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2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: China (Tibet)

Executive Summary

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) and counties in Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Gansu are 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, Han 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 had any Tibetan members.

Civilian authorities maintained control over the security forces.

Significant human rights issues included: forced disappearances; torture; arbitrary detention; political prisoners; censorship and website blocking; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; severe restrictions on religious freedom; severe restrictions on freedom of movement; and restrictions on political participation.

The government strictly controlled information about, and access to, the TAR and some Tibetan areas outside the TAR. The PRC government harassed or detained Tibetans as punishment for speaking to foreigners, attempting to provide information to persons abroad, or communicating information regarding protests or other expressions of discontent through cell phones, email, or the internet, and placed restrictions on their freedom of movement.

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

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

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

b. Disappearance

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

Lodoe Gyatso was arrested outside the Potala Palace in January 2018 and has not been seen since. In November 2018 sources reported Lodoe had been sentenced to 18 years in prison, but officials insisted his case was a state secret that could not be discussed. His whereabouts and condition were unknown.

Thubpa, a monk from Ngaba County, Sichuan, was detained in late 2017 and has not been heard from since. He had previously served 18 months in prison for burning a Chinese flag in protest in 2008. No charges have been announced and his whereabouts were unknown.

The whereabouts of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the second-most prominent figure after the Dalai Lama in Tibetan Buddhism’s Gelug school, remained unknown. Neither he nor his parents have been seen since PRC authorities disappeared them in 1995, when he was six years old.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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According to credible sources, police and prison authorities employed torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment in dealing with some detainees and prisoners. There were reports during the year PRC officials severely beat some Tibetans who were incarcerated or otherwise in custody. Such beatings reportedly led to death.

On May 1, Yeshe Gyatso, 50, died in Rebkong County of Malho TAP, Qinghai, following his release from prison where he was reportedly beaten and tortured. Authorities had arrested him in 2008 for taking part in peaceful protests against PRC policies in Tibet.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and potentially life threatening due to physical abuse and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

There were reports of recently released prisoners who were permanently disabled or in extremely poor health because of the harsh treatment they endured in prison (see Political Prisoners and Detainees subsection below). 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 in recent

years, prisoners rarely received medical care except in cases of serious illness. There were many cases in which officials denied visitors access to detained and imprisoned persons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Arbitrary arrest and detention remained serious problems. Public security agencies are required by law to notify the relatives or employer of a detained person within 24 hours of their detention, but they often failed to do so when Tibetans and others were detained for political reasons. Public security officers may legally detain persons throughout the PRC for up to 37 days without formally arresting or charging them. Criminal detention beyond 37 days requires approval of a formal arrest by the procuratorate, but in cases pertaining to “national security, terrorism, and major bribery,” the law permits up to six months of incommunicado detention without formal arrest. After formally arresting a suspect, public security authorities are authorized to detain a suspect for up to an additional seven months while the case is investigated. After the completion of an investigation, the procuratorate can detain a suspect an additional 45 days while determining whether to file criminal charges. If charges are filed, authorities can detain a suspect for an additional 45 days before beginning judicial proceedings. Security officials frequently violated these legal requirements, with pretrial detention periods of more than a year being a common occurrence. It was unclear how many Tibetan detainees held by authorities under various forms of detention were not subject to judicial review.

On April 29, Wangchen, Lobsang, and Yonten (reports only indicated the use of one name) from Sershul County of Kardze TAP, Sichuan, were detained for praying for the release of the 11th Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and for his reunification with the Dalai Lama in Tibet. The Sershul County People’s Court sentenced Wangchen to four years and six months in prison. Authorities fined Lobsang and Yonten 15,000 yuan (\$2,140) and ordered them to attend six months of political re-education classes.

