

**Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Communist Party authority:  
the fundamental problem of Dalai Lama leadership**

by

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## **Abstract**

Tibet has been under the administrative control of the People's Republic of China since 1950. The Seventeen-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, signed in 1951, promised autonomy to Tibetans, as well as the freedom to practice their religion, Tibetan Buddhism. In practice, however, the PRC has not allowed this autonomy or freedom of religion to Tibetans within its borders. The identity of the Tibetan people is largely based on their strong religiosity, manifested in their reverence of their leadership institutions: the Dalai Lama and to a lesser extent, the Panchen Lama. As the PRC government has sought to suppress religion and control religious practices, it has exerted a stricter level of control over the religions perceived as 'foreign,' of which Tibetan Buddhism is one. This strict control of 'foreign' religions (specifically their leadership institutions) has manifested in the defamation and coercive manipulation of the Dalai and Panchen Lama institutions, in order for the Chinese Communist Party to maintain its control over Tibet. This thesis asks why the CCP perceives the control of these leadership institutions as necessary for achieving its broader policy goals. Through an in-depth review and analysis of relevant literature, this thesis will argue that the strong religiosity of Tibetans and the corresponding politico-religious power wielded by the Dalai and Panchen Lama leadership institutions are perceived as threats by the CCP. The power of Tibetan Buddhism and its leadership institution, as well as the identity they instill in Tibetans, threatens not only the CCP's control over the resource-rich region, but also its legitimacy as the unique governing power over a secular, unified China. To the Chinese government in Beijing, allowing the Dalai and Panchen Lamas the freedom to return to Tibet, whether in body or just through the worship of Tibetan Buddhists, would be tantamount to losing its control over the entire region.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Jonathan P.F. Brasnett. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who, along with supporting me throughout my academic pursuits, have instilled in me a sense of appreciation and respect for the power of religions on those who believe in them. In keeping with this teaching, I also dedicate this thesis to all Tibetan Buddhists who feel their religious freedoms are being suppressed; I pray that you may find the peace you seek.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*“In the practice of tolerance,  
one’s enemy is the best teacher.”  
Dalai Lama*

Tibet has been governed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as part of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) since its ‘liberation’ or occupation in 1950 and the subsequent forced signing of the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet in 1951.<sup>1</sup> During the next 65 years, the CCP initiated various different policies in what became the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965, and elsewhere to ensure that the practice of Tibetan Buddhism and other religions cannot be utilized to foment anti-Chinese or anti-government sentiments. Despite a brief period of soft policies aimed at winning the support of religious leaders in the period immediately following the formation of the PRC, the CCP has most often relied on policies of coercive control of religion. These policies of control are revealed in the “political vetting of monks and nuns and strict supervision of their institutions,”<sup>2</sup> the “control of a religious revival in Buddhism and at the political questions surrounding the authority of the Dalai Lama.”<sup>3</sup> The Dalai Lama, who is the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism and revered as the reincarnation of Dromtonpa, the personification of the Bodhisattva of Compassion (Avalokiteśvara), has become the symbol of Tibetan independence and resistance to the Chinese government. Scholarly investigation of the Tibetan case has focused on various aspects of the Tibetan administrative apparatus, its political and spiritual leadership (i.e. Dalai Lama and to a

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Liberation” was an invention of the CCP, which felt that Tibet had always been a part of China and needed only to be liberated by Chinese forces from foreign influence and governance. In practice, this event was a military invasion of the Tibetan region by the People’s Liberation Army. See Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration. 2011. “Tibet: Proving Truth from Facts.” Accessed March 3, 2016. <http://tibet.net/1996/01/tibet-proving-truth-from-facts-1996/>.

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch Asia, *China: State Control of Religion*. (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1997), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Pitman Potter, “Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China,” *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003), 328.

lesser extent, the Panchen Lama), as well as its opposition to Chinese rule. Using this and other literature, this thesis asks why the CCP perceives the control of these leadership institutions as necessary for achieving its broader policy goals.

The CCP has proclaimed China to be an atheist state.<sup>4</sup> Communism has historical ties to atheism because of this political ideology's foundations in Marxism. Karl Marx (1818-1883), the German philosopher who wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, called religion "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world [...] It is the opium of the people."<sup>5</sup> Essentially, he viewed religion as an ideology that was manipulated by the ruling classes to subdue opposition from working classes and needed to be eliminated in order for the oppressed to rise up and challenge their oppressors. Considering this negative view of religion held by the central theorist behind Communist doctrine, it is no surprise that many Communist regimes over the past century have outlawed religion or made religiosity taboo. In modern China, however, the freedom of religious practice is constitutionally guaranteed, albeit with some significant caveats such as ensuring that religion does not "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State."<sup>6</sup> These limitations to religious freedom enable the CCP to criminalize any religion which does not capitulate to its demands, all while proclaiming itself as a religiously tolerant regime. Moreover, because the CCP has promoted atheism and prohibited any of its party members from openly practicing their religion, espousing

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<sup>4</sup> See Eleanor Albert, "Religion in China," *Council of Foreign Relations*, June 10, 2015, accessed February 20, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/china/religion-china/p16272>.

and André Laliberté, "The Politicization of Religion by the CCP: A Selective Retrieval," *ASIA* 69 (2015), 191. and Human Rights Watch 1997, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), 42.

<sup>6</sup> "Article 36, Chapter II The Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens," Constitution of the People's Republic of China, accessed December 28, 2015, [http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content\\_1372964.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content_1372964.htm).



a religion, whether freely or not, excludes an individual from the machinery of state power.<sup>7</sup> This state atheism or ‘secularism’ has evolved over the decades since the formation of the PRC, and has been variously characterized by policies aimed at the complete eradication of religion in contrast with more laissez-faire approaches to governing religious practice during its evolution.<sup>8</sup>

For the CCP to remain in control of the largest population in the world, it must ensure that no one among its 1.3 billion citizens can amass sufficient support to challenge its authority. Pitman Potter (2003) explains that the CCP believes that the stability of the regime is most threatened by religion, which has historically been the cause of anti-government revolutions during premodern dynasties and continues to attract believers, who could potentially be mobilized to support political goals. Despite the perceived threat of religious groups to the regime’s continued rule over the PRC, the CCP has been unable to use military force to simply eliminate all religious Chinese citizens. Owing to the tenacity and global recognition of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like Human Rights Watch which continues to publicize any CCP infringements of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Chinese government has had to handle the perceived religious threat delicately. Potter argues that “the regime faces continued challenges of maintaining sufficient authority to ensure political control while still presenting a broad image of tolerance.”<sup>9</sup> In an attempt to maintain a positive

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<sup>7</sup> See “IX. Communist Party Members and Religion; Relations with Religious Ethnic Minorities,” of “Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question During Our Country’s Socialist Period,” in Human Rights Watch/Asia, *Freedom of Religion in China*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992), 53-54.

<sup>8</sup> See Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2009). and Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009). Fenggang Yang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival Under Communist Rule*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Potter 2003, 318.

image internationally (a fundamental part of the international relations theory of soft power<sup>10</sup>), the CCP has written religious freedom into the constitution; it attempts to control religious organizations, public practices and doctrinal content within the PRC by other, less visible means.

The case of Tibetan Buddhism is unique in that, while the Tibetan people have largely resisted Chinese efforts to incorporate the region into the governing structure of the PRC, this opposition has had as much to do with ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity as with religion.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, religion is a very important part of Tibetan identity and symbolized in expressions of support for the Dalai Lama and, to a lesser extent, the Panchen Lama, as both the spiritual and political leaders of Tibet.<sup>12</sup> Having governed itself free of Chinese influence from the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 to the invasion of Tibet in 1950, the subsequent forced signing of the “17 Point Agreement” was opposed by most Tibetans. Although the agreement had promised Tibetan autonomy and self-rule, after its signing, the CCP formed a Tibet Work Committee which was made up of Chinese officials and transferred all governing power to them.<sup>13</sup> This lack of genuine autonomy along with a number of other factors caused the Dalai Lama to flee the Tibetan capital Lhasa to set up a Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE) in Dharamsala, Northeastern India. From here, the Dalai Lama has continued to mobilize opposition to Chinese control over the TAR, and promote nonviolent protest for real Tibetan political autonomy.<sup>14</sup> His symbolic power and importance to Tibetans has resulted in his being perceived as a threat to the CCP which seeks to reduce his influence using various measures of defamation and coercion.

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See Robert Ekvall, “The Tibetan Self-Image,” *Pacific Affairs* 33 (1960), 376-377.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 377-378.

<sup>13</sup> Warren W. Smith, *China's Tibet?: Autonomy or Assimilation*, (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 31-32.

<sup>14</sup> See “His Holiness’ Middle Way Approach for Resolving the Issue of Tibet,” Dalai Lama, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/middle-way-approach>.

