The Question of Tibet in the Context of Asian Development & Environmental Sustainability

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Erika Pathó
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“Tibet is part of a much larger Asian drama that is changing the world.”
(Mr. George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Singapore, 2004-2011)

While the year 2008 marks an important milestone for Western countries, it also means a similarly crucial point for the history of Tibet. Emerging from the crisis, the West is recently concerned about China’s strengthening influence in Asia and its particularly prosperous chances for rapid economic growth, while we are witnessing increasing internal dissatisfaction over Tibet’s situation and echoes calling for an independent Tibet. As a result, China’s human rights record is again at the focal point, along with the country’s future development and its expanding influence after having integrated into the international economic framework.

The Question of Tibet is closely connected with the internal development of China, while at the same time, Tibet’s role is more prominent than that of being an ethnic entity among many others, serving blindly the interests of Chinese unity and economic growth. In this dissertation, I aim to take a look at this 'other' Tibet – an ethnically, culturally and politically unique entity - and I aim to analyze the Cause of Tibet in the context of Asia’s regional development and its prospects for the future.

My work starts with analyzing the socio-political development in China and its impact on Tibet and continues with a historical analysis of the current political status of Tibet. My aim is to provide a better understanding of the Cause of Tibet and its struggle for independence and peace through the lens of regional ties and strategic issues linked with environmental sustainability, food security and water management concerns. In the further chapters on China’s development policy and on Tibet’s and China’s environmental questions I aim to focus on contemporary problems of the Tibet Autonomous Region. At the end, I analyze the crucial role of the Tibetan Refugee community in India, where I present the significance of local NGOs and advocacy initiatives in driving change.
1. SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA AND TIBET

1.1. Understanding the Rise of China and its Impact on Tibet

The question of China’s growth and the arising opportunity for China to acquire prominent economic leadership in the world is highly debated in international economics as well as in international development studies today. According to predictions, the 21st century development will be focused on Asia as the prominent continent regaining its lost power after many centuries prevailed by Western dominance.

Parallel to recent developments, China is well on its way to becoming a superior power, signalizing the recovery of Asia. „The size of China’s economy has quadrupled since the launch of market reforms in the late 1970s, and, according to some estimates, it will double again over the next decade. It has become one of the world's major manufacturing centers and consumes roughly a third of the global supply of iron, steel, and coal. “1

In the last decade, along with its increasing economic strength, China has also extended its soft power. Its active diplomacy has already contributed to the transformation of East Asia and future decades will see even greater increases in Chinese power and influence. Since it’s the world’s fastest growing economy, according to projections, China’s economy is going to become as large as the economy of the U.S. by 2020, while by cca. 2050, it will be the most powerful nation in the world in terms of its nominal GDP and purchasing parity index. In reference to this, several questions will need to be answered: How will the international community react to this? What about China’s internal social development? How does this relate to the situation in Tibet? What future for China and Tibet?

In order to assess the situation and future prospects for Tibet, we have to first understand China’s internal social, economic and ethnic policies. First of all, it is important to note that the rise of China is crucially intertwined with an increasing consciousness of its people, who demand democratization, social security and distinguished respect for human rights. Civil society organizations are growing more powerful and NGOs and grassroots initiatives receive a more dominant role in community assistance, healthcare, human rights and ecological issues. True freedom of speech, freedom of religion and an enhancement of the state structures towards a more extensive participation of civil society is entailed. However, inspite of the accelerating economic growth, inequality among the Chinese is ever larger and gaps are more noticeable. This, in turn, further aggravates the social complexities of the system. Even though when China entered the WTO in 2001, it was projected that economic reforms will go hand in hand with democratic reforms, this did not turn out to be the case. Political freedom, in practice, still does not exist. Censorship of political speech and information, most notably on the internet, is still openly used.

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to silence criticism of the government structure and policies. In fact, internet censorship in China is among the most stringent in the world.  

When it comes to social, cultural and religious issues, we have to take a look at the breakdown of the ethnic groups that China consists of and take into consideration the country’s multi-ethnic character. With a population of 1.3 billion, being a single-party state, governed by the Communist Party of China, China is not a true nation-state, but rather a civilization-state with many systems. Historical roots of the Chinese population lead to Eastern China, where the majority of its people still lives today.

In its social and cultural issues, China is extremely diverse and pluralistic, consisting of many ethnicities. According to the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, „China is a united, multi-ethnic nation of 56 ethnic groups. According to the fourth national census, taken in 1990, the Han people made up of 91.96 % of the country’s total population, and the other 55 ethnic groups 8,04 %.” Ten of them have a population of between 2 and 16 million, while the remaining 45 ethnic minorities have a population between 2,900 and 1.9 million. Ethnic minorities are concentrated in 12 western provinces, especially the five autonomous provinces. A number of ethnic groups are spread variously throughout the provinces. Among the largest in percentages, we could list the groups of the Zhuang, the Manchu, the Hui, the Miao, the Uyghur, the Mongol, the Tibetan and other ethnicities.  

This is important to note, because we have to recognize that dominant economic and political power can successfully result only from a strong nation, which has unanimous interests and has considerable support from the bottom. Up to a certain level, currently this support works well, since „the Chinese state is modeled on the Soviet nomenklature – an elite establishment defined by its loyalty to the party.” On top of that, the Chinese are receiving a massive propaganda in favour of their Communist leadership, agitating against any foreign power that intends to criticize China for its endeavours, let that be the growth of its economic and political influence or its human rights record. So, as a result, the most important political value for the Chinese is unity. In the idea of nurturing this unity, the Han identity has a crucial factor, since it is the one which contributes to keeping China together. The Han, due to their majority and their ideologies, tend to believe in their superiority over other ethnicities and often show disrespect and intolerance against other minority groups. In this sense, Prof. Hangyi emphasizes that the developments in Tibet and Xinjiang since 2008 have again cast the spotlight on China’s ethnic policies,

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2 As a matter of fact, the government of the People’s Republic of China has the dubious distinction of being a world leader in internet censorship. In addition to an elaborate architecture of technological censorship based on website blocking, content filtering and keyword alerts, it is estimated that the government employs over 40,000 internet censors, whose role is primarily focused on blocking and removing content critical of the Communist Party and the Chinese government, and identifying the content’s authors. In addition, government agencies under the Ministry of Propaganda employ large numbers of contracted internet users to flood discussion forums with pro-government propaganda. in: China: World Leader in Internet Censorship, Human Rights Watch, 3 June 2011, available at: http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/03/china-world-leader-internet-censorship, accessed 9 November 2012.

3 further listed as CPC


6 A full list of ethnic minorities listed in China is to be found officially herewith: http://www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/. For more information, please see Annex 1.

highlighting their significance and challenges."  

When considering the idea of nurturing unity by the CPC, we need to look at the situation of the other ethnic groups and analyze the driving forces behind their 'splitist' demands. Therefore, in order to better understand China’s current internal policies, the aims of its modernization and integration of Tibet, while similarly perceive the importance of the Tibet Cause for Tibetans and Tibet’s role in Asia’s development, we need to take a quick look at Tibet’s political history.

1.2. A Glimpse on Tibet’s Political History

Tibet, this special region in Asia, often called as „the roof of the world”, has always been situated among the ancient civilizations of China, Nepal and India. Since the earliest times, Tibet’s role can be characterized as a buffer state amidst the various tribes of the late Mongols, the Han and other nationalities in the region. Tibet’s extraordinary strategic position results from its geographic location in the Himalayas. The history of ancient Tibet is frequently connected to the history of Tibetan Buddhism, since religion has always played a decisive role in the life of the community.

„Located on the high altitude plateau thrown up by the Himalayas, despite its geographic remoteness, Tibet has played a crucial role in key historical developments in Asia. This has ranged from the Dalai Lama’s special relationship with the Mongol Emperors to Tibet’s role in the Great Game between Russia and Britain in the early 20th century.”

The Dalai Lamas have been exerting rule over the Kingdom of Tibet, while different forms of regional and structural ties connected the empire to China and to the Mongols.

It was during the 19th century for the first time, at the peak of Britain’s power, that the British empire sought to establish political, economic and diplomatic ties to Tibet. „Britain’s interest in Tibet grew out of its imperialist expansion into South Asia and its desire to establish Tibet as a market for its goods and a safe trade route to China.”

To strengthen its influence in the region, a treaty in 1904, the Anglo-Tibetan Treaty was imposed. Though being one of Britain’s early interests in the region, unfortunately for Tibet today, Britain’s policies at the time did not aim to turn Tibet into a protectorate state with a similar colony status as India. Since Britain’s trade interests were fulfilled and since it did not wish to interfere in Tibet’s political ties, the Anglo-Tibetan treaty was followed by a Sino-British treaty in 1906 by which the „Government of Great Britain engaged not to annex Tibetan territory or to interfere in the administration of Tibet. At the same time, the Government of China also undertook not to permit any

9 Free Tibet, Historical Relations between Tibet and China, available online at: http://www.freetibet.org/about/historical-relations, accessed 21 July 2012
10 The special connection to China and to the Mongols at the time gained momentum through the title of the ‘amban’. The word comes from a Manchu origin, meaning „high official”. The terms refers to Manchu imperial residents in Lhasa, who received orders from their own government and were supposed to keep a close watch on the leaders of Tibet and oversee the garrison in Lhasa. The practice of having Qing ambans in Lhasa continued until 1912. in: Melvyn C. Goldstein: The Snow Lion and the Dragon. China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, University of California Press, 1997, p. 17.
other foreign state to interfere with the territory or internal administration of Tibet.” Later on, in 1907, Britain and Russia agreed that in “conformity with the admitted principle of the „suzerainty of China over Tibet” both nations "engage not to enter into negotiations with Tibet except through the intermediary of the Chinese Government.”\(^\text{12}\) In fact, this can be comprehended as the first momentum when China’s supremacy over Tibet was proclaimed in its earliest form and a „legal basis” for the „special relationship” has been born. In fact, „Britain’s casual invasion of Tibet stimulated China to protect its national interests by beginning a program of closer cultural, economic and political integration of Tibet with the rest of China. At the same time, in the ethnographic Tibetan borderland, a major campaign was initiated, which quickly converted most of the autonomous native Tibetan states into districts under Chinese magistrates.”\(^\text{13}\) However, Tibetans did not accept their subordinance towards China. Following the theoretical annexation, in fact, during the period of 1912 and 1951, Tibet enjoyed a de facto independence. Many Tibetan scholars refer to this period as the term of real Tibetan independence, claiming that China had no right to establish its rule over a sovereign country, with its own, distinct culture, language and religion.

During this period of de facto independence, the country continued to have very limited contacts to the outside world and managed its relationship with the Chinese Emperor under the „patron and priest” model\(^\text{14}\) as during the previous centuries. In practice, Tibet maintained a very limited foreign policy, emphasizing the importance of its closed society, and did not seek to become a formidable power on the international scene. After so many additional years in history and policial events, we could point out that perhaps this was an unappropriate choice in its foreign policy. However, on the other hand, the question remains: How could have Tibet maintained a high profile at the time, when the international community did, unfortunately, not acknowledge Tibet as an independent state on the basis of international law? In Chinese sources, this fact is often used opportunistically to claim that Tibet was never recognized by the international community. As Xinhua comments on its Tibet Focus website: „No country or government has ever acknowledged the independence of Tibet. (...) the so-called ’Tibet-Independence’ was part of imperialist aggressors’ attempt to carve up China.”\(^\text{15}\)

In fact, the reality was that the international community claimed no particular interest in Tibet. It did rather maintain relations with China on the basis of economic and trade interests, which were clearly important at the crucial start of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century. Would Tibet’s wishful independence been emphasized by the international community at this time, along with Tibet’s own determined aspiration to become part of

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\(^\text{14}\) The patron and priest model is generally used by a number of historic sources, referring to a special relationship of Tibet and China. Accordingly, this relation could be described as that of patron and priest, having a unique character, which was not based on the subordination of one to the other.

the international community, perhaps the turmoil following the First World War could have provided an efficient momentum for the acknowledgement of its borders.

In historic terms, during the period of Tibet’s de facto independence, China aimed to restore its former greatness. Therefore, regaining control of Tibet took on great symbolical significance. China suffered a number of lost battles at the beginning of the 20th century, so the empire clearly needed a restoration of its authority. The fact of “incorporating” Tibetan provinces under its own sphere of influence was a significant part of these political tactics. Thus, on April 12, 1912, the new Chinese republic headed by Yuan Shikai issued an edict that declared Tibet, Mongolia and Xinjiang on equal footing with the provinces of China proper and as integral parts of the Republic. Seats were set aside for Tibetans in the National Assembly and a five-colored flag was created, the black band representing Tibet. As Melvyn Goldstein, a Tibet researcher and writer comments on this special momentum: “The Tibet question in its modern incarnation had been born.”

At the time, Tibet’s 13th Dalai Lama aimed to refrain from losing Tibet’s previous independence, therefore, the Tibetan government requested a new friend, British India to provide help. Even though Britain was no longer interested in ties with Tibet, they secured that under their pressure, the new Chinese government was asked to participate in a conference in Simla. However, the negotiations did not turn out to be promising for Tibetans. Britain’s strategic aims were not congruent with those of Lhasa and the British did not support an independent Tibet. British trade interests in China and Hong-Kong seemed of prior significance, therefore, “Britain proposed that Tibet be accepted as a self-governing dominion nominally under China but with Chinese influence and power severely limited.” This was codified in the so called Simla Convention, which declared that Tibet would be autonomous from China, however, with the acknowledgement of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet.

Instead of solving the Tibet Question, the treaty reinforced Chinese dominance over the region and resulted in massive disappointment for Tibetans. In Tibetan history, this is a point of another misfortune, as British “friends” betrayed Tibet for their own trade interests and ties to China, and because the international community did not manage to provide sufficient help to counterbalance British and Chinese interests in the region. Therefore, for the very first time, Tibet became the “victim” of stronger nations’ interests and was “forced” to subordinate to China. As such, from the viewpoint of the international community, it was argued that Tibet did not ask for international support. On the other hand,

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16 for example its defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 ended with the loss of Manchuria and Taiwan, while there were also a number of anti-Western uprisings taking place internally.
19 In practical terms, Tibetans would administrate Tibet with their own officials in accordance with their own customs and laws, and China would not be permitted to station large numbers of troops and officials in Tibet – but China could maintain a commissioner in Lhasa and an escort of up to three hundred men. This compromise was not the independence Tibet wanted, but nonetheless did guarantee that it would retain complete control over its affairs, including the army, currency, and all other important functions. It would also legitimize an international identity for Tibet and spare it the burden of having to prepare for possible military conflict with China. Britain, of course, achieved exactly what it had sought - a harmless buffer zone along India’s northern border in which its political interests were fulfilled and its commercial interests could develop. in: Melvyn C. Goldstein: The Snow Lion and the Dragon. China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, University of California Press, 1997, p. 33.
the most crucial problem within these years was that the international community continued to exercise a double standards policy. It maintained ties to Tibet, mostly acknowledging the Dalai Lama as the religious leader, while validating the Chinese position on their dominance over Tibet by inaction or by lofty rhetoric and tacit approval. The price for this was to be paid by Tibet itself in the later decades.

Going back to our historic terms, the first years of the official Chinese suzerainty brought a rather friendly and acceptable relationship, leaving enough room for Tibet to maintain its ties with external powers. Exercising a de facto independence, the 13th Dalai Lama aimed to start a modernization process during these years. However, his intentions were wrecked by a layer of theocratic representatives, who identified westernization and transformation as a threat to Tibetan Buddhism. This can be comprehended as another, yet Tibetan setback in Tibet’s history, when Tibetan intellectuals had a crucial opportunity to create their own internal state structure and to start with a contemporary modernization process. Some scholars argue that with the rejection of newly fledgling policies in education, military build-up and with other policies aiming at opening up of the Tibetan economy to the outside world, Tibet lost its best chance to create a modern entity and an internal political and cultural layer, which could have been in the position to coordinate international support for its independent status at the time. Therefore, in the era in between of the World Wars, which were crucial for European and world powers and when new nation-states have been born, Tibet lost several chances of educating its own leaders, starting up with a modernization process instead of isolation and demanding a more prominent role in world politics as an independent nation.

The radical period in Tibet’s history started with the inauguration of the People’s Republic of China by Mao Zedong on 9 October 1949. Directed by a new kind of centralist policy, China was established as a multiethnic state with autonomous nationality regions. The problem of Tibet became obvious: “it was considered one such nationality region….In late 1949 the new Chinese Communist government proclaimed its liberation as one of the main goals for the People’s Liberation Army.”\textsuperscript{20} As commented in a White Paper on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet by Xinhua: “The Tibetan people are an inseparable part of the Chinese nation, and any attempt to divide them from China will be doomed. This is a consistent policy of the Communist Party of China and the People’s Liberation Army.”\textsuperscript{21} Therefore, described as a ‘Peace Liberation’\textsuperscript{22}, on 7 October 1950, the PLA entered the Tibetan area of Chamdo, where they defeated the non-resistant Tibetan army.\textsuperscript{23} In Tibetan history, this is far from being remembered as a peaceful liberation, since it marks the beginning of a stateless and powerless era.

\textsuperscript{22} Free Tibet, Historical Relations between Tibet and China, available online at: http://www.freetibet.org/about/historical-relations, accessed 21 July 2012
\textsuperscript{23} According to Beijing’s version, „the Tibetan nobility and clergy led their people in an armed rebellion against the Chinese state and the Dalai Lama has planned the rebellion since early 1957, with the support from the CIA, which trained 170 guerillas and supplied them with weapons from the air, including anti-aircraft machine guns and 10,000 rifles. However, according to a Chinese historian, Li Jianglin, „it was Mao Zedong who provoked the uprising as it was the only way to remove the Tibetan ruling class and enable him to carry out the same revolutionary reforms of land and society as in the rest of China. in: Mark O’Neill: Dalai Lama’s 1959 Flight from Tibet, 28 January 2011, source: www.phayul.com, available at: http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=29008&t=1, accessed 10 November 2012
characterized by continuous unrest, human rights violations, religious, cultural identity suppression, together with further extended policies for wiping out the Tibetan culture and ethnicity and re-forming it on the basis of the identity of the „motherland“. Even the Seventeen-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet\(^{24}\), which was actually forced, was remembered bitterly by Tibetan friends. It simply needed to be accepted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and made no real concessions for Tibet.\(^{25}\) Despite Tibetan bitterness, Chinese sources comment on the act of liberation as follows: “The peaceful liberation of Tibet was an important part of the cause of the Chinese people's liberation, a great event in the Chinese nation's struggle against imperialist invasion to safeguard national unity and sovereignty, an epoch-making turning point in the social development history of Tibet, and a milestone marking the commencement of Tibet's progress from a dark and backward society to a bright and advanced future.”\(^{26}\)

According to the above statement, the next period was envisioned to be filled with Chinese aspirations under the umbrella of development aid, which can be noticed in a more modern form today. China was and is still convinced that Tibetans are a backward nation and that Han Chinese are the 'liberators’ who bring light and modernization to these remote areas. Tibetans were opposing these aspirations already in 1959, when serious uprisings broke out, first in the regions of Amdo and Kham, then in Lhasa, evoking a wide-scale resistance movement. In March 1959 the 14\(^{th}\) Dalai Lama fled into exile to northern India. The subsequent Chinese crackdown in Tibet was brutal.\(^{27}\) Therefore, from the first decade of Chinese occupation, Tibetans have learned that agreements had no power, religion had no place and autonomy was to be forgotten if Tibet would succumb to China.

With the escape of the Dalai Lama into exile a significant power vacuum was created and a new chapter in Tibetan history has started. This contradictory status lasts up to the present times. Already in 1959, cca. 40 000 of his followers moved into exile with His Holiness. First provided as an interim solution by the Indian government, the home in India became later the exile home of the Dalai Lama.

In Tibet, after the 'peaceful liberation’, the next decade brought Mao Zedong’s moderation policy, which clearly failed.\(^{28}\) Gaining on this momentum, Tibet called for international support and submitted a

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\(^{24}\) Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, or the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet for short, is a document in which the delegates of the 14\(^{th}\) Dalai Lama allegedly reached an agreement with the Chinese government concerning their sovereignty over Tibet. Chinese sources regard the document as a legal source which confirms the validity of Chinese role in Tibet. Tibetan exile sources and international governments reject its validity, arguing it has been signed under pressure and duress. The 14\(^{th}\) Dalai Lama has rejected the agreement several times.

\(^{25}\) The Seventeen-Point Agreement declared that Tibet had become part of China, providing that ‘the Tibetan people shall return to the big family of the Motherland – the People’s Republic of China (Point 1), the Tibetan government should actively assist the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to enter Tibet and consolidate their national defenses (Point 2), Tibetan troops should be reorganized step by step into the Chinese army (Point 8), and China should be responsible for all of Tibet’s external affairs (Point 14), in: Song Liming: Reflections on the 17-Point Agreement of 1951, available at: http://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/FACTS-ABOUT-17-POINT-AGREEMENT_.pdf, p.28


\(^{27}\) Even the Chinese figures record 87,000 deaths in the National Uprising and its aftermath; Tibetan sources suggest as many as 430,000 were killed in the Uprising and subsequent years of guerilla warfare. Even if there was some support provided, the CIA's secret assistance came too late and no free territory could remain as a „Free Tibet”, which could have served as a basis for further military operations. in: Free Tibet, Historical Relations between Tibet and China, available online at: http://www.freetibet.org/about/historical-relations, accessed 21 July 2012

\(^{28}\) Following the rule of the Communist Party in China, Mao Zedong aimed to achieve a modernization and transformation in Tibet. The years 1951-1959 can be seen as a transition period, however, which ended poorly both for China and for Tibet. Tibet’s religious leaders were unable to develop and implement a realistic strategy with which they could have kept Tibet’s autonomy over the long-run, while Chinese were not successful in implementing their socialist policies and therefore, they could not achieve Tibet becoming part of Communist China.

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request even to the United Nations. However, with a lack of clear backing, especially from the side of the United States, the UN resolutions, passed in 1961 and 1965\(^{29}\), did not bring any visible impact. Instead, ‘forced assimilation’ in China had continued and the territories of Kham and U-Tsang (which were under the Dalai Lama’s jurisdiction before) were renamed as Tibetan Autonomus Region or TAR - the modern version of the Tibetan ’ethnic-state’, the TAR was born. With the rejection of the Tibetan initiative as such, the consideration of Tibet as an independent nation and its potential to be acknowledged by the international community, lost perhaps its best momentum in time.

This new chapter in Tibetan history meant the most terrible times for the people of Tibet, since the socialist views promoted anti-religious propaganda, ridiculing Tibetan Buddhism, culture, language and their feudal society. These times are bitterly remembered by Tibetans and, „the years between 1949 and the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 are generally considered the peak period of physical and cultural assault on Tibet.”\(^{30}\) These years are linked with ’cultural genocide’, starting with the period of 1959-61, when the majority of Tibet’s 6000 monasteries were destroyed or closed down.

During these decades, „the Chinese state has relentlessly pursued its vision of ’China’s Tibet’, with a heavy emphasis on the Party’s priorities for economic development and societal transformation. Since Tibetan leaders were unwilling to relinquish from their religious values and cultural identity, an ever more brutal ’democratization’ followed from the Chinese government.\(^{31}\) However, it is clear that China’s policy of liberation of the Tibetan people did not work. The liberation was ’pursued’ along with the contemporary xiafang or ‘downward transfer to the countryside’ campaign, which can be comprehended in some of its features as a predecessor of today’s Western Development Strategy. The xiafang campaign aimed to move millions of people from the urban areas of China to the remote and sparsely populated regions in the north and west with intention to integrate and assimilate the minorities.”\(^{32}\) In some format, the WDS aimed at the same goal starting in the 1990s and the population transfer still continues up to today. If we take a closer look at these governmental policies in the 1960s and 1970s, we find that forced assimilation and Sinecizing Tibet has been continuously ongoing, yet, only the policy framework and the CPC’s leaders have been changing over the decades. Despite the massive attacks on religion and on the identity of the Dalai Lama, Tibetans continue with their religious traditions

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\(^{29}\) In 1961, Malaysia, Thailand, Ireland and El Salvador requested a 2\(^{nd}\) consideration of the „Question of Tibet” in the U.N. General Assembly. Resolution 1723 (XVI) was adopted by the General Assembly by a vote of 56 to 11, with 29 abstentions. In 1965, Malaysia, El Salvador, Ireland, Malta, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Thailand requested a 3\(^{rd}\) consideration of the „Question of Tibet” in the U.N. General Assembly. Resolution 2079 (XX) was adopted by the General Assembly by a vote of 43 to 26, with 22 abstentions. available at: International Campaign for Tibet, [http://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/un-resolution-2079](http://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/un-resolution-2079).

\(^{30}\) 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 53.

\(^{31}\) During this period, there were three key sources of cultural devastation in Tibet: the imposition of ‘democratic reforms’ that attacked the pillars of Tibetan culture, including Tibetan Buddhism; the Chinese authorities’ brutal response to Tibetan resistance to democratic reforms; and the forced collectivization and tragically preventable famine of the Great Leap Forward. in: 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 54.

\(^{32}\) Great Leap Forward - An economic and social campaign. The Great Leap Forward aimed to transform China’s agrarian character to a communist society, with massive industrialization and collectivization as tools. However, instead of gearing up the economy, it resulted in a very destructive outcome.

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\(^{30}\) 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 59.
even stronger today. As noted by Melvyn Goldstein, a Tibet researcher and writer, no matter how comprehensive the cultural genocide was during the 1960s and 1970s, after a visit of the Representatives of the exile-government to Lhasa, „Tibetan masses, despite twenty years of Communist propaganda, still believed strongly in the Dalai Lama and had strong feelings of Tibetan nationalism.”

Having observed the refugee community in Dharamsala and having acquainted myself with the resources of numerous NGO initiatives, I believe that this trend strongly continues even today.

During the 1960s, the strengthening forces of Tibetan nationalism led to the acknowledgment of massive repressions and of Tibet’s destruction by the Chinese government, which can be understood as a major - yet rather tiny and certainly not radical - policy change. Hu Yaobang, the New Party Secretary enforced a friendlier ethnic dimension, which enabled the rebuilding of Tibetan culture, monastic life, improvements in science, education and language, while economic measures focused on improving the standards of living. It was at this time that Tibet was opened to tourism and international trade and the local government was framed according to a clear Tibetan character. However, on the political line, „Tibet would continue to be ruled under the `unified leadership’ of the Chinese Communist Party.” Due to the liberalization policies, an ever larger number of Chinese workers arrived to Lhasa and other regions in Tibet, with the aim to find job opportunities in the TAR. Eventually, many of them settled for long years or even for ever, helping the Chinese government to put an end to the homogenous character of Tibet’s society. The Open Tibet Policy (as this influx of Han Chinese people at the time was called), however, did not bring the best results for Tibetans, since they started to be in danger of becoming a minority in their homeland. In the decades since then, this social development trend has been further enforced and under the current conditions, it is impossible to turn it back. Several researchers see this 'type of development' as a primary tool for wiping out Tibetan culture and identity from the region. As Diane Wolff, a prominent Tibet writer comments in reference to the events in the 1960s and 1970s: „Was this a good model for development, as Beijing contended? Or was it cultural genocide, as Dharamsala contended?”

