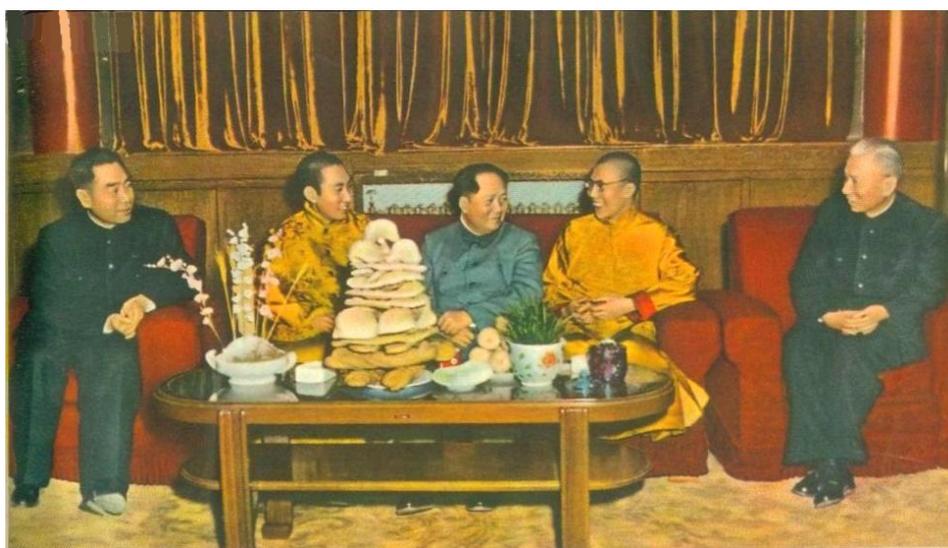


Dangerous Truths

The Panchen Lama's 1962 Report and China's Broken Promise of Tibetan Autonomy



Matthew Akester

July 10, 2017

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About the Project 2049 Institute

The Project 2049 Institute seeks to guide decision makers toward a more secure Asia by the century's mid-point. Located in Arlington, Virginia, the organization fills a gap in the public policy realm through forward-looking, region-specific research on alternative security and policy solutions. Its interdisciplinary approach draws on rigorous analysis of socioeconomic, governance, military, environmental, technological and political trends, and input from key players in the region, with an eye toward educating the public and informing policy debate.

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Cover Image: Mao Zedong (centre), Liu Shaoqi (left) meeting with 14th Dalai Lama (right 2) and 10th Panchen Lama (left 2) to celebrate Tibetan New Year, 1955 in Beijing. Source: 民族出版社, 1956年, Wikimedia Commons

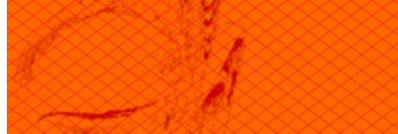


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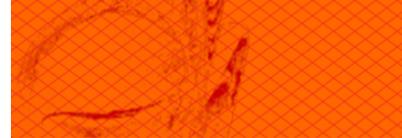
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Introduction

The 10th Panchen Lama's '70,000 character report' on problems with the 'pacification of rebellion' and implementation of 'democratic reforms' in Tibet was the most significant critique of Communist rule in minority regions ever acknowledged by the Party. It was handled by the United Front Work Department (UFW), the branch of government charged with co-opting and coordinating loyal figures of authority outside the Party. In 1962 Chöki Gyaltsen, the 10th Panchen Lama, was the vice chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a body under the purview of the UFW. The eventual rejection of the Panchen Lama's report by the central leadership signaled both the fall of the Panchen Lama—the most eminent such figure remaining in Tibet—and the end of any meaningful consultative role for the United Front organizations in minority regions generally.

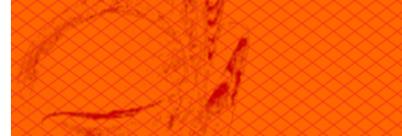
This document, sometimes regarded as the most important in modern Tibetan history, had never been seen outside elite circles of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) until the publication of a leaked copy in London in 1997.¹ The contents had been alluded to in Jampel Gyatso's sympathetic but carefully worded biography, published in Beijing in 1989, but it was 35 years before the appearance of the actual text could confirm the wide-ranging and detailed nature of the critique presented to the CCP's top leaders by its most senior Tibetan figurehead in 1962. While dutifully affirming support for the Party and its 'democratic reform' agenda, the report highlighted the disastrous failings of the Party's nationalities and religion policy, indiscriminate arrests and persecution, mass imprisonment, impoverishment, and starvation. It is the boldest internal criticism of Maoist policies ever known to have been written, and had been kept secret inside China for more than three decades.

Now, 20 years after the report's first publication outside China, further details of the Party's handling of the affair have finally emerged, including official transcripts of the series of high-level meetings held to discuss the report in Beijing in June-July 1962. These were recovered and published in English translation by independent researcher Li Jianglin in 2016.²

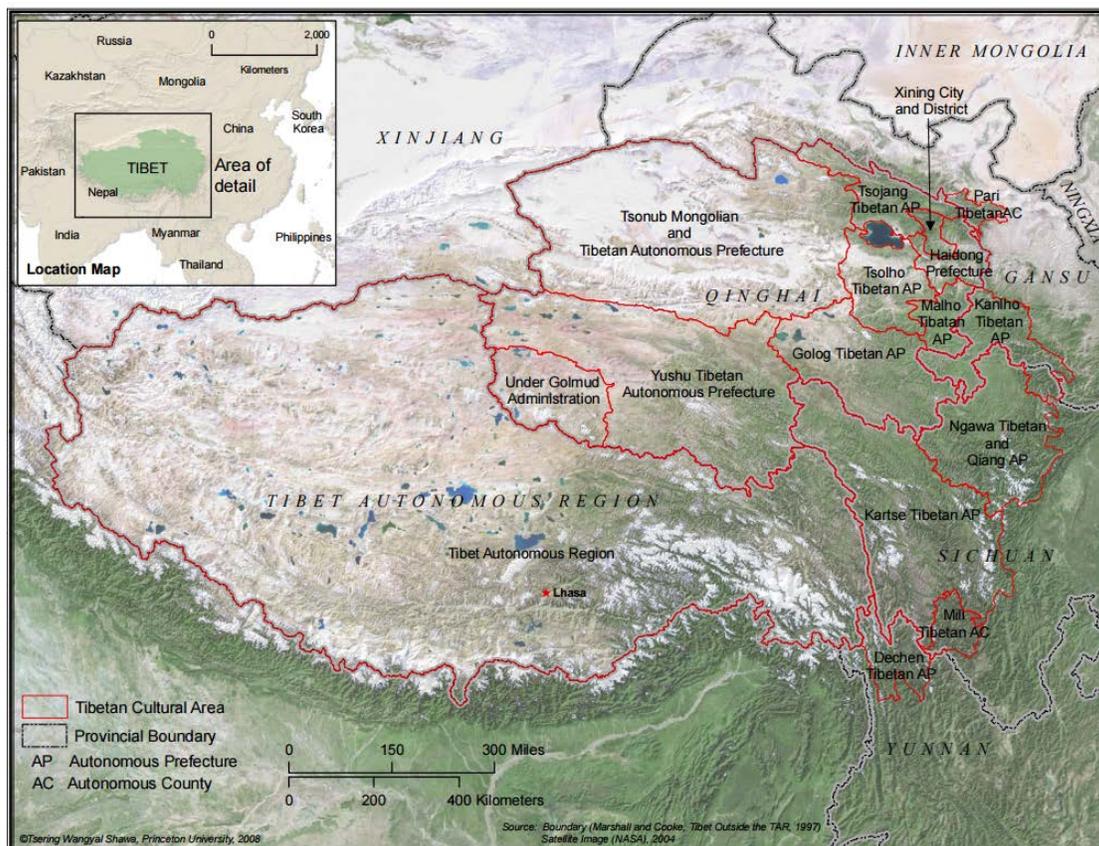
As outlined below, they confirm that even the regime's top diplomats, Zhou Enlai and Li Weihai, had no intention of addressing the substance of the Panchen's report. Their main concern was rather to determine whether the Panchen was docile and pliable enough to still be appointed chairman of the long-delayed Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)—the purpose for which he had been groomed by the Party all along. The discussion was used by Mao to depose not only the Panchen Lama but most of his senior

¹ *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the Panchen Lama*. London: Tibet Information Network 1997.

² Li Jianglin and Matthew Akester, "Achievements are predominant, mistakes are secondary", January 12, 2016, at <http://historicaldocs.blogspot.in/2016/01/achievements-are-predominant-mistakes.html>



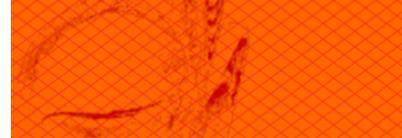
interlocutors as well. Within a matter of weeks from September 1962, the religion and nationality policies that had guided CCP rule in minority regions thus far were effectively abandoned.



(Map of Tibet Autonomous Region, PRC administered divisions, and Tibetan Cultural areas. Source: Credit to Tsering Wangyal Shawa, Princeton University; Boundary [Marshall and Cooke, Tibet Outside the TAR, 1997])

The Panchen Lama's petition

During 1961, political revisionism in Beijing and the rollback of the 'Great Leap Forward' led to a brief amelioration of conditions in Tibetan areas. There was limited rehabilitation and compensation for individuals wrongly categorized as 'class enemies', and a slowdown of the Maoist approach to collectivization. In Qinghai, where 'pacification of the revolt' had been particularly harsh, Party secretary Gao Feng was dismissed on charges of 'left deviationism'. It was at this time that the most senior Tibetan leader still serving in the United Front, the 10th Panchen Lama Chöki Gyeltsen (then vice-chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) and acting chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region (PCTAR), used his high standing with the central leadership to petition for redress of the excesses visited on Tibetan areas since 1958. He was just 24 years old.



