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Tsering Topgyal<sup>1</sup>

Royal Holloway University of London  
United Kingdom

Прегледни рад

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## THE SECURITISATION OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM IN COMMUNIST CHINA

### Abstract

This article examines the troubled relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and the Chinese state since 1949. In the history of this relationship, a cyclical pattern of Chinese attempts, both violently assimilative and subtly corrosive, to control Tibetan Buddhism and a multifaceted Tibetan resistance to defend their religious heritage, will be revealed. This article will develop a security-based logic for that cyclical dynamic. For these purposes, a two-level analytical framework will be applied. First, the framework of the insecurity dilemma will be used to draw the broad outlines of the historical cycles of repression and resistance. However, the insecurity dilemma does not look inside the concept of security and it is not helpful to establish how Tibetan Buddhism became a security issue in the first place and continues to retain that status. The theory of securitisation is best suited to perform this analytical task. As such, the cycles of Chinese repression and Tibetan resistance fundamentally originate from the incessant securitisation of Tibetan Buddhism by the Chinese state and its apparatchiks. The paper also considers the *why, how, and who* of this securitisation, setting the stage for a future research project taking up the analytical effort to study the *why, how and who* of a potential desecuritisation of all things Tibetan, including Tibetan Buddhism, and its benefits for resolving the protracted Sino-Tibetan conflict.

**Key words:** Sino-Tibetan conflict; Tibetan Buddhism; religion; securitization; and insecurity dilemma.

This article examines the troubled relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and the Chinese state since 1949. In the history of this relationship, a cyclical pattern of Chinese attempts, both violently assimilative and subtly corrosive, to control Tibetan Buddhism and a multifaceted Tibetan resistance to defend their religious heritage, will be revealed. This article will develop a security-based logic for that cyclical dynamic, hinging on this central argument: the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese government see a rival in Tibetan Buddhism with local and national dimensions, prompting its repression at the slightest sign of threat to the Party-State. The fate of Tibetan language education is also examined briefly to demonstrate that the

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<sup>1</sup> [tsetop74@gmail.com](mailto:tsetop74@gmail.com)

same argument holds across a range of cultural fields. For these purposes, a two-level analytical framework will be applied. First, the framework of the insecurity dilemma will be used to draw the broad outlines of the historical cycles of repression and resistance. However, the insecurity dilemma does not look inside the concept of security and it is not helpful to establish how Tibetan Buddhism became a security issue and continues to retain that status. The theory of securitisation is best suited to perform this analytical task.

Accordingly, this article is organised into four key sections. First, the theoretical framework will be introduced in the following section. The next section gives a brief overview of Tibetan Buddhism. Then, the historical cycles of the insecurity dilemma surrounding Tibetan Buddhism from 1949 to the present day will be chronicled. The fourth section examines how Tibetan Buddhism has been constructed and reconstructed as a security issue by the Chinese Party-State, before concluding the article.

### **The Insecurity Dilemma and Securitisation: two-level analytical framework**

The insecurity dilemma begins when an insecure state, owing to a sense of state weakness, engages in state-building to increase its security in terms of nation-building, institutional integration and infrastructural development. However, other groups—ethno-national, racial, religious, linguistic and ideological—within that state interpret the state's policies and practices [state-building] as threatening their identities, and resist in ways that are almost as multi-faceted as the arsenal of statecraft, and unwittingly enhances the state's sense of weakness and insecurity.<sup>2</sup> A caveat: while the possibilities in terms of the adversarial non-state groups are legion, this article will use the Tibetans as an ethno-religious group living within the frontiers of a multi-national imperial state. Paradoxically, while the state and its adversarial groups begin with the motive of improving their respective security conditions, both ends up having less security, locking them into perverse cycles of state-building and resistance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tsering Topgyal, "The Insecurity Dilemma and the Sino-Tibetan Conflict", PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012: 123-27; Brian L. Job (Ed.) *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992; John Glenn, "The Interrugnum: The South's Insecurity Dilemma," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1997: 45-63; Georg Sorensen, "After the Security Dilemma: The Challenges of Insecurity in Weak States and the Dilemma of Liberal Values," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2007: 357-378; Yong-Pyo Hong, *State Security and Regime Insecurity: President Syngman Rhee and the Insecurity Dilemma in South Korea, 1953-60*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> For more about the insecurity dilemma and its applications, see Brian L. Job, *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992; Mohammed Ayooob, "Security in the Third World: The Worm About to Turn?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 1, Winter 1983-84; "The Security Problematic of the Third World," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1991; *The Third World Security*

While the insecurity dilemma is helpful to set-up the cyclical interplay of the security competition between the state and its internal rivals, it does not look into the concept of security and fails to help us understand how something treated as a security issue becomes one in the first place and gets perpetuated over time. The theory of securitisation, developed by the Copenhagen School of security studies, serves this purpose the best.<sup>4</sup>

The Copenhagen School differentiates itself from the treatment of security issues as objectively or subjectively present by traditional and constructivist security theories by treating all public issues as lying on a spectrum ranging from non-political (not on the state's agenda) through political (statist agenda) to securitised (extra-legal and beyond politics, i.e. presenting an issue as an existential threat requiring emergency or extraordinary counter-measures).<sup>5</sup> Hence, security is a special kind of politics. The Copenhagen School's distinctive trade-mark is the treatment of security as a "speech act" or discursive construction of security. Speech acts "bring into being *as* a security situation by successfully representing it as such."<sup>6</sup> As Buzan, Waever and de Wilde wrote:

For the analyst to grasp this act [securitisation], the task is not to assess some objective threats that "really" endanger some object to be defended or secured; rather, it is to understand the processes of constructing a shared understanding of what is to be considered and collectively responded to as a threat. The process of securitisation is what in language theory is called a speech act. It is not interesting as something more real; it is the utterance itself that is the act. By saying the words, something is done (like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship).<sup>7</sup>

Any issue (not just political and military issues) can be placed in the security realm when a securitising actor (state as well as non-state) defines to an audience that there is an existential threat to one or more values (referent objects that include national defence, regimes, sovereignty,

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*Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995; Georg Sorensen, "After the Security Dilemma: The Challenges of Insecurity in Weak States and the Dilemma of Liberal Values," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2007: 357–378; John Glenn, "The Interrugnum: The South's Insecurity Dilemma." *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1997: 45-63; Yong-Pyo Hong, *State Security and Regime Insecurity: President Syngman Rhee and the Insecurity Dilemma in South Korea, 1953-60*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1998; Ulrik Pram Gad and Karen Lund Petersen (Eds.) "Special issue on The Politics of Securitization," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 42, Issue 4-5, August-October 2011; Michael C. Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 47, 2003: 511–31; Thierry Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitisation: Political Agency, Audience and Context," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 11, 2005: 171- 201.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: 23-4; Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009: 214.

<sup>6</sup> Williams 2003: 513.

<sup>7</sup> Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998: 26; Williams 2003: 513.

state institutions, ideology, economy, identity, environment, and so on) and recommends counter-measures that violate the normal social rules, legal strictures and political relations.<sup>8</sup> What differentiates successful securitisation from an unsuccessful one (a mere securitising move) is the audience's acceptance or rejection of the securitising actor's presentation of an issue as existentially threatened and its recommendation of emergency defensive measures.<sup>9</sup> A successful securitisation therefore contains three features: "existential threats, emergency action and effects on inter-unit [political] relations by breaking free of rules."<sup>10</sup> There are two facilitating conditions for a successful securitisation: "(1) the internal, linguistic-grammatical [the grammar and vocabulary of security and constructing 'a plot that includes existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out']...and (2) the external, contextual and social" i.e. the social standing or capital of the securitising actor and the nature of the threat.<sup>11</sup>

It is necessary to clarify here that it is neither necessary to utter the specific word "security" nor is its utterance more facilitating of securitisation. As the Copenhagen School writes:

It is important to note that the security speech act is not defined by uttering the word *security*. What is essential is the designation of an existential threat requiring emergency action or special measures and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience.<sup>12</sup>

Another caveat is that securitisations can become sedimented "rhetorically and discursively, culturally, and institutionally" to make them subject to probabilistic analysis.<sup>13</sup> This is especially relevant when we are dealing with socially constructed 'objects' like identity.<sup>14</sup> Because it is beyond the scope of this article to develop the theory or engage in a comprehensive critical review, these basic insights of securitisation theory will inform the examination of how the Chinese have securitised Tibetan Buddhism later on. Before that, a short overview of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is in order.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998: 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 26; Williams 2003: 514.

<sup>11</sup> Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998: 32-3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid: 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid: 27-8; Williams 2003: 514.

<sup>14</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, 'Slippery? Contradictory? Sociologically Untenable? The Copenhagen School Replies,' *Review of International Studies*, Volume 23, 1997: 107.

