CHAPTER VI

The Panchen Lama Controversy

Next to the Dalai Lama, who is the spiritual head and sovereign ruler of Tibet, the Panchen Lamas had for centuries been Tibet's second principal leaders both spiritually and politically. In contrast to the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama has much less to do with worldly affairs, although the monastery is well endowed, and the Lama is traditionally the rich ruler of Tsang province in central Tibet. Thus, it is not surprising that much of Tibet's own history centered around on the personalities and politics of the Dalai Lamas and the Panchen Lamas.

Historically, the origins of the Panchen Lama institution is closely associated with the founding of a well-organized and disciplined sect in Tibetan Buddhism, Gelukpa (Yellow Hat Sect) inspired by Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). It was Tsongkhapa's third follower, Gedun Drub who, among other things built the Tashilhupo Monastery in 1445, which in the 17th century became the seat of the Panchen Lamas. Prior to that, neither the Panchen Lama nor Tashilhunpo was a distinct political entity. They were only part of the expanding Gelukpa order. It was only when the institution of the Dalai Lama became well established and acquired papal and political distinction by the 17th century, did Tashilhunpo acquire a separate entity and political importance. ¹

The institution of the Yellow Hat Sect became firmly established in the middle of the 16th century when Mongolia was converted to the Buddhist faith. Before that, while it was true that the Yellow Hat Sect had gained some spiritual recognition in the country, politically, Tibet was still under the sway of its karmapa chiefs who patronized the older, Red Hat Sect.

The Mongol chief Gushri Khan and the 5th Dalai Lama studied under the same spiritual teacher, and the two had shared warm friendship. The ambitious fifth Dalai Lama appealed to his old friend for help in gaining political supremacy over Tibet. The Mongol ruler responded to his friend’s entreaties and in alliance with other Mongol chiefs defeated the Tsang ruler. With the conquest of the Tsang ruler, the influence of Lama Buddhism was almost complete. The Mongol chief then handed over Tibet to the head of the Yellow Hat Sect (the Dalai Lama) who from that day to the present has been not only the spiritual head of his country, but its ruler in things temporal as well. A priest by spiritual descent and later recognized as an incarnation of Chen-re-zi, the fifth Dalai Lama was now invested with supreme worldly authority – a priest, God and king in one, a formidable combination that has been the sheet-anchor of successive Dalai Lamas.

Thus, the institutions of the Dalai Lamas of Lhasa came fully into their own during the time of Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1616-1680), also known as the Great Fifth. Until the time of the Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso (1548-1588), Tashi -- lhunpo was taken care of by senior lamas who were later regarded as the predecessors of the Panchen Lamas.
It was the Great Fifth, who founded the institution of the Panchen Lama, the office of the second incarnate Lama of Tibet. As he has now been invested with supreme worldly authority, he bestowed the title Panchen Lama on his old tutor Chokyi Gyaltsen (1570-1662) and declared him to be the 2nd incarnate of O. Pame Panchen Lama, and this lineage continues till the present day. The Vth Dalai Lama then gifted his teacher the Tashilhunpo monastery along with three estates for maintenance and source of income.

The Mongol authority gradually declined after the death of Gushri Khan, and by the first half of the 18th century, the Manchus defeated the Mongols and established their dynasty, becoming a paramount power over the entire length and breadth of the land. This new authority brought in the ownership of Tibet as well, leading to the establishment of Chinese “protectorate” over Tibet in the 18th century.

It was during this period that Tibet was invaded four times by the Gorkhas of Nepal. Since Tibet did not have a standing army, it appealed for help from the Manchu Emperor Ching-lung. Each time the Emperor would come to Tibet’s aid by sending troops to repulse the invading Gorkhas. During this invasion, the VIIth Dalai Lama and his family sided with the Gorkhas (Dzungar) forces. Therefore, partly to punish the Dalai Lama and partly to have counter balancing forces within the Gelukpa hierarchy, the Ching Emperor arranged that the Panchen Lama be made ruler of Tsang (western Tibet). That is how in 1728, the then Panchen Lama was given considerable power. A special administrative office called Chizong (Spyi-rzon) was established

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2 (Details in W.W. Rokhill, The Dalai Lamas of Lhasa and their Relations with the Manchus Emperor of China 1644-1908, T'oung Pao, Series II, Vol. XI Leiden 1910, D.R. Luciano Petch “China and Tibet” Supra, N. 6a)
next to Tashilhunpo, administering sixteen districts in western Tibet from Shigatse. This was the beginning of the Chinese policy of divide and rule during the Gelukpa period of Tibetan history, which continues even to this day. It ushered in the never-ending tug-of-war between Lhasa and Shigatse for supremacy and political power.

Communist China claims that the highlight of the Manchu Imperial domination over Tibet was the presentation of a golden urn by the Manchu emperor Ching-Lung in 1792 (the so called lots drawing system) for the choice of the Dalai Lamas and other high lamas. The Communist leaders had always taken this golden urn presentation as the basis of its claim to confirm the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. Their claim over Tibet rests on the argument that the Ching Emperor had ‘appointed’ high lamas, through whom China had always ruled indirectly over Tibet. This, of course is a distorted interpretation of the complex Sino-Tibetan relations. The reason being that the communist rulers are paranoid about the takeover of Tibet even after more than four decades of occupation. It stems from their increasing ideological guilt that they may have committed as act of imperialism in Tibet, which makes China always defensive of its rule over Tibet.

During that period, it was customary for the emperor to send his ambassadors during the religious ceremonies conducted for the recognition and enthronement of high lamas. However, the emperor had no right to appoint or confirm high lamas to their posts. China being the ‘protectorate’ of Tibet, the two (China and Tibet) maintained a patron – priest relationship. It is true that an imperial edict was

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4 Ibid. p. 314.
proclaimed which said that even after the use of the ‘golden urn,’ the full and final investiture of authority of the high Lamas office would be complete only after the issue of an imperial mandate by the Son of Heaven. Even then, history tells us that the very first Dalai Lama to be selected after the edict, was chosen without the use of the urn. This renders China’s claim to rule over Tibet on an ‘imperial’ tradition of confirming titles on high lamas ineffectual. Rather, the use of the urn is more of a valuable item especially in present day Chinese propaganda.

Another make-believe in Sino-Tibetan relations is Communist China’s claim that the whole ‘system of drawing lots’ was instituted by the Manchu Court. This is not true, either historically or culturally. Tagkril is an ancient Tibetan tradition long predating the Manchu empire in China. This ancient Tibetan method involves encasting the names of candidates in dough balls of an equal size and weight. The balls are put into a container, which is then rotated until one ball pops out. The name contained in the ejected ball is declared as the reincarnate.\(^5\) However, Tibetans resort to this method only if when all the candidates listed prove equally promising, making it hard to come to any definite conclusion. The golden urn was presented by emperor Chien-lung, with the hope of replacing the ordinary container used by the Tibetans. It was also suggested that the names of candidates be inscribed on ivory or tablets and drawn from a golden urn with chopsticks. This suggestion was given in the spirit of priest-patron relationship and was by no means a decree or order from the ruler to his subjects.

Thus, Tibetans rarely used the emperor’s urn, and mostly continued to adhere

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\(^5\) The Panchen Lama Lineage: How Reincarnation is Being Reinvented as a Political Tool. DIIR February 1996, Dharamsala(India) p.45. (Note: This will further be refered to as Panchen Lama Lineage.)
to their traditional practices. They disregarded the use of the Golden urn for the selection of the IX th Dalai Lama, which happened to be soon after the golden urn presentation. The urn had not been used for selecting the late Panchen Lama or the present Dalai Lama either. There have been six Dalai Lamas' since emperor Chienlung made his suggestion in the 18th century, and the urn was used in confirming only three of them. As for the idea of reincarnation, it is a uniquely Tibetan religio-politico institution going back to the 12 century. The idea is based on the Buddhist (or Hindu) concept of rebirth, which all sentient beings undergo after death. In Tibetan Buddhism, finding the highest spiritual incarnation is a matter of highest spiritual importance, when a high Lama dies. After a wait of years for the consciousness of a departed trulku, or “reincarnation of a high lama” to appear in mortal form, a clerical search committee is appointed and then, guided by dreams, omens, oracles and prophetic visions, set off to find the child in whose corporeal form the departed consciousness has been reborn.

It is true that China through the Ambans had exercised a far wider control over the affairs of the country, up to the last quarter of the 19th century. From then on, it was the Regents who usually influenced the Ambans and by the latter half of the 19th century the power wielded by the Manchus Ambans in Lhasa had been rudely shaken. As the 13th Dalai Lama attained maturity, assuming full power as lay and spiritual ruler of his country, managing his country’s affairs, the Ambans ability to influence events in Tibet declined further. It may also be noted that the Lhasa government had selected the XIIIth Dalai Lama without the use of the golden urn, and the emperor had

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6 Ibid., p. 46.
no alternative but to accept Lhasa’s choice. It is believed that the pontiff showed scant
courtesy to the wishes of the emperor’s representatives in the choice of Tibet’s
ministers. 8

The XIIIth Dalai Lama after assuming full authority over Tibet began to
consolidate his power and started centralising Tibetan government as its main
headquarters in Lhasa. The lamas besides being rich traders were the biggest
landlords – for the monasteries were richly endowed. As a part of his reform measure,
the Dalai Lama decided that the monks and monasteries had to disgorge their huge
long-cherished, if ill gotten hoardings. Naturally, the Lamas considered the reforms
costly. Besides, they perceived the Dalai Lama’s reforms as westernization and
rebelled against his authority, which the Dalai Lama crushed in no time.

