

Article

Sinicisation and the Threat of Cultural Genocide in Tibet

Sarada Subhash

Abstract

The Tibetan people and their distinct national identity have been under constant threat since the invasion and occupation of Tibet by China in 1950-51. To understand the extent and magnitude of atrocities against the non-violent Tibetans by China one needs to grasp China's state policies/programmes that drive the state-led efforts to erase Tibetan national identity. This article argues that Chinese policies of 'stability-maintenance', 'social management', 'political re-education programme', with Sinicisation at their core, are attempts by the CPC to tighten its domestic security and stability in the country in general and its alienated and restive periphery, in particular. Even the so-called development narrative in the Tibetan region is but a pretext by Xi Jinping's regime to systematically monitor and control any discontent that may arise amongst the Tibetans against the Chinese state. Xi's Tibetan 'development plans' can also be perceived as a Chinese strategy to buy support with the aim to curb disaffection and ensure social stability.

There is growing awareness around the world that protection of universal human rights, including preservation of cultural identities in all states, are essential conditions for the peace and well-being of humankind and the states themselves. State policies that target specific ethnic groups and indulge in mass persecution and killings as in Rwanda and the Yugoslav break away states in the 1990s are seen as blots on

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humanity and the so called liberal international order even as its triumph in the Cold War was being hailed. Yet even now minorities in many countries such as China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan continue to face persistent persecution and repression without significant global concern or action. The plight of the Tibetan people under Chinese occupation and authoritarian control is of particular concern as it appears to have somewhat receded from public focus even as the repression on them has steadily grown under Xi Jinping's regime. The destiny of the Tibetan people could have been different, if they had received timely and adequate support from the international community, when their country was being occupied and colonised by China. Significant international support also could have made a difference when the United States and the liberal Western powers were forging strong ties with China and backing its reforms and modernisation. That too did not happen, and now that US-China ties have become tense it is not sure there would be a significant change in liberal stance and greater focus on the threats and repressions the Tibetan people face.

Recently, the Tibetan Bureau-Geneva called upon Beijing to address the underlying grievances of the Tibetan population by giving due respect to their historical, cultural, and social roots.¹ The challenges faced by the Tibetan population were also raised at the 14th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, convened on December 2-3, 2021, by Kalden Tsomo, the United Nations (UN) Advocacy Officer from Tibetan Bureau-Geneva.² There are signs of desperation among the Tibetans, both within China and those in exile.

This article describes the unending human rights violations encountered by the Tibetans in China and draws attention to one of the most egregious cases of occupation and violation of an entire people's rights in the post-War and post-Cold War international orders. It argues that Chinese state policies driven by a search for total security under President and Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping not only have become deeply repressive in recent years but threaten the annihilation of Tibetan national identity. Be it the Chinese policy of 'stability-maintenance', 'social management' or 'political re-education programme', Beijing's intention is to tighten its domestic security and maintain stability at all costs. Xi's policies are aimed at safeguarding the Communist Party of China's (CPC) ironclad rule not only in Tibet but other ethnic minority regions such as Xinjiang and Inner-Mongolia.

Tibetans and Tibetan national identity have been under the constant and expansive securitisation radar of China since its invasion of Tibet in 1950-51. The Tibetans suffered brutal repression under Mao. While there was an attempt to reach out to the Dalai Lama and discuss relatively more autonomy in the initial reform years, the talks broke down as agreement proved elusive. Relaxation gave way to control and repression as resistance and protests re-emerged. Repression of religion and culture have grown many-fold in recent years under Xi Jinping. Details in this article give a fair idea that even the so-called development narrative of the Tibetan region is but a pretext by the Xi Jinping regime to constantly monitor and stamp out any discontent that may arise amongst the Tibetans.

The Plight of Tibetans Raised at UN Forum

The UN General Assembly adopted 'Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities' on December 18, 1992.³ Article 1 of the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities calls upon States to safeguard their existence.⁴ The UN also set up a Forum on Minority Issues to provide a platform for promoting cooperation and dialogue on various matters related to ethnic or national, linguistic and religious minorities, in addition to providing expertise and thematic contributions to the work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues.⁵ The year 2022 marks 30 years of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.⁶

The UN Forum on Minority Issues last year opened its platform to the Tibetans to voice their concerns to the international community. The 14th UN Forum on Minority Issues convened on the 2nd and 3rd of December 2021 in Geneva, focussed on "Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights of Minorities".⁷ The Special Rapporteur, de Varennes opined that the instances of significant violent internal conflicts have tripled since 2010 across the world and most of these conflicts involved minorities and their grievances over exclusion and discrimination, as well as threats to their identity.⁸ The discussions that took place at this Forum, along with the outcome of four of the regional forums held during the course of the year would be the basis for the annual report and recommendations to be presented to the 49th UN Human Rights Council in March 2022.⁹

Kalden Tsomo, the UN Advocacy Officer from the Tibetan Bureau-Geneva, in her presentation to the 14th session of the Forum emphasised that the Tibetan people are facing the repercussions of the imposition of demographic and socio-structural changes by the People’s Republic of China (PRC).¹⁰ The Tibetan Bureau-Geneva is the official agency of the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Central & Eastern Europe, and is based in Dharamsala, India.¹¹ Tsomo highlighted the plight of Tibetans, and drew attention to the dearth of opportunity in acquiring knowledge on Tibetan traditions, culture and history, as well as the lack of employment opportunities in Tibet.¹² She stated that these issues have resulted in a cycle of protests and conflicts in recent years, which included the incidents of self-immolation in protests against Chinese rule by more than 155 Tibetans in Tibet.¹³

Tsomo also invited the attention of the Forum to Beijing’s closure of the remaining schools which conducted classes in Tibetan medium and also of the Tibetan language classes (informal).¹⁴ This, the officer said, included the recent demolition of the Drago Monastery school in the Kardze Tibetan region.¹⁵ Additionally, while citing the ongoing employment challenges faced by the Tibetans, she pointed out that the job markets in the Tibetan areas were getting more and more dominated by “a state-sponsored influx of Chinese”, leaving no job prospects for the local Tibetan college graduates.¹⁶ Tsomo said that Tibetan survival is centered around its language and cultural identity that are under severe threat from Beijing’s increasing attempt to ‘Sinicise’ all aspects of the people’s way of living.¹⁷ She urged Beijing to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the representatives of the Tibetan people under the framework of H.H. Dalai Lama’s Middle Way Approach.¹⁸ The Officer also appealed to the holders of the UN Mandate to realise the sense of crisis, conflict and complexities faced by the Tibetans under the Chinese regime and take into account the ongoing cultural genocide and social exclusionary processes in Tibet.

