



CHINA AND ITS PERIPHERIES **STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF TIBET**



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Tibet is not an identity and cultural issue for China. It is essentially a strategic and security issue. Tibet being located in China's Western frontier has been historically a vulnerable periphery. It is a strategic periphery not merely because of the 1962 India-China war, but more because it is a minority area located in the southwestern periphery occupying one-fourth of China's landmass. Significantly, the flaring of the Tibetan unrests in the recent times has exposed not only the flawed nature of China's minority policy but also raised questions on the efficacy of its security centered approach in dealing with the Tibet question.

China's Tibet policy is essentially driven by strategic considerations and periphery security. The focus on the periphery had been a perennial security concern right from the imperial times. However, in the

post-1949 era, it gained preeminent focus not in terms of external threats alone but more due to its domestic concerns arising out of nation building exercise and governance issues.

Inevitably, in the post-1949 period, after the establishment of the Communist government, the first task for China was to consolidate and integrate its vulnerable Tibetan periphery. It militarily occupied the region with its Red Army in 1950. It sought to legally incorporate the region by forcing the Tibetans sign the Seventeen-Point Agreement in 1951. It administratively integrated the region by creating the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 1965. The minority policy thus crafted does not address the concerns related to the Tibetan identity per se but essentially provides the recipe for how to deal with China's vulnerable periphery.

This essay first looks briefly into how historically Tibet factors in China's imperial periphery policy. Second, by exploring China's Tibet policy in the post-1949 Maoist period, the essay shows how internally its minority policy, underscored in

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the ethnic classification project and regional autonomy system, is geared towards periphery consolidation and how externally China sought to settle its sovereignty claims on Tibet vis-à-vis India and attain a stable frontier. Third, the essay explores China's Tibet policy in the post-1978 reform period and demonstrates how China has continued to address the Tibet issue from a security perspective and thus has implemented the Western Development Strategy internally and re-crafted its Nepal policy externally. Finally, the study evaluates China's Tibet policy in the larger periphery policy.

The essay also seeks to establish a critical link between Tibet and China's periphery strategy and argue that its Tibet policy is a continuation of its historical quest for a stable periphery. Periphery strategy thus has dual implications, one security of the internal periphery underscored in the minority policy and two security of the external periphery reflected in its policy towards India, Nepal and the Tibetan Government in Exile. Tibet remains a strategic and security issue for the People's Republic of China (PRC) rather than a cultural and identity issue. Since China treats Tibet as a strategic issue and not as a cultural issue, the solutions to the Tibetan problem are invariably a security-centric response than an identity-centric one. Quite inevitably then the Tibet issue which is a quest for Tibetan identity will continue to pose a formidable challenge to China's periphery security and the Tibet question will remain unresolved for long time to come.

Periphery strategy thus has dual implications, one security of the internal periphery underscored in the minority policy and two security of the external periphery reflected in its policy towards India, Nepal and the Tibetan Government in Exile. Tibet remains a strategic and security issue for the People's Republic of China (PRC) rather than a cultural and identity issue.

I TIBET IN CHINA'S IMPERIAL POLICY: MAKING OF THE TIBETAN PERIPHERY

Concerns related to the security of the frontiers are traceable to the late Shang and Zhou periods of Chinese history. It was the Qin and then the Han who developed an elaborate mechanism for frontier security and development. In fact, it is in the Han model that the current policies of Hanization and defence and development of the borderlands are rooted. However, it was only under the Qing dynasty, the last non-Han rulers that the periphery was not only consolidated but as James Millward says, 'provincialized' (Millward 2007).

Incidentally, this provincialization of the periphery had taken place only in the late Qing era having confronted with Western imperialism and modernity in the post-Opium War period. In the early period of the Qing rule, however, frontier consolidation was adopted not through turning them into provinces but through sharing of power with the frontier elites. What evolved in the early Qing period was institutionalization of hybrid structures where the Qing delegated power to the local elites that of the Tibetan Buddhist clergy, Turkic leaders (begs) and the Mongol banners (Giersch 2008). Thus, the Dalai Lama institution emerged as the key to administering Tibet. In fact, the Mongols first devised the patron-priest relationship that bound the Tibetans with the Mongol rulers which rendered high degrees of autonomy to Tibet and kept its socio-political structures largely intact (Norbu 2001).

