned Kamtok (Chinese: Gangtuo) dam in the upper reaches of the Yangtze (Driчу in Tibetan), for instance, risks a cascade of adverse consequences both on the plateau and downstream in China.<sup>139</sup>

These factors mean that Tibet is vital to the future of China and of high political

importance to Xi Jinping. In Tibet, Xi Jinping has presided over intensified militarization and social engineering projects, reshaping of the Tibetan plateau through infrastructure construction and mass displacement and relocation of Tibetan nomads and pastoralists.<sup>140</sup>

China's approach to Tibet is a central to fulfilling its quest for 'national rejuvenation'. During the Communist Party's 100 year anniversary in 2021, Xi Jinping warned other countries against trying to influence China, saying that they would "crack their heads and spill blood" if they tried. Control over the Tibetan Buddhist succession process is also viewed by China as integral to its strategic competition for influence and dominance across the region, particularly with regard to India and Mongolia.

## CHINA'S POLICIES OF SINICISATION

*"We are going through the cataclysm of forced cultural integration, both intentionally and unintentionally. In this thick climate of cultural assimilation, the environment and the people, language and culture, traditional customs, and so forth are all subjected to acute destruction and decline. As a result, if we are to resist this historical situation, based on individual passion, talent, or ability, we must leave no stone unturned in gaining control over the reins of our future. There is nothing more important than that."*

- Go Sherab Gyatso, a respected Tibetan writer who is serving a ten-year prison sentence <sup>141</sup>

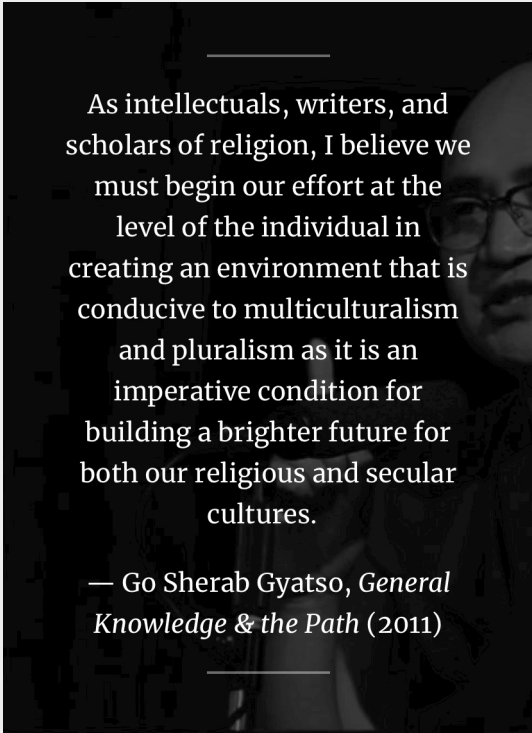
China's policy of Sinicisation is aligned with the imperative of imposing "Xi Jinping Thought", and involves a more far-reaching effort than before to break and reshape Tibetan Buddhist belief and practices.<sup>142</sup>

It aims to bring religion under the total control of the Party state, and to ensure the religious and personal feelings of monks, nuns and laypeople are supplanted by loyalty to Chinese cultural nationalism, the

concept of 'Zhonghua minzu'.<sup>143</sup> Officials are required to prioritize 'ethnic mingling' (minzu jiaorong) of China's nationalities and 'identification' by Tibetans (and other 'minority nationalities' such as Uyghurs) with "Chinese culture" (Zhonghua wenhua).

In 2020 the charter of the Buddhist Association of China (BAC) was amended to include "Sinicisation of Buddhism in China" as one of its objectives, to "support the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist system, study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and adhere to the direction of the Sinification of Buddhism in China."<sup>144</sup> The BAC's Party committee has authority over monastic leadership,<sup>145</sup> consistent with Party control over religious institutions across Tibet. Monasteries are micro-managed by secular committees, and a new generation of Buddhist teachers are trained both in religious doctrine and state ideology in order to ensure a political agenda of Sinicisation and to "adapt Tibetan Buddhism to socialist society."<sup>146</sup>

A policy paper by a Chinese scholar indicates how the CCP is motivated by an agenda against Buddhist identity that can be understood through an official term: "breaking lineage, breaking roots, breaking connections, and breaking origins".<sup>147</sup> Former Deputy Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs Chen Zongrong says: "Promoting the Sinicisation of religion in our country is just to strip away those historical deposits [i.e., sediment, accumulations] that are not suitable for our contemporary society."<sup>148</sup>

A black and white portrait of Go Sherab Gyatso, a Tibetan man with glasses, looking slightly to the side. The image is partially obscured by a dark rectangular box containing text.

As intellectuals, writers, and scholars of religion, I believe we must begin our effort at the level of the individual in creating an environment that is conducive to multiculturalism and pluralism as it is an imperative condition for building a brighter future for both our religious and secular cultures.

— Go Sherab Gyatso, *General Knowledge & the Path* (2011)

Go Sherab Gyatso, also known as Gosher, is a prominent Tibetan writer, a passionate educator, and a fiercely outspoken public intellectual. In October 2020, Gosher was detained for the fourth time. He was held in incommunicado detention for over a year before being handed a 10-year prison sentence in a secret trial in December 2021. Image: <https://gosherabgyatso.com/>



A 'Sinicised' official Buddhism is designed to further dissociate Tibetans from the Dalai Lama, with the intention that future generations will only remember him in negative terms, as an enemy, even as a 'terrorist'.<sup>149</sup> Wu Yingjie, Party boss of the TAR until 2021, has referred to the

requirement to separate "religion from life", although spirituality and the Dalai Lama are integral to Tibetan identity.<sup>150</sup> Wu Yingjie also referred to a phrase that is increasingly used in official discourse, the Party's focus on a "happy life" – again, referring to a life that is separate from religion.<sup>151</sup>



Monks in exile from Amdo hold a banner at the Dalai Lama's temple in Dharamsala, calling for the freedom of imprisoned writer and scholar monk Go Sherab Gyatso.



Last June it was revealed that Wu Yingjie was being investigated for corruption, prompting speculation that this was linked to his tenure in Tibet from 1974-2021.<sup>152</sup> The reasons for the investigation are not known, although they are unlikely to be linked to his ideological position on the Dalai Lama, which aligns with that of the Party's. Nevertheless the case serves as a reminder of the factional struggles that are usually hidden from the outside world but that can have impacts on policy.<sup>153</sup>

The focus on controlling tulkus (reincarnate lamas) as an integral element of Sinicisation can also be understood as an indication of the political difficulties faced by the authorities following their failure to secure the allegiance of some senior reincarnate lamas in Tibet. This includes the 17th Karmapa, who was being groomed by the Chinese as a 'patriotic' figurehead. Arjia Rinpoche, then the abbot of Kumbum monastery in Qinghai, who also held official positions, defected to the US in 1998 after Beijing sought his endorsement of the Chinese Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu. Both made statements afterwards about the lack of genuine religious freedom in Tibet.

This has led the Party to develop new methods to break the connections between generations and obliterate memories and knowledge of Tibet's history. At the Seventh Forum on Tibet Work in August 2020, the major central Party meeting to guide policy over the coming decade, Party Secretary and President Xi emphasized the need for more political education in schools to implant "the red gene" in the minds of children. There has been an expansion in pre-school education in Tibetan areas, focusing particularly on kindergartens for children from the age of two upwards. There is a heavy focus on teaching Chinese, depriving Tibetan children of their mother tongue, the basis and core of Tibetan cultural identity, and on shaping minds at an early age.<sup>154</sup>

But the success of Xi Jinping's sweeping 'Sinicisation' project is not guaranteed. Even China's official Panchen Lama Gyaltsen Norbu appeared dubious when he said: "Whether our Tibetan Buddhism can adapt to the socialist society with Chinese characteristics and whether it can be Sinicised will determine the future and development of Tibetan Buddhism."<sup>155</sup>

# CHINA'S AIM TO END SUPPORT FOR TIBET: CULTIVATING DRAGONS' TAILS WITHOUT A HEAD



Before and after images of religious oppression in Tibet. This image from 2017 depicts the major Buddhist institute of Yachen Gar, prior to major demolitions and expulsions of thousands of Tibetan Buddhist nuns and monks. Nuns who studied here from the Tibet Autonomous Region may have been detained for 're education' according to some sources. Name of photographer withheld on request



Caption: This image from November 2020 of Yachen Gar in Sichuan, the Tibetan area of Kham, depicts the demolition of around half the monastic complex, with much of the lay residential area left intact and the survival of only a few meditation huts. Photo courtesy of E.C.

Papers by scholars in Party-run institutes in China can offer glimpses of critique of policy or official approaches. They inform policy development and can warn of harsh measures to come. For instance, in the early 2000s influential Chinese scholars such as Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe wrote about a "second generation of ethnic policies" directed toward diminishing 'ethnic' identity (Chinese: *minzu*) and strengthening a single, shared 'national

identity' with the emphasis on cultural assimilation and the construction of an extensive architecture of surveillance and control before these policies became visible in Tibet and Xinjiang.<sup>156</sup>

Wang Jiaquan accepts this will be a difficult task: "[The Dalai Lama] is an idol in the hearts of Western people and has many adoring fans. This is the reason why the long-term content of our Tibet

communications, with its aim of directly criticizing the Dalai, has had difficulty being accepted in the West. After the death of the Dalai, no matter whom he himself chooses as his reincarnation or who the new generation of Tibet independence forces cliques may be, they will find it hard to immediately garner the same fascination that the 14th reincarnation once had, and this will undoubtedly lead to a period of 'vanished idol' in the hearts of his Western supporters; not to mention if we go by what he has said and his selection is a female successor, an adult or even a non-Tibetan."

The paper sets out the opportunities for the CCP of splits and divisions among Tibetan exiles and their supporters, saying: "There have always been disagreements within the Dalai clique on how to press forward on the so-called Tibet issue. After the Dalai dies, it is highly probable that overseas Tibet independence forces and cliques will be 'many dragon tails without a head' and will become greatly splintered. And furthermore, for the purposes of power and interests, there will inevitably be a struggle over isolating the 'government in exile' and the Dalai Lama's method of reincarnation and his selection. Third is the possibility that overseas Tibetan independence forces may move a step closer towards violence."<sup>157</sup>

Wang Jiaquan referred to a fourth factor as China's power globally: "The 'post-Dalai era' is also the era of China continuing to take great strides forward along the road of revival. China's strength continues to grow and our international position continues to rise with our diplomatic strategies maturing, all of which is doubtlessly

beneficial to resolving the Tibet independence force's strategy of 'internationalizing the Tibet issue.'"

Raising an apparent contradiction in the same paper, Wang Jiaquan warns that: "The international weight of the Tibet issue is unlikely to lessen because of the passing of the Dalai era" because "hostile Western forces" may "make ever more noise about the 'Tibet issue'." Wang concludes: "The general trend in the situation being faced will be towards even more complexity."

The paper, which was presented to a national conference on communications in Beijing in 2009, notes that while the main target of CCP outreach has previously been to an international audience, this changed after 2008. The solidarity among Tibetans across the plateau, and the risks they were prepared to take to express their grief, sense of dispossession, and wish for the Dalai Lama to return home, shocked Party leaders and became a turning point in Tibet policy, transforming the political landscape. It was concluded that Party leaders had failed in their duty by not being tough enough, and the response was to strengthen the very approaches that sparked the protests, such as aggressive campaigns against the Dalai Lama. "It is only by properly carrying out domestic Tibet communications that we will be able to properly neutralize the 'viruses' of foreign media, Tibet independence forces' 'rebels,' and the differing voices in some domestic opinion, and it is only in this way that a good domestic atmosphere for opinion can be created for engaging in the international struggle on Tibet," Wang writes.

He is also critical of old school style propaganda methods, with officials “making opulent speeches critical of the Dalai [...] to the extent that sometimes even literal repetition can’t be avoided. This is [...] a classic example of what the foreign media calls ‘cliches’.”<sup>158</sup> Perhaps Wang had in mind the rhetoric of figures like former Chair of the TAR People’s Congress Pema Choling (Padma Choling) who became Chairman of the TAR People’s Congress, who declared that the Dalai Lama’s spirit properly resides with the Communist Party in Beijing and that his reincarnation “is not up to the Dalai Lama.” For the Dalai Lama to suggest anything else, Padma Choling said, is “blasphemy against Tibetan Buddhism.”<sup>159</sup>

In his paper Wang Jiaquan refers to the ‘3.14’ incident in Lhasa as a turning point. The Chinese authorities represented the unprecedented unrest across the Tibetan plateau as one violent riot, referring solely to the events of 14 March 2008 in Lhasa, when a minority of protestors turned to violence. Alarmed by the depth of resistance, the CCP sent a number of research delegations to Tibet from Beijing to investigate why the protests had happened. Wang Jiaquan confirms this: “Following the ‘3.14’ incident, there arose a domestic need to understand Tibet and the Tibet issue.” Alarmed by the solidarity and extent of resistance, Wang mentioned the “problem” after 2008 of “nationalist sentiment among Tibetan youth”.

Wang is also critical of Party officials displaying an innate insecurity and “colonialism complex” by prefacing projects such as aid for Tibet with an unnecessary mention of the Chinese province that has supported them. (Chinese official media

frequently uses the term ‘China’s Tibet’, although it would not refer to, for instance, China’s Hunan). Wang notes that this is understood by the outside world as a marker of ‘colonialism’ just as Party officials described Tibetans as ‘backward’.

These comments reflect how closely Party officials monitor international coverage of Tibet as well as the work of NGOs and Tibet support groups internationally. This monitoring has been stepped up since 2008, with lengthy reports produced by Chinese scholars on the activities of groups such as the International Campaign for Tibet, the largest Tibet rights and advocacy organisation worldwide.<sup>160</sup>

In a paper published by the Public Security University of China in Beijing in 2017, Wang Yanmin acknowledges that in the ‘post Dalai era’, “contests surrounding the ‘reincarnation issue’ will be unavoidable, but as far as our side is concerned, this is an opportunity: we can use the recognition of the reincarnated soul boy and the new Dalai Lama to attack the pseudo government”. (The Chinese authorities do not recognise the CTA in Dharamsala as a legitimate entity).<sup>161</sup>

The document provides insights into the insecurities and positioning of the CCP as they double down on oppressive control measures and convey a sense within the Party that outcomes nevertheless are still uncertain.

As with Wang Jiaquan’s paper, Wang Yanmin’s commentary emphasizes the tougher responses following the protests of 2008 and the self-immolations from 2009, referring to extensive investigation by a “special research group” set up “to



understand conditions in monasteries and of monks and nuns.” In typical Party style, they “carried out a survey of monasteries and monks’ and nuns’ thinking in Tibet and the four provinces’ Tibetan areas” as well as “in-depth inspections of monasteries”.<sup>162</sup>

The official position, of course, remains uniformed by genuine research, and the Party state continues to take the position that the Dalai Lama incited the protests and self-immolations from exile. On the

contrary, there appears to be a direct correlation between the self-immolations and an intensified campaign against the Dalai Lama in Tibet together with the aggressive expansion of legal measures tightening state control over Tibetan religion and culture. This was particularly evident following the imposition of increasingly restrictive measures after 2008 in the eastern Tibetan areas of Amdo and Kham, where most of the self-immolations occurred.

## WARNING OF VIOLENCE

Both papers warn of the possibility of violence following the Dalai Lama’s passing and fail to concede that this is more likely to result from the PRC’s oppressive measures. Tibetans have overwhelmingly followed the Dalai Lama’s position on nonviolence despite decades of political crackdowns that criminalise even the mildest expression of loyalty to the exiled spiritual leader. Since 2009, not one of the 159 Tibetans who have set fire to themselves, often with hands in prayer position or calling for the Dalai Lama to be allowed to return home, have sought to harm anyone else.<sup>163</sup>

While Xinhua commentator Wang Jiaquan warns of the possibility of Tibetans turning to violence in a future scenario, he reassures his audience that even this could work in the CCP’s favour and could “help us pull the veil away from overseas Tibet independence forces and conversely help us to garner sympathetic opinion from the international community.”

The Party’s fears of unrest are real. In 2011, it began to post a cadre team<sup>164</sup> in each ‘in the TAR. It was announced that 21,000 cadres - approximately a quarter of the region’s entire administrative force - were going to live and work in each of the 5,451 villages in the region. Thirteen years later, they are still there.

“This measure has never been explicitly connected to the ‘major challenge of the transition from the Late-Dalai to the Post-Dalai era’, but it is hard to find another explanation for it,” wrote Robert Barnett.<sup>165</sup> “Nothing like this has happened before in China’s history: The lowest level of government administration in China is the township, and no government in China, including that of the PRC, has ever stationed fulltime officials at the village level on a systematic basis. When it began, the program was unique in China, and only later was it rolled out in parts of Xinjiang too, where the state has openly declared that it fears grassroots unrest or

insurrection. But in the TAR, political unrest in Tibetan villages is extremely rare, government offices at the township level already supervise each village closely, and each village already has an administrative committee and a Party branch staffed by part-time local personnel who run all village business. There is therefore no obvious reason for cadre-teams to be posted permanently in every village. As a result, speculation has spread privately among some Tibetans that the real reason the village-based cadre teams have been posted in Tibetan villages is to await the Dalai Lama's death and manage the response of Tibetans to that event at the local level."

Chinese writer Wang Lixiong, who is married to author and poet Tsering Woeser,

highlights the danger of China's policies against religion with a story from a monk in eastern Tibet. A young man had told the monk that his dream was to join an army to fight for an independent Tibet. He thought that if he did so, he would inevitably be reborn in paradise. Wang points out that such ideas are not the result of studying Buddhism – they are the result of not studying Buddhism. "If the authorities continue with the current policies of meddling with religion, making religion lose its philosophies and systems," writes Wang, "People's superstitions could become easily perverted and easily fomented, leading to extremism and social instability." <sup>166</sup>

## SECURITISATION OF THE REINCARNATION PROCESS: OFFICIAL SOURCES

*"The CCP is using very aggressive policies and a coercive approach to struggle for dominance of religion and its institutions. They have also brought in softer approaches of funding the monasteries, as part of an effort to ensure that local people are no longer making offerings and supporting monasteries financially. That makes monasteries more dependent on the Chinese state and also breaks the connections with the local community. At the same time they are using the reincarnate lamas on their official list. They believe the people are more easily persuaded by one Tibetan lama, even if they are endorsed by the state, than 10,000 soldiers."*

- Golog Jigme, former political prisoner now in exile

Outlining a position on the succession issue, Wang Yanmin says it should use “a pretext of respecting historical systems and religious traditions”. He first advocates an imposter candidate: “If the pseudo government [Dharamsala] violates historical systems and religious ceremonies by searching for and identifying their own reincarnated soul boy, we should similarly establish our own in opposition to theirs and use it to eat away at the Dalai’s foreign influence.”

But he still appears to concede that Dharamsala is in the driver’s seat: “If the Dalai’s regime decides not to recognise the next reincarnation of the Dalai, then we can still install one and use the legitimate Dalai

to oppose Tibetan independence forces, [Since the 1980s, Tibetans in exile have generally followed the Dalai Lama’s lead of seeking a genuine autonomy for Tibet rather than independence. The United Front Work Department ignores this.] “[Thus] weakening the foundations they have; or if the pseudo regime doesn’t recognise one, we can also not recognise one, and allow the venerated title of Dalai Lama to fade away and use the opportunity to raise the influence of the Panchen and gain the support of Tibetans both within and beyond the borders.”

The paper notes the difficulty to Tibetan exiles of a period in which a child is recognised as the reincarnation, leaving a



Armed police gather at the Jokhang temple in Lhasa to surround pilgrims at a prayer festival in 2016. Image circulating on Tibetan social media.



vacuum of power: “The next reincarnated Dalai will find it very difficult to match the current Dalai’s status, and therefore the Fifteenth Dalai’s leadership power over Tibetan exiles will be seriously weakened; second, even if the newly selected reincarnated soul boy happens to be recognized by the international community, the young boy will have to undergo a long period of training and education before he can be qualified to be a ‘leader,’ and before this can happen, there will only be an elected government; third, there are

numerous factions within the Dalai clique, and without the leadership of an authoritative leader, contradictions are bound to appear which will affect the stability of the pseudo regime; in sum, if democratically elected leaders can grasp and even lead the Dalai clique, that will cancel out the possibility of the Fifteenth Dalai ever holding political power, and the importance of the reincarnated soul boy issue will diminish, which will likely reduce the Dalai clique’s degree of influence.”<sup>167</sup>

## THE CONTESTED ‘GOLDEN URN’ AND A RIGGED SELECTION OF THE PANCHEN LAMA

*“The Party co-opts through religion, but bans it among its members. Likewise, it wears other ideologies that appeal to targets it cultivates: free trade, socialism, sustainability, market reforms, human rights, anti-racism. The Party doesn’t believe in these any more than reincarnation.”*

- Jichang Lulu and Lin Li, ‘The Party in monk’s robes’, Synopsis<sup>168</sup>

The CCP continues to regard the arcane method of drawing lots from an urn as key to its claim for historical legitimacy over control of the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation.<sup>169</sup> It is now described by the PRC as the only legal way to select a reincarnation. An official White Paper issued by the State Council in 2021 stated: “The reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and other grand Living Buddhas had to follow the procedure of ‘drawing lots from the golden urn’ and that the selected candidate would be subject to approval by the central government of China”.<sup>170</sup>

China’s leadership claims there will be “disturbances and chaos” if the next Dalai Lama is not chosen using the Golden Urn or following the relevant PRC regulations.<sup>171</sup>

The Dalai Lama has pointed out that the urn method was used in the selection of only one of his predecessors and played no part in his own recognition. In a 2011 statement the Dalai Lama said: “The Golden Urn system was actually used only in the cases of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dalai Lamas. However, the Twelfth Dalai Lama had already been recognized before the

procedure was employed. Therefore, there has only been one occasion when a Dalai Lama was recognized by using this method. Likewise, among the reincarnations of the Panchen Lama, apart from the Eighth and the Ninth, there have been no instances of this method being employed. This system was imposed by the Manchus, but Tibetans had no faith in it because it lacked any spiritual quality. However, if it were to be used honestly, it seems that we could consider it as similar to the manner of divination employing the dough-ball method (zen tak)."<sup>172</sup>

China's position has "elevated a long-forgotten ceremony into a controversial symbol of Chinese sovereignty in Tibet", according to scholar Max Oidtmann.<sup>173</sup> This applies even when the process of using the urn is rigged, as it was for China's Panchen Lama.

