



# CHINESE RULE IN TIBET



*Celebrations of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in front of the Potala in Lhasa*

For centuries, Tibet - a vast high altitude plateau between China and India - remained remote from the rest of the world with a widely dispersed population of nomads, farmers, monks and traders. In 1949, following the foundation of the Chinese Communist state, the People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet and soon overpowered its poorly equipped army and guerilla resistance. In March 1959, Tibetans rose up against the Chinese occupiers. The uprising was crushed, and the Dalai Lama escaped to India, followed by some 80,000 Tibetans. Tens of thousands of Tibetans who remained were killed or imprisoned. Since 1949, hundreds of thousands have died as a direct result of China's policies. In 1959, 1961 and 1965 (before

the People's Republic of China was a member of the United Nations), the General Assembly passed resolutions condemning human rights violations in Tibet and affirming the Tibetans' right to self-determination.

China claims to have wiped out theocracy, feudalism and slavery in Tibet. But there was never systemized slavery in the traditional Tibetan society, and it is also incorrect to characterize old Tibet as feudal or theocratic. There was a system of labor and land management in central Tibet that analysts have compared to manorial serfdom, insofar as peasants were hereditarily tied to land held by nobles and monasteries to whom they owed various services.



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However, the eastern Tibetan rangelands were largely ruled through tribal systems. The modern Chinese Communist Party (CCP) terminology of feudalism, theocracy and slavery draws from Marxist theories of ethnicity that were elaborated by Stalin in the 1930s and then later adapted to China by the CCP. To the frustration of many Tibetan and Chinese scholars in China, public presentations on Tibet from within China still remain heavily constrained by this official ideology.

Tibetan Buddhism is an integral element of Tibetan national identity and, consequently, has been a prime target for suppression by the Chinese government. Approximately 6,000 religious institutions and their contents were destroyed from the period of the Chinese invasion through the Cultural Revolution. Today, the CCP continues to try to undermine the Dalai Lama's role in Tibet and to maintain strict control over most aspects of religion. For example, political campaigns or "patriotic re-education" require forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama, and obtaining a proper religious education remains extremely difficult or impossible in Tibet.

The year 2008 was a turning point for Tibet. Beginning on 10 March 2008, more than a hundred overwhelmingly peaceful protests against the Chinese government swept across the Tibetan plateau. Tibetans have risked their lives and safety to express their fundamental discontent with policies imposed by Beijing. This has been met by a violent crackdown by the Chinese authorities, who have engaged in a comprehensive cover-up of the torture, disappearances and killings that have taken place across Tibet.

Today, Tibet continues to be controlled by China, which severely restricts the rights of Tibetans, both civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights.

A non-exhaustive list of human rights violations occurring in Tibet on a daily basis include:

- Repression of religious freedom
- Restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association
- Lack of access to information and censorship (both online and offline)
- Excessive use of force by the police
- Arbitrary arrests, detentions and torture
- Capital punishment
- Forced evictions and resettlements of nomads
- Lack of consultation on development projects directly affecting Tibetan communities and livelihoods
- Restrictions on cultural rights
- Insufficient access to healthcare
- Insufficient access to education and, consequently, employment

With China's rise as an international power, it has become even more difficult to challenge it on its human rights performance and specifically on Tibet, which is still considered a highly sensitive issue.