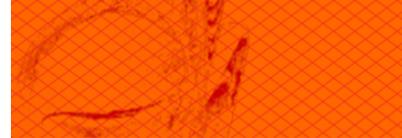
The CCP had made the generation-old rift between the courts of the Dalai Lamas in Lhasa and Panchen Lamas in Shigatsé a crucial pretext for sending the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into Tibet in 1950-51. This played out in the following years as a vehicle for the power struggle between the PLA's southwest and northwest military commands in proto-TAR. The Shigatsé faction was awarded its own regional council, one of three constituents of the preparatory TAR administration set up in the 1950s under this divide-and-rule strategy (the other two being the Lhasa government and Chamdo Liberation Committee). The young 10th Panchen Lama (b.1938) was cultivated by the Party as its chief Tibetan protégé, and therefore was taken for a Communist stooge by many Tibetans, especially Lhasa people, until the denunciation of his petition became public knowledge in 1964.

Like the 14th Dalai Lama (b.1935), the 10th Panchen Lama was a native of the far-eastern Amdo region, with a progressive outlook, open to Communist promises of reforming Tibet's archaic, hidebound social order and bringing economic and technological development to the region. Although he remained in Tibet after the 1959 uprising and the Dalai Lama's flight to India, publicly supported Chinese policies that were strongly resisted within Tibet and accepted promotion for doing so, this was not out of ignorance of or indifference to the suffering of his people.

In April 1958, the arrest of Tri Gyanakpa Yeshe Pel, the senior Lama at Bimdo monastery and former tutor to the Panchen Lama, sparked a protest that turned into a massacre. Gyanak Rinpoché was taken away for 're-education', as were many other religious leaders, as the authorities tried to contain Tibetan resistance to collectivization. Public agitation for his release led to attacks on the offices of Xunhua county (Tibetan: Yadzi Dzong, in Haidong prefecture, Qinghai), which was besieged for days, before the arrival of PLA troops. In the space of four hours, over 719 unarmed protesters were injured, of whom 435 died, and 2,499 arrests were made in a single afternoon during the manhunt that followed.³ The Xunhua massacre presaged the outbreak of revolt across Amdo, which culminated in the Lhasa uprising, resulting in the CCP's unrestrained use of military force to suppress it. The Panchen Lama was informed, and his high-level petition originated around this time.

In view of the privileged status accorded to the Panchen Lama and his administration, 'democratic reforms' were initially conducted 'peacefully' in Shigatsé in 1959-60,

³ This is one of few cases where casualty figures were published for a military assault on the civilian population in Qinghai that year. See *Tibet in Agony: Lhasa 1959* by Jianglin Li, Harvard University Press 2016 p.49; *The Tenth Panchen Lama: a life*, by Jampel Gyatso. Hong Kong: Kai fang chu ban she 2008 p.97-9; and *The Tragedy of My Homeland* by Alak Tenzin Pelbar. Dharmshala: Narthang Publications 1994 p.134-5. Numerous refugees from the region took shelter at Tashi Lhunpo monastery during 1958, including senior religious figures, leading to concern among TWC cadres that the Panchen group was "harboring counter-revolutionaries" (e.g., *Memoir of Fifty Years' Work in Tibet* by Zhang Xiangmin, privately published 2006, p.96-99).



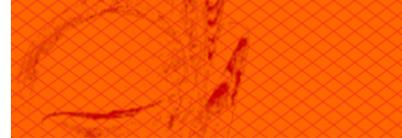
without the 'struggle' and violence visited on members of the ruling class in the rest of the country. According to Zhang Xiangmin, "the Panchen clique belonged to the serf-owner class, but they were the ones sitting on stage in meetings, so it was rather difficult to make substantial progress in democratic reform..."⁴ Following such complaints, the Tibet Work Committee (TWC) in Lhasa sent a high-level team to Shigatsé, and launched an 'investigation' of the Panchen's parents, to signal that the interests of the 'three big oppressors' would not remain untouched. The Panchen Lama, who had received assurances from the central government that he and his entourage would be exempt from 'class struggle' during 'democratic reform' (due to their progressive credentials), promptly complained to the central government. At the behest of Mao Zedong, Wang Feng, the Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department and Deputy Director of the State and Ethnic Affairs Commission, personally visited Tibet to defuse the situation, leading to a tense standoff with the TWC leadership.⁵ This tension continued over the next three years, until the central authorities weighed in and supported the Leftist position in favor of class struggle and forceful implementation of 'democratic reforms', and the Panchen removed from office.

During 1960, the Panchen Lama was one of very few senior Tibetan figures allowed the privilege of touring the country and witnessing conditions in the aftermath of 'democratic reform'. In Qinghai, he was accompanied by Geshé Sherab Gyatso, the veteran scholar and politician, who also came from the multi-ethnic Haidong prefecture in the east of the province, and became a mentor in those crucial years.⁶ Both were shocked by the extreme disparity between central government policy and the bleak reality on the ground. The Geshé is said to have commented: "If you listen to the Party's

⁴ *Memoir of Fifty Years' Work in Tibet* p.96-99. Zhang Xiangmin[张向明](1919-2007) came to Tibet with the 4th Army 4th Division. After 1950, he served as Deputy Minister of Social Affairs of the Tibet Work Committee (TWC), Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department, and the Deputy Secretary-General of TWC. Among other titles, he would serve on the Standing Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region Party Committee, and was Secretary-General, deputy secretary of the Party Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region. His memoir is seen as a response to that of Fan Ming, the Northwest commander, which was apparently in circulation for years before it was published in Hong Kong in 2008. For more on Zhang Xiangmin's bio, see <http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/07/content_6839070.htm>

⁵ The Panchen Lama used his father as an example of the unjust persecution of loyal 'upper strata' in his petition: "Although there were no serious errors in his behavior, he was for a period part of the feudal serf-owning class, and so there will have been instances where he contravened the will of the people. He understood the importance of acknowledging his errors and apologizing before the masses and of reforming himself properly; so, when democratic reform was carried out in Shigatsé, he went of his own accord from Lhasa to Shigatsé and did these things (i.e., acknowledged his errors and apologized to the masses). It goes without saying that in Shigatsé he was not cared for and commended, but on the contrary: cadres of the work teams instigated struggle against him, including public confrontation and fierce beating, by a group of bad people from the middle and upper strata who had disguised themselves as activists, the eloquent, and opportunists. This is not the only such incident in Tibet. Many other friends like him, who believe in the Party, sympathize with the people, support democratic reform and are willing to reform themselves, have been attacked in the democratic reform struggle." (*A Poisoned Arrow: the secret report of the 10th Panchen Lama*, p.23). The gratuitous conduct of the work team at Tashi Lhunpo monastery, that caused the Panchen much grief in the summer and autumn of 1960, is described by Jampal Gyatso in *The Tenth Panchen Lama: a life* (p.84-7).

⁶ Geshé is the highest scholastic degree in Tibetan Buddhism.



policy in Beijing, it sounds like a ceremonial oboe. When you get to Xining, it sounds like a conch shell trumpet. When you get to Yadzi County, it sounds like a bellowing donkey!”

Bimdo, the Panchen’s birthplace in Yadzi County, was among the worst affected by the ‘pacification of the revolt’. Approximately 3000 people from 700 Tibetan households in Bimdo were relocated to Dowi and Karing, in their place, 5000 Chinese youth from Hunan were settled there to start a ‘Youth Farm’. The plan was to form a militia to prevent further revolts, but due to inadequate food and the unfamiliar environment, most of them died. By 1961 the farm was abandoned, and the survivors returned home. The Panchen Lama revisited his birthplace that October to find it virtually uninhabited.⁷ In his petition, he wrote:

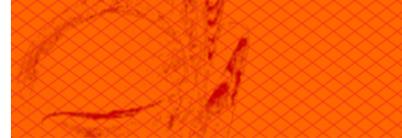
“For example, in Wendu [Bimdo] monastery of Xunhua [Yadzi] county in Qinghai province, I specifically convened a forum of more than three hundred grassroots-level cadres and representatives of the masses of the Tibetan, Han, and Salar nationalities. In the meeting, the people, and principally the grassroots cadres, said: "From 1959 until the first half of 1961, the difficult circumstances in the lives of the masses in the Xunhua area were unimaginable and difficult to describe. In every village, a percentage of people miserably starved to death".”⁸

On arrival in Beijing in September 1960 to attend the 11th National Day celebrations, he directly addressed Premier Zhou Enlai on the Tibetans’ plight. The leadership responded by sending him on a tour of the southern provinces in the company of United Front leaders Li Weihan, Wang Feng, and Liu Chun.