Lobsang Thamkhe and Lobsang Dorjee, both monks at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba County, Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, were detained in 2018 without stated cause. On July 31, Thamkhe was convicted on undisclosed charges and sentenced to four years’ imprisonment. Dorjee’s whereabouts and the reasons for his detention were unknown.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Legal safeguards for detained or imprisoned Tibetans were inadequate in both design and implementation. Criminal suspects in the PRC have the right to hire a lawyer or other defense representation, but many Tibetan defendants, particularly those facing politically motivated charges, did not have access to legal representation. While some Tibetan lawyers are licensed in Tibetan areas, observers reported they were often unwilling to defend individuals in front of Han Chinese judges and prosecutors due to fear of reprisals or disbarment. In cases that authorities claimed involved “endangering state security” or “separatism,” trials often were cursory and closed. Local sources noted trials were predominantly conducted in Mandarin, with government interpreters

provided for Tibetan defendants who did not speak Mandarin. Court decisions, proclamations, and other judicial documents, however, generally were not published in Tibetan.

Trial Procedures

In a report published in January, the TAR High People’s Court reportedly sentenced 25 persons for supporting the Dalai Lama, spreading reactionary information, and inciting separatism. Details of the trial proceedings were unknown.

In May officials in Nyintri City, TAR, announced the local court would hire 39 court clerks. Among the requirements for new employees were loyalty to CCP leadership and a critical attitude towards the Dalai Lama.

Tibetan language activist Tashi Wangchuk, arrested in 2016, has not been granted access to a lawyer since his conviction in May 2018. Attorney access was limited prior to his trial, and petitions and motions to appeal the verdict filed by his lawyer during the year were not accepted by the government, despite provisions for such requests in the PRC legal system.

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, or sentenced because of their political or religious activities. Individuals detained for political or religious reasons were often held on national security charges, which had looser restrictions on the length of pretrial detention. Many political detainees were therefore held without trial far longer than other types of detainees. Authorities held many prisoners in extrajudicial detention centers without charge and never allowed them to appear in public court.

The U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China examined publicly available information, and as of November 7, its Political Prisoner Database (PPD) contained 273 records of Tibetans known or believed to be detained or imprisoned by PRC authorities in violation of international human rights standards. Of the 115 cases for which there was available information on sentencing, punishment ranged from 15 months’ to life imprisonment. The PPD is believed to contain only a small fraction of the actual number of political prisoners due to Chinese government censorship, and a change in the number of PPD records compared with previous years does not necessarily reflect a change in the human rights situation.

Politically Motivated Reprisal Against Individuals Located Outside the Country

Tibetans seeking asylum in neighboring countries were sometimes repatriated to China, with reports citing pressure by the PRC as a main cause for the repatriation. There were credible reports that the PRC put heavy pressure on the government of Nepal to approve an extradition treaty in which Nepal would commit to forcibly returning Tibetan refugees facing criminal prosecution in the PRC. While the Government of Nepal deferred the bill amid reported concerns about sovereignty infringement and the safety of Tibetan refugees, the government signed a mutual legal assistance treaty with China in October. Rights groups expressed concerns that the PRC could use it to target Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

Tightened border controls sharply limited the number of Tibetans crossing the border from China into Nepal and India. The PRC government at times compelled Tibetans located in China to pressure their family members seeking asylum overseas to return to China.

Authorities in Tamil Nadu State, India, detained approximately 40 Tibetans, including the leader of the Tibetan Youth Congress, as “preventative arrests” ahead of the October 2019 state visit by PRC president Xi Jinping. The government of Nepal also closed monasteries during Xi’s visit in October, despite no protests being planned. The Nepali government also refused requests by Tibetan residents for a public celebration on the Dalai Lama’s birthday. When Tibetan Buddhists held private events in the largest settlement in Kathmandu, police intervened to stop the celebration.

Tibetan Self-Immolations

One case of self-immolation was reported in November. There have been 156 known immolations since 2009, more than half of which took place in 2012. Local contacts reported the decline in reported self-immolations was due to tightened security by authorities, the collective punishment of self-immolators’ relatives and associates, and the Dalai Lama’s public plea to his followers to find other ways to protest 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.

Self-immolators reportedly viewed their acts as protests against the government’s political and religious oppression. According to multiple reports, the law criminalizes 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.”

On November 26, 24-year-old former monk Yonten self-immolated and died in Meruma Township, Ngaba County, Sichuan.

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

The TAR regional government punished CCP members who followed the Dalai Lama, secretly harbored religious beliefs, made pilgrimages to India, or sent their children to study with Tibetans in exile. Authorities continued electronically and manually to monitor private correspondence and to 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.

