

DISSENTING VOICES

The State of Expression in Tibet



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TCHRD Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy

Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) is a registered nongovernmental human rights organisation established in January 1996 in Dharamsala (India) with the mission to protect the human rights of the Tibetan people in Tibet and promote the principles of democracy in the exile Tibetan community. The centre is entirely run and staffed by Tibetans in exile. TCHRD's work entails monitoring, researching, translating, and documenting human rights violations in Tibet. The centre conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses in Tibet. It brings out annual reports, thematic reports, testimonies of victims of human rights violations, electronic newsletters, and briefings on human rights issues that confront Tibetans inside Tibet. The centre engenders awareness on various issues relating to human rights and democracy through grassroots and diplomatic means, using regional and international human rights mechanisms and community-based awareness campaigns.

The TCHRD logo features the image of a white dove rising out of the flames. The dove and olive branch are universal emblems of peace. The flames, drawn in traditional Tibetan style, represent the suffering of the Tibetan people, as well as the devastating and purifying force of truth.

TCHRD's staff members are Tenzin Dawa, executive director; Phurbu Dolma, manager and accountant; Nyima Woesser and Ngawang Lungtok, researchers; Phurbu Dolma, Legal Officer; Kunchok Choedon, office assistant.

Staff members at TCHRD-North America are Ila Schoop Rutten, Tenzin Dhonyoe and Kalsang Dorji Lungkhawa.

For copies of any reports and/or for more information, please contact:

TCHRD
Near Nechung Monastery
Gangchen Kyishong
Dharamsala, District Kangra
Himachal Pradesh, India -176215
Email: office[at]tchrd[dot]org
Tel: +91-1892-223363



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I. INTRODUCTION

Since Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, the Chinese government has systematically tightened its control over press freedoms and online expression, drastically curtailing citizen's access to information and stifling freedom of thought and expression. Xi's directive to major state-run media outlets, including the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and the China Central Television, has been unambiguous: display unwavering loyalty to the Communist Party and prioritize the leadership of the President above all else.¹

In 2018, the Chinese authorities abolished the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, transferring its powers and authority directly to the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department. This restructuring marked a significant escalation in the state's capacity to control public discourse. In March 2020² additional content regulations further strengthened the Cyberspace Administrations of China (CAC) to suspend or shut down online platforms for violating vaguely defined rules. These measures have entrenched a system of pervasive censorship, silencing dissent and intensifying the suppression of free expression.³

Under Xi's leadership, China has escalated its effort to dismantle the rights to freedom of opinion

and expression, fostering a climate of extensive surveillance and systemic repression. Although China claims adherence to the international human rights obligations under treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), these commitments remain largely nominal. In practice, the legal and administrative frameworks have been weaponized to crush dissent, further marginalise ethnic minorities, and eliminate independent thought.

This report focuses on the interplay between China's authoritarian governance and its expansive surveillance state, with a particular emphasis on the impact on Tibetans inside Tibet. Legal tools such as the Cybersecurity Law and the National Intelligence Law grant sweeping powers to monitor internet use, criminalize dissent, and impose the state's narrative. Real-name registration requirements for online platforms and the collection of personal data have rendered anonymity—and by extension, safety—virtually impossible for those attempting to speak out.

For Tibetans, these policies intersect with broader campaigns of cultural assimilation and erasure. Advocacy for Tibetan language education, the promotion of cultural practices, or peaceful critiques of state policies

are frequently punished under vague charges like “inciting separatism” or “threatening national security.” Tibetan digital spaces, once vital for cultural exchange and intellectual discourse, have been systematically dismantled.

China’s deployment of advanced technologies for repression is central to its authoritarian model, extending its influence beyond domestic borders. Through initiatives like the Digital Silk Road, China exports its surveillance technologies, enabling other states to adopt similarly repressive tactics. This global proliferation of digital authoritarianism poses a grave threat to international human rights norms and the integrity of the global digital commons.

This report details the legal and technological mechanisms of repression employed by the Chinese government, their devastating effects on Tibetan communities, and the broader implications for global human rights.

II. POLICIES AND MEASURES RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF OPINION AND EXPRESSION

The Chinese government's policies and practices under Xi Jinping have increasingly curtailed the right to freedom of expression, especially for marginalised groups like Tibetans. Although China is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)⁴ These international commitments have not translated into meaningful protections domestically. Instead, legal frameworks such as the Cybersecurity Law, National Security Law, and the National Intelligence Law have been weaponized to suppress dissent, justify surveillance, and restrict the free flow of information.⁵ In addition to these laws, the Chinese state has implemented a 'Grid Management' system subdividing counties into cells for intrusive monitoring and surveillance.⁶ Furthermore, a network of thousands of 'convenience police posts' collects biometric data on the population and serves as outposts or checkpoints in the event of potential unrest.⁷ The 'Double-linked Household' system further divides families into small groups to ensure stability and preempt dissent, enlisting communities as low-level state surveillance agents. 'Loyal' families are often paired with 'suspect' families to monitor supposed 'religious extremism,' potential threats to 'Party control', and to keep an eye on 'specific individuals.'⁸

Tibetans face some of the harshest restrictions, with expressions online deemed to challenge China's territorial claims or cultural policies often resulting in arbitrary detention or imprisonment.⁹

Activities labeled as "inciting separatism," "advocating for the middle way," or "promoting mother-tongue education" are criminalized under vaguely defined laws, underscoring the Chinese government's disregard for the fundamental rights enshrined in its own constitution. Articles 35 and 40 of the Chinese Constitution ostensibly protect freedom of expression and privacy, but distorted interpretations of national security allow these rights to be routinely violated. China's domestic authoritarian model serves as the foundation for its global ambitions, particularly through the Digital Silk Route (DSR), a key initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Domestically, technology companies like Huawei and Alibaba have been transformed into proxies for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), advancing state priorities such as mass surveillance and censorship. Internationally, the DSR exports this authoritarian approach under the guise of digital diplomacy and innovation, promoting practices that accelerate internet fragmentation, undermine freedom of expression, and encourage other states to adopt repressive digital policies.¹¹

The authoritarian model also extends to tools like Artificial Intelligence (AI) that is not only used to spread its propaganda globally¹² but also to tighten restrictions on the freedoms of Tibetans inside Tibet by enhancing monitoring and surveillance capabilities.¹³ While it is only rational that all human rights envisioned before the digital age should apply to the virtual sphere - Chinese authorities nonetheless rely on a strict and pervasive disciplinary system to punish individuals perceived as threats, leading to an extraordinarily high level of mutual self-censorship among Tibetans, effectively turning Tibet into a panopticon where online surveillance, CCTV cameras, bugged homes, and checkpoints serve as tools of observation and monitoring, expanding the state's influence.¹⁴

