

**Sino-Tibetan Conflict: Nation-building and China's Policies on  
Ethnic Movement**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the intractable nature of the Sino-Tibetan conflict in considering the institutional set-up and goal of the Chinese state on the one hand and the ethnic nature of the Tibetan nationalism on the other hand. It does so by using the theoretical framework of nation-building and ethnic conflict management that argue that different states choose different paths in pursuit of their nation-building mission. The application of this framework proves that there is a wide gap between the application of laws in the ethnic minority areas and the constitutional provisions as China is an authoritarian state and everything on paper is subordinate to the state or the party interest. In addition, the Chinese state pursues a project of exclusive mono-nation building that threatens the identities of ethnic minorities in the country. The rise of minority nationalism as a reaction to this majority nationalism has a feedback effect on the survival of the Chinese regime. Both sides perceive the other as a threat, thus, the bilateral dialogue was broken down several times and the ethnic conflict is perpetuated and intensified over time.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **List of abbreviations**

PRC- People's Republic of China

CTA-Central Tibetan Administration

TAR- Tibet Autonomous Region

CCP- Chinese Communist Party

ICESCR- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

HKSAR- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

LRNA- Law on Regional National Autonomy

NPC- National People's Congress

CIA -Central Intelligence Agency

TGiE- Tibetan Government in Exile

SFT- Students for a Free Tibet

TYC- Tibetan Youth Congress

UN- United Nations

## Introduction

The famous “17-point agreement”<sup>1</sup> was signed between the Chinese and Tibetan delegates in 1951 after the military occupation of Chamdo, the provincial capital of eastern Tibet. China promised to “liberate” the remaining parts of Tibet peacefully on the condition of the Tibetan leader’s acceptance of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. The agreement was signed under pressure, Tibetan leaders, however, sought to co-exist with Communist China and hoped that China would keep its promises to grant autonomy for Tibet.<sup>2</sup> However, violation of the terms of the agreement from the Chinese side has outraged the Tibetan people that led to a massive uprising against the People’s Republic of China<sup>3</sup> in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet, in 1959. Subsequently, Tibet’s spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama and 8000 Tibetans were forced to flee their country and sought political asylum in India, where the Tibetan Government in Exile<sup>4</sup> was established as a legitimate representative of Tibetans remaining at home under the Chinese occupation. Tibetans in Tibet were severely suppressed under Chairman Mao’s strict approach towards ethnic identity. The traditional land area of Tibet was divided into several parts and administered separately by merging large parts of the Tibetan areas into Chinese mainland provinces.

For several decades, the Sino-Tibetan relationship has remained confrontational and the Tibetan leader in exile single-handedly struggled to restore

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<sup>1</sup> "Seventeen-Point Plan for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet". 1969. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <http://www.cfr.org/tibet/seventeen-point-plan-peaceful-liberation-tibet/p16006>.

<sup>2</sup> Tibet in this thesis refers to the traditional Tibet that comprises three provinces of Tibet collectively known as “*cholka sum*”. *Amdo* (China administered Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu province.), *Kham* (which incorporated into Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai), and *U-Tsang* (together with small part of Kham, is referred to as China’s newly created Tibet Autonomous Regions.)

<sup>3</sup> When referring to the People’s Republic of China, I will use the acronym PRC and China interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> Tibetan Government in Exile is officially known as Central Tibetan Administration but it is set up with formal government institutions, both names would be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

complete independence for Tibet. However, United States' sudden abandonment of the Tibet issue in 1971 in exchange for establishing good relations with China<sup>5</sup> made Tibetan leaders realize the importance of bridging a friendly bilateral relationship with China. The Dalai Lama and TGiE's position have shifted from their initial goal of restoring independence to that of a higher degree of autonomy through its principled nonviolent means in the early 1970s as a response to the changing political scenario in the world. Several liberal-minded Chinese Communist Party leaders signaled their accommodating gesture towards the Tibet issue by establishing a direct contact with the exiled Tibetan leader. The face to face governmental representatives of both parties engaged in dialogue and discussion for many times in the subsequent years in an attempt to glue the two seemingly vastly opposing forces.

In 1997, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was created based on the "one country, with two systems" approach<sup>6</sup> after signing a bilateral agreement between the British and the Chinese government. Using this example, the Dalai Lama lowered the Tibetan's framework of demands from a far-reaching quasi-independence autonomous arrangement to a lower degree of autonomy equivalent to the Hong Kong model. However, Chinese authorities have not fulfilled any of the Tibetan demands, although the ongoing dialogue between the two parties resumed from time to time to discuss further on the preexisting divergent views. In 2008, the Chinese government asked the Tibetan leaders in exile to present a detailed description of their demand and in response, the Central Tibetan administration proposed "Memorandum on Genuine

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<sup>5</sup> John B. Roberts and Elizabeth A. Roberts. *Freeing Tibet: 50 years of struggle, resilience, and hope*. AMACOM Div American Mgmt Assn, 2009,154.

<sup>6</sup> Chien-Min Chao, 1987. "'one Country, Two Systems': A Theoretical Analysis". *Asian Affairs* 14 (2). Taylor & Francis, Ltd.: 107–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30172037>,116.



Autonomy for the Tibetan people”.<sup>7</sup> The memorandum essentially narrowed down the demand precisely on the cultural aspect of Autonomy for Tibetans living in the three traditional provinces of Tibet within the framework of the Chinese constitution. The new proposal attempted to downplay certain political aspect of autonomy to appease the Chinese government, but little progress has been achieved, as China did not respond positively to the concessions made from the Tibetan part that led to the ultimate breakdown of negotiations ever since. The Chinese government has advanced an autonomy policy in Tibet under its national minority law and the Tibetan leaders proposed their autonomous vision based on the preexisting Chinese law. The puzzle here lies in why the ethnic conflict between China and Tibet remains unresolvable despite the fact that on the Tibetan side, people agreed to accept autonomy under Chinese sovereignty and on the Chinese side, the government agreed to discuss any issue that does not instigate independence for Tibet.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that the demand of TGiE has significantly departed from its initial demand, as *Umaylam* or the “Middle Way”<sup>9</sup> is the official policy that is firmly pushed forth by exile leaders to resolve the issue of Tibet peacefully through dialogue. But, China demonstrates an ambiguous attitude towards the negotiations over the years and refused to respond seriously to the collective demand of Tibetan people. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the question of why China maintains an uncompromising stance on the ethnic demand of Tibet though it has a clear constitutional framework to settle ethnic issues through various autonomous arrangements. The puzzle is even more

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<sup>7</sup> "Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People | Central Tibetan Administration". 2016. *Tibet.Net*. Accessed April 6. <http://tibet.net/important-issues/sino-tibetan-dialogue/memorandum-on-genuine-autonomy-for-the-tibetan-people/>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael C. Davis, “Establishing a workable autonomy in Tibet.” *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2008): 227-258.

<sup>9</sup> Dalai Lama, "His Holiness's Middle Way Approach For Resolving The Issue Of Tibet | The Office Of His Holiness The Dalai Lama". *Dalailama.Com*. Accessed April 6. <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/middle-way-approach>.

intriguing if we consider that the Chinese government made concessions to accommodate a democratic system in Hong Kong and Macao and leaders in Beijing declared they are also willing to make further concessions to Taiwan if the contested island agreed to integrate with the Mainland China. The PRC agreed to compromise in such cases because these exceptional autonomous areas are essentially constituted by ethnic Chinese. Thus, the Chinese national identity is not in question like in other ethnic cases in China.

The ethnic minority issue is, however, perceived by leaders in Beijing always as a potential threat to national security, thus, any demand of ethnic groups from highly contested areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang has been silenced heavy-handedly by its police and military power. TGiE and the Dalai Lama are willing to resolve the six long decades' conflict if China agrees to grant them autonomy, but due to the aggressive policies of China on Tibet, the survival of Tibetan identity is threatened. The Tibetan sense of threat evokes Tibetan nationalism that has a feedback effect on Chinese state security. Both side's position is perceived as a threat by the other. China's hardline policies in Tibet are undoubtedly linked to the Chinese nation-building. Chinese leaders think it is their duty to mitigate the threat posed by local nationalism and separatism to safeguard state integrity and security without making any concession. Ethnic Tibetans feel their national identity is threatened by aggressive Chinese policies thus they aspire to preserve their distinctive identity. It is the Chinese forceful imposition of the national identity on Tibetans that led to the clash of identities that prevents true conflict resolution.

Divergent perceptions over history that are closely associated with ethnic identity lie at the bottom of the disagreement in the Sino-Tibetan conflict. As such, nation-building and ethnic conflict management theory are helpful to synthesize the

central puzzle that lies at the core of this issue, a conflict of identities. It is also useful to understand the overall picture of Sino-Tibetan conflict and Chinese state policies in Tibet within the wider debate of majority-minority relationship. The next five chapters are devoted to examining this case of conflicting identities and proceed with a detailed description of the theoretical framework (chapter 1) as a cornerstone of analysis. This description is followed up by tracing the creation of historical myths in the Sino-Tibetan relation (chapter 2). The bulk of literature on the Sino-Tibetan issue is focused mostly on the historical relationship between the two nations to address the question whether Tibet was previously a separate and sovereign state of its own or a subordinate to China before the takeover of the PRC.<sup>10</sup> This chapter is devoted to present myths being created by both parties involved in the conflict to support their claim as a general background for readers to understand the root cause of China-Tibet problem. Thereafter, I proceed to analyze the importance and implication of Tibetan Buddhism and reincarnation system (chapter 3) on the Chinese state policies in Tibet. This description is followed by the analysis of the institutional set-up of the People's Republic of China to highlight the political structure of CCP and its goals and how these become obstacles for Tibetan autonomy desires (chapter 4). The last chapter (Chapter 5) is a reflection on the Sino-Tibetan dialogue to explain the opportunities, progress and final breakdown of negotiations and demonstrate how China uses its power and resources to manage the conflict. Finally, this thesis presents the concluding remark based on the research findings.

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<sup>10</sup> Wang Lixiong, Reflections on Tibet. New Left Review 14, March-April 2002, accessed August 20, 2015, <http://newleftreview.org/II/14/wang-lixiong-reflections-on-tibet>; Smith, Warren W. 2008. *China's Tibet?* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc; Sperling, Elliot. 2004. 'The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics'; Shakya, Tsering. *The dragon in the land of snows: A history of modern Tibet since 1947*. Columbia University Press, 1999.

## ***Research methodology and limitations***

This thesis is basically a descriptive analysis of the Sino-Tibetan conflict, the methodology utilized for the research involves analysis based on the existing literature that directly and indirectly has a bearing on the Sino-Tibetan issue. By using the method of historical analysis, various resources ranging from scholarly articles produced by Tibetan, Chinese and Western scholars, Chinese and Tibetan official policy documents, newspaper articles, blogs and press release of Non-Governmental Organizations are synthesized to evaluate different perceptions attached to the issue. The Chinese side of the discourse mainly comes from the Chinese state-run media like Xinhua News Agency, the ministry-level institution subordinates to the Chinese central government and people's daily (Renmin Ribao), the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party. These Media are propaganda machines of the Chinese Communist Party, the information produced in these are most likely to be biased. Thus, the reliability of information is a major concern given the nature of the Chinese closed regime. In terms of policy discourse, Chinese central government issued policy documents widely available online in Chinese and English and these are useful to assess the Chinese state policies in Tibet. Tibetan sources used in this thesis are also gathered from the exile government of Tibet and other Tibet-groups, though their information could also be biased.

Having been born in a Tibetan area outside of China's "Tibet Autonomous Region" and joined Chinese schools there, I personally have directly experienced Chinese policies in Tibet. As a teenager, I escaped from Tibet for seeking educational opportunity in India where I became part of the Tibetan refugee community, I closely observed the Sino-Tibetan conflict since my high school. Bearing a close touch with my family and friends in Tibet for the past decade, I have indirect experience of local

Tibetan's day to day life in that respect. Therefore, my personal background has enriched the depth of research as the recent academic work and my decade long cumulative observation are combined in this thesis.

At the same time, it is a great challenge to write a thesis on this contentious issue due to my personal background. I openly admit that it would be impossible to avoid my personal bias on this specific issue. However, I made every effort possible to remain as professional as I could and I hope a delicate balance has been maintained in this thesis to weed out serious prejudices I might have.

### ***Case justification***

Despite my personal connection to Tibet, there are several reasons for selecting Tibet as the case study for my thesis. First of all, the traditional view is that ethnic minority's autonomy movements lead to secession from the existing central state, however, Tibetan case is a unique one to study because the movement willingly gave up the demand of independence to that of autonomy. Second, the Tibet issue is a core issue between India and China and resolving the issue has a great implication not only for the security of the two Asian giants, but also for other Asian countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar that used to share a mutual border with Tibet. Tibet remains as a buffer zone between India and China, and a solution can secure long-term peace and stability in the heart of Asia and the world at large. Most importantly, the Sino-Tibetan conflict is a very important case study to examine exclusive nation-building that aims at eliminating identities of other ethnic minorities under the state control.

# Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework: Identity and nation-building

## *Introduction*

Nation-building is a highly contested concept and there is a lack of consensus in the relevant literature on what exactly constitutes nation-building. The term is often used interchangeably with “state-building” in the academic literature<sup>11</sup> but the two concepts are different. “Most theorists agree that a well-functioning state is a requirement for the development of a nation, state building is, therefore, a necessary component of nation-building.”<sup>12</sup> Francis Fukuyama states four aspects of the state which are organizational design and management, institutional design, the basis of legitimization and social and cultural factors. He defines state building as “creation of new governmental institutions and strengthening of existing ones.”<sup>13</sup> Mohammed Ayoob defines state-building as the expansion of territory and imposition of forceful order in the contested regions by making war on them, maintain order in the territory where such order has been imposed on the population and the extraction of resources from the territory and people under the control of the state to support the first two activities.<sup>14</sup>

In this thesis, I will employ Ayoob’s definition to highlight the intertwining relationship between state-building and the nation-building process. I believe state-building is a core aspect of successful nation-building, a well-functioning strong state institution or political organization is essential not only for the protection of nation from foreign enemies but also for the integration processes of various societies or groups

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<sup>11</sup> Sinclair Dinnen, “Nation-Building Concepts Paper.” Draft paper for AusAID (2006), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Zoe Scott, “Literature review on state-building.” Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham, at [www. Gsdrc. Org/docs/open/hd528. Pdf](http://www.Gsdrc.Org/docs/open/hd528.Pdf) (2007), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century* London: Profile Books, 2004: 30-41.

<sup>14</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, *The third world security predicament: State making, regional conflict, and the international system*. L. Rienner Publishers, 1995, 22.

within the territory of the state. States often make diverse choices when it comes to managing ethnic diversity and meeting the grievances of each group. Some states legitimize the existing pattern of pluralism through various institutional mechanisms. In this sense, the identity and culture of minority groups are accepted and respected to promote a culture of peaceful co-existence within the society. The state's monopoly of power, also, could be used to commit genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other bloody practices to integrate or homogenize society in the name of nation-building<sup>15</sup> when the state is run by the ethnic majority group. The analysis of nation-building could lead to raises questions surrounding the meaning of other concepts such as identity, ethnicity, nation and nationalism. Let me now offer a brief conceptual clarification of these terms, the process of nation-building will be discussed in detail afterward.

