



# 17 Points of Disagreement

## 60 Years of China's Failed Policies in Tibet



It is over 60 years since China's army invaded Tibet. In May 2011 China will mark what – in a gross distortion of events – it calls the 'Peaceful Liberation of Tibet'. For Tibetans and their supporters, it is 60 years since the People's Republic of China moved aggressively to consolidate its military occupation of Tibet. The '17 Point Agreement', signed on 23 May 1951 by the Chinese government and by the Tibetan government under duress, collapsed under growing opposition to Chinese rule among Tibetans and the escape of the Dalai Lama in 1959 (a).

For 60 years now China has ruled Tibet; 60 years in which to win Tibetan hearts and minds, to weaken the influence of the exiled Dalai Lama, and to assimilate Tibet into mainland China. Yet Tibetans over the decades have rejected and continue to actively resist Chinese rule, through protests, non-violent direct action, or by fleeing into exile.

Exactly ten years ago, the official press in Tibet said, *"Through 50 years of glorious history...the cadres and the masses of every ethnic group have become further convinced that only under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party, within the great family of the motherland, and only by taking the socialist road, will there be a happy today and a bright tomorrow for Tibet. Therefore, in celebrating such a glorious occasion, the people of every ethnic group in our region must again sing out loud throughout the plateau the benefits of having the communist party, socialism, liberalised reforms, and a united people"* (b).

Within a few years of these sweeping declarations, Tibetans across the plateau once again rose up in the most widespread and resolute protests yet; a clear denunciation of Chinese rule. The overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations of 2008 (c) were characterized by the participation of young people, many carrying photographs of the Dalai Lama and calling for his return. Despite a savage crackdown, protests and other more subtle forms of resistance continue today.

The Tibetan national identity is stronger than ever. As part of a cultural renaissance in Tibet, Tibetan singers and writers are calling on Tibetans to be unified across the provinces of Kham, Amdo and U'Tsang. Their lyrics foretell the return of the Dalai Lama, and the unification of Tibetans in Tibet and in exile; arguably Tibetans are more united as a nation now than ever before. 60 years of Chinese rule has far from crushed the Tibetan spirit and in spite of all the suffering, the Tibetan resolve persists.

This report lists '17 Points of Disagreement' between China and Members of the International Tibet Network, a global coalition of 180 Tibet groups dedicated to campaigning to restore the rights of the Tibetan people. It has been written to counter China's expected propaganda drive.

(a) Tsering Shakya, 'Dragon in the Land of Snows', 1999.

(b) Lhasa Xizang Ribao, 21 May 2001

(c) The 230+ largely peaceful protests are often collectively, and erroneously, referred to as "riots", despite only a tiny minority involving violence.

Abbreviations: TAR – Tibet Autonomous Region; PRC – People's Republic of China; CCP – Communist Party of China; PLA – People's Liberation Army

# 17 Points of Disagreement

## 1. Military Occupation not Peaceful Liberation

**China says:** “The peaceful liberation of Tibet was a major event in modern Chinese history and an epoch-making turning point in the course of development in Tibet.” President Hu Jintao (1a).

**Reality:** China’s ‘peaceful liberation’ of Tibet was a military invasion that began in 1949; on 7 October 1950 40,000 troops from the People’s Liberation Army crossed the Driчу (Yangtse) river into central Tibet. Hopelessly outnumbered, the Tibetan army surrendered (1b); Tibet, an independent country since 1911 (1c) became an occupied state (1d). Chinese persecution steadily increased, as did Tibetan resistance; in March 1959 popular protests erupted in Lhasa. When the PLA began shelling the city the Dalai Lama was forced to escape Tibet. China stated 87,000 Tibetans were killed or arrested as a result of the Uprising (1e). In 1989 Martial Law was imposed and China still maintains a strong military presence, with estimates of between 150,000 – 500,000 PLA troops stationed on the Tibetan Plateau (1f).

## 2. Tibetans: A Nation not a Minority

**China says:** “As a member of the big family of the Chinese nation, the Tibetan people have created and developed their brilliant and distinctive culture during a long history of continuous exchanges and contacts with other ethnic groups” Liu Yandong, United Front (2a).

**Reality:** The PRC claims Tibetans are among 56 ethnic nationalities (2b) bound closer together by a common destiny (2c). This fabrication, rooted in China’s deep historical ethnocentrism, became the foundation for China’s colonization of Tibet and other neighboring territories (2d). Tibet is not only a clearly defined nation, but the government of Tibet fulfilled the criteria of a sovereign state three decades before the founding of the PRC. Prior to the invasion, Tibetans and Chinese had little to no contact and China did not formally exercise control over Tibet (2e). China’s leaders however classified Tibetans as ‘barbaric uncivilized’ peoples that should be

‘assimilated or eliminated’ (2f). Tibetans, fiercely proud and independent, showed no signs of assimilating and thus the CCP pursued policies to eliminate the Tibetan nation.

