



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Millions of Chinese students to be sent to “minority areas”; China doubles down on Tibet control during anniversary period

<http://www.savetibet.org/millions-of-chinese-students-to-be-sent-to-minority-areas-china-doubles-down-on-tibet-control-during-anniversary-period/>

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- In a move reminiscent of China’s disastrous Cultural Revolution, millions of Chinese youth volunteers will be sent to rural areas across China, including “ethnic minority areas,” to “spread civilization,” according to international news agencies.
- The activities of thousands of Communist Party cadres deployed in homes, schools and monasteries in Tibet are being prioritized under a new political campaign called “Thousands for Promotion” [of the Party state’s agenda], launched in a Tibetan area of Yunnan last month.
- Coinciding with the 60th anniversary of the Dalai Lama’s escape from China’s invading forces and the annual government meetings in Beijing in March, Chinese authorities focused on a coercive security agenda in Tibet combined with a systematic approach to deepen the Communist Party’s ideological reach. Intimidating military drills and a “Devil’s Week” extreme armed training exercise were combined with a series of meetings in monasteries and elsewhere among regional and local leaders emphasizing the political struggle against “separatism” and targeting allegiance to the Dalai Lama.

Chinese students initiative reveals return of Maoist Party ideology

In a March 22 document,¹ the Chinese Communist Youth League said it was sending more than 10 million vocational school and university students to rural areas as volunteers by 2022 in order to “increase their skills, spread civilization and promote science and technology.”² The document was made public by Chinese state media as well as by international news agencies.³

For some the deployment of millions of students to “spread civilization” evokes the excesses and chaos of the Cultural Revolution in 1966-76, when millions of Chinese intellectuals and others were sent to live in the countryside. According to an AFP report, which monitored reaction to the campaign on China’s Twitter-like Weibo social media platform, a user, WangTingYu, posted “Has it started again?,” while another user with a Tibetan-sounding name, KalsangWangduTB, posted: “Sometimes history advances, sometimes it retreats.”⁴

¹ To spur rural development, China to send millions of students on ‘volunteering’ trips
<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/12/reuters-america-to-spur-rural-development-china-to-send-millions-of-students-on-volunteering-trips.html>

² Chinese youth ‘volunteers’ to be sent back to villages in Mao-style move
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/04/12/asia-pacific/social-issues-asia-pacific/chinese-youth-volunteers-sent-back-villages-mao-style-move/#.XLSJzPIKgdU>

³ Text of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League document on “Development of Rural Revitalization” (in Chinese)
<http://www.gqt.org.cn/documents/zqf/201904/P020190409601867844904.pdf>

⁴ Chinese youth ‘volunteers’ to be sent back to villages in Mao-style move
<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/04/12/asia-pacific/social-issues-asia-pacific/chinese-youth-volunteers-sent-back-villages-mao-style-move/#.XLSJzPIKgdU>

Xi Jinping, president of China and secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, spent seven years in a village in the northwestern province of Shaanxi starting at the age of 16. Xi has become known for reinvigorating Communist Party ideology to an extent unseen since the Cultural Revolution, and policy developments in Tibet indicate a doubling-down on strategies of control and securitization.

Quoting Zhao Yue, a spokesperson for the Communist Youth League branch at Tianjin University, the state-controlled Global Times reported this month that the young Chinese students are “a major driving force in ‘promoting cultural and spiritual civilization’ in rural regions.”⁵ Giving an example, Zhao added that students from Tianjin University “have held lessons to teach rural residents and factory workers about the theories and spirits of the 19th Party Congress. To better inspire social values in rural regions, they decorated the walls in Fujia village, North China’s Tianjin Municipality, with paintings that illustrated China’s core socialist values.”

Assuming that the students will also be sent to Tibetan areas, it would mean a further step in the intensification of Communist Party presence in Tibetan areas since a crackdown on peaceful protests by Tibetans in 2008. This intensification has included the deployment of thousands of Party cadres working at all levels of society in private homes, monasteries and schools.

