



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET



ACCESS DENIED:

CHINA'S ENFORCED ISOLATION OF TIBET, AND THE CASE FOR RECIPROCITY

A report by the International Campaign for Tibet
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Front page captions:

(Left)

Troops are seen closing in on Dorje Rinchen's body after he has self-immolated. Smoke can still be seen arising from his body and it is not clear if he was still alive at this point. Laypeople and monks are trying to protect him from being taken away by troops. In Tibetan tradition, it is important to protect the body of someone who has died for religious ritual and offerings in order to ensure an auspicious rebirth. Since the self-immolations began in Tibet in 2009, many Tibetans have taken great risks to retrieve the bodies of those who have self-immolated in order to carry out religious practice.

(Right)

An intimidating military presence at one of the major Tibetan Buddhist festivals in Kumbum, Qinghai, on March 5, 2015, the last day of traditional celebration Tibetan New Year (Losar). The images show ranks of uniformed paramilitary police appearing to outnumber religious devotees at the festival, which is one of the most significant religious gatherings in Tibet, attracting thousands of pilgrims.



Note on the Political Geography of Tibet:

Tibet was traditionally comprised of three main areas: Amdo (north-eastern Tibet), Kham (eastern Tibet) and U-Tsang (central and western Tibet). The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was set up by the Chinese government in 1965 and covers the area of Tibet west of the Dri-chu (Yangtse river), including part of Kham. The rest of Amdo and Kham have been incorporated into Chinese provinces, where they were designated Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties. As a result most of Qinghai and parts of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces are acknowledged by the Chinese government to be "Tibetan." ICT uses the term "Tibet" to refer to all Tibetan areas currently under the jurisdiction of the People's Republic of China.

With regard to access, the different political divisions of Tibet have broadly different levels of restrictions.

The Tibet Autonomous Region is generally more restricted than areas administered by Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces, while Dechen prefecture in Yunnan typically experiences fewer restrictions than much of the rest of Tibet. The system of requiring every foreigner who enters the Tibet Autonomous Region to acquire a special entry permit is unique within the People's Republic of China; no other province-level region in China requires this. When noteworthy, this report will mention relevant differences in the access policies of different jurisdictions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Police checkpoint, Gyantse, Tibet Autonomous Region. (Photo: Carlos Mel Bruno)

It was Tibetan New Year at Dzongsar monastery in eastern Tibet in early February (2018), and two New York Times journalists had arrived to write about holiday traditions. But as they watched monks rehearsing a traditional monastic dance, a uniformed police officer appeared in the temple and took them away for questioning, beginning a 17-hour period in custody.

The journalists' Kafkaesque experience was the latest demonstration of China's systematic policies to control access to the world's highest and largest plateau in order to ensure absolute compliance with the ruling Communist Party's policies and to dominate the global narrative on Tibet.

Xi Jinping, whose power as Party Secretary and President of China was turbo-charged in February (2018) after he scrapped a two-term limit that was designed to guard against a Mao-style personality cult, has proclaimed a "new era" for China, with control over Tibet a top priority of particular strategic significance for the Chinese Communist Party.

Under systematic new policies, access to Tibet has been weaponized by the PRC, with the slogan "Please come in, then go and tell the world" – which effectively means: "Come in if we allow you to do so, then go away and repeat what the Chinese Communist Party tells you". Denying access, or threatening to do so, is increasingly used as a powerful tool to shut down critique by scholars, writers, independent experts and foreign government officials.

China promotes Tibet as being open to the world, but its strategies on Tibet are covert and coercive. Multiple visits of diplomatic personnel and intergovernmental organisations have been refused access to Tibet in recent years, in contravention of usual diplomatic practice between countries. Comparable restrictions to those instituted by Chinese authorities in Tibet today mainly exist in instances like the declaration of a state of emergency in Ethiopia in 2016.

Scholars have been denied visas because of their writing, and international journalists thrown out of the PRC – in the case of one French reporter, because they were critical of China's policies in Tibet and Xinjiang. New tactics have been developed to control those who do manage to gain access. This

is combined with more systematic efforts to silence Tibetans, particularly when they encounter outside visitors, and prevent them from travelling on pilgrimage or leaving the PRC.

As part of this strategy, there has been an upsurge in the number of Chinese officials being sent to the West to “tell the world the story of Tibet in China” – with nearly three times the number of Party-state organized delegations visiting Western countries over the past ten years compared to Western government representatives allowed access to Tibet. These delegations are an integral part of China’s sophisticated strategic information operations, designed to manipulate and influence perceptions of target audiences in Western countries on Tibet and the Dalai Lama.

Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet, said: “The Chinese leadership is seeking to enforce complete isolation on Tibet, often described as being worse than in North Korea, where at least some foreign media are based. Independent international observers are shut out of Tibet, or allowed to visit only under strictly controlled circumstances, while numerous delegations of Party officials face no obstacles in travelling to Western democracies to spread their propaganda. Their bland, apparently positive, language obscures the steel glint of the knife; China’s intention is to prevent the truth being told about the Chinese oppression prominently, but not exclusively in Tibet – which in reality is so extreme that more than 150 Tibetans have set fire to themselves in protest and anguish.

“Tibetans are locked in, prevented even from going on pilgrimage to see their revered religious leader, the Dalai Lama, and every aspect of their everyday lives is under draconian control and surveillance. China’s aggressive strategies have serious implications for an entire generation and for genuine international exchange.”

THIS REPORT DOCUMENTS

- Since 2008, when protests swept across Tibet to be met by a violent crackdown and lockdown, the Chinese authorities have pursued a strategy of allowing access to certain delegations, often seeking to impose conditions of secrecy, and presenting a carefully stage-managed face to the world in which rapid economic transformation is highlighted and attempts to raise genuine questions about Tibetan grievances, address human rights abuses or engage in dialogue on core issues such as cultural survival are blocked or subverted.
- The concept of reciprocity is increasingly being cited by governments as an instrument for countering China’s one-way influence economic operations and in order to seek compliance with international standards and long-term mutual obligations. Key European governments and the United States have referred to reciprocity as a key principle in terms of their bilateral relations with China. Acknowledging that reciprocity is an important tenet of international relations, beyond trade, in the United States, Members of Congress have introduced bipartisan legislation, the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, to promote freedom of movement and an open and accessible Tibet for American citizens and for Tibetans themselves, including the Dalai Lama.
- China’s propaganda efforts to ensure it controls the narrative on Tibet, both inside and out, have been intensified, described as a “new historical starting point” to be strengthened by the Party state in 2018. Hardline strategies to be strengthened this year that underpin China’s control of access to Tibet involve a dramatic expansion of securitization on the plateau, the engagement of the military in propaganda efforts and a continued focus on obliterating loyalty to the Dalai Lama among Tibetans.
- The PRC is ranked as one of the worst countries for press freedom in the world, and Tibet (along with Xinjiang and Taiwan) is regarded as one of the “red zones” or “no fly areas”, in which almost any coverage can be regarded as nothing less than a challenge to the sovereignty of the PRC and legitimacy of the CCP. Foreign journalists have been chased out of Tibet by police, forced to

sign documents promising not to return, evaded checkpoints by hiding in the back of cars, and in some cases, detained. Tibetans who speak to journalists, even informally, face serious penalties such as torture and imprisonment.

- No other province-level area in the PRC has equivalent barriers to access as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). This is most evident each year in March, when the Tibet Autonomous Region is closed to tourists coinciding with the anniversary of the March 10 Uprising in 1959 and protests in 2008. The closure indicates that ultimately the 'pillar industry' of tourism is subordinate to the Party state's priority of securitization of the plateau.
- In an unprecedented development, mass Chinese domestic tourism across Tibet now coexists with the untrammelled powers of a security state engaged in the most widespread political crackdown in a generation. While Chinese tourists are increasingly free to come and go to the plateau, usually escorted in groups by state-trained guides, Tibetans themselves face unprecedented restrictions on their movement.
- Serious and ongoing restrictions imposed by the Party state leave Tibetans locked in virtual isolation from the global community, unable to travel, even when they are able to obtain Chinese passports and scholarships abroad, which is rare. Tibetans face some of the most severe penalties anywhere for expressing views that differ from those of the Party state, no matter how moderate and mild. While Chinese policy statements refer to the need to increase availability of propaganda materials in the Tibetan language, there has been a steady trend of the criminalization of integral elements of Tibetan identity and culture particularly targeting Tibetan efforts to promote and speak their mother tongue. Xi Jinping's "new era" approach involves a dramatic downturn in any support for protections of minority "ethnic" culture.
- Restrictions on access have led to a new wave of closures and shutdowns of international NGOs following Xi Jinping's rise to power that have adversely affected Tibetan lives. The two founders of one of the last international NGOs, Braille Without Borders, to remain in Tibet were forced to leave last year (2017), documenting the "heart-rending" closure of their nursery school for blind and sighted children, some orphans of the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan.
- China has taken advantage of the openness of other countries such as in Europe and the US to enforce its aggressive "sharp power". In some countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and within Europe, there is an emerging backlash that arises from a recognition that this foreign interference is not only a threat to national security, but also to social inclusiveness and democracy, in terms of ensuring freedom of expression and from fear.

Matteo Mecacci said: "It is unacceptable that numerous official delegations from China are allowed access to our countries to press their hardline message on Tibet while delegations from Western democracies are frequently blocked or not able to discover the truth about oppression in Tibet. Similarly, foreign journalists can be expelled from China for simply questioning or criticizing Party policies on Tibet or other sensitive issues. Yet there are significant numbers of Chinese journalists from the state media operating in our global capitals without interference. It is now time to insist upon a more robust approach, based on the growing awareness that China's increasing authoritarian influence has the capacity to subvert and shape our own democracies in ways that pose a real threat to our future.

"Tibet's geopolitical significance is such that it deserves greater prominence in global affairs. It is incumbent upon our governments and the international community to now insist upon the principle of reciprocity in its dealings with the PRC, in order to address the asymmetry of authoritarian influence not only in Tibet but also on our own societies."

In this report, the International Campaign for Tibet calls for unfettered access to Tibet in every sphere, an end to policies restricting Tibetan freedom of movement and speech, and urges a deeper engagement by governments worldwide on China's Tibet policy.

THE CONCEPT OF RECIPROCITY AND CHINA'S INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

“UNDER XI JINPING, THE LEGITIMACY OF THE PARTY’S TIGHTENING AUTHORITARIAN RULE – AND INDEED THE LEADER’S OWN CULT OF PERSONALITY – ARE BECOMING MEASURED BY CHINA’S ABILITY TO MEET THE AMBITIOUS AND NATIONALISTIC FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY GOALS IT HAS SET ITSELF. THIS IS PARTLY ABOUT ‘REGAINING’ TAIWAN, POTENTIALLY BY FORCE, EXTENDING CONTROL OVER HONG KONG, MAINTAINING FIRM CONTROL OF TIBET AND XINJIANG, AND PUSHING BACK AMERICA’S INFLUENCE AND ALLIANCE PROTECTION FROM CHINA’S EASTERN NEIGHBORHOOD, WHICH ALSO INCLUDES JAPAN, THE KOREAN PENINSULA AND INDEPENDENT SOUTH-EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES. GLOBALLY, THE MISSION OF THE ‘REJUVENATION’ OF THE CHINESE NATION HAS ALSO BEEN IDENTIFIED WITH CHINESE PRE-EMINENCE IN ECONOMIC WEIGHT AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AS WELL AS INFLUENCE OVER CHINESE DIASPORA COMMUNITIES. [...] AUSTRALIA AND OTHER DEMOCRACIES ARE ENTERING NEW TERRITORY IN TERMS OF THEIR VULNERABILITY TO FOREIGN INFLUENCE.”

– Professor Rory Medcalf, Head, National Security College, Australian National University, February 15, 2018^[1]

Reciprocity is considered a universally accepted principle of international law applied in international relations under which a state adopts a given behavior symmetrical in response to that adopted by another state.

It is a diplomatic principle that is increasingly being invoked by Western governments in relation to the more strident and far-reaching economic and trade influence operations by China. Both governments and specialists have highlighted the dangers of China’s promotion of its authoritarian ideals as an alternative to liberal democracy as well as broader values and interests.

“In expanding its political influence, China takes advantage of the one-sided openness of Europe,” stated a report entitled ‘Authoritarian Advance’ published in February (2018) by the influential think tanks Merics (Mercator Institute for China Studies) and the Global Public Policy Institute.^[2] “Europe’s gates are wide open whereas China seeks to tightly restrict access of foreign ideas, actors and capital. The effects of this asymmetric political relationship are beginning to show within Europe. European states increasingly tend to adjust their policies in fits of ‘preemptive obedience’ to curry favor with the Chinese side. Political elites within the European Union and in the European neighborhood have started to embrace Chinese rhetoric and interests, including where they contradict national and/or European interests.

“EU unity has suffered from Chinese divide and rule tactics, especially where the protection and projection of liberal values and human rights are concerned. Beijing also benefits from the ‘services’ of willing enablers among European political and professional classes who are happy to promote Chinese values and interests. Rather than only China trying to actively build up political capital, there is also much influence

courting on the part of those political elites in EU member states who seek to attract Chinese money or to attain greater recognition on the global plane.”

French President Emmanuel Macron referred to the importance of reciprocity during his visit to China in January (2018), the first by a major European leader since the 19th Party Congress, at which Party leader Xi consolidated his power. “Reciprocity is the key word, and I think that is what Macron was trying to convey as a message to Xi Jinping, that the Chinese market should be more open to Western markets,” China expert Philippe le Corre, a research fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, was cited as saying during the visit. In a reference to the ways in which China seeks to influence European societies, he added that investment from Chinese companies was welcome in the West, as long as it doesn’t affect the sovereignty of those countries.^[3]

President Macron made specific reference to Xi Jinping’s ambitious One Belt One Road global strategy, saying that: “The new roads cannot only go one way.” While expressing sympathy with Xi’s efforts to get the world behind the Belt and Road Initiative, he said it “must meet our own plans as well.”^[4]

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union, the CDU/CSU, and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) explicitly referred in their agreement on a Grand Coalition government to the principle of reciprocity, when stating in early February: “In opening their markets, Germany and Europe must rely on the principle of reciprocity and define where our common strategic interests lie and how they can be secured.”^[5]

While the German governing parties’ and President Macron’s comments appeared to focus mainly on trade, the theory of international relations of reciprocity is considered an instrument for achieving the development of relations of mutual trust and long-term mutual obligations and an incentive for compliance with international standards.^[6]

It is a principle that should not only be implemented in terms of trade, but in terms of freedom of movement, information and genuine exchange between peoples. In 2017, a bipartisan and bicameral legislation on Reciprocal Access to Tibet was introduced in the United States Congress in Washington, DC, to put pressure on China to allow US diplomats, journalists, and all citizens to have access to Tibet based on the principle

of reciprocity.^[7] As detailed in this report, US citizens face severe restrictions in their access to Tibet, while Chinese citizens, diplomats, NGOs, journalists and media have free access to the United States.

