

„Strengthen Party and Government Leadership and Consolidate Management of Religion”: Religious Policy towards Tibetan Buddhism in 1990s

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The religious policy towards Tibetan Buddhism adopted by the Chinese Communist Party and the Central Government after the incorporation of Central Tibet into the newly established People’s Republic during the years 1950-1951 has had some distinctive features which on the one hand reflect the Chinese historical experience with Tibetan Buddhism and on the other the specific social, political and economic characteristics of Tibetan Buddhism in traditional, i.e. pre-1950, Tibetan society. The special place of Tibet in Chinese religious policy and policy towards the national minorities in general can be further illustrated by the existence of a special document, the Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet (Chin. *Zhongyang renmin zhengfu he Xizang difang zhengfu guanyu heping jiefang Xizang banfa de xieyi*) signed on 23 May 1951, which explicitly mentions the issue of religious freedom in Tibet, and in its seventh provision stipulates that: „the policy of freedom of religious belief ... will be protected. The central authorities will not effect any change in the income of the monasteries” (Van Walt van Praag 1987, 339). There does not exist any analogous document which would regulate relations between the Central Government and another either ethnic or religious group.

As far as the historical context is concerned, one has to bear in mind that the Manchu-Chinese Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) was involved in both Tibetan politics and religious system. The involvement of the Qing Dynasty into Tibetan affairs was quite complex. It included at least three various and interlinked aspect: during its westward expansion the Qing dynasty has successfully attempted to incorporate Tibet into the Inner Asian Empire in the course of the 18th century and in order to stabilize the political situation in Central Tibet the Imperial government had especially since 1751 till 1793 issued a number of decrees which attempted to regulate also the realm of Tibetan Buddhism (Zhang 1988, 2-201; Su 2001, 160-182; Yu 1999, 134-146). Some of the measures and regulations designed by the Imperial bureaucracy have been repeatedly referred to also by the government of the People’s

Republic as an important part of its Tibet policy.¹ However, the role of Tibetan Buddhism in the Qing policy towards Inner Asia was not limited to Tibet proper as the Qing emperors had striven to use Tibetan religion as a tool of their policy towards Mongolia (Dabringhaus 1997) Besides of these attempts to use Tibetan Buddhism as an instrument of rule in both Tibet and Mongolia, some Qing emperors – especially Qianlong (r 1736-1796) had shown deep personal interest in Tibetan Buddhist teachings (Wang 2002; Benard 2004) and the presence of high-ranking Tibetan lamas and acquaintance of Tibetan culture had influenced also the art production at the Qing court (Berger 2003).

In Tibet the Chinese authorities have to cope with a distinctive socio-political system characterized by the close relationship between religious authority and political power in Tibet. From the 13th century the dignitaries of various Buddhist schools started to play an influential role in Tibetan politics and this tendency reached its height with the assumption of political power by the 5th Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatsho (*ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617-1682) in 1642 in Central Tibet (Tib. *dbus gtsang*) (Shakabpa 1988, 61-124). The traditional political system of Central Tibet in the years 1642-1950 is often described in Tibetan as „having two [powers]: religious and political” (Tib. *chos srid gnyis ldan*)² which reflected the fact, that the supreme political and religious power was in the hands of the successive reincarnations of the Dalai Lama (Phuntsog 1975, 78-81). The ecclesiastical elite of Tibetan society played an important role in the government and therefore the Tibetan polity is often characterized as theocratic. The influence of Buddhist clergy in Tibet is also obvious from the structure of government agencies and posts, where the so-called monk officials from the biggest Gelugpa (*dge lugs pa*) monasteries occupied crucial posts (Michael 1982, 51-60; Goldstein 1989, 6-19). Due to this position the Buddhist clergy successfully asserted its political and economical priorities in traditional Tibet and in fact they perceived the role of state as the protector of their interests and the Buddhist faith.

Moreover Tibetan Buddhism is considered to be the most important element in the identity of Tibetans by both Tibetan and foreign authors (e. g. Karmay 1994, 114; Stoddard 1994, 128), and by Tibetans it is even perceived as a symbol of the superiority of their civilization (Goldstein 1998, 15).³ Tibetan

¹ Especially the system of identification of the successive reincarnations of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, so-called „drawing lots from a gold urn“ (e. g. see Jing 1989, 13-14)

² In Chinese sources this system is characterized as the „union of politics and religion“ (Chin. *zheng jiao heyi*) which is in direct contradiction with the „principle of the separation of politics and religion“ (Chin. *zheng jiao fenli de yuanze*) which stands at the core of religious policy in the People’s Republic of China (Jiang et al. 1996, 96).