'keep its grip on power', it relies heavily on basic surveillance tools, a hierarchised system of monitoring and observation, distributed responsibility, and the normalisation of fear, judgment, and social distrust.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy has cited that DNA collection can provoke human rights concerns as government surveillance can misuse their databases (A/HRC/31/64).¹⁵ Chinese authorities were also found collecting DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans, and blood types of millions from the age of 12 to 65 in XUAR under the guise of providing free medical check-ups.¹⁶

Since every action of the Chinese Party-State stems from the intent to

III. CHINA'S CYBERSECURITY FRAMEWORK: THE NATIONAL INTERNET ID AND THE GROWING THREAT TO DIGITAL FREEDOMS

China's Cybersecurity Law, implemented in 2017, was framed as a measure to "safeguard national security" and "protect the lawful rights and interests of citizens."¹⁷ However, its practical application has significantly curtailed online freedoms. The law mandates real-name registration for all internet users, linking online identities with personal data such as national IDs and phone numbers. This registration system is closely tied to the social credit system, enabling the state to track individuals and penalize dissent, effectively eliminating online anonymity.¹⁸

In regions like Tibet, the law's implementation has been particularly severe. For example, in October 2017, authorities in Machu (Ch: Maqu) County, Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province in the Tibetan province of Amdo, Issued notices requiring administrators of online groups to monitor and regulate the content posted by their members. Failure to comply could result in punitive action, underscoring the state's intent to control digital interactions at every level. Companies are also obligated to provide "technical support and assistance" to government agencies, granting authorities expansive powers to access private information during criminal investigations.¹⁹

Complementing these legal measures, a slew of other laws—including the National Security Law, National Intelligence Law, and the recently revised Counterespionage Law²⁰—have further eroded freedom of expression. These laws incentivize citizens to report on peers, with financial rewards offered for identifying individuals accused of violating state security regulations. In July 2022, days before the Dalai Lama's birthday, a public notice from the Lhasa Public Security Bureau encouraged such reporting, targeting activities deemed threats to "state security." This approach fosters a climate of fear and suspicion, eroding trust within communities.

The revision of the Counterespionage Law in 2023 intensified these measures, broadening the definition of "acts endangering national security"²¹ and empowering authorities to further suppress dissent. The introduction of the "Measures for Rewards for Citizens Reporting Behaviors Endangering National Security" in 2022 laid the groundwork for these changes, institutionalising citizen surveillance as a tool for social control.²²

In 2024, the Ministry of Public Security and the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)

announced plans for a National Internet ID program, aiming to assign unique identifiers to over a billion internet users.²³ While promoted as a strategy to protect user privacy, the program has already been heavily censored, with platforms like Weibo blocking search terms and disabling comment sections on related posts. This censorship highlights the government's intent to stifle dissent even during the proposal phase.²⁴

The CAC's enforcement of content restrictions further exemplifies China's digital repression. In the past year alone,²⁵ over 57 million pieces of online content were removed, and 4,800 websites were shut down for hosting "illegal" information. These actions not only violate China's constitutional guarantees of free expression but also contravene international treaties to which China is a signatory.

Tibetans face even stricter digital controls. The state monitors domestic platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and Kuaishou, where moderators are required to regulate user behavior and content. Users are warned against activities such as "organizing illegal organizations" under the guise of social causes, "provoking ethnic conflicts," or "sharing information with foreign entities."²⁶

Additionally, the government has targeted Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) – a crucial tool for bypassing the Great Firewall.

In February 2018,²⁷ state-owned telecom companies were ordered to block VPN access entirely, cutting off a vital channel for accessing uncensored information.

State surveillance extends beyond content censorship to include live video platforms. For example, in October 2022, five Tibetans were detained after a live-streamed contest on Kuaishou was abruptly censored.²⁸ Platforms like Kuaishou employ thousands of moderators tasked with enforcing compliance with government regulations, further highlighting the pervasive nature of digital repression.

These measures, combined with the introduction of programs like the internet ID system, illustrate a systematic effort by the Chinese state to consolidate digital control, suppress dissent, and monitor individuals at an unprecedented scale. The impacts are particularly devastating in regions like Tibet, where the erosion of online freedoms exacerbates broader human rights violations, ensuring the continued absence of freedom of expression and trust within society.

IV. CRACKDOWN ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS TARGETING TIBETAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Despite the restrictions imposed by the Great Firewall, Tibetans managed to establish a vibrant digital space in the mid-2000s using state-approved Tibetan-language platforms. This digital community became a vital sanctuary for , sharing Tibetan culture, history, literature, and personal expression. It was not a forum for political discourse but a medium to preserve Tibet's unique identity through modern communication channels. Since 2018, China has tightened restrictions on freedom of expression as part of its national policy under Xi Jinping to accelerate its cultural assimilation campaign against ethnic minorities including Tibetans and Uyghurs. In Tibet, the campaign has targeted advocates of Tibetan language education and enforced widespread restrictions on using Tibetan as a medium of instruction in schools.

Young Tibetan writers and intellectuals were instrumental in building this digital ecosystem. However, systematic crackdowns by Chinese authorities have targeted these platforms, arresting key contributors and forcing the closure of many websites. Over time, these actions have brought this fragile online community to the brink of collapse.

The restrictions on Tibetan language platforms have grown increasingly severe.

Popular sites like "*Choemey Bhoe Ki Drawa*" were shut down multiple times before 2020. Since 2020, however, reviving platforms has become nearly impossible. The intensified crackdown has led to the permanent closure of numerous prominent websites, including cultural hubs like "*Gechoe Tzomri*", youth-oriented platforms like "*Nashoen Sarpa*", religious websites like "*Choe Drog*", and language focused spaces like "*Bod Kyi Keying*."²⁹

Similarly, many other Tibetan language websites have been shut down. Former Tibetan political prisoner Tashi Wangchuk has repeatedly voiced his opinion on his Weibo about the closures, emphasising the danger to Tibetan language rights.

Administrators have faced significant personal and financial challenges in maintaining these platforms. One anonymous website founder explained:

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For more than twenty years, I have dedicated myself to preserving and promoting Tibetan literature and performing arts, achieving considerable success in these efforts. I firmly believe that a modern platform is vital for advancing this cause. My platform became a hub for Tibetan intellectuals and a valuable space for writers to share their works. However, repeated shutdowns have discouraged many contributing writers, leaving them unmotivated to continue.

I launched my first blog in 2009, carefully avoiding any content critical of the Chinese government. Despite this caution, it was shut down in 2013. I often wonder if this was related to the works of writers like ‘Shokdung’ and ‘Theurang,’ though I never promoted any politically sensitive content. Determined to continue, I relaunched the platform under the same name in 2015 after navigating China’s Internet regulations and obtaining the necessary licenses. Unfortunately, maintaining the platform required significant resources, and it was shut down again after just one year.