Introducing the Bill in the House of Representatives, Congressman McGovern, co-author of the Act, said the Dalai Lama can play a constructive role in negotiating a better future for the Tibetan people, but China “clearly doesn’t see it that way”. “China is waiting him out and counting on his eventual departure to remove Tibet from the international agenda, so we need to move now, and we need some leverage, and that is why earlier this year, along with a bipartisan group of members, I introduce HR1872, the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act,” he said. “If China wants its citizens and officials to travel freely in the United States, Americans must be able to travel freely in China, including Tibet. “But allowing travel to Tibet is only one step China needs to take, and there are others. Most especially, China should permit His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, to return to Tibet for a visit if he so desires,” McGovern said.^[8]

US Senator Marco Rubio, co-chair of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China who introduced the Bill in the Senate with a bipartisan group of Senators said: “The Chinese government’s oppression of Tibet includes keeping it off limits to Americans, journalists and others who can shine a bright light on the human rights violations committed daily against the Tibetan people. We should not accept a double standard where Chinese officials can freely visit anywhere in the US while they block our diplomats, journalists and Tibetan-Americans from visiting Tibet. This bipartisan bill will hold China accountable for its oppression and make it clear that if Chinese government officials want to enjoy the privilege of entering the United States, they must allow equal access to Tibet.”^[9]

At a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing on December 6, 2017, committee members heard “officials of the Government of the United States submitted 39 requests for diplomatic access to the Tibet Autonomous Region between May 2011 and July 2015, but only four were granted; and when such requests are granted, diplomatic personnel are closely supervised and given few opportunities to meet local residents not approved by authorities.”^[10] In contrast, five official delegations from the PRC visited US Congress officials during the same period (2011-5) to speak about Tibet, including senior Party leaders from Tibet.

Among other elements of the legislation, it would request the State Department to deny access to the United States by Chinese officials who are responsible for creating or administering policies on travel to Tibetan areas until China eliminates discriminatory restrictions on access by Americans to Tibet. It cites the diplomatic principle of reciprocity, wherein “a country should give equivalent consular access to the nationals of another country in a reciprocal manner to the consular access granted by such other country to its own citizens.”

Congressman McGovern said: “Restricted access to Tibet leaves Tibetans in virtual isolation from the world community, limiting international exchange and the ability to objectively assess the human rights situation there. Our goal is an open and accessible Tibet, where Americans can visit and learn from the wonders of the Tibetan plateau – its natural beauty, its people and its rich culture and religious heritage.”^[11]

WEAPONIZING ACCESS: CHINA'S STRATEGIC APPROACH IN 2008 AND BEYOND

“ONE DAY [IN 2010], IN A RESIDENTIAL AREA IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE CITY, I FIRST SAW A PROPAGANDA VEHICLE EQUIPPED WITH BIG LOUDSPEAKERS AND DECORATED WITH RED BANNERS SLOWLY PASSING BY; FROM THE SPEAKERS CAME A SONG BY TSETEN DOLMA, A SINGER HIRED BY THE AUTHORITIES: ‘NO MATTER HOW BITTER TIBETAN PEOPLE’S LIVES WERE, NO MATTER HOW BITTER, BITTERNESS HAD AN END, THE BITTERNESS HAS TURNED TO SWEETNESS AFTER THE COMMUNIST PARTY CAME, THE BITTERNESS HAS TURNED TO SWEETNESS AFTER THE COMMUNIST PARTY CAME...’ AND WHAT FOLLOWED WERE OVER TEN VEHICLES SLOWLY DRIVING PAST: A POLICE VAN; THEN FIVE ARMORED CARS INSCRIBED WITH THE LETTERS XZ AND THE NUMBERS 001-005 DROVE PAST, EACH HAD FOUR SNIPERS STANDING ON TOP POINTING THEIR MACHINE GUNS AT THE ROAD AHEAD OF THEM; THEN FIVE MINIBUSES FILLED WITH MASKED SOLDIERS CARRYING GUNS FOLLOWED; AND FINALLY, TWO ARMORED CARS INSCRIBED WITH THE NUMBERS 006 AND 007 PASSED BY.”

– Tsering Woeser, blogpost, February 5, 2011^[12]

In March, 2008, a wave of overwhelmingly peaceful protests swept across Tibet. In the midst of a violent crackdown by China, two weeks later, a group of international journalists were invited to Lhasa by the Chinese government. The intention was to prove that the situation had returned to normal after days of demonstrations and some rioting, and that Tibetans were happy under Chinese rule. But on this rare occasion, the Communist Party's propaganda efforts were eclipsed by a courageous group of monks at the Jokhang Temple – who stepped forward onto the world stage accorded by the presence of global broadcast media and exposed the official version as no more than a lie.^[13]

Footage of the Jokhang monks, some of them weeping, was broadcast internationally as they conveyed the message to the foreign media that the Chinese Communist Party “tricked the people”, was “always telling lies” and that after the protests beginning on March 10 (2008), “they killed many people.” It was effectively the first ‘press conference’ inside Tibet exposing the reality of China's oppression. It was followed the next month by a group of monks at Labrang Tashikyil monastery in Amdo (Gansu) staging an equally courageous demonstration in front of state-organized media tour for foreign and Chinese journalists on April 9, 2008.^[14]

The dangers of expressing such views and challenging China's propaganda on Tibet are vividly illustrated by the outcome; after their protest in front of international journalists, two of the Labrang monks died following torture in prison.^[15]



*Footage captured by Stephen McDonnell in Ngaba shows a heavy Chinese security presence.
(Photo: Screen grab from Australian Broadcasting Corporation news item)*

These two examples of Tibetans speaking direct to journalists on official tours were rare and isolated occurrences, unprecedented given China's strategies of blocking and restricting access to numerous groups of foreign government officials, reporters and independent experts.

They happened during a pivotal political moment in Tibet, the protests that swept across Tibet a decade ago in March, 2008, involving all spheres of society, from monks, nuns, nomads and farmers to school children and intellectuals. Tibetans risked their lives in the “peaceful uprising of the Earth Rat Year” to demonstrate that the Dalai Lama represents their interests, not the Chinese Party state.^[16]

The 2008 protests propelled Tibet to the top of the global news agenda, directly challenging the image China sought to convey of normalcy and harmony in the buildup to the Beijing Olympics in August that year. The PRC was dismayed by the international coverage of the crackdown in Tibet, which became the human rights issue of the Games.

Tibetologist Robert Barnett writes: “The Tibetan unrest, coupled with the protests over the Olympic torch relays abroad, [...] changed the way politics is done and thought about in China. The intense attacks that

emerged in both official and unofficial media in China against foreign representations of the 2008 events were not new in themselves – for decades if not centuries, political acts by Tibetans have been reshaped to fit starkly conflicting explanations by their neighbours and other interested parties. But these were the first major Tibetan protests to occur in the internet age, and they impelled young Chinese, the so-called fenqing or ‘angry youth’, to deploy new technologies in inventive ways in their efforts to recover control of discourse for the Chinese nation from the international or Western handling of this issue.”^[17]

Chinese authorities had a specific purpose when they invited a group of Beijing-based ambassadors from 14 countries to Lhasa on March 30, 2008. The PRC wanted to ensure that the world understood what had happened across Tibet as “a violent riot”, referring solely to the events of March 14, 2008, in Lhasa, when protesting turned briefly to violence but only involving a small minority of Tibetans.

The ambassadors, from countries including the European Union (EU), Japan, US, Russia and Australia, were taken on a tour of Lhasa, with the Chinese state media reporting that: “The delegation’s buses passed through the Beijing Middle Road, Qingnian Road, North and East Linkuo roads on which some shops and institutions were smashed, looted and burnt by the rioters. Then they arrived at the Second Middle School of Lhasa that was partially burnt in the riot. [...] George Manongi, minister of the Tanzanian embassy in China, said he felt very sad while seeing the burnt houses and wounded innocent people. ‘Those “peaceful protests” were in fact ended up with violence. No government will tolerate this,’ he said”, according to China Daily on March 30, 2008.^[18]

From the Chinese government side, it was mission accomplished. Even now, the wave of protests that swept across the plateau in 2008 is still framed by some international media simply as ‘rioting’.^[19] While it is the case that around 14 of more than 200 protests that swept across Tibet in 2008 involved a significant degree of violence to people or property, the overwhelming majority of the protests were non-violent. The vast majority of Tibetans went to significant lengths to demonstrate their support for the Dalai Lama’s position of non-violence. By late October, 2009, ICT had logged 235 protests, the vast majority of which were peaceful.^[20]

After March 2008, the Chinese government sought to ensure that nothing like this challenge to their international image could happen again. Their response was to intensify the military buildup in Tibet and intensify the very policies and approaches that were at the root cause of the protests in the first place. The Beijing leadership moved from instilling an oppressive environment in monasteries, nunneries and lay society after 2008 to one that can be more accurately characterized as totalitarian – an approach in which the state recognizes no limits to its authority, imposes a climate of fear, and strives to regulate every aspect of public and private life. The Beijing leadership decided that the answer to the “instability” of the unrest was not to address the genuine grievances of Tibetans, but to deepen existing oppressive strategies and actively intensify Party presence, particularly in rural areas.

This has led to a much more pervasive and systematic approach to “patriotic education”, and a dramatic increase in work teams and Party cadres across the plateau, from remote villages and monasteries to larger towns and cities. This is a political struggle on a war footing – the CCP describes it as a “war against secessionist sabotage”,^[21] in which loyalty to its perceived enemy, the Dalai Lama, is to be replaced, particularly among the younger generation, with allegiance to the Chinese Party state, and to undermine Tibetan national identity at its source.

This intensified campaign against the Dalai Lama, together with the aggressive expansion of legal measures tightening state control over Tibetan religion and culture, were contributory factors to the beginning of a wave of self-immolations in February 2009, when a Kirti monastery monk called Tapey set himself on fire.^[22] In this shocking new development in the evolution of Tibetan dissent and protest against Chinese rule, more than 150 Tibetans have since set fire to themselves.^[23]

Since the protests and crackdown of March 2008, and the beginning of the self-immolations in 2009, the Chinese Party state has made increasingly systematic and aggressive efforts to silence Tibetans and to suppress any representations of the unfolding situation inside Tibet other than the official “fake news”

version. In 2009, when the crackdown was deepening in scope and scale, Lhasa was declared to be the “happiest city in China” by the Chinese state media, in an attempt to erase any notions of despair and distress among Tibetans. The particular message they seek to convey both to a Chinese audience and the outside world is that the Chinese had brought modernity to Tibet, and Tibetans were grateful to them for guiding them from a ‘backward’ past.^[24]

The brave direct encounters with the monks and press at the Jokhang and Labrang Tashikyil in 2008 had an immediate impact on China’s strategies for handling access to Tibet for delegations of government officials and media. They led to the Chinese authorities largely discontinuing the practice of organizing official press tours for several years, with more frequent tours resuming in 2013.



*Jokhang monks bravely speak directly to visiting journalists in 2008.
(Photo: Screen grab from Al Jazeera footage)*

After the 2008 visit of the ambassadors detailed above, there were no other official delegation visits for the rest of 2008, with the next high-level delegation, UK Minister Ivan Lewis, visiting the TAR in September, 2009. The UK Minister raised critical questions with his hosts on various issues of human rights and imprisonment of human rights defenders, among other discussions.^[25] It was likely not to be a coincidence that two months after his trip, the Chinese authorities sent two delegations to the UK, who met with the then Minister and, according to the Chinese press, “reaffirmed the British government’s clear position acknowledging Tibet as part of China.”^[26]

Once the CCP was confident it could thoroughly control such visits after 2008, foreign governments began to be invited back to join carefully stage-managed tours that sought to underline propaganda messages and to showcase rapid economic development in Tibet. With these visits, the Chinese authorities take a highly proactive approach in defining itineraries, ensuring long meetings with Party officials in an environment in which critical questions are discouraged, and preventing meaningful encounters between foreign government officials or journalists and ordinary Tibetans.

TELLING THE STORY OF TIBET - 'PLEASE COME IN, THEN GO OUT'

“FOR THE FUTURE OF TIBET, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO BREAK THE ‘LOCKDOWN’ THAT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT HAS IMPOSED ON THE TIBETAN PEOPLE. AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE TIBETANS DESERVE THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS FREELY WITHOUT FEAR OF BEING ARRESTED OR TORTURED. WE DESERVE THE RIGHT TO MOVE AND PRAY FREELY AND CHINA SHOULD BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE WHEN THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN, AS IN MY CASE AND IN MANY OTHERS.”

– Tibetan monk and former political prisoner, Golog Jigme^[27]

Handpicked government and delegation visits are managed by the Chinese authorities as part of the “please come in, then go and tell the world” approach (the literal translation is “Please come in”, or “Welcome to enter”, then “Go out”).^[28]

This is an integral part of a global strategy by the CCP not only to hide the realities of what is happening in Tibet today, but to dominate and control discourse and further its political agenda and power. While projected as “soft power”, this can be more accurately termed as the implementation of “sharp power”, which “In the new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states [...] should be seen as the tip of [the CCP’s] dagger—or indeed as their syringe.”^[29]

As part of the same process, Chinese government officials, scholars, and religious figures holding official titles are sent across the world to spread China’s official message on Tibet. ICT has monitored 55 such official groups since 2009, with the highest number of 10 delegations in this ten-year period travelling to Europe, Argentina, Mongolia, Russia, Japan and other countries in 2017.^[30] This is nearly three times as many as the 20 official foreign government delegations permitted to travel to Tibet in the same period, according to ICT’s monitoring.

Countries targeted reflect China’s efforts to exert its influence in specific areas of the world, and hammer home its message of dominance over Tibet and economic progress on the plateau. They are also evidence of the Chinese government’s intent to undermine the Dalai Lama during a ten-year period when he has travelled widely.

While the US received most of the delegations in the decade from 2008-18, ICT monitored a high number of delegations to EU countries, particularly Britain (five Tibet-related delegations), France, Spain (which each received four delegations) and Germany (three official delegations).

The hosts in the West of these delegations, including respected scholarly institutions, think-tanks, and governments, may not always be aware that while their purpose is presented as engaging in dialogue (and while sometimes a level of engagement may indeed be possible), ultimately these delegations are part of China’s strategic information operations, reflecting the vigorous propaganda efforts of the United Front Work Department.

Analysis of the Tibet-related Chinese delegations to the West reveals a specific political agenda often based on Tibet visits or criticism of China’s policies by host governments. Two delegations were sent to the UK in March and November 2009, the year that the then Foreign Office Minister Ivan Lewis visited Tibet (in September, 2009). The delegations both focused on promoting the social and economic developments

in Tibet in a positive light, meeting Parliamentarians and Foreign Office officials in their efforts to directly counter critique of human rights abuses in Tibet that had arisen during the visit and in the British media at the time.

