



Enduring Tibetan Faith under Sinicization

The cultural and national identity of Tibet is deeply intertwined with Tibetan Buddhism, a religious tradition that has shaped Tibet and the Tibetan ethos for the past fourteen centuries. Through periods of prosperity and adversity, the Tibetan people and the monastic community in specific have steadfastly maintained the integrity of their religious practices, ensuring the survival of sacred rituals, philosophical teachings, and artistic traditions.

Despite facing significant challenges, including political upheavals and repression over six decades of Chinese misrule, the Tibetan monastic community has remained resilient, safeguarding Tibet's spiritual and cultural identity against formidable odds. Their efforts have not only preserved ancient wisdom but also fostered a sense of unity and resilience among Tibetans, ensuring that the heart of their faith and culture continues to thrive.

Since the widespread 2008 protests that swept Tibet in defiance of the Chinese party-state's repression, Chinese authorities have significantly intensified their efforts to suppress dissent. This crackdown has manifested in heightened surveillance, stringent control measures, and aggressive assimilationist policies aimed at diminishing Tibetan faith and identity.

Under Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and President of China, even more draconian restrictions have been imposed on the monastic community and the Tibetan people. The Chinese party-state's campaign to "Sinicize" Tibetan Buddhism represents a deliberate and aggressive strategy to bring religious institutions under stringent party-state control "to forge a sense of community for the Chinese nation". Far from being mere rhetoric, this policy has been methodically implemented through a series of steps within the CCP apparatus and state system, steps specifically geared to profoundly impacting Tibetan believers and the monastic communities daily life. In the ten years, since the Central United Front Work Conference in mid 2015, the structural changes in the party-state system under Xi's leadership have amplified the United Front Work Department's authority, granting it unprecedented control over the implementation of sinicization policies to subordinate the Tibetan people and the monastic community to the CCP's authority, including compelling monks and nuns to place the party and its leaders above Buddhist precepts and revered religious figures, such as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

In July, Tibetan Buddhists and supporters worldwide celebrated the life and legacy of the 14th Dalai Lama as he turned 90. However, inside Tibet, the atmosphere remained tense and subdued. Reports indicated heightened police and military presence in multiple Tibetan cities and towns. In the lead-up to the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6, numerous Chinese government officials visited Tibetan areas and monasteries across the region,



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reflecting a broader strategy to enforce “stability.” State media heavily promoted these activities, amplifying warnings against expressions of support for the Dalai Lama. Affected areas included cities and towns in the officially designated “Tibet Autonomous Region”, Qinghai Province, and Sichuan Province, with other parts of Tibet likely targeted as well. Between July 1 and 6, 2025, government officials held meetings in all monasteries across Lhasa to warn against “anti-separatist” activities, specifically targeting the major monastic learning centers of Drepung and Ganden. Military personnel also conducted 24-hour patrols in Lhasa’s residential areas with significant Tibetan populations. Sources inside Tibet reported that politically active regions, such as Ngaba and Dzoge, faced intense “stability maintenance” measures. These included bans on sharing images of the Dalai Lama or other religious symbols on social media and prohibitions on public gatherings for religious rituals or celebrations. Leaked documents, believed to be part of a longer directive from the Chengdu Cybersecurity Corps on “ideological risks” for the third quarter of 2025, revealed specific instructions to prevent religious believers from celebrating the Dalai Lama’s 90th birthday or displaying his portrait.

For the past six centuries, the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism, and the Tibetan people have been deeply interconnected with the land of Tibet. This profound relationship, rooted in a sacred belief system, is one the Chinese party-state seeks to co-opt through its laws, policies, and practices. Despite these challenges, the 14th Dalai Lama affirmed in May 2025 that the institution of the Dalai Lama will endure. He emphasized that the responsibility for the search process for the 15th Dalai Lama rests exclusively with the Ganden Phodrang Trust, the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who, in consultation with the heads of various Tibetan Buddhist traditions, will search for and recognize the future Dalai Lama in accordance with established tradition. No other entity has the authority to interfere in this matter.

Recommendations for the U.S. government:

1. Urge the Trump Administration to prioritize and mitigate, in accordance with the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020, Chinese officials’ violations of Tibetan religious freedom, including interference in the recognition of a successor or reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama and any future Dalai Lamas. Consider imposing sanctions on such officials under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (22 U.S.C. 2656 note) and applying the relevant section of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(G)) with respect to these officials.



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2. Recognize Chinese rule in Tibet as colonialism with Chinese characteristics that poses an existential threat to the survival of Tibet's unique civilization and spiritual heritage.
3. Urge China to release Tibetan political prisoners, particularly those imprisoned for exercising their religious rights, including the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.
4. Call on China to stop shutting down private monastic schools in Tibet.
5. Allocate additional assistance to the Central Tibetan Administration to protect and promote Tibetan language, religion, culture, and environment, helping to sustain Tibetan identity amidst Chinese Sinicization policies. Ensure continued dedicated diplomatic resources focused on Tibetan affairs, including coordination of policy and programs for Tibetan rights, environment, and security.
6. Promote and explore initiatives to advance substantive dialogue without preconditions between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama, his representatives, or the democratically elected leaders of the Tibetan community.
7. Encourage China's government to address the aspirations of the Tibetan people regarding their distinct historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity.