

Chinese Rule in Tibet

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FOR CENTURIES, TIBET — a vast high altitude plateau between China and India — remained remote from the rest of the world with a widely dispersed population of nomads, farmers, monks and traders. In 1949, following the foundation of the Chinese Communist state, the People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet and soon overpowered its poorly equipped army and guerilla resistance. In March 1959, Tibetans rose up against the Chinese occupiers. The uprising was crushed, and the Dalai Lama escaped to India, followed by some 80,000 Tibetans. Tens of thousands of Tibetans who remained were killed or imprisoned. Since 1949, hundreds of thousands have died as a direct result of China's policies. In 1959, 1961 and 1965 (before the People's Republic of China was a member of the United Nations), the General Assembly passed resolutions condemning human rights violations in Tibet and affirming the Tibetans' right to self-determination.

China claims to have wiped out theocracy, feudalism and slavery in Tibet. But there never was systemized slavery in the traditional Tibetan society and it is also incorrect to characterize old Tibet as feudal. It was certainly not theocratic — as Buddhists do not believe in God. There was a system of labor and land management in central Tibet that analysts have compared to manorial serfdom, insofar as peasants were hereditarily tied to land held by nobles and monasteries to whom they owed various services. However, the eastern Tibetan rangelands were largely ruled through tribal systems. The modern Chinese Communist Party (CCP) terminology of feudalism, theocracy and slavery draws from Marxist theories of ethnicity that were elaborated by Stalin in the 1930s and then later adapted to China by the CCP. To the frustration of many Tibetan and Chinese scholars in China, public presentations on Tibet from within China still remain heavily constrained by this official ideology.

Tibetan Buddhism is an integral element of Tibetan national identity and, consequently, has been a prime target for suppression by the Chinese government. Approximately 6,000 religious institutions and their contents were destroyed from the period of the Chinese invasion through the Cultural Revolution. Today, the CCP continues to try to undermine the Dalai Lama's role in Tibet and to maintain strict control over most aspects of religion. For example, political cam-



Chinese troops in the Barkhor area of Lhasa on March 10 2008, when Drepung monks led a peaceful protest to mark the anniversary of Lhasa's Uprising in 1959. This led to a tidal wave of protests against Chinese rule across the Tibetan plateau, which continues today.

paigns or “patriotic re-education” require forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama, and obtaining a proper religious education remains extremely difficult or impossible in Tibet.

The Chinese government severely restricts the rights of Tibetans, including the freedoms of speech, press, association, and religion. Tibetan political prisoners endure harsh prison conditions and torture. There is an ongoing security crackdown at present due to hundreds of demonstrations that swept across the Tibetan plateau in Spring 2008.

The Chinese central government is transforming Tibet through its Western development plan, launched in 1999 to accelerate economic development across the plateau. The central element of the plan has been the separation of Tibetan nomads from their traditional livelihoods and their resettlement into urban centers concurrent with the movement of Chinese economic migrants up and onto the Tibetan plateau, facilitated by the construction of a new railroad, linking the Chinese interior to central Tibet. Many are calling this act of social reengineering the “second invasion of Tibet.” The Chinese government has elected to pursue a development model for Tibet that increases rather than narrows the gap between Chinese and Tibetans and risks undermining its objective for a stable Tibet within the People's Republic of China.