The former abbot of Kumbum monastery, Arjia Rinpoche, who defected in 1998 and now lives in exile in the U.S., recalls that under armed guard, at 2 am on 29 November 1995, he was compelled to attend a ceremony to validate the Party's choice of Panchen Lama. Television footage confirmed the staging of the urn ceremony at the Jokhang temple. Presided over by Bomi Rinpoche [the then Chair of the TAR Buddhist Association], the names of three candidates were placed in the urn. Arjia Rinpoche writes: "I expected him to lift the vessel and shake one of the lots out of the urn, but instead he passed his hand quickly over the lots and pulled one out. [...] The lamas recited prayers and cheered ritually, but with an obvious lack of enthusiasm. We returned to the hotel about five o'clock that morning, and later, when we turned on the

TV, a newsman announced: 'At ten o'clock this morning, the Golden Urn Ceremony was held at the Jokhang Temple.' In the close-ups on TV it appeared that the ivory lot selected by Bumi Rinpoche stood slightly above the others, but the only lie we recognized for certain was the time of the ceremony."<sup>174</sup> A monk at Labrang monastery watching the ceremony on state TV remembers he and fellow monastics noticed, with some shock, how one of the lots appeared to be longer than the others.<sup>175</sup>

Ye Xiaowen the director of the Bureau of Religious Affairs under the State Council – who later presided over Order No Five – revealed to Arjia Rinpoche that the process had indeed been entirely rigged. He told Arjia Rinpoche: "When we made our selection, we left nothing to chance. In the silk pouches of the ivory pieces we put a bit of cotton at the bottom of one of them, so it would be a little higher than the others and the right candidate would be chosen."<sup>176</sup> He also explained: "When the Dalai Lama announced the name of his chosen candidate, the government immediately sent out charter jets, usually reserved for members of the Politburo, to the birthplaces of the three final candidates in the Naqu district of Tibet. They put the boys and their families on the three jets and whisked them away into hiding."<sup>177</sup>

Despite numerous requests to ascertain his welfare by UN mechanisms and government, no concrete information has emerged on the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima in the nearly three decades since he and his family disappeared. It is assumed if he is still alive that he is somewhere in the PRC, and may be separated from his family.

It was during the Qing era in the 18th century that the contested 'Golden Urn'<sup>178</sup> selection system began. In 1792, Emperor Qianlong called for a complete restructuring of the Tibetan government, including a 'reincarnation lottery' system in which Manchu officials would place the names of selected candidates into a golden urn. This enabled the installation of religious figures in Tibet and Mongolia who were loyal to the emperor rather than to local leaders who might challenge the imperial Qing authorities.

The Golden Urn method continued to be used but without any consistency until the end of the Nationalist government in 1949. An official Republic of China policy

document of 1936 stipulated that the Golden Urn method should be used,<sup>179</sup> but these measures had no impact on the recognition of the 14th Dalai Lama, which was carried out according to traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice and ritual after the death of his predecessor. The Republican government had no role in the enthronement ceremony for the 14th Dalai Lama; the British Mission in Lhasa reported at the time that the ROC had requested Chinese representation, but implied that Lhasa had rebuffed its request.<sup>180</sup> The lack of such participation may have been another factor in prompting the incoming Communist Party government to assert its control on any future succession process.



## 4. RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY VS POLITICAL CONTROL: THE BATTLE OVER REINCARNATION



Pilgrims in Lhasa doing the traditional circumambulation, the Lingkor, around the sacred sites of the Potala and the Jokhang now have to negotiate roads and fences, in a symbolic barrier to devotional practice reflected in policies. Name of photographer withheld upon request.



*“Patriotism to China and loyalty to the Communist Party are regarded as absolutely essential. The unbroken authority of the tulkus for the Tibetan population can in this way be turned into a tool to legitimize Chinese politics in Tibet.”*

Peter Schwieger, ‘The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation’<sup>181</sup>

Integral to China’s strategies to ensure control over Tibetan Buddhism in the “late Dalai [Lama] era”, a network of institutions has been set up to influence a new generation of monastics.

The construction of a multi-million dollar religious institute began in Lhasa just seven months after a wave of protests, led originally by monks from the major monasteries of Lhasa, swept across Tibet in March 2008.<sup>182</sup> The establishment of the Tibetan Buddhist Theological Institute in October 2008, and others outside the TAR, have become critical to the long-term ambitions of the Party.

In December 2016, the Central Party Committee agreed to establish CCP control over the management of all the higher-level Buddhist institutes across the PRC.<sup>183</sup>

Two years later in 2018, it was announced that 200 Communist Party cadres and lay officials were taking over all management, finances, security, admissions, and even the choice of textbooks at the world’s largest Tibetan Buddhist institute, the pioneering monastic encampment of Larung Gar in Kham, eastern Tibet.<sup>184</sup> This followed expulsions of thousands of monks and nuns and demolitions of their homes under three Chinese leaders, Xi Jinping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, in order to curb and manage the growing influence and number of monks and nuns at this important

monastic centers of study and Buddhist ethics in eastern Tibet, the largest such institute in the world.<sup>185</sup>

The changes at Larung Gar were in line with China’s policies on religion, which emphasize political ‘stability’ in monasteries by intensifying official management, and reward political compliance by monks and nuns with public praise and material or social benefits. Human Rights Watch reported, “The scheme appears designed to micromanage religious institutions rather than close them down and to produce a new generation of Buddhist teachers trained equally in religious doctrine and state ideology in order to ‘adapt Tibetan Buddhism to socialist society.’”<sup>186</sup>

The first class of 150 monks, including tulkus and monks from various Tibetan Buddhist schools, graduated from the Buddhist institute for reincarnate lamas in the Chushur (Chinese: Quxu) county of Lhasa municipality in 2013. The building cost 103 million yuan (US\$15.8 million).<sup>187</sup>

Online references in Chinese media specify that teaching at the Institute is conducted in the Chinese language, although Tibetan language is integral to the understanding of religious concepts fundamental to Tibetan Buddhist religion and philosophy. The institute also provides primary-level teaching for young tulkus, although no children are allowed by law to become

monks in the PRC. Images of 'Living Buddhas' recognised by China depict monks who are clearly under 18.<sup>188</sup>

One of the main courses, which run in length from two to four years, is specifically designed for students recognised as 'Living Buddhas', while all students are required to attend classes on Buddhist, cultural, and legal studies, according to the state media. Drupkhang Thubten Khedrub, who heads the Institute in Lhasa, has been a prominent critic of the Dalai Lama. At the height of the wave of Tibetan self-immolations in 2012, he accused the Dalai Lama of inciting these actions, which was "despicable".<sup>189</sup>

Xi Jinping's father, the late Xi Zhongxun, was one of the chief guests for the opening of the China Advanced Institute of Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing in 1987. The first of these higher-level institutes, the Beijing college was originally founded at the suggestion of the Tenth Panchen Lama, whose critique of the Party's policies against Tibetan religion, language and culture was known as the '70,000-character petition.' Although the Tenth Panchen Lama's intentions were to sustain and develop authentic Tibetan Buddhism, the college is now under tight Party control and used as a showcase for the religion and reminder that religious practice can only be carried out under the auspices of the Party.

The quality of Tibetan religious teaching has declined significantly since then, focusing instead on the political training and socialization of a young generation of tulkus. A number of Tibetan monks and lamas who attended the school have disrobed in recent years, according to Tibetan sources.

Liu Peng, the deputy director, said that over the past three decades, more than 1000 Tibetan Buddhist monks have been trained at the college, including more than 400 official tulkus, who have returned to major monasteries and Buddhist institutions across Tibetan areas of the PRC, as well as secular centres, where they are required in turn to 'educate' other monks, nuns and students.

The process is systematic: the Party department for Religious Affairs has been conducting research since 2004 to transform the curriculum and qualifications for Tibetan Buddhist monks. Now the Beijing institute is the parent establishment for provincial level Buddhist colleges across the country, hosting seminars which promote Party doctrines on religion and seek to "effectively

address and restrain the hidden evils", a reference to external influences such as the Dalai Lama and any 'separatist' activity. This is tantamount to an acknowledgment of continued loyalty to the Dalai Lama and authentic religious teachings. Deputy director Liu Peng noted in an article published in 2019 that in the past three decades, "one of the students has participated in the activities of separatism and sabotage".

There is an emphasis on asserting the Party's position on reincarnation in the tulku training schools. At the institute in Beijing, CCP officials lead sessions emphasizing that reincarnate lamas cannot be born outside PRC territory and can only be chosen through the 'Golden Urn' method, which was faked for the installation of the Chinese Panchen Lama.

Tibetan Buddhist forums to support Xi Jinping's 'Belt and Road Initiative' are organised by the Beijing college, and in an example of how Beijing seeks to leverage Tibetan Buddhism in order to expand its extraterritorial influence, delegations have been sent to Nepal and Mongolia to promote China's religious policies and develop exchange programmes.

As part of this focus on ideological as opposed to theological education, young tulkus acknowledged as such by the CCP are taken on secular 'pilgrimages' to 'red' sites such as Mao Zedong's birthplace in Shaoshan, Hunan, or to military bases. On one tour, a 'Living Buddha' was photographed in state media offering a khatag to a statue of Mao.<sup>191</sup>

There appears to be an element of competitiveness between provinces regarding the number of officially-

recognised incarnate lamas. The United Front Work Department in Sichuan hosted an exhibition about 'Living Buddhas' in September 2020, boasting that it had trained more than 439 Party approved reincarnations in the province.<sup>192</sup> (Vice President of the Sichuan Buddhist Association, Gyalten Lobsang Jampa (Jiadeng Luorong Xiangba), a lama of Dhargye (Dajin) Gelug monastery in Kardze (Ganzi), is President of the Sichuan Tibetan Buddhist College.)<sup>193</sup>

Meanwhile in Qinghai four months earlier, the head of the United Front Work Department of Qinghai Province Gonpo Tashi referred to his area being "a main battleground to promote Sinicisation of Tibetan Buddhism", with more than 100 'Living Buddhas' and Party cadres stationed in their monasteries undergoing a training on 'reincarnation management'.<sup>194</sup>

## THE DANGERS FOR 'UNOFFICIAL' REINCARNATE LAMAS

A monk in his early twenties<sup>195</sup> who recently escaped from eastern Tibet to India said that he had been a focus of suspicion for the authorities given his status as the reincarnation of a monk who had served years in prison during the Cultural Revolution. The monk was recognized as a reincarnate lama by his monastic community, but this was not approved by the Chinese authorities. "To get official approval," the monk told Tibet Watch when he arrived in exile, "you have to apply and then the relevant government authority will decide based on loyalty to the Party and the Chinese state. China has made it compulsory

to get official approval if you are to continue your role as a reincarnate lama. This is a way to control and define the role of religious reincarnations and to reduce the impact of lamas on the Tibetan people. The [Chinese government] especially targets those Tibetan tulkus with deep faith in the Dalai Lama."

The monk studied at a boarding school from 2008-2013. Teachers were mostly Chinese, and Tibetan children were frequently beaten. The reincarnate lama said that he knew one child who went deaf after he was beaten by one of the school wardens for talking in the bedroom. "Subjects taught are all about the

greatness of the Chinese Communist Party,” said the lama. “They talk about how Tibet, Hong Kong and Taiwan are inalienable parts of China. Tibetans have been labeled as barbarian, uncivilized and backward for a long period until the Chinese brought civilization and learning. The [success and academic progress] of children is based on his or her Chinese language skills.”

After this, the reincarnate lama was able to receive basic religious tuition at a monastic school that had remained open. But because Tibetans knew of his status as a tulku and came to visit him, the local authorities became suspicious. In 2018, police came to the monastery and detained him, keeping him for weeks in police custody. “They interrogated me about my position towards the Dalai Lama, telling me that he is not

trustworthy, that he ran away from all of us Tibetans. They said that the exiled Tibetan administration had no international support and that the Dalai Lama lives in a backward place, a town full of rubbish.” The monk was later compelled to leave the monastery because other monks were experiencing problems because of his presence. This happened several times. In despair, he escaped to India after he made a last-ditch effort to talk to the Chinese Panchen Lama, to explore whether it would be possible for him to be officially recognized and allowed to return to his monastery. But they could not meet because of his lack of formal recognition as an ‘official’ lama.



A video of young Tibetan herder Ding Zhen went viral on Chinese social media platform Douyin, after he captured hearts across China with his handsome looks. “How can such a man, wild but pure, exist in the world? I immediately fell in love with him,” one Douyin user wrote. He has now found fame in Chinese media, and has accepted a job from a state-owned travel company. This image from the viral video tells a more complex story. In the context of the current Sinicization drive, Ding is depicted in front of a monastery with hands in devotional prayer pose – reflecting the importance of religion to Tibetan identity. A surveillance camera can be observed on the monastery wall. Image captured from a YouTube video which went viral, covered by SCMP and other global media outlets.



## **‘FOR THE NATION’S STABILITY, WE CAN KILL YOU’: RETURN OF A REINCARNATE LAMA TO TIBET**

As the Chinese authorities have tightened control over tulku and the institutions of Tibetan Buddhism, so Tibetans are compelled to maintain secrecy to protect authentic Tibetan reincarnations in Tibet, particularly since the disappearance of the child Panchen Lama recognised by the Dalai Lama in 1995. In some rare instances, contact with the Dalai Lama’s office has been made through clandestine channels to seek guidance, with the tacit understanding that the Tibetan religious leader should not be involved in any way in the formal recognition of a particular child.

A young reincarnate lama from Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), the Tibetan area of Amdo, found that this was the case when he returned to Tibet from India. Alak Nakor had been sent out of Tibet as a child by his family for an education in exile. He was recognised as an important incarnation of an abbot at the age of five by Kirti Rinpoche in Dharamsala, India. His recognition was later affirmed in an audience with the Dalai Lama. After some years at the monastery in exile in India, he disrobed, although he maintained a strong connection with his monastic precepts, and decided to go back to Tibet to see his family and to find out more about his previous incarnation. “I found that there are Tibetans in Tibet who are genuine incarnate lamas, and they don’t have the ‘Living Buddha’ certificate. Often these are of the elderly generation. They have to keep a low profile,” he said.<sup>196</sup>

Alak Nakor’s own background as a non-CCP appointed tulku was known to the

authorities when he returned to Ngaba from exile. Two days after his return he was taken to the local Public Security Bureau office and warned that now he was back in Tibet, they would be watching him very closely. “They knew absolutely everything about my life back in India – almost better than I know myself – they knew all about my friends, my recognition as a tulku by Kirti Rinpoche, that I had disrobed. They warned me that if I misbehaved it would be the worst for me. When they asked questions it was like a test, as they knew everything and wanted to see how I would respond. It was in-depth, not surface information.”<sup>197</sup>

Alak Nakor was detained after witnessing the aftermath of the self-immolation of a Kirti monk, Phuntsog, on 16 March, 2011.<sup>198</sup> While it was not the reason for his imprisonment, Alak Nakor’s background as a tulku recognised in Dharamsala and approved by the Dalai Lama only compounded suspicion against him.

He was subject to brutal torture. “All through the interrogation process,” he said, “I was tied to a ‘Tiger Chair’ with my hands and legs shackled. I could feel intense pain in my wrists. To make me confess, they hung me from the ceiling by the handcuffs with both my hands shackled behind my back, and feet off the ground. At the time I weighed almost 200 gyama [about 100 kg] and the weight of my body worsened the pain.” Alak Nakor was taken to Sichuan Detention Centre No 2, and gives this account: “The officers would take turns one

after another to beat me. When an officer is done with his share of beatings, he would rest one of his feet on my head, take a cigarette break and then call up the next team to come and take over. The next officer would duly arrive and carry on the beatings until he gets tired at which point he would smoke using my head as his footrest and call up the next one. And this would go on. I was shocked to see how I was treated. As if I was not a human being! I don't think it was done because the officers were evil but this is a systematic practice approved at the highest level to terrorise and intimidate, and to break the spirit of a human being."

Alak Nakor also recounts that he was subjected to lie detector tests - an unusual method rarely reported by political prisoners, indicating even when utmost violence has been employed to silence individuals, there is still a neuralgic focus on whether they are harbouring private loyalties or ideas. <sup>199</sup>He said: "The aim of the long drawn interrogation was to force me into accepting that I had acted not on my own volition but on the behest of exile Tibetan groups." Alak Nakor was imprisoned for three years, and was only

released in 2014 when the prison doctor warned he would likely die within the week. During interrogation he was told: "For the nation's stability, we can kill you, and you can do nothing." Alak Nakor managed to escape to India.

Of tulkus appointed by the Chinese authorities, Alak Nakor makes the distinction between those who do a lot of work for the Party and government, like the Chinese Panchen Gyaltsen Norbu, and those who "actively participate in the flourishing of Buddhism in mainland China. Then there are others who genuinely and properly engage with Tibetans in Tibet."

The political nature of the system however does not entirely preclude the inclusion of some Tibetan reincarnate lamas perceived to be authentic within Tibetan communities. A Western scholar who carried out fieldwork in the Amdo area of Tibet recalled being present as a young lama, acknowledged by elders as an important incarnation, filled in a form to apply to be recognised on the database to avoid being characterized as illegal.

## DEATH OF A TIBETAN LAMA LINKED TO CHINA'S REINCARNATION POLICY

The consequences of China's control over practices at the core of Tibetan Buddhist belief were demonstrated with the hushed-up death on 30 January (2022) of a Tibetan lama at a little-known monastery in Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu), the TAR, where the

crackdown since protests in 2013 has been particularly severe.

Three years on from the imposition of the measures on reincarnation in 2007, a monk at Shag Rongpo monastery called Tulku

Dawa (Dawa Khyenrab Wangchug) was arrested in May 2010. He was accused of seeking guidance from the Dalai Lama in selecting the reincarnation of the Rongpo Choje, the monastery's chief lama. A rigorous 'patriotic education' campaign was imposed, and monks who protested and defended Tulku Dawa were expelled. An elderly monk, 70-year old Ngawang Gyatso, committed suicide. Officials ordered Shag Rongpo monks to support the government description of his death as "natural."<sup>200</sup>

Tensions surfaced again at Shag Rongpo in July 2013, when local residents clashed with officials conducting re-education at the monastery.<sup>201</sup> The Chinese authorities sent troops to the area, banning all religious activities at the 300-year old monastery, and expelled all the monks.

Tulku Dawa served a seven-year sentence under house arrest in Lhasa, and he remained confined there until his death on 30 January 2022. The authorities scrubbed all mention of his death from social media and warned those who knew about it that they would face "imprisonment or worse" if they circulated news or photographs.<sup>202</sup>

A video from the Chinese state media then emerged of an enthronement ceremony of a child the authorities had selected as the Rongpo Choje, head of the monastery.<sup>203</sup> The footage from Xizang TV (the Chinese name for Tibet) depicts a gathering of Party officials and cadres with only a few monks visible outside the small, remote monastery, and the installation of a small boy on the lama's throne in the shrine room.

In another incident in Nagchu, a monk was arrested when police found a photo on his phone of a two- or three- year old boy from India who had been recognised by the Dalai Lama as the incarnation of a religious teacher. In 2020, the monk died from torture, according to a Tibetan in exile whose family lives near the monk's village in Tibet.

The Tibetan, whose identity is withheld, said that the boy in the photograph leading to the Tibetan monk's death had been recognised by the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of Kyabje Choden Rinpoche, who died in exile in 2015. The monk who died had received the photograph of the child tulku from India, most likely via WeChat, which is closely monitored by Chinese security.<sup>204</sup>

It is unlikely that the monk in Tibet was involved in any way other than simply receiving the information, as Choden Rinpoche died in exile, and his successor was also discovered in India. The boy's parents are Tibetan exiles.

No further details are known about the monk's death, and his identity has not been made public by sources in Tibet. But it is suspected that the monk was subjected to particularly harsh treatment because of Choden Rinpoche's close connection to the Dalai Lama and the discovery of his reincarnation in India and not in Tibet under PRC control.

## 5. EVOLUTION OF CCP POLICY: A 'COMPLEX AND ACUTE' POLITICAL STRUGGLE



The new urban scene at Drago county in eastern Tibet, subject to a tough crackdown particularly since 2021. See Tibet Watch report documenting the impacts, 'Desecration in Drago county'. Image courtesy of Vera Hue.



*“Our country is the leader of the nations of Asia; this is already commonly acknowledged throughout the world. Internally, the regions of Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai and Kham, and externally, the regions of Indo-Burma, Thailand and Indonesia – these nations are all united really by having Buddhism as their center...[If] we don’t respect Buddhism, who will respect us?”*

Dai Jitao, a Chinese politician under Chiang Kai Shek in the 1930s who became a disciple of the Tenth Panchen Lama

*“I now think that Tibetan fighters might have saved their country if they’d had a Zelenskyy and the level of international awareness and support that Ukraine has today. Our leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama — historically recognized as the reincarnation of the Buddha of Compassion — has long believed his singular priority is to carry out the mission of peace. He was therefore understandably against war and violence. Nevertheless, many Tibetans fought voluntarily, led by chieftains, businessmen, and monks. But in the outside world, the CIA was perhaps the only group who knew about the brutality of this war. [...] Tibetans and Ukrainians remind us that resistance is a natural act for humans faced with their own extermination, no matter what form it might take. The act is not a choice but an affirmation of identity that becomes the bedrock of future generations.”*

- Tibetan writer in exile Yeshe Dorje in *The Diplomat*, 29 April 2022 <sup>205</sup>



New developments in 2025 in Tawu (Dawu, Daoфу) in Kardze (Garze), Sichuan, an area known for its strong Tibetan identity, now in danger of erasure. Image courtesy of Vera Hue.

Mao Zedong informed a young Dalai Lama in the 1950s that “religion is poison”, and the Party Chairman presided over the destruction of thousands of Tibetan monasteries, the burning of religious texts, and the killing and imprisonment for decades of monks and nuns in labour camps. But the Chinese helmsman was also of the view that the Dalai Lama and the religious elites were an essential ‘bridge’ to ensuring control over the population.<sup>206</sup>

Twenty years earlier, Dai Jitao, who became a disciple of the Tenth Panchen Lama, was the first Chinese politician to argue in the 1930s that Buddhism was the critical link between China and Tibet. He successfully campaigned for three Tibetan Buddhist lamas to be recognised as ‘protectors of the country’ and even as state officials, with stipends and offices.<sup>207</sup>

The appropriation of a religio-political system based on precepts of wisdom and compassion by a Leninist Party state focused on protecting its own power is reflected in often baffling official discourse. “The roots of religious contradictions and religious conflicts are contained in the contradictions and conflicts between economic, political, and cultural interests in the actual society, [literal translation: real world] but religion is good at elevating the roots of the most common human conflicts to the category of cosmic, eternal conflicts that have existed forever, bestowing on them an absolute form that makes it very difficult to make any sort of compromise,” declared Chinese scholar Cao Qunyong of Hengyang Normal University, writing about the influence of Tibetan Buddhism on “social stability”, a political term referring to ensuring compliance to Party policy and the suppression of any dissent.<sup>208</sup>

One of Wang Junzheng’s first engagements after taking over as Party Secretary of the TAR in October 2021 was at the Tibetan Buddhist Academy in Lhasa, a state-run religious centre where students accepted by the CCP as reincarnate lamas receive an education. Before his appointment in Tibet, Wang Junzheng has presided over the prison camps in Xinjiang as head of security, and was one of a handful of Chinese leaders to be sanctioned for human rights abuses by multiple Western governments including the U.S. and U.K. (The U.S. Treasury sanctioned Wang Junzheng and another official in connection with serious human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in March 2021.)<sup>209</sup>

Alongside the EU, US and Canada, the UK imposed asset freezes and travel bans against Wang Junzheng and three other Chinese government officials, as well as the Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, under the UK’s Global Human Rights sanctions for systemic violations against Uyghurs and other ‘ethnic minorities’.

