

# **Incomparable Warriors: Non-violent Resistance in Contemporary Tibet**

*'The Tibet movement is the most successful resistance movement in modern history. Nowhere in the world has the spirit of freedom been kept alive as in Tibet. Once the Tibetans give up hope for their future, the story is over.'*

- Brahma Chellani, senior analyst at the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research and commentator on strategic and defence issues

The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa wrote the following lines during his escape from Tibet to India in 1999, envisioning a golden age for Tibet:

*Radiating their brilliant sunlight to all beings,  
Lineage holders are free of all bias  
And not covered by the dusky veils of wrongdoing,  
Present above our crown and seated on a swaying lotus,  
They play the victorious drum of true Dharma that never fades.  
May the memory of these warriors without compare,  
Who, for the sake of honesty and truth, risk even their treasured body or life,  
Always burn within the heart and mind of our Tibetan people  
Right here, where their fame has found a home.*

*From the poem A Song of Blossoming Goodness to Celebrate the Youth's Golden Age, included in Music in the Sky: The Life, Art and Teachings of the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje by Michele Martin (Snow Lion Publications, 2003)*

## Dedication

*Incomparable Warriors: Non-violent Resistance in Contemporary Tibet* is dedicated to the memory of the five nuns who died at Drapchi prison in June 1998, Tsultrim Zangmo, Drugkyi Pema, Khedron Yonten, Tashi Lhamo and Lobsang Wangmo, and the other courageous Tibetans who, in the words of the 17th Karmapa, risked 'even their treasured body or life' in the pursuit of non-violent resistance against Chinese rule.

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### **Incomparable Warriors**

*Non-violent resistance in contemporary Tibet*

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## Anthem of the Uprising

Rise up! For ten long years,  
persecuted by our enemy,  
our very flesh torn from the bone!  
persecuted by our enemy,  
our very flesh torn from the bone!

In 1959, in desperation the people of Tibet  
rose up for truth and justice.  
In desperation the people of Tibet  
rose up for truth and justice.

Rise up, rise up, you who love Tibet.  
Rise up, rise up, you people of the world;  
Support us, hear our cries for justice!  
Rise up, rise up, you people of the world;  
Support us, hear our cries for justice!

Protector of Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama,  
only true leader of Tibetans everywhere.  
His Holiness the Dalai Lama,  
only true leader of Tibetans everywhere.

Oh enemy with butcher's bloody hands,  
murderous red Chinese,  
we are going to drive you from Tibet!  
Rise up, all you who love Tibet!

# Preface

by John Ackerly

Tibetans have a long history of resistance - long before they fought against the British invasion in 1904, the Chinese invasion in 1949-50 and the uprising against the Chinese authorities on 10 March 1959, which led to the Dalai Lama's flight to India. As this exceptional collection of writings reveals, in the last 50 years, there have been signs of resistance to the Chinese presence in Tibet and the assertion of Tibetan identity everywhere from the secret shrines to the Dalai Lama and bold display of the banned Tibetan national flag to the impassioned speeches of the 10th Panchen Lama in support of Tibetan language and culture before his death in 1989.

In September 1987 I happened to be in Lhasa with a friend at the time of a pro-independence demonstration, marking the beginning of three years of protest activity that culminated in the imposition of martial law in 1989. I managed to capture historic photos of thousands of Tibetans bravely demonstrating in the streets, some of which are included in this book. Hundreds of Tibetans were arrested, and I vividly remember the fear in the faces of those in the back of military jeeps as they were taken off to be interrogated. Then our turn came. We were pushed into the back of a jeep. During our three days of interrogation, the officials were not so interested in why we carried 'subversive' literature, such as a book by the Dalai Lama, or why we had taken pictures of the demonstration. They were more practical; they wanted names of Tibetans who we had met and talked to so that they could be arrested. They also demanded to know if we believed Tibet had been an independent country and if we were willing to defend our position. Because I was a Western tourist, I was one of the lucky few who was not tortured. It is humbling to think of the many Tibetans who stood up to their interrogators while being tortured, and stuck to their beliefs.

While the heart and soul of Tibetan resistance lies in the hundreds of thousands of Tibetans who risk their lives every year inside Tibet, its leader, the Dalai Lama lives on the southern side of the Himalayas, in India, a great democracy. Thousands of Tibetans have gone to prison because they believe in the Dalai Lama, respect his authority and would not renounce him. But for his part, the Dalai Lama has told Tibetans not to sacrifice themselves in the daily loyalty charades imposed by the Communist Party. Denounce me, he says, if that is what they require you to do. What is important is in your heart.

When the International Campaign for Tibet was established in 1988, virtually no Presidents and Prime Ministers would meet the Dalai Lama, who was living in northern India, isolated by China's growing influence. But by the late 1980s, he had begun to attract attention for his unflinching dedication to non-violence and his ability to reach out across religious, political and ethnic boundaries. He was becoming a leading international voice not only for his people, but also for global human rights, the environment and an end to the deadly arms trade. For this, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, catapulting himself and the Tibetan resistance movement to international attention.

The great non-violent leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, insisted that participants in their political movements remain completely non-violent, but they used tactics that often led to violence by their oppressors. Marches, boycotts, and sit-ins often brought a predictably violent response from the authorities which, when covered in the media, helped to hasten the demise of unjust laws. The Dalai Lama has taken non-violence a step further, wanting to avoid violence altogether. It is his deeply felt belief that violence, no matter who commits it, cannot present a lasting solution and will only provoke more violence.

As Jonathan Mirsky writes in this book:

*'Why then has the Tibetan opposition to the Chinese occupation been so strikingly non-violent - apart from the guerrilla operations - since the Dalai Lama's flight in 1959? This is not a mystery. It is because of the Dalai Lama himself who has implacably urged non-violence on his supporters, which means virtually all Tibetans.'*

But this equanimity, nearly unheralded in the history of modern resistance movements, seems to be lost on China's leadership, and on some governments under China's sway. China has a unique opportunity to resolve this issue. Violent resistance is often the last resort of a people and is born of frustration. The Dalai Lama's focus is on compassion for both oppressed and oppressor. He is a rational man, a man of peace and above all else a man who can unite the Tibetan people. And he is a man who has shown that he wishes to negotiate. Failure to do so now is to bet on the uncertainty of the future rather than the openness and reason of the present.

It is time for arrogance to give way to tolerance and for the world to rally behind the Tibetan movement in ways that it never has before. After all, the failure to vigorously stand up for this peaceful struggle is also our own failure to reward dialogue, non-violence and compassion. Let us close with these words by the Dalai Lama:

*'It is on the basis of this [spirituality of compassion] that we should pursue our struggle for freedom. We struggle for freedom, not against the Chinese people. The issue is the survival of a precious heritage that we happen to possess.'*

*What is a non-violent struggle? It is a struggle where we do not lose our compassion for the enemy, where we pursue a goal of mutual benefit.*

*At present, only few people in China have access to real information because of the propaganda. But I am certain that knowledge of the true facts will gradually increase in the near future. So the power of the non-violent solution will also increase, year by year. Therefore, I would ask everyone to take heart in this and continue to sustain your efforts.'*

**Re·sis·tance:** n. the action of opposing something that you disapprove of or disagree with

**Re·sist:** v. to refuse to accept or be changed by something

### **The Dalai Lama's Middle Path Policy**

'The middle path is not an end or a goal of the Tibetan movement. It is not a peace proposal either...the middle path as conceived by the Dalai Lama is a method of conducting the struggle for freedom and justice for all Tibetans. Thus, middle path does not represent or reflect the overall belief system of the Tibetans. Rather, it is a non-violent technique advocated by the Dalai Lama which can be crudely compared to the Gandhian satyagraha. The essence of the middle path is avoiding extremes. On the one side there is the necessity of not submitting to Communist Chinese policies that are against the survival of Tibetan culture and religion. The other side is the extreme measure of achieving a free Tibet at the cost of a vicious cycle of violence that might work against Tibetan culture and religion. Thus, taking a middle path is a moderate position that could guarantee the common minimum interests of all concerned parties. For the Tibetans, it is the protection and preservation of Tibetan culture and religion; for the Chinese it is the security and territorial integrity of the motherland; and for the neighbours and third parties, peace at their borders and peaceful international relations. The goal of the Tibetan struggle, according to the Dalai Lama, is to achieve a spiritual, religious and cultural freedom conducive for Tibetans to perform their universal responsibility of preserving, maintaining and disseminating the sublime cultural traditions of the unique inner sciences for the sake of the whole world in an autonomous political arrangement within the PRC.

Though the Tibetan conflict is defined by various researchers as “intractable nationalistic conflict”, “ethno-nationalistic conflict”, “non-violent conflict” and an issue of “identity and autonomy”, for the Dalai Lama it doesn't have any political motivation. The problem between Tibet and China, in the Dalai Lama's words, “is not the difference in ideology, social system or issues resulting from clashes between tradition and modernity. Neither is it an issue of human rights violations nor about a struggle based on ethnic claims. The root of the Tibetan issue lies in Tibet's long, separate history, its distinct and ancient culture, and its unique identity.” Under his leadership, the Tibetan movement has a spiritual motivation to protect the religious tradition of Tibet that is rooted in compassion and non-violence and to facilitate Tibetans to perform their broader responsibilities to humanity.'

- Dr Senthil Ram in *Understanding the Dalai Lama*, edited by Rajiv Mehrotra, (Penguin Viking India, 2004)

'Like so many of the issues he cares deeply about, [the Dalai Lama's] Sino-Tibetan policies are driven by his Buddhist view of the inter-dependence of all things - insights that he had internalized, like a cloth soaked in oil, when he was in his late twenties. For the Dalai Lama, the essence, the crux of reality, is the fundamental interconnectedness between people and people, and between people and things. This is how he views the world around him.'

*- The Wisdom of Forgiveness: Intimate Conversations and Journeys, HH the Dalai Lama and Victor Chan (Riverhead Books, 2004)*

## Legacy of Rangzen

Few people in the world are so distinctly defined by the kind of land they live in as the Tibetans. Tibetan national identity has not just been created by history, nor only by religion, but has its roots deep in the Tibetan land. Tibetans are people who live, and have always lived, on the great Tibetan plateau, high above and apart from the rest of the world. The passage to Tibetan-inhabited areas from the surrounding lowlands of Nepal, India and China is not only unmistakable and dramatic but clearly a transition to a unique world. Few other people are so specifically defined by geography or climate except perhaps for Eskimos, Bedouins and Polynesian Islanders. But very early in their history Tibetans managed to transcend this merely environmental affinity to create a powerful national identity through the unification of the various kingdoms and tribes throughout the plateau.

Though the imperial period of Tibetan history ended around the tenth century, its legacy of nationhood was permanent. Later monarchs like Phagdrup Jangchub Gyaltzen (1302-1364) and the Great 5th Dalai Lama (1617-1682) consciously drew inspiration from the imperial age in their efforts to create a united and free Tibet. More recently, the Great 13th Dalai Lama's (1876-1933) untiring and monumental struggle to regain and later defend Tibetan independence was no less an expression of this heritage of national freedom that Tibetans have maintained throughout their history. It is absolutely essential that we Tibetans understand how longstanding and legitimate our claims to nationhood are. That we did not join the League of Nations or the United Nations, or that some big powers did not recognise Tibet as a nation, because they did not want to jeopardise their trade links with China, does not detract from this legitimacy.

The fact that Tibet has, for periods of its history, been conquered by foreign powers or that some Tibetan ruler used foreign military backing to gain political control of the country also makes no difference to its rightful status as a free nation. There is probably no country in the world that has not at one time or another been under the rule of another. Rangzen (freedom) is a legacy that has been passed on to us by countless generations of Tibetans. But even more significant is that Rangzen is the birthright of generations of Tibetans yet to come. No one now has the right to make a decision that will compromise or deny this heritage of life and freedom to them in the future.

*- Jamyang Norbu is a leading writer and former member of the Tibetan resistance force in Mustang. His writings, which have influenced and inspired so many young Tibetans, have been described by the Chinese authorities as being as inconsequential as 'the wings of a fly beating against a boulder.' The Rangzen Charter, [www.rangzen.net](http://www.rangzen.net)*



# A 'peaceful liberation', guerrilla warfare and non-violent protest

## The historical context of resistance in Tibet

In 1911, when the Qing, China's last imperial dynasty, collapsed, Tibet emerged as a *de facto* independent state. This independence was not recognised by China, nor was it formally and unambiguously acknowledged by Britain, India or any other state, despite repeated efforts to establish relations with foreign powers. Even so, under the government of the Dalai Lama, Tibet did effectively function independently of China, although it was increasingly vulnerable. Attempts during the first half of the twentieth century to modernise the army and introduce reforms had been thwarted by the monasteries and conservative officials, who wanted to maintain the status quo. In the years leading up to the invasion, internal division and power struggles within the ruling elite further weakened the government. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China, this *de facto* independence came to an end. In the month before the official foundation of the PRC in October 1949, the Communists made it clear that one of the remaining tasks of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was the 'liberation' of Tibet.

### Invasion and occupation - the early years

The Chinese Communist Party used a combination of persuasion and threat in the early years of their takeover of Tibet; trying to win over the ruling elite, while leaving no doubt of China's military might. Tibetan troops managed to push the PLA back during the first skir-



The arrival of Chinese People's Liberation Army troops in Lhasa, autumn 1951. Picture courtesy of John Kenneth Knaus

mish in May 1950. Meanwhile, the Tibetan government, working to gain international support, was unwilling to come to any agreement that would cede its sovereignty. In October 1950, China launched a full-scale military invasion, catching the Tibetan army by surprise, and taking Chamdo in the east. But rather than pushing on to Lhasa, the advance was halted, and efforts were focused on negotiating a 'peaceful settlement'. A delegation was sent to Beijing in 1951 and the '17-point agreement' was signed. This acknowledged Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, but recognised the rights of Tibetans to regional autonomy and religious freedom. Crucially, the political system in Tibet was to remain unchanged and reform carried out 'step by step', rather than being forcibly implemented. The PLA arrived in Lhasa in October, signalling the beginning of a period of uneasy co-existence.

## **Revolt sparked in eastern Tibet**

The 17-point agreement only extended to central Tibet. By the end of 1954, the implementation of socialist reforms in Kham and Amdo was fomenting resistance to Chinese rule. Sporadic uprisings erupted as attempts were made to re-distribute land, settle nomads and confiscate personal arms. In 1955 a major revolt broke out in Kham. The Chinese responded with aerial bombardment of towns and monasteries. Thousands of refugees fled the fighting, moving into central Tibet and India. What had started as pockets of resistance in Amdo and Kham coalesced into a national resistance movement as groups of rebels congregated in central Tibet and joined forces under the leadership of Gonbo Tashi and his pan-Khampa guerrilla movement 'Four Rivers, Six Ranges'. They were supported by the CIA, which made its first arms drop in 1958.

## **Deteriorating relations**

In 1956, signs of resistance in the form of posters and leaflets appeared in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa. Despite conciliatory efforts to quell dissent by postponing reforms in Lhasa, relations between the Tibetans and Chinese Communists continued to deteriorate. Refugees brought with them news of the Communist reforms and harsh punitive measures in Kham and Amdo and by the beginning of 1959 there was widespread anti-Chinese feeling. At the same time, 'anti-rightist' hard-liners in China were attacking those Communist leaders who had been in favour of a gradualist approach in Tibet.