However, the first target of the Tibetan government in Lhasa was the IX
Panchen Lama and Tashilhunpo; as the monastery had been growing since 1728 as an
autonomous local power due to Chinese and British encouragement - their policy
being in building up the Panchen Lama as a counter-force to the Dalai Lama. The XIII
Dalai Lama’s nationalistic government sought to curtail the Panchen Lama’s growing
influence, by confiscating several of his estates and by reducing the political
privileges of his court. This created tension between Lhasa and Shigatse, and the IX
Panchen Lama and his entourage escaped to China in 1921. 9 Tashilhunpo was really
irked, as it may have hoped (as did many others) that the Dalai Lama would see no
reason to desist from measures that were bound to be resisted. On the other hand,

8 Charles Alfred Bell, for details see Portrait of The Dalai Lama, Oxford, 1924. p. 59.
9 Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead. p.299.
Lhasa saw in the non-compliance of its administration, a rebellious posture and took it as an opportunity to put Tashilhunpo in its place. Lhasa argued, plausibly enough, that the Panchen and his estates could not be treated differently from the rest of the country, or the community; like everyone else, he too must pay, and play his part in the new scheme of things. The situation is well summed up in Richardson’s words:

“a conflict between the determination of Lhasa to reduce Tashilhunpo to the status-on which there was fair reason to insist of an honoured vassal, and the reluctance of Tashilhunpo to give up any of the privileges it had acquired in the past century and more.”11

However, it is to be noted that, the relationship between the two was bedeviled by intrigue and mutual suspicion much before the Dalai Lama initiated his reforms. This is because the IX Panchen Lama was a weak and timid individual, lacking in self confidence, which made him an easy target to outside powers who influenced him to always take a different stance from the Dalai Lama. For instance, towards the closing decades of the 19th century when the Dalai Lama openly defied the Chinese and befriended the Great White Tsar, the Panchen Lama seemed well-disposed towards the British. Subsequently, in 1904, with Younghusband and his man marching relentlessly on to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama became a fugitive (till his return in 1909) from his land, the Panchen Lama still swore fealty to his old allies.12 The rivalry between the two carried on even during the difficult days, when on two occasions the Dalai Lama had to wander and go into self-exile on account of the British and the Chinese.

10 For details see H.E. Richardson, Tibet and its History pp.53-54 and 125-26.
11 Ibid., p.126
However, the 1911 October Revolution in China brought an almost total collapse of Chinese authority. A direct consequence thereof was the Dalai Lama’s return from self-exile in India, and once again he was the undisputed head of Tibet. The Manchu dynasty was toppled over in the revolution and the Dalai Lama repudiated China’s new regime on the plea that with the emperor’s deposition his ties with the son of heaven had snapped and that the Republic had no locus standi in the land of the lamas.¹³

The Dalai Lama had wanted to re-install the Panchen Lama in Tashilunpo. For the same reason, the Dalai Lama went out of his way, giving great concessions to the Panchen Lama and the Tashilhunpo monasteries including restoration of “practically all his movable and immovable property” but the Panchen Lama maintained a stubborn silence to all of the Dalai Lama’s overtures, though he is said to have maintained that there was no personal animosity between him and the Dalai Lama.

Both the Chinese and British officials later tried to intervene and mediate in the Dalai—Panchen dispute, but without much success, for at the heart of the dispute was feudal power struggle. The Panchen Lama wanted a return to the earlier system in which Tashilhunpo functioned autonomously from Lhasa. Besides, he also wanted the right to maintain an armed force of his own. It was only after the XIII th Dalai Lama’s death in December 1933 that the IX th Panchen Lama was to return to Tibet.

Unfortunately he died en route in Jyekundo on 1 December, 1937. The reason for the Panchen Lama's unyielding attitude to the Dalai Lama's initiatives probably could be that by 1932 the Panchen Lama had arrayed solidly behind the Koumintang regime in Nanking. He had probably calculated that Chinese help alone would salvage his future. The tragic outcome was that the two passed away, unreconciled, to the end.

It would have been a different story had the two (Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama) abstain from political contest, especially during the period 1445-1728. The Dalai and the Panchen Lamas were meant to maintain an ideal relationship even though the office of the Dalai Lama was established much before the Panchen Lama's, for the relationship between the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama are depicted as the 'sun' and the 'moon', the 'father' and the 'son'. Moreover, whenever the Panchen Lama is older than the Dalai Lama, he is of course, the teacher of the younger and vice-versa. Traditionally, the senior lama recognises the junior, thus giving sanctity and legitimacy of the 'new' Lama. This has also been confirmed by the XIV Dalai Lama who declared:

"The Panchen Lama has been among the Lamas second only to the Dalai Lama in religious authority in Tibet, but they had never hold any secular authority. Throughout our history, relations between the two had been perfectly cordial—in most generations, the younger had been the pupil of the older".  

After the death of the IXth Panchen Lama in 1937, the Tashilhunpo monastery organised a search for the reincarnation. The search committee discovered two

14 Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead. p.299.
15 Dalai Lama, 14th, My Land and My People, London, 1962, p.45. From here on this work will be abbreviated as The Dalai Lama.
probable candidates in Tibet itself, one in Amdo and the other in Kham. The Amdo (Qinghai) candidate was born Gonpo Tseten, on February 3, 1938, in the village of Karang Bidho, in northeastern Tibet. He was ordained into monkhood and later became the Xth Panchen Lama under the name of Lobsang. Trinley Lundrup Choekyi Gyaltsen.

Strange as it may seem, in retrospect, there were considerable complications that preceded the Xth Panchen Lama’s formal recognition as is the case with the present Panchen Lama. The Pro-Chinese section of the previous Panchen Lama’s Court recognised the Amdo child on their own in 1941. But a reincarnation of the Panchen Lama’s stature would not be readily and widely accepted unless his authority was publicly confirmed by a Dalai Lama. In Buddhist tradition, reincarnations of high Lamas are accepted publicly, strictly after traditional religious tests are conducted. The Panchen Lama being the second highest ecclesiastical head of the land, and the Dalai Lama at that time a minor still, the Tibetan government and the monastic officials insisted on conducting all the traditional tests with accompanying religious ceremonies performed before confirming the reincarnation. This delayed the official Tibetan government’s recognition of the Xth Panchen Lama.

Historically, China had always coveted the land of the snow and had been eager to establish its hold over Tibet by any means. While the Tibetan government delayed in according recognition, the KMT government of China exploited the situation to gain a foot-hold in Tibet. The nationalists took active interest in the discovery of the Panchen Lama’s successor from the beginning. By 1949, they had accorded official recognition to their candidate as the Xth Panchen Lama. The motive
behind this move was probably a desperate attempt on the part of the Nationalists to use the child Panchen to obtain support and influence from the Tibetans. The reason being that by the fall of 1949, the Lhasa government had decided to drive out all KMT officials from Tibet. Meanwhile, by August 1949, the KMT were losing most of its territories to Red Chinese armies and were on the verge of facing defeat at the hands of the communist Chinese. Hence, the nationalists’ urgency in installing their candidate as the Panchen Lama at a ceremony in the Kunbum monastery near Jyekundo. However, the KMT nationalist government fell in 1949 and the child Panchen passed into the hands of the Chinese communist, who later exploited the child to the fullest for their political gains.

The Panchen Lama was only 11 years old when the PLA Lanzhou military division sent a telegram in his name to Mao Zedong requesting the “liberation of Tibet”.16 Earlier, a telegram of congratulations from the Panchen Lama on the founding of the PRC was widely publicized.17 Even to a casual observer, these reports would appear simply ludicrous – a blatant concoction on China’s part, as the Panchen Lama was too young at that time to even comprehend the significance of the founding of the PRC in China, let alone the meaning of “liberation”.

Initially the Xth Panchen Lama was an innocent puppet at the hands of the communist Chinese. He was caught up in the politics of China’s ambition towards Tibet and its “divide and rule” policy aimed at undermining the authority of the Dalai

16 Dawa Norbu Road Ahead, p.301.
17 The Dalai Lama, p.96,
Lama and the Tibetan government. He was groomed and brought up as a rival to the Dalai Lama and also to give legitimacy to China’s rule over Tibet. He became the Chinese imprimatur, thereby, in 1951 when the Tibetan delegates went to Beijing to negotiate the status of Tibet, the Chinese brought the young Panchen Lama to put pressure on the delegates in signing the “agreement”. The delegates ended up signing under “duress” the so-called “seventeen point agreement”. While in Beijing, the Dalai Lama received a telegram from his chief plenipotentiary Ngabo Jigme that if the Tibetans refused to recognise the Chinese candidate as the Panchen Lama, it would hinder the negotiation, underway, failing which they would carry out military invasion of the remaining part of Tibet.

Therefore, it was under extreme political pressure- with threat of the nation crumbling hanging in the air, that the Dalai Lama accepted the Chinese choice of the Panchen Lama as the true incarnate, without the traditional tests being conducted. The Dalai Lama then bestowed the title Tenzing Trinley Jigme Choekyi Wangchuk the to Xth Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama was then escorted by the Chinese army to Lhasa on April 28, 1952, before he was taken to Shigatse and installed in the Tashilhunpo monastery. In Lhasa the Panchen Lama had two audiences with the Dalai Lama at Potala palace. Beijing maintained that the two Lamas had “a friendly exchange of opinion” on implementing the May 1951 Agreement and that the Tibetan people rejoiced at their happy union.  