The young and indignant Panchen could not abide by diplomatic etiquette, and protested to his hosts that this was no time for sightseeing and banquets. Premier Zhou seemed to have taken the Panchen’s views on board to some extent, as he criticized TWC deputy head Zhang Guohua for Leftist mistakes when he delivered the annual Tibet

⁷ *The Tenth Panchen Lama: a life* (p.103-4). According to *History of Golok* by Damchö Pelsang (Dharmshala: Amnye Machen 2000 p.457-9), 9000 youths from Hunan were sent to Golok prefecture, Qinghai in 1959 as part of a campaign to turn the grassland into wheat fields, and the majority died of hunger. Golok, an exclusively pastoral region, was the worst affected by famine according to official census figures, which record a population reduction of 78% between 1953 and 1964. According to official documents cited in *Tibet in Agony: Lhasa 1959* (p.55-6), 6000 settlers from Henan were sent to Xinghai [Tsikortang] county in Hainan [Tsolho] prefecture, Qinghai, in September 1959, at a time when up to half the local population was dying either from famine caused by forced collectivization, or from the military ‘pacification’ of resistance to collectivization. ‘...untold numbers of them perished of hunger and disease. Their farms were disbanded within a few years, and most of the survivors returned home, leaving behind a wake of environmental devastation. *Building New China, Colonising Kokonor* by G. Rohlf (Lexington Books 2016 p.213) notes that the planned number of settlers sent to Qinghai from Henan was tripled during Gao Feng’s tenure, after the launch of the Great Leap Forward.

⁸ *A Poisoned Arrow: the secret report of the 10th Panchen Lama* p.113. A public consultation meeting held by the Panchen Lama at Kumbum monastery in 1961 is described in *Surviving the Dragon* by Arjia Rinpoché (New York: Rodale 2010 p.49-51).



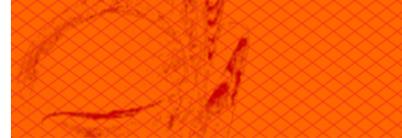
work report in Beijing that autumn, telling him to pay more attention to the masses' livelihoods. Meanwhile, the Panchen Lama used his enforced vacation to engage Li Weihuan in a series of discussions on the Tibet situation. These discussions were recorded and formulated into a document that informed the central government's January 1961 inspection mission to Lhasa, led by the Central Nationalities Affairs Commission (CNAC) vice-chairman Yang Jingren. The documents were effectively the first draft of the petition.

Yang Jingren's recommendations included postponing the introduction of communes for 5 years, relaxation of the bans on trade and handicraft, lowering taxes on the rural population, releasing indiscriminately arrested prisoners, and better guarantees of the constitutional freedom of religious belief. On the return of the mission, the Panchen Lama attended a meeting with the top leadership, including Chairman Mao, who assured him that mistakes committed during 'democratic reform' would be rectified. The meeting approved a six-point agenda, directly addressing his concerns: 1) No communes to be established, only Mutual Aid Teams; (2) Greater role for progressive upper class figures (over 3000 had nominal government posts); (3) Approve the Panchen Lama's proposal for academic training of selected monks in Buddhist studies (following the wholesale disbanding of monasteries); (4) Leftist mistakes such as searching the homes of the Panchen's parents and leading officials are wrong; (5) Establishment of an Autonomous Regional Administration must be through popular election, and local governments at county and village levels must be elected, followed by TAR level delegates; and (6) the TWC must keep closer relations with the Panchen Lama, keep him informed and consult him.⁹

He returned to Lhasa to transmit these guidelines to the provincial leadership, apparently provoking considerable resentment there. Zhang Guohua and others in the TWC were in favor of moving rapidly towards the introduction of communes, and the formation of a Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) government.¹⁰ In the spring and summer of that year, the Panchen Lama continued to tour eastern Tibet, including the Kandzé and Ngaba prefectures of Sichuan, where he criticised Li Jinquan and other provincial leaders for sending false reports to the central government and ignoring the

⁹ *Research on Panchen Erdeni* by Tsangtruk Topla (Privately published 2012) p.335-6. In February 1961, in response to central government directives to ameliorate the living conditions of the rural masses, the TWC formulated 'Regulations on specific policies related to the countryside', and in June, 'Regulations on specific policies for the future in pastoral areas'. The Panchen Lama devoted a section of his report (p.75-90) to detailing the improvements brought about during 1961, following the implementation of these directives.

¹⁰ *Memoir of Fifty Years' Work in Tibet* by Zhang Xiangmin p. 96-99. The writer asserts that doubts over the political reliability of the Panchen Lama (its preferred figurehead) was the main factor delaying the inauguration of the TAR, which eventually happened only in September 1965, a year after his official dismissal. It is said that during the initial attempt to force the Panchen to recant his petition in late 1962, he was tempted by senior TWC officials that if he publicly denounced the Dalai Lama, he could assume full chairmanship of PCART and take up residence in the Potala (e.g., *Research on Panchen Erdeni* p.359).



suffering of the masses.¹¹ By the time he reached Beijing to attend the 12th National Day celebrations on October 1st, he had completed the draft of his petition to the Central Committee.

At that point, with the PRC's leaders being preoccupied with Sino-Soviet relations, the Panchen Lama sought the opinions of Tibetan colleagues, most of whom were perturbed by his audacity. Ché Jigmé, the most influential politician in his administration, and Ngulchu Rinpoché, his senior tutor, pleaded with him in the strongest terms to abandon the petition. Ngapo Ngawang Jigmé, the most senior Tibetan figure in the Communist hierarchy—older, shrewder and with none of the Panchen's idealist fire—is believed to have toned down the text considerably.¹² The Panchen did, however, receive welcomed moral support and guidance from Géshé Sherab Gyatso. At the national-level Nationalities Work Meeting convened by Li Weihan in April-May 1962, Sherab Gyatso again spoke out bluntly and fearlessly against the Party's failures in minority regions.¹³ Six years later, at the age of 86, the veteran Buddhist master and politician would be hounded to death by Maoist zealots, chiefly on the charge of having 'conspired' with the Panchen Lama in drafting the petition. Ngulchu Rinpoché and other members of the Panchen's entourage suffered a similar fate.

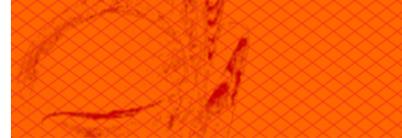
Among the senior Chinese leadership, it was the assiduous and relatively moderate Premier Zhou Enlai who showed interest in dealing with the issue, and it was through him that the petition was submitted once the Chinese translation was completed in May 1962. This was the high tide of a period of reform and openness following the '7000 cadres conference' in January, and the Nationalities Work Meeting, which sought to extend the same spirit to minority affairs, had just ended well.

Zhou initially responded that while rectification of Leftist mistakes by local cadres and activists may be correct, the petition also contained political errors. In particular, it alleged that the CCP was out to destroy Tibetan religion and culture. This was untrue, he said, and the petition should be amended and re-submitted. The final version, 70,000 characters in length, was submitted at the beginning of June. It was organized under eight headings:

¹¹ *Research on Panchen Erdeni* by Tsangtruk Topla (Privately published 2012) p.338-9.

¹² *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the Panchen Lama*. London: Tibet Information Network 1997, p. xviii

¹³ *The Tenth Panchen Lama: a life* (p.120-34). The Géshé is supposed to have mocked the CCP's penchant for numerical formulations by enumerating its mistakes: "Number one, telling lies; Number two, refusing to admit faults; Number three, random persecution; Number four, lack of compassion and humanity..." He crossed another red line by pointing out that economic conditions for the masses had been better under the 'reactionary régime' of Chiang Kaishek and Ma Bufang.



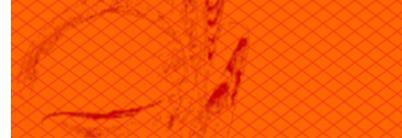
1. The 'Pacification of the Rebellion': dealing with the problem of indiscriminate arrests, and the failure to implement the Party's "Four No-s" policy ("no killing, no jailing, no sentencing, and no struggling" of surrendering rebels)
2. 'Democratic Reform': dealing with indiscriminate conduct of 'struggle', property confiscation and class categorization during the democratic reform campaign, and emphasizing the low quality of local cadres and activists
3. Livelihood and Economy: dealing with grain tax and restrictions on travel and trade, in the context of mass impoverishment and starvation
4. 'The 'United Front': dealing with the alienation of 'upper and middle strata' and failure to implement the Party's policy of 'winning over'
5. 'Democratic Centralism': dealing with the absence of openness and tolerance in the Communist system, and the dominance of the Party over other branches
6. 'Proletarian Dictatorship': dealing with punitive re-education and mass imprisonment
7. Religion Policy (the most detailed section): dealing with the failure to implement the Party's policy of freedom of religious belief
8. Nationality Issues: dealing with attacks on Tibetan language, dress and customs, and drastic population reduction

The petition concluded with a discussion of the situation in 'fraternal provinces', meaning eastern Tibet, principally Tibetan areas of Qinghai and the Gannan prefecture of Gansu province, about which the Panchen was most worried, but as a TAR official, had less authority to discuss. Concerning the 'pacification of the rebellion' there, he said excessive military force had been used. On proletarian dictatorship, he commented that 10,000 had been imprisoned in each area, "worse than in Tibet itself...huge numbers died of abnormal causes, so many that their corpses could not be buried."¹⁴ Discussing nationality rights, he referred to "blind Leftist tendency at prefecture and county levels."¹⁵ The state of religious affairs in Qinghai and Gansu was worse than central Tibet: no monasteries were left at all; livelihood was seriously affected by mass imprisonment; and the hasty communalization of the remaining population ("only women, infants and the elderly are left"), who were burdened with unachievable production targets and had been reduced to eating grass and tree bark.¹⁶

¹⁴ *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the Panchen Lama*. London: Tibet Information Network 1997, p. 102.

