

Vol. VI No. 2 2019

TIBET POLICY JOURNAL

The Tibet Policy Institute

TIBET POLICY JOURNAL

VOL. VI No. 2 2019

The Tibet Policy Institute

Published by:

Tibet Policy Institute
Central Tibetan Administration
Dharamshala - 176215
H.P. INDIA
Website: <http://www.tibetpolicy.net>

Editor: Tenzin Desal
Contact: editor@tibetpolicy.net

First Edition : 2020 June
No. of copies : 500

ISSN No. 2394-2983

Printed by Narthang Press (DIIR)

Editor's Note

The articles in this volume should have been inked, stapled, glued and bounded at the press a little earlier, but the pandemic that has overwhelmed us all had caused a slight delay. Nevertheless, we are delighted to share it with you despite tardiness.

This volume is truly an in-house enterprise. All the articles published here are contributed either by the researchers at the Tibet Policy Institute or by promising interns who spent their last year's monsoon months at our office. I tip my hat to them for coming out with impressive research output during their relatively short stint at our institute.

Since the advent of the internet, the world is being wired in a way unprecedented in human history. This has enabled us to conveniently access information and communicate. For our age, internet is serving as an indispensable vector for ideas and data. After several failed attempts by California-based tech giants to penetrate the hugely profitable Chinese market, China has instead created a parallel internet ecosystem. The Chinese internet ecosystem is hermetically sealed by the great firewall of China where only specialized applications (VPNs) provide glimpses into what lies beyond its internet frontiers.

In China, before Xi Jinping came to power, internet provided a limited yet vibrant space for its citizens to engage politically. But now, China has the most sophisticated online censorship operation that seeks to curtail and shape its political discourse. Tenzin Dalha's article looks at the ways by which the Chinese state could act trans-nationally on the exile Tibetan population by disrupting their communication channels and furtively planting what has now become a common parlance of political discourse -- "fake news." Dalha's article merits from first-hand documentation of such cases with the staff members of the Central Tibetan Administration.

Tenzin Choedon's paper is a critical examination of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy, 2014. In the earlier volume of this journal, we have published an article where the author viewed this policy through foucauldian lens and his concept of governmentality. Here, Choedon examines the liminal space occupied by exile Tibetans through conceptual framework developed by Agamben and Arendt. She outlines

practical challenges by examining diversity of Tibetan settlements in India and other impediments in the implementation of this policy. She shares her findings from a small random sample survey she had conducted in Dharamsala and selective interviews with concerned authorities. To her, notwithstanding this policy, the precarious status of the Tibetans in India persists where questions surrounding their land rights and legal status are still unaddressed.

For China, its economic rise and engagement with the world has resulted in extension of its clout over global affairs. Its ambitious project to connect the world through a complex trading network where Chinese state is initially bankrolling the cost was greeted with as much fanfare as nervous protestation calling it a neo-colonialist adventurism. The engagement of such tenacious ambition requires understanding of the world that is constantly changing. Here Tenzin Lhadon's article looks at the genesis of the study of International Relations theory in the People's Republic China, a sort of an archaeology of Mao to Xi in the field of IR theory. She points to the salience of this discipline in PRC by alerting us to theorists returning to 'indigenous' thinkers on statecraft and state-state relations to develop International Relations theory with 'Chinese Characteristics'.

Anyone who is remotely interested in the Himalayas and Tibet would be aware of the significance of Tibet and its geographical positioning. Dubbed as the third pole of the world for the volume of water conserved here in solid state, Tibet in anthropocene is undergoing geological, climactic, social, cultural and political transformation. In a thought provoking recent environmental history of Buddhists across Asia, where the author contends, quite convincingly, about Buddhists ecological footprint. This could be a new line of academic enquiry by bringing Tibetan studies in conversation with burgeoning scholarship on environmental history.

More pressing to us is the unfolding global climate crisis, and here Dechen Palmo's article looks at secondary reports on a Tibetan river that flows through to many countries and China's involvement in building of dams along the Mekong River. She argues that the mechanism to equitably share the water resource is vulnerable to China's hegemony.

With the recent publication of Atwill's work on the Tibetan Muslim population in Lhasa, this has added to a sizable scholarship on this community despite paucity of sources. When the historical sources

are short in supply, a rich ethnography could open a new register for our knowledge repository on a population that has received relatively less attention in Tibetan studies. Tenzing Wangdak's article is such an attempt, looking at the ways through which the Tibetan Muslim population became part of the fabric of cosmopolitan Lhasa in the 17th Century. His article asserts to carve a narrative that has eluded broader national history. As with the case with all national histories, marginal histories suffer from neglect by historians practicing the craft of writing national history.

Foregrounding the role of Tibetan Buddhist nuns in resisting China's rule over Tibet, Tsering Kalden's article is framed to revisit the Tibetan singing nuns in one of the China's most notorious prisons in Tibet, Drapchi. Recorded at great risk, a collection of resistance songs were later smuggled out of Tibet. Their songs spoke of their condition, despair and hope. For Kalden, their songs which are rich in metaphorical allusions could be deconstructed to analyze subtle ways through which Tibetan nuns are resisting oppression. By transmitting messages through what James Scott called "hidden transcript," these Tibetan nuns relayed their conditions in most trying of circumstances through music. This study, to me, problematizes a widely employed analytical trope in western academia of Tibetans in Tibet and exile-Tibetans dichotomy.

The library of the Tibet Policy Institute recently acquired a sizable collection of Tibetan works published in the People's Republic of China. Among the valuable acquisition, the collected works of Muge Samten formed the basis for my study on the question of Tibetan identity and ethnicity under the occupation of People's Republic of China. I look at two essays embedded in the sixth volume of his collected works on the question of "Baima" Tibetans. Locating him beyond the binary described by Chomsky of an intellectual either working with the state or someone speaking truth to power, his essays reveal to us that he employs his intellectual capital to subtly resist and even subvert the Chinese state discourses on Tibetan ethnicity and identity. His role as an intellectual could be tentatively placed under the rubric of vernacular cosmopolitan intellectual, an idea, I must admit needs to be developed further in Tibetan context. In a discursive representation against the state discourse on Tibetan ethnicity and its transition from Marxist-Leninist nationality to ethnicity with a bureaucratic sleight of hand, I look at the evidence in modern Tibetan literature and popular

culture to understand strategies for expression of Tibetan nationalism. This is still a working paper and I intend to develop certain ideas and cast a wider net on other vernacular sources to explore this dynamics.

We have introduced a new book review section to this volume. Tenzin Tsetan reviews Fabienne Jagou's biography on the ninth Panchen Lama. Initially accessible exclusively to the francophone world, the English translation by Rebecca Biesset Buechel helped us map the life, time and journeys of this extraordinary modern Tibetan figure at the cusp of calamitous changes.

It should go without saying that I thank all the contributors for not only submitting papers but duly replying to my queries and responding to my suggestions. At the same time, we would like to disclaim that content published in this volume are the outcome of labour and intellectual enquiry by the authors, hence it doesn't reflect the opinion of the editor and by extension the Tibet Policy Institute.

Tenzin Desal
Dharamsala
June 2020

Contents

Tenzin Dalha

China's Cyber War and the Exile Tibetans: A Policy Analysis.....	1
--	---

Tenzin Choedon

Rehabilitation or a Temporal Adjustment: An Assessment of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy, 2014.....	15
--	----

Tenzin Lhadon

The Development of International Relations Theory in China and the Significance of Chinese Characteristics	39
--	----

Dechen Palmo

Beijing's Politics on Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) and Its Implications for Mekong Subregion Countries	55
--	----

Tenzing Wangdak

<i>Lhasa Khache</i> and <i>Bhod</i> : A Brief Overview of Tibetan Muslims in 17th Century Lhasa and the Narratives of their Exile.....	73
--	----

Tsering Kalden

Singing Nuns of Tibet: From Language of Buddhism to Language of Protest	89
---	----

Tenzin Desal

Who do you think you are? Identity, Ethnicity and Strategies
for Expression of Tibetan Nationalism in People’s Republic
of China.....113

Tenzin Tseten

Book Review147

China's Cyber War and the Exile Tibetans: A Policy Analysis

Tenzin Dalha
(Tibet Policy Institute)

Abstract

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has reinforced their idea through a long-term campaigns, propaganda, and reforms and thereby suppressing freedom of expression and more recently by investing on digital, as well as strong foreign and domestic policies. This has enabled them to shape its image and consolidate control over the masses to maintain social and political stability in China. As the volume and sophistication of cyber-attacks grow, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and Tibetan NGO's, especially those who are tasked with safeguarding information relating to their daily work, need to take steps to protect their sensitive data and personal information. China has employed a wider range of cybersecurity, internet surveillance, data mining and censorship measures to control Internet Service Provider (ISP) and Internet Content Provider (ICP).

Regulation over internet access has grown more comprehensive, specific and extensive with the Ministry of Public Security gaining the overall authority over internet supervision. China is using more sophisticated ways of controlling online public opinion. This paper examines sophisticated Chinese cybersecurity policy operation. A new law forces individuals to self-censor and restrict sharing of images or videos that are deemed by the Chinese authorities as being politically subversive. In other words, introduction of this cybersecurity model is used as an instrument for the leadership to foster and consolidate its power. From a strategic point of view, the country has been investing highly in the technology sector to realise its ideological goals.

Keywords: Tibet, internet, cybersecurity, cyber-attack, technology, online, policy

Introduction

The fragility of the information world we now live in necessitates states to adopt strong cybersecurity and surveillance system. The threat of escalation of potent cyber-attacks in the digital era has made our private information more vulnerable to exploitation than ever before. Organizations transmit sensitive data across networks and to other devices in the course of communication. Cybersecurity is the discipline dedicated to protecting that information and the systems used to process or store it. As the volume and sophistication of cyber-attacks grow, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and Tibetan NGOs, especially those are tasked with safeguarding information relating to their daily work, need to take steps to protect their sensitive data and personnel information.

In exile, the Office of the Dalai Lama, CTA, Tibetan NGOs and offices of Tibet around the world have been persistently targeted by digital espionage operations for over a decade. These attacks are extensively aimed to collect sensitive information about their communications and other activities. The Tibetan diaspora faces many threats and challenges. The scale of China's operation was not clear until 2009, when the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab released a report titled "Tracking Ghost net."¹ The report explicitly laid out, for the first time, the scope of cyber espionage and how deeply it had infiltrated the Tibetan movement, including the private office of the Dalai Lama.

China has employed more range of cybersecurity, internet surveillance, data mining and censorship measures to control Internet Service Provider (ISP) and Internet Content Provider (ICP).² Regulation over

1 Jane, "Tracking GhostNet Investigating a Cyber Espionage Network," *The Citizen Lab*, 28 March, 2009, <https://citizenlab.ca/2009/03/tracking-ghostnet-investigating-a-cyber-espionage-network/>

2 The OpenNet Initiative is a collaborative partnership between three leading academic institution "the citizen Lab at the Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, Berman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law

internet access has grown more comprehensive, specific and extensive with the Ministry of Public Security gaining the overall responsibility for internet supervision. Chinese are using more shrewd ways of controlling opinion online. More significantly the country's technocratic rulers have suggested that digital technology is not just for making economic transactions frictionless, but also for implementation of sophisticated systems of social control.

In 2009, researches at the Information Warfare Monitor, a Canadian NGO, revealed Chinese hacking groups of breaking into computers of CTA, in London, New York and Dharamshala.³ But now hacking has become more sophisticated and refined. The Chinese hacker has become nuanced and savvy.

When the Dalai Lama's official Chinese language website was hacked and infected in 2013 it became a global news and was covered by BBC.⁴ Kaspersky, multinational cybersecurity and anti-virus provider says the CTA website has been under constant attack from the same group of hackers since 2011,⁵ but previous breaches have been quietly identified and repaired before attracting significant attention. Kaspersky Lab researcher, Kurt Baumgartner says that the hackers used a method known as a "watering-hole" attack. Infecting visitors' computers with viruses in what may be an effort to spy on human rights activists who frequently visit the site.⁶

Implications of the New Cyber Security Law

School, and the Advanced Network Research Group at the Cambridge Security Program (Centre for International studies) at the University of Cambridge. Reports on Internet Filtering in China in 2005-2005. Page 15-18.

- 3 "Major cyber spy network uncovered," *BBC News*, 29 March, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7970471.stm>.
- 4 Joe Millar, "Dalai Lama's Chinese website hacked and infected," *BBC News*, 13 August, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-23680686>.
- 5 [Mike Lennan](#), "Official Tibetan Website Compromised in Watering Hole Attack," *Security Week*, 13 August, 2013, <https://www.securityweek.com/official-tibetan-website-compromised-watering-hole-attack>.
- 6 Jim Finkle, "Dalai Lama's China site hacked, infects others: expert," *Reuters*, 13 August, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/net-us-tibet-cyberattack/dalai-lamas-china-site-hacked-infects-others-expert-idUSBRE97B0QU20130812>.

The implementation of the Cyber Security Law on 1 June, 2017⁷ accelerates the damage it could do for global trade and services. According to the new law, China seeks to require companies to store all data within China and pass security reviews, within China's framework of "cyber sovereignty", the idea that states should be permitted to govern, monitor their own cyberspace and control incoming flow of data. The new law overtly intrudes upon individuals' rights to freedom of expression, opinion and information. The new law also forces individuals to self-censor and restrict sharing of images or videos that is understood by the Chinese authorities as politically subversive.

Cyber-attacks seek to corrupt, damage, or destroy information systems, and the people who rely on them. The Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack and phishing a relatively low-cost tactics to gain access to other accounts. Malware attack, sent as email attachment, become a common threat experienced by Tibetans in diaspora. They are few others which are more sophisticated.

The hackers send email with a malicious attachment in spear-phishing intended for monitoring the contact details within the Tibetan community. Video cameras and microphones are often hacked to spy on activist groups. Citizen Lab, a leading research group on digital censorship and online suppression of flow of information, has found in its research that the lab has uncovered vast electronic spying networks that compromised thousands of computers, including the office of the Dalai Lama.

China has long denied their involvement in such operations. Not only does it hack heavily, but it also reportedly employs around 500,000 to two million internet propagandists to write comments on the internet to safeguard the prestige of CCP. A euphemism for people in employment stems from the idea that the government pays 50 renminbi cents per pro-China post. The 50cent army use more sophisticated techniques for gathering and analyzing massive amounts of data.

7 "Overview of China's Cyber Security Law," *IT Advisory KPMG China*, February 2017, accessed August 16, 2019, <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/cn/pdf/en/2017/02/overview-of-cybersecurity-law.pdf>.

This is a critical challenge for Tibetans who seek to use the internet to enhance their efforts to articulate views on sensitive political, economic, social subjects and to counter Chinese government's attempt to promote misconception among exile Tibetan community. They are many evidence which shows, that Chinese hackers have been spying on Tibetan groups in India for many years. The Chinese government is fabricating almost 488 million social media posts a year in order to distract the public from criticising or questioning its rule, according to a study.⁸

Tibetan activists, and reporters received training to improve “digital hygiene” on the production of digital files and keeping intact information systems against unauthorized access, modification or destruction. They are being trained by the Tibet Action Institute (TAI)⁹ who aims to combine the power of digital communication tools with strategic nonviolent action to build the strength and effectiveness of the worldwide Tibet movement.

China and the Abuse of Internet Freedom

Recent report by Freedom House titled “Freedom on the net 2018”, says that China is the “world's worst abuser of internet freedom” for the fourth consecutive year. The level of internet freedom in the country declined due to the new introduction of cybersecurity law.¹⁰ This has strengthened repressive restrictions on online activities and places financial strains on technology companies, freelancers, citizen journalists and bloggers.

Cyber security protects the data and integrity of computing assets belonging to or connected to an organization's network. Its purpose

8 Tom Philips, “Chinese officials ‘create 488m bogus social media posts a year’,” *The Guardian*, 20 May, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/20/chinese-officials-create-488m-social-media-posts-a-year-study-finds>.

9 Tibet Action Institute combines the power of digital communication with strategic nonviolent action to advance the Tibetan freedom movement.

10 Adrian Shahbaz, “The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism,” *The Freedom House* (2018), accessed on 28 April, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/China>.

is to defend those assets against all threats throughout the entire life cycle of cyber-attacks. There are few evidences regarding the cases of Tibetans in Tibet who are detained and interrogated for violating the cybersecurity laws of China.¹¹ Tibetans are summoned for political education workshops on China's cyber security laws and regulations.

Hackers will always exploit the weakest link, and many attacks are easily preventable by performing basic security tasks. China's efforts to influence global internet policy is largely designed to legitimize and prevent other countries from complaining about China's existing controls on freedom of expression. The escalation of the Chinese government's effort to neutralize critical online opinion comes after a series of ongoing anti-corruption campaigns and its struggle against "ethnic minority". These are organized or published on the Internet service.

The Environment and Development Desk (EDD) of the Tibet Policy Institute email ID was hacked several times. According to the head of EDD, Mr Zamlha Tempa Gyaltzen, he said: "The official email is occasionally targeted by malware attacks. Last year some unknown virus infected our computer and whatever mails we sent or received, unknowingly it bounced back and forwarded these automatically to another registered mail ID. This is a clear indication that our accounts were being watched and monitored."¹²

Mr. Samdup Choephel, an independent cyber security researcher based in Dharamshala said: "Many Tibetan NGOs lack professional web handlers, limiting their knowledge in updating their website and it opens greater possibilities for hackers to attack their websites."¹³ He further emphasised on keeping individuals' computers operating system, applications and antivirus programs updated to ensure the latest security updates and patches. Installing pirated software is also a

11 Lobe Socktsang," Tibetan Monk Detained on 'Cybersecurity' Charge," *Radio Free Asia*, 24 April, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/cybersecurity-04242018142800.html>.

12 Interview with the author on 1 February, 2019.

13 Interview with the author on 28 January, 2019.

key concern for him.

Pirated software which are cracked versions may land users on potentially dangerous websites, which can infect your PC with adware, bots and even ransom-ware. When the device is infected, the malware sends out sensitive information such as username, account number, password etc. to a third party. Apart from all these, it can also completely disable your PC.

Surveillance and Theft of Data

Cisco Talos,¹⁴ a group of researchers, analysts, and engineers, recently uncovered a new cyberespionage campaign delivering a malicious Microsoft PowerPoint document using a mailing list run by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA).¹⁵ The document is a copy of a legitimate PDF file titled "Tibet was never a part of China," which is available for download from the CTA's official website *tibet.net*. The malicious version, however, contains a Remote Access Trojan (RAT). The email is targeted at Tibet support groups and individuals in order to distribute what has been dubbed as Exile RAT. The attack delivers an Android and Windows-based Trojan capable of stealing system and personal information, terminating or launching process, or carrying out surveillance and theft of data.

As the volume and sophistication of cyberattacks grow worldwide, it is essential for CTA and Tibetan nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to take necessary precautions to protect their sensitive data and personal information of employees. The recent cyberespionage attempt targeting CTA and Tibetan NGOs is just one facet of more comprehensive and sophisticated cyberattacks perpetrated by Chinese state-sponsored hackers. The goal is primarily to gain entry into the network system of the CTA, and consequently to monitor activities

14 "ExileRAT shares C2 with LuckyCat, targets Tibet," *Talos group*, 4 February, 2019, <https://blogs.cisco.com/security/talos/exilerat-shares-c2-with-lucky-cat-targets-tibet>. blog U.S: Cisco Taslos group.

15 Warren Mercer, Paul Rascagneres and Jaeson," ExileRAT shares C2 with Lucky-Cat, targets Tibet," *Talos Group*, 4 February, 2019, <https://blog.talosintelligence.com/2019/02/exilerat-shares-c2-with-luckycat.html>.

and extract information using various social engineering techniques.

Last year, Citizen Lab documented the use of suspicious emails with links to complex malware in its 30 January, 2018 report, “Spying on a Budget: Inside a Phishing Operation with Targets inside the Tibetan Community.”¹⁶ The source of the phishing operation could not be determined, according to Citizen Lab; Tibetans are inclined to believe that the Chinese government is behind these malicious activities. As Citizen Lab notes, “Uyghurs, Falun Gong supporters, and Tibetan groups are well documented targets of digital espionage operations that are often suspected to be carried out by operators directly sponsored or tacitly supported by Chinese government agents.”

The Tibetan Computer Resource Center (TCRC) comes under the direct administration of the Department of Information and International Relations, CTA. Speaking to the author, Mr. Namgyal Lekshey, director of TCRC, said: “In the past six months, we have been observing an increase in phishing operations targeting the Tibetan community. We created awareness amongst users about phishing attacks in a variety of ways, including educating about basic and safe browsing practices and also by notifying users of dangerous links in email and browsers, preventing suspicious account sign-ins and conducting workshops. We have suggested not to open unsolicited attachments from suspicious email accounts.”

He further emphasized that “earlier, cyberattacks on Tibetan organizations were restricted only to special occasions, like the anniversaries of March 10th Tibetan Uprising Day and the Dalai Lama’s birthday etc... but now the trend has completely changed. Tibetan organizations in Dharamshala are targeted with Distributed Denial of Service and phishing attacks frequently.”

16 Masashi Crete-Nishihata, Jakub Dalek, Etienne Maynier, and John Scott-Railton, “Spying on a Budget: Inside a Phishing Operation with Targets in the Tibetan Community,” *The Citizen Lab*, 30 January, 2018, <http://spying-on-a-budget-inside-a-phishing-operation-with-targets-in-the-tibetan-community/>



Figure 1: Most spear-phishing files come in .zip format. Hackers usually dress .zip files as other files in disguise, as in the below screenshot showing a malicious email sent to Tibet Corps in December 2018. Photo: Author

Spear-Phishing Attacks

Attackers focus primarily on gaining access to Google accounts and more recently into the personal WhatsApp accounts of CTA staff. They have been targeting researchers of the Tibet Policy Institute and staff of the CTA's Department of Religion and Culture.

In an interview with the author, malware analysis expert Tenzin Chokden of the TCRC said: “Scammers are tricking staff of CTA into clicking on fake links that are identical to original attachments,

and then [the attackers] steal people's information and data. Staff are targeted via email and Google drive to their Gmail account. The emails often include an attachment or file, resembling a standard email. Many receivers mistakenly presume it to be from their trusted friends or colleagues.

“While it looks like a standard PDF file with Adobe icon, when clicked, this opens a new tab with a page which closely resembles the real Gmail login page, and asks the user to log in again. However, the page is actually a portal for hackers to steal targeted email addresses and passwords, and get full access to the user's account.” And even worse, if a user uses the same login details for other websites or accounts, the hackers will be able to gain access to these details.”

He further adds, “It is important to know your online digital footprint and take necessary steps to safeguard your data.”

This example clearly indicates that one of the email account's details are already compromised. The file names are broadly categorized under different set themes, including project-related, the budget, and diplomatic issues, largely determined by the types of organizations the hackers are targeting.

This type of attack is known as spear-phishing, sending common emails from identical addresses to many email addresses, hoping that just some of the malware recipients will click on a malicious link (even if by accident) or download an infected file. It pays off for the hackers, the infection rate can be as high as 50 percent.

The cyber espionage campaign is an evolving tactic but the operations keep the CTA and its staff as their prime target. The attackers rely more and more on spear-phishing instead of malware and other attacks.



Figure 2: A WhatsApp message sent from Tibet to a staff member of the Department of Religion and Culture on December 5. The number is registered in Lhasa. Photo: Author

The new trend of targeting WhatsApp accounts is potentially even more dangerous. If a user clicks on a malicious link, unknowingly installing a Trojan virus on his or her phone, hackers will have access to the user's contacts and a trove of other personal data.

These attacks are often designed to target a large number of victims at once. Any such occurrences should immediately be reported to experts; it's unlikely only a single person would receive such a message. The safest approach is to keep away from unidentified numbers and email IDs, who sends links anonymously.

Samdup Choephel, an independent cybersecurity researcher based in Dharamshala who is involved in helping Tibetan NGOs fix hacked

websites said: “I am overwhelmed to see the increased number of Tibetans becoming aware of the risks in clicking on unidentified ‘attachments’ and knowing the risks of creating weak passwords. Still many people are reluctant to update their password to enable the two-factor authentication. Such a small step will give a hard time to anybody who tries to get your credentials. A strong password provides essential protection; commonly used passwords enable intruders to easily gain access and control of a computing device.”

The TCRC observes that of the cyber-attacks on the CTA during the last many years, more than 90 percent are spear-phishing attacks. This is primarily aimed to steal project ideas and schedules according to Namgyal Lekshey. But some hackers are increasingly using sophisticated techniques. They adopt new techniques to conceal their activities. Due to the frequent attacks and complicated inter channel relations within Chinese cyberspace, it is really hard to prevent cyberattacks completely.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Cybersecurity is a security standard which enables organizations to practice safe security techniques to minimize a number of cybersecurity attacks. They are designed to protect and safeguard computers, networks and data from unauthorized access.

The attackers’ primarily objective is to sow mistrust among Tibetans that are digitally connected. The hackers install surreptitious monitoring program on the computer and create fake ID’s to weaken the harmony of the community. This disrupts the ability of Tibetan exiles to circulate free flow information and communicate through internet by deliberate exploiting computer systems. Tibetan Community should be aware that the systems are built to certain security standards, they should be properly trained to prevent cyber-attacks that target the disclosure of important job files.

It’s very difficult to put technical controls into place to prevent humans from making mistakes. To stymie these attacks, email users have to do the right things by following safe and secure practices. Updated software is needed for PC and mobile applications.

The hackers are having a two-fold impact. Beside deliberately exploiting Tibetan computer systems — including installing surreptitious monitoring program on computers and creating fake IDs. They more indirectly weaken the harmony of the community by disrupting the ability of Tibetan exiles to exchange information and communicate through the internet. Tibetan communities should be aware that the systems are built to certain security standards, they should be properly trained to prevent cyberattacks that target the disclosure of important files.

Tibetans both as an individual and as a community are being targeted with some of the most sophisticated malware attacks and cyber surveillance by the Chinese government. As long as Tibetans equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to defend against such attacks and understand the threats involved, technology can be one of most powerful tools in the struggle for freedom.

To minimize the number of cyberattacks, Tibetan computer users should be aware of the risks involved in opening unsolicited attachments and suspicious links through email. Similar messages are used to steal people's personal information. Unless you trust the sender, don't click links or reply with personal information.

Efforts to increase digital security awareness to the masses are important. Tibetan computer users should be educated not to open unsolicited attachment and suspicious links through emails. It's obvious fact that Tibetans internet users in Tibet have expressed their indignation against the stringent surveillance, screening and blocking of information by the Chinese government. More and more people are equipping themselves to defend against cyber-attack and understand the imminent threat attached.

References

- Adrian Shahbaz. *Freedom on the Net*. Annual, Wangshington, D.C: Freedom House , 2018.
- Harvard researchers . *theguardian.com*. May 20, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/20/chinese-officials-create-488m-social-media-posts-a-year-study-finds> (accessed December 20, 2018).
- Jack Wagner. *thediplomat.com*. June 1, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/chinas-cybersecurity-law-what-you-need-to-know/> (accessed 1 June, 2017).
- Jane. *Citizenlab.ca*. March 28, 2009. <https://citizenlab.ca/2009/03/tracking-ghostnet-investigating-a-cyber-espionage-network/> (accessed June 25, 2018).
- Jim Finkle. *reuters.com*. August 13, 2013. <https://www.reuters.com/article/net-us-tibet-cyberattack/dalai-lamas-china-site-hacked-infects-others-expert-idUSBRE97B0QU20130812> (accessed September 10, 2018).
- Joyce lau. *voanews.com*. October 7, 2016. <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/who-are-chinese-trolls-50-cent-army> (accessed January 25, 2018).
- Masashi Crete-Nishihata, Jakub Dalek, Etienne Maynier, and John Scott-Railton. *citizenlab.ca*. January 30, 2018. <https://citizenlab.ca/2018/01/spying-on-a-budget-inside-a-phishing-operation-with-targets-in-the-tibetan-community/> (accessed February 10, 2018).
- Millar, Joe. *bbc.com*. August 13, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-23680686> (accessed May 10, 2018).
- Talos group . <https://blogs.cisco.com/security/talos/exilerat-shares-c2-with-luckycat-targets-tibet>. blog , U.S: Cisco Taslos group , 2019.
- Tibet Action Institute . *tibetaction.net*. n.d. <https://tibetaction.net/>.

Rehabilitation or a Temporal Adjustment: An Assessment of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy, 2014

Tenzin Choedon

(Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Abstract

Through the mapping of responses of Tibetan residents and officials in Dharamshala, this paper analyzes the context of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy 2014, its history and process of implementation. It also examines the effects of uncertain legal status of the policy for the Tibetan refugees. And although, the factors that had contributed to the implementation of the policy may be many folds, however, the interplay of the Tibetan identity between liminality and belonging in relation to the complex relationship between the exile administration and the host state remain the most influential factor that led to the status of the current policy.

Keywords: Tibet, exile, rehabilitation, liminality, Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy 2014

Introduction

The Tibetan refugees in exile not only have a long history of struggle for freedom but also, in adapting and settling in the new spacial and socio-cultural environment without a proper legal status for more than sixty years in exile. There were multiple identities formed and shaped both in Tibet and in the exile Tibetan community in order to adjust and coexist in the new environment. The Tibetans who fled along with the 14th Dalai Lama in 1959 were offered refuge by the Nehru administration on humanitarian and moral grounds. Nearly 80,000¹

1 Tanka Subba, *Flight and Adaptation: Tibetan Refugees in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya* (New Delhi: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1990)

to 85,000² Tibetan refugees escaped to seek refuge in South Asian countries from which 80 percent are resettled in India with the second highest concentration in Nepal.³ The previous studies related to the rehabilitation of the Tibetan refugees in India have mostly agreed that the Tibetan refugees are successfully rehabilitated compared to other such communities and therefore, considered a ‘model refugee community’⁴. Nonetheless, it drew very little attention of the scholars on the difficulties being faced by these refugees in their everyday life which is largely defined by their legal identity.

Several literature on the exile Tibetan community focused specifically on the initial phase of rehabilitation of Tibetans in exile⁵ and the interplay of the Tibetan refugee identity vis-à-vis the complex relationship between the exile administration, the host state and foreign aid agencies.⁶ There are relatively less scholarship on India’s policy on Tibet or Tibetan refugees. Thus, this paper attempts to fill the existing research gap on India’s policy on Tibet by analyzing the framework

-
- 2 Bureau of H.H. The Dalai Lama, *Tibetans in Exile 1959-1969*. Government Report (New Delhi: Bureau of H.H. The Dalai Lama, 1969).
 - 3 Dawa Norbu “Tibetan Refugees in South Asia: Implications for security.” (Paper presented at Seminar on Refugees and Internal Security in South Asia, Colombo: July 10-11 1994), 2 http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_meta-data.jsp?pid=fmo:1240
 - 4 Ibid.,4.
 - 5 See Norbu, “The settlements: Participation and integration,” in *Exile as challenge: The Tibetan diaspora*, ed. Bernstorff, D., Von Welck, H. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003),186–212; Subba, *flight and adaptation*, 1990.
 - 6 See Dibyesh Anand, “(Re)imagining nationalism: Identity and representation in the Tibetan diaspora of South Asia1,” *Contemporary South Asia* 9 no. 3 (2000): 271-287; Sonika Gupta, “Enduring liminality: voting rights and Tibetan exiles in India,” *Asian Ethnicity* 20 no. 3 (2019): 330-347; Thomas Kauffmann, *The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees: Survival Strategies of a Government-in-Exile in a world of Transnational Organizations* (New York: Berghahn, 2015); Fiona McConnell, “A state within a state? Exploring relations between the Indian state and the Tibetan community and government-in-exile,” *Contemporary South Asia* 19 no.3 (2011): 297-313; Fiona, “Citizens and Refugees: Constructing and Negotiating Tibetan Identities in Exile” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (2011): 966-983; Carole McGranahan, “Refusal as political practice: Citizenship, sovereignty, and Tibetan refugee status.” *American Ethnologist* 45 no. 3 (2018): 367-379.

and implementation of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (TRP) 2014.

An insight into study on land governance in India with the case study of TRP 2014 by Balasubramaniam stresses on the policy as a form of governmentality to identify the formal membership in the polity and the provision of welfare. She projected the preservation and reinforcement of the principle of ‘temporariness of exile’ as a shared interest of the Indian state and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA).⁷ This, she unravels through a study of the land tenure and how it is produced in three locations – bureaucratic processes of the Government of India, policies of the CTA and positions of the individual Tibetans. Similarly, Yunsong, a Chinese scholar refers to the rehabilitation as a ‘tragedy’ that has resulted in various land issues for the Tibetans in India.⁸ He believes that TRP 2014 is another diplomatic strategy of Indian government to confront China by restricting Tibetans from becoming Indian citizens and using their political identity to provoke the Beijing government.