At the institute in Lhasa, Wang Junzheng emphasised the need for: “In-depth training on the management methods for the reincarnation of living Buddhas”, and “vigorous publicisation” of the “principles of domestic search [...] [and] approval by the central government, and religious rituals and historical customization.”<sup>210</sup> Party chief Wang, who took over from Wu Yingjie as Party Secretary, reminded the monks that they must not be a “double-faced person”, which refers to efforts by the CCP to ensure that even private thoughts of Tibetan Buddhists, including any heartfelt,

unexpressed loyalty to the Dalai Lama, are regarded as criminal.

Wang Junzheng has also led an expansion of political 'education' focusing on reincarnation policy from the monastic elite to lay people at a grass roots level, demonstrating perhaps a concern from the Party that educating monks and lamas may no longer be enough to prevent popular dissent in future.

Soon after Wang assumed leadership in the TAR, a Party official in Sog (Chinese: Suo) county in Nagchu (Naqu) in the TAR, held re-education sessions for cadres and monastery management committee members in November 2021, with the purpose of ensuring that local Tibetan officials endorse government policies on the recognition of Tibetan Buddhist incarnations. The official, A-wang, Head of the United Front and Deputy Secretary of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, a United Work Front Department Party organisation) in Sog spoke about the "Origin, Laws and Regulations of Reincarnation System of Living Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism" to an audience of local Party cadres and monastery management committee members.<sup>211</sup>

Intensified re-education sessions have been expanded from the monastic elite to the lay population, with a particular emphasis on those living in sensitive border regions of the TAR, such as residents in new xiaokang (model well off) border villages close to Arunachal Pradesh in India. Through a touring exhibition, the state media reported, "The cadres and the masses have further improved their understanding of

the historical customization and religious rituals of the reincarnation of the living Buddha of Tibetan Buddhism, and enhanced the Tibetan Buddhist circles and believers in the 'domestic search, lottery, and central approval' of the reincarnation of the Great Living Buddha." Images depicted local Tibetans corralled in the middle of official displays as Party officials preside from a platform adorned with prominent images of Xi Jinping.<sup>212</sup>

These sort of meetings, emphasising that reincarnation is a matter for the Party state to decide, are also held outside the TAR. In Golog (Chinese: Guoluo) in Qinghai, location for Xi Jinping's official tour in June, monks were pictured sitting in ranks in what appeared to be a car park and told that they must support government decisions on this matter.<sup>213</sup>

In Chongye (Chinese: Qiongjie county) in Lhokha (Chinese: Shannon) in the TAR, UFWO officials travelled "deep into 20 villages" to "educate" Tibetans "one by one" about reincarnation policy. An official described in the state media as 'Comrade Tashi' said that the "authority of the central government to approve and decide on the reincarnation of living Buddhas must be resolutely maintained."<sup>214</sup>

A Tibetan monk from eastern Tibet who is now in exile said that the purpose of the grass roots trainings in village, township and remote monasteries is clear. Golog Jigme, a former political prisoner who now lives in exile in Switzerland after escaping from Tibet, said: "The Chinese are telling the Tibetan people that the 15th Dalai Lama cannot be recognised by them if born outside the PRC. This is their early warning

to Tibetan believers. They want to tell people what the Party will do when the time arrives.”

Initiatives to promote the Party's priorities on reincarnation policy and installing a CCP approved successor to the Dalai Lama have been held across Tibet, not only in the TAR, for instance at the primary institute in Sichuan for training incarnate lamas endorsed by the CCP.<sup>215</sup>

The 'Four Standards' campaign, which has been enforced in monasteries since 2018,

involves the requirement of religious practitioners to be loyal to the CCP and “dependable at critical moments”. Monks are also instructed to promote the CCP-approved methods of recognizing reincarnation. The campaign underpins the CCP's ideological and quasi-legal efforts to secure broad endorsement of their choice of the next Dalai Lama and any other reincarnate lama.

## COOPERATION TO CO-OPTION

China's approach to reincarnation and co-opting religious leadership has moved through several distinct phases, involving the reversal of softer policies involving some cooperation with Dharamsala to the ban on reincarnation without government permission spelt out in Order No Five in 2007, an intensification of the anti-Dalai Lama campaign, and the adoption of an official reincarnate lama database.

Once it had been accepted that the existing tulku system was to be utilized by the Party, the softer policy enabled search teams for reincarnate lamas to be in contact with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, most prominently in the cases of the Karmapa and the Panchen Lama in the 1990s.

Indicative of the atmosphere of the time, a Tibetan monk who was detained in Lhasa in 1993 under suspicion of political activity was released after he told the authorities he was

merely searching for the reincarnation of his lama. He said at the time: “The Communist government don't believe in reincarnation, they don't care about lamas, and they know nothing about our tradition of finding and recognizing a lama.” Thubten (not his real name), the monk who was detained, was part of a daring effort to bring a Tibetan lama from Tibet into exile, with two dharma students from Hawaii.<sup>216</sup>

In 1992, the prominent lama Akong Rinpoche, founder of Samye Ling monastery in Scotland, led a search team within Tibet for the reincarnation of the 16th Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. It was the first time that exile Tibetan lamas, led by India-based Tai Situ Rinpoche, had risked working with the Chinese authorities on the process of recognizing a reincarnate lama. It was only possible because of Akong Rinpoche's pre-existing relationships with Chinese officials,



maintained to ensure success in the funding of schools, clinics, orphanages, vocational training centres and environmental projects across the Tibetan plateau for his cultural preservation NGO Rokpa (meaning 'help' in Tibetan).

Akong Rinpoche's leadership "represented a breakthrough, visionary moment in Tibetan-Chinese relations", according to Tibet expert Robert Barnett. "Instead of taking a child secretly to be educated in exile in India, as had happened in almost all prior cases, the agreement brokered by Akong and others allowed the child to be educated in his homeland, but with access to exile teachers."<sup>217</sup>

Before he died, the 16th Karmapa predicted that he would be reborn "to the north in the east of the land of snow [...] /Where divine thunder spontaneously blazes/In a beautiful nomad's place with the sign of a cow/The method is Döndrub and the wisdom is Lolaga." The website of the 17th Karmapa describes how the advance search party went to the village of Bakor ('ba' is one word for 'cow' in Tibetan), near Lhatokgar, in the province of Lhatok ('Lha' means god, or divine, and 'thok' means 'thunder') in Kham. They were told that there was a woman in the village by the name of Loga, and were told that her husband's name was Dondrub. "They discovered that the couple had a young son, born in the Wood Ox Year, and that his birth had been accompanied by many miraculous signs. When the search party arrived in Bakor, they found that they had been expected by the eight year old son of Döndrub and Loga. He had for many weeks been planting trees and performing special blessing rituals, preparing to depart soon."<sup>218</sup>

The 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, is the only Tibetan lama in recent times to have had the recognition of the Dalai Lama as well as the approval of the Chinese government. But China broke the deal and did not give him access to his religious teachers, which he needed to fulfil his religious lineage.

In the second example of initial cooperation in the search for a reincarnation, Chadrel Rinpoche, the former abbot of the Panchen Lama's traditional seat at Tashilhunpo in Shigatse, was allowed to head a team to locate the reincarnation of the Tenth Panchen Lama who had died in 1989. Chadrel Rinpoche was allowed to meet in Beijing in July 1993 with the Dalai Lama's elder brother, Gyalo Thondup to convey the message that the Dalai Lama's participation in the recognition process would be formally allowed. According to the Tibetan side, however, China ended all formal channels of communication with the exiles at the end of August 1993.<sup>219</sup> (This has been linked to geopolitical considerations, suggests Jagannath Panda, who says that China believed contact with the Dalai Lama might derail ongoing talks with New Delhi, with which Beijing was about to sign an important agreement concerning settlement of their border dispute.)<sup>220</sup> The Dalai Lama publicly sought to open communications again with Beijing, but the Chinese side remained intransigent.<sup>221</sup>

In the absence of any formal connection with Beijing on the matter of the reincarnation the Dalai Lama pre-emptively announced on 14 May 1995 that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima from Lhari, Tibet, was the new Panchen Lama. Immediately, Chinese authorities seized the child and his family from their home and put them on a charter flight at Golmud in Qinghai

to Beijing. (According to one account, the police tried to separate the child from his parents, but all three resisted.)<sup>222</sup>

The disappearance to this day of the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama and the imprisonment of the monk who headed the search team, Chadrel Rinpoche,<sup>223</sup> represented the end of the softer policy towards identification of reincarnate lamas.

Nearly three decades later, Beijing continues to deny access to Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, now in his early thirties, and his family, despite repeated requests by governments, parliaments and UN mechanisms. His whereabouts is a closely guarded secret. It is not known how aware he is of his own identity, and he is likely to have received an

almost entirely secular education. Tibetans lamas cannot fulfill traditional duties related to their religious lineage without proper spiritual education and training.

The next indication of China's intentions came with the installation of a six-year old Tibetan boy, Gyaltsen Norbu (referred to by Chinese media in English as Gyalcain or Gyaincain Norbu), the son of Communist Party cadres, as 11th Panchen Lama. While the political nature of his family connections decreased the political risk for the CCP – rather than involving Buddhist parents whose loyalty to the state might be compromised – it has been noted that his designation also violated PRC laws, including one forbidding CCP cadres to allow their children to be recognised as tulkus or permitting them to study religion.<sup>224</sup>

## THE NEXT PHASE – INTENSIFICATION OF ANTI DALAI LAMA CAMPAIGN

In 1994, the Third Tibet Work Forum declared the intention of “chopping off the serpent’s head”, thus laying the groundwork for an aggressive campaign against the Dalai Lama. This included prohibitions on the possession of Dalai Lama photographs or other religious symbols by government employees, and was followed by an announcement that the Dalai Lama’s influence was to be eradicated not only from politics but also from religion – with a statement being published in March 1996 questioning whether he is even a reincarnated lama.<sup>225</sup>

The ideological approach was developed further at the Fifth Work Forum in 2010, when the centrality of the Tibetan religious leader in Party thinking was demonstrated with the use of a Marxist theoretical concept (‘special contradiction’) to cast the Dalai Lama (‘the Dalai Clique’) as a threat to ethnic unity and stability. In doing so, the then Party Secretary Hu Jintao was seeking to link “resolution of the ‘special contradiction’—bringing to an end the Dalai Lama's influence among Tibetans in China—to the Party's reputation as “Communist.”<sup>226</sup>

A 'Sinicised' official Buddhism is aimed at further dissociation of Tibetans from the Dalai Lama. The CCP blames the Dalai Lama for the protests of 2008 and the self

immolations that began in 2009, and now has the intention that future generations will only remember him in negative terms, as an enemy, even as a 'terrorist'.<sup>227</sup>



Chinese tourists pose in Tibetan clothing for pictures in ShangriLa (Gyalthang), Dechen Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, a county-level city that China named to attract tourists after the mythical land depicted in the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. Image courtesy of a recent visitor to Tibet.



## 'ORDER NO FIVE' : OFFICIAL MANAGEMENT OF REINCARNATION

The first major legislative shift by the Party towards a harder policy on reincarnation was Order No Five, or "Management Measures for the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism", passed by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) for implementation from 1 September 2007. The law stipulates a ban on searching for and recognizing a tulku by unauthorized groups and individuals, stipulating that "Reincarnating living Buddhas shall not be interfered with or be under the dominion of any foreign organization or individual" (Article Two). This also means that 'living Buddhas' must forfeit their status as a tulku if they leave the PRC, according to the law. This could serve to question the validity of Buddhist lineages outside the borders of the PRC if Beijing endeavours to do so.

The new measures, passed just over a decade after the abduction of the Dalai Lama's recognition of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as Panchen Lama, marked a more aggressive and consistent approach towards controlling the selection, installation and education of reincarnate lamas, as a means of strengthening the government's position as the 'official' arbiter of Tibetan Buddhist culture. Paradoxically, the rulings demonstrated an acute awareness of the Dalai Lama's continued influence in Tibetan areas, as well as a recognition of the importance of the role of reincarnate lamas in Tibetan society. Buddhist institutions and education were, and still are, at the heart of the

Tibetan cultural world. "The 2007 regulation [...] represented a major shift in post-Maoist approaches to the relationship of religion with the state. As well as institutionalizing religious practices and procedures, it involved the state in rescripting and adjudicating spiritual aspects of the succession process and related beliefs," wrote Robbie Barnett.<sup>228</sup>

Throughout China and Tibet, measures to control religion vary in their level of intrusiveness, and these national regulations were aimed at ensuring that layers of control are the same both in the TAR and all other Tibetan areas now incorporated into the People's Republic of China.

Order No Five decreed that reincarnations of 'living Buddhas' who do not have government approval are "illegal or invalid", which is intended to convey that the Tibetan system of recognizing and educating reincarnate lamas is no longer relevant, because it is the government that decides whether a reincarnation is a legitimate religious figure or not. The measures were backdated, applying to tulkus who were recognised by authentic Tibetan religious means years before 2007.

While these earlier measures emerged from an acute awareness of the Dalai Lama's continued influence in Tibet, and a political imperative to supplant him, he is not specifically named in Order No. Five. But official language has become more



aggressive and personal, particularly since the wave of self-immolations that swept across Tibet from 2009 onwards. In 2019, for instance, the Global Times newspaper (a publication of the Party's flagship People's Daily) reported that "reincarnation, written in government regulations and embedded in Tibetan Buddhism, will be carried out properly and not affected by any individual or the 'Dalai Lama's separatist clique,'" citing researcher Penpa Lhamo (Chinese transliteration: Bianba Lamu), head of the South Asia Institute of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences.<sup>229</sup>

(indicating its integral connection with security and paramilitary matters) and the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing were studied for this report. The Party-affiliated writers construct a case justifying and proposing policies imposed from the grass roots up prioritizing Party loyalty as opposed to the usual prerogatives of a religious practitioner – loyalty to their root religious teacher, the teachings, happiness of all beings and spiritual development.

A paper by Baima (Pema) Namgyal, Tsering Dickie and Wang Chunhuan of the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences published in 2015 gives important insights into the trajectory of Party policy on the management of 'Living Buddhas'. The paper, published in the first issue of the 'Journal of Tibetan Studies' in 2015, underlines the influence of Buddhism on Tibetan society and upholds Mao's basic position that the CCP can only effectively manage Tibet and enforce policy through the control of reincarnate lamas. It confirms that Order No 5 in 2007 marked the first step of the Party's 'management' and 'regulation' of reincarnation through legal means.

Liu Shuguang, a professor at the Institute of Marxism, Gansu Normal University for Nationalities, emphasised the important political role of reincarnate lamas, recommending that: "Living Buddhas can preach more conducive publicities such as ethnic harmony, unity and regional stability in their religious activities [...] By comparing the advantages of socialism in the new situation, and call[ing] on the Tibetans to be patriotic and love religion, and motivat[ing] religious believers resolutely to resist and oppose foreign interference of China's internal or domestic affairs, and fight against the separatism headed by 14th Dalai".

The CCP sees religious belief as one of its most significant problems in Tibet, and has been confounded by its failure to draw Tibetans away from their strong spiritual and religious identity, in particular their allegiance to the Dalai Lama. This ideologically-driven approach is grounded in political and strategic concerns, which are particularly acute in areas which have been at the forefront of resistance and protest. Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) in Sichuan (the Tibetan area of Kham) is one of those areas. Not only were many Khampas involved in resistance to the Chinese invasion in 1949-59, but monks and nuns led waves of successive peaceful protest in 2008, 2009 and beyond, calling for freedom and for the Dalai Lama's return.<sup>230</sup> As a result, Kardze, one of 18 counties in the prefecture, has been the site of more known political detentions of Tibetans by Chinese authorities than any other county outside the TAR since the current period of Tibetan political activism began in 1987.<sup>231</sup>

A paper by a scholar at Sichuan Police College makes the connection between the number of monasteries and nunneries in Kardze and the Party's concerns over 'stability'. Dr Cao Qiongyun, Associate Professor on religious sociology, Tibetan social, culture research institute of Police Management Department of the Police College, lists 532 'approved' Buddhist monasteries and sites in Kardze<sup>232</sup> with a total population of monks and nuns of more than 40,000. The professor acknowledges the dramatic decline in monasteries and nunneries and the population of monks and nuns since the 1950s, although does not speak of the reasons.<sup>233</sup>

More than 12 years after the protests that

swept across Kardze and other parts of the Tibetan plateau in 2008, concerns are clearly still evident over the need for strengthening "management of religious affairs", according to Cao Qiongyuan, who says: "[...] Thousands of separatist forces tried every means to carry out separatist and infiltrative activities in Kardze Tibetan areas [...] Tibetan Buddhism plays a dual role in social stability in Kardze, [on the one hand with] positive effects of social control, group integration, psychological adjustment and behaviour norms, [while on the other, religion] also has negative effects on social stability in Kardze due to major factors including some religious beliefs, politics in monasteries and 14th Dalai Clique."

## A REINCARNATE LAMA DATABASE AND THE PARTY'S EFFORTS TO CONTROL 'LIVING BUDDHAS'

Decades in the planning, the CCP's systematic and multi-pronged approach to reincarnation involves the cultivation of a cadre of senior religious and secular figures intended to be central to efforts to impose a 'fake' Dalai Lama, and the training of young reincarnate lamas (known as 'tulkus') on an official database in special institutes.

Even after decades of effort in 're-educating' monks and nuns in Tibet, Wang Jiaquan's paper makes it clear that monastics are still not to be trusted. He specifies that only 'senior-level tulkus', meaning those approved by the Party, should be allowed to "preach Buddhist ideas". Ordinary lamas and tulkus, on the

other hand, "must not be allowed to discuss religious freedom. This is not their strength and it is not in their work." These "ordinary lamas" should only "talk about life around them in their monasteries."

Wang Yanmin's paper, which is entitled 'A study into new changes and countermeasures against Tibet independence splittist activities in the post-Dalai era', was published a decade after the 2007 legislation banning reincarnation without government permission. He indicates that ten years on, problems with the system of tulkus are still 'acute' for the Party, inferring continued Tibetan determination in protecting the teachings

and institutions of Buddhism despite the dangers. Just one of the problems outlined by Wang is: “inconsistent leniency and strictness in tulku reincarnation policy implementation, and where the management of a tulku’s reincarnation is neglected the struggles around the tulku’s reincarnation are still very acute.”

China makes a distinction between ‘ordinary’ tulkus (who are dealt with by the religious affairs departments of provinces and autonomous regions for approval) and those “with greater influence”, who are required to report to the State Administration of Religious Affairs. There is another category, too. “Living Buddhas with particularly significant influence” (which is not defined) must report to the State Council.<sup>234</sup>

The Chinese authorities announced in 2016 that they had completed a “Living Buddha database with biographies of over 1,300 Living Buddhas residing in the country”. The intention, according to Zhu Weiqun, Party ideologue and former interlocutor for the United Front Work Department with the Dalai Lama’s envoys, is to “strike a heavy blow to the Dalai Lama, as he has been utilizing his religious status to ratify Living Buddhas at will – which is against religious tradition – in an attempt to control Tibetan monasteries and divide the country.”<sup>235</sup>

The Chinese state media said in 2016 that the online registration system contains the profiles of 1,311 individuals approved by the state “as reincarnated Buddhas”.<sup>236</sup> The database can be viewed online (provided a Chinese cellphone number and identification is given)<sup>237</sup> and TAR and provincial authorities have launched their

own databases of approved incarnations.

Just as there are increasing numbers of sincere Chinese Buddhist practitioners who follow genuine Tibetan lamas, there are also a number of fake ‘Living Buddhas’ who seek to exploit followers. The Dalai Lama and other authentic Tibetan teachers have long been alert to the possibility of fake lamas being recognised and the dangers of the process of identification being hijacked or subject to corrupt influence. The inherent weaknesses of this method of succession had been abused long before the Chinese intrusion into the process, and are now exacerbated by connections to patronage networks with wealthy Chinese devotees.

The official database only risks entrenching that corruption rather than eliminating it, as it often rewards or endorses those who know how to work the political system rather than helping followers check their authenticity, as the Chinese state media claims. Tibetans have observed that the system operates by issuing permits to those who can be recognised officially as reincarnate Tibetan lamas, so is open to corruption in terms of back-door payments to those in charge of providing permits.<sup>238</sup> In a rare and detailed critique from inside the PRC by someone who lived through the 1950s and the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, Tibetan elder Jamphel Gyatso confirmed the absurdity and ramifications of an official reincarnation database, saying: “Living Buddhas are recognised by monasteries and authenticated by monks; but by being confirmed with the issuance of a ‘Living Buddha permit’, [...] because of all this, the phenomena of systemic chaos and corruption have been created. In [lay]

society, official positions are traded, and in religious circles “Living Buddha permits” are traded.”<sup>239</sup>

Tibetans are acutely aware of the threat to the integrity and survival of Tibetan Buddhism represented by these developments. On a Chinese-language Tibetan blog, Caiwang Nouru (a Chinese transliteration of Tsewang Norbu) warned of the “hostility and hatred” produced by the spread of fake reincarnate lamas, particularly in China and Taiwan, saying: “The actions of a swindler are like a leaf that blocks their eyes, nearly defaming Tibetan Buddhism”. He used the analogy of

a “mouse ruining the pot of soup”.<sup>240</sup>

It can be assumed that all ‘official’ lamas on the CCP’s database would be required to endorse any Party-imposed candidate as the 15th Dalai Lama in future, in addition to current pressures to endorse its Sinicisation campaign.



## 6. THE PARTY'S ANTI DALAI LAMA CAMPAIGN: OFFICIALS AND LEADERS

**The contest over the future of the Dalai Lama institution involves a complex network of religious figures, political institutions, and power structures. The Chinese Communist Party has established elaborate mechanisms and cultivated key figures to assert control over the succession process, while traditional Tibetan institutions work to maintain authentic religious traditions and authority.**

Many religious figures serving in official roles as members of 'people's congresses' and 'political consultative conferences' at various levels are designated as 'Living Buddhas' on the database. For instance in

Sichuan, CPPCC members in 2021 included seven tulkus and one Khenpo (a Tibetan name for a learned scholar or abbot) from Yachen Gar, the religious institute in Pelyul county, Kham, where thousands of nuns and monks have been expelled and their homes demolished.<sup>241</sup> In Qinghai, 35 members of the Qinghai Chinese People's Consultative Committee (CPPCC) came from the religious community, including 10 'Living Buddhas'.<sup>242</sup> CPPCC members in 2021 from Gansu province included five 'Living Buddhas'.<sup>243</sup> State-chosen 'Living Buddhas' are also used by the CCP for international diplomacy, for instance a delegation led by Shingtsa Tenzin Chodrak to the United States to convey the CCP position on the Dalai Lama in 2015.<sup>244</sup>

While there are no Tibetans among national level Ministers in China,<sup>245</sup> two Tibetans were appointed as Vice Chairs of Party committees at national level during last year's Two Sessions meetings in March. Lobsang Gyaltsen (Chinese: Luosang Jiangcun) was announced as one of the 14 Vice Chairs of the National People's Congress, China's rubber stamp Parliament, replacing Pema Thinley or Padma Choling (Baima Chillin) in the position. (Padma Choling has become known for his invective against the Dalai Lama, declaring that the Dalai Lama's spirit properly resides with the Communist Party in Beijing and that his reincarnation "is not up to the Dalai Lama.")