### Tibetan Buddhism: an overview

Buddhism first came to Tibet in the 7<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of the Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo (617/18-649/50). One of his descendants Emperor Trisong Detsen (A.D. 756-797) declared Buddhism as the state religion and showered imperial patronage to Buddhist practitioners and institutions, including appointing monks to the most important ministerial positions.<sup>15</sup> By inviting renowned Indian Buddhist masters, principally Shantarakshita, Kamalashila and Padmasambhava, Trison Detsen laid a strong foundation for the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet.<sup>16</sup> The first Tibetan monastery of Samye was constructed and a set of seven Tibetans became the first Tibetans to come fully ordained monks.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Trisong Detsen also presided over a spiritual debate between the Chan Chinese monks and Indian Buddhists, which the latter won with great religious-historical significance for the development of Tibetan Buddhism. Trisong's great grandson, Tri-ralpachen (806-841) further expanded this state-patronage to the Buddhist clergy,<sup>18</sup> to the great displeasure of the practitioners of Bon, the original religion of Tibet, and arguably also some secular minded personalities in his court. Tri-ralpachen was assassinated in 841, after which, his elder brother Udum Tsenpo, more popularly known as Lang Dharma (A.D. 803-46), ascended to the throne. Depending on which source one is using, Lang Dharma was either a rabid anti-Buddhist ruler, who destroyed Buddhism in favour of Bon, or a secular reform-minded emperor who was concerned about the fact that patronage towards Buddhism was taking away resources from the considerable administrative and military requirements of an empire stretching from Eastern Afghanistan in the West to China in the East and parts of present day South Asia in the South to the Tarim basin (Central Asia) in the North.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the reasons, Lang Dharma himself was assassinated by a Buddhist monk

<sup>15</sup> Stein, R.A., *Tibetan Civilisation*, London: Faber and Faber, 1972: 141-43.

<sup>16</sup> ཚལ་པ་ཀུན་དགའ་རྗེ་ (Tsalpa Kunga Dorje), དེབ་ཐེང་དམར་པོ། (The Red Annals), དུང་དཀར་ལྗོ་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས། (Dhungkar Lobsang Thinley) (Ed.), Beijing: མི་རིགས་དབུ་ཁྱེན་ཁང་། (Nationalities Publishing House), 1993: 36-38 (hereafter, The Red Annals); Blondeau, Anne-Marie and Buffetrille, Katia (Eds.) *Authenticating Tibet: Answers to China's 100 Questions*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2008: 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Red Annals 1993: 37.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid: 143.

<sup>19</sup> Red Annals 40-41, like most Buddhist sources, claims that Lang Dharma “destroyed the Buddha’s dharma”. On the contrary Karmay argues that Lang Dharma merely reduced the level of state patronage towards monastic Buddhism in light of the pressures for material resources for administering a sprawling empire and man power for administrative and war-fighting capacity. See བསམ་གཏན་མཁར་མེད། [Samten Karmay] བཅོན་པོ་ལྷ་སྐུ་དང་མ་དང་དེའི་རྗེས་སུ་བྱུང་བའི་རྒྱལ་རབས་མདོར་སྐྱེས། [Royal History of the Divine Prince Dharma and the Aftermath] རྗེ་མཁས་ལཱ། [Dharamsala], 1986.

around 846. His death was followed by a divisive power-struggle between two of his queens, each of whom claimed to have a son fathered by the emperor.

Lang Dharma's death spelt the breakup of the Tibetan empire. Tibetans call this the 'time of fragmentation (གསེས་བྱེད་ལུས་) or fragmentation (གསེས་བྱེད་ཆེད་). In the next one hundred years, for reasons that even historians have still not ascertained, Buddhism disappeared from much of Tibet. Tibetans refer to the spread of Buddhism in Tibet up to this point as the "Early Propagation of the Faith" (བསྟན་པ་ལྔ་དུས་). Starting from the Eastern and Western peripheries of the erstwhile empire, Buddhism began to be revived in what Tibetans call "resuscitating the embers of the faith" (བསྟན་པའི་མེ་ལོ་གསོ་སྦྲོམ་པ་) or the "Latter Propagation of the Faith" (བསྟན་པ་ལྔ་ལྔ་དུས་). It was during this period, roughly starting in the later part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, when the four sects of Tibetan Buddhism began to take shape. Those who remained faithful to or traced their tradition to the Buddhist masters of the above-mentioned imperial period came to be known as Nyingmapa (རྣམ་ཐུག་པ་), or the Ancient Ones. Around 1073, an ancient noble family founded the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> The various sub-sects of Kagyu (བཀའ་རྒྱུད་) also originated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> Building upon an order, which originated as Kadampa in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Tsongkhapa founded the Geluk (དགེ་ལུགས་) sect in 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the followers of Bon, the indigenous religion of Tibet, had also organised themselves doctrinally and institutionally along similar lines as the rival Buddhist sects. In fact, the Bonpos and the Buddhists had borrowed from each other extensively in terms of philosophy, rituals and institutions that they have become almost indistinguishable from each other. It is not without reason that Bon teachers in the West promote their religion as "Bon Buddhism".<sup>22</sup> Especially among the Buddhist sects, they differ from each other only ritually and on the emphasis that they put on certain practices, but they share the same fundamental tenets. This has been the case down to the modern times. Therefore, any analysis dealing with religion in Tibet has to be sensitive to this diversity amidst uniformity. Any analysis of the politics of Tibetan Buddhism also has to take account of what it means for the Tibetans.

Buddhism is at the core of Tibetan culture, society and national identity. It is the chief source of national pride. As Goldstein wrote, "Tibetan Buddhism...exemplified for Tibetans the

<sup>20</sup> ལུན་ཚོག་ཚེ་རིང་གིས་ཚུམ་སྒྲིག་བྱས། [Phuntsok Tsering (Ed.)] བོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་དོན་ཚན་རེུ་མིག། [A Chronology of Key Events in Tibetan History], བོ་ཅིང་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུར་ཁང་། (Beijing: People's Printing Press), 1991: 17; Stein 1972: 75.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See the website of Ligmincha Institute, based in America, for instance, available at <https://www.ligmincha.org/>.

value and worth of their culture and way of life and the essence of their national identity. It is what they felt made their society unique and without equal.”<sup>23</sup> This is why the Tibetans have always resisted foreign rulers when they were seen as threats to Tibetan Buddhism, even when they have tolerated violations of Tibetan independence or autonomy. This presents a dilemma for the Chinese, which captures Beijing’s policy dilemma:

[B]y suppressing Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan resentment and hence the longing for freedom are increased; but by adopting a liberal policy, the very cultural system that most encourages the Tibetans to identify themselves apart from China continues to flourish.<sup>24</sup>

From the Tibetan perspective, even during the more liberal era of the 1980s, the Chinese have been hostile towards Tibetan Buddhism, albeit with more subtle measures. The following historical analysis shows that repressive Chinese policies in an area that the Tibetans hold so dear to their hearts would only lead to confrontation.

### **Tibetan Buddhism under Communist China: Cycles of Repression and Resistance**

After 1949, when the Communist Party of China (CCP) led by Mao Zedong took over power in China and began to “liberate” the Tibetan regions, Tibetan Buddhism went through a number of phases ranging from the apparent tolerance in the first few years to the most cataclysmic periods of the so-called Democratic Reforms and the Cultural Revolution to a short but intense moment of revival in the 1980s to the increasingly repressive policies beginning in the 1990s and lasting to these days. Within these broad phases, there were regional variations operating across the legal demarcations of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), or Central and Western Tibet (CWT) which corresponds roughly to the Tibetan areas formerly under the rule of the Dalai Lama’s government in Lhasa, and the Tibetan regions to the east which have been incorporated into Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces—The Tibetans refer to these eastern regions as Kham and Amdo provinces. This section charts these developments in the last six decades since 1949.

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<sup>23</sup> Goldstein 1998: 6; see also Mathew Kapstein, “Concluding Reflections” in Melvyn C. Goldstein and Mathew Kapstein (Eds.) *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998: 139-49 and Kapstein 2004: 230-69.

<sup>24</sup> Kapstein 1998: 149.

*Repression in the East, Gradualism in CWT (1949-1959)*

As soon as the CCP won the Chinese civil war, they immediately began the task of “liberating” the Eastern Tibetan regions, which had been under Chinese rule since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Central and Western Tibet (CWT), ruled by the Dalai Lama’s government in Lhasa, had been exercising *de facto* independence since at least the Tibetans drove out the Qing officials and soldiers after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Not only did the Chinese lack any physical presence there, CWT also possessed a level of international personality. Therefore, CWT had to be “liberated” very differently: either through an agreement with the Tibetan government or through invasion. Accordingly, the Chinese government told Lhasa to send representatives to discuss the “peaceful liberation” of Tibet, but when the Tibetan delegation did not reach Beijing in time, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) attacked and occupied Chamdo, the Tibetan town closest to the border between CWT and the nominally Chinese-controlled Kham.<sup>25</sup> After demonstrating its military power and threats of further use of force, the Chinese compelled the Tibetans to sign the so-called “17-Point Agreement” for the “liberation of Tibet” on 23 March, 1951.<sup>26</sup> The Agreement required the Tibetans to accept Tibet as a part of China and the stationing of Chinese soldiers in CWT and the ceding of the powers foreign and defence relations to Beijing. However, the Agreement also assured the Tibetans of regional autonomy, preservation of the existing socio-political system in Tibet, including the powers and privileges of the Dalai Lama and the aristocratic and monastic elite. The agreement also promised to respect and protect Tibetan religious, linguistic and cultural freedoms. Reforms would only be conducted by the Tibetan authorities if demanded by the Tibetan people. It should be pointed out straightaway that this Agreement only applied to the Tibetans in CWT and not the Eastern Tibetans of Kham and Amdo on the legality that these regions were not under the rule of the Lhasa government since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup>

Treating the Eastern Tibetans as no different from the Chinese, the Communist authorities subjected them to radical communist reforms beginning around 1954.<sup>28</sup> Immediately after the Communists overran eastern Tibet in 1949, they started building the administrative and

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<sup>25</sup> Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947*, New York: 1999:34-45.

