



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET



# ACCESS DENIED:

**NEW US LEGISLATION,  
THE QUEST FOR RECIPROCITY IN EUROPE  
AND THE LOCKDOWN IN TIBET**

A report by the International Campaign for Tibet  
Washington, DC | Amsterdam | Berlin | Brussels  
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# **ACCESS DENIED: NEW US LEGISLATION, THE QUEST FOR RECIPROCITY IN EUROPE AND THE LOCKDOWN IN TIBET**

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## **Front page caption:**

Security checkpoint in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, 2017. (Photo credit: Carlos Brum Melo)



## **Note on the Political Geography of Tibet:**

Tibet was traditionally comprised of three main areas: Amdo (north-eastern Tibet), Kham (eastern Tibet) and U-Tsang (central and western Tibet). The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was set up by the Chinese government in 1965 and covers the area of Tibet west of the Dri-chu (Yangtse river), including part of Kham. The rest of Amdo and Kham have been incorporated into Chinese provinces, where they were designated Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties. As a result most of Qinghai and parts of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces are acknowledged by the Chinese government to be “Tibetan.”

ICT uses the term “Tibet” to refer to all Tibetan areas currently under the jurisdiction of the People’s Republic of China.

With regard to access, the different political divisions of Tibet have broadly different levels of restrictions. The Tibet Autonomous Region is generally more restricted than areas administered by Qinghai, Gansu,

Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces, while Dechen prefecture in Yunnan typically experiences fewer restrictions than much of the rest of Tibet. The system of requiring every foreigner who enters the Tibet Autonomous Region to acquire a special entry permit is unique within the People’s Republic of China; no other province-level region in China requires this. When noteworthy, this report will mention relevant differences in the access policies of different jurisdictions.

In December 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump signed into law the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (RATA), the first major legislation on Tibet passed by the United States Congress since the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 (TPA), indicative of the high level of support for Tibet in the U.S. This was followed by the passing in January 2020 in the U.S. House of Representatives of the Tibetan Policy and Support Act (TPSA), which will dramatically upgrade US political and humanitarian support for Tibetans, including sanctioning Chinese officials for interfering in the Dalai Lama's succession.

The landmark bipartisan RATA legislation represents an important step towards holding China accountable for its policies on Tibet.

There is now an increasing awareness at European Union level of the importance of reciprocity, not only with regard to trade and economic relations, but also more generally relating to access to Tibet. Accordingly, there are moves to develop legislation in Europe, similar to the one in the United States.

RATA seeks to address the difficulties in access to the isolated and oppressed region for American diplomats, NGO workers, journalists, and all citizens whom Chinese authorities prevent from traveling freely. The Act makes it possible to deny U.S. entry to Chinese officials who are involved in policies that ultimately prohibit American citizens from access to Tibet.

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has documented how multiple visits of diplomatic personnel, journalists and intergovernmental organizations from across the world to Tibet [have been refused or blocked in recent years, in contravention of usual diplomatic practice between countries.](#)

Today, the developments connected to the COVID-19 pandemic on the international stage show the determination of the Chinese Communist Party state to suppress the free flow of information and to silence the people in China.

The quarantine and lockdown in Tibet because of COVID-19 came at an already sensitive political time, in the buildup to Tibetan New Year (Losar) from February 24 as well as the anniversary of the March 10 Uprising in 1959 and the wave of protests across Tibet on the same date in 2008. Every year since 2008, the TAR has been closed off to foreigners for at least one month at around this time, with the closure in 2019 lasting from January 30 until April 1.<sup>[1]</sup> The annual closures of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) are integral elements of the approach of the Chinese government to restrict access to Tibet for independent observers in order to maintain an iron grip in the region while at the same time avoiding any form of external scrutiny.

Chinese authorities have used their existing "grid management" network of total surveillance and tens of thousands of Party cadres in TAR to enforce control and quarantine measures, taking every opportunity to ensure praise for the Communist Party. In February, flights to Tibet were cut to almost nil,<sup>[2]</sup> and Tibetans marked Losar (Tibetan New Year) this year mostly at home, with streets and temples deserted rather than thronged with Chinese tourists as they have been in recent years.

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**“THE PASSING OF THE RECIPROCAL ACCESS TO TIBET ACT HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE TOWARDS A MORE ROBUST APPROACH TO THE PRC, BASED ON THE GROWING AWARENESS THAT CHINA’S INCREASING AUTHORITARIAN INFLUENCE HAS THE CAPACITY TO SUBVERT AND SHAPE OUR OWN DEMOCRACIES IN WAYS THAT POSE A REAL THREAT TO OUR FUTURE.”**

*– Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet*

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This ICT report highlights moves towards targeting the lack of reciprocity in EU-China relations with regard to access to Tibet, outlining the following:

- No other province-level area in the PRC has equivalent barriers to access as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). This is most evident every year in March, when the Tibet Autonomous Region is closed to foreigners coinciding with the anniversary of the March 10 Uprising in 1959 and protests in 2008. This year, a more universal lockdown across the PRC due to the coronavirus was implemented.
- The TAR is currently the only area for which the PRC requires a separate permit for foreign travelers, including foreign residents and foreign journalists or diplomats based in China. Such permits are routinely denied. Tibetan Americans also face denial of visas to visit their homeland on family visits, which is mentioned in the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act. Tibetans in Europe face the same issue, and are subject to intense pressure and scrutiny from Party officials in the process of obtaining a Chinese visa. China has stepped up its efforts to influence Tibetans in Europe, seeking to impose a false narrative using a mix of threats and incentives.
- Chinese authorities intensified their propaganda drive and promotion of Tibet as “open” still further in 2019, seeking to obscure their covert and coercive policies, while at the same time restricting meaningful engagement with the situation on the ground for journalists and governments. The PRC authorities have weaponized the issue of access to Tibet, with access granted only on its own specific terms, and with different conditions to the rest of the PRC. Denying access, or threatening to do so, is used as a means of shutting down critique by government officials, scholars, journalists and independent experts.
- In 2019 rapidly expanding surveillance and an oppressive climate of fear drove deterioration in the work environment for foreign journalists, and there was a downward trend in organized press visits permitted by the authorities to Tibet. The Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCCC) reported in 2018 “the darkest picture of reporting conditions inside China in recent memory,” and this has continued throughout 2019, with even fewer media visits possible.



- As the diplomatic focus on reciprocal access has gained attention, China has heightened its propaganda efforts on Tibet by sending official Tibetan delegations to foreign capitals to attack the Dalai Lama and gain support for its representations of Tibet. Over the past decade nearly three times the number of Party state organized delegations visited Western countries compared to Western government representatives allowed access to Tibet. In 2019, this continued to be a priority of the Chinese Communist Party, with a particular focus on its efforts to control the succession of the Dalai Lama, in response to an increasing international pushback on this issue as governments assert the Dalai Lama's legitimacy over Beijing's. While there was a small downturn in visits of Chinese delegations telling their version of Tibet's story to Europe compared to 2018, hardly any foreign governments were hosted in Tibet.
- No access was possible in 2019 for any United Nations (UN) experts and special rapporteurs to Tibet, despite repeated requests. Following requests since the fire at the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa in February, 2018,<sup>[3]</sup> a "Reactive Monitoring Mission" to Lhasa by UNESCO took place from April 8 to 15, 2019, and was kept under wraps by the global heritage body. Its mission report has still not been released, more than a year later, and despite the outstanding significance of the sites in Tibet's historic and cultural capital.
- Mass Chinese domestic tourism and foreign tourists to Tibet have been coexisting with the untrammelled powers of a security state engaged in the most widespread political crackdown in a generation. In contrast to the situation in Xinjiang (known to Uyghurs as East Turkestan), in 2019, China announced a dramatic spike in the number of foreign tourists visiting the Tibetan plateau, indicating a high level of confidence in covering up the human rights situation to visitors from outside the PRC, and ambitious new plans to attract Chinese tourists and promote "Third Pole Tibet" as a new tourist "brand."
- Risks to American and European citizens of travelling in the PRC in general increased in 2019, linked to China's shifting political agenda against their countries of origin. The dangers of access to both Xinjiang and Tibet for foreign visitors were first highlighted in the U.S. State Department's China Travel Advisory in 2018, following the detention of two Canadians, former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor, in the wake of the controversial arrest of a Huawei executive in Canada in December, 2017 – a disturbing indicator of China's interpretation of "reciprocity."
- While Chinese tourists are increasingly free to come and go to the plateau, Tibetans themselves face unprecedented restrictions on their movement. Ongoing restrictions imposed by the Party state also leave Tibetans locked in virtual isolation from the global community, unable to travel, even when they are able to obtain Chinese passports and scholarships abroad, which is rare. Tibetans face some of the most severe penalties anywhere for expressing views that differ from those of the Party state, no matter how moderate. While Chinese policy statements refer to the need to increase availability of propaganda materials in the Tibetan language, there has been a steady trend of the criminalization of integral elements of Tibetan identity and culture particularly targeting Tibetan efforts to promote and speak their mother tongue. Xi Jinping's "new era" approach involves a dramatic downturn in any support for protections of minority "ethnic" culture.
- Increasing numbers of Tibetan exiles who wish to return to see families such as elderly parents are compromised and at risk from the surveillance state, and there are intensified efforts to influence a younger generation of Tibetans born to parents in exile in a bid to instill "the red gene" and replace memories or awareness of what families have lived through over 60 years of Chinese rule. Visits of Tibetans from abroad are institutionalized under the

auspices of the hardline United Front Work Department (UFWD), which also attempts to work within communities in exile, seeking to influence and exacerbate divisions and convey propaganda messages.

Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet, said: “The passing of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act has been an important milestone towards a more robust approach to the PRC, based on the growing awareness that China’s increasing authoritarian influence has the capacity to subvert and shape our own democracies in ways that pose a real threat to our future. It will make Chinese officials directly responsible for Tibet policy and therefore for restricting foreign travelers’ access to Tibet ineligible for US visas, after an annual report assessing the degree of restrictions.

“Tibet’s geopolitical significance is such that it deserves greater prominence in global affairs. It is incumbent upon the European governments and the international community to now insist upon the principle of reciprocity in its dealings with the PRC, in order to address the asymmetry of authoritarian influence not only in Tibet but also on our own societies.”

## EUROPE AND ‘RECIPROCAL ACCESS’

In 2019 the incarceration of more than a million Uyghurs, Kazakhs, etc., in Xinjiang brought human rights in China to the forefront of the international agenda, highlighting the deeply oppressive measures that were trialed first in TAR and the threat that China’s networked authoritarianism presents beyond its borders.<sup>[4]</sup>

Beijing is now confronting significant pressure and pushback from the international community, particularly the United States, over its business and political practices – compounded now by the international scrutiny faced by China’s leader Xi Jinping over his handling of the coronavirus crisis.

In this context, the concept of reciprocity is increasingly being cited by governments as an instrument for countering China’s one-way influence economic operations and in order to seek compliance with international standards and long-term mutual obligations, with evidence of an increasing awareness of the asymmetry in EU-China relations.

In September 2018, the European Parliament (EP) approved a report from MEP Bas Belder on the state of play of relations between the EU and China, which urged “China to give EU diplomats, journalists and citizens unfettered access to Tibet in reciprocity to the free and open access to the entire territories of the EU Member States that Chinese travellers enjoy; calls on the Chinese authorities to allow Tibetans in Tibet to travel freely and to respect their right to freedom of movement; urges the Chinese authorities to allow independent observers, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to access Tibet; urges the EU institutions to take the issue of access to Tibet into serious consideration in the discussions on the EU-China visa facilitation agreement.”<sup>[5]</sup>

In March 2019, the European Commission set out a 10-point plan stating that China’s increasing presence in Europe “should be accompanied with greater reciprocity.” In a joint communication in March, 2019, the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini stated that: “The EU should robustly seek more balanced and reciprocal conditions governing the economic relationship [with China].”<sup>[6]</sup> The EU-China Strategy adopted in 2016 commits the EU to promoting “reciprocity, a level playing field and fair competition across all areas of co-operation with China.”<sup>[7]</sup>

In April 2019, Mogherini specifically stated at the plenary of the European Parliament that she had asked the Chinese authorities for reciprocal access to Tibet. She said, “Likewise, freedom of religion or belief is often violated in Tibet, and restrictions to access to the region are also in place. We have called on the Chinese authorities to allow reciprocal access to Tibet for European journalists, diplomats, and families.”<sup>[8]</sup>

Vice President Josep Borrell on behalf of the European Commission also said on March 9, 2020, “The Commission will continue to call on the Chinese authorities to allow reciprocal access to Tibet as part of the discussions in the Human Rights dialogue.”<sup>[9]</sup>

These developments, vigorously supported by ICT’s advocacy, represent an important step towards holding China accountable for its policies in Tibet, and recognizing that reciprocity is an important tenet of international relations, beyond trade, with the intention of promoting freedom of movement and an open and accessible Tibet for both American and European citizens and for Tibetans themselves, including the Dalai Lama, and Tibetans in the diaspora in Europe.



*US Member of Congress Jim McGovern, who introduced the Reciprocal Access to Tibet, seen here delivering speaking in the Congress on the Dalai Lama and Tibet on December 14, 2017 on the subject, “Let His Holiness the Dalai Lama Go Home,” Representative McGovern said.*

The signing into law of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (RATA), after coordinated lobbying in Washington DC, undermined China’s intensive propaganda efforts to ensure it controls representations of Tibet – signaling that China’s claims have failed to convince. Representative Jim McGovern (D- Mass), who introduced the bill said: “For too long, China has covered up their human rights violations in Tibet by restricting travel. But actions have consequences, and today, we are one step closer to holding the Chinese officials who implement these restrictions accountable. I look forward to watching closely as our law is implemented, and continuing to stand with the people of Tibet in their struggle for religious and cultural freedom.”<sup>[10]</sup> The Chinese leadership was particularly vituperative in its response as a result. China “resolutely opposed” the law, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said on December 20, 2018, adding that it “sent seriously wrong signals to Tibetan separatist elements.”<sup>[11]</sup>

Tibet is not a marginal issue for the Chinese leadership. Xi Jinping’s sweeping political and strategic objectives in Tibet and the rise of a “control state,” in which the Party has an increasingly intrusive role in people’s everyday lives and beliefs reflect its prominence to the Communist Party leadership as an issue that is integral to China’s territorial concerns, the future of China’s economic expansion and the legitimacy of the Communist Party itself.



Beijing prioritizes campaigns directed against the Dalai Lama's influence, Tibetan culture, and Tibetan religion, meaning that in recent years, almost any expression of Tibetan identity not directly sanctioned by the state can be branded as 'separatist' and penalized by a prison sentence or worse. This has been a cause of widespread anguish among Tibetans and a contributing factor in the wave of self-immolations that has taken place across Tibet since 2009.

China's hostile response to the signing into law of RATA also involved attacks on the Dalai Lama, which were also linked to the 60th anniversary in March 2019 of his escape into exile in 1959, which was marked by Tibetan communities and supporters worldwide.

State media publication the Global Times, whose English-language version targets an international audience with an often aggressive message, published an article headlined "Tibet authorities lambast Dalai Lama in series of articles as US passes Tibet Reciprocal Access bill," referring to unusually long editorials blaming the Dalai Lama for self-immolations across Tibet, as well as widespread protests that broke out in Tibet in 2008.<sup>[12]</sup> The articles, the first of which was published on the front page of *Tibet Daily* on December 12 (2018), were subsequently distributed by the TAR Justice department, coinciding with international coverage of the passing of RATA.

The attacks in the *Tibet Daily* editorials took the standard and extreme official line of blaming the Dalai Lama for being "prime leader of separatist political groups pursuing 'Tibet independence,' the loyal tool of international anti-China forces, the root cause of social unrest in Tibet, the biggest obstacle for Tibetan Buddhism to establish normal order and a politician under the disguise of religion." It reiterated accusations made by the Chinese leadership at the height of the wave of self-immolations in Tibet blaming the Dalai Lama, saying that he "also violated the essential religious doctrine of 'loving kindness and compassion' by inciting religious believers to self-immolate."<sup>[13]</sup>

## DELEGATION VISITS SEEK TO DOMINATE DISCOURSE ON TIBET

Handpicked government delegation visits are managed by the Chinese authorities as part of the "please come in, then go and tell the world" approach (the literal translation is "Please come in," or "Welcome to enter," then "Go out").<sup>[14]</sup>



*Nyima Tsering (3rd R, front), deputy director of the Standing Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Regional People's Congress, at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, on Oct. 15, 2019.*



This is an integral part of a global strategy by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) not only to hide the realities of what is happening in Tibet today, but to dominate and control discourse and further its political agenda and power. While projected as “soft power,” this can be more accurately termed as the implementation of “sharp power,” which “In the new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states [...] should be seen as the tip of [the CCP’s] dagger—or indeed as their syringe.”<sup>[15]</sup>

Aggressive warnings and attempts to control who European governments meet are a consistent feature. During a recent visit of an official Tibetan delegation to Brussels, Belgian Parliamentarians were warned “not to allow leaders of the Dalai group to visit Belgium, nor to provide any support for or facilitate the Dalai group’s anti-China separatist activities, and to work with China to maintain a healthy and stable development of China-Belgium relationships.”<sup>[16]</sup>



*Norbu Dondrup, member of the Tibet Autonomous Regional People’s Congress and vice chairman of the regional government, with Vice President of the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium Andre Flahaut in Brussels on Dec. 12, 2019.*

As part of the same process, Chinese government officials, scholars, and religious figures holding official titles are sent across the world to spread China’s official message on Tibet. ICT monitored 55 such official groups from 2009 to early 2018, with the highest number of 10 delegations in this ten-year period travelling to Europe, Argentina, Mongolia, Russia, Japan and other countries in 2017. This is nearly three times as many as the 20 official foreign government delegations permitted to travel to Tibet in the same period, according to ICT’s monitoring.<sup>[17]</sup>

While the US received most of the delegations in the decade from 2008 to 2018, ICT monitored a high number of delegations to EU countries, particularly Britain (five Tibet-related delegations), France, Spain (which each received four delegations) and Germany (three official delegations). In 2019, fewer Chinese delegations promoting the official line on Tibet were sent to the EU than the year before, and those who visited targeted specific countries. The major delegation visits consisted of a National People’s Congress (NPC) group from Lhasa to Brussels and the Belgian Parliament in December, a year after a similar visit by representatives from Tibet’s NPC in December 2018, and a different Tibetan “cultural delegation” that went to the European Parliament in October,<sup>[18]</sup> also visiting France, taking in the French Senate, the Netherlands (including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland<sup>[19]</sup> and Lithuania.<sup>[20]</sup>

Analysis of the Tibet-related Chinese delegations to the West reveals a political agenda often based on Tibet visits or criticism of China's policies by host governments, and also connected to visits by Tibetan Parliamentarians in exile and the Sikyong (President of the Central Tibetan Administration) Lobsang Sangay – for instance linked to the latter's visits to the Belgian Parliament, the French Senate, and Lithuania. Previously, official Chinese delegations have coincided with the Dalai Lama's overseas trips to these countries, in largely unsuccessful attempts to undermine and undercut his message, but this has been less visible in 2019, as the Dalai Lama did not make foreign trips.

