

*Policy Studies 4*

# Beijing's Tibet Policy: Securing Sovereignty and Legitimacy

*Allen Carlson*



East-West Center  
Washington

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For Printed version contact:

Editor: *Policy Studies*

East-West Center Washington

1819 L Street NW, Suite 200

Washington, DC 20036

Tel: (202) 293-3995

Fax: (202) 293-1402

Email: [AsianSecurity@EastWestCenterWashington.org](mailto:AsianSecurity@EastWestCenterWashington.org)

Website: <http://www.eastwestcenterwashington.org>

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# List of Acronyms

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CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
INGO	international NGO
KMT	Kuomintang
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NPC	National People's Congress
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
TAR	Tibetan Autonomous Region



# Executive Summary

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This paper examines Beijing's Tibet policy over the course of the last two decades. It argues that the basic framework of Beijing's Tibet policy did not change during this period. On the contrary, in congruence with earlier Chinese policy, Beijing's stance on Tibet was at all times designed to ensure that the region and the people living there remained an integral part of China. Beijing's position on Tibet has always been grounded by concerns about defending Chinese sovereignty—specifically its jurisdictional sovereignty—over the region. Indeed one of the essay's main purposes is to highlight the extent to which the sovereignty issue, which has been surprisingly overlooked in the academic literature and policy analysis on Tibet, constitutes the central aspect of the current Sino-Tibetan dispute.

Looking beyond this fixed foundation of policy, the paper also finds that the way in which Beijing acted to secure its sovereign rights over Tibet has actually varied in a significant fashion over the course of two distinct phases. During the initial phase, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chinese actions seemed to concede that jurisdictional sovereignty was not just a privilege to be invoked by Beijing and imposed on Tibet but rather a right that was at least partly contingent on the acceptance of Chinese rule by those in the region and the international community at large. While the paper takes note of the significance of this move—and reports that it raised the hopes of many that a new chapter in Sino-Tibetan relations had begun—it also contends that at no point in this period did

Beijing budge on the fundamental issue of where the right to rule Tibet resided (in Beijing, not Lhasa, or even more emphatically Dharamsala).

During the second stage, which began in late 1987 and continues today, the essay reports that Beijing's position on Tibet has been defined by highly critical discursive moves, pointed diplomatic activity, a renewed commitment to use force to silence all opposition to Chinese rule, and the utilization of economic development programs to augment such efforts. In taking such a stance Beijing returned to substantiating its claim of jurisdictional sovereignty over the region via policies of assertiveness rather than consultation. Regardless of the economic or political cost to Beijing, Chinese sovereignty over Tibet was to be defended, protected, and reinforced. Cutting against such a trend, there have been limited signs of a slight moderation in Beijing's stance on Tibet over the last few years (especially in regard to the issue of talks with the Dalai Lama), and such moves have again created an air of cautious optimism about the future of Sino-Tibetan relations. The essay cautions, however, that insofar as Beijing's fundamental position on Tibet has not shifted during this new period of détente the prospects for a real breakthrough on the "Tibet issue" remain quite remote.

The key analytical questions addressed in this paper seek to explain why Beijing is so adamant about securing its jurisdictional claims over Tibet; why it showed limited flexibility on jurisdictional issues at certain times; and the factors contributing to the sustained contraction in the Chinese position during the last decade. The explanations of these issues hinge on three factors: the underlying strategic value of Tibet to Beijing within the regional security dynamic; the persistence of historically conditioned, sovereignty-centered values in elite circles in China; and Deng Xiaoping's policy of reform and opening. The first of these forces acts as a constant touchstone for all Chinese policies. Quite simply, China's advantageous geographic position in South and Central Asia would be seriously undermined by the loss of Tibet. Therefore, straightforward national security concerns preclude any serious consideration of ceding China's claim to Tibet. The second factor creates a level of concern about the possible loss of Tibet—and hypersensitivity to any internal or international developments that appear to jeopardize Chinese rule over the region—that far exceeds objective strategic calculations and infuses the Chinese position with a defensive hue. The third factor inadvertently introduced a new set of pressures for change. Initially Deng's line created an opening for novel

solutions to the unsettled situation in Tibet. At this juncture in the late 1970s the motivation for change was largely domestic, although international strategic considerations also played a role in framing the shift in Chinese policy. In contrast, it was the convergence of external pressures and internal opposition that caused the pronounced and costly contraction in Chinese practices during the mid-1980s (spurred by a surge in historically grounded nationalist narratives that crystallized China's claims to Tibet). Such a turn was sustained in the 1990s by Chinese decision makers' unrelenting commitment to overcome continued opposition within Tibet to Chinese rule (a movement that was given limited material support from external sources) and the perceived rise of new "self-determination" norms in the international arena.

The paper contends there are two especially significant aspects of these analytic findings. First, the causes of Beijing's behavior are eclectic—integrating collective memory, pragmatic calculations, and external normative and material influences within its frame. Second, contrary to expectations derived from the theoretical literature on the diffusion of norms and the intentions of those pressing Beijing to change its Tibet policy (human rights INGOs, foreign governments, the Tibetan government-in-exile), external forces have tended to prolong Chinese intransigence over the "Tibet issue" (by deepening concerns about the loss of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet) and, arguably, have forestalled the implementation of a more flexible policy line toward the region. In other words: the motivation for change and innovation on the Tibet front has largely come from within China. While this finding does not imply that outside pressure cannot play a constructive role in resolving the Sino-Tibetan conflict, it does merit consideration on the part of those interested in Tibet's future and suggests the need for a recalculation of how to engage China on this front.



# Beijing's Tibet Policy: Securing Sovereignty and Legitimacy

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China's Tibet policy stands at the turbulent intersection of contrasting Chinese and Tibetan nationalist narratives regarding the legitimacy of Beijing's rule over the "rooftop of the world." As is the case with so many conflicts of this nature, within such charged discourses the policies of the Beijing government toward the disputed region are mostly valorized or vilified with little room left for careful description or measured analysis. Moreover, much of the academic analysis and policy discussions of Sino-Tibetan relations are caught up in these contending discursive efforts. More pointedly, within the voluminous literature that has emerged from such studies there is a striking absence of comprehensive descriptions and compelling explanations of the evolution of Beijing's approach to the region.<sup>1</sup> While a host of historical concerns have been slighted as a result of this tendency,<sup>2</sup> in this paper I concentrate on developments that have taken place since the start of China's reform era (1979 to the present). This contemporary focus is warranted by the relative thinness of the literature on recent Sino-Tibetan relations and by the apparent shifts in Chinese positioning on Tibet that took place during this period. In short: any examination of Chinese policy during the reform era must begin by simply asking how much the Chinese stance has actually changed over the course of the last two decades.

I contend that the basic framework of China's Tibet policy did not change during the 1980s and 1990s. On the contrary, in congruence with

earlier Chinese policy, Beijing's stance on Tibet was at all times designed to ensure that the region and the people living there remained part of China. In other words: China's position on Tibet has always been grounded in concerns about defending Chinese sovereignty—what I identify as jurisdictional sovereignty—over the region. In this sense, studying China's approach to Tibet is a matter of determining how the Chinese have persistently acted to substantiate their claim to sovereignty over the “rooftop of the world.” Indeed, one of the main purposes of this paper is to highlight the extent to which the sovereignty issue, which has been surprisingly overlooked in the academic literature and policy analysis on Tibet, constitutes the root of the current Sino-Tibetan conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, it is clear that the way in which the Chinese acted to secure such rights since 1978 have varied significantly over the course of two distinct phases. During the initial phase, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Chinese position was marked by the implementation of a pair of relatively moderate policies. First, the region was given more autonomy (in terms of Chinese recognition of its unique status within the boundaries of the People's Republic).<sup>4</sup> Second, outright criticism of China's detractors in Tibet was largely silenced and moves were made to promote a negotiated settlement of the “Tibet issue” with the Dalai Lama (the Tibetan leader who has lived in exile in India, eventually settling in Dharamsala, since 1959).<sup>5</sup> Chinese actions in this phase seemed to concede that jurisdictional sovereignty was not just a privilege to be invoked by Beijing and imposed upon Tibet. Rather, it was a right that was at least partly contingent on the acceptance of Chinese rule by those within the region and the international community at large.

The significance of this move should not be understated. It represented a substantial shift in the mechanisms Beijing was employing to secure its claim to the region and those living there. It also raised the hopes of many that a new chapter in Sino-Tibetan relations had begun. Its subsequent failure, therefore, resulted in a general sense among observers of a tragic loss of opportunity. But if we bear in mind that at no point in this period did Beijing budge on the crucial issue of where the right to rule Tibet resided (in Beijing, not Lhasa, or even more emphatically Dharamsala), then it is possible to see the false promise built into such developments. They did nothing to bridge the gap between Chinese and Tibetan views on Tibet's status as a part of China.

More important, this brief interlude was soon followed by an unexpected escalation of conflict in the region in the mid-1980s. It was during this period that a second, more strident phase in Chinese reform-era policy on Tibet began to take shape. During this stage—which began in late 1987 (although limited signs of an impending shift were first visible in 1984) and continues today—the Chinese position on Tibet has been defined by highly critical discursive moves, pointed diplomatic activity, a renewed commitment to use force to silence all opposition to Chinese rule, and the utilization of economic development programs to augment such efforts. In taking such a stance the Chinese returned to substantiating their claim of jurisdictional sovereignty over the region via policies of assertiveness rather than consultation. Regardless of the economic or political cost to China, Chinese sovereignty over Tibet was to be defended, protected, and reinforced. Cutting against such a trend, however, there have been limited indications of a slight moderation in the Chinese stance on Tibet over the last few years (especially in regard to the issue of talks with the Dalai Lama). Such moves have again created an air of cautious optimism about the future of Sino-Tibetan relations. But in light of the fact that Beijing's fundamental position on Tibet has not shifted during this new period of détente, I contend that the prospects for a real breakthrough on the Tibet issue remain quite remote. Beijing continues to define Tibet as an issue of Chinese sovereignty. And whether or not one accepts the normative basis for such a claim, it places remarkably clear constraints on the menu of possible resolutions to the conflict. In light of such empirical trends, the key analytical questions addressed in this paper become: Why are the Chinese so adamant about securing Beijing's jurisdictional claims over Tibet? For what reasons have they at times shown limited flexibility on jurisdictional issues? What factors contributed to the sustained contraction in the moderately flexible Chinese position during the last decade?

In a broad sense three forces were crucial in determining Chinese policy on Tibet during the 1980s and 1990s: the underlying strategic value of Tibet to Beijing within the regional security dynamic; the persistence of historically conditioned, sovereignty-centered values within elite circles in China;<sup>6</sup> and Deng's policy of reform and opening. The first of these forces acts as a constant touchstone for all Chinese policies. Quite simply,

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claims over Tibet?***

China's advantageous geographic position in South and Central Asia would be seriously undermined by the loss of Tibet. Therefore, straightforward national security concerns preclude any serious consideration of ceding China's claim to Tibet. The second force creates a level of concern about the possible loss of Tibet—and hypersensitivity to any internal or international developments that appear to jeopardize Chinese rule over the region—that far exceed objective strategic calculations and infuse the Chinese position with a defensive hue. The third force inadvertently introduced a new set of pressures for change. Initially Deng's line created new space for novel solutions to the unsettled situation in Tibet at the end of the 1970s. At this juncture the motivation for change was largely domestic, although international strategic considerations also played a role in framing the shift in Chinese policy. In contrast, it was the convergence of external pressures and internal opposition that caused the pronounced and costly contraction in Chinese practices during the mid-1980s (one that was also fueled by a surge in historically grounded nationalist narratives that crystallized China's claims to Tibet). Such a turn was sustained in the 1990s by Chinese decision makers' unrelenting commitment to overcome continued opposition within Tibet to Chinese rule (a movement that was given limited material support from external sources) and the perceived rise of new "self-determination" norms in the international arena.<sup>7</sup>

There are two especially significant aspects of these findings. First, my explanation of Chinese behavior is eclectic in integrating collective memory, pragmatic calculations, and external normative and material influences within its frame. It may thus be seen as contributing to the recent movement in international relations and security studies toward bridging the apparent divide between rationalist and constructivist accounts of international politics (See Alagappa 2003; Elman and Elman 2002: 231-62; Fearon and Wendt 2002: 52-72; Kang 2003: 57-85; Sil 2000: 353-87; Suh et al. 2004). Second, contrary to expectations derived from the theoretical literature on norms diffusion,<sup>8</sup> as well as the intentions of those pressing China to change its Tibet policy (human rights INGOs, foreign governments, the Tibetan government-in-exile), external pressure has tended to prolong Chinese intransigence about the Tibet issue (by deepening concerns on the loss of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet) and, arguably, forestalled the implementation of a more flexible policy toward the region. In other words: the motivation for change and innovation on the Tibet front has largely come from within China. While this finding

does not imply that external pressure cannot play a constructive role in resolving the Sino-Tibetan conflict,<sup>9</sup> it does merit consideration by those interested in Tibet's future and suggests the need for a recalculation of how to engage China on this front.

The rest of this paper sustains these arguments via a five-part discussion of China's Tibet policy. The first section places the Chinese stance within a broad conceptual framework by focusing on the issue of sovereignty. The second section sets the baseline for measuring change in recent Chinese policies by considering the nature of China's rule over Tibet through the late 1970s. The third contains a detailed examination of Chinese practices during the initial reform era. The fourth focuses on events since 1987. The final section explores the implications of Chinese behavior during these two phases.

### Conceptual Issues

It is no exaggeration to say that sovereignty lies at the heart of the contrasting claims of independence and national unity (and the often maligned compromise of regional autonomy) that define each of the conflicts considered in "The Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia" project developed by the East-West Center Washington. Bluntly stated: in each case battles have been fought and lives lost for the sake of grasping the mantle of sovereignty. Certainly the issue of sovereignty lies at the core of the ongoing struggle over Tibet and China's Tibet policy. In other words: making sense of Beijing's position on Tibet means grappling with the issue of sovereignty. What is less immediately clear, however, is how to go about conceptualizing, measuring, and analyzing such an abstract, yet intensely contested, concept.

*making sense of Beijing's  
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The first step in this process involves coming to terms with sovereignty's general role in contemporary international politics. Along these lines, students of international politics have shown that sovereignty is the organizing principle in contemporary international relations. It is the principle that makes the defining feature of the system—the distinction between internal hierarchy and international anarchy—possible. It is increasingly apparent that sovereignty consists of a set of norms or institutions, rather than a single monolithic construct, and should be viewed as a potent vari-

able within the international arena (See Ansell and Weber 1999: 73-93; Barkin and Cronin 1994: 107-130; Biersteker and Weber 1996; Held 2002: 1-44; Krasner 1996: 115-51; Sorensen 1999: 590-604; and Thomson 1995: 213-33). In accord with the literature, I agree that sovereignty consists of a set of mutually recognized rights and obligations that states, via their status as sovereign members of the contemporary international system, possess. But I also argue that sovereignty contains four distinct bundles, or nodes, of rights: exclusive possession of a specified territory, jurisdiction over a defined population, political authority to govern within its own domain without foreign interference, and the ability to regulate economic activity within its territorial boundaries (See Carlson forthcoming).

The core structural aspect of each of these components is the imposition of distinct spatial boundaries between each state's affairs. Such boundaries define both the limits and status of state and nonstate actors within the international system, although they are often contested and rarely (if ever) unambiguous. Spatial boundaries are continually in the process of being created, reformed, and redefined through the interaction that takes place among political units over the terms of recognition or among them. In other words: the practices of those constituted by the sovereignty norm are what substantiate its role in the international arena. Indeed, it is through such practices that the specific meaning of sovereignty (its scope and boundaries) is interpreted.

