

THE PANCHEN LAMA LINEAGE

How Reincarnation is Being
Reinvented as a Political Tool

(Updated – 2015)



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Preface

On 14 May 1995 His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognized a six-year-old boy as the Eleventh Panchen Lama. Within three days, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his parents had disappeared from their home in the Nagchu region of Central Tibet.

In his place, the People's Republic of China installed their own candidate, Gyaltsen Norbu, as the Panchen Lama who is seen by Tibetans inside and outside Tibet as a puppet and pawn in the hands of Beijing's Communist rulers.

The enforced disappearance of the Eleventh Panchen Lama remains the most high-profile example of human rights abuse during the entire 65 years of Tibet's occupation by the PRC. Evading requests for news, or any sighting of him, the authorities treat his whereabouts as a zealously guarded State secret by claiming he is "in good health, leading a normal life," and his family is "not willing to allow any interference."

This title is an update of our 1995 booklet, *The Panchen Lama Lineage: How Reincarnation is Being Reinvented as a Political Tool*. It includes biographical data on the Tenth Panchen Lama who died at Shigatse in 1989.

In addition to documenting condemnations by governments, parliaments and coverage by the world media, this compilation includes insightful political analysis by prominent China Watchers and Human Rights experts. It reveals how Beijing has manipulated the unique religious faith and practice in Tibet to serve its political ends.

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A Portrait of
Lobsang Trinley Lhundrup Choekyi Gyaltsen
The Xth Panchen Lama



I – The Origin, Title and Importance of the Panchen Lamas

‘...Generally speaking, from the point of view of age, the new incarnation of the Panchen Lama becomes somebody who has to continue my work. Since the Panchen Lama has special responsibilities, he is important from every point of view. Therefore, I request everyone to pray for his long life and success.’

– His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, 14 May 1995

The Panchen Lama is considered to be one of the most revered religious leaders of Tibet. The Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas share a special spiritual relationship and are referred to as the ‘Sun and the Moon’ in the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual firmament. The relationship between the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas is unique since each lama is not only involved in the search for the other’s reincarnation, but also assumes the interchangeable role as Disciple and Teacher to each other.

The title ‘Panchen’ is made up of the first syllable of two words ‘Pandit’, a Sanskrit word meaning scholar, and ‘Chenpo’, a Tibetan word meaning great. Therefore it is a title given to great scholars. All the abbots of Tashilhunpo Monastery (the seat to the Panchen Lamas and one of the great monasteries of Central Tibet) were also known by this title. During the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama, Lobsang Gyatso, Tashilhunpo’s abbot, Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen, was bestowed the title and the ownership of Tashilhunpo Monastery. Since then his three previous and subsequent incarnations came to be known by the title Panchen Lama.

The Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas played a vital role in each others’ lives and in Tibet at large. Both the lineages of these pre-eminent lamas have not only made tremendous contributions to the spiritual and physical well-being of Tibetans but also in the socio-economic, cultural and political fields of the Tibetan people in Tibet.¹

1 Official Statement of Tashilhunpo Monastery on the 22nd birthday of His Holiness the XIth Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, 22 April, 2011, <http://www.honorpanchen-lama.org/imported-20100407235507/2011/4/22/official-statement-of-tashilhunpo-monastery-on-22nd-birthda.html>

At various times and places in history Panchen Lamas have contributed immensely to Tibetan society. For example, after the sudden demise of the 4th Dalai Lama, there were some major political disturbances due to doubts about the cause of his death, which the 4th Panchen Lama handled very skillfully.² Yet another example is that in 1884 the 7th Panchen Lama was requested to take responsibility as regent of the Tibetan Government. He agreed to this for an interim period, went to Lhasa and took charge as the regent for about nine months.³

The 10th Panchen Lama, Lobsang Thrinley Choekyi Gyaltsen, in particular played a vital role in preserving Tibetan culture, tradition and language. The 10th Panchen Lama was born in the village of Karang Bidho in Amdo, north-eastern Tibet, in 1938. Steadfast, firm and adamant in what he believed in, he was considered to be one of the important leaders in contemporary Tibet. His devotion towards the Tibetan people, culture and religion remained intact despite suffering many years of torture and imprisonment under Mao Zedong.

At the age 24, the 10th Panchen Lama wrote the first major criticism of Chinese policy in Tibet in the form of a ‘70,000 - character petition’, which he presented to China’s then premier, Zhou Enlai. The text urged the communist authorities to improve the social, economic and cultural lives of Tibetans. Chairman Mao denounced the petition as ‘a poisoned arrow shot at the Party by the feudal lords’. Chinese leaders were further enraged when the Panchen Lama declared before a huge crowd at Shungtri Linka – his residence in Lhasa – that he considered His Holiness the Dalai Lama as his “refuge for this and the next life”. This led to him being placed under house arrest in Beijing. The launch of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) saw his plight worsen and in 1968 he was imprisoned in Beijing and only released in October 1977.

The Panchen Lama’s 70,000-character petition – for Mao ‘A Poisoned Arrow’ – raised major issues including religion, democratic reform, Tibetan nationality rights, the lives of the masses and many more inequities. He requested the PRC to consider of all the issues he raised in his petition and utilize them

2 History of the Institution of Panchen Lama - Professor Samdhong Rinpoche

3 Ibid.



Head bowed, eyes closed, body bent in subjection, the tenth Panchen Lama faced his Communist accusers during rounds of *thamzing* (struggle) sessions in the mid-1960s. His crimes? Daring to write a 70,000-character petition criticizing “reforms” in Tibet and publicly revering His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In 1966 he was seized by Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution and tortured for two months, and then in 1968 he was formally arrested by the PLA, imprisoned and tortured, for a further nine years.



as a reference in future policy-making.

Again, in March 1987, during the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region Standing Committee Meeting of the National People's Congress in Beijing, he delivered a second landmark criticism of China's misrule in Tibet. He repeated many points first raised in the 1962 petition. This criticism also covered issues like developing Tibet, Tibet being sidelined and neglected, the influx of Chinese migrants and nurturing indigenous languages and culture.

In his statement the Panchen Lama reiterated the fact that Tibet had been ignored and remained backward in all the major policies adopted by China. He criticized Beijing's State Planning Commission by pointing out that though there were initiatives on poverty alleviation in many regions, no mention was made on the minority areas. He commented "...there is nothing wrong in you becoming prosperous first. We will wear threadbare garments and beg for food. But does that do you proud?" He mentioned that the leftist policy in minority areas like Tibet had been very detrimental.

On spiralling migration, he observed that the expense of keeping one Chinese in Tibet was equal to that of keeping four in China, and questioned why Tibetans should support Chinese migrants. He stressed that Tibetans were the legitimate masters of Tibet and the wishes of its people must be respected. On lack of education, he stated that there were only a few schools in Tibet and those schools had a poor quality of education. He raised the pressing need to establish all levels of schools in Tibet and the importance of using Tibetan language in Tibetan schools. He also commented that the policy of using Chinese language in the administration was solely for the convenience of Chinese officials and was of no value to 90 percent of Tibetans who did not speak the language.

These episodes establish that the 10th Panchen Lama had always remained a fearless Tibetan nationalist and finally a martyr for the cause of Tibet.

On 9 January 1989, the Panchen Lama arrived in Shigatse to consecrate the newly-renovated mausoleums of the 5th to 9th Panchen Lamas, and later in the month made a public statement that Chinese rule in Tibet has brought more destruction than

benefit. On 28 January 1989, four days after delivering this statement, he died at Tashilhunpo Monastery raising a mystery surrounding his sudden death.

Two years later, on 21 March 1991, the Beijing government was informed through its New Delhi Embassy that His Holiness the Dalai Lama wished to assist in the search for the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. However, three months later, China rejected the proposal by saying that there was no need for 'outside interference'. Several attempts were made to contact the leadership to convey the Dalai Lama's wish to assist in the reincarnation. This was in vain. So, on 14 May 1995, the Dalai Lama declared Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. In his statement, he stressed the importance of the historical and spiritual relationship between the Dalai Lamas and the Panchen Lamas.



The 14th Dalai Lama (left) and the 10th Panchen Lama (right) in Beijing, 1954.



The 10th Panchen Lama (left), Mao Zedong (centre), the 14th Dalai Lama (right) in Beijing, 1954.



The 14th Dalai Lama (left) and the 10th Panchen Lama (right) in India, 1956, for the celebration of 2500th anniversary of Buddha Jayanti.



The 10th Panchen Lama (left) and the 14th Dalai Lama (right) in India, 1956.



Gyalo Thondup (the 14th Dalai Lama's elder brother) (left), the 10th Panchen Lama (middle), Baba Phuntsok Wangyal (right).

II – Enforced Disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama: Gedhun Choekyi Nyima

‘Nothing can justify such a practice. Whether it is used to fight terrorism and organized crime or to silence the voices calling for democracy and human rights, enforced disappearance cannot and should not be tolerated.’ – President of the United Nations General Assembly — 30 August 2014

Enforced disappearance is internationally recognised as a violation of human rights. Beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR hereinafter), and subsequently leading to the adoption of the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by General Assembly resolution 47/133 of 18 December 1992, and finally leading to adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Person from Enforced Disappearance on 20 December 2006 (came into force on 23 December 2010) with 94 signatories so far.⁴

