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China's Perception of External Threats and Its Current Tibet Policy

Lin Le*

ABSTRACT

Little thought has been given to the possibility that China's repressive Tibet policy could be driven largely by its fear of external forces, as opposed to the government's authoritarian nature. This article tries to explain why it was only in 1994 that Chinese authorities seriously and systematically strengthened religious control in Tibet. This had been put in place during the 1987–89 protests but never effectively enforced. The key is the Chinese leaders' perception of external threats in the post-Tiananmen era, which prompted Chinese authorities to believe that instead of being mostly an ethnic nuisance, Tibetan separatism—utilizing Tibetan Buddhism as a “weapon”—had become a “tool” wielded by “hostile Western forces” seeking ultimately to break up China.

Major outbreaks of unrest erupted in Tibet in 1959, 1987–89, and 2008.¹ An abundant literature exists about the causes, and analysts generally agree that the Chinese government's problematic policies were at the root of Tibetan grievances and protests,² while the Dalai Lama's “internationalization” of the is-

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1. Other cases of lesser scale and significance were seen in 1969, 1993, and 2009–13 (mainly self-immolation incidents). For a thorough discussion on this topic, see *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25 (2012), <http://digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/ret/index.php?selection=7>.

2. While analysts basically make the same argument, they generally do it in three ways. First, some directly point to specific policies as sources of Tibetan grievances, such as Han Chinese immigration, problematic economic development policies, restrictive religious, educational, and cultural policies. Second, some stress the general concepts behind specific policies, such as the Chinese government's ideology-based predispositions and nation-state-building efforts. For example, Tsering Shakya concludes that Han Chinese chauvinism and the CCP's “narrow Marxist economic-determinist view of national identity” are responsible for China's failure in Tibet. Third, instead of focusing on the Chinese state, many others emphasize Tibetan nationalism. This is the other side of the same coin as they attribute the rise of Tibetans' nationalism to China's policies. For example, Tsering Topgyal points out that a Tibetan identity crisis grows out of China's “securitization” of religious issues in Tibet, and he notes that an “insecurity dilemma” best explains the unrest. Relevant literature includes Wang Lixiong, “Tianzang: Xizang de mingyun” [Sky burial: The fate of Tibet] (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 1998); Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, eds., *Authenticating Tibet: Answers to China's 100 Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China,*

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sues played a conditioning role.³ This diagnosis has led to the prescription that to solve the Tibet issue once and for all, the Chinese government should overhaul its Tibet policies by removing repressive controls and granting a real measure of autonomy to the Tibetan people.⁴

No one has raised the question of why the Chinese government seems unable to understand something that everyone else understands. This question could be ignored if we accept that repression in Tibet is normal because China is an authoritarian state intolerant of any domestic dissidents, much less ethnic unrest aiming at independence. This line of thinking assumes that the crux of the problem is the Chinese government's fear of internal challenges to its authoritarian power from an autonomous Tibet. Little thought has been given to the possibility that China's repressive Tibet policy is instead driven more by its fear of external forces.

This article examines statements by Chinese leaders, as well as Party mouthpieces and historical documents, to view how the perceptions of China's decision makers influenced the country's Tibet policy.⁵ A caveat is that in order for the central argument of this article to be valid, it is assumed that Chinese leaders' articulated perceptions have reflected their real thinking and guided their decision making. It also assumes that national decision-makers' perceptions of threats within the international system matter here, as opposed to bureaucratic interests and domestic politics.⁶ My study tries to refute the domestic politics style of analysis—China's authoritarian system alone does not explain its Tibet policy. Sepa-

Tibet, and the Dalai Lama (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Ronald Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Wang Lixiong and Tsering Shakya, *The Struggle for Tibet* (New York: Verso, 2009); Barry Sautman and June Teufel Dreyer, eds., *Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development, and Society in A Disputed Region* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2006); Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snow: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Tsering Topgyal, "The Securitization of Tibetan Buddhism in Communist China," *Politics and Religion Journal* 6, no. 2 (2012), and "The Insecurity Dilemma and the Sino-Tibetan Conflict" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011); Warren W. Smith Jr., *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996); Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon, 2001).

3. While the cause of the late 1980s unrest in Tibet was Tibetans' dissatisfaction with China's rule, the timing of the outbreak of unrest was closely associated with the Dalai Lama's "internationalization" of the Tibet issue, which gave Tibetans the illusion that with the help of the West Tibet could soon be freed. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion*, 83; Melvyn C. Goldstein, "Tibet and China in the Twentieth Century," in *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 204.

4. There are many suggestions of this kind. See, e.g., Gongmeng (Open Constitution Initiative), "An Investigation on the Social and Economic Causes of the 3-14 incident in Tibetan area," http://www.tibet-china-conference.org/content/pdf_chn/Think_Thank_Chinese.pdf.

5. "Tibet policy" has many aspects such as the economy, education, religion, culture, immigration, government structure, and security. This article focuses on China's religious policies and the measures that China took to deal with protests.

6. This is, in part, a "level of analysis" question. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 13–19.

rately, it has been argued that the “stability maintenance” mechanisms in Tibet have become so bureaucratized that cadres in Tibet have formed an interest group averse to any policy change that would reduce the budget from the central government.⁷ However, for such vested interests to have a selling point, there must be a threat perception that makes current policies seem necessary.

Wherever there is perception, there can be misperception. This becomes relevant here as reading Chinese leaders' statements shows that the “external threat” they have perceived is narrowly defined—it ignores India, a neighboring power that provides asylum for the Dalai Lama and Tibetan exiles, but refers mainly to the West's so-called evil intention to destroy China, especially by the United States.⁸

The central argument is that, while Chinese leaders view Tibetan separatism itself as posing no serious threat because of its weak military capability, the Tiananmen incident of 1989 and later the tumultuous political events in eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union evoked Chinese leaders' fear that “imperialism has never stopped seeking to destroy China” (*Diguo zhuyi wang wo zhi xin bu si* 帝国主义亡我之心不死). This perceived external threat prompted Chinese leaders to believe that “hostile Western forces” wield Tibetan separatism as a “tool” to break up China, and Tibetan Buddhism is used by separatists as a “weapon.” Thus to Chinese leaders Tibetan separatism is a proxy of external enemies rather than a purely internal ethnic problem.

This perception has had consequences. After the wave of Tibetan protests of 1993 in which nonreligious Tibetans rather than Buddhist monks staged large-scale protests, Chinese leaders especially targeted Tibetan religion, believing that Buddhism was now used by separatists backed by their Western masters in stirring up protests to break up China. Finally, in 1994 Chinese authorities took serious steps to systemically strengthen religious control in Tibet. The lasting impact of this perception also explains why between 1996 and 2007 China ratcheted up controls in Tibet in response to only a few sporadic protests.

PARTY LEADERS IN TIBET: THE MYTH OF A “SOFTLINE” WU JINGHUA VS. A “HARDLINE” HU JINTAO

It has been said that Hu Jintao rose to become Party secretary and president of China in part because of his earlier tough performance as Communist Party secretary of Tibet. It is also the conventional view that Hu Jintao's takeover from Wu Jinghua (伍精华) as Tibet's Party secretary in late 1988 was a significant wa-

7. Wang, “Tianzang”; Wang and Shaky, *The Struggle for Tibet*.

8. Whether the Chinese leaders' perceptions correctly reflect reality will not vitiate the validity of this argument. After all, decision making is based on decision makers' ideas. Misperception only matters when discussing how decision makers' views could and should be changed.

tershed in China's Tibet policy: before that, repression was milder and after that, hardline. However, a close scrutiny shows that there was no clear sign of a "hard-line turn" in the way that Chinese leaders, either Wu or Hu, dealt with the Tibetan protests in the late 1980s: crackdowns were always the mainstay of measures against unrest and simply further intensified as Hu Jintao took charge.

