

# China claims right to select next Dalai Lama: Present Dalai Lama may find successor in India

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Against the backdrop of celebrations to mark the countdown to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Chinese government has angered religious- freedom activists by attempting to assert greater influence over the choice of a successor to the Dalai Lama.

“The so-called reincarnated living Buddha without government approval is illegal and invalid,” Beijing said in a 14-part order purporting to regulate the reincarnation of Tibet’s Buddhist leaders.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that their lamas are reincarnated from departed lamas dating back to the 12th century.

The August 3 order implements a provision that was put in place as part of the Chinese government’s 2005 regulations on religion, said Scott Flipse, a senior policy analyst at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

“The system of reincarnation is one of the core beliefs of the Tibetan religious tradition,” said Kate Saunders, spokesperson for the International Campaign for Tibet. “It is a source of deep resentment among Tibetans that an atheist state has claimed the legitimacy to preside over a centuries-old religious practice.”

The Chinese government has involved itself previously in the theology of reincarnation. In 1995, Beijing rejected the Panchen Lama, believed to be Tibet’s second-highest spiritual leader, chosen by the exiled Dalai Lama.

Beijing later admitted to taking him to an undisclosed location. The Chinese government then ordained its own Panchen Lama. “That’s why they have their own Panchen Lama—he will play an important role in selecting the next Dalai Lama,” said Flipse.

The government rules state that “the process cannot be influenced by any group or individual from outside the country”—a likely reference to comments by the present Dalai Lama about possibly finding a successor in India or elsewhere. –*Religion News Service*