On the other front, it was during these years that the exile community realized its crucial role in acting on behalf of all Tibetans. While the Dalai Lama developed the Tibetan policy of non-violence and declared his position on the 'Middle-Way Approach’ already at these times, the CPC did not show real terms for cooperation. Using the Communist Party’s propaganda machine, the Party blamed its misfortune and its unsuccessful policy implementation in Tibet on Tibetan backwardness and continuously pointed out Tibet’s economic primitiveness. The question of ethnic difference has never come to official questioning, as China was not willing to accept Tibet in other statehood than within its

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34 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 66.
own borders. Means for reconciliation of Tibetan 'statehood', to grant 'real political autonomy' or to agree on 'independence' have not yet been provided ever since.

The strengthening role of the Dalai Lama as a religious (and at that time political) leader gained strong momentum on the international stage from the late 1980s. Thanks to his international travels, his worldwide speeches calling for religious freedom and liberty, and his teachings about the essential nature of Tibetan society and Tibetan Buddhism, the international community, state governments as well as international organizations have showed an increased concern for Tibet. Following the earlier double standards policy and the rapprochement with China, the Clinton administration established the provisions for appointing a Special Envoy for Tibet already in 1997. In terms of assistance, USAID ranks amongst the most important donors for Tibetan development projects, while the United States also hosts the largest ethnic Tibetan group – 15000 people today. On the European horizon, the governments of Norway, Denmark, Switzerland and Belgium are similarly important donors, while on the EU-level the Tibet Intergroup at the European Parliament gathers local and international NGOs and provides a specific platform for human rights debates, negotiations and integrating Tibet-related NGOs.

Despite having the world citizens lined up behind the Dalai Lama on the occasion of the Nobel Peace Prize award and despite his increasing support and acknowledgement, China’s hard-line policy has not changed throughout the last decades. The strengthening actions of the exile government and their aim to establish themselves as a relevant political force, neither the triumphs of the Dalai Lama on the international scene, seemed powerful enough to compel China to a significant policy change.

As a result of Beijing’s hard-line measures, the Tibetan uprising of 2008 marks a new era in Tibet’s political history. Since all other means are banned, Tibetans are turning to new ways of expressing their hopelessness and inability to change their fate inside China. The self-immolations of monks and nuns, up to the present 97 Tibetan men and women since February 27, 2009, have mobilized wide-ranging international support, catching the attention of NGOs, international organizations and Tibet supporters around the globe. According to Mr. Tendar Tsering, Managing Editor at Tibet Telegraph, „self-immolations clearly contribute to international awareness-raising. Neither the United Nations, neither the EU are supportive enough as they are more concerned about their own interests. However, at least people can help...if not governments.”

The events are clearly visible, while according to many Tibetans, especially the young, the protests and self-immolations mark a new, revolutionary era in Sino-Tibetan relations.

36 Personal interview with Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet, Dharamsala, May 2012.
37 Personal interview with Mr. Thomas Mann, President of the Tibet Intergroup at the European Parliament, November 2012.
39 Personal interview with Mr. Tendar Tsering, Managing Editor at Tibet Telegraph, Journalist at www.phayul.com, Dharamsala, May 2012.
40 Based on personal interviews with Representatives of the Tibetan Youth Congress and Students for a Free Tibet, grassroots organizations based in Dharamsala, India, May 2012.

According to Warren W. Smith, writer and broadcaster with the Tibetan service of Radio Free Asia, „the demonstrations and riots in Tibet in March 2008 were the largest anti-Chinese protests there since March 1989, when martial law was imposed for a year, or perhaps even since the 1959 revolt. The magnitude and spread of the protests to all parts of the Tibetan Plateau, including many areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region, fully justify their characterization as a Tibetan national uprising.”41 The uprising marked the 49th anniversary of the unsuccessful March 1959 protests and intended to draw attention to the ongoing disrespect towards Tibetans ever since. Perhaps the most straightforward description of the background of the event was commented by Human Rights Watch, as follows: „Against the backdrop of ever-more intrusive controls over religious and cultural activities, accelerated state-led economic development and large-scale compulsory resettlement of farmers and nomads, major protests against Chinese rule erupted on March 10, 2008 in Lhasa and spread across the Tibetan Plateau.”42

The event started with the march of some 500 monks of Drepung monastery into the center of Lhasa, when on the way they were stopped by Chinese security police. Some of them were beaten and even arrested under the pretext of having carried the Tibetan national flag. The next day, some of their fellows from Sera Monastery aimed to march to the jail and demand their release, however, these monks were also stopped and beaten on the way. Following these unrests, Chinese police surrounded other religious centers, among others the famous Ganden monastery, in order to stop other masses of monks and nuns from protesting. Many were arrested, mistreated and hungered in prison due to their disobedience to Chinese forces.

The revolts resulted from the overall frustration from the non-existent, but still wishful religious freedom of Tibetans inside China and from the continuous economic, social and cultural marginalization of Tibetans on their own territory. Under the framework of the WDS and following the opening of the Tibet-Qinghai Railway in 2006, China imposed further restrictions on Tibetan culture, emphasizing anti-Dalai Lama propaganda, accusation of the Dalai Clique of ‘splittist policies’ and humiliation of Tibetans in all possible aspects.

As a reaction to the massive arrests of monks and the misconduct committed against them, further masses gathered in the old town of Lhasa, where clashes with the Chinese police occurred. At the same time, protests in other international cities broke out, where Tibetans were demonstrating in front of Chinese embassies, justifying their alignment with their fellows inside Tibet.

World leaders called on China to start negotiations with the Dalai Lama, but Beijing responded with inaccurate statements and accused Tibetans and the Dalai Lama of the organization of the riots. According to the organization Human Rights Watch, „the Chinese government has framed all discussions

about Tibet as a sovereignty issue, claiming that the country’s territorial integrity and inter-ethnic relations were threatened by a secessionist movement supported by ‘hostile foreign forces’. The government has consistently rejected all allegations of human rights abuses in Tibet, by claiming that Tibetans’ rights are fully protected under the law; pointing to political, social and economic development over the past half-century; or rejecting the expression of such concerns as conspiracies to fan ethnic dissatisfaction against the Communist Party and the government.”

Chinese propaganda spread all over the international media, focusing on accusations of the ‘Dalai Clique’ of incendiarism and splitism. U.S. President George W. Bush urged Hu Jintao, the Chinese President to engage in substantive talks with envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama towards bringing a peaceful solution to the unrest in Tibet. (...) On 25 March, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of South Africa called on United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Tibet to investigate into the developments there and to report to the international community.”

The riots drew the attention of several world papers, attracting scrutiny of China’s human rights record and its pollution problems. Tibet’s question for sovereignty and the nation’s call for autonomy was supported in the media. As The New York Times commented: 'the protests by Buddhist monks spiraled to include cries for Tibet’s independence...'

The European Union also expressed its deep condemnation of China’s measures and urged the Chinese authorities to refrain from using force against Tibetan demonstrators. On March 12, 2009, the European Parliament issued a resolution, in which it „urged the Chinese Government to consider the Memorandum for Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People of November 2008 as a basis for substantive discussion leading towards positive, meaningful change in Tibet, consistent with the principles outlined in the Constitution and the laws of the People’s Republic of China. Similarly, it called on the Council Presidency on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to India to adopt a declaration calling on the Chinese Government to open a constructive dialogue with a view for reaching a comprehensive political agreement and condemned all acts of violence.” (...) In the resolution, the MEPs have also asked the Chinese authorities to „provide foreign media access to Tibet, including the Tibetan areas outside the TAR”, and „to grant UN human rights experts and recognized international NGOs unimpeded access to Tibet so that they can investigate the situation there.” The EU’s High Representative, Catherine Ashton, has also expressed European concerns over the

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deteriorating situation in Tibet, in particular due to the unjust development and environmental policies implemented in Tibet. In her speech, she urged the government of China to resume the talks with the Dalai Lama.\textsuperscript{48} However, without further practical actions, the EU’s inactivity has been criticized by many Tibetans. It was claimed that several EU resolutions were passed on this matter, yet none of them have been transformed into specific actions by the Council.\textsuperscript{49}

Considering the wide scope of the international attention which has been achieved, we could claim that Tibetans were successful in their intention to generate interest in their cause and in China’s human rights record at the time when it could perhaps hurt China the most - right before the Beijing Summer Olympics. As Warren W. Smith comments: „Tibetans and their supporters were subsequently very successful in turning the Olympic Torch relay that Beijing had promoted as a ‘Journey of Harmony’ into a propaganda disaster for China.”\textsuperscript{50} At a time, when China aimed to become a respectful member of the international community and integrate itself into a league of powerful and modern world leaders, its accusation of its human rights record and of internal problems was assuredly humiliating.

Overall, China has been facing harsh criticisms and condemnation from the world community for its aggressive handling of the events of the Tibetan 2008 uprising. Therefore, its reaction was of equal volume, deliberately misinterpreting the internal situation and disguising it with international propaganda. Quoting a lawmaker, Xinhua commented on the events as follows: „Recent self-immolations by monks in China’s Tibetan regions were part of the Dalai Lama clique’s scheme to internationalize the Tibet issue.”\textsuperscript{51} On top of this, China managed to garner international support for its cause and presented the situation in a way that the country’s stability and unity was threatened due to the Dalai Lama’s separatist activities. According to Xinhua, „the governments of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Syria and a number of African states have all expressed their empathy towards Beijing and felt sorry for the destructive acts that ’attempted to harm the unity of China’s people at this very important time. Numerous Asian countries, along with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have pledged their support for the necessary measures adopted by the Chinese government in stopping criminal actions and maintaining stability in Tibet.\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, comments by Chinese all around the world have shocked many Tibetans. It became clear that anti-Tibetan propaganda taught the Chinese that China liberated Tibet and that Tibet’s advancements were the result of the generous Chinese leadership. Chinese views similarly revealed that according to them, Tibet was a feudal backward state and that its people were much better off since China liberated their territory and incorporated it into the Great Motherland. „Chinese rule was further justified by the characterization of

\textsuperscript{49} Personal interview with Mr. Ngodup Dorjee, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Office of Tibet in Brussels, 4 October 2012
old Tibet before liberation as a dark, barbaric, cruel, feudal Hell on Earth, suitably exaggerated by Chinese propaganda, from which Tibetans were grateful to have been liberated by the CPC.” Overall, these opinion distortions reflected the existence of a very powerful Chinese propaganda machine, deeply affecting public thinking about their own and about Tibetan realities. China’s arrogant and aggressive reactions to the events and to the appeals of the international community, in fact, revealed a lot about the nature of its statehood in the modern era. While China aimed to present itself as a well-advanced, powerful, modern, 21st century state at the Beijing Olympics, its critics and Tibet’s friends rather understood that the Chinese state is still held back in the times of 19th century empires, that committed propaganda and crushed any revolt in order to hold on to its colonies. China’s intransigence in regard to the Tibetan issue, their accusation of the Dalai Clique and the hostile Western forces, has exposed the real Chinese sense of aggrieved nationalism. This policy line is being followed even up to today. As Mr. Dhundup Gyalpo from the CTA stated, „Chinese propaganda is too huge. Therefore, our aim remains to provide Tibetan perspectives based on Tibetan views. It is within our responsibility to provide accurate information, raising awareness outside, mobilize international resources and sustain their existence.”

However, on the other hand, according to the International Campaign for Tibet, „a group of Chinese intellectuals in China had publicly urged the country’s leaders to rethink the Tibet Policy, in a petition entitled ’Twelve Suggestions for Dealing with the Tibetan Situation’, released on March 22, 2008.” Signed by 29 signatories, the letter urged the Chinese government to stop the violent suppression in Tibet and appealed to the Tibetan people likewise not to engage in violent activities. China’s decades-long Tibet Policy was openly criticized and a revision of the failures committed against Tibetans was demanded. Even though the petition emphasized the importance of China’s image at the crucial times of the country’s smooth integration into the structures of the international community, it had no significant impact on the propaganda effect. Yet, in published articles, China is referring to the Tibetan self-immolations as „copycat suicides of young Tibetans, who are impulsive and lack self-control. (...) Similarly, monks and lamas are accused of urging young Tibetans to commit these acts.” Since the Dalai Lama has publicly prayed for the life of the self-immolators, in China’s interpretation this means that he has not publicly condemned the events. As confirmed by Tibetan media, the Dalai Lama has announced on several occasions that he did not stand behind the agitations and urged Tibetans inside Tibet to refrain from such violence. Until China interprets these actions as ’motivated by the Tibetan clergy to undermine social harmony”, reconciliation will not be plausible.

54 Personal interview with Mr. Dhondup Gyalpo, Tibetan civil servant at the CTA, Dharamsala, May 2012.
2. CHINA’S DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN TIBET

2.1. Understanding Regional Economic and Social Development

Social unrests in Tibet are clearly connected not merely with the lack of religious freedom granted to Tibetans inside the TAR, but with disadvantaged economic and social opportunities for Tibetans due to their ethnic origin and due to their marginalization in everyday life’s many aspects.

Regional economic and social transformation in Tibet has already started during the times after the Great Cultural Revolution with the aim to ‘modernize Tibet and lift it up to the level of that of the rest of China’. The earliest economic policies featured construction projects and China’s ‘Open-Door Policy’, which aimed „to open Tibet’s door wide to inner parts of the country and encourage traders, investments, economic units and individuals from China to Central Tibet to run different sorts of enterprises.“ On the social side, Mao Zedong’s new strategies under the umbrella of the ‘Great Cultural Revolution’ aimed to forge a rapid advance of Tibetans toward Communism, pursuing “to transform the PRC citizen into a new, modern, ‘socialist’ man. In order to do this, Mao and his followers believed it was necessary to rid the people of the ‘four olds’ – meaning old ideas, old culture, habits and customs.

Considering from the viewpoint of the one-China policy, the need for social and cultural assimilation of Tibetans is “understandable”. With a vision of promoting a strong, unified China, the role of minorities and their distinct character was less and less considered. Going back to the historic roots, China interpreted the status of the ‘Tibetan minority group’ as an ethnic group on Chinese territory since ancient times. During the late 20th century, economic interests were clearly strengthening the reasons why according to Chinese interpretation Tibet needed to remain incorporated into mainland China, given especially Tibet’s specific geographical location, natural and mineral resources.

In the late 1990s, the framework strategy for Tibet’s development became well elaborated and it became operational under the name „Western Development Strategy“. The WDS was officially launched by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in his speech on June 17, 1999. Its impact is highly criticized ever since, while it proved to become a development plan serving primarily Chinese interests and neglecting the social and cultural differences of the ethnically distinct Tibetan population. The WDS, in fact, was presented as a response to poverty in the western provinces and its primary aim was to counterbalance regional disparities. Proclaimed for Tibet, but with latent Chinese interest in the background, it put an emphasis on construction projects in transport, on the development of energy and raw material industries, the construction of infrastructure for the transfer of resources from the west to the east of the country and the construction of soft infrastructure such as irrigation systems, roads, schools and other facilities. Which
is further important to note, is that its key component was the „freedom of non-Tibetans” to do business in Tibet.\textsuperscript{60}

When assessing its impact after more than a decade, it becomes clear that the WDS, eventually, contributed to a deepening of Tibetan ties to mainland China and reinforced Tibet’s integrity within the Chinese state. The influx of the „floating population” as the incoming and settling Han and Hui Chinese workers were called, contributed to a rapid acceleration of deepening social unrest, growing inequality and a more visible oppression of Tibetans on their own, Tibetan land. „The number of these non-Tibetans have turned Lhasa, the political heart of Tibet, into a city where non-Tibetan residents appear to equal or exceed the number of actual Tibetans.”\textsuperscript{61}

As such, these development projects were taking place for the happiness of the Chinese, but caused unhappiness among the Tibetans. Xinhua News Agency comments: „Over the 60 years since its peaceful liberation, Tibet, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the Central People's Government, has undergone a great historic process starting with democratic reform, and proceeding to the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, socialist construction, and to the reform and opening-up era, made unprecedented achievements in the modernization drive, and witnessed great changes in its social outlook and profound changes in its people's life. These achievements were attained by all the ethnic groups in Tibet through concerted efforts, and vividly manifest how China implements the ethnic minority policy of promoting unity and achieving common prosperity and development.”\textsuperscript{62}

However, this common prosperity and development was differently interpreted by the Tibetan ethnic 'minorities'. Numerous academics and researchers drew attention to the fact that the WDS actually resulted in facilitating the exploitation of the region’s abundant natural resources and transporting these into the mainland, serving as a catalyst for China’s resource-hungry economy. There is no doubt that the construction and opening of the famous and often celebrated Qinghai-Tibet Railway only „positively” contributed to „this success”.

Considering from the Chinese point of view, it is understandable that China’s accelerating economic growth still needs more resources and materials for its high-volume industrial manufacturing. Currently, large quantities of these raw materials are coming from Tibet, since China’s other geographic territories are suffering from overuse of land, deforestation and massive population quota. The CTA points out China’s lack of resources: „Seven of China’s 15 key minerals are expected to run out within a decade and consequently the extraction of minerals in Tibet is increasing in rapid and unregulated manner.”\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Melvyn C. Goldstein: The Snow Lion and the Dragon. China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, University of California Press, 1997, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{61} Melvyn C. Goldstein: The Snow Lion and the Dragon. China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, University of California Press, 1997, p. 94.
Concerning the ‘positive end-results’ of the plan, the Chinese government argues under the umbrella of extensive economic development, providing excellent boom for Tibet and points out that the TAR owes its modernization to the Chinese and their eagerness to provide such voluminous development assistance. The need for large-scale development projects, e.g. in construction, mining, natural resource exploitation, is explained by Tibet’s backwardness and the requirement to achieve rapid economic modernization. In fact, not much has changed since Mao’s Open-door Policy and the great liberalization 'achievements’ introduced „similarly in the interest” of Tibet. As of today, the government is continuously working on new projects and undertakings in the region in order to 'match Tibet’s standards with that of China’s’. According to the PRC’s 12th Five Year Plan, which covers 2011-2015, „the infrastructure boom still continues in Tibet.”64

However, from a Tibetan perspective, the reality is different. „Non-Tibetans control a large segment of all levels of the local economy – from street corner bicycle repairmen to computer store owners to large firms trading with the rest of China.”65 As such, the impacts of the greatly celebrated WDS promise are becoming less and less acceptable for Tibetans, while this kind of 'infrastructure development’ only reinforces their common economic ties, increases the influx of Chinese migrant workers into Tibetan areas and serves to exploit all remaining natural resources from Tibet. Tibetans argue that they have no real economic benefits from the WDS, but, on the contrary, they are suffering from environmental destruction, inhuman approach towards Tibetan Nomads, enforced relocation of local pastoral Tibetans and from an increasing immigration of ethnic Chinese.

When analyzing the economic development policies put in place in the TAR, it is important to note that this development boom is actually closely interconnected with an ever larger extent of social marginalization of Tibetans. Tibetans are suffering from social exclusion, which leads to improper education resulting in a high rate of illiteracy66 among locals. This, in turn, reinforces the need for more skilled 'immigrant Chinese workers’. In educational terms, Tibetans are facing high numbers of school dropout, as they are unable to face discrimination in local schools and since they are Sinecized in their language and culture. In terms of language skills, Chinese is a must and Tibetan language is neglected. As young adults, with no proper language skills in place, they cannot compete for local jobs. 67 “Contrary to

64 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 91.
66 According to the 2005 China Statistical Yearbook, the TAR, Tsongon and Gansu – which have large ethnic minority populations – have illiteracy rates of 33.03%, 22.08% and 19.42% respectively. The national average is 10.3%. Also according to the Human Development Report, national adult illiteracy rates throughout China are as low as 9.1%; whereas the illiteracy rate in Tibet continues to be as high as 54.86% – the highest among all the provinces in China. In: Society of Threatened Peoples, Racial Discrimination in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas in the People’s Republic of China”, a report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, June 2009, p. 14, available at: www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngo/Society_for_Threatened_Peoples_China_CERD75.doc - 2009-06-02
67 During the 10th Five-Year Plan, China claims to have invested 530 million yuan to support the reconstruction and extension of Tibet University, which serves to maintain Tibetan cultural heritage and preserve Tibetan education. Regarding the education of young and middle-aged children, China had promised several times in its Five-Year plans to provide bilingual education for the compulsory nine years of basic and elementary education for Tibetans and to acknowledge their right to education in their own language. However, serious breachings of this law have been reported. Despite all claims of the Chinese government, the reality is that Tibetans still do not receive an adequate education to enter the Chinese-language biased Tibetan job market. In fact, those who learn Chinese, usually do so on the expense of their own language and culture. Moreover, there are rather large differences in the quality of schools in cities and in rural areas. Since
the picture portrayed by the Chinese Government, unemployment among Tibetans is on the rise and discrimination is rampant. In addition to the work incentives given to Chinese immigrants to Tibet, blatant disparities exist in both the working conditions and wages between Tibetans and Chinese living in Tibet. For example, Tibetans are more often given jobs involving high risks; Chinese holding identical positions to Tibetans earn twice the wage; policies like compulsory confiscation of land, compulsory fencing and stock reduction quotas impede the ability of nomadic and rural Tibetans to support themselves; Tibetans do not command comparable fluency in Chinese necessary for many jobs; and Tibetans do not benefit from the huge mining and construction projects located in Tibet, which create jobs that are given to Chinese.”\textsuperscript{68} As Dr. Andrew Fischer, Professor at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague and contemporary researcher on China and Tibet argues, “the disadvantage of less-educated Tibetans is compounded by their lack of fluency in Chinese….only a wide spread proactive preferential policy towards Tibetans encompassing educational reforms, among other things, can address this problem. As he further comments, “such reforms could lead to a necessary shift towards ‘Tibetan-ising’ development.”\textsuperscript{69}

However, when it comes to the evaluation of education projects for Tibetans, the Chinese Government’s Official Web Portal claims as follows: “The Chinese government continues to assist education in Tibet and helps to train more people to guarantee the prosperity and stability of the region. (…) Moreover, it emphasizes that the government sticks to the policy of boosting the fast, coordinated and healthy development of education in the TAR.”\textsuperscript{70} Tibetan sources point out that propaganda is primary when it comes to the assessment of socio-economic development and education in the TAR as well, especially in terms of oppressing Tibetan interests. China argues that there are too few Tibetans and that apparently they are not able to modernize the economy all by themselves and for this reason, the help of Han Chinese shall be „welcomed”. Moreover, the CPC is proud of the investments in providing education resources for ethnic minorities\textsuperscript{71} and proclaims the improvement of the human rights situation within the borders of the PRC. However, according to independent sources, as for example the 2005 report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), only half the population in Tibet can read and write as opposed to 97% of those living in Beijing, Shanghai or Tianjin. With regard to curriculum,
distorted versions of Tibetan history are taught emphasizing the backwardness of the Tibetan race.” 72 The system clearly targets the weakening and shrinking of Tibetan culture, literature and language. According to Mr. Robbie Barnett, a Professor of contemporary Tibetan Studies at Columbia University, “upward mobility into the middle class and into secure positions is more and more dependent on learning Chinese. Tibetan becomes more and more rarely a way to get a position.” 73

Despite of all claims by the PRC’s central government, statistics taken at the TAR clearly demonstrate the failure of the Chinese “Western Development Strategy”, tailor-made for the development of the region. Nonetheless, the idea to economically transform Tibet goes hand in hand with the oppression of its cultural and religious heritage. This is a very important social issue for Tibetans, since Tibetan Buddhism is the core point of Tibetan society. In fact, the influx of Han Chinese workers provides a ‘good solution’ for these ‘oppression’ intentions, since if more and more Han Chinese settle in Tibet – given the economic and social benefits to them for this endeavour – Tibetan culture might become less homogeneous in the long run. According to the Chinese government, Han people shall provide modern thinking and new ideas to ‘backwards Tibetans’ and urge them to modernize by showing great examples. However, among local Tibetans, China’s population transfer policy is very unpopular. The influx of Han Chinese severaly disrupts the realities of the local economy and leads to the changing status of Tibetans as a disadvantageous minority on their own land. In light of these arguments, China describes its program as a necessary measure to “alleviate poverty in ethnic areas through the training and transfer of labor force.” Economic advantages and investments are similarly accentuated. Specifically, the authority notes: “The Chinese government has made special arrangements for infrastructure development in Tibet. During the period of the 10th Five Year Plan, the Central Government and Tibet Autonomous Region together invested 31.2 billion yuan in 117 projects.” 74 Even if Beijing feels this is the price they have to pay for the modernization of Tibet and building a modern Tibetan society which will not be based on religious thinking, I believe the concept is completely wrong. Such strategy cannot triumph in the long run, since the essential nature of Tibetan identity is aimed to be taken away. Moreover, if we look into history, we cannot find any example when this strategy could prove successful. Neither the ’Great Cultural Revolution’, neither the famous ’Great Leap Forward’ policies of previous Communist Party leaders proved successful in fully assimilating Tibetans into China.

In reference to economic development, significant urban growth is taking place in Lhasa, Tibet’s capital. As government investments are pouring in, the city’s landscape is changing, representing features of a modern era. Since the traditional Tibetan buildings are demolished and new, Chinese-style offices,
homes, shopping malls are constructed, this development is unacceptable for Tibetans. Once being a Holy City, Lhasa’s landscape tends not to represent the traditional Tibetan culture any more, yet, provides a mixed atmosphere of Tibetan, Han and international, modern influences. Tourism is continuously on the rise, with unbearable numbers of visitors, which – in the long run – will be unsustainable.

On the one hand, Tibetans’ resistance to this kind of change is understandable, since the city’s expansion is taking place without their involvement in these infrastructure projects. However, when assessing the modernization of Tibet, according to Liu Jianqiang, a Chinese scholar „the biggest threat to Tibetan culture is not the Han Chinese, but, it’s globalization”....As he comments: „In Lhasa, many Tibetans have put away their traditional clothes, and money has become paramount as young farmers and nomads leave the land for the city lights.”75 This is certainly important to note as well, since for an independent Tibet of the future, the nation has to find its way to combine modernization with religion, tackle the arising social issues in this relation and be successful in capitalizing on its own strength and resources.