<sup>26</sup> “The Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet” Beijing, 23 March, 1951. Dawa Norbu, *China’s Tibet Policy*, Richmond: Curzon, 2001:179-209.

<sup>27</sup> Norbu 2001: 215.

<sup>28</sup> Norbu 2001: 215; Shakya 1999:136-37 makes the same argument.



Party structures there. By 1956, Eastern Tibet was organised into Tibetan autonomous districts.<sup>29</sup> By 1953, the Communists started land reforms targeting the monasteries and local elites, classifying people into different class groups, confiscating weapons and forcibly settling nomads, beginning in Gyalthang, Kham (Yunnan).<sup>30</sup> The officials and PLA travelled from village to village confiscating land and property from landlords and traditional leaders and redistributing these with great ‘propaganda and fanfare’ to the poor, albeit after taking the best of everything for themselves, including land and livestock.<sup>31</sup> Land and property redistribution was accompanied by persecution of landowners and traditional leaders through ‘struggle sessions’ (འཇམ་འཛིང་), public humiliations, and arrests in order to eliminate any potential leadership for resistance. However, many of these social, political, and religious leaders were not regarded as class exploiters even by the lower-class Tibetans, but as respected and revered figures representing Tibetan cultural, religious and national identity. The communist reforms went beyond taking away the autonomy of the local elite to humiliating and persecuting them in public.

The Chinese call these ‘Democratic Reforms’ to abolish ‘serfdom, a grim and backward feudal system’ and claim that it was the ‘yearning of the overwhelming majority of the Tibetan people.’<sup>32</sup> However, they were also a ruse to ‘expose and eliminate all Tibetan opponents to Chinese rule...facilitating not only Chinese control over Tibet but social control as well.’<sup>33</sup> The Chinese pushed on with the reforms despite popular opposition and the appeals of the Dalai Lama and local Tibetan elites like Geshe Sherab Gyatso.<sup>34</sup> The Eastern Tibetans saw the reforms first and foremost as an attack on their value system and identity.<sup>35</sup>

Tibetans of all classes and regions were united by a common culture and their faith in Buddhism and deeply resented the reforms that threatened the existence of their religious institutions.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the Tibetan regions of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan rose up in violent rebellions attacking Chinese civilian and military personnel in their localities.<sup>37</sup> When Tibetan villagers resisted land reforms, the ensuing fighting forced them to seek sanctuary

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<sup>29</sup> Shakya 1999: 137.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid: 138.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid: 37.

<sup>32</sup> State Council, ‘Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet’ 2 March, 2009; available at <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/gdxw/t539939.htm>. Hereafter, *White Paper on Democratic Reform in Tibet*.

<sup>33</sup> Smith 2008: 36.

<sup>34</sup> Shakya 1999: 143-44.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid: 143; Norbu 2001: 216.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid: 143.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid: 139.

in local monasteries, which the PLA besieged and bombed from the air.<sup>38</sup> Hundreds of Khampas and Amdowas fled to central Tibet bringing news of the persecution of monks and religion in their homelands. As the fighting continued in the east, the number of refugees in and around Lhasa increased to about 58,000 families, according to one estimate.<sup>39</sup>

Far from winning over the lower classes, Democratic Reforms ignited a broad-based Tibetan resistance. The persecution of the local elites ‘was more successful in creating resistance to the Chinese than it was in creating “proletarian class consciousness.”’<sup>40</sup> While the United Front was able to co-opt some members of the upper class, they failed to anticipate the nationalistic reaction engendered by their persecution of the non-cooperative elements. The Tibetans simply saw the collaborators as traitors and the rebellious ones as national heroes. In retrospect, treating more than half the Tibetan population that lived outside Lhasa’s rule as Chinese and conducting radical communist reforms was a fundamentally flawed policy.<sup>41</sup> It added more fuel to the powder-keg that the Chinese-Tibetan relations were fast turning into in Lhasa. Sure enough, Lhasa erupted in a massive uprising on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1959, which led to a violent Chinese suppression, the flight of the Dalai Lama to India and the dissolution of the traditional Tibetan government.<sup>42</sup>

*The Lhasa Uprising (10<sup>th</sup> March) and Democratic Reforms Everywhere (1959-1966)*

This epochal event of the 10<sup>th</sup> March uprising in Lhasa, which the Tibetans commemorate every year as the Tibetan National Uprising Day, cleared the way for the Chinese to impose the above-mentioned Democratic Reforms in all Tibetan regions, including the destruction of most aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. The Panchen Lama’s Petition submitted to the Central Chinese authorities in 1962 was most scathing and detailed in its criticism of the Chinese brutalisation of Tibetan religion during the so-called Democratic Reforms:

“Before democratic reform, there were more than 2,500 large, medium and small monasteries in Tibet. After democratic reform, only 70-odd monasteries were kept in existence by the government. This was a reduction of more than 97%... In the whole of Tibet in the past, there was a total of about 110,000 monks and nuns. Of those possibly 10, 000 fled abroad, leaving about 100, 000. After democratic reform

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid: 140-41.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid: 142; Norbu 2001: 221.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid: 38.

<sup>41</sup> Norbu 2001: 215-227; Smith 1996: 387-450.

<sup>42</sup> For comprehensive academic treatments of the 1959 Lhasa Uprising, see Shakya 1999: 185-211; Norbu 2001: 210-227; Smith 1996: 440-50; Knaus 1999: 160-9.

was concluded, the number of monks and nuns living in the monasteries was about 7,000 people, which is a reduction of 93%....”<sup>43</sup>

By “Tibet” here, the Panchen Lama, means TAR, but in Eastern Tibet “the level of seriousness, the length of time and the scale [of the destruction and suppression of religion] are a great deal worse than in Tibet.”<sup>44</sup> Another Tibetan Lama, Arjia Rinpoche, who rose to the highest echelons of the religious bureaucracy in China and subsequently escaped to America writes about the suppression of Buddhism in his monastery, Kumbum, in Qinghai:

By now [late 1950s] the fervor of the Communist Religious Reform Movement had led to the total suppression of all religion. Kumbum has been closed as a working monastery for several months, and monks were longer allowed to wear robes. Classified by the Communist Chinese as members of the exploiting class, they were forced to perform slave labor.<sup>45</sup>

This punctures the widespread belief that the destruction of religion in Tibet began only during the Cultural Revolution. If Tibetan Buddhists felt that Democratic Reforms were repressive, worse was to come during the Cultural Revolution.

*The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976): Destroy the Four Olds*

Under Chairman Mao’s injunction to eliminate the Four Olds (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) or the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chinese and Tibetan Red Guards rampaged against Tibetan culture, religion and customs. Whatever the nature of the Cultural Revolution in China itself and whatever the original intentions of the authorities, every aspect of Tibetan culture was destroyed, ‘reformed’ or banned.<sup>46</sup> As Shakya contends, “The effect was to destroy Tibet’s separate identity. The Chinese now propagated a policy of total assimilation and Tibetan identity was reduced to the language alone, although...even this had come under attack.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> TIN, *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama*, London, 1997: 52. This contains both the Chinese original and TIN’s English translation. The Panchen Lamas are considered the second most important Tibetan spiritual leaders after the Dalai Lamas. The 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama chose to stay in Tibet and work with the Chinese rather than escape to exile. For this petition, the Panchen Lama was labelled an enemy of the party, people and socialism in 1964, persecuted with violent public ‘struggle-sessions’ and incarcerated for 14 years in prisons and house-detentions. However, the Panchen Lama was not the only Tibetan to criticise Chinese policies in those days. Geshe Sherap Gyatso, another Tibetan lama who supported the CCP from the beginning also attacked the policy towards Tibetan Buddhism and the disproportionate manner of the suppression of the rebellion in Tibetan regions. Shakya 1999: 270-1.

<sup>44</sup> TIN 1997: 104.

<sup>45</sup> Arjia Rinpoche, *Surviving the Dragon: A Tibetan Lama’s Account of 40 Years under Chinese Rule*, New York: Rodale, 2010: 38.

<sup>46</sup> Shakya 1999: 314-24; Goldstein 1997: 59.

<sup>47</sup> Shakya 1999: 322.

