Current State of Affairs in Tibet: Reasons?

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Summary

“Current State of Affairs in Tibet: Reasons?” is the second in the series of programmes organised by the Foundation for Non-violent Alternatives (FNVA), meant to study issues of common concerns to India, China and Tibet. The first in the series was “Relevance of Tibet in the Emerging Regional Situation” held in January, 2011.

The main purpose in organising such public discussions is to place new information and generate fresh analysis and approach amongst Indian opinion makers regarding the country’s interest vis-a-vis Tibet and China, because it is in India’s national interest that New Delhi looks afresh at its policy on Tibet and ensures the issue of Tibet is resolved soon and peacefully, our endeavours are towards this end.

In the wake of the many self-immolations taking in place in different parts of Tibet, we at FNVA thought it necessary to examine possible reasons for such tragic happenings, by inviting experts with deep insights into Chinese policies as well those who have experienced impacts of such policies first hand. This conference brought fresh information, new insights and possible ways to a resolution of the current situation and highlighted India’s specific role in the Tibet issue. This conference discussed China’s current policies in Tibet, situation inside Tibet since 2008, a non-violent approach to win over the Chinese to Tibet’s story and the security of Tibetans living in exile and the shift of the Tibet movement westward.

The panelists presented incisive analysis on the factors perceived globally as well as China’s Tibet policy seen in practice. The experts analysed the policies as implemented in Tibet starting with the Seventeen-Point Agreement which is widely believed to have laid the foundation for the “one country, two systems” model, with its “high degree of autonomy,” which has been applied in Hong Kong and Macau but never applied in Tibet. The PRC government refuses to apply the Hong Kong model in Tibet.

It was observed that the 1982 PRC Constitution seemed to offer greater local autonomy, which includes the power, subject to higher approval, to enact “regulations on the exercise of autonomy and other separate regulations in light of the political, economic and cultural characteristics.” However, none of the PRC’s five autonomous regions, Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, and Ningxia, have ever received approval for such basic regulations on the exercise of autonomy to be implemented. The word ‘autonomy’ thus loses its intent and meaning with many curbs and restrictions imposed in every aspect of life- education, culture, religion, freedom of expression and use of their language etc.
In addition, political structures existing in minority areas makes such areas susceptible to top-down central administrative control that further limits autonomy. A 2007 report by Minority Rights Group International and Human Rights in China highlights the centralisation of power in the top leadership of the CCP; Chinese dominance of CCP leadership in minority areas, including Chinese officials from the center always holding the top CCP post, and the lack of real power at the local level. Of particular concern is a CCP rule that bars party members from practicing Tibetan Buddhism and a new rule to ensure cadres withdraw their kids from Tibetan schools in India. The most disturbing news however has been the formal claim by the atheist Chinese government to choose the next reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other leading lamas. This made His Holiness to issue His formal statement making clear plans for reincarnation, thus disputing any Chinese official role in this process.

A ‘visible and punitive’ security regime has been set in place under which new military bases, were established; security in the border areas were stepped up resulting in the drop of about 70% annual refugees from Tibet to Nepal; Public Serving Police Stations have been equipped with digital surveillance gadgets and duty staff round the clock who are ready to respond to any sign of unrest within minutes. One hundred and thirty five of these units were set up in Lhasa in late 2011 alone and their numbers are being further extended.

Another major step introduced and implemented forcefully was to resort to re-education. A public education campaign for Tibetans has been launched, to be used as a means of punishment for lay and monk protesters alike. Private Tibetan Schools have been forced to close down and Tibetan language and culture are not tolerated in the Tibetan Autonomous Regions. In short, virtually any expression of Tibetan Identity is to be branded ‘reactionary.”

India’s unresponsive role even though detrimental to its own interest is also perceived, to a great extent, as a major contributory factor to the adoption of China’s repressive policy in Tibet. Observers thus find that human right violations continue in this region with impunity and there is no impact of international pressure not even that of UN’s declarations.

Use of derogatory adjectives for the Dalai Lama, one of the tallest and much respected leader of the World today have also added insult to injury.

The continued application of the cultural revolution tenets, under which there is no place for religion; denial of right to expression and language; income disparity vis-a-vis Han Chinese are also substantive factors adding to the discontentment of Tibetans which is reflected in the March incident and other protests in 2008 and now in self-immolations.

Panelists and those who spoke from the audience impressed that a ‘re look’ of India’s Tibet Policy is much required.
The conference was chaired by Prof. Siddiq Wahid, former Vice Chancellor of Islamic University of Science and Technology in Kashmir. Prior to that he was the Maharaja Gulab Singh Chair Professor at the University of Jammu. He also taught at Harvard University in the Department of Inner Asian and Altaic Studies.

The papers presented at this conference have been compiled for your reference.

FNVA records its grateful thanks to each author and participant.

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May 2012, New Delhi
Great Wall of Stability: the State’s Longer Term Response to the 2008 Uprising

By Matthew Akester

Matthew Akester is an independent researcher in Tibetan history, based in the Himalayan region. He has done years of informal field research in various parts of Tibet, and worked as consultant for Tibet Information Network, Tibet Heritage Fund, Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center and Human Rights Watch. Research interests include history of Lhasa, history of occupied Tibet and history of central Tibet’s monuments. He has published several books, translations and research articles, and contributed to many more in English, French and Tibetan.

The March 2008 uprising, like previous Tibetan uprisings, was a major turning point in relations between the state and its Tibetan subjects. I will not dwell on the events here, except to note some key factors. They represented an important departure from previous protests since 1987 in the sense that there was a high degree of lay involvement and a high incidence of protest in rural areas; that after the initial spark in Lhasa, the movement took off in areas of eastern Tibet outside the TAR, and especially Amdo, which had not seen mass street protest against Chinese rule for many decades; as in many other popular protests around the world in the 21st century, the availability of mobile communications technology significantly empowered protestors to coordinate with each other and with the outside world.

The state’s response was an immediate resort to overwhelming force and intimidation, the intensive deployment of security forces in all affected areas, mass arrests (thousands) and the systematic use of extraordinary violence against detainees, followed by harsh sentencing (hundreds) and intensification of the already intense surveillance. On the other hand, the state made its own extensive use of mass communications to characterise the protests in official media as “the 3.14 incident”, an ethnic riot in Lhasa, and to stir up an ultra-nationalist backlash through the internet. Naturally, it also sealed off Tibet to outsiders and stepped up policing of electronic communications.

I suggest that this response was conditioned by the basic reality that since the introduction of fairly extreme assimilationist policies in the early 1990s (in the aftermath
of 1989), the CCP has left itself no tools to cope with Tibetan dissent but force and intimidation. Through zero tolerance policies on control of religion and culture especially, and a security dominated agenda incapable of trusting and allowing leeway to Tibetan cadres and influential figures, the party has effectively given up on the quest for a degree of political legitimacy, and attempts to quell dissent through a combination of intensive security management on one hand, and economic largesse on the other.

Compliance with this regime is largely performative, and the effectiveness of the strategy depends a great deal on the management of appearances. Because Tibetans have no voice, no means of expression or organisation, public protest has exceptional potency. If protest can be pre-empted and intimidated, or prevented from gaining wider attention where it does occur, the regime can claim to domestic and international audiences that all is well in Tibet, and that is a priority.

Thus the 2008 protests upset this strategy by obliging the authorities to make the security regime visible and punitive. Security forces were deployed in the tens of thousands in affected areas, and are still there now, four years later. In the absence of any softer means of quelling dissent, the state lacks the confidence to withdraw them. Large new military bases were constructed in places like Ngaba and Kanze that have seen persistent unrest. Tibetan folklore speaks of soldiers changing into tracksuits and hiding their guns in shoulder bags during occasional visits to such places by higher officials or managed groups of journalists. Monasteries, towns and villages where incidents of protest took place in 2008 and since are routinely blockaded by security forces, who then remain in the area, manning checkpoints along main roads, conducting armed patrols and practicing martial arts or target practice to send a message to the inhabitants.

Presence of security forces in the border region was also stepped up to the point that annual refugee flow from Tibet to Nepal dropped by about 70%, and remained at that level since. Given the state’s longstanding and insistent security concerns, we might find it surprising that this did not happen earlier. I cannot go into this here, my point is just that since 2008, China is well on the way to cutting off refugee flow altogether.

Inside Tibet, emphasis has been placed on controls of movement and, as everywhere it seems, but more so, the extensive use of electronic surveillance. There is concern over managing the ‘floating population’ in urban areas, and moving people back to their places of origin wherever possible, especially monks attending monasteries outside their home areas for higher studies. These measures are particularly intense in Lhasa, which remains the symbolic centre of statist triumph and popular dissent, and where the continued presence of large numbers of armed security forces on the streets presents the regime with an image problem. The latest solution to this problem seems to be the construction of Public Service Police Stations: these are kerbside cubicles equipped with
digital surveillance equipment where small numbers of duty staff keep round-the-clock watch on a patch of city neighbourhood, ready to respond to any sign of unrest within minutes. One hundred and thirty-five of these units were set up in Lhasa (which is still a very small city by Chinese standards) in late 2011, and they are now being extended to major towns across the region.

**Re-education**

Beyond security crackdown, the immediate response of the state was the resort to re-education. This too has revealed the retrogressive nature of China’s rule in its colonies vis-a-vis the mainland, and the absence of more nuanced channels of communication between the state and its subjects. The idea is simply that if people are protesting, it is because they have not been sufficiently exposed to the state’s ideological message. Re-education campaigns are most noticeably conducted in monasteries, where they have often provoked visible confrontation, but they are also routinely conducted in schools at all levels, and used to reinvigorate and indeed test the loyalty of government and party officials at the lower levels. In the aftermath of March 2008, reeducation was reintroduced for the general public as well, some what of a throwback to the Maoist era.

Local governments in all Tibetan areas appear to have been given quotas for conducting reeducation in Socialist ideology and law, the evils of the old society and the benefits of Socialism, ‘Scientific Development’ etc. at township and village level public meetings, which are ongoing. This often takes the form of screening ‘patriotic’ films, or adapting quasi-populist patriotic campaigns from Mainland China. It also involves classes for ordinary residents held by local neighbourhood committees at which attendance is monitored and points given based on performance. Primary school parents have to attend school meetings on patriotic education and students are given homework about these issues which parents must be available to help with. Re-education campaigns frequently require participants to submit written pledges of loyalty to the PRC state and denunciations of the Dalai Lama before completion.

A recent initiative of this type is a public education campaign for Tibetans on ‘remembering the kindness of the Party’ involving the distribution (and thus compulsory display) of a picture of CCP leaders. One million have been distributed in TAR so far.

According to a Tibet Daily report the campaign presents eight aspects of reflection on the Party’s great kindness: consider the clothing worn by oneself and those around one, the great difference between the old and new society, the beneficiary of that change, and the source of that benefit; likewise consider food, housing, transport, technological progress, education, medical care and a transformed society in which the masses are the masters.

Re-education is now reportedly being used again as a means of punishment for lay protestors as well as monks. The Kirti monks in exile reported that a large group of
mostly older people who attempted to prevent the mass deportation of monks in April 2011 were detained and taken for reeducation. Earlier this year, Tibetans who travelled to Nepal legally and were suspected of sneaking into India to attend the Kalachakra Puja in Bodh Gaya were rounded up on return and subjected to weeks of internment for reeducation. Then for example, students at the Ngaba prefecture upper middle school who went on hunger strike from March 17 2011 in sympathy with the suicide of Kirti monk Phuntsok and the situation of the Ngaba people, were confined to the school premises, had their mobile phones confiscated and internet access cut, and were forbidden from making outside contact. Around April 22, the students’ textbooks and other reading matter were checked by government officials, and any books not endorsed by the government were confiscated and burned. Students were warned that they are not allowed to possess any book without an official stamp of approval. These are not isolated incidents.

More seriously, one of the punitive measures taken soon after March 2008 was the closure of private Tibetan schools. Private schools offering Tibetan language and culture have not been tolerated in TAR (with a few exceptions), but became popular in eastern provinces as a response to the perceived dysfunction and unsuitability of state schools in rural areas. Many were run by monasteries, giving primary education to local kids. Almost all were closed down in 2008-9, often on flimsy pretexts.

Media, Propaganda and smashing rumours

Another aspect of managing the information environment is of course the propagation of official media. This is now a global priority for the regime, with state subsidies for broadcast media breaking all previous records, but again, in the colonies we see it in an intensified form. In a speech to the propaganda bureau on June 2, 2008, then party secretary Zhang Qingli said:

“This is the time to draw conclusions from what we have learned from the 3.14 incident and from the first phase of suppression of the disturbances… The main responsibility of TARPB is to persuade and guide all Tibetans in the right political direction and to provide correct information to outsiders. Furthermore, to use state power to ensure that outsiders do not get access to state secrets, and to more effectively convince all Tibetans to accept the government’s authority unconditionally”.

This means greater dissemination of more sophisticated media products, increased availability of hardware like TV sets and satellite dishes in rural area, as well as denying access to foreign media (such as Tibetan language TV and radio broadcasts produced in
exile). In a speech to media workers in Lhasa in January this year, party secretary Chen Quanguo told them:

“…. let the Party and central government's voice and image be seen and heard, and the voice and image of the Dalai clique not be heard and not be seen”

ensuring the absolute security of Tibet's ideological realm and cultural realm.

Despite the growing sophistication of official media, the thinking behind this smacks of unreconstructed Maoist cynicism: people will believe what they are told, if it is loud enough and consistent enough. In the globalised 21st century, China is still attempting to seal off Tibet and Xinjiang to ideological influences from the outside world, and apparently managing quite well, despite using methods and approaches that seem to us crude and heavy handed in the extreme. This is not simply a matter of policing the internet.

Announcing a new campaign to ‘smash rumour-mongering and pernicious views’ in November 2008, then propaganda bureau chief Cai Yuying:

“…..the focus of the campaign in our region is the struggle against infiltration by the Dalai Clique in the ideological sphere, by eliminating and cracking down on nationality cultural products with the nature of politically separatist reactionary views which mislead the public and incite the separation of nationalities, and developing effective ways of guaranteeing long term ideological security at the same time as the cultural market flourishes”.

‘Rumour-mongering’ is a Chinese Communist term for sotto voce forms of dissent. The policing of ‘cultural goods’ means that having banned pop songs, photos or ringtones on one’s mobile phone is a ground for arrest and imprisonment. And it is not just explicitly political songs that are banned, but anything deemed to constitute promotion of Tibetan identity. In 2011, China banned a rap song about a popular Tibetan snack that had gone viral on Youtube.

The implication is that virtually any expression of Tibetan identity not sanctioned by the state is liable to be branded ‘reactionary’, and any comment on current affairs treated as ‘rumour-mongering’.

A few days later (Nov 8th), astonishingly harsh sentences (ranging from 8 years to life) were announced for seven Lhasa people detained and charged with disseminating nationalist CDs and leaflets and providing information ‘concerning national security and interests to organisations outside China’ during 2008. Since it is most unlikely that any of
the accused were involved in any activity even remotely resembling espionage as that
term is understood outside the PRC, this case represents an alarming readiness on the
part of the Public Security and legal authorities to criminalise even the mildest forms of
dissent. This again was not an isolated case. A report compiled by the ICT in summer
2010 documented the arrests of over 50 singers, artists and other cultural figures, mostly
in eastern Tibet, over the past year.

Monastery Management

Clearly, the Party has taken the 2008 protests as a sign that its already extensive and
deply unpopular control of Tibet’s monasteries was insufficient. Consider this example
from Kanze, one of the most restive areas of Kham, where monks and nuns were
protesting in the marketplace almost daily through the spring of 2008. In June, the
prefecture issued orders for dealing with the situation:

Two: dealing strictly with troublemaking monasteries

1) Those monasteries with 10-30% of monks or nuns participating in disturbances
will be sealed off, searched, suspect persons detained according to law and any banned
items they have hidden handed over (to the authorities). All religious activities will be
suspended, inmates will be prohibited from leaving the premises, and they will be
cleaned up and rectified in the proper manner.

2) Monastery management committees with officials participating in disturbances
will be rectified in a timely manner, and in cases where an overt incident has occurred, or
where there are no suitable personnel available, the local government will depute
officials to assume control of management. During the period of cleansing and
rectification, the monastery’s financial control and all other management functions will
be suspended.

3) During the period of rectification, those monks or nuns who do not assist the
work of the committee, who do not agree to be registered and photographed, who leave
the monastery premises as they please and refuse to correct themselves despite repeated
reeducation, will be completely expelled from the monastery, will have their rights as
religious practitioners annulled, will be sent back to their native places, and their
residential cells will be demolished.

4) Monks and nuns at monasteries involved in disturbances must re-register, and
their cells in the monastery must be collectively numbered. The limit on the number of
monks or nuns allowed to join the monastery must be reduced in accordance with the
number who participated in the disturbances and the number expelled. Monks and
nuns who continue to profess Splittism, who covertly assist or participate
in disturbances, or refuse to comply with re-education will be expelled
5) The management committees of monasteries that do not improve following rectification, where monks and nuns go out again and make trouble, will be investigated, and in due course, according to law, they will be removed from the list of religious institutions and closed down.

I have made the quotation as brief as possible, but rest assured that there is plenty more where this comes from. One point stands out in retrospect, the local government will depute officials to assume control of management, because that seems to be the import of the latest regulations announced in 2011. Ever since the freedom of religious belief policy was reinstated in the early 1980s, monasteries have theoretically been governed internally by elected groups of monks called ‘Democratic Management Committees’. In effect, these committees have very little power beyond implementing party policy and government regulations, and in addition, official work teams billeted in monasteries to conduct reeducation have been a constant feature for past 15 years, but still the principle of autonomy has been preserved until now.

A memorandum on “mechanisms to build long-term stability in Tibet” issued by the central leadership (notably Jia Qinglin, minister of public security) in December 2011 orders the TAR to have cadres stationed in the main monasteries to further strengthen and innovate monastery management.