The patron-priest relationship was later appropriated by the Qing to control its Tibetan periphery. However, with the advent of the Western imperialistic forces in the nineteenth century, the late Qing rulers departed from their pluralist policy and adopted the strategy of integration where by the indirect rule was given up and borderlands were transformed into provinces (Giersch 2008). New survey maps and census were deployed to map

the periphery and depict the people. In the course of provincialization apart from modern cartographic and ethnographic techniques, geography, anthropology and history emerged as critical disciplines aiding in locating the frontier people and weaving them into a national narrative.

However, the story of transformation and integration differed from one frontier to another. While Xinjiang was turned into a Qing province by 1884 and Taiwan in 1887, the Tibet proper escaped such a fate. This was primarily because of the 'Great Game' between the British and the Russians that engulfed the Tibetan politics and helped it to remain virtually independent till 1950. In fact, new studies reveal that different approaches were adopted by the later Qing rulers to integrate the Kham region and the Tibet proper in which the former saw oppression and large-scale violence and the latter saw 'coercive persuasion' (Giersch 2008). In both cases, local elites were undermined and alienated. Violence and coercion ultimately damaged the characteristic patron-priest Tibetan-Qing relationship.

The 19th century Great Game while altered the fate of the Tibetan vis-à-vis the Qing, also spurred a whole new genre of reformist writings in Qing China on the growing imperialist threat and the need for centralized control over the periphery (Giersch 2008). These writings in particular condemned the Qing pluralist policy as reasons for foreign interference and therefore urged for direct rule. For instance, Wang Rongmao writing in June 1898, enumerated four-fold strategy to implement direct rule over Tibet: one, he identified foreign threats as a means to construct Tibet as vital national territory; two, he emphasized new forms of knowledge and institutions to reinvigorate imperial rule; three, he urged Han migration; and four, he advocated economic development of Tibet to integrate it with the China proper (Giersch 2008).

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that Sichuan would be rendered defenseless if Tibet is lost (Giersch 2008). By identifying Sichuan as a courtyard and Tibet as a screen or a wall, such writings drew the importance of periphery in the defence of the core. The Qing state thus moved to 'nationalize' the frontier. However, they could not repeat the Xinjiang story in Tibet due to the expanding British forces.

Fearing Tsarist expansion in Asia, the British colonial power in India for the first time realized the need to define the status of Tibet. Tibetan skirmish with the British over Sikkim exposed the real nature of Chinese authority in Tibet and prompted the British to directly establish contact with the Dalai Lama. The British interpreted the existing patron-priest relationship between Tibet and China as some kind of 'loose reign' and consequently devised the strategy of conferring China suzerain rights over Tibet. A recent study on the status of Tibet vis-à-vis China indicates that the arrangement of suzerainty was not an original idea of the British, but they derived it from the existing priest-patron relationship that had defined the relationship between Tibet and China under the Mongols and the Manchu rulers (Schaik 2012).

The British strategy of suzerainty was essentially devised to keep the Russians out from the region bordering India. More than that, it meant to engage a weak China and encourage it to play a role so as to avoid a power vacuum in the region and thereby prevent the penetration of Russian influence in Tibet (Bhattacharya

forthcoming). Eventually, this meant turning Tibet into a buffer zone between British India and Tsarist Russia. This arrangement while eliminating Russian influence on Tibet, preventing China's sovereignty and ensuring Tibetan autonomy ultimately guaranteed security of British Indian frontiers and ensured British commercial rights in China (Norbu 2001). Keeping these imperatives in context, the British government repudiated its own gains achieved through the Younghusband expedition of 1904 and signed the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1906 whereby the British India government and Russia agreed to keep Tibet under Chinese suzerainty.