The “grid system” (also known as the “double-linked household system”) continued. The grid system involves grouping households and establishments and encouraging them to report problems in other households, including monetary problems and transgressions, to the government. Authorities reportedly rewarded individuals with money and other forms of compensation for reporting on others. While this system allows for greater provision of social services to those who need them, it also allows authorities to more easily control those it considers “extremists” and “splittists.” During the year maximum rewards for information leading to the arrests of social media users deemed disloyal to the government increased to RMB 300,000 (\$42,800), six times the per capita GDP of the TAR.

According to contacts in the TAR, Tibetans frequently received telephone calls from security officials ordering them to remove from their cell phones photographs, articles, and information on international contacts the government deemed sensitive. Security officials visited the residences of those who did not comply with such orders.

The TAR Communist Party also launched specialized propaganda campaigns to counter “Tibetan independence” and undermine popular support for the Dalai Lama. Media reports indicated that in some areas, households were required to have photographs of President Xi Jinping placed in prominent positions in private homes and were subject to inspections and fines for noncompliance. The PRC’s continuing campaign against organized crime also targeted supporters of the Dalai Lama, who were considered by police to be members of a criminal organization.

In July international media reported local officials detained and beat a number of Tibetan villagers from Palyul County of Kardze TAP, Sichuan, for possessing photographs of the Dalai Lama after raids on their residences.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

Freedom of Expression: Tibetans who spoke to foreigners or foreign reporters, attempted to provide information to persons outside the country, or communicated information regarding protests or other expressions of discontent including via mobile phones and internet-based communications, 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 vaguely defined crime of “creating

and spreading rumors.” Supporting the CCP, criticizing the Dalai Lama, and “not creating and spreading rumors” were some of the major requirements Tibetans had to fulfill to apply for jobs and receive access to government benefits.

Media reports in October noted that advertisements for teaching positions within the TAR required applicants to “align ideologically, politically, and in action with the CCP Central Committee,” “oppose any splittist tendencies,” and “expose and criticize the Dalai Lama.” The advertisements explained that all applicants were subject to a political review prior to employment.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: Foreign journalists may visit the TAR only after obtaining a special travel permit from the government, and authorities rarely granted this permission.

Authorities tightly controlled journalists who worked for the domestic press and could hire and fire them based on assessments of their political reliability. In April the *Shannan Newspaper*, a daily newspaper in Lhoka City, TAR, included in a listing for new positions the requirement that employees “resolutely implement the party’s line, principles, policies, and political stance, fight against separatism, and safeguard the motherland’s unity and ethnic unity.” CCP propaganda authorities remained in charge of 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: PRC authorities arrested and sentenced many Tibetan writers, intellectuals, and singers for “inciting separatism.” Numerous prominent Tibetan political writers, including Jangtse Donkho, Kelsang Jinpa, Buddha, Tashi Rabten, Arik Dolma Kyab, Gangkye Drupa Kyab, and Shojkhang (also known as Druklo), reported security officers closely monitored them following their releases from prison between 2013 and 2019 and often ordered them to return to police stations for further interrogation. In addition, authorities banned some writers from publishing and prohibited them from receiving services and benefits such as government jobs, bank loans, passports, and membership in formal organizations.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Authorities prohibited domestic journalists from reporting on repression in Tibetan areas. Authorities promptly censored the postings of bloggers and users of WeChat who did so, and the authors sometimes faced punishment.

The TAR Internet and Information Office maintained tight control of a full range of social media platforms. According to multiple observers, 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 it was almost impossible to register with the government, as required by law, websites promoting Tibetan culture and language in the TAR.

The PRC continued to disrupt radio broadcasts of Radio Free Asia’s Tibetan- and Mandarin-language services in Tibetan areas, as well as those of the Voice of Tibet, an independent radio station based in Norway.

In addition to maintaining strict censorship of print and online content in Tibetan areas, PRC authorities sought to censor the expression of views or distribution of information related to Tibet in countries and regions outside mainland China.