Unelected ‘monastery management committees’ composed of officials are now being instituted in monasteries across TAR, and the process is already well underway in Qinghai province.

A parallel series of measures emphasising subsidised health care and old age pensions for monks and nuns was announced at the same time, but if you read about this in the international media, you may not have appreciated that only the politically reliable will be eligible for these benefits. It is part of a campaign to ‘select patriotic, law-abiding monks and nuns’ and award privileges to ‘harmonious and progressive monasteries’.

**Cadres in Villages**

Monasteries have always been in the frontline of “anti-splittist struggle”, but the widespread occurrence of rural protest in 2008 and since seems to have given China’s leaders a shock. During 2009, then party secretary Zhang Qingli spoke of rebuilding the party’s grassroots organisations to ensure close contact with the masses. Experimental policies were introduced, such as having one trained cadre per five households, who was supposed to communicate party policy to them…watch them, and deeply understand their political thoughts.

By early 2011, we started to see media coverage of a new campaign in TAR, known as ‘sending 1000 cadres to 100 villages’. The idea is that work teams from government departments will be stationed in villages across the region, apparently for a period of
three years, in order to strengthen grassroots party organisations, help with practical needs of rural masses, educate them about the kindness of the Party, and of course promote stability. This project is now in full swing and seems to be a huge undertaking. According to official figures, it involves over twenty thousand officials, at least a quarter of the total cadre force, stationed in five thousand villages, requiring an annual budget in billions of Yuan. They are supposed to live with the villagers, educate them and understand their problems. During the security alert that seized the region in the first three months of this year, they were also described by the TAR leadership as ‘holding the frontline of the anti-splitist struggle.’

Now, there has been a high level meeting on reviewing Tibet policy since the uprising, and that was the 5th Tibet Work Forum held in Beijing in January 2010. The decisions of this meeting that were made public are fairly nebulous, so it is difficult to establish a precise link with the subsequent policy of sending cadres to villages, but (apart from affirming existing policy - four adherences: party leadership, socialist system, nationality autonomy system, development with Chinese characteristics and Tibetan traits) the priorities emphasised were improving rural incomes and living standards, and boosting provision of services and infrastructure in rural areas, so that ‘the masses feel the warmth of the Party’. I do not want to suggest that this concern for rural development is entirely bogus, but ‘stability’ is as usual the main concern here, and physically sending large sections of the government to live with the masses looks like the response of a regime with plenty of resources but few effective political tools to build legitimacy.

Finally, just a couple of remarks on the bigger picture: I don’t think it is controversial to suggest that security agencies and the military have tightened their already tight grip on Tibet policy since 2008, while the central party leadership has at the same time tried to emphasise development initiatives for the enrichment of the rural masses. Outside observers like me, with no insight into the opaque workings of the political system, cannot pretend to offer analysis of how policy is made. What we might say is that it seems possible to discern tensions running through the system between the central and regional governments, and between security management and image management. But basically, ever since the introduction of the present policy of ‘development and stability’ in the early 1990s, following the suppression of the 1989 democracy movement, it has not really been possible to discern substantive differences over Tibet policy within the Communist Party, and that remains the case today.
Tibet and China’s ‘National Minority’ Policies

By Michael C. Davis

Michael C. Davis is a Professor in the University of Hong Kong, Faculty of Law. This article is a revised version of a paper he delivered at a conference on ‘Contested Terrain: China’s Periphery and International Relations in Asia. The event was sponsored by the Foreign Policy Research Institute and the Reserve Officers Association in Washington, D.C. on November 4, 2011.

Abstract: China’s hardline and repressive policies have often stood in the way of its acceptance on the international stage. This legacy has nowhere been more evident than with respect to its national minority policies applied in Tibet. While China long ago in the 1951 17-point Agreement agreed to provide autonomy to Tibetans it has never delivered on this promise, offering repression and assimilation instead. In nearly every diplomatic outing, as was especially evident in the lead up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, China’s Tibet policies have been an issue. With the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the 2008 Tibetan Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People China surely has excellent guidance for a more humane policy to meet Tibetan concerns. With reference to its historical legacy and international standards, this paper encourages China to embrace such policy reform.

China has recently taken to labeling claims to peripheral territory as “core interest,” as if such labeling might eliminate any competing claims. While the past year has most notably seen the extension of such designation to regions beyond China’s current control in the East and South China seas, Beijing has long taken such aggressive posture regarding occupied areas along its Western borders—especially in Tibet and the Uyghur areas of present-day Xinjiang. Each of these areas shares the status of being the homeland of a distinctive nationality with a separate language, culture and history. Both were occupied by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) soon after its
founding. While the Tibetan and Uyghur areas share in common aggressive and dismissive Chinese national minority policies and laws, their distinctive history and analytical posture make the coverage of one case, Tibet, a fruitful vehicle for exploring the implications of such nationality policies in the border regions more generally. After decades of Chinese posturing over foreign criticism and discussions with the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan case offers a telling example with deep implications for Chinese foreign policy and assessing China’s rise. The Tibet issue has been most directly of concern to China’s immediate neighbor, India, but has also been a long-standing foreign policy concern in both the United States and Europe.

Superficially, the positions publicly taken by the Tibetan leadership in exile and the Chinese government appear to overlap considerably. ¹ The Dharamsala-based Government-in-Exile, under the Dalai Lama and its newly elected Kalon Tripa or Prime Minister, has long sought a renewed agreement granting Tibet genuine autonomy under the Chinese constitution. Proposals in this regard were formally submitted to the Chinese Government in the 2008 Tibetan Memorandum of Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People.² As discussed below, the Chinese Government has likewise claimed to offer autonomy under its national minority laws. Such autonomy was first promised in respect to Tibet under a Seventeen-point Agreement reached between the PRC and the Dalai Lama in 1951.³

While China has since extended this autonomy promise in much more limited form to fifty-five designated national minorities, the Tibetan case of an historic nation on China’s border has remained distinctive, as the only “national minority” with which the PRC has entered a bilateral agreement, promising a high degree of autonomy under an indigenous form of self-rule. The Tibet case shares only with the Uyghur case the status of a border nationality with historically distinct identity occupying a substantial portion of the territory currently ruled by the PRC.⁴ However, even the Uyghur do not possess a comparable agreement with the PRC government. The Seventeen-Point Agreement is widely believed to be the precursor to the “one country, two systems” model, with its “high degree of autonomy” now applied in Hong Kong and Macau, though the PRC government refuses to apply such Hong Kong model in Tibet. China’s designation of fifty-five national minorities may aim at watering down the distinctive status and consequent obligations to the Tibetan people. Except for the Tibetans, Uyghur and Mongols, most minority nationalities are well within historically occupied Chinese

¹ Warren W. Smith, Jr. sees the two sides position as irreconcilable, as the central issue for Tibetans is the maintenance of Tibetan national identity and for the Chinese is to extinguish it. Warren W. Smith, Jr. China’s Tibet: Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People,” Issued During the Eighth Sino- Tibetan Meeting, Nov. 4, 2008 (hereinafter “Tibetan Memorandum”). See also “Summary of the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People,” Dharamsala, India, Nov. 16, 2008.
³ Tibetan areas currently occupied by the PRC make up roughly one-quarter of the present PRC. The other border nationality with substantial historical territory are the Mongols, though they have been reduced to a small minority in their region.
Assessing Chinese public pronouncements and policies in light of international practices and standards may shed light on the current impasse and suggest possible alternatives going forward. This article addresses these Chinese policies and pronouncements in four parts: first, to set the tone, the stridency of China’s recent public statements in the shadow of the 2008 Tibetan uprising and the Beijing Olympics; second, historical policies and current practice regarding the claimed provision of autonomy in Tibet; third, international standards regarding similarly situated indigenous populations; and fourth, recommendations regarding both Chinese policies and international foreign policy responses.

These recommendations will suggest the usefulness of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework and recommend the 2008 Tibetan Memorandum as a negotiating document that approximates these international standards. That recommendation will encourage a Chinese path that embodies the same spirit of inventiveness that it employed in creating the “one country, two systems” model now applied in Hong Kong and Macau and proposed for Taiwan. Such approach would enable China to shape a hybrid Tibetan solution that achieves the genuine autonomy embraced by the Tibetan Memorandum. The present analysis will not question the Tibetan exile government’s formal stance on seeking autonomy versus independence, as this is a question with both substantive and strategic implications for Tibetans to decide.

A China that employs its rising power to repress indigenous and other internal populations and to intimidate its neighbors cannot help but pay an international price in suspicion and criticism for such aggressive stance. In this sense, Tibet has always been part of a larger policy concern that stretches beyond border security and internal resources. For China, seeing Tibet in limited security terms has been costly. With China’s rise—and increasing global reach and potential—this price can only increase. In this sense, a viable solution to the Tibet problem may contribute to the effort to address wider peripheral concerns beyond Tibet, including even the Uyghur case. In moving forward in this regard China may also acquire a gentler less threatening face in its other international endeavors, reducing concerns currently associated with China’s rise. Since the Chinese Government has rejected suggestions for a more moderate Tibet stance, realization of such policy objectives is likely to require international diplomatic engagement along similar policy lines for some time to come.

**The Current Impasse: China’s Reaction to Recent Tibetan Disturbances and Discussions**

The March 2008 Tibetan uprising, the subsequent Chinese crackdown and the international protests that followed the Olympic torch attracted considerable international concern, embarrassing Chinese officials as they prepared to host the 2008
Beijing Olympics. Beijing faced considerable international pressure to meet with the Dalai Lama’s representatives and resolve this long-standing dispute. 

Though Chinese officials quickly moved into damage control, their subsequent actions and statements raise doubt about their intentions. The approach taken seemed aimed at putting out the immediate fire until the Olympics had passed and then bringing the Tibet problem under firm control. This mode of proceeding has long plagued Chinese policies in its periphery and has long attracted skepticism about its intentions in areas it identifies as core interests. Chinese officials quickly held an informal meeting with the Dalai Lama’s representatives in Shenzhen near Hong Kong in May of 2008 and scheduled the seventh and eighth rounds in their ongoing formal dialogue to begin in July and late October that year, a time line just sufficient to get past the Beijing Olympics.

While international leaders and diplomats held out hope for substantive Sino-Tibetan dialogue, the marching orders for Chinese representatives were clearly more limited. They merely reiterated China’s long-standing official position that Sino-Tibetan “contacts and dialogues were about the Dalai Lama’s personal future, and not so-called "China-Tibet negotiation" or "dialogue between Han and Tibetan people." They insisted on three “stops” to: “stop activities aimed at splitting China, stop plotting and inciting violence and stop disrupting and sabotaging the Beijing Olympic Games.” This was later refined to “four non-supports”: “not to support activities to disturb the upcoming Beijing Olympic Games, not to support plots to fan violent criminal activities, not to support and concretely curb the violent terrorist activities of the "Tibetan Youth Congress" and not to support any argument and activity to seek "Tibet independence" and split the region from the country.” The exiled Tibetan leadership has long met these conditions, and there is no record of the moderate Tibetan Youth Congress engaging in terrorist activities.

Though their earlier efforts in the 1950s to win over the Dalai Lama’s support belie such claim, Chinese officials dismissively challenged the Dalai Lama’s credentials to represent the Tibetan people, insisting that he must speak to the central government as a “common person.” They launched vociferous personal attacks on the Dalai Lama, labeling him a “wolf in monk’s robes.” All branches of the exile Tibetan community were lumped together and castigated as the “Dalai clique.”

Though these Chinese arguments are generally viewed with disdain around the globe, few foreign leaders have been willing to publicly confront the Chinese stand. Most substantive research to challenge the Chinese official position has been limited to private academic work with

6 “Chinese official urges Dalai Lama to respond with sincerity after recent contact,” Xinhua, Beijing, July 6, 2008.
7 Ibid.
little official engagement.

In response to a Chinese request made at the July 2008 Sino-Tibetan meeting, the Dalai Lama’s representatives in early November presented a formal Tibetan “Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People” outlining their argument for autonomy under the Chinese Constitution. The Tibetan Memorandum sets forth Tibetan “aspirations” for genuine autonomy and self-government in eleven policy areas, including language, culture, religion, education, environmental protection, utilization of natural resources, economic development and trade, public health, internal public security, population migration and cultural, educational, and religious exchanges with other countries. Unfulfilled national ethnic autonomy policies enacted under Article 4 of the PRC Constitution already promise autonomy in nearly all of these areas. The exception may be those relating to immigration and external exchanges in the commercial and cultural areas, which appear instead to track policies similar to those applied under the PRC Constitution Article 31 “one country, two systems” formula.

There appears to be nothing in the law on national minority autonomy that would prohibit these extra protections in response to the unique local character, as allowed by the national minority law, discussed below. In the interest of self-government, the Tibetan Memorandum includes a specification that local laws within the scope of autonomy not be subject to central approval as is now required in minority areas under the Chinese national minority statute and that the terms of their agreement with the Central Government not be subject to the Central Government’s unilateral amendment. The Tibetans appear to recognize that too much Central oversight and manipulation has lead to the failure of the current autonomy policies. They further proposed to unify into one autonomous region the thirteen contiguous Tibetan areas that China has designated under its national minority autonomy laws. The Tibetan Memorandum acknowledges the continuing application of the Chinese socialist system within Tibet, though one may doubt whether that economic system persist in China today.

Finally, the Tibetan Memorandum acknowledges the authority of the National People’s Congress (NPC) and other organs of the Central Government and would accept application of the system of local people’s congresses with locally chosen representatives within the Tibetan autonomous area. The Tibetan Memorandum was presented as a starting position for further negotiation. These proposals track the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that China supported in the UN General Assembly.

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10Tibetan Memorandum, supra note 3.
The Chinese response was quick and harsh. In an early November 2008 Chinese State Council press conference, Mr. Zhu Weiqun of the United Front Works Department attacked the Tibetan position as essentially camouflage for independence. The accompanying State Council Address likened the Tibetan notion of “genuine autonomy” to the “high degree of autonomy” allowed Hong Kong. The Tibetans were accused of seeking “half-independence,” and “covert independence,” though no explanation is given why the same language applied to Hong Kong means only autonomy. The State Council Address further accuses the exiled Tibetans of “colluding with such dregs as ‘democracy activists,’ ‘falun’ (Falungong) elements’ and ‘Eastern Turkistan terrorists.’” The Tibetan proposal to gain control over immigration is likened to “ethnic cleansing.” The exile government is said to be a “small group of splittists.” The meetings were essentially damage control, with some international public relations objectives, mostly aimed at persuading the Dalai Lama to “give up his splitting activities.” The State Council Address declared, “We never discussed the so-called ‘Tibet issue’ and will ‘never make a concession.’” Demonstrating even greater insensitivity to Tibetan concerns, in January 2009 the PRC created a new holiday to celebrate the “liberation” of Tibet which they have labeled “Serfs Emancipation Day.”

After the State Council Address the Dalai Lama’s representative published a note responding to these various criticisms and emphasizing that the type of self-governing autonomy sought in the Tibetan Memorandum is consistent with both the PRC Constitution and the practice of autonomy around the world—that posed no risk to the sovereignty of the country. They emphasized that there was a difference of opinion on history and that this should be no “obstacle to seeking a mutually beneficial common future within the PRC.” The Tibetan exile movement also convened a large Special Meeting of the Tibetans in Diaspora in Dharamsala, India in mid-November, 2008 where Tibetans expressed doubts about Chinese intentions but resolved to continue efforts at achieving genuine autonomy under the Middle-Way approach. Presently, things remain at an impasse, with Chinese efforts to control opposition in Tibet and isolate the Dalai Lama continuing. Offering no concessions regarding the character of autonomy, the Chinese Government in its 2009 White Paper on Tibet claims that autonomy is already provided under existing national minority laws. This

11 Address at the Press Conference by the State Council Office, Beijing, Nov. 10, 2008 (hereinafter “State Council Address”) (address given by Mr. Zhu Weiqun, Executive Vice-Minister of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee). The United Front Work Department is responsible for national minority affairs.
14 Ibid., p. 3.
16 White Paper on “Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet” (hereinafter “2009 White Paper”), Information Office
essentially means no autonomy at all. In these discussions the Tibetan side, being the least empowered, has made the most concessions, including deference to Chinese demands regarding sovereignty. The quid pro quo for this concession is supposed to be “genuine autonomy” under a formula they have labeled the “Middle Way” approach. The Tibetan exile leaders clearly appreciate the relative weakness of their bargaining position. Their hope is that such autonomy will promote both democracy and human rights in Tibet. There is urgency to the Tibetan cause both as to ongoing repression and to secure their long-term survival. With increasing Chinese immigration into Tibet, Tibetans are concerned that the 1.3 billion Chinese may eventually swamp the 5.5 million Tibetans in the vast mountainous regions of Tibet, leaving them a minority in their own land. By some estimates this has already happened in the Tibetan cities. The spate of Tibetan self-immolations in 2011 and 2012 have added urgency to this impasse.

Historical Claims and Present Practice in Tibet

While the Dalai Lama has gone to great lengths to avoid a discussion of Sino-Tibetan history in his formal discussions with the Chinese Government, history has lurked in the background of nearly all Chinese claims. The Dalai Lama takes the view that agreement on history is not possible without misrepresentation, as he proclaims a willingness to work out an autonomy arrangement in the shadow of the present reality. China, on the other hand, has not been shy about reinterpreting history to justify present practice, especially when there are doubts about the legitimacy of its position. This has led it to advance a claim of ancient title and “liberation” with respect to Tibet that the Dalai Lama disputes. At a general level this dispute appears less a battle over the historical narrative than its interpretation. There are two parts to this dispute: historical title and present practice.