## 3. Rule by Force not Consent

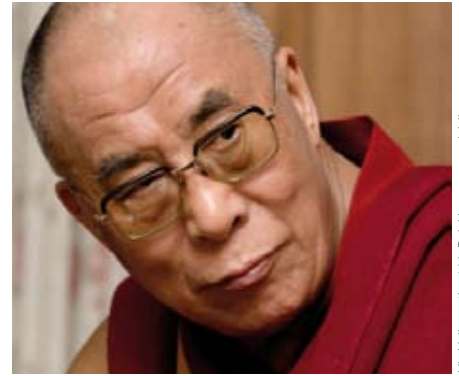
**China says:** “We must build up a Great Wall in our fight against separatism and safeguard the unity of the motherland, and push Tibet’s basic stability towards long-term stability” Hu Jintao (3a).

**Reality:** After 60 years China still relies on military and paramilitary control of Tibet, control which is stepped up around sensitive anniversaries. Mass protests have continued across Tibetan areas since 2008, for example in Ngaba, March 2011. There are currently at least 824 political prisoners in Tibet (3b). China now spends more on public security than it does on defence (3c). China has never accounted for the thousands it detained in 2008 nor the deaths that have resulted from its security measures (3d), for example the 2006 fatal shooting by Chinese border police of 17 year old nun Kelsang Namtso (3e).

## 4. Poverty not Prosperity

**China says:** “The region’s GDP reached 50.8 billion yuan (US\$7.75 billion) in 2010, with an annual growth rate of 12.4%. The per capita net income of both farmers and herdsman hit 4,319 yuan, double that of 2005” TAR Governor Padma Choling (4a).

**Reality:** Despite vast investment in the TAR – 310 billion Yuan (US\$45.4 billion) since 2001 (4b) – funds mainly benefited Chinese migrants (see 11) and have actually contributed to the economic marginalisation of Tibetans. Andrew Fischer, an economist specialising in development who analysed Chinese government statistics calls Tibet’s growth ‘ethnically exclusionary’ (4c). The speed and scale of Han Chinese migration onto the Tibetan plateau, and the unequal business and employment opportunities this migration creates, were some of the driving forces behind protests in Lhasa in 2008.



His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. www.dalailama.com

## 5. Dalai Lama: Peace Icon not Wolf

**China says:** “We are in the midst of a fierce struggle involving blood and fire, a life and death struggle with the Dalai clique.” TAR Party Secretary, Zhang Qingli. TAR Chairman Jampa Phuntsog was quoted by China Daily as saying the majority of Tibetan people do not want the Dalai Lama to return (5a).

**Reality:** The Dalai Lama is the pre-eminent representative of the Tibetan people and a globally respected icon of peace. He is viewed by Beijing as enemy number one, described as a “wolf in monk’s robes” and “a monster with human face” (5b). His image is banned in Tibet (5c). During the 2008 Uprising Tibetans of all ages risked their lives to demand the Dalai Lama’s return. China accused him and his ‘splittist’ supporters of inciting the protests (5d). His recent decision to devolve political power to an elected leadership has only strengthened his position; he remains the free spokesperson of the Tibetan nation.

## 6. Language: Assimilation not protection

**China says:** “All nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages,” Article 4, Constitution of the PRC (6a).

**Reality:** “...there are few lucrative job prospects for Tibetans who have not



Tibetan students protest for language rights. Radio Free Asia.

1a. Hu Jintao, Lhasa 19 July 2001.  
1b. Tsering Shakya, ‘Dragon in the Land of Snows’, 1999.  
1c. “The Tibetans have every moral right to their independence for which they have fought successfully in the past, and we are committed to support them in maintaining it.” (UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office

to Chongqing, June 1942)  
1d. On 30 March 2011, Court No. 2 of Spain’s National High Court, the Audiencia Nacional, acknowledged Tibet is an occupied state under international law.  
1e. Radio Lhasa broadcast, 1 October 1960.  
1f. Tibet Justice Centre.