*Jurisdictional Sovereignty: The Right to Rule*

When we disaggregate sovereignty in this manner it becomes clear that it is the jurisdictional aspect of the norm that is most at stake in Tibet. The central tenet of this component of sovereignty is that within the international system people are divided into distinct groups that are defined by the spatial boundaries of individual sovereign states. In other words: jurisdictional sovereignty is above all related to the relationship between a state and the people residing within it and, as well, to the extent to which both the domestic and international community views the state's reign as legitimate.

As the differences between territorial sovereignty, jurisdictional sovereignty, and sovereign authority are a subtle, yet crucial, element of the framework utilized in this paper, it is worthwhile elaborating on the predominant features of the three. To begin with, territorial sovereignty involves the boundaries of already existing states—a concern that at its core hinges on the demarcation of each state's spatial limits, often the sub-

ject of intense dispute. Within conflicts over such rights, questions of territorial integrity may arise. But in most cases the fight is over sparsely populated areas, and the issue at stake is where to draw the line between neighbors in a way that is acceptable to each of the involved parties. When the location of such lines is not contested (or has gained at least a modicum of acceptance), attention turns to the development of border regimes that can regulate transboundary flows between states.

Jurisdictional sovereignty, by contrast, is essentially an issue of how people are placed within each state's territorial domain. This facet of sovereignty revolves around the principle of national unity that holds those within a sovereign state together. If territorial sovereignty sometimes involves questions of national unity, jurisdictional sovereignty always involves this potentially explosive concern (in ways that are grounded by, but extend beyond, the drawing up of territorial lines between states). In short: it consists of the relationship between a state, the people residing within it, and the extent to which the state's reign over such a people (not how it chooses to rule but the very right to rule itself) is viewed by both the domestic and the international community.

Finally, the way in which a state rules its subjects—and the degree of insularity the state's sovereign status affords it insulation from external or international criticism on this front—belong to a separate component of the norm: sovereign authority. Involvement in the international human rights system circumscribes this right because acceptance of this regime implies that respect for, and adherence to, basic human rights standards at the very least proscribe a set of activities on the part of all states without regard for the prerogatives that each state has conventionally enjoyed via the principle of nonintervention. It does not, however, have any direct impact on the way states deal with jurisdictional issues.

A clear example of this distinction can be found by considering the differences in China's stance on three prominent policy issues related to Tibet. First, Beijing's handling of the Sino-Indian boundary dispute (much of which demarcates the outer limits of what Beijing designates as the Tibetan part of China) is largely an issue of territorial sovereignty. It hinges on a process of reaching understandings via distinct sets of interactions between Beijing and New Delhi (through both negotiation and the use of force) over the location of a specific stretch of China's external border. The jurisdictional underpinning of the Tibet issue, by contrast, is immediately evident from the fact that the key dynamic at play here is

***At stake in China's Tibet policy is the right to rule the region...a jurisdictional issue***

between Beijing and those claiming to represent the people of Tibet. At stake in China's Tibet policy is the right to rule the region—and this is a jurisdictional issue (albeit one that is rooted in competing conceptions of where the territorial boundary between China and the rest of the international system should be located). Finally, on the human rights front it is apparent that the Chinese have shown a limited willingness to acknowledge and address human rights concerns within Tibet (in response to international pressure). They have, however, adamantly opposed the introduction of jurisdictional issues into human rights forums.

*Sovereign Practices: Interpreting Jurisdictional Rights*

How, then, are such rights secured? In other words: what do those in Beijing, Lhasa, and Dharamsala do to substantiate their claim to jurisdictional sovereignty? On one level, this is simply an issue of force and control, i.e., which side has the power to impose its own interpretation of where sovereign boundaries should be located? But beyond such blunt instruments, a broad array of policy and representational practices are utilized. On the policy front, the key issues are negotiations, the positions taken vis-à-vis other states and international organizations, and the moves made within the disputed region. In composite such actions map out the concrete outlines of one party's stance on jurisdictional sovereignty. Framing such measures is a variety of discursive efforts designed to promote a particular interpretation of the disputed jurisdictional issues. Such moves include both the official discourse produced by each side in a dispute and the internal discussions on each side that explore and expand upon such rhetoric. In short, it is both words and actions that lend substance to an actor's position on jurisdictional sovereignty.

The main characteristics of a state's handling of an "internal" jurisdictional dispute can then be located in this framework by examining the extent to which its policies and discursive efforts vary with respect to three key vectors. First, practices may be designed to secure a group's location within existing sovereign boundaries or to accept (explicitly or implicitly) a loss of the state's rights over a segment of its population. In Russia, for example, we can imagine that practices may be enacted that leave little room for questioning the current reach of its jurisdictional rights over

Chechnya. Other practices, however, may seek to recoup regions and groups lost in the breakup of the Soviet Union or may cede Russian authority over groups seeking to establish their own sovereign states. Second, practices may be divided according to the extent to which they endorse confrontational versus cooperative solutions between the leaders of a sovereign state and those disputing its sovereign boundaries. Returning to the Russian case, Moscow may negotiate with the Chechens or take a much heavier-handed approach to resolving the Chechen dispute. And third, practices may reinforce jurisdictional boundaries or transgress them. Specifically they may promote a sovereignty-centered stance that highlights the division of jurisdictional rights or they may explore the possibility of defusing a jurisdictional standoff by promoting a nonsovereign solution (through the consideration of confederal models, the conferral of autonomy, or granting limited international status to a region). Moscow's positioning on Chechnya may again provide an example: on the one hand, Russian elites may treat Moscow's jurisdictional claims over Chechnya in a zero-sum fashion; on the other, they may suggest a decentering of sovereignty by creating a novel international (and domestic) status for the region.

#### *Material vs. Normative Causes*

Such a categorization of practices reveals that holding onto an established claim is the obvious default option for states and thus the most likely outcome in a jurisdictional dispute. But looking at recent developments around the globe (East Timor, Kosovo, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union) it is also apparent that the status quo does not always prevail and change is possible. In a general sense there are two competing explanations for why elites may articulate a stance on jurisdictional sovereignty that allows for a diminution of their state's jurisdictional claims. One, change may simply be forced upon elites. It may no longer be politically or economically feasible to hold onto a contested region. The source of this pressure for change may be internal—local opposition to the jurisdictional status quo may erupt or become more effective—or it may be international (creating attention, censure, sanctions, or even intervention). In either case, compromise is the result of a straightforward and rational recalculation of the state's interests in the face of new material pressures for change (See Krasner 2001: 324).

The second explanation is that ideational factors may play a decisive

role in such a dynamic. For example, in a recent theoretical study of sovereignty's general role in international politics, Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin argue that during the 1990s a shift took place in the international arena toward justifying sovereignty claims with reference to nationalist, rather than state-based, arguments. While they trace this change to the interests of the dominant coalition of states in the international system, they also argue that once a normative referent for sovereignty has been chosen, it has powerful consequences for all parties in the system (Barkin and Cronin 1994). Such claims were carried even further by those advocating an expanded role for the principle of self-determination in international politics. Although most scholars working on this issue agree that the norm is vaguely defined and hotly disputed, they still contend that the rise of self-determination norms (a development that appears to be indirectly linked to globalization) has reshaped the basic terrain on which internal conflicts and jurisdictional disputes are fought (See Sellers 1996; Shehadi 1997: 131-51; and, for a more cautious stance, Mayall 1999: 52-81). It has pushed elites in states around the globe in the direction of more compromising and less sovereignty-centered policies and discourses. In other words: it has challenged the legitimacy of privileging the state's claims over that of the "people's" right to self-determination (by an inversion of the two entities' normative status). In short, it has made status-quo interpretations of the jurisdictional order less tenable.<sup>10</sup>

The following sections demonstrate that neither of these explanations satisfactorily explains the main dynamics of China's Tibet policy during the reform era. Beijing's position was not the sole product of material pushes. Nor was it primarily determined by a new wave of international pressure. On the contrary, the Chinese calculus on Tibet grew out of the intersection of international and internal, interest-centered and norm-centered, forces.

### **Historical Background**

The preceding theoretical discussion opens the way for analyzing recent developments in China's approach to Tibet. But before proceeding with the study it is essential to consider the historical issues at play in the region. Such a move will enable us to trace the origins of the contemporary Sino-Tibetan struggle and establish a set of benchmarks for measuring the scope of change in China's Tibet policy during the reform era.

*From Ambiguous Past to the Modern Fight for Sovereignty*

Beginning in the late 1800s, Chinese elites championed the rights to sovereignty and self-determination as a way to clear the path for China to break out of its subjugated position in the international community. But the introduction of such principles to the Chinese political discourse—intended to unify the country—also led groups residing along China's vast frontiers to identify with such rights for their own regions. Ironically, in areas like Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia, where non-Han populations dominated, this development led to the formation of movements to overthrow central government administration at precisely the same time that those in China's main political parties were attempting to forge a unified Chinese state. Although these attempts to throw off the yoke of central rule were not new, the idea of establishing separate sovereign states based on recognition of the right to self-determination was unprecedented. Indeed, it posed a direct challenge to the KMT's, and later the CCP's, vision of a unified, modern Chinese nation-state.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century both parties dealt with the possibility of a divisive assertion of the principle of self-determination in China's minority regions via a dual set of policies. First, the right to self-determination for those residing in such regions was recognized via a series of assurances and guarantees that minority regions would be granted autonomy within the Chinese state. Second, such rights were then constrained by emphasizing that self-determination and regional autonomy for minorities came from the realization of national self-determination of the entire Chinese people rather than from any subset of peoples within the Chinese state. As a result, while statements and policies had a tendency to waver between recognizing differences and preserving unity, in the end, for both the KMT and CCP, it was the latter objective that came to define each party's approach to jurisdictional issues. But the inconsistency of promoting sovereignty and self-determination for all China, while limiting extension of the right to segments of the population within the declared boundaries of the state, created ongoing questions about the legitimacy of Beijing's jurisdictional rights in frontier regions, especially in Tibet.

*Liberation and After*

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949—and especially after the quelling of the 1959 uprising against Chinese rule in Tibet—Chinese sovereignty over the region was never seri-

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designed to silence the  
regime's critics***

ously threatened by either Beijing's domestic or international opponents. At the same time, however, throughout this period opposition to Chinese rule persisted in the form of sporadic armed resistance in the region and broadly critical views of China's claims within the international realm. As a result, Beijing's approach to Tibet during the first 30 years of the PRC was consistently designed to silence the regime's critics (through the use of force) and bolster China's claims to the region (through the enactment of a static set of policy and discursive practices).

On the policy side there were three main components to the Chinese strategy of securing Tibet's status as part of China. First, and most fundamentally, the Chinese simply moved to establish control over the region. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) spearheaded this responsibility. Indeed, "liberating" Tibet was designated as one of the major tasks facing the army in the early 1950s. The rationale for such a move (and the expected Tibetan response) was given clear voice in one of the first main policy statements on Tibet issued in November of that year. It read: "All the religious bodies and people of Tibet should immediately unite to give the PLA every possible assistance so that the imperialist influence may be driven out and allow the national regional autonomy in Tibet to be realized . . . so that a new Tibet within the new China can be built up with their help" (Shakya 1999: 46).

Second, on the heels of early military successes, Beijing established a legal framework for incorporating Tibet into China. The central component of this drive was the signing of the Seventeen Point Agreement that again made the Chinese position on Tibet's sovereign status abundantly clear. It read: "The Tibetan nationality is one of the nationalities with a long history within the boundaries of China and, like many other nationalities, it has done a glorious duty in the course of the creation and development of the great motherland."<sup>11</sup>

And third, within the framework of this agreement the Chinese then enacted a set of policies designed to strengthen the Tibetan economy and accommodate the obvious differences between Tibet and the rest of China. While this last line produced a host of modest changes in Tibet, it was also the source of intense controversy in China during the Cultural Revolution and ultimately collapsed under the weight of continued Tibetan opposi-

tion to Chinese rule and factional infighting in both Tibet and Beijing. Indeed, following the 1959 uprising in Lhasa and the subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India, Chinese policy turned away from the relative moderation of the early 1950s and was replaced by a more radical stance. Mirroring changes taking place in the rest of China, this stance became even more pronounced in the 1960s and 1970s as a heavier emphasis was placed on class divisions and leftist policies.

Chinese discursive practices were largely unaffected by such shifts in policy. Throughout this period the keystone of the Chinese discursive project was the claim that the traditionally close relationship between China and Tibet amounted to a long record of Chinese jurisdictional rights over the region. Such historical references were frequently paired with a presentation of the argument that Tibet had remained part of China even during the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century. Beyond these references to Tibet's past relationship to China, Chinese rhetoric invariably highlighted the host of apparent benefits the PRC had bestowed on Tibet since the early 1950s. Finally, the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile was denigrated as a reactionary clique bent on overturning the advances that had taken place in the region and breaking up China.<sup>12</sup>

*Chinese rhetoric  
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### **China's Policy in the Initial Reform Era**

During the late 1970s and early 1980s China's Tibet policy was based on promoting China's jurisdictional rights over the region. Yet the Chinese also began to subtly change the way in which they sought to secure Tibet's status as part of China. These measures included a renewed effort to establish meaningful contact with the Dalai Lama for the first time since his flight to India and the implementation of policies designed to enhance Tibet's autonomous status within China.

#### *Initiating Talks*

The first public hint of a shift in Beijing's stance on the Dalai Lama came via a series of statements issued by Chinese officials that welcomed the Tibetan leader's return to China on the condition that he accept Tibet's status as part of the PRC. According to a *Xinhua* report, Ngapoi Ngawang-Jigme told the State Nationalities Affairs Commission in

January 1979 that he hoped for the return of the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan compatriots to China for the purpose of “building up the homeland.”<sup>13</sup> A meeting soon followed between Deng Xiaoping and the Dalai Lama’s elder brother, Gyalo Thondup, to discuss the possibility of the Tibetan leader’s return to China.

During this March 1979 meeting Deng emphasized that apart from independence, anything else could be discussed in talks between the Dalai Lama and Beijing (Shakya 1999: 376). Indeed, Deng suggested that the exiled Tibetan leader send delegations to Tibet to discover the actual conditions in the region and thus allay his fears about Chinese rule. But Deng also used the meeting as a platform for outlining his motivation for extending the invitation and to specify what would be required before such a visit could take place. With regard to the rationale for initiating a dialogue with the Tibetan leader, Deng explicitly emphasized that he was making such a move because he felt it would help stabilize the situation in Tibet. As for preconditions, he contended that dialogue could only proceed if the Tibetans accepted that Tibet was part of China.<sup>14</sup> In short, while the offer to talk was a departure from the previous Chinese position, its goal of shoring up China’s claim to Tibet was entirely consistent with earlier Chinese practices.

#### *Explaining Beijing’s Opening Salvo*

This limited shift in Chinese policy was the product of two new influences. First, the international strategic situation facing Beijing had changed as China’s relationship with both the Soviet Union and the United States evolved. Specifically, it was at this juncture that both superpowers made new overtures toward the Dalai Lama. Indeed, Tsering Shakya says that in the late 1970s the relationship between the Tibetan leader and Moscow appeared to improve in a dramatic fashion (Shakya 1999: 376-77). Regardless of the actual substance of this development, Chinese records from this period generally show a high level of anxiety about such a possibility. They also show the manner in which the Dalai Lama/Soviet Union relationship was viewed in Beijing—through the lens of the contemporary memory of Russian “aggression” in the region. This frame lent greater significance to the warm reception the Dalai Lama was given in Moscow than its substance alone merited. Thus when the Panchen Lama reiterated the Chinese request for the Dalai Lama to return to China in the summer of 1979, he did so with direct reference to the

Tibetan leader's recently concluded trip to the Soviet Union and Mongolia. Indeed, the Panchen Lama warned the Dalai Lama not to fall "into the trap of Soviet social-imperialism and much less do anything detrimental to the interests of the Tibetan people and the people of China as a whole."<sup>15</sup> Such sensitivity was even more emphatically underscored by the Chinese response to subsequent Soviet commentary on Tibet.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time that relations between Moscow and Dharamsala began to show signs of improvement, the Carter administration continued to promote an initiative to mend Washington's relationship with the Tibetan leader against the backdrop of the White House's uneven emphasis on human rights.<sup>17</sup> The American moves were limited and indirect—and fell far short of the covert support the United States had given Tibetan rebels in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>18</sup> They did, however, make the region more of an issue in Sino-U.S. relations than had been the case since America's rapprochement with China in the early 1970s. The highlight of this policy adjustment was the decision to allow the Dalai Lama to travel to the United States in the fall of 1979 for a "nonpolitical" visit.<sup>19</sup> As these moves were made on the heels of Washington's drive to normalize Sino-U.S. relations—at a juncture when Beijing had placed increasingly strong emphasis on stabilizing such new ties—they did not evoke a blistering Chinese response. Rather, they pushed the Chinese to work more closely with the Tibetan leader.

