

# Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet

*Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*

EDITED BY

Melvyn C. Goldstein

AND

Matthew T. Kapstein

WITH A FOREWORD BY

Orville Schell

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## TWO

# The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung Monastery

*Melvyn C. Goldstein*

Religion in Tibet played a role that went beyond its universal functions as an explanation of suffering and a template for salvation. Tibetans saw religion as a symbol of their country's identity and of the superiority of their civilization.

At the heart of Tibetan Buddhism in the traditional society was the monastery and the institution of the monk. Monasteries were (ideally) collectivities of individuals who had renounced attachments to materialism and family and had made a commitment to devote their lives to the pursuit of Buddhist teachings, including a vow of celibacy. Their presence was both the concrete manifestation and the validation of Tibetans' belief in their society's religiosity. In this chapter I examine the revival of Drepung, Tibet's largest monastery in the precommunist period.

Tibetan monasticism shared many features with its Buddhist counterparts in South, Southeast, and East Asia but also differed in several important ways. First, the overwhelming majority of monks were placed in monasteries by their parents as young children, generally between the ages of six and twelve. They were chosen without particular regard to their inclination or personality and were expected to remain celibate monks for their entire lives.<sup>1</sup> Tibetans articulate a straightforward rationale for a system of child enrollment: it is better to enroll candidates at a young age before they have had much exposure to secular life (in particular, to girls).

Second, monasticism in Tibet was pursued with an implicit ideology of "mass monasticism" in that it enrolled as many monks as sought entrance and expelled very few. Size rather than quality became the objective measure of the success of monasticism (and Buddhism) in Tibet, and there were a staggering number of monks. In 1951, at the time of the Lhasa uprising, there were approximately 2,500 monasteries and 115,000 monks in Tibet proper, comprising roughly 10 to 15 percent of Tibet's male population.<sup>2</sup> The magnitude of this can be appreciated by comparing it with Thailand, another prominent Buddhist society, where only 1 to

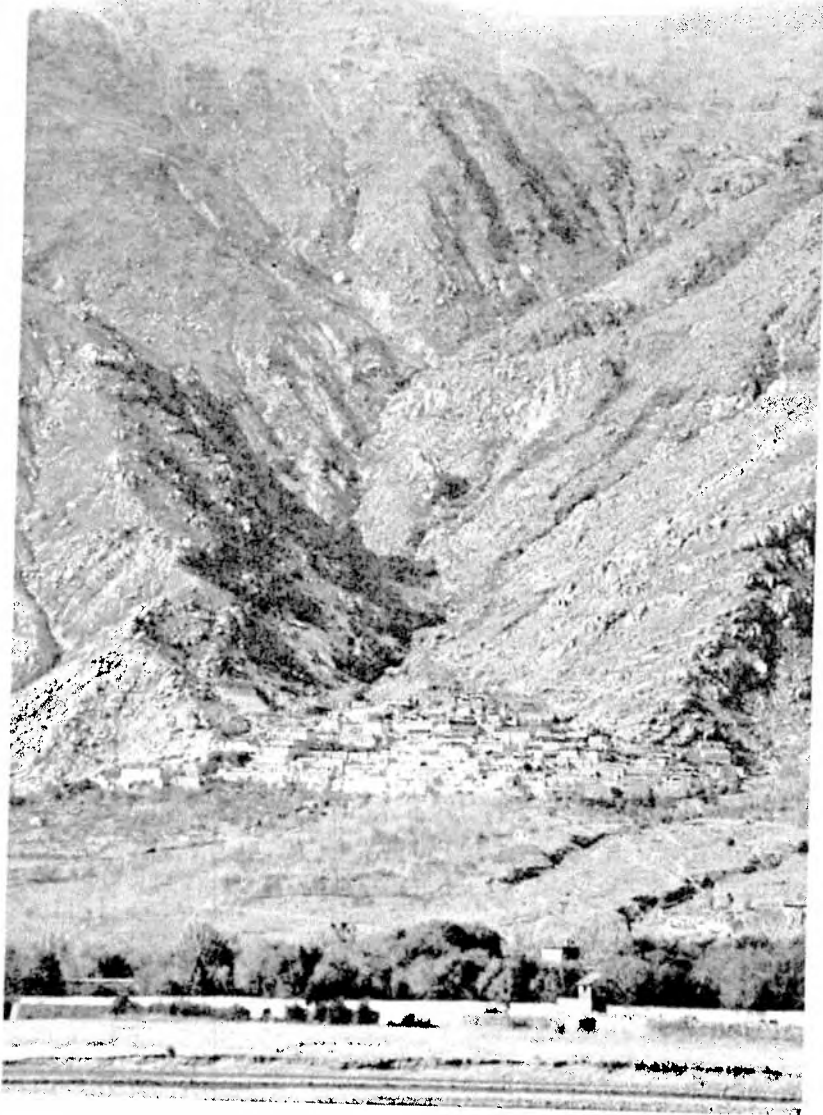


Figure 2.1. Drepung Monastery.

2 percent of the total number of males were monks.<sup>3</sup> Monasticism in Tibet, therefore, was not the otherworldly domain of a minute elite but a mass phenomenon.

There were many reasons why parents sent their sons to become monks in traditional Tibet. For many, it was a deep religious belief that this bestowed a great privilege on the child and brought good merit and esteem to the parents. For oth-



Figure 2.2. A senior monk and his young monk ward.

ers, it was a culturally valued way to reduce the number of mouths to feed while also ensuring that the child would avoid the hardships of village life. Parents sometimes also committed a son to monkhood to fulfill a solemn promise to a deity to dedicate a sick boy to a religious life if the deity spared the boy. Occasionally, an older monk asked a brother or a sister to send a son to the monastery to live with him, and in yet other cases, recruitment was simply the result of a corvée tax obligation (*grwa-khral*) that some monasteries were entitled to collect from their subjects.

Parents occasionally broached the topic with the child before making him a monk but usually simply told him of their decision. In theory the monastery asked the young candidates whether they wanted to join, but in reality this was pro forma. For example, if a new child monk ran away from the monastery, he was inevitably returned by his parents and welcomed by the monastic administration. There was no thought of dismissing him on the grounds that he obviously did not want to be a monk. Tibetans feel that young boys cannot comprehend the value of being a monk and that it is up to their elders to see to it that they have the right opportunities.

In addition to the high prestige of being a monk, the emphasis on mass monasticism can be seen in the manner in which monasteries made it easy for monks to find a niche within the monastic community by allowing all sorts of personalities to coexist. The monastery did not place severe restrictions on comportment, nor did it require rigorous educational or spiritual achievement. New monks had no exams

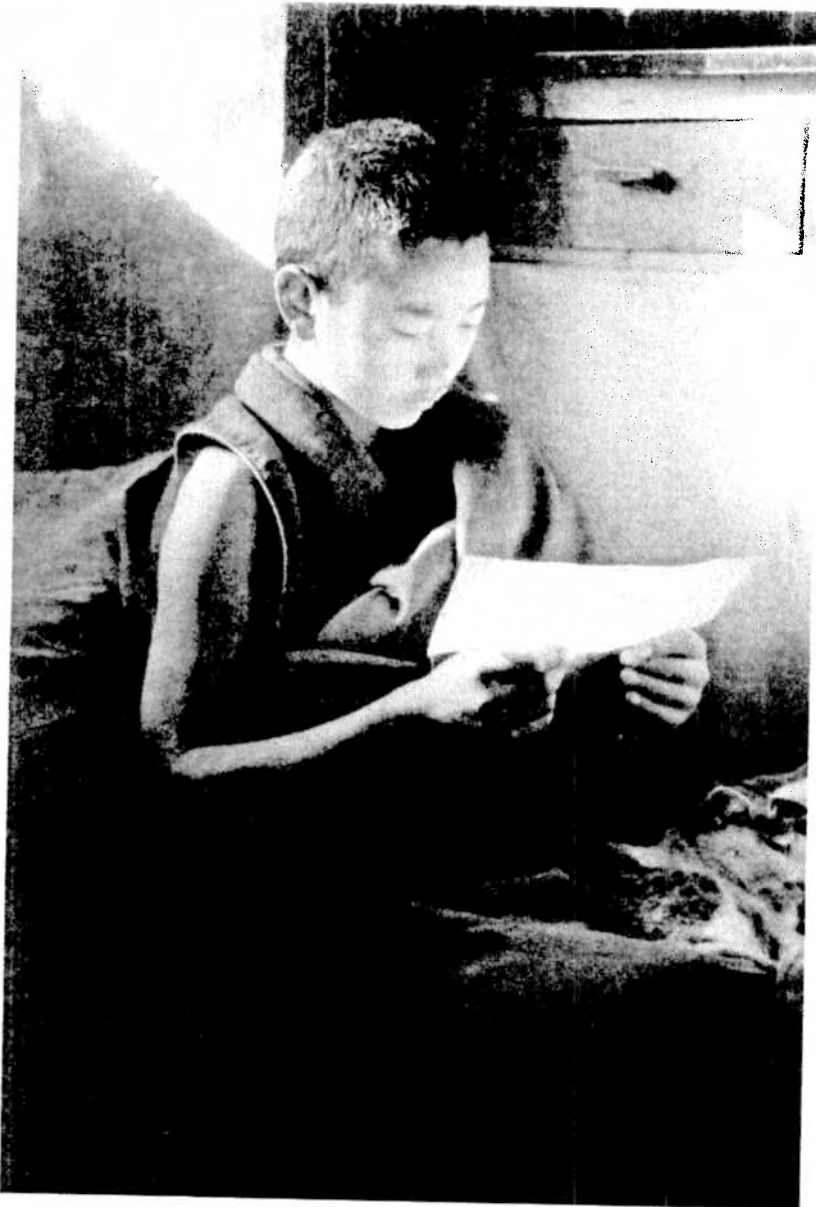


Figure 2.3. A young Drepung monk memorizing a text.

to pass in order to remain in the monastery, and monks who had no interest in studying or meditating were as welcome as the dedicated scholar monks. Even illiterate monks were accommodated and could remain part of the monastic community. In fact, rather than diligently weed out young monks who seemed temperamentally unsuited for a rigorous life of prayer, study, and meditation, the Tibetan monastic system allowed all sorts of deviance to exist, including a type of “punk monk” (*ldab-ldob*) who fought, engaged in sports competition, and was notorious for stealing young boys for use as homosexual partners.<sup>4</sup> Monks were expelled only if they committed murder or major theft or engaged in heterosexual intercourse.

