র্শান্তরশ্বিশাব্যর্শিশ TIBET QUARTERLY BRIEF

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TIBET QUARTERLY BRIEF

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¹ 臺灣國立政治大學選舉研究中心

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Photo:TPI

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Section II: English Articles

The Party, State and Tibet¹

Dr. Tenzin Desal, Senior Fellow

When the State Council issued its latest White Paper on Tibet on 10 November, 2023, it was no surprise that the document went about dishing out a long laundry list its supposed achievements in Tibet.

It remains significant that any refutaion of China's claims of achievements, it must be carried out with clear understanding of the organs of the party, the state and little of what remains of the Civil Society in the People's Republic of China. With that consideration in mind, I felt it would be useful to offer a short primer on structure of the political system that governs contemporary China. Hence, this paper is going to be more instructive and descriptive than analytical.

By the way of introduction, PRC is an authoritarian party-state that has been governed by a single political party, Communist Party of China (CPC) since Mao declared the inception of PRC in 1949. To put things into perspective, take India as a comparative example of a country that is commensurable in terms of geographical and population size. It would be unthinkable for many of us who assume democratic governance as a normative practice to accommodate such an idea, for instance either Indian National Congress or Bharatiya Janta Party ruling India since the founding of Republic with little or no opposition to speak of. How on earth! Right?

The Party and the State/Government: Party-state

For a little while in December 2022, it was debated when China's mouthpiece, Global Times contested that the acronym CPC should be employed instead of CCP for the Chinese Communist Party. The piece said that calling The Party, Chinese Communist Party amounts to "racism." In another article published in Australia's Canberra Times in 2021, it was argued that the CCP acronym is "racist" and even went on to say that all Chinese share similar sentiments. In order to illustrate this, a new narrative is built forming a part of new historiography of Chinese nationalism. Suffice to say, it is broadly acceptable to call it CCP.

The CCP is a powerful and operates an all-encompassing bureaucracy. It extends leadership over all areas of "endeavor in every part of the country." The party is above the state/government. This enmeshed and interlocking form of governance is replicated down to the level of small towns. Hence, the party leader in this power structure is higher in hierarchy than the government official. This makes Xi Jinping, who since 2012 as the General Secretary of the CCP, the most powerful man in the PRC. Besides holding other significant titles from which he draws his power from, this includes -- Chairman of the CCP's Central Military Commission. Here it is to be noted that the military falls under the supervision of the CCP, which has its armed wing -- the People's Liberation Army. Now extend another thought experiment, imagine a political party who has an armed wing, who serves at the pleasure of the party leaders and not the government.

In relation to China as a country, that is the People's Republic of China -- he is the head of the state -- the President of the PRC government. That in all frankness is a minor position compared to his

¹ Due to its brevity and precision, this piece has relied heavily on Susan V. Lawrence's excellent publication (Lawrence 2024).

role in the party and the military.

Anatomy of the Party

As mentioned earlier, the CCP has led China since 1949. The number of members of the CCP is according to an estimate hovers over 98 million. That is nearly 7 percent of China's population. To join CCP as a member, one has to go through a rigorous process of application process and is inducted only when vetted by the CCP.

The Party's most powerful and chief institution is the Central Committee. This is led by the General Secretary. And Xi Jinping, as mentioned earlier is the current General Secretary of the CCP. It has an elite 24 person politburo and above it, there is an even more selective group of a 7-member Political Standing Committee.

Following Xi Jinping, the Party's number 2 is Li Qiang, who is currently the Premier of the State Council. The State Council which will be discussed later is the cabinet of the China's Central People's Government. This is tasked to oversee the government's bureaucracy. Subordinate to this position, Vice Premiership is held by Ding Xuexiang who is no. 6 in party hierarchy.

In no. 3 of the Party hierarchy sits Zhao Leji, who is head of the National People's Congress. Which is often been labeled as rubber stamp law-making body. It is a unicameral legislative body. Members of this body are obviously not elected by enfranchised citizens. There are over 3,000 NPC delegates as they are referred to as. They are instead drawn from sub-national bodies.

Wang Huning sits as the Party's number 4. He heads the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). This is a supervisory body that goes out of its way, to garner support for the CCP from different levels and cross section of society, including those in the diaspora. There are organizations through which it employs to realize is objectives, such as the Communist Youth League; and ethnic minority, religious, and professional communities.

Cai Qi, currently sits as the no. 5 in the party hierarchy. He is tasked to manage the party secretariat and the bureaucracy of the CCP's Central Secretariat.

Party's hold over the state or the government is described to be more absolute since Xi Jinping came to power. Often straying into roles and duties that is generally been discharged by organizations in the realm of government. There are in essence, five functional departments under Xi Jinping.

Organization Department

This is the Party's personnel management agency. It is responsible for recruitment, training and appointment in civil services across party-state.

Publicity or Propaganda Department

Another crucial department which is often been translated as the Propaganda Department (it is also rendered in English as Publicity Department). It is responsible for messaging by the Party and to manage the cultural institutions, media and instructions on ideology.

United Front Work Department

A crucial department that is of relevance to Tibet is the United Front Work Department (UFWD). It is the very organ of the Party to which the representative of the H.H. the Dalai Lama was engaged in a dialogue with, although scholars have tended to argue that it has reached an impasse. This has been described by Mao as the Magic Weapon of the Party, whose role is very similar to that of CPPCC that is to co-opt and manage diverse social groups that are not part of the party.