The Dalai Lama's failure to achieve autonomous governance of the TAR by Tibetans is the result of the CCP's unwillingness to relinquish its control over the region. One of China's core interests, asserted in its 2011 White Paper entitled "China's Peaceful Development," is the upholding of its territorial integrity.<sup>15</sup> In essence, this means the suppression of secessionist movements like the ones which have arisen in the TAR and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). While these two secessionist movements are nationalistic in nature, these two regions are characterized by strong religiosity which plays into the identity of their citizens.<sup>16</sup> It is because of this strong religious element and the CCP's fear of religious opposition to its regime that such intensive control has been exerted by the Party to prevent these religions from becoming vehicles for anti-regime or secessionist movements. In fact, David Ownby argues that, to the CCP, "Tibetan Buddhism is the *bête noire*, embodying Chinese authorities' worst fears about religion as a force for mobilization and resistance to political authority."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the question of interest to this thesis is: in the particular case of Tibetan Buddhism, why does the CCP believe it is so important, even essential, to exert such strong control over this religious institution and its leadership in order to achieve its broader policy goals?

## **Chapter Outline**

Chapter two will argue that the politicization of religion has historically been a part of the governance of China, and that it continues under the Communist Party policy of controlling all religious institutions within the PRC, despite the CCP's claim to be a secular government. This

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<sup>15</sup> "III. China's Foreign Policies for Pursuing Peaceful Development," in *China's Peaceful Development*, Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China, September 2011, accessed December 29, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-09/06/c\\_131102329.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-09/06/c_131102329.htm).

<sup>16</sup> See Dru C. Gladney, *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> David Ownby, "Human Rights and the State Management of Religion in a Globalizing China," 2008, accessed April 25, 2015, [http://archives.cerium.ca/IMG/pdf/Microsoft\\_Word\\_-\\_Ownby\\_China.pdf](http://archives.cerium.ca/IMG/pdf/Microsoft_Word_-_Ownby_China.pdf).

chapter will discuss the theoretical background of the CCP's atheist ideology, its history and development into its modern political ideology of 'state secularism'. The reasons for the Communist Party's perception of a religious threat will be outlined in this chapter, as well as the ways it attempts to cope with this threat. Here, it will be relevant to analyze the constitutional framework for governing religion, including the various institutions appointed to supervise the practice of different religions. It will also be crucial to note the differences between laws and policies applying to the so-called "foreign religions" of Christianity, Islam and Tibetan Buddhism compared to those which apply to indigenous religions like ancestor worship and Daoism, or locally-developed religions like the Mahāyāna Buddhism of the Han ethnic majority.

Chapter three will present a brief historical account of Tibet's relationship with China as well as the development of the Tibetan Buddhist religion and the Dalai Lama leadership institution. Next, it will delve into the early period of communist rule in Tibet including the invasion, or so-called 'Liberation' of Tibet by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the signing of the 17-Point Agreement and the subsequent assimilationist policies implemented by the CCP in the TAR. This section will also discuss the policies concerning the practice of Tibetan Buddhism as well as the actions taken to destroy its ideological foundation, clergy and temples.

Chapter four will explain the central argument of the thesis, that the symbolic nature of the religious and political power wielded by the Tibetan Buddhist leaders (i.e. the Dalai and Panchen Lamas) threatens the CCP's control over the Tibetan region and its inhabitants. This chapter will analyze the symbolic power of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, and the political influence they carry will be outlined, as well as the strategies undertaken by the Chinese government to subdue their influence and bring these institutions under its control. We will also explore the reasons why the CCP feels threatened by the Tibetan Buddhist religion and its

leadership institutions, particularly the overwhelming influence of these institutions over the thoughts and actions of Tibetans. This chapter will close with a summary of events which reveal Tibetans' desire for autonomy or even independence from the PRC, including the 1959 Tibetan Uprising, the 2008 Tibetan unrest and the self-immolation movement of recent years.

A brief conclusion will summarize the importance of the TAR to the PRC and the methods used by the CCP to control the Tibetan Buddhist religion and its leadership in order to influence Tibetans. Then this thesis will offer some general observations about the CCP's policy and practice of 'state secularism' as well as some predictions about the future of the Tibetan Buddhist institution and other minority religious institutions within the PRC.

## **Chapter 2 - The Chinese Communist Party's Path to the Secular State Model**

*“Religion only harms the human race. It does nothing helpful. The great poison of religion is particularly pervasive among Tibetans and Mongolians.”<sup>18</sup>  
Mao Zedong to the Dalai Lama, 1955*

### **China's History of Governing Religion**

The politicization of religion in China dates back many millennia to an era when emperors ruled dynasties on the basis of their self-proclaimed ‘mandate of heaven,’ or *tiānmíng* (天命).<sup>19</sup> Glanville (2010) elaborates on this concept, saying that from the Zhou dynasty (roughly 1046-221 BCE), many rulers claimed to have been chosen by heaven (*tiān* 天), which convinced the Chinese populace of their right to rule. However, this double-edged sword also ensured their benevolent rulership, because scholars like Confucius and Mencius promoted the idea that emperors retained their mandate from heaven only as long as they ruled for the benefit of their people. In fact, according to Confucian scholars, the people “had the right to banish a bad ruler and even to kill a tyrant.”<sup>20</sup>

During the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), the famous Empress Wu Zetian (武则天) famously manipulated different religious belief systems to consolidate her rule over the empire.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Lempert, *Discipline and Debate: The Language of Violence in a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 95.

<sup>19</sup> See Orville Schnell, *Mandate of Heaven: The Legacy of Tiananmen Square and the Next Generation of China's Leaders*, (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 21. and Elizabeth J. Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China*, (London: Routledge, 2015), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Luke Glanville, “Retaining the Mandate of Heaven: Sovereign Accountability in Ancient China.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39 (2010), 324.

She successfully portraying herself as the mythical Nüwa (女媧), the ‘mother goddess,’<sup>21</sup> as well as “*devi* Jingguang, Pure Radiance, a goddess the Buddha predicted would descend to the mortal world and become a powerful monarch, a bodhisattva with the body of a woman, and a great champion of the Buddhist faith.”<sup>22</sup> For other political leaders in Chinese history however, religion had the opposite effect. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), Emperor Ling (漢靈帝 r. 168-189 CE) was faced with a Daoist uprising called the Yellow Turbans which were unhappy with the corrupt court and felt that the emperor had lost the mandate of heaven to rule.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, during the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1912 CE), a scholar named Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全), claiming to be the brother of Jesus Christ and thus the ‘Son of Heaven’, formed a Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (太平天國) to challenge the Qing.<sup>24</sup> Evidently, religion has successfully inspired support for Chinese leaders as well as opposition to them throughout China’s history, which has inevitably played into the attitudes of the Communist Party and the development of its policies for governing religion.

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<sup>21</sup> Norman H. Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon of Devis, Divinities, and Dynastic Mothers*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 25-42.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 209-210.

<sup>23</sup> See John K. Fairbank, Michael Loewe and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 1, The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 BC-AD 220*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 366-368 and Eva Wong, *Tales of the Dancing Dragon: Stories of the Tao*, (Boston: Shambhala, 2007), 51-53 and André Laliberté, “Legal Pluralism and the Universality of Conscience: A Comparative Historical Sociology of the Secular State in the Euro-American and Sinitic Worlds.” *台灣人權學刊 Taiwan Journal of Human Rights Studies* (2014), 30.

<sup>24</sup> See Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 102. and Laliberté 2014, 30.

## **The Chinese Communist Party's Foundational Ideology**

The connection between the CCP and religion stems from its Marxist ideological roots and its adaptation to the Chinese case. Although Karl Marx is often labeled as anti-religion, this is factually inaccurate. He simply viewed “the abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people [as] the demand for their *real* happiness.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, for Marx, the elimination of religion was not because religion was bad per se, but rather that it was a tool, like many other ideologies, for oppressive bourgeois classes to subdue revolutionary fervour among working classes, and for the ruling class to legitimize its rule. In other words, if the class struggle could be overcome and socialist equality achieved, Marx argued that religion would no longer be needed for workers to achieve happiness. Religions, to Marx, are not evil for teaching morality, but for their propensity to make the oppressed peoples of the world accept their oppression in the hopes of a brighter afterlife, what Marx called a “false consciousness”.<sup>26</sup> It is in this sense that Marx referred to religion as the “opiate of the people,”<sup>27</sup> and Marxism became seen as an anti-religion ideology.