The lofty status of monasteries was reflected in their position as semiautonomous units within the Tibetan state. Drepung, for example, had the right to judge and discipline its monks for all crimes except murder and treason and to own land and peasants. The three great monastic seats around Lhasa, Drepung, Ganden, and Sera, moreover, exercised an almost veto-like power over major government policy. They believed that the political and economic system in Tibet existed to further Buddhism and that they, not the government, could best judge what was in religion’s short- and long-term interests. Thus, although they were not involved in the day-to-day ruling process, when the monastic leadership felt strongly on some issue, their views could not easily be ignored by the Dalai Lama’s government. The 20,000 monks resident in Drepung and its two sister monastic seats dwarfed numerically the small military contingent maintained by the government in Lhasa and represented a genuine physical threat that on occasion has been used. For example, in 1947 Sera Monastery’s Che College rebelled against the Regent, and in 1912–13 Drepung’s Loseling College together with (Lhasa’s) Tengyeling Monastery supported the Chinese Amban against the Dalai Lama.<sup>5</sup> Drepung and its two sister monastic seats also had an important political role by virtue of the presence of their abbots (and former abbots) in Tibet’s National Assembly where they had an often-pivotal say on major issues.

The power and influence of monasteries like Drepung also extended to the economic sphere. Economic support for monasteries in the “old society”<sup>6</sup> was extensive, and many owned large tracts of productive land in the form of estates that had been obtained from the state and individual donors. Between 37 and 50 percent of the arable land in Tibet, in fact, was held by monasteries and incarnate lamas. By contrast, only 25 percent of the land was in the hands of the lay aristocracy and about the same was held by the government. The state also provided generous subsidies to select monasteries, funding religious rites such as the annual Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa and the daily morning prayer chanting assemblies in the three monastic seats.

Monasteries and monks, therefore, were integral to Tibetan Buddhism and to Tibetans’ perception of the glory of their civilization and state. And as a result of the ideology of mass monasticism, Tibet contained thousands of monasteries and monks. These monasteries, however, varied considerably in size and scope. Some held only five or ten village monks; others contained thousands of monks from all

over Tibet as well as Mongolia and India. The focus of this chapter, Drepung, exemplifies the latter category.

#### DREPUNG IN TRADITIONAL TIBETAN SOCIETY: OVERVIEW

The largest monastic institution in traditional Tibet was Drepung. Founded in 1416 by Jamyang Chöje and located about five miles west of Lhasa, it was a virtual town housing about ten thousand monks at the time of the Chinese invasion in 1950–51. It epitomized the institutionalization of mass monasticism in Tibet and was at that time the world's largest monastery.

Drepung was organized in a manner that resembled the segmentary structure of classic British universities like Oxford in that the overall entity, the monastery, was a combination of semiautonomous subunits known as *tratsang*. These are conventionally called "colleges" in the English literature, although there were no schools (with teaching faculties) in the Western sense. In 1959 Drepung consisted of four functioning colleges: Loseling, Gomang, Deyang, and Ngagba.<sup>7</sup> Each was a mini-monastery with thousands of monks, an administrative structure headed by an abbot, and its own rules and traditions. Each was a corporate entity in the sense that it had an identity (a name), owned property and wealth, and had its own internal organization and leadership. The monks came and went over the decades, but the entity and its property endured.<sup>8</sup> A monk's loyalties, in fact, were primarily rooted in his college.

The highest official of a college was the abbot. He held his office for a term of six years and could be renewed for another six-year term. He was appointed by the ruler (the Dalai Lama or in his minority, the regent) from a list containing six or seven ranked nominees submitted by the college in question. The ruler had the final authority over the appointment and could select someone not on the list, although this was rarely done. Nevertheless, power to choose the administrative leadership of colleges was one of the main ways that the Tibetan government maintained control over powerful and potentially unruly monasteries like Drepung. Under the abbot, various officials such as the *gegö* (disciplinary officer) and *nyerba* (economic manager) oversaw specific aspects of monastic life. Also, an "assembly" of the more senior monks periodically met to discuss collegewide issues.

Large monastic colleges were normally subdivided into smaller, named residential units known as *khamtsen*, or residence halls as I shall refer to them. These units, similar to the colleges in terms of administrative structure, consisted of one or more buildings divided into apartments (*shag*) where the monks lived. Residence halls had a strong regional flavor since each *khamtsen* held rights to recruit monks from a specific geographic area or areas. Because great monasteries like Drepung recruited monks from all over the Tibetan cultural world as well as from non-Tibetan areas such as Mongolia, this system helped to facilitate the initial period of acculturation by situating a new monk in a residence together with others who spoke his dialect or language.

Drepung as a whole functioned as an alliance of colleges. There was no single abbot at the helm. Instead, monasterywide issues were decided by a council made up sometimes by the abbots of the different colleges and sometimes by the current and the former abbots. The monastery as a whole also owned property, and there were several important monasterywide monk stewards whose responsibility was to manage these. There were also monasterywide disciplinary officers.

At the level of the individual monk, Drepung's ten thousand members were divided into two broad categories—those who studied a formal curriculum of Buddhist theology and philosophy and those who did not. The former, known as *pechawa*, or bookish ones, were a small minority, amounting to only about 10 percent of the total monk population. These "scholar monks," as I shall refer to them, pursued a fixed curriculum that involved approximately fifteen classes or levels (*'dzin-grwa*), each of which took a year to complete (Anon. 1986). This curriculum emphasized learning Buddhist theology by means of extensive formal debating. Like much else in Drepung Monastery, the theological study program was conducted at the college rather than the monastic level. Three of Drepung's four colleges offered such a curriculum (Gomang, Loseling, and Deyang); the other, Ngagba, taught tantric rituals. The scholar monks in Gomang, Loseling, and Deyang met three times a day to practice debating in their respective college's outdoor walled park called a *chöra*, or dharma grove. The curriculum in each college used a slightly different set of texts, although in the end they all covered the same material. Monks pursuing this trajectory started in the lowest class and worked their way up until they were awarded one of several titles or degrees of *geshe* by their college's abbot.<sup>9</sup> The title of *geshe* was sought by both monks and incarnate lamas of the Dalai Lama's Gelugpa sect, including the Dalai Lama himself.<sup>10</sup> Monks came to Drepung from all over the Tibetan Buddhist world to see if they could master the difficult curriculum and obtain the degree of *geshe*. The intellectual greatness of the Gelugpa sect's monastic tradition was measured by the brilliance of these scholar monks.

The overwhelming majority of common monks—the *tramang* or *tragyü*—however, did not pursue this arduous course and were not involved in formal study. Many could not read much more than one or two prayer books, and some, in fact, were functionally illiterate, having memorized only a few basic prayers. These monks had some intermittent monastic work obligations in their early years but otherwise were free to do what they liked. However, because Drepung did not provide its monks with either meals via a communal kitchen or payments in kind and money sufficient to satisfy their needs, they had to spend a considerable amount of time in income-producing activities. Some monks, therefore, practiced trades like tailoring and medicine, some worked as servants for other monks, some engaged in trade, and still others left the monastery at peak agricultural times to work for farmers.

The reason for the monastery's financial shortfall was not a lack of resources. Drepung, for example, owned 151 agricultural estates and 540 pastoral areas,<sup>11</sup>

each of which had a population of hereditarily bound peasant families who worked the monastery's (or college's) land without wages as a *corvée* obligation. Drepung also was heavily involved in money- and grain lending and had huge capital funds with thousands of loans outstanding at any given time. The monastery's inability to fund its monks, therefore, derived primarily from its decisions on how to utilize its income vis-à-vis its monks. On the one hand, Drepung allocated a substantial portion of monastic income to rituals and prayer chanting assemblies rather than to monks' salaries; on the other, it did not attempt to restrict the number of monks to the income it had available. Rather, it allowed all to join. Despite a traditional government-set ceiling of 7,700 monks, monasteries like Drepung made no attempt to determine how many monks they could realistically support and then admit only that many. How monks financed their monastic status was, by and large, their own problem.

The monks most affected by the insufficient funding were those who had made a commitment to study Buddhist theology full-time, that is, the scholar monks. They were sorely disadvantaged since they had no time to engage in trade or other income-producing activities because of their heavy academic burdens. Consequently, they typically were forced to lead extremely frugal lives unless they were able to find wealthy patrons to supplement their income or were themselves wealthy, as in the case of the incarnate lamas. Tales abound in Drepung of famous scholar monks so poor that they had to eat the staple food—*tsamba* (parched barley flour) —with water rather than tea, or worse, who had to eat the leftover dough from ritual offerings (*torma*).

Consequently, in the traditional society monasteries like Drepung (and Sera and Ganden) were full of monks who spent a large part of their time engaged in moneymaking activities. Periodically, some monastic leaders sought to reform this situation and return the monastery to a more otherworldly orientation, but this was not the dominant point of view. The karma-grounded ideology of Tibetan Buddhism saw the enforcement of morality and values as an individual rather than an institutional responsibility. Individuals, monks or otherwise, were responsible for their actions. Depending on the morality of their behavior, actors reaped quantities of "merit" or "demerit," which in the end interacted to determine the nature of their future rebirths. Monks, by virtue of their commitment to monastic life, especially their forsaking of the binding "this-world" attachment to sex and family life, had elevated themselves to a higher moral-spiritual plane than laymen, and the need of many to engage in secular work to secure subsistence was viewed as secondary in comparison to the extraordinary merit-producing behavioral commitment they had made. Thus it was only in the most serious cases such as heterosexual intercourse that the monastery as an institution felt the need to enforce morality and eliminate those who lapsed.

Consequently, at the time Mao Zedong incorporated Tibet into the new Chinese state in 1951, the ideology and practice of mass monasticism were in full play in Drepung.

#### INCORPORATION INTO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

During the first phase of the new Sino-Tibetan relationship—the years from 1951 until the abortive Tibetan uprising of 1959—China's strategy in political Tibet, today's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), focused on gradually winning over the majority of the Tibetan elite rather than on immediately trying to implement socialist reforms.

Instructions sent by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the Chinese leaders in Lhasa in mid-1952 regarding the Three Monastic Seats convey the gist of this gradualist policy:

The united front work of the three main monasteries is like other united front work in Tibet. The emphasis should be on the upper hierarchy. We should try to win any of those close to the top of the hierarchy, provided that they are not stubborn running dogs of imperialists, or even bigger bandits and spies. Therefore, you should try patiently to win support among those upper level lamas whom you referred to as those full of hatred to the Hans and to our government. *Our present policy is not to organize people at the bottom level to isolate those at the top.* We should try to work on the top, get their support, and achieve the purpose of building harmony between the masses and us.<sup>12</sup>

The arrival of the Chinese communists in Tibet, therefore, did not change monastic life or the monastery's ownership of estates and peasants/serfs during the initial period. The abortive uprising in 1959 ended Beijing's gradualist policy in Tibet, changing overnight all facets of monastic life in Drepung. Beijing now moved to destroy the political, economic, and ideological dominance of the estate-holding elite, including the monasteries.<sup>13</sup>

The overwhelming majority of Drepung monks were not active participants in the Lhasa uprising, although certainly all had great faith in and support for the Dalai Lama. However, a number of monks from Drepung had defended the Dalai Lama's summer palace and fought in Lhasa. Because of that, Drepung was classified as a rebellious monastery and had all its estates and granaries confiscated without compensation.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, all the loans it had made which were still outstanding were canceled. Chinese accounts state that Drepung at this time had 140,000 tons of grain and 10 million yuan in cash (equal then to U.S. \$5 million) outstanding in such loans.<sup>15</sup> The flow of income to Drepung (in kind and cash) totally ceased.