Goldstein concurs: “The Chinese Communist Party....placed Tibetan traditional culture and religion under severe attack.”<sup>48</sup> Since Buddhism permeated every aspect of Tibetan life and culture, it was a special target of the Red Guard.<sup>49</sup> Any expression of religion was prohibited and eradicated. The Tibetans were indoctrinated into believing that Buddhism, Bon and their folk expressions were backward superstitions. As Goldstein wrote,

The leaders of Tibet’s great monasteries were incarcerated...and most other monks were sent home or to other work units.... Private religious activities, including altars, were forbidden; religious structures, monasteries and prayer walls were torn down; and thousands of religious texts and icons were burned or desecrated.<sup>50</sup>

The fate of one specific monastery, Drepung, is illustrative. Drepung escaped the wholesale physical destruction, which could not be said about most other monasteries in Tibet, but the monks were prohibited from wearing their robes or exhibiting any signs of monkhood, indeed of Tibetanness, keep religious altars in their personal quarters. Religious beliefs and practices and spiritual leaders and practitioners were attacked in mass study sessions and struggle sessions.<sup>51</sup>

However, consistent with the cyclical logic of repression and resistance, even at the height of the Cultural Revolution, many Tibetans attempted to defend their religion, culture and identity, which went beyond the widespread phenomenon of concealing sacred objects to avoid destruction. For most of the Cultural Revolution in all parts of China, the Party Central had lost control of the campaign, which had dissolved into brutal factional in-fighting between rival groups of Red Guards divided along class lines.<sup>52</sup> In Tibet, the factional conflict played out between the Nyam-drel or United Front (གཉམ་འབྲེས་) and Gyen-log or Rebel (བྱུན་ལོག་) groups. The Tibetans in many parts of Central Tibet took advantage of this factional disarray to defend their religious culture.

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<sup>48</sup> Goldstein 1997: 59.

<sup>49</sup> Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, *Authenticating Tibet: Answers to China’s 100 Questions*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2008: 163.

<sup>50</sup> Goldstein 1998: 9-10.

<sup>51</sup> Goldstein “The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung Monastery” in *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999: 25. The memoirs of former Tibetan political prisoners contain graphic details of how religion and religious practitioners, indeed the entirety of Tibetan cultural heritage, were persecuted and eliminated throughout the Tibetan plateau. See for instance ལུ་བཟུན་མཁས་བཙུན། [Thupten Khetsun] དཀའ་ལྷན་ལོག་གི་བྱུང་བ་བརྗོད་པ། [Recounting a Life of Suffering] རྫོང་མ་ལ། [Dharamsala, India] བོད་ཀྱི་དབེ་མཛོད་ཁང། [Library of Tibetan Works and Archives] བོད་རྒྱལ་ལོ་ཡུན་ [Tibetan Royal Year 2134] རྒྱུ་ལོ་འུ་ལ། [1998]: 330-36; Palden Gyatso, *The Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk*, New York: Grove Press, 1997: 125-42.

<sup>52</sup> Fairbank and Goldman 1999: 392.

The most well-known example is the Nyemo Revolt of 1969.<sup>53</sup> Beginning in 1968, Tibetans in Nyemo County (west of Lhasa), led by Trinley Chodon, a nun claiming to be possessed by the spirit of Gongmey Gyalmo [གོང་མདེ་རྒྱལ་མོ་], the celestial aunt and advisor of Gesar, the mythical king in the Tibetan epic, Gesar of Ling [གཟིང་གེ་སར་], rose up in a violent rebellion that spread to eighteen counties.<sup>54</sup> Her fame spread far and wide because of her presumed prophetic and healing powers. Trinley and her supporters allied with *Gyenlog* because of its anti-establishment crusade against the *Nyamdrel* faction. *Nyamdrel* were associated with the destruction of Tibetan culture, the brutal suppression of the 1959 uprising and the enforcement of democratic reforms and most recently the commune system. With her charismatic leadership, she inspired the rural Tibetans to attack the Chinese officials and Tibetan collaborators, often with extreme brutality.<sup>55</sup> Her success inspired other Tibetans to claim to be mediums of one or another of *Gesar's* warrior-ministers, all claiming to be working for the restoration of Buddhism in Tibet.<sup>56</sup> The revolt culminated in attacks on the PLA in a village named Bagor, where twenty PLA soldiers and cadres were killed, and attacks on the headquarters of Nyemo County.<sup>57</sup> A huge contingent of PLA soldiers with reinforcements from other counties had to be deployed to subdue the rebels. The operation resulted in the death of many of the rebels and the arrest of the nun and her colleagues including a Lama who had performed the ritual, *Opening the Nerve Door* (མཚོ་སྐྱེད་ལྷན་སྐྱེད་), to spiritually prepare her for possession by Gongmey Gyalmo.<sup>58</sup> They were all executed in

<sup>53</sup> Shakya 1999: 343-47; 2002: 39-40; Smith 2008: 128; Goldstein 2009; Wang 2002: 98. There is a debate about whether it was primarily a nationalistic revolt or an economic struggle against the introduction of the commune system in central Tibet, with Goldstein and Wang privileging the economic rationale and others espousing the nationalist argument, but all of them agree that there was, at least, an ethnic dimension to the brutal conflicts of 1969. Goldstein 2009: 170.

<sup>54</sup> Goldstein 2009: 1 and 82; Shakya 1999: 345. Gesar is believed to be the longest epic in the world. In the epic, Gesar descends from heaven to subdue the demons that were destroying Buddhism in Tibet. Gongmey Gyalmo stays in heaven, but helps Gesar in his mission in Tibet through prophecies. Although there is little information on how the rebellion manifested in the other counties, Goldstein provides an account of what happened in the nomadic area of Phala, Ngamring County. There, achieving religious and economic freedoms were the main agenda of the nomads who took part in the rebellion. Goldstein 2009: 174-81.

<sup>55</sup> Shakya 1999: 345. *Gyenlog* and Trinley Chodon had a symbiotic relationship. While *Gyenlog* acquired thousands of rural Tibetan members because of her charismatic authority, the nun and her entourage found increasing space, at least temporarily, to revive some of Tibet's traditions and to fight for the restoration of Buddhism in Tibet.

<sup>56</sup> Goldstein 2009: 98-99. Of course, occasionally, they asserted rhetorical affiliation with Mao's leadership, which was a tactical ploy given the broader political state of affairs.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*: 122-36.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*: 144-161.

Lhasa in 1970.<sup>59</sup> Although economic reasons definitely played some role and it was entwined with the tumultuous factionalism of the Cultural Revolution, the Nyemo Revolt was primarily a ‘cultural response’ ‘inspired by the Tibetan’s desire to regain some measure of social, psychological and cultural freedom.’<sup>60</sup> It was provoked by ‘the constant attack on their culture by the Chinese.... The total negation of traditional Tibetan cultural and religious authority elicited an extreme response from the Tibetans.’<sup>61</sup> The violent and relentless socialist nation-building met an equally violent millenarian cultural response. Ultimately, the rebellion was brutally put down and the offensive against the Four Olds resumed unimpeded.

Consequently, what was left of Tibetan Buddhism after Democratic Reform had been completely destroyed by the time the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. The death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of the Gang of Four, headed by his wife Qiang Qing, paved the way for the ascension of Deng Xiaoping as the paramount leader of China in 1977. Deng initiated a series of economic and political reforms in China, which also led to a period of political liberalisation in Tibet

*Liberalisation, Revival and Reversal (1979-1989).*

Deng’s liberalisation, including the initiation of dialogue with the exiled Dalai Lama gave a sense of optimism to the bewildered Tibetans. Chinese-Tibetan relations in the post-Mao era began on a cautiously positive note. China began by releasing and rehabilitating a number of Tibetans who had taken part in the March 1959 rebellion and some officials of the former Tibetan government who had been imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution. The 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama was also released on 10 October, 1977 and politically rehabilitated in 1978,<sup>62</sup> followed by Bapa Phuntsok Wangyal.<sup>63</sup> Over 2300 Tibetans who were wrongly accused and incarcerated during the Cultural Revolution were also given monetary compensation.<sup>64</sup> Travel restrictions were relaxed, enabling some Tibetans in exile to visit Tibet and those in Tibet to travel to India and Nepal for family visits, pilgrimage and religious teachings. Beijing also initiated contact with the Hong Kong-based elder brother of the Dalai Lama, Gyalo Dhondup, resulting in his meeting with Deng in Beijing in 1979. Deng reportedly told Dhondup:

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid: 154. In total, 34 members of her group including herself were executed.

<sup>60</sup> Shakya 1999: 346.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Hilton 1999: 173.

<sup>63</sup> Goldstein, Siebensschuh, Sherap and Siebensschuh 2004.

<sup>64</sup> Shakya 1999: 373.

The basic question is whether Tibet is part of China or not. This should be kept as the criteria for testing the truth.... So long as it is not accepted that Tibet is an integral part of China, there is nothing else to talk about.<sup>65</sup>

Tibetan exile officials and western scholars have interpreted this as meaning that apart from independence, all other issues could be discussed.<sup>66</sup> This rather ambivalent statement became the basis of a dialogue process that lasted until 1993. Deng also invited the Dalai Lama to send fact-finding delegations to inspect the local situation inside Tibet, leading to four fact-finding delegations and two exploratory talks between 1979 and 1985. A mix of objective realities, pragmatic imperatives and confidence in the Tibetans' ideological loyalty to Beijing accounted for the relaxation of policy and initiation of dialogue, including allowing the exile fact-finding missions.