This paper aims to explore the problems of implementation of the policy through what Merton calls an insider’s perspective.⁹ The focus here is to verify underlying factors responsible for the ineffective implementation of the TRP 2014 by using an empirical approach to understand the problems. The major observations of this paper are based on interviews with Tibetans in Dharamshala and few CTA officials, survey reports, public discourse, media and archival research undertaken between September to December 2018 in Dharamshala.

7 Madhura Balasubramaniam, “Land Governance in Exile: Case study of the 2014 Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy and 2002 Regularization of Unauthorized Colonies.” (Master diss., IIT Madras, 2018).

8 Huan Yunsong, “Tragedy of Rehabilitation: Land Issue of Tibetans in India,” *China Tibetology* no.2 (2017):101-120.

9 The social position of the researcher plays key role in identifying problems and in the production of knowledge. Keeping in the view of limitations as an insider, the analyses are drawn from interaction of both personal accounts of experiences and the outsider’s perspectives. For details, refer Merton “Insiders and Outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of Knowledge,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78 no. 1 (1972): 9-47.

This study is limited only to one “scattered Settlement”¹⁰ which is geographically important for both its central influence as well as to understand the discriminatory aspects of the policy. Hence, it begins by critiquing the framework of the policy that has aimed to bring uniformity across the Tibetan settlements through the TRP 2014 despite diversity of problems and history of each settlement. The failure to understand this disparity has further led to generalization of problems of all Tibetans in the policy making process. The first part of this paper is devoted to historical background and various stages of Tibetan rehabilitation in exile. The second part deals with the question of why TRP was formulated in 2014 despite the long-standing dispute of land use rights of the Tibetans and the factors responsible for the inadequate policy with a case study of Dharamshala. The third part brings in the discourse of legal identity of Tibetans vis-a-vis local Indian citizens and how it is subject to constant change depending on the foreign and national interest of the host country. The final part of the paper concludes with what can be a possible solution to the problems related to Tibetan refugees in India and how the TRP 2014 can be reformulated in order to become more relevant.

The term ‘Rehabilitation’ in this paper makes two different senses in the context of Tibetan refugees in India. First, in the initial phase of the exile Tibetan community, it refers to restoring or bringing all Tibetan refugees into one homogenous Tibetan community that allows them to preserve their culture and traditions to forge national identity and also providing basic needs to economically self-supporting communities in exile.¹¹ However, with modernization and massive development that took place in both the exile Tibetan community and the host country in the last half of the century, there’s an essential shift in the understanding of the rehabilitation of the Tibetans. Rehabilitation today therefore, refers to assisting and facilitating the existing Tibetan settlements and giving access to the same developmental projects and

10 Dharamshala popularly known as “little Lhasa” accommodates a large number of Tibetan refugees and also for being the centre of the Central Tibetan Administration.

11 Central Tibetan Administration, *Tibetan Refugee Community Integrated Development Plan, 1992-97* (Dharamshala: Planning Commission, 1992).

opportunities as provided for Indian citizens. A discernible change in this attitude of the Indian government with regard to rehabilitation can be seen in the policy that largely focuses on providing welfare and economic provisions. This becomes more evident by understanding the history of rehabilitation and tracing differences from the past to the present.

Historical Background

Today, there are 39 formal Tibetan settlements spread across 12 states of India.¹² These settlements have prospered and developed over a long period of time which reflects the past history of struggle. This history can be traced from the first two generations of Tibetans whose memories of the trauma-filled flight and their determination to resist China's occupation of Tibet led to a successful rehabilitation in the initial years of exile. The rehabilitation of Tibetans in the initial years was often remembered as a difficult phase predominated by psychological trauma, health problems, language difficulties and general uncertainties.¹³ Perhaps, the most unforgettable hardships were experienced in the two transit camps set up by the Indian government-- Misamari in Assam and Buxa in West Bengal. Particularly between May 1959 to June 1959, a total of 15,000 refugees had been registered at Missamari alone. Despite the care and assistance provided by the Indian government, 167 children and 65 adults were reported to have died in the camps.¹⁴

In the view of these difficulties, efforts were made simultaneously to send the first group of exile Tibetans to other places where temporary employments like road construction, handicraft work etc. were available. Gradually, on New Delhi's request, the state of Mysore (now Karnataka) was the first state to have positively responded to provide land for the new refugees to settle. This further led to the allocation of 3,000 acres of land and enough funds from the Indian government for

12 CTA, Department of Home, "*Tibetan Refugee Settlements*" Accessed September, 3, 2018, Available at <https://tibet.net/departement/home/>

13 For more reference, see Norbu (1994).

14 Bureau, "Tibetans in Exile 1959-1969," 2.

a total of 3,000 Tibetans to settle at Bylakuppe in Karnataka.

Given its own national and geostrategic interests towards the Tibet issue, the host government at the initial stage of resettlement had provided more moral and material assistance than political. With increasing number of assistance from overseas agencies and governments after 1962 and the realization that the period of exile might last longer than expected, the Indian government decided to welcome the financial support from international agencies. In 1964, the Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC) made a “Master Plan”¹⁵ for the proper rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees in India which was supported by almost all the donor agencies. This according to Kauffmann marked the transition from an emergency relief situation to the rehabilitation of the Tibetan refugees followed by the development and globalization phase.

The end of the 1970s is known for the end of the ‘rehabilitation phase’ for Tibetans¹⁶ in India but there are one thousand Tibetans who were reported to have migrated from Bhutan to Dekyiling and Mundgod in the early 1980s and resettled in India.¹⁷ Though many international organizations and agencies in the development phase scaled down their support and left it to the Tibetans to work on their future sustainability in exile, however, there are others who felt the need to stay and continue their support for a smooth transition from a successful rehabilitation to economic and material development.

Tibetans in the beginning of the 1990’s had entered the ‘globalization phase’. The economic growth in India led to more investment in education and produced more professionals that gradually put the then Tibetan Government in Exile under pressure for not being able to generate more employment opportunities. As a result, many Tibetans chose to either migrate to urban areas in search of better livelihood or go abroad, or to some extent, apply for Indian citizenship. It is

15 Kauffmann, *The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees*, 23.

16 Ibid.

17 Rinchen Sadhutsang, *A Life Unforeseen: A Memoir of Service to Tibet* (Boston: Wisdom, 2016), 262.

interesting to note that, this particular phase had ignited desire amongst Tibetan youth in seeking answers for questions related to their legal identity in exile, and this issue has been relatively understudied.

Why Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy in 2014?

Despite the Tibetan's successful rehabilitation, there were a series of issues particularly with regard to the ownership of land leased to Tibetans in both "regular and irregular settlements." The problems related to land use for the Tibetan refugees ranges from forceful dissents from the local population to the administration at the district/state level accusing Tibetans of illegally encroaching their land. This is evident in July 2008 when the local Indian authorities were pressured to not renew the land lease document of the Tibetans of Phuntsokling settlement, Orissa by a local interest group and prevent them from undertaking their agricultural activities.¹⁸ Several other Tibetan settlements in Himachal Pradesh were also not spared from receiving eviction notices from the local administration. These included approval from the Divisional Commissioner in Shimla in 2010 for the eviction of 70 Tibetan families for occupying land that was required for the construction project of a parking lot¹⁹ and the Himachal Pradesh High Court order to evict 218 Tibetan families in Dharamshala for encroaching upon the forest land.

The policy also aimed to fill the opportunity gap for the third generation Tibetans in exile. Unlike the first generation of Tibetans who longed to return to their homeland, the generations that followed have a different sense of belonging. They, having physically been born and brought up in a foreign land without experiencing the hardship under Chinese authoritarianism, have developed numerous definitions of 'homeland' on their own. Their exposure to new ideas, cultures and modern education has led to a consciousness of uncertainty about

18 Leaf Francesca, "Land issues in the Phuntsokling settlement," *Tibetan Magazine for Tibet News and Issues*, May 22, 2013, <http://www.contactmagazine.net/articles/may-2013/land-issues-phuntsokling-settlement/>

19 Rakesh Lohumi, "Sanjauli parking project runs into rough weather Land identified occupied by Tibetan refugees," *The Tribune*, 31 August, 2010, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2010/20100901/himachal.htm#1>

their future. Thus, the mass-migration and emigration of Tibetans had a great impact on change in methods of land use in many Tibetan settlements from subsistence agriculture in the initial stages to leasing of land to the local tenants or selling it to others. This compelled the CTA and the Indian government to collectively decide on governing the land use of Tibetans. But a crucial question remains: has TRP 2014 addressed these issues and what can be the reasons behind not being able to be implemented? In order to answer these questions, one should understand how and why the policy was enacted in the first place.

The Formulation/ Drafting of the TRP 2014

With the background history of problems related to the land rights of the Tibetans, the CTA discerned the need for uniform guidelines for all Tibetans. Thus, on the initiative of the former Home Kalon²⁰, the Department of Home through the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama had approached some officials at both central and state level administration of the Indian government. On 31 December, 2013, at a meeting with K.K. Pathak, the Joint Secretary of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs' Freedom Fighters and Rehabilitation Division (FFR), the former Home Kalon had brought issues related to the land occupied by the Tibetans in various settlements due to the absence of proper land lease documents. The specific case of eviction of Tibetans in Dharamshala was also reported to which they were suggested to make a proper list of the Tibetan settlements in India and various problems associated with each settlement. The Joint Secretary further recommended a meeting with representatives of the CTA, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), officials at the state level and the Tibetan Settlement Officers to discuss the same.²¹ The first meeting was held on 26 February, 2014 which was followed by another on 1 April, 2014 where the CTIRC submitted and presented a report containing 15 points outlining the problems faced by Tibetan refugees

20 'Kalon' is a Tibetan term referred to the ministers of different departments of the CTA.

21 CTA.,Department of Homes "An Introduction to the process of the passing of the policy."

in the settlements to the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs. These meetings resulted in drafting the policy that was sent to the respective states under whose jurisdictions the Tibetan settlements came and requested them for their opinions and suggestions within 15 days.²²

Shortly thereafter, the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy 2014²³ was declared on 20 October, 2014 that focuses on two important aspects namely, land lease agreement that provides land use rights to the Tibetans and extending central and state benefits of various development schemes to the Tibetans. However, as the policy was framed solely to end the issues related to land, less importance was given to the schemes.

Legal Aspects of the Policy

The Indian government has recognized Tibetans in her country as foreigners or 'de facto refugees' which have remained than was expected. However, it is interesting to note that the need to revise the Tibetan rehabilitation policy was realized much later despite long existing debate on Tibetans' land ownership right.

Unlike Fundamental Rights, the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) are legally non-binding in nature. The TRP is a reflection of DPSP that has been structured and framed in a language that allows the state to have control over extending welfare benefits. Hence, the relationship of the particular state, its locals with the Tibetan settlement plays a significant role in the implementation of the policy. Likewise, it is also very crucial to understand that the economic, political and social aspects of the particular state differs in order to extend these benefits.

Contrary to CTAs' expectations, only five states (Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim)²⁴ had adopted the

22 Ibid.

23 Government of India, "Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy" (2014). Available at: <http://www.centraltibetanreliefcommittee.org/ctrc/trp-2014/tibetan-rehab-policy-2014-final-copy.pdf>.

24 Whereas Himachal Pradesh have issued their state guideline on 23rd February 2015, Uttarakhand on 26th May 2015 and Karnataka on 4th June 2015, however, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim has only adopted the TRP on 12 August 2017 and 20th November 2018.

Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy 2014, from which Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim are yet to frame their state guidelines.

The policy also holds several problematic provisions that pose more restrictions on the existing rights of Tibetans in exile. For instance, paragraph 10 of the lease document prohibits all political meetings on settlement land which is in violation individuals' rights. Secondly, paragraph 30 allows the central government of India to cancel the lease at any time for any reason, upon only 3 months' notice. Similarly, the ambiguous nature of the policy is reflected in the Karnataka land lease agreement²⁵ in which paragraph 28 and 29 say that if the land or portion of land is required for any public purpose or for any administrative purpose, the lessor shall, at the expiry of a notice of fifteen days to that effect that the said land is required for such purpose, be at liberty to take possession of the land with structures. This contradicts the clause (f) under lease agreement in the policy that restricts any act of hindrances or disturbances on land occupied by the Tibetan refugees except in the case of a court order where the state government should relocate them with a new piece of land of equal or larger size.

The policy lacked clarity which could be open to subjective interpretation because it neither addresses the Tibetans inability to own or lease property in their own names, nor does it mention anything about getting government jobs. More importantly, the legal status of Tibetans under the Indian constitution or law remained uncertain that left them still vulnerable to arrest, detention, fines and even deportation.²⁶

The absence of clarity on legal status of Tibetans has also resulted in the exclusion of certain sections of the people from the benefits of the policy. This include, Tibetans living outside of formal settlements or those who are settled in clustered communities like Dharamshala

25 CTA, Home Dept. Lease agreement between the Deputy Commissioner U.K. Karwar and Mundgod Tibetan Settlement Officer Representative of Central Tibetan Relief Committee.

26 Tibet Justice Centre. 2016 "Tibet's Stateless Nationals III 2016: The status of Tibetan refugees in India". Accessed August, 12, 2018. <http://www.tibetjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/TJCIndiaReport2016.pdf>

and Majnu Ka Tila. The Tibetans who aren't recognized as Tibetan refugees by the Indian government who are denied Registration Certificate (RC) are also not protected by this policy.

Problems of Implementation of the Policy: A Case Study of Dharamshala

In the beginning of the Tibetan exile community, there wasn't much pressure on the host government in framing a long-term policy for Tibetan refugees due to the hope of returning to their homeland. This perception has resulted in the 'non assimilative' approach of the Indian government towards the Tibetans to preserve their culture and identity by providing them land to settle in different parts of the country. The first 20 years in exile has led the Tibetans to feel the need for a structured plan for the settlements to preserve their culture and identity for a longer period of time. This was when the first ever conference-cum-workshop on Tibetan Refugees in India was held in Delhi from 20 to 24 October, 1986 under the initiative of Shri Buta Singh, the former Union Home Minister in the presence of the Dalai Lama, Home Kalon J.T. Namgyal and all the Tibetan Settlement Officers of that period.²⁷ The record of the meeting outlines the importance of the Tibetan settlements and focused on further development of these settlements by addressing their issues.

It is not a surprise to learn that the process of the implementation of this policy has been time consuming for several reasons and challenges. According to the existing literature, the majority of the states are not forthcoming in adopting the policy despite constant negotiations by the CTA with them as visible in the gazette notification sent to the Sikkim state. And it is also noticeable that the resistance from the local people, in the case of Arunachal Pradesh has been preventing the process of implementation.²⁸ Thus, depending on various factors, the level of implementation differs from one settlement to another.

A crucial problem of the implementation of the policy lies in the

27 The unpublished report of the meeting held in 1986- Department of Home.

28 Balasubramaniam, "Land Governance in Exile."

inherent structural gap in the bureaucratic system and the institutional set up. These include, first, lack of negotiation between the two legitimate authorities (the MHA and the CTA), second, the gap between the state and the district/local administration and third, the CTA and the Tibetan refugees who are at the receiving end of the policy.

Despite adoption of the TRP 2014 by several states, it is not very productive when the officials at district level are either not aware or do not recognize both central and state's guidelines. The gap between the central government's policies and the local governments' practices has a huge impact on the implementation of the policy. For instance, in an interview with the author, Dawa Rinchen said:

Even though the Himachal state has adopted the policy, till date, there has been no outcome of its implementation. I doubt the reasons behind the lack of proper implementation of the policy is due to lack of coordination and negligence of the ministerial office, the administrative office and the offices at district level in explaining and training government servants about the policy. When I carried the 2014 and 2015 policy documents along with me to different offices, the office bearers were not aware of it. If the office bearers have no knowledge about these policies, it will be very difficult to facilitate the benefits of policy.²⁹

Similarly, it was noted that there is a wide gap between the proposed policy and its actual benefit for the Tibetans in exile as it excludes certain section of the people. These are, first, the Tibetans who are born in India but do not have access to the land leased under CTRC and second, those who had arrived in India between 1979 to 2003 and had been denied RC and the rights and entitlements that go with it.³⁰

Although a spokesperson of the CTRC claimed that the policy was framed after consulting the representative officers of all the settlements, however, this contradicts with a statement made by a settlement officer³¹ in a personal conversation that they aren't consulted in the policy making processes. Similarly, the implementation gap between

29 Personal interview with Dawa Rinchen, Tibetan Settlement Officer, Dharamsala, September 26, 2018.

30 Fiona, "Citizens and Refugees," 972.

31 Personal communication with a settlement officer, November 3, 2018.

the CTRC and the Tibetans are evident from a random survey sampling conducted by the author to assess awareness and knowledge on TRP 2014 in Dharamshala from September to November 2018. Out of the total 50 respondents 44% were aware of this policy. Within them, only 6% had accessed it from the CTA website. This proves that more than the majority of the respondent 56% were not aware of the policy and those who were aware, are the ones who received their information from unofficial sources and very few of them had been informed or received information from CTA. Therefore, the finding of the survey indicates that there was limited attempts made by the CTRC in informing Tibetans through other means except on the official website.

Therefore, this anecdotal evidence implies that both the institutions, the Himachal Pradesh state and the CTRC had failed to take adequate measures to inform the Tibetans of their rights under the TRP 2014. And also, the gaps in institutional practices have resulted in the delayed implementation of the policy.

The Dharamshala Tibetan settlement is not a planned settlement of the CTA. Tibetans started settling in the place after His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and his government shifted to Dharamshala. There were 500-600 Tibetans in the beginning.³² The land covered by forest around the TIPA road was given to the newly-arrived Tibetans through His Holiness by the state which was then under Punjab. However, following the Punjab Reorganization Act 1966, Punjab was trifurcated creating Punjab, Haryana and transferring certain areas to Himachal Pradesh. There wasn't much pressure from the Indian government on the Tibetan occupied land until in 2010 when fifteen families received eviction orders from the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department. When the number increased to 218, CTRC intervened:

When we approached the Department of Homes with the eviction orders, they asserted it was our personal problem and that we should solve it ourselves. People hired lawyers and spent money for the cases on their own. When the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy 2014 was adopted, there was a notice that the houses would not be destroyed. Since then

32 Department of Home, "History of Tibetan Refugees Volume II"

people have been so relieved. In between 2010-2014, people were anxious and depressed. Older people will come in the morning and evening in my home to ask the status because they've spent their whole life building their home.³³

On the recommendation of a one man fact finding commission under Justice D.P. Sood, a case was filed in the Himachal Pradesh High Court (CWP No. 2228/ 2012). It was reported that:

Despite the fact that there are specific restrictions imposed by the Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, Tibetans are illegally entering into benami transactions which ordinarily take place with the active connivance of local people under the garb of rehabilitation/ resettlement policy of the government of India.

This was followed by an eviction order from the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department against the 218 families living in Dharamshala. It includes, houses built along TIPA road, Bhagsu road, Mitnala, near the Dalai Lama's temple and a portion of Namgyal monastery.

According to the Tenancy and Land Reform Act, 1972,³⁴ not even a Himachal resident can purchase farmland unless he already owns farmland. Tibetans have used this loophole to acquire land in a Benami³⁵ way, even though as refugees they cannot own it. In the case of the 218 families who received eviction letters from the forest department, the matter remained unresolved for a number of years. Though the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy has helped in withdrawing the eviction order and agreed to lease land to the Tibetans, however, the process hasn't moved beyond defining and identifying whether Tibetans are a 'bonafide settlers' or 'deliberate encroachers'³⁶. This policy has reduced

33 Personal Interview with Thinley Jampa, Dharamshala, September 26, 2018

34 Government of Himachal Pradesh, "Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act" (1972). Available at: https://indiacode.nic.in/bit-stream/123456789/5723/1/the_himachal_pradesh_tenancy_and_land_reforms_act%2C_1972.pdf

35 'Benami' is a term used for property without any name. In the case of land occupied by the Tibetan refugees, it refers to a transaction where the person who pays for the property does not buy it under his/her own name.

36 Personal Interview with Sh. Sandeep Kumar, the former Deputy Commissioner of Kangra. December 4, 2018.

the 100 years of land lease agreement with CTRC to 20 years.

Therefore, the vulnerabilities, discriminations and future uncertainties of the stateless persons in relation to the protected citizen is likely get intensified post the 14th Dalai Lama. In mid November, 2018, local Indian residents of Khuled village were seen protesting against the CTA on the construction of a gate at the entrance which happened to be on their own premises.³⁷ The protest was followed by a vicious attack on a CTA staff by a group of local Indians for unverifiable reasons. Such incident is also a reminder for the Tibetans of the 1994³⁸ brutal riots between the two communities that almost resulted in relocation of the CTA to the South of India. Such disputes are generally due to the power dynamics of the local citizens on one hand and the Tibetan refugees as an outsider or stateless people on the other. Hence, in order to resolve the long standing disputes between these two, a legal status has to be issued to the Tibetan refugees, clearly demarcating their entitlements and rights and also recognizing CTA as a legitimate authority representing Tibetan refugees in exile by the host government.

Interplay of the Tibetan Refugees Legal Identity: Between Liminality and Belonging

The discourse on the legal identity of the Tibetans in India is highly contested and can be open to different interpretations, considering the diverse forms of identities and definition of “Tibetaness”.³⁹ Although the meta- narrative remains the retaining and affirmation of the refugee status which is oriented towards the goal of reclaiming

37 Tenzin Sangmo, “CTA’s attempt to erect a gate at its entrance shelved due to protest from locals”, *Phayul*, November 19, 2018. Accessed November 20, 2018. <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=40950&t=1>

38 The tension between Indians and Tibetans in Dharamsala escalated on April 22, 1994 when a Tibetan was accused of killing an Indian boy. This led to violent outburst from the Indians which resulted in storming the compound of the Tibetan government-in-exile, smashed windows, set fires and destroyed furniture. Dhondup, K. “Dharamsala: Shangri La or Sarajevo?” *Tibet Review*, 1994.

39 According to Dibyesh, there are no concrete features to identify oneself as a Tibetan. Rather than taking it as something given, one should see it as a process.

homeland, however, it could not be considered as the only narrative. Western scholars like McGranahan and McConnell stressed on “refusal” of citizenship in the context of Tibetans in South Asia as a form of resistance to assert political sovereignty. This practice rather reflects the top-down approach to discourse analysis over bottom-up approach. This allows us to question that if the “refusal” of the citizenship determines an act of resistance, then why hasn’t it impacted the representation in current leadership who mostly hold citizenship of other nations? Hence defining people’s political stand through “refusal” of the citizenship right is problematic. The citizenship right to the Tibetan refugees in exile represent a very complex issue which can not be addressed without taking into account the cultural, political and the legal aspect and the various popular narratives of Tibetan nationalism. Speaking to the author, an informant with Indian citizenship, availing of the Indian citizenship right did not obviate their Tibetan-ness or dismiss their national struggles; it rather helped them in making a Tibetan voice heard on the International platform.⁴⁰

Similarly, over an informal conversation with a small group of young Tibetans in their mid 30s consisting of both Tibetans from Tibet and those born in India, they expressed how everyday reality in exile stand in contrast to the common goal of returning home which is imaginary:

Many Tibetans who are settled in India may not want to return to Tibet due to fear of losing what they have here. We’re not sure what the future holds for us if we return to a free Tibet. Though, many Tibetans here already had registered themselves for the Indian citizenship, nobody wants to talk about it openly because they think this act is against the CTA.

Whereas, on the one hand, many Tibetans are determined to remain a refugee to protect their culture, religion and to uphold the sign of patriotism, yet there are other narratives of a) people who think the goal of returning to Tibet is too far-fetched in the foreseeable future, b) people who do not see Tibetan legal status as Indian and c) those who see it as mutually exclusive to the project of preserving culture

40 Personal Interview with Tsering (name changed due to person’s confidentiality) a Tibetan-Indian scholar, November 13, 2018.

and religion.

As per the Indian Citizenship Act, Tibetans born in India on or after 26 January, 1950 but before 1 July, 1987 and those born between 1987 to 2003 with any of their parents born between 1950-1987 are eligible for Indian citizenship. Albeit the Delhi High Court decision in *Namgyal Dolkar versus Ministry of External Affairs*, Tibetans born in India between January 26, 1950 and July 1, 1987 are citizens pursuant to the Citizenship Act,⁴¹ yet there are several cases in which Tibetans are denied these rights.⁴²

As Arendt⁴³ and Agamben⁴⁴ argued that when nation-states become involved in protecting the inalienable rights of man, the idea of “man” begins to refer to “citizens” of a particular nation-state. This creates a situation in which the inalienable rights are only guaranteed for those who qualify as citizens. The obvious problem then arises in account of non-citizens, illegal migrants, and stateless peoples, as to who is responsible for defending the inalienable rights of these human beings? Thus, as seen in the case of Tibetan refugees in India, the state’s authority to decide whom to provide hospitality and secure their rights and whom not to has rather politicized the idea of humanitarian ground on which they’ve provided the refugee status.

Despite being a non-signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1967 protocol, India still continues to be a host to the largest number of refugees across Southeast Asia since its independence. However, as a result of not having particular national legislation regarding refugees, its differential treatment of different groups of refugees are subject to criticism. Therefore, it is essential to understand the politicized nature of labeling individuals refugees based on their

41 *Namgyal Dolkar v. Ministry of External Affairs*, W.P (C) 12179/2009 (High Court of Delhi) (India), December 22, 2010.

42 Refer Tibet Justice Center’s 2016 Report on “the Status of Tibetan Refugees in India” for the details.

43 Hannah Arendt, “We refugees.” *International Refugee Law*, Routledge (2017) pp. 3-12.

44 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)

political interests towards the community. It is also noteworthy that the Tibetans have been contributing in both national economy and security.⁴⁵

Conclusion

By attending the everyday practices in association with the legal and political identities of the Tibetans in India and the structural gap between all the factors, this paper analyses few factors affecting the implementation of the TRP 2014. These include the socio-economic and political factors of the concerned states and its relation with the Tibetan settlements. Hence, the factors affecting the implementation indicates that these are not unidimensional or homogenous throughout all settlements.

In response to the government's policy specifically aimed to bring uniformity to the land use rights of the Tibetans and extending central and state's benefits, it raises related questions a) CTA's position, which remains looming ineffective and powerless at both national and international level b) liminal position of the Tibetan refugees as a stateless people between belonging and a hope to return to homeland. Perhaps answering these questions will help answer the related question as to why TRP 2014 remains ineffective in Dharamshala despite its implementation since 2015 and why are there gaps between proposed policy and its practical implementation? So far, the issues have surfaced sporadically and haphazardly.

The TRP 2014 seems more like the CTA and the host government's policy intervention to alleviate some immediate issues and problems that Tibetans are facing without recourse to granting of citizenship or legal rights. This resulted neither in alleviation of the problems related to land ownership nor in accessing the opportunities provided by the

45 Tibetans have contributed in Indian economy not only through their livelihood but also, religiously and culturally attracting tourists and through foreign remittance. In terms of military, Tibetans have been significant in establishment of Special Frontier force (popularly known as 22) who took a major role in 1962 war with China and 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. They still play a very crucial role in the Indian army.

Indian government. Therefore, this complex and under-studied area needs careful and systematic attention.

With a comprehensive background knowledge of the settlements and understanding of the situations, problems and factors affecting the implementation of the policy in each settlement, the policy can be revised based on a thorough study in the settlements where it is already implemented to understand the gap. The study can be inclusive of all the Tibetans in India irrespective of whether they are a resident of a formal settlement or living outside of it. The CTA may also consider negotiating with the host government in future prospects of the policy in terms of land issues, legal identities and political rights of the Tibetan refugees by exploring the relations of the Tibetan community with the local community and the state governments.

Apart from the legal status of the Tibetan refugees and recognition of the CTA as a legitimate representative of the Tibetans, the GOI should also address the unresolved land use rights of Tibetans and the other concerned issues.⁴⁶ The negotiation between the two legitimate authorities may help reinforce and accomplish shared interest of both the governments in promoting ‘temporariness’ of the exile.

46 Choekyi Lhamo, “Bureau office urges JNU to exempt Tibetans from fee hike”, *Phayul*, December 3, 2019. <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=41982>

Reference

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Anand, Dibyesh. “(Re)imagining nationalism: Identity and representation in the Tibetan diaspora of South Asia.” *Contemporary South Asia*, 2010: 271-287.
- Arendt, Hannah. “We refugees.” In *International Refugee Law*, pp. 3-12. Routledge, 2017.
- Arya, Tsewang Gyalpo. Interview with Tenzin Choedon. Personal Interview. Dharamshala, October 3, 2018.
- Balasbramaniam, Madhura Niveditha. *Land Governance in Exile: Case study of the 2014 Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy and 2002 Regularization of Unauthorized Colonies*. Master Thesis, Madras: IIT Madras, 2018.
- Basu, Durga Das. *Introduction to the Constitution of India*. Prentice Hall of India, 1982.
- Bernstorff, Dagmar, and Hubertus von Welck, eds. *Exile as challenge: The Tibetan diaspora*. Orient Blackswan, 2003.
- Center, Tibet Justice. *Tibet’s Stateless Nationals III The Status of Tibetan Refugees in India*. committee report, Tibet Justice Center, 2016.
- Central Tibetan Administration, “Arunachal Pradesh Adopts the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy Act.” August 17, 2017. <http://tibet.net/2017/08/arunachal-pradesh-adopts-the-tibetan-rehabilitation-policy-act/>.
- Choedon, Yeshi. “The Unintended Consequences of India’s Policy on Citizenship for Tibetan Refugees.” *Policy Brief*, 2018: 1-6.
- Department of Home, Central Tibetan Administration, “Tibetan Refugee Settlements” 2015. <http://www.centraltibetanreliefcommittee.org/doh/tibetan-settlements.html>.
- Department of Home, CTA. *History of Tibetan Refugee Settlements Volume II*. Government Report, Kangra: Department of Home, CTA,

2010.

Dhondup, K. "Dharamsala: Shangri La or Sarajevo?" Tibet Review, 1994.

Falak, Areeba. "Embargo on information on Tibetans' 'Thank you India' campaign", March 24, 2018. <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/embargo-information-tibetans-thank-india-campaign>

Francesca, Leaf. *Tibetan Magazine for Tibet News and Issues*. May 22, 2013. Accessed October 12, 2018, <http://www.contactmagazine.net/articles/may-2013/land-issues-phuntsokling-settlement/>

Government of Himachal Pradesh, "Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act" (1972). Available at: http://indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/5723/1/the_himachal_pradesh_tenancy_and_land_reforms_act%2C_1972.pdf

Government of Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (2015). <http://rajpatrahimachal.nic.in/OPENFILE1.aspx?ID=%20240/GAZETTE/2015-2/24/2015%20&etype=SPECIAL>.

Government of India. Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (2014). <http://www.centraltibetanreliefcommittee.org/ctrc/trp-2014/tibetan-rehabpolicy-2014-final-copy.pdf>

Gupta, Sonika. "Enduring liminality: voting rights and Tibetan exiles in India." *Asian Ethnicity* 20, no. 3 (2019): 330-347.

Jampa, Thinley. Interview with Tenzin Choedon. Personal Interview. Dharamshala, September 26, 2018.

Jessica Falcone & Tsering Wangchuk (2008) "We're Not Home": Tibetan Refugees in India in the Twenty-First Century, *India Review*, 7:3, 164-199, DOI: 10.1080/14736480802261459

Kauffmann, Thomas. *The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees: Survival Strategies of a Government-in-Exile in a world of Transnational Organizations*. New York: berghahn, 2015.

Kumar, Sandeep. Interview with Tenzin Choedon. Personal Interview. Kangra, December 4, 2018.

- Lama, Bureau of H.H. The Dalai. *Tibetans in Exile 1959-1969*. Government Report, New Delhi: Bureau of H.H. The Dalai Lama, 1969.
- Lhamo, Choekyi. "Bureau office urges JNU to exempt Tibetans from fee hike", December 3, 2019.
<http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=41982>
- Lohumi, Rakesh. *The Tribune*. August 31, 2010. Accessed September 5, 2018 <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2010/20100901/himachal.htm#1>
- McConell, Fiona. "Citizens and Refugees: Constructing and Negotiating Tibetan Identities in Exile." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, (2011): 966-983.
- McConnell, Fiona. "A state within a state? Exploring relations between the Indian state and the Tibetan community and government-in-exile." *Contemporary South Asia* 19, no.3 (2011): 297-313.
- McGranahan, Carole. "Refusal and the gift of Citizenship." *Cultural Anthropology*, 2016: 334-341.
- McGranahan, Carole. "Refusal as Political Practice: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Tibetan Refugee Status." *American Ethnologist* 45, no. 3 (2018): 367-79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12671>.
- Merton, Robert K. "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge." *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 1 (1972): 9-47. Accessed November 11, 2018. www.jstor.org/stable/2776569.
- Norbu, Dawa. "Refugees from Tibet: Structural Causes of Successful Settlements." *The Tibet Journal* 26, no. 2 (2001): 3-25. Accessed August 22, 2018. www.jstor.org/stable/43302483.
- Norbu, Dawa. "The settlements: Participation and integration," in *Exile as challenge: The Tibetan diaspora*, ed. Bernstorff, D., Von Welck, H. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003) 186-212.
- Norbu, Dawa. "Tibetan Refugees in South Asia: Implications for security." (Paper presented at Seminar on Refugees and Internal Security in South Asia, Colombo: July 10-11 1994),

http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:1240

Planning Commission. *Demographic Survey of Tibetans in Exile- 2009*, Central Tibetan Administration

Planning Council, CTA. "Tibetan Refugee Community Integrated Development Plan, 1992-97." Government Report, Kangra, 1992.