### ***Identity***

Identity is an ambiguous concept for which different scholars give different definitions. There are two prevailing definitions in the relevant literature. The Primordialists treat identity as an objectively given and believe that identity is unique, sacred, and unchangeable. Primordialists argue that national identity is culturally bound, historically continuous and ethnically fixed.<sup>16</sup> Instrumentalists, on the other hand, think that identities were created based on socio-historical context, thus, they are malleable and can be changed according to the changing circumstances. I believe the concept of identity lies between the view of primordialists and that of the instrumentalist. Each identity is unique but it is constructed and reconstructed through historical

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<sup>15</sup> Jochen Hippler, "Ethnicity, state, and nation-building-experiences, policies and conceptualization." *Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved July 3 (2002):* 2003, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Tsering Topgyal, "The insecurity dilemma and the Sino-Tibetan conflict." PhD diss., the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2011, 23.

contestation among members of different groups to gain recognition from their adversaries.

Notwithstanding the debate on identity in the literature, I will treat identity as a collective phenomenon that is constituted by belief, symbol, value, behavior and practice that help individuals to identify the sameness among members of a group.<sup>17</sup> Based on the self-understanding of one's own group, identity can be a foundation for political action among different ethnic groups. This sense of self-understanding is transmitted through a culture that each community or ethnic group passes from one generation to another generation. Therefore, I believe that collective identity is a shared sense of "oneness" or "we-ness"<sup>18</sup> from other groups that motivates a group to act together in pursuit of its collective interest or goal.

### ***Ethnicity***

The term ethnicity or ethnic group is used in reference to a group of people, who associate with a specific homeland, have a collective identity and identify themselves based on their shared common ancestry, historical memories, and cultures; they embrace a sense of solidarity with other members of the group.<sup>19</sup> The membership of an ethnic group is defined by a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin myth, history, homeland, language, mythology, and culture. Unlike other social groups, ethnicity is primarily an inherited status that cuts across socioeconomic class differences. Ethnic identity can unify the members of the group along the horizontal as well as vertical axes. Culture is apolitical in nature and consists of the value system, way of life,

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<sup>17</sup> Rogers Brubaker, and Frederick Cooper. "Beyond 'identity'." *Theory and society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1-47 cited by Tsering Topgyal, "The insecurity dilemma and the Sino-Tibetan conflict." PhD diss., the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2011, 24.

<sup>18</sup> David Snow, "Collective identity and expressive forms." *Center for the Study of Democracy* (2001),

<sup>19</sup> Anthony D. Smith, "National identity: Ethnonationalism in comparative perspective." (1991), 21.



worldview, tradition, belief, language, ritual, religion and mythology of a particular community or an ethnic group. Each ethnic group has a distinct culture that is incommensurable with that of another group and it creates the identity of groups over time.<sup>20</sup> Given my understanding of identity, I consider that ethnic groups and their composition are a product of changing circumstances in the relation to other competing groups based on the foundation of its common history, belief, institutions and language for a very long time. Ethnic groups are largely incorporated within the state structure, the majority group which controls the state becomes dominant over other minority groups. This asymmetric relation between different groups leads to tension and conflict in society.

### ***Nation and nationalism***

The Primordialists assert the antiquity of the nation and the premodern ethnic identity is referred as its baseline. The modernists argue that the rise of nations and nationalism is a consequence of social transformation and contends that the idea of a nation has been socially constructed through modern processes such as technological innovation, communication, capitalism, and industrialization. Benedict Anderson argues that nations are imagined and were made possible by print technology since “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion”.<sup>21</sup> To avoid theoretical confusion, I define nations as political communities of ethnic groups that attach to certain norms, belief and behavior, and most importantly: control the state apparatus.

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<sup>20</sup> Kristen A. Norman-Major and Susan T. Gooden, eds. *Cultural competency for public administrators*. ME Sharpe, 2012, 334.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London and New York: Verso, 1991.

The nation is constructed by nationalism or people's desire to assert their national and cultural identity. Nationalism excavates the common past and interprets or over-dramatize certain events that are linked to the past, present and future of ethnic groups to evoke a group consciousness, solidarity, and mobilization.<sup>22</sup> Nationalism is a political expression of national identity, loyalty, and solidarity that bind the relationship between an individual and a collectivity. Using the history and culture of the group to construct common myths to maintain the identity of the group and create a congruent political unit. The majority group or the nation thus seeks to legitimize its national identity, history and language throughout the country. Since the state and majority group are essentially intertwined, the hegemonic nationalism promoted by the state is given legitimacy while denied to minority nationalist movement.<sup>23</sup> The expression of majority nationalism seeks to convey an imaginary common past through rewriting of history. The majority nationalism or the state nationalism is often associated with nation-building.<sup>24</sup> The dominant group that controls the state apparatus attempts to impose a common language, history, and identity on all ethnic groups within the state boundary. The promotion of majority nationalism, thus, leads to the socialization of minority people to norms, culture and language of the dominant majority group.<sup>25</sup> Minority groups are after all assimilated into the dominant group and the identity of the minority is threatened"<sup>26</sup> as a result. Therefore, minority nationalism is evoked as a reaction to the majority/ state nationalism. Majority nationalism seeks to defend the state and ensures the allegiance of minority groups. However, minority nationalism

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<sup>22</sup> Sinclair Dinnen, (2006), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Alain-G Gagnon and Andre Lecours. *Contemporary majority nationalism*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2011,3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>26</sup> John Plamenatz, "Two types of nationalism." *Nationalism: the nature and evolution of an idea* 27 (1976):23-24, cited in Robert, Sata, *Multicultural pluralism: towards a normative theory of ethnic relations*, 2006.

challenges the majority group-controlled state, thus, it is considered to be destructive and illegitimate.

The academic literature notes several types of nationalism, but the term nationalism in this thesis refers to ethnic nationalism. Ethnic and cultural nationalism is primarily based on language, history, religion and memory that narrates the historical myth of the group to nurture a common understanding of the past and assures their group is the first among others in the specific geographic region. The sense of nationalism organizes or unifies the group based on these attributes to unify the entire community. Ethnic minorities are often put in a disadvantaged and discriminated position within the subsystem of political structure, nationalism is also evoked as a result of the superiority of an ethnic group towards other communities. This could also be resentment, especially towards dominant groups that control them. This sense of resentment often leads to attack on other group or defend their own group and its threatened identity. Thus, minority nationalism involves the struggle for the entitlement of self-determination, meaning the group demand either for self-government in the form of autonomy for greater freedom and participation in the government of the state or demand for outright secession to establish its own state that challenges the political authorities of the existing state in which the ethnic community reside in.<sup>27</sup> Thus, minority nationalism is a reaction to the hegemony of majority nationalism that threatens the identity of minority groups.

### ***Nation-building***

Nation-building is a highly complex concept and to avoid conceptual confusion and provide a better understanding, I will present different approaches to nation-

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<sup>27</sup> Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic politics*. Cornell University Press, 1994, 3.

building as a starting point. Nation-building is defined as a process of integration of all localized primordial communities and groups into political entities with the evolution of the modern state based on impersonal bureaucratic political structure from the traditional patrimonial state. Nation-building is also perceived as an approach to political dominance.<sup>28</sup> Many nationalists use nation-building to boost their political power and integrate forcefully reluctant sector of society into nations that brew ethnic identity-based conflict. From modernization theorists' perspective, nation-building is perceived as a strategy for development and it is assumed that ethnicity as a premodern phenomenon which would disappear as more modern, rational states emerge.<sup>29</sup> But, history has proved that modern-nation state did not bring the end of history but the resurgence of ethnonationalism around the world that challenges the survival of regimes. So, the ethnic matter should be taken seriously by policymakers to embrace multi-ethnicity for long-term stability. Ottawa argues that ethnic identity cannot be made to disappear easily. With this in mind, it should be noted that it is not possible to make a homogeneous ethnic state today unless the state commits vicious crimes such as genocide or ethnic cleansing.<sup>30</sup>

Nation-building is a highly complex and difficult task in heterogeneous societies because it is an "abstract process of developing a shared sense of identity or communities among various groups making up the population of a particular state."<sup>31</sup> Nation building essentially addresses the issue of a common identity and the process of nation-building targets the creation of "communities bound together by shared history and culture."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the nation-building project requires integrating ideologies

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<sup>28</sup> Jochen Hippler, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Zoe Scott, (2007), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Marina Ottawa, 1999, 'Nation-building and State disintegration' Mengisteab, Kidane. *State building and democratization in Africa: Faith, hope, and realities*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999, 94.

<sup>31</sup> Sinclair Dinnen, (2006), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Francis Fukuyama (2004), 99.

and identities of various ethnic groups in multi-ethnic states. A common nation is difficult to emerge if different groups perceive themselves primarily on specific tribal, religious, or ethnic lines, so it is necessary to create a common identity by integrating multiple identities within the state structure. Education is one of the means by which the new identity is constructed through the infusion of a common language and it “enables individual to find a meaningful place for himself within the wider context of society.”<sup>33</sup> Raphael Utz argues that the creation of a national history is the central aspect of nation building. He highlights the importance of ‘nationalization of the past’ to build a social consensus about the historical experience. Each national history projects the uniqueness of the nation and presents the relationship between the past, present, and future. Thus, an alternative narrative of history to be excluded or downplayed from the mainstream narrative.<sup>34</sup> I would argue that nation-building in this sense is a very difficult task because to establish a consensus historical experience within multi-ethnic states is a daunting challenge and there is always a “competition for historical narrative” between the majority and the minority group. The stronger group who controls the state often tends to silence the other groups’ perspective on the past history that undermines the idea of multicultural pluralism.

As I argued before, nation-building is a process of building a common identity, the integration of identity is, thus, necessary. Integration, however, does not necessarily mean homogenization. There are positive ways of managing ethnic diversity as I discussed earlier, the integration of identities does not necessarily mean to eliminate already established identities of specific groups. The nation-state can be also established on the multicultural model by constructing complementary identities or a

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<sup>33</sup> Raphael Utz, "Nations, Nation-Building, and Cultural Intervention: A Social Science Perspective." *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 9, no. 1 (2005): 632.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, 629.

shared sense of identity among various groups. Heterogeneity can be perceived as a strength that enriches society rather than a threat. In order to have smooth integration, an inclusive environment has to be created. The majority group has to accept/respect diverse cultures of other minorities and of course the minority groups themselves need to compromise to some extent without endangering their own culture, tradition, and language. This can be possible based on mutual respect, acceptance, and tolerance of ethnic and cultural differences in society. This concept can be best understood as “unity in diversity” and a typical good example would be India’s nation building experience.

### ***Conflict management***

Ethnic conflict emerges due to profound disagreement about national identity among different groups. The action and reaction process of majority-minority nationalism as discussed earlier assume that the dominant group at the center that controls the state attempts to establish a common identity to impose on the population living in the peripheries and that is perceived by the minority group as a threat to their identity. This clash of identity between the core and minority groups persists today around the world. As discussed above, nation-building also constitutes the creation of a functioning state. Ethno-nationalism is a stumbling block for the nation-building identity creation,<sup>35</sup> different states pursue different paths to resolve the ethnic-based conflicts. Esman argues that the normal inclination of the political authorities is to defend the existing political structure at minimum cost in their effort of conflict management, thus, they tend to make a marginal concession to ethnic demands in order to maintain the current political status quo.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lucy Lewis, 1994. “Ethnicity and Nation-building: The Surinamese Experience”. *Caribbean Quarterly* 40 (3/4). University of the West Indies, 72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40653906>,1.

<sup>36</sup> Milton J. Esman, 40.

Still, some multi-ethnic states or plural societies have formulated several institutional mechanisms to meet the demands of ethnic minority groups or to resolve the protracted conflict. In contrast, some states make efforts to establish a single indivisible nation by either eliminating or assimilating ethnic minorities within the state boundaries based on the ideology that the state should be an embodiment of the single constituent nation.<sup>37</sup> Hence, besides the collective social, economic and political discrimination the ethnic minority face in society, the act of the state has threatened the survival of minority groups.

Esman also points out that different types of regimes take different measures. For instance, authoritarian states use repressive and violent measures to control ethnic minorities while democratic regimes prefer accommodative measure to appease the ethnic grievances. He listed several strategies a state may employ such as genocide or ethnic cleansing, a civilized method of depluralization through gradual assimilation, power-sharing through the federal, consociational and autonomous arrangement, etc. and classified them according to the pursued goal of the state.<sup>38</sup> The goals of the state in the management of ethnic conflicts are 1) to de-pluralize societies to make it homogeneous; 2) to maintain and legitimize the existing pattern of pluralism; 3) and to reduce the salience of ethnic solidarity while accepting the social pluralism.<sup>39</sup>

Another important factor that shapes ethnic conflict is the response of the international community.<sup>40</sup> The minority often tends to seek international support when the majority group violates their rights and repress their culture. The effective response from the international community towards the ethnic conflict can stop mass killings and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 3-6.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 40-45.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr. 2003. *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*. New York: Westview Press, 5.

wars. However, international responses are constantly changing, some ethnic conflicts are considered as an internal matter. Thus, it has been isolated from the international community and major powers with no substantive response towards atrocious mass killing of ethnic groups by some states. Lina Kutkauskaitė argues that states are unwilling to use coercive measures when there is a wider international support for the ethnic movement and vice versa. However, the more powerful the state is, the more reluctant the international community is<sup>41</sup> to interfere in the ‘internal matter’ of the state that essentially leads to further human rights abuses and sometimes ethnic cleansing.

### ***Exclusive or Mono-nation building of China***

Ethnic diversity is a universal phenomenon within the boundary of the major political systems in the contemporary world. According to Walker Connor, the 9.1 percent of 132 contemporary states<sup>42</sup> only can be considered as a homogenous from the ethnic viewpoint,<sup>43</sup> but it is important to note that there are minorities within many homogenous societies regardless of their significance or visibility in the society. The fundamental reality is that ethnic-based conflict persists in multi-ethnic states. The goal of states are not the same, thus, the process of nation-building is also different from state to state.

As Charles Tilly argues, nation-states are those “whose people share a strong linguistic, religious and symbolic identity”,<sup>44</sup> many modern nation-states are

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<sup>41</sup> Lina Kutkauskaitė, "Chinese State Policies towards Tibet and Xinjiang: Why Not the Hong Kong Scenario?" *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 28 (2012): 66.

<sup>42</sup> The 132 units include all entities that were generally considered to be states as of January 1, 1971 according to the author. However, East and West Germany, North and South Korea, and North and South Vietnam were treated as single entities in his analysis.

