

Global search starts for Tibet's ... Living Buddha

THE sudden death of the Panchen Lama, Tibet's second highest spiritual leader, has presented the Chinese Government with a unique problem: how is modern, socialist China going to locate the living incarnation of a Tibetan Buddhist deity?

The Chinese Premier, Mr Li Peng, in a statement issued soon after the Panchen's death, stressed that the selection process, although carried out according to Tibetan tradition, would have to be approved by the State Council. But Tibetan custom stipulates that the new incarnation must be verified, or at least endorsed, by the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibet.

The Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama are the leaders of the two most important sects in Tibetan Buddhism. The first Panchen Lama, Khaedrubje, was a disciple of the Dalai Lama, and the Panchen has traditionally been the Dalai Lama's junior, albeit with a considerable degree of independence in spiritual matters.

"A Panchen Lama without the endorsement of the Dalai Lama would have no moral authority within Tibet", says Mr Tswang Togyal, the Dalai Lama's representative in London.

The Dalai himself, in an interview with the *Hindustan Times* in February, said: "Traditionally, the responsibility of the recognition and selection of the Dalai Lama or the Panchen Lama lies entirely with either of the one who is alive at the time. So now, the Panchen Lama's reincarnation is my responsibility."

Mr Tashi Wangdi, foreign minister of the exiled Tibetan Government in Dharamasala said: "We are willing to co-operate with the Chinese Government in the search for the new Panchen Lama, in fact the monks from the Tashi Lhunpo Lamasery (the residence of the Panchen Lama in Xigaze) have already asked the Dalai Lama to offer prayers for a quick and authentic reincarnation, and his Holiness has obliged."

"However, if there is any political interference in the selection process, we will let our views be heard," Mr Wangdi added.

"It would be unacceptable, if, for example, all the signs indicated that the new incarnation had been born outside of Tibet for the Chinese Government to put pressure on the selection committee to find a candidate within Tibet," he said.

Ms Chen Xin, the deputy director of the State Nationalities Affairs Commission in Beijing has stressed that the central government will not interfere in the work of the selection committee which will comprise senior monks from the Tashi Lhunpo Lamasery and officials from the Tibet Branch of the Buddhist Association of China, and headed by Gyalyab, one of the late Panchen Lama's teachers, and a member of the National People's Political Consultative Committee.

All the members of the committee are considered to be pro-Beijing and are unlikely to put up much resistance if the central government was to bring pressure to bear.

Mr Robbie Barnett, an expert on Tibetan affairs and an eye-witness to the Lhasa riots of October 1987, says it is significant that the monks from the more political monasteries such as Ganden, Drepung and Sera have been excluded from the selection process.

Ms Chen said the selection committee would carry out the work of the Kanbu Conference which she said traditionally organised the search for the new lama.

"The Kanbu Conference was abolished in the early 1960s

With the death earlier this year of the tenth Panchen Lama, one of Tibet's highest spiritual leaders, Buddhist monks have begun the search for the reincarnation of his successor. The candidates will be children born within a year after the death of the Panchen and could come from anywhere in the world. But as well as the spectre of Beijing seeking a say in choosing the new Panchen, the unique selection procedure is in the hands of monks operating from inspecific spiritual guidelines, as GEOFFREY CROWTHALL reports.

when Tibet began its democratic reforms," Ms Chen said. "Kanbu was a product of the old system which mixed politics with religion. There is no Kanbu Conference now, only a democratic administrative committee," she added.

But many Tibetan scholars say this is the first time they have ever heard of the Kanbu. The selection procedures have varied throughout history, they say, according to the political situation within Tibet and the degree of co-operation between the four sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

The exact procedures to be followed in the search for the new Panchen Lama have never been written down in the Tibetan scriptures. Rather, senior lamas from the Tashi Lhunpo Lamasery have performed divinations and incantations and consulted oracles - believed to be the incarnations of deities known as dharmatara (protectors of religion) - to determine the location of the reincarnate.

The search for the reincarnated child will be based on visions seen by the lamas and oracles which will indicate the region in which the child can be found. The visions will often be of holy mountains or lakes, although others will be more abstract, offering more cryptic clues as to the Panchen's whereabouts.