Internet Freedom

As in past years, authorities curtailed cell phone and internet service in the TAR and other Tibetan areas, sometimes for weeks or even months at a time. Interruptions in internet service were especially pronounced 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 authorities restored internet service, they closely monitored its usage. There were widespread reports of authorities searching cell phones they suspected of containing suspicious content. Many individuals in the TAR and other Tibetan areas reported receiving official warnings and being briefly detained and interrogated after using their cell phones to exchange what the government deemed to be sensitive information. In July, in advance of the Dalai Lama’s birthday, Radio Free Asia reported authorities warned Tibetans not to use social media chat groups to organize gatherings or celebrations of the spiritual leader’s birthday. The TAR Internet and Information Office continued a research project known as *Countermeasures to Internet-based Reactionary Infiltration by the Dalai Lama Clique*.

In February, TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie urged authorities to “resolutely manage the internet, maintain the correct cybersecurity view, and win the online antiseparatist battle.”

Throughout the year authorities blocked users in China from accessing foreign-based, Tibet-related websites critical of official government policy in Tibetan areas. Technically sophisticated hacking attempts originating from China also targeted Tibetan activists and organizations outside mainland China.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

As in recent years, 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, to prevent “separatist” political and religious activities on campus. Authorities frequently encouraged Tibetan academics to participate in government propaganda efforts, both domestically and overseas, such as making public speeches supporting government policies. Academics who refused to cooperate with such efforts faced diminished prospects for promotion and research grants.

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 the party had not organized or approved. Authorities in Tibetan areas regularly banned the sale and distribution of music they deemed to have sensitive political content.

The state-run TAR Academy of Social Science continued to encourage scholars to maintain “a correct political and academic direction” in its March conference to “improve scholars’ political ideology” and “fight against separatists” under the guidance of Xi Jinping.

In May police detained Sonam Lhundrub, a Tibetan university student in Lanzhou City, Gansu, after he wrote an essay criticizing the government. His essay noted the lack of government job positions available to Tibetans in the province and the difficulty of competing with Han Chinese applicants for jobs.

In accordance with government guidance on ethnic assimilation, state policies continued to disrupt traditional Tibetan living patterns and customs and accelerated forced assimilation through promoting the influx of non-Tibetans to traditionally Tibetan areas, expanding the domestic tourism industry, forcibly resettling and urbanizing nomads and farmers, and weakening Tibetan-language education in public schools and religious education in monasteries.

Tibetan and Mandarin Chinese are the official languages of the TAR. Both languages appeared on some, but not all, public and commercial signs. Official buildings and businesses, including banks, post offices, and hospitals, frequently lacked signage in Tibetan. 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. To print in the Tibetan language, private printing businesses in Chengdu needed special government approval, which was often difficult to obtain.

Financial and subsistence aid is sometimes tied to a reeducation program called “Unity and Love for the Motherland,” a program that continued to expand since its inception in 2017. In areas where this program was in place, state subsidies and incentives were given only to Tibetans who could demonstrate support and knowledge of CCP leaders and ideology, often requiring them to memorize party slogans and phrases of past CCP leaders and to sing the national anthem. These tests were carried out in Chinese, disadvantaging Tibetans who could not speak or read Chinese.

According to multiple sources, monasteries throughout Tibetan areas of China were required to integrate CCP members into their governance structure, with party members exercising control over monastic admission, education, security, and finances. This requirement included geographic residency limitations on who can attend each monastery. In August monks from prominent Tibetan monasteries attending a

government training were told to “lead the religion in the direction of better compatibility with socialist society” and that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama “would not be affected by the Dalai Lama’s separatist clique.”

PRC law states “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 officially approved Tibetan-language instruction and textbooks, particularly in the areas of “modern-day education,” which refers to nontraditional, nonreligious education, particularly computers, physical education, arts, and other “modern” subjects.

The country’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 Han 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.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful 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 government intimidation and arrest if they protested official policies or practices.

In March and July, local observers noted that many monasteries and rural villages in the TAR and Tibetan areas in Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu received official warnings not to organize certain gatherings, including the celebration of the Dalai Lama’s birthday.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/> (<https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

d. Freedom of Movement

PRC 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 as well as lay persons whom the government considered to have “poor political records.”

In-country Movement: The People’s Armed Police and local public security bureaus set up roadblocks and checkpoints in Tibetan areas 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. Tibetans without local residency were turned away from many Tibetan areas deemed sensitive by the government.