The second factor for change was the deemphasis on ideology and class within Chinese politics that began to take shape in the late 1970s. In a general sense it removed the Tibet issue from the straitjacket of polarizing ideological debates and created new space for a consideration of modifying Chinese practices.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the broad leadership changes taking place at the top levels of the party brought in new personnel and led to a flood of new assessments of the situation in Tibet that placed greater emphasis on pragmatism and problem solving than on class distinction and revolution. In both cases, the ascendant reform faction in Beijing saw the solution of the Tibet problem as lying in economic reform and regional autonomy paired with an effort to improve relations with the Dalai Lama. While it would be an overstatement to argue that Tibet was at the center of the reformer's agenda, the new Chinese leadership did make the resolution of outstanding jurisdictional concerns one of the key priorities for the Chinese state during the 1980s. In his 1987 conversation with Jimmy Carter, for example, Deng suggested that there was a strong link

between his general reform agenda and the implementation of new policies in Tibet (Deng 1994: 242-43).

*Extending the Reform Agenda in Tibet*

Over the following three years (1980-82) Beijing went further in attempting to implement new policies in Tibet and collaborate with the regime's opponents outside of China. On the side of domestic policy, for example, the weak reform initiatives of the late 1970s were reinforced in the spring of 1980 via Hu Yaobang's acknowledgment of the persistence of problems in Tibet. While official commentary had previously admitted to mistakes made in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution, Hu's public six-point statement issued in conjunction with his own fact-finding mission to the region elevated the acceptance of blame to an unprecedented level. Hu admitted: "The people of Tibet suffered heavily during the past decade and more due to disruption caused by the 'ultra-left' line pushed by Lin Biao and the 'gang of four' as regards party policies on the nationalities, the economy, religion, united front work, and cadres. As a result, no marked improvement had been brought about in the Tibetan people's livelihood." He then emphasized the need for reform and argued that "regulations that do not suit the conditions in Tibet and are unfavorable to national unity and the development of production can be revised, modified, or rejected."<sup>21</sup>

The proposed solution to such difficulties was also set forth in Hu's statement. Hu placed heavy emphasis on the necessity of a thorough realization in practice of Tibet's theoretical status as an autonomous region. Specifically, autonomy meant self-government: "Tibet may formulate its

***In short: Tibetans were to be given more space to govern themselves.***

own decrees and regulations, in line with its characteristics, to protect its national autonomy and special interests." Hu also pledged to exempt the region from existing tax obligations, implement policies in accord with specific economic conditions in Tibet, and make room for Tibetan culture, language, and religion. In short: Tibetans were to be given more space to govern themselves. The limits on such self-rule were also clearly articulated in Hu's statement—in all cases autonomy was to be "under the unified leadership of the central people's government."<sup>22</sup> In other words: the change in Chinese policies was a tactical shift designed to secure Chinese rule over the region by utilizing new strategies (rather than

retreating on fundamental issues about Tibet's status as part of China).

This balance between underlying continuities and limited change in tactics dominated Chinese policy regarding contact with the Dalai Lama, as well, as Chinese elites initially decided to allow new fact-finding missions (even though the first such visit, in 1979, had led to an outpouring of public opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet). Thus in the spring and summer of 1980 two Tibetan delegations traveled to China. In a replay of the earlier visit, supporters reportedly mobbed these missions enthusiastically when they entered Tibetan regions. The persistence of such support for the returning Tibetan delegations apparently convinced the Chinese that allowing such visits was detrimental to Beijing's position in Tibet. Thus two scheduled visits were subsequently cancelled (Smith 1996: 571-72). This move ended the fact-finding stage in the dialogue between Beijing and the Dalai Lama. Nonetheless, the general initiative on promoting discussion with the Tibetan leader remained intact through the mid-1980s.

Along these lines, Hu Yaobang's five-point statement on Tibet in 1981 was of particular importance. In it Hu subtly expanded the level of flexibility in the Chinese position by placing an emphasis on Beijing's willingness to work with the Dalai Lama. This effort parallels the much more publicized overture made by Ye Jianying at roughly the same time via his nine-point proposal on Taiwan.<sup>23</sup> Yet, as was the case in Ye's statement, Hu placed significant constraints on the degree to which China would compromise. His invitation to the Dalai Lama remained rooted in an endorsement of Chinese jurisdictional rights over Tibet. Thus the key point in Hu's proposal is not the limited concessions it forwarded but rather its insistence that the Dalai Lama "will contribute to safeguarding China's unification, to promoting unity between the Han and Tibetan nationalities and among all nationalities in the country, and to China's modernization."<sup>24</sup>

Hu's proposal was soon followed by a negotiating session between Beijing and representatives of the Dalai Lama that took place in the spring of 1982. According to Western analysis of this meeting, the Tibetans chose to ignore the emphasis on national unity that formed the core of Hu's statement and instead called for creation of a Tibetan cultural zone within China. They also focused on the similarities between their situation and that of Taiwan and argued that Tibet was deserving of a higher level of autonomy than had been offered to the island after reunifying with the mainland.<sup>25</sup>

Such requests were not well received in China. An editorial published

in *Beijing Review* in November 1982, for example, made short work of the main points the Tibetans had forwarded in the spring. The comparison between Tibet and Taiwan was rejected as entirely misguided because Tibet was liberated soon after the establishment of the PRC and had subsequently “been an autonomous region under the leadership of the central government.” As for the request to form a unified Tibetan cultural zone, it was “not reasonable to change the historically determined administrative divisions simply according to the distribution of nationalities.” And although the editorial refrained from directly attacking the Dalai Lama, it did open with a pointed criticism of his increasingly high profile on the international scene. It rejected such activities on the grounds that the Dalai Lama “is not simply a religious figure but a political figure conducting political activities in exile.”<sup>26</sup> A much more confrontational rejection of “Tibetan independence” followed this relatively tepid criticism of the Tibetan leader. Indeed, talk of independence was condemned as “a dirty allegation of imperialist aggression against China and has been opposed by the Chinese people and most strenuously by the Tibetan people.”<sup>27</sup>

#### *Enhancing Autonomy Despite Growing Misgivings*

At the same time that skepticism about the Dalai Lama was beginning to grow, the Chinese continued to push policy reforms in Tibet (and other minority regions) that were designed to enhance the region’s autonomous status and strengthen its economy. The key institutional frame for this development was the reinstatement of autonomous rights to minority regions in the 1982 Constitution (rights omitted from the 1975 Constitution adopted at the tail end of the Cultural Revolution). While this was a national development it had special significance for Tibet. In commenting on such changes at the NPC, Yin Fatang, first secretary of the Tibetan regional committee of the CCP, emphasized they would help cement Tibet’s position as an autonomous region. Complementing this endorsement, Yin said that Tibet would continue to benefit from a “more flexible economic policy” that would accommodate private land use in the region, facilitate border trade, extend Tibet’s exemption from most tax obligations to the central government, and increase prices for Tibetan products. He also noted that Beijing had increased the level of financial support to Tibet to 550 million yuan in 1982.<sup>28</sup>

These policies were again advanced in 1984 by a dual set of developments within Tibet and China. On the Tibetan front, it was at this point that the Second Tibet Work Conference was held and yet another moderate set of policy measures approved. The keystone of these reforms was the economic “opening of Tibet”—to be accomplished by emphasizing the region’s potential as a destination for international tourism and encouraging Chinese enterprises to establish operations in Tibet. In addition, tax exemptions for the region were again extended (this time to 1990) and more than 40 large-scale infrastructure projects were approved for completion in the region prior to the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the PRC (Shakya 1999: 397; Smith 1996: 591). On the national front, the 1982 constitutional reforms were given substance by the passage of a new law on national regional autonomy. Adopted in June at the second session of the sixth NPC meeting, the law went into effect in November of the same year.<sup>29</sup>

*The keystone of these reforms was the economic “opening of Tibet”*

In short, as Warren Smith has observed, this move gave all autonomous regions (including Tibet) a more detailed and extensive set of rights and privileges within the Chinese legal system, but it retained the emphasis on maintaining national unity.<sup>30</sup> In other words: once again the goal of such new measures was consistent with earlier policies—securing each of China’s contested jurisdictional claims. This boundary-reinforcing intent is abundantly apparent in all elite commentary on the law. In *Beijing Review*, for example, Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme (1984: 17) observed: “By implementing regional national autonomy in a multinational country like ours, the right of each minority group to administer its own internal affairs and the unity of the minorities and unification and independence of the country are both guaranteed. This system benefits the fight against foreign aggression and subversion.” Thus while Han chauvinism was to be opposed and contradictions among the people were to be resolved, “activities aimed at betraying and splitting the country are problems of an entirely different nature” (p. 19). In addition, commentary in the minority affairs journals published in China returned again and again to the theme of promoting such an interpretation of the practice of regional self-government. For example, in 1984, Shi Yun emphasized: “China’s national autonomous regions are under the unified leadership of the country, [with] each national minority region enacting regional autonomy, estab-

lishing regional organs, and exercising autonomy” (Shi 1984: 3).

### *A Gathering Storm*

Against the backdrop of this reformulation of the legal articulation of minority rights within China’s autonomous regions, the Chinese offer to talk with the Dalai Lama was rearticulated in a statement issued by Yin Fatang at the Fourth Regional People’s Congress. On the surface, Yin’s speech reads as simply another extension of the Chinese appeal to the Tibetan leader to return to China. In a departure from the string of earlier invitations, however, Yin framed his appeal with a direct criticism of the Dalai Lama (a rhetorical move that had been largely missing from Chinese commentary since the late 1970s). Yin observed that the Dalai Lama’s “greatest mistake is treason. He is not only carrying out traitorous activities but also spreading erroneous remarks in foreign countries. He has done a disservice to the motherland and the people. This is very bad and he has discredited himself.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite such an open questioning of the Dalai Lama’s commitment to talks, in the fall of 1984 another meeting between his representatives and Chinese officials was held in Beijing. According to the same set of Western commentaries cited earlier, the Tibetans once again forwarded demands for greater autonomy and unification of culturally Tibetan areas within China. In response, the Chinese predictably rejected such arguments as entirely unacceptable starting points in the negotiating process and publicly voiced their growing skepticism about continuing discussions with the Tibetans.<sup>32</sup>

A *Beijing Review* article—indeed one that carried the main components of Hu’s earlier conciliatory statement on talks with the Dalai Lama—effectively captured these facets of the Chinese response. Although Yang Jingren, chair of the United Front Department, was quoted in the article as welcoming the Dalai Lama’s return to China, for example, his invitation was balanced with a thinly veiled criticism of the Tibetan leader. According to *Beijing Review*, Yang noted that some of the Dalai Lama’s “followers carry out activities advocating Tibetan independence.” Moreover, in a blunt warning Yang cautioned: “It will never do for anyone to play with the idea of an independent Tibet or to restore the serf system.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1985 and 1986 the twin projects of bringing about the Dalai Lama’s return to China and instituting a set of more moderate policies within Tibet continued. But the support for both initiatives was eroding

and additional signs of more confrontational policies began to mount. Such a situation was exemplified by the dual nature of Chinese preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the TAR. On the one hand, the anniversary was clearly seen as an opportunity to showcase the advances made in Tibet since the start of the reform era. Along these lines Warren Smith (1996: 593-94) has noted that great emphasis was placed on completing the developmental projects that had been approved by the Second Work Conference in time for the formal festivities marking the anniversary of the establishment of the TAR. In addition, new compromises on religious activity were instituted, relatively liberal regional party leadership was strengthened by the appointment of key personnel, and tourism and trade were promoted. On the other hand, at the same time the Chinese intensified security measures in the region and the influx of Chinese traders and businessmen began to exacerbate Tibetan sensitivities about the intent of Chinese policies in the region.

*Explaining Beijing's New Defensive Line*

During this period three main factors came together to drive Beijing back toward a more defensive and confrontational line. First, as border relations with India became increasingly tense, concerns that New Delhi might use the Tibet issue to gain leverage vis-à-vis China became more pronounced in Beijing. Such worries tended to create an increased degree of caution within elite circles on how to handle the Tibet issue.<sup>34</sup>

Second, frustration with the Dalai Lama's failure to offer a substantive reply to Hu's 1981 proposal had begun to mount in Beijing and strengthened the hand of those who were already critical of the cooperative policy line of the early 1980s. Dawa Norbu, for example, has argued that a fundamental divide between hard-liners and pragmatists in Beijing influenced what he calls the "prenegotiation" process. Yet, as Norbu emphasizes, "all factions in the Chinese leadership are unanimous in their view that Tibet is an inseparable part of China and that any question of Tibetan independence must be rejected outright as the basic preconditions for dialogue" (Norbu 1991: 366). In other words: differences on Tibet were limited to questions of tactics and strategy and never extended to the basic jurisdictional rights at stake in the region. Despite divisions among Chinese leaders on how to secure China's

*In other words: differences on Tibet were limited to questions of tactics and strategy*

jurisdictional claims to Tibet and factional struggles to gain the upper hand in Beijing, elite infighting would not produce anything more than the sort of changes seen in the 1980s. The combination of Tibet's strategic importance to China and the nationalist narratives that inscribed the region within the body of the Chinese state was simply too pervasive to be challenged by even the most intense factional struggles in the capital.

Third, and most important, in the mid-1980s the unintended consequences of China's internal reforms in Tibet became more pronounced. At this point it became increasingly apparent that such relatively moderate policies had raised Tibetan expectations for more extensive liberalization without actually changing the nature of Chinese rule in Tibet. Religious and cultural reforms had allowed Tibet's monasteries to begin functioning once again, for example, but had not extended religious freedom to practice Buddhism within such institutions in accord with historical traditions—thus exacerbating (rather than dissipating) resentment toward the Han Chinese.<sup>35</sup> In this sense such measures perversely created new sites of resistance to Chinese rule. On the economic front, while policies designed to stimulate the Tibetan economy did produce modest material gains in the region, they also introduced a flow of Chinese that heightened (rather than placated) Tibetan fears about assimilation and cultural survival. And while opening Tibet to the outside world did increase tourist revenues, it also opened the region to independent observers and media. Thus for the first time since the establishment of the PRC there was an international audience in Tibet that could evaluate, criticize, and report on Chinese policies in the region. At the same time, news from the outside world (especially news related to the activities of the Dalai Lama) could filter into the region more freely than during the first 30 years of the PRC's rule over Tibet.

None of these factors boded well for the continued enactment of the moderate Chinese practices in Tibet that had incrementally shifted Beijing's stance in the early 1980s. Indeed over the following years, as the Tibetan issue was further "internationalized," the original commitment to reform in Tibet and talks with the Dalai Lama collapsed. It was quickly replaced by a more combative set of jurisdictional practices that once again favored blunt, unilateral measures to secure China's sovereign rights over the region (rather than the relatively cooperative, consultative initiatives they had experimented with earlier in the decade).

