

Trans Himalaya is an independent, interdisciplinary
research and policy journal published by the
Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives

Vol 1 | Edition 1 | September 2026



Trans HimalayaTM

STRATEGY • CULTURE • CHANGE
IN TIBET AND ASIA'S UPLANDS



T I B E T

AT THE HEARTLAND OF ASIA

This inaugural edition examines why Tibet matters far beyond its borders - as source of Asia's water, a civilisation bridge, a strategic frontier, and an enduring question of international order. It invites readers to reconsider Tibet not as history, but as one of the defining issues of the twenty-first century.

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The Tibetan spirit can never be destroyed because it lives in the hearts of the people.

- His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama







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Trans Himalaya is an independent, interdisciplinary research and policy journal examining the forces and transformations shaping Tibet and Asia's upland regions. Anchored in the Himalayan–Tibetan continuum and extending across Inner and Central Asia, the publication explores the historical, political, economic, cultural, social, and strategic consequences of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) control over Tibet, and examines how developments in Tibet—including the policies of the PRC—continue to shape wider regional and international dynamics. By bringing together rigorous scholarship, policy-relevant analysis, and regional voices, Trans Himalaya provides a forum for examining critical issues, emerging challenges, and long-term trends affecting Tibet and Asia's upland regions. Bridging research and practice, the publication offers a credible platform for informed dialogue on strategy, culture, and change across one of the world's most consequential yet underexamined regions.

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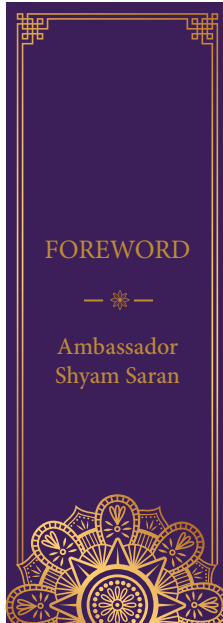
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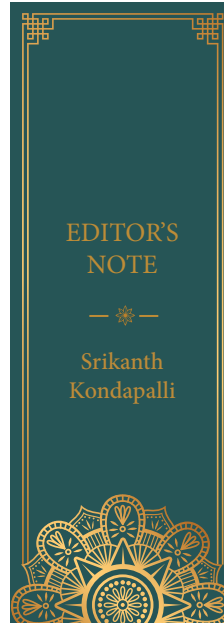
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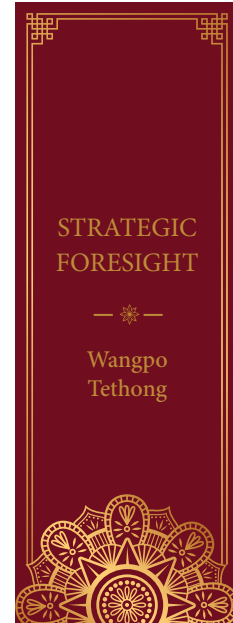
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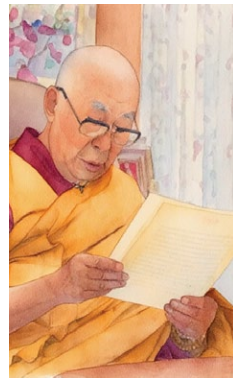
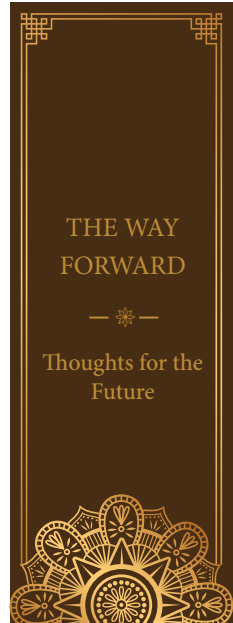
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The Way Forward translates research into practical policy offering informed and implementable solutions to the strategic and geopolitical challenges shaping the Trans-Himalayan region.

TENT S —

IN FOCUS

History and
Foundational



Inside Tibet
Today



Tibet Beyond
Borders

THE STRATEGIC TRIANGLE



India, Tibet and
the PRC

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

IN CONVERSATION WITH LEADERS



Sikyong
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YOUTH VOICES



Tenzin Woesel
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Foreword



The Himalaya have often been described as a great natural barrier separating civilisations and states. History presents a more nuanced picture. For centuries, these mountains connected people as much as they divided them. Ideas, religious traditions, trade, and culture found their way across high mountain passes, creating enduring links between the Indian subcontinent, the Tibetan Plateau, and the wider Himalayan region. The Himalaya and the vast plateau beyond have shaped Asia's history in profound ways, although this interconnected past is not always fully appreciated.

Today, the region is once again undergoing significant change. Strategic competition, environmental pressures, water security, climate change, and rapid technological advances are reshaping the political and ecological landscape of Asia. Developments on the Tibetan Plateau increasingly have consequences that extend far beyond its immediate neighbourhood, influencing the security, environmental stability, and economic well-being of countries across the region.

During my years in diplomacy, our northern frontiers were viewed primarily through the lens of boundary negotiations and border management. Those issues remain important and will continue to require careful attention. But they represent only one dimension of a much larger Himalayan reality. Questions of security today are closely intertwined with ecology, water resources, infrastructure, local communities, economic development, and the wider geopolitical changes taking place across Asia. A fuller understanding of these interconnections is no longer simply an academic pursuit, it is an essential element of informed public policy.

It is therefore a pleasure for me as a Trustee of the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives, to welcome the publication of *Trans Himalaya*. The journal reflects the Foundation's longstanding commitment to encouraging rigorous scholarship, fostering informed dialogue, and promoting a deeper understanding of Tibet and the wider Himalayan and Trans Himalayan region.

I am pleased to see this commitment take shape in a publication that I hope will become a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and all those interested in this important part of Asia.

One of the strengths of *Trans Himalaya* lies in its interdisciplinary approach. History, strategy, international relations, ecology, religion, culture, and economics are often studied independently of one



another. Yet, the Himalayan region does not lend itself to such neat divisions. Geography influences politics, ecology shapes security, culture and history continue to inform contemporary diplomacy. A meaningful understanding of the region requires these subjects to be viewed together rather than in isolation.

It is fitting that the inaugural issue is devoted to Tibet. Few places illustrate more clearly the relationship between geography, history, and geopolitics. Tibet occupies a distinctive place in Asia. It is the source of many of the continent's great rivers, home to an extraordinary civilisational tradition, and a region whose strategic significance has grown steadily in recent decades. No serious understanding of the Trans Himalayan region can be complete without an appreciation of Tibet's historical, cultural, ecological, and strategic importance.

Equally important is the recognition that scholarship on the Himalaya should not remain confined to academic institutions alone. It has much to contribute to informed public debate and to better policymaking. Publications that encourage careful research, thoughtful discussion and informed analysis perform a valuable public service, particularly at a time when commentary on the region is often shaped by immediacy rather than perspective.

Future editions of *Trans Himalaya* will broaden this conversation by exploring other parts of Asia's upland world and the many historical, cultural, and strategic linkages that bind them together. I hope the journal will provide a forum where scholars, practitioners, and policymakers can engage with one another and where academic research can contribute more directly to public understanding and policy discourse.

The publication of this inaugural issue reflects the efforts of many individuals. I congratulate Professor Srikanth Kondapalli, Editor, the members of the Editorial Board, the Governing Council, and my fellow Trustees of the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives for bringing this ambitious project to fruition. I would also like to acknowledge the vision and perseverance of Rebon Banerjee Dhar, whose commitment has been central to transforming the idea of *Trans Himalaya* into a reality. It is particularly encouraging to see the younger generation of scholars—both on the Editorial Board and among the contributors to this inaugural issue—bringing fresh perspectives while upholding the highest standards of scholarship.

There is no shortage of commentary on the Himalayan region today. What is often lacking is careful analysis grounded in historical understanding, rigorous research, and informed debate. If *Trans*

Himalaya succeeds in fostering such scholarship and encouraging thoughtful engagement with one of Asia's most consequential regions, it will make a meaningful contribution to both academic discourse and public policy.

The Himalaya have shaped Asia's past in profound ways and will continue to influence its future. Understanding this remarkable region in all its complexity is therefore not merely an academic undertaking but an investment in informed statecraft.

I wish *Trans Himalaya* every success and hope that, in the years ahead, it will establish itself as a respected forum for scholarship, dialogue, and informed public discourse.

Ambassador Shyam Saran

Former Foreign Secretary of India
Former Chairman, National
Security Advisory Board
Trustee, Foundation for Non-Violent
Alternatives

Editor's Note



As we present this inaugural edition of FNVA's journal *Trans-Himalaya*, we take pride in offering this bouquet of articles carefully curated from distinguished practitioners and scholars. While the *Trans-Himalayan* region essentially includes the territory from Karakoram, Ladakh, Zaskar and

Kailash ranges, given the similarities in history, mountainous geography, ecosystems, culture, religion, way of lives, "under-development" and others, many other contiguous areas can be included. However, for this inaugural issue, we focused on Tibet for several reasons.

The idea of publishing a journal devoted to Tibet and the wider Himalayan region arose from a simple observation. Although the region has received increasing strategic attention, scholarship on it remains dispersed across different disciplines and institutions. Tibet, in particular, is studied through separate lenses of history, religion, security, environment and international relations, with relatively little effort to examine how these subjects intersect.

Trans Himalaya has been conceived to contribute to this gap. It seeks to bring together scholarship from different disciplines and perspectives and to place contemporary developments within their wider historical and strategic context. Over the years, research on Tibet in India has remained similarly dispersed. We hope the journal will encourage new scholarship, provide space for younger researchers and contribute to a stronger academic and policy community concerned with Tibet and the Himalayan region. It is therefore appropriate that the inaugural issue is devoted to Tibet.

Tibet today is also at cross-roads. For millennia, Tibet was influenced by its monastic life style with the successive Dalai Lamas acting as the spiritual and temporal head. However, China's invasion into Tibet in 1950 brought structural changes to the region with its new political ideology of socialism and Communist-Party cadres, military expansion, infrastructure and in general the predominant focus on materialism. The flight of the 14th Dalai Lama to India in 1959, after expressing his displeasure on the implementation of 17-point commitments by China since 1951, had shifted regional and global attention to the Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamshala. While China continues

to rule Tibet with more vigour today with its plans to “Sinicize” Tibetan Buddhism, pouring in huge human, financial and technical resources, its hold remains tentative as witnessed by a number of protests inside Tibet. Despite an effort for reconciliation as reflected in the Dalai Lama’s Strasbourg Proposals, nine talks between the Dalai Lama’s representatives and the “United Front Work Department” of China’s People’s Political Consultative Committee, the progress in such efforts is negligible.

For India, Tibet is not simply a region beyond the Himalayas. The two have been connected for centuries through Buddhism, trade, scholarship and pilgrimage. Today, developments in Tibet have direct implications for India’s security environment, border management, water resources, ecology and relations with China. A serious understanding of the Himalayan region therefore requires sustained attention to developments on the Tibetan Plateau.

The contributions in this volume reflect this wider approach. They examine historical questions as well as contemporary developments within Tibet, India’s evolving approach, Buddhism, regional perspectives and the changing geopolitical environment. Taken together, they underline that Tibet cannot be understood only as a historical question or as a bilateral

issue between India and China. Its significance extends to a number of political, strategic, environmental and cultural questions across Asia.

One of the distinguishing features of Trans Himalaya will be its use of primary sources. Understanding contemporary Tibet requires engagement with Chinese-language scholarship, official documents, laws, policy papers and debates within Chinese academic and policy circles. Such material helps us understand how the Chinese leadership views Tibet, the objectives of its policies and the institutions through which they are implemented. These sources, however, need to be examined critically and alongside other evidence. Studying official Chinese positions is not an endorsement of them; it is necessary for understanding them.

The journal also seeks to contribute to a stronger Indian discourse on Tibet and the Himalayan region. India’s understanding of Tibet cannot remain episodic. It requires sustained research, informed public debate and greater institutional attention. We hope this journal will make a modest contribution in that direction.

An important objective is to bring research and policy discussion closer together. Each issue will therefore include a section offering policy recommendations arising

from the subjects examined in the volume. These are not intended to prescribe a particular course of action, but to place considered options before the Government of India, the Central Tibetan Administration and others concerned with Tibet and the Himalayan region.

The journal will also look beyond immediate developments. Every issue will carry an article examining longer-term trends, possible scenarios and the choices they may present. No assessment of the future can be certain, but policy analysis must take account of developments that may emerge over the longer term. This recurring feature is intended to encourage such strategic thinking.

We have also included a Reference Guide and a range of maps, timelines, photographs, institutional information and other material. These are intended to provide context to the essays and make the journal useful not only to specialists but also to students, researchers, policymakers and readers approaching the subject for the first time.

While Tibet is the subject of this inaugural issue, the scope of Trans Himalaya is wider. Future issues will examine other parts of Asia’s uplands, including Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Mongolia, as well



as subjects such as Buddhism, borderlands, environmental change, infrastructure, technology and regional security. The Himalayas are undergoing considerable political, economic and strategic change. The journal will seek to examine these developments through scholarship as well as policy analysis.

This first issue would not have been possible without the support of many people. I am deeply grateful to Ambassador Shyam Saran for contributing the Foreword and for placing Tibet within the wider context of India's strategic and civilisational interests.

I am equally grateful to all the contributors who supported the journal when it was still little more than an idea. Their scholarship and willingness to participate have made this inaugural issue possible.

My colleagues at the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives have worked over many months to bring the project to fruition. I am grateful to the members of the Governing Council for their advice and encouragement. I also wish to acknowledge Ms Deepika Chadha for her careful language editing and Priyanka Kakra Vutts, Sunil Sud and Academic Foundation for bringing out this volume. Finally, I acknowledge with gratitude the donor whose confidence in the project made this first issue possible.

The value of a journal is ultimately determined by the quality of the scholarship it publishes and the discussion it generates. We hope Trans Himalaya will contribute to a better understanding of Tibet and the wider Himalayan region, encourage sustained research and, where possible, contribute to better-informed policy discussion.

Srikanth Kondapalli

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for Non-Violent Alternatives (FNVA)

Tibet in the Year 2048

Wangpo Tethong

Let us make a leap into an imaginary future, to the year 2048: the Peace Zone Tibet has become reality. This could be the premise of an admittedly optimistic scenario for Tibet and Asia as a whole.

We want to enrich the core of this ‘utopian’ scenario with a few logical additions: in a further development of the Peace Zone concept, I extend the Dalai Lama’s proposal to all of Inner Asia. Only then—when it passes, so to speak, an expanded proof of validity—does it acquire genuine geopolitical sense. The Tibetans, together with the Mongols and the people of East Turkestan, could form the core of an Inner Asian federation, underpinned by security guarantees from the surrounding great powers China, India, and Russia, and supported by the United States (US).¹ The entire Inner Asian space could thereby be demilitarised, becoming the cornerstone of an age of Pax Asiatica.

This would need to be preceded by a fundamental shift in consciousness, in which India and China recognise that their security is decisively linked to a reordering of their geopolitical spaces and interests—and Inner Asia is part of that. An end, too, to the oscillation between hollow balance-of-power politics and nationalist imperial fantasies. This would also entail the admission that neither India nor China has succeeded in developing a vision for Inner Asia that served their own security interests, in the period after World War II.

What may be required to reach this moment of recognition is perhaps a profound crisis and the catastrophe of a war—triggered by a dispute over the water resources of the Brahmaputra, the India-Tibet-China border, or the dominance of an artificial intelligence (AI). The prevailing belief in the formation of national empires will have to be displaced, ‘on the day after the day’, by the courage for interstate cooperation and thus a greater degree of political complexity.

By 2048, we already have a reincarnation of the Dalai Lama.² The succession process has been comparatively

1 Such a system of international relations could, in my view, be conceived under the assumptions of both defensive and offensive realism as represented by Kenneth Waltz and John J. Mearsheimer.

2 Much has already been written on this topic. What is often overlooked in the consistently very pessimistic forecasts is the following: viewed

smooth—unlike the succession struggles that have long unsettled China. The new Dalai Lama—or perhaps it will even be a girl—becomes a new bearer of hope, inspiring Tibetans and the world alike. The young child is supported by an international—predominantly Asian—group of intellectuals, courageous politicians, and religious leaders of all traditions. Within and beyond Tibet, a desire for a better future emerges—also in resistance to the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party—oriented around the universal idea of a good life.

We tend to dismiss such positive scenarios as impossible because we stand under the impression of the present. Perhaps it is also the mistaken assumption that we believe we can sense that human history is moving towards a particular destination.

In this context, it may help to recall the image of people imprisoned in

soberly, Tibet holds an advantage over China when it comes to the succession process of its leadership. The procedure is well established and typically results in an outcome endowed with considerable charisma and legitimacy. In theories of successful statehood, factors such as leadership succession and the presence of future-oriented visions play a major role. Both can be affirmed in the case of Tibet. In this context, I would also refer to resilience research, particularly Indian scholarship (i.e., Girija Saklani on the Tibetan refugee community), which concludes that the Tibetan exile community possesses a well-tested and high degree of resilience. If resilience is required for such a long game, Tibetans may have it.



Figure 1: Future that never arrives

the cave of ignorance.³ As long as we have not managed to step out of the cave—and even then—we will have little to say about the reality. Any message from beyond the boundaries of our conventions will therefore be met with suspicion.

The Dalai Lama was compelled to take that step out of the cave in 1959. He found it to his liking. Not only he, there were a number of Tibetans who developed a keen interest in the outside world and, through their confrontation with the 20th century, contributed to developing visions for Tibet's future.

The debate about the future at present, is dominated by those who see an analysis of current conditions in Tibet and China—and in particular their reading, or the prevailing opinion, of geopolitical power relations—as the foundation for any interpretation of the future. Any form of boldness is therefore seen—including by many self-

3 Plato's Allegory of the Cave offers a basis for critically examining our assumptions of political systems, including the leader's qualities. Socrates clearly did not have revolutionary communist agitators in mind when discussing the qualities of a philosopher statesman with Adeimantus. It is worth noting that interest in the Greek classics, nonetheless, has recently grown in China, some intellectuals even wrongly suggesting some resemblance to Confucius; in this context, see *Plato Goes to China: The Greek Classics and Chinese Nationalism* (Princeton University Press, 2023) by Shadi Bartsch.



Figure 2: The future we can all paint a picture of

declared Tibet experts from the West—as an affront.

To describe the ‘actual’ conditions, to identify the resulting options for the future, and to use the most probable predictions as the basis for political action—is that not a reasonable method? Looking at the results of this conventional mode of thinking, the answer is: No. Year after year, the predictions have grown bleaker and the political imagination poorer. These forecasts lacked courage and dignity—and with that, political charisma.

This was not always so. In the early 1960s, the debate was—paradoxically, despite the traumatic experience of a lost war—marked by

an optimistic faith in the future and a discourse on Tibetan modernity. The democratic constitution for a free Tibet is an expression of that. The most intriguing official proposal to emerge from this context was, in my view, the idea of a Zone of Peace.⁴ In 1989, following the award of the Nobel Prize, the Dalai Lama finally had the opportunity to present his vision for the future of Asia in detail to a broader public. It is a tragedy—and at the same time a

proof of the validity of the Allegory of the Cave—that in the years that followed, this text received virtually no attention in either the Tibetan or the international public sphere, and was never developed further.⁵ There is not a single publication that engages with the philosophical, geopolitical, economic, or social implications of this idea.

The Zone of Ahimsa can be understood as an attempt to offer, in the Asian context, a universal

4 The Dalai Lama referred to it as a “Zone of Peace” or “Zone of Ahimsa.” See, for comparison, his Nobel Lecture in Oslo at the Nobel Prize: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1989/lama/lecture/>

5 It is a regrettable omission that this forward-looking text, which could have provided a counterpoint to the “Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People,” was not included in the appendix of *Voice for the Voiceless*.

answer to the fundamental questions of justice and the good life. A reconciliation of spiritual values with the demands of a modern world that had just freed itself from the Cold War is set out in remarkably clear and accessible concepts. Read in light of today's geopolitical upheavals, the ideas for a Peace Zone appear as the core of a peace and security plan for 21st-century Asia. Regrettably, however, it does not offer a recipe—it is an invitation to think. An overreach, it seems, for the Tibetans in exile, who were busy chasing the carrot that Beijing dangled before them until the de facto breakdown of negotiations in 2008.

The Future of Tibet Conferences were an attempt at a fresh start—to fill a vacuum.⁶ The group succeeded in developing a methodology for speaking about the future, detached from the unproductive debate between independence and autonomy. More important to this scenario crafting was an understanding of the role narrative structures play in exploring the future. They outline intermediate steps and possible paths, including limited points of

intervention. Participants realised they are part of the story. As in real life, some things are beyond control; focusing on what can be influenced is empowering. But a geopolitical reflection on these scenarios, and a deeper political-philosophical grounding of them, remains outstanding.

It is high time, therefore, for a new round of 'Future of Tibet' conferences—this time with an expanded circle including Trans Himalayan representatives from Inner Asia, India, and China.



Wangpo Tethong is one of the main initiators of the "Future of Tibet" conferences (2020–2023). Born in Switzerland and educated at the University of Zurich in history and constitutional law, he has spent many years working with international NGOs, from Greenpeace to SWISSAID. He also coordinated Tibetan protests around the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Since 2021, he has been the European Executive Director of the International Campaign for Tibet, and is based in Amsterdam.

⁶ This series of four conferences from 2020 to 2023 was a civil society initiative by Tibetan activists, students, and academics. Four scenarios were developed and visualised: one highly positive, one pessimistic, and two shaped by missed opportunities and by stagnation. A substantial document with four scenarios were published in 2024. See here for more: <https://future-of-tibet.org/en/>

Way Forward

Policy Recommendations from this Edition

Editorial Team (Trans-Himalaya)

Although the contributors approach Tibet from different disciplines and perspectives, several common policy concerns emerge across the essays. These recommendations are not intended to reflect the views of every author. Rather, they bring together the principal themes that recur throughout this volume and are organised as short-, medium-, and long-term priorities for both the Government of India and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA).

Short-Term Priorities

The succession of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is likely to be one of the most significant developments affecting Tibet in the years ahead. India should quietly prepare for the diplomatic, legal and security implications while maintaining its long-standing position that the recognition of the Dalai Lama is a religious matter to be determined in accordance with Tibetan Buddhist traditions. At the same time, the CTA should continue strengthening its institutional preparedness, preserving key archives and ensuring close coordination with Tibetan Buddhist communities across the world.

Several contributors also draw attention to the growing importance of information and cyber security. As debates on Tibet increasingly play out in the digital domain, both India and the CTA should strengthen their strategic communications, improve their ability to respond to disinformation, and invest in secure communications and cyber resilience.

Medium-Term Priorities

Many of the issues discussed in this volume ultimately point to the need for stronger institutions and better-informed policymaking.

For India, this means investing more seriously in expertise on Tibet and contemporary China through universities, research institutions, military academies and diplomatic training. Continued support for Tibetan educational, cultural and monastic institutions will also help preserve a unique civilisational heritage while reinforcing India's position as the principal home of Tibetan Buddhism in exile.

For the CTA, the priority should be to ensure that younger Tibetans remain connected to their language, culture and democratic institutions. Education, cultural programmes, scholarships and greater opportunities for young Tibetans to participate in public life will all contribute to the long-term strength of the exile community.



Long-Term Priorities

Looking further ahead, India would benefit from developing a more coherent and enduring Tibet policy that recognises Tibet's importance beyond the immediate context of India-China relations.

India also has a direct civilisational stake in the future of Tibetan Buddhism. While Buddhism originated in India, Tibet became the principal custodian of the Nalanda tradition after the decline of the great Buddhist universities in India. Through centuries of scholarship, translation and monastic practice, Tibetan Buddhism preserved and developed a rich intellectual and spiritual heritage rooted in the teachings of Nalanda. Attempts to control, reinterpret or undermine this tradition therefore affect not only Tibetan religious and cultural identity but also an important part of India's own civilisational legacy. Preserving the integrity and freedom of Tibetan Buddhism strengthens and reinforces India's role as the home of the living Nalanda tradition, and safeguards a heritage that remains integral to India's civilisational ethos.

The issues discussed throughout this volume—from border security and water resources to Buddhism and regional stability—demonstrate that Tibet will continue to occupy an important place in India's strategic thinking.

India is also uniquely placed to become a global centre for Tibetan studies, Himalayan research and policy analysis. Building on the institutions and expertise already available would strengthen both scholarship and policymaking.

For the CTA, preparing the next generation of leaders will remain one of its most important responsibilities. Future leaders will operate in a very different political and technological environment from previous generations. Investing in leadership development, governance, diplomacy and public policy today will help ensure that Tibetan institutions remain effective and resilient in the decades to come.

Conclusion

The essays in this volume suggest that Tibet's future will depend as much on strong institutions, informed leadership, and the preservation of identity as on wider geopolitical developments. Preparing for that future requires sustained investment in knowledge, institutions, and younger generations—an effort that both India and the Central Tibetan Administration can begin strengthening today.

At the same time, this volume makes clear that Tibet is far more than a geographical space. Its history, civilisation, and strategic importance extend well beyond the

Himalayas, influencing the security, diplomacy, and future of Asia. Understanding Tibet in this broader context is essential not only for informed policymaking, but also for building a more stable and secure region.

These recommendations do not necessarily reflect a consensus among all contributors, but rather represent the principal policy themes that emerge from the scholarship and analysis presented throughout this volume.



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India-Tibet Cultural Relations and its Legacies

Jampa Samten

The Tibetan Plateau served as a natural defensive wall for the National Security of Asian countries that did not share borders with China before 1959. China shared land borders with 6 countries before 1959, and India was not among these countries.

This natural defensive wall collapsed in 1959 with the forceful occupation of Tibet by Communist China. China, now shares borders with 14 countries, with India being one of those.

Tibetan Plateau is the most glaciated region on Earth. Water runoff from these regions feeds the largest rivers of Asia. Closed to 47% of the world's population depends on the watershed originating from the Tibetan Plateau. Tibet's strategical, ecological, and environmental significance to the Asian regions is therefore immense.

Tibet also served as a repository of ancient Indian knowledge or wisdom, particularly Buddhist teachings and practices. Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan travelled to Tibet four times between the period 1934 and 1938 in search of ancient Indian knowledge and wisdom preserved there. The Indian population remains largely unaware of how this ancient knowledge and wisdom reached Tibet, and how it has been preserved and cherished by the Tibetan people for over a 1,000 years. This paper aims to present a brief overview of India-Tibet cultural relations and their legacies.

According to traditional Tibetan historical texts, Tibet's first cultural contact occurred with India sometime in the 4th century CE, during the reign of the Tibetan king Lha Thothori Nyentsan. Buddhism was introduced to the Tibetan king by an Indian scholar named Legjin, assisted by a Khotanese monk and Tokharian translator. The introduction of medical system to Tibet is also attributed to an Indian doctor couple during the reign of King Lha Thothori Nyentsan.

In the 7th century, King Songtsan Gampo (r. 617-650), embraced Buddhism most likely due to the influence of his two consorts: a Nepalese princess named Bhrikuti Devi and a Chinese princess named Wencheng Konjo. The Nepalese princess arrived at the Tibetan Court sometimes around 638 CE, and the Chinese Princess in 641 CE. The Chinese consort brought with her an



Figure 1: Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan (seated) during his second expedition to Tibet in 1934.

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Rahul-Sankrityayan-seated-taken-in-1934-during-his-second-visit-to-Tibet_fig3_339781360

image of Sakyamuni Buddha, which was installed in the Ramoche temple built by her in Lhasa. The Nepalese consort likewise brought a Sakyamuni Buddha image, which was installed in the temple of Rasa Trulnang, also built by her in Lhasa.

Indian Influence on Tibetan Script and Language

One of the most ambitious and significant tasks facing King Songtsan Gampo was the translation of a vast body of Buddhist literature from Indian languages into Tibetan. Until that point, Tibetan was transmitted orally, as the language had no

written script. It became clear that a written Tibetan script with a systematic grammar was essential to accomplishing this goal. King Songtsan had two options: to devise the Tibetan script and grammatical system on either the Indian or the Chinese model. The king chose the Indian model, as the Indian alphabetic script and its systematic grammatical framework were far better suited to translating Indian Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan.

The king dispatched a group of 16 young Tibetans to India to study Indian languages and scripts. Thonmi Sambhota was one of them,

and he was the first Tibetan to reach India where he studied Indian languages, scripts, and grammatical texts under various scholars. Based on Indian alphabets and the Brahmi script of the Gupta period, Thonmi Sambhota devised the Tibetan alphabet, script, and grammatical system that remain in use to this day. The Tibetan alphabet consists of 30 basic consonants, including the inherent vowel *a*, and four vowel-signs—for *i*, *u*, *e*, and *o*—modelled on the Indian system. He was also the first Tibetan to translate Buddhist scriptures from an Indian language into Tibetan.

No account of the history and development of Buddhism in Tibet would be complete without the mention of Śāntarakṣita, Padmasambhava, and Kamalaśīla—all of whom travelled to Tibet during the reign of Trisong Detsan (r. 742-798). Śāntarakṣita's most enduring contribution was the establishment of the Buddhist *Samgha*—the monastic community—in Tibet for the first time. In 767 CE, Śāntarakṣita, assisted by 12 *bhikkhus* invited from India, ordained the first seven Tibetans into the *Sarvāstivādin* tradition of *Vinaya* (monastic discipline) and admitted them into the monastic order. He is remembered, honoured, and venerated to this day as the first *upādhyāya* (*Khanpo*) of the Tibetan *Samgha*. Through his tireless, lifelong devotion and the Royal



patronage of King Trisong Detsan, the teachings and practice of *Vinaya* spread widely across Tibet. On Śāntarakṣita's recommendation, the king also invited Padmasambhava, one of the greatest tantric masters known in India.

During the same period, the Chinese teacher Mo-ho-yen was imparting instruction in deep meditation remaining in a state of 'absolute inaction and thoughtlessness'. His teachings diverged, both in theory and practice, from those of the Indian traditions by discouraging the study of the religious and philosophical scriptures. Sharp disputes arose between the followers of the Chinese Spontaneist (*cig char ba*) tradition and the Indian Gradualist (*rim gyis pa*) tradition. The Indian

philosopher, Kamalaśīla—a disciple of Śāntarakṣita—was brought from India to debate the Chinese teacher. The Chinese master was defeated and returned to his homeland. The king thereupon proclaimed that all Tibetan should henceforth follow the Madhyamika doctrines of the great Indian teachers, such as Nāgārjuna, and conduct themselves in accordance with the 10 religious practices and the 6 *paramitas*. Kamalaśīla composed *Bhāvanākrama* (stages of meditation), thereby consolidating and stabilising the foundation of Buddhism laid by Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava.

Tibet's First Monastic Institution and Indian Influences on Tibetan Culture

Tibet's first monastic institution,

Samye Mahāvihāra, was built under the patronage of King Trisong Detsan. Acharya Śāntarakṣita, modelled its construction on Odantapuri Mahāvihāra, the ruins of which are believed to lie in and around the modern city of Bihar Sharif in the Nālandā district of Bihar. The Ajanta Cave Vihāras offer vivid evidence that Tibetan monastic architecture is closely reminiscent of the Indian model of Buddhist *Vihāras*. The *Sayanasanavastu* chapter of the *Vinayavastu*—one of the foundational texts on monastic discipline—prescribes the drawing of a *bhāvacakra* on the front verandah wall outside the main entrance, which is a common feature of Tibetan monasteries. The *bhāvacakra* is also clearly visible on the front verandah wall of



Figure 2: Samye Mahāvihāra in Tibet.

Source: <https://www.wondersoftibet.com/destinations/samye-and-tsedang/>



Ajanta Vihāra Cave no. 17, to the left of its main entrance, though unfortunately, a large portion of the painting has been lost.

Of the three catalogues of Indian classical texts translated into Tibetan—compiled in the 9th century—two have survived: the *Dankar Palace Catalogue*, which lists 736 titles and the *Phangthang Palace Catalogue*, which lists 959 titles. By the 9th century, the continuous flow of Indian cultural heritage had substantially enriched and transformed Tibetan civilisation, which absorbed these new ideas and adapted them to its own context.

Langdarma, the last Tibetan king, carried out a persecution of Buddhism beginning in 841 CE; religious activities were outlawed, and the entire organisation of faith was dismantled. The political unity of Tibet began to crumble, ushering in an era of decay and dissolution. Cultural interaction between India and Tibet came to a standstill for approximately a century.

Revival of Cultural Relations

The cultural interaction between India and Tibet was revived in the late 10th century as a result of the dedicated and tireless efforts of Lha Lama Yeshe-'od and the successive kings of western Tibet. Lha Lama Yeshe-'od and his nephew Jang-chub-'od despatched Gya Tshondu Senge and Nagtsho Lotsaba to

India in search of a teacher who could revive the deteriorating state of Buddhism in Tibet. After a long search and repeated visits to India, they finally concluded that Atiśa (Dīpaṅkaraśrījñāna) was the right person to resolve the Tibetan religious crisis. On numerous occasions, Jang-chub-'od sent invitations to Atiśa to visit Tibet, accompanied by generous gifts of gold.

Atiśa arrived in Tibet in 1042. He devoted 17 years of his life to Tibet, preaching the Buddha Dharma and translating classical Buddhist texts into Tibetan in collaboration with his Tibetan disciples. He is credited with composing 26 texts—including the *bodhipathā-pradīpa*, a manual of Mahayana Buddhist practices—and translating 27 Indian classical texts. The wealth that Atiśa accumulated in the form of offerings from the devotees and disciples was despatched to India on three occasions, through Chag Khri-mchog and other disciples, as offerings to his teacher and the monastic community, most probably of the Vikramaśīla Mahāvihāra.

Atiśa emphasised the necessity of an unbroken teaching tradition that could prevent the arbitrary interpretation of sacred texts, which had become a problem in Tibet at that time. The authority and validity of the doctrine had to be guaranteed through direct

transmission from masters to disciples. Such direct instruction was held to ensure both the correct interpretation of the scriptures and the right understanding of the spirit concealed behind their words, thus enabling Buddha's teaching to fulfil its mission of salvation. He is therefore credited with the revival of Buddhism in Tibet.

The period between the 10th and the 12th centuries was a peak era during which many Indian scholars visited Tibet to preach and assist in translation work, while many Tibetans travelled to India to study under Indian scholars. These Tibetans visited the sacred places of the Buddhist tradition in India in order to collect texts, study with the Indian teachers, receive initiation into tantric traditions, and obtain instruction in the oral tradition of mystical and yogic texts as well as tantric practice. Lochen Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055 CE), Marpa Lotsaba, Nagtsho Lotsaba, Gya Tshondu Senge, and Ngog Loden Sherab are among the notable Tibetans of this period who brought and propagated the Indian knowledge and wisdom in Tibet. Rinchen Zangpo travelled to Kashmir and other parts of India on two occasions, returning each time with scriptures, teachers, and artists from Kashmir. He is credited with building 108 temples or chapels, and with translating or revising 158 texts, either alone or in collaboration with Indian scholars.



Some Tibetans even held significant positions at the great Mahāvihāra in India. Tsami Lotsaba Sangye Dakpa became a leader and teacher of the *Samgha* at Bodhgaya and Nālandā Mahāvihāra. The basic account of Ga Lotsaba's first meeting with Tsami Lotsaba at Nālandā is given as follows:

*At the Vihāra of Sri Nālandā there
dwell many pandits;
And among them also there dwells
the one who has obtained Wisdom
in the five Major Sciences and the
Siddhi of long life;
The one called Tsa-mi Sangye
Dakpa.*

As a result of Tibet's continuous cultural interactions with India during the given period, Tibetans produced the largest body of translations of the Indian classical literature. The Tibetan Tripitaka, known as Kanjur,¹ and Tanjur,² preserves approximately 5,000 classical texts translated mostly from Sanskrit language.

In addition to the vast number of the translation of Buddhist classical texts of Mahayana and Buddhist philosophical texts preserved in Kanjur and



Figure 3: Kanjur and Tanjur

Source: <https://adarshah.org/kangyur/>

Tanjur collections, there are over hundred non-Buddhist Indian texts covering classical medical, grammar, poetics (*Kāvyasāstra*), dramaturgy (*Nāṭakaśāstra*), and political science (*Nitisāstra*), all translated into Tibetan language and preserved in the *cikītsā vīdyā* (*gso ba rig pa*), *śabda vīdyā* (*sGra rig pa*), *Śīlpā vīdyā* (*bzo rig pa*), and *Nitisāstra* (*lugs kyi bstan bcos*) sections of Tanjur collection. These texts are still studied by Tibetans and have exerted the greatest influences in Tibetan literary and medical traditions.

The cultural interaction between India and Tibet gradually diminished from the mid-13th century following the destruction of Buddhism in India by foreign invaders, but it was never entirely

severed. Several Indian scholars continued to visit Tibet and collaborate with Tibetan scholars after that period. Notable figures among them include Sariputra, the abbot of Bodhgaya who arrived in Tibet in 1418; Pandit Vanarātna who arrived in Tibet with a group of 14 masters in 1426; and Pandit Buddhaguptanātha, Nirvānaśrīpāda, and Pūrṇāvajrapāda, the principal teachers of Taranatha (1575-1634), the author of *History of Buddhism in India*. The interaction of the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) with Indian pandits is also noteworthy. The visit of Pandit Gokulnāth Miśra and his elder brother Balabhadra in 1655 at the request of the fifth Dalai Lama may have been the final phase of these historic India-Tibet cultural interactions.

1 Kanjur meaning “the Translations of the Buddhavachan” (Buddha's teachings). This collection consists of 100 volumes.

2 Tanjur meaning “the Translations of the treatises (śāstra)” authored by Indian scholars of 1st to 12th century. This collection consists of 225 volumes.

The Return of Buddhism and Indian Literary Works to India

In the early 20th century, Sarat Chandra Das undertook a journey to Tibet on a political mission. A pioneering Indian Tibetologist, he wrote several books on the religion, history, and grammar of Tibetan language, including *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*, as well as a work on the activities of Indian scholars in Tibet entitled *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*. In 1934, Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan came to Tibet to study Buddhism with Tibetan scholars and to search for Sanskrit manuscript that had left India since the 7th century. He returned to India with photographic copies of approximately 80 Sanskrit manuscripts and 40 horse-loads of Tibetan Buddhist texts. With the arrival of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan refugees in India in 1959, Buddhist culture and values that had long disappeared from their land of origin were once again restored to India.

Conclusion

As a result of Tibet's continuous cultural interactions with Indian scholars, Tibetans have produced the largest number of translations of Indian classical texts. The Tibetan Tripitaka, known as the Kanjur and Tanjur, preserves approximately 5,000 titles translated from Indian languages. The Tibetan people have proved to be exemplary custodians of Indian cultural

values, particularly Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy, inherited and transmitted from India over a period of 1,000 years. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Tibetan scholars in exile have made a remarkable contribution to propagating Buddhist values—particularly *Mahāyāna* teachings and Buddhist philosophy—in India as well as the wider world.



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Tibet was Never Part of China¹

Hon-Shiang LAU

Why is this Topic Important?

China is a signatory to the 1918 League of Nations Covenant and the 1945 United Nations Charter; both documents prohibit future (i.e., post-1918) territorial acquisitions via conquest.

Moreover, the People's Republic of China (PRC) incessantly paints a sorry picture of China being a victim of Japan and the western colonial powers, and vehemently condemns these powers for their past conquests. Therefore, the PRC cannot admit that her 1950 annexation of Tibet is a new conquest, but must legitimise it by lying to the world that 'Tibet has been part of China since antiquity 西藏自古以来就是中国的一部分' (see, e.g., the PRC's State Council 1992 White Paper 'Tibet: Its Ownership and Human Rights Situation,' www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/9-1.htm). In contrast, the Central Tibet Administration (CTA) claims that Tibet has always been independent from China. This contrarian claim is used by the PRC as:

1. A prima facie proof of CTA's betrayal to her motherland (i.e., China), and
2. Justification for not negotiating with the CTA or the Dalai Lama.

Most other similar international disputes are impossible to resolve because each side relies on its own 'historical evidence' and rejects the 'historical evidence' presented by the opposing side as false. Moreover, many polities do not have reliable historical records that date back sufficiently long. The China-Tibet dispute however, is a rare exception because:

1. China has a multi-millennial tradition of keeping reliable historical records, and
2. China's own official/authoritative records unequivocally show that China never had sovereignty or governing power over Tibet before 1950 (although the PRC keeps this fact secret).

¹ This article is based on author's book *Tibet was never part of China since Antiquity* (Publisher: Optimum Publishing International. ISBN-10:0888903782, ISBN-13:978-0888903785. 1272 pages. Publication date: February 2026).

‘Guiding Principles’ for Judging whether Tibet was part of China before 1950

My book uses the following two Guiding Principles (GPs) to assess the situation.

GP#1: Using only Chinese documents that the People’s Republic of China recognises as authoritative

There are many groups of such documents, one example is China’s ‘Official History’ system:

1. ‘Veritable Records (‘VRs’) 实录.’ After the death of each emperor, his successor convenes a panel to compile, using archival records, a set of annals for the deceased emperor’s reign.
2. ‘Official Histories 正史.’ After the demise of each dynasty, the succeeding-dynasty’s regime convenes a panel to compile a comprehensive ‘History’ of the preceding dynasty based on the ‘VRs’ and other archival material.

Another example is the comprehensive catalogues of contemporaneous dynastic territories called Unification Records (一统志).

GP#2: Using proper criteria for judging a ‘Sovereignty’ claim

To judge whether China had sovereignty over Tibet during (say)

the mid-Ming-dynasty² period, my book investigates whether mid-Ming China had, among others:

- published geographic documents showing Tibet as part of China,
- conducted census and collected taxes in Tibet,
- recognised Tibetans as Chinese subjects, and
- imposed China’s currency/coinage, language, legal codes and judicial system in Tibet.

My book shows that China’s own authoritative historical documents indicate clearly that through the centuries, China’s governments were never able to perform such basic governmental functions. Therefore, it can be concluded objectively that ‘Tibet was never part of China before 1950.’

One detailed example: The Great Ming Unification Record (GMUR) 敕修大明一统志 clearly indicates that Tibet was not part of the Ming Empire

An edition of GMUR³ was commissioned by Ming Emperor Yingzong and published in 1461. The GMUR’s Preface, written by the Emperor himself, states that:

...As for governing within our national boundaries, ... the

‘Chinese world’ (天下) is divided into 13 provinces, namely: Shanxi, Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, HuGuang, Sichuan, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou. *Interpretation:* The emperor states that the ‘Chinese world’ consists of only the explicitly-listed ‘13 provinces’; Tibet is not included.

Table 1 presents an abridged version of GMUR’s Table of Contents. Two key points warrant special attention:

1. Out of the 90 Scrolls in the entire GMUR book, the first 88 Scrolls are devoted to China’s territories. Within them, Scrolls 86-87 cover Yunnan Province, and Scroll 87 records Burma, BaBaiDaDian (i.e., northern Thailand) and Laos as part of Yunnan Province; that is, they were considered as ‘regular’ Ming-territories just like Beijing or Fujian province, demonstrating the Ming-Empire’s very inclusive attitude in declaring whether a certain region was ‘part of China.’
2. Tibet however, is relegated to the ‘Foreign Aliens’ section (Scrolls 89-90) at the end of the book, together with such polities as Japan and the Arabian Mecca and Medina.

Figure 1 shows the Great Ming Unification Map (GMUM) given in the GMUR. In this map, labels of ‘framed white text on black

² Ming dynasty, 1368 A.D. to 1644 A.D.

³ The entire book (5500+ pages) can be downloaded from the Internet for free.

Scroll #	Name of the Scrolls and the Entities Covered by these Scrolls
1	National Capital Cities, ShunTian Prefecture
32	ShaanXi Province 陝西布政司: XiAn Prefecture I 西安府 上
37	ShaanXi Province contd. 續 ‘陝西布政司’
86	Yunnan Province 雲南布政司: various prefectures/counties etc.
87	Yunnan Province cont. 續 ‘雲南布政司’: ... Burma District Office, 緬甸軍民宣慰使司; BaBaiDaDian District Office 八百大甸軍民宣慰使司; Laos District Office 老撾軍民宣慰使司...
88	Guizhou Province 貴州布政司
89	Foreign Aliens 外夷: Korea, Manchuria, Japan , Ryukyu, XiFan 西蕃 (Tibet), etc. (16 entities listed)
90	Foreign Aliens cont. 續‘外夷’: Vietnam, Siam, Java, Mecca, Medina, etc. (41 entities listed)

TABLE 1: The Structure of the Great Ming Unification Record

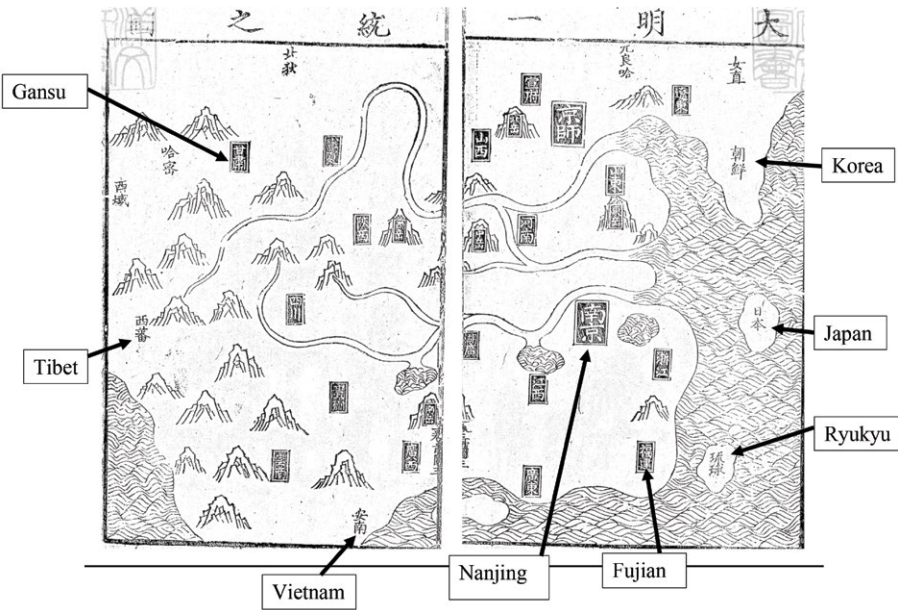


Figure 1: Great Ming Unification Map (1461)

background’ are used for places within China (e.g., Capital City, Fujian Province, etc.). In contrast, foreign countries beyond the eastern national border such as Japan and Korea are labelled with ‘unframed black text on white background.’ The labels ‘Tibet 西蕃’ and ‘Western Lands西域’ on GMUM beyond China’s western

border are also in ‘unframed black text on white background,’ just like Japan.

My book presents several hundred proofs—drawn from China’s own authoritative documents—demonstrating clearly that Tibet was never historically part of China.



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The McMahon- Shatra Line

Claude Arpi

Introduction

Chinese Warlord Zhao Erhfeng's campaigns in Kham (particularly in the Pome and Zayul areas) between 1905 and 1911 brought the Chinese close to the Indo-Tibet border in the North-East.

In Zayul, the Chinese issued an order to the Chief of the Mijir Mishmis to open a track from Tibet to Assam. They also sent an expedition on the Delei river and planted their dragon flag at Menilkrai on the Lohit (South of Walong) with the inscription 'The Southern Frontier of Zayul on the Borders of Sichuan Province of the Chinese Empire'.

This raised alarm bells in London; the British also realised that the treaties signed with China and Russia regarding Tibet (in 1906 and 1907 respectively), had no relevance if they could not be implemented on the ground.

It is in these circumstances that London decided to call China and Tibet for a tripartite Convention to solve the Tibetan problem, secure a buffer zone between British India and China, fix the Indo-Tibet boundary and ensure peace and stability in the region. Simla was selected as the venue for the Tibet Conference (1913-14).

When we speak of the border between India and Tibet in the North-East, it is common to call the demarcation of the boundary—drawn on two paper sheets in March 1914—the 'McMahon Line'.

In our views, it should be called the McMahon-Shatra Line since the maps agreed upon by the governments of India and Tibet, carried two signatures and two seals (that of Sir Henry McMahon, the British Plenipotentiary and his Tibetan counterpart, Lonchen Shatra Paljor Dorje, the Tibetan prime minister).

Both signatories represented their respective countries at the Tibet Conference (some authors referred this conference to as the Simla Conference).

Who were the British and Tibetan Plenipotentiaries?

Arthur Henry McMahon

Lt Col Sir Arthur Henry McMahon (1862-1949) was a British Diplomat and an Army officer. In 1914, he

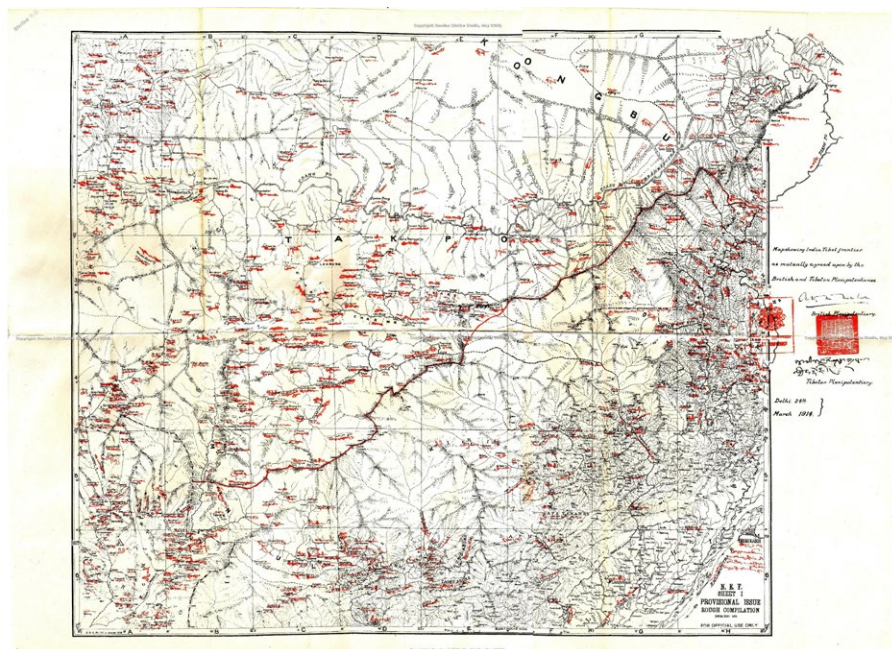


Figure 1: The McMahon-Shatra Line

Source: Author's personal collection

was Foreign Secretary to the Government of India; later he served as the High Commissioner in Egypt from 1915 to 1917. In Simla, McMahon was assisted by Charles Bell, the 13th Dalai

Lama's old acquaintance from his Kalimpong days.

Lonchen Shatra Paljor Dorje

Lonchen Shatra, after marrying into an aristocratic family in Lhasa, the Shatra, used 'Shatra' as his name, as it was then the custom in Tibet. When the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa after his exile in India (1910–1912), Shatra won the pontiff's confidence. In October 1913, Shatra was nominated as Plenipotentiary to the Tibet Conference. He was known as a progressive official and a supporter of reform in Tibet.

Sir Charles Bell wrote: "[Shatra] showed skills and a political power that surprised many at the Conference. His simple dignity and charming way of doing things made

him beloved by all who knew him in Simla and Delhi." India's north-eastern border with Tibet certainly owes a lot to Lonchen Shatra.

The Background

In 1913, war in Europe appeared imminent; the British finally realised that the treaties regarding Tibet, signed with China and Russia (in 1906 and 1907 respectively), had no relevance as they could not be implemented in practice. In these circumstances, London decided to call China and Tibet for a tripartite Convention to solve the Tibetan problem, secure a buffer zone between British India and China, and ensure peace and stability in the region. Simla was selected as the venue for the Tibet Conference, and Sir Henry McMahon was to chair the tripartite talks. It must be noted that 10 years earlier, Lord Curzon had already thought of Simla as the place for such a Conference.

It was not an easy proposal; for months the Chinese were rather reluctant to sit at the negotiating table on an equal footing with the Tibetans. But diverse factors forced them to agree; the Chinese were aware that the Dalai Lama was close to some British officers such as Charles Bell, and they feared another Lhasa-like Convention (of 1904) in which they would perhaps not even be asked to participate.