<sup>43</sup> Walker Connor, 1972. “Nation-building or Nation-destroying?” *World Politics* 24 (3). Cambridge University Press: 319–55. Doi: 10.2307/2009753, 320.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, capital, and European states*, 43, 3 cited by Ayoob, Mohammed. *The third world security predicament: State making, regional conflict, and the international system*. L. Rienner Publishers, 1995, 24.



constructed on multi-ethnic background by seeking complementary identities. China is officially a multi-ethnic state, but national leaders in China follow the idea of Ernest Gellner that “political and the national unit should be congruent”.<sup>45</sup> Raphael Utz shares the idea of Milton Esman on how the types of regime shape the process of nation-building. He argues “non-democratic nation-building process are the exclusive reliance of particular nationalism on the power of the state, militaries or the figure of a leader”.<sup>46</sup> PRC is an authoritarian state and the majority group employs the state’s hard power to impose, forcefully, values and identity on people living in contested areas and crackdowns on ethnic minorities using lethal force to accomplish its nation-building mission. Thus, the type of nation-building strategies employed by China could be a good example to study the exclusive model of nation-building.

The Chinese style of nation-building is vastly different from other state’s nation-building. India. For example, being the second largest population in the world after China with multi-ethnic and multi-cultural difference presents a great challenge for the modern Indian state to build a monolithic entity out of multiple identities existing in the country. There were ten different languages spoken by more than 13 million people, and another 17 languages were spoken by more than one million people in India.<sup>47</sup> In terms of religion, Indian society has almost all major world religions like Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism. The second largest minority population, the “Muslim” constitutes 12.4% of the total population of India but still it is the world’s third largest Muslim population with 161 million after Indonesia and Pakistan.<sup>48</sup> Given this diversity, Indian founding fathers established a

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<sup>45</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983):1.

<sup>46</sup> Raphael Utz, (2005), 633.

<sup>47</sup> Yogendra Yadav, 2010. 'India as a state- Nation: Shared political community amidst Deep Cultural Diversity'. In *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies.*, 1st ed, 40.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 41.

democratic system base its legitimacy on the idea of secularism that promotes unity out of a robust cultural as well linguistic and religious differences. India rejected the idea of a nation-state based on homogenous culture and religious community and it acknowledged the various forms of diversity.<sup>49</sup> This mode of nation-building has strengthened the smooth functioning of Indian democracy from its independence till today. Therefore, India's nation-building project can be a model for other multi-ethnic states to replicate for conflict management including its neighboring state-China.

In the process of nation-building in China, the state becomes a tool of dominance over minorities within the state territory. The ethnic demands are mostly suppressed by force. People who take part in ethnic identity-related peaceful movements are often killed, imprisoned and tortured in the name of stability maintenance.<sup>50</sup> The bloody practices to integrate and homogenize ethnic identities under the absolute control and a totalitarian system, however, make minorities more resistant to challenge the Chinese regime without considering dire consequences. The ultimate goal of the CCP is to establish a homogenous or mono-nation state<sup>51</sup> by eliminating the existing identities of other ethnic groups in China.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter began by defining the key terms that shall be used in this thesis. After presenting the key concepts, the theoretical framework of this thesis is introduced and described in detail by mapping the different path of nation-building that different states pursue according to varied goals of states around the world. This analytic

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>50</sup> "China: Repression Expands Under 'Stability Maintenance' In Tibetan Areas". 2016. *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/22/china-repression-expands-under-stability-maintenance-tibetan-areas>.

<sup>51</sup> Minglang Zhou, and Hongkai Sun, eds. *Language policy in the People's Republic of China: Theory and practice since 1949*. Vol. 4. Springer Science & Business Media, 2006:3-9.

framework is developed to analyze the ethnic based intra-state conflicts. Since it is my interest to shed light on the process of the Chinese nation-building and its special character, I also present the nation-building project of India to demonstrate the contrasting nature of nation-buildings depending on the institutional structure, strategy and goal of the state. In the next chapter, the origin of Sino-Tibetan conflict will be traced to situate the issue within the analytical framework.

## Chapter 2- Historical myths in the Sino-Tibetan conflict

### ***Introduction***

The highly contested nature of history between Tibet and China reflects the different perspectives of the PRC and the Tibetan Government in Exile on the past historical relations between the two nations. Due to their different perspectives on the past, both parties compete for the ownership of the historical narrative. The leaders in Beijing and Dharamsala stick to their own version of the narrative and neither side is ready to compromise on that ground even though the Dalai Lama already agreed to remain within the framework<sup>52</sup> of the Chinese constitution if Tibetans were granted genuine autonomy. This divergent perspective impedes both parties from taking further steps to seek a common ground at present to resolve the ethnic conflict. China is only concerned about creating a national history that is an essential aspect of its nation-building, thus, it attempts to downplay the alternative narrative to construct a uniform narrative of the past. In the main body of this chapter, I will examine the detailed historical narrative of each party involved in the conflict to demonstrate how important the historical narrative is to the identity construction of both parties and how it thus becomes detrimental to the conflict resolution.

### ***2.1 Chinese perspective***

Tibet is culturally, linguistically and historically a distinctive ethnic nation that had a close tie with India than China for more than a millennium. But, the communist party leaders in Beijing claims, in an inconsistent manner, that Tibet became an integral

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<sup>52</sup> Nawang phuntsog, 2013. 'The Middle Way: A Highway for Solving Tibet Agony - Tibetan Political Review'. <https://sites.google.com/site/tibetanpoliticalreview/articles/themiddlewayahighwayforsolvingingtibetagonny>.

part of China either during the 8<sup>th</sup> century Chinese Tang Dynasty or during the 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongol-ruled Yuan Dynasty. But the exact moment when Tibet supposedly became a part of China is ambivalent in the historical narratives of the PRC itself. The Chinese *white paper* published in 1992 brings the historical account of marriage between the Chinese royal Princess Wencheng and Tibet's King Srongtsen Gampo in 641 A.D as a historical landmark for the union of the Tibetan and Han Chinese nationalities.<sup>53</sup> The PRC goes on to state that Tang-*Tubo* Tibet alliance monument<sup>54</sup> erected in 823 still stands in the capital city of Tibet today and the monument inscription reads, "The two sovereigns, uncle and nephew, having come to an agreement that their territories be united as one, have signed this alliance of great peace to last for eternity."<sup>55</sup> But this version of the narrative was omitted in recent Chinese official documents.

The more of a consistent claim China makes in the major Chinese official publications on Tibet today on the sovereignty issue bringing the case of Chinggis Khan and his descendants' conquering of Tibet during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). The PRC insists that the Chinese central government has exercised an 'effective and indisputable rule' over all regions of Tibet by "collecting taxes, stationing troops and appointing officials"<sup>56</sup> since 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The PRC attempted to demonstrate that the issue of Qing emperors' granting of honorary titles to the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama as an official establishment of Tibetan leaders' political and religious status in Tibet by the Chinese court.<sup>57</sup> The Chinese government also goes on to interpret

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<sup>53</sup> China.org.cn, 1992. 'Tibet -- Its Ownership and Human Rights Situation', accessed August 15, 2015, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/>.

<sup>54</sup> Chinadaily.com.cn, 2012. "China to Reinforce Historic Tibetan Monument". [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/ethnic/2012-03/04/content\\_14771275.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/ethnic/2012-03/04/content_14771275.htm).

<sup>55</sup> Claude, Arpi, 2013. Dharamsala and Beijing: The Negotiations That Never Were. New Delhi: Lancer, 151.

<sup>56</sup> Chinadaily.com.cn, 2006. 'What Is Dalai Lama's 'Middle Way'', August 16, 2015, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-07/26/content\\_649545.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-07/26/content_649545.htm).

<sup>57</sup> News.xinhuanet.com, 2006. 'Full Text: Sixty Years since Peaceful Liberation of Tibet', accessed August 16, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-07/11/c\\_13978644\\_3.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-07/11/c_13978644_3.htm).

the Dalai Lama's visit to Beijing in order for establishing a 'cho-yon' relation, which preexisted with former Yuan dynasty, after Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1912) conquered China in 1644 as Tibetan leader's submission to the Qing Court<sup>58</sup> and on account of this historical submission, the succeeding the Dalai Lamas have to be approved by the Chinese central government for their official appointment as Tibet's political leader.<sup>59</sup> Qing court's office of the *Amban* or the residential commissioner in Tibet was also cited by the Chinese government as a principal symbol of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet though it was considered to be a connector between the Manchu court and the head of the yellow hat sect Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.2 Tibetan perspective

According to Tibetan chronicles, the first Tibetan king ruled over Tibet from 127 BC but only during the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD Tibet has emerged as a unified state under the Dharma king Songtsen Gampo. The successive emperors expanded the Tibetan empire by occupying some parts of China, including Chang-an, then capital of Tang Dynasty.<sup>61</sup> The marriage between the Tibetan king and Chinese princess was a historical fact that the Chinese emperor was forced to give her daughter for the purpose of avoiding attacks from the mighty empire of Tibet.<sup>62</sup> A peace treaty was signed between the Tibetan and the Chinese empire on a mutual agreement not to attack each other. The text of the treaty is inscribed on stone pillars that bear the witness of their

<sup>58</sup> Warren W. Smith, 2008. *China's Tibet?* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 7.

<sup>59</sup> News.xinhuanet.com, 2009. 'Tibet's History during Qing Dynasty\_English\_Xinhua', accessed August 19, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/12/content\\_11367580.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/12/content_11367580.htm).

<sup>60</sup> Wang Lixiong, Reflections on Tibet:79-80.

<sup>61</sup> Tibet.net, 2015. 'Tibet Was Not Part of China But Middle Way Remains A Viable Solution, 8 | Central Tibetan Administration'. <http://tibet.net/2015/09/tibet-not-part-of-china-but-middle-way-remains-a-viable-solution/>.

<sup>62</sup> Studentsforafreetibet.org, China's Favorite Propaganda On Tibet...And Why It's Wrong — Students For A Free Tibet'. <https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/get-involved/action-toolbox/chinas-favorite-propaganda-on-tibet...and-why-its-wrong>.

commonly demarcated border, hence neither side shall attempt to seize the territory of each other but respect other's territorial sovereignty.<sup>63</sup> The pillar inscription reads, "all to the east is the country of great China; and all to the west is, without question, the country of great Tibet" thus, it not only epitomized the solidified diplomatic relations between Tibet and China but also two countries' recognition of each other as independent nations.<sup>64</sup> The exile Tibetans however argue that Chinese government misinterpret China-Tibet peace treaty as a symbol of 'alliance' of two nations by intentionally omitting the engraved text that reads "Tibetans shall be happy in the land of Tibet, and Chinese in the land of China"<sup>65</sup> in an attempt to falsify the history to fortify their claim on Tibet.

Tibetan Government in Exile as well as Tibetan scholars unanimously accepts the incorporation of Tibet into the Yuan Mongol Empire during the 13<sup>th</sup> century but refute the Chinese claim that "Tibet has been an integral part of China since antiquity".<sup>66</sup> Regarding the Tibet-Mongol Yuan relations, the Tibetan community gives emphasis on the nature of Yuan dynasty before going on to debate the question of 'who belongs to whom'. The Yuan dynasty was a Mongol empire and its rulers conquered not only Tibet but also vast territories of Europe and Asia including China. Tibetans deconstruct the Chinese 'propaganda' by presenting the argument that it was not China that ruled over Tibet, but China itself became the colony of a foreign rule during the 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongol era.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Tibetans contend that Mongolia rather than China

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<sup>63</sup> Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa and Derek F Maher. 2010. *One Hundred Thousand Moons*. Leiden: BRILL, 156.

<sup>64</sup> Patricia C. Marcello, 2003. *The Dalai Lama*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Tibetjustice.org, 1998. 'Tibet Justice Center - Tibet Justice Center Reports - The Case Concerning Tibet', accessed August 25, 2015, <http://www.tibetjustice.org/reports/sovereignty/independent/c/#1>.

<sup>66</sup> News.xinhuanet.com, 2015. 'Full Text: Tibet's Path of Development Is Driven By an Irresistible Historical Tide - Xinhua | English.News.Cn'. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-04/15/c\\_134152612.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-04/15/c_134152612.htm).

<sup>67</sup> Rangzen.com, 2015. 'Tibet: Two Distinct Views'. Accessed October 1. <http://www.rangzen.com/history/views.htm>.

could assert its claim on Tibet on the basis of this particular historical account. Tibetan government underscores the special Tibet-Mongol “*cho-yon*” priest-patron relationship to bring the fact that none of the Mongol rulers actually ever administered Tibet directly as the Tibetan lama was offered the political authority, mainly because of his spiritual power, to rule over Tibet.<sup>68</sup>

Another important issue that the Chinese government asserts in the white paper is the honorary title being given to Lobsang Gyatso, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama by Qing court. However, the Mongol Ruler, Altan Khan, in fact, bestowed the historical title of the ‘Dalai Lama’<sup>69</sup> to Younten Gyatso, the 3rd reincarnation of Tibetan leader a century ago in recognition of his spiritual capacity. During the Qing Dynasty, China has again come under the Manchu rule and the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama established and maintained the “choyon” priest-patron relationship with the Manchu emperor. There is no much disagreement about the Qing court’s attempt to establish a certain degree of influence in Lhasa as Manchu official *ambans*<sup>70</sup> were stationed in Lhasa from 1728 till the collapse of the Manchu empire in 1911.<sup>71</sup> Qing emperor had made a proposal for the selection of Dalai Lama’s reincarnation and amban tried to influence the selection process of reincarnation on the ground. However, the Tibetan government in Lhasa disregarded the self-imposed role of *amban* and his status in Tibet was considered no more than an ambassador of a foreign country.<sup>72</sup> Much political turmoil had undoubtedly shaken the independent status of Tibet on many occasions, but Tibetan government claims that Tibet had never been a part of China and it used to be a fully

<sup>68</sup> ‘Tibet Was Not Part of China’, 9.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Dalai’ is a Mongolian word meaning “ocean” and the ‘Dalai Lama’ often refers to as an ocean of wisdom.

<sup>70</sup> Amban is a Manchu word meaning ‘high official’. Ambans are the representative of Qing court residing in Tibet to show the symbolic Qing authority over Tibet.

<sup>71</sup> Tibet.dharmakara.net, 2015. ‘Tibet Facts 1’. Accessed October 2.

<http://tibet.dharmakara.net/TibetFacts12.html>.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Tibet Was Not Part of China’, 11.



functioning state before the Chinese invasion in 1949. Apart from the fact that Tibet has maintained a distinct political, cultural, religious and linguistic identity in contrast to that of China, it has signed numerous treaties<sup>73</sup> with other states on the basis of equal footing though none of the world governments today consider Tibet as an independent state. Nepal has presented an original copy of 1856 Tibet-Nepal peace treaty as a proof of its foreign relations with other countries while applying for the membership of the United Nations.<sup>74</sup> On the basis of the application, Nepal was admitted as a member state of the UN on January 14, 1955. This clearly shows that Nepal, as a neighboring state of Tibet, considered Tibet as a sovereign state.<sup>75</sup>

### ***2.3 The point of divergence and dispute***

As the pages above show, there is no much dispute over the sovereign status of Tibet prior to the Mongol-ruled Yuan Dynasty, but the central point of the dispute lies in the intervening period between the post-Yuan Dynasty and the pre-communist rule. The PRC claims that Tibet has become an integral part of China during the Yuan dynasty.<sup>76</sup> The Central Tibetan Administration counterclaims that Tibet remained as an independent state for nearly two thousand years until the communist troop invaded and occupied the country.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Phayul.com, 2010. 'INDEPENDENT TIBET – THE FACTS: BY JAMYANG NORBU'. <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=26803>, <http://tibet.net/>, 2013. 'POLITICAL TREATIES OF TIBET (821 To 1951)'. <http://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/political-treaties-of-tibet...pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> Tibet Justice Center, 2009. 'Nepal UN App - Legal Materials on Tibet', 7. <https://sites.google.com/site/legalmaterialsontibet/home/nepal-un-app>.