The Commission for Political and Legal Affairs

This department is tasked to oversee "safeguarding of social stability." It is also tasked to maintain an oversight of the work of the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the Ministries of Public Security, State Security, and Justice. The heads of those institutions serve as commission members.

The International Department

The role of this department resembles institutions that existed in Soviet model. A long winding debate about the ideals of internationalism in communism and how nationalism is driving communism in China could be made. Nevertheless, this department is responsible for party-party relations with other communist regimes in the world.

The Government/State

The State Council is the government's top and most significant institution. This is led by the Premier, who more significantly is the no. 2 in terms of hierarchy in the Party. There are other state councilors who do not sit in the Politburo. Instead they are members of other senior party bodies and State council's party committee.

China's Two Sessions

There are two large meetings held every year. These are National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. National People's Congress, in theory is the most powerful and significant political organ that has the power to make laws. However, in practice it acts as a rubber-stamp body for the ruling CCP in passing laws and appointing leadership that have already been decided. On the other hand, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) has no legislative power. As it draws its members from myriad sectors of the society. Emerging debates on political, social, and economy out of this conference is nevertheless worth taking notes.

Will Lai Ching-te move away from Tsai Ing-wen: The Tibet Question in Taiwan's New Era*

Dr. Tenzin Lhadon, Research Fellow

Will Lai Ching-te move away from Tsai Ing-wen: The Tibet Question in Taiwan's New Era

On May 20th, 2024, Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party (DDP) will be sworn in as the 8th President of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in a ceremony that will be closely watched not just by its allies, but more importantly by the almost Sauron like fiery Eye of Beijing. The DPP's third consecutive presidential victory and fifth overall elicited a wave of positive acknowledgment from other "separatists' factions", a favored term of Beijing, including the Tibetan exile leadership, East Turkistan supporters, and Hong Kong advocates. The Dalai Lama's congratulatory message for Lai underscored the importance of Taiwan's "exercise of democracy" as "a source of encouragement for all of us who aspire to live in freedom and dignity". On his X account (formerly Twitter), the President of the Central Tibetan Administration, Penpa Tsering, drew a parallel between the Tibetan exile polity and Taiwan, stating that "As a democracy in exile, Tibetans profoundly admire the spirit of self-determination exemplified by the people of Taiwan".

Taiwanese and Tibetans are connected through the practice of Buddhism, and a small community of Tibetans and Tibetan monks reside in Taiwan, albeit with legal issues surrounding their residency. Politically, the two have always been entwined vis-à-vis their relations with the PRC.In her X post, the outgoing President of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen, expressed gratitude to the Dalai Lama for his recognition of "the importance of our exercise of democracy in Taiwan to freedom and dignity worldwide". Both Taiwan and Tibet pose a security problem for China precisely because they challenge Beijing's perception of its sovereignty and legitimacy to rule. The late Prof. Dawa Norbu noted that the Communist Party of China seesseveral similarities between Taiwan and Tibet in terms of the past and present issues that inform its vicious diatribe against the two.³ The DPP's first presidential victory in 2000 was built upon the emergence of a wave of native Taiwanese nationalism replacing thethen-ruling Kuomintangparty that continued to talk about a unified "China" albeit with a different leadership. Both the incumbent President, Tsai Ing-wen, and the newly elected President on January 13, Lai Ching-te, belong to the generation of Taiwanese born in Taiwan with a strong sense of Taiwanese national identity. Under such historical and present circumstances of an increasingly assertive Taiwanese identity and interests, separate from China, and an apparent blossoming relationship between Tibetans in exile and Taiwan, one would be predisposed to believe that the Tibet issue will be prominently figured in these changing realities of Taiwanese socio-politics, leading to significant progress in Tibet – Taiwan relations.

Despite such optimistic assumptions for the future, the reality remains that for Taiwan's leadership, whether it be the DPP or Kuomintang, the cross—straits relationship has always been prioritized over its support for the Tibetan National Movement (or even the Hong Kong or East Turkistan movements), and while its civil society has fostered and shared platforms with the latter, such transnational

^{*} This article was previously published in phayul.com on December 25, 2023

The Dalai Lama (2024), Congratulating Lai Ching-te, President-Elect, Taiwan, access on 1/15/2024 12:35 pm, https://www.dalailama.com/news/2024/congratulating-lai-ching-te-president-elect-taiwan

³ Ibid



(left) The Chairperson of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Tsai Ing-Wen with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in 2009 (right) Tsai at a Tibet support rally in Taipei

solidarity has been absent from Taipei's public statements or actions. It is no wonder that while Tsai Ing-wen gushes over the Dalai Lama's support for Taiwan's exercise of democracy, she never contemplated meeting the Tibetan leader even once during her eight years in office, despite repeated requests to do so from Tibetans and sections of Taiwanese society. While former Presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian met the Dalai Lama in 1997 and 2001 respectively, Tsai's refusal to follow in their footsteps disappointed many who believed her presidency would signal a shift from the conciliatory approach towards Beijing of her predecessor Ma Ying-jeou with regards to the Tibet issue. Ironically the Dalai Lama's third visit to Taiwan in 2009 occurred during Ma Ying-jeou's Presidential tenure, a KMT stalwart and a favorite of the CCP. When Tsai succeeded him as a DPP leader, with a perceived image of a staunch bulwark against Beijing, the Dalai Lama's visa to visit Taiwan in order to attend the 2019 Taiwan International Religious Freedom Forum and on the request

of many other supporters was denied. Although her government denied even having received a visa application⁴, RFA's interviews with participants of the forum confirmed that the Dalai Lama was invited but he was unable to attend due to interventions of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council⁵. In my interview with the then Representative of Taipei's Tibet Office and the current Director of the Tibet Policy Institute, Dawa Tsering, he revealed thatprior to the Dalai Lama's scheduled visit, his office received numerous correspondence from various channels imploring the Office of Tibet and thus the Dalai Lama to refrain from applying for the Taiwan visa in order to avoid antagonizing and suffering retaliation from Beijing. After much deliberations with the Dalai Lama, it was decided to comply with their requests. There was no public statement of rejection of the Dalai Lama's proposed visit, and the Taiwan government maintained the position that they hadn't received any application, a claim that was devoid of the actual context in which the decision was made.