In fact, the issue was whom to blame for the unrest, rather than how hard the crackdown should be. Ironically, Wu was removed on the charge of giving too much freedom to Tibetans who finally ran out of control, while he had always been tough in crackdowns. But Wu's view that "leftist" policies in the past gave rise to the protests angered Party cadres who had been in Tibet before the post-Mao reforms.⁹ For example, Dorjee Tseten, a leftist Tibetan cadre who was removed from his leadership position in Tibet in 1985 and was appointed to be in charge of the Center of Tibetan Studies of China from 1986 to 2000, wrote in a letter to Hu Jintao: "I worked with him [Wu Jinghua] for five months, which were the most uncomfortable five months I had ever had since I began working in Tibet. . . . On the origin of the riots that occurred in Tibet in 1987, it was caused by the fault of a certain leader [Wu Jinghua]."¹⁰

But Wu Jinghua was tough against dissidence and protests. Indeed, it was Wu who kicked off the "anti-splittism" campaign when the first protest broke out in 1987. His legacy was later turned into an entrenched mechanism adopted and modified by his successors to deal with Tibetan protests, as Ronald Schwartz observed.¹¹ While Wu Jinghua proved popular among Tibetans for respecting Tibetan culture and embracing religious activities, his administration's reaction to protests followed a very hardline style; it was not different in nature from what Hu Jintao did later.

When Wu Jinghua was removed from his position at the beginning of December 1988, he was in the middle of a second phase of the intensified anti-splittism campaign. Even though it has been claimed that Wu had become a figurehead immediately after the Tibetan protests in March 1988 before he was officially removed in December,¹² his tough reaction was undeniable. It was he who called in armed police for the first time in the post-Mao era to handle Tibetan protests. In January and February 1988, before the March protests, paramilitary troops had

9. Shakya, *The Dragon*, 422.

10. Interesting is the fact that in the letter Dorjee Tseten argued that the best way to handle Tibetans religious fervor was to stand by and Tibetan Buddhist passion would die down as unrestricted access to religion would gradually reduce their desire for it. See Dorjee Tseten, "Duojiicaidan shangshu zhongyang zhengzhiju changwei" [Dorjee Tseten's petition to the Standing Committee of the Central Politburo], in *Shangshu: xizangren yu zhonggong de linglei duihua* [Petition: A special dialogue between Tibetans and the Chinese Communist Party], ed. Xueyu zhiku (Snowland Think Tank) (Taipei: Xueyu chubanshe, 2012).

11. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest*, 45.

12. Schwartz noted that the administration of Tibet "had in fact been in the hands of Mao Rubai, Party deputy secretary and a career administrator in Tibet for over 20 years, since shortly after the Monlam demonstration the previous March." *Ibid.*, 148.

already moved into Lhasa in preparation for any further protests.¹³ In addition, violent means were used in prison. The goals were to “seriously punish those small groups of separatists, safeguard the dignity of law, frighten enemies, strike hard at criminals, and protect the people.”¹⁴ Wu showed little “rightist” leniency when handling the protests,¹⁵ except that he thought the police should not have opened fire on protestors.¹⁶

When Hu Jintao took over the post of Party secretary in Tibet, he simply pursued an intensified version of the crackdown. Hu did not come to Tibet with the central government’s mandate that tougher measures be taken to substitute for Wu’s “softness.” But there was to be no tolerance of protest. After his appointment in Tibet on December 1, 1988,¹⁷ Hu personally ordered soldiers to open fire on protestors in December and asked for the central government’s endorsement to put Lhasa under martial law. Later in March 1989, Hu again ordered shooting during a crackdown.¹⁸ The escalation of Tibetan protests was deliberately provoked as a premeditated strategy; it thus justified the call for martial law.¹⁹ It is widely believed that Hu’s iron-fisted crackdown in Tibet won him credit with Deng Xiaoping, who subsequently “anointed” him as the successor of Jiang Zemin.²⁰

Dispatching work teams (*gongzuo dui* 工作队) of officials to oversee crackdowns was permanently institutionalized in Tibet as unrest continued. By November 1989, 300 cadres had been assigned to the work team in Lhasa, and a thousand cadres for Tibet as a whole.²¹ After a protest on December 10, 1988,

13. Ibid., 86.

14. Wu Jinghua, “Zangdangfa [1988] 4 hao” [Issued by CCP of TAR [1988] document no. 4], March 12, 1988, in *Xizang zizhiqiu zhongyao wenjian xuanbian: 1985–1990* [Selection of important Party documents of Tibet Autonomous Region: 1985–1990], ed. Xizang zizhiqiu dangwei bangongting [The Chinese Communist Party Committee Office of Tibet Autonomous Region], *Zhonggong xizang zhongyao lishi wenxian ziliao huibian* [Collection of important CCP historical documents and materials on Tibet], vol. 26 (Los Angeles: Zhongwen chubanshu fuwu zhongxin, 2011).

15. The Human Rights Committee of LAWASIA and the Tibet Information Network, *Defying the Dragon: China and Human Rights in Tibet* (London: Tibet Information Network Press, 1991), 25.

16. Arjia Rinpoche, *Surviving the Dragon: A Tibetan Lama’s Account of 40 Years under Chinese Rule* (New York: Rodale, 2010), 159.

17. Chen Fu, ed., *Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao xizang minzu ganbu peixun dashiji: 1980–2010 nian* [Chronicle of major events of Tibetan minority cadre training camp of the Chinese Communist Party School: 1980–2010] (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue yanjiu zhongxin dangdai yanjiusuo, 2010), 52–53.

18. Rumors of a “crafty game” scenario also circulated, in which Hu was believed to deliberately tell his subordinates who were at the frontline facing Tibetan protestors to “hold on until he gives orders” and finally cut off communication with his subordinates, which forced them to decide on their own as protestors pressed on. In this way, Hu could shirk any responsibility if the result was bad while claim credit if the protests were successfully handled. Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Hu Jintao Era: New Leaders, New Challenges* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2006).

19. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest*, 164.

20. Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

21. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest*, 53.

Tibetans were asked to make public testimonies of loyalty; and the campaign also spread to middle and primary schools.²² Finally came martial law.

Reflecting the big picture of the Party's internal politics in the late 1980s, Wu's removal as Party secretary in Tibet can be interpreted as a fallout effect of Hu Yaobang's ouster as China's Party secretary in 1987. Wu's dismissal did not spell the end of a degree of religious and cultural freedom, which remained in place until 1994.

THE REAL TURNING POINT: THE THIRD FORUM ON TIBET WORK

The real turning point came at the Third Forum on Tibet Work in 1994, which introduced "the most fundamental revision of policies on Tibet since the relaxation of hard-line Maoist policies."²³ Although a core agenda of the forum was to accelerate the economic development of Tibet and its assimilation into China's economy, Robert Barnett observes that the forum also provided "the highest level of political legitimacy for the use of force and of other measures not previously sanctioned at such a level, in the suppression of the pro-independence movement in Tibet."²⁴ Specifically, Tibetan cadres were faced with strict surveillance and suspicion, more ideology-laden "patriotic education" was introduced into schools, and religious control was substantially tightened.²⁵ This article focuses on the religion policy.