<sup>75</sup> Tibetanpoliticalreview.org, 2011. 'The Forgotten History of Tibet's Role in Nepal's 1949 UN Application - Tibetan Political Review'. <http://www.tibetanpoliticalreview.org/articles/theforgottenhistoryoftibetsroleinnepals1949unapplication>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 21.

All scholars on Sino-Tibetan relations commonly argue that Tibet had declared independence after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and established a de facto independent state between 1912-1949<sup>78</sup> even if it earned little recognition from the western powers.<sup>79</sup> However, the PRC refutes the argument on Tibet's independent status in the history by highlighting the fact that no single country in the world recognizes Tibet as an independent state.<sup>80</sup> Chinese government asserts that the so-called Tibetan independence was in fact instigated by western imperialist forces to separate Tibet from China during the succeeding Chinese weak dynasties.<sup>81</sup> It was the British who initially instigated the idea of "Tibetan independence" during the Republican government of China that led to the raising of the independence slogan by Tibetan representatives in the Shimla conference for the first time in 1914.<sup>82</sup> Chinese government goes far to assert that the current 14<sup>th</sup> the Dalai Lama, who is being perceived as a major threat to Chinese rule in Tibet, also got approval from the Chinese central government to be the leader of Tibet.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

The Dalai Lama and the CTA agree to remain within China on the promise of granting meaningful autonomy for Tibet and emphasize repeatedly that autonomy is their end goal rather than a means to achieve alternatives. However, their

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<sup>78</sup> Warren W. Smith, 2008. *China's Tibet? Autonomy or Assimilation*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 13; Tsering Shakya., 1999. *The Dragon in the Land Of Snows*. New York: Columbia University Press, 4; Goldstein, Melvyn C, and Gelek Rimpoche. 1989. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 30-37; Elliot, Sperling, 2004. 'The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics', 28.

<sup>79</sup> Bajoria Jayshree, 2008. 'The Question of Tibet'. *Council on Foreign Relations*.  
<http://www.cfr.org/china/question-tibet/p15965#p2>.

<sup>80</sup> Sixty Years since Peaceful Liberation of Tibet', 2006.

<sup>81</sup> Govt. white Paper-China.org.cn, 1992. 'Origins of So-Called "Tibetan Independence"', accessed August 20, 2015, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/9-2.htm>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Sixty Years since Peaceful Liberation of Tibet', 2006.

uncompromising stance on the historical status of Tibet opens a wider backdoor for Tibetans to strive for alternative goals when the opportunity comes from the Chinese viewpoint. The ethnic nature of the Tibetan issue that deeply rooted in the history challenge the Chinese state sovereignty, the PRC is unwilling to make any concession to legitimize the ethnic movement and its demand. Rather, the CCP engages into the rewriting of history to impose its narrative on the Tibetan community to legitimize its rule in Tibet. Since historical myth is an important factor in shaping the collective identity of a particular community, the majority group (China) marginalizes the alternative narrative of the minority group (Tibet) to construct a uniform history that is essential for the successful nation-building. On the other hand, the minority group promotes its own narrative to assert the endangered ethnic identity. Thus, the ultimate disagreement over history becomes a core issue in the Sino-Tibetan conflict.

## **Chapter 3- Tibetan Buddhism and Reincarnation politics**

### ***Introduction***

Buddhism has transformed one of the most brutal warring ancient nations into a peaceful one in seven century and it has become a core aspect of Tibetan culture and identity maker since. Tibetan people's behavior, the worldview, the way of life and value system are deeply shaped by the teaching of Buddhist leaders who are reincarnated. And religious leaders like the Dalai Lama had to take political responsibility also for centuries to make peace within the country as well as with its aggressive neighbors. Thus, the influence of religious figures has penetrated the breath and length of the Tibetan society over time. China has come to realize the importance of Tibetan Buddhism as an identity-maker of Tibet and its great influence on the Tibetan people, Beijing attempts to control the reincarnation system to control Tibet.

### ***3.1 Buddhism and politics***

Tibet is a country, which is predominantly Buddhist, and the Dalai Lama is both the spiritual and political leader of Tibet for nearly four centuries prior to the Chinese occupation. The culture and politics of the country were closely intertwined and Tibetan's sense of identity is deeply rooted in its religion. Buddhism lies at the center of Tibetan hearts. Buddhism teaches the importance of love, compassion, and interdependence. For more than a thousand years, Tibetans focused merely on the internal aspect of human life to create a peaceful society through transforming their mind. The former warring nation has turned into one of the most peaceful countries in the heart of Asia and the world at large as Buddhism got spread from India. Monks are highly respected in society, people's social and moral conduct are shaped by the

spiritual guidance of religious leaders. Through many centuries' practices of Buddhism, the imported religion has become the core identity of the Tibetan people. Compassion, forgiveness and non-violence have been developed into a way of life and daily practice of Tibetan people throughout the country. Thus, Tibetans are considered as "peace-loving people" around the world.<sup>84</sup> Politically, religious figures have the spiritual capacity to mobilize the mass and they are the driving force of resistance against China in pursuit of their goal of freedom.

Religious freedom is enshrined in the Chinese constitution, but it is very limited to external expressions such as visiting temples and holy sites. The real religious practices of Buddhism are strictly controlled. The Dalai Lama's photograph was banned in Tibet and any person who worships him is punished with many years' imprisonments.<sup>85</sup> However, some elements of culture are allowed to preserve in Tibet, thus, China can show the world that Tibetans enjoy cultural autonomy. China experienced over the years that the monasteries and other religious institutions are the epicenters of Tibetan resistance. Monks frequently get down in the streets<sup>86</sup> to protest the Chinese rule in Tibet which leads to a military crackdown, and Tibet is put under undeclared martial law. The liberalization policy of the 1980s that gave some cultural and religious autonomy was blamed for the monk-led riots particularly by the hardliners in the CCP. Thus, new Chinese policy makers endorsed a hardline approach to the Tibet issue as they realized "Tibetan nationalism has rapidly coalesced into anti-Chinese resistance"<sup>87</sup> when a certain degree of autonomy was allowed in Tibet. Since 1996, the Chinese government has put heavy restrictions on Tibetan monasteries,

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<sup>84</sup> A. A. Shiromany. *The Political Philosophy of His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama: Selected Speeches and Writings*. Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 1998.

<sup>85</sup> "18 Years in Prison for Dalai Lama Picture | Free Tibet". 2014. *Freetibet.Org*.  
<http://freetibet.org/news-media/na/18-years-prison-dalai-lama-picture>.

<sup>86</sup> Goldstein, 90.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, 19.

implemented “patriotic education”<sup>88</sup> and endorsed severe political repression along with rapid economic modernization to enhance social stability. The revival of the traditional culture led to a series of anti-China protests in Tibet and monks and nuns became the face of the potential resistance against China. The Chinese government introduced a new policy known as the “Complete Long-term Management Mechanism for Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries” under which every monastery is put under the direct rule of the government and with up to 30 lay party officials are permanently stationed in the monasteries to monitor every single activity of the monks.<sup>89</sup> For Tibetans, Buddhism, as I mentioned earlier, has become an important part of their national identity, the revival of Buddhism promotes the distinctive identity of Tibet. For China, Buddhism is a great impediment to its project of identity construction and nation-building. Thus, communist leaders are convinced to control every aspect of Tibetan culture to prevent further separatist movements.

### **3.2 The role and position of the Dalai Lama**

The Tibet’s highest reincarnated Lama was merely a spiritual leader of Tibet, from his 1st to the 4<sup>th</sup> lineage, who molds his people’s conduct and way of life through his spiritual teachings. The 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama Lobsang Gyatso, however, became the head of the state in 1642, since then the succeeding Dalai Lamas automatically becomes both the spiritual and political leader of Tibet. For Tibetans, the Dalai Lama is not just one holy individual; he symbolizes the Tibetan nation and represents Dalai genealogy.<sup>90</sup> Tibetan believes that the Dalai Lama is the manifestations of Avalokiteshvara or the

<sup>88</sup> N Subramanya, 2004. *Human Rights and Refugees*. New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 275.

<sup>89</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2012. "China: Tibetan Monasteries Placed Under Direct Rule". <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/16/china-tibetan-monasteries-placed-under-direct-rule>.

<sup>90</sup> Wang Lixiong, "A True ‘Middle-Way’ Solution to Tibetan Unrest." *China Security* 4, no. 2 (2008): 29.

Bodhisattva of Compassion. “Bodhisattvas are believed to be enlightened beings who have postponed their own nirvana or enlightenment and chosen to take rebirth in order to serve humanity.”<sup>91</sup> The institution of the Dalai Lama, in a practical sense, has not only sustained Tibetan culture and way of life for more than many centuries but also saved the Tibetan nation from numbers of foreign invasions such as Mongol and Manchu army.

The current 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, made his journey to India in 1959 seeking political asylum after the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Though he has lived in India since, Tibetan people’s spiritual bond with him has transcended their physical departure. His message of peace and compassion are well received in Tibet. Tibetans across the Tibetan plateau revered the Dalai Lama as *Gyalwa Rinpoche* or the most precious one irrespective of their religious and provincial affiliations. Thus, the Chinese government believes that the series of monk-led protests in Tibet are instigated by the Dalai Lama from outside. Chinese authorities launch patriotic re-education campaign in monasteries and force monks to denounce the Dalai Lama. Beijing rewards some monks who openly criticize their spiritual leaders and punishes those who refuse to do so.<sup>92</sup>

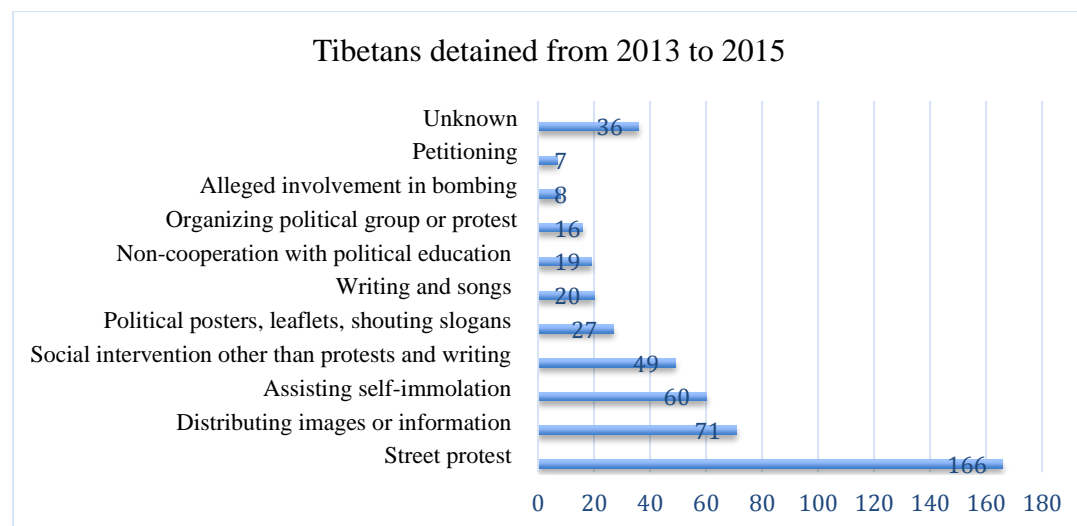
Despite the Chinese harsh treatment, “Tibetans have increasingly leaned towards the Dalai Lama who has not given them a penny”.<sup>93</sup> Tibetan people’s sense of devotion to their leader is proved to be resilient in the face of Chinese repression and incentives. China sharpened also its criticism against the Dalai Lama in major international Media and labeled him a “splittist” who challenges the PRC’s legitimacy

<sup>91</sup> The Dalai Lama. "Brief Biography | The Office Of His Holiness The Dalai Lama". *Dalailama.Com*. Accessed May 27. <http://www.dalailama.com/biography/a-brief-biography>.

<sup>92</sup> “United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2010” <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/ar2010/china2010.pdf>, 106.

<sup>93</sup> Wang Lixiong, "A True ‘Middle-Way’ Solution to Tibetan Unrest.", 29.

in Tibet. Since the Dalai Lama and Tibetan nation can't be separated, the Chinese act of targeting the Dalai Lama is flawed. Evidently, more than more than 144 Tibetans chose the most drastic form of protest by burning their bodies, all of them had a common slogan of “freedom in Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama”. The self-immolation is the latest form of political protest in Tibet and exile to condemn the Chinese repressive policies in Tibet. The self-immolation protest started in 2009 by a 20-year-old monk from Kirti monastery in Tibet<sup>94</sup> and later this drastic form of protest spread to all other Tibetan areas like a wildfire. This ‘act of dying without killing’ conveys strongly the Tibetan mentality of nonviolence as none of these courageous people caused harm to any Chinese. This form of protest also demonstrates the intolerable situation in Tibet as there is no space for other forms of protest<sup>95</sup> shown in Figure 1. The self-immolators thus chose to kill themselves rather than die in the hands of Chinese authorities.



(Source: Human Rights Watch, 2016)

<sup>94</sup> "International Campaign for Tibet | Self-Immolations by Tibetans". 2016. *Savetibet.Org*. <http://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/#Tapey>.

<sup>95</sup> The Stream - Tibetan PM Speaks Out After Self-Immolations. 2011. Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU0OyNrNVjI>.



The Chinese authorities, in return, intensified its hard measures on Tibetans and punished the family and friends of the self-immolations in suspecting their involvement. The hostile attitude of the Chinese government towards the Dalai Lama makes Tibetans more inclined towards their spiritual leader whom many of them have never seen. The Chinese attack on the Dalai Lama, for Tibetans, is an attack on Tibet's religion and the Tibetan nation as a whole. Neither the economic incentives could win over the hearts of Tibetans, nor could the religious repression waver their fundamental belief and loyalty towards the Dalai Lama.

### **3.3 Tibetan reincarnation system and its challenges**

Because of the weight of religion in the Tibetan resistance, the Chinese state became more invasive in the various traditional religious system, including the reincarnation that further exacerbate the existing tension between China and Tibet. "Reincarnation has to be someone's taking rebirth as a human being after previously passing away"<sup>96</sup> and a newborn child will be recognized as the incarnation of his predecessor through vigorous Buddhist practices.

