



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China's top leaders visit Tibet, seeking to assimilate Tibet's religion and children

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Chinese President Xi Jinping and Chair of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Wang Huning, China's two highest decision makers on Tibet, visited the Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham. Xi and Wang called for the full implementation of the Party's policy to Sinify Tibetan Buddhism – essentially, converting it into a tool of the Chinese state.

Xi also visited one of the colonial boarding schools China has established in Tibet. This visit is significant, as it comes amid ongoing international criticism of a project aimed at separating Tibetan children from the language and culture.

Transforming Tibetan Buddhism

During their visits to Xining in Qinghai, [Kardze \(Ganzi\) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and](#) Ngaba (Aba) Tibetan & Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, Xi and Wang asked Tibetans to regard themselves as Chinese and demanded loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from Tibetan Buddhists, instructing them to integrate their religious practices with the CCP's value system.

While these are standard CCP positions concerning Tibetan Buddhism, the timing of these visits appears connected to anxiety among Chinese leaders concerning the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. A "news tea party" was organized by the All-China Journalists Association on Tibet on June 27, 2024, purportedly on "65th Anniversary of the Democratic Reform in Tibet," and some staff from the Beijing-based China Tibetology Research Center (CTRC) were there to respond to questions.

Chinese state media reported [that one reporter asked](#), "The 14th Dalai Lama, who will be 89 soon, has said that he will announce his reincarnation plan when he is about 90 years old. What attitude and policy will the Chinese government take in response?"

This is a reference to the [Dalai Lama's 2011 statement on his reincarnation](#) in which he outlined his timeline, saying:

"When I am about ninety I will consult the high Lamas of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Tibetan public, and other concerned people who follow Tibetan Buddhism, and re-evaluate whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue or not. On that basis we will take a decision. If it is decided that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama should continue and there is a need for the Fifteenth Dalai Lama to be recognized, responsibility for doing so will primarily rest on the concerned officers of the Dalai Lama's Gaden Phodrang Trust. They should consult the various heads of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions and the reliable oath-bound Dharma Protectors who are linked inseparably to the lineage of the Dalai Lamas. They should seek advice and direction from these concerned beings and carry out the procedures of search and recognition in accordance with past tradition. I shall leave clear written instructions about this. Bear in mind that, apart from the reincarnation recognized through

such legitimate methods, no recognition or acceptance should be given to a candidate chosen for political ends by anyone, including those in the People's Republic of China."

The response to the reporter's question was given by Lhajam Gyal (Laxianjia), a deputy director of the Institute of Religion of CTCRC, [who mentioned the Chinese government's "Regulations on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism"](#) of 2007. [He further said](#), "Although the Dalai Lama is currently outside China, his reincarnation is still part of the [Tibetan Buddhist] Gelug tradition and under the jurisdiction of the Chinese government, as most temples are located within China."

Since his 2011 statement, the Dalai Lama has been holding a position of strategic ambiguity when asked about his reincarnation. Chinese authorities have responded by making further efforts to control Tibetan Buddhists in Tibet, repeating standardized narratives on reincarnation, and strengthening their administrative measures.

During their visits, Xi and Wang had discussions with provincial leaders. It seems likely that measures to control Tibetan Buddhists were among the topics discussed.

Chinese authorities are continuing their efforts to indoctrinate the Tibetan Buddhist community, particularly reincarnate lamas. In May 2024, they took a group of young Tibetan Buddhists to a study tour of different Chinese cities.

In July, Chinese state media in tandem with Xi and Wang's visit to the Tibetan areas published a series of essays by some of the lamas on the indoctrination tours labeled as ["national conditions study tours"](#) to Beijing and other Chinese cities in May. While purporting to be "personal reflections," these essays, laden with standard Chinese political jargon, appear to have been written by Chinese officials but published under the names and photographs of young reincarnate lamas. For instance, [18-year-old reincarnate lama Dorjee Lodroe from Lhorong](#) (Luolong) county in Chamdo (Changdu) City concludes his ["personal reflection"](#) by writing: "In my future studies and practice, I will cherish the hard-won learning opportunities, implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's earnest teachings, and move forward firmly on the path of becoming an outstanding monk in the new era. I will always listen to the Party, be grateful to the Party, and follow the Party, and strive to become a qualified monk in the new era!"

Xi attempts to change the narrative on Tibetan boarding schools

During his visit to Xining in Qinghai, Xi visited a boarding school funded and built with assistance from Shanghai for students from the pastoral areas in Golog (Guolo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. State media showed him visiting the school classroom, kitchen, bedroom and interacting with students. The students talk about the wonderful opportunity to be studying in the school.

Obviously, this focus on a boarding school for Tibetans is [connected to the international concern](#) at Chinese policy of mass forced assimilation of children of Tibetan nomads and herders in the Chinese boarding school system and separated from their parents and their culture. The subtext of the Xi visit is that everything is fine with boarding schools. However, what can be noticed is the absence of any mention of the students being able to learn about Tibetan history or the Tibetan language; one student is in fact shown as saying his Chinese is improving.

Similarly, Wang visited a middle school in Ngaba. In 2023, [according to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights & Democracy](#), Chinese authorities quietly began enforcing an assimilationist education system in Ngaba and the Model 2 education system, which uses Chinese as the primary language of instruction, has been introduced in primary and middle schools across Ngaba.

Since assuming the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012, President Xi Jinping has made three visits to Qinghai, in 2016, 2021 and most recently in June 2024. Interestingly, while state

media did not report any presence (a standard procedure) of officials from the Central United Front Work Department (UFWD) during Xi's visit to Xining, it did mention that UFWD Minister Shi Taifeng accompanied Wang to the Tibetan areas in Sichuan.



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