2a. Liu Yandong, China Tibetan Culture Forum, October 2006.  
2b. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_ethnic\\_groups\\_in\\_China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ethnic_groups_in_China)  
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2e. Ibid.  
2f. International Campaign for Tibet, ‘Jampa, the Story of Racism in Tibet’, 2001, page 24.  
3a. Hu Jintao, 9 March 2009.  
3b. US State Department Human Rights Report 2010.  
3c. 2010 public security spending RMB 549bn; defence spending RMB

533.4bn, Reuters, 5 March 2011.  
3d. Human Rights Watch, ‘I Saw it With My Own Eyes’, 2010.  
3e. The Guardian, 30 October 2006.  
4a. Padma Choling, 28 March 2011.  
4b. Xinhua 25 January 2010.  
4c. A M Fischer, ‘Perversities of Extreme Dependence and Unequal Growth in the TAR’, 2007.

5a. Zhang Qingli, 19 March 2008; Jampa Phuntsog, 20 June 2007.  
5b. Zhang Qingli, 19 March 2008.  
5c. The Independent, 20 May 1996.  
5d. Wen Jiabao, quoted by the BBC, 18 March 2008.  
6a. See <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>

been educated in Chinese. Nor [can] a student educated in Tibetan acquire professional qualifications at college or university. There are no relevant courses taught in Tibetan.” Tsering Dorje, teacher (6b). Since 2008 China has intensified efforts to marginalize the Tibetan language in favour of Chinese (6c). In October 2010 over 10,000 Tibetan students and teachers protested against proposed education reforms by Qinghai Province, which aimed to change the primary language of instruction from Tibetan to Chinese (6d). Street signs are in Chinese, official documents generally only available in Chinese and letters addressed in Tibetan are not delivered. In spite of China’s efforts, a resurgence of the Tibetan language as an expression of identity is underway in Tibet (6e).



Chinese propaganda at Dzong Monastery, Gyantse, Tibet.

## 7. Occupation is No Holiday

**China says:** ‘Tibet’s tourism revenue reached 22.62 billion yuan, averaging a 30% rise a year...the local tourism administration estimate tourist arrivals will hit 15 million in 2015.’ (7a).

**Reality:** With millions of domestic and international visitors each year, Beijing expects tourism, a designated ‘pillar industry’, to accelerate economic development in Tibet. Whilst attempting to maximize tourism’s profitability, the authorities control what tourists see and understand. Tour guides and hoteliers are under pressure to provide an officially sanctioned version of Tibetan history. Tour guides face suspension and even imprisonment for perceived indiscretions including befriending tourists or disregarding the party line. In March 2011, coinciding with the anniversaries of the Uprisings of 1959 and 2008, the TAR was closed to tourists due to “limited accommodation capacity” (7b), despite several international hotels, including the St Regis (7c), having recently opened in Lhasa.

## 8. Oppression not Emancipation

**China says:** “Without the peaceful liberation of Tibet, the entry of the CCP and the PLA, those oppressed and enslaved Tibetan people would not have deeply understood the policy of the CCP”, Zhu Weiqun, United Front (8a).

**Reality:** The Chinese Communist Party claims it liberated Tibet from the “oppressive, feudal rule of the Dalai Lama” (8b), a medieval, oppressive society consisting of “landowners, serfs and slaves”. In March 2009 the Dalai Lama said that Beijing’s policies “thrust Tibetans into such depths of suffering and hardship that they literally experienced hell on Earth” (8c). Ultimately, Beijing’s condemnation of Tibet’s ‘feudal’ past is a classic colonialist argument – ‘backwardness’ serving as a justification for invasion (8d). Pre-invasion, many Tibetans recognized inequalities in their system and the Dalai Lama had begun to promote improvements. The founding of ‘serf-emancipation day’ in 2009 is symbolic of China’s continued colonial vision of Tibet, while the exiled Tibetan government is now a democracy (8e).

## 9. Religious Repression Not Freedom

**China says:** “The region has perfectly implemented a policy granting freedom in religious belief and ensuring all Tibetan people enjoy such a right.” Qin Yizhi, Lhasa Party Secretary (9a).

**Reality:** Since China’s occupation, Tibetan Buddhism has been under attack to undermine the core belief system at its heart and sever loyalty to the Dalai Lama. An estimated 6,000 monasteries were destroyed and today the number of monks and nuns are vastly reduced, religious institutions tightly controlled and ‘patriotic re-education’ campaigns regularly carried out (9b). In April 2011



Monks protesting at Labrang Monastery 2008

over 300 monks were removed from Kirti Monastery in eastern Tibet following protests (9c). In 1995 six-year old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama’s choice of 11th Panchen Lama, disappeared and remains missing, and in 1999 the 17th Karmapa felt compelled to flee Tibet. China now insists that permission to reincarnate must be given by the government (9d).

## 10. Crisis at the Third Pole

**China says:** Strengthening environmental protection on the Tibetan plateau is important for “maintaining border stability, ethnic unity and the building of a well-off society”, State Council statement (10a).

