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## **Destruction and Revival: The Fate of the Tibetan Buddhist Monastery Labrang in the People's Republic of China<sup>1</sup>**

MARTIN SLOBODNÍK

The Tibetan Buddhist monastery Labrang Tashikhyil (*bla brang bkra shis 'khyil*) is situated in the north-eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau which was the area of Amdo (*a mdo*) Province<sup>2</sup> in pre-1949 Tibet. Currently the monastery belongs administratively to Gansu Province of the People's Republic of China. The Labrang monastery is one of the six most important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries of the Gelugpa (*dge lugs pa*) school (Powers, 1995, pp. 402–30) and it was the most influential monastery in this part of Tibet.<sup>3</sup> The monastery was founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century on the initiative of the Mongolian prince Galdan Erdeni Jinong, who belonged to the western Mongolian Qoshot tribal federation.<sup>4</sup> The Mongolian prince was the local ruler in this part of Amdo. He tried to strengthen his position through traditional alliance with a religious authority. With his financial support the already well-known Buddhist scholar Jamyang Zhepe Dorje Ngawang Tsöndru (*'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus*, 1648–1721),<sup>5</sup> who was born in this part of Amdo, returned from Central Tibet and founded the Labrang monastery in 1709. As a result of the crucial role played by Jamyang Zhepa in the foundation of the monastery, his subsequent reincarnations, who live at the monastery, have always been accorded the highest status there and have borne the title Jamyang Zhepa.<sup>6</sup>

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Labrang monastery became an important centre of learning and the six monastic faculties (in Tibetan 'dratshang', *grwa tshang*) were subsequently founded: the Thösamling dratshang (*thos bsam gling*, the faculty of Buddhist logic, founded in 1710); the Gyume dratshang (*rgyud smad*, the lower Tantric faculty, founded in 1716), the Dükhor dratshang (*dus 'khor*, the faculty of the Kalacakra teachings, founded in 1763); the Menpa dratshang (*sman pa*, the faculty of Tibetan medicine, founded in 1782); the Kyedor dratshang (*kye rdor*, the faculty of the teaching on the Hevajra deity, founded in 1879); and the Gytö dratshang (*rgyud stod*, the higher Tantric faculty, founded in 1941) (Zhouta, 1998, pp. 75–391). As result of the high scholarly level of Buddhist education at Labrang it was not only monks from north-eastern Tibetan areas who came to the monastery; it was also an important centre of learning for Mongolian and Buryat monks. The monastery was also the seat of a number of reincarnations who were subordinated to Jamyang Zhepa.<sup>7</sup>

Because the Labrang monastery was situated on the north-eastern periphery of Tibet it was not under the administrative authority of the central government in Lhasa. Contacts with Lhasa were maintained only in religious matters and the Dalai Lama was also

respected there as the highest authority of the Gelugpa school, but his government had no political and economic influence in this part of Amdo. The regional *de facto* ruler was the highest reincarnation of the monastery, Jamyang Zhepa, who personified the traditional Tibetan combination of political and religious power (Phuntsog Wangyal, 1975). The administration of the monastery, appointed by Jamyang Zhepa, ruled large parts of the Amdo area. The local Tibetan population was obliged to pay taxes to the monastery<sup>8</sup> (these were its main source of income) and was subordinated to the monastery. The monastery appointed its representatives (Tibetan *'go ba, sku tshab, rgan pa*) to these tribes and their land was owned by the monastery. The power vacuum in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, which were reached by the administrative authority of neither Beijing nor Lhasa, enabled the Labrang monastery to preserve its traditional religious, political and economic role until the end of 1949.

The destruction of religious life in the Labrang monastery was carried out in two waves following the incorporation of the Amdo area – and later of all Tibet – into the People's Republic of China. The Chinese communist forces entered the Amdo area in summer 1949. At the beginning the religious policy of the new government was tolerant and its implementation was restrained (Tsering Shakya, 1999, p. 35). The basic document regulating the relations between China and Tibet, the *Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet* (in Chinese *Zhongyang renmin zhengfu he Xizang difang zhengfu guanyu heping jiefang Xizang banfa de xieyi*) signed on 23 May 1951, stipulated in its seventh provision that: 'the policy of freedom of religious belief ... will be protected. The central authorities will not effect any change in the income of the monasteries' (Van Walt van Praag, 1987, p. 339).<sup>9</sup> These provisions, together with the freedom of religious belief stipulated in the first Constitution of the PRC from 1954 (MacInnis, 1972, p. 21), established the legal framework of the relations between the state and the Tibetan Buddhist institutions after 1949. In the early 1950s Mao Zedong ruled out the coercive elimination of religion (Tsering Shakya, 1999, p. 101), and especially in respect to Tibetan Buddhism the state authorities opted for a 'gradualist strategy' (Goldstein, 1998a, pp. 6–7) with the aim of gradually diminishing the role of religion in Tibetan society. The Chinese authorities stressed the importance of the separation of church and state,<sup>10</sup> which was in sharp contrast to the traditional division of power in Tibet. The policy of the Chinese authorities towards Tibetan Buddhist monks was implemented in the context of the Marxist class struggle and in the monasteries groups of elder, educated and influential monks and lamas were labelled as 'feudal elements oppressing the masses' and targeted for criticism at mass meetings.<sup>11</sup> In contrast with the situation of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Soviet Union and Mongolia in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>12</sup> then, the criticism of the authorities was aimed not at Tibetan Buddhism as such but only at particular strata of the monastic community.