In 2018, with the support of Rebkong Gyal, a prominent Tibetan web development expert, we revived the platform once more. Leveraging my connections with notable writers, it quickly gained a large audience. Sadly, this success was short-lived; the platform was permanently shut down in 2020, and the arrests of my colleagues have deterred me from pursuing any further online initiatives.

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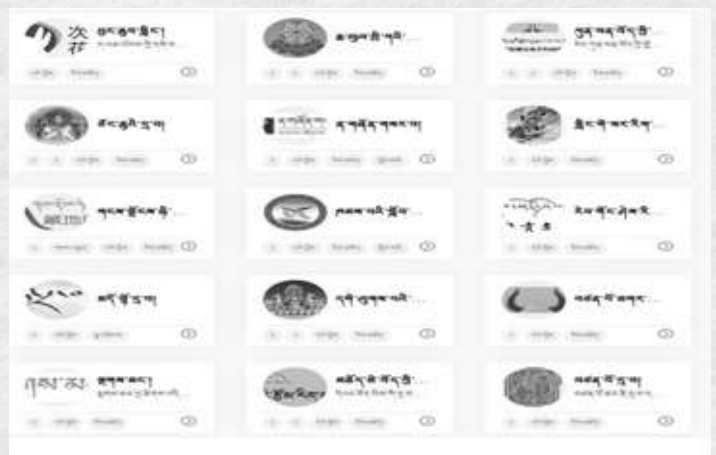
The closure of these platforms has dealt a severe blow to cultural preservation. Platforms like Luktsang Palyon, one of the largest Tibetan websites, faced similar fates. Created by Yeshe Tenzin and managed by a team of young editors under the banner of "reflection, knowledge, and critical thinking," Luktsang Palyon published over 10,000 articles in its 11 years of operation, reaching an estimated 60,000 Tibetans (approximately 10% of the population). Despite its focus on cultural and educational content, it was forcibly shut down in April 2024.

The Chinese government has also targeted Tibetan-language groups on WeChat. Platforms like Luktsang Palyon represented more than just digital spaces- they were lifelines for cultural preservation, education, and identity in the face of growing state control. This methodical dismantling of Tibetan online platforms reflects a broader strategy aimed at erasing linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. By silencing these digital spaces, the Chinese government not only stifles free expression but also undermines the resilience of Tibet's cultural heritage.

a. Four Years Imprisonment for Creating a New Online Platform

Bumpa Gyal, a renowned Tibetan webmaster from Rebkong (Ch: Tongren) County in Malho (Ch: Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province

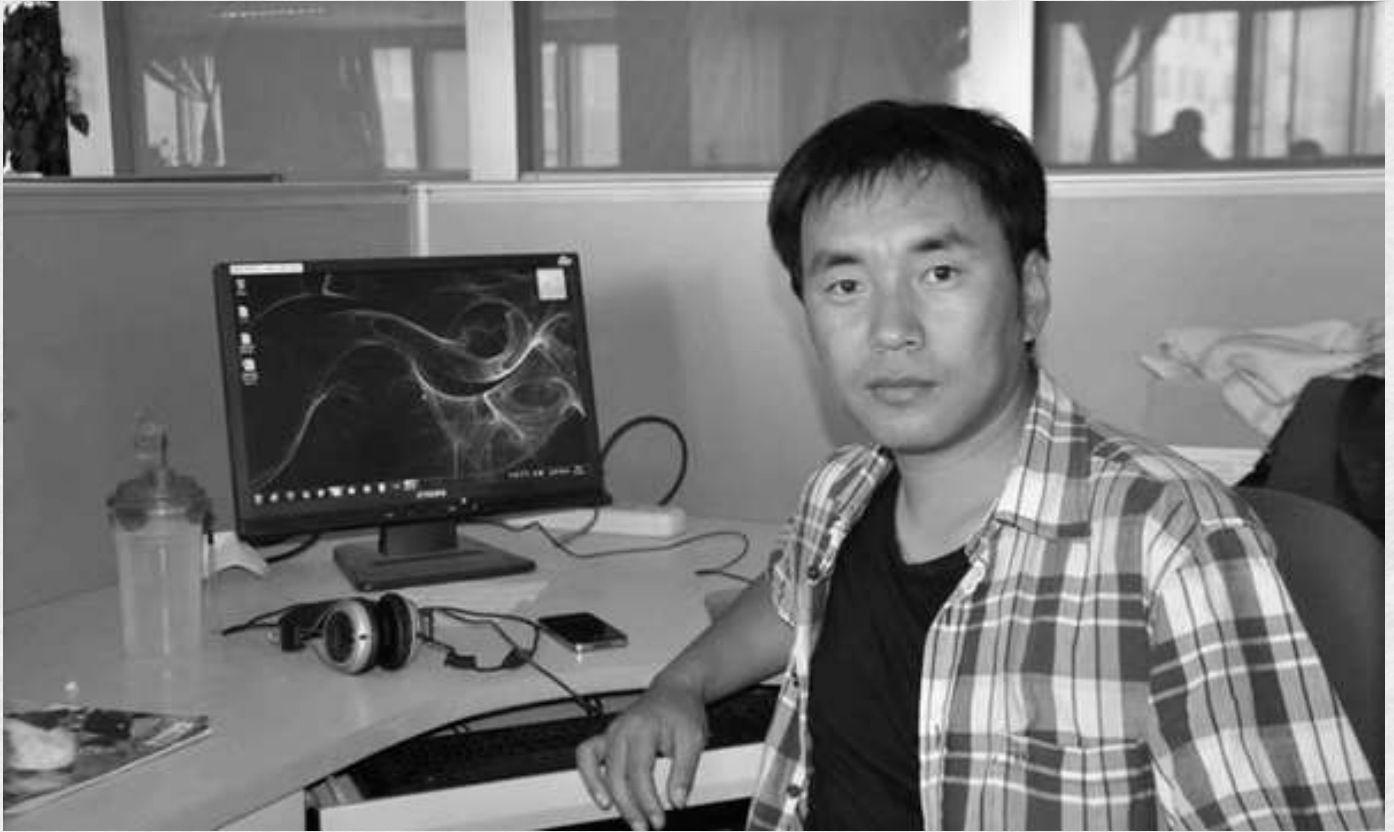
has played a central role in the development of Tibetan online platforms. Over a decade, he created and supported numerous Tibetan-language websites that became vital resources for Tibetan communities. Despite his efforts to advance digital literacy and preserve Tibetan culture, the Chinese government repeatedly shut down his platforms.



Once vibrant Tibetan social media platforms, many now closed.