Sometimes the reincarnated lama will leave signs of his own. Often the child will exhibit the same physical or mental attributes of his predecessor or develop character traits which would attest to his true identity.

The Chinese-backed selection committee will probably place greater emphasis on the physical signs exhibited by the candidates to verify their choice. The Chinese have traditionally tried to codify Tibetan religious practices into a form that makes sense in terms of the Chinese language.

The Tibetans on the other hand say that Buddhist practices are unknowable except to those who practise them. They are essentially ethereal and cannot be explained in material terms.

The search for the new lama usually begins one year after the death of the previous incarnation on the assumption that the child will have been conceived

soon after his predecessor's death and can take up to two or three years to complete. Once three or four suitable candidates have been located, they will be asked to pick out certain possessions belonging to the previous lama and identify his close associates.

IF MORE than one candidate passes these tests, the final selection may be determined by the drawing of lots, however Tibetan scholars disagree as to the validity of this procedure. According to the official New China News Agency, the practice of drawing lots was introduced by the Qing Emperor, Qian Long in 1740.

An imperial commissioner, representing the emperor, inscribed ivory lots with the names of the candidates which were then placed in a golden vessel in the Potala, the Lhasa residence of the Dalai Lama.

The lots were drawn by the commissioner after the lamas had chanted the "golden vessel scripture" for seven days. The name of the successful candidate would then be sent to Beijing for final approval by the emperor.

Tibetans in exile say that the drawing of lots formed only a minor part in the selection process and that the final choice of candidate was the responsibility of the Dalai Lama not the Chinese emperor.

"At those times when relations between Tibet and China were close," says Tashi Wangdi, "the Chinese representative in Lhasa would be consulted over the selection of candidates but he would have no say in the final choice, and it was certainly not necessary to gain the emperor's approval."

The New China News Agency claims that the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth Pan-



PANCHEN THE FIRST

Khaedrubje, born 1385, died 1438. Took Zong Kaba, the founder of the Yellow Hat sect as his master and eventually became one of his senior assistants.

PANCHEN THE SECOND

Sodnam Chhogiang, born 1439, died 1504. The author of several texts on Tibetan Buddhism.

PANCHEN THE FOURTH

Lozang Chhoegyad, born 1570, died 1662. Worked together with the 5th Dalai Lama to make the Yellow Hat sect the dominant force in Tibetan Buddhism.

PANCHEN THE THIRD

Lozang Dondrub, born 1505, died 1566. Based at the Angom Monastery, he spent most of his life travelling Tibet and preaching.

PANCHEN THE FIFTH

Lozang Yeshe, born 1663, died 1737. The first Panchen to have his title confirmed by the Chinese emperor. Received military backing from the emperor during times of factional conflict within Tibet.

PANCHEN THE SIXTH

Paldan Yeshe, born 1738, died 1780. The first Panchen Lama to visit the emperor. A Tibetan Palace was built in the town of Chengde in honour of his visit.

PANCHEN THE EIGHTH

Tanpi Wangchhug, born 1855, died 1882. Officially died of a mysterious illness but many believe he was yet another victim of Tibetan factional infighting.

PANCHEN THE SEVENTH

Tanpi Nyima, born 1782, died 1853. Acted as regional administrator in western Tibet with the backing of the Chinese imperial army.

PANCHEN THE NINTH

Chheokyi Nyima, born 1883, died 1937. Organised resistance against British and Japanese invasion forces but was forced out of Tibet by the 13th Dalai Lama.

PANCHEN THE TENTH

Bainqen Erdini Qoigy Gyaincain, born 1938, died 1989. Refused to denounce the Dalai Lama in 1959 but supported Chinese policies in Tibet. An NPC vice-chairman.

that the Dalai Lama need not necessarily have the final say in the selection process either. His role was mainly to ceremonially enthrone the new Panchen Lama. It is unclear just how much influence he had over the selection process.

"The Tashi Lhunpo Lamasery has traditionally been independent from Lhasa and has not welcomed unwarranted interference in its affairs either from Beijing or Lhasa," said Mr Shakya.