The other Vice Chair at the national level is Phagpala Gelek Namgyal (Pabala Gelie Langjie), re-appointed one of the 23 vice chairs of the 14th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the highest advisory body in China, in 2023. Both are considered to be members of the influential 'Chamdo clique' group of leaders, based on this strategically important area of the TAR, traditionally a centre of tough Khampa resistance to the PLA. Communist authorities gained control of central Tibet when Chamdo fell to the People's Liberation Army in October 1950. Since then Chamdo has been under a heavy crackdown since mass protests in March 2008 led to a dramatic tightening of security in the area and the imposition of "emergency" measures that include a "readiness to defend to the death key sites, key aims, and key areas at sensitive and highly critical periods."<sup>246</sup>

Phagpala Gelek Namgyal, who was born in 1940, was one of the first Tibetans to join the Communist Party soon after the

Chinese invaded Tibet, and is the reincarnation of the head lama of the Jampa Ling Monastery in Chamdo. In the buildup to the 70th anniversary of the Party's National Day on 1 October 2019, the Chinese state media broadcast footage of monks at Jampa Ling monastery in Chamdo hanging khatags on giant images of Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong. There is speculation that the Chinese authorities may choose such monasteries, perceived by many Tibetans as the CCP's right hand, as the base of a future 'official' candidate Dalai Lama. This area of Tibet also has strong connections to the CCP-aligned Shugden group. A number of powerful leaders in the TAR including Phagpala is one of a number of powerful leaders in the TAR (also including Padma Choling, and Lobsang Gyatsen) rumoured to support the pro CCP group Shugden (or Dolgyal) in opposition to the Dalai Lama.<sup>247</sup>

Drupkhang Thubten Khedrub (rendered in Chinese reports as Trukang Thupden Keldro or Zhukang Tubdankezhub) is believed to be a reincarnation of a Gelugpa lama from Nagchu (Naqu) in the TAR. Drupkhang Thubten Khedrub heads a Party institute for the training of official tulkus in Lhasa. At the height of the wave of Tibetan self-immolations in 2012, he accused the Dalai Lama of inciting these actions, which he stated was "despicable". He was born in 1955 in Nagchu (Naqu) in the TAR and endured a period of imprisonment until his political 'rehabilitation' in 1979. He holds a number of official positions, including Vice Chairman of the TAR's Political Consultative Conference and Vice Chair of the Buddhist Association of China. Drupkhang Thubten Khedrub was present at a meeting in the buildup to celebrations of the 70th

anniversary of the CCP in 2019 which stressed the need for all Tibetans, not only monks, “to consciously draw a clear line with the 14th Dalai Lama and the Dalai clique and resolutely resist the various activities of the Dalai clique.” This directive represents a further intrusion on the private devotional space of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners.

The current abbot of Labrang Tashikyil monastery in Kanlho (Chinese: Gannan) in Gansu, Shepa <sup>248</sup> - among the most senior

lamas of the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism – has a range of religious and political positions. He is a member of the Standing Committee of the 14th NPC, Deputy Director of the Standing Committee of the 14th Gansu Provincial People’s Congress, Vice President of the Buddhist Association of China, Dean of the Advanced Buddhist Institute in Beijing, President of the Buddhist Association of Gansu Province, and President of Gansu Buddhist Academy.

Five Tibetans including the China’s official Panchen Lama Gyaltsen Norbu are listed as being on the CPPCC Standing Committee as follows: <sup>249</sup>

- Tashi Dawa (Zhaxi Dawa) is a writer of Han-Tibetan ethnicity from Bathang in Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan. In January 2018, he was elected as a member of the 13th CPPCC and vice chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region CPPCC.
- Dorjee Raptan (Douji Redan) is a politician from Amdo (Qinghai), who was elected as a member of the CPPCC and also Chairman of the Qinghai PPCC. In addition to being on the Standing Committee, he is a Deputy Director of the Ethnic and Religious Committee of the CPPCC National Committee.
- Che Dalha (Qi Zhala) headed the Dechen (Deqing) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan there before being moved to Lhasa as Communist Party Mayor, where he underlined the importance of “striking hard at all the separatist, destructive and criminal activities of the Dalai clique”.<sup>250</sup> In 2021, he was moved from being the Tibet Autonomous Region Chairman to serve as the Vice Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Committee of the National People’s Congress but has not risen further up the Party hierarchy, despite his previous prominence meeting high level Western politicians such as former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a long-time supporter of the Dalai Lama and human rights in Tibet and China.
- Lhodro Gyatso Rinpoche. Pandian Dunyu is a member of the Steering Committee for Advanced Academic Titles of Tibetan Buddhism and vice president of the Buddhist Association of Shigatse, TAR. He participated in a meeting of the China Buddhist

Association in Lhasa in 2021, chaired by the 11th Panchen, Gyaltzen Norbu. He was appointed as a member of the 13th CPPCC National Committee in 2018.<sup>251</sup>

- Both Drupkhang Thubten Khedrub and Lhodro Gyatso Rinpoche, known in Chinese as Pandian Dunyu, are known as the 'right hands' of the Chinese installed Panchen Lama. Pandian Dunyu is a member of the Steering Committee for Advanced Academic Titles of Tibetan Buddhism and vice president of the Buddhist Association of Shigatse, TAR. He participated in a meeting of the China Buddhist Association in Lhasa in 2021, chaired by the 11th Panchen, Gyaltzen Norbu. He was appointed as a member of the 13th CPPCC National Committee in 2018.<sup>252</sup>

China may require the following individuals to play a role, whether key or minor, in any future process of installing an official Dalai Lama candidate:<sup>253</sup>

## **Tsomonling Tenzin Trinley Rinpoche**

Tsomonling Tenzin Trinley Rinpoche was born in 1950 and confirmed as the Fifth Tsomonling Rinpoche in 1955 at Sera Monastery. Tsomonling Rinpoche was elected as member of the people's political consultative conference committee of TAR in 1977 and member of the national committee of CPPCC in 1988. "The changes in Tibet are really delightful, and so is the central government's policy," Tsomonling Rinpoche was cited as saying in the official media.<sup>254</sup>

## **Drikung Chungtsang Rinpoche**

The Drikung Kyabgon Chungtsang was born in 1942 in Lhokha (Shannan), the TAR, as the youngest of five sons into the prominent aristocratic Lhagyari family, one of the oldest noble houses of Tibet. In 1959, the Drikung Kyabgon Chungtsang was imprisoned and during the Cultural Revolution had to undergo re-education and forced labour. He was released in 1982 after serving 23 years in prison. During that period of relative cultural liberalization in China, he was given a post in the Regional Peoples Congress and subsequently a leading position in the Department of Religious Affairs of the TAR.

## **Samding Dorje Phagmo**

The 12th Samding Dorje Phagmo leads the Samding monastery and is a high government cadre in the TAR. Born in 1942, the female lama was chosen as the incarnation of the abbess of Samding monastery, near Lhasa, and as far as is known, is the leading female



reincarnation in Tibet.<sup>255</sup> She is the Deputy Director of the TAR's Standing Committee of the People's Congress and Director of the China Tibet Cultural Protection and Development Association. In July (2022) she was pictured greeting the Chinese Panchen Gyaltsen Norbu.<sup>256</sup>

In 2008, she blamed the Dalai Lama for causing the protests and riots in Lhasa, accusing him of violating Buddhist teachings, statements that were helpful to CCP propaganda in advance of the Beijing summer Olympics that year.<sup>257</sup>

Samding Dorje Phagmo left Tibet after the Uprising of 10 March 1959, and the Dalai Lama's escape. A Chinese state media report said: "In August of 1959 on the eve of China's National Day Ceremony, the 12th Dorje Phagmo Rinpoche began a long and roundabout journey through Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, and Mongolia with the help of Chinese Commercial Agency in Kalimpong to eventually return to Beijing by the end of September that year, ending her days of wandering adrift abroad. After returning to China, the government assisted her to relocate in Lhasa, so that she could practice Buddhism at home."<sup>258</sup>

Like other religious figures of the time, Samding Dorje Phagmo was denounced and struggled against during the Cultural Revolution. She was pictured with head bowed surrounded by a crowd in August 1966 in a rare photograph by the father of writer Tsering Woeser, in her book 'Forbidden Memory: Tibet during the Cultural Revolution'.

## The Sixth Kondor Tulku

Lobsang Tendzin Pelden Lhundrub, born in Kham in 1951, was identified as the Sixth Kondor Tulku originally from Jampa Ling monastery in Chamdo, which has strong Party affiliations. When he was eight, his parents took him to follow the Dalai Lama to India, and he lived in Switzerland.<sup>259</sup> In 2011 he returned to China. He was made Vice Chairman of the TAR Overseas Friendship Association.

## Seventh Tagtsa Tulku, Garang Thubten Lashay Gyatso

The 51-year old Tibetan tulku is Deputy head of the CPPCC of Ngaba (Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture and President of Ngaba China Buddhist Association. He was born in July 1967 in Sichuan province and joined the Party in November 2006 after graduating from the Chinese Department of Tibetan Languages. Tagtsa 'Living Buddha' as he is known comes from a monastery that is well supported by the CCP due to its pro-CCP Shugden connections, according to Tibetan sources.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Referring to the publication of the book, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said: “The 14th Dalai Lama is a political exile engaged in separatist activities under the guise of religion. He has absolutely no right to represent the people in Xizang [China’s name for Tibet]. [...] The reincarnation of Living Buddhas is unique to Tibetan Buddhism. It follows established religious rituals and historical conventions. The Dalai Lama’s lineage, formed in Xizang, China, and religious standing and title which were affirmed by the central government, date back several hundred years. The 14th Dalai Lama himself was found and confirmed in line with this set of rituals and conventions and was approved by the then central government. The Chinese government issued Regulations on Religious Affairs and Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas, and respects and protects this method of succession. The reincarnation of Living Buddhas including the Dalai Lama must comply with Chinese laws and regulations as well as religious rituals and historical conventions, and follow the process that consists of search and identification in China, lot-drawing from a golden urn, and central government approval.” Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning’s Press Conference on 11 March 2025, available at: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/202503/t20250311\\_11572943.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/202503/t20250311_11572943.html)

<sup>2</sup> The Dalai Lama, ‘Voice for the Voiceless’, Harper Collins, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Tibetan religious teacher Tulku Thondup describes three types of tulku as follows: the emanations of the buddhas, the manifestations of the highly accomplished adepts, and the rebirths of highly virtuous teachers or spiritual friends “It is impossible for ordinary people like myself to judge which tulku belongs to which category,” wrote Tulku Thondup. “For they all appear more or less similar – kind and honest people who are seriously following and practicing Dharma and dedicating their lives to serving many.” Tulku Thondup, ‘Incarnation: The History and Mysticism of the Tulku Tradition of Tibet’, Shambhala, 2011. Also see Petr Jandacek, ‘Rebirth Control in Tibetan Buddhism’, at: [https://www.academia.edu/7360993/Rebirth\\_Control\\_in\\_Tibetan\\_Buddhism\\_Anything\\_New?email\\_work\\_card=view-paper](https://www.academia.edu/7360993/Rebirth_Control_in_Tibetan_Buddhism_Anything_New?email_work_card=view-paper)

<sup>4</sup> The Dalai Lama, ‘Voice for the Voiceless’, Harper Collins 2025.

<sup>5</sup> The Tibetan authorities in Dharamsala hosted a press conference on 9 April, featuring Ju Tenkyong, Director of the Amnye Machen Institute, who disclosed that Tulku Hungkar Dorje was apprehended on 25 March 2025 from his hotel room in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) in a joint operation orchestrated by Vietnamese police and Chinese intelligence agents. He was subsequently transferred to a local public security bureau on 28 March, where he died under unexplained circumstances. On 1 April, the administrative office of Lungngon Monastery—Humkar Rinpoche’s seat in Tibet—was summoned to receive his death certificate. However, monastery representatives were prohibited from keeping the document or photographing it. Tibetan media website Phayul.com, 9 April 2025, available at: <https://www.phayul.com/2025/04/09/52037/> Also see Tibet Watch, ‘Rigzin Hungkar Dorje was missing since August last year’, 3 April 2025, available at: <https://tibetwatch.org/chinese-authorities-declare-missing-tibetan-abbot-dead/>

<sup>6</sup> Tibetan source, shared by Tenzin Choekyi of Tibet Watch.

<sup>7</sup> Xinhua, 19 June 2024 and South China Morning Post, 20 June 2024, citing Xie Maosong, a senior researcher at the National Institute of Strategic Studies at Tsinghua University, quoted by Tibetan Review, 20 June 2024, available at: <https://www.tibetanreview.net/president-xi-inspects-tibet-sinicisation-drive-in-qinghai-province/>

<sup>8</sup> In an obituary for the People’s Daily published on 20 February 1989 after the Tibetan leader passed away in January of that year in Shigatse, Xi Zhongxun referred to one of their last meetings, when he apparently expressed concern about his health, saying: “I told him that Buddha didn’t want him to go yet, nor did Marx want him to go. Who knew that this would be our final parting.” Xi Zhongxun had also been friendly with the young Dalai Lama when he spent some six months in Beijing in 1954. Originally published in the People’s Daily, 20 February 1989, <http://xz.people.com.cn/GB/138902/8689896.html>, ‘Xi Zhongxun: In Fond Memory of Buddhist Great Master Panchen Lama, a Loyal Friend of the Communist Party’, translated into English by the International Tibet Network website Chinese Leaders, <https://chinese-leaders.org/blog/xizhongxun-panchenlama/>

<sup>9</sup> Pelbar, and Chakmo Tso. “Xi Jinping Calls for Ethnic Unity in Tibet.” Radio Free Asia, 21 June 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/xi-jinping-calls-ethnic-unity-06212024145524.html>

<sup>10</sup> Wang Huning, Politburo member and Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, visited Tibet on 1–4 July 2024, according to state media reports: “王沪宁在四川甘孜、阿坝调研时强调 全面贯彻新时代党的治藏方略 促进宗教和顺社会和谐民族团结”. Xinhua, 4 July 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240705020203/http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0704/c1024-40271068.html>

<sup>11</sup> Lhajam Gyal (Laxianjia), deputy director of the Institute of Religious Studies at the official China Tibetology Research Centre in Beijing, referred to the 2007 ‘Regulations on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism’ of 2007, and said: “Although the Dalai Lama is currently outside China, his reincarnation is still part of the [Tibetan Buddhist] Gelug tradition and under the jurisdiction of the Chinese government, as most temples are located within China.” Liang, Xinlu, and Laura Zhou. “China Has ‘Natural Say’ in Choosing Next Dalai Lama, Tibet Experts Tell Beijing Forum.” South China Morning Post, 30 June 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3268564/china-has-natural-say-choosing-next-dalai-lama-tibet-experts-tell-beijing-forum>. The questioner had asked: “The 14th Dalai Lama, who will be 89 soon, has said that he will announce his reincarnation plan when he is about 90 years old. What attitude and policy will the Chinese government take in response?”. An The All-China Journalists Association ‘news tea party’ on the 27th [June 2024], inviting experts and scholars such as Zhang Shigao, Laxianjia, Yan Yongshan, Liang Junyan, Xi Mengmeng, and Suolang Zhuoma, researchers from the China Tibetology Research Center, to exchange views with domestic and foreign reporters on the theme of “65th Anniversary of Democratic Reform in Tibet”. “专家：达赖喇嘛转世应遵循《藏传佛教活佛转世管理办法》”. China News Service, 28 June 2024, <http://www.jqchinapress.com/static/content/SS/2024-06-28/1256204927656566074.html>.

<sup>12</sup>For instance, referring to meetings with Chinese diplomats 20 years ago, Tibetologist Robert Barnett said: "The real purpose of the visits was always clear, although it was only ever mentioned in the last minutes of each meeting: their mission was to collect intelligence, and the principal topic they were interested in was the health of the Dalai Lama. Their interest in the exiled Tibetan leader's well-being was evidently driven not by sympathy but by a wish to get prior warning of his coming death." Barnett, Robert. "Special Paper: The 'Post Dalai Era', – the Party Prepares for the Tibetan Leader's Death." *The Dalai Lama's Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question*, Institute for Security and Development Policy, 15 May 2023, <https://isdp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ISDP-Special-Paper-Tibet-May-15.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>Sikyong Penpa Tsering's comments were reported by the Indian media, for instance in *The Hindu* he was cited as saying: "We have been having back-channel negotiation with the Chinese side. We do not have any expectation from these talks but we have to keep the engagements going as these are part of our long-term plans. We met in the first week of this month and the talks are being held with the help of a third country". Bhattacharjee, Kallol. "China-Tibet Back-Channel Talks Ongoing with the Help of a Third Country: Sikyong Penpa Tsering." *The Hindu*, 9 July 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/china-tibet-back-channel-talks-ongoing-with-the-help-of-a-third-country-sikyong-penpa-tsering/article68414923.ece>. The *Hindustan Times* cited Penpa Tsering as saying that "developments such as the Indian government's clearance for a US Congressional delegation to meet the Dalai Lama, India's support for the Philippines in the South China Sea, and the Indian prime minister's decision to skip the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit were all a response to 'China's behaviour'." Laskar, Rezaul H. "Held Back-Channel Talks with China Earlier This Month, Says Tibetan Leader." *Hindustan Times*, 9 July 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/held-back-channel-talks-with-china-earlier-this-month-says-tibetan-leader-101721222284626.html>.

<sup>14</sup>The Sikyong was cited by Indian media as saying: "If you ask me, why do you engage even if you have no expectations, I say it's long term. We can't just think only about short term, just can't think only about [Chinese President] Xi Jinping...But we have to maintain communications." Laskar, Rezaul H. "Held Back-Channel Talks with China." *Hindustan Times*, 9 July 2024.

<sup>15</sup>Ranade, Jayadeva. "China Preparing for Trouble in Tibet." *Vivekananda International Foundation*, 21 January 2025, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2025/january/21/China-Preparing-for-Trouble-in-Tibet>.

<sup>16</sup>Laskar, Rezaul H. "Held Back-Channel Talks with China." *Hindustan Times*, 9 July 2024.

<sup>17</sup>Barnett, Robert, "The Tibetan Government in Exile Has a New Strategy." *ChinaFile*, 30 December 2024, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/tibetan-government-exile-has-new-strategy>.

<sup>18</sup>Citing Party affiliated scholar Sonam Dolma, assistant researcher at the Institute of Religion of the Tibet Research Center, speaking to the meeting on 28 June 2024, *China Press*, 28 June 2024, <http://www.jpchinapress.com/static/content/SS/2024-06-28/1256204927656566074.html>.

<sup>19</sup>Michael Van Walt, testimony to the Congressional Executive Commission on China, 23 June 2022: "Tibet was never a part of China. The PRC did not inherit Tibet from the Republic of China or from earlier empires, as it claims. Tibet was, in fact, an independent state in the modern sense of the term in fact and law from 1912 to 1951, when the PRC took it by force." <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-117/jhrg47897/pdf/CHRG-117jhrg47897.pdf>

<sup>20</sup>This supports the Dalai Lama's position in seeking dialogue with China without preconditions. The Tibetan religious leader has always said he cannot accept a false view of history in which Tibet was always a part of China nor change the past, but that the future can be discussed. The Act states: "The Government of the People's Republic of China continues to impose conditions on substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama, including a demand that he say that Tibet has been part of China since ancient times [...] The United States Government has never taken the position that Tibet was a part of China since ancient times." <https://savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/HR-533-McGovern-Updated.pdf>

<sup>21</sup>"...that the People's Republic of China should cease its propagation of disinformation about the history of Tibet, the Tibetan people, and Tibetan institutions, including that of the Dalai Lama". Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>"Xi Inspects Northwest China's Qinghai Province." *Xinhua News*, 19 June 2024, <https://english.news.cn/20240619/5ec11cb18e914004b41b63ab4879dd17/c.html>.

<sup>23</sup>The Act draws attention to China's inconsistent narratives on its historic relationship with Tibet. Tibetologist Robert Barnett explains: "Before the 1950s, many Chinese scholars and their government said that Tibet came under Chinese (they meant the Manchu Qing) rule in the 18th century. Since the late 1950s, however, Beijing has said that Tibet was formally incorporated into China (by which they meant the Mongol Yuan) in the 13th century. But in 2011, Beijing declared that what had happened to Tibet in the 13th century was only the "formal incorporation" of Tibet within China. Tibet, China now said, had already been part of China "since ancient times". This referred, it said, to cultural and genetic ties, not necessarily to Chinese administration in Tibet. In April 2015, it changed that view again: a government White Paper announced that "since ancient times" meant that Tibet had become "a local government of ancient China" in the seventh century. This was an unprecedented claim for which Beijing has produced little argument or evidence." Barnett, Robert. "The Tibetan Government in Exile Has a New Strategy." *ChinaFile*, 30 Dec. 2024, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/tibetan-government-exile-has-new-strategy>. In a study of historical arguments made by China and Tibet, the late historian Elliot Sperling wrote: "China's contention that Tibet has been an 'integral' part of China since the 13th century took shape only in the 20th century. Moreover, as late as the 1950s, Chinese writers were accustomed to describing Tibet's place in the world of imperial China as that of a subordinate vassal state, not an integral part of China, as current Chinese materials put it. Indeed for quite some time after Tibet was incorporated into the PRC, Chinese narratives of that process were often vague and beset by contradictory chronologies." Elliot Sperling, 'The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics', East-West Center Washington, 2004.

<sup>24</sup>The Dalai Lama explains the centrality of rebirth in Tibetan Buddhist tradition as follows: "Generally, Buddhists believe that there is no beginning to birth and that once we achieve liberation from the cycle of existence by overcoming our karma and destructive emotions, we will not be reborn under the sway of these conditions. Therefore, Buddhists believe that there is an



end to being reborn as a result of karma and destructive emotions, but most Buddhist philosophical schools do not accept that the mind-stream comes to an end. To reject past and future rebirth would contradict the Buddhist concept of the ground, path and result, which must be explained on the basis of the disciplined or undisciplined mind. If we accept this argument, logically, we would also have to accept that the world and its inhabitants come about without causes and conditions. Therefore, as long as you are a Buddhist, it is necessary to accept past and future rebirth.” The Dalai Lama’s statement on reincarnation, Dalai Lama. “Reincarnation.” The 14th Dalai Lama, 24 Sept. 2011, <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/retirement-and-reincarnation/reincarnation>.

<sup>25</sup> For an overview, Michael, Franz. ‘Rule by Incarnation: Tibetan Buddhism and Its Role in Society and State’. Westview Press, 1982.