The rise to power of the Chinese Communist Party (in Chinese *Zhongguo gongchandang*) did not have much influence on the religious life in the Labrang monastery,<sup>13</sup> where about 3800 monks lived at that time. In February 1952 the current Sixth Jamyang Zhepa Lozang Jigme Thubten Choekyi Nyima (*blo bzang 'jigs med thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma*, 1948–) (Zhazha, 1998, pp. 435–37) was identified and enthroned in accordance with traditional practices and the Chinese authorities did not interfere with this process. The first significant changes resulted from the economic reforms of the Chinese government, which started in 1956. The land reform and collectivisation deprived the monastery of its traditional income from the nomadic and semi-nomadic local Tibetan population.<sup>14</sup> These measures were completed in summer 1958 when in the whole of China the movement for the establishment of people's communes (in Chinese *renmin gongshe*) started. This

campaign marked the first serious interference in the internal life of the monastery on the part of the state authorities as its monastic community was also forced to participate in the physical labour in these communes. Economic reforms imposed by the Chinese authorities resulted in the radicalisation of the local Tibetan population and subsequently an anti-Chinese armed uprising broke out in summer 1958. The uprising was quelled by the Chinese army. The defeat of the uprising led to the first wave of destruction in the Labrang monastery, as the Chinese authorities considered the monastery to be the centre of the anti-Chinese resistance. In the course of the so-called 'democratic reform of the monastery' (in Chinese *siyuan minzhu gaige*) almost all the monks were removed from Labrang. The high reincarnations with their seats in Labrang were taken to labour camps and imprisoned,<sup>15</sup> the remaining senior monks were either taken to labour camps or were forced to return to their native villages. Only a limited number of monks (several hundred)<sup>16</sup> were allowed to stay in the monastery. In the course of the uprising and its suppression some temples and other monastery buildings were destroyed. Numerous sculptures, Buddhist scriptures and the monastery archives were taken from Labrang to Lanzhou and other Chinese cities.<sup>17</sup> Senior monks were humiliated at mass meetings. The traditional religious life (liturgies, rituals, education, religious feasts) of the monastery practically ceased to exist. The systematic approach of the authorities towards Tibetan monasteries was a part of the 'three antis' (in Chinese *san fan*) campaign (Anon., 1997, p. 49), which aimed to eliminate the monastic aspect of Tibetan Buddhism and to 'reduce Buddhism to a domestic ritual' (Tsering Shakya, 1999, p. 288).<sup>18</sup>

During the years 1961–62 there was a certain liberalisation of religious policy, which also manifested itself at Labrang. At this time the Chinese authorities initiated a 'normalisation' of their policies, turning from an ultraleftist economic and political line towards a more pragmatic approach (Weggel, 1989, pp. 218–31). This move resulted in changes in the realm of religious policy and the policy towards minorities. The revival of the religious life in Tibetan monasteries was also a consequence of the very critical attitude of senior Buddhist monks and reincarnations towards the ultraleftist policy of the Chinese government. The Tenth Panchen Lama Choekyi Gyaltsen (*chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1938–89) was one of the sharpest critics of Chinese policy and his comprehensive evaluation of the developments in Tibetan areas resulted in a petition addressed to the then prime minister Zhou Enlai in 1962.<sup>19</sup> According to the monk informants from Labrang, the limited revival in Labrang was due to the patronage of the influential lama Geshe Sherab Gyatsho.<sup>20</sup> His position and political influence enabled about 1200 of the previously removed monks to return to the monastery. The limited revival had only a provisional character, however, and the authorities attempted to control the internal life of the monastery through the establishment of a Monastery Management Committee (in Chinese *siyuan guanli weiyuanhui*, in Tibetan *dgon pa'i do dam u yon lhan khang*) which was to consist of monks loyal to China and the Party. However, this idea materialised only to a restricted extent during this period. The brief interlude of limited normalisation of religious life in the Labrang monastery finished with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) which marked the final destruction and discontinuation of religious activity in the monastery. One of the components of the new political movement was the campaign against the 'four olds' (in Chinese *sijiu*): old customs, habits, culture and thinking. In Tibet, where despite the attempted socialist reforms society still had very traditional features, the campaign had a destructive impact on religion. In Tibet the Red Guards forbade the local population any – even individual – manifestations of their faith and traditional Tibetan identity (dress, customs) (Tsering Shakya, 1999, pp. 320–21). The Labrang monastery was again closed and 'all the monks and reincarnations were transferred to the countryside to labour camps' (Suodai, 1998, p. 44). For the first time in