More importantly, the military situation in Kham was not



Figure 2: Photograph of Lonchen Shatra Paljor Dorje

Source: Author's personal collection

favourable to the Chinese as most of the territory captured by Zhao Erfeng had been recovered by the Tibetan troops. The Tibetan army was now better organised, and was armed with imported weaponry. Following the Dalai Lama's return, the Tibetan army underwent British-style-training. According to all records, it was the clinching factor. This development was worrisome for the Chinese who were already apprehensive after Mongolia signed a Treaty with Tibet, in 1913, under Russian influence. For the Chinese, the question was: Would the Tibetans join the British sphere if they refused to participate in the Conference? Hence, the Chinese felt they had no alternative but to accept the British conditions and attend the proceedings in Simla.

The 13th Dalai Lama chose Lonchen Shatra, his experienced Prime Minister, as his representative; he had dared to suggest negotiations with the Younghusband Mission 10 years earlier. Trimon, Bell's assistant, had prepared detailed documentation on the legal status of Tibet, especially of the eastern border areas.

It was certainly one of the great surprises of the conference: the Tibetans had come well prepared with volumes and volumes of original documents, while the Chinese had no documents to prove their claims.

The brief given to Lonchen Shatra by the Dalai Lama was clear:

1. Tibet was to look after its own internal affairs;
2. Its foreign affairs were to be managed for important matters in consultation with the British;
3. No Chinese Amban or official should be posted in Tibet;
4. Tibetan territory should include all the Tibetan-speaking areas up to Dartsedo in the east and Kokonor in the north-east.

When the Conference assembled, it became immediately apparent that the positions of the Tibetan and Chinese delegates were diametrically opposite on the Tibet-China border.

In his presentation, Lonchen Shatra reiterated the Dalai Lama's viewpoints, and formally requested recognition of Tibet's independence.

He also wanted the Dalai Lama to be acknowledged as the temporal and spiritual leader of Tibet. He claimed that the Tibetan territory should include all the Tibetan-speaking areas of Kham and Amdo. Lonchen Shatra also requested that the Conference declare the Conventions of 1906 (with China) and 1908 (with Russia) invalid, as Tibet had not been a party to them.

The Chinese stand however, was very different. Ivan Chen claimed Tibet as a part of China. He explained that after the conquest of Genghis Khan, Tibet had become a part of the Chinese Empire. Another argument that he used was that the Tibetans had called upon the Manchus for military assistance many times, and each time the Emperor had come to provide support. He gave the examples of the invasions of the Dzungar people

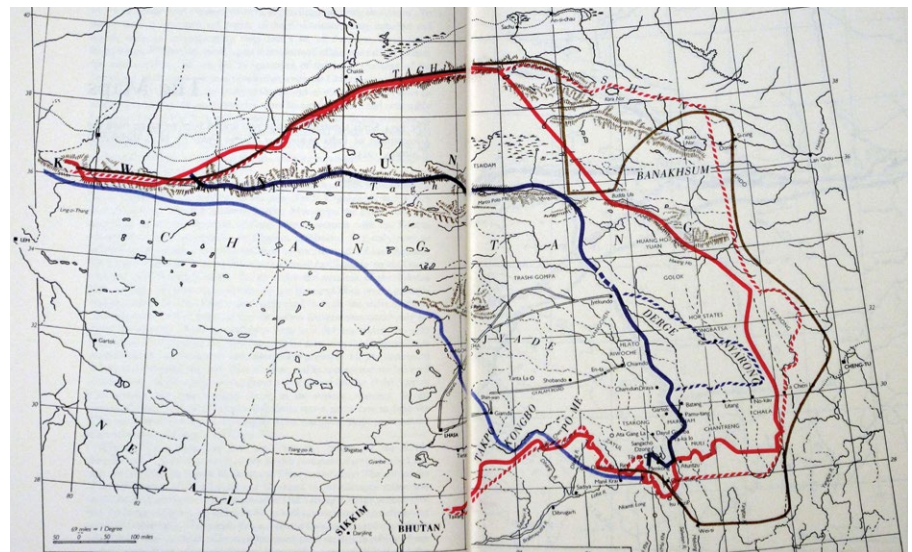


Figure 3: Differing perceptions for the Sino-Tibet Border

Source: Author's personal collection

of Mongol in the 18th century and the Gurkhas in the 19th century.

For the Chinese, the status of Tibet had to be restored as per the 1906 Agreement, and the border between China and Tibet was to be in Gyamda, some 150 miles east of Lhasa.

The Chinese and Tibetan perception of the location of the Sino-Tibet border was extremely different (see Figure 3). The British Plenipotentiary was caught between two opposing viewpoints, and on behalf of His Majesty's government, McMahon had to harmonise the two sides.

He found a way out by dividing

Tibet into two parts, with consequences that are still felt today. McMahon believed that he could impose a 'fair deal' on both parties that would also be advantageous for Great Britain. Accordingly, Tibet was to be divided into two parts:

1. 'Outer Tibet' which corresponded roughly to Central and Western Tibet including the sections skirting the Indian frontier, Lhasa, Shigatse, Chamdo; and
2. 'Inner Tibet' including Amdo Province and part of Kham.

'Outer Tibet' was to be recognised as autonomous. China would not interfere in the administration of Outer Tibet, nor with the selection of the Dalai Lama. No troops or

Ambans would be stationed there.
It would not be converted into a
Chinese Province.

The Need to Settle the Indo-Tibet Boundary

Soon after the Conference started, the British felt the need to separately demarcate their border with Tibet; the Chinese Plenipotentiary would not be involved in the entire process.

On 21 November 1913, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, sent a proposal for the Indo-Tibet boundary: “They are based on recent survey and information obtained of limits of effective occupation and territorial rights on either side.”

One must admit that the knowledge of the border was rather vague, but McMahon was anxious to open a discussion with Lonchen Shatra pending settlement of more difficult questions. The Viceroy referred to a map in two sheets showing the north-east frontier map, sent by the Foreign Secretary on 02 October 1913.

Starting from near Isu Razi Pass [in Burma] on Salwin divide line follows throughout main northern watershed of drainage into the Irrawaddy and Brahmaputra basins as far as peak 16,834 on Tsangpo-Dihang divide [East of Pemakoe],

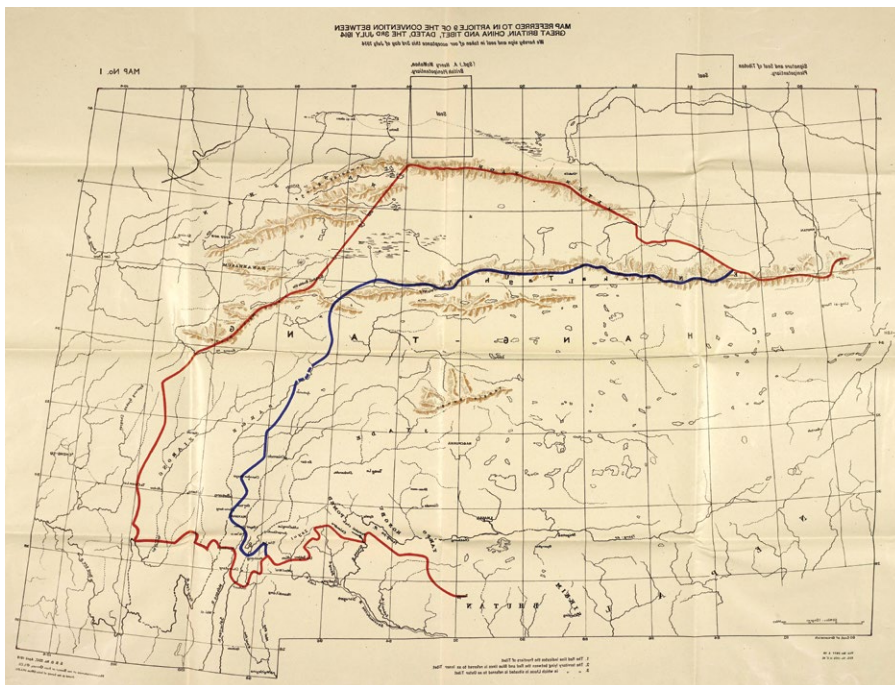


Figure 4: Proposal for settling the Sino-Tibet Border in the East

Source: Author's personal collection

except at one place near the Burma border (the Taron river area).

Isu Razi was the border pass between Yunnan province and Burma (now Myanmar).

The same day, Sir T.W. Holderness, Under Secretary of State for India, recommended some special consideration for the frontier in the Lohit valley:

1. it is perhaps the most vulnerable point between Isu Razi and Chumbi (Sikkim), and
2. the Chinese have advanced definite claims there by creating flags at Menilkrai purporting to mark the boundary line. ... His Majesty's Government are under no obligation to accept an ex-parte definition of the border; and in any case the situation has been entirely changed since January 1912 by the expulsion of the Chinese from Zayul, which has deprived them of all power to enforce their claim to the Menilkrai line.

It must be pointed out that Menilkrai (Walong) is far north from the line claimed by China today. The same memo concluded:

- West of the Lohit region, the proposed frontier seems generally suitable. The recent surveys in the Abor country (i.e. the valleys of the Dihang and Dibong rivers and their

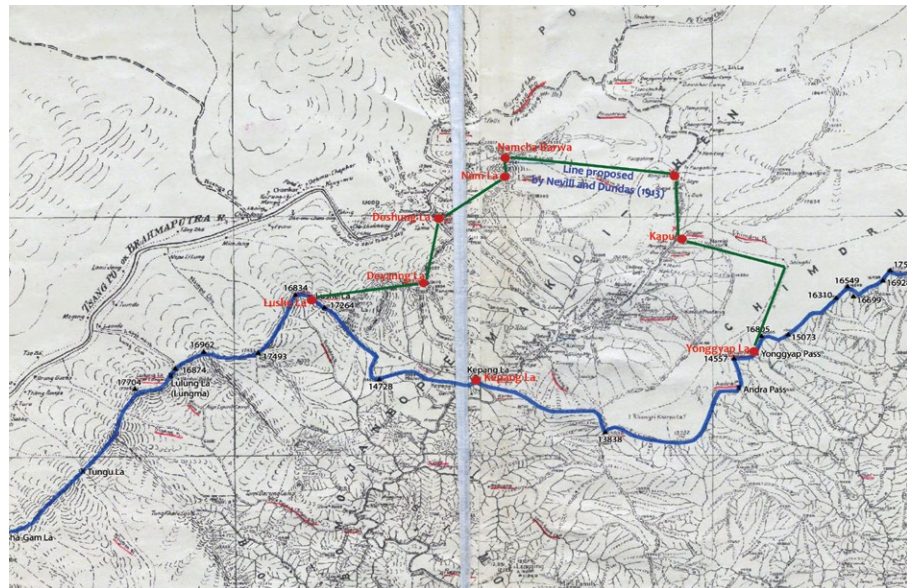


Figure 5: A Draft proposal in August 1913 puts the Line at the Namcha Barwa

Source: Author's personal collection

various affluents) have made it possible to define with some degree of precision the line of division between tribal and Tibetan influence; and it is on this division that the Government of India's proposals are based.

The Vice-Roy had commented:

- Westward from peak 16,834 [Lushe La] on the Tsang Po-Dihang divide our information does not yet suffice to permit of detailed definition.

What is not mentioned is that different proposals had been made a few months earlier by the General Staff in London. They were based on earlier tours of administrators/explorers like Captains Neville, Morshead, Bailey, or Dundas. In

the Pemakoe area, the border was drawn over the Namcha Barwa leaving the area with India (See Figure 5) . It was rejected by the British government as a gesture of accommodation towards the Tibetan views, who argued that the area was mainly inhabited by Tibetans. Similarly, in Tsari sector, the Dakpa Shelri was included in the first draft of the line but later given to Tibet in view of the religious importance of the Tsari Yatra (known as Rongkor).

About the Tsari sector, the Vice-Roy observed:

- We do not know source of Subansiri, nor the southern limits of Tibetan possessions in and south of Tawang. The line can only be defined in general terms as running in general

south-westerly direction along mountain range which forms main northern watershed of rivers draining so southward into the Brahmaputra basin until it reaches limit(s) of Tibetan district of Tawang, and thence following southern limits of Tawang to Bhutan. ...Until we obtain further information this line may be roughly marked on map along chain of peaks.

The least one can say is that it was not very precise. The line drawn by the British survey was often following the higher peaks, more information was required for a watershed line which could differ from the peaks' line.

It explains why two young captains, Frederick Bailey (intelligence) and Henry Morshead (survey), were sent on an expedition to clarify many unclear locations on the maps.

Finally, the Indo-Tibet border agreement was signed on 24 March 1914. After the signature of the bilateral agreement, Bell told McMahon:

- I told the Lonchen [Shatra] that the boundary line which I had shown him was ... based on the reports of British Officers and surveyors, who had made careful surveys ... and the proposed line appeared to represent an equitable frontier between Tibet and India.

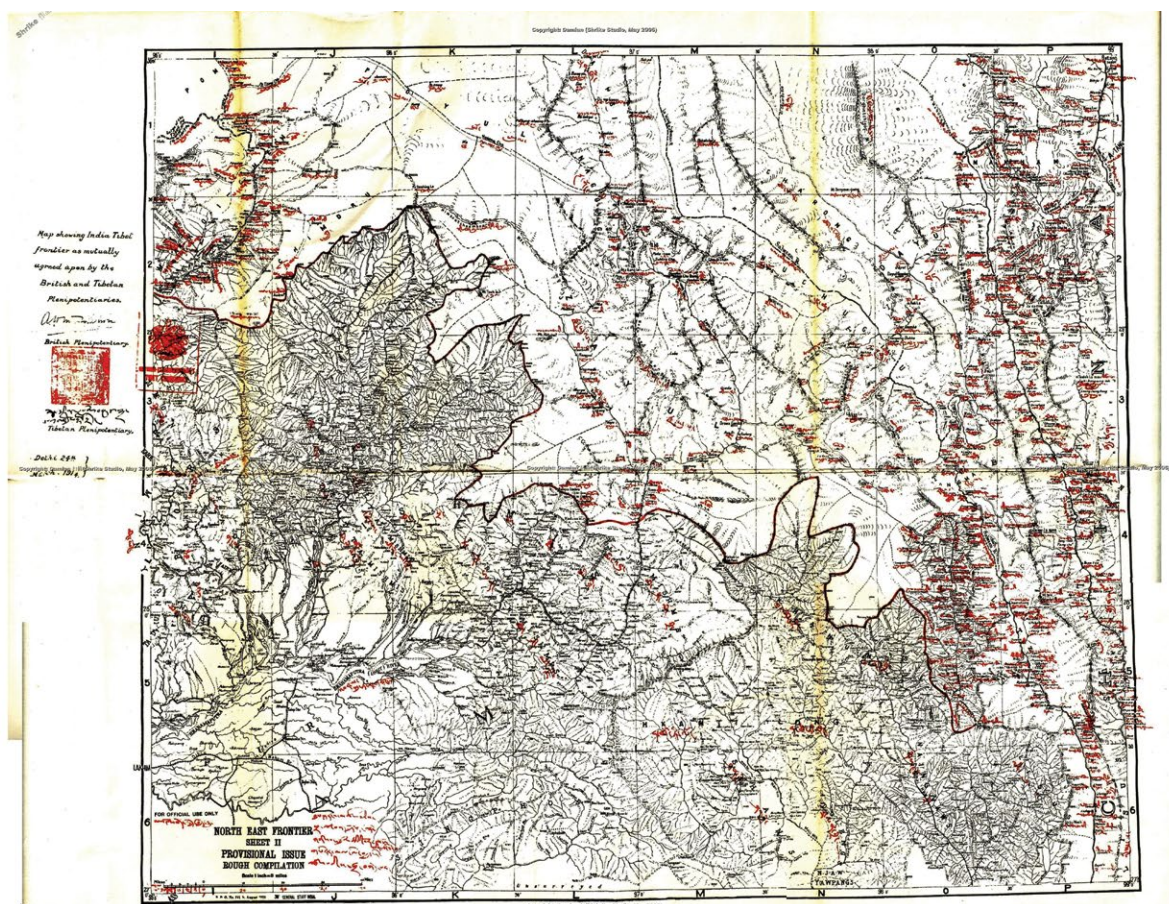


Figure 6: The McMahon-Shatra Line in the Dibrang Sector

Source: Author's personal collection

Bell further stated:

- The Lonchen recognised the friendly attitude of the British Government towards Tibet. He stated that for the purposes of the present Treaty he accepted the proposed boundary line. ...His only request was that [if] any territory belonging to Lopas [local tribes under Lhasa] had been included within the land on the British side of the line, questions might be settled direct by the Tibetan Government with the British Government.

This was accepted by the British government.

For the rest of the boundary, the Viceroy also wrote:

- In view of possible dispute as to the correct boundary between Tibet and Bhutan and Nepal, we think it is preferable to confine Indo-Tibet boundary laid down by Agreement map to Assam-Tibet boundary East of Bhutan and the north-East-east salient of Burma.

Retrospectively, one can regret that the entire border was not demarcated on a map at that time.

Some Conclusions

- In 1913-14, India and Tibet were on friendly terms, it was therefore enough for them

to have a rough line marked on a map. Clearly, each party was ready to renegotiate some parts or adjust the line if necessary. With the arrival of a new neighbour on the scene at the end of the 1950s, things took a dramatic turn.

- The Chinese were not invited to discuss the question of the border between India and Tibet, and their acceptance of the McMahon-Shatra Line was never sought; nor did they ask anything about the final demarcation. However, it was not a 'secret' negotiation as alleged by the Chinese today.
- Through an exchange of notes between the British and

Tibetan Plenipotentiaries, the Indo-Tibet frontier was fixed in March 1914. These letters would have important consequences for the future of both nations, especially India which, 48 years later, would fight a war along the McMahon-Shatra Line.

- The boundary line was born in the form of a fat red line on a map showing the Indo-Tibetan border in the north-eastern sector. The British and the Tibetan delegates signed and put their seals on the map; it should therefore be called the McMahon-Shatra Line.



Claude Arpi, a French-born author, journalist, and Tibetologist, has lived in India for nearly five decades. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Tibet, China, India, and Indo-French relations, including the widely regarded *The Fate of Tibet: When Big Insects Eat Small Insects*. He also held the prestigious Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa Chair of Excellence at the United Service Institution of India (USI), where he conducted extensive research on the Indian presence in Tibet between 1947 and 1962, later published in four volumes. Claude Arpi currently serves as a Distinguished Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi; Director of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture; and also serves on the Board of Advisors for the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives since 2011.

Why Tibet Matters

Srikanth Kondapalli

Variously described as the land of mythological Srinmo earth goddess, the last bastion of Buddhism, the 'land of snow dragon', 'roof of the world', 'water tower of Asia', 'Third Pole' and others, Tibet had attracted global attention from time immemorial. Legend also suggests a Tibetan ancestry for Raja Rupati of Kauravas of Mahabharat times.

The region also boasts to Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, considered to be sacred to hundreds of millions of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Bön religious believers. Tibet exhibited rich history, exemplified in arts, culture, religion, philosophy, institutions, and talent. While Tibet had gone through several vicissitudes in its history, the current round of changes is structural and of long-term in nature. Six issues are raised in this article briefly on how structural changes brought by Beijing is influencing Tibetan dynamics today.

Geography

Ethnic minorities occupy nearly two-thirds of current geography of China's south and northwest, while Han Chinese who used to be in one-third of the territory, in the south, southeast and north, are now expanding. Stretching into more than 2.5 million km² and divided between U-tsang, Amdo and Kham, Tibet is on an average elevation of over 4,300 metres above sea level and thereby provides the region with its unique characteristics and resilience.¹ For instance, given several millennia residency in the high altitude areas, Tibetan genes could adjust to low oxygen and high altitude areas of the Tibetan Plateau, unlike Han or other nationals.² Geography acts as a barrier for outsiders' influx, even though China is developing infrastructure and taking scientific aid like oxygen kiosks to overcome such difficulties in Han migration to Tibet.

High altitude and permafrost conditions of Tibet are also conducive to glacier formations. Glaciers in Tibet account for 84 percent and 81 percent, respectively, of the total area and volume of glaciers in China.³ This

1 Kuzmin, Sergius L. (2011). *Hidden Tibet: History of Independence and Occupation*. Edited by Andrey Terentyev (Translated from Russian by Dmitry Bennett). Chapter 1. Dharamsala, H.P.: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

2 See Sanders, Robert (2010). "Tibetans adapted to high altitude in less than 3,000 years", *UC Berkeley News*. 01 July. Available at https://news.berkeley.edu/2010/07/01/tibetan_genome/

3 Shiyin, Liu et al. (2014). "Glaciers in China and Their Variations", in J.S. Kargel, G.J. Leonard, M.P. Bishop, A. Kääb and B.H. Raup (eds.), *Global*



Figure 1: The supine (lying down) Srinmo whose body spanned the entire Tibetan plateau, with strategic geomantic temples like the Jokhang Monastery to pin her down and tame the land for Buddhism.

Source: Utsang Culture <https://utsangculture.com/?p=4916>

is significant as the glaciers on the plateau holds over 8 trillion cubic metres of water that flow downstream.⁴ Major glaciers in Tibet include Purog Kangri (covering 380 km²), Laigu group, Rongbuk (at Mount Everest), Kangshung, Karola, Midui and others that sustain fresh water resources in Asia. However, due to construction work and mining, several glaciers are melting and pose environmental challenges to

the region. The structural change in geography is integrating far flung Tibet into the rest of China like never before.

Population

One of the most versatile features of Tibet is its talented population. Undivided Tibet has an estimated population of above 7 million. After the 1965 reorganisation, today an estimated 3 million Tibetans live in U-tsang, compared to the rest in Amdo and Kham that were integrated into Qinghai and Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. A huge diaspora exists as refugees abroad escaping political hardships in Tibet, even though their numbers are dwindling due to restrictions in emigration policies. For instance, over a decade ago about 5,000

refugees escaped Tibet through Kodari road to land in Kathmandu. This figure has plummeted to a couple of hundreds recently due to intensive surveillance, capture, and torture of those escaping from Tibet.⁵ Tibetans complain of the concerted demographic changes

Land Ice Measurements from Space. Springer Praxis. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-79818-7_25

4 “Over half of Tibetan Plateau’s glaciers may melt by 2100”, Tibetan Review, 20 August 2024, <https://www.tibetanreview.net/over-half-of-tibetan-plateaus-glaciers-may-melt-by-2100/#:~:text=China%20arrests%20Tibetan%20monk%2C%20another,to%20disappear%20in%20the%20future>

5 “Tibetan refugees who survived shooting by Chinese police tell their story” *Asia News*, 26 October 2006. Available at <https://www.asianews.it/en/east-asia/china/tibetanrefugees-who-survived-shooting-by-chinese-police-tell-their-story>; Sharma, Gopal (2015). “Nepal detains Tibetan refugees in crackdown as China’s influence grows”, *Reuters*, 15 November. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/nepal-detains-tibetan-refugees-in-crackdown-as-chinas-influence-grows-idUSKBN13A2BP/>; and Dhakal, Binod (2026). “Refugees in Nepal: Between humanitarianism and geopolitics”, *Nepal News*, 30 May. Available at <https://english.nepalnews.com/s/explainers/refugees-in-nepal-between-humanitarianism-and-geopolitics/>

in Tibet with the influx of Han nationals for jobs, construction work, or as permanent settlers. According to Chinese official figures, 12 percent of Tibetan population is Han Chinese,⁶ while other estimates suggest to more than double this figure. Hannisation has become a major issue in Tibet-China relations, with the émigré population accusing China of promoting massive influx of Han Chinese from other provinces. This has resulted in demographic changes in Tibet with most public positions in the region occupied by the migrant Han Chinese.

6 Fischer, Andrew M. (2021). "Han Chinese population shares in Tibet: Early insights from the 2020 census of China", 20 September. Available at <https://www.niussp.org/migration-and-foreigners/han-chinese-population-shares-in-tibet-early-insights-from-the-2020-census-of-china/>

Infrastructure projects have further facilitated and intensified these demographic changes. Tibetans tend to still occupy lower positions while Han Chinese have been at the helm of affairs. For instance, more than 80 percent of the employed population of Tibetans are engaged in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, and less than 4 percent of the employed population are engaged in the secondary industry.⁷ Official

7 See "第七次全国人口普查结果公布！中国人口共141178万人" [The results of the seventh national census are released! China's population is 1411.78 million]. 11 May 11 2021. Available at http://www.miluo.gov.cn/28584/60906/60910/60924/content_1815734.html; Poston Jr., Dudley L. and Jing Shu (1987). "The demographic and socioeconomic composition of China's ethnic minorities", *Population and Development Review* 13(4): 703-22, December. ; and Rongxing, Guo (2020). *China Ethnic Statistical Yearbook 2020*. Palgrave Macmillan.

estimates suggest 70 million tourists visited Tibet in 2025, increasing from 12 million in 2013, with 95 percent of them from China.⁸ Demographic changes are structural in nature and Tibet saw reduction of Tibetans in their own land but also the influx of Han Chinese laying claim to the resources of the region.

Ethnic Relations

The above-stated demographic changes in Tibet are connected to China's ethnic policies which has undergone major changes in the last seven decades. The Communist Party adopted two main policies given the postures of different factions within the party. These are, firstly, national integration policies in the 1950s and the reform period that emphasised co-optation and notional equality; and secondly, assimilationist policies during the Cultural Revolution that tried to abolish/restrict religious belief systems, marriage patterns and other aspects of ethnic minorities, including Tibetans.



Figure 2: The Purog Kangri Glacier, which is the largest glacier outside the poles is located in Tibet's Tsonyi Dzong (Ch: Shuanghu County)

Source: China Global Television Network's Wang Yuqiang <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-08-31/Puruogangri-Glacier-The-third-largest-ice-sheet-of-the-world-Tp0kWcNgUU/index.html>

8 "China's Xizang sees steady tourism growth in 2025", *Xinhua*, 24 January 2026. Available at <https://english.news.cn/20260124/91406e252b4e4649b41a850440f8ff90/c.html>; "Tourism generates nearly 20 percent of the local GDP and sustains 11 percent of the population", *Tourism in Tibet*, Available at <https://factsanddetails.com/china/cat6/sub37/item2846.html>. However, Simon Denyer and Congcong Zhang argued that these figures are inflated. See "China's Tibet tourism statistics just don't add up", *Washington Post*, 06 October 2016. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/06/tibettourism/>.

After the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, a 'united front' policy was adopted in the 1950s by giving equal rights to the minorities. Article 6 of the Common Program of September 1949 and Article 3 of China's first Constitution (1954) mention the equality of all nationalities and uphold regional autonomy in minority areas. However, Article 4 of the 1975 Constitution mentioned that China is a 'unitary multi-national state'. During Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, regional autonomy was jettisoned, and extreme assimilation policies led to the demolition of mosques—over a million Tibetans were killed in these pogroms. Subsequently, the 1978 and 1982 Constitutions restored 'equality' and regional autonomy for the ethnic minorities, and the amended version of the 1982 constitution mentions the 'unitary multi-ethnic State'. Meanwhile, China sent troops to 'liberate' Tibet in October 1950. A 17-point agreement was signed in May 1951, establishing China's sovereignty over Tibet,⁹ regional autonomy, and not

to alter the political system under the Dalai Lama's government and others.¹⁰ However, as China began violating these provisions, Tibetan revolt took place in 1959, leading to the flight of the Dalai Lama to India. These indicate to the very abrupt and contentious policies on ethnic minorities in China.

Since the August 2020 7th Tibet Forum meeting, China is actively pushing 'Sinicisation of Tibetan Buddhism' by promoting 'colonial' boarding schools to children, forcible inter-ethnic marriages, surveillance of religious institutions and others. Here the role of Communist Party Secretary Chen Guangguo for Tibet (2011-2016) and later in Xinjiang (2016-2021) are significant in terms of instituting extensive surveillance systems in the region. Earlier, there was a window of talks between the United Front Work Department of the Chinese government and the Central Tibetan Administration on resolving China-Tibet relations in 2002 and 2010 when nine rounds of talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives (the

ninth in January 2010).¹¹ However, these fizzled out. China has hardened its position on the Tibet issue, as with other ethnic minorities in its Sinicisation drive.

Today, following the implementation of assimilation policies, inter-ethnic relations in China are configured as a pomegranate with all seeds (56 nationalities) bound together in a tight embrace, leaving no scope for 'autonomy'. In March 2026, China's parliament passed a Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress and began implementing it in July.¹² Divided into 7 chapters and 65 articles, the new law intends to build a 'community of the Chinese people' as a part the CCP's ethnic work. It wants to build a shared destiny among the ethnic groups "sharing in joy and sorrow, honor and disgrace, and life and death." The law imposes on all citizens an "obligation to preserve national unity and the unity of the nation's ethnicities, and shall preserve the nation's sovereignty, security, and developmental interests." It categorically opposes interference of "foreign forces". Further, it states that "All acts using excuses such as ethnicity, religion, or human rights to insult and disparage,

9 China claims sovereignty over Tibet since ancient times. However, Tibetans deny this and mention 63 AD seizing of Tang dynasty capital Chang'an and installing a pro-Tibetan ruler and 821 AD pillars erected at Lhasa, Chang'an and Qingshu (Gansu) as proof of this. See Sharma, Vidur Ji Sharma (2025). "The Tibetan quest for independence: A historical overview and an exploration of the future", *Occasional Paper*, Observer Research Foundation. 29 August. Available at [https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-tibetan-quest-for-independence-a-historical-](https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-tibetan-quest-for-independence-a-historical-overview-and-an-exploration-of-the-future)

overview-and-an-exploration-of-the-future See also Central Tibetan Administration (2018). *Tibet was never a part of China*. Dharamshala. Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration. October. Available at <https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/TWNPC-2026.pdf>

10 Arya, Tsewang Gyalpo (n.d.). "The 17-point agreement: What China promised, what it really delivered and the future?", Available at <https://tibet.net/the-17-point-agreement-what-china-promised-what-it-really-delivered-and-the-future-2/>

11 Qian, Li (2019). "China's veteran religion official continues to contribute after retiring", *Global Times*, 14 March. Available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1142158.shtml>

12 China Law Translate (2026). *Ethnic unity and progress law*, 12 March 2026. Available at <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/ethnic-unity-and-progress-law/>



contain and suppress, or infiltrate and undermine the PRC are to be resolutely opposed.” In order to establish a “correct perspective”, the state will “guide each ethnic group in promoting identification with Chinese culture.” Thus, China’s tighter ethnic policy postures today have become a major structural factor in the increasing division and differences between Beijing and ethnic minorities.

Economy

China today is a \$20 trillion economy, the second largest in the world. However, Tibet remains the poorest with an estimated \$42 billion in gross domestic product (GDP). While Beijing had subsidised Tibetan economic development, it had outpoured more resources from the region, specifically, water, minerals (such as copper, chromium, iron, lithium and others), and hydro-electricity. For instance, between 1951 and 2015, China spent \$100 billion in projects in Tibet. Another estimate suggested that after China launched Western Development strategy, in 2001 and 2009 alone, China spent \$45.4 billion in Tibetan economy, including the \$3.6 billion Tibet railway from Gormud to Lhasa by 2006.¹³ Cumulatively by 2021, according to

State Council’s Information Office, China spent over \$253 billion in Tibet, with one-third spent on infrastructure projects.¹⁴ For 2025-26, China is estimated to spend over \$27 billion in subsidies and projects in Tibet.¹⁵

China has built extensive dual-use infrastructure facilities such as highways, railways, airfields, fibre-optics, energy pipelines, telecommunications and others to ensure security and stability of Tibet and other regions as well as for pumping out strategic resources into rest of China. While China argues that these infrastructure facilities are meant for connectivity, poverty alleviation, and economic development, Tibet on the other hand remains the poorest region of the country.¹⁶ The transportation networks trigger tourism, migration and

other sectors from other parts of China.¹⁷

One of the most consequential changes in Tibet is the pumping out of its minerals by China’s agencies and the abovementioned infrastructure projects contribute to their swift transfers. Tibet is estimated to possess over 100 minerals that are considered to be ‘strategic resources’.¹⁸ Tibet ranks among the top five in China in terms of production and reserves of over 10 mineral resources, including 80 million tonnes of copper, 20 million tonnes of gold, and 30 million tonnes of lead and zinc.¹⁹ This resource potential is valued at over 650 billion yuan, making it a key

13 Roberts, Dexter (2015). “Tibet can’t kick its subsidy habit”, *Bloomberg*, 17 December. Reprinted at <https://tibet.net/tibet-cant-kick-its-subsidy-habit/>

14 “Infrastructure investment greatly boosts Tibet development”, 22 May 2021. Available at http://english.scio.gov.cn/m/pressroom/2021-05/22/content_77519357.htm and “China planning building spree in Tibet as India tensions rise, sources say”, *Reuters*, 04 September 2020. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-planning-building-spreetibet-india-tensions-rise-sources-say-2020-09-04/>

15 “China investing \$27.8 billion in major construction projects on 60th ‘autonomous’ Tibet anniversary”, *Tibetan Review*, 20 January 2025. Available at <https://www.tibetanreview.net/china-investing-27-8-billion-in-major-construction-projects-on-60th-autonomous-tibet-anniversary/>

16 Qing, Li (2019). “西藏的发展阶段、主要矛盾与战略地位” [Tibet Development Stage, Main Contradictions and Strategic Status in Tibet], *财经智库* [Financial Think Tank] 4(2): 63-84, March. <https://doi.org/10.20032/j.cnki.cn10-1359/f.2019.02.005>

17 Guixi, Zhang (2021). 川藏铁路对沿线城市就业影响研究 [Research on the Influence of Sichuan-Tibet Railway on Employment in Cities Along the Line]. Beijing Jiaotong University. May; Yundan, Danzeng (2015). “西藏旅游交通的现状、问题及对策研究” [Research on the current situation, problems and countermeasures of tourism transportation in Tibet], *北方经贸* [Northern Economic and Trade] 12: 56-57.

18 Mindat (n.d.). “Qulong Cu-(Mo) deposit”, Available at [https://www.mindat.org/loc-134575.html%20and%20https://miningdataonline.com/property/1290/Qulong-\(Julong\)-Mine.aspx](https://www.mindat.org/loc-134575.html%20and%20https://miningdataonline.com/property/1290/Qulong-(Julong)-Mine.aspx)

19 Shuangjie, Wang (2021). “保障青藏高速的工程健康” [Ensuring the Engineering Health of the Qinghai-Tibet Expressway], *中国公路* [China Highway] 5, <https://doi.org/10.13468/j.cnki.chw.2021.05.011>; CSECEC (2021). “The world’s highest highway, built with the participation of China Construction Transportation, opens to traffic”, 26 August. Available at https://www.cscec.com/xwzx_new/zqydt_new/202108/3387234.html; Go To Tibet (n.d.). “Road transportation to Tibet”, Available at <https://www.gototibet.com/travel-guide/tibet-travel-advice/road-transportation-to-tibet.html>

strategic resource reserve base for China. China's dependence on copper imports exceeds 70 percent and dependence on lead and zinc imports is approximately 30 percent. China's state-owned enterprises or Han Chinese mainly own these companies with Tibetans hardly figuring out in the management of these projects.

Environment

China's militarisation, large-scale construction of dual-use infrastructure projects, and mineral exploitation has created environmental challenges in Tibet. River diversion, mineral exploitation, infrastructure projects have wrecked the environment of Tibet. For instance, mining caused contamination of water and soil with toxic substances such as arsenic, destruction of habitats, and undermined the ecological balance. Intensive mining, especially riverbed mining, has led to deforestation and salination due to high contents of heavy metals entering into the rivers and the ecosystem of Tibet. Most of the victims of these projects are Tibetans.

One of the main environmental challenges in Tibet is the control of river waters and their exploitation. Tibet is the source for 10 major rivers that flow into China, South and Southeast Asia, providing water resources for hundreds of millions of people. China has constructed the

Zangmu dam on Yarlung Zangpo that generates over 510 MW of electricity,²⁰ Pengduo dam on Lhasa River which generates 160 MW of electricity, Zhikong dam with 100 MW capacity, Suwalong on Jinsha River that generates 1200 MW of electricity, and has plans for dams at Dagü (640 MW), Jiacha (320 MW), and Jixu (560 MW). Premier Li Qiang's inauguration in July 2025 of dam process near Medog costing about \$167 billion, is to generate an estimated 60 GW of electricity.²¹ Most of the beneficiaries of these hydro-electricity projects are Han Chinese.

Geopolitics

Although Tibet borders many countries and its diaspora had fanned out to several countries in the world—mainly to Nepal, Bhutan, and India—China has curtailed their influence. China achieved this by either working within the multilateral institutions, such as the League of Nations and its successor United Nations (UN), or through bilateral, non-reciprocal, and binding “one China” arrangements with a number of countries, thereby geopolitically

isolating the Tibetans. When the Kuomintang was in power in the Republic of China, it bound the successive United States administrations to consider Tibet as a part of China and lobbied against including Tibet in the League of Nations/UN debates. After the PRC was formed in 1949, despite animosity between China and the US till 1971, Tibet hardly figured in the UN debates. Instead of debates on self-determination, the US and European Union (EU) mainly focused on human rights and religious freedom issues in Tibet.

Similarly, Nepal and India, which declared Tibet as a part of China in the 1950s, were bound by several Chinese political conditionalities. For instance, Nepal had declared Tibet as an “inalienable” portion of China and subsequently allowed the Chinese police or paramilitary forces into Nepal to chase away escaping Tibetan refugees. Nepal's dependence on China's aid has created constraints on Kathmandu. Likewise, while India did not declare Tibet as an “inalienable” portion or “historical” part of China, Beijing's pressure on New Delhi is extensive.

Further, at the multilateral level, Beijing began conducting China Xizang Trans-Himalaya Forum meetings at Nyingchi in Tibet and opposite to Arunachal Pradesh with the participation of officials from Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Five meetings

20 Ranjan, Amit (2020). “China's hydropower projects on River Brahmaputra”, *ISAS Briefs*, NUS, 06 August. Available at <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/chinas-hydropower-projects-on-river-brahmaputra/>

21 Jeshong, Tsewang Dorji and Kalsang Dolma (2025). *China's strategy to escalate water war over Tibet's river*. Central Tibetan Administration. 04 August 4. Available at <https://tibet.net/chinas-strategy-to-escalate-water-war-over-tibets-river/>



have been held so far with the first and second in 2018 and 2019, the third from October 4–5, 2023; fourth from July 3–5, 2024; and fifth from July 16 to 18, 2026.²² Earlier, on 06 January, 2021 China, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh held the first meeting of director-general level working groups on COVID-19 and poverty alleviation cooperation. China packages these for cooperation between these countries in infrastructure development, health cooperation, green development, among others. However, according to Lan Jianxue of China Institute of International Studies, “if China and these countries face threats in areas other than non-traditional security in the future, the four countries may further widen the scope of cooperation between them.”²³

Conclusion

It is argued here that Tibet is undergoing major changes in geographical, demographic, economic, ethnic, environmental,

geopolitical, and other spheres. These are structural in nature and not cyclical suggesting that China’s policies are going to be concerted, long-lasting, and comprehensive in nature. China promised autonomy to the ethnic minorities in its Common Program and the Constitutions, including in its 17-point agreement in Tibet. However, it had introduced assimilation policies, jettisoning co-optation and integration policies. Sinicisation policies are being introduced extensively that affect everyday life in minority region, including Tibet. This process has brought in a new element in Han-ethnic minorities relations, also strengthened by Han nationalism and migration patterns. Traditional Tibet was divided in 1965, and its population was dispersed in U-tsang (Tibet), Qinghai (Amdo), and parts of Yunnan and Sichuan provinces (Kham), thus weakening

their bargaining capacity. While protest movements have increased in intensity—such as those in 1959, 1987, 2008, alongside self-immolations and others acts—China’s grip on the region has not decreased due to the physical integration of the region as well as other factors. This makes a strong case to rethink of policies, as Tibet’s message resonates across the world.

22 Daqiong and Guo Yanqi (2026)., “Trans-Himalaya Forum focuses on green development”, China Daily, 17 July. Available at <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202607/17/WS6a5a4882a310986e2b465ef9.html> and “The 4th China Xizang Trans-Himalaya Forum for International Cooperation kicked off in Lulang”, *Tibet.cn*, 05 July 2024. Available at http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/index/top/202407/t20240705_7654759.html

23 Jianxue, Lan (2021). “‘Himalayan Quad’ hype is Cold War mentality”, *Global Times*, 20 April. Available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221560.shtml>



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What the Fire Knew



The Dalai Lama Institution in a Global Context¹

Kate Saunders

Camera crews and journalists from across the world, from local Himalayan TV to French radio and the BBC, arrived early at a conclave of Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders coinciding with the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday in July 2025.

As an image of the Dalai Lama appeared on screens, the room fell silent. This was the long awaited statement by His Holiness on plans for the future, conveyed on video from his residence, and it did not disappoint. The Dalai Lama affirmed that the institution of the Dalai Lama would continue, and that his Gaden Phodrang Trust has sole authority to recognise a future reincarnation, saying: “no one else has any such authority to interfere in this matter.”

Xi Jinping may promote an ‘unyielding Marxist atheism’ among Party members, but Beijing was rattled. It issued a peremptory statement reiterating that, on the contrary, approval rests with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and that the search must be conducted inside China. A month later, Xi Jinping showed up in Lhasa for a heavily choreographed, North Korean-style display of control—in contrast to the joyous celebrations in Dharamsala.

China views any future succession of the Dalai Lama as a ‘protracted war’, regarding control over Tibet’s religious elite as crucial to maintaining its grip on this strategically vital region. The lines of contest, long visible to those watching the region, are now formally drawn. They cut across borders that India’s policy establishment can no longer treat as merely adjacent to its strategic interests.

What is at stake is not primarily a contested religious succession. Throughout his 65-year exile—the most difficult and dangerous period in Tibet’s two-millennium history—the 14th Dalai Lama has safeguarded Tibet’s national, cultural, and religious identity. He also became the first Dalai Lama to transition from a traditional head of state to champion

¹ This article is drawn from a series of papers by the same author, ‘Sacred Authority and State Power: The Future of the Dalai Lama in a Global Context’, published by leading Czech thinktank Sinopsis (<https://sinopsis.cz/en/sacred-authority-and-state-power-the-future-of-the-dalai-lama-institution-in-a-global-context/>) and independent research network, Turquoise Roof (<https://turquoiseroof.org/sacred-authority-and-state-power-summary-briefing/>).

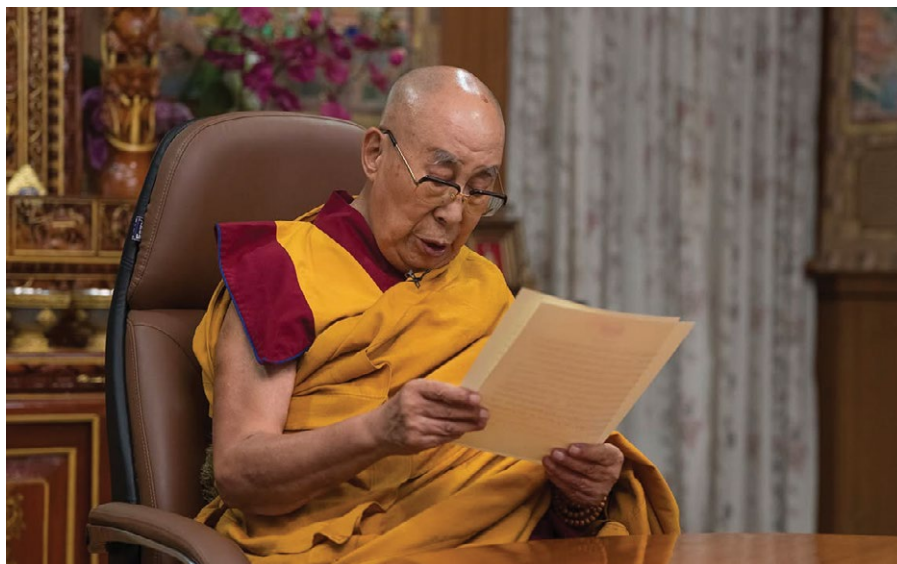


Figure 1: His Holiness the Dalai Lama reading the statement on his reincarnation on 2nd July, 2025 at his residence in Dharamshala, India.

Source: <https://www.dalailama.com/>

democratic governance in exile. Assuming full political authority as early as 1950, the Dalai Lama demonstrated that same resolute commitment to his people in 1956. While travelling to India to attend celebrations marking the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's birth news of China's increasingly brutal suppression of his homeland reached him. Despite counsel from his brothers and other close advisors that he remain in safety, he made the fateful decision to return to Tibet.

The civilisational reach of Tibetan Buddhism—across the Indian and Nepalese Himalaya, Bhutan, and Ladakh; across Mongolia and the Central Asian Russian Republics of Tuva, Buryatia, and Kalmykia; into Han Chinese society itself—is what

makes Beijing's effort to capture the institution so consequential, and what gives the administration in exile an element of strategic leverage in efforts to engage China. The Dalai Lama's global moral authority and popularity, the resilience of Tibetans in protecting their culture, and the appeal of India's ancient Nalanda tradition as a 'science of mind' of relevance to 21st-century concerns are the real counterweights to PRC influence operations, and what Beijing is working systematically to dismantle.

Under Xi Jinping, the appropriation and 'Sinicisation' of Buddhism has become integral to China's foreign and domestic policy framework. Hard repression inside Tibet—the forced disappearances and

imprisonment of senior monks, raids on prominent monasteries to confiscate images of the Dalai Lama and other exiled religious leaders, Communist Party control over monastic committees—all point to a systematic effort to eliminate perceived challenges to state authority.² These policies, which have intensified in the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday year, are compounded by a sharp-power projection beyond PRC borders that pressures governments to deny visas to the Dalai Lama and those connected to him, bankrolls Buddhist organisations across Asia in exchange for loyalty, secures the exclusion of Indian and Tibetan scholars from religious initiatives, cultivates pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) religious proxies, and threatens the safety of a vulnerable exile diaspora.

Demonstrating China's efforts to control influential Buddhist figures even beyond China's borders, Hungkar Dorje Rinpoche, a 56-year old abbot of a monastery in Tibet, was pursued to Vietnam only for China to announce his death several days later. The suspicious death of

² Recent cases of Tibetan political prisoners who are in critical condition after torture, poor health after release from prison, or who have been 'disappeared' demonstrate a system that is methodical, opaque, and increasingly punishing even of private expressions of Tibetan identity. Documented by *Tibet Watch*, <https://tibetwatch.org/disappeared-tortured-and-silenced/> and <https://tibetwatch.org/the-dalai-lamas-90th-birthday-in-tibet/>



Figure 2: His Holiness the Dalai Lama addressing the congregation during his teaching at the main Tibetan temple in Dharamshala upon the request of Taiwanese Buddhist in October, 2025

Source: <https://www.dalailama.com/>

this respected Tibetan reincarnate lama, who was dedicated to the protection of Tibetan language and culture, marks how far that reach now extends.

Tibet is where India and China's competing interests intersect, in a complex and high-stakes relationship of rivalry, deadly conflict, and economic partnership. Until the People's Liberation Army (PLA) took control of Tibet in 1950, there was no contiguous border between China and India, and that fact still governs the strategic geometry. As the home of the Dalai Lama and base of the Tibetan exile administration, India is the

principal target of Chinese pressure over the future of the institution. Border incursions since Xi Jinping came to power have tripled.³ Militarisation on the border involves new strategic roads, the Lhasa–Nyingtri railway capable of moving troops at speed to contested sectors, the dual-use Lhuntse Dzong (Lhokha) airport less than 30 miles from the McMahon Line, and the network of xiaokang border villages whose two largest clusters—Tsona, opposite Tawang

in Arunachal Pradesh, and Dzayul, opposite Walong—sit where the 1962 fighting took place. Tawang itself is the strategic hinge: over-run by Chinese troops in 1962, claimed by Beijing as 'south Tibet', and the birthplace of the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso, in 1683. The possibility that a 15th Dalai Lama could in future be recognised in the region—among devotees in Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh, or the wider Himalayan belt—gives the militarisation a dimension that succession-period contingency planning cannot ignore. China will, on existing evidence, seek to disrupt and fragment the Tibetan exile community: there are already

³ International Crisis Group, 'Thin Ice in the Himalayas', <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/334-thin-ice-himalayas.pdf>

disinformation flows seeking to blacken the reputation of the Dalai Lama and key officials in the Gaden Podrang Trust, and the possibility that Shugden followers select a candidate with Chinese backing cannot be ruled out.

The wider regional architecture has shifted in ways that are rarely read alongside the succession question. In 2023, China hosted representatives from over 40 countries, among them the Deputy Prime Minister of Mongolia, the Vice-Chairperson of Nepal's National Assembly, Bhutan's Energy and Natural Resources Secretary, and the Acting Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in heavily-militarised Nyingtri, with India conspicuously absent. This was followed by various China-led Trans-Himalayan groupings deliberately structured around India. Beijing presses governments to use the Chinese name 'Xizang' for Tibet—a move with direct legal and historic implications for India.⁴

These efforts are explicitly tied to a Sinicised projection of Buddhism, with the World Buddhist Forum

and the Hainan Nanhai Academy as institutional vehicles. Tibetan Buddhists played a vital role in saving Nalanda's teachings when the university was razed centuries ago, and in their revival today; yet when Prime Minister Modi inaugurated the revived Nalanda University in Bihar on 20 June 2024, he was accompanied by the Chinese Ambassador, not by the main living proponent of the tradition, the Dalai Lama.

Nepal's strategic drift is an illustration of how China's regional Buddhist project operates in the absence of countervailing pressure. Kathmandu has formally adopted the 'One China principle', going beyond the standard 'One China policy' to explicitly endorse Beijing's positions, and signed a

September 2023 joint communiqué with the PRC pledging to prevent 'separatist activities' on Nepali soil. China has successfully restricted traditional escape routes for Tibetan refugees, with a dramatic reduction in Tibetan arrivals from thousands to dozens or less annually, while the border town of Dram has been turned into a military garrison with enhanced security on both sides.

Although the Tibetan community in Nepal (which has shrunk to around 9,000) is demoralised and disadvantaged, Tibetan religious leaders with a strong international profile now have a powerful presence and are attracting people from all over the world to their monasteries in the Kathmandu valley. They are also highly engaged



Figure 3: The International Conference on the Cultural and Historical Significance of His Holiness the Sixth Dalai Lama Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatso. Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, 4th December 2025

Source: Tsering Lhamu, MLA of Lumla Constituency, Arunachal Pradesh

⁴ As historian Claude Arpi has observed, India's north-eastern boundary was negotiated between Sir Henry McMahon and Tibetan Prime Minister Lonchen Shatra; the term 'Xizang' appears nowhere in the agreement. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/claude-arpi-chinas-communists-and-new-old-game-of-poker-885930>. Also see International Tibet Network report, 'Tibet not Xizang'; <https://tibetnetwork.org/tibet-not-xizang/>



Figure 4: The 10th Jebtsundamba Khutughtu, A. Altannar publicly recognised by the Dalai Lama in 2023.

Source: Cultures of East Asia

in interactions between Dharamsala and Himalayan Buddhists, while many Chinese Buddhists come to Nepal to experience authentic, as opposed to Sinicised, religious teachings.

Just a few kilometres across the border from India, the Lumbini Buddhist University was inaugurated in December 2024 in partnership with the Beijing Language and Culture University. The intent is to displace Bodhi Gaya, where the Dalai Lama taught almost every winter until the COVID pandemic, in the imagination of Buddhists, and to dilute India's historical and cultural connection to Buddhism itself. Beijing's attempt to send its Panchen to Lumbini in May 2022 (and again in 2024) was rejected by Kathmandu, but the cultivation of Shugden lineages in Nepal opens up the dangers of an interregnum-period scenario, with the protective optics of Buddhist Nepal and a propaganda staging-ground at the Buddha's birthplace directly on India's border.

Mongolia provides an early reading of how this contest unfolds beyond PRC borders. The Dalai Lama's public recognition of a Mongolian-American child as the new Bogd Lama, or Jebtsundampa, the nation's spiritual leader, in March 2023 triggered reactions from China, which seeks to control Buddhist institutions across Asia,

threatening the security and religious freedoms of Mongolian Buddhists. Mongolia has become a frontline of the Shugden offensive, with supporters at the heart of government, business, and religious life and the sect used as a front for advancing Chinese political and business interests; the abbots of several significant Ulaanbaatar monasteries have sought funding from China's Panchen Lama, who has been openly invited to Mongolia.