The CCP abandoned the Cultural Revolution-era policy of violent assimilation and returned to the traditional Chinese belief that the frontier-barbarians would voluntarily adopt the 'superior' and 'advanced' culture of the Chinese. This was also compatible with the Marxist idea of the eventual withering away of national and religious identities in favour of proletarian identity in the course of revolution.<sup>67</sup> However, conditions should be created conducive for such a process of 'acculturation' to work even if that meant giving ground temporarily. This opened up some space for the revival of Buddhism and other aspects of Tibetan culture.<sup>68</sup>

To be sure, relaxation in the religious sphere was sensitive and cautious. Despite the initial opening, considerable restrictions remained on religious freedom since the monasteries were seen as the nerve-centres of Tibetan nationalism and the biggest challenge to Chinese rule.<sup>69</sup> Although the Party was resigned to allowing some role for religion in Tibet, albeit wary of inflaming separatism,<sup>70</sup> it could not hide its true agenda with regard to religion in Tibet. In 1983, the Party had reiterated the ultimate withering away of religion as a matter of ideological and

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Norbu 2001: 316.

<sup>66</sup> Goldstein 1997: 61.

<sup>67</sup> Liu Xianzhao and Wei Shiming, 'On the protracted nature of the nationalities problem in the Socialist period,' *People's Daily*, 6 April, 1979. For English translation, see SWB, 1979: FE/6099/B/10.

<sup>68</sup> Blondeau and Buffetrille 2008: 164-68; Goldstein and Kapstein 1999; Mathew Kapstein, "A Thorn in the Dragon's Side: Tibetan Buddhist Culture in China," in Morris Rossabi (Ed.) *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004: 230-69.

<sup>69</sup> Goldstein 1997: 85; Shakya 1999: 419.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*: 419.

policy objectives.<sup>71</sup> As some scholars put it, the limited official tolerance of religion in Tibet was ‘purely strategic.’<sup>72</sup> Yet, it was not entirely up to the CCP. The spurt of religious revival in the early 1980s took everyone by surprise, rattling the Chinese officials.<sup>73</sup> Arjia Rinpoche wrote that much of this revival, including the renovation of monasteries and recognition of reincarnations happened largely outside the official framework.<sup>74</sup> Only when the scale of the revival became obvious, and the religious bureaucracy risked becoming irrelevant did the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) bring in regulations for monastic restoration and the recognition of reincarnate Lamas.<sup>75</sup> The CCP’s loss of control in Tibet, if not of China’s, was genuinely feared as an outcome of a separatist movement organised along ethnic, religious and linguistic lines. State and regime security were seen to be at stake.

The revival of Tibetan Buddhism was particularly dramatic in Kham and Amdo, where, as parts of neighbouring Chinese provinces, Tibetans also enjoyed more religious freedom there.<sup>76</sup> Many monasteries and temples that survived the Cultural Revolution were renovated and opened for worship and many that sustained damage were rebuilt.<sup>77</sup> Most of the renovation and rebuilding was made possible by the ‘vigorous’ faith of the Tibetans ‘who gave their time and money, and also with the funds collected by Tibetans in exile.’<sup>78</sup> However, some touristy sites like Potala and Norbu Lingka Palaces and Jokhang Temple in Lhasa received substantial state funding for renovation.<sup>79</sup> Rituals and various devotional activities such as pilgrimage, prostrations and prayer flags were permitted and religious scriptures were printed and openly circulated. Some lamas from exile travelled to Tibet to teach or direct renovation work, while others like the

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<sup>71</sup> This was outlined in an important document published in the Party’s theoretical journal *Red Flag*, 16 June, 1983. English translation is available in *Missiology: An International Review*, 1983, Vo. XI, No. 3: 267-89.

<sup>72</sup> Blondeau, in Blondeau and Buffetrille 2008: 161; Kapstein 2004: 242

<sup>73</sup> Ibid: 164; Shakya 1999: 402-4,

<sup>74</sup> Arjia Rinpoche, *Surviving the Dragon: A Tibetan Lama’s Account of 40 Years Under Chinese Rule*, New York: Rodale, 2010: 125-28.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Kapstein 2004: 239-45.

<sup>77</sup> Blondeau in Blondeau and Buffetrille 2008: 165-169.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid: 165-66. The latest White Paper on Tibetan culture claims that by the year 2000, 300 million Yuan were spent by the Chinese government to renovate 1,400 monasteries, and to conduct scientific excavations of Neolithic sites. State Council, *Protection and Development of Tibetan Culture*, Beijing, 25 September, 2008. Hereafter cited as White Paper on Tibetan Culture. Well-known monasteries outside TAR, such as Kumbum, Qinghai, also received state funding, but the overwhelming majority of monasteries were renovated and rebuilt either with the offerings of Tibetan devotees or donations from Chinese (Mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong) and foreign disciples of Tibetan Lamas. Blondeau and Buffetrille 2008: 166.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, who stayed in Tibet and became victims during the Cultural Revolution, were rehabilitated and resumed some of their traditional roles.<sup>80</sup>

However, liberalisation was intended to provide an opportunity for the last vestiges of superstitious belief to quietly wither away.<sup>81</sup> As Blondeau puts it, liberalisation was 'purely strategic'. As mentioned earlier, in 1983, the Party established 'the natural withering of religion' through socio-economic transformation as the long term goal of its religious policy, since ideology and coercion had failed during the Maoist era.<sup>82</sup> Such a sanguine view was ill-advised as the speed with which Tibetan Buddhism was revived in the 1980s unnerved the Chinese, and revealed the intense devotion that most Tibetans still felt towards the Dalai Lama. Between 1987 and 1993, monks and nuns led many pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa in support of the Dalai Lama, requiring the Chinese to impose martial law in 1989 and implement harsh new policies.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Marshal Law and Hard-Line Shift in Policy (1989-2008)*

The confluence of a number of internal and external events in Tibet and China in the late 1980s brought about a hard-line shift in Beijing's Tibet policy, particularly in the religious sphere.<sup>84</sup> In response to the pro-independence demonstrations and riots in Tibet, Wu Jinghua, the Yi minority Party Secretary of TAR, was replaced by Hu Jintao on 12 January, 1989. The central authorities ordered the imposition of martial law in Lhasa on 7 March, 1989, effective from 8 March. During a Politburo meeting, Beijing unveiled on 19 October, 1989, the hard-line policy of rejecting political liberalisation, repressive enforcement of stability and rapid economic development inside Tibet and the side-lining of the Dalai Lama.<sup>85</sup> It reflected a loss of faith in the liberal policies of the Hu Yaobang and Wu Jinghua to win Tibetan loyalty. In fact, they were seen as increasing nationalistic sentiments, leading to ethnic riots. It was also indicative of the

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<sup>80</sup> Shakyas 1999: 372-3. The Panchen Lama re-emerged in public in March 1978 for the first time since 1964. There are no available figures for the total number of monks, nuns or Lamas rehabilitated. Former Tibetan government officials imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution were also rehabilitated in late 1978. In January 1979, compensation was announced to former aristocrats and land-lords who were wrongly accused and lost property during the Cultural Revolution. 2300 people shared 7 million Yuan in compensation. Some prisoners involved in the 1959 uprising were also freed, although not given compensations.

<sup>81</sup> Kapstein 2004: 242.

<sup>82</sup> Shakyas 1999: 420.

<sup>83</sup> Goldstein 1997: 79-87. For a detailed analysis of the protests and riots during this period, see Schwartz, 1994.

<sup>84</sup> Topgyal 2012: 123-27.

<sup>85</sup> Rabgey and Sharlho 2004: 15.

loss of faith in the Dalai Lama to ‘play a constructive role in Tibet.’<sup>86</sup> In broad terms, the new policy came to be known as ‘grasping with both hands’, involving accelerated economic development through massive state subsidies and investment and ruthless enforcement of stability in Tibet through the use of the police, military and other security agencies.<sup>87</sup> A third element of the hard-line policy was a continuation of the Maoist-style political campaigns of mass mobilisation and ideological indoctrination.<sup>88</sup>

Especially after the failure of the Dalai Lama and Beijing to work together to choose the reincarnation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama in 1995, Beijing unleashed a series of campaigns against the Dalai Lama, banning his photographs and requiring monks, nuns and lay Tibetans to criticise him, which continues to foment unrest in various Tibetan regions. Since the 1990s, China has put increasing restrictions on Tibetan Buddhism in all Tibetan regions.<sup>89</sup>

Several instances show the fall-out of the vice-like control on religion that Chen Kuiyen and his subordinates and successors oversaw in the Tibetan regions. Two high ranking lamas, Arjia Rinpoche and the Karmapa, escaped into exile due to the continuing restrictions on religious study and practice and the requirements to criticise the Dalai Lama and legitimise the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama.<sup>90</sup> In February 1998, Arjia Rinpoche, who held high offices in the Chinese Buddhist Association and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee, escaped ‘the repressive climate’ which included being ‘coerced into publicly supporting China’s increasingly anti-Tibet agenda, including taking part in carefully orchestrated rituals engineered to undermine the authority of the Dalai Lama.’<sup>91</sup> The Karmapa escaped in 2000 citing restrictions on religion and the fear of being used by the Chinese to serve their anti-Tibetan agenda.<sup>92</sup> The demolitions in 2007 of the statues of an eighth century Indian saint Padmasambhava in Samye (funded by Chinese Buddhists from the Mainland) and Ngari testify to the continuing

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid; Goldstein 1997: 92-93; Shakya 1999: 433.

<sup>88</sup> Shakya 1999: 433; 196.