As the last point in terms of economic and social development, I believe we also need to take a closer look at the agricultural policies implemented in Tibet and to consider the issue of food security and of the policies against the Nomads, especially from the perspective of international environmental human rights law.

China aimed to gain control over Tibet’s agricultural policy since the 1960s, when the traditional barley production was forcibly diminished and upon the government’s planning, other wheat types were introduced. These were heavily dependent on fertilizers and chemical substances – being not only more costly for the local Tibetans, but, moreover, depriving them from their self-sufficient production and from a possible barter economy. As a result of this, the great famine went into Tibet’s history as a remarkable period, when Chinese interventionist policies aimed to provide only for the needs of Chinese settlers and neglect local interests. “From 1961 to 1964, and again from 1966 to 1976 during the Cultural Revolution, more than 340,000 Tibetans starved to death.”76 The restrictive measures were changed at the end of the 1970s. At the same time, China also lobbied at international organizations’ doors to increase wheat production in Tibet. As a result, several financing projects were undertaken by the World Food Program in the 1980s, which, however, did not solve the primary issue of food security in the region. Current threats of food security include the restrictive measures on Tibetan Nomadism and the gradual cutback on Tibetan pastoral lifestyle and the changing of traditional agricultural methods without the necessary capacity development and trainings among the locals. This goes hand in hand with the frequent questions raised around the issue of Tibet’s modernization and of the eradication of the lifestyle of the uncivilized Nomads.

76 Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues. Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 120.
Nomads, making up cca. one-third of the population of Tibet, were natively living on the Tibetan Plateau and have developed a careful approach towards the vast environmental resources, in accordance with Tibetan Buddhism and have always been emphasizing environmental protection and inviolability. However, through the policies of the Chinese government, they were forced into permanent settlements, which deprived them their right to cultural and environmental practices. As the CTA states, „this localization or ’Sedentarisation’ of the Nomads has not only taken their pride but also made them dependent on the central government for future aid.”77 As it comments further: “China’s policy of modernizing agriculture in Tibet comes at the expense of eliminating traditional subsistence farming and a self-sufficient rural economy.”78 China’s Nomad Policy is often criticized even by the West, arguing that it takes away the dignity of the locals in terms of their environmental human rights. In practical terms, the social consequences for Tibetans are often those of unemployment, alcoholism, suicide and social exclusion.

Above all, no matter what success is envisioned by China for these development projects, the CPC’s strategy is not blessed by Tibetans. The fact that numerous religious and environmental sites in Tibet are being desecrated by these undertakings, only aggravates the problem. Furthermore, when it comes to the implementation of these plans and to the ‘sacrificing of Tibet’s environment’, locals are not informed and not even consulted by the government. In reference to this, the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights points out the importance of environmental sovereignty as follows: it is “the peoples’ right to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources…and in no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence.”79 In these terms, environmental sovereignty of the people and land of Tibet will need to be seriously re-considered if we aim to find ways for Asia’s sustainable development in the future and for a better cooperation towards these goals.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND SUSTAINABILITY IN CHINA AND TIBET

3.1. Strategic and Environmental Importance of Tibet for China and the Region

When assessing the importance of Tibet, it is certainly worthy to note the region’s geostrategic and geographic position and to carefully consider the geopolitical situation in the region. Tibet lies on the crossroads of influential cultures, where throughout the centuries, trade interests, power and influence dominated by regional and foreign powers. India, China and their predecessor kingdoms have always been competing for the surrounding territories and the remains of these disputes are still to be observed in the relations of the two countries today.

As Tibet lies in a region with the highest altitude on the planet, it is often called the „Roof of the World”. In this regard, I believe we certainly have to give credibility to the statement „Who controls the roof of the world, controls Asia.” As described by the CTA, „Tibet is one of the most environmentally strategic and sensitive regions in the world.”

It has not only a unique geographical location in the Himalayas, but also, when it comes to natural resources, Tibet can proudly demonstrate its wealth. The country has spacious areas of intact lands, a wide variety of precious herbs and plants, unique wildlife, biodiversity and has abundant water resources. Furthermore, its mineral resources are not to be dismissed either – as affirmed by the website www.china.org.cn, „the mine resources in Tibet are abundant.”

„Today, there are more than 126 identified minerals in Tibet with significant reserves of the world’s deposits of uranium, chromite, boron, lithium, borax and iron...Besides these, there are globally significant reserves of copper, gold, silver, zinc, oil and gas and other minerals on the Tibetan Plateau.”

It was estimated, that overall „the Plateau holds about 30-40 million tons of zinc, and several billion tons of iron.” Moreover, Tibet holds the largest reserves of Lithium (80% globally) and ranks amongst the top for its copper deposits.” Therefore, it is clear that such mineral wealth, with yet intact resources and plentiful untouched environmental assets make Tibet a territory of key importance for China and serve well for its drive for development and economic growth.

Apart from its geopolitical significance, Tibet has a very sensitive residence in the Himalayas, enjoying a unique ecosystem with specific flora and fauna on the planet. The region encompasses the Himalaya-Hindu Kush mountain range and the Tibetan Plateau, whereas the Tibetan Plateau is considered to be a region with a unique topography on earth, with particular geological, ecological and socio-cultural characteristics.

Apart from its nicknames due to its cultural and geographic isolation like 'Shangri-la’, or, 'The Roof of the World’, Tibet is also widely known as the 'Third Pole’. Its ice fields contain the largest reserve of fresh water outside the Polar Regions. This is of crucial importance, because „runoff from these region’s mountains feeds the largest rivers across Southeast Asia, including the Yangtze, Yellow, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Sutlej and Indus rivers.” Therefore, Tibet is also called the 'Water tower of Asia’, since it serves as a fresh water resource for Asia, giving birth to 10 major rivers that sustain around

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82 Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues. A publication by the Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, Dharamsala, India, 2000, p. 86.
2 billion people, spread over much of the continent.”

According to a White Paper published on www.chinaview.cn, „Tibet serves not merely as a ‘source of rivers’, and the ‘ecological source’ for the areas of South and Southeast Asia, but is also ‘the starter’ and ‘regulating area’ of the climate of China and indeed of the Eastern Hemisphere as a whole.” Yet, partly resulting from China’s development policies and partially due to uncontrolled pollution, Tibet’s reserves and its abundant ecosystem in the Himalayas face major environmental threats today.

3.2. Major Environmental Issues in Tibet

Climate change: Regional water management and food security

The glaciers, rivers, forests, innumerable lakes, mountains and wetlands of Tibet have long provided major environmental service to Asia, from Pakistan to Vietnam to modern China. „Its snow peaks and glaciers enable Tibet to be the source of four major rivers that meets much of Asia’s water demand, for instance as much as 70% of the summer flow in the Ganges and 50-60% of the flow in other major rivers and the Drichu (Yangtze River) river basin accounts for 40% of China’s freshwater resources, more than 70% of China’s rice production, 50% of its grain production, more than 70% of fishery production and 40% of China’s GDP.” Tibet’s importance for the world – among others - lies in its specific location, rooted in the Himalayas at an altitude of 4,500 metres. Its abundant glaciers and icy peaks play a crucial part in the water provision of the surrounding countries - its glaciers form the primary water source for 2.3 billion people of the total human population, much of that living in developing countries. This makes Tibet one of the most vulnerable regions on earth, inviting to receive more international attention. It has been scientifically proved that Tibet’s glaciers are much more exposed to climate change than the ice ranges at the Poles and that climate change is happening much faster here than at other spots on our planet. Therefore, if the current pace of CO₂ emissions will continue, cca. 80% of the Himalayan glaciers will disappear until the year 2030. According to projections by Tibet Environment Watch, they could shrink from the current 500,000 km² to 100,000 km² by the year 2030.

Previous events have already pointed out the sensitivity of the Tibetan environment and its crucial role in regulating water flows to the surrounding areas. Since a warmer climate is likely to occur with every additional year, the chance of floods in the region is higher - melting glaciers are more and more likely to cause floods and mudflows. According to the data provided by the CTA’s report, “since 1990, China’s major rivers have flooded large tracts of land almost every year. More than 1600 people drowned

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90 Tibet Environmental Watch, www.tew.org
91 To think in specific figures, for instance, the Rongbuk Glacier, draining the north side of the Mount Everest into Tibet, has been retreating 20 m a year. In the Khumbu region of Nepal along the front of the main Himalaya of 15 glaciers examined from 1976 to 2007 all retreated significantly, with an average retreat of 28 m per year. Source: Tibet Environment Watch, available at: http://www.tew.org/archived/2010/03082010_2.html#Asia, accessed 2 October 2012
due to flooding of the Yangtze River in July 1996. The flooded river waters have affected 1 in 10 Chinese.”92 Due to the increasing melting process, it is expected that water shortages will become more and more commonplace in numerous countries overall Asia. Due to the changing climate patterns, the run-off and flow regimes of the rivers in Tibet have already been changing. As Mr. Kishan Koday, a regional climate change expert notes, “The Machu (Yellow River), on which some 300 million people in China depend, is quickly drying up. The river has often failed to reach the Yellow Sea, its natural destination. Also in 2006, the upper section of Drichu (Yangtze River), which, as it runs to the sea, provides water for approximately 500 million people, sunk to its lowest level in over 80 years.”93 In its report “Summary of the First-ever Yangtze River Basin Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation Report, WWF China confirms the region’s particular vulnerabilities in terms of water resources, agriculture and food security, forests, grasslands, wetlands management and the sustainable development of the city of Shanghai in the future.”94 In terms of water scarcity, it is important to emphasize that water provision is limited already at the current circumstances, whereas the heart of China – the northeast – suffers from severe droughts and lack of water resources.95

Due to the loss of glaciers, Asia’s human livelihoods will face significant problems with water scarcity, since much of Asia’s population depends on the water resources originating on the Tibetan Plateau. The availability of safe drinking water is likely to be threatened and the use of sufficient amounts of water for irrigation purposes is questionable. It is already under the present circumstances that the lack of irrigation possibilities within certain areas on the Tibetan Plateau causes less productive yields, hinders usual access to drinking water and diminishes the chance of preserving local crops, which were historically present in the region. The effects of climate change in the region also force the locals, especially the Tibetan Nomads to redistribute their crop cultivation into new regions which seem to become more productive with the changing climate patterns and to introduce new types of crops besides the traditional barley. As research shows, Tibet’s grasslands and lowlands are facing different climate standards, therefore, numerous crops need to be adapted to the different conditions on the plateau in order to financially survive the impacts of climate change.

If the food security threat is already present under the current circumstances, it will be assuredly aggravated in the coming decades, especially when considering the needs of the fast growing populations of India, China and to some extent of that of Bangladesh as well – all dependent on the water sources of

95 For years, water shortage, water pollution and flooding have constrained growth and affected public health and welfare in many parts of China, where per capita availability of natural fresh water is only a quarter of the world average. Northern China is already a water scarce region, and China as a whole will soon join the group of water stressed countries. In: Addressing Water Scarcity in China, The World Bank, available at: http://web.worldbank.org/WEBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPENVIRONMENT/0..contentMDK:21015230--pagePK:34004173--piPK:34003707--theSitePK:502886.00.html, accessed 9 December 2012
the region. As Joydeep Gupta, Project Director of Chinadialogue’s Third Pole Project comments, Tibet’s environment certainly desires more attention since it becomes clear that “the effect of receding glaciers will be felt well beyond its borders, with profound impacts over a wide area in Asia and great risks of increased poverty, reduced trade and economic turmoil.” However, there are some major issues, which prevent effective cooperation in terms of water management and ensuring food security in the region. Firstly, it is quite problematic that the glaciers are located in a militarized zone. Secondly, due to the latent political adversary among the neighbours, political accords in the region face enormous sensitivity. Political cooperation is arranged along weak lines and the zone is disputed by the governments of China, India and Pakistan as well.

According to Mr. Tsering Choedup, Asia Coordinator for International Tibet Network based in Dharamsala, “the next world war will most likely occur as a fight over water resources in Asia, over the management of these water resources and due to the rapidly emerging water scarcity. Depending on what role for Tibet is secured, Tibet’s position will have a crucial impact on these developments.” The core problem is that water is often viewed in nationalist terms, instead of its appropriate term as a ‘shared resource’. Water disputes are generally handled bilaterally or regionally, but there are no international conventions or laws which would be binding for the affected countries. An establishment of a regional entity with joint responsibility for common water issues is difficult, given the long-term mistrust between India and China. At the end of the day, we have to acknowledge that Tibet lies in a region, which is crucial for Asia’s future development. Our previous statement “Who controls the Roof of the World, controls Asia”, provides herewith its best validity.

**Changing permafrost behaviour**

Apart from the above mentioned environmental concerns of water scarcity and changing river flows and climate patterns, influencing the stability of food security, it is also important to note the impact of warming climate on the state of permafrost layers on the Tibetan Plateau. This is often neglected, since it concerns biodiversity and the conservation of the species and does not affect – for the time being – strategic issues of the surrounding countries. Due to global warming, the permafrost areas are suffering from the loss of moisture, from species competition for survival, extinction of the native species and subsequent domination by more resistant species.” Biodiversity, which is so important for China and for all countries of the world, is in danger in this unique region. According to studies, “overall,
a reduction of 27% of plant species occurred between 1999 and 2001. More specifically, a 21% of medicinal plants and non-medicinal plants lost 40% of species due to warming."\(^\text{100}\)

For biodiversity, the importance of the Plateau lies in the fact that it is the most ecologically diverse place on the planet. As Joydeep Gupta argues, “the Plateau includes the most intact example of mountain rangelands in Asia with a relatively intact vertebrate fauna, and is one of the largest remaining terrestrial wilderness regions left in the world.”\(^\text{101}\) Several animal species are found only in this part of the world, like the wild yak, the Tibetan antelope or the snow leopard. “According to the WWF, at least 353 new species were discovered in the eastern Himalayas between 1998 and 2008, an average of 35 new species finds every year….The Plateau is home to specific species such as it is the last bastion for the greater one-horned rhinoceros. But the biodiversity of the region is already under immense pressure due to deforestation, agriculture, unsustainable fuel wood collection, overgrazing by domestic livestock, illegal poaching, mining, pollution, hydropower development and poorly planned infrastructure.”\(^\text{102}\) Yet, according to the WWF statistics, “only 25% of the region’s original habitats remain intact and 163 species that live in the eastern Himalayas, are considered to be globally threatened.”\(^\text{103}\)

Due to new climate patterns, permafrost behavior has similarly an impact on hydrological regimes and vegetation. “For instance, with the rise of 0.052 °C the permafrost area on the Tibetan Plateau will reduce about 195,000 km\(^2\) (13%) and over 700,000 km\(^2\) (46%) within the next 50 and 100 years respectively.”\(^\text{104}\) For a concrete example, it is worthy to mention that “in July 1975, drilling records indicate that permafrost found in Amdo (Chinese: Qinghai) at a depth of 3.5 m was 6.5 m thick. In July 1989, however, no frozen layer was detected in the same site, it had completely thawed.”\(^\text{105}\) At the same time, permafrost change will most likely lead to the shrinking of wetlands and grasslands. It will most likely cause insufficient irrigation, which, in turn, will enhance the need for alternative agricultural patterns and will aggravate the dangers related to food security in the region.

**Soil deterioration**

Apart from the changing permafrost behavior, the decreasing quality of the soil is another issue to be debated when it comes to environmental concerns in Tibet. In the last decades, the quality of Tibet’s grasslands has significantly diminished, particularly due to the increased use of fertilizers and to changing grazing patterns. In comparison to traditional nomadic grazing and inherited agricultural standards, the Tibetan Plateau has been exposed to a massive use of chemical fertilizers throughout the past three decades in order to maximize agricultural outputs. However, their negative results caused plenty of

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\(^\text{100}\) Julia A. Klein, John Harte and Xin-Quan Zhao, Decline in Medicinal and Forage Species with Warming is Mediated by Plant Traits on the Tibetan Plateau, 20 June 2008, p. 1


constraints for the Tibetan Nomads already in the 1990s. In its 1998 report, the International Commission of Jurists, commenting on the destruction of Tibetan rangelands, noted: “The degradation of the Tibetan grasslands is the most pervasive environmental impact of the era of Chinese control of Tibet, and the impact which most threatens the sustainability of Tibetan civilization.”¹⁰⁶ Due to the lack of grazing nowadays, desertification and soil destruction is becoming an alarming issue in Tibet, especially in the northeast, the source region of the Yellow and the Yangtze Rivers. According to a UN report from 2007¹⁰⁷, Tibet’s grasslands are being turned into desert at a rate of 2,330 km² each year.

**Pollution and industrial activities**

Over the past decade, China’s heavy industrial growth has led to a series of controversial environmental issues in Tibet and within China proper itself. A significant increase in pollutants has occurred largely due to the rapid rate of unregulated economic growth. The problem is that pollutants from industrial activities are often transported to the Tibetan Plateau, causing further soil deterioration. China’s unlimited drive for industrial development can also be traced on the planned expansion of mining activities, in particular in the ore-rich areas of Tibet. Mining is a significant emitter of greenhouse gases and it contributes to the further destruction of permafrost layers. The high concentration of pollutant emissions in the atmosphere has serious health effects - more children are suffering from asthma, have respiratory diseases and skin disorders. As the mining plants are not modernized, they emit high volumes of toxic emissions, which cause the vegetation to die or going extinct and absent in the nearby areas.

**Controversy over nuclear waste and nuclear activities**

Among the major environmental issues, nuclear waste has a high profile. It is now known that China is utilizing the vast space on the Tibetan Plateau for dumping nuclear waste. According to the sources of the CTA, the Chinese government has been using Tibet’s areas to produce nuclear bomb designs since the 1960s. The activities started with the establishment of the Northwest Nuclear Weapons Research and Design Academy, known as the ‘Ninth Academy’, or ‘Factory 211’¹⁰⁸, which was built by the Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Nuclear Production Establishment.¹⁰⁹ The most significant – known - deployment sites today are located in the Tsaidam Basin, in Tserlingkha in the province of Amdo (Chinese Qinghai) and the fourth site is located at the border between Amdo and Sichuan province.¹¹⁰


¹⁰⁸ The Ninth Academy was the very first nuclear facility, under the jurisdiction of the 9th Bureau, the most secret organization of China’s entire nuclear program. The Academy was responsible for designing all of China’s nuclear bombs through the mid-1970s. For this purpose the facility designed and carried out non-nuclear explosions. It also served as a research center for detonation development, radiochemistry and other nuclear weapons-related activities. The ‘Ninth-Academy’ was the first Chinese nuclear base, located in Qinghai Province, near Kokonor Lake, the largest Tibetan lake. Parts of the facility were located underground to deter detection and possible destruction in the event of an attack. (...) Today the facility is declassified and open to the public. It was closed in 1987 and given to the local government in 1993. in: Vincent Metten: Nuclear Tibet: Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Waste on the Tibetan Plateau, International Campaign for Tibet, 29 February 2012, available at: [http://www.unpo.org/downloads/400.pdf](http://www.unpo.org/downloads/400.pdf), p. 1, accessed 9 December 2012


has been confirmed by the International Campaign for Tibet and several human rights activists that China uses Tibetan political prisoners to conduct dangerous work at these nuclear sites, for example to excavate radioactive ore. China’s nuclear missiles are permanently stationed in the area of Nagchuka, which is a large underground nuclear complex. China’s most prominent negative action is the dumping and storage of nuclear waste, for which the Tibetan Plateau is an ‘ideal place’, due to its vast areas with Nomadic population. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, many of the local population died or suffered from lethal diseases in the area of Nagchuka. “Vanya Kewley, a BBC reporter who visited the Chinese missile base at Nagchuka in 1988, interviewed several people living in the area. In her book: Tibet: Behind the Ice Curtain a man called Kelsang said: ‘Many people have seen and heard movements and noises. Most people here have seen missiles coming from China and many travelers have seen movements of missiles at different places. (…) As a result of the situation here, animals are getting strange diseases and dying. Some people are dying and children are being born deformed. In many places, water is contaminated and undrinkable. The moment you drink it, you get ill or get diseases that we never had before. People get ill and go to different hospitals. They don’t get better and the doctors don’t tell us what it is and then we have to keep quiet about it.” Consequently, in the last decades, the impacts of the disposal of nuclear waste on the safety of the local population and on the health of flora and fauna have been ultimately questioned.

The CTA’s Environment and Development Report publications from the years 2000, 2003 and even 2009 point out the problem of increasing water pollution, the environmentally destructive results of mining and nuclear activities as well as emphasize the ongoing damage of the Tibetan Plateau’s ecologic sensitivity. On the contrary, Chinese sources speak about a peaceful, calm and perfect state of the environment in the TAR. In its Focus on Tibet, the official website www.chinaview.cn, points out that “latest environment reports show that there is basically no pollution of water or atmosphere in Tibet and that Tibet has basically maintained its original nature state and is globally one of the areas with the best environmental quality. (…) The report also emphasizes that ecological conservation has been progressing rapidly and that environmental protection is strengthened in an all-round way in Tibet.”

Even if Chinese propaganda and ‘news service’ towards the outside world is dominant, locally updated information is not present. In terms of communication and awareness-raising, the problem persists that China’s nuclear intentions are not communicated and the locally planned actions remain hidden from Tibetan ethnic groups. This particularly generates further suspicion. According to reports of the Environment and Development Desk of the DIIR of the CTA, several countries bought storage place

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111 Chinese activist, Harry Wu, former political prisoner and China expert, has reported in his works that labour camps in Qinghai used prisoners to excavate radioactive ore and that prisoners were forced to enter nuclear test sites to perform dangerous work. In Qinghai, placement of huge prison labour camps adjacent to nuclear missile sites were observed on the Tibetan Plateau.

112 Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues, Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 112.

from China in the Tibetan areas, serving for the dumping of their own toxic waste.\textsuperscript{114} This is alarming information for the CTA, since toxic materials - even if buried deep in the ground in concrete containers - threaten the local ecosystem, e.g. their impact on underground waters and soils is questionable.

Uranium mining similarly caused series of health issues, which were denied from public attention. Today, it is known that “there are nine uranium mining sites on the Tibetan Plateau, which are used by China’s nuclear weapons program and for development of nuclear power.”\textsuperscript{115} The incidences caused by the operation of Project 792, a large uranium mining site, bitterly uncovered the deliberate denial of information to local Tibetans. A young Tibetan writer, Dolma Kyab, who aimed to uncover the mysterious health diseases and the reasons for the death of local people, was imprisoned ‘for espionage and stealing or passing state secrets.’\textsuperscript{116}

Concerning these incidences, it is clear that human rights enforcement, as well as environmental human rights law and China’s environmental projects implementation shall be more critically monitored. The likelihood of air pollution shall be diminished, since due to wind patterns, this can affect regions well beyond the borders of China. Moreover, “since Tibet is the fountainhead of water for most of South and Southeast Asia, the impact of headwater pollution – especially by nuclear or industrial toxic waste – on the social and economic fabric of millions of people living downstream would be disastrous.”\textsuperscript{117} As Tibet is the cradle for numerous rivers, originating in the Himalayas, the region acts as a safe haven for bringing essential water supplies to the surrounding countries. Therefore, it is needless to say that the health of Tibet’s ecosystem and water resources has and will continue to have a crucial influence on the livelihoods of Asia’s population.

\textit{Regional strategic and environmental concerns related to China’s dam projects}

Similarly, China’s recent dam projects have been causing lots of controversy, not merely for Tibetans, but also for China’s downward neighbours. With the construction of dams, China aims to divert the rivers from Tibet into China proper and to import more of this ‘essential element’ to the northern territories, which already suffer from water scarcity under the present circumstances. From the viewpoint of the Chinese government, which needs to tackle the alarming population growth problem, the strategy is ‘understandable’. However, as scholars point out, several environmental and geopolitical factors shall be taken into account before acting unilaterally in this vulnerable region of South Asia.

\textsuperscript{114} Just to provide two examples: On 18 February 1984, The Washington Post reported that China had tentatively agreed to store up to 4,000 tons of radioactive waste from European nuclear reactors in the remote Gobi Desert in exchange for USD 6 billion. Since then this was to take place over the next 16 years. (...) In 1991, Greenpeace reported that the city officials of Baltimore, Maryland, USA, had secured a tentative agreement with China to ship 20,000 tons of the city’s toxic sewage waste to Tibet in exchange for payment of USD 1.44 billion. in: Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues, Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 109.


\textsuperscript{117} Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues, Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 112.
In China, water resources are unevenly distributed throughout the country, while the problem of water scarcity is aggravated by ineffective water policies, weak institutional capacity and weak implementation practices. According to the website www.china.org.cn, “the areas south of the Yangtze River, China’s longest, which account for only 36.5 % of the country’s total territory, have 80.9 % of its total water resources. However the areas north of the Yangtze, which make up 63.5% of China, possess only 19.1% of total water resources.” Therefore, diverting rivers is necessary to gain further supplies for the northern territories of China.

However, even if we ‘would acknowledge’ the above strategy by any means, we have to note that the lack of regional agreements, lack of regional cooperation and massive environmental effects shall make scientists and especially policy-makers thoughtful. With such constructions, Tibet’s sensitive ecosystem suffers particularly, while downstream countries are agitated. It has been already China’s Three Gorges Dam - becoming operational in 2008 - which has received lots of criticism, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 earthquake, which occurred in the southern province of Sichuan. Even if the dam was constructed with the purpose of generating more power and providing cleaner energy, environmentalists have been pointing out its ‘unlucky’ location in a seismically sensitive area, prone to cause landslides due to heavy industrial activities. Concerns related to drastic population relocation and environmental effects on the local ecosystem are similarly not to be disregarded.

Concerning its recent plans to divert the Brahmaputra River, regional uncertainty, particularly that shared by China’s neighbours has been frequently voiced in the media. According to recent reports, China is planning to construct 6 major dams directly on the mainstream of the river by the year 2014. As reported anxiously by the Times of India, Chinese scientists had conducted scientific monitoring of the movement of the Brahmaputra River on several occasions. However, the information since then is ambiguous, because when relevant authorities in China were asked if the government plans to divert water from the Brahmaputra River to ease its water shortages, the answer was that “the country had no such plans, considering technical difficulties, environmental impacts and state relations.”

According to Robert G. Wirsing, Specialist on South Asian Politics and Professor at Georgetown University in the USA, the uncertainty is caused by the fact that “the three riparian states sharing the Brahmaputra – China, India and Bangladesh – are the world’s first, second and seventh most populous countries. All three face severe problems of water scarcity. All three also face steeply rising demand for increased power – including hydropower – generation.” India and Bangladesh are particularly worried.