Nevertheless, Buddhist institutions in Mongolia are standing their ground and the boy known simply to many as 'The Tenth' is gaining popularity, with thousands of devotees gathering to see him at teachings in Ulaanbaatar, and the retired head of Mongolian Buddhism in Mongolia, former Khamba Lama D. Choijamts saying that he will undoubtedly "play an important role in world Buddhism".⁵

Under the Dalai Lama's leadership, Tibetan Buddhism has become a vital and socially progressive force globally, with the capacity to provide alternative frameworks to navigate a fractured global order and the devastation wreaked

historically by communism. What hangs in the balance extends well beyond Tibet's future. It tests the international community's resolve to safeguard pluralism, religious freedom, and cultural autonomy against transnational authoritarian networks whose reach increasingly transcends borders through disinformation, economic coercion, and digital control mechanisms.

The window for establishing effective countermeasures to these threats is narrowing as China accelerates elaborate plans to control Tibet's future and impact Buddhist discourse globally. India

sits at the centre of this geometry not by choice but by geography, history, and the Dalai Lama's exile itself. What is being tested is whether neighbouring countries, Buddhist regions, and like-minded governments can construct the multilateral engagement the moment requires before the architecture of authority over the institution is settled by other means.



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⁵ Interview with the now retired Khamba Lama D. Choijamts by @Ganchimeg in Baabar.mn (in Mongolian), <http://www.baabar.mn/article/dchoijamts-x-bogd-bol-burkhanii-shashnii-ertuntsud-aguu-uil-buteekh-gegeenten-yum>

China's Digital Repression

Tenzin Dalha

Surveillance in Tibet is often described as 'Orwellian', reflecting the alarming reality of China's extensive digital population control system. This apparatus represents one of the most sophisticated and comprehensive forms of surveillance seen in the modern world.

Across the Tibetan plateau, what has been systematically established transcends traditional coercive measures; it is a multi-layered, artificial intelligence (AI)-driven architecture that meticulously monitors communications, regulates movement, and pre-emptively suppresses political dissent. By employing predictive, algorithmically-triggered enforcement, this system effectively stifles opposition before it can emerge, posing significant implications for human rights and freedoms in the region.

The chief architect of this transformation is Chen Quanguo, whose appointment as Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Party Secretary in 2011, initiated the systematic institutionalisation of digital securitisation. Within two months of assuming office, Chen introduced a dense network of 'convenience police stations' that by 2016 numbered over 700 across urban and semi-urban centres, each integrated with police databases for automated, continuous surveillance. Beyond conventional security forces, the Party constructed an interlocking apparatus combining military presence, police networks, 'grid cell' system, and double-linked household management structures that institutionalised neighbourhood-level monitoring at unprecedented control.

When Chen was transferred to East Turkistan in 2016, he replicated Tibet's entire securitisation framework within a single year, compressing into 12 months what had required 5 years to construct in the TAR. In East Turkistan, the Tibetan model was not merely reproduced but technologically escalated. The repression of Tibetans was never a localised or improvised policy. Instead, it constituted the research and development (R&D) phase of a systematic project of ethnic subjugation, one in which Tibet provided the proof of concept that was replicated in East Turkistan.

**The Architecture of Total Surveillance:
Infrastructure, Biometrics, and Behavioural Control**
The technical infrastructure bolstering this system



Institutionalised monitoring in Lhasa

Source: Authors own collection

is considerable in both scale and sophistication, and its deliberate architectural consistency makes it qualitatively different from mere surveillance. China has deployed hundreds of thousands of 5G networks enabling hyper-precise geolocation capabilities that feed into extensive networks of facial recognition cameras capable of identifying and tracking individuals across vast geographic areas in near real time. These systems have been integrated with deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) databases, Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking infrastructure, and internet activity logs to produce a fused biometric surveillance state of unprecedented range.

Tibetans are required to install government-mandated applications (apps) on their devices, officially promoted as

anti-fraud tools, but functioning in practice as persistent surveillance instruments. These apps grant authorities ongoing access to call logs, contacts, location data, and core device functions.

Dhondup, a resident of Central Tibet whose name has been changed to protect his identity,

speaks candidly about the psychological weight of living under this system. He says: “I feel unsafe using my phone” and “I feel constantly watched and monitored by an invisible algorithm.”

He is unequivocal about the true nature of these tools. He further says: “These apps are not protective measures” and that “They are instruments of control, installed without consent”. The consequences, he explains, run deeper than surveillance alone. “We self-censor. We become more cautious, more surveil, about everything we say and share”. His words reflect a broader reality: a community living not just under watch, but where distrust of the system has become part of daily life, and fear has quietly reshaped the way people speak, connect, and exist. It reveals how the architecture of control aligns with



Staff members of the Central Tibetan Administration, Tibetan civil societies, advocacy groups, and their activists born in Tibet and affiliated with these institutions, frequently face a difficult choice: continue serving the Tibetan cause or maintain contact with their families in Tibet. Unable to silence these exiles directly, the Chinese government instead targets their family members and pressuring them to compel their relatives abroad to resign from their positions and refrain from political involvement entirely. Families are thus weaponised as instruments of repression and a direct threat of state retaliation.



extensive surveillance practices and could aid the Chinese government's efforts in controlling them.

The collection of biological data has proceeded alongside this digital dragnet. According to Citizen Lab research, from 2022, approximately one-third of the Tibetan population has had their DNA extracted without informed consent. Iris scans, voice samples, and genomic profiles are held in state databases whose scope continues to expand, meaning the state does not merely know where a person is, but who they biologically are, permanently. This logic extends to physical space as well. Drone monitoring of border corridors, particularly the high Himalayan passes toward Nepal historically used by Tibetan refugees, has reduced crossing attempts to near single digits, a closure enforced through unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) patrols and sensor networks that rendered lethal border enforcement largely unnecessary. Containment, in other words, has been technologised to the point where it no longer requires visible violence to be total.

Information Warfare, Transnational Repression, and the Global Proliferation of the Tibetan Model

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) operates a deliberate,

sophisticated, and escalating campaign of transnational repression targeting Tibetans in exile, a campaign designed to overshadow dissent through digital surveillance, systematic intimidation, and calculated threats against relatives still inside Tibet. Tactics include the pervasive monitoring of exile activities, coerced repatriation of diaspora

of 300,000 yuan, over \$42,000, for information leading to the arrest of social-media users deemed disloyal to China. The move was deliberate in its logic: by monetising surveillance, the state effectively crowdsourced ideological enforcement, transforming ordinary citizens into instruments of digital policing. The machinery no longer required



For many Tibetan exiles, severing family ties is not a choice freely made, it is a sacrifice brutally extracted by an external factor. Maintaining contact carries grave consequences, directly exposing their families to interrogation, surveillance, detention, and punishment. And so, to shield their families from harm, they choose to stay at distance and silent over the ordinary comfort of human connection. Tragically, many Tibetans who fled Tibet have never received a single word from their families since the moment they departed, carrying that profound absence with them every single day of their lives. It is a deliberate, systematic strategy designed to isolate, exhaust, and ultimately break the spirit of those who dare to speak for Tibet.

members, cyberattacks on Tibetan institutions, and the sustained harassment of those who dare to advocate for human rights on the international stage.

The digital infrastructure of that control is continuously expanded and refined. By 2019, Beijing was offering rewards

centralised monitoring of every account, it required only that users internalised the possibility of being watched and reported by anyone around them. The ultimate output of this surveillance architecture is engineered self-censorship, a condition in which the state need not silence every voice directly. It needs only to make enough

people afraid that the rest silence themselves. In this sense, the technology of control is not merely a tool of repression; it is a system designed to make repression self-executing.

China's effort to shape information operates in parallel with, and as a deliberate extension of, its physical surveillance infrastructure. A government-employed network of online commentators, commonly referred to as the '50 Cent Army', is estimated to number between 500,000 and 2 million operatives proficient across multiple languages and platforms.

The Centre for Information Resilience has documented extensive coordinated networks operating across major Western platforms, promoting pro-Beijing narratives and systematically discrediting criticism of Chinese policy through artificially generated profiles, compromised accounts, and synchronised posting activity. Search engine optimisation has been deployed as a refined instrument of political influence, with state-backed media systematically elevated in results for geopolitically sensitive queries, embedding official narratives within the information architecture that international audiences depend upon for basic orientation.

Chinese firms have supplied surveillance systems to more than

80 countries with documented poor human rights records, and China now holds approximately 40 per cent of the global video surveillance market, with exports valued at approximately \$9.8 billion in 2023. Hikvision alone operates across more than 150 countries and regions, and concerns over the intelligence-gathering potential of Chinese surveillance hardware have prompted sanctions, bans, and procurement restrictions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and several European Union member states.

Tibet functions as a laboratory in which the operational limitations of total digital governance have been established. The international community faces a narrowing window in which to develop effective countermeasures, establish enforceable norms, and restrict the further proliferation of cutting-edge technologies. The experience of Tibetans governed not by soldiers but by algorithms,

not by law but by anticipatory data base systems, constitutes both a precise forecast of what AI-enabled authoritarian governance looks like in sustained practice.

In conclusion, the developments in Tibet signify a profound shift in surveillance and control mechanisms, surpassing traditional boundaries. The use of advanced technologies cultivates an environment where silence becomes the only viable expression. This engineered quietude exemplifies contemporary authoritarianism, Operating covertly and overtly to suppress dissent without leaving visible scars. As these methods gain traction globally, they challenge the discourse on freedom and human rights. The lack of adequate language to describe these dynamics highlights the urgent need for a collective response, as the silence surrounding dissent may be a deliberate aspect of this emerging paradigm.



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China's Colonial Policies and its Practice in Tibet

Gyal Lo

Introduction

The expansion of China's colonial boarding school system in Tibet represents one of the most far-reaching sociocultural transformations in the region's modern history.

While Chinese officials present these institutions as vehicles for 'poverty alleviation' and 'modernisation', a growing body of scholarship argues that their design reflects settler-colonial logics aimed at restructuring Tibetan identity, language, and cultural life (Barnett, 2020; Fischer, 2020). By separating children from their families, communities, and linguistic environments for most of the year, these schools have become central mechanisms through which the state reorders Tibetan society and disrupts its 4,700-year-old civilisational continuity.

This article examines the boarding school system as a state strategy of colonial transformation, particularly its impact on Tibetan language vitality. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship and recent evidence from Tibetan educational initiatives, it argues that the policy landscape is bifurcating the role of Tibetan language—Mandarin Chinese is positioned as the sole pathway to socioeconomic mobility, while Tibetan is being pushed towards a narrow function as a symbolic marker of heritage. Community-based educational programmes provide important countercurrents, yet remain structurally marginalised.

Colonial Education as a State Strategy

Education has long served as a primary tool for transforming colonised populations (Fanon, 1963; Gellner, 1983; Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o, 1986). In the People's Republic of China (PRC), schooling in minority regions operates simultaneously as a developmental promise and an assimilationist mechanism (Postiglione, 2014; Tsung & Cruickshank, 2009). Since the 2000s—and especially after 2016—the government has rapidly expanded boarding schools throughout Tibetan areas, framing them as necessary for equalising educational access and promoting national integration.

However, research demonstrates that these institutions frequently centralise Mandarin-medium instruction, restrict Tibetan-language use, and enforce tightly regulated institutional cultures that limit religious,



Figure 1: Sinicisation of Tibetan children

Source: Authors own collection

cultural, and family-based socialisation (Roche, 2019; Yeh, 2013). The result is a significant reduction in the everyday linguistic and cultural spaces essential for Tibetan intergenerational transmission. This structure parallels earlier colonial schooling systems in North America and Australia that sought to assimilate Indigenous children by weakening family and community ties.

Linguistic Reordering and the Future of Tibetan Language

One of the educational videos referenced in this analysis features a Tibetan speaker who argues that Tibetan language risks losing its functional role in contemporary public life under current sociopolitical conditions. This concern aligns with established linguistic scholarship indicating that Tibetan is increasingly relegated to religious, ceremonial, or traditional domains as Mandarin becomes dominant in education,

government, and employment (Hill, 2015; Tournadre, 2017). This linguistic reordering is not incidental. It reflects a deliberate state strategy that frames Mandarin as essential for economic mobility, national belonging, and participation in public institutions. Although officially labelled 'bilingual education', most Tibetan schools prioritise Mandarin in nearly all instructional contexts, with Tibetan marginalised to a single subject or extracurricular activity (Makley, 2018; Tshe dpag et al., 2021). Over time, such policies reduce the social and economic value of Tibetan language, thereby shrinking the environments in which culturally embedded knowledge can be transmitted.

Community-based Resistance: The Case of Weekend Programmes

In contrast, another educational video highlights a community-led initiative created by a Tibetan woman who organises weekend language programmes for children enrolled in state boarding schools. These programmes offer protected spaces for children to use Tibetan, learn local knowledge, and reconnect with their communities. Scholars describe such efforts as 'micro-level cultural resilience', emphasising their crucial role in maintaining minority cultural life under restrictive state policy (Roche, 2021).

Despite their importance, these initiatives remain limited in scale and resources. They operate outside the state's institutional support and cannot fully counterbalance the linguistic and cultural erasure facilitated by full-time boarding education. Nevertheless, they reflect the agency of Tibetan educators and the enduring aspirations of families to sustain cultural continuity.

Boarding Schools as a Civilisational Crossroads

The contemporary educational landscape in Tibet represents a civilisational crossroads. China's boarding school expansion does more than alter schooling structures—it transforms the cultural ecology that has historically sustained Tibetan society: if Tibetan language becomes functionally

irrelevant in social, economic, and administrative life, the consequences extend beyond pedagogy to worldview, cosmology, and collective memory.

Thus, the boarding school system operates as a civilisational disruptor, not merely an educational institution. While Tibetan culture has historically demonstrated remarkable resilience, the current pressures—linguistic, political, institutional, and demographic—are unprecedented in scale.

China's New Law of Ethnic Unity and Progress: It for Unity or to Commit Genocide against Minorities?

The next 15–20 years will be the key under China's colonisation of Tibet. Because education is the central arena in which the

future of Tibetan society will be determined. If language, culture, and identity are not sustained through education, the continuity of Tibetan civilisation is at risk. A recent policy ascertained the civilisational risk of Tibet by China's newly passed policy.

China's recently enacted 'New Law of Ethnic Unity and Progression' seeks to fundamentally transform Tibetan society by undermining the traditional system of reincarnation, including the recognition of the Dalai Lama lineage. The law's broader objectives appear to include legalising the assimilation of Tibetan culture into the Chinese state, expanding the scope of human rights violations both domestically and internationally, and strengthening transnational repression of Tibetans abroad.

By eroding cultural diversity, the law threatens not only Tibet's heritage but also the broader cultural landscape of Asia. It may also provoke other ethnic minorities towards separatist strategies in response to increased state control. In practical terms, the law directly challenges the continuity of the Dalai Lama lineage, accelerates the assimilation of Tibet into a Chinese-modelled region, undermines Tibet's existence as a distinct nation, and creates new geopolitical pressures, notably intensifying challenges for India in the region. Overall, the



Figure 2: A colonial boarding school in Tibet

Source: Authors own collection

law represents a strategic attempt to consolidate control over Tibet while reshaping cultural and political dynamics in Asia.

The underlying aims of these policies can be summarised as follows: A) Legalisation of cultural and linguistic assimilation; B) Expansion of human rights restrictions both domestically and transnationally; C) Intensification of transnational repression; D) Erosion of cultural diversity within China and across Asia, and E) Increased risk of social and political destabilisation among minority populations.

Conclusion

China's colonial boarding school system is reshaping the cultural and linguistic foundations of Tibetan society. By removing children from their communities and restricting the functional domains of Tibetan language, the system accelerates linguistic erosion and reorients identities towards a state-centred national framework. Community-based interventions provide crucial forms of resistance but cannot independently counteract the systemic erasure produced by state policy.

Protecting the future of Tibetan language—and the continuity of Tibetan civilisation—requires safeguarding linguistic rights, supporting local educational initiatives, and generating sustained

scholarly and policy attention to the long-term impacts of colonial schooling.

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The Political Economy of Tibet under the People's Republic of China

Gabriel Lafitte

A favourite topic among Chinese economists is comparing provinces. Since all 31 provinces and 'autonomous regions' annually publish a statistical report, usually at least 1,000 pages each, there is plenty of basis for comparing growth, consumption, productivity, which industries are flourishing, wealth accumulation, and much more. Yet, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) established in 1965 is often missing.

Why so? Tibet Autonomous Region, like all provinces, puts out a detailed statistical yearbook, and there are plenty of other sources available. The reason TAR is routinely omitted seems to be that, compared to almost any other province, it is such a laggard, embarrassing.

Although China routinely boasts Tibetans are getting richer, just by dividing total gross domestic product (GDP) by head of population this can be asserted; only to be undermined by the annual official survey of what urban Tibetan households actually spend, likewise rural consumption.

Over a decade ago economist Andrew Fischer published a detailed analysis of the 2011 TAR Annual Statistical Report, back in the days when China made its statistics readily available to researchers, now a state secret. Fischer's lengthy 2014 book is tellingly titled: *Disempowered Development of Tibet in China: A Study in Marginalization*. The book is a detailed interrogation of the 2011 TAR Statistical Yearbook; so we should ask: what has happened since?

In March 2026, Lhasa's Chinese mayor launched all 1036 projects of the 15th Five Year Plan for 2026 through 2030. In his words "treating the start as a decisive battle and the beginning as a sprint, seizing the policy window and the golden period for project construction." Directly addressing the assembled cadres standing rigidly to attention, he stated:

They should work backwards from deadlines and implement a visual management approach to ensure the 'three rates advance in tandem' – project implementation rate, commencement rate and investment rate – whilst achieving a 'threefold increase' in work volume, physical output and investment volume.

Why such urgency? This is disempowerment; it is ongoing, actually accelerating. Tibetans have no say in what is done, in the name of development. Therefore, we should call China's ongoing strategy disempowering development.

7-12 农村居民家庭基本情况

BASIC CONDITIONS OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS

项 目	Item	2019	2020
调查户数	(户) Number of Households Surveyed (unit)	1480	1480
调查户常住人口	(人) Number of Permanent Residents in the Households Surveyed (person)	7360	7331
平均每户常住人口	Number of Permanent Residents per Household	4.97	4.95
平均每户整半劳力	Number of Able-bodied and Semi-able-bodied Laborers per Household	2.94	2.91
平均每个劳动力负担人口(含本人)	Number of Persons Supported by Each Laborer (including the laborer himself or herself)	1.69	1.71
总收入	(元) Total Income (yuan)	15511.0	17333.6
工资性收入	Income of Wages and Salaries	3907.0	4778.3
经营净收入	Net Business Income	8884.2	9578.4
财产净支出	Net Income from Property	442.2	613.1
转移净支出	Net Income from Transfer	2277.7	2363.8
可支配收入	(元) Disposable Income (yuan)	12951.0	14598.4
工资性收入	Income of Wages and Salaries	3907.0	4778.3
经营净收入	Net Business Income	6364.5	6912.1
财产净收入	Net Income from Property	436.5	609.9
转移净收入	Net Income from Transfer	2243.1	2298.1
现金可支配收入	(元) Cash Disposable Income (yuan)	12755.6	13217.3
现金工资性收入	Cash Income of Wages and Salaries	3906.8	4775.2
现金经营净收入	Cash Net Business Income	6491.3	5781.5
现金财产净收入	Cash Net Income from Property	436.5	609.9
现金转移净收入	Cash Net Income from Transfer	1921.0	2050.6
总支出	(元) Total Expenditure (yuan)	11365.3	11764.7
#消费支出	Consumption Expenditure	8417.9	8917.1
生产经营费用支出	Expenditure for Business	1755.9	1909.7
财产性支出	Property Expenditure	5.7	3.2
转移性支出	Transferred Expenditure	34.6	65.8
购置资产及非经常性转移支出	Acquisition of Assets and Non-recurring Transfer Expenditure	655.9	578.1
借贷性支出	Lending Expenditure	495.1	290.6
现金支出	(元) Cash Expenditure (yuan)	9577.8	8422.8
现金消费支出	Cash Consumption Expenditure	6741.2	5777.3
生产经营费用支出	Cash Expenditure for Business	1645.2	1707.7
现金财产性支出	Cash Property Expenditure	5.7	3.2
现金转移性支出	Cash Transferred Expenditure	34.6	65.7
购置资产及非经常性转移支出	Acquisition of Assets and Non-recurring Transfer Expenditure	655.9	578.1
贷性支出	Lending Expenditure	495.1	290.6
期末住房情况	Housing Conditions		
人均自有住房面积	(平方米) Per Capita Floor Space (sq.m)	41.46	41.15
人均新建(购)住房面积	(平方米) Per Capita Newly-built Houses Space (sq.m)	6.68	5.79

Table 1: Basic conditions of the rural households in Tibet Autonomous Region

Note: Transfer payments, which are paid only when Tibetans stay at their official household registration address, are a substantial portion of actual cash disposable income.

Source: TAR 2021, *People's Living Conditions*, p.110.

How can development paradoxically be disempowering? China, then and now, pours money into Tibet, much of it through an elaborate mechanism requiring wealthy coastal provinces to provide development assistance to specific Tibetan counties and prefectures (these days they are all municipalities). This compulsory 'aid-Tibet' programme (对口援藏) began in 1994 and has been running over 30 years, with little to show for it, yet it still continues.¹ Wealthy Jiangsu province finances projects in Lhasa, including compulsory Chinese language training of Tibetan children, all part of what China defines as development. Tibetans are required to be grateful, but transfer payments refuse to allow displaced Tibetans to return to their pastures, or to migrate to cities.

Taking the conventional classification of primary industry (pastoralism and farming), secondary industry (manufacturing) and tertiary industry (retail, banking, services, government staffing), Fischer shows the inflow of capital was (and is) heavily concentrated in the tertiary sector, especially in the high wages paid to security personnel, cadres, local government, regulators, and other officials. This explains the paradox of disempowered development. No developing country in the world has

年 份	就业人员 (万人)		2003	289.80	156.78
Year	Total Employed Persons (10 000 persons)	第一产业 Primary Industry	2004	290.42	148.69
1982	171.17	113.83	2005	291.04	144.06
1990	241.25	144.75	2006	294.19	139.15
1991	245.21	147.37	2007	298.56	132.26
1992	249.24	150.54	2008	301.00	133.95
1993	253.33	142.62	2009	303.26	130.40
1994	257.49	144.96	2010	310.00	128.00
1995	261.71	146.82	2011	304.00	120.00
1996	266.01	151.09	2012	299.00	111.00
1997	270.38	151.41	2013	296.00	110.00
1998	274.81	153.07	2014	293.00	107.00
1999	279.32	152.23	2015	292.00	105.00
2000	283.91	158.42	2016	289.00	103.00
2001	285.66	170.25	2017	287.00	101.00
2002	287.72	162.27	2018	285.00	95.00
			2019	282.00	90.00
			2020	279.00	71.00
			2021	277.00	69.00

Table 2: Number of employed persons at year end by three strata of industry in main years

Note: In Amdo/Qinghai, the number of primary producers — pastoralists and farmers — has declined from a 2001 peak of 1.7 million, to 690,000 in 2021, while all employment has risen from 1.7 million in 1982 to 2.77 million in 2021.

Source: Qinghai 2022, Chapter 5, p.140.

a lopsided economy dominated by the services sector. Only in the richest countries are services — such as entertainment, leisure, retail, holiday travel — bigger than the primary farming sector or the manufacturing secondary sector. Thus, Tibet's economy is a global anomaly; a top-down artefact with no roots in the daily work of Tibetans.

What this means for individual Tibetan families is disempowering dependence on state subsistence payments, once traditional livelihoods are cancelled as a result of mandatory displacement of rural Tibetans from their pastures. When Tibetans are evicted from their pastures, herded into high density frontier

villages, all their production skills become redundant. Dependence is the result.² The policy of evicting nomads and farmers from their lands, wherever a development project is scheduled, has over decades become routine, regulated, widespread, and unavoidable. Local communities are depopulated, in the name of dam construction, solar panel arrays,

¹ Rong, Zhou (2019). "Current Situation and Prospects of Counter-support Tibet Research: Based on the Visual Analysis of CSSCI Journal Papers", *Tibetan Studies* 5: 117-127

² Survey and Research Center for China Household Finance (SWUFE) (2013). "Report of China Household Income Disparity", *Frontiers of Economics in China* 8(3): 452-466. SWUFE, Chengdu. DOI:10.3868/s060-002-013-0022-4; Lei, Genqiang, Xiaohong Huang, and Penghui Xi (2016). "The Impact of Transfer Payments on Urban-Rural Income Gap: Based on Fuzzy RD Analysis of China's Midwestern County Data", *China Finance and Economic Review* 4(1): 1-17, December. Springer.

national parks, soil degradation repair, poverty alleviation, and watershed protection.

Customary livelihoods are cancelled, the displaced are shunted to distant frontier villages where they are crowded together. Keeping of animals is forbidden, thousands of years of intimate knowledge of grassland dynamics is suddenly redundant, so individuals must depend on official handouts of subsistence rations, and express gratitude. Economists call this transfer payments, which show up in the statistical yearbooks as a substantial portion of rural Tibetan incomes — disempowered development.

This is why comparing Tibet to other provinces is embarrassing. China prides itself on being the world's factory, "the world's most comprehensive industrial system" (产业体系完备) encouraging heavy industries to move to western provinces inland. Manufacturing generates industrial employment, in economic jargon endogenous growth; at least until the robots take over. In central Tibet, however, success remains elusive despite decades of 'aid-Tibet' programme that attempted to establish 'demonstration industrial parks' for a wide range of industries—including intensified animal fattening and slaughter, aquaculture, plantations of tea, nuts, fruits; woollen mills, carpet factories, hot spring health spas. Only domestic tourism has scaled up in the region, with 63

million Han coming to Lhasa each year. While this generates hospitality industry jobs for sojourning Chinese speakers, it offers very little benefits for Tibetans, who are often marketed as the objects of the Chinese gaze.

In 2026, disempowering development is as relevant as when Fischer named it in 2014. A lopsided economy in which Tibetans remain poor, marginal, dependent, while the only sector that grows is tertiary: surveillance, policing of ideological conformity, grid management, predictive policing, enforcement of regulatory compliance. While expensive, it enables China to claim Tibetan are getting richer, simply by dividing GDP per person.

The origins of disempowering go back to China's conquest of Tibet in the 1950s, and what the conquerors then did with the substantial annual Tibetan production surpluses, of wool and dairy products, available for sale, for export, for endogenous growth. If China had invested in these Tibetan comparative advantages, Tibet's overwhelmingly rural economy could have grown, in the ways development economists have advocated for the past 80 years; by upgrading sheep breeds, making more fine and semi-fine wool, adding value, local processing, new industries. This is classic textbook stuff.

What actually happened is that revolutionary China stopped the export of Tibetan wool via

Kalimpong and Calcutta to the United Kingdom (UK) woollen mills, and from the Ma Chu/Yellow River to Tianjin port and on to New York. Tibet's wool was requisitioned by the state owned Shanghai woollen mills, with no payment to pastoralist producers. Disempowerment grows from the barrel of a gun. Dairy, in great demand by Chinese consumers, similarly received no investment in value adding—processing raw milk into butter, cheese, yoghurt, ice cream etc.—with cold chain logistics installed. Instead China built intensive corporate dairy factories in Inner Mongolia, plus major imports from New Zealand.

A new political economy imposed from above is now fast emerging. There are strong signs that this model is transitioning to something more ambitious, more extractive and intensive—a scaling up of the siphoning of commodities, minerals and energy for the benefit of wealthy, distant Chinese cities. Tibet Autonomous Region is beginning to shift from being a cost centre to a profit centre. It is the state-owned corporate giants that build, then own and operate the hydro dams, solar farms, power grids, mineral extraction enclaves that are positioned to capture the profits, having received central government subsidies and loans, incentivised to invest in intensified extraction. Not only does the displacing, disempowering build of hydro, solar, and wind power make TAR into a major exporter



5-14 2021年分行业分地区非私营单位就业人员工资总额
Total Wages of Employed Persons in Non-private Units by Sector and Region(2021)

单位：万元 (10 000 yuan)

项 目	Item	全省 合计 Provincial Total	西宁市 Xining City	海东市 Haidong City	海北州 Haibei Zang A.P	黄南州 Huang- nan Zang A.P	海南州 Hainan Zang A.P	果洛州 Golog Zang A.P	玉树州 Yushu Zang A.P	海西州 Haixi Mong- olian & Zang A.P
合计	Total	7243211	3811795	770048	291405	255601	365710	218975	291119	1238558
农林牧渔业	Agriculture, Forestry, Animal Husbandry and Fishery	39164	8689	3826	5476	4419	11498	502	528	4226
采矿业	Mining	412729	18473	170	4530	17		4680		384859
制造业	Manufacturing	794209	469984	62855	1077	2884	1335	240	533	255301
电力、燃气及水的 生产和供应业	Production and Supply of Electricity, Gas and Water	294231	204066	8663	8001	4447	19059	1460	3639	44896
建筑业	Construction	336179	299380	10789	1981	5233	7019	2178	94	9505
批发和零售业	Wholesale and Retail Trades	173797	127142	8498	3742	2417	3869	3124	9636	15369
交通运输、仓储和邮政业	Transport, Storage and Post	578736	486414	39212	6257	2104	2661	11802	5774	24512
住宿和餐饮业	Hotels and Catering Services	23488	15945	1343	658	649	712	331	496	3354
信息传输、软件和 信息技术服务业	Information Transmission, Software and Information Technology	121150	112176	2380	662	376	1019		1059	3478
金融业	Financial Intermediation	409409	301810	37163	10558	5963	17618	7073	3768	25456
房地产业	Real Estate	94450	75959	11857	156	1215	467	373		4423
租赁和商务服务业	Leasing and Business Services	82826	59858	10170	2056	462	1310	460	1062	7448
科学研究和技术服务业	Scientific Research and Technical Services	249697	179559	16835	10179	5071	6435	4752	3222	23644
水利、环境和公共 设施管理业	Management of Water Conservancy, Environment and Public Facilities	70747	38872	7472	3152	3548	2629	2975	1252	10847
居民服务、修理和 其他服务业	Services to Households, Repair and Other Services	12572	6804	1199		97	207	5	2291	1969
教育	Education	1030497	373898	216783	60056	71054	90345	37630	93713	87018
卫生和社会工作	Health and Social Services	650070	412100	58546	21165	17017	50600	13449	17555	59638
文化、体育和娱乐业	Culture, Sports and Entertainment	72643	40691	7416	4721	4383	3209	3167	4322	4734
公共管理、社会保障和 社会组织	Public Management, Social Security Social Organization	1796617	579975	264871	146978	124245	145718	124774	142175	267881

Table 3: Total wages of employed persons in non-private units by sector and region (2021)

Note: In state owned enterprises (SOE), wages are higher to attract Han Chinese sojourners—especially in Xining municipality and adjacent, to the east, on the Xining to Lanzhou corridor, the largely non-Tibetan municipality of Tsongkha/Haidong. The SOE wages are lower in the six Tibetan 'Autonomous' Prefectures, except in Chumarleb/Haixi where there are major SOE extracting oil, gas, lithium, magnesium, potash, and sodium from drill wells and salt lakes.

Source: Qinghai 2022, Chapter 5, p.14.

7-9 分地区农村居民人均生活消费支出

Per Capita Consumption Expenditure of Rural Households by Region

单位：元		(yuan)											
地 区	Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
西宁市	Xining City	5317	6383	6858	7503	8079	8353	8826	9824	10318	11299	11633	13317
海东市	Haidong City	4198	5215	6079	6646	7307	7646	7956	8149	8606	9274	9686	10896
海北州	Haibei Zang A.P	3834	4574	6076	6805	7662	7997	8511	9001	9662	10400	11143	13048
黄南州	Huangnan Zang A.P	2971	3614	4856	5311	5347	5686	6384	7182	7912	8764	9207	10818
海南州	Hainan Zang A.P	3923	5512	6417	7215	8037	8298	8860	9316	9995	11003	12101	13800
果洛州	Golog Zang A.P	2057	2279	2559	2880	3181	3299	3827	4266	4839	5981	6568	8207
玉树州	Yushu Zang A.P	1730	2678	3379	3924	4215	4365	5237	4940	6009	7308	8606	9204
海西州	Haixi Mongolian & Zang A.P	4398	5926	7224	8181	8805	9154	9862	10429	10738	11548	12148	13979

Table 4: Per capita consumption expenditure of rural households by region

Note: What do people in rural areas spend money on? Compare the higher spend in rural areas surrounding Xining city, also in Haibei to the north of Xining, and Hainan/Tsolho where hydropower extraction and industrial processing of Tibetan minerals have attracted immigration of Han Chinese. Lowest consumption is in Golog and Yushu prefectures.

Source: Qinghai 2022, Chapter 7, p.202.

of electricity, it is Beijing's policy to provide cheap electricity to big distant cities, so there will be no economic benefit to Tibet for becoming a power generation exporter. Economists call this siphoning.

This transition to intensive exploitation will be familiar to Tibetans beyond TAR. Roughly half the Tibetan Plateau, and half of the seven million Tibetans listed in the 2020 Census live in what used to be

the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan—all closer to lowland China than central Tibet, all integrated more into China's economy. The chain of hydro dams on the Ma Chu/Yellow River in Tibet has enabled intensive industrialisation in Qinghai, and electricity export over long distances. In Yunnan, tourism is booming. Mining of copper, gold, and lithium goes through the boom and bust cycles of mining worldwide,

and in bursts is intensifying, across Tibet.

Xi Jinping's demand for greater self-reliance makes the common pool resources of Tibet into monetizable commodities—assets that can be owned, monopolised, converted into fungible material wealth. Lithium demand is starting to boom again. The rivers of Tibet have been intensively dammed, and now it is the turn of the Yarlung Tsangpo

海北州	Haibei Zang A.P	7457	8928	10430	11777	12959	14230	15557	17084	18684	20392	21699
黄南州	Huangnan Zang A.P	6118	7269	8347	9468	10691	11742	12843	14099	15425	17058	18331
海南州	Hainan Zang A.P	7070	8280	9546	10967	12426	13656	14949	16413	17935	19655	21047
果洛州	Golog Zang A.P	5503	6150	7249	8232	9374	10264	11265	12459	13912	15494	16534
玉树州	Yushu Zang A.P	7961	7568	8664	9838	11203	12253	13445	14886	16348	18242	19399
海西州	Haixi Mongolian & Zang A.P	11709	13393	15132	16790	18632	20358	22218	24336	26524	28732	30168

Table 5: Household income in the Tibetan prefectures of Amdo 2010 to 2020: Amalgamated Data of Urban and Rural Households

Note: The most Tibetan of the six prefectures (fewest non-Tibetan immigrants) are: Golog, Hainan/Tsolho and Yushu, consistently the poorest. Divide by seven for US dollar equivalent.

Source: Data from annual survey of income and consumption, in Qinghai Statistical Yearbook 2021.

to yield its treasure of electricity, before, from China’s perspective, it disappears to India and Bangladesh.

The Yarlung Tsangpo hydro project is meant to become operational in 2033; the high-speed electrified rail route from Shanghai via Chengdu to Nyingtri and Lhasa fully operational by 2030. These two massive capital expenditures have the capacity to transform the TAR economy, and the many plans and analyses available make it clear that the intention is to integrate Tibet into China as never before. To lock Tibet as the source of commodity chains that enrich the coastal cities, a model of vertical integration in which Tibet is the captive source of a wide range of raw materials essential to maintaining China’s global dominance of industrialisation.

Not only does China frequently boast of its benevolent spending in Tibet, it has long defined such outlay as the core fulfilment of human rights. China insists there are no universal human rights, and the civil and political rights of individuals are secondary to economic and social

rights of communities, villages and towns where access to services such as electricity and smart phone coverage are made available. China’s State Council White Papers have cited the number of phones in Tibet as proof of human rights in Tibet.



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The Plateau's Quiet Revolt: Geography, Identity, and the Elusive Quest to 'Close' Tibet

Sriparna Pathak

The 'Roof of the World' or Tibet, presents one of the most formidable challenges to modern governance and statecraft. Spanning about 2.5 million km², with an average elevation beyond 4500 metres, Tibet comprises of Amdo, Kham, and U-tsang with Tibetan inhabitants. In 1965, the People's Republic of China (PRC) established the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), which is home to roughly 3.65 million people in a territory of 1.2 million km².

Harsh climate, low oxygen, permafrost, and vast differences are some of the facets that embody the limits to centralised power in upland peripheries. Logistics, military projection, and economic integration are all dependent on these difficult facets of the TAR. Despite China's massive investments in infrastructure, surveillance, and assimilation, full incorporation remains elusive. Tibet's upland geography imposes structural constraints on state power. Moreover coercion without legitimacy breeds resilient resistance. Understanding the Tibet context is crucial to understand why high-altitude peripheries resist full subjugation, even by powerful authoritarian states such as China, which has tried several means to close the region by attempting to erase Tibetan narratives and cultural autonomy.



Tibet context is crucial to understand because high-altitude peripheries resist full subjugation, even by powerful authoritarian states such as China, which has tried several means to close the region by attempting to erase Tibetan narratives and cultural autonomy.

Upland Geography and High-Altitude Governance Dilemmas

Tibet's physical environment fundamentally limits state reach; the extreme altitude of the Tibetan plateau creates physiological barriers, as oxygen levels drop to 50-60% of sea level, demanding acclimatisation that slows troop movements as well as civilian labour. While non-Tibetans, including Han Chinese administrators and soldiers face higher risks of altitude sickness, reduced physical efficiency, and long-term health issues, locals tend to possess genetic adaptations enabling efficient oxygen use without elevated levels of haemoglobin.

Such an asymmetry favours indigenous resilience over outsider control.

Compounding the problem are issues of permafrost. Extensive permafrost layers cover much of the plateau, where ongoing thawing due to climate change threatens the stability of roads and rail lines. The Qinghai-Tibet Railway, that was opened in 2006, is a flagship project that traverses 960 km, above 4000 metres. It required specialised engineering for frozen soil, oxygen supplementation, and ecological mitigation. However, it still faces ongoing permafrost degradation risks, projected to cost billions in infrastructure repairs by 2090. Military operations suffer similarly: diesel engines lose power, helicopters carry lighter loads, and resupply demands strain even advanced systems. High-altitude bases need oxygen pipelines and medical networks; while recent expansions by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) demonstrate technological progress, they also underscore persistent constraints on rapid and sustained deployment.

The TAR's vast, rugged terrain, which includes mountains, valleys, and sparse population, further fragments state control. Traditional Tibetan pastoralism and mobility historically evaded lowland states. Geography enables state evasion, through

dispersion, oral cultures, and flexible adaptive identities. Tibet—while historically having its own state formations—fits this pattern as its plateau acts as a natural barrier, rendering full surveillance and extraction costly. Modern extensions, including border roads, dual-use infrastructure, attempt to integrate the region economically but simultaneously expose environmental fragility. The majority (75%) of the Tibetan



Chinese Communist Party documents admit that Tibetans remain ideologically resilient. Repression hardens identity, rather than erasing it, and younger generations, despite state education, preserve language ties at home and draw on digital exile networks.

plateau is now ecologically vulnerable; warming has accelerated permafrost thaw, undermining the very projects that are supposed to develop the plateau. Geographic distance dilutes coercion, while local knowledge of micro-environments sustains autonomy. China's responses in the form of railroads, highways, and airfields have compressed space, but have not eliminated it; winter closures and altitude still constrain year-round dominance.

Why Legitimacy Matters more than Coercion

Most modern states rely on

Weberian legitimacy of consent via shared norms, alongside coercion. In Tibet, Beijing prioritises the latter, visible in the form of grid-style surveillance, facial recognition cameras, monastery police stations, boarding schools for more than one million Tibetan children, emphasising Mandarin, attempts to Sinicise Buddhism through state-appointed lamas, rewritten curricula criminalising Dalai Lama veneration, and so on. The

limits of coercion are exemplified by ethnographic evidence from Amdo in Northeastern Tibet. Local officials often negotiate consent pragmatically with religious and tribal leaders, subverting central demands for uniform sovereignty to maintain order; acknowledging that ideological imposition alone fails.

Legitimacy gaps are structural as Tibetans view China's rule as colonial. Economic gains in the form of infrastructure and tourism feel extractive, benefiting Han migrants, while eroding pastoral livelihoods and cultural sites. Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

documents admit that Tibetans remain ideologically resilient. Repression hardens identity, rather than erasing it, and younger generations, despite state education, preserve language ties at home and draw on digital exile networks. Coercion can only produce silence, and not loyalty. In Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism and collective memory of pre-1959 autonomy function analogously, framing resistance as spiritual defence.

Why China Struggles to Fully 'Close' Tibet

Closing Tibet, or sealing it from external narratives, attempting to assimilate demographics, and controlling succession of the Dalai Lama remains elusive, despite vast surveillance networks and border fortifications. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGiE), or the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamshala, India, sustains a global diaspora of about 100,000–200,000 ethnic Tibetans. The non-violent Middle Way and the international stature of the Dalai Lama, undermine Beijing's framing of him as 'splittist'. Moreover, the attempts to dictate his reincarnation via the Qing-era Golden Urn risk creating parallel lineages, thereby deepening schisms.

Given that families transmit heritage orally, information control falters at cultural edges. Monasteries preserve rituals, while exile media and pilgrims maintain

ties. Demographic engineering, via Han influx in urban centres, shifts economics, but fuels resentment rather than fusion. Urban landscapes change, yet pastoralists and monks retain their unique identities.

Environmental degradation from militarised infrastructure invites criticism, while climate change threatens the plateau's viability. Beijing's isolation policies—including restricted foreign access and controlled journalism—attempt to project strength but instead signal fragility, even as Tibetan identity endures.

Broader Implications and Conclusion

Tibet exemplifies how and why upland geographies constrain even hyper-modern states. Peripheries are strategically positioned against incorporation; while technology—in the form of drones and artificial intelligence (AI) surveillance—attempts risk mitigation, friction does not get abolished. Legitimacy,

rooted in cultural recognition, proves decisive; coercion may sustain short-term control, but it incubates long-term resistance. China's Tibet quagmire is structural; it showcases a civilisation insisting on distinctness, confronting a state demanding uniformity. Economic integration and surveillance close physical space, yet transnational and spiritual ties remain open.

China's attempts to control Tibet are actually cautionary tales, against overestimating authoritarian capacity in fragile ecosystems. High-altitude dilemmas recur globally, as sustainable governance demands hybrid legitimacy—accommodating local idioms over pure coercion. Tibet remains and will remain a governed yet ungovernable frontier, unless Beijing can address Tibetan identity as a political grievance, rather than a pure security threat. True closure requires consent, which geography and history have rendered profoundly elusive.



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What the Fire Knew

Bhuchung D. Sonam

One winter we went to Pong Dam, an earth-fill dam in Himachal Pradesh, India, known for its wildlife—especially birds that nest in winter and migrate from as far away as Russia and Tibet. When evening fell and the sun went down, we started a bonfire.

As the fire crackled, I heard tiny popping sounds and saw very small sparks flying into the chilly air. I looked carefully into the fire and witnessed insects emerging from the cracks of semi-dried logs, only to be caught up in the tongues of flame that warmed us.

I shivered, not from cold. Fire gives life and destroys it in the same act. I have known this since 2009 when the first self-immolation took place in occupied Tibet.

Early morning on 27th March 2012, I got a call from a friend in Delhi, the general secretary of the Tibetan Youth Congress. “A self-immolation has taken place and he has left a note behind.” “Can you do a quick translation?”, she said. I could not even ask for the name, let alone any other details—there was too much commotion at the other end. Voices crowded the line. I simply said, “Send me an image of the note immediately.”

A few minutes later I flipped open my laptop to find a one-page handwritten letter. On the top right corner was the date in numerals: 16/3/2012. The rest of the five-point note was written in Tibetan uchen script.

Jampel Yeshe was 27 years old when he set himself on fire in New Delhi on 26th March to protest against Chinese rule and the visit of the then Chinese President Hu Jintao. Engulfed in flames, he ran through streets crowded with protesters and fell. Police and bystanders rushed to put out the flames, but he had already suffered burns over 90% of his body and died the next day.

On my computer screen, I typed out his last message—each sentence piercing my mind, each point tugging at my heart.

“Freedom is the basis of happiness for all living beings. Without freedom, six million Tibetans are like a butter lamp in the wind, without direction”, Jampel wrote. “If you have money, it is the time to spend it; if you are educated, it is the time to produce results; if

you have control over your life, I think the day has come to sacrifice it. The fact that Tibetan people are setting themselves on fire in this 21st century is to let the world know about their suffering, and to tell the world about the denial of basic human rights.”

A couple of months earlier, I had received a call from another friend, the executive director of Students for a Free Tibet in New York, about a self-immolation that had taken place in Tibet. Before setting himself alight on 8th January in the Eastern Tibetan town of Golok, Lama Soepa left a recorded audio message. My friend said he needed the translation done immediately and shared the recording, which was found wrapped in Lama's robe after his death. He was the first person to leave a recorded message as a testimony.

Listening to the voice of the quadragenarian Buddhist monk and deciphering his words into another tongue was viscerally painful and profoundly stirring. His voice was calm and his message filled with compassion and dignity, even as he was about to set himself on fire.

This is the twenty-first century, and this is the year in which so many Tibetan heroes have died. I am sacrificing my body both to stand in solidarity with them in flesh and blood, and to seek repentance through this highest

tantric honour of offering one's body. This is not to seek personal fame or glory... I am giving away my body as an offering of light to chase away the darkness, to free all beings from suffering, and to lead them—each of whom has been our mother in the past and yet by ignorance has been led to commit immoral acts. My offering of light is for all living beings, even as insignificant as lice and nits, to dispel their pain and to guide them to the state of enlightenment.

I sat at my makeshift desk on a cold winter's day in Dharamsala and thought about Lama Soepa in Golok—known for its fiercely independent and ferociously rebellious people. I thought about our separation by the politics of occupation and censorship, and yet how we are bound by our non-violent resistance and struggle for freedom. I thought about how his burgundy robes crumbled and turned to ash under the weight of flames, sending sparks into the infinite blue sky.

Lama Soepa was one of the 159 Tibetans who have set themselves on fire since 2009 to protest against the Chinese occupation of their homeland. Nineteen of them left messages before carrying out their final act, and I translated all of them—each time bearing the weight of their unbearable pain and unimaginable sacrifice, devoid of

hatred and vengeance towards the enemy. I am often left with sleepless nights thinking about the lengths to which human beings are capable of going for freedom and dignity, and for an end to occupation and subjugation.

Among these 159 Tibetans were 28 women, including Sangye Dolma. Days before her self-immolation, she took a selfie with ‘བོད་རང་བཙན་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་’ (Tibet: An Independent Country) written on the back of her left hand and left a short poem as her last message.

...look, my Tibetan brothers and sisters / look at the land of snow / our destiny is on the rise / Tibet is an independent country. While His Holiness the Dalai Lama / has been away for too long / travelling all over the world / Tibetans suffer under oppression / let's pray for this darkness to be over...

She was 17 years old on the day she died from her burns.

Of the 159 Tibetans, 26 were younger than 18 years of age and 127 of them have died from their burns. Each was like a butter lamp in the biting cold wind, but their light has not gone out yet.

What lessons can we learn from them? Their moral courage and clarity of intention speak to our world. To live and die not only

Source: Bhuchung D. Sonam.

for oneself but for the goodness and wellbeing of everyone—to dispel their suffering.’ The people in Tibet are deprived of all basic human rights and dignity, and driven to the point of annihilation. And yet without losing hope, without animosity, and with great equanimity—even as they set themselves ablaze—they had the presence of mind to leave such insightful messages behind. If those of us in general, and particularly our leaders, could draw lessons from them, the world would be far less violent and more humane.

For Tibetans, these acts are a constant reminder that freedom does not come without sacrifice—individually and collectively. Any dismissal of these last messages leaves the struggle for freedom more fragile and more morally adrift. Even as China labels the self-immolators as mentally unsound and accuses their relatives of being accomplices, Tibetans—particularly those in exile—must adamantly counter such distorted propaganda and assert their right to narrate these historic events as they unfold.

The last known self-immolation took place on 27th March 2022, when 81-year-old Taphun doused himself in kerosene and set himself ablaze—making him the oldest person known to have done so. On his 80th birthday, considered a milestone in Tibetan tradition, he had told friends and acquaintances:

“It is certain that the sun of happiness will shine in Tibet. The young children should not become discouraged.”

Living in exile for over 40 years, each day I live with a dream for a free Tibet, where I can walk across the plateau under the blue skies leaving behind the fear of fire.



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Tibetan Political Philosophy in an Age of Power Asymmetry

Rinzin Namgyal

The Tibet question today is often framed in terms of human rights,¹ geopolitics,² history,³ sovereignty, and assimilation.⁴ Yet such a framing, while relevant, remains insufficient to define the ongoing stalemate of Tibet- Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) dialogue.

1 <https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/2026/4/sen-rick-scott-sen-jeff-merkley-introduce-tibet-atrocities-determination-act>

2 <https://fnvaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Resetting-Indias-Tibet-Policy-PDF-copy-1.pdf>; <https://savetibet.org/why-tibet-2025/>

3 Lau (2026).

4 <https://tibetaction.net/colonial-boarding-school-report/>

At its core, the stalemate since 2010 between Beijing and Dharamshala⁵ reflects a deeper clash—not merely of interests, but of political ontology at core. It is a conflict shaped by competing traditions of political thoughts, divergent understandings of authority, and what may be called conceptual determinism: the underlying assumptions that define what each side considers legitimate, rational, and possible.

To fully grasp this, one must move beyond conventional international relations frameworks and situate the Tibetan Middle Way Approach (MWA)⁶ within both classical and contemporary Chinese political theory. In doing so, a striking contrast emerges between the governing logic associated with Xi Jinping often interpreted through the lens of Han Feizi's Legalism and the normative vision of humane authority articulated by Xunzi and revived in modern form by Yan Xuetong through his theory of moral realism.

Dharamshala's MWA is grounded in a normative belief that political legitimacy must accommodate identity, religion, and culture. It assumes that a stable political order is one that respects pluralism and allows space for civilisational continuity. In this sense, autonomy is not a threat to sovereignty but a condition for meaningful coexistence mainly driven out of the Buddhist tenets of interdependence in particular (Madhyamika Philosophy).⁷

Beijing, under Xi Jinping, operates within a framework that prioritises unity, stability, and centralised authority in every possible way. This framework shows strong resemblance to the Legalist tradition associated with Han

5 <https://mwa.tibet.net/print-ready-umaylam-2023-edited-23-march-2023/>

6 Both the Constitution of the PRC and PRC Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law provide a legal framework that could, in principle, accommodate the genuine autonomy sought by Dharamshala in negotiations with Beijing. <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/35194/CHN35194.pdf>

7 Ibid.



Items	Yes % (n)	No %(n)	Don't know %(n)
The MWP is an effective policy	86.51(478)	6.30(35)	8.41(47)
Support for the MWP in exile	62.03(343)	4.32(24)	3.8(21)
Tibetan regards it Tibetan support the MWP	64.30(355)	3.25(18)	25.37(140)
Saitsfied with the outcomes of the Sino Tibet dialogue	20.57(113)	53.83(301)	25.76(144)
The MWP receives international support	78.64(446)	8.29(49)	13.29(76)
The nature of the MWP is unrealistic	28.50(157)	47.72(263)	21.61(126)
The PRC will comply with the demand of the MWP	36.41(201)	34.51(193)	29.11(163)

Table 1: The Middle-Way Policy: Survey during February-October 2014
Source: Data collected by author

Feizi. In such a system, diversity is often viewed through the lens of risk management rather than moral accommodation. This divergence creates a situation where the same proposal such as genuine autonomy appears as a reasonable compromise to one side (Tibetan) and a latent threat to the other (China’s leadership).

Table 1 presents data from the Middle Way Awareness campaign conducted 12 years ago in 2014. While Tibetan support for the MWA remains overwhelmingly high, the level of satisfaction appears considerably lower. This raises a crucial question: what is required to translate strong support into genuine satisfaction among Tibetans?

Xi Jinping and the Legalist Turn
The governance model under Xi Jinping reflects a synthesis of statecraft such as techno-driven

state and classical legalist principles.⁸ While officially framed within socialist ideology, its operational logic reveals key features of legalism of Shi (authority), Shu (governance) and Fa 法 (Law). While coming to the power, Xi Jinping has centralised all the power authority of the party, the government, and the army. Further, he has deployed his own governance model to bring rivals into line and to silence all dissident voices by using the law (Fa 法) to his own advantage.

