

**Mao a Buddha: Náboženská politika voči tibetskému buddhizmu v Číne (Mao and Buddha – Religious Policy towards Tibetan Buddhism in China).**

By Martin Slobodník. Bratislava: Chronos Publishing, 2007.

The latest monograph from the Slovak sinologist and tibetologist, Martin Slobodník deals with religious policy in China related to Tibetan Buddhism. Today, this topic has been considered particularly interesting not only by scholars dealing with China, Tibet or with religions in general, but also by a wider public. However, in his book Slobodník not only refers to a fascinating topic, but especially he offers an impartial and well-balanced perspective on this problem.

The volume examines relations of Tibet and China in different historical periods: during traditional Tibetan society and imperial China, moreover republican China (1912 – 1949) as well as in the People's Republic of China (1949 – today). The author primarily explains in which way the religious policy in contemporary China and in the past relate to each other. He mainly focuses on the tools applied by the Chinese state in order to control Tibetan Buddhism and on the effectiveness of this policy. The role of religion in contemporary China as defined in the Chinese constitution and in the key state documents is described, together with basic principles governing the relation between religions and state

as well as with the role of religious associations and departments for religious issues.

The book presents several striking paradoxes of religious life in today's China, mainly in relation to Tibetan Buddhism but also concerning, for instance, Muslims in the Xinjiang province. One of these paradoxes is the way in which the Chinese authorities try to interfere in the process of choosing a new *tulku*, a person considered by Tibetan Buddhists a reincarnation of a distinguished Tibetan religious teacher. For Chinese officials secularity is one of the main principles they are required to believe. However, trying to avoid the Dalai Lama and exiling the Tibetan government to inhere in the process of identification of new *tulkus*, the Chinese executive actually tries to define and inspect the rules how *tulkus* should be sought, identified and enthroned. The secular Chinese state claims that when choosing these traditional religious but also political Tibetan authorities, the Communist party and the government should play the key role. For example, the Chinese government demands that the children to whom *tulkus* have reincarnated should not be sought

among the children of authorities at the community level and above, as well as among the offspring of party members at the county level and above. Moreover, the Chinese bureaucracy attempts to make a special register of *tulkus* which may reincarnate. Also, the Chinese authorities argue that enthronization and everyday life of *tulkus* in monasteries bring too much expense, and that is why the number of *tulkus* should be reduced.

Increased effort of Chinese bodies to administer more control in Tibetan religious affairs is a rather topical issue in contemporary China. In July 2007 the People's Republic of China's State Administration of Religious Affairs approved a special set of rules that regulates the process of identifying reincarnated lamas. The document entitled *Management Measures for the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism* describes in 14 articles the issues including whether or not the search for a new reincarnation may begin; moreover, the way in which the search is to be conducted; the procedure for the actual recognition of any reincarnation and how to obtain government approval for the recognition.

Another issue that brings tension between Tibetan Buddhists and Chinese government is the economic life of Tibetan monasteries. Slobodník explains that the monks living in monasteries receive no finances from the Chinese state. However, the state understands the monasteries as a

burden for economic development of Tibet unless they not only accept donations for religious services, but also function as production units. Monks are thus required to run restaurants, dormitories, souvenir shops, drugstores with traditional Tibetan medicine and to increasingly finance themselves from the tourist industry. Reactions of Tibetan monks and laics vary. Some believe that personal contact with the Tibetan culture helps the Han (Chinese) tourists to overcome negative stereotypes and it shall contribute to solve Chinese-Tibetan disputes. However, more often Tibetans view themselves as occupied by the Han majority and they are being afraid that the increasing numbers of tourists negatively influence traditional functioning of monasteries.

Slobodník also discusses the position and activities of the United States, the European Union and non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International regarding religious freedoms and policies in the People's Republic of China. He describes how these interferences bring more tension into the relationship of Tibetan Buddhist and the Chinese state. Namely, China has been reacting to foreign criticism with a strong refusal claiming that Western powers joined the Dalai Lama and his followers in order to undermine the authority of the Chinese state.

Although the author also observes some positive progress in religious policy as well as in the status of

religions in China he has been rather sceptical regarding corrections in religious policy in the near future. System changes in the conditions for religious life in China can only come with democratization and pluralist society in which the political authorities would resign on the ambition to control and interfere into the religious sphere, Slobodník concludes.

In his book, Slobodník derives from numerous scholarly works both of Western and Chinese authors, moreover from the documents of Chinese religious policy as well as from his own fieldwork in the Labrang monastery. The text is supplemented by translations of four documents issued by the Chinese government in the 1990s and after 2000. These documents which regulate management, administration and education in Buddhist monasteries well illustrate the aims and the mechanisms used by the Chinese authorities in order to control the religious life of Tibetan Buddhists. Besides, fitting pictures including the

photographs of the author himself illustrate the book.

The text would benefit from including some standard conclusion where the author would summarize his main findings. Moreover, even more results of the author's fieldwork in China could possibly have been presented in order to bring life in a Tibetan monastery closer to the Slovak readership. Also as this topic has been rather often researched in Western countries, the views of Chinese authors bring newer and particularly valuable insights that could possibly deserve more space in the volume.

Nevertheless, the book presents results of independent scholarly work and thus shall be welcome as a contribution to our knowledge of relations between the state and religion.

Gabriela Pleschová  
Faculty of Social and  
Economic Sciences,  
Comenius University, Bratislava