



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Lawmakers and advocates call for strengthened support for Tibet during Congressional hearing

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The Congressional-Executive Commission on China's latest hearing featured testimony from Chinese Christians, a Hui Muslim, and a Tibetan Buddhist – including ICT's Bhuchung K. Tsering. It also included resounding calls for new initiatives to take a tougher stance on China's ongoing occupation of Tibet.

The [hearing](#), entitled "China's War on Religion: The Threat to Religious Freedom and Why It Matters to the United States," took place on November 20, 2025. The other witnesses included Sam Brownback, former Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Ismail Juma, a Hui Muslim human rights advocate, Bob Fu, founder and president of ChinaAid, and Grace Jin Drexel, daughter of Pastor Ezra Jin.

The hearing was chaired by CECC chairman Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and attended by co-chair Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA), Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Rep. Dale Strong (R-AL), and Rep. Jen Kiggans (R-VA).

Need to establish consequences for China

Tibet came up repeatedly during the hearing, with panelists and legislators alike in agreement on the need to impose consequences for China's refusal to resume dialogue with representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration.

"There is a cultural genocide in Tibet going on today, and we need to call it out," Brownback said in his opening comments.

"We should categorically reject the Chinese government's claim to the right to appoint the next Dalai Lama," he continued, saying that Vice President Vance or Secretary of State Marco Rubio should travel to Dharamsala to meet with the Dalai Lama.

"I believe we should announce our support for the Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach for Tibet," Brownback announced, "and if China will not agree to this within a set period of time, say 60 days, we should announce our recognition of an independent Tibet."

Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) expressed agreement. "I share, by the way, Ambassador Brownback, a kind of impatience on the Tibetan issue," he stated.

"We need to be thinking in terms of consequences, of responses that are more than just words of condemnation but that have an impact. I actually like the idea of putting deadlines on some of this stuff, and if China doesn't comply, then we formally recognize Tibet as an independent country," McGovern continued.

Asked about this proposal by McGovern, ICT's Bhuchung Tsering highlighted the need for international support.

"The Dalai Lama and the elected leadership of the Tibetan people have been earnestly working for a solution," Tsering said, "and the path of peaceful struggle they have led needs international support to be fulfilled. If there is enough international pressure on China, whether through such acts that you describe or any other way of strengthening American policy, that can only help if the Chinese government responds by sitting down and resolving the issue of Tibet."

“I appreciate that,” McGovern replied. “We need to step it up here in Congress, and we need to encourage the administration to use the tools that we have given them to pressure China even more.”

Testimony of ICT’s Bhuchung K. Tsering

Testimony of Bhuchung K. Tsering, Head of Research & Monitoring Unit of the International Campaign for Tibet at the Congressional-Executive Commission on China Hearing on “China’s War on Religion: The Threat to Religious Freedom and Why it Matters to the United States”

November 20, 2025

I would like to thank the Congressional-Executive Commission on China for giving me the opportunity to testify on China’s policies and tactics for coercively controlling Tibetan Buddhism and its relevance to the United States.

Tibetan Buddhism has a sizable following throughout the world, including here in the United States, as well as in the Indian subcontinent. Tibetan Buddhism is linked to the security of the Indian subcontinent through its historical ties and its cultural and ethnic connections across the Himalayan region. The cultural influence of Tibetan Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent has also been a factor in regional stability. The Indian subcontinent is also a major player in the Indo-Pacific region and matters to the United States due to its massive economic importance, strategic security interests, and its role in global stability and the rules-based order.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is revered by communities in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as in the United States where opinion polls have clearly shown that a majority of Americans embrace him as both a religious leader and globally respected statesman. Americans have shown that they care deeply about what happens in Tibet and successive Congresses and Administrations have reflected that through legislative and policy initiatives.

The Chinese government’s actions in Tibet have created a complex security dynamic, with India attempting to stabilize a sensitive frontier with Chinese-controlled Tibet. For its part, China has been blatantly using Tibetan Buddhism as a vehicle to not only control the Tibetan people, but also to influence the international community, including the citizens of India, Nepal, Bhutan as well as the United States.