18 Ibid
19 Tieh-tseng Li, The Historical Status Of Tibet, New York, pp.208-9, Also see Werner Levi, Supra N.12
The Dalai Lama later confided that the first formal meeting was at once "constrained" and not "very successful". The same day they met informally and this was what the Dalai Lama recorded in his memoirs. "He (Panchen Lama) showed a genuine respect for my position as the custom of Buddhism requires towards a senior monk. He was correct and polite in manner, a true Tibetan; and I had a firm impression of unforced good will. I felt sure that left to himself he would have whole heartedly supported Tibet against inroads of China."\(^{20}\) Sure enough, the Xth Panchen Lama later played a heroic role and died championing the Tibetan cause, even though he had been under Chinese control throughout his life.

After ascending Tashilhunpo, his seat of spiritual authority, the Panchen Lama resumed his spiritual training and received all the special teachings of Tashilhunpo Monastery in particular and the Gelukpa tradition in general from Gyenak Rinpoche. In the field of tantrik theory and practice he was personally tutored by a well known meditation master, Kanchen Ang Nyima. When Kanchen Ang Nyima passed away, the Panchen Lama turned to Kachan Nyulihu Rinpoche from whom he received intensive teachings in Vajrayana and Mahayana Buddhism. All this rigorous spiritual training transformed him from a mere boy into an incarnate Lama, befitting the high status of a Panchen Lama.\(^{21}\)

Considering the fact that the IX th Panchen Lama had revolted against the XIII th Dalai Lama Government in Lhasa, and sought China’s support when the XIII th Dalai Lama tried to impose a new tax system in Tibet, that he was born in Amdo

\(^{20}\) The Dalai Lama, P.113.
\(^{21}\) Dawa Norbu. Road Ahead p.302
(Qinghai) under Chinese influence and that the Communists supported his candidature; the young Panchen Lama was probably perceived as being pro-Chinese throughout the 1950s. Even the foreign media portrayed him as the "Lama who stayed back," implying that he was pro-Chinese. In most Tibetan circles in 1950, particularly among the older generation Tibetans, the Xth Panchen Lama was "Chinese made-reincarnation" and "Mao’s Panchen". It is only natural that in the initial period, at any rate, the Panchen Lama co-operated with his Communist Chinese policies and actions in Tibet. As the whole of his education and training had been subject to Chinese influence, it was expected that Communist China would certainly manipulate and use him for their political gains. Under the circumstances, a majority of Tibetans did not particularly take the Xth Panchen Lama to heart.

The Chinese, in order to legitimize their policies in Tibet, well-publicized the Panchen Lama's role during the 1950's. In the wake of the rebellion and the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, the Panchen Lama evidently became a mere "puppet" spokesman, in the hands of the administration, which the Chinese set up by abolishing the "local government of Tibet", and invested the preparatory committee with unquestioned authority. The Panchen Lama was then appointed the acting chairman of "TAR Preparatory Committee" and Vice-Chairman of the Nationalists People’s Congress in 1960.

While on his way to attend the 2nd National People’s Congress at Beijing, the Panchen Lama had reportedly stated that he firmly believed that the "rebellion" in

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22 Ibid.
23 Richardson, History, op. cit. p.212.
Tibet would be “thoroughly crushed.” The Panchen Lama, on April 30, 1959 also declared to the world that the “rebellion” in Tibet had been “liquidated, order re-established and democratic reform had been implemented.” He then along, with the Chinese Prime Minister expressed hope that the Dalai Lama would return to his seat of authority to see before his eyes “his long cherished wish for Tibetan reform” being “smoothly realised.” Further, at the behest of his Chinese masters, the Panchen Lama introduced a “system of democratic management” in the monasteries where earlier a “3-anti” movement against rebellion, feudal prerogative and feudal exploitation and oppression had been launched at his bidding. As the communists publicized these declarations for their vested interest, it further re-enforced the doubts and “suspicion” in the authenticity of the reincarnation among a large segment of Tibetan people. To them, he was a “Chinese made reincarnation” guided and educated by the nationalists and communist Chinese right from his childhood. These declarations were only to be expected.

However, the Dalai Lama had defended the Panchen Lama’s stand before he (Panchen Lama) was disillusioned by Chinese policies in Tibet and turned against the Chinese. The Dalai Lama had maintained that the Panchen Lama had been “under Chinese influence ever since his boyhood”, and that he had “never enjoyed any freedom”, that in the preparatory committee, he had no alternative except to carry out the orders of the Chinese. In his memoirs, the Dalai Lama recorded that,

25 Ibid.
26 The Chinese Prime Minister Chau En-Lai in his address to the first session of the Second National People’s Congress, April 18 and the Panchen Lama to the CPCC, on April 29, Asian Recorder, April 16-22, 1959, pp.2, 600 and 2,664.
"No boy who grew under such concentrated, constant alien influence could possibly retain his own free will. And in spite of this influence I do not believe he will ever quite abandon our religion in favour of the communist." 28

Sure enough, the Panchen Lama later became the greatest champion of Buddhist religion and spoke up against his masters, for their policies in Tibet. It is true that in the initial stage, the Panchen Lama played the part his communist masters had designed for him, bidding their orders. He gave credence and even endorsed the Chinese propaganda reports that in Tibet, a ‘new socialist paradise the roof of the world had been created. However, the honeymoon was short lived, for as the years sped by, the Dalai Lama matured into a responsible incarnate Lama and a Tibetan nationalist at heart. He fell out of his master’s favour as it became more and more clear that he would no longer be playing the role his communist masters had written for him.

Following the Tibetan uprising and the crushed rebellion, China unleashed a reign of terror in Tibet, killing, starving off hundred and thousands of Tibetans, destroying all but a handful of the thousands of the country’s monasteries, condemning the Buddhist faith by suppressing their practices as “feudal” and vigorously working on eradicating their culture. The Panchen Lama was blissfully oblivious to his people’s sufferings of the true nature of the Chinese rule in Tibet until 1961, when he had gone to Beijing at Chairman Mao’s invitation. While on his way to

28 Dalai Lama, pp.97-8. For the text of the Dalai Lama’s statement of April 18 and June 20, 1959, See Foreign Affairs Reports, Supra, No.12.
Beijing the Panchen Lama received a rude shock seeing crowds of wretched Tibetans gathered along his route to seek an end to the hardships and suffering under the Chinese occupation. In Beijing, the Panchen Lama complained to Mao and the Chinese officials about the pathetic conditions in Tibet and asked them to rectify the situation. What he saw along the way made him tour many countries of Kham and Amdo and his discoveries there shocked him deeply. He found out for himself that the Chinese had killed thousands of Tibetans as rebels or "reactionaries" and had imprisoned hundreds of thousands of Tibetan officials, high lamas, scholars, landlords, aristocrats and local citizens, most whom were starved or beaten to death.

Seeing the inhuman treatment meted out to the Tibetans at the hands of the Chinese "liberators", the Panchen Lama took an extremely bold step at the risk of his own life – by writing a hard-hitting report to Mao Zedong on 18 April, 1962. He submitted his famous "70,000" words petition in Chinese to the officials, appealing to them to cease persecution and indiscriminate armed suppression to increase food rations, improve the deplorable economic condition, and to respect the religious freedom of the people in Tibet. The Panchen Lama’s petition outlined and condemned the harsh condition of Tibetans living under the Chinese occupying forces and used as examples the Tibetan areas in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu provinces which he toured extensively in 1961 and early 1962. In his petition, the Panchen Lama complained that after the introduction of reforms, Buddhism has suffered serious setbacks and is now on the verge of extinction – many prisoners died pitiable deaths because of the deplorable economic conditions, thousands starve to death, which greatly reduced the population of Tibet. With the exception of old people, women and children, most of the able bodied men and intelligent people in the Tibetans areas of Qianghai, Gansu,
Sichuan and Yunnan were incarcerated”.

Of all the issues, the Panchen Lama showed deep concern for the destruction of religious and cultural life, the economic deprivation and indiscriminate imprisonment, form the major basis of his appeal to the Chinese leadership. The Panchen Lama’s account in the petition shows his deep compassion and deep interest in the day to day life of his people, as no other high lamas in the history had ever shown. He was prepared to face the wrath of the communist party, to even tell them on their face that the economic conditions in Tibet were far worse under the communist rule than under the feudal period. He declared: “In the past, although Tibet was a society ruled by dark and savage feudalism, there had never been such a shortage of grain. In particular, because Buddhism was widespread, all people, whether noble or humble, had the good habit of helping the poor. A situation could not have arisen where people starved to death.29 The life of the masses was poverty-stricken and miserable and many people, young and old died of starvation or because they were physically so weak that they could not resist minor illness. Also many people who were arrested and imprisoned during and after the period of suppression of the rebellion caused large number of people to die abnormal deaths. Consequently, there has been an evident and severe reduction in the present day Tibetan population.30

As regard to religion, the Panchen Lama stated that “religious activities were as scarce as stars in the day time, and there were hardly any complete set of religious

29 A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the 10th Panchen Lama. TIN, London, 1997, p.29. (Further this work will be abbreviated as Poisoned Arrow.)
30 Ibid., p.103.
activities". He was very concerned about the future of Buddhism in Tibet and he stated that Tibetans on the plateau "love Buddhism as life itself", and declared that the elimination of Buddhism is "something which I and more than 90% of Tibetans cannot endure".