The Younghusband expedition however, exposed the prospect of British threat to the Qing frontier and the subsequent period inevitably saw the Chinese expansion into the areas adjacent to China proper, the so called Inner Tibet or the Kham region. Tibet got further embroiled in the Great Game when the 13th Dalai Lama claimed Tibetan independence. This greatly concerned the Qing and what followed then was subjugation and sinicization of Kham or inner Tibet. Sam Van Schaik argues that the 13th Dalai Lama regarded this Qing expansion as colonization of Eastern Tibet and thus saw this as Qing forfeiture of the age-old priest patron relationship (Schaik 2011). In 1911, the Manchu power collapsed and the 13th Dalai Lama declared Tibet's independence.

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II

TIBET IN THE POST-1949 MAOIST CHINA: RECLAIMING THE PERIPHERY

The Communist besides integrating Tibet by forcing the Tibetans sign the 17-Point agreement, also devised the minority policy to consolidate its control. This was underscored in the ethnic classification project to depict the people and regional autonomy system to map the territory (Bhattacharya 2003). In essence, the minority policy was crafted not to tackle the issue of Tibetan identity per se in a Han dominated state but to territorially integrate the Tibetan minority with the Han geo-body.

Inevitably, the idea of Tibet disintegrated and in place of U-tsang, Kham and Amdo that had historically defined Tibet, the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) was created from the existing U-tsang and Western Amdo Outer Tibet in 1965 and four provinces (Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan) were carved out from the erstwhile Eastern Amdo and Kham or Inner Tibet. The Chinese unitary state model deviated from the Soviet federal system and contended that since none of China's minorities were in possession of contiguous territories free of other minorities or the Han, the Soviet system was untenable for China.

Also, as Zhou Enlai argued that the unique size of Han majority made Soviet style federalism inappropriate for China (Leibold 2010). In effect, the Chinese system made the right to secession illegal and the 1954 PRC Constitution introduced 'regional autonomy' instead of fulfillment of self-determination. Interestingly, China defined self-determination as an exclusive right of the proletariat to choose union with a Communist state where oppression is non-existent (Smith 2004). By liberating the Tibetans from double oppression—oppression of the foreign powers and oppression of the feudal Lamas—the PRC hailed the liberation of Tibet and establishment of a socialist society and thereby claimed the elimination of oppression and fulfillment of self-

determination for the Tibetans.

In the post-1949 period, out of some odd four hundred ethnic groups, fifty-six nationalities or minzu were defined as people of China out of which fifty-five comprised the minority population. Quite significantly, there is no separate word for nationality, nation and ethnicity. All are clubbed under the term minzu. This in essence, meant that in China minority is regarded as a cultural concept and does not connote a political identity. Hence, no distinction is made between people (minzu), nation (minzu), nationality (minzu) and ethnos (minzu). This harks back to the civilizational state identity wherein whoever resided in China historically and have accepted Chinese Confucian culturalism are part of China and are Chinese. Following this conceptualization, there is no place for separate political identity and of self-determination. This definition however, arose out of strategic consideration as minorities in China that comprise some 8.49 % of the population occupy almost 63.72% of land all along the greater part of the periphery.

While internally, minority policy was crafted to integrate and govern the periphery, externally, the 1954 India-China agreement was meant not to just establish friendly relations with India by settling the status of Tibet but to secure the status of China's Tibetan periphery. Thus the Agreement states "Tibet region part of China." By making India sign the Agreement China gained sovereignty over Tibet and India's renunciation of all special rights in Tibet. In fact, Indian government did not understand that it was actually surrendering its security of the national borders vis-à-vis China and getting trapped in the rhetoric of Hindi-Chini bhai bhai.

III

TIBET IN THE POST-REFORM ERA: CONSOLIDATING THE PERIPHERY

The post-reform era China gave primacy to economics than to radical politics and hence there was a shift in addressing the

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issues of security. The issues of security were best handled through the prism of economic development. This encapsulated Deng Xiaoping's notion of political integration through development. This was epitomised in the Western Development Strategy (Xibu Da Kaifa) adopted in 1999 and implemented in 2000 in the poor backward Western region of China that had fallen behind the richer advanced and developed eastern coastal region in the post-1978 Chinese economic reform process.