³ The importance of religion for the self-identification of Tibetans can be further illustrated by the fact that it serves as a criterion for the inclusion/exclusion of a particular individual from the Tibetan community:

Buddhism was the *raison d'être* of the traditional Tibetan state before 1950. This apparent congruence between religion and ethnicity in caused the fact that religious policy in China is closely interrelated with the general policy towards national minorities as the phenomenon of religion is predominantly associated with various minority ethnic groups such as the Uighurs, Hui (followers of Islam), Mongols and Tibetans where the percentage of believers, as acknowledged also by Chinese authors, is very high (Gong Xuezheng 1998, 341) Official Chinese publications on religious policy repeatedly stress the close relationship between ethnicity and religion (Gong 1998, 339-346; Guojia 2002, 207-211; Wang 2002, 231-235) and state that in relation to the national minorities the State and the Party should take this linkage into consideration and deal with them as a complex issue. The central role of religion as an identity building factor of Tibetans is to a certain degree also reflected in the official Chinese documents dealing with the religious policy towards Tibetan Buddhism. Due to the fact that unlike in the case of the Hui, Uighurs and some other ethnic groups in China which follow Islam and thus form a part of the international community of Muslims, *umma*, Tibetans believe in an autochthonous religious tradition which originated in the 10th-12th centuries in their homeland. Therefore the identification with Tibetan Buddhism is very strong and any restrictions and limits imposed by the Chinese authorities on the religious practice on the individual and collective level are perceived by both the clergy and the laity as unacceptable infringements, which touch the core of „Tibetanness“.

The state authorities are well aware of the above-mentioned distinctive features of Tibetan Buddhism and they have especially in the post-Maoist period striven to design specific measures which should be implemented towards Tibetan Buddhism. The target of the religious policy is foremost the institutionalized form of Tibetan religion, i. e. the web of monasteries covering all the areas inhabited by Tibetans,⁴ which have traditionally functioned as educational centres preserving and reshaping religious tradition. The various forms of the „unwritten tradition of the laity“ (Karmay 1994, 115) which take place outside of the monastery compounds – for instance the mountain cults (e. g. Berounský/Slobodník 2003) - are not explicitly tackled in the documents and regulations approved after 1979. The important role of Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese religious policy is documented also by the repeated statements by high-ranking government officials who link the Tibetan issue with Xinjiang and

one is either an “insider” (Tib. *nang pa*, i. e. believer in Tibetan Buddhism) or an “outsider” (Tib. *phyi pa*, i. e. non-believer in Tibetan Buddhism) (Sagaster 1999, 185).

⁴ That is the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous units on lower administrative levels (prefecture, county) in neighboring provinces Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

falun gong and perceive them as „threats to Communist Party leadership and the stability of China” (Potter 2003, 26).

The religious policy towards Tibetan Buddhism in the post-Mao period can be roughly divided into two periods, i. e. 1980s and 1990s. The economic reforms which have started in 1978-79 have a positive influence on the minority and religious policies of the Chinese authorities. The First Tibet Work Forum (Chin. *Xizang gongzuo huiyi*), convened by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in March 1980 (Tsering Shakyas 1999, 380-82; Li Dezhu 2003, 70-71), played an important role in the economic and cultural revival in Tibet, as its aim was to revise the previous Chinese policy in Tibet which had proved mistaken. The new policy was focused on raising the living standard of Tibetans and the restoration of traditional Tibetan culture. This change of policy resulted in an unexpected revival of religious activities – not only – in Tibet which included the release from prisons and labor camps of monks arrested in late 1950s and 1960s, rebuilding of monasteries, entrance to monasteries by young monks, revival of traditional education, rituals and festivities in monasteries throughout Tibet.⁵ The large scope of the religious revival in Tibet and in China in general has caught the authorities unprepared and they have tried to establish only a very loose framework for the functioning of religious institutions and religious groups under new political conditions, which was not specifically designed for the needs of Tibetan Buddhism. The legal guarantees stipulated by the Article 18 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China approved in 1982 (Constitution 1994, 30) together with more detailed guidelines for the religious work elaborated in the so-called Document No. 19 issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in March 1982 (MacInnis 1989, 8-26) provided basic guidelines for the implementation of religious policy. During this initial period the Buddhist monasteries in Tibet were able to secure their interest and reaffirm their fundamental role in Tibetan society. The religion resurfaced as the centre of Tibetan life, the people were permitted to carry out religious practices and the cadres were instructed to respect them. The state authorities were not able to cope with the high dynamics of the religious revival and they have striven to subordinate the religious life to the leadership of Party and state only to a limited extent (Anon. 1996, 25). This period of relative freedom of religion in Tibet has ended with the politicization of religious revival as the renaissance of Tibetan identity caused by the revival of Tibetan Buddhism, soon brought with