<sup>26</sup> There were a combination of signs indicating the rebirth of the 13th Dalai Lama, according to the autobiography of his mother and other sources detailed on the Dalai Lama’s website at: <https://www.dalailama.com/the-dalai-lama/biography-and-daily-life/birth-to-exile>. These included the following: unusual cloud formations were seen in the northeast from Lhasa; the 13th Dalai Lama’s body turned eastward after being placed on a throne, and a star-shaped fungus appeared on a wooden pillar in the Norbulingka shrine, indicating the direction to search for the new Dalai Lama. The Regent visit the sacred lake of Lhamo Lhatso in 1935, where he had a vision of three Tibetan letters (Ah, Ka, Ma) and a monastery with jade green and gold roofs, along with a house with turquoise tiles. ‘Ah’ was interpreted as representing Amdo, the district where the young Dalai Lama was located; ‘Ka’ was believed to stand for Kumbum, a prominent nearby monastery seen in the vision. ‘Ka’ and ‘Ma’: could have also signified the Karma Rolpai Dorje monastery, situated on the mountain above the village. In 1936, high lamas and dignitaries were sent out to find the location described in the vision. When the search party arrived at the Dalai Lama’s family’s home, the boy recognized a lama from Sera Monastery disguised as a servant and identified the rosary of the 13th Dalai Lama. The boy successfully passed additional tests with religious items, and the vision of the letters from the sacred lake was further interpreted to confirm the reincarnation. When the search party was able to leave, the little boy insisted that he wanted to go with them.

<sup>27</sup> Dalai Lama. “Statement of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, on the Issue of His Reincarnation.” The 14th Dalai Lama, 24 Sept. 2011, <https://www.dalailama.com/news/2011/statement-of-his-holiness-the-fourteenth-dalai-lama-tenzin-gyatso-on-the-issue-of-his-reincarnation>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Dalai Lama. “Addressing Students from North Indian Universities.” The 14th Dalai Lama, 25 Oct. 2019, <https://www.dalailama.com/news/2019/addressing-students-from-north-indian-universities>. Tibetan Review cited the Dalai Lama as saying: “The [Tulku] system should end, or at least change with the changing times. There have been cases of lamas who use reincarnation [i. e. their Tulku status for personal gain] but never pay attention to study and wisdom.” The Dalai Lama added that he feels there should be no institutions of [such] lamas and no [Tulku] reincarnations now, saying: “Institutions need to be owned by the people, not by an individual. Like my own institution [Labrang], the Dalai Lama’s office [in Tibetan: Gaden Phodrang, the throne of Drepung Monastery], I feel it is linked to a feudal system.”

<sup>30</sup> None of the great Nalanda masters of India are on record as having their reincarnation identified. In comments regarded by many Tibetan intellectuals as indicative of his progressive, reformist approach, Indian newspapers reported the Dalai Lama as saying: “I feel it’s time that we revert to the Indian system of Buddhism.” Littlefair, Sam. “Dalai Lama Suggests Ending Tibetan Reincarnation System.” Lion’s Roar, 28 Oct. 2019, <https://www.lionsroar.com/dalai-lama-suggests-ending-tibetan-reincarnation-system/>.

<sup>31</sup> Monk and educator Tenzin Priyadarshi says: “The Buddha often refers to past lives or predicts how a person might come back in the future, and many sutras mention Bodhisattvas who remain in the cycle of samsara out of compassion.” Tenzin Priyadarshi is president and CEO of the Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Priyadarshi, Tenzin, ‘Running Toward Mystery: The Adventure of an Unconventional Life’, Random House, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Priyadarshi, Tenzin, ‘Running Toward Mystery: The Adventure of an Unconventional Life’, Random House, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> It is said that Palden Lhamo, as the female guardian spirit of the Lhamo Lhatso promised the First Dalai Lama in one of his visions that she would protect the reincarnation lineage of the Dalai Lamas. “All the Dalai Lama incarnations relied upon Palden Lhamo, the Oracle Goddess, for the inspirations during times of doubt,” wrote Glenn Mullin in his account of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s advice to his attendants. Glenn Mullin, ‘The Fourteen Dalai Lamas: A Sacred Legacy of Reincarnation’, Clear Light Publishing, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> A minister in the Tibetan government before the Chinese invasion, Tsepon Wangchuk Shakabpa, author of a famous history of Tibet, recalled his own experience accompanying a search committee for the 14th Dalai Lama: “As the search committee was formed to seek out the new incarnation of the Dalai Lama, Shakabpa himself accompanied the party seeking visions in the oracle lake called Lhamo Lhatso inhabited by Palden Lhamo, the protector spirit charged with ensuring the well-being of the Dalai Lamas. What the regent and others saw in the lake contributed to the emerging notion of where the new incarnation would be found and under what circumstances.” Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. Tibet: A Political History. Yale University Press, 1967.

<sup>35</sup> “Eleventh Panchen Lama visits Lhamo Lhatso Lake”. Xinhua, 20 August 2018, [http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201808/t20180820\\_6189684.html](http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201808/t20180820_6189684.html). Cited in International Campaign for Tibet Report, 11 Sept. 2018, <https://savetibet.org/china-tightens-screws-on-tibetan-buddhism/>.

<sup>36</sup> In 2000, China installed two-year old Sonam Phuntsog as the Seventh Reting Rinpoche. Protests by monks were crushed as a result. Previous Reting Rinpoches have not only been crucial during interregnums of Dalai Lamas, but they have also recognized other incarnate lamas, notably the Ninth Jetsundhampa of Mongolia in 1933 – the predecessor of the child who was recognized by the Dalai Lama and introduced publicly to devotees in March 2023. China is likely to claim that its official Reting Rinpoche incarnation has the authority to endorse an imposter Dalai Lama not only within the PRC but also beyond its borders.

<sup>37</sup> In 2012, the Chinese authorities launched a major operation to detain Tibetans attending the last Kalachakra in Bodh Gaya, 'disappearing' many pilgrims for weeks or months on their return, and holding them for long periods for 're-education' in military camps and other facilities. In July 2014, when the Dalai Lama conferred another Kalachakra initiation in Ladakh, India, for the first time the religious teachings were described by the Chinese state as an incitement to 'hatred' and 'extremist action'. It was the most systematic crackdown so far linked to a Dalai Lama's teaching in exile, following a trend of increasingly hardline steps targeting continued devotion to him within Tibet. "Tibetan Pilgrims Compelled to Return from Dalai Lama Teaching in Bodh Gaya, India; China Calls the Teaching 'Illegal'." International Campaign for Tibet, 9 Jan. 2017, <https://savetibet.org/tibetan-pilgrims-compelled-to-return-from-dalai-lama-teaching-in-bodh-gaya-india-china-calls-the-teaching-illegal/>.

<sup>38</sup> Dalai Lama. "Losar (Tibetan New Year) Greetings - 2024." The 14th Dalai Lama, 10 Feb. 2024, <https://www.dalailama.com/videos/losar-message-2024>.

<sup>39</sup> <https://seelearning.emory.edu/en/home>

<sup>40</sup> 'Oath-bound' refers to keeping Buddhist promises made, usually to Guru Rinpoche or Padmasambhava, a legendary tantric Buddhist master from India credited with bringing Tibetan Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th-9th centuries.

<sup>41</sup> There are two Kundeling Rinpoches. The other is known to have aligned himself with the anti-Dalai Lama grouping of Shugden devotees and is known as 'Nga Lama' by many Tibetans, meaning literally 'me lama', a reference to his self-proclaimed status as he was not formally recognized as the reincarnation of Kundeling (Tatsak) Rinpoche. In 2008, Shugden supporters held a press conference at which 'Nga Lama' described the Dalai Lama as a "pawn of U.S. intelligence". This provided rare endorsement to Beijing's political struggle against the Dalai Lama at a time when Tibetans around the world were protesting against the Beijing Olympics and mourning Tibetans killed by security forces across the plateau.

<sup>42</sup> Mostly these younger generation religious figures are from the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, to which the Dalai Lama belongs. The 17th Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school, who escaped from Tibet in 2000, would have been likely to have had a far more prominent role were he still in India. Following his escape from Tibet, the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje was based at a Gelugpa monastery in India near the Dalai Lama, where he faced restrictions and suspicion from the Indian government. He is now at an undisclosed location in the West, where he continues to teach online but is not involved in any planning capacity with the Dharmasala establishment.

<sup>43</sup> Dalai Lama statement, 24 September 2011. In 2018 the Dalai Lama told journalists that the traditional path of finding an infant reincarnation of the Dalai Lama was open to question, saying that his successor will be "a high lama or high scholar," or a person "around 20 years old". Kuronuma, Yuji. "Dalai Lama Says High Priests to Discuss Adult Successor." Nikkei Asia, 3 April 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Dalai-Lama-says-high-priests-to-discuss-adult-successor> The Dalai Lama has not spoken of an emanation or successor in this way more recently. In his 2011 statement he makes this further distinction, citing Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo: "Reincarnation is what happens when someone takes rebirth after the predecessor's passing away; emanation is when manifestations take place without the source's passing away." The Dalai Lama's emphasis indicates that he could choose to 'emanate' into another person before his death, thereby expressly choosing his successor. The statement also says that, "Alternatively it is possible for the Lama to appoint a successor who is either his disciple or someone young who is to be recognized as his emanation." Tibetan Rinpoche Kunsang Dorji referred to the five different manifestations, in which a single Tibetan advanced practitioner 'manifests' into five different bodies representing body, speech, mind, activities and merit. Conversation with Tenzing Dhamdul, the Foundation for NonViolent Alternatives podcast, 12 August 2023, <https://www.menlhajamtse.com/2019/03/h-e-9th-kunsang-dorjie-rinpoche-la/> Some analysts have speculated whether in the political sphere, this option could allow for some movement in dialogue with China, in which a figure for instance like the Chinese Panchen Lama could be recognised as just one manifestation, without undermining the authenticity of the Panchen Rinpoche recognised by the Dalai Lama.

<sup>44</sup> Another two types of emanation are described by the Dalai Lama in his 2011 statement as "emanations who are connected to others through the power of karma and prayers, and emanations who come as a result of blessings and appointment."

<sup>45</sup> In his 2011 statement, the Dalai Lama also gives the example of senior Sakya lama Chogyé Trichen Ngawang Khyenrab, who was one of three emanations or 'manifestations' and who was appointed as Secretary General of the Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs of the Tibetan government in exile.

<sup>46</sup> Kunsang Dorji Rinpoche, a Tibetan lama in exile, gives the example of a tulku at Drikung monastery who recognised his son as such an emanation, given his son's level of spiritual attainment and the circumstances at the time. Conversation with Tenzing Dhamdul, the Foundation for NonViolent Alternatives podcast, 12 August 2023, <https://www.menlhajamtse.com/2019/03/h-e-9th-kunsang-dorjie-rinpoche-la/> Kunsang Dorji Rinpoche was recognised as a reincarnate tulku as a child, when he spent his time building mandalas out of sticks and paper. He would burn it down as soon as he had finished, and teach others about impermanence, according to his biography online. "At the age of two the young boy had nightmares of himself being killed at the same time every night just after midnight," the same biography reads. "He would shout 'don't kill me, don't kill me'. Later that they confirmed with other high lamas that he was the reincarnation of the 8th Kyabje Kunsang Dorje Chang who was being killed during the time of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet." <https://www.menlhajamtse.com/2019/03/h-e-9th-kunsang-dorjie-rinpoche-la/>

<sup>47</sup> For instance, former Sikyong Lobsang Sangay cited by Fish, Isaac Stone. "Self-Immolations. Threats From Beijing. Playing Politics With the Dalai Lama." Foreign Policy, 4 Feb. 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/04/tibet-dalai-lama-sangay/>. Bhuchung D Sonam wrote: "To preempt any meddling or maneuvering from China, the Dalai Lama should appoint a successor who would be recognized as his 'emanation.' This way of identifying reincarnations, called ma-dhey tulku, has historical precedence, and it would ensure a smooth and legitimate succession, with international support. This person would continue the work the present Dalai Lama has started." Sonam, Bhuchung D. "Who Will Be the Dalai Lama's Successor? China Won't Have a Say." The Washington Post, 3 Oct. 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/10/03/china-tibet-dalai-lama-succession/> India-based historian Claude Arpi wrote: "Viewed from a political angle, many issues would be solved if the Dalai Lama decides to go for an 'emanation'. He himself would select the next Dalai Lama and the Chinese would have nothing to say

in the process; it would certainly bring far greater stability to the political scene of Tibetans in exile and the Himalayan belt. But the final decision is the Dalai Lama's choice. In the meantime, India should clearly state that the 15th Dalai Lama will be a 'guest of honour' if he decides to come back to India, whether as a reincarnation or an emanation." Arpi, Claude. "China Is Preparing the Dalai Lama's Successor." Arpi, Claude. "China Is Preparing the Dalai Lama's Successor." Claude Arpi's Blog, 11 Mar. 2023, <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2023/03/china-is-preparing-dalai-lamas.html>.

<sup>48</sup> On 22 February 2023, Global Times stated that: "China is the birthplace of Tibetan Buddhism and the Living Buddhas are Chinese. So the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama must be carried out within Chinese territory. Furthermore, any religious affairs are part of China's domestic affairs, so it must be done in accordance with Chinese law." The Party state mouthpiece was in reference with the propaganda video 'Tashilhunpo' depicting the reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas. "Recognition of New Dalai Lama Must Be Conducted in China." Global Times, 22 Feb. 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202302/1285980.shtml>. Chinese official Li Decheng was cited in People's Daily on 31 December 2020: "The inheritance lineage of reincarnated living Buddhas originated in China and belong to Chinese temples. The management of their reincarnation is an integral part of China's religious affairs management. It is an unquestionable historical fact to adhere to the principle of territorial management and domestic search in accordance with the law." Li Decheng, 'The Historical Customization and Principles of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism,' Renmin Ribao (People's Daily), 31 December 2020, <https://china.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202102/10/WS6023e1f8a3101e7ce973f90a.html>. A year before in 2019, a Chinese official had told Indian journalists that no foreign governments should be involved with the selection of a future reincarnation and that the process should take place in China, but he did not specify that the location of a lama's birthplace. TAR official Wang Nengsheng, speaking to Indian journalists on a visit to the TAR, Laskar, Rezaul H. "China May Reject Dalai Lama Chosen Abroad." Hindustan Times, 16 July 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/china-may-reject-dalai-lama-chosen-abroad/story-iTFuBCTATHD8KKJknwGj7l.html>. The bipartisan Tibet Policy and Support Act which was passed by Congress on 21 December 2020 and signed into law a few days later, states that the role of picking a successor to the Dalai Lama belongs to the Tibetan Buddhist system, the Dalai Lama, and other Tibetan leaders, and not to any government.

<sup>49</sup> A Chinese policy document cited in this report states: "The next reincarnated Dalai will find it very difficult to match the current Dalai's status, and therefore the Fifteenth Dalai's leadership power over Tibetan exiles will be seriously weakened; second, even if the newly selected reincarnated soul boy happens to be recognized by the international community, the young boy will have to undergo a long period of training and education before he can be qualified to be a 'leader,' and before this can happen, there will only be an elected government; third, there are numerous factions within the Dalai clique, and without the leadership of an authoritative leader, contradictions are bound to appear which will affect the stability of the pseudo regime; in sum, if democratically elected leaders can grasp and even lead the Dalai clique, that will cancel out the possibility of the Fifteenth Dalai ever holding political power, and the importance of the reincarnated soul boy issue will diminish, which will likely reduce the Dalai clique's degree of influence." Wang Yanmin, 'A study of new changes in Tibet independence splittist activities in the post-Dalai era and countermeasures', MA Dissertation, Public Security University of China, 7 April 2017, <https://wap.cnki.net/touch/web/Dissertation/Article/10041-1017861373.nh.html>; archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211221171904/>; <https://wap.cnki.net/touch/web/Dissertation/Article/10041-1017861373.nh.html>. For translation, see <https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/New-changes-and-countermeasures-against-Tibet-independence-splittist-activities-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> "Despite [there being no reincarnations of the masters], even after thousands of years, their teachings are still relevant. So we should give more importance to the teachings." Interview by Namrata Biji Ahuja in The Week, India, 6 July 2019, <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/cover/2019/07/05/exclusiveinterview-reincarnation-isnt-important-says-the-dalai-lama.html>

<sup>51</sup> For instance on 3 April, he said: "I pray and am determined to live for more than 100 years." 'Long life prayers', Dalai Lama's website, 3 April 2025, available at: <https://www.dalailama.com/news/2024/long-life-prayers>

<sup>52</sup> "Storm in the Grasslands: Self-Immolations in Tibet and Chinese Policy." International Campaign for Tibet, 10 Dec. 2012, <https://savetibet.org/storm-in-the-grasslands-self-immolations-in-tibet-and-chinese-policy/>.

<sup>53</sup> Wang Lixiong. 'Last Words Analysis'. 27 December 2012, Phayul, <http://www.phayul.com/2012/12/27/32726/>.

<sup>54</sup> Tibetan writer Namloyak Dhungser asked young Tibetans how they felt about the Dalai Lama returning home. "Generally, although these people highly respect and revere the Dalai Lama, theirs is not as 'pure' a faith as the older generation," he observed in his book about self-immolations in Tibet. "They all agree that the Dalai Lama [...] is emblematic of the 'ultimate' leader [...] in part through his propagation of 'nonviolent' resistance. Yet this [...] has not led to a change in the status quo." Dhungser also made it clear that the Tibetans in Tibet who responded to his question "agreed that the Dalai Lama's return in the current situation was 'unfeasible and may lead to the same tragedy which befell the Tenth Panchen Rinpoche. This is not what we want." Namloyak Dhungser, 'Dhungser returns home', 2007, blog in Tibet, banned by the PRC in 2007, cited in Namloyak Dhungser, 'Aflame for Freedom in Tibet: The Origin and Development of the Self-Immolation Movement', edited by Joshua Esler, Lexington Books, 2024.

<sup>55</sup> The Dalai Lama, 'Voice for the Voiceless', Harper Collins, 2025. Also see New York Times advance review, 23 January 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/23/books/dalai-lama-book-voice-for-the-voiceless.html>

<sup>56</sup> September 2022, the Dalai Lama recalled a conversation with the former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh, telling him that: "At the time when I am dying, I prefer India, you see, surrounded by people who really show you love, not artificial something," he said. "If I dying surrounded with Chinese officials, too much artificial [sic]. So, I much prefer dying in this country – free, democracy, open."

<sup>57</sup> In his meeting with the Dalai Lama after an absence from India of more than eight years, the Karmapa Ogyen Thrinley Dorje emphasised the importance of the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet if his health allows it, referring to the importance of keeping hope alive among Tibetans in Tibet. "Especially, while His Holiness is still alive, if he could return to Tibet and set foot on Tibetan soil, it would fulfill the hopes of all Tibetans inside Tibet [...] and accomplish the lama's wishes," he said in a statement following the meeting in Zurich on 28 August 2024. "Gyalwang Karmapa's Message on Meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama." Kagyu Office,

28 Aug. 2024, <https://kagyuoffice.org/gyalwang-karmapas-message-on-meeting-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama/>.

<sup>58</sup> Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari. 'The Dalai Lama's Special Envoy: Memoirs of a Life in pursuit of a reunited Tibet', Columbia University Press, 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p 480.

<sup>60</sup> Tibet 2040: Four Scenarios." Future of Tibet, Dec. 2024, [https://future-of-tibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Tibet-2040-Four-scenarios\\_ENG-Design-Version.pdf](https://future-of-tibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Tibet-2040-Four-scenarios_ENG-Design-Version.pdf).

<sup>61</sup> When scholar Dawa Lokyitsang was invited to give a keynote lecture for an academic conference about the 'next Dalai Lama', she said that several Tibetans had urged her not to do so as the subject matter was inauspicious. "The Dalai Lama's Future Succession: Understanding the 14th Dalai Lama and His Formidable Contributions – A Keynote Lecture." Lhakar Diaries, 25 Sept. 2024, <https://lhakardiaries.com/2024/09/25/the-dalai-lamas-future-succession-understanding-the-14th-dalai-lama-and-his-formidable-contributions-a-keynote-lecture-by-dr-dawa-lokyitsang/>.

<sup>62</sup> Cited by Dawa Lokyitsang in her keynote, 'The Dalai Lama's future succession: understanding the 14th Dalai Lama and his formidable contributions', on 13 September 2024 at the University of Colorado Boulder's Department of Anthropology. The lecture was part of the Leadership and Reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas Project (LEAD): A Research Network on Succession, Innovation, and Community. The presentation is available at <https://lhakardiaries.com/2024/09/25/the-dalai-lamas-future-succession-understanding-the-14th-dalai-lama-and-his-formidable-contributions-a-keynote-lecture-by-dr-dawa-lokyitsang/>

<sup>63</sup> Tsepon Wangchuk Shakabpa. 'Tibet: A Political History', Yale University Press, 1967.

<sup>64</sup> For a summary of the meetings, see International Tibet Network report, <https://tibetnetwork.org/geopoliticsoftibetsreincarnation/>

<sup>65</sup> The resolution made in January – March 2021, affirmed the right of the Dalai Lama to decide upon his own reincarnation, denying legitimacy to any political interference from the PRC.

<sup>66</sup> Tibet Advocacy Alliance India, International Tibet Network. 'Indian MPs Unite in Strong Support for the Reincarnation Rights of the Dalai Lama', 30 March 2025, <https://tibetnetwork.org/indian-mps-unite-in-strong-support-for-the-dalai-lama/>

<sup>67</sup> Dhamdul, Tenzing. The Central Tibetan Administration and its democratic institutions: The political successor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama? Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives, Oct. 2024, [https://fnvaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CTA-the-Political-Successor-for-HHDL\\_by-Tenzing-Dhamdul.pdf](https://fnvaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CTA-the-Political-Successor-for-HHDL_by-Tenzing-Dhamdul.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Some called for him to maintain a role similar to the late Queen Elizabeth in the UK as head of state.

<sup>69</sup> "Like other institutions, the institution of the Dalai Lama has its great strength and also weakness. In times of crisis like the one we are now facing, the Dalai Lama becomes the rallying point of the Tibetan spirit. At other times, the Tibetan people's dependence on one man and on one institution becomes a hindrance to the growth of Tibetan democracy." Foreword by the Dalai Lama in 'The Dalai Lamas of Tibet' by Thubten Samphel and Tendar, Rolí Books, 2000, 24 August 1998.

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Namloyak Dhungser, 'Aflame for Freedom in Tibet: The Origin and Development of the Self-Immolation Movement', edited by Joshua Esler, Lexington Books, 2024.

<sup>71</sup> Comments translated from the Dalai Lama's remarks in Tibetan made during a public teaching at Tsulagkhang, the main temple, in Dharamsala on 19 March 2011, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Remarks on Retirement", <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/retirement-and-reincarnation/retirement-remarks> In the same message, the Dalai Lama clarified the nature of the exile administration, saying: "We don't use the English word 'government' as such to describe our exile administration. [...] We call our administration the Central Tibetan Administration. Of course there are Tibetans in exile and we need an organization to look after them. This is the direct responsibility of the administration. Generally, the few of us in exile, being Tibetans, have the responsibility to articulate the aspirations of the Tibetans inside Tibet and to tell the world of the real situation inside Tibet. We have never called our administration the Tibetan exile government. [...] So, the precise title is the Central Tibetan Administration whose leaders are all democratically elected."