**Reality:** Tibet, known as the Third Pole because it holds the third largest store of glacial freshwater, is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world. Glacial melt from the plateau is disrupting water supplies, threatening sustainable livelihoods and putting more than one billion downstream peoples at risk (10b). Since occupying Tibet, China’s policies have brought region-wide famine, desertification on the grasslands, acute flooding from clear-cutting Tibet’s forests, and environmental destruction through unregulated mining (10c). China’s solution is to build more dams, denying downstream users a stable water supply. In turn, China blames Tibet’s nomads, not its own policies, for threatening China’s precious water resources.

## 11. Colonization with Chinese Characteristics

**China says:** “In carrying out the strategy of large-scale western development, development will be greatly accelerated and human talent will flow westward.” Li Dezhu, State Ethnic Affairs Commission (11a).

**Reality:** A 1980s ‘open door’ policy encouraged Chinese workers into the TAR. The 2000 census states the population of the entire Tibetan Plateau – including 150 Tibetan autonomous counties – as at least 10 million, excluding military and migrant workers. 5.4 million are listed as Tibetan; the rest Han or other Chinese people (11b). In 2002 officials admitted encouraging Chinese migration, telling journalists Tibetans would soon be a minority in Lhasa and the influx of Chinese migrants was part of a drive to develop the economy, bring prosperity and stability (11c). The reality of colonial life for many Tibetans consists of discrimination and exclusion.

6b. Free Tibet, ‘Forked Tongue: Tibetan language under attack’, 21 February 2008  
6c. Woesser’s Blog, ‘When Tibetan Students fight for the Tibetan language’, 4 November 2010, translated by Hugh Peaks Pure Earth.  
6d. BBC report, 20 October 2010.

6e. Tsering Shakya, ‘The Politics of Language’, December 2007.  
7a. Padma Choling, 16 January 2011.  
7b. Zhang Qingli, 7 March 2011.  
7c. The Independent, 3 November 2010.

8a. Interview for “China’s Tibet”, 7 May 2011.  
8b. Blog post, James Reynolds BBC, 19 January 2009.  
8c. The Times, 10 March 2009.  
8d. Lhadon Tethong, ‘China’s favorite propaganda on Tibet and Why it’s Wrong’.  
8e. Tsering Shakya, ‘Tibet and

China: the past in the present’, 2009.  
9a. Qin Yizhi, 28 March 2011.  
9b. Tibetan Government in Exile.  
9c. International Campaign for Tibet, 22 April 2011.  
9d. Padma Choling, quoted by Reuters, 7 March 2011.

10a. State Council Meeting chaired by Wen Jiabao, 30 March 2011.  
10b. International Campaign for Tibet, ‘Tracking the Steel Dragon’, 2008 pg 231.  
10c. Tibetan government-in-exile Environment Report 2008.  
11a. Li Dezhu State Ethnic Affairs Commission, in Qiu Shi,

1 June 2000.  
11b. See <http://chinadataonline.org>. The 2010 census, available soon, is intended to count the floating migrant population.  
11c. New York Times, 8 August 2002.

## 12. Forcing Nomads off Land

**China says:** ‘All herdsmen are expected to end the nomadic life by the end of the century’; report quoting Qi Jingfa, Agriculture vice-minister 1998 (12a).

**Reality:** At least 2.25 million Tibetans live nomadic or semi-nomadic lives, a way of life that is an intrinsic part of Tibetan society (12b). Following the occupation, nomads were classified as ‘uncivilized’ and their lifestyle threatened by China’s agricultural and collectivisation policies (12c). Although China missed its 2000 deadline to end nomadic life, efforts to force Tibetans into ghetto-style housing blocks have intensified since the launch of China’s ‘Western Development Plan’. In January 2011, officials said 1.43 million farmers and herders had new homes (12d). Land, seized under false claims of ‘environmental protection’ in the age of climate change, is cleared largely to make way for dams and mining operations. For thousands of years, Tibetan nomads lived sustainably on the grasslands; now China’s policy of ‘converting pastures to grasslands’ is leading to overgrazing in fenced-in areas and exacerbating desertification (12e). Coercive settlement is causing economic and social problems (12f), likely to fuel greater unrest.

## 13. Railroading Tibet

**China says:** “A total of 16 billion yuan was earmarked for investment in Tibet in 2010, up 46% year on year, boosting the infrastructure such as airports, highways and railways in the region.” Padma Choling. “Although our top priority is to realize a leapfrog development, maintaining social stability is of great importance.” Zhang Qingli (13a).