Monastic life and monastic administrative structure were also fundamentally altered. In the initial months following the uprising, a group of officials called a work team (*las-don ru-khag*) was sent from Lhasa to take charge of the monastery. They ended up staying continuously in the monastery until the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. These officials immediately terminated the power and authority of the traditional leadership and appointed a new administrative committee selected from among the poorer and "progressive" monks in a manner analogous to what was done in the rest of China years earlier. The new adminis-

tration was called the Democratic Management Committee (*dmangs-gtso bdag-gnyer u-yon lhan-khang*, henceforth DMC).<sup>16</sup> It has continued to the present.

One of the main initial tasks of the work team (and the new DMC) was determining how monks should be grouped into the various class categories used by the state. Monks involved in the uprising and virtually all the monastery administrators/leaders were classified as “exploiters” and imprisoned or sent to labor camps. The rest of the monks were given several months of “education” in the new socialist ideology, including the need to engage in productive labor. At this time all the monks, and especially the young ones, were encouraged to leave the monastery—to return to their home areas or to join nonmonk work units. The number of monks in Drepung decreased sharply, and by the end of 1959 there were only about four thousand remaining. A Drepung monk described this period: “At first, at this time there was [political] education all day. We were taught things we never heard before like the ‘three antis’ and the ‘two exemptions’ and the ‘three great mountains.’ . . . [How we got food] depended on the wealth of the monks. The poor monks ate together using the food the monastery had amassed in its storerooms, while the better off monks ate in their apartments using their own food supplies. I was among the latter.”<sup>17</sup> After a few months of this political reeducation and reorganization, the remaining monks began to engage in manual labor projects, initially as “volunteers” and then as part of work units. Another monk recalled,

At first we ate the monastery’s food in our own residence halls, but then after many monks were sent off and the total number of monks became much less, the remaining monks gathered together in Loseling College where we ate food together. After about 5–6 months, the monastery’s food stores ran out. However, by then we were all engaged in productive labor so we got food through that work. At this time only the old monks were [regularly] left in the monastery. All the younger monks were out working on projects. How often we returned to the monastery varied; some returned once a week, some daily. These jobs weren’t permanent postings.

After communal dining at Loseling broke up, we divided into smaller production units that worked and ate together; for example, there was a sewing unit, a masonry unit, a construction unit, a carpentry unit and a firewood collecting unit. Later some of these were again divided into two units. Each unit, therefore, had its own livelihood [i.e., was organized as a collective] and ate together. The *tsamba* was divided among the monks, and the butter was kept jointly and used to make tea for all. The monks ate their *tsamba* separately and took tea together. The older monks who couldn’t work and wouldn’t go home were organized as an “old people’s unit” (*gen-gosang*) and lived off subsidies from the government.<sup>18</sup>

In 1965, six years after the uprising, one foreign visitor to Drepung reported that only 715 of the 10,000 monks present in Drepung in 1959 remained.<sup>19</sup> The physical shell of Drepung stood and those monks who remained had vows and prayed in their rooms when not working, but the defining institutional religious activities—joint prayer chanting sessions and the *dharma* grove theology curricu-

lum—had ended. The monastery ceased to function as an institution where religious study, debate, and ritual were practiced. But the worst was still to come.

The third, and most devastating, period for Drepung began with the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. It brought an end to the religion practiced by individual laypersons and monks alike. Drepung remained “open” in the sense that monks continued to live there, but the monks were no longer allowed to wear their robes or maintain private altars in their rooms, and all religious acts were now prohibited. At the same time, political struggle sessions attacked religious beliefs and practices as well as former leaders. Lay and monk Tibetans were encouraged and pressured to ridicule and deride religious laws and gods as well as despoil sacred sites. And although Drepung was fortunate in that most of its building were not destroyed during this period (as were so many other Tibetan monasteries), it was no longer a monastery: those who remained were simply former monks living and working in what used to be a monastery. By the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the number of monks in Drepung had decreased to only 306, and a number of these were married.<sup>20</sup>

The fourth, or current, period began with the liberalizing decisions made in Beijing in 1978 at the Eleventh Party Plenum (see chapter 1). In Lhasa the new policy quickly resulted in the reemergence of “individual” religion, that is, the religious practices performed by individuals. At the same time, a number of temples and shrine rooms were reopened so the public could make religious visits and offerings to deities as in the past.<sup>21</sup> Tibetans responded enthusiastically to the new opportunities and began a host of traditional practices such as circumambulating holy sites. By 1980–81 the shrine rooms in Drepung Monastery were receiving religious visitors from Central Tibet as well as from the ethnic Tibetan areas in Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces daily. However, the revival of monasticism per se did not progress as rapidly as did that of individual religion.

The first changes in Drepung began in 1979–80 and paralleled those of the lay society. “Monks,” although still engaged full-time in manual labor, began openly to practice religion as individuals, setting up altars in their rooms, using rosaries to count prayers, and reading religious prayer books in their free time. At the same time, the number of monks in Drepung increased slightly after a small number of former monks returned to take up residence in the monastery.<sup>22</sup> Some Drepung monks also were again able to engage in full-time religious work when monk caretakers (*gönye*) were recruited to look after Drepung’s newly opened shrine rooms. These monks performed the necessary propitiatory rites to the shrine’s deities, collected donations given by pilgrims, and guarded against theft.

However, collective monastic activities did not immediately reemerge in Drepung. A 1995 leader in the DMC explained this as follows:

The official document [of the Eleventh Plenary Session] stating the new proclamations of Deng Xiaoping reached us in the monastery later than others in Lhasa, . . . but it was still earlier than other remote areas in Tibet where class struggle was still

in progress as late as 1982 and 1983. . . . No one at this time came to us and told us that now we could do religious activities and do the joint prayer chanting sessions, but gradually as we read the document and thought about it, we concluded that the religious freedom it expounded meant we could return to practicing religion in Drepung.<sup>23</sup>

Another current DMC official in Drepung recalled this period in a similar vein: "With the new liberalized nationality and religious policies, we and the people thought that the monastery can't continue to remain empty as it then was [i.e., without religion]. At the very least, we should revive the joint prayer chanting sessions."<sup>24</sup>

When Drepung's DMC finally decided in 1981 that the time was right to revive monastic life in an active sense, they also understood that this would be neither easy nor straightforward. It would need the agreement of the government of the TAR. Many officials in Tibet were hostile to this, believing that Tibetan monasteries were an anachronism, that they were unnecessary or even worse, a threat to socialism and the domination of the Communist party. Nothing should be done, they felt, to allow monasteries and lamas to once again function as unifying institutions for the Tibetan masses since this would inevitably give new hope to those most reactionary and hostile to Beijing and foster nationalistic, pro-independence dissidence.

Moreover, the laws governing religious freedom included a number of important limitations to which a "new" Drepung would have to conform. For example, the 1982 Chinese constitution's definition of religious freedom specifies, "In our country, citizens may believe in religion or disbelieve, but politically they have one thing in common, that is, they are all patriotic and support socialism. . . . The State protects legitimate religious activities, but no one may use religion to carry out counter-revolutionary activities or activities that disrupt public order, harm the health of citizens, or obstruct the educational system of the State. . . . [and] no religious affairs may be controlled by any foreign power."<sup>25</sup> And there were other important caveats. Because religious freedom was part of the more basic freedom to believe or *not to believe*, the state sought to create a level playing field by prohibiting religious education and recruitment of individuals into the priesthood who were under the age of eighteen.

Religious freedom in China, therefore, was predicated on religious practitioners and organizations accepting the principle of the unity of the nation, eschewing any activities that foster separatism, remaining completely free from foreign control, and not engaging in activities the government deemed "exploitive." However, whether Tibetan monasteries would actually abide by these rules was uncertain and, given the history of the monks' opposition to communism and their likely sympathy with the exiled Dalai Lama, entailed a considerable risk.

Despite such dangers, China's new policy toward Tibet compelled it to permit the process of revival to begin. In 1978-79 Beijing had set out to improve conditions in Tibet and if possible induce the Dalai Lama to return from exile. In par-

ticular, it sought to reverse the cultural assimilationist policies of the Cultural Revolution period. This new policy was orchestrated by Hu Yaobang and the Central Committee of the Communist party over the strong opposition of virtually all the leading Han and Tibetan officials in Tibet. Beijing did so because it believed that this strategy would be welcomed by Tibetans and would enhance their confidence in, and loyalty to, the state. In mid-1980 Hu Yaobang made an unprecedented visit to Tibet where he announced the new policy.<sup>26</sup> His public statement on Tibet conveys the tone of the Central Committee's new "conciliatory" policy:

So long as the socialist orientation is upheld, vigorous efforts must be made to revive and develop Tibetan culture, education and science. The Tibetan people have a long history and a rich culture. The world renowned ancient Tibetan culture included fine Buddhism, graceful music and dance as well as medicine and opera, all of which are worthy of serious study and development. All ideas that ignore and weaken Tibetan culture are wrong. It is necessary to do a good job in inheriting and developing Tibetan culture.

Education has not progressed well in Tibet. Taking Tibet's special characteristics into consideration, efforts should be made to set up universities and middle and primary schools in the region. Some cultural relics and Buddhist scriptures in temples have been damaged, and conscientious efforts should be made to protect, sort and study them. Cadres of Han nationality working in Tibet should learn the spoken and written language. It should be a required subject; otherwise they will be divorced from the masses. Cherishing the people of minority nationalities is not empty talk. The Tibetan people's habits, customs, history and culture must be respected.<sup>27</sup>

The new Chinese policy made a revival of monastic life feasible but, as mentioned above, did not eliminate the need for the monastery's leaders (the DMC) to proceed carefully. Drepung's DMC, as they contemplated how to transform the new Chinese policy into practice, had to make difficult decisions regarding what functioning as a monastery meant in the context of the ideology and values of both the old and the new society. They had to prioritize and structure the revival so as to restore an institution that would both be accepted by Tibetans as authentic and at the same time fall within the purview of China's definition of religious freedom, that is, would avoid precipitating a government crackdown and renewed suppression. Drepung's leaders focused initially on two essential aspects of the monastic way of life: collective prayer assemblies and the recruitment and education of new monks.