¹⁵ *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the Panchen Lama*. London: Tibet Information Network 1997, p. 103

¹⁶ In the communal canteens, the Panchen wrote, individuals owned nothing but the clothes on their backs, a blanket and a tea bowl, and were starving to death, something unknown in the supposedly dark feudal system of old Tibet. It



The Meetings

A series of four meetings was held to discuss the report in June 1962, organized by the United Front and chaired by Xi Zhongxun and Li Weiha, which brought together the Panchen Lama's group and the TWC leadership. The transcripts reveal that despite a tactical admission of the need to correct mistakes (indiscriminate arrests, heavy-handed attacks on religion and neglect of mass livelihood), there was implacable denial of the force of the Panchen's critique, as well as of specific points such as denigration of minority nationality language and customs, on the part of the central leaders.

The transcripts further show that the meetings were effectively conducted as a high-level arbitration between the two acrimonious partners in the regional leadership – the hardcore party-military leaders of the TWC and the symbolic leader of the PCART – rather than as a substantive discussion of the report. The tensions between the two sides are evident; the Panchen's impatience and youthful impetuosity breaks the surface at times, and Zhang Guohua in particular delivers the requisite acknowledgement of mistakes defensively and grudgingly.

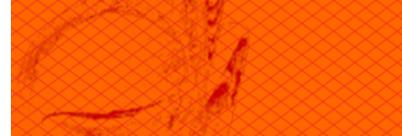
At the first working meeting on June 21st, Li Weiha sets out the Party's rather sinuous response to the report. He commends the Panchen Lama for speaking out, saying that pointing out mistakes helps us [the Party] do our work better, although the more he reassures the Panchen not to worry about getting into trouble, the less reassuring he sounds. Suppression of the rebellion was basically correct, he emphasizes:

“We didn't want to fight, but war was inevitable. Of course, mistakes were made, and in Qinghai they were worse than you say, but this was because local cadres tried to cover them up, and we are dealing with that (a reference to the dismissal of provincial Party secretary Gao Feng et al)...Achievements (i.e., 'liberation of the masses from class oppression') are primary, mistakes are secondary.”

He makes a point of apologizing for the mistreatment of the Panchen's family members during 'democratic reform' in Shigatsé, perhaps as a tacit suggestion that no greater concession was likely.¹⁷

is said that he personally bought basic utensils for the people in his native area, where all metal objects had been melted down during the Great Leap Forward. In a meeting with the provincial leaders, he banged his fist on the table, shouting “In the past, it was the masses who made offerings to the Lamas, and for Lamas to buy tea bowls for the masses was unheard of. In old Tibet, even beggars had tea bowls, and under the reactionary regime of Chiang [Kaishek] and Ma [Bufang] there was no case of Tibetans lacking bowls in which to drink their tea, so how could this happen under Socialism?” After his downfall, this outburst would be cited as evidence that he had “attacked the new society and praised the Chiang regime” (e.g., *The Tenth Panchen Lama: a life* p.107-8, *Research on Panchen Erdeni* p.330-31).

¹⁷ Summary of Meeting between Comrades Xi Zhongxun, Li Weiha etc. and Banchan, June 21st, 1962. Internal document. For access to the primary sources of the meeting transcripts for the June 8, 1962 Meeting Record; June 21-25, 1962 Meeting Record; July 24, 1962 Meeting Record (classified version); and the July 24, 1962 Meeting Record (published version), see <http://historicaldocs.blogspot.in/2016/01/achievements-are-predominant-mistakes.html>



The June 22nd meeting starts with a ponderous discussion of problems in minority language teaching and usage, wherein the main concern was with standardization and modernization, ignoring the Panchen's contention that "If language, clothing and customs are lost... a nationality will disappear."

Li then switches rather awkwardly to the question of deaths during the suppression of the rebellion. Betraying some insecurity, he wavers between denial ("Those who were killed should be considered the responsibility of the rebellious upper strata, because it was they who incited the rebellion"¹⁸) and guarded admission of excessive force ("We should not take life like children playing games"¹⁹). He goes on to concede the Panchen Lama's concerns on excesses in religion reform, again particularly assuring him that his complaint over the appointment of anti-religious activists to the Democratic Management Committee of Tashi Lhunpo monastery (his traditional seat in Shigatsé) will be addressed. The Panchen seemed less than convinced.²⁰

At the third meeting on June 25th chaired by Xi Zhongxun, the Panchen Lama's frustration manifests in a brief tantrum. Objecting to his loyalty to the Party being taken for granted, he asserts "I had the power to rebel if I wanted."²¹ Faced with a flurry of disapproval from the elders, he backs down with a plea for genuine implementation of any agreed measures, and for the situation in Qinghai and Gannan to also be taken into account.

Ngabo Ngawang Jigmé is then called upon, and after the expected consensual speech, he unexpectedly takes up the cause of Tibetan areas in Sichuan, those least covered in the report. He concludes with a direct request for the release of falsely imprisoned lamas. Ngabo is thought to have been responsible for toning down the report in the drafting stage, and adding an obsequious prologue, and was known more generally for careful and obedient diplomacy in his dealings with the senior leadership. Yet here he appears to be almost daring in his support of the report.

Emboldened by this, the Panchen Lama becomes outspoken, protesting that the situation in Sichuan has also been overlooked, that learned people there "have all been locked up and wiped out."²² He then directly accuses Zhang Guohua of failing to release falsely arrested persons on an agreed list. "Nowadays the system is so rigid, but orders passed down are still not executed. We are so surprised by such things, to the point that our heads are about to explode."²³

¹⁸ Ibid.

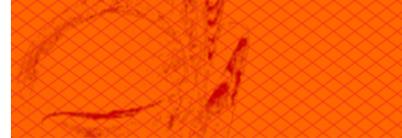
¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.



Then Pakpala Gelek Namgyal is called upon. Few senior Tibetan ‘progressives’ had less integrity than Pakpala and yet even he speaks out about conditions in his native Chamdo (TAR). Chamdo itself did not rebel, and yet all the monasteries have been closed down, he reports. “Everyone belonging to the upper class was jailed; Are they all connected with rebellion? Are they all under suspicion?...After some time they were told that it was a mistake. They got an apology and were released, only to be jailed again later.”²⁴

Faced with this barrage of discontent from the Tibetan side, the leaders expressed concern and suggested an inspection tour, to which the Panchen responded, “What’s the point of us going, since we cannot solve any problems...”²⁵

Following the Tibetan leaders remarks, it was the TWC leaders turn to present. Zhang Guohua makes the apology for Leftist mistakes expected of him, and warms to the theme of mistakes in Chamdo where, he admits, battle-hardened PLA units from the Korean front were deployed to crush rebellion indiscriminately. Zhang Jingwu’s speech, by contrast, is a more polished and diplomatic presentation, and concludes with agreements on four issues, on which four policy documents were then formulated by the central government for implementation in TAR.²⁶ These covered 1.) Strengthening relations between Party (TWC) and government (PCART) to improve Tibet work collectively; 2.) Regulations on full implementation of the freedom of religious belief policy; 3.) Recommendations for fully implementing regulations on dealing with rebels (the ‘Four No-s’); and 4.) More training for local cadres.

A final meeting chaired by Zhou Enlai was held on July 24th, in order for the premier himself to formally approve the four documents and conclude the discussion. Zhou’s speech is complex and rich in insinuation, but firm on the primacy of the Party’s achievements over its mistakes. Pacification of the rebellion and the violence of ‘democratic reform’ were justified, and Zhou maintained that there was no need to fear the eradication of religion. “If you agree that achievement is primary and mistakes are secondary, or less than secondary, but at the same time you want it to be loss-free, these two positions contradict each other,” he reasoned.²⁷

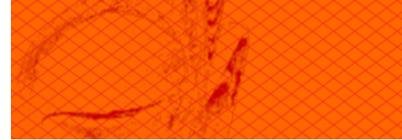
The Fall of the Panchen Lama

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Summary of Meeting between Comrades Xi Zhongxun, Li Weihan etc. and Banchan, June 25th, 1962. Internal document. <http://historicaldocs.blogspot.in/2016/01/achievements-are-predominant-mistakes.html>

²⁷ Summary of Meeting between Premier and Banchan etc., July 24th 1962. Internal document. <http://historicaldocs.blogspot.in/2016/01/achievements-are-predominant-mistakes.html>



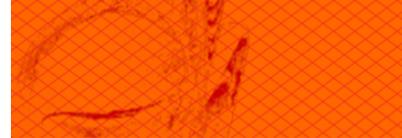
The 1961-1962 rollback of the Great Leap Forward was short-lived. The 70,000 Character Petition had eventually been submitted just at the moment Mao launched his return to power, and took revenge on the 'revisionists'. Among the first to go were the UFDW leaders Li Weihai and Xi Zhongxun. At meetings in Beidaihe and Beijing in August and September [1962] Mao accused them of 'capitulationism', failing to adhere to 'class struggle' in United Front work, and is said to have denounced the Panchen's petition as "a poisoned arrow shot at the Party by a reactionary serf-owner."²⁸

Zhang Jingwu returned to Lhasa in late September from the 10th plenum of the 8th Central Committee (slogan: 'Never Forget Class Struggle') to announce the cancellation of the four documents. At the annual PCART meeting shortly after, the Panchen Lama was effectively dismissed from office and subjected to 'struggle' to make him confess his mistakes. He refused, and spent much of the next 18 months under house arrest in the Dorjé Potrang residence that had been built for him beneath the Potala.²⁹ The success of Mao's counter-attack on moderates in the leadership also had effects on foreign policy. Although the exact reasons for going to war with India over the Tibetan border in October 1962 are still the subject of conjecture, this was one of the most important. The war was an instrumental factor in banishing any prospect of conciliation or accommodation in Tibet policy. The Panchen's chief antagonist in the regional leadership, Zhang Guohua, was also commander of the PLA forces that scored a thumping victory over India in the eastern sector where most of the fighting took place.³⁰ This greatly strengthened the TWC's hand in gaining the confidence of the reshuffled Central Committee, and thus the necessary backing for dealing with the Panchen Lama. And with popular Tibetan sentiment rooting for an Indian victory, the