The leading edge of this retrenchment is to be found in a series of fiery

official and elite condemnations of the Dalai Lama's expanding international itinerary—with especially heated critiques of all those perceived to be facilitating the Tibetan leader's rising prominence on the international stage. One of the earliest such developments came in June 1987 when the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution that was highly critical of China's rule over Tibet. Citing the Chinese embassy in Washington's denunciation of the American resolution, *Beijing Review* declared that it “grossly violates China's sovereign rights and territorial integrity.”<sup>36</sup> But the Dalai Lama's subsequent visit to the United States in September—and his shifting of the venue for Sino-Tibetan negotiations to the floor of the U.S. Congress—played an even more pivotal role in the contraction of the moderate Chinese stance on Tibet. This turn is immediately evident in the initial *Xinhua* response to the Dalai Lama's appearance. It chastised the United States for interfering “in China's internal affairs” and allowing “the Dalai Lama to conduct political activities aimed at advocating independence for Tibet and sabotaging the unity of China.” It also rejected the Dalai Lama's statement as an attempt “to create an independent Tibet to split the country and undermine the unity of the various nationalities.”<sup>37</sup>

At the same time that Chinese elites were articulating this stance, they were confronted with a significant internal challenge—the first of what was to become a series of Tibetan demonstrations against Chinese rule. While this is not the place to examine the immediate cause of the first of these protests on October 1, 1987, it is clear that from the perspective of Chinese elites it was intimately linked to the activities of the Dalai Lama and his international supporters. Thus Beijing repeatedly condemned such ties and increasingly treated Tibet as a region in danger of being separated from China by a conspiratorial convergence of external and internal enemies. For instance, a *Beijing Review* editorial categorized the “riot” as “designed in faraway quarters as an echo to the Dalai Lama's separationist activities during his visits to the United States and Europe.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the U.S. support for such activities was condemned as “a gross violation of the norms of international relations and an act of interference in China's internal affairs.”<sup>39</sup>

In short, then, the diplomatic initiative that had lost momentum after 1984 was eviscerated in 1987 (although the Chinese continued to pay lip service to the idea of talks through the late 1980s and into the following

***the diplomatic initiative that had lost momentum after 1984 was eviscerated in 1987***

decade). Thus we can see that the moderation in Chinese practices during the early 1980s was a tactic—one that had broad support in Beijing but whose endpoint was universally understood as the strengthening of Chinese authority and control over Tibet. When unexpected cracks in this project emerged in the mid-1980s via the Dalai Lama's promotion of the Tibetan cause in the international arena, the Chinese response was swift and unforgiving.

### **Events Since 1987**

From Beijing's perspective, the situation in Tibet was rapidly deteriorating in 1987. The Dalai Lama's effort to shift the discussion of Tibet's status to the international arena had resulted in an unprecedented invitation to speak in front of the U.S. Congress. At virtually the same time, large-scale public demonstrations against Chinese rule were organized in Lhasa for the first time during the reform era. We have already seen Beijing's defiant response to these events. During the late 1980s and throughout the following decade the defiant position was evident in each of the jurisdictional practices at Beijing's disposal.

#### *Suppressing Dissent in Tibet*

Throughout this period Beijing continued to emphasize economic reform and regional autonomy. However, such measures were overshadowed by the premium the Chinese placed on the suppression of open opposition within Tibet to Chinese rule. Although this turn toward asserting control over the region by force was most prominent in the late 1980s, it continued to be a signature of the Chinese approach to Tibet throughout the 1990s as well. Such a move was carried out via the implementation of an expanding set of surveillance and coercive measures designed to close off spaces that had become central to the production of dissent (monasteries) and intimidate those most likely to protest (the monastic population). These actions were initially less than successful. In fact they have been cited as one of the causes of the series of protests that took place in the late 1980s (Goldstein 1997: 87-99; Sharlo 1992; Schwartz 1994). With the imposition of martial law in March 1989, however, Beijing succeeded in curbing popular protest and concluding this turbulent chapter in Sino-Tibetan relations.

The use of draconian measures in Tibet (both in the late 1980s and after) incited a burst of international condemnation. Along these lines, the Tibetan government-in-exile, INGOs, Western states, and scholars alike

have emphatically argued that the Chinese are guilty of committing a series of brutal human rights abuses in Tibet. Such accusations have centered on the number of protesters killed by Chinese forces during the 1987-89 demonstrations, the scope of Chinese penal efforts in the region, and the ongoing use of torture throughout the 1990s. Although I will not attempt to ascertain the validity of such charges here, my analysis of Beijing's policies and practices has left me with the impression that the Chinese leadership has no reservations about using whatever means necessary to secure Chinese rule over Tibet. Without substantial field research in Tibet, it is nearly impossible to verify the numerous allegations of violations advanced by China critics. In any case, Beijing's use of internal coercive measures is of less importance here (regardless of its brutality and verifiability) than the way in which Chinese elites responded to criticism of such measures and moved to reinscribe the region within China.

My emphasis on this component of Beijing's approach is merited because it is through such efforts that elites staked out China's jurisdictional claims to the region and through which we can gain insight into the extent to which international criticism influenced the pattern of Chinese jurisdictional practices toward Tibet. Indeed the following pages show that the sensitivity of elites to outside criticism—while embedded in underlying historical concerns and framed by broad strategic factors and factional competition—was also contingent upon the source of such critiques and its jurisdictional implications. In general, it was the escalating level of U.S. support for the Dalai Lama that elicited the strongest Chinese response—and it was assertions about Tibet's independent status (rather than human rights abuses in the region) that evoked the most virulent Chinese reactions. In short, while there is evidence that both sources of external pressure influenced Chinese policy, more often than not it led to a hardening of Chinese attitudes (rather than the moderation that both Dharamsala and Washington hoped to see).

#### *Rejecting the Strasbourg Proposal and Promoting Limited Autonomy*

Even as tensions in Tibet mounted in 1988, China continued to cautiously promote the idea of the Dalai Lama's return to China.<sup>40</sup> The Dalai Lama's response to such an offer once again came via his expanding role in the international arena. While speaking to the European Parliament in June 1988, the Tibetan leader significantly scaled back the call for Tibetan independence. In this statement, which became known as the Strasbourg

Proposal, the Dalai Lama, while taking note of Tibet's historical sovereignty and calling for the region's self-government, conceded that Beijing could have the final say on Tibet's foreign relations. In making this concession he temporarily created a new space within which Beijing could preserve its demand for recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.<sup>41</sup>

Despite his apparent effort to defuse tensions, Beijing's official commentary on the Tibetan leader's statement fixated on the extent to which the Dalai Lama continued to emphasize Tibet's past independence while neglecting the positive impact Chinese policies had had on the region. In the words of a *Beijing Review* editorial: "The fundamental difference between the Chinese government and people on the one hand and the Dalai Lama on the other is whether to safeguard or split the unity of the motherland" (An 1988: 4). This stance was further specified through China's reported contact in 1988 with the Dalai Lama's office in New Delhi. On the surface, China reendorsed the idea of dialogue between the Dalai Lama and China. But in bracketing such a proposition with a heavy emphasis on the inflexibility of the basic jurisdictional issue at stake, the Chinese move also highlighted Beijing's critical approach to the Strasbourg Proposal.<sup>42</sup>

Analysis published in China at this time elaborated on such reservations. This work was characterized by particularly narrow interpretations of autonomy and the degree to which it revealed the persistence of historically framed sensitivities to the loss of Tibet within elite circles.<sup>43</sup> On the first of these fronts, Chinese scholars returned to their earlier arguments vis-à-vis the 1984 regional autonomy law. In *Minzu Yanjiu*, for example, Jin Binggao emphatically argued: "Autonomous rights are the right to self-decision-making under the leadership of a unified nation and the conditions of the constitution, laws, and rules. This type of national autonomy is not equal to the right of national sovereignty" (Jin 1988: 15). Making the same type of claim, but with reference to Marxist ideology, De Youde posited in *Zhongyang Minzu Xueyuan Xuebao* that China's system of national regional autonomy had effectively solved the problems that self-determination had posed for Lenin and the Soviet Union. De argued that the Chinese system differed sharply from the Soviet federal system by combining Marxism-Leninism and China's actual situation. De reported: "For China it is not suitable to bring up national self-determination and right-to-secession slogans; nor is it suitable to bring up a federalist system. The national regional autonomy system has already become an important

part of China's political and legal system and has been accepted by the peoples of each nationality. [It] should be continually strengthened and developed in order to eradicate actual inequality between nationalities and realize the mutual prosperity (*fanrong*) of each nationality."<sup>44</sup>

On the second front, the first issue of *Zhongguo Xizang* published in 1989 elaborated on China's historical claim to Tibet. In this journal Yang Gongsu, a noted student of Sino-Indian relations and Tibetan studies, returned to his earlier commentary on Tibet by focusing on the historical framework of the current controversy over Tibetan independence. Yang's analysis of this sensitive topic had a twofold intent. The first was to establish that China's jurisdictional rights over Tibet were beyond reproach. Thus he began with the standard refrain: "Since the Yuan dynasty, none of imperial China's neighbors ever regarded Tibet as an independent nation; all recognized that it was under the administration of the Chinese emperors. This history has been recorded in numerous books and become a reality known to everyone in the whole world" (Yang 1989: 26). The second intent was to demonstrate that from its inception the Tibetan independence movement was nothing more than the product of the efforts of foreign powers to interfere in China's internal affairs and divide its sovereignty. Thus Yang queried: "Now, where is the 'Tibetan independence' movement from? This must be discussed from the perspective of the plot of the British colonialists to separate Tibet [from China] in order to attain the goal of invading China" (p. 26). In briefly examining more recent events in Tibet, Yang cautioned against the deliberate misrepresentation of Tibet's status by "foreigners and certain irresponsible Tibetans." Yet he concluded that regardless of the actions of such forces, they could not fool genuine people or even less "change the objective reality that Tibet is part of Chinese territory" (p. 83). Yang's claim was seconded by a critical commentary written by Hua Zi that also dwelled upon the historical link between imperialism and the Tibetan independence movement. Moving beyond Yang's article, however, Hua warned that the Dalai Lama was "difficult to trust" and "will have to be responsible for the results if the current situation is unchecked."<sup>45</sup>

### *Martial Law and Its Aftermath*

Despite such rhetorical barbs, through the end of 1988 the two sides continued at least to go through the motions of attempting to start negotiations (Shakya 1999: 425-26). After the sudden death of the Panchen Lama

in January of the following year, Beijing again extended an invitation to the Dalai Lama to return to China to attend the funeral ceremonies. And in February, in an indication of the increasing emphasis being placed on Tibet, Hu Jintao (who was to emerge as Jiang Zemin's successor as China's top leader in the late 1990s) was appointed the region's new party secretary. But with the escalation of protests in Lhasa in December, and then again in March 1989, what little momentum these maneuvers had generated collapsed under the weight of the mutual recriminations that followed the imposition of martial law in the region.

This period saw a reinforcement of the three basic themes in Beijing's approach to securing China's jurisdictional claim to Tibet. Once again the protests themselves were categorized as the product of foreign instigation and "separatists in exile."<sup>46</sup> The Dalai Lama himself was largely spared from direct criticism, however, and invitations for him to return to China were not entirely retracted even after martial law was declared.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, all criticism of Chinese administration of the region was sharply rejected via the utilization of boundary-reinforcing jurisdictional arguments. Within this turn it was once more U.S. actions that particularly enraged the Chinese (She 1989: 18-20). And, finally, elites attempted to bolster China's claim to the region via a flood of statements intended to document China's historic ownership of the region and its recent contribution to Tibet's development.

In the absence of the violent suppression of the Tiananmen protests in early June, such rhetoric might have been enough to mute the growing

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international condemnation of the situation in Tibet. Indeed it is easy to forget that at this juncture neither the region nor its exiled leader had garnered anywhere near the level of international attention they now attract and, moreover, China was still the beneficiary of a limited reserve of international goodwill generated by Deng's earlier reform efforts. In addition, the apparent debate between Norbu's "pragmatists" and "hard-

liners" within elite circles through the spring of 1989 might have ended with a different outcome (Norbu 1991: 365-66; Goldstein 1997: 91-92). But the worth of such counterfactual thinking is limited by two factors. First, international opposition on the Tibet issue had already begun to take shape prior to June 4. Second, as Norbu himself pointed out, whatever the

factional differences on Tibet through early 1989, all Chinese elites shared the same basic position: Tibet was, and must always remain, part of China. In this sense, the post-June 4 condemnation of Beijing (and the conservative shift in Chinese politics at this time) simply increased the level of international criticism directed toward Beijing's Tibet policy and strengthened the hand of Chinese elites determined to keep Tibet part of China. In other words: even prior to Tiananmen, the roles that each of the main actors were to play during the 1990s had been clearly articulated. The events that followed simply altered the terrain on which the battle was carried out and, at least in the early 1990s, escalated the normative challenges to the basic Chinese position.

#### *A New International Venue*

During this period the internationalization of the Tibet issue gained momentum and changed the playing field on which the jurisdictional fight between Dharamsala and Beijing unfolded. The initial move in this direction took place in the spring of 1989, prior to June 4, when the UN Commission on Human Rights (and subsidiary organizations such as the Human Rights Subcommittee) became a significant conduit for international criticism of China's Tibet policy (Kent 1999: 56). Although the summer session of the subcommittee did not examine the situation in Tibet per se, its passage of a resolution critical of China's human rights record opened the way for more extensive consideration of the Tibet issue within the international arena. The awarding of the Nobel Peace prize to the Dalai Lama in the fall pushed this trend forward, and provoked a particularly angry Chinese response.<sup>48</sup>

The alarm in China over these events focused on the apparent attempt by the international community in general, and the Dalai Lama specifically, to change the normative framework for discussing issues of jurisdictional sovereignty. Such anxieties coalesced around what Chinese elites saw as the negative aspects of the new emphasis on human rights and self-determination in international politics. In both cases, their analysis did not just focus on the illegitimacy of allowing such norms to surpass sovereignty. They also emphasized the way in which powerful states (especially the United States) appeared to be manipulating discussions of normative change in order to attack China. The human rights cause was directly addressed in *Minzu Yanjiu* at the end of the year. In this issue a coauthored article outlined the improvements that China had brought to Tibet—and

then sharply criticized the use of human rights rhetoric by what were dismissed as Western capitalists, legislators, and Tibetans outside of China to split China, harm human rights in Tibet, and interfere in China's internal affairs (Guo and Zhang 1989). Such commentary was expanded upon in the pages of other journals. In a lengthy article commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the UN's Declaration of Human Rights, for example, Chen Guangguo documented the vast improvements in human rights in Tibet since the 1940s and extensively criticized ongoing efforts by Western powers to use human rights to undermine Chinese sovereignty over Tibet (Chen 1989).

Elites worked in the same vein to promote a particularly conservative interpretation (in contrast to the flexible analysis of self-determination appearing in the United States and Europe) of the relationship between self-determination and sovereignty and China's claim to Tibet. At the end of 1990, for example, Luo Qun's article in *Zhongguo Xizang* focused exclusively on the relationship between China's claim to Tibet and the two sets of norms. According to Luo, extending the right of self-determination to Tibet would violate the historical record that proved the region was part of China, distort the basic principle stated in the UN's human rights documents, and trample on the fundamental principles of international relations. Luo argued: "To promote 'Tibetan self-determination' is in essence an activity that incites national separatists to nakedly dismember national sovereignty. It is impossible not to express great regret about such patent trampling on the basic principles and norms of international relations" (Luo 1990: 5).