**Reality:** China’s financial investment in Tibet is substantial, but the emphasis on large infrastructure rather than community-led projects has delivered patchy development that seldom benefits the poorest Tibetans. The most significant project is the Gormo-Lhasa Railway, completed July 2006, which has accelerated the influx of Chinese into Tibet, further excluding Tibetans from the local economy, exacerbating resentment and thereby making China’s aimed-for ‘stability’ more unlikely. The Railway also facilitates the swift deployment of military, the exploitation of Tibet’s natural resources and threatens both Tibetans’ nomadic lifestyles and the Tibetan environment itself (13b).

## 14. Control of the Water Tower

**China says:** “Although Tibet is rich with water and hydropower resources, water resources are still one of the key factors in restricting Tibet’s development” Zhang [Qingli] stressed it is of great urgency to develop water infrastructure projects in Tibet’ (14a).

**Reality:** As in other development projects, Tibetan voices have been absent from decision-making about dam construction. Until recently Tibet hosted the largest undammed river in the world, the Yarlung Tsangpo. In 2010 China confirmed plans to build at least five dams on the middle section of the river including the Zangmu Project, potentially the world’s biggest hydro-power scheme (14b). Concerns about the possible impacts of these dams include downstream nations’ access to a safe, stable water supply (14c), the risk of damming rivers in seismic activity areas (14d) and threats to the most bio-diverse region in the world (14e).

## 15. Long life: Not for Dissidents

**China says:** ‘Life expectancy of Tibetans is 67 years, almost double the 35.5 years prior to the liberation of Tibet. Between 2006 and 2010 1.7 billion yuan was spent to finance free medical services for Tibetan farmers and herders’ (15a).



Nomad on the grasslands of Tibet.

**Reality:** Infant and child mortality rates remain among the highest in the world. Coercively settled nomads report that promised healthcare provision is seldom available, whilst Tibetans generally find healthcare unaffordable (15b). The rise in prostitution in Lhasa raises concerns about AIDs. Dissent significantly affects life expectancy; those injured in demonstrations are too afraid to seek medical treatment and deaths linked to detention are common. In early 2011 a monk from Labrang Monastery died after having been arrested and tortured following protests in 2008 (15c).

## 16. A Second Cultural Revolution

**China says:** “The government has dedicated a large amount of manpower, materials and funds to the protection and promotion of fine traditional Tibetan culture... bringing about unprecedented protection and development of Tibetan culture.” White Paper 2008. “Anyone possessing illegal music or videos will be severely dealt with.” Shigatse School website (16a).

**Reality:** Beijing has always relied on music and song to deliver propaganda, but the authorities maintain a roster of ‘acceptable’ Tibetan singers; dozens of Tibetan language songs are banned and security checkpoints regularly check Tibetans’ phones for illegal songs and ringtones (16b). Some 30 Tibetan writers and performers have been detained and served sentences, including singer Tashi Dhondup (16c) but despite this, increasing numbers of artists are reasserting their cultural identity, calling for unity among Tibetans, and celebrating the enduring spirit of the Tibetan people.

## 17. Happiness at Gunpoint

**China says:** CCTV announced that Lhasa was awarded the ‘2010 City With the Happiest People’ (17a).

**Reality:** Tibetan writer and intellectual Woesser responded “living under gunpoint day and night, being followed by snipers even when going to the temple to pray, how can there be any sense of happiness? Is it possible that after such a short time, Lhasa people left behind the gory terror of 2008 and their faces were wreathed in smiles again? Since they are happier than so many other people from many other Chinese cities, why do they still take to the streets?” (17b).

12a. Qin Jingfa, Vice Minister of Agriculture, quoted in Xinhua 18 March 1998.

12b. International Campaign for Tibet, ‘Tracking the Steel Dragon’, 2008.

12c. Gabriel Lafitte, ‘Eight Chinese Myths about Tibetan Nomads’, 2011.

12d. Padma Choling, 16 January 2011.  
12e. Oliver W Frauenfeld and Tingjun Zhang, ‘Is Climate Change on the Tibetan Plateau Driven by Land Use/Cover Change?’ 2005.  
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13b. International Campaign for Tibet, ‘Tracking the Steel Dragon’, 2008.

14a. Zhang Qingli, 28 March 2011.

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14c. Ibid.

14d. Geologist Yang Yong quoted by South China Morning Post, 1 May 2010.

14e. Conservation International.

15a. Padma Choling, 16 January 2011 and 28 March 2011.

15b. International Campaign for Tibet,

‘Health and Health Care in Tibet’, 2010.

15c. International Campaign for Tibet,

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17b. Ibid.

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