

# China

## Tibet

**Political Rights:** 7  
**Civil Liberties:** 7  
**Status:** Not Free

### Overview:

China maintained its control over Tibet in 2004, jailing dissidents and managing the daily affairs in major Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. However, some positive signs were in evidence as well during the year, as the Chinese government indicated its willingness to allow a human rights delegation and nongovernmental organizations to visit in 2005.

China's occupation of Tibet has marginalized a Tibetan national identity that dates back more than 2,000 years. Beijing's modern-day claim to the region is based on Mongolian and Manchurian imperial influence over Tibet in the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively. Largely under this pretext, China invaded Tibet in late 1949 and, in 1951, formally annexed the Central Asian land. In an apparent effort to undermine Tibetan claims to statehood, Beijing split up the vast region that Tibetans call their traditional homeland. It incorporated roughly half of this region into four different southwestern Chinese provinces beginning in 1950. The rest of this traditional homeland was named the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965.

The defining event of Beijing's rule took place in 1959, when Chinese troops suppressed a local uprising by killing an estimated 87,000 Tibetans in the Lhasa area alone. The massacre forced the Tibetan spiritual and political leader, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, to flee to Dharamsala, India, with 80,000 supporters. Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution further devastated Tibet; China jailed thousands of monks and nuns, and nearly all of Tibet's 6,200 monasteries were destroyed. As resistance to Beijing's rule continued, Chinese soldiers forcibly broke up mainly peaceful protests throughout Tibet. Few large-scale protests against Chinese rule have occurred since 1989, when Beijing imposed martial law on Lhasa and the surrounding areas following three days of antigovernment protests and riots. Officials lifted martial law in 1990.

In addition to jailing dissidents, Chinese officials have stepped up their efforts to control religious affairs and undermine the exiled Dalai Lama's religious and political authority. In a flagrant case of interference with Tibet's Buddhist hierarchy, China in 1995 detained six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and rejected his selection by the Dalai Lama as the eleventh reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second-highest religious figure. Officials then stage-managed the selection of another six-year-old boy as the Panchen Lama. Since the Panchen Lama identifies the reincarnated Dalai Lama, Beijing potentially could control the identification of the fifteenth Dalai Lama. The government has also tried to control the identification and education of other religious figures.

### Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Under Chinese rule, Tibetans lack the right to determine their political future. The Chinese Communist Party rules the TAR and traditional Tibetan areas in nearby Qinghai,

Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces through appointed officials whose ranks include some Tibetans. No Tibetan, however, has ever held the peak post of TAR party secretary. Tibetans suffer the same lack of political freedom as their Han Chinese counterparts.

China controls the flow of information in Tibet, tightly restricting all media and regulating Internet use. The government blocks access to Tibetan-language broadcasts of Voice of America and Radio Free Asia (as well as the Norway-based Voice of Tibet), as it does for the Chinese-language broadcasts. Radio Free Asia reports that Tibetans who listen to foreign-language radio broadcasts may be liable for official intimidation or fines. In early 2004, the government banned a book written by a Tibetan that discussed religious issues and asserted that Tibetans revere the Dalai Lama.

Chinese officials permit Tibetans to take part in many religious practices, and most Tibetans practice some degree of Buddhism. However, since 1996, the government has also strengthened its control over monasteries under a propaganda campaign that is aimed largely at undermining the Dalai Lama's influence as a spiritual and political leader. Under this "patriotic education campaign," government-run "work teams" visit monasteries to conduct mandatory sessions on Beijing's version of Tibetan history and other political topics. Officials also require monks to sign a declaration agreeing to reject independence for Tibet, denounce the Dalai Lama, not listen to Voice of America radio broadcasts, and reject the boy whom the Dalai Lama identified as the eleventh Panchen Lama.

The government directly manages monasteries through Democratic Management Committees (DMCs) and local bureaus. Only "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns may lead DMCs, and the government must in any case approve all committee members. According to the U.S. State Department's 2003 Human Rights Report, released in February 2004, "the government continue[s] to discourage the proliferation of monasteries, which it contend[s are] a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community."

In universities, professors cannot lecture on politically sensitive topics, and many reportedly are required to attend political education sessions. The government also limits course materials to prevent campus-based political and religious activity, and bans ancient and/or religious texts from classrooms on political grounds.

