

Documentation

New Progress in Human Rights in the Tibet Autonomous Region

by the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

*(In September 1992, the Information Office of the State Council published a white paper titled **Tibet--Its Ownership and Human Rights Situation**. In February 1998, the Information Office published a follow up on that original document titled, **New Progress in Human Rights in the Tibet Autonomous Region**. From this new document we have chosen for our documentation purposes only the section on religious freedom, (Section IV). The long, new document appeared in the March 9-15, 1998 issue of the Beijing Review.)*

IV. The Right to Freedom of Religious Belief

The Chinese government respects and protects its citizens' right to freedom of religious belief in accordance with the law. The Chinese Constitution stipulates that freedom of religious belief is one of the fundamental rights of citizens. Specific provisions on the protection of citizens' right to freedom of religious belief are also given in the Law on National Regional Autonomy, the Criminal law, the General rules of the Civil law, the Education Law, the Labor Law and the Electoral Law. The laws are strictly observed in Tibet. At present, there are 1,787 sites for Tibetan Buddhist activities in the region, and there are 46,380 Buddhist monks and nuns living in monasteries. The Tibetan Autonomous Region and the seven prefectures or cities under its jurisdiction all have their own Buddhist associations, and the Tibet Autonomous Regional Buddhist Association has its own journal and establishment for printing Tibetan scriptures.

Government protects, respects and helps finance religious sites

Since the peaceful liberation of Tibet the Chinese government has accorded consistent respect and protection to the Tibetan people's right to freedom of religious belief. In 1951 the central government and the local government of Tibet headed by the 14th Dalai Lama, signed the 17-article Agreement of Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, which explicitly stipulated, "In Tibet a policy ensuring the people freedom of religious belief will be carried out. The religious beliefs, customs and habits of the Tibetan people will be respected, and the Lamaist monasteries will be properly protected. The central government will allow no change in the revenues of monasteries." In 1959, the Democratic Reform started in Tibet. The feudal privileges of the three major categories of feudal lords, including senior monks, as well as the system of exploitation, were abolished, and religion was separated from government. At the same time the central government reaffirmed its stand for "respecting the freedom of religious belief and the customs and habits of the Tibetan people," and that the monasteries should be managed independently and in a democratic way by people of religious persuasion. In addition, the central government and the government of the Tibet Autonomous Region have ranked some famous religious sites, such as the Potala Palace and Jokhang, Tashilhunpo, Zhaibung, Sagya and Sera monasteries, among key historical sites under state or regional protection. Since the early 1980s the state has allocated special funds as well as gold and silver every year for the maintenance, restoration and protection of monasteries in Tibet, to the sum of over 300 million yuan-worth.

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The state and the autonomous region have financed the maintenance and restoration of a number of famous monasteries, including the Jokhang, Palkor, Tselayungdrung, Mindrol, Samye (built in the eighth century), Tashilhunpo, Zhaibung, Sera and Gandain (the latter four being the four main monasteries of the Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism), Qamaling in Qamod, Razheng, Sagya of the Sagya Sect, Rurpu and Garmadainsa of the Garma Gagyā Sect, Zhigungti of the Zhigung Sect, Meru and Rala Yungdrung Ling of the Bon religion, and Salu of the Shalu Sect. The state allocated a special fund of more than 55 million yuan for the five-odd-year renovation of the Potala Palace involving a total floor space of 33,900 square meters. Another special fund of 6.7 million yuan, together with 111 kg of gold and over 2,000 kg of silver and a large amount of gems, has been provided to finance the restoration of the funerary stupas and sacrificial halls of the fifth to the ninth Panchen Lamas. In addition, the state has allocated 66.2 million yuan and 650 kg of gold for the construction of the funerary stoop and sacrificial hall of the 10th Panchen Lama. In 1994 an additional appropriation of 20 million yuan was made to further renovate the Garden Monastery.

Preserving ancient religious books

Much importance has been attached in Tibet to collecting, editing, publishing and studying ancient religious books and records. Religious books edited and published in the 1990s include the Tibetan-language *China Tripitaka-Danagyur* (collated edition), *A Tibetan-Chinese General Catalogue of the Tibetan Tripitaka*, *A Commentary on Tshad-ma sde-bdun*, *Five Treatises by the Family of Mercy*, *Annotations on Pramanavarttika Karika--the Solemn Snowland* and *the Collected Works of Mani*. More than 1,490 copies of the *Dangyur* of the *Tripitaka* and a large number of pamphlets on Tibetan Buddhist practices, biographies of famous monks and treatises on Tibetan Buddhism have been printed to meet the needs of the various monasteries and the Buddhist monks, nuns and lay believers. *Treatises on Buddhism* written and published by religious research institutions, eminent monks and scholars include *Collation and Studies of the Pattra Sutra*, *compilation of the Sanskrit Pattra*

Sutra Extant in Lhasa, Studies of the Origin and Development of Religious and Religious Sects in Tibet, The Reincarnation System of Living Buddhas, History of Buddhism by Tuta, Records of the Monasteries of the Tibetan Bon Religion, Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in China and The Fresco Art of Tibet's Buddhist Monasteries.