In response to these restrictions, Bumpa Gyal turned to WordPress, a platform outside of the Chinese government's control. This move aimed to provide Tibetan platforms with greater autonomy and more user-friendly tools for managing content. He adapted WordPress for Tibetan use, offering technical guidance to independent website operators. However, Chinese authorities quickly labeled the use of WordPress "illegal," leading to his arrest in November 2020. After being held incommunicado for nearly a year, he was sentenced in 2022 to a harsh seven-year prison term on charges of engaging in "illegal activities".

Bumpa Gyal's Contributions to Tibetan Digital Culture



Bumpa Gyal, 40 years old (pen name: Lingnyoen), graduated from Northwest University in 2005 and launched the Tibetan IT Website in 2007, one of the first independent platforms in the Tibetan language. The website aimed to promote digital literacy, offering a wide range of IT knowledge and training resources. It became a critical hub for disseminating technical know-how and supporting Tibetan-language websites, including some affiliated with the Chinese government, such as 'Tunguo Bod kyi Drawa.'



Tibet Information Technology (IT) logo

Through the Tibetan IT Website, Bumpa Gyal provided technical and administrative assistance to numerous independent platforms.³⁰

Some of the websites Bumpa Gyal provided assistance to include but are not limited to: Gechoe Tzomri (Virtuous Poetry and Literature); (Gangjong Shonnyu Bodyig Lengteg) Tibetan Youth Forum; Rebkong Chatrin; Himalaya Bon; Nashoen Sarpa (New Youth); Phadra Video Platform; Bodyig Nyenyig (Tibetan video transcript); Tsongchu 1; Tsenpo (Emperor); Tsaluma (Orange); Choemey Tibetan Literature; Woe Kham; Tibetan Film and Literature Platform.

His pioneering work ensured these platforms became vibrant spaces for cultural expression, education, and community building. By advocating for WordPress starting in 2014, he empowered Tibetan creators with tools to bypass restrictive Chinese hosting services and gain greater independence. The Chinese government viewed Bumpa Gyal's use of WordPress as a direct challenge to its control over online content.

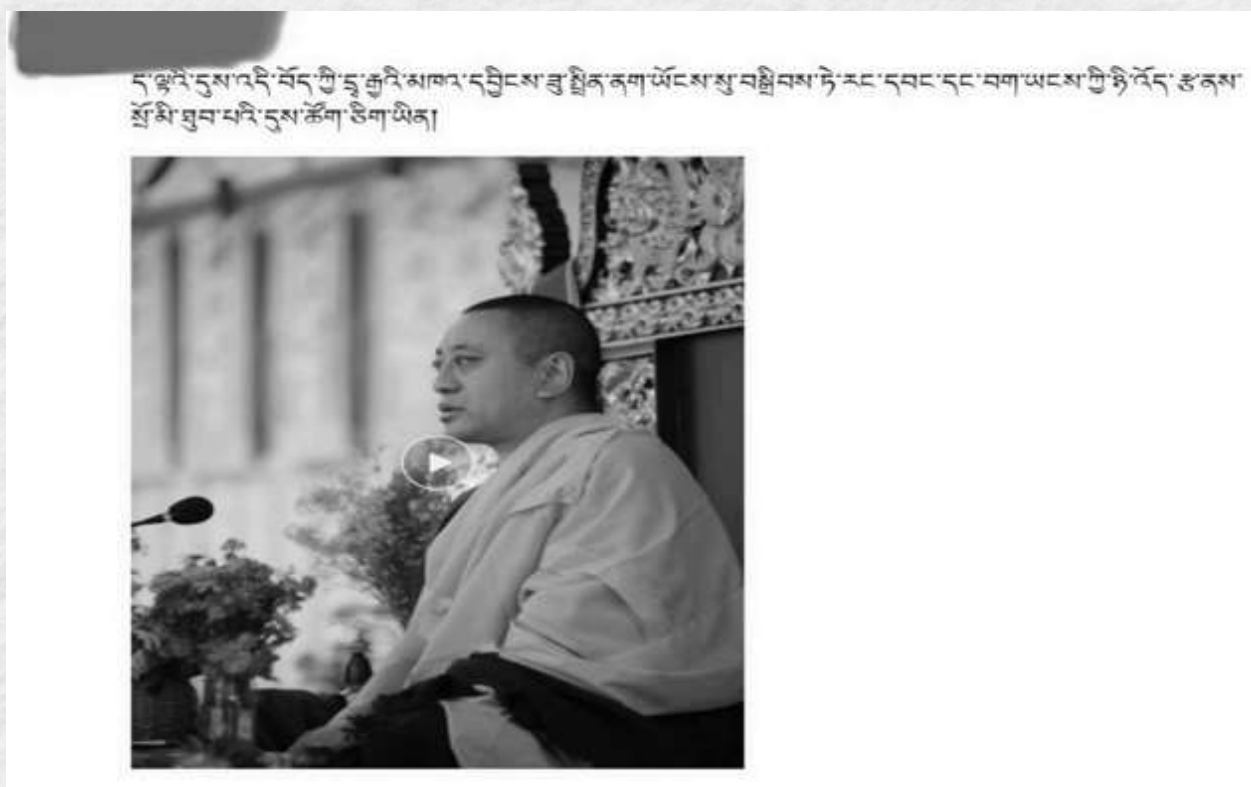
Following his sentencing in 2022, many of the platforms he supported were permanently shut down, dealing a significant blow to the Tibetan digital ecosystem. Bumpa Gyal's imprisonment underscores the risks faced by those striving to preserve Tibetan culture and language through modern technology. His contributions, however, remain a testament to the resilience and innovation of Tibet's digital pioneers in the face of systemic repression.

Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk shared screenshots of closed websites on the Chinese microblogging site Weibo and wrote, "Why can [we] not access these Tibetan language websites?"



b. The Struggle for Language Rights and Freedom of Expression in Tibet

Efforts to preserve the Tibetan language and culture continue to face severe challenges under restrictive Chinese policies. In December 2022, Khenpo of Serta Larung, Gepel, highlighted the erosion of Tibetan language, culture, and traditional practices in a widely circulated video. He urged Tibetan parents to prioritize cultural education during school vacations, as state-run schools exclude Tibetan language from their curriculum. The video was removed within a week, reflecting the strict censorship Tibetans face when advocating for their linguistic and cultural rights. Nevertheless, Tibetans shared it widely through various channels and accounts. In a short period, Khenpo Gepel's speech became viral.



A screenshot of a Weibo post by a teacher from Chumarleb sharing Serta Larung Khenpo's talk.

Similarly, a Tibetan teacher hailing from Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, expressed despair over the repressive online environment in a video circulated via messaging apps. The teacher lamented that the lack of freedom online created an oppressive atmosphere, further stifling Tibetan cultural expression:

“

The current online space, obscured by dark clouds and devoid of the sun's rays, offers no reprieve or freedom, creating an atmosphere that feels oppressive and lacking tranquillity.