²⁸ *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the Panchen Lama*. London: Tibet Information Network 1997, p. xx (preface)

²⁹ The Panchen Lama is reputed by Tibetan sources to have made one public appearance during the months of house arrest. In late February 1964, the TWC invited him to preside over Lhasa's annual Great Prayer Festival, supposedly on condition that he publicly denounce the Dalai Lama. From the podium in the Sungchöra courtyard of the Jokhang temple, where the Dalai Lamas traditionally addressed huge assemblies at the climax of the festival, the Panchen made an extraordinarily defiant speech: "There must be freedom of religion! The development of Tibet must be based on its people! Our supreme omniscient leader [the Dalai Lama] was taken out of the country by force...I want to take the opportunity of being with you today to proclaim to you my eternal faith in the great omniscient one. Before long, Tibet can regain its independence, and the great omniscient master will return to his golden throne!" (*The Lamp of Truth* by Lhatruk, TGiE Dept. of Security 2004 p.238). He was arrested immediately afterwards, and not seen again until the start of his trial in September (e.g., *Research on Panchen Erdeni* p.368). Informants from Lhasa remember this as the moment they first realized the Panchen Lama's loyalty to the Tibetan people, and were astonished by his courage. Due to declining official tolerance of religion, and surely also due to this incident, it was the last time the Great Prayer Festival (begun in 1409) was held. In 1986, the rehabilitated Panchen Lama would preside over the reinstatement of the festival after a 22-year hiatus.

³⁰ Zhang Guohua (张国华) was commander of the Southwest Eighteenth Army Corp of the PLA, and led the main attack force during the 1950 Chamdo campaign against Tibet. On January 24, 1950, the CPC Central Committee, Central Military Commission of the CPC Tibet Work Committee approved Zhang as the Secretary and Political Commissar. For a likely Chinese authorities approved account of Zhang Guohua's involvement in the attack on Tibet and later the Sino-India border war, see <http://military.china.com/history4/62/20150206/19285115_all.html>



war triggered a new wave of punitive political campaigns across TAR that would set the tone for years to come.³¹

According to Zhang Xiangmin, perhaps the only published account of the affair by a TWC insider, the Panchen had been pushing for a leading group of TWC and PCART officials, led by himself, to oversee implementation of the four documents. This would amount to imposing his authority on the Party, which was completely unacceptable.³² Even if this version is somewhat exaggerated, it seems clear that in the Party's eyes, the Panchen Lama had overstepped the advisory and ceremonial role allotted to non-Party figures, and arguably even got away with more than others because of the CCP's central leadership's reluctance to lose a Tibetan figurehead of unique value.

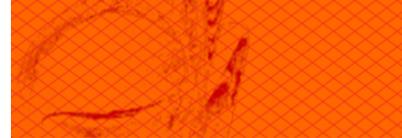
Eventually, the 7th plenary meeting of the PCART, which began on September 18, 1964, became the occasion to deliver the Party's final verdict on the Panchen. The timing was presumably determined by the Central Committee's decision to proceed against Li Weihang, whom the Party regarded as his mentor. In his opening speech, Zhang Guohua spoke menacingly of a "big rock on the road to Socialism," which he then identified as the "Reactionary Panchen."³³ This was the signal for the denunciations to begin, and would not have come as a surprise to all present. Several religious figures in the establishment had already been recruited to enact the denunciation. Over the next 50 days, the Panchen was repeatedly made to stand with bowed head on the stage of the meeting hall, and in other government offices and work units, while Chinese officials and Tibetan colleagues harangued him for his crimes, shouted abuse, slapped and kicked him, spat in his face, and worse.³⁴

³¹ In civil society, a campaign was launched to detect and punish individuals who "harbored empty hopes" of an Indian victory, which involved 'struggling' class enemies and any others suspected, on the slightest grounds, of disloyalty. Work teams were sent to rural areas to conduct this campaign, while villagers with 'clean' class backgrounds and political records were recruited as porters, needed to move supplies in the mountainous war zone. At the end of hostilities, Indian POWs in a disheveled and forlorn state were paraded in Lhasa's Barkor street as a propaganda exercise to demonstrate China's military superiority. In the prisons and labor camps, an onerous three-month 'Winter Training' campaign was held, involving fulltime re-education and 'struggle', to root out resistance cells and the spreading of 'rumors' (*Child of Mount Everest* by Tingri Ngawang. Dharmshala:Guchusum Publications 2007 p.80-100, *Memories of life in Lhasa under Chinese rule* by Tubten Khetsun. New York: Columbia University Press 2008 chapter 10).

³² *Memoir of Fifty Years' Work in Tibet* p.96-99. The author records November 6th, 1962 as the exact date on which Mao's theory of the persistence of class and the need for continued class struggle in Socialist society (the ideological justification for his attack on the revisionists) was communicated to the TWC in Lhasa.

³³ *Research on Panchen Erdeni* by Tsangtruk Topla (Privately published 2012) p.373

³⁴ In his memoirs, Rimbur Tulku, an incarnate Lama at Sera monastery and then member of the regional Religious Affairs Bureau and Chinese Buddhist Association, describes how he was induced to denounce the Panchen Lama's tutor during the meetings: "Then, when it seemed that Yongdzin Ngulchu and some of his attendants and entourage were to be 'struggled', I was summoned one evening by Turen Dawa. Cha-pel Tseten Puntsok was also there. Dawa told me "Cha-pel-la has prepared for the denunciation of Yongdzin Ngulchu tomorrow. Now, since it would be more impressive for an incarnate Lama to deliver it, you have to take his place tomorrow." I replied that I had no relation



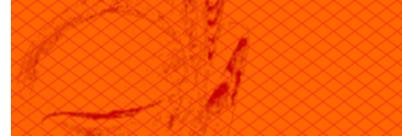
(Tibet's 10th Panchen Lama is seen undergoing a Cultural Revolution struggle session in Tibet's capital Lhasa, in this 1964 photo. Source: VOA news)

Apart from the petition itself, and his speech at the Jokhang temple, he was accused of “dreaming of overthrowing the People’s dictatorship” after records of the divinations he had made while under house arrest were discovered. He was said to have asked the deities how long Chinese rule would last and when the Dalai Lama would return. His

whatsoever with Yongdzin Ngulchu, neither political nor religious, and knew nothing of the allegations against him. Cha-pel coaxed me, saying “That doesn't matter. The denunciation has already been put in writing. You just have to memorize it this evening and there will be no difficulty”, and as Dawa also insisted, I had to reluctantly agree. The statement which Cha-pel read to me concerned an attempt to cast spells on the Party. It alleged that seven reactionary Geshés had been sent to Amdo to learn wrathful Mantras and rituals, but that one had died on the way. I had to listen to their explanation of the story and commit the statement to memory that evening. The next day I went to the meeting as instructed. The leading official was Secretary Shen. After a while, when the aged Yongdzin Ngulchu Rinpoché was led onto the stage, I felt miserable, but helpless to do otherwise. After a few others had made accusations against him, my name was called, and I fearfully went up on to the stage and performed my denunciation...For some time afterward, I had no peace of mind.'

He also describes a 'struggle' meeting for members of the regional Buddhist Association at that time: 'At that meeting, a Chinese leader instructed us that our cases would be decided by our ability to differentiate ourselves from the 'Reactionary Panchen' and thoroughly reject him. Then the Panchen Rinpoché was summoned, and he entered gracefully and prepared to take his seat on a chair, but a Chinese official menacingly told him “Your time to sit there is over, sit on the floor!”, and at once a rug was put on the floor and he sat on it cross-legged, without dignity. Looking closely, one could see that his face was darkened by a finger's width of stubble, and I wondered whether even such possessions as a razor had been taken from him, or whether after spending the whole time from morning to night in 'struggle meetings', he had had no chance to shave. On that occasion, he was dressed in a smoke-colored felt gown and yellow silk undershirt, and wore a rosary around his neck...On that occasion, he retained his dignity before whatever abuse was addressed to him, and from time to time he bent his head and closed his eyes momentarily. One of the Chinese officials demanded to know what he was thinking when he closed his eyes, and he replied chillingly, “Now that I have to suffer the full weight of the law pressing down on my head, I am bringing the Buddha Sakyamuni to mind, nothing else”, whereupon I remember some of the officials and activists shouting out “Now he is using a religious mask to spread his poison”.