These themes were further developed in a series of critiques of the advocacy of Tibetan self-determination that appeared in the work of Michael van Walt van Praag, the man chosen by Dharamsala in 1988 to participate in talks with the Chinese. One of the first of these articles, published in *Zhongguo Zangxue*, harshly challenged both the legal and historical basis of the international legal scholar's argument. In it Li Zerui attacked his work as "an attempt to transform the illegal British occupation of China into a legal one; it is also an attempt to recover the imperial colonist's control in the 1980s and 1990s" (Li 1990: 16-17). For these reasons Li rejected van Walt van Praag's book in the harshest of terms, denigrating it as a manifesto on "how to invade China" (p. 21). In the following issue Zhang Zhirong continued the drumbeat of critical commentary and concluded his analysis by approvingly citing a comment attrib-

uted to Deng Xiaoping. According to Zhang, Deng had said: “There are some who would like (*xiang*) to split Tibet from China, who would like to take Tibet away; I don't think they have the ability (*benshi*)” (Zhang 1990). Commenting on van Walt van Praag's appearance at the winter 1991 meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission, Zhi Yun (1991) added that the scholar had not only misinterpreted the UN Charter but also distorted basic aspects of Lenin's work on national autonomy.

In the process of producing this rhetorical turn, elites were not only working to convince those supporting the cause of Tibetan independence of the illegitimacy of their position. They were also entrenching the already “sacred” status of the region within the Chinese state—making the limited attempts to work out a negotiated settlement that had been made in the 1980s even less palatable to Chinese elites. In other words, forcefully securing Tibet as part of China became even more important to Chinese elites as their right to the region was questioned at home and abroad. As an expert at the Institute of Contemporary International Relations noted later in the decade:

After some in Tibet began promoting independence, the question of Tibet became an increasingly emotional one in China. The position of those supporting independence is just so unreasonable. Yes, I see that conditions in Tibet need to be improved, but it is clear to all of us that this has nothing to do with the Dalai Lama's insistence on gaining a new political status for the region. There is absolutely no room to compromise on this issue.<sup>49</sup>

In the spring and summer of 1991, the pressure on Beijing on both the human rights and self-determination fronts mounted. But true to the commentary cited here, Chinese elites refused to compromise on either issue. Initially it was the promotion of human rights claims that appeared to give those critical of Chinese rule over Tibet the most traction. In conjunction with the Dalai Lama's private meeting with President Bush in April, for example, the U.S. Senate passed a nonbinding resolution that emphasized concerns about human rights in Tibet but did not directly endorse Tibetan self-determination, let alone independence.<sup>50</sup> This meeting and resolution constituted yet another convergence between the country Chinese elites were most concerned about—the United States—and a

***They were also entrenching the already “sacred” status of the region within the Chinese state***

political figure they were convinced was trying to divide China. Beijing's rejection of such moves once more turned to the language of preventing external interference in China's internal affairs and condemning the American manipulation of human rights to criticize China unfairly.<sup>51</sup> Along these lines, the Chinese produced a series of graphically illustrated articles designed to demonstrate the contrast between the brutality of the Dalai Lama's feudal Tibet and the remarkable advances in human rights made under the leadership of the PRC.

Despite such efforts, as well as intense lobbying by Beijing to prevent such a development, in August the Tibet issue was inserted into the UN Human Rights Subcommission's review of China's handling of the 1989 student-led demonstrations. In fact, in the course of this session the subcommission passed a resolution titled "The Situation in Tibet."<sup>52</sup> This move was of particular significance because it represented the first (and to date only) time the United Nations has directly criticized China on human rights conditions in Tibet since Beijing regained China's seat in the organization in the early 1970s (replacing Taipei). Yet the text of the resolution carefully skirted the even more controversial issue of Tibet's political status vis-à-vis the principle of self-determination. Nonetheless, in the reports that INGOs subsequently sent to the subcommission in accord with the resolution's mandate, the line between human rights and self-determination claims was quickly blurred. While not all INGOs took up this effort, many placed a conspicuous emphasis on just this facet of Chinese policy in Tibet.<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, China's memorandum to the subcommission protesting its decision anticipated this emphasis. In an effort to preclude such a possibility, the document made the case for severing the tie between human rights, self-determination, and criticism of China's position in the region:

The so-called "Tibetan people's right to self-determination" raised by some is nothing but an attempt to turn a matter essentially within the national jurisdiction of a country into one for discussion within the scope of international law. One may ask, at what time has China ever lost its sovereignty over Tibet? Moreover, which country in the world has recognized "the State of Tibet"? If the answers are negative, then what reason is there to apply the principle of self-determination to China's internal affairs?<sup>54</sup>

Reflecting upon these developments in the United Nations, Ann Kent has argued that the 1991 resolution was passed in large part due to “individual agency.” Indeed, her detailed description of the role played by particularly influential members of the subcommission in orchestrating the vote on the resolution lends a great deal of credibility to this claim (Kent 1999: 63–64). Certainly Beijing had not yet developed a strong, coherent strategy for defusing opposition to Chinese human rights practices within the subcommission. But in addition to the maneuvering that went on in the subcommission, it is important to emphasize the significance of broad structural factors in framing such an outcome. To begin with, international outrage over Tiananmen was still strong enough at this juncture to hold together a broad coalition of parties wishing to rebuke China’s behavior. Moreover, the need for Beijing’s acquiescence in the Security Council to the UN’s authorization of the use of force against Iraq had evaporated with the relatively quick conclusion of the first Gulf War—thus removing a crucial incentive for constraining international criticism of China. Later in the decade, the group of states most strongly opposed to China’s human rights record in Tibet began to pursue divergent policies to deal with Beijing. Moreover, China’s representatives to the United Nations became more adept at influencing the direction of debate within the human rights committees especially in regard to producing more positive portrayals of conditions in the region. As a result, China was able to frustrate all subsequent attempts in the commission and subcommission to pass additional resolutions referring to the situation in Tibet.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, Chinese elites relentlessly promoted a view of the relationship between human rights, sovereignty, and Tibet that directly challenged the one being advanced by China’s critics in the international community. At the start of 1992, for example, elites published a flurry of analysis explicitly designed to build a wall between the debate on human rights in Tibet and any discussion of the region’s political status as a part of China.<sup>56</sup> But the most authoritative and comprehensive articulation of this stance can be found in the Tibet White Paper.<sup>57</sup> Clearly the release of this paper in September 1992 constituted a watershed in Beijing’s stance on Tibet. Through its publication Chinese elites acknowledged that at the very least the international community had the right to know more about the situation in the region (in a manner that paralleled the 1991 release of a Chinese white paper on the more general human rights issue). Yet the paper also demonstrates just how narrow the Chinese acquiescence to

international dialogue on Tibet was—and how adamant Beijing continued to be about maintaining an iron grip on China’s jurisdictional claim to the region.

The title of this document, “Tibet—Its Ownership and Human Rights Situation,” telegraphs the main components of the Chinese argument.<sup>58</sup> Its contents pull together most of the critical strands that had been forwarded in elite circles to justify China’s claim to the region. Thus the document meticulously outlines the history of Chinese jurisdiction over Tibet and denounces every attempt by the Dalai Lama and his international supporters to separate the region from China. Following this lengthy exposition, the paper presents a wealth of claims about the improved human rights situation in Tibet. It concludes that criticism of China’s human rights record in Tibet could only be part of a scheme to “mislead the public and create confusion in an attempt to realize their dream of dismembering China, seizing Tibet, and finally subverting socialist China. Here lies the essence of the issue of so-called human rights in Tibet.”

#### *Sources of Chinese Intransigence*

While the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union did not figure prominently in the Tibet White Paper, an obsession with both developments constituted the main counterpart to the dominant human rights themes in the Chinese discourse on Tibet during the early 1990s. In the eyes of Chinese elites the collapse of the Cold War strategic order played a framing role in the incremental escalation of ties between the Dalai Lama and Washington at the end of the Bush administration and the start of Clinton’s presidency (Goldstein 1997: 117-20). A noted Tibet specialist in Beijing observed in a 1998 interview: “Yes, we placed a stronger emphasis on state sovereignty over Tibet in 1991 and 1992. The rest of the world changed at this time, and it was clear to us that the U.S. was starting to challenge China on Tibet to an extent that it hadn’t since the end of CIA involvement in the region in the 1970s.”<sup>59</sup>

Such comments reflect the rational calculations being made by elites in Beijing in the early 1990s in response to the shift in distribution of material capabilities within the international system. As noted in the introduction, such concerns played a key role in informing the prolonged retrenchment in China’s Tibet policy throughout the decade. But during this period Chinese policy and rhetoric on Tibet were also guided by a more abstract development in the international arena—the apparent rise

of new self-determination norms. Indeed, at least with regard to Tibet, the normative changes that followed the Cold War appear to have been read in Beijing as posing a greater threat to China than the end of the bipolar system itself. From the perspective of China's Tibet specialists, the establishment of the Baltic and Central Asian successor states appeared to contribute to a redefinition of the relationship between sovereignty and self-determination in international politics and posed a distinct challenge to Chinese rule over Tibet.

One of the most direct commentaries on this threat was published at the start of 1993 when two scholars from the International Politics Department at Peking University warned:

In the last few years, with the drastic change in Eastern Europe, self-determination has been used to oppose communism and socialism and has taken on new characteristics. Under these conditions, anti-Chinese foreign forces and internal separatists have written many articles about "Tibetan self-determination" and stated that "the realization of Tibetan self-determination is the most reasonable, ideal, and peaceful method for solving the Tibetan issue in the future." . . . Actually, this trumpeting of the theory of self-determination is a distortion and misinterpretation of the theory of self-determination and a deliberate misunderstanding of Tibetan history and reality [Yang and Zhi 1993: 90].

### *Demonizing the Dalai Lama*

The official discourse following the publication of the Tibet White Paper supported the main claims of the 1992 document. It was also animated by an ongoing stream of criticism against international support for Tibet and the Dalai Lama's failure to accept the Chinese position. In attacking both targets official commentary placed a premium on securing China's jurisdictional claim to Tibet and discrediting any whose words or actions challenged the status quo in the region. Within this framework the theme of promoting Tibetan regional autonomy was again given voice, but always within the boundaries of Chinese sovereignty. On the tenth anniversary of the passage of the National Regional Autonomy Law, for example, *Renmin Ribao* published an editorial that made a forceful case for a strictly attenuated interpretation of autonomy.<sup>60</sup>

The apotheosis of such a trend in the mid-1990s can be seen in the statement issued by Jiang Zemin following a national work conference on Tibet in July 1994. Jiang's assessment of the situation in Tibet first picked

***“Nobody is permitted to pursue independence or independence in disguised forms in Tibet.”***

up on the themes of development and reform that Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang had enunciated in the early 1980s. Arguing that stability in Tibet was closely related to economic growth in the region, Jiang underscored the region’s importance to all of China and observed that maintaining stability in Tibet was “crucial to the success of reforms, development, and stability throughout the country.” Turning to the Dalai Lama, the Chinese leader emphasized: “The differences between us and the Dalai Lama clique are not a question of whether to believe in a religion or not, or whether to exercise autonomy or not, but an issue of safeguarding our motherland’s unification and opposing secessionism.” Jiang added that the Tibetan leader was welcome to return, but he warned: “Nobody is permitted to pursue independence or independence in disguised forms in Tibet.”<sup>61</sup>

Jiang’s use of the somewhat derogatory term “Dalai clique” (*jituan*) brought the Chinese discourse on Tibet back to the harsh anti-Dalai Lama tropes that had dominated official claims and elite analysis before the start of the Deng era. Such critical views of the Tibetan leader had been percolating in elite journals since the late 1980s and were given voice in the commentary of lower-level officials as well. But the Chinese president’s choice of words presents a striking symbol of just how disinclined Beijing was to negotiate in the mid-1990s. Interestingly, this aversion appears to have been less the product of confidence in the reform process within Tibet or the result of international pressure (from either the United States or INGOs). Rather, it grew out of a fairly specific contempt for the Dalai Lama himself. The source of this contempt was frustration over the realization that no matter how the Dalai Lama might choose to frame his position on Tibet, he would not accept Beijing’s position on Chinese sovereignty over the region. While the accuracy of this perception may be open to debate, its hegemonic status in Tibet in the mid-1990s was supported in both elite commentary and private interview data I collected during this period—coupled with a growing conviction that solving the Tibet issue might best be accomplished by waiting to see what the region would look like without the current Dalai Lama’s involvement. As a well-known Chinese Tibetan specialist conveyed in an interview: “I think in the mid-1990s we realized that it was a matter of time. Much of the independence movement depended on one individual, and people thought that no one

lives forever.”<sup>62</sup>

The wave of elite commentary that followed the work conference expanded upon Jiang's pairing of a renewed commitment to economic development and a hardening of attitudes toward the Dalai Lama and his supporters. A celebratory analysis of the first of these issues appeared in *Zhongguo Xizang* in January 1995 (Bian 1995). In addition, *Beijing Review* published a series of articles that enthusiastically reported on recent economic and cultural advances in Tibet.<sup>63</sup> But it was the highly critical commentary on the Dalai Lama that truly stands out. The most striking example of such criticism appeared in *Zhongguo Xizang* soon after the work conference ended. In the article, attributed to Zhi Yun, the “Tibetan separatist clique” was condemned for making use of “violent and terrorist methods” in their opposition to the central government. The Dalai Lama's opposition to such methods was then questioned by placing each reference to such a stance in parentheses. More important, the author argued that the “Dalai's” support for human rights and peace was simply a tactical move. Such moves were characterized as providing the Tibetans with rhetorical cover under which they could both conceal and surreptitiously promote their separatist aspirations. Furthermore, the strengthening of the “renegade government” since the 1980s was primarily due to the Dalai Lama's activities. In a bold move the article then directly discussed how the Tibetan independence movement would be much weaker if the Dalai Lama were no longer around (Zhi 1994: 3).

This biting commentary was surpassed in the second half of 1995. The impetus for such an outpouring of critical claims was the controversy that erupted over the process of selecting and enthroning the successor to the ninth Panchen Lama, who had passed away in 1989. According to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, high-level religious leaders such as the Panchen Lama, or the Dalai Lama for that matter, have the ability via a process of reincarnation to control the form of their return to this world following their deaths. It then falls upon other religious and political figures to find such reincarnates. Smooth handling of this process—through references to the Chinese narrative of the historical role of the Chinese central government in monitoring past searches—represented a key component of Beijing's wait-and-see policy toward the Dalai Lama. So long as the Dalai Lama was outside China and Beijing was able to control the naming of top-level lamas, it would be able to populate the upper echelons of the Tibetan leadership with figures indebted to China. According

to scholars with ties to the Dalai Lama, those in Dharamsala were well aware of this possibility. Thus the Tibetan leader took the initiative to name his own choice for a new Panchen Lama in May 1995 before Beijing had a chance to announce its own selection.