He declared, before democratic reforms, there were more than 2500 large, medium and small monasteries in Tibet. After democratic reforms, only 70 or so monasteries were kept in existence by the government. This was a reduction of more than 97 percent. Anti-Buddhist pressure was so strong that there were no people living most of the monasteries, there was no one to look after their great prayer halls and other divine halls and the monks' housing. The Panchen Lama said that during the democratic reform, anti-Buddhist pressure was so strong that many monks returned to secular life, even "sixty and seventy year old monks were asked to go back to secular lives and return to their families". Not only were monks "compelled to go back to their families, but the work team went so far as lining up monks on one opposite side, and lining up nuns and secular women on the other side, forcing them to select someone on the side". Buddhist statues, scriptures, stupas were burned or thrown away. They recklessly carried out wild and hasty destruction of monasteries, and Buddhist halls, stole many ornaments and precious things from the Buddhist stupas that the destruction was unbearable to look at. They unscrupulously insulted religion, using the "tripitake" as material for fertilizer, pictures of Buddha and Buddhist sutras were used to make shoes. People of all strata were shocked, confused, discouraged and disheartened. They cried out, with tears flowing from their eyes.

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31 Ibid., p.55.
32 Ibid., pp.96, 57.
"saying: our area has been turned into a dark area (areas which have no religion are called dark areas by Tibetans) and other such piteous cries." 33 In the whole of Tibet, in the past there were a total of about 110,000 monks and nuns. Of those, possibly 10,000 fled abroad, leaving about 10,000. After the democratic reform was concluded the number of monks and nuns living in the monasteries was about 7000 people, which is a reduction by 93 percent.34

The Panchen Lama was also very concerned about the indiscriminate imprisonment and violation of human rights in Tibet. Many of the people in Tibet who did not deserve arrest, and many good and innocent people, were unscrupulously charged with offense, maligned, and categorised as criminals. The number of prisoners in the whole of Tibet reached a percentage of the total population which has never been surpassed throughout history.35 In addition, the guards and cadres threatened prisoners with cruel, rude and malicious words, and beat them fiercely and unscrupulously. Prisoners were also deliberately transferred back and forth, from the plateau to the low lands, from freezing cold to warm, from north to south, up and down, so that they would not accustomed to their new environment. Their clothes and quilts did not keep their bodies warm, their mattresses could not keep out the damp, their tents and buildings could not shelter them from the wind and rain and the food did not fill their stomach. Their lives were miserable and full of deprivation, they had to get up early for work and return late. These people were given the heaviest and the most difficult work, which inevitably led to decline of physical strength from day to day. They caught many diseases and in addition, did not have sufficient rest; medical

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33 Ibid, pp.50,51.
34 Ibid, p.52.
treatment was poor, which caused many prisoners to die from abnormal causes. All prisoners in their 50's and 60's who were physically weak and already close to death were also forced to carry out heavy and difficult physical labour.

In September 1961, for example, the Tibet work committee reported to the preparatory committee of the Tibet autonomous that even after the release of less guilty prisoners in the TAR, 10,000 prisoners would still remain. The Panchen Lama stated that such a figure was far too high for Tibet, which at that time had a total of 1.2 million. He stated that "this certainly caused the parents, wives, children, relatives and friends in hundreds and thousands of households to be overwhelmed with grief, and it goes without saying that their eyes were constantly filled with tears."

The Panchen Lama said in his March 1987 speech that the actual condition in Tibet was more severe than what he had reported in his "70,000" word petition. He however gave a watered down version of the facts out of fear of Chinese torture. Later, this is what he said later, about his cautious approach in editing his text:

"In Qinghai, for example, there are between three to four thousand villages and towns, each having between three to four thousand families with four to five thousand people. From each town and village, about 800 to 1,000 people were imprisoned. Out of this, at least 300 to 400 people died in prison. This means almost half of the prison population perished. Last year (1986), we discovered that only a handful of people had participated in the rebellion. Most of these people were completely innocent. In my 70,000 character petition, I mentioned that about five

36 Ibid., 36-37.
percent of the population had been imprisoned. According to my information at that
time, it was between 10 to 15 percent. But I did not have the courage to state such a
huge figure. I would have died under thamzing if I had stated the real figure”.37

Mao Zedong was reportedly shocked and furious reading the report that he
called the Panchen Lama “an enemy of our class” for daring to criticize Chinese
policy in Tibet and calling for it to be corrected. The Chinese government realized
that the Panchen Lama was becoming disenchanted with their practices in Tibet and
as test to determine his loyalty to the communist Chinese, Zhang Jinwu, the Secretary
of the CCP Tibet work Committee asked the Panchen Lama to openly denounce the
Dalai Lama as a reactionary and traitor for fleeing the country. However, the Panchen
Lama being a true Buddhist, adamantly refused to do so. He was also asked to assume
the position of the Dalai Lama in PCART and shift his seat from Tashilhunpo to
Potala. The Panchen Lama declined the offer explaining to the Chinese officials that
he was not competent to replace the Dalai Lama. Moreover, during a religious
teaching, he urged the Tibetans to pray for the long life and success of His Holiness
the Dalai Lama. He encouraged the Tibetans to exercise the freedom of worship and
religion “guaranteed” in the “17 Point Agreement”. During several sermons at Shugti
Lingke, Lhasa in March 1964, the Panchen Lama further enraged the Chinese
leadership by openly advising the Tibetans to preserve Tibetan culture, religion and to
respect the Dalai Lama.38 He then declared that he considered His Holiness the Dalai
Lama as his “refuge for this and the next life” and prayed for the long life and quick

38 Kunsang Paljor, Tibet: The Underlying Flame, chapter V, “Trial and Punishment of the Panchen
return of the His Holiness the Dalai Lama”, who he said is the only leader left”, thus displeasing the Chinese immensely.

China had always tried to enhance and elevate the role of Panchen Lama in the political life of the country in order to use him as a rival against the Dalai Lama’s office. Therefore, the Chinese gave the Panchen Lama a political standing which none of his predecessors had enjoyed. China needed the denunciation of the Dalai Lama by the Panchen Lama, which would certainly be a valuable advantage to the Chinese who needed a Tibetan urgently for the position of religious head so that proclamations could be made, and through whom, their political designs in Tibet could be accomplished. In October 1964, the Panchen Lama was given one last chance to denounce the Dalai Lama after a short sermon in Lhasa town hall, he was expected to lead the monks of Sera, Drepung and Ganden in denouncing the Dalai Lama. However, instead of denouncing the Dalai Lama, he declared: “Today while we are gathered here, I must pronounce my firm belief that Tibet will soon regain her independence and that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will return to the Golden throne. Long Live His Holiness the Dalai Lama”. 40

These declarations put to rest a section of the Tibetan people’s “suspicion” about the authenticity of the reincarnation and confirmed their faith and belief in the Panchen Lama. It was reported that after the declaration, a large number of crying Tibetans crowded to pay their respect and almost all Tibetans including the Chinese trained youths wept to hear the Panchen Lama speak from his heart for the land and

39 Ibid.
the people". 41

The Panchen Lama's declarations were completely contrary to what China had expected to hear and the Chinese leaders were infuriated to lose their perfectly designed potential 'puppet' whom they had nurtured over the years, gradually turning into a national (Tibetan) hero and a symbol of courage and conscience. Their only alternative now was to denounce and brand him as a "reactionary traitor", and banned Tashilhunpo from worship. In no time China proposed the trial, torture and the purge on the Panchen Lama in 1964, in Lhasa itself. A propaganda campaign was carried out in full force to undermine his credibility by assassinating his character. At the Fourth TAR Preparatory Committee Session, held from September 18 to November 4, 1964, Zhang Guohua and other Chinese officials bitterly accused the Panchen Lama of being anti-party, anti-socialist and anti-people. 42 During the sham trial that lasted for 17 days, which subjected him to humiliation and thamzing, he was blamed for all the failures of the PCTAR and charged with ten other "crimes" allegedly committed by him. By all accounts, it is probable that China concocted his "crimes" for the sole reason of his open declaration of support for the Dalai Lama, and heroically defying the Chinese by revealing the true nature of their occupation of Tibet.

On 21st December 1964, the Panchen Lama, even though described as a "reactionary" was offered "a final chance for repentance", by Chou-En-Lai during his speech. 43 Yet the Panchen Lama never totally buckled down to them and stood by

42 Panchen Lama Lineage, p.8.
43 Bureau of Dalai Lama, op.cit., p.29.
what he had told the Tibetans in his sermon. He was then removed from the post of
the committee’s chair, then taken to Beijing and was placed under house arrest. Along
with him the Chinese arrested his tutor Ngulchu Trulku and a top ranking official
Zasak Tedong.44

However, the worst part of his troubles were yet to come. In the wake of the
Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, there were rumours of his hobnobbing with the
“reactionary clique” which worsened his plight. In August 1966, he was put through
more struggle, torture and humiliation by the Red Guards. Then, in 1968, he was
formally imprisoned in Beijing Qin Chang Prison and was released only in October,
1977.45

For 13 years the Panchen Lama suffered mentally and physically languishing
in prison for almost ten years and the remainder of the years under house arrest in
Beijing. From time to time he was taken out for massive struggle session in the sports
stadia in Beijing, where he would be publicly humiliated in front of thousands of
people. The outside world knew nothing definite about his whereabouts and whether
he was dead or alive until his re-emergence in February 26, 1978 when the New China
News Agency published a report that he had appeared at the Fifth National Committee
of the Chinese political consultative conference meeting in Plenary Session in Beijing.
Rehabilitation of the Panchen Lama was China’s way of proving to the world how
considerate it was towards Tibetan cultural and religious sentiments.

44 Ibid., p.28.
45 Panchen Lama Lineage, p.9.
However, on rehabilitation, the Panchen Lama reportedly refused to accept the post of the "religious head" and "chairman" of the political commission and "Vice-chairman" of the TAR until and unless the Chinese meet his conditions laid down in the "70,000 words memorandum" and respect the "17 Point Agreement". Moreover, immediately after his release from the prison, he is said to have asked the Chinese authorities, permission to visit Tibet.