Purohit, Kunal. "The search for home: Why Tibetans are leaving India" *Hindustan times*, April 5, 2018. Accessed August 22, 2018. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/the-search-for-home-why-tibetans-are-leaving-india/story-fs6G56W52aPEjkFPbS5yYK.html>

Rigzin, Tsewang. *The Exile Tibetan Community: Problems and Prospects*. New Delhi: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2016.

Rinchen, Dawa. Interview with Tenzin Choedon. Personal Interview. Dharamshala, September 26, 2018.

Singh, Vijaita. "Karmapa acquires Dominica passport." *The Hindu*, October 3, 2018. Accessed October 10, 2018. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karmapa-acquires-dominica-passport/article25115016.ece>

Subba, Tanka B. *Flight and Adaptation: Tibetan Refugees in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya*. New Delhi: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1990.

Thakur, Naresh. "Government sets conditions for Tibetans to get passports, says move out of settlements, forgo benefits", *Hindustan Times*, June 26, 2017. Accessed September 13, 2018. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/govt-riders-for-tibetans-to-get-passports-move-out-of-colonies-forgo-benefits/story-jBsKDOitUKmDACZ1DP2jFK.html>

"Tibetans on 'encroached' land in Dharamshala to be evicted by March 31" August 28, 2012, *Phayul*. October 12, 2018. <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=31994&t=1>

"Uttarakhand Govt Formulates Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy Act."

Central Tibetan Administration News Flash, June 2, 2015.
<http://tibet.net/2015/06/uttarakhand-govt-formulates-tibetan-rehabilitation-policy/>.

Yunsong, Huang. "Tragedy of Rehabilitation: Land Issue of Tibetans in India." *China Tibetology*, 2018: 101-120.

The Development of International Relations Theory in China and the Significance of Chinese Characteristics

Tenzin Lhadon

(Tibet Policy Institute)

Abstract

International Relations as an academic field has been predominantly led by Western scholars who interpret world affairs through Eurocentric framework. Although international relations theory as a subject is comparatively new in China, it has nevertheless developed into a sophisticated and full-fledged course taught in the universities in China today. Chinese IR scholars' attempt to bring Chinese perspective to the existing IR theory and build an IR theory with Chinese characteristics is still widely debated within and outside China. This paper examines the development of IR theory in China with special emphasis on the three major schools of thought. The article specifically inquires the idea and reasoning behind formulating IR theory with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: International Relations theory, non-Western IR theory, IR theory with Chinese characteristics, Chinese IR scholars, Chinese IR theory

Introduction

International Relations (IR) as an organized field of study came into existence only from the early 20th century and slowly gained its recognition as an autonomous discipline after the First World War.¹ In addition, International Relations later included the study of diplomatic history, international law, and international organizations such as the League of Nations, the emergence of civil society and their role in influencing the global community. IR theories in this sense, attempts to understand the way the international system work, how international organizations engage with the world, as well as how nations view each other and why some countries have completely different political

1 Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., "International Relations Theory: Retrospect and Prospect," *International Affairs* 50 no.1 (1974): 28.

system and ideologies.

Debates on IR theory and its purpose continue in academic field. Throughout the years, number of theories have been produced to examine international affairs. Some of the main branches of IR theory are Classical Realism, Neo-Realism, Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, Marxism, English School, Critical theory, Constructivism and Post-modernism. In IR theory, Neo-Realism is a recurring theme where the discussions and debates always revolve around nations being in a perpetual state of anarchy.² As Chris Brown argues, anarchy in this context does not necessarily mean lawlessness and chaos, rather it means the absence of a formal system of government.³ However, the growing interest in the study of IR theory developed a form of a desire to understand international affairs through theories. The purpose of IR theories is to analyze international affairs like war, international system like (bi-polar and multi-polar), behavior patterns of various countries, domestic politics and also to study the decision making and bureaucratic processes as they affect foreign policy behavior.⁴

While International Relations developed into a comprehensive academic discipline, the major focus has been on empirical studies, normative theories and other theoretical issues.⁵ Kenneth Thompson notes that an important stage in the unfolding of any scholarly or intellectual discipline is the quest for empirical reality.⁶ The great amount of importance given on empiricism was highlighted in social sciences and modern science, both of which illustrate this development.

International relations today are theoretically sophisticated covering issues from global economic meltdown, to gender, identity to agency structure and many more. Evidently, these issues are studied and reflected in IR theory through which scholars and students have discovered the importance of IR theory. In the academic field of

2 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Relations* (Boston: Mc Graw Hill,1979), 88.

3 Chris Brown and Kristen Ainsley, *Understanding International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2005),6.

4 Pfaltzgraff, "International Relations Theory: Retrospect and Prospect," 28.

5 Kenneth W. Thompson, "The Empirical, Normative, and Theoretical Foundations of International Studies," *The Review of Politics* 29 no.2(1967): 147.

6 Ibid., 148.

International Relations today, theoretical and scientific study of global affairs and world politics have become more significant and a dominating area of interest in the discipline of IR. As explained in a simple way by Chris Brown and Kristen Ainley, theory basically answers questions as simple as, why things happen and what we should do in situation where one need result or action that is morally right.⁷

However, there is another issue related to IR theory which is the Western dominance of IR theory manifests through 1) the origin of mainstream IR theory in Western philosophy, political theory and/or history 2) the Eurocentric framing of world history, which weaves through and around much of IR theory.⁸ There is little doubt that international relations have been predominantly dominated and carried forward by western scholars and that Western theory continues to dominate the field of International Relations. Scholars such as Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan in their book, “Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspective on and beyond Asia” explained the reason behind why there is no non-Western International Relations theory. Although due to reasons pertaining to a combination of Western hegemony, inconducive local conditions and engagement in catch-up that non-West endure, while the authors notes that the present IR theory is also “both too narrow in its sources and too dominant in its influence to be good for the health of the wider project to understand the social world in which we live”.⁹

International Relations in China

International Relations as an academic discipline have recently become popular in academic studies precisely during and after the Cold War period. Although extensive expansion of Chinese academic writing on IR began in the early 1980s, there was nevertheless the first initiation that came from Premier Zhou Enlai in 1964 having realized that Chinese expertise on the subject was weak and ill-informed.¹⁰ However, due to the Cultural Revolution that lasted till mid 1970s

7 Brown, Chris and Ainsley, Kristen, “*Understanding International Relations*,” 11.

8 Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations Theory perspectives on and beyond Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010): 6.

9 Ibid., 22.

10 Michael B. Yahuda, “China and International Relations,” *Review of International Studies* 14no.4 (1988):297.

which prevented further expansion and development of the subject. Mao's political campaign destroyed and closed schools and universities and persecuted intellectuals. Only in the late 1970s and early 1980s did international relations as a subject began to flourish. The reason that the discipline is relatively new in China, is that not until the late 1980s the Chinese government began taking efforts to study and analyze world politics and issues with IR theories around the time when China opened up to the world. China's long-term policies of modernization and the open door were the guidelines for carrying out research in IR.¹¹ It is more so in China that International Relations as an autonomous academic discipline began to emerge in China only in the early 1980s.¹² International Relations as a subject and scope with the number of students, faculties, research centers, policy analysts and practitioners in China gradually began to grow in number as more discussion on IR took place among the Chinese scholars with the rise in China's power and increase in its global participation.¹³ IR is a multi-faceted and a complex subject that studies comprehensive issues which not only involve state-centric issues but it goes beyond state borders.¹⁴ The nature and development of IR in China is closely related to the nature of political status and political leader of China at a particular time and also changes in the international environment.

The drastic change in the political situation of China has significantly changed the approach towards IR studies leading to a new generation of scholars. Since the late 1990s, a growing number of Chinese academics began to incorporate Western theories of IR into their work in an attempt to produce their own theoretical responses.¹⁵ As Chen Yue notes, several Chinese IR scholars began to translate seminal works on major IR theories, like "Constructivism and International Politics" by Guo Shuyong, "The Transition of Social Science in International Political Theories: The Study of Constructivism" by Yuan Zhengqing, "Power and International Politics" by Xu Jia, "Study of Waltz's International Political Theory" (2003) by Wu Zhengyu

11 Ibid., 298.

12 Yongjin Zhang, "Review: International Relations Theory in China Today: The State of the Field," *The China Journal* no. 47(2002), 101.

13 Ibid., 102.

14 See Alexander Wendt (1999) ; Robert O Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (2012).

15 Chen. Yue, "Political Science in China: The Domestic Scene and a World Vision," *Contemporary International Relations* 20 no.2 (2010):70.

and “Myth of Hegemony” by Li Yongcheng.¹⁶ There are prominent Chinese academics in the field of IR, such as, Qin Yaqing, Ni Shixiong, Wang Yizhou, Yan Xuotong, Su Changhe and Tian Ye who have written several articles and have incorporated Western theories of IR in their work.¹⁷ Although China has made great progress in producing its own theoretical responses, Chen Yue states that China still lack innovations in theory and found weaknesses too in methodology.¹⁸ He noticed that China is currently an importer instead of an exporter of theories. It is only when the Chinese became aware of their emerging status as a global power that they started looking to the possibility of a Chinese IR, or precisely, an international relations theory with Chinese characteristics.¹⁹ Moreover, there is also the need to bring in new IR theories, particularly a self-made and a ‘genuine’ Chinese IR theory that serves as a non-Western IR theory and more importantly, that caters to the certain distinct features of Chinese political system. The question here is, why there is a need of a non-Western IR theory or more precisely, a Chinese IR theory. Although, there is another way of looking at it by asking why not bring an Asian IR theory or a Chinese IR theory in the discipline? It is always encouraging to develop new IR theories, be it Chinese IR theory or else, since Western IR theory only provides partial outlook on international politics. However, it is also necessary to question whether Chinese IR theory can represent Asian outlook on international politics as opposed to the Western IR theory. As far as Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan are concerned, they do not foresee a Chinese dominance of Asian IRT, in a way Western IRT has shaped global IRT. Furthermore, the authors believe that, China is trying to avoid being treated as a threat to the status quo as its power rises, and the moves to develop a Chinese school of IR are focused on this problem.²⁰

Such debates about whether there is a Chinese IR theory or the need for a Chinese IR theory has been in academic discussion of the discipline for a long time. Although it takes time in the emergence of a well-established Chinese IR theory, China nevertheless is on its way

16 Ibid., 70.

17 Ibid., 70.

18 Ibid., 74.

19 Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, “*Non-Western International Relations Theory perspectives on and beyond Asia*,” 223.

20 Ibid., 3.

in building a Chinese IR theory by investing heavily on the discipline. Noting that IR as a subject and a discipline is relatively new in China, it is nevertheless worth paying attention to the growth in the importance given to the discipline while growing number of Chinese IR scholars continue to bring distinctive views to further formulating theories that will most likely make contribution and changes to Chinese foreign policy, and hence China's behaviour in the international politics.²¹ China's increasing global influence (economically, politically and militarily) make it imperative to study and understand how China views global politics and what their understanding of international relations is.

Development Stages of IR in China

Qin Yaqing elaborates the initial stages of development of IR in China from the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949. The three different stages of institutional building in the development of China's IR theory as elaborated by Qin reflects gradual shift in the approach towards IR. In the first stage, only Renmin University had a Department of Foreign Affairs in 1953 where two more institutes were built which are called the Institute of International Relations and the other was the Institute of International Politics.²² Premier Zhou Enlai, Foreign Minister Chen Yi and Mao Zedong, all encouraged the study of international affairs calling for furtherance of research due to the rapidly changing relationship between China and the Soviet Union.²³ The development of the subject as an academic discipline was not the central purpose but the drive and push for the study of international affairs was to meet the immediate needs of scholars and sound knowledge of the world affairs for the national security and state interests. According to Qin Yaqing, "between 1979 and 1981, the journal was named Reference about World Economy and carried no IR-related articles. Between 1990 and 1992, European Studies was named Western European Studies and carried no IR-

21 Men Jing and Gustaaf Geeraerts, "International Relations Theory in China," *Global Society* 15 no.3(2001),251.

22 Yaqing Qin "Why is there no Chinese international relations theory?" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7 no.3(2007): 315.

23 Jianwei Wang, "International Relations Studies in China," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 2no.1(2002):70.

related articles”.²⁴ China has started picking up on the study of IR and met the standards of European journals in order to get their articles published. As a greater number of institutions started building up in China and courses like IR are introduced, there are a greater number of scholars working on IR related issues and a greater number of literature produced on IR by Chinese scholars.

The second stage during 1960s till 1979 before the reform and opening up policy, saw establishment of three departments of international politics at three national universities in China, Peking University, Renmin University of China in Beijing and Fudan University in Shanghai.²⁵ These three departments offered courses in international politics and especially trained IR specialists. Furthermore, these three departments also offered different area of studies and research, such as the Beijing University focus on the study of the national liberation movements in the Third World, the Remin University specializes on the international communist movements, and Fudan University concentrated on the study of IR in the Western capitalist world.²⁶ Along with the establishment of these departments, there were many research institutes and area studies that were introduced in the universities, such as the Institute of Soviet and Eastern European Studies, the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, the Institute of Japanese Studies, the Institute of American Studies, and the Institute of Capitalist Economy.²⁷ The deterioration of China-Soviet relations not only culminated in the establishment of IR studies in major universities in China and area studies but at the same time, number of official agencies and Chinese foreign relations media, including the ministries of Foreign Affairs and State Security, the International Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee, the New China News Agency (Xinhua), the People's Daily, the central committee of the Communist Youth League, and the All-China Federation of Trade Union, have set up their own research institutes on international affairs.²⁸ Although these developments clearly showed the need and rapid growth in importance of studying IR as an academic subject in China but the study of IR remains an important tool at the time to understand its enemy and

24 Ibid.,70.

25 Qin, “*Why is there no Chinese international relations theory?*,” 315.

26 Ibid., 318.

27 Wang, “*International Relations Studies in China*,” 71.

28 Ibid., 71.

study revolutionary leaders' thoughts (Marx, Lenin and Mao) due to the political climate and the radical political campaign during Cultural Revolution.²⁹ It was not until China adopted opening up policy under Deng Xiaoping that IR as an academic discipline reached its highest form of development. A serious and independent study of IR in China took place only after the reform and opening up policy that led to extensive exchanges of ideas and knowledge between China and the outside world.

The third stage is from 1980 to the present time where China witnessed the highest development of IR as an academic discipline. It not only witnessed the booming of institutions and departments of IR but it also witnessed the demand of the subject and more number of students taking interest in the subject.³⁰ The reform policy after 1979 has had a huge impact on Chinese universities, their openness to ideas from western countries particularly on IR and a great number of students from China studying abroad change the nature and extensiveness of how IR as a discipline is studied in China and approached. According to Yue Zou and Patrice McMahon, "Between 1978 and 2006, more than one million Chinese studied abroad, in 2008 alone, almost 180,000 students left to study."³¹ With the change in leadership and its policy (reform and opening up policy) in China, the interactions between the Chinese universities and western universities also increased especially after the Chinese Universities received international recognition from American centers,³² for example, the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing University Center in Nanjing has become one of the country's most well-known IR programmes due to the development of area studies institutes that led to the popularization of IR in China.³³ According to Song Xinning, there are three groups of IR scholars in China today: (1) researchers in institutes under various government agencies that conduct policy-oriented studies and their main function is to justify government policies (2) university professors and researchers that focuses on more general and theoretical international studies, and

29 Ibid., 71.

30 Qin, "Why is there no Chinese international relations theory?," 316.

31 Yue Zou and Patrice C. McMahon, "Thirty years of Reform and Opening Up: Teaching International Relations in China" *Political Science and Politics* 44 no.1(2011.): 116.

32 Ibid., 116.

33 Ibid., 116.

(3) researchers in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing and the academics of social sciences at the provincial level that does both.³⁴ With the popularization of IR in China along with rise in China's global status, the Chinese IR scholars' work has received more attention. More importantly, in the process of theorization of Chinese IR has led to the creation of major schools of thought as enumerated below.

Three Major Schools of Thought and Chinese IR Theory

Before discussing IR theory with Chinese characteristics, it is essential to be aware of the traditional Chinese thoughts and their relevance since China has a long history of applying different means of conducting state and foreign relations. One argument put forth by Men Jing and Gustaaf Geeraerts is that from as early as the Spring and Autumn Period (770- 476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) there prevailed all kinds of schools of thought on how to deal with interstate relations in China.³⁵ The Chinese scholars draws on its rich traditional and ancient culture evidenced in how rigorously China is trying to bring out their own IR theory that comprises of Chinese traditional thoughts on state conducts, foreign relations and global politics. Song Xinning observes that nowadays, more number of Chinese scholars are turning to traditional Chinese ideas and trying to find similarities and differences between Chinese and Western philosophical traditions.³⁶ The Chinese scholars believe that China not only give great value to their culture, but also have a strong belief that their ancient culture has an important influence on forming the worldview of Chinese leaders and Chinese foreign policy makers.³⁷ The traditional Chinese style of thinking is essentially the Chinese understanding of the world order and China's position in the world community as indicated in concepts such as Sinocentrism (*huaxia zhongxin zhiyi*), heaven's mandate or rule of courtesy by the dynasty

34 Song Xinning, "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10 no. 26 (2001):62.

35 Men Jing and Gustaaf Geeraerts, "International Relations Theory in China," 259.

36 Song Xinning, "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics," 62.

37 Men Jing and, Gustaaf Geeraert, "International Relations Theory in China," 259.

of heaven (*tianchao lizhi*), ‘tributary system’ (*chaogong tizhi*), and China in the center-tribal societies in the periphery (*huayi zhiyu*).³⁸ For reasons that Chinese scholars attach great importance to the role of history in shaping the present and future policies of a nation, it is important to study and understand the school of thoughts prevailing in ancient China. This demonstrates how China historically and traditionally conduct interstate relations and what are their viewpoints on state construction. The table below (Table. 1) makes a comparison between three major schools of thought, although there are other prominent philosophers in China that made great contributions in understanding state system and order.

The most influential school of Chinese philosophy is Confucius and Mencius whose fundamental ideas are that human nature is good (*xing shan*), that policies should be benevolent (*ren zheng*), and that China (the Middle Kingdom) should be united (*da yi tong*).³⁹ Confucianism emphasize virtue and morality (*renyi daode*), benevolent governance (*renzheng*), and integration and peace (*he-he*) that bears much resemblance to Western idealist thinking on international relation.⁴⁰ Another kinds of thought of realism in ancient China is Legalism (*fa jia*) that maintains that human nature is evil and that human beings are guided by ‘interest’.⁴¹ The legalist school of thought regards that law takes precedence over morality and virtue. They strongly believe that law should rule a state otherwise the country will be in chaos.⁴² The third school of thought, which is distinct from the above two schools and which is quite influential in terms of how relevant it looks in the aspects of present Chinese political system. The Land and Heaven school of thought (*qing zhong xue shuo*) represented by Guan Zi is based on his theory of governing the state through economic activity.⁴³ Guan Zi held that relationship between states and people is based on mutual interest and that economic power is the decisive force.⁴⁴

38 Song Xinning, “Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics,”70.

39 Men Jing and Gustaaf Geeraerts, “International Relations Theory in China,” 260.

40 Ibid., 262.

41 Ibid., 261.

42 Ibid., 260.

43 Ibid., 261.

44 Ibid., 261.

Table. 1 Comparisons of the three major schools of thought

Name of school	Representative(s) of school	Differences	Similarities
Confucianism	Confucius and Mencius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human nature is good • Benevolent governance, virtue and morality are stressed, and the role of force is downplayed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All consider peace and security to be prior for a state • All aim at serving the dominance of the ruler • All attach great importance to agricultural production
Legalism	Shen Dao, Sheng Buhai, Shang Yang and Han Feizi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human nature is evil • Legal measures are necessary • Power is predominant, the development of agriculture and the results of war decide the comparison of state power 	
Land and Heaven (qing zhong) school	Guan Zi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States and people are linked by interests. • Agricultural production administration is more important than agricultural production itself • Economic force is decisive 	

Table 1 Source: Jing and Geeraerts, "International Relations Theory in China," 263.

There are also generally considered seven influential pre-Qin masters known as Guanzi, Laozi, Confucius, Mencius, Mozi, Xunzi and Hanfeizi who studied the interstate order, interstate leadership, and

transfer of hegemonic power.⁴⁵ All these illustrate wide variety of perspectives in pre-Qin international political philosophy. The three major schools of thought and early Chinese thinkers hold that morality and the interstate order are directly related, especially at the level of the personal morality of the leader and its role in determining the stability of interstate order.⁴⁶ Whether Yan Xuetong calls it IR theory with insights from pre-Qin state that intend to contribute to the present Western IR theories or whether China intend to challenge the existing mainstream Western IR theories is still a debate that is strongly continuing in the Chinese academia.

International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics

During the Shanghai conference on IR theory in 1987, Hu Menghao emphasized two prominent IR theories, they are, Marxist IR theory and the bourgeois IR theory.⁴⁷ As Song Xinling argues, “A bourgeois theory is to safeguard the imperialist foreign policy and the imperialists’ interests, while the socialist IR theory is to serve to the final victory of socialism”.⁴⁸ As far as the younger Chinese scholars are concerned, they underscore the importance of analyzing international relations using ‘scientific framework’.⁴⁹ Song Xinling also notes that there is a division between scholars on when IR theory came to China, such as, many senior Chinese scholars believe that theories of Chinese leaders existed since the establishment of PRC, while for many other scholars there were only international studies, no IR theory existed in China before 1980s.⁵⁰ He outlined that Mao Zedong’s ‘Three Worlds’ theory, theory of hegemonism, Deng Xiaoping’s one country, two-system theory and etc. are strategic viewpoints on international issues rather than theory.⁵¹ He further notes that the study of IR theory with Chinese characteristics began in the early 1980s with Deng Xiaoping putting forth the concept of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’.

45 Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

46 Ibid., 5.

47 Song Xinling, “*Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics*,” 64.

48 Ibid., 64.

49 Ibid., 64.

50 Ibid., 65.

51 Ibid., 65.

Jing and Geeraerts notes that soon after which it became a norm in every field.⁵² The question is what is ‘Chinese characteristics’ and what does it entail? The most pressing query is whether China should come up with its own Chinese IR theory and is it necessary to do so? Chinese IR scholars have been studying western IR theories to construct a discipline of its own and to develop an international relations theory with Chinese characteristic. It is an unavoidable challenge for the Chinese scholars to understand and respond to Western IR scholarship, perspectives, and concepts such as realism and liberalism within the discipline. Several Chinese scholars such as Liang Shoude, Ni Shixiong, Jin Yingzhong, and Feng Shaolei advocates constructing an IR theory with Chinese characteristics that should include: (1) standing on the side of peace-loving people in the world, (2) adhering to the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’, and (3) using the Chinese style of language, expression, and thinking.⁵³ Whereas Yang Zheng argues that an IR theory with Chinese characteristics should include fundamental tenets of Marxism, theories of Chinese leaders and Western IR theories, while Zhang Zhi points out that it should include Marxism, ancient Chinese theories, Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping’s thoughts.⁵⁴ However, there are very few scholars in China who share the view that there is no need of the term Chinese characteristics in IR theory studies and who believe that the term is mainly a political and ideological rather than a scientific or meeting academic standards.⁵⁵ According to Jing Men and Gustaaf Geeraerts, the political climate of the development of IR studies in China has become highly politicized noting that, “Chinese characteristics” connotes a kind of authority or legitimacy.⁵⁶ Some arguments put forward by dissenting voices that expressed disagreement over the use of the term Chinese characteristics are interesting and compelling. From a comprehensive summary of the dissenting voices presented by Song Xinning, one intriguing argument was:

Their reasons to prove the necessity and urgency to develop an IR theory

52 Men Jing and Gustaaf Geeraerts, *International Relations Theory in China*, 251-276.

53 Song Xinning, “Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics,” 68.

54 Ibid., 68.

55 Ibid., 68.

56 Men Jing and Gustaaf Geeraerts, *International Relations Theory in China*, 264.

with Chinese characteristics derive from a specific Chinese political situation leading to the backwardness of IR studies in China, such as dogmatism, rigidity, and conservatism, in the past. The description and demonstration of the contents of the term are neither logical nor rigorous.⁵⁷

According to Gustaaf Geeraerts and Men Jing, an alternative explanation for the emphasis on Chinese characteristics in IR theory construction might be that with the increase in national power, the Chinese are more confident in sharing their own narrative on dealing with international issues.⁵⁸

Yan Xuetong is at the forefront today in developing a new theory combining China's pre-Qin ancient political thoughts and contemporary international relations theory. He explicitly mentioned "that the aim should not be to produce a distinct Chinese school of international relations theory but rather it should aim to improve the existing international relations theory with insights from pre-Qin thinkers".⁵⁹ However, there are other critical viewpoints regarding the efforts that Chinese scholars are investing in building Chinese IR theory. The effort put in developing IR theory with Chinese characteristic is to minimise the dominance of western IR theory, which is based on the nature of western polity. The idea behind IR theory with Chinese characteristic was initially to rival against the dominant western IR theory. While discussions continued regarding IR theory with Chinese characteristics, the overall development of IR theory in China is still in its initial stage and is yet to be an in-depth discussions in the area of IR theorization.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to provide a detailed account of the development of IR theory in China and what 'Chinese characteristics' entails in the IR theory. In so doing, I have analyzed the queries in the development of Chinese IR theory. The questions that are addressed in this article concern the relevance of ancient Chinese philosophy and ideas and their applicability in the development of Chinese IR theory. The article also dwells into one of the most pressing issue behind theory building in China, the notion behind "Chinese characteristics" and the

57 Song Xinning, *Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics*, 69.

58 Men Jing and Gustaaf Geeraerts, *International Relations Theory in China*, 271.

59 Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

problems attached to it. However, there is definitely a division among Chinese IR scholars, and moreover a diversion from conventional Marxist and Maoist orthodox line demonstrates the tendency of IR study in China to be more pluralistic and less ideological. To quote from Song Xinming:

The study of IR is still regarded as part of the political establishment's ideological campaign and mainly an instrument or tool of policymaking by the Chinese leadership. To a great extent, the pace of development will depend upon the pace and direction of political evolution in China.⁶⁰

With China's rise now supposedly challenging the power status of the Western countries, the discourse of Chinese IR scholars is receiving increasing attention within and outside China. Western scholars want to know how Chinese IR scholars perceive the international system and what are the changing roles that China takes in defining or redefining international order. "Understanding Chinese theory construction is conducive to a better comprehension of Chinese foreign policy".⁶¹

60 Song Xinming, *Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics*, 74.

61 Men Jing and Gustaaf, *International Relations Theory in China*, 276.

References

- Acharya, Amitav and Buzan, Barry. *Non-Western International Relations Theory perspectives on and beyond Asia*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Brown, Chris and Ainsley, Kristen. *Understanding International Relations, third edition*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan , 2005.
- Florini, Ann. "Rising Asian Powers and Changing Global Governance." *International Studies Review* (2011): 24-33.
- Jing, Men and Geeraerts, Gustaaf. "International Relations Theory in China." *Global Society* (2001): 251-276.
- Pfaltzgraff, Robert L. Jr. "International Relations Theory: Retrospect and Prospect." *International Affairs* (1974): 28.
- Qin, Yaqing. "Why is there no Chinese international relations theory?" *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (2007): 313-340.
- Thompson, Kenneth W. "The Empirical, Normative, and Theoretical Foundations of International Studies." *The Review of Politics* (1967): 147.
- Wang, Jianwei. "International Relations Studies in China." *Journal of East Asian Studies* (2002): 69-87.
- Xinning, Song. "Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics." *Journal of Contemporary China* (2001): 61-74.
- Yahuda, Michael B. "China and International Relations." *Review of International Studies* (1988): 297-302.
- Yan, Xuetong. *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Yue, Chen. "Political Science in China: the Domestic Scene and a World Vision ." *Contemporary International Relations* (2010): 64-78.
- Zhang, Yongjin. "Review: International Relations Theory in China Today: The State of the Field." *The China Journal* (2002): 101-108.
- Zou, Yue and McMahon, C. Patrice. "Thirty years of Reform and Opening Up: Teaching International Relations in China." *Political Science and Politics* (2011): 115-121.

Beijing's Politics on Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) and Its Implications for Mekong Subregion Countries

Dechen Palmo

(Tibet Policy Institute)

Abstract

Lancang Mekong Cooperation (LMC) is a sub-regional cooperation mechanism, initiated by China, connecting the six countries along the Mekong River.

This study assesses the proposal put forward by Premier Li Keqiang during the 2nd LMC leaders' meeting to understand China's strategic interest in the creation of LMC and the damming of the Mekong River and its impact. This paper argues that China doesn't just see this mechanism as a way to mend the relationship and develop together with other countries, but as a way to implement its strategy to achieve its goal of an apparent de-securitizing of the water and damming issues. The inclusion of water resources as one of the main priority areas of cooperation alongside economic cooperation is a tactic to complement the implementation of the BRI and to ease criticism of China's unilateral dam building. Whereas on the other side, Mekong sub-region countries are responding to China's initiative and participating in the LMC with no initial strategy, they all see explicit benefits to be gained from the mechanism's projects.

Keywords: Mekong River, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, de-securitization, Mekong sub-region, China

Introduction

Since Xi Jinping came to power, there has been a significant shift in China's foreign policy.¹ A country which believes in keeping a low profile in international affairs has now abandoned Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum "hide your strength, bide your time" and started

1 Tim Ruhlrig, "A 'New' Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping," *Institute for security and development policy*. March 2018, Available at: <https://isdpeu/content/uploads/2018/03/A-New-Chinese-Foreign-Policy-FA.pdf>.

moving closer towards playing a central role in what China calls being a “responsible great power.”² In order to achieve such ambitions of becoming a dominant economic power, China has started investing around the world through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and gained international influence in return.

With the multibillion dollar BRI project, China is making an effort to deepen regional cooperation and improve connectivity on an international scale. Since the Mekong sub-region represents one of the key areas for the BRI, China has started using different tactics to bring the Mekong catchment countries under their influence. Of all the issues between China and Mekong region countries, Mekong River has been the binding factor,³ as its water is considered as an issue of vital importance to both sides.

For the BRI initiative to succeed, Beijing needs to lessen distrust among its stakeholders in the region. Since fresh water resources has been the source of tension between these countries, China started using rivers as a tool to consolidate regional power.⁴ Hence China has come up with the initiative known as Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC). LMC is a sub-regional cooperation mechanism initiated by China. It involves the six countries of the Mekong sub-region -- China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. The Lancang Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism was officially launched at the first LMC leader’s meeting in Sanya, China in March 2016 with the participation of leaders from all the six countries of the Mekong region.⁵

2 Xia Liping, “China: A responsible great power,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 10 no. 25 (2001):17-25.

3 Xinhui Guo. “Feature: Mekong river binds regional countries, peoples together as lifeblood of Southeast Asia,” *Xinhua* 19 May, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/19/c_138071574.htm

4 Paul B. Stares, “Who Controls the Tap? Addressing Water Security in Asia,” Centre for Preventive Action (Blog), 10 October, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/who-controls-tap-addressing-water-security-asia>

5 Lancang-Mekong Cooperation , “A Brief Introduction of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation,” 13 December, 2017, http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/gylmhz_1/jj/t1519110.htm

Lancang and Mekong, though differing in their names, refers to the same river. The river has its origin in Zadoe, in the north-eastern part of Tibet. The river is known as Dzachu in Tibet and Lancang in Chinese and once it flows out of Yunnan, the river is known as the Mekong. From its source in the Tibetan plateau, the river runs for almost 4,880 km. The Mekong River feeds more than 60 million people and provides a habitat for riverfront communities and natural wildlife.⁶



Figure 1: 3+5 Cooperation Framework. Source: Lancang Mekong Cooperation websites, http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/zyjz_3/35hz/t1519481.htm

6 World Wildlife Fund, "Greater Mekong" accessed 2 January, 2018, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/places/greater-mekong>

This mechanism identifies three pillars of cooperation, namely political and security issues, economic and sustainable development, and social-cultural and people-people exchanges. The five priorities under the LMC include interconnectivity, industrial capacity, cross-border economy, water resources, and agriculture and poverty reduction.⁷

China doesn't just see this mechanism as a way to mend the relationship and develop together with the other stakeholders, but as a way to implement its own strategy to achieve its goal of de-securitizing⁸ the water and damming issues.