Tibetan survival is centered around its language and cultural identity that are under severe threat from Beijing’s increasing attempt to ‘Sinicise’ all aspects of the people’s way of living.

Similarly, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), the world’s largest NGO related to Tibetan affairs and a non-profit advocacy group¹⁹, also delivered a statement at the 14th UN Forum on Minority Issues. Vincent Metten, the EU Policy Director for the ICT, poignantly reminded the floor about the more than seven decade-long violation of

Tibetan political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights under Chinese rule.²⁰ While pointing out that the surveillance and control of Tibetans have increased under Xi Jinping's regime, Vincent Metten also noted how the culture of the Tibetan population is being viewed as a threat to the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Communist regime implementing expansive programmes to Sinicise the Tibetan culture— a point made by Kalden Tsono as well.²¹ Metten remarked that such attempts are not just a violation of the universal standards of basic human rights but they also create new conflicts and aggravate already existing tensions.

The ICT's EU Policy Director also gave a reminder as to how the non-violent nature of the Tibetans have resulted in the Tibetan struggle remaining a crisis of a silent nature, as exemplified (since 2009) by the self-immolation attempts of more than 150 Tibetans, many of whom had urged a return of the 14th Dalai Lama to Tibet. The succession tussle of the 14th Dalai Lama, between the Tibetan community and the CPC, could eventually lead to Tibetans expressing their grievances via protest, and this would in all probability be dealt with force and repression by Beijing, possibly leading to violent conflicts and grievous violations of Tibetan human rights— Metten, warned.²²

To avoid such conflicts, he urged the Chinese leadership to resume the long-stalled Sino-Tibetan dialogue and also called on Xi Jinping's government to protect the Tibetan Buddhists' right to determine their own religious leaders in line with the Tibetan practices and traditions. Metten also noted that the Chinese policies of 'Sinicisation' must be scrapped, as they are eroding the Tibetan cultural identity and concluded the speech by saying that they advocate and extend the support "for the specific recommendation made by 50 Special Procedures for the creation of a special mechanism to monitor and report on the human rights situation in China", including in Tibet, Hong Kong and Xinjiang.²³

Core Threat—Sinicisation

The Sinicisation of Tibet is the most worrisome aspect of China's approach towards Tibet. Nonetheless, before detailing the Sinicisation and securitisation attempts by CPC, it is critical to understand how Tibet and Tibetans were led to such a distressful state by the Chinese Communist Party regime. The story of Tibetan subjugation by China is also a story of how this modern-day colonialism has led to the erosion of national identity and all that symbolises identity -- religion, language, culture, etc.

The once sovereign Tibet (a narrative vehemently opposed by CPC) was invaded by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), and what amounts to being colonised, in 1950-51 soon after the newly formed Communist regime seized power in Beijing. In the events that unfolded, the then incumbent Tibetan government was forced by the Chinese invaders to sign a "Seventeen Point Agreement" and recognise the Chinese Communist Party's rule in Tibet.²⁴ The 17-point agreement is also known as the 'Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet'. The point 3 of the agreement says that, in conformity "with the policy towards nationalities laid down" by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference's (CPPCC) Common Program, Tibetans shall have "the rights to exercise national regional autonomy under the unified leadership" of the Central People's Government (CPG).²⁵ The 17-point agreement also states that "the policy of freedom of religious belief laid down in the Common Program of the CPPCC shall be carried out" and that the Tibetan religious beliefs, their habits and customs would be respected, and the (lama) monasteries shall be protected (point 7).²⁶ In practice, the autonomy or the sanctity of religious and cultural identity were never fully implemented and systematically curbed.

Unable to accept the Chinese invasion, the Tibetan resistance to safeguard their once sovereign state simmered. Armed resistance broke out against the occupying PLA forces in 1958 and was brutally crushed. The resistance continued until the 10th of March 1959 (now commemorated as National Uprising Day by Tibetans), when around 300,000 Tibetans offered protection to H. H. Dalai Lama by surrounding the Potala Palace, the winter abode of the Dalai Lamas.²⁷ As the Chinese forces started to brutally crush the Tibetan uprising, the 14th Dalai Lama and some 90,000 of his followers had no option but to escape and seek refuge in India. On March 31, 1959, H.H. 14th Dalai Lama started an indefinite exile in India, where he eventually established a democratic Tibetan government-in-exile (TGiE). It is 63 years since the Tibetans have been displaced from their homeland by the PRC and have lived in India, keeping alive their identity and struggle for a free Tibet. Tibetans who remained in their occupied homeland have faced continued repression and an imminent threat to the loss of their national and civilisational identity.

'Whose history is it' is a much-debated topic in the academic world. Do the historical narratives and documents support the sovereignty of the Tibetan state, or do they support China's claims that Tibet has been a part of their land for over 800 years?

Going into the claims by both sides is beyond the scope of this article. Though, it is safe to assume that the Tibetan claims are steadily garnering more support and credibility than those by the Chinese government. Those dealing with Tibetology are aware that many historians, academicians, and scholars, are now presenting reliable evidence to support the Tibetan claim of being an independent and sovereign state pre-1951. In a path-breaking article for National Security, Prof. Hon-Shiang LAU of the City University of Hong Kong dismantles China's extended and continued claim that "Tibet has been part of China since antiquity".²⁸ Though understandably, this claim is a prerequisite to legitimise China's annexation of the Tibetan state in 1950-51, Hon-Shiang LAU, drawing upon Beijing's primary-source records dating to pre-1949, refutes the claim of Chinese sovereignty upon Tibet.²⁹ The author has presented evidence from the Ming- and Qing-dynasties to support his argument against the Chinese claim.³⁰ Tibet's strategic and historical significance, primarily the region sharing borders with Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and critically, India, makes it a critical component of China's securitisation strategy in the remote Himalayan regions.³¹