Over the years China has been increasing putting pressure on Nepal to restrict Tibetan religious activities, leading to a climate of fear and limited freedoms for Tibetans in Nepal. This pressure includes having Nepal crackdowns on protests, surveillance of the community, refusal to register refugees, and increased security cooperation with Chinese authorities.

Lhasa is the most sacred place of pilgrimage for all followers of Tibetan Buddhism throughout the world, and Chinese authorities are politicizing access to Tibet to further their agenda. China continues to impose restrictions on Tibetan Buddhists, including American citizens, who wish to travel to Tibet, the PRC. At the same time it is providing selective access to journalists and other influencers to drive its own narrative. China has also used the Confucius Institutes in the United States to spread its propaganda on Tibet.

China not only restricts the religious freedom of Tibetans in Tibet but also attempts to interfere in the activities of Tibetans and Tibet supporters abroad. In a report on “Chinese Transnational Repression of Tibetan Diaspora Communities,” the Dharamsala-based Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) says China is attempting “to control the actions of exiled Tibetans, Chinese authorities weaponise their relatives in Tibet by harming, threatening, or otherwise manipulating them. The looming threat resulting from ubiquitous surveillance also fosters a constant feeling of unease that spreads fear and disempowers exiled communities. Knowing that spies are planted among their members undermines the trust essential to the survival of diaspora networks. Transnational repression poses increasing threats to Tibetan diaspora communities and, thereby, to the future of the Tibetan freedom movement.”

The head of the Central Tibetan Administration, Sikyong Penpa Tsering, also said he faced transnational repression from China, which tries to stop his visits to different countries, including a direct attempt to stop a major Australian TV station from broadcasting a discussion program with him. More egregiously, in July this year, the Chinese authorities disappeared Zhang Yadi (Tara), a Chinese student and a follower of Tibetan Buddhism who had been advocating peacefully in France for Tibet and Tibetan rights. Zhang had been on a visit to China when she

was disappeared in Yunnan. Reports indicate she was taken away by state security officers and is being held incommunicado on suspicion of “inciting separatism”.

Therefore, the Chinese Communist Party’s attitude towards religion in general and on Tibetan Buddhism in particular becomes a national security interest for the United States.

In this testimony I will highlight China’s policy of altering the very identity of Tibetan people as part of President Xi Jinping ‘s overall strategy to co-opt and eventually eliminate Tibet’s unique religious, linguistic, and cultural identity.

I am submitting the full text of my testimony for the record and will provide an overview at the hearing.

The Chinese government’s policy on Tibetan religion has moved from total destruction of Tibetan religious institutions and systems to one of insidious control and erosion. Initially China launched major attacks on the physical structure of Tibetan Buddhism destroying almost all of the monasteries and temples. Subsequently, China altered its policy to allowing a semblance of Tibetan Buddhist practice while simultaneously using it as a vehicle to exert influence over the Tibetan people as well as followers of Tibetan Buddhism throughout the world.

Over the years, the Chinese state has promulgated various regulations to bring Tibetan monasteries and monastics under tighter control by the State. To be clear, while these measures apply to all religious communities in the People’s Republic of China, in Tibet the effect is increasingly intense due to the defining role religion plays as the cultural and social foundation of Tibetan society. The mechanisms of control inflicted by the Xi Jinping regime are designed to contort genuine Tibetan Buddhism and its institutions into another tool of autocratic control and eventual replacement of the Tibetan people’s unique civilization with one defined by the Communist Chinese Party.

The Buddhist Association of China (BAC), a supposedly non-political organization, is becoming a key instrument in the Chinese Communist Party’s strategy to assimilate and transform Tibetan Buddhism. This process is intended to break down Tibetan Buddhism’s unique characteristics and to change it into a tool of the Chinese state.

The most critical area where the BAC contributes to the CCP agenda is in the search and recognition of Tibetan reincarnations. CCP has a strategy to use the opportunity of the ageing of the Dalai Lama to use the deeply spiritual process of his reincarnation to promote its political agenda in Tibet and the region.