In 1980, he was reinstated as the Vice-Chairman of the National People’s Congress and was finally granted permission to visit Tibet in 1982. On reaching Lhasa, he announced “Tibet is my homeland and I have a special regard for this land. Although I have not lived here for the last 18 years, my heart has always been beating with those of the people of Tibet. I have always missed Tibet and its people, and have been thinking about the welfare of Tibetans”. He visited Tibet seven times and also various parts of Kham and Amdo before his death.

The Panchen Lama remained true to his people, faith and country inspite of all the torture and humiliation. As a true nationalist, his conscience would not permit him any betrayal of the peoples’ cause. Bold and courageous, he never ceased to be the voice of his people. Even after the purge and rehabilitation, he was still the valiant and heroic Tibetan who had the courage to defy the ruthless occupation of Tibet and fought for the fundamental human rights of his fellow countrymen. He again spoke up for his people, reaffirmed and made public his faith in the Dalai Lama and continued attacking the Chinese policies in Tibet.

47 Quoted in The Panchen Lama Lineage, p.9.
In 1985, speaking to a gathering of Tibetans during the Monlam festival in Lhasa, he said: "His Holiness the Dalai Lama and I are spiritual friends. There are no differences between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and me. Some people are trying to create discord between us. This will not succeed."48

Further, at the TAR standing Committee meeting of the National People’s Congress held in Beijing in March 1987, the Panchen Lama openly delivered a landmark criticism of the Chinese government’s policy in Tibet regarding education, economic development, population transfer and discriminatory treatment of Tibetans and their culture. He repeated many of the points raised in his 1962 "70,000 words petition" that got him into trouble. Yet he spoke in the same aggressive manner with determination and challenged the military might and ideological presentation of the PRC. On Jan 9, 1989 the Panchen Lama consecrated the newly-renovated mausoleum of the fifth to the ninth Panchen Lamas in Shigatse. While still in Shigatse, the Panchen Lama on 24th Jan 1989, stated that the Chinese rule in Tibet had brought more destruction than benefit to the Tibetans.49 On 28 Jan, 1989, four days after this speech, the Xth Panchen Lama died at the age of 51, in his traditional monastic seat of Tashilhunpo, in Shigatse.

He was a giant enigma with extra ordinary character. Throughout his life, the Panchen Lama attempted to reconcile conflicting forces and to balance himself between them. Despite the widespread suspicion of Chinese Communist influence in

48 Ibid.  
49 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
his upbringing, Tibetans universally revered the late Panchen Lama, and he remained a practising Buddhist throughout his life. His sincerity and commitment to Tibetan interests has never been doubted. He took special interest in his social responsibility towards his people and has been associated with a strategy for development, of setting up an organisation called Kangchen, a development cooperation in 1987. He tried to develop economic independence for Tibetans, which would alleviate them socially to face the challenges of the present material world. In an effort to make Tibetans stand on their own feet, he also established a ‘technical school’ in Shigatse for 300 odd students. The school taught Hindi, Tibetan and Chinese, to the students, all of whom came from the upper class families of the Tsang region. It also gave training in driving, photography, horse-riding, shooting and other military and surveillance skills.

The late Panchen Lama remained a true Tibetan nationalist and a proud one at that. He showed enormous pride and faith in the Tibetan people, even when he was confronted with a formidable adversary, who tried to belittle, humiliate, and denigrate the Tibetan race. The example of his great pride in being a Tibetan could be seen in his petition, when he declared, “I have taken an oath in the future, I will certainly do good things for the party and the people, and will certainly not allow any trace to be left in my history which would tarnish my reputation as a descendant of the hardworking and brave Tibetan nationality”. From all accounts, it is blatantly clear that the 10th Panchen Lama was a great patriot and martyr, who fought for the Tibetan people’s right, as no other high lama death or living has ever done in history.

50 Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead, P.319
51 Poison Arrow, p.123.
The Panchen Lama’s death ushered in the beginning of a dispute between the Dalai Lama and Beijing. Basically, the bone of contention between the Dalai Lama and Communist China was on the question of who held the final authority of the recognition of the 11th Panchen Lama? The Dalai Lama’s claim was based on historical precedents and sound religious convention. All the previous Panchen Lamas had been formally recognised by the Dalai Lama. Being the highest spiritual and temporal head of Tibet, the Dalai Lama has the prerogative right, and no recognition could take place without his approval. Whereas, communist China based its claim in the legacy of the Qing emperor power which we have already discussed. China also claims that the titles “Dalai Lama” and “Eridini” of the Galukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism were “conferred by the central government of the Qing Dynasty”.52 According to China, the drawing of lots from the golden urn established in 1792, was the most important of religious rituals that govern the issues of the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. China still insists on invoking the use of this age-old practice set in the feudal period as justification of their policies in Tibet, so as to demonstrate that Tibet has always been a part of China. As we have seen, it is true that the Qing emperor had exercised some power over Tibet in the 18th century and the Tibetans at that time had accepted Chinese authority. However, any ties between China and Tibet had always been blown out of proportion by the Chinese, when and where it suited them. In reality, both were involved in the final recognition of the Panchen Lama, but the Dalai Lama, more so than the Manchu emperor. The emperor’s stamp gave the added frills of power and prestige, but the Dalai Lama’s recognition alone sanctified and legitimized the reincarnation in the eyes of the Tibetans and the Mahayaha Buddhist world. The Emperor’s stamp and the use of the Golden Urn could be

52 Beijing, May 17, 1995, Xinhua, “Dalai Lama’s confirmation of reincarnation invalid”. 223
dispensed with, but not so the Dalai Lama’s recognition.

It is also to be noted that the title “Dalai Lama” was offered by the Mongol Prince Altan Khan to Sonam Gyatso at Mongolia in 1576, long before the Qing Dynasty was founded in 1644. The title “Panchen” is made up of two words “Pandita” a Sanskrit word, meaning scholar and “Chenpo” a Tibetan word meaning great. It is a title given to great scholars and all the abbots of the Tashilhunpo monastery were known by this title. However, it is true that in 1731, the Manchu emperor Guang-xu offered the title “Eridini” to the fifth Panchen Lama, Lobsang Yeshi. At the same time, Tibetan lamas also conferred numerous titles on the rulers of China and other neighbouring kingdoms. The exchange of complimentary titles in the form of certificates and seals was a part of diplomatic culture prevailing in central Asia at that time. It did not in any way signify superiority of one party over the other, as claimed by China. Furthermore, ‘Eridini’ is a Mongol word meaning “precious jewel” a title shared by many Mongol lamas. 53

The unexpected death of the Panchen Lama left China with no credible figure head in Tibet, in whose name they could carry out their policies. The late Panchen Lama being the second highest figure in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy, became the most important leader in Tibet after the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, and the intermediary on whom the Chinese leadership most relied upon to obtain support of the Tibetan people. At that time, China was also facing repeated demonstrations in Lhasa by the Tibetan nationalist challenging the Chinese rule in Tibet. Then, there was the repeated press statements and announcement from Dharamshala and the Dalai

53 Panchen Lama Lineage, p.44.
Lama that the recognition of the reincarnation had to come from the Dalai lama alone, sending the Chinese authorities into a panic. Hence, the Chinese at its highest level decided that they needed to urgently establish priority over the recognition of the Panchen Lama. Immediately after the demise of the Panchen Lama, the Chinese premier Li Peng announced that outsiders would not be allowed to “meddle in the selection procedure”, indicating that China would not accept the Dalai Lama’s involvement in the selection process.

Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama approached the Chinese officials numerous times offering to send religious delegations to Tibet, in order to assist and participate in the search for the reincarnation, which was spurned. In fact, up till 21 March 1991, the Dalai Lama’s representative in New Delhi conveyed the Lama’s message to the Chinese Embassy that he would like to send a religious delegation to observe prophetic visions in Lhamo Lhatso, near Lhasa which will guide the search for the Panchen Lama’s reincarnation. China rejected his request saying that, there was no need for ‘outside interference’. In a high level meeting of the United Front Department in Beijing, a month after the Panchen Lama’s death, it was decided that the Dalai Lama should play no role in the selection process and that all efforts were to be made to counter any interference from outside. In a decision, signed by premier Li Ping, it was announced that the search would be overseen by the Democratic Management Committee of Tashilhunpo.

However the Chinese authorities at the same time, took special care and went

54 Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead, pp 315-316.

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to considerable lengths to accommodate traditional Tibetan wishes concerning the manner in which the 10th Panchen Lama’s successor should be sought. Both the monks of the Thashilhunpo monastery and the Chinese authorities unanimously agreed that the search for the Panchen Lama’s seat in Shigatse would be carried out under the guidance of Chadrel Rinpoche, the acting abbot of the Tashilhunpo, in Shigatse, in the traditional manner.\(^5^6\)

The authorities also allowed the monks a free rein and authority over the day to day running of the search even though Chinese Buddhist Association would be nominally in charge. Further, the Chinese officials agreed with Chadrel Rinpoche on the official procedure, for the finding of the Panchen Lamas reincarnation. The following steps were to be used in determining the authentic reincarnation: (1) mystical signs to identify the candidate; (2) tests with objects to identify the most likely candidate; (3) oracles and divination to “reconfirm” the final candidate; (4) the Golden Urn (lottery system), drawn by a government official, to single out the candidate from the short list; and (5) approval of the final decision by the central government.\(^5^7\) China was least bothered about having an authentic reincarnation. It only wanted to approve the final selection publicly and proclaim it first with great funfare, which would demonstrate China’s sovereignty and authority over Tibet. Thus, it was decided that the Religious Affairs Bureau would supervise the installment of the final candidate using the lottery system.

