

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
International Religious Freedom Report for 2011

China (Includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau) -

Tibet

Executive Summary

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The constitution of the PRC provides for religious freedom for all citizens but in practice, the government generally enforced other laws and policies that restricted religious freedom. The PRC constitution states that Chinese citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" and bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion. It protects "normal religious activities," but does not define the word "normal." Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members are forbidden from holding religious beliefs and from participating in religious activities.

The CCP demands that religion "adapt to socialism." Tibetan Buddhists, like other religious people in China, face an array of restrictions on religious education, training of clergy, and conduct of religious festivals. These restrictions, which complement the atheism taught in schools, are resented by many religious people who view them as part of a systematic effort by the CCP to eradicate religious belief.

There was a marked deterioration in the government's respect for and protection of religious freedom in the TAR and other Tibetan areas, including increased restrictions on religious practice, especially in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. Repression tightened in the lead-up to and during politically and religiously sensitive anniversaries and events, such as the third anniversary of the protests and riots in Tibetan areas that began on March 10, 2008; the observance of "Serf Emancipation Day" on March 28, the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CCP on July 1, the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6, and the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the "peaceful liberation" of Tibet on July 19. Official interference in the practice of Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions generated profound grievances and contributed to a series of self-immolations by Tibetans. The government continued to vilify the Dalai Lama, whom most Tibetan Buddhists venerate as a spiritual leader, and blamed the "Dalai clique" and "other outside forces" for instigating the March 2008 unrest in Tibetan areas and subsequent acts of protest, including self-immolations by Tibetan monks, nuns, and laypersons that occurred throughout the year. The government repeated its assertion of authority over the approval of all reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and the supervision of their education. Chinese authorities often associated Tibetan Buddhist monasteries with pro-independence activism and characterized disagreement with religious policy as seditious behavior.

Government and CCP control over religious practice and the day-to-day management of monasteries

and other religious institutions tightened, especially during the second half of the year. This was particularly pronounced in Sichuan Province's Aba (Ngaba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (T&QAP), home of Kirti Monastery, which saw the highest concentration of self-immolations. Progressively heavy-handed measures were implemented to compel acquiescence, convey the appearance of popular support, and prevent public protest in many Tibetan areas. Tibetan Buddhist monasteries were increasingly hindered from delivering the educational and medical services they traditionally provided to their communities, as well as from carrying out environmental protection, a traditional element of both religious and conservation practice. Continued restrictions on the exchange of monks between monasteries resulted in the decline of monastic educational standards.

There were reports of societal discrimination, including of Tibetans who encountered discrimination in employment, obtaining hotel accommodation, and in business transactions, but since Tibetan Buddhists' ethnic identity is closely linked with religion, it can be difficult to categorize incidents solely as examples of ethnic or religious intolerance.

The U.S. government repeatedly urged Chinese authorities at multiple levels to respect religious freedom for all faiths and allow Tibetans to preserve, practice, and develop their religious traditions. The U.S. government raised individual cases and incidents with the Chinese government. U.S. government officials urged the Chinese government to engage in constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives as well as address the policies that threaten Tibet's distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic identity and that are a primary cause of grievances among Tibetans. Despite numerous requests for permission to travel to the TAR, U.S. diplomatic personnel were only permitted one visit during the year. U.S. diplomatic personnel were occasionally barred from visiting Tibetan areas for which permission was not required, particularly during sensitive anniversaries and periods of unrest. In the TAR and most other Tibetan areas, the ability of U.S. diplomatic personnel to speak openly with Tibetan residents and members of the monastic community was severely restricted.

Section I. Religious DemographyShare

Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, an indigenous religion, and a very small minority practices Islam, Catholicism, or Protestantism. Many Tibetan government officials and CCP members are religious believers, despite government and CCP prohibitions against officials' holding religious beliefs or participating in religious activities.

Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include ethnic Han Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, or traditional folk religions; Hui Muslims; and non-ethnic Tibetan Catholics and Protestants. Approximately 4,000 to 5,000 Muslims worship at mosques in the TAR. A Catholic church with 560 members is located in the traditionally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. Cizhong (Tsodruk), in Diqing (Dechen) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP), Yunnan Province, is also home to a large Tibetan Catholic congregation. The TAR is home to a small number of Falun Gong adherents as well as unregistered Christian churches.