⁵ Tibetans call use the term “the door of religion was opened” (*chos sgo phye*)” for the religious revival. For case-studies on the revival of Buddhist monasteries in Tibetan areas see Goldstein (1998) and Slobodnik (2004).

it also such political and sensitive issues as Tibetan independence and the protection of human rights. A crucial role in this movement was played by Buddhist monks and nuns who since autumn 1987 have participated in numerous anti-Chinese protests mainly in Lhasa, but also in other parts of Tibet, which resulted in the imposition of martial law in Lhasa on the 7th March 1989.⁶ From the Tibetan point of view the participation and organization of protests by Tibetan monks and nuns was a logical consequence of their traditional role in the society, which included political activism especially in situations, where the monastic community saw their interests endangered.⁷ On the contrary, from the Chinese perspective their activities represented an abuse of religion and religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution for political activities aimed against China. These developments have posed a dilemma for the Chinese leadership on how to proceed with the implementation of the new religious policy in Tibet, as this process is in their eyes inevitably connected with the further intensification of anti-Chinese protests.⁸ The government authorities, due to these internal developments and internationalization of the Tibet issue (i. e. support of Western governments for the initiatives of the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatsho /*bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho*, 1935- / who was in December 1989 awarded Nobel Peace Prize), have opted for a hard-line approach (Goldstein 1997, 91) and a reshaping of the implementation of religious policy.

During the 1990s „religious policy in China has taken centre stage in a way that was never true under Mao” (Lambert 2001, 124). The new policy towards religions in general which can be summed up as an endeavor to subordinate the religious life to the „rule of law” and Party leadership came to the forefront in 1991 with the promulgation of the so-called Document No. 6⁹ which was a result of the leftist and conservative turn in Chinese policy in the post-Tiananmen period (Lambert 1992, 394) which sought to strengthen the regulations of religious affairs according to law in order to eliminate hostile elements who were using religion to undermine China’s socialist system (Spiegel 2004, 44). This political guideline was further strengthened by the then

⁶ For a detailed account of these protests and the role of monks and nuns in them see Schwartz (1994) and Goldstein (1997, 79-92).

⁷ For instance in 1944 the monks from the Che (*byes*) college in the Sera (*se ra*) monastery were ready to challenge the authority of the central government in Lhasa with arms (Goldstein 1989, 437-445).

⁸ The choice between the focus on solely religious matters and involvement in politics to a certain degree also splits the monastic communities, as there are advocates of direct participation in the fight for Tibetan independence and those who oppose this because it can endanger the fragile status of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the People’s Republic of China.

⁹ For the Chinese text of this document entitled „Circular on Some Problems Concerning the Further Improvement of Work on Religion” see Anon. 1998,58-65.

President and Party secretary Jiang Zemin in a speech (Guojia 2002, 295-311) at the National United Front Conference in November 1993 in which he presented three main tasks for the future religious work: a) full implementation the Party's policy on freedom of religious belief; b) governing religious affairs by law; c) guiding religious groups to adapt into the socialist society.¹⁰ These central government political guidelines which tried to formulate a regulatory system of laws and regulations on the central level, resulted in the approval of various rules and regulations regarding religion on provincial and lower institutional levels which tackle the specific issues of different religious groups according to the situation in the given region.¹¹

As far as the religious policy towards Tibetan Buddhism is concerned the Third Tibet Work Forum which was held in July 1994 in Beijing has played a crucial role in the implementation of the new priorities of religious work in Tibet (Anon. 1996, 25-34; Anon. 1997, 45-48; Li 2003, 84-87). The Third Forum formulated tasks for the future Tibet policy which were echoing the overall developments of religious policy in the early 1990s but reflected the special situation in Tibet: a) strengthening the administration of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries according to law (Chin. *yi fa jiaqiang guanli*); b) strengthening the administration of the system of reincarnations (Chin. *huofo*, Tib. *sprul sku*) in Tibetan Buddhism; c) launch the education to patriotism which included a campaign to denunciate the Dalai Lama and his „clique” who has been identified as the main target of the reeducation as in the perception of Chinese authorities he was the main destabilizing factor in Tibet (Wang 2002, 257; Gong 1998, 351) These guidelines have since then provided a political blueprint for the religious policy in both the TAR and neighboring Tibetan areas. Future developments – namely the controversy over the identification of the reincarnation of the late 10th Panchen Lama Choekyi Gyaltsen (*chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1938-1989) – contributed to the speeding up of the campaign against the Dalai Lama (which have started in autumn 1994 in the TAR) and the tightening of control of religious activities. This dispute evolved in May 1995 after the Dalai Lama publicly announced the recognition of Gendun Choekyi Nyima (*dge 'dun chos kyi nyi ma*, 1989-) as the 11th Panchen Lama. In disapproval the Chinese government has subsequently enthroned its candidate Gyaltsen Norbu (*rgyal mtshan nor bu*, 1990-) in December 1995.¹²

¹⁰ This central theme of the religious policy in 1990s was later reconfirmed by various high-level cadres (e. g. Potter 2003, 16).