This approach is particularly visible in Tibet, where policies aim to assimilate the region more tightly into the Chinese state through the Sinicization of religion, economic development, administrative restructuring, and ideological re-construction in colonial boarding schools. Religion and culture, rather

than being treated as autonomous domains, are subject to regulation and reinterpretation in line with state objectives to assimilate and create a sense of oneness of the Chinese nation.⁹ From a legalist perspective, such measures are rational—they minimise chaos and maximise control. However, they also risk undermining the very legitimacy they seek to secure, since they fail to address the deeper aspirations of the Tibetan people.

Humane Authority: Xunzi and Yan Xuetong Vision

In contrast to Legalism, the Confucian tradition—particularly as articulated by Xunzi—offers a conception of political authority

8 <https://licentiapoetica.com/the-triad-of-legalism-fa-shu-shi-2e1534f9274d>

9 <https://fnvaworld.org/chinas-ethnic-minority-issues-analysis-and-future-tibet-eastturkestan-%e0%bd%a2%e0%be%92%e0%be%b1%e0%bc%8b%e0%bd%93%e0%bd%82%e0%bc%8b%e0%bd%82%e0%be%b2%e0%bd%84%e0%bd%a6%e0%bc%8b/>



grounded in moral cultivation rather than mere enforcement of law. For Xunzi, effective governance depends on the ethical quality of the ruler and the state, where humane authority (Wang Dao) rests on moral legitimacy, reciprocal relations between ruler and people, and the generation of long-term stability through voluntary compliance rather than coercion.¹⁰ Building on this tradition, Yan Xuetong's theory of moral realism argues that moral authority is a critical component of national power alongside material capabilities. He distinguishes between tyranny (rule by coercion), hegemony (rule by power and alliances), and humane authority (rule through moral leadership and voluntary support), contending that the latter is the most sustainable form as it reduces resistance, enhances cooperation, and strengthens legitimacy.¹¹ Thus, moral realism does not reject power politics but reframes it—positioning ethical leadership as integral to effective and enduring statecraft.

When viewed through the combined lens of Xunzi and Yan Xuetong, the Tibetan MWA emerges as a clear expression of humane authority at the operational level. The MWA does not seek independence or confrontation. Instead, it proposes

a framework of coexistence that balances Tibetan identity with Chinese sovereignty. Its core features align closely with the principles of humane authority:

- Moral appeal: It is grounded in non-violence, dialogue, and mutual respect.
- Reciprocal stability: It seeks a solution that benefits both Tibetans and the Chinese state.
- Long-term vision: It prioritises sustainable harmony among ethnicities over short-term gains.

In this sense, the MWA is not a sign of weakness but a strategic calculated choice which I have termed as 'pragmatic nationalism'. It leverages moral legitimacy as a form of power, aiming to reshape the terms of engagement rather than contest them directly.

Bridging the Conceptual Divide

The key challenge, however, lies in bridging the gap between these competing frameworks. For Beijing under Xi Jinping, influenced by Legalist logic, the Middle Way may appear potentially destabilising to the PRC.¹² For Dharamshala, the current approach of MWA is practical and in accordance with the Chinese constitution.¹³ This

is where the concept of humane authority offers a potential bridge. By reframing the Tibetan issue in terms that resonate with indigenous Chinese political thought, it becomes possible to present the Middle Way not as an independence in disguise but as an opportunity to apply the political philosophy of Xunzi to contemporary efforts to solve the Tibet question.¹⁴

Adopting elements of humane authority would allow China to: firstly, enhance its domestic legitimacy by addressing Tibetan grievances; secondly, strengthen its international image as a morally responsible power; and lastly, reduce the long-term costs associated with coercive governance. At the same time, such a shift would require a departure from the strict Legalist emphasis on control—a move that is politically and institutionally challenging. However, the existence of such a political thought in the form of humane authority is visible within the Chinese political, according to which the MWA is not an alien to the Chinese state.

The MWA may also provide strategic advantages for Beijing by reducing the enormous and disproportionately high spending

10 King (2011).

11 Ibid.

12 <https://www.ccasindia.org/insightdetails.php?tid=47>

13 <https://www.tibetanreview.net/the-middle-way-approach-a-highway-for-resolving->

[tibets-pressing-contemporary-problems/](#)

14 However, such an assessment is largely subjective in nature; although, such an outcome is possible where there is sufficient political will.



associated with stabilising and maintaining politically sensitive regions such as Tibet remains. Studies show that per capita security expenditure in Tibet, Beijing, and Xinjiang is nearly three times higher than the national average.¹⁵

Conclusion

The Sino-Tibetan stalemate cannot be understood solely through geopolitics or legal claims, but must be situated within a deeper clash of political ontologies. While Beijing's governance reflects a Legalist emphasis on control, centralisation, and stability, the MWA embodies a model closer to humane authority, grounded in moral legitimacy, reciprocity, and long-term coexistence. This divergence explains why mutually acceptable solutions remain elusive. However, the presence of alternative traditions within Chinese political thought, particularly those associated with Xunzi and moral realism, suggests that the Middle Way is not entirely alien to the Chinese intellectual framework. Its success ultimately depends on whether future political conditions allow a shift from coercive governance towards a more moral legitimacy-based approach to the Chinese statecraft.

The question, therefore, is whether the MWA is not entirely alien to the Chinese state? Could a shift in Xi

Jinping's political philosophy away from the Legalism associated with Han Feizi enable the future success of the MWA? Alternatively, will such prospects emerge under future Chinese leaders whose political philosophy is more closely aligned with Mencius or Xunzi?

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¹⁵ Chestnut Greitens (2026).

Beyond Exile Governance: The Strategic Evolution of the CTA

Bhuchung K. Tsering

Since its establishment in April 1959, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGiE), formally known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), has evolved into a uniquely functioning democracy with all three pillars of democracy.

It works as a de facto government—albeit without a territory—with which the international community interacts. In the process, it has become a topic of research for political scientists and a model for other political movements in similar situations. An analysis of the evolution of CTA shows how His Holiness the Dalai Lama strategically transformed a government structure that had virtually no space for ordinary citizens to a system today where the highest decision making body is made of representatives directly elected by the people.

Soon after the Dalai Lama crossed over into the safety of Indian territory on 31 March 1959, the Indian Government arranged for his stay in the northern hill station of Mussoorie (subsequently moving to Dharamsala). He regrouped those of his ministers and senior officials who were able to escape or who were already in India before 1959 and established the TGiE. The evolution began at that time itself. As His Holiness explains in his memoir, *Freedom in Exile* (1991), he made two “radical changes” from the system in Tibet: I saw at this time to the creation of various new Tibetan government departments. These included Offices of Information, Education, Rehabilitation, Security, Religious Affairs and Economic Affairs. I also particularly encouraged women to take part in the government.

Then, on 20 June 1959 the Dalai Lama established the legitimacy of the Administration through a unique rationale. In response to a reporter’s question at his press conference that day, “Do Tibetans still recognise you and your ministers here with you as the Government of Tibet?” the Dalai Lama asserted, “Wherever I am, accompanied by my Government, the Tibetan people recognise us as the Government of Tibet”.¹ More than six decades later, this acceptance of the Tibetan people, both in exile and in Tibet, is the backbone of the CTA despite there not being any country that has formally recognised it.

1 *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law*, International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 1959, page 202.



The development of CTA has been in both form and substance. From operating from a single cottage (Mortimer Hall) in McLeod Ganj in 1960, it now occupies several buildings in an area with the Tibetan name, Gangchen Kyishong (“Snow-laden happy valley”). More importantly, the CTA now oversees a vast network of offices in Dharamsala and in all the Tibetan communities in the Indian subcontinent, and the Offices of Tibet in 11 countries.

The role of CTA has also expanded. From meeting the critical needs of the newly arrived refugees, today it is responsible for short-term and long-term needs of Tibetans outside of Tibet on top of the overarching resolution of the Tibetan political problem.

The framework has also evolved. In 1959, the Dalai Lama had minimum choice of shaping the structure. He was also compelled to have a hands-on management oversight, right from appointing the Ministers to even issuing appointment letters for officials. As time passed, the Dalai Lama was able to establish a functioning democratic structure. In his annual “State of the Union” statement on the anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising on 10 March 2001, the Dalai Lama explained, I had always been aware that Tibet needed social changes and had embarked on reforms while in Tibet under very difficult political

circumstances. After coming into exile I have been encouraging the Tibetans in exile to follow the democratic process. Today, the Tibetan refugees may be among the few communities in exile that have established all the three pillars of democracy – legislature, judiciary and executive.²

In 2001, in a major reform the Tibetans in exile began to directly elect the Kalon Tripa, the head of the Tibetan cabinet (now known as Sikyong). This led to the devolution of the Dalai Lama’s political authority to the CTA in 2011. His Holiness had been planning for such an eventuality for long. In his statement on the anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising on 10 March 1969, he laid out his vision when he said,

When the day comes for Tibet to be governed by its own people, it will be for the people to decide as to what form of government they will have. The system of governance by the line of the Dalai Lamas may or may not be there. It is the will of the people that will ultimately determine the future of Tibet.³

2 Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Forty-Second Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day, 10 March 2001, <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/2001>

3 Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Tenth Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day, 10 March 1969, <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/1969>

In keeping with his philosophy of “hoping for the best but preparing for the worst”, he developed the CTA to continue functioning no matter what situation developed.

Despite the limitations of an exiled situation, the three democratic pillars—the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary—were given shape and their structure were strengthened. The judiciary was the last to be established, set up only in 1992. As Tibetans living in exile are subjected to the laws of their host countries, there cannot be an independent judiciary. So they came up with a system in the form of the Supreme Justice Commission exercising some aspects of adjudicatory role. As for the legislature, the skeletal Tibetan People’s representatives system established in 1960 evolved into today’s Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, the holder of the purse strings and policy setter. The Parliament’s composition was structured such that it can symbolically represent the majority of Tibetans left behind in Tibet. The Executive, represented by the Sikyong, saw transformation through direct elections to the post in 2001. The Sikyong nominates the Cabinet, to be confirmed by the parliament. All these changes were enshrined in the Tibetan Charter-in-Exile that is the binding law for the Tibetans in exile.

In general, according to the Westphalian world order, governments are legitimated



The Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile in session pre devolution of powers in 2011.

Source: The Tibet Museum, Dharamshala

according to the territory over which they hold authority. But the CTA does not have control of any physical territory in exile, not to speak of in Tibet. Instead, by virtue of the moral authority of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his farsightedness an institutional framework was developed in exile that is exercising that legitimacy.

Challenges before the Central Tibetan Administration

The changing international political landscape combined with China's transformation of Tibet on one side and with the Dalai Lama being in his 90s on the other, the CTA will be faced with a few challenges in the coming future.

Strengthening the Bond between Tibetans in Tibet and those in exile

Given the institutional history of the Dalai Lama, he not only maintained, but was able to even strengthen

his bond with the Tibetans inside Tibet despite having been physically away from them for more than six decades. The post-1959 era has seen Tibetans from areas outside the territory of the then government of Tibet in Lhasa look to the Dalai Lama as their political leader, too. This has provided powerful leverage for the Dalai Lama. This is the reason for the Chinese effort to distance the people all over Tibet from the Dalai Lama, including through vilification, banning of any contact with him, and even banning his photos.

However, the elected CTA leadership does not have this advantage. It will have to win the trust of the Tibetans in Tibet. In exile, the challenge is to see how it can bring the people together and decrease the negative aspects of electoral politics. While democracy has many virtues, the election system invariably means there will

be factional politics and if people lack maturity in their political consciousness, this environment can become obstacle to development.

Establishing itself as the Legitimate Representative of the Tibetan People

When the Dalai Lama was holding direct charge of CTA, he did not face any issue of global legitimacy. Although devoid of any formal diplomatic recognition at the political level, the Dalai Lama nonetheless gained acceptance by governments and organisations alike to speak on behalf of Tibetans both in exile and in Tibet. This was because his leadership position was undisputed among all Tibetans.

Even after the Dalai Lama devolved his political authority, his presence continues to be a factor for the legitimacy of CTA, both within the Tibetan community and outside. He is there to provide political guidance to CTA or even use his good office as and when necessary. For instance, the politically significant Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy that the Indian Government formulated in 2014 clearly says,

The issues relating to Tibetan Refugees are coordinated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC) located at Dharamshala (emphasis added to show how a way has been found by India by virtue of the CTRC, a registered unit under



CTA, be of His Holiness the Dalai Lama).

But the elected CTA leadership will have to eventually be able to stand on its own two feet and show that it is able to bring along all the Tibetans together, particularly gaining the confidence of Tibetans in Tibet.

Internationally, while organisations might have less issues, CTA will have to work with governments in finding a creative way for interaction.

Countering the “One China” challenge Internationally

Among the issues that the CTA will be challenged with internationally is the assertive Chinese campaign to drive the narrative on Tibet. For example, China has been using direct and indirect means to undermine H.H. the Dalai Lama as well as CTA's legitimacy by pointing out that any dealings with them would be against a “One China” policy.

A study of the history of this concept shows it came about on account of the Republic of China in Taiwan's claim to represent China after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over the Mainland. The CCP came out with its “One China Principle” that “there is but one China in the world, Taiwan is

an inalienable part of China...”⁴ The United States, on the other hand, has its “One China Policy”⁵ again solely with reference to Taiwan. There are other governments who have their respective differing “one China policy”.⁶ It appears there are more than nine different definitions of “one China” by various governments.⁷

In an address to the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, DC, on 23 April 2012, Lodi Gyari, then Special Envoy of H.H. the Dalai Lama, explained why Tibet does not fall under this concept. He said,

No Tibetan government has ever claimed to be the government of China, so the application of the ‘one-China’ policy to Tibet—or for that

matter, the PRC government's ‘one China’ principle that stresses the inalienability of both Taiwan and mainland China as parts of a single ‘China’—simply does not arise.

At the time of writing this article, the Tibetans in exile are going through elections for their Sikyong and the Parliament, whose new term begins at the end of May 2026. If we look at statements issued by the current CTA leadership, it seems that they are aware of the challenges and are working to overcome them.



Bhuchung Tsering heads the Research & Monitoring Unit, International Campaign for Tibet, Washington D.C. He was a member of the Task Force set up by the Central Tibetan Administration to work on issues relating to the dialogue process and was also a member of the team led by the envoys of the Dalai Lama in the discussions with the Chinese leadership between 2002 and 2010. He has testified in Congress on behalf of the International Campaign for Tibet and is the recipient of the 2023 Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom From the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.

4 See for example, “Questions and Answers Concerning the Taiwan Question: What is the one-China principle? What is the basis of the one-China principle?” Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, 15 August 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20230523015133/http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/20220812Taiwan/202208/t20220815_10743591.htm

5 “The U.S. One China Policy: A Primer for Professional Military Education Faculty Luke Bellocchi, Joint Forces Staff College, 11 May 2022, <https://jfs.c.ndu.edu/Media/Campaigning-Journals/Academic-Journals-View/Article/3026633/the-us-one-china-policy-a-primer-for-professional-military-education-faculty/>

6 The Many “One Chinas”: Multiple Approaches to Taiwan and China, Chong Ja Ian, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 09 February 2023 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/09/many-one-chinas-multiple-approaches-to-taiwan-and-china-pub-89003>

7 Ibid

The Dalai Lama's Reincarnation: Sino-Tibetan Conflict and Geopolitical Impact

Kelsang Gyaltsen¹

The question surrounding the reincarnation of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is drawing increasingly renewed international interest in and attention to the unresolved Sino-Tibetan conflict.

It is a monumental clash between the cultural and spiritual resilience of an ancient nation and the power and will of the Chinese Communist regime—a colonial power intent on erasing the identity of the Tibetan people and transforming Tibet into its own image.

In this context, on 2 July last year, the Dalai Lama issued a landmark decision from his exile headquarter in Dharamsala, North India. He announced that the centuries-old institution of the Dalai Lama will continue and that only the Gaden Phodrang Trust—the enlarged office of the Dalai Lama—holds the legitimate authority to search and determine the recognition of his successor. This declaration further affirms that the procedures of search and recognition should be carried out in accordance with established Tibetan Buddhist traditions. A few months earlier, in a new memoir titled *Voice for the Voiceless*, the Dalai Lama stated that any search for a successor must take place in the free world so that the successor is able to carry forward the mission started by the predecessor.

This announcement made the Communist regime in Beijing bristle with anger. Beijing rejects the Dalai Lama's authority to decide on his reincarnation and asserts that Communist China, which has ruled Tibet since its military invasion in 1950, alone holds the right to make the final decision on the recognition of 15th Dalai Lama. This sets the stage in this century for the next round of the battle in the epic struggle between the unyielding resistance of the Tibetan people on one hand and the continued subjugation of Tibet by Communist China on the other.

Against this background, the probability that there will be two Dalai Lamas when the current 14th Dalai Lama passes away is exceedingly high: One discovered and recognised in exile by Tibetan Buddhist masters and

¹ My views are not academic but based mainly on personal experience and insight. They are expressed in my private capacity and not in any other capacity.



Tibetans living in free countries in exile in accordance with established Tibetan Buddhist traditions and another appointed and installed by the Communist regime in Beijing in occupied Tibet.

This clash of two different views of spirituality, faith, and religion is monumental. It is a clash with worldwide consequences and repercussions. In essence, it concerns the freedom of religion and the role and place of spirituality, faith, and religion in human societies. Here, the political ambitions of an atheist, totalitarian regime collide with an established, centuries-old spiritual tradition. The relevant questions here are: Can spiritual authority be imposed by decree, and engineered politically? Or does it come from spiritual traditions, heritage, trust, and truth?

These questions do not concern Tibet alone. They have universal implications and consequences. Members of the international community will be challenged to take position on these issues. Beijing's aggressive diplomacy, backed by economic and political pressures, will come into play once more. The imperative question is: How will members of the international community react and respond to it?

For Tibetans, Beijing's rigid stand on the issue of reincarnation of the

Dalai Lama reflects its intransigent and uncompromising policy toward Tibet. In recent decades, the Dalai Lama has undertaken numerous initiatives and put forward various proposals in hope of reaching a mutual understanding on the issue of Tibet. To this end, his envoys had put forward the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy to their Chinese counterparts in 2008 in Beijing. This document outlines specific competence areas to ensure that Tibetans could manage their own affairs without challenging the People's Republic of China's (PRC) territorial integrity and sovereignty.

I have been one the two envoys of the Dalai Lama with my late colleague, Lodi Gyari. From 2002 to 2010, we had nine rounds of formal discussions and one informal meeting. The meetings took place mostly in Beijing and other places in China. The regime in Beijing rejected all our proposals and initiatives. From my dealings with the Chinese Communist regime, I have come to the conclusion that no amount of Tibetan flexibility or compromise will move the present Chinese Communist leadership to reconsider and change its policies regarding Tibet. The Chinese Communist leadership will never feel secure of their hold on Tibet until Tibet is completely assimilated into the Chinese mainstream. It is clear to me: There is no way we Tibetans can address this paranoia of the Chinese Communist

leadership if we remain what we are: Tibetans.

It is now my belief that there will be no improvements in the agonising situation of the Tibetans inside Tibet nor a path through negotiations towards a mutually acceptable solution to the question of Tibet, until and unless there are major and fundamental political changes in China. Bringing about these changes in the PRC must be the strategic objective of the Tibetan freedom movement. In the pursuit of this political objective, we must build a broad international coalition with this cause as a common mission, whose members perceive the present Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime as a threat to its national security and to international stability and peace.

Beijing's intransigent position on reincarnation of the Dalai Lama underlines the assumption that it never had the political will to engage in earnest negotiations while he is still alive. The Chinese Communist regime's approach to the Sino-Tibetan conflict seemed to have been to wait until the Dalai Lama passes away. Obviously, it is their hope that the death of the Dalai Lama will render any compromise on Tibet unnecessary and resolve the issue of Tibet once and for all in Beijing's favour.

This is a monumental political miscalculation by Beijing.

The Dalai Lama is the key to resolving the conflict and is not the source of the problem. He has consistently advocated non-violence, dialogue, compromise, and reconciliation since 1950. There are deep grievances, discontent and resentment among Tibetans in Tibet stemming from Beijing's misguided policies and not because of the Dalai Lama. Clearly, without a fundamental rethinking and change in Beijing's policies on Tibet, the conflict will persist even after the 14th Dalai Lama.

In contrast to the hopes of Beijing, the question surrounding the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama is already triggering renewed international interest in and attention to the Sino-Tibetan conflict. For Tibetans, Beijing's political weaponisation of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation is not just a violation of their right to choose their religious leaders free of political interference; it is a profound and humiliating assault on their religious values and traditions.

It is true that Tibetan land is occupied and Beijing controls everything in Tibet. But it cannot occupy and control the hearts and minds of her people. Devotion cannot be politically enforced, and spiritual reverence and loyalty cannot be regulated or decreed. The death of the 14th Dalai Lama will mark a turning point in history,

and it will be a watershed moment for the people of Tibet and its freedom movement. However, the absence of the 14th Dalai Lama will not remove the causes for Tibetan resistance and freedom movement. What will be absent are his restraining influence and forward-looking and conciliatory approach in finding a peaceful and negotiated resolution to the Sino-Tibetan conflict.

Beijing installing a fake Dalai Lama will be perceived by Tibetans as the ultimate violation and humiliation of their values and traditions. Therefore, in the absence of the unique moral authority of the 14th Dalai Lama, it is possible that this act may represent the last straw, transforming Tibetans' long

standing deep sense of resentment and humiliation into rage and violence. Were this to happen, it would constitute a profound tragedy for the Tibetan people and, more broadly, for the global cause of non-violence. A measure of the depth of resentment of Tibetans inside Tibet is reflected in the number of tragic self-immolation protests in Tibet. In the past 15 years over 160 Tibetans from all walks of life have resorted to this drastic form of protest.

The current Dalai Lama has made clear that his reincarnation will be born in exile in the free world when he is unable to return to Tibet. He has been residing in India since his flight from Tibet in 1959. India also holds the largest Tibetan diaspora.



Kelsang Gyaltsen (L) Lodi Gyari (C) 2003, Talks with Liu Yandong

Source: DIIR, CTA



Against this background, the likelihood that the reincarnation of the current Dalai Lama might be found in India is high.

India gave Tibetan refugees not only political asylum but a second home in exile. Today, the Tibetan exile community in India is a vibrant democratic society with a well-functioning cultural, educational, social, and political infrastructure. It is in India where Tibetan culture, religion, and philosophy have been preserved, taught, and projected into the future by educating the next generation. Tibetan civilisation did not only survive in India, but it also adapted and connected to the world.

For Buddhists all over the world and especially for Tibetans it would feel right and authentic if India were the place where the reincarnation of the current Dalai Lama is found. India as the birthplace of Buddhism would make good sense to be the birthplace of the 15th Dalai Lama. India's karmic connection to Buddha is authentic. The entire Buddhist world would revere India not only as the historic birthplace of Buddhism but as a living Buddhist spiritual centre and the home of the 15th Dalai Lama. India would acquire the role of the custodian of Tibetan Buddhism. This will greatly enhance India's diplomatic standing and strategic gravity in the international community.

With each passing year, the question of the reincarnation of the current Dalai Lama will attract greater international attention, scrutiny, and importance. As he enters the final phase of his life, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama will once again act as a catalyst, thrusting the fate of Tibet and the Tibetan people into the forefront of international attention.

The pertinent question is: How will the international community react when, one day in the future, it is challenged to take a stand on the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama? When called upon, will the members of the international community chose to endorse a successor recognised by Tibetan Buddhist masters and Tibetans living in free countries in accordance with spiritual traditions of their religion, or a contender installed by political engineering by an atheist regime in Beijing with no spiritual authenticity and gravity. If the next Dalai Lama, born in the free world, were endorsed by India, the US, Europe, Australia, Japan—and by Buddhist, Christian and Islamic leaders and communities worldwide in a concerted common effort to defend religious freedom—it would create a global consensus that would completely delegitimise China's attempt to fake spiritual authority.

Such an outcome would have far-reaching global consequences. It

would make clear what counts in spiritual matters: Spiritual authority doesn't come from force or state control or directive. It comes from freedom, faith, legacy, and truth. Spiritual legitimacy cannot be manufactured through political engineering. Finally, such global solidarity and unity in defence of freedom of religion would be a powerful reminder that, in the long run, spiritual authenticity and truth are not only resilient but destined to prevail.



Kelsang Gyaltzen is currently serving in a honorary capacity as Co-Vice President of the Gaden Phodrang Foundation of the Dalai Lama in Zurich and as a senior advisor to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. He worked for over 30 years in the service of the Dalai Lama as his representative in Europe, as the private secretary for international relations at the Office of HH the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, India, and as his envoy for talks with Beijing. In this role, he and his senior colleague, Lodi Gyari, led the Tibetan negotiating team in talks between the Tibetan and Chinese leadership from 2002 to 2010.

Monlam's Role in Preserving Tibetan Language in the Digital Space

Tenzin Thinley

Every culture, to survive, must find its footing in the technologies of its time. For Tibetan language—a language with a literary tradition spanning more than a millennium—that means confronting the digital age directly and on its own terms.

The Monlam Tibetan IT Research Center has pursued this mission for the past 14 years, building the fonts, dictionaries, and artificial intelligence (AI systems) that allow a displaced community to maintain a living presence in the digital world.

The Center was founded by Geshe Lobsang Monlam, a Buddhist scholar, lexicologist, and programmer, who fled Tibet in 1993 and completed 16 years of philosophical study at Sera Mey Monastery in India. He holds a doctorate in Library Science and has developed more than 37 Tibetan language applications across Android, iOS, Windows, and macOS.

Tibetan is not simply a vernacular. It is the primary medium through which one of the world's major intellectual and spiritual traditions has been transmitted across 14 centuries. The language preserves the full range of Buddhadharma across three domains: religion, philosophy, and mind science. The Kangyur and Tengyur canons—more than 300 volumes of translated Buddhist scriptures and commentary—exist primarily in Tibetan. Critically, Tibetan translations of Indian philosophical texts on logic, epistemology, and Madhyamaka are in many cases the only surviving record of those works—the Sanskrit originals have been lost. The language's engagement with consciousness, meditation, and Abhidharma psychology has also drawn serious attention from contemporary neuroscientists and researchers in well-being. Beyond Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan preserves centuries of knowledge in traditional medicine, ecology, history, and poetry—much of it untranslated and existing nowhere else. Its absence from the digital sphere would mean not just the marginalisation of a community but the effective inaccessibility of knowledge that scholars across multiple disciplines are only beginning to engage.

Of the approximately 7,000 languages spoken globally, fewer than 20 receive substantial attention in natural language processing research. The rest exist at the periphery of the digital transformation. Low-resource



Monlam AI team at work.

Source: Authors own collection

languages face three compounding deficits: scarce machine-readable text, limited trained language models, and little representation in the research community. The consequences are practical. A language that cannot function in search engines, messaging platforms, or educational software finds its social space progressively narrowed. Young people gravitate towards languages in which they can operate fully in the digital world. Over time, rational individual choices aggregate into generational language shift.

There is also a structural risk for languages that depend entirely on external technology systems. A language whose translation,

search, and AI tools are provided by large companies with no stake in its cultural continuity is vulnerable to changes in commercial or political priorities. If those companies deprioritise the language, the community has no recourse. This is the argument for linguistic sovereignty: not the rejection of international tools, but the insistence on building digital infrastructure that is owned, maintained, and accountable to the speakers themselves.

For Tibetan, the work began with a basic problem: Tibetan had no reliable digital infrastructure—no usable fonts, no accessible dictionaries, no tools that ordinary speakers could use on contemporary

devices. The first product in this endeavour was Monlam Bodyig—a Tibetan font system, now in its third version, which underpins how Tibetan appears on screens worldwide. Alongside it came the Monlam Grand Tibetan Dictionary—223 volumes in print, over 100,000 digital downloads—used by millions of speakers and scholars globally.

The Center has since moved into AI. Monlam AI is developing machine translation, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and optical character recognition (OCR) for Tibetan. It has also built Melong, an in-house large language model (LLM). At present, Melong has approximately 12,000 unique IP users, Monlam AI has 21,000 users, and the broader platform has 13,500 users. The models have been trained on 28 billion tokens—a figure that required generating most training data from scratch, since Tibetan had no pre-existing digital corpus of adequate scale.

Building this infrastructure required confronting what might be called the low-resource paradox: without sufficient data, building language technology is difficult; without language technology, generating more data is harder. The costs of hiring annotators, Tibetan language experts, and quality control specialists are hurdles that well-resourced languages do not face. Monlam has addressed these not by

waiting for external solutions but by building its own data pipelines, annotation networks, and quality frameworks—work the Center intends as a replicable model for other low-resource language communities.

Technical work alone does not capture what Monlam has built. The project depends on close collaboration with Tibetan language teachers, historians, monks, linguists, and technology professionals. This network ensures that the language processed by Monlam's models is culturally grounded, not merely technically functional. For its lexicographic work, the Center mobilised over 200 editors from monasteries and community organisations across multiple countries.

The project has also created remote employment for more than 500 people in Tibetan settlements, institutes, monasteries, and schools across the diaspora. These positions span annotation, quality control, linguistic research, and software development. Particularly significant is the employment created for younger Tibetans in technology—a field where Tibetan language competence and technical expertise had rarely intersected. By requiring both, Monlam has given diaspora youth with technical skills a professional reason to remain engaged with their heritage language, and has encouraged

more Tibetans to pursue STEM¹ education. When a scholar reviews a translation output or a monastery provides annotated curriculum texts, they are doing something simultaneously technical and traditional: preserving knowledge in the medium of their time.

What the Monlam Tibetan IT Research Center has built over 14 years is the digital infrastructure for a language whose absence from AI systems would, over time, threaten its transmission to the next generation. The fonts, dictionaries, and AI models are not peripheral products. They are how the Kangyur and Tengyur, the philosophical texts, the medical traditions, and the poetry survive into a world mediated by machines. For every low-resource language community facing similar pressures, the institutional model, the data architecture, and the community networks that Monlam has developed represent a practical demonstration that this work is possible without the resources of a commercial technology company. Fourteen years in, the Center continues. Guided by Geshe Monlam's founding commitment, the work of preservation, building, and linguistic sovereignty goes on.

¹ An interdisciplinary approach to learning that combines Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics into a unified teaching model.



Tenzin Thinley serves as the Fundraising Officer and Operations Lead at Monlam Charitable Trust, where he works to advance the preservation and promotion of Tibetan language and culture through innovative technological initiatives. He leads fundraising efforts, cultivates strategic partnerships, and oversees the Trust's daily operations. Among his notable contributions is the Tibetan Digital Library Project, a major initiative dedicated to safeguarding Tibet's literary and cultural heritage in digital form for future generations. His interests in artificial intelligence, politics, and international relations reflect a wider engagement with the impact of technology on society and global affairs. Thinley studied at TCV schools, UWC Atlantic College, and Methodist University.

Tenshug Offering: Ritual as Action for the Tibet Cause

Jyotsna Roy

On 11th March 2026, Tibet Support Groups (TSGs) from across India gathered in Dharamshala to offer a Tenshug to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso.

While conventionally a religious act expressing devotion and a wish for longevity, TSGs approached the Tenshug as a considered action in addition to a prayer. In this construction, ritual produces social and political effects. Tenshug becomes a mode of intervention through which civil society reaffirms collective commitment to the Tibetan cause and deep regard for His Holiness.

Civil Society Formation for the Cause of Tibet

Participation of TSGs in the Tenshug reflects their long history of engagement with Tibet since the watershed events of 1959. Over time, the movement has evolved from dispersed expressions of solidarity into coordinated efforts. The formation of the Core Group for Tibetan Cause–India (CGTC-I), constituted under the guidance of venerable Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, represents institutional consolidation aimed at strengthening coordination. The Tenshug offered by the TSGs reflects maturation.

Participation of 450 delegates—women and men from diverse regions, and belief systems—underscored the extensive support for the Tibet cause among the Indian civil society. Contributions to the commemorative souvenir by those unable to attend extended participation beyond physical presence, creating a wider community of engagement within the movement.

Time Frame and Commemorative Layers of Tenshug Offering

The timing of the ceremony added meaning, as it took place between 10th March, marking the Tibetan Uprising of 1959, and 12th March, commemorating the Tibetan Women’s Uprising Day, situating the event within a spectrum of resistance and gendered expression.

The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) designated the year 2025–26 as the ‘Year of Compassion’ to mark the 90th birth anniversary of His Holiness the Dalai



Figure 1: His Holiness with the Karuna Ratna

Source: Authors own collection

Lama. Compassion is raised from a personal ethic to a value for collective action. The Tenshug, therefore, linked past sacrifices, present commitment, and continuity in the future.

Ritual as Action¹

Alternative forms of engagement emerge when formal diplomatic engagement is circumspect. In this setting, this ancient ritual functions as an action; it represents and shapes social realities.

In the language of movements, this Tenshug exemplifies ritual as action, where collective participation produces social and political effects. Through ritualised offerings, shared texts, and embodied presence,² participants reinforced shared values and commitments without confrontation, reflecting what Erving Goffman describes as the significance of co-presence in structuring social action. Drawing on Clifford Geertz, ritual may be understood as a system of meaning

and a mechanism through which coherence and legitimacy are produced.

Moments were organically built to enable all the delegates to be in the presence of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama. The presentation of the auspicious gifts, the 'Khatags', the 'Bua' presenters, culminating in the personal meeting of each of the 450 delegates with His Holiness, stamped an experience of a lifetime.

Importantly, by reaffirming commitment, the ritual acts as a stabilising intervention, sustaining the moral and institutional coherence of the Tibetan cause.

¹ Ritual as action here refers to understanding ritual not just as symbolic or devotional expression, but as a practice that produces social and political effects. It becomes a way through which collective identity is affirmed, ethical commitments are expressed, and continuity is sustained, especially where formal institutional or diplomatic avenues are limited.

² Embodied presence refers to people being physically present together in a shared space, where meaning, commitment, and social relations are expressed through participation. It highlights that engagement is not only symbolic but also involves being visibly and collectively present.



The Karuṇā Ratna and Ethical Expression

Central to the ceremony was the offering of the Karuṇā Ratna (Jewel of Compassion), symbolised through a beautifully crafted token encased in crystal. The accompanying scroll defined compassion as “courage in action and responsibility towards all beings,” extending karuṇā into an ethic of engagement. Compassion here is active and linking spiritual values with social responsibility.

Invocation of India as the soil of offering, in the scroll, situated the act within a shared civilisational ethos shaped by karuṇā and ahimsā.

References such as ‘Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah’ and ‘Sarva Maṅgalam’ reinforced a shared ethical lexicon.

Voice and Collective Commitment

The ceremonial scroll read on behalf of the TSGs by the CGTC-I articulated the importance of the Dalai Lama’s presence as a source of resilience for Tibetans, a revered teacher in India, and a global moral voice. His life was described as a bridge between suffering and dignity, and exile and belonging.

The pledge read on behalf of the TSGs reinforced the above expression. Delegates pledged to highlight, at all appropriate

platforms, the importance of dialogue between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). They also pledged to uphold the continuity of the institution of the Dalai Lama and to articulate the Tibetan cause across national and international fora. This pledge constitutes an act of collective affirmation.

Spatial Significance:

Dharamshala as Site

The location amplified the meaning of the Tenshug offering. Dharamshala is the locus of a spiritual centre and political site as it is the residence of the Dalai Lama and the seat of the CTA. The Tsuglagkhang Temple complex represents the institutional heart of Tibetan life in exile. The presence of the Sikyong, Kashag members, Ama Jetsun Pema la, and other key dignitaries was a recognition of the partnership with the TSGs of India. The location enacted continuity despite displacement, anchoring the Tibet cause within a lived geography and reinforcing its legitimacy.

Creative Civil Society Engagement

The Tenshug highlights how civil society engages creatively within structural constraints. This ritual provides an alternative mode of engagement and strong communication. At the same time, the event reflects India’s calibrated position on the Tibetan issue. While the state maintains diplomatic



Figure 2: The Karuna Ratna

Source: Authors own collection

caution, civil society engagement remains active, sustaining the moral presence of the Tibetan cause in the civic sphere.

Continuity and Leadership

The offering of Tenshug signifies a collective effort to reduce uncertainty, especially among Indian supporters of the Tibetan cause. This Tenshug offering to the Dalai Lama reflects both reverence and the criticality of the present moment. The pledge affirmed the present while preparing for transforming into a collective resolve.

Tenshug offered by Indian TSGs concluded with carefully curated cultural performances from states in the North-East and South of India. The Tenshug thus becomes a prayer for longevity and a reiteration of commitment towards the Tibetan cause.

Conclusion

I have been a supporter of the Tibetan cause since my early days and as the founding President of the Women's Wing of India Tibet Friendship Society (ITFS), I have had the good fortune of meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama and receiving guidance from him. I have reached the Gelugpa lineage through political action. For the Tibet cause, I have advocated creatively at every opportunity, even during my professional work in other countries.

For me, offering of the Tenshug by TSGs' on 11 March 2026 presented a moment to revitalise support among Indian TSGs, even the Karuṇā Ratna, conceptualised by the women advocates of TSGs, reflected a deep understanding of its significance. It illuminates ritual transforming into action within civil society engagement. The event created a space where ethic and political aspiration converged through ceremonial offerings and participation of Indian TSGs.

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Jyotsna Roy is a social scientist with over four decades of experience in institutional and social development, mostly in post-conflict countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East and Southern Africa, serving as a team leader and expert with multilateral and bilateral organisations. As an advocate for the Tibet cause, she is currently the National Treasurer of the India Tibet Friendship Society (ITFS). Jyotsna has been a member of the “Organising Committee for the Tenshug Offering, 2026”, and served as editor of the commemorative souvenir.



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India and the Tibet Question: Shelter, Strategy, and the Future of Policy

Dilip Sinha

The Tibet question unfolded very gently, almost imperceptibly, for India during its early years of independence. When China invaded it in 1950, India was still preoccupied with the aftermath of Partition and the war with Pakistan.

It adhered to the British precedent, recognising China's suzerainty over Tibet, but appealing to it to respect its autonomy and avoid using force. Tibet's appeal to the United Nations (UN) was brought before the General Assembly by El Salvador. India and the United Kingdom sought postponement on the ground that talks were taking place between Tibet and China. The resolution was shelved. Prime Minister Nehru looked at the Tibet question through the prism of the Cold War and, even though he accepted that a tragedy was being enacted there, he took China's assurances at face value. India facilitated the travel of the Chinese general, Zhang Jingwu, to Lhasa through Kolkata. Cooperation with China in promoting Asian resurgence in a new post-imperial world remained the central pillar of India's foreign policy through the 1950s.

All three countries made efforts to keep their relations going. Tibet accepted a 17-Point agreement offered by China, promising to respect its autonomy, culture and politico-religious institutions. India gave up the extra-territorial rights it had inherited in Tibet from the British and accepted Zhou Enlai's proposal to convert the Indian mission in Lhasa into a consulate. The Dalai Lama visited Beijing in 1954, as did Nehru. Two years later, Zhou Enlai attended celebrations in Delhi marking the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha. The Dalai Lama also participated.

This bonhomie was short-lived. China's repressive policies led to a revolt in Tibet and the flight of the Dalai Lama with thousands of compatriots to India in 1959. China's reaction to India giving asylum to the Dalai Lama was fierce. It criticised it as an unfriendly act – a violation of Chinese sovereignty and the Panchsheel agreement. It accused India of harbouring imperial designs on Tibet, dismissing its protestations that the asylum had been given to the Dalai Lama as a revered religious leader who would not be allowed to indulge in anti-China activity. China raked up the border dispute, questioning the McMahon Line and claiming all of what is now Arunachal Pradesh.



Prime Minister Nehru tried to address China's concerns. He persuaded the Dalai Lama not to settle in Kalimpong, the hub of Tibetans in India, sending him initially to Mussoorie and then to Dharamsala. But the enormity of China's action and its consequences were not lost on him. "It would be a tragedy not only for India and, and possibly for China, but for Asia and the world if we develop some kind of permanent hostility," he said in Parliament.¹ Tragically, this is exactly what happened. China's invasion in 1962 shattered the dream of India-China friendship.

Meanwhile, India had the task of providing for the rapidly increasing numbers of Tibetan refugees. It accommodated them in 45 settlements spread over 10 states. Providing employment, healthcare, and education became the top challenges, in addition to protecting their cultural heritage and traditions. Tibetans were encouraged to manage their settlements themselves and set up schools where their children could be provided education in a Tibetan setting. The Dalai Lama also ensured that the children got modern education that would prepare them for the new world they were growing up in. He went a

step further and started promoting democratic institutions, such as an elected parliament and cabinet. He eventually abdicated his temporal powers in favour of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), which he had set up.

The Tibetan administration functions as a government-in-exile in managing the affairs of Tibetans living in India and coordinating with those living in other countries. It also speaks on behalf of all Tibetan people and maintains relations with various countries. However, no country, including India, recognises it as a government-in-exile.

The Tibetan refugees have integrated seamlessly in India, living in harmony with local communities and contributing to the general welfare. They have imbibed the enlightened outlook of their leader, the Dalai Lama, which has enabled them to adapt to new places and changing times, both in India and abroad.

However, the challenges they face remain huge. Problems relating to owning land, running businesses, getting employment, and travelling abroad persist. India does not have a refugee or asylum law, even though it hosts refugees from all its neighbouring countries. It deals with them through ad hoc administrative measures. The Central Tibetan Relief

Committee set up by the Dalai Lama coordinates activities with various government departments at the Centre and in the states. The Home Ministry issues Registration Certificates, with duration varying from 1 to 5 years, as identity documents to Tibetan refugees. For travel abroad, the Ministry of External Affairs issues Identity Certificates, renewable every 10 years. Tibetan refugees are entitled to government welfare schemes meant for Indian citizens such as the public distribution system (PDS), rural housing, health and employment schemes, and they can take up employment in several non-government sectors. In 2014, the Home Ministry issued a Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy to streamline these facilities across states, since most of these schemes are implemented through state governments. However, the implementation of the policy is patchy and leaves much to be desired.

Tibetan refugees can acquire Indian citizenship under certain conditions but few do so because it will weaken their cause and the movement for their homeland, and deprive them of their refugee benefits. The population of Tibetans in India has been shrinking in recent years due to migration abroad for better opportunities and the hardening of the border by China, making it very difficult for Tibetans to escape.

1 Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Statement in Parliament on 4 September 1959', in *India's Foreign Policy*, New Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, 1961, p. 344.

Coming back to the UN, the El Salvador resolution was never taken up again, but the Tibet question was brought up by some other countries in 1959 and later in 1961 and 1965, raising the destruction and human rights violations taking place there. The 1961 resolution also asserted Tibet's right to self-determination. India abstained on the first two resolutions and supported the third. Tibet's hopes of assistance from the UN vanished once China replaced Taiwan as a permanent member of the Security Council. The human rights violations in Tibet came up briefly in the Commission on Human Rights in 1991, but with most countries, including India, reluctant to take on China, even on human rights, the openings to raise the Tibetan issue internationally have withered away. It remains a cause taken up occasionally by the civil society.

The issue of the Dalai Lama's succession has now become a major concern for the Tibetan people and their sympathisers. Even though he no longer holds any political authority, his leadership remains the biggest source of inspiration and solace for the Tibetan people. Their peaceful struggle has drawn universal admiration and sympathy in great part due to his spiritual standing and political sagacity. China is aware of the political significance of the institution and claims proprietorship over it with the cynical intent of using it to

undermine the Tibetan struggle. India has declared that the succession issue is a purely religious matter in which governments should not interfere. Several other countries have taken the same line. It will be important in the coming years for countries and the Tibetan people in exile to continue their support for the CTA and protect the religious sanctity of the institution of the Dalai Lama. India will have to gingerly guide the Tibetan community through this transition and also ensure that their international support does not flag. Tibet has historically been India's largest and friendliest neighbour. Restoring that peaceful coexistence in an acceptable political arrangement with China is one of India's biggest foreign policy challenges and will be the key determinant of their relations.



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India after the 14th Dalai Lama: A Strategic Appraisal

Anil Wadhwa

The passing of the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso will not merely end an era in Tibetan Buddhism, but will also begin the process of a complex geopolitical transition. Few spiritual successions in the modern world carry such layered implications—religious, political, strategic, and symbolic.

The 14th Dalai Lama had escaped from Tibet to India on 31 March, 1959, following a failed Lhasa uprising against Chinese military occupation. For India, which has hosted the Dalai Lama since 1959 and remains home to the Tibetan exile community, the moment will demand a calibrated response that balances civilisational empathy with geopolitical sagacity. The whole issue of the 14th Dalai Lama's succession will likely not be a simple event, but we will see the unfolding of a process lasting many years and stretching across numerous parts of the world, throwing up multiple narratives and even claimants and actors.

India's task of preparation for the event is cut out. India need not be declaratory and prescriptive, but the institutions required must be in readiness. There are numerous scenarios and possibilities, including a reincarnation identified within India, one identified outside Chinese control, or the bursting into scene of rival claimants backed by competing states and authorities—foremost amongst them a successor chosen by China. Given the circumstances, India and China have tacitly recognised the presence of only one Dalai Lama. This understanding may come under threat after the 14th Dalai Lama passes.

The Indian state does not, and cannot, intervene in religious processes. Yet, it hosts the institutional infrastructure of Tibetan Buddhism in exile, including the Gaden Phodrang Trust, which the Dalai Lama has indicated will play a decisive role in identifying his successor. Tibetan Buddhists believe that high Lamas, including the Dalai Lama, are reborn in a new body. After his death, senior monks and historically, a regent chosen by the previous Dalai Lama would look for final instructions he may have left about his rebirth, seek visions through meditation at sacred sites, and send search parties to locate the child identified as the next Dalai Lama.

India must prepare to uphold a principle that the selection of the Dalai Lama is a matter of religious



The whole issue of the 14th Dalai Lama's succession will likely not be a simple event, but we will see the unfolding of a process lasting many years and stretching across numerous parts of the world, throwing up multiple narratives and even claimants and actors.

freedom, not political sovereignty. This principle, articulated with restraint and composure, should form the bedrock of India's response. Simultaneously, India must enhance its internal coordination between the Ministry of External Affairs, security agencies, and the Tibetan administration in exile to manage contingencies ranging from mass gatherings to potential diplomatic pressure. The management of Dharamshala, both as a spiritual centre and a geopolitical flashpoint, will acquire heightened importance.

When the Dalai Lama passes away, India's immediate response will likely avoid pronouncements that could precipitate confrontation with Beijing. India is likely to support the right of the Buddhists in Tibet to choose their own spiritual leader and maintain 'structured ambiguity' by avoiding backing any specific claimant. Simultaneously, India is likely to quietly facilitate the process of transition which will guarantee security, enabling communication among Tibetan religious authorities, and providing a stable environment

for deliberation. India will likely root for a successor who commands legitimacy among Tibetan Buddhists globally, rather than one imposed through state authority.

India is wary of Chinese machinations and would prefer a process with credibility, consensus, and insulated from political manoeuvring and pressure. The Dalai Lama himself has speculated about the possibility that his successor may be identified outside the People's Republic of China (PRC). It is perhaps likely that this event could be within India. A successor located in India could become a pressure point for Sino-Indian tensions, and transform a spiritual institution into a geopolitical contradictory dialectic.



India must prepare to uphold a principle that the selection of the Dalai Lama is a matter of religious freedom, not political sovereignty. This principle, articulated with restraint and composure, should form the bedrock of India's response.

China's approach to the succession question is premeditated. It rests on three pillars: assertion of Chinese legal position, institutional control, and narrative management. China has always projected that it possesses the authority to approve the reincarnation of 'Living Buddhas' (Reincarnated Lamas), drawing upon historical precedents such as the 1793 imperial ordinance as part of China's broader project of 'Sinicization' of religion. In practical terms, China is likely to prepare for the identification of a state-sanctioned Dalai Lama within its territory, possibly through the Golden Urn mechanism or other controlled processes. The precedent of the Panchen Lama—where Beijing appointed its own candidate while disregarding the Dalai Lama's choice—offers a clear indication of its approach. The result, could also be the emergence of 'dual Dalai Lamas', one recognised by the Tibetan diaspora and international supporters, and another endorsed by the Chinese state. China has already cautioned India against statements that could be construed

as interference in its internal affairs. This suggests that China views the succession not merely as a religious issue, but as a test of sovereignty and international influence.

The role of the United States (US) and other interested actors will be shaped by their broader commitment to religious freedom and their strategic positioning vis-à-vis China at that point of time. The US has, in recent years, articulated a clear stance that the selection of Tibetan religious leaders should be free from state interference. Legislative instruments such as the Tibet Policy and Support Act of 2020 and the Resolve Tibet Act of 2024 reflect this position, signalling potential diplomatic and economic consequences for attempts to manipulate the succession. These laws state that religious matters fall in the domain of the Tibetan Buddhist community alone, and funds have been set aside to counter Chinese disinformation and support for the Chinese exiled government. The US has expressed support for the Dalai Lama's 2025 announcement which granted the Gaden Phodrang Trust the sole authority over the identification of the 15th Dalai Lama, which rejects Beijing's role.

European countries and institutions, too, have begun to voice support for Tibetan religious autonomy, as evidenced by parliamentary resolutions affirming

the exclusive right of Tibetan Buddhists to choose their spiritual leader. For India, the involvement of external actors presents both an opportunity and a complication. While international support could lend weight to the principle of religious freedom, overt alignment with external powers could provoke Chinese sensitivities and constrain India's strategic autonomy.

India's approach, therefore, may lean towards quiet convergence rather than explicit coordination and it would tend to align with shared principles without entering into coalitions or camps. The succession of the Dalai Lama must ultimately intersect with India-China relations, the future of Tibet, and the evolving discourse on sovereignty and identity in Asia. For India, the challenge is not to just 'manage' the succession, but to navigate its consequences. This requires a combination of

restraint in avoiding premature positions, and resolve in upholding foundational principles.

India's response to the passing away of the 14th Dalai Lama will test its ability for quiet statecraft, require the ability to support the exiled Tibetan community without appearing to intervene, and to uphold principles without precipitating confrontation. India must allow the spiritual to unfold without undue politicisation, even as it prepares for the geopolitical aftershocks. Such a measured approach would not only honour the legacy of the Dalai Lama but also reaffirm India's own identity as a country where faith, freedom, and diplomacy coexist in a delicate equilibrium.



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High Stakes on the Himalayan Frontier

**Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia
(Retd.)**

Asia's Uplands extend from Ladakh through Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh in India, Southwest China, Yunnan, the central region, and the all-critical Tibetan Plateau.

For centuries, the region commonly referred to as the 'Roof of the World' remained in geographical isolation, shrouded in mystery, with a strong, unique religious-political identity. The terrain along the Tibetan Plateau is treacherous and rugged, with high mountains ranging from 3500 to 6000 metres, sparsely populated with an estimated population of 14 million people, mainly concentrated along the eastern counties.

Tibet: Buffer Zone to Strategic Competition

Geography, Buddhism, and Chinese communist ideology drive and dictate the cultural landscape, strategic calculus, and the security environment in the Tibetan region. Geographically and historically a buffer zone between India and China, the two Asian giants, the Tibetan people and region have always aspired for and respected their autonomy and religious freedom. China's planned and ruthless annexation of Tibet in the 1950s completely altered the strategic space, transforming a rich cultural zone, home to a peace-loving people, into a militarised and contested region. The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is riddled with strategic competition and a disputed border between India and China, accentuated by an interplay among religion, culture, development, politics, and geography. It is imperative to examine the strategic importance, military deployment, and impact of infrastructural development on the region and people.

China is the proverbial bull in the China shop, with its ambition of territorial expansion, based on the strategy of Claim-Occupy-Legalise-Integrate and Exploit. The 'One China Principle Policy' is China's core national interest. After the occupation and integration of Tibet, it aims and plans to militarily take over Taiwan, the South China Sea, and Arunachal Pradesh (South Tibet), in its declared six wars in the next decade. The recent US-Israel war on Iran has further strengthened, possibly legalised, China's aim to integrate its claimed areas militarily. Be as it may, India's national interest is to ensure 'Territorial Integrity', especially along the 3488 km India-China (Tibet) border, and deter China's aggressive behaviour.