Since China has failed to place the current Dalai Lama under its control, it plans to ensure the next incarnation will be subservient to the Communist Party of China. China’s atheist, authoritarian government is claiming authority to select the next Dalai Lama. They attempted this identical strategy with the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, the second most well-known Tibetan Buddhist leader, by kidnapping him when he was six years old (the youngest political prisoner ever). The CCP subsequently “appointed” a patently false substitute in his place. Not only do the Chinese government’s claims completely disregard centuries-old Tibetan religious tradition; they also violate the universal principle of religious freedom.

The Chinese government’s interference in the Dalai Lama reincarnation issue has clear geopolitical implications on many Tibetan Buddhist institutions in the United States, the Indian subcontinent, Mongolia and other parts of the world. If not challenged vigorously by free countries, this decision threatens religious freedom, not only of Tibetans, but also of millions of followers of Tibetan Buddhism worldwide, including in the United States. If China achieves its goal of co-opting and controlling Buddhism in the region and globally with impunity, then it will only embolden Beijing to further its other expansionist and authoritarian ambitions.

The CCP has introduced the following measures, regulations and initiatives to exercise control over the recognition of reincarnations. In 2019, the Chinese spokesperson responded to the Dalai Lama’s assertion about his authority to decide on his reincarnation by stating that the process must adhere to Chinese law.

The “Management Measures for the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism” (Order No. 5) passed by the State Administration of Religious Affairs on July 18, 2007, that came into force on Sept. 1, 2007. It articulates in detail the CCP role in selection, installation and education of reincarnate lamas.

The 2010 “Tibetan Buddhism Living Buddha Certificates” provided by the BAC to reincarnations who have been approved by the Chinese government.

The 2016 “Tibetan Buddhism Living Buddha Inquiry System” launched by the BAC to verify legitimacy of reincarnations. In January 2016, the database started with 870 names, while in April the same year, it increased to 1,300.

The “Revised Religious Affairs Regulations” (Order No. 686) passed by the State Council on June 14, 2017 that came into force on Feb. 1, 2018. It mandates that the religious community shall “practice the core socialist values; and preserve the unification of the country, ethnic unity, religious harmony and social stability.”

The “Measures for the Administration of Religious Clergy” (Order No. 15) passed by SARA on Jan. 8, 2021, regulating the administration of religious clergy. The measures, which came into force on May 1, 2021, standardize state management of clergy to serve the ideological and political interests of the state and legally underpins the “Sinification” of religion policy in China. Article 15 in the regulation explicitly reaffirms the state’s role in management and approval of Tibetan reincarnate lamas.

“Administrative Measures for Religious Activity Venues” (Order No. 19) that came into force on Sept. 1, 2023.

The Chinese authorities realize that Tibetan Buddhism is the core of Tibetan identity. Thus, to the CCP, Sinification serves to make Tibetan Buddhism conform to the CCP ideology and be an active agent of its promotion and implementation.

In a formal statement on September 24, 2011, the Dalai Lama categorically maintained that only he can make a decision regarding his reincarnation and the process in which he intends to handle the issue of his succession and on July 2 this year, he reiterated his position. I would like to submit these two statements for the record.

In the past more than 60 years, the Chinese authorities have adapted from a policy of destruction of Tibetan religious institutions and system to one of controlling them to serve its own political objectives. For the first several years leading to and after the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet, there was a policy of complete annihilation of Tibetan religion, including its institutions.

After the Cultural Revolution, there was a brief period of liberalization in the 1980s, leading to a resurgence of Tibetan religious expression. In an apparent realization of the failure of its policy to eliminate Tibetan Buddhism, the Chinese leadership slowly began to change its policy to one of subversion and mounting erosion.

Tibetan Buddhists inside and outside Tibet will not accept China’s plans to control the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation. Nor will the international community endorse such a blatant assault on not only Tibetan religious freedom, but also the fundamental right of any religion to choose its own leaders.

Tibet is within the parameters of US security interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Tibet occupies an Asian fault zone of clashing cultures and big power politics. Tibet is where Russia, China and British India played the Great Game in the past. A stable Tibet where the human rights and religious freedom of Tibetans is respected would contribute greatly to peace and stability in this sensitive region.