The Tibet-Taiwan-China triangular relationship is commonly understood as a complex nexus, and that complexity and stagnancy persist even if China is 'taken' out of the equation, despite the impossibility of doing so in reality. Since the occupation of Tibet and the establishment of the Tibetan exile community in India and Nepal, the ROC, under Kuomintang, continued to maintain secretive relations with Tibetans inside and outside Tibet, and a rising antagonistic relationship with the Tibetan exile leadership, particularly with regards to the activities of the ROC's Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (MTAC). It was the visit of the Dalai Lama to Taipei in 1997 that signaled a significant warming and shift in these relations, which was followed by two other visits in 2001 and 2009. Although the controversial vocational training program, run by the MTAC, for Tibetans from India to Taiwan, ended in 1999, following the visit of the Dalai Lama several Tibetans have moved to Taiwan either as part of individual ventures or for religious purposes. The institutionalization of this relationship was formalized in the establishment of the Office of Tibet in Taipei, immediately

⁴ Ping, Yu (2019). "Sources says Taiwanese President Tsai revoked Dalai Lama's invitation to Taiwan", Taiwan News, Access on 23/01/2024, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3717574

⁵ Radio Free Asia (2019) "宗教团体曝蔡英文政府阻挠达赖喇嘛、热比娅访台". Access on 23/01/2024,

https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/gangtai/hx-05302019114613.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=%20蔡英文

following the visit of the Dalai Lama in 1997.6

However, Tibet and Tibetans continue to be obscured in the public perception of Taiwanese social and political demographic, whether it be due to the overwhelming presence of the cross—strait tension or the "government's restriction of information on Tibet". During my year-long stay in Taiwan in 2017 as a Research Fellow, I encountered a similar reaction from the Taiwanese students, and general populace with regards to Tibet. I was rather amused by their wonder of seeing a Tibetan who was not a monk. On further pressing them on the matter, they spoke about how in their school textbooks, Tibetans were portrayed as individuals who lived on high mountains, with dark sun burnt skin and rosy cheeks. Their incredulous surprise on seeing a Tibetan woman who did not fit this mold was shocking, to say the least, displaying a severe lack of awareness of Tibet and Tibetans, which was compounded by the existence of such racial stereotypes. It would be too simplistic to condense it down to a mere lack of engagement at the policy level, but the reality remains that outside of Buddhism, Tibet, and Tibetans have not received a nuanced and realistic focus at various levels of Taiwanese society.

Was Tibet an independent country before its occupation by Communist China? Does it have the right to be one in the future? These questions lie at the core of the Tibet – Taiwan relationship. I spoke at the Geneva Forum in 2023, on the "One China" narrative in International Relations, and how Beijing's push for its discourse with limited international resistance adds to its legitimacy and diplomatic muscle. Nicole Su, the Director General of the Taipei Cultural and Economic Delegation in Geneva, wholeheartedly agreed with this observation, and the continuing presence of Taiwan's representatives in such CTA-led forums speaks to the mutual interests that bind the two. Sikyong Penpa Tsering of the CTA, in his 2021 meeting with the Taiwanese Representative to India, Baushuan Ger, highlighted the mutual interest and concerns of the Tibetan and Taiwanese people.⁸

However, this "camaraderie" does not reappear in the Taiwanese government's official position on Tibet. Taiwan and Tibet "stand together" when it comes to opposing China but on a governmental level there has never been any indication of any support for Tibet's "core issue" which is freedom from Communist occupation or the official position of the CTA i.e. genuine autonomy under the Middle Way Approach. Both theROC and PRC claim Tibet as part of China, and while the KMT and the CCP have disagreed vehemently over the governance of China, both have notsupportedany change in Tibet's present occupied status. The DDP, unlike the KMT, has moved away from any vestigial ambitions of replacing the CCP as China's government and has solely focused on governing Taiwan as a separate entity from the PRC. However, it has continued to maintain its silence on Tibet, and its political futureto avoid antagonizing its cross-straits neighbor. This absence of reciprocity on its "mutual interest" with Tibetans is a major limitation in any hope of translating the relationship into a position of potential strength.

https://tibetoffice.eu/offices-of-tibet/

7 Uncle Sam (1976), Taiwan and Tibet, Tibetan Review, Vol. XI Nos. 1&2, January-February 1976 I&2, pp. 18-19, 25

⁶ Bureau du Tibet, Brussels. "Offices of Tibet". access on 1/15/2024,

⁸ CTA (2021), Sikyong Meets Taiwanese Ambassador H.E. Baushuan Ger at New Delhi, Central Tibetan Administration, access on 1/17/2024, https://tibet.net/sikyong-meets-taiwanese-ambassador-h-e-baushuan-ger-at-new-delhi/

⁹ Uncle Sam (1976), Taiwan and Tibet, Tibetan Review, Vol. XI Nos. 1&2, January-February 1976

I&2, pp. 18-19, 25

Such limitations have been materialized in the striking difference of support or acknowledgment of Tibet and Tibetans between the political leadership in Taipei and Taiwan's Civil Society. While the engagement and solidarity between Tibetan exile society and Taiwan's NGOs have increased in recent years (such as the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and a few DPP legislative members¹⁰), the same cannot be said for the Taiwanese political leadership. During Tsai-Ing Wen's presidency, the Dalai Lama did not make a single visit to the country, despite its strong Buddhist population. While Tsai refused to meet the Tibetan and global leader as Taiwan's President, she did not harbor such reservations during her meeting with the Dalai Lama in 2009 when she was still rising in the ranks of her party and Taiwan's political leadership. She has even participated in Tibet support rallies, but that level of support was drastically reduced once she became President.