The aforementioned adaptation of Marxism to the Chinese society around the time of the ‘October Revolution’ in Russia in 1917 was influenced by more than just the Soviet model. Chan (2003) indicates that class exploitation was an important element of China’s communist revolution and the rapid growth in support for the new Chinese Communist Party. However, the May Fourth Movement also represented the anger of the Chinese people towards their country’s oppression at the hands of Japan and Western powers during the so-called ‘Century of Humiliation.’<sup>28</sup> Perhaps this anti-Western sentiment evolved into the CCP’s policies of exerting greater control over ‘foreign religions’, however it certainly inspired unity among Chinese

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<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1843), 171.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Marx and Engels 2008, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Chan, *Chinese Marxism*, (London: Continuum, 2003), 29-50.



citizens at the time. While Western imperialism was despised for its subjugation of the Chinese, its emphasis on modern science nevertheless became a driving ideology of the Communist movement in China. “Influenced by the Enlightenment and modern Western philosophies, many leading intellectuals engaged in fierce attacks on religion and the traditional culture, and some leading thinkers recommended replacing religion with science, ethics, or aesthetic education.”<sup>29</sup> There was even a propaganda campaign which stipulated that “Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy” would lead China to its Communist utopia and eliminate the need for religion.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Development of CCP Atheism**

The evolution of atheism in China, a society traditionally characterized by high levels of religiosity, was a process of propagating the acceptance of the Marxist view of religion through anti-religion propaganda and promotion of communism as an alternative. In keeping with the CCP’s founding Marxist ideology, the party viewed religion as a “dangerous opium and narcotic of the people, a wrong political ideology serving the interests of the exploiting classes and the antirevolutionary elements; thus, political forces are necessary to control and eliminate religion.”<sup>31</sup> After the official founding of the PRC in 1949, many Chinese scholars were charged with writing about the negative aspects of religious devotion and the benefits of Communism as an alternative. According to Yang (2012), “in China, as in other Communist-ruled societies, the pseudo-religion of Communism was forced on the people as a substitute for religion, but many people resorted to some semireligion that would provide the supernatural element.”<sup>32</sup> Yang

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<sup>29</sup> Yang 2012, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Rana Mitter, *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 68

<sup>31</sup> Yang 2012, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Yang 2012, 43.

points to three different forms of atheism experienced by the PRC at different stages of development which are important to outline here.

The first form is ‘Enlightenment Atheism’ which “serves as the theoretical basis for a limited tolerance of religion while insisting on atheist propaganda.”<sup>33</sup> This was the atheism which characterized the CCP’s early policy toward religion after the founding of the PRC, and it was manifested in the publication of pro-atheism, anti-religion scholarship in well-circulated journals in China. After almost two decades of trying to convince the populace of the harms of religion and benefits of Communism, the efforts of the CCP to eliminate the need for and use of religion had failed, as can be seen in the continued practice of various religions in China. In 1966, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) began along with a period of ‘Militant Atheism’, during which “religious believers were cracked down as ox-monsters and snake-demons [...] all religious venues were closed down. Many religious artifacts were destroyed.”<sup>34</sup> After the severe destruction of many religious institutions and their ritual artifacts, the Cultural Revolution ended and many temples were rebuilt at the start of a phase of “Mild Atheism”. The rhetorical approach of the CCP at this phase of its atheist development was to profess religion as an inseparable part of Chinese culture, which was to be rehabilitated and studied as such. By including religion into the scope of culture, the CCP was negating its ‘ideological incorrectness’ while also turning it into the subject of broader cross-disciplinary studies.<sup>35</sup> The CCP continues to take this approach, albeit remaining wary of the ability of religions to mobilize mass support from followers, prompting the need for strong ideological and institutional control.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Kangsheng Dai, “50 Years of Religious Research in New China,” in *Annual of Religious Research, 1999-2000*, ed. Cao Zhongjian, (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2001), 43.

<sup>35</sup> Yang 2012, 55-56.

## Governance of Religion in Modern Communist China

In the post-Mao era, the PRC has become a ‘mild atheist’ state, with the CCP portraying itself as a secular government. Laliberté (2014) compared the Chinese model of secularism to that of Euro-American states and argued that these two models are nearly opposites.<sup>36</sup> He cites Alfred Stepan’s (2001) definition of secularism as “non-interference of the state in the affairs of religious institutions, and freedom from the influence of religious institutions in the affairs of the state.”<sup>37</sup> In the case of China, the CCP has embraced the latter but ignored the former.

Throughout the short history of the PRC, as in pre-modern China, religion has been manipulated by the governing regime to achieve political goals and ensure regime stability. The Mao era saw a very negative politicization of religion in the Cultural Revolution, during which religions provided a target which helped to unite the Chinese people as they overcame their old, feudal heritage.<sup>38</sup> Religion has also been positively politicized, as it was under early Mao rule before the Cultural Revolution and again since Mao’s death as an influential medium of propaganda for disseminating CCP ideologies. By allowing a limited ‘freedom of religion’, albeit under strict controls, “the regime hopes religion will be active politically to promote its objectives, to project an image of China’s soft power abroad, to raise funds for philanthropic activities within China, or to support its ‘patriotic’ (*aiguozhuyi* 爱国主义) agenda.”<sup>39</sup> In this context, it is not difficult to see why a region such as Tibet, with a strong religious leader like the Dalai Lama and a religiosity as strong as that of Tibetan Buddhists, must be controlled by the CCP in order to protect its territorial integrity, international soft power and domestic patriotism.

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<sup>36</sup> See Laliberté 2014, 25-51.

<sup>37</sup> Alfred Stepan, “The World’s Religious Systems and Democracy: Crafting the ‘Twin Tolerations’,” in *Arguing Comparative Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 213-253.

<sup>38</sup> Laliberté 2014, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Laliberté 2015, 186.

In the original constitution of the PRC, which was adopted in September of 1954 during the first session of the First National People's Congress, Article 88 professed the freedom of religious belief for all citizens.<sup>40</sup> The 1975 and 1978 Constitutions reiterated this freedom adding that citizens were equally free "not to believe in religion and to propagate atheism."<sup>41</sup> The addition of this second clause indicates a realization that, while the freedom of religious belief needed to be constitutionally guaranteed, this could be done simultaneously with the promotion of atheism. The death of Chairman Mao in 1976 ushered in the rule of Deng Xiaoping and eventually, the 'Reform and Opening' (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) era during which the PRC opened its borders to trade and investment in order to increase Chinese economic output and accelerate growth.

The Deng regime introduced the newest Constitution in 1982 which, while giving the semblance of being more protective of religious freedom, was in fact ambiguous enough to restrict this freedom even more. The point that "no state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion" ensures that no missionaries can openly convert any Chinese citizens.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, another clause states "religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any *foreign domination*," thus preventing non-indigenous religions (i.e. Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam and Tibetan Buddhism) from joining their transnational coreligionists in being guided by a leadership outside of China and the long

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<sup>40</sup> "Article 88," Constitution of the People's Republic of China, September 20, 1954, accessed January 12, 2016 <http://e-chaupak.net/database/chicon/1954/1954bilingual.htm>.

<sup>41</sup> "Article 28," Constitution of the People's Republic of China, January 17, 1975, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.e-chaupak.net/database/chicon/1975/1975e.htm>, and "Article 46," Constitution of the People's Republic of China, March 5, 1978, accessed January 12, 2016, [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/People%27\\_Republic\\_of\\_China\\_1978\\_Constitution.pdf](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/People%27_Republic_of_China_1978_Constitution.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> "Article 36," Constitution of the PRC, 1982.

reach of CCP control.<sup>43</sup> Finally, the constitutional declaration that “no one can make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state” provides justification for repressive actions taken by the regime against religions it deems threatening.<sup>44</sup>

Arguably the greatest fear held by various regimes throughout Chinese history has been that, if a religion is permitted to influence the thinking of Chinese people, unchecked by the governing power, it could mobilize support against this power. This fear is especially exemplified in the example of the Roman Catholic clergy, which is meant to be obedient to the Pope, its central authority in the Vatican. Madsen (1999) argues that the CCP, wanting complete control over Chinese society and cultural practices, could now accept that priests loyal to a foreign entity could be seen as spiritual leaders in the PRC and could gain popular support. For this reason, Catholic priests in China are ordained by the CCP and they must renounce their ties to the Vatican, or else take their congregations to underground churches where they risk imprisonment if they are caught.<sup>45</sup> The fear is also exemplified in the CCP’s unwillingness to allow any foreign influence in the education of religious clergy or the scriptures they propagate. Seminary education is strictly monitored with all foreign teachers being vetted and very few Chinese students being permitted to go abroad for their training, while all teaching materials and scriptural texts must be approved by the government before publication.<sup>46</sup>

Although the CCP has always claimed to be a secular regime which guarantees the freedom of religious belief and separates religion and politics, this has proven to be a myth of Homeric proportions. To begin with, only five religions are officially recognized in the PRC;

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Madsen, *China’s Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 34.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 22-23.

Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Christianity and Islam.<sup>47</sup> From the early 1950s, the CCP established a Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB - Later renamed the State Administration of Religious Affairs, or SARA) to control the functioning of six patriotic associations charged with overseeing the five official religions. These are the Buddhist Association of China, the Daoist Association of China, the Islamic Association of China, the Catholic Patriotic Association of China, the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (the last two both oversee Protestantism).<sup>48</sup> Under these patriotic religious associations, each religious group must register their places of worship and allow these locations to be inspected yearly.<sup>49</sup> “By registering, congregations agree to certain limitations on their independence including control over selection of clergy, supervision of financial affairs, veto power over building programs and religious materials, and restriction on activities such as education and social welfare projects.”<sup>50</sup>

While the PRC is founded on an ideology of equality, it is important to indicate here the inconsistency of the CCP’s policies towards religions. The ‘indigenous’ religions like Daoism and the majority ethnic Han Chinese form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, have accepted CCP supremacy and agreed to follow their rules and distance themselves from any foreign influence, so the government has been more willing to cooperate with them.<sup>51</sup> The promotion of these religions by the PRC government is part of a campaign to emphasize the importance of traditional culture, of which it considers these two religions to be a part. By contrast, however, the religions of Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism, with their institutional authorities located

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<sup>47</sup> Zhufeng Luo, *Religion Under Socialism in China*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), xvi.

<sup>48</sup> See Human Rights Watch 1997, 13-14.  
and Yang 2012, 69.

<sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch 1997, 17.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 18-21.

<sup>51</sup> See Laliberté 2015, 189.  
and Ownby 2008.

outside the PRC and the grasp of direct CCP influence, face stricter regulations.<sup>52</sup> Such controls are justified by the government as being necessary to prevent the “destabliz[ation of] society via evangelism” by the Christians and the “spread of violence by extremists and terrorists” among the Muslim communities.<sup>53</sup> Tibetan Buddhism, while falling under the purview of the Buddhist Association of China, has failed to secure the same positive relationship with the CCP that its Mahāyāna counterpart has enjoyed. In fact, the Tibetan Buddhists living within China’s Tibetan Autonomous Region have faced severe religious repression, and the reasons for this repression as well as the historical background to the relationship between the Han Chinese and Tibetans will be detailed in the following chapter.

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<sup>52</sup> See Human Rights Watch, 1997.  
and Laliberté 2014, 40.

<sup>53</sup> Laliberté 2015, 191

## **Chapter 3 - Tibetan Buddhism's Evolving Relationship with China**

*"I believe that Tibetans should have the right to control their own destinies, and decide for themselves whether they want to be part of China or not. But this view isn't shared by most Chinese, or even the leaders of most Western democracies. As long as the Communist Party is in power, there is little hope for Tibet."*<sup>54</sup> - Ma Jian

### **History of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism**

The first contact between China and Tibet came in 608 C.E. when Namri Songtsen, a clan leader who managed to gain control over much of Tibet's modern-day capital Lhasa, sent an emissary to China's Sui dynasty.<sup>55</sup> Tibet then reconnected with the Chinese during the Mongol expansions of the 13th century, when they came under the administrative control of the Yuan Dynasty after two separate invasions in 1240 and 1244.<sup>56</sup> When the Yuan Dynasty fell in 1368, there was a power vacuum in the Tibetan region which many sought to fill, and many rival factions brought tributary gifts to the newly-established Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in an attempt to curry favour.<sup>57</sup> In the early years of this power struggle, a boy was born in Ü-Tsang province of Tibet in 1391 who would take the vows of a novice monk at the age of 14 and receive the name Gendün Drupa.<sup>58</sup> Having quickly learned all of the knowledge that monks could teach, he was often called the 'Omniscient One' and it was quickly determined that he was the first reincarnation of Dromtonpa, the personification of Avalokiteśvara, subsequently given

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<sup>54</sup> Ma Jian, "Olympics in China," *The New York Times*, December 19, 2008, accessed January 16, 2016, [http://www.pwf.cz/archivy/texts/interviews/ma-jian-olympics-in-china\\_1618.html](http://www.pwf.cz/archivy/texts/interviews/ma-jian-olympics-in-china_1618.html).

<sup>55</sup> See Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). and Andrew Forbes and David Henley, *China's Ancient Tea Horse Road*, (Chiang Mai: Cognoscenti Books, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Turrell V. Wylie, "The First Mongol Conquest of Tibet Reinterpreted," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37 (1977), 103-133.

<sup>57</sup> Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy*, (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 140-141.

<sup>58</sup> Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons: An Advanced Political History of Tibet*, (Leiden: BRILL, 2010), 293.



the title of first Dalai Lama.<sup>59</sup> Later, the fifth Dalai Lama would recognize the fourth Panchen Lama, as well as his three previous incarnations, as being reincarnations of Amitābha Buddha. These institutions would come to wield significant political power and while “the Panchen Lamas were officially second in rank, [they] sometimes actually rivalled the Dalai Lamas themselves.”<sup>60</sup>

Although a succession of Dalai Lama reincarnations faced opposition among different groups of Tibetans, it was with the support of Mongols who had adopted Tibetan Buddhism as their religion, that the Dalai Lama institution was able to take power in Lhasa.<sup>61</sup> After the Manchu conquest of China and start of the Qing Dynasty in 1644, in an effort to form an alliance with the Mongols, the fifth Dalai Lama was invited to Beijing in 1652 and was welcomed with a ceremony usually reserved for “independent sovereigns.”<sup>62</sup> For the rest of the Qing Dynasty until its overthrow in the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, the Manchu rulers of China maintained some military presence and political control over Tibet, while allowing the Dalai Lama to exert religious and political leadership among Tibetans.<sup>63</sup> With the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and the subsequent disunity, the Dalai Lama was able to declare Tibet’s independence and the Tibetans were governed by Lhasa with no Chinese influence for nearly four decades.<sup>64</sup> It was not until the rise of the Chinese Communist Party and the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) that Tibet once again came into contact with, and under the control of, the Chinese.

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<sup>59</sup> Shakabpa 2010, 293.

<sup>60</sup> see Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, (Maiden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Norbu 2001, 141-142.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>63</sup> Norbu 2001, 142-144.

and Yingcong Dai, *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 131.

<sup>64</sup> See Shakabpa 2010, 939.

and Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *The Tibetan History Reader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 564.

## **The History of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in the Modern PRC**

After the Japanese were defeated in the Second World War and forced to withdraw troops from conquered Chinese territories in 1945, the ruling Nationalist *Guómíndǎng* (国民党 - KMT) party under its leader Chiang Kai-shek (*Jiǎng Jièshí* 蒋介石) soon re-engaged in civil war against the Chinese Communist Party (中国共产党 - CCP). Overwhelmed, Chiang Kai-shek decided to officially grant Mongolia its independence after decades of independent governance, but although Tibet had experienced the same status since 1911, “the official Chinese position [was] that Tibet was one of the territories comprised by the Chinese nation.”<sup>65</sup> With the defeat of the KMT and its retreat to the island of Taiwan, the CCP took control of all Mainland Chinese territory and formed the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The CCP’s leader, Mao Zedong (毛泽东) understood the value of Tibet and made it a top priority to bring the region under Communist Party control. Not only could Tibet serve as a buffer between Han Chinese settlements and their powerful Indian neighbour, but its land also contained an abundance of mineral wealth that Mao wanted to exploit. “Tibet had large reserves of gold, copper, lead and zinc, millions of acres of virgin timber,” already known at the time, while “oil, borax, and uranium would later be discovered as additional natural resources and robustly pursued by the communist occupation.”<sup>66</sup> Of course, controlling Tibet would also bring with it the prestige of controlling the same territory as the Qing Dynasty, the largest in Chinese history.

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<sup>65</sup> Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>66</sup> Mikel Dunham, *Buddha’s Warriors: the Story of the CIA-backed Tibetan Freedom Fighters, the Chinese Invasion, and the Ultimate Fall of Tibet*, (New York: J.P. Tarcher, 2004), 5.