The messaging of delegations to the West in 2009 also reflected an assertive approach one year on in countering the protests against China over Tibet that occurred in many Western capitals including London and Athens as the Olympic torch was en route to China for the Beijing Olympics in August, 2008. In Paris, officials had to extinguish the flame at least twice and carry it by bus when pro-Tibet protesters tried to seize it. Embarrassed Chinese organizers also cancelled a reception for the torch at Paris city hall at the last minute after a banner supporting human rights was hung from the façade.

A year later, an official Chinese delegation visited Paris in November 2009, and strongly condemned the French media's "shallow understanding of Tibet", saying that its intention was to help "the world understand Tibet." Delegate Shen Kaiyan told reporters that: "On the eve of last year's Beijing Olympic Games, a lot of unpleasant things happened in France around the Tibet issue. There have been many misunderstandings about Tibet in the media." He added that they would "introduce the real situation to everyone [...] and allow everyone to understand the development of China's ethnic policy in Tibet."^[31]

A Tibet-related official delegation visited South Africa in 2009, the same year that the refusal of a visa to the Dalai Lama to Johannesburg sparked outrage, and became the subject of legal action by Tibet supporters there. In 2012, a South African court ruled that officials had acted unlawfully in failing to grant the Dalai Lama a visa in time for a 2011 trip to celebrate Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 80th birthday celebrations, largely out of fears of angering the Chinese government.

The contributions of certain governments in taking a strong stand against meetings with the Dalai Lama are often applauded by the Chinese delegates. During a visit to Mexico in April, 2016, the Chinese delegation said that they highly appreciated the Mexican government for not providing a platform for "Dalai clique separatists". In 2013, it became the first time in four visits to Mexico by the Dalai Lama that no representative of government met the exiled religious leader, reflecting Mexico's aims to boost ties with China.^[32]

During this ten-year period from 2008 there were two Tibet-related delegation visits to Australia and two to New Zealand. In Australia, intelligence chiefs have sounded the alarm over a systematic Chinese government campaign of espionage and influence peddling that has led to fears over an erosion of Australian sovereignty, while in New Zealand, scholars and government ministers have drawn attention to a disturbing expansion of political influence activities by China, connected to both the CCP government's domestic pressures and foreign agenda. Analysts in both countries note that a high priority is silencing critique on sensitive political issues such as Tibet or Taiwan.

Official Chinese delegations to the West are tightly controlled, and every intention is made to ensure they have the opportunity to issue boilerplate statements without challenge at non-public events. Meetings with ordinary Tibetans in the diaspora who might raise sensitive questions are avoided, and mostly governments and even civil society and academic hosts concede to their specifications.

Professor Dibyesh Anand, head of the Department of Politics and International Relations at Westminster University in London, was one of the few who sought to create opportunities for genuine engagement with an official delegation and the broader scholarly and Tibetan community. He told ICT: "Hosting a Tibet-related delegation coming from China is an 'interesting' experience because there are conspicuous anxieties that the sponsors of the delegation – usually Chinese Embassy – express and this includes the possibility of protest or disturbance by pro-Tibetan activists. I have often been under pressure to restrict the events I have hosted to 'scholars only' when at our university we open all the events to both students and academics and many of them to the members of public.

"The unsaid assumption is that Tibet-related Western scholars will not ask probing questions and thus not embarrass the delegation. At our university, we have adhered to the principles of transparency, academic

freedom and meaningful exchange and thus always kept events open to all so long as people register. It is surprising how China, with all its geopolitical and economic might, comes across as fragile when it comes to matters relating to Tibet. When we hosted Pema Thrinley [a prominent Tibet Autonomous Region leader and one of the most aggressive critics of the Dalai Lama] in 2017, we had robust questioning from the audience and to his credit, the speaker did not shy away from answering them. Another challenge we face at such events is the presence of Chinese media where some members of the audience prefer not to have their face on camera. While we make it clear there should be no recording of anyone other than the speakers and the chair, we note that the cameraperson tries to record the audience also unless told off. Whether this is for surveillance or for propaganda back home in China where the delegation needs to show they were well received, this is a disturbing phenomenon.”

The level of access granted to delegations, and the priorities of those sent to the West, emerge from China’s economic and strategic imperatives on the plateau. Infrastructure construction and resource exploitation are key elements of its strategies to integrate Tibet into the PRC, casting Tibetan support for the Dalai Lama and protection of Tibetan national identity as obstacles to its elaborate ambitions to re-shape the Tibetan plateau for its own purposes.



A Tibetan delegation of China’s National People’s Congress meeting with the co-chairman of US-China Working Group of United States House of Representatives in Washington in December, 2014. Such delegations are an integral element of China’s propaganda strategies on Tibet, and outnumber the foreign delegations allowed to visit Tibet. This official photo shows Lobsang Gyaltzen (2nd left), then head of the Tibetan delegation of China’s National People’s Congress (NPC), talking with the co-chairman of US-China Working Group of United States House of Representatives in Washington on December 4. (Photo: Xinhua)

Tibet is of key geopolitical significance to the Beijing leadership for a number of reasons, which can be summarized as follows: securing control over its borders; expansion of mining based on the rich resources of the Tibetan plateau (uranium, lithium, gold) in order to fuel China’s economic development, which is linked to raising the productivity of the core industrial cities of Xi’an, Chongqing and Chengdu at the foot of the plateau, and importantly, using water from Tibet – the source of most of Asia’s major rivers – to address the progressive scarcity of water resources in the North and North-East of China.

This is the hidden agenda behind the appearances of officials like the Tibetan Pema Thrinley (Chinese: Baima Chilin), formerly of the People’s Liberation Army, now Vice Chair of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, at think-tanks in Brussels^[33] or in Swiss cities. The messages from these official delegates are generally uniform, involving officials requiring their hosts to accept that Tibet is “an inalienable part of China,”^[34] and that there is rapid economic progress and positive social change in Tibet.

Despite the generally urbane approach of such delegations in Western countries, where they are freely granted access despite the lack of reciprocity in access to Western governments to Tibet, the “tip of the dagger” lies in their political context. The delegations are a critical component of China’s information and influence operations, designed to manipulate perceptions of audiences in Western countries on Tibet and the Dalai Lama.

Xi Jinping has stressed the importance of “civil and military integration”, and particularly at the time of the 19th Party Congress last October (2018) PLA troops were deployed to convey propaganda to “the masses” in Tibetan areas. The concept of the “Three Warfares”, the guiding doctrine for PLA information operations, involves three strategies that underpin the systematic approach to these delegations to the West as follows: the coordinated use of strategic psychological operations; overt and covert media manipulation; and legal warfare designed to manipulate strategies, defense policies, and perceptions of target audiences abroad. Propaganda campaigns supporting these efforts use mass media and cyberspace channels to promote specific themes favorable for China’s image abroad – political stability, peace, ethnic harmony, and economic prosperity supporting the narrative of the “China model” in Tibet.^[35]

China’s attempts to obliterate the influence of the Dalai Lama in favour of the CCP underpin all of these propaganda efforts. The same state media report on tactics of “telling Tibet’s story to the world” specifies that: “The main tasks for our region were the positive promotion of Tibet and deeply exposing the 14th Dalai clique [...], vigorously innovating external propaganda methods and actively expanding avenues for external dissemination, further telling the world the good story of Tibet [and] sharing with the world the Chinese people’s sense of happiness and accomplishment”.^[36]

These delegations overseas, stated the same article, are capable of “answering questions of concern to the international community with concrete facts, explaining our country’s principled stand on the issue of Tibet, and forcefully exposing the 14th Dalai clique’s fallacies and lies. Such activities, which take cultural exchange as their point of entry, have been positively appraised by the people of the countries that the international visitors have been to, achieving excellent results.”^[37]

There is another important aspect of this approach, which is to strengthen China’s leverage on other issues by pushing Western governments on “soft” areas such as meetings with the Dalai Lama. The significance of meeting the Dalai Lama is in real terms small since there are no military or economic implications for governments. But numerous Western governments have conceded to the demand from the Chinese side that they should not meet the Dalai Lama. For instance the Chinese authorities blamed a period of diplomatic chill in UK-China relations on a meeting in May 2012 of the Dalai Lama and the then Prime Minister David Cameron and his deputy Nick Clegg, although there was no evidence of an adverse impact in trade ties. The Chinese insistence on the Dalai Lama as the “problem” in bilateral meetings with the UK was likely to be part of an elaborate strategy by the Chinese authorities to gain the upper hand in the diplomatic relationship.^[38]

The Chinese government is highly active in promoting its representations of Tibet during these high-profile visits of the Dalai Lama to Western countries. When the Dalai Lama was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal in Washington, DC, by the then President George Bush in 2007, official representatives lobbied every member of Congress involved in the award.

It is unlikely that many of the official delegates believe they will completely succeed in undermining the reputation of Nobel Peace Laureate the Dalai Lama, given his global standing and widespread popularity. But, at the same time, the systematic nature of efforts to discredit the Dalai Lama in the political sphere does make an impact. A major factor in doing so is the access granted to Chinese delegations speaking about Tibet, while Tibetans from inside Tibet are blocked from leaving Tibet to speak for themselves, and Western governments or international institutions have requests for access refused.

Following the 19th Party Congress in October (2017), the CCP’s language on “telling the Tibet story” and welcoming overseas visitors hardened, demonstrating a focus consistent with Xi Jinping’s “new era” of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.^[39] The number of delegations sent from Tibet and China with

propaganda messages to the West also spiked last year, coinciding with the 19th Party Congress, compared to previous years in the decade-long period.

Indicating the significance of the Party Congress, the TAR was closed to foreigners during the period of the meeting, and Tibetans were further isolated from the outside world due to more systematic blocking of communications, creating dangers even in innocent family conversations in the buildup to the Party Congress.



Contemporary Lhasa, showing the Potala Palace, former home of the Dalai Lama.

(Photo: Carlos Mel Bruno)

The Party has expanded its reach even further since Xi Jinping extended his term as Party Secretary and President in February. In line with Xi's slogan "the Party leads everything", past practice of leaving policy implementation to the state has been overhauled in elaborate plans to tighten Communist Party control. There is no mention of guaranteeing rights or interests in the report of the 19th Party Congress, which represents the Party as "the lone force that can guide China to greatness amid the challenges of a new era."^[40]

Among measures unveiled after the high-level 'Two Sessions' Party meetings in Beijing in March (2018) were an upgrade of four of the party's "leading groups" – on financial and economic affairs, cyber-security, reforms and foreign affairs – to become commissions. The new plans also involve an increase in oversight of the United Front Work Department, the Party department that is particularly associated with Tibet policy. In an alarming development, the offices in charge of religious and overseas Chinese affairs now fall under the United Front Work Department, responsible for overseas liaison work, and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission will also report to that department. This signals a policy orientation towards the elimination of social and cultural differences among 'ethnic minorities' in the PRC, strengthening policies that undermine Tibetan language, culture and religion and reversing earlier approaches recognizing 'ethnic autonomy'.^[41] It is accompanied by an expansion of intensified securitization methods in Tibet and Xinjiang.^[42]

"A NEW HISTORICAL STARTING POINT" ON PROPAGANDA

In this context, a statement in the Chinese state media in 2018 reflected the new ideological position, saying that “propaganda thought and culture work are at a new historical starting point”. The official report, based on a meeting of the TAR Regional Propaganda Conference in January, repeated the line from a 2016 statement published in the official media demonstrating the approach on access to Tibet and associated propaganda efforts, urging officials that they must: “Tell the story of Tibet well, spread the good voice’ on Tibet”.^[43]

The state media report stated that Tibet’s propaganda departments would “increase their efforts” in 2018 to “educate the news corps in political thought and to train them in professional qualities, speeding up the pace of reform at major media outlets such as Tibet TV, and stimulating internal forces, increasing the strength of support, and ceaselessly improving the fighting force and influence of the Party media.”^[44]

As part of this propaganda strategy, visits of official delegations to the West have been accompanied by more assertive efforts in ensuring China’s messages on Tibet reach the outside world, and a strong feature has been special editions of China Daily distributed with prominent foreign newspapers. In 2015, according to the article, the authorities “ceaselessly increased” the volume and quality of overseas special editions of state media specifically about Tibet.

The same article states: “In 2015, our region took the opportunity of major events throughout the year to highlight themes, using them as a beachhead and starting point to promote special editions about Tibet to the foreign media, ceaselessly increasing the volume and quality of overseas special editions. Eleven special editions in total were published in *The Washington Post* in the US and in *The Daily Telegraph* in the UK; and 11 overseas Chinese-language media, such as *Overseas Chinese News* in the US, *Dragon News* in Russia, *British China News* in the UK, and *The European Times* in France launched weekly Tibet Today special editions, with more than 500 issues throughout the year; in Nepal, *People’s Weekly* was published once a week with news about Tibet; and there were six special issues about Tibet covering all social strata in India in the mainstream media publications *The Indian Express* and *The Financial Express*; and in Nepal, the Himalaya TV Station broadcast 96 episodes of the foreign propaganda program ‘The Story of China’s Tibet.’^[45]

The International Campaign for Tibet in Germany wrote to *Süddeutsche Zeitung* to express concern about the supplements. “Can democratic societies get the upper hand against authoritarianism if their own institutions sell out to dictators?” wrote Executive Director of ICT Germany Kai Muller. “Since November 10 (2017), we have had to ask this question again—especially in Germany. It has become particularly pressing since Germany’s daily newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, in its own words ‘Germany’s largest nationwide quality daily’ notable for its ‘opinionated and independent journalism,’ published a supplement from the state-run *China Daily*.” In his letter, Kai Muller pointed out that the Chinese state media: “actively took part in blackmailing human rights activists, bloggers, book dealers, and journalists into making ‘confessions’ and publicly humiliating them.”^[46] These methods, reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, violate to an extreme degree the human rights, personal rights, and liberty of those they target. They intimidate dissenters and doubtlessly intensify the climate of repression under Xi Jinping. *China Daily* and *Xinhua*, state-run media, are an integral part of this repression.

“The *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, if it really wishes to produce quality journalism and preserve its credibility as an independent paper, cannot publish the propaganda of authoritarian states guilty of egregious human rights violations. In this particular case, they also must disclose what the Chinese state media paid for advertising and supplements. The International Campaign for Tibet in Germany has urged the paper’s editorial board to rethink their policies accordingly.”^[47]

Even the tragedy of the Nepal earthquake in April, 2015, was characterized as an opportunity to boost China's representations of Tibet in Nepal. The state media details how in response to the earthquake, "three successive news media meetings were convened along with one news conference (Beijing) to release authoritative information on such efforts as earthquake relief, rescue and emergency assistance and aid to Nepal."^[48]

Special mention is made in the report of China's outreach on Tibet in Nepal: "Since 2015, our region has continuously strengthened its positional construction, consolidating and expanding the effects of 'China's Tibet Bookstores' in surrounding countries. In the face of a complex external public opinion environment, our region has conquered every difficulty and ceaselessly consolidated the external propaganda position of these bookstores, continuously promoting and issuing our country's external propaganda via the bookstore in Nepal."