Unlike tightly structured Christian monasteries, Drepung traditionally had no activities that required the participation of all monks. Whether a monk spent his time praying or studying or sitting in the sun was his own decision. In Tibetan Buddhism, as indicated earlier, individuals were responsible for their own religious behavior and, via karmic cause and effect, reaped rewards or punishments in their next life based on their decisions in this one. Nevertheless, there were large-scale joint activities that symbolized the monastery as a collectivity. The most important of these were the meetings at which large numbers of monks assembled to chant



Figure 2.4. Monastic official reading the names of patrons at the monks' collective prayer chanting session.

prayers for the benefit of all sentient beings. Collective chanting sessions lasted several hours, including a break during which the monks were served tea (and sometimes food).<sup>26</sup> These prayer assembly meetings also had direct economic importance traditionally because they were the time when patrons distributed alms to the assembled monks.

In 1980–81, the DMC sought and received permission from the Lhasa Religious Affairs Bureau to begin to hold these prayer chanting sessions on a regular basis.<sup>29</sup> One old monk recalled the first assembly meeting in 1982:

When we got permission, we immediately tried to get the stoves in the monastic kitchen back in shape so we could have the first prayer chanting assembly on the 30th of the fifth lunar month. However, we couldn't manage this so we had to be satisfied with a "dry" assembly [i.e., a prayer assembly at which tea was not served]. We kept on working and quickly got the kitchen operating again so on the festival that commemorates the first sermon of the Buddha on the 4th of the sixth lunar month (Trugpa tsheshi), we held our first full prayer assembly with tea. On that day the DMC sponsored [financed] the tea and gave each of us a small tormo religious offering made from tsamba.<sup>30</sup>

From then on, Drepung held prayer chanting assemblies regularly, at first three times a month and then five times a month.<sup>31</sup> In addition, special sessions were held on holidays such as the Great Prayer Festival of the first lunar month.



Figure 2.5. Monks in the kitchen making tea to serve at the prayer chanting session.

While this was going on, Drepung sought and received permission to revive a second critical monastic activity—enrolling new (young) monks. It is not surprising, given the energetic revival of individual religion in 1979–81, that there was a revival of interest among some parents, their motives involving the old mix of economic and religious reasons but also a strong new religionationalistic belief that Tibetan religion, the basis of the greatness of the Tibetan nationality, should be revived to its former greatness. Demographically, this was not problematic since the Chinese government's "one-child policy" had not been implemented in Tibet and rural Tibetans had large families.

Parents seeking to make a son a monk went about this in accordance with the customs of the old society; they sought an older monk (usually a relative or family friend) to serve as the boy's sponsor-guardian (*kegya gegen*) and take the boy in to live with him. Since a foundation of traditional Tibetan monasticism was that monkhood should be available to as many people as possible, it was difficult for older monks to refuse such requests, especially since parents assured them they would provide all the food and clothes their boys needed. Consequently, by 1981 a number of the older monks in Drepung had young boys living in their monastic apartments. These boys took monastic vows. But they were monks without a monastery, for although they were living in Drepung, they were not officially accepted in its monastic rolls.



Figure 2.6. A lay Tibetan patron distributing alms to the monks at a prayer chanting session.

In the old society, when a guardian monk took a young ward to the abbot of his college, he was invariably admitted and immediately became a “legal” monk in the monastery. In the new society, the situation was different. The DMC, like the college’s abbot in the old society, had the authority to select applicants, but now this decision was not final. It had to seek approval from the government, which was reluctant to permit the reemergence of monasteries housing many thousands of monks and thus did not readily give such approval. While the government wanted to try to meet the religious aspirations of Tibetans by permitting Drepung and other formerly great monasteries to reopen, it did not want them to become too large or powerful. Consequently, the young boys who went to live with guardian monks in Drepung did not immediately obtain official status and thus were not eligible to participate in prayer assemblies or to receive alms from patrons. Only official monks could partake of these. They were, therefore, novice monks living in Drepung waiting to be formally admitted.<sup>32</sup>

In 1982 the government gave approval to officially enroll the first such monks and fifteen to twenty of those who were already in residence were entered into the monastic roll. This occurred at the same time that Drepung received permission to begin regular prayer chanting sessions. The “new” Drepung, therefore, emerged at this time.<sup>33</sup>

These successes raised the question of what sort of rules should be established for the new monks. Should all monks be forced either to work for the monastery or to study religious theology, or should monks be permitted to work or not work according to their own wishes? And should monks be allowed to engage in private business as in the old society, or must they only work for the monastery? Basic to such questions was the underlying issue of whether the focus of the monastery should be quantity or quality. Was it better for Drepung to try to maximize the number of monks even if most of these would primarily be engaged in manual labor or business, or should Drepung support fewer monks, most of whom would be engaged in the rigorous study of Buddhist theology?

In the traditional society, the answer to this question was clearly quantity. The ideology of mass monasticism dominated. In the new society, Drepung, as I shall show below, had difficulty supporting even a small number of monks financially, and the new political and social climate opposed allowing monasteries to fill up with monks who neither studied nor worked, or worse, became private businessmen as was typical of pre-1959 Tibet. The issue of shifting the monastic emphasis from quantity to quality, however, was not merely a response to the values of the new society or financial constraints. It also had deep roots in the old society and, as the following example illustrates, it was a contentious issue.

#### THE GOMANG COLLEGE DISPUTE OF 1958-59

In the 1950s in Drepung monks did not have to pass examinations to remain part of the monastic community, and even in the large monastic seats like Drepung

only about 10 percent of the monks were actively engaged in the Buddhist study curriculum that led to the title of geshe. This became a problem for Drepung's Gomang College when the number of monks annually receiving the geshe title became so low that it embarrassed the abbot of the college. As the Gomang College prayer chant master (*undze*) of the time explained,

During the six-year term of each abbot, it was expected that 60 geshes would be produced. But in recent years in Gomang College, only two, three, or four were graduating each year. Because of this, the government asked Drepung why there were so few geshes now whereas in the past there had been so many. When we looked into this, we found . . . that the number of geshes produced was declining because in general only 100 to 200 of Gomang College's over 4,000 monks were engaged in active study. So we decided that we had to do something to reverse this trend.<sup>34</sup>

Part of the reason for this dearth was Drepung's policy of not providing special financial support for monks engaged in full-time theological studies. Since these monks had no time to engage in income-producing work like ordinary monks, they faced lives of hardship and poverty unless they had some other source of support. This manner of allocating monastic wealth, therefore, functioned as a disincentive for producing substantial numbers of scholar monks.

Nevertheless, there was very little support in the monastery for providing extra income to scholar monks or, alternatively, for forcing all monks to study and pass exams. Most of the monks, particularly the common monks and monk administrators, in fact, felt that the scholar monks were studying for their own benefit, not for the welfare of the monastery, so deserved nothing special. Consequently, the Gomang College reformers decided that the best way to proceed was indirectly. They convinced the abbot to make a new rule shifting the site of the salary payments the college made to all monks to the dharma grove where the scholar monks debated. The logic behind this move was explained by one of the leaders of the reform faction: "We thought that if we distributed salaries in the dharma grove, more monks would come to it, and if we did this continually, then some of these monks would get used to the dharma grove [and come even when there was no salary distribution]."<sup>35</sup>

The abbot's new order meant that all monks, even administrators, had to go to the dharma grove and sit through the prayers that began a debating session before collecting their salaries. Although they did not have to study, or participate in the debates, or attend the dharma grove during the rest of the year, this order produced an outcry of protest from the monk officials who handled the college's administrative work. At their instigation, the mass of common monks became involved, insisting that the rules of the monastery were sacred and could not be changed.

This controversy polarized Gomang College's monks and eventually led to violence when a mob of angry monks broke into a meeting on this issue and



Figure 2.7. The Drepung dharma grove.

dragged three of the reform leaders outside where they tied them to pillars, beat them, and then locked them up as prisoners. Ultimately, the Dalai Lama's government intervened and freed the monks, but while it expelled the leaders of both factions, it did not force the monks to go to the dharma grove to collect their salaries. The reform program had failed. At this point the Tibetan uprising of 1959 occurred and the traditional monastic system ended.

Consequently, as the DMC and older monks contemplated how to re-create a monastic community in the early 1980s, there were both historical and contemporary reasons for deviating from past tradition, and the leaders opted for a monastery that would emphasize quality over quantity. Monks in the new Drepung would either have to pursue the full-time study curriculum in Buddhist theology or engage in productive work on behalf of the monastery. The formal Buddhist studies curriculum would be revived and monastic life would be structured so that as many monks as possible could devote themselves to the study of Buddhist theology. Thus, as Drepung began to function again as a monastic community, it set out to recruit a new generation of monks, socialize them into the monastic alternative culture, and educate and support the brightest to pursue the theological study program that would eventually result in their attaining the geshe title.

Theological study in Drepung traditionally centered on the dharma grove where a college's scholar monks met three times a day (during semester periods) to



Figure 2.8. Monks debating in the dharma grove.

engage in formal debate on issues of Buddhist theology. Rather than attend formal classes in the Western sense, students studied with private teachers in the monastery. Monks pursuing this trajectory started in the lowest class and worked their way up until they were awarded one of the *geshe* titles by their college's abbot. The curriculum was arduous. It required memorizing thousands of pages of Buddhist texts and their commentaries, understanding their meaning and significance, and being able to use these to engage in high-level formal debates with other scholar monks and teachers. The scholar monks devoted the overwhelming preponderance of their time to their studies, often debating in the dharma grove until late at night. As mentioned above, they traditionally received no special salary or alms for doing this. In the new Drepung, this changed. In 1984, when Drepung revived the dharma grove debating system (with permission of the government), it did so with a major innovation: the monastery would now provide financial support for all monks opting to study full-time.<sup>36</sup>

Securing government permission for prayer assemblies and dharma groves, however, did not imply government willingness to provide financial support for these activities. On the contrary, the state was adamant that monasteries had to be totally self-sufficient. Consequently, the expanding revival of monastic life placed new economic responsibilities on Drepung. How Drepung handled this is an important dimension of the revival of institutional Buddhism in Tibet.

### THE FINANCING OF TODAY'S DREPUNG

In the old society, Drepung's income primarily came from the monastery's own resources—its manorial estates and its moneylending operations—and from the government. For the individual monks, alms from donors were also an important source. In the new society, with no estates, the inability to engage in private moneylending, and no financial support from the government, Drepung faced a formidable challenge, especially since it had opted for quality in its approach to monastic organization. Not only could its monks' subsistence no longer simply be left to their own resourcefulness, but a large number of monks—the scholar monks—now had to be subsidized.