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c. Shrinking Space for Tibetan Language Online

The suppression of Tibetan language platforms is part of a broader policy to prioritize Mandarin and restrict ethnic minority languages in China. Tibetan users of popular Chinese apps like Douyin and Kuaishou frequently report discriminatory practices, such as account shutdowns or reduced visibility for content created in Tibetan.

In June 2023, Rinchen and Sonam from Kham protested these practices through video messages.³¹ They highlighted the disparity between how Tibetan cultural content is censored while harmful content from other groups often remains unrestricted. Although their campaign gained significant support within Tibetan communities, Rinchen's account was eventually blocked, and Sonam's video was removed. Their pleas to platforms like Kuaishou to address this discrimination went unanswered.

Douyin's parent company, ByteDance, has drawn similar criticism for censoring Tibetan-language content. In July 2024, Tibetan netizens such as Youga Ga and several others publicly criticised the platform for banning Tibetan language usage in videos, sparking widespread concern.³²

Duoyin's censorship practices, coupled with its ties to the Chinese Communist Party³³(CCP), highlight its role as a propagator of state narratives and an enforcer of cultural assimilation. Other apps, such as Talkmate and Bilibili, have also imposed restrictions on the use of Tibetan language.³⁴ These measures reflect the broader impact of the "Administrative Measures for Internet Religious Information Services". Under this policy, any online references to religion must receive state approval, with all platforms required to obtain renewable licenses. These regulations severely limit the exercise of freedom of religion and belief, particularly for ethnic minorities. The 'Administrative Measures' subject all online platforms to government control, and any references to religion online are deemed illegal if not approved by the relevant authorities on religion. The requirement to obtain a renewable licence before opening an online account or website has made the exercise of the right to freedom of religion and belief highly difficult online.³⁵



Tibetan netizens speaking out against the recent ban on Tibetan language online.

Aside from the apps developed by the Chinese, Tibetan-developed apps like Gangyang enabled the use of the Tibetan language in videos and brought relief and joy to the Tibetan community. However, this app was also quickly shut.



The now closed Gangyang app's icon

In 2018, three young individuals from Southeast Tibet developed the Gangyang app with permission from the State. It was also forcefully shut on 17 November 2022. A recent announcement citing reasons for the closure identified financial issues as the leading cause. However, the closure of the app has sparked tension and drawn the attention of many Tibetans, who view it as another attempt at the sinicization of Tibetans through restrictions on the Tibetan language.

The prohibition of Tibetan language use is a flagrant violation of provisions enshrined in the Chinese constitution as well as the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, which promised but rarely granted meaningful autonomous powers to ethnic minorities, including Tibetans.

V. Persecution of Intellectuals, Artists, Musicians, and Other Influential Figures

Under Chinese law, all Tibetans face varying degrees of suppression of their right to freedom of expression. However, certain groups who attempt to exercise their rights are prioritised as targets and encounter disproportionate measures. Writers, intellectuals, artists, and musicians are among these groups and are routinely persecuted for their work and beliefs. Those who advocate for Tibetan independence, promote the teachings of the Dalai Lama, or work to preserve the Tibetan language frequently face arrests and imprisonment, with sentences often disproportionate to the alleged “crimes.” Alongside the crackdowns on online Tibetan platforms, the persecution of these groups has intensified in the years following Xi Jinping’s ascension to the premiership of the Chinese state.

These individuals, collectively referred to as ‘thought leaders,’ are at the forefront to protect and sustain Tibetan cultural traditions and language. Consequently, all actions taken against these prominent voices, including legal proceedings and arrests over the past decade, can be easily inferred as an intentional attack to halt the further propagation and use of the Tibetan language, thereby undermining the preservation of Tibetan culture, religion, and practices despite protection against such action being enshrined³⁶ within China’s Regional National Autonomy Law. The following examples of prosecution, arrests and imprisonment depict a grim state in which the right to freedom of expression has been effectively subdued; the situation continues to deteriorate as time passes.

Profiles of Tibetans Targeted: Writers, Intellectuals, Singers, and Thought Leaders



Gangke Drupa Kyab, teacher and author from Serthar (Ch: Seda) County in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province has been repeatedly targeted for his writings, including *Tears of the Past* and *Blood Letter* of 2008, which document Tibetan suffering during the 2008 protests. He was first arrested on 15 February 2012 and held incommunicado for 18 months before receiving a 5.5-year prison sentence for alleged “political activities.” He was detained twice following his release in 2016, with a subsequent arrest in 2022 leading to a 14-year sentence for “inciting separatism” and “endangering state security.”³⁷



Go Sherab Gyatso, a widely respected Tibetan writer from Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, has authored numerous works on democracy, human rights, and Tibetan culture. He was arrested on 26 October 2020 and sentenced to ten years in November 2021 on charges of “inciting separatism.” This was his fourth arrest, reflecting a pattern of recurrent targeting for his intellectual contributions.³⁸



Gangbu Yudrum was detained on 22 March 2021 by the local police in Serthar (Ch: Seda) County in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. He has been sentenced to seven years. He was detained previously in 2008 for his role in protests that took place in Serthar County.³⁹ He had protested with the Tibetan national flag and shouted slogans for the return of the Dalai Lama, and against China’s repressive policies. He was subsequently sentenced to three years in prison. On 19 February 2011, he was released and later detained again in 2012 for his involvement in an underground association named ‘Margol Tsogpa’ (Anti-Communist Association). He was sentenced to two years in prison on 14 May 2012. He hails from Goetsa Township in Serthar.



Samdup from Gonchok Village, Serthar (Ch: Seda) County in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province was sentenced to eight years in prison.⁴⁰ He was arbitrarily detained on 5 April 2021 and remained a victim of enforced disappearance till his sentencing. On 13 June 2012, he was detained on similar charges as Gangkye Drupa Kyab and sentenced to five years in prison on 1 August 2013 by the Nyagchu People’s Court. Though he was released on 19 August 2016, he was detained again on 18 September 2016 and remained in detention for 17 days.