As we can see, before the Dalai Lama’s pre-emptive action of announcing


\(^5^7\) Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead, pp 310-311.
Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama on 14 May 1995, the Chinese authorities gave considerable freedom and power to the search committee. According to Prof. Dawa Norbu, Beijing most probably would have "approved" the same candidate, had it not been for the pre-emptive and unilateral action, which China perceived as an indirect challenge to its sovereignty.\(^{58}\) The result was that China retaliated to the Dalai Lama's announcement, which had a far reaching repercussion on the Tibetan and the Buddhist world, as we shall discuss later.

Initially, China assumed that they had managed to gain complete control of the issue and was not expecting any protest from inside Tibet. However, Tibetans were unhappy that the Chinese authorities had dispensed with the Dalai Lama's involvement. The Chinese stipulation also put the monks of Tashilhunpo monastery in a difficult position, as they were hesitant about entirely ruling out the Dalai Lama from the picture. For the monks, the question of the Dalai Lama's recognition and confirmation was an important matter of prestige and any new successor would lack legitimacy in the eyes of the Tibetans and the Mahayana Buddhist world without the Dalai Lama's blessing. There was also indignant response and protest from the Dalai Lama's government — in-exile, with a warning that political interference in the selection of the Panchen Lama would render the choice invalid. However, the Chinese authorities were adamant that the Dalai Lama's involvement and the traditional need for the Dalai Lama's approval should be dispensed with. Therefore, the search party stalled locating the new candidate until the issue of the Dalai Lama's involvement was resolved.

\(^{58}\) Ibid p.311
Further in April 1991, a meeting was held in Tashilhunpo monastery where high lamas from Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia and TAR attended, to hear a report from the Chadrel Rinpoche on the progress of the search for the Panchen Lama. During the meeting, the lamas made it known that the Dalai Lama’s approval was essential for recognition and that it could not be simply dismissed. The lamas were of course careful to qualify their statement by saying that they disapproved of the Dalai Lama’s political campaign but his religious authority was nevertheless absolute, whether he lived in exile or in Tibet. The monks faced a difficult position in their dual task of trying to balance their religious duties as well as appease the Chinese authorities.

The Chinese decision to exclude the Dalai Lama had been made at a time when anti-Chinese agitation was high and the relationship between Beijing and the Dalai Lama was at its lowest point since 1979. However by 1993, there was a thawing of the ice as the unrest and protests had quietened down, to some level. Chinese authorities had also clearly come to the realisation that without the approval of the Dalai Lama, they would have a hard time convincing the Tibetans and the Buddhist world that they had selected the true candidate. Therefore, the Chinese authorities, while rejecting the Dalai Lama’s formal role in the search at the government level, nodded their approval to the Tashilhunpo monastery search party to seek the Dalai Lama’s “guidance”, at a purely religious level. For this, they invited Gyalo Thundup, the Dalai Lama’s elder brother to visit Beijing. Chadrel Rinpoche was especially flown in to Beijing to meet Gyalo Thundup, and the Rinpoche handed over a letter for

the Dalai Lama, an official request for the Dalai Lama’s "guidance" in the search for the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. The letter also briefed the Dalai Lama, of the progress made so far in the search for the reincarnation.60

After Chadrel Rinpoche’s return from Beijing, once again in Shigatse, there was a meeting of high lamas from all parts of Tibet to hear his report on the search progress. There, at the meeting, Chadrel Rinpoche announced that contact had been established with the Dalai Lama and that he had been informed of the progress of the search, which put to rest the suspicions that arose about the validity of the meetings that had taken place before.

China had allowed the ‘involvement’ of the Dalai Lama assuming that his approval would be merely fulfilling mandatory religious requirements, so as to appease the Tibetans. They appear to have seen the Dalai Lama’s role as merely to endorsed the candidate selected by them. For the Dalai Lama this was not only unacceptable on political grounds, but would have implied that he had accepted the Chinese government’s rights to intervene in purely religious affairs. The Chinese authorities had allowed the Tashilhunpo monastery to communicate with the Dalai Lama, but had expected in return no more than a formal symbolic acknowledgement of acquiescence from him.61 Naturally, the Dalai Lama had a different view on the issue. Hence he took the official line and on 5 August 1993, he responded by delivering a letter to the Chinese Embassy, New Delhi, inviting Chadrel Rinpoche and other members of the search party to visit India for discussions, to which there

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60 There was no official statement about the contents of the letter from either side. But Gyalpo Thundup later said that," the monastery and the Committee led by Chadrel Rinpoche is seeking His Holiness’s guidance[sic] the search for the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama", and the Chinese State Council had endorsed the delivery of the letter.(BBC World Service, date line East Asia.18 August,1993.)
61 Tsering Sakya. The Dragon in the Land of the Snows, p.443
was no reply. As far as China is concerned, any involvement by the Dalai Lama could take place only on their terms.

Right from the start, the essential issue was not whether the correct religious rituals were carried out or not, but a question of political sovereignty associated with the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. For the Dalai Lama it was a chance to assert his authority as the highest combined religious and temporal leader and to demonstrate that his word was the final authority in Tibet. For Beijing, it did not even matter which particular child was to be chosen and installed: as long as the recognition of the new Panchen Lama was arranged and presented according to their wishes, thus demonstrating past and present claim of China’s sovereignty over Tibet.

Beijing did not give a written reply to the Dalai Lama’s initiative. Informally, they sent a Chinese individual with close ties to the government in Beijing on 17th and 18th October 1994 to Dharamsala. During the meeting the Dalai Lama told the Chinese individual that he was still waiting for a reply from Chadrel Rinpoche and reiterated the importance of carrying out the search of the Panchen Lama through strict traditional religious procedure. Further in January 1995, Dharamsala sent two communications to the same person as reminders of the discussion, held in Oct 1994, requesting him to urge the Chinese authority for an early reply. However there was no reply either from the Chinese individual or the Chinese authorities. Thus, having waited in vain for a reply, the Dalai Lama on May 14, 1995, announced Gedhun Chokeyi Nima, a six year old boy living in Lhari, Tibet’s Northern region of Ngachu,
as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama.  

In his statement the Dalai Lama said that the search and recognition of the Panchen Lama reincarnation is a religious matter and not political. Therefore, after naming his candidate, the Dalai Lama graciously invited the Chinese government to "extend its understanding, cooperation and assistance" to the Tashilhunpo monastery so that the new Panchen Lama will receive proper religious training which will enable him to assume his spiritual responsibilities.

China was taken by surprise as it had not been expecting the Dalai Lama to make the public announcement. Immediately, China denounced the Dalai Lama's announcement as "totally illegal and invalid" and a political plot by the "Dalai Clique", to split the motherland. The way the Dalai Lama announced his choice of candidates irked the Chinese extremely. Since there was no prior notice given to China, before announcement, acknowledgement or acceptance of the boy would have been a blow to Chinese ego. It would have appeared as if the "superior" Han race had been tricked by the "backward" Tibetans.

Not surprisingly China reacted with profound hostility, launching an aggressive campaign which ended in a major schism within the religion. Given the nature of Sino-Tibetan relation, it was expected that the announcement would not have been taken kindly to by the Chinese. Conflict ensued and the Chinese

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62 Panche Lama Lineage n pp36-37
63 Announcement of the Panchen Lama Reincarnation by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharmsala, 14 May, 1995
64 Beijing, May 17, 1995, Xinhua.

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government’s reaction was drastic to say the least. On 17 May 1995, three days after the Dalai Lama’s announcement, Chadrel Rinpoche and his assistant Jampa Chung-la, both of whom were accused of having co-operated with the Dalai Lama, were detained. Between May and August 1995, 48 Tibetans were arrested on suspicion of helping Chadrel Rinpoche sent messages about the child (Gedhun Chokyi Nyima) to the Dalai Lama in India.  

Gedhun Chokyi Nyima, the real reincarnate, was whisked away by China along with his family to an unknown location, and it is likely that he would not be allowed to come out of ‘confinement’ ever. China then launched a high profile campaign from Beijing, which required all Tibetan leaders, government officials and leading monks and lamas to denounce the Dalai Lama publicly for making the announcement. A denunciation campaign against Chadrel Rinpoche was also launched within Tashilhumpo monastery itself. At a meeting which took place on July 11, 1995, Chadrel Rinpoche was denounced by name for the first time by the Chinese as a collaborator in the Dalai Lama’s plot to split the country through the choice of the new Panchen Lama.  

TIN, reported that in the TAR- a total of sixty Tibetans were arrested for illegal involvement in the Dalai Lama’s recognition of the child reincarnate, including the abbot and thirty two monks from Tashilhumpo monastery. Further, on 14 July 1995, the local religious bureau in Shigatse formally removed Chadrel Rinpoche from his post and replaced him with a pro-Chinese Communist Lama, including Sengchen Lobsang Gyaltser and Lama Tsering as a new head and

65 Dawa Norbu- The Road Ahead. p. 311.
administrator of Tashilunpo monastery. Bomi Rinpoche, a Chinese Gaden throne holder was then appointed as head of the Gelukpa sect in order to facilitate the staging of the Chinese candidate with some semblance of 'traditional procedures' to back up the Chinese direct political action in the religious domain. 68

Although, China had earlier declared that they would never recognise the reincarnated child for the Panchen Lama, which according to them was announced illegally by the Dalai Lama, they had never denied that the child identified by the Dalai Lama was the correct reincarnation of the Xth Panchen Lama. However, by 4 November, a number of Tibetan leaders were ordered to take part in a week-long meeting in which they were required for the first time to declare that the child identified by the Dalai Lama was not the real reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. 69 This was a clear indication that China would come up with their own choice of Dalai Lama and for the first time there would be two competing Panchen Lamas.

