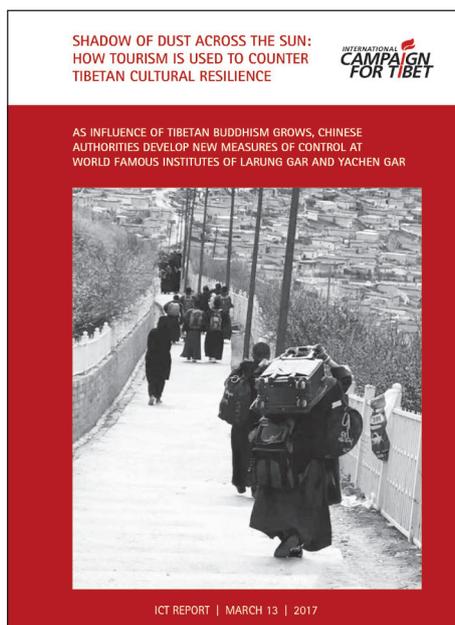


New ICT Report: Shadow of dust across the sun: How tourism is used to counter Tibetan cultural resilience

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) issued on 13 March a report revealing the extent to which tourism is now being used as a tool by the Chinese authorities to confront revivalist trends of Tibetan religious and cultural expression and contain monastic growth.

The report, '[Shadow of Dust across the Sun: how tourism is used to counter Tibetan cultural resilience](#)', reveals how the demolitions and expulsions at the Buddhist Institute of Larung Gar and Yachen Gar since July 2016 are part of an unfolding political strategy involving more aggressive measures to curb and manage the growing influence and number of monks and nuns at these important monastic centres of study and Buddhist ethics in eastern Tibet. It also details how the Chinese authorities, while undermining religious practice and stepping up intrusive security measures, are using this interest in Tibetan Buddhism to attract domestic tourists, leading to fears of further diminishment of these monastic communities, popularly known as 'encampments' or 'chogars' in Tibetan.

For the past year, major construction work has indeed been in progress in the valley at the foot of Larung Gar, with the apparent aim of creating a tourist centre that is likely to include Tibetan



restaurants, souvenir stores, horse-riding centres, trekking, and organised visits to the now world-famous Buddhist Institute. "Monks and nuns who remain at Larung Gar have already endured distress and trauma over the demolitions and removal of monks and nuns" said a Western scholar who has visited the area recently. "Now they are frightened that this important place, known for the scholarship and serious study possible there, will be reduced to a superficial attraction for temporary visitors and spiritual seekers."

According to Radio Free Asia, around 5,000 monks and nuns have now been expelled from Larung Gar. Many of them have been

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subjected to tight restrictions on their freedom and forcibly enrolled in 'patriotic re-education' exercises, as shown in a [video](#) first circulated on social media, in which nuns believed to have been expelled from Larung Gar are depicted praising Chairman Mao in song, with the lyrics: "Chinese and Tibetans are children of one mother".

In a rare step last month, six UN experts made public a [joint submission](#) they had sent to the People's Republic of China in November 2016, which stated that the developments at the Buddhist institutes violate international human rights laws. They said the events "seem to be concerted attacks on tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which

constitute serious violations of cultural rights of current and future generations". Concerns about the situation at Larung Gar had also been raised in a [resolution](#) of the European Parliament adopted in December 2016. ■

First cases of Tibetan self-immolations in 2017



A screenshot of a video showing a man in uniform spraying a fire extinguisher on a smoking body at the town square in Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, on 15 April. (Photo: Radio Free Asia)

A Tibetan monk has set himself on fire in Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture on 15 April, according to exiled Tibetans familiar with the region. This brings to 148 the number of self-immolations in Tibet since the wave of protests began in 2009.

A [video](#) of the incident has circulated on social media, in which a policeman sprays a fire extinguisher on a burnt body lying on the ground and blocks onlookers from approaching the body. Exiled Tibetan sources with contacts in the region said the self-immolator was

Wangchuk Tseten, a 30-year-old father of three from Asey Gyechak nomadic region in Ngagrang county, Kardze. According to informed sources, his body was completely burned after the self-immolation and Chinese police took it to an undisclosed location. The

Dharamsala-based Voice of Tibet radio has reported that he has died as a result of his severe burn injuries. After the self-immolation, Chinese police reportedly summoned a meeting of residents of the three regions of Asey, Lumo Ru and Horma, during which the authorities reissued its previous order of compulsory possession of various identity papers for locals wishing to travel anywhere.

This is the second confirmed case of self-immolation in Tibet this year, after a 24-year-old farmer named Pema Gyaltzen set himself alight on 18 March near Tsoga monastery in Nyarong (Chinese: Xinlong), in the Tibetan area of Kham in Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan. The eldest of five children and the main provider for his family, Pema Gyaltzen was reportedly immediately taken away to a hospital in Chengdu. It is still unclear whether he is still alive.