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“If China constructs the dam, it is likely to divert the Brahmaputra in the area of the Great Band, the point in the Himalayas where the river turns to India. This will mean that India will become absolutely dependent on China in terms of water resources and China will control the flow of the river completely.”  

While China is keen on ‘transporting’ fresh water supplies from its western regions to the more densely populated north, India has a similar scenario of providing increased water supplies for its western and southern regions, which are naturally water scarce. Bangladesh is also anxious about the projected plans, since the river serves as the most important water resource for the country. Given the fact that farming activities contribute essentially to local employment, the importance of river water flow in Bangladesh cannot be underestimated.

China’s statements regarding a better control of floods and water supplies seem naïve and unacceptable for its neighbours. Provided that the construction of the dam would be realized, there is no guarantee that China would provide sufficient amounts of water supplies to the downstream countries, shall they be in need due to their droughts during the monsoon season, e.g. as it is each year in the case of Bangladesh. Furthermore, as no regional or international agreement exists, which would handle international water disputes according to international law, neighbouring countries feel particularly in peril. The Indian government has drawn attention to China’s reluctance of signing any particular agreement on water management issues, whereas according to the Times of India, “this has caused consternation in other south-east Asian nations like Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos as well.”

Due to mistrust, China’s neighbours are afraid of its voluminous development plans. “According to the World Commission on Dams, the Chinese government increased the number of large dams from 22 in 1959 to 22,000 in 2000. And, while plans to divert water from the Yangtze and Brahmaputra rivers to the fast-drying Yellow River will improve its flow through the most populated areas of China, it will also deprive millions of people who currently depend on the Yangtze and Brahmaputra for their water.” Since China has already more hydroelectric dams than any other country in the world, these plans are particularly seen as an act of greed by the surrounding neighbours, which, in such case, would be all underlying the supremacy of China in water management issues. Apparently, for the Chinese government, these are unsubstantial concerns causing unnecessary tension among the ethnicities in the region. However, some Chinese scholars urge the government to limit population growth in the northern cities

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123 The country’s own renewable water resources are estimated at only 105 cubic km per year (ground water is only about 21 cubic km). Therefore, Bangladesh depends heavily on the supply of water from rivers originating in India or Tibet, which bring in 1,106 cubic km of water every year. Of this, Brahmaputra alone brings in about 600 cubic km per year (54 percent); the rest comes from the Ganges (344 cubic km) and the Meghna (163 cubic km).
124 The project of the dam runs under the name ‘Zangmu’. It shall be the first mega hydro-electric power plant, starting its operations in 2014 on the Tibetan Plateau. According to Chinese media, it is part of a larger framework of a well-elaborated development plan for Tibet, within China’s 11th Five-Year Plan.
and encourage water conservation instead. Mr. Wang Jian, a former environmental and water management official with the Beijing government and the State Council, China’s cabinet, agreed that the project “carries huge risks,” but he said there were no other options given the severity of the current water shortage.\(^\text{127}\) It seems that China’s economic prowess has made the country resistant to any international pressure. Yet, if the misleading tactics on information sharing as well as insufficient pollution control, along with the increasing water scarcity threat continues in the region, we will witness the Tibetan Plateau to emerge as a future battleground for the resources of the Himalayan rivers.

### 3.3. Proposals for Solving the Environmental Issues in Tibet

Given the sensitivity of the ecosystem of the Tibetan Plateau and its key significance for the future development of Asia’s livelihoods, it would be necessary for China as well as for the international community to dedicate more attention to the environmental concerns at the Roof of the World. Since the Tibetan Plateau’s ice ranges serve as the major water source for all downstream waters in India, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Burma, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, upsetting the ecological balance of the region will have devastating effects well beyond the borders of the Tibetan Plateau. Air pollution can be particularly alarming, provided the change of climatic, wind and monsoon patterns.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has proposed several times his views on maintaining a nuclear free area in Tibet and to officially nominate Tibet as a Peace Zone. His five-point Peace Plan in this regard was announced on September 21, 1987 in Washington D.C. The plan presents an idealistic solution for the region’s problems: if Tibet became a peace zone, free of nuclear weapons, this event would serve as a gesture towards India as well and would diminish the threat of India by China. In this respect, it is worthy to note that the two superpowers have been competing with nuclear arms depositories since the Indo-Chinese war in 1962. Their common border runs along areas that are disputed still up to the present days. By being “incorporated” into China, Tibet has lost its genuine role as a buffer state in between of the two most populous states of the world, and, nowadays, rivals. Therefore, the Peace Plan of His Holiness gains unquestionable importance herewith: The elimination of all nuclear arms from Tibet could considerably mitigate the long time existing tensions between India and China. As the Environment and Development Desk of the DIIR, CTA states, “the altar of the earth – the Tibetan Plateau – must be saved from a nuclear holocaust for the survival of mankind.”\(^\text{128}\)

However, as mentioned previously, investigation into China’s nuclear programs is very difficult, or, almost, impossible. Locals are not informed and the attention of the international community is similarly kept out. Activities in regard of Chinese nuclear activities remain on a low profile and local

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Tibetans are not merely denied the information about environmental problems in their country, but, furthermore, they are even punished for raising their voice against any such development. The TGiE is obtaining most of its information via TCHRD, thanks to refugees, having recently escaped from Tibet. Certainly, if China wishes to cooperate with the international community and to establish peace cooperation instead of threat and suspicion, this information blockage shall be less restricted in the future. Mitigating the effects of climate change and raising environmental awareness could significantly increase China’s soft power on the global environmental stage.

Secondly, in order to prevent further deterioration of the environmental stage in the Himalayas, the importance of a cooperative approach among scientists and researchers needs to be further emphasized. Establishing a link among the surrounding countries’ national programs is a must, since there are remarkable differences when it comes to environmental approach by governments in the region. Even though the particular countries are all concerned by the environmental development in the Himalayas, yet, not all of them can invest into research and improve policy-making and awareness-raising equally. The lack of high quality expertise and a lack of acceptable cooperation for all parties results in insufficient research activities in the region. As Kenneth Hewitt, Professor and Research Associate in Geography and Environmental Studies, states: „It is estimated that „the largest challenges stem from inadequate information and monitoring, and limited scientific understanding of these high elevation glaciers.“129

Thirdly, recommendations from Tibetan and international research focus on the improved management of cross-border issues, such as glaciers, water and climate. Water issues, above all, should be shared and discussed by the affected countries. „Countries sharing rivers such as Mekong should sign trans-boundary river treaties, promote ecosystem management of water resources and watershed systems and oblige China to do the same.”130 In fact, China’s solution to the meltdown of glaciers and to water management issues was the construction of dams on different rivers. However, as we noticed above, under the current circumstances of communication, this solution provided a further point for disputes.

Notwithstanding the regional distrust by neighbouring countries, it has been mainly Tibetan Nomads in the Chinese Tibetan provinces (not what is called the TAR today) who have also expressed their fierce disagreement with the diverting of the Great Himalayan rivers. The construction of dams, mines and the establishment of the Tibet-Qinghai Railway have clearly demonstrated that despite the benefits of these development projects, Tibetans were not able to gain decisive economic values from them. Tibetan Nomads have been particularly suffering under the construction projects, since they had to leave their lifestyle behind and were urged to live in plotted, encircled areas, often with damaged soil quality. Moreover, the response of the Chinese government to the protests of Nomads was a very delicate

issue. According to the International Tibet Network, this situation is viewed by Tibetans as follows: “Tibet's Nomads, who have already lived sustainably on the Roof of the World for thousands of years, are thus essential to the long-term restoration, conservation and health of the very ecosystems and resources that China so desperately craves - and for which China invaded Tibet in 1949. Yet China continues to crush any voice, in Tibet and around the world that dares to speak up for Tibet's environment, for Tibetans' environmental human rights, and for all downstream communities affected by China's actions.”

Concerning the Nomads, it is important to note that according to Mr. Ngodup Dorjee at the Office of Tibet in Brussels, „it is them (‘the Nomads’) who are the most resistant among all Tibetans when it comes to the preservation of the Tibetan culture and identity.” In relation to this, we need to point out, that Mr. Zhang Qingly, Party Secretary of the TAR, has also publicly acknowledged that resettlements of the Nomads are necessary to counteract the Dalai Lama’s influence. These misunderstandings clearly pose obstacles to finding a way for a proper cooperation and for considering the interests of the Nomads in Chinese policy-making.

Furthermore, according to Tibetan demands, Tibet shall be appointed as an exploitation-free international observatory zone. This could serve advantageously for data collecting to international scientists and locals. Local Tibetans shall be trained to monitor changes and to report to competent authorities. The international community could utilize this valuable data in several other locations of the planet, where the effects of climate change are happening slower and cannot be so significantly observed. This way, an enhanced preparedness for disaster and risk management could be ensured and the more profound data collection would result in a better understanding of climate issues in other regions.

Overall, if managed under cooperative terms, Tibet’s development plans could go hand in hand with environmental monitoring and with a more emphasized respect for Tibet’s ecology as well as for locals’ benefits. Local NGOs as well as the responsible department – the Environment and Development Desk - of the CTA are entrusted with a crucial role of pointing out these issues to the international community and to advocate for a more coordinated scientific and policy-making approach. In these terms, as well as in the terms of Tibet’s future, the Tibetan Refugee community in India - with its community initiatives and with its eagerly working media and NGOs - plays a major role in driving this highly demanded change.

132 Personal interview with Mr. Ngodup Dorjee, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Office of Tibet in Brussels, 4 October 2012.
4. THE ROLE OF THE TIBETAN REFUGEE COMMUNITY IN INDIA

4.1. Community Development in India: Grassroots Initiatives and NGOs

As mentioned in our previous chapter, the fate of the Tibetan refugee community in India dates back to the year 1959 when the Tibetan uprising against Communist takeover failed and His Holiness the Dalai Lama chose to flee to India. Following their religious leader in exile, Dharamsala became the first settlement of Tibetans in India, which continued through an expansion with time and eventually led to the establishment of Tibetan settlements scattered throughout other parts of India.\(^\text{134}\) Today, all settlements are administered by a Settlement Officer and have their own welfare communities with schools and community social services.

Centrally, His Holiness the Dalai Lama retained his power in Dharamsala and the town became the headquarters of a fully functioning Tibetan Government in Exile. Today, the TGIE fulfills an important role of acting on behalf of all Tibetans in Tibet and on behalf of the refugee community. In fact, it became the representative of the Tibetan ‘state’ and is run under the name „Central Tibetan Administration“ (CTA). It has gone through a continuous and comprehensive reform process, starting with a drafting of its own, first constitution\(^\text{135}\) in the early 1960s and appointing a leader as Chief of Cabinet (the Kashag) in 2011.

„In the early 1960s, the exile government drafted its first constitution...Its first article reads: Tibet shall be a democratic country. It also states that Tibet should occupy the territory that it occupied at the time of the (1950) Chinese invasion.\(^\text{136}\)“ In the framework of the new document, the question of the Head of State was coined for the first time, claiming the Dalai Lama’s view on a separate state and religion system as well as a new structure of government and a new civilian head of state.\(^\text{137}\) This momentum gains importance in particular during the present times.

Within the present structure of the Central Tibetan Administration, „the Kashag (Cabinet) is the apex executive body. The Kalon Tripa (Executive Chief) is elected directly by the exile population for a term of five years. Under the Kashag are the main departments of Religion and Culture, Home, Education, Finance, Security, Information and International Relations and Health.\(^\text{138}\)“ The CTA, in practice, bears responsibility for most of the internal affairs of the settlements, although India, of course, retains formal authority and the CTA may exercise only so much power as India finds it expedient to allow.\(^\text{139}\) „The Exile Parliament of Tibet consists of 46 representatives from all three regions of

\(^{134}\) Most Tibetan settlements are to be found in the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Karnataka. For a complete list of Tibetan settlements in India, please see: Department of Home, CTA, available at: http://ctrc.tibet.net/settlements-in-india.html, accessed 8 October 2012

\(^{135}\) For a full review on Tibet’s constitution of 1963, please visit the Tibet Justice Center, Legal Materials on Tibet, Constitution of Tibet, available at: http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/tibet/tibet2.html, accessed 10 November 2012


\(^{137}\) For a full historical background and analysis of the development of Tibet’s democracy, please review the website of the Central Tibetan Administration, available at: http://ctibet.net/about-cta/legislature/about-us/historical-background/, accessed 10 November 2012


traditional Tibet but also includes one representative from North America and one from each of the Tibetan exile communities (such as those in Switzerland and Great Britain).”

According to the statistics of the CTA, there are 128,014 Tibetans in exile, with an approximate world-wide distribution as follows: India – 94,203, Nepal – 13,514, Bhutan – 1,298, and the rest of the world – 12,999. Yet, in order to legally reside in India, Tibetans must have a Registration Certificate (RC), which needs to be renewed every six months to one year. Their residential status is, however, not legal, according to the international law, and, is normally tied to a Tibetan settlement. They possess Indian citizenship by no means, therefore, Tibetans regard themselves as guests on the Indian land.

„Contrary to the common misperception, India did not grant the Dalai Lama refugee status or any other type of permanent status. As noted by the Tibet Justice Center, „to this day, the Indian government refers to the Dalai Lama simply as an „honored guest” and cultivates a studied ambiguity relative to his legal status in India.“ Therefore, „Tibetan refugees in India live in a state of legal limbo. They do not qualify as refugees in any legal sense. It is sad but apparently true that Tibetans are stateless in India and landless in mainland China. According to international law, they have no right to own a property, to be employed in government services and to exercise basic human rights in India. Lack of education and lack of employment opportunities aggravate their problem. In its modern form today, Tibetans can be considered as an ethnic nation without their state and without their rights and sovereignty.

However, regardless of their complicated status on both sides of the border, the crucial role of the exile community needs to be emphasized. Due to its activities, its political as well as social competences, we can well describe the exile community as the ’heart and soul’ of the Tibetan movement.

The TGIE stands for all Tibetans, inside and outside of Tibet and with the international representation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it aims to be a political structure representing Tibet to the world. According to many Tibetans, the exile community fulfills a crucial role in maintaining the Tibet-movement and keeping the Tibet Cause alive. Along with the aspirations of the Dalai Lama, Tibetans in exile aim to provide better education to their future leaders and they do their best in order to capitalize on their youth for the future democracy in Tibet. As Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet stated, „In the struggle for the future of Tibet, we should not depend on others.” Many see the strength of the exile community in providing a unique form of assistance to all Tibetans and in nurturing a future patriotic and well educated Tibetan youth. The National Democratic Party of Tibet plays a crucial role in this process, focusing Tibetans’ attention on

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142 Personal interview with Mr. Ngodup Dorjee, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Bureau du Tibet in Brussels, 4 October 2012.
145 Based on personal interviews during my stay in Dharamsala, India, May 2012.
146 Personal interview with Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet, Dharamsala, May 2012.
politics and on teachings about democratic values. The Party was formed in September 1994 following its initiation by the Tibetan Youth Congress and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. As the only political party on the Tibetan front, they nominate candidates for the Parliament in Exile, however, lacking the existence of a free Tibet, the organization is currently registered as an NGO.

The profile of the exile community is further strengthened by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, which is accounted for another significant organization in terms of external representation. Maintaining ties to Tibetans inside Tibet and to the relevant human rights bodies in the international community, the organization aims to provide research in regard of human rights issues inside Tibet. Obtaining accurate and evidently verified information is posing many difficulties, yet, it is one tool among those few for Tibetans to tell their stories to the outside world. The organization plays a significant role in disseminating relevant information and materials and is a proper representative of Tibet at the United Nations Human Rights Council, while similarly working with other international entities. According to my interview with Ms. Tsering Tsomo, Executive Director of TCHRD, the most compelling question remains how to make their voice heard even more.

In order to strengthen the potential of the Tibetan youth and secure the nation’s future functioning, the number of community grass-roots organizations has been on the rise in India. According to observations, these organizations fulfill a crucial role in representing Tibet’s interest, serve as tools for social cohesion, promote education, Tibetan language, culture, religion and identity and moreover, have a crucial impact in nurturing the idea of an independent, autonomous future for Tibet. Dharamsala as such, serves as a safe haven for refugees. Inspite of the recent closure of Tibet and the enforced military controls on China’s borders, there are many Tibetans who take the risk of escaping Tibet in the hope of a better future in exile. Following an exhausting journey through the Himalayas, the Dharamsala reception centre takes care of these refugees upon their arrival. In the difficult conditions, often with no English skills and no financial means, social service initiatives are crucial for survival and social integration. Organizations such as Rogpa Charitable Trust, Tibetan Womens’ Association, Tibet Hope Center and Lha Charitable Trust, registered as non-profit community grassroots organizations at the Government of Himachal Pradesh, aim to fulfill the needs of the refugee community in education, trainings and social service provision. In terms of emphasizing compulsory education in Tibetan language as well as within its aims to preserve Tibet’s rich heritage, Tibetan Children’s Village (TCV) receives primary appreciation.

With the increased importance of social media and its abundant tools, Tibetans in India are nowadays in a better position to reach out to the world. Therefore, computer skills and the knowledge of web tools for online communication are particularly endorsed. The Tibetan media in exile is a primary

148 Personal interview with Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet, Dharamsala, May 2012.
149 Personal interview with Ms. Tsering Tsomo, Executive Director, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Dharamsala, May 2012.
source for Tibet’s openness to the world, presenting and commenting on actual issues from Tibet and from the life of refugees. It has also a crucial importance for Tibetans living overseas and is the backbone of contributing to Tibetan identity and cohesion. One of the most extensive webportals, www.phayul.com claims to have a readership of 2000 people daily, consisting not only of readers from India. Extensive online engagement aims not merely to encourage Tibetans to interact with the world, but, primarily – as mentioned before – it is viewed as the main tool for offsetting Chinese propaganda and providing accurate information about the status of Tibet and the Tibetan community worldwide.

In terms of Tibet’s environmental and development issues and in terms of its importance for Asia’s future, the policy of enhanced environmental preservation, protective human approach and better consideration of resources has also been emphasized by numerous NGOs as well as talented local campaigners. In Dharamsala, there are numerous initiatives that aim to draw attention upon these concerns. Among others, it is important to note the initiative of the International Tibet Network – the Tibet Third Pole Campaign, http://www.tibet3rdpole.org/, which was created with the aim to bring the environmental crisis in Tibet and the fate of Tibet’s Nomads to the attention of climate change negotiators at the UN talks in Copenhagen, the media and the general public.” Similarly, attention on political prisoners and their life stories from Tibet are captured on the campaigning website www.freetibetanheroes.org, which aims to press on the release of these people from China’s prisons. Among others, Students for a Free Tibet and International Tibet Network are the most active campaign organizers in and beyond the Tibetan Refugee community. SFT India has been successful with their http://nomadrights.org/ campaign, which represents the voice of Tibet’s Nomads and raises attention on their ongoing forced displacements, as well as with their http://stopminingtibet.com/ campaign, which aims to offset China’s disputed mining activities throughout the Tibetan Plateau. Apart from its environmental awareness raising activities, International Tibet Network also calls for Tibetan human rights and justice, expressed on their campaigning website http://chinese-leaders.org/.

These local campaigns, often in collaboration with other Tibetan organizations and campaign groups in foreign countries, are well able to mobilize the public, however, at this time, they are still insufficient to move official positions. Given the deteriorating environmental status of Tibet, China’s regional dynamics and the expansion of its influence, more attention will need to be dedicated to the Question of Tibet, if the international community aims to steer future developments on the Asian continent.

150 Personal interview with Mr. Tendar Tsering, Managing Editor at Tibet Telegraph, Dharamsala, May 2012.
5. VISION ON TIBET'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Understanding the role and the aims of the refugee community in India is crucial for driving conclusions about the future of Tibet, while understanding the role of the other regional players and of China is crucial for perceiving the significance of Tibet for the future development of the livelihoods of Asia. In the long run, no matter how developed the resources of the refugee community will become, change in Tibetans’ fate and securing their future inside Tibet will need to be achieved by a common effort and will most likely be a long-term goal, fought by the next generation as well. Tibetans will have to keep their endurance, their faith and belief in their struggle, while, in the decades to come, this might also pose some challenges. As reported by some of the interviewed representatives, Tibetan youth is often not unified and there are Tibetans living abroad, who no longer think within the framework of their community approach. However, social media and the increasing influence of NGOs aim to offset this trend.

When it comes to the future of Tibet, I am convinced that the assimilation of Tibetans into the Han Chinese ethnicity will never be an option. The CPC’s colonialist policies and propaganda have no prerequisites to become successful anytime soon, however, their advantage lies in securing more time for deepening China’s economic and demographic occupation of Tibet. If Tibet aims to become accepted by the other states, that are dominant in international trade, it is crucial that Tibet’s political forces gain a more competitive acknowledgement on the international scene and that Tibet presents itself on the international markets with its policies and economic resources. When it comes to achieving this, its 'statehood’ needs to be finalized first. Considered from the viewpoint of the official Tibetan stance, the Dalai Lama’s 'Middle-Way Approach’, an autonomous, yet, a ’geographically Chinese’ Tibet is possible, in cooperation and under the aegis of the PRC. Since this goal have been long time out of reach, this approach has been receiving more and more criticism in the last years. As discussed with many organizations during my stay in Dharamsala, it is especially the Tibetan youth - many of them living in exile, having never seen their homeland - who are demanding a more desperate approach, aiming for Tibet’s complete independence. They believe that the 'Middle-Way Approach’ has not brought any significant change in Sino-Tibetan relations for a long time. Furthermore, they are asking why shall Tibet be satisfied with less, e.g. autonomy, if Tibetans have been stateless and landless for so many decades. Some of the officials, on the other hand, believe in a more moderate approach, somewhat close to that of the vision of the Dalai Lama. They advocate for Tibet’s autonomy within the PRC, while receiving full powers over its own administration and over its internal policies.

Recent calls for Tibet’s independence, manifested by the self-immolations as well as the 2008 protests, show us that advocating for more will be a pre-requisite of starting of any kind of dialogue with China. The Tibet movement for the Tibetan Cause is desperately alive. The Tibetan youth is in the best position when putting pressure on the CPC, especially via the tools of social media and by garnering international support. Therefore, it is also them who are given the best means to navigate the potential for
Tibet’s future development. At the same time, it is clear and also acknowledged by Tibetans, that an internal policy change in China will be necessary in order to come to a fruitful end in the dialogue.

On the ’state and country’ level, Tibet’s fate is directly intertwined and connected to that of China’s, therefore, China’s economic growth and its future development will have crucial consequences for the future of Tibet. The rise of China in all aspects could provide significant ways for a solution to the Tibet Question, provided that economic development would evolve hand in hand with political and democratic developments. Until now, this was not the case and the international economic structures permitted China to operate in the world economy despite its actions not being in accordance with western democratic values. As China is gaining an ever stronger economic influence in the belief of the West and an increasing power in its region in Asia, Western powers are in a more difficult situation when it comes to exerting criticism. However, the international community will not be able to achieve any enduring results until the Tibet Question will be regarded as a highly sensitive issue by influential actors.

As considered from the viewpoint of China, I believe the key of the solution lies in the design of more appropriate, acceptable policies for Tibetans. If implementing a just policy in Tibet and turning the region into China’s own resource-land under fully cooperative terms - allowing it to become autonomous and to flourish thanks to trade and economic prosperity - China could serve its own interests in the region much more effectively than at any other time in the past two centuries. However, this needs a prior acknowledgement of Tibet’s rich cultural heritage, distinct identity and ethnic origin and implementing a fully accountable human rights record. As some say, a modest change in the mindset of China – thanks to the increasing role of grassroots initiatives gaining momentum on the social scene – is already on the way.

From the viewpoint of Tibet, looking at the events since 2008, we can claim that Tibet is also ‘on its way’ – moving and changing. Thanks to strong community development in India, thanks to the initiatives of the TGiE and the Dalai Lama’s international acknowledgement, I believe that the Tibetan Cause has never been so vivid since the 1960s as nowadays. Self-immolations have raised the attention of many Tibet supporters around the world and several political recommendations and resolutions urged to end these actions. However, this might well be only the start of a new process....Hopefully the future does hold more promising ways for the development of both nations and China’s sustainable development and social and economic prosperity can go hand in hand with that of Tibet. As discussed above, an important pre-condition of this is not merely Chinese political change driven by internal social forces, but also the unity and knowledge of the people of Tibet. Tibetans need competitive education, more openness to the world, while they also need to perceive the aims of modernization and be able to link it with their religious identity. However, much more than this, they need to make sure that their future leaders will be there to grasp the momentum, when China’s internal revival starts.

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152 Establishing interviews at the European Commission’s China Desk was not welcomed. Representatives were referring to the issue as a “particularly sensitive one” at the current time - October/November 2012
CONCLUSION

As we have witnessed above, Tibet is a compelling part of a larger Asian drama that has a key impact on future evolvements on the Asian continent. Environmental and socio-political development in Tibet and China will be closely interconnected with the issues of safe and just water management as well as food security in a region, which is inhabited by masses of vulnerable people in South Asia.

It is clear that China’s rise needs to be monitored from the perspective of all these concerns, as they could significantly contribute to threats to regional security, especially in terms of environmental and strategic issues. Solving the status of Tibet and giving back to it its previous ‘natural’ mission of being a buffer state between India and China could positively contribute to the ease of regional tensions. Furthermore, turning Tibet to a demilitarized and nuclear-free zone, as advocated for by the Dalai Lama, could perhaps best ensure that Tibet could properly serve its function as the source of environmental potential for the populations of the Himalayas.

In regard of the economic development policy for Tibet, it is vital that these policies are adopted and implemented with an equal right to consultation and policy-formulation by Tibetans. A real Tibet-centric development policy should truly serve mutual interests by promoting the greatness of China as well as by promoting favorable economic, cultural and social development for Tibet at the same time.

However, a peaceful and orderly status for Tibet is crucial, so that the Roof of the World is able to fulfill its mission, provided by its geographic nature. There is no doubt that future policies of the CPC shall consider a comprehensive dialogue with Tibet and that the human rights record has to be improved, shall China aim to develop a productive and stable collaboration with Tibet in the future. Such a step could significantly improve the image of China internationally and prove its changing nature towards real social modernization and future collaboration. What framework will be chosen for this cooperation, should perhaps be determined by the Tibetans themselves, as called for by Article 1 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: „All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

ACRONYMS

TAR – Tibet Autonomous Region, includes about half of the ethno-cultural Tibet, excludes the Tibetan community in the provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan. (*population: 2 million*)

Ethnic Tibet – refers to the whole of Tibet known as Cholka-Sum (3 Tibetan provinces: U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo). It includes the present-day Chinese administrative areas of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, two Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and one Tibetan Autonomous County in Sichuan Province, one Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and one Tibetan Autonomous County in Gansu Province and one Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. (*population: 6 million*)

China Proper – also: Inner China, a term usually used to refer to mainland China in order to express a distinction between the core and frontier regions of China.