The Process of Sinicisation

Following the invasion and colonisation of Tibet, China started the process of politically dividing and Sinicisation of the Tibetan regions. Since the invasion of the Tibetan region, the Communist Party has been following the process to (forcefully) assimilate all the minority ethnic communities with the majority Han Chinese culture.³² China's Sinicisation attempts have led to the erosion of some of the oldest cultures of the world, like the Manchu, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Mongol cultures. Many other countries have also faced the sinicisation attempts in the course of their history, for example, Vietnam and Japan.³³ While the Vietnamese were forced to adopt China's culture following the Chinese conquest of their state, Japan witnessed the rise of a military dictator, Shogun, following the country's voluntary adoption of sinicisation of their culture.³⁴

Reiterating CPC's commitment to sinicisation of religions, Xi Jinping, at the National Conference on Work Related to Religious Affairs (held on December 2 and 3, 2021), expressed his wish to fully apply the theory on religious affairs by the Communist Party of China (CPC).³⁵ The underlying meaning is that the "five accepted religions" should learn to carry out their activities in places of worship that belong to them and more importantly, they should in no way "interfere with social life" and the education

of the country's younger generations.³⁶ According to *Bitter Winter*, a magazine on human rights and religious liberty, since 2016, this was the first such conference, and definitely "not an auspicious recurrence for believers".³⁷ The reason for such an interpretation lies in a past precedent. It was during the 2016 'Conference on Work Related to Religious Affairs', that Xi Jinping declared his plans for a harsher crackdown on religion, which -- as the world knows -- were implemented in the country by the party-state in the subsequent years.

'Sinicisation' Paving Way to Cultural Genocide

What are the consequences of the policy of Sinicisation in Tibet? The consequences are definitively detrimental to other ethnic minority communities in China, such as the Mongols and Uyghurs. This is already evident. In the context of Tibetan affairs, 'cultural genocide' is once again garnering much global attention. The Dalai Lama has expressed his deepest concern about it since 1993 and has made the world conscious about it.³⁸ Penpa Tsering, the Sikyong/President of the Tibetan democratic government-in-exile, has expressed the fear of an imminent "cultural genocide" threat in Tibet and appealed to the international community to stand up to China ahead of the 2022 scheduled Beijing Winter Olympics.³⁹ Referring to the threats facing Tibetan culture, Penpa Tsering poignantly reminded the world: "Time is running out. Once it is eliminated, it doesn't make sense to fight for anything," he said.⁴⁰

Tibetans and various rights groups have repeatedly called out the Chinese establishment for its strict control and monitoring of Tibetan culture, education, language, religion, job opportunities, etc., and its simultaneous encouragement of large-scale immigration of the ethnic Han majority population to the Tibetan region.⁴¹ Penpa Tsering referring to China's subjugation and oppression of Tibetan culture, has stated that the Tibetans are not against the concept of "multiculturalism", but when an overwhelming majority community tries to totally devastate a minority community, it is tantamount to cultural genocide, and this is more so when this is a state-enforced policy.⁴²

Over two thousand years Tibetans have developed and safeguarded their distinctive civilisation, which is identified by language, literature, spiritual practices and traditions, astrology and calendar, and even their own specific livelihood practices like the reliance on an environmentally sustainable agriculture.⁴³ In addition to this, Buddhism has been an integral part of Tibetan identity since the 7th century CE, with the Tibetan monastic

system of education regarded as the key element of Tibetans spiritual and intellectual growth; significantly, it also functioned as a political body for the Tibetan population.⁴⁴ The crucial point to be understood is that Tibetans identify themselves as an indigenous community and time after time, have unequivocally stated that their Tibetan national identity is clearly distinctive from that of the Han-Chinese.⁴⁵ It is this ancient civilisation and cultural heritage that the Chinese government is systematically trying to erase from China. Sovereign Tibet had deep historical, cultural, and economic ties with India, and to a lesser extent with China, and Central Asia. It signed treaties with British India, Nepal, Russia. It's distinct civilisational, cultural, economic, and sovereign identity till PRC occupied it, is well-recorded, notwithstanding recent Chinese sovereignty claims over it.

The interpretation of "genocide" by Raphael Lemkin, as early as in 1944, is a textbook definition of the Chinese atrocities towards the Tibetan culture since the invasion and colonisation. In 1944, Raphael Lemkin, a public prosecutor, and a Polish-Jewish lawyer, coined the term Genocide in his book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws Of Occupation, Analysis Of Government, Proposals For Redress*. According to Lemkin, genocide is a coordinated attempt of various actions designed to destroy the requisite foundations pertaining to the life of national groups, with the goal of obliterating the groups in themselves.⁴⁶ The intent of such a plan or policies would be the disintegration of social and political, national feelings, language, religion, culture, even "the economic existence" of such national groups, along with the destruction of the liberty, dignity, health, personal security, and all in all, the very lives of the individuals who are a part of such groups.⁴⁷ The erosion of culture became the focal point in Lemkin's interpretation of Genocide as he considered culture as "the social fabric of a genus".⁴⁸ Regarding this, Lemkin wrote, "If the culture of a group is violently undermined, the group itself disintegrates and its members must either become absorbed in other cultures which is a wasteful and painful process or succumb to personal disorganization and, perhaps, physical destruction....(Thus) the destruction of cultural symbols is genocide...(It) 'menaces the existence of the social group which exists by virtue of its common culture.'"⁴⁹

The book titled *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory* describes "China's assimilationist thrust", which ensued just before the Cultural Revolution. The book says, in the year 1964, the Panchen Lama, who is considered to be the most

senior leader of the Tibetans after the Dalai Lama (according to the Gelug-pa school), was imprisoned and labeled “an enemy of the People, of the Party and of Socialism” and the “cultural assault” in the name of Revolution only increased.⁵⁰ The Panchen Lama, who was later released in 1978, made a statement that is now quoted widely by many when describing the consequences of the suppression and systematic annihilation of Tibetan national identity. The senior monk said- “Once a nationality’s language, costume, customs, and other important characteristics have disappeared, then the nationality itself has disappeared— that is to say, it has turned into another nationality”.⁵¹

Atrocities against Tibetan Buddhism

In 2020, President Xi Jinping stressed that Beijing should erect an “impregnable fortress” to safeguard national unity, maintain stability in Tibet and also reiterated the need to educate the people about the “struggle against splittism”.⁵² While stressing the requirement of strengthening the role of China’s Communist Party in the territory and better assimilate the ethnic groups, Xi also pledged to build a “united, prosperous, civilised, harmonious and beautiful new, modern, socialist Tibet”.⁵³ Chinese President also added that Tibetan Buddhism should adapt to the conditions of China and to socialism.⁵⁴ Socialism has been the guiding principle of China and its atheist Communist Party since its inception.