<sup>89</sup> Chen Kuiyen, ‘The Situation of Tibet and the Problems We Request the Central Authorities to Solve’, *Xizang de Jiaobu (Tibet Steps)*, February 1994: 134-136.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid: 244. Karmapa is the highest Lama of the Kagyu sect and considered the third most important Lama in Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. His defection gained added significance because he is the only Lama to be recognised by both the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government.

<sup>91</sup> Arjia Rinpoche 2010.

<sup>92</sup> ཨ་རིའི་རྒྱུ་འབྲིན་ཁང་གི་ཀུན་ལྷོང་ (VOA Kunleng), དབའ་རྒྱལ་བ་ཀུན་པ་མཚོག་ལ་དམིགས་བསལ་བཅར་འདྲི། (Interview with H. H. Karmapa), 15 July, 2011; available at <http://www.voanews.com/tibetan/programs/tv/95779544.html>; Mick Brown, *The Dance of 17 Lives: The Incredible True Story of Tibet's 17th Karmapa*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 5 April 2004.

restrictions on Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>93</sup> On 18 July, 2007, Beijing announced ‘Order No. 5’, a regulation essentially prohibiting Tibetan lamas from reincarnating without prior approval from the Chinese government.<sup>94</sup> Clearly, Beijing has the selection of the next Dalai Lama in mind, inflaming Tibetan resentment. Eastern Tibet has also come under increasing restrictions since the 1990s, exemplified by the fates of Serta Larungar Institute and Yachen Institute.

Serta Institute in Kham (Sichuan), started by the charismatic abbot Jigme Phuntsok in 1980 with 100 Tibetan students, grew into a monastic town with 9300 resident disciples, including about 1000 Mainland and overseas Chinese.<sup>95</sup> In June 2001, officials from Beijing came to Serta to reduce the number of monks and nuns to 1000 and 400 respectively, which led to the demolition of some 2000 dwellings.<sup>96</sup> The same fate befell Yachen Institute in Sichuan, just months after the crackdown in Serta.<sup>97</sup> A Chinese student, a middle-aged medical doctor, who joined Yachen after expulsion from Serta, summed up the rationale of fear behind the patriotic education campaign in Tibetan Buddhist institutes:

The [Chinese] authorities told teachers from Larung Gar and Yachen that they were forbidden to teach Vajrayana [referring to Tibetan Buddhism] to Chinese or to travel to China to teach. And they said that Chinese are forbidden to follow or receive Buddhist talks from Tibetan lamas. So many Chinese are coming to these areas where Tibetans usually live, but really the authorities don’t want us to have connections with any lamas here. *The Chinese government knows that the more people believe in the Buddha the more those people will respect the Dalai Lama. So it is a threat to the government’s idea of unity if either Tibetans or Chinese believe in the Buddha.*<sup>98</sup>

The death sentence later commuted to life in prison of Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, another popular reincarnate Lama, on allegations of masterminding a series of bomb-blasts in Chengdu is another illustration. The common thread in all these cases is that the CCP and the government sensed

<sup>93</sup> ICT, ‘Demolition of giant Buddha statue at Tibetan monastery confirmed by China’ 14 June, 2007; ICT, ‘Rare Protest as Tibetans Attempt to Save Buddhist Statue from Demolition’, 1 November, 2007.

<sup>94</sup> State Religious Affairs Bureau, ‘Order No. Five: Management Measures for the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism,’ 13 July, 2007.

<sup>95</sup> Mathew Kapstein, ‘A Thorn in the Dragon’s Side: Tibetan Buddhist Culture in China’ in Morris Rossabi (Ed.) *Governing China’s Multiethnic Frontiers*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004: 252; David Germano, ‘Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People’s Republic of China,’ in Goldstein and Kapstein 1998: 53-94.

<sup>96</sup> ICT, ‘When the Sky Fell to Earth: The New Crackdown on Buddhism in Tibet,’ 2004: 66. There is clear evidence from Western scholars who visited these Centres that large numbers of disciples had indeed congregated there. David Germano (University of Virginia) and Mathew Kapstein (University of Chicago) spent time doing research at Serta.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid: 69.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid: 71. Emphasis added.

rival power-centres with local and national dimensions. Such fear has prompted the repression of Tibetan Buddhism at the slightest sign of threat to the Party-State.

Therefore, after the Cultural Revolution, Beijing has adopted a policy of allowing limited religious practice but undermining the whole edifice of Buddhism by promoting materialism and atheism, as expounded by the Party's racial theoretician Li Dezhu, who until recently was the director of the State Nationality Affairs Commission.<sup>99</sup> Addressing the ideological and political threats from Tibetan Buddhism is a major concern for Chinese leaders. Initiated by Chen Kuiyen, Tibetan Buddhism has been a special target for his successors, not the least for Zhang Qingli, who described the Central Party Committee as the real Buddha for the Tibetans and enforced existing restrictions on religion ever more strongly.<sup>100</sup>

Predictably, the cumulative effect of these repressive policies and practices provoked the most serious and widespread Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule in Spring 2008.<sup>101</sup> Although, the uprising was overwhelmingly peaceful, it turned violent on a couple of instances, especially in Lhasa on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2008. The Chinese government claimed that 18 civilians and one policeman died and 382 civilians were injured on 14 March 2008.<sup>102</sup> The Tibetan Government-in-exile (TGIE) and rights groups claim that 220 Tibetans were killed, 5,600 arrested or detained, 1,294 injured, 290 sentenced and over 1,000 disappeared in the ensuing crackdown.<sup>103</sup> Not surprisingly, the protests all over the Tibetan plateau were mostly led by monks, which is why monasteries again became the key targets of the Chinese efforts to quell the uprising.

Monasteries were blockaded and Patriotic Education Campaign (PEC) was stepped up in all Tibetan regions. Leading an official delegation to Lhasa in 23-24 March, the Chinese Minister of Public Security, Meng Jianzhu, told members of the management committees of the Lhasa monasteries that the Dalai Lama is 'unfit to be a true follower of Buddhism, and called for

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<sup>99</sup> Michael Sheridan, 'Ethnic Repression in Tibet Masterminded by Faceless Chinese Trio,' *Times Online*, 23 March, 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Geoff Dyer and Richard McGregor, 'Tibet untamed,' *Financial Times*, April 1 2008.

<sup>101</sup> Tsering Topgyal, "Insecurity Dilemma and the Tibetan Uprising in 2008," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 20, Issue No. 69, March, 2011: 183–203.

<sup>102</sup> People's Daily, "18 civilians, 1 police officer killed by Lhasa rioters", 22 March 2008; "Appalling March 14 riot in Lhasa", 26 March 2009.

<sup>103</sup> Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGIE), "Fact Sheet: Tibetan deaths under China's crackdown since March 2008", (20 March 2009), available at: <http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id¼760&articletype¼flash&rmenuid¼morenews&tab¼1#TabbedPanels1>; "Dharamsala condemns Chinese court's death sentence for riots", Voice of America, 9 April 2009.

broader “patriotic education” in TAR.<sup>104</sup> In a Regulation publicised on 18 July, 2008 by the government of Kartze (Sichuan), “Order No. 2 of the People’s Government of Kartze TAP” threatened the entire monastic hierarchy with reprisals for anti-Chinese disturbances: monks and nuns who protest and refuse to ‘conform’ and submit to PEC will be expelled and their residence demolished; Tulkus and senior monks could be ‘stripped of the right to hold the reincarnation lineage’ for communicating with foreigners or engaging in anti-China protests; monasteries/nunneries where a specific percentage of monks/nuns have engaged in dissident activities will be banned from performing Buddhist rituals; and senior Buddhist teachers could face public ‘rectification’ or imprisonment if they ‘tolerated’ any protest activity, peaceful or otherwise.<sup>105</sup> In fact, some of the protests were direct responses to Chinese attempts to conduct PEC in monasteries and nunneries, which was demeaning and extremely provocative for the monks and nuns, not the least because of the requirement to denounce the Dalai Lama. On 1 April, the authorities conducted PEC inside Dza Wonpo Monastery, Dzachukha County, Kartze, ordering the monks to criticize and denounce the Dalai Lama and provoked a monk-led protest.<sup>106</sup> On 2 April, PEC was initiated in Ba Chode Monastery, Batang County, Kartze, resulting in clashes and arrests of monks, including the abbot and disciplinarian.<sup>107</sup> On 3 April, PAP and a PEC work unit ransacked Tongkor monastery, Kartze, confiscating mobile phones and throwing the photographs of the Dalai Lama and the monastery’s abbot to the ground, and ordered the monks to “curse” the Dalai Lama. The monks started a protest joined by lay Tibetans from that area, reportedly resulting in many fatalities.<sup>108</sup> Monks of Pada Sangdruling Monastery in Zachukha, Kartze, refused to cooperate in a PEC session on 26 April.<sup>109</sup> To be sure, PEC was intensified in other Tibetan regions and the cross-section of the lay population, including students, officials, farmers and nomads were also subjected to PEC, fomenting great

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<sup>104</sup> Maureen Fan, “Patriotic Education” Campaign: China Moves to Tighten Control Over Religion in Tibet, *Washington Post*, 26 March, 2008; ICT, “Mass detentions of monks, suicides and despair as enforced condemnation of Dalai Lama provokes dissent,” 29 April, 2008.

