



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **Tibet must remain Tibet: Beijing's propaganda forum on Sinicizing Tibet**

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China's global propaganda forum on development in Tibet reconvened on May 23, marking its return after a hiatus since 2019 owing to the global pandemic. Following a familiar pattern, foreign Sinophiles with a favorable view and ideological alignment with China embarked on a week-long tour of Tibet before gathering in Beijing for the day-long global propaganda forum.

The recently concluded forum is the seventh such "China Tibet Development Forum" since the first in Vienna in 2007. It was timed to coincide with the date when China coerced the Tibetan government into accepting the 17 Point Agreement on May 23, 1951.

#### **Tibet is Tibet**

The propaganda nature of the forum is evident in the official title and theme of the forum. Dubbed the "2023 Forum on the Development of Xizang, China: New Era, New Xizang, New Journey - New Chapter in Xizang's High-quality Development and Human Rights Protection," the forum attempted to convert the country name of Tibet in English to Beijing's preferred term, Xizang, which translates as "western treasure house." Xizang has been used in Chinese to refer to Tibet, but there is increasing use of it even in English language outputs.

Since a [decision](#) apparently made by the CCP Propaganda Department in September 2021 to gradually start replacing Tibet with Xizang in external propaganda, China has been steadily and strategically attempting to alter the identity of Tibet to Xizang for English speakers worldwide. China's attempt to do the same in the past had failed miserably.

Drawing confidence from its investment in and capacity to alter the global media landscape, Beijing launched an ongoing reattempt in fall 2021 to Sinicize the global name of Tibet to Xizang. Beijing Sinicized the country name "East Turkestan" as Xinjiang, which translates as the "new frontier." Today, Xinjiang is widely recognized around the globe as the name for East Turkestan, despite the Uyghurs' tireless objections to the Sinicization of their country name.

Globally, Tibet should continue to exist as Tibet and not be subjected to the Sinicized version being promoted by Beijing.

#### **Propaganda specialist**

The second evidence of the propaganda nature of the forum is in the name of the organizers: the State Council Information Office (SCIO) and the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The State Council Information Office is not a policy-making or -implementing entity. As the

global propaganda mouth of the Chinese party-state, the SCIO's existence and function is to mislead or to defend the atrocities of the party-state through propaganda. SCIO was established in 1991 "to assist news media in presenting aspects of China to the world" to counter international condemnation of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989.

SCIO has been consistently involved in global propaganda on Tibet. Since the launch of the so-called "Forum on Development of Tibet" in Vienna in 2007, SCIO has continued to be the forum organizer to date. The difference between the first propaganda forum and the most recent is its other organizer. The 2007 forum in Vienna was jointly organized by the SCIO, the Chinese embassy in Austria, the permanent mission of China to the United Nations, international organizations in Vienna and Austrian organizations including the Organization to Support the Austrian and Chinese Economic Cooperations. In the latest propaganda forum, the People's Government of Tibet Autonomous Region is named as the co-organizer.

The People's Government of Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is a government installed by Beijing after disbanding the legitimate government of Tibet in the aftermath of China's occupation of Tibet. As the puppet government, the People's Government of TAR's function is to extend legitimacy to Beijing as the "people's government."

In a continuation of the 2019 forum, Li Shulei, a Politburo member and the head of the Propaganda/Publicity Department of the CCP Central Committee, delivered the opening speech and read Xi Jinping's "congratulatory letter" to the forum. This practice of sending letters in the name of Xi Jinping began in 2019, while in the past, Yu Zhengsheng, a Politburo member, sent a letter in 2016. This emphasis on Xi Jinping's involvement highlights the "new era" where Xi Jinping is positioned at the center of everything and holds a status similar to that of Mao Zedong as the "helmsman."

## **South-South brotherhood**

China has long been fashioning itself as the leader of the developing and the under-developed world despite its status as a great power and the world's second largest economy. Despite its rise through the peace and tranquility provided by the Westphalian system, China aims to thrust Chinese values and its authoritarian system over the prevalent universal values and global system. The strategy to bend the global system to its liking is clear through the south-south coalition policy. China has been working in this direction for a long time. China's propaganda forum on Tibet in Beijing is a clear reflection of its international strategy.