CPC – Communist Party of China

PRC – People’s Republic of China

PLA – People’s Liberation Army

TCHRD – Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy

TGiE – Tibetan Government-in-Exile

WDS – Western Development Strategy

DIIR – Department of Information and International Relations

CTA – Central Tibetan Administration

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18. https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/ - website of Students for a Free Tibet
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TIBET
UNDER PR CHINA 1949-1999
The Year & Types of Territorial Sub-Divisions

- Ü-TSANG
- QINGHAI PROVINCE: 1955
- AMDO
- KHAM
- TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION (TAR): 1965

SOURCE: IO, CTA 1979 (Reproduced from Tibet 2000)
Digital-Cartography & Design: Planning Council, CTA, Dharamsala-2000
Predicted water shortages in China by 2010

Severity of water shortages on a scale of 0 to 1, with 1 representing the most severe shortages.

Source: China Water Resources and Hydropower Scientific Research Institute
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Erika Pathó
Brussels, January 2013
“Tibet is part of a much larger Asian drama that is changing the world.”

(Mr. George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Singapore, 2004-2011)

While the year 2008 marks an important milestone for Western countries, it also means a similarly crucial point for the history of Tibet. Emerging from the crisis, the West is recently concerned about China’s strengthening influence in Asia and its particularly prosperous chances for rapid economic growth, while we are witnessing increasing internal dissatisfaction over Tibet’s situation and echoes calling for an independent Tibet. As a result, China’s human rights record is again at the focal point, along with the country’s future development and its expanding influence after having integrated into the international economic framework.

The Question of Tibet is closely connected with the internal development of China, while at the same time, Tibet’s role is more prominent than that of being an ethnic entity among many others, serving blindly the interests of Chinese unity and economic growth. In this dissertation, I aim to take a look at this ‘other’ Tibet – an ethnically, culturally and politically unique entity - and I aim to analyze the Cause of Tibet in the context of Asia’s regional development and its prospects for the future.

My work starts with analyzing the socio-political development in China and its impact on Tibet and continues with a historical analysis of the current political status of Tibet. My aim is to provide a better understanding of the Cause of Tibet and its struggle for independence and peace through the lens of regional ties and strategic issues linked with environmental sustainability, food security and water management concerns. In the further chapters on China’s development policy and on Tibet’s and China’s environmental questions I aim to focus on contemporary problems of the Tibet Autonomous Region. At the end, I analyze the crucial role of the Tibetan Refugee community in India, where I present the significance of local NGOs and advocacy initiatives in driving change.
1. SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA AND TIBET

1.1. Understanding the Rise of China and its Impact on Tibet

The question of China’s growth and the arising opportunity for China to acquire prominent economic leadership in the world is highly debated in international economics as well as in international development studies today. According to predictions, the 21st century development will be focused on Asia as the prominent continent regaining its lost power after many centuries prevailed by Western dominance.

Parallel to recent developments, China is well on its way to becoming a superior power, signalizing the recovery of Asia. „The size of China’s economy has quadrupled since the launch of market reforms in the late 1970s, and, according to some estimates, it will double again over the next decade. It has become one of the world's major manufacturing centers and consumes roughly a third of the global supply of iron, steel, and coal. “1

In the last decade, along with its increasing economic strength, China has also extended its soft power. Its active diplomacy has already contributed to the transformation of East Asia and future decades will see even greater increases in Chinese power and influence. Since it’s the world’s fastest growing economy, according to projections, China’s economy is going to become as large as the economy of the U.S. by 2020, while by cca. 2050, it will be the most powerful nation in the world in terms of its nominal GDP and purchasing parity index. In reference to this, several questions will need to be answered: How will the international community react to this? What about China’s internal social development? How does this relate to the situation in Tibet? What future for China and Tibet?

In order to assess the situation and future prospects for Tibet, we have to first understand China’s internal social, economic and ethnic policies. First of all, it is important to note that the rise of China is crucially intertwined with an increasing consciousness of its people, who demand democratization, social security and distinguished respect for human rights. Civil society organizations are growing more powerful and NGOs and grassroots initiatives receive a more dominant role in community assistance, healthcare, human rights and ecological issues. True freedom of speech, freedom of religion and an enhancement of the state structures towards a more extensive participation of civil society is entailed. However, in spite of the accelerating economic growth, inequality among the Chinese is ever larger and gaps are more noticeable. This, in turn, further aggravates the social complexities of the system. Even though when China entered the WTO in 2001, it was projected that economic reforms will go hand in hand with democratic reforms, this did not turn out to be the case. Political freedom, in practice, still does not exist. Censorship of political speech and information, most notably on the internet, is still openly used

to silence criticism of the government structure and policies. In fact, internet censorship in China is among the most stringent in the world.²

When it comes to social, cultural and religious issues, we have to take a look at the breakdown of the ethnic groups that China consists of and take into consideration the country’s multi-ethnic character. With a population of 1.3 billion, being a single-party state, governed by the Communist Party of China³, China is not a true nation-state, but rather a civilization-state with many systems. Historical roots of the Chinese population lead to Eastern China, where the majority of its people still lives today.

In its social and cultural issues, China is extremely diverse and pluralistic, consisting of many ethnicities. According to the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ,,China is a united, multi-ethnic nation of 56 ethnic groups. According to the fourth national census, taken in 1990, the Han people made up of 91.96 % of the country’s total population, and the other 55 ethnic groups 8.04 %.”⁴ „Ten of them have a population of between 2 and 16 million, while the remaining 45 ethnic minorities have a population between 2,900 and 1.9 million. Ethnic minorities are concentrated in 12 western provinces, especially the five autonomous provinces. A number of ethnic groups are spread variously throughout the provinces.⁵ Among the largest in percentages, we could list the groups of the Zhuang, the Manchu, the Hui, the Miao, the Uyghur, the Mongol, the Tibetan and other ethnicities.⁶

This is important to note, because we have to recognize that dominant economic and political power can successfully result only from a strong nation, which has unanimous interests and has considerable support from the bottom. Up to a certain level, currently this support works well, since ,,the Chinese state is modeled on the Soviet nomenklature – an elite establishment defined by its loyalty to the party.”⁷ On top of that, the Chinese are receiving a massive propaganda in favour of their Communist leadership, agitating against any foreign power that intends to criticize China for its endeavours, let that be the growth of its economic and political influence or its human rights record. So, as a result, the most important political value for the Chinese is unity. In the idea of nurturing this unity, the Han identity has a crucial factor, since it is the one which contributes to keeping China together. The Han, due to their majority and their ideologies, tend to believe in their superiority over other ethnicities and often show disrespect and intolerance against other minority groups. In this sense, Prof. Hangyi emphasizes that the ,,developments in Tibet and Xinjiang since 2008 have again cast the spotlight on China’s ethnic policies,

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² As a matter of fact, the government of the People’s Republic of China has the dubious distinction of being a world leader in internet censorship. In addition to an elaborate architecture of technological censorship based on website blocking, content filtering and keyword alerts, it is estimated that the government employs over 40,000 internet censors, whose role is primarily focused on blocking and removing content critical of the Communist Party and the Chinese government, and identifying the content’s authors. In addition, government agencies under the Ministry of Propaganda employ large numbers of contracted internet users to flood discussion forums with pro-government propaganda. in: China: World Leader in Internet Censorship, Human Rights Watch, 3 June 2011, available at: http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/03/china-world-leader-internet-censorship, accessed 9 November 2012
³ further listed as CPC
⁶ A full list of ethnic minorities listed in China is to be found officially herewith: http://www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/. For more information, please see Annex 1.
highlighting their significance and challenges. When considering the idea of nurturing unity by the CPC, we need to look at the situation of the other ethnic groups and analyze the driving forces behind their ‘splittist’ demands. Therefore, in order to better understand China’s current internal policies, the aims of its modernization and integration of Tibet, while similarly perceive the importance of the Tibet Cause for Tibetans and Tibet’s role in Asia’s development, we need to take a quick look at Tibet’s political history.

1.2. A Glimpse on Tibet’s Political History

Tibet, this special region in Asia, often called as „the roof of the world”, has always been situated among the ancient civilizations of China, Nepal and India. Since the earliest times, Tibet’s role can be characterized as a buffer state amidst the various tribes of the late Mongols, the Han and other nationalities in the region. Tibet’s extraordinary strategic position results from its geographic location in the Himalayas. The history of ancient Tibet is frequently connected to the history of Tibetan Buddhism, since religion has always played a decisive role in the life of the community.

„Located on the high altitude plateau thrown up by the Himalayas, despite its geographic remoteness, Tibet has played a crucial role in key historical developments in Asia. This has ranged from the Dalai Lama’s special relationship with the Mongol Emperors to Tibet’s role in the Great Game between Russia and Britain in the early 20th century.” The Dalai Lamas have been exerting rule over the Kingdom of Tibet, while different forms of regional and structural ties connected the empire to China and to the Mongols.

It was during the 19th century for the first time, at the peak of Britain’s power, that the British empire sought to establish political, economic and diplomatic ties to Tibet. „Britain’s interest in Tibet grew out of its imperialist expansion into South Asia and its desire to establish Tibet as a market for its goods and a safe trade route to China.” To strengthen its influence in the region, a treaty in 1904, the Anglo-Tibetan Treaty was imposed. Though being one of Britain’s early interests in the region, unfortunately for Tibet today, Britain’s policies at the time did not aim to turn Tibet into a protectorate state with a similar colony status as India. Since Britain’s trade interests were fulfilled and since it did not wish to interfere in Tibet’s political ties, the Anglo-Tibetan treaty was followed by a Sino-British treaty in 1906 by which the „Government of Great Britain engaged not to annex Tibetan territory or to interfere in the administration of Tibet. At the same time, the Government of China also undertook not to permit any

9 Free Tibet, Historical Relations between Tibet and China, available online at: http://www.freetibet.org/about/historical-relations, accessed 21 July 2012
10 The special connection to China and to the Mongols at the time gained momentum through the title of the ‘amban’. The word comes from a Manchu origin, meaning „high official”. The terms refers to Manchu imperial residents in Lhasa, who received orders from their own government and were supposed to keep a close watch on the leaders of Tibet and oversee the garrison in Lhasa. The practice of having Qing ambans in Lhasa continued until 1912. in: Melvyn C. Goldstein: The Snow Lion and the Dragon. China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, University of California Press, 1997, p. 17.
other foreign state to interfere with the territory or internal administration of Tibet.” Later on, in 1907, Britain and Russia agreed that in “conformity with the admitted principle of the „suzerainty of China over Tibet” both nations "engage not to enter into negotiations with Tibet except through the intermediary of the Chinese Government.”

In fact, this can be comprehended as the first momentum when China’s supremacy over Tibet was proclaimed in its earliest form and a „legal basis” for the „special relationship” has been born. In fact, „Britain’s casual invasion of Tibet stimulated China to protect its national interests by beginning a program of closer cultural, economic and political integration of Tibet with the rest of China. At the same time, in the ethnographic Tibetan borderland, a major campaign was initiated, which quickly converted most of the autonomous native Tibetan states into districts under Chinese magistrates.”

However, Tibetans did not accept their subordination towards China. Following the theoretical annexation, in fact, during the period of 1912 and 1951, Tibet enjoyed a de facto independence. Many Tibetan scholars refer to this period as the term of real Tibetan independence, claiming that China had no right to establish its rule over a sovereign country, with its own, distinct culture, language and religion.

During this period of de facto independence, the country continued to have very limited contacts to the outside world and managed its relationship with the Chinese Emperor under the „patron and priest” model as during the previous centuries. In practice, Tibet maintained a very limited foreign policy, emphasizing the importance of its closed society, and did not seek to become a formidable power on the international scene. After so many additional years in history and political events, we could point out that perhaps this was an inappropriate choice in its foreign policy. However, on the other hand, the question remains: How could have Tibet maintained a high profile at the time, when the international community did, unfortunately, not acknowledge Tibet as an independent state on the basis of international law? In Chinese sources, this fact is often used opportunistically to claim that Tibet was never recognized by the international community. As Xinhua comments on its Tibet Focus website: „No country or government has ever acknowledged the independence of Tibet. (...) the so-called 'Tibet-Independence' was part of imperialist aggressors’ attempt to carve up China.”

In fact, the reality was that the international community claimed no particular interest in Tibet. It did rather maintain relations with China on the basis of economic and trade interests, which were clearly important at the crucial start of the 20th century. Would Tibet’s wishful independence been emphasized by the international community at this time, along with Tibet’s own determined aspiration to become part of

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14 The patron and priest model is generally used by a number of historic sources, referring to a special relationship of Tibet and China. Accordingly, this relation could be described as that of patron and priest, having a unique character, which was not based on the subordination of one to the other.
the international community, perhaps the turmoil following the First World War could have provided an efficient momentum for the acknowledgement of its borders.

In historic terms, during the period of Tibet’s de facto independence, „China aimed to restore its former greatness. Therefore, regaining control of Tibet took on great symbolical significance. China suffered a number of lost battles\textsuperscript{16} at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, so the empire clearly needed a restoration of its authority. The fact of „incorporating” Tibetan provinces under its own sphere of influence was a significant part of these political tactics. Thus, on April 12, 1912, the new Chinese republic headed by Yuan Shikai issued an edict that declared Tibet, Mongolia and Xinjiang on equal footing with the provinces of China proper and as integral parts of the Republic. Seats were set aside for Tibetans in the National Assembly and a five-colored flag was created, the black band representing Tibet. As Melvyn Goldstein, a Tibet researcher and writer comments on this special momentum: „The Tibet question in its modern incarnation had been born.”\textsuperscript{17}

At the time, Tibet’s 13\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama aimed to refrain from losing Tibet’s previous independence, therefore, the Tibetan government requested a new friend, British India to provide help. Even though Britain was no longer interested in ties with Tibet, they secured that under their pressure, the new Chinese government was asked to participate in a conference in Simla. However, the negotiations did not turn out to be promising for Tibetans. Britain’s strategic aims were not congruent with those of Lhasa and the British did not support an independent Tibet. British trade interests in China and Hong-Kong seemed of prior significance, therefore, „Britain proposed that Tibet be accepted as a self-governing dominion nominally under China but with Chinese influence and power severely limited.”\textsuperscript{18} This was codified in the so called Simla Convention, which declared that Tibet would be autonomous from China, however, with the acknowledgement of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet.\textsuperscript{19}

Instead of solving the Tibet Question, the treaty reinforced Chinese dominance over the region and resulted in massive disappointment for Tibetans. In Tibetan history, this is a point of another misfortune, as British „friends” betrayed Tibet for their own trade interests and ties to China, and because the international community did not manage to provide sufficient help to counterbalance British and Chinese interests in the region. Therefore, for the very first time, Tibet became the „victim” of stronger nations’ interests and was „forced” to subordinate to China. As such, from the viewpoint of the international community, it was argued that Tibet did not ask for international support. On the other hand,

\textsuperscript{16} for example its defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 ended with the loss of Manchuria and Taiwan, while there were also a number of anti-Western uprisings taking place internally.
\textsuperscript{17} Melvyn C. Goldstein: The Snow Lion and the Dragon. China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, University of California Press, 1997, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{19} In practical terms, Tibetans would administer Tibet with their own officials in accordance with their own customs and laws, and China would not be permitted to station large numbers of troops and officials in Tibet – but China could maintain a commissioner in Lhasa and an escort of up to three hundred men. This compromise was not the independence Tibet wanted, but nonetheless did guarantee that it would retain complete control over its affairs, including the army, currency, and all other important functions. It would also legitimize an international identity for Tibet and spare it the burden of having to prepare for possible military conflict with China. Britain, of course, achieved exactly what it had sought - a harmless buffer zone along India’s northern border in which its political interests were fulfilled and its commercial interests could develop. in: Melvyn C. Goldstein: The Snow Lion and the Dragon. China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama, University of California Press, 1997, p. 33.
the most crucial problem within these years was that the international community continued to exercise a double standards policy. It maintained ties to Tibet, mostly acknowledging the Dalai Lama as the religious leader, while validating the Chinese position on their dominance over Tibet by inaction or by lofty rhetoric and tacit approval. The price for this was to be paid by Tibet itself in the later decades.

Going back to our historic terms, the first years of the official Chinese suzerainty brought a rather friendly and acceptable relationship, leaving enough room for Tibet to maintain its ties with external powers. Exercising a de facto independence, the 13th Dalai Lama aimed to start a modernization process during these years. However, his intentions were wrecked by a layer of theocratic representatives, who identified westernization and transformation as a threat to Tibetan Buddhism. This can be comprehended as another, yet Tibetan setback in Tibet’s history, when Tibetan intellectuals had a crucial opportunity to create their own internal state structure and to start with a contemporary modernization process. Some scholars argue that with the rejection of newly fledgling policies in education, military build-up and with other policies aiming at opening up of the Tibetan economy to the outside world, Tibet lost its best chance to create a modern entity and an internal political and cultural layer, which could have been in the position to coordinate international support for its independent status at the time. Therefore, in the era in between of the World Wars, which were crucial for European and world powers and when new nation-states have been born, Tibet lost several chances of educating its own leaders, starting up with a modernization process instead of isolation and demanding a more prominent role in world politics as an independent nation.

The radical period in Tibet’s history started with the inauguration of the People’s Republic of China by Mao Zedong on 9 October 1949. Directed by a new kind of centralist policy, China was established as a multiethnic state with autonomous nationality regions. The problem of Tibet became obvious: “it was considered one such nationality region….In late 1949 the new Chinese Communist government proclaimed its liberation as one of the main goals for the People’s Liberation Army.” As commented in a White Paper on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet by Xinhua: “The Tibetan people are an inseparable part of the Chinese nation, and any attempt to divide them from China will be doomed. This is a consistent policy of the Communist Party of China and the People’s Liberation Army.” Therefore, described as a ‘Peace Liberation’, on 7 October 1950, the PLA entered the Tibetan area of Chamdo, where they defeated the non-resistant Tibetan army. In Tibetan history, this is far from being remembered as a peaceful liberation, since it marks the beginning of a meaningless era.

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22 Free Tibet, Historical Relations between Tibet and China, available online at: http://www.freetibet.org/about/historical-relations, accessed 21 July 2012
23 According to Beijing’s version, „the Tibetan nobility and clergy led their people in an armed rebellion against the Chinese state and the Dalai Lama has planned the rebellion since early 1957, with the support from the CIA, which trained 170 guerrillas and supplied them with weapons from the air, including anti-aircraft machine guns and 10,000 rifles. However, according to a Chinese historian, Li Jianglin, „it was Mao Zedong who provoked the uprising as it was the only way to remove the Tibetan ruling class and enable him to carry out the same revolutionary reforms of land and society as in the rest of China. in: Mark O’Neill: Dalai Lama’s 1959 Flight from Tibet, 28 January 2011, source: www.phayul.com, available at: http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=29008&t=1, accessed 10 November 2012
characterized by continuous unrest, human rights violations, religious, cultural identity suppression, together with further extended policies for wiping out the Tibetan culture and ethnicity and re-forming it on the basis of the identity of the „motherland”. Even the Seventeen-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, which was actually forced, was remembered bitterly by Tibetan friends. It simply needed to be accepted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and made no real concessions for Tibet. Despite Tibetan bitterness, Chinese sources comment on the act of liberation as follows: “The peaceful liberation of Tibet was an important part of the cause of the Chinese people's liberation, a great event in the Chinese nation's struggle against imperialist invasion to safeguard national unity and sovereignty, an epoch-making turning point in the social development history of Tibet, and a milestone marking the commencement of Tibet's progress from a dark and backward society to a bright and advanced future.”

According to the above statement, the next period was envisioned to be filled with Chinese aspirations under the umbrella of development aid, which can be noticed in a more modern form today. China was and is still convinced that Tibetans are a backward nation and that Han Chinese are the 'liberators' who bring light and modernization to these remote areas. Tibetans were opposing these aspirations already in 1959, when serious uprisings broke out, first in the regions of Amdo and Kham, then in Lhasa, evoking a wide-scale resistance movement. In March 1959 the 14th Dalai Lama fled into exile to northern India. The subsequent Chinese crackdown in Tibet was brutal. Therefore, from the first decade of Chinese occupation, Tibetans have learned that agreements had no power, religion had no place and autonomy was to be forgotten if Tibet would succumb to China.

With the escape of the Dalai Lama into exile a significant power vacuum was created and a new chapter in Tibetan history has started. This contradictory status lasts up to the present times. Already in 1959, cca. 40 000 of his followers moved into exile with His Holiness. First provided as an interim solution by the Indian government, the home in India became later the exile home of the Dalai Lama.

In Tibet, after the 'peaceful liberation', the next decade brought Mao Zedong’s moderation policy, which clearly failed. Gaining on this momentum, Tibet called for international support and submitted a...
request even to the United Nations. However, with a lack of clear backing, especially from the side of the United States, the UN resolutions, passed in 1961 and 1965\textsuperscript{29}, did not bring any visible impact. Instead, ‘forced assimilation’ in China had continued and the territories of Kham and U-Tsang (which were under the Dalai Lama’s jurisdiction before) were renamed as Tibetan Autonomus Region or TAR - the modern version of the Tibetan ’ethnic-state’, the TAR was born. With the rejection of the Tibetan initiative as such, the consideration of Tibet as an independent nation and its potential to be acknowledged by the international community, lost perhaps its best momentum in time.

This new chapter in Tibetan history meant the most terrible times for the people of Tibet, since the socialist views promoted anti-religious propaganda, ridiculing Tibetan Buddhism, culture, language and their feudal society. These times are bitterly remembered by Tibetans and, „the years between 1949 and the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 are generally considered the peak period of physical and cultural assault on Tibet.”\textsuperscript{30} These years are linked with ’cultural genocide’, starting with the period of 1959-61, when the majority of Tibet’s 6000 monasteries were destroyed or closed down.

During these decades, „the Chinese state has relentlessly pursued its vision of ’China’s Tibet’, with a heavy emphasis on the Party’s priorities for economic development and societal transformation. Since Tibetan leaders were unwilling to relinquish from their religious values and cultural identity, an ever more brutal ’democratization’ followed from the Chinese government.\textsuperscript{31} However, it is clear that China’s policy of liberation of the Tibetan people did not work. The liberation was ’pursued’ along with the contemporary xiafang or ‘downward transfer to the countryside’ campaign, which can be comprehended in some of its features as a predecessor of today’s Western Development Strategy. The xiafang campaign aimed to move millions of people from the urban areas of China to the remote and sparsely populated regions in the north and west with intention to integrate and assimilate the minorities.”\textsuperscript{32} In some format, the WDS aimed at the same goal starting in the 1990s and the population transfer still continues up to today. If we take a closer look at these governmental policies in the 1960s and 1970s, we find that forced assimilation and Sinecizing Tibet has been continuously ongoing, yet, only the policy framework and the CPC’s leaders have been changing over the decades. Despite the massive attacks on religion and on the identity of the Dalai Lama, Tibetans continue with their religious traditions.

\textsuperscript{29} In 1961, Malaysia, Thailand, Ireland and El Salvador requested a 2\textsuperscript{nd} consideration of the „Question of Tibet” in the U.N. General Assembly. Resolution 1723 (XVI) was adopted by the General Assembly by a vote of 56 to 11, with 29 abstentions. In 1965, Malaysia, El Salvador, Ireland, Malta, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Thailand requested a 3\textsuperscript{rd} consideration of the „Question of Tibet” in the U.N. General Assembly. Resolution 2079 (XX) was adopted by the General Assembly by a vote of 43 to 26, with 22 abstentions. available at: International Campaign for Tibet, http://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/un-resolution-2079.

\textsuperscript{30} 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{31} During this period, there were three key sources of cultural devastation in Tibet: the imposition of ’democratic reforms’ that attacked the pillars of Tibetan culture, including Tibetan Buddhism; the Chinese authorities’ brutal response to Tibetan resistance to democratic reforms; and the forced collectivization and tragically preventable famine of the Great Leap Forward. in: 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 54. Great Leap Forward - An economic and social campaign. The Great Leap Forward aimed to transform China’s agrarian character to a communist society, with massive industrialization and collectivization as tools. However, instead of gearing up the economy, it resulted in a very destructive outcome.

\textsuperscript{32} 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 59.
even stronger today. As noted by Melvyn Goldstein, a Tibet researcher and writer, no matter how comprehensive the cultural genocide was during the 1960s and 1970s, after a visit of the Representatives of the exile-government to Lhasa, „Tibetan masses, despite twenty years of Communist propaganda, still believed strongly in the Dalai Lama and had strong feelings of Tibetan nationalism.”33 Having observed the refugee community in Dharamsala and having acquainted myself with the resources of numerous NGO initiatives, I believe that this trend strongly continues even today.

During the 1960s, the strengthening forces of Tibetan nationalism led to the acknowledgment of massive repressions and of Tibet’s destruction by the Chinese government, which can be understood as a major - yet rather tiny and certainly not radical - policy change. Hu Yaobang, the New Party Secretary enforced a friendlier ethnic dimension, which enabled the rebuilding of Tibetan culture, monastic life, improvements in science, education and language, while economic measures focused on improving the standards of living. It was at this time that Tibet was opened to tourism and international trade and the local government was framed according to a clear Tibetan character. However, on the political line, „Tibet would continue to be ruled under the ’unified leadership’ of the Chinese Communist Party.”34 Due to the liberalization policies, an ever larger number of Chinese workers arrived to Lhasa and other regions in Tibet, with the aim to find job opportunities in the TAR. Eventually, many of them settled for long years or even for ever, helping the Chinese government to put an end to the homogenous character of Tibet’s society. The Open Tibet Policy (as this influx of Han Chinese people at the time was called), however, did not bring the best results for Tibetans, since they started to be in danger of becoming a minority in their homeland. In the decades since then, this social development trend has been further enforced and under the current conditions, it is impossible to turn it back. Several researchers see this ’type of development’ as a primary tool for wiping out Tibetan culture and identity from the region. As Diane Wolff, a prominent Tibet writer comments in reference to the events in the 1960s and 1970s: „Was this a good model for development, as Beijing contended? Or was it cultural genocide, as Dharamsala contended?”35

On the other front, it was during these years that the exile community realized its crucial role in acting on behalf of all Tibetans. While the Dalai Lama developed the Tibetan policy of non-violence and declared his position on the ’Middle-Way Approach’ already at these times, the CPC did not show real terms for cooperation. Using the Communist Party’s propaganda machine, the Party blamed its misfortune and its unsuccessful policy implementation in Tibet on Tibetan backwardness and continuously pointed out Tibet’s economic primitiveness. The question of ethnic difference has never come to official questioning, as China was not willing to accept Tibet in other statehood than within its

34 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 66.
own borders. Means for reconciliation of Tibetan ‘statehood’, to grant ‘real political autonomy’ or to agree on ‘independence’ have not yet been provided ever since.