Hypothetically, let us say that each monk should receive as income 150 yuan per month.<sup>37</sup> In 1992–93 this would have been a decent, but not high, wage. Lhasans working in the education sphere, by comparison, earned 281 yuan per month in 1992, those working in factories earned on the average 258 yuan per month (per capita), and those in trade earned 237 yuan per month.<sup>38</sup> To support monks at this modest level, Drepung needed to generate an astounding amount of income. If it were to again house ten thousand monks as it did in 1959, the monastery would have to generate a net annual income of 18 million yuan just to cover those salaries, and more when upkeep, renovation, and other such nonsalary expenses were factored in. And even if we consider only the 437 monks who were actually present in 1993, the annual income needed was 787,000 yuan—about 1 million yuan if repairs and other costs are included. How daunting a challenge this is becomes evident when we examine the income Drepung generated by its monk-staffed (“co-op”) economic units and enterprises.

In the agriculture sphere, the monastery owns a large apple orchard that produced a gross income of about 66,000 yuan in 1993.<sup>39</sup> That income represents just 8 percent of the 787,000 yuan needed for monks' salaries. The monastery also owns and operates a herd of several hundred milch yaks (and calves) and sells some of the yogurt and butter produced by them. The gross income from this was only 11,000 yuan for the year.<sup>40</sup>

Drepung also engages in nonagricultural economic activities. It operates a grocery store and a restaurant, both just outside its entrance. The latter services the tens of thousands of pilgrims and tourists who come to visit the monastery every year. In 1993, they grossed 43,000 and 64,000 yuan, respectively. Drepung also owns and operates two trucks that it hires out for transportation and operates construction and tailoring work units staffed by monks. Together these earned about 45,000 and 46,000 yuan, respectively, in 1993. Finally, monks engage in a number of smaller activities (on behalf of the monastery) such as selling tree branches for prayer flags, consecrating new statues, and making ceremonial items. And the monastery sells ceremonial scarves to pilgrims who use them to make offerings in the various shrine rooms in the monastery. These activities generated another 29,000 yuan.

As impressive as this array of activities seems, the monastery's total gross income in 1993 was only 294,000 yuan. After deducting expenses, the net profit was only 138,000 yuan, that is, only 17 percent of the 787,000 yuan Drepung's 437 monks needed. Put in another way, the 138,000-yuan profit would have supported only 76 monks at the 150-yuan-per-month level. Traditional Tibetan mass monasticism, therefore, represents an economic hurdle that Drepung and other monasteries cannot easily meet through their own business operations.

Drepung, however, actually fared better economically than the above figures suggest because it had other sources of income. One of these was the yield from the entrance fees it charges visitors (foreign and Chinese). These fees generated as much income as everything else mentioned above: in 1993, 247,000 yuan.<sup>41</sup> In addition to this, the monastery charged each car or bus that used the road leading from the main highway to the monastery a fee of 1 yuan per round-trip. That yielded another 17,000 yuan in 1993, bringing the total for these two activities to 264,000 yuan. When this is added to the 138,000-yuan net income mentioned above, the new total net income for Drepung came to 402,000 yuan in 1993.<sup>42</sup>

This income was not distributed equally. As Drepung is organized economically as a co-op, the income produced by monks on all these enterprises goes into the general coffer, with each working monk receiving income based on the amount of work he does. The latter is calculated via a system of work points (*skar-ma*). In this system, each task or job receives from 1 to 10 points per workday. Every six months the total number of work points accumulated by all monks is totaled, and this amount is divided into the total net income produced during the period.<sup>43</sup> This produces the cash value of a single work point.<sup>44</sup> On this basis, each monk is paid in accordance with the total number of work points he earned during the accounting period. In 1993, 333 of Drepung's 437 monks (76%) engaged in activities that earned at least one work point and the average compensation received by each monk was 93 yuan per month. However, averages are misleading, and many elderly monks in fact worked very little. For example, 38 percent of the above-mentioned monks with work points actually earned less than 50 yuan per month (the lowest being only 1 yuan per month). Thus, in reality, more than half of the monastery's monks either did not work at all or worked only part-time and thus earned nothing or very little. These included the 115 elderly monks and the 137 monks who were studying full-time in the dharma grove program. These non-worker monks secured their subsistence in a variety of ways.

Part of the income of Drepung's elderly monks comes from welfare paid by the government under a nationwide "safety net" program that provides aid to elders living alone (the "five guarantee household" program). However, because this subsidy is small—only 35 yuan per month—the monastery supplements it, in 1993 allocating 25,000 yuan or roughly 18 yuan extra per month in welfare for each elder. These two payments, however, raised the average monthly income of the old monks to only 53 yuan per month.

The other group of nonworking monks, the scholar monks, received no income from the government. Instead, a major portion of their income came from the scholarship money Drepung paid them: 4.75 yuan by the monastery for every day they attended the dharma grove.<sup>45</sup> Figures for the second half of 1993 reveal that the average payment per month for these monks was 91 yuan and the highest payment was 104 yuan per month.<sup>46</sup> Although this is better than the income of the elderly, it still does not meet the 150-yuan standard.

However, the income of these and all other Drepung monks is greatly enhanced by donations from outside the monastery—from the alms (*'gyed*) individuals give to the monks. The most common form this alms-giving takes is a distribution made to each monk during a prayer chanting session. Such payments were a traditional Tibetan custom that reemerged when Drepung revived the collective prayer chanting sessions.

In Drepung, these alms are funneled through the *rikshung*,<sup>47</sup> a monk work unit that was specially created for this purpose. It collects the money individuals donate for the prayer chanting sessions and the monks' alms and organizes the sessions, including the preparation of tea (or food) in the monastery's kitchen. Individuals wishing to sponsor (fund) all or part of a prayer session and/or give alms to the monks go directly to the monastic kitchen where the *rikshung* officials are located. The *rikshung* is headed by the *gegö*, traditionally the head disciplinary officer of a college. He, along with the other *rikshung* members, are appointed by the DMC and are therefore subordinate to it, but they have financial autonomy (the donations they receive are not added to the rest of Drepung's income). It remains in their hands and is used entirely for alms and prayer sessions. The amount of donation money the *rikshung* receives is substantial. It covers the expenses of all of the tea (and food) served in the prayer chanting assemblies and provides important income to the individual monks. According to 1991 figures, the *rikshung* distributed 225,000 yuan in alms to the monks, or 43 yuan per month for each monk.

A second similar source of outside income also comes as alms, but here via the semiannual public religious teaching (*sungjō*) held in Drepung's prayer assembly hall by one of its lamas, Gen Lamrim. These teachings last several weeks and are attended by thousands of Tibetans from the TAR and other parts of ethnographic Tibet, virtually all of whom give an alms offering to Gen Lamrim.<sup>48</sup> They are important to the monks' finances because Gen Lamrim donates *all* the alms he personally receives during this period to the *rikshung* for redistribution to the monks. In 1991 this amounted to roughly 200,000 yuan.<sup>49</sup>

These two sources of alms, therefore, totaled roughly 425,000 yuan per year, an amount greater than the 402,000 yuan generated by all of the monastery's productive activities and fees. They added about 81 yuan per month to each monk's income and brought the total monthly income of most monks to at least the 150-yuan-per-month level. Ironically, although most Drepung monks were critical of the government for not supporting the monastery financially, objectively their income was good, and most older monks I talked with agreed that economically

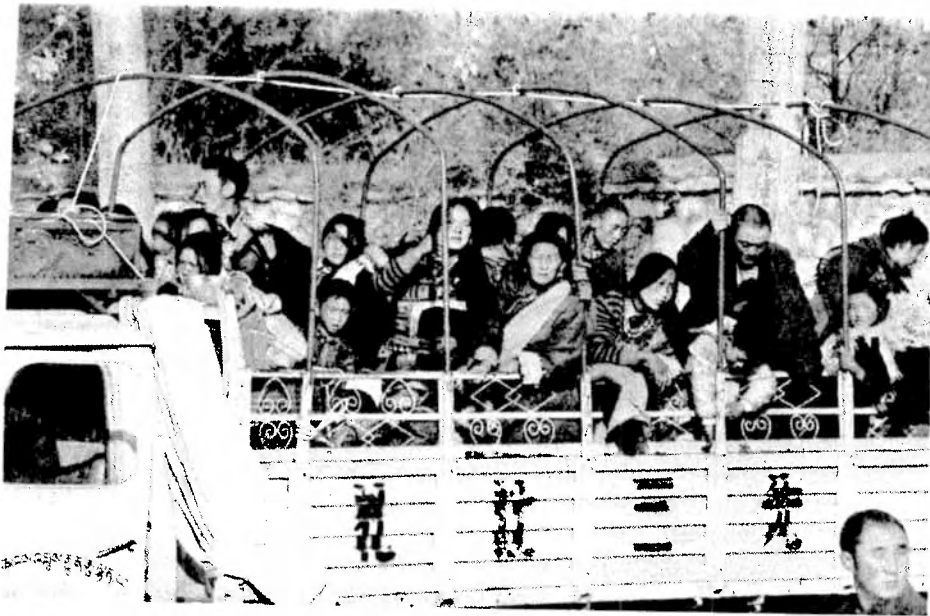


Figure 2.9. Pilgrims on the way to a religious teaching being given by a Drepung lama.

they were better off than in the old society. Even the monks at the bottom of the monastic income hierarchy—the old monks on welfare—received an average of 134 yuan per month.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, the average monthly income of all citizens of the TAR in 1992 was only 105 yuan, and farmers and herders earned only 41 yuan.<sup>51</sup>

These figures, moreover, do not take into account the fact that some of Drepung's monks also receive direct food transfers from parents and relatives. The older guardian monks regularly receive such transfers from the parents of the boy monks living with them, and since roughly 20 percent of Drepung's official monk population are serving as guardian monks, the impact of this source is not trivial.<sup>52</sup>

The monks in today's Drepung, therefore, receive excellent income, although it is clear that this is not so much a result of the success of Drepung's revenue-producing endeavors as a consequence of the enormous supplemental income provided by the alms donated by thousands of individual Tibetans. Without these alms, the monastery would not have been able to support the 437 monks it housed in 1993 without reverting to monks having to fend for themselves economically. These alms donations accounted for roughly 50 percent of the monks' total income, excluding the direct food transfers.<sup>53</sup>

Economic anemia, however, is clearly not the main reason for the small number of monks at Drepung: only 437 monks in 1993 (547 in 1995) instead of the 10,000 that were present in 1959. Even if Drepung were able to increase its income

exponentially by developing new businesses or by doubling or tripling donations, it could not increase the number of monks it houses because of restrictions imposed by the state. Drepung's current ceiling is 600 monks.