## **Lhasa Uprising - March 1959**

On 10 March 1959 tensions finally erupted. Thousands of Tibetans gathered outside the Dalai Lama's summer palace, Norbulingka, as rumours that the Chinese were planning to abduct him spread throughout Lhasa, which was teeming with pilgrims following the annual Great Prayer Festival (Monlam Chenmo). During the week that followed, demonstrations in support of the Dalai Lama and against Chinese rule escalated into a mass protest throughout the city. On 17 March the PLA started sporadic shelling of the city, and that evening the Dalai Lama escaped and began his flight into exile. On 20 March 1959 the PLA was ordered to re-take the city. After two days of fighting, the Chinese flag was hoisted above the Potala Palace. Both sides renounced the 17-point agreement and by the end of March the Tibetan government had been dissolved. Thousands of Tibetans had been killed, and thousands more followed the Dalai Lama into exile.

## The 'years of chaos'

By 1960, the Chinese army had established complete control over Tibet. A ruthless retribution campaign was carried out against those suspected of involvement in the uprising and thousands of Tibetans were sent to labour camps. Gradualist reform was abandoned in favour of 'democratic reform' policies that proved to be disastrous. For the first time in its history Tibet experienced widespread famine. The situation worsened as Tibet was swept up into the political and economic chaos of China's ultra-leftist Cultural Revolution. Society and community were dismantled through class struggle. Religion came under attack and nearly all Tibet's monasteries were destroyed. Any expression of cultural difference was forbidden. There was extreme use of violence by both Tibetans and Chinese. In 1969, the unrelenting attacks on Tibetan culture and way of life sparked a major revolt that was suppressed by the army. Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya described the effect of these chaotic and brutal years:

*'For the majority of Tibetans [...] the trauma of the Cultural Revolution would linger in their minds, and evidence of the appalling destruction of Tibet's cultural heritage would haunt the Tibetan landscape. The people who lived through the period still express their incomprehension and describe it as the time "the sky fell to earth."' (Tsering Shakya, The Dragon in the Land of Snows, London: Pimlico, 1999)*

## Struggle from exile

During the 1960s the Tibetan resistance carried out raids in Tibet from a rebel base across the border in Mustang, Nepal. They were aided by the CIA, which was interested in their intelligence-gathering capabilities, and over 150 Tibetans were sent to the USA for training. Following the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, India began to support the rebels and established a secret Tibetan army base in India. India also allocated aid for Tibetan refugees and allowed the establishment of a government-in-exile in Dharamsala. But by the mid-1960s, American priorities had changed and the CIA decided to withdraw its support. At the end of the decade, the resistance was beset by rifts and infighting, exacerbated by the Tibetan government's attempts to control the group. In 1973, the Nepalese started to demand that the Mustang base be disbanded. The following year, the Dalai Lama sent a recorded message, urging the rebels to lay down their arms and effectively ending the guerrilla resistance. The disillusionment and trauma this caused is described by John Kenneth Knaus, one of the CIA operations officers involved in Tibetan operations:

*'On July 23 a group from Wangdu's headquarters surrendered their arms, but only after painful sessions in which two men committed suicide. Soon afterward, men from the other camps packed their belongings and weapons and began a mournful trek south from the last redoubt of the Tibetan resistance. For most it was the end of a cause that had defined the last twenty years of their lives.' (John Kenneth Knaus, Orphans of the Cold War, New York: Public Affairs, 1999, p. 302)*



Tibetan guerilla commanders and their men at the pass overlooking Tibet in the early days of the CIA-supported operation at Mustang. Picture courtesy of John Kenneth Knaus

## **A new start?**

At the end of the 1970s, China's new leadership began a program of economic and social reform throughout China. In Tibet, the relative liberalisation led to the rehabilitation of leaders who had come under attack, improvements in peoples' livelihoods, and a revival of Tibetan religion and culture. Policies to open up Tibet to the outside world also began to be implemented. It soon became apparent that assimilation policies had not worked and that there was deep-seated resentment against Chinese rule. China had allowed the Dalai Lama to send three fact-finding missions to tour Tibetan areas and was taken aback by the enthusiasm with which the delegations were greeted. In Lhasa there were open calls for Tibetan independence. The spontaneous fervour and speed of cultural and religious revival and the renewal of Tibetan identity also took the Chinese by surprise. By the end of the 1980s, Tibetans had assimilated new political ideas of democracy and human rights, and a new political consciousness and cohesiveness was emerging.

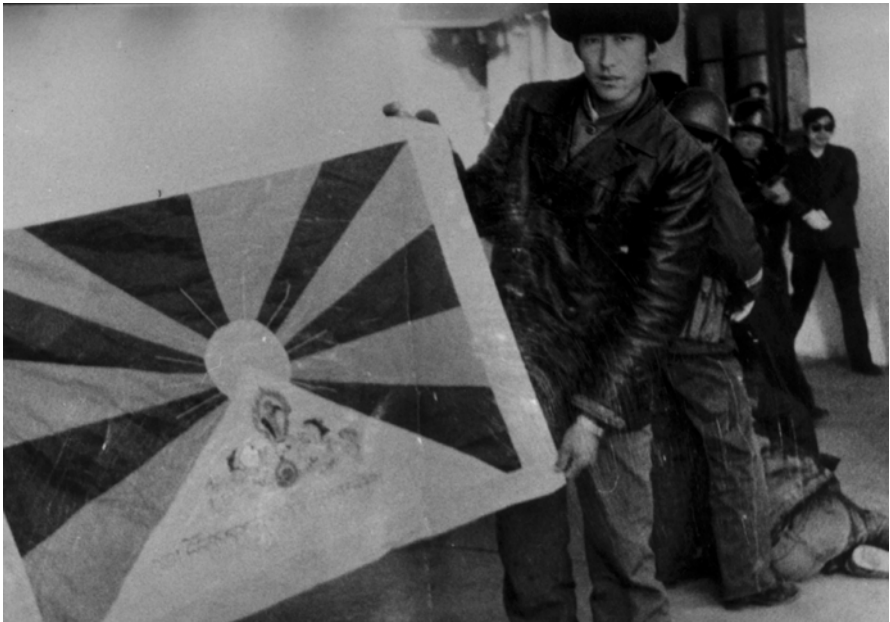
## **Martial law**

In September 1987, the first in a series of pro-independence protests took place in Lhasa, signalling a new phase in Tibetan resistance. The non-violent protests were led by monks and nuns and asserted cultural identity by drawing on traditional religious practice, for example shouting freedom slogans while circumambulating the inner pilgrimage circuit of the city, the Barkhor. Many of the Tibetans involved in these political protests were born under Chinese rule, and had grown up during the relatively liberal

1980s. Tensions increased following the violent suppression of the protests in Lhasa and on 5 March 1989, a demonstration started by 12 or 13 monks escalated into a mass protest. After three days of demonstrations, the then Tibet Party Secretary Hu Jintao, now Party Secretary and President of China, presided over the imposition of martial law. The Chinese army regained control of the streets and martial law remained in place until the end of April 1990. There was a wave of arrests following the crackdown, but protest continued to spread to the countryside and to Kham and Amdo. The most common forms of protest that resulted in arrest during this period were demonstrating, distributing leaflets and pasting wall posters, shouting or writing slogans, possessing an image of the Tibetan flag or Dalai Lama photos, tapes, videos or literature, or refusing to comply with political campaigns.

## **Fast-track development and suppression of dissent**

Following the demonstrations in Lhasa, moderate officials who had advocated Tibetan-centred development lost ground in favour of those who advocated fast-track development. Control over the population was tightened through development of a more sophisticated security operation, sustained repression and harsh punishment of political prisoners. In the mid-1990s China launched a series of political campaigns. In Tibet these focused on rooting out 'separatist elements' and undermining the influence of the Dalai Lama by attacking his religious authority. In 1995, the boy identified by the Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama was detained. Attempts to enforce loyalty to another boy, selected by the authorities, and to get monks and nuns to denounce the Dalai



A Tibetan security official displays a confiscated Tibetan national flag, possibly belonging to the Tibetan being held by police in the background on his knees. © Tibet Images.



Crowds gathering in Lhasa to welcome the Dalai Lama back from India in 1951, with the Potala Palace in the background. Picture courtesy of John Kenneth Knaus

Lama, led to a new wave of resistance. In some monasteries resistance took the form of overt protest; others refused to comply, or tried to avoid attendance at political meetings. Some Tibetan officials also resisted this new attack on Tibetan religion and culture by turning a blind eye to non-compliance.

## Resistance in prison

Political prisoners have expressed their dissent through shouting slogans, recording protest songs, non-compliance with orders and refusal to reform. They have faced severe consequences, including extended sentences, solitary confinement, torture and even death. The largest known mass protest occurred in Drapchi prison on 1 and 4 May 1998 and involved both political and criminal prisoners. At least nine Tibetans died following the beatings and torture meted out during the brutal suppression of the protest and its aftermath (see Ngawang Sangdrol's story in this report). Ngawang Sangdrol, one of a group of nuns who recorded protest songs in prison, describes some of the ways in which prisoners resisted reform on a daily basis.

*'Even though they tried to deny us the ability to practice our religion, Drapchi Prison became our nunnery and the prison guards were our gurus. The Buddha taught that an enemy is the best teacher, because only when someone is cruel to you can you truly be tested on your practice of compassion toward all sentient beings. No matter our sufferings, our spirits were far from broken. We never lost faith in the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama or the strength of our religious commitment.'*

## New forms of resistance

One result of the more hardline policies was a marked decline in the number of known Tibetan political prisoners after 1996. For many, resistance became less overt, although Tibetans continued to find ways to express dissent using music, art, literature, religion, the internet and other means. The decline in known prisoner numbers at the end of the 1990s did not, however, indicate satisfaction with Chinese policies:

*'While Tibetans increasingly explore the path favoured by official policy, toward wealth creation and consumerism, [...] they are also bearing a considerable burden of resentment and frustration. Falling political prisoner numbers may mirror this contradiction and reflect a new trend: one of rising aversion to the risks inherent in overt political protest. As a result less is revealed about Tibetan views, and more about their reluctance to express them.'* (Suppressing Dissent, Tibet Information Network, 2001)

## Resistance from exile

The Dalai Lama has succeeded in winning supporters to the Tibetan cause throughout the world. There are Tibet support groups in more than 50 countries, most with the explicit aim of an independent Tibet. In 2002, the Dalai Lama's Envoys visited Beijing and Tibet, breaking a decade of stalemate. The government-in-exile later requested Tibet support groups to refrain from certain pro-independent protests in order to support the dialogue process, which is ongoing (see Prospects for the future: talks between Beijing and the Dalai Lama, p 53). Growing frustration within the exile community, particularly younger Tibetans, has also led to the emergence of a more radical element. In addition to the political activity of Tibetans and their supporters in exile, there are many groups working to promote and protect Tibet's religious and cultural traditions.

## Repression of resistance: a climate of fear

Tibetan resistance to Chinese rule has taken many forms that include overt resistance in the form of armed rebellion and non-violent demonstrations, to more subtle forms of protest such as non-compliance or allegorical expression of dissent through the arts. Some Tibetans inside Tibet have tried to use their positions of influence to effect beneficial change; while those outside have worked to secure international support. The Communist regime has used military force to suppress open resistance, but has also tried to win Tibetans over through political campaigns and re-education and by co-opting Tibetan leaders. Beijing has sought to deter resistance through political repression, developing sophisticated mechanisms of regulation and control over every aspect of Tibetans' everyday lives, and generating a climate of fear and suspicion. Coercive attempts to assimilate Tibetans were most intense during the Cultural Revolution, but China continues to seek integration and unity through the policy outlined in the mid-1990s by Hu Jintao as 'grasping with both hands', accelerated economic development, combined with suppression of dissent. Beijing also devotes increasing resources to counter support for the Tibet issue worldwide through more sophisticated propaganda.



Tibetan prayer-flags tied to a radio mast in central Tibet. © Ian Cummings, *Tibet Images*

## The tsampa-eaters: defiance & sacrifice in Tibet today

by Yeshi Dorje

‘We don’t want rice, you go back to China, we have tsampa (roasted barley flour) to eat,’ was the weary but determined refrain of an old man in the Barkor area of Lhasa in the 1980s. He would often disappear from the street for days, sometimes weeks. People said he was taken to prison. But as soon as he was released, following medical confirmation of ‘mental illness’, he would continue the same chant, sitting on the street corner everyday. I wasn’t the only person to wonder whether he wasn’t in fact saner than the rest of us.

To the Tibetans, tsampa represents the Tibetan culture while rice represents Chinese culture. This is equivalent to saying that Tibet and China are two different countries with two distinct cultures and peoples. With this understanding, the Tibetans have resisted the Sinicisation of their culture. Knowing what is inside their hearts, I saw this old man’s persistence as a reflection of this determination and spirit. Some dare to show it to the outside world, and others keep it inside like their hearts and silently work for the survival of their identity.

The 1959 Uprising on 10 March is well-known, but the 1969 revolt, which occurred in different parts of Tibet with no single leader or organization, is less well-known. The Chinese call these the ‘Two Nines rebellions’ and did everything in their power to prevent a third ‘Nine’ in 1979. But in 1989, the Tibetans marched in the capital, Lhasa, in support of independence for Tibet.

In 1999, demoralized and undermined by hardline security measures adopted in the mid-1990s, Tibetans did not take to the streets in support of independence. But everyday resistance has become a fact of life for Tibetans. From prison cells to classrooms, from labor camps to pastureland, Tibetans resist Chinese domination. They resist by speaking out, they resist by not saying certain things, they resist by doing the very things (such as tsampa-eating and prostrating) that remind China that they are not Chinese and that they will never be Chinese.

*Yeshi Dorje is a pseudonym for a writer from Kham now in exile.*



# an extract from Waterfall of Youth

by Dhondup Gyal

You are witness to history,  
The way of the future—  
The breathing and lifting of the snow land  
are written on every droplet,  
the rise and development of the Land of Snows  
shine in each of your rays,  
Without you!  
Where can we whet the sword of language?  
Where can we sharpen the sword of our skills,  
Without you!

*(translated by Tsering Shakya)*



A rare image of Tibetan student protestors from the Beijing Minzu Daxue (Beijing Minorities University) walking along Chang An Dajie, outside Beijing Hotel, en route to Tiananmen Square in May 1989 (prior to the crackdown one month later). The banners they are holding are demanding human rights, freedom and democracy (Tibetan: mithobtang, rangwang, mangtso). © Max Cotton

# How the pen speaks for the soul

## Writing in Tibet today: new forms of literature and the role of the writer

by Yangdon Dhondup

Tibetan writers were reminded of the fragility and danger of their positions in Tibet today by the recent consequences of publication of a new book, *Xizang Biji* (Notes on Tibet) by Oser, a young poet born in Derge (Kham, presently under the administration of Sichuan province). Oser's book is a collection of essays about her own experiences and encounters in Tibet, revealing how ordinary Tibetans suffer under the religious restrictions in Tibet today and how certain Tibetans in prominent positions are used by the Chinese government to promote their policies to the outside world. The book was not only banned by the Chinese authorities in September 2003 for demonstrating too respectful a position towards the Dalai Lama, but in the beginning of 2004, Oser was dismissed from her work unit, evicted from her home, her health and retirement benefits were terminated, and she was not allowed to apply for a passport to leave the country.