The strengthening role of the Dalai Lama as a religious (and at that time political) leader gained strong momentum on the international stage from the late 1980s. Thanks to his international travels, his worldwide speeches calling for religious freedom and liberty, and his teachings about the essential nature of Tibetan society and Tibetan Buddhism, the international community, state governments as well as international organizations have showed an increased concern for Tibet. Following the earlier double standards policy and the rapprochement with China, the Clinton administration established the provisions for appointing a Special Envoy for Tibet already in 1997. In terms of assistance, USAID ranks amongst the most important donors for Tibetan development projects, while the United States also hosts the largest ethnic Tibetan group – 15000 people today.36 On the European horizon, the governments of Norway, Denmark, Switzerland and Belgium are similarly important donors, while on the EU-level the Tibet Intergroup at the European Parliament gathers local and international NGOs and provides a specific platform for human rights debates, negotiations and integrating Tibet-related NGOs.37

Despite having the world citizens lined up behind the Dalai Lama on the occasion of the Nobel Peace Prize award and despite his increasing support and acknowledgement, China’s hard-line policy has not changed throughout the last decades. The strengthening actions of the exile government and their aim to establish themselves as a relevant political force, neither the triumphs of the Dalai Lama on the international scene, seemed powerful enough to compel China to a significant policy change.

As a result of Beijing’s hard-line measures, the Tibetan uprising of 2008 marks a new era in Tibet’s political history. Since all other means are banned, Tibetans are turning to new ways of expressing their hopelessness and inability to change their fate inside China. The self-immolations of monks and nuns, up to the present 97 Tibetan men and women since February 27, 200938, have mobilized wide-ranging international support, catching the attention of NGOs, international organizations and Tibet supporters around the globe. According to Mr. Tendar Tsering, Managing Editor at Tibet Telegraph, „self-immolations clearly contribute to international awareness-raising. Neither the United Nations, neither the EU are supportive enough as they are more concerned about their own interests. However, at least people can help...if not governments.“39

The events are clearly visible, while according to many Tibetans, especially the young, the protests and self-immolations mark a new, revolutionary era in Sino-Tibetan relations.40

36 Personal interview with Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet, Dharamsala, May 2012.
37 Personal interview with Mr. Thomas Mann, President of the Tibet Intergroup at the European Parliament, November 2012.
39 Personal interview with Mr. Tendar Tsering, Managing Editor at Tibet Telegraph, Journalist at www.phayul.com, Dharamsala, May 2012.
40 Based on personal interviews with Representatives of the Tibetan Youth Congress and Students for a Free Tibet, grassroots organizations based in Dharamsala, India, May 2012.

According to Warren W. Smith, writer and broadcaster with the Tibetan service of Radio Free Asia, „the demonstrations and riots in Tibet in March 2008 were the largest anti-Chinese protests there since March 1989, when martial law was imposed for a year, or perhaps even since the 1959 revolt. The magnitude and spread of the protests to all parts of the Tibetan Plateau, including many areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region, fully justify their characterization as a Tibetan national uprising.“\(^41\) The uprising marked the 49\(^{th}\) anniversary of the unsuccessful March 1959 protests and intended to draw attention to the ongoing disrespect towards Tibetans ever since. Perhaps the most straightforward description of the background of the event was commented by Human Rights Watch, as follows: „Against the backdrop of ever-more intrusive controls over religious and cultural activities, accelerated state-led economic development and large-scale compulsory resettlement of farmers and nomads, major protests against Chinese rule erupted on March 10, 2008 in Lhasa and spread across the Tibetan Plateau.“\(^42\)

The event started with the march of some 500 monks of Drepung monastery into the center of Lhasa, when on the way they were stopped by Chinese security police. Some of them were beaten and even arrested under the pretext of having carried the Tibetan national flag. The next day, some of their fellows from Sera Monastery aimed to march to the jail and demand their release, however, these monks were also stopped and beaten on the way. Following these unrests, Chinese police surrounded other religious centers, among others the famous Ganden monastery, in order to stop other masses of monks and nuns from protesting. Many were arrested, mistreated and hungered in prison due to their disobedience to Chinese forces.

The revolts resulted from the overall frustration from the non-existent, but still wishful religious freedom of Tibetans inside China and from the continuous economic, social and cultural marginalization of Tibetans on their own territory. Under the framework of the WDS and following the opening of the Tibet-Qinghai Railway in 2006, China imposed further restrictions on Tibetan culture, emphasizing anti-Dalai Lama propaganda, accusation of the Dalai Clique of ‘splittist policies’ and humiliation of Tibetans in all possible aspects.

As a reaction to the massive arrests of monks and the misconduct committed against them, further masses gathered in the old town of Lhasa, where clashes with the Chinese police occurred. At the same time, protests in other international cities broke out, where Tibetans were demonstrating in front of Chinese embassies, justifying their alignment with their fellows inside Tibet.

World leaders called on China to start negotiations with the Dalai Lama, but Beijing responded with inaccurate statements and accused Tibetans and the Dalai Lama of the organization of the riots. According to the organization Human Rights Watch, „the Chinese government has framed all discussions

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about Tibet as a sovereignty issue, claiming that the country’s territorial integrity and inter-ethnic relations were threatened by a secessionist movement supported by ‘hostile foreign forces’. The government has consistently rejected all allegations of human rights abuses in Tibet, by claiming that Tibetans’ rights are fully protected under the law; pointing to political, social and economic development over the past half-century; or rejecting the expression of such concerns as conspiracies to fan ethnic dissatisfaction against the Communist Party and the government.**43**

Chinese propaganda spread all over the international media, focusing on accusations of the 'Dalai Clique' of incendiarism and splittism. U.S. President George W. Bush urged Hu Jintao, the Chinese President to engage in substantive talks with envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama towards bringing a peaceful solution to the unrest in Tibet. (...) On 25 March, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of South Africa called on United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Tibet to investigate into the developments there and to report to the international community.”**44** The riots drew the attention of several world papers, attracting scrutiny of China’s human rights record and its pollution problems. Tibet’s question for sovereignty and the nation’s call for autonomy was supported in the media. As The New York Times commented: 'the protests by Buddhist monks spiraled to include cries for Tibet’s independence...'**45**

The European Union also expressed its deep condemnation of China’s measures and urged the Chinese authorities to refrain from using force against Tibetan demonstrators. On March 12, 2009, the European Parliament issued a resolution, in which it „urged the Chinese Government to consider the Memorandum for Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People of November 2008 as a basis for substantive discussion leading towards positive, meaningful change in Tibet, consistent with the principles outlined in the Constitution and the laws of the People’s Republic of China. Similarly, it called on the Council Presidency on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to India to adopt a declaration calling on the Chinese Government to open a constructive dialogue with a view for reaching a comprehensive political agreement and condemned all acts of violence.”**46** (...) In the resolution, the MEPs have also asked the Chinese authorities to „provide foreign media access to Tibet, including the Tibetan areas outside the TAR”, and „to grant UN human rights experts and recognized international NGOs unimpeded access to Tibet so that they can investigate the situation there.”**47** The EU’s High Representative, Catherine Ashton, has also expressed European concerns over the

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deteriorating situation in Tibet, in particular due to the unjust development and environmental policies implemented in Tibet. In her speech, she urged the government of China to resume the talks with the Dalai Lama.\(^{48}\) However, without further practical actions, the EU’s inactivity has been criticized by many Tibetans. It was claimed that several EU resolutions were passed on this matter, yet none of them have been transformed into specific actions by the Council.\(^{49}\)

Considering the wide scope of the international attention which has been achieved, we could claim that Tibetans were successful in their intention to generate interest in their cause and in China’s human rights record at the time when it could perhaps hurt China the most - right before the Beijing Summer Olympics. As Warren W. Smith comments: „Tibetans and their supporters were subsequently very successful in turning the Olympic Torch relay that Beijing had promoted as a ’Journey of Harmony’ into a propaganda disaster for China.“\(^{50}\) At a time, when China aimed to become a respectful member of the international community and integrate itself into a league of powerful and modern world leaders, its accusation of its human rights record and of internal problems was assuredly humiliating.

Overall, China has been facing harsh criticisms and condemnation from the world community for its aggressive handling of the events of the Tibetan 2008 uprising. Therefore, its reaction was of equal volume, deliberately misinterpreting the internal situation and disguising it with international propaganda. Quoting a lawmaker, Xinhua commented on the events as follows: „Recent self-immolations by monks in China’s Tibetan regions were part of the Dalai Lama clique’s scheme to internationalize the Tibet issue.“\(^{51}\) On top of this, China managed to garner international support for its cause and presented the situation in a way that the country’s stability and unity was threatened due to the Dalai Lama’s separatist activities. According to Xinhua, „the governments of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Syria and a number of African states have all expressed their empathy towards Beijing and felt sorry for the destructive acts that ’attempted to harm the unity of China’s people at this very important time. Numerous Asian countries, along with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have pledged their support for the necessary measures adopted by the Chinese government in stopping criminal actions and maintaining stability in Tibet.\(^{52}\) Moreover, comments by Chinese all around the world have shocked many Tibetans. It became clear that anti-Tibetan propaganda taught the Chinese that China liberated Tibet and that Tibet’s advancements were the result of the generous Chinese leadership. Chinese views similarly revealed that according to them, Tibet was a feudal backward state and that its people were much better off since China liberated their territory and incorporated it into the Great Motherland. „Chinese rule was further justified by the characterization of


\(^{49}\) Personal interview with Mr. Ngodup Dorjee, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Office of Tibet in Brussels, 4 October 2012


old Tibet before liberation as a dark, barbaric, cruel, feudal Hell on Earth, suitably exaggerated by Chinese propaganda, from which Tibetans were grateful to have been liberated by the CPC. Overall, these opinion distortions reflected the existence of a very powerful Chinese propaganda machine, deeply affecting public thinking about their own and about Tibetan realities. China’s arrogant and aggressive reactions to the events and to the appeals of the international community, in fact, revealed a lot about the nature of its statehood in the modern era. While China aimed to present itself as a well-advanced, powerful, modern, 21st century state at the Beijing Olympics, its critics and Tibet’s friends rather understood that the Chinese state is still held back in the times of 19th century empires, that committed propaganda and crushed any revolt in order to hold on to its colonies. China’s intransigence in regard to the Tibetan issue, their accusation of the Dalai Clique and the hostile Western forces, has exposed the real Chinese sense of aggrieved nationalism. This policy line is being followed even up to today. As Mr. Dhundup Gyalpo from the CTA stated, „Chinese propaganda is too huge. Therefore, our aim remains to provide Tibetan perspectives based on Tibetan views. It is within our responsibility to provide accurate information, raising awareness outside, mobilize international resources and sustain their existence.”

However, on the other hand, according to the International Campaign for Tibet, „a group of Chinese intellectuals in China had publicly urged the country’s leaders to rethink the Tibet Policy, in a petition entitled ‘Twelve Suggestions for Dealing with the Tibetan Situation’, released on March 22, 2008.” Signed by 29 signatories, the letter urged the Chinese government to stop the violent suppression in Tibet and appealed to the Tibetan people likewise not to engage in violent activities. China’s decades-long Tibet Policy was openly criticized and a revision of the failures committed against Tibetans was demanded. Even though the petition emphasized the importance of China’s image at the crucial times of the country’s smooth integration into the structures of the international community, it had no significant impact on the propaganda effect. Yet, in published articles, China is referring to the Tibetan self-immolations as „copycat suicides of young Tibetans, who are impulsive and lack self-control. (...) Similarly, monks and lamas are accused of urging young Tibetans to commit these acts.” Since the Dalai Lama has publicly prayed for the life of the self-immolators, in China’s interpretation this means that he has not publicly condemned the events. As confirmed by Tibetan media, the Dalai Lama has announced on several occasions that he did not stand behind the agitations and urged Tibetans inside Tibet to refrain from such violence. Until China interprets these actions as ‘motivated by the Tibetan clergy to undermine social harmony’, reconciliation will not be plausible.

54 Personal interview with Mr. Dhondup Gyalpo, Tibetan civil servant at the CTA, Dharamsala, May 2012.
2. CHINA’S DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN TIBET

2.1. Understanding Regional Economic and Social Development

Social unrests in Tibet are clearly connected not merely with the lack of religious freedom granted to Tibetans inside the TAR, but with disadvantaged economic and social opportunities for Tibetans due to their ethnic origin and due to their marginalization in everyday life’s many aspects.

Regional economic and social transformation in Tibet has already started during the times after the Great Cultural Revolution with the aim to ‘modernize Tibet and lift it up to the level of that of the rest of China’. The earliest economic policies featured construction projects and China’s ‘Open-Door Policy’, which aimed „to open Tibet’s door wide to inner parts of the country and encourage traders, investments, economic units and individuals from China to Central Tibet to run different sorts of enterprises.” On the social side, Mao Zedong’s new strategies under the umbrella of the ‘Great Cultural Revolution’ aimed to forge a rapid advance of Tibetans toward Communism, pursuing “to transform the PRC citizen into a new, modern, ‘socialist’ man. In order to do this, Mao and his followers believed it was necessary to rid the people of the ‘four olds’ – meaning old ideas, old culture, habits and customs.

Considering from the viewpoint of the one-China policy, the need for social and cultural assimilation of Tibetans is “understandable”. With a vision of promoting a strong, unified China, the role of minorities and their distinct character was less and less considered. Going back to the historic roots, China interpreted the status of the ‘Tibetan minority group’ as an ethnic group on Chinese territory since ancient times. During the late 20th century, economic interests were clearly strengthening the reasons why according to Chinese interpretation Tibet needed to remain incorporated into mainland China, given especially Tibet’s specific geographical location, natural and mineral resources.

In the late 1990s, the framework strategy for Tibet’s development became well elaborated and it became operational under the name „Western Development Strategy”. The WDS was officially launched by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in his speech on June 17, 1999. Its impact is highly criticized ever since, while it proved to become a development plan serving primarily Chinese interests and neglecting the social and cultural differences of the ethnically distinct Tibetan population. The WDS, in fact, was presented as a response to poverty in the western provinces and its primary aim was to counterbalance regional disparities. Proclaimed for Tibet, but with latent Chinese interest in the background, it put an emphasis on construction projects in transport, on the development of energy and raw material industries, the construction of infrastructure for the transfer of resources from the west to the east of the country and the construction of soft infrastructure such as irrigation systems, roads, schools and other facilities. Which

58 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 73.
59 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 61.
is further important to note, is that its key component was the „freedom of non-Tibetans” to do business in Tibet.⁶⁰

When assessing its impact after more than a decade, it becomes clear that the WDS, eventually, contributed to a deepening of Tibetan ties to mainland China and reinforced Tibet’s integrity within the Chinese state. The influx of the „floating population” as the incoming and settling Han and Hui Chinese workers were called, contributed to a rapid acceleration of deepening social unrest, growing inequality and a more visible oppression of Tibetans on their own, Tibetan land. „The number of these non-Tibetans have turned Lhasa, the political heart of Tibet, into a city where non-Tibetan residents appear to equal or exceed the number of actual Tibetans.”⁶¹

As such, these development projects were taking place for the happiness of the Chinese, but caused unhappiness among the Tibetans. Xinhua News Agency comments: „Over the 60 years since its peaceful liberation, Tibet, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the Central People's Government, has undergone a great historic process starting with democratic reform, and proceeding to the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, socialist construction, and to the reform and opening-up era, made unprecedented achievements in the modernization drive, and witnessed great changes in its social outlook and profound changes in its people's life. These achievements were attained by all the ethnic groups in Tibet through concerted efforts, and vividly manifest how China implements the ethnic minority policy of promoting unity and achieving common prosperity and development.”⁶² However, this common prosperity and development was differently interpreted by the Tibetan ethnic 'minorities'. Numerous academics and researchers drew attention to the fact that the WDS actually resulted in facilitating the exploitation of the region’s abundant natural resources and transporting these into the mainland, serving as a catalyst for China’s resource-hungry economy. There is no doubt that the construction and opening of the famous and often celebrated Qinghai-Tibet Railway only „positively” contributed to „this success”.

Considering from the Chinese point of view, it is understandable that China’s accelerating economic growth still needs more resources and materials for its high-volume industrial manufacturing. Currently, large quantities of these raw materials are coming from Tibet, since China’s other geographic territories are suffering from overuse of land, deforestation and massive population quota. The CTA points out China’s lack of resources: „Seven of China’s 15 key minerals are expected to run out within a decade and consequently the extraction of minerals in Tibet is increasing in rapid and unregulated manner.”⁶³

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Concerning the 'positive end-results' of the plan, the Chinese government argues under the umbrella of extensive economic development, providing excellent boom for Tibet and points out that the TAR owes its modernization to the Chinese and their eagerness to provide such voluminous development assistance. The need for large-scale development projects, e.g. in construction, mining, natural resource exploitation, is explained by Tibet’s backwardness and the requirement to achieve rapid economic modernization. In fact, not much has changed since Mao’s Open-door Policy and the great liberalization 'achievements' introduced „similarly in the interest” of Tibet. As of today, the government is continuously working on new projects and undertakings in the region in order to ‘match Tibet’s standards with that of China’s’. According to the PRC’s 12th Five Year Plan, which covers 2011-2015, „the infrastructure boom still continues in Tibet.”

However, from a Tibetan perspective, the reality is different. „Non-Tibetans control a large segment of all levels of the local economy – from street corner bicycle repairmen to computer store owners to large firms trading with the rest of China.” As such, the impacts of the greatly celebrated WDS promise are becoming less and less acceptable for Tibetans, while this kind of 'infrastructure development’ only reinforces their common economic ties, increases the influx of Chinese migrant workers into Tibetan areas and serves to exploit all remaining natural resources from Tibet. Tibetans argue that they have no real economic benefits from the WDS, but, on the contrary, they are suffering from environmental destruction, inhuman approach towards Tibetan Nomads, enforced relocation of local pastoral Tibetans and from an increasing immigration of ethnic Chinese.

When analyzing the economic development policies put in place in the TAR, it is important to note that this development boom is actually closely interconnected with an ever larger extent of social marginalization of Tibetans. Tibetans are suffering from social exclusion, which leads to improper education resulting in a high rate of illiteracy among locals. This, in turn, reinforces the need for more skilled 'immigrant Chinese workers’. In educational terms, Tibetans are facing high numbers of school dropout, as they are unable to face discrimination in local schools and since they are Sinecized in their language and culture. In terms of language skills, Chinese is a must and Tibetan language is neglected. As young adults, with no proper language skills in place, they cannot compete for local jobs. “Contrary to

64 60 Years of Chinese Misrule, Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet. Published by International Campaign for Tibet, Washington, April 2012, p. 91.
66 According to the 2005 China Statistical Yearbook, the TAR, Tsongon and Gansu – which have large ethnic minority populations – have illiteracy rates of 33.03%, 22.08% and 19.42% respectively. The national average is 10.3%. Also according to the Human Development Report, national adult illiteracy rates throughout China are as low as 9.1%; whereas the illiteracy rate in Tibet continues to be as high as 54.86% – the highest among all the provinces in China. In: Society of Threatened Peoples, Racial Discrimination in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas in the People’s Republic of China”, a report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, June 2009, p. 14, available at: www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngo/Society_for_Threatened_Peoples_China_CERD75.doc - 2009-06-02
67 During the 10th Five-Year Plan, China claims to have invested 530 million yuan to support the reconstruction and extension of Tibet University, which serves to maintain Tibetan cultural heritage and preserve Tibetan education. Regarding the education of young and middle-aged children, China had promised several times in its Five-Year plans to provide bilingual education for the compulsory nine years of basic and elementary education for Tibetans and to acknowledge their right to education in their own language. However, serious breachings of this law have been reported. Despite all claims of the Chinese government, the reality is that Tibetans still do not receive an adequate education to enter the Chinese-language biased Tibetan job market. In fact, those who learn Chinese, usually do so on the expense of their own language and culture. Moreover, there are rather large differences in the quality of schools in cities and in rural areas. Since
the picture portrayed by the Chinese Government, unemployment among Tibetans is on the rise and discrimination is rampant. In addition to the work incentives given to Chinese immigrants to Tibet, blatant disparities exist in both the working conditions and wages between Tibetans and Chinese living in Tibet. For example, Tibetans are more often given jobs involving high risks; Chinese holding identical positions to Tibetans earn twice the wage; policies like compulsory confiscation of land, compulsory fencing and stock reduction quotas impede the ability of nomadic and rural Tibetans to support themselves; Tibetans do not command comparable fluency in Chinese necessary for many jobs; and Tibetans do not benefit from the huge mining and construction projects located in Tibet, which create jobs that are given to Chinese.”

As Dr. Andrew Fischer, Professor at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague and contemporary researcher on China and Tibet argues, “the disadvantage of less-educated Tibetans is compounded by their lack of fluency in Chinese….only a widespread proactive preferential policy towards Tibetans encompassing educational reforms, among other things, can address this problem. As he further comments, “such reforms could lead to a necessary shift towards ‘Tibetan-ising’ development.”

However, when it comes to the evaluation of education projects for Tibetans, the Chinese Government’s Official Web Portal claims as follows: “The Chinese government continues to assist education in Tibet and helps to train more people to guarantee the prosperity and stability of the region. (…) Moreover, it emphasizes that the government sticks to the policy of boosting the fast, coordinated and healthy development of education in the TAR.”

Tibetan sources point out that propaganda is primary when it comes to the assessment of socio-economic development and education in the TAR as well, especially in terms of oppressing Tibetan interests. China argues that there are too few Tibetans and that apparently they are not able to modernize the economy all by themselves and for this reason, the help of Han Chinese shall be „welcomed”. Moreover, the CPC is proud of the investments in providing education resources for ethnic minorities and proclaims the improvement of the human rights situation within the borders of the PRC. However, according to independent sources, as for example the 2005 report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), only half the population in Tibet can read and write as opposed to 97% of those living in Beijing, Shanghai or Tianjin. With regard to curriculum,
distorted versions of Tibetan history are taught emphasizing the backwardness of the Tibetan race.”  

The system clearly targets the weakening and shrinking of Tibetan culture, literature and language. According to Mr. Robbie Barnett, a Professor of contemporary Tibetan Studies at Columbia University, “upward mobility into the middle class and into secure positions is more and more dependent on learning Chinese. Tibetan becomes more and more rarely a way to get a position.” 

Despite of all claims by the PRC’s central government, statistics taken at the TAR clearly demonstrate the failure of the Chinese “Western Development Strategy”, tailor-made for the development of the region. Nonetheless, the idea to economically transform Tibet goes hand in hand with the oppression of its cultural and religious heritage. This is a very important social issue for Tibetans, since Tibetan Buddhism is the core point of Tibetan society. In fact, the influx of Han Chinese workers provides a ‘good solution’ for these ‘oppression’ intentions, since if more and more Han Chinese settle in Tibet – given the economic and social benefits to them for this endeavour – Tibetan culture might become less homogeneous in the long run. According to the Chinese government, Han people shall provide modern thinking and new ideas to ‘backwards Tibetans’ and urge them to modernize by showing great examples. However, among local Tibetans, China’s population transfer policy is very unpopular. The influx of Han Chinese severely disrupts the realities of the local economy and leads to the changing status of Tibetans as a disadvantaged minority on their own land. In light of these arguments, China describes its program as a necessary measure to “alleviate poverty in ethnic areas through the training and transfer of labor force.” Economic advantages and investments are similarly accentuated. Specifically, the authority notes: “The Chinese government has made special arrangements for infrastructure development in Tibet. During the period of the 10th Five Year Plan, the Central Government and Tibet Autonomous Region together invested 31.2 billion yuan in 117 projects.” Even if Beijing feels this is the price they have to pay for the modernization of Tibet and building a modern Tibetan society which will not be based on religious thinking, I believe the concept is completely wrong. Such strategy cannot triumph in the long run, since the essential nature of Tibetan identity is aimed to be taken away. Moreover, if we look into history, we cannot find any example when this strategy could prove successful. Neither the ‘Great Cultural Revolution’, neither the famous ‘Great Leap Forward’ policies of previous Communist Party leaders proved successful in fully assimilating Tibetans into China. 

In reference to economic development, significant urban growth is taking place in Lhasa, Tibet’s capital. As government investments are pouring in, the city’s landscape is changing, representing features of a modern era. Since the traditional Tibetan buildings are demolished and new, Chinese-style offices,
homes, shopping malls are constructed, this development is unacceptable for Tibetans. Once being a Holy City, Lhasa’s landscape tends not to represent the traditional Tibetan culture any more, yet, provides a mixed atmosphere of Tibetan, Han and international, modern influences. Tourism is continuously on the rise, with unbearable numbers of visitors, which – in the long run – will be unsustainable.

On the one hand, Tibetans’ resistance to this kind of change is understandable, since the city’s expansion is taking place without their involvement in these infrastructure projects. However, when assessing the modernization of Tibet, according to Liu Jianqiang, a Chinese scholar „the biggest threat to Tibetan culture is not the Han Chinese, but, it’s globalization”....As he comments: „In Lhasa, many Tibetans have put away their traditional clothes, and money has become paramount as young farmers and nomads leave the land for the city lights.” This is certainly important to note as well, since for an independent Tibet of the future, the nation has to find its way to combine modernization with religion, tackle the arising social issues in this relation and be successful in capitalizing on its own strength and resources.

As the last point in terms of economic and social development, I believe we also need to take a closer look at the agricultural policies implemented in Tibet and to consider the issue of food security and of the policies against the Nomads, especially from the perspective of international environmental human rights law.

China aimed to gain control over Tibet’s agricultural policy since the 1960s, when the traditional barley production was forcibly diminished and upon the government’s planning, other wheat types were introduced. These were heavily dependent on fertilizers and chemical substances – being not only more costly for the local Tibetans, but, moreover, depriving them from their self-sufficient production and from a possible barter economy. As a result of this, the great famine went into Tibet’s history as a remarkable period, when Chinese interventionist policies aimed to provide only for the needs of Chinese settlers and neglect local interests. “From 1961 to 1964, and again from 1966 to 1976 during the Cultural Revolution, more than 340,000 Tibetans starved to death.” The restrictive measures were changed at the end of the 1970s. At the same time, China also lobbied at international organizations’ doors to increase wheat production in Tibet. As a result, several financing projects were undertaken by the World Food Program in the 1980s, which, however, did not solve the primary issue of food security in the region. Current threats of food security include the restrictive measures on Tibetan Nomadism and the gradual cutback on Tibetan pastoral lifestyle and the changing of traditional agricultural methods without the necessary capacity development and trainings among the locals. This goes hand in hand with the frequent questions raised around the issue of Tibet’s modernization and of the eradication of the lifestyle of the uncivilized Nomads.