China calculated that the Tibet issue can be easily resolved once their religious leaders are controlled. In 1994, the PRC declared its control of the Tibetan reincarnation system and that was considered to be the most crucial task of its religious policy in Tibet.<sup>97</sup> Traditionally, The Dalai Lama has the ultimate authority in the selection of new reincarnation and he identified a six-years-old boy named Gedun Choekyi Nyima<sup>98</sup> as

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<sup>96</sup> Dalai Lama, "Reincarnation | The Office Of His Holiness The Dalai Lama". *Dalailama.com*. N.p., 2011. Web. 30 Apr. 2016.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Slobodník, (2011): "A Difficult Rebirth: Tibetan Reincarnations in the Spotlight of Chinese Religious Policy." *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, Vol. 10, Nr. 1, 71.

<sup>98</sup> Gedun Choekyi Nyima is considered to be the youngest political prisoner in the world and 2015 is marks as the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his forced disappearance.

the reincarnation of the late 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama<sup>99</sup>, the second-highest figure in Tibetan Buddhism, who died in 1989. In response, Chinese central authorities appointed a different boy, Gyaltzen Nobu, undermining the authority of the Dalai Lama. Gedun Choekyi Nyima, the real Panchen Lama, and his family were kidnapped by the Chinese government after two months of his recognition<sup>100</sup> and no one knows his condition and whereabouts until today.

In 2011, China launched “reincarnation law” in an attempt to control the unique Tibetan reincarnation system. Tibetan Buddhist leaders are ironically made compulsory to seek permission from the Chinese authorities for any activity related to reincarnation.<sup>101</sup> China also launched “Living Buddha authentication database” in 2016 from which the Dalai Lama was excluded. The database contains the list of nearly 360 reincarnated Tibetan lamas and China declared that Beijing “has undeniable endorsement right on the reincarnation system”<sup>102</sup> of the living Buddha. The communist party leaders in Beijing made themselves arbiters of religious authorities with the power to determine even the reincarnation of the current 14<sup>th</sup> the Dalai Lama.<sup>103</sup> So, it can be argued that Chinese religious policies in Tibet are both past and future oriented. The new move of China aimed to secure its historical ownership of Tibet. It is not without basis when China attempts to control the reincarnation of the

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<sup>99</sup> Panchen Lama is the second highest religious leader after the Dalai Lama.

<sup>100</sup> Dorjee Tseten, 2015. "China's Worst Kept Secret: 5 Facts about the Abduction of Tibet's Panchen Lama". *The Huffington Post*. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dorjee-tseten/chinas-worst-kept-secret-\\_b\\_7308598.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dorjee-tseten/chinas-worst-kept-secret-_b_7308598.html).

<sup>101</sup> Naresh K. Sharma, 2011. "'New Chinese Law Aimed At Wiping Out Tibetan Identity' - Times Of India". *The Times of India*. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/New-Chinese-law-aimed-at-wiping-out-Tibetan-identity/articleshow/7495939.cms>.

<sup>102</sup> Hannah Beech, 2015. "China Is Compiling A Database Of Living Buddhas". *TIME.Com*. <http://time.com/4145552/china-tibet-living-buddha-dalai-lama/>.

<sup>103</sup> Aljazeera.com, 2015. "Dalai Lama Warns China On Interfering In Succession". <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/dalai-lama-warns-china-interfering-succession-150716142610991.html>; WSJ., 2016. "China Launches Living-Buddha Authentication Site, Dalai Lama Not Included". <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2016/01/19/china-launches-living-buddha-authentication-site-dalai-lama-not-included/>.

current 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. During Manchu-ruled China, the Manchu emperor had proposed to select the reincarnation by Golden urn as discussed in the previous chapter. The selection of the several Tibetan lamas has followed that procedure due to the Manchu pressure though authentic reincarnations had already been found and confirmed.<sup>104</sup> So, China's new reincarnation law is a repeated claim of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. In addition, China came to realize that attacking the Dalai Lama can backfire. The Chinese authorities came to the conclusion that the future of Tibet can be best controlled by appointing the reincarnation of the current Dalai Lama once he passes away.

In order to prevent misuse of the reincarnation system for political interest, the Dalai Lama is also trying to make clear guidance on how to recognize the next Dalai Lama while he is alive. In March 2011, he also relinquished all his political authority in order to separate the role of the religion from politics. In the election followed in the same month, Lobsang Sangay, a Full-bright scholar, and Harvard law graduate won with 55 percent of the vote and became the first democratically elected Sikyong or Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile. This is a landmark in the history of Tibet. Whoever comes to be the next Dalai Lama no longer enjoy the same political authority as his predecessors did for four-century, when according to the old tradition, the Dalai Lama functioned as both the political and spiritual leader.<sup>105</sup> Behind the move from both sides lies a struggle on the past and future of Tibet.

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<sup>104</sup> Dalai Lama, The. "Reincarnation."

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

Chinese leaders came to the conclusion that Tibetan Buddhism is a detrimental to the Chinese nation-building project due to its cross-cutting influence on geographically and administratively demarcated Tibetan people across the Tibetan plateau. For a few decades, Chinese leaders struggled to eliminate Tibetan Buddhism by destroying monastic institutions and disrobing the monks as they have been seen to have a great potential for organizing resistance movements against the Chinese control of their land. However, Chinese policies on Tibetan Buddhism have proved futile, so, leaders in Beijing diverted their path to control the contested area by controlling influential religious leaders. By controlling the reincarnation system, China aimed to reduce the resilience of Tibetan identity and solidarity.

Chinese leaders believe that Tibet can never be fully controlled unless the religion and religious figures in Tibet are controlled first. Therefore, religious activities are controlled strictly to prevent ethnic separatist movements. The patriotic education campaign was launched in monasteries to promote Chinese nationalism and loyalty among Tibetans towards the motherland. In order to accomplish that, Chinese leaders realize that they need loyal promoters (religious figures) to change the identity of ethnic Tibetans. Thus, Chinese state attempts to control the reincarnation system in order to also control the next Dalai Lama and justify its arbitrary activities by bringing the history myth again in the debate.

## Chapter 4- Institutional set-up of the Chinese state

### *Introduction*

China projects itself as a multi-ethnic state that respects and promotes cultural diversity. In reality, it is a Han-monopolized authoritarian state under which other ethnic minorities are suppressed.<sup>106</sup> Since there is no a liberal concept of democratic constitutionalism, there is a vast gap between the law and its practice. In this chapter, I would highlight the nature of the institutional set-up of the PRC and how it becomes an obstacle for Tibetan autonomy desires. The Chinese state institutions penetrate the society and demands submission from ethnic groups to the state authority. Ethnic minorities are in disadvantageous positions within the institutional set-up and any demand of rights or self-rule by minorities are perceived as separatist activities, thus often get silenced by the state's military might. Tibetan nationalism and the ethnic solidarity among Tibetans are not only a hurdle in accomplishing the Chinese style of exclusive nation-building project but also a threat to the survival of the regime itself from the Chinese viewpoint, the Chinese state follows the divide and rule policies to demobilize the ethnic movement and at the same time to adopt the Chinese language as a powerful tool to construct an indivisible "one China identity" while assimilating the local ethnic identity.

### **4.1 National self-determination**

China's view on the concept of the right of self-determination is inherited from the Soviet Union. In 1923, CCP acknowledged its respect for the principle of self-

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<sup>106</sup> Barry Sautman. "Ethnic law and minority rights in China: progress and constraints." *Law & Pol'y* 21 (1999): 284.

determination of all nationalities in China to help them achieve real independence and self-governance and in 1931, the communist party of China also confirmed its support for the right of national self-determination of the national minorities in China.<sup>107</sup> However, the right of self-determination was denied to ethnic minorities in China when the political and social conditions changed in favor of CCP after the defeat of Kuomintang regime. CCP employed “self-determination” as an effective political strategy during the civil war to garner the support of minority nationalities. After it consolidated the power in China, it implemented the policy of equality among all ethnic minorities rather than emphasized on the right of self-determination.<sup>108</sup> The greatest fear of the CCP was the division of the country, it declared that any ethnic-based movements towards secession to be suppressed before it threatened the national sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>109</sup>

Self-determination is an important principle within international laws like International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and article 1 of the both the international covenants pronounced “all people should have the right of self-determination and by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”<sup>110</sup> China bears the obligation of ensuring the right of self-determination as it signed and ratified the ICESCR. But Beijing firmly asserts that the minorities in China are not entitled to the

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<sup>107</sup> Xia Chunli, "Reappraising the Right of Self-Determination in the People's Republic of China." *Asia-Pac. J. on Hum. Rts. & L.* 8 (2007): 1, 7.

<sup>108</sup> Yongmin Bian, "Legal Autonomy of Tibet: A Chinese Lawyer's Perspective." *JE Asia & Int'l L.* 1 (2008), 363.

<sup>109</sup> Xia Chunli, "Reappraising the Right of Self-Determination", 15.

<sup>110</sup> Ohchr.org. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights". Accessed February 13. <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>; Wwww1.umn.edu. "International Covenant On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights, G.A. Res.2200A (XXI), 21 U.N.GAOR Supp. (No. 16) At 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, Entered Into Force Jan. 3, 1976." Accessed February 13. <https://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/b2esc.htm>;

right of self-determination and international criticism of Chinese ethnic policies is being accused of interfering in internal matters of China.<sup>111</sup> The current policies towards ethnic minorities deny the right of national self-determination that is justified by national sovereignty and non-intervention. The ambiguous nature and different interpretations of the right of self-determination within the international legal theories and practices induce reluctance from the international community to challenge China. In addition, Chinese government replaced the word nation (minzu) by ethnic group (zuqun) in attempting to prevent any hidden danger of national separatism as “nation has a political implication, relating to national self-determination.”<sup>112</sup> Take, for instance, beginning with 1998, CCP “white paper” used the term ‘ethnic’ for the Chinese word ‘minzu’ which previously has been translated as ‘nationality’. This is considered to be an important strategy of the CCP to obliterate the right to self-determination from the psyche of all the ethnic minorities in China. The alteration of the word ‘nationality’ would induce minority groups to think themselves as minorities rather than nations that deserve the right of national self-determination according to the international law.<sup>113</sup>

#### **4.2 The structure of CCP**

The PRC is a centralized authoritarian state and the communist party is the only de facto party in the country that has a monopoly of power over every policy-making decisions. There is no rival political force that can challenge the superior authority of

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<sup>111</sup> Anonymous. "China and the Principle of Self-Determination of Peoples." *ST. ANTONY'S INT'L REV.* 6 (2010): 87.

<sup>112</sup> Tsering Woesser, 2015. "The Intention behind Changing “Nationality” Into “Ethnic Group” By Woesser". *High Peaks Pure Earth*. <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2015/the-intention-behind-changing-nationality-into-ethnic-group-by-woesser/>.

<sup>113</sup> Smith, 27.

the Chinese Communist Party because opposition parties or other political organizations are not permitted within the institutional framework. Article 3 of the Chinese constitution stipulates that all the organs of the state should apply the principle of democratic centrality<sup>114</sup> and this dictatorial nature of central power does not leave enough space for local authorities to exercise power on their own. The party presence is a universal phenomenon at every level of the state, CCP enjoys an unlimited power whether at the center or at the regional level. The political structure of top-down nature that limits the bottom-up political organization and mobilization, party submission is the norm for government officials to be nominated for a higher position from above.

The opaque Chinese communist party, however, has undergone a series of transformation since the economic liberalization in the country. The power of the state is no more concentrated in the hand of a single leader like in the past. Beijing introduced significant reform within the institutional structure and the current highly bureaucratic system functions based on the Chinese meritocratic tradition of Confucianism. CCP also introduced strict mandatory retirement for the top-level officials with a maximum of two terms,<sup>115</sup> like office rotation in the democratic countries, to impede the cult of personality or permanent entrenchment of power in the hand of one person. Major state policies decisions are made on a consensus basis within the standing committee of the central political bureau of the communist party. Therefore, the personality of the party secretary or the president can't significantly affect ethnic related policies after all. However, the presence of factions within the communist rulers between Nationalist and pragmatists lead to constant disputes among party leaders on policies in Tibet. The nationalists argue that ethnic resistance is

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<sup>114</sup> En.people.cn, 2004. "CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA".  
<http://en.people.cn/constitution/constitution.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Zhang Weiwei, 2012.



inevitable given the multiethnic nature of the Chinese state, but the implementation of separate policies for the ethnic regions divides the Chinese society between the Han majority and ethnic minorities. The hardliners argue that the promotion of cultural pluralism imposes a threat to the national security and they defend their arguments based on the past experiences of Tibetan separatist movement. Thus, they propose to eliminate the current policies in the ethnic minority regions to embrace a uniform system of governance across the country on the principle of ‘equality of everyone before the law.’<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the pragmatists argue that the elimination of ethnic policies would undermine the cooperation and solidarity among different ethnic groups and thus it would lead to political and social conflict. But the two blocs within the CCP have a consensus view on the assimilationist solution to the Tibet issue.

### **4.3 Autonomy laws in China**

China is a multiethnic state with 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities and the dominant ethnic group is the Han Chinese. From the official narratives of the Chinese authorities, all the citizens of ethnic minorities enjoy autonomy. But, in practice, it is a “lip service” and “minority rights are suppressed.”<sup>117</sup> Currently, two types of autonomy are promulgated within the Chinese constitution. A higher degree of autonomy was established in the case of Hong Kong and Macau under “one country, two systems” theory. According to the article 31 of the Chinese constitution, “state may establish special administrative regions when necessary”. This special provision allows two regions to maintain their preexisting democratic system with rule of law and an

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<sup>116</sup> James Leibold, 2015. "China's Ethnic Policy under Xi Jinping". *The Jamestown Foundation*. [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=44496&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=ff9ccea85bb7d17f906a992105f75603#.Vr4O55MrKb9](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44496&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=ff9ccea85bb7d17f906a992105f75603#.Vr4O55MrKb9).

<sup>117</sup> Barry Sautman, 1999. “Ethnic law and minority rights in China”, 283-284.

independent judiciary. The one country with two systems has appeared to be effective that proves that liberal democracy with a market economy is possible under the authoritarian state. In these two special administrative regions, people enjoy human rights and other basic freedoms under its own constitution and the local government maintains its own currency, flag, border control and police force. The exceptional treatment in two special administrative regions is an important model for China to convince the Taiwan government to unify with the mainland. This type of autonomy arrangement is proved to be possible in “Chinese” dominated areas only in practice. The Chinese government is not ready to apply similar arrangement in other ethnically contested areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang.

Another type of autonomy arrangement in China is the “regional autonomy” which has been crafted for the ethnic minorities in the country. Under the PRC’s 1982 constitution and the Law on Regional National Autonomy (LRNA) of 1984, ethnic minorities are granted autonomy, at least on paper, in areas of language, education, freedom of speech, political representation, local administration, the use of national resources and socio-economic policies in their regions.<sup>118</sup> According to article 4 of the Chinese constitution, “regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of minority nationalities live in concentrated communities”. The Chinese government claims that a system of regional autonomy was established in the ethnic minority areas that allow the native people to exercise autonomy. Various preferential treatments and favorable conditions are said to have been created for all ethnic groups in China on an equal footing to preserve their cultures and customs.<sup>119</sup> However, in the article 15 of LRNA clarifies that regional autonomy must be exercised under the leadership of the state

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<sup>118</sup> Michael C Davis, "The quest for self-rule in Tibet." *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 4 (2007): 160.