¹¹ For a selection of these rules and regulations on central and provincial levels see Guojia 2000. The volume includes also „The provisional measures for the administration of religious affairs in the Tibetan Autonomous Region“ (Guojia 2000, 130-135).

¹² For details of this issue see Tsering 1999, 440-447; Anon.1996, 52-70.

This conflict which involves the crucial issue of the responsible authority in the process of identification, selection and enthronement of high-ranking Tibetan reincarnations¹³ has highlighted the hard-line policy of Chinese government towards Dalai Lama in the aftermath of the Third Tibet Work Forum and has directly led to the launch of the new campaign „love the motherland and love the religion” (Chin. *aiguo aijiao*, Tib. *rgyal gces chos gces*) in Buddhist monasteries in 1996 in the TAR and subsequently in 1997 in the neighboring Tibetan areas.¹⁴

In order to illustrate the implementation of these political guidelines on local level, I will focus on the situation in the Labrang (*blab rang*) monastery in the Gansu Province.¹⁵ This influential Gelugpa monastery founded in 1709 is situated outside of the TAR, but the praxis of the religious policy in Labrang is of a representative character. However one has to keep in mind the differences between the situation in the TAR and in adjacent regions. According to Chinese authors the primary target of the religious reform should be the TAR (Gong 1998, 351). Due to the political reasons, namely the pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa in the years 1987-1989, the administrative control of large monasteries in the vicinity of Lhasa is far more strict than it is the case in areas outside the TAR where the revival of religious life was of a much wider scope (Anon.1991, 12).¹⁶ The main campaigns and policy measures were however similar in all areas inhabited by Tibetans, they have differed in the scope. The official Chinese perception of crucial issues in religious work will be documented by an internal document entitled „An Investigation Report on the Situation in the Management of the Labrang Monastery” (Chin. *Guanyu Labuleng siyuan guanli qingkuang de diaocha baogao*) which was prepared in by the Inspection team of the provincial Religious Affairs Bureau (Chin. *sheng zongjiaoji diaocha zu*) during the summer 1995 and published in 1998 in the

¹³ This conflict over the issue of reincarnations has further escalated in the beginning of the year 2000 when the 17th Karmapa Ugyen Trinley Dorje (*dbu rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje*, 1985-), the highest reincarnation of the Karma-Kagyü (*karm bka' brgyud*) school of Tibetan Buddhism, escaped from Tibet to India. The Chinese government, who approved his reincarnation, had previously portrayed him as a “patriotic” religious leader who should have played a key role in the legitimization of Chinese religious policy in Tibet. His detection represents a great failure of Chinese authorities in charge – for details see Anon. 2001, 30-35.

¹⁴ For the details on this campaign in the Qinghai Province see Anon.1999a.

¹⁵ In this area I have conducted – together with D. Berounský (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic) – field research in summers 2000, 2001 and 2004 during which the information on the implementation of religious policy was gathered. Our informants were monks and lay believers from the area around Labrang. For a general background on the Labrang monastery see Nietupski 1999. For the post-1949 developments see Slobodník 2004.

¹⁶ Tibetan informants have also repeatedly stated that the situation in Labrang is comparatively better than in the TAR.

bilingual (Chinese-Tibetan) volume *Zangchuan fojiao aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu xuexi xuanchuan cailiao* [Propaganda Materials for Education and Study in Patriotism in Tibetan Buddhism] in 1998 (Anon.1998).¹⁷ The analysis of this document published for internal reasons and thus speaking quite openly and in great detail about various issues involved lucidly shows the obstacles, challenges and goals of implementation of religious policy in praxis as formulated by Chinese bureaucratic apparatus in charge.