"TOO MUCH TASHI DELEK": ACCESS RESTRICTIONS FOR FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS

**"OUR CONCERNS ABOUT RESTRICTED ACCESS REMAIN AND WE
CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR GREATER DIPLOMATIC ACCESS TO TIBET.
WE ARE NOT ALONE IN OUR FRUSTRATION AND KNOW THAT OTHER
COUNTRIES HAVE ENCOUNTERED SIMILAR OBSTACLES."**

*– Former Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Sarah Sewall,
speaking at a side panel event in Geneva, 2015, co-organized by
the International Campaign for Tibet*

"YES."

*– US Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson, during his 2017
confirmation hearings, answering whether or not he finds China's
denial of Tibet access to reporters, civil society actors, and
diplomats to be problematic*

Coming out of decades of isolation under Mao Zedong's rule, China's 'reform era' saw a general trend of growing openness to the world. This trend has reversed under Xi Jinping's rule, in which an increasingly repressive Communist Party exerts greater influence abroad even while it restricts the activities of foreign governments and organizations inside China.^[49] Tibet has never been afforded the same degree of openness as other parts of the PRC, and the Party has implemented even greater restrictions in recent years.

The International Campaign for Tibet has monitored more than 20 foreign government delegations to Tibet in the ten-year period from March, 2008, averaging around two each year. Perhaps unsurprisingly, during this period there have been more delegations from the United States to Tibet than any other foreign government. The US is the only Western nation which has institutionalized support for Tibet in the form of the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, which is intended to "support the aspirations of the Tibetan people to safeguard their distinct identity," including by supporting "projects designed ... to raise the standard of living for the Tibetan people and assist Tibetans to become self-sufficient."^[50]

The then US Ambassador to China, Gary Locke, visited Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (the Tibetan area of Amdo) in Sichuan in September 2012, a month before a major spike in self-immolations of October 2012, coinciding with the time of the 18th Party Congress in Beijing.

^[51] Despite numerous requests, Ambassador Locke was not able to visit Lhasa until June, 2013, when he

urged the Chinese authorities to open the area up to tourists and diplomats, and highlighted the importance of preserving Tibet's cultural heritage.^[52] It was the first time since September 2010 that the Chinese government had granted a US ambassador access to the tightly-controlled region.

The United States has an embassy in Beijing and consulates in the major Chinese cities of Chengdu, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenyang, and Wuhan. The State Department has repeatedly requested permission to open a consulate in Lhasa, and the Chinese authorities have repeatedly refused. The Lhasa consulate has been a top priority for years, and Congress approved legislation that included a provision for \$5 million to construct it nearly a decade ago.^[53]

Invoking the concept of reciprocity, the House Foreign Affairs Committee stipulated in 2011 that China would not be permitted to establish any more consulates in the United States until it allows the opening of a consulate in Lhasa.^[54] The only consulate in Lhasa at present is from neighboring Nepal.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Dr. Daniel B. Baer told the House Foreign Affairs Committee about ongoing State Department efforts to establish the consulate in 2011: "We have, since 2005, made the establishment of a consulate in Lhasa a priority. We continue to press the Chinese government to answer our request, while we reiterate our long-standing interest in regular and comprehensive access to Tibetan areas for international diplomats, journalists and non-governmental organizations."

India, which operated a mission and consulate in Lhasa until the 1962 Sino-Indian War, has occasionally sought to reestablish a diplomatic presence in Tibet. In 2009, Ju Jianhua, the then director of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Tibet Autonomous Region, told an Indian news correspondent that India was welcome to establish a consulate in Lhasa "any time it wants to".^[55] In 2012, Beijing formally rejected India's request,^[56] however, and in 2015 following further rejections India accepted a counter-offer to open a consulate in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan.^[57]

Denied the opportunity to establish a physical presence in Tibet, diplomatic personnel from multiple countries and intergovernmental organizations have attempted to visit Tibet in recent years, with varying success. Chinese authorities, despite international treaties and regulations meant to guarantee consular access, have blocked numerous attempts.

Article 20 of the Consular Convention between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China cites "reasons of national security" as the only exception to freedom of movement for consular personnel.^[58] Article 7 of the Regulations of the People's Republic of China Concerning Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities states that diplomatic personnel "shall enjoy freedom of movement and travel within Chinese territory," except where entry is "prohibited or restricted by the regulations of the Chinese Government."^[59]

Comparable restrictions to those instituted by Chinese authorities in Tibet mainly exist in instances like the declaration of a state of emergency in Ethiopia in 2016.^[60] Even diplomats stationed in North Korea face fewer barriers leaving the city of Pyongyang than diplomats who attempt to travel from Chinese areas into Tibet.^[61]

Sarah Sewall, a former Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues at the US State Department, spoke on the topic of Chinese restrictions on access to Tibet in 2015,^[62] saying: "Reciprocity is a cornerstone of diplomatic relations. However, while Chinese diplomats and journalists travel freely throughout the United States, our diplomats and journalists are not afforded the same access to Tibet. Over the last four years, 35 of 39 requests made by our Embassy or Consulates to visit the TAR were denied."

These restrictions have imposed serious difficulties for foreign diplomats attempting to render aid to their citizens in Tibet, as was the case following a 2013 bus crash in the TAR which left three Americans dead and several more injured. Chinese authorities delayed consular access to American diplomatic personnel for more than 48 hours; Sewall's comments suggested the possibility that these delays may have impinged on the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the 1981 US-China Bilateral Consular Convention.

Australian and Canadian diplomats have also publicly acknowledged the difficulty of gaining access to Tibet. The Australian Ambassador to China, Frances Adamson, was granted a short visit to Tibet only after two years of requests for access. In a statement after her visit, Ambassador Adamson said: “I clearly and directly conveyed the Australian government’s views on the human rights situation in Tibet. I made the point that we wished to see open and regular access to the Tibetan Autonomous Region for the media, as well as for Australian diplomats.”^[63]

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion stated in 2016 that Chinese officials routinely attempt to delay diplomatic visits to Tibet or made it very difficult to obtain permits, adding that Canadian embassy staff were even barred from visiting Canadian-funded projects in Tibet.^[64] As with the restrictions on journalists, the primary mechanism for restricting access is the selective granting of Tibet Travel Permits, which require submitting the applicant’s visa and passport, and without which it is impossible to book travel or hotel rooms within the TAR.

A prominent tactic of the Chinese authorities is to use a visit to Tibet as a carrot or stick to further their own agenda in bilateral dialogues, for instance in the EU. The International Campaign for Tibet has monitored cases for instance in Germany when government visits have been cancelled at the last minute due to “scheduling difficulties”.

Members of legislative bodies from around the world have also been targeted by Chinese restrictions. In one prominent case, a German lawmaker who chairs the Bundestag’s Human Rights Committee was refused access to the PRC on the basis of previous comments he had made about the human rights situation in Tibet.^[65] Bundestag Member Michael Brand was told by China’s foreign ministry that he was “not welcome” because of his support for Tibet. In response to the ban, Brand said: “We can’t just accept it when authoritarian regimes like China, Russia or Turkey carry out censorship and oppression, certainly not if they want to export these methods — and to Germany too.”

When foreign legislators are given access, it is always on China’s terms, with interviews, itineraries, and access carefully planned and handled. ICT research has found a pattern of high-level delegations that slowly increased in quantity after a near-total lockdown in the wake of the 2008 Tibetan Uprising. The delegations — led by British ministers, EU Commission Chairmen, ambassadors, and more — speak with Party leaders and local government leaders who can be relied upon to convey Communist Party narratives.

A frequent tactic is to quote delegates with making positive comments in Chinese state media, whether they actually did so or not. Last year (2017), the Slovenian ambassador to China was quoted in the official media as remarking that “seeing all these believers come here to worship and pray for their families indicates religious freedom in Tibet,” following a visit to the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, and Sera Monastery.^[66] The same article lays out the themes which Chinese authorities had sought to take credit for in front of their guests: cultural protection and heritage, Tibetan Buddhist culture, ecological and the environment, tourism, and the “stability” — a political term meaning compliance with Party policy — of Tibetan society.

Democratic Leader of the House in the US Nancy Pelosi, a long-term friend of the Dalai Lama and supporter of Tibet, said that the Chinese security detail accompanying her group on a visit to the TAR in 2015 did what they could to stop them even greeting ordinary Tibetans. At a press conference after the visit, Minority Leader Pelosi said: “There were people who — shall we say — had walkie-talkies that may not have been identified as security who are part of the mass movement through the — down the path and through the old part of Tibet. But, those same people, right from the start, kind of complained that there was too much ‘Tashi Delek’ [a traditional Tibetan greeting] going on between us and the people who were standing around. They were like: ‘She wasn’t supposed to be doing that.’” Congressman Jim McGovern, who was also on the visit, said: “I think it’s fair to say that I think the Chinese government wanted to control as much of our visit as they could. And we saw what they wanted us to see. We also saw things that they didn’t want us to see.”^[67]



Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and her delegation in front of the Potala in Lhasa, Tibet, in 2015. (Photo: democraticleader.gov)

In 2009, a four-member delegation of the German Bundestag's Human Rights Committee visited Tibet, are still the only delegation of the German Parliament to be able to go to Tibet since 2008. Holger Haibach, a Christian Democrat MP who headed the mission, said after the trip: "We were given the impression that Tibet is a country with a big economic boom and no real problems in terms of ethnic or religious minorities. Whether this impression actually corresponds to reality would need more intensive scrutiny — we didn't have the chance to do this in three days". Haibach added that it was also difficult because of the "constant accompaniment". The liberal politician Burkhard Müller-Sönksen, who was also a member of the delegation, stated: "We tried to meet ordinary Tibetans. But we were introduced to a functionary, a farmer, in a village near Lhasa. It all seemed like a façade because he was doing very well and was very successful. We were never able to meet any normal Tibetans unfortunately."^[68]

Chinese authorities have routinely denied access to United Nations officials as well, perhaps recalling the 2005 visit of UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Dr. Manfred Nowak, who stated that 'torture remains widespread' and described "a palpable level of fear" in Tibet after his visit.^[69] Dr. Nowak noted that security officials attempted to obstruct his attempts at fact-finding in his Mission Report: "As the Special Rapporteur was unable to obtain a letter of authorization from the relevant authorities to visit detention centers alone (in contrast to his previous country visits), officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accompanied him to detention centers to ensure unrestricted access." He concludes that as prison authorities were informed of his visits approximately an hour in advance, the visits could not be considered to have been truly "unannounced."

The then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, noted in 2012 that there were 12 outstanding requests for official visits to China by UN Special Rapporteurs on various human rights issues, including one by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief.^[70] The six UN Special Rapporteurs who joined forces to criticize China's violations of religious freedom in Tibet in 2016 did so without ever being granted access to the areas of concern,^[71] including the Larung Gar religious institute in Sichuan, where thousands of homes have been demolished and nuns and monks expelled over the past two years.



Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi during a meeting with Chinese officials in Beijing. (Photo: AP)

In 2014, Chinese authorities used a timeworn tactic of manipulating foreign government officials and academics through the use of access. Attendees of a government-organized conference in Lhasa found, upon return to their home countries, that a statement had been issued from the conference endorsing hostile propaganda against the Dalai Lama and asserting the “happiness” of Tibetans under Chinese rule.^[72]

What was termed the “Lhasa Consensus” was a blunt propaganda weapon against the Dalai Lama, with the official media stating that: “Participants unanimously agree that what they have actually seen in Tibet differs radically from what the 14th Dalai [Lama] and the Dalai clique have said. The Dalai clique’s statements on Tibet are distorted and incorrect.” The same document emphasized the happiness and satisfaction of Tibetans under Chinese rule. Its release coincided with news that paramilitary troops opened fire on unarmed Tibetans in eastern Tibet, seriously injuring at least ten Tibetans.^[73]

Among those attending the conference were a prominent British Lord, an Austrian Parliamentarian and the director of the Confucius Institute in Vienna. When asked whether he had actually signed on to the statement, one participant, the former mayor of Christchurch, New Zealand, Sir Bob Parker, said: “Not at all. I’m aware that the statement was made but I certainly haven’t signed up to it. I think a number of people who were there were a little surprised to hear about that statement.”^[74]

In 2016, the exercise of the Lhasa Consensus was repeated, although this time with an emphasis on Tibet’s environment and development; the authorities sought to convey the impression that its policies are aimed at conservation. The Tibetan plateau, a global climate change epicenter which is warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the world, is the source of the earth’s largest river systems, and a critical resource to the world’s ten most densely populated nations surrounding Tibet. But instead of seeking to protect this fragile high-altitude environment, China is building multiple dams on all the major rivers running off the plateau, devastating the landscape with large-scale copper, gold, silver and lithium mining, and intensifying urbanization. Because water and mineral resources are seen as strategic assets by the Communist Party government, Beijing’s policies on Tibet remain exempt from genuine debate and enquiry.^[75]

The wording of the Lhasa Consensus was indicative of the authorities’ efforts to convince foreign delegates that the land use policies that are having such a devastating impact are aimed at climate change adaption and mitigation. In this political language, dam-building on a massive scale is described as ‘water conservation construction’ and the displacement of nomadic pastoralists from the ancestral grasslands

they have protected for centuries is framed in terms of environmental protection, although the opposite is the case. In a disturbing new development, the Chinese leadership is also seeking to gain endorsement from international institutions and governments for the creation of national parks on the plateau that are contingent upon the removal of nomads from their pastures. Visitors to the Lhasa Forum were even taken on a tour of a relocation site, depicted on state TV.^[76]

TOURIST ACCESS TO TIBET AND THE SECURITY STATE

As the number of self-immolations by Tibetans exceeds 150, indicating the Tibetan people's anguish at Chinese oppression, the Chinese authorities are seeking to brand Tibet as a romantic 'Shangri La' destination, and there is a tourist boom in Tibet.

According to the Chinese state media, in just three days alone during the Tibetan and Chinese New Year period from February 15-18 (2018), 216,400 tourists visited the Tibet Autonomous Region, up 30.7 percent compared to the same period last year, with tourism revenue reaching \$25 million.^[77] Official statistics, which are greatly exaggerated, project arrivals to rise to 35 million visitors by 2020. Statistics published in the state media also show that tourism already makes up one-fifth of the economy of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, has created 320,000 jobs and is helping to fuel double-digit rates of growth, officials say.^[78] The figures are certainly inflated, with visitor arrivals bolstered to meet official quotas,^[79] but that does not detract from the transformative impact of the rising tourist numbers to the world's highest and largest plateau.