When the Tibetan leadership, headed by the Dalai Lama, refused to meet with Mao to discuss the ‘peaceful liberation’ of Tibet, he sent the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to attack Chamdo, the largest city in Kham, the Tibetan province bordering China. Defeated at the hands of the PLA and unable to secure military assistance from Western powers who feared jeopardizing their relationship with the PRC,<sup>67</sup> the Tibetan government sent a delegation to Beijing where they were forced to sign the ‘Seventeen-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet’ on May 23, 1951. Although this document officially recognized the PRC as having sovereignty over Tibet, it also promised to allow Tibet to maintain its ‘feudal-theocratic’ form of governance, thus enabling the Dalai Lama to continue to rule the region autonomously.<sup>68</sup> In reality, however, “all actual governing power was transferred from the Tibetan government to the CCP’s Tibet Work Committee, composed exclusively of Chinese.”<sup>69</sup>

The ‘Seventeen-Point Agreement’ applied only to the area which had been officially under the administration of the Dalai Lama, the area that would later be called the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).<sup>70</sup> As a result of this decision, areas which bordered the TAR (only officially established in 1965) with majority Tibetan populations (namely Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan), experienced revolts by Tibetans against the CCP’s policy of collectivization of agriculture which was occurring in all Chinese provinces except Tibet.<sup>71</sup> The PLA was quick to arrest dissidents and initiate further land reforms in the summer of 1958 which

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<sup>67</sup> Goldstein 1997, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>69</sup> Smith 2008, 31-32.

and “The Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet” May 23, 1951, accessed January 16, 2016,

[http://www.historyubc.ca/sites/default/files/courses/documents/%5Brealname%5D/17\\_point\\_agreement\\_0.pdf](http://www.historyubc.ca/sites/default/files/courses/documents/%5Brealname%5D/17_point_agreement_0.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Shirin Akiner and Robert Barnett, *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1994), 63.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 64.

complicated the lives of many Tibetan agricultural and pastoral workers.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, “class struggle, which for Tibetans meant the purge of Tibetan leaders and coerced denunciations of Buddhist monks and lamas, was also initiated.”<sup>73</sup> Large-scale revolt throughout the Tibetan regions of Kham and Amdo followed the initiation of these CCP policies and the PLA violently suppressed the uprising, killing many Tibetans.<sup>74</sup> Realizing that the Communist Party would not grant Tibet the autonomous governance they had promised, the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, establishing the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE) in Dharamsala, in the Northeastern Indian province of Himachal Pradesh.<sup>75</sup>

Under the Seventeen-Point Agreement, religion in Tibet was supposedly allowed to be freely practiced and administered by its traditional leaders. In points four through seven of the agreement, the CCP promised not to alter the political powers or religious authority of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, as well as ensuring that “the religious beliefs, customs and habits of the Tibetan people [are] respected, and lama monasteries [are] protected.”<sup>76</sup> Over time, history revealed the true intentions of the Chinese leaders, who selectively disregarded clauses of the agreement, especially during the era of Mao’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During this era, the CCP encouraged the formation of so-called “Red Guards” whose duty it was to forcibly promote Communism based on Marxist ideologies which regarded religion as a tool of the ruling class which needed to be eliminated.<sup>77</sup> Thus, they undertook the destruction of many Tibetan Buddhist temples, while the CCP implemented a system of secular education and the PLA

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Tsering Shakya, “The Genesis of the 17-Point Agreement: The Genesis of the Sino-Tibetan Agreement of 1951,” Proceedings of the 6th International Conference of Tibetan Studies – Fegernes, Norway, *Institute of Comparative Research in Human Culture* (1994), 739.

<sup>76</sup> “Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet,” 1951.

<sup>77</sup> Dan Smyer Yu, “Delayed contention with the Chinese Marxist scapegoat complex: remembering Tibetan Buddhism in the PRC,” *The Tibet Journal* 32 (2007).

ensured that all rebellions were quelled.<sup>78</sup> After the Cultural Revolution and the death of Chairman Mao, there was a brief liberalization of CCP policies in the TAR which included its controls on Tibetan Buddhism, however this increased freedom was short-lived.

In 1980, the CCP under the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping, held its first Tibet Work Conference in Beijing to determine the future of this region. It was at this time that the party's leaders agreed a change needed to be made to its repressive policies in the TAR which were becoming internationalized by Tibetan advocacy abroad, led by the Dalai Lama. After Party Secretary Hu Yaobang visited Tibet to observe the situation there, he announced six liberal policy changes that would need to be implemented in the TAR, comprising of both ethno-cultural and economic dimensions.<sup>79</sup> These changes took effect almost immediately, and "individual religious practices reappeared on a massive scale through Tibet, monasteries reopened (with certain restrictions), and new child monks poured in to resurrect the old tradition."<sup>80</sup> This was the time when the CCP's Central Committee issued the famous "Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question During our Country's Socialist Period," in 1982. This document emphasized the freedom of religious belief, albeit stressing an equal freedom not to believe in religion, which was revolutionary following more than a decade of outlawing religion and destroying anything associated with religious institutions.<sup>81</sup>

As Smith (2008) notes, however, the sudden revival in religion and culture resulted in the simultaneous revitalization of Tibetan nationalism. It was not long before this renewed

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<sup>78</sup> see Yu (2007).

and Tsering Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows: The History of Modern Tibet since 1947*, (Random House eBooks, 1999), 314-347.

and Barnett & Akiner 1996, 69.

and Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "Postcoloniality and Religiosity in Modern China: The Disenchantments of Sovereignty," *Theory Culture Society* 28 (2011), 14.

<sup>79</sup> Goldstein 1997, 63-66.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>81</sup> Potter 2003, 319-320.

nationalist fervour brought about old desires for independent Tibetan governance, and from 1987 to 1989, Lhasa was mired in riots “after which the Chinese essentially abandoned the experiment of allowing any real Tibetan autonomy.”<sup>82</sup> The CCP realized that their attempts at assimilating Tibetans through re-education campaigns and destruction of their Buddhist temples and clergies had only strengthened support for Tibetan independence from the PRC. A large part of this anti-CCP sentiment stemmed from the fact that the CCP continued to slander the Dalai Lama domestically and deny him access to his political and religious powers in the TAR. It seems that the Communist Party had not accounted for “Tibetans’ commitment to Buddhism and the Dalai Lama as their spiritual leader, which together were antithetical to both the tenets and practice of communism, which required obeisance to only the Party.”<sup>83</sup> It is the importance of the Dalai Lama and to a lesser extent, the Panchen Lama, coupled with the CCP’s repression of and desire to control these institutions which has resulted in the strong opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet. The next chapter will explore the significance of these leaders in determining the nature of Sino-Tibetan relations and the resulting policies of the CCP towards Tibetan Buddhism in the TAR.

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<sup>82</sup> Smith 2008, 165.

<sup>83</sup> Lezlee Brown Halper and Stefan Halper, *Tibet: An Unfinished Story*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 175.

## **Chapter 4 - The CCP's Evolving Approach to Tibet's Spiritual Leaders**

*The Dalai Lama is "a wolf in monk's robes,"  
"a devil with a human face but the heart of a beast."<sup>84</sup>  
- Zhang Qingli, 2008  
(Party Secretary in the Tibetan Autonomous Region)*

*"The whole purpose of religion is to facilitate  
love and compassion, patience, tolerance,  
humility, and forgiveness." - Dalai Lama*

### **The Significance of the Tibetan Spiritual Leaders to the CCP**

The significance of the Tibetan Spiritual leaders, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas is clear for most Tibetans, within the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and elsewhere. They are seen by Tibetan Buddhists as reincarnations of Dromtonpa, a very important bodhisattva<sup>85</sup> and personification of *Avalokiteśvara* (the bodhisattva of compassion), and the Amitābha Buddha<sup>86</sup>, respectively. While this status alone gives them great importance among a majority of Tibetans who are fervent believers and followers of Tibetan Buddhism, it is this symbolic significance which makes these two leaders important for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). From the perspective of the CCP, control of these leadership institutions would make it possible to manipulate the Tibetan people into accepting assimilationist policies and the annexation of their territory by the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, failure to control them could bring about the proliferation of anti-regime ideology from a religious institution which wields

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<sup>84</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2010*, (Washington DC: DIANE Publishing, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> A bodhisattva is compassionate individual who has developed bodhicitta, or an enlightened mind, and strives to achieve awakening for all sentient beings of the Earth. See Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *The Bodhisattva Vow: A Practical Guide to Helping Others*, (Ingram Publisher Services, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> The Amitābha Buddha is the Buddha of light and of all-encompassing love who can act as a guide to those sentient beings striving to achieve enlightenment themselves. He is the basis of Pure Land Buddhism, sometimes called Amitabha Buddhism or Amidism. See Nils Horn, *Modern Amitabha Buddhism: A way to inner peace and happiness*, (BookRix, 2015).

tremendous power in a region that is both geographically and ideologically distant from Beijing. Consequently, the unwillingness of these Tibetan leaders to submit to CCP control has caused the central government to resort to more aggressive tactics in order to weaken their influence.