Tibet and the Tibetan issue receive solidarity not just from Taiwan's NGOs, but also through its political sector, but that is limited to the lower rungs of the latter. It remains to be seen whether Lai Ching-te will seek to either emulate Tsai Ing-wen, the President of the Republic of China, or Tsai Ing-wen before her rise to the Presidency. Dawa Tsering, during our interview, noted that Lai Ching – te during his time as Mayor of Tainan City, visited the Office of Tibet to express gratitude for the Dalai Lama's aid for the earthquake that devastated his city. His Vice President-elect, Hsiao Bi-khim, has frequently participated in Free Tibet rallies and served as Vice-Chair of the Taiwanese Parliamentary Group for Tibet when she was a Member of Parliament¹¹. Similar to Tsai-Ing wen's 'promotion' from a DPP member to President, it would be too much of a stretch of one's hope for Taiwan, under the new leadership of Lai and Hsiao, to acknowledge Tibet's inherent right to determine its future. However, the Taiwanese Government's policies vis-à-vis its allies not just Tibetans, but also Hong Kongers, Uyghurs, and Mongolians will be a litmus test of its mettle against Beijing's aggressive demands for integration.





(left) Dr. Lai Ching-te, the mayor of Tainan City visited the Office of Tibet and met with the former Representative for Taiwan, Mr. Dawa Tsering in 2016, as a gratitude for the Dalai Lama's donation for the devastating earthquake in Tainan. (right) Hsiao Bi-khimin a Free Tibet rally

https://tibet.net/newly-formed-parliamentary-group-for-tibet-says-dalai-lama-should-be-allowed-to-visit-taiwan-with-out-any-restriction/

To Tsering, Dolma (2021), Is there hope for Taiwan-Tibet relations? East Asia Forum, access on 1/15/2024, https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/11/29/is-there-hope-for-taiwan-tibet-relations/

¹¹ Central Tibetan Administration (2020), Newly formed Taiwanese Parliamentary Group for Tibet says Dalai Lama should be allowed to visit Taiwan without any restriction from China, access on 1/15/2024

Beijing's Weapon of Mass Deception

Tenzin Dalha, Research Fellow

The Chinese pioneered the notorious use of surreptitious methods to distort online discussions and suppress dissent more than a decade ago, but the practice has since gone global. Such state-led interventions present a major threat to the notion of the internet as a liberating technology. The use of "fake news," automated "bot" accounts, disinformation campaigns and other manipulative methods are more emphasized and prioritized by the Chinese regime.

A Harvard study demonstrated that the Chinese government fabricates as many as 488 million fake posts on Chinese social media annually. (Wertime 2019) A more current study analyzed 50 million comments on Chinese news sites, only to find that one-sixth of them were fake. The Chinese manipulation of the internet and social media is at an unprecedented level.

Xi Jinping has been pushing hard to upgrade the technology at the disposal of China's security forces (Lin 2022). He believes that the CCP's domestic power will be enhanced if authoritarianism is prevalent and democracies are dysfunctional—fellow despots will not punish China for rights abuses, and the Chinese people will not want to emulate the chaos of liberal systems. He thinks that preventing revolts against authoritarianism in other countries will lower the odds of such a revolt erupting in China. And he believes that silencing critics abroad will limit the challenges facing the CCP within China. He sees rolling back democracy overseas as part of his plan to enhance his government's totalitarian control.

Beijing spends billions of dollars annually on an "antidemocratic toolkit" of nongovernmental organizations, media outlets, diplomats, advisors, hackers, and bribes all designed to prop up autocrats and sow discord in democracies (Lin 2022). China has started an Information Warfare, it has employed over 14,000 journalists and propagandists to neutralize American influence and spread disinformation on every continent. (Dhawan 2020) It is propelling newspapers worldwide to spread disinformation. In India in the recent past Chennai based newspaper, 'The Hindu' has been seen carrying many such inserts, glorifying China. China has a whopping \$6.8 billion budget for this disinformation exercise called da waixuan (大外宣), or 'grand foreign propaganda'.

With more than one billion internet users (State Council 2023), China certainly has the capability to orchestrate large-scale social media campaigns, and target what it sees as anti-China voices with a wealth of opposing opinions. The use of fake profile pictures in disinformation campaigns is becoming more common as users and platforms become more wary of suspicious accounts. Instead of relying on expensive and potentially rebellious armies to brutalize a resentful population, an autocrat will now have more insidious means of control. Millions of spies can be replaced with hundreds of millions of unblinking cameras. Facial-recognition technologies can rapidly sort through video feeds and identify troublemakers. Bots can deliver propaganda tailored to specific groups. Malware can be installed on computers through seemingly innocuous apps or links, and then government hackers can crash the computer networks of dissidents or gather information on their operations. That information, in turn, can be used to co-opt resistance movements by bribing their leaders or meeting their more innocuous demands. Alternatively, authorities can print out an AI-assembled list of alleged activists

and threaten everyone on it.

The Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) revealed a network of social media accounts that distort international perceptions on significant issues, elevate China's reputation amongst its supporters, and discredit claims critical of the Chinese Government. The report further highlighted the coordinated influence operation on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. They use a mix of artificial and repurposed accounts to push pro-China narratives and distort perceptions on important issues. The narratives amplified by the accounts are like those promoted by Chinese Government officials and China state-linked media."

The Facebook parent company Meta took down a network of 4,789 fake Facebook accounts originating from China that were apparently designed to polarize voters ahead of the 2024 election. Meta again removed 13 accounts and seven groups with Chinese origins that primarily targeted India and Tibet, for violating its policy against coordinated inauthentic behavior according to the company's latest quarterly Adversarial Threat Report. (Meta 2023) The accounts posed as journalists, lawyers and human rights activists. Some also operated accounts using the same names and profile pictures of Xi Jinping and made criticism of the Dalai Lama.

The government-employed troll army, proficient in multiple languages and reportedly numbering from five hundred thousand to two million, works to post comments on the internet, praising the image and integrity of the CCP and attack its critics with the intention of fabricating facts as well as removing content deemed as unfavorable. They are specifically employed across multiple government propaganda departments, private co-operations, and news outlets.

The use of fake profile pictures in disinformation campaigns in popular social media accounts. It is becoming more common as users and platforms become more wary of suspicious accounts. By analyzing the flow of comments, it is evident that the trolls typically avoid arguments or direct discussions, which is indicative of their lack of knowledge and information on the issues being discussed. Instead, they focus on posting CCP's deceptive narratives in multiple languages filled with propaganda or baseless allegations.

By studying the outflow usage of Tibetan language in controversial Facebook posts and comments, it could be assumed that the troll army also employs Tibetans from Tibet or Chinese netizens well versed in the Tibetan language. Many rely on automatic translation software to turn Chinese messages into Tibetan, meaning such messages are riddled with typos, or contain clumsy grammatical structures.

Beijing has exploited search engine results on a range of topics of geopolitical importance to disseminate state-backed media that amplify the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda. Search engines play a key role in Beijing's effort to shape external perceptions, which makes it crucial that platforms—along with authoritative outlets that syndicate state-backed content without clear labeling—do more to address their role in spreading these narratives. A consensus has emerged that fake news is false news spread in an organized and systematic way, with consistent efforts made to make them appear as true, and with a skilled use of new technologies and social networks that distinguished them from Cold-War-era disinformation.

"Wolf warrior diplomacy" has emerged, with officials using Twitter accounts to fly the flag for Communist Party rhetoric. China wants to portray itself as being more liberal and freer.

Pro-China propaganda networks flood YouTube with spam, political messages about Taiwan, US, etc. Ukraine Google's threat analysis group says a China-linked influence network will spread tens of thousands of spams and political messages on its platforms in 2022 (Pan 2023).

China has knowingly put at risk the safety and security of dissidents and activists all over the world and strengthened rogue and undemocratic regimes with the involvement of various media outlets, referred to a leaked document from Chinese authorities asserting that Beijing had launched an information war, using disinformation, online harassment, and trolling campaigns to manipulate public opinions in Tibetan. In addition to the internet China is employing every possible means available at its disposal to plant fake news. If China aspires to become a trusted global partner in fair and transparency, they need to address growing domestic and international distrust over how its companies and government agencies gather, use and share and instrumentalize data.

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China's New "Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Ecological Protection Law": A threat to Tibet's Environment

Dechen Palmo, Research Fellow

The new "Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Ecological Protection Law", gives Beijing expanded legal grounds for designating Tibetan areas as nature reserves area and removal of Tibetan nomads from their land in the name of conservation. However, the mining companies can continue to exploit the resources if they follow the so-called "ecological protection requirement".

The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Ecological Protection Law of the People's Republic of China is a new law formulated by the Standing Committee of the Fourteenth National People's Congress in Beijing on April 26, 2023. This law comes into effect from 1st September 2023. It has seven chapters, including general provisions, ecological security layout, ecological protection and restoration, ecological risk prevention and control, guarantee and supervision, legal responsibilities, and supplementary provisions, with a total of 63 articles. This law applies to the whole of Tibet and Xinjiang.

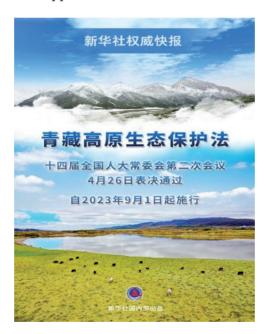


Figure 1. Qinghai-Tibet Ecological Protection Law¹

Problematic law

The implementation of this law will have immense social and ecological impact and it is deeply worrying. Article 16 of the law specifies that "The state supports the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet nature reserves system". I do acknowledge that the Tibetan plateau with its rich biodiversity,

1 Xinhuanet, There is a law to protect the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau ecology, April 26, 2023

http://env.people.com.cn/n1/2023/0426/c1010-32673998.html

2 中华人民共和国青藏高原生态保护法

(Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Ecological Protection Law of the People's Republic of China), NPC Observer,

needs such protection and conservation and the nature reserves are considered as the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation. However Tibetan people shouldn't be the ones to pay for the conservation effort.

