

Tibetans commemorate loss of country and present world map

“China wants to erase us”

China is trying to wipe Tibet off the map. But Dutch Tibetans have discovered a centuries-old European world map on which Tibet is clearly depicted. The map was unveiled on Tuesday afternoon, March 10, during a demonstration on Dam Square.

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Amsterdam

Tibetan flags, scarves and protest signs color Dam Square. Around one hundred people are present. Several hide their faces behind a scarf or flag. Some even wear a special mask with the Tibetan flag. They do not want to be recognizable at the demonstration, because this could cause problems for their family in Tibet.

The Tibetan-Dutch **Dekyong*** fled with her family to the Netherlands when she was eleven, because her mother demonstrated against the Chinese government. She now lives in a larger town in North Holland, but for safety reasons she does not want to say which one.

Dekyong explains that Chinese people often come to these demonstrations to take photographs of those present.

“Once they know who you are, it’s possible that they will approach your family,” she explains. “A friend of mine in Tibet was once visited at home. They told her that she had to tell me to keep quiet.”

The demonstration has not even been going for twenty minutes when Dekyong sees three suspicious men walking through the crowd.

“They are monitoring things here, and I saw them taking photos as well. I immediately filmed them, but look how they react when I come close with the camera. They ignore me. If you are here as a tourist or protester, one would ask why are you filming me.”

Torture

"The Chinese pressure is always noticeable here. How do you notice it in daily life? You get harassing phone calls. My parents have received several. The Chinese want to show with this that they are watching us closely. They are trying to erase Tibet; we are supposed to keep quiet."

Strong slogans echo in English through the speakers in front of the Royal Palace on Dam Square:

"Stop the torture in Tibet. Stop the killing in Tibet. China lies, Tibetans die. Free Tibet, Hong Kong and South Mongolia."

At the demonstration there are Dutch people, Tibetans, but also Taiwanese. Taiwan, like Tibet, is not recognized by China, although most democracies view the country as a self-governing nation.

The 77-year-old Hilversum resident **Terrence Degenaar** is a donor to the International Campaign for Tibet. He has been to Tibet four times, although the last visit dates back to 2009.

"I feel sorry for the Tibetans," Degenaar says. "They are treated like third-class citizens."

He describes how China governs the beautiful country.

"Tibetans are no longer allowed to speak their language, one million Tibetan children are being brainwashed in boarding schools. You could call it a genocide. It's heartbreaking."

He believes there is far too little media attention for the situation.

Quote: "You could call it a genocide. It's heartbreaking."

Iran

Dekyong says that the suffering of Tibet receives less attention in the Netherlands than it used to.

"The situation in Tibet actually has no direct effect on the Netherlands. The war in Iran, for example, affects things much more here, because of gas prices."

Compassion

Robert Koelewijn (72) from Heemskerk is very interested in Tibetan culture. Armed with a camera, he has followed Tibetans in exile for twenty years.

"Compassion is a very important emotion for Tibetans. In their view, every life is valuable."

He once met a Tibetan monk who told him that he had been terribly tortured in prison by Chinese authorities.

"He had absolutely no hatred toward the perpetrators! The man radiated so much peace and compassion."

Koelewijn has never been to Tibet. "I can't get in. I am politically active."

Unveiling

Koelewijn and Degenaar watch as the map is unveiled. Applause follows.

The name **Tibet** is clearly visible, and according to the Tibetans this is the ultimate proof that Tibet should be free from China.

Although various European maps and books mention Tibet, researchers believe this is one of the earliest known European world maps on which Tibet is correctly positioned in Asia. The map dates from **1655**.

On the map used by China, Tibet is called **Xizang**. Literally translated this means: *western treasure house*. Tess de Jongh of Students for a Free Tibet finds this shameless.

"That name actually proves that they are exploiting the Tibetans."

Although the current situation points to oppression, De Jongh sees reason for optimism in the broader historical perspective.

Will Tibet ever be free? "Absolutely. Every empire that has ever existed has fallen. History is on our side."

Commemoration of the 1959 uprising falls on March 10

See? Tibet was an independent country. Just look at the European world map from 1655. "Tibet." The name is right there. Very clearly. It appears to mark a large area.

Wangpo Tethong, executive director of the International Campaign for Tibet Europe, came across the map by chance in the Burgerzaal (Citizens' Hall) of the Royal Palace on Dam Square.

The map is enormous, with a diameter of **6.3 meters**. It forms part of the original decorative program of the former Amsterdam city hall.

This discovery is very important. At a time when Tibet's status as a separate nation is disputed by China, this 17th-century Dutch world map shows that Tibet was already clearly recognized centuries ago as a separate entity.

Historical facts cannot simply be erased.

Tethong presented the map on Tuesday, March 10, at Dam Square in Amsterdam. The date was not chosen by coincidence.

It is the commemoration day of the **1959 popular uprising** against the Chinese presence and domination of the country. The uprising cost thousands of Tibetans their lives.

The Dalai Lama, **Tenzin Gyatso**, fled the country to **McLeod Ganj**, near Dharamsala in northern India. There he continued the Tibetan government in exile.

Today Tibet has the status of an **autonomous region within the People's Republic of China**.

* **Dekyong** is a fictitious name. She does not want her real name to appear in the newspaper for safety reasons.