18 Interview with HH the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, India, Aug. 9, 2006.
Assessing the Historical Sino-Tibetan Relationship. Though Chinese officials are fond of repeating the above statement, a closer look reveals a more nuanced story and hardly one that would sufficiently justify present-day sovereignty. The general disrepute of imperial claims would alone call into question present-day sovereignty claims based on historical empire. But the factual record of the Tibetan case raises further question, as Chinese efforts at imperial conquest met Tibetan resistance for nearly a thousand years. This historical record does highlight the special character of the historical Sino-Tibetan relationship and may offer a yardstick by which to assess current autonomy obligations.

Imperial China often faced external threats on its western borders and attempted to neutralize these threats by conquering and assimilating its neighbors. Though Tibet was sometimes a target of such efforts, its remote mountain location made it less of a threat and inhibited Chinese efforts at conquest. After Tibet’s own imperial age during the Chinese Tang Dynasty, it rarely posed sufficient threat to justify a costly conquest and direct rule. Rather, a loose imperial association prevailed. It was only during the last Chinese dynasty, the Qing, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that military invasion and imperial occupation sometimes occurred. Even then Tibet was treated as a vassal state and part of China’s external empire subject to indirect rule. Eliot Sperling identifies China’s claim that Tibet was always an inseparable part of China as a late twentieth century invention.

Present-day Chinese accounts usually date China’s claimed incorporation of Tibet to the Mongol-ruled Yuan Dynasty (1270-1368). The Tibetan abbot Sakya Pandita is reported to have subordinated Tibet to the emerging Mongol Empire in 1247AD. With some initial Tibetan resistance, the Mongols invaded and establish administrative control in 1267. It was subsequent to this in 1270 that the Mongol King, Kubilai Khan, proclaimed the Yuan Dynasty in China. Even then China was administered separately from Tibet among the Mongol’s conquest.

Warren Smith describes a carefully calibrated diplomatic relationship from the Yuan Dynasty forward between China’s emperors and ruling Tibetan lamas. Imperial attempts at subordination would be matched with Tibetan resistance. In the Yuan Dynasty, leading Tibetan lamas served in a religious advisory role for the Mongol emperors—a
role characterized by the Tibetans as a Cho-yon or patron-priest relationship. During the succeeding Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) this relationship persisted, though the Ming court seemed to value Tibetan lamas more for their intermediary role in dealing with the still threatening Mongols. The succeeding Manchu dominated Qing Dynasty (1636-1910) featured the highest level of Chinese intervention and sometimes conquest in Tibet, though no serious incorporation of a Tibet that remained separate from China. Complex interplay and protocol would offer the emperor’s support for rule in Tibet by the Gelugpa Buddhist sect under the Dalai Lama. In the eighteenth century, the expanding Qing intruded more and more on Tibetan autonomy. By 1720, under the Emperor Kang Hsi, the Qing occupied and ruled Tibet, though the Qing garrison was withdrawn when he died in 1722. Such occupation was restored later and off and on in the decades to follow. During its occupations, to advance its efforts at indirect rule the Qing set in place a permanent government under a Tibetan Kashag or council. The Qing was also represented in Lhasa by its Amban. Qing control always involved at most indirect imperial rule, with central Tibet considered part of the Qing’s “exterior empire.”

From 1911 until the PRC occupation in 1950, Tibet was de facto independent. To justify their invasion and occupation, Chinese officials claim Tibet during this period was hopelessly feudal and savage. One doubts that feudal Tibet suffered from any worse conditions than its Asian neighbors. Commentators contest recent Chinese claims of systematic savagery and serfdom. Even Melvyn Goldstein, who is often cited in Chinese official accounts, notes that Tibetan serfs “were not necessarily downtrodden.” It seemed that Tibet had a traditional land-based economy with hierarchical social structures that are not uncommon in such systems. At this time, Tibet also began the first stages of political modernization. With a council or cabinet called the Kashag in place since the late Qing Dynasty, Tibetans had in the 1860s introduced a national assembly or Tshongdu, which included representatives of Lhasa’s monasteries and secular officials. In recent Tibetan exile a form of liberal constitutional democracy has emerged, including universal suffrage in the exile community, a directly elected prime minister served by a cabinet or Kashag, a Supreme Justice Commission, and an elected Assembly of Tibetan People’s Deputies. The Dalai Lama has recently withdrawn from temporal rule in favor of the elected Prime Minister, a situation he promises will persist

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29 Ibid. pp. 111-112. The title “Dalai Lama” was introduced during the Ming Dynasty by a Mongol leader Altan Khan, designating Sonam Gyatso, the abbot of the Drepung monastery, the third Dalai Lama. Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, eds. Authenticating Tibet, supra, note 21, pp. 35-36. The word Dalai derives from the Mongolian word Tale, for oceans.  
32 See Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, eds. Authenticating Tibet (comments of Robert Barnett), supra note 21, at pp. 293-298.  
34 See Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, eds. Authenticating Tibet (comments of Katia Buffetrille), supra note 21, pp. 81-84.  
in some agreed form in an autonomous Tibet.\textsuperscript{37}

The period of de facto independence also witnessed the introduction of the language of modern statehood and sovereignty. In negotiations with Tibet and British India, Republican Chinese officials generally acknowledged that Tibet had a special status with only Chinese indirect rule. In negotiations at Shimla, India in 1913, the British advanced a notion, similar to that which China had accepted for Mongolia, of inner and outer Tibet. This distinguished a largely independent central Tibet under Chinese suzerainty from a subordinate Eastern Tibet under Chinese sovereignty. All parties initialed the Shimla Convention, accepting this view, though the Chinese ultimately did not ratify it, as they were dissatisfied with the stipulated boundary between inner and outer Tibet.\textsuperscript{38} In various other negotiations in the 1930s, China acknowledged Tibet’s high degree of autonomy under nominal Chinese rule. The United States and Britain early on tended to characterize Chinese imperial territorial claims as suzerainty.\textsuperscript{39}

As the Dalai Lama explains it, when the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) invaded Tibet in 1951, he faced an offer he could not refuse for Tibet to become part of the PRC.\textsuperscript{40} With weak international support to do other wise, he accepted a Seventeen-Point Agreement “on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet.”\textsuperscript{41} The Chinese, at the time, appeared more concerned with gaining territory and resisting outside imperialism than with saving Tibetans from feudal poverty. As the only treaty-like agreement with any of its purported national minorities, the 17-point agreement acknowledged the special status of Tibet and promised autonomy under Tibet’s indigenous system of self-rule. Early on China failed to keep these special commitments, pushing Tibet toward “democratic reform.”

Chafing under the thumb of their new cadre rulers in March of 1959 Tibetans rebelled and the Dalai Lama fled Tibet.\textsuperscript{42} This brought to an end centuries of Tibetan self-rule. On March 28, 1959, after the Dalai Lama’s departure, China dismissed the local government and for the first time in history established direct Chinese rule over all of Tibet. The Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region (PCTAR), which had been established under the Dalai Lama’s earlier formal chairmanship, was declared

\textsuperscript{38} Goldstein, \textit{supra}, note 34, pp. 68-80, 832-841.
\textsuperscript{39} “(A) distinctive element of the feudal suzerainty relationship is that the suzerain holds the source of the governmental authority of the vassal state whose ruler he grants the right to exercise the authority autonomously,” Michael C. van Walt van Praag, \textit{The Status of Tibet} (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 105-06. \textit{See also} United States Policy Concerning the Legal Status of Tibet, 1942-1956, Historical Division, Department of State, Research Project No. 403, November, 1957, US National Archives 793B.boo/11-157.
\textsuperscript{41} Seventeen-point Agreement, \textit{supra} note 4. \textit{See} Goldstein, \textit{supra} note 34, p. 759-772.
\textsuperscript{42} Dalai Lama, \textit{supra} note 41, p. 136.
the official governing body.43 In September 1965 the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was proclaimed under the first People’s Congress of the TAR. Under the national minority laws, Tibet no longer enjoys a special status, being lumped together with fifty-five designated “national minorities.”

The PRC’s Practice of Autonomy in Tibet. China’s national minority autonomy policies applied in Tibet and throughout the country are promulgated in the current 1982 PRC Constitution44 and in the Law on Regional National Autonomy (LRNA) passed in 1984, and revised in 2001.45 Article 4 of PRC Constitution provides that, “Regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of minority nationalities live in concentrated communities.” Under LRNA Article 15 autonomous areas carry out their role “under the unified leadership of the State Council and shall be subordinate to it.” The LRNA promises national minority autonomy in respect of language, education, political representation, administrative appointments, local economic and financial policies, and the use of local natural resources. Effective exercise of such promised autonomy is in doubt. These laws are narrowly applied and allow substantial intrusion of central control and the national political system into local affairs. They contrast sharply with the flexible approach under PRC Constitution Article 31, as applied in Hong Kong and Macau.

The 1982 PRC Constitution, passed during China’s liberalizing phase, appears to offer enhanced local autonomy. Along with the LRNA, it includes the power, subject to higher approval, to enact “regulations on the exercise of autonomy (zizhi tiaoli) and other separate regulations (danxing tiaoli) in light of the political, economic and cultural characteristics.”46 “Regulations on the exercise of autonomy” have the status of a sub-constitution or basic law and it is expected that one such regulation will be enacted in each autonomous area.47 The required higher approval must typically come from the next higher level of government, for autonomous regions the Central Government and for autonomous prefectures and counties the provincial government. None of the PRC’s five autonomous regions: Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, and Ningxia, have received approval for such basic regulation on the exercise of autonomy. The one attempt at enacting a basic regulation on the exercise of autonomy in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) went through 15 drafts and was eventually abandoned without being submitted to the State Council.48 Various autonomous prefectures and counties have received approval from provincial governments for basic autonomy laws

43 Preparatory Committee for the Tibetan Autonomous Region (PCTAR), Established in April 1956.
46 PRC Constitution (1982), supra note 45, Article 116; LRNA, supra note 47, Article 19. Such provision is repeated in Article 66 of the Legislative Law.
47 Ibid., p. 10
that largely track the LRNA content. Autonomous regions and other areas have enacted many “separate regulations.” A third category would be ordinary laws unrelated to autonomy, which do not require such higher approval.

Chinese communism and Communist Party (CCP) control offers an even more daunting challenge to autonomy. This is especially evident in the legislative drafting process. Chunli Xia describes a complex system of CCP oversight of the legislative drafting process with numerous approvals required from various CCP party committees at each stage of the process. Given the center’s control over the CCP and the fact that top party officials always come from the center there is little room for local legislative initiative. The imposition is further bolstered by the party’s Marxist ideology, which denigrates Tibetan claims by denying the essential character of China’s policies in Tibet. The CCP characterizes the 1950 occupation of Tibet as “liberation” and the institution of CCP rule as “democratic reform.” This Marxist logic views colonialism as only a product of capitalist exploitation. Since China never reached the stage of full capitalist development it could not have colonized Tibet. Instead, China “liberated” the exploited classes of Tibet under a Chinese “internal multinational system,” in a “common program” of local autonomous rule. Autonomy was merely a temporary solution on the path to ultimate assimilation. The CCP clearly envisioned that “the local Government of Tibet should carry out “reform” voluntarily.” Such a system was, in fact, imposed after the 1959 uprising when the Dalai Lama fled.

After the 1959 Tibetan uprising, all forms of traditional political structure were quickly eliminated. The indigenous form of government promised in the 1951 Seventeen-point Agreement did not survive. The replication of the national political structures in minority areas has made them highly susceptible to top-down central administrative control. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was an especially severe period of hardline class struggle and massive cultural destruction across China. In the early 1980s, after Chinese Premier Hu Yaobang observed especially dire conditions in Tibet, a remorseful China briefly pursued a policy of liberalization. As Tibetans became more outspoken in the slightly more liberal environment this was followed by even greater repression and martial law, as hardliners in the Beijing regime concluded that liberalization had

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49 Separate regulations are made by autonomous legislative bodies on specific topics such as language, marriage, family planning, etc.
51 Ibid.
52 See Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, eds. Authenticating Tibet (comments by Thierry Dodin), supra note 21, pp. 191-196.
53 Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee (1949).
54 Warren W. Smith, jr., China’s Tibet, supra note 2, at 233. Chinese officials cite advanced technology and modern communications to justify direct rule. Interview with Liu Hongji, supra note 17.
encouraged greater resistance. In the recent decade, a policy of cracking down on political support for the Dalai Lama has included so-called “patriotic education” and greater emphasis on economic development under which Chinese immigration has been favored.  

Chinese repression has taken many forms, including military occupation and crackdowns, the sacking and razing of Buddhist monasteries, suppression of religion, coerced “reeducation” of monks and nuns, imprisonment of dissidents, and the forced relocation of rural dwellers and herders to more populated areas. Monks and nuns have especially resisted coercion to renounce the Dalai Lama. Popular dissent and rebellion famously arose in 1959, 1989 and 2008. Increased tensions in Tibet, most recently evident in a rash of more than thirty self-immolations over the past two years, bear out the continued Tibetan frustration with Chinese policies.

Both the Chinese government and its critics have issued reports on Chinese policies in Tibet. The March 2009 Chinese White Paper on “Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet” highlights favorable statistics on Tibetan participation in autonomous governance, including: Tibetans and other minorities holding 94 percent of the seats in local people’s congresses; a 96.4 percent voter turnout rate for participation in the electoral process; Tibetan and other ethnic minority deputies holding 77 percent of the staff positions in state organs at the regional, prefectural and county levels; and a claim of Tibetan occupation of the top positions of various autonomous governments and standing committees. At the time of the report 12 of the 20 deputies from the TAR to the National People’s Congress were Tibetan. The report states that the Tibetan language is taught in the schools, and widely used along with the Chinese language—though critics worry this is mostly at the primary level.

Even that has come under threat, with recent reports of Tibetan demonstrations against reported Chinese efforts in Qinghai autonomous areas to replace Tibetan with Chinese as the primary language of instruction in primary schools. The Chinese report also emphasizes China’s contribution to Tibet’s economic development, though critics worry that these policies benefit Chinese more than Tibetans. The bulk of the report


57 Interview with President, Gu Chu Sun Movement of Tibet (Association of former Political Prisoners), Dharamsala, Aug. 3, 2006; Interview of “Singing Nun” Renchen Choeky, Dharamsala, Aug. 4, 2006 (Sentenced to prison for demonstrating in protest in Lhasa; and sentenced again while in prison when 18 nuns produced a singing recording that was smuggled out)


60 See Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, eds. Authenticating Tibet (comments by Amy Heller and Anne-Marie Blondeau), supra note 21, p. 235.


62 Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, eds., Authenticating Tibet, supra, note 21 (comments by Andrew M. Fischer), pp. 250-277. Fischer worries that the current subsidies tends to benefit Chinese officials and large Chinese construction companies, while creating dependency—what he calls the boomerang effect. Ibid., p. 269. Fischer sees greater productivity if Tibetans are left to traditional herding and farming. Ibid., p. 275.
emphasizes China’s “liberation” of Tibet and its “democratic reform.” Though the liberation was stated to be from “foreign imperial forces,” the text of the report lays greater empirical emphasis on liberation from Tibetans themselves, accusing the traditional Tibetan elites of horrific feudal practices. No attempt is made to explain why China should assume the role of modernizing Tibet. The claimed democratic reform is not much explained, overlooking China’s own lack of democratic reform.

A 1997 report of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) notes that while “Tibetans are in positions of nominal authority, they are often shadowed by more powerful Chinese officials” and that “every local organ is shadowed by a CCP committee or leading group.” A 2007 report by Minority Rights Group International and Human Rights in China highlights several deficiencies, including the centralization of power in the top leadership of the CCP; the above concerns with the law-making process, Chinese dominance of CCP leadership in minority areas, including Chinese officials from the center always holding the top CCP post, and the lack of real power at the local level. Of particular concern for the deeply religious Tibetan nationality, is a CCP rule that bars party members from practicing Tibetan Buddhism and a recently added rule that cadres withdraw their children from Tibetan schools in India. Particularly puzzling has been the formal claim by the avowedly atheist Chinese government to choose the next reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and other leading lamas, which recently moved the Dalai Lama to issue his own formal statement making clear his own plans for reincarnation or emanation challenging any Chinese official role in this.

**International Legal Standards**

Self-determination of peoples is grounded in the UN Charter and in the international human rights covenants, though these sources offer little guidance on who are the peoples entitled to such right. International law generally distinguishes between external and internal rights of self-determination. When the external right, which is thought to include a right of secession, is effectively denied, justified or not, then the internal right

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65 Kristine Kwok, “Officials to be sacked for sending their children to ‘Dalai Lama Schools,’” South China Morning Post, July 18, 2006.
may be all that survives.\textsuperscript{68} This typically involves some notion of autonomy, though autonomy has not enjoyed very strong protection in international law.\textsuperscript{69} It may be argued, however, that in two circumstances autonomy becomes effectively internationalized: 1) when it is the consequence of treaty arrangements or 2) when it arises out of the denial of rights of self-determination, especially of indigenous peoples. The Tibet case includes both. The Seventeen-point Agreement reflects a treaty arrangement and Tibetans appear to be indigenous people or at least similarly situated.

For indigenous populations, human rights, self-determination and autonomy acquired greater international traction in the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.\textsuperscript{70} The Declaration provides the substantive content of internal autonomy. While UN declarations are generally not binding as such, the nearly unanimous passage (143 to 4 with eleven abstentions) of the Indigenous People’s Declaration along with its purported declaration of existing customary law may strengthen its binding effect.\textsuperscript{71} The Chinese government voted for the declaration but claims there are no indigenous peoples in China,\textsuperscript{72} claiming 5,000 years of national unity and harmony with minorities living on their own lands.\textsuperscript{73}

While the UN Declaration does not define “indigenous peoples,” it does specify that they exist throughout the world.\textsuperscript{74} A separate 1986 UN study “China Concerned with Protection of Indigenous Peoples’ Rights,” defined indigenous peoples as “communities, [...] which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing[...]”.\textsuperscript{75} It also emphasized that such communities consider themselves distinct from the dominant sector. The Tibetan people, even in China’s own accounts in the 2009 White Paper, clearly satisfy these criteria of distinctiveness as to language, culture and history. Whatever its legal status, this UN Declaration can clearly serve as a useful guide to measure Chinese policies discussed above.