Writer Gautam Mukherjee observes that Xi’s wrath is at “the glue of Buddhism” in Tibet and the cultural, religious and political dissidents in the region.⁵⁵ Why the wrath and usage of strong words like ‘splittism’ and ‘impregnable fortress’? Or rather, why now when China is a powerful, visibly more prosperous nation and integrated state? Mukherjee argues that could be related to the visible resistance from India. Mukherjee’s three critical points being- India’s refusal to cede any more of its covertly seized territory and also her “intent to get back” most of what was lost to Beijing since 1962; India’s decision to spearhead her military strategy “along with a Tibetan commando force made up from Tibetan exiles”; and last but not the least there is Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile waiting and observing in the Indian soil.⁵⁶ The writer also draws attention to the recent atrocities on Tibetan Buddhism like the demolition of a Buddhist monastery in the eastern region of Tibet, the Tibetan monks being “roughed up” and even at times killed, and the pulling down of Tibetan Prayer Flags almost regularly.⁵⁷

The recent Chinese atrocities against Tibetan Buddhism seem to be far more expansive and focused, and the world is getting concrete evidence of such inhumane acts, thanks to the use of sophisticated and improved surveillance technologies across the globe. Satellite images acquired by London-based NGO, *Free Tibet*, and released in August 2019, suggest authorities of China have “levelled almost half of Yarchen Gar – one of the world’s largest Tibetan Buddhist sites” in Eastern Tibet.⁵⁸

According to *Free Tibet*, the demolitions were a part of CPC’s long-term plan to reduce the number of residents at the mentioned site.⁵⁹ *Free Tibet*, referring to the satellite images, points out the stark contrast of the bare ground visible now instead of a densely-populated community which once inhabited “on the west bank of the river running through Yarchen Gar”.⁶⁰ Earlier, authorities have also evicted a large number of nuns and monks from their places of worship and homes at Yarchen Gar in Kardze.⁶¹ *Tibet Watch*, the research partner of *Free Tibet*, was able to verify that in July 2019, some 70 nuns were removed from the region, detained for at least two or three months, and made to go through a Chinese state-led “patriotic re-education” programme that compels the detainees to denounce Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama, while praising the Chinese state.⁶² This is an attempt perceived to wear out the Tibetan sense of identity as well as eliminate those elements seen by the CPC as threatening.⁶³ Yarchen Gar, is one of the areas where Chinese authorities have increased their surveillance, barred foreigners and deployed around 600 odd military personnel to watch the community inhabiting there.⁶⁴ The community is sometimes referred to as “The City of Nuns” due to the large population of resident nuns in Yarchen Gar.⁶⁵ Citing anonymous sources, a recent media report states that Gendun Lhundrup, the Tibetan author, who was arrested by the Chinese authorities in December 2020, following the publication of the author’s latest book ‘Korwa’, is being forced to undertake China’s political re-education programme.⁶⁶

There have been other recent atrocities against Tibetan monks by Chinese authorities. *WION News* on Jan 10, 2022, that the authorities in Sichuan province were arresting and assaulting Tibetan monks under the suspicion that they were disseminating information to the outsiders about a 99-foot tall monument of Buddha being destroyed in China’s Luhuo county.⁶⁷ Citing the Tibetan reports quoted in *Radio Free Asia*, *WION News* reports that in December, the monument of Buddha in Kardze (Ganzi) of the TAR was demolished by the authorities on the ground “it was erected too high”.⁶⁸ According

to the sources, around eleven monks of Drago's Gaden Namgyal Ling monastery have been arrested so far.⁶⁹ The local Tibetan residents and monks were forced to witness the demolition act -- an attempt many discern as part of China's ongoing campaign to eliminate Tibet's distinct religion and culture.⁷⁰

The Chinese President Xi has hinted at his dissatisfaction with the monitoring of the Internet aimed at preventing "religious propaganda" and other "inappropriate remarks" on various social media.⁷¹ The remark was made during the earlier mentioned 2021 National Conference on Work Related to Religious Affairs, where all the top and senior leaders of CPC were present.⁷² Xi Jinping also asked the authorities to step up surveillance and punish those believers who resort to social media for "religious proselytization" or disapprove of the Chinese establishment's religious policy.⁷³

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China is attacking not just the religious beliefs and traditions of the Tibetans, but the Communist leadership has a problem with all religions. As Gautam Mukherjee observes: the Chinese President "likes to trample on cultural, political and religious identity. And not just those of the Buddhists, Christians and Muslims located in China. He expects to break resistance this way".⁷⁴ A case in point is Mount Kailash, a sacred abode for Hindus. It has been reported that China chose to position a military base and missiles at the foot of Mount Kailash, when India enhanced a road leading to LAC so that it becomes easier for Hindu pilgrims taking a pilgrimage from Uttarakhand to Kailash Parbat and Kailash Mansarovar, Mukherjee observes.⁷⁵

The 'Stability Maintenance' Policy

The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), a Dharamsala-based human rights organisation that looks after the welfare of the Tibetan community, released on 26 April 2021, the 'Annual Report 2020: Human Rights Situation in Tibet'. The TCHRD report identifies that the human rights scenario in Tibet has been worsening severely for years, particularly since Xi Jinping's became the President of China.⁷⁶ According to China watchers, since 2017 the phrase "political security" has frequently occurred in the speeches of Xi Jinping and other CPC officials. Additionally, they also observe that "domestic economic downturn" and the added pressures of US-China trade

war, have also resulted in its increasing use.⁷⁷ On January 21, 2019, at ‘the Provincial and Ministerial Level Leading Cadre Seminar’, the Chinese President stressed on the requirement for a “bottom-line thinking” to avert critical risks in all areas to “ensure the security” of economics, ideology, politics, party building, society, external environment and science and technology.⁷⁸ Adding to this, Xi Jinping also signalled an increasing sense of insecurity within the regime by stressing a “comprehensive view of national security”.⁷⁹ Interestingly, while “security” was used around 36 times during the report of Hu Jintao to 18th Party Congress in 2012, it increased to 55 times in Xi’s 2017 report to the 19th Party Congress— highlighting the enormous pressure faced by the officials of CPC to “maintain stability” in the country.⁸⁰ Clearly the leadership has been exercising “stricter social control in recent years”.⁸¹ The TCHRD report mentions that the political repression and human right violations in Tibet have grown to the level of “crimes against humanity”, with cases of torture, arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings occurring in a systematic and wide-ranging manner.⁸² Critically, the TCHRD report points to Beijing’s ‘stability maintenance’ policy as the root cause of the continuing offenses and human rights violations against the people in Tibet.⁸³