Whereas on the other side, the Mekong sub-region countries are responding to China's initiative and participating in the LMC, in a process effectively allying with the latter with no strategy of their own, they all see explicit benefits to be gained from the mechanism's projects. Those benefits mainly lie in opportunities to attract resources for national development based on Beijing's offered concessional loan of US \$ 11.5 billion for development projects in the Mekong, ranging from infrastructure and other projects,⁹ alongside a further US\$ 200 million for poverty alleviation initiatives and US\$ 300 million for regional cooperation.¹⁰ Though the Chinese initiative in the region is a welcome move, there are several reasons for Mekong countries to be worried about the cost and how it will impact the region in the future, which is surely a matter of concern for downstream countries. This study examines the proposal put forward by Premier Li Keqiang during the 2nd LMC leaders' meeting to understand China's strategic

7 Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, "3+5 Cooperation Framework," accessed 6 February, 2019, http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/zyjz_3/35hz/t1519481.htm.

8 Desecuritisation is best understood as the fading away of a particular issue from the security agenda and implies that issues, for which the potential use of exceptional measures had previously been legitimised, gradually start to take steps backward so that violence will no longer be considered as a legitimate option.

9 "China's offers \$ 11.5 billions in loan, credit to Southeast Asia," *Reuters*, 23 March, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/china-diplomacy/update-1-china-offers-11-5-billions-in-loans-credit-to-southeast-asia-idUSL3N16V3HL>.

10 "Cambodia celebrates Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Week 2019," *Xinhua*, 21 March, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/21/c_137913146.htm.

interest in the creation of the LMC and the damming of the Mekong River and its impact.¹¹

Strategy Behind China's Proposal

LMC has a four-level meeting mechanism which comprises of working groups, senior officials, foreign ministers and leaders respectively.¹² So far there have been two leaders' meetings, five foreign ministers meetings, six meetings of senior officials and six joint working group meetings.¹³ In early January, during the 2nd Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) leaders meeting, the Chinese premier Li Keqiang, made five proposals for advancing the LMC from the nurturing period to the growth period. First, he stressed on implementing good water resource cooperation and emphasized mapping out a five-year action plan; second, he requested construction of water conservancy facilities and stated that the cascade development of hydropower in the Lancang River would not deplete the river. Instead, it would help adjust the water level in both dry and rainy seasons. Moreover, he noted that China supports its companies in undertaking hydropower plants, reservoirs, irrigation and drinking water projects in the Mekong countries; third, expansion of agricultural cooperation; fourth, upgrade of human resource cooperation; and finally, to push forward medical and health cooperation.¹⁴

Though Li's proposal has been welcomed and praised by the leader

11 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China .2016. *Address by H.E. Li Keqiang at the First Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Leaders' Meeting*. Accessed on March 24, 2018. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1350422.shtml

12 Wang Yan, "Can the countries of the Mekong pioneer a new model of co-operation?" *The Third Pole* , 15 March 2018, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/2018/03/15/can-the-countries-of-the-mekong-pioneer-a-new-model-of-cooperation/>

13 Lancang Mekong Cooperation, Accessed 14 February 2020. <http://www.lmc-china.org/eng/>

14 "Li Keqiang Attends the 2nd LMC Leaders' Meeting," *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Malta*, 11 January, 2018, <http://mt.china-embassy.org/eng/zyxwdt/t1525244.htm>

present at the meeting,¹⁵ it is important for downstream countries to assess China's goal and strategy behind taking such initiatives and its implications.

In the proposal, the Chinese premier has focussed mainly on water resource cooperation, where he encouraged the formulation of a five-year action plan on water resource cooperation and encouraged the development of a cascade of dams on the river. He argues that the dams will enable the generation of renewable hydropower, enhance flood security and increase water storage to buffer against varying availability.¹⁶ However, he ignored the potential adverse ecological, hydrological and social impacts of dams on the Mekong basin.

Though the annual flood in Mekong region has the potential to cause adverse regional effects, they also play a vital role in sustaining the productivity and biodiversity of the region.¹⁷ The building of hydropower dams can disrupt the river ecosystem, which would have a huge impact on the environment as a whole.¹⁸ His main strategy is to shift the focus from the impact of these dams on downstream countries into opportunities for economic development from hydropower dams. China is overstating the hydropower benefits, but the reality is that the real cost of hydropower outweighs the benefit.¹⁹

The inclusion of water resource as one of the main priority areas of cooperation alongside economic cooperation is a tactic to complement the implementation of the BRI and to ease criticism of

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 "Flood and Drought," Mekong River Commission, accessed on 17 September, 2019, <http://www.mrcmekong.org/topics/flood-and-drought/>.

18 Chrisatina Nunez, "Hydropower, explained," *National Geographic*, 13 May, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/hydro-power/>.

19 Stefan Lovgren, "Southeast Asia May Be Building Too Many Dams Too Fast," *National Geographic*, 23 August, 2018, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/08/news-southeast-asia-building-dams-floods-climate-change/>.

China's unilateral dam building.²⁰ China knows that if the water issue is not well managed, it will remain a problem and escalate tensions. Therefore, China is investing and financing the LMC project, especially hydropower development, in these low and middle income countries to gain their diplomatic support in return. Mekong region countries should remain cautious of China using LMC as a tool to expand its geopolitical and geo strategic influence in the region.

Damming of the Mekong River

Despite the river being the lifeline of six Mekong basin countries, the dam building boom is underway, threatening the basin's vital ecosystems. With downstream regions already facing the impact of 11 Chinese dams on the upper Mekong River,²¹ Chinese state owned enterprises are also active in funding eleven dam- building projects in the lower Mekong region.²²

20 J.S. Hecht et al., "Hydropower dams of the Mekong River basin: a review of their hydrological impacts" *Journal of Hydrology*, Vol. 568 (2019): 285-300.

21 Amy Bainbridge and Supattra Vimonsuk, "China's Mekong River dams are generating renewable energy, but are costing locals their livelihoods, " 20 January, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-20/china-mekong-river-plan-creates-renewable-energy-but-costs-jobs/11872640>.

22 "Laos and its Dams: Southeast Asia's Battery, Built by China," *Radio Free Asia*, June 2016, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/china-build-laos-dams/?fbclid=IwAR1WJQogQ_EDpadW9jApGawad7AU3m3-R_SF1hKoSXXKntM-j6OmkgmJTKzWs.



Figure 2: This map shows the status of the Lancang cascade dams.
Source: Brian Eyler (2020)

China, which has a long history of domestic dam building and has the largest number of dams in the world, has come to dominate the world market through financing and building dams, especially in Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia.²³ They are involved in overseas dam building investment in different roles. They act as financiers, developers, builders, sub-contractors or a combination of these roles. Usually they are involved in at least two of the above tasks.²⁴ If all the development plans are carried out, there could be over 150 large dams built on the Mekong River and its tributaries.²⁵

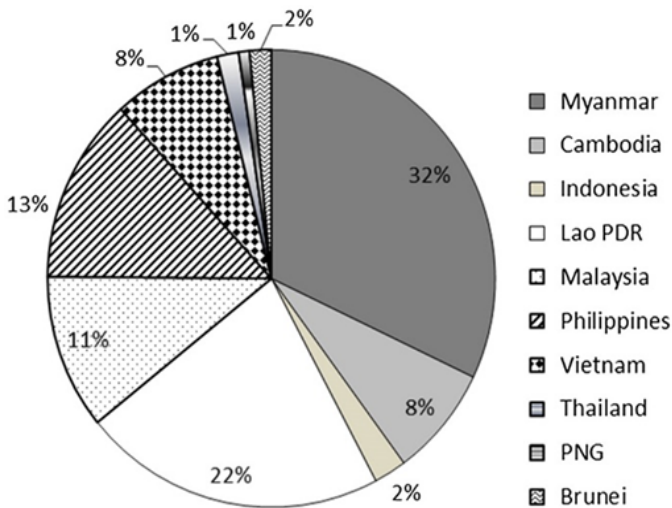


Figure 3: Chinese overseas dams in south-east asia. Source: Urban & Siciliano (2013)

There are around 323 Chinese funded and Chinese built overseas hydropower projects, most of them in South-East Asia (38%) and

23 Frauke Urban et al., "China's dam- builders: their role in transboundary river management in South-East Asia," *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, 34 no.5 (2017): 747-770.

24 Ibid.

25 Timo Räsänen, "New study shows significant impact of Chinese dams on Mekong," *The Third Pole*, (6 February, 2018 <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/2017/02/06/new-study-shows-significant-impact-of-chinese-dams-on-mekong/>)

Africa (26%).²⁶ By 2016, about 30 dam constructions, where Chinese dam builders or financiers were involved,²⁷ were completed.

At present, only 10 percent of the estimated hydroelectric potential in the lower Mekong river basin has been developed. Under the auspices of LMC, China intends to bring more investment into the region. If all the planned hydropower dams are built, the cumulative impact of these dams will transform the river into a series of ponds and reservoirs. Moreover, it will have repercussions throughout the entire basin.

The Impact of Hydropower Development on the Mekong River

Hydropower development on the Mekong River in China's Yunnan province already has had a huge impact on downstream countries. In pursuit of economic development, the lower reaches of the Mekong River have started exploiting their hydropower resources by building a cascade of dams on the river without considering its negative effects on the environment and ecosystem.

According to research done by Chinese scientists, the cascade of six operational dams on the mainstream Lancang river has led to a decline in the flood season water discharge and a reduction in the number of fish species and annual sediment flux, which has negatively affected ecology along the Chinese part of the Mekong river.²⁸

Timo A. Rasanen and his colleagues at Aalto University in Finland have done a research on river discharge changes in the lower Mekong basin due to hydropower operation of Chinese dams on the upper Mekong basin. In their study, they found that Chinese hydropower operations have led to wide fluctuations of the river flow in the downstream countries. Mekong water levels have increased during the dry season

26 Stephanie Jensen-Cormier, "Reflections on Chinese Companies' Global Investments in the Hydropower Sector Between 2006-2017," *Internationalrivers.org* (Blog), 14 December, 2017 (3:24am), <https://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/435/reflections-on-chinese-companies'-global-investments-in-the-hydropower-sector-between-2006>

27 Ibid.

28 Hui Fan et al., "Environmental consequences of damming the mainstream Lancang-Mekong River: A review." *Earth Science Review*, Vol. 146 (2015): 89.

and decreased during the wet season at several sites on the river as a result of China's dams.²⁹

According to a study done by Paritta Wangkiat, unpredictable water release from the hydropower during electricity production has a deleterious impact on some riverside communities.³⁰ Further dam construction on the river will exacerbate the changes in the hydrology of the river.

Both of the research studies found that a cascade of dams on the river changes the natural flow of the river, which has significant impact on the ecology and environment of the Mekong region. Since Mekong is home to an estimated 1,000 fish species, by changing the hydrology of the river, these dams threaten the biodiversity of the Mekong and the livelihoods of fishermen throughout the region.³¹

China has provided hydrological data for the rainy season, however, hydrological data on the dry season and sediment load are being kept as a national secret.³² In times of drought, dams can cause regional insecurity by contributing to water scarcity problems of downstream countries. Moreover, these cascades of dams will also trap the sediment load transported from the upper basin. The amount of nutrient-rich sediment flowing downriver has already declined dramatically, so much so that a UNESCO report has warned that Chinese dams built on the upper sections, known as Lancang, have caused a 70% reduction in sediment, which will adversely impact fisheries and rice production in Cambodia and Vietnam.³³

29 Timo A. Rasanen et al., "Observed river discharge changes due to hydropower operations in the Upper Mekong Basin," *Journal of Hydrology*, Vol. 545 (2017): 30.

30 Paritta Wangkiat, "Drowning in generosity," *Bangkok Post*, (27 March, 2016), [Accessed 19 September, 2018], Available at: <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/911532/drowning-in-generosity>

31 Ibid.

32 Hongzhou Zhang, "Sino-Indian water disputes: the coming water wars?" *Wires Water*, 3 (2016):162.

33 T. Piman, and M. Shrestha, *Case Study on Sediment in the Mekong River Basin: Current State and Future Trends* (Stockholm: UNESCO and Stockholm Environment Institute, 2017)

Besides the potential environmental and social impact of hydropower development, there is also a political and economic impact. China, under the Belt and Road Initiatives and various institutions such as LMC, is offering hundreds of billions of dollars in loans to build dams. According to an article published by the Australian Financial Review (AFR), at least 16 states, including Mekong region countries like Cambodia, Laos and Thailand are falling for China's so-called "debt book diplomacy"³⁴. The main aim of China is to extend hundreds of billions of dollars in loans to countries that can't afford to pay them and then strategically leverage the debt in exchange for both political influence and strategic equities. While there is a lack of "individual diplomatic clout" in Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines, Chinese debt could give China a "proxy veto" in ASEAN.³⁵

Despite many negative impacts of the dam building on the river, it continues to progress. The supportive attitude of the downstream countries to the hydropower projects in the Mekong region reflect their priority of developing their economies over the protection of the environment.

Conclusion

China's introduction of the Lancang Mekong Cooperation (LMC) to the Mekong sub-region countries is centred on China's transcontinental development project, the 900 billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).³⁶ Since Mekong serves as an economic lifeline for tens of millions of people in the five Southeast Asian countries,³⁷ in the name of the common shared river, Beijing is quietly promoting its agenda

34 "United States report warns about China's debt book diplomacy," *Business Standard*, 20 May, 2018, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/us-report-warns-about-china-s-debt-book-diplomacy-118052000552_1.html

35 Ibid.

36 Xing Wei, "Lancang-Mekong River Cooperation and Trans-Boundary Water Governance- A Chinese Perspective," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 3 no.3 (2017): 383.

37 Clark Pilita, "Troubled waters: The Mekong river crisis," *Financial Times*, 18 July 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/1add7210-0d3d-11e4-bcb2-00144fec-abdc0>

through this platform. Beijing believes that this institution will help ease tension over the development projects on the river and it is one of the best ways to boost economic development in the region. Under this mechanism, China has made several provisions to help finance dozens of projects along the Mekong River and further promote the hydropower development in the region.

The primary concern about the number of dams being built on the Mekong River is far from being resolved. Instead, it is most likely continue to increase. Excessive damming of the Mekong and its tributaries by Chinese dam-builders and others may lead to water scarcity and food insecurity across the region. Downstream countries which have criticized China for its unilateral dam building on the Mekong River are now also following the path of China in dam building.³⁸

Despite the negative impact of hydropower dams on the river, China has framed the phenomena positively in the name of cooperation and coordination. Therefore, China is re-orienting the relationship in the Mekong region in order to place itself at the centre of control over the geo political issues surrounding it. With China being the centre of this cooperation, it is clear that there would be more and more hydropower projects that were previously politically or economically unviable.

The major drawback of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) is that it is unable to regulate the dam building on the Mekong mainstream. But with the launch of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) offers new hope for water sustainability by gathering the six Mekong countries to cooperate on water resource management. However, Hydropower development on the Mekong river was undertaken without transboundary water governance, threatens water sustainability.³⁹ Therefore, the LMC does not support sustainable use of the Mekong.

38 Hannah Beech, "Our River Was Like a God': How Dams and China's Might Imperil the Mekong," *The New York Times*, 12 October, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/12/world/asia/mekong-river-dams-china.html>

39 Verna Yam, "The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation: Unable to Resolve Hydropower Development Threats to Mekong Water Sustainability," *The Yale Review of International Studies*, September 2018, <http://yris.yira.org/comments/2579>

So far there is no agreement and no provision that has been made under this mechanism to solve the problems of the Mekong River and will be unlikely to do so shortly. Since member countries are talking only about operation and coordination of the project, they are avoiding the discussion around the potentially adverse ecological, hydrological or social impact of dams.⁴⁰

Although this initiative does contribute to the overall economic development of the Mekong basin countries it also poses a serious risk on river's ecology. Beijing, by initiating such cooperation among the Mekong region countries, also loses considerable freedom of using its dams and water flow as a policy tool. Such cession of power is coupled with the geo-strategical foresight and desire to leverage significant influence in the regions over any matters that may arise with regards to the Belt and Road Initiative as well as damming of the rivers within and outside the Chinese borders.

Before it is too late for downstream countries to realize the impact of these hydropower projects, these countries need to rethink the trajectory of dam building on the Mekong River and drive a hard bargain for the right sort of cooperation.

A 2018 World Wildlife Fund for Nature's report has drawn attention to how the dramatic decline in the health of the Mekong is not only an ecological disaster but also a serious threat to the economy of the region. With a fresh perspective on how ecology and economy are intimately linked together, the report reminds all stakeholders: "Economic growth in the Greater Mekong region depends on the Mekong River, but unsustainable and uncoordinated development is pushing the river system to the brink."⁴¹

40 Carl Middleton and Jeremy Allouche, "Watershed or Powershed? Critical Hydropolitics, China and the 'Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Framework'," *The International Spectator* 51 no.3 (2016).

41 *World Wildlife Fund*, "Thai Economy at Risk from Development on the Mekong River: WWF Report," *11 November*, 2016), [Accessed on 2 January, 2018], Available at: https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?284232/ThaiEconomyatRisk-fromDevelopmentontheMekongRiver

References

- ANI. *US report warns about China's 'debt book diplomacy'*. May 20, 2018. <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/us/us-report-warns-about-chinas-debt-book-diplomacy201805202055330003/>.
- Bainbridge, Amy, and Supattra Vimonsuk. *China's Mekong River dams are generating renewable energy, but are costing locals their livelihoods*. January 20, 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-20/china-mekong-river-plan-creates-renewable-energy-but-costs-jobs/11872640>.
- Beech, Hannah. *'Our River Was Like a God': How Dams and China's Might Imperil the Mekong*. October 12, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/12/world/asia/mekong-river-dams-china.html>.
- Biba, Sebastian. "China's 'old' and 'new' Mekong River Politics: the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation from a comparative benefit-sharing perspective." *Water International* 43, no. 5 (2018): 622 - 641.
- Cormier, Stephanie Jensen. *Reflections on Chinese Companies' Global Investments in the Hydropower Sector Between 2006-2017*. December 14, 2017. <https://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/435/reflections-on-chinese-companies%E2%80%99-global-investments-in-the-hydropower-sector-between-2006>.
- Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Malta. *Li Keqiang Attends the 2nd LMC Leaders' Meeting*. January 11, 2018. <http://mt.china-embassy.org/eng/zyxwdt/t1525244.htm>.
- Fan, Hui, Daming He, and Hailong Wang. "Environmental consequences of damming the mainstream Lancang-Mekong River: A review." *Earth - Science Reviews* 146 (2015): 77 - 91.
- Hecht, Jory S, Guillaume Lacombe, Mauricio E Arias, Thanh Duc Dang, and Thanapon Piman. "Hydropower dams of the Mekong River basin: A review of their hydrological impacts." *Journal of Hydrology* 568 (2019): 285 - 300.
- Lancang - Mekong Cooperation. *3+5 Cooperation Framework*. December 14, 2017. http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/zyjz_3/35hz/t1519481.htm.
- . *A Brief Introduction of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation*. December 13, 2017. http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/gylmhz_1/jj/t1519110.htm.
- Liping, Xia. "China: A responsible great power." *Journal of Contemporary*

China 10, no. 26 (2010): 17 - 25.

Lovgren, Stefan. *Southeast Asia May Be Building Too Many Dams Too Fast*. August 23, 2018. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/08/news-southeast-asia-building-dams-floods-climate-change/>.

Mekong River Commission. *Flood and Drought*. n.d. <http://www.mrcmekong.org/topics/flood-and-drought/>.

Middleton, Carl, and Jeremy Allouche. "Watershed or Powershed? Critical Hydropolitics, China and the 'Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Framework'." *Italian Journal of International Affairs* 51, no. 3 (2016): 100 - 117.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. *Address by H.E. Li Keqiang Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China At the First Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Leaders' Meeting*. March 23, 2016. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1350422.shtml.

Nunez, Christina. *Hydropower Explained*. May 13, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/hydropower/>.

Piman, Thanapon, and Manish Shrestha. "Case study on sediment in the Mekong River Basin: Current state and future trends." *UNESCO Bangkok*. December 1, 2017. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260566>.

Radio Free Asia. *Laos and its Dams*. 2019. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/special/china-build-laos-dams/?fbclid=IwAR1WJQogQ_EDpadW9jApGawad7AU3m3-R_SF1hKoSXXKntMj6OmkgmJTKzWs.

Rasanen, Timo A, Paradis Someth, Hannu Lauri, Jorma Koponen, and Juha, Kummu, Matti Sarkkula. "Observed river discharge changes due to hydropower operations in the Upper Mekong Basin." *Journal of Hydrology* 545 (2016): 28 - 41.

Rasanen, Timo. *New study shows significant impact of Chinese dams on Mekong*. February 6, 2017. <https://www.thethirdpole.net/2017/02/06/new-study-shows-significant-impact-of-chinese-dams-on-mekong/>.

Reuters. *China offers \$11.5 billions in loans, credit to Southeast Asia*. March 23, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/china-diplomacy/update-1-china-offers-11-5-billions-in-loans-credit-to-southeast-asia->

idUSL3N16V3HL.

Ruhlig, Tim. *A "New" Chinese Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping?* March 2, 2018. <https://isdpeu/publication/new-chinese-foreign-policy-xi-jinping-implications-european-policy-making/> .

Southeast Asia May Be Building Too Many Dams Too Fast. n.d. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/08/news-southeast-asia-building-dams-floods-climate-change/>.

Stares, Paul B. *Who Controls the Tap? Addressing Water Security in Asia.* October 10, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/who-controls-tap-addressing-water-security-asia> .

Urban, Frauke, Giuseppina Siciliano, and Johan Nordensvard. "China's dam- builders: their role in transboundary river management in South-East Asia,." *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 34, no. 5 (2018): 747 - 770.

Wangkiat, Paritta. *Drowning in generosity.* March 27, 2016. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/911532/drowning-in-generosity> .

World Wildlife Fund. *Greater Mekong: Facts.* n.d. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/places/greater-mekong>.

World Wildlife Fund. *Thai Economy at Risk from Development on the Mekong River: WWF Report.* November 11, 2016. https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?284232/ThaiEconomyatRiskfromDevelopmentontheMekongRiver.

Xinhua. *Cambodia celebrates Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Week 2019.* March 21, 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/21/c_137913146.htm.

Yam, Verna. *The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation: Unable to Resolve Hydropower Development Threats to Mekong Water Sustainability.* September 2018. <http://yris.yira.org/comments/2579><http://yris.yira.org/comments/2579>.

Yan, Wang. *Can the countries of the Mekong pioneer a new model of cooperation?* March 15, 2018. <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/2018/03/15/can-the-countries-of-the-mekong-pioneer-a-new-model-of-cooperation/> .

Zhang, Hongzhou. "Sino-Indian water disputes: the coming water wars?" *WIRES Water* 3 (2016): 155 - 166

Lhasa Khache and Bhod: A Brief Overview of Tibetan Muslims in 17th Century Lhasa and the Narratives of their Exile

Tenzing Wangdak
(Tibet Policy Institute)

We imagine the lives under the mortar, but how do we recognize the end of a bottomless silence

- Michel – Rolph Trouillot

Abstract

Since the flight of the Dalai Lama into India from Tibet in 1959, Tibet has been thrust into the spotlight, reinforcing as well as reinterpreting past and present Western imaginations of it. The narratives that have been built in this process has essentially seen the country and its people's history and culture through the prism of Buddhism and its adhering community. This paper attempts to unravel some of these narratives in the context of the Tibetan Muslim community, one which has been sidelined in the general discussion of the history, politics and culture of 'Tibet' and of its 'diaspora'. The paper looks into the state of the Tibetan Muslim community in Lhasa during the 17th Century, when institutionally and socially, it began to integrate into the larger Tibetan society, focusing on its contributions to the social, political and cultural fabric of Tibet.

Another theme that this paper tentatively explores is the absence of the narrative of the Tibetan Muslim community's exile and suffering within the larger understanding of the exile condition of the Tibetan diaspora.

Keywords: Tibetan Muslim, Lhasa, exile, diaspora, history

The celebration of Tibetan New Year would be incomplete without the traditional Tibetan cookies (Tib. Khabsey) that are an integral part of the tradition. Due to modern societies dilemma of attempting to

retain such traditions but not having the adequate time or skill to do so, many of the Tibetan families in Darjeeling buy these cookies from the Tibetan Muslim families who have made it into a marketable enterprise. In 2014, my mother introduced me to the family who were part of this business and I was fascinated to see a Tibetan elderly woman, wearing traditional attire and a typical Tibetan style house you would expect to find in the area yet having Islamic symbols / Arabic characters framed on its walls, a call for prayer from the local mosque being observed diligently by these individuals who had a much higher mastery over the Tibetan language than I did. Having been brought up with this assumed idea that being Tibetan naturally meant being a Buddhist and speaking Tibetan and wearing Tibetan attires warranted a connection to the same, this experience was certainly an eye opening one on the diversity of definitions on what it meant to be a 'Tibetan' and how only certain ones find expression in the larger public sphere. The idea behind this paper is a result of this experience.

The most common term used in Tibetan to refer to Muslims is *Khache* (which is used in reference to Tibetan Muslims in this paper unless stated otherwise) while *Bhodpa-Khache* refers to Tibetan Muslims. The term *Khache* was commonly used in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, when Muslim communities began to emerge in Central Tibet and it was derived from the Tibetan term for Kashmir, the region most Tibetan Muslims trace their ancestry to.¹ The term has also been popularly used for those who have adopted Tibetan customs, speak the language and often married non-Muslim Tibetans, and so therefore were intricately woven into the social fabric of Tibetan society. This distinction is important since a large section of Muslims in Tibet are Chinese Muslims or known as *Hui* Muslims, those who trace their ancestry to China and have for large parts of history kept their Chinese identity.

Tibetan Muslims have been an integral part of the Tibetan society yet as David Atwill mentions "it is commonly believed that to be Tibetan is

1 David G. Atwill, "A Tibetan by any other Name : The Case of Muslim Tibetans and Ambiguous Ethno Religious Identities," *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie* 23 (2014): 38.

to be Buddhist and conversely, that to be Muslim precluded one from being Tibetan”.² The attempt of this paper will be to understand how this notion can be reversed by looking into the symbiotic relationship, one which engaged with and contributed to each other’s social and cultural growth, between the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Tibet in the 17th Century, the purpose being to show that Tibetan Muslim community have a stake in the cultural and historical narrative of Tibet within a political, cultural and economic context.

The narrative of the Tibetan plight in 1959 – 1960 has been extremely focused on the Tibetan Buddhist community and the loss of its historical culture, yet the sufferings of the Tibetan Muslim community has been overlooked and remains ‘silent’. Therefore, this paper will also explore the notion of shared suffering of the Tibetan Muslims within the geo-political context of the Tibetan exile condition.

Tibet in Islamic Literature

There is a dearth of information in the case of trying to understand Islamic attitudes towards Tibet, having to rely on snippets that have been collected from various sources. Anna Akasoy cites several reasons for this situation, geographic difficulties of communication and travel between the Islamic World and the Himalayan region and the fact that Tibet did not register as a prestige culture for the Arab World.³ Yet there are several texts that do refer to Tibet. In Arabic medical literature, we find references to substances from the East, with Musk from Tibet being of particular importance.⁴ Arabic geographical literature contains some of the earliest references and descriptions of Tibet. The *Akhbar al-Sin wal-Hind* (Stories about China and India) written in the ninth Century by a merchant named Sulayman, Yaqut’s *Mujam al-buldan*, Jahiz’s *Book on Animals* written in the 8th Century are few of the earliest Islamic texts that refer to Tibet’s political and geographical

2 Ibid., 33.

3 Anna Akasoy, “Tibet in Islamic Geography and Cartography.” In *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Route*, ed. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Y Tlaim (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 18.

4 Ibid., 19.

landscape. Perhaps the most famous remains Ibn Khaldun's History written in 1377.⁵

The importance of these references brings forth the fact that Tibet was not an isolated region, cut off from the rest of the Islamic world but rather it was a known entity. Interactions along trade routes and the empire building process in Central Asia brought these two cultures and regions in communication with each other. In the mid- eighth Century, the three major empires: the Abbasid Empire founded in 750, the Tibetan Empire and the Tang empire competed for supremacy in the Central Asian Region.⁶ The political and religious movements (Buddhism and Islam) would be fundamental factors in the shaping of the region and its various societies. The competition among religions and its missionaries to gain the faith of the various Empires and their rulers is one that has been played out in the political and social histories of Central Asia and T.W. Arnold elucidates this well:

The spectacle of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam emulously striving to win the allegiance of the fierce conquerors ... is one that is without parallel in the history of the world. ⁷

For the purpose of this paper, the Islamic culture's influence on Tibet and the role of the Muslim community in Tibetan society would be important referents to keep in mind.

Entry of Islam into Tibet

Jose Ignacio Cabezon argues that Islam entered Tibet from two directions. From the East, it spread from Persia and Afghanistan, reaching China through the Silk Routes and then moved into Eastern Tibet. From the West, during the early 15th Century, we see a movement from Turkestan, Baltistan and Kashmir into Ladakh. From here, and primarily through Ladakh, the Islamic religion and culture moved into Western Tibet and then to Lhasa.⁸ The focus of this paper

5 Ibid., 19.

6 Ronit Y Tlaim, "Islam and Tibet :Cultural Interactions - An Introduction." In *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Route* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011),1.

7 T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (London: AMS Press, 1913),169.

8 Jose I Cabezon, "Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere." In *Islam in Tibet - Tibetan*

will be on the Kashmiri Muslims who trace their ancestry to Kashmir and Ladakh, since unlike the Chinese *Hui* Muslims, they have been integrated within the social and cultural fabric of Tibetan society⁹ and the following sections will elaborate on their journeys into Tibet.

What is of interest here is the fact that the spread of Islam from the Arabic world into Tibet did not happen through conquests or wars but primarily through trade routes, settlements and intermarriages.¹⁰ Abu Bakr, one of the earliest writers to have written a book on the history of Islam in Tibetan society (as well as the first in the Urdu language in 1979), notes:

The Arab traders used to visit China for commerce and trade and often came to Tibet via Samarkhand, Bukhara, Kashgar, Chinese Turkestan and Ladakh and they had close trade relations with Tibet as well ... All this goes to prove that the relations between Arabs and Tibet were age old and that Muslim preachers who went to China, Chinese Turkestan, Kashgar, Cikhara, Baluti and Ladakh did reach Tibet also.¹¹

The *Khache* Community in 17th Century Lhasa

The lineage of the Kashmiri Muslims, who constitute the oldest Muslim community in Central Tibet, can be traced back to the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama [1642 – 1682]. Before his reign, Tibet was in a state of political, social and religious factionalism, with power brokers from the various religious schools and external actors that were the Mongol and Manchu empires exacerbating the situation. The year 1642 was a crucial year in the history of Tibet as it was the first time a Dalai Lama rose above the monastic system of politics to become the ruler of Tibet under the protection and patronage of the Mongolian

Caravan, Abdul W. Radhu (Fons Vitae, 1997).

9 Cabezón, *Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere*.

10 Rohit Singh, “Reimagining Tibet through the lens of Tibetan Muslim History and identity,” *Oxford Handbook Online*, (January 2015.), [Accessed April 2018], Available at: [http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb-9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-7](http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-7).

11 Abu Bakr, *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*, Trans. Paramanda Sharma (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2004), 37.

ruler, *Gusri Khan*. Under his reign, Tibet from *Ngari* in the west to *Dartsedo, Kham* in the South-east and to *Kokonor* in *Amdo* in the north-east was reunified for the first time since the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the 9th Century.¹²

The body of research into how the Muslims from Kashmir came into Tibet is scarce and unclear. Prince Peter notes various theories that had come about to explain this phenomenon of their origin¹³ yet none of them have been hailed as the most affirmative one, such as the belief that the fifth Dalai Lama had requested the Mughal emperors for advisors or that he allowed Muslims to come to Lhasa in a “purely representative capacity” in order to showcase the cosmopolitan nature of his capital. Oral history accounts of families moving into Tibet from Kashmir to escape famines or religious repression are frequently cited also. TW. Arnold refers to Muslim traders from Kashmir and Ladakh who helped in the spread of Islam in Tibet and later settled in Lhasa through intermarriages with the Tibetan community.¹⁴ Marc Gaborieau notes that the presence of Tibetan Muslims in Tibet was well known in the West since the 18th century through the accounts of the visits of the Western travelers to the region.¹⁵ The testimonies of these earliest missionaries, as Gaborieau states, were the first Western sources to confirm the presence of Muslims in Tibet. The account of Father de Andrade encounter with the King of Tsaparang, a region in Western Tibet, in 1624 and his observation of the presence of Muslim Kashmiri merchants in Tibet, is quoted in Gaborieau’s article:

Furthermore, he (the king of Tsaparang) ordered a letter to be written in Persian to use for all the Muslims ... the letter commanded all the Kashmiris of Agra and Lahore who traded with his land... to do what

12 Samten G. Karmay, “The Fifth Dalai Lama and the Reunification of Tibet.” In *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*. (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2003).