As a major step in tightening religious control, the Party decided to attack the Dalai Lama's religious status. Past repudiations of him often targeted his political status and views rather than his religious authority. Since 1987, the Chinese government had been careful in choosing the words used in the propaganda to criticize him. But severe criticism of the Dalai Lama appeared in September 1994; and the Third Forum pushed Tibetans to denounce the Dalai Lama to show their allegiance.²⁶ All Tibetans—ordinary lay people, monks and nuns, and Party members and cadres—were forced to "politically draw a clear line of demarcation with the Dalai clique."²⁷ (At a later time in 1995 after the Panchen Lama dispute, the Dalai Lama's influence—religious and political—was to be totally removed). On September 28, 1994, for the first time police took action to confiscate photographs of the Dalai Lama that were circulating in Lhasa markets.

22. Ibid., 144.

23. Robert Barnett and Mickey Spiegel (Tibet Information Network), *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head: Tightening Control in Tibet, 1994–1995* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996), 1.

24. Ibid., 35.

25. For details of Tibetan cadre control and patriotic education in school, see *ibid.*, 49–62.

26. Ibid., 44.

27. Ibid., 41.

This was the beginning of “the extension of the campaign from officials to ordinary Tibetans.”²⁸

The second component of the new religious policy was the systemic strengthening of temple control. In addition to intensification of existing measures,²⁹ for the first time this control came directly from the central government, aimed particularly at Tibet, and extended to all the monasteries and nunneries in Tibet regardless of their past political record.³⁰ Particularly noteworthy here is that some major religious control regulations, such as patriotic education, the setting up of so-called Democratic Management Committees in temples, and imposing limits on the number of monks and nuns, had remained documents without being effectively implemented in practice, until this time. The first wave of work teams of officials to carry out the new policies arrived at monasteries shortly after the forum to enforce “existing demands that had never been enforced.”³¹

As Robert Barnett has observed, until the Third Forum Chinese restrictions on religion in Tibet were “in essence uncoordinated”: “the 1980s reform dispensation was still theoretically in place as far as culture and religion were concerned, albeit hemmed in by numerous and erratic restrictions,” and “the theoretical right of Tibetans to develop their culture and religion as much as circumstances allowed remained intact.”³² Everything changed at the Third Forum, which initiated new religious controls that “represented the decision by China’s most powerful leaders to authorize their representatives in Tibet to impose these limits at any cost.”³³

Why did this “left turn” only come in 1994 at the Third Forum? A commonly held explanation for the escalation in repression is that more protests lead to more repression: just as martial law was declared to cope with previous protests, the Third Forum was convened to initiate a new package of policies in Tibet in response to a new wave of Tibetan protests in the early 1990s.

But this reasoning begs a question: why did a series of serious protests of the late 1980s not lead at that time to such systematic religious control?

A possible explanation is that the rise of religious influence and the spread of unrest into rural areas during the 1990–1994 period brought to the fore “the potential impact of monastic dissent.”³⁴ Indeed, while the major protests in the past mostly had concentrated in urban areas such as Lhasa, unrest had spread into

28. Robert Barnett, “Chen Kuiyuan and the Marketization of Policy,” in *Tibet and Her Neighbors: A History*, ed. Alex McKay (London: Hansjörg Mayer, 2003), 229–39.

29. For details of those measures, see Barnett and Spiegel, *Cutting Off the Serpent’s Head*, 41–42.

30. *Ibid.*, 42.

31. *Ibid.*, 41.

32. Barnett, “Chen Kuiyuan and the Marketization of Policy.”

33. Barnett and Spiegel, *Cutting Off the Serpent’s Head*, 36.

34. *Ibid.*, 39.

rural areas by 1993, as Chen Kuiyuan (陈奎元), the new Party secretary of Tibet, reported at the Third Forum: "Evidence shows that unrest is spreading into other towns and cities and remote areas. Since 1991, there has been a growing trend that the influence of separatism is extending to rural and pastoral areas."³⁵

Protests had broken out in rural areas of Nyemo, Meldro Gyama, Phenpo, and Chideshol, places within about 150 kilometers of Lhasa.³⁶ In some cases Tibetan people "beat party leaders, cadres and policemen, took away prisoners by force, smashed the signboards of village Party committee offices, blackmailed village cadres, and shouted reactionary slogans at county government offices."³⁷

More importantly, the majority of protests seemed to contain religious elements. According to Barnett, between 1990 and the Third Forum, religious people took the lead in about a hundred confirmed protests for independence.³⁸ Chinese leaders took special notice of this, as Chen Kuiyuan, Hu Jintao's successor as Party secretary of Tibet, noted: "Temple development has gotten out of control; the number of monks and nuns increased dramatically and the composition of religious groups is complex. Some local governments don't know much about these temples and their temple management is poor. . . . In fact, the leaders of riots were mostly young lamas and nuns . . . some temples defy local governments and cadres, relying on their sheer weight of numbers. In several places there were abnormal phenomena of local governments losing control over temples and temples taking control of local governments."³⁹

However, while most of these protests were initiated and staged by Tibetan religious people, they lasted for a very short time—no more than an hour. The scale and size of these protests were also insignificant—none of them involved more than 15 people. In contrast, lay Tibetan people staged large-scale protests and demonstrations in urban areas in the same period. According to Barnett's observation, "more than five years had passed since a protest initiated by monks and nuns had led to even a medium-size nationalist protest."⁴⁰

Moreover, not all the unrest in rural areas contained religious elements. For example, in April and June 1993, the flash points in Rinchenling in Meldro-gongkar and Nemo in Phenpo Lhundrup involved mostly lay people and had little, if any, religious involvement.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Chinese leaders came to conclude that religion should be targeted. Why did the national Party leaders lay empha-

35. Chen Kuiyuan, "Zai disanci xizang gongzuo zuotanhui shang de fayan" [Speech at the Third Tibet Work Meeting], in *Xizang de jiaobu* [The pace of Tibet] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1999).

36. Barnett and Spiegel, *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head*, 9.

37. Chen Kuiyuan, "Zai disanci," 208.

38. Barnett and Spiegel, *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head*, 37.

39. Chen Kuiyuan, "Zai disanci," 209.

40. Barnett and Spiegel, *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head*, 38.

41. *Ibid.*, 38.

sis on one part of a mixed pattern of protests and ignore the other aspects? If religion had always been a concern for the Chinese government, why did not the 1987–89 protests end up with systematic religious controls, which were only activated and seriously enforced at the Third Forum in 1994?

If selective understanding is a result of preexisting beliefs when trying to understand something without an obvious pattern, then what beliefs did the Chinese leaders not hold in the late 1980s but now held in 1994? This is the key.

CHINA'S FEAR

The Tiananmen crisis in 1989 was arguably the most seminal political event of the post-Mao era: it was a watershed both within China and between China and the West. A political earthquake of a similar nature occurred shortly thereafter: Communist Party regimes in Eastern Europe fell in 1989–90, and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. In the Chinese leadership's eyes, the world had changed.