Tibet, once known as a 'forbidden kingdom,' a remote Shangri-la in the clouds, is now more accessible to travelers than ever before. No longer do tourists have to endure the long and arduous journey along treacherous mountain roads. Now they can enter Tibet from Chengdu in Sichuan, Xining in Qinghai, or Kathmandu in Nepal by air—and the Golmud-Lhasa train that opened in July 2006 has made the plateau even more accessible.

While tourists may see for themselves that the devotional element of Tibetan Buddhist religion is still thriving in Tibet, they may fail to grasp that the survival of the Buddhist culture, so critical to Tibetan identity, is facing its most severe crisis. It may also not be apparent that behind the modern urban façade, a growing underclass of Tibetans are increasingly marginalized and impoverished, without access to even basic healthcare and education. China's economic policies, imposed from the top-down, are resulting in a dramatic and irreversible change to Tibetan people's lives with little or no consideration for the differences between Tibetan and Chinese culture and traditions.

At first glance the sheer numbers of tourists – mostly Chinese domestic visitors – may seem to suggest that there are no issues with access to the plateau. Certainly Chinese tourists have more freedom to explore different areas of the plateau than Western journalists or government delegations. But they are also evidence of a deliberate strategy by the Chinese government to attract large numbers of Chinese visitors to the scenic sites and cultural icons of Tibet and receive a version of history and traditions overseen by Beijing and its state-trained guides. The calculation is that attracting high-end tourism will not only boost the economy, but will at the same time assert China's propaganda message of its ownership and dominance of Tibet.

In 2014, the confidence of the Chinese authorities in showcasing Lhasa in particular after the protests and crackdown of 2008 was evident in its hosting of a Tourism Expo, that has become an annual event. In 2016, it attracted "400 overseas guests, who were foreign ambassadors in China, diplomatic corps from Northeast Asia and South Asia, foreign journalists and overseas merchants from 15 countries and regions, including the United States, France, Republic of Korea and Pakistan".^[80]



Horseracing festival near Gyalthang, Dechen Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan province, 2012.

In an unprecedented development in contemporary Tibetan history, mass tourism coexists with an extreme security and surveillance state in place in Tibet. Great efforts are made to hide this from visitors from the outside, particularly foreign delegations of government officials or journalists, and often the authorities succeed in this effort, given the pace of change and development in Tibet.

But it can never be fully obscured. Every year since 2008, the Tibet Autonomous Region has been closed to tourists for at least a month, coinciding with the anniversary of the March 10 Uprising in 1959 and protests in 2008. The closure, this year from February until early April (2018) indicates that ultimately the ‘pillar industry’ of tourism is subordinate to the securitization priorities of the Party state.^[81]

Indicating the contradictions of the “closed openness” of Tibet, the TAR government announced in March (2018) that there would be free admission to 115 major tourist sites in area, including the Potala Palace, at a time when Lhasa and the TAR is closed to foreign visitors.^[82]

Access to foreign tourists to Tibet can also be restricted at other times, too, depending on the political climate; tours to a particular area such as Mount Kailash, in a sensitive border region, can be suddenly cancelled.

Having secured a Chinese tourist visa, foreigners are free to roam across most of the PRC. Even entering the comparatively sensitive regions of East Turkestan (Chinese: Xinjiang) and Southern Mongolia (Chinese: Nei Menggu) requires the same tourist visa that grants access to Beijing, Shanghai, and the rest of China.

But entering the TAR is impossible without acquiring a Tibet Travel Permit (TTP) and arranging for a state-approved tour guide; no other province-level entity in the PRC has equivalent additional barriers to access.

The requirement for a TTP, and for paid guides, gives Chinese authorities another chance to screen entrants before they’re allowed to enter the Tibet Autonomous Region and to raise the cost barrier for travel in Tibet. Applicants are not guaranteed a TTP, and no TTPs are issued at all during the 4 to 6 week period centered on March each year,^[83] coinciding with the time of heightened security restrictions aimed at preventing public observances of the anniversary of the 1959 Uprising and widespread protests of 2008. Additional blackout periods may be imposed at other times too, depending on China’s political priorities, as was the case in 2017 when the TAR was closed for 10 days in October during the period of the 19th Party Congress in Beijing.^[84]

The stipulation that foreigners hire state-approved tour guides also serves to color and qualify the limited access foreigners have to Tibet. From 2002 onwards, Chinese authorities became concerned that Tibetan tour guides were straying from the officially sanctioned version of Tibet's history, in particular those Tibetans who had been educated in English in India, where the Central Tibetan Administration and the Dalai Lama are based.^[85] Around 160 tour guides were dismissed in early 2003 when they were unable to produce confirmation from their local home governments that they had never been to India. The dismissed tour guides were replaced with people drafted from China. The tourism bureau in the TAR explained that Chinese tour guides "speak a foreign language and Tibet has a shortage of tour guides who speak a foreign language" – without acknowledging, of course, that many of the Tibetans who had spent time in India went home with a degree of proficiency in English. The new tour guides were told that they must "ceaselessly raise their political qualities, to maintain political awareness, to quickly enter their role, be a good foreign ambassador for the people and to perform well their duties of introducing Tibet and propagandizing Tibet."^[86]

Restrictions are by no means limited to the TAR, nor is every part of the TAR equally accessible. Tibet travel experts note that Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu) prefecture in the TAR has been completely closed to foreign travelers since 2008, with the exception of Lake Rawok. Restricted areas outside the TAR include Darlag (Chinese: Dari), Gabde (Gande) and Padme (Banma) counties in Golog prefecture, and Semnyi (Menyuan), Chilen (Qilian), Terlinkha (Delingha), and Wulan counties in Tsonub and Tsojang prefectures (all in Qinghai Province), which have been closed to foreigners for over 20 years. In other cases, more specific closures can target individual towns or monasteries, such as the closure of Larung Gar Buddhist Academy in Sichuan to foreign tourists during and after a government campaign of demolishing monks' and nuns' quarters, and expelling thousands of religious practitioners.^[87]

It is impossible to fully hide the workings of the security state from all visitors. Many Chinese tourists have been horrified by the militarization they see in Tibet, and the intense, repressive political environment since the protests of 2008 and wave of self-immolations. These observations, possible because Chinese travelers get access to Tibetan areas that are denied to foreign diplomats and journalists, counter the portrayal by Chinese officials and state media of a tranquil and grateful Tibetan population.

Chinese travelers posting messages on the social media platform, Weibo, in Tibet also appear to be afforded greater leeway by the government, while Tibetans who pass on information about Tibet are considered suspect by the state. They find a reality in Tibet that differs sharply from expectations formed through official propaganda about Tibet; often expressing confusion and at times fear over checkpoints and ID searches, or finding that their cell phone and internet service are turned off in Tibetan areas, revealing government efforts to block Tibetans' communication. Chinese social media posts also raise questions, and criticism, such as this post from 2012: "At night in the square in front of the Jokhang, there are more People's Armed Police and regular police than other people combined. Is that really necessary?"^[88]

'THE PLANET'S LEADING CENSOR AND PRESS FREEDOM PREDATOR': ACCESS RESTRICTIONS FOR JOURNALISTS IN TIBET

“AS A JOURNALIST YOU HAVE TO HAVE EXTRA, EXTRA, SHREWD MEASURES TO BE ABLE TO ENTER [TIBET AND XINJIANG]. IT’S MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO GO TO THESE [MINORITY] AREAS THAN TO HAN [CHINESE] AREAS.”

– Ursula Gauthier, former Beijing correspondent for L’Obs, who was expelled from China for her reporting in 2015^[89]

“FREEDOM DEPENDS ON FACTUALITY. FREEDOM DEPENDS ON REPORTERS. WHY? BECAUSE YOU CANNOT BE A FREE PERSON IF ALL YOU DO IS ACCEPT THE THINGS THAT PEOPLE TELL YOU [...] IF YOU WANT TO BUILD UP RESISTANCE TO THE OVERWHELMING FORCES THAT ARE JUST FEEDING YOU THE THINGS THAT THEY HAVE ALREADY FIGURED OUT YOU WANT TO HEAR, IF YOU WANT TO HAVE A CHANCE OF RESISTING THAT YOU NEED FACTS, WHICH MEANS YOU NEED REPORTERS.”

– Timothy Snyder, author of ‘On Tyranny’, speaking about journalism on March 10, 2018^[90]

STEPHEN MCDONELL OF THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION TRAVELED UNDERCOVER TO EVADE ROADBLOCKS MEANT TO KEEP REPORTERS OUT OF TIBET IN 2012. ARRIVING AT LABRANG MONASTERY IN NORTHERN TIBET, HE WAS ONLY ABLE TO FILM ONE INTERVIEW BEFORE PLAINCLOTHES POLICE ARRIVED TO STOP HIM:

Voiceover: Again, police and government officials find us, and this time there’s no getting away. They’re angry that we haven’t already left town.

McDonell, to police officer: Why does it matter? Why do you want us to go?

Officer: Because [inaudible] this is our government has consideration...

McDonell: But why? What is the problem?

Officer: Because you’re a journalist.

McDonell: But... we’re journalists, we go to lots of places. What is the problem here?

Officer: Because this is a Tibetan area.

– ABC News, October 9, 2012^[91]

While Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution guarantees the freedom of the press, and regulations issued by the State Council^[92] clearly state the Chinese government is responsible for protecting “the legitimate rights and interests of foreign journalists,” in practice journalists face significant restrictions on their ability to report inside the People’s Republic of China. The conflict is clear in the CCP’s characterization of all media work abroad and with foreign press as *wai xuan*, or “external propaganda.”

Nearly half of the correspondents surveyed by the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China (FCCC) in 2017 reported experiencing interference, harassment, and physical violence in the course of their work.^[93] Reporters Without Borders (RSF) consistently ranks China as one of the worst countries on Earth for press freedom;^[94] in 2017 it placed 176th on a list of 180 countries, and RSF refers to China as “the planet’s leading censor and press freedom predator.”

China’s restrictions on reporting in Tibet are even harsher. While journalists struggle to pursue stories in Chinese cities and rural areas, conventional reporting is largely impossible in Tibet.

The amount of access granted to journalists has fluctuated over the last decade, reflecting the changing priorities and level of confidence of Chinese authorities. There was an impact on access following the two protests in March and April 2008 when foreign journalists on state-guided tours witnessed Tibetan monks boldly breaking through police cordons and going off-script at the Jokhang Temple and in Labrang monastery, delivering impassioned pleas for human rights and the return of the Dalai Lama as they refuted Chinese narratives on Tibet.

This affected organized media tours as well as diplomatic visits. More frequent press tours resumed in 2013, reflecting a growing confidence that the implementation of more rigid forms of control and visible evidence of increasing tourism and prosperity in many areas, allow for thorough stage-managing of these visits. The International Campaign for Tibet monitored no major organized foreign press trips from 2009-2011, and just one in 2012. In 2013 this increased to three while by 2016 there were five. The state media reported that that in 2015, “141 people in 12 batches of mainstream media journalists were received from such countries and regions as India, Nepal, Italy and Australia, and among them the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office hosted the press corps from the China-Africa News Centre, Nepalese mainstream media groups, and Beijing-based foreign correspondents.”^[95]



*A Chinese official gestures to Stephen McDonnell to stop filming in Labrang.
(Photo: Australian Broadcasting Corporation)*

The Foreign Correspondents Club of China stated in their 2016 annual report that “vast areas of the country still remain inaccessible to foreign reporters,” noting as one of their top concerns that it is impossible to report from Tibet without incurring serious interference.^[96] Most respondents to the FCCC working conditions survey who applied to go to Tibet were denied access, and of those who were able to enter

Tibet, 75% reported encountering problems in 2015. By 2017, the number who experienced ‘significant’ attempts to hamper their reporting had risen to 80%.^[97] Elaborating on the problems they encountered, one respondent reported that after gaining access to Tibet, he or she “was followed... While there, was questioned by government officials and police who also harassed our sources, translators and driver.”

In recent years, other journalists have reported being chased out of Tibet by police and government officials,^[98] and being forced to sign documents promising not to try to return.^[99] Others filed stories after bypassing police checkpoints by hiding in the backseat of a car,^[100] with reporters resorting to this tactic multiple times.^[101] One Beijing-based journalist attempting to enter Kanlho (Chinese: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous prefecture in Gansu Province was turned back by police at a roadblock and told that temporary regulations in place at the time supposedly protecting the right of foreign journalists to report inside the People’s Republic of China “don’t apply here.”^[102]

New York Times writer Steven Lee Myers and a French photographer named Gilles Sabrié were detained and expelled from the town of Dzongsar in Kandze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (in Sichuan) in February 2018, during an attempt to report on the celebration of Losar (Tibetan New Year).^[103] Myers had expected to write about how the resumption of Losar ceremonies suggested “a growing government acceptance” of Tibetan Buddhist rituals. Instead, shortly after their arrival Myers and Sabrié were escorted to a police station where, in his words, “it soon became clear that our mere presence was the problem.” First driven to the county seat of Derge (Chinese: Dege) for questioning, and then to the prefectural capital of Dartsedo (Chinese: Kangding), they were finally driven back to the provincial capital of Chengdu. Myers wrote: “For the Chinese, though, it was a self-inflicted embarrassment. We had traveled high into the mountains of the Tibetan plateau last week to write about holiday traditions in that part of China. By detaining us, and ultimately expelling us from the region, the authorities succeeded in preventing that. So I am writing this instead.”

The above incidents mostly took place in parts of Tibet outside the TAR; inside the TAR restrictions are even greater. The FCCC states that the TAR remains “unreachable” for foreign correspondents, whose presence is banned outside of government-organized reporting trips. These restrictions are implemented through the J-1 and J-2 visas that journalists are required to acquire before reporting in China, combined the requirement to submit your visa and passport when applying for a Tibet Travel Permit. Holding a journalist visa essentially makes the bearer ineligible to enter TAR without government permission, as Chinese airlines and buses will refuse to sell tickets without a TTP, and hotels will report the arrival of any J visa to the police upon check-in. One of the very few foreign journalists to independently report inside the TAR since the mass expulsion of journalists in 2008,^[104] Cyril Payen, did so only by obtaining a non-journalist visa and then reporting from Lhasa in secret. Obtaining the visa took eight months, and the story Mr. Payen filed resulted in Chinese embassy personnel in multiple countries harassing and threatening him in the weeks that followed.^[105]

In contrast to the extensive restrictions placed upon foreign journalists in China who attempt to report from Tibet, Chinese authorities will occasionally reach out to journalists in other countries and invite them to visit Tibet, particularly for instance reporters from Nepal and India who they wish to cultivate for favorable coverage. Few, if any, of the reporters brought in from abroad speak Chinese or Tibetan, and they are almost certainly less familiar with the Tibet issue than reporters who have lived in China and studied Chinese politics for years. This lack of fluency with the issues can be considered a plus for the Chinese government, which may hope that their guests will be more easily misinformed than resident journalists.