However, Quinjian Tian (2004) has pointed out the reasons for the Western development strategy in the widening gaps between the coastal and interior regions engendering regional disparities that coincided with growing concerns over political stability in China's ethnic minority regions. In other words, Western development strategy was manifestation of China's classic security paradigm of *neiluanwaihuan* meaning domestic chaos would invite foreign aggression. The significance of *neiluanwaihuan* could be gauged from the fact that the developed coastal region of China comprising 41% of the population covered 14% of land while the underdeveloped Western region comprising 28.1% of the population covered a huge 71.4% of China's land mass.

Significantly, security of the core is dependent on the security of the periphery and in Deng's formulation the security of the periphery could be

achieved through spreading the economic prosperity achieved in the coastal region to the rest of China.

Western Development Strategy was envisioned as a security driven strategy and this was evident in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1991–1995) which outlined major infrastructure projects in the central and western regions. Among these were the construction of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River and Xiaolangdi Water Control Project on the Yellow River, Beijing–Hong Kong Railway, Nanning–Kunming Railway, major energy projects like coal mines in Shanxi, Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia and oil and nature gas fields in Xinjiang (Tian 2004). A similar focus on infrastructure development could be seen till 2012, when China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) reinvigorated the Western development programme with a fresh announcement of infrastructure construction and development of industries in twenty-two key projects with a total investment of 577.8 billion yuan. These twenty-two new major projects included Chongqing to Wanzhou Railway, Dunhuang to Golmud Railway, Zhangjiakou to Hohhot Railway, Nanjing–Xi'an Railway, Xi'an to Hefei additional second-line, Yunnan the Maliu Cove to zhaotong, Huangling highway to Tongchuan Highway, Qinghai Chakahighway renovation and expansion to Golmud, the Xinjiang Aksu to Kashgar highway, Inner Mongolia Ulanhot to Zalantun Highway, State Road 318, the Sichuan-Tibet Highway (Tibet section), the Nanning airport new terminal

area and the construction of facilities and the construction of the western regional airports. There have been 187 major projects with a total investment of 3.68 trillion yuan since the implementation of the Western development strategy between 2000 and 2012.

Looking at the scale of the projects, it is implicit that the Western development strategy is essentially a security driven programme. This can be further demonstrated by its two flagship projects in Tibet- the Qinghai Tibet Railway (QTR) and the South-North Water Diversion project. The former has been completed in 2006 and the latter is yet to be operationalized. Arguably, the QTR is predicated on developing strategic and defence structures in the TAR. The QTR is being extended to Xigaze and there is a plan for building a further link from Xigaze to Yadong - a major trading town on the India-China border. The strategic salience of the QTR is also evident in Chin's counter-terrorism measures in the TAR. There are more than 40,000 troops in the TAR, though the Tibetan exile government puts the figure at 250,000. They are stationed to stamp out any kind of Tibetan resistance. Besides, the TAR is dotted with five airfields: Gongar, Pangta, Linchi, Hoping and Gar Gunsar. The total road network in the TAR has increased to 58,000 km in 2010 from 1996; prior to the Western development programme it was only 22,000 km.

Besides having a focus on infrastructure development and military deployment, the QTR has also hastened the process of Hanization. According to Deng, since Tibet is a big area with a small population, its development by Tibetans alone would not be possible. The Han Chinese, therefore, should help in its economic development. Accordingly, Deng justified the influx of Han Chinese into Tibet as a necessary step to promote economic development. The Country Report on Human Rights Practice which is published from time to time indicates Hanization process in terms of large-scale transfer of Han population in the TAR that has

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sidelined the traditional dominance of the Tibetan population. New economic opportunities have attracted migrant workers to Tibetan areas, increasing the non-Tibetan share of the TAR population from approximately 4 per cent in 1990 to 6 per cent in 2000. The PRC denies any large scale swamping of Han population in the TAR and maintains that the Tibetan population has generally increased in Tibet. According to the 2000 census, the PRC holds that 92.8 percent are Tibetans and 6.1 percent are Han in the TAR. While the Tibetan government in exile contends that in the whole of Tibet, Tibetans are only 6 million while non-Tibetans are 7.5 million. Contrary estimates however do not overshadow the fact that migration and Han settlement had been the historical practice for periphery consolidation. Further, Western development projects have created a demand for skilled workforce in the TAR where 85 percent of Tibetans are poor and unskilled. The opening of the Qinghai Tibetan Railway in 2006 has invariably exacerbated the pressure of floating population in the TAR.