the history of the monastery religious life was discontinued. In the late 1960s almost all the buildings within the monastery compound were destroyed with the exception of a few temples, which were converted to other uses: for example the Hevajra temple in the western part of the monastery was turned into a slaughterhouse. Chinese companies moved into the emptied and depopulated monastery compound and constructed housing facilities for their workers.<sup>21</sup> As one informant stated, 'during the Cultural Revolution there did not exist any teaching of Buddha'. The period of the Cultural Revolution represents the most radical phase of Chinese religious policy in Tibetan areas, when the authorities coercively attempted to eliminate the traditional role of Buddhism in Tibetan society. Labrang, as well as other monasteries in Amdo and all Tibetan areas, ceased to function for a period of over ten years.

The revival of religion in Tibet, as well as its destruction, were closely related to general political developments in China. After the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 the period of economic reforms started, and the change had a positive influence on the minority and religious policies of the Chinese authorities. The First Tibet Work Forum (in Chinese *Xizang gongzuo huiyi*), convened by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in February 1980 (Tsering Shakya, 1999, pp. 380–82), played an important role in the economic and cultural revival in Tibet, as its aim was to revise the previous Chinese policy in Tibet which had proved mistaken. The new policy was focused on raising the living standard of Tibetans and the restoration of traditional Tibetan culture. The political changes in China also resulted in the adoption of a new Constitution of the PRC, in which the article on religious freedom was worded in more detail (Constitution, 1994, p. 30). The new religious policy was further elaborated in the so-called Document No. 19, *The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period* (in Chinese *Guanyu wo guo shehuizhuyi shiqi zongjiao wenti de jiben guandian he jiben zhengce*) (MacInnis, 1989, pp. 10–26), issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party<sup>22</sup> in March 1982. This document reaffirms the protection of religious freedom, stresses the natural weakening of the influence of religion in socialist society and opposes coercive measures which would speed up the process. However, the premise of the document is that in the long run the role of the various religions in China will fade out. The document 'grants some limited autonomy to religious believers while asserting the Party's right to maintain ultimate control of all religious affairs' (Lambert, 2001, p. 123). The document also contains a brief summary of the religious policy in socialist China and marks the post-1958 developments as 'leftist errors'.

These developments on the central level and changes in the legal framework of state-church relations were mirrored in activity in Tibetan areas. In the Labrang monastery the religious revival started in 1979. Monks and reincarnations were released from prisons and labour camps<sup>23</sup> and on the basis that they 'were not guilty and were mistakenly arrested, thus they were granted rehabilitation' (in Chinese *wuzui cuobu yu yi pingfan*) (Zhazha, 2000, p. 4). Soon about 50–60 monks who had lived in the Labrang monastery before the Cultural Revolution returned there. Most of the old Labrang monks either died in the years 1958 to 1979 (from natural causes or by violence) or were forced to laicise by marriage and thus lost their monastic status. Besides these 50–60 old Labrang monks some 400 young monks came to the monastery immediately after the ban on religious activities was lifted.<sup>24</sup> In the first phase of the religious revival efforts were focused on the restoration of the monastery building. Tibetan laypeople played an important role in this process, financing the restoration and taking an active part in the rebuilding work. The monastery was officially reopened in 1980 (Anon., 1998, p. 201). The Tenth Panchen Lama, who after his release from detention in October 1977 was installed in the position of a member of the Standing Committee of the Fifth Chinese People's Political Consulta-

tive Conference (in Chinese *Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi*) in March 1978,<sup>25</sup> played a crucial role in the revival of Tibetan Buddhism; with his influence he was able to secure financial aid for the restoration of Buddhist monasteries and religious sites throughout Tibet. The Tenth Panchen Lama also contributed to the restoration of the Labrang monastery. He had a close relationship with the monastery as he had personally identified the sixth reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa in the early 1950s (Zhazha, 1998, pp. 435–37). He visited Labrang in November 1980 (Suodai, 1998, p. 44);<sup>26</sup> his visit gave a great impetus to the revival process. He managed to return to the monastery some of the cultural relics confiscated after 1958. On the local level in Amdo a similarly important role in the religious revitalisation was played by the two highest reincarnations of Labrang, the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa and the Sixth Gungthang Rinpoche Jigme Tenpe Wangchug (*gung thang rin po che 'jigs med bstan pa'i dbang phyug*, 1926–2000) (Zhazha, 2000, pp. 38–47), who were installed in various positions at the provincial level after their rehabilitation.<sup>27</sup> The Sixth Jamyang Zhepa was forced to marry during the Cultural Revolution and thus lost his status of a monk (but not his status as a reincarnation as it is an ascribed status)<sup>28</sup> and since 1978 he has mainly resided outside the monastery in the provincial capital Lanzhou. The late Sixth Gungthang was an immensely popular lama not only among the monks but also among the lay believers, especially nomads, in the whole Amdo region. After 1979 both hierarchs from Labrang were able to exert their influence for the sake of the Buddhist community in Labrang and were successful in defending the religious and economic interests of the monastery *vis-à-vis* the Chinese authorities on the local and provincial level.

