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Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016 - China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau) - Tibet

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) and counties in Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Gansu Provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Central Committee oversees Tibet policies. As in other predominantly minority areas of the PRC, ethnic Chinese CCP members held the overwhelming majority of top party, government, police, and military positions in the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Ultimate authority rests with the 25-member Political Bureau (Politburo) of the CCP Central Committee and its seven-member Standing Committee in Beijing, neither of which has any Tibetan members.

Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces.

The government's respect for, and protection of, human rights in the TAR and other Tibetan areas remained poor. Under the professed objectives of controlling border areas, maintaining social stability, combating separatism, and extracting natural resources, the government engaged in the severe repression of Tibet's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage by, among other means, strictly curtailing the civil rights of the Tibetan population, including the freedoms of speech, religion, association, assembly, and movement. The government routinely vilified the Dalai Lama and blamed the "Dalai [Lama] clique" and "other outside forces" for instigating instability.

Other serious human rights abuses included extrajudicial detentions, disappearances, and torture. Many Tibetans and other observers believed that authorities systemically targeted Tibetans for political repression, economic marginalization, and cultural assimilation, as well as educational and employment discrimination. The presence of the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP) and other security forces remained at high levels in many communities on the Tibetan Plateau, particularly in the TAR. Repression was severe throughout the year but increased in the periods before and during politically and religiously sensitive anniversaries and events. Authorities detained individuals in Tibetan areas after they reportedly protested against government or business actions or expressed their support for the Dalai Lama.

The government strictly controlled information about, and access to, the TAR and some key Tibetan areas outside the TAR, making it difficult to determine fully the scope of human rights problems. The Chinese government severely restricted free travel by foreign journalists to Tibetan areas. In addition, the Chinese government harassed or detained Tibetans who spoke to foreign reporters, attempted to provide information to

persons abroad, or communicated information regarding protests or other expressions of discontent through cell phones, e-mail, or the internet. The few visits to the TAR by diplomats and journalists that were allowed were tightly controlled by local authorities. Because of these restrictions, many of the incidents and cases mentioned in this report could not be verified independently.

Disciplinary procedures were opaque, and there was no publicly available information to indicate that security personnel or other authorities were punished for behavior defined under PRC laws and regulations as abuses of power and authority.

Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. There were no reports that officials investigated or punished those responsible for such killings.

In June *Phayul.com* reported that Yudruk Nyima, a villager from Derge (Chinese: Dege) County, Kardze TAP in the Tibetan Region of Kham (Sichuan Province), was detained for reportedly “possessing a gun” and died in custody from injuries sustained through torture. According to local contacts, security forces in the local area raided many villages and monasteries and detained people to prevent them from celebrating the birthday of the Dalai Lama in early July.

Tibetan exiles and other observers believed Chinese authorities released Tibetan political prisoners in poor health to avoid deaths in custody. Lobsang Yeshe, a former village leader, died in a Lhasa hospital after enduring torture, mistreatment, and negligence at the hands of prison authorities, according to a July report by the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy. Authorities detained Lobsang Yeshe in 2014 after he protested against mining operations near his hometown.

In March Chinese authorities abruptly released Jigme Gyatso, a monk of Labrang Monastery who was serving a five-year criminal sentence on separatism charges, and moved him to a hospital in Lanzhou. According to Radio Free Tibet eyewitness reports, the monk was extremely frail due to repeated instances of severe torture, beatings, and poor conditions in the detention facilities.

Disappearance

Authorities in Tibetan areas continued to detain Tibetans arbitrarily for indefinite periods.

On June 30, according to the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, Yeshe Lhakdron, a nun from Dragkar Nunnery in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) TAP in the Tibetan Region of Kham (Sichuan Province), who had been missing since her detention in 2008, reportedly died in police custody due to the effects of torture. Yeshe staged a peaceful protest in 2008 raising slogans such as “long live the Dalai Lama” and “freedom in Tibet.”

The whereabouts of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, Tibetan Buddhism’s second-most prominent figure after the Dalai Lama, remained unknown. Neither he nor his parents have been seen since they were taken away by Chinese authorities in 1995 when he was only six years old.

Torture and Other Cruel and Degrading Treatment

Police and prison authorities employed torture and degrading treatment in dealing with some detainees and prisoners. There were many reports during the year that Chinese officials severely beat, even to the point of death, some Tibetans who were incarcerated or otherwise in custody.

On April 1, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that Tashi, a man from Chamdo TAP in the Tibetan Region of Kham, now administered by the TAR, was detained for unknown reasons just days before the March 10 anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising. Sources reported that Tashi was driven to suicide due to being severely beaten and tortured while in detention.