<sup>72</sup> Snyder, Jim. "A Tibetan Experiment in Democracy Struggles." Radio Free Asia, 24 Oct. 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/free-tibet-10242023142657.html>. "This power of democracy that the Tibetans have attained in the post-1959 period has enabled united efforts under His Holiness the Dalai Lama, which have been a source of hope for the Tibetans in Tibet and of concern for the Chinese leadership," Bhuchung K Tsering, Research Director of the International Campaign for Tibet, wrote in January. "In one sense, it is good that problems, like the recent one with the Tibetan parliament, are taking place now while corrective measures can be taken and when we have the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to provide guidance, if all other efforts fail. But [...] the Tibetan people need to change their mindset on their understanding of democracy." Bhuchung K Tsering blog, 2 January 2024, <https://weblog.savetibet.org/2024/01/is-tibetan-democracy-in-exile-failing/>

<sup>73</sup> "Securing Tibet's future: Vision Paper", the 16th Kashag of the CTA, 2021-26, 2023, [https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Final\\_Printready\\_Vision-Paper\\_Eng-1-1.pdf](https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Final_Printready_Vision-Paper_Eng-1-1.pdf). The Tibetan Kashag (Cabinet) has made the following statement: "With regards to the reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, His Holiness's repeated statements since 1969, the official pronouncement of September 24, 2011, or any guidance in future is inherently discretionary. No government nor any individual has the right to interfere in this matter." "Kashag's Position on the Issue of Reincarnation of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama." Central Tibetan Administration, 29 Sept. 2011, <https://tibet.net/kashags-position-on-the-issue-of-reincarnation-of-his-holiness->



the-14th-dalai-lama/.

<sup>74</sup> See Xiaoyuan Liu, who draws upon access to the archives of the CCP to shed light on Beijing's evolving Tibet policy and relationship with the Dalai Lama and Tenth Panchen Lama during the first decade of the People's Republic. In his book 'To the end of revolution: The Chinese Communist Party and Tibet, 1949-59', Xiaoyuan Liu investigates the factors in the 1950s that led to the Dalai Lama being changed from an asset to a liability in Mao's eyes (Chapter Five). Columbia University Press, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu, *ibid*, and Gray Tuttle. Even before Mao, Buddhism was a key factor in maintaining a link between China and Tibet during the Republican period (1912-49), a link the Communists exploited when exerting control over Tibet by force in the 1950s. Tibetologist Gray Tuttle says that the measures on reincarnation emerge from an understanding by Beijing of the 'desperate importance' of the religious authority of Tibetan lamas to the Party: "The Communists may have felt that raising a generation of Tibetans without religion during the Cultural Revolution would put an end to the need to work with and through the religious elite, but the revival of Buddhism in the period of reforms made it clear they were wrong...The Public Security Bureau and the People's Liberation Army can control Tibet, but the religious authority of numerous lamas, such as the current Panchen Lama, is of desperate importance to the Communist Party. Contemporary Chinese government policies towards Tibet include not just the overt political processes, such as governmental recognition of certain lamas, but also the more subtle aspects of cultural interaction: the roles of Tibetan Buddhists in official Buddhist organizations of China, of Chinese monastic adherents of Tibetan Buddhism as leaders of Chinese Buddhist academies, and of Chinese and Tibetan scholars in promoting the state's efforts to integrate Tibetan religious culture within a more broadly defined Chinese culture." Gray Tuttle, 'Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China', Columbia University Press, 2005.

<sup>76</sup> Blanchard, Ben. "China Says Dalai Lama Profanes Buddhism by Doubting His Reincarnation." Reuters, 9 Mar. 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-tibet/china-says-dalai-lama-profanes-buddhism-by-doubting-his-reincarnation-idUSKBN0M50R920150309>.

<sup>77</sup> Liu Shuguang, 'On the Relationship between the Status of Living Buddha and the Stability of Tibetan areas', published in the 20th Issue of "Journal of Society in the Western Regions" in 2015, obtained from the PRC. Partial translation for this report.

<sup>78</sup> "Selection of Dalai Successor Must Follow Central Government: Experts." Global Times, 29 Nov. 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201911/1171643.shtml>.

<sup>79</sup> The papers were first analysed for a report produced by the same author for the International Tibet Network, an edited version of which was presented at a side event in October 2022 of the 51st Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, sponsored by the U.S. and cosponsored by the U.K., Canada, Czech Republic and Lithuania. The event was addressed by former Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights and U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Uzra Zeya. See: <https://tibetnetwork.org/new-evidence-exposed-concerning-chinas-planned-interference-over-next-reincarnation-of-the-dalai-lama/> And also: Radio Free Asia report: Lodoe, Kalden. 'Policy Docs Show China Plans to End Support for Tibet After Dalai Lama's Death.' Central Tibetan Administration, 6 October 2022, <https://tibet.net/policy-docs-show-china-plans-to-end-support-for-tibet-after-dalai-lamas-death/>.

<sup>80</sup> See translation into English at: [https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Escaping-a-predicament\\_thoughts-on-the-opportunities-and-considerations-for-communicating-on-Tibet-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf](https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Escaping-a-predicament_thoughts-on-the-opportunities-and-considerations-for-communicating-on-Tibet-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari. "The Dalai Lama's Special Envoy: Memoirs of a Lifetime in pursuit of a reunited Tibet", Columbia University Press, 2022, p 481

<sup>82</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama (the 'Great Fifth') declared Lobsang Chokyi Gyaltsen (1570-1662) to be the First Panchen Lama and incarnation of the Buddha Amitabha. He requested the Panchen Lama to accept Tashilhunpo monastery as his multi-lifetime seat. Mullin, Glenn. *The Fourteen Dalai Lamas: A Sacred Legacy of Reincarnation*. Clear Light Publishers, 2001.

<sup>83</sup> In her book, "The Search for the Panchen Lama" (1999) Isabel Hilton writes: "It was an intervention for which the present Dalai Lama remains grateful to the Panchen." (p 81).

<sup>84</sup> The Tibetan scholar was studying in the West and interviewed outside the PRC for this report.

<sup>85</sup> Xinhua, 20 August 2018, [http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201808/t20180820\\_6189684.html](http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201808/t20180820_6189684.html), cited in International Campaign for Tibet report, 11 September 2018, <https://savetibet.org/china-tightens-screws-on-tibetan-buddhism/>

<sup>86</sup> The Chinese government is paying Tibetans 100 yuan (about US\$14) each to attend visits and receive blessings from Gyaltsen Norbu, residents in Tibet told the Tibetan service of Radio Free Asia. Kunchok, Sangyal. "China Pays Tibetans to Receive Blessings from Beijing-Backed Panchen Lama." Radio Free Asia, 7 June 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/panchen-lama-06072023084927.html>.

<sup>87</sup> A Westerner who travelled to Kham and Amdo in 2014 said it was almost impossible to find his portrait: "The degree of his absence was still striking, the sole exception being a small picture stuck to the outside wall of a temple in Labrang. In contrast, pictures of the beloved Tenth Panchen Lama are far more numerous; I lost count at around 150." 'Observations from Amdo: Trip report from a Western traveler in eastern Tibet', published by the International Campaign for Tibet, 6 August 2014, <https://savetibet.org/observations-from-amdo-trip-report-from-a-traveler-in-eastern-tibet/> Another Westerner who has travelled widely in the region confirmed this paucity of images more recently, saying that they had only seen a small image of the Chinese Panchen at Tashilhunpo itself.

<sup>88</sup> Jamyang Shepa (full name: Lobsang Jigme Thubten Choekyi Nyima) has various political as well as religious roles. He is member of the Standing Committee of the 14th NPC and deputy director of the Standing Committee of the 14th Gansu

Provincial People's Congress. He is the head of the Steering Committee for Awarding Academic Ranks in Tibetan Buddhism and dean of the High-level Tibetan Buddhism College of China in Beijing. He is president of the Buddhist Association of Gansu and president of Gansu Buddhist Academy.

<sup>89</sup> These factors are likely to have led to his striking comments in 2015 about the dangers of “Tibetan Buddhism existing in name only” because of a shortage of monks. Gyaltsen Norbu’s comments appeared to reflect a genuine alarm that monasteries in the TAR that once housed thousands of monks are now reduced to a few hundred whose main responsibility is no longer religious study but tending to the buildings and tourists. Many of the monks in these major monasteries were from Amdo, Kham, Mongolia, and the broader Himalayan region. Since a wave of overwhelmingly peaceful protests spread across Tibet in March 2008, monasteries of historic and cultural significance have been targeted by the authorities and many monks and nuns expelled. Translation into English of the Chinese Panchen Lama’s comments by the International Campaign for Tibet, posted 17 April 2015, <https://weblog.savetibet.org/2015/04/the-danger-of-buddhism-existing-in-name-only-translation-of-a-speech-by-gyaltsen-norbu-the-chinese-panchen/>

<sup>90</sup> Tibet Daily, Chinese social media, 31 July 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/7EYZCEX9sFNTK3dwbN9Y0A>

<sup>91</sup> China Tibet News, 26 July 2022, [http://m.tibet.cn/cn/index/gdt/202207/t20220726\\_7244385.html](http://m.tibet.cn/cn/index/gdt/202207/t20220726_7244385.html)

<sup>92</sup> The three other Politburo members were Yu Zhengsheng of the Standing Committee, Sun Chunlan, the then UFWD head and Li Zhanshu, director of the General Office of the Party; also present was Jampa Phuntsog (at the time, the senior-most Tibetan in the Party). See: Arpi, Claude. “Hot Summer on Tibetan Plateau.” Claude Arpi’s Blog, 30 June 2015, <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2015/06/hot-summer-on-tibetan-plateau.html>

<sup>93</sup> Originally published in the People’s Daily, 20 February 1989, <http://xz.people.com.cn/GB/138902/8689896.html>, ‘Xi Zhongxun: In Fond Memory of Buddhist Great Master Panchen Lama, a Loyal Friend of the Communist Party’, translated into English by the International Tibet Network website Chinese Leaders, <https://chinese-leaders.org/blog/xizhongxun-panchenlama/>

<sup>94</sup> Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. According to state media, “This shows that the Party Central Committee has consistently given a high level of attention to Tibet.” “Why Did Xi Jinping Meet with the Panchen Lama Just Now?” Xinhua, 3 Dec. 2015, [http://m.tibet.cn/eng/opinion/analysis/201512/t20151203\\_5763522.html](http://m.tibet.cn/eng/opinion/analysis/201512/t20151203_5763522.html).

<sup>95</sup> In a typical such example, current Vice Premier (then head of the United Front Work Department) Sun Chunlan was pictured in the state media meeting Gyaltsen Norbu on 1 March 2016 and saying that she hoped he would “keep in mind the exhortations of Xi Jinping [...] and to consciously safeguard the unity of the motherland and national unity [...], playing an active role to lead Tibetan Buddhism to adapt to the socialist society.” Xinhua, 2 March 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Some observers expected that he would be appointed at least as a Vice Chair of the CPPCC, according to the International Campaign for Tibet. “Buddhist Association of China Takes a Leading Role in China’s Attempts to Control and Forcibly Reshape Tibetan Buddhism.” International Campaign for Tibet, <https://savetibet.org/buddhist-association-of-china-takes-a-leading-role-in-chinas-attempts-to-control-and-forcibly-reshape-tibetan-buddhism/>.

<sup>97</sup> Cited in Josephine Ma, South China Morning Post, 28 September 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/>

<sup>98</sup> Cited in Josephine Ma, South China Morning Post, 28 September 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/>

<sup>99</sup> “11th Panchen Lama Visits Rural Families.” China Tibet Online, 7 Aug. 2019, [http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201908/t20190807\\_6656885.html](http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201908/t20190807_6656885.html).

<sup>100</sup> State media China Tibet News in Chinese, 26 July 2022, [http://m.tibet.cn/cn/index/gdt/202207/t20220726\\_7244385.html](http://m.tibet.cn/cn/index/gdt/202207/t20220726_7244385.html)

<sup>101</sup> Claude Arpi describes the spiritual connections in an Asian Age article: “Stop China from Erasing the Heart of the World.” The Asian Age, 11 Oct. 2021, <https://www.asianage.com/opinion/columnists/111021/claude-arpi-stop-china-from-erasing-the-heart-of-the-world.html>.

<sup>102</sup> “11th Panchen Lama Visits Rural Families.” China Tibet Online, 7 Aug. 2019, [http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201908/t20190807\\_6656885.html](http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201908/t20190807_6656885.html).

<sup>103</sup> This was flagged from his arrival in Lhasa in June, when the state media reported: “On June 11, the Panchen Erdeni Choskyi Gyalpo, a member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and a vice president of the Buddhist Association of China, arrived in Lhasa by plane to conduct research and Buddhist activities.” “11th Panchen Lama conducts research and Buddhist activities in Lhasa”. China Tibet Online, 28 June 2019, [http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201906/t20190628\\_6623271.html](http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201906/t20190628_6623271.html).

<sup>104</sup> “班禅额尔德尼·确吉杰布在山南考察调研开展佛事活动.” China Tibet News online in Chinese, 28 Aug. 2018, <http://www.xztzb.gov.cn/news/1535419327828.shtml>.

<sup>105</sup> For the first time, China’s dam building is now reaching upriver to the sources of Asia’s great wild mountain rivers in Tibet in landscapes that were previously among the least disturbed habitats on earth. Tibet is described by Chinese engineers as “the main battlefield of China’s hydropower construction”,<sup>1</sup> while a Chinese chief engineer warned that the process of constructing a

dam in the upper reaches of the Drichu river is like building “high-rise blocks on tofu”. Turquoise Roof and Tibet Watch report with Gabriel Lafitte: “Occupying Tibet’s Rivers: China’s Hydropower Battlefield in Tibet.” Turquoise Roof, 21 May 2024, <https://turquoiseroof.org/download/occupying-tibets-rivers-chinas-hydropower-battlefield-in-tibet/>.

<sup>106</sup> Giri, Anil. “Nepal Shoots Down the Prospect of Panchen Lama’s Visit.” The Kathmandu Post, 12 Dec. 2024, <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2024/12/12/nepal-shoots-down-the-prospect-of-panchen-lama-s-visit>.

<sup>107</sup> The visit to the Gaden Sumtsenling Monastery in Gyalthang county, the largest Tibetan-Buddhist temple in Yunnan, was in 2015. Reported by Claude Arpi on his blog on 15 June 2015, <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2015/06/hot-summer-on-tibetanplateau.html>

<sup>108</sup> Conversation with a Tibetologist based in Europe, who travelled widely in Tibet for research until 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Z Yangzoin (July 2005) ‘Lama Gangchen and his self healing therapy’, China Tibet magazine, link now offline, cited in ‘Dolgyal Shugden: A History: The Real Story behind the Shugden Cult’s Campaign against the Dalai Lama’. The Dolgyal Shugden Research Society, published by Tibet House, New York, US, and Hay House, 2014.

<sup>110</sup> “积极推进藏传佛教中国化”. China Tibet Online, 7 Jan. 2022, [http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/zx/202201/t20220107\\_7126858.html](http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/zx/202201/t20220107_7126858.html).

<sup>111</sup> There were reports that eight monks had been arrested in an indication of tensions at the monastery. The source is a Tibet Information Network report now taken offline following the closure of TIN. Cited by International Campaign for Tibet 2004 report, ‘When the Sky Fell to Earth’, <https://savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2004ReligionReport.pdf>, footnote 96.

<sup>112</sup> Account given to the International Campaign for Tibet, ‘When the Sky Fell to Earth’, <https://savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2004ReligionReport.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> Arpi, Claude. “Reting and Dalai Lama’s Reincarnations”, Claude Arpi’s Blog, 30 Jan. 2013, <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2013/01/reting-and-dalai-lamas-reincarnations.html>.

<sup>114</sup> “积极推进藏传佛教中国化”. China Tibet Online, 7 Jan. 2022, [http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/zx/202201/t20220107\\_7126858.html](http://www.tibet.cn/cn/culture/zx/202201/t20220107_7126858.html).

<sup>115</sup> Wang Yanmin. ‘A study of new changes in Tibet independence splittist activities in the post-Dalai era and countermeasures’, MA Dissertation, Public Security University of China, 7 April 2017, <https://wap.cnki.net/touch/web/Dissertation/Article/10041-1017861373.nh.html>; archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211221171904/https://wap.cnki.net/touch/web/Dissertation/Article/10041-1017861373.nh.html>. For translation, see <https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/New-changes-and-countermeasures-against-Tibet-independence-splittist-activities-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> “Jianshou gongchandang ren jingshen jiayuan yong bao gongchandang ren zhengzhi ben se 坚守共产党精神家园 永葆共产党政治本 (Adhere to the spiritual home of the Communist Party, always maintain the true political qualities of the Communist Party)”, Xizang ribao, 6 December 2016, cited by Robert Barnett, ‘Special Paper: The “Post Dalai Era” – the Party prepares for the Tibetan Leader’s Death’, published in ‘The Dalai Lama’s Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question’, edited by Janannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, May 2023, Institute for Security and Development Policy and the Organisation for Research on China and Asia’, available at: <https://isdpeu/content/uploads/2023/05/ISDP-Special-Paper-Tibet-May-15.pdf>

<sup>118</sup> The uprising of 2008, which involved Tibetans from every sphere of society, from farmers and nomads to teachers and professors, was met by a violent crackdown involving the torture, disappearances and killings of Tibetans who protested or who sent images or messages to the outside world. See “Tibet at a Turning Point.” International Campaign for Tibet, 2024, <https://savetibet.org/tibet-at-a-turning-point/> and “A Great Mountain Burned by Fire: China’s Crackdown in Tibet.” International Campaign for Tibet, March 2009, [https://savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ICT\\_A\\_Great\\_Mountain\\_Burned\\_by\\_Fire.pdf](https://savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ICT_A_Great_Mountain_Burned_by_Fire.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> See for example, ‘Luobu Dunzhu, Danke, Jiang Jie, Bianba Zhaxi, He Wenhao, Baima Wangdui, Liu Jiang and Chen Yongqi participated in the second session of the 11th NPC delegation group deliberations’, Xizang ribao (Tibet Daily), 14 January 2019. Cited by Robert Barnett, fn22, ‘Special Paper: The “Post Dalai Era” – the Party prepares for the Tibetan Leader’s Death’, published in ‘The Dalai Lama’s Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question’, edited by Janannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, May 2023, Institute for Security and Development Policy and the Organisation for Research on China and Asia’, <https://isdpeu/content/uploads/2023/05/ISDP-Special-Paper-Tibet-May-15.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> “Pema Wangdu at the Municipal Committee (Expanded) Consultation Study Group on the topic of studying core theory”. Lhasa Daily, 6 August 2018, <http://www.lasariabao.com/lrsrbzw/pc/content/201809/06/c44947.html>, also cited by Robert Barnett, as above.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Shannan City Holds a Meeting on the Arrangement and Deployment of the Educational Practice Activities of “Complying with the Four Standards and Striving to Be Advanced Monks and Nuns” in 2020’, Shannan Municipal Party Committee United Front Work Department, 14 April 2020. See also <http://www.lasariabao.com/lrsrbzw/pc/content/201809/06/c44947.html>, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211215135448/http://www.lasariabao.com/lrsrbzw/pc/content/201809/06/c44947.html> and [https://web.archive.org/web/20211215135449/http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrbzw/202111/22/content\\_112301.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20211215135449/http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrbzw/202111/22/content_112301.html).

<sup>122</sup> “New Central Xinjiang Office director emerges”. The Observer, 26 March 2019, online; Wang Qian [王骞], “中央西藏工作小组工作范围从西藏扩至川甘等藏区” [The Central Tibet Work Small Group’s scope extends from Tibet to Tibetan parts of Sichuan and

Gansu], 凤凰周刊 [Phoenix Weekly], 17 August 2010, <https://archive.ph/O4YDE#selection-577.0-729.75>. established the coordinated implementation of Party and government policies on Tibetan issues in an area that will include not just the Tibet Autonomous Region, but also Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties located in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces. The expanded area is contiguous and approximately doubles the number of Tibetans.

<sup>123</sup> According to a Tibetan official interviewed for an article by Robert Barnett, 'Special Paper: "The 'Post-Dalai Era' – the Party prepares for the Tibetan Leader's Death", published in 'The Dalai Lama's Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question', edited by Janannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, May 2023, Institute for Security and Development Policy and the Organisation for Research on China and Asia', <https://isdpeu/content/uploads/2023/05/ISDP-Special-Paper-Tibet-May-15.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> A Tibetan official interviewed for this report.

<sup>125</sup> There appear to be several different research groups under the Tibet Leading Group which conduct various 'fact-finding' visits to Tibetan areas.

<sup>126</sup> "中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会常务委员会工作报告". CPPCC, 10 March 2024, <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2024/03/10/ART11710083212795493.shtml>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20250304125905/http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2024/03/10/ART11710083212795493.shtml>.

<sup>127</sup> "China's Top Political Advisor Stresses Implementing Party's Policies for Governance of Tibet." Xinhua News, 28 July 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20230728/eb537d4e92494c1>

<sup>128</sup> "Wang Huning Highlights Religious, Ethnic Harmony." Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, 5 July 2024, [http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2024-07/05/c\\_1002159.htm](http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2024-07/05/c_1002159.htm).

<sup>129</sup> This reference is from a meeting of the Shaanxi Provincial Party Committee on the occasion of Zhao Liji's transfer from Qinghai to Party Secretary of Shaanxi in 2007. People's Daily in Chinese, 25 March 2007, <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/14562/5520440.html>. Also cited by International Campaign for Tibet: "New Chinese leadership and Tibet", 22 March 2023, <https://savetibet.org/new-chinese-leadership-and-tibet/>. Zhao Leji biography by Brookings, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20thpartycongress\\_zhao\\_leji.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20thpartycongress_zhao_leji.pdf).

<sup>130</sup> "Officials Warned of Dalai Worship." Global Times, 11 November 2015, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/951991.shtml>. An 'expert' cited in the article said that: "The 14th Dalai Lama has been deodorizing his image, and local governments should provide more information of his activities in a transparent and open manner."

<sup>131</sup> Two years later, in line with their broader political objectives of undermining the influence of the Dalai Lama, the Ngari authorities stepped up border security just prior to a Kalachakra conferred by the Dalai Lama in Ladakh from 3-14 July, 2014. At a conference in Ngari on 2 September 2014, officials asserted the "key importance" of counter-terrorist work across Tibet but in particular in the border, 'frontline', areas. State media article: <http://www.xzali.gov.cn/tv/10314.jhtml>

<sup>132</sup> "Tibet Party Boss Speaks of Establishing Red Lines in the Anti-Dalai Lama Struggle as Nancy Pelosi Visits Lhasa". International Campaign for Tibet, 13 November 2015, <https://savetibet.org/tibet-party-boss-speaks-of-establishing-red-lines-in-the-anti-dalai-lama-struggle-as-nancy-pelosi-visits-lhasa/#5>, citing a link to a Chinese source that is no longer functional.