The revival of monastic Buddhism in Labrang is characterised by the endeavour to reconstruct the monastery to its pre-1958 condition on both the material and the spiritual levels. During the 1980s and 1990s almost all the buildings in the monastery compound (temples, the six dratshangs and the monks' living quarters) were rebuilt in their original shape as far as their architectural style, size and location were concerned. One of the last buildings to remain destroyed is the old printing house in the south-eastern part of the monastery; it was rebuilt in a different place. The internal decoration of individual temples was reconstructed according to the pre-1958 design. Spiritual restoration also strives to follow the centuries-old traditions. The religious feasts have been celebrated again in the monastery since the beginning of the 1980s and a comparison of the current form of these festivities with descriptions from the pre-1958 period (Li An-che, 1994, pp. 212–34) shows that they are almost identical. This is also true also of the educational system in the individual dratshangs: a comparison of the curricula in two of them (Thösamling and Dükhor) with those of the pre-1958 period has shown that the content of the instruction, the Buddhist scriptures to be used, the length of the courses and the examination system are based on the old models (Luo Faxi *et al.*, 1982, pp. 25–33, 46–48). The rites regularly performed by the monks also follow the long-established rules. Despite these persistent endeavours to restore the monastery both materially and spiritually, several old monks who lived in the monastery before 1958 have voiced their criticism of the discipline and the level of education. The monastery lost a number of educated monks during the two waves of destruction and the continuity of transmission of teachings from teacher to pupil, which is of high importance in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, was not maintained. There is now only a small number of highly qualified monks.<sup>29</sup> The critical attitude of older monks towards the current state of education in Labrang has been balanced, however, by contrary opinions voiced by numerous monks and lay believers, who note approvingly that the Labrang monastery is currently not only the largest Buddhist monastery in areas inhabited by Tibetans in China, but also a place where the traditional character of education has been preserved and revived on a comparatively high level.

In summer 2001 the Labrang monastery contained about 2300 monks, most of them born in the Amdo region. These monks fall into two categories: 1100 monks who reside in the monastery with the official approval of the Chinese authorities; and about 1200 monks with long-term residence in Labrang who are not officially allowed to stay there.<sup>30</sup> These circumstances are the consequence of the effort of the Chinese authorities to limit the number of monks in Tibetan monasteries.<sup>31</sup> Since 1980 the Chinese authorities have striven to fix the number of official monks in Labrang, but as a result of the activities of the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa and the Sixth Gungthang the number has repeatedly increased. In justification of increase both hierarchs have referred to the pre-1958 situation, when about 3800 monks lived in Labrang. The Chinese authorities perceive the current confusing situation, with a large number of 'unofficial' monks participating in the life of the monastery, as a serious problem (Anon., 1998, p. 208), which must be dealt with urgently. The number of monks in the monastery is restricted for both economic and political reasons. After 1958 the Labrang monastery was deprived of all its possessions<sup>32</sup> and all the formal economic links between the monastery and the local population, which supported the monastery financially by paying taxes directly to it, were broken off. In the eyes of the Chinese authorities the monastery represents a heavy financial burden for the Tibetan population. The state authorities do not provide financial support even for the 'official' monks in Labrang, who depend on the financial help of their relatives and on local people who give them alms (Tibetan 'gyed; either money or food).<sup>33</sup> The aim of the Chinese authorities is that the monastery will provide services and organise self-supporting production units which will finance the monastery, and this forms part of official policy towards Tibetan monasteries, under the slogan 'let the monastery support itself' (in Chinese *yi si yang si*, in Tibetan *dgon par brten nas dgon pa skyong*) (Jiang Ping *et al.*, 1996, pp. 108–9; MacInnis, 1989, p. 175). In order to implement this policy, the Labrang monastery has established restaurants, shops and hostels and produces Tibetan medicine. These are located on the monastery premises (Anon., 1998, pp. 205–7; Anon., 1994a, p. 58).