76 Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues. Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 120.
Nomads, making up cca. one-third of the population of Tibet, were natively living on the Tibetan Plateau and have developed a careful approach towards the vast environmental resources, in accordance with Tibetan Buddhism and have always been emphasizing environmental protection and inviolability. However, through the policies of the Chinese government, they were forced into permanent settlements, which deprived them their right to cultural and environmental practices. As the CTA states, „this localization or ’Sedentarisation’ of the Nomads has not only taken their pride but also made them dependent on the central government for future aid.”77 As it comments further: “China’s policy of modernizing agriculture in Tibet comes at the expense of eliminating traditional subsistence farming and a self-sufficient rural economy.”78 China’s Nomad Policy is often criticized even by the West, arguing that it takes away the dignity of the locals in terms of their environmental human rights. In practical terms, the social consequences for Tibetans are often those of unemployment, alcoholism, suicide and social exclusion.

Above all, no matter what success is envisioned by China for these development projects, the CPC’s strategy is not blessed by Tibetans. The fact that numerous religious and environmental sites in Tibet are being desecrated by these undertakings, only aggravates the problem. Furthermore, when it comes to the implementation of these plans and to the ‘sacrificing of Tibet’s environment’, locals are not informed and not even consulted by the government. In reference to this, the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights points out the importance of environmental sovereignty as follows: it is “the peoples’ right to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources…and in no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence.”79 In these terms, environmental sovereignty of the people and land of Tibet will need to be seriously re-considered if we aim to find ways for Asia’s sustainable development in the future and for a better cooperation towards these goals.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND SUSTAINABILITY IN CHINA AND TIBET

3.1. Strategic and Environmental Importance of Tibet for China and the Region

When assessing the importance of Tibet, it is certainly worthy to note the region’s geostrategic and geographic position and to carefully consider the geopolitical situation in the region. Tibet lies on the crossroads of influential cultures, where throughout the centuries, trade interests, power and influence dominated by regional and foreign powers. India, China and their predecessor kingdoms have always been competing for the surrounding territories and the remains of these disputes are still to be observed in the relations of the two countries today.

As Tibet lies in a region with the highest altitude on the planet, it is often called the „Roof of the World”. In this regard, I believe we certainly have to give credibility to the statement „Who controls the roof of the world, controls Asia.” As described by the CTA, „Tibet is one of the most environmentally strategic and sensitive regions in the world.” It has not only a unique geographical location in the Himalayas, but also, when it comes to natural resources, Tibet can proudly demonstrate its wealth. The country has spacious areas of intact lands, a wide variety of precious herbs and plants, unique wildlife, biodiversity and has abundant water resources. Furthermore, its mineral resources are not to be dismissed either – as affirmed by the website www.china.org.cn, „the mine resources in Tibet are abundant.”

„Today, there are more than 126 identified minerals in Tibet with significant reserves of the world’s deposits of uranium, chromite, boron, lithium, borax and iron...Besides these, there are globally significant reserves of copper, gold, silver, zinc, oil and gas and other minerals on the Tibetan Plateau." It was estimated, that overall „the Plateau holds about 30-40 million tons of zinc, and several billion tons of iron.” Moreover, Tibet holds the largest reserves of Lithium (80% globally) and ranks amongst the top for its copper deposits.” Therefore, it is clear that such mineral wealth, with yet intact resources and plentiful untouched environmental assets make Tibet a territory of key importance for China and serve well for its drive for development and economic growth.

Apart from its geopolitical significance, Tibet has a very sensitive residence in the Himalayas, enjoying a unique ecosystem with specific flora and fauna on the planet. The region encompasses the Himalaya-Hindu Kush mountain range and the Tibetan Plateau, whereas the Tibetan Plateau is considered to be a region with a unique topography on earth, with particular geological, ecological and socio-cultural characteristics.

Apart from its nicknames due to its cultural and geographic isolation like 'Shangri-la’, or, 'The Roof of the World’, Tibet is also widely known as the 'Third Pole’. Its ice fields contain the largest reserve of fresh water outside the Polar Regions. This is of crucial importance, because „runoff from these region’s mountains feeds the largest rivers across Southeast Asia, including the Yangtze, Yellow, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Sutlej and Indus rivers.” Therefore, Tibet is also called the 'Water tower of Asia’, since it serves as a fresh water resource for Asia, giving birth to 10 major rivers that sustain around

82 Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues. A publication by the Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, Dharamsala, India, 2000, p. 86.
2 billion people, spread over much of the continent.”

According to a White Paper published on www.chinaview.cn, “Tibet serves not merely as a ‘source of rivers’, and the ‘ecological source’ for the areas of South and Southeast Asia, but is also ‘the starter’ and ‘regulating area’ of the climate of China and indeed of the Eastern Hemisphere as a whole.” Yet, partly resulting from China’s development policies and partially due to uncontrolled pollution, Tibet’s reserves and its abundant ecosystem in the Himalayas face major environmental threats today.

3.2. Major Environmental Issues in Tibet

Climate change: Regional water management and food security

The glaciers, rivers, forests, innumerable lakes, mountains and wetlands of Tibet have long provided major environmental service to Asia, from Pakistan to Vietnam to modern China. „Its snow peaks and glaciers enable Tibet to be the source of four major rivers that meets much of Asia’s water demand, for instance as much as 70% of the summer flow in the Ganges and 50-60% of the flow in other major rivers and the Drichu (Yangtze River) river basin accounts for 40% of China’s freshwater resources, more than 70% of China’s rice production, 50% of its grain production, more than 70% of fishery production and 40% of China’s GDP.” Tibet’s importance for the world – among others - lies in its specific location, rooted in the Himalayas at an altitude of 4,500 metres. Its abundant glaciers and icy peaks play a crucial part in the water provision of the surrounding countries - its glaciers form the primary water source for 2.3 billion people of the total human population, much of that living in developing countries. This makes Tibet one of the most vulnerable regions on earth, inviting to receive more international attention. It has been scientifically proved that Tibet’s glaciers are much more exposed to climate change than the ice ranges at the Poles and that climate change is happening much faster here than at other spots on our planet. Therefore, if the current pace of CO₂ emissions will continue, cca. 80% of the Himalayan glaciers will disappear until the year 2030. According to projections by Tibet Environment Watch, they could shrink from the current 500,000 km² to 100,000 km² by the year 2030.

Previous events have already pointed out the sensitivity of the Tibetan environment and its crucial role in regulating water flows to the surrounding areas. Since a warmer climate is likely to occur with every additional year, the chance of floods in the region is higher - melting glaciers are more and more likely to cause floods and mudflows. According to the data provided by the CTA’s report, “since 1990, China’s major rivers have flooded large tracts of land almost every year. More than 1600 people drowned

90 Tibet Environmental Watch, www.tew.org
91 To think in specific figures, for instance, the Rongbuk Glacier, draining the north side of the Mount Everest into Tibet, has been retreating 20 m a year. In the Khumbu region of Nepal along the front of the main Himalaya of 15 glaciers examined from 1976 to 2007 all retreated significantly, with an average retreat of 28 m per year. Source: Tibet Environment Watch, available at: http://www.tew.org/archived/2010/03082010_2.html#Asia, accessed 2 October 2012
due to flooding of the Yangtze River in July 1996. The flooded river waters have affected 1 in 10 Chinese.\footnote{Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues, Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 114.} Due to the increasing melting process, it is expected that water shortages will become more and more commonplace in numerous countries overall Asia. Due to the changing climate patterns, the run-off and flow regimes of the rivers in Tibet have already been changing. As Mr. Kishan Koday, a regional climate change expert notes, “The Machu (Yellow River), on which some 300 million people in China depend, is quickly drying up. The river has often failed to reach the Yellow Sea, its natural destination. Also in 2006, the upper section of Drichu (Yangtze River), which, as it runs to the sea, provides water for approximately 500 million people, sunk to its lowest level in over 80 years.”\footnote{Kishan Khoday, Climate Change and the Right to Development. Himalayan Glacier Melting and the Future of Development on the Tibetan Plateau, UNDP, 7 May 2007, available at: \url{http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/papers/khoday_kishan.pdf}} In its report “Summary of the First-ever Yangtze River Basin Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation Report, WWF China confirms the region’s particular vulnerabilities in terms of water resources, agriculture and food security, forests, grasslands, wetlands management and the sustainable development of the city of Shanghai in the future.”\footnote{Summary of the First-ever Yangtze River Basin Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation Report, WWF China, November 2009, available at: \url{http://awsassets.wwfcn.panda.org/downloads/wwf_yangtzeva.pdf}, accessed 12 January 2013} In terms of water scarcity, it is important to emphasize that water provision is limited already at the current circumstances, whereas the heart of China – the northeast – suffers from severe droughts and lack of water resources.\footnote{For years, water shortage, water pollution and flooding have constrained growth and affected public health and welfare in many parts of China, where per capita availability of natural fresh water is only a quarter of the world average. Northern China is already a water scarce region, and China as a whole will soon join the group of water stressed countries. In: Addressing Water Scarcity in China, The World Bank, available at: \url{http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/EXTEAPREGTOPENVIRONMENT/O..contentMDK:21015230~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:50288600.html}, accessed 9 December 2012}

Due to the loss of glaciers, Asia’s human livelihoods will face significant problems with water scarcity, since much of Asia’s population depends on the water resources originating on the Tibetan Plateau. The availability of safe drinking water is likely to be threatened and the use of sufficient amounts of water for irrigation purposes is questionable. It is already under the present circumstances that the lack of irrigation possibilities within certain areas on the Tibetan Plateau causes less productive yields, hinders usual access to drinking water and diminishes the chance of preserving local crops, which were historically present in the region. The effects of climate change in the region also force the locals, especially the Tibetan Nomads to redistribute their crop cultivation into new regions which seem to become more productive with the changing climate patterns and to introduce new types of crops besides the traditional barley. As research shows, Tibet’s grasslands and lowlands are facing different climate standards, therefore, numerous crops need to be adapted to the different conditions on the plateau in order to financially survive the impacts of climate change.

If the food security threat is already present under the current circumstances, it will be assuredly aggravated in the coming decades, especially when considering the needs of the fast growing populations of India, China and to some extent of that of Bangladesh as well – all dependent on the water sources of
the region. As Joydeep Gupta, Project Director of Chinadialogue’s Third Pole Project comments, Tibet’s environment certainly desires more attention since it becomes clear that “the effect of receding glaciers will be felt well beyond its borders, with profound impacts over a wide area in Asia and great risks of increased poverty, reduced trade and economic turmoil.”\(^9\) However, there are some major issues, which prevent effective cooperation in terms of water management and ensuring food security in the region. Firstly, it is quite problematic that the glaciers are located in a militarized zone. Secondly, due to the latent political adversary among the neighbours, political accords in the region face enormous sensitivity. Political cooperation is arranged along weak lines and the zone is disputed by the governments of China, India and Pakistan as well.

According to Mr. Tsering Choedup, Asia Coordinator for International Tibet Network based in Dharamsala, “the next world war will most likely occur as a fight over water resources in Asia, over the management of these water resources and due to the rapidly emerging water scarcity. Depending on what role for Tibet is secured, Tibet’s position will have a crucial impact on these developments.”\(^9\) The core problem is that water is often viewed in nationalist terms, instead of its appropriate term as a ‘shared resource’. Water disputes are generally handled bilaterally or regionally, but there are no international conventions or laws which would be binding for the affected countries.\(^9\) An establishment of a regional entity with joint responsibility for common water issues is difficult, given the long-term mistrust between India and China. At the end of the day, we have to acknowledge that Tibet lies in a region, which is crucial for Asia’s future development. Our previous statement “Who controls the Roof of the World, controls Asia”, provides herewith its best validity.

*Changing permafrost behaviour*

Apart from the above mentioned environmental concerns of water scarcity and changing river flows and climate patterns, influencing the stability of food security, it is also important to note the impact of warming climate on the state of permafrost layers on the Tibetan Plateau. This is often neglected, since it concerns biodiversity and the conservation of the species and does not affect – for the time being – strategic issues of the surrounding countries. Due to global warming, the permafrost areas are suffering from the loss of moisture, from species competition for survival, extinction of the native species and subsequent domination by more resistant species.\(^9\) Biodiversity, which is so important for China and for all countries of the world, is in danger in this unique region. According to studies, “overall,

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\(^9\) Personal interview with Mr. Tsering Choedup, Asian Coordinator, International Tibet Network, Dharamsala, India, May 2012.

\(^9\) The UN Convention on non-navigational uses of international water courses of 1997, which would handle also trans-border water issues, has 16 signatory countries and 29 parties. However, India, Nepal, China and neither Bangladesh are present as signatories. More on its status herewith: [http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=UNTS&n=XXVII-12&chapter=27&lang=en#Participants](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=UNTS&n=XXVII-12&chapter=27&lang=en#Participants), accessed 9 December 2012

a reduction of 27% of plant species occurred between 1999 and 2001. More specifically, a 21% of medicinal plants and non-medicinal plants lost 40% of species due to warming.”

For biodiversity, the importance of the Plateau lies in the fact that it is the most ecologically diverse place on the planet. As Joydeep Gupta argues, “the Plateau includes the most intact example of mountain rangelands in Asia with a relatively intact vertebrate fauna, and is one of the largest remaining terrestrial wilderness regions left in the world.” Several animal species are found only in this part of the world, like the wild yak, the Tibetan antelope or the snow leopard. “According to the WWF, at least 353 new species were discovered in the eastern Himalayas between 1998 and 2008, an average of 35 new species finds every year….The Plateau is home to specific species such as it is the last bastion for the greater one-horned rhinoceros. But the biodiversity of the region is already under immense pressure due to deforestation, agriculture, unsustainable fuel wood collection, overgrazing by domestic livestock, illegal poaching, mining, pollution, hydropower development and poorly planned infrastructure.” Yet, according to the WWF statistics, “only 25% of the region’s original habitats remain intact and 163 species that live in the eastern Himalayas, are considered to be globally threatened.”

Due to new climate patterns, permafrost behavior has similarly an impact on hydrological regimes and vegetation. “For instance, with the rise of 0.052 °C the permafrost area on the Tibetan Plateau will reduce about 195,000 km² (13%) and over 700,000 km² (46%) within the next 50 and 100 years respectively.” For a concrete example, it is worthy to mention that “in July 1975, drilling records indicate that permafrost found in Amdo (Chinese: Qinghai) at a depth of 3.5 m was 6.5 m thick. In July 1989, however, no frozen layer was detected in the same site, it had completely thawed.” At the same time, permafrost change will most likely lead to the shrinking of wetlands and grasslands. It will most likely cause insufficient irrigation, which, in turn, will enhance the need for alternative agricultural patterns and will aggravate the dangers related to food security in the region.

Soil deterioration

Apart from the changing permafrost behavior, the decreasing quality of the soil is another issue to be debated when it comes to environmental concerns in Tibet. In the last decades, the quality of Tibet’s grasslands has significantly diminished, particularly due to the increased use of fertilizers and to changing grazing patterns. In comparison to traditional nomadic grazing and inherited agricultural standards, the Tibetan Plateau has been exposed to a massive use of chemical fertilizers throughout the past three decades in order to maximize agricultural outputs. However, their negative results caused plenty of
constraints for the Tibetan Nomads already in the 1990s. In its 1998 report, the International Commission of Jurists, commenting on the destruction of Tibetan rangelands, noted: “The degradation of the Tibetan grasslands is the most pervasive environmental impact of the era of Chinese control of Tibet, and the impact which most threatens the sustainability of Tibetan civilization.” Due to the lack of grazing nowadays, desertification and soil destruction is becoming an alarming issue in Tibet, especially in the northeast, the source region of the Yellow and the Yangtze Rivers. According to a UN report from 2007, Tibet’s grasslands are being turned into desert at a rate of 2,330 km² each year.

Pollution and industrial activities

Over the past decade, China’s heavy industrial growth has led to a series of controversial environmental issues in Tibet and within China proper itself. A significant increase in pollutants has occurred largely due to the rapid rate of unregulated economic growth. The problem is that pollutants from industrial activities are often transported to the Tibetan Plateau, causing further soil deterioration. China’s unlimited drive for industrial development can also be traced on the planned expansion of mining activities, in particular in the ore-rich areas of Tibet. Mining is a significant emitter of greenhouse gases and it contributes to the further destruction of permafrost layers. The high concentration of pollutant emissions in the atmosphere has serious health effects - more children are suffering from asthma, have respiratory diseases and skin disorders. As the mining plants are not modernized, they emit high volumes of toxic emissions, which cause the vegetation to die or going extinct and absent in the nearby areas.

Controversy over nuclear waste and nuclear activities

Among the major environmental issues, nuclear waste has a high profile. It is now known that China is utilizing the vast space on the Tibetan Plateau for dumping nuclear waste. According to the sources of the CTA, the Chinese government has been using Tibet’s areas to produce nuclear bomb designs since the 1960s. The activities started with the establishment of the Northwest Nuclear Weapons Research and Design Academy, known as the ‘Ninth Academy’, or ‘Factory 211’, which was built by the Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Nuclear Production Establishment. The most significant deployment sites today are located in the Tsaidam Basin, in Tserlingkha in the province of Amdo (Chinese Qinghai) and the fourth site is located at the border between Amdo and Sichuan province.

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108 The Ninth Academy was the very first nuclear facility, under the jurisdiction of the 9th Bureau, the most secret organization of China’s entire nuclear program. The Academy was responsible for designing all of China’s nuclear bombs through the mid-1970s. For this purpose the facility designed and carried out non-nuclear explosions. It also served as a research center for detonation development, radiochemistry and other nuclear weapons-related activities. The ‘Ninth-Academy’ was the first Chinese nuclear base, located in Qinghai Province, near Kokonor Lake, the largest Tibetan lake. Parts of the facility were located underground to deter detection and possible destruction in the event of an attack. (…) Today the facility is declassified and open to the public. It was closed in 1987 and given to the local government in 1993. In: Vincent Metten: Nuclear Tibet: Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Waste on the Tibetan Plateau, International Campaign for Tibet, 29 February 2012, available at: http://www.unpo.org/downloads/400.pdf, p. 1, accessed 9 December 2012
has been confirmed by the International Campaign for Tibet and several human rights activists\(^\text{111}\) that China uses Tibetan political prisoners to conduct dangerous work at these nuclear sites, for example to excavate radioactive ore. China’s nuclear missiles are permanently stationed in the area of Nagchuka, which is a large underground nuclear complex. China’s most prominent negative action is the dumping and storage of nuclear waste, for which the Tibetan Plateau is an ‘ideal place’, due to its vast areas with Nomadic population. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, many of the local population died or suffered from lethal diseases in the area of Nagchuka. “Vanya Kewley, a BBC reporter who visited the Chinese missile base at Nagchuka in 1988, interviewed several people living in the area. In her book: \textit{Tibet: Behind the Ice Curtain} a man called Kelsang said: ‘Many people have seen and heard movements and noises. Most people here have seen missiles coming from China and many travelers have seen movements of missiles at different places. (…) As a result of the situation here, animals are getting strange diseases and dying. Some people are dying and children are being born deformed. In many places, water is contaminated and undrinkable. The moment you drink it, you get ill or get diseases that we never had before. People get ill and go to different hospitals. They don’t get better and the doctors don’t tell us what it is and then we have to keep quiet about it.’\(^\text{112}\) Consequently, in the last decades, the impacts of the disposal of nuclear waste on the safety of the local population and on the health of flora and fauna have been ultimately questioned.

The CTA’s Environment and Development Report publications from the years 2000, 2003 and even 2009 point out the problem of increasing water pollution, the environmentally destructive results of mining and nuclear activities as well as emphasize the ongoing damage of the Tibetan Plateau’s ecologic sensitivity. On the contrary, Chinese sources speak about a peaceful, calm and perfect state of the environment in the TAR. In its Focus on Tibet, the official website \url{www.chinaview.cn}, points out that “latest environment reports show that there is basically no pollution of water or atmosphere in Tibet and that Tibet has basically maintained its original nature state and is globally one of the areas with the best environmental quality. (…) The report also emphasizes that ecological conservation has been progressing rapidly and that environmental protection is strengthened in an all-round way in Tibet.”\(^\text{113}\)

Even if Chinese propaganda and ‘news service’ towards the outside world is dominant, locally updated information is not present. In terms of communication and awareness-raising, the problem persists that China’s nuclear intentions are not communicated and the locally planned actions remain hidden from Tibetan ethnic groups. This particularly generates further suspicion. According to reports of the Environment and Development Desk of the DIIR of the CTA, several countries bought storage place

\(^{111}\) Chinese activist, Harry Wu, former political prisoner and China expert, has reported in his works that labour camps in Qinghai used prisoners to excavate radioactive ore and that prisoners were forced to enter nuclear test sites to perform dangerous work. In Qinghai, placement of huge prison labour camps adjacent to nuclear missile sites were observed on the Tibetan Plateau.

\(^{112}\) Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues, Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 112.

from China in the Tibetan areas, serving for the dumping of their own toxic waste. This is alarming information for the CTA, since toxic materials - even if buried deep in the ground in concrete containers - threaten the local ecosystem, e.g. their impact on underground waters and soils is questionable.

Uranium mining similarly caused series of health issues, which were denied from public attention. Today, it is known that “there are nine uranium mining sites on the Tibetan Plateau, which are used by China’s nuclear weapons program and for development of nuclear power.” The incidences caused by the operation of Project 792, a large uranium mining site, bitterly uncovered the deliberate denial of information to local Tibetans. A young Tibetan writer, Dolma Kyab, who aimed to uncover the mysterious health diseases and the reasons for the death of local people, was imprisoned ‘for espionage and stealing or passing state secrets.’

Concerning these incidences, it is clear that human rights enforcement, as well as environmental human rights law and China’s environmental projects implementation shall be more critically monitored. The likelihood of air pollution shall be diminished, since due to wind patterns, this can affect regions well beyond the borders of China. Moreover, “since Tibet is the fountainhead of water for most of South and Southeast Asia, the impact of headwater pollution – especially by nuclear or industrial toxic waste – on the social and economic fabric of millions of people living downstream would be disastrous.” As Tibet is the cradle for numerous rivers, originating in the Himalayas, the region acts as a safe havoc for bringing essential water supplies to the surrounding countries. Therefore, it is needless to say that the health of Tibet’s ecosystem and water resources has and will continue to have a crucial influence on the livelihoods of Asia’s population.

Regional strategic and environmental concerns related to China’s dam projects

Similarly, China’s recent dam projects have been causing lots of controversy, not merely for Tibetans, but also for China’s downward neighbours. With the construction of dams, China aims to divert the rivers from Tibet into China proper and to import more of this ‘essential element’ to the northern territories, which already suffer from water scarcity under the present circumstances. From the viewpoint of the Chinese government, which needs to tackle the alarming population growth problem, the strategy is ‘understandable’. However, as scholars point out, several environmental and geopolitical factors shall be taken into account before acting unilaterally in this vulnerable region of South Asia.

114 Just to provide two examples: On 18 February 1984, The Washington Post reported that China had tentatively agreed to store up to 4,000 tons of radioactive waste from European nuclear reactors in the remote Gobi Desert in exchange for USD 6 billion. Since then this was to take place over the next 16 years. (...) In 1991, Greenpeace reported that the city officials of Baltimore, Maryland, USA, had secured a tentative agreement with China to ship 20,000 tons of the city’s toxic sewage waste to Tibet in exchange for payment of USD 1.44 billion. in: Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues, Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 109.


117 Tibet 2000: Environment and Development Issues, Environment and Development Desk, Department of Information and International Relations, CTA, 2000, p. 112.
In China, water resources are unevenly distributed throughout the country, while the problem of water scarcity is aggravated by ineffective water policies, weak institutional capacity and weak implementation practices. According to the website www.china.org.cn, “the areas south of the Yangtze River, China’s longest, which account for only 36.5 % of the country’s total territory, have 80.9 % of its total water resources. However the areas north of the Yangtze, which make up 63.5% of China, possess only 19.1% of total water resources.” Therefore, diverting rivers is necessary to gain further supplies for the northern territories of China.

However, even if we ‘would acknowledge’ the above strategy by any means, we have to note that the lack of regional agreements, lack of regional cooperation and massive environmental effects shall make scientists and especially policy-makers thoughtful. With such constructions, Tibet’s sensitive ecosystem suffers particularly, while downstream countries are agitated. It has been already China’s Three Gorges Dam - becoming operational in 2008 - which has received lots of criticism, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 earthquake, which occurred in the southern province of Sichuan. Even if the dam was constructed with the purpose of generating more power and providing cleaner energy, environmentalists have been pointing out its ‘unlucky’ location in a seismically sensitive area, prone to cause landslides due to heavy industrial activities. Concerns related to drastic population relocation and environmental effects on the local ecosystem are similarly not to be disregarded.

Concerning its recent plans to divert the Brahmaputra River, regional uncertainty, particularly that shared by China’s neighbours has been frequently voiced in the media. According to recent reports, China is planning to construct 6 major dams directly on the mainstream of the river by the year 2014. As reported anxiously by the Times of India, Chinese scientists had conducted scientific monitoring of the movement of the Brahmaputra River on several occasions. However, the information since then is ambiguous, because when relevant authorities in China were asked if the government plans to divert water from the Brahmaputra River to ease its water shortages, the answer was that “the country had no such plans, considering technical difficulties, environmental impacts and state relations.”

According to Robert G. Wirsing, Specialist on South Asian Politics and Professor at Georgetown University in the USA, the uncertainty is caused by the fact that “the three riparian states sharing the Brahmaputra – China, India and Bangladesh – are the world’s first, second and seventh most populous countries. All three face severe problems of water scarcity. All three also face steeply rising demand for increased power – including hydropower – generation.” India and Bangladesh are particularly worried.

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“If China constructs the dam, it is likely to divert the Brahmaputra in the area of the Great Band, the point in the Himalayas where the river turns to India. This will mean that India will become absolutely dependent on China in terms of water resources and China will control the flow of the river completely.”

While China is keen on ‘transporting’ fresh water supplies from its western regions to the more densely populated north, India has a similar scenario of providing increased water supplies for its western and southern regions, which are naturally water scarce. Bangladesh is also anxious about the projected plans, since the river serves as the most important water resource for the country. Given the fact that farming activities contribute essentially to local employment, the importance of river water flow in Bangladesh cannot be underestimated.