Deng Xiaoping had launched his ambitious opening up of China at the end of the 1970s, seeing that after a decade of chaos, China should wholeheartedly focus on modernization, and Western countries were great sources of technology and capital. Deng judged in the pre-Tiananmen period that “the world forces for peace are growing faster than the forces for war,” and “there will be no large-scale war for a fairly long time to come and there is hope of maintaining world peace.”⁴²

In the wake of the Tiananmen protests, Deng reversed his previous assessment of the world environment. First, he believed ideological antagonisms had reappeared. Deng pointed out that by waging “a world war without gun smoke,” “capitalists want to defeat socialists in the long run,”⁴³ trying to bring the latter “under the rule of international monopoly capital and set them on the road to capitalism.”⁴⁴ Therefore, “China should hold its ground,” as there are many who “are out to get us.”⁴⁵

42. Deng Xiaoping, “Zai junwei kuoda huiyi shang de jianghua” [Speech at the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Committee], June 4, 1985, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* [Selected works of Deng Xiaoping] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), 3:126–28. David Shambaugh once observed that even before the Tiananmen incident China's America Watchers had a strong prejudice toward seeing the United States as a hegemonic power that sought to harm China. If this pattern also reflect top leaders' mind-set, however, it seems that this threat perception temporarily stayed dormant until the critical year of 1989. See David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 301.

43. Deng Xiaoping, “Women you xinxin ba zhongguo de shiqing zuo de geng hao” [We are confident in doing a better job in China], September 16, 1989, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan*, 3:325–26.

44. Deng Xiaoping, “Disandai lingdao jiti de dangwuzhiji” [Urgent task for China's third generation of collective leadership], June 16, 1989, *ibid.*, 3:311.

45. Deng Xiaoping, “Gaige kaifang zhengce wending, zhongguo da you xiwang” [The policy of reform and opening-up remains stable, China is promising], September 4, 1989, *ibid.*, 3:319–20.

Second, the psychological complex about historical victimization by foreign invasion was reactivated in Chinese leaders' minds, as Deng noted in April 1990: "When I heard of the decision of the summit of seven Western countries' leaders on sanctioning China, it immediately reminded me of the history of the invasion of China by the Eight-Power Allied Army."⁴⁶

Chinese leaders' fear of the US policy of "peaceful evolution" was stoked when, on the heels of the Tiananmen upheaval, the crisis in Eastern Europe broke out, and the Soviet Union collapsed. Deng even decried the series of events as a "Third World War" against socialist countries.⁴⁷ The period witnessed an outpouring of articles, especially by left-leaning Party leaders, denouncing the US plan of "peaceful evolution."⁴⁸ Deng even imagined the worst scenario—being militarily attacked: "What are we afraid of? We are not afraid of war. We don't think there will be a world war, but even if there were, we would not be afraid. Anyone who dared invade China would never get out again. China has a wealth of experience in resisting foreign aggression. We would first defeat the invaders and then start reconstruction."⁴⁹

Despite such a strong perception of an external threat, Deng decided that China should maintain smooth relations with the West and should continue to secure capital and technology for China's modernization and economic development. Coexisting with this ad hoc pragmatism, however, the external threat perception became deeply rooted in Chinese leaders' minds, as Deng made clear: "we should keep them (Western countries) as friends but also have a clear understanding of what they are doing" (*pengyou hai yao jiao, danxin zhongyao you shu* 朋友还要交, 但心中要有数).⁵⁰ President Jiang Zemin later fleshed out this point:

46. Deng Xiaoping, "Zhengxing zhonghua minzu" [Revitalize the Chinese nation], April 7, 1990, *ibid.*, 3:358.

47. Deng Xiaoping, "Jianchi shehui zhuyi fangzhi heping yanbian" [Adhere to socialism and prevent peaceful evolution], November 23, 1989, *ibid.*, 3:344.

48. For example, Deng Liqun, a leftist national leader, even believed that Deng's reform in China was essentially a peaceful evolution per se. See A. Greer Meisels, "Lessons Learned in China from the Collapse of the Soviet Union," China Studies Centre University of Sydney Policy Paper Series, paper 3, January 2013, http://sydney.edu.au/china_studies_centre/images/content/ccpublications/policy_paper_series/2013/Lessons-learned-in-China-from-the-collapse-of-the-Soviet-Union.shtml.pdf. This elite factionalism suggests a domestic political dimension to this external threat perception. Deng Xiaoping finally prevailed over his political adversaries and pushed forward his reform, but this by no means indicates that Deng perceived a reduction in external threats.

49. Deng, "Gaige kaifang zhengce wending," 319–20.

50. *Ibid.* M. E. Sarotte's recent research based on newly dug-out historical documents argues that President Bush's "conciliatory" gesture assured Chinese leaders that "no real countermeasures" were forthcoming from the United States after the Tiananmen incident. Sarotte cited Randolph Kluver's reasoning that "Deng rightly judged that Bush was unwilling to break off relations because it might drive China back into the orbit of the Soviet Union or isolation." Chinese leaders might hold this optimistic ad hoc view of the situation, but this does not exclude an underlying threat perception, which is supported here by Chinese leaders' "words," something that Sarotte believes closely fit their "deeds." See M. E. Sarotte, "China's Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example," *International Security* 37, no. 2 (2012): 156–82.

“America’s China policy has a dual face. [The first is] to make China undergo peaceful evolution, a long-term goal of some Americans. . . . On the other hand, driven by its consideration of global strategy and pragmatic economic interests, the US is looking at our huge market.”⁵¹

Emphasizing this external threat perception is not to imply that Chinese leaders did not regard domestic events as potentially threatening. In fact, while the crisis at Tiananmen and in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union reactivated Chinese leaders’ fear of the West, the external threat perception was one part of an external-internal threat dyad in Chinese leaders’ understanding of the grim situation around them. This dyad underpins how Chinese leaders’ external threat perception exerted influence on policy making.

The USSR’s collapse shocked and alarmed Chinese leaders, so much that they sent out teams to investigate the factors that caused the disintegration of the Soviet Union. While Chinese leaders perceived evil intentions in the West, they pointed to some internal reasons for the fall of socialism. They blamed the beliefs of Mikhail Gorbachev and his hastening of political reform, which they identified as lessons that should be learned.⁵²

The external-internal threat dyad that they perceived presumed that internal problems and external threats reinforce each other: while external evil intentions seek to take advantage of internal weakness, internal subversive elements solicit foreign support. But the question is which of the two poses a greater threat? With regard to Tibet, evidence will be presented in the following section that Chinese leaders thought the external threat took the lead and was more threatening.

TIBET AS THE “BREAKTHROUGH”

Before the Tiananmen protests, despite the internationalization of the Tibet issue by the Dalai Lama’s speech to the US Congress in 1987 and the Strasburg proposal of 1988, Chinese authorities did not seem seriously worried about Tibetan protests. This was regarded as a domestic nuisance with insignificant external support that China was well equipped to handle. Deng remarked confidently that “the Dalai Lama and some Americans caused a few problems but they didn’t

51. Jiang Zemin, “Waijiao gongzuo yao jian ding buyi de wei hu guojia he minzu de zui gao li yi” [Diplomatic work should resolutely safeguard national core interests], July 12, 1993, in *Jiang Zemin wenxuan* [Selected works of Jiang Zemin], vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006).