Although the banning of books is not uncommon in Tibet, this incident sent shockwaves through the artistic community. Oser's political mistake was clearly to write about her devotion to Buddhism and to the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetans.

Writers in Tibet must always be careful not to contradict policy as set down by the Communist Party in their writings, and they must also, often, withhold their true feelings. Pema Bhum, a literary critic based in New York, writes: '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...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.'

Under these circumstances, many writers prefer to focus on the social problems within their own community while others experiment with literary techniques. The outcome, despite these social and political pressures, is often meaningful and innovative. Tibetan literary journals such as *Sbrang char* (Light Rain) and *Bod ki rtsom rig sgyu rstal* (Tibetan Art and Literature) continue to publish new and exciting works.

The authors of these journals are mostly writing in their spare time and receive little, if any, financial support from the state. The majority of Tibetan authors who are employed as full-time writers (receiving thus a monthly salary) in regional literary associations' subsidies by the state are those who express themselves in Chinese. Training in creative writing at college, university or literary associations is not available due to financial

restrictions. There is also no literary prize awarded by the state for works written in Tibetan, or any other 'minority' language. Alai, a native from Barkham (Kham) is the first Tibetan to win the Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2000, China's most prestigious literary prize. His novel *Chen'ai luoding* (translated as *Red Poppies*) was written in Chinese.

Many Tibetan writers use the Chinese medium because they receive more exposure both inland and abroad - there are more translations from Chinese into languages such as English, German and French than from Tibetan. The Chinese government appears to provide some financial support and encouragement to those writers who express themselves in Chinese, while authors who write in Tibetan rarely receive support from the state.

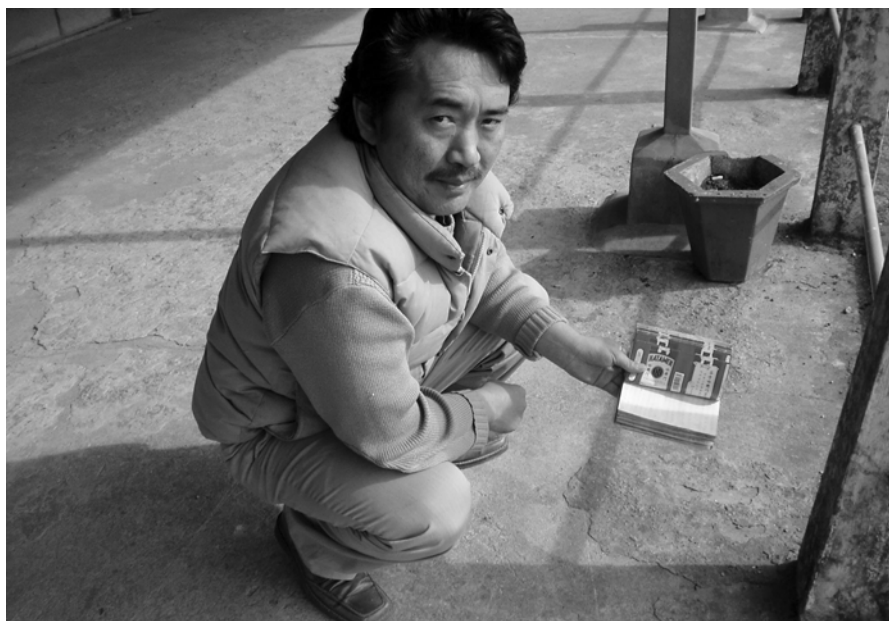
This means that the literary community in Tibet is split into two camps; those who write in Tibetan, and those who write in Chinese. Most of the authors in the latter group have not chosen to write in Chinese but are simply unable to make a living otherwise. The result is a generation of writers who are not able to express themselves in Tibetan, both in spoken and written form.

Debates such as whether literature written in Chinese by ethnically Tibetan authors should be included in the canon of Tibetan literature dominated literary discourse on Tibet in the 1980s. But the debate has lessened since then. Some writers felt that their views could be seen by the authorities as displaying too nationalistic a stance, while others have simply accepted the situation as an inevitable result of Chinese colonialism.

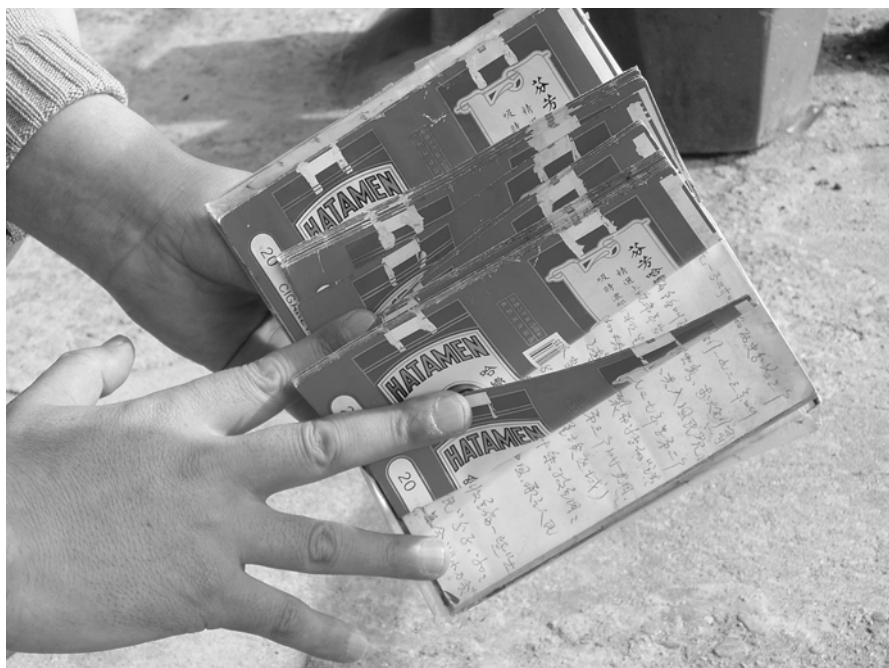
Ultimately, the creative expression of Tibetan writers in Tibet today is intimately linked to the various shifts in the status and use of the Tibetan language. Since the 1980s the Chinese authorities have demonstrated both support and contempt towards the issue of the Tibetan language. While Tibetan language is still taught in schools, at least at a primary level (from middle school onwards, the primary teaching medium is supposed to be Chinese) and Tibetans are able to find employment in a Tibetan medium context, educational policies reveal a lack of practical support and financial resources.

Although safeguards and promotional measures for the Tibetan language are included in official regulations, in the absence of measures that favour the use of Tibetan in practice, the use of Chinese (already dominant in business, commerce and administration), is likely to be enhanced. It is certain that the gradual decline in the use of the Tibetan language witnessed nowadays in Tibet will have a dramatic effect on a new generation of Tibetan writers.

*Yangdon Dhondup is currently a Research Associate at the Oriental Institute, University of Oxford and at the Section de Langues et Civilisations Orientales, University of Lausanne. Her Ph.D. thesis focused on contemporary Tibetan literature written in Chinese.*



Amdowa poet Namlo Yak, who lives in exile in India, with his collection of poems written in prison on cigarette paper smuggled in by friends. © ICT



## Namlo Yak: Poetry from Prison

Namlo Yak is a Tibetan writer in his thirties who has lived in exile in Dharamsala since escaping from Tibet in 1999. After a university education in Qinghai (incorporating the traditional Tibetan area of Amdo), he started work as a county-level cadre for the Department of Education. Like many Tibetans working for the Chinese government, he maintained private loyalties to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan cause. With his friends, Namlo Yak discussed issues such as Chinese immigration into Tibetan areas, birth control policies imposed by the authorities, the exploitation of natural resources and human rights abuses. In 1993, he was arrested together with two other Tibetans, Lukhar Jam and Tsegon Gyal, and charged with espionage and ‘founding a counter-revolutionary organization’. Evidence submitted against Namlo Yak for stealing ‘state secrets’ included published volumes of statistics on the Qinghai economy and education system.

Namlo Yak, who was released in November 1997, was held in four different prisons during his sentence. He says: ‘We were kept in leg shackles and often had our hands bound. We were not allowed to see the sun for an entire year. The food was worse than what we would feed to pigs.’ For Namlo Yak, a writer, one of the most difficult elements of his captivity was the deprivation of reading and writing materials. So he asked a friend to smuggle in some cigarette paper and the inside of a pen, and he began to write about his prison experiences, his feelings and his inner life. Some of the results are published for the first time in English on the following pages.

Namlo Yak’s poems are written in the free verse form. The first Tibetan to write poetry in free verse form was Dhondup Gyal in ‘Waterfall of Youth’ (Lang tsho’i rbab chu), which influenced the writing of a whole generation. By the late 1980s, free verse became widespread and almost everyone wrote in that style. Students, teachers, monks and other lay people were publishing their poems in unofficial and official literary journals and poetry reading sessions were organised in universities and schools. Virtually all students (at least in Amdo) have written or published poetry, which is still a dominant form of literary expression in Tibet. Although many of these poems express personal emotions, they are equally used to present challenging views of social problems.

Yangdon Dhondup, a scholar of Tibetan literature whose essay features on p 18, says: ‘Namlo Yak uses landscape, weather and nature as metaphors. In “Winter is Coming”, the wind refers to China, while the snow represents Tibet (the land of snows bows “eastwards to the bitter wind”). The allusions are forms to conceal his real feelings. Having written the poems while still in prison, it would be foolish to write something openly against the government. The poem “Because of that Wish” is personal and reveals the poet’s nostalgia for his childhood, the loneliness he experiences in the prison cell and the regret of not being able to do something, perhaps, for Tibet. All in all, his outlook is quite positive; even though he knows that people laugh at him (see “The Night of Burning Snows”), he seems to be relatively unconcerned about this. This attitude might have come from his conviction that he is in the right and that his actions were for a just cause. I imagine that it is this spirit which has kept him going.’

# Winter Is Coming

*24 October 1993, Ping'an Detention Centre, Qinghai*

Winter has come and everything departs in its shiver.  
The will of flowers is swept aside and shaken by the wind.  
Bees from a distant anxious heaven  
Fall into the fissure opened between land and sky.  
Capped with glistening snows  
The lonely mountains are crying.

Every time there is a moment  
When the Land of Snows is shocked under night skies.  
The grasslands and forests bow eastwards  
Towards the bitter winds and under the hooves of wild beasts.  
Only there by the edge of the cliff,  
Only the pine trees, shooting forth green.

## Because Of That Wish

**--Written on the eve of the first trial**

*28 July 1994, Terlinkha City Prison, Qinghai*

Drenched with sunlight  
My poem shines in the distance  
And the welling language of my heart  
Is hidden deep in clouds.  
The sun goes down and as it slowly rises,  
Why can I not recall my childhood years?  
That ruin is a Snow Mountain scoured by wind and rain.  
The snows are still great; the winds still fierce.

Since searching for myself and my own sacrifice  
A blue sky the size of my palm  
Sometimes floats before my eyes.  
My body and heart are maybe not separated  
On the path to sacrifice.  
Sometimes hidden, sometimes hiding,  
Hanging in space the Moon peeps out,  
Like she who put the full stop to my love-letter.

This age! The King of Hell rides on the back of Time.  
Faith and resolution have already ridden  
To surf the Milky Way and enjoy that flawless poem.

# This is how I'm Thinking

## --To Tsering Tso

*25 March 1995, Terlinkha Prison, Qinghai*

In early Summer, no one wants to become memory's gravestone!

That day when the rains stroked the cheeks of the Hang'ang grasslands,  
Captivated by you and your smile, I left through dancing silence, wind and rain  
To a faraway place, a dark world far away.

When owls or crows screech there's no way back,  
The peaceful night drips tears of gold on the world.  
Whether admired or a start too far,  
I once gave you a single tear in place of hopes and blessings.

## The Night Of Burning Snows

*19 May 1996, Terlinkha City Prison, Qinghai*

Within our hearts  
Falling snow is consumed by fire.  
Fire grumbles at the falling snow,  
But still it hums a lullaby.  
If the great son of poetry's soul can be born here,  
And if that soul or sour tears can seep into my guts, I will recite at the top of my  
lungs the legend of fire and snow.  
When cold and heat are wrapped in my fleece-lined Chuba<sup>1</sup>  
I recite the Drugjupa<sup>2</sup> to break the curse  
Of the scorching freezing changing seasons.  
Beneath the mocking stars and smirking moon I forge ahead in solitary stubbornness.  
Once the night has washed my eyes,  
Should I go to the park bustling with weak souls  
To listen to their mumblings?  
Fire-flies reply: 'The snow is still falling'.  
Flies retort: 'The fire is still burning'.  
Thus they open each other's minds,  
And thus the night cruelly laughs.  
People's minds are like switched-off machines,  
And poetry torments like a new-born child.  
Can its cries break the snows that were burnt this night?

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<sup>1</sup>A Tibetan traditional robe

<sup>2</sup> 'Drugjupa' literally means '60' - a form of religious ritual

## A Tribute to Dhondup Gyal



Dhondup Gyal. Picture from Langtsoe Babchu, published by Amnye Machen Institute

Dhondup Gyal, who died in 1985 at the age of 32, is regarded as the founder of modern Tibetan literature, inspiring a generation of Tibetan youth with his nationalistic poems urging Tibetans to develop their cultural traditions through new creative expression. Palden Gyal, a journalist and poet from Amdo now living in the US, pays the following tribute to Dhondup Gyal:

*'Dhondup Gyal was a huge influence on me, and a generation of young Tibetans educated in Chinese schools and universities, while I was growing up in Tibet. I was not alone; most Tibetan writers are influenced by him. He felt that we have to move forward as Tibetans, not as Chinese. That was radical at a time when many Tibetans were confused about their identity. Many Chinese held the belief that Tibetan culture was backward. Gyal encouraged them to take pride in their own culture, and he shook their ideas to the core. While he was a passionate advocate of Tibetan religion and culture he criticized blind faith. He gave us back our language and encouraged us to express ourselves in Tibetan. Before him, everybody thought of only religious work being in the Tibetan language. Today in Tibet there is more and more interest in Dhondup Gyal; six volumes of his work were published in the late 1990s, and Tibetans seem to have given him a new honorific to his name of 'Pal' (dpal) Dhondup Gyal. Nearly all Tibetans know his work, including people like farmers or manual workers who might not normally have the opportunity to know about literature. One of his most well-known song lyrics is called "Sto ngon po" or "Kokonor", including the words: "You are proud of our nationality". Even though he took such a nationalistic stance, exhorting the Tibetan youth to stand up for their culture, there has still been a resurgence of interest in him since his death that appears to be acceptable at colleges and universities in Tibet.'*



# The tenth anniversary of the death of Dhondup Gyal (1953-1985) by Palden Gyal

*Before he took his own life he wrote these words: 'I hope you will understand my reason for departing this life ... The sole purpose of my writings has been to awaken the Tibetan people from mental slumber, but I have failed. So I have given my life for the Tibetan people.'*

To D.G.