Chen Quanguo, the hardline former Party boss of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) who was transferred in 2016 to Xinjiang (known to Uyghurs as East Turkestan), presided over the systematic transfer of thousands of Party cadres to the TAR from 2011 onward. During his tenure in the TAR, Chen made it clear that control over people’s everyday lives was not the only aim, but that individuals’ deepest loyalties and private thoughts were also targeted. This was particularly true when it came to the Dalai Lama; Chen has said that: “Those who have fantasies about the 14th Dalai Clique, those who follow the 14th Dalai Clique, and those Party cadres involved in supporting separatist infiltration and sabotage activities will be strictly disciplined and severely punished in accordance with the law.”⁶

The presence of Party cadres and the deployment of millions of young Chinese to rural areas connect China’s claims about rural development with the Communist Party’s main political objectives of ensuring control and imposing total surveillance.⁷

In March, in the Tibetan area of Dechen (Chinese: Diqing), Yunnan province, the state media announced a new campaign called “Thousands for Promotion” [of the Party’s agenda]. The report stated that the activities by the thousands of Party cadres stationed at the grassroots level would “carry out extensive and in-depth publicity of the legal system through the activities of ‘opposing separatism and maintaining stability’ in accordance with the requirements of ‘regulating Tibet according to law, enriching the people, and building a long-term basis, rallying people’s hearts and solid foundations’.”⁸ An important function of the deployment of cadres is to combine “propaganda work” with “social stability” and to “close the gap between the Party and the masses.”⁹

In anniversary month, a doubling-down of security and control

Last month was particularly significant in Tibet because Tibetans marked the 60th anniversary of the Dalai Lama’s escape from China’s occupation of Tibet during the March Uprising in 1959. It was also

⁵ China aims to send 10m volunteers for rural services <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1145605.shtml>

⁶ Xinhua, November 5, 2014 http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/html/2014-11/05/content_579554.htm

⁷ The “double-linked household” system, which was established in the Tibet Autonomous Region in 2013, refers to “households linked for security and also for increased income. International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘Tightening of an invisible net: new security measures in eastern Tibet heighten surveillance, control’, February 16, 2016, <https://www.savetibet.org/tightening-of-an-invisible-net-new-security-measures-in-eastern-tibet-heighten-surveillance-control/>

⁸ Official state media website in Chinese, March 13, 2019, http://www.xgll.com.cn/xwzx/2019-03/13/content_350307.htm

⁹ Translation of information from the state media by ICT, April 15, 2015, outlining the plans for sending Party cadres to village areas in Malho (Chinese: Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai <http://www.qhaudit.gov.cn/info/1010/7783.htm>

the month in which China's two main political bodies—the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the National People's Congress—were held.

The Chinese authorities chose this timing to release a 'White Paper' on March 27 that demonstrated the Chinese leadership's efforts to erase the Tibetan religious leader's influence and to underline their political control over Tibet.¹⁰

While China claimed it was an anniversary of "democratic reforms" in Tibet, foreign media nevertheless rightly focused on rights abuses in Tibet. The release of the 'White Paper' was also undermined by two detailed reports by the US State Department—one on human rights abuses and religious oppression in Tibet¹¹ and another denouncing China for "systematically" impeding Americans' travel to Tibet.¹²

The objectives outlined in the White Paper reflects the deepening institutionalization of the current policy model in both Tibet and Xinjiang, which combines coercive securitization and militarization with efforts to accelerate political and cultural transformation. In Tibet, this means the Chinese authorities are seeking to eradicate loyalty to the Dalai Lama and replace it with allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party and to "Sinicize" Tibetan Buddhism. The document underlined in particular the appointment of Tibetan reincarnate lamas.

