



Research Report General Assembly 4

The question of managing the accessibility
of Tibet as a religious place of worship

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Introduction

For more than a century Tibet and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have been in dispute over the status of the area of Tibet. The People's Republic of China claims that the isolated region has been part of Chinese territory for as long as can be remembered. In contrast, Tibetans believe that Tibet has always been an independent kingdom. The discord has crept into relations between both parties and for over sixty years tensions have been high, leading to numerous armed rebellions and protests. Although the PRC desperately wants to keep hold of Tibet, it is no secret that the government's ideologies and principles clash with the traditional beliefs that the majority of the Tibetan inhabitants follow.

In particular, there are significant differences in the beliefs extolled by Tibetan Buddhism, the region's most dominant religion the ideas put forward by the Chinese government. Since 1949 the PRC has treated Tibetans as second-class citizens. Tibetan Inhabitants have been ejected from their houses and sent to townships so the government can "develop" occupied spaces. Over 6000 Tibetan Monasteries have been destroyed and those that have survived are not being used by monks, but ironically, are used as spiritual attractions for mostly Chinese tourists while they tighten Tibetans' religious freedom. Other spiritual sights have been totally neglected and used as nuclear waste sites. Worst of all, Tibetans do not have freedom of speech, religion or movement. Many passports have been recalled and the borders are closed, trapping Tibetans as their culture and land diminishes.

The Committee

General Assembly 4, mostly referred to as GA4, is one of the four GAs of MUNA 2019. General issues in this committee revolve around special political situations and decolonization. GA4 is a 'normal committee'. This means that resolutions have to be prepared by each delegate. During the debate we will entertain these resolutions as a whole at once. In order to have your own resolution added to the agenda there have to be at least eight co-submitters, who also want your resolution to be discussed. This does not mean that they have to be in full agreement with the content of the resolution.

In the General Assembly all member states have one vote. A simple majority decides on matters. All General Assemblies together have the function and power to discuss questions relating to international peace; they make recommendations for peace settlements, protect human rights and international economic collaboration to name just a few.

In comparison to other committees, the General Assemblies together participate in the Plenary session. This will take place on the last day of the conference, where with all General Assemblies together several passed resolutions are discussed and voted on.

Key Words

Tibetan Buddhism: Branch of Buddhism and the dominating "religion" in Tibet and yet a minority group in the whole of the PRC. Recognize the Dalai Lama as their spiritual leader.

Han Chinese: Largest ethnic group indigenous to China. Consists of 92% of the Chinese population. Many Han Chinese dislike the cultural habits of Tibetan Buddhism.

Chinazation: the act of making people Chinese in character, cultural tradition and religion.

Key Players

The People's Republic of China (PRC): the PRC wants to suppress any Tibetan hint of independence. It strives for the "Chinazation" of Tibet. In order to reach these aims it wants to get rid of ancient Tibetan traditions and religion.

Tibet: Region of China which strives for independence. Has an ancient history of traditions and religion that make the region unique from the rest of China. In contrast to other areas of China, Tibet's dominating religion is Tibetan Buddhism. Although officially under the authority of the Chinese government many inhabitants recognize the Dalai Lama as their spiritual leader. It is important to note that Tibet does not have a seat in the UN as it is not an independent country.

Dalai Lama: the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism and, until the establishment of Chinese communist rule, the spiritual and temporal ruler of Tibet. The current reincarnation was born in 1935 and forced to flee into exile in 1959. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. The Dalai Lama has been the head of the nonviolent opposition to China's occupation of Tibet.

History

In order to understand the conflict between the PRC and Tibet we have to go back to the 20th century. In 1913, Tibet declared its independence from China, now to be recognized by other nations as a distant domain.

However, after World War II, the newly established Chinese communist regime led by Mao Zedong decided that Tibet should be a permanent part of the PRC and so an invasion was launched. In October 1950, forty thousand soldiers marched into the region. The Tibetan government led by the then still teenage Dalai lama was no match for Mao's military and in order to save its people had to make some inevitable concessions. In 1951 Tibetans signed a seventeen-point agreement, reaffirming the PRC's sovereignty over Tibet in return for tolerance of Tibet's political system and more importantly Tibetan Buddhism.

China failed to keep its promises and on-going Tibetan resistance came to a head on 10 March 1959. Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans surrounded the Potala Palace in Lhasa fearing that the Dalai Lama was about to be kidnapped or assassinated. The uprising was brutally suppressed and the Dalai Lama was forced to flee into exile.

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In 1965 the Chinese government established the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). After the start of Mao Zedong's "cultural revolution" in 1966 Tibetan red guards closed monasteries in Tibet, smashed Buddhists statues and forced monks and nuns to return to secular life.

