



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China's new 'White Paper' on Tibet: Ominous silence amid barrage of party language

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Analysis by the International Campaign for Tibet:

The new "White Paper" on Tibet released on Nov. 10, 2023 by China's State Council unsurprisingly presents an overwhelmingly flowery image of the situation in Tibet, while its barrage of figures and alleged achievements, along with language characteristic to the Communist Party under Xi Jinping, remain silent on core projects of the party-state in Tibet, namely the boarding school system and the massive relocation programs, both of which are having a tremendous impact on the Tibetan people and their culture.

During a recent UN review, the Chinese government had given details on both programs and stated, for example, that 260,000 Tibetans had been relocated alone in 2019, while the total figure may amount to up to 2 million relocated Tibetans over the past 20 years. At the same time, UN experts have called for an immediate end to the residential boarding school system in Tibet.

Obviously aimed at an international audience and timed to coincide with upcoming scrutiny of China at the UN level, the document and its language are also in contrast to recent speeches given by Xi Jinping at "study sessions" of the CCP Politburo, where China's autocratic leader more bluntly talked about assimilationist policies toward Tibetans and others. The paper also aims to justify policies toward Tibetan Buddhists that have been found to be in contravention to international law many times, also by independent UN experts. Absurdly, the atheist party-state reiterates its authority over the appointment of Tibetan Buddhist leaders and teachers, such as the Dalai Lama.

Only a thin veil is laid over the massive indoctrination drives toward the Tibetan population, as they are euphemistically coined "education campaigns" and misleadingly represented as promoting the rule of law, in the absence of an independent judiciary, a free media and the separation of powers. The emphasis on such programs in the paper gives reason for concern that repressive policies will only be expanded in Tibet.

Tellingly, the paper portrays its top-down approach to "cultural undertakings" as success, when it highlights television shows, songs and performances such as "The Party Shines upon the Border," "Affection of the Tibetans for the CPC," "Forging Ahead in the New Era" or "Bitter Turns to Sweet when the CPC Comes." Such alleged cultural achievements must sound offensive particularly to Tibetans who have been imprisoned for their dissenting or autonomous artistic, cultural or political expression and for those who risk their freedom for protecting the Tibetan culture.

The document is titled "CPC Policies on the Governance of Xizang in the New Era: Approach and Achievements." Throughout, the paper imposes the Chinese term "Xizang" instead of "Tibet" as an apparent attempt to imply legitimacy of Chinese rule over the occupied country and to eradicate the global association of "Tibet" with injustice and the assault on a precious culture.

The white paper covers the period after the 18th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012, when Xi Jinping assumed office. It is preceded by a white paper from 2019, when the Communist Party presented its version of 60 years of repressive and repeatedly extremely brutal rule in Tibet, while Tibetans in Tibet and across the world were commemorating the violent crackdown in 1959 and the ensuing exodus of Tibetans from Tibet, among them the 14th Dalai Lama.

The International Campaign for Tibet commented on the White Paper: *“The State Council’s white paper offers insight into the Communist Party’s repressive strategies and assimilationist ideology on Tibet through what it omits, how it manipulates and reframes terminology, and what can be read between the lines. After deducting the patently absurd sugarcoating, what remains is a people who are totally subjected to a regime that does not understand the value of their culture, does not understand the Tibetan people, their religion, their traditions and their aspirations. Such paternalistic elaborations of an autocratic one-party dictatorship should be rejected by anyone who reads the white paper.”*

Imposition of Chinese identity on Tibetans

In 2012, Tibetans were also among those filled with optimism over Xi Jinping’s ascent to power and hoping for forward movement on the resolution of the Tibet-China conflict. However, contrary to the claims in this white paper, 11 years later, Xi Jinping has shown himself to be among the most repressive of Chinese leaders. His focus was on two primary goals: securitize Tibet and “Sinify” the Tibetan people within the Chinese nation-state.

This white paper reflects the proceedings of the “group study sessions” that Xi Jinping has been conducting for the members of the politburo in which outside experts are invited to lead a discussion on a particular topic that the leadership finds important. In his address to one such study session, the eighth collective group study session of the Political Bureau of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee held on Oct. 27, 2023, Chinese state media outlet Xinhua reported that Xi Jinping called for forging “a strong sense of community for the Chinese Nation, efforts should be made to let the people cultivate the awareness that people from all ethnic groups are in the same community, where they share weal and woe and the same future and stick together through thick and thin, and life and death.”

Xi continued saying that, “The Party’s ethnic work and all other initiatives in areas with large ethnic minority populations should focus on forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.”

Continuing with his assimilation theme, Xi encouraged “people of all ethnic groups to identify themselves with the Chinese culture. And continuously enhance the recognition of Chinese culture among the people of all ethnic groups, effectively promote the popularize the standard spoken and written Chinese language and the use of unified state-compiled textbooks to ensure the facilitation shared communication of heart and soul through language.”

The white paper clearly shows that whatever little protections that were afforded to Tibetans who are considered “minorities” in the Chinese system of regional autonomy to retain their identity and culture in the past are endangered under Xi Jinping’s administration. In fact, the report forebodingly asserts that in Tibet, “A shared sense of belonging for the Chinese nation has been consolidated.”

Creating a new generation of Sinified Tibetans

Creating a new generation of Sinified Tibetans includes assimilating an entire Tibetan youth demographic. This has led to boarding schools (without parents having any say in the upbringing) in Tibet being one of the primary domains for Sinification policy through which Tibetan children are distanced from their traditional cultural environment and through strict enforcement of Chinese as the primary language over Tibetan language in the education system. Through this, the Chinese

government's objective is to encourage a new generation of Tibetans only being able to identify themselves as Chinese with loyalty to the Chinese nation.