On April 4, *Phayul.com* reported that Yeshe Dolma, a Tibetan political prisoner serving a 15-year sentence at the TAR’s Drapchi Prison, was transferred to a hospital in Lhasa for urgent treatment. Yeshe was unable to stand without assistance, and sources say her disability was caused by torture and a lack of proper health care in prison. Authorities prohibited Yeshe’s family and friends from meeting her at the hospital.

On May 13, *Phayul.com* reported that Lobsang Choedhar, a monk from Kirti Monastery in the Tibetan Region of Amdo located in Sichuan’s Ngaba TAP, was in critical condition after enduring torture in prison. He was serving a 13-year sentence for calling for the return of the Dalai Lama and release of the Panchen Lama, Gendun

Choekyi Nyima. According to local contacts, calls for the Chinese authorities to release him for medical treatment have been ignored.

In December Jigme Guri, a Tibetan political prisoner who had recently been released from prison, was admitted to a local government hospital in Sangchu County (Xiahe) in the Amdo Region of Tibet (Gansu Province). He had reportedly been subjected on four separate occasions to torture while in prison.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

The number of prisoners in the TAR and Tibetan areas was unknown. There were reports of recently released prisoners permanently disabled or in extremely poor health because of the harsh treatment they endured in prison. Former prisoners reported being isolated in small cells for months at a time and deprived of sleep, sunlight, and adequate food. According to individuals who completed their prison terms during the year, prisoners rarely received medical care except in cases of serious illness. In April the TAR government stated that prisons in the region were tasked with re-educating prisoners who have endangered “state security” to strengthen the fight against separatism. There were many cases of detained and imprisoned persons being denied visitors. As elsewhere in the PRC, authorities did not permit independent monitoring of prisons.

Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Arbitrary arrest and detention was a problem in Tibetan areas. Public security agencies are required by law to notify the relatives or employer of a detained person within 24 hours of the detention, but they often failed to do so when Tibetans and others were detained for political reasons. With a detention warrant, public security officers may legally detain persons throughout the PRC for up to 37 days without formally arresting or charging them. Following the 37-day period, public security officers must either formally arrest or release the detainee. Security officials frequently violated these requirements. It was unclear how many Tibetan detainees were held under forms of detention not subject to judicial review.

In May authorities in Kardze TAP in the Tibetan Region of Kham (Sichuan Province), detained 23-year-old Jampa Gelek after removing him from his monastery. According to RFA, authorities gave no reason for his detention, and he remained incarcerated at year’s end.

In June authorities in Qinghai Province detained for a second time Choesang Gyatso, a monk from Lutsang monastery in the Tibetan Region of Amdo, just one day after authorities had freed him from a month of unexplained detention. Authorities provided no reason for the second detention, and he appeared to remain in detention at the end of the year. He started a civil organization to promote education among young Tibetan nomads and also edited a Tibetan cultural journal.

Denial of Fair Public Trial

Legal safeguards for detained or imprisoned Tibetans were inadequate in both design and implementation. Prisoners in China have the right to request a meeting with a government-appointed attorney, but many Tibetan defendants, particularly political defendants, did not have access to legal representation. In cases that authorities claimed involved “endangering state security” or “separatism,” trials often were cursory and closed. Local sources noted that trials were predominantly conducted in Mandarin with government interpreters providing language services for Tibetan defendants who did not speak Mandarin. Court decisions, proclamations, and other judicial documents, however, were generally not published in Tibetan script.

Trial Procedures

In its annual work report, the TAR High People’s Court stated it firmly fought against separatism and cracked down on the followers of “the 14th Dalai (Lama) clique,” by, among other things, sentencing those who instigated protests, promoted separatism, and supported “foreign hostile forces.”

According to a 2015 report in the government-controlled *Tibet Daily*, only 15 percent of the cadres (government and party officials) working for courts in the TAR had passed the National Legal Qualification Examination with a C grade certificate or higher. The report concluded that judges in the TAR were “strong politically, but weak professionally.” In its 2016 annual work report, the TAR High People’s Court stated that strengthening “political ideology” was the top priority of the court.

Security forces routinely subjected political prisoners and detainees known as “special criminal detainees” to “political re-education” sessions.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

An unknown number of Tibetans were detained, arrested, and sentenced because of their political or religious activity. Authorities held many prisoners in extrajudicial detention centers and never allowed them to appear in public court.