13 Prince Peter, “The Moslems of Central Tibet,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*. 39(1952) 236.

14 Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*.

15 Marc Gaborieau, “The Discovery of the Muslims in Tibet by the first Portuguese Missionaries.” In *Islam and Tibet - Interactions along the Musk Route*, ed. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Y Tlalim, 253 - 260. (U.K: Ashgate, 2011), 253.

they were ordered and to transport our belongings by their own means to Tibet as if they were the baggage of the king himself.¹⁶

Another account by Fr. Cacula mentions Tibetan Muslims who traded in Tsaparang, Gyantse and Lhasa:

It (Tibet) also trades with Kashmir, taking the route via Tsaparang as well as with the lands, which are neighbors of this kingdom. Many people travel to Lhasa also.¹⁷

The reign of the fifth Dalai Lama represents an institutional turning point for Islam in Tibet. According to oral sources,¹⁸ a certain Muslim saint used to do his prayers on a hill near the edge of the city. When the Dalai Lama heard about him, he had the saint brought to him. The saint explained that he was praying according to the tenets of his religion on the hill because there was no mosque in the region. The Dalai Lama then fired five arrows in different directions and the plot marked by the arrows were bequeathed to the Muslim community and the area came to be known as *Gyang – da Khang* or the “House of Far Reaching Arrows”. The first mosque and cemetery were built in that area and the first 14 elders and 30 youths who were the original occupants of the sites were given official patronage.

Jose Ignacio argues that the favorable policy shown towards the Muslim community was part of the Dalai Lama’s attempt to encourage the ethnic, cultural and economic diversity of the country and strengthen the cosmopolitan nature of the capital.¹⁹ Ataullah Siddiqui lists out the privileges that were allowed to the Muslim community²⁰:

1. Muslims were given considerable freedom in settling their internal affairs according to the tenets of the *Sharia*. They were allowed to elect among themselves a five-man committee known as *Ponj*, the leader of which was the representative of

16 Ibid., 255.

17 Ibid., 256.

18 Cabezon, *Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere*, 17

19 Cabezon, *Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere*, 17.

20 Ataullah Siddiqui, “Muslims of Tibet.” *The Tibet Journal* 16no.4 (1991): 75.

their community in its dealings with the Government.

2. They were exempted from commercial taxes and were free to open up their businesses of trade and commerce.
3. The Muslims were exempted from the requirements of laymen to take off their caps in respect to the Buddhist monks who came to inspect the city during the twenty-day rule of Lhasa by the monastic order every year.
4. Muslims were exempted from the Buddhist law of abstaining from meat during the holy month of *Saga Dawa* of the Buddhist calendar.²¹

Abu Bakr ²² elaborates on the special position of the Muslims in Lhasa during this period. Muslim leaders were specially invited to all the important celebrations and there was a close affinity between the aristocracy of Lhasa and the Muslim community. There were four mosques (which were demolished during the Cultural Revolution) in Lhasa, two in Shigatse²³ and one in Tsetang.²⁴ For the purpose of religious education, there were two Madrassas in Lhasa and one in Shigatse. Abu Bakr further mentions the existence of two Muslim cemeteries in Lhasa, since Tibetan Buddhists did not require the same due to their tradition of “Sky Burials” and these were the first Muslim cemeteries that were built in Lhasa.

The Political – Social – Economic – Cultural role of the *Khache* Community

As established above, the regime in Lhasa granted a favorable position to Tibetan Muslims during this period. This generosity is reflective of the vital roles the Muslim community played in the areas of diplomacy, economics and culture.

21 For more references on this, see Abu Bakr, *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims* (Dharamsala: LTWA, 2004); Marc Gaborieau, “The Discovery of the Muslims in Tibet by the first Portuguese Missionaries” (UK: Ashgate, 2011).

22 Nadvi, *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*.

23 A city in the Southern part of Tibet, 340 Km from Lhasa.

24 A city in Southeast part of Tibet, 183 Km from Lhasa.

Politically, the *Khache* were connected to the ruling elite of Lhasa in its dealings with foreign powers, serving as its emissaries in various capacities. In 1679, a war was fought between the kingdom of Ladakh and Tibet, with the latter attacking with a Mongolo – Tibetan army led by Ganden Tsewang, a Mongol Prince and grandson of Gushri Khan, the patron of the 5th Dalai Lama.²⁵ The Peace treaty of Tingmosgang, signed in 1684 between the two kingdoms to end the war brought about the establishment of a trade connection that persisted until the early 20th Century. According to the terms of the treaty.²⁶ The Ladakh king had to send a caravan known as *Lo-pyang* to Tibet every three years, which then returned to Ladakh. The caravan was symbolic of the allegiance of the Ladakh King to the Dalai Lama but was also fundamental in the establishment of a trade route between the regions, one that was heavily used by Muslim traders who later settled along this route and even in Lhasa. Their colonies were established in Lhasa, Tsetang, Gyantse, and Shigatse and in Western Tibet. What is of interest here is that the *Khawaja*, a prominent *Khache* family in Lhasa, managed and organized these caravans and the *Khache* community retained responsibility for this caravan until the 20th Century.²⁷

Lhasa *Khache* leaders were called in 1909 to arbitrate disputes with the Qing Dynasty, where they were part of the special delegation that brokered a settlement between Lhasa's polity and Manchu representatives.²⁸ They also acted as mediators in the Tibetan government's dealings with the British Raj, meeting with them in 1774-1775, as part of the first British Trade mission to Tibet. The Panchen Lama (the second highest religious and political figure in Tibet) sent

25 Ngawang Jinpa, "Why Did Tibet and Ladakh Clash in the 17th Century? Rethinking the Background of the 'Mongol War' in Ngari (1679 – 1684)," *The Tibet Journal* 40 no.2(2015):113.

26 Pascale Dollfus, "The History of Muslims in Central Ladakh." *The Tibet Journal* 20 no.3(1995): 38.

27 Abdul G. Sheikh, "Tibetan Muslims." *The Tibet Journal*, 16.no4(1991):88.

28 Rohit Singh, "Reimagining Tibet through the lens of Tibetan Muslim History and identity." *Oxford Handbooks Online*. (January 2015), [Accessed April 2018], Available at: [http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb-9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-7](http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-7).

two Tibetan Muslim leaders as envoys to India to seek aid from the British Government in its war with the Nepalese Gorkha army in 1788.²⁹ Gaborieau notes the influence of Muslims as intermediaries between Tibet and the West. The earliest western knowledge of Tibet was obtained via Muslims, as they served as valuable intermediaries of the western missionaries who travelled to Tibet. They used the guild of Muslim merchants in Tibet as aid in travelling through India and Tibet³⁰.

The sphere of greatest influence of the *Khache* Community remained economic. The majority of the Tibetan Muslims participated and contributed to the growth of trade between Lhasa and its neighbors in South Asia. The two primary trade routes were either the *Lop-pyag* route to Ladakh or the Nepalese trade route. As Luce Boulnois writes:

They (the *Khache*) traded in all products; their role in trade between Tibet, Nepal, Kashmir, Ladakh and the rest of India became more important; they had in their hands the “shawl” of the wool trade. In Lhasa they set up, by the end of the 17th Century, fifty-six commercial firms. It was the Muslim caravanners who were given the responsibility of running the Lopchak caravan to Ladakh.³¹

The *Khache* community of traders procured wool, musk and salt from Tibet which they exchanged in India for shawls, cloths, saffron, dried fruits, jewelry, medicinal herbs and gold.³² As a result, they were fundamental in creating markets for Tibetan good abroad while importing commodities and luxury goods for the Tibetan community in Lhasa. French missionary Evariste Regis visited Lhasa in 1846 and noted that the Tibetan Muslims were the richest merchants in Lhasa and extremely influential. This wealth and prominence elevated some of the members of the *Khache* community to an almost aristocratic

29 Ram Rahul, “Kashmiri Muslims in Tibet.” *International Studies*, no.3(1961): 182.

30 Gaborieau, *The Discovery of the Muslims in Tibet*, 256.

31 Luce Boulnois, “Gold, Wool and Musk: Trade in Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century.” In *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*. (Netherlands: Brill Leiden, 2003), 153.

32 Cabezon, *Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere*.

social status.³³

One of the most well-known Tibetan treatises written on social conduct, the *Khache Phalu's Teachings on the System for Worldly Actions and Consequences*, was composed in Lhasa in the late 18th or early 19th Century.³⁴ Its authorship is a contested issue due to the mix of Buddhist and Islamic references in it. The text is a testimony to the working spiritual consensus that the Muslims in Tibet achieved with the Tibetan Buddhist community.³⁵ Abu Bakr also mentions several Muslim artists who were famous during this period such as Muheeuddin, a *Sarangi* maestro, Mohamad Iqbal who was a flute player and others. The play *Sashi Blo* which gained a large popularity during this time was actually staged by Muslim actors and was later incorporated by the Tibetan theatre.³⁶

The Islamic influence can even be seen in the field of Tibetan medicine. The translation of the Indian medical classics into Arabic: Susruta, the Astangahrdaya Samhita and the Siddhasara became important texts for the Tibetan medical tradition when they were then translated into Tibetan from Arabic.³⁷ As Cabezón writes, these influences of the *Khache* community on Tibetan culture provide “glimpses of the two worlds simultaneously: the Muslim and the Buddhist, the Tibetan and the Arabic.”³⁸

The exile of the *Khache* Community from Tibet

1959 marked the departure of the 14th Dalai Lama from Tibet. As he along with thousands of other Tibetans moved into exile, settling

33 Singh, *Reimagining Tibet*.

34 Nicolas Bommarito, “The Khache Phalu: A Translation and Interpretation.” *Revue d'Etudes*, no39 (2016) 61

35 Dawa Norbu, “The Translator’s Introduction.” In *Khache Phalu's Advice on the Art of Living*,” Trans. Dawa Norbu (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1987).

36 Nadvi, *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*.

37 Ronit Y. Tlaim, “Islam and Tibet :Cultural Interactions - An Introduction.” In *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Route*. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 4.

38 Cabezón, *Islam in the Tibetan cultural sphere*, 22.

predominantly in India. The current scholarship on the Tibetan diaspora is highly centered on the loss of its territory and culture, which is seen predominantly as Buddhist. What is overlooked is that there was a wide movement of Tibetan Muslims during this period, as they too started to go into exile as the People Liberation Army marched against them. A shared suffering with the Tibetan Buddhist community is an important theme of this paper, as similar to how both communities shared a living and cultural space in the 17th Century, their sufferings in diaspora are also one that is part of a similar narrative.

The *Khache* community traced their origin to Kashmir and it was trade and cultural exchanges that brought them to Tibet in the 17th century. India, in 1959, stated that by virtue of being Kashmiri due to their Muslim faith, they were Indian citizens while the PRC could not accept this situation for two reasons³⁹. First to admit that being Kashmiri meant being Indian would mean siding with India against Pakistan in the issue of who had sovereignty over Kashmir between the two nations. Second, the PRC argued that due to centuries of intermarriage, the *Khache* were Tibetans and so by that logic, Chinese citizens.

The majority of the Lhasa *Khache* managed to leave Tibet by ‘repatriating’ to India in 1960. The *Khache* community harked on their ancestral links to Kashmir as well as the fact as part of the special provision provided to them during the 17th Century reign of the fifth Dalai Lama, they were exempt from taxes and were allowed a large measure of self-governance. The PRC did not agree to their demands due to the lack of formal documents to prove their claims.⁴⁰

India has earlier maintained that it would grant citizenship “to only those whose permanent domicile remained in the State of Jammu and Kashmir and who visited India from time to time, whose parents were born in undivided India”.⁴¹ But as the community sought aid from India, it changed its stance, acknowledging that Tibetan Muslims

39 Sulmaan W. Khan, *Muslim, Trader, Nomad, Spy* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.),100.

40 Singh, *Reimagining Tibet*.

41 Siddiqui, *Muslims of Tibet*, 80.

originated from Kashmir, making them Indian citizens.⁴²

Therefore in 1959, the two nations of China and India, contested the nationality of the *Khache*, with the former highlighting their Tibetan-ness (and so being Chinese) and the latter distancing them from all of it. The Chinese authorities cracked down violently on the *Khache* community decision to distance itself from the Tibetan- Chinese citizenry and to accept Indian citizenship. For example, Rohit Singh notes that the period between 1959 and 1960 saw all of the community leaders being arrested on charges of espionage, urging insurrection and inciting people to leave for India. Four of the five community leaders died within five years of their imprisonment. The intention behind such a move was to discourage the community from mobilizing for Indian citizenship.⁴³ False promises were made to the *Khache*, allowing them to believe that they could migrate to India in exchange for their property.⁴⁴ Social restrictions were placed on them which prevented them from buying food or doing business with other communities. Many of the older *Khache* members died of starvation, as their trade routes were closed with no means to acquire food.⁴⁵ Some members of the community were rounded up by the Chinese soldiers and issued death threats to discourage them from migrating to India. At the end, the Chinese Government gave in and in 1960, about 120 families were escorted out of Tibet by Chinese officials and received by the government of India in the north Indian towns of Kalimpong and Gangtok.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The existing research, as David Atwill in his reply to one of my emails to him, mentioned “is extremely scarce. You are both lucky and unlucky to be writing this paper: lucky because it is an important field of research and unlucky because you will have much difficulty finding

42 Siddiqui, *Muslims of Tibet*, 80.

43 Singh, *Reimagining Tibet*.

44 Masood Butt, “Muslims of Tibet.” *The Tibetan Bulletin*, 16(1994).

45 Siddiqui. *Muslims of Tibet*, 8. For more, see Abu Bakr *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*.

46 Singh, *Reimagining Tibet*.

past research to build upon.”

The *Khache* narrative (s) is one that needs to be heard in the larger context of the historical interactions between nations as well as in the narratives of loss and diaspora. From the seventeenth century through to Heinrich Harrer’s best seller *Seven Years in Tibet*, foreign visitors to Lhasa have documented the presence of a Tibetan Muslim community that was and is deeply integrated into the social, cultural and political fabric of Central Tibet. Writing the history of the Tibetan Muslims in the 17th Century cannot be side stepped in the larger political conversation between Tibet, Mongolia, China, Ladakh or the Arabic world. The *Khache* community were part of this larger interaction that was taking place across the borders of empires of Central Asia and later impinged on the foreign relations of the People Republic of China and India in 1959 – 1960. Carole McGranahan writes:

Historical truths are always social truths. The making of history is a social and political process, not a neutral rendering of what happened in the past ... certain pasts are converted into histories while others are not. ⁴⁷

Tibet and the notion of ‘Tibetan-ness’ is one that is constantly being negotiated, challenged and changing. Within the discussion of the Tibetan diaspora, as argued in the paper, the larger narrative that is heard is one of the loss of Tibetan Buddhist culture and the suffering of its adherents at the hands of the PRC. Atwill’s observation about the difficulty of past research on the Tibetan Muslim community is indicative of this silencing, conscious or otherwise, of certain histories and cultures from the larger meta - narratives that have come to define ‘Tibet’. What this paper, which is by no means an exhaustive study, has attempted to do is to tentatively highlight a few of the influences the *Khache* community have had on the historical, political, cultural and social fabric of the larger Tibetan society and attempt to broaden the narrative that define it, beyond the ones that assume it as an ontologized whole.

47 Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA and memories of a forgotten War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010),3.

References

- Akasoy, Anna. "Tibet in Islamic Geography and Cartography." In *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Route*, edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, & Ronit Y Tlalim, 18. Surrey: Ashgate, 2011.
- Arnold, T.W. *The Preaching of Islam*. London: AMS Press, 1913.
- Atwill, David G. "A tibetan by any other name : the case of muslim tibetans and ambiguous ethno religious identities." *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie*, 2014: 33-61.
- Atwill, David G. "A Tibetan by any other name : the case of Muslim tibetans and ambiguous ethno religious identities." *Cahier d'Extreme - Asie*, 2014: 33-61.
- Bommarito, Nicolas. "The Khache Phalu: A Translation and Interpretation." *Revue d'Etudes*, 2016: 60 - 132.
- Boulnois, Luce. "Gold, Wool and Musk: Trade in Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century." In *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*, 133-157. Netherlands: Brill Leiden, 2003.
- Butt, Masood. "Muslims of Tibet." *The Tibetan Bulletin*, 1994: 8-9 , 16.
- Cabezon, Jose I. "Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere." In *Islam in Tibet - Tibetan Caravan*, by Abdul W. Radhu. Fons Vitae, 1997.
- Denmark, Prince Peter of Greece and. "The Moslems of Central Tibet." *Journal of the Royal Centra Asian Society*, 1952: 233-240.
- Dollfus, Pascale. "The History of Muslims in Central Ladakh." *The Tibet Journal*, 1995: 35-38.
- Gaborieau, Marc. "The Discovery of the Muslims in Tibet by the first Portugese Missionaries." In *Islam and Tibet - Interactions along the Musk Route*, edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, & Ronit Y Tlalim, 253 - 260. U.K: Ashgate, 2011.
- Karmay, Samten G. "The Fifth Dalai Lama and the Reunification of Tibet." In *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*. Boston: Brill Leiden, 2003.
- Khan, Sulmaan W. *Muslim, Trader, Nomad, Spy*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- McGranahan, Carole. *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA and memories of a forgotten War*. Durham and London: Duke Universtiy Press, 2010.

- Nadvi, Abu Bakr. *Tibet and Tibetan Muslims*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2004.
- Norbu, Dawa. "The Translator's Introduction." In *Khache Phalu's Advice on the Art of Living*, by Khache Phalu, translated by Dawa Norbu. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1987.
- Peter, Prince. "The Moslems of Central Tibet." *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 1952: 233-240.
- Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Rahul, Ram. "Kashmiri Muslims in Tibet." *International Studies*, 1961-1962: 182.
- Sheikh, Abdul, G. "Tibetan Muslims." *The Tibet Journal*, 1991: 86-89.
- Siddiqui, Ataullah. "Muslims of Tibet." *The Tibet Journal*, 1991: 71-85.
- Singh, Rohit. "Reimagining Tibet through the lens of Tibetan Muslim History and identity." *Oxford Handbooks Online*. January 2015. <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-7> (accessed April 2018).
- Tlaim, Ronit Y. "Islam and Tibet :Cultural Interactions - An Introduction." In *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Route*, 1. Surrey: Ashgate, 2011.
- Yeh, Emily T. "Exile meets homeland: Politics, Performance and authenticity in the Tibetan diaspora." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (2007): 6468 - 667.

Singing Nuns of Tibet: From Language of Buddhism to Language of Protest

Tsering Kalden

((Jawaharlal Nehru University))

Abstract

The article examines the accounts of nuns who have left a mark in the history of political struggle in Tibet. A number of protests took place after the occupation of Tibet by the Communist China in 1950. This article sheds light on the widely recognized ‘singing nuns’ as a unique form of resistance initiated by fourteen nuns undergoing brutal custody in Drapchi (Number one prison in Tibet Autonomous Region). This study particularly analyzes the freedom songs sung by the nuns in Drapchi prison and presents how they articulated their political views and criticism of the authoritarian Chinese government and asserted Tibetan identity. This paper also explores the position of nuns vis-a-vis monks and when juxtaposed with lay Tibetan girls, nuns are usually considered to hold a privileged position in Tibetan society. This determination in maintaining their religious practice became their voice of protest under the suppression of Communist China. However, the question here is, how their language of Buddhism is being transformed into a language of protest with the invasion of Tibet by the People’s Liberation Army of China. The study also stresses the importance of the voices of resistance by the 14 nuns despite the religious hierarchy and additionally being women in the society. The resistance from the fourteen nuns encompasses political, social and religious values. Their medium of demonstration against the repressive China’s rule is a nonviolent initiative while at the same time, they have managed to find a new language to express their resistance to China’s rule over Tibet.

Keywords: Resistance, Drapchi prison, nuns, songs, communist China, demonstration, human rights.

*From our heavenly land of the Dharma, We must get rid of the
Communist Chinese.*

*Even if we have to sacrifice our lives, we must work for total
freedom.*

*O, what a sad fate we Tibetans have, to be tortured mercilessly by
barbarians.*

We don't have freedom, under the yoke of these barbarians.

Nuns' songs from Drapchi prison¹

Introduction

According to Foucault, “where there is power, there is resistance”.² Since the arrival of military power of the communist China, Tibetans have been engaged in various forms of protests and resistance. According to a study by Ronald Schwartz, some 140 demonstrations took place between 1987 to 1992.³ Evidently, some nuns from the ‘singing nuns’ were arrested repeatedly and released. Even within custody, under strenuous circumstances, they have never stopped resisting against the oppressive authoritarian Chinese government. Several nuns became well known in the Tibetan political resistance with their unprecedented fight against Chinese occupation. On 12th March 1959, when women uprising took place in Lhasa, there were two nuns among the leaders namely, Galingshar Ani and Tsamgung Ani Yonten along with many other nuns participated in the demonstration. Also, during the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976, an uprising took place in Nyemoru Nunnery.⁴ A nun named Thinley Choedon

1 Tibet Information Network, *Unity and discord; Music and Politics in contemporary Tibet* (London: TIN, 2004), 197-207.

2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 95.

3 Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest; Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (London: Hurst & Co. Ltd, 1994), 1.

4 Hanna Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns. History, Cultural Norms, and Social Reality*, (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1989), 83-84.

who is now widely known as Nyemo Ani⁵ had fearlessly organized a resistance movement. From the Chinese point of view, the most dangerous ‘revolt’ since 1959 and a major ‘incident’ till 1987 in Tibet was the Nyenmo uprising of 1969.⁶ The nuns have played a crucial role in the resistance movement inside Tibet for the past 60 years under China’s rule. The underlying fundamental Buddhist value in the current phase of Tibetan resistance was predominantly featured in the political activities of the nuns. They used the traditional religious practice of circumambulation around Barkhor and burning of juniper incense (*bsSang*) to initiate their protest.⁷ The ‘singing nuns’ used their songs as a creative and peaceful demonstration against the Chinese rule while they were imprisoned. The songs sang by the singing nuns also consist of Buddhist value of the nonviolent act of protest against the Chinese regime without harming its adversary. The manner of resisting against the state in the method of singing songs is not peculiar in Tibet since songs were widely included in sending out varied political messages.⁸ The Chinese government, on the other hand, uses songs in their propaganda presenting Tibetans living happily and prosperous life. As opposed to the Chinese propaganda songs, the Tibetans in Tibet produce pop music albums to highlight the real situation in Tibet. However, the songs which are explicit and overt in nature for accusing the Chinese authorities like singing nuns were very rare. Hence, it’s important to understand why ‘singing nuns’ are widely regarded as a successful resistance movement in the contemporary history of Tibet. These nuns were not only able to develop a form of protest that reflects their circumstances under the harsh political system of China, but they

5 Generally, a different term is used to denote a nun among Tibetans as ‘Ani’ ‘Jomo’ and ‘Gema’. The term ‘Ani’ is used mostly in central Tibet and among the exile Tibetan community. They also use ‘Tsunma’ to address nun more respectfully.

6 Robert Barnett, “Women and Politics in Contemporary Tibet,” In *Women in Tibet*, ed. Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 349.

7 Ronald D Schwartz., *Circle of Protest; Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 1994), 28.

8 Tibet Information network, *Unity and discord; Music and politics in contemporary Tibet*, 7.

also managed to make the world hear their voices and understand their expression of resilience and aspiration.

The Singing Nuns of Drapchi

From 1987 to 1989 and thereafter, a number of demonstrations took place in Lhasa leading to a huge number of imprisonment. There was a rapid increase in Tibetan political prisoners from 1987 onwards. According to Tibet Information Network's (TIN) report, there were 224 nun prisoners from 1987-1993. Even within the prison, people have been carrying out several nonviolent protests including the singing nuns. In July 1993, a group of 14 nuns who were imprisoned in Drapchi secretly recorded freedom songs in audiocassettes.⁹ The recorded tape was smuggled out from Tibet and was able to spread their message around the world. Their recorded songs were made into CD and named it 'Seeing Nothing but the Sky' and the first version was released in London in 1995. Later, it was released to the larger audience concealing the singers' names. Their songs continuously appeared in radio broadcasts and commercial compact disc.¹⁰ After the release of these secretly recorded songs of nuns, it was brought to the world's attention. Thus, they attracted many listeners to their stories of political resistance. With this successful accomplishment of their freedom songs, they are widely recognized as 'singing nuns' today. After Chinese authorities learned about singing nuns' recorded songs, their sentences were extended with different range of years proportionate their involvement in political activities from their initial given sentence.

Status of Nuns Before 1959 in Tibet

The time when Buddhism flourished in Tibet beginning from the 7th to 8th century, the idea of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' were shaped accordingly, particularly the narrative on the status of Tibetan nuns as subordinate sought out from Buddhist text.¹¹ The religious order for the

9 Steven D. Marshall, *Rukhang 3: The Nuns of Drapchi Prison*, (London: Tibet Information Network, 2000) 23.

10 Barnett, Robert, *Women and Politics in Contemporary Tibet*, 337.

11 Mitra Härkönen, *Tibetan nuns between oppression and opportunities: An intersectional*

ordination of nuns was created five years after Buddha's enlightenment. It is recorded that, Buddha was initially hesitant about the decision over the nuns' ordination because he believed that according to monastics order, women would reduce the length of Dharma by five hundred years. After requesting three times by 'Mahaprajapate', the Buddha's aunt who is also known as his foster mother, Buddha finally agreed to establish nuns' order but he gave nuns eight extra vow and more rules to obey than monks to attain enlightenment.¹² It is also stated that there are temples in which women are not allowed to enter and certain objects for rituals that cannot be touched by women for the fear of contamination. Though there is no rational reasoning in the scripture rather grounded on superstition and sexual discernment.¹³ Traditionally, the notion behind gender in Tibetan society is a mix of a complex pattern of 'religious doctrine' and 'cultural idea'. The rebirth of a female is largely regarded as a 'lower birth' where the word "Keyman" (sKye dMan) in Tibetan denotes lower birth referring to a female.¹⁴ According to Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik who noted that writings and studies on gender as well as on Tibetan women is largely absent in Tibetan literature. They argued that there are very few writings on Tibetan women and assumed that subjects relating to Tibetan women are hardly discussed in Tibetan history.¹⁵ Therefore, at present in exile, there is rarely any literature on women's history and even if we could find few, those are mostly narrated by men or western scholars.

Historically, nuns were excluded from much of the monastic life and it is largely enjoyed by monks in Tibetan Buddhist centres. The nuns had fewer opportunities for education and to become advanced

study (Finland: Unigrafia, University of Helsinki, 2016),152.

12 Carole Devine, *Determination: Tibetan women and the struggle for an Independent Tibet* (Toronto: Vauve Press, 1993), 14-15.

13 L.S.Dagyab Rinpoche, "The Changing perception of women in Buddhism," *Tibet Review* XXIII no.3 (1988): 16.

14 Härkönen, Mitra, *Tibetan Nuns Between Oppression and Opportunities*, 155-156.

15 Carole McGranahan, "Narrative Dispossession: Tibet and the gendered logics of Historical possibility," *Comparative Studies in society and History* 2 no.4: 774.

religious practitioners.¹⁶ Even the size and nature of the religious foundation alone shows the difference that there are large monasteries for monks that can accommodate over 8000 monks whereas, nuns used to live in simple nunneries with limited facilities to study.¹⁷ Education is the gateway in one's life and nuns are excluded from this opportunity due to which nuns are often given less value or considered inferior. Additionally, nunneries are either less economic or politically influential compared to monasteries or receive less financial support from the government while the religious institutions mostly depend on local people's offering and patronage from individual families.¹⁸ Generally, monks are regarded as more educated than nuns and the ritual performed by monks is considered more effective. According to Dargyab Rinpoche, as the Tibetan saying goes, "if you need a master at home, let your son become a monk, if you need a servant, let your daughter become a nun".¹⁹ The overall traditional stereotypes and biased notion towards nuns reflect the relative powerlessness of nuns in traditional Tibetan society.

Contradictory Notion Constructed on Nuns

According to Hanna Havnevik, the Tibetan society downgraded nuns into believing that nuns who are either ugly, unable to get a partner to get married or physically disabled are sent to nunneries as well as, nuns are also regarded as lustful who cannot discipline themselves and maintain their vows strictly. The marginalisation of nuns was intensified after the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the situation of nuns deteriorated under Chinese repressive policies by a) their ethnic identity is already marginalized under Chinese colonization b) by their religion as Buddhist practitioners c) their gender identity as female makes them susceptible to cultural scrutiny as well as Han patriarchy. Regarding both traditional values of Chinese and Communist, they

16 Carole Devine, *Determination: Tibetan women and the struggle for an Independent Tibet*, (Toronto: Vauve Press, 1993), 15.

17 L.S.Dargyab Rinpoche, "The Changing perception of women in Buddhism," 16.

18 Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest; Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd, 1994), 99-100

19 L.S.Dargyab Rinpoche, "The Changing perception of women in Buddhism," 16.

have the idea that women should get married and work and not practice religion. d) Chinese authorities also consider monasteries as lucrative centres with unique architectural designs. Therefore, the Chinese government in the post-Mao period began to rebuild and invest heavily in few important monasteries which were demolished during the Cultural Revolution to generate more profit for attracting tourists. However, the Chinese government refuses to finance and rebuild nunneries. Instead, the Chinese government tried to minimise the nunneries by expelling the nuns and imposing certain rules to control them.²⁰ Hence, they face multiple forms of oppression under Chinese occupation coupled with misogyny ingrained in Tibetan culture. Despite those multiple victimizations of nuns, there is a huge number of women who want to become a nun and study Buddhism under such a brutal environment. There are many nuns fleeing into exile to maintain their spiritual practice by risking their lives. This evidence suggests that the traditional stereotype over Tibetan nuns is either a misconception or that it is completely untrue or stand to contradict what general Tibetans used to believe. Moreover, the nuns have shown great enthusiasm in resisting against the Communist Chinese just like monks did. While keeping the core value of Buddhism, the nuns also resisted China's rule by giving up their lives for their belief in Tibet's freedom and actively involved in the protection of Buddhism from Communist Chinese who tries to dismantle it. These nuns came to be recognised as an important political activist in the current phase of a demonstration against Communist China inside Tibet. Carole McGranahan argued that women are mostly dispossessed from the social acknowledgment of individuals as historical actors. Even within Tibetan diaspora, the idea of nation and history is more privileged among men.²¹

Songs from the 'Heart of Darkness'²²

20 Carole Devine, *Determination: Tibetan women and the struggle for an Independent Tibet*, 51-52.

21 Carole McGranahan, "Narrative Dispossession: Tibet and the gendered logics of Historical possibility," *Comparative Studies in society and History* 2 no.4(2010), 771.

22 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2007).

Though Tibetans have stated about its exceptional culture over centuries, however, it remains primarily oral society where singing has a wider possibility and more insightful effect than the written verses.²³ The fourteen singing nuns took great risk in recording their songs under extensive surveillance within the prison. They were determined to show their families and people around the world that imprisonment has not broken their spirits for the freedom struggle of Tibet. According to Ngawang Sangdrol (one of the fourteen nuns) in her talk in America stated that generally prison authorities imposed more restrictions on the political prisoners and are not allowed to keep any electronic devices. But at one time, two nuns could secretly borrow a tape-recorder from a male non-political prisoner and using that recorder they have recorded all their songs in the tape. However, it was not easy to do so because every nun is separated from one another in their cells. So, they passed the tape to one after another as one finished recording their song at night time. It took a long time to record those songs and in between, they hid the tape under the ground where some of the tapes were spoiled. But they managed to smuggle one tape out of the prison. All the recorded songs are not written by the nuns and most songs are composed by previous political prisoners. While two or three songs were composed by nuns in the cell which they sang in Chinese tune.²⁴ They have recorded a total of 16 songs in the tape from which few are not audible.²⁵ Later in 1996, Ngawang Sangdrol composed two more songs when she was held in solitary confinement which was not recorded.²⁶ It is quite unbelievable the way the nuns fearlessly recorded the songs under heavy surveillance. This shows the spirit and immense bravery of fourteen courageous nuns. While learning their situation under Chinese brutality, there is a strong expression of resilience among the nuns. They appeared as strong

23 Lama Jabb, *Singing the Nation: Modern Tibetan Music and National Identity*, 6.

24 Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota, *Talk By Ngawang Sangdrol & Kunga Tashi La* (16 March, 2019), [Accessed October 23, 2019], Available at: <https://www.tafm.org/2019/03/16/talk-by-ngawang-sangdrol-kunga-tashi-la/>.