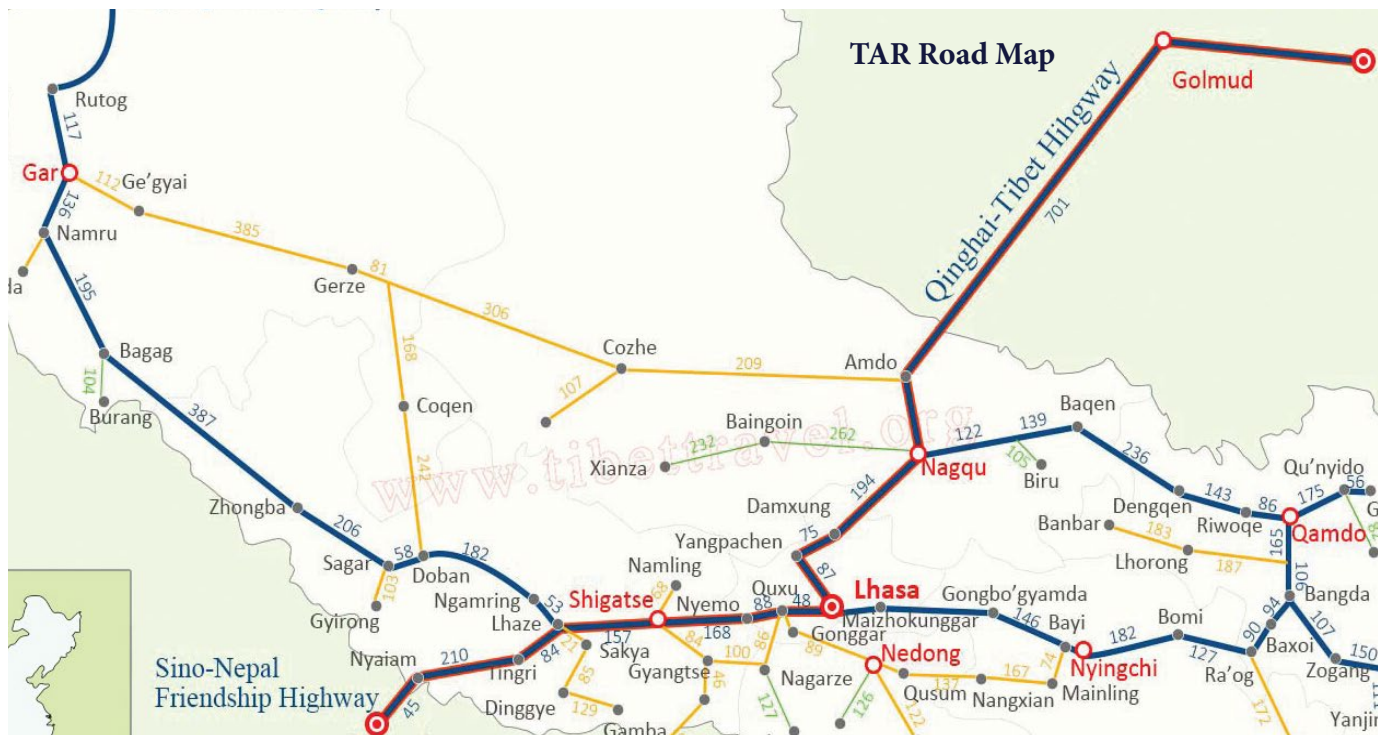


Figure 1: Tibet Autonomous Region Road Map

Source: <https://www.tibettravel.org/tibet-travel-guide/tibet-road-condition.html>

China's Strategy

In the Asian uplands, Chinese grand strategy is of 'Palm and Five Fingers', with Tibet as the palm and India's Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Ladakh, with Nepal and Bhutan as the five fingers. India and China share a 3488 km-long disputed boundary. The contested border runs along India-TAR from Karakoram in the Northwest to Kibithu (or Kibithoo) in the Northeast. China occupies nearly 38,500 km² of Indian territory in Eastern Ladakh, in addition to the 5125 km² of Shaksgam Valley illegally ceded by Pakistan to China in 1963. China also claims over 90,000 km² of India's Arunachal

Pradesh, which it alleges is an integral part of TAR, calling it 'Zangnan' — part of South Tibet. The 3488 km long India-China border is the longest disputed border in the world, and it was the most peaceful contested border for over four decades from October 1975 till the clash in Galwan in June 2020. The Chinese intrusions in Eastern Ladakh in April/May 2020 shattered the fragile peace and tranquillity based on the five agreements between India and China on border management. The intrusions are an indicator that China will not hesitate to employ military power to resolve the 'Boundary Question' on favourable

terms, especially if it perceives India as weak at any given point of time. The intrusions also resulted in enhanced military deployment on either side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The militarisation of the LAC along the high altitude Tibetan Plateau is an ever-present and clear danger of conflict between two nuclear-armed nations, home to one third of humanity.

Line of Actual Control: Military Build Up

There is no common understanding of the LAC, which is a line of perceptions. There is an Indian perception of the LAC, then there is a Chinese perception of the LAC. To

compound the confusion further, there is an Indian perception of the Chinese perception of the LAC and a Chinese perception of the Indian perception of the LAC. Despite these contradictions and confusion, the two sides have managed to maintain peace and tranquillity along the LAC. China's 2020 intrusions along the LAC were countered by a proportional and commensurate military deployment. The many sensitive face-offs were managed by both sides without any escalation, based on established norms and standard operating procedures (SOPs). India's operational philosophy along the LAC is one of 'No Blinking No Brinkmanship'. It needs to be noted that in these high altitudes the temperatures are low, but tempers are high. It is to the credit of the troops, their discipline, SOPs, and established diplomatic and military structures that a sensitive situation was diffused, leading to de-escalation. However, the de-induction of troops has not taken place. The TAR, once a buffer zone, is now militarised, with two of the largest world militaries facing each other along the LAC.

Infrastructure in the Tibet Autonomous Region

Historically, the region remained protected and isolated on account of its inaccessible rugged terrain with limited access through the high-altitude mountain passes. With the Chinese occupation

of Tibet in the 1950s came the next phase of integration. China constructed a multi modal, multidimensional state of the art infrastructure. This includes a vast road and rail network, such as the Qinghai-Tibet railway line. A major road network was developed, consisting the Central, Eastern, and Western Highways, along with airfields, oil pipelines, logistic installations, and warehousing. This infrastructure has helped China to integrate Tibet more closely and has facilitated the settlement of Han majority in the region. Resultantly, the demographic patterns in this remote and generally hostile region have fundamentally changed. Massive camps and habitats were constructed to house the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the aim of controlling the Tibetan population and a build-up for war and military coercion against India, compressing mobilisation times.

China is also building what it terms the 'Great Wall of Villages' along the LAC, presumably as the eyes and ears of the PLA for border



The author, Lt General Vinod Bhatia, with the Chengdu Military Region Commander, 2013

management. But in effect, this also aims to change the age-old culture, traditions, and religious beliefs of the Tibetan people residing in these areas. The people on either side of the border have had strong ethnic, religious, and historical linkages for centuries.

India in a misplaced sense of security, did not develop any major infrastructure till 2005. The China Study Group (CSG) sanctioned 73 strategic roads in 2005, to be completed by 2012. However, because of various environmental issues, little or no progress was made on these projects. It is only after the 2020 intrusions in Eastern Ladakh that infrastructure development has been taken up on a war footing.

India's military strategy against China has been one of 'Dissuasive Defence', building capabilities as a war prevention strategy. In July 2013, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) sanctioned accretion forces of 90,270 personnel, constituting a Mountain Strike Corps along with combat support arms and services, to be raised over eight years at a cost of over ₹67,000 crore. Though sanctioned, the additional budget was not allocated, thus causing delays. The impetus to the raising of formations has now been accorded as India builds up the requisite and effective military capabilities along the LAC to thwart China's aggressive behaviour.

India's Strategy

India's challenge is to deter 'China's Aggressive Behaviour', which requires a comprehensive '4 D strategy'.

- One — Defend the LAC.
- Two — Dominate Sea Lanes of Communications, particularly at choke points in the Indian Ocean such as the Malacca Strait. The Malacca Strait is a strategic concern and vulnerability for China since 80% of its oil imports transit through the Strait.
- Three — Deft Diplomacy 'Bind to Balance' with nations where we have convergence and congruence of interests, such as QUAD.
- Four — Deny space to China in the neighbourhood. Mitigate China's aim of isolating India as part of its 'String of Pearls' strategy.

China has three 'T' sensitivities — Tibet, Taiwan, and East Turkestan (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). It is imperative for India to extend moral and material support to the people of Tibet and their cause for autonomy.

Militarily, India must seek 'Peace through Preparedness' while keeping its powder dry. For far too long, China has been considered a long-term threat; this has now changed as China knocks at our doorstep. India will need to invest in military capabilities to deter

Transport Network and Military Base - Tibet Autonomous Region

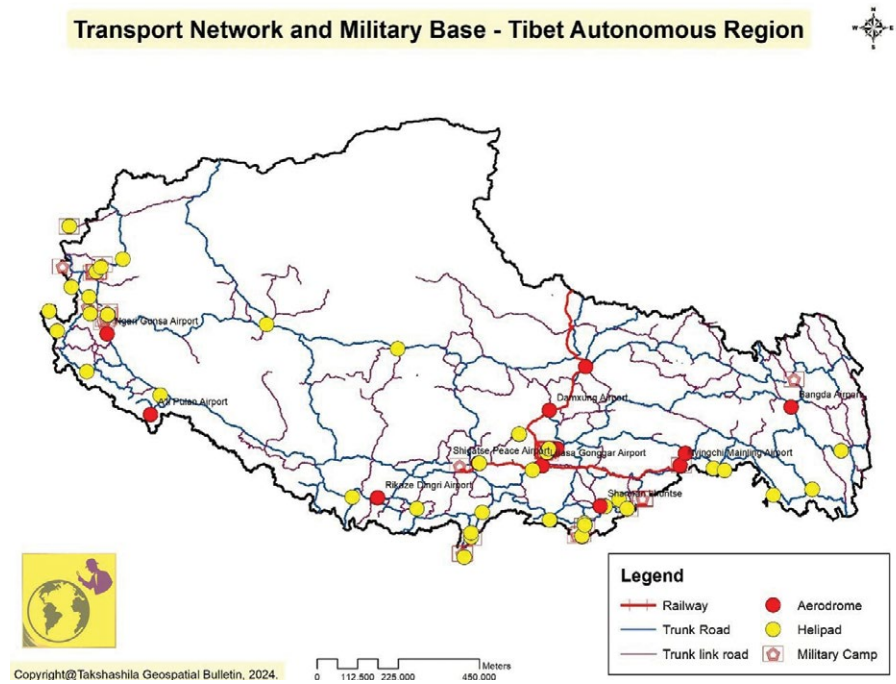


Figure 2: Transport network and military base: Tibet Autonomous Region

Note: Reprinted with permission from Takshashila Institute.

Source: Dr Y Nithiyandam (2024) *In-Depth Mapping of Transport Infrastructure Through Geo-Spatial Analysis*, Takshashila Geospatial Bulletin.

China's aggressiveness. China respects strength; India needs to build capabilities and enhance its capacities to ensure peace.



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China's Politics of Toponyms in Tibet and Beyond: Strategic Concern for India

Tenzing Dhamdul

Tibet and China are two civilisations that have shared a complicated relationship, with some even viewing it as symbiotic.

The current phase sees China led by the Communist Party of China (CPC)

governing Tibet after its People's Liberation Army (PLA) annexed it seven decades ago with the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile (officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration – CTA) based in Dharamshala, India. China has since established the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965— it celebrated its 60th anniversary last year in Lhasa with President Xi Jinping attending it along with members of the Politburo Standing Committee. During the celebrations, one could notice the spotlighting of Xizang, substituting Tibet in English. Xizang refers to Tibet, particularly the TAR in Mandarin Pinyin, and is one clear example of Beijing's politics of renaming.

The name of places known as 'Toponyms' involves the study of the etymology, history, meaning, and cultural significance of geographic names. They are largely categorised as endonyms and exonyms, referring to local and foreign names, respectively. The significance or relevance of toponyms is seen by their reference as the Signposts to the past.¹ The politics surrounding the naming of places is called 'Toponymic Politics', and it was embraced by academia and became an important field of study during the late 20th century. It is intriguing that the interest in Toponymic politics piqued when the world experienced decolonisation.

The practice of renaming here, which has been practised since ancient times when nations conquered territories, is largely utilised to assert power, redefine national identity, and erase/create both colonial and ideological legacies. In India, we can clearly see renaming in major cities like Bombay to Mumbai, Madras to Chennai, among others — all seen to shed the colonial legacies associated with their former names. China likewise has a long history of using Toponyms. It can be seen through the several dynasties that came to power, during the warring kingdoms, where there was frequent change in territories and finally, since the overthrow

¹ Gelling, Margaret. (1978). *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*. Book Club Associates BCA.



Figure 1: The 60th Anniversary of the Tibet Autonomous Region Logo being Displayed in a Floral Artwork at Bhakhor in Lhasa.

Source: China Global Television Network (CGTN).

of its last monarch. It eventually led to the CPC coming to power after being victorious against the nationalists during its long civil war in the 20th century.

With the CPC ruling China since 1949, they implemented several policies, including changes in the very foundation of Mandarin with the introduction of the Pinyin and Putonghua system. This system, which was officially adopted in 1958, is seen to position Mandarin as an imperial lingua franca that the Han imposed on their multi-ethnic

frontiers.² This systemic change saw several names being changed in Chinese and in English, for example, Peking becoming Beijing, Nanking becoming Nanjing, Canton becoming Guangzhou, etc. The United Nations, international media, and several countries officially adopted this system in 1979.

China was emboldened by all of these developments, and they were

encouraged in using such changes to assert their legitimacy in Tibet, Southern Mongolia, East Turkistan, etc.

In Tibet, we see how not only the name of the once independent country has become sinicised to Xizang now, but the names of Tibetan places have likewise experienced similar treatments. Shigaste, one of the most prominent Tibetan cities and the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, has been impacted by such a change of names, with it being officially called Xizage and Rikaze in Pinyin. This impact in Tibet is not limited to the names of places, as it targets the very foundation of Tibetan language and identity here. Examples here included prominent Tibetans representing China on the international stage, such as:

1. Choeyang Kyi, referred to as Qieyang Shijie,
2. Sonam Dhargyal, referred to as Su Mudaerji,
3. Tenzin, referred to as Ding Zhen, and
4. Gyaltsen Norbu, referred to as Gyancian Norbu (Beijing-approved Panchen Lama).

What all of these do is one clear thing, and that is the gradual eradication of Tibet's independent history, its culture, and language. What began from personal names to landmarks, names of cities, and now

2 Kuzuoglu, Ulug. (2022). "The Chinese Latin Alphabet: A Revolutionary Script in the Global Information Age", *Journal of Asian Studies* 81(1): 23–41.

the entire country showcases the level of long-term vision at play by Beijing when it comes to seeking legitimacy over Tibet by force. A force that is not visible by military engagement, but one that is soft, yet procures the same intended result at the end.

Seeing its success in Tibet, Beijing has carried out this very tactic in East Turkestan, where thousands of villages³ have had their name

changed from 2009 to 2023, with more than 500 such name changes reflecting the ideology of the CPC — for example, Aq Meschit village renamed to Unity Village in 2018 and Dutar village renamed to Red Flag village in 2022.

The main argument that Beijing places here in such names, including renaming Tibet to 西藏 Xizang, in English, is a western

imperial/colonial term for Tibet. If this is the case, why is Beijing not renaming China to 中国 Zhongguo, considering China is a Western term? Hence, many view this as a clear policy targeting Tibet. Besides this, the name change also has major territorial implications, as Tibet connotes to an area of 2.5 million km²—including the 3 traditional provinces of Amdo (Domey), Kham (Dotoe), and U-Tsang where Tibetans live — while Xizang is only 1.2 million km² and equates strictly to the TAR, excluding parts of Kham and the

3 “Hundreds of Uyghur Village Names Change: Part of Broader Government Effort to Erase Uyghur Culture in Xinjiang”,

Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/18/china-hundreds-uyghur-village-names-change>



Figure 2: The 60th Anniversary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) celebrated in Lhasa with Chinese President Xi Jinping in attendance, 2025.

Source: Tibetan Review

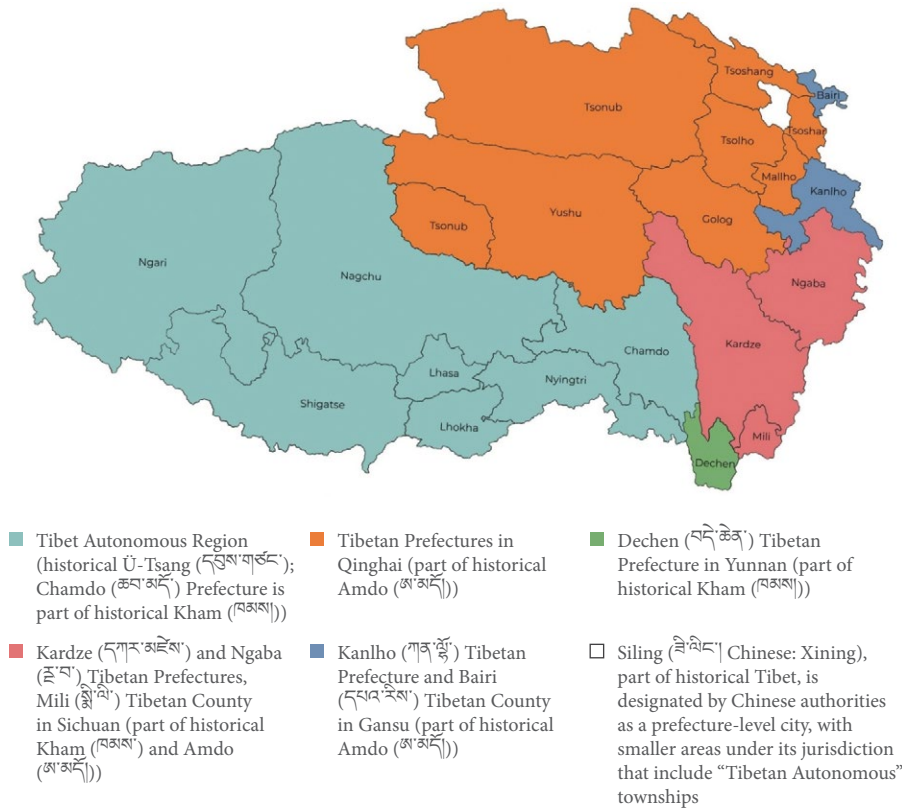


Figure 3: Map of Tibet in Prefectures and Counties Designated by the Chinese Government.

Note: The map shows how Tibet is a territory beyond the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

Source: The Tibet Action Institute.

entire Amdo region. Furthermore, on 2nd September 2024, Beijing established the བོད་མཚན་རྒྱལ་ཁྱེད་ཁྱེད་མཚན་ཁྱེད་ཁྱེད་ Xizang International Communication Centre⁴ to promote Xizang and to shift the international outlook on Tibet with a strong and reinforced narrative. This can already be seen to hold fruition from the incidents at Musee Guimet and the Nepal International Film Festival where Tibet was

replaced by Himalayan world and Xizang respectively.

The global reaction to Beijing's policy of replacing Tibet and Xizang — which truncates the recognised territory of Tibet — has been swift. Tibetans worldwide, from the very individuals to the Sikyong (President) of the CTA, also known as the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, are actively calling it out. India, which hosts the CTA and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, likewise has sent circulars stating that Xizang must not be used instead of

Tibet, and continues to monitor this development closely. Meanwhile, the United States (U.S.) has officially recognised Tibet as a territory larger than TAR — including the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures in the region of Amdo and Kham — across various legislative measures including the Resolve Tibet Act. The U.S. Congress recently even tabled a bipartisan legislation that would expand international recognition and support for the CTA. Conversely, many nations that can be influenced by Beijing have begun using Xizang, replacing Tibet, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan, to name a few with the latter two directly sharing a border with Tibet.

All this makes it clearly evident that Beijing is implementing this long-term policy of asserting legitimacy in territories that it has occupied and are currently under its administration. However, a major concern for India is that since 2017, Beijing has begun implementing this very modus operandi in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Beijing, under its Ministry of Civil Affairs,⁵ has since released a total of six batches of lists totalling 112 locations on 13th April 2017, 29th December 2021, 2nd April 2023, 30th March 2024, 11th May 2025, and 10th April 2026, respectively.

4 Official Website of iXizang, <https://english.xzxw.com>

5 Official Website of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, <https://www.mca.gov.cn/mzsj/xzqh/2022/202204tjsj.htm>

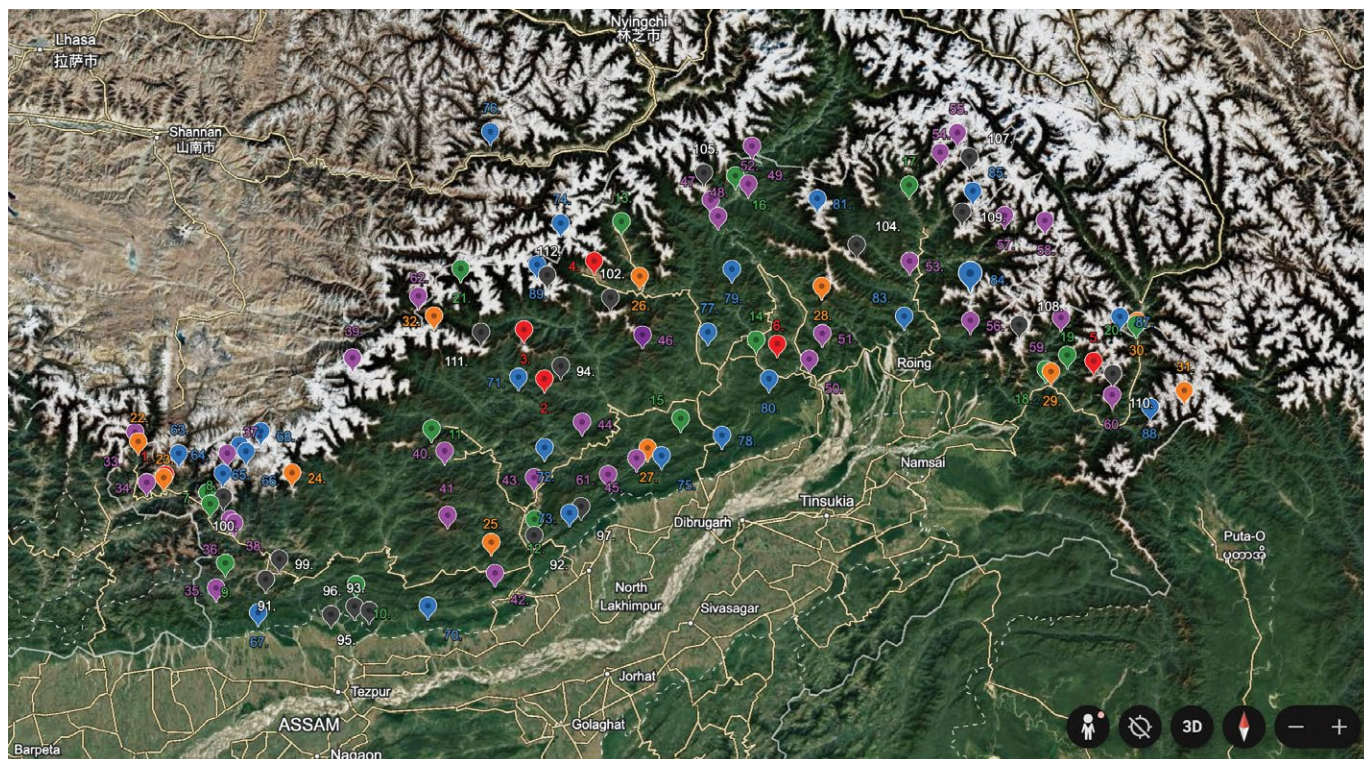


Figure 4: Map of Locations in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam till 10th April, 2026 — Claimed and renamed by the People's Republic of China.

Note: Out of the 112 locations, 104 locations are highlighted here.

Source: Tenzing Dhamdul, Author.

After each release of these names, which not only remain locations in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh but are claimed as territories of South Tibet (藏南 Zangnan), there are exchanges between the Ministry spokespersons of both India and China. Though each of them stand their ground firmly, China continues to carry this exercise even when India raises an issue against it. Among the plethora of trends available, what is concerning is that China is now claiming and renaming territories in the Indian state of Assam as well. A total of 2 locations have been identified in

Assam based on the coordinates available in the 6th Batch of the list released on 10th April 2026.

Figure 5 and Figure 6 indicate the scale of locations renamed and claimed in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, showing how certain districts are seen as more significant than others. Notably, the districts of Tawang, Dibang Valley, and Anjaw all border China presently and are renamed with the highest frequency.

With Beijing's continued push into sovereign Indian territory after its success in Tibet and East Turkestan

(known as 新疆 Xinjiang), a clear pattern of rise in cartographic aggression is on display, and there is a high likelihood that territories in Assam, Aksai Chin, and beyond might be targeted. The 6th batch of names and creation of new administrative units — Cenling in March⁶ and Hean and Hekang in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XUAR) — illustrate this. One must clearly follow these developments

⁶ China has mapped out a third new county in Xinjiang, why? https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3349558/china-has-mapped-out-third-new-county-xinjiang-why?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article

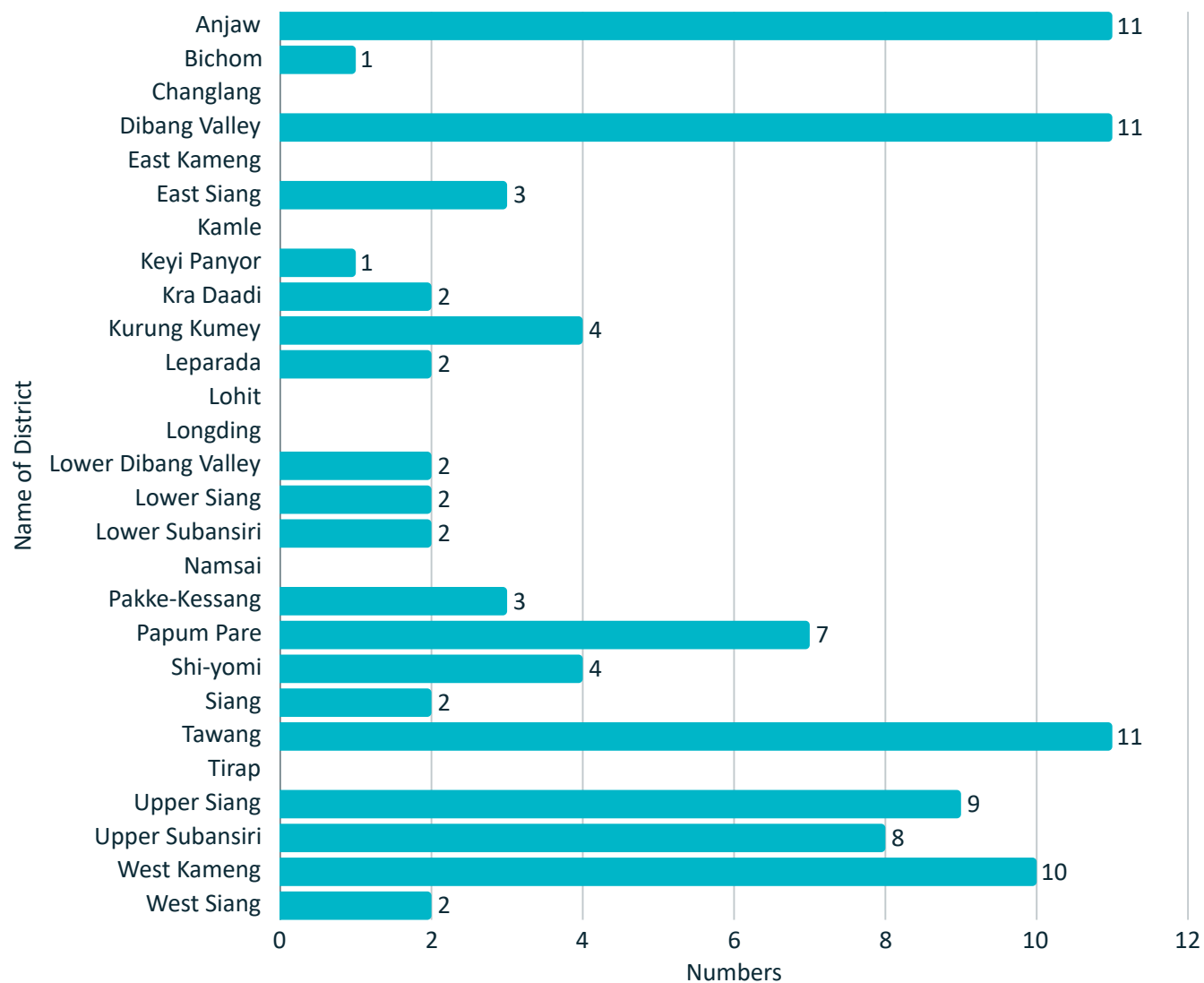


Figure 5: District-wise renaming of locations by China in Arunachal Pradesh since 2017

Source: Tenzing Dhamdul, Author

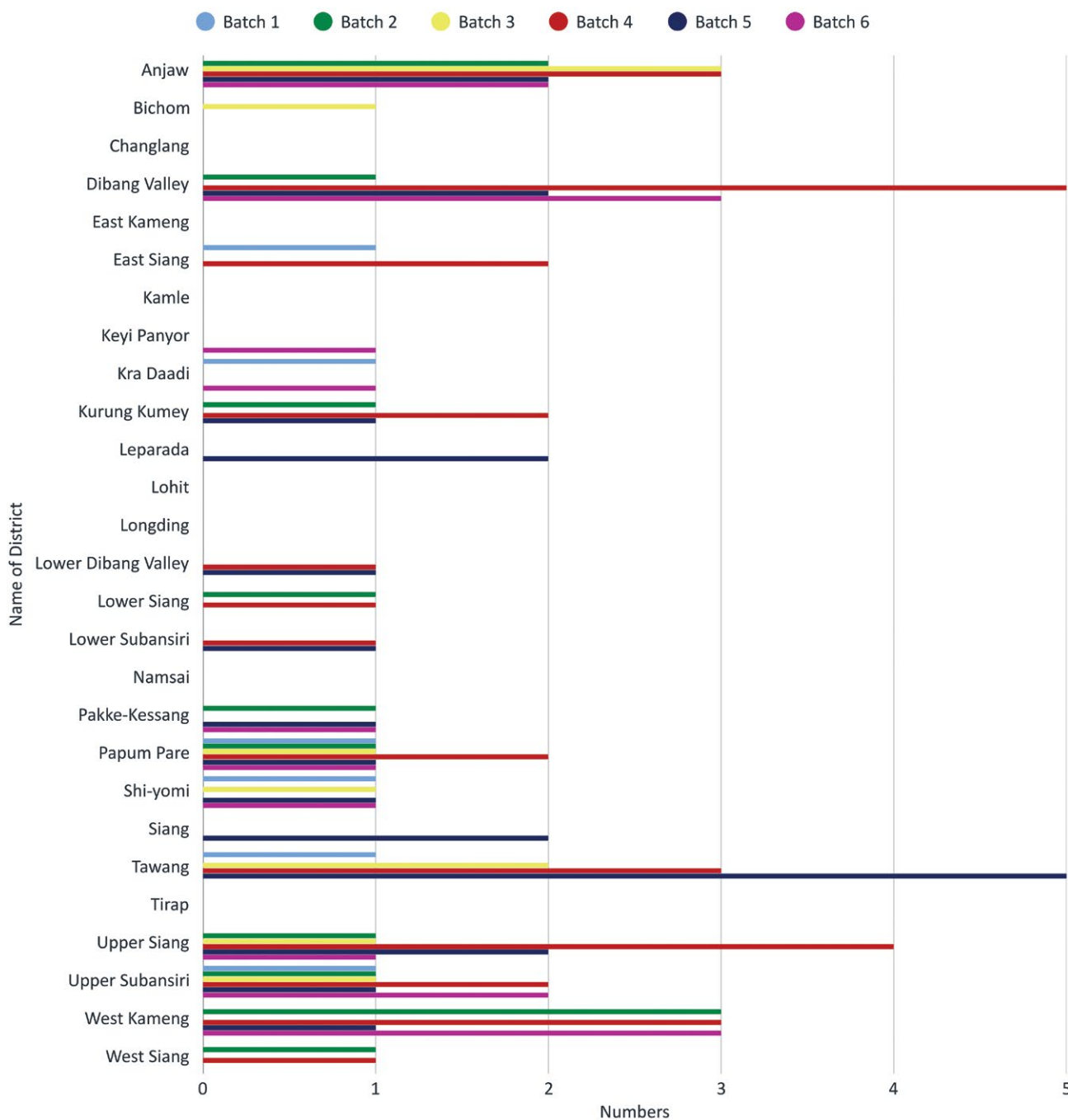


Figure 6: District-wise batch list from 2017 till 10th April, 2026.

Note: The figure includes 109 (out of 112) locations in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Source: Tenzing Dhamdul, Author.



because the arrow certainly seems to point towards a grander strategy in one-upping India by controlling the narrative to its domestic audience, sphere of influence, and larger global community.

Following the annexation of Tibet by China, India and China became neighbours for the first time in history, sharing one of the longest borders between two nations at more than 3,000 km, and with this began the contestations. Although India desired to secure cordial relations, the recent renaming and claiming of Arunachal Pradesh since the 1st batch of the list was released in 2017 is one of many avenues through which such contests take place. What India should do here is:

1. Continue to develop the necessary infrastructure to understand China, which has come a long way since the 1950s and needs to continue improving, especially with China's continued growth.
2. Understand the Chinese policies in Tibet, as India shares a border with Tibet, and the policies carried out in Tibet, including its annexation, have a direct impact on India geo-strategically.
3. Continue to develop the frontier regions sustainably, aligning with the aspirations of the locals.

4. Bring more awareness of these developments to the public, particularly those impacted, as it is evident that one of the goals of China through toponymical politics is to ensure national cohesion domestically to such claims.
5. Develop key allies and ensure they do not make mistakes or are informed of China's claim through these exercises.
6. Carry out exercises like the one taken on 7th August where the Government of India in consultation with Government of Arunachal Pradesh identified

27 places/features located in Arunachal Pradesh by standard place and feature names on the official maps of Survey of India. And likewise add the coordinates (latitude and longitude) for best accuracy/ clarity moving forward.



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Nepal's Strategic Reality Outlasts its Political Upheaval

Biswas Baral

The prolonged controversy over Lipulekh Pass—an ancient Himalayan pass located near the trijunction of Nepal, India, and China—illustrates Nepal's increasing difficulty in navigating its way between its two big neighbours.

India and China have repeatedly bypassed Nepal's concerns by announcing bilateral trade through the pass. Last year, during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's New Delhi visit, the two sides agreed to resume trade through Lipulekh Pass without notifying Nepal. Then, on March 20 this year, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported that preparations were underway to reopen the pass and resume trade, which had been stalled for the past six years.

Nepal makes a claim for complete sovereignty over the territory, which India also claims. India terms Nepal's claim on Lipulekh 'untenable' given the long history of India-China (Tibet) trade through the pass. China has adopted a rather ambiguous position, saying that it is a "bilateral" matter to be sorted out between Nepal and India.



Nepali leaders often struggle to balance relations between New Delhi and Beijing. When their ties are strained, Kathmandu is often asked to pick sides, mostly by the Indians.

The complete lack of progress on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Nepal is partly because of India's reservations. Yet when the relations between India and China seem to improve, as is the case now, Nepal again becomes the victim, as the case of Lipulekh shows. If the two big powers wanted, they could have put a condition that they would open trade through Lipulekh only in consultations with Kathmandu.

Nepal is a changed country following a youth revolution last year that overthrew the then government and led to successful holding of new elections. These elections diminished the country's traditional political behemoths and gave an overwhelming mandate to a new outfit, the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), and its charismatic new prime minister, Balendra Shah, who is only 35-year-old.

There is thus likely to be some changes in the handling of Nepal's foreign policy. The party, for instance, says that it wants to benefit from India's rapid progress, particularly on digital infrastructure, public infrastructure, and state capacity enhancement. In the case of China, it says it will mobilise concessional finance to build world-class infrastructure. The focus seems to be on getting the two neighbours' help in Nepal's development without getting enmeshed in any ideological tussle.

Yet even a drastic change in Nepali politics that has been brought about by the Gen Z uprising and the subsequent elections are unlikely to change the fundamentals of Nepal's foreign policy architecture. Given the land-locked country's precarious position between the two neighbours, the country has no option but to continue to carefully balance their influence. It cannot afford to alienate any one of them. Of late, Nepal has also looked to cultivate relations with its 'third neighbour', the United States (US) as well as other partners such as the European Union (EU) and Japan.

Such broadening of the scope of Nepal's foreign policy architecture is in Nepal's interest. For instance, during the 2015-16 border blockade imposed by India, the Americans helped get the message of the hardships being faced by



If the newly elected RSP government can take Nepal's major international partners into confidence that it is simply not interested in 'playing off' India and China, or any other powers for that matter, but instead wants to leverage their economic heft for its own development, its message could resonate—especially compared to the older parties that were tainted by bias towards a particular country.

Nepalis out to the international community. Such messaging helped put pressure on India to eventually lift the blockade. Again, the goal is maximum diversification so that the country can develop economically and preserve its sovereignty.

One thing going for the RSP is that it does not have the baggage of old political parties. For instance, the liberal-minded Nepali Congress was traditionally seen as being close to India, while the CPN-UML, the country's biggest communist party, had an affinity for China. These two parties were the mainstays of the post-1990 Nepali polity.

However, it would be foolish to assume that the new government will not have to navigate similar geopolitical challenges that its predecessors did. In fact, South Asian geopolitics is getting increasingly complicated. More and more, India is keen to preserve its sway in its old backyard. The Chinese want a new foothold in South Asia lest the Americans beat them to it. The Americans, meanwhile, want smaller

countries such as Nepal to stay as far from China as possible.

In a similar vein regarding Lipulekh, it is difficult to see how the new RSP government's position will differ much from that of its predecessors. Governments come and go, Geography stays the same.



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Living between Giants: Bhutan's Strategic Lessons

Tenzing Lamsang

If one scans the global map, there is no country quite like Bhutan: a nation of around 700,000 people in the high eastern Himalayas, situated between India to the south, and China to the north.

By 2050, China is poised to be the world's largest economy, with India the second largest. Both possess nuclear weapons and massive armed forces, and have border disputes, even fighting a war in 1962, with occasional flare-ups since.

How, then, did Bhutan survive, and even thrive, in such a neighbourhood? What lessons does it offer to other small countries in an era where sovereignty is no longer guaranteed, as seen in Ukraine and other conflicts where powerful states influence instability across regions from Africa to Asia?

For a visitor, two features stand out in Bhutan. The first is the network of dzongs or fortresses built in strategic locations, which continue to serve administrative and religious functions. The second is the continued use of national dress, with the Gho for men and the Kira for women. Both reflect a deeper and historical reality of security and identity.

Historically, Bhutan relied on its formidable terrain and strategic fortifications to deter invasions, particularly from the north. Geography acted as a natural defence, making any military campaign costly and uncertain.

Bhutan's encounters with the British in the 19th century reinforced this reality. Although it ceded the Assam and Bengal Duars, it retained sovereignty due to three factors: the prohibitive cost of invasion, the lack of significant economic incentives, and its eventual role as a buffer state along the Himalayas.

The mid-20th century brought three decisive changes that impacted Bhutan deeply. The first was India's independence in 1947 which led to the India–Bhutan Friendship Treaty,¹ later revised in 2007, laying the foundation for close cooperation.

¹ <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf/india-bhutan-treaty-07.pdf>



Figure 1: His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his November 2025 visit to Thimphu, Bhutan.

Source: His Majesty The King's Facebook Page

The second and third changes were the absorption of Tibet and Sikkim into China and India respectively, albeit by different means, leaving Bhutan as the last surviving Vajrayana Buddhist Kingdom.

Bhutan's response was clear which is to strengthen sovereignty while managing its external environment carefully. Its foreign policy rests on a delicate balance of being firm on independence, and yet cautious not to antagonise either neighbour. A

small state surrounded by giants cannot afford to be perceived as a threat.

In its relationship with India, Bhutan has worked consistently to build trust, maintaining close coordination on issues affecting Indian security and foreign policy. This has allowed Bhutan to gradually expand its own strategic space without undermining the relationship.

With China, Bhutan has no formal diplomatic ties but maintains friendly ties and functional engagement through peaceful border negotiations.

In this sense, Bhutan plays a stabilising role in a contested region. It serves not only as a buffer between two major powers but also as a country deeply invested in avoiding conflict between them. During the 2017 Doklam crisis, Bhutan acted with restraint, seeking



to prevent escalation as Indian and Chinese forces faced off.

At the domestic level, stability is central to survival. Bhutan's transition to democracy in 2008 was not only a political reform but also a strategic step to build long-term resilience. A system with distributed power and strong institutions is better equipped to withstand internal and external pressures.

Importantly, Bhutan's foreign policy has remained consistent

across governments, reinforcing predictability and trust externally.

Bhutan's geostrategic location could have been either a blessing or a curse. It is to the careful and often shrewd diplomacy of its Monarchy that it has largely been a blessing.

Yet the same factors that preserved Bhutan's independence—its rugged terrain, limited natural resources, and small homogenous population—also constrain its economic options. Unlike its

neighbours, Bhutan lacks large domestic markets and industrial capacity.

While the country has made strong progress in health and education, it has struggled to generate sufficient employment for its youth. As a result, many Bhutanese are seeking opportunities abroad, particularly in Australia and the Gulf.

Recognising these challenges, Bhutan is attempting to leverage its location through initiatives such



Figure 2: His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck during the Global Peace Prayer Festival in November in Thimphu, Bhutan.

Source: His Majesty The King's Facebook Page

as the Gelephu Mindfulness City,² envisioned as a gateway linking South and Southeast Asia, and attracting investment to the region.

Bhutan's experience offers a few clear lessons for small states living alongside larger powers.

First, never pose, or even appear to pose, a security threat to larger neighbours. Understanding their core concerns is essential.

Second, domestic stability is inseparable from foreign policy. Internal divisions can invite external pressures, making unity and effective governance critical.

Third, small states are not without agency. With careful leadership, they can maintain an independent voice even in an asymmetric world.

Fourth, in the absence of hard power, soft power becomes crucial. Bhutan has leveraged its environmental leadership, carbon-neutral status, and Gross National Happiness development philosophy to build international goodwill.

Finally, even in a difficult strategic environment, a country must not lose sight of its internal priorities.

Stability, harmony, and the well-being of its people remain the ultimate foundations of national strength.



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² <https://thebhutanese.bt/his-majesty-announces-gelephu-mindfulness-city-sar-project-of-1000-sq-km/>; <https://thebhutanese.bt/gelephu-mindfulness-city-sar-project-to-host-companies-on-cutting-edge-of-sustainability-technology-and-finance/>

Why East Turkistan/ 'Xinjiang' Matters to India

Dolkun Isa

In 1949, the ancestral homeland of the Uyghurs—East Turkistan—was occupied by the Communist Chinese army. Following the occupation, both armed and ideological resistance continued in the region.

During this period, the Chinese government declared the “autonomy” status in order to suppress Uyghur demands for independence and to consolidate its own control.

East Turkistan was designated by the Chinese government as the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” on 01 October 1955. The so-called “Uyghur Autonomous Region” was never established as an institution based on the free will of the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in East Turkistan. It is solely a governance system forcibly imposed by the Central Government of the People’s Republic of China. The so-called “autonomy” granted by the Chinese government is nothing more than a political mask. In reality, it serves to erase Uyghur identity, forcibly assimilate the Uyghur people, and permanently annex East Turkistan as Chinese territory.

History shows us clearly: whether under the Manchu Empire, the Nationalist regime, or the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), none of the promises made to the people of East Turkistan were ever honoured. Every Chinese regime has sought to dismantle the region’s political and cultural autonomy.

After the founding of the East Turkistan Republic in 1944, the Communist occupation of 1949, and the hollow declaration of “autonomy” in 1955, Uyghurs have been subjected to systematic oppression, the erosion of their identity, and the crushing of their freedoms under the weight of state control.

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2014, these policies have escalated into a full-scale campaign of genocide. United Nations assessments, independent investigations, the Uyghur Tribunal’s rulings, international reports, and the recognition of Uyghur genocide and crimes against humanity by 11 national parliaments—including the European Parliament—document the shocking reality: mass arbitrary detentions, forced labour, coercive birth control,



In the face of this ongoing atrocity, it has become undeniable that there is no lasting path for the Uyghurs to safeguard their identity, language, culture, and very existence other than through independence.

and the deliberate destruction of Uyghur culture and heritage.

In 2016, the Western Theater Command (WTC) of People's Liberation Army (PLA) was established by the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a part of the reorganisation of the PLA, with the aim of increasing political control over the PLA and making it an institution of significant combat capability.¹ The establishment of the WTC, the focus thereof being East Turkistan—"Xinjiang Autonomous Region" (XUAR) and "Tibet Autonomous Region" (TAR)—is of significant importance to the border conflict between India and China, as Chengdu and Lanzhou are now within the jurisdiction of the same command which possesses extensive military power.²

The relevance of East Turkistan and Tibet to India is further reinforced by the PRC's investment into the transportation infrastructure in the region on top of the aforementioned military restructuring. In 2022, the PRC announced its plans to build a new highway between Lhunze/Tibet and Mazha/East Turkistan, which passes close to the disputed regions, such as the Depsang Plains and the Galwan Valley and Hot Springs on the Sino-Tibet border Line of Actual Control (LAC).³ In addition, "Xinjiang"-Tibet Railway Company has been formed by the PRC to manage the construction of a strategic railroad between Lhasa/Tibet and Hotan/East Turkistan (Galwan Valley, centre of the military conflict

of 2020 between the PRC and India, is governed by Hotan).⁴ Furthermore, Highway G219—one of the longest highways in the PRC—passes through Aksai Chin, a region that is controlled by the PRC but is claimed by India.⁵

As a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project was launched in 2015 to modernise Pakistan's transportation infrastructure. The project connects the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region ("XUAR") to Pakistani ports of Gwadar and Karachi to improve bilateral trade between the two countries. Furthermore, it fosters the integration of the South Asian countries.⁶

As East Turkistan is in the centre of both the WTC and the CPEC as part of the BRI, having a strict control over the region is of utmost importance for the PRC. For this reason, it is expected that as the CPEC advances, the PRC will increase the repression of the people it deems to pose a security threat

1 Saunders, P. C., and J. Wuthnow. (2016, April). *China's Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA organizational reforms*. Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University Press. <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-294.pdf>

2 Rajagopalan, R. P., and P. Mohan. (2020,

February). *PLA joint exercises in Tibet: Implications for India* (ORF Occasional Paper No. 238). Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20230718000119.pdf>

3 Tibetan Review. (2026, March 10). *China to build, upgrade Xinjiang-Tibet highways for greater power projection*. <https://www.tibetanreview.net/china-to-build-upgrade-xinjiang-tibet-highways-for-greater-power-projection/>

4 Ibid

5 Duhalde, M., D. Wong, and L. Lee. (2020, July 2). "China-India border dispute". *South China Morning Post*. <https://multimedia.scmp.com/infographics/news/world/article/3091480/China-India-border-dispute/index.html>

6 Rauf, S., and A. Zeidan. (2026, February 18). "China-Pakistan economic corridor". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor>



On 20 April, 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended a press conference after their talks in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Source: Xinhua News Agency

to these projects, which includes the entire Uyghur population of the “XUAR”.⁷ As a method to reinforce its authority, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) designates the critical political actors in Hong Kong, East Turkistan, and Tibet, as well as the leadership in Taiwan as separatist who are supported by what is described as “external forces”, who are deemed to pose a serious threat to the CCP’s legitimacy and authority.⁸ Another

element that aims to strengthen the PRC’s control over East Turkistan and Tibet, as well as to provide logistical advantage in case of an armed conflict with India, is the transport and military corridor between Tibet and East Turkistan. The PRC is building several road and railroad lines to establish connection within Tibet, between Tibet and China, also between Tibet and East Turkistan, which would allow the PLA, People’s Armed Police (PAP), defensive forces in the

border regions, and the militia to deploy swiftly if an incident occurs on the Indian border.⁹

This military restructuring and development of the transportation infrastructure in the region would also facilitate the use of surveillance and securitisation models by the PRC in East Turkistan and Tibet, under the pretext of security and stability. A security and forced assimilation system, which consist of a combination of hyper-securisation and militarisation elements, is practised in East Turkistan, after originally being formed in Tibet by the CCP official Chen Quanguo.¹⁰ This system aims to destroy the roots and lineage of Tibetans and Uyghurs, severing their social ties. This has resulted in the imprisonment of at least one million Uyghurs and Kazakhs because of their ethnic origin and cultural background as well as religious beliefs.¹¹ The repression in East Turkistan and Tibet intensified significantly after the appointment of Chen Quanguo. The surveillance

7 Foreign Policy Centre. (2018, September 18). *The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the security risks of infrastructural expansion*. <https://fpc.org.uk/the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-cpec-and-the-security-risks-of-infrastructural-expansion/>

8 U.S. Department of Defense. (2025, December 23). Annual report to Congress: Military and security developments

involving the People’s Republic of China 2025. <https://media.defense.gov/2025/Dec/23/2003849070/-1/-1/1/ANNUAL-REPORT-TO-CONGRESS-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2025.PDF>

9 Desai, S. (2021, November 19). Infrastructure development in Tibet and its implications for India. Jamestown Foundation. <https://jamestown.org/infrastructure-development-in-tibet-and-its-implications-for-india/>

10 International Campaign for Tibet. (2018, December 19). The origin of the ‘Xinjiang model’ in Tibet under Chen Quanguo: Securitizing ethnicity and accelerating assimilation. <https://savetibet.org/the-origin-of-the-xinjiang-model-in-tibet-under-chen-quanguo-securitizing-ethnicity-and-accelerating-assimilation/>

11 Ibid

methods that were first tried in the TAR were subsequently deployed in the “XUAR”. Especially since 2016, the surveillance campaigns in East Turkistan have intensified substantially.¹²

Considering the reports of widespread mass DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) collections in Tibet and East Turkistan, it can be concluded that the PRC authorities consider it imperative to expand grassroots level data collection and monitoring capacity in these regions.¹³ Recently, the PRC has adopted the Law on the Promotion of Ethnic Unity and Progress, which requires all children to learn Mandarin and creates a legal ground to prosecute parents and guardians who are considered to transmit “detrimental” views to the ethnic harmony. According to some analysts this can lead to dispersal of neighbourhoods predominantly inhabited by minorities.¹⁴

In summary, due to its strategic location at the centre of the WTC, and the CPEC, East Turkistan is of significant importance to India in connection with its border conflict with the PRC. The importance of East Turkistan is amplified as the PRC is building new transportation infrastructure, which would provide them a logistical military advantage. For these reasons, it is anticipated that the PRC could increase the repression and surveillance of the Uyghur population in the near future. Since they are deemed as a threat, the PRC aims to “protect” its military interests against India as well as its commercial relationships with Pakistan as part of the BRI.

12 European Foundation for South Asian Studies. (2022, February). Language, religion, and surveillance: A comparative analysis of China's governance models in Tibet and Xinjiang (EFSAS Study Paper No. 2). <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/comparative-analysis-of-governance-models-in-tibet-and-xinjiang/>

13 Human Rights Watch. (2022, September 5). China: New evidence of mass DNA collection in Tibet. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/05/china-new-evidence-mass-dna-collection-tibet>

14 Bicker, L. (2026, March 12). “China approves ‘ethnic unity’ law requiring minorities to learn Mandarin”. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp9meeek051o>



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Cultural Erasure: China's Assimilation of Southern Mongolia

Enghebatu Togochoᠭ

For nearly eight decades, the Chinese state—and tens of millions of ordinary Chinese settlers acting alongside it—has pursued a relentless settler-colonial project in Southern Mongolia, with the People's Republic of China (PRC) renaming the Mongolian homeland as 'Inner Mongolia'.

What is now unfolding under the cultural-genocide policies launched in 2020 is not a new development, but the finishing touch on this long project—the final solution to the Mongolian question, intended to wipe out Southern Mongolia as a nation once and for all.