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*A Chinese delegation on Tibetan studies meeting scholars from Leiden University in the Hague, the Netherlands, on May 25, 2018.*

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The visits of such delegations can also reflect efforts to create divisions between specific governments in terms of an approach to China – for instance, between member states of the European Union who may show differing levels of public support to Tibet and the Dalai Lama.

The Chinese Embassy vociferously condemned the Sikyong's visit to Lithuania in May, 2019, describing it as a "serious political incident."<sup>[21]</sup> China has been carefully cultivating the Baltic States with MPs from Lithuania and Latvia travelling to Tibet in August 2018, despite concern; the Baltic Times reported: "Lithuanian NGOs say the very fact that Lithuanian politicians will visit Tibet will demonstrate acceptance of Beijing's order in this region."<sup>[22]</sup>

In a similar timed intervention, the Chinese Embassy invited visitors to a screening of a propaganda film about life in Tibet at the same time as the World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet in neighboring Riga, Latvia, in May, 2019.<sup>[23]</sup>

There is increasing alarm in EU member states over the operations of China's state security, evident in an assessment by Lithuanian state security in 2019. "Growing China's economic and political ambitions in the West resulted in the increasing aggressiveness of Chinese intelligence and security services' activities not only in other NATO and EU countries, but also in Lithuania," stated a National Threat Assessment carried out by the Lithuanian State Security Department in 2019.<sup>[24]</sup> The assessment continued: "Chinese intelligence looks for suitable targets – decision-makers, other individuals sympathizing with China and able to exert political leverage. They seek to influence such individuals by giving gifts, paying for trips to China, covering expenses of training and courses organized there. Chinese intelligence officers treat those gifts as a commitment to support political decisions favorable to China. Chinese intelligence-funded trips to China are used to recruit Lithuanian citizens. Given the growing threat posed by Chinese intelligence and security services in NATO and

EU countries, their activity in Lithuania in the long term is also likely to expand.” The report makes specific mention of China’s specific agenda in influencing over Tibet, stating: “Primarily, China’s domestic policy issues drive Chinese intelligence activities in Lithuania. For example, it seeks that Lithuania would not support independence of Tibet and Taiwan and would not address these issues at the international level.”

In Australia, intelligence chiefs have sounded the alarm over a systematic Chinese government campaign of espionage and influence peddling that has led to fears over an erosion of Australian sovereignty, while in New Zealand, which also received a TAR delegation in 2018, scholars and government ministers have drawn attention to a disturbing expansion of political influence activities by China, connected to both the CCP government’s domestic pressures and foreign agenda. As with Lithuania and elsewhere, analysts in both countries note that a high priority is silencing critique on sensitive political issues such as Tibet or Taiwan.

China’s state media claims that the purpose of its delegations is to “dispel Tibet-related myths with truth and facts. These delegations have used vivid examples and statistics to confront foreign politicians, scholars and Tibet secessionists.”<sup>[25]</sup> The official press admits to mixed success with the delegations, stating: “Although those delegates have successfully discredited many rumors and helped eliminate prejudice held by many Western scholars and politicians against Tibet, the process has not always been smooth.”<sup>[26]</sup>

Accounts from Western politicians who meet such delegations give a very different picture. Belgian MP Samuel Cogolati, Vice President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, told ICT: “The meeting [with a Chinese delegation in December 2019] presented a window of opportunity to question the CCP about the situation in Tibet. Nevertheless, the meeting was confined to a long monologue on the ‘benefits’ of communism in Tibet. The Belgian parliamentarians were very disappointed not to receive any opportunity to question the Chinese representatives -- especially given the lack of objectivity in the information provided.”

“For instance, Chinese representatives did not review the case of Gedun Choekyi Nyima [the Panchen Lama, in the custody of the Chinese government since 1995]. They only claimed that the Dalai Lama’s succession was a matter of Chinese domestic law and that no foreign state had [the right] to express itself on the subject. In addition, Chinese representatives defined themselves as those who protected Tibetan religious practices and claimed that it was the Dalai Lama who refused to comply with these practices. Moreover, the Chinese representatives spoke in Chinese but stated at the beginning of their presentation that they also spoke Tibetan.”<sup>[27]</sup>

Various Chinese officials have been prominent in overseas propaganda visits to the U.S. and other countries in the last few years; one of them is Lobsang Gyaltsen (rendered in different ways in Chinese media including ‘Losang Jamcan’) head of the Standing Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region People’s Congress. Lobsang Gyaltsen has led delegations to the U.S. and in 2018 travelled to Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands, where he made particularly strident criticisms of the Dalai Lama. In a visit to Europe made in the same month as the passing of RATA into law in December 2018, Lobsang Gyaltsen told Danish Parliamentarians that he hoped they would “recognize the Dalai Lama’s anti-China separatist nature,” taking the hardline approach of stating that: “The contradiction between us and Dalai group is neither a national or religious issue, nor a human rights issue, but a major issue of principle concerning national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”<sup>[28]</sup>

Lobsang Gyaltsen’s exhortations fell on deaf ears, particularly in the Netherlands given that his visit followed a teaching by the Dalai Lama, who spoke to a packed stadium and met Dutch Parliamentarians in Rotterdam in September, 2018.





*Lobsang Gyaltsen (2nd L), chairman of the Standing Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Regional People's Congress, meeting scholars from Nordic Institute of Asian Studies at Copenhagen University in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Dec. 14, 2018.*

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Another prominent Tibetan official who has travelled to the U.S. and Europe on various occasions, although not in 2019, is Pema Thinley (Chinese: Baima Chilin), Vice Chair of the National People's Congress Standing Committee. Pema Thinley, known for his hostile critique of the Dalai Lama, has spoken at think-tanks in Brussels<sup>[29]</sup> or in Swiss cities with uniform messages including that Tibet is "an inalienable part of China," and that there is rapid economic progress and positive social change in Tibet.

The hosts in the West of these delegations, including respected scholarly institutions, think-tanks, and governments, may not always be aware that while their purpose is presented as engaging in dialogue (and while sometimes a level of engagement may indeed be possible), ultimately these delegations are part of China's strategic information operations, reflecting the vigorous propaganda efforts of the United Front Work Department. Official Chinese delegations to the West are tightly controlled, and every intention is made to ensure they have the opportunity to issue boilerplate statements without challenge at non-public events. Meetings with ordinary Tibetans in the diaspora who might raise sensitive questions are avoided, and mostly governments and even civil society and academic hosts concede to their specifications.

All of these efforts involve the same motivation; to change the story on Tibet. A close Tibetan observer of efforts by China's United Front Work Department, the hardline Party department responsible for Tibetan affairs, said: "China is trying to change the story on Tibet. For 60 years, the world has known about the killings in Tibet, the oppression, the human rights abuses, and this information has been conveyed to governments and journalists through exile Tibetan representatives and rights groups across the globe. But China wants to change this story and create new narratives for Tibet in the 21st century based on progress, development, the 'happiness' of Tibetans under Chinese rule. This is the basis for their efforts with delegations overseas, with returned Tibetans and with governments worldwide."





*The Institute for Security and Development Policy in Stockholm organized a roundtable with a delegation from the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the China Tibetology Research Center on June 25, 2018.*

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## DALAI LAMA SUCCESSION THE “HOTTEST ISSUE”

In January 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to approve the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, a comprehensive piece of legislation that will dramatically upgrade US political and humanitarian support for Tibetans, including the sanctioning of Chinese officials for interfering in the Dalai Lama’s succession.<sup>[30]</sup>

The U.S. is the only Western country to have support for Tibet enshrined in law with the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, which requires the administration to report to Congress over the progress of dialogue between the Dalai Lama’s envoys and Beijing, as well as providing multi-million dollar funding annually for social, cultural and economic projects in Tibet and the Tibetan community in exile.

China’s state media have prioritized the issue of the Dalai Lama’s succession in its messaging over the past year, with the Global Times stating it was the “hottest issue” under discussion in 2019.<sup>[31]</sup> This is likely to reflect Beijing’s concern over increasing assertions globally of China’s lack of legitimacy in this matter, and support for the Dalai Lama.

Now there is growing interest in Europe in pushing back against China’s efforts to control representations of the Dalai Lama’s succession. In the first written policy statement by the Dutch government to include explicit language on Tibet, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands, Stef Blok, stated in November 2019: “The government is concerned about interference by the Chinese government in religious matters. According to the Chinese authorities, the reincarnation process is subject to Chinese legislation. The position of this cabinet is that it is up to the Tibetan religious community itself to appoint a future successor to the Dalai Lama.”<sup>[32]</sup>

The Dutch Foreign Affairs Ministry raised the following additional matters of concern: “The government also encourages China to remain in dialogue with representatives of the Tibetan community inside and outside of China. There is also increased police presence and surveillance in Tibet, particularly in urban areas and in and around temples. [...] Other worrying developments include the partial

demolition of the Tibetan monastery complex Larung Gar and the fact that the Tibetan language in compulsory education must increasingly give way to Mandarin. The government concludes that the Chinese policy in Tibet as a whole has a strongly restrictive effect on the religious and cultural freedoms in Tibet, as well as on the privacy of Tibetan Buddhists in particular.”