According to a 2009 People's Daily (the official newspaper of the CCP) article, there are 3,000 Tibetan

Buddhist monasteries with 120,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns in the TAR and in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for religious freedom for all citizens, but other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. The constitution states that Chinese citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief.” It bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion. The constitution protects “normal religious activities” but does not define “normal.” The constitution states that religious bodies and affairs are not to be “subject to any foreign control.”

The government’s 2005 White Paper on Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities states, “Organs of self-government in autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and relevant laws, respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities and safeguard all legal and normal religious activities of people of ethnic minorities.” Organs of self-government include governments of autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties.

At the national level, the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD) and the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), with support from officially recognized Buddhist, Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant “patriotic religious associations,” are responsible for developing religious management policies. Local branches of the UFWD, SARA, and the Buddhist Association of China coordinate implementation of religious policies by Democratic Management Committees (DMCs) in monasteries. Regulations restrict leadership of DMCs to “politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and government officials.” The government stations CCP cadres and has established police stations on the premises of many monasteries. The government also supports the development of the “3+1” education model in some monasteries. Under this model, local village committees, family members, and DMCs ensure that monks and nuns cooperate with regular political education.

In a December 16 article published in Qiushi Online (an official journal of the CCP Central Committee), Zhu Weiqun, Executive Deputy Director of the UFWD, reiterated the principle that party members “must not be allowed to have religious faith,” particularly those cadres involved in religious work.

The last round of talks between officials from the UFWD and envoys of the Dalai Lama was held in January 2010. As of 2007 approximately 615 Tibetan religious figures held positions in provincial and lower-level People’s Congresses (PCs) and committees of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in the TAR. The CPPCC is a political advisory body that nominally serves to allow non-CCP delegates to participate in the administration of state affairs. Although CCP cadres are not permitted to practice religion, Tibetan religious figures who hold government positions (for example on the local NPC or CPPCC) are permitted to practice Buddhism. The government-recognized 11th Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, is the vice president of the Buddhist Association of China and a member of the CPPCC.

Rules and regulations provide the ostensible legal basis for government control over and authoritative reinterpretation of Tibetan religious traditions. The Management Measures on Reincarnation, issued by SARA, codify government control over the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including reincarnate lamas. The regulations stipulate that city governments and higher political levels can deny the required permission for a lama to be recognized as a reincarnate, or “tulku.” Provincial-level or higher governments must approve reincarnations, while the State Council reserves the right to deny the recognition of reincarnations of high lamas, often referred to by the Chinese term “Living Buddhas,” of “especially great influence.” Regulations state that no foreign organization or individual can interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within the country. The government maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnated lamas.

The TAR Implementation of the Religious Affairs Regulations (the “Implementing Regulations”), also issued by SARA, assert state control over all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including religious groups, venues, and personnel. The TAR government has the right under the Implementing Regulations to deny any individual’s application to take up religious orders. The Implementing Regulations codify the practice of controlling the movement of nuns and monks, requiring them to seek permission from county-level religious affairs officials to travel to another prefecture or county-level city within the TAR to “practice their religion,” engage in religious activities, study, or teach.

In Tibetan Buddhism, a key component of religious education is to visit different monasteries and religious sites in the region and abroad to receive specialized training from experts in particular theological traditions. The Implementing Regulations require that monks who travel across county or provincial lines for religious teaching or study must obtain permission from the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) of both the sending and receiving counties. Such restrictions sometimes also apply to monks visiting other monasteries within the same county for short-term study or teaching. Tibetan Buddhist monks say that these restrictions have resulted in a decline in the quality of monastic education.

The Implementing Regulations also give the government formal control over the building and management of religious structures and the holding of large-scale religious gatherings, each of which requires official permission. The TAR maintains tight government control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and maintains that the relics, as well as the religious buildings and institutions themselves, are state property.

There are no national official religious holidays. However, the Shoton Festival, originally a religious festival, is celebrated as a weeklong official holiday in the TAR.

Government Practices

There were numerous and severe abuses of religious freedom, including religious prisoners and detainees. Monasteries were increasingly forbidden to deliver traditional educational and medical services to the people of their communities, and official intimidation was used to compel acquiescence and preserve a facade of stability.