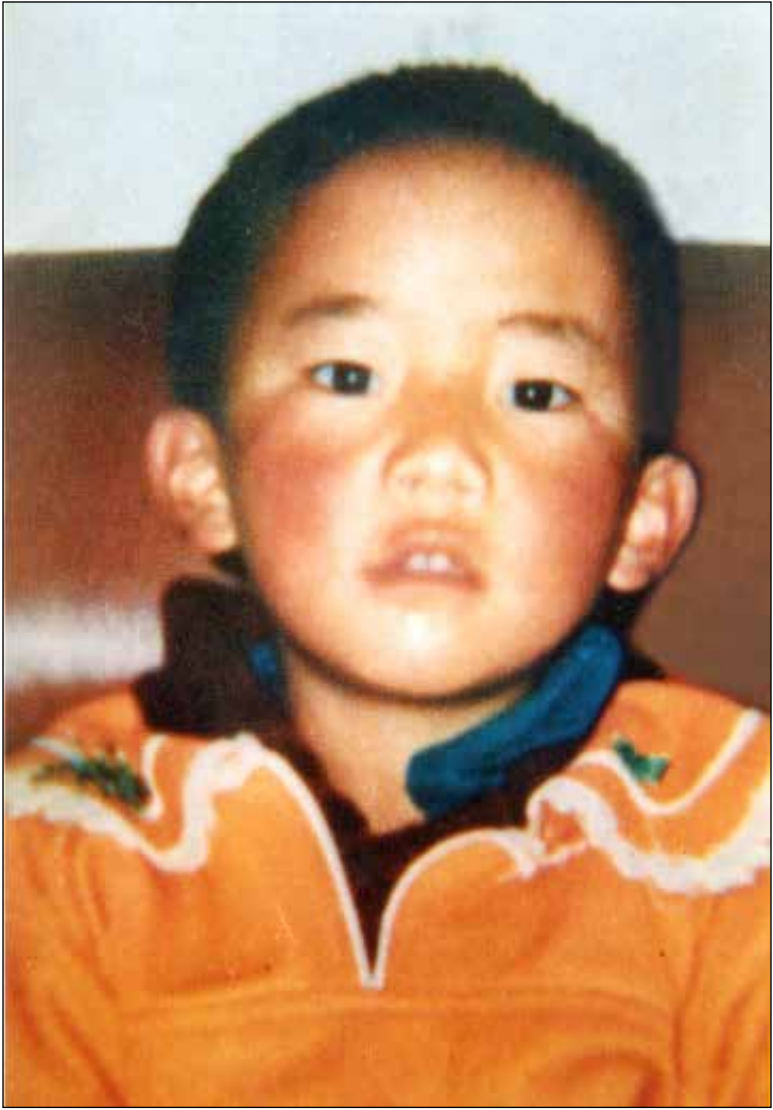
The International Convention for the Protection of All Person from Enforced Disappearance defines enforced disappearance as ‘... an arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the state or by persons or persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the state, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared persons, which place such a person outside the protection of the law’.⁵

It is important to note that enforced disappearance is a continuous crime⁶, from the time of abduction till the release or acknowledgement by the state as to the conditions and whereabouts of the abductee. During enforced disappearance, various other

⁴ United Nations Treaty Collection, International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, New York, 20 December 2006

⁵ International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, available at www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CED/Pages/ConventionCED.aspx

⁶ Working group on enforced disappearances, General comment on enforced disappearances as a continuous crime, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disappearances/GC-EDCC.pdf>



11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima

equally important rights are violated at the same time including the right to life, to liberty, security, the right not to undergo torture or cruel, inhuman treatment, the right to free trial, the right to family life and many more enshrined inalienable rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to Article 5 of the convention, the systematic and widespread practice of enforced disappearance constitutes a crime against humanity in international law and shall attract the consequences therein.⁷ No one shall be held in secret detention (Article 17).⁸

Enforced Disappearance is rampant in Tibet. Arbitrary arrest, torture and sentencing of Tibetans are common on the plateau. According to Human Rights Watch, China uses enforced disappearances as one of the means to silence dissent or perceived dissent and the regime either tactfully or tacitly ignored such practice of enforced disappearances.⁹ According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD hereinafter), in 2011 alone there were 102 cases of enforced disappearances in Tibet.¹⁰

The 11th Panchen Lama, one of the most revered religious leaders of Tibet, is today the most prominent case of enforced disappearance in Tibet. Just three days after His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama named six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the 11th Panchen Lama, the child and his family disappeared and none of them have been seen since. This made the 11th Panchen Lama the youngest political prisoner in the world.

Even after 20 years, no significant progress has been made in this case and the PRC leadership has continuously refused to reveal any information about the young man or his family's whereabouts. Nevertheless, the clichéd statement "he and his family are doing well" is the only response. Various national, international community and human rights defenders are ceaselessly working for the release of the now 26-year-old Panchen Lama.

7 Id.

8 Id.

9 Human Rights Watch, China: Enforced Disappearances a Growing Threat, November 10, 2011, available at www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/09/china-enforced-disappearances-growing-threat

10 *Into Thin Air, An introduction to enforced disappearances in Tibet* –Tibetan Centre for Human Rights & Democracy

III – The Right to Religion

The enforced disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama has not only violated the fundamental rights of the abductee, but also violated the right to religion of the Tibetan people collectively. Freedom of religion is important because it enables the citizens to follow what their conscience dictates and also people are entitled to religious freedom by virtue of their humanity.¹¹

According to Article 6 (g) of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, right to freedom of thought, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, ‘to train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirement and standards of any religion or belief.’¹² This declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/36/55 on 25 November 1981. Article 6 (g) of the Declaration is perhaps one of the most comprehensive articles dealing with the right to religion or belief.

According to Article 18 of the UDHR, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.¹³ Everyone shall have right to freedom of thought conscience and religion.¹⁴ (Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) (ICCPR hereinafter). In States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minority exists, such person shall not be denied the right to...profess and practice their own religion...¹⁵ (Article 27 of ICCPR).

11 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Freedom, 2014, available at www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_2014_Annual_Report_PDF.pdf

12 United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/36/55, 25 November 1981, Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Based on Religion, or Belief, available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/36/a36r055.htm>

13 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

14 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

15 *Id.*

According to article 6 (g) of the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Based on Religion, the right to religion includes the right to train or appoint such appropriate leader in accordance with requirement and standard of such religion.¹⁶ Accordingly, by this time the young Panchen Lama should have completed, or be near completing, the second of the five major subjects of Tibet Buddhism known as Madhyamaka (Tibetan: *dhu:ma*).¹⁷ The first of the five subjects, Prajnaparamita (Tib: *phar-phyin*) or the Perfection of Wisdom, takes at least five years of study and the second takes around four years.¹⁸ However, as he has been held in State custody he has not been able to receive any of this education, which is crucial for him and the continuation of the lineage that is important to Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁹

The Tibetan form of Buddhism is practiced by the majority of Tibetans and has been one of the core elements of Tibetan culture and identity for centuries. However, since China's invasion and occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, Beijing has imposed numerous repressive policies leading to violation of various fundamental rights including the right to religion. One such policy is the introduction of Order Number 5 by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) on 1 September 2007. The regulation mandates that all the reincarnate lamas or so-called 'living Buddhas' must be recognised by the government or they will be deemed illegal or invalid.²⁰ This is an indication, perhaps, of a lesson learned from the issue of the 10th Panchen Lama's reincarnation that the State initiated regularization of the reincarnations.

In addition, in 1996, campaigns like 'Patriotic Re-education' were launched in Tibet as a part of Beijing's 'Strike Hard' campaign against crime and corruption. Ever since then this has been expanding and today it controls the entire region. The

16 Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion and belief, available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/36/a36r055.htm>

17 The Communist Party as Living Buddha, The Crisis Facing Tibetan Religion Under Chinese Control, A report by the International Campaign for Tibet, available at www.savetibet.org/wp-content/upload/2013/03/2007ReligionReport.pdf

18 Id.

19 Id.

20 Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Measures on the management of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism, available at <http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/measures-on-the-management-of-the-reincarnation-of-living-buddhas-in-0>

core message of the campaign is ‘Loyalty to the State is a prerequisite to be a good monk or nun’. Under this campaign, ‘Work Teams’ consisting of both Chinese and trusted Tibetan officials visit monasteries and nunneries and force monks and nuns to denounce the Dalai Lama and declare their absolute support to the Communist Party. Besides that the ‘Nine must-haves’ programme, which is under the ambit of the Patriotic re-education campaign, requires all nunneries and monasteries to display portraits of China’s communist leaders and the PRC’s flag. Tibetans are forced to denounce their religious heads – including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama – and failure to do so results in imprisonment and other severe forms of punishment.

State control over religious issues in this manner is a clear indication of China systematically undermining Tibet’s age-old culture and traditions.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its 2014 annual report mentioned that since the 2008 protests in Tibet, the PRC has intensified efforts to discredit religious leaders and issued new measures to increase government supervision over monasteries.²¹ Hundreds of Tibetans were put in prison for exercising religious freedom. The report highlighted the self-immolation protests of Tibetans, including monks, nuns, former monks and nuns, and mentioned that it is directly linked with China’s effort to control religious practice and the culture of Tibetans.²² Since 1999, China has been designated as one of the countries of particular concern (CPC hereinafter) by the U.S. State Department.

Hence, China’s claim to religious rights in Tibet, propagated in its documents including the recent White Paper released in April 2015 – ‘Tibet’s Path of Development is Driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide’ – amounts to a narrow definition of the right to religion. The White Paper cited China’s Constitution and laws and mentioned that the Tibetan people enjoy full religious freedom and gave an illustration of religious activities held in Tibet. The White Paper mentioned that ‘...believers usually have a scripture

21 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Freedom, 2014, available at [www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF 2014 Annual Report PDF.pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202014%20Annual%20Report%20PDF.pdf)

22 Id.

at home or a Buddha Shrine at home and such religious activities as circumambulation while reciting scriptures' is normally practiced.²³

The repression of religious freedom is at one of its worst levels in Tibet today and that the number of self-immolators is so high amongst monks and nuns is another indication of this fact.

²³ Tibet's Path of Development Is Driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, April 2015, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-04/15/c_134152612.htm

International Indictments



Photo: ICT

IV – International Indictments

International human rights organisations have repeatedly called for Gedhun's release and confirmation of his well-being, and many world governments have issued statements about his detention. However, no one has been allowed to visit him.

Series of international indictments followed soon after his abduction:

1. On 17 May 1995, the U.S. State Department responded to the Chinese Rejection of the Panchen Lama recognised by His Holiness. The State Department raised doubts about the Chinese government's commitment to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of Tibetan Buddhists.
2. On 30 November 1995, Senator Bourne moved a resolution in the Australian Senate. The resolution expressed its dismay at the PRC's action of attempting to overrule the Dalai Lama's choice of Panchen Lama and urged China to respect the wishes of the Tibetan people by supporting the Panchen Lama recognised by the Dalai Lama.
3. On 13 December 1995, in the United States Senate a joint resolution was moved. The resolution stated that recognition of the successor of the Panchen Lama in Tibet has always been within the authority of the Dalai Lama. The resolution called for the United States government to urge the government of PRC to respect the wishes of the Tibetan People by supporting the selection of the Panchen Lama recognised by His Holiness.
4. On 14 December 1995, the European Parliament passed a resolution noting the PRC's attempt to overrule the Dalai Lama's choice of Panchen Lama, disregarding the religious traditions of Tibetan People and politicising an issue which has always been purely religious. The resolution condemned China's intervention in the religious matters of Tibet and forced appointment of the candidate imposed by the Chinese authorities. The resolution called on China to

allow European Union diplomats to meet Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his parents.

