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Forum: GC4 – Culture

Issue: The issue of cultural suppression in Tibet.

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Introduction

Since the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese in 1950, Tibet's culture, religion, and most of their rights have been removed. Tibet, if freed, would be in the top 15 largest countries in the world. As a result of China annexing Tibet, over one million residents have died and there are now more Chinese in Tibet than Tibetans. Despite the fact that getting tortured is as simple as mentioning the phrase, human rights, "Tibetans have continued with protests for the last 70 years. The Tibetan flag, national anthem, and Buddhism are some of the many banned things in Tibet. Although Tibet is technically ruled by China, they have even less rights than the Chinese. The government has never let a Tibetan be part of the government nor does it let its citizens leave the country. Furthermore, the traditional lifestyle for Tibet has been removed. The Chinese government has removed more than two million Tibetan nomads from their land where they have lived for generations. Lastly, the Tibetan language has almost been completely removed and replaced with Chinese. What used to be a country filled with rich culture, has become a land that suppresses anyone who tries to bring that back."

Definition of Key Terms

CAT - United Nations Committee against Torture

ICT - International Campaign for Tibet

Suppression - The action of suppressing something such as an activity or publication

Tibetans - The residents of Tibet

Dalai Lama - the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism and, until the establishment of Chinese communist rule, the spiritual and temporal ruler of Tibet.



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Background Information

Preparations for the invasion of Tibet was started by Mao Zedong shortly after the Chinese Communist Revolution. He gave the order to the army to march into Qamdo in December 1949 and 1950, after failed negotiations, Tibet was occupied by China and this brought a dark era filled with torture and brutality for the Tibetans. In 1951, the Seventeen Point Agreement was signed. The agreement confirmed Chinese supremacy over Tibet and it is believed to be signed under threat.

When the year 1959 came around, the Tibetans had faced a great deal of suppression and violation of their human rights and this led to a Tibetan national uprising against the Chinese government, to which China responded with brutality. On 10th March, 300,000 people gathered around Potala Palace in fear of a possible plan to abduct the Dalai Lama and offered protection. A week later, the Dalai Lama went into exile in India. Since then, 10th March is considered as the “Tibetan Uprising Day” as a way of honoring the uprising in 1959.

During Mao Zedong’s campaign “The Great Leap Forward”, a campaign which aimed to transform the country into a communist society through industrialization, thousands of Tibetan people died and many important religious places were destroyed.

In 1982, a group of Tibetan delegates went to Beijing and in 1988, the Dalai Lama offered the Strasbourg Proposal; however, no progress was made.

Protests continue to take place across Tibet and they result with the deaths of many people and political imprisonment. Since 2011, there have been more than 135 protests of self-immolation. These protests are a symbol of the Tibetan resistance to the Chinese policy on Tibet.

Tibet is still under a great deal of suppression. The Chinese government has been strictly monitoring any and all religious practice throughout the region. Regardless of this, Tibetans resist the Chinese government by staying as bonded to their culture as possible.



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Timeline of Major Events

Date	Description of the Event
1913	The 13 th Dalai Lama declared Tibet's independence by issuing a proclamation and stating "We are a small, religious, and independent nation".
1950	Tibet was invaded by China following the Communist Revolution in China in 1948. 40,000 Chinese troops were sent to Tibet.
1959	The Tibetan uprising was responded with severe brutality by the Chinese government. The 14 th Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual and political leader at the time, fled into exile in India along with thousands of Tibetans.
1982	The Dalai Lama offered the "Strasbourg Proposal".
1989	The Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
April 5, 2018	The Tibet Bureau submitted a human rights report titled "Human Rights of Tibet". The report "underpinned how China's development goals are systematically violating the economic, social and cultural rights of the Tibetan people." ¹

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United Nations Human Rights Council:

¹ <https://tibet.net/2018/04/new-report-to-the-united-nations-unveils-systematic-violation-of-human-rights-in-tibet/>



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The Human Rights Council is one of the UN's inter – governmental bodies that deals with human rights violations and strengthening the promotion of human rights. The Council was created in 2006 by the UN General Assembly and it replaced the UN Commission on Human Rights.

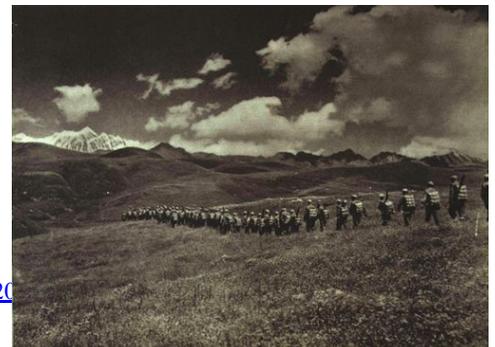
During the 38th session of the Council, Zeid bin Ra'ad al-Husseini (the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) expressed his concerns regarding the situation of Tibet during his opening statement: “In China, despite efforts by my Office to establish conditions conducive to an effective dialogue, my staff have not been given unfettered access to the country, including to the Tibetan Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where the human rights situation is reportedly fast deteriorating. Moreover, although two mandate-holders have visited the country in the past five years, China has in that period accumulated more than 15 pending requests for visits. I am, furthermore, dismayed by China's continuing efforts to prevent independent members of civil society from engaging with human rights mechanisms, including Treaty Body reviews, this Council's UPR, and many mandate-holders. I encourage the authorities to enable all actors to contribute to all the international human rights mechanisms, and to cooperate with them in a spirit of open and mutual partnership, in order to improve respect for the rights and freedoms of China's people.²”