Since mid-March, authorities have carried out a prolonged and intense crackdown at Kirti Monastery in Sichuan Province's Aba (Ngaba) T&QAP, where up to 1,000 local residents staged a peaceful demonstration to protest the violent beating by police of a Kirti monk named Phuntsog, who set himself on fire on March 16 (he died the next day). Authorities subsequently removed hundreds of monks from the monastery, forcing some to return to their hometowns. Several hundred monks who remained in the monastery were required to spend months in small-group indoctrination sessions led by approximately 100 government officials dispatched to the monastery for that purpose.

At least 12 reported self-immolations by Tibetan Buddhist clergy and laypersons occurred during the year. Eight of the 12 were affiliated with Kirti and other monasteries and nunneries located in Aba (Ngaba) T&QAP, where repression was ongoing and particularly intense. Of the remaining four self-immolations, three took place in Ganzi (Kardze) TAP, Sichuan Province, and one in the TAR. Many of the self-immolators were reported to have been clutching photos of the Dalai Lama and calling for religious freedom and the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet as they set themselves alight. Security personnel reportedly beat, kicked, or otherwise physically abused some individuals as they burned. For example, according to sources cited by the U.S. nongovernmental organization (NGO) International Campaign for Tibet, after 17-year-old Kirti monk Kelsang Wangchuk set himself on fire on the main street of Aba (Ngaba) County Town, Aba (Ngaba) T&QAP, on October 3, he was quickly surrounded by authorities who extinguished the flames and beat him before removing him to an undisclosed location. Kelsang Wangchuk's whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

On August 30, the official Xinhua News Agency reported the People's Court of Ma'erkang (Barkham) County in Aba (Ngaba) T&QAP convicted three monks from Kirti Monastery of "intentional homicide" in connection with Phuntsog's self-immolation in March. The court sentenced Tsering Tenzin and Tenchum to 13 and 10 years in prison, respectively, for allegedly instigating and assisting Phuntsog's self-immolation. In a separate trial, another Kirti monk, Phuntsog's uncle Drongdru, was sentenced to 11 years in prison on similar charges.

Official interference in monastic life and religious practice in Tibetan areas increased markedly during the year. "Patriotic education campaigns," in which authorities forced monks and nuns to participate in "legal education," denounce the Dalai Lama, study materials praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, and express allegiance to the government-recognized 11th Panchen Lama, were carried out with renewed intensity and frequency at monasteries and nunneries across the Tibetan Plateau. The "innovative monastery management" system, which began permanently stationing government officials at monasteries in the TAR midyear, had spread to some monasteries in Tibetan areas of Sichuan province by the end of the year. Government-selected monks had primary responsibility for conducting patriotic education at each monastery. In some cases, the government established "official working groups" at monasteries, and religious affairs and public security officials personally led the patriotic education. Monks and nuns reported patriotic education campaigns detracted from their religious studies, and some fled their monasteries and nunneries because they faced expulsion for refusing to comply with the education sessions. The relentless implementation of patriotic education, coupled with strengthened controls over religious practice, including the permanent installation at some monasteries

and nunneries of party and public security officials, are believed by many observers to be among the primary sources of discontent among Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns, and the impetus behind such acts of protest as self-immolation.

The first reported case of house church persecution in the TAR occurred around the National Day holiday in early October. The U.S.-based NGO China Aid Association reported Lhasa authorities detained 11 members of a Protestant house church for nearly a month. During this time, authorities reportedly insulted and beat church members and confiscated a large number of Tibetan-language Bibles.

Based on information available from the political prisoner database of the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), as of September 1, 527 Tibetan political prisoners were imprisoned in Tibetan areas. The actual number of Tibetan political prisoners and detainees was believed to be much higher, but the lack of access to prisoners and prisons, as well as the dearth of reliable official statistics, made this impossible to determine. An unknown number of prisoners were held under the Reform Through Labor system, to which the Public Security Bureau (PSB) can commit people for up to two years without judicial review. Of the 527 Tibetan political prisoners tracked by the CECC, 483 were ethnic Tibetans detained on or after March 10, 2008, and 44 were Tibetans detained prior to March 10, 2008. Of the 483 Tibetan political prisoners who were detained on or after March 10, 2008, 264 were believed or presumed to be detained or imprisoned in Sichuan Province, 160 in the TAR, 23 in Gansu Province, 34 in Qinghai Province, one in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, and one in Beijing Municipality. There were 113 persons serving known sentences, which ranged from one-and-a-half years to life in prison; the average sentence length was seven years and two months. Of the 113 persons serving known sentences, 62 were monks, nuns, or Tibetan Buddhist teachers.