Mr Wangdi said that the Tibetan Government in exile will wait for a year or so before beginning its search for the new

So far, four Lamas born outside Tibet have been verified as authentic reincarnations by the Dalai Lama. The most famous reincarnation is four-year-old Osel Hita Torres who was confirmed two years ago as the living incarnation of Lama Thubten Yeshe who died in 1984. Thubten Yeshe fled from Tibet with the Dalai Lama in 1959 and travelled the world teaching and establishing monasteries.

The Tibetan Government in exile says that the oracles which have to be consulted in the selection process are living in northern India and it was unlikely that the official Chinese-backed selection committee would be allowed to travel outside Tibet in its search for the new Panchen Lama.

Tsering Shakya agrees that whether or not the committee is allowed to visit the oracles living in India will be a crucial test of the selection procedure's validity.

The Chinese Government has indicated that it would welcome representatives of the Dalai Lama to come to Tibet to assist in the selection process there but so far has not said whether it was willing for the search to be conducted outside its territorial boundaries.

The degree of co-operation between the two sides will largely depend on the political situation within Tibet. After nearly two years of violent protests which have resulted in more than 600 casualties, according to official Chinese figures, martial law has now been introduced in Lhasa and a very chill wind is blowing between Beijing and Dharamasala.

The only man who could have brought the two sides together was the tenth Panchen Lama. He was the only Tibetan with enough authority in China to stand up for the rights of the Tibetan people; he had access to



□ The Panchen Lama greeted by supporters in Beijing in January shortly before his death.

tionally tried to codify Tibetan religious practices into a form that makes sense in terms of the Chinese language.

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chen Lamas were all approved by the Chinese emperor and that the tenth and latest incarnation was sanctioned by the Nationalist Government in 1938.

But Tsering Shakya, a Tibetan scholar based in London says: "The drawing of lots was a procedure introduced by the Qing Dynasty to try to legitimise its presence in Tibet. In fact, only the fifth Panchen Lama and two of the Dalai Lamas were selected in this way."

Panchen Lama, however sources close to the Dalai Lama admit privately that the preparations for the search, including the offering of prayers, are already underway.

The Dalai Lama's representatives will conduct their search outside Tibet. "There is no reason why the new incarnation should necessarily be born in Tibet. The Dalai Lama himself has said that he will be reincarnated in a free country. At the moment, Tibet is not a free country," said Mr Wangdi.

● Continued Spectrum 4

Hunt for the next Panchen

● From Spectrum 1

the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party and when he spoke, Chinese officials in Tibet took note. It is very doubtful, analysts say, whether the Panchen Lama would have allowed Beijing to impose martial law in Lhasa.

The day before he died, the Panchen Lama had launched a blistering attack on the Chinese Government's record in Tibet, claiming that many Chinese officials had already forgotten the tragedies of the past and some had begun to repeat the same mistakes.

The Panchen Lama's standing within the Chinese hierarchy was clearly indicated by the lavish funeral arrangements prepared for him by the central government. A memorial service attended by several senior leaders was held in the Yonghegong, Beijing's main Buddhist shrine.

The funeral committee headed by President Yang Shangkun has arranged for a giant stupa to be built in the Tashi Lhunpo Lamasery to hold the body of the Panchen Lama, described by a State Council circular as a "great patriot, a well known state affairs activist, a great friend of the Chinese Communist Party and an outstanding leader of Tibetan Lamaism".

The announcement of the Panchen Lama's death on January 29 was greeted with shock and dismay in Lhasa. Residents described old women openly weeping in the streets and crying that "this is the end. The death of the Panchen Lama is the death of Tibetan culture."

THERE is a very real fear in Lhasa now, that with the death of the Panchen Lama, there will be no one to stand in the way of complete Chinese dominance in Tibet.

Even those Tibetans who had previously been highly critical of the Panchen Lama's collaboration with Beijing and his

corrupt business practices in Tibet, suddenly felt very guilty and began to say that maybe his heart was in the right place after all.

Up until his death, the Panchen Lama was considered by many, mainly younger Tibetans, to be nothing more than a rich, fat businessman making money by collaborating with Chinese authorities and ripping off foreign tourists.