Apart from Hanization, the QTR also furthered China's resource extraction from the mineral-rich Tibetan region. Reports suggest that the QTR has carried 44,000 tons of Tibetan products to the rest of China in its first year of operation. These include organic farm produce, adornments, herbs, incense, dried yak meat, barley beer and even mineral water from an altitude of 5100 metres. Besides, the QTR has facilitated siphoning of essential raw materials out of the TAR. Commenting on resource extraction the official website of Central Tibet Administration outlines that "China's dam-building and water diversion agenda - and the State's international trans-boundary policies - directly threaten the integrity of Asia's river systems fed by the Tibetan Plateau and the survival of the millions of Asians who depend on them." (Resource Extraction: State of the Environment 2003)

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deployment, resource extraction and Hanization are associated with Western development project, ecological protection is a fifth aspect of the strategy. In 2003, the policy of 'Returning Grazing Land to Grassland' was initiated as part of Western development programme. Since grazing and nomadic herding were found reasons for increasing deforestation and desertification, the PRC has taken steps to discourage grazing, often forcefully. They have also compensated the nomadic Tibetans with housing in return for agreeing to vacate their grazing land. Deprived of their farm land and farm animals, Tibetans are forced to turn into a migrant population. Arguably, the root cause of self-immolation today is largely related to the loss of grazing land and means of livelihood creating social dislocation, economic deprivation and cultural attenuation.

Finally, the sixth aspect of Western development strategy is repression. Under the Strike Hard Campaign introduced in 2000, almost 10,000 monks and nuns have been expelled from their monastic institutions. Thousands have been persecuted. Pictures of the Dalai Lama have been banned. Monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or who were found to be "politically unqualified" have been expelled. The government monitors the daily functioning of major monasteries.

The Western development strategy essentially comprises of six aspects- Hanization, Infrastructure development,

resource extraction, military deployment, ecological protection and repression. Each of them has contributed to the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the Tibetans. In fact, it is geared to usher in material prosperity but is not aimed at assuaging identity related issues. In the socio-economic indices of China's provinces and autonomous regions, Tibet ranks the lowest on every index. For instance, the figures for 2011 region wise participation of people in basic pension insurance indicate Beijing at 1089.4 persons, Xinjiang at 431.5, while Tibet is placed at the last at 11.2 persons. Again the 2011 region-wise figures for number of people covered under basic medical insurance shows Beijing at 1347.8 persons, Xinjiang at 825.2 but Tibet at the last at 43.7 persons. While phenomenal growth has taken place in the TAR, the fruits of the prosperity are not reaching the 85 percent of Tibetan population. Since most of the state owned enterprises and investments are centered in urban areas and most of them generally recruit skilled Han knowing people, the Tibetans are marginalized in their own society. While western development project has been conceptualized to develop the backward western region of China, in reality most of the developments are geared towards enhancing state power and peripheral security.

Significantly, the Western development strategy resonates the imperial Han model of periphery strategy that was based on 3 components: one, development and defence of territorial and border region; two, political control and security through

forced Han migration; and three, economic development of sparsely populated region.

Internally, Western development strategy addresses the security of the periphery, while externally, China has re-crafted its Nepal policy (Bhattacharya 2011). China is playing a proactive role to determine the future shape of Nepali politics. The Chinese leadership believes that any political instability in Nepal has a bearing on China's peripheral region of the TAR. With growing tensions in Tibet, particularly after the March 2008 uprising, China's conception of Nepal as a new buffer acquired special significance. Its policy towards Nepal came to be driven essentially by the need to curb the clandestine activities of some 20,000 Tibetan refugees (the second largest Tibetan refugee community in the world) in Nepal. The presence of the Tibetan refugees in Nepal and their arrival each year in hundreds to the Himalayan kingdom attest to the human rights violations rampant in Tibet. More than that, their periodic staging of protests draws in international attention that in effect, exacerbates China's vulnerability in Tibet.