Dear Dhondup Gyal  
Do you hear me?

Some people said  
You are a hero of our nation.  
Some people said  
You are a disgrace to our ancestors.  
Some people said  
You are a victim of our society.

I said  
You are yourself,  
You are a bonfire burning within the ice,  
You have never raised your head boastfully.  
But you have shed a pool of tears for our people.  
You would disagree with this.  
This is your character.

You understand that the snow mountains are white,  
You know that the sky belongs to birds.  
Therefore you have never grown despondent.  
But tears of compassion have formed a pool within you.  
You left a far away secret place,  
And arrived with an ordinary life.

A smile spreads across your face.  
With fresh vigour  
You have gone to another far off secret place.

*Originally published by the Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamsala, India in Lungta No.9.  
1995*

# Bloodwheel of the hunter

## The expression of nationalism through pop songs

Music has been a key element of Tibetan attempts to assert their identity and resist Chinese rule, particularly from the 1980s, which saw the emergence of a new era of popular, modern Tibetan music. Tibetan pop songs today are influenced by Chinese contemporary music and Hindi films from India, but lyrics frequently contain metaphorical nationalist meaning. The following song, Sorrow Song of the Calf, has been popular in Tibet since the early 1990s. It was originally sung by the Amdowa vocalist and song-writer, Dhebe. The song has two meanings - the sad story of the calf warns people to stop killing wildlife. Secondly, the tragedy which the calf endures is a reference to the greater tragedy of the Tibetan nation following China's invasion. In Tibetan literature, 'bloodwheel' refers to killing other beings, specifically the taking of human life.

### Sorrow Song of the Calf

The high land of the snow mountains  
Is the paradise of my birth-place  
The deepest affection is the love from mother  
The wind was blowing ahead  
The rain was at my back  
In mother's warm arms  
I could live out my life like this  
A sudden shot like thunder  
By the black-hearted hunter  
My mother's life was taken away  
I had to flee without thinking  
I, the self who lost his mother  
Fled into the land that belongs to others  
I was not sure where I can find a mother's arms again  
The shadow covered the afternoon  
The laughing came from the hunter's house  
As he was chewing my mother's flesh  
When I fled into the forest  
Where the baby deer were happy living with their mothers  
Oh, I missed my mother  
My tears flew like running water  
The night conquered the world  
The cold winter came with the snow-storm  
Others basked in the warmth of their mothers' arms  
Only me, the motherless calf  
Wandered alone in the frozen world  
The shameless hunter is turning the bloodwheel still  
So sad there is no justice in this world.

*Analysis and translation by Rinchen Tashi, a writer from Kham who works for the International Campaign for Tibet in Washington, DC.*

# A Message to the Younger Generation of Tibetans from His Holiness the Dalai Lama

*This moving and emotional message from the Dalai Lama was intended for young people in Tibet*

Today, I have obtained this opportunity to meet a friend, who has great dedication for our Tibetan cause. So I am taking this opportunity to say a few words to my fellow Tibetans inside Tibet, especially to the younger generation.

People refer to Tibet, our land of snows, which has a clean environment and pure air as 'the roof of the world.' Not only is Tibet geographically speaking the roof of the world, also from many other perspectives, there are grounds to recognize the people of Tibet as deserving high esteem and respect. As understandings grow, today this fact is being increasingly acknowledged all over the world.

For example, our Tibetan culture and spirituality, which are deeply connected with Buddhism, the values of kindness, compassion, and goodness that are integral to the Tibetan character - these are becoming objects of admiration by people everywhere. So it is most important not to lose this precious part of our heritage, which others regard with such esteem and appreciation.

It is on the basis of this that we should pursue our struggle for freedom. Our freedom struggle is not an issue of opposing the Chinese people, nor is it an issue of seeking victory for us and defeating the other. The issue is the threat posed to the survival of a precious heritage that we happen to possess.

Unfortunately, many Chinese remain ignorant of this. Because of this, they behave with greed, hostility, and short-sightedness, all of which lead to a situation where the very survival of our cultural heritage is being undermined. Even the physical existence of Tibet is facing threat of extinction. It is under such a situation we are pursuing a struggle for justice.

Since we are pursuing a struggle for a just cause, support for this just and noble cause is increasing in the world year by year. Especially, amongst our Chinese friends, the number of those who recognize the just nature of the Tibetan struggle and express their sympathy and support is slowly growing as well. As for China itself, it is in a process of change.

So, if you consider all these factors, then even though the current Chinese policies inside Tibet are repressive and extremely narrow-minded, looking at this situation from the wider perspective, things are certainly in a process of change. It is clear that the resolution of our just cause for Tibet is approaching ever closer. Therefore it is critical for everyone to have, as in the past, a conviction in the just nature of our cause and continue to persevere in this struggle. The nature or identity of our struggle is to pursue it through non-violence.

What is a non-violent struggle? It is a struggle where, while ensuring that we do not lose our compassion for those whom we are struggling against, we pursue a goal of mutual benefit.

Since we are pursuing a nonviolent struggle to achieve a mutually beneficial goal, as I have mentioned earlier, amongst the Chinese, although at present it remains only a small educated section who has the opportunity to listen to factual information pertaining to Tibet, who as a result support our cause, gradually, as opportunities will increase in China for gaining better knowledge of facts concerning Tibet and the Tibetan people, I am certain that understanding and support for our cause amongst ordinary people in China will slowly increase too.

So the power of this mutually beneficial nonviolent struggle is increasing year by year. Therefore, I would like ask everyone to take heart in this and, as before, continue to sustain your determination and efforts in our struggle.

Most importantly, our youth should ensure not to waste their life, including their body, through indulgence in alcohol and cigarettes.

Instead, you should persevere in education; cultivate experience in whatever profession you might be engaged in so that you could become skilled and independent in your field of work. It is important to keep this in mind.

As far as our knowledge in the fields of inner development is concerned, we Tibetans, our achievements have been truly remarkable. This is increasingly being recognized in the world all over.

However, in terms of modern education related to external material development, we have been lagging behind. This is not because we Tibetans are incapable, or that we are lazy, or that we possess inferior intelligence. It is because we never had the opportunity. It is therefore critical for all of us to put our efforts in the pursuit of modern education that relate to external material development and take an interest in education.

While we improve education, it is important to maintain values like compassion, altruism, goodness, and so on, which are part of our Buddhist heritage.

So through the combination of these two, it is important to become an educated person with a good heart. I would like to say this especially to you, our young men and women.

So keep this in your mind. And if we were to judge by the changing times, not before too long, we will certainly have the opportunity to meet each other. So keep well.

On my part, I am in good health and continue to keep my determination. So remain happy.

*Translation by Thubten Jinpa of a message by the Dalai Lama, obtained by Kalsang Dolma in June 2000*

# The hidden shrine & the empty picture-frame

## Religious devotion and resistance in Tibet today

by Matteo Pistono



A secret shrine to the Dalai Lama in Tibet (Faces of Tibetan lamas are obscured). © ICT

Tibetan Buddhism is an integral element of Tibetan identity, associated with Tibetan feelings of nationalism, and therefore perceived by the Chinese authorities as a potential threat to the authority of the state and unity of the People's Republic of China. Beijing describes the Dalai Lama as a 'wolf in lama's clothing' and 'chief splittist', and states that it is a political priority to undermine his influence in Tibet. As a result, expressions of spiritual devotion in Tibet are complex and subtle, and things are not always as they seem on the surface. Visitors to Tibet see the colourful pantheon of deities on monastery walls, the pageantry of religious ceremonies, and the burning of juniper and barley flour as offerings to the many images of past and present Buddhist teachers affixed in butter-lamp filled temples. But they may not be aware of the hidden images of the Dalai Lama, the significance of a tray of offerings under one image but not another, or the danger of a whispered prayer in a place where an otherwise everyday experience of devotion can be regarded as a criminal act.

The central figure of Tibetans' religious lives is Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, a leader of such moral and spiritual authority that he commands the loyalty of millions of Tibetans both inside Tibet, despite the dangers of expressing this devotion, and in exile.

The significant international support for the Dalai Lama infuriates the Chinese leadership because of the way he has managed to 'internationalize' the Tibet issue - which Beijing describes as a purely domestic affair. He is blamed for any dissent or unrest inside Tibet and is also portrayed as the ringleader of anti-China and pro-Tibet activities in the West.

The Third Work Forum held in Beijing in 1994 marked the launch of an aggressive campaign to undermine his influence. Although the Dalai Lama's political views and status as Tibet's political leader had previously been repudiated, China had not challenged his religious authority since the period of relative liberalization began at the end of the 1970s. But the propaganda campaign launched in the official media following the Third Forum directly attacked the Dalai Lama on religious grounds, accusing him of violating Buddhist doctrine and using the 'mask' or 'cloak' of religion to incite social unrest. Following a crackdown on the display of Dalai Lama images in 1996, Tibetan people demonstrated their continuing devotion through the symbolic gesture of displaying an empty picture frame.

Because religious devotion to the Tibetan spiritual leader can be considered a 'splittist' act, events to commemorate the Dalai Lama's birthday were banned from the 1990s onwards.

An image of the Dalai Lama is a potent symbol of Tibetan identity and an expression of Tibetan nationality, and as such, the face of resistance to Chinese rule. A monk who lives in eastern Tibet told me last year: 'The Chinese can destroy my meditation house, or my religious encampment, but I will still have the image of His Holiness enshrined in my heart.'

Despite the ban on pictures of the Dalai Lama, enforced through the state apparatus to varying degrees through the Religious Affairs Bureau, the United Work Front Department, and the so-called Democratic Management Committees now responsible for the running of virtually all monasteries in Tibetan areas, it is still possible to see the Dalai Lama's image in Tibet. They are particularly visible in the traditional Tibetan areas of Kham and Amdo, now under the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai. Images will usually be hidden when Communist Party cadres, police or other law enforcement bodies arrive to carry out political re-education or other official surveillance of religious activities. A nun in central Tibet commented last year a day after a political re-education team gave lectures in the main hall of her nunnery: 'Just because we turn the frame around and display a picture of that Buddhist deity, that doesn't mean that the protection given by His Holiness's [the Dalai Lama's] picture isn't still in the temple.'

From monks and nuns placing the photograph behind the silk lining on the back of a throne in a temple hall, to sewing a photograph inside the top of a cowboy hat, to simply having a long enough string so that a Dalai Lama neck-pendant is not visible, the Dalai Lama's image, and the courage and resistance that it represents, continues to be present in Tibet today.



A mural in central Tibet of the 14th Dalai Lama. © ICT

Even subtler and more esoteric modes of resistance are sometimes used, emerging from Tibetans' belief in reincarnation and the notion that enlightened beings have the ability to manifest their qualities in different forms. For instance, devotion to the Dalai Lama is in some places expressed by placing an black and white photograph of the 13th incarnation of the Dalai Lama (1876 - 1933) on temple shrines or altars in their homes. In a few monasteries in eastern Tibet, I noticed that the artist have simply painted a moustache similar to that of the 13th Dalai Lama, on a mural or statue of the 14th Dalai Lama, acting as a disguise with religious significance in itself. Tibetan Buddhists consider the incarnation lineage of Dalai Lamas as a manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion, or Chenrezig. As the PRC ban on images of the Dalai Lama has not yet ventured into the realm of tantric deities, Tibetans will often settle for an image of Chenrezig rather than the actual human form of the 14th Dalai Lama, as the object of their devotional expression.

It is obligatory for some religious institutions in Tibetan areas to display photos of the Chinese-appointed 11th Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, who is regarded as 'fake Panchen' (Panchen Zuma) by virtually all Tibetans. Tibetans often replace the photograph with that of the previous Panchen Lama, who died in 1989, still widely respected in Tibet for his outspoken support for Tibetan language, culture and religion. In those monasteries where the photograph of the Gyaltsen Norbu remains due to political pressure, monks who look after the butter-candle lit temple halls sometimes do not place traditional silk offering scarves around or in front of the image.



October 1, 1987. Jampa Tenzin, a monk from Jokhang Temple, being carried by the crowd. He had been badly burned after entering a police station that had been set on fire (by a large Tibetan crowd, trying to help free monks who had been detained inside). Some managed to escape, others were taken out at the back by security forces, and some were reportedly shot inside. This followed a demonstration that had begun peacefully and turned violent when security forces beat a group of monks who had been chanting independence slogans. © John Ackerly/*Tibet Images*

Security personnel examine bodies dragged in from the streets during the 1980s pro-independence protests. © *Tibet Images*





A more overt form of resistance to Chinese religious policy is the documentation of destruction of religious sites. During the demolition of more than 2,000 meditation huts at the religious encampment of Larung Gar religious encampment near Serthar in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, both monks and nuns (including Chinese monastics) took photographs at great risk and sent them to human rights organizations in the West. Most daring of all was the video footage, taken at Larung Gar, which had pioneered the revival of Tibetan Buddhism in the area, by monks. This included film of Chinese government cadres and police overseeing the destruction of meditation huts and homes as their occupants looked on in disbelief and despair. Muffled sobbing can be heard on the soundtrack of the video (see [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org) and [www.tchrd.org](http://www.tchrd.org) for further information).

One of the harshest responses to devotion to the Dalai Lama in recent years was seen in October 1999, in the traditional Tibetan area of Kham, now incorporated into Kardze prefecture in Sichuan. A respected Buddhist scholar and religious leader, Sonam Phuntsok, was arrested, interrogated and sentenced to five years in prison for 'separatist' activities which were described in the official court document as follows:

'The accused illegally organized a mass gathering with 2,000 participants at Puse Township of Kandze Country on 30 January 1998 to pray for the long life for the Dalai Lama, the exile who has been engaged in activities to separate the motherland. At this prayer gathering, the accused raised a giant portrait photograph of the Dalai Lama, which was provided by the accused himself, and entered in the gathering with slogans. During the religious teaching session, the accused not only chanted long life prayers for the Dalai Lamas, but also openly advocated monks and other people to believe in the Dalai Lama. At the same time, the activity of chanting long life prayers for the Dalai Lama as was taped by video camera, and the tape was spread in many places.'

This official document shows that nearly all the charges presented against Sonam Phuntsok concerned his connection to the Dalai Lama. Sonam Phuntsok was tortured throughout his five-year prison sentence, and has lost some mobility in his right arm due to scarring from boiling water being poured over him during interrogation.

It is often said that a picture can speak a thousand words. In Tibet, the visible and hidden display of images of the Dalai Lama emerge from the very heart of the Tibetans' often unspoken resistance to the Chinese presence in Tibet. When Ngawang Sangdrol, a Tibetan nun who served more than a decade in prison for her non-violent protests against Chinese rule, stepped off the plane to America after the Chinese government was pressured into releasing her from prison, one of her first actions was to take a photograph of the Dalai Lama and place it in reverence above her head. This single act was an expression of the devotion that had inspired her fierce resistance through long years of torture and solitary confinement.

