



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

New phase of expulsions at important Buddhist institute leads to rounding up of monks and nuns for “re-education”

<https://savetibet.org/new-phase-of-expulsions-at-important-buddhist-institute-leads-to-rounding-up-of-monks-and-nuns-for-re-education/>

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- A new phase of thousands of expulsions of nuns and monks has begun at the well-known religious institute of Yachen Gar in eastern Tibet, with reports that those evicted are now being subjected to “political re-education” in detention in extra-legal facilities where there is a high risk of torture.
- Tibetan nuns who broke down and wept due to the stress of this environment were brutally beaten, according to one report, and told that they had to stay in detention for a year and a half, while others would be released in six months. This alarming development is similar to the treatment of Uyghurs in internment camps in Xinjiang, where witnesses have testified to harsh punishment if they cry.
- The nuns’ treatment is consistent with much harsher policies in Tibet in which a dystopian control state using cutting-edge surveillance technology is combined with the deployment of tens of thousands of Party cadres in monasteries, schools and homes, with the aim of rewiring Tibetan thoughts and beliefs, giving rise to fears of nothing less than the obliteration of cultural and religious identity.
- The demolitions and expulsions at Yachen Gar, following the same harsh approach at Larung Gar in Sichuan, involve increasingly aggressive measures in order to curb and manage the growing influence and number of monks and nuns – both Chinese and Tibetan - at these important monastic centers of study and Buddhist ethics in eastern Tibet, the largest such institutes in the world.

While there has been a slow bleed of expulsions at Yachen Gar over the past few years, this year the authorities have intensified pressure on the important Buddhist center in Palyul (Chinese: Baiyu) county, Kardze (Ganzi) in Sichuan according to Tibetan sources.

The Chinese authorities have ordered that the number of religious practitioners at Yachen Gar should not now exceed 4,700, according to a Tibetan source speaking to Radio Free Asia – compared to an estimated 10,000 monks and nuns at any one time who have been studying religious texts and meditation practice there. As many as 3500 may have been expelled since May in a highly systematic official operation focusing on those who arrived at Yachen Gar from outside Sichuan Province.¹

When this happened at Larung Gar in Serthar (Seda), Kardze (the Tibetan area of Kham), powerful footage emerged of nuns sobbing as their friends left, and a nun collapsing, inconsolable, by the

¹ See Radio Free Asia report, ‘Thousands of Monks, Nuns Evicted From Sichuan’s Yachen Gar’, June 11, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/EVICTED-06112019163506.html>

roadside.² According to various sources, at Yachen Gar in recent weeks officials did not permit anyone to accompany those being evicted as they are brought to buses to be taken away, in a move likely to indicate that the authorities wanted to avoid such emotional scenes being documented.³

Now reports have emerged of those expelled from Yachen Gar being forcibly detained in centers facing intensive political “re-education”. This is consistent with evidence that emerged in 2016 and afterwards that monks and nuns were being held for “re-education” after the expulsions of thousands of religious practitioners from the other major Buddhist institute, Larung Gar in Sichuan. Video footage was obtained from Tibet showing what appeared to be a group of Tibetan nuns, apparently from Larung Gar, in military-style uniform singing a “red song” praising the Communist Party.

The same Tibetan source said: “Those monks and nuns who were forcefully returned to their birthplaces have now been rounded up by local Chinese police and made to attend political re-education classes [at detention centers] in their hometowns.” The source referred specifically to monks’ and nuns’ home towns in the TAR, in areas known for particularly hardline policies, saying that due to “overflowing numbers” at a detention center in Jomda (Jiangda), “many have been sent to Chamdo (Changdu) city for political re-education.”⁴ For around a decade, strategically-important Chamdo has been described by the official media as the “frontline” of political “patriotic education” campaigns, including an emphasis on securitization including the use of “vigilante” squads, military drills, and the imposition of more police checkpoints.⁵

According to a Tibetan source, after political re-education during the day, nuns in one of the centers have been compelled to watch Chinese propaganda films showing Chinese soldiers winning victories in battle during the war between China and Japan. Due to the combined stress, some of the nuns had broken down and wept. Believing the nuns’ tears to be evidence of disloyalty to China, guards then physically attacked the women, “beating them black and blue,” the source told Radio Free Asia’s Tibetan service. “Afterward, the nuns could hardly stand up because the torture was so severe.”

Those nuns who had wept were then told they will now be held in detention for a year and a half, while others would be released after six months, and were refused permission to receive gifts of food or clothing from visiting family members, the source said.⁶

This chilling testimony bears comparison with accounts from the internment camps in Uyghur areas of the PRC, where women have said they face punishment for crying. In one account, a Kazakh woman who was held at the Dongmehle Re-education Camp in Ili Kazakh (Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture’s Ghulja (Yining) city from July 2017 to October 2018, told RFA in an interview that detainees dealing with the stress of 14-hour days of political study are given a “crying session” every two weeks.