The construction of nature reserves on the Tibetan Plateau began in 1963, since then there are 155 nature reserves of various types were constructed on the Tibetan Plateau with an area of 822,400km2, accounting for 31.97% of the plateau's land area.³

To make a way for nature reserves, the Chinese government has been implementing policies of resettlement, land confiscation, herding size limit, and fencing of pastoral areas inhabited primarily by Tibetans dramatically curtailing their livelihood. These resettlement policies in Tibet are usually carried out without free, prior, and informed consent in violation of international mandates and principles. ⁴Local Tibetan people have no right to challenge them or refuse to participate.

According to the International Campaign for Tibet, almost 2 million Tibetan nomads have been systematically stripped of their ancestral lands and relegating them to smaller plots of marginal land.5To make room for wildlife, tourism, and industry, the Chinese government is using nature reserves as a pretext to drive the world last great nomadic societies away from the lands and animals they have lived with for generations. Designating Tibetan nomadic areas as nature reserves carries a heavy human cost with many Tibetan people facing arrest and beating, harassment, and being forced to leave their grassland.

China's rush to designate many nature reserves in Tibet can be attributed in part to China's desire to win global recognition as well as they can get grab their lands and relocate them to the colonies where they can kept under tight surveillance.

José Francisco CalíTzay, The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in her reports, she highlighted multiple human rights violations in protected areas ranging from "denied their rights to land and resources, self-determination and autonomy and cultural heritage and suffer from forced eviction, killings, physical violence and abusive persecution". ⁶

The article 33 of the law says that it "It is prohibited by law to engage in sand mining and mining activities that do not comply with ecological protection control requirements in the nature reserves at the source of rivers such as the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Lancang River, Yarlung Zangbo River, and Nu River". The unclear rendering of the term "ecological protection requirement" is likely deliberate

https://npcobserver.com/legislation/qinghai-tibet-plateau-ecological-conservation-law/

https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/431/62/PDF/N2243162.pdf?OpenElement

³ Zhang Yili, WuXue, QiWei, LiShicheng, Bai Wanqi. Characteristics and protection effectiveness of nature reserves on the Tibetan Plateau, China [J]. Resources Science, 2015, 37(7): 1455-1464.

⁴ Nyima Y, Yeh E. The Construction of Consent for High-altitude Resettlement in Tibet. The China Quarterly. 2023; 254:429-447. doi:10.1017/S0305741023000206

⁵ International Campaign for Tibet, Mass relocations continue: 17,000 Tibetans to leave homes by august. July 5, 2022. https://savetibet.org/mass-relocations-continue-17000-tibetans-to-leave-homes-by-august/#:~:text=This%20 has%20led%20to%20the,their%20livelihood%2C%20poverty%20and%20marginalization.

⁶ José Francisco Calí Tzay, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, , Protected areas and indigenous peoples' rights: the obligations of States and international organizations .

and it can open up a Pandora's Box of mining activities in the future. This shows that the mining can still be conducted in the nature park but with some restrictions. While not entirely forbidding mineral resource exploitation, the law requires such activities to be "strictly limited".

The Chinese central or provincial government can adjust the border of the reserve to make a way for the mining companies to mine without any consequences.⁷ Is this conservation or something more akin to bullying the weak and exploitation of the land in the interests of the powerful?

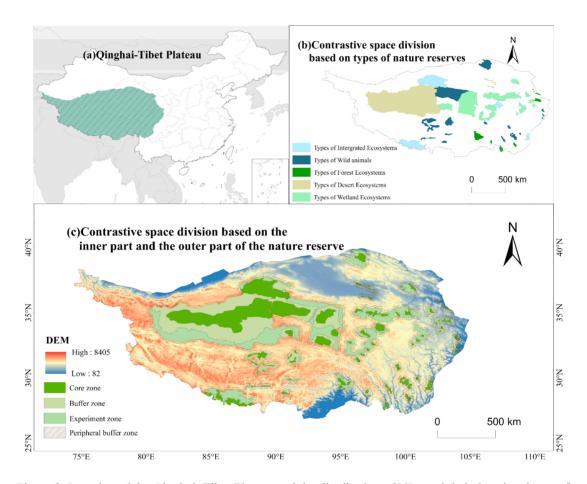


Figure 2. Location of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the distribution of NRs and their functional zones.8

Articles 9 and 10 of the law call the relevant department of the state Council and local people's government at all levels to support and encourage individuals or groups who contribute to the ecological protection of the Tibetan plateau. However, in reality, there is an increasing attack and the criminalization of environmental defenders. It is a clear violation of the environmental rule of law and an affront to the rights, roles, and contributions of Tibetan individuals and groups protecting

⁷ Shi Yi, Tibetan nature reserves shrunk to make way for mines, august12, 2014. The Third Pole, https://www.theth-irdpole.net/en/energy/tibetan-nature-reserve-shrunk-to-make-way-for-mines/

⁸ Jiang, Mingjun, Xinfei Zhao, Run Wang, Le Yin, and Baolei Zhang. 2023. "Assessment of Conservation Effectiveness of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Nature Reserves from a Human Footprint Perspective with Global Lessons" Land 12, no. 4: 869. https://doi.org/10.3390/land12040869

our environment. The law doesn't cover the respect for human rights for the sustainability of our environment. Between 2010 and 2019, nine Tibetan human rights defenders- Anya Sengdra, DorjeeDaktal, KelsangChoklang, Dhongye, RinchenNamdol, TsultrimGonpo, JangchupNgodup, SogruAbhu and Namesy – were arrested after they protested against illegal mining activities at the sacred mountains and exposed the hunting of endangered species in Qinghai Province, Sichuan Province and the Tibetan Autonomous Province.⁹

Emily Yeh has rightly called most of the so-called protected areas in China "paper parks" which look good on paper but lack addressing the conservation efforts.¹⁰ What is the point of conservation, if these protected areas are lacking in staff, management and funding and being overrun by mining companies?