*Matteo Pistono is a travel writer and Buddhist practitioner who has traveled widely in Tibetan areas. For further information on religion in Tibet, see: When the Sky Fell to Earth: The new crackdown on Buddhism in Tibet, a report by the International Campaign for Tibet, 2004. The report is available online at [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org).*



Ngawang Sangdrol. ©Tom Stoddart.

These are examples of Chinese torture instruments that have been used on monks and nuns in Tibetan prisons. Palden Gyatso, a monk who served more than 30 years in prison, was able to smuggle out a set of such implements to the West. Picture by David Hoffman, © *Tibet Images*



# The cost of resistance: my story

## by Ngawang Sangdrol

I was born in Lhasa, Tibet, in 1977. My family was poor but we were very close, and I loved playing games and being with my two older sisters and my four brothers. When we had dinner together at home, my father used to tell us a lot of stories about Tibet and the Tibetan people. Tibet has been occupied by China since 1949, and my family have really suffered under Chinese rule.

My father Namgyal Tashi used to tell us how he had been involved in the 1959 Lhasa Uprising against Chinese rule, which led to the deaths and imprisonment of tens of thousands of Tibetans. My mother also told me that during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet in the 1970s, he would be subjected to such severe beatings during political 'struggle sessions' that sometimes he would be brought home unconscious. Later he suffered more persecution after he refused to sign an official letter expressing support for Chinese policies in Tibet. I admired my father's determination and courage. I also shared his strength of feeling for our country.

It is common for at least one child in a Tibetan family to be sent to a monastery or nunnery to receive a religious education, and at the age of 12 I joined Garu nunnery. My family was very religious and devoted to Tibetan Buddhism, and I was happy to become a nun. I immediately fitted into the small close-knit community there.

It was really from the age of 12 that I began to be aware of the truth of my mother and father's stories, about the way Tibetans were repressed by the Chinese. The occupation of Tibet by China turned into something very personal for me. I became determined to do something, to resist in some way. It wasn't because of anger. It was something deeper. One day some of the nuns were talking about making a protest against the Chinese. I decided to join the nuns in their political demonstration.

We set off one morning to make our protest at a religious festival at the Norbulingka, the former summer palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I was only 13, and the youngest and smallest in our group of 13 nuns. We knew that because there were going to be many people there, we would receive a lot of attention for what we were going to do. We also knew that there would be many armed Chinese police. We walked into the middle of the crowd and started shouting, 'Long live the Dalai Lama!' 'Free Tibet!' Almost immediately, Chinese police in uniform and in plain clothes dragged us away. We were forced into a truck and taken to Gutsa detention centre outside the city.

When we arrived at Gutsa, we were subjected to many hours of violent interrogation. The prison guards told us we were 'counter-revolutionaries' who were trying to separate Tibet from China. The interrogators beat us with iron pipes and sometimes with electric cattle-prods. They attached live electric wires to our tongues. They even tied us up in a very painful 'airplane' position, where our hands were tied back and hung from the ceiling. It felt like my shoulders were being pulled out of their sockets.

The guards would constantly try to find out who were the leaders of the protest among us nuns. They would constantly try to make us accuse each other or confess that what we did on behalf of Tibet was wrong. But we would all band together to resist them. We would all tell them that we were the leader. And of course they would beat us more for that defiance.

We were always cold at night and hungry. I would try to catch rainwater by holding my cup outside the cell, but I was so small that I could barely reach far enough beyond the bars.

My parents found out where I was from neighbours, who had heard about the demonstration, and my mother, Jampa Choezom, was allowed to visit me once. When I saw my mother, I forced myself not to cry, so that she would know that I was strong, and because I didn't want to distress her. We didn't say very much; she couldn't talk because she was so upset, and we were surrounded by armed guards. After she left, I collapsed in tears in my cell.

After nine months, I was released together with the other nuns and allowed to go home. But my world had fallen apart. While I'd been in detention, my father and one of my brothers, Tenzin Sherab, had been imprisoned after an incident in which the Tibetan flag was raised in Samye monastery. The Tibetan flag is banned in Tibet. Just a few weeks later, my mother died. I was told it was due to heart problems. I feel that the shock of my father and brother's arrest, combined with many years of suffering, was the cause of her death. She was only 52.

I continued to live in the family home with my brothers and sisters - we felt bereft. As a former political prisoner, I wasn't allowed to return to my nunnery, so I didn't even have the support of the community of nuns. I was always watched by police, and it was impossible for me to see friends for fear of causing trouble for them. I spent some time making offerings and praying for my mother and being with the family. But all the time I wanted to be involved in political activity. This time, I think it was mainly because I had friends who were in prison, other nuns, who were still suffering, and I wanted to do something to show my solidarity with them. When I was about 15, I went with some other nuns to the Barkor area, the main Tibetan area of Lhasa. As soon as we began calling for Tibet's freedom, the police took me away once again. This time, I would not emerge from prison for 11 years.

## **Resistance at Drapchi**

I was sentenced and transferred to Tibet's 'Number One' prison, known as Drapchi. The regime there is hard. Every day, we had a quota of weaving for the prison carpet factory, so from the moment we woke up early in the morning we would have to work until we finished our quota, which often took us until late in the evening. If we didn't meet the targets set by prison officials, we were beaten or food was withheld. There were spiders and huge rats in our cells, and at night the rats would crawl over us and sometimes bite us while we tried to sleep. We were all scared of the rats.

Soon after my arrest, several of us nuns were being held in a small dark cell. A fellow prisoner had smuggled in a tape-recorder, and 14 of us decided to record some songs secretly at night and then send it out of prison. We wanted our families to know that we were still alive, and we wanted Tibetan people to know about our situation and our love for our country.

I didn't find out until I was released in October last year (2002) that our tape-recording had become famous all over the world. A CD was even made of the songs. But we paid a heavy price. All of our prison sentences were extended by several years. Even so, I would not let them break my spirit. Soon afterwards, I made a further protest when an official Chinese delegation visited the prison. When the Chinese officials arrived, I shouted 'Freedom for Tibet!' And I told them, 'We are not permitted to show respect to our own religious leaders. Why should we show respect to Chinese officials?' As punishment, I was confined in a dark solitary cell wearing only a shirt, with no coat or blanket. The cell was very small, like being in a box. It had an open ceiling above for guards to keep watch. At night they would turn on a light and not allow me to sleep properly. I was given only a steamed flour bun and bowl of water with some vegetables in it every day to eat. Occasionally they would give me a cup of tea. I kept myself going by constantly saying my prayers, chanting silently so that the guards could not hear. I also wove some mala (rosary) beads out of threads that I had unwound from my shirt. It was winter at the time, and so cold at night that the water in the tap in my cell would turn to ice. Every day, I was made to stand outside in the courtyard in the snow. If I slumped a little bit, I would be beaten. I responded to this by shouting again for freedom. The other nuns who saw this were worried, and they went on hunger strike in my support. After six months in solitary confinement, I was released to the normal cells.

The prison guards always told other prisoners to inform on those of us who were political prisoners at Drapchi. In one cell, a young female criminal prisoner became very friendly with the nuns, but she was under constant pressure to inform on them. She became very ill, and was in a lot of pain and bleeding from her mouth, and the guards said to her, if you think those nuns are so good and kind, then let them help you. The nuns said she needed to go to hospital, but the officials wouldn't allow this and just kept asking her to report on the nuns. But she knew the nuns were trying to help her. Her distress became so great that one day the nuns returned to the cell to find that she had hanged herself.

The worst time I ever experienced in prison was in May 1998. 1 May is 'Labour Day' in China and the prison officials had organised a ceremony to raise the Communist Party flag. As all the prisoners assembled, two criminal inmates began shouting freedom slogans and chanting 'Long live the Dalai Lama!' All the monks and nuns joined in. There was immediate chaos. Soldiers and armed police started grabbing prisoners and dragging them away and beating them. Three days later, the atmosphere was still tense, and prisoners were ordered to attend another ceremony organised by prison officials. We felt it was our responsibility to do something patriotic for Tibet. Prisoners at the ceremony started chanting freedom slogans, and we joined in, shouting from our cells through the bars, I remember shouting, 'Don't raise Chinese flags on Tibetan land!' Prison guards started shooting at the prisoners.

We could see prisoners who were shot, lying on the ground bleeding and shaking. Guards rushed into our cells and grabbed us. In the courtyard, a few of us were thrown into the middle of the screaming crowd. The police were beating us savagely with electric batons and rifle butts. There was so much blood everywhere.

You know, when they were torturing us it was literally as if they were trying to kill us. They would hit and beat with all their strength. I don't know how long the beating lasted, later I heard it went on for two or three hours. At one point several guards were kicking me in the head and beating my body with batons and I fell unconscious. Later, I heard that another nun, Phuntsog Peyang, had thrown herself on top of me to protect me from the beating, thinking that I would be killed. She was then beaten badly herself. Phuntsog probably saved my life.

Afterwards we were all confined in tiny solitary cells and at night the police would take various nuns, one by one, to interrogate them. Often they would have to be dragged back to their cells unconscious following torture.

## **The death of nuns at Drapchi**

One afternoon about a month later I remember hearing a terrible cry from the cell-block nearby. This sound was not like the voices I had heard before, when we were being tortured, it was worse. This screaming made me go cold inside. It sounded something like mortal fear, a knowledge that you are going to be killed.

It was only in 2002, four years later, that I found out what had happened. Five nuns, all in their twenties, who had all been imprisoned for peaceful protests against the Chinese, had died in that cell-block. The authorities said it was suicide, but I believe they died due to torture. I heard that their bodies and faces were so swollen and bruised that people could hardly identify who they were.

The five nuns who died were the ones who resisted most. In their block they had to sing the Chinese national song and they refused so other prisoners followed. I heard later that this refusal to sing the national Chinese anthem was probably connected to their death.

In Buddhism, killing yourself is the worst thing you can do, so if those nuns did kill themselves it was for the sake of the other nuns. They wouldn't have killed themselves just because they had endured so much torture. They knew that because of their refusal to sing the Chinese song, all of the nuns had been punished. They were not afraid to die. At that time, all of us nuns from Drapchi were not afraid to die. We had gone beyond that.

I will never forget the voices I heard that day, they were really like ghosts in the night. I knew that something terrible was happening.

## Meeting my father in prison

At that time my father was being held in the same prison, but we were not allowed to see each other. He was released a year later, in 1999, but he was very ill, suffering from kidney problems and high blood pressure. Finally after his release he was allowed to visit me again in prison. We were surrounded by prison guards and the atmosphere was tense. We were so conscious that they were listening to every word, so we couldn't really say in detail how we were or discuss anything about politics or my conditions in prison. We just said very general things. It was just important for me to be with my father again. My father died at home on 20 September 2001. I heard later that he said that being able to see me in prison brought him peace before he died.

There has been so much sadness. One of my friends who was in prison has lost her mind, another is paralysed from the waist down after beatings. Three more nuns who were friends of mine died after torture.

I was finally released from Drapchi in October 2002, following an international campaign on my behalf. I was amazed to find out that even US President Bush had asked the Chinese leader Jiang Zemin for my release. Five months later, I was allowed to travel into exile. As the plane touched down in Chicago, I felt overjoyed and so grateful.

The most important thing for me about coming to the West has been to meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Tibet supporters flew me to Europe, where he was giving teachings, and it was arranged for me to meet him in Copenhagen. When I saw him walking into the lobby of the hotel, surrounded by monks and Western followers, I fell to the floor at his feet. I couldn't stop crying. But he held my hands and talked to me. I was overwhelmed with emotion. After everything I had been through, finally I felt I had come home.

I am now living in Washington, DC, working for the International Campaign for Tibet, and I want to devote myself to supporting the Tibetan cause. I had no idea while I was in prison that so many people in the outside world cared about me, and had spent years campaigning for my release. Some people in the West have called me a heroine. But I feel I am nothing special. To me, it was almost a duty to do what I did, being a Tibetan. Everything I did was inspired by His Holiness the Dalai Lama - his presence was always with me. It is now my dearest hope that my close friends still suffering in prison will soon follow the same path of freedom.

*The nuns who died at Drapchi in June 1998 were: Tsultrim Zangmo (layname: Choekyi); Lobsang Wangmo (lay name: Tsamchoe Drolkar); Drugkyi Pema (lay name Dekyi Yangzom); Khedron Yonten (lay name: Tsering Drolkar) and Tashi Lhamo (lay name Yudron).*

*Ngawang Sangdrol was talking to Kate Saunders in this account. A recording of the songs sung by Ngawang Sangdrol and her fellow nuns was smuggled out of prison and to the West, where it was made into the CD 'Seeing Nothing But the Sky', available from Free Tibet Campaign at [www.freetibet.org](http://www.freetibet.org).*

# Why we took a stand for Tibetan independence

Two of the nuns who sang the songs on tape in Drapchi prison with Ngawang Sangdrol are now living in Europe, after escaping from Tibet in 2004. They explained their motivation in carrying out the peaceful protests that led to their initial arrests, which they knew was likely to lead to torture and imprisonment.

Gyaltzen Dolkar, who is in her early thirties, took part in a demonstration with the other nuns from Garu nunnery on 22 August 1990. She was sentenced to four years imprisonment, which was increased to 12 years after singing the songs. She told ICT:

*'I am not an educated person, but I wanted to contribute to the Tibetan struggle, and the strength came from the knowledge that it is a just cause. The Chinese say that Tibet has been a part of China forever, but we wanted to show the world that Tibet is an independent and free country. Because of the strength of our feelings, we did not experience any fear when we were shouting the slogans about freedom. I wanted our actions to have an impact on other Tibetans and to give them motivation to resist too.'*

Namdrol Lhamo, a nun in her late thirties from Tashi Choeling nunnery in Shigatse prefecture and the second to last member of the 14 'singing nuns' to be released from Drapchi prison, said:

*'Tibetans have been suffering under the Chinese regime since 1959. In 1987, people in Lhasa took part in major demonstrations for independence. Lots of people were killed and injured, and dozens imprisoned for their participation in the demonstration. I became much more aware of the reality of our situation. I wanted to participate myself in the resistance against Chinese rule in order to express my opinions, and so I did so by being part of a peaceful protest. I wanted to contribute to a better situation in Tibet, to have more freedom and rights for our people. We knew the consequences of being arrested, but we carried out our protests because our struggle is right and fair. When I was arrested, I thought that I was going to die. But I never regretted my act. We continued to resist in prison until we could go no further. It was our contribution to the struggle. Now we are in exile, we will continue to resist by bearing witness to the Tibet issue based on our own experience.'*



# Nothing to see but the Sky:

Two prison songs sung by the 14 Drapchi nuns in 1994

སྟོབ་པའི་གཤམ་ཅིག་བཏང་ཡོད།

We've Sung a Song of Sadness

སྟོབ་པའི་ལ་གཤམ་ཅིག་བཏང་ཡོད།  
གྲ་བཞིའི་ནང་ནས་བཏང་ལ་ཡོད།  
དགའ་སྟེང་གངས་རི་འདྲ་བའི།  
གཤམ་ཤིག་རང་བཙན་ཆེད་དུ་བཏང་ཡོད།

We've sung a song of sadness  
We've sung it from Drapchi prison  
Like the happy and joyful snow mountains  
We've sung this song for the sake of freedom

སྟོན་ཆད་ལ་ཆོས་ལུན་ཞིང་ཁམས་རེད།  
ད་ཆ་ཀྱ་སྟེའི་བཙོན་རྒྱུར།  
འོང་མིས་སྟོག་ལ་ཐུག་ཀྱང་།  
སྟོང་སྟོང་བས་ནས་ཡང་མི་ལྟུ།

Previously, a spiritual realm of dharma  
Now, is changed to a barbaric prison ground.