As expected there was indignant protest by the Tibetans in the whole of Tibet as well as from the exile communities. A poster supporting the Dalai Lama’s candidate appeared in Shigatse on 21, May 1995. On May 19,1995, a poster rejecting Beijing’s claim for the use of the golden urn appeared in Lhasa. Then, on July 12,1995, Chinese riot police interrupted a major religious ceremony at Tashilhunpo when over a hundred monks threatened to stage a demonstration against the Chinese government’s forceful intervention in the selection of the new Panchen Lama. 70 Unlike the two protagonists in the dispute who were clearly swayed by their eagerness

68 Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead, p.311.
69 China Daily, the People’s Daily, on 13 Nov.1955.
to use the issue to gain maximum propaganda value, the search party was mainly concerned about finding the right candidate.

The Chinese leadership was aware that in religious matters the Dalai Lama’s spiritual authority has been universally accepted by the Buddhist world and that any attempt to challenge his spiritual prestige would risk inviting protest from the Tibetans. Nevertheless, by the beginning of November 1995, the Chinese authorities had come to a decision. With the support of a few senior monks from Tashilhunpo monastery, the leadership announced in Beijing that the Golden Urn ceremony for the selection of a new reincarnation of the Panchen Rinpoche would take place shortly, and that it would not include the child named earlier by the Dalai Lama. Beijing also issued instructions to 300 senior lamas in central Tibet, ordering them to arrive at the Chinese Capital by the morning of 5 November 1995. The lamas were told to condemn Chaderal Rinpoche and to support the Chinese decision to use the ‘golden urn’ method to select their own Panchen Lama, instead of the divination method used unilaterally by the Dalai Lama.

The motive behind all these was that, China wanted to show the world that their selection of their ‘Panchen Lama’ was conducted as according to the traditional Tibetan religious practices and that it had the backing of the religious institutions. For the same purpose, they had earlier appointed pro-Chinese Communist ‘lamas’. However, almost all the monks and lamas of Tashilhunpo opposed the Chinese-imposed methods in a special meeting convened by the Chinese authorities on 4 June,

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72 Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead, p-311.
1995. In that meeting, a highly respected lama, Ngagchen Rinpoche, who was one of the main people in charge of the search for the reincarnation of the XI Panchen Lama, recalled how Chadrel Rinpoche, Chung-la and he had visited Lhamoi Lhatso near Lhasa to see visions of the reincarnation. 'Based on this' Ngachen Rinpoche declared, 'the reincarnation is the real one'. He said that, 'especially, when we arrived in Ngachu, we experienced many supernatural events. Everywhere there was snow and also suddenly there was brilliant sunshine. When we met the reincarnation he immediately said, "I am Panchen". When we asked him, "do you want to go to the monastery?" He said "yes, I would like to go". Ngagchen Rinpoche concluded that, 'it was clear that the boy was the real Lama, so he asked the Central Government not to hold a lottery "We have already found the reincarnation. All we needed to do was to ask Gong-sa-Choe (His Holiness the Dalai Lama) to recognise him. We ask the Central Government this several times"'.

Thus, going by all accounts, Gedhun Chokeyi Nyima was probably the authentic incarnation. Chadrel Rinpoche and Ngagchen Rinpoche’s close observations and supernatural signs point to this fact, but their candidate has become an innocent victim of Beijing-Dharamshala confrontation. China was least concerned about the manner in which the choice was made of selecting the true candidate for the Panchen Lama. For Beijing, the correctness of the selection procedure was secondary. So regardless of hurting the religious sentiment of the Tibetan people, as long as it suited their political motives, China went ahead and used the 'golden urn' method to select the Panchen Rinpoche reincarnation. The search committee’s recommendations were thereby rendered null and void.

On 29th November 1995, fearing protest from the Tibetan people the Chinese Central authorities, in great secrecy, held the 'golden urn' ceremony in Jokhang (Lhasa) without the presence of the local public, and selected a six-year old boy Gyaltsen Norbu, from Ngachu in northern Tibet, as the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. On December 8, 1995, the boy was enthroned in Tashilhunpo monastery (Shigatse) the seat of the Panchen Lama, as the eleventh Panchen Rinpoche. China correctly anticipated that their political action would be opposed by the Tibetans inside Tibet. Therefore, both the lots drawing and enthroning ceremony was conducted amidst tight security, with a cordon of military and armed police forces deployed around the compound of both the monasteries in Shigatse and Lhasa.

This was a politically motivated action to show that the final authority in Tibet had always rested in Beijing, contrary to the Dalai Lama's claim that his word was the final authority in Tibet. By selecting a rival Panchen Lama, China 'invalidated the Dalai Lama’s candidate, whose reincarnation had also been confirmed not only by the Dalai Lama, but also the search committee and Tashilunpo monastery. Political claim over Tibet was the whole point behind the earlier press statement issued by the Bureau of Religious Affairs, that the Dalai Lama, 'in disregard of fixed historical convention, undermining religious rituals, disrupting the normal search process, and negating the supreme authority of the Central Government in the matter concerning the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, went so far as openly announcing a reincarnated child for Panchen Lama abroad. This is totally illegal and invalid'. China also claim that this action of the Dalai Lama, "will surely meet with strong..."
opposition from people of the Tibetan Buddhism circle and others believers. 75

A lot of questions remain unanswered if one is to take the Chinese authorities on their word. Was there a need to heighten security in Tibet during the announcement of their ‘Panchen Lama’, dismiss Chadrel Ripoche from his position as head of the search party and as acting Abbot of Tashillhunpo, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was spirited away and his whereabouts still remained a mystery. Was there a need for China to declare time and again that the child recognized by the Dalai Lama was “fake”, an “illegal” contender for the Panchen Lama’s throne, accuse the child’s parents ‘as notorious for speculation, deceit, and scrambling for fame and profit’ and condemn the child for having ‘once drowned a dog’. 76 It was petty and purely unnecessary on China’s part to be denouncing a small child. China had to resort to all these measures for the plain reason that they themselves do not believe in their own propaganda. They knew that their own candidate, Gyaltsen Norbu was just a mere political rival claimant to the throne. Thus they found it necessary to ‘confine’ and defame the child, so as to avert any public display of veneration of the child chosen by the Dalai Lama, and most of all to regain control of the succession procedure, in order to defend its territorial claim over Tibet.

The Dalai Lama must have expected opposition from the Chinese, but he was caught unawares by the Chinese with their reaction to his recognition of the 11th Panchen Lama. Against all odds, it had never occurred to him that China would check-mate him by coming up with their own Panchen Lama and negate his choice of

75 Ibid
the true incarnation by causing the ‘disappearance’ of his candidate.

It is true that China had sought approval from the Dalai Lama. However, Dharamshala’s hope of gaining political advantage by trying to extract maximum gain from China, when the latter sought “guidance” and approval from the Dalai Lama, proved disastrous. No doubt, a lot of Dalai Lama’s motivation may have been to confirm his choice of the Panchen Lama in an authentic way. It is unfortunate that the whole matter, which is a purely religious issue became a political struggle between the Dalai Lama and Beijing.

As to the handling of the Panchen Lama reincarnation process, China stage-managed the traditional procedures with considerable skill, albeit forcibly. All reports and evidence gathered from both the Chinese official sources and the Tibetan government clearly indicat that the boy discovered by Chadrel Rinpoche is believed to be the authentic reincarnation and is recognised by the Dalai Lama. For this reason, most of the senior monks were reluctant to carry out the ‘golden urn’ and hair cutting ceremony, which would have required them to directly contradict the Dalai Lama’s decision. The authorities realised that they needed a highly respected lama to persuade the senior lamas, so as to find acceptance in the eyes of the Tibetan people. Bomi Rinpoche was an answer to the authorities’ need to find a Lama who was acceptable to the Tibetan people. He is a widely respected lama and the Chinese promoted him to the most senior academic position in the Gelukpa sect, thereby giving him sufficient authority and credibility to carry out the ‘golden urn’ and the enthronement ceremonies. Communist atheist would thereby gain some respect for having shown to be tolerant by providing a religious touch to the all important mission of finding and
enthroning the 11th Panchen Lama.

On the other hand, the Dalai Lama more or less dispensed with much of the traditional procedures and practices customarily associated with the Panchen Lama reincarnation process. This is not unusual with his unconventional spiritualism and divine right— as the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet. At the same time the Dalai Lama seized the Chinese initiative— a request for "guidance" in the search process, by naming his own nominee for the XI Panchen Lama. By bringing the issue of the Panchen Lama to the forefront, the Dalai Lama must have hoped to apply pressure on the Chinese government and bring them to the negotiating table.

Soon after the Xth Panchen Lama passed away, the Tashilhupo monastery in exile in Mysore (India) requested the Dalai Lama permission thrice to start searching for the reincarnation of the Lama but the Dalai Lama kept dilly-dallying. However when China announced its counter candidate, the monks of the Tashilhunpo monastery in Mysore were brought to Delhi to back up the Dalai Lama decision.\footnote{Dawa Norbu, Road Ahead, page 314} The Dalai Lama decided to follow his own plan, taking the whole matter in his hand. He dispensed with much of the traditional conventions and practices customarily associated with the Panchen Lama reincarnation search process, and chose to use the divination method for selecting the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, the whole process of which is given below.

