

Official documents from this period indicate that the attitude of the government toward religion had not changed. During this period of relative accommodation the Chinese government hoped to win the support of Tibetans while it pursued the new economic reforms. It certainly did not anticipate the enthusiasm for religion shown by a younger generation of Tibetans who had grown up under Chinese rule.

It was also during this period that the young monks and nuns began to organize demonstrations in support of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan independence, and to call for human rights and democracy. Monks and nuns were prepared to face beatings, arrest, imprisonment, and death for the peaceful expression of their beliefs. Though some of these demonstrations by monks and nuns were large and resulted in troops opening fire on demonstrators and bystanders, many have been small – no more than a few monks or nuns, prepared to face immediate arrest and imprisonment.

Since 1987 several thousand Tibetans have been arrested and imprisoned, with perhaps as many as a thousand now remaining in prison. Two thirds of those detained have been monks and nuns – most under thirty years of age and some just in their teens. Some have received sentences as long as twenty years for offenses of shouting slogans, putting up posters, or distributing literature. Religious practice is forbidden in prison. Defiance of restrictions inside the prisons results in beatings and torture, and lengthening of sentences. In a number of cases deaths have resulted from treatment received in prison.

A renewed repressive policy toward religion was given official approval at the Third National Forum on Work in Tibet, which took place in July of 1994 in Beijing. This called for a new assault on Tibetan religion and culture. In particular, the Dalai Lama is now vilified as a religious leader and denunciation of the Dalai Lama has been required as a test of loyalty. As the Chinese government has come to recognize the depth of Tibetan discontent, and how widespread nationalist feelings are, they have become obsessed with loyalty. Propaganda has become more and more strident, and suspicion has extended to include more and more of the Tibetan population – not just monks and nuns. This has led to a climate of fear and coercion not seen since the days of the Cultural Revolution.

Some of the key documents of the Third Forum, as well as material documenting the subsequent implementation of that policy, have become available over the intervening years. There is an enormous amount of information on Chinese religious policy and its implementation available from government sources such as local newspapers and internal documents that have become available –as well as from reports of refugees. The policy of Western governments should reflect this information rather than relying on public reassurances from the Chinese government, guided tours offered to visiting dignitaries, and statements intended for foreign consumption.

A ban on the display of pictures of the Dalai Lama in public places was instituted in 1994. This was extended to include the display of all religious symbols in the homes of not just Party members, but all government workers and their families, who were required to allow