



Title: History and Politics of Reincarnations and How China manages Tibetan Buddhism

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The Seminar began with an introduction of the Tibet Policy Institute. It initially was created as a part of the department of security to monitor Chinese and Tibetan language publications. However, eventually, it became a research institute with the aim of putting Tibetan narratives on the table. Their research focuses on the contemporary issues like the military build-up, infrastructure, environment, ethnic and Chinese leadership and his policies in Tibet.

There have been few significant emperors who helped in shaping the Tibetan Buddhism the way it is today. King Songtsen Gampo summoned his minister Thonmi Sambhota, who is credited with inventing the Tibetan script, to go to India and learn the language so as to record history. This eventually led to Tibetans coming in contact with the Indian philosophy during Trisong Detsen's reign when Shantarakshita was invited to the court. He also became the first king to declare Buddhism as the state religion. However, by the 10th century, there was a shift in Tibetan culture when Buddhism as a religion was de-emphasized and a more secular approach was adopted. Tibetan historians often refer to it as the "Dark Ages". It was the dark ages when Tibet which used to be at the peak of its geographical expanse started getting fragmented. This is when the Tibetans requested Atisha to revive the Tibetan Buddhism culture. This is when the regeneration of Tibetan Buddhism began.

All the sects of Tibet follow a lineage which can be traced back to an Indian master. It was Karmapa who initiated the tradition of reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism. The reincarnate is usually recognized by a Panchen Lama. However, in 1793, a new system was introduced. Gorkhas had attacked the Tibetans for the treasure which led to Tibetans waging a war against them. For this, they requested the support of the then Chinese Emperor. This was the pivotal moment in the Tibetan history as Chinese improvisation of Tibetan tradition began here. This was done when ordinances were issued which suggested a new method of choosing the reincarnate using the golden urn system. In the 20th century, Arijia Rinpoche's testimony recounts how he was involved in the recognition of Panchen Lama and the candidate favourable to Deng Xiaoping was chosen. This indicated that everything was stage-managed to suit the political ends of the Chinese. There are many other ways the Chinese

have been meddling with Tibetan Buddhism. For instance, in 2010, China started issuing certifying for 'Living Buddhas'. China also started giving political positions to the lamas of their choice. Most notably, China has been endorsing Gyaltsen Norbu and have also made him the youngest standing committee member of CPPCC.

China has also been taking part in actively managing the Tulku system. There is a Tibet Buddhism Academy which grooms these young Tulkus. Not only that, China has started a degree system that undermines the fine tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and ends up distorting it. In 2007, the state order no.5 stated that the selection, education and training of Tulkus will be done by the government. Chinese also undertook commercialization of Tulkus. This meant that there was a Tulku assigned to every province, county and so on. Hence, in a way, China ended up making a joke out of these Tibetan traditions.

The question of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama's successor still remains an important question that would impact the future of Tibet. Dalai Lama has stated that the successor could be born outside China. He has also stated that it is possible that he could transfer his emanation and that his successor could be announced while he is alive. In the case that the next Dalai Lama is not recognized by China, it could mean that there could be two Dalai Lamas- one chosen by the Chinese and the other chosen by the Tibetans. It is to be noted here though that a Dalai Lama chosen by the Chinese won't have the loyalty and respect of the Tibetans. Reincarnation is not just limited to geographical Tibet. Many earlier Lamas have come from areas beyond Tibet like Russia. There is a possibility that the next Dalai Lama could be born in India. This could shift the geopolitical balance in favour of India.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama devolved his political power to the people of Tibet in 2011. Since the 5th Dalai Lama, both political and spiritual leadership of Tibet has been held by him. However, there is a form of a reversal where the current Dalai Lama gave up his political role to just be limited to being the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people. The reason behind this is that His Holiness hopes that people will take more responsibility for their political future. The future remains uncertain. There is a saying that "Tibetans are ruined by hope and Chinese are ruined by suspicion" and as time goes, it seems pretty evident.

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About the Speakers –

Dr. Tenzin Desal completed his early education from Tibetan Children's Village School, Ladakh and then completed his doctoral studies in Anthropology from the University of Mysore. He is currently a Research Fellow at the Tibet Policy Institute, researching on "Development in Tibet and Ethnic Policy in China".

Mr. Tenzin Tseten joined Central Tibetan Administration in 2007. He did his schooling from Tibetan Children's Village School, Dharamsala. He graduated from St. Aloysius College, Mangalore University, and post-graduation from Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda. Currently, he is working with the Tibet Policy Institute. His research focuses on Chinese leadership.

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