Long-standing agenda

Nothing is surprising in implementing this new environmental law covering the whole of Tibet. They are keeping with the trend of putting forward new concepts, new ideas, new strategies and as soon as Xi Jinping became the president of China.

As per the new law, the law was formulated to build a national ecological civilization highland. Ecological civilization is an axiom of Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, commonly known as Xi Jinping's thought.¹¹ This phrase was enshrined in the Chinese communist party constitution in 2012. The CPC Central Committee and the state council attach great importance to the development of ecological civilization. One of the many policies and plans that have been unveiled in this regard is expanding the nature reserves system.¹² According to the Global Times, state-backed media outlet, China is going to build the world's largest national park system. "There were 49 candidate areas across the country. Among them, 13 are located on the Qinghai-Xizang (Tibet) Plateau with a total area of about 777,000 square kilometers, accounting for 70 percent of the total coverage of national parks"¹³ Upon completion, China will have the largest-scale national park protection zone in the world.

This policy is purely ornamental and it is just to cover their main intention of removing Tibetan nomads who have preserved Tibetan culture and tradition for generations. China encourages Tibetan nomads to abandon their traditional nomadic lifestyle in favor of settling down in settlement to pursue income-generating activities. Such government practice will lead to the loss of traditional knowledge

- 9 International Campaign for Tibet, ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS OF TIBET CHINA'S PERSECUTION OF TIBETAN ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS, June 2022, https://savetibet.org/wp-content/up-loads/2022/08/2205-ICFT-Report V8.pdf
- 10 Emily Yeh, Do china's nature reserves only exist on paper?February 3, 2014. https://chinadialogue.net/en/nature/6696-do-china-s-nature-reserves-only-exist-on-paper/
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- 13 Global Times, China to build world's largest national park system, selecting 49 spots including 13 on Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, Dec 30, 2022. https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202212/1282951.shtml

of the Tibetan people.

This will also further attract a large number of mining companies to exploit Tibet's resources and bring more Chinese migrant workers to Tibet. It will also allow ecotourism projects to come up as Nature Park while further weakening the power of local Tibetans in deciding the future of their grassland.

Failure to protect Tibet's environment

According to the People's Daily News, there are more than 30 laws concerning the ecological and environmental protection as well as over 100 administrative regulations in China and over 1,000 local laws and regulations putting various natural resources -- including mountains, waters, forests, fields, lakes, grasses, deserts, glaciers and Snow Mountains -- under sound legal protection.¹⁴

Although there is a dramatic growth in laws to protect the environment, China has failed to protect Tibet's fragile environment. There is a continuous degradation of the grassland and desertification, retreating glaciers and permafrost degradation persist. The United Nations Environment Programme's Scientific Assessment of the Third Pole Environment, published in April 2022, found that an intensifying water cycle was leading to more frequent glacial lake outburst floods and ice collapses. By the end of the century, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau will be warmer and wetter, possibly causing yet more disasters.¹⁵

What should worry us even more is that on top of global warming, there will be more mining and the relocation of Tibetan nomads with more nature parks with the implementation of this new law. The implications are frightening to imagine.

The main drivers of biodiversity decline such as climate change, pollution, changes in land use, and overconsumption must be addressed. Simply expanding nature reserves without forcefully relocating Tibetan peoples who are dependent on those areas is not the solution.

A way forward to protect Tibet's fragile biodiversity is to engage with local communities. Tibetan nomadic way of life and knowledge need to be preserved and protected, together with the lands that they inhabit. The Chinese government should respect the rights of the Tibetan people by not excluding them from their territories in the name of conservation. It will ultimately benefit Tibet, China, and the whole planet.

¹⁴ Xinhua, China passess landmark law to protect Qinghai-Tibet Plateau ecosystem, People's Daily Online, April 27, 2023.http://en.people.cn/n3/2023/0426/c90000-20011582.html

¹⁵ Yang Yong, Expedition notes: Warming shocks the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, July 4, 2023. China Dialogue https://chinadialogue.net/en/climate/expedition-notes-warming-threatens-the-qinghai-tibet-plateau/

Mining pollution of Rivers in Tibet: a Brief Analysis

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Tibet is often known as the water tower of Asia. This means that major rivers that run into many of the Southeast Asian countries emerge from Tibet. A water resource originating from Tibet shared by different downstream countries is used for irrigation, hydropower development, industry, and domestic use. An assessment of river quality is vital if one has to understand the role of the Tibetan Plateau as the origin of water resources in Southeast Asian countries. By assessing the river quality, it is also important to implement proper scientific research on the effects of mining on river quality and how to overcome such negative impacts on the river.

Based on several research findings, the rivers in Tibet are contaminated with heavy metals. The contamination of heavy metals has severely polluted the rivers and reduced the water quality. Natural processes and anthropogenic factors are considered the reasons for pollution. However, my presentation at the 4th Tibet Environment Conference was on mining as the main anthropogenic pollutants for river pollution in Tibet.

In a few research papers, it was written that mining has caused direct river pollution. However, many other research papers are there, that do not link river pollution directly to mining. For example, a paper titled Environmental impact of mining activities on the surface water quality in Tibet: Gyama Valley, published in June 2010, a paper reported that "The environment risk at the Gyamaxung chu source area where the measured contents correspond to geochemical background was zero". The study further noted, "The great Gyama project is about to be launched in the valley despite lack of adequate understanding of the hydrogeochemistry of the heavy metals in this very sensitive environment and without environmental impacts being assessed."