Independent civic groups, human rights groups, and trade unions are illegal. However, in October, at a human rights conference in Australia, Chinese officials indicated that they would invite a human rights delegation to visit Tibet in 2005. Moreover, for the first time ever, Chinese officials invited nongovernmental organizations to take part in the human rights discussion that will be held in China in 2005. Though improvements in the human rights situation thus far have been marginal at best, the observation made by the deputy secretary of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that China is being "increasingly forthcoming" in its response to Australian expressions of concern about the situation gives hope that conditions might begin to show more serious improvement in coming years.

Tibet is governed by China's corrupt, poorly developed, state-controlled legal system. Like the rest of China, it does not enjoy the rule of law. Human Rights Watch said in February that the government "is misusing criminal charges to repress political, cultural and religious expression in Tibetan communities." The organization was responding to the news that Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, a senior lama, was being held in a high-security prison. He had been sentenced to death in December 2002, but the sentence was suspended for two years and may be commuted to life in prison. Neither his trial nor any of the evidence against him—he was allegedly involved in a bombing—was made available to the public, on the grounds that "state secrets" were

involved. In November 2004, the US State Department renewed pressure on China to allow him a fair hearing before his stay of execution expired on December 2nd.

Tibetan political dissidents face particularly severe human rights abuses. Security forces routinely engage in arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and execution, without due process, to punish even nonviolent protesters against Chinese rule. In March 2004, for example, security officials arrested a popular Tibetan singer and a composer because of the allegedly political content of their music. The previous month, security officials near Lhasa arrested a monk for possessing a photograph of the Dalai Lama and a Tibetan flag.

There are many political prisoners—strictly controlled access to the TAR makes it difficult to determine exactly how many, according to the 2003 U.S. State Department report—and they suffer beatings, physical and psychological torture, forced labor, and “political investigation” sessions that result in further punishment if detainees are not found to be loyal enough to the state. In October, the head of a Tibetan Buddhist monastery was shot and killed by the police; he and other monks had asked that the police repay them for medical treatment they had required after being beaten while in custody.

The issue of human rights scored an apparent victory in March, when one of the so-called “singing nuns” was released from prison after 15 years. Phuntsog Nyidron was detained in 1989 on charges of “counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement” for her part in an independence march. She and 13 other imprisoned Tibetan women became known for smuggling a tape out of jail that had on it songs about their commitment to Tibet. However, Phuntsog Nyidron remains under constant government supervision, according to Human Rights Watch; at least two security officials out of the four assigned to her—two prison representatives and two public security officers—monitor her 24 hours a day. Calling China’s strategy a “nasty game,” the executive director of the organization’s Asia Division remarked, “China tries to score points with other governments by opportunistically releasing activists, then keeping them isolated and under constant surveillance.”

Because they belong to one of China’s 55 recognized ethnic minority groups, Tibetans receive some preferential treatment in university admissions and governmental employment. Tibetans, however, generally need to learn Mandarin Chinese in order to take advantage of these preferences or to hold many private sector jobs. Many Tibetans are torn between a desire to learn Chinese in order to compete for university slots and jobs and the realization that increased use of Chinese threatens the survival of the Tibetan language and culture. Government development policies have helped most Tibetans to some extent, but the policies still benefit Han Chinese disproportionately.

Tibetans reportedly face difficulties obtaining passports. Up to 3,000 Tibetans, many without valid travel documents, cross the border into Nepal each year. Many seek to study or settle in India. The government restricts foreign travel to the TAR and restricts Tibetans’ movements during particularly sensitive anniversaries or events.

In November 2004, however, the Russian government granted the Dalai Lama a visa for the first time in 13 years, risking the displeasure of China, with whom it has increasing political and military ties. The Dalai Lama led prayers in the Russian republic of Kalmykia, one of the largest centers of Buddhism in that country. China responded by indicating that it “opposes...visits by the Dalai Lama to countries with diplomatic relations with China” and expressing its hope that Russia would “strictly abide by...relevant political agreements between the two sides”.

State employment policies are generally less restrictive for Tibetans than for Han Chinese. Officially, the government maintains the right to refuse an individual's application to take up religious orders, but this is not often exercised. In the private sector, employers favor Han Chinese for many jobs—especially in urban areas—and give them greater pay than Tibetans for the same work. Tibetans also find it more difficult than Han Chinese to obtain permits and loans to open businesses. Tibetans are limited in many areas because of their relatively poor command of Mandarin Chinese, the language that has become widespread in urban areas and many businesses.

China's restrictive family planning policies are somewhat more lenient towards Tibetans and other ethnic minorities than towards the Han Chinese majority. Officials generally limit urban Tibetans to two children and encourage—but do not require—rural Tibetans to stop at three children. These restrictions were in any case not enforced in 2004. As in other parts of China, prostitution is a growing problem in the TAR.