State-organized trips to the TAR tend to follow similar itineraries, visiting places that Chinese authorities use to make their strongest case for their rule in Tibet. Arriving in Lhasa, journalists are brought to the Potala Palace, one or more of the major temples and monasteries, and a model business or cooperative. Showing off new infrastructure, including highways and dams, the journalists may then be chauffeured to model towns in Nyingtri (Chinese: Linzhi), a budding tourist center in southern Tibet, and Tsethang (Chinese: Zedang), a historically significant Tibetan town.^[106] Other parts of Tibet, such as the sensitive border region of Ngari (Chinese: Ali) and the restive Nagchu prefecture, where a terrifying crackdown has been underway in Driru (Chinese: Biru), remain firmly off the itinerary.



*Kumbum monastery, March 2, 2018 troops march in front of the great butter sculpture offering.
(Photo: Social media)*

In some cases, Chinese authorities have invited resident China journalists on guided trips through Tibet; these trips rarely result in positive coverage. Unable to report freely, the restrictions themselves become the subject of the stories, as Los Angeles Times reporter Jonathan Kaiman wrote following a 2016 tour of Tibet: “We were closely monitored. Each time we stopped at an attraction, two to five SUVs full of middle-aged men — brooding smokers, most wearing ill-fitting polo shirts — would park behind us. The men followed along as we reported. They did not introduce themselves, and they did not respond to questions... Everything was recorded. The foreign journalists recorded the tour guides, and Chinese reporters recorded the foreign ones. The shadowy men recorded us all.”^[107]

Simon Denyer of the Washington Post called his trip to Tibet “a tour the North Koreans would have been proud of,” a “Disney meets Potemkin” experience that soured when he and other journalists requested permission to visit a local monastery and were told that no such place existed. Escaping from their minds by repeatedly switching cabs, they found police waiting outside the local monastery and were escorted back to their hotel.”^[108]

Nevertheless, the authorities often profess themselves satisfied with the results of its approach to invite foreign journalists, indicating a capacity to withstand criticism and a confidence in their ability to ensure damage limitation, given the deeply embedded structures and mechanisms of control in Tibet. After hosting 12 groups of mainstream media journalists in 2015 as part of the “Please come in then go out” approach, the state media reported: “After returning to their countries, the majority of reporting was quite objective and neutral, playing an important role in the foreign masses’ understanding of Tibet, and achieving good results.”^[109]

In the same year, 2015, the Chinese authorities offered a trip to journalists to visit hand-picked Tibetan nomad families who had been ‘settled’ in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), the Tibetan area of Amdo. The visit directly followed a critical opinion piece and article in the New York Times about Chinese policies of nomad settlement in Tibet, and may have been in response to this prominent piece, which cited Chinese academics criticizing the policy. The implementation of Chinese policies to settle Tibetan nomads, and to resettle Tibetans in towns and villages, threatens the survival of a way of life that is integral to Tibetan identity as well as the survival of the rangelands and Tibet’s biodiversity. The policy is openly contested in China; there is a strong consensus among Chinese and foreign rangelands experts that settling nomads runs counter to the latest scientific evidence on lessening the impact of grasslands degradation, which

points to the need for livestock mobility in ensuring the health of the rangelands and mitigating negative warming impacts.^[110]

For the trip, journalists were taken to meet settled nomads, and the resulting articles were not entirely critical, giving impressions of a better quality of life, even though reporters also mentioned clearly that this was a propaganda visit, aimed at winning people over with the Chinese authorities' narrative on nomad settlement. While not omitting criticism of the policy, Reuters reported: "None of the herders spoke out against the resettlement program during interviews with reporters. Shuke Sonam, 27, whose family now runs a guest-house, said Tibetans living in tents previously would often be soaked by rain. 'Now we have such nice houses, and because we're taking in guests from other places, it's improved our awareness about life,' she said. Bai Yingchun, deputy head of the Ngaba prefecture's propaganda office, said 'absolutely nothing was forced' in the resettlement program."^[111] A Wall Street Journal reporter, aware of how thoroughly the deck had been stacked, wrote of one interviewee: "Later, prompted by reporters, the father of two said he was more than a beneficiary: Mr. Qiongbo is also a member of the local Communist Party organization that helped implement the resettlement program."^[112]



Nomad resettlement housing near Golmud, Tibet. (Photo: ICT)

Reporters are keenly aware of the reprisals that often face Tibetans who speak to journalists. One FCCC respondent described potential interviewees as "locked in Tibet" after reporters leave, vulnerable to draconian punishments for speaking out.^[113]

Tashi Wangchuk, a shopkeeper and language advocate who had called for greater Tibetan-language education, was detained just days after the New York Times (NYT) published a video story profiling his efforts.^[114] After two years in detention he was tried for 'inciting separatism,' which could result in a sentence of up to 15 years in prison. In the first known instance of an international news story being used in a criminal prosecution against a Tibetan, the NYT video was used as evidence – despite Tashi Wangchuk's clear disavowals of separatism, and his stated intention to use the Chinese law to protect the Tibetan language.^[115]

Jonah Kessel, the NYT correspondent who made the video clip, said later: "The use of my film as evidence against Mr. Tashi gets at the heart of one of the thorniest issues that can plague foreign journalists: How do we justify instances when our work — aimed at giving voice to the voiceless and holding the powerful to account — ends up putting its subjects at risk or in danger? [...]"^[116]

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China found in 2016 that Tibetan sources being afraid to speak freely was one of the greatest barriers to comprehensive reporting in Tibet.^[117]

"IT WAS AS IF THE MONK DID NOT EXIST"

The restrictions on foreign journalists in Tibet represent an attempt to prevent certain stories from being told – stories that China's state-run press agencies will not tell. The Chinese government thus uses access as a tool that can be given or taken away in the service of preventing negative coverage or attempting to cultivate positive coverage. Chinese propaganda organs can still use a trip that produces negative coverage in foreign newspapers to support the case that Tibet is open, as in the trip described by Jonathan Kaiman, which involved a meeting with a Tibetan monk: "A group of foreign reporters, who just concluded a weeklong tour of a Tibetan-inhabited area in southwest China, have said they were amazed by the experience," reported the official New China News Agency. Other reports quoted foreign journalists praising the area's development and natural beauty. The reports included no acknowledgment of restrictions, no skepticism about the authenticity of the villagers presented for interviews, and nothing at all about the 'living Buddha' — no quotes, no name, no description. Even mentioning our discussion about religion, it appeared, was off-limits. It was as if the monk did not exist."

The expulsion of journalists for their writing is also a blunt but powerful weapon used by the Chinese authorities against reporters. In 2015, Ursula Gauthier, Beijing correspondent of the magazine *L'Obs*, endured a campaign of insults in the official media and death threats posted on her Facebook page before being expelled from the PRC by the Chinese authorities. Gauthier, one of the few journalists based in Beijing to travel regularly to Tibet and Xinjiang, was accused by Beijing of "encouraging terrorism" after she wrote that Beijing's policy of forced assimilation of 10 million Uighurs, especially in the fields of culture, religion and language, is partially responsible for the bloody attacks, some of them terrorist, that have targeted the Han ethnic majority and Chinese officials in recent years.

The French newspaper *Le Monde* commented afterwards on the weak reaction – indeed, a lack of reciprocity, given the Chinese state media who are free to stay, come and go in France – from the French government: "The absolute priority placed by the French government on 'economic diplomacy' most likely facilitated matters for the Chinese authorities. The corollary of this 'doormat diplomacy' – silence about the condemnations of political prisoners and silence on violations of freedom of speech – guaranteed in a way that Paris would allow Ms. Gauthier to be expelled without making too much of a fuss. Indeed, the reaction of the French Foreign Ministry consisted of just two sentences: 'We regret that the visa of Ms. Ursula Gauthier was not renewed. France recalls the importance of journalists being able to exercise their profession in the world.' Period."^[118]

Le Monde contrasted the approach to Gauthier's expulsion by the French government with earlier responses in the US and France, saying: "It is worth recalling that when China threatened not to renew the visas of several New York Times journalists in 2013 as a result of articles that displeased it, Vice President Joe Biden of the United States rushed to intervene. He informed President Xi Jinping in person that there would be consequences if the reporters were expelled. The message got through. In 2009, China threatened not to renew the visa of an official of the French production company Hikari because of a documentary he produced for the France 5 channel titled, 'Tiananmen, the forbidden memory'. The French foreign minister at the time, Bernard Kouchner, made it known that two Xinhua agency journalists based in France would have their visas revoked if this threat was carried out. Once again, the matter was settled without harm.

"Whatever motivated it, the lack of firmness of the French authorities is irresponsible. The work of foreign correspondents in China is essential to the understanding of that country. French correspondents in Beijing and their foreign colleagues are now more than before at the mercy of an authoritarian caprice of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party – which in fact issues the orders in this area. China, which ranks 176th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, can for its part project a toned-down image."^[119]

Speaking about her experience at a think-tank discussion organized by the International Campaign for Tibet afterwards, Gauthier said: “That’s the important thing for us today; not only to see what is happening on the ground – which is horrendous, because I have seen it on the ground – but to understand that China has a very detailed strategy of imposing their own narrative on the ‘free world’ and a strategy, with us, of imposing their own narrative – on us.”

Travel bans are often imposed on scholars who write or speak about Tibet or Xinjiang, with the inevitable outcome of self-censorship, and worse. The prominent scholar on Uighur issues, James Leibold, wrote in a microblog recently that: “Sadly, I’ve recently experienced this problem of self-censorship firsthand when two respected colleagues refused to publish beside me out of fear of recrimination. Fears over access to China are dividing the Sinological community and generating self-censorship.” (@jleibold, posted April 5, 2018). In response, another scholar, Jonathan Sullivan, said: “Self-censorship among scholars is more pernicious than publishers pulling content from China websites. Access not only motivation- concerns about own institutions, getting jobs & promotion, getting published, passing peer review, provoking Chinese colleagues & students etc.” (@jonsullivan, April 5, 2018).

In an era of unprecedented collaboration between US and Chinese universities, 13 American scholars were barred from China in 2011 because of a book they wrote about Xinjiang (East Turkestan).^[120]

SHUTTING OUT INTERNATIONAL NGOS

International NGOs, which have encountered formidable barriers to operating in Tibet for years, faced a new wave of shutdowns and closures following Xi Jinping’s rise to power.^[121] Repressive new laws, which came into effect in 2017, burdened NGOs with new registration and reporting requirements, and gave Chinese police organs even more power to interfere with their operations. As late as June 2017 as few as 1% of international NGOs in China were operating in accordance with the new laws,^[122] leaving the rest in a “risky legal limbo.” A list of NGOs currently operating in China maintained by The China NGO Project using data from the Ministry of Public Security includes only eight organizations which have definitely worked in areas marked as ‘Tibetan Autonomous’ by the PRC since the new NGO laws went into effect.^[123] It should be noted that some organizations only marked the province in which they were active, however, leaving some ambiguity as to whether or not they worked in a Tibetan area inside a larger province.

In 2017 the international organization Braille Without Borders was forced to withdraw from Tibet, where it had established a preparatory school for blind students. Supporters of their work from across the world asked why – but the NGO could provide no answers, writing in their newsletter: “Because in Tibet there is no alternative training similar to the one we created, we had assumed that the Tibet Disabled Persons Federation would take over the responsibility. Unfortunately, we have not reckoned with their inability. Our motto, ‘Empower the blind before they become disabled’, did not seem to be understood by them. Instead, now everything were to be closed and the blind students to be transferred to ‘special schools,’ facilities where there is no special training for the blind and because of that these children would not be able to integrate themselves into regular schools and later into society. [...] Although the Chinese government has always praised BWB as a showcase project, and even though other disability organizations elsewhere in China have adopted our self-integration methods, now everything was going to be over? Just like that? Nobody would profit from a closure of these projects. We never got an answer on the question ‘why?’ We don’t know the reason.” (Braille Without Borders newsletter, No 3, 2017).^[124]

These shutdowns took place in the context of an already constricted operational environment. A number of international NGOs, which had worked in Tibet for years and directly impacted the lives of Tibetans, had been forced out much earlier, including Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF, Doctors Without Borders) and the Tibet Heritage Fund. MSF pulled out of Tibet in 2002 following 14 years of work on humanitarian and medical assistance projects.^[125] The pullout was preceded by years of tense relations with the Chinese

authorities, including a 1997 incident in which two senior members of the MSF team had their permits withdrawn. They were only granted partial access to Tibet after the direct intervention of senior MSF officials, who flew to Lhasa to resolve the issue.

The Tibet Heritage Fund, which had worked on preserving and restoring historic buildings in Lhasa, was expelled from Tibet in August 2000 after years of successful work.^[126] The orders came without warning, with Chinese police ordering the Fund to stop all restoration work and shut down its office within days.

Before March 2008, Tibetans who worked for international NGOs were accorded some protection from the Chinese authorities, possibly because the Chinese government did not wish to face awkward questions from foreign embassies. The protests in 2008 transformed the political landscape in Tibet, however, and two young Tibetan men who both worked for NGOs received sentences that were unprecedented, and are still in prison with some years left to serve. Migmar Dhondup, an NGO worker, was sentenced to 14 years in prison for “espionage”, and Wangdu, a former Project Officer for an HIV/AIDS program in Lhasa run by the Australian Burnet Institute, was sentenced to life in prison.^[127]

LOCKED IN, LOCKED OUT: TIBETANS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE TIBET

“WHEN OUR TRAIN, PACKED FULL OF SO MANY LIVING THINGS, ARRIVES AT LHASA STATION, THE MAJORITY OF NON-TIBETAN PASSENGERS BREEZE EASILY THROUGH, SO VERY EXCITED TO BE HEADING OFF TO VARIOUS PARTS OF LHASA, AND LOOKING QUITE PERKY; EVEN THOSE WHO ARE IMMEDIATELY HIT BY ALTITUDE SICKNESS. THE DOZEN OR SO TIBETAN PASSENGERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE STOPPED BY ARMED POLICE AND THEIR IDENTITY CARDS CHECKED WITH A DEVICE SIMILAR TO THOSE USED TO SWIPE CREDIT CARDS... WE ARE ALL TAKEN INTO THE POLICE STATION NEXT TO THE RAILWAY STATION.”