The 1100 monks who reside in Labrang with official approval have special bilingual monks' certificates (in Chinese *sengren zheng*, in Tibetan *dge 'dun pa'i dpang yig*) issued by the local Religious Affairs Bureau (in Chinese *zongjiao shiwu ju*)<sup>34</sup> of Xiahe county. As well as a picture and personal data the certificate also lists rules for the monks' behaviour; these illustrate the ideological claims the state makes on the individual monk.<sup>35</sup> In the late 1990s the procedure for admission of new monks to the monastery became more complicated. According to various people, before that date 30 to 40 monks were allowed to enter the monastery each year, but recently the number has fallen to 15 to 20. Monks who are applying for a monk's certificate first live unofficially in the monastery and study at one of the six dratshangs. Every year in the tenth and eleventh Tibetan lunar months (approximately November and December) there are examinations in each of the dratshangs and the most successful candidates are given certificates; their presence in the monastery then becomes official. The 'official' and 'unofficial' residents in Labrang differ in that the latter cannot participate in the common rituals in the main hall (*tshogs chen 'du khang*) and in the fact that their status is more vulnerable. In summer 2001 the six dratshangs contained the following numbers of monks: Thösamling 1,300 (officially 700–750); Gyume 115 (officially 30–40); Dükhor 130 (officially 70), Menpa 100; Kyedor 150; and Gyutö 110. Before 1958 about 3000 monks used to study in the largest and privileged<sup>36</sup> Thösamling dratshang, but the numbers of monks affiliated to the other five dratshangs are comparable to those of the pre-1958 period. The total number of 2300 monks living in Labrang includes monks under 18 years of age, who according to Chinese

regulations are prohibited from entering a monastery (Anon., 1999a, p. 49; Kuznetsov, 2001, p. 167);<sup>37</sup> they live there without official approval.

In 1981, in the the course of the religious revival, the Chinese authorities established a Monastery Management Committee (in Chinese *siyuan guanli weiyuanhui*, in Tibetan *dgon pa'i do dam u yon lhan khang*) in Labrang (Luo Faxi *et al.*, 1982, p. 183).<sup>38</sup> Shortly after its establishment the two highest reincarnations in Labrang, the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa and the Sixth Gungthang, occupied the leading positions in the Committee. The members of this self-governing body,<sup>39</sup> senior monks of Labrang, have to fulfill certain ideological criteria<sup>40</sup> and must be approved by the local Religious Affairs Bureau. The Committee is in charge of all administrative, economic and security activities related to the monastery. It focuses on ideological work and has published and distributed propaganda material.<sup>41</sup> It also puts into practice the ideological campaigns initiated by the central authorities. These campaigns represent the reaction of the Chinese authorities to the involvement of some Tibetan Buddhist monks in politics. From autumn 1987 Central Tibet (mainly Lhasa) was the scene of political protests, with the participants demanding Tibetan independence. Numerous monks from monasteries near Lhasa were involved (Schwartz, 1994, pp. 74–172). The politicisation of the religious revival in Tibet,<sup>42</sup> with Tibetan Buddhism providing the ideological background for the political discourse on Tibetan independence (Kolas, 1996, pp. 51–66), poses a dilemma for the Chinese authorities: on the one hand the state wants to pursue a policy of limited liberalisation of religious policy in Tibet; but on the other hand the authorities cannot tolerate what they label counterrevolutionary political activities by monks.<sup>43</sup> Lhasa is the centre of pro-independence activities, and consequently there is tight surveillance of the monasteries in Central Tibet. The conditions in Labrang, and in Amdo generally, are somewhat different: the political involvement of Labrang monks has so far not resulted in overt anti-Chinese protests. As a result of the restraint and influence of the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa and the Sixth Gungthang, Labrang has been able to secure a higher degree of autonomy and a larger monastic community than is the case in Central Tibet. However, most of the monks have repeatedly voiced their support for the activities of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatsho (*bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho*, 1935–) and cherish the idea of Tibetan independence. A number of Labrang monks have spent some time in exile in India<sup>44</sup> and have now returned to China; they are informed about the activities of the Tibetan government in exile.

A recent campaign by the Chinese authorities has focused on the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries as potential centres of anti-Chinese activities. The campaign 'love the motherland and love the religion' (in Chinese *aiguo aijiao*, in Tibetan *rgyal gces chos gces*) was launched in Labrang in summer 1997.<sup>45</sup> In the course of the campaign monks were obliged to denounce the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and to reject the idea of Tibetan independence (Anon., 1999b). If a monk did not comply with these requirements he would be removed from the monastery. During the summer of 2001 the campaign was still going on, although to a lesser extent. The Gansu Province Buddhist Institute (in Chinese *Gansu sheng foxueyuan*, in Tibetan *Kan su'u zhing chen nang bstan slob grwa*) which operates inside the monastery compound has played a specific role in this and other ideological campaigns in Labrang. The institute was established in December 1985 (Anon., 1994b, pp. 80–82) and it is one of the five Buddhist Institutes which were founded by the Tenth Panchen Lama in the provinces neighbouring the Tibetan Autonomous Region (Tsering Shakya, 1999, p. 446).<sup>46</sup> Apart from of a number of lamas from Labrang who teach at the institute, most of the staff are Han Chinese. Several dozen students (all of them are monks) following a five-year curriculum study Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan grammar and rhetoric, but also the Chinese language and the history of China, and take classes in