52. Meisels, “Lessons Learned in China.” Chinese leaders at that time sided with those who argued that too much ethnic autonomy was one of the reasons why the Soviet Union had collapsed, and ethnic autonomy in China has been curtailed since then. See Li Shaoming, “Minzu quyue zizhi: Duochong yinsu de lishi shijian he minzu hexie de jichu—Li Shaoming meiguo xiyatu huashengdun daxue renleixuexi jiangzuo [4]” [Ethnic regional autonomy: Multifactor historical practices and the basis for ethnic harmony—lecture series by Li Shaoming at Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle [4]], *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao* (*Renwen shehui kexue ban*) [Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities (Social Science and Humanities Section)], no. 8 (2012).

have any impact on us; no one has the ability to separate Tibet from China.”⁵³ This view was evident in the pattern of the criticisms that Party mouthpieces crafted against the Dalai Lama during that period.⁵⁴ First, the criticisms always focused on individuals or single organizations, which were not taken as representative of foreign governments. Some typical key words and phrases were: “vehemently condemn a few senators in the US Congress,”⁵⁵ “a few people in the US Congress,”⁵⁶ “a few foreign imperialists,”⁵⁷ “a few people in the US Senate are following the path of the old colonialism,”⁵⁸ “a few foreign political forces and a few foreign organizations and individuals in the name of protecting human rights.”⁵⁹ Even these few persons or organizations were often described as passive actors from which the Dalai Clique actively sought support, “naively wishing to rely on the support of foreigners to carry out separatist activities.”⁶⁰

53. Deng Xiaoping, “Wenhua shenghuo shuiping” [The quality of cultural life], October 16, 1987, in *Xizang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian: 1949–2005*. [Selected documents on Tibetan work, 1949–2005] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2005).

54. The Party mouthpiece newsletters cited here come from a collection called *Yangguang xia de zui'e: Lasa lici saoluan, baoli fanzui jishi* [Crimes in the sunlight: A record of each wave of riots and violent crimes in Lhasa], ed. Xizang zizhiq dangxiao and Xizang ribao she [Party school of Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibet Daily] (Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 2009).

55. “Qianglie qianze Meiguo guohui ganshe Zhongguo neizheng” [Vehemently condemning US Congress for interfering with China’s domestic affairs], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 9, 1987, *ibid.*, 52; Li Xiannian remarked that “the US Congress is only in a position to manage the US and not to intervene into other countries’ domestic affairs”; see Zhu Yunlong, “Dalai fenlie zuguo de hoodong shi bu de renxin de” [Dalai’s separatist activities does not win people’s hearts], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 11, 1987, *ibid.*, 45; “Wo zhumei dashiguan dui mei caniyuan tongguo Xizang wenti xiuzhengan biaoshi fenkai” [Our embassy in the US expressed indignation about US Senate passing the amendment on the Tibet question], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 6, 1987, *ibid.*, 58.

56. “Mei caniyuan tongguo ganshe Zhongguo neizheng de xiuzhengan shi mei guohui shaoshuren cedong de you yi yanzhong shijian” [That US Senate passed the amendment to interfere with China’s domestic affairs was again a serious incident plotted by a handful of people in US Congress], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 7, 1987, *ibid.*, 57; Foreign Minister Qian Qichen said that “a few people in the US know little about Tibet but hold strong biased opinions,” see “Xizang wenti shi zhongguo neizheng, buxu waiguo ganshe” [The Tibet question is China’s domestic affair, no foreign interference is allowed], *Xinhua News Agency*, March 27, 1988, *ibid.*, 161; Bao Guangren, “Mei guohui shaoshu yiyuan you zai Xizang wenti shang zuo wenzhang” [A few US senators made an issue of Tibet again], *ibid.*, 187.

57. “Yinzhong youxie qianze Xizang fenlie zhuyizhe de baoluan xingdong” [The association of Sino-Indo friendship accused Tibet separatists of violent activities], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 14, 1987, *ibid.*, 76.

58. “Qianglie qianze Meiguo caniyuan tongguo de ganshe Zhongguo neizheng de xiuzhengan, jianjue yonghu woguo wajiaobu fayaren daibiao woguo zhengfu suo chanshu de yanzheng lichang” [Vehemently condemning US Senate passing the amendment to interfere with China’s domestic affairs, firmly supporting the righteous stance declared by our diplomats on behalf of our government], October 8, 1987, *ibid.*, 67.

59. Tian Changjin, “Lasa saoluan de beihou” [Behind the Lhasa riot], 1988, *ibid.*, 202.

60. “Xizang zizhiq dangwei fushuji, zhengxie zhuxi redi tongzhi de dianshi jianghua” [The speech on TV by Raidi, the deputy party secretary of TAR and President of CPPCC of TAR], *ibid.*, 50; Xu Xinhua and Zou Aiguo, “Zhongguo de lingtu zhuquan burong qinfan, zhongguo de neibu shiwu burong waiguo ganshe” [Intolerable is any offense to China’s sovereignty and any interference with China’s domestic affairs], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 7, 1987, *ibid.*, 54; “Fandui fenlie zuguo, fandui powai anding tuanjie” [Oppose separating motherland, oppose harming stability and solidarity], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 3, 1987, *ibid.*, 89.

The official perception was that militarily Tibetans are too weak to pose any real threat, as *Tibet Daily* once commented: “calling for Tibet independence and plotting to ‘change the sky’ is just like a crazy pipe dream . . . we have our heroic and powerful People’s Liberation Army and People’s Armed Police that are loyal to the motherland, loyal to the people.”⁶¹

While Chinese authorities often pointed to the Dalai Lama and his exile government in India as the source of internal unrest in Tibet,⁶² there is evidence that after Tiananmen China’s leaders were worried about something other than just the “Dalai Clique,” as a seemingly contradictory statement by the Party secretary of Tibet Chen Kuiyuan, suggests: “We must not think that riots staged by lamas and nuns holding the Snow Lion flag and chanting pro-independence slogans were so trivial that it is not worth our time to deal with it. Of course, a few lamas and nuns staging protests would by no means cause the severe outcome [that we face], and the whole Dalai Clique would never be able to achieve anything.”⁶³

If the Dalai Clique has “little strength”⁶⁴ and “politically and materially doesn’t have the power to fight with us,”⁶⁵ then who does?

In the post-Tiananmen era, Tibetan protests and separatism were no longer seen as purely driven by the independence ambitions of “the Dalai Clique”; rather, they were perceived to be backed by “hostile western forces” ultimately seeking to break up China. Just as the hostile West pursues “peaceful evolution” as a means to pursue its goal of politically subverting China,⁶⁶ “the Dalai Clique” became a “tool” of the West to break up China territorially and politically.⁶⁷ In the words of an internal report, “the Dalai Clique” has been serving the West as “shock troops” in its “breakthrough strategy” to break up China, and the Dalai Lama is none other than the “flagship” of this proxy force.⁶⁸ This view was reiterated

61. “Xizang de tian shi bian bu liao de” [Tibet’s sky cannot be changed], 1988, *ibid.*, 198.

62. Jiang Zemin, “Weirao fazhan he wending liangjian dashi kaichuang xizang gongzuo xinjunian” [Focus on the two major tasks of development and stability to open up new prospect for Tibet work], July 20, 1994, in *Xizang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian: 1949–2005*.

63. Chen Kuiyuan, “Zai fanfenlie douzheng zhong yao zhuyi jie jue jige wenti” [Several problems that need to be solved in the antiseperatism struggle], June 11, 1992, in *Xizang de jiaobu*.

64. Chen Kuiyuan, “Renqing xingshi, zhuhao fazhan yu wending liangjian dashi” [Clearly understand the situation and fulfill the two major tasks of development and stability], May 14, 1996, in *Xizang de jiaobu*.