Based on information available from the political prisoner database of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), as of August 1, 650 Tibetan political prisoners were known to be detained or imprisoned, most of them in Tibetan areas. Observers believed the actual number of Tibetan political prisoners and detainees to be much higher, but the lack of access to prisoners and prisons, as well as the dearth of reliable official statistics, made a precise determination difficult. An unknown number of persons continued to be held in detention centers rather than prisons. Of the 650 Tibetan political prisoners tracked by the CECC, 640 were detained in or after March 2008, and 10 were detained prior to March 2008. Of the 640 Tibetan political prisoners who were detained in or after March 2008, 276 were believed or presumed to be detained or imprisoned in Sichuan Province, 201 in the TAR, 95 in Qinghai Province, 67 in Gansu Province, and one in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. There were 156 persons serving known sentences, which ranged from two years to life imprisonment. The average sentence length was eight years and seven months. Of the 156 persons serving known sentences, 69 were monks, nuns, or Tibetan Buddhist reincarnate teachers.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, an influential reincarnate lama and social activist, died in prison in 2015. Authorities immediately cremated the body without an autopsy or traditional religious funeral rites. According to local sources, the top priority for the followers of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was to seek to identify his reincarnation, but officials prohibited his monasteries from conducting the search.

Tibetan Self-Immolations

Three Tibetans reportedly self-immolated during the year, including one Tibetan Buddhist monk and two laypersons, fewer than the seven self-immolations reported in 2015 and significantly fewer than the 83 self-immolations reported in 2012, bringing the total of self-immolations to at least 140 since 2009. Non-Chinese media reports stated that the declining number of reported self-immolations was due to tightened security by authorities and the collective punishment of self-immolators' relatives and associates, as well as the Dalai Lama's public plea to his followers to find other ways to protest against Chinese government repression. Chinese officials in some Tibetan areas withheld public benefits from the family members of self-immolators and ordered friends and monastic personnel to refrain from participating in religious burial rites or mourning activities for self-immolators. According to a RFA report, security officials detained, beat, and tortured the wife and two daughters of Tashi Rabtan after he self-immolated in Gansu Province in December.

Self-immolators reportedly viewed their acts as protests against the government's political and religious oppression. The Chinese government implemented policies that punished friends, relatives, and associates of self-immolators. The Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the Ministry of Public Security's joint 2012 Opinion on Handling Cases of Self-immolation in Tibetan Areas According to Law criminalize various activities associated with self-immolation, including "organizing, plotting, inciting, compelling, luring, instigating, or helping others to commit self-immolation," each of which may be prosecuted as "intentional homicide." In September, 10 public security officers reportedly raided the home of Sangdak Kyab in Sangchu County (Xiahe) in the Amdo Region of Tibet (Gansu Province) and detained him in connection with the role he allegedly played in 2013, transporting the remains of a self-immolator to his family's home to prevent security agents from seizing the corpse.

On September 20, RFA reported that two monks of Labrang Monastery, Jinpa Gyatso and Kelsang Monlam, were sentenced to 18 months in prison in a secret trial by a court in Sangchu (Chinese: Xiahe) County in the Tibetan Region of Amdo (Gansu Province) for involvement in a 2015 self-immolation of another monk. The monks were arrested in June for sharing information and pictures of the self-immolation. Their families were not informed of the charges or of the monks' location after the arrests.

Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

Since 2015 the TAR has strengthened the punishment of Communist Party members who follow the Dalai Lama, secretly harbor religious beliefs, make pilgrimages to India, or send their children to study with Tibetans in exile. Authorities continued to monitor private correspondence and search private homes and businesses for photographs of the Dalai Lama and other politically forbidden items. Police examined the cell phones of TAR residents to search for "reactionary music" from India and photographs of the Dalai Lama. Authorities also questioned and detained some individuals who disseminated writings and photographs over the internet.

On November 15, TAR CCP secretary Wu Yingjie outlined his plan to protect “social stability” that included a vow to “strictly implement a real-name user identification system for landline telephones, mobile phones, and the internet and continuously intensify the launching of attacks and specialized campaigns to counter and ferret out ‘Tibetan independence’ and promote the proliferation of party newspaper, journals, broadcasts, and television [programs] into every home in every village in order to completely stop infiltration by the hostile forces and the Dalai clique.”

On February 24, *Phayul.com* reported that Gomar Choephel, a Tibetan monk from Rongwo Monastery in the Tibetan Region of Amdo (Qinghai Province), was sentenced to two years in prison in January for possessing a photograph of the Dalai Lama and sharing it on social media.

On December 6, a court in the Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in the Tibetan Region of Amdo (Sichuan province) sentenced nine Tibetans to prison for terms ranging from five to 14 years for involvement in celebrations of the Dalai Lama’s 80th birthday in 2015. Three of the nine, who were senior monks from Kirti Monastery, received the longest sentences of between 12 and 14 years each.