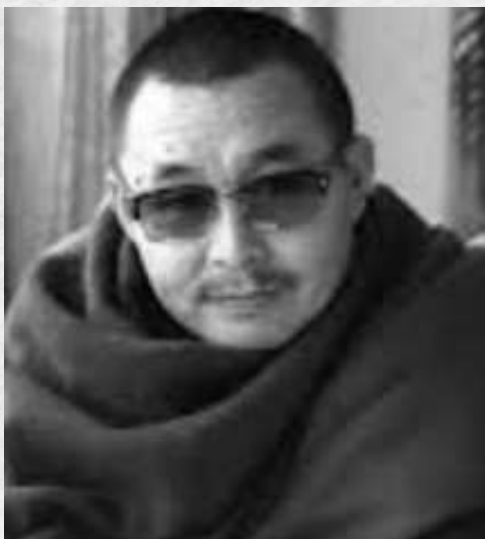
Tsering Dolma from Serthar (Ch: Seda) County in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province has faced multiple detentions since her participation in 2008 protests. Most recently detained in April 2021 and sentenced to eight years in prison. She was subjected to torture, including severe beatings leading to lasting health complications, highlighting the inhumane treatment faced by detainees. She is married to Karma Samdup with two sons, her parents are Solo and Choekyi.



Rinchen Tsultrim, a 33-year-old Tibetan writer and Bon monk from Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, was arrested on 27 July 2019 and forcibly disappeared for a prolonged period. When he reappeared in March 2020, he courageously shared his political views on his website and social media, distributing numerous books published inside Tibet to audiences abroad. He also published articles on Tibetan language and politics, which authorities used to falsely accuse him of "inciting separatism."⁴¹ Consequently, he was sentenced to four and a half years in prison and was released on 1 February 2024 after completing his entire sentence.



Sabuchey (real name: Thupten Lodoe), a 34-year-old Tibetan writer and teacher from Dzachuka area in Sershul (Ch: Shiqu) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, in the Tibetan province of Kham was arrested in 2021 and held in an undisclosed location. In 2022, he was sentenced to four years and six months in prison on trumped-up charges of "inciting separatism," which included accusations of publishing content that "endangered state security" and "harmed ethnic unity."⁴² Sabuchey, a bilingual teacher fluent in both Tibetan and Chinese, regularly published analyses on various topics—from Eastern and Western culture to Tibetan culture, economy, life, and society on Tibetan websites and major social media platforms.



Rongwo Gendun Lhundup, a poet and cultural advocate from Rebkong (Ch: Tongren) County in Malho (Ch: Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province was arrested by Chinese authorities on 11 November 2020 and later sentenced on 1 December 2021 by the Xining Intermediate People's Court. In addition to four years of fixed-term imprisonment, he was sentenced to two years of "deprivation of political rights". He used to administer the famed website 'Tsenpo' and frequently travelled all over Tibet teaching and participating in panel discussions on Tibetan culture. Rongwo Gendun Lhundup's influence extends far beyond his immediate community. He had been interrogated several times in the past by Chinese security officers for criticising the Chinese party-state's policy of "sinicising Tibetan Buddhism". He was detained soon after he published his latest collection of poems, "Khorwa"(Samsara), the Buddhist concept of the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth), which led to his recent sentencing. He was released on 9 November 2024 after completion of his prison term.⁴³



Dhi Lhaden, a 53-year-old Tibetan writer and thinker from Pema (Ch: Baima) County, Golog (Ch: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, in the Tibetan province of Amdo, was arrested and detained in 2019. He was sentenced to four years in prison in 2021 on charges of “inciting social unrest” and was released around mid-2023. Dhi Lhaden authored two significant books. His first book, titled “Tsesok Le Trun Pe Kecha” (Words Uttered with Life at Risk), was published by TCHRD in March 2011 and documents his experiences and observations during the 2008 Tibetan uprising. His second book, initially titled Tungol Trimtug (Resistance through Cooperation with Law), was later translated and published as The Art of Passive Resistance on 29 June 2015. This book provided a guide for Tibetans to resist Chinese rule peacefully. Both books were deemed criminal offences during his trial.⁴⁴



Tenzin Khenrab, a 29-year-old monk from Wuthok village in Nagchu (Ch: Naqu) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, was detained by Chinese authorities in 2023 after a photograph of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was allegedly found on his phone. Since his arrest, his whereabouts and health status have remained unknown, causing his mother’s health to deteriorate severely, ultimately leading to her death.⁴⁵



Jigme Gyatso, 36, a native of Dosum (Ch: Duosong), Yugan (Ch: Henan) Mongolian Autonomous County, and Thongko Dewa township in the Malho (Ch: Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai province. He is better known by his pen name ‘Nublung’ and was once the recipient of a poetry award organised by the Lhoka Prefecture in the southeastern Tibet Autonomous Region. This competition draws poets from across the three regions of Tibet. In June 2021, Jigme Gyatso, along with his companions, was subjected to enforced disappearance shortly after releasing a poetry collection during a graduation ceremony at Tsongon Buddhist University in Qinghai. He was abducted from Shingza Monastery by Qinghai provincial police, and his whereabouts remain unknown.⁴⁶



Geshe Monlam Gyatso, a 48-year-old writer and teacher from Serthar (Ch: Seda) County in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, forcibly disappeared on 9 June 2021. It is believed that he has been sentenced to three-year in prison,⁴⁷ the specific charges, detention location, and trial details remain unknown. He was a teacher who dedicated himself to promoting Tibetan language and culture through social service.



Pema Rinchen (pen name: Dugtser), a writer from Drango (Ch: Luhuo) County in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, was arrested by Chinese authorities around late 2020. After spending nearly two years in detention, he was sentenced to four years in prison. This is not the first time he has been targeted. In 2011, following the publication of his Tibetan-language book “Toe”, meaning “Look”, he was arrested and subjected to severe torture and interrogation, leading to long-term health complications. Since then, he has been repeatedly summoned and interrogated by Chinese authorities, particularly during Tibetan festive occasions. His family, which consists of only his mother and sister, has been deeply affected, with his mother suffering from long-term illness.⁴⁸



Rongwo Gangkar, a Tibetan poet approximately 49 years old from Rebkong (Ch: Tongren) County in Malho (Ch: Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province was arrested in 2021, though the exact date remains unknown. For the past three years, his whereabouts and place of detention have remained undisclosed. The primary reason for his arrest appears to be a statement he made during a discussion at a teahouse in Rebkong County, where he advocated for celebrating the birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other related anniversaries. Following his arrest, the teahouse came under heavy surveillance.⁴⁹



Goyon, a 35-year-old Tibetan writer from Drango (Ch: Luhuo) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, in the Tibetan province of Kham, was arrested in 2021 and released in 2022, marking his second arrest and detention. His previous arrest occurred on 5 June 2010, when Chinese police forcibly took him and two friends from a street in Chengdu without explanation. They were detained overnight, during which they were subjected to severe torture and beatings, resulting in significant injuries. This harrowing experience is detailed in his writing titled “Tsoenkhang ki Narchoe”(Torture in Prison).⁵⁰



Senam, a writer from Toktsa Village, was detained by local police officials of Serthar County; he was sentenced to six years in prison. In September 2020, he was detained for 15 days by local police officials along with ten other Tibetans for their alleged involvement in a meeting on the “welfare of Tibetan parents” that the authorities deemed illegal.⁵¹ He hails from Toktsa village in Ragtam township, Serthar (Ch: Seda) County in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. His family consists of his mother, Lewu Tso, father, Dhungkar, wife, and two daughters. He is a Tibetan language teacher and an environmental defender.⁵²



Palden, a singer from Yotag village in Didha town, Pema (Ch: Baima) County, Golog (Ch: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, was arrested by Pema County police for sharing a patriotic Tibetan song on the Chinese social media platform KuaiShou in March 2023. He was held in an undisclosed location for an extended period before getting sentenced on unknown charges to three years in prison in December of the same year. The authorities asserted that Palden was imprisoned for singing an ‘illegal’ song, yet they did not provide a clear explanation of the specific charges against him. Throughout his detention, Palden was denied fundamental rights, including the right to legal representation of his choice, a fair trial, and transparency regarding the proceedings. He was released in the summer⁵³ of 2024.