<sup>119</sup> Govt. White Papers - china.org.cn, "Adherence to Equality and Unity among Ethnic Groups". Accessed January 28. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/4/4.2.htm>.

council and shall be subordinate to it.<sup>120</sup> The asymmetrical vertical relation between the central government and autonomous regions makes the autonomy regime hard to achieve in a genuine sense because every lawmaking in the autonomous regions must obtain approval from the standing committee of the NPC in Beijing.<sup>121</sup>

The central government's double check system makes it extremely difficult for the local legislative bodies to adopt any law in the region as the communist party holds the veto power in any rule and regulation related to the exercise of autonomy.<sup>122</sup> Minority representation in the local and national government is also clearly specified in the Chinese law that 12 percent of NPC, the highest legislative body of PRC, is required to be minorities.<sup>123</sup> The weak status of the rule of law in China and communist party's overarching position above the constitution, the realization of autonomy in a true sense is somewhat impossible.<sup>124</sup> The Chinese predominantly occupies major important government positions at the central and the regional level. Central authorities also handpick even the regional party secretary so it does not allow a single leader from ethnic minority areas to be the party secretary in their autonomous regions although the Chinese law speaks otherwise.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, the local legislative bodies are the rubber stamps of decisions being made by CCP<sup>126</sup> and minority leaders with the high position are nothing but puppets of CCP. So, Michael C. Davis argues that the present autonomy arrangement in the ethnic minority areas is merely a "vehicle for top-down

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<sup>120</sup> Davis, 160.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>122</sup> Lina Kutkauskaitė, "Chinese State Policies Towards Tibet And Xinjiang: Why Not the Hong Kong Scenario?", 50.

<sup>123</sup> Barry Sautman, "Preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China: The case of Xinjiang." *Working papers in the social science*, No, 32, Clear Water Bay: Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 1997, 25.

<sup>124</sup> Yash Ghai, Sophia Woodman and Kelley Loper. "Is There Space for "Genuine Autonomy" for Tibetan Areas in the PRC's System of Nationalities Regional Autonomy?" *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 17, no. 1 (2010):3.

<sup>125</sup> Open Democracy, 2009. "China's Tibet: Question with No Answer".  
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/chinas-tibet-question-with-no-answer>;

<sup>126</sup> Sautman, 25.

implementation of CCP leadership policies, rather than bottom-up popular control”.<sup>127</sup>

In addition, the communist party puts restrictions on individuals becoming party members as religious practitioners are barred from joining it.

#### **4.4 The application of laws and minority rights in Tibet**

Tibet enjoys all autonomous rights under the “regional autonomy” law in the view of Chinese leaders. Yet, in reality, the minority areas in China are less free than the rest of China as the application of laws contradicts the provisions of the constitution. The Chinese constitution stipulates that all ethnic groups in the PRC are equal. But, the Tibetan people’s movement is strictly monitored and they are forbidden to travel freely to other areas within the domestic wall as well as in other countries. Tibetan people are often treated as a ‘second class citizen’ in the country. On the domestic level, Tibetans can go to Lhasa only with several requisite identity cards and approval letters from the Chinese authorities. The Chinese government has made the ordinary life of Tibetan people extremely difficult by blacklisting them at hotels in major Chinese cities.<sup>128</sup> This state-imposed ethnic discrimination has heightened the discontentment and hatred among ethnic Tibetans. To the international community, the Chinese government propagandizes that ‘Tibet is a part of China’ but Tibetans are left with the status ‘statelessness’ in China as the overwhelming majority of Tibetans are forbidden to hold a passport.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Michael C. Davis, 2008. 'Establishing a Workable Autonomy in Tibet'. *Human Rights Quarterly* 30 (2), 238.

<sup>128</sup> "Tibetans, Uyghurs 'Blacklisted' At Hotels In Chinese Cities". 2015. *Radio Free Asia*. <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/china-minorities-05142015143907.html>.

<sup>129</sup> "Discriminatory Chinese Passport Regulations Violate Tibetans' Right To Travel - Tibetan Centre For Human Rights And Democracy". 2015. *Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy*. <http://www.tchrd.org/discriminatory-chinese-passport-regulations-violate-tibetans-right-to-travel/>.

It is true that there are not many Tibetan cadres in the local as well as at the national level, but some hold a fairly high position in the government sectors. Minority leaders can never reach a position to influence the communist party's monopoly power on policy matters. Their position is confined to name only and the real decision-making power lies in the hand of CCP. 99 percent of Tibetans strongly believe in Buddhism and their religion is an inseparable part of their unique culture and identity. The CCP's barring of religious practitioners from entering the party has created a 'give and take' scenario. But, Tibetans were not convinced to make a choice to surrender their belief. Thus, in the minority areas the local people are under-represented in all government bodies.

Most importantly, the slicing up of the vast territory of Tibet into many administrative divisions such as 'autonomous' districts, prefectures and a separate "Tibetan Autonomous Region"<sup>130</sup> explicitly reveals China's 'divide-and-rule' strategy that intends to undermine the power of ethnic solidarity. The imposed autonomy from the central authorities does not concern the interest of ethnic minorities but national unity as LRNA article 7 specifies that the highest responsibility of autonomous areas is to strengthen and promote the national unity by placing the interest of state above anything.<sup>131</sup> The PRC's autonomy policy is a temporary measure to achieve its goal of controlling the minority areas and its borders rather than granting genuine autonomy for the minority people in their regions.<sup>132</sup> The autonomy arrangement, therefore, is merely a steppingstone to gradual assimilation of the ethnic minority into the Han

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<sup>130</sup> Tibetan Autonomous Region was created by PRC in 1965 that comprises only half of historical Tibet and the rest of Tibetan areas are merged into neighboring provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu.

<sup>131</sup> China.org.cn, "Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy -- China.Org.Cn". Accessed January 29. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/207138.htm>.

<sup>132</sup> Woodman Ghai and Loper 2010, 5.

majority dominance.<sup>133</sup> Tibetan autonomous areas enjoy less autonomy than any other province of China<sup>134</sup> and under the illusionary banner of autonomy; autonomous areas are put under severe restriction from the central government. The excessive military and security personnel use hard measures to suppress any demand of the minority people by framing them as a plot to undermine the national security.

In addition, minority groups in China are constitutionally guaranteed the right to use and promote their native language, but there is a significant gap between provision and practice. As Benedict Anderson posits that the origin of the modern concept of nation arose in historical communities' relationship with script languages, the Chinese government attempted to construct a common 'one China identity' through its language policy. Therefore, it is important to note that China's education policies in ethnic minority areas are not independent of its political agenda.<sup>135</sup> The Chinese constitution stipulates that:

"The state protects the lawful rights and interest of the minority nationalities... discrimination against and oppression of any nationality is prohibited"<sup>136</sup>

In the article 37 of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy law also states:<sup>137</sup>

Schools (classes) and other educational organizations recruiting mostly ethnic minority students should, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use these languages as the media of instruction....Han language and literature courses should be taught to popularize the common language used throughout the country...

<sup>133</sup> Davis, "The quest for self-rule in Tibet." 161.

<sup>134</sup> Woodman Ghai and Loper 2010, 35.

<sup>135</sup> Nelson Keely, "Language policies and minority resistance in China. *"Languages, communities, and education* (2005): 28.

<sup>136</sup> Yuxiang Wang, and JoAnn Phillion. "Minority language policy and practice in China: The need for multicultural education." *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 11, no. 1 (2009), 3.

<sup>137</sup> "Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (Chinese and English Text) | Congressional-Executive Commission on China". 2016. *Ceccc.Gov*. Accessed April 24. <http://www.ceccc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>.

But, the nationwide promotion of Mandarin Chinese as a national language and discrimination towards the minority languages remain since the founding day of the PRC. Mandarin Chinese penetrates all ethnic minority areas: from government documents, work environment, school, business etc. and Speaking Mandarin or *putong hua* not only guarantees good employment opportunities but also a higher social status of being Chinese. The Chinese government also sends every year, about 1000 Tibetan students to various mainland Chinese schools. Tibetan students also believe that they can get a government job, but educational policy makes Tibetan youth alien to their ancestral culture and language. The Chinese government perceives that minority language rights as also detrimental to national stability, the bilingual education system in autonomous areas was changed by replacing the Chinese language as the medium of instruction in schools.<sup>138</sup>

This hegemonic domination of Chinese language in the school curriculum has endangered the local languages and identity of minority students. As Michael Billig argues “the creation of national hegemony often involves a hegemony of language”<sup>139</sup>, the Chinese government denied the language rights for Tibetan to construct of Chinese nationalism while repressing local language-induced strong group identity and linguistic nationalism. But, Tibetan people are unwilling to give up the most important attribute of their national identity, thus, the Chinese *Ronghe* or assimilation policy rather than multiculturalism often leads to Tibetan resistance.<sup>140</sup> The CCP’s education policy aims to foster a ‘national identity’ or a national ‘one China identity’ among 56

<sup>138</sup> Nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu, 2010. "Tibetan Students Campaign To Defend Tibetan Language In Schools, Tibet And China, 2010 | Global Nonviolent Action Database". <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/tibetan-students-campaign-defend-tibetan-language-schools-tibet-and-china-2010>; BBC News, 2010. "Tibetan Students in China Protest Over Language Policy - BBC News". <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11581189>.

<sup>139</sup> Michael Billig, 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage, 29.

<sup>140</sup> International Tibet Network, 2011. "'17 Points of Disagreement': 60 Years of China's Failed Policies in Tibet". *Issuu*. [https://issuu.com/internationaltibetnetwork/docs/60yrsreport\\_eng\\_hi-res](https://issuu.com/internationaltibetnetwork/docs/60yrsreport_eng_hi-res).

ethnic groups in China, thus, formal schooling in China is more about the repression of minority culture than receiving an education.

**Conclusion:**

Being an authoritarian state, the CCP misuses laws and violate rights of minorities according to its will. Any ethnic demand is perceived as a threat thus, more often hard measures are used to quell it and maintain the political status quo. In order to neutralize the threat of secession, the state employs language as an “identity maker of Chinese” by making the *Putong Hua* as a national language throughout the country that threatens the survival of native languages and undermines people’s linguistic identity. The primary concern or the goal of the PRC is to maintain the sovereignty of the state; Chinese authorities are very reluctant to compromise when it comes to the ethnic issue. Various channels for disseminating cultural pluralism are systematically controlled while assimilation is highly prioritized in government policies to achieve the goal of the state. Dissent voices and civil societies are strictly monitored offline as well as online. There is no a secure ground for raising public opinion. From the Chinese viewpoint, ethnic demands pose a threat to Chinese state security, Chinese authorities justify its coercive measures to silence any political demand from ethnic minorities.



## Chapter 5- Sino-Tibetan dialogue

### ***Introduction***

The Sino-Tibetan conflict has shifted toward a positive direction after the demise of Chairman Mao. Liberal minded new leaders in China were interested in resolving the entangled conflict with the Tibetan leader. After three decades of negotiations, Chinese leaders refused to fulfill any demand of Tibetan people despite the fact that Tibetans have given up their initial goal of independence to seek a meaningful autonomy. In this chapter, I will present the different stages of the negotiation to highlight the change in demand from the Tibetan side, and what prevents the two from having a meaningful dialogue.

### ***5.1 Establishment of dialogue between Beijing and Dharamsala***

After the communist party's takeover of Tibet, the Chinese Red Guards-led mob destroyed more than 6000 traditional monastic institutions<sup>141</sup> and other countless sacred cultural artifacts under the 'destruction of four olds'<sup>142</sup> campaign of Mao. However, after his demise, new leadership in China initiated a series of liberalizing policies not only in Mainland China but also in the peripheral regions like Southern Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. The Dalai lama subsequently changed his strategy in dealing with China in the early 1970s by formulating the "Middle Way Policy" based on the principle of justice, friendship and nonviolence to find a realistic solution without holding on to the two extreme positions namely "complete independence" for Tibet and the "present Tibet's status under China". In his 10th March statement 1973, the Dalai

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<sup>141</sup> Tibet.net, "Issues Facing Tibet Today | Central Tibetan Administration". Accessed January 29. <http://tibet.net/about-tibet/issues-facing-tibet-today/#code0slide1>.

<sup>142</sup> Mao Zedong had called for the destruction of the "Four Olds": Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas.

Lama said, “The aim of the struggle of the Tibetans outside Tibet is the attainment of the happiness of the Tibetan people. If the Tibetans in Tibet are truly happy under Chinese rule then there is no reason for us here in exile to argue otherwise.”<sup>143</sup> A similar statement has been issued in 1978, 1979 and 1980 respectively to send a clear message to leaders in Beijing of his intention to negotiate with them. The Dalai Lama did not have any alternative means to deal with China as Nixon and Henry Kissinger secretly traveled to China and established a new Sino-American cordial relationship<sup>144</sup> to undermine the power of the Soviet Union. The Nixon administration not only recognized China’s claim of sovereignty over Tibet, but also withdrew all CIA military assistances to Tibet in the subsequent years that led to the disbandment of - “Chushi Gangtruk”, the four rivers and six ranges Tibetan guerilla resistance force <sup>145</sup> based in Mustang, which fought a proxy war in Tibet until 1974. In addition, The Indian government chose to build friendly relations with China and refused to recognize the Tibetan government though the Tibetan leader and his followers were warmly welcomed and provided all humanitarian supports.

The emergence of Deng Xiaoping as a new leader in China after the demise of Chairman Mao in 1976, brought a new beginning: he not only integrated the Chinese economy with the rest of the world through his ‘open door policy’, but also took “bold initiatives to resolve some of the “national” problems such as Taiwan and Tibet.” <sup>146</sup> Deng expressed his willingness to start a dialogue with the Tibetan exile leader during his interview with the Associated Press on December 28, 1978. However, the prime

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<sup>143</sup> Dalai Lama, 2015. '1973 | The Office Of His Holiness The Dalai Lama'. *Dalailama.Com*. Accessed May 28 2015. <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/10th-march-archive/1973>.

<sup>144</sup> Dawa Norbu, 1991. 'China's Dialogue with the Dalai Lama 1978-90: Prenegotiation Stage of Dead End?' *Pacific Affairs* 64 (3), 351

<sup>145</sup> Palden Gyal, 2012. 'Merabsarpa Journal » Tibet Policy under Deng: A Critical Assessment of the Causes and Consequences of His Approach'. *Merabsarpa.Com*. <http://www.merabsarpa.com/politics/tibet-policy-under-deng-a-critical-assessment-of-the-causes-and-consequences-of-his-approach>.