political education. In the course of the campaign 'love the motherland and love the religion' the meetings of the monks have usually taken place inside the Institute. The Han Chinese teachers also give classes as political instructors in the monastery. Nevertheless, despite the ideological bias of the education at the Buddhist Institute, a number of young monks have repeatedly stated that they would like to pass the exam and study there. This latest campaign was also a reaction to the controversy between the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in exile and the Chinese government over the identification of the eleventh reincarnation of the Panchen Lama (Tsering Shakya, 1999, pp. 440–47). The Chinese choice of the Eleventh Panchen Lama, Gyaltshen Norbu (*rgyal mtshan nor bu*, 1990–), was not accepted by Tibetan Buddhists and recent development have stirred up new tensions in relations between the monks and the state. The Chinese authorities have been striving to acquire the highest authority in the final approval of a candidate who has always been identified and enthroned by the Buddhist hierarchs using traditional procedures. The process is always closely supervised by the different administrative levels of the Religious Affairs Bureau (Anon., 1998, 195). In Amdo the identification of all new reincarnations was prohibited by the Chinese authorities in 1958 and the practice was revived only after 1990, since when the two highest reincarnate lamas from the Labrang monastery have identified and enthroned more than 50 new reincarnations from Labrang and numerous other monasteries in the region.<sup>47</sup> The issue of the enthronement of a new reincarnation will again be crucial for Labrang in the near future, since after the death of the Sixth Gungthang Rinpoche in February 2000 the search for his new reincarnation has started under the auspices of the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa.

The process of destruction and revival of religious life in the Labrang monastery is similar to developments in other monasteries in Amdo, in Kham (*kham*s), in Central Tibet<sup>48</sup> and to some extent also in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in China.<sup>49</sup> The years 1949 to 1958 were a period of comparatively tolerant religious policy; the first period of destruction was in the years 1958 to 1962; there was a limited revival in the years 1962 to 1965; there was complete destruction of religious life in the years 1966 to 1978; and there has been a religious revival since 1979. The process of religious revival in Labrang has one distinctive feature, namely the endeavour to restore pre-1958 conditions on both the material and the spiritual levels. Despite these persistent efforts one can agree with M. C. Goldstein (referring to the conditions in Central Tibet) that 'some individual traits have reemerged identical with the past, but others have reappeared somehow changed, and still others have not been restored at all' (Goldstein, 1998a, p. 11). The long period of destruction has deprived the monastery of numerous highly qualified monks, and this has naturally had a negative influence on the educational level during the revival. Religious relations between the monastery and the lay population in the adjacent region have been reestablished and the need to reconstruct the Labrang monastery was a result of the strong religiosity of the Tibetans, which was not subdued even during the Cultural Revolution. The Labrang monastery is functioning under changed economic circumstances, with its traditional sources of income practically nonexistent. The monastery has therefore had to rely on different sources of income, and tourism has proved very important in recent years (Bělka & Slobodník, 2002b). The Tibetan issue has had internal consequences, such as pro-independence demonstrations, and external consequences, such as the activities of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the government in exile and international criticism of violations of human rights and religious freedom. Like other Tibetan monasteries, Labrang is therefore under the surveillance of the Chinese authorities, who through political campaigns have a negative effect on the functioning of the monastery and who place restrictions on the number of monks.

The revival of religious life in the Labrang monastery has reached a certain limit. The