Freedom of Speech and Press

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Tibetans who spoke to foreign reporters, attempted to provide information to persons outside the country, or communicated information regarding protests or other expressions of discontent through cell phones, e-mail, or the internet were subject to harassment or detention under “crimes of undermining social stability and inciting separatism.” During the year authorities in the TAR and other Tibetan areas sought to strengthen control over electronic media and to punish individuals for the ill-defined crime of “creating and spreading of rumors.” According to official news reports in January, TAR officials punished 141 individuals for “creating and spreading rumors” online between June 2015 and January.

In March public security authorities charged Tashi Wangchuk, an entrepreneur and education advocate from Jyekundo in the Tibetan Region of Kham, now part of the Yushu TAP in Qinghai Province, with “inciting separatism,” according to *The New York Times*. Tashi’s lawyer told the *Times* in August that public security case files he had reviewed indicated that the charge was based on Tashi’s participation in a late 2015 *Times* report about the lack of Tibetan language education in Tibetan areas. Tashi was detained in January, but his family members were not informed until late March, and he remained in detention awaiting trial at the year’s end. Tashi had no known record of advocating Tibetan independence or separatism, according to the *Times*, and has denied the charges against him.

On May 9, the Wenchuan County People’s Court sentenced Jo Lobsang Jamyang, a monk at Kirti Monastery and a popular writer who addressed issues such as environmental protection and self-immolation protests, to seven years and six months in prison on charges of “leaking state secrets” and “engaging in separatist activities.” The trial was closed, and his family and lawyers were barred from attending. Soon after he was detained in April 2015, 20 Tibetan writers jointly called for his release and praised his writings. Authorities held Jamyang incommunicado and reportedly tortured him during more than a year of pretrial detention.

On May 14, authorities detained Jamyang Lodroe, a monk from Tsinang Monastery in Ngaba TAP, without providing any information about his whereabouts or the reason for his detention to the monastery or to his family. Local sources told RFA reporters that it was widely believed that authorities detained Lodroe on account of his online publications.

Press and Media Freedoms: The government continued to severely restrict travel by foreign journalists. Foreign journalists may visit the TAR only after obtaining a special travel permit from the government, and this permission was rarely granted. The Foreign Correspondents Club of China’s annual report stated that reporting from “Tibet proper remains off-limits to foreign journalists.” This same report noted that many foreign journalists were also told that reporting in Tibetan areas outside the TAR was “restricted or prohibited.”

Authorities tightly controlled journalists who worked for the domestic press and could hire and fire them on the basis of political reliability. In February TAR Television announced job vacancies with one of the listed job requirements to “be united with the regional party committee in political ideology and fighting against separatism.” CCP propaganda authorities remained in charge of local journalist accreditation in the TAR and required journalists working in the TAR to display “loyalty to the Party and motherland.” The deputy head of the TAR Propaganda Department simultaneously holds a prominent position in the TAR Journalist Association, a state-controlled professional association to which local journalists must belong.

Violence and Harassment: Chinese authorities arrested and sentenced many Tibetan writers, intellectuals, and singers for “inciting separatism.” In February the Malho (Hainan) Prefecture Intermediate People’s Court in Qinghai Province sentenced Druklo (pen name: Shokjang), a writer and blogger from Labrang in the Tibetan Region of Amdo, to three years in prison for “inciting separatism.” According to various sources, Shokjang wrote poetry and prose about Chinese government policies in Tibetan areas that enjoyed significant readership.

among Tibetans. Chinese security officials took Shokjang from the monastic center of Rebkong in March 2015, and no information was known about his welfare or whereabouts until the sentencing almost a year later.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Domestic journalists were not allowed to report on repression in Tibetan areas. Authorities promptly censored the postings of bloggers who did so, and the authors sometimes faced punishment.

Since the establishment of the CCP's Central Leading Small Group for Internet Security and Informatization in 2014, the TAR Party Committee Information Office has further tightened the control of a full range of social media platforms. According to multiple contacts, security officials often cancelled WeChat accounts carrying "sensitive information," such as discussions about Tibetan language education, and interrogated the account owners. Many sources also reported that it was almost impossible to register websites promoting Tibetan culture and language in the TAR.

The Chinese government continued to jam radio broadcasts of Voice of America and RFA's Tibetan and Chinese-language services in some Tibetan areas as well as the Voice of Tibet, an independent radio station based in Norway. As part of a regular campaign cracking down on unauthorized radio and television channels, the TAR Department of Communications conducted an investigation in the Lhasa area in June and found zero "illegal radio programs."