It is unnecessary to examine here the complex set of intrigues involving Dharamsala, Beijing, and religious leaders in Tibet before and after this move.<sup>64</sup> It is sufficient to simply highlight the fact that these machinations poisoned the already troubled relationship between the Dalai Lama and Beijing and led to a new flood of invective from Beijing directed against the Tibetan leader. A *Xinhua* report on the Tibetan regional CPPCC's resolution condemning the Dalai Lama's actions provides a representative sample from the initial round of this critical commentary. The resolution stated: "We feel extremely indignant at the despicable trick of the Dalai Lama clique." It also argued that the Dalai Lama had made such an announcement in order to achieve his "final sinister goal of separating Tibet from the motherland."<sup>65</sup>

Much of this controversy was overshadowed by the dangerous confrontation across the Taiwan Strait that erupted in 1995 and 1996. Indeed, on the diplomatic front it was Taiwan that dominated China's relationship with the rest of the world during this period. In 1997, however, this began to change as international attention once again turned to Tibet and Chinese policies in the region. The first component of such a turn—that is, formal attention—was contingent on the Clinton White House's decision to place greater emphasis on the Tibet issue within the American relationship with China. In July the Clinton administration, via a statement by Madeleine Albright to congressional leaders, announced its intention to create a position within the State Department for monitoring Tibetan affairs (Myers 1997; Sautman 1999). In addition, the issue of Tibet was repeatedly brought up during Jiang Zemin's October visit to the United States. By the end of the year the Tibet post had been established and a new round of congressional criticism had been launched against China's record in Tibet. The initial Chinese response to such pressure was predictably negative. In early August, *China Daily* warned Washington to "draw back the hand that tries to stir China's business."<sup>66</sup>

Informal interest in Tibet grew out of a convergence between the outreach activities of pro-Tibetan INGOs and a surge in the pop culture status of the Dalai Lama and Tibet via the release of a series of high-profile Hollywood movies. Moreover, this trend closely resembles the pattern of

international targeting described by Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink in their work on the diffusion of human rights norms (1999: 22-23). On the one hand, INGOs were increasingly effective at promoting the Tibetan cause through garnering the support of musical and movie celebrities. On the other hand, the 1997 release of *Kundun* (a tale of the Dalai Lama's early life) and *Seven Years in Tibet* (based on the famous Heinrich Harrer autobiography of the same name) created a wave of unprecedented public relations for the Dalai Lama and Tibet. While the Western love affair with Shangri-la was nothing new—Hollywood had produced depictions of the “rooftop of the world” before—these developments elevated Tibet chic to a new level (Schell 2000). Interestingly this trend provoked an even stronger response from China than the formal moves of the White House—and in the process a new, cultural front was opened up in the war over Tibet's sovereign status. Indeed, in a globalizing world in which Hollywood images have gained almost universal currency, Beijing felt obliged to rebut the idyllic vision of Tibet advanced in these films. In a January 1998 issue of *Beijing Review*, for example, the Harrer film was systematically dissected. Dwelling on the controversy about Harrer's ties with Nazi Germany, the article denounced the German mountain climber as a “faithful Nazi,” a “downright political swindler,” and a “typical speculator.” The article then expanded its target by directly criticizing the Dalai Lama: “There is nothing strange in Harrer, a faithful Nazi, eulogizing serfdom and lavishing praise on the 14th Dalai Lama, the single largest owner of serfs in old Tibet.” The author condemned the Dalai Lama for not taking a stand against Harrer or the movie (Ren 1998: 22).

The universality of such hostility toward the Dalai Lama within Chinese elite circles was highlighted during a series of interviews I conducted in Beijing in 1997 and 1998. In 1998, for example, a noted Tibet specialist observed:

I can see that your government might have a strategic interest in supporting an independent Tibet, but I don't understand why people in the West like the Dalai Lama so much. He is nothing more than a separatist who is trying to hurt China. His talk of an independent Tibet is such an obvious distortion of international law and norms, and yet you still look up to him. This is really too much and shows how little Westerners understand the situation in Tibet.<sup>67</sup>

These sentiments also dominated a conversation with a high-ranking,

retired official who had worked for decades in Tibet and is currently affiliated with the Academy of Military Sciences. He argued:

There is no way we will ever permit Tibet to become independent, nor is it even worth our time to listen to the lies the Dalai Lama is telling in India. The sovereign rights of the state do not change. This is the case with China and Tibet. To talk about the so-called softening of sovereignty or the passing of sovereignty, of self-determination, is just another way of trying to undermine China's legitimate sovereign rights. Obviously, we will not permit this to happen."<sup>68</sup>

### *Hints of Compromise*

Despite this harsh rhetoric, indications of change in Beijing's position began to emerge during the same period. The first sign of such a shift can be seen in the Chinese decision to permit a small delegation of American religious leaders to travel to Lhasa in February 1998.<sup>69</sup> This move was soon

### ***Despite this harsh rhetoric, indications of change in Beijing's position began to emerge***

followed by a cautious change in China's position on negotiations. During the joint press conference between Bill Clinton and Jiang Zemin that was broadcast live in China during the American president's June visit there, Clinton and Jiang engaged in a remarkably frank exchange of their differences over the Tibet issue. At this time Jiang emphasized: "As long as the Dalai Lama can publicly

make a statement and commitment that Tibet is an inalienable part of China, and he must also recognize Taiwan as a province of China, then the door to dialogue and negotiation is open. Actually, we have several channels of communication with the Dalai Lama."<sup>70</sup>

Although such commentary did not radically change Chinese policy on the Dalai Lama, this statement was remarkable for two reasons. First, the setting of a live press conference meant that Jiang's remarks were made on one of the most public platforms available to the Chinese president. Second, the tone and content of Jiang's statement contrasted sharply with his address to the 1994 Tibet Work Conference. Nonetheless, indicating just how sensitive these issues were in China, the Clinton-Jiang exchange on Tibet (and human rights) was censored in subsequent Chinese reports of the press conference (Kolatch 1998; Sautman 1999). For example, the *Beijing Review* report on the press conference simply mentioned that Jiang and Clinton "stated their stance and views on human rights."<sup>71</sup>

Such notes of caution offered clear indications of the improbability of a rapid breakthrough in the Beijing and Dharamsala relationship. Indeed, while signals of renewed interest in talks were forwarded later in the year, official reports downplayed their significance.<sup>72</sup> On the one hand, Beijing's silence may be interpreted as a sign that both sides were attempting to keep discussions behind closed doors to prevent a recurrence of the accusations accompanying the total breakdown of exchanges in the early 1990s. On the other hand, whatever informal channels may have been opened by Jiang's initiative, very few indications emerged over the subsequent months that any real progress was being made in the negotiation process.

More important, international developments the following year once again led to a deemphasis of moderate jurisdictional practices and a resurgence of the broad concerns about the erosion of Chinese authority over the region. This external impetus for an escalation of jurisdictional anxieties was located in the Balkans. Although Chinese commentary refrained from directly linking Tibet and Kosovo, the ethnic cleansing and human rights abuses that were at the center of NATO's justification for intervening in Yugoslavia cut close to home for elites whose government's policy on Tibet had been criticized on very similar grounds throughout the previous decade. Thus it is not surprising that Beijing's condemnation of the war in the Balkans relied on precisely the same terminology that had long been used to denounce external involvement in Tibet. Not only was the U.S.-led war a case of interference and a violation of territorial integrity, it was done under the perversely distorted banner of protecting human rights and furthering the cause of humanitarian intervention.

A paper delivered at a fall 2000 meeting on humanitarian intervention at the Institute of International Studies highlighted the nature of Chinese fears over the Kosovo intervention. Pang Sen, a well-known legal scholar, argued: "Today, gunboat [diplomacy] is obsolete and has been replaced by destroyers and carriers. Intervention needs a more charming camouflage. So when the holy war against the Serbs was launched, it was in the name of humanitarianism. . . . The barbarian state which refuses to surrender is dismembered" (Pang 2000: 5). Within this framework, Chinese policies returned to established themes of promoting limited autonomy for Tibet within the boundaries of the modern Chinese state. Indeed, one of the clearest statements of such a line was voiced in an April 1999 *Renmin Ribao* editorial that directly attacked the Dalai Lama's position on these issues. The editorial began by ridiculing the Dalai Lama's stance as being

based on lies that overlooked the basic fact that Tibet had already attained autonomy. Moreover, this autonomy had allowed for the “unity of nationalities, social stability, and economic prosperity in Tibet, while earthshaking changes have taken place in people’s living standards.” The editorial concluded by urging the Tibetan leader to pay heed to such developments and warning: “The tide of history cannot be reversed . . . and the sun in the east cannot rise in the west; these dreams of the Dalai Lama can certainly not come true on the snowy plateau.”<sup>73</sup>

Yet cutting against the grain of such commentary, it was also possible to find a trace of creative thinking in Chinese discussions of the Tibet issue. Indeed, among the experts I spoke with in 2001 there was general agreement that Chinese policy in Tibet had reached a dead end and Beijing needed to consider new options to stabilize the situation in the region. One top Tibet watcher argued that Chinese leaders’ failure to come to terms with the central role of religion in Tibetan life continued to block the development of successful policymaking in the region. This scholar—who had previously advocated extremely stringent measures in Tibet—said it was time for Beijing to reconsider its policies in the region.<sup>74</sup> But he also made it quite clear that in his view Tibet had always been, and would always remain, part of China.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Recent Developments*

Beijing’s resolve to hold onto Tibet was clearly evident in 2001 on a number of fronts. To begin with, throughout the year the Chinese placed renewed emphasis on promoting regional autonomy. The year began, for example, with Jiang Zemin’s endorsement of the NPC’s revision of the regional autonomy law and its call to stimulate the economy in minority regions in order to “promote national solidarity.”<sup>76</sup> It ended with Li Peng addressing an NPC forum on regional autonomy. Li informed the meeting that regional autonomy was the solution to China’s ethnic problems and—turning to the main political slogan of the later Jiang period—was in line with the “three representations” (*san ge dai biao*).<sup>77</sup>

Against this backdrop, the Fourth Forum on Tibet was held in June 2001 in Beijing. The meeting forwarded few new initiatives on Tibet but reiterated the importance of promoting economic development in the region and ensuring political and economic stability there.<sup>78</sup> The work forum was followed in July by a carefully orchestrated set of observations of the fiftieth anniversary of the “peaceful liberation of Tibet.”<sup>79</sup> Indeed,

signaling the importance Beijing placed on this ceremony, Hu Jintao, then vice-president of China, traveled to Tibet at this time. His remarks underscore the historical underpinnings of the Chinese stance on Tibet as well as the limits on its current policies toward the region. Hu observed that peaceful liberation had allowed the Tibetan people to “cast off the yoke of imperial aggression” and usher in “a new era in which Tibet would turn from darkness to light, from backwardness to progress, from poverty to affluence, from seclusion to openness.” Even so, it was essential to continue to fight against the “separatist and disruptive activities of the Dalai clique and anti-China forces.”<sup>80</sup>

Despite such a warning, limited progress toward renewing talks with the Tibetan leader was made during the following two years. The first signs of such a development began to appear in the summer and fall of 2002 when Beijing permitted two delegations of high-profile exiled Tibetans to return to Tibet. While international groups supportive of the Tibetan cause reported that such visits might be “highly significant,”<sup>81</sup> the Chinese foreign ministry downplayed the possibility of substantial talks in the fall by studiously avoiding responding to a reporter’s question about them during the ministry’s regularly scheduled press conference.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, an end-of-the-year commentary posted on the official website of the Chinese embassy in Washington sought to cool down speculation about both visits. The posting not only emphasized that the Chinese government had not recognized either of the visits as official but also laid blame for lack of progress in talks squarely on the shoulders of the Dalai Lama. Further, the Tibetan leader’s commitment to autonomy was directly questioned: in reality, the commentary argued, he had become “a thorough chieftain of Tibetan separatism.”<sup>83</sup> In light of such commentary it is not surprising that the subsequent spring 2003 visit by a delegation led by Lodi Gari to China did not produce any major breakthrough in the standoff between Beijing and Dharamsala.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the Dalai Lama’s highly publicized trip to the United States later in the year (which included a visit with President Bush in the White House and a series of extremely popular public Buddhist teachings and seminars) appears to have once again hardened Chinese resolve against compromising on negotiations with the Tibetan leader.<sup>85</sup>

### **Lessons**

In sum, then, during the 1980s Chinese elites experimented with the possibility of stabilizing Chinese jurisdictional claims to Tibet through the

enactment of more cooperative and flexible rhetoric and policies. While such a move was intended to maintain a boundary-reinforcing interpretation of Chinese sovereignty, it placed greater emphasis on compromise than during the first 30 years of the PRC. After 1987, by contrast, Chinese jurisdictional practices were emphatically boundary-reinforcing, unfailingly dismissive of all who questioned such a position, and defensively intransigent about the scope of China's sovereign right to rule over Tibet.

The initiatives of the former period grew primarily out of Deng's call for strengthening China via a controlled process of integration with the international political and economic system. In the early 1980s this drive had largely united Chinese elites in their recognition of the need to reorient China's Tibet policy and led to a modification of each facet of the Chinese stance on the region through emphasizing a willingness to bolster the legitimacy of China's claim to the region via policies of negotiation and the granting of autonomy rather than confrontation and ideological purification.

The hardening of the Chinese position during the later period can only be understood with reference to two sets of new forces: one was the end of the Cold War and the surge in international (especially American) interest in the Tibet issue and attempts to influence Chinese policy toward

*Put differently: such moves were viewed as a threat to the very identity of the Chinese state*

the region; the other was the consolidation of opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet that created new challenges for Chinese elites. Both developments were viewed in Beijing within the frame of past injustices and a deeply embedded certainty of the legitimacy of the contemporary Chinese position. Quite simply, within such a worldview

these developments were read as direct and dire threats to the Chinese position on Tibet and as such elicited a particularly reticent response from Beijing. Put differently: such moves were viewed as a threat to the very identity of the Chinese state and the integrity of the modern Chinese polity and thus demanded strong Chinese opposition.

Thus it was a combination of changing international and domestic pressures that produced the initial contraction in the flexible Chinese approach to Tibet in the late 1980s. Local and international critics of China's position then reacted against such moves, and this development in turn elicited an even more unyielding Chinese stance. Out of this process emerged the confrontational environment that characterized China's han-

dling of Tibet during the 1990s. This pattern of behavior (and the causes underlying it) speaks directly to five broad issues. First, it calls for a reconsideration of the extent to which real progress toward a peaceful settlement of the “Tibet issue” could have been made at the start of the reform era. Indeed, it suggests that—despite the suggestion by some commentators that a unique opportunity for settling the issue was missed in the early 1980s (either by Beijing’s deafness to Tibetan demands or Dharamsala’s inept negotiating tactics)—in reality there was little possibility of a substantive breakthrough coming out of the aborted round of talks that took place at that time. Quite simply, the Tibetan and Chinese positions were divided by vastly different understandings of the sovereignty issue. Indeed, looking to China’s other jurisdictional disputes, I am struck by the fact that there was arguably a greater opportunity to transform cross-Strait relations at this time than there was to create a new framework for resolving the conflict on the “rooftop of the world.”<sup>86</sup>

Second, one is led to conclude that the recent talks between Beijing and Dharamsala are unlikely to produce dramatic results. On the contrary, Beijing is more adamant now about defending China’s claims to the region than during the previous high-water mark in relations between Beijing and Dharamsala. At the same time, the Dalai Lama can ill afford (owing to opposition within the exile community) to make additional compromises on Tibet’s status. In other words: while I expect that talk of talks will continue—and news of such meetings will undoubtedly elicit new optimistic press reports (especially in the international media)—there will be little in the way of substantive results from such a process and the stalemate over Tibet is likely to continue.

Third, it appears that the status quo in the region has actually been reinforced within the post-September 11 international system and the American-led “war on terrorism.” In contrast to the 1990s, greater emphasis is now being placed in the international arena on securing the existing state system against the threat of revisionist challenges from nonstate actors. Although the focus of such efforts has obviously been Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, and even Beijing has been reluctant to paint the free Tibet movement with the terrorist label,<sup>87</sup> the distance between self-determination movements and terrorism has been halved in the process—giving Beijing more room to deal with Tibet than had been the case (especially when read alongside the recent warming in Sino-Indian relations and Delhi’s apparent willingness to enhance its endorse-

ment of the Chinese position on the region). While this development may give the Chinese the confidence to try once again to deal with the Dalai Lama (as seems to be the case in the latest round of exchanges between Beijing and Dharamsala), it falls far short of impelling the Chinese to compromise. On the contrary, it would appear to give them even greater leverage in talks. Thus, barring a dramatic and highly unlikely new initiative on the part of Dharamsala, the status quo in Tibet is likely to remain in place.