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Decoding the aforementioned CPC’s ‘stability maintenance’ policy, Willy Wo-Lap Lam, a well-known China scholar at the *Jamestown Foundation*, elucidates to his readers that since the mid-2010’s, China has recorded ‘a relatively high growth rate’, even as the Chinese economy was battling ‘serious downward pressures’.⁸⁴ And this became a “perennial theme in the annual springtime meetings of the National People’s Congress (NPC) and its counterpart, the *Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)*”, he notes. Nonetheless, Lam says, a more noticeable theme in the year 2019 was “stability maintenance (weiwen, 维稳)—coded language for ensuring the CPC’s ‘perennial ruling status’, and President’s Xi Jinping’s quasi-permanent role as the ‘leadership core’ of the world’s largest political organization”.

With economic policy as the focal point, Premier Li Keqiang, in that years’ annual ‘Government Work Report’ to the NPC signaled the worrying concerns regarding China’s economic trajectory and ‘the security of the regime’ and also emphasised the need to

endorse ‘social stability’ via increasing ‘welfare payouts to underprivileged classes’ and creation of jobs.⁸⁵ Firm application of “harsh laws against destabilizing elements in a broad number of social groups, ranging from dissident intellectuals and impoverished petitioners to underground church-goers and ethnic “terrorists” in Xinjiang and Tibet”, became another core part of ‘social stability management’ in China.⁸⁶ President of the Supreme People’s Court, Zhou Qiang, told the deputies of NPC that “courts of various levels” were devoted to “severely punishing crimes” that are detrimental to the security of the Chinese state and they are also committed to firmly upholding the political security of the state– the core being “security of the [political] order” and “regime security”.⁸⁷ In lieu of this, Zhou Qiang, informed that China’s judicial authorities have severely punished crimes related to espionage, incitement of dividing the country and “the incitement of the subversion of state power”.⁸⁸

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), since 2011, various policies relating to political and security control have been clubbed together under an umbrella term ‘stability maintenance’-- referring to the security measures installed across China from 2007 onwards to counter dissent and unrest.⁸⁹ Formal implementation of stability maintenance across China, in fact, began in 2007 and the policy focused on “moving from suppression to prevention (*guankou qianyi*)” by identifying and stamping out “any signs of potential unrest preemptively” rather than just reacting to events once it has already taken place.⁹⁰ In the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and also in other Tibetan regions under Chinese control, state authorities have deployed stability maintenance as an alternative way to eliminate Tibetan support to the Dalai Lama.⁹¹

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The earlier mentioned TCHRD report states that using highly repressive state laws of the country, the policy of ‘stability maintenance’ essentially targets people and punishes whom Beijing considers as “destabilizing elements” against China’s party-state.⁹² TCHRD also reminds the world that many Tibetans who are accused of these charges are denied the basic right to a fair trial and even their choice of legal representation, not to forget, many of them still remain “convicted of vaguely-worded crimes and suffer torture and maltreatment and unjust sentences.”⁹³

Carl Minzner and Yuhua Wang, wrote in 2015 for the *The China Quarterly* that

over the past 20 years Beijing's domestic security framework has enlarged dramatically and operations related to stability maintenance operations have become the highest priority for the local authorities in China.⁹⁴ While the bureaucratic authority of Beijing's Public security chiefs has increased, so is the rise in personnel and funding for "state operations" directed at controlling social protest and "citizen petitioners" -- not to mention that the command of the institutions responsible for overseeing these matters has been endowed in Party authorities who had progressively more seniority, the scholars write.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Carl Minzner and Yuhua Wang add: "*However, China remains far from being a simple police state*".⁹⁶ A rather bizarre explanation follows. According to them, even though the state authorities of China detain, harass and arrest those whom they consider a threat to their regimes' rule, and a large number of informally recruited personnel and state agents have been deployed by the CPC to keep-an-eye-on the citizen activists, "selected political dissidents" and lawyers who focus on the interest of the public, increased "official sensitivity to social unrest" has also paved the way towards "state concessions to mobilized groups of aggrieved citizens and has facilitated strategies of "rightful resistance" among petitioners".⁹⁷

Tibetan Repression under 'Stability Maintenance'

How credible are the aforementioned arguments pertaining to the so-called 'state concessions' and 'rightful resistance' by the Chinese state? Not all agree with this China-sided argument, particularly in the context of the China-occupied Tibetan region. A 2016 report by the *Human Rights Watch (HRW)*, titled "Relentless: Detention and Prosecution of Tibetans under China's "Stability Maintenance" Campaign", chronicles "how the changing patterns of unrest and politicized detentions, prosecutions, and convictions from 2013-2015" correspond to the latest phase of CCP's campaign of stability maintenance campaign- a policy that has led to unprecedented control and surveillance in Tibetan towns and villages.⁹⁸

The HRW notes the declining tolerance towards assembly and forms of expression by Chinese authorities. This, the report says, is noticeable by the rise in state control over day-to-day life, occasionally "disproportionate responses to local protests", and the rise in "criminalization of nonviolent forms of protest" in the regions.⁹⁹ Echoing the TCHRD findings, HRW also mentions that these measures, which form a part of the policy of "stability maintenance," have led the Chinese authorities to broaden the issues

and activities targeted for Tibetan repression, specifically in the countryside of the region. For instance, during 2008 to 2012, the Tibetan part of Sichuan province had the highest cases of detentions and protests on the Tibetan plateau, but the report indicated that in 2013, “the epicenter of detentions shifted to the central and western areas of the Tibetan plateau”, which since 1965 is known as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).¹⁰⁰

According to HRW, many of those prosecuted and detained were environmental activists, local community leaders and villagers who were involved in cultural and social activities, and even local singers and writers.¹⁰¹ While in the 1980s the Buddhist nuns and monks constituted more than 90 percent of political detainees in the Tibetan region, this group represented ‘less than 40 percent of the 479 cases’ that were documented in the report. This, as the report suggests, indicates that the rural parts of Tibetan areas, where almost 80 percent of Tibetans live, have seen an increase in dissent. The striking aspect is that of the 479 cases analysed, most of the protests were peaceful.¹⁰²

The rural parts of Tibetan areas, where almost 80 percent of Tibetans live, have seen an increase in dissent.