The UN Declaration’s preliminary articles emphasize demilitarization of indigenous lands; the right of indigenous people to freely determine their relationship with states; that treaties, agreements and constructive arrangements with states are matters of

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. Opposing the Declaration were the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.
\textsuperscript{74} There are thought to be over 370 million indigenous people worldwide. “UN adopts declaration on rights for indigenous peoples worldwide,” International Herald Tribune, Sept. 13, 2007.
international concern; “the fundamental importance of the right of self-determination of all peoples, by virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development;” and that the right to exercise self-determination in conformity with international law shall not be denied.

The operative articles of the Declaration guarantee indigenous peoples: the right of self-determination; 76 the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs; 77 the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies, including access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites and control of their ceremonial objects; 78 the right to participate in decision making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures; 79 the right to be consulted and prior consent through their own representative institutions before implementing state legislative and administrative measures; 80 and the right to recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements. At the same time they are guaranteed the rights protected by the various human rights treaties and covenants. China’s imposition of top-down CCP control under its national political system and its weak protection of basic human rights clearly falls greatly short of these standards of indigenous self-rule.

A Recommended Path Forward

The spirit of self-determination articulated above, in conjunction with Tibet’s centuries-long tradition of self-rule and autonomy, clearly calls for substantive change in China’s Tibet policy. That same spirit suggests that the Tibetan indigenous leadership be consulted over the policy direction. The Tibetan Memorandum offers initial guidance. The good news is that the Chinese Constitution already offers the tools in various articles on autonomy for a flexible approach to the Tibet question. A flexible approach that fully implements China’s national minority laws, supplemented where appropriate with guarantees already applied under the “one country, two systems” formula, can surely be judged acceptable within China’s constitutional framework.

Foreign ministries concerned with this issue should encourage precisely this approach using the Tibetan Memorandum as a point of takeoff. While China has traditionally objected to foreign interference, it clearly places great stock in foreign approval of its newly claimed status as a responsible leading state. Recognition of China’s status surely warrants a reciprocal right to comment on what should be expected of a leading country in respect to basic human rights. China’s leading trading partners, such as the United

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76 Indigenous People’s Declaration, supra note 71, Article 3.
77 Ibid., Article 4.
78 Ibid., Article 12.
79 Ibid., Article 18.
80 Ibid., Article 19.
States and Europe should use their good offices to emphasize this connection.

While the PRC Government has long taken a strident view that is hyper-concerned that relaxing its Tibet polices will threaten national security, this view seems unfounded. A confident and secure Tibetan community within China would surely offer China greater security than a distraught and downtrodden community effectively under military occupation. In the Dalai Lama, the Chinese Government faces a reasonable and influential interlocutor who may assist them greatly to address their security concerns with a workable model that would, on his agreement, be accepted by both the Tibetan and international communities. This would be especially true with a model based on the standards articulated in the UN Declaration, for which the Tibetan Memorandum is a reasonably close fit. At the same time a workable model in Tibet would offer a very useful model for addressing the Xinjiang and other peripheral problems, each with attention to the unique local character in an asymmetric association.

In some respects, China’s own political reforms nationwide appear to be held hostage to its concerns about losing control over its peripheral areas. A strong repressive center is seemingly thought necessary to hold the country together. Given peripheral tensions and little success at achieving the internal political reform conducive to China’s continuing development a change of approach seems warranted. As the Hong Kong model is sometimes advanced as a possible solution to the Taiwan problem, an agreeable Tibet model could be offered as a solution in Xinjiang and possibly Inner Mongolia. In addition to freeing up the path to domestic reform, these arrangements may likewise eliminate some of China’s stickiest foreign policy challenges. The Hong Kong model was the product of a confident and inventive Chinese leadership. That inventiveness is again sorely needed. At present Tibet and Taiwan are problems at the heart of nearly every foreign policy outing. More magnanimous gestures by China to address these problems may open the door to China normalizing its international relations and achieving more solid international standing. While the offer of genuine autonomy in a gentler China may prove an attractive option to China’s disputed peripheral communities, it would also go a long way toward easing concerns about China’s rise in the world at large.
The Art of Nonviolence
Winning China Over to Tibet’s Story

By Thupten Samphel

With the possible exception of the island nation of Taiwan, never in its more than 5,000 years of history has China’s imperial throne met a match like that of Tibet. The Mongols, on whose mighty imperial enterprise communist China lays its claim of legitimacy to rule the minorities, are now a people divided in two. Chinese settlers’ demographic assault on the traditional grazing grounds of the Mongols goes on at a ferocious pace. The Manchus, another nomadic people, who whipped China into its present imperial shape and size, are so totally assimilated into the mainstream that they are indistinguishable from the Chinese who they ruled from 1664 to 1911. Today at the last count only about twelve ageing Manchus can speak the language. The Uighurs of Eastern Turkestan, or what the Chinese call Xinjiang, are politically and militarily suppressed and, like other minorities, demographically flooded by Chinese settlers.

Tibet grapples with all these problems faced by China’s other minorities. The Tibetans, like the Mongols and Uighurs, bristle under Beijing’s subjugation and have been doing so for these last sixty years. However, in all three regions, China has not succeeded in either snuffing out their separate identities or winning their loyalty. On the contrary, resistance, violently in Eastern Turkestan and non-violently in Inner Mongolia and Tibet, is growing.

The recent prolonged and peaceful protests in Inner Mongolia, the outburst of violence in Eastern Turkestan and the fiery death of two monks in eastern Tibet are clear indication that the minorities in these regions are deeply unhappy with the nature of
Beijing's brutal rule over them.

The Mongols of Inner Mongolia, the Uighurs of Eastern Turkestan and Tibetans in Tibet are served by active exile communities in the free world. In the case of the Tibetans, they are served by an organized and productive community, mainly based in India, that has preserved the values of the Tibetan Buddhist civilization and successfully promote these in the larger world. The Dalai Lama has empowered and truly liberated his people by persuading them to elect their political leader. This event will resonate far beyond the Tibetan people and into the hearts and minds of the Chinese who will one day want the same gift of democracy to decide who they want their leaders to be. At the same time the Tibetan exiles maintain and run an education system that produces successive generation of teachers, doctors, writers and social activists and professionals in other vital fields. They are all committed soldiers in Tibet's non-violent struggle for freedom. In this freedom struggle, the Tibetans are supported by the selfless efforts of thousands of non-Tibetans, Indians and others across continents, who form the worldwide Tibet support group movement. For these reasons the Tibet movement constitutes one of the most dynamic, sustained and non-violent struggles of our times.

But all these efforts by the Tibetans on both sides of the Himalayas pale in significance and import to their decision to reach out to the Chinese people. The success of this new effort will decide the political fate of Tibet.

However, the decision to reach out to the Chinese people on the issue of Tibet threw up several serious challenges. One is the sheer scale of China's teeming masses. As one seasoned Western diplomat observed in disbelief at this Tibetan audacity to do what he perceived as the impossible, “There's 1.3 billion Chinese! Best of luck!” The other is the nature of the Chinese state. Ever since its founding in 1949, the People's Republic of China underwent tumultuous changes, from party-induced political upheaval to state-guided economic transformation. Overseeing all this is China's communist party, determined at all cost to keep the country under its vigilant rule. In such a circumstance, even if the six million Tibetans were able to convince all the 1.3 billion Chinese about the true nature of their non-violent struggle and win their support, would the opinion of the 1.3 billion Chinese in a one-party state matter in shaping Beijing's Tibet policy?

Then there is an even bigger challenge. These days, in the age of the Internet, the greatest obstacle to the Tibetan exiles' effort to outreach to the Chinese people is the Great Firewall. Like the Great Wall of China, this wall erected by Beijing in cyberspace is meant to prevent barbarian thoughts from infecting the health and harmony of the Middle Kingdom.

Like all rulers of one-party states, China's communist leaders know that knowledge will set the Chinese people free. These challenges either individually or collectively make the Tibetan effort to reach out to the Chinese a horrendous task. Accomplishing this task is made well- neigh impossible by the fact that the resources, both in manpower and otherwise, available to the exile Tibetan community are limited. Whereas the political,
economic, commercial and media reach of China both domestically and internationally is enormous and growing at a ferocious pace.

Though these challenges are compelling enough, for some Chinese there is a bigger problem. They consider the Tibetan exiles’ incorporation of the pacifist doctrine of non-violence into their struggle against a highly militarized Chinese state as “mosquitoes stinging a bull's horn.” Others, no less caustically, liken the Tibetan effort to “beating a dead yak to life.” Or, as Beijing is condescendingly fond of pointing out, “a fly flapping its wings against the king of mountains.” The latest Chinese government description of the Tibetan exile community is “Dalai and his scattered monkeys.”

Whether as mosquitoes, or a dead yak or a lone fly or scattered monkeys, the Tibetan effort to reach out to the Chinese is producing results. These results are slow but they are inexorable. This is as much a credit to the Dalai Lama’s unshakable conviction in the power of human persuasion as to the keen sense of justice of millions of Chinese, who themselves suffer the same boot-heel treatment from their rulers.

Chinese expression of sympathy and support for the Tibetan people came when it was most needed. The spring of 2008 saw Tibet swept away by a wave of prolonged protests that called for freedom in Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama. China responded by massive force. On 15 May that year about three hundred and sixty eight Chinese intellectuals signed an open letter to the Chinese government (google search by typing twelve suggestions for dealing with the Tibetan situation). This letter, signed by Liu Xiaobo, the 2010 Nobel laureate, among many other Chinese luminaries, urged the official Chinese media to stop

“stirring up inter-ethnic animosity and aggravating an already tense situation. This is extremely detrimental to the long-term goal of safeguarding national unity. We call for such propaganda to be stopped.”

The letter added,

“We support the Dalai Lama’s appeal for peace, and hope that the ethnic conflict can be dealt with according to the principles of goodwill, peace, and nonviolence. We condemn any violent act against innocent people, strongly urge the Chinese government to stop the violent suppression, and appeal to the Tibetan people likewise not to engage in violent activities.”

To explain both the violence meted out to the largely peaceful Tibetan protesters and to shirk responsibility for China’s appalling misrule in Tibet, Wen Jiabao, the premier, went
on air with these words,

“There is sufficient evidence to prove this incident was organized, premeditated, and meticulously orchestrated by the Dalai clique.”

The challenge to ascertain the accuracy of the Chinese premier’s accusation was taken up by Gongmeng, which translates into English as the Open Constitution Initiative, also known as the Gongmeng Law Research Centre, an organization based in Beijing. It consists of lawyers and academics who advocate the rule of law and greater constitutional protections in the People's Republic of China. It was established in 2003 by Xu Zhiyong and other lawyers.

Gongmeng sent four researchers throughout Tibet to find out the causes of the Tibetan people's discontent. In May 2009 it issued its findings (the report can be google searched by typing Gongmeng Tibet report). The report said that the causes of the Tibetan people's unhappiness lay within Tibet and not outside. It said that the Chinese government's hard line policy on Tibet threw up a new aristocracy of corrupt officials whose chief concern was the protection of their personal interests and not the formulation and the implementation of just governance. The report presented to the Chinese government a nine-point recommendation. The first of these recommendations urged the Chinese government to “Earnestly listen to the voices of ordinary Tibetans and on the basis of respecting and protecting each of the Tibetan people's rights and interests, adjust policy and thinking in Tibetan areas to formulate development policies which are suited to the characteristics of Tibetan areas, and which accord with the wishes of the Tibetan people.”

On 17 July 2009, Beijing declared Gongmeng “illegal” and shut down the law firm. The same month one of its founding members, Xu Zhiyong, was arrested for “tax evasion” and released on bail a month later.

To further intensify the Tibetan efforts to reach out to the Chinese, the Dalai Lama himself started a conversation on the Internet with the Chinese people. Moderated by Wang Lixiong, a well-known Chinese writer on Tibet, the Dalai Lama tweeted with Chinese netizens in May and July 2010, answering questions on his successor, his approach to resolve the issue of Tibet with Beijing, the nature of autonomy for Tibet, whether Tibetans would stick to non-violence after his demise and relations between Tibetans and Chinese. According to the Radio Free Asia's broadcast of this event on 21 July 2010, “A total of 1,543 netizens submitted 326 questions with a further 12,771 votes submitted online to select a final 10 questions.”

The same broadcast, quoting Yu Jie, the author of Wen Jiabao: China's Best Actor, a book, banned in China but published in Hong Kong and critical of the Chinese prime minister, assesses the impact of this interaction between the Tibetan leader and the
Chinese. “Beijing-based writer Yu Jie said Tuesday that the Dalai Lama’s online dialogue will be very helpful in addressing false propaganda created to attack his image.

“The scale of the dialogue is not that big, just several thousand [participants]. However, I believe its influence and impact are getting bigger and bigger,” Yu said.

“One day it will defeat all distorted propaganda on the Dalai Lama and truth in Tibet, which has been overwhelmingly portrayed in the newspaper, on the radio, on television, and via the Internet controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.”

Regardless of Beijing's determined efforts to control and supervise the Internet traffic, the Internet has empowered the Tibetan people.

Lui Xiaobo, the imprisoned Nobel laureate, considers the Internet God's gift to the Chinese people. Likewise for Tibetans the Internet has exponentially increased their capacity to reach out to the Chinese people in order to tell their side of the story.

And the Chinese people are listening to the Tibetan story with increasing sympathy and understanding because the Tibetan effort to seek greater freedoms for Tibet embodies all the values which the Chinese people cherish but are denied to them: democracy, freedom, human dignity, tolerance, compromise and cultural diversity. These are the political attractions of exile Tibet for an increasing number of Chinese.

For a different group of Chinese there is another Tibetan attraction. This is Tibetan Buddhism. China today is roiled by sweeping economic and social changes. Communism, the ideological foundation of socialist and egalitarian China, lies in ruins except for the determined assertion of the Chinese communist party to its right to rule a hugely successful capitalist China. Communism as a discredited ideological force has created a spiritual vacuum and young Chinese are flocking to traditional beliefs like Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity and Buddhism or extreme nationalism to make senses of their lives and their rapidly changing society. Young and well-to-do Chinese are turning to Tibetan Buddhism, inviting Tibetan lamas to their homes, joining monasteries in Tibet and even coming to India to attend the teachings of the Dalai Lama.

The story of Chinese fascination with Tibetan Buddhism is told in a new book, Tragedy in Crimson: How the Dalai Lama Conquered the World but Lost the Battle with China, by Tim Johnson, a veteran reporter who had covered China for Knight-Riddler and McClatchy for six years from Beijing. One of the stories the book tells is about the Serthar Buddhist Academy, founded in eastern Tibet more than thirty years ago by the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, a charismatic and deeply venerated master both in Tibet and the outside world. In Tibetan the Serthar Buddhist Academy is known as Larung Gar, which invokes a vast nomadic encampment that downplays its monastic character
to circumvent China’s restrictions on the construction of new monasteries. At its height the academy attracted over ten thousand students from all over Tibet, China and South-East Asia. At least about 1000 students were Chinese, mostly from Mainland China.

Unfortunately, China in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s suffered from the Falun Gong fear which led to the organisation’s uprooting from the country. Just as the Chinese Communist Party feared Falun Gong which at one point is said to have more than seventy million members, more than that of the Chinese Communist Party, the provincial authorities in Sichuan grew nervous about the potential for trouble from such a large body of people outside Party control. In July 2001, the authorities declared the academy “illegal.” Soon after, demolition squads descended upon the academy and by their own admission the authorities said 1,875 dwellings were razed to the ground. All students not native to the region were expelled.

Tim Johnson visited Larung Valley in which the academy is located after the sustained protests that swept Tibet in the spring and summer of 2008. Despite the mauling the Serthar Buddhist Academy received from the provincial authorities nearly a decade ago, what the author saw in Larung Valley astonished him.

“While thousands of monks and nuns were forced to leave Serthar in 2001, many climbed over the mountains and returned to the academy later. The population has swollen now to an even higher number … Thousands of simple rustic cabins climbed the slopes as far as the eye could see … A few minutes later, lower in the valley, several thousand nuns flooded out of wooden buildings at the end of classes … I’d never been to a Tibetan Buddhist center with so many ethnic Han Chinese. I wondered what was different here. While clearly some of the Chinese were from Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, many were from the Chinese mainland.”

The presence of a large body of Chinese students at the academy certainly indicates that Tibet’s political struggle with Beijing does not deter ordinary Chinese men and women from embracing and benefiting from the universal values embedded in the Tibetan Buddhist culture.

The Tibetan ability to tell their story effectively to the Chinese might determine the outcome of the story itself. Joseph S. Nye, the coiner of the “soft power” concept, explains this in his new book, The Future of Power,

“On an increasing number of issues in the 21st century, war is not the ultimate arbiter… Outcomes are shaped not merely by whose army wins but also by whose story wins.”
In articulating this view, Joseph Nye echoes the military precepts of Sun Tzu, who lived around the same time as Confucius. In his classic text on military strategy, The Art of War, ancient China’s master military strategist reveals this piece of gem,

Ultimate excellence lies
Not winning
Every battle
But defeating the enemy
Without ever fighting.
China’s Policies in Tibet

By Srikanth Kondapalli

China’s policies in the ethnic minority areas have come under focus in the last six decades as the government started implementing various measures designed to usher in stability and development in these areas. As China’s hard power is rising in the recent period with its economy becoming the second largest in the world and its military expanding modernisation programme, nevertheless, due to the ethnic unrest in Tibet, Xinjiang and other areas, the soft power of China is taking a dip in the international community. This discrepancy between hard and soft power of China has larger implications domestically as well as internationally for the coming decades.