Many monks and nuns remained in detention due to their alleged involvement in the March 2008 unrest or other acts of protest in the years since. More than 80 nuns reportedly were detained in Sichuan Province after March 2008; their whereabouts remained unknown.

Limited access to information about prisoners and prisons made it difficult to ascertain the number of Tibetan prisoners of religious conscience, assess the extent and severity of abuses, or determine the charges brought against them.

In March a local court sentenced Reincarnate Lama Jangchub and Monk Pesang of Jophu Monastery, Jiangda (Jomda) County, Changdu (Chamdo) Prefecture, TAR, to prison terms of three years and two-and-one-half years, respectively, reportedly for their participation in demonstrations protesting government seizure of land belonging to the monastery.

Jigme Guri, a monk and former DMC deputy chairman from Labrang Monastery, Xiahe (Sangchu) County, Gannan (Kanlho) TAP, Gansu Province, was detained August 20 by police officers who reportedly raided his hotel room in Hezuo (Tsu) City, Gansu Province, seizing computer equipment and dozens of portraits of the Dalai Lama. In 2008 Jigme Guri recorded a YouTube video detailing abuses he allegedly suffered at the hands of prison officials during previous detentions. By his own account, the

prison beatings left him unconscious for six days and required two hospitalizations. At year's end, Jigme Guri remained in detention and the charges against him were unknown.

Jamyang Jinpa, a monk from Labrang Monastery who had been detained in 2008 for protesting against and refusing to participate in compulsory "patriotic education," died April 3 reportedly of injuries suffered during severe beatings and torture inflicted by local security forces at the time of his detention.

As many as 300 monks from Sichuan Province's Kirti Monastery were reportedly detained in connection with their alleged participation in protests that followed the self-immolation of monk Phuntsog on March 16, and while several were formally charged, convicted, and/or sentenced, the whereabouts of many others remained unknown. On May 2, the Aba (Ngaba) County People's Court sentenced Kirti monks Lobsang Dhargye and Kunchok Tsultrim to three-year prison terms, reportedly for the crime of inciting splitting of the state. Another Kirti monk, Lobsang Rinchen, was reportedly detained May 9; his whereabouts and the charges against him were unknown. On May 19, Chinese authorities arrested Kirti monk Lobsang Choephel, reportedly for failing to follow orders during a "patriotic education" session. His whereabouts were unknown at year's end.

Karma Monastery in Gama (Karma) Township, Changdu (Chamdo) Prefecture, TAR, was the target of increasingly stifling official pressure during the year. Early in the year, RAB and UFWD officials began forcing Karma monks to comply with onerous religious licensing requirements, requiring them to obtain "religious venue," "legal representative," "religious teacher," and "reincarnate lama" licenses. Karma monks reportedly refused to comply with the requirement, rejecting the licenses as irrelevant to the practice of their religion. An unoccupied "party activities center" that had recently been built to accommodate "patriotic and legal education" sessions for residents of Gama Township was bombed on October 26. According to the overseas NGO Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), local officials held Karma Monastery monks responsible for the building's destruction and subsequently subjected them to detention, surveillance, and harassment. On October 29, two Karma Monastery abbots and seven monks were reportedly arrested for refusing to denounce the Dalai Lama or to cooperate with patriotic education at the monastery. A former Karma Monastery monk, Tenzin Phuntsog, died on December 6, five days after setting himself on fire, reportedly to express solidarity with local monks.