The report starts with a brief overview of the history of Labrang monastery, stresses the important position of this monastery in Gansu and highlights the fact, that the correct implementation of the religious policy in Labrang will have a positive effect for the religious work among Tibetan monastic communities in the whole of the Gansu Province. After this introductory part the report focuses on four important goals of the religious work in Labrang. The first part is devoted to the „strengthening of political ideology” and thus directly refers to the conclusions of the Third Tibet Work Forum. The Labrang monastery is praised for the ideological reeducation which have started already in late 1980s with a campaign to patriotism, and was later speeded up in 1995, while this ideological work has reached its peak in the period after 1997, when also the monks of the Labrang monastery were subjected to the campaign „love the motherland and love the religion”. The campaign, which forms a part of the movement to built social spiritual civilization (Chin. *shehuizhuyi jingsheng wenming*), has been focused on four aims: a) education on the protection of the unity of the motherland; b) education on the adopting of religion to socialist society; c) education on the socialist democracy and the legal system; d) education on the unity of nationalities and the nationalities and religious policy of the government (Anon.1998, 190-191).¹⁸ The campaign has been primarily focused on the person of the 14th Dalai Lama who is by Chinese authorities perceived as the root of the unstable situation in Tibet and with whom the government is „fighting for the masses of believers” (Anon.1998, 189). This ideological dispute with the Dalai Lama is seen as a crucial matter while its outcome will either strengthen stability and territorial integrity in areas

¹⁷ This volume published for internal circulation was acquired during the field research in summer 2001. The publication is a reader for the Chinese and Tibetan cadres in charge of the religious policy. It is divided into four parts: 1) speeches of Party and State leaders on religious policy; 2) documents issued by the Party and State Council which deal with religious issues; 3) laws and regulations by the Central and provincial governments regulating religious activities; 4) question and answers related to the religious policy, patriotic education, administration of the process of identification of new reincarnation, etc. The report on the Labrang monastery (Anon. 1998, 200-201) forms the sole appendix of this publication.

¹⁸ For an English translation of a similar manual for patriotic education in the Qinghai Province see Anon. 1999a, 27-40.

inhabited by Tibetans or will lead to chaos and potential disintegration.¹⁹ The strong personification of the religious work in Tibetan Buddhism cannot be encountered with in the policy towards other religions tolerated by the state in China. In the course of the campaign monks were obliged to denounce the Dalai Lama, to reject the idea of Tibetan independence and declare the loyalty to the Chinese Party and government. If a monk did not comply with these requirements he would be removed from the monastery. The ideological claims the state makes on the individual monk can be illustrated also by the rules which can be found on the third page of the monk's certificate (Chin. *sengren zheng*, Tib. *dge 'dun pa'i dpang yig*): „Rules for monks: 1) firmly uphold the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, uphold the socialist system, love the motherland and implement the religious policy of the Party; 2) consciously safeguard the legal system and its dignity, safeguard the interests of the people, safeguard the unity of nationalities and the territorial integrity of the state; 3) study and consciously comply with the various laws, regulations and decrees of the state, and comply with the rules and regulations formulated by governments on different administrative levels; 4) consciously obey the leaders of the Monastery Democratic Management Committee, and comply with the various rules and regulations and organizational discipline of the monastery; 5) be a pious believer, diligently study Buddhist sutras, strictly abide by monastic vows, and become an up-to-standard monk loving the motherland and loving the religion.“ Since summer 1997 all the monks of the Labrang monastery (as well as other Tibetan Buddhist monasteries) were obliged to participate in the compulsory classes which were organized by the local cadres from the Religious Affairs Bureau and United Front Department usually for two days in a month during the whole year. During these sessions they had to study propaganda materials prepared either by the Monastery Management Committee or by provincial authorities. These materials included various laws and regulations regarding religion, a brief overview of Tibetan history which was supposed to prove that Tibet was an inseparable part of China, criticism of Dalai Lama and Western countries (mainly the United States) which support the independence claims. Another important issue of this campaign was the requirement of Chinese authorities to declare the loyalty to the 11th Panchen Lama recognized by the Chinese government. However, in private conversations most of the monks and lay believers has repeatedly stated that this choice is a „Chinese Panchen“ (Tib. *rgya mi'i pan chen*) which cannot be venerated by Tibetans, thus his acceptance is low. The campaign „love the

¹⁹ However, the Chinese propagandists do not go so far as to denounce Dalai Lama as the religious leader of Tibetans, they target his political activities and label him as a splittist (Anon. 1996, 34).

motherland and love the religion” is seen by Chinese authorities as an important measure in the ideological battle which should win the hearts and minds of Tibetan monks and nuns. It seems that this strong pressure on the monasteries has brought directly the opposite outcome: further sharpening of the division between the State and monks.