The report also mentions, since 2011, Beijing officials have escalated surveillance and social control at the grassroots level, specifically in the rural parts of the TAR.¹⁰³ This, the report states, have “included the transfer of some 21,000 officials to villages and monasteries in the TAR, where they are tasked with implementing new management, security, and propaganda operations, and, more recently, the deployment of nearly 10,000 police in Tibetan villages in Qinghai”.¹⁰⁴ This corresponds to the ‘new phases’ in the campaign of stability maintenance in the TAR and other parts of Tibet and the change of policy has led to an increase in the formation of ‘local Communist Party organizations’, police posts, government offices, security patrols, and political organizations in the towns and villages of Tibet, distinctly in the TAR.¹⁰⁵

China’s budget for “stability maintenance”, or, in other words, the budget for maintaining its domestic security, was 1.39 trillion yuan in 2019– which, as the TCHRD points out, is almost 16.8 percent more than China’s (official) military expenditure!¹⁰⁶ The report is quick to add that in actual reality, the aforementioned figure is only a “fraction of the actual budget” considering the fact that ‘stability maintenance’ is lodged

in state-owned as well as big private organisations.¹⁰⁷ China devotes a major chunk of its ‘stability maintenance’ budget on operating highly sophisticated 24-hour digital surveillance machinery, which the report says act as the “nets in the sky, traps on the ground”, an expression for identifying, tracking and capturing dissidents, fugitives and criminals.¹⁰⁸ Whilst Beijing’s human rights violations have doubled along with their ‘stability maintenance’ budget, analysts also agree that this budget will only continue to rise considering the “portending challenges” lying ahead given the situation unfolding in Tibet.¹⁰⁹

Does Xi’s obsession with “national security” have any long-term implications for China? Jia Qingguo, a former dean of Peking University’s International Relations school and who sits on the Standing Committee of China’s top political advisory body, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC) analyses that the chasing of “absolute national security can extract a heavy price”.¹¹⁰ Using the 1991 Soviet Union collapse as a reference point, Jia Qingguo observes that the federation’s drawback of spending heavily on defense for many years, pertinently, at the cost of ignoring their “long-term security”, resulted in the Soviet Union falling behind in economic development and unable to sustain the enormous defence spending.¹¹¹ The lives of civilians in the Soviet Union did not improve for a long period and obviously, this led to losing of considerable political support. In short, according to Jia: *“To ignore the comparative nature of security, and blindly pursue [it] absolutely will result in making the country less secure, as it inflicts unbearable costs and fails to achieve absolute security”*.¹¹²

China devotes a major chunk of its ‘stability maintenance’ budget on operating highly sophisticated 24-hour digital surveillance machinery.

Development as a Politico-cultural Instrument

As detailed in the previous section, since its inception, the policy of stability maintenance has been used as an alternative way to eliminate Tibetan support to the Dalai Lama.¹¹³ But, in 2008 (spring) a new wave of protests emerged in the Tibetan plateau in support of the Dalai Lama, prompting the Communist party to introduce a new set of security and administrative measures since 2011 to prevent future protests and unrest in TAR, specifically (several of these has now been implemented in Xinjiang and other Tibetan regions).¹¹⁴ Since around 2013, policies grouped under stability

maintenance have also been grouped as “social management”.¹¹⁵

Known as ‘social management’ the new set of policy measures included improvement in the livelihood of people, a shift from ‘governing to service and management’, and lastly, ‘administering sophisticated social control’.¹¹⁶ What did the CPC hope to achieve via this change in policy trajectory? First and foremost, starkly different from ‘stability maintenance’, social management policy is focussed on economic development and for the very first time China correlated stability and economy in an official statement.¹¹⁷ The idea behind such an assumption was that an improvement in livelihood would diminish the dissatisfaction of the people and their ‘inclinations to protest’.¹¹⁸ Now, analyzing the shift from ‘governing to service and management’, the idea was to formulate new ways to govern these regions that could effectively regulate and manage people rather than deploying the conventional techniques like directing, suppressing or disciplining.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, it has to be recognized that the principal instrument of the social management policy remains “the state apparatus for maintaining stability—the security and police forces, or the Political and Legal System (*zhengfaxitong*)”.¹²⁰ In effect, the foremost task of this policy remains maintaining stability and retaining ‘state’s control of society’ just like its predecessor but via a newer set of techniques of social control.¹²¹

Held in the month of August 2020, the Seventh Tibetan Work Forum (TWF), saw Xi Jinping stressing the importance of the ‘ongoing mass re-education campaign in Tibet’ perceived as an attempt of ‘ideological indoctrination’ in Tibetan schools.¹²² Xi said, “We must attach importance to strengthening ideological and political education in schools, put the spirit of patriotism throughout the entire process of school education at all levels and types, sow the seeds of loving China in the depths of the hearts of every teenager”.¹²³ This signals the increasing insecurity of the Chinese regime regarding the younger generation of Tibet getting involved in all facets of the freedom struggle for Tibet. According to Tenzin Tseten, a research fellow at the *Tibet Policy Institute*, the decision of the Chinese establishment to “return to re-education” rather than merely counting on the securitization strategy in Tibet is being assessed as a long-term fix to “ensure long-term stability” in Tibet.¹²⁴

The policy of ‘long-term stability’ also warrants a brief explanation precisely for its implication to Tibet. The long-term stability details the ultimate goal of social management and stability maintenance policies— i.e., all the control and security-related

policies “are supposed to lead to this outcome”.¹²⁵ In the Tibetan context, it has a more ominous meaning, i.e., creation of a society with no dissent. HRW says the Communist government believes that in the Tibetan region, this “extreme form of ‘long-term stability’ will be achieved by eradicating dissident ideas, which are seen as the root causes of instability, rather than just the symptoms”.¹²⁶ The propaganda and ideological works in schools are one way the Chinese regime hopes to achieve it.¹²⁷ One example that can be cited in this context is the campaign of ‘ideological indoctrination’, which appears to be proceeding well. The state media reported that in December 2020, a propaganda team from TAR visited Tibetan schools in Chinese cities to conduct ‘National Unity Education Activities’.¹²⁸ Apparently, it has been reported that one of the speakers from the TAR came to “give a [t]alk about the kindness of the party” and directed these students to “love the core, listen to the Party”.¹²⁹ In several cities of China, special classes and schools have been established since 1985 as a part of the Chinese establishment’s supposed plan to “improve the backward education and lack of talents in the Tibetan region”.¹³⁰ The schools are widely viewed by the state authorities as centres for ‘indoctrination’ of the Tibetan students.