There were continued reports that the government detained Tibetans seeking to cross the border from Tibet to Nepal for religious purposes. Such detentions reportedly lasted as long as several months and sometimes took place without formal charges. Some Tibetans who returned from Nepal reportedly suffered torture while incarcerated or otherwise in official custody, including electric shock, exposure to cold, and severe beatings, as well as being forced to perform heavy physical labor. Security forces routinely subjected prisoners to "political investigation" sessions and punished them if they were deemed insufficiently loyal to the state. According to TCHRD, on July 5 local security officials interrogated monks at Dargye Monastery in Sichuan's Ganzi (Kardze) TAP, paying particular attention to monks who had been to India. Monks Lobsang Choejor and Jampa Wangchug, each of whom had spent several years studying at Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India, were reportedly removed from their

monastery and placed in detention at the Ganzi County Detention Center. It was not known whether formal charges had been brought against them.

Although authorities permitted many traditional religious ceremonies and practices during the year, including public manifestations of religious belief, they rigorously confined most religious activities to officially designated places of worship, often restricted or canceled religious festivals, forbade monks from traveling to villages to conduct religious ceremonies, and maintained tight control over the activities of religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypeople. The government suppressed religious activities it viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence.

The government stated there were no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries and that each monastery's DMC could decide independently how many monks the monastery could support. In practice, however, the government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, particularly in the TAR and Sichuan's Ganzi (Kardze) TAP. One method used by local authorities to restrict the growth of the number of monks in some monasteries was to impose restrictions on the construction of new housing in a monastery, requiring that each dwelling bear an address plate issued by the local government. Local RABs also frequently refused to issue official clergy permits or monk permits.

The number of Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns in monasteries and nunneries fluctuated significantly, due in part to religious personnel leaving their monasteries and nunneries to avoid government-imposed "patriotic education" and "legal education" campaigns, forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama, and other acts they felt constituted a betrayal of their religious beliefs. Authorities in the TAR and other Tibetan areas tightened enforcement of long-standing regulations forbidding monasteries and nunneries from accepting individuals under the age of 18 for training.

The government reportedly continued to remove from monasteries and nunneries monks under the age of 18, unregistered monks and nuns, and monks and nuns who came from other areas. Nevertheless, unregistered monks under the age of 18 remained in residence at some monasteries.

Monasteries were prohibited from operating schools, although some continued to do so. Children were removed from schools attached to monasteries and enrolled in public schools or provided no alternative arrangements. During the year, local authorities frequently pressured parents, especially those who were CCP members or government employees, to withdraw their children from monasteries in their hometowns, private schools attached to monasteries, or Tibetan schools in India. In some cases local authorities confiscated identity documents of parents whose children were studying at Tibetan schools in India as a means of forcing the parents to return their children to China. In the absence of such documents, the parents risked losing their jobs.

In March 2010 newly appointed TAR Chairman Pema Choling (Baima Chilin) called the Dalai Lama, venerated by most Tibetan Buddhists as a spiritual leader, "the most important cause of instability in Tibet." On March 10, the 52nd anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the Dalai Lama announced he

was relinquishing his formal political position in the Tibetan exile community. He maintained his role as a spiritual leader to Tibetan Buddhists inside and outside China.

Some government officials maintained there was no law against possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama, but rather that most Tibetans chose not to do so. However, multiple sources reported open veneration of the Dalai Lama remained prohibited and that officials, who considered the images to be symbols of opposition to the CCP and the state, removed pictures of the Dalai Lama from monasteries and private homes. The government also continued to ban pictures of Gedun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama. The Implementing Regulations state, “religious personnel and religious citizens may not distribute books, pictures, or other materials that harm the unity of the nationalities or endanger state security.” Some officials deemed photos of and books by or about the Dalai Lama and Gedun Choekyi Nyima to be materials that violated the Implementing Regulations.

Nevertheless, many Tibetans displayed photos of the Dalai Lama and Gedun Choekyi Nyima in their homes, in lockets, and on cellular telephones. The ability of Tibetans to display the Dalai Lama’s picture varied regionally and with the political climate. In Tibetan areas outside the TAR, visitors saw pictures of the Dalai Lama prominently displayed in private homes, shops, and monasteries, although monks reported they would temporarily remove such photos during inspections by officials from the local RAB or other agencies.

The prohibition against celebrating the Dalai Lama’s birthday on July 6 was enforced during the year. Authorities in many Tibetan areas confiscated or defaced photographs of the spiritual leader in monasteries and private residences.