Links to the area via the internet and mobile phone signals were cut following Pema Gyaltzen self-immolation. It is also believed that Tibetan onlookers who shouted out in solidarity or simply witnessed the burning were detained. Around 10 members of the protestor's family were also brutally beaten and held overnight, [according to Tibetan sources](#).

China and Tibet at the 34th Session of the UN Human Rights Council



ICT's Mélanie Blondelle delivering a statement on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 6 March. (Photo: Screenshot from UN Web TV)

The human rights situation in Tibet and China was the focus of civil society organisations and concerned governments during the 34th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, held in Geneva between 27 February and 24 March.

In his [report to the Human Rights Council](#) on 8 March, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein once more expressed his concern about the situation in Tibet. He stated: *"The Government of China had stated its intention to play a leadership role in the Human Rights Council, and so far it had performed remarkably in lifting hundreds of millions of people from poverty. However, it should respect the rights of human rights defenders, and cease to restrict cultural and religious rights, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet."* While welcoming this statement, ICT

is concerned that by praising China's performance in "lifting hundreds of millions of people from poverty" and linking it to the country's role in the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner gives credence to the official Chinese view that criticism of the human rights violations in the PRC is unfair.

The International Campaign for Tibet warmly welcomed further statements made by the [United States](#), the European Union, [Germany](#), Canada, France and the Czech Republic under

"Item 4" of the Council's agenda and which either referred to the situation in the People's Republic of China or to Tibet specifically.

ICT participated in this session, delivering a [statement](#) on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights on the dangerous implications of the new Chinese law on counter-terrorism for Tibetans during the Interactive Dialogue on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism. The statement urged China to repeal or revise the law in accordance with international standards, and called on the Human Rights Council to challenge the increasing use of national security legislation to criminalise those exercising their fundamental rights in China. On 10 March, ICT also spoke at a side-event on Tibet organised by the Society for Threatened People entitled "Human Rights in Tibet – 2016". ICT's EU Policy Director Vincent Metten presented ICT's latest counter-terrorism report, and gave an overview of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, which 2016's round was cancelled.

Ahead of the session, ICT, along with other advocates for human rights in the People's Republic of China and Tibet, had also sent [a joint letter to Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva](#), asking governments to sustain the call for accountability of the Chinese Government. ■

U.S.-China Presidential Summit



U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping together at the Mar-a-Lago estate in West Palm Beach, Florida, 7 April. (Photo:AFP)

The much-anticipated first meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping held on 6 and 7 April in Mar-a-Lago ended without any detailed announcements.

Addressing the media briefly between meetings, President Trump said, "I think we have made tremendous progress in our relationship with China" but no further details were given. President Xi Jinping said, "We have further built up understanding and established a kind of trust, and we have initially built up a working relationship and friendship."

In a [statement](#) published following the summit, ICT's President Matteo Mecacci said: "The International Campaign for Tibet will be closely monitoring the U.S.'s interaction with the Chinese government to see if the obligations established by the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 will be implemented."

He added: "We are all for wholesome U.S. engagement with China, but it will be a betrayal of America's interests if we abandon the fundamental values of freedom, human rights, and democratic governance."

On the eve of the Summit, a [bipartisan legislation](#) to promote access by Americans to Tibetan areas, which is routinely denied by Chinese authorities, was introduced simultaneously by two lawmakers in both the U.S. Senate and U.S. Congress. If passed, it would deny access to the United States to any Chinese officials responsible for administering travel policies to Tibetan areas until China cancels the discriminatory restrictions placed on Americans who wish to enter Tibet. ■

Tibet Friendship Parliamentary Group Formed in Sweden

On 28 March, a Tibet Friendship Parliamentary Group was launched at the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag.

The inauguration ceremony and the first meeting of this newly formed group was attended by Swedish Tibet Committee board members Hanna Sahlman and Jamyang Choedon and Tibetan Community in Sweden's board member Tenzin Deki. Member of Parliament Margareta Cederfelt said how important it was to raise the question of Tibet in the Swedish Parliament. The group also decided to hold a Tibet Seminar to raise awareness about Tibet in the near future. ■



Members of Swedish Tibet Friendship Parliamentary group with Swedish Tibet Committee board members Hanna Sahlman, Jamyang Choedon and Tibetan Community in Sweden board member Tenzin Deki. (Photo: Office of Tibet London)

2017 International Tibet Lobby Days



Tibet Lobby Days participants in front of the European Parliament in Brussels on 28 March. (Photo: ICT)

Between 27-29 March 2017, hundreds of Tibetan activists and Tibet supporters from all over the U.S., Europe and Australia gathered in Washington D.C., Brussels and Canberra for the 2017 Tibet Lobby Days. Together, they urged their governments and Parliaments to increase their support for Tibet and the Tibetan people.