Consequently, China has been playing a proactive role in determining the future of Nepal's politics. During each of the high-level meetings China has extracted assurances from Nepal that it adheres to the one-China principle, acknowledges Tibet as an inalienable part of China, and ensures that no anti-China activity is allowed on its soil. Further, with the rise of pro-China Maoist and Marxist-Leninist parties in Nepal, in 2006, China has effectively drawn their support in furthering its security goals in Nepal. With the State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan's official visit to Nepal in March 2006, there is a perceptible shift in China's Nepal policy from non-interference to apparent pro-activism. China hitherto regarded the 2005 Royal takeover of Nepal as the latter's internal affair (Ghimire 2006). But after the 2006 People's Movement, China stated that "key to resolution of crisis in

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Nepal lies in conciliation among the constitutional forces"... and urged the King to "reach out to the political parties to restore democracy and peace in the country." (Ghimire 2006)

Apparently, Nepal is witnessing quite a frequent spurt of crackdown on the Tibetans. For instance, on 11 March 2011, the police violently stopped a prayer meeting at the Buddhist temple in Kathmandu (Parajuli 2011). Dozens of Buddhist monks had gathered to mark the 60th anniversary of Tibet's invasion. Again, during the March 2011 election of the Tibetan government-in-exile at Dharamsala, Nepal cowed down to China's pressure and prevented its 20,000 Tibetan refugees from participating in the voting. On 13 February 2011, Nepal's police prevented the Tibetan community "even from holding its own internal elections, by bursting into polling stations and seizing ballots and other electoral material." (Parajuli 2011) Most glaring was the ban of Tibetans in Nepal from celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on 6th July 2011 (China and Nepal Crackdown to Mark the Dalai Lama's Birthday 2011). There is thus, growing atrocities committed on the Tibetan refugees by the Nepalese government at the behest of the PRC.

Also, inside Tibet, China imposed strict restrictions on the Tibetan monasteries during the election of the exiled government in Dharamsala. There were reports of a new round of patriotic religion campaign undertaken in March in Sichuan province and Ngaba County of Tibet to tame the Tibetan monks (Crackdown in Ngaba 2011). Further, interestingly, the visit of the PLA General to Nepal coincided with the Dalai Lama's succession question. Some news reports believed that "the real reason for the general's visit is to boost cooperation between Beijing and Kathmandu against anti-Chinese dissent among Tibetan exiles." (Kalpitparajuli 2011) "China's concerns over Nepal are growing," said Rameshwor Acharya, ex-Nepali ambassador to China. "The country is

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close to the border with India and is home to thousands of Tibetan refugees who often organise anti-Chinese activities." He further adds that "The visit shows that China wants the support of our army to control anti-Chinese activities following the resignation of the Dalai Lama." (Kalpitparajuli 2011)

Notably, it was the first time that the Chinese PLA directly signed a deal with the Nepalese Army. Sudheer Sharma, editor of Nepalese newspaper Kantipur contended that "The Nepalese army is seen as the only strong state institution. This is why the Chinese are keen on investing in it." (China cements Nepal ties with military deal) Inevitably, the several measures undertaken by the Nepalese government at the behest of China indicate Beijing's proactive foreign policy towards Nepal.

While China redefined its Nepal policy post-2006, it was not a coincidence that it laid claim to the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh as Chinese territory exemplified in Sun Yuxi's statement prior to Hu Jintao's visit to India in December 2006. Arguably, this hardening of Chinese position on the disputed border is inextricably linked with the developments in inside Tibet. China is averse to any loosening of control on Tibet as sovereignty over Tibet has significant ramifications not only for its national integrity but also for stability of its other minority areas, particularly Xinjiang. If Tibet falls from China's grip, Xinjiang would follow suit.