A total of 3,270 monks in Tibet have studied the Buddhist classics in classes run by monasteries, and more than 50 Living Buddhas, Geshe (Buddhist doctor of divinity) and members of the democratic management bodies of Tibetan monasteries have, in the past few years, taken advanced refresher course at the China Senior Buddhist Institute of Tibetan Language in Beijing, half of whom have graduated.

Reincarnation and succession

The state holds in great esteem the system of reincarnation of Living Buddhas, which is characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism and an important succession method of the leadership of Tibetan Buddhism, and has profound respect for the religious practices and historical conventions of Tibet's main religion. In 1992 the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council approved the succession of the 17th Garmapa Living Buddha, in accordance with Tibet's religious practices. In 1995, a great event in the Buddhist world came to pass when the rite of drawing lots from a golden urn was carried out, and the boy who in Buddhist belief was the reincarnation of the deceased 10th Panchen Erdeni was identified, confirmed, given the title, enthroned and ordained as the 11th Panchen Erdeni in accordance with the religious practices and historical conventions and with the approval of the State Council.

Respect for believers and non-believers alike

Government departments at all levels treat all religions and religious sects as well as all people, whether religious believers or not, in Tibet equally and without discrimination. They respect and protect all religious activities in accordance with the law. Religious and non-religious people, and the different sects of Tibetan Buddhism, in harmonious coexistence, also have mutual respect for each other. The internal affairs of temples and monasteries are independ-

ently handled by the management bodies formed through democratic elections. Buddhist monks and nuns, on their own initiative, study and debate the scriptures, attend lectures given by eminent monks, perform Abhiseka (consecration by pouring water on the head) and ordination, disseminate esoteric doctrines, perform Buddhist ceremonies, chant scriptures in the presence of believers, release the souls of the dead and pray for blessings by touching the heads. Religious people have the freedom to make pilgrimages to temples and monasteries, and holy mountains and lakes, including circumambulation around holy mountains and spinning prayer wheels. They are also free to offer sacrifices, give food or alms to Buddhist monks and nuns, burn incense and chant scriptures. Prayer banners, cairns of stones with scripture texts painted or carved on them and religious people devoutly prostrating themselves on the ground, spinning prayer wheels or on pilgrimages can be seen everywhere in Tibet; and prayer niches and shrines to Buddha can be found in the houses of almost all religious people. It is estimated that more than one million religious believers go to Jokhang Temple in Lhasa to pay homage and burn incense to Buddha each year.

Concluding Remarks

A host of facts show clearly that human rights in Tibet are making unceasing progress. The Central government and the local governments at all levels in the Tibet Autonomous Region have made great efforts to safeguard and promote the progress of human rights in Tibet. The situation as regards human right in old Tibet bears no comparison with the situation in Tibet today. The fact that human rights in Tibet have improved is beyond all dispute. All people, Chinese and foreign, who have been to Tibet and are acquainted with Tibet's history will draw such a fair conclusion. The Dalai Lama vilifies the present human rights situation in Tibet. But, ironically, under his rule the old Tibet human rights were wantonly trampled on in wide areas--a crime stemming from the dark, savage and cruel system of merging politics with religion and the feudal serfdom. Making no mention whatsoever of the situation where trampling the people's basic human rights was commonplace in old Tibet, the exiled Dalai Lama has tried by every means to cover it up and vilify and attack the development and progress in new Tibet. He

also fabricates sensational lies to befuddle world opinion. One of the fundamental commandments of Buddhism forbids the spreading of falsehoods. The Dalai Lama's wanton fabrication of lies and his violation and trampling of this commandment serve only to expose him in all his true colors. He is waving the banner of religion to conduct activities aimed at splitting the motherland.

People of all ethnic groups in Tibet are constructing the new Tibet with one heart and one mind. But since Tibet's economic and social development, which started at a very low level, is hampered by unfavorable natural conditions, such as its exceptional elevation, frigid weather and lack of oxygen, Tibet remains economically and socially underdeveloped. As a result, the human rights enjoyed by the Tibetan people have yet to be further improved. But the Central government and Tibet's local governments at all levels will continue to make painstaking efforts to promote Tibet's economic and social development, consistently improve the people's lives and further promote the progress of human rights in Tibet.■