Gyamaxung chu is located south of Gyama Valley and it drains into the Lhasa River and finally merging into Yarlung Tsangpo. The locals in Lhasa city use the underground water of a well which is at the north bank of this river as the main source of drinking water therefore study warned that, the poor tailings and gangue piles of mine' water can contaminate the groundwater through seepage in future and can risk to human health.

The river is an important natural resource. It is widely used for migration, transportation, navigation, irrigation, power generation, etc., and especially used for freshwater resources. As far as the Tibetan Plateau is concerned, the rivers start from here into other countries in South East Asia. Therefore, pollution created in the Tibetan Plateau will run into downstream countries. This contaminated river will destroy the ecosystem and pose a serious risk to the human health of the river basin. Toxic elements such as As and Cr are toxic because those elements cannot biodegrade and easily accumulate in water bodies and sediment. The physical and chemical parameters of water bodies that as pH and Eh can easily change with mining.

According to a paper titled, Heavy Metal Pollution and Environmental Risks in the Water of Rongna River Caused by Natural AMD around Tiegelongnan Copper Deposit, the river flowing through mining areas is more likely to get polluted with heavy metals. In their paper, they observed that the

Rongma River which flows through the Tiegelongnan Copper Deposit gets polluted due to acid mine drainage formed in the middle of the ore body. This acid mine drainage that has polluted the river has caused serious ecological damage. For example, the disappearance of vegetation near the river and the formation of yellow froth in the river. Tiegelongnan Copper Deposit is located in the Oma (Ch: Wuma) township of Gerze County in Ngari prefecture with an estimated more than 11 million tons of copper ore reserve. After analyzing the source of heavy metals in Rongma River, it was noted that "the main pollution in the water was also Cu, Zn, Ni, Mn, and Cd, indicating that these heavy metals are mainly derived from AMD.

The acidic water produced in the mining area may be the main reason that the Rongna River is polluted by heavy metals."They have identified the distribution of heavy metals in the Rongma River and they write before acid mine drainage entered into the river, the concentration of heavy metals in the upper reaches of the Rongna River (R1) was similar to that of the Bolong River. After acid mine drainage entered into the Rongma River, the concentration of heavy metals such as Cu, Zn, Mn, Pb, Cr, and Ni became 60.36, 5.23, 25.65, 3.00, 2.15 and 2.60 higher than Bolong River.

Based on research findings on Water quality in the Tibetan Plateau: Major ions and trace elements in rivers of the "Water Tower of Asia" published in August 2018, the minerals deposits such as copper ore and lead zinc ore near the Yarlung Tsangpo basin have polluted the Yarlung Tsangpo river. Chemicals such as Cd, Cr, Pb, and Zn in the YarlungTsanpo River were found three to ten times higher than other rivers in the Tibetan Plateau and the world. As the report noted river pollution in the Tibetan Plateau comes from anthropogenic sources, municipal waste from the plateau is another factor that has caused the river contamination by heavy metals. They further added that municipal waste has been directly thrown into the river without proper management for many decades. There is another paper titled Water Quality in the Tibetan Plateau: Metal Content Four Selected Rivers which also reported that there are no municipal waste treatment facilities in an area.

This study was carried out in April and May of 2006 on four rivers Salween, Mekong, Yangtze River, and YarlungTsangpo. The samples were collected and taken for analysis for Cu, Pb, Zn,Ag,Mo, Cd, Co, Cr, Ni, Li, Mn, Al, Fe, Mg, and Hg. In their analysis of the Salween River, they write that Tsenchu is a tributary of the Salween River and this river is a drinking water source and a domestic wastewater recipient for the town of Nakchu. Similarly, in their analysis of the Mekong River, they write "No municipal waste treatment facilities are available here. All liquid and solid wastes are "naturally" discarded directly into the rivers. The Dzachu and Ngomchu both serve as drinking water sources and as domestic wastewater recipients for the town".

In the Yangtse River analysis of heavy metals concentration, they took the samples from different areas namely 20 to 33 sites, they mentioned that the concentration of copper at site 26 which is at Chunyido villages is found highest in the survey with a copper concentration of 14.6 mg/L even though the concentration of Aland Fe that is 0.5 to 1.7 mg/were found in high concentration as compared to other. However, they do not mention that the highest concentration of copper was detected due to its direct linkage with the Yulong copper mine with an estimation of 6.5 million tons of reserves in Chunyido village but they have mentioned that Samples 24, 25, and 26 and 27 were taken from the two creeks which is near to mining site and the sample26 which shows the highest level of copper is one among the four sample that was taken from creeks around the mining area.

As reported in a paper titled Water Quality in the Tibetan Plateau: Major Ions and Trace Elements in Rivers of the "Water Tower of Asia", the source of river pollution from Hg and Ti in rivers is unclear but they write that those toxic elements are deposited with copper, lead, zinc, and other heavy metals sulfide ores. Those ores are generally developed near rivers. From this understanding, it tells that Hg and Ti pollution of rivers come from ores.

Conclusion

The river pollution in the Tibetan Plateau comes from mining. About many reports, some have evidence that shows mining has directly polluted the river yet on the other side, there are few other reports that do not link river pollution with mining but their reports suggest that due to the presence of mine sites in an area, river get contaminated with heavy metals. Another problem is the waste material treatment facilities. Maybe there are no adequate management facilities for municipal and domestic waste products, which have led to locals directly throwing their waste into the river. Therefore, it is necessary to build a proper waste management system in towns.



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