The second goal of the religious policy, which is mentioned also in the report on the Labrang monastery is the „strengthening of democratic management” of monasteries. This policy aims at the establishment of the so-called Monastery Management Committees (Chin. *siyuan guanli weiyuanhui*, Tib. *dgon pa'i do dam u yon lhan khang*).²⁰ These administrative self-governing bodies appeared at least in theory already after the year 1958 (in Tibetan areas outside of Central Tibet) and in 1959 in Central Tibet in the course of the so-called democratic reform of monasteries (Chin. *siyuan de minzhu gaige*). At that time these committees designed by the state were supposed to carry out the religious policy in individual monasteries and reform them to meet the requirements of the state (Jiang et al. 1996, 105). During this early period this plan did not materialize but with revival of religion in Tibet, the state authorities again attempted to revive this system of administrative control. In the Labrang monastery, the Monastery Management Committee was established in the year 1981 and the establishment of this administrative body is an explicitly declared precondition for any reopened monastery in areas inhabited by Tibetans (e. g. Anon.1999b, 48). During the 1990s the state have striven to systematize the functioning of these committees and various regulations approved on the provincial level which dealt with the management of Buddhist affairs in areas inhabited by Tibetans, describe in great detail the organizational structure and personnel of committees.²¹ The leading positions in such committees are usually occupied by influential monks and reincarnations of the given monastery who are respected by the monk’s community. But according to these regulations the members of these committees must at the same time fulfill certain ideological criteria.²² The members of the committees are elected by the monks of the given monastery and subsequently the candidates must be approved by the local authorities (especially the Religious Affairs Bureaux). The selection process should guarantee that the monks loyal to Dalai Lama or supporters of Tibetan

²⁰ The terminology is not united and these bodies are sometimes called Monastery Democratic Management Committees.

²¹ For regulations approved in the Qinghai Province see Anon. 1999a, 41-45; in the Gansu Province Anon.1998, 163-168; in the Sichuan Province Anon.1999b, 48-51.

²² According to Article 5 of the Gansu Province Measures for the Management of Buddhist Monasteries (in Chinese *Gansu sheng fojiao simiao guanli banfa*) approved in January 1991 these monks should “support the leaders of the Party, love the nation and love the religion” (Anon.1998, 164).

independence would not gain positions and negatively influence the monk community as it was obviously sometimes the case in the 1980s (Anon.1998, 192). The term of office of committee members may be from one to three years and they may be then reelected. Under the auspices of the Monastery Management Committee there might be established various commissions which are responsible for a wide scope of issues ranging from the implementation of the Party policy (including the organization of political campaigns, publication and distribution of study materials, etc.), organization and management of daily business in the monasteries, up to economical issues, protection of cultural relics and reconstruction work in the monastery compounds. These administrative bodies represent an important tool of the state authorities with which they try to control the internal life of Buddhist monasteries. Their correct functioning and appointment of members who are loyal to the Party leadership is seen as a crucial measure in the implementation of religious policy in Tibetan Buddhism (Gong 1998, 352). The members of these bodies are often caught in between the loyalty to their monastery and religious roles, and the ideological requirements from the side of the authorities. However, the example of Labrang monastery shows that due to the fact, that the highest reincarnations of the monastery, namely the 6th Jamyang Zhepa Lozang Jigme Thubten Choekyi Nyima (*blo bzang 'jigs med thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma*, 1948-) and the late 6th the Sixth Gungthang Rinpoche Jigme Tenpe Wangchug (*gung thang rin po che 'jigs med bstan pa'i dbang phyug*, 1926-2000), who were installed in various positions at the provincial level after their rehabilitation in late 1970s,²³ have also held the positions of chairman and vice-chairman of the Labrang Monastery Management Committee, they were able to exert their influence for the sake of Buddhist community in Labrang and were successful in defending the religious and economic interests of the monastery *vis-à-vis* the Chinese authorities on the local and provincial level.

The third goal of the implementation of religious policy in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries is the so-called standardization and systematization of the administrative work within individual monasteries. The establishment of a set of rules regulating various particular activities (ranging from the entrance procedure of new monks, to measures related to the fire prevention) should lead to better administration of internal affairs of monasteries. Especially the issue of new monks has occurred as an important task in the post-1979 developments. Since the late 1980s the authorities have striven to limit the number of monks

²³ For example the 6th Jamyang Zhepa served in a number of positions including chairman of Gansu Provincial Buddhist Association and vice-chairman of the All-China Youth Federation. The 6th Jamyang Zhepa currently holds the position of vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of Gansu Provincial People's Congress.