China and Minority Rights

From the Chinese Government’s point of view, the issue of minority rights is significant as 55 of its 56 ethnic groups live in nearly two-thirds of China’s territory, although the ethnic minorities constitute a less significant proportion of the entire population – with the Han nationality constituting overwhelming proportion of the population. Another factor that overweighs Beijing’s considerations on this issue is that the ethnic minority areas are connected to the neighbouring states and hence acquire international dimensions.

The minority policies of China - evolving since the 1930s - were enshrined in the four Constitutions enacted in 1954, 1975, 1978 and 1982. They all suggest that the right to retain certain marriage patterns and traditions of conducting one’s personal life is guaranteed. Right to engage in various forms of religious practices which are otherwise considered “superstitious” have also been guaranteed in the Constitution. In the course of the last six decades, however, the “socialist” project in the ethnic minority areas came in clash with the Constitutional rights and contributed to tensions between the government and the ethnic minorities. Specifically these are related to education which
has become controversial especially in the light of Lhakar Movement where the Tibetans are trying to assert their identity. This issue had been highlighted with the Tibetan resistance to the Mandarin Chinese being taught in the schools and colleges in Tibet and other ethnic minority areas.

Secondly, China’s minority policy is intertwined with the issue of finances. As a part of the “developmental” issue, Beijing had been pumping money and material in the ethnic minority areas since 1949 and with the China rise recently, such resources’ flow have expanded by leaps and bounds – mainly in the dual use infrastructure development projects such as water-conservancy, power plants, roads, railways, airfields, fiber optic networks, etc. Nearly 95 per cent of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)’s budget is subsidized by the Central Government in Beijing. The Western Development Campaign of the last decade has been labelled as a key project by Beijing in improving infrastructure – and seen by many in the ethnic minorities as consolidating China’s rule over far-flung areas.

Thirdly, culture is one of the major problems in China’s minority policies. One of the aspects of Strasbourg proposals in 1988 relate to the cultural autonomy in addition to the religious autonomy that the Dalai Lama had suggested then. So in relation to the Chinese government, the minority rights have been enshrined in various places and policy directives. One of the things that had become controversial is the religious policy of China. We can trace the historical roots of this issue from the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the Marxism-Leninism in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Mao Zedong Thought and other ideas. Mao mentioned about the “United Front” tactics with the ethnic minorities, including with that of the Tibetans, in formulating a “patriotic” political alliance and as part of the struggle the CCP waged against the Kuomintang and against the Japanese in 1930s and 1940s.

In the Common Programme of September 1949, Article 5 mentions about the freedom of thought, speech, publication, assembly, association, correspondence, residence, mobility, religious belief and demonstration. Subsequently, the four Constitutions of 1954, 1975, 1978 and 1982 mention about the minority rights positions in China. The 1975 and 1978 Constitutions took a leftist orientation – with the United Front tactics questioned. Li Weihan’s thesis on the “Five Characteristics of religion” is important and it is here that the “patriotic” mass associations and democratic reform movements were mentioned in the CCP literature.

In the 1960s, the Culture Revolution had the sixteen point decisions. While rejecting the United Front approach, these decisions suggested to the eradication of ‘four olds’ (old ideas, culture, customs and habits). During this period, campaigns were launched by the Red Guards and vitiated by the “work teams” sent to the ethnic minority areas. Post 1978 reform programme saw the restoration of constitutional provisions, including
freedom of religious belief. The 1982 document mentions about the government supervision of political education, action against unlawful activities, etc. With this modernisation aspects were initiated into Tibet.

Recognising ethnic minorities was an issue in the 1940s when groups enlisted themselves to be recognised by the Party/State. Although, for the Tibetans who constituted a significant ethnic minority (in terms of numbers, etc.) had no major problem in being recognised, the Chinese government was able to manipulate the official recognition policy specifically with those have lesser numbers in China. It is similar to what India had during the late 1980s regarding the reservation of backward communities and castes. Chinese government was able to manipulate on the lesser numbered minorities such as in Yunnan Province where some minorities are just about 2000-3000 people per community. This provides for overall leverage for the Central Government in co-opting minority regions especially in Xinjiang.

Another major feature is that while the four Constitutions as well as the Communist Party documents have mentioned about the danger of the great ‘Han Chauvinism’ and its negative consequences in ethnic minority areas, indeed, over a period of time due to the concerted pressure and propaganda of the Central government, alienation of the ethnic minorities and the rise of Han nationalism in the last more than two decades, Han domination in the minority areas are increasingly being questioned.

A related dynamic that is taking place in China is the population displacement. With the successive waves of Han migration due to the Western Development Campaign and other projects, most of the business sectors in Lhasa are run by the Han Chinese at present. Currently 90 per cent of the party positions are also occupied by the Han Chinese and this is the major grievance of the locals in terms of the implementation of the Chinese project of modernisation.

It is estimated that the average income of Uighurs, Tibetans and Mongols amount to one-fourth to one-third of income of the Han settlers and this reflects to one of the grievances of Tibetans in Tibet. It is also the religious reprisals that the Tibetans are concerned, especially in terms of Dalai Lama’s photograph being removed from all the monasteries as part of the political education campaign initiated in Tibet. One of the major themes of China in Tibet and other ethnic minority areas is the issue of assimilation and alienation. It can be said that the policies vis-à-vis integration and alienation or assimilation are at the roots of the tension in Tibet now.

One of the major policy setting institutions in Tibet by China is Tibet Forum Meetings. There were five major meetings that took place in the last two-three decades. The last one was held in January 2010. President Hu Jintao had been in-charge of the Tibet Forum Meetings with his interactions and interventions in shaping the Tibet related discussions at the National People’s Congress sessions. Vice President Xi Jinping, who is
expected to succeed Hu Jintao in October this year at the 18th CCP Congress had visited Tibet extensively in July last year and had met with a cross-section of Party officials, military, para-military and other segments. Xi took charge of Central Tibetan Work Committee from Jia Qinglin in July 2011, thus solidifying his position on Tibet. The Tibet Forum meetings emphasised on two points:

a. on stability and
b. development.

So the two projects on stability and development are crucial in the analysis of Chinese policies vis-à-vis Tibet.

Stability has been the watchword for China in Tibet for some time. The current construct of the Chinese discourse in Tibet is about the “three evils.” ‘Splittism’ is one of these “three evils” mentioned by China and it indicates that the Dalai Lama splitting the Motherland and any activity towards the internationalisation of Tibet is pounced upon by the Chinese government. Various White Papers issued by China had argued about the overcoming of “three evils” and on how China can rule over Tibet.

As a result of the implementation of China’s policies in Tibet, we have been witnessing an emerging civil war between the Tibetans and the Han nationals specifically the discontentment of the Tibetans increasing as reflected in the ‘March 14 Incident’ in Lhasa and other areas in 2008 as well as the recent above 30 self-immolation attempts in the last two years. Rising Han protests were also reflected not only in Tibet but also in Los Angeles, London and Paris where the Han versus the Tibetan protests have been taking place specifically in the backdrop of the Beijing Olympics.

The Chinese entry into Tibet is through the military means and it is one major factor in Chinese control over Tibet. After the military’s march in 1950, Tibet had been militarised with an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 troops, para-military or militia in Chengdu and Lanzhou military regions. In the aftermath of Sichuan earthquake, some additional troops are being deployed and these are now trying to stabilise the situation in Kirti Monastery and in other monasteries in Kham areas. There are also nuclear as well as ballistic missile programmes active in Yunnan military district as well as in Amdo (Qinghai).

The second aspect of Chinese policies in Tibet are reflected in development – expressed in the recent launch of the ‘Western Development Campaign’ - in terms of investments in infrastructure so as to integrate Tibet more effectively into the Chinese control.

In the 12th Five-Year Plan, China is planning to invest about USD 50 billion as compared with the nearly USD 30 billion in the Eleventh-Five Year Plan on various
infrastructure projects like highways, railways, roadways, airfield construction, etc. The Tibetan railway alone would carry about 3 million tons of cargo and 800,000 visitors a year which would pump out nearly 18,000 mines and 17 minerals into mainland China in terms of exploitation. Five main air fields are located in TAR. Telecommunication lines are also improving so that the Chinese would have more effective control over Tibet.

Another aspect as part of ‘Western Development Campaign’ is the water resources being exploited extensively and includes the South to North River diversion projects have been initiated. According to the Chinese Ministry of Water Resources, there are total of nearly 45 billion cubic meters per year will be diverted over a length of nearly 3,700 kilometers. From the Indian point of view, western route which would be completed by 2050 is important. As a part of the Western Route, China intends to build a number of hydro-electricity projects – some with 48,000 MW projects (i.e. three times the current Three Gorges Dam) – at the Great Bend when Yarlung Zangpo enters India in Arunachal Pradesh into Brahmaputra and Siang Rivers. This project had become controversial as there has been some discussion about whether these are river-diversion projects or run-of-the-river projects.

The dam constructions in Tibet have direct impact on the neighbouring Southeast and South Asia. Countries like Myanmar, had cancelled a dam construction activity which China is undertaking. India has also raised the issue of these mega projects which affects the lower riparian environment. It is interesting to note that in the Wikileaks cables, the U.S political officer reported that the Dalai Lama emphasised on environment protection as the main issue for the Tibetans in the next 5-6 years rather than on the political agitation. So the dam construction project and glacier meltdown in Tibet has a major impact on the environment issues.

**Recent Protests and Concluding Remarks**

China had undertaken several measures in Tibet for stability and consolidation of its rule. There is a campaign for mobilizing the 20,000 Han Chinese sent to Tibet for campaigning “loving the motherland” and for publicizing the Chinese government policies. There have been nine rounds of talks between the Dalai Lama’s representatives and the United Front Work Department (UFWD) till January 9 2010. However, there was not much progress in the talks in terms of discussing about the self-autonomy or other subjects.

As mentioned above, the Chinese discourse emphasizes on stability and development. There is also the emergence of Han dominance in Tibet in terms of population displacement as well as the finance mainly from southern and south-eastern provinces like Guangdong. China’s economy is rising and it has reached number two in the world economy. However, one of the key problems for China is the disjuncture/depletion of
soft power as China faces questions related to its image in the international community. The Tibetan protests are intensifying as well as diversifying. The March 14 Incident in 2008 reflects to the application extensively of micro-blogs and ‘electronic guerrilla warfare’ by the Tibetans in Tibet. There has been immense diversification in the Tibetan protest movements in terms of current self-immolation attempts.

Another major consequence of China’s policies in Tibet include environment. Tibet is resource rich region on which neighbouring countries are dependent on its environment. China is now tapping most of these in terms of infrastructure projects and exporting back resources to the Mainland China. This is major problem confronting the neighbouring countries.
India, Tibet and the Tibetans:
A Troubled Road Ahead?

By Dibyesh Anand

Dibyesh Anand, Dr. - Reader (Associate Professor) in international relations at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Westminster University, London. He is the author of 'Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination', 'Tibet: A Victim of Geopolitics', 'Hindu Nationalism in India and Politics of Fear' and published numerous articles.

In 1959 when the Dalai Lama was forced into exile and tens of thousands of Tibetans followed him, India granted them asylum without any hesitation. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, fully aware that the asylum would antagonise People’s Republic of China and most likely destroy his vision of Sino-Indian cooperation, went ahead without any dilly-dallying. While the sheer force of Indian public and parliamentary opinion that was sympathetic to the suffering of the Tibetans was crucial, the main factor behind the decision was Nehru’s own sense of morality and responsibility. It was not a decision made out of guilt for having helped China extinguish all semblance of Tibet’s international identity through the 1954 Panch Sheel Agreement. In fact, as early as 1951, when there was a possibility that the Dalai Lama may reject the Seventeen Point Agreement converting Tibetan government into a local government under People’s Republic of China’s sovereignty, Nehru was open to the idea of granting asylum if asked. The Dalai Lama accepted the Agreement and returned to Lhasa commencing an eight-year period of uneasy accommodation. Nehru was clear that the recognition of Tibet as part of China did not imply being blind to the human tragedy taking place there. His decision to grant asylum in 1959 were not strategic but moral for in that period the dominant thinking was still in favour of working with China to maintain peace in Asia. Later in the autumn of 1959 when the Tibetans sought to raise the issue in the United Nations General Assembly, despite their strong reservations, Indians did not prevent the Dalai Lama from going ahead with it. Of course, once the 1962 Sino-Indian border war occurred, Indian attitude became even more supportive of Tibetans, though mostly covertly. This was more a matter of strategic convergence rather than political morality that lay behind the 1959 asylum decision.

More than half a century on, more than a hundred thousand Tibetans reside in India. Their dream of returning to their homeland is unrealised. Tibet has witnessed all forms
of resistance to the Chinese rule but in the last few decades, they have been mostly non-violent. Moral, political and geopolitical considerations and the overwhelming dominance of the Dalai Lama has ensured Tibetan commitment to non-violence and experimentation with forms of civil disobedience. However, the Chinese refusal to negotiate sincerely combined with their focus on demonisation of the Dalai Lama, securitisation of everyday life of Tibetans, and the repressive rule in Tibet have contributed to a new radicalisation amongst Tibetans. Recently, more than thirty Tibetans have immolated themselves calling for freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama.

During the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Summit in New Delhi in March 2011, a young Tibetan refugee Jamphel Yeshi immolated himself at Jantar Mantar and succumbed to his injuries a while later. This brought the reality of self-immolations closer to the exile Tibetans, Indians and the international media. More recently, another Tibetan man practiced a suicide protest through drowning in Kolkata. How did the Indian Government, parliamentarians, and public opinion react to this new phase in Tibetan tragedy? Mostly through silence and ignorance. The contrast with 1959 could not be greater. There is hardly any public and parliamentary pressure on the Indian government to persuade the Chinese Government to negotiate with the Dalai Lama. On the other hand, during the BRICS summit Delhi Police went about treating ‘Tibetan-looking’ individuals in the capital with suspicion, and restricted the freedom of movement and expression of hundreds of Tibetans. There was no outrage in India at this racist policing. How did this happen?

**British India’s Legacy**

Contrary to both the rhetoric of Nehru and others in 1950s that the ties between India and Tibet was special due to historic, cultural and religious factors and the expressions of the present Dalai Lama that the Tibetans relate to India as a ‘chela’ does to a ‘guru’, Tibet barely had any connection with mainland India and mainstream Indian civilisation for almost a millennium. It was the policies of frontier British officials (the so-called ‘Tibet cadre’ like Charles Bell, Basil Gould and Hugh Richardson) to re-orient Tibet toward India and away from China that had led to the discourse of historic Indo-Tibetan ties. The disappearance of Buddhism from India, the establishment of Muslim dynasties, and Tibet’s relations with empires based in China contributed to this. Border trade and religious connection were mostly with areas that were beyond the pale of mainland India. When the British East India Company for commercial reasons and with the hope of finding a route to enter China tried to approach Tibet in late 18th century, efforts came to a naught with the death of George Bogle and more intimate relation between Qing imperial court and Lhasa after the Gurkha invasion. In the 19th century, British India was established as a ‘jewel in the crown’ of British Empire but Tibet remained
mostly ‘unknown’ in the Western imagination. During the span of the 19th century, from an unknown land out of bounds to Europeans that mostly evoked curiosity but was thoroughly harmless, Tibet transformed into an important ‘buffer state’ in the British Indian imagination. Buffers are held to be weak entities that separate large empires jostling for influence and control and hence their friendliness or neutrality are not only desirable but held to be strategically vital. That the Tibetans saw themselves as not in-between greater empires but a unique people with their own empire was lost in this discourse of buffer. As the British played a ‘Great Game’ at the beginning of 20th century with the expanding Russian Empire in Central Asia and consolidated their hold over Himalayan entities such as Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and Jammu and Kashmir, Tibet’s status as a buffer that needed to be kept out of hostile foreign influence was consolidated. British invasion of Tibet under Youngusband in 1903-04 was meant to force Tibet to open itself up to the British. However, it was the Russians and not the Chinese that British saw as the primary hostile influence. Frontier issues were seen as insignificant at this time.

British now embarked upon a policy toward the status of Tibet that I have elsewhere called ‘strategic hypocrisy’ - recognising Chinese suzerainty and Tibetan autonomy but deciding the commitment according to the strategic, commercial and geopolitical interests of the time. The exact contour of this differed depending on the situation on the ground. For instance as the Chinese were awakened to the vulnerability of Tibet to British influence and consolidated their rule over Tibet in 1905-1911, British mostly avoided reminding the Chinese of the requirement for Tibetan autonomy. London had perceived Curzonian forward policy of which the Younghusband expedition was an illustration as unnecessary nuisance that potentially upset its relations with other great powers and compromised its interests in mainland China. When the Thirteenth Dalai Lama sought refuge in 1910 to escape the Chinese army, he was allowed to stay in Kalimpong but all his requests for assistance was rejected by the British as unnecessary burden. Britain had shown itself to have no interest or commitment in ensuring Tibetan autonomy; their only interest was to consolidate control over cis-Himalayan region and this they did through measures such as supporting the establishment of a hereditary monarchy in Bhutan that signed a treaty in 1910 putting the kingdom’s foreign policy under British control.