In response to a question from Member of Parliament Samuel Cogolati on his government’s position, Belgian Foreign Affairs and Defense Minister Philippe Goffin said in January 2020: “It is logically up to the Tibetan religious community to designate his successor without interference from the temporal authorities.”<sup>[33]</sup> In Germany, the Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Niels Annen, replying to a written question from parliament, stated that the German government “is of the opinion that religious communities may regulate their affairs autonomously.” Annen added, “This includes the right to determine their religious leaders themselves.”<sup>[34]</sup>

Several similar parliamentary questions have also been tabled in France by members of the Senate’s International Information Tibet Group, and the answer from the French government is pending.<sup>[35]</sup>

At the European level too, the issue has been gaining traction in recent months; in April 2020, replying to a written question submitted to him by five Members of the European Parliament, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Vice President of the EU Commission Josep Borrell stated that the EU, in the framework of the EU-China Human Rights dialogue, “has consistently expressed the expectation that China will respect the succession of the Dalai Lama in accordance with Tibetan Buddhism norms,” and that it will “continue to express its position on this matter.”<sup>[36]</sup> Furthermore, in an opinion piece published in several European newspapers in May 2020, Borrell said that the focus of the EU-China relationship should be on “trust, transparency, and reciprocity.”<sup>[37]</sup>

## A PATTERN OF RESTRICTIONS IN ACCESS

**“I HAD EXPRESSED A WISH TO GO TO THE COUNTRYSIDE AND VISIT A PRISON, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE HOPE OF LEARNING A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE REAL CONDITIONS ON SITE. ULTIMATELY, WE WERE SUGGESTED TO VISIT NUMEROUS CULTURAL VENUES, A RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE SITE, A SCHOOL AND A FORMER FARMING FAMILY. THIS PROGRAM SHOULD CERTAINLY SIGNAL NORMALCY AND SUCCESS OF CHINA’S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY. NEVERTHELESS, EVERYTHING WAS NATURALLY ORGANIZED BY THE CHINESE SIDE WHICH ACCOMPANIED US THROUGHOUT THE TRIP. IN THIS RESPECT, THE INSIGHT INTO THE CONDITIONS THERE WAS VERY LIMITED.”**

*– Bärbel Kofler, German Human Rights Commissioner*

The most prominent European visit to Tibet over the past year was the German Human Rights Commissioner Bärbel Kofler, who travelled to Lhasa on December 5, 2018, after her request to visit

Xinjiang was rejected by the Chinese government. This was most likely a reflection of the Chinese government's confidence in securing full control in Tibet and ability to stage manage foreign delegations.

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*Germany's Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid Bärbel Kofler in Lhasa for the 15th China-Germany Human Rights Dialogue held from December 6 to 8, 2018. It was participated by officials of the Supreme People's Court of China, the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the Ministry of Public Security of China, the Ministry of Justice of China.*

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Upon return, Rights Commissioner Kofler described the human rights situation in Tibet as critical, highlighting the “the excessive controls, punishment of relatives for the crimes of family members, prohibition of normal religious freedom and patriotic education that are being carried out in Tibet even to this day.”<sup>[38]</sup> The German Human Rights Commissioner also referred to the difficulties in establishing the true conditions in Tibet, saying: “I had expressed a wish to go to the countryside and visit a prison, for example, in the hope of learning a little more about the real conditions on site. Ultimately, we were suggested to visit numerous cultural venues, a religious pilgrimage site, a school and a former farming family. This program should certainly signal normalcy and success of China's economic development policy. Nevertheless, everything was naturally organized by the Chinese side which accompanied us throughout the trip. In this respect, the insight into the conditions there was very limited.”<sup>[39]</sup>

The coverage of the visit in the Chinese state media referred predictably to the “the outstanding achievements” of the Communist Party leadership under Xi Jinping in Tibet.<sup>[40]</sup> The German Human Rights Commissioner did not hold a press briefing in Beijing after the visit, as delegations to Tibet once used to do, reflecting the high levels of control by the Chinese authorities over messaging by foreign delegations.

European governments have raised concern about access, with the UK government stating that access to Tibet by all foreign passport holders is heavily restricted by the Chinese authorities, including journalists and that: “We continue to urge the Chinese authorities to lift the visit restrictions imposed on foreigners.” The then Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Mark Field said: “We have made repeated requests to the Chinese authorities to visit Tibet in the last 10 years, but very few of those have been agreed or acknowledged.”<sup>[41]</sup> The UK sent a delegation to Lhasa from their Beijing Embassy in July, 2019, their first visit since a joint trip with other EU Embassies in 2017.



In response to a question from a Parliamentarian about access to Tibet, the Latvian Foreign Ministry downplayed the issue by stating that: “In 2018, one request for a diplomat’s private trip was submitted to the TAR Foreign Affairs Office through the embassy, but no response was received. In 2017, the Ambassador of Latvia participated in the joint trip of the EU Ambassadors to the TAR, while in 2018, during the visit of the Baltic parliamentarians to China, several members of the Saeima visited the TAR.”<sup>[42]</sup>

In February 2020, in response to a Parliamentary question, the Danish government stated that the Foreign Policy Committee of the Parliament request to visit Tibet in June 2012 was rejected, but instead visited Qinghai (in its response, it appeared to be unaware that Tibet includes not only the TAR, but areas administered by the neighboring provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu). The last official visit of Denmark’s Ambassador to China to the TAR was together with the group of EU ambassadors in Beijing, in June 2017.<sup>[43]</sup>

Delegations to Tibet in 2019 tended to be from “friendly” countries such as Nepal, which has shaped its foreign policy around China’s influence and investments, becoming a part of China’s strategic imperative to maintain and enforce control on Tibet’s borders. Engagement between the two countries has been stepped up since Nepal signed up to China’s One Belt One Road global infrastructure initiative, followed by a visit by China’s leader Xi Jinping to Kathmandu in October 2019. Visits included a delegation of Nepalese MPs to Tibet University in Lhasa in August 2018.<sup>[44]</sup>

The confidence of the Chinese authorities in showcasing Lhasa in particular after the protests and crackdown of 2008 is increasingly evident – for instance in its annual hosting of a Tourism Expo from 2014 onwards. In addition, the blunt propaganda exercise of the Lhasa Forum was repeated in 2019, with journalists from Italy, France and the UK in attendance and individuals from 37 different countries, according to the Chinese state media.<sup>[45]</sup> The Lhasa Forum seeks to secure the endorsement of foreign participants to China’s official line on Tibet’s development, using the timeworn tactic of manipulating foreign visitors through the use of access to an otherwise closed region.<sup>[46]</sup>

## THE OBSTACLES FACED BY TIBETAN COMMUNITY IN EXILE

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**“I APPLIED FOR A CHINESE VISA IN BRUSSEL BUT I DON’T KNOW THE NAMES OF THOSE OFFICIALS. THEY ASKED ME MY BIRTH PLACE AND I ANSWERED THEM “TIBET”. IMMEDIATELY THEY CHANGED THE VISA FORM ENGLISH TO CHINESE. THEN I HAD TO GIVE THEM ALL INFORMATION ABOUT MY FAMILY MEMBERS AND I NEEDED TO EXPLAIN WHO I WANTED TO VISIT AND I WAS ASKED TO PROVIDE INVITATION LETTERS FROM HIM OR HER. AFTER WE DID ALL THOSE THINGS THEY DID THREE OR FOUR TIMES INQUIRY TO MY SISTER. FINALLY THEY DENIED ME A VISA AND WHEN I ASKED THEM THE REASON, THEY DIDN’T HAVE ANY SPECIAL ANSWER BUT THEY SAID IT IS DECISION BY THE GOVERNMENT.”**

*– ICT survey participant*

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In order to document the obstacles and difficulties that European citizens of Tibetan origin face in accessing Tibet, ICT started conducting a survey aimed at collecting information about their attempts to travel to their homeland. At this stage, 527 Tibetans from 12 European countries (including many from Belgium), as well as some from India, participated in the survey; out of these 527 participants, 224 requested a visa for China or a permit for Tibet, and the vast majority of these requests were rejected.

One of the participant told ICT: *"I applied for a Chinese visa in Brussel but I don't know the names of those officials. They asked me my birth place and I answered them "Tibet". Immediately they changed the visa form English to Chinese. Then I had to give them all information about my family members and I needed to explain who I wanted to visit and I was asked to provide invitation letters from him or her. After we did all those things they did three or four times inquiry to my sister. Finally they denied me a visa and when I asked them the reason, they didn't have any special answer but they said it is decision by the Government."*

Other participants provided the following testimonies:

- "I applied for a visa in 2008 and waited until May 2009 but my passport was returned to me without a visa"
- "They kept my passport for about one year and my visa request was rejected without any proper reason and I did not try to get further details as I have family in my homeland"
- "I waited for one and half year and then when I went to ask to get my passport back then they said we must ask you to cancel the application in order to get the passport back."
- "My interview was around 25 minutes. The interview was all about my past and present life. I applied in Brussels Chinese visa application center. They have asked about His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his political perspective."
- "I applied (for a visa/permit) through the Brussels Chinese Embassy and they asked me if I did join demonstrations during Tibetan uprising day and (asked) all related questions about Tibetan government in Exile. I waited for three years. I was not allowed to call them and ask about my visa process. I waited for three years and I didn't get visa and they can't tell me any reason (why it was rejected)."

The testimonies also confirm that some Tibetans do not dare to apply for fear of putting their relatives in Tibet in danger, or of their request being immediately rejected without consideration. One respondent said: *"I would like to go to visit my family and my homeland. I heard many people are denied visa, so I haven't applied yet!"*

## A CLOSED OPENNESS

While denying access to foreign governments except on highly stage-managed, restricted tours, and making independent visits for journalists all but impossible, China claims that it is "steadily increasing the opening up" of Tibet to the outside world.

All of the official Chinese delegations on Tibet to the West in 2018 and 2019 emphasized the message of "openness," while meaning the opposite, with the delegation from the National People's Congress (China's rubber-stamp parliament) in May inviting American and Canadian lawmakers to visit Tibet

for themselves and enhance “their understanding of Tibet’s reality”.<sup>[47]</sup> Despite this assertion, the text of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act refers to 39 requests for diplomatic access made by the U.S. government to the Tibet Autonomous Region made between May 2011 and July 2015, stating that only four were granted.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has confirmed a possible visit to China, including Xinjiang, this year, having made the request to the Chinese authorities in December 2018. The International Campaign for Tibet has called for the UN chief to visit Tibet and be granted unfettered access.<sup>[48]</sup> The UN rights chief typically only undertakes national visits provided the host government offers guarantees on certain conditions, including access to key sites such as prisons and the right to speak with activists.