According to multiple sources, authorities in Qinghai Province confiscated or destroyed "illegal" satellite dishes in many Tibetan areas. In addition to maintaining strict censorship of print and online content in Tibetan areas, Chinese authorities sought to censor the expression of views or distribution of information related to Tibet in countries outside the PRC. In February the PRC ambassador to Bangladesh pressured organizers of the Dhaka Art Summit to remove an exhibit that displayed the handwritten final writings of five Tibetans who had self-immolated in protest of Chinese government repression.

National Security: In 2015 China enacted a new National Security Law that includes provisions regarding the management of ethnic minorities and religion. The PRC frequently blamed "hostile foreign forces" for creating instability in Tibetan areas and cited the need to protect "national security" and "fight against separatism" as justifications for its policies, including censorship policies, in Tibetan areas.

Internet Freedom

Authorities curtailed cell phone and Internet service in the TAR and other Tibetan areas, sometimes for weeks or even months at a time, during periods of unrest and political sensitivity, such as the March anniversaries of the 1959 and 2008 protests, "Serf Emancipation Day," and around the Dalai Lama's birthday in July. When Internet service was restored, authorities closely monitored the Internet throughout Tibetan areas. Reports of authorities searching cell phones they suspected of containing suspicious content were widespread. Many individuals in the TAR and other Tibetan areas reported receiving official warnings after using their cell phones to exchange what the government deemed to be sensitive information.

In February the head of the TAR Party Committee Internet Information Office asserted that "the Internet is the key ideological battlefield between the TAR Party Committee and the 14th Dalai (Lama) clique."

In November the National People's Congress Standing Committee passed a cybersecurity law that further strengthened the legal mechanisms available to security agencies to surveil and control content online. Some observers noted that provisions of the law, such as Article 12, could disproportionately affect Tibetans and other ethnic minorities. Article 12 criminalizes using the internet to commit a wide range of ill-defined crimes of a political nature, such as "harming national security," "damaging national unity," "propagating extremism," "inciting ethnic hatred," "disturbing social order," and "harming the public interest." The law also codifies the practice of large-scale internet network shutdowns in response to "major [public] security incidents," which public security authorities in Tibetan areas have done for years without a clear basis in law. A work conference held in Lhasa on November 8 urged the TAR and other provinces with Tibetan areas to step up coordination in managing the internet.

Throughout the year, authorities blocked users in China from accessing foreign-based, Tibet-related websites critical of official government policy in Tibetan areas. Well-organized computer-hacking attacks originating from China harassed Tibet activists and organizations outside China.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Authorities in many Tibetan areas required professors and students at institutions of higher education to attend regular political education sessions, particularly during politically sensitive months, in an effort to prevent "separatist" political and religious activities on campus. Authorities frequently encouraged Tibetan academics to

participate in government propaganda efforts, such as making public speeches supporting government policies. Academics who refused to cooperate with such efforts faced diminished prospects for promotion.

Academics in the PRC who publicly criticized CCP policies on Tibetan affairs faced official reprisal. The government controlled curricula, texts, and other course materials as well as the publication of historically or politically sensitive academic books. Authorities frequently denied Tibetan academics permission to travel overseas for conferences and academic or cultural exchanges. Authorities in Tibetan areas regularly banned the sale and distribution of music they deemed to have sensitive political content.

In May senior officials of the state-run TAR Academy of Social Science encouraged scholars to maintain “a correct political and academic direction” and held a conference to “improve scholars’ political ideology” and “fight against separatists.”

Policies promoting planned urban economic growth, rapid infrastructure development, the influx of non-Tibetans to traditionally Tibetan areas, expansion of the tourism industry, forced resettlement of nomads and farmers, and the weakening of both Tibetan language education in public schools and religious education in monasteries continued to disrupt traditional living patterns and customs.

Tibetan and Mandarin Chinese are official languages in the TAR, and both languages appeared on some, but not all, public and commercial signs. Inside official buildings and businesses, including banks, post offices, and hospitals, signage in Tibetan was frequently lacking, and in many instances forms and documents were available only in Mandarin. Mandarin was used for most official communications and was the predominant language of instruction in public schools in many Tibetan areas. Private printing businesses in Chengdu needed special government approval to print in the Tibetan language.

A small number of public schools in the TAR continued to teach mathematics in the Tibetan language, but in June the *Tibet Post* reported that TAR officials have replaced Tibetan language mathematics textbooks in all regional schools with Mandarin versions. Sources reported that WeChat users in the TAR discussing the issue were subsequently visited by public security officers and given warnings.

According to sources, there were previously 20 Tibetan language schools or workshops for local children operated by Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Sichuan Province’s Kardze TAP. After the 2015 release of the Kardze TAP Relocation Regulation for Minors in Monasteries, authorities forced 15 of these schools to close and relocated their students to government-run schools.