#### DREPUNG AND POLITICAL DISSIDENCE

Like much else in contemporary Tibet, it is difficult to divorce the revival of Buddhism and monasticism from the struggle over the political status of Tibet vis-à-vis China, that is, from what is often referred to as the Tibet Question. This nationalistic conflict is being played out in two major arenas. Abroad, there is the vocal and active independence movement led by the Dalai Lama and his exile government. In Tibet, the center of Tibetan political consciousness is Lhasa (and its environs), the capital of the traditional Tibetan state. There, monks and nuns launched a very visible campaign of active political dissidence beginning in 1987. From Drepung alone, ninety-two monks were arrested for participating in ten antigovernment political demonstrations between 1987 and 1993.

However, at the time the Chinese government liberalized its policy on religion in 1978–80, resolution of the Tibet conflict seemed promising. Beijing had invited the Dalai Lama to send fact-finding delegations to visit Tibet, and the exiles had begun discussions with China aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable solution to the Tibet Question. But this was not to be. The talks stalemated when the gap between the Chinese position emphasizing enhanced cultural autonomy and the exile's position emphasizing real political autonomy could not be bridged. By the mid-1980s, therefore, the momentum for reconciliation had collapsed and both sides unilaterally pursued policies aimed at improving their position relative to the other.<sup>54</sup>

For the Dalai Lama and his government-in-exile, this meant launching a new political offensive that sought to persuade the United States and Europe to use their economic and political leverage to force concessions from Beijing. At the same time, they sought to counter China's policies aimed at winning over Tibetans within Tibet by conveying to Tibetans there not only that the Dalai Lama was actively working on their behalf in the West but also that his endeavors were successful—that he represented a realistic hope for securing Western assistance to settle the Tibet Question in Tibet's favor.

The key innovation in this strategy was having the Dalai Lama himself carry the exile's political message to the United States and Europe. Prior to this, the Dalai Lama traveled as a religious leader and did not make overtly political speeches. In 1987 there were several important breakthroughs. In June the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a bill that condemned human rights abuses in Tibet, instructed the president to express sympathy for Tibet, and urged China to establish a constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama.<sup>55</sup> Then, in September, the Dalai Lama made a major visit to the United States during which he presented his first political speech to the Congressional Human Rights Caucus (on 21 Septem-

ber). It was a carefully crafted talk arguing that Tibet had been independent when China invaded it. Specifically, he said, "though Tibetans lost their freedom, under international law Tibet today is still an independent state under illegal occupation." The speech also raised serious human rights charges, referring twice to a "holocaust" inflicted by the Chinese on the Tibetan people.<sup>56</sup>

The Dalai Lama's activities in the United States were widely known and eagerly followed in Lhasa where Tibetans regularly listen to the Chinese-language broadcasts of the Voice of America and the BBC. The Chinese government's media also covered this trip on radio and television, making vitriolic attacks on his visit and views. Among Tibetans in Lhasa the visit was widely taken as confirmation that the tide of history was shifting in Tibet's favor and that the Dalai Lama was on the verge of achieving victory.

At this juncture, a group of about twenty Drepung monks staged an overt political demonstration in Lhasa—the first political demonstration of its type. They did not demonstrate to protest any particular problem Drepung was facing at the time but rather to show Beijing and the West that Tibetans in Tibet support the Dalai Lama and independence. On the morning of 27 September, while the Dalai Lama was still in the United States, they met in Lhasa's central marketplace, the Bargor, unfurled signs that included a handmade Tibetan national flag, and walked around the circular "Bargor" road three times. When nothing happened to them, they marched about a mile down one of the main east-west streets and continued their protest in front of the headquarters of the Tibet Autonomous Region government. At this point they were detained by security forces. Their arrest made news throughout the Western world.

A few days later, on the morning of 1 October, a group of monks from several other monasteries in the area staged a demonstration to show support for the Dalai Lama and the previous monk demonstrators and to demand the latter's release from jail. Police quickly took them into custody in the Bargor and allegedly started beating them. A crowd of Tibetans demanded the release of these monks, and before long this escalated into a full-scale riot. In the end, a number of vehicles and buildings were burned, and anywhere from six to twenty Tibetans were killed when police (including ethnic Tibetan police) fired at the rioters.

Over the next year and a half scores of monk- and nun-led demonstrations occurred, three more of which ended in bloody riots. Martial law was finally declared in 1989 and was not lifted until 1990. In the eight years since then, monk and nun demonstrations have continued, although tight security measures have prevented them from turning into riots. The political atmosphere is volatile, however, and the danger that some monk- or nun-led incident or protest will precipitate a new riot remains ever-present.

These events rocked Drepung, creating a serious crisis that threatens its viability and future. One of the key negative consequences of the political activism was its inadvertent decimation of Drepung's nascent theological study program. Not only were many of the young monk demonstrators part of the dharma grove pro-

gram, but the most gifted of Drepung's young scholar monks were involved, arrested, and thus lost to the monastery. Still other young monks have fled to India to join the Dalai Lama and the exile community. For a time, Drepung's dharma grove actually ceased to be used.

The political conflict also negatively affected the government's attitude toward Drepung and other similarly involved monasteries. The risk Beijing took in allowing a monastic revival in Tibet has turned out poorly as monks have become, as many hard-liners in China predicted at the outset of the liberalization, leaders in the nationalistic opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet. Although the principle of religious freedom continued to be espoused, with, of course, the inherent caveats mentioned earlier, and although the government claims it does not hold the monastery responsible for the political protests of individual monks, in reality the government's attitude toward Drepung hardened demonstrably. Monastic requests from Drepung's DMC on a range of issues, such as assistance in renovating the main prayer assembly hall, payments for teachers, and, critically, permission to increase the number of monks, were denied or approved only on a limited basis. At the same time, the government instituted much closer security scrutiny and supervision over Drepung. Moreover, with regard to Tibet in general, these dissident activities have led Beijing to implement a more hard-line policy that minimizes the importance of meeting Tibetans' cultural and religious expectations and maximizes Tibet's economic and political integration with the rest of China.

Equally significant is the negative effect the political activism has had on the morale and purpose of the monks themselves. As the monastery's revitalization gained momentum in the early 1980s there was hope among the older monks that a serious monastic community could be restored, despite Tibet's presence as part of communist China. There was even hope that regular contact with the Drepung Monastery in exile (in India) would ultimately be possible and that lamas from India could participate in Drepung's revival.<sup>57</sup> The initial focus of their attention, therefore, was on how to operationalize a high-quality revitalization—i.e., how to structure finances, education, recruitment, discipline, and so forth—not politics or nationalism. The major escalation of political activity in the mid-1980s challenged this orientation by thrusting nationalistic and political issues onto center stage where they competed head to head with solely religious interests.

Traditionally a monk's primary loyalty was to his monastery/college and Buddhism rather than the state and nation, and great monasteries like Drepung (or even colleges within them) were not reluctant to oppose the Tibetan government. As mentioned earlier, Tengyeling Monastery and Drepung's Loseling College gave support to the Manchu/Chinese Ambans and troops in Lhasa after the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911–12.

The Chinese invasion and incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China in 1951 changed this in important ways. It created a heightened sense of national identity and political purpose among Tibetans, including the monks. Ti-

betans, whether rich or poor, monk or layman, Easterner or Westerner, now more than ever before defined their identity primarily in terms of political nationalism, as Tibetan vis-à-vis the Han Chinese. Defending the religious interests of one's monastery (and religion in general) now was projected to a larger arena where defending Tibet as a nation-state was seen as synonymous with defending and preserving Buddhism against an atheistic enemy. Such feelings intensified after the abortive Tibetan uprising of 1959 when the Chinese government devastated Tibet's proud monastic tradition. Communism and the Chinese state became a hated enemy for all monks.

But history does not stand still, and China's dramatic shift in policy in 1978 ushered in a new chapter in the relations between Tibetan Buddhism and the Chinese state. In Drepung this revival process started in the early 1980s and had begun to gain momentum by the middle of the decade when political issues exploded on the scene. Once some Drepung monks began political dissidence in 1987, all monks were forced to reassess whether their primary loyalty was to Buddhism and their monastery as in the past or to their nationality and the Dalai Lama. The question facing monks, in essence, was whether the restoration of monasticism and the study of Buddhist theology took precedence over the political struggle to wrest Tibet from Chinese control, and in particular, to support the Dalai Lama.

Every Drepung monk believes in the sanctity of the Dalai Lama and wants him to return to Tibet, and virtually all support his efforts to secure Tibetan independence. Nevertheless, some monks believe these efforts are not only unrealistic but also harmful to the monastery and the revival of religion. The DMC,<sup>58</sup> for example, has repeatedly tried to persuade the monks that Drepung's interests are best served by focusing their efforts on religious study and eschewing political activism. Some senior monks have similarly tried to persuade their young wards to reject political activism because of the personal and monastic dangers. However, by and large, such efforts were not successful. Most Drepung monks believed that the Dalai Lama was moving to free Tibet with U.S. assistance, and there was a broad consensus that this was a time for monks—who have no wives and children to worry about—to sacrifice themselves for the good of the Dalai Lama, religion, and Tibet. The intense distrust of the motives of the atheistic communist state toward Buddhism and the caveats and constraints Drepung operates under made it easy for some monks to conclude that Buddhism cannot flourish in China despite the new liberalism. Accepting the risks entailed in openly demonstrating against the Chinese state, therefore, for some monks became not only a nationalistic-political activity but also, by extrapolation, a religious one. Moreover, for the young monk activists, the traditional notion of acceptable political action to defend religion was infused with new meanings from the West in the form of the incorporation of notions of universal human rights.<sup>59</sup> Such new constructs, however, were not shared by all monks, some of whom, as mentioned above, value the efflorescence of Buddhism in Tibet above abstract universal values such as democracy and human rights, neither of which, of course, existed in the traditional society.

In any case, Beijing has chosen not to close the monastery, and monastic life goes on with the leaders of Drepung trying to make the best of the situation, despite deep-seated frustration at their inability to control the events in which they are mired. They are focusing their attention on two related problem areas.

One of the most serious issues Drepung's DMC faced in the years immediately following martial law was what to do about the hundreds of unofficial young monks waiting to gain official admittance. The DMC was able to persuade the government to admit some of these in 1992 and 1993, but this still left a backlog of several hundred, and more were coming all the time. Given the continuing monk-led political tensions in Lhasa, it was reasonable to assume that Beijing would not permit many more new monks since these obviously would provide a pool of potential new political recruits for the activists in the monastery. It was likely, therefore, that some of these unofficial youths would never become official Drepung monks.