Eighty Years of Settler Colonisation

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on 01 May 1947, two years before the founding of the PRC itself. Branded as a model of ethnic self-determination, it was in fact deliberately drawn to absorb vast Chinese agricultural districts, guaranteeing that Mongolians would never hold demographic dominance in their own homeland. From the 1950s onward, the state directed wave after wave of Chinese settlement onto the grasslands, but the project was never confined to government planners. It was carried out, populated, and profited from by ordinary Chinese peasants and other settlers who arrived by the millions to claim pasture, plough it under, open mines, and build cities atop displaced Mongolian communities. Settler colonisation in Southern Mongolia has been a popular Chinese national project, not merely a regime policy.

The era of 1960s and 1970s made the violence of that project explicit. The fabricated 'Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party' purge of 1967–1969 unleashed a textbook example of a genocide campaign: tens of thousands of Mongolians—conservative figures begin at 22,900 dead, with credible accounts citing 100,000 or more—were tortured or killed, and hundreds of thousands were persecuted on fabricated charges of separatism. The post-genocide era then opened the grasslands to industrial-scale dispossession through mining, agribusiness, and the forced sedentarisation of nomadic herders. By the 2010 census, Mongolians made up only about 17 percent of the region's 24 million inhabitants. They are today a small minority on their own ancestral soil.



The Mongolian language has now been completely banned as a medium of instruction in every school in Southern Mongolia, from kindergarten through university.

2020: The Cultural Genocide Climaxes

If the preceding decades hollowed out the material foundation of Mongolian life, the policies launched in August 2020 began the systematic dismantling of its cultural foundation. Beginning that autumn and intensified every year since, Chinese authorities have moved not merely to reduce, but to eliminate, the Mongolian language and every visible marker of Mongolian identity in Southern Mongolia.

Every subject in every grade is taught exclusively in Chinese. Mongolian-language textbooks have been pulled, Mongolian-speaking teachers have been reassigned or dismissed, and Mongolian-language schools have either closed outright or been stripped of their character and converted into Chinese-language institutions. Beyond the schoolhouse, the language has been driven out of all social and public life: erased from government documents and proceedings, courtrooms, hospitals, banks, public signage, billboards, shop fronts, broadcast media, websites, mobile applications, and even from

official place names rendered in the traditional Mongolian script.

The campaign reaches far beyond language, anything that bears Mongolian characteristics has been targeted for suppression. Mongolian-language publishing houses have been shuttered or absorbed, Mongolian books have been pulled from libraries, and Mongolian social media accounts have been deleted en masse. The traditional Deel and other markers of national dress are discouraged in schools and workplaces. Naadam festivals, Genghis Khan commemorations, monasteries, shrines, and historic sites have been placed under tightening ideological supervision or rebranded as generic 'Chinese' heritage stripped of any Mongolian meaning. Writers, historians, musicians, teachers, and herder activists have been arrested,

surveilled, dismissed, or driven into exile. Even private gatherings where Mongolian songs are sung, reciting Mongolian poetry, or teaching children the Mongolian alphabet at home have been treated as suspect, monitored by neighbourhood committees, and in some cases prosecuted as 'separatism' or 'inciting subversion of state power'.

When parents, teachers, and students mounted the largest protest the region had seen in decades—mass school boycotts and street demonstrations against the August 2020 policy—the state responded with mass arrests, dismissals, school lockdowns, electronic surveillance, and threats against any state employee whose child stayed home.

'Forging the Chinese Nation':

Compulsory Indoctrination

Layered atop these prohibitions is a positive programme of forced ideological assimilation. The entire Mongolian population including students, civil servants, herders, monks, retirees, even small children is now subjected to the campaign known as 'forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation'



Several Mongolians, including the teacher Ulaan, government official Surnaa, and a ninth-grade student, took their own lives in despair. The policy, however, did not retreat. In fact, it expanded.



(铸牢中华民族共同体), Xi Jinping's signature ethnic policy. Through mandatory study sessions, loyalty pledges, workplace examinations, neighbourhood meetings, and saturation propaganda in every village and every community, Mongolians are required to renounce any distinct national identity and absorb themselves into a singular 'Chinese nation' defined by the language, culture, and political authority of the Chinese majority. Non-participation is not permitted, visible enthusiasm is rewarded, quiet refusal can cost a job, a pension, or a child's school placement.

The Final Solution

Chinese officials and state commentators have, in effect if not always in name, presented this campaign as the definitive resolution of what Beijing calls the 'Mongolian question'. It is the final solution: not merely the suppression of dissent, but the planned termination of Southern Mongolia's existence as a distinct nation. After nearly 80 years of land seizure, demographic submergence, mass political violence, and grassland enclosure, the cultural genocide unleashed since 2020 is the finishing touch—the closing move of a settler-colonial project that has worked, generation by generation, to ensure that the Mongolian people, language, script, and homeland are absorbed without

remainder into the homogenous Chinese state.

The land will remain. Whether anything recognisable as the Mongolian nation survives the coming decade depends on whether the world is willing to name what is happening, cultural genocide, and to act on it before the project Beijing has openly described as final achieves what it set out to do since 1947.



Enghebatu Togochoog, born in Southern Mongolia, Enghebatu Togochoog came to the United States in 1998. In 2001, he established the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC), New York. Currently he is the Director of the SMRHIC and the chief editor of the organisational newsletter "Southern Mongolia Watch". He has testified on human rights conditions of Southern Mongolia before the US Congressional Executive Commission on China, United Nations Human Rights Council, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, United Nations Committee Against Torture, and European Parliament. His work include the translation of "Way Out of Southern Mongolia" and "Genocide on the Mongolian Steppe" (Volume I and Volume II).

Xi Jinping's Ten Commandments for Governing Tibet

Ming Xia

The Chinese Communist leader Xi Jinping believes he is an epoch-making thinker. Unsurprisingly, being transformative, he has imprinted his signature on socio-economic, political, and geostrategic realms and beyond with the mantra: “East, West, South, North, and the Center; the Party, government, army, civilians, and intellectuals, the Party commands all!”

Xi's strategic guideline for governing Tibet is summarised into ten commandments:

1. Institutional arrangements: The Communist Party of China (CPC) leadership, socialism, and the autonomous system of nationalities;
2. Strategic thinking: Overall governance prioritises the frontier governance, the latter prioritises stabilizing Tibet;
3. Focal point: The work of Tibet serves the unity of the motherland and the solidarity of nationalities;
4. Guiding principles: Governing Tibet by law and through enriching the people and the land in order to win hearts, and consolidate governance at grassroots in the long run;
5. Worldview: Carefully coordinating the overall situations both at home and abroad;
6. Method and Goal: Improving Tibetans' livelihood to win their hearts;
7. Contact: Intensifying contact and exchange between the Han and Tibetan peoples to achieve assimilation of the latter into the former;
8. Crucial point: Tightening control over religious monasteries and activities to achieve the Sinicization of all religions;
9. Top concern: Insisting on ecological integrity and environmental protection; and
10. Organisational assurance: Strengthening the construction of the Party, especially political loyalty.

These ten guidelines were formally laid out by Xi Jinping himself at the Seventh Central Tibet Work Forum held in Beijing in late August 2020. Since then, they have been repeated almost verbatim in major official documents, including the 2021 State Council White Paper, “Tibet Since 1951: Liberation, Development and Prosperity”, as well as in the Party's theoretical journals. In essence, they constitute the authoritative strategic blueprint for governing Tibet in what the leadership now calls the “new era.”

Under the Communist “verbocracy” with Chinese characteristics, we have to learn how to read between



Table 1: Key Policies Implemented in Tibet (2020–2026)

#	Official “Must” (Guideline)	Key Policies Implemented in Tibet (2020–2026)
1	Uphold CPC leadership, socialism with Chinese characteristics, and regional ethnic autonomy	Mandatory ‘Xi Jinping Thought’ study sessions in government offices, schools, and monasteries; loyalty pledges required from all cadres and religious personnel; regional autonomy retained in name but fully subordinated to absolute Party control.
2	Strategic thinking: Stabilising Tibet first for border governance	Massive construction of “Xiaokang” (well-off) border villages (628 planned, largely completed by 2022), dual-use roads, airports, and military infrastructure along the India border; increased People’s Liberation Army (PLA)/ People’s Armed Police (PAP) presence and ‘stability maintenance’ budgets to secure the southwestern gateway.
3	Focus on unification of the motherland and ethnic solidarity	Nationwide ‘ethnic unity’ campaigns and the Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress; mandatory ‘gratitude education’ programmes portraying the Party as the sole benefactor; efforts to portray Tibet as inseparable from China.
4	Govern by law, enrich the people, win hearts, and build long-term foundations	Codification of Party and government policies into legislation; large-scale poverty alleviation, relocation programmes, and infrastructure (highways, railways) leading to reported gross domestic product (GDP) growth; paired with intensified surveillance, legal controls, and political education embedded in welfare delivery.
5	Coordinate domestic and international situations	Tibet policy framed within national security and ‘community of shared future for mankind’; diplomatic pushback against international criticism; cutting-off cross-border contacts between Tibetans within China and those in exile; use of the plateau as a strategic rear area amid border tensions with India.
6	Improve livelihood and unite hearts as the starting point and goal of development	Significant investment in housing, roads, and services with claims of poverty eradication; through partnership assistance programmes between inland provinces/cities and Tibetan localities to transform dilapidated houses and nomadic lifestyle into settlement; many programmes involve relocation and create dependency on state support, with political indoctrination integrated into daily services.
7	Promote exchanges, interactions, and integration of ethnic groups	Expansion of Mandarin-dominant (or Mandarin-only) education; rapid increase in Han migration and cadre transfers; incentives and policies encouraging inter-ethnic interaction and mixed communities.
8	Sinicization of religion and lawful management of religious affairs	Revised “Administrative Measures for Religious Activity Venues” (effective September 2023, further tightened in 2024–2025 for Tibetan Buddhist temples) requiring monasteries to uphold CCP leadership and implement Xi Jinping thought; installation of surveillance cameras and Party secretaries inside monasteries; mandatory ‘patriotic re-education’ for monks and nuns; restrictions on children entering monasteries; systemic defilement of the Dalai Lama becoming more covert but not ending; reinterpretation of Tibetan Buddhism to align with socialist core values.
9	Insist on ecological protection first	Official ‘ecological civilisation’ campaigns and protected-area designations; continued large-scale hydropower dams (including the massive Yarlung Tsangpo/Medog mega-dam project), mining, and infrastructure that critics say undermine genuine environmental protection while serving strategic and energy goals.
10	Strengthen Party building, especially political loyalty	Enhanced ideological vetting and training for cadres in Tibet; anti-corruption drives used to enforce political reliability; deeper embedding of Party cells into villages, schools, and monasteries.

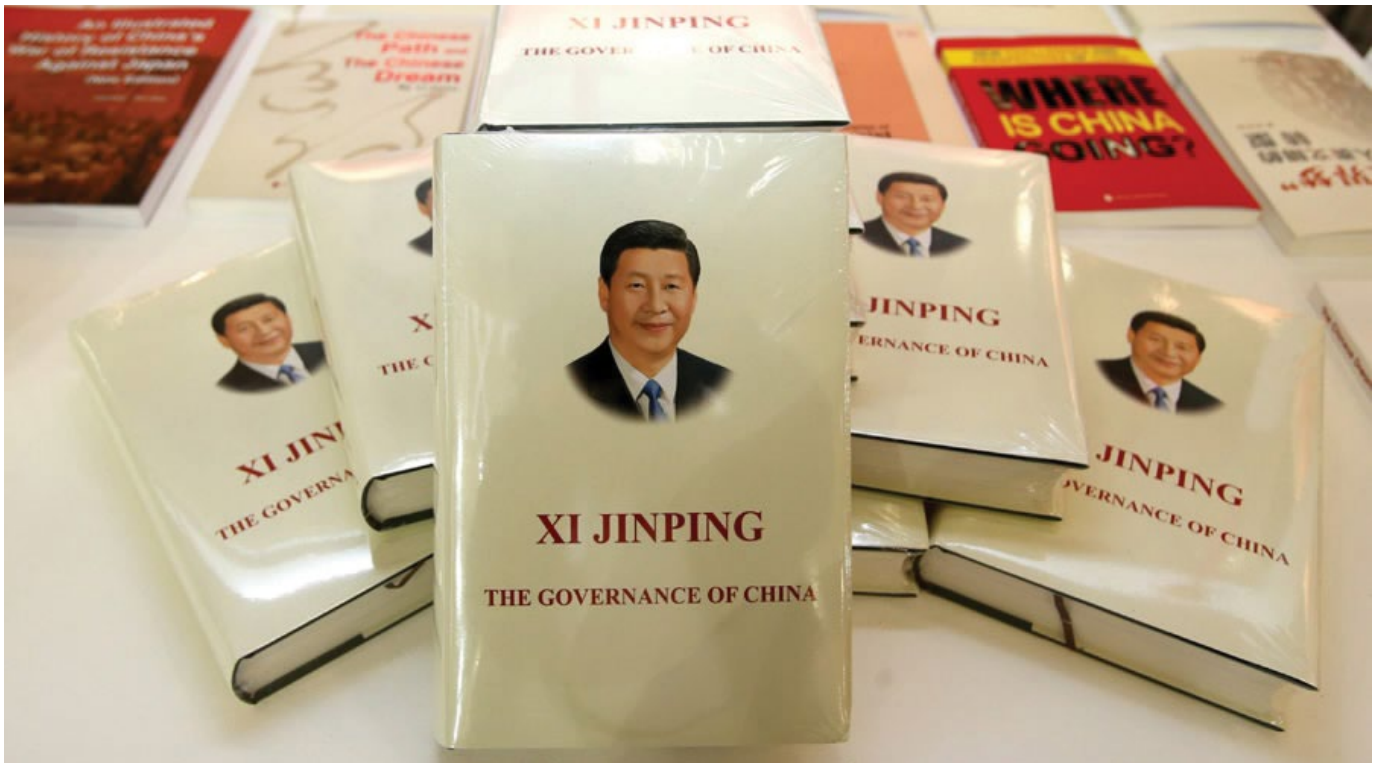


Figure 1: Xi Jinping's Magnus Opum, the Governance of China

Source: China Global Television Network

the lines/lies. For example, politics always has both explicit and tacit scripts. The Chinese official media has glorified Xi's "personal" attention to and involvement in Tibetan affairs since 1998, when he was still a deputy party secretary in Fujian; it is conspicuous that Tibet is absent from Xi's opus magnum, *The Governance of China*. The four volumes, covering the period from 2012 to 2022, index Tibet only once in the context of urban-rural ecological protection, which is fewer mentions than those of Leo Tolstoy. Most likely, many substantive matters discussed at their closed-door conferences between party leaders and relevant

officials—assessing dire situations and concocting brutal statecraft—are deemed inappropriate for public or global consumption. With this caveat, Xi does not clearly indicate subjects or objects, nor does he use tense (not clear about time framework—it is past, present, or future; if it is the future, how long? etc.) in his grand social engineering. He does not clearly explain the cost-effective calculations for limited capacity and unlimited ambition. Since Xi has a mimetic desire to stand shoulder to shoulder with Mao Zedong, Maoism permeates Xi's strategic thinking, preventing a complete rupture from the Party tradition towards Tibet over the

past century. Nevertheless, under the Great United Front Work framework proposed at the Third Plenum of the 20th Party Congress in 2024, Tibet has acquired more importance in Xi's strategic security thinking. This has at least two important implications: First, national self-determination—a rare agreement between Lenin and Woodrow Wilson—cannot be openly rejected by the Chinese communist leader, who draws legitimacy from a Leninist party and aspires to offer China's wisdom to a Human Community of Common Fate. Second, Mao's "plan and manage Tibet" strategy must be appreciated on a larger scale:



at home, it offers experiences and a blueprint for Hong Kong and Taiwan; abroad, it serves a long-term national interest, not merely security from neighbouring India or Western hegemonic powers, but probably with an empire-building ambition in the long run. Therefore, on the one hand, we have to see Xi's tightening policies and legislation (e.g., Law of the PRC on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress) since 2012 not as an aberration from the Party line; on the other hand, we must see the realpolitik strategy as well as utopian impulse in Xi's programme, inherited from Mao and other leaders.

In Chinese political cliché, the Party often warns people of “sugar-coated bomb.” We can find both sugar coats and fatal bombs in Xi's package—a fatal attraction. The sugar-coated part lies in his control of guts: feed people better; the fatal part is his control of hearts: through brainwashing to reprogramme Tibetans' minds. During the Cold War era, scientists in the West (i.e., William Sagant, Joost A.M. Meerloo, and others) entered the studies on mind control (or menticide) after they saw widespread use of brainwashing in the Soviet Union and China on their political opponents and foreigners. But after a brief period of research, the scientists abandoned their programme because the cognitive landscape is too complex and sensitive for

human engineering without causing unexpected disasters. Now, affective neuroscience has also discovered that through millions of years of biological evolution, humans have developed “the gut-brain axis”—an integrated and organic unity. Commenting on head-transplant surgery conducted by a Chinese scientist, American scientist Leonard Mlodinow (Emotional, 2022, 56) warned, “That the connection of a brain to a body to which it is not accustomed could lead to death, no matter how technically splendid the merger is, is perhaps the greatest sign of the intimacy and importance of the

mind-body connection.” In this sense, transplanting Communist ideology and core values into the minds of Tibetans threatens their survival as integrated human beings.

Understanding that every gift from Beijing comes with a proviso can guide the Tibetan community in exile in navigating the most difficult predicament. The good news is that the Chinese Communist idealistic and utopian style, particularly under Xi, does deliver material improvements (e.g., poverty relief and infrastructure) in Tibet. The past half-century



Figure 2: Xi Jinping lands in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet and is seen waving on 20th August, 2025

Source: Yan Yan, Xinhua/Associated Press

of economic progress in China made this possible; the advocacy, oversight, and pressure from the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala, India, made this progress necessary, although with the Communist ideological hypocrisy. The bad news is, what are we going to do with the menticide under genocide? Fortunately, the strength of Tibetans, especially embodied in the Tibetans-in-exile under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, lies in the rich and expanding resources of mindful philosophy and affective sciences. Therefore, the continuous preservation and innovation of Tibetan Buddhism to contribute to secular ethics, along with Tibetan language and tradition, would offer optimism for preserving the mental and psychological integrity of Tibetans under the brutal techno-totalitarianism. This may also be the affective and spiritual source of hope for Han Chinese living under brainwashing for at least three generations.

Indian sage Sri Ramakrishna once told an allegory of a water snake and a bullfrog mutually tormenting each other: the former has no sword of wisdom to subdue; the latter has no will to surrender. The bullfrog gets stuck in the water snake's throat. This situation applies to the China-Tibet struggle also. As the Communist regime is dealing with a turning point of

its economy towards long-term downturn, I hope someday it will be applicable to this relationship, too: the Tibetan monastic community with a sharp sword of wisdom to conquer a mechanically developed but spiritually impoverished China. For the Greater South Asian region, especially for India, Tibet has been and will always be a bridge to help China and India to overcome the geographic, ideological, and cultural barriers as high as the Himalayas. If the well-intentioned Pancasila (Five Principles) can sometime in the future, facilitate a democratic and peaceful Monsoon Asian Union, then a triangular co-opetition (cooperation through competition, competition for cooperation more between China and India, with Tibet as the linchpin) needs to be meticulously pursued as a long-term strategic goal.



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In Conversation with Leaders

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Penpa Tsering, Sikyong
Central Tibetan Administration



In Conversation with Leaders: Sikyong Penpa Tsering

Host: Tenzing Dhamdul, Senior Researcher,
FNVA

Tashi Delek, Greetings. It's both an honor and privilege to welcome Your Excellency Sikyong Penpa Tsering la of the Central Tibetan Administration for an exclusive inaugural edition interview for the Trans-Himalaya Journal.

As the democratically elected political leader of the Tibetan people in exile, His Excellency has been at the forefront of efforts to preserve the Tibetan identity, advocate for the rights and aspirations of the Tibetan people and strengthen international awareness of the Tibet cause. In this conversation, we explore with His Excellency perspectives on the future of Tibet, the role of the Central Tibetan Administration, the preservation of the Tibetan heritage and the broader significance of the Tibet-China conflict in our contemporary world.

Sikyong: Thank you for having me. And I wish Trans-Himalaya Journal very good success, good readership and good followers.



First and foremost, congratulations on your re-election. As you begin your second term with a decisive mandate, what are the core strategic pillars of your administration for the next five years? And additionally, your Kashag (Cabinet) has already been formed with Six Kalons (Ministers). How does this specific leadership structure serve your governance in the next five years?

Sikyong: On the political front, we have three main responsibilities: resolving the Sino-Tibet conflict, delivering social services to Tibetan communities in exile, particularly in India and Nepal, and ensuring an efficient administration to support both. Right now, if you look at Chinese policies, especially in Tibet and other nationality regions, there appears to be very little space for dialogue. However, back channels still exist, and it is important that they remain open. We know that any lasting solution to the Sino-Tibet

Held at the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, New Delhi



conflict can only come from China. We follow the Middle Way Approach, which is based on non-violence and a mutually beneficial negotiated solution. Although Tibet was historically independent, His Holiness is not seeking independence. He is seeking meaningful autonomy. Even though there are autonomous regions and prefectures in name, there is no genuine autonomy in practice. Until there is leadership in China willing to seriously engage with this proposal, we must continue building international support for the Middle Way Approach. The United States has already adopted the Resolve Tibet Act, and we hope other like-minded countries will take similar positions. Another issue that deeply concerns the Chinese government is the future reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama. In many ways, they seem more concerned about the future 15th Dalai Lama than the living 14th. They believe that if they can control the recognition of the next Dalai Lama, they can control Tibet. That is why we are working to build awareness and support among Tibetans, the wider Buddhist world, and the international community. So far, we have received support from around 38 democratic countries. Alongside these international efforts, we also remain focused on the welfare, rehabilitation, and long-term well-being of Tibetan refugee communities in exile. We face several challenges. One is the dispersal of young people

from rural Tibetan communities in India. Over the last 65 years, our settlements across India have played a crucial role in preserving our language, culture, religion, arts, and crafts in exile. We need to keep these communities vibrant and sustainable. A second challenge concerns more than 1,800 Tibetan families in India and Nepal who do not have homes of their own. We are encouraging them to move to larger settlements, not only to address their housing needs but also to strengthen these communities for the long term. Today, Tibetans are spread across nearly 30 countries, and our communities are becoming less compact than they once were. Then, of course, there are ongoing responsibilities in health, education, religion, and culture. These are essential not only for the welfare of Tibetans in exile but also for preserving our identity and heritage. To do all of this, we need an efficient administration. Over the last few years, we have been working to strengthen both the institutional and individual capacities of the Central Tibetan Administration, and I would say we are about halfway there. Looking ahead, a lot of our focus will be on data, technology, and human capacity. The world is entering the age of artificial intelligence, and we do not want to fall behind. We are already moving towards AI-assisted systems for administration, budgeting, reporting, and project tracking. These tools should help

improve efficiency, accountability, and transparency. In my view, transparency remains the best way to counter disinformation. These are some of the key areas we need to focus on over the next five years.



You mentioned transparency and accountability. I think this is something that the Central Tibetan Administration stands for. And going on what you mentioned about the Tibet Autonomous Region, we have seen in the past few years the engagements that China has been carrying out, it was only last year that President Xi Jinping visited the Tibet Autonomous Region to celebrate its 60th year anniversary. He continues to remain a dominant figure when it comes to reshaping, administrating and governing the Tibet Autonomous Region and its subsequent Tibet Autonomous Prefectures. Based on your administration's analysis, what is your current reading of President Xi Jinping's long-term vision on Tibet? And do you see any strategic entry points of flexibility on Tibet to be engaged upon?

Sikyong: That is why I said there appears to be very little space for dialogue if you look at the policies being implemented today. The thinking behind President Xi



Jinping's administration is that if there are no distinct national identities such as Tibetans, Uyghurs, or Mongols, then there will be no nationality issues. Since these peoples cannot simply be eliminated, the approach is assimilation—to gradually turn them into Chinese. Many of the campaigns and programmes of recent years reflect this objective. What is particularly concerning is that these policies are now being given the force of law. One example is the Ethnic Unity and Progress Law, adopted earlier this year. It provides a legal framework to enforce assimilation policies and includes provisions that can even be applied beyond China's borders against those seen as opposing its objectives.

Whenever it comes to Communist Party policies and programmes, they are often given very appealing names. The Ethnic Unity and Progress Law is one example. It sounds positive, but in reality it is about assimilation and the gradual erosion of distinct ethnic identities. Language is a good example. Tibetan children are increasingly taught in Mandarin rather than in their own language. Yet Tibetan is one of the world's oldest living languages. Recently, a Tibetan monk completed a Tibetan-to-Tibetan dictionary in 223 volumes, which shows the richness and depth of the language. When a language is weakened, culture, religion, and

an entire way of life are also put at risk. These are the foundations of a people's identity. Then there is the issue of Tibet's environment. The consequences will not be limited to Tibetans alone. If Tibet's environment is damaged, future generations in China will also be affected. Protecting Tibet's environment is therefore not only in the interest of Tibetans, but in the interest of China as well.

Xi Jinping visited Tibet last year, but there were several other important developments as well. For those unfamiliar with the issue, the 10th Panchen Lama passed away in 1989 under circumstances many Tibetans consider suspicious. His reincarnation was identified in 1995 and recognised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. On the very day that recognition was announced, the boy and his family disappeared. Since then, we have not known whether the Panchen Lama recognised by His Holiness is still alive. In the meantime, the Chinese government appointed its own Panchen Lama and has been promoting him as part of its effort to influence the future recognition of the 15th Dalai Lama. So these developments are very much connected. More broadly, I often say that China today stands on one pillar—Xi Jinping. He controls the Party, the government, and the military. Over the last several years, we have also seen more power shifting from state institutions to the Communist Party itself, with

Party commissions playing an increasingly decisive role. At the same time, there has been growing militarisation, tighter security measures, and a greater atmosphere of suspicion, reflected in laws such as the Anti-Espionage Law. China remains a very opaque system, but if you watch developments closely, certain patterns become visible. The repeated purges and removals of senior officials, both in political circles and within the military, suggest that significant tensions exist within the system. The situation in the military is particularly striking, with a number of senior figures investigated, removed, or disappearing from public view. That raises important questions about the state of China's top leadership and institutions today.

The economy is also facing challenges. Trade and commerce are slowing in some sectors, while China's energy demands remain enormous. Even with large energy reserves and major investments in renewables, sustaining an industrial base that produces goods accounting for roughly 33 per cent of global manufacturing output requires vast amounts of energy. At the same time, there are concerns about weak domestic consumption and problems in the housing sector. A number of pressures are building within the economy, and it is difficult to predict how they may unfold. There is also the issue of



youth unemployment. At one point, the Chinese government stopped releasing certain unemployment figures, which itself reflected the sensitivity of the issue. Many young people are struggling to find suitable jobs, and we are now seeing reforms to the hukou system for rural migrants living and working in cities. Let us see how these changes affect Chinese society. If these challenges are not addressed, they could develop into much larger problems. That is why we need to think about different scenarios for China and consider what challenges, as well as opportunities, they might present for Tibet and the Tibetan people.



When you mention the level of authority that Xi Jinping has, it very much contrasts to his Holiness the Dalai Lama, where in 2011 he devolved his political authority to the Central Tibetan Administration. And talking on his reincarnation, recently your very remarks on the Hindustan times regarding the succession and reincarnation of His Holiness, drew a sharp response from the Chinese Embassy here in New Delhi who asserted their position. What is your message to China's

claim over such a sacred spiritual lineage for Tibetans and followers of Buddhism for that matter? And how is the Central Tibetan Administration positioning itself globally on this issue? And there is some talk of whether President Xi Jinping would visit India this September for the BRIC Summit. In this context is there a possibility of engagements with the very leader who holds all the powers here when it comes to China?

Sikyong: I would say that we are not looking for one, and I do not think there can be one. Religion and spirituality are matters of faith. They cannot be imposed by someone else telling you what religion to follow or what religion not to follow. It becomes even more difficult to accept when such directives come from a state that officially does not believe in religion. For Tibetans, this only deepens wounds that already exist. Tibetan society has been rooted in Buddhist faith and values for more than 1,300 years. That faith is deeply woven into our culture, identity, and daily life. It is not something that can simply be removed by policy or decree.

This is one of the reasons why His Holiness is seeking a mutually beneficial solution. China has perhaps 250 to 300 million Buddhists, many of whom are searching for spiritual meaning. Tibetans can help preserve and

share the Buddhist traditions that have been maintained in Tibet, while Tibetans can benefit from China's economic development. That is the essence of the Middle Way Approach—finding a solution that benefits both sides. Unfortunately, the current Chinese leadership believes Tibet can be controlled through ever greater surveillance and restrictions. Today, these systems are increasingly supported by artificial intelligence and advanced technologies. China is also expanding its influence beyond its borders. We have seen reports of overseas police stations, police cooperation programmes, training initiatives, and the export of surveillance technologies. What is concerning is that these tools and methods are increasingly being shared with other authoritarian governments. In that way, China is not only extending its influence but also strengthening a broader network of like-minded regimes.

Is that what the world wants to see? Is that what India wants to see? Is that what Europe wants to see? If not, then I keep making a simple point. Many of our friends say, "The dragon is biting us." My response is that there was a time when the dragon was weak and poor. Who helped the dragon become so large and powerful? The United States, Europe, Japan, Taiwan, and many others invested in China, traded with China, transferred technology, and helped integrate



it into the global economy. Now, if you know the dragon is biting you and you continue to feed it, then the question becomes: whose problem is it?

You are feeding the dragon even more through trade. China is promoting greater market access because it has surplus goods to sell, while the United States is moving in the opposite direction and raising tariffs. These are some of the realities we need to consider when discussing China. We also need to look at how China is engaging with the international community. When the United States steps back from multilateral institutions, China often steps in. Increasingly, it is trying to shape international discussions, including how concepts such as human rights should be interpreted and understood. You can see this across forums such as BRICS and other international platforms. At the same time, there are important developments at the leadership level, with major world leaders engaging China and China seeking a larger role in global affairs. We will have to see how these developments unfold. People often ask how China–India relations affect us. It is not something that can be judged over a short period of time. It is a very dynamic relationship, and we need to watch it carefully over the longer term. Historically, relations have often been one step forward and two steps back. At the moment, there

are signs of improvement, partly because China needs access to India's market. But if you look at the trade figures, India's imports from China have grown significantly, while exports have not kept pace. As a result, India continues to run a trade deficit of around US\$115 billion annually with China. I am sure the Indian government is concerned about this. At the same time, Indian businesses also need to think carefully about the long-term implications of these trends.

We know that China has a chokehold on rare earth supplies and is increasingly using that leverage to exert influence. Countries seeking access to rare earths often face conditions, including restrictions on how the materials can be used or exported. These measures affect not only India, but also countries in Europe and Southeast Asia. Through this, you can see how China extends its influence beyond its borders. Many people around the world still do not fully appreciate the scale of that influence. That is why we also need to look at the Belt and Road Initiative and its broader implications. In a number of countries, these projects have created significant debt and long-term dependence. At the same time, they have given China a presence in strategically important locations along key maritime and overland trade routes. If you look at places such as Sihanoukville, the Coco

Islands, Hambantota, and Gwadar, you can see that these are no longer viewed simply as economic projects. They have acquired strategic significance as well, and that is something the international community needs to pay close attention to.

Several years ago, more than 20 African leaders went to China to renegotiate their loans because they were struggling with repayment. Nothing comes for free. Everything has a price. When countries receive financing for ports, airports, telecommunications, and other major infrastructure projects, there can also be political expectations attached. If countries are expected to align with China's positions on key issues, then the question becomes: how much political autonomy do they really have? Sovereignty is not just about territory or borders. It is also about the ability to make decisions independently and in accordance with your own national interests. Just before coming to this interview, I was reading about the Burmese President's visit to India. Situations like these remind us that dealing with authoritarian governments often involves both moral questions and strategic realities. Balancing those considerations is never easy, especially when it involves neighbouring countries.



Sikyong la, you touched upon the India-China relations here. Historically Tibet has been described as a geopolitical buffer zone between these two nations and especially in today's context of heightened Himalayan border frictions, how would you define Tibet's strategic relevance when it comes to contemporary India-China relations?

Sikyong: I remember Lodi Gyari once saying that Tibet served as a political buffer between India and China for centuries—or, as the Chinese would say, “since time immemorial”. It was only after China occupied Tibet that India and China became direct neighbours. Even today, it is called the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, not the Indo-China Border Police. That reflects an important historical reality. Looking ahead, if there is a peaceful resolution to the Sino-Tibet conflict, Tibet can once again become a bridge between the two most populous countries in the world rather than a source of tension. India, Tibet, and China already share deep historical and cultural connections. Buddhism travelled from India to China and later to Tibet, creating a common civilisational heritage. That is why Tibet has the potential to be not

only a geographical bridge, but also a cultural and civilisational bridge between India and China.

Right now, there is a serious trust deficit when it comes to China. If you listen to Chinese leaders today, you may get the impression that China is becoming more responsible on the international stage. But many people remain unconvinced. We have a saying that an elephant has tusks to show and teeth to chew with. In other words, what is said publicly is not always reflected in practice. When China calls for dialogue and negotiated solutions in places such as the Middle East or Ukraine, people naturally ask why the same approach is not applied to Tibetans, East Turkestanis, Mongols, or the people of Hong Kong. That is why many see a double standard between China's international rhetoric and its domestic policies. At the same time, China is very skilled at shaping narratives and presenting its positions in ways that appeal to international audiences. That is why it is important to look not only at what is being said, but also at what is being done.

But that is not the reality of China today. China is increasingly behaving as a hegemonic power, and countries across the region are responding to that reality. From Japan and Taiwan to Australia and Southeast Asia, many countries are increasing defence spending

and strengthening their security capabilities. A major reason is China's growing assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea and other disputed areas. If you look at countries such as Vietnam, they are adapting to what they see as a changing security environment. India is no exception. Today, India is investing more than ever in border infrastructure, defence preparedness, and security. These developments are not happening in isolation. They are part of a broader regional response to China's growing influence and increasingly assertive behaviour.

If you look at these developments across the region, many of them are responses to China's increasingly assertive behaviour, not to India. India has traditionally been a defensive country, focused on protecting its own security and interests. At the same time, India-China relations need to improve. Greater trust has to be built, and that can only happen through sustained engagement and understanding. Historically, Tibet served as a buffer between India and China. In the future, if there is a peaceful resolution to the Sino-Tibet conflict, Tibet can become a bridge between the two countries. Tibetans were once the buffer; today, they want to be the bridge. That is one way greater trust and understanding can develop between India and China.



When you mentioned India and China, we see in the global arena that there are a lot of competing international crises which sort of, according to many, keep the Tibet cause as a growing challenge to be raised in the world arena. So, what are the new diplomatic initiatives and public strategies that your administration intends to deploy to mobilise fresh and even the continued support for the Tibetan movement?

Sikyong: As you mentioned, there are conflicts taking place across the world, and the number seems to be growing. Whether it is 50, 100, or more, what is clear is that we are seeing increasing instability and tension in many regions. In a world that is becoming more uncertain and unpredictable, we also have to ask ourselves: where do we stand, and how do we position ourselves in this changing environment?

The greatest strength of the Tibetan movement is, of course, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Over the decades, he has built friendships, trust, and goodwill with people across the world and across different political systems. That is why I often say that whatever we have been able to achieve, however modest, is largely because of His

Holiness. Even at the age of 90, he continues to meet hundreds of people almost every day. He has always said that as long as he is physically able, he wants to serve humanity. That is also why so many people continue to come to Dharamsala—whether they are ordinary citizens, scholars, former leaders, or political leaders. They come because of the respect they have for His Holiness and the values he represents. Ultimately, much of the strength and success of the Tibetan movement rests on His Holiness' leadership, vision, and lifelong commitment to serving others.

When you look at the amount of violence in the world today, perhaps the Tibetan movement remains one of the few movements still firmly committed to non-violence. We genuinely believe that conflicts can be resolved through dialogue and negotiation rather than through fighting and killing. Ultimately, it is not the identity of the ruler that matters most, but the quality of governance. If people are oppressed, it makes little difference who is in power. If we step back and look at the bigger picture, we are all citizens of the same small world. Borders are created by human beings. From space, you do not see them. Yet conflicts often arise over a few metres of territory, and before long lives are lost. Whether a civilian dies or a soldier dies, it is still a human life. Soldiers also have

families, loved ones, and dreams. Their lives are no less valuable. That is why I believe one of the enduring strengths of the Tibetan movement is its foundation in non-violence. At a time when so many conflicts are driven by force, we continue to believe that lasting solutions can only come through peaceful means. Between 2009 and 2022, around 157 Tibetans self-immolated. Most were young people between the ages of 17 and 35. What is striking is that they never experienced an independent Tibet, nor did they live through the Cultural Revolution. What they witnessed was the reality of Tibet as it exists today. Their intention was not to harm others. They hoped that their sacrifice would draw attention to the suffering of the Tibetan people—either from the Chinese government or, failing that, from the international community. The challenge is that China works very hard to control information and shape narratives. Although we have been able to document and publicise many of these cases, it remains difficult to reach the wider world because of the scale of China's state apparatus. It is not that Tibetans could not have chosen violence. They could have. But His Holiness has always been clear that violence is not the way forward. He has consistently urged Tibetans to follow the path of non-violence, believing that the movement would lose its moral foundation if it embraced violence.



On that note, we have seen that the Tibetan movement emanating from two different fronts, mainly the resilient population living inside Tibet, which you mentioned now directly under the Chinese administration, and a highly global Tibetan diaspora led by the Central Tibetan Administration. So, how do you view these distinct yet complementary roles of these two groups and how does your administration continue to bridge the gap between the two?

Sikyong: Tibet is the largest and highest plateau on Earth. Tibetans traditionally call it the Land Surrounded by Snow Mountains, while many in the West know it as the “Roof of the World.” Today, environmental scientists often refer to it as the “Third Pole” because it contains the largest concentration of glaciers outside the Arctic and Antarctic. These glaciers feed many of Asia’s major rivers, which is why Tibet is also known as the “Water Tower of Asia.” Rivers originating in Tibet flow into ten countries and support hundreds of millions of people. Take China itself. The Yellow River and the Yangtze, two of China’s most important rivers, both originate on the Tibetan Plateau. The Mekong also begins in Tibet before flowing

through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Before it leaves Chinese-controlled territory, China has already built more than 30 dams along its course, giving it significant influence over downstream water flows. The same concerns apply to the Brahmaputra, which originates in Tibet before flowing into India. Near the Great Bend in Medog, China is planning a massive hydropower project that could generate several times more electricity than the Three Gorges Dam. Much of that energy is intended to be transmitted to the industrial centres of eastern and southern China. That is why Tibet is not just a political issue. It is also an environmental, ecological, and water-security issue. What happens on the Tibetan Plateau affects not only Tibetans, but hundreds of millions of people across Asia.

You also have major rivers such as the Indus and the Jhelum that originate in Tibet and flow into India and Pakistan. These rivers have sustained some of the world’s oldest civilisations, including the Indus Valley civilisation. Because of its geostrategic location and unique environment, what happens on the Tibetan Plateau has consequences far beyond Tibet itself. I remember coming across studies by climatologists examining the relationship between the “Roof of the World” and the “Lungs of the World”—the Tibetan Plateau and the Amazon rainforest. When I was

travelling in Brazil, I read research suggesting links between climatic patterns in these two regions, despite being on opposite sides of the globe. Some studies found that heavier snowfall in Tibet was associated with lower rainfall in the Amazon, while increased rainfall in the Amazon corresponded with reduced snowfall on the Tibetan Plateau. Whether we are talking about water resources, climate systems, biodiversity, or environmental security, Tibet’s importance extends far beyond its borders. What happens on the Tibetan Plateau affects not only Asia, but the wider world as well.

We are seeing the effects of environmental and climate change in many parts of the world, from Canada to Europe and beyond. Scientists increasingly point to the interconnected nature of climate systems, including the role of the Tibetan Plateau. As I mentioned earlier, rivers originating in Tibet flow into ten countries and support some of the most densely populated regions on Earth. When control over these river systems changes, the effects are felt far downstream. I have travelled to countries such as Cambodia and Thailand, where people often speak about how changing river flows are affecting their livelihoods. Communities that depend on these rivers for farming, fishing, and daily life are already experiencing the consequences. Some experts estimate that between

1.8 and 2 billion people depend, directly or indirectly, on rivers that originate on the Tibetan Plateau. That gives you a sense of the scale of the issue. So, we are not just talking about environmental concerns. We are talking about future food security, water security, and the livelihoods of millions of people. What happens on the Tibetan Plateau has consequences for the entire region.

When there is excess water, it can be released downstream and contribute to flooding. When there is a shortage, water can be retained upstream, increasing the risk of drought for downstream communities. That is why control over these river systems has become such an important issue. China now controls the source of many of Asia's major rivers, giving it considerable influence over water flows and related resources. For downstream countries, this creates a sense of vulnerability. In the long run, however, shared resources cannot be managed effectively through unilateral control alone. These rivers connect countries and peoples across the region, and their future depends on cooperation and mutual understanding.



Going back to your recent inauguration that took place in 27 May, you made a point to publicly address the rising political polarisation happening within the exile community, which is a global trend. How do you plan to foster internal cohesion and would future engagements between yourself and your predecessor, the only two Sikyongs since 2011, take place?

Sikyong: I have not spoken much about divisions within the community because I have always tried to avoid contributing to them. During the previous election, I campaigned mainly online, but I never spoke against any of the other candidates. I had made a personal commitment not to take part in anything that could divide the Tibetan community. Democracy, by its nature, can be divisive because people hold different views and support different candidates. But I have always believed that the unity of the Tibetan people must remain our highest priority. This time, I did not campaign at all. I wanted to remain consistent with that principle. That was the message I was trying to convey.

But anyone who understands the history of the Tibetan exile community would know that these issues are not new. Today, we live in the age of social media. News travels much faster, although not all of it is necessarily accurate or well-informed. That creates its own challenges. If you look back at the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there were times when tensions within the community were, in some ways, even greater than they are today. There were fights, stabbings, and disruptions at meetings. These things happened. Many younger Tibetans have not witnessed those experiences firsthand, nor have they always heard about them from the older generation. That is why I often say that disagreements and tensions have existed at different points in our history. What has changed today is not the existence of those differences, but the way they are expressed. The environment has changed, technology has changed, and society has changed. As a result, these issues now take different forms.

But I have always believed that there is a way forward. That is why we follow the Middle Way Approach, which seeks genuine autonomy for Tibet. At the same time, there are Tibetans who continue to advocate for full independence. One reason we place so much emphasis on Tibetan history is that it



is important to make clear that history cannot simply be rewritten. Before the People's Republic of China entered Tibet, Tibet was never directly ruled by China. We have historical records and evidence that support this position. China often tells the world that Tibet has been part of China since ancient times. But political statements cannot change historical facts. That is why we continue to study, preserve, and present Tibet's history. We believe the historical record speaks for itself, and when it comes to Tibet's history, we are confident that the evidence is on our side.

The second message is for the international community. We believe countries should not simply repeat China's position on Tibet without examining the historical record for themselves. That is why we encourage policymakers, scholars, and governments to study Tibetan history and look at the evidence before reaching conclusions. We often provide historical materials and ask people to make their own informed judgments based on facts rather than political narratives. When governments automatically accept China's narrative, there is less incentive for Beijing to engage in meaningful dialogue on the Tibet issue. Our position is quite simple. Tibet today is under Chinese rule. That is a fact. Tibet also existed as an

independent country in history. That is a fact as well. Any serious discussion about Tibet must take both realities into account.

The third reason is for the younger generation of Tibetans. If we do not study and preserve Tibetan history, then who will? If we lose our history, we risk losing the foundation of our struggle as well. Without understanding our past, it becomes difficult to shape our future. The fourth reason relates to both the Middle Way Approach and those who advocate independence. While our political goals may differ, both sides depend on the same historical foundation. That is why I do not think Tibetans should spend too much time arguing among themselves. We already know our history. The real challenge is to help the international community, the Chinese people, and the Chinese government better understand it. There is still a great deal of education to be done. We often assume that people in India, the United States, and elsewhere understand Tibet. But that is not always the case. Just a few weeks ago, someone from America told me, "I visited the museum, and only then did I realise how large Tibet is". That illustrates the challenge. Many people still do not fully understand Tibet's size, its strategic importance, its environmental significance, or the value of Tibetan Buddhist culture.

That is why our energy should be directed towards education, awareness, and outreach rather than internal disagreements. We need to focus on helping more people understand Tibet and why it matters.

That is what we are trying to do, and I think it has already produced some positive results. Recently, I was conducting a workshop for newly elected members of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. One of the participants, a former president of the Tibetan Youth Congress, told me, "Since you adopted this position, it has made our advocacy work much easier". Comments like that suggest that people are beginning to see the positive side of the direction we are taking. What is important now is that we bring our energies together and focus on the larger goals before us. After all, we are only about 130,000 to 140,000 Tibetans living in exile. If we spend our energy on internal divisions, we only weaken ourselves. We are already facing a very large and powerful opponent. That is why unity and a shared sense of purpose remain so important. If we can stay focused on the bigger picture, our efforts will be far more effective.

Q

Under your leadership, we have seen global communities around the world celebrate the Year of Compassion to honour His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday. The focus nationally shifts to continuity also. So, beyond celebrity events, how can the global Tibetan community practically institutionalise and preserve the Dalai Lama legacy, his secular philosophy and also pass on what we have learnt to the next generation?

Sikyong: This Year of Compassion is really an opportunity for people to better understand the thinking of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. What is remarkable about His Holiness is that his message is simple and easy to understand. He often says, "I am one among eight billion human beings. As a human being, my responsibility is to promote human values." That is also the spirit behind Social, Emotional and Ethical (SEE) Learning, which I believe is one of His Holiness' most important contributions. The message is straightforward: whether you are a believer or a non-believer, what matters most is that you are a good human being. His Holiness has always encouraged people to practise their own faith while respecting all other religions,

as well as those who choose not to follow any religion. That is why SEE Learning is for everyone. It is not limited to Buddhists or religious people. It is meant for believers and non-believers alike because it is ultimately about compassion, ethics, and universal human values.

Then there is His Holiness' role as a Tibetan and his commitment to preserving and promoting ancient Indian wisdom. He often says that many of these traditions of knowledge, philosophy, and ethics have declined in their land of origin, and he has consistently encouraged their revival and wider appreciation. In many ways, that wisdom helped shape His Holiness into the person he is today. That is why he places such importance on sharing it with the world. Whether it is compassion, human values, interfaith harmony, or ancient wisdom, the messages of His Holiness continue to resonate because they speak to something universal in all of us. I believe that anyone who sincerely reflects on these teachings becomes a better person. At the same time, this is not limited to His Holiness alone. Any person—religious or non-religious—who promotes peace, compassion, and understanding deserves our respect. In a world marked by so much division and conflict, voices that bring people together are more important than ever. His Holiness is often regarded as an apostle of peace.

People respect him not only because he speaks about peace, but because he lives by what he teaches. In many ways, that is the more difficult part. In the Tibetan tradition, we speak of *thab* and *sherab*—method and wisdom. His Holiness has always shown how the two can be brought together in a balanced and harmonious way. Even when faced with difficult questions, he often responds with wisdom, humility, and humour. That is why the message of His Holiness remains so important. I have heard that many of the events organised during the Year of Compassion were very well received. If that is the case, then perhaps these efforts should continue beyond a single year. After all, compassion is not something to be practised only during a Year of Compassion or on a particular day. It has to be practised every day, throughout our lives. That is the message the world needs to understand. The same principle applies to public life. Many politicians describe themselves as religious and regularly visit places of worship. But faith should be reflected in one's actions. Public service is ultimately about serving people, and those entrusted with leadership should place the welfare of the people above personal interests. That is one of the most important lessons His Holiness continues to teach through both his words and his example.

Concluding:

Thank you, Sikongala. On that note, we thank you for sharing your profound insights and for outlining the strategic vision of your administration for the coming five years.

This comprehensive conversation has sort of illuminated the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that the Tibetan communities face and also the global landscape that continues to evolve.

We are deeply honored to have you for this special interview. On behalf of our readers, our editorial team, we thank you for your time, your leadership and your openness. We are still navigating and trying to stay afloat in this turbulent global politics evolving politics. Thank you for having me.

Summary of the talk:

In this wide-ranging interview, Sikyong Penpa Tsering outlines the Central Tibetan Administration's priorities for the coming five years, focusing on resolving the Sino-Tibet conflict through the Middle Way Approach, strengthening Tibetan communities in exile, and modernising governance through technology and institutional reform. He discusses China's policies in Tibet under Xi Jinping, warning of increasing assimilation, surveillance, and restrictions on Tibetan identity, religion, and



language. The Sikyong emphasises the importance of safeguarding the succession of the Dalai Lama from political interference and highlights Tibet's growing strategic relevance as a source of Asia's major rivers and a critical environmental region. He also reflects on India-China relations, Tibet's role as a potential bridge between the two civilizations, the enduring importance of non-violence, and the need for greater international awareness, Tibetan unity, and youth

leadership. Finally, he underscores the universal relevance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's message of compassion, ethical leadership, and human values.

You can watch the video recording of this interview at: <https://youtu.be/oKchocskXo> or visit our youtube channel forfnva



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Youth Voices



Tenzin Woese

For 67 years, Tibetans have found refuge in India. Yet, if we look closely, we are far more than what a refugee community is traditionally perceived to be. We are active contributors, quietly shaping the social, cultural, and moral fabric of our host nation, Mother India.

In my region, Dharamshala, this contribution is clearly visible. Once a quiet British-era cantonment town, established in 1849, Dharamshala has evolved into a global epicentre of spirituality, dialogue, and cultural exchange following the arrival of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan community. This presence has drawn thousands from across the globe, strengthening the local economy, and positioning Dharamshala as a cornerstone of Himachal Pradesh's tourism.

Moreover, the significance goes beyond the economic or infrastructural growth of Dharamshala. The Tibetan community has played a significant role in India's identity as a diverse and pluralistic society today. In a land that granted us with sanctuary, we have chosen not to live as an outsider, but as engaged individuals.

A Tibetan proverb speaks of 'returning tea for water', a reminder that even the smallest kindness must be repaid

How has the Tibetan community in your region contributed to your host country?

with something greater. India gave us hope. In return, we share values of compassion, coexistence, and resilience, striving to turn the bitterness of exile into the sweetness of contribution.

And perhaps one day, when Tibet is free, this bond will endure by evolving from refuge to a lasting partnership rooted in shared history, mutual respect, and a stronger future.

Tenzin Woessel is Regional Coordinator of the Voluntary Tibetan Advocacy Group (VTAG), Dharamshala, dedicated to advancing Tibetan advocacy and youth engagement. Tenzin actively works to raise awareness of Tibetan issues by informing and engaging with youth across the globe.



Tenzin Yangchen

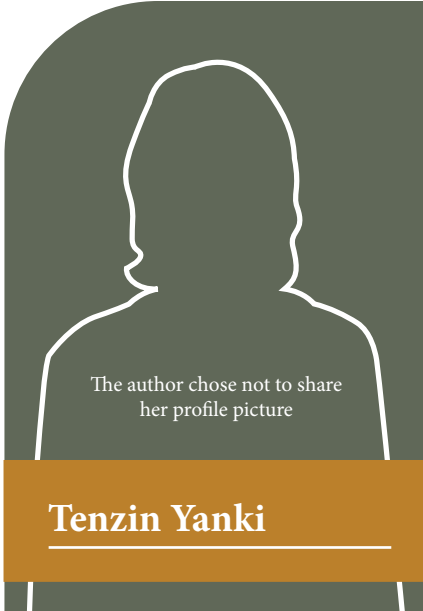
Growing up in Paris, I have seen our Tibetan community evolve from a small group of newcomers into a visible and active part of French society. This journey has been about more than settling down, it's also about how we take part in and contribute to life in France while maintaining and adapting our identity within it.

Many Tibetans have opened small businesses that support local economies while introducing elements of Tibetan culture into daily life. At the same time, more Tibetan youth pursue higher education in prestigious French universities and enter professional fields such as law, business, and social services, including social work. In doing so, they contribute to the same social systems that once welcomed and supported their families.

Culturally, the weekly Lhakar movement brings Tibetans together every Wednesday to dance. This initiative has grown more inclusive, with non-Tibetans participating, turning a community space into a shared cultural experience.