and nuns in individual monasteries as the steady increase in the number of monks and nuns became an issue of concern (Anon.1999b, 14-15). The number of monks in the monasteries is restricted for both economic and political reasons. As stipulated by provincial regulations (e. g. Guojia 2000, 131) the local Religious Affairs Bureaux have fixed a certain quota of monks for every individual monastery and therefore only some monks have received the official status in the monastery and subsequently a long-term residence permit.²⁴ However, the authorities are well aware of the fact that the restrictions on the number of monks in monasteries have not been fully implemented and they perceive the current confusing situation, with a large number of monks without official registration participating in the life of the monasteries, as a serious problem (Anon.1998, 208; Wang 2002, 261), which must be dealt with urgently, but in a sensitive way in order to prevent potential conflicts. In average, the number of monks has been reduced by administrative measures approximately by one third in comparison with the situation in pre-1950 Tibet.²⁵ The size of monastic communities is also reduced due to the fact that according to Chinese regulations children under 18 years of age are officially prohibited from entering a monastery (Anon.1999b, 49; Anon.1998, 165). This provision is in deep contrast with the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of mass monasticism (especially in the Gelugpa school) and limits imposed on the age and number of monks and nuns are often mentioned in interviews with Tibetans as particular examples of violations of their freedom of religion.²⁶ The interference of state authorities into traditional religious procedures may also be illustrated using the example of the identification and enthronement of new reincarnations. Reincarnations, *tulkus*, have traditionally occupied a high status in Tibetan society and they embodied the supreme religious and often also political authority. The issue of the recognition of a new Buddhist reincarnation in Tibet was highlighted in 1995 when the choice of the 11th Panchen Lama stirred

²⁴ For instance in the case of Labrang, in 2001 the monastery contained about 2300 monks. These monks fall into two categories: 1100 monks who reside in the monastery with the official approval of the Chinese authorities; and about 1200 monks with long-term residence in Labrang who are not officially allowed to stay there. The “official” and “unofficial” residents in Labrang differ in that the latter cannot participate in the common rituals in the main hall (*tshogs chen 'du khang*) and in the fact that their status is more vulnerable.

²⁵ According to Chinese figures, there were 114 100 monks in Central Tibet in 1958 and about 42 500 monks in 1994 (Yan 2000, 17).

²⁶ However, as it is the case with the fixed numbers of monks, there are numerous monks younger than 18 years in Tibetan monasteries, and this has been so far tolerated by the local authorities as far as the monastic communities have not engaged in political activities directed against the state. Some Chinese official publications even mention detailed numbers of these minor monks – for instance in the Tibetan autonomous prefecture Gannan in the southern part of the Gansu Province they represented about 20% of all monks in 1990 (Coll. 1999a, 1738).

a controversy between the Dalai Lama's government in exile and the Beijing government. The issue of the identification of new reincarnations is important for the process of religious revival as it was prohibited by the authorities in the years 1958-1959 and revived as late as in 1990. The Chinese authorities have been striving to acquire the highest authority in the final approval of a candidate who has traditionally been identified and enthroned by the Buddhist dignitaries using established procedures and completely eliminate the influence of the Dalai Lama or the government in exile on the process (Anon. 1998, 198). The authorities have decided to create a register of the tulkus which are allowed to be reincarnated (Anon. 1998, 195).²⁷ There is a ban on the search for reincarnation on tulkus who have escaped to India or were indulged in separatist activities (Anon. 1998, 195). The process has always to be closely supervised by the different administrative levels of the Religious Affairs Bureau and according to Chinese documents should be conducted under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party (Anon. 1998, 194; Ackerly 1993, 91; Anon. 1999b, 12-13) This is valid not only for the highest reincarnations in Tibet such as the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, but also for all the local reincarnations who have traditionally played an important role in the religious and social life of Tibetan Buddhist communities. The attempt of the Chinese authorities to subordinate the process of the choice of a new reincarnation to a dull set of bureaucratic regulations, which deal in great detail with the territorial, social,²⁸ and organizational aspects of the search, identification and enthronement, illustrates the deep contrast between the administrative perception of religion by the state bodies in charge and the spiritual understanding of it. The authorities also stress the importance of the education of young tulkus who should not be influenced by the exiled government and should become loyal to the Chinese regime (Anon. 1998, 197).²⁹ The control of the process of search, identification, recognition and education of new tulkus is seen as another important task in the religious work in Tibet (Wang 2002, 257, 261).

²⁷ In 1930s the Guomindang government has formulated measures for the process of identification and registration of reincarnations in Tibet (Coll. 1999b, 66-77). This precedence may serve as an illustration of the continuity of religious policy towards Tibetan Buddhism since the period of Imperial China.

²⁸ Instructions explicitly warn that new reincarnations should not be searched for between children of Party cadres on county and higher administrative levels and children of public officials on village/town and higher administrative levels (Anon. 1998, 195).