Before leaving office, the then U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Al Hussein said in June 2018 that despite efforts by his office “to establish conditions conducive to an effective dialogue,” China had refused to give unfettered access to the region. Zeid Al Hussein noted that in the last five years, China had accumulated over 15 pending requests for visits.<sup>[49]</sup> The last visit to Tibet by a UN human rights commissioner was by Mary Robinson in 1998.

## A TOURIST BOOM – BUT INFLATED STATISTICS

While it is indisputable that numbers of tourists to the plateau are at a record high – before the closure due to the coronavirus – nevertheless numbers of the tens of millions cited in the state media are highly inflated. In part this is likely to be linked directly to efforts to prove Tibet’s increasing “openness” to the world. It is also to make a show of meeting official targets to enhance the reputation and perceived performance of the tourism industry and ensure personal promotions within the competitive government hierarchy.<sup>[50]</sup>

Reporting staggeringly high and inflated tourist figures in 2019, Director of Tourism Development in the TAR Wang Songping said: “The next step is to steadily expand Tibet’s opening up to the outside world.” Wang said that his department would intensify the push to attract domestic tourism to Tibetan areas and streamline inbound tourism procedures.<sup>[51]</sup>

The same state media article stated that in 2018, the TAR “received a total of 33.672 million tourists, a year-on-year increase of 31.5%, and realized tourism revenue of 49.014 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 29.2%.” Wang said that the target for 2019 was to receive 40 million tourists – a target that reflects the tourist figures presented in January 2020 as the total for 2019.<sup>[52]</sup> This was far higher than previous targets – in 2016, official statistics projected arrivals to rise to 35 million visitors by 2020<sup>[53]</sup> - and is clearly impacted heavily now by the coronavirus closure.

The figures are inflated even by official admissions - by a factor of something like 2.75 to meet official quotas. Officials have previously said that they multiply the number of arrivals to Lhasa by a factor of 2.7 or 2.8, calculating “an average probability” to account for the fact that most people visit two or three places. In a rough calculation of figures in 2016, Simon Denyer of the Washington Post said that “8 million tourists this year seems just about possible, albeit something of a stretch. Twenty-three million does not.”<sup>[54]</sup>

While most tourists are Chinese, travelling in groups with state-trained guides, the Chinese state media is now indicating high figures for foreign tourists visiting Tibet too, coinciding with announcements that the authorities are planning to simplify application procedures for tourists to enter Tibet “in order to further promote an open-up policy”. A China Daily report on January 10, 2019

stated, “Overseas tourists will find it easier and faster to apply for a travel permit to Tibet this year as the regional government makes efforts to boost tourism.” The report quoted a Chinese government official in Lhasa saying, “The Tibet Autonomous Region plans to cut the time for issuing travel permits to overseas tourists by half in 2019.”

The direction of the push to intensify tourism to unprecedented levels, according to Chinese officials, is to promote “high quality” tourism, likely to be a reference to the political sensitivity of backpacking tourists with sympathy for the Tibetan cause and the Dalai Lama.<sup>[55]</sup>

It was notable that the announcement of streamlining travel procedures was made just a month after RATA was signed into law, and reflects the Chinese authorities’ efforts to counter the message of restricted access to Tibet. One of the two lead sponsors of RATA in Congress, Senator Marco Rubio, tweeted on January 11, 2019, “Seems the new Reciprocal Access to Tibet law has gotten the attention of the Chinese Gov’t. Time will tell if they open up Tibet & stop brutally repressing the Tibetan people.”

If taken only at face value, the sheer numbers of tourists – mostly Chinese domestic visitors – may seem to suggest that there are no issues with access to the plateau. Certainly Chinese tourists have more freedom to explore different areas of the plateau than Western journalists or government delegations. But they are also evidence of a deliberate strategy by the Chinese government to attract large numbers of Chinese visitors to the scenic sites and cultural icons of Tibet and receive a version of history and traditions overseen by Beijing and its state-trained guides. The calculation is that attracting high-end tourism will not only boost the economy, but will at the same time assert China’s propaganda message of its ownership and dominance of Tibet.

But as the annual March closures indicate, even tourist dollars come second to the security imperatives of the Party state, and that is unlikely to change. Access to foreign tourists to Tibet can be restricted at other times, too, depending on the political climate; tours to a particular area such as Mount Kailash, in a sensitive border region, can be suddenly cancelled.

China is making additional efforts to boost winter tourism on the plateau, currently low due to the challenging weather at altitude, and promote “Third Pole Tibet” as a tourism “brand.”<sup>[56]</sup> Known as the earth’s ‘Third Pole’, because it contains the biggest reserves of freshwater outside the Arctic and Antarctic, Tibet’s changing climate not only affects the monsoon in Asia, but also weather in Europe. As the source of most of Asia’s major rivers, including the Dri Chu (Chinese: Yangtze), the Dzachu (Ch: Mekong) and the Yarlung Tsangpo (Ch: Yalu Zangbu), Tibet’s fragile ecology is of critical importance to hundreds of millions of people in the water-dependent societies downstream, but is being devastated by damaging Chinese policies.<sup>[57]</sup> The tourism drive also involves the promotion of national parks across the plateau – as Chinese tourists are welcomed into these areas for adventure tourism, Tibetan nomads are displaced and forced to settle in urban areas and concrete encampments.

These imperatives of course have become redundant in the early winter months of 2020, due to the coronavirus. Tibetan netizens tweeted images of a deserted, quarantined Lhasa. It was the first Losar (Tibetan New Year) to be marked without Chinese tourists filming or photographing Tibetan pilgrims prostrating around the Jokhang Temple in the Barkhor or burning incense and displaying prayer flags in monasteries.

## TOURISM AND THE BUREAUCRACY OF ACCESS

Having secured a Chinese tourist visa, foreigners are free to roam across most of the PRC. Even entering the comparatively sensitive regions of Xinjiang (known to Uyghurs as East Turkestan) and



Inner Mongolia (Mongol rights advocate prefer the name Southern Mongolia. Chinese: Nei Menggu) requires the same tourist visa that grants access to Beijing, Shanghai, and the rest of China. But entering the TAR is impossible without acquiring a Tibet Travel Permit (TTP) and arranging for a state-approved tour guide; no other province-level entity in the PRC has equivalent additional barriers to access.



Details of Tibet Travel Permit and other permits that are required for getting access to different parts of the Tibet Autonomous Region. This is posted by travel agencies that operate in TAR.

This is a copy of a Tibet Travel Permit document from the Tibet Autonomous Region Tourism Bureau. The document is in Chinese and Tibetan. Key details include:

- Header:** 西藏自治区旅游局 (Tibet Autonomous Region Tourism Bureau)
- Confirmation Number:** 旅藏确认函 NO 0062480 号
- Issued to:** 西藏中国旅行社 (Tibet China Travel Service)
- Confirmation:** 兹确认 (I hereby confirm)
- Group ID:** TCIS-L0917C
- Travel Dates:** 于贰零壹壹年玖月壹拾陆日至贰零壹壹年玖月贰拾贰日在藏旅游。 (From September 16, 2011, to September 22, 2011, in Tibet).
- Travel Route and Locations:** 旅行路线及地点: 西宁-拉萨、白居寺、日喀则、纳木错、羊八井-成都 (Xining-Lhasa, White Horse Temple, Lhasa, Namtso Lake, Yangbajing- Chengdu).
- Transportation:** 民航 火车 汽车售票处 (Civil Aviation, Train, Car Ticket Office)
- Stamps:** Multiple red circular stamps from the Tibet Autonomous Region Tourism Bureau and the Tibet China Travel Service.
- Commission Fee:** 注: 此件不收费 NO COMMISSION FEE

Copy of Tibet Travel Permit that is required for getting access to different parts of the Tibet Autonomous Region. This is posted by travel agencies that operate in TAR.



The requirement for a TTP, and for paid guides, gives Chinese authorities another chance to screen entrants before they're allowed to enter the Tibet Autonomous Region. Applicants are not guaranteed a TTP, and for the past several years, no TTPs have been issued at all during the four to six week period centered on March each year, coinciding with the time of heightened security restrictions around the anniversary of the 1959 Uprising and widespread protests of 2008. Additional blackout periods may be imposed at other times too, depending on China's political priorities. The stipulation that foreigners hire state-approved tour guides also serves to color and qualify the limited access foreigners have to Tibet.

Restrictions are by no means limited to the TAR, nor are every part of the TAR equally accessible. Travel experts note that Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu) city in the TAR has been completely closed to foreign travelers since 2008, with the exception of Lake Rawok. Restricted areas outside the TAR include:

In Qinghai Province:<sup>[58]</sup>

- Four counties of Darlag (Chinese: Dari), Gabde (Ch: Gande), Pema (Ch: Banma), and Chikdril (Ch: Jiuzhi) in Golog (Chinese: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture;
- Two counties of Semnyi (Ch: Menyuan) and Chilen (Ch: Qilian) in Tsonub (Chinese: Haixi) Mongol and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture;
- Two counties of Terlinkha (Ch: Delingha), and Ulam (Ch: Ulan) in Tsojang (Chinese: Haibei) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (all in Qinghai Province).