By the time of Mao Zedong's death in August 1976, the PRC had reached rock bottom; wealth, prestige and power reached an all time low; it was time for the PRC to reform on both economical and political grounds. And so by the 1980s the Chinese government had introduced market reforms and had boosted investments while still resisting any move towards greater autonomy, or independence, for Tibet. In 1989 the death of the 10th Panchen Lama, the second most important figure in Tibetan Buddhism, led to days of riots rioting. The Chinese government responded by imposing the martial law on Tibet's capital city Lhasa.

The death of the 10th Panchen Lama led to further religious conflict between Tibet and the PRC as the discussion centred on the true identity of the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen lama, the 11th Panchen Lama. From his position in exile, the Dalai Lama still managed to appoint the next Panchen Lama, a six-year-old boy named Ghedun Choekyi Nyima. However the Chinese government rejected this decision and appointed its own Panchen Lama, a six-year-old boy named Gyaincain Norbu. A mysterious sets of events led to the disappearance of Ghedun Choekyi Nyima who has not been seen in public since 1995. According to the PRC the boy has been taken into "protective custody".

In 2008, protests against Chinese rule escalated into the worst violence Tibet has seen in 20 years. Chinese security forces responded crudely to the, generally peaceful, Tibetan protests. Casualty estimates vary between 23 and 203. This happened just several months before the Beijing Olympic Games.

Current Situation/Conflict

The Tibetan culture is one that does not resemble any other culture in the world. This makes it attractive for tourists but the problem that arises is that tourism benefits at the expense of Tibetan culture and religion. The touristic attraction of Tibet is one romanticized by the Chinese government. Under occupation, Tibetans themselves have little to say on how their country is portrayed and only gain a small amount of the revenue the tourist sector produces.

The opening of the Qinhai-Tibet railway in 2006 allowed for easier access to the remote area of Tibet. As a result, the sector of tourism has seen a rapid increase. From 2006 to 2010, the number of tourists visiting Tibet reached 21.25 million with an average annual growth of 30.6%. This number is so significant that the number of tourists a year now exceeds the TAR population. Many Tibetans claim that the high number of tourists will have a catastrophic effect on Tibetan culture. Tibet advocacy groups say it is accelerating the influx of Han Chinese and threatens its fragile high-altitude environment. The inauguration of the Qinhai-Tibet railway marks a turning point for the PRC's decades-long effort to tame the Tibet Autonomous Region. China's aim is to send as many tourists and entrepreneurs to the TAR as possible. With the new movement of people, the Chinese Government hopes to create a situation where Tibetans are significantly outnumbered by ethnic Han Chinese in

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their own territory making it impossible for separatists, striving for independence, to stage a rebellion against the Chinese Government. In short, the Qinhai-Tibet railway has made the TAR more accessible, which is a big step forward towards the PRC's aim of the "Chinazation" of the TAR.

In contrast to Chinese tourism, movement of the Tibetan inhabitants is restricted. In order to visit sensitive religious areas Tibetans need to have permits while at the same time being monitored by police checkpoints. Furthermore, Tibetans have no automatic right to Chinese passports making travelling internationally virtually impossible.

The PRC has also made efforts to support the vast increase in the number of Chinese tourists. "Redevelopment" work in Lhasa has seen the establishment of shopping malls, car parks and hotels. Projects may improve tourist access to sacred Buddhist sites, but also sideline Tibetan pilgrims and threaten the traditional sanctity of sites.

Historical places and local customs have been reduced to trivial entertainment for tourists. Chinese tourism to Tibet could have a positive impact, promoting communication and understanding between cultures. However, irresponsible marketing and propaganda have dehumanised Tibetans for many Chinese tourists and encouraged them not to take Tibetan culture seriously.

Possible solutions:

The first solution to the problem could be limiting the number of tourists visiting Tibet. By reducing the activity in sightseeing less harm would be done to Tibetan culture and also it would be made easier for the Tibetans to preserve their culture. On top of that the establishment of a Han-Chinese majority would not be possible.

A second way to tackle the issue is by encouraging the protection of certain religious sites. China signed the World Heritage Convention in 1985 meaning they could add sites to the World Heritage List by UNESCO. These sites would then be protected and any party harming these protected areas would face heavy consequences.

Another solution could be the investment in local touristic companies. By protecting the business of small Tibetan entrepreneurs the percentage of revenue produced by the tourist sector that is actually going to the Tibetan people could be increased producing more wealth for the local Tibetans.

Creating an awareness campaign for the diminishing culture and religion in Tibet could be another solution to the problem. In this way foreign and Chinese tourists will see the negative effects of non-Tibetan Buddhists visiting Tibet which will lead to a smaller number of tourists.

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Resolution

General Assembly four is a committee in which all delegates have to prepare their resolutions beforehand. A resolution should give an insight into your country's opinion and its stance on the issue. It should mention possible solutions, and how these solutions can be entertained. A very important note while writing a resolution is that the delegate should only defend its country's own ideologies and not form its own perspective and ideas.

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