The Panchen Lama ran a string of restaurants and gift shops in Lhasa staffed by renegade, drunken monks who charged foreign tourists outrageous prices for Tibetan jewelry and clothes.

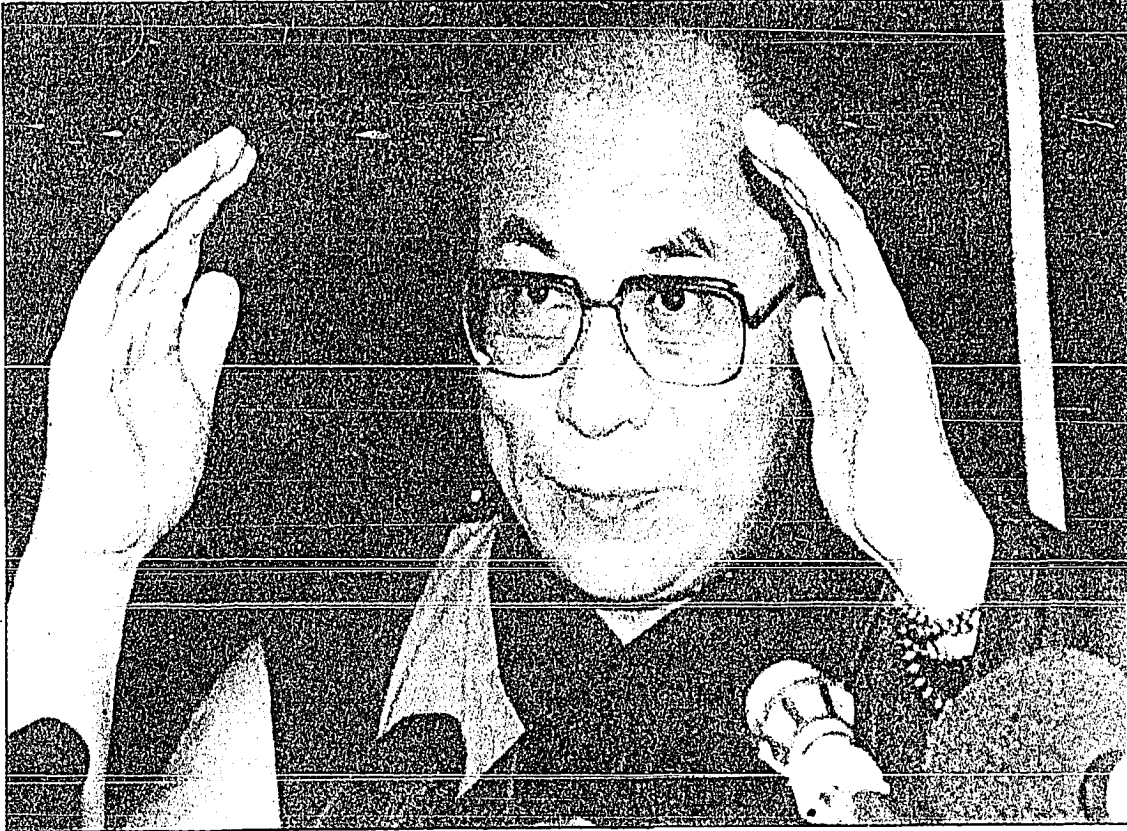
The Panchen Lama's enterprises were largely boycotted by the Tibetans living in Lhasa and in March 1988 came under attack from rioters who burned down many shops said to be run by collaborators. The shops were later rebuilt with reinforced glass.

This year's riots, which occurred after the Panchen Lama's death, were focused on Chinese-owned properties and businesses.

At the same time, the Panchen Lama has always been revered in Tibet as a great spiritual leader and teacher. When he passed through Lhasa on his way to Xigaze this year (only the sixth time he had visited Tibet since his release from jail after the Cultural Revolution) thousands of pilgrims turned out to receive his blessing.

The Tibetans in exile have always maintained that the Panchen Lama was merely a puppet of Beijing. Indeed he could only return to Tibet in 1952 with the help of the People's Liberation Army. However, the Dalai Lama has frequently described the Panchen as a great fighter for the rights of the Tibetans.