To understand the plausible potency and the far-reaching impact of the Chinese indoctrination programmes on Tibetan youth via such China-conducted ‘schools’ and ‘classes,’ one needs to look into some data. Relying on the information provided (in 2019) by the Chinese official website– “Over the past 33 years, a total of 141,900 students have been enrolled in Tibet Class in the Mainland, including 53,000 in junior high schools, 42,000 in high schools, 11,000 in technical secondary schools (secondary teachers), and 35,000 in colleges and universities. They have trained more than 46,000 students from all walks of life in Tibet”.¹³¹ The Chinese official website also claims that ‘the Tibet Class in the Mainland’ has become a significant platform for integration, a mode for rapid social and economic development in Tibet and “the guarantee of talents for long-term stability”.¹³²

Curbing the Tibetan Linguistic Rights

The development of any community, region or society is welcome news, particularly when the ruling establishment plays a constructive role. Why then is the Chinese narrative of their commitment towards ‘Tibetan development’ anything but convincing? Why do the world and the Tibetan community themselves (for whose betterment the establishment claims the policies are being formulated) view these

policies and the intentions of its creators with deep-seated suspicion? A report by The *Tibet Policy Institute* (a research center of the Central Tibetan Administration), titled “Cultural Genocide in Tibet: A Report”, showcases how China’s ‘fundamental education policy’ in Tibet has been formulated through the “ideological viewpoint to stem any Tibetan character, identity and content”.¹³³ This, the report argues, was aimed to ‘win over’ Tibetan loyalty of many generations.¹³⁴ One example is how since the early 1960s, the regime initiated a reformation of the Tibetan language by making changes in grammar to make it closer/similar “to the so-called proletarian language as spoken by the people. The most pronounced example was the elimination of three of the five deldra or genitive particles *gi, kyi, gyi, yi ‘i*. These were considered redundant. The standard written Tibetan requires all five”.¹³⁵

The *Tibet Policy Institute* report also has a distressing anecdote by Muge Samten, a Tibetan scholar who had the direct experience of the Chinese occupation and the personal experience of living through the “the terrible decades of the Cultural Revolution”.¹³⁶ Samten recalls that during those times, almost all schools and universities in Tibet were shut, they banned the Tibetan language classes, even the fragments of Tibetan language used in materials used for propaganda, the scholar remembers “were so-called ‘reformed language’ created in the name of destroying the ‘four olds,’ opposing the bourgeoisie and to be closer to ‘people’s language’. This ‘reformed language’ was devoid of standard Tibetan grammatical usage and was far removed from the colloquial language spoken by ordinary people”.¹³⁷ Muge Samten also recollects how people who used Tibetan language in the standard format were attacked by branding them as “counter-revolutionary” and “revisionists”.¹³⁸

China’s ‘fundamental education policy’ in Tibet has been formulated through the “ideological viewpoint to stem any Tibetan character, identity and content”.

Targeting the Tibetan language and through it, the destruction of the Tibetan identity and culture is not a thing of the past. According to Tibetan sources, Tibetan children have been banned from attending classes outside their schools during their winter holidays— an attempt to further debilitate their connection to the native Tibetan language.¹³⁹ In northwestern China’s Qinghai province, authorities issued a notice regarding the ban in October last year to all cities and districts in the province, which

is “historically a part of northeastern Tibet’s region of Amdo”.¹⁴⁰ Such informal classes (during the school holidays) to teach the Tibetan language are popular in the Tibetan areas, as it has become “progressively less” desirable for government-run schools to use the Tibetan language as their medium of instruction.¹⁴¹

The March 2020 *HRW* report titled “China’s ‘Bilingual Education’ Policy in Tibet: Tibetan-Medium Schooling Under Threat” brings to the spotlight the establishment’s ‘bilingual policy’ in the TAR. The policy, *HRW* research says, is aimed at reducing the ethnic Tibetans’ access to education in their mother tongue and is “leading to the gradual replacement” of the Tibetan language by the Chinese as a mode of instruction in the primary schools across the TAR (except for those classes studying Tibetan as a language).¹⁴² Introduced formally by China in 2010, the ‘bilingual education’ policy was for schools in all the minority areas of the country– a globally accepted approach when it comes to minority education for promoting competency in both the national language of a state as well as their local one. The official position of the authorities of the TAR is that both Chinese and Tibetan languages “should be promoted”, leaving the decision of which language to be prioritized as the medium of instruction to the individual schools.¹⁴³

But the *HRW* report brings to light a different story from the place of action. According to the research, the TAR authorities are deploying ‘a strategy of cultivated ambiguity’ in their statements (made public) while deploying ‘indirect pressure’ upon primary schools, which are witnessing an increased allocation of ‘ethnic Chinese teachers’ on the campus.¹⁴⁴ With the increase in the number of such ‘ethnic Chinese teachers’ who do not speak the Tibetan language in Tibetan schools, the primary schools adopt Chinese as the medium of instruction at the expense of Tibetan language, the report notes.¹⁴⁵ Citing sources, *Radio Free Asia* reported that in recent years “language rights” have become a focus of significance in the Tibetan efforts to assert their national identity, with “informally organized language courses” in towns and monasteries across the Tibetan region being deemed as “illegal associations” and the teachers being subjected to detention and arrest by the authorities in China.¹⁴⁶

Employability is a critical parameter for assessing economic growth. Recent media reports indicate that Tibetan graduates from universities are finding it difficult to secure employment in Lhasa due to the inflow of Han Chinese (in the name of development) to the job market. Moreover, employment in China’s state-sector is mostly kept out of

their reach.¹⁴⁷ Another valid concern related to employment is raised by Karma Tenzin, a researcher at the Tibet Policy Institute based in India. According to Karma Tenzin, even if the Tibetans are hired for various positions in government service, they are frequently placed in sections that are not related to their major or training- which underscores the education-related discrimination faced by the Tibetans.¹⁴⁸ As China seeks to promote the Chinese language and culture, the proficiency requirement in China's Mandarin language becomes another hurdle in the employment opportunities of Tibetan students.¹⁴⁹