The overthrown of the Manchus, the end of the Qing Empire and the revolution in Mainland China provided an opportunity to the Tibetans to become free. They forced the Chinese army to withdraw and the Dalai Lama returned in 1912 to embark upon a period of de facto independence. The Dalai Lama made various efforts to transform Tibet into a modern nation- state and part of this was to explore options for diplomatic recognition. Treaty with Mongolia was the best example. British once again feared the Dalai Lama turning toward Russia for help and therefore wanted to ensure a status for Tibet that kept out all foreign powers except itself. British did not want Tibetan independence because that would open it up to other foreign powers too and thus
undermine exclusive British influence. Chinese, once again, were not seen as a hostile power and since the chaos in China was ensuring Tibet’s de facto independence, British were not overly worried. To preempt the Dalai Lama from looking toward anyone else other than the British for help, a conference was proposed to thrash out the contours of Sino-Tibetan relations, the Simla conference in 1913-1914. There was another major factor for British India - frontier. China’s ability to control Tibet without too much trouble and feelers to Tibetan-influenced peoples in the CIS-Himalayan regions in 1905-11 period was a reminder that buffers are fluid and hence cannot be taken for granted. Chinese armies’ activities to the north of Assam Himalayas before the 1911 revolution had alerted the British to the fact that Assam Himalayas populated by various tribes and Tibetanised and semi-Tibetanised communities had to be converted into British India in order to keep it as a buffer of the ‘uncivilised’ between Tibetan plateau and the Tea plantations and cultivated fields of Assam. British did not fear Tibetans and their ways of relating to the Assam Himalayas, but they now knew that Tibet’s status as a reliable buffer was in doubt if and when China would have resurgence. British knew that China resurgence and taking over Tibet was not a question of if but of when and therefore wanted to use the opportunity of the proposed Conference to deal with the frontier issue in addition to the status of Tibet.

Simla conference of 1913/14 was a failure. The main item there was the status of Tibet - the Tibetans insisted on independence and the Chinese on sovereignty even though China had no control over central Tibet and was fighting the Tibetan armies in the east. British proposed the division of Tibetan populated territory into two Tibet’s with different statuses. Outer Tibet, under the Dalai Lama’s government, which would accept nominal Chinese suzerainty but will be practically independent (Chinese suzerainty-Tibetan autonomy formula allowed this flexibility); and the Inner Tibet, that would remain under Chinese political control though the Dalai Lama’s role in religious affairs of the monasteries would be respected. During the Conference, the lines on the maps kept shifting as the Chinese and the Tibetan plenipotentiaries could not agree where to draw it. British compromise was still seen as favouring the Tibetan maximalist position. Given that the British interest at the time was mainly to re-inscribe the Tibetan state (‘Outer Tibet’ in the new formulation) as a buffer and not colonise it, what explains the British negotiators favouritism? Personal affinity and empathy of officials like Charles Bell toward the Tibetans is only part of the explanation. A primary reason for the British partiality under the guise of being an honest broker was a secret Anglo-Tibetan negotiation over Indo-Tibetan frontier. This negotiation was kept out of the eyes of Chinese plenipotentiary. It is the outcome of this secret negotiation - an agreed boundary on the map, called McMahon Line after the British plenipotentiary, that firmly put Assam Himalayas in British India - that later became the main legacy of the otherwise failed conference. The Assam Himalayas included the Tawang tract populated by Monpas who followed Tibetan Buddhism, paid taxes to the Tibetans and had amidst
themselves the large monastery in Tawang town that was firmly under the authority of Loseling college of the powerful Drepung monastery of Lhasa through the intermediary of Tsona dzong. That this agreement was overwhelmingly one-sided involving Tibetans losing their rights and territories but still managed to get the seal of all the powerful institutions of the Tibetan government including the Dalai lama, the Tsongdu and the three big monasteries indicates that Tibetans were promised a quid pro quo in another arena. That was not only British assurance of friendship, help with arming a modern Tibetan army, but also support for the Tibetan maximalist claim vis-a-vis China. So, we can understand the failure of Simla conference ostensibly over where to draw a line between Inner and Outer Tibet as connected to the British partiality toward Tibetans because the latter had agreed to the McMahon Line in secret. Had the British been genuinely neutral as they were claiming in public to be, instead of using the conference to negotiate a highly favourable frontier deal, there might have been a Simla Convention agreed to between China and Tibet that would have later left Tibet in a better position to seek international recognition of their separateness from China.

The failure of Simla did not have immediate impact upon either Tibet as a state or Assam Himalayas as new addition to British India. The world wars, reassertion of monastic and aristocratic conservatism in Tibet preventing the modern Tibetan army from becoming more effective, the ebb and flow of wars and peace offerings by the Chinese, differences between the British interests in China and the strategic interests of British India, and finally the gradual British realisation that British India would become an independent India sooner than expected encouraged the maintenance of the status quo. That the status quo meant Tibet was juridically in a limbo did not matter to the British. That the status quo meant that most people inhabiting Assam Himalayas, renamed the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) did not even know that they were subjects of British India since no serious effort was made to extend the administration there was not seen as a matter of concern since there was no immediate risk of a hostile power taking control over Tibet. What mattered was that Tibet was for all intents and purposes acting as a buffer and thus precluding the imperative to make meaningful the McMahon Line. In fact, half-hearted British efforts reminding Tibetans that they had agreed to McMahon Line generated responses ranging from complete ignorance about the deal, to a counter-reminder that this was conditional upon British help in securing an Agreement with China, and often expression of hope that while the Line was agreed to, Tibetan activities, including tax collection, in parts of the Assam Himalayas would continue unabated. In the meantime, the Chinese KMT government, even when they had little control over their own territories and were losing to the Japanese and later to the Communists, from time to time reminded British of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and their maps showed Indo-Tibetan/Chinese boundary at the foothills of Himalayas thus completely ignoring the McMahon Line.

From Indo-Tibetan Relations to Indo-China Relations: The Disappearance of Traditional Tibetan State
This state of legal ambiguity and practical inaction came to an end with the independence of India in 1947. Within a few years, India extended its administration over NEFA, occupied Tawang and rejected all Tibetan protests and demands for the return of Tibetan territories. Though soon after independence, Indians continued the British Indian policy of selling small arms to Tibet and hoped for Tibet’s continuance as a buffer, the establishment of People’s Republic of China and Mao’s declaration of the intention to ‘liberate’ Tibet peacefully led to a rethinking in Delhi. Half-hearted Indian requests to China to resolve Sino-Tibetan relations peacefully in 1950 were rebuffed strongly as an interference in China’s internal affairs. That was the first and the last time Indians raised the issue of Tibet’s status.

Indian Prime Minister, the architect of Indian foreign policy, deliberated and decided to make virtue out of necessity since he held that nothing that India could do would prevent the Chinese takeover of Tibet. Tibet’s status did not matter to him a great deal for three reasons. First, he strongly believed that the geography, culture and politics of Tibet would ensure that Tibet would in practice be a buffer for India’s security for China would not have the capacity to overwhelm Tibetan plateau for many decades. Second, by befriending China and keeping the Cold War out of South Asia, he would reduce the Chinese will to militarise the Tibetan plateau. Third, the steady increase of Indian administrative control over NEFA, the cartographic firming up of the Indo-Tibetan boundary in 1954, and Indian treaties with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan had not led to Chinese protests and hence it was safe to assume that there were no serious clash of strategic interests between India and China. Tibet therefore did not matter. He was proven wrong.

In 1954, India proactively gave up its rights in Tibet, held to be the legacy of British imperial rule, as it recognised Chinese sovereignty over Tibet in the Panch Sheel Agreement. There was no participation of Tibetans in the discussions or the signing of the Agreement even though the Agreement was about trade and other relations between the Tibet region of China and India. This was the last foreign treaty in which ‘Tibet’ as an entity figured at least in name. Indian assumption that the debate over the status of Tibet was a product of British imperialism and hence needed to be jettisoned reflected a rather simplistic understanding of Indo-Tibetan relations. First, it ignored the fact that the Indo-Tibetan boundary was a product of same imperialism. It was a conscious, and not innocent, ignorance for Nehru had been reminded time and again of the connection between Tibet and Indo-Tibetan boundary not only by Sardar Patel but also Indian Consul General S Sinha in early 1950s. Nehru’s response was to rebuff these. Second, it ignored the political agency of the Tibetans. That the people first and foremost concerned with the status of Tibet - the Tibetans - were not only looking for a reaffirmation of historic religious ties with India but at various points wanted a closer political relations and international help was completely brushed aside. Nehru’s vision of friendly India-China as leaders of Asia that kept Cold War at arms length did not
acknowledge Tibetan political agency and saw them as mere pawns in the hands of British and now mere victims of the Chinese.

However, the boundary dispute gained in traction in the late 1950s as Indian and Chinese both sought to make real on the ground what they claimed on the maps - Chinese in the Western sector and Indians in the Eastern sector. However, Indians protesting about Chinese actions in the Western sector (Aksai Chin) region and then seeking to occupy territories they claimed to be Indian converted this into a crisis. The Chinese did not race to occupy any disputed territory in the Eastern sector. Crisis was still manageable. India did not see the link between Tibet’s status and boundary dispute. It failed to appreciate that post-Simla conference, Chinese memory of that had been completely transformed. The issue was no longer the boundary between different Tibet’s but the abortive British efforts to ‘humiliate’ China and make it sign another ‘unequal treaty’ where Tibet’s status as a treaty-making power was affirmed. As the Sino-Burmese boundary agreement confirming the McMahon alignment in 1960 showed, China’s interest in rejecting McMahon Line was not to alter the status quo on ground but to completely obliterate any evidence of Tibet’s treaty making power as practiced in 1914 Simla Convention. The fact that Nehru continued to argue in the Parliament and outside that terms such as suzerainty and sovereignty to identify Chinese rule over Tibet did not make any difference since India had no option but to accept the reality had the opposite effect on Beijing. Nehru’s use of these terms interchangeably, often articulated without much thought about the semantics being political, only exacerbated the Chinese belief that Nehru’s had a ‘dark mentality’, that he wanted to continue the British policy of ‘separating’ Tibet from China and convert it into a buffer.

Though the Sino-Indian border dispute was perceived by India as a product of Chinese aggression, for the Chinese, it was a result of Nehru’s attempts to ‘nibble away’ the Chinese-Tibetan territories in conjunction with his desire to prevent China from exercising sovereignty over Tibet and thus weaken it. Chinese blamed India, along with the United States and the Taiwan based Nationalists, for fostering the rebellion in Tibet which led to the exile of the Dalai Lama. The March 1959 Lhasa uprising was in fact one of the many big and small rebellions in various parts of Tibet. It became historically significant because it led to the exile of the Dalai Lama and thus the end of the uneasy accommodation between the traditional Tibetan state and People’s Republic of China. This wasn’t only a failure of Chinese and Tibetans to work together, it was a failure of Nehru’s vision -- in return for explicit Chinese sovereignty and Sino-Indian friendship, Chinese will have no will to militarise the Tibetan plateau. Dalai Lama’s presence had been the effective buffer for India in Tibet. Therefore, unlike the British for whom it was the territorial Tibet that was a buffer, for post-independence India it was the Dalai Lama’s presence in Tibet and the Chinese compulsion to accommodate ‘Old Tibet’ that
was a quasi-buffer. It was therefore not the 1951 Seventeen Point Agreement but the exile of 1959 that put an end to Tibet’s status as buffer for India. The Indo-Tibetan (disputed) border had transformed into Indo-Chinese (disputed) border with the suppression of the Tibetan revolt in 1959.

However, the significance of this did not seem to have been grasped by the Indian policy makers. India then had two options. First, rethink its entire Sino-Tibetan policy, support a Tibetan government in exile and along with the United States and others help Tibet get international recognition, and thus break away from Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai in rhetoric as well as in practice. Second, realise that the strain due to the Tibetan rebellions and the exile of the Dalai Lama needed to be reduced and the only way to do that was to negotiate sincerely with China on the border issue. Chou’s 1960 visit was a golden opportunity to legitimise the status quo in the border regions and disconnect Tibet issue from the border question; however, that was missed as Indian leaders showed no inclination to negotiate but only to lecture Chou and his team on Chinese aggression and Indian righteousness. India chose neither of the two options and adopted a policy that ended in the disaster of 1962 border war and a defeat in it. It refused to negotiate diplomatically, adopted a militarily indefensible forward policy, and at the same time failed to support the Tibetans or to learn about the Chinese military from them. Even the intelligence gathered through the Tibetans about Chinese troop movements and buildup were either ignored or not taken into account in assessing China. The assumption that the Chinese will not retaliate to Indian forward policy had become like a religious dictum. Therefore the defeat in 1962 war is not surprising.

In a sense, the war provided Tibetans with more space and room for maneuverability in India. The support they received from the central and state governments to settle down the refugees, create the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, recreate monasteries in exile and so on was remarkable. Tibetans also served in Indian military and were crucial in Intelligence gathering in Tibet. However, the promises to Tibetans like those serving in the Establishment 22 (later named Special Frontier Force - SFF) that India appreciates the pain of the loss of the homeland and would help them free Tibet evaporated rather quickly. By the time of 1971-72 when Establishment 22 was pioneering in Indian intervention to break up Pakistan and liberate Bangladesh, it became clear that India saw Tibetans as useful for Indian defense but had no interest or inclination to support Tibetans against China. In fact, much of the war sacrifices by Tibetans for Indian military goes unremarked or at best recognised without much ceremony. Around the Bangladesh war, the Dalai Lama had to personally visit the Establishment 22 at Chakrata to pacify the Tibetans who felt unhappy that they were being made to fight a war not against China to liberate Tibet but against Pakistan. These events were symbolically important since they can be understood as pointers toward what role India expected of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans in a situation where the relationship with China was at its nadir.
Fast Forward to the Present

Contrary to the views of many Indian commentators, Tibet is not a strategic card for India; no serious person contemplates an Indian-controlled Tibet nor is there any evidence that the government works covertly or overtly to reduce Chinese control over the geographical Tibet. In fact it is the Dalai Lama and the exile community in India who could be perceived by some as strategic buffer. Given the asymmetry of power vis-a-vis China, the uneasy status quo in the borders, the continuing instability in Tibet, and the (de)stabilising influence of Tibetan lamas in the border regions of India, Indian attitude toward Tibetans has become an amalgam of three discourses.

The strategic discourse bemoans the loss of Tibet as a buffer, recognises the flaws of Nehruvian compromise of having one’s cake and eating it too, and hopes for Tibetan success in securing more autonomy and thus reducing Chinese imprint over the Tibetan plateau. This discourse looks aghast at all developments in Tibet - say road-building, railways, dams, observatories, or airports - and interprets them mainly as targeted at challenging India and compromising its border security. This discourse reduces Tibetans to being mere victims or potential assets who could be used to reduce the asymmetry between China and India. The wishes and aspirations of the Tibetans are important only as a fodder in the imaginary strategic game against China.

The liability discourse that perceives Tibetans as having outlived their hospitality provided by ‘generous’ India and as greedy and arrogant immigrants who are outcompeting the native locals in controlling land and property. They are perceived as arrogant people who refuse to learn the local language or mingle with the Indians and because of all the money they make through foreign donations, they adopt an air of superiority. This discourse is usually not articulated in the public but exists strongly in places with large settlements especially in North India including Dharamsala. A different strand of the same discourse can be read in the behavior of the state toward Tibetans, especially when they protest against Chinese leaders during their visit. Tibetans are seen as a roadblock in better relations with China.

The third discourse is of appreciation. One that recognises the crucial role the Dalai Lama plays in securing India by stabilising border areas populated by Buddhists, enriching its Buddhist heritage, and even promoting Indian’s soft power abroad. The Tibetans are also seen as vital in rejuvenating Buddhist places of worship, contributing immensely to the economy of the places they inhabit, and keeping the border Buddhist people pro-India. With the high profile the Dalai Lama has and the media attention he attracts, one would think that this discourse would be strong. I argue that this is far from the reality. The Dalai Lama attracts attention when he attacks China because it fits into the overwhelming Sinophobia of majority of Indian news media or he attracts attention when he talks of non-controversial things such as corruption or compassion. It is rare to
come across discussion on the Dalai Lama’s contribution to India, leave alone a
discussion of the Tibetan contribution to India. Why?

**Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of ‘Generosity’**

While providing refuge to the Tibetans and helping them rebuild their lives and preserve
their culture, some actors within the Indian state also seems to be working hard to
remove Tibet issue from public debate and scrutiny. Affected by a mix of strategic and
liability discourses, they want to be able to control the Tibet issue. They do not want
Indian public opinion to care either ways about the Tibetans, or the Indian
nongovernmental organizations to lobby on their behalf, or Indian politicians to speak
for the Tibetans. And they seem to be succeeding in doing so. Let me give examples and
anecdotes.

What explains the censoring of the word ‘Tibet’ from a ‘Free Tibet’ flag in the Sadda
Haq song of Rockstar? It was not the Tibetan flags that was flying all around in the song
or on the lapel of Ranbir Kapoor’s character that was censored, but the word ‘Tibet’.
Since when did the word Tibet become a sensitive one in India? Even in China, where
the flag is banned, the term Tibet is not frowned upon and hence Indian action was
remarkable. Censor Board, clearly under instructions from someone in Delhi, decided
that most Indians who watched the song would not be aware that the colourful flags are
Tibetan and so it is better to blur the word Tibet.

Or what explains the discriminatory silence of India about the role of Special Frontier
Force, also known as Establishment-22, where Tibetans have sacrificed their lives and
limbs for a country that is not their own without much public recognition? SFF has been
used in Kargil and now is in Siachen defending India and yet most people remain
unaware that a number of these fighting men are not Indians but Tibetans with no rights
in the country they are giving their life for?

The scandalous treatment of the Karmapa in early 2011, a religious figure only second in
importance to the Dalai Lama, through planted and distorted stories in the Indian media
is the best example of growing inhospitality. The story was not about a
misunderstanding or the law of the land sparing no one. It was an attack on the
Karmapa to associate him forever in Indian public’s mind with a scandal. He has been in
India for more than a decade now, thoroughly vetted and always under surveillance
because his escape was seen as ‘suspicious’ by some in Indian Intelligence community.
Sadly, very few commentators have scrutinised the issue and questioned why a story
about financial irregularity by someone in Karmapa’s office became full blown into
accusations of spying for China. Even though the spy story was proven to be false, the
memory of that lingers because neither the Indian government nor the media apologised
for this. I have dealt elsewhere with the atrocious stupidity of the accusations and total
lack of research by news media that without a sense of propriety indulged in an orgiastic fest of lies and libel. Here I want to propose my own hypothesis based on my research. Given the nature of the topic, this cannot be verified and hence I am calling it a hypothesis.