25 Robert Barnett, "Women and Politics in Contemporary Tibet," 336.

26 Personal interview with Ngawang Sangdrol on 11 November, 2019.

and fearless instead of just being oppressed under Chinese cruelty. Their songs covered a wide range of topics -- from the expression of religious freedom to the brutality of Chinese invasion and destruction while keeping their faith and hope alive. The most familiar theme in their songs is their prayers and dedication to the Dalai Lama expressing grievances in his absence and their wish for him to return to Tibet.

Their songs reflect their hopes and aspirations more than the pains that they have endured. As stated in their songs title:

O, Land of Snow

གངས་ལྗོངས་ཡ་གངས་ལྗོངས།

གངས་ལྗོངས་ཡ་གངས་ལྗོངས།

འདི་གཅེས་འདི་ཡུམ་ཆེན།

O, Land of Snows, Land of Snows

My beloved mother,

The beginning of this song strongly depicts Tibet as an independent nation. In the song, “Mother” refers to Tibet as a country, where Tibet is also called the land of snow due to its snow-covered mountain throughout the year.

ཡུམ་ཆེན་གྱི་སློབ་པ་ཚོས་སྤང་དབང།

འདི་ཙ་འདི་བླ་མ་དང་འཇོ།

རྒྱ་དམར་གྱིས་ཁ་བྲལ་བཏང་སྟངས།

The life essence of our Mother is secular and religious freedom,

Our ‘root lama’ and us,

The Red Chinese, have forced us apart.

It is evident that political and religious freedom is the fundamental theme of the song above. With China’s forceful occupation of Tibet, land known for Buddhism predominantly, the Chinese government forced Tibetans inside Tibet to depart from its ‘root lama’. The Dalai Lama is often referred to as the ‘root Lama’ of the Tibetan people.²⁷ As well as the spiritual head of Tibet. The Dalai Lama or the ‘root Lama’ was forced into exile in 1959 after the Chinese invasion. Many Tibetans inside Tibet are still longing for the blessing of the Dalai Lama since

27 Tibet Information Network, *Unity and discord; Music and politics in contemporary Tibet*, 197.

then. The one major demands of many of the demonstrators are the return of His Holiness back to his homeland in Tibet.

གཤམ་སྤྱི་བོད་མི་སྤྱི་ཡང་གཅིག་གིས།

If even anyone Tibetan,

དྲོག་ཅུ་གཅིག་བསྐྱེལ་གནང་ན།

Uniting with Solidarity,

ཉི་མ་སྤྱོན་པའི་འོག་ནས།

*A time will come when the sun will emerge
from the cloud,*

དྲངས་བའི་དུས་ཅིག་ཤར་ཡོང་།

And shine clearly

In this lyrics, the nuns are urging for national unity among all Tibetans. They believed that if united, Tibetans can reclaim the lost land from the red Chinese. While urging for unity, they also present a pan-Tibetan identity in this song. Traditionally, Tibetans subscribe to identity-based on their sects of religion or which region they belong to. The idea of nation among Tibetans emerged in the early 20th century, and was reinforced after the Chinese invasion. The occupation of Tibet by PLA changed the notion of Tibetan nationalism which was in pre-modern times based on ‘localized ideology’.²⁸ However, in this song, the nuns depict the oneness of Tibetan identity as the lyrics goes. The song strongly promotes that Tibetans will return to their homeland in Tibet. Another lyrics from the song “Bedrock of Tibetan people’s Trust”

༄༅། །བོད་མིའི་སེམས་ཀྱི་རྩིན་ས།

ཆོས་ལྗན་ཞིང་ཁམས་ལྷ་ས་ལ།

From our heavenly land of Dharma,

ཁྱེད་མར་མེད་པ་བཟོ་དགོས།

We must get rid of the Communist Chinese.

རང་ཕྱོག་དོར་དགོས་ལྷུང་ཡང་།

Even if we have to sacrifice our lives

རང་དབང་གཙང་མ་དགོས་ཡོད།

We must work for total freedom.

28 Mitra Härkönen, “Tibetan nuns between oppression and opportunities: An intersectional study,” 166.

Here the song notes that Tibet is a country and land that Buddhism flourished for many centuries was destroyed by the Communist China and its attempts to eradicate Buddhism. Buddhism is considered as a primary marker for Tibetan identity especially to the Buddhist nuns and the nuns are committed to saving the land of Dharma from whatever it takes- even at the cost of their lives. They were prepared to sacrifice everything to drive out the Chinese from Tibet and declare complete freedom of Tibet.

One of the nuns is very straightforward about how Chinese are treating them behind the prison walls as follows:

ཐ་ལྷ་ནི་དེ་ནི་སྐྱ་ལྷོ་ཅིག་དང་འདྲ།

The food is like pig swill,

ཉེས་རྒྱུ་དེ་ནི་དྲག་སྒོ་ཅིག་བཏང་།

They beat us harshly.

ལོ་ཆད་དེ་ནི་ཆད་མེད་ཅིག་བཅོས།

They have given us endless prison sentences,

བཅོས་ལ་སོང་།

Yes, given us.

These above lines tell a great deal about the nuns' prison conditions and provide a vivid image of brutality inside the prison. One of the issues mentioned above is the improper food condition which has been compared with the pig swill while they were being tortured endlessly. According to TIN's research report, Rukhang 3, the Drapchi authorities had metted out severe beatings on all inmates as a means to discourage and punish those who were constantly involved in the demonstration against the Communist party. The sentence for imprisonment is often extended extensively.

Through the nuns' song, "We've sung a song of sadness" མྱོ་བའི་གཞས་ཅིག་བཏང་ཡོད། below, the nuns juxtaposed the Chinese arguments about Tibet and Tibetans by calling the Chinese government treatment of the Tibetans as barbaric.

Previously, a spiritual realm of dharma

མྱོན་ཆད་ལ་ཆོས་ལྷན་ཞིང་ཁམས་ཤེད།

Now, is changed to a barbaric prison ground.

ད་ཆ་ཁྱ་མྱོའི་བཅོན་ནུབ་གྲུ།

Even at the cost of our lives,

མོད་མིས་སློག་ལ་སྤྱག་ཡང་།

We Tibetans will never lose our courage.

སྤྲོད་སྟོབས་ནམ་ཡང་མི་ལྷུང།

O, what a sad fate we Tibetans have,

ཨ་ཅི་ལ་བོད་མི་ལ་སྟོབ་ལ།

To be tortured mercilessly by barbarians

ཁྲ་ཁྲོས་ཉེས་རྒྱུ་དྲག་པོ་བཏང་།

We don't have freedom

ང་ཚོར་རང་དབང་མེད་པས།

Under the yoke of these barbarians.

ཁྲ་ཁྲོའི་འོག་ཏུ་འཛུད་པོང་།

The nuns feel Communist Chinese as a barbarian who is calling religion a poison and treat the people in a very inhuman manner without having any mercy. They considered barbarian as someone who does not have any compassion and sympathy toward the other living beings. This song reflects the past and present status of Tibet and their suffering under the Chinese authoritarian regime. They mentioned how the uniqueness of Tibetan Buddhist culture was changed into a barbaric prison ground where nuns, monks, and laypeople were forcefully put behind the bars for a peaceful demonstration against China calling for human rights. They feel that Tibetans are unfortunate to live under the barbaric Chinese who does not have any compassion where they have to go through all the traumatic heavy beating without any humanity. With this opportunity of raising their voice verbally, they have been articulating their experience under Communist China in a most trying of circumstances. They used the word such as “mercilessly”, showing how the Chinese are ruthless and harsh. There is much evidence that the Chinese government has inhumanly treated Tibetans. For instance, a nun from Garu had explained about how disturbing her interrogation as:

They would strip us naked, bend over us and then start beating us. They took off all our clothes. One would hold your arms and twist and drop you to the ground, while another would step on your head and keep it down. Then the fourth person would take your clothes and beat you with the stick. They didn't tie us and hang us up, but they tied me against the wall and gave me shocks. They would prod us all over our backs. They would expose our breast and prod us. They would make us sit on a chair and then slap our

faces and push us off the chair so that we fell to the ground.²⁹

Recently, a deeply disturbing image of Xinjiang has revealed that China has named the prison as “vocational training centres” where most of the prisoners from Xinjiang were to undergo ideological conversion. The account was given by former detainee named Sayragul Sauytbay, who now seeks asylum in Sweden. Sauytbay gave an estimated number of detainees in her camp as 2500 including elderly men, women and Children as young as 13 years of age. She mainly stated about how China’s brutality is worse for female detainees who constantly faced the threat of sexual violence. To see whether their re-education was succeeding or not, police authorities gather around 200 inmates’ and allow women to confess their ‘wrongdoings’. After doing that they ordered her to undress and raped her like others in front of everyone. While they were raping her, they will check on other inmates’ reactions. If they saw anyone of them showing angry face, bend their heads or closed their eyes to avoid seeing it, this was used to take them away and they were never to be see them again.³⁰ This measure of Communist China is beyond imaginable and created a huge disturbance among people around the world who regard this as a violation of human rights. Even inside Tibet, there are a number of so-called “re-education camps” of China. Carole McGranahan who reviewed the two-part journal written by former prisoner of one of the camps in Tibet stated that “what is happening in Xinjiang with what has happened in Tibet since the 1950s, the logics, structures, and tactics of oppression are similar and similarly devastating.”³¹ The testimony was given by a former monk detainee who spent about about four months in the re-education centre in China-administered Sog County in Nagchu Prefecture, TAR stated that most prisoners in the camp where he was detained were nuns and monks. They were made to wear Chinese military-style uniform

29 Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest; Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising*, 98.

30 Nzherald.co.nz. 2019. Unspeakable horror: China’s most terrifying secret exposed to the world. 1 November. Accessed November 28, 2019. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=12281506.

31 Yeshe Dorje, *Tibetan re-education camp journal tells of China’s tactics now used on Uighurs*, 25 May, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/tibetan-re-education-camp-journal-tells-chinas-tactics-now-used-uighurs>.

which they have to pay RMB 150 from their pocket. He further spoke about the extreme sexual abuse faced by nuns in the camp. He stated that “many nuns would lose consciousness during the ‘military drills’. Sometimes the officers would take unconscious nuns inside where I saw them fondle the nuns’ breasts and grope all over their body”.³²

The forms of sexual abuse during the interrogation were reported by many nuns that involved insertion of electric batons in the most sensitive private part of women as vaginas, rectums and also laceration of nipples which left permanent internal injuries without treatment.³³ These were very traumatic forms of torture over women’s bodies. It does not only involve physical brutality but there is psychological hardship that women go through. Maybe it is too hard for the nuns to remember what had happened to them or being monastic celibacy, who is abstaining from any sexual relations find it too painful to speak about those instances in front of others. Carole Devine similarly assumed that nuns who are raped may feel ashamed that their vow of celibacy was broken even it was done by force. Because they may feel that either they have to disrobe or not to tell about those assaults they faced. It is told that prison authorities are targeting moreover religious persons to degrade their religious faith.

It also contain a wishful line and prayer dedicated to all the living beings of the world in their song called “This song sadness in our heart” མེས་ལ་ནི་སེམས་ཀྱི་ནང་གི་སྡོ་བྱུ་འདི།

བདག་ཅག་བཙོན་པའི་ཉམ་ཐག་དཀའ་སྡུག་འདི།

སེམས་ཅན་ལ་ནི་ཀུན་ལ་སྤྲིན་པ་མ་གྱུར་ཅིག།

བདེན་པའི་སྟོན་ལམ་གཤམ་མེད་བྱུང་གྱུར་ཅིག།

*May the miserable hardships of us prisoners,
Never be the fate of any sentient being,*

*May the prayer of truth be accomplished
without hindrance!*

They wish and pray that the suffering undergone by the prisoners

32 TCHRD, Tibetan monk’s account reveals torture and sexual abuse rampant in China’s political re-education centres, 28 May, 2018, <https://tchrd.org/tibetan-monks-account-reveals-torture-and-sexual-abuse-rampant-in-chinas-political-re-education-centres/>.

33 Tibetan women’s Association, *Light in the Abyss: The Drapchi Fourteen* (Dharamsala: Tibetan women’s Association, 2009), 29.

themselves would not be faced by any other sentient beings on this earth. These lines not only express their pain under the brutality of Chinese torture but also ensures their spirituality, the compassion that they have cultivated over their years of practice of Buddhism. This shows the genuine nature of their religious practice.

The nuns have explained about how singing helps to keep them strong and strengthen their hope despite the physical and mental suffering they endured at the time. There are strong lines depicting resilience among the prisoners that can understand through their song entitled “I looked out from Drapchi prison” གྲུ་བཞིའི་ནང་ནས་བཟུས་བས་ལ།

ང་ཚོ་བཙོན་ཐོགས་འདི་གས་ལ།

We fellow prisoners

ནོར་བུ་སྒྲིང་གའི་ལ་མེ་ཉླ་།

Like flowers in Norbulingka,

སད་དང་མེར་བས་བརྒྱུངས་ཟུང་།

Even if we're beaten by frost and hail,

ལག་གདང་བྲལ་ས་མ་རེད།

Our joined hands will not be separated.

The above lines reveal a strong sense of community and unity among the prisoners. The nuns' integrity and their strong belief in truth will never get subdued by any kind of torture even if it causes death. They also reveal being tortured under various climatic circumstances. According to Norzin Wangmo, a nun from Shugsib who was detained in 1993 describes how prison authorities are using nature's components to torture them:

When it hailed they would put it in our mouths and the blood vessels were in pain. When the sun was shining they would make us stand for two hours or more, with arms stretched out under the sun and balancing books on our arms and head, and we wouldn't be able to move. This would go on for a long time and our bodies would frequently become swollen and painful. They would hit us in the face and check whether or not the blood vessels were swollen. Once the blood vessels were swollen, we couldn't bend our arms if we wanted to. Then, they would beat us and leave us in the sun. I was so weak and I bled two times.³⁴

34 Steven. D. Marshall, *Rukhang 3; the Nuns of Drapchi Prison*, 26.

They are addressing that the Chinese authorities not only torture them but try to take them apart from each other but they will maintain their support for each other with unity.

In another stanza, they have stated that

མེས་པ་སྐྱོ་གི་མི་འདུག་ལ།

Our hearts are not sad;

ག་རེ་ཡིན་ཟེར་ལ་སྐྱོ་བ།

Why should we be sad?

ཉིན་མའི་ཉི་མ་བཞུད་ཡང་།

Even if the sun doesn't shine during the day

མཚན་མའི་ཁླ་བ་ཡོད་རེད།

There will be a moon at night.

Here the lines have a strong sense of resilience and hope in it. They are hopeful that the truth will prevail and there will be victory sooner or later as the song compares just as the sun sets there will be moon showing up referring to Tibetan freedom. They did not feel any sadness while in the prison rather all the tortures they have undergone make them stronger to fight over truth and Tibet's freedom. Regardless of the content of songs, every song reveals the hopes that sustained them and withstand through all traumatic tortures and dreadful conditions. Every day, they are living with faith and hope of a better tomorrow.

This process of narrative through the songs involve reconstruction of Tibet's national consciousness by drawing from its past, present and future of Tibet. The nuns' use of linguistic as the discourse of protest were able to show their social condition under repressive China's rule in a very critical way. The power of words is that they are not only speaking of themselves rather they are consistently articulating many unexpressed emotional states, thoughts and matter of the ordinary Tibetans and their fellow prisoners. That makes their recorded songs an effective approach of communication from prison to the rest of the world. In which their songs let the world know that Tibetans are desperately in need of their basic human rights and freedom.

Language of Buddhism to Language of Protest

Traditionally in Tibet, a sizeable male population were literate and women were mostly illiterate. They were not likely to be literate to the same extent as men. Those 14 nuns were mostly from rural background

who have no access to education. The position of nuns as ‘unprivileged’ or ‘privileged’ is debateable. As compared to monks, their education opportunity is very limited but compared to ordinary girls in traditional Tibet they can get certain access to education. Somehow, their goal of being a nun is to learn Buddhist philosophy and maintain their spiritual practice. But this changed with the occupation of Tibet by PRC. But for them, Buddhism remains a defining aspect of their struggle. Carole Devine maintained that nuns are major activists in the freedom struggle of Tibet that embodies the significant Buddhist values of non-violent and patience. The nuns in recent protests have creatively used their limited knowledge to initiate the number of demonstrations against the Chinese government. Ronald Schwartz states that “demonstration by nuns during the 1987-1989 period has a special significance. They were small, unannounced and unexpected”.³⁵

Susan argues that many anthropologists in the 20th century continued to view men as the only social actors where women are treated as at best marginal members of society and at worst as non-existent. But nuns in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Tibet were determined to fight for the larger cause for Tibet’s freedom. It is similar to what Susan mentioned that “women are social actors with the goal of their own and means to achieve them”.³⁶ Those 14 nuns have their own goals and to achieve this goal they carry out this action consciously by knowing the severe consequences of their actions. Robert Barnett claims that generally, the protest of Tibetans in that period largely focuses on events directed by men. However, much of the practice and appeal of recent demonstrations as viewed by both Tibetans and the international media primarily associate with a non-violent protest organized by women. In the traditional thinking of Tibetan society, nuns are inferior for being women and their religious hierarchy as nuns. As far as this study is concerned, they were mostly from rural background and so they were marginal in their social standing and education. Paradoxically, their standing in the political protest is

35 Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising*, 99.

36 Susan Carol Rogers, “Women’s place: A critical review of Anthropological Theory,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 no.1 (1978): 137-138.

remarkable with their way of organizing the protest. The nuns' method of protest both inside and outside of the prison came into view as more sophisticated than those of their male counterpart. Their standard of protest is challenging over Chinese authorities to claim that the singing and recorded songs are threatening the states or that of individuals.³⁷ It again could be seen as more 'feminization project' that it was not very confrontational as the male initiative where authorities required to react with force directly. The nuns' prison protest was more repeatable than those of their male counterparts.³⁸ There are several reports of nuns singing openly national songs and express their loyalty to Tibet's nation in front of the prison authorities even though the repercussion for singing the patriotic songs were serious challenge to their authority.

Bourdieu mentioned that "language as a universal treasure as a collective property of the whole group".³⁹ Somehow, under the force of communist China, they imposed a certain restriction on using that language as legal and illegal as politically sensitive. Tibetan people inside Tibet are not allowed to use any language related to Tibet's independence, in praise of the Dalai Lama, criticizing the Chinese rule and their policies. If they do so, the Chinese authorities will directly arrest and imprison the person. But those nuns frequently sang songs and used the language that largely conveys the need of Tibet's independence and return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama which fundamentally shows their loyalty toward Tibet's nation within the prison. On the one hand, these songs act as a defiant voice of both hopes and despair of nuns under abusive Communist Chinese but on the other hand, it appears as an epic way of carrying the movement and nuns as courageous some. Bourdieu also discusses how Saussure debated the relation amongst the space and language where Saussure proved that it is not space that defines language but its language which defines its space. The nuns' songs are the one language that precisely defines the space of prisoners themselves as well as Tibetans under the

37 Robert Barnett, "Women and Politics in Contemporary Tibet," 337.

38 Ibid., 335.

39 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 44.

repressive political environment of China.

The nuns recorded songs largely constructing the pre-1959 Tibet as a utopian nation with having complete freedom. Though China stated that they have liberated Tibet from an old feudal lord and 'lamaist society',⁴⁰ but since 1959 to a recent protest in Tibet from mass demonstration to the phase of self-immolation make it clear that China had not liberated anything in Tibet rather than depriving its basic human rights. Tibetans frequently raise their voices that Tibet predominantly the land of Buddhism was an independent state and not the 'hell on earth' as it has now become under Communist China.⁴¹ Concerning the study of Ronald Schwartz, indicated that there is no instance of political action organized by nuns in Tibet before 1959. Somehow, after 1959 under the Chinese colonization, the nuns' rise as a significant political activism in the history of Tibet with a large number. With this desperate end under the PRC rule, they have been organizing demonstrations with the best of their knowledge and capability. Their songs presenting that Tibet under Communist China is very repressive and intolerable. By using the verse and vernacular speech allow their songs to function as a communication linkage between them and the outside world.

The role of nuns have changed massively from religious practitioners to political nuns since the occupation of Tibet. By knowing the consequences of their resistance, they are strongly willing to keep their role in the freedom movement of Tibet. There was a saying that the nuns' leadership was to represent their devotions to Tibetans.⁴² Carole Devine also argues that religious people join in the nationalistic movement because they believe that the freedom of practicing own religion freely can exist only through having freedom of own country Tibet. This may be another reason for nuns to participate in the freedom movement of Tibet being religious practitioners.

40 Carole Devine, *Determination: Tibetan women and the struggle for an Independent Tibet* (Toronto: Vauve Press, 1993), 7.

41 Ibid., 7.

42 Ibid., 21.

Collective Nature of Resistance in the Form of Songs

According to Christopher Small, the idea of musical act is “which does not separate musical participation from musical product”.⁴³ So, here the 14 nuns had participated in this musical act in recording songs to spread their message from the prison to their families and the world. And small critique on how music theorists and philosophers usually objectifying and narrowing the definition of music by “solely emphasizing musical products, dissociated from the people involved in the process of creating and performing”.⁴⁴ Instead, he had broadened the conception of music that as “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing”.⁴⁵ With his idea of the musical act, it is understandable that everyone who is part of this successful accomplishment of spreading recorded songs by the nuns to the world is a huge part of this resistance by the nuns. This includes the male non-political prisoner named Buchung,⁴⁶ who lends them the tape recorder through which they can bring this movement, the people who help them to smuggle this recorded tape out of prison and to the world. Small’s perception recognized the performing of music as a social reality, which “establishes in the place where it is happening as an act of relationships that ‘musicking’* is giving the meaning”.⁴⁷ They have used songs as their means of protest as the strong power lies in singing as a tool to carry their movement further. It is that even their physical freedom is taken away by the Chinese force but their voice is not easy to confine within the imprisonment. Through songs they

43 Carol Frierson Campbell and Park Keumje, “‘I want to learn that’: Musicking, Identity, and Resistance in a Palestinian Music Academy,” *Action, Criticism, and Theory of Music Education* 15 no.2 (2016): 73.

44 Ibid., 77.

45 Ibid., 77.

46 Tibetan women’s Association, *Light in the Abyss: The Drapchi fourteen*, 35.

*The term ‘Musicking’ was introduced by Christopher Small which means that any activity involving or related to music performance.

47 Campbell and Keumje, “‘I want to learn that’: Musicking...” 77.

Name	Detention age	Affiliation	Date of Detention	The expiry date of release	Base Sentence	Extension Sentence	Resultant Sentence	Origin County
Ngawang Choezom	22	Chubsang Nunnery	21-03-1992	21-03-2003	5	6	11 Years	Toelung Dechen
Gyaltsen Choezom	21	Garu Nunnery	21-08-1990	21-08-1999	4	5	9 Years	Tagtse
Gyaltsen Dolkar	19	Garu Nunnery	21-08-1990	21-08-2002	4	8	12 Years	Maldrogongkar
Ngawang Sangdrol	15	Garu Nunnery	17-06-1992	17-06-2013	3	6	21 Years	Lhasa
Phuntsog Nyidrol	20	Mechungri Nunnery	14-10-1989	14-10-2006	9	8	17 Years	Lhundrub
Lhundrub Zangmo	23	Mechungri Nunnery	21-08-1990	21-08-1999	4	5	9 Years	Lhundrub
Tenzin Thubten	20	Mechungri Nunnery	21-08-1990	21-08-2004	5	9	14 Years	Maldrogongkar
Ngawang Choekyi	23	Samdrub Drolma	14-05-1992	14-05-2005	5	8	13 Years	Maldrogongkar
Ngawang Lochoe	19	Samdrub Drolma	14-05-1992	14-05-2002	5	5	10 Years	Toelung Dechen
Ngawang Tsamdrol	21	Samdrub Drolma	14-05-1992	14-05-2002	5	5	10 Years	Toelung Dechen
Rigzin Choenyi	24	Shugsib Nunnery	28-08-1990	28-08-2002	7	5	12 Years	Gongkar
Jigme Yangchen	23	Shugsib Nunnery	01-10-1990	01-10-2002	7	5	12 Years	Gongkar
Phelden Choedron	19	Shugsib Nunnery	01-10-1990	dd/02/2002	3	5	12 Years	Niyemo
Namdrol Lhamo	28	Tashi Choeling	12-05-1992	12-05-2004	6	6	12 Years	Rinlung

Figure 1: List of fourteen singing nuns in Drapchi prison and their given sentence extension for recording freedom songs in audio-cassette in June 1993. Source: Tibet Information Network, 2000, p.65.

can create a social space among themselves in the expression of their identity, picturing a future Tibet and their aspiration that becomes their source of strength while giving a powerful message to the Chinese government and oppressed Tibetans. There is a strong sense of collectiveness among the nuns, they not only express their sense of belonging in terms of own group activism but also in terms of the larger community as Tibetans in which the songs are addressed.

Conclusion

The Tibetan culture and songs have been changed drastically with the occupation of Tibet by Communist China. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, singing traditional Tibetan songs was prohibited where traditional Tibetan songs became highly politicized and became a medium for protests.⁴⁸ Still today in Tibet there is continued censorship of lyrics of the songs and musical production as legal and illegal based on the content of particular song. However, many Tibetan singers still compose songs and sing songs that contain a strong political message. Most of the songs sung in the prison were composed by previous Tibetan prisoners while some are composed by the nuns which later became famous and through them this could reach out to the world. Therefore, it is important to appreciate the significance of their role as well as to remember the importance of their songs which could able to attract listeners to the story narrated by nuns. These nuns had never renounced their belief nor surrendered their humanity even after the hardship they endure. These spirits, songs, and actions by the fourteen nuns largely symbolize the unique way of freedom struggle in Tibet. Their lives in prison strongly depict how one can rise above the ill-treatment and how one's faith and courage can always stand in resistance to authoritarian power.

It is identified that their way of protest against Communist China is very unique, especially them being Buddhist practitioners and women in their mid-20 who are from a rural background with limited education. So, it is important to place a voice of them, women in the historical

48 Tibet Information Network, *Unity and discord; Music and politics in contemporary Tibet*, 139.

narrative of the political struggle of Tibet in which their method of protest can combine both the Buddhist and women perspectives. These recorded songs of nuns allowed the world to observe the first-hand pain and torture of political prisoners faced on daily basis in Tibet and more than that witness some courageous women behind the horror prison wall of Drapchi.

China signed the United Nations Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at the thirty-ninth session on it on 10 December 1984. The CCP signed it on 12 December 1986 and ratified it on 4 October 1988.⁴⁹ Though the Communist China signed much international agreements like the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Agreement on Eliminating all Forms of Racial Discrimination and so on including the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT). But in reality, it's just an abstract since they are violating their commitment and misleading the international community time and again. Shokdung, one of the remarkable author based in Tibet in his book "The division of heaven and earth- On Tibet's peaceful revolution" stated that we can see and hear about the governments and parties who take great pride in placing of national sovereignty above human rights and disrespect universal human values in favour of national interest. They normally murder and eliminate those who fight for and support these values. Here, the author mainly argues that Tibetans are in that position who has spent more than half a century under oppressive China without having any freedom and equality. Even these universal values as rights and freedom, equality and democracy have come to form as the basic ideal and objective of all nations, regions, and people around the world today.

49 United Nation. 10 December 1984. Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. New York. *Treaty Series* (Vol. 1465): 85.

Reference

- D.Marshall, Steven. *Rukhang 3; The nuns of Drapchi*. London: Tibet Information Network, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. *The history of sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley. London: Penguin books, 1978.
- . *The History of Sexuality*. Translated by Robert Hurley. London: Penguin Book, 1978.
- Marshall, Steven D. “Rukhang 3; The nuns of Drapchi prison.” By Steven, 26. London: Tibet Information Network, 2000.
- Rogers, Susan carol. “Woman’s place: A critical review of Anthropological theory.” *Comaprative studies in soceity and history* (Cambridge University Press) Vol.20, No.1 (January 1978): 123-162.
- Sangdrol, Ngawang, interview by Tsering Kalden. *Songs composed by nuns* (11 November 2019).
- Tibet Information Network. *Unity and discord. Music and politics in contemporary Tibet*. London: Tibet Information Network, 2004.
- . *Unity and discord. Music and politics in contemporary Tibet*. 2004.
- . *Unity and discords. Music and plitics in contemporary Tibet*. London: Tibet Information Network, 2004.
- Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota. *Talk By Ngawang Sangdrol & Kunga Tashi La*. 16 March 2019. <https://www.tafm.org/2019/03/16/talk-by-ngawang-sangdrol-kunga-tashi-la/> (accessed October 23, 2019).
- Tibetan women’s Association. *Light in the Abyss: The Drapchi fourteen*. Dharamsala: Tibetan women’s Association, 2009.

Who do you think you are? Identity, Ethnicity and Strategies for Expression of Tibetan Nationalism in People's Republic of China

Tenzin Desal

(Tibet Policy Institute)

Were people living then in Tibet and Xinjiang thoroughly aware of themselves as “Tibetans/Uighurs, yes, all of us”? Or did this awareness gradually develop as the regime made policies in every field on the basis of the fifty-six, and the citizenry found themselves replying to the state’s incessant “Who are you?” in new ways. Identity is never a one-way street.

Benedict Anderson¹

Abstract

What makes someone a Tibetan? This paper will examine theoretical approaches to studying Tibetan identity. The invasion of Tibet in 1950 and the signing of the 17 Point Agreement consolidated PRC’s colonial design in Tibet. The configuration of peoples in PRC is influenced by Chinese intellectuals in the turn of the century and it led to, I argue here to *institutional ethnicization* of Tibetan people with other 54 minorized ethnic groups in PRC. Here I will look at Tibetan intellectual response to this project, and particularly that of a “vernacular intellectual,” Muge Samten. Two essays in his collected works is examined here highlighting his response to the question of identity and ethnicity. The year 2008 and 2009 marked a watershed in debates surrounding China’s “ethnic policy.” Leading up to the Beijing Olympics, large scale protests erupted across traditional Tibet in 2009 and then in the following year in Xinjiang. The debate surrounding China’s ethnic policy shifted to “second generation of ethnic policy.” This paper will examine creative forms of Tibetan resistance and forging of new strategies for expression of Tibetan nationalism under

1 See Benedict Anderson’s forward in Thomas Mullany, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), xx.

the dominance of the Chinese state.

Keywords: Tibet, Identity, *institutional ethnicization*, nationalism, People's Republic of China

Introduction

In her transnational ethnographic study of Thami people straddling in three modern nation states of Nepal, India and Tibetan region administered by the People's Republic of China, Sara Shneiderman returns to the question in her epilogue: *Thami Ke ho?- What is Thami?*² Here I look at the identity formation of Tibetan people, and interrogate what is it to be a Tibetan. In essence, framing the question in rhetorical terms, *who do you think you are?* What makes one a Tibetan. With a vast body of scholarship and ethnography, Tibetan people today, after the annexation of Tibet are spread in China-administered Tibet Autonomous Region, and Tibetan prefectures and counties in the provinces of Sichuan, Yunan, Gansu and Qinghai.

Theoretical Approaches towards Studying Tibetan Identity

The disintegration of Machu rule over China and transition into a modern Chinese nation-state spurred scholarly interest in the study of Tibetan identity.³ This is further catalyzed by Tibet remaining a de facto independent country till People's Liberation Army marched into Tibet and complete annexation of Tibet in 1959. Scholarship on Tibetan identity is shaped and influenced by popular and varying theoretical approaches to studying identity in the broader field of social sciences. Primordialist approach to the understanding of identity and nationalism is based on the assumption that ethnic and national identities are assigned at birth and are their preoccupation is to identify defining group characteristics. Anthony Smith describes the genesis of this "organic" theory as first being developed by the

2 Sara Schneiderman, *Rituals of Ethnicity:Thangmi Identities Between Nepal and India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 252.

3 Ben Hillman, "Studying Tibetan Identity." In *The Sage Handbook of Contemporary China*, ed. by Weiping Wu & Mark W. Frazier (London: Sage Publication, 2018)

German Romantics and yet questions its tenability to a modernist as it would render “modernist paradigm irrelevant and superfluous.”⁴ This view remained influential as evidenced in early European writings on Tibet and the “Orient” and through to the mid-twentieth century when “Tibet Question” was thrust into the international spotlight following the PRC’s annexation of Tibetan areas in 1950–51 and the Dalai Lama’s flight into exile in 1959.⁵ The preponderance of primordial perspective still influences our assumptions on ethnic identity even when it had largely been discredited.⁶

Barth challenged the primordialist approach and belief that ethnic groups are distinguished by units with innate cultural characteristics.⁷ Taking a subjective position that individuals selectively emphasise those forms of cultural differentiation that are important to them. Essentially, Barth laid emphasis on relational, interactional and situational nature of ethnicity. The instrumentalist approach to identity became popular in the discipline of Political Science and Conflict Studies. In Tibetan context, it is useful in situating Tibetan “ethnicity” in wider socio-economic and political framework.⁸ The limitation of this approach is failure to recognize human agency as evidenced in resistance in the form of street demonstrations and a series of self-immolations in Tibet and the assumption that people could be easily mobilized along ethnic lines. Constructivists take a more radical approach and define identity as a product of social and historical forces that became “sticky” over time.⁹ Ashutosh Varshney asserts that central to constructivist approach is that “ethnic and

4 Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 146.