Authorities sometimes banned Tibetans, particularly monks and nuns, from leaving the TAR and from traveling to the TAR without first obtaining special permission from multiple government offices. Some Tibetans reported encountering difficulties in obtaining the required permissions. Such restrictions not only made it difficult for Tibetans to make pilgrimages to sacred religious sites in the TAR, but they also made it difficult to visit family, conduct business, or travel for leisure. 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 Han Chinese visitors to the TAR.

Even outside the TAR, many Tibetan monks and nuns reported 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 certain other ethnic minorities had to provide far more extensive documentation than other citizens when applying for a PRC passport. For Tibetans, the passport application process sometimes required years and frequently ended in rejection. Some Tibetans reported they were able to obtain passports only after paying substantial bribes and offering written promises to conduct only apolitical or nonsensitive international travel.

Tibetans continued to encounter significant obstacles in traveling to India for religious, educational, and other purposes. In some instances the government refused to issue passports to Tibetans. Many Tibetans who possessed passports were concerned authorities would place them on the government’s blacklist and therefore did not travel. Tibetans who had traveled to Nepal and planned to continue to India reported that PRC 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.

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. According to local observers, travel agents in the cities of Chengdu, Xining, and Kunming were forbidden to sell overseas package tours to Tibetans for the months of March and July, the periods around Tibet Uprising Day (March 10) and the Dalai Lama's birthday (July 6). Travel restrictions also increased around Chinese National Day (October 1).

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

The 2018 Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act defines open access to Tibet as meeting the following two criteria: that U.S. diplomats, journalists, and citizens can access Tibetan areas in the same way as other areas in China, and that no special permits or procedures are required to access Tibetan areas. During the year the PRC did not provide open access to Tibet based on either criterion. PRC authorities repeatedly denied requests for international journalists to visit the TAR and other Tibetan areas (see Freedom of Expression section). The TAR government also frequently denied foreign diplomats' requests for official travel. Although foreign officials were able to travel more freely in Tibetan areas outside the TAR, the People's Armed Police and local public security bureaus often subjected them to multiple checkpoints. Local government officials routinely limited diplomatic travel within Sichuan Province.

From February to April, the local government reportedly banned foreign tourists from visiting the TAR in advance of Tibet Uprising Day and the convening of the PRC's national legislature.

Exile

Approximately 150,000 Tibetans live in exile throughout the world. Tibetans live outside of China for many reasons, although policies enacted by the PRC government in Tibetan areas were frequently cited as the primary factor. Among those living outside of China are the 14th Dalai Lama and several other senior religious leaders who are not approved by the PRC government. These leaders were often unable to meet directly with their home monasteries and students.

The Tibetan overseas community is often subjected to harassment, monitoring, and cyberattacks believed to be carried out by the PRC government. Individuals reported they were subjected to government harassment and investigation because of family members living overseas. Observers also reported that many Tibetans traveling to visit family overseas were required to spend several weeks in political education classes after returning to China.

In September media outlets reported PRC government efforts to hack into the phones of several leaders in the Central Tibetan Administration, the governance organization of the overseas Tibetan community, as well as officials in the Office of the Dalai Lama.

Section 3. 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. The PRC government, however, severely restricted its citizens' ability to participate in any meaningful elections. Citizens could not freely choose the officials who governed them, and the CCP continued to control appointments to positions of political power.

Since 2015 the TAR and many Tibetan areas have strictly implemented 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 was interpreted to require candidates to denounce the Dalai Lama. Several sources reported that newly appointed Communist Party cadres had replaced nearly all traditional village leaders in the TAR and in Tibetan areas outside the TAR over the last three years, despite the lack of village elections.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

PRC law provides criminal penalties for corrupt acts by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively in Tibetan areas, and high-ranking officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption in Tibetan areas during the year; some low-ranked officials were punished.

In September 2018 Tibetan anticorruption activist A-nya Sengdra was arrested for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” by Qinghai police after exposing corruption among local officials who were failing to pay for land appropriated from local Tibetans. A-nya's detention was extended several times, and no trial had been scheduled.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Some domestic human rights groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were able to operate in Tibetan areas, although under substantial government restrictions. Their ability to investigate impartially and publish their findings on human rights cases was limited. Restrictions on foreign NGOs made it nearly impossible for foreign human rights groups to investigate or report findings within Tibetan areas. PRC government officials were not cooperative or responsive to the views of foreign human rights groups.

