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## Tibet in the Zürcher Oberland

In 1961, Switzerland was the first European country to grant asylum to Tibetan refugees. Jacques and Henri Kuhn, the brothers who owned Kuhn Rikon in the late 1950s, once attended a conference by Mrs Sprüngli, a chocolate industrialist much taken with Tibet. When they heard about the sorry business of the Chinese invading Tibet, ransacking the temples, imprisoning the monks and driving out the population, they decided to help the Tibetans however they could - not by placing 'Free Tibet' stickers on the car or writing letters. Jacques Kuhn called the Red Cross and said they had plenty of free space in their employee lodgings. 'They also need a job', said the Red Cross. 'No problem, we'll hire them at the factory', answered the brothers. These Tibetan families have worked at the factory ever since. It has proved mutually beneficial, as industrial jobs in rural areas are not always easy to staff in Switzerland.

In their effort to help the families come to terms with the loss of their homeland and the totally alien culture they were now confronted with, the Kuhn brothers and Peter Lindegger, then director of the home for Tibetan people in Rikon, turned to H.H. the Dalai Lama for advice.

H.H. emphasized the importance of monasteries for Tibetan people and sent an abbot and four learned monks from India to Rikon in 1967. Their work soon came to be regarded as a blessing among the community of Tibetan refugees in Switzerland, which had, in the meantime, grown significantly. Recognizing this, the Kuhn brothers decided to construct a Tibetan monastery in Switzerland, an idea already voiced by Tony Hagen, a delegate of the ICRC, in the early 1960s. The "Tibet Institute Rikon" foundation was thus established.

The monastic Tibet Institute was consecrated on the 9th of

November 1968 by the two leading teachers of H.H. the Dalai Lama. The solemn ceremony was attended and followed with great interest by the Tibetan community in Switzerland. At present the monastic community at the Tibet Institute comprises 8 Tibetan monks.



The Tibet Institute in Rikon

The monastery is presided over by the fifth abbot in the monastery's 40 years of existence, appointed by H.H. the Dalai Lama in 2010.

Since 2007 the monastic community comprises representatives of all four great traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

The monks administer to the needs of their fellow countrymen in many ways: They provide spiritual guidance during sickness and death, as well as advice in other difficult circumstances, perform religious ceremonies during the Tibetan festivities, teach Buddhist philosophy and the Tibetan language to Tibetans, also to youth and children and maintain close contacts with Tibetan organizations in Switzerland.

The monks convey their knowledge of Tibetan culture and religion also to interested western and other non-Tibetan people. This is achieved mainly through teaching activities organized by the Tibet Institute as well as by lectures at external institutions and dialogue with students and scholars.

There is a large and growing interest in Tibet and Buddhism in the West. The Tibet Institute promotes the understanding of Ti-

betan culture, both in the general public and at a scientific level, in a variety of ways. These comprise the organisation of public events, the maintenance of a library, issuing its own publications, supporting students and scientists, maintaining contacts with related institutions and public relations. Moreover, the Tibet Institute exposes Tibetan monks and nuns to western scientific culture within its project "Science meets Dharma".

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