ཨ་ཙེ་ལ་བོད་མི་ལ་སྟོབ་པ་ལ།  
ཀྱ་སྟེའི་ཉེས་རྒྱུད་དཀའ་པོ་བཏང་།  
ང་ཚོར་རང་དབང་མེད་པས།  
ཀྱ་སྟེའི་འོག་ཏུ་འཛུད་མོང་།

Even at the cost of our lives, we Tibetans,  
Will never lose our courage.  
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

གྲ་བཞིའི་ནང་ནས་བརྟམས་པས་ལ།

I looked out from Drapchi Prison

གྲ་བཞིའི་ནང་ནས་བརྟམས་པས་ལ།  
མཆོང་རྒྱ་གནས་ལས་མི་འདུག  
གནས་ལ་འཁོར་བའི་སྟོན་པ།  
ལམ་ལུས་ཡིན་ན་བསམ་བློང་།

I looked out from Drapchi prison  
There was nothing to see but sky  
The clouds that gather in sky,  
We thought, if only these were our parents.  
We fellow prisoners

ང་ཚོ་བཙོན་གྲོགས་འདི་གས་ལ།  
ནོར་བུ་བྱིང་གའི་ལ་མེ་ཉྒྱ།  
སད་དང་མེར་བས་བརྒྱབ་ཀྱང་།  
ལག་གདང་བལ་ས་མ་རེད།

[Like] flowers in Norbulingka,  
Even if we're beaten by frost and hail,  
Our joined hands will not be separated.

གར་ལྷོགས་སྟོན་བཟང་དཀར་པོ།  
བརྒྱབས་པའི་ལྗན་པ་མ་རེད།  
ཉེ་མ་སྟོན་པའི་འོག་ནས།  
དྲུངས་པའི་དུས་ཅིག་གར་ལ་ཡོང་།

The white cloud from the east  
Is not a patch that is sewn  
A time will come when the sun will emerge  
From the cloud  
And shine clearly

མེས་པ་སྟོག་མི་འདུག་ལ།  
ག་རེ་ཡིན་ཟེར་ལ་སྟོབ།  
ཉིན་མོའི་ཉེ་མ་བཞུད་ཀྱང་།  
མཆོན་མོའི་རྒྱ་བ་ཡོད་རེད།  
ཉིན་མོའི་ཉེ་མ་བཞུད་ཀྱང་།  
མཆོན་མོའི་རྒྱ་བ་ཡོད་རེད།

Our hearts are not sad;  
Why should we be sad?  
Even if the sun doesn't shine during the day  
There will be the moon at night  
Even if the sun doesn't shine during the day  
There will be the moon at night

# A Small Act of Kindness

## A former political prisoner remembers an attempt by a Chinese official to understand 'Rangzen'

I was imprisoned in 1988 and served most of my sentence in Lhasa's Drapchi prison. Of course I was beaten and tortured. And so when I was summoned one morning from my cell, two years into my sentence, I expected nothing less. I was scared. I was met by a senior Chinese prison official. I walked into the office and he told me to sit down, pulling out a chair for me. This in itself was unusual; I thought that this must be serious. Then he offered me a cup of tea and a cigarette. He told me not to worry, because he just wanted to talk, and there would be no consequences. During my time in prison, I had never been offered a cup of tea or a cigarette by an officer. To experience this small act of kindness was almost overwhelming. It made me drop my guard completely.

Sometimes kindness can be just as effective a method in obtaining information as violence, if not more so. The Chinese understand that. In this case though, the official was right; there were no consequences, and he wanted to know much more than you would be asked in a normal interrogation. He wanted to know why I had risked my life by carrying out my peaceful protest, and how I felt about that now. Did I regret it? Did I really think that Tibetan independence was still something to be aspired for? It seemed during our conversation that the official really wanted to understand these things.

I told him that even though I had been through all these terrible things in prison and had nearly died, I still hadn't changed my point of view, and nor had my cell-mates. I told him that even if they killed us, this still wouldn't solve the Tibetan problem with China, because Tibetans and Chinese have a totally different culture. We still believed passionately that Tibet should be independent. I told him that the political education system in prison was ridiculous - we were given the answers to specific questions, then we were asked the questions, and we just had to recite the answers. I told him, this is a really stupid system! He laughed. Perhaps he agreed. I told him that we were aware that even high-level officers like him didn't have the power to change such things, as directions came from Beijing, and he agreed. We talked for about two hours, and I felt really happy. It was the first time that a prison official had spoken to me like a human being. The officials who are torturing you don't want to know these things. I had had a rare opportunity to express myself. I have no illusions about the fact that the official was gathering information about us Tibetan prisoners. But it seemed to me that he also genuinely wanted to understand exactly why we were prepared to risk so much to shout 'Free Tibet' or 'Long live the Dalai Lama'. He wanted to know the spirit that kept us going. I'm glad that these days memories of the torture and interrogation I endured at Drapchi don't stay in my mind too much. But I particularly remember this meeting, as it seemed to me to be a significant encounter between two very different ways of thinking.

*- The writer is a former monk who was released from prison in the mid-1990s after serving more than five years for his participation in political protests. He now lives in exile.*

## Visionaries and treasure-seekers: religion and repression

The emergence of monastic encampments ('chögars' in Tibetan) in eastern Tibet has created a new space for Tibetans to practice Buddhism in a climate of increasing religious repression. These monastic centers in Amdo and Kham (now Qinghai and Sichuan provinces) are an increasingly important means of ensuring the continuity of Tibetan Buddhist lineage and activities, and strengthening cultural identity for many Tibetans.

Chögars today are avant-garde monastic institutes for the study, practice, and promotion of Buddhist teachings otherwise difficult to access or non-existent in regular monasteries and nunneries due to persistent pressures imposed on monasteries and other formal religious institutes by government policies that undermine their authority and prominent role in religious affairs.

Teachings at the chögars, which first appeared in the 14th century in Tibet, have revitalized Tibetan Buddhist contemplation and scholarship in recent years. The high standard of religious education and traditional Buddhist instruction offered by qualified teachers is attracting more and more monks, nuns and laypeople from both Tibetan areas and from China itself, reflecting an increasing Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism. Among the most popular chögars are Yachen Gar, led by Achö Khenpo Rinpoche, Larung Gar, founded by the late Khenchen Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, and Lungön Gar, led by Kusum Lingpa Rinpoche.

Predominantly established within the Nyingma tradition, today these communities are led by charismatic masters claiming visionary activities, treasure (Tibetan: gter ma) discovery (finding tantric teachings that had been hidden centuries before) and ascetic virtuosity. They are now places for traditional instruction and contemplation rather than temporary facilities set up for special occasions. Most monks and nuns move to these religious encampments from their home monasteries, some temporarily, and others permanently, to gain access to specific Buddhist instructions emerging from the spiritual attainments of their teachers. Traditional study curricula, given in an ecumenical and non-sectarian environment, which include philosophy, logic-epistemology, and debate, are offered at almost all chögars.

In many of these religious encampments, there is little or no restriction on enrollment and less centralized control or management of the complexes than in formally-established monasteries, allowing for the influx of many monastics and lay practitioners alike from different regions and schools of Tibetan Buddhism. A recent phenomenon is also the presence among the chögars of large groups of Chinese (both mainland and Taiwan), and non-Chinese (such as Malaysian and Singaporean) who go there to study and in many cases, to take ordination and become monastics in Tibet.

*The author is a scholar on Tibet whose name is withheld.*

# Bringing Tibetans together through cyberspace: the impact of China's digital revolution on a new generation

by Tashi Rabgey

For those wired onto the Internet in Tibet, digital technology has brought not only unprecedented access to information but also a new means of creating networks of relationships with those who would otherwise be strangers. For Tibetans, the significance of this technological innovation is particularly striking because of the limits that have been imposed over public communication and expression in Tibetan-speaking areas during the post-Mao era.

While there has been a rapid expansion of economic reforms in Tibet since the 1980s, the scope for public discussion and open exchange of ideas has diminished markedly over time. For example, in the early 1980s, the revival of print media and the development of modern Tibetan literature generated a burst of intellectual energy and provided the impetus for the first critical discussion of questions concerning the problem of modernity and Tibetan cultural change. But constraints on Tibetan writers heightened after 1994, undermining the innovation and originality that marked the first wave of iconoclastic writers such as Dhondup Gyal.



Monk using computer in internet café. © Tibet Images

Likewise, the 'sweet tea houses' of Lhasa (Tibetan: ja mngar mo) also lost their role as spaces for public discussion and open debate in the early 1990s. Throughout the 1980s, from late morning until early afternoon, the sweet tea houses dotting the old town of Lhasa would swell with animated talk. Certain establishments, and even certain tables, were known for the discussion of particular themes and topics – ranging from as broad as international affairs to as narrow as the financial concerns of truck drivers. With the tightening of political controls in the early 1990s, however, this unusual space of lively open debate was brought to an end through constant surveillance.

By the late 1990s, however, the effects of the state's longer-term economic and social strategies conspired to give rise to an entirely new form of Tibetan public space. First, the mandate to improve China's long-term growth and international competitiveness provided the momentum for a massive expansion of network infrastructure between 1993 and 1996. The full-scale wiring of China was thus less a product of private sector considerations than of 'a state-centric strategy' for comprehensively advancing information technology. There are now 86,000 Internet users in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) alone and 195,000 in the province of Qinghai (China Information Network Center, January 2004).

Among the new Tibetan Internet users are a large group of young Tibetans who had been sent *en masse* to be educated in Chinese cities from middle school onward as part of a special program launched in 1985. Unlike the older generation of Tibetan elites, these young Tibetans (the oldest cohort is now in their early thirties) did not experience the trauma of Tibet's annexation or the psychological devastation of the Cultural Revolution. Born after 1972, these Tibetans were brought up in a Chinese-ruled Tibet, but one in which there was a minor renaissance of Tibetan cultural identity and a new awareness of a political struggle being waged in their name. This new generation now constitutes the first critical mass of fully bilingual and bicultural Tibetans.

Just as 20 years ago the advent of print media and literary journals triggered a burst of interest in self-expression and social critique, the recent arrival of the Internet has heightened the self-awareness and reflexivity of an entirely new generation of Tibetans. This new cultural moment is potentially even more significant because of the speed and physical reach of computer-mediated information. Discussions on one cultural website during its first months of existence revealed an acute dissatisfaction with the current Tibetan elite as well as a collective vision for Tibet that encompasses all Tibetan-speaking areas.

This coincides with the general impetus toward increased regional integration. In nearly every aspect of social, political, and economic life, the various Tibetan autonomous areas share far more in common with each other than with the Chinese provinces to which they have been assigned. Even Chinese official discourse has increasingly used the concept of *shezang* ('involving Tibet') to acknowledge the commonality of interests throughout the Tibetan autonomous areas...The Internet has accelerated the development of these positions by collapsing physical space and bringing Tibetans in Beijing, Lhasa and Labrang into a single conversation.

*This is an edited extract from an unpublished paper by Tashi Rabgey, LLM*

# Concepts of violence and non-violence in Chinese law

an extract from the *Congressional-Executive Commission on  
China Annual Report 2004*

*'Some actions that are crimes have consequences. Some don't.'*

The Chinese government severely restricts the rights of Tibetans to exercise constitutionally guaranteed human rights, including the freedoms of speech, press, association, and religion. China's constitution also bans actions deemed 'detrimental to the security, honor and interests of the motherland.' The state represses or punishes peaceful expression by Tibetans deemed to 'endanger state security' or to be 'splittist', even if the expression is non-violent and poses no threat to the state.

An official in Beijing explained the Chinese view of the roles of 'violence' and 'consequence' in crime to Commission staff in September 2003. 'There is not a distinct line between violent and non-violent,' he said. 'A non-violent action can result in eventual violence. If someone advocates an idea that could later become a threat to the country, then the statement is a form of violence, and it is a crime to be punished...Social consequence determines whether it is a crime.' A provincial official told Commission staff, 'All criminal acts must have four elements to be crime.' One of the elements, he said, is 'consequence'. But he emphasized that in the case of Tibetans, 'You have to understand the background. It is necessary to take Tibetan history into account. Tibetans combine religion and politics.' Another official defended the notion of crimes without consequence succinctly: 'Some actions that are crimes have consequences. Some don't.'

...State restrictions on religion, including devotion to the Dalai Lama, interfere with the normal practice of religion for Tibetans. Suspicious authorities can impute subversive motives to Tibetans' dedication to their religion, as well as to their enthusiasm for Tibetan culture, language, and self-identity. Provinces where political imprisonment rates are lower, however, also appear to have a somewhat less repressive environment for Tibetan culture. Conversely, provinces where political detention rates are higher are known to deal with Tibetans and their culture more harshly. The unrestricted power that the Party and state enjoy to characterize peaceful expression as a threat to state security, when in fact no threat or consequence to the state is present, undermines Tibetan human rights. Modern states regularly update assessments of actions that could pose a *bona fide* threat to state security and adjust levels of tolerance and response accordingly. Prosecuting and punishing peaceful expression are inconsistent with international human rights practices and the rule of law. If Chinese police, prosecutors, and courts successfully implement China's constitutional articles and laws that protect human rights and the rule of law, then Tibetans and Chinese will both benefit.

*The full report, the CECC Virtual Academy, and a database of political prisoners in Tibetan areas are available at [www.cecc.gov](http://www.cecc.gov)*

# The non-violent nature of Tibetan resistance

## Eyewitness to history

by Jonathan Mirsky

What is noteworthy about Tibetan resistance to China's long occupation since 1950 is how non-violent, although not wholly so, it has been. Nothing in Tibet's tradition explains this, marked as it is by war with foreign enemies as well as internal violent struggles for power, marked by torture and murder, especially within the entourages of the Dalai Lamas. Few Dalai Lamas died of old age in their beds. In the first decade of Chinese rule Tibetans ferociously, if ineffectively, fought the invaders.

But after 1959, with the flight of the 14th Dalai Lama to his Indian exile, resistance and opposition to the Chinese have consisted, for the most part, of scorn, poems, songs and graffiti - four traditional modes of protest - together with displays of the forbidden Snow Lion (Tibetan national) flag, marches and demonstrations. The Chinese reaction has been prompt, frequently by shooting, imprisonment and stringent prison conditions. Lhasa's prisons are an international byword for torture. I have seen, in the late Eighties, an army officer, in the square opposite the Jokhang, shoot dead a monk carrying the Snow Lion flag at the head of a small march of monks chanting praises of the Dalai Lama. Had this occurred elsewhere in the PRC there might have been uproar, but there was none.