Fourth, when viewed against the backdrop of Chinese handling of other major foreign policy and domestic issues, Beijing's relatively static stance on Tibetan sovereignty points to a surprising level of heterogeneity in China's emerging relationship with the rest of the international system. In brief, the sustained retrenchment of the Chinese stance on Tibet during the 1990s cuts against the grain of the more malleable position Chinese elites developed at this time with respect to other aspects of the

***Quite simply: sovereignty remains the organizing principle in the contemporary international system***

norm. On the one hand, Chinese elites are running full speed ahead to secure the status quo of Chinese jurisdictional sovereignty over Tibet in order to hold together the diverse regions and peoples that constitute the contemporary Chinese state. On the other hand, an incremental expansion is taking place in Beijing's willingness to accept transgressions across other sovereign boundaries. At the same time elites were

fighting to maintain control of Tibet, for example, they deemphasized the use of confrontational rhetoric and increasingly turned to international legal agreements to settle China's contested territorial claims. Moreover, they proceeded with a cautious dismantling of what had been an impregnable barrier created by their interpretation of sovereign authority through expanding Chinese involvement with the international human rights system. Finally, an even broader shift in China's stance on economic sovereignty took place via Beijing's negotiations with GATT/WTO and elite acceptance of the trend of globalization and integration.<sup>88</sup>

And fifth, the multiplicity of factors framing the Chinese stance on Tibet suggest that students of international relations and security studies, as well as policymakers and activists, must look beyond parsimonious explanations when they try to make sense of internal conflicts and sovereignty's role in international politics. Moreover, the circumscribed scope

of change in the Chinese position on Tibet points to the underlying robustness of sovereignty's role in international politics. Quite simply: sovereignty remains the organizing principle in the contemporary international system—and disputes over where it lies, and in whose hands it should reside, continue to generate contention and conflict not only in Asia but elsewhere.



# Endnotes

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This paper draws extensively on a chapter in *Unifying China, Integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era* (Carlson forthcoming). I would like to thank three anonymous reviewers as well as Elliot Sperling, Tashi Rabgey, and other members of the Tibet and Xinjiang Study Groups for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to emphasize that throughout the paper I use the term “Tibet” rather than “Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR)” (the official term for the area used in Chinese statements) or “Free Tibet” (the term of choice by many NGOs that favor Tibetan independence). While I shift to “TAR” when directly discussing issues of regional autonomy, I prefer to use the generic “Tibet” because I think it is the most neutral term available to describe the region.

1. Partial exceptions to such oversights include Avedon (1984), Grunfeld (1996), Shakya (1999), Norbu (1991), Sharlo (1992), Smith (1996), Goldstein (1997), and Sautman (1999).
2. See Elliot Sperling “History, Politics, Culture: The Background to the Tibet-China Conflict,” to be reviewed for inclusion in this series for a discussion of such efforts.
3. Michel Oksenberg touched on this possibility in a brief chapter in Stephen Krasner’s edited volume *Problematic Sovereignty*, but he focused primarily on the initial impact of the introduction of Westphalian principles on Sino-Tibetan relations in the first half of the twentieth century and did not explore in any detail the issue of the contemporary conflict on the “rooftop of the world.” See Oksenberg (2001).
4. For a more detailed discussion of this issue see Warren Smith, “Tibetan Autonomy: Archaic or Futuristic?” to be reviewed for publication in this series.

5. In this paper I treat the Chinese stance on negotiations primarily within the framework of my examination of the main contours of Chinese policy on Tibet. For a more focused consideration of the negotiation process itself see Tashi Ragbey's "Sino-Tibetan Engagement in the Post-Mao Era: Lessons and Prospects," to be reviewed for inclusion in this series.
6. In this paper I use the term "elite" to refer to the group of leaders, policymakers, and scholars in Beijing that are involved in making China's Tibet policy and leave aside the views and actions of both Han and Tibetan officials in Tibet. Nor do I address the issue of public opinion. My decision was based largely on my desire to examine how those at the center (Beijing) were attempting to deal with the periphery, rather than how those in the region were reacting to (and implementing) Beijing's policy directives or how policy is related to popular sentiment.
7. I use the term "norm" throughout this paper in a way that is consistent with Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's definition of it "as a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (1998: 891).
8. For a prominent example of this type of work see Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999).
9. Indeed, external pressure has played a role here and has resulted in substantive change in other areas including human rights and economic policy. See Carlson (forthcoming).
10. As I discuss later in the section titled "Lessons," the U.S.-led "war on terrorism" may be having a profound impact on this incipient change. In short, peoples fighting against status-quo jurisdictional orders who were able to muster international support for such movements via self-determination claims are now fighting against state-led drives to label all such movements "terrorist."
11. This translation is from a text made available by the Tibet Information Network, an organization that is highly critical of Chinese policies in Tibet. See <http://www.tibetinfo.net/publications/docs/spa.htm>.
12. As all those familiar with the Sino-Tibetan conflict are aware, the Dalai Lama and Tibetan government-in-exile dispute all of these claims. It is not my intent here to pass judgment on the relative merit of either Beijing or Dharamsala's narratives but rather to examine how and why China's Tibet policy (both words and action) has evolved.
13. "Dalai Lama Urged to Return to Motherland," *Xinhua*, January 27, 1979, Lexis-Nexis.
14. These observations draw on Shakya (1999: 376) and Norbu (1991: 352-53).
15. See "Banqen Erdini Urges Dalai Lama to Return to China," *Xinhua*, June 22, 1979, Lexis-Nexis.
16. See "People's Daily Unmasks Moscow's Designs Over Tibet," *Xinhua*, January 2, 1981, Lexis-Nexis.
17. I would like to thank Elliot Sperling for calling my attention to this side of the new international equation on Tibet during the late 1970s.

18. For a recent history of these operations see Knaus (1999).
19. For a brief description of the Tibetan leader's arrival in the United States see Lescaze (1979). See also Woodward, Mark, and Nagorski (1979). When read in conjunction with the recent coverage of the Dalai Lama's visit to the United States in 2003, the surge of American interest in, and knowledge about, the Tibetan leader is quite striking.
20. Shakya has made similar claims (1999: 371-74).
21. "Develop Tibetan Economy, Raise People's Living Standards, Say Party Leaders," *Xinhua*, May 31, 1980, Lexis-Nexis.
22. Ibid.
23. In September 1981, Ye Jianying, in his position as chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), issued a nine-point statement that reiterated China's 1979 offer to conduct talks with the KMT and called for the resumption of trade, communication, and travel between China and Taiwan. See "Chairman Ye Jianying's Elaborations on Policy Concerning Return of Taiwan to Motherland and Peaceful Reunification," *Beijing Review* 40 (1981): 10-11.
24. "China's Senior Official Reaffirms Five-Point Policy Toward Dalai Lama," *Xinhua*, November 27, 1984, Lexis-Nexis. While Hu's statement was originally issued in 1981, I did not find public acknowledgment of it in the Chinese press until 1984.
25. See Smith (1996: 573) and Shakya (1999: 387); for a different take on this meeting see Goldstein (1997).
26. "Policy Towards the Dalai Lama," *Beijing Review* 46 (1982): 3.
27. Ibid., pp. 3-4.
28. "Yin Fatang on Regional Autonomy in Tibet," *Xinhua*, December 8, 1982, Lexis-Nexis.
29. See "Regional Autonomy for Minorities," *Beijing Review* 24 (1984): 4-5.
30. For a detailed review of both these developments see Smith (1996: 584-95).
31. "Yin Fatang Urges Dalai Lama to Admit Mistakes and Return" (Lhasa, Tibet, regional service, May 13, 1984), BBC Summary of World Broadcasts.
32. Smith (1996), Shakya (1999), and Norbu (1991) all make this point.
33. *Beijing Review* 49 (1984): 10.
34. For a comprehensive review of the Sino-Indian relationship that touches on this point see Garver (2001).
35. Sharlo (1992) has traced this development in some detail.
36. "China Objects to 2 U.S. Amendments," *Beijing Review* 27 (1987): 7.
37. "Chinese Embassy Accuses U.S. Congressional Members of Allowing Dalai Lama to Sabotage China's Unity," *Xinhua*, September 21, 1987, Lexis-Nexis.
38. "The Tibet Myth vs. Reality," *Beijing Review* 41 (1987): 4.
39. "Riot Aimed at Splitting Motherland Occurs in Lhasa," *Xinhua*, October 2, 1987, Lexis-Nexis.
40. See "Police Free 59 Held Over Riots in Tibet, Tibetan Resolution Blasts Separatists," *Beijing Review* 5 (1988): 12-13. See also "Tibetan Leaders on the Tibet Situation," *Beijing Review* 16 (1988): 18-20.

41. For a full text of the statement see <http://www.tibet.com/Proposal/strasbourg.html>. As an anonymous reviewer of this paper pointed out, the subsequent appointment of a non-Tibetan to the Dalai Lama's negotiating team only heightened suspicion of the Dalai Lama's proposal in Beijing and was seen in China as additional evidence of foreign interference in China's affairs.
42. "China Hopes for Direct Talks with Dalai Lama," *Xinhua*, September 23, 1988, Lexis-Nexis.
43. Throughout this paper I make use of articles that appeared in the semiofficial journals published by research institutes in China. Specifically I did a thorough survey of the following publications: *Minzu Yanjiu*, *Zhongyang Minzu Xueyuan Xuebao*, *Xizang Yanjiu*, *Zhongguo Zangxue*, and *Zhongguo Xizang*. I turn to such sources because they offer valuable (and to this point largely unexamined) data on the Chinese stance on Tibet. Moreover such journals tend to be more frank and detailed than official media outlets (such as *Xinhua* and *Beijing Review*). In short, they reveal the way in which China's Tibet experts talk to each other about the region and thus open a new vantage point for analyzing Chinese positioning on the region. It is important to point out, however, that the arguments which appear in these journals are expected to conform with the broad outlines of official policy at any given time and as such may not be quite as illuminating as *neibu* (internal) publications that may debate the same issues even more directly.
44. See De (1989: 60). De's writing on this topic closely follows the work he did on the same issue in the 1950s. I thank Elliot Sperling for bringing this point to my attention.
45. See Hua (1989: 30). Articles attributed to Hua Zi appeared quite frequently in the 1990s and generally articulated a stance that was highly critical of the Dalai Lama. The name Hua Zi is widely thought to be a pseudonym, however; its literal meaning is "Children of China." See Smith (2003).
46. "Lhasa: From Riots to Martial Law," *Beijing Review* 13 (1989): 33.
47. "Li Peng on Tibet Issue," *Xinhua*, March 20, 1989, Lexis-Nexis.
48. "China Indignant Over Nobel Committee Awarding Dalai Lama with Nobel Peace Prize," *Xinhua*, October 7, 1989, Lexis-Nexis.
49. Personal interview, Institute of Contemporary International Relations, May 25, 1998.
50. But later the same year the House did attach a resolution to the Foreign Relations Act that characterized Tibet as an occupied country. See Smith (1996: 622-23).
51. "Bush-Dalai Lama Meeting Protested," *Beijing Review* 17 (1991): 11.
52. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/10. For a detailed discussion of these meetings see Kent (1999: 63-64).
53. For examples see reports by Human Rights Advocates (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/NGO/12, 1 August 1991: 2) and the Pax-Christi-International Catholic Peace Movement (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/NGO/24, 9 August 1991: 3).
54. E/CN.4/1991/73: 2.

55. See Carlson (forthcoming) for a more detailed discussion of the shifts in international pressure during the 1990s on China in regards to human rights.
56. For an example of such commentary see Duojie (1992).
57. For a full English-language text of this document go to <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/index.htm>.
58. In Chinese the words “*zhuquan guishu*”—literally “sovereign jurisdiction” or “belonging” rather than the more neutral “ownership” that appears in the title of the English-language document—made this point even more directly.
59. Personal interview, Peking University, April 8, 1998.
60. “‘*Renmin Ribao*’ Editorial Marks Anniversary of Minorities Autonomy Law,” *Xinhua*, September 19, 1994, Lexis-Nexis.
61. “Jiang Zemin on Stability in Tibet,” *Xinhua*, July 26, 1994, Lexis-Nexis. Using internal documents from the conference Warren Smith has emphasized the extent to which the work forum consolidated a policy of tight political control paired with an escalation of economic aid for the region. Without relying on these sources, one can see from this public statement the accuracy of such a conclusion.
62. Personal interview, Peking University, December 20, 2001.
63. “Tibet Special,” *Beijing Review* 32 (1995): 9-26.
64. For a journalistic account see Hinton (1999).
65. “Dalai’s Claim Refuted as ‘Sinister Conspiracy,’” *Xinhua*, May 24, 1995.
66. See “China Slams U.S. Decision to Appoint Tibet Affairs Official,” *AP*, August 6, 1997.
67. Personal interview, Peking University, May 4, 1998.
68. Personal interview, Academy of Military Sciences, July 1, 1998.
69. “U.S. Religious Leaders Visit Prison in Lhasa,” *Beijing Review* 11 (1998): 6.
70. “Chinese, U.S. Presidents Give Live News Conference,” China Central TV, Beijing, June 27, 1998, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific.
71. “Jiang and Clinton Meet the Press,” *Beijing Review* 29 (1998): 13.
72. “Tibet Welcomes Return of Overseas Tibetans,” *Beijing Review* 36 (1998): 5.
73. “Paper Criticizes Dalai Lama’s Notion of Autonomy,” *Xinhua*, April 24, 1999, in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts.
74. Personal interview, Peking University, December 20, 2001.
75. *Ibid.*
76. “Jiang Zemin Signs Order Announcing Revision of Minority Self-Rule Law,” *Xinhua*, March 1, 2001, Lexis-Nexis.
77. “China’s Li Peng Addresses Forum on Regional National Autonomy Law,” *Xinhua*, December 6, 2001, Lexis-Nexis.
78. “Initial Reports on Fourth Tibet Work Forum,” Tibet Information Network, [www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/nu270701.htm](http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/nu270701.htm).
79. “Chinese Vice-President in Lhasa to Mark Anniversary of ‘Peaceful Liberation,’” Tibet Information Network, [www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/nu200701.htm](http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/nu200701.htm).
80. *Xinhua*, July 19, 2001, Lexis-Nexis.

81. "Lodi Gyari's Visit to China: A Significant Development," Tibet Information Network, September 13, 2002, [www.tibetinfo.net/news-in-brief/nib130902.htm](http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-in-brief/nib130902.htm).
82. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Press Conference," September 10, 2002, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/2510/2511/t14661.htm>.
83. "Negotiations with the 14th Dalai Lama and the Issue of Regional Autonomy," [www.chinaembassy.org.in/eng/premade/48326/Tibet%20Feature.htm](http://www.chinaembassy.org.in/eng/premade/48326/Tibet%20Feature.htm).
84. "Success of the Second Round of Dialogue Uncertain," Tibet Information Network, June 12, 2003, [www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/2003/1206.htm](http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-updates/2003/1206.htm). For a critical official Chinese commentary on this visit—and the extent to which U.S. pressure on China over Tibet continues to elicit strong Chinese renunciations—see "Writer Rejects U.S. Report on Tibet," *Xinhua*, June 11, 2003.
85. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks on Dalai Lama's Meeting with the U.S. Officials," September 12, 2003, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/2510/2535/t25727.htm>.
86. For a detailed consideration of this issue see Carlson (forthcoming: chap. 3).
87. Although, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, Beijing did initially label Tibetan separatists as "terrorists" in the aftermath of the attacks on the United States, it soon dropped this claim.
88. For a detailed discussion of these divergent trends see Carlson (forthcoming).