5. On 1 December 1995, the French Parliament's Parliamentary Study Group on the Problems of Tibet, National Assembly and the Parliamentary Association of Friends of Tibet, denounced the Chinese authorities' manipulation in announcing their own Panchen Lama.
6. On 15 January 1996, the All-Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet expressed dismay and concern in a press release at the PRC's attempt to impose a rival Panchen Lama on Tibetans. The forum urged the Government of India to take up the issue of the safety of the young Panchen Lama at the highest level of the Chinese government.
7. On 15 January 1996, in a press release, the Committee of International Parliamentarians for Tibet expressed its concern about the safety and well-being of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. The committee holds the Chinese government responsible should anything happen to Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.
8. On 18 January 1996, Amnesty International raised its concern regarding the missing Panchen Lama. The organisation said it was 'seriously concerned that a six-year-old Tibetan boy and his family have been missing from their home for eight months and may be under restriction by the authorities.'²⁴
9. In 1997, two delegations of westerners to Tibet were given conflicting information about the 11th Panchen Lama. The Austrian delegation was told that the boy was living in the village of Lhari (his birthplace) and the American delegation was assured that he was in Beijing.²⁵

24 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/007/1996/fr/107668ec-11dd-98d3-79fb64d46c94/asa170071996en.pdf>

25 Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima: the XIth Panchen Lama of Tibet, Briefing Paper on Tibet's XIth Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, 25 April 2005, available at <http://www.tchrd.org/2005/04/gedhun-choekyi-nyima-the-xith-panchen-lama-of-tibet/#more-3348>

10. On 23-24 April 1997, the third World Parliamentarians Convention on Tibet was held in Washington D.C. The Convention expressed its dismay at the PRC's interference in the religious process for the recognition of the Panchen Lama and detention of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.
11. On 17 September 1998, S. Con. Res. 103, a Concurrent Resolution, was passed in the United States Congress. The resolution calls on the PRC to release Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and allow him to pursue his religious studies without interference and according to tradition.²⁶
12. On 17-18 February 2001, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) held its sixth General Assembly in Tallinn, Estonia. UNPO expressed its deep concern on detention of political prisoners, including Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, and urged the government of PRC to open negotiations without pre-conditions with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.
13. In October 2000, when British officials raised the issue of the Panchen Lama, the British delegates were told that the boy was well and attending school and that his parents did not want international media 'intruding into his normal life.' Two photographs purported to be the 11th Panchen Lama were shown to them. However, they were not allowed to take the photos away with them.²⁷
14. In August 2001, a Polish parliamentary delegation visiting Lhasa was promised photos of the 11th Panchen Lama within six weeks, which they never received; they were later told that his parents do not wish any interference from outside.²⁸ Australian and European Parliamentary delegations, in October 2011 and March 2002 respectively,²⁹ were also told that the parents of the Panchen Lama do not wish to have any interference in his normal life when they enquired about the whereabouts of the Panchen Lama.

26 105th Congress, 2d Session, S.CON.RES.103, Concurrent Resolution, available at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/105/sconres103/text/es>

27 Supra note 24

28 Id.

29 Id.

15. On 23 January 2002, the United States enacted the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2003. Under section 621 of the Act, Religious Persecution in Tibet, called on the U.S. Ambassador to the PRC to meet with the 11th Panchen Lama and ascertain his whereabouts and well-being and release the 11th Panchen Lama and allow him to pursue his religious studies without interference and according to tradition.
16. In October 2002, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H. Res. 410. Congressman Christopher Smith introduced this resolution on 4 May calling for the release of Panchen Lama. The resolution mentioned, ‘...Whereas Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was taken from his home by Chinese authorities on 17 May 1995, at the age of six, shortly after being recognized as the Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama; Whereas the forced disappearance of the Panchen Lama violates fundamental freedoms enshrined in international human rights covenants to which the People’s Republic of China is a party, including the Convention on the Rights of Child.’³⁰ ‘... President Jiang Zemin should be made aware of congressional concern for the Panchen Lama...’³¹ ‘... the government of the People’s Republic of China should (A) release the Panchen Lama and allow him to pursue his traditional role at the Tashilhunpo Monastery in Tibet...’³²
17. On 9 June 2005, on the tenth anniversary of the disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief sent the following communication. ‘Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, then aged six, disappeared together with his parents from Lhari, their home village in Tibet on 17 May 1995, three days after having been recognized as the eleventh reincarnation of the Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama.

30 H. Res. 410 In the House of Representatives, U.S., October 10, 2002, available at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/hres410/text>

31 Id.

32 Id.

Their whereabouts were not known.³³ The Special Rapporteur also expressed her concern about the ‘grave interference with the freedom of belief of the Tibetan Buddhists who have the right to determine their clergy in accordance with their own rites and who have been deprived of their religious leaders.’³⁴

18. On 7 September 2005, the government of China responded to the Special Rapporteur’s communication. The response merely mentioned that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima is ‘not the Panchen Lama but just an ordinary child. He is in good health and just like other children is leading a normal life, receiving good culture education, he is in secondary school with good results and he and his family are not willing to let any interference’.³⁵ The Special Rapporteur noted the information given by the PRC government on Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, but expressed concern that it has not yet been possible to have this information confirmed by an independent expert and recommended that an independent expert be allowed to visit and confirm his well-being and that of his parents.³⁶
19. On 19 November 2005, the Fourth World Parliamentarians’ Convention on Tibet was held in Edinburgh, Scotland. The convention also condemned China’s refusal to release political prisoners, in particular the Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. The convention called for the release of the Panchen Lama.³⁷
20. On 6 April 2006, New York-based Human Rights Watch urged the then President of the United States, George W. Bush, to raise the issue of the Panchen Lama during his summit with the then President of China, Hu Jintao, on 20 April 2006 in Washington D.C. The monitoring

33 Commission on Human Rights sixty-second session, Civil and Political Rights, including the Question of Religious Intolerance, 27 March 2006, available at www.ohchr.org/English/bodies/chr/sessions/62/listdocs.htm

34 Id.

35 Ibid.

36 Id.

37 Fourth World Parliamentarians’ Convention on Tibet, Edinburgh, Scotland, 18-19 November, 2005, available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/~morgan/edinburgh.htm>

organisation wrote, ‘Although the Chinese government has publicly claimed that it does not restrict religious education of minors, such restrictions (whether in law or in practice) remain in force in some areas.’³⁸ ‘...Ten years ago the Chinese government expropriated from Tibetans the right to select the Panchen Lama, and took the young Panchen Lama chosen by the Dalai Lama and his family into custody; their whereabouts remain unknown. In 2005, the government claimed that the Panchen Lama was “the highest ranking figure in Tibetan Buddhism,” an accreditation never before been given to anyone except the Dalai Lama.’³⁹The organisation urged the U.S. President to call upon President Hu to allow access to the Panchen Lama designated by the Dalai Lama by members of the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child.

21. On 25 April 2007, the U. S. Commission on International Religious Freedom’s former Chair, Felice D. Gaer, issued a statement during the Congressional Human Rights Caucus briefing on ‘Tibet and Religious Freedoms in China’. She mentioned, ‘I brought up the case of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Panchen Lama, and asked why in spite of entreaties from so many people from members of Congress, statesmen, diplomats, NGOs, ordinary people, had there been not a single opportunity for any independent observer to see him or his family.’⁴⁰ ‘... The United States and its allies must insist again that China allow Panchen Lama to meet freely with independent international observers.’⁴¹
22. From 3-21 November 2008, the United Nations’ Committee against Torture (CAT) held its 41st session in Geneva. In the concluding observation for China, the committee raised its concern for national, ethnic or religious minorities in China including Tibetans. The committee mentioned that China should adopt all the necessary measures to prohibit

38 Letter from Human Rights Watch to President Bush, April 6, 2006, available at www.hrw.org/en/news/2006/04/04/letter-human-rights-watch-president-bush

39 Id.

40 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Tibet and Religious Freedom in China, Statement by Felice D. Gaer, Chair, Congressional Human Rights Caucus Briefing, April 25, 2007

41 Id.

and/or prevent enforced disappearance and to shed light on the fate of missing persons, including Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, and prosecute and punish perpetrators, as this practice constitutes, per se, a violation of the Convention.⁴²

23. On 11 March 2009, the United States Congress passed resolution H. Res. 226 recognizing the plight of Tibetan people on the 50th anniversary of His Holiness the Dalai Lama being forced into exile and calling for a peaceful solution on the issue of Tibet. This resolution reiterated the issue of the disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama.
24. On 8 April 2011, a group of United Nations experts raised serious concern about the enforced disappearances reported to have taken place in China and called on authorities in the concerned countries to release all those who had been forcibly disappeared. In a Press statement issued in Geneva, the working group said, ‘according to the allegations received, there is a pattern of enforced disappearances in China, where persons suspected of dissent are taken to secret detention facilities and are then often tortured and intimidated, before being released or put into “soft detention” and barred from contacting the outside world.’⁴³

The working group also raised its concern about the case of 11th Panchen Lama and mentioned,

‘While the Chinese authorities have admitted taking him, they have continually refused to divulge any information about him or his whereabouts, making his case an enforced disappearance. A number of human rights mechanisms including the U.N. Committee against Torture, the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, have called

42 United Nations, Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishments, CAT/C/CHN/CO/4 12 December 2008

43 UN News Centre, Wave of enforced disappearances in China sparks concern from UN rights experts, available at www.un.org/app/news/story.asp?NewsID=38058#VH_06Ba5FIU

for his whereabouts to be revealed, to no avail.⁴⁴

The expert body also mentioned that China has an obligation to abide by the strictest standard of human rights and should fully co-operate with the UN special procedures and in particular with the working group.⁴⁵