The relationship between the CCP's leadership and its Tibetan counterparts began surprisingly amicably in the first years of Communist Party rule. Liu (2010) outlines the gifts that Chairman Mao, following the formation of the PRC, had sent to both the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama in an attempt to buy their support. Careful to respect the Dalai Lama's hierarchically superior status relative to the Panchen Lama, Mao wrote intimate letters to both leaders in October, 1953, making sure to send more generous gifts to the former.<sup>87</sup> The relationship warmed even further after the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama visited several provinces from September 1954 to March 1955, including a visit to Beijing where they attended the National People's Congress.<sup>88</sup> The CCP was trying to secure the loyalty of these Tibetan spiritual leaders using tactics of seduction instead of coercion. However, despite the apparent entente between the Dalai Lama and Beijing that Tibet would be granted autonomy and that the former's political leadership could continue, the CCP nevertheless insisted that he and the Panchen Lama usher in policies that would integrate Tibet into Communist China.<sup>89</sup>

As riots began throughout Tibetan communities outside the TAR (see Chapter 3), the Dalai Lama sought to distance himself from the reform policies he was meant to support. In a final attempt to appease the Tibetan leaders and secure their support, Mao gave the leaders permission to travel to India for the 2,500-year anniversary celebrations of the Buddha's nirvana in 1956. During his trip to New Delhi, the Dalai Lama met with then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal

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<sup>87</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu, *Recast All Under Heaven: Revolution, War, Diplomacy, and Frontier China in the 20th Century*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 159.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 160.



Nehru and indicated his desire not to return to the TAR but instead to seek political asylum in India. Unfortunately for the Dalai Lama, Mao had warned Nehru of the repercussions India would face if it granted political asylum to the Dalai Lama, and so the Indian leader rejected the Tibetan leader's request.<sup>90</sup> After his return to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama received one final letter from Mao "praising him for rejecting bad advice from the Tibetans in exile during his India trip and admitting that the CCP policy had 'defects' in prematurely pushing reforms in Tibet."<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, riots had begun in Eastern Tibet in response to the reforms, prompting Mao to abandon the carrot strategy (seduction) in favour of the stick (coercion). "Quietly, in 1958 Beijing replaced its political maneuvering in Tibet with a military strategy."<sup>92</sup>

Since the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) initial 'liberation' (i.e. invasion) of Tibet in 1950, the military has established a strong presence throughout Tibet, especially in the capital, Lhasa. When the Dalai Lama was invited to attend a cultural performance at the PLA headquarters on March 10, 1959, rumours spread that the Chinese would arrest or even kidnap the Tibetan leader when he arrived at the event.<sup>93</sup> Thousands of Tibetans mobilized to the Dalai Lama's summer residence (Norbulingka) to protect their leader and protest for Tibetan independence, proving his significance to the Tibetan people and his capacity to mobilize support, even unwittingly.<sup>94</sup> The revolt continued to escalate as leaders in Beijing tried to decide how to react. Although it was agreed that the PLA was to avoid using violence, on March 17, two artillery shells fired by the PLA exploded near Norbulingka, prompting the Dalai Lama to flee Lhasa and head for India.<sup>95</sup> Subsequently, violence continued to escalate until the PLA

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<sup>90</sup> Halper and Halper 2014, 183.

<sup>91</sup> Liu 2010, 164.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Chen Jian, "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 (2006), 71.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Chen 2006, 74-76.

received permission on March 20, to start a “comprehensive counteroffensive” against the Tibetan “rebels” and by March 28, “the PLA had effectively and almost completely eliminated the armed resistance in Lhasa.”<sup>96</sup>

### **The CCP’s Search for Control over Tibet**

Although Chairman Mao had hoped to prevent the Dalai Lama from leaving Tibet where he could be controlled, he nevertheless informed his PLA officials that the Dalai Lama’s escape to India would not be detrimental to CCP control of the TAR. Deng Xiaoping, who at the time was representing the CCP Politburo Steering Committee, simply replaced the Fourteenth Dalai Lama with the Tenth Panchen Lama as the chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the TAR.<sup>97</sup> After the Indian government granted asylum to the Dalai Lama, a conflict developed between Beijing and New Delhi, further aggravated by the warm welcome issued to the Tibetan leader.<sup>98</sup> In the view of the CCP, the Indian government had taken a clear stance on the Tibetan issue and they had sided against Beijing. As old border disputes between the two countries were revived, tensions flared and a war of propaganda and occasional border skirmishes ensued.<sup>99</sup> In the safety of asylum in the Northeastern Indian city of Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama, “reportedly with the assistance of the Indian government, issued a statement on 18 April calling for Tibet to be independent of China.”<sup>100</sup> Thus began the dispute between the Dalai Lama and the CCP, which endures to this day, worsening each time a foreign government welcomes him to their country.

In order to legitimize Beijing’s appointment of the Panchen Lama as chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the TAR, the CCP had to invite journalists to Beijing where they fed

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 80-89.

<sup>100</sup> Chen 2006, 86.

them propaganda to report to the world. These journalists were told that Tibet had been part of China for seven centuries and that “the Dalai and Panchen Lamas were equal in Tibet, and all their titles and positions had come by appointment of the Chinese emperors.”<sup>101</sup> Although the Panchen Lama was initially supportive of the CCP’s ‘democratic reforms’ which were aimed at removing feudal lords from their positions of power and redistributing power and wealth to Tibetans, he soon realized that these ‘reforms’ were, in fact, a disguise for an assimilationist drive by Beijing. In a petition submitted to the National People’s Congress in April and May of 1962, he outlined many of the problems he saw in the CCP’s policies in the TAR, most prominent among them was the policy towards Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>102</sup> The Panchen Lama also drew attention to the intentional and violent destruction of Buddhist “statues, scriptures, and shrines,” as well as entire monasteries.<sup>103</sup> The Tibetan leader, whom the Chinese government in Beijing had hoped to use as a puppet to persuade the Tibetan people to accept reforms and assimilation, had turned against the CCP, his would-be puppeteer.

After the submission of this petition, the Communist Party, feeling threatened, demanded that the Panchen Lama denounce the Dalai Lama. When he refused, he himself “was dismissed as a ‘rock on the road to socialism,’ deprived of his position as head of the PCTAR, and subjected to seventeen days of *thamzing*.”<sup>104</sup> After this public humiliation ceremony, the CCP continued a campaign to smear the Panchen Lama, accusing him of being an enemy of the Tibetan people. He was arrested and forced to live under house arrest in Beijing, face more *thamzing* during the Cultural Revolution and spend many of the subsequent years in prison.<sup>105</sup> Although he continued to actively oppose CCP rule, his voice had been effectively silenced by

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<sup>101</sup> Smith 2008, 70.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 76-92.

<sup>103</sup> Smith 2008, 87.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

the central government which could boast that it had brought the Panchen Lama leadership institution under its control. The Dalai Lama's flight from the PRC prevented him from falling under the same CCP control, although his advocacy for Tibetan independence would not be easy.

### **The Dalai Lama and the Efforts to Free Tibet**

The Dalai Lama's arrival in Dharamsala, India, led to the establishment of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA – also referred to as the Tibetan Government in Exile) in the spring of 1959.<sup>106</sup> The struggle of the CTA for international recognition of their plight at the hands of the Chinese was worsened by the rapprochement of many countries, including the United States, to Beijing.<sup>107</sup> After the PRC replaced the Republic of China (Taiwan) as a member of the United Nations and a permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1971, the CTA would find it impossible to win Tibetan independence from China given its newly acquired international power and status.<sup>108</sup> Although the Dalai Lama has also tried to negotiate a bilateral agreement with the CCP to gain Tibetan autonomy, after three fact-finding delegations (in 1979, 1980 and 1984) to the TAR and a visit by the Dalai Lama's brother Gyalo Thondup to Beijing in 1978, it became clear that genuine autonomy would never be granted to Tibet under CCP rule.<sup>109</sup>

When these official channels failed to produce the desired results, the CTA began advocating to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) about “key issues, like human rights, non-violence, [etc.] Through the presentation of these topics to an international audience, exiled Tibetans, led by the 14th Dalai Lama, have been increasingly successful in generating

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<sup>106</sup> See Stephanie Romer, *The Tibetan Government-in-Exile: Politics at Large*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 63.

<sup>107</sup> Goldstein 1997, 58.

<sup>108</sup> Romer 2008, 82.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

international financial support and awareness.”<sup>110</sup> The international fame of the Dalai Lama and his efforts to challenge Beijing using non-violent means has received international recognition, including the American Congressional Gold Medal and the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>111</sup> It is through this international support, including support from the United States government, that the CTA has put pressure on the CCP to change its policies towards the TAR, making the Dalai Lama a menace to the CCP regime’s stability.<sup>112</sup> The Dalai Lama’s efforts have also inspired the foundation of various non-profit organizations supporting Tibetan independence, the most well-known of which are Free Tibet,<sup>113</sup> Students for a Free Tibet,<sup>114</sup> and International Campaign for Tibet.<sup>115</sup> It is this growing support for the Tibetan struggle against the PRC that has motivated Beijing to increase its control on Tibetan Buddhism and its leadership institutions, which it sees as the independence movement’s primary source of inspiration.

