

By XINHUA

**E**very sunrise, life inside Drepung Monastery begins as it has for centuries — monks awaken, chant sutras, eat a light breakfast and begin their studies.

An asphalt road connects the monastery at the foot of a mountain with a western suburb of Lhasa, capital of Southwest China's Tibet autonomous region.

A world of golden sculptures and colorful murals hides behind white-washed walls. Ubiquitous wooden signage in Chinese and English provides direction for the endless streams of Buddhist pilgrims and foreign tourists.

Drepung — the Gelug School's largest monastery — has stood silent witness to events beyond its walls for 600 years.

Many monasteries in Tibet are centuries old and in need of repair. The government has spent more than 200 million yuan (\$30.8 million) to renovate Drepung over the past five years.

"The buildings were repaired, and a parking lot and nursing home were built," said Nyima, head of Drepung's management committee, who like many Tibetans only has one name.

Tibet started providing funds to monasteries in 2011. It supplied them with electricity and water, and built roads, bathhouses, greenhouses and waste treatment facilities.

Drepung Monastery also generates more than 10 million yuan a year from tickets, alms given by pilgrims, and earnings from shops and teahouses. Most of the money is used to maintain buildings and preserve artwork. The remainder supports the monks.

A management committee of government officials and monks has been set up in almost every monastery in Tibet. These enable officials to work with monks to manage the monasteries' affairs and solve any problems the monks may have.

Dradul came to live in Tsurpu Monastery 31 years ago. He enjoys high prestige in the Karma Kagyu School since he completed a three-year retreat of fully cloistered meditation.

Dradul is a member of the monastery's management committee and a political adviser for Tibet.

Committees have provided monks with medical and endowment insurance, and living allowances. They have maintained the buildings and improved infrastructure like roads.

Datri, a government-designated member of Drepung Monastery's committee, has helped to source more than 200,000 yuan in medical assistance for 39 monks, and has also helped 114 monks to apply for living allowances.

"These officials are like family members to us. We seek their help whenever we have a problem," said monk Ngawang Gonchen.

Religious studies and public service remain the main activities in monastic life.

The Tibet Buddhist Theological



Restoration work at Samye Temple nears completion. XINHUA

# Preserving Tibet's monasteries

Government funding ensures the protection of Buddhist buildings and artwork, and provides support to monks



Workers repaint the exterior walls of Potala Palace.

HE PENGLEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Institute, the autonomous region's first comprehensive Buddhism academy, has branches in 14 major monasteries.

Monks at the institute's branch at Drepung study sutras to acquire the highest academic degree in Tibetan Buddhism — *geshe lharampa* — which is similar to a doctorate.

More than 100 monks have received the degree in Tibet since 2005.

"Those monks who study sutras

are the future of any monastery," said Ngawang Kunqing, head of the institute's Drepung branch. "So, it's important to take care of them."

Monks with excellent conduct and academic performance can study at the institute, which recruited its first batch of 150 monks in 2011.

"To acquire the highest degree isn't easy," said Ngawang Chupa, a sutra teacher from Ganden Monastery. It took him 32 years to obtain his *geshe lharampa*. He now teaches



A conservationist cleans a wall painting inside the Drepung Monastery.

CUI MENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

sutras to more than 100 monks in four classes.

Dharma assemblies are still the most important activity at monasteries.

Sera Monastery begins an assembly at 6 am on the anniversary of Buddha's birth, when more than 500 monks chant sutras together.

Monasteries — big and small — hold traditional ceremonies as they have for centuries on auspicious days of the Tibetan calendar.

Tsurphu Monastery stages 38 such ceremonies a year. Sera and Drepung monasteries hold even more.

Tibet hosts 1,787 religious-activity sites and more than 46,000 resident Buddhist monks and nuns, who offer on-site services such as weddings and funerals, an official survey shows.

"These services not only meet Tibetans' religious needs but also are the responsibility of the monks," said Dorje Tsering, from Xigaze city's religion bureau.