– Tsering Woeser, 2012^[128]

“PROCESSING TIME: 4 BUSINESS DAYS”

– Chinese Embassy to the USA website page on visa procedures

“I APPLIED TWICE. BOTH TIMES, I GOT A PHONE CALL A FEW MONTHS LATER. ‘ARE YOU SO-AND-SO? WE CANNOT GIVE YOU VISA. COME COLLECT YOUR PASSPORT.’ I WAS NOT GIVEN REASON WHY. THEY TOLD ME DECISION IS FROM ABOVE.”

– An anonymous Tibetan-American who reported waiting five months for a visa before ultimately being rejected

T Tibetans in Tibet are increasingly locked in, with restrictions on moving from one place to another, obtaining a Chinese passport, or even leaving the country while in possession of a passport. At the same time, Tibetans in exile are increasingly under monitored, living in constant awareness of the possibility of their families in Tibet being targeted if they step out of line even in international capitals, and often it is impossible for them to return home at all. These restrictions, aimed at a specific ethnicity, treat all Tibetans with the same suspicion Chinese authorities may level at individual Chinese dissidents.

In an indication of the taboo nature of even talking about ethnic discrimination in the PRC, a Chinese woman who wrote a widely discussed online account of how people of different ethnicities face prejudice and discrimination was branded a “crazy dog” who supports terrorism and should be put to death.^[129]

From 2012, following the imposition of tough new measures restricting travel in Tibetan areas since the 2008 protests, Tibetans began to face tightening restrictions on the issuance of passports, limiting their travel outside Tibet – for instance to teachings of the Dalai Lama, or to study abroad. This is in contrast to the increasing number of Chinese citizens being granted a passport, and the dramatic increase in domestic tourism to Tibet, with Tibet being branded as a spiritual, romantic destination.

The Chinese authorities used the opportunity of a PRC-wide transition to electronic passports in 2012, when Chinese nationals were required to submit outdated passports for replacement, to single out both Tibetans and Uighurs for more severe restrictions and punitive measures. Regulations issued in 2012 in the Tibet Autonomous Region required all Tibetans in the Tibetan region to surrender their old passports, even when their validity had not expired, ostensibly to be replaced by the electronic version. But in numerous cases, the passports were not replaced.^[130]

The Chinese authorities then began to impose much more systematic measures in order to prevent Tibetans travelling to teachings by the Dalai Lama outside Tibet, and to punish those who do. In 2012, they launched a major operation to detain Tibetans attending a major religious teaching by the Dalai Lama, the Kalachakra in Bodh Gaya, India, ‘disappearing’ many pilgrims for weeks or months on their return, and holding them for long periods for ‘re-education’ in military camps and other facilities.

In July 2014, when the Dalai Lama conferred another Kalachakra initiation in Ladakh, India, for the first time the religious teachings were described by the Chinese state as an incitement to ‘hatred’ and ‘extremist action’. For the first time at a major Buddhist teaching by the Dalai Lama, there were more Chinese Buddhists present than Tibetans from inside Tibet.



This image depicts troop deployment at Kumbum in order to ensure tight control over the Monlam Chenmo Great Prayer Festival. (Photo: Social media)

Last year (2017), thousands of Tibetan pilgrims were compelled by the Chinese authorities to return to Tibet after travelling to India to attend a major teaching by the Dalai Lama in Bodh Gaya, a sacred Buddhist site in India. This followed systematic measures in Tibet to prevent them travelling out of the country at all, even though many had spent years obtaining passports for legal travel.^[131]

These restrictions also threaten the survival of Tibetan Buddhist teachings in Tibet by making it nearly impossible for monks and nuns who wish to travel outside the PRC to receive instruction from teachers who are in exile, and difficult for exiled teachers to get permission to travel within Tibet to give teachings.

As a result of the tighter security in the border areas as well as the crackdown in Tibet since 2008, there has been a dramatic decline in Tibetans escaping from Tibet into Nepal in the past decade. Figures cited by Nepalese immigration officials demonstrated a drop from 1,248 Tibetans in 2010 to 85 applications for an exit permit to India (showing transit via Nepal) in 2015. Department of Immigration (DoI) Director General Kedar Neupane acknowledged the stricter controls on both sides of the border, but also revealed how Nepalese officials often use the language of Chinese propaganda when he was cited as saying that: “Tibetans are opting to stay in their homeland because of declining fervor over the Dalai Lama.”^[132]

Within the PRC, limitations on travel for Tibetans largely center on the TAR. Following the self-immolation protests of Dorje Tseten and Dargye in May 2012, wide-ranging restrictions on access to the TAR were implemented for Tibetans from the regions administered by Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces. These restrictions were accompanied by the mass expulsion of Tibetans from Lhasa; at the time, Human Rights Watch estimated that as many as several hundred were sent out of the Tibet Autonomous Region,^[133] including many who had valid business permits to live and work in Lhasa.

Restrictions on entry to the TAR varied by region, but in one example, Radio Free Asia reported that Tibetans from Golog (Chinese: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (in the eastern area of Amdo) wishing to travel to the TAR were required to produce a residence permit and then apply for permission to travel from county and provincial authorities.^[134] The source added that the restrictions were “still more stringent” for Tibetan monks, who were required to obtain additional permission forms from the local police.

No similar restrictions were placed on Chinese tourists, who did not have to seek permission before visiting Tibet. “They are stopping the Tibetans at the gates, while the Chinese are free to go anywhere and enter from everywhere in Lhasa,” a Tibetan told RFA.^[135] In another example, Tibetans from Qinghai province were barred from entering the TAR for 10 days in October 2017 during the period of the 19th Party Congress.^[136]

Specific areas such as Mount Kailash in western Tibet, and the border counties in southern Tibet, have been the focus of additional barriers. Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash is of profound importance to Tibetan Buddhists, particularly during the holiest month of Saga Dawa, but Chinese authorities have repeatedly banned Tibetans from going there on pilgrimage,^[137] even while allowing Chinese tourists to visit.^[138]

Denial of the ability to travel outside Tibet legally is sometimes used as a form of collective punishment; the family and friends of certain individuals such as former political prisoners, or people associated with Tibetans who have self-immolated or participated in protest, can also have passports denied or recalled. According to ICT research, exceptions seem to have been granted to some Tibetan officials, businesspeople, or others with good connections to the Chinese Communist Party whose travel may be in the interests of the Party.^[139]

Ordinary Tibetans who do manage to receive passports may have to wait years for applications to be processed, and pay thousands of yuan. While the official cost for a passport in China is 220 RMB (\$35), in many areas substantial bribes are necessary, and Tibetan sources have given examples of individuals paying several thousand yuan in associated procedures, which they can also lose completely if their application is finally turned down by security personnel. This is in contrast to the situation before 2008, when Tibetans were sometimes able to obtain passports after applying to the county-level Public Security Bureau after their political record had been checked.

There is a two-tiered system for passports in the PRC: a fast-track for the ethnic Chinese majority, as opposed to a slow-track system imposed in Tibetan areas.^[140] These discriminatory policies place restrictions on freedom of movement across borders and contravene international law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

For Tibetans outside China, visiting their homeland can be highly difficult or even impossible. While other American citizens can obtain a Chinese visa in a few days, American citizens of Tibetan origin reported a process that took anywhere from one to six months.^[141] Of a small sample size by ICT, 62.5% were unable to obtain a visa in the end, with some being told by Embassy staff that they would not be issued a visa, while others grew tired of waiting and asked for their passports to be returned without one. Almost all of the respondents applied more than once, and not one was told why their visa request had been denied.

Every respondent told ICT they had to fill out extra forms beyond the ones required of other American citizens, and that they were required to provide additional information – including a detailed personal history. Of them, 43.7% told ICT that their family members inside Tibet were contacted for questioning by Chinese authorities. Personal interviews were conducted in almost all cases, either over the phone or in person.

In contrast to the onerous restrictions Tibetans face on their freedom of movement normally, the Chinese government will occasionally organize stage-managed trips for returning Tibetans. These trips contain many of the same ‘Potemkin village’ elements as the trips arranged for foreign journalists and diplomats, with government minders guiding returning Tibetans to curated destinations. Here, again, access that is normally denied is instead granted in order to fulfill specific political goals – in this case, enticing overseas Tibetans to return to the PRC. A 2017 state media report on one such trip reveals that the objective of the trip is to promote China’s narratives on “the development of cultural inheritance and protection, urban construction, [and] environmental protection” in Tibet under Chinese rule.^[142]

CHINA: QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED ON RECIPROCITY AND ACCESS

Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet, posed the following questions at a side-panel to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, speaking on the same platform as representatives of the US government, including the former Special Coordinator on Tibet, Sarah Sewall.^[143]

Matteo Mecacci said: “No nation state can hide from international scrutiny forever. The affirmation of economic and social inter-dependence in today’s world can either lead to the creation of stronger global institutions or to their replacement by more nationalistic and painful confrontations. Unfortunately, we are already seeing signs of more confrontation and less cooperation.

“The path that China chooses matters to this institution and to the world. Tibet is and will continue to be an important litmus test that should be watched closely. These are the questions that UN member states, NGOs and journalists should continue to raise and to keep China, as any other government, accountable before the international community.”

1. If human rights are respected in Tibet, why then did China not allow the previous High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Tibetan areas of the PRC to assess the situation?
2. Why has China not extended invitations to UN Special Procedures representatives to visit Tibet?
3. Why is it almost impossible for Western independent journalists to go to the Tibet Autonomous Region?
4. Why can foreign tourists only travel to Tibet on organized tours? Why are they not allowed to travel freely with a guide of their choice?
5. Why is it impossible for foreign NGOs who monitor human rights to travel to Tibet?

6. Why is the number of Ambassadors who can travel to Tibet so limited, and why is it so difficult for them to speak freely to ordinary Tibetans?
7. If China is confident that freedom of religion is respected and that monks and nuns are patriotic, why don't they invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom to travel to Tibet and speak to different monks and nuns, and visit some of the great religious institutions in Tibet?

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Parliaments should pass Reciprocal Access to Tibet resolutions and adopt a common approach towards this issue;
- UN officials, diplomats and representatives of multilateral organizations, should seek access to Tibet in compliance with China's international commitments and obligations and based on the principle of reciprocity by which Chinese diplomats and journalists enjoy unrestricted access in their countries;
- Governments should raise the issue of reciprocal access to Tibet in appropriate international fora, including UN bodies;
- Governments should urge the Chinese leadership to re-evaluate the 'stability maintenance' approach applied in Tibet and the dominance of the security apparatus;
- Consider how delegations from China conveying a propaganda message on Tibet are part of a strategy to control and dominate the global discourse; the hosting of such PRC delegations overseas should be contingent upon granting meaningful access to representatives from host countries;
- During visits by Chinese delegation to the West for instance for human rights dialogues, host countries should provide opportunities for representatives from civil society, and Tibetan citizens living in exile, to engage with the official representatives;
- As Nepal is on the 'frontline' of China's influence operations and is the gateway into exile for many Tibetans, urgent attention should be paid to the matter of lack of documentation among the Tibetan community in Nepal, and further efforts made to ensure their security;
- The international press corps in the PRC play an essential role and must be protected wherever possible; in the case of threats against them, robust responses must be made by relevant governments on the basis of reciprocity, linking the matter to the presence of Chinese state media in Western countries;

TO THE US CONGRESS

- The US Congress should send a strong message by passing the bipartisan and bicameral bills, H.R.1872 and S 821 — Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2017 to promote access for American citizens, diplomats and journalists in Tibet similar to that enjoyed by Chinese citizens, diplomats and journalists in the United States;

- Congress should pass the bipartisan and bicameral resolutions (H.Con.Res.89, . S.Con.Res.30) urging that the treatment of the Tibetan people should be an important factor in the conduct of United States relations with the People's Republic of China;
- Congress should organize a Congressional/staff delegation to Tibet to assess the situation;
- Congress should organize a Congressional/staff delegation to Dharamsala in India to assess the situation of the Tibetan community in exile;
- Explore possibilities for penalizing Chinese officials involved in human rights abuses in Tibet to utilize the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, which authorizes the US President to block or revoke the visas of certain "foreign persons" (both individuals and entities) if they are responsible for or acted as an agent for someone responsible for "extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights."

TO THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

- The Administration should vigorously pursue the United States' long-stated goal of establishing a consulate in Lhasa;
- The Trump Administration should elevate the issue of Tibet to an important factor in bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China;
- The Trump Administration should use economic and political leverage to pressure China to respect Tibet's distinct religion and culture and to resume negotiations with envoys of the Dalai Lama on solving the Tibet problem;
- The early designation of the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues in the State Department is necessary to take the lead in these initiatives of the Trump Administration

TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

- The European Union and EU countries should formulate a multilateral approach to the Tibet issue, particularly on the issue of access; 2018 is EU-China Tourism Year. As noted by the European Parliament (EP) in its 2015 report on EU-China relations, the restrictions imposed on EU citizens or on European-Tibetan citizens wishing to travel to certain areas of Tibet do not exist for Chinese citizens who are granted visas to travel to EU Member States or within the Schengen area. The EU has been calling for reciprocity with China in the area of trade and, in its 2016 Strategy on China, mentioned the objective to "[P]romote reciprocity, a level playing field and fair competition across all areas of co-operation". This notion of reciprocity should therefore be extended to the respect for fundamental rights, including the freedom of movement and the freedom of information of European citizens in China and Tibet.
- It is only by fully involving Tibetans in any decision-making process and implementation of policies aimed at encouraging tourism to Tibet the objectives of generating economic benefits, improving local living standards, and protecting the environment of the plateau can be achieved. Tibetans should be the primary beneficiaries of revenues from tourism, the main employees of tourism enterprises, and, above all, the guides and story tellers who explain Tibet's culture and values to visitors. Tourism can also play a critical role in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and understanding between Tibetans and Chinese. European investors in tourism in Tibet – such as hotel chains – should therefore be urged and encouraged to do their part in ensuring the active participation of Tibetans in the tourism industry and protecting authentic Tibetan culture.

TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

With regard to Tibetans being locked into Tibet, urge the Chinese authorities to:

- Refrain from confiscating valid passports of Tibetans who return from foreign travel; also refrain from confiscating valid passports from Tibetans as a means of sanctioning religious, political or cultural expression that is viewed not to be compatible with the Party state's official policies.
- Allow for unhindered domestic travel for Tibetans and refrain from sanctioning expression of religious, political and cultural beliefs and activities.
- Abolish all discriminatory practices against Tibetans that are perceived to be root causes of Tibetan discontent and grievances, such as the unlawful denial of passports.
- Allow foreign travel for Tibetans; issue passports to Tibetan applicants in accordance with Article 6 of the Passport Law. In particular, when denying the issuance of a passport, explain the relevant decision in accordance with Article 6 of the Passport Law and allow for unhindered judicial review of relevant decisions. Issue passports within the time periods as prescribed in the Passport Law, i.e. 15 or 30 days.
- Repeal Article 13 (7) of the Passport Law that allows for the refusal to issue a passport to a person who may "cause major losses to the interests of the State", as it is not in accordance with Article 12 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has been signed by the People's Republic of China.