Recommendations

1. The Trump Administration must monitor, as per the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020, Chinese officials’ violation of Tibetan religious freedom, including interference in recognizing a successor or reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama and any future Dalai Lamas and consider imposing sanctions with respect to such officials under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (22 U.S.C. 2656 note) and applying the relevant section of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(G)) with respect to such officials.
2. The Trump Administration should continue to engage multilaterally with like-minded countries and international bodies to undertake coordinated initiatives and develop a united policy on religious freedom of the Tibetan people, including within the European Union and at United Nations.
3. The Administration should publicly demand release Tibetan political prisoners, including those who have been imprisoned for upholding their religious rights, including the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.

4. China should be asked to stop transnational repression and release those who have been detained for peaceful advocacy of Tibetan rights, including Zhang Yadi.
5. The State Department should make greater use of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act by publicly releasing the names of Chinese officials sanctioned under the Act in the hopes of gaining greater access to monitor the conditions in Tibet, including the practice of Tibetan Buddhism and the situation in Buddhist monastic establishments.
6. Relevant Congressional Committees should request access to Tibet and ask American diplomats as well as organizations, including representatives of multilateral organizations, to seek access to Tibet to as part of the implementation of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act.
7. Denial of religious freedom for Tibetans is merely a symptom of a bigger problem, which is political, and needs to be addressed. The United States has a policy of encouraging unconditional negotiations between the Tibetan leadership and the Chinese leadership. The Trump Administration should urge Beijing at senior levels, both privately and publicly, to return to substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives, without pre-conditions, to negotiate a resolution to the Tibet-China conflict, in line with the 2002 Tibetan Policy Act and 2020 Tibetan Policy and Support Act.

Submissions for the record

Statement of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, on the Issue of His Reincarnation

September 24, 2011

<https://www.dalailama.com/news/2011/statement-of-his-holiness-the-fourteenth-dalai-lama-tenzin-gyatso-on-the-issue-of-his-reincarnation>

(Translated from the Tibetan)

Introduction

My fellow Tibetans, both in and outside Tibet, all those who follow the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and everyone who has a connection to Tibet and Tibetans: due to the foresight of our ancient kings, ministers and scholar-adepts, the complete teaching of the Buddha, comprising the scriptural and experiential teachings of the Three Vehicles and the Four Sets of Tantra and their related subjects and disciplines flourished widely in the Land of Snow. Tibet has served as a source of Buddhist and related cultural traditions for the world. In particular, it has contributed significantly to the happiness of countless beings in Asia, including those in China, Tibet and Mongolia.

In the course of upholding the Buddhist tradition in Tibet, we evolved a unique Tibetan tradition of recognizing the reincarnations of scholar-adepts that has been of immense help to both the Dharma and sentient beings, particularly to the monastic community.

Since the omniscient Gedun Gyatso was recognized and confirmed as the reincarnation of Gedun Drub in the fifteenth century and the Gaden Phodrang Labrang (the Dalai Lama's institution) was established, successive reincarnations have been recognized. The third in the line, Sonam Gyatso, was given the title of the Dalai Lama. The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, established the Gaden Phodrang Government in 1642, becoming the spiritual and political head of Tibet. For more than 600 years since Gedun Drub, a series of unmistakable reincarnations has been recognised in the lineage of the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lamas have functioned as both the political and spiritual leaders of Tibet for 369 years since 1642. I have now voluntarily brought this to an end, proud and satisfied that we can pursue the kind of democratic system of government flourishing elsewhere in the world. In fact, as far back as 1969, I made clear that concerned people should decide whether the Dalai Lama's reincarnations should continue in the future. However, in the absence of clear guidelines, should the concerned public express a strong wish for the Dalai Lamas to continue, there is an obvious risk of vested political interests misusing the reincarnation system to fulfil their own political agenda. Therefore, while I remain physically and mentally fit, it seems important to me that we draw up clear guidelines to recognise the next Dalai Lama, so that there is no room for doubt or deception. For these guidelines to be fully comprehensible, it is essential to understand the system of Tulku recognition and the basic concepts behind it.