In Washington D.C., over 130 Tibetan-Americans and Tibet supporters visited the offices of more than 250 Members of Congress over the two days to ask them to continue the funding of Tibet programmes and to advocate for the release of Tibetan political prisoners. They also called on them to promote access to Tibetan areas for U.S. officials, journalists, citizens and to hold Chinese leaders accountable for human rights violations in Tibet.

On 28-29 March, a group of 18 Tibetan activists, community leaders and former political prisoners living in Australia also participated in the [Lobby Days organised by the Australia Tibet Council](#) in Canberra. The Tibetan delegation met with 35 Members of

Parliament from all sides of the political spectrum to ask them to join a global effort to increase pressure on China to improve the human rights situation in Tibet.

In Brussels, a group of Tibetan activists from Austria, Germany, Italy and Poland participated in the programme. They briefed representatives of different European institutions, including some European deputies and their assistants and officials from the European External

Action Service and from the European Economic and Social Committee, on the situation in Tibet. They also made some concrete recommendations



Australia Tibet Council's Kyinzom Dhongdue and Tibetan activists at the training session of the Tibet Lobby Days in Canberra. (Photo: Australia Tibet Council)

for a way forward, including on EU-China relations, and exchanged with a group of assistants of Members of the European Parliament known as long-time supporters of Tibet. "It was a great learning experience and a golden opportunity for us to raise our voices for our country", said one participant from Germany. ■



Tibet Lobby Days participants from Virginia in front of the Capitol Building in Washington D.C. on 27 March. (Photo: ICT)

Political Prisoner Focus

Yeshe Choedron



Last month, Yeshe Choedron, a Tibetan political prisoner currently serving 15 years imprisonment, was urgently transferred to a hospital in the Tibetan capital Lhasa in a 'critical condition', according to information received by the Tibetan web portal Phayul. Yeshe Choedron, 57, is presently unable to stand and requires a wheelchair for mobility. Sources say her disability was caused by torture and a lack of proper healthcare in prison. According to the official website of the Central Tibetan Administration, her friends and families have not been allowed to see her in hospital, where three policemen are guarding her.

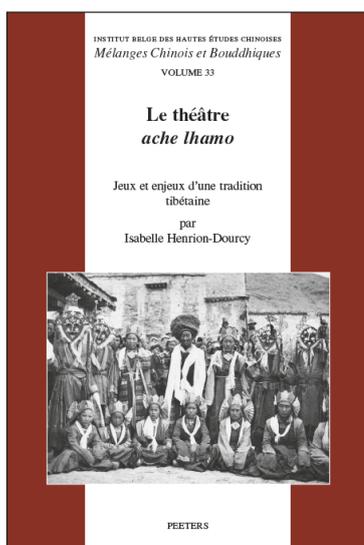
Back in November 2008, the Lhasa

Intermediate People's Court sentenced Yeshe Choedron to 15 years in prison after being convicted for 'espionage'. According to the Lhasa Evening News, an official party newspaper, the authorities say she provided "intelligence and information harmful to the security and interests of the state" to "the Dalai clique's security department".

Last year, Yeshe Choedron was awarded the inaugural Tenzin Delek Rinpoche Medal of Courage, a new international Tibetan human rights award created in honour of the late popular monk Trulku Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, who died in a Chinese prison in unclear circumstances in July 2015. ■

Reading Suggestion

Le Théâtre "ache lhamo", Jeux et enjeux d'une tradition tibétaine, by Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy



Editor:
Peeters
Publishers
Publication date:
2017

This book is a thesis on 'ache lhamo' Tibetan theatre as it was played in pre-modern times (before 1950) and as it is still played in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and throughout the Tibetan diasporas in India and Nepal. As in most Asian theatre, it is a mix of different styles: a religious-themed drama from Mahayana Buddhism, mimed satire and peasant farce at the same time. It includes recitations, songs, percussions, dances and improvised buffooneries, as well as the use of flamboyant masks and costumes, which sharply contrasts with its staging limitations. Although it was supported and financed by the governments of the Dalai Lamas, important monasteries and aristocratic families, it is above all a theatre of the people. This book combines anthropology, Tibetology and theatre studies, and is based on over four years of field research in Tibet and in exile. ■

Click [here](#) to buy this book.

HBO's Last Week Tonight with the Dalai Lama



A March episode of the HBO show Last Week Tonight saw its host John Oliver fly all the way to Dharamsala to sit with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and discuss China, the conditions in Tibet - and horse milk. A funny and thoughtful discussion worth watching!

Click [here](#) to watch the interview.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ▶ **5-7 MAY:**
International Tibet Network's European Regional Meeting in Riga, Latvia
- ▶ **14-15 MAY:**
One Belt One Road Summit organised by China in Beijing
- ▶ **MAY:**
Visit of the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa to the United Kingdom *(more information and schedule at <http://karmapavisituk.com/home/>)*
- ▶ **2 JUNE**
19th EU-China Summit in Brussels
- ▶ **6-23 JUNE**
35th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council