In Sichuan:

- Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) county under Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture<sup>[59]</sup>

In other cases, more specific closures can target individual towns or monasteries, such as the closure of Larung Gar Buddhist Academy in Sichuan to foreign tourists during and after a government campaign of demolishing monks' and nuns' quarters, and expelling thousands of religious practitioners. The U.S. State Department notes in Section 2 of RATA that foreign tourists "are banned from visiting the area where Larung Gar, the world's largest center for the study of Tibetan Buddhism, and the site of a large-scale campaign to expel students and demolish living quarters, is located."

Religious teachings at Larung Gar, the world's largest center of Tibetan Buddhist study and ethics, used to attract thousands of Chinese and Tibetan devotees as well as visitors from all over the world. Now security has been tightened and there is continuing distress among monks and nuns who were studying at the institute in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, in the aftermath of the imposition of direct Communist Party control on Larung Gar in 2017 and a wave of demolitions and expulsions. Many nuns displaced by the demolitions have not yet been re-housed, while monks returned to their villages are unable to rejoin monasteries and face major restrictions.<sup>[60]</sup>

While tourists may see for themselves that the devotional element of Tibetan Buddhist religion is still thriving in Tibet, they may fail to grasp that the survival of the Buddhist culture, so critical to Tibetan identity, is facing its most severe crisis as the Chinese leadership implements an oppressive plan to "Sinicize" religion in Tibet and across the PRC. It may also not be apparent that behind the modern urban façade, a growing underclass of Tibetans are increasingly marginalized and impoverished, without access to even basic healthcare and education. China's economic policies, imposed from the top-down, are resulting in a dramatic and irreversible change to Tibetan people's lives with little or no consideration for the differences between Tibetan and Chinese culture and traditions.



*Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Academy, summer, 2018.*

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## POLICY ORIENTATION AND TIBET'S LOCKDOWN

In 2018, the dangers of access to both Xinjiang and Tibet for foreign visitors were specifically referenced in the U.S. State Department's China Travel Advisory, which stated: "Extra security measures, such as security checks and increased levels of police presence, are common in the Xinjiang Uighur (sic) and Tibet Autonomous Regions. Authorities may impose curfews and travel restrictions on short notice."<sup>[61]</sup>

In 2019, the lockdown also coincided with the Chinese leadership's largest political event of the year, a meeting known as the "Two Sessions" in Beijing, involving thousands of delegates from the National People's Congress (NPC), and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), an advisory body. These meetings for this year were postponed from March to May.

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The policy orientation agreed in recent years has been clearly towards the elimination of social and cultural differences among "ethnic minorities" in the PRC, strengthening policies that undermine Tibetan language, culture and religion and reversing earlier approaches recognizing "ethnic autonomy", accompanied by an expansion of securitization and total surveillance in both Tibet and Xinjiang.<sup>[62]</sup>

Hardline strategies that were strengthened in 2019, underpinning China's control of access to Tibet, included a dramatic expansion of securitization across the plateau, the engagement of the military in propaganda efforts and a continued focus on obliterating loyalty to the Dalai Lama among Tibetans. China's propaganda efforts to ensure it controls the narrative on Tibet, both inside and out, have been intensified, described as a "new historical starting point" to be strengthened by the Party state.<sup>[63]</sup>

## TIBETAN EXILES; LOCKDOWN, COMPROMISE, AND DIVISIONS IN EXILE OVER RETURN

**“GIVEN THEIR TIBETAN NAME AND THE PLACE OF BIRTH THAT IS RECORDED ON THEIR PASSPORT (OFTEN ‘TIBET’ OR ‘AMDO’, FOR INSTANCE), THEY ARE IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZED AS TIBETANS BY THE CONSULATE AND THEY CANNOT APPLY FOR A REGULAR, L, TOURIST VISA. THEY HAVE TO APPLY FOR A Q2 TYPE VISA, ‘VISITING CHINESE COMPATRIOT’ VISA. THIS COMES WITH QUITE A NUMBER OF CONSTRAINTS AND MEETINGS WITH THE UFWD.”**

*– Interviews with two Tibetans conducted by Francoise Robin*

Tibetans in Tibet are increasingly locked in, with restrictions on moving from one place to another, obtaining a Chinese passport, or even leaving the country while in possession of a passport. At the same time, Tibetans in exile are monitored and endure the constant awareness of the possibility of their families in Tibet being targeted if they step out of line even in international capitals. Often it is impossible for them to return to their homeland at all. These restrictions, aimed at a specific ethnicity, treat all Tibetans with the same suspicion Chinese authorities may level at individual Chinese dissidents.



*Security checkpoint in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, 2017. (Photo credit: Carlos Brum Melo)*

From 2012, following the imposition of tough new measures restricting travel in Tibetan areas since the 2008 protests, Tibetans began to face tightening restrictions on the issuance of passports, limiting their travel outside Tibet – for instance to teachings of the Dalai Lama, or to study abroad. This is in



contrast to the increasing number of Chinese citizens being granted a passport, and the dramatic increase in domestic and foreign tourism to Tibet.

The Chinese authorities used the opportunity of a PRC-wide transition to electronic passports in 2012, when Chinese nationals were required to submit expired passports for replacement, to single out both Tibetans and Uighurs for more severe restrictions and punitive measures. Regulations issued in 2012 in the Tibet Autonomous Region required all Tibetans in the Tibetan region to surrender their old passports, even when their validity had not expired, ostensibly to be replaced by the electronic version. But in numerous cases, the passports were not replaced.<sup>[64]</sup>

As a result of the tighter security in the border areas as well as the crackdown in Tibet since 2008, there has been a dramatic decline in Tibetans escaping from Tibet into Nepal in the past decade. Before 2008, there was a steady outflow of 2500-3500 per year. In 2019, the figure dropped to a staggering low of 18 Tibetans who escaped into exile and were received at the reception center in Dharamsala, India.<sup>[65]</sup>

Limitations on movement of Tibetans within Tibet are not shared by Chinese tourists, who did not have to seek permission before visiting Tibet. “They are stopping the Tibetans at the gates, while the Chinese are free to go anywhere and enter from everywhere in Lhasa,” a Tibetan told RFA, in a report issued prior to the current restrictions due to the coronavirus.<sup>[66]</sup>

Specific areas such as Mount Kailash in western Tibet, and the border counties in southern Tibet, have been the focus of additional barriers. Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash is of profound importance to Tibetan Buddhists as well as to followers of the indigenous Bon religion, but Chinese authorities have repeatedly banned Tibetans from going there, even while allowing Chinese tourists to visit.<sup>[67]</sup>

For Tibetans outside China, visiting their homeland can be highly difficult or even impossible, and the RATA specifically mentions Tibetan-Americans who are unable to visit their homeland because of visa denials. While other American citizens can obtain a Chinese visa in a few days, American citizens of Tibetan origin reported a process that took anywhere from one to six months.<sup>[68]</sup> In a small sample of these Tibetans by ICT, every respondent said that they had to fill out extra forms beyond the ones required of other American citizens, and that they were required to provide additional information – including a detailed personal history. Of them, 43.7% told ICT that their family members inside Tibet were contacted for questioning by Chinese authorities. Personal interviews were conducted in almost all cases, either over the phone or in person.

Tibetans living in exile in Europe must first approach the relevant Chinese Embassy, where they encounter officials from the UFWD, and the process would then be passed down the line involving security departments. The security network is comprehensive and integrated; for those seeking to visit family in Tibet, requests for visas would be conveyed also to their home areas, at county or township levels, and would generally involve vetting family and associates, and checking whether there are political considerations, such as a member of the family who might have been a political prisoner, or any connections to someone who self-immolated. Other concerns may be less obvious.

This involves a feedback loop to the Tibetan’s activities in Europe, participation in protests at Chinese embassies in their new home country are noted, and personal details of their lives. In one case known to ICT, a Tibetan who returned to his village was met by local police who knew details of his marriage in his home country in Europe.

In recent years, the Chinese authorities have been hosting trips to Tibet for Tibetans living in Europe and America. There is evidence that they are increasingly targeting a younger generation in exile, consistent with their efforts inside Tibet, in order to replace and obliterate memories and awareness of



Tibetan history, culture and politics with CCP approved versions. According to Tibetan exile sources, this involves hosting young Tibetans living in the West for trips to Tibet during the summer holidays.<sup>[69]</sup>

The Beijing-based Tibetan writer Tsering Woesser had documented the complicated process for Tibetans seeking to return to Tibet, writing in 2011: “[Their] application goes to the TAR United Front Work Department and is approved only after the local police station determines that the relatives do not have any political background. Then the United Front Work Department issues a TAR permit that makes it possible to travel to the TAR. This takes at least three-four weeks and many Tibetan compatriots living abroad have been refused permission to travel to the TAR to see their relatives. There are four units authorized to issue TAR entry permits: the United Front Work Department, the Travel Bureau, the Commerce Bureau and the Foreign Affairs Bureau [that is the TAR Foreign Affairs Bureau].”

In an unpublished study of the difficulties for Tibetans in exile seeking to return home, Tibetologist Francoise Robin writes: “Among the 120,000 Tibetans living in exile, the ones who took to exile in the 1980s and 1990s when they were teenagers or young adults are most likely to wish to return to Tibet now. Their parents are now often in their 70s. For these Tibetans, in constant contact with their homes thanks to WeChat, going back home once to Tibet in their lifetime, to meet their aging parents and see their homeland one more time, has become a priority, a personal pilgrimage of sorts. So how can they do if they are not famous or notorious enough to be invited, or if they refuse the invitation? I see two scenarios, apart from UFWD-approved trips<sup>[70]</sup>: Tibetan exiles living in India with no valid ID to travel back to China/Tibet (*gsar ‘byor ba*), and Tibetan exiles turned citizens of another country.”<sup>[71]</sup>

In terms of the latter group, based on interviews with two Tibetans conducted by Francoise Robin in the same study: “Given their Tibetan name and the place of birth that is recorded on their passport (often ‘Tibet’ or ‘Amdo’, for instance), they are immediately recognized as Tibetans by the consulate and they cannot apply for a regular, L, tourist visa. They have to apply for a Q2 type visa, ‘visiting Chinese compatriot’ visa. This comes with quite a number of constraints and meetings with the UFWD.”