65. Chen Kuiyuan, “Laoji Xiaoping jiaodao nuli zoujin qianlie” [Keep in mind Xiaoping’s guidance and work hard to become one in the top echelon], May 14, 1997, in *Xizang de jiaobu*.

66. “Ruogan ‘neican’ zhong de ‘liusi’ fansi” [Reflection on the “June Fourth” in some internal reference], issue 27 and issue 40 of *Neican xuanbian* [Selection of internal reference], Xinhua News Agency, July and October 1989, in *Zhonggong xizang zhongyao lishi wenxian ziliao huibian* [Collection of important CCP historical documents and materials on Tibet], vol. 36 (Los Angeles: Zhongwen chubanyu fuwu zhongxin, 2004).

67. “Zangdangfa [1989] 24 hao” [Issued by CCP of TAR [1989] document no. 24], *Xizang zizhiqiu zhongyao wenjian xuanbian: 1985–1990*.

68. Renzhen Luose, Xie Gangzheng, and Chen Zhichun, “Suowei ‘Xizang wenti’ de lishi he xianzhuang” [History and current situation of the so-called “Tibet issue”] (Sichuan zangxue yanjiusuo, 2001), in *Xizang zizhiqiu zhongyao wenjian huibian 1993–1997* [Collection of important party documents of Tibet Autonomous Region, 1993–1997], vol. 31 of *Zhonggong xizang zhongyao lishi wenxian ziliao huibian* [Collection of im-

on many occasions by different senior Chinese leaders such as Jiang Zemin,⁶⁹ Li Peng,⁷⁰ and Chen Kuiyuan.⁷¹ Their belief in a Western conspiracy to support the Dalai Lama might well have seemed confirmed to them when the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1989.⁷²

The new Party secretary of China, Jiang Zemin, asserted that the instability in Tibet was primarily due to the separatist activities of the “Dalai Clique” based in India; and Jiang further stated, “Because the Dalai Clique is under the support of Western hostile forces, the current struggle is a continuation of the over one hundred years long struggle of the Chinese people against the plot of capitalist and imperialist forces to break up China.”⁷³

Thus, while Tibetan separatism manifested itself internally, the mastermind was from outside. Jiang asserted, “Ethnic separatists always serve as collaborators from inside for foreign invaders coming to grab our borderland and territory.”⁷⁴

In 1993, Chen Kuiyuan was quick to link a protest against inflation to an external plot, as he noted that “this riot had an external linkage—after the riot, the US Consul General in Chengdu asked to enter Tibet and talk with our TAR officials.”⁷⁵ In response to a tax protest in May 1994, Chen ordered that a “relentless crackdown” should be carried out to nip the bud of unrest whenever enemies “poke out their head.”⁷⁶ He further noted, “International hostile forces have been emboldened after the Eastern Europe crisis and the collapse of the Soviet Union and will not abandon their policy of westernizing and breaking up China. . . . Hostile forces and the Dalai Clique expect to see huge unrest in China. . . . They

portant CCP historical documents and materials on Tibet] (Los Angeles: Zhongwen chubanshu fuwu zhongxin, 2011), 177.

69. Jiang Zemin, “Wei jianshe tuanjie, fuyu, wenming de shehuizhuyi xin Xizang er fendou” [Work hard to construct a consolidated, wealthy, and civilized socialist new Tibet], July 24, 1990, in *Xizang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian: 1949–2005*.

70. Li Peng, “Zhuzhu jiyu, tuanjie fendou, jiakuai xizang jianshe” [Seize the opportunity, work hard in solidarity, speed up Tibet’s construction], July 22, 1994, in *Xizang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian: 1949–2005*.

71. Chen Kuiyuan, “Xuexi makesizhuyi minzu lilun zhengque renshi xinshiqi de minzu wenti” [Study the Marxist theory of nationality and correctly understand the minzu problem in the new era], in *Xizang de jiaobu*, and “Jielu pipan dalai jituan tigao xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo de weili” [Expose and criticize the Dalai Clique and enhance the power of publicity work], April 18, 1994, in *Xizang de jiaobu*.

72. The US congress extended significant support to the Dalai Lama in securing the honor. See John Kenneth Knaus, *Beyond Shangri-la: America and Tibet’s Move into the Twenty-First Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

73. Jiang Zemin, “Weihe wending, jiakuai fazhan, kaichuang xizang gongzuo xinjunian” [Secure stability, expedite development, and open up new prospects for our Tibet work], July 20 1994, in *Xizang zizhi zhongyao wenjian huibian 1993–1997*.

74. Jiang Zemin, “Jin yi bu jiaqiang ge minzu de da tuanjie, jianju weihu zuguo de tongyi” [Further strengthen the great solidarity among all nationalities and resolutely safeguard the unification of our motherland], January 14, 1992, in *Xizang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian: 1949–2005*.

75. Chen Kuiyuan, “Jianju daji naoshi fenzi quanli weihu shehui wending” [Strike hard at rioters, spare no effort to keep society stable], May 30, 1993, in *Xizang de jiaobu*.

76. Ibid.

hope that they could stir up Tibet and then bring in international intervention to realize "Tibetan Independence."⁷⁷

With the Dalai Clique identified as a proxy of external plotters, Chinese authorities quickly began to identify Tibetan Buddhism as a "weapon" of the Tibetan separatist forces serving external "masters." As Chen Kuiyuan said, "Most of the temples are generally stable, and the majority of monks and nuns didn't participate in unrest. But we must see that generations of the Dalai Lama's influence widely affects monks and nuns' minds. The 14th Dalai Lama is just utilizing this traditional influence for his political gamble."⁷⁸

In short, religion was made a top target at the Third Forum because of its potential mobilization power in Tibetan society, which Chinese leaders thought would be exploited by the "Dalai Clique" for its separatist cause. This external-internal dyad determined how Chinese leaders responded to the threat. There was nothing that could be done directly to annihilate external enemies, but at least China could remove all the possible domestic hazards so that "one palm alone cannot clap," as Jiang pointed out at the Third Forum: "Securing stability in Tibet must depend on we ourselves doing our work well. The focal point of our work is not outside but inside our country. . . . If we deal well with our work within our country, then there will not be a market left for the Dalai clique, and their international activities would achieve nothing."⁷⁹

As a consequence, Chinese leaders decided at the time of the Third Forum to strike hard and beat the internal proxy forces serving the external mastermind. And one way to do it, in addition to buying off Tibetans with economic development and assimilation through Han immigration, was not only to continue rigorously to suppress protests, which it was assumed were inspired by the Dalai Clique in exile,⁸⁰ but also to strike at the Dalai Clique by strengthening controls over Tibetan religion.

The Third Forum's decisions seemed to have come late, five years after the Tiananmen incident and three years after the Soviet collapse. A reasonable explanation is the timing: the Tiananmen crisis occurred three months after martial

77. Chen Kuiyuan, "Jianjue daji didui shili zhangwo fanfenlie douzheng de zhudongquan" [Strike hard at hostile forces and take the upper hand in anti-separatism struggle], April 14, 1994, in *Xizang de jiaobu*.

78. Chen Kuiyuan, "Liji zai quanqu simiao kaizhan aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jianli zhengchang de zongjiao zhixu" [Immediately carry out patriotic education in all temples and establish normal religious order], May 25, 1996, in *Xizang de jiaobu*.