The taste of good and evil deeds by Rimbur Tulku, Dharmshala: Tibet Cultural Press 1989 vol.2 p.151-8.



tutor Ngulchu Rinpoché in particular was accused of “aiming black incantations at the Party.”³⁵ It was also claimed that his collection of uniquely sacred statues saved from various temples in central Tibet in 1959 was a self-interested act of theft. The Panchen Lama responded defiantly to his accusers, angrily refuting them, and reportedly was “banging tables, smashing teacups and tearing up accusation papers” which intensified and prolonged the ordeal.³⁶

More colorful accusations were put to him: he was said to have used the technical college he started in Shigatsé as a base for raising a counter-revolutionary army, stockpiled weapons and communications equipment, and indoctrinated the students in subversion. Horses presented to him by the United Front leader Ulanfu were said to be his cavalry, and military-trained dogs presented to him by Chen Yi were also characterized as part of his guerilla force. A jeep fitted with an extra fuel tank by mechanics at the technical college was said to be the getaway car if his reactionary rebellion failed and he had to flee to the Indian border (staff and students at the college were also struggled and imprisoned). Flags with the crossed-vajra symbol that he used were said to be the insignia of the independent state he wanted to establish; several people in his entourage were alleged to have founded an underground group called ‘Patriotic Association for the struggle for a free Tibet’; and numerous allegations were made by individuals who claimed to have heard him speak against the Party and in favor of an independent Tibet ruled by the Dalai Lama and himself.³⁷

Those who joined in the denunciation were promoted; those who refused were detained and subjected to ‘struggle’ themselves, either then or subsequently.³⁸ Even senior members of his administration, such as Ché Jigmé and Lhamön Yeshé Tsultrim, who tried to save themselves by agreeing to denounce him during the meeting, were nonetheless later ‘struggled’ and imprisoned for their involvement.

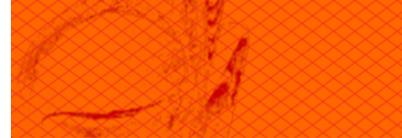
As the PCTAR session dragged to a close, the Panchen was given three ‘hats’, Anti-Party, Anti-People and Anti-Socialism. A few weeks later, at the NPC meeting in Beijing, he was formally dismissed as acting chairman of PCTAR and vice-chairman of the NPC, finally clearing the way for the formation of a TAR government. The Panchen himself

³⁵ *The taste of good and evil deeds* by Rimbur Tulku, Dharmshala: Tibet Cultural Press 1989 vol.2 p.157-8.

³⁶ *The Tenth Panchen Lama: a life*, by Jampel Gyatso. Hong Kong: Kai fang chu ban she 2008 p.160

³⁷ *The Tenth Panchen Lama: a life*, by Jampel Gyatso. Hong Kong: Kai fang chu ban she 2008 p.160, Research on Panchen Erdeni by Tsangtruk Topla (Privately published 2012) p.378-80

³⁸ Among the most vocal in denouncing the Panchen were Pakpala Gelek Namgyal, incarnate head of Chamdo monastery, and the young female incarnation Samding Dorjé Pakmo; senior Tashilhunpo Labrang officials including Lhamön Sonam Lhundrup, Cha-pel Tseten Puntsok, Sengchen Losang Gyaltzen and Trentsa Tamdrin Gyalpo; ‘progressive’ members of the regional United Front organizations, including Gyatso-ling Rinpoché Tubten Kelsang, Tsamkhung Jampa Wangmo, Gonpa-sar Tubten Jikdral and Tsédron Gyaltzen Puntsok. Among those who reportedly refused were Demo Rinpoché and Norbrang Urgyen.



was placed under house arrest in the city, and remained there until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, when he faced further persecution.

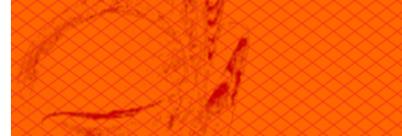
A broader political campaign to root out 'Medium Panchens' and 'Little Panchens' was already underway in the United Front and other government offices across the TAR, and in other Tibetan areas. The campaign was soon extended to the general population as well. Any individual whose merest word or deed could be construed as sympathy for the Panchen Lama was liable to face 'struggle' at their work unit or neighborhood meetings, be given a 'hat', or imprisoned. It has been estimated that 3000 were 'struggled' and 'hatted,' and some 500 sentenced to imprisonment, many of them religious and highly educated.³⁹ Tseten Shabdrung, the foremost Tibetan scholar in Amdo (eastern Tibet), and his group at the Northwest Minorities University in Lanzhou, were among the highest profile casualties.

An 'Exhibition exposing the Panchen's reactionary crimes' was put on display in Lhasa at the height of this campaign. Tubten Khetsun⁴⁰ recalls: "In order to prepare public opinion for the denunciation of the Panchen Rinpoché, they set up an exhibition on the 'crimes of the anti-Party Panchen clique' at Trungchi Lingka, the site of the present Tibet University, and each neighborhood committee in turn took people there to see it. I was in Lhasa at the time and was taken to see it, and an activist member of my sub-committee appointed to check on my reaction stayed right next to me throughout the tour, which was very trying. The exhibition featured rifles, cannons, a jeep, radio transmitters and a 'Vajra army' flag, which were presented as evidence that the 'Panchen clique' was staging a rebellion. Some of the famous images from holy places in Ü district...which the Panchen had previously collected and looked after, were also in the exhibition, and people jostled to get a closer look at them. The exhibition guides delivered a very harsh spiel about how Panchen Rinpoché had been involved in violent opposition to the Party, had stolen national sacred artifacts for himself, and behaved despicably."⁴¹

³⁹ *A mirror clearly showing the facts of Red China's inhumane atrocities in Tibet 1959-84*. Dharmshala: Tibetan Cultural Press 1991 p.512.

⁴⁰ Author of *Memories of life in Lhasa under Chinese rule*, the following background is taken from the summary of his book: Born in 1941, Tubten Khétsun is a nephew of the Gyatso Tashi Khendrung, one of the senior government officials taken prisoner after the Tibetan peoples' uprising of march 10, 1959 Khétsun himself was arrested while defending the Dalai Lama's summer palace, and after four years in prisons and labor camps, he spent close to two decades in Lhasa as a requisitioned laborer and 'class enemy' in this eloquent autobiography, Khétsun describes what life was like during those troubled years. His account is one of the most dispassionate, detailed, and readable firsthand descriptions yet published of Tibet under the communist occupation. Khétsun talks of his prison experiences as well as the state of civil society following his release, and he offers keenly observed accounts of well-known events, such as the launch of the cultural revolution, as well as lesser-known aspects of everyday life in occupied Lhasa since communist china continues to occupy Tibet, the facts of this era remain obscure, and few of those who lived through it have recorded their experiences at length Khétsun's story will captivate any reader seeking a refreshingly human account of what occurred during the Maoists shockingly brutal regime.

⁴¹ *Memories of life in Lhasa under Chinese rule* p.156. Tingri Ngawang saw a similar exhibit at Tashi Lhunpo monastery: 'There was a red flag at the gate of the monastery, and in the courtyard within was a red banner inscribed



The Limits to Criticism

In assessing the CCP's handling of the Panchen Lama's report, while the contingencies of the wider political context in those turbulent years appear decisive, the parameters within which figures of peripheral authority must operate in the PRC system are also quite apparent.

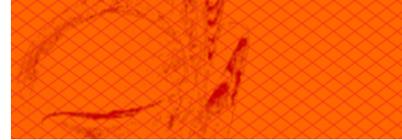
The Panchen Lama had been a great strategic asset in the 'liberation' of Tibet, allowing the CCP to take full advantage of the historic tensions between Lhasa and Shigatsé. It allowed the center a useful check on the power of the Southwest military command in the region, as the Panchen was the adopted figurehead of the rival Northwest command. Although largely forgotten since, the leadership had initially framed the 1950 PLA advance to Chamdo and the 1951 negotiations on 'peaceful liberation' as a central government arbitration of an internal dispute.⁴² When the power-sharing agreement with the Lhasa government unraveled in 1959, leading to the flight of the Dalai Lama and the introduction of 'democratic reform', it was crucial to have a Tibetan leader of comparable standing on the Party's side.

Therefore, the Panchen Lama had enjoyed extraordinary concessions, such as partial exemption from 'democratic reform', permission to take local initiatives (like the Shigatsé technical college and Nechung Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies), and some freedom to travel within the PRC and to report directly to the central leadership. His first appeal on redressing the excesses of 'democratic reform' in 1960 was met with the appointment of a central government mission to formulate measures, noted earlier, which came with Mao's personal assurance.

Of course, this took place during the nadir of Mao's leadership, when power had been wrested from him by Liu and Deng, and 'revisionist' policies were favored to reverse some of the disasters of the Great Leap Forward. It was a moment of unusual hope for the Party's critics and victims, who could not know that it would also prove to be a brief

'Reactionary Panchen Exhibition'. On either side of it, loudspeakers announced the many ways he had opposed the state. A few Chinese officials were loitering around smoking, and on a table where a few monks were sitting, evidence of his crimes was set out. "First: a newspaper with a photo of Indian PM Nehru was proof that the Dalai Clique was sending information about India to the Panchen Clique. Second: a meter-high statue of Tara indicated that he had stolen the famous speaking Tara statue from the Trandruk temple, among others. Third: a mould for minting coins showed his intention to restore the former Tibetan government. Fourth: a copy of the 70,000 character petition showed that he had rebelled against the Party. Fifth: two plates of food, one rich and tasty, and the other meager and rancid, placed next to each other. It was explained that the fine food was eaten by the Panchen, while the masses had to make do with bad food. There were about 11 such displays, and at the end, a pen and register lay on the table, and three monks puffing away on their cigarettes told me to sign my name. I declined, saying "I just came here on pilgrimage, I have no understanding of politics", and took three steps back' (*Child of Mount Everest* p.83). Arjia Rinpoché participated in the Anti-Panchen campaign at Tashi Lhunpo monastery that winter, and describes it in his memoirs (*Surviving the Dragon* p.70-72).

⁴² Ngabo's statement to the Second Session of the Fifth TAR People's Congress, July 31, 1989, Lhasa; *An Old Man's Tale* by Khémé Sonam Wangdu. Dharmshala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives 1982 p.120.



and unique one, and it is unlikely that the Panchen's report would otherwise have gone as far as it did.