The Kardze TAP has the highest illiteracy rate (above 30 percent) in Sichuan Province, compared with a national rate of 4 to 5 percent. Despite the illiteracy problem, in late April the central government ordered the destruction of much of Larung Gar, the largest Tibetan Buddhist education center, a focal point for promoting both Tibetan and Chinese literacy.

China’s Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law states that “schools (classes and grades) and other institutions of education where most of the students come from minority nationalities shall, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use their languages as the media of instruction.” Despite guarantees of cultural and linguistic rights, many primary, middle, high school, and college students had limited access to Tibetan language instruction and textbooks, particularly in the areas of modern education.

China’s most prestigious universities provided no instruction in Tibetan or other ethnic minority languages, although classes teaching the Tibetan language were available at a small number of universities. “Nationalities” universities, established to serve ethnic minority students and ethnic Chinese students interested in ethnic minority subjects, offered Tibetan language instruction only in courses focused on the study of the Tibetan language or culture. Mandarin was used in courses for jobs that required technical skills and qualifications.

Freedom of Assembly and Association

Even in areas officially designated as “autonomous,” Tibetans generally lacked the right to organize and play a meaningful role in the protection of their cultural heritage and unique natural environment. Tibetans often faced intimidation and arrest if they protested against policies or practices they found objectionable. A 2015 RFA report stated that authorities in Rebkong County in the Tibetan Region of Amdo, now administered under Qinghai Province, circulated a list of unlawful activities. The list included “illegal associations formed in the name of the Tibetan language, the environment, and education.” Sources in the area reported that this list remained in force and no new associations have been formed since the list was published.

In February 2015 public security officials in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, detained a group of Tibetans who were peacefully protesting the government’s seizure of land in Zoige County in the Tibetan Region of Amdo, now administered by Sichuan, outside a meeting of the Sichuan Provincial People’s Congress. In April four of these Tibetans were sentenced to prison terms of two to three years.

On June 23, a protest by Tibetans on Qinghai Lake over the demolition of unregistered restaurants and guest houses was violently dispersed by security forces, leading to the arrest of five demonstrators and the injury of at least eight others. Authorities decreed that these small businesses were illegal and needed to be torn down and that residents should leave the area, which was a popular tourist location. Local Tibetans likened it to a “land grab” meant to benefit ethnic Chinese at their expense.

At the Sixth Tibet Work Forum in August 2015, the CCP ordered a large-scale campaign to expel students and demolish living quarters at Larung Gar, the world’s largest center for the study of Tibetan Buddhism. The expulsion and demolition campaign commenced in July. According to a local CCP directive, authorities must reduce the resident population to no more than 5,000 by September 2017. Before the campaign began, the population at Larung Gar was estimated to range between 10,000 and 30,000. In July authorities banned foreign tourists from visiting the area.

In August authorities in the Kardze TAP in the Tibetan Region of Kham reportedly prevented Tibetans from holding a religious gathering and traditional horse race festival after Dargye Monastery, the organizer of the events, and local residents refused a government order to fly the PRC national flag at the two events, at the monastery, and from residents’ homes.

Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

Freedom of Movement

Chinese law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, the government severely restricted travel and freedom of movement for Tibetans, particularly Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns.

In-country Movement: Freedom of movement for all Tibetans, but particularly for monks and nuns, remained severely restricted throughout the TAR, as well as in other Tibetan areas. The PAP and local public security bureaus set up roadblocks and checkpoints on major roads, in cities, and on the outskirts of cities and monasteries, particularly around sensitive dates. Tibetans traveling in monastic attire were subject to extra scrutiny by police at roadside checkpoints and at airports.

Authorities sometimes banned Tibetans, particularly monks and nuns, from going outside the TAR and from traveling to the TAR without first obtaining special permission from multiple government offices. Many Tibetans reported encountering difficulties in obtaining the required permissions. This not only made it difficult for Tibetans to make pilgrimages to sacred religious sites in the TAR, but also obstructed land-based travel to India through Nepal. Tibetans from outside the TAR who traveled to Lhasa also reported that authorities there required them to surrender their national identification cards and notify authorities of their plans in detail on a daily basis. These requirements were not applied to ethnic Chinese visitors to the TAR.

Even outside the TAR, many Tibetan monks and nuns reported that it remained difficult to travel beyond their home monasteries for religious and traditional Tibetan education, with officials frequently denying permission for visiting monks to stay at a monastery for religious education. Implementation of this restriction was especially rigorous in the TAR, and it undermined the traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice of seeking advanced teachings from a select number of senior teachers based at major monasteries scattered across the Tibetan Plateau.