<sup>146</sup> Norbu,352

motive of Deng was to persuade the Tibetan exile leader ‘return to the motherland’ to enhance the legitimacy of Chinese rule in Tibet and to neutralize the threat of the Soviet Union.<sup>147</sup> Deng feared Soviet- Tibet friendship<sup>148</sup> as Soviet kept in touch with Tibetan refugees in Nepal and India for some intelligence operation and other activities in Tibet.<sup>149</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, two communist states were in friction due to US-China rapprochement during Mao’s era. In particular, Soviet stance on Tibet gradually changed over time. In 1979 for the first time, the Dalai Lama visited Moscow and Soviet delineated China’s activities in Tibet in the 1950s as “aggression”.<sup>150</sup>

In March 1979, Deng received the representatives of the Dalai Lama in Beijing for negotiation. As a gesture of trust building measure, 376 Tibetan political prisoners who participated in the 1959 revolt were released from prison.<sup>151</sup> Three rounds of fact-finding delegations were warmly welcomed to visit all Tibetan-inhabited areas between 1979 and 1980 to observe the condition of Tibetans under the Beijing government. The Chinese government started to reassess its policy in Tibet in April 1980 under newly appointed party chief Hu Yaobang and he led China’s own fact-finding delegation on May 22 to central Tibet. At the end of his nine-day tour, Hu made a public statement that accepted the Chinese government’s failed policies in Tibet.<sup>152</sup> The face-to-face meeting between the new leader of the People’s Republic of China and the Dalai Lama’s representative, Gyalo Dhondup<sup>153</sup> took place in Beijing in February 1979.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Rabgey and Sharlho, 3.

<sup>148</sup> Gyal (2012).

<sup>149</sup> Claude Arpi, 2013. *Dharamsala and Beijing: The Negotiations That Never Were*. New Delhi: Lancer, 37.

<sup>150</sup> Gyal (2012).

<sup>151</sup> Wang Lixiong, ‘Reflections on Tibet’, 100.

<sup>152</sup> Tashi Rabgey and Sharlho, Tseten Wangchuk, ‘Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era: Lessons and Prospects’, *Policy Studies* 12, East-West Center Washington, (2004), 5.

<sup>153</sup> Gyalo Dhondup is the elder brother of the Dalai Lama who studied in Nanjing, China with the request of Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Republic of China. He also served as the prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile from 1991 to 1993.

<sup>154</sup> Claude, Arpi, 2009. ‘How The Dalai Lama Forsake Independence’. *Asthabharati.Org*. [http://www.asthabharati.org/Dia\\_Apr%2009/arpi.htm](http://www.asthabharati.org/Dia_Apr%2009/arpi.htm).

During their meeting, Deng said he would like to improve the situation in Tibet and invite Tibetans in India and abroad back to Tibet<sup>155</sup>, which the Dalai Lama demanded in his statement of 10<sup>th</sup> March 1978. During this encounter with Gyalo Dhondup, Deng also made a very important historical statement “whatever is the past is past; except independence, anything can be discussed.”<sup>156</sup> Based on the condition laid by Deng, the Sino-Tibetan negotiation was started. On March 13, 1981 the Dalai Lama wrote a letter to Deng Xiaoping in which he stated: "genuine efforts must be made to solve the problem by the existing realities in a reasonable way."<sup>157</sup> A response to the letter from the Chinese government came indirectly through Hu Yaobang on July 28, 1981, with ‘five-point proposal’ in which the issue of Tibet has not been taken seriously. The main points of the proposal call for the Dalai Lama being sincere with the central government to uphold China’s unity and ethnic harmony. In doing so, the Chinese government would, in return, welcome the Dalai Lama to China and give him the same political status as he had in pre-1959. The Tibetan national issue was clearly downsized to the personal status of the Dalai Lama in the Chinese proposal. Tibetan people were disappointed by the proposal as Chinese view reflected that the Sino-Tibetan conflict is fundamentally a dispute between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. But the high-level Tibetan delegates were continuously sent to Beijing in 1982 to make their demand on the political future of Tibet by placing a high hope on the Deng’s political statement. From the Tibetan side, they proposed that all Tibetan-inhabited traditional cultural areas should be incorporated into a single administrative unit with a higher degree of autonomy<sup>158</sup> so that Tibetan traditional culture, language and identity can be

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> WSJ, 2009. 'Gyalo Thondup: Interview Excerpts'

<sup>157</sup> Tibetjustice.org, 2015. 'Tibet Justice Center - Legal Materials on Tibet - Tibet - Letter of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Deng Xiaoping (1992) With Annotation [P.158]'. Accessed May 30. <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/tibet/tibet7.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Rabgey and Sharlho, 7.

preserved. Tibetan delegates also claimed that Tibetans should be offered a higher level of autonomy than Taiwan due to Tibet's non-Chinese nationality.<sup>159</sup> But, the Chinese government refused to make any concession beyond Hu's five-point proposal. The leaders in Beijing considered that there was no reason to make a further compromise to the Tibetan issue as Tibet had already "return to the motherland" but Taiwan not.<sup>160</sup>

## **5.2 Internationalization of Tibet issue**

Due to the adamant attitude of the Chinese government about the dialogue on the issue of Tibet, the TGiE employed a new strategy to seek international support. On September 21, 1987, the Dalai Lama addressed the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus, proposed his Five-Point Peace Plan for Tibet;

The five points are:

1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace;
2. Abandonment of China's population transfer policy;
3. Respect the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms;
4. Protection of the Tibet's natural environment and abandonment of the use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste;
5. and earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet.

Based on this proposal, the Dalai Lama called on the Chinese government to sincerely negotiate on the future status of Tibet instead of addressing his personal status."<sup>161</sup> The Dalai Lama thought he could bring the Chinese officials to the negotiation table to get his demand accepted with international pressure as an equalizing factor in the asymmetrical relationship between the two parties. However, a significant pro-independence protest took place in the capital of Tibet few days after the Dalai Lama's public speech in the US that led to further disengagement for negotiation. The Chinese

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<sup>159</sup> Smith, 23.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Rabgey and Sharlho.

government accused the Tibetan leader for instigating independence movement.<sup>162</sup> On June 15, 1988, the Dalai Lama presented an elaborated five-point peace plan at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. In the Strasbourg proposal, the Dalai Lama officially called for the establishment of a “self-governing democratic politic entity . . . in association with the People’s Republic of China”. The proposal was the first public acknowledgment of the exiled Tibetan leader to forgo “independence” in exchange for higher autonomy within the framework of the PRC<sup>163</sup> that later become popularly known as the “Middle Way Policy”.

The Dalai Lama did not challenge the Chinese claim of sovereignty over Tibet but called for allowing a greater degree of autonomy with the right to establish a democratic system comprised of a popularly elected leader, a bicameral legislature and an independent judiciary.<sup>164</sup> But the proposal did not fulfill the demand of the Chinese government that “Tibet was an inalienable part of China”.<sup>165</sup> The Dalai Lama’s recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet is only for the post-1950 period and contends that Tibet was historically an independent nation prior to the communist takeover.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, China rejected the proposal by leveling it a “strategy to achieve independence” in two stages.<sup>167</sup> However, the proposal has been an effective political strategy that enhanced the Dalai Lama’s international reputation. At the same time, it placed Beijing in a negative spotlight in the eyes of the world.<sup>168</sup>

The external interference in the ‘internal matter’ of China makes the leaders in Beijing frustrated and they perceived the initiative of the Dalai Lama was insincere in

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<sup>162</sup> Rabgey and Sharlho, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Norbu, 355.

<sup>165</sup> Smith, 23.

<sup>166</sup> Norbu, 356.

<sup>167</sup> Smith, 25.

<sup>168</sup> Goldstein, 90.

motive. After all, the Strasbourg proposal did not induce a positive response from Beijing. Rather, it prompted the Chinese leaders to restrict all aspects of Tibetan culture with strong measures. As China has become suspicious of the Dalai Lama for harboring some hidden agendas and at the meantime, a large-scale anti-China protest broke out in Lhasa. The year 1989 brought another unpleasant situation for China as the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel peace prize. Tibetans everywhere perceived it as an important gesture of support from the international community in their fight against Chinese rule. Indeed, the international recognition of the Tibetan leader has heightened the political support for Tibet from the Western world.<sup>169</sup> The Dalai Lama's internationalization of Tibet issue, however, did not facilitate a conducive atmosphere for negotiation rather it caused further distance for the two parties' engagement. China perceived the western support for the exiled leader as a conspiracy of imperialists' hostile force to undermine China.<sup>170</sup> The Dalai Lama's political campaign in the west often brews international accusation of China and encouraged domestic protest in Tibet. Beijing reacted harshly by shifting to a more hardline and integrationist policy in Tibet. As a result, the direct discussions about the negotiations were ended in 1993.

In the mid1990s, the exiled leader showed his willing to concede more to the Chinese government. He minimized his demand from "Higher degree of autonomy" under association to "genuine autonomy" under the Hong Kong model.<sup>171</sup> Hong Kong enjoys a limited democracy but China has multiple channels of influence in the decision-making process of the Legislative Council of the HKSAR.

In 1993, the Dalai Lama declared "Hong Kong type settlement to the Tibet question acceptable" <sup>172</sup> but Beijing did not see the demand differ from the concept of

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<sup>169</sup> Rabgey and Sharlho, 15.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Sautman, 56.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 53.

association. Moreover, the exile groups continued to call for Tibetan independence and built an alliance with other independence forces like Uyghurs, Falun Gong<sup>173</sup> practitioners and Chinese dissidents that made Chinese leaders suspecting the goal of the Tibet movement.<sup>174</sup> Beijing hardened its attitude towards the exile Tibetan leader and at the same time, employed a new strategy to manage the ethnic conflict. A rapid economic modernization was endorsed to reduce the salience of Tibetan nationalism through gradual assimilation. In late 1999, China launched the great western development program (Xibu da kaifa) to improve the economic conditions of mostly ethnic minority areas such as Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, Southern Mongolia and Xinjiang and TAR.<sup>175</sup> This development program includes government subsidies, waiving of taxation and state-funded mega infrastructure projects. The average income of every household had risen rapidly subsequently, but the local people were not satisfied with the new program because the production of raw materials and extraction of natural resource are driving forces of the economy in the region.<sup>176</sup> Tibetans question the motive of China's sudden shift of economic policies by bringing empirical evidence of their loss in the cultural, social and economic fields. The economic policy also induced the influx of Chinese immigrants to Tibet that makes Tibetans demographically minorities in their ancestral land while natural resources are exported to mainland China. The western area (Tibet, Xinjiang, and Southern Mongolia) focused economic policies of China also threatened the traditional way of life as Tibetan nomads were forcefully removed from grassland to resettle them into "new socialist village" or urban settlement. This made much easier for China to surveil and combat ethnonational and

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<sup>173</sup> Falun Gong is a Chinese spiritual practice that was banned in China since 1990s

<sup>174</sup> Sautman, 62.

<sup>175</sup> Hongyi H. Lai, "China's western development program: Its rationale, implementation, and prospects." *Modern China* 28, no. 4 (2002): 432.

<sup>176</sup> Lina Kutkauskaitė, 53.



separatist movements in Tibet.<sup>177</sup> The Chinese government argues that the primary objective of expanding Tibet's economy is to improve the social and economic condition but critics contend that the real motive behind the economic policies is to consolidate Beijing's control over contested lands in maintaining unification of the motherland and securing unlimited access to natural resources in the regions.<sup>178</sup>

After all, the essential strategy of Chinese government's economic policies in Tibet is sinicization through an officially initiated population transfer in the least populated areas of Tibet in China. During the Mao era, Han Chinese were forced to migrate but now they are encouraged with certain promises from the state like subsidies and "looser application of the one-child policy".<sup>179</sup> The massive influx of Chinese immigrants in Tibet led to the phenomenon of "population invasion"<sup>180</sup> that Han Chinese immigrants outnumbered the existing Tibetan population in their homeland although the Chinese government claims that 93% of the total population in the TAR is ethnic Tibetans.<sup>181</sup> Because of the rapid transformation of demographic structure in Tibet, the ethnic Tibetans are very scared to see the scenario of Southern Mongolia where the Mongolian population comprises only 17% of the total population as compared to 79% Han in the region according to 2010 Chinese census. As a tourist described Beijing's rule: "In Lhasa nowadays, there are more Chinese than Tibetans, more soldiers than monks and more surveillance cameras than windows",<sup>182</sup> Beijing

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<sup>177</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2013. "China: End Involuntary Rehousing, Relocation of Tibetans". <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/27/china-end-involuntary-rehousing-relocation-tibetans>.

<sup>178</sup> Statement by Li Dezhu, Minister of State Nationality Affairs Commission in the Party Committee journal Qiu Shi, 1 June 2000, as cited by Tibet Information Network, China's Great Leap West (London: TIN, 2000), 8; Central Tibetan Administration., 2001. "China's Railway Project: Where Will It Take Tibet?." [http://www.tibetcorps.org/files/Resources/rail\\_report.pdf](http://www.tibetcorps.org/files/Resources/rail_report.pdf),9.

<sup>179</sup> Lina Kutkauskaitė, 57.

<sup>180</sup> Andrew M. Fischer, "'Population invasion' versus urban exclusion in the Tibetan areas of western China." *Population and Development Review* 34, no. 4 (2008):631.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 632.

<sup>182</sup> John Avedon. "Preface". In exile from the land of snows: The definitive account of the Dalai Lama and Tibet since the Chinese conquest. Vintage, 2015.

makes efforts to change the demographic structure in ethnic areas to make ethnic minorities unqualified for claiming rights of autonomy in the long run by making them “double minority” within the boundary of the PRC. The demographic invasion is one of the political tools of China to deppluralize the society thus Tibetans feel the economic development actually weakens them.

In 2002, the negotiation between Beijing and Dharamsala was resumed under international pressure, and a Tibetan delegation visited Beijing to negotiate with leaders in China. But, Chinese leaders refused to engage in substantive discussion. There was little evidence that China has decided to resolve the issue of Tibet. Typically, the contact between the two parties was used by Beijing as a political tool to appease the international critics and curtail the anti-China activities by Tibetans and supporters around the world.<sup>183</sup> To create a cordial atmosphere for “talks about talks”, exile political leaders have refrained Tibetans and other support groups from protesting against Chinese leaders and calling for Rangzen or independence.

