



DEFINING TIBET AND TIBETAN AUTONOMY



The three Tibetan regions: Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang

Tibet was traditionally comprised of three main regions: Amdo (northeastern Tibet), Kham (eastern Tibet) and U-Tsang (central and western Tibet). The Tibet Autonomous Region was established by the Chinese government in 1965 and covers the area of Tibet west of the Yangtse River (Tibetan: Drichu), including part of Kham. The rest of Amdo and Kham have been incorporated into Chinese provinces, and designated as Tibetan

Autonomous Prefectures and Tibetan Autonomous Counties. As a result, most of Qinghai and parts of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces are acknowledged by the Chinese authorities to be “Tibetan autonomous”. The term ‘Tibet’ is used to refer to all of these Tibetan areas currently under the jurisdiction of the People’s Republic of China. Tibet constitutes 25% of what the world today recognizes as China.



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While Chinese government officials refer only to the Tibet Autonomous Region when they speak of 'Tibet', their 2010 special policy meeting on Tibet, the Fifth Tibet Work Forum, marked a shift in focus to include all Tibetan areas in their policy considerations. The widespread nature of the Spring 2008 uprising, which spread across all Tibetan areas in the PRC, indicates a shared Tibetan identity, a commonality of grievances and a determination to express a shared loyalty to the Dalai Lama.

The uprising during the spring of 2008 and the continuing tensions in Tibet result from the failure of the government of the People's Republic of China to implement a system of genuine autonomy for Tibetans concurrent with its campaign to dilute the Tibetan identity and, in particular, to constrain the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, of which devotion to the Dalai Lama is an integral element.

According to the Chinese government's own analysis of its law on regional ethnic autonomy, the Tibetan people are entitled to the full political right of autonomy:

- Full decision-making power in economic and social development undertakings;
- Freedom to inherit and develop traditional culture and to practice religious belief;
- Freedom to administer, protect and be the first to utilize natural resources; and
- Freedom to independently develop educational and cultural undertakings.

However, this rhetoric is not reflected in reality.

The Tibetan position in the dialogue is that Tibetans be able to maintain their distinctive Tibetan identity into the future. Central to this position is the political right of autonomy provided to all Tibetans living in contiguous Tibetan areas, governed by a single administrative unit under a single unified policy. Chinese officials fear that this proposed autonomy represents a challenge to Chinese sovereignty on territories outside of those which the government has already designated as 'Tibetan autonomous' or claim as 'Tibetan' or 'autonomous', however, the Tibetan position is clear that autonomy would not extend beyond these territories.