Therefore, I shall briefly explain them below.

Past and future lives

In order to accept reincarnation or the reality of Tulkus, we need to accept the existence of past and future lives. Sentient beings come to this present life from their previous lives and take rebirth again after death. This kind of continuous rebirth is accepted by all the ancient Indian spiritual traditions and schools of philosophy, except the Charvakas, who were a materialist movement. Some modern thinkers deny past and future lives on the premise that we cannot see them. Others do not draw such clear cut conclusions on this basis.

Although many religious traditions accept rebirth, they differ in their views of what it is that is reborn, how it is reborn, and how it passes through the transitional period between two lives. Some religious traditions accept the prospect of future life, but reject the idea of past lives.

Generally, Buddhists believe that there is no beginning to birth and that once we achieve liberation from the cycle of existence by overcoming our karma and destructive emotions, we will not be reborn under the sway of these conditions. Therefore, Buddhists believe that there is an end to being reborn as a result of karma and destructive emotions, but most Buddhist philosophical schools do not accept that the mind-stream comes to an end. To reject past and future rebirth would contradict the Buddhist concept of the ground, path and result, which must be explained on the basis of the disciplined or undisciplined mind. If we accept this argument, logically, we would also have to accept that the world and its inhabitants come about without causes and conditions. Therefore, as long as you are a Buddhist, it is necessary to accept past and future rebirth.

For those who remember their past lives, rebirth is a clear experience. However, most ordinary beings forget their past lives as they go through the process of death, intermediate state and rebirth. As past and future rebirths are slightly obscure to them, we need to use evidence-based logic to prove past and future rebirths to them.

There are many different logical arguments given in the words of the Buddha and subsequent commentaries to prove the existence of past and future lives. In brief, they come down to four points: the logic that things are preceded by things of a similar type, the logic that things are preceded by a substantial cause, the logic that the mind has gained familiarity with things in the past, and the logic of having gained experience of things in the past.

Ultimately all these arguments are based on the idea that the nature of the mind, its clarity and awareness, must have clarity and awareness as its substantial cause. It cannot have any other entity such as an inanimate object as its substantial cause. This is self-evident. Through logical analysis we infer that a new stream of clarity and awareness cannot come about without causes or from unrelated causes. While we observe that mind cannot be produced in a laboratory, we also infer that nothing can eliminate the continuity of subtle clarity and awareness.

As far as I know, no modern psychologist, physicist, or neuroscientist has been able to observe or predict the production of mind either from matter or without cause.

There are people who can remember their immediate past life or even many past lives, as well as being able to recognise places and relatives from those lives. This is not just something that happened in the past. Even today there are many people in the East and West, who can recall incidents and experiences from their past lives. Denying this is not an honest and impartial way of doing research, because it runs counter to this evidence. The Tibetan system of recognising reincarnations is an authentic mode of investigation based on people's recollection of their past lives.

How rebirth takes place

There are two ways in which someone can take rebirth after death: rebirth under the sway of karma and destructive emotions and rebirth through the power of compassion and prayer. Regarding the first, due to ignorance negative and positive karma are created and their imprints remain on the consciousness. These are reactivated through craving and grasping, propelling us into the next life. We then take rebirth involuntarily in higher or lower realms. This is the way ordinary beings circle incessantly through existence like the turning of a wheel. Even under such circumstances ordinary beings can engage diligently with a positive aspiration in virtuous practices in their day-to-day lives. They familiarise themselves with virtue that at the time of death can be reactivated providing the means for them to take rebirth in a higher realm of existence. On the other hand, superior Bodhisattvas, who have attained the path of seeing, are not reborn through the force of their karma and destructive emotions, but due to the power

of their compassion for sentient beings and based on their prayers to benefit others. They are able to choose their place and time of birth as well as their future parents. Such a rebirth, which is solely for the benefit of others, is rebirth through the force of compassion and prayer.