<sup>133</sup> Alex Joske writes: "The united front system has nearly always been a core system of the CCP. For most of its history it has been led by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee—the party's top leadership body. However, Xi has emphasised united front work more than previous leaders, pushing it closer to the position of importance that it occupied in the party's revolutionary era by elevating its status since 2015. That year, he established high-level bodies and regulations that signalled a greater emphasis on and centralisation of united front work. Later, the Central Committee's UFDW was expanded by giving it authority over religious, ethnic and Chinese diaspora affairs. The united front system and the UFDW in particular have also been given a central role in coordinating policy on Xinjiang, where the darkest side of the party's political security efforts are on full display. [...] Functions of united front work include increasing the CCP's political influence, interfering in the Chinese diaspora, suppressing dissident movements, building a permissive international environment for a takeover of Taiwan, intelligence gathering, encouraging investment in China, and facilitating technology transfer." Joske, Alex. 'The party speaks for you: Foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party's united front system', Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), 9 June 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-y>

<sup>134</sup> Figure given by the International Campaign for Tibet in the report 'Party Above Buddhism', <https://savetibet.org/party-abovebuddhism/>

<sup>135</sup> Modom Lodro Chotso. 'The Tragedy of Modom House', translated by Matthew Akester, Blackneck Books, 2023, [www.tibetwrites.in](http://www.tibetwrites.in)

<sup>136</sup> Translated roughly from the Tibetan text by Lobsang P Lhaungpa in 1973. Published by Lotsawa House [https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/thirteenth-dalai-lama/testament?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0dxI606IzsjYAO-TpoSeA6qkgYWeFuHN9LX5mFBYYvrf1ehR6q75gTXUU\\_aem\\_unJf6A6xflpqspOelOs7w](https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/thirteenth-dalai-lama/testament?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0dxI606IzsjYAO-TpoSeA6qkgYWeFuHN9LX5mFBYYvrf1ehR6q75gTXUU_aem_unJf6A6xflpqspOelOs7w)

<sup>137</sup> The Chinese term used is 'ruan lei', literally, soft cartilage; not exactly a vulnerability like an 'Achilles heel' but a tender point. From 'Escaping a predicament: thoughts on the opportunities and considerations for communicating on Tibet in the "post-Dalai era"', by Wang Jiaquan, Xinhua News Agency, presented at a conference in 2009. A translation of the paper into English is published online by the International Tibet Network at: [https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Escaping-a-predicament\\_thoughts-on-the-opportunities-and-considerations-for-communicating-on-Tibet-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf](https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Escaping-a-predicament_thoughts-on-the-opportunities-and-considerations-for-communicating-on-Tibet-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf)



<sup>138</sup> Lafitte, Gabriel. Tibet, a new frontline of white gold rush in global race for renewable energy. *Turquoise Roof*, 1 November 2023, [https://turquoiseroof.org/white\\_gold\\_rush\\_in\\_tibet/](https://turquoiseroof.org/white_gold_rush_in_tibet/).

<sup>139</sup> Occupying Tibet's rivers: China's hydropower 'battlefield' in Tibet'. *Turquoise Roof*, 21 May 2024, <https://turquoiseroof.org/occupying-tibets-rivers/>.

<sup>140</sup> Since 2016, the Chinese government has dramatically accelerated the relocation of rural villagers and herders in Tibet, often to new settlement sites hundreds of miles away. A report by Human Rights Watch, drawing on more than 1,000 official Chinese media articles between 2016 and 2023 as well as government publications and academic field studies, shows that China's own media reports in many cases contradict the claims that all those relocated gave their consent. "Educate the Masses to Change Their Minds": China's Forced Relocation of Rural Tibetans". Human Rights Watch, 21 May 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/05/22/educate-masses-change-their-minds/chinas-forced-relocation-rural-tibetans>.

<sup>141</sup> Letter to Dr Li Wenliang, translated by Palden Gyal: "A Must-Know Person" – Go Sherab Gyatso's Tribute to Dr Li Wenliang". *High Peaks Pure Earth*, 1 February 2022, <https://highpeakspureearth.com/a-must-know-person-go-sherab-gyatsos-tribute-to-dr-li-wenliang/>.

<sup>142</sup> See Kuei-min Chang, 'The New Politics of Sinicisation and Religion Regulation in China', *China Perspectives*, 2018/1-2 | 2018, 41-49, <https://journals.openedition.org/perspectiveschinoises/8058>. Details of a five-year plan to sinicise religion in the PRC were published in the Chinese state media report 'China passes five-year plan to sinicise Islam, as Beijing tightens grip on major faiths in China', *The Straits Times*, 9 January 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-passes-five-year-plan-to-siniciseislam-as-beijing-tightens-grip-on-major>.

<sup>143</sup> For example, a faculty meeting of United Front work in Ngari (Chinese: Ali), Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAR) on 10 May 2020, emphasized that their work should further ensure that the monastic community develops a consciousness as Chinese nationals and have "consciousness only for the country and its laws", according to a state media report. The meeting also emphasized making the monks and nuns follow the Chinese version of rights and obligations. Implementation of the party's policy on religion and the state's laws and regulations governing religious affairs is required in the monasteries.

<sup>144</sup> The terms 'sinicisation' and 'sinification' are both used in official media and translations into English. Articles of Association of the Buddhist Association of China (Adopted by the 10th National Representative Conference of the Buddhist Association of China in Dec. 2020): <https://web.archive.org/web/20240409200123/>; <https://www.hbsfjxh.cn/article.html?id=6968112937445625856>, cited by International Campaign for Tibet report: "Buddhist Association of China takes a leading role in China's attempts to control and forcibly reshape Tibetan Buddhism". 29 May 2024, <https://savetibet.org/buddhist-association-of-china-takes-a-leading-role-in-chinas-attempts-to-control-and-forcibly-reshape-tibetan-buddhism/#3>.

<sup>145</sup> The Tibet Autonomous Region BAC party committee's general secretary is Sonam Rinzin (Chinese: Suolang Renzeng), who was a deputy head of the TAR United Front Work Department before becoming a vice chair of the TAR CPPCC. The Party Secretary of the Dechen (Diqing) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Buddhist Association is Yang Jinhua, also a lay Tibetan and a CCP cadre. He worked in Dechen since 1995, including in the CCP's foreign affairs and propaganda divisions in the prefecture.

<sup>146</sup> "China: New Controls on Tibetan Monastery". Human Rights Watch, 24 January 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/25/china-new-controls-tibetan-monastery>.

<sup>147</sup> This term was used in various official documents to summarise objectives in Xinjiang, and equally applies to the CCP's strategies in Tibet. Cited by Adrian Zenz in "Break Their Roots: Evidence for China's Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang", *Journal of Political Risk*, Vol. 7, No. 7, July 2019, [https://www.jpolrisk.com/break-their-roots-evidence-for-chinas-parent-child-separation-campaign-in-xinjiang/#\\_ftn145](https://www.jpolrisk.com/break-their-roots-evidence-for-chinas-parent-child-separation-campaign-in-xinjiang/#_ftn145). Dr Zenz was citing an article on the Kashgar government website in Xinjiang dated 2 March 2018, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20180813115300/http://www.kashi.gov.cn/Government/PublicInfoShow.aspx?ID=2851>. Also see 'Eradicating Ideological viruses'. Human Rights Watch, 9 September 2018, [https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs#\\_ftn232](https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs#_ftn232).

<sup>148</sup> Chen Zongrong, 'Adhere to the Sinicisation of my country's religion', *Theory magazine*, undated copy obtained in pdf form in Chinese from the PRC and partially translated from this report.

<sup>149</sup> The CCP blames the Dalai Lama for the wave of self-immolations that have swept across Tibet since 2009, with a typical front page article of the Lhasa Evening News on 30 April 2021 saying that he "even searched Buddhist scriptures for the 'foundation' to teach people to commit suicide in an attempt to turn Tibetan Buddhism into a religion that teaches people to commit suicide." *Lhasa Evening News*, 30 April 2021, <https://archive.vn/O54Ap#selection-159.0-191.374>

<sup>150</sup> At a meeting in Lhasa in November 2020, the then Party Secretary Wu Yingjie said: "To make efforts on Sinicisation of Tibetan Buddhism, effectively prevent and resolve major risks and challenges in the field of religion, and educate monks, nuns and religious believers to consciously distinguish between themselves and 14th Dalai Clique, and take a clear stand to eliminate negative influence of the 14th Dalai's manipulation of religion." *People's Daily*, 24 November 2020, <https://archive.vn/0BAZn> At a meeting in Lhasa, the Leading Group of United Front Work Department of Tibet Autonomous Region convened to "thoroughly implement the spirit of Fifth Plenary Session of 19th Regional Party Congress and Seventh Central Tibet Work Forum". Also see statement from Chamdo reported by Tibet Daily and reproduced online on Chinese social media network QQ on 8 October 2020, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/49sjes8l9SYFLLWW2M\\_zHw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/49sjes8l9SYFLLWW2M_zHw)

<sup>151</sup> This was during a visit to Chamdo (Chinese: Qamdo) in the TAR in October 2020: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/btOyT8DKDNpQEIX5oizx\\_w](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/btOyT8DKDNpQEIX5oizx_w), archived at: <https://archive.vn/DV0In>. See "Chinese Authorities Aim to 'Liberate' Tibetan Believers". Human Rights Watch, 22 October 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/22/chinese-authorities-aim-liberate-tibetan-believers>.

<sup>152</sup> Liang, Xinlu. "China's anti-corruption watchdog investigates former Tibet party boss Wu Yingjie". South China Morning Post, 24 June 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3266891/chinas-anti-corruption-watchdog-investigates-former-tibet-party-boss-wu-yingjie>. Also see analysis by International Campaign for Tibet: "Former Chinese TAR boss Wu Yingjie's fall likely due to misuse of funds", 3 July 2024, <https://savetibet.org/former-chinese-tar-boss-wu-yingjies-fall-likely-due-to-misuse-of-funds/>.

<sup>153</sup> The Chinese government did not issue strong statements condemning the departures of both Arjia Rinpoche and the Karmapa even after they both expressed their concerns in exile about the lack of religious freedom in Tibet. Former President and Party Secretary Jiang Zemin even wrote a verse praising Arjia Rinpoche following his defection to the U.S. The Chinese authorities continued to make discreet efforts to communicate with the Karmapa in exile following his arrival in India, in order to encourage him to return.

<sup>154</sup> Xi Jinping called for "strengthening ideological and political education in schools, instilling the spirit of patriotism throughout the entire process of school education at all levels and types, and planting the seeds of loving China in the depths of the hearts of every teenager." Xinhua, 29 August 2020. Tibet Action Institute, 'Uncovering China's Colonial Boarding Schools in Tibet', <https://tibetaction.net/>

<sup>155</sup> Wang Shu, Jia Huajia. "班禅在西藏昌都弘法利生". China Tibet Network, 20 June 2023, [https://web.archive.org/web/20240415175635/http://m.tibet.cn/cn/news/yc/202306/t20230620\\_7437800.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20240415175635/http://m.tibet.cn/cn/news/yc/202306/t20230620_7437800.html). It is not the first time that China's Panchen has made a statement that is open to interpretation. The Chinese Panchen made a surprising statement of concern in 2015 that because of the shortage of monks in Tibet and "quotas set too low", there is "a danger of Buddhism existing in name only". Gyaltsen Norbu made the usual provisos in line with Party policy, asserting that Tibetan Buddhism is thriving in Tibet. But his main contention countered existing policy, as officials do not generally admit to monastic 'quotas'. The statement, which appeared online in some state media outlets (although only in Chinese), surprised many given the constraints upon him. Tibetans with a detailed knowledge of monastic practice point out that Gyaltsen Norbu must have gleaned a broader understanding of the current situation of Tibetan Buddhism that is conversely only made possible by his official role. Translation into English of the Chinese Panchen Lama's comments by the International Campaign for Tibet: "The 'danger of Buddhism existing in name only': translation of a speech by Gyaltsen Norbu, the 'Chinese Panchen'". 17 April 2015, <https://weblog.savetibet.org/2015/04/the-danger-of-buddhism-existing-in-name-only-translation-of-a-speech-by-gyaltsen-norbu-the-chinese-panchen/>.

<sup>156</sup> See Leibold, James. 'Toward A Second Generation of Ethnic Policies?', China Brief Volume: 12 Issue: 13, 6 July 2012.

<sup>157</sup> Noting the debate among exiles, Wang Jiaquan refers to the possibility of "a greater security challenge to the question of China's security" which could conversely "help us pull the veil away from overseas Tibet independence forces and conversely help us to garner sympathetic opinion from the international community.". Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Wang Jiaquan adds: "The problem lies in the fact that such speeches as these don't pack any kind of punch against the Dalai, but they do add a pretext for the foreign media to attack us, which amounts to helping the foreign media strengthen their own poor impressions, which on the contrary is not as desirable as simply saying, 'Our policy position has never changed.'"

<sup>159</sup> Cited by Evan Osnos: "Who will control Tibetan reincarnation". The New Yorker, 13 March 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/who-will-control-tibetan-reincarnation>. At the time Padma Choling was the only ethnic Tibetan who was a full member in the 18th CCP's Central Committee and as such gained frequent access to Western correspondents on trips abroad and on the sidelines of Party meetings in Beijing.

<sup>160</sup> The author of this paper has seen a document of more than 100 pages detailing the strategies, personnel and communications of the International Campaign for Tibet, apparently circulating in Beijing. Most of the information it contains is available in the public domain.

<sup>161</sup> A translation of sections of the paper is published by the International Tibet Network here: <https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/New-changes-and-countermeasures-against-Tibet-independence-splittist-activities-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf>

<sup>162</sup> The paper refers to field observations in 15 prefectures and prefecture-level cities and 35 counties (county-level cities). Despite the scale of the inspection tour, only 87 individual interviews were carried out, and of 8000 questionnaires issued to monks, only just over half (4975) were apparently returned.

<sup>163</sup> Details of Tibetans who have self immolated on International Campaign for Tibet website: <https://savetibet.org/tibetan-self-immolations/>

<sup>164</sup> Village-resident work teams are known in Chinese as 'zhucun gongzuodui'; and Tibetan as 'grong tshor bca' sdod las don ru khag'.

<sup>165</sup> Barnett, Robert. 'Special Paper: The "Post Dalai Era" – the Party prepares for the Tibetan Leader's Death', published in 'The Dalai Lama's Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question', edited by Janannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, May 2023, Institute for Security and Development Policy and the Organisation for Research on China and Asia', <https://isdp.eu/content/uploads/2023/05/ISDP-Special-Paper-Tibet-May-15.pdf>

<sup>166</sup> Cited by International Campaign for Tibet: "New measures on reincarnation reveal Party's objectives of political control". 15 August 2007, <https://savetibet.org/new-measures-on-reincarnation-reveal-party-objectives-of-political-control/>

<sup>167</sup> Wang Yanmin, 'A study of new changes in Tibet independence splittist activities in the post-Dalai era and countermeasures',

MA Dissertation, Public Security University of China, 7 April 2017, <https://wap.cnki.net/touch/web/Dissertation/Article/10041-1017861373.nh.html>; archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20211221171904/>; <https://wap.cnki.net/touch/web/Dissertation/Article/10041-1017861373.nh.html>. For translation, see <https://tibetnetwork.org/free1/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/New-changes-and-countermeasures-against-Tibet-independence-splitting-activities-in-the-post-Dalai-era.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> Jichang Lulu, Lin Li. 'The Party in monk's robes: The cultivation of global Buddhism within CCP influence operations'. Sinopsis, 18 July 2022, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/the-party-in-monks-robes/>.

<sup>169</sup> For instance in Cai Zhichun and Huang Hao, 'Huofu zhuanshi' (Reincarnation of a Living Buddha), Beijing: Huawen Chubanshe, 2000. After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Chinese Nationalists, without the traditional religious authority of the Manchu Emperor, promoted nationalism and racial unity in an effort to win support among Tibetans. When this failed, Chinese politicians appealed to a shared Buddhist heritage reflecting the late 19th century academic notion of Buddhism as a unified world religion, rather than a set of competing and diverse Asian religious practices, according to Gray Tuttle in his analysis of how Buddhism shaped Chinese rule. Tuttle writes: "While Chinese politicians hoped to gain Tibetan loyalty through religion, the promotion of a shared Buddhist heritage allowed Chinese Buddhists and Tibetan political and religious leaders to pursue their goals. During the 1930s and 1940s, Tibetan Buddhist ideas and teachers enjoyed tremendous popularity within a broad spectrum of Chinese society and especially among marginalized Chinese Buddhists. Even when relationships between the elite leadership between the two nations broke down, religious and cultural connections remained strong. After the Communists seized control, they continued to exploit this link when exerting control over Tibet by force in the 1950s." 'Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China' by Gray Tuttle, Columbia University Press, 2005.

<sup>170</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/21/c\\_139960338.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/21/c_139960338.htm). The pro-Beijing Global Times underlined the political point, stating: "The then central government adopted the system of lot-drawing from a golden urn in 1793 to improve the reincarnation order of the living Buddhas. The system not only helped to prevent malpractices in the reincarnation of living Buddhas, but also showed respect for the principles and traditions of the reincarnation of living Buddhas as well as the sentiment of believers. Moreover, it shows the authority of the central government over the reincarnation process." Global Times, 2 January 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1211614.shtml>. The White Paper is at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/21/c\\_139959978.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/21/c_139959978.htm)

<sup>171</sup> Referring to the CCP's appropriation of the Golden Urn, Chen Qinying and Chen Lijian, scholars at Beijing's Chinese Centre for Historical Studies, warned: "Only if the system used historically is employed during the reincarnation process for a Living Buddha can it be completed, otherwise there will be disturbances and chaos". 'Huo fo zhuan shi ji qi li shi ding zhi', paper by Chen Qinying and Chen Lijian, cited by Ben Blanchard: "Tibetans fear China's hand in Dalai Lama succession. Reuters, 5 March 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-dalailama-idUSTRE62404020100305>. At around the same time, former governor of the TAR Padma Choling, speaking on the sidelines of the annual meeting of China's rubber stamp Parliament, the National People's Congress, said that the Dalai Lama does not have the right to alter the succession process and must follow the "historical institutions and religious rituals of Tibetan Buddhism". Reuters report by Sui Lee Wei and Ben Blanchard: "China says Dalai Lama has to reincarnate". 7 March 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/china-says-dalai-lama-has-to-reincarnate-idUSTRE72624L/>.

<sup>172</sup> The Dalai Lama's statement on his reincarnation, 24 September 2011, <https://www.dalailama.com/the-dalai-lama/biographyand-daily-life/reincarnation>. Also see Fabienne Jagou, 'The Use of the Ritual Drawing of Lots for the Selection of the 11th Panchen Lama', in: 'Katia Buffetrille (ed.), 'Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World', Proceedings of the Seminar 'La transformation des rituels dans l'aire tibétaine à l'époque contemporaine', Paris on 8-9 November 2007. Leiden, Brill: 43-67.

<sup>173</sup> Oidtmann, Max. 'Forging the Golden Urn: The Qing Empire and the Politics of Reincarnation in Tibet' Columbia University Press, July 2018. Also see Jichang Lulu: 'Thinking outside the Urn: China and the reincarnation of Mongolia's highest lama', <https://jichanglulu.tumblr.com/urn>; a version of this piece was published by China Policy Institute on 20 March 2017.

<sup>174</sup> Arjia Rinpoche. *Surviving the Dragon*. Rodale, 2010, p. 206. The yellow pouch containing Gyaltzen Norbu's name was passed to Gyaltzen Norbu, then governor of the TAR. "This led to a widely circulated joke," Arjia Rinpoche recounts. "Gyaltzen Norbu chose Gyaltzen Norbu. The government chose itself as Panchen Lama."

<sup>175</sup> Conversation with former Labrang monk in exile, May 2024.

<sup>176</sup> 'Surviving the Dragon', *ibid*, p 207.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>178</sup> The late scholar Elliot Sperling clarified why the process came about as follows: "The way in which the use of the Golden Urn came to be mandated for the selection of Tibetan incarnations has a generally well-known common explanation: in the aftermath of the Qing campaign against the Gurkha state in Nepal, the Qing court made a sweeping reassessment of Tibetan affairs, seeking to find a way of understanding what circumstances had left it with no option but to mount a difficult and costly military expedition to the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley. The Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799; r. 1736-1799) was particularly exasperated with the state of affairs at the upper levels of the Tibetan government and considered the selection of incarnate lamas and lay ministers to both be subject to corrupt influences. In 1793 the emperor promulgated articles that comprised the 'Twenty-Nine Regulations for Resolving Tibetan Matters'. Sperling, Elliot. "Reincarnation and the Golden Urn in the 19th Century: The Recognition of the 8th Panchen Lama." *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalaya*, edited by Roberto Vitali, 2012, pp. 97-107, <https://elliotsperling.org/reincarnation-and-the-golden-urn-in-the-19th-century-the-recognition-of-the-8th-panchen-lama/>.

<sup>179</sup> National Center for Tibetan Studies (China). *Regulations of the Republic of China Concerning Rule Over Tibet (1912-1949)*. China Intercontinental Press, 1999. Cited in Julia Famularo, "Spinning the Wheel: Policy Implications of the Dalai Lama's Reincarnation," edited by Kelley Currie, Project 2049 Institute, 30 Jan. 2012, footnote 32.

<sup>180</sup> 'A History of Modern Tibet' by Melvyn Goldstein and Gelek Rinpoche, p 319-22, cited by Julia Famularo in 'Spinning the Wheel' as above.

<sup>181</sup> Columbia University Press, New York, 2015.

<sup>182</sup> Xinhua, 20 October 2008.

<sup>183</sup> Article by deputy director Liu Peng in 2019, 'Reform and practice of training modern monks in Tibetan Buddhism', DOI:10.16805/j.cnki.11-1671/b.2019.0077.

<sup>184</sup> Translation of announcement: "China: New Controls on Tibetan Monastery." Human Rights Watch, 25 Jan. 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/25/china-new-controls-tibetan-monastery>.

<sup>185</sup> 'Shadow of dust across the sun: how tourism is used to counter Tibetan cultural resilience'. International Campaign for Tibet report, 13 March 2017, <https://www.savetibet.eu/shadow-of-dust-across-the-sun-how-tourism-is-used-to-counter-tibetan-cultural-resilience/>.

<sup>186</sup> "China: New Controls on Tibetan Monastery." Human Rights Watch, 25 Jan. 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/25/china-new-controls-tibetan-monastery>.

<sup>187</sup> "China Publishes Regulation on Religious Affairs." Xinhua, 12 September 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-09/12/c\\_136604341.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-09/12/c_136604341.htm), archived at: <https://archive.vn/MJ922>.