Gegjom, a singer from Khyungchu (Ch: Hongyuan) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, was arbitrarily arrested on 12 February 2024, the third day of the Tibetan New Year after performing the song “*Kyolu Chima Gyukhil*” meaning “Tearful deluge of a sorrowful song,” at an evening gathering during the Tibetan New Year.⁵⁴

*In a country without the Dalai Lama, a leader exists but is illegitimate.
Like a deer lost in the fog, so are Tibetans without direction.
The sun of just policy is eclipsed in this land of injustice.
Confronted with injustice, the red-faced Tibetans are ants under a giant's feet.
In this land rife with torture, the "lamp of peace" is mere empty rhetoric.
Deprived of freedom, Tibetans are like birds confined inside a cage.*



Choeying Kalden, a monk at Tsenden Monastery in Sog (Ch: Suo) County in Nagchu Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region, in the Tibetan province of Kham was detained on 16 March 2014 by Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials for simply writing about his identity as a Tibetan and criticising China's policy of forcing Tibetans to fly a Chinese flag over their homes, his writings were shared through social media with other monks from Tsenden Monastery, as well as Chinese "work teams" present at the site. His whereabouts remain unknown following his arrest and presumed detention.⁵⁵



Tashi Wangchuk, the renowned Tibetan language rights advocate and writer, who hails from Kyegudo (Ch: Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, in the Tibetan province of Kham has faced numerous legal obstacles since his sentencing in 2018 to five years in prison for "inciting separatism" after speaking to the New York Times about the repression of Tibetan language education. Following his initial arrest in 2016, he spent nearly two years in pre-trial detention before being charged. Whenever he attempted to launch an appeal in 2019, he was repeatedly denied access to his lawyers.⁵⁶ Since his release in 2021, Wangchuk has been rearrested and has suffered beatings at the hands of the police.⁵⁷



Khedup, a senior Tibetan monk, from Mura Township, Machu (Ch: Maqu) County in Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, in the Tibetan province of Amdo was initially arrested and detained in December 2016 and rearrested in February 2017. His second spell of detention lasted for several months. He was accused of posting the teachings of the Dalai Lama to his social media accounts and of authoring blog posts that sympathised with and expressed solidarity with the displaced monks and nuns of Larung Gar.⁵⁸



Derab, a singer, alongside four others, was arrested on 13 October 2022. They were detained following their participation in a musical contest on the Chinese short-form video sharing app 'Kuaishou'. The song performed by Derab included lyrics glorifying the Dalai Lama. The men in the musical contest were detained and interrogated for a day before they were released; Derab was banned from performing on any live video service again, and was forced to sign a document which stated that he would not participate in any festivals or gatherings in future.⁵⁹



Lhundrub Drakpa, a Tibetan singer, from Mokhyim Village, Diru (Ch: Biru) County, Nagchu Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), in the Tibetan province of Kham was held for over a year in detention and beaten before being sentenced to six years in prison after releasing a song that condemned the actions of the Chinese government in Tibet. Having spent a year in pre-trial detention, where he suffered beatings, he was sentenced to 6 years in prison. There is no known charge attributed to his sentence. His only crime was the performance of a song "Black Hat" critical⁶⁰ of China.

Black Hat

*A noble and truthful nationality
Forced to wear a black hat of subterfuge
Months and years of wearing the hat
Enduring undesired hell of suffering on earth
A language more valuable than a wishful gem
Chained by a net of thousand strategies
Months and years without loosening the net
Gagged the speech of red-faced six million
Tibetans
Months and years of the cloud-covered sun
Days and nights of the darkened moon
The time when gloom enveloped the universe
Became the defeat for me and all Tibetan*



Zangkar Jamyang, a writer from Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, was arrested and detained by Chinese authorities on 4 June 2020. He had, throughout the period prior to his arrest, become vocal online about a variety of topics relating to the Chinese authorities' policies and actions in Tibet, primarily focusing on the importance of teaching Tibetan in schools. He was also accused of sharing information about and celebrating the Dalai Lama in online chatrooms. For these crimes, he was charged with "splittism and spreading rumours in internet chat groups" after three years in pre-trial detention. He was sentenced to 4 years in prison.⁶¹

Prominent voices in a standard-free society are often the most vocal and outspoken, earning admiration and respect from all walks of life. However, in China, these voices face severe repression. Instead of being celebrated, they are silenced and persecuted for exercising their right to freedom of expression both online and offline.

Writers, intellectuals, and other "thought leaders" are compelled to completely censor their writing, art, and speech under Xi Jinping's leadership. In Xi Jinping's China, the right to freedom of expression for these groups is non-existent.

VI. Virtually Non-Existent Space for Offline Dissent

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the Chinese government has systematically implemented legal reforms to suppress dissent and tighten its control over Tibetan expression. These changes, often couched in the language of national security and social stability, have significantly curtailed Tibetans' ability to voice grievances or resist oppression.

One of the most notable reforms was the 2015 revision to China's Criminal Law, which criminalized the vaguely defined offense of "inciting rumors." This provision gave authorities broad discretion to target individuals critical of government practices, often arresting and charging them without substantive evidence. This ambiguity has enabled the prosecution of not only activists and human rights advocates but also ordinary citizens expressing dissent in private conversations or on social media.

The Counterterrorism Law and the National Security Law, introduced in the mid-2010s, further expanded the scope of state control. These laws frame dissent as a threat to national security, allowing authorities to prosecute peaceful protests or religious expression under charges of "separatism" or "inciting terrorism." Such legal frameworks have legitimized the use of force against Tibetan protesters and the surveillance of entire communities.

These measures, paired with increasingly intrusive surveillance technologies, have effectively eradicated most avenues for public dissent under Xi Jinping today. Physical protests, a key form of resistance prior to 2008, have been met with harsh crackdowns, while online platforms have been co-opted into state-controlled systems, leaving Tibetans with no safe space to express grievances.