Foreign Travel: Many Tibetans continued to report difficulties in obtaining new or renewing existing passports. Sources reported that Tibetans and other minorities had to provide far more extensive documentation than other Chinese citizens when applying for a Chinese passport. In the TAR, a scholar needs to get about seven stamps with signatures from various government offices to apply for a passport, in addition to other standard required documentation. For Tibetans, the passport application process could take years and frequently ended in rejection. Some Tibetans reported they were able to obtain passports only after paying substantial bribes. Tibetans continued to encounter substantial difficulties and obstacles in traveling to India for religious, educational, and other purposes. Individuals also reported instances of local authorities revoking their passports after they had returned to China.

In November Chinese officials in the Tibetan Regions of Kham and Amdo under the administration of Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu Provinces visited the homes of Tibetan passport holders and confiscated their documents, according to an RFA report. Officials claimed the passports were collected in order to affix new seals on them, but Tibetans suspected the timing was intended to make it impossible for them to attend an important religious ceremony known as the Kalachakra, which the Dalai Lama planned to conduct in India in January 2017. Additional reports in December indicated that travel agencies in China were told explicitly by local authorities to cancel trips to India and Nepal during this same period. The apparent travel ban also reportedly extended to

ethnic Chinese travelers. Tibetans who had traveled to Nepal and planned to continue on to India reported that Chinese officials visited their homes in Tibet and threatened their relatives if they did not return immediately. Sources reported that explicit punishments included placing family members on a blacklist, which could lead to the loss of a government job or difficulty in finding employment; expulsion of children from the public education system; and revocation of national identification cards, thereby preventing access to other social services, such as health care and government aid.

Tight border controls sharply limited the number of persons crossing the border into Nepal and India. In 2015, 89 Tibetan refugees transited Nepal through the Tibetan Reception Center, run by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Kathmandu, en route to permanent settlement in India. This compared with 80 in 2014, down from 171 in 2013 and 242 in 2012.

The government restricted the movement of Tibetans in the period before and during sensitive anniversaries and events and increased controls over border areas at these times. In February there were reports that travel agents in Chengdu were forbidden to sell package overseas tours to Tibetans for the months of March and July, the periods of time around Tibet Uprising Day (March 10) and the Dalai Lama's birthday (July 6).

The government regulated travel by foreigners to the TAR, a restriction not applied to any other provincial-level entity in the PRC. In accordance with a 1989 regulation, foreign visitors had to first obtain an official confirmation letter issued by the TAR government before entering the TAR. Most tourists obtained such letters by booking tours through officially registered travel agencies. In the TAR, a government-designated tour guide had to accompany foreign tourists at all times. It was rare for foreigners to obtain permission to enter the TAR by road. In what has become an annual practice, authorities banned many foreign tourists from the TAR in the period before and during the March anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising. Foreign tourists sometimes also faced restrictions traveling to Tibetan areas outside the TAR.

The decline in the number of foreign tourists to the TAR was more than offset by an increase in domestic ethnic Chinese visitors to the TAR. Unlike foreign tourists, Chinese tourists did not need special permits to visit the TAR.

Officials continued to tightly restrict the access of foreign diplomats and journalists to the TAR. Foreign officials were able to travel to the TAR only with the permission of the TAR Foreign Affairs Office, and even then only on closely chaperoned trips arranged by that office. With the exception of a few highly controlled trips, authorities repeatedly denied requests for international journalists to visit the TAR and other Tibetan areas (see section on Freedom of Speech and Press).

In September *The Washington Post* reported that "the Tibet Autonomous Region, as China calls central Tibet, is harder to visit as a journalist than North Korea. There were only a handful of government tours organized for journalists in the past decade, all closely controlled."

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

According to the law, Tibetans and other Chinese citizens have the right to vote in some local elections. In practice the Chinese government severely restricted its citizens' ability to participate in any meaningful elections.

In 2015 RFA reported that security forces in Kyangchu Village in Qinghai Province detained nearly 70 Tibetans who had protested against local officials' insistence that villagers vote for the local government's preferred candidate in a village election. Sources reported that those detainees were subsequently released, but they were prohibited from voting in village elections.

Since 2015 the TAR and many Tibetan areas have reinforced implementation of the Regulation for Village Committee Management, which stipulates that the primary condition for participating in any local election is the "willingness to resolutely fight against separatism;" in some cases, this condition is interpreted to require candidates to denounce the Dalai Lama. Many villagers in Tibetan areas of Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces expressed frustration that the best candidates for village heads were unwilling to run under those conditions. According to many scholars, the regulation led to high turnover during the year: As a result, 90 percent of TAR township and village-level leaders as well as delegates to the local People's Congress, were new; the same was true for 70 percent of those in Qinghai Province.

Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corrupt acts by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively in Tibetan areas, and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption in Tibetan areas during the year.

Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: There was no confirmed information on the incidence of rape or domestic violence.

Reproductive Rights: Population and birth planning policies permitted Tibetans and members of some other minority groups to have more children than Han Chinese. Prostitution involving local women in Tibetan areas was not uncommon. Nongovernmental organizations and health experts expressed serious concern about the growing prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the TAR and other Tibetan areas.

Discrimination: There were no formal restrictions on women's participation in the political system, and women held many lower-level government positions. They were, however, underrepresented at the provincial and prefectural levels of government.

According to official reports, female government and party officials in the TAR have accounted for 41 percent of the TAR's total cadres since 2012. During the year the TAR was the only provincial-level jurisdiction in the PRC that did not have at least one female cadre in its provincial CCP standing committee.

Children

Many rural Tibetan areas have implemented China's nationwide "centralized education" policy, which has resulted in the closure of many village and monastic schools and the transfer of students, including elementary school students, to boarding schools in towns and cities. Reports indicated many of the boarding schools did not adequately care for and supervise their young students. This policy also resulted in diminished acquisition of the Tibetan language and culture by removing Tibetan children from their homes and communities where the Tibetan language is used.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Ethnic Minorities

Although the 2010 TAR census figures showed that Tibetans made up 90.5 percent of the TAR's permanently registered population, official figures did not include a large number of long-, medium-, and short-term ethnic Chinese migrants, such as cadres, skilled and unskilled laborers, military and paramilitary troops, and their respective dependents. Tibetans continued to make up nearly 98 percent of those registered as permanent residents in rural areas, according to official census figures.

Migrants to the TAR and other parts of the Tibetan Plateau were overwhelmingly concentrated in urban areas. Government policies to subsidize economic development often benefited ethnic Chinese migrants more than Tibetans. In many predominantly Tibetan cities across the Tibetan Plateau, ethnic Chinese or Hui migrants owned and managed most of the small businesses, restaurants, and retail shops.

According to a December CNN report, Tibetans in the TAR were paid less than Han Chinese migrants there. A Tibetan laborer was quoted indicating Tibetan laborers received on average two-thirds the pay of ethnic Chinese for the same work.

Observers continued to express concern that development projects and other central government policies disproportionately benefited non-Tibetans and resulted in a considerable influx of Han Chinese and Hui persons into the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Many major infrastructure projects across the Tibetan Plateau were engineered and implemented by large state-owned enterprises based in other provinces, and they were managed and staffed by professionals and low-wage temporary migrant workers from other provinces rather than by local residents.

Economic and social exclusion was a major source of discontent among a varied cross section of Tibetans. Some Tibetans continued to report discrimination in employment. Some Tibetans reported it was more difficult for Tibetans than ethnic Chinese to obtain permits and loans to open businesses. Restrictions on both local NGOs that received foreign funding and international NGOs that provided assistance to Tibetan communities increased during the year, resulting in a decrease of beneficial NGO programs in the TAR and other Tibetan areas.

The government continued its campaign to resettle Tibetan nomads into urban areas and newly created communities in rural areas across the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Despite a January 2014 Xinhua News Agency report that claimed the TAR's eight-year nomad resettlement program was officially completed at the end of 2013, there were new reports of compulsory resettlement. Improving housing conditions, health care, and education for Tibet's poorest persons were among the stated goals of resettlement, although there was a pattern of settling herders near townships and roads and away from monasteries, which were the traditional providers of community and social services. A requirement that herders bear a substantial part of the resettlement costs often forced resettled families into debt.

Although a 2015 media report noted that Tibetans and other minority ethnic groups made up 70 percent of government employees in the TAR, the top CCP position of TAR party secretary continued to be held by a Han Chinese, and the corresponding positions in the vast majority of all TAR counties were also held by Han Chinese. Within the TAR, Han Chinese also continued to hold a disproportionate number of the top security, military, financial, economic, legal, judicial, and educational positions. Han Chinese were party secretaries in eight of the nine TAPs, which are located in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces. One TAP in Qinghai Province had a Tibetan party secretary. Authorities strictly prohibited Tibetans holding government and CCP positions from openly worshipping at monasteries or otherwise publicly practicing their religion.

Government propaganda against alleged Tibetan "proindependence forces" contributed to Chinese societal discrimination against ordinary Tibetans. Many Tibetan monks and nuns chose to wear nonreligious clothing to avoid harassment when traveling outside their monasteries and throughout China. Some Tibetans reported that taxi drivers throughout China refused to stop for them and hotels refused to give them rooms.