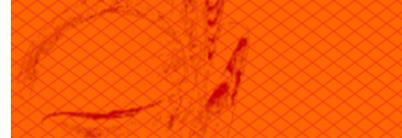
Nonetheless, even in this season of conciliation, with the attention of the regime's most senior diplomats, committed to upholding its nationality policies, the leadership's concern with rectifying mistakes was entirely tactical, as can now be seen from the meeting transcripts. The measures taken in 1961—dismissal of Gao Feng in Qinghai, and approval of the Yang Jingren mission's findings—were essentially cosmetic. Gao's Leftist policies had been enforced with the knowledge and approval of the Central Committee, and he was thus made a scapegoat.⁴³ As for the TAR recommendations, there was some welcome rehabilitation of the wrongfully arrested and compensation for wrongfully confiscated property, but perhaps their main effect was to sharpen the differences between the TWC and the Panchen Lama, who complained that they were not being implemented.

Notably, while both Li Weihan and the Panchen Lama were effectively dismissed as soon as Mao regained control of the Central Committee (September 1962), they were held in suspense for another two years before being formally condemned. By that time, India had been soundly defeated, boosting the regime's confidence in its annexation of Tibet, and consolidating the standing of the Southwest military leadership; Khrushchev had fallen from power in Moscow, allaying the threat of revisionism within the Communist world; and the PRC was about to successfully test an indigenously developed atom bomb, a milestone in establishing its international stature. The tactical need to accommodate minority nationalities, as with other critics of Mao, had largely disappeared.

While much of this tactical behavior appeared to be about Mao's struggle to regain power, it must be noted that a similar dynamic between tactical and core interests was played out again during the second phase of the Panchen's career in the 1980s, after Mao's death. Within a few years of his release from Qincheng prison in 1978, at the outset of 'liberalization', the Panchen Lama returned to the national stage as the foremost advocate of the reinstated policies of nationality autonomy and religious freedom. During the 1980s, he fought for and established the rights of Tibetans and other minorities to education in their own languages, religious freedom, and economic opportunity.⁴⁴ He became the guiding inspiration for the phenomenal resurgence of

⁴³ The documentary evidence for this is mentioned in *Tibet in Agony: Lhasa 1959* p.56-65.

⁴⁴ His officially listed achievements include advising on the 1982 revision of the nationality autonomy law (with Ngabo and Bapa Puntsok Wangyal), submitting a draft law on Tibetan language education, usage and development that was approved by the TAR People's Congress in 1987 (with Ngabo), and establishing the Tibet University in 1985, Tibet Development Fund and Institutes of Higher Buddhist Studies in 1987. Numerous other initiatives for the revival and institution of Tibetan religion, language and culture during these years were also credited to him.



Tibetan religion, education and culture that emerged in those years. And even with the benefit of maturity and experience, he remained dangerously outspoken.

In this bid to substantiate the constitutional provisions of nationality autonomy, the Panchen Lama found an ally in the reformist leader Hu Yaobang. However, Hu's 1980 reforms in the TAR—dismissing the Party secretary and returning thousands of non-Tibetan cadres to the mainland—became one of the causes of his deposition by [CCP] hardliners in 1987. Popular protest against Communist rule returned to the streets of Lhasa that year. Then, in January 1989, during the ceremonial re-consecration of the Tashi Lhunpo monastery, the Panchen Lama suddenly died (supposedly from heart failure). He was 50 years old. A few days earlier, Chinese state media reported him as saying that the price paid for the development of Tibet that had taken place since 'liberation' was greater than the gains, a statement that harked back unrepentantly to the discussion of the 70,000 character report in 1962.⁴⁵

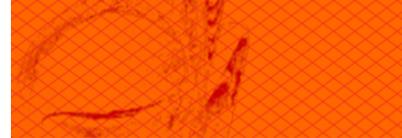
For most Tibetans, and other observers, there is no doubt that the Party had once again rid itself of the Panchen Lama by foul means. His death fuelled nationalist protest in Lhasa that year, much as Hu's death in April presaged the democracy protests in the mainland that shook the Party to its foundations, and brought a swift end to 'liberalization.' Thereafter, Tibet policy reverted to aggressive assimilation and repression. Beijing used the issue of the Panchen's reincarnation in 1995 to limit the freedom of the re-established monasteries, and set about dismantling most of what the Panchen Lama had worked for up to his untimely death.

The Historical Record

The CCP's denial of the Panchen Lama's petition is in kind with its denial of the history of its occupation of Tibet. Apart from the formal denunciation of the "Gang of Four" and rehabilitations of the early Deng era, there has been no official admission of the crimes and injustices committed in the name of 'democratic reform' in Tibet. Such admissions as have appeared have been rendered inaudible by the din of state propaganda.⁴⁶ The statement about control of history in the notorious 'Document 9' (April 2013) on

⁴⁵ For an account of the Panchen Lama's remarks during a high-level meeting between [CCP] government and religious leaders on January 23, 1989 in Shigatsé, see Isabel Hilton, *The Search for the Panchen Lama*, *W.W. Norton & Company*, 1999, pg 194.

⁴⁶ By far the most explicit and controversial admission was made by Hu Yaobang, then CCP general secretary, on his May 1980 visit to Lhasa to see conditions there at first hand. In a speech to TAR cadres, he concluded "We feel that our party has let the Tibetan people down. We feel very bad! ...We have worked nearly thirty years, but the life of the Tibetan people has not been notably improved. Are we not to blame? If we don't make this clear, people won't let us off the hook; party members won't let us get away with it!" This position was not approved by the Party, and is believed to have been one of the reasons for his dismissal (1987), see TIN News Review no.26 1998 p.44 . In Qinghai, acknowledgement of "excesses in the pacification of the rebellion" came in 1981, in the form of compensation for victims, but almost nothing further (see *Tibet in Agony* p.64).



“combating ideological infiltration”, for example, is in reality no more than a restatement of longstanding Party policy.⁴⁷

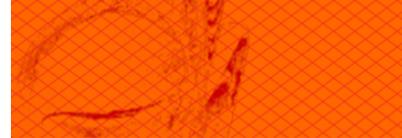
This principle is applied nowhere more rigorously than in Tibet, where the Party-State’s historical legitimacy is most disputed. Since the end of ‘liberalization’ in 1989, Party policy has consistently held that combating separatism is the top priority in Tibet (surpassing even economic and social development), and has relied on ‘patriotic education’ and coerced denunciations of the Dalai Lama to reshape and invigilate public attitudes and behavior. These practices place the contestation of history at the forefront in the battle for hearts and minds—an approach often seen as unnecessarily confrontational and even irrational by observers outside China. The party-state insists on reducing the complex history of Sino-Tibetan relations to one simple formula—reunification of the motherland and opposition to the “Dalai Clique”—to which any Tibetan who would attend school, join government service, or be legally registered as a monk must pledge allegiance.

Why is this? Apparently, the Party sees the persistence of Tibetan nationalist sentiment, even ambiguities of national identity and loyalty, as incompatible with its concept of “social stability,” which requires the active political compliance of Tibetan subjects. The historical record cannot, in this view, be ignored or be relegated as background in favor of other sources of popular legitimacy, such as economic development or strong governance, as has happened to some extent in the rest of the PRC. Rather, the living memory of Tibet as an independent country and the socializing power of oral tradition within Tibetan communities are considered forces so disruptive to state legitimacy that they can only be confronted head-on.

Following the protests that swept Tibet beginning in March 2008, one of the party-state’s first responses was to ramp up “patriotic education,” and extend it beyond institutions like monasteries and schools into the broader lay population. In 2009, the TAR declared a new official holiday on March 28th called Serf Liberation Day⁴⁸, which was to be celebrated with officially scripted performances of music and drama. One of

⁴⁷ Point 6. “The goal of historical nihilism, in the guise of “reassessing history,” is to distort Party history and the history of New China. This is mainly expressed in the following ways: Rejecting the revolution; claiming that the revolution led by the Chinese Communist Party resulted only in destruction; denying the historical inevitability in China’s choice of the Socialist road, calling it the wrong path, and the Party’s and new China’s history a “continuous series of mistakes”; rejecting the accepted conclusions on historical events and figures, disparaging our Revolutionary precursors, and vilifying the Party’s leaders. Recently, some people took advantage of Comrade Mao Zedong’s 120th birthday in order to deny the scientific and guiding value of Mao Zedong thought. Some people try to cleave apart the period that preceded Reform and Opening from the period that followed, or even to set these two periods in opposition to one another. By rejecting CCP history and the history of New China, historical nihilism seeks to fundamentally undermine the CCP’s historical purpose, which is tantamount to denying the legitimacy of the CCP’s long-term political dominance.”
<http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>

⁴⁸ March 28, 2009 marked the 50th anniversary of the launch of “democratic reforms” in the TAR.



the staple themes of patriotic education in recent years is 'Comparing Old and New Tibet', in which lectures, photo exhibitions and films contrast the darkness of feudalism with the brilliant accomplishments of socialism.