Dharamsala propagandists and enthusiasts in the West have portrayed Tibet as a place of eternal Buddhist non-violence. Most Tibetan or Western scholars do not concur with this portrait which ignores, for example, that in 763, Tibetan forces occupied Changan, the capital of the mighty Tang dynasty. The dynastic annals routinely refer to the Tibetans as cruel and predatory, and in over a century of battles the Tibetans usually won. To this day Chinese authorities describe the dispatch of a Tang princess to the Tibetan king in the mid-Seventh century as a civilising gesture. In fact it was what the Mafia today would term 'protection' against Tibetan invasion.

To leap into the 1920s and 1930s, during those years a debate took place in Lhasa between those who advocated a modern British-supplied and trained army, and monks in the most powerful monasteries, who considered such a development a threat to their positions. Melvyn Goldstein's 'A History of Modern Tibet' includes photographs of Tibetan soldiers in British uniforms drilling with modern machineguns and artillery; he quotes the 13th Dalai Lama warning Sir Charles Bell, the senior British official in Lhasa, of the opposition to such developments among the clergy, who themselves were far from pacific. *"The mass of the monks do not consider their actions; they act without thinking. I am always afraid that they will cause bloodshed at the great festivals in Lhasa."* Bell observed that in those days the Dalai Lama's entourage included armed soldiers. Even today, Indian soldiers with automatic weapons guard the Dalai Lama's bungalow.

In the end the monks won this debate and Tibet was militarily weak when the Chinese invaded in 1950. But the resistance was violent. As Jamyang Norbu contends in Barnett's and Akiner's 'Resistance and Reform in Tibet' it is untrue that the first decade of opposition

to Chinese rule was non-violent. 'There never was a non-violent campaign against the Chinese. Even the few public demonstrations before the uprising of March 10, 1959 were not a display of the public's commitment to non-violence: quite the reverse. They were a signal to the Chinese that the Tibetans were prepared to act violently to protect their leader,' Norbu quotes Harvard's Roderick MacFarquhar on that period. It was, Professor MacFarquhar contends, 'the gravest episode of internal disorder [in the People's Republic] prior to the Cultural Revolution. ' In his 'Orphans of the Cold War,' Kenneth Knaus, who was deeply involved, shows how the CIA trained Tibetans in Okinawa and the United States to conduct guerrilla operations, which were largely ineffective, against the Chinese. CIA operations were called off in the late Sixties although some guerrillas continued to fight for a few more years.

Why then has the Tibetan opposition to the Chinese occupation been so strikingly non-violent apart from the guerrilla operations - since the Dalai Lama's flight in 1959? This is not a mystery. It is because of the Dalai Lama himself who has implacably urged non-violence on his supporters, which means virtually all Tibetans; such a figure has not emerged in Xinjiang. This policy has been outspokenly opposed by younger Tibetans abroad, but even they, despite their discussions of fomenting and mounting anti-Chinese sabotage and assassination, have hardly breached it. It is especially astonishing, especially after large-scale Chinese atrocities during the Cultural Revolution, how few accounts there are after 1959 of Tibetan violence against Chinese in Lhasa and elsewhere. In the late 1980s monks and civilians attacked Chinese offices and on one occasion a police station; some Tibetans were shot dead. In March 1989, just before martial law was declared, a great demonstration was mounted by monks: a Chinese security man was thrown from the roof of the Jokhang, and the army then killed many Tibetans, perhaps several hundred, in the alleys around the Jokhang. That only one Chinese was killed is notable. Those were the years when now-President Hu Jintao was Party Secretary in Tibet, where he told me how dangerous Tibetans were.

Tibetans continue to resist non-violently, even as their situation darkens, with so many Hans now in Tibet that in Lhasa they are said to outnumber native inhabitants. There are frequent accounts of acts of disobedience and defiance by monks and more especially by nuns. Few if any Tibetans accept the Chinese-imposed 11th Panchen Lama, the result of the kidnapping and disappearance in 1995 of the legitimate incarnation. Tibetans must understand, as the present Dalai Lama does, that the kidnapping and imposition of the child-Panchen were rehearsals for what happens when the present 14th Lama passes from the scene; will they simply ignore a Chinese-imposed successor?

That the Chinese regard Tibet with suspicion and fear is only too plain from the extent of their military forces in the region. That the occupiers are rarely in physical danger from Tibetans, who have a fierce history, is almost beyond belief. Whether this forbearance will outlast the 14th Dalai Lama is not predictable.

*Dr Jonathan Mirsky is a journalist and historian specializing in Chinese affairs. He has been to Tibet six times. In 1989 he received the British Press Award, International Journalist of the Year, for his reporting from Tiananmen.*



# Waiting For The Inevitable

## by Ma Jian

In 1985, after three years of travelling through the dusty hinterlands of China, I finally reached Tibet. I had hoped to find there a refuge from the soulless and materialist society that China was becoming. Growing up in China, I had been fed communist propaganda about Tibet's 'Peaceful Liberation', and so I didn't expect to face any particular antagonism. But when I arrived, I found a country that was under siege, and whose spiritual heart had been ripped out.

Lhasa was in the throes of 'celebrating' the 20th anniversary of the Tibet Autonomous Region. It was a farce. No one was allowed out on the streets apart from a select group of people who had been chosen by the government to either take part in the parade or stand on the pavement waving flags. On the second night, I couldn't bear being cooped up any longer, and slipped out for a midnight stroll, but was promptly arrested by the local police. When the siege was lifted, I started travelling through the countryside, visiting temples and monasteries, and was treated with either indifference or open hostility. Sometimes people even threw stones at me. But the more I saw of Tibet and the damage that Chinese rule had inflicted on the country, the more I understood the Tibetans' hostility to me. For the first time in my life I felt that I was walking through a part of the world where I had no right to be.

Two years later, when I was living in Hong Kong, I was not surprised to hear that the resistance to Chinese rule that I had felt simmering during my travels had erupted into violent protests. I admired the courage of the Tibetan lamas who demonstrated against their communist colonisers. I hoped that their efforts might lead to a greater level of autonomy for Tibet, and in turn inspire pro-democracy dissidents in mainland China to take similar bold action. But the violent crackdown in Lhasa, and the brutal Tiananmen Massacre two years later, showed how naïve it was to assume that the communist party would tolerate any open opposition to its rule.

In the last 15 years, political protests in both Tibet and mainland China have been weak and sporadic. The Chinese government has discovered that economic prosperity is more effective than machine guns and army tanks in silencing popular demands for democracy or regional autonomy. Today, people in China and Tibet are united by their common desire to get rich quick. No one has the time or inclination to think about politics. And even if the Tibetans were to suddenly start openly calling for independence again, they would face opposition not only from the Chinese government, but from 99% of the Han Chinese people who although distrust the communist party, have nevertheless swallowed its nationalist propaganda concerning the need to maintain the 'integrity of the motherland'.

Given these circumstances, what chance is there for any successful resistance to Chinese rule in Tibet? In China, most dissidents have come to the conclusion that open opposition to the government is futile, and that the only hope of reforming the Communist Party is to change it from within. A new generation of liberal-minded, foreign-educated Chinese

professionals are slowly infiltrating the government, and perhaps in decades to come they will help bring about political reforms and a greater level of autonomy for the Tibetans, Mongolians and Uyghur populations who live under Chinese control. In China, there is a belief that 'That which is united will eventually separate, and that which is separated will eventually reunite.' Now that Tibet is united with China, its eventual separation is, if one holds this belief, an inevitability. But when and how will it take place? My hope is that the separation will be peaceful and that it will take place soon, before any more of Tibet's unique culture and way of life is lost for ever.

*Ma Jian is a writer, painter and photographer from Beijing. He left China for Hong Kong in 1987, shortly before his books were banned in China, and moved to Europe at the hand-over of Hong Kong in 1997. He now lives in London. Ma Jian's book Red Dust: A Path Through China (Anchor Books, 2002), acclaimed as the Chinese equivalent of Jack Kerouac's On the Road, tells the story of his journey through the remotest parts of China.*

## A Chinese Voice in support of Tibetan Resistance

*In 1983, at the age of 30, dissident artist Ma Jian found himself divorced by his wife, separated from his daughter, betrayed by his girlfriend, facing arrest for 'Spiritual Pollution', and severely disillusioned with the confines of life in Beijing. His award-winning book Red Dust is the account of the journey he made through the most remote regions of China, journeying across deserts and over mountains. The following extracts depict a conversation in Lhasa with a Chinese cadre, Liu Ren.*

...'The Tibetans have been pushed to the limit, they have a right to be angry. Imagine if you invited some friends for supper and they decided to move in and take over your house. It is not the loss of power that hurts, it's the loss of dignity and respect.'

...'We [as Chinese living in Lhasa] bear the brunt of the anger. Tibetans can spit in our faces but we're not allowed to fight back. They have huge daggers dangling from their belts but we can't carry so much as a fruit knife.'....Liu Ren fetches the egg and tomato soup from the stove and pours it into wooden bowls.

...'For us Han Tibetophiles, Tibet is an escape from China, but we are drawn to it for aesthetic rather than religious reasons. So much of the culture is being lost, though. The Tibetans in our office are more westernized than us. They wear jeans and perm their hair. The only people left who can talk to us about art are a few mad painters hiding in the hills...You shouldn't confuse art with religion. Buddhism is a very practical philosophy. Disciples have to abide by the rules and control their desires. But art requires you to push your individuality to the extreme and break all the rules.'

...'Communism can wipe out individual rights, but it cannot destroy a nation's traditions. Although, when traditions are too strong, they can smother the individual as much as any political tyranny. This country is now caught between the two faiths. I saw little boys in Young Pioneer scarves drop their school bags in front of Jokhang Temple and perform five full prostrations.'

# A Shared History and a Common Purpose

## by Nury Turkel

A future element of the Tibetan resistance struggle may lie in establishing strategic alliances with the Uyghur people in the neighbouring autonomous region of Xinjiang. In the last few years, stronger alliances have been forged between Tibetans and Uyghurs, because the fundamental issues facing both people under Chinese occupation - the loss of cultural identity, religious freedoms, political autonomy, and economic marginalisation and dominance, are the same.

China ruled most of my homeland, known as East Turkistan, for varying periods over the past few hundred years, just as they did in Tibet. However China maintained a weak grip until the foundation of the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong in 1949, when the People's Liberation Army took control. Since 1949 the Chinese population in East Turkistan has increased from around 7% to more than 40%. The same has happened in Tibet, and the Dalai Lama has said that the influx of Chinese people is the single biggest threat to Tibet's cultural survival.

For both Tibetans and Uyghurs - a Turkic-speaking people who converted to Islam in the 1300s - this threat has increased dramatically since Beijing's accelerated drive to develop the Western regions of the PRC, including Tibet and East Turkistan. The Chinese domination of the economy in both East Turkistan and Tibet is linked to Beijing's policies of control over its 'minority nationalities'. The late Yulo Dawa Tsering, a senior religious teacher in Tibet who served 20 years in prison for the peaceful expression of his views, could have been speaking for Uyghurs too when he referred to the drive to develop the Western regions as representing 'a period of emergency and darkness.'

Since 11 September 2001, Beijing has continued to use the international 'war against terror' to justify harsh repression in East Turkistan, which continues to result in serious human rights violations against the ethnic Uyghur community. The authorities make little distinction between acts of violence and acts of peaceful resistance. There are thousands of political prisoners in East Turkistan, and it is currently the only province in the PRC that continues to execute people for political offences. Repression is targeted at the heart of Uyghur identity, involving the closure of mosques, restrictions on the use of the Uyghur language and the banning of certain Uyghur books and journals. A policy that, since the mid-1990s, has been seen to be effective in silencing many dissenting voices in East Turkistan and Tibet.

Like Tibetans, Uyghurs have been demoralized and undermined by hardline security policies and crackdowns on their culture, language and religion. But equally, for many of us, Chinese rule has intensified our sense of national pride and identity. Uyghurs stand alongside Tibetans by expressing their continued resistance to the Party and government through their language, culture and jokes. It happens everyday; at Uyghur gatherings, over the dinner table. In the Uyghur language, there are so many nuances of expression to convey the subtleties of what is happening. This is one of the reasons for China's ongoing persecution of Uyghur artists, writers and comedians.

There's a well-known joke about the appointment of the new chairman of the so-called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Jiang Zemin (China's former Party Secretary and President) locks up four Uyghurs in a dark room and touches their heads. He then picks the one with the softest skull. It's a reference to the fact that the Chinese don't care how skilful, talented or knowledgeable Uyghurs are; the most important virtue in a leader is their 'soft head': their submissiveness to Beijing.

Chinese propaganda depicts Uyghur resistance against the Chinese as 'violent separatism', and the international press have sometimes taken up this theme too, often describing this as a contrast to the peaceful resistance of Tibetans. The real picture is much more complex. It is true that violent anti-government activity was reported in East Turkistan before the mid-1990s. But it is next to impossible to connect known Uyghur separatist organizations with most of the violent incidents inside East Turkistan in recent years, and the frequency of violent activity associated with Uyghur separatism has declined dramatically since the late 1990s. All of the underground networks have been largely broken up and the people disempowered by the coercive mechanisms of the state, which has all served to make any form of overt resistance less likely.

Uyghur political prisoners don't have the same profile as Tibetan political prisoners, partly because security measures are so ruthless and so sophisticated that this information is not reaching the West. In general, it seems that China is much more careful about how it handles the Tibet issue because it remains high on the international political agenda and the situation there is monitored by lobbying organisations and activists all over the world who take every opportunity to make representations on behalf of the Tibetan people.

It is also because the Tibetans, both those who continue to resist and those who choose to conform to the ways of the Chinese regime, have the leadership of the Dalai Lama. Even though we don't have any religious attachment to the Dalai Lama, I know that Uyghur people admire him greatly. On an international level, he has unified Tibetans both in Tibet and in exile. We admire his dedication and the sacrifices he has made for his people, in the way he lives his life. He has provided the noblest example of peaceful resistance.

The future for the Uyghur people, and indeed Tibetans, is very much linked to the international climate. As an emerging global economic power, China has an increasing need for energy resources and is challenging the only world superpower, the US, with its developing influence in Asia, the Islamic world, and Europe. There is simply no precedent in world history for the Chinese state today. But it is becoming clearer that even as the Party leadership tightens its grip, its legitimacy is under challenge from its own people, and its political system is ultimately fragile. Today, it is ever more important for Uyghur people to strengthen their political and economic ties with Tibetans facing the same threat from China. We need to hold fast to our language and our culture during this darkest time of our history.

*Nury Turkel, who was born in Kashgar, East Turkistan, is a lawyer and President of the Uyghur American Association. He lives in Washington. See [www.uyghuramerican.org](http://www.uyghuramerican.org)*

# Prospects for the future: talks between Beijing and the Dalai Lama

*from Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era:  
Lessons and Prospects (East-West Center)*

**by Tashi Rabgey and Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho**

After 50 long years of resistance to Chinese rule, in September 2002, an official envoy of the Dalai Lama arrived in Beijing to take part in what has become the most serious round of Sino-Tibetan talks since the early 1980s. Since then, the Dalai Lama's representatives have undertaken two further trips to meet with counterparts in China. In a formal statement following the third visit, which took place in September 2004, special envoy Lodi Gyari described the meetings as 'the most extensive and serious exchange of views' between the parties to date. In the following extract from the paper *Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era: Lessons and Prospects* (East-West Center), authors Tashi Rabgey and Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho explore how pressure to renew contacts with the Dalai Lama has come not only externally from Western governments, lobbied by the Tibet support movement, but also internally from domestic critics.