During early 1990s there were enough flexibility in Tibet for connections to be maintained between the exile monasteries and monasteries inside Tibet and this included contacts between the Dalai Lama and senior lamas inside for the purposes of identification of reincarnations. Chinese government did not object so long as it got to proclaim its final authority. The identification of Ogyen Trinley Dorje as the Karmapa by a relevant search party, the approval of the process by the Dalai Lama as well as the Chinese government was nothing out of ordinary. However, someone in Indian security establishment, either posted in Sikkim or in Delhi but with decent network in Sikkim, felt that having a Karmapa inside Chinese controlled Tibet was a risk in the future because the seat of the Karmapa, Rumtek, was in Sikkim that until then was still not recognised by China to be part of India. He, lets assume the official was a man, found out that there were disagreements within the search party and that one of the senior lama involved, Shamarpa, was open to the idea of recognising someone else. Shamarpa believed that he was the person invested with the authority to recognise Karmapa and therefore the recognition made by the rest of the search party under Ti Situ was illegitimate and that the Dalai Lama had no locus standi in this matter of Kagyu sect. Tibetan Buddhist practice of Trulku is ridden with examples of disagreements over recognitions and competition between different members of search party to get their candidate recognised. The fact that Kagyu sect of which Karmapa is a leader happens to be the richest Tibetan Buddhist sect adds to the incentive to seek to control it. Shamarpa recognised another boy Trinley Thaye Dorje in Tibet as the real Karmapa, smuggled him out of Tibet, and reared him. The Indian official saw this project of an alternative ‘Indian Karmapa’ - this Karmapa is no more Indian than Karmapa Ogyen - as his contribution to make India secure. However, dissent within Kagyu sect became open, clashes took place in Rumtek monastery, and most Tibetans and majority of Sikkimese Buddhists saw through the divisiveness introduced by Shamarpa. The escape of Karmapa into India upset the calculations of the Indian official and created a crisis for Shamarpa and they worked hard to put Karmapa under suspicion. The paranoid attitude of Indian bureaucracy and their inability to do research and understand the context did not help.

A decade on, a small incident gave opportunity to Karmapa’s enemies to spin stories. Indian newspapers in the beginning relied upon unnamed sources in Home Ministry to spread what later proved to be lies about Karmapa. The local politics of Himachal Pradesh - some in the state BJP are inclined to play the sons of the soil politics against the Tibetans, some senior politicians and their offspring’s find the competition from the well off monasteries a hurdle in their efforts to buy and control land - and the relative isolation of Karmapa facilitated this. Curiously a senior police official brought in the
issue of doubts over the reincarnation choice as if he is an expert on the process without being questioned about why he would do so when the investigation is to do with alleged financial irregularities. He made statements to the effect that the main backer of Karmapa, Tai Situ Rinpoche is a curious character since he often travels on Bhutanese passport and therefore Karmapa’s loyalty to India is in doubt. What of course no one pointed out was the fact that Shamarpapa too travels on Bhutanese passport, his candidate has never criticised the Chinese policies in Tibet, and Shamarpapa himself has argued against criticising China. The Central government, which was not responsible for the stories, has in recent years been dealing with one crisis after another and the scandal around Karmapa was not seen as urgent enough to nip it in the bud. This allowed the vested Indian bureaucratic and Tibetan sectarian interests to work to question Karmapa’s character for their own goals. The goal seems to be to make Karmapa’s life in India unbearable, and thus push him out to the West.

The fact that overwhelming number of exile Tibetans respect the Karmapa, that Shamarpapa’s choice is not even known inside Tibet and hence becomes almost illegitimate, and that Karmapa is the primary leader apart from the Dalai Lama who has a following amongst Tibetans, Chinese and other foreign Buddhists should give out a clear message to the Indian government that officials who are conniving with sectarian politics are in practice sending out a wrong message to the millions of Tibetans. The message is that India is allowing a cherished Tibetan lama to be humiliated and thus is no longer friendly to the Tibetans. The fact that the Karmapa reincarnation controversy is not very important for the Tibetans themselves should be a reminder that the project of certain individual or individuals to support Shamarpapa’s candidate should be shelved and all sides encouraged to come to an amicable settlement. Tibetan system offers enough flexibility for accommodation in terms of multiple incarnations and emanations. Otherwise we are looking at a hugely popular figure, who can clearly be a strategic asset for India in terms of projecting itself as a responsible power that is hospitable to Tibetan Buddhists and provides a refuge from the severe repression on that religion under China, being forced to lose faith in India. Karmapa’s strength lies in his popularity amongst both the Tibetans and the Chinese and that should be maintained. From his statements it is clear that he is grateful to India for hosting me and providing hospitality to all Tibetans. It is time that India show gratitude to him in return. Not out of courtesy alone but out of national interest.

Finally, take the example of recent policing of Tibetan protests in Delhi during the BRICS summit. Jamphel Yeshi’s self-immolation was used by Delhi Police, under the instructions of Central Government, to crackdown on all Tibetans in the capital. A Tibet Youth Congress leader, an American passport holder, was returned from the airport itself. Renowned Tibetan writers were arrested and take away from amidst seminars at respectable venues. Tibetan activists and students were all detained. In fact, Delhi, adopting a radicalized policing, stopped and interrogated men and women who ‘looked
Tibetan’. Thus, ‘oriental’ featured Indians from Northeast were stopped, asked to show their passport or another ID to prove they were not Tibetans, and so on. There was hardly any murmur from Indian civil society, no cry at this racist and draconian policing. Very little expression of sympathy for the Tibetans at a time when scores of them have self-immolated in protest. There is therefore absolutely no public or parliamentary opinion pressure on the Indian government.

Few media commentators who noted this saw it as India ‘appeasing’ China. They were correct in questioning this as going against humanitarianism and democratic rights of long term residents. What they missed out was that seen in the context of changes to regulations governing the non-refugee refugees that are Tibetan (non-refugee because India has not signed up to the Geneva Convention on Refugees), increasing use of arbitrary bureaucratic and police powers to remind politically active Tibetans of their vulnerability, and efforts to discourage Tibetans from taking up Indian citizenship, this incident of policing reflects a wider and more disturbing trend. Many Tibetans are entitled to acquire Indian citizenship, especially after a landmark Delhi High Court judgment in December 2010 but the bureaucratic hurdles have remained in place to prevent Tibetans from effectively exercising this right. In this, the attitude of the Central Tibetan Administration too has been unhelpful. I am not calling for all eligible Tibetans to take up Indian citizenship but for the CTA to offer help to some of those who want to do so. Citizenship does not dilute identity, it offers opportunities and rights to exercise that identity without the fear of being pushed out. Taking Indian citizenship will not imply one is no longer Tibetan for hyphenated identities are increasingly the norm. And in any case, many Tibetans are already Indian-Tibetan in practice, culture and loyally and thus the citizenship will only formalise it. However, this is a debate to be had amongst Tibetans residing in India. This will reduce the uncertainties and vulnerabilities currently existing. For instance, Indian government is increasingly stringent in giving Registration Certificate (RC) to new Tibetan refugees and everyday life of ordinary Tibetans is getting tougher. In fact, Tibetans in India, even those who have been there for most of their lives, suffer from severe handicaps. In the past, before 1990s, Indian authorities were more tolerant of the presence of Tibetan refugees. But as China-India relations improved, the space within which Tibetan exiles operate has narrowed down. While the religious leaders are usually protected (Karmapa’s case is an exception), ordinary young Tibetans face a number of legal, political and economic hurdles in their lives. They cannot own immovable property easily; they cannot get most jobs; they have no access to many public services. Since India has not signed up to 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Tibetans in India are not recognised officially as ‘refugees’ and therefore beyond the scrutiny of UNHCR. Their position in the country is in limbo - totally dependent on the priorities of the government. If Indian government for its strategic needs wants to be friendly to the Tibetans (1950s-1980s), it does so; when it wants to restrict them to have better relations with China, it can do so without any treaty obligations.
For the day-to-day living, a lot depends on personal connections individual Tibetans have with the local authorities in India and this relation is open to all sort of corrupt practices and abuses. As you can imagine, in a country that is rather infamous for nepotism and corruption, if there are people who have no legal rights, they are open to abuse and exploitation by local officials, including the police. While many Indians too need to bribe for everyday service, at least they have the right to vote and other rights protected by law. For Tibetans who have no legal protection and do not form any political constituency for parties (for they cannot vote), the vulnerability is extremely high. The recently reported measure that those holding RC for 20 years do not need to go to renew it every six months but could do so every five years is a welcome move but its actual implementation will need to be scrutinised.

Since the changes in the regulations of Dharamsala based Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) - treated as the government in exile by Tibetans, not recognised by any state as legitimate, yet treated as a de facto government by the Indian officialdom - in 1995 and later years, it is no longer technically possible for new arrivals/refugees to get RC and Identity Certificate (IC). India issues RC only on recommendation of CTA but expects it to confirm that only those who are born in India get recommended. Legally, there is no status for Tibetans who arrive from 2003 onward. Therefore, CTA has no option but to give India as the birthplace for all new arrivals. Given that it is responsible for the welfare of all Tibetans, and claims to speak for the entire Tibetan population in the world, CTA through various means tries to help new refugees in India. Part of this is to use ‘back channels’ to get RC. CTA will be in no position to proclaim this publicly, but scholars and observers who pay attention to Tibetan settlements in India are aware of the informal networks that enable Tibetans to get an identity. This legal game is obvious to all -- the Indian officials, Tibetan officials, and the new refugees -- yet it is maintained because Tibetans are at the mercy of Indian official tolerance and have no option and Indians want to maintain the status quo to avoid any criticism from China that it is supporting Tibetans. This legal ambiguity serves two purposes for the Indian officials. It allows them to tighten or loosen the control over Tibetan activities depending on the prevalent Sino-Indian relations. It allows them to deny Chinese accusation of supporting Tibetan separatism. And most importantly, for the local officials, it offers an opportunity to make money. This practice of expecting Tibetans to get their RC renewed regularly, get No Objection to Return to India (NORI) Certificate, issue IC, renew it - all these are open to discretion of local police and other officials. For instance, it is reported that politically active Tibetans are often not issued NORI. All these examples show that Tibetans in India are a vulnerable community.

Conclusion

An optimistic reading could ascribe these self-defeating measures to the shallowness of Indian leaders and bureaucrats of today who not lack a vision of internationalism and
have no interest in human suffering unless it translates into votes or influence for them. A pessimistic reading would see this as a covert Nepalisation of Indian stance vis-a-vis China and Tibetans. India, in order to please China, is reducing the freedom of maneuver for resident Tibetans. Is it doing so in preparation for a grand bargain with China over the border issue? Or have the subscribers of liability discourse not been effectively challenged by those who adopt strategic and appreciation discourses? There is a real risk that once the present Dalai Lama is no longer around, India may withdraw its hospitality from the Tibetans. Indians who recognise Tibetan presence in India as a security, cultural, religious, humanitarian, and even geopolitical asset need to avoid being on defensive.

Indians should not forget that their country’s neighbour is not China but Chinese-controlled Tibet and India’s own Himalayan frontiers are populated by many who practice Tibetan Buddhism. Nehru gave up on Tibet but retained his empathy for the Tibetans. It seems that the current Indian leadership is giving up on Tibetans too. This goes against principles of natural justice, humanity and tends to burn the vestiges of historic Indo-Tibetan relations. Moreover, their short-term thinking goes against Indian national security for it is the Tibetan community in India that is a buffer against dominance of China over the Himalayan region.
Turning points in the Tibetan Movement
The latest shift: from Dharamsala to Eastern Tibet

By Claude Arpi

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Political Shifts on the Roof of the World

In 1986, I had asked the Dalai Lama about the future of Tibet.

He said that the solution will not come from any action of the exiled community, but from changes from within China. In a way the Tibetans have nothing to do (whether it is fighting for “freedom or Rangzen” or “autonomy”), but to keep their culture and religion alive. Today, I understand better this statement. It appears even truer than 25 years ago. When will changes occurring in China trigger a solution for the Tibet issue?

It is necessary to look at some important dates in modern Tibetan history, to grasp the changes of wind on the Roof of the World. It is what I call here ‘shifts’ or turning points.

There have been many turning points earlier.

- In 1950, when Tibet was invaded
- In 1959, when the Dalai Lama took refuge in India
- In 1973, when the Dalai Lama started travelling abroad
- In 1979 when Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama’s brother met Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese Paramount Leader, who told him that everything except independence could be discussed.
- In 1987/88 when the Dalai Lama internationalized the Tibet issue through his Five Point Peace Plan and his Strasbourg proposals. However for the sake of this presentation, I will restrict myself to the period starting in 2000.
**Some Important Dates:**

(In red = important turning points)

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Let us start with the Fourth Tibet Work Forum in June 2001 under the Chairmanship of President Jiang Zemin. These “Tibet Work Fora” are very large meetings called for deciding China’s Tibet Policy. They are attended by 200/300 senior Party leaders, including members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, Party Secretaries involved in Tibet areas, PLA Commanders, etc.

The decisions taken at the highest level during these meetings are usually implemented during the following decade.

President Jiang Zemin’s two priorities were development and stability, for China as well as for Tibet. The motto was therefore to develop Tibet by building infrastructure, keeping a tab on the ‘stability’ of these ‘minority’ areas.

It is probably in this perspective (to bring ‘stability’ to Tibet) that soon after the Fourth Tibet Work Forum, Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama’s Special Envoy and his team, were invited to visit China for ‘talks’. 
After the difficult times at the end of the 1980’s and during the first years of the 1990’s, Beijing thought that the situation in Tibet was rather stable. It was therefore decided to emphasize on development programmes in order to win the support of Tibetan people.

The First Attempt to Reach out to the Tibetans

The first negotiations between China and the Dalai Lama’s representatives had taken place in 1979, twenty-nine years after the so-called peaceful liberation in 1950/51.

In 1980, during his March 10 Statement, the Dalai Lama elaborated on his perception of the then situation in China and Tibet: “In the past few years, the fluid international political scene has witnessed rapid new developments; the internal situation in China under the present leadership who are ‘seeking the truth from facts’ is also undergoing changes. We hear of the repeated calls by the Chinese government requesting us to return to our homeland. We also hear that the so-called wave of moderation has begun to creep into China and, to some extent, into Tibet. However, it is still too early to predict the outcome of what may happen in the future. In response to these changes, as well as to the request by the Chinese government, I have dispatched a fact-finding delegation to visit Tibet through China. It is for the first time in nearly twenty-one years that we have established contact with the Chinese government, as well as our beloved countrymen”.

The Chinese Communist government in Beijing was under the impression that the ‘backward Tibetan people’ had finally been ‘liberated’. Hence, the local Communist authorities briefed the Tibetan population in Lhasa about the forthcoming visit of the Dalai Lama’s delegates: “You should not resent this visit. You should not insult the delegates; you should not spit on them, just receive them as your own countrymen,” were the strict Party instructions.

They had however misread completely the Tibetan people’s feelings, their deep resentment, as well as their will to resist colonization. The three first delegations visited Tibet between 1979 and 1980; wherever the Dalai Lama’s envoys went, they were mobbed by crowds of Tibetans. One delegate remembered: “The Tibetans tried even to tear our chubas (Tibetan dress) to have them as relics”. The entire Lhasa population was in the streets; everybody wanted a darshan of the Dalai Lama’s envoys.

During these fact-finding trips, Tibetans inside Tibet told the Dalai Lama’s representatives of their descent to hell. During the past 20 years, since their precious Protector had left for India, they felt orphaned. Despite the constant indoctrination by the Communist Party, that they had been ‘liberated’, nobody had forgotten the Precious One. Each and every Tibetan still dreamt of seeing him back in the sacred Land of Snows with his full power and regalia.
The leader of the first delegation told us: The Chinese definitely did not expect that the Representatives of the Dalai Lama would be received with so much enthusiasm. They were bewildered. During the 20 years of absence of His Holiness and the twenty years of Chinese administration, they had tried their best to denounce and put down the Dalai Lama, they wanted people to lose their faith in the Dalai Lama. Whenever the Chinese would make derogatory statements against the Dalai Lama, people used to say, “Yes, Yes”. At that time, the Chinese might have thought that the people might spit at the representatives and throw stones at them. The Chinese had in fact forbidden the people to spit at the Representatives, to throw stones at them or do anything bad to them. When they saw what was happening, they were completely bewildered.

The local populations had been told by the Chinese that a delegation was coming to facilitate a better relation between China and Tibet.

Surprisingly, the Chinese cadres sincerely believed that the Chinese presence on the Roof of the World was appreciated by the locals and that none would ever think with nostalgia of the ‘old regime’.

But the unbelievable happened. The same Envoy said:

“The day after the delegation reached Lhasa, the delegation went to Jokhang. We went to the terrace and from there we saw that thousands of people had gathered around the Jokhang. They were very enthusiastic, so we went down and tried to meet the people, but we were not allowed by the police who had barricaded us off inside the Jokhang to cut us off from the people. There was a building in front of the Jokhang from where the Chinese were peering and watching what was happening on Jokhang. When they saw that the Tibetan people were prostrating, folding their hands in prayers in front of the delegates and were trying to get whatever their hands could grab [from the delegates], the Chinese people in Jokhang became so angry that they remarked “Here is the result of all our efforts for these people for 20 years”.”

They became so nervous and disappointed by their failure, that some stamped their feet and even cried. From these anecdotes, you can see that the Chinese were not expecting what happened.

It was after all Avalokistehwara’s envoys driving away in those vehicles. The Chinese perhaps began to understand that their ‘liberation’ had not brought all the changes that they had expected.