Footnotes:

[1] Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, <https://t.co/iVvKDhbT7n>.

[2] 'Authoritarian Advance: Responding to China's Growing Political Influence in Europe', by Thorsten Benner, Jan Gaspers, Mareike Ohlberg, Lucrezia Poggetti, Kristin Shi-Kupfer: <https://www.merics.org/en/publications/authoritarian-advance>.

[3] CNBC, 'Macron's China visit points to Beijing's shifting relationship with Europe', posted January 10, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/10/macrons-china-visit-points-to-beijings-shifting-relationship-with-europe.html>.

[4] Bloomberg, January 8, 2018, 'Macron Tells China New Silk Road Can't Be One-Way Street', <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-08/macron-calls-for-china-eu-relationship-to-enter-21st-century>.

[5] Coalition Agreement, "Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa – Eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland – Ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD", February 7, 2018, <https://www.cdu.de/koalitionsvertrag-2018>; translation into English by ICT.

[6] 'Reciprocity in international relations', from 'Notes on Diplomatic Practice' by Odeen Ishmael, posted on August 19, 2013, at: <https://odeenishmaeldiplomacy.wordpress.com/2013/08/19/41-reciprocity-in-international-relations>.

[7] On Eve of Chinese President's US visit, Congressional Bicameral Bill Calls for Americans to Receive the Same Access to Tibet that Chinese Citizens Enjoy in the United States <https://www.savetibet.org/on-eve-of-chinese-presidents-us-visit-congressional-bicameral-bill-calls-for-americans-to-receive-the-same-access-to-tibet-that-chinese-citizens-enjoy-in-the-united-states>.

[8] Comments reported by the Press Trust of India, December 7, 2017.

[9] See note 128.

[10] International Campaign for Tibet report on the Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing calls for reciprocal access, religious freedom, and human rights in Tibet, December 6, 2017, <https://www.savetibet.org/committee-on-foreign-affairs-hearing-calls-for-reciprocal-access-religious-freedom-and-human-rights-in-tibet>.

[11] The bill, H.R. 1112, the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act 2015, was introduced by Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA) and Joseph Pitts (R-PA) on February 26, 2015.

[12] 'CCTV says Lhasa people are happiest' by Tsering Woesser, broadcast by Radio Free Asia and translated into English by High Peaks Pure Earth, <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2011/cctv-says-lhasa-people-are-happiest-by-woesser/>. XZ is used as a prefix for license plates in the Tibet Autonomous Region, referred to as Xizang in Chinese.

[13] 13 International Campaign for Tibet, 'Jokhang monks peaceful protest changes Beijing's propaganda offensive', March 27, 2008, <https://www.savetibet.org/jokhang-monks-peaceful-protest-changes-beijing-propaganda-offensive>

[14] One of the journalists who spoke to the monks told ICT: "The monks were very emotional, and one of them was crying. They said that they were not asking for Tibetan independence, but for human rights, and that they had no human rights now. They spoke mostly in Tibetan although then switched to Chinese and also some words of English to communicate. When some of them saw the photographers they threw their robes over their heads so we couldn't see their faces, but kept talking." International Campaign for Tibet report, 'Labrang monks stage protest during official media tour' April 9, 2008, <https://www.savetibet.org/labrang-monks-stage-protest-during-official-media-tour>.

[15] International Campaign for Tibet report, 'Torture blamed for death of Tibetan monk, second death following protest during foreign reporters' visit to Labrang monastery', April 4, 2011, <https://www.savetibet.org/torture-blamed-for-death-of-tibetan-monk-second-death-following-protest-during-foreign-reporters-visit-to-labrang-monastery>.

[16] Phrase used by the Tibetan contemporary writer Shokdung (pseudonym for Tagyal) in his book (banned in Tibet, and published later in English), 'The Division of Heaven and Earth: On Tibet's Peaceful Revolution', translated by Matthew Akester and published by Hurst publishers in English, December, 2016, <http://www.hurstpublishers.com/book/division-heaven-earth>.

[17] Robert Barnett, 'The Tibet Protests of Spring 2008: Conflict between the Nation and the State', China Perspectives, 2009/3, <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/4836>

[18] 'Foreign diplomats visit Lhasa after March 14 riot', Xinhua, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-03/30/content_6575800.htm.

[19] This characterization was used widely at the time (for instance, New York Times, 'Tibetan Riots Spread Outside Region', March 16, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/world/asia/16iht-tibet.4.11148124.html>) and continues to be used as an over-arching definition of more than 200 protests that were overwhelmingly non-violent in nature.

[20] International Campaign for Tibet protest logs and map: <https://www.savetibet.org/resources/archived-research/2008-2009-protest-logs>. The 14 violent protests logged include burning of government buildings, vehicles and Chinese-owned shops, with clear efforts to ensure no people were harmed. See International Campaign for Tibet report, August 6, 2008, 'Tibet at a Turning Point: The Spring Uprising and China's New Crackdown', <https://www.savetibet.org/tibet-at-a-turning-point>

[21] Cited by Tibet Daily, February 10, 2012.

[22] International Campaign for Tibet report, 'Storm in the Grasslands: Self immolations in Tibet and Chinese policy', <https://www.savetibet.org/storm-in-the-grasslands-self-immolations-in-tibet-and-chinese-policy>. December 2012.

[23] International Campaign for Tibet factsheet, <https://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans>.

[24] Lhasa has been named the 'happiest city' of the PRC around half a dozen times since 2007 by the official media.

[25] According to various reports of the visit given by UK officials to the International Campaign for Tibet.

[26] The British government changed its position on Tibet, effectively rewriting the historical record, under Foreign Minister David Miliband on October 29, 2008. Until this statement, Britain recognised that China had a "special position" in Tibet but fell short of stating that Tibet was part of China. In the statement, however, this position was deemed an "anachronism". Miliband continued by setting out explicitly that "we [the British government] regard Tibet as part of the People's Republic of China". Britain's position on the legal status of Tibet is important because it is the only major power to have dealt directly with the Tibetan government before China's 1950 invasion and occupation of Tibet. The statement is here in full: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm081029/wmstext/81029m0001.htm>. Also see Robert Barnett oped in the New York Times, November 25, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/25/opinion/25barnett.html>.

[27] Golog Jigme was speaking at a side panel at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in June, 2015: his statement is here: <https://www.savetibet.org/golog-jigme-statement-at-lockdown-in-tibet-panel-at-un-in-geneva>

[28] 'External propaganda work on Tibet: tell a good story about Tibet, spread the good voice' on Tibet' by Wang Fei, February 4, 2016, China Tibet News, <http://www.tibet.cn/culture/news/1454550681330.shtml>. Translated from Chinese into English by ICT.

[29] The International Forum for Democratic Studies and the National Endowment for Democracy From the report, 'Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence', Published December 2017, <https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report>.

[30] The list sought to cover as many Tibet-related delegation visits globally as possible, although it is unlikely to be completely comprehensive. Visits to Nepal and India were not included.

[31] China News online, November 25, 2009, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2009/11-25/1984393.shtml>.

[32] Casa Tibet Mexico founder and president Marco Antonio Karam said at the time: "The president of Mexico does not intend to meet the Dalai Lama, and we have not requested a meeting. We do not feel that the environment is favourable for this and we do not want to create political controversy that would hurt the visit." South China Morning Post, October 13, 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/world/article/1329686/no-official-welcome-dalai-lama-mexico>.

[33] EU Policy Director for the International Campaign for Tibet, Vincent Metten, took the opportunity to raise critical questions directly with Pema Thrinley during one of the Tibetan official's European tours in 2015. Vincent Metten also challenged the thinktank that hosted the propaganda delegation, saying that a proposal for an independent Tibet expert to speak about Tibet's environment had been rebuffed prior to the official delegation going ahead. International Campaign for Tibet weblog by Vincent Metten, 'The ambivalent attitude of the Brussels based European Institute for Asian Studies on Tibet', December 8, 2015, <https://weblog.savetibet.org/2015/12/the-ambivalent-attitude-of-the-brussels-based-european-institute-for-asian-studies-on-tibet>.

[34] International governments tend to speak about Tibet being a part of 'China' or the 'PRC' interchangeably, when there is a distinct difference, given that the PRC was founded by Mao in October 1949.

[35] The Diplomat, 'China and the "Three Warfares"', by Michael Raska, December 18, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/hybrid-warfare-with-chinese-characteristics-2>.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid. The article stated that in 2015, for example, "Arranged by the State Council Information Office, our region has organized seven batches of 24 government officials, Tibet scholars, scholars of Tibetan medicine and religious personages to visit such countries as Sweden, Slovakia, Spain, Britain, France, the US, Canada, Japan and Nepal to carry out academic exchanges and friendly visit."

[38] Tibetologist Robert Barnett has written about the "Trojan Horse" scenario, which "occurs when a country conceals a major demand within a minor issue in order to obtain disproportionate advantage from another country. The recipient country misreads the demand as a minor issue and miscalculates the cost of concessions. These concessions then expose the country to disproportionate vulnerabilities beyond the original issue and that country's potential for negotiation becomes more limited." Professor Barnett argues that since 1989, China has used issues related to Tibet that do not directly affect countries' strategic or military issues, such as meeting the Dalai Lama, as Trojan Horses towards competitor states, especially Western countries such as France, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States, in order to enhance its position at a global level. See: 'Tibet in China's Diplomacy: The Implications of the Trojan Horse Hypothesis' Asia Center and Digris, Memo Observatoire Chine, 2016-7.

[39] For further discussion on China's "new era" and Tibet see Gabriel Lafitte, 'Ethnic minority identity in new era China', posted on January 29, 2018, www.rukor.org.

[40] According to ChinaFile Senior Editor Jessica Batke, an expert on China's domestic political and social affairs, 'Party All the Time: Governance and Society in the New Era,' China Leadership Monitor No 55, Winter 2018, <https://www.hoover.org/research/party-all-time-governance-and-society-new-era>.

[41] International Campaign for Tibet report, 'New developments in China's Tibet policy as Communist Party's 19th Congress begins', October 17, 2017, <https://www.savetibet.org/new-developments-in-chinas-tibet-policy-as-communist-partys-19th-congress-begins>

[42] Xinhua, March 21, 2018. Also see South China Morning Post, March 21, 2018.

[43] "External propaganda work on Tibet: tell a good story about Tibet, spread the good voice' on Tibet" by Wang Fei, February 4, 2016, China Tibet News, <http://www.tibet.cn/culture/news/1454550681330.shtml>. Translated from Chinese into English by ICT.

[44] 'Delineations and focuses for Tibet propaganda work in 2018' by Gu Huajia for China Tibet Network, February 12, 2018; http://www.tibet.cn/cn/news/yc/201802/t20180212_5459379.html. Translated from Chinese into English by ICT.

[45] Translated from the original Chinese into English by ICT.

[46] Jeremy Goldkorn wrote on ChinaFile: "The first example of the Xi Jinping era of televised confessions that I am aware of took place on July 15, 2013, when an executive at pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline's China operations appeared on primetime CCTV News to confess that the company had used bribes to expand its business in China. Since then, confessions have become regular fare on CCTV. [...] The victims include: Peter Humphreys, a then Shanghai-based commercial investigator who had been working for GSK; Charles Xue, the celebrity Weibo user (who confessed to visiting prostitutes and abusing his influence on Weibo); Xiang Nanfu, a freelance contributor to US dissident website Boxun; the journalist Gao Yu accused of leaking 'Document No. 9,' a Party directive against Western ideological influence in academia and government [...]" . Posted on ChinaFile, January 20, 2016, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/beijings-televised-confessions>.

[47] International Campaign for Tibet blog by Kai Mueller, November 20, 2017, <https://weblog.savetibet.org/2017/11/selling-out-germanys-sddeutsche-zeitung-and-its-chinese-propaganda-ads>.

[48] The same report added: "Last year, the bookstore issued, sold and donated a total of as many as 4500 publications of all kinds and external propaganda, and issued 400 copies of the South Asian edition of *China News Weekly*. The bookstore also actively carried out exchange activities with Nepalese academic institutes and Tibetan compatriots friendly to China, actively carrying out coordination work such as cooperating Tibet's external propagandizing in Nepal, and carrying out projects such as the proposal for the 'China's Tibet Cultural Centre', achieving solid research outcomes."

[49] Foreign Policy/ChinaFile, July 28, 2015, "Is China's Reform Era Over?", <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/28/china-reform-era-xi-jinping-new-normal>.

[50] This act, a major piece of Tibet legislation, was enacted as law by President George W. Bush on September 30, 2002, as part of the US Foreign Relations Authorizations Act.

[51] It is not known whether the high number of self-immolations at this time were intended as a message to the Party Congress. Self-immolations tend to occur in clusters, according to monitoring of patterns of these protests. See International Campaign for Tibet report, *ibid*.

[52] South China Morning Post, 'US releases photos of ambassador Gary Locke's Tibet visit', July 2, 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1274103/us-releases-photos-ambassador-gary-lockes-tibet-visit>.

[53] International Campaign for Tibet, June 27, 2008, "Lhasa is No 1 priority for new US consulates in China: Congress approves \$5 million to build", <https://www.savetibet.org/lhasa-is-no-1-priority-for-new-us-consulates-in-china-congress-approves-5-million-to-build>.

[54] International Campaign for Tibet, July 22, 2011, "House committee says no new Chinese consulates in the US until the US gets one in Lhasa, Tibet", <https://www.savetibet.org/house-committee-says-no-new-chinese-consulates-in-the-us-until-the-us-gets-one-in-lhasa-tibet>.

[55] South China Morning Post, August 30, 2009, "India told it can open consulate in Lhasa", <http://www.scmp.com/article/691012/india-told-it-can-open-consulate-lhasa>.

[56] Hindustan Times, August 03, 2012, "China says no to Indian consulate in Tibetan capital", <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/china-says-no-to-indian-consulate-in-tibetan-capital/story-yy4nPBISPGR96aZCkLkxgP.html>.

[57] LiveMint, March 31, 2015, "India to set up consulate in Chengdu as China says no to Lhasa", <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/FbBiPnYJaaZOyKcVDFsigL/India-to-set-up-consulate-in-Chengdu-as-China-says-no-to-Lha.html>.

[58] United States Department of State, September 17, 1980, "Consular Convention with The People's Republic of China", <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/travel-legal-considerations/intl-treaties/Bilateral-Consular-Conventions/Chinese-Treaty.html>.

[59] People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry, September 5, 1986, "Regulations of The Peoples Republic of China Concerning Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities", http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fw_673051/lbwfw_673061/qita_673075/t540227.shtml.

[60] Al Jazeera, October 17, 2016, "Ethiopia limits foreign diplomats' movements", <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/ethiopia-limits-foreign-diplomats-movements-161017213545223.html>.

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