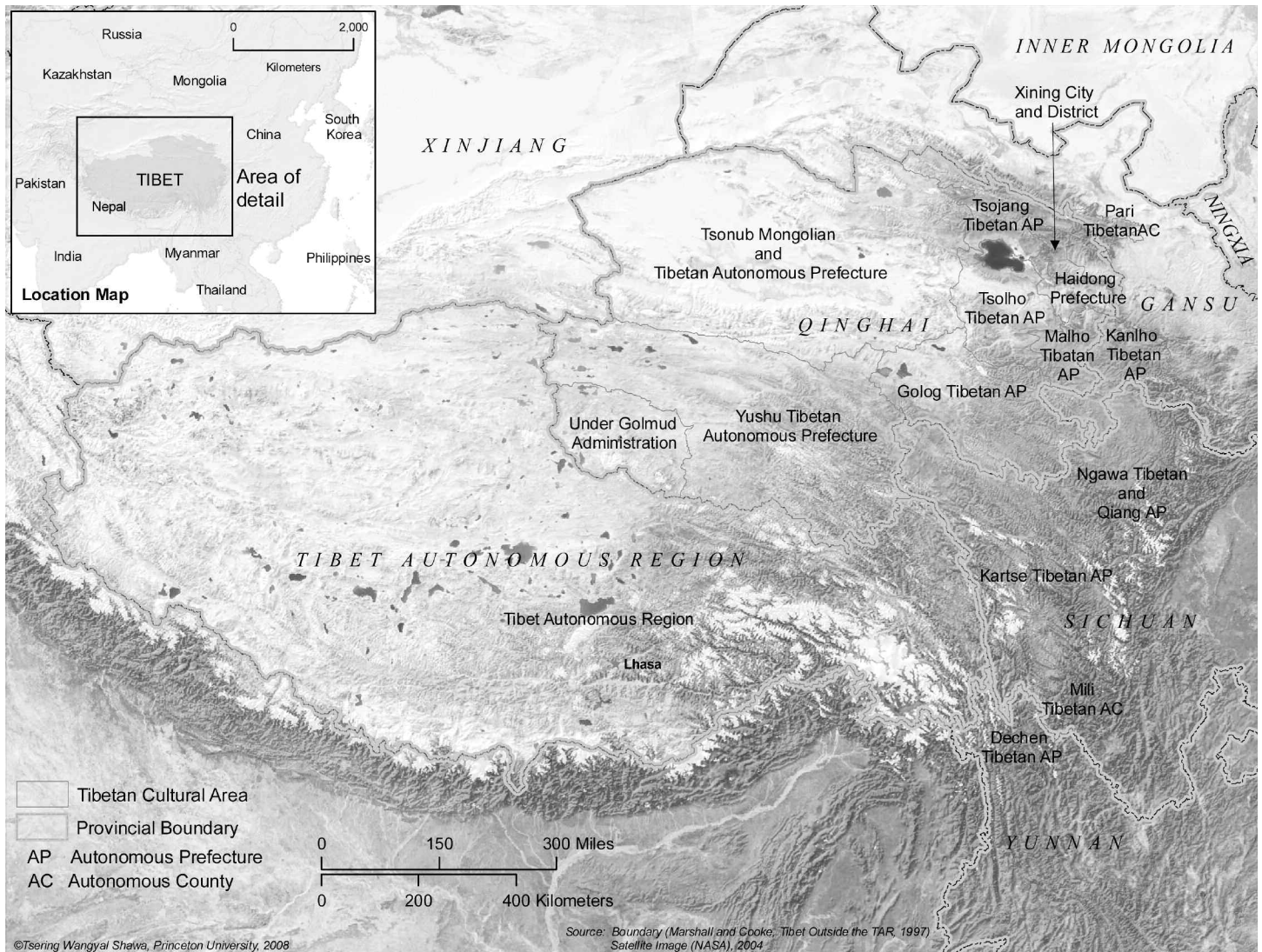


Defining Tibet and Tibetan Autonomy



TIBET IS COMPRISED OF THREE MAIN REGIONS: AMDO (NORTHEASTERN TIBET), KHAM (EASTERN TIBET) AND U-TSANG (CENTRAL AND WESTERN TIBET). The Tibet Autonomous Region, roughly equating to U-Tsang, was established by the Chinese government in 1965 and covers the area of Tibet west of the Yangtze River (Tibetan: Drichu), including part of Kham. The rest of Amdo and Kham have been incorporated into Chinese provinces, and designated as Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and Tibetan Autonomous Counties. As a result, most of Qinghai and parts of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces are acknowledged by the Chinese authorities to be “Tibetan autonomous.” The term

“Tibet” is used to refer to all of these Tibetan areas currently under the jurisdiction of the People’s Republic of China. (For more maps of Tibet, visit ICT’s webpage <http://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/topics-fact-sheets/tibet-maps>.)

Chinese government officials typically referred only to the Tibet Autonomous Region when they spoke of “Tibet,” but their 2009 special policy meeting on Tibet, the Fifth Tibet Work Forum, marked a shift in focus to include all Tibetan areas in their policy considerations. The widespread nature of the Spring 2008 uprising, which spread across all Tibetan areas in the People’s Republic of China, indicated a shared

Tibetan identity, loyalty to the Dalai Lama and a commonality of grievances. (See ICT report: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/top-level-meeting-beijingsets-strategy-tibet>.)

The uprising during the spring of 2008 and the continuing tensions in Tibet result from the failure of the government of the People's Republic of China to respond to fundamental human rights, economic and political issues held by Tibetans concurrent with its campaign to dilute the Tibetan identity and, in particular, to constrain the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, of which devotion to the Dalai Lama is an integral element.

A political solution is possible. Envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Chinese officials have been engaged in a dialogue process for decades and which was revived in September 2002. Unfortunately, years of sporadic dialogue have not progressed to substantive negotiations and have not met the expectations of the international community, including several heads of state, for meaningful progress towards a mutually-agreeable solution for Tibet. (For a complete listing of ICT reports on the Sino-Tibetan Dialogue, visit: <http://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/topics-fact-sheets/tibetan-chinese-negotiations>.)

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

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

However, this rhetoric is not reflected in reality.

The Tibetan position in the dialogue is that Tibetans be able to maintain their distinctive Tibetan identity into the future. Central to this position is the political right of autonomy provided to all Tibetans living in contiguous Tibetan areas, an area roughly defined by the geography of the Tibetan plateau, governed by a single administrative unit under a single unified policy. Chinese officials fear that this proposed autonomy represents a challenge to Chinese sovereignty.