Tibetan exiles known to ICT who have visited Tibet report varying encounters with security forces and UFWD officials. The nature of the encounters often depend on specific local conditions, for instance, whether it was an area where there had been political protests or resistance of some form, and also upon the particular profile of the Tibetan concerned. A Tibetan scholar or individual with some profile in the West would be likely to experience a high degree of scrutiny. One academic from Europe mentioned, for instance, numerous requests to report to local and county-level police stations for questioning. Others report a mixture of threats and blandishments, including even offers to help set up businesses or assist economically, with officials reiterating the line that life is surely harder in the West, and here in Tibet it is possible to be more comfortable and to live a better life. Tibetans also report that they are often asked questions about Tibetans in diaspora communities, often with implicit threats if individuals do not do so.<sup>[72]</sup>

A Tibetan in France said that he was questioned at three different offices, which all appeared to be linked to the UFWD, when he went on a visit. At the first office, which oversaw internal security, he was asked questioned about whether he had joined demonstrations, and whether he was a member of the Tibetan community association in France. He said: “[Later] Qinghai State Security bureau officers [...] came down from the capital to the district. A car driver came to fetch me and he drove me to a restaurant nearby, although I did not want to go. There were four people in the room. They had received my file from the Embassy, two months before. They asked me an amazing number of questions, comparing with the answers I had given previously. The questions were in part the same (about how and why I had gone to India and France, my connections in France, my relationship to Tibetan Youth Congress, my participation in demonstrations). Then the conversation took a new turn: they asked me about certain Tibetan persons in Paris. In particular, they said one Tibetan from another district had defected to France after embezzling money and that if I knew such persons and

I could denounce them, I could become rich. Then they tried to buy me with money: they asked me what was my family's occupation (they are farmers). They asked if I sent money to them from time to time. They then said that if my family needed money, if they had health problems (your mother is getting old), they could help me. Another friend who often goes to Tibet, in a different area, had told me that they would try to buy me over. I did not believe him then, but now I realised that this is exactly what they were trying to do. They finally asked me if I intended to come. 'Next time, just contact us; there will be no problem for your visa. We will help you.' They ended on a threat: "The authorisation for you to come back is in our hands. You'd better tell us everything and we will help you with your visa."<sup>[73]</sup>

## RECIPROCAL ACCESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OFFICIALS

RATA stated that within 90 days of its enactment – by March 20 (2019) – and annually thereafter for five years, the State Department must submit and make publicly available a report that includes an assessment of the level of access Chinese authorities granted diplomats and other officials, journalists, and tourists from the United States to Tibetan areas.

The first 90-day period fell within the longest period of restricted access in March 2019 to Tibetan areas for years – until now, and the COVID-19 coronavirus. The State Department issued the initial report on March 25, 2019 in which it denounced China for “systematically” impeding Americans’ travel to Tibet.<sup>[74]</sup>

RATA also states that within a year the U.S. Secretary of State will “provide to the appropriate congressional committees a report identifying the individuals who have had visas denied or revoked pursuant to this section during the preceding year and, to the extent practicable, a list of Chinese officials who were substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies to restrict access of United States diplomats and other officials, journalists, and citizens of the United States to Tibetan areas.” At the time of this report, the State Department is yet to submit this report although our understanding is that it is being prepared.

This approach is consistent with the push to sanction officials directly for human rights abuses, under the provisions of the Global Magnitsky Act. The Tibetan Policy and Support Act strengthened this proviso still further, stating that Chinese officials who attempt to appoint their own Dalai Lama in the future could be sanctioned for instance by having assets frozen and entry to the U.S. denied.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi introduced the Tibetan Policy and Support Act by stating, “We are supporting the Tibetan people’s right to religious freedom and genuine autonomy by formally establishing a US policy that the Tibetan Buddhist community has the exclusive right to choose its religious leaders, including the 15th Dalai Lama. Imagine the Chinese government should think they should be choosing the next Dalai Lama of the Tibetan Buddhists. We are sending Beijing a clear signal they will be held accountable for interfering in Tibet’s religious and cultural affairs, making clear that Chinese officials who meddle in the process in recognizing the new Dalai Lama will be subject to targeted sanctions, including those in the Global Magnitsky Act. [...] The Congress will and must continue to take action to hold China accountable.”<sup>[75]</sup>

The call to target officials is increasingly being made by Parliamentarians in Europe. In a resolution adopted with a large majority of 505 voices (with only 18 against and 47 abstentions) on April 18, 2019, the European Parliament has singled out China for its persecution of Tibetans and other ethnic and religious groups and demanded that the Chinese authorities respect their fundamental rights and

freedoms. Article 20 of the Resolution called on the Council to consider adopting targeted sanctions against officials responsible for the crackdown in Xinjiang.<sup>[76]</sup>

## INSIDE THE 'BLACK BOX': IDENTIFYING OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

While policy decisions in Tibetan areas are made at the highest levels, it is also possible to pinpoint officials at lower levels involved in formulating and executing policy on the issue of access. The prefectural, provincial, and central levels from the United Front Work Department, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Public Security, People's Liberation Army, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are involved in approving permits for Tibet travel. In particular, officials of the United Front Work Department and security departments in the TAR are involved with such decisions. According to one well-informed Tibetan source, the TAR UFWD is regarded as particularly authoritative in level of restriction imposed, compared to counterparts in Tibetan areas of Gansu, Sichuan, Qinghai, and Yunnan.

As a Party organ, the UFWD is directly responsible to the regional Party Committee that in turn reports to the Central Committee in Beijing. It operates both as an organ of administration and as a supervisor overseeing the implementation of Party policy.

The current head of the UFWD at central level is You Quan, whose central importance to Tibet policy is frequently indicated, for instance by his appearances with the Chinese-selected Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, and statements on religious matters.<sup>[77]</sup> Shi Jun, vice minister of the UFWD of the CPC Central Committee, was appointed in 2018 after crushing Tibetan unrest in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), Sichuan as former Party chief of the Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, and is known for his strong connection to oppressive ethnic policies. He was identified as "head of the office of the Central Coordinating Group for Work on Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region".<sup>[78]</sup> "Some people say that he [Shi Jun] is the 'lord of devils'," wrote a Tibetan cadre under the name of Luo Feng, in a rare open letter. "All those who speak Tibetan have become an object of suspicion. In his view, Tibetan costumes should only appear on stage or in dramas, otherwise, those who wear them are disloyal."<sup>[79]</sup>

The current head of the UFWD in the TAR is Tenkho (Danko), who is of Tibetan ethnicity.<sup>[80]</sup>

The most senior figure in the TAR involved in decisions on access restrictions is the Party Secretary, currently Wu Yingjie, appointed by Beijing. He has a critical leadership role overseeing the number of different committees and departments that would be involved in overseeing applications for travel to Tibet, which would vary according to whether they were diplomatic, press, Tibetans from Europe or tourism requests.

The U.S. State Department summarizes the process of obtaining diplomatic permissions as follows: "Chinese authorities assessed each U.S. official request to visit the TAR on a case-by-case basis. The TAR Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) generally required a diplomatic note for any official visit, accompanied by a detailed day-by-day agenda and list of trip attendees. Once the TAR government received the request, it reportedly informed a foreign affairs leading committee, consisting of representatives at the prefectural, provincial, and central levels from the United Front Work Department, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Public Security, People's Liberation Army, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This committee reviewed the request and then instructed the TAR FAO to provide the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu with a formal response. This process typically took at least one month. In the interim, U.S. officials typically made dozens of calls to the TAR FAO



to inquire about the status of the request. The TAR FAO did not provide a timeline for a decision and typically conveyed a verbal approval or rejection two or three days before the planned travel. The TAR FAO instructed U.S. diplomats also to request approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a U.S. Ambassador trip.”<sup>[81]</sup>

For such official requests the TAR FAO would be the ‘gateway’ department sending information to the various committees for processing which would involve vetting each named individual. The process is secretive, and according to ICT sources, both the TAR UFWD and security departments’ roles are crucial.

## A THREAT TO JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY: ACCESS FOR REPORTERS

While Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution guarantees the freedom of the press, and regulations issued by the State Council clearly state the Chinese government is responsible for protecting “the legitimate rights and interests of foreign journalists,” in practice European journalists face significant restrictions on their ability to report from China. The conflict is clear in the CCP’s characterization of all media work abroad and with foreign press as *wai xuan*, or “external propaganda.”