China’s statements regarding a better control of floods and water supplies seem naïve and unacceptable for its neighbours. Provided that the construction of the dam would be realized, there is no guarantee that China would provide sufficient amounts of water supplies to the downstream countries, shall they be in need due to their droughts during the monsoon season, e.g. as it is each year in the case of Bangladesh. Furthermore, as no regional or international agreement exists, which would handle international water disputes according to international law, neighbouring countries feel particularly in peril. The Indian government has drawn attention to China’s reluctance of signing any particular agreement on water management issues, whereas according to the Times of India, “this has caused consternation in other south-east Asian nations like Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos as well.”

Due to mistrust, China’s neighbours are afraid of its voluminous development plans. “According to the World Commission on Dams, the Chinese government increased the number of large dams from 22 in 1959 to 22,000 in 2000. And, while plans to divert water from the Yangtze and Brahmaputra rivers to the fast-drying Yellow River will improve its flow through the most populated areas of China, it will also deprive millions of people who currently depend on the Yangtze and Brahmaputra for their water.”

Since China has already more hydroelectric dams than any other country in the world, these plans are particularly seen as an act of greed by the surrounding neighbours, which, in such case, would be all underlying the supremacy of China in water management issues. Apparently, for the Chinese government, these are unsubstantial concerns causing unnecessary tension among the ethnicities in the region. However, some Chinese scholars urge the government to limit population growth in the northern cities


123 The country’s own renewable water resources are estimated at only 105 cubic km per year (ground water is only about 21 cubic km). Therefore, Bangladesh depends heavily on the supply of water from rivers originating in India or Tibet, which bring in 1,106 cubic km of water every year. Of this, Brahmaputra alone brings in about 600 cubic km per year (54 percent); the rest comes from the Ganges (344 cubic km) and the Meghna (163 cubic km).

124 The project of the dam runs under the name ‘Zangmu’. It shall be the first mega hydro-electric power plant, starting its operations in 2014 on the Tibetan Plateau. According to Chinese media, it is part of a larger framework of a well-elaborated development plan for Tibet, within China’s 11th Five-Year Plan.


and encourage water conservation instead. Mr. Wang Jian, a former environmental and water management official with the Beijing government and the State Council, China’s cabinet, agreed that the project “carries huge risks,” but he said there were no other options given the severity of the current water shortage. It seems that China’s economic prowess has made the country resistant to any international pressure. Yet, if the misleading tactics on information sharing as well as insufficient pollution control, along with the increasing water scarcity threat continues in the region, we will witness the Tibetan Plateau to emerge as a future battleground for the resources of the Himalayan rivers.

3.3. Proposals for Solving the Environmental Issues in Tibet

Given the sensitivity of the ecosystem of the Tibetan Plateau and its key significance for the future development of Asia’s livelihoods, it would be necessary for China as well as for the international community to dedicate more attention to the environmental concerns at the Roof of the World. Since the Tibetan Plateau’s ice ranges serve as the major water source for all downstream waters in India, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Burma, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, upsetting the ecological balance of the region will have devastating effects well beyond the borders of the Tibetan Plateau. Air pollution can be particularly alarming, provided the change of climatic, wind and monsoon patterns.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has proposed several times his views on maintaining a nuclear free area in Tibet and to officially nominate Tibet as a Peace Zone. His five-point Peace Plan in this regard was announced on September 21, 1987 in Washington D.C. The plan presents an idealistic solution for the region’s problems: if Tibet became a peace zone, free of nuclear weapons, this event would serve as a gesture towards India as well and would diminish the threat of India by China. In this respect, it is worthy to note that the two superpowers have been competing with nuclear arms depositories since the Indo-Chinese war in 1962. Their common border runs along areas that are disputed still up to the present days. By being “incorporated” into China, Tibet has lost its genuine role as a buffer state in between of the two most populous states of the world, and, nowadays, rivals. Therefore, the Peace Plan of His Holiness gains unquestionable importance herewith: The elimination of all nuclear arms from Tibet could considerably mitigate the long time existing tensions between India and China. As the Environment and Development Desk of the DIIR, CTA states, “the altar of the earth – the Tibetan Plateau – must be saved from a nuclear holocaust for the survival of mankind.”

However, as mentioned previously, investigation into China’s nuclear programs is very difficult, or, almost, impossible. Locals are not informed and the attention of the international community is similarly kept out. Activities in regard of Chinese nuclear activities remain on a low profile and local

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Tibetans are not merely denied the information about environmental problems in their country, but, Furthermore, they are even punished for raising their voice against any such development. The TGiE is obtaining most of its information via TCHRD, thanks to refugees, having recently escaped from Tibet. Certainly, if China wishes to cooperate with the international community and to establish peace cooperation instead of threat and suspicion, this information blockage shall be less restricted in the future. Mitigating the effects of climate change and raising environmental awareness could significantly increase China’s soft power on the global environmental stage.

Secondly, in order to prevent further deterioration of the environmental stage in the Himalayas, the importance of a cooperative approach among scientists and researchers needs to be further emphasized. Establishing a link among the surrounding countries’ national programs is a must, since there are remarkable differences when it comes to environmental approach by governments in the region. Even though the particular countries are all concerned by the environmental development in the Himalayas, yet, not all of them can invest into research and improve policy-making and awareness-raising equally. The lack of high quality expertise and a lack of acceptable cooperation for all parties results in insufficient research activities in the region. As Kenneth Hewitt, Professor and Research Associate in Geography and Environmental Studies, states: „It is estimated that „the largest challenges stem from inadequate information and monitoring, and limited scientific understanding of these high elevation glaciers.”

Thirdly, recommendations from Tibetan and international research focus on the improved management of cross-border issues, such as glaciers, water and climate. Water issues, above all, should be shared and discussed by the affected countries. „Countries sharing rivers such as Mekong should sign trans-boundary river treaties, promote ecosystem management of water resources and watershed systems and oblige China to do the same.” In fact, China’s solution to the meltdown of glaciers and to water management issues was the construction of dams on different rivers. However, as we noticed above, under the current circumstances of communication, this solution provided a further point for disputes.

Notwithstanding the regional distrust by neighbouring countries, it has been mainly Tibetan Nomads in the Chinese Tibetan provinces (not what is called the TAR today) who have also expressed their fierce disagreement with the diverting of the Great Himalayan rivers. The construction of dams, mines and the establishment of the Tibet-Qinghai Railway have clearly demonstrated that despite the benefits of these development projects, Tibetans were not able to gain decisive economic values from them. Tibetan Nomads have been particularly suffering under the construction projects, since they had to leave their lifestyle behind and were urged to live in plotted, encircled areas, often with damaged soil quality. Moreover, the response of the Chinese government to the protests of Nomads was a very delicate

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issue. According to the International Tibet Network, this situation is viewed by Tibetans as follows: “Tibet’s Nomads, who have already lived sustainably on the Roof of the World for thousands of years, are thus essential to the long-term restoration, conservation and health of the very ecosystems and resources that China so desperately craves - and for which China invaded Tibet in 1949. Yet China continues to crush any voice, in Tibet and around the world that dares to speak up for Tibet’s environment, for Tibetans’ environmental human rights, and for all downstream communities affected by China’s actions.”

Concerning the Nomads, it is important to note that according to Mr. Ngodup Dorjee at the Office of Tibet in Brussels, „it is them (‘the Nomads’) who are the most resistant among all Tibetans when it comes to the preservation of the Tibetan culture and identity.”

In relation to this, we need to point out, that Mr. Zhang Qingly, Party Secretary of the TAR, has also publicly acknowledged that resettlements of the Nomads are necessary to counteract the Dalai Lama’s influence. These misunderstandings clearly pose obstacles to finding a way for a proper cooperation and for considering the interests of the Nomads in Chinese policy-making.

Furthermore, according to Tibetan demands, Tibet shall be appointed as an exploitation-free international observatory zone. This could serve advantageously for data collecting to international scientists and locals. Local Tibetans shall be trained to monitor changes and to report to competent authorities. The international community could utilize this valuable data in several other locations of the planet, where the effects of climate change are happening slower and cannot be so significantly observed. This way, an enhanced preparedness for disaster and risk management could be ensured and the more profound data collection would result in a better understanding of climate issues in other regions.

Overall, if managed under cooperative terms, Tibet’s development plans could go hand in hand with environmental monitoring and with a more emphasized respect for Tibet’s ecology as well as for locals’ benefits. Local NGOs as well as the responsible department – the Environment and Development Desk - of the CTA are entrusted with a crucial role of pointing out these issues to the international community and to advocate for a more coordinated scientific and policy-making approach. In these terms, as well as in the terms of Tibet’s future, the Tibetan Refugee community in India - with its community initiatives and with its eagerly working media and NGOs - plays a major role in driving this highly demanded change.

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132 Personal interview with Mr. Ngodup Dorjee, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Office of Tibet in Brussels, 4 October 2012.

4. THE ROLE OF THE TIBETAN REFUGEE COMMUNITY IN INDIA

4.1. Community Development in India: Grassroots Initiatives and NGOs

As mentioned in our previous chapter, the fate of the Tibetan refugee community in India dates back to the year 1959 when the Tibetan uprising against Communist takeover failed and His Holiness the Dalai Lama chose to flee to India. Following their religious leader in exile, Dharamsala became the first settlement of Tibetans in India, which continued through an expansion with time and eventually led to the establishment of Tibetan settlements scattered throughout other parts of India. Today, all settlements are administered by a Settlement Officer and have their own welfare communities with schools and community social services.

Centrally, His Holiness the Dalai Lama retained his power in Dharamsala and the town became the headquarters of a fully functioning Tibetan Government in Exile. Today, the TGiE fulfills an important role of acting on behalf of all Tibetans in Tibet and on behalf of the refugee community. In fact, it became the representative of the Tibetan ‘state’ and is run under the name „Central Tibetan Administration” (CTA). It has gone through a continuous and comprehensive reform process, starting with a drafting of its own, first constitution in the early 1960s and appointing a leader as Chief of Cabinet (the Kashag) in 2011.

„In the early 1960s, the exile government drafted its first constitution...Its first article reads: Tibet shall be a democratic country. It also states that Tibet should occupy the territory that it occupied at the time of the (1950) Chinese invasion." In the framework of the new document, the question of the Head of State was coined for the first time, claiming the Dalai Lama’s view on a separate state and religion system as well as a new structure of government and a new civilian head of state. This momentum gains importance in particular during the present times.

Within the present structure of the Central Tibetan Administration, „the Kashag (Cabinet) is the apex executive body. The Kalon Tripa (Executive Chief) is elected directly by the exile population for a term of five years. Under the Kashag are the main departments of Religion and Culture, Home, Education, Finance, Security, Information and International Relations and Health.” „The CTA, in practice, bears responsibility for most of the internal affairs of the settlements, although India, of course, retains formal authority and the CTA may exercise only so much power as India finds it expedient to allow.” „The Exile Parliament of Tibet consists of 46 representatives from all three regions of

134 Most Tibetan settlements are to be found in the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Karnataka. For a complete list of Tibetan settlements in India, please see: Department of Home, CTA, available at: http://ctrc.tibet.net/settlements-in-india.html, accessed 8 October 2012
135 For a full review on Tibet’s constitution of 1963, please visit the Tibet Justice Center, Legal Materials on Tibet, Constitution of Tibet, available at: http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/tibet/tibet2.html, accessed 10 November 2012
137 For a full historical background and analysis of the development of Tibet’s democracy, please review the website of the Central Tibetan Administration, available at: http://tibet.net/about-cta/legislature/about-us/historical-background/, accessed 10 November 2012
traditional Tibet but also includes one representative from North America and one from each of the Tibetan exile communities (such as those in Switzerland and Great Britain).”

According to the statistics of the CTA, there are 128,014 Tibetans in exile, with an approximate world-wide distribution as follows: India – 94,203, Nepal – 13,514, Bhutan – 1,298, and the rest of the world – 12,999. Yet, in order to legally reside in India, Tibetans must have a Registration Certificate (RC), which needs to be renewed every six months to one year. Their residential status is, however, not legal, according to the international law, and, is normally tied to a Tibetan settlement. They possess Indian citizenship by no means, therefore, Tibetans regard themselves „as guests on the Indian land.”

„Contrary to the common misperception, India did not grant the Dalai Lama refugee status or any other type of permanent status. As noted by the Tibet Justice Center, „to this day, the Indian government refers to the Dalai Lama simply as an „honored guest” and cultivates a studied ambiguity relative to his legal status in India.” Therefore, „Tibetan refugees in India live in a state of legal limbo. They do not qualify as refugees in any legal sense.” It is sad but apparently true that Tibetans are stateless in India and landless in mainland China. According to international law, they have no right to own a property, to be employed in government services and to exercise basic human rights in India. Lack of education and lack of employment opportunities aggravate their problem. In its modern form today, Tibetans can be considered as an ethnic nation without their state and without their rights and sovereignty.

However, regardless of their complicated status on both sides of the border, the crucial role of the exile community needs to be emphasized. Due to its activities, its political as well as social competences, we can well describe the exile community as the „heart and soul” of the Tibetan movement.

The TGiE stands for all Tibetans, inside and outside of Tibet and with the international representation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it aims to be a political structure representing Tibet to the world. According to many Tibetans, the exile community fulfills a crucial role in maintaining the Tibet-movement and keeping the Tibet Cause alive. Along with the aspirations of the Dalai Lama, Tibetans in exile aim to provide better education to their future leaders and they do their best in order to capitalize on their youth for the future democracy in Tibet. As Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet stated, „In the struggle for the future of Tibet, we should not depend on others.” Many see the strength of the exile community in providing a unique form of assistance to all Tibetans and in nurturing a future patriotic and well educated Tibetan youth. The National Democratic Party of Tibet plays a crucial role in this process, focusing Tibetans’ attention on

142 Personal interview with Mr. Ngodup Dorjee, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Bureau du Tibet in Brussels, 4 October 2012.
145 Based on personal interviews during my stay in Dharamsala, India, May 2012.
146 Personal interview with Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet, Dharamsala, May 2012.
politics and on teachings about democratic values. The Party was formed in September 1994 following its initiation by the Tibetan Youth Congress and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.\textsuperscript{147} As the only political party on the Tibetan front, they nominate candidates for the Parliament in Exile, however, lacking the existence of a free Tibet, the organization is currently registered as an NGO.\textsuperscript{148}

The profile of the exile community is further strengthened by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, which is accounted for another significant organization in terms of external representation. Maintaining ties to Tibetans inside Tibet and to the relevant human rights bodies in the international community, the organization aims to provide research in regard of human rights issues inside Tibet. Obtaining accurate and evidently verified information is posing many difficulties, yet, it is one tool among those few for Tibetans to tell their stories to the outside world. The organization plays a significant role in disseminating relevant information and materials and is a proper representative of Tibet at the United Nations Human Rights Council, while similarly working with other international entities. According to my interview with Ms. Tsering Tsomo, Executive Director of TCHRD, the most compelling question remains how to make their voice heard even more.\textsuperscript{149}

In order to strengthen the potential of the Tibetan youth and secure the nation’s future functioning, the number of community grass-roots organizations has been on the rise in India. According to observations, these organizations fulfill a crucial role in representing Tibet’s interest, serve as tools for social cohesion, promote education, Tibetan language, culture, religion and identity and moreover, have a crucial impact in nurturing the idea of an independent, autonomous future for Tibet. Dharamsala as such, serves as a safe haven for refugees. Inspite of the recent closure of Tibet and the enforced military controls on China’s borders, there are many Tibetans who take the risk of escaping Tibet in the hope of a better future in exile. Following an exhausting journey through the Himalayas, the Dharamsala reception centre takes care of these refugees upon their arrival. In the difficult conditions, often with no English skills and no financial means, social service initiatives are crucial for survival and social integration. Organizations such as Rogpa Charitable Trust, Tibetan Womens’ Association, Tibet Hope Center and Lha Charitable Trust, registered as non-profit community grassroots organizations at the Government of Himachal Pradesh, aim to fulfill the needs of the refugee community in education, trainings and social service provision. In terms of emphasizing compulsory education in Tibetan language as well as within its aims to preserve Tibet’s rich heritage, Tibetan Children’s Village (TCV) receives primary appreciation.

With the increased importance of social media and its abundant tools, Tibetans in India are nowadays in a better position to reach out to the world. Therefore, computer skills and the knowledge of web tools for online communication are particularly endorsed. The Tibetan media in exile is a primary


\textsuperscript{148} Personal interview with Mr. Chime Youngdung, Former President of the National Democratic Party of Tibet, Dharamsala, May 2012.

\textsuperscript{149} Personal interview with Ms. Tsering Tsomo, Executive Director, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Dharamsala, May 2012.
source for Tibet’s openness to the world, presenting and commenting on actual issues from Tibet and from the life of refugees. It has also a crucial importance for Tibetans living overseas and is the backbone of contributing to Tibetan identity and cohesion. One of the most extensive web portals, www.phayul.com claims to have a readership of 2000 people daily, consisting not only of readers from India. Extensive online engagement aims not merely to encourage Tibetans to interact with the world, but, primarily – as mentioned before – it is viewed as the main tool for offsetting Chinese propaganda and providing accurate information about the status of Tibet and the Tibetan community worldwide.

In terms of Tibet’s environmental and development issues and in terms of its importance for Asia’s future, the policy of enhanced environmental preservation, protective human approach and better consideration of resources has also been emphasized by numerous NGOs as well as talented local campaigners. In Dharamsala, there are numerous initiatives that aim to draw attention upon these concerns. Among others, it is important to note the initiative of the International Tibet Network – the Tibet Third Pole Campaign, http://www.tibet3rdpole.org/, which was created with the aim to bring the environmental crisis in Tibet and the fate of Tibet’s Nomads to the attention of climate change negotiators at the UN talks in Copenhagen, the media and the general public.” Similarly, attention on political prisoners and their life stories from Tibet are captured on the campaigning website www.freetibetanheroes.org, which aims to press on the release of these people from China’s prisons. Among others, Students for a Free Tibet and International Tibet Network are the most active campaign organizers in and beyond the Tibetan Refugee community. SFT India has been successful with their http://nomadrights.org/ campaign, which represents the voice of Tibet’s Nomads and raises attention on their ongoing forced displacements, as well as with their http://stopminingtibet.com/ campaign, which aims to offset China’s disputed mining activities throughout the Tibetan Plateau. Apart from its environmental awareness raising activities, International Tibet Network also calls for Tibetan human rights and justice, expressed on their campaigning website http://chinese-leaders.org/.

These local campaigns, often in collaboration with other Tibetan organizations and campaign groups in foreign countries, are well able to mobilize the public, however, at this time, they are still insufficient to move official positions. Given the deteriorating environmental status of Tibet, China’s regional dynamics and the expansion of its influence, more attention will need to be dedicated to the Question of Tibet, if the international community aims to steer future developments on the Asian continent.

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150 Personal interview with Mr. Tendar Tsering, Managing Editor at Tibet Telegraph, Dharamsala, May 2012.
5. VISION ON TIBET'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Understanding the role and the aims of the refugee community in India is crucial for driving conclusions about the future of Tibet, while understanding the role of the other regional players and of China is crucial for perceiving the significance of Tibet for the future development of the livelihoods of Asia. In the long run, no matter how developed the resources of the refugee community will become, change in Tibetans’ fate and securing their future inside Tibet will need to be achieved by a common effort and will most likely be a long-term goal, fought by the next generation as well. Tibetans will have to keep their endurance, their faith and belief in their struggle, while, in the decades to come, this might also pose some challenges. As reported by some of the interviewed representatives, Tibetan youth is often not unified and there are Tibetans living abroad, who no longer think within the framework of their community approach. However, social media and the increasing influence of NGOs aim to offset this trend.

When it comes to the future of Tibet, I am convinced that the assimilation of Tibetans into the Han Chinese ethnicity will never be an option. The CPC’s colonialist policies and propaganda have no prerequisites to become successful anytime soon, however, their advantage lies in securing more time for deepening China’s economic and demographic occupation of Tibet. If Tibet aims to become accepted by the other states, that are dominant in international trade, it is crucial that Tibet’s political forces gain a more competitive acknowledgement on the international scene and that Tibet presents itself on the international markets with its policies and economic resources. When it comes to achieving this, its 'statehood’ needs to be finalized first. Considered from the viewpoint of the official Tibetan stance, the Dalai Lama’s ’Middle-Way Approach’, an autonomous, yet, a 'geographically Chinese’ Tibet is possible, in cooperation and under the aegis of the PRC. Since this goal have been long time out of reach, this approach has been receiving more and more criticism in the last years. As discussed with many organizations during my stay in Dharamsala, it is especially the Tibetan youth - many of them living in exile, having never seen their homeland - who are demanding a more desperate approach, aiming for Tibet’s complete independence. They believe that the 'Middle-Way Approach’ has not brought any significant change in Sino-Tibetan relations for a long time. Furthermore, they are asking why shall Tibet be satisfied with less, e.g. autonomy, if Tibetans have been stateless and landless for so many decades. Some of the officials, on the other hand, believe in a more moderate approach, somewhat close to that of the vision of the Dalai Lama. They advocate for Tibet’s autonomy within the PRC, while receiving full powers over its own administration and over its internal policies.

Recent calls for Tibet’s independence, manifested by the self-immolations as well as the 2008 protests, show us that advocating for more will be a pre-requisite of starting of any kind of dialogue with China. The Tibet movement for the Tibetan Cause is desperately alive. The Tibetan youth is in the best position when putting pressure on the CPC, especially via the tools of social media and by garnering international support. Therefore, it is also them who are given the best means to navigate the potential for
Tibet’s future development. At the same time, it is clear and also acknowledged by Tibetans, that an internal policy change in China will be necessary in order to come to a fruitful end in the dialogue.

On the 'state and country' level, Tibet’s fate is directly intertwined and connected to that of China’s, therefore, China’s economic growth and its future development will have crucial consequences for the future of Tibet. The rise of China in all aspects could provide significant ways for a solution to the Tibet Question, provided that economic development would evolve hand in hand with political and democratic developments. Until now, this was not the case and the international economic structures permitted China to operate in the world economy despite its actions not being in accordance with western democratic values. As China is gaining an ever stronger economic influence in the belief of the West and an increasing power in its region in Asia, Western powers are in a more difficult situation when it comes to exerting criticism. However, the international community will not be able to achieve any enduring results until the Tibet Question will be regarded as a highly sensitive issue by influential actors.\footnote{Establishing interviews at the European Commission’s China Desk was not welcomed. Representatives were referring to the issue as a “particularly sensitive one” at the current time - October/November 2012}

As considered from the viewpoint of China, I believe the key of the solution lies in the design of more appropriate, acceptable policies for Tibetans. If implementing a just policy in Tibet and turning the region into China’s own resource-land under fully cooperative terms - allowing it to become autonomous and to flourish thanks to trade and economic prosperity - China could serve its own interests in the region much more effectively than at any other time in the past two centuries. However, this needs a prior acknowledgement of Tibet’s rich cultural heritage, distinct identity and ethnic origin and implementing a fully accountable human rights record. As some say, a modest change in the mindset of China – thanks to the increasing role of grassroots initiatives gaining momentum on the social scene – is already on the way.

From the viewpoint of Tibet, looking at the events since 2008, we can claim that Tibet is also ‘on its way’ – moving and changing. Thanks to strong community development in India, thanks to the initiatives of the TGiE and the Dalai Lama’s international acknowledgement, I believe that the Tibetan Cause has never been so vivid since the 1960s as nowadays. Self-immolations have raised the attention of many Tibet supporters around the world and several political recommendations and resolutions urged to end these actions. However, this might well be only the start of a new process….Hopefully the future does hold more promising ways for the development of both nations and China’s sustainable development and social and economic prosperity can go hand in hand with that of Tibet. As discussed above, an important pre-condition of this is not merely Chinese political change driven by internal social forces, but also the unity and knowledge of the people of Tibet. Tibetans need competitive education, more openness to the world, while they also need to perceive the aims of modernization and be able to link it with their religious identity. However, much more than this, they need to make sure that their future leaders will be there to grasp the momentum, when China’s internal revival starts.
CONCLUSION

As we have witnessed above, Tibet is a compelling part of a larger Asian drama that has a key impact on future evolutions on the Asian continent. Environmental and socio-political development in Tibet and China will be closely interconnected with the issues of safe and just water management as well as food security in a region, which is inhabited by masses of vulnerable people in South Asia.

It is clear that China’s rise needs to be monitored from the perspective of all these concerns, as they could significantly contribute to threats to regional security, especially in terms of environmental and strategic issues. Solving the status of Tibet and giving back to it its previous ‘natural’ mission of being a buffer state between India and China could positively contribute to the ease of regional tensions. Furthermore, turning Tibet to a demilitarized and nuclear-free zone, as advocated for by the Dalai Lama, could perhaps best ensure that Tibet could properly serve its function as the source of environmental potential for the populations of the Himalayas.

In regard of the economic development policy for Tibet, it is vital that these policies are adopted and implemented with an equal right to consultation and policy-formulation by Tibetans. A real Tibet-centric development policy should truly serve mutual interests by promoting the greatness of China as well as by promoting favorable economic, cultural and social development for Tibet at the same time.

However, a peaceful and orderly status for Tibet is crucial, so that the Roof of the World is able to fulfill its mission, provided by its geographic nature. There is no doubt that future policies of the CPC shall consider a comprehensive dialogue with Tibet and that the human rights record has to be improved, shall China aim to develop a productive and stable collaboration with Tibet in the future. Such a step could significantly improve the image of China internationally and prove its changing nature towards real social modernization and future collaboration. What framework will be chosen for this cooperation, should perhaps be determined by the Tibetans themselves, as called for by Article 1 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: „All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

**ACRONYMS**

**TAR** – Tibet Autonomous Region, includes about half of the ethno-cultural Tibet, excludes the Tibetan community in the provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan. *(population: 2 million)*

**Ethnic Tibet** – refers to the whole of Tibet known as Cholka-Sum (3 Tibetan provinces: U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo). It includes the present-day Chinese administrative areas of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, two Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and one Tibetan Autonomous County in Sichuan Province, one Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and one Tibetan Autonomous County in Gansu Province and one Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. *(population: 6 million)*

**China Proper** – also: Inner China, a term usually used to refer to mainland China in order to express a distinction between the core and frontier regions of China.

**CPC** – Communist Party of China

**PRC** – People’s Republic of China

**PLA** – People’s Liberation Army

**TCHRD** – Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy

**TGiE** – Tibetan Government-in-Exile

**WDS** – Western Development Strategy

**DIIR** – Department of Information and International Relations

**CTA** – Central Tibetan Administration

**SFT** – Students for a Free Tibet
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Predicted water shortages in China by 2010

Severity of water shortages on a scale of 0 to 1, with 1 representing the most severe shortages.