Beijing gathered and paraded several foreign nationals—accounting for one-third of the total 150 delegates to the forum—from the under-developed or developing countries as well as foreign employees in China's institutions for amplification of its narrative during the forum. One such delegate is Alexander Birle, chief representative of the German Hanns Seidel Stiftung in China, who is quoted by Chinese state media outlet Xinhua as praising China for its protection of the "cultural heritage of Tibetan people." His statement is in stark contrast to assessments by UN bodies and the German government on the situation of the Tibetan people. While the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation pointed out in a statement that the statement of its representative was "distorted" by the Chinese state media, Birle has been criticized for letting himself become a tool of the Chinese government.

The delegates to the forum included several ambassadors from the Global South. Hardly anyone from the developed or neutral countries took part in the propaganda forum. When crude attempts were made in the past to disingenuously claim foreign nationals as co-signers of China's so-called "Lhasa Consensus" during the 4th and the 5th forums in [2014](#) and [2016](#), controversy over Beijing's

disingenuity revealed the global propaganda aim of the forums. The latest forum in Beijing is devoid of any serious and impartial experts with no conflict of interest on either development or human rights despite the forum's proclaimed theme of "High-quality Development and Human Rights Protection."

## **Potemkin village tour**

Beijing's blockage of access to Tibet is widely known and [documented](#). The only access to Tibet available is through state-organized and managed tours. The foreign delegates to the latest forum, like in the past, were first taken for a week-long Potemkin village tour to Lhasa and Nyingchi, with a quick stop at Yamdrok Yutso lake in Lhoka (Chinese: Shannan) between May 16-22.

Chinese state media carried quotes of its foreign delegates in print and video to paint a glowing affirmation of Beijing's narrative on Tibet. For example, the retired Australian academic Colin Mackerras in several video interviews to Chinese state media hailed Beijing's lifting Tibet from "backwardness," a Beijing pejorative for Tibet, to Chinese modernity. Mackerras singularly focuses on socio-economic development as "good human rights" while completely ignoring the civil and political dimension of human rights.

Similarly, Vikash Kunmar Singh, an Indian national teaching Hindi at Beijing Foreign Studies University, echoes China's official position of relativity of human rights. Conveniently ignoring the universality of human rights, Singh in video interviews to Chinese state media logically equates money as progress and thus protection of human rights.

The Ambassador of the Philippines to China glowingly praises China in ensuring that, "The local [Tibetan] students can learn new things, but also while preserving their own culture, their own language." Ambassador Jaime FlorCruz chooses to ignore global condemnation of the ongoing mass-scale Sinicization of Tibetan children in state-run boarding schools and the systematic destruction of Tibetan language. In another video interview, the ambassador of Nepal to China praises China's Belt and Roads Initiative as bringing connectivity and enterprise structural development. Today China's global BRI project is in total disarray with limited progress being made in certain regions, including Nepal.

## **Next propaganda stop**

As part of the propaganda efforts surrounding the recently concluded forum in Beijing, a one-hour CGTN video documentary was released, highlighting Tibet as a destination for "red tourism" and focusing on the "revolutionary heroes" who played a role in modernizing Tibet.

The next significant propaganda event related to Tibet on Beijing's calendar is the upcoming China Tibet Tourism and Culture Expo, scheduled to take place in Lhasa from June 16 to 18. This expo will be the fifth of its kind, following the previous edition held in 2018.

## Development Forum on Tibet

Year	Location	Date	Official title	Theme
2007	Vienna	Nov. 29, 2007	First Forum on Development of Tibet, China	
2009	Rome	Oct. 22, 2009	Second Forum on Development of Tibet, China	Tibet: Development Prospects and Cooperation Opportunities
2011	Athen	Nov. 10, 2011	Third Forum on the Development of Tibet, China	
2014	Lhasa	Aug. 12-13, 2014	Forum on the Development of Tibet, China	
2016	Lhasa	July 7-8, 2016	Forum on the Development of Tibet, China	
2019	Lhasa	June 14, 2019	Forum on the Development of Tibet, China	Belt and Road Initiative and Tibet's Opening up and Development
2023	Beijing	May 23, 2023	2023 Forum on the Development of Xizang, China	New Era, New Xizang, New Journey--New Chapter in Xizang's High-quality Development and Human Rights Protection