Dharamshala's Recognition Process

1. After the demise of Panchen Rinpoche in January 1989, over the years altogether
around 30 names of potential candidates for the reincarnation of Panchen Rinpoche were received both from within and outside Tibet.

The places from which the names of potential candidates had been received are: Those located in Tibet are Lhasa, Damzhung, Danang (Lhokha), Lhari Zong (Nagehu), Gyalthang, Tawu, Toe Gegye, Chabdo, Lhamo, Duejung, Tso-ngon malho tsazon, Amdo in the Ngachu area, Gyazon (Lhokha), Tsethang (Lhokha), Lithang and Getse (Ngari). Those located in India are Dharamshala and Ladakh.

2. In 1991, on the third day of the Tibetan Iron-Sheep year a divination was performed to find out whether Panchen Rinpoche's reincarnation had been born in Tibet or outside Tibet. The divination revealed that the reincarnation had been born in Tibet.

3. On 11th August 1991, the second day of the seventh month of the Tibetan Iron-Sheep year, a divination was performed to find out whether a certain child in Tibet who was widely thought of as being the Panchen Rinpoche's reincarnation was authentic or not. The divination was negative.

4. In 1993, on the third day of the Tibetan Water-Bird year a divination was performed to establish whether it was the proper time to commence and finalize the recognition process. The divination indicated that it was not the right time.

5. A petition dated 17th July 1993 was received through official channel via Beijing from Chatral Rinpoche, head of the committee from Tashilhunpo Monastery in Tibet searching for the reincarnation. He explained that in connection with the
reincarnation of Panchen Rinpoche two visits had been made to the sacred lake of Chokhor Gyal Latsho (Lhamol Lhatso) and one to Rinpung Chamsring Yung Tsho in order to observe indications concerning the reincarnation. It was also explained that some other religious investigations had been born and the search had been carried out. These indicated that Panchen Rinpoche had already been born and the search for the reincarnation should be conducted in a direction east of the Tashilhunpo Monastery among the children born in the Tibetan years of the Snake, Horse and Sheep.

6. In 1994, on the third day of the Tibetan Wood-Dog year, a divination was performed to establish whether it was the proper time to commence and finalize the recognition process. The divination indicated that it was not the right time.

7. In 1994, on the tenth of the first month of the Tibetan lunar calendar, the Nechung Oracle proclaimed, "My teacher, the Meaningful to Behold, (referring to His Holiness the Dalai Lama) is continuing to seek the reincarnation. If all Tibetans are firmly united in solidarity an unmistaken reincarnation will definitely be found soon in Tibet. This prophecy was confirmed on the same day by the Tshangpa Oracle.

8. Again on 30th March 1994, at the request to the Tashilhunpo Monastery in India the Tshangpa Oracle prophesied, "The reincarnation was born in Tibet, and since his Holiness is investigating the matter there is no need for concern.

9. On 3rd December 1994, a divination was performed to establish whether it was
the right time to commence and finalise, the recognition process. The divination revealed that it was the proper time.

10. In January 1995, during His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra teaching at Mundgod, India, His Holiness commenced the recognition process. A divination was done which revealed that among the potential candidates, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whose father is Konchok Phuntsog and whose mother is Dechen Chodon of Lhari district in Nagchu, Tibet, was an “extremely good” candidate for the reincarnation of Panchen Rinpoche.

11. On 23rd January 1995, at Dharamshala, after making elaborate offerings before such exalted objects as the Kyirong Jowo (a special image of the Buddha brought from Tibet), the Thangka of Palden Lhamo (a female protector of Tibet) etc., special prayers were performed invoking the names of the previous Panchen Lamas. A divination was then performed to determine whether the above-mentioned child, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, was the unmistaken reincarnation of Panchen Rinpoche. The divination confirmed this.

12. To confirm the result of the previous divination a second divination was performed, this corroborated with the first result. Therefore, no doubt remained that the child, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, was the true reincarnation of Panchen Rinpoche and his recognition was finalised.

13. Again in 1995, early on the 13th day of the third Tibetan month the Nechung Oracle proclaimed that, “there is no need for me, the formless to do or say
anything more. My teacher, the Meaningful to Behold, has already investigated the matter through the mind of the three secrets."

14. Oh 13th May 1995, a final divination was performed to determine whether it was appropriate to declare the recognition of the reincarnation of Panchen Rinpoche on the fifteenth of the third month of the Tibetan Lunar calendar (which corresponded to 14th May 1995) or to postpone it for some time. The divination indicated that it would be better to declare it on the fifteenth as proposed. 78

After the final divination, the identity of the XI Panchen Lama, a child named Gedhun Chokeyi Nyima born on April 25, 1989, in the 13th day of the 3rd Tibetan month in the Earth-Snake year, was proclaimed on 14th May 1995.

It should be remembered that the search and the recognition of the Panchen Lama is the sole prerogative of the Dalai Lama, as validated by tradition and history. This is a historical and spiritual role, which has been followed with respect to all other Panchen Lamas “in accordance with the historical and spiritual relationship between the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama” 79. Even the late Panchen Lama had categorically stated that the selection of his reincarnation should be done by the Dalai Lama. In January issue of China Reconstruct, an official China Publication, the Panchen Lama spoke of the historical and spiritual relationship between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. He said, “according to the Tibetan tradition, the confirmation of either the Dalai Lama or the Panchen Lama must be mutually recognized”.

79 Lineage Panchen Lama pg 29
One cannot say whether the divination method is right or wrong and whether the Dalai Lama’s decision was a wise one or not. It is true that the Dalai Lama was only doing what was his duty, but his unilateral announcement is perceived as an attempt to counter China’s attack on the Dalai Lama’s religious and political influence inside Tibet – thus posing a direct challenge to Chinese sovereignty. Although the Dalai Lama had gained major propaganda advantage, making the Chinese look bad, placing them in a very difficult and embarrassing position, in the end his decision does not look likely to serve either the Buddhist purpose or the Tibetan cause. The Chinese had already exacted a high price (repercussions Tibetans could ill-afford) for the small victory. After the Panchen Lama’s dispute, China had definitely hardened their stand on Tibet, and it is likely that China would refuse to negotiate over long-term solution of Tibet in the near future. In fact the shift in Beijing’s attitude to this question between 1993 –1995 was drastic – the hardliners have triumphed again. The Dalai Lama’s choice had ‘vanished’ from public view, making him the youngest political prisoner in the world and would probably never resurface again. China is aware that, if the child is made accessible to the public there would be spontaneous mass recognition and veneration which would embarrass the Chinese authorities highly and would also be a rival to ‘their’ Panchen Lama.

At the same time no matter how much China might promote him, Gyaltsen Norbu as the 11th Panchen Lama would always remain a suspect without the Dalai Lama’s blessings. A Panchen Lama without the recognition of the Dalai Lama – which virtually legitimises and sanctifies the reincarnate boy-would remain

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[80] Dawa Norbu, *Road Ahead*, p 315
doubtful in the eyes of Tibetans and the Mahayanaya Buddhist world, as we have seen from the demonstration of mounting protests in Tibet as well as outside Tibet. The explosion of a bomb, on 18th Jan 1996, Lhasa, at the house of Sengchen Lobsang Gyaltse, a Tibetan Lama, one of the political appointee who collaborated with the Chinese in installing their choice of Panchen Lama\textsuperscript{81}, is a clear example of people’s outrage and anger against China’s action in Tibet. The Dalai Lama’s government-in-exile had issued statements condemning the Chinese move as “illegal” and “invalid” and the child Norbu was labelled “pretender Panchen Lama”.

The conflict between these two protagonists is likely to go on for decades. Caught in the middle of the power-struggle between the two is, Gyaltse Norbu and Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, two six-year-old innocent boys, who have become mere pawns in the battle.

However, it should be noted that, despite his pre-emptive action, which the Chinese took exception to, the Dalai Lama was only acting what is within his rights. He had determined the Panchen Lama’s reincarnation according to existing procedures that do not offend the religious sentiments of Tibetans. Whereas, China had imposed its own candidates for a new ‘Panchen Lama’ and rejected the Dalai Lama’s choice to suit their political motive alone. For China, religious sentiments hurt along the way did not matter. This is purely a violation of fundamental human rights and infringement on the freedom of religious beliefs and practices of Tibetan Buddhists, guaranteed by China’s constitution. As one

\textsuperscript{81} Panchen Lama Lineage p 38

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news commentator pointed out, “the Chinese presumptions in overruling the Dalai Lama, who had selected a different boy in May, is as absurd as if Fidel Castro tried to appoint the next Pope”. \(^{82}\)

Tibetans and China watchers believe that, by stripping the Dalai Lama off one of his key religious functions: the nomination of the next Panchen Lama, China is seeking to make the Dalai Lama irrelevant to the Tibetans living inside Tibet. China’s main motive is to manipulate the new ‘Panchen Lama’ and use him as spokesman for whatever they wish to do in Tibet. Another motive is that, by imposing their own ‘Panchen Lama’, China is pursuing a long term agenda – which is to influence the choice of the next Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama traditionally approve of each others incarnation, though at this time China had deemed it irrelevant and tried to belittle the Dalai Lama in the eyes of his people by taking away his rights. The Dalai Lama is already 65 years old, and when the time comes for the selection of the next Dalai Lama, China will most likely refer to the customary right of the Panchen Lama to chose the next Dalai Lama. There is a strong possibility of having a Chinese appointed “Dalai Lama” after the present Dalai Lama is gone. Tibetans have solid reasons to fear for the extinction of their religion and culture.

\(^{82}\) China’s Buddha complex, for Beijing nothing is sacred, (Pico Iyer, *The New York Times*, 3 December, 1995.)