Civically, our engagement can be seen in discussions around the representation of Tibetan heritage at the Guimet Museum, particularly following the reframing of Himalayan collections. This shows how diaspora participation extends into public and institutional dialogue on heritage and representation in France.

Tenzin Yangchen is a member of the Students for a Free Tibet France, Paris.



Tenzin Yanki

Tibetans in France have contributed in various cultural forms, such as hosting Himalayan festivals where locals can discover Tibetan culture. These events often include food stands—where one can enjoy Tibetan cuisine—as well as traditional dance performances. The Circle dance, held every Sunday and Wednesday in public parks, is one such event where locals can enjoy the dance moves and participate in these cultural expressions.

From my perspective, the most impactful contribution is through civic engagement and advocacy. For example, on 30th August 2024 27 scholars published an article (a tribune) in *Le Monde* titled: “French museums are bowing to China’s demands to rewrite history and erase peoples”. The article highlighted how two museums in

Paris have erased Tibet’s name—the Muséd du Quai Branly replaced the term ‘Tibet’ with ‘Xizang’, while Musée Guimet relabelled their gallery space from ‘Tibet-Nepal’ to ‘Le monde himalayen’ (Himalayan world).

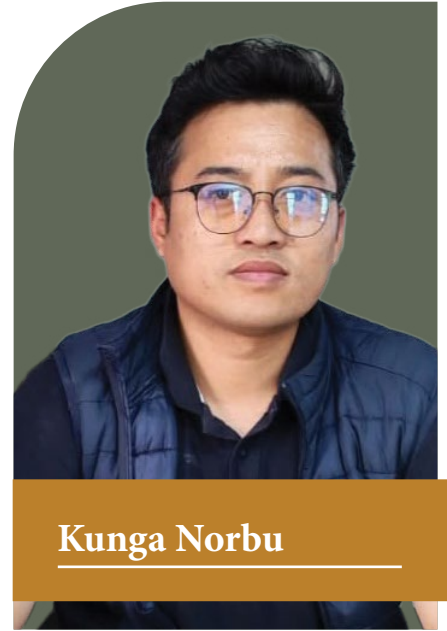
At this critical point, Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) France, along with five other Tibetan associations, launched a campaign through open letters, social media, and demonstrations. On 23rd

September 2024, the Muséd du Quai Branly restored the name Tibet. On 21st May 2025, senator Jacqueline Eustache-Brinio raised an issue with the government regarding the Musée Guimet, questioning how a national museum replaced the word ‘Tibet’ from its gallery space. On 2nd July 2025, SFT France along with five other associations filed an administrative lawsuit for abuse of power; the lawsuit is still ongoing.

These actions demonstrate how the Tibetan community in France has embraced democratic values of the country while restoring its own identity. It also brings awareness among the citizens for transparency and vigilance against foreign interference.

Sources: Le monde, SFT France Instagram page, senat.fr, Tibet.fr, asialyst.com

Tenzin Yanki is a member of the Students for a Free Tibet France, Paris.



Kunga Norbu

In the quiet hills of Dharamshala, a unique story of coexistence continues to unfold, one shaped not by policy, but by people. Over the years, the relationship between Tibetan refugees and local Indian communities has grown into a meaningful partnership, rooted in shared spaces, everyday interactions, and a quiet sense of mutual respect.

At the heart of this transformation is His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, whose presence has turned Dharamshala into a global centre for spirituality and learning. The Dalai Lama’s temple, along with numerous monasteries, draws visitors from across India and around the world, some seeking answers, others simply a moment of peace. This steady flow of people sustains a vibrant local economy,



supporting cafés, guesthouses, handicraft shops, and small businesses run by both Tibetans and Indians.

The depth of this economic connection becomes especially visible during Losar. Markets come alive, streets fill with colour, and business thrives. Yet, when the Dalai Lama once spent Losar in South India, the absence was felt deeply, celebrations grew quieter, and many local shopkeepers experienced a noticeable drop in income, revealing how closely livelihoods are intertwined.

Beyond economics, the cultural and spiritual exchange is equally profound. Tibetan traditions, art, medicine, and philosophy, have enriched the region's diversity, while values like compassion and non-violence quietly influence both locals and visitors. Socially, bonds are built through simple acts: Tibetans renting homes from Indian families, neighbours sharing daily life, and during March 10 Uprising Day gatherings, local residents offering water and refreshments in gestures of solidarity.

Dharamshala today stands not just as a place on the map, but as a living example of harmony, where two communities do more than coexist; they support, shape, and uplift one another in a shared journey of resilience and understanding.

Kunga Norbu Secretary, Centre for Middle Way Initiative, is a Science and English teacher based in Dharamshala and serves as the main manager at Tibet World, as well as a secretary at the Middle Way Initiative. He is the author of two books and has also edited an English textbook, while regularly conducting workshops for students. Kunga Norbu is passionate about blending science, language, and Buddhist philosophy to support meaningful learning.



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Tibet Then and Now



The Democratic Institutions of the Central Tibetan Administration



The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) represents one of the world's most distinctive democratic institutions.

Established in 1959 following the Dalai Lama's arrival in India, it serves as the

representative institution of Tibetans both inside Tibet and across the global Tibetan diaspora. Guided by the Charter of the Tibetans in Exile, the CTA comprises independent executive, legislative, and judicial institutions, reflecting the democratic reforms initiated by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. The following

diagrams provide an overview of its constitutional structure, principal institutions, and the responsibilities of its key organs, offering readers a visual guide to the functioning of Tibetan democratic governance in exile.



Diagram 1: Constitutional Structure of the Central Tibetan Administration
A high-level overview of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the CTA



STRUCTURE OF THE KASHAG(CABINET)



PENPA TSERING

SIKYONG

2021-PRESENT

The Kashag (Cabinet) is the highest executive office of the Central Tibetan Administration. The Kashag runs and fulfills all its executive and administrative responsibilities. In accordance to the Charter of Central Tibetan Administration, the seven members of the Kashag, is headed by a Sikyong (Political Leader). Sikyong is directly elected by exile Tibetan populace. Sikyong, in turn nominates his seven Kalons and seeks the Parliament's approval. The term of the Kashag is for five years.

SEVEN DEPARTMENTS UNDER THE KASHAG

1

DEPT. OF RELIGION & CULTURE



KALON
Tsegpal Chukya Dranyi

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Preservation of Tibetan Buddhism
- Protection of Tibetan cultural heritage
- Monastery affairs
- Support for Tibetan nunneries
- Promotion of Tibetan language and arts
- Religious education
- Preservation of manuscripts and rituals
- Coordination between major Tibetan Buddhist traditions

INSTITUTIONS UNDER THE DEPARTMENT

- Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA)
- Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA)
- Tibet House
- Monasteries and Nunneries in exile
- Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies
- Manjushree Tibetan Culture Centre

2

DEPT. OF HOME



KALON
Palden Dhondup

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Tibetan refugee settlement, rehabilitation and welfare
- Economic development & self-reliance
- Co-operative societies
- Agriculture & organic farming
- Elder welfare & sponsorship programme
- Disaster relief & settlement infrastructure

TIBETAN SETTLEMENTS UNDER HOME DEPT

45 Tibetan settlement offices located across India, Nepal and Bhutan

BREAK DOWN

INDIA
15 Agricultural settlements
13 Handicraft settlements
16 Cluster / scattered communities

NEPAL
6 Agricultural settlements
3 Handicraft settlements
2 Cluster/scattered communities

BHUTAN
7 Agricultural communities

ADDITIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC)
- 14 Old Peoples' Homes
- Sponsorship Programmes

3

DEPT. OF FINANCE



KALON
Tsering Dhondup

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- CTA annual budget preparation
- Revenue generation
- Green Book administration
- Voluntary contribution management
- Economic and entrepreneur projects
- Women empowerment projects
- Emergency Fund management

DIVISIONS

- Administration Division
- Revenue Division
- Expenditure Division
- Welfare/Fund Raising Division
- Project Division
- Technical Division

4

DEPT. OF EDUCATION



KALON
Ugyen Tenzin

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Overseeing Tibetan schools in exile
- Curriculum development
- Scholarship programmes
- Teacher training
- Preservation of Tibetan language education
- Educational Policy and Administration

SCHOOL CATEGORY

- Tibetan Children's Villages (15 schools)
- Sambodha Tibetan Schools (34 schools)
- Tibetan Homes Foundation (4 schools)
- Snow Lion Foundation (9 schools)

list of pre-primary sections and private schools excluded here

5

DEPT. OF SECURITY



KALON
Kunga Tashi

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Protection of Tibetan leadership
- Documentation and immigration support
- Settlement security liaison
- Emergency response coordination
- Internal administrative security
- Security coordination

6

DEPT. OF INFORMATION AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (DIIR)



KALON
Pempa Tsering

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- International advocacy on Tibet
- Diplomatic outreach
- Human rights documentation
- Media and publications
- International campaigns
- Public diplomacy
- Relations with NGOs

OFFICES UNDER DIIR

Tibet offices overseas act as de facto embassies of the CTA

- Brussels, Belgium
- Canberra, Australia
- Geneva, Switzerland
- Kathmandu, Nepal
- London, UK
- Moscow, Russia
- New Delhi, India
- Paris, France
- Pretoria, South Africa
- Sao Paolo, Brazil
- Taipei, Taiwan
- Tokyo, Japan
- Washington D.C. USA

MAJOR UNITS

- Tibet News Bureau
- Tibet Museum
- Translation and Publication
- Media Coordination Desk

7

DEPT. OF HEALTH



KALON
Pempa Tso

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Tibetan refugee healthcare
- Public health programmes
- Primary medical health care
- Maternal and child healthcare
- Health awareness campaigns
- Coordination with Tibetan medical institutions

INSTITUTIONS LINKED

- Meen-Tsee-Khang
- Tibetan hospitals and clinics
- Community health centres

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

- Vaccination and preventive healthcare
- Holding healthcare camps in settlements
- Traditional Tibetan medicine promotion

On 29 April 1959, His Holiness the Dalai Lama established the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in the north Indian hill station of Mussoorie. Officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), this is the continuation of the government of independent Tibet. The Central Tibetan Administration is now headquartered in Dharamshala, India and functions as the official representative institution of Tibetans inside Tibet and in exile/diaspora. It oversees democratic governance, education, religion, and international outreach for the Tibetan community. In 2011 His Holiness the Dalai Lama devolved his political authority to the Central Tibetan Administration. The democratically elected body that represents the Tibetan people in exile and inside Tibet and works for the welfare of Tibetan refugees and the cause of Tibet.

It guarantees fundamental rights, democratic governance, and the preservation of Tibet's distinct identity.

OUR VISION

CTA has set itself the twin task of rehabilitating Tibetan refugees and restoring freedom and happiness in Tibet

SOURCE: TIBET.NET AND FNVA. ©FNVA

Diagram 2: Executive Branch
Organisation of the Kashag and the principal departments of the Central Tibetan Administration.



STRUCTURE OF THE TIBETAN PARLIAMENT-IN-EXILE (TPIE)

DOLMA TSERING TEYKHANG
SPEAKER TPIE
Presides over Parliamentary sessions and the Standing Committees and represents the Parliament

VEN KHENPO SONAM TENPHEL
DEPUTY SPEAKER TPIE
Assists the Speaker and presides in the Speaker's absence

MEMBERS OF THE TIBETAN PARLIAMENT-IN-EXILE

Elected by the Tibetan people in exile to represent them

MEMBERS FROM THE THREE TRADITIONAL PROVINCES

Ü-tsang
Kham
Amdo

REPRESENTATIVES FROM RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Nyingma
Kagyü
Sakya
Gelug
Bön

REPRESENTATIVES FROM TIBETAN DIASPORA REGIONS

Europe
Americas
Australasia

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT

SECRETARY GENERAL
leads and coordinates the secretariat's overall functions

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
provides administrative and operational support to the parliament and its committees

RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION
offers research support, maintains records and supports information management

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE
Speaker and Deputy Speaker; two from each of the provinces and one from each of the religious denominations

POLITICAL COMMITTEE
Monitors political situations inside Tibet and reviews executive branch decisions.

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE
oversees ethical conduct and review relevant matters of The Parliament

FINANCE COMMITTEE
examines and approves the annual budget proposed by the Kashag

SPECIAL COMMITTEE
formed for specific tasks or issues as required by The Parliament

FUNCTIONS OF THE TIBETAN PARLIAMENT-IN-EXILE

MAKING LAWS
The Parliament enacts laws in accordance with the Charter of the Tibetan People in exile to meet the needs of the Tibetan Community

SCRUTINISING POLICIES
The Parliament examines policies and programmes of the Kashag (Cabinet) to ensure they are in the best interest of the Tibetan people

APPROVING BUDGET
The Parliament discusses and approves the annual budget proposed by the Kashag

DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS
The Parliament discusses important issues concerning Tibet, Tibetan people and the global situation

REPRESENTING THE TIBETAN PEOPLE
The Parliament gives voice to the aspirations, concerns and welfare of the Tibetans inside Tibet and around the world

STRENGTHENING TIBETAN UNITY
The Parliament works to strengthen unity among Tibetans in exile and between Tibetans inside and outside Tibet

UPHOLDING DEMOCRATIC VALUES
The Parliament promotes democracy, transparency, accountability and the rule of law within the Tibetan polity

ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD
The Parliament builds awareness regarding the Tibet conflict and engages with governments, parliaments and organisations worldwide

COMPOSITION OF THE PARLIAMENNT

The Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile is a unicameral body with a total of 45 members. The composition includes

TRADITIONAL PROVINCES
10 members each from the three traditional provinces - Ü-tsang, Kham and Amdo

RELIGIOUS SECTS
2 members each from the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the traditional Bön faith

REPRESENTATION FROM THE AMERICAS / EUROPE
2 members each from the Americas and Europe

REPRESENTATION FROM AUSTRALASIA
1 member

PARLIAMENTARY SESSIONS
The Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile meets twice a year, with sessions held in March for the budget session and in September for the general session

KEY POWERS OF THE PARLIAMENNT

LEGISLATIVE POWER
Enacts, amends and repeals laws in accordance with the Charter of the People in exile

FINANCIAL POWER
Approves the annual budget and ensures responsible use of Tibetan people's resources

EXECUTIVE OVERSIGHT
Holds the Kashag (Cabinet) accountable by scrutinising its policies, decisions and implementation

COMMITTEE SYSTEM
Refers bills and issues to the Standing Committees

HOW THE PARLIAMENNT FUNCTIONS

SITTINGS
Enacts, amends and repeals laws in accordance with the Charter of the People in exile

AGENDA
Enacts, amends and repeals laws in accordance with the Charter of the People in exile

DEBATE
Enacts, amends and repeals laws in accordance with the Charter of the People in exile

COMMITTEE REVIEW
Enacts, amends and repeals laws in accordance with the Charter of the People in exile

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TIBETAN PARLIAMENNT IN EXILE

VOTE

It is a symbol of Tibetan democracy and self-determination
It ensures the voice of the Tibetan people remain united
It works tirelessly to achieve a just and lasting resolution to the Tibetan conflict.
It preserves Tibetan identity, language, culture and national aspirations
It represents Tibetans today and the future generations

"Our Parliament is not just a legislative body; it is the voice of six million Tibetans and a beacon of hope for a free Tibet"
Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile

Diagram 3: Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile
Composition, constitutional role and principal responsibilities of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile.

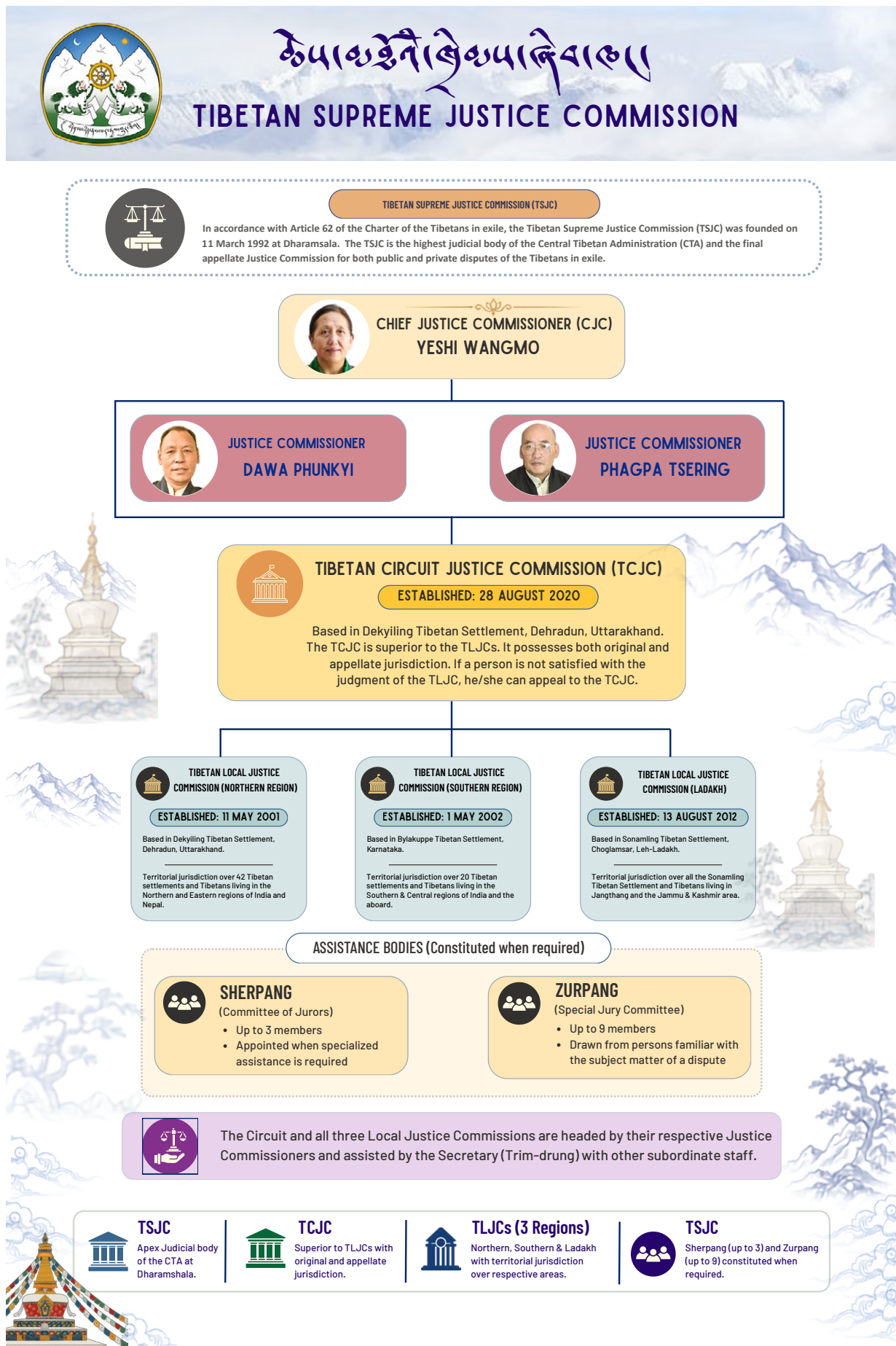


Diagram 4: Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission
Structure, jurisdiction and responsibilities of the judicial branch of the Central Tibetan Administration.

Archives

1. Proclamation issued by H.H. The Dalai Lama XIII, on the eighth day of the first month of the water-ox year (1913)
2. The 1992 PRC white paper on Tibet



1

In his 1913 Proclamation reasserting the independence of Tibet, His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama declared that following the collapse of the Manchu Qing Empire and the expulsion of Chinese forces from Tibet, that Tibet had

regained its freedom and would govern itself as a small, religious, and independent nation. He emphasised that the historical relationship between Tibet and China had been one of priest and patron rather than political subordination. The proclamation called for the preservation of Buddhism and its institutions, the

protection of religious traditions, just and humane governance, the abolition of harsh punishments, vigilance in safeguarding Tibet's independence, and the responsible development of the country's resources and agricultural lands. It concluded by urging all Tibetans to work collectively for the prosperity, security, and independence of Tibet. From 1912 until the entry of the People's Liberation Army in 1950–51, Tibet exercised many of the functions of an independent state, including maintaining its own government, army, currency, and foreign relations.

2

The 1992 PRC white paper, Tibet – Its Ownership and Human Rights Situation, was one of Beijing's earliest and most comprehensive attempts to justify its rule over Tibet. Running to more than 37,000 words, the document presents Tibet as an inseparable part of China since ancient times, claiming that its incorporation into China dates back to the Yuan Dynasty. It portrays the 1951 Seventeen-Point Agreement as a voluntary acceptance of Chinese sovereignty, describes the 1959 Tibetan uprising as a rebellion by the Dalai Lama and the old elite to preserve a feudal system, and credits the Chinese Communist Party with liberating one million serfs, abolishing slavery, and transforming Tibet through economic development,

Tibet -- Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation	
Contents	
<u>Preface</u>	
Part One	
I. <u>Ownership of Tibet</u>	
II. <u>Origins of So-called 'Tibetan Independence'</u>	
III. <u>The Dalai Clique's Separatist Activities and The Central Government's Policy</u>	
Part Two	
IV. <u>Feudal Serfdom in Old Tibet</u>	
V. <u>The People Gain Personal Freedom</u>	
VI. <u>The People Enjoy Political Rights</u>	
VII. <u>Economic Development and Improvement of Living Standards</u>	
VIII. <u>Freedom of Religious Belief</u>	
IX. <u>Development of Education and Culture</u>	
X. <u>People's Health and Demographic Growth</u>	
XI. <u>Protection of Living Environment</u>	
XII. <u>Special State Aid for Tibet's Development</u>	
Information Office of the State Council of The People's Republic of China September 1992, Beijing, China	

education, healthcare, and religious freedom. Any suggestion that Tibet was historically independent is dismissed outright, while the Dalai Lama is urged to abandon what Beijing calls “separatism” and embrace national unity.

For Tibetans and many outside observers, however, the white paper is less a historical account than a political defence of Chinese rule. It largely ignores the fact that Tibet functioned independently for decades before the arrival of the People's Liberation Army in 1950,

maintaining its own government, army, currency, postal system, and diplomatic contacts. The military takeover of Tibet and the circumstances under which the Seventeen-Point Agreement was signed remain at the heart of the dispute. Tibetan leaders have long argued that the agreement was imposed under military pressure and therefore lacked genuine consent. The International Commission of Jurists, in its investigations of Tibet in 1959 and 1960, concluded that Tibet had demonstrated the essential

characteristics of statehood prior to 1950 and that the Tibetan people had been denied the right to self-determination.

The white paper is also difficult to reconcile with the commitments contained in the Seventeen-Point Agreement itself. While Beijing presents the agreement as evidence of Tibetan acceptance of Chinese sovereignty, the document explicitly promised that Tibet's existing political system and the status of the Dalai Lama would not be altered. In practice, those assurances were steadily eroded in the years that followed, culminating in the collapse of Tibet's traditional government after the 1959 uprising and the Dalai Lama's flight into exile.

Equally controversial are the paper's claims regarding human rights. While highlighting economic and social development, it makes little mention of political repression, arbitrary detention, restrictions on religious practice, or the treatment of those who peacefully expressed dissent. At the time, organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were documenting cases of political imprisonment, torture, and severe limitations on fundamental freedoms in Tibet, presenting a picture very different from the one described in the white paper. Critics argue that this narrative depends on the selective use of history and the

exclusion of Tibetan perspectives. Supporters of the Tibetan cause often describe the white paper not as an objective account of events but as an attempt to legitimise Chinese control by recasting a contested history as an unquestionable fact.

Key international reactions included:

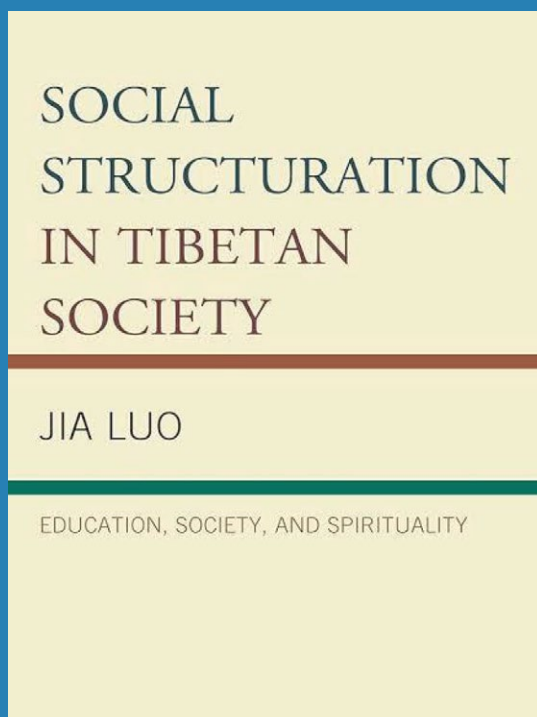
- **Central Tibetan Administration (Tibetan Government-in-Exile):** Called it propaganda filled with "misinterpretation, misconceptions, and lies," noting it failed to address Tibetan grievances or acknowledge Tibet's separate history
- **Human Rights Watch:** In their 1992 World Report, documented extensive political imprisonment, torture, and restrictions on religious freedom in Tibet that directly contradicted the white paper's claims
- **Amnesty International:** Published a 1992 report on human rights violations against Tibetan minorities, including detention of peaceful activists and torture, challenging the paper's "human rights improvement" narrative
- **International Campaign for Tibet (ICT):** Dismissed the white paper series as "false propaganda" and a "whitewash," arguing it acknowledged China's policy failures by

blaming the Dalai Lama

- **US State Department:** Included Tibet in its annual human rights reports documenting repression, religious restrictions, and cultural assimilation contradicting Beijing's claims

The white paper established China's propaganda framework for subsequent Tibet documents, with groups calling it a "lie repeated a thousand times" that erased Tibetan history while labeling criticism as "separatism"

Book Review



(Lanham: Lexington Books/ Rowman & Littlefield, 2017). Pp 232. Price ₹8,589, ISBN: 9781498544665.

Jia Luo's *Social Structuration in Tibetan Society: Education, Society, and Spirituality* is an ambitious and theoretically innovative intervention in Tibetan Studies that seeks to address a long-standing gap in the sociological analysis of Tibetan society - by developing what the author explicitly terms a "Tibetan sociology of education" grounded in both Western social theory and indigenous Tibetan philosophical traditions. Situated within the *Emerging Perspectives on Education in China* series, the book is framed against two interrelated absences: first, the marginalisation of Tibetan society within mainstream sociological inquiry and research, and second, the dominance of anthropological, historical, and political approaches that, while rich in empirical description, have largely failed to conceptualise Tibetan society deeply.

The author's central objective is to overcome these limitations through a creative synthesis of Anthony Giddens's structuration theory and the dialectical philosophy of Je Tsongkhapa, thereby offering a novel framework capable of explaining how spirituality, education, authority, and social reproduction interact in a spirituality-centric society such as Tibet. Structurally, the book proceeds from a methodological and theoretical justification of this synthesis to a detailed discussion of Tibetan social

organisation before and after the mid-20th century, with particular emphasis on the role of monastic institutions, oral communities, and state schooling in shaping social continuity and change. One of the book's most significant contributions lies in its refusal to treat Tibetan Buddhism merely as a belief system or religion; instead, Luo conceptualises spirituality as a constitutive force of social structuration that permeates family organisation, knowledge production, authority relations, and educational practices, thereby challenging secular assumptions embedded in much Western sociological theory.

By placing Giddens's notions of the duality of structure, agency, and rule-resource sets into dialogue with Je Tsongkhapa's distinction between conventional and ultimate reality, the author advances a genuinely interdisciplinary model that neither uncritically universalises Western theory nor romanticises Tibetan tradition. Methodologically, the work is explicitly historical-theoretical, combining extensive textual analysis across Tibetan, Chinese, and English sources with supplementary qualitative material drawn from unstructured interviews, narrative dialogues, and the author's own lived experience within Tibetan village and monastic contexts. This positionality as both insider and

trained sociologist enables the author to move beyond surface-level description and offer a deeper critique of how Tibetan social structures have been destabilised by post-1951 political and educational transformations, particularly through the imposition of a state-centric schooling system that marginalises Tibetan language, oral knowledge, and monastic pedagogy.

The book's sustained critique of state schooling is especially compelling, as the author demonstrates how education functions not merely as a neutral instrument of modernisation but as a powerful mechanism of restructuring that fragments traditional social relations, weakens monastic authority in the Tibetan community, and produces forms of cultural and linguistic alienation among Tibetan youth. At the same time, the author is careful not to idealise pre-1959 Tibetan society; instead, he presents Tibetan social history as a dynamic process marked by fragmentation, reconstitution, and transformation with the support of Tibet's ancient history.

In the last chapter of the book, author describes the relation of education to Tibetan society. It provides a detailed description of the two forms of traditional education in Tibetan society, namely the oral society and the

literate society, the latter also includes monastic curriculum. In the oral society, it describes a social control based on oral traditions and village level (micro-level) social structures. It provides a strong empirical evidence of how this system maintains Tibetan social structuration prevalent at the micro level. Author also cautions about the degradation of oral traditions and urges for dialogue between elders and youth to keep these traditions alive, as well as to expand the scope of content of oral education and literary practices. While at the macro level, it gives a comprehensive explanation of the monastic education curriculum and how the curriculum has kept the Tibetan macro level structuration intact, with monks and nuns playing the role of social agents. At the end, it critiques the modern school education curriculum, noting its novelty in Tibetan society based on the author's research. This curriculum has tremendous effects, impacting both oral traditions and traditional monastic curriculum. The author suggests developing mutual coordination among the three forms of education to foster social development of the Tibetan society. Furthermore, it highlights underlying issues within both oral and literate societies regarding their development, which is marked by both external and internal factors.



Despite these strengths, the book is not without limitations. At times, the theoretical synthesis between Giddens and Je Tsongkhapa risks appear novel rather than systematically integrated, particularly when concepts such as “ultimate reality” are extended into the sociological domain without fully resolving the potential epistemological tensions between religious philosophy and social theory. Moreover, while the author is critical of the universalist claims of Western sociology, his reliance on Giddens as the primary external theoretical anchor reproduces a hierarchy in which Tibetan analytical traditions are positioned as complementary rather than co-equal sources of sociological theory. Empirically, the study’s historical-theoretical orientation means that contemporary Tibetan social differentiation—particularly along lines of class, gender, and region in post-reform China—receives less sustained analysis than readers might expect. Furthermore, this approach leaves some claims about present-day structuration under-substantiated, as well as the possible new structuration underway in the exile Tibetan community. These ongoing shifts are driven by various factors including the environment, the duration of alienation from the Tibet, the introduction of Indian languages, and the mass migration of Tibetan youths to the west.

Nonetheless, these limitations do not diminish the book’s overall significance, as it lays the foundation of Tibetan sociology. Additionally, while the book is extremely rich in both theory and empirical evidences, it may obstruct school students and the layperson to grasp the content in a comprehensive manner. Consequently, this can hinder them from formulating new research questions and hypothesis, as well as significantly better understand their own society.

Several new questions emerge from this foundational sociological book on Tibetan Society, since the data for this particular book were driven mostly from inside Tibet: How far is it applicable to the Tibetan society in exile residing in India? What’s the structure and agent in the Tibetan society in exile? How far does the Indian national school curriculum reshape the perception, culture, and agent of the Tibetan youths in exile? In relation to the author’s suggestion to include Tibet’s Epic of King Geser in the school curriculum, is it already being taught in the Tibetan schools run by Central Tibetan Administration, and what will be the advantages and obstacles in teaching such an epic? According to the author, a Revered Buddhist master (Tib: Rinpoche) is a prominent social agent. is this role also applicable in the Tibetan society in exile, and what function

can they play during community disputes? Further, if their interventions result in failure, how far is it appropriate to continue calling them social agents, and it may be pertinent to question why they failed despite being social agents?

According to the author, literate (monastic) tradition of education is one of the fundamental factor for the lack of social and economic development. However, in the Tibetan society in exile, it is clearly visible that monasteries and Buddhism in general play a critical and fundamental role in the social development and political advocacy of the Tibet issue. It is important to understand why the change in the legal status of Tibetans to refugees brought Buddhism and monasteries into prominence as key figures in socio-economic development as well as political importance?

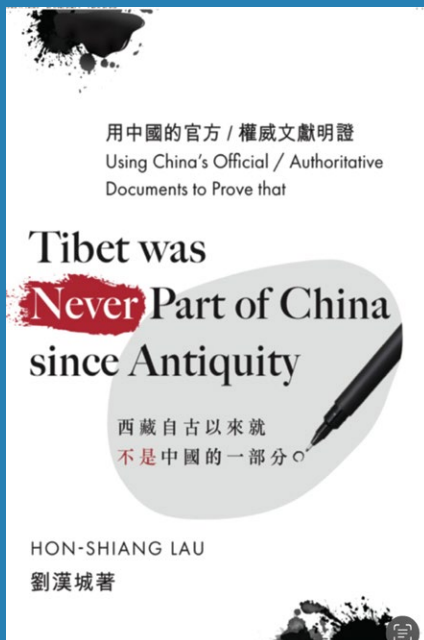
In fact, the books succeeds in opening a new analytical space in which Tibetan society can be understood neither just as a part of tradition nor a passive recipient of state power, but rather as a complex, reflexive social formation shaped by the interaction of spirituality, education, and agency. For scholars of Tibetan studies, sociology of education, and comparative social theory, the author’s work represents a foundational text that challenges

disciplinary boundaries and invites further empirical and theoretical refinement. Furthermore, the book's most interesting contribution is integrating the school of education into the structuration of the society, and using Tibetan education systems to structure the Tibetan society. Most importantly, the book is recommended for the researchers and scholars who have an interest in the Tibetan studies and sociology in particular.

Rinzin Namgyal is a Research Associate at the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives and a NASC (2025–2026) Fellow at Takshashila Institution, Bangalore. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Chinese Studies at the University of Delhi, where he also completed his Master's degree in East Asian Studies with a specialisation in China.

Recommended Readings

1



TIBET WAS NEVER PART OF CHINA SINCE ANTIQUITY

Hong Shang Lau

Publisher: Optimum Publishing International

Pages: 1268

Price: Canadian \$80

Release Date: February, 2026

ISBN - 13: 978-0888903785

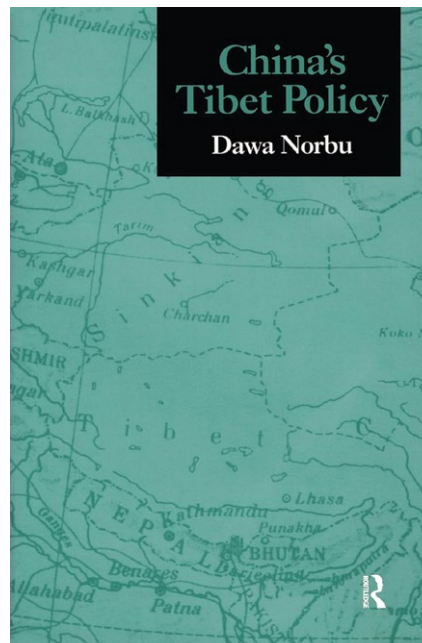
As a signatory to the League of Nations and United Nations covenants, China promised not to conquer new territories after 1919. Therefore, after the People's Republic of China (PRC) conquered Tibet in 1950, she saw the necessity of lying to the world that Tibet has always been an inseparable part of China. In this groundbreaking work, Dr. Lau, Ph.D., dismantles that narrative with clarity and precision. Drawing on official Chinese sources, imperial records, treaties,

and eyewitness accounts, Lau demonstrates that Tibet's relationship with China was neither one of continuous subjugation nor sovereign control. Instead, he reveals a far more complex and independent Tibetan history that stands apart from Beijing's propaganda.

Dr. Lau (劉漢城), Ph.D., is an independent historian and scholar specializing in East Asian history, with a focus on Tibet's contested status and China's evolving territorial claims. His work has been published in leading journals and is widely cited by Tibet advocacy groups, academics, and policymakers. Known for his ability to bring clarity to complex historical disputes, Lau draws on both Chinese and Western sources, including many authoritative primary-source materials largely overlooked in mainstream narratives.

This book represents the culmination of decades of dedicated scholarship and stands as a landmark contribution to understanding Tibet's modern and historical identity.

2



CHINA'S TIBET POLICY

Dawa Norbu

Publisher: Routledge

Pages: 484

Price: British £200

Release Date: September, 2001

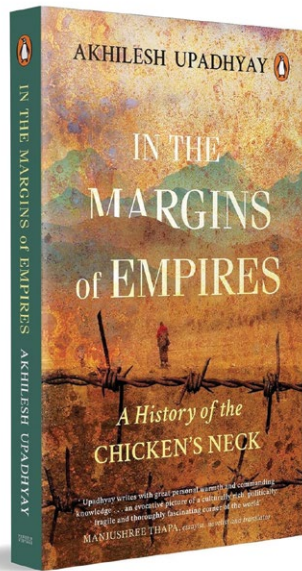
ISBN - 13: 978-0700704743

This major study analyses the traditional modes of Sino-Tibetan relations in order to unearth general patterns beyond partisan points of view. It sheds light on contemporary issues in the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, and discerns possible future structures for conflict resolution in occupied Tibet. With its economic

reforms, China is changing and will change more in the near future, thereby expanding the scope for freedom and democracy. It is in such a context that several leading Chinese intellectuals have, since the early 1990s, called for a fresh examination of the history of Sino-Tibetan relations in order to determine the actual status of Tibet. This book is a Tibetan's contribution to this great debate. Tibet is often viewed in isolation from other developments in Asia or the West. This book, for the first time, analyses the Tibetan question within the context of international politics, especially the roles of Britain, India, the USA and Russia in paving peaceful ways to conflict resolution in Tibet.

Prof. Dawa Norbu (1949-2006) was born in Tibet in 1949, one year before the Chinese invasion, and escaped with his family in 1959. He was educated at St. Stephens College in Delhi, India and received his doctorate from University of California, Berkeley (1976-1982). Prof. Dawa Norbu later worked as a professor of Central Asian studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is the author of *Red Star Over Tibet*, *Tibet: The Road Ahead*, and *China's Tibet Policy*. Norbu has had scholarly papers published in such journals as *China Quarterly*, *Asian Survey*, *Royal Central Asian Society Journal*, *International Studies* and *Pacific Affairs*.

3



**IN THE MARGINS OF
EMPIRES: A HISTORY OF
THE CHICKEN NECK**
Akhilesh Upadhyay

Publisher: Penguin Vintage Books
Pages: 328
Price: ₹ 499
Release Date: 8th November, 2025
ISBN - 13: 978-0143466215

The Himalaya has always been a contested region and has gained even more political salience after the 1962 Sino-Indian border war and, more so in recent times, with the rise of India and China. What gets lost are the voices and lives

of the people who actually call the Himalaya home. This book documents the lives and livelihoods of the borderlands in the Eastern Himalayan region - Nepal, Bhutan, pre-1950 Tibet and the post-1950 Tibetan Autonomous Region, Sikkim, Darjeeling, and India's North-East.

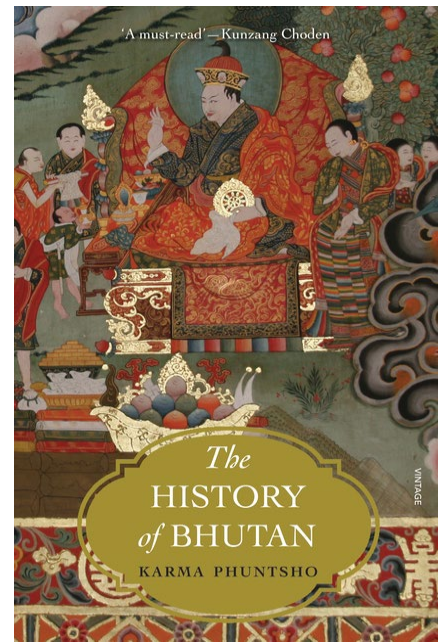
The book is an effort to look at the region as an organic whole, from within the region, connected through centuries of transboundary traders, travellers, scholars, monastic exchanges, but also by missionaries, monks, and moles.

As border infrastructure across the Himalaya in TAR and India is being constantly upgraded, and as India and China play a cat-and-mouse game, smaller states and communities in the borderlands, including the Chicken's Neck, find themselves caught up in the larger geopolitical arena. With fresh analysis, great insight, and on-the-ground reportage, the author tells the story of the region and of communities that remain wedged between giants, yet are also shaping their own futures in the shadow of the Himalaya's peaks.

Akhilesh Upadhyay is the policy lead for the Center for Geostategic Affairs at the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), a Kathmandu-based think tank. He led the Kathmandu Post as editor-in-chief from 2008 to 2018. His

multicultural New York experiences echo in his stories of borderlands. Akhilesh's research is reflected in his column *View from the Himalaya* for Hindustan Times, focuses on how China and India's near-concurrent rise, the great Sino-US power rivalry, and Asian powers impact this region. He has written for *New York Times*, *Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express*, *the Wire (India)*, *ThePrint*, *Flipboard*, *MSN India*, *Kantipur* and *Kathmandu Post*.

4



THE HISTORY OF BHUTAN

Karma Phuntso

Publisher: Penguin Vintage Books
 Pages: 680
 Price: ₹ 999
 Release Date: April, 2013
 ISBN - 13: 978-8184003116

In recent years, the remote kingdom of Bhutan has increasingly attracted the attention of the world. In 2008, it emerged as the world's youngest democracy and in the same year crowned the world's youngest monarch. This was followed by the new King's colourful wedding in 2011. Today, it continues to enchant the rest of the world with its policy of Gross National Happiness and has become a very popular destination for travel. But, despite its growing popularity and the rising scholarly interest in the country, Bhutan remains one of the most poorly studied places on earth.

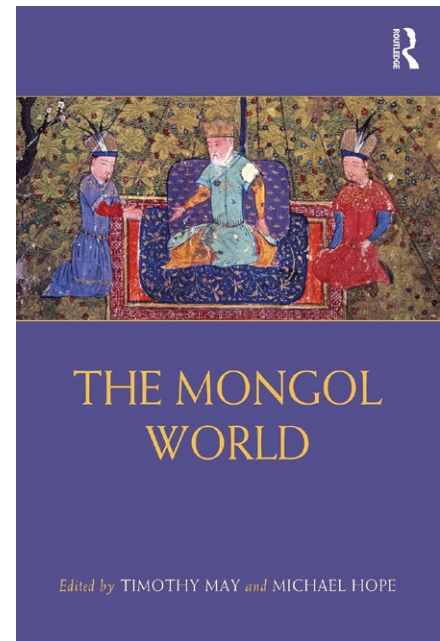
Karma Phuntsho's *The History of Bhutan* is the first-ever attempt to cover the entire history of Bhutan in some detail in English, combining both traditional perspectives and modern academic analysis. Written by a leading expert on the country, the book tells the story of Bhutan in a narrative style interspersed with some analytical and topical discussion, and numerous citations and translations from earlier writings. It is primarily a historical account, but it also includes

substantive discussions of Bhutan's geography, culture and society to give the readers an incisive introduction to the country.

Dr Karma Phuntsho is a leading scholar on Bhutan and teaches Buddhism and Bhutan Studies in the country and abroad. He finished his full monastic training and even taught at the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute in Bylakuppe before he joined Oxford University to pursue a D.Phil. in Oriental Studies. Since 2003, he has worked as a research fellow at Cambridge University and CNRS, Paris. The author of several books and numerous articles, he speaks and writes extensively on Bhutan's history, religion and culture.

His current work focuses on the documentation and study of Bhutan's written and oral cultures. He is also an enthusiastic social worker and the founder of the Loden Foundation, a leading educational charity in Bhutan.

5



THE MONGOL WORLD

Timothy May and Micheal Hope
(Ulambayar Erdenebat has contributed one chapter here in the book)

Publisher: Routledge
 Pages: 1100
 Price: British £47.99
 Release Date: February, 2015
 ISBN - 13: 978-1032244839

Drawing upon research carried out in several different languages and across a variety of disciplines, *The Mongol World* documents how Mongol rule shaped the trajectory of Eurasian history from Central

Europe to the Korean Peninsula, from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century.

Contributing authors consider how intercontinental environmental, economic, and intellectual trends affected the Empire as a whole and, where appropriate, situate regional political, social, and religious shifts within the context of the broader Mongol Empire. Issues pertaining to the Mongols and their role within the societies that they conquered therefore take precedence over the historical narrative of the societies that they conquered. Alongside the formation, conquests, administration, and political structure of the Mongol Empire, the second section examines archaeology and art history, family and royal households, science and exploration, and religion, which provides greater insight into the social history of the Empire -- an aspect often neglected by traditional dynastic and political histories.

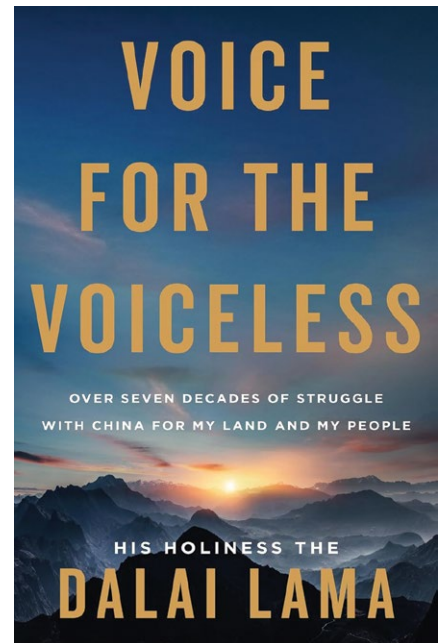
With 58 chapters written by both senior and early-career scholars, the volume is an essential resource for all students and scholars who study the Mongol Empire from its origins to its disintegration and legacy.

Timothy May (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Madison) is Professor of Central Eurasian History at the University of North Georgia and serves as Associate Dean of Arts & Letters. A scholar of the Mongol

Empire, he focuses on Mongol military history and strategy. He is the author of *The Mongol Art of War* (2007), *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (2012), *The Mongol Empire* (2018), *The Mongols* (2019), and *Simply Chinggis* (2021). In 2014, he was named the University of North Georgia Alumni Distinguished Professor, and he earned the UNG Distinguished Teaching Award in 2021.

Michael Hope (Ph.D., Australian National University) is Associate Professor of History at Yonsei University, Korea. He specializes in the political and cultural history of the Mongol Empire with a particular focus on the Ilkhanate. He is the author of *Power, Politics, and Tradition in the Mongol Empire and the Ilkhanate of Iran* (2016).

6



VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS: OVER SEVEN DECADES OF STRUGGLE WITH CHINA FOR MY LIFE AND MY PEOPLE

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Publisher: Thorsons, Harper Collins

Pages: 272

Price: ₹ 400

Release Date: March, 2025

ISBN - 13: 978-0008774097

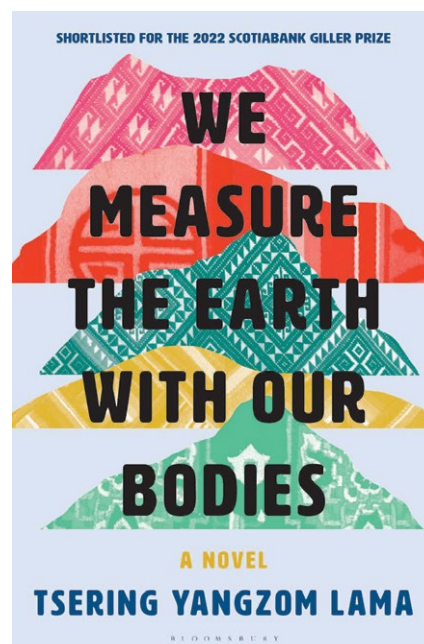
In this unique book, His Holiness the Dalai Lama tells the full story of his 75-year struggle with China to save Tibet and its people. The Dalai Lama has had to contend with the

People's Republic of China his entire life. He was 15 years old when communist China invaded Tibet in 1950, only 19 when he had his first meeting with Chairman Mao in Beijing, and 24 when he was forced to escape to India and became a leader in exile. Almost 75 years after China's initial invasion of Tibet, the Dalai Lama has faced communist China's leaders – Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping – in his effort to protect Tibet and its people.

In *Voice for the Voiceless*, the Dalai Lama reminds the world of Tibet's unresolved struggle for freedom and the hardship his people continue to face in their homeland. The book captures his extraordinary life, uncovering what it means to lose your home to a repressive invader and build a life in exile; dealing with the existential crisis of a nation, its people, and its culture and religion; and envisioning the path forward. This book is a powerful testimony from a global icon, sharing both his pain and his enduring hope in his people's ongoing quest to restore dignity and freedom.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the spiritual leader of Tibet and a global beacon of peace. Born in 1935, he was recognized as the reincarnation of his predecessor at age two. Since being forced into exile in 1959, he has led the Tibetan government-in-

exile and advocated for compassion, non-violence, and human rights. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and has been awarded several prestigious awards. He is the author of many books and lives in Dharamshala, India.



**WE MEASURE THE WORLD
WITH OUT BODIES**
Tsering Yangzom Lama

Publisher: Bloomsbury Publishing
India
Pages: 368
Price: ₹ 699

Release Date: January, 2023
ISBN - 13: 978-9356402256

In the wake of China's invasion of Tibet throughout the 1950s, Lhamo and her younger sister, Tenkyi, arrive at a refugee camp in Nepal. They survived the dangerous journey across the Himalayas, but their parents did not. As Lhamo-haunted by the loss of her homeland and her mother, a village oracle-tries to rebuild a life amid a shattered community, hope arrives in the form of a young man named Samphel and his uncle, who brings with him the ancient statue of the Nameless Saint-a relic known to vanish and reappear in times of need.

Decades later, the sisters are separated, and Tenkyi is living with Lhamo's daughter, Dolma, in Toronto. While Tenkyi works as a cleaner and struggles with traumatic memories, Dolma vies for a place as a scholar of Tibetan Studies. But when Dolma comes across the Nameless Saint in a collector's vault, she must decide what she is willing to do for her community, even if it means risking her dreams.

Breathtaking in its scope and powerful in its intimacy, *We Measure the Earth with Our Bodies* is a gorgeously written meditation on colonization, displacement and the lengths we'll go to remain

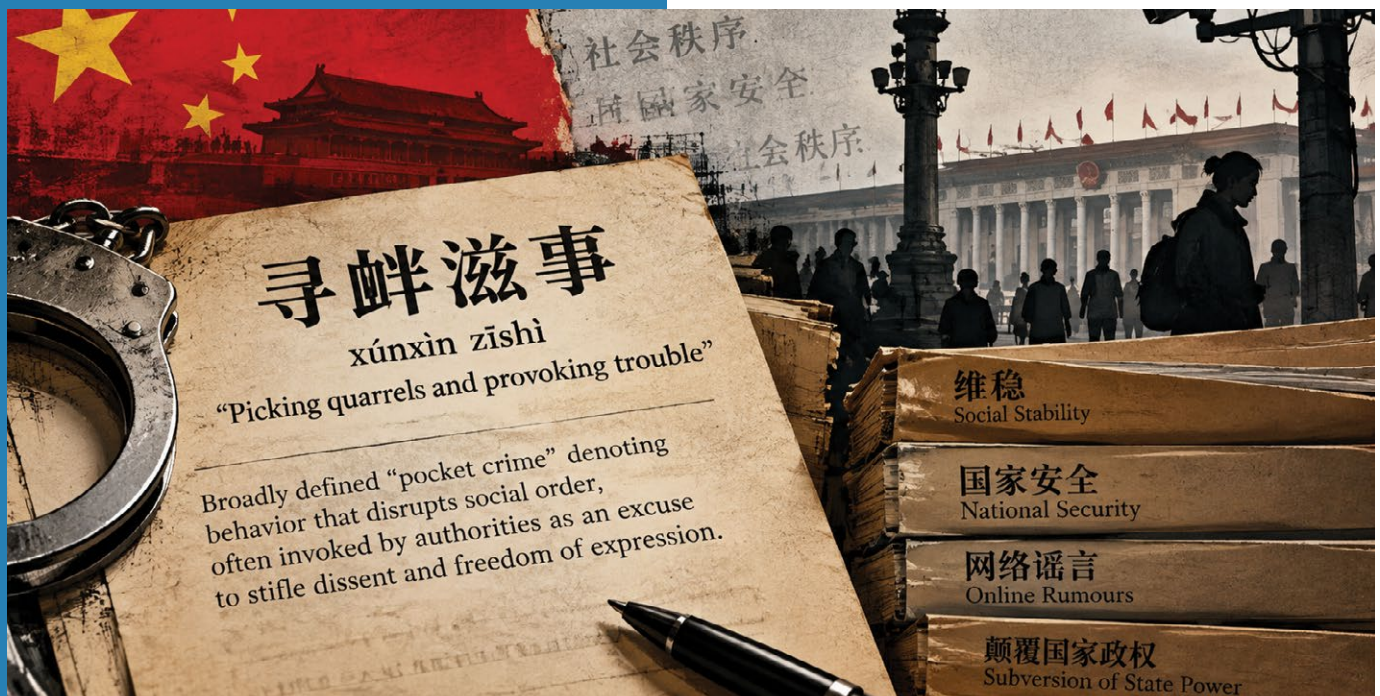


connected to our families and ancestral lands. Told through the lives of four people over fifty years, this novel provides a nuanced, moving portrait of the little-known world of Tibetan exiles.

