

Religious Repression in Tibet

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE RELIGIOUS POLICY is particularly harsh in Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism is an integral element of Tibetan identity and Tibetan nationalism and therefore, is perceived as a potential threat to the unity of the country and the authority of the Communist Party, which requires Chinese citizens to 'love the country' above all else.

China attempts to convey an image to the world of government tolerance for religion. In Tibet, it may appear that some monastic institutions are thriving, and that Tibetans are still able to express their devotion through traditional rituals; yet, the reality behind the appearance is quite different. Monasteries that once housed thousands of monks are now reduced to a few hundred whose main responsibility is no longer religious study but tending to the buildings and tourists.

As part of the tight control and regulation of religious practice in Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, the powers of the Democratic Management Committees have been strengthened. They have supplanted the traditional role of the abbots and are responsible to the Communist Party for control of religious institutions. 'Patriotic education' campaigns, are a regular feature of monastic life and are at times intense. These campaigns are carried out to identify patriotic monks and nuns and separate and expel perceived troublemakers. A core requirement of patriotic education is to denounce the Dalai Lama.

A new element of patriotic education emphasizes the importance of upholding the Communist Party line on the Beijing Summer 2008 Olympics. A recent report in China's state media links patriotic education with ensuring "security and stability" during the Olympics and provided the example of a monastery in Lhundrub (Chinese: Linzhou) county in the Tibet Autonomous Region where patriotic education includes passing onto monks "relevant knowledge" about the Olympics.

Chinese government authorities have used the Spring 2008 protests in Tibet as justification for imposing further restrictions on monasteries. The intensification of patriotic education has been accompanied by punitive searches of



Jokhang monk answers to Chinese security personnel.

monasteries by security forces (including those previously uninvolved in protests), arrests of monks for possession of photos of the Dalai Lama, and the requirement that individuals sign statements confessing involvement in the protests. In many cases, heads of monasteries have had to promise to fly the Chinese flag and guarantee that no further demonstrations will take place. Monks without proper residency permits are expelled and sent home. Some monks have chosen to leave voluntarily after finding the new levels of surveillance too burdensome to their religious practice. Laypeople are also being targeted in this new round of patriotic education with demands that they denounce the Dalai Lama and pledge loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party.

Reaction to the intensification of 'patriotic education' campaigns that followed the Spring 2008 demonstrations appears to have contributed to a second wave of dissent in Tibet.