25. In May 2012, the ‘Society for Threatened Peoples International’ released a report titled ‘The Human Rights Crisis in Tibet: Europe Must Act!’ The report highlighted various human rights issues in Tibet. It raised its concern on the fate of the missing Panchen Lama citing the U.N. Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and mentioned that the enforced disappearance of Tibetans after arrest had become a major concern following the 2008 Uprising in Tibet. The report recommended governments in Europe and member-states of the European Union to seek the release of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.⁴⁶
26. In June 2012, the European Parliament passed a resolution on the human rights situation in Tibet. The resolution reiterated its call to China’s authorities to reveal the fate and whereabouts of the 11th Panchen Lama.
27. In September 2013, the International Federation for Human Rights and International Campaign for Tibet released a report on Beijing’s crackdown on Tibetan Buddhism. The report raised the issue of Panchen Lama and asked for his release from State custody.⁴⁷ The report also asked the Chinese government to allow the Panchen Lama to pursue his religious education necessary for assuming his legitimate position as a religious leader.⁴⁸

44 China: UN expert body concerned about recent wave of enforced disappearances, available at www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvent/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=10928&LangID=E

45 Id.

46 The Human Rights Crisis in Tibet: Europe Must Act! Briefing note, The European Solidarity Rally for Tibet-2012, May 2012, By Society for Threatened Peoples International

47 Chinese Crackdown on Tibetan Buddhism, A Report published for the People’s Republic of China’s second Universal Periodic Review, available at <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/en-report-tibet-4.pdf>

48 Id.

28. On 29 October 2013, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child made its concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China, adopted during its 64th session held from 16 September to 4 October 2013. In this concluding observation the committee stated that ‘...the situation of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who disappeared at the age of six years in 1995, and the fact that, while the State party has provided some information, it has not allowed any independent expert to visit and confirm his whereabouts, the fulfilment of his rights and his well-being’.⁴⁹ The committee recommended China should repeal all measures and restrictions that prohibit Tibetan children of any age from participating in religious activities or receiving religious education, and immediately allow an independent expert to visit Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and verify his living conditions.
29. The 2013 annual report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), listed Gedhun Choekyi Nyima under individuals detained on account of religious belief and other activities. It also mentioned that the Chinese government continues to deny repeated international requests for access to the young Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. The report observed that, ‘the religious freedom conditions in Tibetan Buddhist areas of China are worse now than at any time over the past decade.’⁵⁰
30. On 28 July 2014, U.S. Secretary of State Kerry submitted the International Religious Freedom Report 2013 to the U.S. Congress. The report highlighted that the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima still remains unknown.⁵¹
31. On 12 September 2014, the U.N. Human Rights Council held an interactive dialogue with the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances.

49. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 29 October 2013, CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4, Concluding observation on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China, adopted by committee at its sixty-fourth session (16 September-4 October 2013)

50. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2013

51. U.S. Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, available at http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dynamic_load_id=222125&year=2013#wrapper

During the interactive dialogue, the Asian Indigenous Tribal Peoples Network expressed its concern about enforced disappearances in China and asked China to respond positively to the working group's request to visit the country. It also urged the working group to address the unresolved case of disappearances of the Panchen Lama and his family members.⁵²

⁵² Human Rights Council holds interactive dialogue with working group on enforced disappearances, Human Rights Council, 12 September, 2014, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15020&LangID=E>

V – Chronology of Events Surrounding the Recognition and Disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama

- 28 Jan. 1989 The 10th Panchen Lama, Lobsang Thrinley Choekyi Gyaltsen, passes away in Shigatse, Central Tibet.
- 21 Mar. 1991 The Chinese Government is informed through its New Delhi embassy that His Holiness the Dalai Lama wishes to assist in the search for the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. His Holiness expresses his desire to send a religious delegation to Lhamoi Lhatso – the sacred lake near Lhasa – to pray and observe prophetic visions in the lake's surface, which will guide the delegation to the genuine reincarnation. Three months later, the PRC rejects this request by stating there is no need for 'outside interference'.
- 17 July 1993 Chatrel Rinpoche, acting abbot of Tashilhunpo Monastery, who is appointed as the head of Beijing's official search party, delivers a letter to Kalon Gyalo Thondup in Beijing with offerings for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The letter records the progress made in the search for the reincarnation.
- 5 Aug. Dharamsala delivers a reply to Chatrel Rinpoche through the Chinese embassy in New Delhi. The official response invites a delegation under the de facto abbot to visit India and discuss the matters relating to the search for the 11th Panchen Lama. There is no response to this letter.
- 17-18 Oct. 1994 A Chinese individual, with close ties to the government in Beijing, meets the Tibetan leaders in Dharamsala. During the meeting, His Holiness asks the Chinese man to remind

Beijing that he is still waiting for a reply to his letter to Chatrel Rinpoche.

Jan. 1995

Dharamsala sends two communications to the same Chinese individual reminding him of the discussion held in October 1994. This requests him to urge the PRC for an early response.

14 May

His Holiness announces Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, a six-year-old boy born in Tibet's northern region of Nagchu, as the 11th Panchen Lama.

Choekyi Nyima and his family disappear. They remain incommunicado since then.

Spokesman of China's Bureau of Religious Affairs terms His Holiness' action as 'illegal' and accuses him of disregarding the 'fixed historical convention and undermining religious rituals'.

Chatrel Rinpoche is intercepted in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, en route to Tibet. He is flown back to Beijing to be held incommunicado.

The U.S. State Department responds to reports that the Religious Affairs Bureau in Beijing has rejected the Panchen Lama appointed by His Holiness. The U.S. State Department says that they would be disappointed and this issue of reincarnation of Panchen Lama might raise doubts about the Chinese government's commitment to respecting religious belief and practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

18 May

The PRC launches its campaign to denounce His Holiness' announcement of the identity of the new Panchen Lama. Tourists in Shigatse report a sharp increase in troop activity.

- 19 May Posters appear in Lhasa refuting Beijing's claim to legitimacy by using the Golden Urn in selecting their 11th Panchen Lama.
- 20 May Dharamsala reacts to China's statements by outlining the historical conventions relating to the recognition of reincarnations. The exile authorities urge Beijing not to politicize Tibet's sacred spiritual traditions.
- 21 May Posters supporting His Holiness's candidate appear in Shigatse.
- 23 May A report from Lhasa suggests that the Beijing authorities have been calling for Political Re-education meetings to announce a ban on public discussion of the Panchen Lama issue.
- 12 July Government security forces in riot gear interrupt a major religious ceremony at Tashilhunpo when over a hundred monks had threatened to demonstrate against Beijing's intervention in the selection of the child Panchen Lama.
- 13 July The European Parliament passes a resolution on disappearance of the Panchen Lama. The parliament expresses its grave concern on the abduction of a six-year-old, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, and calls China for his immediate release.
- 14 July The local Religious Affairs Bureau in Shigatse issues an order removing Chatrel Rinpoche and other leading lamas of Tashilhunpo Monastery from their posts.
- Eight pro-Beijing appointees, including Sengchen Lobsang Gyaltzen and Lama Tsering, become the monastery's new administrators.
- 14 Sept. Tibet Information Network, a London-based

monitoring agency, releases a list of 48 Tibetans who have been arrested by the Armed Police in connection with the reincarnation of Panchen Lama.

- 8 Nov. China's United Front Department calls a meeting in Beijing. 75 Tibetans at the meeting, including government-appointed Gaden Throne-Holder, Bomi, table a list of three Beijing-nominated Panchen Lama candidates.
- 14 Nov. The 75 Tibetan at participants at the United Front Department meeting return to Lhasa.
- 19 Nov. China's Gaden Throne-Holder, Bomi, disappears from his home.
- 29 Nov. Bomi resurfaces in Lhasa to draw lots from the Golden Urn to select the Chinese candidate to be the Panchen Lama. The emerging lots result in the selection of a six-year-old, Gyaltzen Norbu from Nagchu region, as Beijing's Panchen Lama.
- 30 Nov. Senator Bourne moves a resolution in the Australian Senate expressing the parliament's dismay at the PRC's action and urges China to respect the wishes of the Tibetan people. The resolution establishes support for the Dalai Lama's candidate as the only legitimate Panchen Lama.
- 1 Dec. 200 deputies and senators from the French Parliamentary Study Group and the parliament's Association of Friends of Tibet denounce China's manipulation in the selection of its own Panchen Lama.
- 8 Dec. The child Gyaltzen Norbu enthroned at Tashilhunpo Monastery – seat of the Panchen Lamas – amidst tight security with over 500 PLA military personnel deployed throughout

the monastery compound.

Dharamsala condemns announcement of Gyaltsen Norbu and expressed concern over the safety of Tibet's real Panchen Lama.

- 13 Dec. The U.S. Senate's 104th Congress issues a joint resolution expressing its concern over the issue of the Panchen Lama and urges China to respect the wishes of the Tibetan people by supporting the Panchen Lama recognized by His Holiness.
- 14 Dec. The European Parliament passes a resolution on the Panchen Lama issue. This expresses its dismay at China's action and calls upon the PRC to respect the wishes of Tibetans by accepting the Panchen Lama recognized by His Holiness.
- 15 Jan. 1996 All-Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet expresses dismay and concern at China's imposition of a rival 11th Panchen Lama and also voices its concern over the whereabouts of the authentic boy. They urge the Government of India to take up this issue with China's leadership.
- 18 Jan. A bomb detonates at the house in Lhasa of Sengchen Lobsang Gyaltzen, the Tibetan lama-collaborator and new political appointee at Tashilhunpo Monastery who collaborated with Beijing in installing their choice of Panchen Lama.
- Amnesty International sends a document to China expressing its concern over Panchen Lama and another 50 monks and lay people detained as a result of the reincarnation controversy.
- June The 12th session of the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child questions the Chinese

government in connection with the missing Panchen Lama. Ambassador Wu of China responds by blaming the Dalai Lama for 'illegally declaring a boy as the Panchen Lama.' The Ambassador responds to the questions on the whereabouts of the Panchen Lama by saying that China is acting in conformity with the wishes of the parents of the Panchen Lama to ensure the protection of the Child.