### **China’s Complete Control over Tibetan Buddhism: From Birth to Death**

In an attempt to stop Dalai Lama sympathizers within the PRC organizing, the CCP has initiated what Human Rights Watch calls an “Anti-Dalai Lama campaign”. This CCP strategy portrays the Dalai Lama as a feudal leader whose selfish defence of his privileged position prevents modernization and threatens to destroy Tibet and the Tibetan Buddhist religion.<sup>116</sup> Beyond this propaganda, the CCP issued a ban on the public display of Dalai Lama portraits in November 1994, enforced by authorities searching public places and even private homes. This

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Smith 2008, 265-269.

<sup>112</sup> See Xiaobing Li and Patrick Fuliang Shan, *Ethnic China: Identity, Assimilation, and Resistance*, (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 241-242.

<sup>113</sup> See “Free Tibet,” accessed January 25, 2016, [www.freetibet.org](http://www.freetibet.org).

<sup>114</sup> See “Students for a Free Tibet,” accessed March 16, 2016, <https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/>.

<sup>115</sup> See “International Campaign for Tibet,” accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.savetibet.org/>.

<sup>116</sup> Human Rights Watch 1997, 43-44.

See FBIS, June 7, 1996, under the title “Tibet Five-Year Plan, Long Range Target.”

ultimately resulted in a major protest at the Ganden monastery where hundreds of monks gathered in non-violent defence of their right to worship their leader, the Dalai Lama. The protest quickly became violent and the PLA was sent to suppress it, resulting in injuries to several monks and even one death, along with the arrest and sentencing of fourteen.<sup>117</sup> The ability of the Dalai Lama to be the source, in absentia, of anti-CCP sentiments and the motivation for anti-government protests further justifies Beijing's perception of a need to control this leadership institution in order to preserve its regime's stability.

In addition to the Anti-Dalai Lama Campaign, the CCP also began a 'Patriotic Education Campaign' in the monasteries of the TAR to ensure that all monastic leaders were "certified as patriotic,"<sup>118</sup> or in other words, could be manipulated by Beijing. Although it began only in monasteries, it eventually spread to secular society, with its purpose being to "transform Tibetan national identity into Chinese identity, to eradicate Tibetans' loyalty to the Dalai Lama, and to cultivate Tibetan loyalty to China instead."<sup>119</sup> This campaign consisted of 'Reeducation teams' living in monasteries for short periods and ensuring that all monks denounce the Dalai Lama and praise the Communist Party.<sup>120</sup> Those monks who refused to do so were expelled by the 'Reeducation team' and sometimes even arrested. For example, a young monk named Ngawang Tharchin, "after interrupting a lecture by a well-known Tibetan historian to deny that Tibet had been an integral part of China for centuries," was given a sentence of 'reeducation through labor' which he served in prison.<sup>121</sup> All monks were forced to study Communist doctrine and patriotic

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<sup>117</sup> Human Rights Watch 1997, 44.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>119</sup> Smith 2008, 170.

<sup>120</sup> Human Rights Watch 1997, 46-47.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 47.

literature, and those who failed an exam for which the answers were distributed in advance because they refused to answer some questions, were expelled from the monastic order.<sup>122</sup>

The CCP imprisoned many monks who refused to submit to its control, but what has most angered the Tibetan populace are the cases in which arrested Tibetans died in prison without their remains being returned to their families. The reason this is offensive to Tibetans is because it means the family is unable to conduct the traditional Tibetan ‘sky burial’.<sup>123</sup> The case of Tenchok Tenphel in 1996<sup>124</sup> and more recently, the case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche in 2015,<sup>125</sup> are two prominent examples of this occurring, as a result of what many Tibetans believe to be unjust imprisonment. While this kind of repressive control by the CCP is seen as unjust by Tibetans and the international community alike, even more enraging has been the Beijing government’s attempt to control the reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhist leaders.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Panchen Lama is responsible for naming the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and vice versa. When the tenth Panchen Lama passed away in 1989, it took several years before the Dalai Lama named his reincarnation; a six-year-old boy named Gendun Choekyi Nyima. The announcement was made on May 15, 1995 and within days, both the boy and the abbot who had been charged with finding the Panchen Lama’s reincarnation, Chadrel Rinpoche, disappeared. It was later discovered that both were being held in custody by the central government, the boy for his own safety and the abbot for having committed crimes of separatism and colluding with foreign enemies.<sup>126</sup> The CCP subsequently installed its own chosen child as the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, claiming this continued a tradition dating

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>123</sup> See Herbert J. Batt, *Tales of Tibet: Sky Burials, Prayer Wheels, and Wind Horses*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 3.

<sup>124</sup> Human Rights Watch 1997, 48.

<sup>125</sup> See “Tibetan monk Tenzin Delek Rinpoche dies in China prison,” *BBC News*, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-33505834>.

<sup>126</sup> Human Rights Watch 1997, 49-50.

back to 1793 through which the Qing dynasty had been able to choose the spiritual leaders' reincarnations.<sup>127</sup> "They were willing to impose an unpopular choice for Panchen Lama on the Tibetan people in order to reject the Dalai Lama's influence in Tibetan affairs."<sup>128</sup> In doing so, the CCP gave itself full control over the only Tibetan spiritual leader still residing within the PRC, as well as future control over the nomination of the reincarnation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.

With the current Dalai Lama turning 80 years old in 2015, many have begun to ask how the naming of his reincarnation will be conducted. In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), he stated that he may choose not to reincarnate, instead allowing the "centuries-old tradition [to] cease at the time of a quite popular Dalai Lama."<sup>129</sup> Seeing the Panchen Lama he nominated get detained and replaced by order of the CCP, the Dalai Lama expects that Beijing will do the same to his reincarnation. By controlling both the Panchen and Dalai Lamas, the CCP will effectively control all faithful Tibetan Buddhists who accept the figures it selects as legitimate. It is for this reason that Beijing continues to insist that the Tibetan leader will reincarnate and that "the power to determine the future location and durability of the Dalai Lama's spirit properly resides with the Communist Party in Beijing."<sup>130</sup> Despite the apparent futility of the cause, the Dalai Lama clings to the hope that a way can be found to prevent the CCP from taking full control of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.

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<sup>127</sup> In 1973, the Qing government established a system for naming the reincarnation of the spiritual leaders (Dalai and Panchen Lamas) by choosing lots from a golden urn. This enabled them to manipulate the selection process and ensure that their choice of reincarnation would be named.  
See Smith 2008, 167-168.

<sup>128</sup> Smith 2008, 168.

<sup>129</sup> "Dalai Lama concedes he may be the last," *BBC News*, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30510018>.

<sup>130</sup> Statement made by Padma Choling, the chairman of the Standing Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Regional People's Congress, as cited in: Evan Osnos, "Who Will Control Tibetan Reincarnation?" *The New Yorker*, March 13, 2015, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/who-will-control-tibetan-reincarnation>.



## **Opposition to Chinese Control of Tibet and its Religion**

The efforts of the CCP to control Tibet and the Tibetan Buddhist religious institution have not, however, been without opposition. The Dalai Lama has been central in an attempt to raise awareness of the Chinese repression in Tibet, meeting with the likes U.S. President Barack Obama, Burmese pro-democracy politician Aung San Suu Kyi, and former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, to name just a few.<sup>131</sup> He also made a lasting impression among many celebrities who have taken up the fight for Tibetan independence as their own including Richard Gere with the International Campaign for Tibet,<sup>132</sup> and the Beastie Boys who started the Milrepa Fund, which brought together many famous bands including the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Smashing Pumpkins and Radiohead to perform in the Tibetan Freedom Concert.<sup>133</sup> Despite the banning of numerous pro-Tibet artists, including Bob Dylan,<sup>134</sup> from performing in Mainland China, the CCP seems to have failed in its efforts to prevent high-profile foreign opposition to its control of Tibet, as new proponents for this cause continue to arise around the world.

Arguably the most violent and publicized case of Tibetan opposition to the CCP came during the run-up to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, as tensions escalated in the TAR and in Tibetan-populated parts of Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai provinces. The CCP prevented students in the TAR from observing the Tibetan Buddhist festival of Vesākha, celebrating the

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<sup>131</sup> See the full list of dignitaries met by the Dalai Lama: <http://www.dalailama.com/biography/dignitaries-met>.

<sup>132</sup> See “International Campaign for Tibet,” accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.savetibet.org/> and read Richard Gere’s statements in

David Lague, Paul Mooney and Benjamin Kang Lim, “China co-ops a Buddhist sect in global effort to smear Dalai Lama,” *Reuters*, December 21, 2015, Accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-dalailama/>.

<sup>133</sup> See <http://www.beastiemania.com/qa/milarepa.php> for information about the Milarepa fund and <http://www.setlist.fm/festivals/tibetan-freedom-concert-13d6bd91.html> for information about the bands which performed at the four Tibetan Freedom Concerts.