The following delegations had the same experience.
Hu Yaobang’s Visit

It was the first big shock of the Chinese because for the first time they noticed that there is something wrong in their policies. As a result, the General Secretary of People’s Republic of China (PRC), Hu Yaobang went to Tibet in May 1980 to see the real situation in Tibet. Hu Yaobang was the first Chinese leader to have the courage to announce publicly that there was something wrong with the Chinese policy in Tibet. In my view, the Chinese will bring change in Tibet only when the leaders in the politburo have the courage to tell the truth of the situation. Otherwise, it will be very difficult.

Unfortunately, Hu Yaobang was soon after removed as Party Secretary. Today, China is still waiting for another Hu Yaobang, or a Chinese Gorbachev to reform the country.

We have gone into details in the happenings of this period to show the surprise of the Chinese leaders when they realized that the Tibetans were unchanged by their ‘liberation’.

With the political struggle going on full swing in China today, will we see the emergence a new Hu Yaobang? And more importantly, can a reformist leader last in the present system?

Another Turning Point: Amravati Kalachakra: January 2006

Let us come to more recent times.

The Dalai Lama gave the Kalachakra initiation in Amravati (Andhra Pradesh) in January 2006. More than one thousand Tibetans from Tibet had come to attend the teachings. The Dalai Lama started the function with a powerful statement urging Tibetans from inside Tibet to tell their countrymen living on the Roof of the World when they returned about the importance of the ‘Middle Path’ approach towards a genuine autonomy for Tibet. The Tibetan leader said that it was natural to consider the newcomers from Tibet as the main audience for the Kalachakra: “Tibetans living in Tibet are less fortunate than their counterparts living in India. They have to suffer a lot in their own motherland from repressive forces. Tibetans from Tibet are the key for the Tibetan cause”.

During an audience with the Tibetans from Tibet, the Dalai Lama urged the Tibetans not to wear robes and furs of endangered animals which Tibetans used to traditionally wear, especially those who came from Amdo and Kham regions of Eastern Tibet.

As a result of his speech, there was an immediate reaction in Tibet, thousands started to burn their chupas made with animal fur. Once again it was a big shock for the Chinese leadership, who had come to believe that they had got Tibetans on their side by building roads, bringing a railway line to Lhasa or developing the Tibetan plateau.
Despite the changes in the Tibet policy introduced during the Fourth Tibet Work Forum in 2001, Beijing seemed to face a tremendous reaction from the Tibetans.

I personally believe that the negotiations between Beijing and Dharamsala were already finished in 2006 after this incident. The United Front work Department suddenly realized the power of the Dalai Lama on the simple folks in the remotest parts of Tibet: he just had to say a few words and the entire population followed his advice.

During the following months, Beijing got busy in the preparations of the Olympic Games and their main preoccupation was the ‘peaceful’ passage of this world event. The dialogue with the Dalai Lama’s representatives was not a priority. Their only interest in Tibet was that the issue should not disturb the peaceful conduct of the Games. As a matter of fact, no progress has been made in the dialogue after 2006.

Though in the Fourth Tibet Forum Meeting, the Chinese had strongly emphasized on the economic development of Tibet, the resentment of the Tibetan population was still present. The huge infrastructural development in Tibet both in terms of railways and roadways especially in the border region, had not helped removing the misgivings against the Chinese Hans.

Another Turning Point: The 2008 Riots

On March 10, 2008, soon after 500 monks of Drepung monastery began a peaceful protest in Lhasa, they were tear-gassed and beaten by the People’s Armed Police (PAP). Some ten monks were arrested and the monastery surrounded by the PAP; the water supply was cut off.

The same day, 14 monks from Sera monastery held a protest in the Jokhang Central Cathedral in Lhasa; they waved Tibetan flags. They were immediately taken away by the local police. Minor protests were also reported from Amdo region (today in Qinghai province).

The next day, 600 monks from Sera monastery marched peacefully to the Tibetan capital. They were also tear-gassed by the police and many were arrested. The same method was used by the PAP: the water supply of the monastery was cut off and restaurants in the area closed.

On March 12, when two monks from Drepung cut their wrists, other monks from Sera monastery began a demonstration. During the first three days, the main events occurred around Lhasa. Local authorities however considered the happenings as "a direct challenge to the long term stability of Tibet".
On March 13, when a few hundreds of monks from Ganden monastery, together with a few nuns, came to Lhasa to stage a peaceful protest, they were stopped by the police. Later that day, the three Great Monasteries of Drepung, Ganden and Sera were closed.

The next day, March 14, 2008 will remain etched in the history of protests in Tibet. It was subsequently termed ‘the 3/11 incident’ by Beijing, probably to make it sound like a terrorist attack against the People’s Republic of China.

In the morning, about one hundred monks from Ramoche monastery began to demonstrate against the arrest of the monks on the previous days. Once again they were stopped and beaten by the police. This infuriated the Tibetan by-passers. From then on, the situation went out of control.

Soon after, a large scale demonstration involving tens of thousands of people lead to a confrontation between Tibetans and the PAP.

It was reported that on March 14, the ban on firing weapons was lifted. Police and the PAP were free to shoot at will.

Robert Barnett, a scholar from Columbia University later wrote the details of the events for the New York Review of Books:

Unlike the great monasteries, Ramoche is in the heart of Lhasa, and opens onto a busy market street in one of the few areas of the city that remains a largely Tibetan quarter. Members of the public, apparently aroused by rumors that monks detained that Monday had been beaten in custody, began to attack the police and a small squad of PAP sent in to support them. The police and soldiers were pelted with stones, their cars were burned and, pursued by a group of stone-throwing youths, they fled. No reinforcements were sent into the area for at least three hours (one Western journalist who witnessed the events saw no police for twenty-four hours), though they were waiting on the outskirts.

It was the traditional response of the Chinese security forces to serious unrest—to wait for orders from Party leaders on whether to shoot or not—but the hours of inaction left the citizenry unprotected and allowed the violence to escalate. (The government announced on April 9 that wily monks had ‘misled’ them into sending the security forces to the city suburbs).

In this vacuum, a number of Tibetans turned from attacking police to attacking the next available symbol of Chinese governance, the Chinese migrant population. The rapid increase of migrants in Tibetan towns (they already were 34 percent of the Lhasa population when official figures were last made available in 2000, and this figure

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probably excludes temporary residents and the military) had created uneasy resentment — until then silent — among the indigenous population. About a thousand Chinese-owned shops were set on fire by rioters who were seen by foreign tourists igniting cooking gas cylinders or dousing shops in gasoline.

According to The Economist’s correspondent James Miles, the only accredited foreign journalist in Lhasa at the time, almost every [Chinese or Chinese Muslim] business was either burned, looted, destroyed, smashed into, the property therein hauled out into the streets, piled up, burned. It was an extraordinary outpouring of ethnic violence of a most unpleasant nature to watch: “Miles saw Chinese passersby, including a child of about ten years old, pelted with stones, and several Western tourists described hard-core rioters beating random Chinese civilians with enough force to have killed them. Eleven Chinese civilians and a Tibetan were burned to death after hiding in shops set on fire by the rioters, and a policeman and six other civilians died from beatings or unknown causes, according to the Chinese government. Later, the PAP moved in, shooting from time to time, leading to an unknown number of casualties. The exiled Tibetan government has said that eighty Tibetans were shot dead in Lhasa, while the Chinese government says that its forces never opened fire; just what happened when the security forces moved in remains unclear because no tourists saw Tibetans being shot and most foreign reporters were allowed to visit Tibet only for three days in March and then only in a group under supervision. By the official count, one thousand Tibetans were detained in Lhasa alone, and the punishment of those deemed guilty of offenses is expected to be ferocious—to be handled according to the principles of ‘quick approval, quick arrest, quick trial, quick execution’ according to Zhang Qingli, the current Party secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

From Beijing, the Tibetan Autonomous authorities immediately blamed the Dalai Lama. Even Premier Wen Jiabao accused the Tibetan Leader to have masterminded the violence for sabotaging the forthcoming Olympic Games. This was denied by the Dalai Lama.

An interesting collateral was a redefinition of Tibet, the map of Tibet was redrawn. Till 2008, it was very clear that for China, ‘Tibet’ was only the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), while the Dalai Lama spoke for Cholka Sum, the three traditional provinces of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo. For Beijing, there was absolutely no question of negotiating anything special status for ‘traditional’ Tibet; the discussion between the Dalai Lama’s representative and the Chinese were restricted to the TAR.
After March/April 2008, a tremendous change occurred: the map of Tibet was changed. Suddenly all the Tibetan inhabited areas were included in Tibet, not only by Dharamsala but by Beijing too. The changes were even incorporated in the Chinese official website (chinatibetonline.com)

Similarly after the Drugchu mudslide, while the Chinese (and even the Western) medias first mentioned the tragedy as having happened in ‘Western China’, later, it was shown as “Tibetan-inhabited areas”.

It was a tremendous change for the definition of the Tibet issue. The same thing occurred in the case of the huge earthquake in Jyekudo; the media first reported that it touched ‘Western China’ and later it was designated as part of “Tibetan inhabited areas”.

![TIBET 2008: THE UNREST](image)
External events (2008 unrest, mudslide, earthquake, etc.) forced Beijing to reconsider the Tibet geographical definition: a feat that several rounds of negotiations have never succeeded to achieve.

This is quite remarkable and the words of the Dalai Lama of 1986, that the change will not come through the efforts of the exiled-community, but through changes in China, resounded in my mind.

Interestingly, though after the TAR was formed in 1965, the Tibetan leadership often raised the question of ‘reunifying’ Tibet, it was never accepted by Beijing. In 2008, it became a fact, accepted by even the Chinese media; the development plans were also altered.

And the Fifth Tibet Work Forum in January 2010 for the first time included all the Tibetan-inhabited areas of the plateau in its projections and programs.
Self-Immolation

Another important shift in the annals of the Tibetan issue is the Dalai Lama’s ‘retirement’ from his political activities in March 2011. This was subsequently enshrined in the Charter (Tibetan Constitution in Exile) after a General Meeting of the Tibetans in exile in May 2011.

Practically in parallel, another shift started: the Tibetan movement moved from Dharamsala, the seat of the Dalai Lama in India to Tibet.

It manifested through a series of immolations which began around March/April 2011 in Kirti Monastery in Eastern Tibet. The world media coverage of the Tibetan issue also shifted from Dharamsala to Eastern Tibet.

Let us look at the phenomena: most of the people who committed the ultimate self-sacrifice were very young; they were not even born during the 1959 Uprising, the Martial Law in Tibet (1988-89), or the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. For the Tibetan movement, it is a very new phenomenon led by very young people. It will probably continue during the next months or years. It will put a tremendous pressure on Beijing and badly dent China’s image. New repressive measures imposed by the Communist leadership may give rise to more self-immolations in Tibet rather than stopping the process, thereby entering in a vicious circle.
Let us examine some statistics

- 35 Tibetans have been confirmed to have self-immolated since February 27, 2009
- 30 men, 5 women
- 25 of the 35 are known to have died following their protest
- 25 of the 35 are from Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province
- One is from Chamdo prefecture in the Tibet Autonomous Region
- Five are from Tibetan Autonomous areas in Qinghai province
- Seven of the 35 were monks at Kirti monastery in Ngaba
- Eight of the 35 are former monks at Kirti monastery in Ngaba
- Two of the 35 were nuns from Mame Dechen Chokorling nunnery in Ngaba
- 34 of the self-immolations have occurred since March 16, 2011

The immolations have occurred mainly in former Amdo and Kham provinces.
they had to remain for a period of 4 years. Each team member could rotate to a new
location after 12 months, but the team was assigned to the same village for at least 25
days per month.

In addition teams were sent from Lhasa to each of the seven prefectures “to oversee the
prefecture’s work teams, receive the work reports and monitor the success or failure [of
the program]”. The scale of the scheme was the largest since the Cultural Revolution.

It created further rancor and resentment.

The objectives of the Fifth Tibet Work Forum were five-fold:

a. To strengthen the Party organization at the local level,
b. To promote stability by persuading villagers to join the struggle against the Dalai
   Lama’s splitist activities and independence plans,
c. To improve the economy of each village and create new jobs for the village
   youth,
d. To educate the locals to appreciate and be grateful to the motherland and the
   Party, and
a. To get each village to begin to more effectively carry out the plans and policies
   of the Party.
The Party started implementing these decisions in October 2011. Further the United Front Department decided to promote new schemes such as the “Nine Haves Monasteries”

1. Have a poster of the four national leaders
2. Have a national PRC flag
3. Have a motorable road to the monastery
4. Have a good source of water
5. Have electricity
6. Have a broadcast TV set
7. Have (the capacity) to show films
8. Have a reading room for books
9. Have The People’s Daily and the Tibet Daily newspapers (both have Tibetan language editions)

The Party added that all expenses will be met by the TAR Government.

Another scheme: ‘The Six Ones’ was also implemented.

1. Make one friend. Each temple management official should try to be soulmates with one or several monks/nuns to understand their difficulties in life and what’s going on in their mind.
2. Visit one family. Each temple management official to visit the families of one or more monks/nuns to understand what’s going on in their homes.
3. Solve one problem. To solve the most urgent, real problem facing the family of any monk/nun so as to make them feel the warmth of the party and government.
4. Build one file. Establish a file for every monk/nun to document in a detailed fashion their personal and family situation. This will aid in preparedness, understanding and management.
5. Keep clear one communication channel. Steady communications should be maintained between temple management officials and the families of monks/nuns through telephone, letters and house visits, so as to educate them to love the nation and love the religion, as well as to obey the law.
6. Develop one mechanism. To build temple management committees (with full-time officials) that temple management officials, monks/nuns and families are jointly responsible for. This is to develop a mechanism for building harmonious model temples.
Policies such as monks having to build a file on their dharma brothers or sisters which could “aid in preparedness, understanding and management” explain the state of despair of the monks and nuns of Eastern Tibet.

**Torture Permitted**

Another example can be given: a police poster threatening to punish 'criminals' appeared in different counties of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Gansu province). Those not following the ‘directives’ were promised violent beating and torture.

Here is the content of the poster written in Tibetan:

The following directives have been authorized by the Security Department (PSB). All the following actions will be met with violent beating/torture by the PSB:

The disturbance of relations between ethnic groups, public agitation between ethnic groups, the destruction of national unity.

The corruption of the public with ideas of the splitting of the nation, through speech and the distribution of written information, cartoons, home-made materials, videos, etc.

— all acts destructive to social discipline and stability.

The membership, promotion of, or the making of donations to illegal organizations — all of which harm national security and destabilize society.

The incitement of the public to illegal activities through websites, e-mails and audio files, all acts destructive to ethnic unity through websites and sms texts, and other major criminal actions against the security of society.

The engagement in criminal activities such as grievous bodily harm, destruction of property, arson and looting, etc, and the coercion of others into criminal acts that damage the security of society.

Further informers/denunciators were promised a hefty reward:

“Any member of the public who informs the police about the above criminal acts or gives the police information about the
perpetrators will be guaranteed personal protection by PSB officers, personal confidentiality, and a reward of 5,000 Chinese Yuan.”

It should be noted that like in the 1950’s, it is in Eastern Tibet that the most repressive measures are first implemented.

**Abolishing ‘Special Privileges’ for Minorities**

To make things worse, an article written by Zhu Weiqun, the Deputy Director of CCP’s United Front Work Department in *The Study Times* (Xuexi Shibao) raises the possibility of abolishing special privileges and preferential policies offered to minority nationalities, taking the nationality name off all IDs cards and passports and removing nationality names from provinces.

Zhu, who is the interlocutor of the Dalai Lama’s Envoy's in the Beijing-Dharamsala negotiations, argues that China must change some aspects of its present political and educational system in order to achieve ‘national cohesion’. Fortunately, this issue was not taken up during the last National People’s Congress, too busy with L’Affaire Bo.

**A New Shift?**

The death of 26-year-old Jampel Yeshi may be the latest shift in the Tibetan issue. Yeshi, the 26-year-old Tibetan youngster who immolated himself on March 26 in New Delhi during a demonstration against Chinese President Hu Jintao’s presence at the BRICS Summit has become ‘Pawo’ Jampel Yeshi, a hero. He was given a ‘national’ funeral in Dharamsala, the seat of the Central Tibetan Administration.

The picture of the young native of Tawu from the Kham province of eastern Tibet splashed on the front pages of hundreds of publications around the world.

The function was held on the Tiananmen of Dharamsala, in front of the Central Cathedral in Dharamsala where all important ceremonies, such as the Dalai Lama’s addresses to the Tibetan people or the oath taking of a new Kalon Tripa (Chairman of the Council of Ministers) are held. As khatas (Tibetan ceremonial scarves) were placed on Yeshi’s coffin, with the Tibetan national anthem resounding in the hill town over the Kangra Valley, Dhondup Lhadar, vice president of the Tibetan Youth Congress which spearheaded the demonstration against President Hu in Delhi, spoke emotionally of the young martyr's last days.

This was a first: the Tibetan Youth Congress presiding over a function in the central place of power of the Tibetan capital-in-exile.
Has the Tibetan Youth Congress taken the lead in the Tibetan movement? Since he retired last year, the Dalai Lama does not actively participate in the political life of the exiles, for example, he has hardly commented on the self-immolations. And though Yeshi’s funeral was less than a furlong away from his residence, he did not participate. This could be a real shift.

Some Conclusions

The resentment of the Tibetan populations which was witnessed by the first fact-finding delegations in 1979-80 in Tibet is still present, even stronger today. It is mainly due to the senseless repressive policies of the Chinese government or at least a clique in the Government which believes that repression will solve all the problems.

The novelty is that it is a new generation of Tibetans, the third one, today revolts against the Chinese occupation. This has serious implications for the regime in Beijing which has always thought that it could ‘liberate’ Tibet by giving a few freebees.

It has not been the case, and it will not be so in the coming years.