- 20 June German Bundestag passes a resolution on Tibet. The resolution, expressing its concern over the reports of missing Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family, requests the Chinese authorities to release him and his family forthwith.
- 17 Sept. Australian Senate passes another resolution on Tibet. The resolution expresses its concern over welfare and location of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.
- 23-24 April 1997 Third World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet held in Washington D.C. expresses its dismay at the PRC's interference in the religious process for the recognition of the Panchen Lama and detention of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.
- 17 Sept. 1998 The United States Congress passes a Concurrent Resolution (S. Con. Res. 103). The resolution calls on the PRC to release the nine-year-old, Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, and allow him to pursue his religious studies without interference and according to tradition.
- 17-18 Feb. 2001 The Unrepresented Nations and People's Organisation (UNPO) during its sixth general assembly, held in Tallinn, Estonia, expresses its concern over the missing Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.

- 23 Jan. 2002 The U.S. Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2003 calls on the U.S. ambassador to China to meet the 11th Panchen Lama and ascertain his whereabouts and well-being; and also requests the government of PRC to release the Panchen Lama and allow him to pursue his religious studies without interference and according to tradition.
- 10 Oct. The U. S. House of Representatives passes Resolution, H. Res. 410. This resolution calls for the release of the Panchen Lama to allow him to pursue his traditional role.
- 9 June 2005 The U.N.'s Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief sends a communication on the tenth anniversary of the disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama. She expresses her concern about 'grave interference' in the practice of Tibetan Buddhism inside occupied Tibet.
- 7 Sept. The People's Republic of China responds to a communication sent on June 2005. It declares that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima is not the Panchen Lama: he is just an ordinary boy, in good health, and receiving a normal education and that his family doesn't welcome any interference in their lives.
- 19 Nov. The Fourth World Parliamentarians Convention on Tibet held in Edinburgh, Scotland, condemns Beijing's refusal to release political prisoners – in particular the Panchen Lama – and calls for the release of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.
- 6 April 2006 Human Rights Watch, New York, writes a letter to President George W. Bush requesting him to raise the issue of the missing Panchen Lama, during his meeting with China's President, Hu Jintao.

- 25 April 2007 The United States Commission on Religious Freedom chair, Felice D. Gaer, issues a statement on Gedhun Choekyi Nyima during the Congressional Human Rights Caucus briefing on 'Tibet and Religious Freedoms in China.'
- Nov. 2008 The U. N. Committee against Torture in its 41st Session, terms the practice of enforced disappearances – including the case of the 11th Panchen Lama, per se violation of the Convention.
- 11 Mar. 2009 The U.S. Congress passes Resolution H. Res. 226 recognizing the plight of Tibetan people on the 50th anniversary of His Holiness the Dalai Lama being force to flee into exile. The resolution reiterates the Congress's call on China's government to authenticate the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared Panchen Lama.
- 8 April 2011 A group of U.N. experts raise serious concerns about the missing 11th Panchen Lama and makes him an enforced disappearance case.
- 14 June 2012 The European Parliament passes a resolution on the human rights situation in Tibet and calls on the PRC to reveal and prove the fate and whereabouts of the Panchen Lama.
- 20 June 2013 In China's fifth Universal periodic report due in 2012, China responds, 'Regarding paragraph 23 of the concluding observations, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima is an ordinary citizen who has received a good education. He is currently in good health, and his family members are living normally in Tibet. China is a country under rule of law; its citizens' lawful rights are protected by the nation's law: allegations of Choekyi Nyima's disappearance are unfounded.'

- 29 Oct. The U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child raises the issue of the 11th Panchen Lama and recommends that China allow an independent expert to visit the Panchen Lama and verify his well-being and living conditions.
- 28 July 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, 2013 submitted to the U.S. Congress, highlights the issue of whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.
- 12 Sept. During an interactive dialogue session of the U.N. Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, the Asian Indigenous and Tribal People's Network urges the Working Group to investigate the unresolved case of the Panchen Lama.

VI – Analysis by Prominent China Watchers And Human Rights Experts



Dr. Dibyesh Anand



Isabel Hilton



Tsering Tsomo



Chen Weijian

How would it impact on the Chinese government and the validity of the two Panchen Lamas in future if the current situation of Gendhun Choekyi Nyima persists?

Dr. Dibyesh Anand, Head of Department of Politics & International Relations, University of Westminster (24 March 2015)

Traditionally, politico-religious legitimacy in Tibet flowed through the institution of reincarnation and not absolutist dominance of territory and population in the form of sovereignty. Since the Chinese occupation, the tensions between trulku system and territorial sovereignty emerged. The controversy over Panchen Lama goes at the heart of Chinese claims of legitimacy for its rule over Tibet; it is not merely about one religious leader. China argues that sovereignty over Tibet implies it has the right to control every aspect of Tibetan body politic, including the matters of faith and religion. The move to arrest and remove from the public eye the Dalai Lama backed choice for Panchen Lama and impose its own candidate and build an institution around him is an experimentation to see how Tibetans and the world will react in the long run. If Chinese can intimidate Tibetans to accept its candidate and the world to get disenchanted with the issue and ignore it in favour of trade with rising powerful China, their purpose will be achieved. This experiment is to test waters for what happens after the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. So far, there is no evidence of the Chinese government's candidate for Panchen Lama has any following amongst Tibetans. Sadly, the International Community shows no interest in the fate of a religious leader who was abducted and arrested at a very young age and remains a political prisoner for two full decades.

Through this controversial act, China has restricted its own options to resolve the Sino-Tibetan conflict as vested interests within its government will benefit from the imbroglio and not want the status quo to change. The hardliners will want Beijing to replicate the practice in the future with the Dalai Lama institution because they would argue that Tibetans can be suppressed through brute force and International Community silenced through bullying and trade.

Even though the case of the missing case of Panchen Lama was able to draw international attention initially, in later years there's been less international interest. As one journalist puts it, "They dropped the case like a hot potato". As someone who has been closely watching the case and is deeply concerned, what do you think lies ahead if this situation persists?

Isabel Hilton, Journalist, Broadcaster & Author of the book "The Search for The Panchen Lama" (3 August 2015)

To your question, I am afraid the question of the missing Panchen Lama is related to the wider situation in Tibet. The missing Panchen Lama has already missed his religious education and the training that he should have been given. His followers have been deprived of his presence and it is possible that he himself may be unaware of the background to his situation. The fact is, his followers simply do not know and the Chinese government is unlikely to tell them. Unless there is a new settlement in Tibet that recognises the right of its people to the free exercise of their religious beliefs and practice, this situation is not likely to change. There is, of course, a further risk: that the government will seek to use its nominee to influence the eventual recognition of the next Dalai Lama. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is well aware of this risk and has made clear his own view of his next incarnation and of the office of Dalai Lama in the future. It is important that his words be taken seriously.

China must be held accountable for enforced disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama

Tsering Tsomo, Director, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) (9 July 2015)

25 April 2015 marks the 26th birthday of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, one of the most important spiritual leaders of Tibet, who was disappeared when he was 6 years old.

For years, the Chinese authorities have willfully misled the international community on the actual whereabouts and wellbeing of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family members, almost always sticking to the standard, unverifiable response that the “perfectly ordinary boy” is in “protective custody”.

Gedhun Choekyi Nyima is now 26 years old, no longer a minor to be kept under “protective custody”, according to both Chinese and International Law. He has a right to live as a normal citizen, as provided in article 34 of the Chinese Constitution, which stipulates that any person who has reached the age of 18 is entitled to fundamental rights such as the right to religious belief, education and occupation.

The enforced disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family has further tainted China’s abysmal human rights record. Enforced disappearance is a crime. Every enforced disappearance violates a range of human rights including the right to security and dignity of person; the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the right to humane conditions of detention; the right to a legal personality; right to a fair trial; right to a family life and the right to life.

In 2005, on the tenth anniversary of Panchen Lama’s disappearance, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in a communication sent to the Chinese government called the act of secretly holding the Panchen Lama “grave interference with the freedom of belief of the Tibetan Buddhists who have the right to determine their clergy in accordance with their own rites and who have been deprived of their religious leader.

In the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1981, Art. 6 (g) provides that the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief includes the freedom “to train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate leaders.” This Declaration remains the most important contemporary codification of the principle of freedom of religion and belief. The Human Rights Committee in its General Comment 22, Para. 4, has clarified that “the practice and teaching of religion or belief includes acts integral to the conduct by religious groups of their basic affairs, such as the freedom to choose their religious leaders, priests and teachers.”

It is unacceptable that as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, the government of the People’s Republic of China continues to engage in enforced disappearance, a serious international crime that violates multiple human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other major international human rights instruments. TCHRD urges the international community including governments, human rights groups and other civil society groups to pressure China in releasing Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family members without any condition and delay. TCHRD believes that one of the most important steps toward the protection of international human rights system is to ensure that states are not allowed to set unlawful precedent.

Forcibly Disappeared Person - The 11th Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima*

Chen Weijian, Vice President, Sino Tibetan Friendship Association, New Zealand (10 May 2015)

When a person goes missing, it implies his/her whereabouts is not known to anybody. There is no place to look for him. Nowhere can he/she be traced. In Tibet a child disappeared. People know well who is behind his disappearance, as well as in whose captivity he is. This type of disappearance has a new term - enforced disappearance. The 11th Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima is the longest forcibly disappeared person in the world.

Choekyi Nyima went missing twenty years ago, when he was just six years old. At that time he was just an innocent child. He was born in Nagchu (Naqu) Prefecture of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region. He became the 10th Panchen Lama Choekyi Gyaltsen's reincarnation following unique Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Actually the boy could have had an extraordinary life ahead of him. But as he was recognized by the exiled Dalai Lama, he was not to have the destined future. In Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama recognize each other's reincarnations. A Panchen Lama's reincarnation becomes legitimate only with the Dalai Lama's authentication. But the hegemonic Communist Party of China (CPC) believed recognizing the Panchen Lama's reincarnation was the sole responsibility of the secular authorities. Consequently, the Panchen Lama recognized by the Dalai Lama naturally failed out of the CPC's favour. In order to prevent Tibetan people from worshipping and prostrating themselves before the Dalai Lama recognized Panchen Lama, Choekyi Nyima was disappeared into thin air. It was not him alone; his whole family disappeared with him. In the blink of an eye, twenty years have passed. The child named Gedhun Choekyi Nyima must have become a grown up man - a youngster in his prime. But nobody can get a glimpse of his heroic bearings.