With the death of the Panchen Lama, the only real link between the Chinese Government and the Tibetan people is the Dalai Lama's eldest brother,



□ The Dalai Lama: in exile but retaining an important say in the choice of the new Panchen Lama.

Gyalo Thondup, a Hongkong-based businessman, who has been acting as a go-between for Dharamasala and Beijing.

However, many Tibetans fear Mr Thondup does not have the best interests of his country at heart. He is seen to represent the interests of the old Tibetan aristocracy and is more concerned with securing a beneficial place for the aristocracy in Tibet's political and economic future than in the rights and freedom of ordinary Tibetans.

The secrecy of Mr Thondup's negotiations with Beijing have done nothing to allay these fears. Mr Lhasang Tsering, head of the Tibetan Youth Congress, a radical organisation of more than 10,000 exiled Tibetans said: "I believe that if Mr Thondup is struggling for the cause (of Tibetan Independence), he should mix with the people. Staying aloof and distinct like some deity, all-seeing, all-knowing, then making decisions on behalf of us sentient beings, that is one thing; but all of us being of flesh and bone, we should at least see each other, discuss things together and work together."

Furthermore, Mr Thondup does not have any influence over the hearts and minds of Ti-

betans living in Tibet, most not even knowing who he is.

Even the Dalai Lama seems to be dissatisfied with his brother's performance. A New China News Agency statement that the Chinese authorities had established direct links with the Dalai Lama received a terse denial from Dharamasala. "There has been no new direct contact between his Holiness and the People's Republic of China," Mr Tashi Wangdi said recently.

Given the fragile relations between Beijing and Dharamasala and the potentially explosive situation within Tibet it is unlikely that the two sides will be willing to launch a joint hunt for the 11th Panchen Lama. Unless the situation improves dramatically, the world can look forward to two Panchen Lamas.

If two Panchen Lamas are discovered, one by the official selection committee, the other by representatives of the Dalai Lama, there is no doubt that it will be the Dalai Lama's candidate who is recognised as the true incarnation by the people of Tibet.

However, as Tsering Shakya points out, there has nearly always been two Panchen Lamas, one chosen by Tashi Lhunpo, the other by the Potala. The

Potala's choice of the 10th Dalai Lama is a monk currently living a life of quiet meditation and teaching in a monastery in Dumfries, Scotland.

"In Tibetan Buddhism, you can actually have three authentic reincarnations of a lama; one of the body, one of the mind, and one of speech. So there is certainly no contradiction, in purely religious terms, in finding two Panchen Lamas," says Mr Shakya.

However, as Mr Barnett points out, the selection of the Panchen Lama has rarely had anything to do with religion. The selection of a new lama has always been a political battle between the different factions within the Tibetan theocracy and their allies outside of Tibet. The monks of Tashi Lhunpo have traditionally co-operated with the Chinese in the selection of the Panchen Lama, and several previous incarnations have been installed with the help of the Chinese military.

As Mr Barnett says, Tibetan history has a habit of repeating itself.

The 11th Panchen Lama could well be used as a bargaining chip by Dharamasala. They could agree to sanction the Tashi Lhunpo/Chinese candidate in return for concessions

on the question of Tibetan autonomy and perhaps try to reinstate the 17-point agreement originally worked out between the Dalai Lama and Beijing in the early 1950s which gave Tibet a large degree of autonomy within the Chinese nation state.

However, the question would then arise as to where the Panchen Lama should be trained and by whom. Dharamasala has always insisted that there has been no true teaching of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet since the Dalai Lama fled in 1959.

Before Dharamasala could agree to the Panchen being trained in Tibet, they would have to receive firm guarantees from Beijing that his teachers would be allowed to conduct his training according to Tibetan scriptures without any interference from central government.

All of these machinations will probably go way above the heads of the ordinary Tibetans in Tibet. All they want to see is an end to the massive immigration of ethnic Han Chinese into their country, the lifting of restrictions on their right to travel and do business and the freedom to practise their religion without harassment. In short, whoever the new Panchen Lama may be, to be let alone.