<sup>188</sup> For instance, depicted on a study tour to the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Shanghai in May 2024, <https://archive.ph/gbeio#selection-1616.1-1771.109>

<sup>189</sup> The link to this Chinese state media report is no longer functioning. 'Zhukang Tudengkezhu Living Buddha: Self-immolation destroys religious conscience', People's Network, 29 March 2012, <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/17529529.html>

<sup>190</sup> Participants at the session on 8 March 2024 were told to "deepen their study of the religious rituals and historical customization of the reincarnation of the Living Buddha, and fully understand that the domestic search for the reincarnation of the Great Living Buddha, the drawing of lots from the golden urn, and the government approval of historical customs are necessary for the reincarnation of the Living Buddha. important principles to uphold. Chinese state media, 12 March 2024, [https://web.archive.org/web/20240425152151/http://www.zyxgjfy.cn/cn/news/college/202403/t20240312\\_7588281.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20240425152151/http://www.zyxgjfy.cn/cn/news/college/202403/t20240312_7588281.html)

<sup>191</sup> Global Times (in English), 6 November 2016, and Tibet.cn in Chinese on 5 November 2016.

<sup>192</sup> "2020四川省藏传佛教寺庙活佛培训班(第4期)开班". Chinese state media, China Tibet Net, 20 September 2020, <https://archive.ph/6xk4N>.

<sup>193</sup> List of prominent figures involved in the Buddhist Association of China in ICT report: "Buddhist Association of China Takes a Leading Role in China's Attempts to Control and Forcibly Reshape Tibetan Buddhism." International Campaign for Tibet, <https://savetibet.org/buddhist-association-of-china-takes-a-leading-role-in-chinas-attempts-to-control-and-forcibly-reshape-tibetan-buddhism/>.

<sup>194</sup> Chinese state media report: "青海省举办藏传佛教界代表人士宗教政策学习班 公保扎西出席开班式并讲话". The United Front of Qinghai, 9 May 2020, <http://www.qhtyzx.com/system/2020/05/09/013157687.shtml>.

<sup>195</sup> Chinese state media report: "青海省举办藏传佛教界代表人士宗教政策学习班 公保扎西出席开班式并讲话". The United Front of Qinghai, 9 May 2020, <http://www.qhtyzx.com/system/2020/05/09/013157687.shtml>.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Alak Nakor, who is now based in exile.

<sup>197</sup> A full account of his ordeal is featured in the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy Annual Report for 2017.

<sup>198</sup> Alak Nakor said that he witnessed a peaceful demonstration on 16 March 2011 in Ngaba county town, the anniversary of a major protest by local people in Ngaba in 2008 which was met by a violent crackdown in which Chinese troops opened fire on unarmed demonstrators, and several days after the self-immolation. He said: "I saw a group of Tibetans arrive at the site of the self-immolation and one person began to throw stones at police. The crowd gathered around to protect that person from the police. Then Tibetans began to shout slogans, and it was decided they would march to the local office of the Public Security Bureau and that the monks would lead the demonstration. They were very clear that there would be no violence, because that is the wish of His Holiness [the Dalai Lama]. But as demonstrators neared the PSB office I saw many police armed with sticks, spiked truncheons, and other weapons. They rounded on the Tibetans and started to kick, punch and beat them. It was chaos. I saw a woman in her forties being attacked by about six armed police. Then monks began to sit on the ground and call for the long life of the Dalai Lama and freedom for Tibet. I clearly remember one monk who raised his fist in the air and the police tried to force it down – they hit him in the head repeatedly with a spiked club until blood was pouring down his face. I am sure they must have killed him. I thought that if I could not carry out this brave act the least I could do was bear witness, and without thinking I picked up my phone and called some friends in India to tell them what was happening.

<sup>199</sup> In 2017, the International Campaign for Tibet reported that officials in an area of eastern Tibet were being compelled to undergo a polygraph test, popularly known as a 'lie-detector test,' linked to an evaluation of their political loyalty to the CCP. The



news, published in the state media, was further evidence of a disturbing new level of intrusion into the private lives and thoughts of Tibetans, indicating the atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia in the official sphere and fears of the erosion of their authority. It was also an implicit acknowledgement that in the official sphere as well as in the wider society, many Tibetans remain loyal to the Dalai Lama and maintain their strong sense of identity as Tibetans. ICT report: "ICT Inside Tibet: Use of Lie Detector to Test Communist Party Members Indicates Escalation of Control in Tibet." International Campaign for Tibet, 15 May 2017, <https://savetibet.org/ict-inside-tibet-use-of-lie-detector-to-test-communist-party-members-indicates-escalation-of-control-in-tibet/>.

<sup>200</sup> "Government Policy on Tibetan Reincarnation Leads to Expulsions, Detentions, Suicide." Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 18 Oct. 2010, citing reports by Phayul and the Central Tibetan Administration, <https://www.cecc.gov/publications/commission-analysis/government-policy-on-tibetan-reincarnation-leads-to-expulsions>.

<sup>201</sup> "Troops head for Nagchu, troupe boycotts summer festival over monastery closure". Phayul, 6 August 2013, <https://www.phayul.com/2013/08/06/33824/>.

<sup>202</sup> "How China's Authorities Aim to Control Tibetan Reincarnation." Human Rights Watch, 6 Apr. 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/06/how-chinas-authorities-aim-control-tibetan-reincarnation>.

<sup>203</sup> Official Chinese media video dated 20 September 2013, <https://news.cctv.com/2013/09/20/VIDE1379681282109139.shtml>, cited in Human Rights Watch, "How China's Authorities Aim to Control Tibetan Reincarnation," Human Rights Watch, 6 Apr. 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/06/how-chinas-authorities-aim-control-tibetan-reincarnation>.

<sup>204</sup> WeChat is used as a tool of surveillance by the Chinese authorities, and Tibetans risk imprisonment and death for posting content the authorities find suspicious or threatening. See Gurung, Tsering. "You spy, we chat". Rest of World, 18 August 2020, <https://restofworld.org/2020/china-surveillance-tibet-wechat/>. In 2021, three Tibetan teenagers disappeared and one was hospitalised with two broken legs after reportedly failing to register a WeChat group with local authorities, according to Tibet Watch, 4 March, 2021, <https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2021/3/5/three-tibetan-teenagers-arrested-and-one-tortured-for-failure-to-register-wechat-group>

<sup>205</sup> Dorje, Yeshe. "For Tibetans, Putin's Invasion of Ukraine Sparks Bitter Memories". The Diplomat, 29 April 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/for-tibetans-putins-invasion-of-ukraine-sparks-bitter-memories/>.

<sup>206</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu charts the establishment of the Dalai Lama-centred approach to a political settlement in Tibet, noting that CCP leaders were apparently confident that they would be able to win Tibetan people over to their political agenda via the 'Dalai bridge'. "This [...] constituted a unique and unprecedented step in the CCP's dealing with frontier affairs and interethnic relations." Liu. Xiaoyuan. *To the End of Revolution: The Chinese Communist Party and Tibet, 1949-1959*. Columbia University Press, 2020..

<sup>207</sup> Tuttle, Gray. 'Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China.' Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 227.

<sup>208</sup> Cao, Qunyong. "The Spread and Development of Tibetan Buddhism in Ganzi (Kardze) Tibetan Area and Its Influence on Social Stability." *Hengyang Normal University Journal*, Feb. 2015.

<sup>209</sup> A Treasury press release stated: "These individuals are designated pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and targets perpetrators of serious human rights abuse and corruption." U.S. Department of the Treasury. "Treasury Sanctions Chinese Officials in Connection with Serious Human Rights Abuse in Xinjiang." U.S. Department of the Treasury, 9 July 2021, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0070>.

<sup>210</sup> "王君正在西藏佛学院宣讲党的十九届六中全会精神并调研". China Tibet News, 20 November 2021, [https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao\\_15480525](https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_15480525).

<sup>211</sup> United Front Work Department of Suoxian County Committee of Nagqu City. "索县深入开展藏传佛教活佛转世管理政策学习宣讲" Xizang United Front Work Department, 12 Nov. 2021, <http://www.xztzb.gov.cn/zongjiao/1636692680910.shtml>. Cited in Human Rights Watch, "Chinese Authorities Double Down on Tibetan Reincarnations," Human Rights Watch, 15 Dec. 2021,

<sup>212</sup> United Front Work Department of Tibet. "错那县持续深入推进活佛转世政策宣讲工作". Xizang United Front Work Department, 25 January 2022, <http://www.xztzb.gov.cn/zongjiao/1643099033627.shtml>.

<sup>213</sup> Radio Free Asia, 2 Aug. 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/tibetan/sargyur/dalai-lama-reincarnation-decree-in-golok-monasteries-08022023072546.html>.

<sup>214</sup> "琼结县宗教领域宣讲组深入各村居开展《藏传佛教活佛转世管理办法》巡回宣讲及巡展活动". Weixin (WeChat), 10 December 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sro32petbD-Dv7DXxswWPA>.

<sup>215</sup> 2 September 2020, /web/20220127162611/http://www.xztzb.gov.cn/zongjiao/1643099033627.shtml.

<sup>216</sup> The story is told by Marya Waifoong Schwabe in her book 'Road to Freedom: A Journey from Occupied Tibet – The true story of the search, discovery and escape of a reincarnate lama', Luminare Press, 2020.

<sup>217</sup> Barnett, Robert. 'The Life and Murder of Akong Rinpoche', Tricycle, 15 November 2013, <https://tricycle.org/article/life-and->

murder-akong-rinpoche/

<sup>218</sup> Kagyu Office of the 17th Karmapa, <https://kagyuoffice.org/in-tibet/predictions-fulfilled-the-search-party-finds-the-karmapa-may-june-1992/>

<sup>219</sup> Central Tibetan Administration, 'Stalemate in Dialogue (1990-1993)', 'Sino-Tibetan Dialogue: A Chronological Account since 1978', Dharamsala, n.d., <https://tibet.net/important-issues/sino-tibetan-dialogue/an-overview-of-sino-tibetan-dialogue/sino-tibetan-dialogue-stalemate-indialogue-1990-1993/>; DIIR (Department of Information and International Relations), 'Contact with the Chinese authorities regarding the search for the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama', Dharamsala, 29 November 1995.

<sup>220</sup> "Both the Chinese and Indian sides created a context that 'sensitive' matters should be kept aside in order to take forward the boundary negotiation process as well as to normalize relations. It was a very conscious effort on the part of the Chinese to suddenly break ties with Dharamsala: The idea was to negotiate with India at its maximum since this was the first-ever period post the 1962 war when the boundary negotiation process exclusively through CBMs in 1993 started." Jagannath Panda, personal communication to Professor Robert Barnett, 10 April, 2023. The two sides signed the 'Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement' on 7 September 1993, agreeing to maintain the status quo on their mutual border pending an eventual boundary settlement. Barnett, Robert. "Special Paper: The 'Post Dalai Era' – The Party Prepares for the Tibetan Leader's Death." *The Dalai Lama's Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question*, edited by Janannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, Institute for Security and Development Policy and the Organisation for Research on China and Asia, May 2023, <https://isdpc.eu/content/uploads/2023/05/ISDP-Special-Paper-Tibet-May-15.pdf>.

<sup>221</sup> Central Tibetan Administration, 'Text of statement issued to the press by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on September 4th, 1993', Dharamsala, 4 September 1993, <https://tibet.net/importantissues/sino-tibetan-dialogue/important-statements-of-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama/text-ofstatement-issued-to-the-press-by-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-on-september-4-1993/>

<sup>222</sup> China expert and journalist Isabel Hilton tells the story in her book 'The Search for the Panchen Lama' (Norton, 1999) and television documentary.

<sup>223</sup> Chadrel Rinpoche (layname: Jampa Trinley) was arrested in May 1995, and sentenced to six years in prison on 21 April 1997 on charges of 'separatism' and 'leaking state secrets'. It is not even known for sure whether he is still alive. The Dharamsala based Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) quoted an audio message by an unnamed Tibetan official at the Bhojong Nangten Thuntsok (Tibetan Buddhism Association) as saying that "Jadrel (Chadrel) Rinpoche is dead". "Some say that Jadrel Rinpoche was poisoned to death," the report further quoted the audio message as saying. Posted by Phayul, 24 November 2011, <http://www.phayul.com/2011/11/24/30415/>. His co-accused, Jampa Chungla, sentenced to five years in 1996, died in custody in November 2010, according to Tibetan media. "China: Free Tibetans Unjustly Imprisoned." Human Rights Watch, 21 May 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/21/china-free-tibetans-unjustly-imprisoned>.

<sup>224</sup> Powers, John. *The Buddha Party: How the People's Republic of China Works to Define and Control Tibetan Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 291. Citing 'Propaganda Materials for Education and Study in Patriotism in Tibetan Buddhism' (anon. 1998: 195), footnote 100.

<sup>225</sup> Tibet Information Network and Human Rights Watch/Asia, 'Cutting off the Serpent's Head: Tightening Control in Tibet, 1994-1995', <https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/c/china/china2963.pdf>. The title is taken from 'A Golden Bridge Leading Into a New Era', (Dus rabs gsar par skyod-pa'i gser zam), a propaganda manual published by the Propaganda Committee of the TAR Communist Party as "reference materials to publicize the spirit of the Third Forum on Work in Tibet" (Tibetan People's Publishing House, October 1, 1994): "As the saying goes, to kill a serpent, we must first chop off its head. If we don't do that, we cannot succeed in the struggle against separatism. .... it is not a matter of religious belief nor a matter of the question of autonomy, it is a matter of securing the unity of our country and opposing separatism."

<sup>226</sup> "Communist Party Leadership Outlines 2010-2020 Tibet Work Priorities." Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 10 Mar. 2010, <https://www.cecc.gov/publications/commission-analysis/communist-party-leadership-outlines-2010-2020-tibet-work-priorities>.

<sup>227</sup> A typical front page article of the Lhasa Evening News on 30 April 2021 stated that the Tibetan leader "even searched Buddhist scriptures for the 'foundation' to teach people to commit suicide in an attempt to turn Tibetan Buddhism into a religion that teaches people to commit suicide." Lhasa Evening News, 30 April 2021, <https://archive.vn/O54Ap#selection-159.0-191.374>

<sup>228</sup> Barnett, Robert. 'Special Paper: The "Post Dalai Era" – the Party prepares for the Tibetan Leader's Death', published in *The Dalai Lama's Succession: Strategic Realities of the Tibet Question*, edited by Janannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, May 2023, Institute for Security and Development Policy and the Organisation for Research on China and Asia, available at: <https://isdpc.eu/content/uploads/2023/05/ISDP-Special-Paper-Tibet-May-15.pdf>.

<sup>229</sup> Zhang, Han. "Tibetan Monks Attend Training." *Global Times*, 25 Aug. 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1162625.shtml>

<sup>230</sup> See for instance International Campaign for Tibet report: "Dozens of Tibetans Imprisoned in New Wave of Kardze Demonstrations; Protest in Lhasa by Dargye Monk." International Campaign for Tibet, 27 June 2011, <https://savetibet.org/dozens-of-tibetans-imprisoned-in-new-wave-of-kardze-demonstrations-protest-in-lhasa-by-dargye-monk/>, and 4 April 2008, when a new wave of protests in Kardze was sparked by an anti-Dalai Lama campaign: "Eight Tibetans Killed in Kardze: New Phase in Protests in Tibet." International Campaign for Tibet, 4 April 2008, <https://savetibet.org/eight-tibetans-killed-in-kardze-new-phase-in-protests-in-tibet/>.

<sup>231</sup> Based on data available in the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) Political Prisoner Database (PPD). (Party, Government Launch New Security Program, Patriotic Education, in Tibetan Area, CECC, <https://www.cecc.gov/publications/>

commission-analysis/party-government-launch-new-security-program-patriotic-education-in

<sup>232</sup> Cao states that this includes 217 Nyingma school monasteries, 82 of the Sakya school, 34 Kagyu and 126 Gelugpa monasteries. His paper was published in the Journal of Heng-Yang Normal University in February 2015 and a copy obtained and partially translated for this report.

<sup>233</sup> Cao Qiongyun says: "According to the data of the early '50s, there were 747 monasteries with population of 93,700 monks and nuns. Among them, 540 monasteries were located in Kardze Prefecture making up 72.3% of the total number of Buddhist monasteries in Sichuan, with a total population of monks and nuns in Kardze of 79,300, more than 84.6% of total population of monks and nuns in Sichuan Tibetan areas." Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> China Daily, 12 January 2021. Also cited in the International Tibet Network paper, 'Tibet, the Dalai Lama and The Geopolitics of Reincarnation', <https://tibetnetwork.org/geopoliticsoftibetsreincarnation/>

<sup>235</sup> China Living Buddha database nearly complete". Global Times, 29 Apr. 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/980724.shtml>.

<sup>236</sup> 1 January 2016, available at: <https://www.cngold.com.cn/20160429d1903n68999550.html>

<sup>237</sup> At the link: <http://hf.tibet.cn/tibet/pubresource/search.jsp>

<sup>238</sup> Tibet specialist Dr Robert Barnett cites "several personal sources" who told him that each area has a quota of these to hand out, and the officials in each area just sell their quota. Los Angeles Times, 8 March 2016.

<sup>239</sup> Before it was taken offline, the post was captured and translated into English by the International Campaign for Tibet. "The Poisonous Fruit of Tibet's Religious Policy as China Publishes Living Buddha Database." International Campaign for Tibet, 2 May 2016, <https://savetibet.org/the-poisonous-fruit-of-tibets-religious-policy-as-china-publishes-living-buddhadatabase/>

<sup>240</sup> Blog entitled 'Unambiguously uphold Ye Xiaowen and Zhu Weiqun's religious line, be resolute supporters of Ye Xiaowen and Zhu Weiqun', by the 'Mao Thought Propaganda Team', posted 14 December 2015. Translated into English by the International Campaign for Tibet, <https://savetibet.org/the-poisonous-fruit-of-tibets-religious-policy-as-china-publishes-living-buddhadatabase/>

<sup>241</sup> Official website, updated 19 June 2022, <http://xjdkctz.com/news/fabu/550535.html>

<sup>242</sup> Qinghai government website, 10 June 2021.

<sup>243</sup> Checked at the time of writing at this link, which is no longer operational: <http://www.gxscse.com/xinwenshuju/550603.html>

<sup>244</sup> On 14 April 2015, China sent a delegation formed by five members of People's Congress of Tibet Autonomous Region to the US, led by Shangtsa Tenzin Chudrak, a 'reincarnation of living Buddha' in Tibetan Buddhism, and deputy director of Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Tibet. He reiterated the Chinese government's position regarding to the Lhasa protests in 2008 and the Dalai Lama, and according to Chinese state media "introduced the rapid social economic development and human rights situation of Tibet in the 50 years since its 'Liberation' to US politicians, and also leaders of the exiled Tibetan communities based in US welcomed the visit of Tibetan delegation from Tibet." [http://www.tibetol.cn/html/2015/1\\_0414/17915.html](http://www.tibetol.cn/html/2015/1_0414/17915.html) 160 International Campaign for Tibet report, 2 December 2009, <https://savetibet.org/determination-to-resist-repression-continues->

<sup>245</sup> In a report analysing current leadership representation at the national level—and in Tibetan areas at the provincial and sub-provincial levels—the International Campaign for Tibet found that Tibetans have mainly token positions while real power in Tibet continues to be in the hands of non-Tibetans. "The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the military and the government are considered the three wings of the Chinese governance system, with the government and military being subordinate to the party. Within the party, the three important organs are its Central Committee, the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee, with the standing committee being the most powerful. The level at which Tibetans are represented in all these different organs at the national, provincial and prefectural levels of administration indicates the discriminatory nature of China's governance when it comes to Tibetans." ICT report, 4 March 2024, <https://savetibet.org/underrepresented-tibetans-kept-out-of-most-leadership-positions/> ICT noted: "One reason for this crisis of Tibetan leadership at the national level is the Chinese leadership's lack of trust and confidence in the Tibetan people, even those who hold comparatively senior positions. Any Tibetan leader who expresses views concerning legitimate grievances of the Tibetan people becomes liable for persecution after being accused directly or indirectly of 'local nationalism.' The life of the 10th Panchen Lama and Bapa Phuntsog Wangyal are cases in point. Even though they worked within the Chinese system and were looked upon as being pro-Chinese by a section of the Tibetan people, they suffered many years of imprisonment and torture because the authorities did not trust them and persistently believed that they had a hidden agenda."

<sup>246</sup> "Determination to Resist Repression Continues in 'Combat-Ready' Chamdo, Frontline of Patriotic Education." International Campaign for Tibet, 2 Dec. 2009, <https://savetibet.org/determination-to-resist-repression-continues-in-combat-ready-chamdo-frontline-of-patriotic-education/>.

<sup>247</sup> See Part Two of this report for more information on this group and its activities. Claude Arpi blogspot: Arpi, Claude. "The Lamas Who Will Select the Chinese 15th Dalai Lama." Claude Arpi's Blog, 24 Mar. 2019, <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2019/03/the-lamas-who-will-select-chinese-15th.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Jamyang Shepa Lobsang Jigme Thubten Choekyi Nyima, Chinese transliteration: Jiamu Yang Luosang Jiumei Tudan Queji

Nima

<sup>249</sup> It has a total of 299 members.

<sup>250</sup> Cited by the BBC: "China Steps Up Security in Tibet Following Protests." BBC News, 31 Jan. 2012, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16805695>.

<sup>251</sup> Report by the China Buddhist Association on 4 September 2016: <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-09-04/11380.html>

<sup>252</sup> Also see this report by the China Buddhist Association on 4 September 2016: <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-09-04/11380.html>

<sup>253</sup> The individuals named in this section are mostly drawn from a list compiled by historian Claude Arpi in a blog: Arpi, Claude. "The Lamas Who Will Select the Chinese 15th Dalai Lama." Claude Arpi's Blog, 24 Mar. 2019, <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2019/03/the-lamas-who-will-select-chinese-15th.html>.

<sup>254</sup> Tsemonling Rinpoche: Tibet receives best period of development'. Chinese state media, 3 December 2015, [http://m.tibet.cn/eng/culture/tibetan/201512/t20151203\\_5775410.html](http://m.tibet.cn/eng/culture/tibetan/201512/t20151203_5775410.html).

<sup>255</sup> In a study of her lineage, Hildegard Diemberger wrote about an "extraordinary phenomenon: although it had been believed that women in Tibet were not allowed to obtain full ordination equivalent to monks, Choekyi Dronma not only persuaded one of the highest spiritual teachers of her era to give her full ordination but also established orders for other women practitioners and became so revered that she was officially recognised as one of two principal spiritual heirs to her main master." Diemberger, Hildegard. *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet*. Columbia University Press, 2014.

<sup>256</sup> Tibet Daily, Chinese social media, 31 July 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/7EYZCEX9sFNTK3dwbN9Y0A>

<sup>257</sup> Reuters citing Xinhua, 29 April 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-33305820080429>

<sup>258</sup> "Legend of China's only female Rinpoche." China Tibet Online, 3 Dec. 2015, [http://m.tibet.cn/eng/culture/tibetan/201512/t20151203\\_5775755.html](http://m.tibet.cn/eng/culture/tibetan/201512/t20151203_5775755.html).

<sup>259</sup> The Treasury of Lives includes a biography of his predecessor and details of the lineage: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kondor-Tulku-05-Lobzang-Namgyel-Tendzin-Lhundrub/13105>







The Dalai Lama paying his respects before an altar set up under the legendary bodhi tree where the Buddha was enlightened in Bodh Gaya, India, on 25 December 2019. Tenzin Choejor/OHHDL