The meaning of Tulku

It seems the Tibetan custom of applying the epithet 'Tulku' (Buddha's Emanation Body) to recognized reincarnations began when devotees used it as an honorary title, but it has since become a common expression. In general, the term Tulku refers to a particular aspect of the Buddha, one of the three or four described in the Sutra Vehicle. According to this explanation of these aspects of the Buddha, a person who is totally bound by destructive emotions and karma has the potential to achieve the Truth Body (Dharmakaya), comprising the Wisdom Truth Body and Nature Truth Body. The former refers to the enlightened mind of a Buddha, which sees everything directly and precisely, as it is, in an instant. It has been cleared of all destructive emotions, as well as their imprints, through the accumulation of merit and wisdom over a long period of time. The latter, the Nature Truth Body, refers to the empty nature of that all-knowing enlightened mind. These two together are aspects of the Buddhas for themselves. However, as they are not directly accessible to others, but only amongst the Buddhas themselves, it is imperative that the Buddhas manifest in physical forms that are accessible to sentient beings in order to help them. Hence, the ultimate physical aspect of a Buddha is the Body of Complete Enjoyment (Sambhogakaya), which is accessible to superior Bodhisattvas, and has five definite qualifications such as residing in the Akanishta Heaven. And from the Body of Complete Enjoyment are manifested the myriad Emanation Bodies or Tulkus (Nirmanakaya), of the Buddhas, which appear as gods or humans and are accessible even to ordinary beings. These two physical aspects of the Buddha are termed Form Bodies, which are meant for others.

The Emanation Body is three-fold: a) the Supreme Emanation Body like Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha, who manifested the twelve deeds of a Buddha such as being born in the place he chose and so forth; b) the Artistic Emanation Body which serves others by appearing as craftsmen, artists and so on; and c) the Incarnate Emanation Body, according to which Buddhas appear in various forms such as human beings, deities, rivers, bridges, medicinal plants, and trees to help sentient beings. Of these three types of Emanation Body, the reincarnations of spiritual masters recognized and known as 'Tulkus' in Tibet come under the third category. Among these Tulkus there may be many who are truly qualified Incarnate Emanation Bodies of the Buddhas, but this does not necessarily apply to all of them. Amongst the Tulkus of Tibet there may be those who are reincarnations of superior Bodhisattvas, Bodhisattvas on the paths of accumulation and preparation, as well as masters who are evidently yet to enter these Bodhisattva paths. Therefore, the title of Tulku is given to reincarnate Lamas either on the grounds of their resembling enlightened beings or through their connection to certain qualities of enlightened beings.

As Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo said:

"Reincarnation is what happens when someone takes rebirth after the predecessor's passing away; emanation is when manifestations take place without the source's passing away."

Recognition of Reincarnations

The practice of recognizing who is who by identifying someone's previous life occurred even when Shakyamuni Buddha himself was alive. Many accounts are found in the four Agama Sections of the Vinaya Pitaka, the Jataka Stories, the Sutra of the Wise and Foolish, the Sutra of One Hundred Karmas and so on, in which the Tathagata revealed the workings of karma, recounting innumerable stories about how the effects of certain karmas created in a past life are experienced by a person in his or her present life. Also, in the life stories of Indian masters, who lived after the Buddha, many reveal their previous places of birth. There are many such stories, but the system of recognizing and numbering their reincarnations did not occur in India.

The system of recognizing reincarnations in Tibet

Past and future lives were asserted in the indigenous Tibetan Bon tradition before the arrival of Buddhism. And since the spread of Buddhism in Tibet, virtually all Tibetans have believed in past and future lives. Investigating the reincarnations of many spiritual masters who upheld the Dharma, as well as the custom of praying devotedly to them, flourished everywhere in Tibet. Many authentic scriptures, indigenous Tibetan books such as the Mani Kabum and the Fivefold Kathang Teachings and others like the The Books of Kadam Disciples and the Jewel Garland: Responses to Queries, which were recounted by the glorious, incomparable Indian master Dipankara Atisha in the 11th century in Tibet, tell stories of the reincarnations of Arya Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion.