Authorities prohibited the registration of names for children that included one or more of the names of the Dalai Lama or certain names included on a list of blessed names approved by the Dalai Lama.

Since the unrest in March 2008, monks and nuns in several Tibetan areas reported they were not permitted to leave their home monasteries. Restrictions on the movement and travel of monastic personnel hindered their access to opportunities for advanced religious education. Such restrictions, together with regulations on the transfer of religious resources between monasteries, also weakened the strong traditional ties between large monasteries in the TAR and affiliated monasteries in other Tibetan areas.

Authorities closely supervised the education of young reincarnate lamas approved by the government. The education of the current Reting Rinpoche, who was born on October 3, 1997, differed significantly from that of his predecessors. Historically, the Reting Rinpoche occasionally acted as the regent and had a role in the recognition of the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. For the current Reting Rinpoche, government officials, rather than religious leaders, managed the selection of his religious and lay tutors – a major deviation from the traditional custom.

Tibetan Buddhist monks reported government restrictions on the ability of monks to travel and conduct exchanges with other monasteries severely damaged the quality of monastic education. In addition, many experienced teachers were in exile in India and elsewhere, older teachers were not replaced, educated young monks were not promoted due to lack of political credentials, and those who remained in Tibetan areas outside the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in other parts of China, abroad, or even within the TAR. Many monks who were expelled from their Lhasa monasteries after March 2008 have not returned. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, and Gyalwa Menri Trizin – all resided in exile and maintained close ties with the Dalai Lama. The Karmapa, leader of Tibetan Buddhism’s Karma Kagyu school and one of its most influential religious figures, stated he left because the government controlled his movements and refused to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or allow his teachers to come to him. According to sources, the overall number of monks and nuns in monasteries and nunneries remained at significantly lower levels than before the unrest of March 2008.

In recent years DMCs at several large monasteries began to use funds from the sale of entrance tickets or pilgrims’ donations – and, in some cases, from government-controlled DMC-run hotels, shops, and restaurants – for purposes other than the support of monks engaged in full-time religious study under the government policy of monastery self-sufficiency. According to sources, although local government policies designed to attract tourists to religious sites have provided some monasteries with extra income, such activities also interfered with and deflected time and energy from the monasteries’ provision of traditional services, such as religious instruction and education, community medical care, and the performance of religious rites and ceremonies for the local Tibetan community.

Spiritual leaders reportedly encountered difficulty reestablishing historical monasteries in rural areas, due in part to government denials of permission to build and operate religious institutions. Officials in some areas contended these religious venues drained local resources and served as a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. However, in some areas, the government restored monasteries to promote tourism and boost revenue.

Security forces continued to block access to and from important monasteries, including those in the Lhasa area of the TAR and in Sichuan Province’s Aba (Ngaba) T&QAP and Ganzi (Kardze) TAP. A heavy police presence within and surrounding the monasteries restricted the movement of monks and prevented “unauthorized” visits, including those by foreign diplomats, journalists, and other observers.

According to policy, government-subsidized housing units in Tibetan areas were constructed at new village sites located near county government seats or along major roads, which, in practical terms, often resulted in there being no nearby monasteries where newly resettled villagers could worship. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community. Many Tibetans saw such measures as illustrative of party and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and the people they serve.

Many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, sought to travel to India for such religious purposes as seeking an audience with the Dalai Lama, an important rite for Tibetan Buddhists, or continuing their studies with key Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders and teachers. Some Tibetans traveled to India to join religious communities and escape the increased controls over religious practice being implemented at monasteries and nunneries in Tibetan areas. In many cases, PSB officials refused to approve the passport applications of Tibetans, even though citizens from other ethnic groups were able to receive passports from the same offices without undue delays. This was particularly true for Tibetan Buddhist religious personnel. Some attributed the passport restrictions to an official effort to hinder travel for religious purposes.

There were also instances in which authorities confiscated previously issued passports of Tibetans. In some cases, high-ranking religious figures were able to obtain a passport only after promising not to travel to India. In other cases, Tibetans were only able to obtain passports after paying substantial bribes to local officials. However, during the year, hundreds of Tibetans, including monks and nuns, managed to travel to India via third countries, with many ultimately seeking refugee status. Some Tibetans who traveled to India were reportedly subject to lengthy interrogations by Chinese PSB officials upon return. Sources reported that on the Tibet-Nepal border, the government increased its border patrols to prevent Tibetans from crossing the frontier without permission, and some alleged the Chinese government exerted pressure on the government of Nepal to forcibly return Tibetan refugees.