<sup>105</sup> Bod-ljongs Nyin-Re’i Tsags-par (Tibet Daily), “Dkar-mzes Bod-rigs Rang-skyong Khung Mi-dmangs Srid-gshung Gi Bka Ang-Gnyis-Pa (Measures for dealing strictly with rebellious monasteries and individual monks and nuns: Order No. 2 of the People’s Government of Kartze TAP),” 18 July, 2008; the Tibetan original is available at [http://zw.tibet.cn/news/xz\\_news/ttxw/200807/t20080718\\_413324.htm](http://zw.tibet.cn/news/xz_news/ttxw/200807/t20080718_413324.htm). This was also publicised in Richard Spenser, “China plans sweeping purge of Tibetan monasteries,” *Telegraph*, 27 July, 2008.

<sup>106</sup> Woenser, “Tibet Update (2).”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Woenser, “Tibet Update (May 1-6, 2008).”

resentment.<sup>110</sup> On top of these practices towards the monastic community, the Chinese have been busy promulgating measures to gain greater control over Tibetan Buddhism.

In 2007, the Chinese *State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)* passed ‘Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas [reincarnates] in Tibetan Buddhism’ or ‘Order No. 5’, which requires all Tibetan Lamas to petition the State for permission to ‘reincarnate’ and be approved by the appropriate state bodies.<sup>111</sup> In 2010, China passed ‘Management Measures for Tibetan Buddhism’ barring any foreign forces from interfering in Tibetan monasteries, temples and other religious sites.<sup>112</sup> Beijing has undoubtedly put these measures in place to undercut the Dalai Lama’s influence and crucially in anticipation of the selection of his reincarnation, but for both ecclesiastical and lay Tibetans, these are deeply offensive, striking at the very heart of Tibetan being. The cycle of Chinese repression and the Tibetan resistance, principally by the religious community, did not end there.

Unable to tolerate the general lack of freedom in Tibet, exacerbated by the repressive tactics adopted by the Chinese authorities to quell the Tibetan uprising since 2008, 42 Tibetans (35 men and 7 women) have self-immolated inside Tibet since February 27, 2009.<sup>113</sup> Of these, 18 were monks and nuns or former monks, mostly in Ngawa T&QAP, Sichuan. Self-immolation constitute the extreme end of what is a broad spectrum of resistance efforts on the Tibetan plateau ranging all the way to what Barnett called ‘strategic deception’ or Kapstein termed ‘dimorphism of values’—working within the Chinese system to work for Tibetan rights and protect Tibetan identity.<sup>114</sup> In between these ends, the Tibetans engage in street demonstrations and protests, clashes with security forces, putting up posters on walls and subtle cultural

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<sup>110</sup> The Economist, “Lhasa under siege”; Wong, “50 Years After Revolt, Clampdown on Tibetans”; Wong, “On Foot in the Mountains of Mystical Yunnan.”

<sup>110</sup> Fan, “‘Patriotic Education’ Campaign”; ICT 29 April, 2008.

<sup>111</sup> State Administration of Religious Affairs, ‘Management Measures for the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism,’ 18 July, 2007. The original Chinese is available on the website of SARA at <http://www.sara.gov.cn/GB//zcfg/89522ff7-409d-11dc-bafe-93180af1bb1a.html>. The English translation is available on the website of the Congressional-Executive Committee on China at <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.php?showsingl=98772&PHPSESSID=2a2c4245f4a54ce8dc1dae02eb9c7f14>.

<sup>112</sup> Global Times, ‘Foreign forces must not interfere in Tibetan Buddhism affairs: government,’ 9 October, 2010.

<sup>113</sup> ICT, “Self-Immolation Fact Sheet,” Last Updated: June 21, 2012. There have been at least 4 self-immolations among exile Tibetans in India and Nepal.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Barnett, ‘Beyond the Collaborator-Martyr Model: Strategies of Compliance, Opportunism, and Opposition within Tibet’ in Sautman and Dryer 2006: 25-66; Kapstein in Goldstein and Kapstein, 1998: 143-44. Of course, there are Tibetans such as Ragdi, Pema Thinley and Sithar who appear to serve CCP and the Chinese government loyally.

regeneration campaigns such as the Lhakar movement, singing songs of protest, writing poetry and essays of protest and producing artwork containing social and political satire and criticism. In most of these protests, Chinese suppression and efforts to control Tibetan Buddhism feature as a central subject. This is not surprising as Buddhism is central to life and society in Tibet. The upshot is that the Chinese and the Tibetans are caught in a cyclical process of Chinese attempts to control, if not undermine, Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan resistance to defend it. This cycle appears set to continue for the foreseeable future. However, what is driving this cycle at a fundamental level? The next and final section takes a stab at this important question.

### **Securitisation of Tibetan Buddhism**

The securitisation of Buddhism is of course embedded in the broader securitisation of most things Tibetan by the Chinese. Indeed, as this author critiqued in his doctoral thesis, most Tibetologists writing on the Chinese-Tibetan conflict tend to see Chinese policies and practices in Tibet as security-driven while treating the Tibetan struggle as ethno-nationalistic.<sup>115</sup> The security-salience of Tibet in Chinese perceptions can be discussed in terms of the three overlapping categories of *political security* (threats to CCP/regime security and legitimacy and territorial integrity, challenges to sovereignty and legitimacy of Chinese rule over Tibet, ideology, state institutions and international image), *military security* (loss of strategic advantage of the Tibetan plateau and the consequent vulnerability of the Chinese heartland on top of the above-mentioned political security concerns inasmuch as the PLA is still very much the Party's army) and *societal/identity security* (threats to national identity and nationalism, both state-led and Han supremacist).<sup>116</sup> Even one of the most liberal Mainland Chinese intellectuals, Wang Lixiong, once viewed Tibet solely through the lens of Tibet and warned Chinese leaders that Tibet is China's 'fatal "underbelly"'.<sup>117</sup> As pervasive as this perception is within contemporary Chinese officialdom, such views dates back to early 20<sup>th</sup> century: 'Tibet is a buttress on our national frontiers—the hand, as it were, which protects the face—and its prosperity or otherwise is of the most vital importance to China.'<sup>118</sup> Issues ranging from Tibetan language education to economic development in Tibet are seen in security terms by the central and/or local Chinese authorities.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Topgyal 2012: 8-11.

<sup>116</sup> For details, see Ibid: 160-71.

<sup>117</sup> SWB, 18 May, 1999: FE/D3537/G. Emphasis mine. Again, Wang has moved on from such worst-case, zero-sum thinking, but much of the Chinese officialdom is stuck in this hyper-realist worldview.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Tuttle, 2005: 44.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid: 129-71.

By now the securitisation of Tibet is discursively (and rhetorically) well-sedimented and deeply institutionalised. Discursively, “local nationalism”, “separatism” or “splittism”, “feudalism”, “theocracy” and “religious extremism” are perceived to threaten “social and political stability”, “national unity”, “national security”, “state power”, “unified leadership of the Communist Party” (regime security), “sovereignty”, “territorial integrity”, “socialism”, “Chinese constitution”, “regional national/ethnic autonomy” and “economic development.”<sup>120</sup> Once an issue becomes associated with open-ended threats like “local nationalism”, “separatism” or extremism and gets defined as a threat to any of the referent objects, it allows the Chinese officials at any level of the government to deal with that issue with harsh measures that could be interpreted as violating even the provisions of the Chinese Constitution and Autonomy Law. Tibetan language education and use in public is a case in point.

The right to use and develop the spoken and written languages of the nationalities is provided for in the Constitution and Autonomy Law.<sup>121</sup> Yet, Tibetan medium instruction is available only up to primary schools in TAR and as well as in the other provinces now.<sup>122</sup> In 2010, authorities in Qinghai province, where the freedom and quality of Tibetan language education has been greater, proposed using Chinese as the medium of instruction in all schools, provoking thousands of Tibetan students in a number of different places to protest openly.<sup>123</sup> One Western scholar lamented that ‘maintaining and improving Tibetan language education is proving to be a difficult uphill struggle.’<sup>124</sup> This represents a worsening situation even in comparison to the 1980s.

The hostility towards Tibetan medium instruction arises from its association with ‘separatism’.<sup>125</sup> As Bass observed, the strong connection between the Tibetan language and national identity has invited violent attacks during leftist periods in the past.<sup>126</sup> Even today,

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<sup>120</sup> Of course, this is only a partial list of the more frequently recurring identification of threats and security referent objects in the Chinese discourses on Tibet.

<sup>121</sup> PRC Constitution: Article 4. Autonomy Law: Article 10.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid; Heller and Blondeau in Blondeau and Buffetrille 2008: 235.

<sup>123</sup> The Guardian, ‘Tibetans protest against language curbs in Chinese schools,’ 20 October, 2010; ‘Tibetan student protests spread to Beijing’ 22 October, 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Kapstein 2004: 246-48.

