

“BE JOYFUL”

By David L. Phillips

The Dalai Lama's followers lined the streets of Dharamsala in Northern India to celebrate His 90th birthday on July 6. The celebration was worldwide. The mood was festive as devotees presented garlands and ceremonial prayer scarves to His Holiness.

Despite the joyful moment, the celebration was tinged with concern. Chinese officials are deeply threatened and have vowed to impose their will on the reincarnation of a new Dalai Lama, politicizing the process to repress Tibetan culture and further restrict the Tibetan people.

Why is China's state security apparatus so fearful of the Dalai Lama? The United Front, which manages minorities policy for the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), knows the depth of devotion to “His Holiness”. It will use all means to prevent an outpouring of affection by China's six million Tibetans, which the CPC fears could destabilize the country. It also fears division between the country's ethnic Han majority and religious minorities, including Muslims and Tibetans.

I was visiting Beijing in 1995 when the Panchen Lama was abducted and disappeared. The CPC installed a substitute Panchen Lama to undermine the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. The young boy, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, disappeared. He was either killed or, rumor has it, was detained at an undisclosed military base in Northwest China. The Dalai Lama's 90th birthday is a major occasion in Tibetan circles.

Events were held on every continent celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday. To prevent China interfering in His incarnation, the Dalai Lama announced that the Gaden Phodrang Trust, a non-profit to support the tradition and institution of the Dalai Lama, would have sole authority to recognize His future reincarnation in consultation with the heads of Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

Anticipating China's efforts to manipulate the process, He sent a video message to the Tibetan leadership with ground rules. He indicated that his successor will be born in a “free country” and called on His followers to reject anyone chosen by Beijing. He told an audience that the successor can be any gender and that He/She was not restricted to Tibet. His Holiness indicated that Tibetans should carry out the procedures of search and recognition in accordance with past tradition. “I am affirming that the institution of the Dalai Lama will continue,” said the Dalai Lama.” “No one else has any authority to interfere in this matter.”

The 14th Dalai Lama was born as Lhamo Dhondup to a farming family in what is now Qinghai province on July 6, 1935. He was identified as a reincarnation when He was just two years old. A search party of wise men decided to recognize the reincarnation based on their vision. The reincarnation was confirmed when the toddler identified ritual objects of His predecessor and declared, "It's mine, it's mine."

The Dalai Lama is a beloved figure among Tibetans and worldwide. He fled Chinese soldiers searching for Him in 1959 and escaped to India where He resides in Dharamsala, seat of today's Tibetan Government in exile where Tibetan culture survives in exile. The Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Prize Peace in 1989. The Committee explained that the Dalai Lama consistently opposed violence in the struggle for liberation. He advocated peaceful solutions based upon tolerance and mutual respect in order to preserve the historical and cultural heritage of his people.

The Dalai Lama has developed a philosophy of peace, reverence for all living things, and the concept of universal responsibility. The Committee explained that the Dalai Lama has come forward with constructive and forward-looking proposals for the solution of international conflicts, human rights issues, and global environmental problems.

Chinese authorities view His Holiness as anathema to their authoritarian rule. China's State Security and the United Front are feuding over who will be responsible for China's policy on minorities when He passes away. They fear His ability to speak truth to power could deepen divisions in Chinese society. They also fear the influence of His successor.

The Dalai Lama is a threat because His spiritual values are antithetical to the Chinese system, which is based on falsehoods and crass materialism. His wisdom and compassion are vast. His laughter and positive energy are irrepressible.

US Presidents such as Bush, Clinton and Obama have made clear their support for the Dalai Lama by inviting Him to the White House. Obama sent a warm birthday greeting. In the ideological struggle between the West and Communist China, the Dalai Lama could be a valuable ally.

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