...Advocates of a new approach include members of the first generation of Tibetan communists, a group with considerable prestige and a degree of political capital...Also supporting renewed engagement are senior military officials of the 18th Army, who, for political and historical reasons, have long been critical of the hard-line approach toward the Dalai Lama...One recent document circulating among Party officials states, 'Anyone who thinks the Tibet issue should be dragged on until after the death of the 14th Dalai Lama is naïve, unwise, and [supporting] the wrong policy.'

...While no doubt there is still a strong aversion to the Dalai Lama in China, commentaries and discussions on the Chinese-language Internet nonetheless indicate a growing interest in engaging in talks to resolve the dispute... The most prominent public advocate of dialogue with the Dalai Lama has been Wang Lixiong, a Beijing-based writer whose provocative essay, *The Dalai Lama is the Key to the Tibet Problem*, has been circulated within the Party. Wang contends that the situation in Tibet is potentially more volatile now than during the unrest of the late 1980s, because resentment against Chinese rule has spread to the Tibetan cadres and state workers. Predicting the failure of China's rapid economic development policy in Tibet, Wang calls on the Chinese leadership to find a lasting solution in partnership with the Dalai Lama, and he urges this be done while his offer to relinquish the goal of independence is still on the table. Intellectuals such as Wang are clearly outside the policy-making process, yet their views are reaching a larger audience as Chinese political discourse becomes more plural and diverse.

Most importantly, Chinese analysts and scholars of foreign affairs and international studies have in recent years begun pointing out the long-term strategic advantages of renewed contacts with the Dalai Lama. In particular, it has been argued that Tibet constitutes a weak link in China's political system that will remain vulnerable to manipulation by hostile forces until it is resolved...For example, it was argued by academics from Beijing University at the Fourth Work Forum of 2001 that rapprochement with the Dalai Lama would reduce China's strategic risks in the volatile region of the Indian subcontinent. These pragmatic considerations contrast sharply with the conservative political discourse of the mid-1990s, a time when considerable optimism was projected about the 'post-Dalai Lama period.' Throughout the mid- and late-1990s, officials of the United Front routinely asserted at large meetings that China's problems in Tibet would disappear after the Dalai Lama's death. Now, however, PRC policymakers increasingly predict that by isolating the Dalai Lama, China could miss an historic opportunity to permanently resolve the Tibet issue. Instead of ending the issue, the Dalai Lama's death would simply eliminate Beijing's primary scapegoat for its problems in the region.

...Other developments have more complex implications for the dialogue process...The rapid economic expansion in Tibet appears to be creating a heightened sense of ethnic cleavage and dispossession among the Tibetans... China's changing global position, shifts in the regional strategic balance, and the changing role of religion are also among the complicating factors. One of the most striking developments has been the institutional restructuring of Beijing's decision-making process for managing the Tibet issue. China has created an elite 'leading small group' on Tibet [including Zhou Yongkang, Minister of Public Security and Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing], drastically expanded the Tibetan units in the United Front (the Party organ charged with establishing alliances with non-Party interest groups), and over-hauled the key personnel dealing with Tibetan policy and administration. These developments have made Beijing's institutional management of Tibetan affairs more complex and considerably less predictable.

...It is likely that the real question is not whether the Chinese leadership is aware of this singular opportunity [of the prospects for Sino-Tibetan engagement], but rather whether it is willing to accept the risks involved. The inertia and conservatism currently pervading the Chinese political system suggest that the leadership will be averse to taking these risks. But while Beijing can perhaps afford to put off other high-risk political issues, the Dalai Lama's lifespan concretely defines the window of opportunity for developing a political solution for Tibet.

*The full paper is available at: [www.eastwestcenterwashington.org](http://www.eastwestcenterwashington.org)*

*Tashi Rabgey, LLM, is a PhD candidate at Harvard University. Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho, a former researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, is a Tibetan journalist based in Washington, DC.*

# Solidarity in Europe: an encounter with the Polish resistance

by Adam Koziel

The meeting took place on a hot summer day in 1993, during the Dalai Lama's first visit to Poland. There was a sense that this visit was special, in the sense of a shared history under communist rule. We met in the private apartment of one of the founders of the workers' defence movement against the Communist Party. This particular group had chosen not to work 'underground' during the 1970s, feeling that this could only lead to revolution, which would be bloody and violent - and preferring to follow a path of making their protests against the regime as open as possible. Also present at the meeting was the only surviving military leader of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, and the first non-Communist Prime Minister in central Europe. So of course there were political resonances that did not escape the attention of His Holiness (see picture, page 60).

Poland, like Tibet, once ruled a very powerful kingdom. Poland, like Tibet, chose to introduce a new religion - Christianity - which would completely transform it. And, in choosing to adopt this new religion, Poland, like Tibet, was mindful of similar strategic considerations. Over time, the Polish kingdom would be broken into provinces before emerging united and even stronger, only to be seized by neighboring powers and disappear from the map of world for 150 years. During this period, we experienced Germanization and Russification, much as Tibet now endures Sinicization. Like Tibetans, we Poles had governments in exile and strong refugee communities. In fact, some of our most important works of art, including many that shape our modern national identity, were written in exile.

The Dalai Lama had not been briefed on the significance of the venue for the meeting, but these veterans of the Polish resistance roared with laughter when he said on arrival that he had the feeling that he was participating in an underground meeting. He was exactly right. For years, these men had suffered from political persecution; friends had been beaten to death by secret police; and that very apartment had been bugged and often raided.

There are parallels between the ingenuity in the Tibetans in peacefully resisting Chinese rule and the methods we used in our political activism. In the 1980s, after martial law had been declared and the activism of the workers' solidarity movement was at its height, the Communists would broadcast official news, which was sheer propaganda, at 7.30 pm each evening. At this exact time, the inhabitants of Warsaw chose to take an evening stroll. The message was obvious. This sort of action gave us a sense of community and strength.

Sometimes, during martial law, you could go out and look up at the windows of a few high tower blocks in the center of Warsaw, which would be lit up in order to spell the symbol for Polish resistance. This was achieved by the coordination of people in the building, often students, switching their lights on or off at an agreed time of night. You would see police running into the building and frantically banging on people's doors, telling them to turn their light on or off. And often messages declaring that Solidarity will prevail would appear during official broadcasts.

Poles understand Tibetan feelings of betrayal by the international community. After the Second World War, Poles felt forgotten, betrayed and sold out by the world to Stalin's empire. However, through these tragedies the Polish nation, like the Tibetan nation, held fast to its identity, its language and its culture primarily due to its strong religious bond and the efforts of its religious leaders. And finally after all this bloodshed - as His Holiness the Dalai Lama so passionately wishes for his native Tibet - we in Poland regained our independence, freedom and rights through non-violent means and dialogue.

For Poles, there is no more powerful symbol of this than the date of June 4th 1989. On that day, while we in Poland cast votes in the first partially free election in over half a century - an election that would transform not only Poland but our entire region - on the other side of the world, Chinese tanks and soldiers were massacring the students and citizens of Beijing. A precedent for martial law in the PRC had been set three months earlier, in Lhasa.

Sadly, I am of the opinion that we in Poland missed an important historical opportunity to speak and act for Tibetan freedom. In the years immediately following our transformation, we, together with our counterparts in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, were the new voices - and the world was listening. Equally disappointing, it is clear today that Beijing has not taken the lesson of our region's history. In Central Europe, it was clear that the transition from authoritarianism was more peaceful and ultimately more successful in those countries - like Czechoslovakia and Poland - with a strong democratic opposition. Conversely, those regimes that did not tolerate the slightest dissent - most notably Romania - experienced a wrenching transition in which much blood was shed. It has also become absolutely clear to us that, contrary to the fears of the Chinese regime, respect for the rights and freedoms of all citizens, minorities, workers and religious groups alike can make a state only stronger, not weaker.

During his visit to Poland, the Dalai Lama met the head of the Polish Catholic Church. We were concerned about possible tension, because the Primate is not well-known for his openness and tolerance to other faiths or views. But the Dalai Lama began by asking him frank questions about the time during the Communist era when the church was a safe space for people to express themselves and cultivate their national identity. He even asked about specific historical incidents, such as the massacre of Polish officers by Russians at Katyn (he had not been briefed about Polish history but was clearly well-informed). The Primate gave a lot of consideration to his answers, and the meeting went on much longer than scheduled. I heard that the Primate told journalists later that never in his life had he experienced such a strong spiritual presence; an amazing statement from someone who had personally known four Popes. The Primate also used an expression meaning 'presence' to refer to the Dalai Lama; a word that is not normally used in Polish. I doubt that he knew that Tibetans themselves refer to the Dalai Lama as 'Kundun', or 'presence'.

*Adam Koziel is a Tibet specialist for the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Warsaw. <http://www.hfhrpol.waw.pl/Tybet/>*



# Why I Write about Tibet

## The Resistance is in the Writing

by Eliot Pattison

Conveying the realities of modern Tibet and the drama of Tibetan resistance in all its many aspects is as important to me as creating a spellbinding mystery. Of all the labels that are applied to me, as a Western writer, I wear none more proudly than that of being part of the Tibetan resistance. My sentiments run deep:

I write about Tibet..not because I am a Buddhist but because I am not a Buddhist, because the ultimate treasures of Tibet are ones that transcend religion or philosophy, lessons that the rest of the world needs desperately to learn. Converting to the cause of Tibet does not mean a conversion to Buddhism, it means a conversion to compassion, self-awareness, human rights and political equality.

I write about Tibet..because I can hear more in one hour beside a silent monk than in a hundred hours listening to Western media.

I write about Tibet..because the world below is starved for heroes and saints and there are so many unsung ones living on the roof of the world.

I write about Tibet..to give those who do not have the opportunity to travel there an understanding of what it feels like to witness an armed policeman assault a praying monk. I write about Tibet because after travelling a million miles around the planet I know of no more perfect lens for examining ourselves and the world we have created.

I write about Tibet..because of the despair and shame I feel over what prior generations did to the American Indians and many other original peoples. I know that though the same thing is happening in Tibet, this is our generation, it is happening on our watch, and I don't want my descendants shamed by what you and I allowed to happen there.

I write about Tibet..because there is no purer symbol on earth of the struggle of soulless bureaucracy and sterile global economic forces versus tradition, spirituality, and ethnic identity. I write about Tibet because in it lies the seeds of the antidote for the troubled world we have created.

I write about Tibet..because Tibet is a monk sitting in front of a steam-roller, and if enough people around the world sit with him we can stop the steam-roller.

The ultimate credo of the ideologue who commanded the invasion of Tibet was that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. In this, as in so many other aspects, Tibet has shown us a new truth - for Tibetan resistance has proven the opposite.

*Eliot Pattison, an international lawyer by training, is the award-winning author of a series of vivid and intriguing thrillers set in contemporary Tibet – Skull Mantra, Water Touching Stone, Bone Mountain and Beautiful Ghosts. [www.eliotpattison.com](http://www.eliotpattison.com)*

# The International Campaign for Tibet

In 1987 a series of large demonstrations took place in Lhasa, started mainly by monks from monasteries around the city and increased dramatically in size by an eager lay population. Thousands of Tibetans took to the streets, at great risk, to show their opposition to China's occupation. Security forces killed many Tibetans and arrested hundreds more. The brutality of China's response to these demonstrations was met with international outrage and galvanized support for the Tibetan resistance movement.

Tibet support groups already in existence around the world worked hard to raise awareness about the grave situation in Tibet. Plans to start a new international organization, the International Campaign for Tibet, were activated. In 1988, the International Campaign for Tibet opened its doors in Washington, DC and, as membership and resources grew, offices opened in Europe.

The International Campaign for Tibet was created to support a movement that sought human rights and democratic freedoms from a government and Party inspired by one of the most brutal dictators of the 20th century - Mao Tse Tung. To this day, Mao's official portrait hangs as a reminder of his living legacy in offices and classrooms across Tibet. When Western countries, led by the United States, began to establish diplomatic relations with China, they did so with scant regard for human rights or the ongoing devastation and occupation going on in Tibet. Indeed, Tibet was a forgotten issue during the 1970s and early 1980s, and the Dalai Lama was scarcely known.

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) is a monitoring and advocacy group dedicated to promoting human rights and democratic freedoms for the people of Tibet. ICT works to free political prisoners, promote human rights and religious freedom and hold China publicly accountable. And with the support of our members and friends around the globe, we provide information and expert testimony to policymakers, secure millions of dollars in assistance to Tibetans in exile and inside Tibet, pressure Nepal to allow refugees to pass unharmed to India, and continue to develop our Tibetan empowerment and Chinese outreach programs.

ICT believes that there must be a political solution based on direct dialogue between the Dalai Lama and his representatives and the People's Republic of China. Leaders from virtually all the most protracted struggles on this planet have met to talk about their differences. Why cannot Chinese leaders meet the Dalai Lama? As the Chinese leadership defers addressing the issue of Tibet's status indefinitely, the push for genuine autonomy is likely to intensify.

ICT is a support group for Tibetans. Our mandate is to support a movement, not to lead it. It is up to Tibetans to determine if they want to pursue autonomy, independence or anything else, not a group with offices in Western capitals. But while our role in Tibet will always be secondary to that of the Tibetans who resist Chinese rule, we have a



Tibetan National Uprising Day Commemoration, Brussels 2003. © ICT

more primary role with world governments, to whom we pay taxes and vote. In the Netherlands for example, the International Campaign for Tibet has a membership of nearly 30,000 working to build support for one of the great resistance movements of our time.

All the major resistance movements of the last century were a combination of internal resistance to their oppressors and foreign support. It is in our nature to look beyond borders and help those behind a seemingly impenetrable wall, a bamboo curtain - or the Himalayas. China herself came to the aid of the African National Congress years before many Western countries, affirming this notion of solidarity.

What does solidarity mean in this context? It means refusing to let normal economic relations with China subsume support for Tibet. It means being adamant in our recognition that Tibetans have the right to choose their own religious leaders. It means providing material and political support for Tibetan refugees, and for health and education inside Tibet. It means standing up for the right of the Dalai Lama to travel and to welcome him into the highest offices in our countries with pride.

John Ackerly  
President ICT

# A tribute to Tibet from heroes of the European resistance

## The Geuzen Award



The International Campaign for Tibet has been awarded the prestigious Geuzen Medal 2005 by the Dutch Geuzenverzet 1940-1945 Foundation, established in memory of the 'de Geuzen' resistance group that fought against the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands during World War II. The award honours the work of organizations and individuals characterizing the spirit of resistance against repression.



The Dalai Lama addresses a meeting of former Polish resistance leaders and their families who successfully fought against communist rule in the 1980s. Warsaw, 1993 (see page 55, Solidarity in Europe). © Jerzy Gumowski (Agencja Gazeta)