There have been international concerns expressed at this development. [Canada](#), [Germany](#), and the [United States \(which imposed visa restrictions](#) on this) are among those that have condemned the Chinese political agenda behind the boarding schools in Tibet.

A [senior Chinese official on Nov. 10, 2023 made an attempt](#) to refute international condemnation of the boarding school system by saying, "it's highly necessary to have a combination of boarding schools and day schools to ensure high quality teaching and the equal rights of children." China ignores the fact that international criticism is not about the boarding school system per se but about how these are administered, resulting in turning Tibetan children into someone devoid of Tibetan identity.

Preempt scrutiny at the UN

The white paper is an attempt to deflect international scrutiny, particularly by the United Nations. China's report is due to be discussed at the UN's Universal Periodic Review session in January 2024.

The International Campaign for Tibet and the International Federation for Human Rights have [submitted a joint report](#) to the UN Human Rights Council, ahead of the UPR process, which highlights "a system of boarding schools that separate families, and the prioritization of Chinese language over Tibetan language in education." This [joint report](#) recommends that the Chinese government "[i]mmediately abolish the boarding school and pre-school system imposed on Tibetan children and authorize and subsidize the establishment of private Tibetan schools."

In [a statement on the Tibetan boarding schools on Feb. 6, 2023, three UN experts](#)—Fernand de Varennes, the special rapporteur on minority issues; Farida Shaheed, the special rapporteur on the right to education; and Alexandra Xanthaki, the special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights—warned that, "As a result, Tibetan children are losing their facility with their native language and the ability to communicate easily with their parents and grandparents in the Tibetan language, which contributes to their assimilation and erosion of their identity." In March 2023, the [UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued the "Concluding Observations"](#) on its third periodic review of China, calling for an end to forced relocations and the state-run boarding school system in Tibet.

Disinformation about Dalai Lama succession

The white paper highlights some peripheral ritualistic activities to show that there is religious freedom in Tibet while there is no reference to the more important and fundamental traditional transfer of religious philosophy to the disciples, as is being continued in the Tibetan community in exile. Ignoring the historical fact that the institution of the Dalai Lama is beyond the geographic boundary of Tibet and that past Dalai Lamas have come from outside Tibet, as per the spiritual process, the white paper asserts that reincarnation of the "Dalai Lamas and Panchen Rinpoches, must be looked for within the country, decided through the practice of lot-drawing from the golden urn, and receive approval from the central government." The present 14th Dalai Lama has said that only he has the authority to decide on his reincarnation. In [a statement in September 2011](#), the Dalai Lama said, "It is particularly inappropriate for Chinese communists, who explicitly reject even the idea of past and future lives, let alone the concept of reincarnate Tulkus, to meddle in the system of reincarnation and especially the reincarnations of the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas. Such brazen meddling contradicts their own political ideology and reveals their double standards. Should this situation continue in the future, it will be impossible for Tibetans and those who follow the Tibetan Buddhist tradition to acknowledge or accept it."

The Dalai Lama has also said that he would not be reborn under the current situation of Tibet under China. “The very purpose of the next reincarnation is to continue the legacy of the previous person,” [he told the Sydney Morning Herald in 2021](#). “Therefore, if the next Dalai Lama is to be found while the current one is in exile still struggling for the freedom of the Tibetan people, and the preservation of Tibetan culture and religion, then obviously he will be reincarnated in a free country. That includes anywhere in the world where there is a sizeable Tibetan Buddhist community...”

No reference to COVID-19 and its impact on Tibetans

A clear indication of the white paper avoiding realities on the ground is the fact that it makes no mention of COVID-19. For anyone believing the white paper, COVID never reached Tibet, even though China itself and the world are still fighting off the pandemic.

Let Tibetans decide their future

Through planted questions posed by Chinese state media reporters, Chinese leaders at a press conference provided a false sense of normalcy in Tibet, even extending an invitation to the audience of almost entirely state media to visit Tibet. The white paper claims that the Tibetan people support Chinese policies saying, “The reactionary nature of the Dalai Group has been exposed and denounced, and the regional government relies closely on the people of all ethnicities to resist all forms of secession and sabotage. It is now deeply rooted in the people’s minds across the region that unity and stability are a blessing, while division and unrest lead to disaster. They are ever more determined to safeguard the country’s unity, national sovereignty, and ethnic solidarity.”

If the situation in Tibet was indeed normal and Tibetans enjoyed all the rights claimed in the white paper, China should end its discriminatory policies, including denial of passports and travel to Tibetans, and allow independent observers to see Tibet for themselves. In fact, in his statement on the anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising [on March 10, 2001, the Dalai Lama said](#), “If the Tibetans are truly happy the Chinese authorities should have no difficulty holding a plebiscite in Tibet. Already a number of Tibetan non-governmental organizations are advocating a referendum in Tibet. They argue that the best way to resolve this issue once and for all is to allow the Tibetans inside Tibet to choose their own destiny through a freely held referendum. They demand to let the Tibetan people speak out and decide for themselves. I have always maintained that ultimately the Tibetan people must be able to decide about the future of Tibet. I would in fact whole-heartedly support the result of such a referendum.” The reality is that China lacks the confidence to even open up Tibet to the outside world.

Chinese officials are fond of quoting the proverb, “Seeing once is better than hearing a hundred times.” But as of today, only a few select individuals, including few journalists, have been able to visit Tibet, and that too only under strict state control.

The sad fact is that [Tibet is the least-free country in the world today](#), sharing the bottom spot with South Sudan and Syria in Freedom House’s global rankings for 2023.



ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435
Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la linière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@savetibet.eu