** The original article is in Chinese available at <http://xizang-zhiye.org/>被失踪的人：十一世班禅确吉尼玛/ in case of any discrepancies treat the Chinese as an original.*

Even his custodians may not know what he is called, except him being a particularly important convict.

Simultaneously with Choekyi Nyima's disappearance, the CPC approved a child of his age, named Gyaltzen Norbu, as the 10th Panchen Lama's reincarnation in his place. Even this child is a grown up man now, groomed and manipulated by the CPC to become a tool to achieve their political objectives. Over the years, like an actor Gyaltzen Norbu is seen gracing stage functions in maroon robes and a yellow hat. But his each and every move is pre-determined by the CPC. Even he himself knows well that he is a mere actor and a stand-in; and he lacks his compatriots' acceptance. This is because Gyaltzen Norbu has not been blessed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the true reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama, and the child that received His Holiness the Dalai Lama's blessings is imprisoned by the CPC. He must be feeling extremely miserable with his own false, yet irredeemable identity. And this feeling will only grow as he gets older.

The CPC is materialistic; still it deliberately interferes in spiritual affairs. With ostensible seriousness it even conducted a "Golden Urn" ceremony. in choosing the Panchen Lama's reincarnation. As if the mere ceremony is not sufficient, the CPC tempered with the process and placed the ivory lot bearing Gyaltzen Norbu's name a tad taller than the others. Thus the sacred process of selecting a reincarnation was turned into a chicanery. When ordinary mortals, especially the filthy CPC, interfere in spiritual matters, the outcome is going to be absolute chaos. With Gyaltzen Norbu kept on a tight rein by the CPC, Tibetan people miss the real Panchen Lama all the more. Every year they remember Choekyi Nyima by different means and in different forms. He alone is the real 11th Panchen Lama in Tibetan people's heart.

The CPC's interference has caused the occurrence of twin reincarnations of the 10th Panchen Lama. This has seriously harmed not only the age old traditional reincarnation system, but also Tibetan people's sentiment. The seriousness of the issue is becoming all the more glaring with His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advancing age. After the Dalai Lama passes away, the CPC will

definitely repeat the process used to select the 10th Panchen Lama's reincarnation on the 14th Dalai Lama. This is something the Dalai Lama himself, as well as the Tibetan people, do not want to see. His Holiness publicly stated that "reincarnation" was a phenomenon which should take place either through the voluntary choice of the concerned person or at least on the strength of his or her karma, merit and prayers. No one else could force the person concerned, or manipulate his or her reincarnation. If any power interfered in the selection and recognition of reincarnations, all Tibetan compatriots and the international community should never accept the candidate.

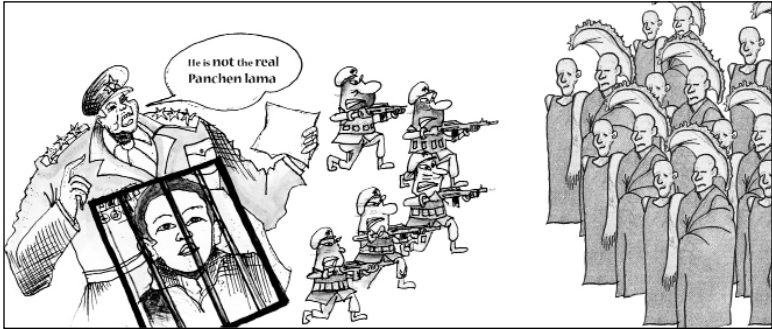
The CPC's refusal to accept the Panchen Lama recognised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama give rise to concern over the recognition of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation in the future. On the one side the Dalai Lama may announce he will not reincarnate anymore. This will dislodge the CPC's scheme to install their choice of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. However, if the CPC chooses a reincarnation of the Dalai Lama of their own, and if he were recognized by the fake Panchen Lama; then an absurd situation will arise, wherein a fake Panchen Lama recognizes a fake Dalai Lama. Therefore, the final result of the CPC's refusal to accept the Dalai Lama recognized Panchen Lama and installing a fake Panchen Lama of their choice will be similar to lifting up a stone only to release it on one's own feet.

The disappeared 11th Panchen Lama Choekyi Nyima and the fake Panchen Lama, dancing to the tune of the Chinese government, both have become tools of the United Front Work Department of the CPC and a test to the traditional Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation system. If the CPC does not change its Tibet policy and Choekyi Nyima continues to remain "missing" failing to regain his rightful status, the reincarnation system possibly will not survive. But things will change, and changes are already happening. There are indications that the Chinese Communist regime will not survive long, and the CPC is on the verge of disintegration. The Tibetan people will soon realize their dream to live life according to their own culture and wish.

The Tibetan Buddhist tradition of reincarnation system is a unique culture of this world that explains human interpretation of life and death. In mysterious ways it describes areas of knowledge unknown to modern science. Its existence enriches this world of ours.

It is now twenty years since the 11th Panchen Lama Choekyi Nyima disappeared. Is he safe today?

VII - From the World Press



Art by Kunga Phuntsok

1. Where is the Panchen Lama?

China clamps down on Tibetan religious life, report says
Uli Schemetzer, *Chicago Tribune*, 03 April 1996

Beijing — Chinese officials insist the 6-year-old Tibetan boy chosen last year as the Buddhist leader is safe and sound. But human rights groups have their doubts, and the boy's fate has become an issue with the UN Human rights groups believe that 6-year-old Tibetan Gedhun Choekyi Nyima is under house arrest somewhere in Beijing. Chinese officials insist the boy is "leading a normal life" but won't say where.

Nyima's fate has become an issue in the dispute over a proposed United Nations resolution condemning China for human rights abuses. He was chosen last May as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama, but was stripped of his status six months later by Beijing.

The reincarnation controversy has caused a schism in Tibetan Buddhism over the succession to Tibet's most senior spiritual leader, who died in 1989. It also has focused attention on China's recent history of falsely claiming that Tibetan political prisoners had been released when they actually were still in custody.

In an 82-page report issued over the weekend, two human rights groups, Tibet Information Network and Asia Watch, have drawn a grim picture of China's campaign to control Tibetan spiritual life and education. Beijing also is demanding loyalty oaths from minor bureaucrats while banning religious items in their homes.

Human rights organizations contend that the international community ignores Tibet's plight because it doesn't want to jeopardize access to China's lucrative markets.

The report said 610 Tibetans have been jailed since January for advocating separatism and opposing the immigration of more Chinese settlers.

It also reports protests by peasants against excessive levies and the arrest of nuns and monks over independence posters in monasteries and temples.

Among those detained are 52 monks and senior lamas who refused to go along with a finding by a special Chinese investigative committee that Nyima was a false reincarnation imposed by the Dalai Lama, Tibet's god-king who lives in exile in India.

Chinese officials replaced the entire lama leadership of Tashilhumpo Monastery in Shigatse, the headquarters of the Panchen Lamas.

The report blames international apathy and the Clinton administration's decision to break the link between trade and human rights in 1994 for encouraging China to embrace a more repressive policy in Tibet.

The report's release coincides with the 52nd UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva this month. The commission will consider a U.S. co-sponsored resolution to censor China for human rights abuses.

The European Union has agreed to support the resolution despite a strong Chinese lobbying effort against it.

One of the key issues is the fate of Nyima, who had been chosen by a search party of monks lead by the venerable Chatral Rinpoche, abbot of Tashilhumpo Monastery in Shigatse. The abbot has been missing since he was denounced as a "criminal" for informing the Dalai Lama of Nyima's selection before informing Beijing.

A spokesman at China's Bureau of Religious Affairs said this week he had no idea of the whereabouts of the "fake Panchen Lama." Last month a senior, Chinese-approved Tibetan official told a press conference: "It's ridiculous to think we would detain a 6-year-old boy."

"As for the boy appointed by the Dalai Lama, he is now in good health and leading a normal life. The so-called arrest and persecution of him is nothing but a pure rumor," said another

official, Gunchok Tsering, a Tibetan member of the Chinese delegation in Geneva.

The human rights report cast doubts on such affirmations. It points out that Chinese vice Foreign Minister Jiang Enzhu, now ambassador to Britain, had told the European Union in 1993 that activist Damchoe Pemo had been released. In fact she was reported still in prison a year later.

In another case, the European Union was informed by Chinese authorities in March 1994 that 15-year-old nun Gyaltzen Pelsang had been released from prison. In fact she remained in Gutsa detention center for another 11 months, the report said.

The report detailed "a three-stage purge" of those at the Tashilhumpo monastery who had refused to accept the denunciation of the "fake lama." The monastery's leadership, officially described as "the scum of Buddhism" was replaced by lamas who supported Chinese authorities, the report said.

At the same time, Chinese authorities issued a statement that has become the new guideline for the practice of religion in Tibet: "A qualified religious believer should, first of all, be a patriot. Any legitimate religion invariably makes patriotism the primary requirement for believers. One can talk about love of religion only if one is a patriot."

2. Panchen Lama: Tibet's Living God or Puppet Ruler?

**Rebecca MacKinnon, Beijing Bureau Chief, *CNN.com*,
2 July 1999**

Beijing (CNN) – At the ripe age of 11, Gyancaïn Norbu finds himself at the center of a weighty theological and political dispute.

The boy has recently returned from seclusion in Beijing to the land of his birth to claim his place in Tibetan society as a living god – the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama, Tibetan Buddhism's second-ranking religious leader.

But many Tibetan exiles – including their top religious leader, the Dalai Lama – consider the boy to be a pawn of the Chinese authorities who took over Tibet in 1959. They say China is attempting to indoctrinate a new generation of Tibetan religious leaders through a puppet ruler.

When the last Panchen Lama died in 1989, a search was launched, according to Tibetan Buddhist belief, to find the child in whom his soul had been reborn. Beijing's government-sanctioned search team selected Gyancaïn Norbu as the 11th Panchen Lama.

Tibetan exiles say he is a false god, that the real Panchen Lama is another boy. From exile in India, where he has lived for 40 years, the Dalai Lama has named Gedhun Choekyi Nyima the real Panchen Lama. But that boy is now under detention somewhere in China, and Hao Shiyuan, of China's Institute of Nationality Studies, says the Dalai Lama's opinion no longer counts.