This posed an ethical problem for the DMC. If some of these youths ultimately had to leave Drepung and return to the secular world, the leaders felt that many would have difficulty adjusting since they had missed out on school while "waiting" in Drepung. Not having been educated to function in secular society, their lives might be ruined. The DMC decided this was unacceptable and concluded they had an obligation to provide these boys with decent schooling, at least with regard to reading and writing.

The traditional system of education in Drepung provided no model for how to do this. In the old society there were no formal schools in Drepung. Monks sought out knowledgeable scholar monks to study with on their own and honed their analytic abilities in the debating sessions in the dharma grove. Drepung monks, moreover, were taught to read Tibetan visually without learning how to write in the beautiful cursive script used in all governmental writing.<sup>60</sup> The rationale for this was that monks unable to write with good calligraphy were less likely to leave the monastery for secular jobs. This orientation, of course, fit the traditional ideology of mass monasticism—keeping as many monks as possible.

In the new Drepung, however, a formal school seemed necessary. A leader in the DMC explained the committee's thinking:

We started the school so that the future generation of monks would be capable. We wanted them to be able to be good in reading religious texts, and also in writing and calculating. This was our desire. If we could accomplish this, the monks who stayed in the monastery would benefit, and those who went into the [secular] society would also benefit. . . .

The main thing was that we had about 200 young boys [in 1991] who were not in the official monk register. The older monks were taking 2 to 3 of these boys each, so that's how we got so many of them. All these were not getting permission to join the monastery, so we worried that they would get ruined unless we acted. So to prevent them from being ruined, we established this school. In the old society, we admitted as many monks as came. Now it's not like this. Now there are only a little over 400

monks in the register. So we felt if we didn't do something these kids would end up beggars.

We discussed this problem in the DMC. We felt that since we are all monks, it is not proper to tell monks and the larger society they can't bring in new boys to be monks. This goes against our religious rules [*chos-khrims-nas 'gal*]. So we didn't say anything [at first] and loads of boys came and started causing us . . . problems. . . . We told their guardian monks to look after them and see they study, etc., but the guardians couldn't control these kids. For example, some guardians went to prayer assemblies, some worked, and so the kids were left alone in the apartments a lot. Some of these fooled around, some stole, etc. So we in the DMC discussed this and said it's best if we started a school for them. We decided to establish this in [what used to be] Kongpo kamtsen, and asked the RAB for permission to do this. They approved, saying this was a good idea. . . . We thought we would get some expenses from the government to help us since they fund other schools in the society, but on this count we were wrong. We got nothing.<sup>61</sup>

Drepung used its own funds to build and open this school, which in 1995 contained almost 400 young students and 7 full-time monk teachers. Three of these teachers were themselves new monks who had graduated from lower middle school before joining Drepung. They taught written Tibetan and some basic arith-



Figure 2.10. The school set up by the monastery for young monks waiting to gain official admittance.

metic. The other four teachers were older monks who taught elementary religion via the religious texts traditionally used in Drepung.<sup>62</sup>

The founding of this formal school, however, was a palliative response to a problem, not a long-term solution. Maintaining hundreds of "waiting" monks for years on end was not in the best interests of either the youths or the monastery. Consequently, Drepung's DMC (together with those at Sera and Ganden monasteries) pressed the government to establish a clear numerical size limit so that everyone would know more or less where they stand with regard to the likelihood of ultimate admission. This has involved repeated discussions on the utility of a formal commitment to a fixed number of monks for each monastery and arguments over what that number should be.

Drepung has been partially successful in this endeavor in the sense that the government has given its verbal commitment to allow it a maximum of 600 monks, but this is still not formal law, and the DMC would like to see the final number set at between 700 and 750 monks. However, even the larger number would be too low since in 1995 there were actually 934 monks living in Drepung (540 official and 396 nonofficial), plus another 100 or so from other provinces outside of the TAR.<sup>63</sup>

The DMC is also trying to restrict the flow of new unofficial monks to prevent the current impasse from being further exacerbated. It has registered all the current "waiting" monks and has instructed senior monks to cease accepting new "wards" without permission. There is, in effect, a moratorium on taking in new wards. However, it is not clear whether this "order" will be enforceable. Drepung's new commitment to quality over quantity means that today's Drepung monks have to be productive: they have to either study theology or work on behalf of the monastery. No longer can monks loaf around or do their own private business. However, this new attitude does not negate the traditional value of the monastery being open to all males who seek to renounce the material world. So long as boys are willing to be "quality" monks, the overwhelming feeling in the monastery is that they should be admitted. It is thus likely that more boy monks will arrive in Drepung in the future, despite the DMC's current moratorium.

Finally, Drepung faces a major problem concerning the theological study program. On the positive side, the DMC was able to revive the dharma grove after martial law was lifted in 1990, and it has subsequently grown to include 240 full-time monks. Moreover, the traditional winter "debating" semester called *Jayan Gūnjō* was recently revived.<sup>64</sup> More than 400 scholar monks attended it in 1995. But on the negative side, Drepung has not yet produced a single new *geshe*, and the ten to fifteen nearest scholar monks are still years away. Since political conflict precludes free exchange of monks from the exile Drepung Monastery in India, many older monks fear that a new generation of *geshe* scholars will not be ready to take over the educational activities in Drepung when the last of the old society monks die off. In their view, therefore, Drepung is locked in a race against time, and there is pessimism about whether it will be able to succeed given the volatile politicization of religion in Lhasa.

## CONCLUSION

The central place of monks and monasteries in Tibetan society made it inevitable that the new era of religious freedom in China would produce powerful pressures to revive Tibet's monastic tradition. The freedom to practice religion as individuals was clearly not enough for Tibetans, and local communities throughout Tibet have rebuilt or repaired traditional monasteries, usually without government financial help. In Lhasa the desire to restore famous monastic centers like Drepung to their former greatness was especially strong. By representing the sophistication of Tibetan culture, monasteries like Drepung bolstered Tibetans' cultural identity and fostered ethnic pride vis-à-vis that of the politically dominant Chinese. And so, as the changes implicit in China's new rules became understood and believed in Drepung, a slow monastic revival commenced. The first major step in this process occurred in 1982 when new youths were admitted and regular collective prayer chanting assemblies started.

The five years following those events were characterized by a period of "institutional revival." The DMC and senior monks set out to operationalize a new monastic community and culture, making difficult decisions about how to finance, educate, and discipline the new monks. Through a delicate, and not entirely conscious, process of adaptation, traditional values, customs, and beliefs were restored, in some cases intact and in other cases with modifications and innovations. The result was an emergent monastic social matrix that was sociopolitically compatible with the realities of the current socialist society yet culturally authentic. From a baseline of zero religion at the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Drepung was able to revive a practicing monastic community with new young monks, regular prayer chanting sessions, and a large theological study program.

This process of institutional reconstruction changed dramatically in the fall of 1987 when open political demonstrations by monks ushered in a new era—the period of "religiopolitical confrontation." Monks (and nuns) suddenly leaped to the forefront of active political opposition and received worldwide attention and plaudits. The monastic revival had become politicized, at least in the regions in and around Lhasa.

This new religious militancy challenged all monks and nuns, confronting them with an emotionally powerful alternative to quietly (apolitically) working within China to rebuild their monastic tradition; that is, it presented them the emotionally compelling alternative of participating in the nationalistic struggle to free Tibet from Chinese rule. Feelings of anger and hatred toward the Communist party and the Chinese, of course, were present before the first demonstration, but after it, Drepung's monks consciously had to choose between conflicting loyalties—Buddhism or the Tibetan nation—or, as some who chose the latter course did, to eliminate the cognitive dissonance by trying to redefine the interests of Buddhism as being best served by political activism.

All of this has placed Beijing in a very difficult situation. Although it is still committed to a policy of religious freedom in Tibet (so long as its political caveats are adhered to) and does not officially hold Drepung responsible for the acts of individual monks, it is also committed to stop monks from continuing to fan the flames of political dissidence. Since intensified "political education" in Drepung has heretofore not succeeded in stopping activism, how Beijing will move to ensure this without simply closing down the monastery is not at all clear. It is reasonable to assume that the government's tolerance of monasteries like Drepung will decrease in the coming years if monastic leaders do not work out some way to stop the political protests of the monks.

This scenario is understood by Drepung's leaders and is creating an underlying atmosphere of frustration and depression. Despite the laudatory objective gains in reviving their monastic community, most of Drepung's leaders are disheartened about the future. Cut off from fellow monks and lamas in India, under scrutiny from a government they consider hostile (or at best unfriendly), unable to convince current monks to eschew political militancy (or prevent them from doing so), they find themselves embroiled in constant political tension and conflict they cannot control. And some, undoubtedly, have doubts whether they should be trying to control this. Their successes, no matter how impressive, are always just a demonstration away from disaster. There is a gnawing fear, moreover, that the continued involvement of monks in demonstrations is setting the stage for the worst of all outcomes—that the Tibet Question will not be settled in Tibet's favor and the monastery will be destroyed.

The revival of Drepung Monastery seventeen years after liberalization, therefore, has been somewhat mixed. On one level, the progress has been impressive; yet on another, the gains seem very unstable. At the heart of this contradiction, like so much else in contemporary Tibet, is the Tibet Question.

The older monks love their monastery and want to see it thrive again as a great center of Tibetan religion. Most laypersons feel the same. Consequently, despite their pessimism and apprehension, the monastery's leaders will certainly continue to work to adapt the basic elements of the monastic way of life to whatever obstacles the unpredictable national and international sociopolitical environments throw in its way. But, whatever happens, Drepung's leaders are unlikely to be able to return to the more placid times of the period of institutional revival unless some major breakthrough in the struggle over the Tibet Question occurs. With the monks, especially the younger monks, torn between nationalistic and religious ideals and loyalties, the future of Drepung is uncertain and unpredictable. Only time will tell whether Drepung will move into a third, more positive phase of revival in which it regains most of its former greatness, or whether monk-led confrontations will escalate and the state will decide to crack down harshly on the monastery and reverse most of the gains of the past decade and a half. The leaders of Drepung, therefore, find themselves trapped between two forces they can-

not control, and while they hope that Drepung can weather the storm, they are far from optimistic.