## Foreign delegates to the 2023 Forum

	Name	Affiliation
1	Colin Mackerras	Recipient of Chinese Government Friendship Award Order of Australia, Emeritus of Griffith University
2	Vikash Kunmar Singh	Lecturer of the Asian Institute of Beijing Foreign Studies University
3	Adham Sayed	Researcher at Zhejiang Gongshang University
4	H.E. Bishnu Pukar Shrestha	Ambassador of Nepal to China
5	H.E. Jaime Adriano Florcruz	Ambassador of the Philippines to China
6	H.E. Maria Gustava	Ambassador of Mozambique to China
7	Roland Boer	School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China

8	Anke Redl	Co-founder of China Media Management, China Representative of German Films, and Organizer of Festival of German Cinema and China-Germany Media Forum in China
9	Michael Crook	Western Academy of Beijing
10	Abdilahi Ismail Abdilahi	Beijing Foreign Studies University
11	Alexander Birle	Chief representative of Hanns Seidel Stiftung in China
12	Frank Sieren	Journalist, China Table
13	Hooi Keng Leun Alexis John	China Daily
14	Minh David Thao Chan	PhD student at Tsinghua University
15	Erik Robert Nilson	Journalist, China Daily
16	Dino Rachmadiana Kusnadi	Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Indonesia in Beijing
17	Guibe Guillaume	Employee of China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation
18	Muhammad Asghar	Director of Associated Press of Pakistan in Beijing
19	Hendy Yuniarto	Lecturer of the Asia Institute of Beijing Foreign Studies University
20	Roberto Malighetti	Visiting Professor of Minzu University of China
21	Diego Garcia Goulart	Editor of Portuguese Department of China Media Group (CMG)
22	Sergio Cabrera	Colombian Ambassador to China
23	Giuseppe Yoffreda	Venezuela's Ambassador to China
24	Fahd Mohammed Saleh Al-Duais (online)	Assistant Professor of Accounting of Philadelphia in Jordan University
25	Leela Mani Paudyal (online)	Former Ambassador of Nepal to China
26	Jiumaocuo	Professor of the School of Economics and Management of Xizang University
27	Ndusi Ruziga Christian	Second Counsellor of the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in China
28	Tefera Derbew Yimam (online)	Ambassador of Ethiopia to China
29	Franz Louis V. Alfonso	Attaché of the Embassy of the Philippines in China

30	Muhammad Irfan Ilmie	Director of Antara News Agency of Indonesia in Beijing
31	Hiranya Lal Shrestha (online)	Former Ambassador of Nepal to Russia
32	Peter Tichauer	German Media Director of Sino-German Ecological Park in Qingdao
33	Richard Trappl (online)	Professor of the Chinese Studies of University of Vienna and Foreign Director of the Confucius Institute
34	Laurence J. Brahm	Political Economist, Writer, Lawyer, Director
35	Shahid Ahmad Hashmat	Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Sri Lanka
36	Mohammad Nazrul Islam	Deputy Chief of Mission and Minister of the Embassy of Bangladesh in China
37	Sarbottam Shrestha	President of Arniko Society of Nepal
38	Elsbeth van Paridon	English Editor of the Americas Communication Center (Beijing Weekly) of China Foreign Language Publishing Administration
39	Rafael Henrique Zerbetto	Foreign Correspondent and Language Consultant of the Asia-Pacific Communication Center of China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration
40	Rahamtalla M. Osman	AU Representative to China
41	Manasa Tagicakibau	Ambassador of Fiji to China
42	Malaeoletalu L. Malaki	First Secretary of the Embassy of Samoa in China
43	Dzheni Madzharov (online)	Professor of Sofia University
44	Katarzyna Anna Nawrot (online)	Professor of Polish Academy of Sciences
45	Jennifer Courtney Holstein	Principal of International Education School of Pingo Academy
46	Tin Maung Swe	Myanmar's Ambassador to China
47	Zaw Lin Ko	Second Secretary of the Embassy of Myanmar in China
48	Shi Anbin	School of Journalism and Communication of Tsinghua University
49	Nathan Keith Williams	New Media Editor of the New Media Center of China Daily
50	Md Enamul Hassan	Editor of Bangla Department of China Media Group (CMG)
51	Vikram Channa	Vice President of Discovery Asia Pacific Television Network

52	Nazar Hussain (online)	Lecturer of Shah Abdul Latif University
53	Haile Andargie Wondalem (online)	Associate Professor of Debre Marcos University
54	Aneesh Malla (online)	Former Foreign Expert of Beijing Foreign Studies University



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