When it comes to addressing the question of employment opportunities for Tibetans under the Chinese regime, a critical name that resonates is that of Chen Quanguo and the silent abrogation of his "Full Employment Commitment" in the TAR region. Until he was transferred to the region of northwestern Xinjiang (i.e., in August 2016), Chen Quanguo was the Party Secretary of the TAR region. He assumed office in TAR in 2011 -- a tumultuous period when the region was still struggling to cope with the aftermath of the 2008 Lhasa uprising and the increasing number of self-immolation cases in the Tibetan regions.¹⁵⁰ The period also witnessed China's rapid economic growth and "soaring urban-rural income discrepancies". In China's minority regions such as Tibet, the gaps in urban-rural income became an indicator of the "inter-ethnic inequality" since more than 90 percent of the TAR's Tibetan population is rural. After assuming office, Chen sought to address the issue via a "full employment commitment," functionally restoring in the region the government's former "graduate job assignment system" with some variations. Chen urged the authorities to "do everything possible to create more job opportunities and positions".¹⁵¹

In the Tibetan context, how successful was Chen's commitment? Chen's full employment commitment is now assessed to be an expensive, bold, and a measure that is unsustainable (in the long run) for advancing 'social stability' in the restless region.¹⁵² According to China scholar Adrian Zenz: "With China's local government and corporate debt levels at record heights, the end of the full employment policy in Tibet raises wider questions about the sustainability of the state's strategy of buying social stability and popular support in Tibet, Xinjiang and elsewhere through massive state-funded and infrastructure-driven investments".¹⁵³

Xi Jinping is dreaming of building a new and "modern socialist Tibet", and emphasising the implementation of a new philosophy for development; but Tibetans

do not appear to be buying this narrative.¹⁵⁴ For instance, Sikyong Penpa Tsering stated that through its development narratives, heightened securitisation and escalated surveillance, China is deepening its subjugation of the Tibetans and tightly integrating the Tibetan regions with China.¹⁵⁵

As if the ongoing atrocities against the Tibetan population are not enough, in October 2021, Wang Junzheng, the official who is viewed as the architect behind the Uyghur genocide, has been appointed as the Party Secretary of the TAR.¹⁵⁶ Wang Junzheng, dubbed as the “Butcher of Xinjiang” has been appointed to the aforementioned position by the ‘Communist Party Central Committee’. The news of the appointment has been received with fear and anger, and *Free Tibet* reminds the readers that Junzheng is “one of the most sanctioned individuals on Earth”, with sanctions by the US, Canada, UK, and the European Union.¹⁵⁷ While heading the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), a hybrid economic and paramilitary organisation with a goal to augment “ethnic harmony”, Wang oversaw the construction, operation and administration of the detention facilities, which is feared to have imprisoned at least a million Uyghurs— another minority community in China.¹⁵⁸ The official’s prior position in Xinjiang (which was called East Turkestan and recognised as their homeland by Uyghurs where the CPC has used “terrorism” and “national security” as grounds for unleashing gross human rights violations) might have been a “testing ground” for further implementation of a similar system, now in Tibet.¹⁵⁹

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Conclusion

Safeguarding domestic security and securing the regimes’ rule is paramount for Communist Party ruled authoritarian China. The fear of Tibetan protests and assertion of their national identity have led to expansive and frequent securitisation policies of China in Tibet. The Tibetan populations’ inability to accept their invaders, China, as their legitimate ruler despite the continued repressive practices followed by the colonialist regime and the fear of international support deeply worries China. The Chinese policy of ‘stability-maintenance’, ‘social management’, ‘political re-education programme’

or even the narrative of Tibetan development is but an attempt to target, monitor, control and indoctrinate the Tibetan population (particularly the younger generation). While the objective of 'stability-maintenance' and 'social management' can be understood as to bringing 'long-term stability' in the restive regions of the country, 'political re-education programme' is an attempt to forcefully dissociate Tibetans from their national identity and make them disown their spiritual leader the H.H. Dalai Lama. The denial of employment and suitable growth opportunities, subjugation of Tibetan religious beliefs, the systematic onslaught on Tibetan culture, denial of freedom of expression and the suppression of dissent, and blocking channels that may advance the Tibetan language amongst the younger generation of Tibet, etc., can be perceived to have only one objective—obliterate anything related to Tibetan identity and forcefully assimilate the Tibetan population into the majority Han Chinese culture and China's statist ideology. Based on the details outlined in this article, it may be fair to assume that the CPC's acute insecurity and fear of instability are a strong guiding force behind the state-led efforts to annihilate Tibetan national identity.

Xi Jinping's development narrative in the Tibetan region resembles the narrative of the British colonial state in India. During their 200-years of gradual colonising of India, the British Raj articulated similar development narratives to lure and subjugate Indians under their rule. Indians were told that Colonial Britain was improving India in terms of her infrastructure, communication, transportation, education, etc. They also promised basic freedoms and democratic rights. The Indians rejected that narrative and fought back to win the freedom for their country. It might have taken 200-long years for Indians to regain their freedom but the point to be taken note of by China is—Indians ultimately fought back! China too cannot forget its history of fighting back against the British, French, Japanese and other colonial powers for over 100 years. No amount of development can compensate for the lack of freedom and usurping the sovereignty of a nation.

The expression of selfhood and cultural identity comes with a free and sovereign nation-state of one's own -- something which has been denied to the non-violent Tibetan community for 70-long years by a colonial China. As Penpa Tsering reminded the world, time is running out, and after a point, the fight may not be fruitful. For there is a younger generation of Tibetans growing up under an indoctrinated environment created by the Chinese establishment, and one cannot gauge how close these youngsters may have come to be forgetful of their Tibetan nationality and Tibetan culture. It is difficult

to imbibe among the youth their unique and distinct culture when they are being perpetually denied access to all aspects of understanding that culture!

As the modern world continues to proclaim its ability to promote democracies across the globe and protect the sovereignty of nation-states across the world, it should not be forgotten that for more than 70-plus years, the hapless and endangered Tibetans are continuing to steadfastly raise the demand to help them secure at least Genuine Autonomy in their own country. The time has come for the world and the international community to positively respond and support the Tibetan cause! Otherwise, we may see the disappearance of an ancient and priceless civilisation in the coming years.

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