#### EPILOGUE<sup>65</sup>

The political fears mentioned above materialized in the summer of 1996 when Beijing launched a major new “patriotism education”<sup>66</sup> campaign aimed at enhancing its control over the most visible source of opposition—the monasteries. As part of its general “get tough” policy in Tibet, this campaign sought not merely to educate monks on the “proper,” apolitical, role of religion in China (see chapter 1), but more important, to demonstrate to monks that if they did not adhere to these rules they could not remain in the monastery. The campaign sought to take steps to reduce the danger that monasteries like Drepung would continue to function as breeding grounds for political opposition.<sup>67</sup> The vehicle for enforcement was what is known in China as a “work team,”<sup>68</sup> that is, a group of officials pulled together from various government offices and sent to carry out a political campaign. In Drepung’s case, more than a hundred officials arrived there in summer 1996 and remained in residence until roughly the end of that year.<sup>69</sup>

The ideological brief of the work team is illustrated by a document handed out to the monks of Drepung’s sister monastery, Sera, at the start of the parallel campaign there:

The time has arrived for patriotic education to take place in Sera monastery by means of Comprehensive Propaganda Education [*geig sadud kyis dril bsgrags slob gso*]. The purpose of carrying out this education session is to implement the Party’s policy on religion totally and correctly, to stress the management of religious affairs according to law, and to initiate efforts for the harmonious coexistence between the religious and socialist societies. It is also aimed at creating the thought of patriotism and implanting in the masses of the monks the view of the government, the political view and the legal view. The campaign is also for the purpose of educating [monks] to oppose completely any activities aimed at splitting the motherland.<sup>70</sup>

Work teams had been sent to Drepung on a number of occasions in the past so the presence of this one in Drepung itself was not exceptional. However, the task of the 1996 work team differed from previous ones in that its brief included vetting each monk with respect to his political views and his future acceptability as a monk.

The work team sent to Drepung interviewed monks and led sessions on topics such as Chinese law, Tibetan history, patriotism, and the government’s view that the Dalai Lama and his Western supporters were playing a negative role in trying to split Tibet from China. All monks were required to study political education materials that spelled out these views, attend classes that went over the official positions, and convey their attitudes about these issues verbally and in writing.

In keeping with the strident rhetoric of the new hard-line policy in Tibet, the work team directly attacked the Dalai Lama, removing his photographs from the monastery’s chapels and temples (and other public venues) while asserting that

the monks must denounce the Dalai Lama as a duplicitous “splittist.” The harsh personal attacks on the Dalai Lama, however, assaulted Tibetan ethnic and religious sensibilities and precipitated a major test of wills in Drepung (and in many other monasteries).

Faced with the necessity of attacking the Dalai Lama by name and agreeing to historical views and “facts” they considered untrue, many monks dug in their heels and, in a variety of ways, refused to participate in what was commonly perceived as a throwback to the mass political campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s, even if this stance meant having to leave the monastery. A few monks expressed their protest by openly challenging the veracity of the work team’s facts at public sessions. Four such monks, it is said, ultimately were sent to reform-through-labor camps when they repeatedly refused to recant. A larger number of Drepung monks—about sixty—adopted a less confrontational method to protest. They chose to leave the monastery on their own accord rather than accept the campaign’s demands. Some of these quietly fled to India, producing the first reports of the campaign abroad.<sup>71</sup> One very old monk, it is said, became so distraught by the thought of either leaving the monastery or denouncing the Dalai Lama that he committed suicide.

Most monks, however, were willing to accept—at least on the surface—the basic ideological “points” of the campaign to remain in the monastery, but they drew a line with regard to the demand that they comment negatively about the Dalai Lama’s political persona. A meeting of work team members with Drepung’s elderly monks illustrates the depth of this opposition. At this meeting, three or four monks rose and said emotionally, tears in their eyes, that as simple monks they knew nothing of the Dalai Lama’s politics but only his religious stature, and this they could not oppose. Consequently, if the work team insisted that they speak against the Dalai Lama, they would have to leave Drepung and go begging in the streets of Lhasa.<sup>72</sup> Comments like this coming from monks who were basically nonpolitical and had lived most of their lives in the monastery had a powerful impact on the work team’s thinking, leading to a reconsideration of the campaign’s anti-Dalai Lama component. The campaign had sought to cleanse the monastery of politically unreliable monks and convince the rest that it was in their and their monastery’s best interests to dissociate themselves from political dissidence, not purge Drepung of virtually all senior monks. Consequently, it was decided that trying to force monks to criticize the Dalai Lama directly would be counterproductive, and this was removed from the list of “conditions” the monks had to accept publicly, leaving only the following items: to cherish the nation and cherish religion; to oppose separatism/splittism; to accept the correct ideology of the Chinese Communist party; to respect the motherland’s unity; to work to continue the socialist system and to obey the orders of one’s superior officials. Monks who “passed” the political education program by stating their acceptance of these conditions were reaffirmed as official Drepung monks and issued a new registration document (in the form of a red handbook with their name, photo, birthdate, etc.).

Although it is easy to dismiss the rhetorical “parroting” the Socialist Education campaign generated as a kind of political charade that changed no one’s views, the 1996 campaign was not limited to rhetoric. It also initiated a number of real structural changes. One such “reform” was the addition of a new criterion for official membership as a Drepung monk—proper age. As mentioned earlier (and in chapter 1), the laws of the People’s Republic of China prohibited the recruitment of monks and priests under the age of eighteen. Religious freedom in Chinese law meant the freedom to believe or not to believe, and the party from early on felt it was important to prevent young children from being indoctrinated into a religious life before they had the maturity to make an informed judgment. Nevertheless, exceptions were made, most notably in Tibet where the great emphasis Tibetans placed on child recruitment was tacitly respected by not enforcing the minimum age rule. The 1996 campaign reversed that policy, the government announcing that Tibetan monks must now be at least eighteen. And it implemented this standard, albeit with a few concessions, the most important of which were that for the duration of the campaign the minimum age for the monks already present in Drepung would be reduced to fifteen, and even younger monks were admitted in a few hardship cases involving those who were orphans with no home to return to or child monks whose coresident guardian monk was so old or infirm that he depended on the young monk.<sup>73</sup> In the future, however, the government decreed that new monks would have to be at least eighteen years of age.

The work team also eliminated the hundreds of unofficial monks who had been residing in Drepung at the start of the campaign “waiting” to be admitted officially. These youths, frustrated and angry at the government’s refusal to allow them to become official Drepung monks, were clearly a fertile breeding ground for political dissent. They were eliminated in two ways. The underage monks (numbering between 80 and 100) were sent home with no political prejudice or stigma attached to this expulsion. They were told to enter secular schools and reapply for admission if they wished when they reached the age of eighteen. The remainder of the older “waiting” monks (numbering more than 160) were officially admitted into the monastery, increasing Drepung’s size by about 30 percent to 706 official monks.<sup>74</sup> This number constituted Drepung’s new official maximum size, although the number of resident monks was actually higher since about eighty unofficial “visiting” monks from outside the TAR continued to live and study in Drepung as in the past.<sup>75</sup> To prevent the reemergence of a new cohort of “waiting” monks, older monks were warned not to allow unofficial monks to live with them regardless of their age.<sup>76</sup>

Equally significant were changes made in the administration of Drepung. The government tightened its supervision over the monks by replacing the monk-staffed Democratic Management Committee with a new committee called the “Management Committee” (*do dam u yon lhan khang*), which included secular cadres who lived in the monastery along with monks.<sup>77</sup> The presence of these lay cadres in the monastery has given the government important firsthand control over the

monastery’s day-to-day operational decisions.<sup>78</sup> Some changes were also made in monk administrative personnel; the former monk head of the Democratic Management Committee, for example, was replaced with another monk, as was the former disciplinary official, the *gegö*.<sup>79</sup>

The 1996 campaign also brought about a series of lesser changes in the life of Drepung. A number of the major monastic economic enterprises were converted to the “responsibility” system, the monks working for these having to guarantee the monastery a fixed annual “lease fee.” For example, the monastery’s store has to guarantee to pay 90,000¥ a year to the monastery, and the restaurant, 80,000¥. Anything these enterprises earn above this they can keep, but it is interesting to note that the monks operating these have pledged that they will only take a salary equal to the salary of other working monks (regardless of how much profit they generate) since as monks they have no desire to become rich.<sup>80</sup>

From another direction, Drepung’s income suffered a severe blow in 1997 when its most revered spiritual leader, Gen Lamrim, died. Overnight the monks lost the several hundred thousand yuan that his biannual public religious teachings generated, as well as his spiritual leadership. The increases in income from implementing the “responsibility” system will not make up for this loss.

Changes were also made in Drepung’s school for younger monks. In 1996 the curriculum was expanded to include Chinese and English, and the school was established as a full six-year primary school. In July 1997 the school enrolled 178 monks. The content of the dharma grove educational program was not altered, but a formal ceiling was set at 230 full-time monks (i.e., 33% of the total number of Drepung monks). These scholar monks continued to receive salaries to support themselves while they studied; the advanced scholar monks receive 7¥ per day, the middle level 5¥ per day, and the newer ones (those admitted in 1996) 2.5¥ per day. Monks from outside the TAR were still permitted to study in the dharma grove, although they did not receive salaries from the monastery.<sup>81</sup>

The 1996 monastery rectification campaign reflects the government’s new hard-line strategy in Tibet, one characteristic of which is less conciliation toward ethnic culture, as well as its frustration with the monks’ hostility and political activism. However, although the campaign was launched with a torrent of tough rhetoric and initially seemed likely to marginalize monasteries like Drepung, in the end its results were somewhat equivocal. Rather than drastically scale back the number of monks, the government again offered up its standard religious compromise—if you concentrate on religion and eschew political dissidence, we will permit you to stay as monks and allow monasticism to develop—and it actually allowed Drepung to increase by more than 30 percent despite the fact that the monks would not denounce the Dalai Lama. However, the campaign also revealed clearly to the monks that the government will no longer tolerate monasteries like Drepung functioning as centers of political and nationalistic opposition and that this was more than empty rhetoric—it was now ready to intervene and forcibly alter elements of monastic life to prevent this.

The future of monasteries like Drepung, therefore, more than ever depends on the monks' acceptance of the government's separation of religion and political dissidence, that is, the government's demand that monks devote themselves to their religion and eschew all antigovernment political activity. So while Drepung can continue to try to train a new generation of scholar monks, the government has made it clear that it will not tolerate the monastery being used as a breeding ground for political dissidence and, of course, that resistance is futile and counter-productive.

Drepung's future, therefore, remains uncertain and precarious since it is impossible to predict how its monks will respond to future vagaries of the Tibet Question, in particular, to events outside of China.<sup>82</sup> The Chinese government's attempt to persuade (and/or intimidate) Drepung's monks to delink religion from nationalistic politics reached a new plateau of intensity in 1996 but did not truly resolve the fundamental conflict of many at Drepung between their political aspirations and their religious loyalties.