5 Ben Hillman, “Studying Tibetan Identity,” 714.

6 For this see Hillman (2018) and also see Kanchan Chandra, “What is Ethnic Identity? A Minimalist Definition,” in *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics* ed. Kanchan Chandra (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 51–96.

7 See Federik Barth, *Ethnic Group and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969)

8 Ben Hillman and Gray Tuttle, *Ethnic Conflict and Protest in Tibet and Xinjiang: Unrest in China’s West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016)

9 Hillman, “Studying Tibetan Identity,” 715.

national identities are constructs of the modern epoch.”¹⁰ Perhaps the most influential argument in favor of constructivist approach is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagine Communities* where he points to the rise in “print capitalism” which is to say that the arrival of printing press and capitalism compounded to the transformation into larger national identities.¹¹ In relation to studying Tibetan identity in the People’s Republic of China, Institutional approach bears huge influence in shaping of Tibetan “ethnic” identity. On this perspective, state and its institutions play a dominant role in shaping of ethnic identity and how ethnicity is governed.¹² As Ben Hillman argues:

Ethnicity becomes institutionalized, or ‘sticky,’ in official discourses about identity, and in the institutions through which ethnic difference is managed, including through systems of regional autonomy, elections and political parties.¹³

Tibetans are counted as one of the other 54 “minority ethnic groups” and Han being the largest and dominant group in the People’s Republic of China. The founding of the PRC in 1949 and subsequent Ethnic Identification Project carried under the supervision of the Chinese state played and continues to play huge role in formulating and implementing policies governing diverse peoples.

Institutional Ethnicization and Managing Diversity

Here I argue that, *Institutional ethnicization* is the institutional assignment of ethnic identity by a hegemonic power. Although the term ethnic is used widely in western literature, it is difficult to find its exact equivalent translation in many other languages. For instance, the term ethnic is untranslatable in Tibetan. Even the Chinese term *Minzu* doesn’t convey in entirety its meaning as ethnic. The English translation of word *Minzu* is ‘folk or common people’ for *min* and ‘consanguinity

10 Ashutosh Varshney, “Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford University Press, 2009), 276-294.

11 Benedict Anderson, *Imagine Communities* (London: Verso, 1983)

12 Daniel Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

13 Hillman, “Studying Tibetan Identity,” 715.

or lineage' for 'zu'. Which is to say a "community of folks with a common origin".¹⁴ The term Minzu is variedly translated into English in various official documents. The term Minzu was introduced to China during the rule by the Manchus in the late Qing period. This term became part of Chinese vocabulary after the Opium Wars and became popular amongst Chinese nationalists in their struggle against foreign invasions.¹⁵ In a subtle move, on the eve of Women's Summit in 1955, the English translation of the 'State Commission of Nationality Affairs' was changed to the 'State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, likewise, the English translation CPC's authoritative journal related to ethnic work 'minzu tuanjie' was also changed accordingly, from 'Unity of Nationalities' to 'Ethnic Unity'.¹⁶

The Manchu Universalist¹⁷ rule over China came to an end and China transitioned into a modern nation state.¹⁸ A brutal war between the Nationalist and the Communist, finally saw the emergence of victorious Communist Party of China. The collapse of Qing empire in 1911 is marked by intersection of anti-manchu sentiments, Han nationalism and the question of managing diversity. Chinese leaders at this point had to devise their own means to reconcile the binaries of diversity and unity, plurality and singularity.¹⁹ Should they fail at formulating a coherent meaning, they stand to lose a vast expanses of territory. As Joseph Esherick asserts:

The prominent public intellectuals of the era, from Liang Qichao to Zhang Bingling, questioned whether Mongolia, Tibet and the Muslim

14 Zhang Haiyang, "Wrestling with the Connotation of Chinese 'Minzu'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 32 no. 30 (1997):75.

15 Ma Rong, "Reflections on the Debate on China's ethnic Policy: My Reform Proposals and their Critics" *Asian Ethnicity* 15 no.2 (2014): 237.

16 Zhang Haiyang, "Wrestling with the Connotation of Chinese 'Minzu',"79.

17 See Mark Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford and California: Stanford University Press, 2002)

18 See Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)

19 Pamela K. Crossley, "Nationality and Difference in China: The Post-Imperial Dilemma." In *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China*, ed. Joshua A Fogel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 138-58.

areas should be included within China.²⁰

A salience could be observed among a minority group of political leaders who welcomed the territorial reduction and its international borders coinciding the distribution of Han population.²¹

The other proposal came for the call for Greater China, arguing for the need to maintain the imperial periphery as buffer regions against foreign aggressor.²² The proponents of the later position prevailed and the Republican leaders laid claims to regions under the influence of imperial domain. However, the Shimla Agreement between Tibet and British India in 1914²³ marked the point where no military or civilian authorities were permitted to hold residence in Tibet for the following twenty years.²⁴ Communists came to confront the question of Nationality which to the point remained a theoretical part of Communist politics when the Gomindang campaigns compelled the Communist leadership to abandon their base in Jiangxi and set off to what had been eulogised in Communist pantheon as the Great Long March. Although there were no internationally recognised geopolitical and modern border, Tibetans had a clear understanding of shifting geopolitics. As explained to Carole McGranahan,²⁵ “they frequently explained to me which territories were *bod sde* and which were *rgya sde*.” During the Long March, for the Communists it was clear to them that they were now in Tibetan lands.²⁶ Communist propaganda during this

20 Joseph Esherick, “How Qing became China.” In *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayali and Eric Van Young, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 243.

21 Joseph Esherick, “How Qing became China,” 229-258.

22 Thomas Mullany, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 24.

23 See Tsepon Shakabpa, *Bod Kyi Srid Don Rgyal Rabs (An Advanced political History of Tibet)* (Kalimpong: Shakapa House, 1976), 219-250.

24 See Ling Hsiao-ting, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics 1928-1949* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006)

25 Carole McGranahan, “Mao in Tibetan Disguise: History, Ethnography, and Excess.” *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 no. 1 (2012): 213-245.

26 Elliot Sperling, “Red Army's first encounters with Tibet—experiences on the.” *Tibetan Review* 10(1976): 11-18.

period promised equality among nationalities and self-determination in order to solicit support from peoples “disgruntled by Qing rule and Chiang Kai-shek’s nationality policy”.²⁷

Its founding document proclaiming the founding of the People’s Republic of China was declared to adopt “Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference as the policy of the government” on 1 October, 1949.²⁸ The Common Program of 1949 promised “common inherent equality of all nations” and “appropriate representation in local organs of political power.”²⁹ In 1952, the Communist regime announced to host its first National People’s Congress in 1954, heralding its transition from a revolutionary force into a legitimate government of mainland China.³⁰ On the question of representation of diverse peoples, Deng Xiaping outlined it in a speech delivered concerning Electoral Law on 11 February, 1953. This law guaranteed 150 minority delegates in the first NPC.³¹ However, as noted by James Townsend the 1953-1954 elections, “The CCP (Communist Party of China) had no intention of establishing representative institutions at the basic level until it was sure of its ability to guide their work”.³² The birth of social science in PRC questioned the imperial notion of “barbarians” and social scientists with “tip-top” training in Europe, America and Japan set to the task of studying these “minorities.” Taking into consideration the study of Ethnic Identification Project in Yunan, Anderson reasoned that these Social Scientists set their camps in Yunan as:

27 Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1987.

28 Mao Zedong, *marxist.org*, 2 October, 1949. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-7/mswv7_003.htm.

29 Tenzin Desal, “When the Empires Fall Apart: Managing Diversity in Two Asian Giants,” *tibetpolicy.net*, 16 November, 2017. <https://tibetpolicy.net/when-the-empires-fall-apart-managing-diversity-in-two-asian-giants-an-essay/>.

30 Thomas Mullany, “Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China,” 18.

31 Ibid., 8.

32 James Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 89.

Tibet was too cold and too difficult to reach and breathe in, and Xinjiang was too Muslim and too arid. Yunnan was fabulously beautiful, had a perfect climate, and, best of all for the romanticism of early anthropology, was a sort of Eden, full of sensuous, bare-breasted, innocent women who were a special attraction for puritan Confucian Han.³³

The early experience in pre-modern Himalayas illustrates the contestation between self-identification of identity and following institutionalism approach to classification of peoples. For instance, the two censuses carried out in Ladakh in 1911 and 1921 in predominantly Buddhist region of Ladakh. British authorities had little knowledge about the region and its people and hence they decided in 1911 to let the population decide for themselves their identity as they pleased. As Anderson illustrates:

Imagine the horror of the bureaucrat when the actual counting started to show that they had on their hands 5,934 “major groups” (castes, tribes, races) etc.) And 8,478 secondary identifications. This would never do. Hence in the 1921 census, Delhi arbitrarily decided on fifty-four categories, from which each subject had to take one pick.³⁴

This experience that perplexed imperial bureaucrats in Ladakh seemed to have completely evaded the ethnographers and ethnologists as they went about experience the same “horror” when Chinese census of 1953-1954 “posed the question of minzu as an unbounded, fill in the blank query” and later to be transcribed into Chinese characters.³⁵

Vernacular intellectual and Native Ethnography

As Ben Hilman’s suggests that none of the theoretical approached to studying identity elaborated in the first part of the article could sufficiently explain the “salience” of ethnicity in our world today, he argues:

33 Thomas Mullany, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*, xviii

34 Benedict Anderson in Introduction to Thomas Mullany, *Coming to Terms With Nation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), xvii

35 Thomas Mullany, *Coming to Terms with the Nation*, 32.

Although no single theory or disciplinary approach is sufficient in explaining the salience of ethnic identity in our world today, one important dimension of ethnicity cuts across all perspectives and approaches: the drawing of ethnic boundaries. In studying ethnic identity social scientists generally agree that it is important to understand where boundaries between groups are drawn, who draws them and for what reasons. These are key questions to bear in mind when studying Tibetan identity in contemporary China.³⁶

Taking cue from this suggestion, I look at a case of the so-called “*Dwag po Tibetans*” and the debate surrounding the classification of these people as *Baima ethnic group* (*Baima Zangren*). Here I will evaluate the role of Muge Samten (dmu dge bsam gtan, 1913-1993) and his arguments to resist the Chinese state and institutional assignment of ethnicity as ‘Baima ethnic group’. He is regarded as one of the three great scholars of Tibet (*mkhas pa sum*) of Tibet in the twentieth century. He was born in 1913 in the eastern region of Tibet in Muge (*Dmu dge*), which currently administered in PRC as Ngaba (rNga ba) Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Region of Sichuan Province. In the same year of his birth, Tibetan government signed an accord with British India and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (*thub bstan rgya mtsho*) also declared Tibet’s independence after returning from three years in exile.³⁷ At the age of 12 he took religious vows and entered Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery (dMu dge shis ‘khor lo). He later joining Labrang Tashi Kyil Monastery (Bla brang bKra ‘khyil) in modern day Gansu Province and later earned Geshe degree in 1947. After Chinese annexation of Amdo, Muge Samten played a pivotal role as a compiler of dictionaries, editor of official periodicals, translator of official documents and later a strong advocate for protection of Tibetan language and grammar against reforms proposed by the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing in 1969. During the signing of the 17-Point Agreement, he was compelled to participate in editing and publication of the document.³⁸ At the age of 37 in 1950, Gunghang Jigme Tenpai Wangchuk (1926-2000) appointed him as to secretary

36 Hillman, “Studying Tibetan Identity,” 715.

37 Tsepon Shakabpa, *Bod Kyi Srid Don Rgyal Rabs*, 629-640.

38 Samten in his collected works describes it as *zhungs dgos byung* (*had to participate*), ascribing to the compulsion (Samten 1996, 576).

(*drung chen mkhan po*) of Labrang. In this capacity he accompanied the illustrious Jetsun Sherab Gyatso (1884-1964) to Beijing.³⁹ He continued to teach periodically from 1970s to early 1990s throughout Tibet and in Beijing.⁴⁰

Operating under the colonial rule of China, it is difficult to locate him and his role as an intellectual within dichotomy described by Chomsky.⁴¹ Intellectuals critiquing the power and authority who are “value-oriented” and the others collaborating with the authority who are “technocratic and policy-oriented intellectuals.” Drawing from earlier scholarship on Colonial India on vernacular intellectual, Dhondup Tashi stresses that Chomsky’s description of binary division of intellectuals is “too simple” and situates the role of Tibetan intellectuals like Muge Samten performing both official and monastic roles.⁴² Extending the concept developed by Yogendra Malik,⁴³ Dhondup Tashi argues that Muge Samten carried out his activities under Chinese authority in both “situational” and “normative” categories.⁴⁴ That is to say Muge Samten as a vernacular intellectual, he worked within the Chinese government in transmission of communist ideas and ideology but he also employs his monastic knowledge and authority to “subtly resist” China’s power position to preserve Tibetan language and culture under Han hegemony.

The so-called “*Dwags po Tibetans*,” also referred to as “*Baima Zangzu*”

39 For a brief biography on Sherab Gyatso (rje btsun shes rab rgya mtsho, 1884-1968), see (Stoddard 1988)

40 Janet L. Upton, “Notes towards a Native Tibetan Ethnology: An Introduction to and Annotated Translation of dMu dge bSam gtan’s Essays on Dwags po (Baima Zangzu).” *The Tibet Journal* 25 no.1(2000): 3.

41 Noam Chomsky, *Who Rules the World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016) 5-21.

42 Dhondup Tashi, *A Monastic Scholar Under China’s Occupation of Tibet: Muge Samten (1913-1993) Autobiography and His Role as a Vernacular Intellectual*. MA Thesis, University of British Columbia (2019), 3.

43 Yogendra K. Malik, “Introduction.” In *In South Asian Intellectuals and Social Change: A Study of the Role of Vernacular Speaking Intelligentsia*, ed. Yogendra K. Malik (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1982), 1-7.

44 Dhondup Tashi, *A Monastic Scholar...*, 5.

or “Baima Zangren” in Chinese official publications, the majority of its population currently living in Sichuan province. They were initially classified as Tibetans (*Zangzu*) during initial ethnic classification project of the 1950s. They came under the lens of ethnographic scrutiny again in late 1970s and early 1980s when a team of academics and researchers from the Nationalities’ Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Sichuan Provincial Nationalities’ Affairs Commission, Sichuan University, and the Sichuan Provincial Museum conducted a field work in the region. In their published reports, it suggested that Dwags Po were not Tibetans but rather a unique ethnic group own its own. Janet Upton provides an English translation of one of their initial reports published by the Sichuan Provincial Nationalities’ Research Institute in 1980 (Sichuan Minzu Yanjiusuo).⁴⁵

The “Baima Tibetans” are divided between Pingwu and Nanping Counties in Si- chuan Province and Wen County in Gansu Province. Since [Communist] Liberation, they have reported many times that they are not Tibetan [Zangzu], and have asked to be reclassified. The Sichuan Provincial Nationalities’ Affairs Commission has twice organized [research] teams to investigate [this issue] (once in 1978 and again in 1979), and has held two academic conferences [on the matter]. Famous historians such as Profs. Xu Zhongshu, Mou Yue, Zhao Weibang, and Deng Ziqin; Vice- Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Sichuan Province People’s Consultative Conference Zhang Xiushu; and Vice-Secretary of the Pingwu County Party Committee and cadre [representative] of his own nationality [i.e., the Baima], Niu Wa believe that the “Baima Tibetans” are the descendants of the ancient “Di” na- tionality. The Tibetan scholar Mr. Sang Mudan [i.e., dMu dge bSam gtan] believes they are Tibetans. Prof. Ren Naiqiang believes they are the descendants of the an- cient “Dangehang Qiang” nationality and attracting a lot of strong interest (SMY, 1980: preface [no page number given])... Other people also support [the idea] that they are yet another nationality. [With] each [participant] airing his own views [and] speaking without any inhibitions, the academic atmosphere [of the meetings] was very dynamic. Because the investigation and research of the “Baima Tibetans” is of relatively high academic value, the famous Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong used the “Baima Tibetans” as a typical example in his essay “On the Question of the Classification of China’s Nationalities,” introducing [the case] both

45 Upton, “Note Towards a Native Ethnography,”4.

at home and abroad, and attracting a lot of strong interest. (SMY 1980: preface [no page number given])

It must be noted here that the debate surrounding this classification has drawn Fei Xiaotong to consider it as a case study for his publication that has attracted “strong interest.” A former student of Malinowski in London, Fei is considered as a Pioneer in Chinese Anthropology and “helped lay the foundation for sociological and anthropological research in China, through his pioneering studies of village life and ethnic minorities.”⁴⁶ Fei in his article also raises the problems associated with the classification of “such other “Tibetans” as the “Zheng” and “Xia’erba” [Sherpa] of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the “Jiarong” [rGyal rong] of rNga ba and dKar mdzes Prefectures in Sichuan Province, and the “Pumi” Tibetans of Muli County in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan.”⁴⁷

As mentioned in the report published by the Sichuan Provincial Nationalities’ Research Institute in 1980 (Sichuan Minzu Yanjiusuo), Muge Samten, “The Tibetan scholar Mr. Sang Mudan [i.e., dMu dge bSam gtan] believes they are Tibetans.” Although classification and identification that Dwag po was not Tibetan was met with much disbelief among Tibetan intellectuals, Muge Samten remained one of the few intellectuals to openly challenge the official classification. To argue his case, he marshals evidence drawing from his knowledge on local history, language, customs, culture and ethnography of its people.

Here I will evaluate two articles written by Muge Samten on the question of identification of Baima Tibetans. The first article was originally published in the Tibetan journal Drang Char (*sBrang char*, Eng: light rain) in 1981. The second article which is a relatively shorter and it also appeared in Drang Char in 1989. In the last section of his article, Muge Samten acknowledges⁴⁸ that the second text was dictated by him in 1987 at Gomang Monastery

46 Wolfgang Saxon, “Fei Xiaotong, 94, a Pioneer in Chinese Anthropology, Is Dead,” The New York Times, 9 May, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/09/obituaries/fei-xiaotong-94-a-pioneer-in-chinese-anthropology-is-dead.html>.

47 Upton, “Note Towards a Native Ethnography,” 4.

48 Muge Samten, “dwags po’i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzugs so (On the question of classification of Dagpo People).” In *Collected Works of Muge Samten Vol 6* (Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 2009), 438-439.

in Ngaba County and was diligently transcribed by Sherab Raldri (*Shes rab ral gri*). Janet Upton asserts that Muge Samten grew rather impatient as the question surrounding the identity of Dagpo resurfaced in 1980s. In his second article, he further strengthens his argument by citing classical Tibetan literature and putting it to the service of his ethnological study. The two articles are reproduced in his collected works.⁴⁹ The first article is titled *dwags po'i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzugs so* (On the question of Classification of Dagpo People)⁵⁰ and the second article as *dwags po'i mi rigs kyi skor la lta stangs bshad pa bzugs so* (My perspective on the Dagpo people).

In his first article *On the question of Classification of Dagpo People* (*dwags po'i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzugs so*), Muge Samten begins by reverting to the earliest recorded history of the Tibetan empire⁵¹ and migration of Tibetan army during the reign of Songtsan Gampo into the region where the Tibetans and Tang erected a stone stele demarcating the border between the two empires.⁵² Here Samten points to the migration of several hundred thousand Tibetan army dispatched from Dagpo and Kongpo to Chukar, Chunag and Tsawa Valley (Region of Nanping and Pingwu). In an imperial decree issued, Tibetan army were to camp there indefinitely to defend the border region between “Tibet and China.”

Samten then returns to the etymology of ethnonyms and toponyms of Dagpo and Khonpo. Here he asserts that the soldiers raised and dispatched from Dagpo and Kongpo were settled in Chukar, they are “Dagpo of Pingwu and Khonpo of Nanping.”⁵³ Although the Khonpo is phonetically a corruption of Kongpo, Dagpo has remained unchanged. Samten then goes on to provide further evidence of

49 For the full text, see Samten 2009, 424-435; 436-439). The transliteration of the texts cited here is appended to this article.

50 I have not used the translation suggested in Janet's (Upton 2000) article. Janet has alternatively translated the titles as “On the Question of the Dwags po' Nationality” and “A Discussion of [My] Views on the Matter of the Dwags po Nationality.” I have instead used a neutral term “people.”

51 For a study of Tibetan empire, see (Beckwith 1987).

52 Muge Samten, “dwags po'i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzugs so (On the question of classification of Dagpo People).” In *Collected Works of Muge Samten Vol 6* (Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 2009), 424.

53 Ibid., 424.

Tibetans who are called Sharpa of modern day Zung Chu County. About them he writes: “The soldiers from eastern Toe (Stod Shar) in Western Tibet settled along the Zung chu drainage and they are the Tibetans of Zung chu County today (Zung chu rdzong). Since the term has also not changed, they are still known as Sharpa to this day”.⁵⁴ As for the Baima as an ethnonym, Samten argues that “Bod dmag”(Tibetan Army) is pronounced as “pe ma,” which is the same as the sound of the [local] Chinese pronunciation of the characters “bai ma”. For that reason, Samten concludes, “Chinese people call the “Pe ma Bod rigs” the “Baima Zangzu”(Baima Tibetans). He further illustrates by giving following cases:

Tracing their origins from one of the four great clans of Tibet, large number of soldiers of dra clan (spra rigs) under the military command of Khopan (kho phan) settled and remained along Gyalmo Nyulchu River (The Salween). These people are also called Se people (bswe rigs). According to *the Oceanic Book* (mdo smad chos ‘byung)⁵⁵ the Dra (sBra) and Se (bswe) people are same. People inhabiting in valleys along the flow of Gyalmo Nyulchu River are known as Gyalmo Tsawarong (rgyal mo tsha ba rong). In official documents issued by Tibetan kings it is written as Khopan of Gyalmo Tsawaring (rGyal mo Tsha ba rong gi Kho phan). Later this lengthy name was abbreviated as Tsakho (Tsha kho) and then it became the name of the people and the region. Today it is a common name for both the people and name of the place which is Tsarong. There are three Zangkar nomadic communities at the headwater of Gyalmo Nyulchu River, since they have arrived from Zangkar in Western Tibet, their name has also remained unchanged.⁵⁶

Mugen Samten declares that “the claims made by certain people that Gyalrong (rGyal rong) and Dagpo (Dwangs po) are not Tibetans are baseless and spoken with no evidence.”⁵⁷ His discussion over the genesis and debates surrounding the classification of Dagpo Tibetans provides us an insight into the institutional approach to the process

54 Ibid.

55 For a further study on the Oceanic Book (mdo smad chos ‘byung) by Drag Gon Tenpa Rabgay (Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, 1800/1– 1869), see (Tuttle 2011).

56 Samten, “dwags po’i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzhugs so,” 427.

57 Samten, “dwags po’i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzhugs so,” 427.

of ethnicization of a “minority population.” In August 1978, relevant officials and researchers from the Nationalities’ Research Institute of the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences and Sichuan Provincial Museum carried out a field work for about one month to investigate in Dagpo region. Although there was no unanimous point of view, the research report was submitted and distributed to relevant offices. This report summed up that the Dagpo people are not Tibetans and suggested that they were “Tis” ethnic group. Muge Samten deconstructs the report’s central thesis that Dagpo ethnic group are a separate ethnic group through careful examination of each arguments made in favour of configuring it as a different ethnic group. Here I will summarise his four-point arguments made in his first article:⁵⁸

1. Language

The claim that Dagpo constitute a separate language as it is not consistent with the standard dialect of Ganan⁵⁹. Muge Samten asserts that language all across Tibet has one root yet differs in pronunciation owing to vast geographical spread of Tibet⁶⁰. Even in Central Tibet (Dbus gtsang) old words have been replaced by new words. In certain cases, like that of Golok and Zamthang their dialects have organically evolved on its own. They all are Tibetan, yet due to changes it has rendered them mutually dissimilar. Here he questions the linguistic competence of ethnographers involved in the research project and impossibility of mastering the language of the population they are studying in little over a month’s period of time. He then explains the social conditions that led to the divergence of their spoken dialect and literary Tibetans. He says that apart from a handful “Bon pos” and tantric practitioners, large proportion of the population are illiterate. He points to its similarity to other regions of Tibet where Tibetan language had

58 Ibid., 427-435.

59 Ganan is a Chinese word, which includes Kanlho County and Labrang Tashi Kyil Monastery in Gansu province as administered in People’s Republic of China.

60 For an interesting current discussion on the classification of Tibetan dialects, see (Phuntsok 2019).

been primarily used in religious works.

2. Social Organisation

Here Muge Samten employs Marxist terminologies and theory of dialectical materialism to analyse the social organization. He then takes the claim head on regarding the manner of production in Dagpo as being feudal. But he points out other examples of Tibetan region having same social organization as in Dagpo where “primary method of exploitation by the local landlords and rich peasants were not system of debt and payment but a wage-paying relationship” in Muge, Ngaba and Zungchu.

3. Dispute Resolution

Here he illustrates the similarities in dispute resolution between Dagpo and other regions such as in Muge, Zungchu, Chunag where dispute resolution is carried out in similar way where an articulate headman and a respected elder are involved in adjudication known as Susen Godung (gZu zan mgo rdung).

4. Religion, Customs and Traditions

On the question of Dagpo people wearing felt hats, it is not unique to them as this tradition of wearing felt hats is common throughout Tibet. Even Dagpo of Central Tibet (dBus) wear felt hats too. The custom of sticking a feather in one's hat could be seen in Padmasambhava bedecked with a feather on his hat in Tibetan tradition. Tibetans wearing felt hats had also been described in Gendun Chopel's (1903-1951) work on Tibetan history, the *White Annals*⁶¹ and *Ludrup Gongyen* (*Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*). He then explains that wearing clothes made of flax fabric reflects the lifestyle and modes of economic production in the region and states that it is a Tibetan way of dressing. The religion is the early Tibetan religion of Bon. The pronunciation varies as it sounds like “pe” instead of “Bon” but their written language is Tibetan.

61 For an English translation of his unfinished yet seminal work on Tibet's history- *The White Annals*, see Chopel (1978).

Towards the end of his article, Muge Samten let us in on information relayed to him through “reliable sources.” The researchers compiling the report during the fieldwork in Dagpo came across a stele with inscription entirely written in Tibetan and unearthed Tibetan books. However, he points out, “There was not a single word mentioned about this in their report.” He also questions the competence of researchers for drawing ethnographic conclusion with limited time spent on their fieldwork. After carefully considering all arguments and his counter-arguments, he concludes:

Based on the theory of dialectical materialism on the classification of a nationality, if we analyse according the research themes explored above, the Dagpo people’s language and customs, characters, traditions, means of production, social organization and the rest is similar to the rest of Tibetans. Hence, the evidence for Dagpo people being Tibetan is authoritative. There is not even a shred of evidence to suggest that Dagpo people are of “Tis” nationality.⁶²

The second article, (*my*) *Perspectives on the Classification of Dagpo People* (*dwags po'i mi rigs kyi skor la lta stangs bshad pa bz'hyugs so*)⁶³, Muge Samten admits towards the end of the article⁶⁴ that he didn't put his pen to paper instead dictated the content of this article: *rnga stod sgo mang nas brtsams shing yi ge ba ni shes rab ral gri'o* (Composed at Ngatod Gomang Monastery and transcribed by Sherab Raldi).⁶⁵ The second article begins by referring to the circumstances that compelled him to address this question again as he has been informed about the question being reinvestigated again. He follows the same line of arguments by substantiating it with other sources not mentioned in his previous

62 Samten, “dwags po'i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzhyugs so,” 435.

63 The first article is not reproduced here due to paucity of space. The transliteration of shorter second article is appended here. I thank Choeying Rangdol la for feeding the Tibetan text into a digital format. The text is reproduced from (Samten 2009, 436-439).

64 Muge Samten, “dwags po'i mi rigs kyi skor la lta stangs bshad pa bzhyugs so (Perspectives on the Classification of Dagpo People) .” In *Collected Works of Muge Samten* Vol. 6 (Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 2009), 436-439.

65 Ibid.

article. On the question of Dagpo people wearing feathers on their hats, he cites from a classical Tibetan literature in Tibetan Buddhist historiography, *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (rgyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long).

Strategies for Expressing Tibetan National Identity

Answering to the call by Janet Gyatso to bring Tibetan Studies to “engage with emerging trends in interdisciplinary critical theory,” Sara Shneiderman points to the lack of “attention to the question of ethnic identity *within* the overarching category ‘Tibetan,’” and explains “but I am more interested in what divides them.”⁶⁶ In this paper, I am interested in looking at the ways in which Tibetans are strategizing to express Tibetan nationalism under Chinese colonial rule. Resistance to China’s rule, overt protests against the Chinese state since annexation of Tibet in 1959 uprising occurred and were initially centered more locally in Lhasa from 1987-1990.⁶⁷ The mass protests across Tibet in 2008⁶⁸ is followed by a series of self-immolations in Tibet.⁶⁹ However, I am interested in a more covert and creative ways in which Tibetans are resisting without directly challenging the state. In his speech delivered at Sorbonne in 1882, Ernest Renan tackles the question: “What is a Nation?” Apart from significance of heritage and glory, he points to the salience of common suffering as a cohesive force for the kindling of national consciousness:

Having suffered, rejoiced, and hoped together is worth more than common taxes or frontiers that conform to strategic ideas and is independent of racial or linguistic considerations. “Suffered together”, I said, for shared suffering unites more than does joy. In fact, periods of mourning are worth more to national memory than triumphs because

66 Sara Shneiderman, “Barbarians at the Border and Civilizing Projects: Analysing Ethnic and National Identities in the Tibetan Context.” In *Tibetan Borderlands*, ed. Christiaan Kleiger (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 9-36.

67 Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner, *Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

68 Central Tibetan Administration, *2008 Uprising in Tibet: Chronology and Analysis* (Dharamsala: Department of Information and International Relations, 2008).

69 For further literature on self-immolations in Tibet, see McGranahan and Litzinger (2012) and Woesser (2012).

they impose duties and require a common effort. A nation is therefore a great solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices made and those that one is still disposed to make.⁷⁰

In congruence with Renan's perceptive analysis, I will look at the development of modern Tibetan literature and situate Tibetan "scar literature" and this development's attempt in negotiating censorship and colonial hegemony.⁷¹ In his "deceptively" yet "devastating critique" of Gramscian theory of Class Hegemony⁷², James Scott argues that beyond hegemony, the subordinate groups do not subscribe to the world-view imposed by the dominant group.⁷³ The "Public transcript" is an illusion created by the subordinate groups to conceal their dissatisfaction. In the absence of open avenues for expression of dissatisfaction, "hidden transcripts" in the form of artistic repertoire is employed to convey resistance to hegemony.

Considered as the founder of modern Tibetan literature, Dhondup Gyal (1953-85) demonstrated that while open criticism of Chinese authorities was unacceptable, through his literary output" it was nevertheless possible to speak implicitly about the wound inflicted on the mind of the Tibetans (*Bod kyi sems kyi rma*)."⁷⁴ Dhondup Gyal published a poem in 1983 called "Lang tsho'i rhab chu" (Waterfall of youth) and was instantly a sensation among Tibetan readership.⁷⁵

70 Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation." Trans. Ethan Rundell (Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992).

71 It is beyond the scope of this paper to study whole gamut of modern Tibetan literary corpus, see (Jabb 2015) for an study of modern Tibetan literature and the "inescapable nation."

72 Charles Ramble, "Hidden Himalayan Transcript: Strategies of Social Opposition in Mustang, 19th-20th Centuries." In *Tibetans Who Escapes the Historian's Net*, ed. Charles Ramble, Peter Schwieger and Alice Travers (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2013), 232.

73 James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

74 Tsering Shakya, "The Development of Modern Tibetan Literature in the People's Republic of China in the 1980s." In *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*, ed. Patricia Schiaffini -Vedani Lauren Hartley (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 78.

75 Dundrup Gyal, *Don grub rgyal gyi lang tsho'i rhab chu/ dang ljags rtsom bdams sgrig*

Apart from a break in style, form, content and meter in classical Tibetan literature influenced by *Karya*, his poem made bold political and nationalistic statements. He uses the classical Tibetan reference to Tibet metaphorically as snowy Tibet (*Gang Chen*) and is interspersed in his poem effectively using it interchangeably with Tibet.