The Panchen Lama's last reported words—that the price paid for the development of Tibet since 'liberation' was greater than the gains—still haunt the CCP in the sense that their loud and insistent denial of this assessment has become the central theme of the party's Tibet-related propaganda.⁴⁹ Under the 'social management' policies introduced in the wake of the 2008 protests, the Party has engaged in a more ambitious attempt to control historical memory that it views as vital for 'long-term stability.'⁵⁰

1958

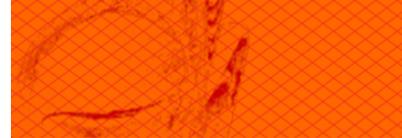
Perhaps the most direct link between the Panchen Lama's 1962 report and the historical memory of democratic reform concerns the events of 1958 in Qinghai and southern Gansu (the region known as Amdo in Tibetan). In global perception and most mainstream Tibetan exile narratives, the 1956 Khampa revolt in the Tibetan areas of present-day Sichuan led to the Lhasa uprising of March 1959 and the Dalai Lama's flight into exile. Until recently, it was less well and widely understood that the most

⁴⁹ The entrenchment of this position can be seen, for example, in the White Papers issued since the 1990s: according to the 'White paper on cultural preservation in Tibet' (June 22nd 2000), the central government has *more* than made up for any losses "in such a special period as the Cultural Revolution" with lavish expenditure on the restoration of temples, the reprinting of Tibetan literature, the construction of a museum, the funding of Tibetan-language TV broadcasts, and so on; the 'White paper on development in Tibet' (November 8th 2001) declines even to acknowledge such "special periods" - development in Tibet, it says, has been on a steady upward curve ever since 'Liberation' in 1950. The 'White paper on 50 years of Democratic Reform in Tibet' (March 2nd 2009) complains that criticism of the Party's record in Tibet is unfair: 'When the Dalai clique staged the large-scale armed rebellion to retain the theocratic feudal serfdom and to split the country, the Chinese government took actions to quell the rebellion for the sake of defending national unity and emancipating the serfs and slaves of Tibet. The historical significance of this righteous action is entirely comparable to the emancipation of the slaves in the American civil war. Yet the anti-China forces in the West simply ignore the historical facts...' Allegations of injustice and excessive violence in the conduct of 'democratic reform,' which were the substance of the 70,000 character petition, are dismissed as "the lies of the Dalai Clique".

⁵⁰ In the post-2011 era of cadres stationed in villages and the enhanced surveillance and social micro-control brought by 'grid management' and the 'double-linked households' system in the TAR, as well as increasingly sophisticated management of the internet and social media generally, the Party's commitment to information control at all levels has reached a new intensity.

The national level meeting on Propaganda and Ideology Work chaired by Xi Jinping in August 2013 characterized "security of the ideological sphere" as "the main battlefield in the struggle with hostile forces" and called for greater attention to assuring dominance in the shaping of public attitudes and policing of information through intensification and refinement of state media output, censorship, public reeducation etc. The TAR meeting held to study its decisions concluded that 'Guiding ideological work, exercising control, making correct public opinion completely understood, criticising mistaken views and ideas, promoting key themes and persuasive power, having the confidence to manage and control and daring to instill fear, we must firmly grasp the power of overall guidance in ideological sphere work' (http://tb.xzxw.com/zt/sxxc/201506/t20150605_625025.html).

This hardened position on control of the ideological sphere was spelt out even more directly in the leaked 'Document 9' (April 2013) that attracted global attention to the direction of Xi Jinping's presidency.



devastating violence of all took place in Amdo in the spring and summer of 1958 during the introduction of 'democratic reforms.' Among Amdo people themselves, however, the number "fifty-eight" is synonymous with state-directed terror and the systematic decimation of their people, material culture, and way of life.

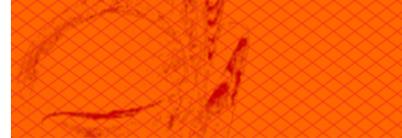
The Panchen Lama was one of the only independent witnesses to these events, which was the subject of his most urgent concern, as can be seen from the text of the report and the meeting transcripts. In a speech to Tibet delegates at the NPC meeting in Beijing in March 1987, he confided:

"In Qinghai, for example, there are between one to three or four thousand villages and towns, each having between three or four thousand families with four to five thousand people. From each town and village, about 800 to 1,000 people were imprisoned. Out of this, at least 300 to 400 people of them died in prison. This means almost half of the prison population perished. Last year, we discovered that only a handful of people had participated in the rebellion. Most of these people were completely innocent. In my 70,000-character petition, I mentioned that about five percent of the population had been imprisoned. According to my information at that time, it was between 10 to 15 percent. But I did not have the courage to state such a huge figure. I would have died under *thamzing* (the Tibetan terms for the CCP's "struggle" or public torture sessions) if I had stated the real figure."⁵¹

To this day, little detail is known of what actually happened and there are a few possible reasons for this. Amdo is further from international borders than other parts of Tibet, and some of the worst atrocities took place in isolated pastoral areas. Those who were able to flee headed to Lhasa where they were soon caught up in the 1959 events. Few learned Amdowa capable of representing their people survived, and those who did were persecuted during the Anti-Panchen campaign or the Cultural Revolution that came soon after. The Panchen Lama, was prevented from bringing these matters to light. In any case, virtually no Tibetan eyewitness testimony made it into writing, and the only available data on military deployments, human losses and mass incarcerations are to be found in classified Party and PLA documents, most of which remain secret—even now (although this is also true of most of the country outside Lhasa).⁵²

⁵¹ *The Panchen Lama Speaks* (Dharmshala: DIIR 1991 p.9).

⁵² One of the first books written on the subject was *The Tragedy of my Homeland* by the late Alak Tenzin Pelbar (Dharmshala: Narthang Publications 1994), which includes reproductions of military maps showing search and destroy missions against "rebels"; the most thorough statistical study published so far is Li Jianglin's *When the Iron Bird Flies: secret war on the Tibetan plateau 1956-62*, and the summary in *Tibet in Agony: Lhasa 1959* chapter 4; *Wounds of Three Generations* published by Kirti monastery in exile (Dharmshala 2010) and *Lifblood Sacrificed for the Land of Snows* by Bari Dawa Tsering (Dharmshala 2007 chapter 6) are attempts to collate survivors' testimony



The effects of repressing the memory of 1958 and forcing the next generation to grow up in the shadow of a forbidden history burst into the open with unforeseen power 50 years later. In March 2008, a wave of nationalist protest against Chinese rule spread across eastern Tibet, most of all Amdo, a region that had not seen such action in the post-Mao era. The fact that the protests coincided with the 50th anniversary of 'democratic reform' in Amdo was not picked up by either the international media, or even Tibetans in the central provinces.

This is partly because the events of 1958 were never recorded, publicly remembered and memorialized in the way, for example, the anniversary of March 10th 1959 has been. The disrupted transmission of oral history in Amdo, as well as the blanket official taboo, has meant that the post-1980 generation tended to articulate the memory of 1958 not historically but imaginatively, in literature and art.⁵³ It was alluded to in short stories and poems in widely read journals, and in the lyrics of popular songs. But around the undeclared 50th anniversary, books, songs and poems dealing directly with the subject started to appear. As these works became more popular, the authorities banned⁵⁴ them, and began to arrest more writers, singers and poets – more than 50 of them in 2009-10 alone.⁵⁵

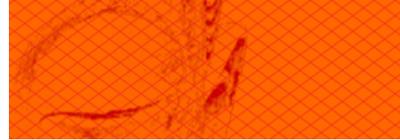
What we have seen in 21st century Amdo is the emergence of precisely the kind of contested historical memory and dissonant consciousness that the Party has identified as the most serious threat to its hegemony and “long-term stability.” But in the post-Panchen Lama period, the Party has locked itself in to a high-stakes confrontation over the control of history, a controlled environment of relentless propaganda, re-education and censorship designed to prevent “rumor-mongering” and “infiltration by hostile foreign forces.” Its position is still that Tibetans protest only because they have been misled by “reactionaries”, chiefly the “Dalai Clique” in exile, and it will contemplate no other solution than force to the inescapable problem of its legitimacy.

collected decades later. On the suppressed historical memory, see *The Body Count* by Elliot Sperling (Rangzen.net Sept 14 2012).

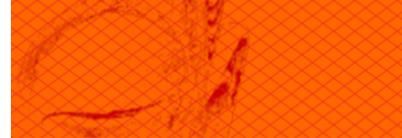
⁵³ As Françoise Robin puts it in her study of this phenomenon: ‘...only a limited array of possibilities is offered to Amdowas in the PRC: no museology can be carried out, no written or oral history archives set up, and no memorials established... Historical research is even less feasible, leaving only literary postmemorial practice available’ (*The Events of Amdo '58 and the Emergence of Literary Postmemory Among Tibetans*, in *Re-remembered Meetings: post-Mao retellings of the Sino-Tibetan encounter* (Barnett, Robin, Weiner (ed.s) forthcoming 2017).

⁵⁴ Notably, two fictional accounts of the period, *Joys and Sorrows of a Naktsang Boy*, Naktsang Nulo (Xining: Qinghai Xining yinshuachang 2007) and *Raging Red Wind*, Tsering Dondrub (privately published 2009), and an oral history, *My Homeland and the Peaceful Liberation*, Jamdo Rinsang (privately published 2008).

⁵⁵ E.g., *A 'Raging Storm': The Crackdown on Tibetan Writers and Artists after Tibet's Spring 2008 Protests*, International Campaign for Tibet, May 18, 2010.



Decades after his death, the 10th Panchen Lama remains in many ways the central figure in the PRC-Tibet relationship. His imprisonment in 1962 and premature death in 1989 were the two historic moments in which the Party opted to cancel the all-important autonomy agenda in favor of repression, but even the fact that the Party chose to nominally honor rather than repudiate his memory demonstrates the necessity of credible Tibetan leaders for its legitimacy. Meanwhile, enormous gains have been made in colonizing, urbanizing and industrializing the Tibetan plateau, and in the enrichment of Tibetan livelihoods, but the regime's concurrent effort to impose its version of history and erase Tibetan grievance and memory has met with relatively little success.



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