The whereabouts of Gedun Choekyi Nyima, recognized by the Dalai Lama and the vast majority of Tibetans as the 11th Panchen Lama, remained unknown. The government refused requests by international observers to visit Gedun Choekyi Nyima, who turned 22 years old on April 25, and asserted that his identification as the 11th Panchen Lama was “illegal.” At a March 2010 press conference, TAR Chairman Pema Choling said Gedun Choekyi Nyima and his family were “reluctant to be disturbed” and wanted to live “an ordinary life.” The government continued to insist Gyaltzen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama’s 11th reincarnation. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks in China, UFWD and RAB officials frequently pressured monks to attend sessions presided over by Gyaltzen Norbu, who also conducted prayer services in Yushu (Yulshul) TAP, Qinghai Province, following the April 2010 earthquake. In August Gyaltzen Norbu, who lives in Beijing, made a highly publicized 13-day tour of monasteries in Gansu Province, including a stay at Labrang Monastery in Xiahe (Sangchu) County, Gannan (Kanlho) TAP. According to a report in the official Xinhua News Agency, Gyaltzen Norbu “reminded local Buddhists to abide by the law, uphold national unity, and conduct themselves in accordance with Buddhist doctrines.”

The government did not provide any information on Lama Chadrel Rinpoche, who reportedly remained under house arrest for leaking information about the selection of the Panchen Lama.

The government severely restricted contact between several important reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example the 11th Pawo Rinpoche, whom the 17th Karmapa recognized in 1994, remained under official supervision at Nenang Monastery in the TAR. Foreign delegations have repeatedly been refused permission to visit him.

Sources reported security personnel targeted individuals in monastic attire for arbitrary questioning and other forms of harassment on the streets of Lhasa and other cities and towns. Many Tibetan monks and nuns chose to wear non-religious garb to avoid such harassment when traveling outside their monasteries and around China. Several Tibetan monks reported it remained difficult to travel outside their home monasteries, with officials frequently denying permission for outside monks to stay temporarily at a particular monastery for religious education.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious FreedomShare

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Since ethnicity and religion are tightly intertwined for many Tibetan Buddhists, however, it is sometimes difficult to categorize incidents solely as ethnic or religious intolerance. Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional religious attire, regularly reported incidents in which they were denied hotel rooms or discriminated against in employment opportunities or business transactions.

Many ethnic Han Buddhists were interested in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries. Tibetan Buddhist monks frequently visited Chinese cities to provide religious instruction to ethnic Han Buddhists. In addition, a growing number of ethnic Han Buddhists visited Tibetan monasteries in the summer, although the central government imposed restrictions that made it difficult for ethnic Han Buddhists to conduct long-term study at monasteries in ethnic Tibetan areas.

Section IV. U.S. Government PolicyShare

The U.S. government, including the Department of State, the U.S. embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. consulate general in Chengdu, made a sustained and concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas. U.S. government officials repeatedly raised Tibetan religious freedom issues, including expressing concern over and seeking further information on individual cases and incidents of religious persecution or discrimination with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels, including during the bilateral U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue and the U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue. U.S. government officials urged the Chinese government to engage in constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives, and to address the policies that threaten Tibet's distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic identity and are a primary cause of grievances among Tibetans.

U.S. diplomatic personnel maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom, although travel and other restrictions made it more difficult to visit and communicate with these individuals than in previous years. U.S. government officials repeatedly requested diplomatic access to the TAR but only one TAR visit was approved, and that visit was closely controlled and monitored. Unpublished restrictions on travel by foreigners to the TAR and some other Tibetan areas often resulted in U.S. diplomats and other foreigners being turned back at police roadblocks, ostensibly for their own safety, or being refused transportation on public buses to Tibetan areas outside the TAR that were ostensibly open to foreign visitors. U.S. diplomatic personnel have not been permitted to visit the TAR since April.