"The Dalai Lama no longer lives in the motherland, and constantly does things which are harmful to the motherland," Hao said. "So of course, the reincarnation chosen by him could not be accepted."

Tibetan monks consider Gyancaïn Norbu to be a Chinese puppet, being used as a pawn to control the next generation of Tibet's religious leaders and the hearts and minds of the faithful. Because of the controversy, the Beijing-backed Panchen Lama is kept

under close guard: Visiting journalists weren't allowed to see him, and were discouraged from filming even his motorcade.

Tibetan authorities say the security is needed to protect the boy from the Dalai Lama's agents, who want to restore the mountain land's independence.

"In Tibet, the splittist and anti-splittist struggle is continuous," said Nema Tsering, an official of the Chinese- allied Tibet Autonomous Government.

3. World's Youngest Political Prisoner Turns 17

By Benjamin Kang Lim, *The Washington Post*, 23 April 2006

Beijing: A Tibetan youth considered by rights groups to be the world's youngest political prisoner turns 17 on Tuesday, 11 years after disappearing from public view when he was named the Himalayan region's second-ranking religious figure.

The whereabouts of Gendun Choekyi Nyima – who human rights watchdogs say has been living under house arrest since Tibet's exiled god-king, the Dalai Lama, appointed him the 11th Panchen Lama – is one of China's most zealously guarded state secrets.

A senior Canadian official pressed for access to Nyima during a visit to Tibet this month, but it fell on deaf ears.

Chinese officials parroted their assertion that Nyima was "safe and comfortable and wishes to maintain his privacy," said the Canadian, who requested anonymity.

The Chinese cabinet spokesman's office did not reply to a list of questions submitted by fax a week ago.

The Dalai Lama's unilateral announcement embarrassed and enraged China's atheist Communists, who dropped Nyima's name from a shortlist of candidates and endorsed Gyaltzen Norbu as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama, who died in 1989.

Tibetan Buddhists believe in reincarnation and that the soul of a "living Buddha" migrates to a boy born shortly after the holy monk's death. The reincarnation is identified through a mystical search that includes a series of ancient and rigorous tests such as picking out items that belonged to the late lama.

While Nyima languished in limbo, Norbu has studied Buddhism for years and made his debut on the world stage this month at China's first international religious forum since 1949.

Security is extremely tight wherever Norbu goes, apparently to prevent any assassination attempt against the 16-year-old, who is reviled by Dalai Lama loyalists as a pretender. "China made a huge gamble in 1995 when it decided to appoint its own Panchen Lama. It seems this has failed completely so far," said Robbie Barnett, a Tibetologist at Columbia University.

The next Dalai Lama

Many analysts expect China, increasingly confident due to its emerging economic and military power, to demand the Dalai Lama recognize its choice before allowing him to return. The Dalai Lama fled into exile in India in 1959 after an abortive uprising.

Whether Chinese Communist Party chief Hu Jintao, who was close to the 10th Panchen Lama during his stint as Tibet's party boss from 1988 to 1992, has the political clout or the intention to undo what the previous administration did remains to be seen.

Party hardliners have sought to undermine the Dalai Lama's influence in Tibet and appear to be dragging their feet on reconciliation in the hope that the headache would disappear after the 70-year-old Dalai Lama dies.

By sticking firmly to its Panchen Lama choice, China may have deprived itself of having a say in the next Dalai Lama.

"China has lost a great opportunity to control the selection and training of the next Dalai Lama," Wang Lixiong, author of two books on Tibet that are banned in China, told Reuters.

Tibetan tradition calls for the Dalai and Panchen lamas to approve each other's reincarnations.

The Karmapa Lama who fled Tibet and joined the Dalai Lama in India in 2000 and Renji, the daughter of the 10th Panchen Lama, are tipped by some to fill the Dalai Lama's shoes when he dies.

"We shouldn't rule out that Tibetans may accept the Karmapa or even the Panchen Lama's daughter as being important figures in the future," Barnett said.

4. The Panchen Lama Mystery

Is China's pick for second-highest spiritual leader in Tibetan buddhism legitimate or just a power grab

Saransh Sehgal, *The Diplomat*, 11 July 2010

The 75th birthday of the Dalai Lama this week was cause for celebration for many Tibetans. But it also acted as an uncomfortable reminder of both their spiritual leader's advancing years and the uncertainty of who will succeed him.

Under Tibetan tradition, the Panchen Lama, second only in ranking to the Dalai Lama, plays a key role in finding the next incarnation of the Dalai Lama. But the problem is there are now two Panchen Lamas – one selected by the current Dalai Lama and another picked by the Chinese government.

In May 1995, the Dalai Lama named Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the real incarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. However, China rejected the nomination, and soon after announced that Gyaincain Norbu was actually the newest incarnation of the Panchen Lama; it also said that the Dalai Lama's named successor had been taken into 'protective' custody. By whom, where and why was never made clear.

So who will really succeed the Dalai Lama?

Beijing has insisted that Gedhun is not the real Panchen Lama, and that he was chosen arbitrarily by the Dalai Lama. The avowedly secular Communist government instead selected its own Panchen Lama by drawing lots from a golden urn. But this selection, although a traditional method used by China, is seen by many as an effort by Beijing to diminish the current exiled Dalai Lama's influence over Tibet. Beijing has long accused the Dalai Lama, who fled Tibet in 1959 and who now lives in exile in the Indian Himalayan town of Dharamsala, of being a separatist.

Supporters of the Dalai Lama say China's efforts at influencing the succession are doomed to failure.

‘China’s appointed Lama will never get any respect. He’s Tibetan, but we can’t recognize him as the Panchen Lama’s reincarnation,’ says a Tenzin monk at the temple complex opposite the Dalai Lama’s residence in exile. ‘The Chinese have given him this status...but for us, the last words will be His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s.’

The monk is far from alone in this view – many Tibetans dismiss China’s choice as a sham and Tibetan exiles have protested over the disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who they describe as the youngest political prisoner in the world. They say China’s chosen Lama is simply a propaganda tool to undercut the Dalai Lama, and many still live in hope that the ‘real’ Panchen Lama can be found or that he can escape to India.

The urn method used by China is actually considered a legitimate one and was used to select the 10th, 11th and 12th Dalai Lama. But critics say such a process is irrelevant if the Dalai Lama has already unequivocally named his choice of Panchen Lama. Indeed, the 10th Panchen Lama himself reportedly declared that according to Tibetan tradition, the confirmation of either the Dalai or Panchen Lama must be ‘mutually recognized’ by the other, as well as Beijing.

China had until recent months kept its choice out of the glare of the international media, with the youngster spending most of his time in Beijing, studying with his teachers and carefully watched over by the Communist Party. But officials underscored the importance of their nominee to the Party by this year appointing him a member of the country’s top legislative advisory body, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. The move followed his election as vice president of China’s state-run Buddhist Association.

‘I’ve shouldered the mission of safeguarding national unity and ethnic solidarity since I was enthroned,’ Norbu told the official Xinhua news agency a week after he was declared a delegate to the advisory body. ‘Now, such a sense of responsibility is becoming even stronger.’

So how does the Dalai Lama feel about Beijing's choice?

In May, he held a Twitter session with Chinese Internet users in which he discussed Norbu's selection. According to AFP, he said: 'As far as I understand, he (the new Panchen Lama) is very intelligent – as far as Buddhist scriptures, he is making a lot of effort...But the people have certain suspicions about him, on whether or not his interpretations of Buddhist scriptures will be effective. This is very important and it will depend on he himself.'

Chinese officials are undoubtedly aware of the uphill struggle they have in winning over sceptical Tibetans, and it was likely such concerns that prompted a visit by Norbu to address a number of prominent Tibetan monasteries, including Tashilhunpo Monastery—traditionally the seat of power of the Panchen Lama.

'China seeks to legitimize its rule in Tibet by claiming it plays a crucial role in the identification of Tibet's two most important spiritual leaders,' says Tenzin, a young Tibetan in exile, on the issue of the Tibet political debut of Beijing's choice.

Indeed, Tibetans in exile have been particularly vocal in their opposition to China's Panchen Lama. 'No matter what China claims and what it does, he (China's Panchen Lama) isn't authentic in the eyes of Tibetans. He has no legitimacy,' says Thupten Samphel, spokesperson for the exile government. 'This is just another attempt by the Chinese government to diminish His Holiness the Dalai Lama's image among the Tibetans.'

And there remains the question of the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, still the choice of Panchen Lama for many exiled Tibetans. China denies he's in detention, with the recently appointed governor of Tibet, Padma Choling, reportedly telling AP on the sidelines of China's annual legislative session:

'As far as I know, his family and he are now living a very good life in Tibet...He and his family are reluctant to be disturbed, they want to live an ordinary life.'

Such assurances are unlikely to satisfy Tibetans any time soon.

5. China Hopes to Bolster the Credential of a Handpicked Lama

By Andrew Jacob, *the New York Times*, 6 August 2011

China – His name is on the lips of the ruddy-cheeked monks, the anxious hotel owners and the intrepid tourists who make their way to this isolated and starkly beautiful town in the mountains of Gansu Province: will he come to Xiahe, as unverified reports suggest, and how long will he stay?

“He” is China’s handpicked Panchen Lama, the second-most important religious figure in Tibetan Buddhism, and despite his formidable rank, his presence is not universally welcomed by the faithful in and around the white-wall Labrang Monastery that sprawls into a cavernous valley here.

In recent weeks, as word has spread that he might be coming to study at the monastery, emotions have spiked, as have the numbers of police officers, both uniformed and in plain clothes, hoping to head off trouble in a place where ethnic Tibetans have been unafraid to express their enmity toward Chinese rule.

“Nobody wants him to come, and yet still he will come,” said one 26-year-old monk. “We feel powerless.”

The main problem is that this Panchen Lama, 21, is one of two young men with claims to the title. The one chosen by Communist Party officials in 1995, named Gyaltzen Norbu at birth, is often referred to by local residents as the “Chinese Panchen Lama.” The other is Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who would now be 22, a herder’s son who was anointed that same year by the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan leader.

Most Tibetans are still loyal to the memory of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, even if he has been missing since Chinese authorities swept him and his family into “protective custody” more than 16 years ago.