In a White Paper released 10 years earlier, *Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet*, Beijing said the "central government has opened and will always keep its door open for the 14th Dalai Lama to return to a patriotic stand."¹³ The 2019 White Paper made no mention of any dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

On March 27, the same day as the release of the latest White Paper, the People's Armed Police Tibet Autonomous Region Corp began a week-long extreme training on the plateau described as "Devil's Week" (Ch: mogui zhou). Signaling intimidation and force, the Chinese state media stated that the training was "aimed at fighting in harsh and complex environments, sharpening the fighting spirit of the special warfare team members, and with close teamwork and excellent overall quality, comprehensively upgrade the anti-terrorism combat capability of the special warfare units."¹⁴ Armed police staged a major display of force in Lhasa on March 7, three days before the March 10 Uprising anniversary (which was also the anniversary of protests that swept across Tibet in 2008).

In Tibet, despite the absence of any violent insurgency, China has undertaken an aggressive "counter-terrorism" drive that has resulted in an expansion of militarization across the plateau. By conflating the expression of distinct religious and ethnic identities with "separatism" and blurring distinctions between violent acts and peaceful dissent, the Chinese government is using counter-terrorism as a justification to crack down on peaceful expressions of religious identity and culture in Tibet and Xinjiang.

A series of meetings focusing on tightening controls and emphasizing ideological imperatives were held throughout the anniversary month in Tibet. Two days before March 10, the Party Secretary of Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, Liu Chengming, visited several

¹⁰ Tibet's continued isolation belies Chinese claims in new white paper on Tibet's development <https://www.savetibet.org/tibets-continued-isolation-belies-chinese-claims-in-new-white-paper-on-tibets-development/>

¹¹ Links at International Campaign for Tibet statement, March 13, 2019, <https://www.savetibet.org/state-department-2018-human-rights-report-exposes-severe-and-significant-restrictions-in-political-participation-and-freedom-of-movement-in-tibet/>

¹² New State Dept. report shows US is serious about ending isolation of Tibet for Americans March 25, 2019, <https://www.savetibet.org/new-state-dept-report-shows-us-is-serious-about-ending-isolation-of-tibet-for-americans/>

¹³ China publishes white paper to mark 50th anniversary of reform in Tibet, March 2, 2009 <http://www.china-un.org/eng/gyzg/xizang/t539937.htm>

¹⁴ Chinese state media in Chinese, March 27, 2019, <http://www.tibetol.cn/html/dutu/tekan/2019/0327/6157.html>

areas in the traditional Kham area where there have been protests and violent crackdowns since 2008: Tawu (Chinese: Daofu), Serthar (Chinese: Seda) and Draggo (Chinese: Luhuo).

Liu's visit to Larung Gar in Serthar, the world's largest center of Tibetan Buddhist study, was two days before the March 10 anniversary, sending a strong signal to the monastic community of Communist Party control. Larung Gar used to attract thousands of Chinese and Tibetan devotees as well as visitors from all over the world before the authorities presided over mass demolitions and the enforced expulsion of hundreds of monks and nuns. During his visit, Liu Chengming emphasized that Buddhist monasteries were integral to grass roots Party control, and must "thoroughly implement Xi Jinping's important instructions on religious work", obeying the diktats of the Party, and "guide monks and nuns to feeling grateful to the Party, loving the 'motherland'" and "adapting Tibetan Buddhism to socialism."¹⁵

Ding Yexian, deputy party secretary of TAR and in charge of overseeing "social stability", led a similar inspection mission to Ganden monastery in Lhasa on March 30. (Tibet Daily, March 31, 2019).¹⁶ Ding emphasized the importance of "strengthening Party leadership over religious work" and visited police stationed at the monastery as well as Party committee members at Ganden, once a major monastic education center, now emptied of the thousands of monks it once housed. Tibet Daily reported that "everyone" at the monastery told the official delegation that: "Their lives are getting better and better and they cannot manage without the good policies of the party and the country. They sincerely thank the Communist Party and thank General Secretary Xi Jinping."

¹⁵ Ganzi Daily online in Chinese, March 8, 2019, http://paper.kbcmw.com/html/2019-03/08/content_114411.htm

¹⁶ In Chinese, http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/html/2019-04/01/content_883252.htm