The waterfall of youth, the youth of snowy Tibet

This is—

the courage to be creative
the expressions of struggle
the music of youth
within the Tibetan youth of the nineteen-eighties

Kye! Kye! Ah, youthful waterfall

Waterfall of youth

He emphasizes that modernisation is essential to him for the regeneration of Tibetan culture and national pride. While acknowledging the imperfections of Tibet's past, his poem is a call for Tibetans to embrace modernism and unburden the weight of its past to march into the future with their heads held high. He also acknowledges the imperfections of Tibetan society⁷⁶

The wounds of history⁷⁷

The ailments of battle

The boils of blind faith

And the dust of conservatism might possibly be found

Nevertheless,

(*Dhondup Gyal's "Waterfall of Youth" and selected writings*), ed. Pema Bhum (Dharmasala: Amnye Machen Institute, 1994)

76 Dhondup Gyal, "Waterfall of Youth" by Dhondup Gyal and a New Translation by Lowell Cook." *High Peak Pure Earth*, 30 November, 2018. <https://highpeakspureearth.com/2018/poem-waterfall-of-youth-by-dondrup-gyal-in-a-new-translation-by-lowell-cook/>

77 Here the poem is translated by Lowell Cook. Another translation by Tsering Shakya is also available at (Gyal 2007). I have not been able to do a comparative study of translations with its original in Tibetan that appeared in *sBrang char*.

Since you possess the majesty of youth and naturally present glory
The frost of the three months of winter will never
have a chance to place your mind within the recess of glaciers
And how could yesterday with its taste of salt ever quench the thirst
of today?

When the life-force that is ripe for the times
Does not fit the lifeless corpse of history difficult to find,
It's impossible for the pulse of improvement to beat
And the heart blood of advancement can not flow
Even more so are the steps on the way forward
Hey, waterfall!

Taking the question of Tibetans in Tibet-Exile Tibetan dichotomy,
Pema Bhum underscores the shared suffering caused by the Chinese
occupation and its colonial rule:

All Tibetans, both inside and outside Tibet, share a common sorrow—their homeland is occupied by another. In addition to this, Tibetans inside bear the sorrow that comes from being forced to hide the anger they feel toward the plunderers of their homeland and the murderers of their fathers; they can never show their real face and must bow respectfully to those in power. There is also a special suffering for writers and poets. Suppressing the fire of hatred in their hearts and pretending to smile, they must use their pen, which is like their soul, to sing songs of praise to the bloody hand that murdered their fathers. Tibetans in exile, though they are unable to take revenge, have the separate satisfaction of expressing their anger by cursing and exposing the crimes of their enemies. However, poets inside Tibet are denied this satisfaction. I think that this suffering that fills the mind is being experienced by Tibetan scholars for the first time in Tibetan history. Material prosperity can only partially erase it, but to overcome the suffering, a basis for belief and hope is required.⁷⁸

The creative use of metaphors to conceal hidden transcripts could be seen in a daring poem by Guru Dhondup's poem *Please Stepfather, Do not Deceive me*. The poem appeared in a blogpost on 18 February, 2010 but later disappeared in Sino-Cybesphere, here he metaphorically equates

78 Pema Bhum, "Heartbeat of a New Generation :A Discussion of the New Poetry." In *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*, ed. Luran R. Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini -Vedani. Trans Ronald Schwartz(Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 114.

communist rule over Tibet to a “self-imposed, tyrannical stepfather”:⁷⁹

Over 50 Years ago

You killed my dear father

Killed with cunning, killed with cruelty

Although I was young at the time I knew his face well

It is still terrifying and enraging to think of it now

Dear stepfather, now I have realized everything clearly

In this environment, where deception and treachery devour one another

I have realized clearly that there is no one but myself to care for me.

Yet, either through karma or coercion, we have become father and son.

Please as a father do not deceive me.

I can endure any deceptions

But for the deception of a father who pretends to care.

Please stepfather, at least do not deceive me.⁸⁰

Guru Dhondup's poem of his stepfather's sinister and cunning way to dispose of his father over fifty years ago is suggestive as a metaphor for Chinese brutal and “cruel” takeover of Tibet. The deceptions of his stepfather insisting on ungratefulness and having “forgotten” his “kindness and caring” could be construed as unrelenting Chinese propaganda for bringing the development to Tibet as argued by Emily Yeh in her book -- *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*.⁸¹ Towards the end of his poem, Guru speaks of utter desolation and comes to terms with the reality with the realization that Tibet has no one but Tibetans to care for it and pleads, “do not deceive me.”

The proliferation of modern Tibetan songs that enjoys huge popularity contains subtext calling for unity among Tibetans and shared suffering and joy. Recalling of history is important to many of these singers reflecting on the collective traumas under the Chinese rule⁸² and

79 Lama Jabb, *Oral and Literary Continuities in Modern Tibetan Literature : The Inescapable Nation* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 112-134.

80 The poem is reproduced as translated in (Jabb 2015, 96-97).

81 See Yeh (2013).

82 Tenzin Desal, “History, Memory and Resistance: A Historical Evaluation of

evocation of national sentiments.⁸³

Beyond Ethnicity

After the widespread Tibetan protests in 2008 and then a year later in Xinjiang, debate surrounding China's ethnic policy got amplified. Among Chinese scholars the most prominent voice calling for the elimination of minority nationality status is the Peking University Sociologist, Ma Rong. Ma's stated goal is to "de-politicize" ethnic identity and proposed complete rejection of the word *Minzu* in favour of *Zuqun*. For Ma, this will lead to social and political stability with Han and non-Han assimilated into a unified identity of *Zhonghua Minzu*. In other words, Tibetans, Manchus, Mongols, Uighurs, Yi would be stripped of their ethnic identity and instead become "Chinese People".⁸⁴ To realize this shared enterprise, Ma suggests strengthening of Chinese legal system as necessary measure to ensure safeguard of social justice and ethnic equality. Answering to his critiques, he argues that depoliticization of ethnic identity also involve jettisoning Stalinist theory of Nationality:

I suggested abandoning Stalin's theory of 'nationality' as the doctrinal basis of China's policy regarding minorities. With this adjustment, all rights of minorities in China could be handled as civil rights of citizens in a modern society, while treating minorities as disparate cultural groups. The goal of nation-building in China should thus be adjusted, from 'a multi-national state' to 'a multi-ethnic nation-state'.⁸⁵

He draws attention to the limitations of 'Marxist nationality theory' which according to him "provides little help in improving relationships among China's 'nationalities'. Relevant to this paper concerning Tibetan

70,000 Character Petition." In *Tibetology and Buddology at the Junction of Science and Religion - 2018*, ed. Sergey Kuzmin Lvovich and Tatyana Shaumyan Lvovna (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2019), 92-113.

83 Lama Jabb, "Singing the Nation: Modern Tibetan Music and National Identity." *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 21 (2011): 1-29.

84 Mark Elliot, "The Case of the Missing Indigene: Debate Over a "Second-Generation" Ethnic Policy." *The China Journal* 73 (2015): 187.

85 Ma Rong, "Reflections on the Debate on China's ethnic Policy: My Reform Proposals and their Critics," 238.

vernacular intellectuals, Ma's response is quite telling when he suggests that "in fact, minority elites who were educated by 'Marxist theory of nationality' have shown a stronger 'nationality consciousness' in dealing with these issues."⁸⁶

Secret official documents leaked over mass-internment of Uighur people reveals CCP's radical plans to remould the society and transform thoughts and behaviour of "minoritized" people⁸⁷. According to *Tibet Daily*, a new regulation is passed by the "Tibet's people's congress", the autonomous region's legislature passed regulations requiring "all levels of government, companies, community organizations, villages, schools, military groups and religious activity centers be responsible for work on ethnic unity." Four years after similar rules were introduced in Xinjiang, this regulation will take effect from first of May.⁸⁸

During the 19th Party Congress, a radical change in CCP's history took shape where the National People Congress reappointed Xi Jinping with no limit on the number of terms he could serve. This came in the wake of a terse announcement by Xinhua News Agency on February 25, 2018 saying that "The Communist Party of China Central Committee proposed to remove the expression that the President and Vice-President of the People's Republic of China 'shall serve no more than two consecutive terms' from the country's Constitution".⁸⁹ In his Work Report at the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping delivered a speech that lasted for over three hours; he further stressed the role of the United Front work to "ensure the success of the Party." The

86 Ibid.

87 Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "*Exposed: China's Operating Manuals For Mass Internment And Arrest By Algorithm.*" *International Consortium of Investigative Journalism*, 24 November, 2019. <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/exposed-chinas-operating-manuals-for-mass-internment-and-arrest-by-algorithm/>.

88 Echo Xie, "*First Xinjiang, now Tibet passes rules to promote 'ethnic unity'.*" *South China Morning Post*, 13 January, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3045757/first-xinjiang-now-tibet-passes-rules-promote-ethnic-unity>.

89 "*CPC proposes change on Chinese president's term in Constitution,*" *Xinhua*, 25 February, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/25/c_136998770.htm.

United Front Work Department functions by liaising with the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). On the sidelines of the CCP's 19th National Party Congress on October 20, Zhang Yijiong, the executive deputy head of the UFWD, elaborated on the CCP's policy on religious affairs since the 18th Party Congress in 2012.⁹⁰ Zhang stressed on CCP's goal of "Sinicizing religions" in China and the role of religious community in realizing "socialist core values." In the public address he further went on to say and it is quoted below in verbatim, he said:

Tibetan Buddhism, born in our ancient China, is a religion with Chinese characteristics. It is true that Tibetan Buddhism in formation had received influence from other neighboring Buddhist countries, but it adapted to the local reality and formed its own unique doctrine and rituals, which is a model of sinicization itself... That we are actively guiding Tibetan Buddhism in the direction of sinicization is in the hope that Tibetan Buddhism will further absorb the nutrition of the Chinese excellent culture.⁹¹

It is unclear what direction the CCP is headed in terms of managing diversity. However, the Xinjian leaks suggest significant dissent.⁹² It also raises the question whether ethnic identity could really be depoliticized. The trajectory of the CCP's policies in asserting its primacy and intrusive drive deeper into the lives of its citizens and "ethnic minority" is grounded on the perceived successes of the Party in maintaining stability in Tibet and Xinjiang. However, China's heavy-handed approach towards "ethnic minority" debates surrounding it suggest assertion and reforging of identity from a subaltern position.

90 Tenzin Desal, "The Tibetan Tradition of Reincarnation and CCP's Assertion to Reign Sovereignty over "Living Buddhas"." *World Focus* 40 no.7 (2019): 37-42.

91 Charlotte Gao, "*Chinese Communist Party Vows to 'Sinicize Religions' in China*," *The Diplomat*, 24 October, 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/chinese-communist-party-vows-to-sinicize-religions-in-china/>.

92 James Leibold, "Planting the Seed: Ethnic Policy in Xi Jinping's New Era." *China Brief* 19 no.22(2019): 9-14.

References

- Allen-Ebrahimian, Bethany. *Exposed: China's Operating Manuals For Mass Internment And Arrest By Algorithm*. NOVEMBER 24, 2019.
<https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/exposed-chinas-operating-manuals-for-mass-internment-and-arrest-by-algorithm/>
(accessed January 13, 2020).
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagine Communities*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Barnett, Robert, and Shirin Akiner, . *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*.
Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Barth, Federik. *Ethnic Group and Boundries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969.
- Beckwith, Christopher I. *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Bhum, Pema. "Heartbeat of a New Generation :A Discussion of the New Poetry." In *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*, edited by Luran R. Hartley, & Patricia Schiaffini -Vedani, translated by Ronald Schwartz, 112-134. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Central Tibetan Administration. *2008 Uprising in Tibet: Chronology and Analysis*. Dharamsala: Department of Information and International Relations, 2008.
- Chandra, Kanchan. "What is Ethnic Identity? A Minimalist Definition." Edited by Kanchan Chandra. *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 51-96.
- Choephel, Gendun. *The White Annals*. Translated by Samten Norboo. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1978.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Who Rules the World*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016.
- Crossley, Pamela Kyle. "Nationality and Difference in China: The Post-Imperial Dilemma." In *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China*, edited by Joshua A Fogel, 138-58. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Desal, Tenzin. "History, Memory and Resistance: A Historical Evaluation

- of 70,000 Character Petition.” In *Tibetology and Buddhology at the junction of science and religion - 2018*, edited by Sergey Kuzmin Lvovich, & Tatyana Shaumyan Lvovna, 92-113. Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2019.
- Desal, Tenzin. “The Tibetan Tradition of Reincarnation and CCP’s Assertion to Reign Sovereignty over “Living Buddhas”.” *World Focus* 40, no. 7 (2019): 37-42.
- . *tibetpolicy.net*. November 16, 2017. <https://tibetpolicy.net/when-the-empires-fall-apart-managing-diversity-in-two-asian-giants-an-essay/> (accessed December 30, 2019).
- Elliot, Mark. “The Case of the Missing Indigene: Debate Over a “Second-Generation” Ethnic Policy.” *The China Journal*, no. 73 (2015): 186-213.
- . *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China*. Stanford and California: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Esherick, Joseph. “How Qing became China.” In *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, edited by Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayali, & Eric Van Young, 229-258. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Gao, Charlotte. *Chinese Communist Party Vows to ‘Sinicize Religions’ in China*. October 24, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/chinese-communist-party-vows-to-sinicize-religions-in-china/> (accessed January 14, 2020).
- Gladney, Dru C. *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Gyal, Dhondup. “Waterfall of Youth” by Dhondup Gyal and a New Translation by Lowell Cook. 11 30, 2018. <https://highpeakspureearth.com/2018/poem-waterfall-of-youth-by-dondrup-gyal-in-a-new-translation-by-lowell-cook/> (accessed 1 8, 2020).
- . *Don grub rgyal gyi lang tsho’i rhab chu/ dang ljags rtsom bdams sgrig* (Dhondup Gyal’s “Waterfall of Youth” and selected writings). Edited by Pema Bhum. Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 1994.
- . *Waterfall of Youth*. Vers. translation by Tsering Shakya. 12 26, 2007. <http://tibetwrites.in/index.html%3FWaterfall-of-Youth.html> (accessed 1 8, 2020).

Haiyang, Zhang. "Wrestling with the Connotation of Chinese 'Minzu'." *Economic and Political Weekly* 32, no. 30 (1997).

Hillman, Ben. "Studying Tibetan Identity." In *The Sage Handbook of Contemporary China*, edited by Weiping Wu & Mark W. Frazier. London: Sage Publications, 2018.

Hillman, Ben, and Gray Tuttle. *Ethnic Conflict and Protest in Tibet and Xinjiang: Unrest in China's West*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Hsiao-ting, Ling. *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics 1928-1949*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006.

Jabb, Lama. *Oral and Literary Continuities in Modern Tibetan Literature : The Inescapable Nation*. London: Lexington Books, 2015.

Jabb, Lama. "Singing the Nation: Modern Tibetan Music and National Identity." *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaines* 21 (October 2011): 1-29.

Leibold, James. "Planting the Seed: Ethnic Policy in Xi Jinping's New Era." *China Brief* 19, no. 22 (2019): 9-14.

Malik, Yogendra K. "Introduction." In *In South Asian Intellectuals and Social Change: A Study of the Role of Vernacular Speaking Intelligentsia*, edited by Yogendra K. Malik, 1-7. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1982.

McGranahan, Carole. "Mao in Tibetan Disguise: History, Ethnography, and Excess." *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 1 (2012): 213-245.

McGranahan, Carole, and Ralph Litzinger. *Self-Immolation as Protest in Tibet*. April 9, 2012. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/self-immolation-as-protest-in-tibet> (accessed January 9, 2020).

Mitter, Rana. *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Mullany, Thomas. *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011.

Phuntsok, Thubten. *Reconsidering the Classification of Tibetan Dialects*. January 28, 2019. <https://highpeakspureearth.com/2019/reconsidering-the-classification-of-tibetan-dialects-by-thubten-phuntsok/> (accessed 16, 2020).

Posner, Daniel. *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2005.

- Ramble, Charles. "Hidden Himalayan Transcript: Strategies of Social Opposition in Mustang, 19th-20th Centuries." In *Tibetans Who Escapes the Historian's Net*, edited by Charles Ramble, Peter Schwieger, & Alice Travers, 231-250. Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2013.
- Ramble, Charles. "Whither, Indeed, the Tsampa Eaters." *Himal* 6, no. 5 (1993): 21-25.
- Renan, Ernest. "What is a Nation." translated by Ethan Rundell. Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992.
- Rong, Ma. "Reflections on the debate on China's ethnic policy: my reform proposals and their critics." *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 2 (2014): 237–246.
- Rong, Ma. "Reflections on the Debate on China's ethnic Policy: My Reform Proposals and their Critics." *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 2 (2014): 237–246.
- Samten, Muge. *A Concise History of Dissemination of Traditional Fields of Learning in Tibet*, Trans. Naga Sangay Tendar. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2005.
- Samten, Muge. "dwags po'i mi rigs kyi gnad don skor bzhugs so (On the question of classification of Dagpo People)." In *Collected Works of Muge Samten Vol 6*, 424-435. Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 2009.
- Samten, Muge. "dwags po'i mi rigs kyi skor la lta stangs bshad pa bzhugs so (Perspectives on the Classification of Dagpo People) ." In *Collected Works of Muge Samten Vol. 6*, 436-439. Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 2009.
- Sawerthal, Anna. *A Newspaper for Tibet: Babu Tharchin and the "Tibet Mirror" (Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long, 1925-1963)*. PhD. diss: Universität Heidelberg, 2018.
- Saxon, Wolfgang. *Fei Xiaotong, 94, a Pioneer in Chinese Anthropology, Is Dead*. May 9, 2005. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/09/obituaries/fei-xiaotong-94-a-pioneer-in-chinese-anthropology-is-dead.html> (accessed 14, 2020).
- Schneiderman, Sara. *Rituals of Ethnicity: Thangmi Identities Between Nepal and*

- India*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
- Scott, James. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Shakabpa, Tsepon. *Bod Kyi Srid Don Rgyal Rabs (An Advanced political History of Tibet)*. Kalimpong: Shakapa House, 1976.
- Shakya, Tsering. "The Development of Modern Tibetan Literature in the People's Republic of China in the 1980s." In *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*, edited by Patricia Schiaffini -Vedani Lauren Hartley, 62-85. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Shakya, Tsering. "Whither the Tsampa Eaters?" *Himal* 6, no. 5 (1993): 9.
- Shneiderman, Sara. "Barbarians at the Border and Civilizing Projects: Analysing Ethnic and National Identities in the Tibetan Context." In *Tibetan Borderlands*, edited by Christiaan Kleiger, 9-36. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Smith, Anthony. *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of Nations and Nationalism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Sperling, Elliot. "Red Army's first encounters with Tibet—experiences on the." *Tibetan Review* 10 (1976): 11–18.
- Stoddard, Heather. "The Long Life of rDo-sbis dGe-bshes Shes-rab rGya-cho." In *4th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, edited by Helga Uebach and Jampa L. Panglung, 465-473. Munich: Kommission für zentralasiatische Studien, 1988.
- Tashi, Dhondup. *A Monastic Scholar Under China's Occupation of Tibet: Muge Samten (1913-1993) Autobiography and His Role as a Vernacular Intellectual*. MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2019.
- Townsend, James. *Political Participation in Communist China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Tuttle, Gray. "Challenging Central Tibet's Dominance of History: The Oceanic Book, A 19th Century Politico-Religious Geographic History." In *Mapping the Modern in Tibet*, edited by Gray Tuttle, 135-172. Andia: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2011.
- Upton, Janet L. "Notes towards a Native Tibetan Ethnology: An Intro-

duction to and Annotated Translation of dMu dge bSam gtan' s Essays on Dwags po (Baima Zangzu).” *The Tibet Journal* 25, no. 1 (2000): 3-26.

Varshney, Ashutosh. “Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, edited by Carles Boix, & Susan C. Stokes, 276-294. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Woeser, Tsering. *Tibet on Fire: Self-Immolations Against Chinese Rule*. Translated by Kevin Carrico. London and New York: Verso, 2012.

Xie, Echo. *First Xinjiang, now Tibet passes rules to promote ‘ethnic unity’*. January 13, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3045757/first-xinjiang-now-tibet-passes-rules-promote-ethnic-unity> (accessed January 1, 2020).

Xinhua. *CPC proposes change on Chinese president’s term in Constitution*. Edited by Liangyu. February 25, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/25/c_136998770.htm (accessed 1 14, 2020).

Yeh, Emily T. *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013.

Zedong, Mao. *marxist.org*. October, 2, 1949. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-7/mswv7_003.htm (accessed December 30, 2019).

Appendix

Dwags po'i mi rigs kyi skor la lta stangs bshad pa bzhugs so

(My) Perspective on the Dagpo People

deng sang phin wung rdzong khongs su yod pa'i dwags po zhes pa'i bod rigs kyi skor la/ rang gis dpyad pa'i rtsom yig gnyis bris shing/gnyis ka si khron zhing chen mi rigs zhib 'jug khang gi dus deb thog rgya yig tu bkod 'dug bod yig ni mtsho sngon gyi sbrang char 1981 lo'i deb 2pa'i thog bkod 'dug_da skabs yang de la zhib 'jug byed kyin yod par thos pas/_slar yang rang gis shes tshod 'ga' zhig bri bar bya ste/'ga' zhig gis de bod ma yin pa'i sgrub byed la mgo la bya spu btsugs pa bkod 'dug_des na mgo la bya spu btsugs pa ni bod kyi gna'i cha lugs yin te/_rgyal rabs gsal me'i lcags par shog grangs 236gi thig phreng gnyis pa na g.yo dge 'byung /_gtsang rab gsal/_dmar shAkya mu ne gsum sgom gyin yod pa la/_btsun pa gcig gis sham thabs brjes/_lag tu mda' gzhu thogs/_mgo la bya sgro btsugs nas 'phral du khyi khrid nas ri dwags gshor gyin 'dug pa g.yo dge 'byung gis mthong nas zhes dang/_klong chen chos 'byung las mdzad pa gtsang rab gsal/_bo dong ba g.yo dge 'byung/_stod lung ba dmar shAkya mu ne dang gsum dpa' chu bo ri la sgom zhing yod pa'i dus su btsun pa khyi khrid rnga gshang brdungs shing mgo la bya sgro btsugs/_sham thabs snga log phyi log byas nas ri dwags la mda' 'phen pa thab kha bas mthong bas ma byan nas ban rgan 'khrul btsun pa ma smyos/_rgyal bos btsun pa skya sar phab pa red zer zhes gsungs pa ni glang der mas btsun pa rnams skya sar phab pa'i rtags la mgo la bya sgro 'dzugs dgos par bshad/_yang mi la'i mgur 'bum ras pa zhu ba 'od kyi skor tsho las ldem bya rgyal rgod kyi 'phru do btsugs/_zhes ras pa zhu ba 'od kyi mgo thog tu bya rgod kyi sgro btsugs yod par bshad/_de ltar lo brgyad brgya'i sngon du yang bod kyi gzhon nu dag gi mgor bya sgro btsugs yod par bshad/_phyis su rim gyi cha lugs de nyams na yang sa cha 'gar cha lugs de da dung yod par mngon/_ge sar gyi sgrung du'ang mgo la bya sgro btsugs yod tshul gyi sgrung glung mang/_lha sa'i gtsug lag khang gi nang sgo'i gyas phyogs kyi gyang thang ngor gna' dus kyi lus rtsal sbyong ba'i ri mo

bkod yod la/_de'i lus rtsal ba dag gi mgor yang bya sgro btsugs yod pa bris 'dug pa bdag gis mthong/_phyis su bod ljongs kyi dmag rtsed dang dus chen/_gtor rgyag sogs kyi skabs su bya sgro can gyi zhwa gyon pa'i srol bcings 'grol bar du yod/_der ma zad rgyal rong sogs bod kyi sa cha 'ga' zhig tu gtor rgyag sogs kyi skabs su dmangs dmag gis lus la go khrab gyon/_mgo la bya sgro can gyi zhwa gyon pa'i srol lugs yod/_rgyu mtshan de dag gis rnam 'phel dang phin wu sogs kyi dwags pa'i mi'i mgo la bya sgro 'dzugs pa ni bod kyi gna'i cha lugs dngos gnas yin no/_de ni dwags po'i mi rnams bod rigs yin pa'i rtags mtshan yang dag cig yin/

ming 'dogs tshul ni bod kyi dmag rnams rgya bod sa mtshams su bzhang pa thang yig gsar rnying las shin tu gsal/_des na 'di dag ni dwags po nas 'ongs pa'i dmag mi shas che ba'i rgyu mtshan gyis bod kyis dwags po zhes 'bod/_rgya mi dag gis der ste pe ma bod rigs zer/_de ni bod dmag ces pa'i sgra bris pa yin te/_zung chu dang chu nag dang rnam 'phel phyogs kyi skad kyi gdangs la bod ces pa'i gdangs ni pe dang/_dmag ces pa'i gdangs ni ma zhes pa'i sgra gdangs dang 'dra/_da dung yang de dag gi skad kyi gdangs la bod dmag ces pa pe ma ste zhes pa'i sgra dang mtshungs/_de'i rgyu mtshan gyis rgya mi dag gis pe ma bod rig zer/

goms 'dris gshi+i+is lugs kyi thog nas/zung chu'i shar ba zhes pa'i bod dang nga rang gi pha yul dmu dge zhes pa'i bod sogs dang goms 'dris gshis lugs 'dra la/_der ma zad khang ba phub lugs/_lha mchod lugs/_dur 'debs lugs sogs kyang 'dra ba yin la/_bud med dag gi cha lugs ni bod ljongs kyi cha lugs dang mtshungs/_skad lugs kyang bod kyi gna' skad yin gshis/_des kyang 'di dag ni bod rigs yin par shin tu 'grub/_chos lugs kyang bod kyi gna' chos bon po shas che/_bon zhes pa'i sgra ni de dag gi skad gdangs la pe zhes pa'i sgra dang 'dra/_de'i rgyu mtshan gyis de dag gis chos lugs ni pe po'u zhes pa chos shig yin par 'dod pa ni lab rdol lo/_yi ge yang bod yig las gzhan pa'i yi ge med/_chos 'dod pa dang dom yig sogs la'ang bod yig bed spyod bzhin pa red/_de ga'i sngon gyi rgya bod sa mtshams kyi rdo ring ngos su'ang rgya bod kyi yi ge gnyis ka yod par grags/_sngar 'ga' zhig gis zhib 'jug byas pa'i snyan zhu'i yi ge snga phyi gnyis bris pa ngas mthong mod/_de dag skabs su bshad pa'i yul de'i goms 'dris gshis lugs

sogs ni bod yin pa'i sgrub byed sha stag las/_tis tso zhes pa'i mi rigs yin pa'i sgrub byed gcig kyang mi 'dug go_sngar gyi snyan zhu gnyis ka la dpyad gtam bris zin pas bskyar zlos mi byed/_sngar dwags po yin min gyi dogs pa ma byung la/_nye char tis tso zer ba'i mi rigs red ces pa'i gtam zhig bsgrags byung ba'i rkyen gyis do snang byed mkhan je mang du song/_bod ljongs nas bzung ste a mdo'i mtha'i bar gyi bod mi dag gis 'di dag sngar bzhin bod yin par ngos 'dzin gyin yod/_khyad par du khong tsho'i yul gyi bod mi dmangs mang che ba kho tsho bod ma red zer ba la khong khro lang gin rgyal rong gi mi dang 'dra'o/_zhes bsam gtan rgya mtsho mi 'jigs dbyangs can dga' ba'i blo gros su 'bod pas rab gnas 1987lo la/_rnga stod sgo mang nas brtsams shing yi ge ba ni shes rab ral gri'o.

Book Review

Tenzin Tseten

(Tibet Policy Institute)

The Ninth Panchen Lama (1883-1937): A Life at the Crossroads of Sino-Tibetan Relations

Fabienne Jagou (Author in French), Rebecca Bisset-Buechel (English Translator)

Pages: 402 pages

Publisher: Silkworm Books (2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 616215016X

Lozang Choki Nyima Gelek Namgyel, the Ninth Panchen Lama lived fifteen years in exile in Inner Mongolia and China until his premature death at the age of 54. Far away from home, the prelate played a significant role in the Sino-Tibetan relations. The prelate was inspired by Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People," namely, nationalism, democracy and the well-being of the people. The prelate emphasized that Sun's principles "aim at eliminating the suffering of the people and at bringing happiness to the greatest number possible, while the Buddhist doctrine supports these ideals of equality and elimination of suffering". The prelate in fact likened Sun's principles with Buddhist ideals and propagated them from Buddhist perspective in his role as an ambassador of Chinese dream, which was then the "union of the five nationalities". In addition the Panchen Lama was given the task to publish a bilingual (Tibetan and Chinese) specialized journal to transmit and further disseminate the Republican government's message.

The prelate perhaps was not aware of the fact that harmonious co-existence of the five nationalities (Chinese, Manchu, Tibetan, Mongolian and Muslims) proposed by Chinese leaders was nothing but a policy of cultural assimilation. From the beginning Sun Yat-sen had been undisguised proponent of assimilation. As late as 1921, he had stressed that the non-Han peoples of China were destined "to be

melted in the same furnace, to be assimilated within the Han nationality.” Chiang Kai-shek was no exception. He denied the existence of ethnic minorities regarding them rather as “branches of Han”.

Unlike the Dalai Lamas, the Panchen Lamas had a relatively longer life exerting greater political influence in regional politics. Considering the fact that most of the Dalai Lamas after the establishment of Gaden Phodrang government lived short lives. Particularly, the Ninth to Twelfth Dalai Lamas all died at a young age under mysterious circumstances. The Ninth Dalai Lama Lungtok Gyatso (1805-1815), for instance, had the shortest life span in the lineage. This offers us a telling case study. One popular narrative surrounding the early death of the Dalai Lamas, precisely before taking political power, had to do with the political influence of the regents at the time.

On contrary, some of the Panchen Lamas had enormous influence as a mediator. The Sixth Panchen Lama at the request of Bhutan mediated between British India and Bhutan following the latter's defeat at the hands of the British Indian troops.

Fabienne Jagou, the author of the latest study of the life of the Ninth Panchen Lama, highlights the special spiritual bond between the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Ninth Panchen Lama. The relationship between the two is based on the centuries-old tradition of teacher and student relationship. In fact the custom of mutual recognition was established since the Fourth Dalai Lama chose the Fourth Panchen Lama.

In her quest to search for an answer to a question on which this book is entirely predicated, Jagou has used primary sources from multiple languages to give the book credibility and more importantly serious perspective of that bygone era.

This brings us to the question: What prompted the Panchen Lama to leave his abode in secrecy and go into exile? The prelate's decision to escape is certainly linked with the Tibetan government's imposition of huge amount of tax on Tashilhunpo monastery, the Panchen Lamas main spiritual seat in Shigatse, the second largest town in Tibet, for the upkeep of the new Tibetan standing army. According to the missive

the prelate had supposedly left behind before his escape reveals his concern and inability to pay the “extraordinary tax” that roughly accounts to one-quarter of Tibet’s military expenses. The missive also reveals an important point that the prelate would seek financial assistance from Kham and Mongolia meaning that he initially had no intention of going to China.

During his exile, the Panchen Lama was bestowed the title “Great and Glorious Master Panchen Who Protects the Country and Propagates its Values ” following a request from an influential Chinese Education Minister Dai Jitao, who was believed to be a devout Buddhist. The title came with an annual allowance of 120, 000 Yuan. Not long after, the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC) gave the prelate the new title “Emissary in Charge of Spreading Values in the Western Region”. The MTAC would provide necessary resources to the prelate to ensure that everything would fall in the right political direction. The creation of MTAC in 1928 following a change in its name and institutional structure from old Qing Ministry ruling the Outer Provinces underlines Republican leaders emerging interest in Tibetan and Mongol issue.

In reciprocity, the Panchen Lama was planning to develop Tibet with much-needed help from the Chinese authorities. His development project primarily involved educational infrastructure and communication networks. The Ninth Panchen Lama like the Thirteenth Dalai Lama realized the importance of modernity during their exile years. Their dreams of modern Tibet in accordance with science and military didn’t materialize, unfortunately.

To facilitate the nuanced understanding of Sino-Tibetan relations of that era, the book is primarily divided into three parts. The first part deals with the economic and structural causes behind the flight of the prelate. The second part explores the prelate’s extensive role in renewal of Buddhism in China through transmission of great number of teachings and the creation of associations and Buddhist institutes. The final part is about the prelate’s desire to return home that unfortunately turned futile under the lack of sincere support from the Republican government and partly due to the lack of loyalty from some influential members of his own entourage.

Jagou has couple of takeaways for readers. First, the whole story revolves around the strategic importance of Tibet in the eyes of British India and the Republic of China. In the process of securing upper hand, British manipulated or encouraged the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to build a robust Tibetan army that could defend its sovereignty and act as a buffer between British India and China, while the Ninth Panchen Lama was manipulated by Chinese to achieve their vision. Second, the relationship between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama was genuinely friendly, but the inner circles of the two Lamas had sown discord between them to gain personal privileges.

As a reader I would highly recommend this book to those who are interested in knowing about Sino-Tibetan relations of the last century. It goes without saying that Jagou's excellent research makes her book one of a kind.