²⁹ For these purposes provincial Buddhist Institutes (*foxueyuan*) and the highest state-sponsored educational institution for Tibetan Buddhist monks (mainly high reincarnations), namely the Beijing Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies (Chin. *Beijing gaoji foxueyuan*) founded in 1987 by the late 10th Panchen Lama, are supposed to provide the Tibetan reincarnations and monks with high-level education not only in the field of Buddhist studies, but the state authorities simultaneously strive to educate influential Tibetan religious authorities in loyalty to the Chinese state and the Party.

The last goal of the religious policy focuses on the economic issues. Due to their political influence and as a result of high social status in pre-1950 Tibet the monasteries held 37 percent of arable land (Goldstein 1989, 3) and the population subordinated to a monastery had to pay taxes to it and provide it with various services. These represented the main source of income of the numerous monasteries while some of them, usually the most important, were also financially supported by direct subsidies from the central Lhasa government. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China these privileges were also guaranteed by the Beijing government but in the late 1950s, in the course of the implementation of the „democratic reform of the monasteries” Tibetan Buddhist institutions were completely deprived of their possessions and all the formal economic links between monasteries and local populations were broken off. After 1980 these possessions have not been returned to the monasteries. The Chinese authorities have perceived the monasteries as a heavy financial burden for the Tibetan population³⁰ and explicitly warn against the restoration of the „feudal religious privileges and the system of oppression and exploitation” (Chin. *fengjian zongjiao tequan he yapu boxue zhidu*) (Anon. 1998, 201; Guojia 2000, 130). In discussing the role of religion in Tibetan society, Chinese authors very often use economic reasons (this line of argumentation does not play an important role in discussions on religious work in other state-tolerated religions in China) which should support the limits and restrictions imposed on the monasteries (e. g. Ciwang 2001, 181-182). The monasteries are depicted as the major obstacles to modernization, social and economic development as they do not contribute to the production. The state authorities do not provide financial support for the monks and they depend on the financial help of their relatives and on local people who give them alms. The aim of the Chinese authorities is that the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries will provide services and organize self-supporting production units, which will finance their religious activities, and this forms part of official policy towards Tibetan monasteries, under the slogan „let the monastery support itself” (Chin. *yi si yang si*, Tib. *dgon par brten nas dgon pa skyong*) (MacInnis 1989, 175; Anon. 1998, 205-206; Jiang et al. 1996, 108, 111) which have already started in mid-1980s. In order to implement this policy, the monasteries have established restaurants, shops and hostels, produce Tibetan medicine, etc. and are receiving Chinese and foreign tourists. These businesses should bring enough money to sustain the monastic communities.³¹ Economic

³⁰ The issue of financial burden of Buddhist monasteries for Tibetan population occurred already during a conversation between Mao Zedong and the 10th Panchen Lama in January 1961 (Coll. 2001, 214).

³¹ According to Chinese figures, in 1994 the Labrang monastery's income from these activities was 980 000 RMB (Anon. 1998, 206), while in 1986 this figure was only 420 000 RMB (Coll. 1999a, 1744).

activities influence the internal life of Buddhist institutions in a negative way and scarce financial resources limit the scope of religious activities.

In June 2001, during the Fourth Tibet Work Forum President Jang Zemin repeatedly stressed the importance of „strengthening the administration of religious affairs, striking those who use religion to carry out splittist criminal activities, and vigorously leading Tibetan Buddhism to adapt to socialism“ (Anon. 2002, 11) but the delegates have focused mainly on economic incentives which should contribute to the stabilization of situation in the TAR (Li Dezhu 2003, 88-96). In the field of religious work no new measures were designed to be implemented. During the 1990s the Party and government authorities have successfully implemented administrative, legal and organizational measures which have strengthened the official control of state apparatus in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries but did not solve crucial problems of religious work in Tibet such as the role and influence of the Dalai Lama or the size of monastic communities. Political campaigns and the lip-service monks and nuns have paid to Party and State did not change their traditional loyalty to the Dalai Lama. The divergent Chinese and Tibetan perceptions of the role of religion, religious institutions and religious figures in society have led and will inevitably lead to further confrontations and conflicts which will negatively influence the overall Chinese policy in Tibet of which the religious policy forms only a small, though very important part. As it was the case in former Communist countries in Eastern Europe, religions in China are considered to be „necessary evils“ (Földesi 1996, 245) which cannot be eradicated by force but must be tolerated and should adopt to socialism. According to some authors the Chinese government's change in religious policy is only a matter of time and opportunity as religion is a relatively easy area in which to make adjustments (Liu 2004, 161, 162). The example of Tibetan Buddhism - similarly as in the case of Islam and Uighurs - illustrates that religious policy is a complex issue which involves sensitive question of ethnic identity, territorial integrity, suitable and sustainable economic policy and therefore any predictions should be formulated with great caution and with regard to particular religion.

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Kommentar: Is that what coll. stands for?

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