On November 6, 2008, Tibetan government in exile presented a proposal “Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People” to the Chinese leadership in which the vision of Tibetan autonomy was extensively elucidated in eleven key points.<sup>184</sup> In the memorandum, the earlier idea of the Dalai Lama to establish a ‘democratic system’ in Tibet was dropped to convince Beijing that Tibetan government has made a further concession. The new demand was converged to situate it within the framework of the Chinese constitution or within China’s National Regional

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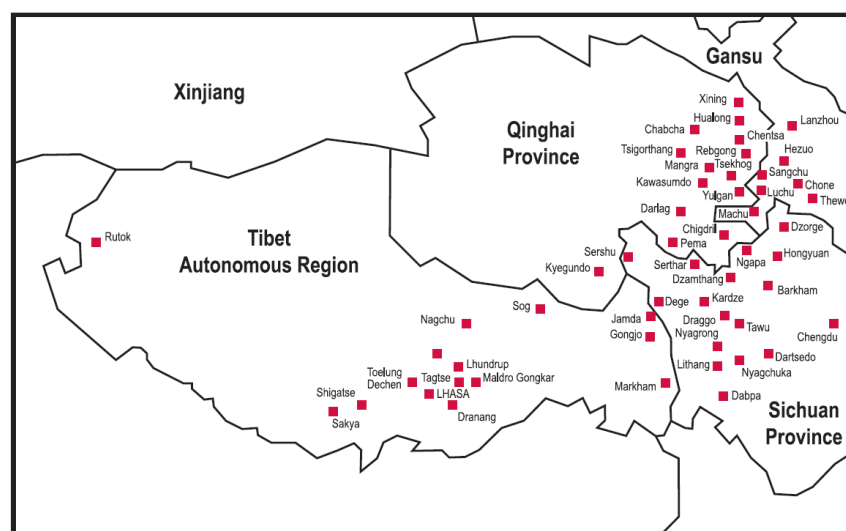
<sup>183</sup> Warren W. Smith, 2015. ‘Sino-Tibetan Dialogue: Talks or Tourism?’. <http://www.mtac.gov.tw/pages/93/Warren%20Smith.pdf>, 68.

<sup>184</sup> Language, culture, religion, education, environment protection, utilisation of natural resources, economic development and trade, public security, regulation on population migration, cultural, educational and religious exchanges with other countries; “Memorandum On Genuine Autonomy For The Tibetan People | Central Tibetan Administration”. 2016. *Tibet.Net*. Accessed April 26. <http://tibet.net/important-issues/sino-tibetan-dialogue/memorandum-on-geniune-autonomy-for-the-tibetan-people/>.

Autonomy Law. However, China rejected the proposal by reiterating the same statement that they made in the 80s, stating that the Dalai Lama was seeking “independence, semi-independence or independence in disguise”. The ‘negotiation about negotiation’ between Beijing and Dharamsala over the years was by and large Chinese-dictated that led to no bilateral compromise in the end.

### ***5.3 Tibetan youth movement in the diaspora***

Tibetan diaspora in general and Tibetan youth groups, in particular, are some of the biggest headaches for China. The Tibetan people in the diaspora represent the repressed Tibetans in Tibet on major international forums that often cause a blemish to the image of China in the West. In addition, they use various resources to mobilize their ethnic kin at home to challenge the Chinese legitimacy in Tibet. The most prominent example was the protest movements that swept across the world and inside Tibet during the 2008 Beijing Olympic. The youth organizations such as Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) and Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) staged large-scale protests to dog the Olympic torch rally that caused the worst embarrassment to China in the world for its repressive policies in Tibet. At the same time, these protests indirectly instigated similar protests in all areas of Tibet, especially in the least expected Tibetan areas outside of the TAR shown in Figure 2.



(Source: Robert Barnett, 2009)

The new wave of the protests symbolically draws the traditional geographic map of Tibet and send a clear message to China and the world that not TAR but all ethnic Tibetan areas are the real “Tibet”. These protests also show the strong sense of ethnic solidarity among Tibetans across the world. This unprecedented new phenomenon has made the Chinese leaders feel insecure. Thus, China initiated a new move in an attempt to break the chain of connection between Tibetans inside its border and abroad. Before 2008, every year, roughly 3000 to 4000 young Tibetans make the most dangerous journey across the Himalaya on foot to India and the majority of them reside in their host country permanently. These youth has been educated in Tibetan refugee schools and becomes the forefront of the Tibetan movement in the free world. In response, China has employed carrot and stick approach to prevent the Tibetans children from escaping the country. The state tightens its border control and punishes Tibetan parents who have sent their children to India, usually firing them from their government jobs. In 2000, the Chinese government issued an order “all party cadres and government employees are strictly instructed to observe the orders prohibiting their

children to study in schools administered by the Dalai Lama”<sup>185</sup> and pressured Tibetan parents to bring back their children from India. As Tibetan Children are getting a free education in India, China also introduced preferential policies to provide free education for all preschools, middle schools and vocational schools in the region.<sup>186</sup> The government also uses its economic resources to fund and subsidize Tibet. Not surprisingly, the Chinese government’s approach has proved to be successful at breaking the tie between the exile Tibetan community and Tibetans living under its grip as the outflow of Tibetan students to India was drastically dried up in the recent past.

On the other side of the spectrum, the democratically elected Tibetan leader of Tibetan Government in Exile made the reestablishment of Sino-Tibetan dialogue as his main policy agenda. He made efforts to seek autonomy from China based on the “Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan people” which the Tibetan delegates presented to China in 2008. However, Chinese leaders repeatedly rejected his dialogue proposal and labeled him as a “terrorist”<sup>187</sup> due to his previous record of being a leader of the Tibetan Youth Congress, the largest pro-independence organization in the Tibetan world, which China considers as a terrorist organization.

#### **5.4 Chinese state power and the changing wind**

Another external actor involved in the Tibetan movement is the Western world. Ever since the Dalai lama was bestowed the Nobel Peace prize, Tibet became very popular

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<sup>185</sup> "China Stopping Tibetans from Going to India for Study | International Campaign for Tibet". *Savetibet.Org* (2001), <https://www.savetibet.org/china-stopping-tibetans-from-going-to-india-for-study/>.

<sup>186</sup> "Central Govt's Growing Support for Tibet - China - Chinadaily.Com.Cn". 2015. *Chinadaily.Com.Cn*. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-09/06/content\\_21795823.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-09/06/content_21795823.htm); "China Investing Heavily in Tibet Education Subsidy". 2015. *Chinadaily.Com.Cn*. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/04/content\\_22626785.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/04/content_22626785.htm).

<sup>187</sup> Li Hongmei, 2011. "Terrorist Poised To Rule "Tibetan Government In-Exile" ?". *People's Daily Online*. <http://en.people.cn/90002/96417/7326988.html>.

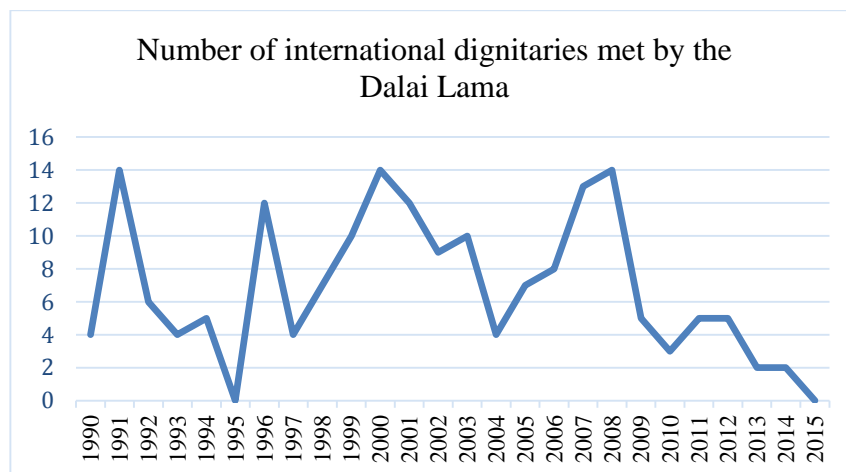
and gained unprecedented international support from governments and civil societies alike in the west. These supporters from time to time collaborate with exile Tibetan youth groups such as TYC and SFT to launch protest around the world against the Chinese government that enabled to gain momentum for the Tibetan freedom movement. The mounting external support for the Tibetan movement has changed the situation on the ground inside Tibet because China could no longer hide their harsh treatment of Tibetans from the international community. However, the increasing economic tie between China and the West has reversed the trend of the pressure game, especially after the 2008 economic crisis in the west. TGiE and the Dalai Lama many times appealed the international community to press China for having a meaningful dialogue with them, but western political leaders distanced them from the Tibet issue in fear of hurting Chinese sentiments and losing economic opportunities with China.

Being the second largest economy in the world, China uses its resources to make sure of non-interference of Western governments in the so-called China's 'internal matter'. China was concerned about the international criticism in the past, but the Western economic crisis has made the Chinese government more daring to use oppressive measures on ethnic movements. China diminishes the international support for the Tibetan cause mostly relies on their economic resources by either giving economic incentives or punishment on Western countries.<sup>188</sup> The Chinese government promises other states huge economic investments for isolating the Tibetan issue. At the same time, the PRC threatens higher officials that the bilateral trade relations will be cut for their receiving of the Tibetan leader. Whether Western democratic states sacrifice their economic interest for the sake of human rights issue in Tibet is a hot debate among scholars. But, money takes precedence over moral and human rights as

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<sup>188</sup> Lina Kutkauskaitė, 59.

other states' decision on Tibet was monitored by their economic tie with China today. Therefore, the tide of wind has changed as China becomes an ever-greater world power. Several international media observers discuss the notable decline of international support for the Tibetan freedom movement at least from political leaders.<sup>189</sup> Though hard evidence on the economic penalty for meeting the Tibetan leader is unfounded, a number of world leaders such as Barack Obama, David Cameron, and the Pope and among others avoid meeting with the Dalai Lama. There was a sharp decline in the numbers of meetings between the Dalai Lama and international dignitaries including Presidents, Prime Ministers, Speakers of the parliaments and foreign ministers. Figure 3 shows the permanent fall in the frequency of these meetings since 2008.



(Source: Office of the Dalai Lama)

The Dalai Lama's meeting with world leaders holds symbolic political value for Tibetans as it encourages Tibetans resistance against China at home and in exile. His visibility on the global scale also mobilizes the global public in the Tibetan freedom movement. Beijing's effort to deny political space for Tibet in the international forum appears successful. The World Peace Conference in South Africa was canceled in 2014 when the South African government denied a visa to the Dalai Lama under Chinese

<sup>189</sup> Baogang He and Barry Sautman. "Politics of the Dalai Lama's New Initiative for Autonomy". *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2030073,605.

pressure. David Cameron's meeting with the Dalai Lama in 2012 sparked fury in Beijing, he refused to meet with the Dalai Lama<sup>190</sup> in the following years. Western political leaders' reluctance to meet with the Dalai Lama clearly crystallizes the diplomatic pressure on foreign countries for hosting the Tibetan leader.<sup>191</sup>

Additionally, China also uses its military might and veto power in the UN Security Council to block any discussion on Tibet, thus, international intervention in the Tibetan issue has become more unlikely than ever. Because of its military, economic and political resources, China has become more influential internationally. These state resources are used to ensure non-interference of external actors in its internal issue. With the isolation of international support by silencing their critical voice, Chinese state uses the repressive measure to crack down the resistance movement and maintains hard stance on the Tibetan issue.

## **Conclusion**

The Sino-Tibetan dialogue is employed as an effective political strategy of China against the Tibetan demand for autonomy through Middle Way. After many years' deliberations, the Dalai Lama, and the TGiE have climbed down the scope of autonomy to squeeze their demand within the Chinese constitutional provisions.<sup>192</sup> However, China refuses to accept that there is a Tibetan issue other than the Dalai Lama. After all, it is a foot-dragging strategy of China to let the Dalai Lama to die

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<sup>190</sup> Tom Mctague, 2015. "Dalai Lama Slams Cameron for Kowtowing To China". *Mail Online*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3246512/Money-money-money-s-Dalai-Lama-slams-Cameron-kowtowing-China-refusing-meet-him.html>.

<sup>191</sup> Malcolm Moore, 2014. "Nobel Peace Summit Cancelled After Dalai Lama Refused Visa". *Telegraph.Co.Uk*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocan/southafrica/11136795/Nobel-Peace-Summit-cancelled-after-Dalai-Lama-refused-visa.html>.

<sup>192</sup> Tsering Topgyal, 2015. "After 75 Years, The Dalai Lama Is More Important Than Ever". *The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com/after-75-years-the-dalai-lama-is-more-important-than-ever-37499>.



outside of China so that the central supporting pillar of the Tibetan freedom movement will be collapsed. Chinese hardliners believe that the Tibetan issue will be fizzed out with passing away of the Dalai Lama. Thereafter, they believe that they can fully control the Tibetan plateau and achieve its final goal of establishing a homogeneous nation by appointing its own puppet 15<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. It was clear that Beijing interested not in substantive dialogue. The leadership change in China brought new opportunities for the conflict resolution, however Beijing's refusal to accept the existence of Tibet issue other than the Dalai Lama breaks the primary ground of negotiation.

To have a strong state is the key for building a successful nation. China has employed its military and economic power to neutralize the internal as well as the external threat today. Domestically, the 'police state' strictly controls the everyday life of ethnic Tibetans and often crushes any ethnic based anti-national activity. But at the same time, the state also uses its economic power to buy people's loyalty through economic incentives, opportunity, and support. At the international level, China crumbles Western support of the ethnic movements in China through its diplomatic pressure and bilateral trade agreement. With little pressure from the international community, China conveniently pursues its goal of establishing a homogenous nation-state by sinicizing Tibetans without much concern over human rights issues that other weak states must respect to fulfill the international legal obligations.

## Conclusion

This thesis sought to situate the Sino-Tibetan conflict within the framework of nation-building and ethnic conflict management to understand how different factors such as historical myths, religion, institutional structure and internationalization can shape state policies towards the ethnic issue. China's ultimate nation-building goal is to establish a homogeneous and powerful nation-state. In the process of nation-building, China tries to integrate forcefully minorities rejecting their identities and culture. This in turn creates mutual suspicion of each other's intentions and actions. The rejection of multi-cultural pluralism incites ethnic movement against the state as it threatens identities of the minorities like the Tibetans. As a result of this animosity, any ethnic movement is considered as separatist movements by the Chinese state and the authorities forcefully silence any ethnic voices without making any concession.

Chinese leaders are concerned only about the national security of the state and they think that the elimination or assimilation of other ethnic groups into the majority group are the best strategies to construct a homogenous nation-state. PRC employs the state as a tool of dominance over ethnic minorities to achieve the nation-building goal. As part of the creation of a national identity, the state uses its power to impose 'one-China identity' among ethnic minorities through its education, economic and cultural policies. These policies are often a combination of little carrot and more stick as the chapters of this thesis have shown.

On the other side of the spectrum, ethnic Tibetans perceive the move of the Chinese state as a threat to their distinctive identities, thus, they struggle against the state power to maintain and secure their rightful place in society. The Tibetan resistance and nationalism evolved from their sense of identity insecurity that escalates the tension between the two adversaries. China struggles to create a homogenous nation state while

Tibet asserts its ethnic roots with a strong nationalistic sentiment. In other words, the conflict can be summed as new national identity creation for China; and identity retention for Tibet. It is this conflict of identities that prevents the two sides from reaching a commonly agreeable ground despite many decades of negotiation.

Unless China changes its policies to embrace the idea of multi-cultural pluralism, the ethnic movements in China will grow stronger and the Sino-Tibetan conflict (possibly other conflicts) will intensify beyond control. Chinese policymakers should realize that elimination of ethnic identity cannot be successful in our contemporary world as the Tibetan case proves. Instead, China should accommodate proposals that are peaceful and call for autonomy arrangements as it is the Tibetan case. This way China could take ethnic matters more seriously and could re-create its national identity in the nation-building project being more inclusive to multiple identities.

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