Thus, China's foreign policy towards India and Nepal is inextricably linked with its domestic developments in Tibet. The redefined policies post-2006 is mainly geared to secure its south-western Tibetan periphery.

IV EVALUATING TIBET IN CHINA'S PERIPHERY STRATEGY

For China, periphery security encapsulates dual security. One, security of the internal periphery underscored in the minority policy and two, security of the external periphery underlined in its policy towards India and Nepal. More specifically, the changes within the domestic situation have spurred changes in the foreign policy. Right from the imperial past to the present, China's prerequisite concern has been security of the frontiers. This arose due to the logic drawn on the linkage between internal and external security as underscored in the concept of neiluanwaihuan.

Since the security of the core is dependent on the security of the periphery, China always gave premium to periphery security. In the imperial times China achieved periphery security through defence and development as well as migration and settlement of Han population in the borderlands. In the post-1949 period, China consolidated the security of the periphery by crafting a minority policy that defined the idea of a Chinese nation. In the post-reform era, it

further drew logic between defence and development and crafted the Western development programme to consolidate the periphery. Thus the periphery strategy is based first on the idea that security of the frontiers is vital for the security of the core; second that the defence of the frontier could be consolidated by development of the frontier region; and third that security of the frontier could be enhanced through diplomacy with the neighbouring powers. And since the frontier region lacks man power and skill for development, China has always justified the migration of Han skilled forces to aid in the development of the backward West. This idea of periphery resonate American frontier experience and its 'manifest destiny' to expand westward and spread prosperity.

Given the primacy of security of the periphery, China's Tibet policy does not pertain to the protection of minority identity and culture but merely secure China's sovereignty over Tibet and integrate the vulnerable periphery to the core. Thus, in the post-1949 era, it repudiated the right of self-determination envisaged in the Russian system. Instead it crafted a minority policy that essentially addressed China's periphery security underscored in the regional autonomy system and ethnic classification project. Further in the post-reform era, Western Development Project unveiled in 2000 was essentially a security driven strategy. It was not formulated to guarantee minority rights and assuage the alienated Tibetan people. Rather all measures were related to usher in material prosperity.

Evidently, a major contention of the Tibetan people is not about attaining material prosperity but to achieve 'Genuine Autonomy' which essentially means upholding the cultural and religious rights of all the Tibetans in China. However, the Chinese leadership defines the Dalia Lama's 'Genuine Autonomy' as 'disguised independence'. More so, to the Chinese leadership 'Genuine Autonomy' is tantamount to loosening of the centralized control and declining

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reach of the state, and thereby weakening the authoritarian Communist party state. As such, Chinese Government has refused to treat the Tibetan issue as a cultural issue. It has castigated the Dalai Lama as a 'splittist' who wants to dismember and throw back China to the dark era of hundred years of humiliation. Rhetorically thus, in 2003, Hu Jintao announced 'Three Insists' that underscore the importance of China's sovereignty over Tibet (adherence to socialism, the CCP leadership and regional autonomy for ethnic minorities). In July 2008 again, in a talk with the Tibetan Task Force Group, China reaffirmed its 'Three Insists' principle.

In January 2009, emphasizing China's sovereignty over Tibet, the TAR legislature passed a resolution to celebrate March 28 as the Serf's Emancipation Day. In 2012, the 18th Party Congress saw no minority representation in the Politburo Standing Committee and the Politburo. Clearly, thus, the Chinese government time and again displays complete apathy to the Tibetan demands and ensures they remain marginalized in the Chinese polity. Under the new leadership of Xi Jinping too no change in minority policy is expected as minority issue would continue to be a strategic issue instead of being an identity and cultural issue. Since China treats Tibet as a strategic issue and not as a cultural issue, the solutions to the Tibetan problem are invariably a security-centric response than an identity-centric one. Quite inevitably then the Tibetan question, which is essentially a quest for Tibetan identity, will remain a formidable challenge to China's periphery security and is likely to remain unresolved.

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