<sup>134</sup> Peter Walker, “China blocks Bob Dylan gig,” *The Guardian*, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/apr/04/china-blocks-bob-dylan-gigs>.

Buddha's birthday in May, 2007.<sup>135</sup> The Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP) also destroyed two religious statues and refused to allow a ceremony to honour Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, seen by the CCP as a terrorist.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, during the Dalai Lama's US Congressional Gold Medal award ceremony, increased security forces in Lhasa warned Tibetans not to engage in any religious activities, prompting a small clash to break out.<sup>137</sup> This escalation of repression resulted in several simultaneously staged demonstrations on March 10th, 2008, the 49th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising. In the days that followed, more Tibetans came out to protest and riots broke out throughout Tibet on March 14th, forcing the CCP to order a military lockdown of Lhasa and the arrest of all demonstrators in an event that is now called the 2008 Tibetan Unrest, or the 3-14 Riots.<sup>138</sup>

This act of violent repression by the CCP was broadcast in the international media and resulted in "calls for a boycott of the Olympic Games, or at least the opening ceremonies by international leaders, and pressure on China to dialogue with the Dalai Lama."<sup>139</sup> Protests interfering with the global torch relay were commonplace and the CCP responded by accusing the Dalai Lama of using the Olympics as a venue for separatist activism.<sup>140</sup> Although the protests did not achieve a widespread boycott of the Olympics, it did make a clear statement that Tibetans reject control by the CCP of them and their religion. No statement, however, was clearer than the

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<sup>135</sup> "China intensifies prohibition of religious activities during the holy month of Saka Dawa," Press Release, *Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy* (TCHRD), May 19, 2007, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.tchrd.org/press/2007/ps20070519.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration, "2008 Uprising in Tibet: Chronology and Analysis," *Narthang Press* (2010), 3.

<sup>137</sup> See "Forcing silence in Tibet as Dalai Lama receives Congressional Gold Medal," Press Release, *TCHRD*, October 23, 2007.

and "China attempts to portray Tibetans as anti-Dalai Lama," Press Release, *Free Tibet Campaign* (FTC), January 10, 2008, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.freetibet.org/newsmedia/china-attempts-portray-tibetans-anti-dalai-lama>.

<sup>138</sup> See "Tibetan riots spread outside region," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2008, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/world/asia/16iht-tibet.1.11134870.html>.

<sup>139</sup> Smith 2010, 139.

<sup>140</sup> Smith 2010, 139-140.

self-immolation movement which began in 2011.<sup>141</sup> From its inception until 2014, over 140 Tibetans have self-immolated in protest against the CCP's control over the TAR.<sup>142</sup> The significance of this action is the dramatic statement it makes which cannot be undone or censored by the CCP, aimed at drawing attention to a cause that is otherwise being ignored.<sup>143</sup> According to Whalen-Bridge (2015), "such irreversible speech is extremely expensive in terms of the individual's sacrifice, but this high price secures an outcome that Tibetans within PRC borders cannot achieve in other ways: dramatic proof that Tibetans insist on the priority of their identity as Tibetans."<sup>144</sup> At the heart of this Tibetan identity are the Tibetan Buddhist religion and its leadership, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, which have been uprooted and coercively controlled by the CCP in an attempt to consolidate its grip over the TAR.

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<sup>141</sup> John Whalen-Bridge, *Tibet on Fire: Buddhism, Protest, and the Rhetoric of Self-Immolation*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 37.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-39.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

## **Chapter 5 - Conclusion: The Future of the Sino-Tibetan Chasm**

*“We can never obtain peace in the outer world,  
until we make peace with ourselves.”  
- Dalai Lama*

### **China’s Tibetan Ultimatum**

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been clear that religious belief is a freedom guaranteed to all Chinese citizens by the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).<sup>145</sup> Insofar as a religion does not harm the peace and stability of Chinese society, any Chinese citizen has a right to his or her beliefs. Given that the CCP has claimed Tibet as part of Chinese territory, Tibetans should thereby have the right to believe in and practice Tibetan Buddhism as they have for centuries. Conflict with the CCP has arisen as a result of the refusal by the Tibetan Buddhist leadership to succumb to interference or intervention from Beijing in what are often seen as purely religious affairs. Both the Dalai Lama and late Panchen Lama were supporters of Tibetan autonomy, which was antithetical to the CCP’s objective of maintaining control over this valuable territory. In order to ensure that these leaders remain unable to mobilize Tibetan support against the regime, the CCP has implemented policies which have sought to control the leadership institutions as well as the educational system and religious practice in the so-called Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). This politicization of religion is in direct contradiction to the concept of a ‘secular state’ (see Chapter 2), which China claims to be.

Numerous armed clashes have pitted Tibetan forces against the overwhelmingly superior Chinese forces, like the biblical story of David and Goliath. While David needed a sling-shot to defeat the giant Goliath, Tibet has had the Fourteenth Dalai Lama fighting peacefully for its cause from abroad. Despite the CCP’s best efforts to keep its oppressive policies in Tibet hidden

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<sup>145</sup> See “Article 36,” Constitution of the PRC.

from the international community, the popularity of the Dalai Lama and his ability to inspire a mass following around the world (with 12.6 million followers on Twitter)<sup>146</sup> to support the Tibetan cause, has made it impossible for Beijing to hide the truth. Nevertheless, continued control over the TAR is important to the CCP which seeks to use this territory to advance its economic and security-related goals. Therefore, as the PRC continues to grow stronger and gain more influence internationally, it will be up to the leaders of other major world powers to challenge the CCP's human rights abuses in the TAR and demand justice for the Tibetan people.

### **What the Future Holds for Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism**

While Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平), whose presidency only began in 2012, has been trying to portray himself as a progressive leader who cares about saving the environment and defeating terrorism, he has nevertheless intensified the CCP's campaign against religion.<sup>147</sup> It is thus difficult to imagine him allowing increased autonomy to Tibetans, at least as long as the current Dalai Lama is still alive and actively opposing CCP rule over their territory, culture and religion. However, the Dalai Lama is aging rapidly and the issue of his reincarnation will undoubtedly take center stage after his eventual passing. President Xi and the CCP will inevitably try to install their own Dalai Lama and present him as the legitimate reincarnation as they did with the Panchen Lama; however it is difficult to predict how Tibetans in China and in Diasporas worldwide will react to this Chinese appointment. If Tibetans accept this CCP-appointed Dalai Lama incarnation as their legitimate spiritual leader, Beijing could feasibly use this puppet to force Tibetan acceptance of new policies. Such policies could include the

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<sup>146</sup> See "Dalai Lama Twitter Account," accessed March 16, 2016, <https://twitter.com/DalaiLama>.

<sup>147</sup> See Human Rights Watch, "China: Reverse Downward Rights Spiral: Aggressive Crackdown on Expression, Religion, and Association," January 27, 2016.

elimination of religious practice from the public realm and the banning of youths from entering monasteries as they have done for Uyghur children in mosques throughout the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).<sup>148</sup> If this happens, the Tibetan Buddhist religion could fade to the background, recognized only as an element of traditional culture and no longer an integral part of the Tibetan identity. If the Dalai Lama decides not to reincarnate as he has indicated as a possibility, the Tibetan people will likely seek another symbolic leader for their pursuit of independence who may not carry any religious significance. If the strong Buddhist element of the Tibetan identity is removed, regardless of Tibet's opposition to control by the CCP, the latter will have succeeded in their goal of depoliticizing religion in the TAR.

A more likely scenario, however, would be that Tibetans would refuse to recognize any CCP-appointed Dalai Lama puppet, instead seeking out a legitimate reincarnation of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. International support for Tibetan independence will intensify under these circumstances and will resurface as we approach the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022. The self-immolation movement will continue to draw international media attention to the plight of Tibetan Buddhists in the PRC as President Xi's repressive policies against religion worsen. As China tries to increase its role in International Organizations like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization and many others, the leaders of other countries will face pressure from their citizens to confront President Xi about his government's abuses of human rights. Under these circumstances, it would be surprising if the PRC was not forced to usher in humanitarian reforms over the coming decades, if for no other reason than to portray itself as a responsible power whose citizens are treated equally regardless of ethnicity or religious belief. It is hard to imagine a country seeking to become a pre-eminent

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<sup>148</sup> "China Bans Officials, State Employees, Children from Mosques," *Radio Free Asia*, February 6, 2006, accessed March 16, 2016, [http://www.rfa.org/english/uyghur/uyghur\\_religion-20060206.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/uyghur/uyghur_religion-20060206.html).

world power, in which minority ethnic and religious groups continue to lack the freedoms and opportunities of the ruling majority. The Chinese Communist Party will undoubtedly face some major choices in years to come, and the choices they make could determine the power structure, human rights standards and future stability of the entire world.

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