In a July interview, the China director for Human Rights Watch noted that the PRC government was “making the stakes higher for people inside [of Tibet] to talk [to NGOs]. There can be consequences for family members ... The authorities are trying very hard to not just cut people off from information sources but really to discourage certain kinds of research or enquiry.”

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Coercion in Population Control: As in the rest of China, there were reports of coerced abortions and sterilizations, although government statistics on the percentage of abortions coerced during the year were not available. The CCP restricts the rights of parents to choose the number of children they have and utilizes family planning units from the provincial to the village level to enforce population limits and distributions.

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

See the Women section in the Mainland China section for more information.

Children

Many rural Tibetan areas have implemented the PRC’s nationwide “centralized education” policy, which forced the closure of many village and monastic schools and the transfer of students to boarding schools in towns and cities. Media reports indicated this program was expanding. The policy limited the ability of children to learn Tibetan language and culture by removing Tibetan children from their homes and communities where the Tibetan language is used. It has also led to the removal of young monks from monasteries, forcing them instead into government-run schools. Authorities enforced regulations specifying that traditional monastic education is available only to monks older than 18, which has led to a reduction in younger students at monasteries. Instruction in Tibetan, while provided for by PRC law, was often inadequate or unavailable at schools in Tibetan areas.

Media outlets reported an increase in the scale of Tibetans attending government-sponsored boarding school outside Tibetan areas. The PRC government reported the programs allowed students greater educational opportunities than they would have had in their home cities. Tibetans and reporters, however, noted the program

prevented students from participating in Tibetan cultural activities, observing religious practices, or using the Tibetan language. Media reports also highlighted discrimination within government boarding school programs. Tibetans attending government-arranged boarding schools in eastern China reported studying and living in ethnically segregated classrooms and dormitories justified as necessary security measures, despite cultural integration being the government’s stated purpose for these programs.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report> (<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>).

National/Racial/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 Han 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 of the TAR, 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 Han Chinese migrants more than Tibetans. In many predominantly Tibetan cities across the Tibetan Plateau, Han Chinese migrants owned and managed most of the small businesses, restaurants, and retail shops.

Observers continued to express concern that major development projects and other central government policies disproportionately benefited non-Tibetans and resulted in a considerable influx of Han Chinese persons into the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Large state-owned enterprises based outside the TAR engineered or implemented many major infrastructure projects across the Tibetan Plateau, with Han Chinese professionals and low-wage temporary migrant workers from other provinces, rather than local residents, managing and staffing the projects.

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 them than Han Chinese persons to obtain permits and loans to open businesses, and the government gave many Han Chinese persons, especially retired soldiers, incentives to move to Tibet. Increased restrictions in the three years since a foreign NGO management law was passed severely decreased the number of local NGOs that received foreign funding and international NGOs that provided assistance to Tibetan communities. For example, after the NGO law took effect in 2017, Trace Foundation, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization focusing on Tibetan areas, began closing its programs on the plateau and reported that it had not carried out any programs within China during the year. Other foreign NGOs

reported being unable to find local partners. Several Tibetan-run NGOs were also reportedly pressured to close. Throughout the year there were no known Tibetan Plateau-based international NGOs operating in the country.

Some employers specifically barred Tibetans and other minorities from applying to job openings. In August, Lens Technology in Hunan Province published a job opportunity specifically barring Tibetans, Uighurs, and Mongolians from applying.

The PRC 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. 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. The government’s campaign resulted in many resettled herders losing their livelihoods and living in impoverished conditions in urban areas.

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 person, and the corresponding positions in the vast majority of all TAR counties were Han Chinese. Within the TAR, Han Chinese persons also continued to hold a disproportionate number of the top security, military, financial, economic, legal, judicial, and educational positions. The law requires CCP secretaries and governors of ethnic minority autonomous prefectures and regions to be from that ethnic minority; however, party secretaries were Han Chinese in eight of the nine TAPs located in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces. One TAP in Qinghai 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.

Promotion of Acts of Discrimination

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, hotels refused to provide lodging, and Han Chinese landlords refused to rent to them.

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