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## Project Information



## **The Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia**

### **Project Rationale, Purpose and Outline**

Project Director: Muthiah Alagappa  
 Principal Researchers: Edward Aspinall (Aceh)  
 Danilyn Rutherford (Papua)  
 Christopher Collier (Southern Philippines)  
 Gardner Bovingdon (Xinjiang)  
 Elliot Sperling (Tibet)

#### *Rationale*

Internal conflicts have been a prominent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945. Asia has witnessed numerous civil wars, armed insurgencies, coups d'état, regional rebellions, and revolutions. Many have been protracted; several have far reaching domestic and international consequences. The civil war in Pakistan led to the break up of that country in 1971; separatist struggles challenge the political and territorial integrity of China, India, Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka; political uprisings in Thailand (1973 and 1991), the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1986), Taiwan, Bangladesh (1991), and Indonesia (1998) resulted in dramatic political change in those countries; although the political uprisings in Burma (1988) and China (1989) were suppressed, the political systems in these countries as well as in Vietnam continue to confront problems of political legitimacy that could become acute; and radical Islam poses serious challenges to stability in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India. In all, millions of people have been killed in the internal conflicts, and tens of millions have been displaced. And the involvement of external powers in a competitive manner (especially during the Cold War) in several of these conflicts had negative consequences for domestic and regional security.

Internal conflicts in Asia (as elsewhere) can be traced to three issues—national identity, political legitimacy (the title to rule), and distributive justice—that are often interconnected. With the bankruptcy of the socialist model and the transitions to democracy in several countries, the number of internal conflicts over the legitimacy of political system has declined in Asia. However, political legitimacy of certain governments continues to be contested from time to time and the legitimacy of the remaining communist and authoritarian systems are likely to confront challenges in due course. The project deals with internal conflicts arising from the process of

constructing national identity with specific focus on conflicts rooted in the relationship of minority communities to the nation-state. Here too many Asian states have made considerable progress in constructing national communities but several states including some major ones still confront serious problems that have degenerated into violent conflict. By affecting the political and territorial integrity of the state as well as the physical, cultural, economic, and political security of individuals and groups, these conflicts have great potential to affect domestic and international stability.

### *Purpose*

The project investigates the dynamics and management of five key internal conflicts in Asia—Aceh and Papua in Indonesia, the Moro conflict in southern Philippines, and the conflicts pertaining to Tibet and Xinjiang in China. Specifically it investigates the following:

1. Why (on what basis), how (in what form), and when does group differentiation and political consciousness emerge?
2. What are the specific issues of contention in such conflicts? Are these of the instrumental or cognitive type? If both, what is the relationship between them? Have the issues of contention altered over time? Are the conflicts likely to undergo further redefinition?
3. When, why, and under what circumstances can such contentions lead to violent conflict? Under what circumstances have they not led to violent conflict?
4. How can the conflicts be managed, settled, and eventually resolved? What are policy choices? Do options such as national self-determination, autonomy, federalism, electoral design, and consociationalism exhaust the list of choices available to meet the aspirations of minority communities? Are there innovative ways of thinking about identity and sovereignty that can meet the aspirations of the minority communities without creating new sovereign nation-states?
5. What is the role of the regional and international communities in the protection of minority communities?
6. How and when does a policy choice become relevant?

### *Design*

A study group has been organized for each of the five conflicts investigated in the study. With a principal researcher each, the study groups comprise practitioners and scholars from the respective Asian countries including the region or province that is the focus of the conflict, the United

States, and Australia. For composition of study groups please see the participants list.

All five study-groups met jointly for the first time in Washington, D.C. from September 29 through October 3, 2002. Over a period of four days, participants engaged in intensive discussion of a wide range of issues pertaining to the five conflicts investigated in the project. In addition to identifying key issues for research and publication, the meeting facilitated the development of cross country perspectives and interaction among scholars who had not previously worked together. Based on discussion at the meeting five research monograph length studies (one per conflict) and twenty policy papers (four per conflict) were commissioned.

Study groups met separately for the second meeting. The Aceh and Papua study group meetings were held in Bali on June 16-17, the Southern Philippines study group met in Manila on June 23, and the Tibet and Xinjiang study groups were held in Honolulu from August 20 through 22, 2003. The third meeting of all study groups was held from February 28 through March 2, 2004 in Washington D.C. These meetings reviewed recent developments relating to the conflicts, critically reviewed the first drafts of the policy papers prepared for the project, reviewed the book proposals by the principal researchers, and identified new topics for research.

#### *Publications*

The project will result in five research monographs (book length studies) and about twenty policy papers.

*Research Monographs.* To be authored by the principal researchers, these monographs present a book-length study of the key issues pertaining to each of the five conflicts. Subject to satisfactory peer review, the monographs will appear in the East-West Center Washington series *Asian Security*, and the East-West Center series *Contemporary Issues in the Asia Pacific*, both published by the Stanford University Press.

*Policy Papers.* The policy papers provide a detailed study of particular aspects of each conflict. Subject to satisfactory peer review, these 10,000 to 25,000-word essays will be published in the EWC Washington *Policy Studies* series, and be circulated widely to key personnel and institutions in the policy and intellectual communities and the media in the respective Asian countries, United States, and other relevant countries.

*Public Forums*

To engage the informed public and to disseminate the findings of the project to a wide audience, public forums have been organized in conjunction with study group meetings.

Two public forums were organized in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the first study group meeting. The first forum, cosponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society, discussed the Aceh and Papua conflicts. The second forum, cosponsored by the United States Institute of Peace, the Asia Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center, and the Sigur Center of the George Washington University, discussed the Tibet and Xinjiang conflicts.

Public forums were also organized in Jakarta and Manila in conjunction with the second study group meetings. The Jakarta public forum on Aceh and Papua, cosponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, and the Southern Philippines public forum cosponsored by the Policy Center of the Asian Institute of Management, attracted persons from government, media, think tanks, activist groups, diplomatic community and the public.

In conjunction with the third study group meetings, also held in Washington, D.C., three public forums were offered. The first forum, cosponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society, addressed the conflicts in Aceh and Papua. The second forum, cosponsored by the Sigur Center of the George Washington University, discussed the conflicts in Tibet and Xinjiang. A third forum was held to discuss the conflict in the Southern Philippines. This forum was cosponsored by the United States Institute of Peace.

*Funding Support*

This project is supported with a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

*Project Director***Muthiah Alagappa**

East-West Center Washington

Aceh Study Group**Edward Aspinnall**

University of Sydney

*Principal Researcher***Saifuddin Bantasyam**

Human Rights Forum - Aceh

**Harold Crouch**

Australian National University

**Ahmad Humam Hamid**

Care Human Rights, Aceh

**Bob Hadiwinata**

University of Parahyangan, Indonesia

**Konrad Huber**

Concil on Foreign Relations

**Sidney Jones**

International Crisis Group, Jakarta

**T. Mulya Lubis**

Lubis, Santosa and Maulana, Jakarta

**Marcus Meitzner**

USAID, Jakarta

**Kelli Muddell**International Center for Transitional  
Justice**Michael Ross**

University of California, Los Angeles

**Kirsten E. Schulze**

London School of Economics

**Rizal Sukma**

CSIS Jakarta

**Paul Van Zyl**International Center for Transitional  
Justice**Agus Widjojo**Former Chief of Staff for Territorial  
Affairs, Government of Indonesia**Sastrohandoyo Wiryo**Chief Negotiator for the Government  
of Indonesia in the peace talks with  
the Free Aceh Movement**Daniel Ziv**

USAID, Jakarta

Papua Study Group**Danilyn Rutherford**

University of Chicago

*Principal Researcher***Ikrar Nusa Bhakti**Indonesian Institute of Sciences  
(LIPI), Jakarta**Richard Chauvel**

Victoria University, Melbourne

**Benny Giay**The Institute for Human Rights Study  
and Advocacy, Jayapura**Barbara Harvey**Former Deputy Chief of Mission for the  
U.S. Embassy in Indonesia**Rodd McGibbon**

USAID, Jakarta

Papua Study Group (continued)**Octavianus Mote**

Yale University

**Samsu Rizal Panggabean**

Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta

**John Rumbiak**

ELS-HAM, Jayapura

**Barnabas Suebu**

Former Governor of Irian Jaya

**Agus Sumule**

Universitas Negeri Papua, Amban

Southern Philippines Study Group**Christopher Collier**

Australian National University

*Principal Researcher***Robert F. Barnes**

USAID, Philippines

**Noemi Bautista**

USAID, Philippines

**Saturnino M. Borrás**

Institute of Social Studies, The Hague

**Jesus Dureza**

Presidential Assistant for Mindanao,

Davao City

**Alma Evangelista**

United Nations Development

Programme, Manila

**Eric Gutierrez**

Institute for Popular Democracy

**Carolina Hernandez**

Institute for Strategic and

Development Studies, Manila

**Abraham S. Iribani**

Assistant Secretary, Department of the

Interior and Local Government,

Government of the Philippines

**Mary Judd**

The World Bank - Philippines

**Macapado Muslim**

Mindanao State University, General

Santos City

**Amina Rasul-Bernardo**

Asian Institute of Management,

Manila

**Steven Rood**

The Asia Foundation, Philippines

**David Timberman**

USAID, Washington, D.C.

**Michael Yates**

USAID, Philippines

Tibet Study Group**Elliot Sperling**

Indiana University

*Principal Researcher***Allen Carlson**

Cornell University

**Shulong Chu**

Tsinghua University, Beijing

**Yongbin Du**

Chinese Center for Tibet Studies,

Beijing

Tibet Study Group (continued)**Mark D. Koehler**

U.S. Department of State

**Carole McGranahan**

University of Colorado at Boulder

**Warren W. Smith, Jr**

Radio Free Asia

**Tashi Rabgey**

Harvard University

**Tseten Wangchuk**

Voice of America

Xinjiang Study Group**Gardner Bovingdon**

Indiana University

*Principal Researcher***Jay Dautcher**

University of Pennsylvania

**Arienne Dwyer**

University of Kansas

**Talant Mawkanuli**

Indiana University

**James Millward**

Georgetown University

**Susan Shirk**

University of California, San Diego

**Stan Toops**

Miami University

**Nury Turkel**

American University

**Nabijan Tursun**

Radio Free Asia

**Shengmin Yang**Central University for Nationalities,  
BeijingOther Participants**Allen Choate**

Asia Foundation, Hong Kong

**Chester Crocker**

Georgetown University

**Stephen Del Rosso**

Carnegie Corporation of New York

**Pauline Kerr**

Australian National University

**Federico M. Macaranas**Asian Institute of Management,  
Manila**Christopher McNally**

East-West Center

**Charles Morrison**

East-West Center

**Holly Morrow**

U.S. Department of State

**Hadi Soesastro**

CSIS Jakarta

**Sheila Smith**

East-West Center

**Arun Swamy**

East-West Center

**Barbara Walter**

University of California, San Diego



## Background of the Tibet Conflict

Tibet has been a focus of international concerns for close to a century. Tibet's contested status as an independent state or autonomous region, the conditions prevailing within its territory—indeed, even its very borders—have all been the subject of controversy and sometimes violent struggle.

In 1911, when the Qing, China's last imperial dynasty, collapsed, Tibet emerged as a *de facto* independent state. That independence was not recognized by China, nor was it formally and unambiguously acknowledged by Britain, India or any other state. Nevertheless, under the government of the Dalai Lamas, Tibet did effectively function independently of China, with the requisites generally expected of states. However, with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tibet's *de facto* independence came to an end. In October of 1950, the People's Liberation Army, already in control of Tibetan-inhabited territory outside the jurisdiction of the Dalai Lama's government, crossed the line into territory controlled by the Tibetan government; and Tibet was formally incorporated into the People's Republic of China by means of an agreement signed in May 1951. Friction, ambiguous expectations and interpretations of Tibet's status under that agreement, and the harsh and often brutal implementation of Chinese socialism in Tibetan-inhabited areas in the eastern portions of the Tibetan Plateau, all worked to spark a revolt in the 1950s that led ultimately to fighting in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, and the flight of the Dalai Lama and well over 100,000 Tibetans into exile, mostly in India and Nepal. Subsequent decades witnessed the implementation of Chinese policies on the Tibetan Plateau that followed what often seemed like radically different directions: the establishment of a Tibet Autonomous Region in 1965, the attempt to suppress a separate Tibetan identity in the 1960s and 1970s, economic liberalization and a relative loosening of cultural and religious restrictions in the 1980s, repression of any signs of separatist tendencies and allegiance to the Dalai Lama in the 1990s, etc. Such ambiguities and apparent contradictions have served to exacerbate the Sino-Tibetan relationship.

Internationalization of the Tibet issue followed upon resolutions passed by the U.N. General Assembly in 1959, 1960 and 1961, one of which explicitly supported the right of the Tibetan people to "self-determination." The result of this history has been to place legitimacy at the

foundation of many of the other aspects of the Tibetan issue. Thus, more than half a century after the incorporation of Tibet into the PRC, questions of economic development, cultural freedom, human rights, and demographics in Tibet all stand against the background of questions about the legitimacy of Chinese rule in the region. This sense of contested authority is further supported as much by China's protestations that there is no issue of Tibet (while at the same time insisting that the Dalai Lama must acknowledge that Tibet has historically been a part of China) as it is by the activities and pronouncements of Tibetan exiles relating to Tibet's right to independence or—on the part of the Dalai Lama—"real autonomy."

Attempts to resolve the Tibetan issue since the late 1970s have focused on formal and informal contacts and discussions between representatives of the Dalai Lama and his government-in-exile on the one hand, and the Chinese government on the other. These have taken place periodically over the last twenty-five years, with no real resolution. Over the last two years such contacts have revived again, but even the nature of those contacts is disputed by both parties. For more than a decade the Dalai Lama has been able to meet with several world leaders who, at his urging, have periodically called on the Chinese government to approach or respond to him in an attempt to resolve the Tibetan issue.

Since 1988 the Dalai Lama has conceded the point of Chinese sovereignty and pressed Western governments to work for the preservation of Tibetan culture; and in 1989 the Dalai Lama was accorded the Nobel Peace Prize for his activities in support of Tibet. Nevertheless, the process of dialogue and confidence building remains at an impasse, and there is a lingering pessimism about any resolution of the Tibetan issue during the Dalai Lama's lifetime.

# Map of the Tibetan Plateau



- Cities and Towns
- ⚡ TAR Boundary
- ⚡ Historical Tibet (est.)

Note: Kham region is largely divided between the TAR and Sichuan Province with smaller portions in Qinghai and Yunnan; Amdo region includes most of Qinghai with small portions also in Sichuan and Gansu.

Note: Map boundaries and locations are approximate. Geographic features and their names do not imply official endorsement or recognition by the UN.





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# *Policy Studies*

A Publication of the East-West Center Washington

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## About this Issue

This paper examines the main contours of Beijing's Tibet policy since the start of the reform era (1979 to the present). It argues that throughout this period China's position on Tibet has always been concerned with defending Chinese sovereignty, more specifically jurisdictional sovereignty, over the region. Since 1979, the ways in which the Chinese acted to secure such rights, however, have varied significantly, in two distinct phases. During the initial phase, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Chinese position was marked by the implementation of relatively moderate policies. In the second phase, which began in late 1987, and continues today, the Chinese position on Tibet has been defined by highly critical discursive moves, pointed diplomatic activity, a renewed commitment to use force to silence all opposition to Chinese rule, and the utilization of economic development programs to augment such efforts. This essay contends that three forces were crucial in determining Chinese policy on Tibet during these two periods: the underlying strategic value of Tibet to Beijing within the regional security dynamic, the persistence of historically conditioned, sovereign-centric values within elite circles in China, and the internal and external pressures created by Deng Xiaoping's "reform and opening" line. The complexity of these factors suggest that understanding how Beijing acts vis-à-vis Tibet requires that students of international relations and security studies, as well as policymakers and activists, look beyond parsimonious explanations and single-faceted policy directions when considering the "Tibet issue."

## About the Author

Dr. Allen Carlson is an Assistant Professor in the Government Department at Cornell University.

## Previous Issues

### Policy Studies 1

*The Aceh Peace Process: Why it Failed*  
Dr. Edward Aspinall, University of Sydney  
Dr. Harold Crouch, Australian National University

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