future will show whether in the revitalisation process it will be possible to reconcile two entirely different sets of interests: on the one hand the desire of the Chinese authorities administratively to control the internal life of the monastery; and on the other hand the endeavour of the Tibetan monks and laypeople to proceed further with the revival of the monastery with the aim of reestablishing it in its traditional role, which encompassed not only religious authority but political and economic power as well. These two trends are contradictory: the alternative of a limited revival is as unacceptable for Tibetans as the vision of the gradual resurrection of the traditional role of the monastery, represented by Jamyang Zhepa and Gunghang, which would result in the creation of parallel administrative structures independent of the Chinese state, is for the Chinese.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A research project 'Religious Policy Towards Tibetan Buddhism in the People's Republic of China: A Comparative Analysis', on which this article is based, was supported by a grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange. Throughout the paper the Wylie system of transliteration of the Tibetan language is used (Wylie, 1959). For the transcription of Chinese the *pinyin* system is used.
- <sup>2</sup> On the specific characteristics of the religious, political and economic developments in Amdo Province, see Samuel, 1993, pp. 87–98; Gruschke, 2001, pp. 1–17.
- <sup>3</sup> Because of the importance of the monastery, there are abundant sources for its history. The most important traditional Tibetan sources on the monastery are Brag dgon pa Dkon mchog Bstan pa Rab rgyas, 1982, pp. 361–534, and Dbal mang Pandita, 1987. The monastery's peripheral position meant that it was also accessible also to visitors from foreign countries (Buddhist monks, travellers, adventurers), some of whom wrote valuable contributions on the history of the monastery (Baradin, 1999; Tsybikov, 1987, pp. 39–45; Li An-che, 1994, pp. 134–259).
- <sup>4</sup> He is also known by the Chinese title Henan Qinwang. For information about him see Zhouta, 1998, pp. 5–18; Luo Faxi *et al.*, 1982, pp. 156–65.
- <sup>5</sup> On his life see his biography 'Jigs med Dbang po, 1987.
- <sup>6</sup> On the lives of the subsequent reincarnations of the Jamyang Zhepa see Zhazha, 1998.
- <sup>7</sup> There were over twenty lineages of various reincarnations living in Labrang (Zhazha, 2000).
- <sup>8</sup> On the administrative structure of the Labrang monastery see Luo Faxi *et al.*, 1982, pp. 15–24.
- <sup>9</sup> Later there were different opinions amongst Chinese and Tibetan leaders as to whether this agreement was relevant only for Central Tibet, or whether its provisions included the whole territory inhabited by Tibetans, that is, including Amdo.
- <sup>10</sup> As illustrated by the document *Instructions for the Implementation of the Religious Policy* (*Guanyu zhixing zongjiao zhengce de zhishi*) drawn up by Chinese authorities (Jiang Ping *et al.*, 1996, pp. 96–101).
- <sup>11</sup> Later Chinese documents even quantify this group: it is said to comprise about five per cent of the monks (Tsering Shakya, 1999, p. 295).
- <sup>12</sup> For a comparison of the destruction and revival of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, Mongolia and Buryatia see Bělka and Slobodník, 2002a.
- <sup>13</sup> The information on the post-1949 developments in Labrang was gathered during field research in the summers of 2000 and 2001. Our informants were monks and lay believers from the area around Labrang. Because of the political situation in China, they will remain anonymous.
- <sup>14</sup> See Wang Yunfeng, 1997, p. 83; Smith, 1996, pp. 442–43. This economic policy was also critically perceived by Tibetan Buddhist monks who were loyal to the new Chinese regime. For a critical speech by the eminent Lama Geshe Sherab Gyatsho (*dge bshes shes rab rgya mtsho*, 1884–1968) see MacInnis, 1972, pp. 221–24.
- <sup>15</sup> Of the 23 most important reincarnations from Labrang, 15 were imprisoned (seven soon died in prison), six were sent to labour camps, one fled to India and the fate of one is unknown (Zhazha, 2000).

- <sup>16</sup> Our informants, older monks who had lived in Labrang at that time, spoke of about 200 monks. A Chinese source gives the figure as 410 (Pu Wencheng, 1990, p. 508).
- <sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1958 the local mosque (built in 1884 and enlarged with the approval of the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa in 1936) was also destroyed even though the local Muslim Hui population did not take an active part in the anti-Chinese uprising. However, the local Chinese authorities branded it a 'feudal institution'. The Muslim community in the area around Labrang encountered phases of religious destruction and revival similar to those affecting the majority Tibetan Buddhist population.
- <sup>18</sup> In 1958 the authorities also forbade manifestations of folk religion in Tibet, notably the cult of mountains (Berounský and Slobodník, 2003).
- <sup>19</sup> For the just recently published text of the petition, see Anon., 1997, pp. 1–124. The Panchen Lama also dealt with the religious situation (Anon, 1997, pp. 40–59, 85–89, 104–5). According to him, after the reforms in the years 1958–59 the number of monks in the peripheral regions of Tibet was cut by 98 or 99 per cent (p. 104) and there was not a single functioning monastery.
- <sup>20</sup> He was a member of the Qinghai Provincial Government and chairman of the All China Association of Buddhists. On his life see Stoddard, 1985.
- <sup>21</sup> Some of these buildings were moved out of the rebuilt monastery only in the 1990s.
- <sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that the crucial document on religious policy in post-Mao China was drawn up by the party authorities and not the state authorities. Other evidence too shows that the Party is in fact in charge of the religious policy.
- <sup>23</sup> For the circumstances related to the release of the Sixth Gungthang, the second highest hierarch in Labrang, see Wang Yunfeng, 1997, pp. 112–13; on the release of the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa see Zhazha, 1998, p. 439.
- <sup>24</sup> Or, as the Tibetans put it, 'the door of religion was opened' (*chos sgo phye*).
- <sup>25</sup> For a chronology of his life with other official positions he held see Anon., 1997, pp. 129–44.
- <sup>26</sup> The Tenth Panchen Lama again visited Labrang in March 1982.
- <sup>27</sup> For example the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa served in a number of positions including chairman of Gansu Provincial Buddhist Association and vicechairman of the All-China Youth Federation. For a full list of these positions see Conner and Barnett, 1997, pp. 112–13, 116–17. The Sixth Jamyang Zhepa currently holds the position of vicechairman of the Standing Committee of Gansu Provincial People's Congress (in Chinese *Gansu sheng renta changweihui*).
- <sup>28</sup> In childhood he was recognised as the reincarnation of the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa and thus his status is 'ascribed' and cannot be lost. In contrast his status as a monk is 'achieved' and can be lost: a monk has to abide by numerous monastic vows which include a life of celibacy. On the concept of reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism see Samuel, 1993, pp. 281–86.
- <sup>29</sup> This problem is also urgent in other monastic centres of learning in Tibet (Goldstein, 1998b, p. 45).
- <sup>30</sup> According to R. D. Schwartz there were about 500 official monks and 800 'unofficial' (or unlisted) monks in Labrang in 1987 (Schwartz, 1994, p. 63).
- <sup>31</sup> For a similar situation in Central Tibet see Goldstein, 1998b, p. 31.
- <sup>32</sup> For a list of these possessions (land, forest, buildings etc.) see Luo Faxi *et al.*, 1982, pp. 89–99.
- <sup>33</sup> Relatives and local people also finance the building of monks' dwellings inside the monastery compound.
- <sup>34</sup> This authority, which functions on the central and lower administrative levels, is in charge of the implementation of the state's religious policy (MacInnis, 1989, p. 1).
- <sup>35</sup> These rules can be found on the third page of the certificate: 'Rules for monks: (1) firmly uphold the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, uphold the socialist system, love the motherland and implement the religious policy of the Party; (2) consciously safeguard the legal system and its dignity, safeguard the interests of the people, safeguard the unity of nationalities and the territorial integrity of the state; (3) study and consciously comply with the various laws, regulations and decrees of the state, and comply with the rules and regulations formulated by governments on different administrative levels; (4) consciously obey the leaders of the Monastery Democratic Management Committee, and comply with the various rules and