However, the present tradition of formally recognizing the reincarnations of masters first began in the early 13th century with the recognition of Karmapa Pagshi as the reincarnation of Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa by his disciples in accordance with his prediction. Since then, there have been seventeen Karmapa incarnations over more than nine hundred years. Similarly, since the recognition of Kunga Sangmo as the reincarnation of Khandro Choekyi Dronme in the 15th century there have been more than ten incarnations of Samding Dorje Phagmo. So, among the Tulkus recognized in Tibet there are monastics and lay tantric practitioners, male and female. This system of recognizing the reincarnations gradually spread to other Tibetan Buddhist traditions, and Bon, in Tibet. Today, there are recognized Tulkus in all the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Sakya, Geluk, Kagyu and Nyingma, as well as Jonang and Bodong, who serve the Dharma. It is also evident that amongst these Tulkus some are a disgrace.

The omniscient Gedun Drub, who was a direct disciple of Je Tsongkhapa, founded Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Tsang and took care of his students. He passed away in 1474 at the age of 84. Although initially no efforts were made to identify his reincarnation, people were obliged to recognize a child named Sangye Chophel, who had been born in Tanak, Tsang (1476), because of what he had to say about his amazing and flawless recollections of his past life. Since then, a tradition began of searching for and recognizing the successive reincarnations of the Dalai Lamas by the Gaden Phodrang Labrang and later the Gaden Phodrang Government.

The ways of recognizing reincarnations

After the system of recognizing Tulkus came into being, various procedures for going about it began to develop and grow. Among these some of the most important involve the predecessor's predictive letter and other instructions and indications that might occur; the reincarnation's reliably recounting his previous life and speaking about it; identifying possessions belonging to the predecessor and recognizing people who had been close to him. Apart from these, additional methods include asking reliable spiritual masters for their divination as well as seeking the predictions of mundane oracles, who appear through mediums in trance, and observing the visions that manifest in sacred lakes of protectors like Lhamoi Latso, a sacred lake south of Lhasa.

When there happens to be more than one prospective candidate for recognition as a Tulku, and it becomes difficult to decide, there is a practice of making the final decision by divination employing the dough-ball method (zen tak) before a sacred image while calling upon the power of truth.

Emanation before the passing away of the predecessor (ma-dhey tulku)

Usually a reincarnation has to be someone's taking rebirth as a human being after previously passing away. Ordinary sentient beings generally cannot manifest an emanation before death (ma-dhey tulku), but superior Bodhisattvas, who can manifest themselves in hundreds or thousands of bodies simultaneously, can manifest an emanation before death. Within the Tibetan system of recognizing Tulkus there are emanations who belong to the same mind-stream as the predecessor, emanations who are connected to others through the power of karma and prayers, and emanations who come as a result of blessings and appointment.

The main purpose of the appearance of a reincarnation is to continue the predecessor's unfinished work to serve Dharma and beings. In the case of a Lama who is an ordinary being, instead of having a reincarnation belonging to the same mind-stream, someone else with connections to that Lama through pure karma and prayers may be recognized as his or her emanation. Alternatively it is possible for the Lama to appoint a successor who is either his disciple or someone young who is to be recognized as his emanation. Since these options are possible in the case of an ordinary being, an emanation before death that is not of the same mind-stream is feasible. In some cases one high Lama may have several reincarnations simultaneously, such as incarnations of body, speech and mind and so on. In recent times, there have been well-known emanations before death such as Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje and Chogye Trichen Ngawang Khyenrab.

Using the Golden Urn

As the degenerate age gets worse, and as more reincarnations of high Lamas are being recognized, some of them for political motives, increasing numbers have been recognized through inappropriate and questionable means, as a result of which huge damage has been done to the Dharma.

During the conflict between Tibet and the Gurkhas (1791-93) the Tibetan Government had to call on Manchu military support. Consequently the Gurkha military was expelled from Tibet, but afterwards Manchu officials made

a 29-point proposal on the pretext of making the Tibetan Government's administration more efficient. This proposal included the suggestion of picking lots from a Golden Urn to decide on the recognition of the reincarnations of the Dalai Lamas, Panchen Lamas and Hutuktus, a Mongolian title given to high Lamas. Therefore, this procedure was followed in the case of recognizing some reincarnations of the Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama and other high Lamas. The ritual to be followed was written by the Eighth Dalai Lama Jampel Gyatso. Even after such a system had been introduced, this procedure was dispensed with for the Ninth, Thirteenth and myself, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

Even in the case of the Tenth Dalai Lama, the authentic reincarnation had already been found and in reality this procedure was not followed, but in order to humour the Manchus it was merely announced that this procedure had been observed.