79. Document no. 5 of the Sixth Enlarged Plenary Session of the Standing Committee [of the Fourth Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Regional Branch of the Chinese Communist Party]. See app. C in Barnett and Spiegel, *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head*.

80. In Chinese leaders' eyes there was no distinction between protests by Tibetans in Tibet and protests plotted by the Tibetan exiles; unrest in Tibet was always linked to the "Dalai Clique" based in India simply because the Dalai Lama is the supreme leader of Tibetans. In other words, the Dalai Lama and his exile government are not "external" because they are in India. Rather, they are "internal," as they are closely associated with the Tibetan protests inside the PRC.

law had been imposed in Tibet, and it was not until 1993 that a new wave of protests reminded Chinese authorities that the religious controls initially put in place after martial law needed to be strengthened and enforced.

Despite the relaxation of relations with Western countries in 1994, marked especially by President Clinton's approval that year of a renewal of China's Most Favored Nation status, "Western hostile forces" remained an enduring threat, and vigilance became critical to the Party's security and survival. As Jiang Zemin noted in July 1994, "Tibet's stability concerns China's stability; Tibet's development concerns China's development; Tibet's security concerns China's security."⁸¹ It concerns "the fate of the Party and the people, and the life and death of our country."⁸²

In 2001, an internal report praised the effectiveness of the policies put in place by the Third Forum and reiterated the nature of the "struggle." As the report stated, "tactically we have to take the current struggle against the Dalai Clique seriously and realize that we are not only faced with the Dalai Clique but, more importantly, the politically and economically powerful Western anti-Chinese forces."⁸³

THE LASTING IMPACT

As time went by, this perception of an external threat had a lasting impact. Between 1994 and 2007, when faced with a few sporadic protests of varied nature, Chinese authorities further undergirded their already systematically repressive religious control.

Between the end of the Third Forum and January 1996, there was a new wave of protests by Tibetans, possibly staged in response to the implementation of the new religious policy.⁸⁴ In tandem with the implementation of the new policy, security measures were also systematically strengthened.⁸⁵ However, after 1996 Tibetan political protests became rare, as Barnett observed. Between 1999 and 2007, only minor isolated protests broke out sporadically—a Tibetan carpenter climbed a flagpole and raised a Tibetan flag in August 1999; a protest by Drepung monks in Lhasa erupted at their monastery in November 2005; a wave of protests against wearing fur from endangered animals erupted in 2006; a protest by graduate students complaining about unemployment occurred in March 2006;⁸⁶ a Tibetan nomad, Rungye Adak, jumped on a festival stage and called for the return

81. Jiang, "Weihu wending," 157.

82. Chen, "Xuexi makesizhuyi," 490.

83. Luose, Xie, and Chen, *Suowei "Xizang"*, 180.

84. For details of the protests, see Barnett and Spiegel, *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head*, 64. Two other possible factors were the seventeenth Karmapa's forced visit to China in October 1994 and the visit to China and Tibet in November 1994 of the UN special rapporteur on religious intolerance M. Abdelfatta Amor.

85. *Ibid.*, 71–75.

86. Robert Barnett, "Thunder from Tibet," *New York Review of Books*, May 29, 2008, 46.

of the Dalai Lama in 2007.⁸⁷ The situation in Tibet was relatively quiet for several reasons. First, Tibetans were aware of diminishing foreign exposure and attention many years after the high tide of their independence movement starting in the late 1980s. Second, China's harsh crackdown seemed to have deterred many from risking jail and worse by protesting. Protesters would face an average 6.5 years imprisonment and around 3,000 were detained for nonviolent protests or having forbidden documents and videos.⁸⁸ Third, the China-Dharamsala negotiations from 2002 to 2007 gave Tibetans hope (elusive, as it finally turned out) that the dialogue might find a solution, and a sense arose among some Tibetans that they did not need to stage protests any more.⁸⁹

Despite this relatively calm period between 1997 and 2007, China tightened its religious control in a number of ways:

1. In 1998, religious control and the "patriotic education" campaign was extended to eastern Tibetan regions in Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu, where greater religious freedom had been granted until then.⁹⁰
2. A campaign dedicated to advocating atheism was authorized to begin in January 1999 and was renewed at a political meeting in Chengdu in April 2000.⁹¹
3. From 2001 to 2003, the national Party launched a "Strike Hard" campaign for three years authorizing the government in Tibet to crackdown on any activities that seemed suspicious, "splittist," and "endangering state security."⁹²
4. In 2003, Trulku Tenzin Delek, a highly respected lama, was sentenced to death.⁹³
5. In March 2005, Regulations on Religious Affairs was officially enacted by the State Administration for Religious Affairs.⁹⁴

87. Warren W Smith Jr., *Tibet's Last Stand? The Tibetan Uprising of 2008 and China's Response* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

88. Barnett, "Thunder from Tibet," 46.

89. According to Warren Smith, upon the resumption of the Beijing-Dharamsala dialogue, Samdhong Rinpoche, the prime minister of the Tibetan exile administration, expressed his hope that Tibetans in exile would stop their protests so that there would be a good atmosphere for talk. Presumably Tibetans in China would choose to refrain from protesting as well. See Smith, *Tibet's Last Stand*; Baogang He and Barry Sautman, "The Politics of the Dalai Lama's New Initiative for Autonomy," *Pacific Affairs* 78, no. 4 (2005–6).

90. Anne-Marie Blondeau, "Question 49," in *Authenticating Tibet: Answers to China's 100 Questions*, ed. Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

91. Ibid.

92. *Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy* (hereafter TCHRD) 2003 report, <http://zh.scribd.com/doc/105359545/Annual-Report-TCHRD-2003>.

93. For more details about Tenzin Delek, see the TCHRD 2003 and 2009 reports available at <http://www.tchrd.org/>; and Wang Lixiong, "The End of Tibetan Buddhism," in Wang and Shakya, *The Struggle for Tibet*.

94. According to the 2011 Congressional-Executive Commission on China report, this regulation "will further erode the traditionally close ties between the Tibetan monastic and secular communities." See Congressional-Executive Commission on China (hereafter CECC), "Special Report: Tibetan Monastic Self-Immolation Appear to Correlate with Increasing Repression of Freedom of Religion," December 23, 2011, <http://www.cecc.gov/publications/issue-papers/special-report-tibetan-monastic-self-immolations-appear-to-correlate-with>.

6. In April 2005, the Lhasa Religious Bureau enforced a three-month-long Patriotic Education Campaign at Sera monastery near Lhasa, and the campaign was reportedly carried out in other monasteries at the same time.⁹⁵
7. In May 2006, Zhang Qingli, the Party Secretary of Tibet, widened the patriotic education campaign to the broader population and intensified the “rectification” and restructuring of temples.⁹⁶
8. In March 2007, Measures for Putting Professional Religious Personnel on Record were enacted by the State Administration for Religious Affairs.⁹⁷
9. In September 2007, Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism were enacted.⁹⁸

To make sense of why the Party stepped up religious control when Tibet was relatively quieter and more stable than in the preceding years, again let us turn to the Chinese leaders’ external threat perception that had taken hold of their minds since 1989.

Jiang Zemin concluded during the 1995–96 Taiwan Crisis that the United States will never “abandon its political plot of Westernizing and separating us.”⁹⁹ In 1999, the Kosovo war created a precedent, in the Chinese leaders’ view, for possible future foreign actions in China’s ethnic areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang.¹⁰⁰ Jiang asked whether Falun Gong “has linkages with overseas and Western forces, and whether there are ‘masters’ commanding it from behind?”¹⁰¹ Hu Jintao stayed alert to the threat posed by the Color Revolutions in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005).¹⁰²

CONCLUSION

Is the Chinese leaders’ expressed perception of an external threat genuinely believed by them, or is it mere political rhetoric to justify a policy predisposition determined by bureaucratic interests or China’s domestic political structure?

95. “China Recommences Patriotic Education Campaign in Tibet’s Monastic Institutions,” TCHRD, October 12, 2005, www.tchrd.org/press/2005/nb20051013.html.

96. CECC, “Special Report.”

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. Jiang Zemin, “Dangqian de guoji xingshi he women de waijiao gongzuo” [The current international situation and our diplomatic work], August 28 1998, vol. 2 of SWJZ (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006).

100. Zhang Zhirong, “Zhongguo bianjiang yu minzu wenti: dangdai Zhongguo de tiaozhan jiqi lishi youlai” [China’s border area and ethnicity problem: The contemporary challenge to China and its historical origin] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2005), 1–7; Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 217.

101. Jiang Zemin, “Yige xinde xinzhao” [A new signal], April 25, 1999, vol. 2 of SWJZ (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006).

102. Shirk, *Fragile Superpower*.

This article argues that Chinese leaders' fear of the West's "evil" intentions did indeed have a major influence on their decision-making regarding Tibet.¹⁰³ This, however, begs a question of whether Chinese leaders misperceived the "external threat."

First of all, the leaders' perception smacks of a "conspiracy theory": that Chinese leaders had convinced each other of a US intention to ultimately "destroy" China, but their fear did not accurately reflect the actual complexity of US-China relations at that time. For example, while Deng Xiaoping detected strong hostility from the United States after the Tiananmen protests, President George H. Bush sought earnestly to preserve the US-China relationship.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, although US-China relations experienced ups and downs during President Clinton's administration, these were mainly due to conflicting interests rather than life-and-death issues.¹⁰⁵

Second, the external threat perceived by Chinese leaders did not include India, even though India is a major regional power that provides asylum for Tibetan exiles, and even though India had a border dispute with China over territory that the PRC claimed for Tibet, and over which the two countries even fought a bitter war in 1962. China's nonchalant view of India seems to dovetail with what Jeff Smith noted in his recent book: China has a legacy of not taking India seriously enough and studying India has long been marginalized in China.¹⁰⁶ However, since India's development of nuclear weapons in 1998, marked by Prime Minister Atal Bihar Bajpayee's expressed perception of a "China threat," China has recognized India's regional great power ambition and has paid more heed, especially to India's closer relationship with the United States. But interestingly on the Tibet issue, the alignment of India's own aspirations with US interests has concerned China the most.¹⁰⁷ In the view of Chinese leaders, India's interest in Tibet is strategically defensive: that is, Tibet as a buffer zone,¹⁰⁸ rather than the assumed offensive goals of the United States that aims at China's dismemberment and destruction.

103. Complementary to this point is Barry Sautman's recent study, where he argues the United States has been leveraging Tibetan separatism against China in order to satisfy American constituents, politically marginalize China, and even "project eventual use of secessionism to affect a post-Soviet-type diminution of China's global position." Sautman also contends that the US support is responsible for Tibetan exiles' refusal to accommodate China's demands. See Barry Sautman, "Secessionism as a United States Foreign Policy Lever: Tibet in Context," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2014): 179–201.

104. For more details, see Sarotte, "China's Fear of Contagion."

105. Robert Sutter, *US-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

106. Jeff M. Smith, *Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 9–10.

107. John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 7–78.

108. Luose, Xie, and Chen, *Suowei "Xizang"*, 187.

When justifying their external threat perception, Chinese leaders talk in terms of the capitalism-versus-socialism mind-set of the Cold War and the traumatic memory of being bullied by Western powers in the early twentieth century. These twin paradigms help explain where Chinese leaders' external threat perception derives from and why it does not focus on India. As David Shambaugh once noted, "National disunity and impotence in the face of imperialist aggression for more than a century has left an indelible mark on the Chinese national psyche."¹⁰⁹

A final argument regards the future prospects of the Tibet issue. As the Western powers have not really helped the Dalai Lama in his confrontation with China over Tibetan autonomy, the future of Tibet hinges on two things, with the first conditioned by the second. The first is that the Chinese authorities realize that stability brought about through repressive control is at best a fortress built on sand. In fact, there are some vague signs that this type of awareness began to sink in after the Tibetan protests of 2008. According to a former government work team member, "The Chinese authorities are looking carefully into what Tibetans are really thinking about their future, and what are the core motivations and reasons for political problems such as the March 14 riot. . . . The Chinese authorities have realized that without completely controlling Tibetans' thinking and what he characterized as the 'consciousness sphere,' the mission of achieving 'long term political stability' in Tibet is impossible."¹¹⁰

This helps us to identify and understand the unstated mission of the "Stationing in Villages" (*Zhu cun* 驻村) policy launched in 2011, a newly upgraded measure of control and surveillance. According to an official Party mouthpiece, the goal was to "further secure the stability of the entire Tibet Autonomous Region, further consolidate the basis of the Party's organization, further promote the Party's image in people's minds, increase the momentum of the leapfrog development of the Tibet Autonomous Region, and further cement the Party-people relationship."¹¹¹

109. David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 302.

110. International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), *Storm in the Grasslands: Self-Immolations in Tibet and Chinese Policy* (Washington, DC: ICT, 2012) <http://www.savetibet.org/storm-in-the-grasslands-self-immolations-in-tibet-and-chinese-policy/>. There has been a positive sign that Tibetan people are now allowed to have the photo of the fourteenth Dalai Lama at home.

111. According to *Tibet Daily*, 21,804 party cadres were picked out from government units and state-owned enterprises to form 5,451 work teams. They were sent to every village in TAR. See Jiang Cuilian, "Qiang jihuimin gugenben—Xizang zizhiqu zhucun gongzuodui gongzuo zongshu" [Consolidate the basis and benefit people—an overview of TAR village stationing team's work], *Tibet Daily*, March 21, 2013, <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n/2013/0321/c117092-20869194.html>; Yao Wen, "Hangshi Xizang kuayueshi fazhan he changzhijuan de shehui genji" [Consolidate the social basis for TAR's leapfrog development and long-term stability], *Tibet Daily*, October 3, 2011, http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/html/2012-10/03/content_394917.htm.

But it seems that the government work teams were also on a special mission to help Chinese leaders make sense of what has gone wrong. Here is part of an account by a Tibetan who had firsthand experience with the work team members sent to Tibetan villages in 2011: "Ever since then, the work team wanted to know more about how my family members and our village conceive of the role of His Holiness. But they never threatened me; they asked questions nicely and as normal conversation. They said: 'How important is Dalai for you and your family, and do you want him to pray when you die?' One of them said that he would not take notes or report what I said to the authorities, but that he really wanted to know how important His Holiness is in our life."¹¹²

Second, it is very unlikely that China's leaders would adopt a more sympathetic approach without assurances that relaxation of control would not risk regime security. Ridding the Chinese leaders of the perception that Tibet relates to a conspiratorial external threat has become a prerequisite for any positive policy change in Tibet. After all, Chinese leaders have expressed no serious concerns about purely domestic ethnic unrest, since the Tibetan people do not have any military capacity, nor do the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile government.

112. ICT, *Storm in the Grasslands*.