- regulations and organisational discipline of the monastery; (5) be a pious believer, diligently study Buddhist sutras, strictly abide by monastic vows, and become an up-to-standard monk loving the motherland and loving the religion.'
- <sup>36</sup> All the reincarnations living in Labrang have traditionally studied in this dratshang and as a rule the monks affiliated with Thösamling dratshang have held various posts in the traditional administrative structure of the monastery.
- <sup>37</sup> This Chinese-imposed age limit on entrance to a monastery is perceived by Tibetans as a serious violation of their religious freedom.
- <sup>38</sup> In the early 1980s these bodies were established in all reopened monasteries in Tibet.
- <sup>39</sup> On the internal structure of the Labrang Monastery Management Committee see Anon., 1998, pp. 200–9.
- <sup>40</sup> According to Article 5 of the *Gansu Province Measures for the Management of Buddhist Monasteries* (in Chinese *Gansu sheng fojiao simiao guanli banfa*) approved in January 1991 these monks should 'support the leaders of the Party, love the nation and love the religion' (Anon., 1998, p. 164). Similar measures were also approved in neighbouring Sichuan Province (Anon., 1999, p. 48).
- <sup>41</sup> We have at our disposal two collections of study materials published in Tibetan in 1987 and 1989 by the Labrang Monastery Management Committee. These materials include translations of the speeches of Chinese leaders relating to religious policy and translations of laws and regulations regarding religion (Anon, 1998).
- <sup>42</sup> In view of the close links between religion and politics in traditional Tibetan society (Phuntsog Wangyal, 1975; Michael, 1982, pp. 40–50), this is not surprising.
- <sup>43</sup> These developments also create some conflicts inside the monastic communities, where some monks are in favour of the continuous religious revival and other (often younger) monks prefer to focus on the struggle for independence despite the negative impact their activities have on their residential monasteries (Goldstein, 1998b, pp. 46–47).
- <sup>44</sup> In India the monks from Labrang prefer to stay at the Gomang (*sgo mang*) dratshang in the Drepung (*bras spungs*) monastery in Karnataka State in southern India.
- <sup>45</sup> On the emphasis on patriotism (in Chinese *aiguo*) in all the five religions tolerated by the state (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism) in the second half of the 1990s see Wenzel-Teuber, 1997, pp. 233–35.
- <sup>46</sup> The highest state-sponsored educational institution for Tibetan Buddhist monks (mainly high reincarnations) is the Beijing Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies (in Chinese *Beijing gaoji foxueyuan*) founded in 1987. These institutions are supposed to provide the Tibetan reincarnations and monks with high-level education in the field of Buddhist studies, but the state authorities simultaneously strive to educate influential Tibetan religious authorities in loyalty to the Chinese state and the Party.
- <sup>47</sup> For a list of reincarnations enthroned in the years 1991–95 in Amdo, see Gannan, 1995, pp. 241–42.
- <sup>48</sup> On the individual phases of the process in Central Tibet see Goldstein, 1998a, pp. 8–10.
- <sup>49</sup> On the religious situation in Inner Mongolia in the second half of the twentieth century see Delege, 1998, pp. 727–80. The monasteries in Inner Mongolia were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The process of religious revival has a different qualitative and quantitative character in Inner Mongolia.

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