Gulzire Awulqanqizi said: “They say, ‘Now you can cry,’ but if we cry at other times when we feel the need, they criticize and threaten us, saying they will move us to a different camp,” said Awulqanqizi, who now lives in exile in Almaty, in neighboring Kazakhstan. “When we feel sad and cry, they say,

² International Campaign for Tibet report, October 4, 2016, ‘Emotional video of nuns leaving Larung Gar as expulsions continue in ‘religious winter’, <https://savetibet.org/emotional-video-of-nuns-leaving-larung-gar-as-expulsions-continue-in-religious-winter/>

³ Radio Free Asia Tibetan service published some images of the expulsions nevertheless at: <https://www.rfa.org/english/multimedia/YachenGar-eviction-slideshow-06212019140848.html>

⁴ Radio Free Asia, ‘Thousands of Monks, Nuns, “Politically Re-Educated” after Eviction From Sichuan’s Yachen Gar’, July 1, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/re-education-07012019162843.html>

⁵ International Campaign for Tibet report, December 2, 2009, <https://savetibet.org/determination-to-resist-repression-continues-in-combat-ready-chamdo-frontline-of-patriotic-education/>

⁶ Radio Free Asia, July 11, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/beaten-07112019164921.html>

‘You cannot cry now—you can only cry when it is your allotted crying hour.’ At the crying hour, they shout at us, ‘Now you cry!’”⁷ Another former inmate of the Uyghur prison camps told a journalist: “We couldn’t even cry because if you cry, they say you have evil thoughts in your mind.”⁸

The account of a Tibetan monk published last year gave new information on the existence of such extra-legal facilities for monks and nuns expelled from religious institutions, detailing a center where he was held in Sog (Suo) county in Nagchu (Naqu) in the TAR, which has been subject to a particularly heavy crackdown particularly since protests swept across the plateau in 2008.⁹ This first-hand account referred to women in these centers being sexually abused with the implication of rape. The monk also described routine collective punishment of military exercises, food and sleep deprivation, prolonged wall standing and beatings.

The Tibetan monk, whose identity is known to the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy that published the account, spent about four months in a re-education center and refers to these centers as “transformation through education” (Chinese: jiaoyu zhuanhua; Tibetan: lobso yosang teyney khang) training centers.¹⁰ All inmates at the re-education center where he was imprisoned at the time were monks and nuns except for “two or three laypersons.” The monk, who had been pursuing his religious education in the Tibetan area of Amdo (present-day Qinghai) was among many other monks and nuns forced to return home, being ordered to return to Sog County or face severe consequences.

There are now fears that monks and nuns expelled from Yachen Gar and earlier, Larung Gar, are facing similar experiences in extra-legal facilities. The mass expulsions followed by the punitive and systematic nature of the treatment of nuns and monks from both institutes demonstrates Beijing’s determination to combat and weaken the influence of both institutes, Larung and Yachen Gar, and to prevent such large gatherings of religious practitioners.

Both religious encampments (Tibetan: chogar) developed and achieved widespread popularity as non-political hubs dedicated to monastic education, academic learning and Buddhist ethics from the mid-1980s when they were founded.¹¹ They have now been targeted under three consecutive Chinese Communist Party administrations from Jiang Zemin in 2001 – when hundreds of homes were razed and nuns and monks expelled – to Hu Jintao and now, Xi Jinping, who is presiding over a five-year plan to “Sinicize” Tibetan Buddhism, a hardline policy announced in January that seeks to enforce compliance with Party policy, impacting distinctive and authentic expressions of religious practice in Tibet. The new and far-reaching powers being implemented from the highest levels in Beijing represent a deepening threat to the continued survival of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet.

⁷ Radio Free Asia report, May 20, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/crying-05202019171525.html>

⁸ The Globe and Mail, March 31, 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-i-felt-like-a-slave-inside-chinas-complex-system-of-incarceration/>

⁹ Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy report, May 28, 2018, ‘Tibetan Monk’s account reveals torture and sexual abuse rampant in China’s political re-education centers’, <http://tchrd.org/tibetan-monks-account-reveals-torture-and-sexual-abuse-rampant-in-chinas-political-re-education-centres/>

¹⁰ The International Campaign for Tibet is investigating the existence of such centers and will report on these shortly.

¹¹ International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘Shadow of Dust Across the Sun: How Tourism is used to Counter Tibetan Resilience’, <https://www.savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/00620-ICT-Report-March-13-DEF-US-letter-LR.pdf>