The Tibet Bureau in Geneva:

The Tibet Bureau in Geneva is the agency of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile. It was opened in 1964. The main objective of the Bureau is “a better understanding of the situation in Tibet and to raise public awareness of the non-violent struggle of the Tibetan people.³” The Bureau works in close relations with the United Nations and has many functions such as but not limited to; supporting the preservation and promotion of Tibetan culture, religion and language, raising the issues of Tibet in the UN Human Rights Council sessions⁴ etc.

People's Republic of China:

After the Chinese Civil War, a war between the Kuomintang – led government of the Republic of China and the Mao Zedong – led Communist Party of China that took place between the years 1927



² <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=2320>

³ <http://www.tibetoffice.ch/das-buro/>

⁴ <http://www.tibetoffice.ch/das-buro/>



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and 1936, Mao Zedong announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China on 1st October 1949.

Chinese soldiers marching towards Tibet, 1950

The PRC had always believed that Tibet was a part of China.

This is why including Tibet to the PRC was one of the top priorities of the Chinese Communist Party, either peacefully or by force. In China, the inclusion of Tibet to China was called “the peaceful liberation of Tibet”. Mao Zedong, who served as the Chairman of the People's Republic of China and who is considered to be the founding father of the PRC, officially started the preparations to march into Tibet at Qamdo to encourage the government of Tibet to negotiate in 1949. During negotiations, the ambassador of China proposed that the PRC should be responsible of Tibet's defense, trade and foreign relations; and as a result, Tibet should be a part of China.

As a result of failed negotiations, the armies of the PRC and Tibet crossed the Jinsha River in 1950. The army of Tibet, being outnumbered, was quickly surrounded by the People's Liberation Army (Chinese Army). The town of Qamdo was captured by the Chinese Army.

Tibet:

Without a doubt, Tibet has a distinctively unique culture, one that should be protected and respected. They had their own national flag, their own currency, their own religion and they maintained their own affairs. Regardless of these, China claimed that Tibet is a “minority nation” under the Chinese nation. During the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the Cultural Revolution (a movement launched by Mao Zedong), around 6,000, nunneries, temples and monasteries were damaged⁵. Freedom of belief of thousands of Tibetans was violated and Tibetans faced violence because of following the Dalai Lama. Bearing in mind that religion is an inseparable part of the Tibetan culture, it is fair to say that an attack towards the religion of the region also meant an attack towards the culture. Moreover, Tibetans were brutally tortured when they expressed their views on the situation and criticized the Chinese government's policies. It was stated in the annual report of the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy that 36 Tibetans were arbitrarily arrested due to political reasons, an average of three each month in 2016⁶. The issue remains to be a huge humanitarian and cultural problem today. Richard

⁵ <https://www.savetibet.org/resources/all-about-tibet/the-issues/>

⁶ China's suppression of Tibet: past, present and future. Website: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/chinas-suppression-of-tibet-past-present-and-future/78665>



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Gere, Chair of the Board of the International Campaign for Tibet, put emphasis on the severity of the issue through the words “Tibet is a human rights issue as well as a civil and political rights issue. But there’s something else too – Tibet has a precious culture based on principles of wisdom and compassion. This culture addresses what we lack in the world today; a very real sense of inter-connectedness. We need to protect it for the Tibetan people, but also for ourselves and our children.”

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Seventeen Point Agreement: Also known as the Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, is a document prepared in 1951 which asserts the sovereignty of the People’s Republic of China over Tibet. The document is seen as a legal document by the PRC, a document which was welcomed by both the Chinese government and the Tibetan government; however, the Central Tibetan Administration (formed after 1960), along with Eckart Klein who is an international law expert find the document to be invalid and it is believed that the agreement was signed under threat. The agreement also authorized the presence of the Chinese military in Tibet.

Five Point Peace Plan: The Plan was suggested by the Dalai Lama in 1987 as an initiative to restore human rights and much needed peace in Tibet. The plan proposed that Tibet should be a fully self-governing state. The proposals of the Dalai Lama were received well internationally, except for China since it rejected them. Later on, the Chinese government showed willingness to negotiate with the Dalai Lama, largely due to the international community’s pressure.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution would be in the form of third-party intervention in the UN. The UN could address the conflict by creating a resolution returning Tibet back to the Tibetans. Although this is not very likely to happen as China has Veto powers. If it passed, this solution would be the most effective.



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Another possible solution would be to write a resolution which gives the Tibetans more control in Tibet while leaving Tibet in China's hands. This could be in the form of democratic elections with Tibetans given a fair chance to join the government. Another form could be giving the residents a bill of rights with basic rights such as Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Media, etc. This option would be far more likely to happen, but might not work very well.

Useful Links for Further Research

1. [Human Rights Situation in Tibet, Annual Report 2017 by Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy](#)
2. [Tibetan Culture, International Campaign for Tibet](#)

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