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) consistently ranks China as one of the worst countries on Earth for press freedom; in 2019 it placed China 177th on a list of 180 countries. RSF refers to China as “the planet’s leading censor and press freedom predator”, saying that: “China is expanding its hold beyond its borders to impose its ‘ideologically correct’ vocabulary, to deter any criticism of itself and to cover up the darker chapters in its history. Less well known than the Belt and Road Initiative, but just as ambitious, this project poses a threat to press freedom throughout the world.” Christophe Deloire, Secretary General of RSF, said: “In the spirit of the Beijing regime, journalists are not intended to be a counter-power but rather to serve the propaganda of states. If democracies do not resist, Beijing will impose his (*sic*) view and his (*sic*) propaganda, which is a threat for journalism and democracy”.<sup>[82]</sup>

Journalists based in China seeking to travel to Tibetan areas would generally engage with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of State Security, and Public Security Bureau (for permits). They would first approach the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing when applying to visit, and requests then pass through security and UFWD. “National security” bureaus at different levels have specific departments for dealing with foreigners.<sup>[83]</sup>

On the ground, local police and Public Security Bureau officials are involved in supervising visits and restricting access. Two reporters from the New York Times, Steven Lee Myers and Gilles Sabrie, detailed the role of police and officials in detaining them in Dzongsar monastery in Derge, (Chinese: Dege), Sichuan in 2018. The presence of the two reporters was registered at a local level quickly, with the ostensible reason for their being escorted to the police station being that foreign travelers are required to register with local authorities within 24 hours of arriving in a new location in China (or 72 hours in rural locations), typically handled by hotel receptionists. At the local village police station the reporters had to wait for officials to come from Derge the county seat, a two-hour drive away. The delegation from Derge then escorted the reporters in a police car to Dartsedo (Chinese: Kangding), where authority was apparently handed over to a woman who identified herself as a representative of the Public Security Bureau, and the reporters were taken to the airport in Chengdu and sent back to Beijing.<sup>[84]</sup>

Foreign Journalists in China also report being under direct pressure from the Foreign Ministry at central level. AFP’s Beijing bureau chief Patrick Baert, who first came to China as a reporter in 1997, was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at least twice in 2017. A UK media organisation said:

“At a friendly lunch meeting with MoFA, our request for help with delayed visas was met with the reply that certain articles were not objective, citing precise dates.”<sup>[85]</sup>

The Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCC) in its report concludes that the TAR remains “unreachable” for foreign correspondents, whose presence is banned outside of government-organized reporting trips. These restrictions are implemented through the J-1 and J-2 visas that journalists are required to acquire before reporting in China, combined with the requirement to submit your visa and passport when applying for a Tibet Travel Permit. Holding a journalist visa essentially makes the bearer ineligible to enter TAR, as Chinese airlines and buses will refuse to sell tickets without a TTP, and hotels will report the arrival of any J visa to the police upon check-in. One of the very few foreign journalists to independently report inside the TAR since the mass expulsion of journalists in 2008, Cyril Payen, did so only by obtaining a non-journalist visa, which took six months, and then reporting from Lhasa in secret.<sup>[86]</sup>

Reporters often refer to direct questioning and involvement by officials from the Ministry of State Security. For instance, Nathan Vanderklippe of the LA Times said of a reporting trip to Xinjiang: “I was detained for three hours in Xinjiang and questioned by officials with the Ministry of State Security, who told me I could not report without prior permission, and demanded access to my laptop. When I refused, they seized my laptop and tailed me for two hours back to a hotel in Kashgar. The laptop was returned 12 hours later.”<sup>[87]</sup>

FCC noted that in 2018 fewer journalists reported being called into the Ministry of State Security than the year before although overall risks and harassment increased.<sup>[88]</sup>

In a typical itinerary for escorted tours to Tibet, journalists are brought to the Potala Palace, one or more of the major temples and monasteries, and a model business or cooperative. Displaying new infrastructure, including highways and dams, the journalists may then be chauffeured to model towns in Nyingtri (Chinese: Linzhi), a budding tourist center in southern Tibet which is also heavily militarized and close to the border with Arunachal Pradesh in India. Other parts of Tibet, such as the sensitive border region of Ngari (Chinese: Ali) and the restive Nagchu, where a terrifying crackdown has been underway in Driru (Chinese: Biru), remain firmly off the itinerary.

Reporters are keenly aware of the reprisals that often face Tibetans who speak to journalists. Tashi Wangchuk, a shopkeeper and language advocate who had called for greater Tibetan-language education, was detained just days after the New York Times published a video story profiling his efforts. After two years in detention he was tried for ‘inciting separatism,’ and sentenced to five years in prison in May 2018.<sup>[89]</sup> In the first known instance of an international news story being used in a criminal prosecution against a Tibetan, the NYT video was used as evidence – despite Tashi Wangchuk’s clear disavowals of separatism, and his stated intention to use the Chinese law to protect the Tibetan language. Jonah Kessel, the NYT correspondent who made the video clip, said later: “The use of my film as evidence against Mr. Tashi gets at the heart of one of the thorniest issues that can plague foreign journalists: How do we justify instances when our work — aimed at giving voice to the voiceless and holding the powerful to account — ends up putting its subjects at risk or in danger? [...]”<sup>[90]</sup>

The expulsion of journalists for their writing is a blunt but powerful weapon used by the Chinese authorities against reporters. In a move linked to the paper’s coverage of the spread of the coronavirus, three experienced correspondents for the Wall Street Journal were given five days to leave the PRC in February (2020).<sup>[91]</sup> Philip Wen and Josh Chin, two of those expelled, have been involved in significant coverage of Tibet during their careers in China, although this was not the specific reason for the expulsion.

In contrast to the extensive restrictions placed upon foreign journalists in China who attempt to report from Tibet, Chinese authorities will occasionally reach out to journalists in other countries and invite them to visit Tibet, particularly for instance reporters from Nepal and India who they wish to cultivate for favorable coverage. Few, if any, of the reporters brought in from abroad speak Chinese or Tibetan, and they are almost certainly less familiar with the Tibet issue than reporters who have lived in China and studied Chinese politics for years. This lack of fluency with the issues can be considered a plus for the Chinese government, which may hope that their guests will be more easily misinformed than resident journalists.

Hanna Sahlberg, president of the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Beijing, observed that China's growing repression of foreign media comes at the same time that Chinese state media are expanding overseas and spreading Beijing's propaganda around the globe. That double standard is one of the reasons for pressing for reciprocity efforts in the EU following the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act in the U.S.

## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET RECOMMENDATIONS

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**“THE EU SHOULD FOLLOW UP ON THE FINDINGS IN ITS 2016 STRATEGY ON CHINA, WHICH MENTIONED THE OBJECTIVE TO “[P]ROMOTE RECIPROCITY, A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD AND FAIR COMPETITION ACROSS ALL AREAS OF CO-OPERATION” AS WELL AS ON THE STATEMENT OF THE CURRENT HIGH REPRESENTATIVE /VICE-PRESIDENT BORRELL SAYING THAT “SINCE DIPLOMACY IS BEST GROUNDED IN CLEAR PRINCIPLES, THE WATCHWORDS FOR EU-CHINA SHOULD BE TRUST, TRANSPARENCY AND RECIPROCITY.”**

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### TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. The European Union and EU countries should formulate a multilateral approach to the Tibet issue, particularly on the issue of access.
2. The EU should push forward the recommendation made by then High Representative/ Vice President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament in 2019 asking Chinese authorities “to allow reciprocal access to Tibet for European journalists, diplomats, and families”.
3. It should implement the recommendations made in the European Parliament report in 2018 on the state of EU-China relations, which asked EU “to ensure that EU-China cooperation is grounded in the rule of law, universality of human rights, the international human rights commitments undertaken by both sides and the commitment to progress towards the achievement of the highest standard of human rights protection; stresses that reciprocity, a level playing field and fair competition across all areas of cooperation should be strengthened.” The EU should specifically note the recommendations of the report on



the “EU institutions to take the issue of access to Tibet into serious consideration in the discussions on the EU-China visa facilitation agreement.”

4. The EU should follow up on the findings in its 2016 Strategy on China, which mentioned the objective to “[P]romote reciprocity, a level playing field and fair competition across all areas of co-operation” as well as on the statement of the current High Representative /Vice-President Borrell saying that “since diplomacy is best grounded in clear principles, the watchwords for EU-China should be trust, transparency and reciprocity.”<sup>[92]</sup> This notion of reciprocity should therefore be extended to the respect for fundamental rights, including the freedom of movement and the freedom of information of European citizens in China and Tibet.
5. It is only by fully involving Tibetans in any decision-making process and implementation of policies aimed at encouraging tourism to Tibet the objectives of generating economic benefits, improving local living standards, and protecting the environment of the plateau can be achieved. Tibetans should be the primary beneficiaries of revenues from tourism, the main employees of tourism enterprises, and, above all, the guides and story tellers who explain Tibet’s culture and values to visitors. Tourism can also play a critical role in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and understanding between Tibetans and Chinese. European investors in tourism in Tibet – such as hotel chains – should therefore be urged and encouraged to do their part in ensuring the active participation of Tibetans in the tourism industry and protecting authentic Tibetan culture.

#### **TO THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

*With regard to Tibetans being locked into Tibet, urge the Chinese authorities to:*

6. Refrain from confiscating valid passports of Tibetans who return from foreign travel; also refrain from confiscating valid passports from Tibetans as a means of sanctioning religious, political or cultural expression that is viewed not to be compatible with the Party state’s official policies.
7. Allow for unhindered domestic travel for Tibetans and refrain from sanctioning expression of religious, political and cultural beliefs and activities.
8. Abolish all discriminatory practices against Tibetans that are perceived to be root causes of Tibetan discontent and grievances, such as the unlawful denial of passports.
9. Allow foreign travel for Tibetans; issue passports to Tibetan applicants in accordance with Article 6 of the Passport Law. In particular, when denying the issuance of a passport, as per Article 6 of the Passport Law, “give the reasons in writing and inform the applicant of his right to apply for administrative reconsideration or to file an administrative lawsuit in accordance with law.” Issue passports within the time periods as prescribed in the Passport Law, i.e. within 15 days.
10. Repeal Article 13 (7) of the Passport Law that allows for the refusal to issue a passport to a person who may “cause major losses to the interests of the State”, as it is not in accordance with Article 12 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has been signed by the People’s Republic of China.

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[69] ICT is aware of at least one invitation to groups of young Tibetans to visit Tibet in 2020 summer.

[70] Such trips are rare and tend to be offered to Tibetans prominent in intellectual or cultural spheres or business.

[71] Extract from unpublished paper used with the permission of the author.

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