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

In 1880, during the recognition of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the Twelfth, traces of the Priest-Patron relationship between Tibet and the Manchus still existed. He was recognized as the unmistakable reincarnation by the Eighth Panchen Lama, the predictions of the Nechung and Samye oracles and by observing visions that appeared in Lhamoi Latso, therefore the Golden Urn procedure was not followed. This can be clearly understood from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's final testament of the Water-Monkey Year (1933) in which he states:

"As you all know, I was selected not in the customary way of picking lots from the golden urn, but my selection was foretold and divined. In accordance with these divinations and prophecies I was recognized as the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and enthroned."

When I was recognized as the Fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama in 1939, the Priest-Patron relationship between Tibet and China had already come to an end. Therefore, there was no question of any need to confirm the reincarnation by employing the Golden Urn. It is well-known that the then Regent of Tibet and the Tibetan National Assembly had followed the procedure for recognizing the Dalai Lama's reincarnation taking account of the predictions of high Lamas, oracles and the visions seen in Lhamoi Latso; the Chinese had no involvement in it whatever. Nevertheless, some concerned officials of the Guomintang later cunningly spread lies in the newspapers claiming that they had agreed to forego the use of the Golden Urn and that Wu Chung-tsin presided over my enthronement, and so on. This lie was exposed by Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, the Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, who the People's Republic of China considered to be a most progressive person, at the Second Session of the Fifth People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region (31st July 1989). This is clear, when, at the end of his speech, in which he gave a detailed explanation of events and presented documentary evidence, he demanded:

"What need is there for the Communist Party to follow suit and continue the lies of the Guomintang?"

Deceptive strategy and false hopes

In the recent past, there have been cases of irresponsible managers of wealthy Lama-estates who indulged in improper methods to recognize reincarnations, which have undermined the Dharma, the monastic community and our society. Moreover, since the Manchu era Chinese political authorities repeatedly engaged in various deceitful means using Buddhism, Buddhist masters and Tulkus as tools to fulfil their political ends as they involved themselves in Tibetan and Mongolian affairs. Today, the authoritarian rulers of the People's Republic of China, who as communists reject religion, but still involve themselves in religious affairs, have imposed a so-called re-education campaign and declared the so-called Order No. Five, concerning the control and recognition of reincarnations, which came into force on 1st September 2007. This is outrageous and disgraceful. The enforcement of various inappropriate methods for recognizing reincarnations to eradicate our unique Tibetan cultural traditions is doing damage that will be difficult to repair.

Moreover, they say they are waiting for my death and will recognize a Fifteenth Dalai Lama of their choice. It is clear from their recent rules and regulations and subsequent declarations that they have a detailed strategy to deceive Tibetans, followers of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and the world community. Therefore, as I have a responsibility to protect the Dharma and sentient beings and counter such detrimental schemes, I make the following declaration.

The next incarnation of the Dalai Lama

As I mentioned earlier, reincarnation is a phenomenon which should take place either through the voluntary choice of the concerned person or at least on the strength of his or her karma, merit and prayers. Therefore, the person who reincarnates has sole legitimate authority over where and how he or she takes rebirth and how that reincarnation is to be recognized. It is a reality that no one else can force the person concerned, or manipulate him or her. It is particularly inappropriate for Chinese communists, who explicitly reject even the idea of past and future lives, let alone the concept of reincarnate Tulkus, to meddle in the system of reincarnation and especially the reincarnations of the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas. Such brazen meddling contradicts their own political ideology and reveals their double standards. Should this situation continue in the future, it will be impossible for Tibetans and those who follow the Tibetan Buddhist tradition to acknowledge or accept it.

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 Dalai Lama
Dharamsala

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