This legal infrastructure not only suppresses Tibetan voices but also violates China's international obligations under agreements such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Despite being a signatory to these frameworks, the Chinese government continues to exploit legal ambiguities to silence dissent and stifle freedom of expression in Tibet.

a. Suppression of Protests

Since the 2008 Tibet-wide protests, the Chinese government has intensified its efforts to suppress any form of protest in Tibet, employing disproportionate force and punitive measures to deter dissent. Protests, whether collective or individual, are met with swift crackdowns, arbitrary detentions, and severe consequences for those involved.

A stark example of this repression occurred during the COVID-19 lockdown in Lhasa in October 2022, when a protest in the Chakrong neighborhood led to the detention of 200 people. Among those arrested, 47 Tibetans were subjected to harsher treatment than their Chinese counterparts—they were held for extended periods, provided with less food, and subjected to repeated interrogations.⁶²



Tibetans charged with spreading so-called rumours about the pandemic in Lhasa.

Protests against land confiscations and resource exploitation have faced similar crackdowns. In April 2018, over 30 Tibetans were detained and beaten for opposing plans to establish a mine at Sebtra Zagyen, a sacred site of cultural and religious significance.⁶³ More recently, in February 2024, a large protest erupted in Derge (Ch: Dege) County over plans to construct a dam on the Drichu River, which would displace entire Tibetan villages and monasteries. Authorities responded with rubber bullets and electric batons, detaining many protesters and cutting off internet access in the area.⁶⁴

These examples illustrate the Chinese government's systematic use of violence and intimidation to suppress Tibetan protests. By criminalizing peaceful assembly and protest, the authorities have eroded Tibetans' ability to

resist repression, leaving them with virtually no means to express their grievances or advocate for their rights. This widespread and calculated suppression underscores the virtually non-existent space for dissent in Tibet and the growing impunity with which Chinese authorities operate.

b. Self-immolation as an Act of Resistance

With traditional avenues for dissent systematically dismantled, self-immolation has emerged as a tragic and powerful form of resistance for Tibetans. This act, both deeply symbolic and intensely personal, reflects the desperation of those who see no other means to voice their suffering or advocate for their people's rights.

Since the 2008 protests, 159 Tibetans have self-immolated, with the highest number—85 cases—occurring in 2012.⁶⁵ These acts are not born out of coercion but rather serve as a form of nonviolent protest, intended to harm no one but the individual sacrificing themselves. Self-immolation is a profoundly distressing plea for justice and a call to the global community to acknowledge the plight of Tibetans.

However, this form of resistance has significantly declined in recent years—not as a result of improved conditions, but due to the Chinese government's harsh punitive measures. These include collective punishment policies, where entire families and communities are penalized for an individual's act of self-immolation. The penalties range from arrests to the withdrawal of social benefits and essential services, exacerbating the hardships faced by already marginalized communities.

Furthermore, the government has aggressively sought to delegitimize self-immolation, falsely framing it as incitement by the so-called "Dalai Clique" and branding it an act of separatism. This narrative is used to justify severe crackdowns, including the arrest and torture of individuals who document, share, or even mourn self-immolators. The authorities' actions aim to erase the memory of these protests and deter others from following suit.

The extreme suppression of self-immolation underscores the Chinese government's broader strategy of silencing all forms of dissent. By criminalizing even the grieving process and targeting entire communities, the state has created an environment of fear where Tibetans are left with no safe outlet to express their suffering.

c. Targeting of Individual Protesters

In addition to suppressing organized movements, Chinese authorities have systematically targeted individual Tibetan protesters, demonstrating the state's intolerance for any form of dissent, no matter how peaceful or isolated. These individuals—ranging from monks and merchants to students and elderly community members—have often faced brutal repercussions for their acts of protest.

The arrest and mistreatment of protesters extend beyond physical violence. Those who dare to speak out often face lengthy prison sentences under vague charges such as "inciting separatism" or "sharing information with outsiders." In 2017, two staff members at Thangkor Sockstang Monastery were sentenced to four and five years in prison on these nebulous grounds, reflecting the legal system's complicity in silencing dissent.

On 26 March 2024, Pema, a Tibetan monk from Kirti monastery, was detained by local Public Security Bureau officers in Ngaba County after staging a peaceful solo protest. Holding a portrait of the Dalai Lama on a road known locally as 'martyrs road,' Pema called for the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet and for religious freedom. Following his arrest, he was held incommunicado, with no information available about his condition or whereabouts.

These incidents highlight the relentless targeting of individual protesters and the lengths to which the Chinese government will go to silence even the most modest expressions of dissent. By criminalizing peaceful acts, employing physical violence, and leveraging vague legal charges, the state ensures that even solitary voices of resistance are met with overwhelming force.

VII. Recommendations

- China should ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to align its domestic laws with international human rights standards and ensure the protection of fundamental freedoms, including the right to free expression and privacy.
- China must repeal laws and regulations that mandate real-name registration for online users, censor online content, and restrict free speech.
- Legislation and policies that extend beyond the reasonable requirements of state security and the prevention of crime, and which infringe upon privacy and other interlinked human rights, must be reviewed, repealed, and amended to ensure compliance with international human rights standards.
- China should immediately cease its policy of forced cultural assimilation or "sinicization," which undermines the individual and collective rights of the Tibetan people.
- The Chinese government must dismantle the state surveillance system that stifles free expression and intimidates Tibetan human rights defenders, activists, and critics of Chinese government policies. This surveillance has a chilling effect on the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to dissent.
- China should introduce comprehensive legislation that recognizes and protects the right to privacy as a fundamental human right. This should include explicit provisions in future legal frameworks, ensuring robust protections for individuals against unwarranted intrusion into their personal lives
- China must repeal the newly enacted counter-espionage law and withdraw other similarly repressive measures, such as the "Administrative Measures for Internet Religious Information Services," which violate the right to freedom of expression both online and offline.
- The Chinese government must cease its policy of forced cultural assimilation and uphold human rights and constitutional rights by immediately and unconditionally releasing all Tibetan writers, intellectuals, and cultural leaders. Their rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and expression must be reinstated.
- The regulation of social media should prioritize transparency, due process rights for users, and stringent human rights protections. The independence of regulatory bodies must be clearly defined, limited, and guaranteed by law to ensure that any restrictions on online expression are proportionate and lawful.
- China should adopt comprehensive data protection laws and update relevant legislation, including electoral laws, to address the pervasive tracking and targeting of individuals and their activities online. These laws should ensure the protection of personal data and safeguard against abuses of privacy.

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Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy

Email: [office\[at\]tchrd\[dot\]org](mailto:office@tchrd.org)

Tel: +91-1892-223363