“We just hope he is still alive,” said Tsering Woenser, a Tibetan essayist and blogger who noted that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima’s visage, frozen as a 5-year-old, hangs in many homes and temples. “We are waiting for him.”

As Gyaltzen Norbu moves from adolescence to adulthood, Chinese authorities are facing a quandary over how to burnish his bona fides: his standing will continue to suffer if he remains apart from Tibetan monks and the faithful, but officials risk inflaming passions by foisting him on a community that remains deeply suspicious.

In recent years, the Communist Party has tried other means to raise his profile. They named him vice president of the state-run Buddhist association and appointed him to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, an advisory body that meets annually in Beijing.

But so far most of his public statements have left Tibetans unimpressed. In one typically stolid remark last March, he said, “We live in a society governed by law, while the religious practices fall into the category of social activity; therefore, only by administration according to law can we ensure a stable and harmonious development of religious affairs.”

The government bureaucrats who oversee Tibetan affairs have come to the conclusion, one rooted in history, that only a significant stint in a prominent monastery can bolster the Panchen Lama’s religious credentials, according to scholars and local religious figures.

“The Tibetans respect good Buddhist practice and accomplishment,” Hu Shisheng, a researcher at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, said in a telephone interview from Lhasa, Tibet’s capital.

The government’s struggle to legitimize the Panchen Lama among Tibetans foreshadows the deeper struggle Beijing will face upon the death of the Dalai Lama, when it has said it will name a successor. The Dalai Lama, 76, is still revered on the Tibetan plateau despite years of fierce propaganda that brands him as a

troublemaking separatist, even as he insists that he is interested only in genuine autonomy for Tibetans.

Although officially atheist, the Communist Party asserts that only it has the authority to pick top spiritual leaders, who, according to Tibetan theology, are reincarnated from deceased religious figures.

A previous attempt to improve the Panchen Lama's religious standing in 1998 did not end well. After officials sought to pair the boy with the abbot of Kumbum, a revered monastery in Qinghai Province, the abbot, Arjia Rinpoche, fled China and sought asylum in the United States. "It was a very difficult decision, but I did not want to be seen as a collaborator with the Chinese government," Arjia Rinpoche said by telephone from Indiana, where he now lives.

According to several Tibetans, both in China and abroad, the antipathy has been strong enough that the authorities may have already scaled back their plans to have the Panchen Lama spend months studying at Labrang Monastery, one of the most important centers of Buddhist learning — and the scene of recent protests against Chinese rule that were prompted by much deadlier ethnic rioting in Lhasa.

One Qinghai-based scholar who said that he had spoken to senior lamas at Labrang in recent days noted that many rank-and-file monks had expressed concern that the Panchen Lama would bring with him security agents, surveillance cameras and even more restrictions than those that already govern the lives of the monastery's more than 1,000 monks. "There is no historical precedent for installing a Panchen Lama at Labrang," said the scholar, who asked for anonymity to shield himself from potential trouble. "But more importantly, they worry Labrang will become like a circus, not a monastery."

He and others said Xiahe was most likely selected because the region's most senior religious figure has been especially cooperative with Beijing. Another factor may be that one of the tutors who teaches the Panchen Lama at his home in Beijing hails from Labrang.

But the monastery also includes a coterie of fiercely independent monks who could make things uncomfortable for the Panchen Lama.

A few months after violent protests that jolted the Tibetan plateau in 2008, 15 monks rushed out of the monastery waving the banned Tibetan flag during a government-arranged visit for foreign journalists. “We have no human rights now,” they told reporters before older monks dispersed them. (Three of them later escaped to India to avoid punishment.) Another senior monk was later jailed for six months after posting a video online that described his torture during a previous detention.

Despite what might seem like insurmountable obstacles to the Panchen Lama’s legitimacy, a number of experts said the government’s long-term strategy might give him at least some credibility. Even if they are unhappy with the arrangement, Tibetans understand the necessary bargain that their spiritual leaders must make with the authorities. Arjia Rinpoche, the exiled former abbot, said that if the Panchen Lama one day showed a hint of independence, Tibetans could come to respect him.

“People say that even if he’s not a real reincarnation, at least he’s a real Tibetan, and maybe when he grows up he can believe in the Dalai Lama and do something good for Tibet,” he said.

More immediately, however, the prospect of a visit to Xiahe is causing consternation, and not only among the monks. Several government workers who are ethnic Tibetans have in recent days said they were threatened with wage cuts or dismissal if they did not greet the Panchen Lama with open arms.

Before he was interrupted by a Han Chinese business owner, one middle-age monk who spoke to a foreign visitor acknowledged the widespread discontent but said he was resigned to the Panchen Lama’s arrival. “I will not allow it to impact me,” he said. “I will continue to pray and be fully observant.”

Adam Century and Edy Yin contributed research.

6. Lamas at Loggerheads

The Economist, 20 August 2011

IT WAS never going to be easy. Installing the Chinese Communist Party's chosen man as Tibet's second-highest ranking religious leader has been an uphill struggle since 1995, when it declared him, at the ripe old age of six, to be the new Panchen Lama. But a recent attempt to introduce him to monastic life suggests that Tibetan resistance to China's choice is still strong. Loyalty to the young man is brittle.

For China, this matters hugely. Tibetan Buddhism has a religious hierarchy with the Dalai Lama at the top, followed by the Panchen Lama. The Dalai Lama is traditionally involved in recognising the Panchen Lama, and the Panchen Lama is part of the process by which each new Dalai Lama is chosen. China has its eyes on a complex struggle that will play out after the death of the current 76-year-old Dalai Lama, who lives in exile in India. With the endorsement of its own Panchen Lama, China wants to choose a successor to the current Dalai Lama and seek to control him. Hence it is believed to be keeping another young man, who was the Dalai Lama's choice as Panchen Lama 16 years ago, incommunicado in an unknown location. China fears that Tibetan exiles will appoint their own Dalai Lama and it does not want any authoritative Tibetan figure to show him support. Both China and the exiles have recently been stepping up preparations for a coming dispute.

On China's side, this has involved an effort to burnish its Panchen Lama's credentials by getting him some monastic training. Gyaltsen Norbu, as he is named, has spent most of his 21 years in Beijing. His outings have been few and secretive. Across Tibet, images of the Dalai Lama's choice of Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, can sometimes be seen on furtive display in monasteries, his face frozen in time as a little boy. Chinese officials probably hoped that installing Gyaltsen Norbu in a big-name monastery might win him more supporters. With some parts of Tibet roiled by unrest—a protesting monk burned himself to death on August 15th in Daofu, a Tibetan-dominated county of Sichuan Province—this was always bound to be tricky.

The monastery they chose was Labrang in southern Gansu province, on the edge of the Tibetan plateau. It is not clear why. Historically, the Panchen Lama's seat was Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse in central Tibet. Robert Barnett of Columbia University in New York says it is possible that even at Tashilhunpo some lamas do not accept China's choice. In 1997, Tashilhunpo's then abbot, Chadrel Rinpoche, was sentenced to six years in prison (he has not resurfaced since) for helping the Dalai Lama make his choice of Panchen Lama. In 1998, Chinese officials tried to give their Panchen Lama a monastic start at Kumbum in Qinghai Province, a monastery that has usually acquiesced to Chinese rule. Its abbot, Arjia Rinpoche, fled to America to avoid the duty.

Labrang has no reputation for tameness. Its monks joined a wave of protests that swept Tibet and neighbouring Tibetan regions in 2008 after an outbreak of rioting in Lhasa, Tibet's capital. In recent days, Labrang has again proved stubborn. Locals gave China's Panchen Lama, who arrived on August 11th, nothing like the rapturous reception his predecessor, the tenth Panchen Lama, received during visits to Tibetan areas. Large numbers of police prevented any protests, and foreigners were ushered out of town. Tibetan exile groups quoted sources at Labrang saying that Gyaltzen Norbu was expected to stay for weeks or months. A local official, however, says he left on August 16th. His cool welcome, it seems, hastened him on his way.

In Dharamsala in India's Himalayan foothills, Tibet's government-in-exile has been busy maneuvering, too. On August 8th it swore in a new prime minister, Lobsang Sangay. This is touted by the exiles as an historic event, with the new man taking over all the Dalai Lama's political functions. Mr. Sangay, who has never been to Tibet, struck an ambiguous tone in his inaugural speech, referring to Tibet as “occupied” but also expressing his wish for “genuine autonomy” under Chinese rule.

The Dalai Lama's decision to give up his political role appears aimed at bolstering the post of prime minister before his death. A new Dalai Lama chosen by the exiles is likely to be a small boy who will need many years of tutelage before taking up his duties. It also presents a challenge to China, which has always refused to recognise the Dalai Lama's political mantle. Now that he no

longer has it, China has a face-saving opportunity to engage with him properly. Chinese officials have held several rounds of talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives in recent years, the latest in January 2010, but have not moved beyond finger-wagging.

Few see any sign of change. The man likely to become China's next president, Xi Jinping, visited Lhasa in July for official celebrations of the Communist Party's takeover of the territory 60 years ago. He praised the fight against "separatist and sabotage activities staged by the Dalai group and foreign hostile forces". But there have been some positive signals, too. A meeting between President Barack Obama and the Dalai Lama at the White House in July elicited the usual sharp criticism from China. But it did not derail subsequent exchanges between China and America, including a visit to Beijing this week by the vice-president, Joe Biden.

On August 13th the Dalai Lama told reporters in France that he would discuss the issue of his reincarnation at a meeting of Tibetan religious heads in September. He said that unlike China, he is in no hurry to make arrangements.

“... Sadly, the International Community shows no interest in the fate of a religious leader who was abducted and arrested at a very young age and remains a political prisoner for two full decades.”

— Dr. Dibyesh Anand

“The missing Panchen Lama has already missed his religious education and the training that he should have been given. His followers have been deprived of his presence and it is possible that he himself may be unaware of the background to his situation.”

— Isabel Hilton

“For years, the Chinese authorities have willfully misled the international community on the actual whereabouts and wellbeing of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family members, almost always sticking to the standard, unverifiable response that the ‘perfectly ordinary boy’ is in ‘protective custody’.”

— Tsering Tsomo

“... the sacred process of selecting a reincarnation was turned into a chicanery.”

— Chen Weijian