<sup>125</sup> Paper on Educational Development in Tibet by a Tibetan scholar in Tibet, 1995: 85, quoted in Bass 1998: 249.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid: 229.



merely talking about Tibetan language education could get one into political trouble.<sup>127</sup> As the veteran Tibetan Communist revolutionary, Phuntsok Wangyal, wrote to President Hu Jintao:

In light of the political phenomenon that “stability overrides all”, the horrible words “Free Tibet” have become a “phobia” to some people for whom even “Tibetans demanding to study the Tibetan language, to use the Tibetan language, would lead to Tibetan independence activities”. On the other side, these words have become a “money-earning tree” for some departments to keep on asking for funds from the Central Government....<sup>128</sup>

More recently, at the height of Tibetan student protests against the introduction of Chinese-language text books in Tibetan schools in Qinghai Province in 2010, a Tibetan teacher wrote on Weibo:

[N]obody, no nationality should politicise their mother tongue, it is the natural heritage of humans’ cultural ecology. Natural phenomena like this should not be used as an ideological vehicle. But there are still some departments and leaders that push these matters on to an ideological level of confrontation to deal with them.”<sup>129</sup>

This quote effectively shows how [association with splittism or separatism], why [to attract government funding, to protect institutional turf, and in the context of the rampant corruption to protect one’s own powers and privileges] and who [various departments within the Party-State apparatus and the officials] are securitising Tibetan language. A popular saying in Tibet brings out even more clearly why Tibetan issues in general are securitised: “These people [local officials and cadres working for some central State and Party departments] live on anti-separatism, are promoted due to anti-separatism, and they hit the jackpot by anti-separatism.”<sup>130</sup> The argument made by some Tibetan officials and scholars that the neglect and hostility towards Tibetan language instruction actually exacerbated separatist sentiments appears to have fallen on deaf ears.<sup>131</sup> In short, the centrality of language and Buddhism in Tibetan national identity, which sits uncomfortably with Beijing’s security and state-led, Han-supremacist nationalism, invites the

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<sup>127</sup> Woesser, ‘Abolishing Tibetan Language Education for the Sake of “Maintaining Stability”’, *High Peaks, Pure Earth*, 13/06/2012; available at <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/abolishing-tibetan-language-education-for-the-sake-of-maintaining-stability-by-woesser/>; Baba Phuntsok Wangyal (Phunwang), *Witness to Tibet’s History*, New Delhi: Paljor Publications, 2007: 78. Phunwang has written three letters to Hu Jintao between 29 October, 2004 and 1 August, 2006.

<sup>128</sup> Phunwang 2007: 78.

<sup>129</sup> Woesser 13/06/2012

<sup>130</sup> Phunwang 2007: 78.

<sup>131</sup> Tenzin (TAR Deputy Party Secretary), ‘Report of Speech to the First Regional Conference on Tibetan Language Teaching,’ *Xizang Ribao*, (*Tibet Daily*), 23 July, 1991; Internal Party Discussion Paper, 1995, quoted in Bass 1998: 244.

hostility of regional and central authorities. In this surfeit of securitisation, Tibetan Buddhism occupies an unenviable place.

Tibetan Buddhism, as we saw earlier, is central to Tibetan national identity and traditionally a key rallying point for an otherwise fragmented people. No wonder, monks and nuns have been at the fore-front of the Tibetan struggle inside Tibet. Beyond the visible sight of maroon-clad monks and nuns, Tibetan Buddhism posed an ideological challenge to Chinese communism when it was the key state and popular ideology in China and still constitutes a formidable challenge to the nationalist ideology that the CCP has been fostering and counting on as a source of legitimacy and an instrument of mobilisation when Communism does not excite the popular imagination anymore. Moreover, as keen students of history, the Chinese leaders should be aware of the Tibetan record of converting foreign rulers to Tibetan Buddhism, i.e. Mongol and Manchu emperors. Seen through that history, the growing interest in Tibetan Buddhism among the educated Han Chinese middle class should be a matter of some concern for the Chinese officials. The almost cult-like loyalty that Buddhism inculcates in the Tibetan hearts towards the Dalai Lama is not the least of the apprehension that it generates in the Chinese mind. These are some of the reasons why Tibetan Buddhism has been securitised in the Communist era, which leaves us with the important question of how Tibetan Buddhism is being securitised.

Of course, the Chinese officials have rarely, if at all, explicitly and publicly said the words “Tibetan Buddhism poses an existential threat to China” or that extraordinary (extra-legal and extra-political) measures should be used to counter that threat, but the official language pertaining to Tibetan Buddhism is consistent with the “grammar of security” and the practices towards it violative of the laws and rules governing culture and religion in contemporary China. As mentioned above, the Chinese Constitution and the Autonomy Law provides the freedom of religion to the Tibetans and adherents of other religions. The Constitution protects “normal religious activities.”<sup>132</sup> The keyword here is “normal” and the Chinese state and its apparatchiks determine what “normal” is—whatever serves the interests of the CCP and the Chinese state—not the Tibetan Buddhists themselves, leaving ample scope for the former to associate various aspects of Tibetan Buddhism with ‘narrow nationalism’, splittism/separatism, extremism and superstition in order to securitise the Tibetan religion. Chen Kuiyen, the former TAR Party

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<sup>132</sup> PRC Constitution, Article 36.

Secretary, was most clear when he petitioned Beijing in 1994 for tougher measures against Tibetan Buddhists:

The continuous expansion of temples and Buddhist monks and nuns should be contained. We shall not allow religion to be used by the Dalai clique as a tool for their splittist activities. This is an outstanding and key issue concerning party construction in Tibet. Under the precondition that we shall rely on education, we shall also take some forceful measures to stop this perverse trend.<sup>133</sup>

This sort of attitude has led to the policy measures and the consequent cycles of repression and resistance that I have outlined in the immediately preceding sections of this paper. However, official utterances and writings are not the only means of securitising Tibetan Buddhism, and indeed the Tibetans as a group. Other forms of political communication, notably images, as pointed out by Williams, are used to no small end.<sup>134</sup> For instance, after the 2008 Tibetan uprising, The Chinese government went on the offensive against “the Dalai clique” by controlling the domestic media coverage of the protests and riots and keeping out foreign journalists,<sup>135</sup> shutting down the communication infrastructure in the Tibetan regions and playing round the clock clips of the Tibetan rioters, especially Tibetan monks, burning and destroying Chinese and state properties and attacking Chinese civilians on national TV and filling up the pages of print media with the same stories. These stories were relayed on overseas Chinese media outlets. As Barnett wrote, “For most people in China, the story of the Tibet uprising starts and ends with what is now called “the 3/14 incident”—what has been portrayed there as the brutal beating and killing of Chinese civilians by rabid Tibetan nationalists.”<sup>136</sup> CCTV, the official Chinese TV network quickly made a documentary called “Records of the Lhasa Riots”, which as Woenser pointed out, was “ceremoniously released during prime time and broadcast over and over again; it even became available on DVD.”<sup>137</sup>

The application of the theory of securitisation entails an important corollary: desecuritisation could render a problem more amenable to resolution than securitising it

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<sup>133</sup> Chen Kuiyen, ‘The Situation of Tibet and the Problems We Request the Central Authorities to Solve’, *Xizang de Jiaobu (Tibet Steps)*, February 1994: 134-136.

<sup>134</sup> Williams 2003: 511–31.

<sup>135</sup> James Miles of *The Economist* was in Lhasa since 12 March. Since he was expelled on 19 March, no other foreign, including Hong Kong, journalists were allowed into Tibetan areas.

<sup>136</sup> Robert Barnett, “Thunder from Tibet,” *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 55, Number 9, 29 May, 2008.

<sup>137</sup> Tsering Woenser, “CCTV’s Explanation for the Tibetan Self-Immolations,” *High Peak, Pure Earth*, 18 June, 2012; available at <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/cctvs-explanation-for-the-tibetan-self-immolations-by-woenser/>.

mindlessly. This is a policy issue that the Chinese leaders would do well to ponder, but beyond the scope of this paper to develop. The key lesson from this historical and analytical account is that the Chinese securitisation of Tibetan Buddhism has helped neither the Chinese desire to win the hearts and minds of the Tibetan people nor the Tibetan efforts to protect their treasured religious heritage. They are locked in paradoxical cycles of repression and resistance.

**Conclusion:** This article explicated the six-decade conflict between the Chinese state and Tibetan Buddhism since the Chinese incorporation of Tibet. To make sense of the cyclical process of Chinese attempts to annihilate or control Tibetan Buddhism through various forms of repression and the equally determined Tibetan resistance, this article applied a two-level theoretical framework, consisting of the insecurity dilemma and securitisation. The paper traversed the complex period of the 1950s, when Eastern Tibet was subjected to radical communist reforms in which the religious estates and personalities were key targets, leading to a wide-spread armed rebellion, while Central and Western Tibet was treated with more gradualist, but subtle measures, ultimately leading to the fateful Lhasa uprising of 1959, to the contemporary period of hard-line assimilationist policies. This history is characterised by cycles of Chinese efforts to undermine Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan resistance, which fundamentally originate from the incessant securitisation of Tibetan Buddhism by the Chinese state and its apparatchiks. At the heart of this struggle is the Chinese state's tendency to view Tibetan monasteries and Lamas as rival power centres that require elimination. The paper also considered the *why, how, and who* of this securitisation before concluding with a pointer to a future research project taking up the analytical effort to study the *why, how and who* of a potential desecuritisation of all things Tibetan, including Tibetan Buddhism.

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