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Decoding China's Political Language

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Picking Quarrels and Provoking Trouble (寻衅滋事 xúnxìn zīshì) Broadly defined “pocket crime” denoting behavior that disrupts social order, often invoked by authorities as an excuse to stifle dissent and freedom of expression.

“Picking quarrels and provoking trouble” originates from the crime of hooliganism, which was outlined in the Chinese criminal code of 1979. In the 1997 revision of the code, the crime of “hooliganism” was abolished and replaced with “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” an offense that applied to



1. arbitrarily attacking people;
2. chasing and intimidating others;
3. damaging private or public property; or
4. causing serious disorder in public places.

In 2013, judicial authorities broadened the scope of the crime to apply to spreading false information on the internet. The crime carries a sentence of up to five years in prison for minor offenses, and between five and ten years in prison for more serious offenses.

Given its broad definition, “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” is typically used as a catch-all offense to target activists, lawyers, journalists, and petitioners, as well as those committing more mundane offenses involving gambling or drunkenness. Some notable people charged with the crime in recent years include the “Feminist Five,” who attempted to raise awareness about sexual harassment before their arrest in March 2015. #MeToo activist and journalist Huang Xueqin was also charged with the crime in October 2019, and later detained in September 2021 for “inciting subversion of state power.” Businessman Sun Dawu was charged with “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” in November 2020, likely due to his political activism. That same month, citizen journalist Zhang Zhan was charged with the crime and

sentenced to four years in prison for documenting the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2022, police in Suzhou accused a woman of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” for wearing a kimono amid rising anti-Japanese sentiment. After the A4 White Paper protests in November 2022, hundreds of young people were detained and some of them, including book editor Cao Zhixin and her friends, were charged with “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” Many others, including Weibo bloggers and Uyghurs in Xinjiang, have also been detained under the same charge. Criticism of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” has been growing. Luo Xiang, a prominent professor of criminal law at China University of Political Science and Law, said in a public lecture that the crime was a “disgrace to the law,” adding that if conviction and sentencing for the crime were too vague, the police and judiciary “will use it indiscriminately, they will use it to do everything as they want, and they will selectively enforce the law.” Agreeing with Luo ahead of the 2023 Two Sessions meeting in February, Zhu Zhengfu, a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference advisory body, called for abolishing the crime because it risked undermining China’s legal system and was too open to “selective enforcement” by authorities. In August 2023, the Supreme People’s

Court published an investigation concluding that local officials in Zhejiang and Fujian had abused the vaguely defined crime in order to prosecute young people, migrant workers, unemployed people, and those who tried to petition higher authorities outside the normal legal channels.

A March 2023 WeChat article by law professor and legal blogger Zhai Zhiyong suggested that it might be better to do away with the offense of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” rather than try to make it less vague by tinkering with it: “In short, if a particular legal offense is frequently abused or misapplied and thus creates logical contradictions within the legal system, it must mean that there is a problem with the law itself. From this perspective, the more thorough and direct solution might be to simply abolish the crime of picking quarrels and provoking trouble, rather than attempt to eliminate its ambiguities.

The Trans Himalaya Lexicon

Key People, Places, Institutions and Concepts

This Reference Guide explains the principal historical, political, religious, legal, and strategic terms appearing throughout this inaugural issue of Trans Himalaya. It is intended to assist readers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds by providing concise explanations and contextual information.

ADMINISTRATIVE & POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY.

Tibet,

Tibet lies at the centre of Asia, spanning 2.5 million square kilometres — by landmass, it would rank among the world's ten largest countries had it not been occupied by the PRC in 1950. Encircled by the Earth's highest mountains, this vast, arid plateau, with an average altitude of 14,000 feet, is home to unique ecosystems and the source of Asia's major rivers, supplying water to 85% of Asia's population. Historically home to the Tibetan people and defined by a distinct civilisation, language, religion, and political history, Tibet comprised three traditional provinces — Ü-Tsang, Kham, and

Amdo — with Lhasa as its political, administrative, and spiritual centre. As the heartland of Tibetan Buddhism, it occupies a singular place in the history, ecology, and geopolitics of Asia.

Amdo,

Amdo is the northeastern region of historic Tibet and forms one of its three traditional provinces, alongside Kham and Ü-Tsang. It has long been recognised as an important centre of Tibetan religious scholarship and cultural life, producing many prominent figures in Tibetan Buddhism, including His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Today, much of historic Amdo falls within Qinghai Province, while other Tibetan-populated areas are administered under Gansu and Sichuan Provinces by the People's Republic of China.

Kham,

Kham is one of the three traditional provinces of historic Tibet, located in eastern Tibet. Characterised by its rugged mountains, deep river valleys, and diverse cultural landscape, the region has long been recognised for its strong regional identities and vibrant monastic traditions. Historically, Kham occupied an important position in Tibetan trade networks and became known for its role in resistance movements during periods



of political upheaval. The region remains an integral part of Tibet's historical, cultural, and political landscape.

Ü-Tsang,

Ü-Tsang refers to the central and western regions of historic Tibet and has traditionally been regarded as the political and religious core of the Tibetan Plateau. The region includes **Lhasa**, Tibet's historic capital and spiritual centre, **Shigatse**, and many of Tibet's most important monasteries, administrative institutions, and centres of learning. Throughout much of Tibet's history, Ü-Tsang served as the seat of the **Gaden Phodrang Government** and the **Dalai Lama Institution**, making it central to Tibet's religious, cultural, and political development.

Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR),

The **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)** is an administrative region established by the **People's Republic of China** in 1965. It covers only part of historic Tibet, primarily central and western Tibet. Large Tibetan-populated areas of the traditional provinces of **Amdo** and **Kham** were incorporated into the neighbouring Chinese provinces of **Qinghai**, **Sichuan**, **Gansu**, and **Yunnan**. As a result, the TAR represents only a portion of historic Tibet and differs significantly from the traditional Tibetan understanding of Tibet's historical and cultural boundaries.

East Turkestan,

East Turkestan is the historic homeland of the **Uyghur people** and other predominantly Turkic Muslim communities of Central Asia. During the twentieth century, the region witnessed repeated movements for self-rule, including the establishment of the **First East Turkestan Republic (1933–1934)** and the **Second East Turkestan Republic (1944–1949)**. Following the establishment of the **People's Republic of China** in 1949, the region came under the control of the **Chinese Communist Party**, despite opposition from segments of the local population and the existence of East Turkestan independence movements. It is today administered as the **Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)**. In recent years, the region has become the focus of sustained international concern over documented reports of mass arbitrary detention, pervasive surveillance, restrictions on religious practice, coercive labour programmes, family separation, and policies aimed at reshaping Uyghur cultural, linguistic, and religious identity. These developments have placed East Turkestan at the centre of international debates on human rights, minority rights, religious freedom, and China's governance of its frontier regions.

Southern Mongolia,

Southern Mongolia is the historic

homeland of the Southern Mongols and forms part of the broader Mongolian cultural and historical world. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in **1949**, the region remained under Chinese rule and is today administered as the **Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region**. The term "**Southern Mongolia**" is preferred by many Southern Mongols, scholars, and advocacy organisations because it reflects the region's historical identity rather than its contemporary administrative designation. In recent decades, concerns have grown over policies affecting Mongolian-language education, demographic change, pastoral livelihoods, cultural heritage, and the preservation of Mongolian identity. Consequently, Southern Mongolia has become an important point of reference in discussions concerning indigenous rights, cultural assimilation, and the governance of China's frontier regions.

RACE AND IDENTITIES

This section introduces the indigenous peoples whose histories, identities, and experiences are central to the themes explored in this volume.

Tibetans

Tibet → Tibetans,

The Tibetans are the indigenous people of the Tibetan Plateau and the bearers of one of Asia's oldest

and most distinctive civilisations. Their history, religion, language, and cultural traditions are central to understanding Tibet's past and present.

Uyghurs

East Turkestan → Uyghurs,

The Uyghurs are a predominantly Turkic Muslim people indigenous to East Turkestan. Their language, culture, and history have evolved over centuries at the crossroads of Central Asian civilisation, and their contemporary experience has become an important focus of international attention.

Southern Mongols

Southern Mongolia → Southern Mongols,

The Southern Mongols are the indigenous Mongolian people of Southern Mongolia. They possess a distinct linguistic, cultural, and pastoral heritage and have played an important role in the history of Inner Asia.

GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONS (TIBETAN)

Central Tibetan Administration (CTA),

On 29 April 1959, following his arrival in India, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama established the Tibetan exile administration in the hill station of Mussoorie, Uttarakhand. Named the **Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)** of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it

represents the continuation of the government of independent Tibet. Subsequently headquartered in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, the CTA functions as the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the principal representative institution of Tibetans inside Tibet and across the global diaspora. It is responsible for democratic governance, education, religion, cultural preservation, healthcare, refugee welfare, and international outreach on behalf of the Tibetan people.

Gaden Phodrang,

Originally established in **1518**, the Gaden Phodrang became the traditional government of Tibet under the Dalai Lama Institution from the seventeenth century onwards. Based in Lhasa, it united religious and temporal authority, with the Dalai Lama serving as both Tibet's spiritual leader and head of government from **1642** onwards. The Gaden Phodrang remained Tibet's governing structure until **1959**, when the 14th Dalai Lama fled to India following the Tibetan Uprising. The institution subsequently continued in exile until **2011**, when His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama formally devolved his political authority to Tibet's democratically elected leadership. Today, the term retains enduring historical, symbolic, and institutional significance within Tibetan religious and political discourse.

Kashag,

The **Kashag** was the cabinet, or governing council, of Tibet under the traditional Gaden Phodrang system. Comprising both monastic and lay officials, it functioned as Tibet's principal executive authority, administering political, judicial, financial, and administrative affairs on behalf of the Dalai Lama. The institution remains historically significant in discussions concerning Tibetan governance, statehood, and political continuity. Today, the Kashag continues as the executive branch of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and is headed by Sikyong, the democratically elected political leader of the Tibetan people in exile, who serves a five-year term.

Sikyong,

The **Sikyong** is the democratically elected political leader of the **Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)**. The title, meaning **"Political Leader"** or **"Protector of the State,"** formally replaced the title of **Kalon Tripa** in **2012** as part of the democratic reforms initiated by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama following his devolution of political authority. In 2017, **'President'** was the official English rendering of Sikyong. As the head of the CTA, the Sikyong is responsible for providing political leadership to the Tibetan community in exile and overseeing the administration's executive functions.



CENTRAL TIBETAN ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE

Charter Of The Tibetans In Exile,

The Charter of the Tibetans

in Exile is the constitutional document governing the **Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)** and the Tibetan exile community. Adopted in **1991**, it sets out the organisation of the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions of the CTA, defines the rights and responsibilities of Tibetans in exile, and provides the legal basis for democratic governance. The Charter reflects the Dalai Lama's vision of a democratic political system founded on the principles of accountability, the rule of law, and the separation of powers. It also provides the constitutional framework within which the **Sikyong**, the **Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile**, and other institutions of the CTA operate.

Middle Way Approach,

The **Middle Way Approach** is the policy framework proposed by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama that seeks genuine autonomy for Tibet within the People's Republic of China rather than full independence. It advocates the protection of Tibet's religion, culture, language, and environment through peaceful dialogue and non-violence, while rejecting separatism. The policy remains central to the diplomatic position of

the Central Tibetan Administration and continues to guide its efforts to achieve a peaceful and mutually beneficial resolution of the Sino-Tibetan conflict.

Westphalian State System,

The **Westphalian State System** refers to the international order that emerged following the **Peace of Westphalia** in 1648. It established the principle that sovereign states exercise exclusive authority over a defined territory and population and are recognised as legally equal within the international system. Under this framework, governments generally derive their legitimacy from effective control over territory.

The Tibetan case presents a distinctive exception to this conventional model. Although the **Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)** does not exercise territorial jurisdiction over Tibet, it functions as the democratically elected representative institution of Tibetans both inside Tibet and in exile. Through its executive, legislative, and judicial institutions, the CTA administers the affairs of the Tibetan exile community while seeking to preserve Tibetan identity, uphold democratic governance, and represent the interests and aspirations of the wider Tibetan people. This unique constitutional arrangement has become an important case study in discussions of legitimacy, representation,

governments-in-exile, and international law.

RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY AND INSTITUTIONS

Nalanda Tradition,

The **Nalanda Tradition** refers to the classical Buddhist scholastic tradition that developed at **Nalanda Mahavihara** and other great monastic universities of ancient India between the fifth and twelfth centuries CE. Characterised by rigorous philosophical inquiry, logical reasoning, debate, ethics, and contemplative practice, it profoundly influenced the development of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. Following the decline of Buddhism in India, Tibetan scholars and monastic institutions preserved, translated, and further developed this intellectual tradition. Today, the Nalanda Tradition remains the philosophical and educational foundation of Tibetan Buddhism and continues to be promoted as a shared civilisational heritage linking India and Tibet.

Tibetan Buddhism,

Tibetan Buddhism is a form of **Vajrayana Buddhism** that developed in Tibet through the integration of Indian Buddhist philosophy, tantric traditions, and Tibetan cultural practices. It encompasses the four principal schools of **Nyingma**, **Kagyü**, **Sakya**, and **Gelug**, each contributing to

Tibet's rich religious and intellectual heritage. Beyond its spiritual teachings, Tibetan Buddhism has profoundly shaped Tibetan society, identity, education, art, architecture, literature, and systems of governance, making it one of the defining pillars of Tibetan civilisation.

Succession (In Tibetan Buddhism),

Succession in Tibetan Buddhism refers to the process through which spiritual leadership and authority are continued following the death of an important lama or religious figure. In many Tibetan Buddhist traditions, particularly in the case of reincarnate lamas (tulku) such as the **Dalai Lama** and the **Panchen Lama**, succession involves the recognition of a reincarnation believed to continue the spiritual lineage, responsibilities, and teachings of the previous incarnation. Traditionally, the process includes the interpretation of religious signs and visions, consultations with senior monks and oracles, and the identification of a child recognised as the reincarnation. The succession of senior religious leaders remains a deeply significant religious matter and has also assumed considerable political importance, particularly regarding the future recognition of the Dalai Lama.

Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig),

In Tibetan Buddhism, Avalokiteshvara—known in *Tibetan*

as *Chenrezig*—is the Bodhisattva of Compassion and one of the most venerated figures in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. The Dalai Lamas are traditionally regarded as manifestations or emanations of Avalokiteshvara, a belief that underpins both the spiritual authority of the Dalai Lama institution and its historical role within Tibetan society. Understanding this relationship is essential to appreciating the religious significance of the Dalai Lama and the wider geopolitical importance that the institution has acquired in contemporary Tibet-related affairs.

Tulku,

A **Tulku** is a reincarnated lama or spiritual master in Tibetan Buddhism who is recognised in accordance with established religious traditions and spiritual signs. The institution of Tulku reincarnation provides continuity of spiritual leadership across generations and has long been a fundamental feature of Tibetan Buddhist practice. Today, the Tulku tradition lies at the centre of contemporary debates surrounding the recognition and succession of senior religious leaders, most notably the Dalai Lama, where questions of religious authority and state involvement have assumed international significance.

Gaden Phodrang Trust,

Established in **2011** by His Holiness

the 14th Dalai Lama, the Gaden Phodrang Trust is a non-profit religious and institutional body responsible for overseeing matters connected to the Dalai Lama's spiritual and institutional legacy. In recent years, the Trust has acquired significant geopolitical importance following the Dalai Lama's declaration that it possesses the sole legitimate authority to recognise and oversee the process relating to the future reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. This position directly challenges attempts by the Chinese state to control or influence the succession process through state institutions and regulations.

Dalai Lama Institution,

The **Dalai Lama Institution** is the spiritual leadership institution of Tibetan Buddhism and has, for centuries, served as one of the defining pillars of Tibetan civilisation. Historically, the Dalai Lamas combined religious and temporal authority, providing spiritual guidance while also exercising political leadership in Tibet. The Dalai Lamas are traditionally regarded as manifestations of Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, a belief that underpins the institution's religious legitimacy and enduring significance within Tibetan society. Beyond its spiritual role, the institution has played a central part in Tibet's cultural identity, governance, diplomacy, and international engagement,



making it one of the most influential institutions in Tibetan history.

Panchen Lama,

The **Panchen Lama** is one of the highest-ranking religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism and occupies a position of profound spiritual significance within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Historically, the Panchen Lama has played an important role in the recognition of the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. The institution became the focus of international attention following the disappearance in 1995 of **Gedhun Choekyi Nyima**, who was recognised by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama. Subsequently, the Chinese government appointed a separate state-approved Panchen Lama, giving rise to one of the most significant and enduring controversies surrounding religious authority and state involvement in Tibetan Buddhism.

Khalkha Jetsun Dhampa,

The **Khalkha Jetsun Dhampa** is the highest-ranking reincarnate lama (Tulku) in Mongolia and the spiritual leader of the country's Gelug Buddhist tradition. The lineage was established in the seventeenth century and has historically maintained close religious and scholastic ties with Tibet, particularly through the Gelug school and the institution of the Dalai Lama. Following decades

of suppression under communist rule in Mongolia, the institution has experienced a revival. In 2023, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama publicly recognised the **10th Khalkha Jetsun Dhampa**, reaffirming the historic religious relationship between Tibet and Mongolia. The recognition also attracted international attention because of its implications for Tibetan Buddhism, regional diplomacy, and debates concerning religious freedom and state interference in the recognition of reincarnate lamas.

GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONS (PRC)

People's Republic Of China (PRC)

The **People's Republic of China (PRC)** is the sovereign state established on **1 October 1949** following the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War. Governed under a one-party political system led by the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**, the PRC administers the **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)** and Tibetan areas incorporated into the provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan. The policies and institutions of the PRC have profoundly shaped political, economic, social, and religious developments in Tibet since the 1950s.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP),

The **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** is the ruling political party of the **People's Republic of China**. Founded in **1921**, it exercises leadership over the state, military, and major public institutions. Through Party organs such as the **United Front Work Department**, the CCP formulates and implements policies relating to ethnic affairs, religion, governance, security, and development in Tibet. Understanding the distinction between the **CCP** as the ruling political party and the **PRC** as the sovereign state is essential to understanding contemporary Chinese governance and policy.

United Front Work Department,

The **United Front Work Department (UFWD)** is an organ of the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** responsible for influence operations, elite co-option, diaspora engagement, religious management, and political outreach. In the context of Tibet, the UFWD plays a central role in overseeing religious institutions, implementing ethnic policies, and shaping official narratives concerning Tibetan Buddhism, national identity, and loyalty to the Chinese state. As one of the Party's principal policy and coordination bodies, the UFWD occupies an important position in the administration of Tibet and the management of relations with Tibetan communities.

CHINESE POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE

Sinicisation,

Sinicisation refers to policies aimed at reshaping non-Han ethnic and religious communities in accordance with the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, political control, and Han cultural norms. In Tibet, these policies include measures affecting language use, monastery administration, education, urbanisation, and the management of religious institutions. As a result, Sinicisation has become a key concept in understanding the evolving relationship between the Chinese state and Tibetan society.

Patriotic Education,

Patriotic Education refers to political indoctrination campaigns conducted by the Chinese state in monasteries, schools, and other institutions across Tibet and minority regions. These programmes emphasise loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, opposition to what the state characterises as “separatism”, and acceptance of official narratives concerning national identity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Within Tibet, Patriotic Education has become an important component of state policy, influencing religious institutions, educational systems, and public life.

Civil-Military Fusion,

Civil-Military Fusion (CMF) is a strategic policy of the People’s Republic of China that seeks to integrate civilian technological, industrial, academic, and infrastructure development with the country’s military modernisation objectives. In Tibet and along the Himalayan frontier, this policy is reflected in the construction and expansion of dual-use infrastructure—including roads, railways, airports, communications networks, and border villages—that support both civilian activity and military operations. The increasing integration of civilian and defence capabilities has become an important feature of China’s approach to frontier development and strategic competition in the Himalayan region.

Ecological Civilisation,

Ecological Civilisation is a political and environmental concept promoted by the Chinese Communist Party as the guiding framework for environmental governance and sustainable development. While presented as a national strategy for ecological protection, critics argue that its implementation in Tibet and other frontier regions has been used to justify state-led ecological relocation programmes, expanded resource extraction, large-scale hydropower development, and increased administrative control

over local communities. As a result, the concept has become an important element in discussions concerning environmental governance, development policy, and state authority on the Tibetan Plateau.

One China Principle,

The **One China Principle** is the official policy of the **People’s Republic of China**, which maintains that there is only one China, that Taiwan forms an inseparable part of China, and that the Government of the People’s Republic of China is the sole legitimate government representing China. The principle originated in the context of cross-Straits relations between the PRC and the Republic of China (Taiwan). Since the 1970s, however, Beijing has increasingly sought to extend the application of the principle beyond Taiwan by encouraging or pressuring foreign governments, international organisations, and other institutions to apply it to Tibet and other territories. Critics argue that this conflates the distinct historical and legal status of these territories with the Taiwan question and represents an exercise in diplomatic, legal, and information warfare rather than a consequence of the original One China framework.

Xizang,

Xizang (西藏) is the official Chinese-language term used by the **People’s Republic of China** for



what it administers as the **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)**. In recent years, Chinese authorities have increasingly promoted the transliterated term “**Xizang**” in English-language publications, diplomatic communications, maps, and official documents in place of “**Tibet**”. **The term has not, however, replaced “Tibet” as the standard terminology used by most governments, international organisations, academic institutions, or international media.** Tibetan organisations, many scholars, parliamentarians, and human rights advocates have criticised the promotion of “**Xizang**”, arguing that it seeks to narrow the concept of Tibet to the administrative boundaries of the TAR and to diminish the broader historical, cultural, and geographical understanding of Tibet, which traditionally encompasses **U-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo**. Consequently, the use of the term has become an important issue in debates concerning historical identity, political narratives, cartography, and international diplomacy.

ECONOMICS, GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Political Economy,

Political economy is the study of how political institutions, state policies, and power relationships influence economic systems, the allocation of resources, and

patterns of development. Rather than viewing economic outcomes as the result of market forces alone, political economy examines how governments exercise authority over investment, production, trade, infrastructure, taxation, and natural resources to achieve political, strategic, or economic objectives. In the context of Tibet, the concept is used to analyse how state-led development, resource extraction, infrastructure expansion, and fiscal policies have reshaped the region’s economy and altered the relationship between local communities, natural resources, and the state.

Disempowered Development,

Disempowered development refers to a model of development in which economic growth is driven primarily by state investment and external actors, while local populations exercise limited influence over decisions affecting their land, livelihoods, natural resources, and future development. Although such development may generate improvements in infrastructure, public services, and economic output, critics argue that it often leaves indigenous communities with limited ownership of economic assets, reduced participation in decision-making, and diminished control over the benefits derived from local resources. In the context of Tibet, the concept has been used to analyse the relationship between

state-led development, resource extraction, fiscal policy, and the changing economic position of Tibetan communities within broader national development strategies.

Transfer Payments,

Transfer payments are government funds transferred from a central authority to regional governments, institutions, or individuals without requiring a corresponding exchange of goods or services. They are commonly used to finance public administration, infrastructure, education, healthcare, social welfare, and regional development. In the context of Tibet, transfer payments from the central government have played a major role in financing economic development and public services. While these transfers have supported investment and infrastructure, they have also featured prominently in discussions concerning fiscal dependency, the sustainability of regional development, local economic autonomy, and the relationship between state investment and long-term economic self-sufficiency.

STRATEGIC RESOURCES AND GEOPOLITICS

Critical Minerals,

Critical minerals are naturally occurring mineral resources considered vital to a country’s economic prosperity, technological

development, and national security, but whose supply may be vulnerable to disruption. They include rare earth elements as well as minerals such as **lithium, cobalt, graphite, copper, nickel, chromium, and tungsten**, which are indispensable for batteries, semiconductors, electric vehicles, aerospace technologies, telecommunications, and advanced defence systems. In recent years, geological surveys have identified substantial deposits of critical minerals across the **Tibetan Plateau**, leading to increased exploration and extraction activities. These developments have heightened the Plateau's strategic importance while also raising concerns regarding environmental sustainability, water security, biodiversity, and the impact of large-scale mining on Tibetan communities and fragile high-altitude ecosystems.

SECURITY AND STRATEGY

Sino-Indian Boundary Question, The ***Sino-Indian Boundary Question*** refers to the unresolved territorial dispute between **India and China** along their Himalayan frontier. The dispute encompasses the **western, middle, and eastern sectors**, including **Aksai Chin** and **Arunachal Pradesh**, and continues to shape the strategic relationship between the two countries. As reflected in this volume, the contemporary boundary dispute is closely linked to developments

following China's entry into Tibet in the 1950s, which fundamentally altered the geopolitical landscape of the Himalayas and transformed the nature of India's northern frontier.

Buffer State,

A **buffer state** is a geographically situated political entity positioned between major competing powers, often serving to reduce direct confrontation and strategic rivalry. Historically, Tibet fulfilled this role by separating British India from the expanding influence of Tsarist Russia and, subsequently, the People's Republic of China. The erosion of Tibet's de facto autonomy during the 1950s fundamentally altered the strategic geography of the Himalayas, replacing a traditional buffer with a direct India–China frontier. This transformation continues to shape the security dynamics, military posture, and geopolitical calculations of both countries.

Grey Zone Warfare,

Grey Zone Warfare refers to coercive activities that fall below the threshold of conventional armed conflict but are designed to alter strategic realities incrementally. Along the Himalayan frontier, such activities may include cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, border incursions, infrastructure expansion, psychological pressure, and influence operations aimed at shifting political or territorial

outcomes without triggering a conventional military response. The concept has become central to understanding the evolving character of strategic competition and statecraft in the India–China border region.

TREATIES, BORDERS AND HISTORICAL AGREEMENTS

Simla Convention (1914),

The **Simla Convention** was a tripartite conference held between **Britain, Tibet, and China** from **1913 to 1914** in Shimla to discuss Tibet's status and boundaries. Although China ultimately refused to ratify the agreement, Britain and Tibet initiated and accepted the Convention and its related boundary arrangements. The Convention continues to hold considerable historical significance in debates concerning Tibet's international status and the evolution of the Himalayan boundary.

McMahon Line,

The **McMahon Line** is the boundary negotiated between British India and Tibet during the **Simla Conference of 1914** by Sir Henry McMahon and Tibetan representatives. India regards the McMahon Line as the legal boundary between India and Tibet/China in the eastern sector of the Himalayan frontier. China, however, disputes its legitimacy, making it one of the central issues



in the unresolved Sino-Indian Boundary Question.

17-Point Agreement,

The **17-Point Agreement** officially called the “Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet (1951)” was signed in **Beijing on 23 May 1951** between representatives of the **Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China** and the **Local Government of Tibet**. The Chinese delegation was led by **Li Weihai**, Chairman of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, while the Tibetan delegation was headed by **Ngabo Ngawang Jigme**, Governor of Chamdo, together with **Sampho Tenzin Dhondup**, **Kheme Sonam Wangdu**, **Tubten Lhundup**, and **Tendhar (Kalsang Tendhar)**. The Agreement recognised Chinese sovereignty over Tibet while promising to preserve Tibet’s existing political system, the authority of the Dalai Lama, religious freedom, and internal autonomy. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile has consistently maintained that the Agreement was signed under military coercion following the PLA’s invasion, that the Tibetan delegation lacked full powers to conclude such an agreement, and that the Tibetan national seal was not used. Following the **1959 Tibetan National Uprising** and His Holiness the **14th Dalai Lama’s**

arrival in India, the Agreement was formally repudiated on the grounds that it had been imposed under duress and had been repeatedly violated by the Chinese authorities.

Tibet Highlights

JULY 2026

UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Tibet Condemns China's 'Ethnic Unity and Progress Law' as an Instrument of Forced Assimilation



The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Tibet has strongly condemned the implementation of China's so-called

"Ethnic Unity and Progress Law", warning that the legislation institutionalises the Chinese government's policy of forced assimilation and poses serious threats to Tibetans and other ethnic nationalities both within China and beyond its borders. The parliamentary group stated that the law targets not only Tibetans but also Uyghurs, Southern Mongolians and other ethnic nationalities by threatening their languages, cultures, religions and identities. The APPG further raised alarm over the law's implications beyond China's borders. It highlighted Article 63 of the legislation, which it said provides a basis for Chinese authorities to target individuals and organisations overseas accused of having "undermined ethnic unity". According to the group, this raises serious concerns for Tibetans, human rights defenders, researchers, parliamentarians and others in the United Kingdom exercising their fundamental freedoms.

Geneva Lawmaker Condemns China's Ethnic Unity Law as "A Dark Day" for Cultural Diversity



Cedric Jeanneret, Member of the Grand Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, has strongly condemned the entry into force of China's new Law on Ethnic Unity and Progress, describing 1 July 2026 as "a dark day" for the country's ethnic minorities and cultural diversity. He warned that the legislation represents a serious assault on the cultural identities and constitutional rights of Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, and other non-Han peoples living under the People's Republic of China.

German Parliamentary State Secretary Michael Brand Urges Repeal of China's "Ethnic Unity Law," Warns of Threat to Tibetan Ancient Cultures



Hon. Michael Brand, Member of the German Parliament and Parliamentary State Secretary to the German Government, has issued a strongly worded video statement condemning China's new "Ethnic Unity Law." In his message, he called on people around the world to join the protest and urge China's leaders to repeal what he described as a racist attack on ancient cultures and peoples. If China succeeds in implementing this policy, Like the European Parliament in April and the Czech Senate in March, we categorically condemn this racist legislation. Experts have warned against it, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for its repeal as recently as June 2026.

States Condemn China's Human Rights Violations and Raise Alarm Over 'Ethnic Unity Law' at the 62nd Session of UNHRC



The United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the Czech Republic

expressed continued concern over the human rights situation in Tibet, East Turkestan and Hong Kong during the 62nd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), warning that it could serve as a mechanism for forced assimilation and further restrict the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

Tibetan Activist Self-Immolates outside the UN in New York

Tibetan activist Lobga Rangzen (also known as Lobsang Palden) self-immolated outside the United Nations headquarters in New York on July 2, 2026, just one day after China's controversial "Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress" went into effect on July 1, 2026. Lobga Rangzen is the first Tibetan to self-immolate in the United States, and the 170th Tibetan to carry out this form of protest. Of these 170 cases, 159 occurred inside Tibet under Chinese rule, while 11 have taken place in exile (primarily in India and Nepal), with Lobga Rangzen being the first case outside of Asia.



Belgian Foreign Minister Affirms Dalai Lama's Succession Is Solely a Matter for the Tibetan Buddhist Community



Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation Maxime Prévot reaffirmed that

the succession of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is exclusively a matter for the Tibetan Buddhist community and must take place without interference from secular authorities.

Responding on behalf of the Belgian Government, Minister Prévot stated unequivocally that "the succession of the Dalai Lama is a matter for the Tibetan community itself, without interference from secular authorities." He added that he shares the concerns regarding the human rights situation in Tibet, freedom of religion and the cultural rights of the Tibetan people.

Belgian Parliament Questions Government on China's Ethnic Unity Law and Risks of Transnational Repression

During the final meeting of the Belgian Federal Parliament's Foreign



Affairs Committee before the summer recess, held on 15 July 2026, parliamentarians have called on the federal government to take a strong stance against China's new Ethnic Unity Law, warning that it could further institutionalise the assimilation of ethnic groups and extend repression beyond China's borders. The MPs expressed serious concern that the legislation provides a legal framework for the continued erosion of the cultural, linguistic and religious rights of Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols and other groups.

Statement by Tibet Support Group in Estonian Parliament and the Members of Riigikogu on China's Law on 'Ethnic Unity and Progress'



On the occasion of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 91st birthday celebration, members of the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu), led by Juku-Kalle Raid,

Head of the Tibet Support Group in the Estonian Parliament, issued a strong statement expressing solidarity with Tibet and condemning the PRC's new "Ethnic Unity and Progress Law".

The statement carries the signatures of 51 out of 101 members of the Riigikogu, representing a symbolic majority and demonstrating broad parliamentary support for Tibet.

The Estonian Parliament has consistently shown its support and solidarity with Tibet, highlighting concerns regarding Tibet's historical status and the impact of China's occupation.

Secretary Jigme Tsering Assumes Charge as the New Representative of Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi

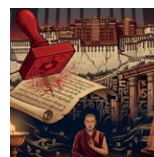


Following the appointment of Secretary Jigme Tsering as the new Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi, the formal handover and takeover of responsibilities took place on 28 July 2026 at the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, New Delhi.

Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile Advances Tibet Advocacy Campaign During India's Monsoon Session



Continuing its Tibet advocacy campaign in the Indian capital, the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, led by Deputy Speaker Khenpo Sonam Tenphel, met with Indian Union Minister of State and Members of the Parliament on the fourth day of its outreach programme. Divided into two delegations, the Tibetan parliamentary representatives engaged with Indian Union Minister of State and lawmakers to raise awareness about the People's Republic of China's Ethnic Unity and Progress Law. They also highlighted the self-immolation protest of Tibetan activist Lobga Rangzen outside the United Nations Headquarters in opposition to the legislation.



The New Law on Ethnic Unity comes into Law 1st July

JUNE 2026

Six Kalons of the 17th Kashag of the Central Tibetan Administration Sworn



The elected Ministers, Tsegyal Chukya Dranyi, Kashag Secretary; Palden Dhondup, Secretary of the Department of Home; Tsering Dhondup Gyangser, Secretary of the Department of Finance; Ugyen Tenzin, former Tibetan Parliamentarian; Kunga Tashi, Tibetan Liaison Officer at the Office of Tibet in Washington, D.C., USA and former CTA Secretary; and Pema Tso, Tibetan Parliamentarian took oath of office, before Yeshe Wangmo, the Chief Justice of the Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission

Members of the 18th Parliament-in-Exile Sworn in



The newly elected members of the 18th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile were sworn in during a ceremony held at the Parliament Hall today at 10:00 a.m., in the presence of Sikyong Penpa Tsering. In accordance with the Charter of Tibetans in Exile, the newly elected parliamentarians took their oath or affirmation of office before Interim Speaker Dawa Tsering. Prior to the swearing-in ceremony, Chief Justice Commissioner Yeshe Wangmo of the Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission (TSJC) administered the oath of office to the Interim Speaker Speaker-elect Dolma Tsering Teykhang and Deputy Speaker-elect Khenpo Sonam Tenphel of the 18th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile took their oaths of office from Tibetan Chief Justice Commissioner Yeshe Wangmo. Speaker Dolma Tsering Teykhang becomes the first woman to serve as Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile — a landmark moment for Tibetan exile governance.

Deputies of Chile and El Salvador Visit Tibetan Parliament

Deputies Luis Mala Valenzuela of Chile and Jose Francisco Lira Alvarado of El Salvador visited the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile on 25 May 2026 and met with Speaker Khenpo Sonam Tenphel and Deputy Speaker Dolma Tsering Teykhang.



Penpa Tsering Sworn In for Second Term as Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration



Penpa Tsering was sworn in as the Sikyong of the 17th Kashag of the Central Tibetan Administration in the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama following his re-election as the 6th directly elected Sikyong. The ceremony was attended by distinguished international guests, including a cross-party parliamentary delegation from the United Kingdom, parliamentarians from Chile and El Salvador, and Indian representatives including Lok Sabha MP Tapir Gao, Rajya Sabha MP Sujeet Kumar, and Atya Nanda of the National Commission for Minorities.

Dolma Tsering Teykhang and Khenpo Sonam Tenphel Elected Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the 18th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile



In accordance with the rules and regulations of the Tibetan Election Commission, members of the 18th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile elected Dolma Tsering Teykhang as Speaker and Khenpo Sonam Tenphel as Deputy Speaker through a secret ballot conducted this afternoon.

Dolma Tsering Teykhang was elected Speaker with 22 votes against Khenpo Sonam Tenphel, who received 20 votes. Three ballots were declared invalid. With her election, Teykhang becomes the first woman to serve as Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile.

The 68th Anniversary of Chushi Gangdruk and the 37th Anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre, Sydney



Dawa Sangmo, Chinese Liaison Officer of the Tibet Information Office, participated in Sydney commemorations marking the 68th anniversary of Chushi Gangdruk and the 37th anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre, highlighting the organisation's legacy, China's continuing Sinicisation policies in Tibet, and the need for greater youth participation in Tibet advocacy. At the Tiananmen commemoration, she expressed solidarity with the pursuit of democracy and constitutional governance in China, recalled the Dalai Lama's support for the 1989 student movement, and outlined the CTA's Middle Way Approach as a mutually beneficial resolution to the Sino-Tibetan conflict.

MAY 2026

New US Senate Bill Would Require State Department to Examine China's Atrocities in Tibet

On 29 April 2026, Senators Rick Scott (R-FL) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) introduced the bipartisan Tibet Atrocities Determination Act (S. 4432), which would require the U.S. Secretary of State to determine whether actions by Chinese authorities in Tibet constitute genocide or crimes against humanity and publicly report the evidentiary basis for that determination. The proposed legislation would also require consideration of issues including the suppression of Tibetan religion, language and culture, forced transfer of children, detention and other alleged abuses, while allowing consultation with Tibetan experts, human-rights organisations and members of the Tibetan diaspora.



TIPA Successfully Concludes Historic Cultural Performance in Bratislava, Slovakia

The Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) presented its first-ever performance in Slovakia at the City Theatre of P.O. Hviezdoslav in Bratislava, attended by more than 200 people, including Slovak political and cultural figures. The 26-member delegation showcased traditional Tibetan songs, dances and a theatre production highlighting the impact of China's boarding-school policies on Tibetan language, culture and identity, with Slovak subtitles and live interpretation. Organised by the Office of Tibet Geneva with local support, the programme promoted Tibetan cultural heritage while raising awareness in Slovakia about the contemporary situation in Tibet, including through local media interviews with TIPA artists and its director.



TIPA Showcases Tibetan Cultural Heritage in Vienna

the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) presented a special cultural evening in Vienna, showcasing traditional Tibetan songs and dances to around 40 invited guests, including Austrian supporters of the arts, members of the Tibetan community and young volunteers. TIPA Director Dhondup Tsering introduced the institute's history and mission and explained the objectives of its European cultural tour, which featured 26 artists from India. The event generated strong appreciation for Tibetan performing arts, with guests expressing interest in supporting TIPA's participation in major cultural festivals and encouraging greater international visibility and promotion of Tibetan culture.



EU Pledges to Press Nepal on Tibetan Refugee Rights



The European Union and its partners in the Refugee Core Group are urging Nepal to address the long-standing humanitarian and documentation challenges faced by Tibetan refugees, including through the issuance of Personal Account Number (PAN) cards to facilitate access to banking, employment and administrative services. The EU has also called for protection of Tibetans' civil, religious and cultural rights, as well as visa waivers and exit permits for refugees resettling in third countries or returning to their countries of origin. These concerns, raised with Nepal's Ministry of Home Affairs in late 2025, remain an EU diplomatic priority and are expected to feature prominently in the EU-Nepal Joint Commission in the second half of 2026.

Sikyong Penpa Tsering Meets German Parliamentarian and Participates in International Uyghur Forum in Berlin

Sikyong Penpa Tsering met with German Bundestag MP Thomas Rachel to discuss the situation in Tibet, the well-being of His



Holiness the Dalai Lama, China's assimilation policies, restrictions on Tibetan religion, language and culture, and the issue of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. He reiterated the Central Tibetan Administration's commitment to the Middle Way Approach and non-violence. Later, at the International Uyghur Forum, Sikyong called for greater strategic coordination among Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, Hong Kongers and Taiwanese in responding to common challenges posed by Beijing.

UK Parliamentary Delegation Visits Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile



Labour MP Kerry McCarthy and Lib Dem MP Wera Hobhouse visited the Tibetan Parliament-in-

Exile, attending the swearing-in ceremony of Sikyong Penpa Tsering.

The European Parliament strongly condemned China's Ethnic Unity Law



Delegations European Parliament

The European Parliament called for its repeal and sanctions, and held a Human Rights Subcommittee Hearing where the ICT President urged member states toward strong coordinated action.

New US Bipartisan Legislation on CTA

Congressmen McCaul and McGovern introduced new legislation seeking to strengthen America's formal relationship with the Central Tibetan Administration.



US Senate Bill on China's Atrocities in Tibet — 1 May 2026



Senators Jeff Merkley and Rick Scott introduced a bipartisan bill requiring the State Department to

formally examine China's atrocities in Tibet going a step beyond the existing Resolve Tibet Act.

APRIL 2026

Australia and New Zealand held a 2+2 ministerial meeting to express concerns about human rights issues, including Tibet.

Australia and New Zealand held their third Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultation in Canberra on March 17, where both countries expressed serious concerns about human rights issues in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.



MARCH 2026

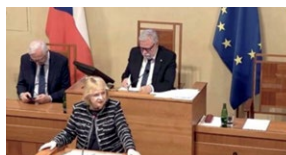
37th Birthday of 11th Panchen Lama & 31st Year of Disappearance

The CTA marked the 37th birthday of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima with a month-long awareness campaign. Events included a pictorial exhibition in Dharamshala, official birthday celebrations at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Bylakuppe, and awareness sessions across Tibetan communities globally.



Czech Senate Passes Historic Tibet Resolution — 10 April 2026

The Czech Senate passed a resolution directly challenging China's interference in the Dalai Lama's succession — one of the most direct European legislative stances on the succession issue to date.



Central Tibetan Administration Commemorates 67th Tibetan National Uprising Day with Tibetans in Dharamshala



CTA observed the 67th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day today at the Tsuglagkhang, marking over six decades of resilient resistance against the illegal occupation of Tibet by the government of the People's Republic of China. The commemoration was attended by Chief Guests Prof. Dr Hans-Gert Pöttering, former President of the European Parliament; Senator Jiří Oberfalzer, Vice-President of the Czech Senate; and Honourable MP Michael Brand, German Parliamentary State Secretary. They were joined by a diverse group of special guests.

More Than 100 Members of Tibet Support Groups Gather in Dharamshala for Special International Tibet Support Groups Meeting



Following three days of intensive deliberations and discussions

on a wide range of topics—including briefings on the current situation inside Tibet, strategies to counter China's increasingly distorted narratives, and reflections on why Tibet matters more than ever in the evolving geopolitical landscape—the Special International Tibet Support Groups Meeting concluded on the eve of the 67th anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising Day.

The New Law on Ethnic Unity



China's ethnic policy introduced on 12 March 2026, framed around "ethnic unity" and

a consolidated national identity, has significant implications for the preservation of Tibetan language, culture and Buddhism. Tibetan is the principal language through which the Kangyur, Tengyur and generations of philosophical, ritual and oral teachings are transmitted, making linguistic preservation central to the continuity of Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Policies including greater reliance on Mandarin in education, state control over religious institutions and reincarnation, and the boarding-school system have raised concerns.

Chinese Liaison Officer Sangay Kyab Attends Inauguration of China Democracy Party's European Headquarter

Chinese Liaison Officer for European countries at the Tibet Bureau in Geneva, attended the inauguration of the China Democracy Party's European headquarters in London, joining around 100 democracy activists, scholars and supporters. Addressing the gathering, he highlighted the Tibetan democratic process in exile and congratulated the Party on strengthening cooperation among Chinese democracy groups. Discussions also emphasised that any meaningful democratic transformation in China must address the political, cultural and linguistic rights of Tibetans and other ethnic minorities, with participants calling for greater research and engagement on these issues.



The 8th All India Tibet Support Groups Conference held in Dharamshala

8th All India Tibet Support Groups Conference reaffirmed solidarity with the Tibetan people and their aspirations for freedom, justice, and cultural preservation.

Recalling India's historic support for Tibet, the Conference expressed concern over ongoing human rights violations, cultural repression, and environmental degradation in Tibet. It called for renewed dialogue between Tibetan representatives and China, recognition of the CTA, and greater international support for a peaceful resolution of the Sino-Tibet conflict. The Conference rejected Chinese interference in his reincarnation, and resolved to strengthen Tibet advocacy across India



His Holiness the Dalai Lama attended Long Life Prayers offered by the All-India Tibet Support Groups as part of celebrations marking his 90th birthday.



Members of the All-India Tibet Support Groups presented His Holiness with the Karuna Ratna — the Jewel of Compassion, a golden bodhi-leaf bearing the Dharma wheel and teaching mudra, honouring his lifelong dedication to peace, compassion, and India's spiritual heritage, while reaffirming support for his Four Noble Commitments and Tibet's freedom. More than 400 members of the All-India Tibet Support Groups paid their respects during the ceremony.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama Endorses His Holiness Pope Leo's Palm Sunday Appeal, Calls for End to Wars



"I wholeheartedly endorse the powerful appeal for peace made by the Holy Father, Pope Leo, during his Palm Sunday Mass.

His call for the laying down of arms and the renunciation of violence resonates deeply with me and reflects a principle at the heart of all the world's great spiritual traditions. Whether in Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism or other faith traditions, the message is fundamentally one of love, compassion, tolerance and self-discipline. Violence can only perpetuate further violence; it cannot provide a lasting foundation for peace. Enduring solutions to conflicts, including those in the Middle East and between Russia and Ukraine, must ultimately be pursued through dialogue, diplomacy and mutual respect, grounded in the recognition of our shared humanity. I pray and earnestly hope that the violence and conflicts we witness today may come to an end, and that peace may prevail.

FEBRUARY 2026

Taiwanese Delegation Visits Tibetan Parliament

A Taiwanese legislative delegation led by the President of the Taiwan Parliamentary Group for Tibet visited the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and met the Speaker and Deputy Speaker. The parliamentary delegation comprising Wu Pei-yi, Member of the Legislative Yuan and President of the Taiwan Parliamentary Group for Tibet; Fa Hui Shen, Member of the Legislative Yuan;

Chen Chang Lee, Taipei City Councilor; Miao Po-ya, Taipei City Councilor; and Tsuni Cheng, Vice President of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, visited the Tibetan Parliament.



Australian APPG Meets on Tibet



The Australian All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet met during parliament's Autumn sitting

to chalk out action plans. Senator Barbara Pocock, who recently visited Dharamshala, shared firsthand insights on Tibetan leadership and refugee communities.

Sikyong Holds High-Level Engagements in Washington, D.C.

Sikyong Penpa Tsering undertook a series of high-level engagements with leading China and Tibet-focused think tanks and organisations to deepen understanding of the PRC and strengthen coordinated responses to Beijing's disinformation and narratives on Tibet. Discussions emphasised credible documentation, fact-based advocacy, policy outreach and the importance of rigorous scholarship to counter historical distortions. Accompanied by Representative Namgyal Choedup, Sikyong also met senior representatives of the International Campaign for Tibet and The Tibet Fund.



Shillong Tibetan Settlement Receives Shri Sandesh Meshram as He Concludes Janjagaran Cycle Yatra for Tibet

Sandesh Meshram, Regional Convener of the Core Group for Tibetan Cause-India and a Tibet activist from Nagpur, undertook the 6th Janjagaran Cycle Yatra, "Pedalling for Freedom, Speaking for Tibet," to raise public awareness about the situation in Tibet. Beginning on 9 December 2025 at Bhumla near the India-Tibet border in Arunachal Pradesh, the Yatra concluded in Shillong on 21 January 2026, covering approximately 2,400 kilometres across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya. The Yatra also carried added symbolic significance as it coincided with the Year of Compassion.



English Translation of "Tibet Was Never Part of China Since Antiquity" Launches



Sikyong attended the launch of Professor Hon-Shiang Lau's Tibet Was Never Part of China Since Antiquity, published

by Optimum Publishing International and drawing on historical records from Chinese official sources. Organised by the National Endowment for Democracy, the event brought together Ambassador Sam Brownback, Bhuchung K. Tsering of ICT and Washington Post columnist Josh Rogin. Sikyong commended the book's evidence-based approach and highlighted its value, alongside Michael van Walt's Tibet Brief 2020, in challenging prevailing narratives on Tibet's historical status.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama Addresses Students of Tibet House, New Delhi

237 students of Geshé Dorjee Damdul, Director of Tibet



House, New Delhi, attended an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Drepung Gomang Monastery, Mundgod. The group, comprising more than 100 Indians and participants from several countries, was attending a 10-day retreat on Special Insight organised by Tibet House at the Science and Meditation Centre of Drepung Loseling Monastery, beginning 8 January 2026.

Inter-parliamentary Group for Tibet in the European Parliament Convenes to Chart Year Ahead

The Inter-parliamentary Group for Tibet in the European Parliament met to set priorities for the year ahead and discuss key developments concerning Tibet. Representative Rigzin Genkhang and EU Advocacy Officer Tenzin Phuntsok of the Office of Tibet briefed lawmakers on the Tibetan electoral process and the deteriorating situation of Tibetans in Nepal. The meeting also explored ways to strengthen parliamentary engagement and sustained monitoring of Tibet-related issues, with lawmakers reaffirming their continued support for the Tibetan cause.



Snippets of Interesting Information

Source: Dalailama.com



Tashi Sholpa (བཏཱ་ཤེས་ཞོལ་པ་), meaning “lucky dance,” is the oldest form of Tibetan opera, originating in a vision of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1645. It was first performed at his enthronement ceremony by the Shol Troupe at Drepung Monastery. All performers wear the white-bearded mask of

Saint Thangtong Gyalpo, the legendary founder of Tibetan opera (Lhamo), who reputedly lived 125 years — symbolizing longevity and good fortune. As an opening act of the ancient white mask school, it is performed at major occasions: the Dalai Lama’s homecoming, monastery inaugurations, and significant cultural gatherings — believed to bring good luck and auspicious blessings.

Sonam Topgyal, Intern, Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives

Tibet Then and Now

Photograph1: Jokhang Square, 1985



©Katia Buffetrille

For centuries, the Jokhang Temple, built by Emperor Songtsen Gampo (c. 605-650), stood as Lhasa's historical and spiritual heart. Home to the Jowo, Tibet's most revered statue, it drew pilgrims from all across the land of Snow, for whom "he who has not been to Lhasa has only half-lived." (Photographs 1, 2 and 3)

In the square before the temple, two monuments bore silent witness to history. The first one is a stone-pillar inscribed with the 822 AD (Photograph 4) Sino-Tibetan peace treaty, which declares that "in order that this agreement establishing a great era when Tibetans shall be happy in Tibet and Chinese shall be happy in China shall never changed, the Three Jewels, the body of saints, the sun and moon, planets and stars have been invoked

as witnesses.” The second one is a 1794 stele (Photograph 5), erected by a representative of the Chinese emperor bearing instructions on how to respond to a smallpox outbreak.

In 2019, while the world was under lockdown, Chinese pavilions were erected over these steles (Photograph 6) — an attempt to reinforce the claim that Tibet has been part of China since ancient times. As the Chinese adage goes, “to erase a nation, first erase its history.” Yet, the historical records tell a different story.



Photograph 2: Jokhang Square, 1993. ©Katia Buffetrille



Photograph 3: Jokhang Square, 1996. ©Katia Buffetrille



Photograph 4: 822 stele, 2017
©Katia Buffetrille



Photograph 5: 1794 pillar, 2017
©Katia Buffetrille



Photograph 6: 1794 pillar in a Chinese pavilion, 2024. ©Katia Buffetrille

The Journey Begins

This is the inaugural edition of Trans Himalaya.

We invite you to be part of this journey as Trans Himalaya develops into a sustained forum for scholarship, dialogue and informed policy discussion on Tibet and the wider upland regions of Asia.

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STRATEGY • CULTURE • CHANGE
IN TIBET AND ASIA'S UPLANDS

