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I N T R O D U C T I O N

A few years ago, a traveller wrote to us saying that the fact that pictures of the Panchen Lama were banned in Tibet was untrue, noting that they were displayed all over the place. What the traveller did see were pictures of Gyaltsen Norbu, the child appointed by the Chinese government as the 11th Panchen Lama, but recognised by few Tibetans. Pictures of Gyaltsen Norbu are not only allowed to be displayed in Tibet but mandatory in some places. This traveller's observation led the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) to decide upon producing a briefing paper for travellers to Tibet, one designed especially for travellers who may have little or no knowledge of the political situation in Tibet, that would be a supplement to the knowledge of seasoned travellers.

Travellers have an important role to play in the Tibetan situation. In recent years they have become a vital source of information on the situation in Tibet by conveying first hand accounts of the situation inside Tibet and verifying the need to support the Tibetan cause in the international community. This in turn heightens the pressure on China to rectify the human rights abuses that are perpetrated under its rule. TCHRD is confident that after reading this guide,

travellers will observe with awareness the conditions in Tibet and upon returning share with us and others what they saw and experienced during their journey inside Tibet.

The most important thing to pack for a visit to Tibet is some understanding of the situation there. It is important for travellers to the region to understand something about the political situation in Tibet. The political climate is volatile. Rules and regulations for travellers are often subject to random changes with little or no notice. Observation combined with awareness allows you to see the reality of everyday life for Tibetans throughout Tibet. The guide also gives recommendations and information that will enable you to see beyond the façade presented by the Chinese authorities. This is not an insignificant task given that the Chinese government has stated that: "We should use people from abroad to carry out the propaganda on Tibet for us, which is more powerful than when we do it."

Be informed before you leave home. Read up on both the Tibetan situation and travel conditions. There are various good publications and websites that can provide valuable and interesting information. DO NOT take this booklet, or any other sensitive documentation on your person to Tibet; this could cause difficulties not just for

you but for any local people who came in contact with you!

Throughout this guide, when referring to Tibet, our definition is that of the complete region of traditional Tibet, which encompasses the three regions of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo. After the annexation of Tibet in 1951, China subdivided the country into the seven administrative regions, the largest of which is the "Tibet Autonomous Region" ("TAR"). When China today refers to Tibet it means only the "TAR" which is less than half of the entire Tibetan plateau. The remaining areas have been incorporated into existing Chinese provinces. This was in order to facilitate effective control over the population. Most of Amdo lies in the Chinese province of Qinghai, and small portions in Gansu and Sichuan. The former principalities of eastern Kham have been incorporated into Sichuan and Yunnan, with smaller areas in Qinghai, and the "TAR". It is only the remaining areas of U-Tsang, western Kham (and Western Tibet) that the Chinese authorities officially designate as the 72 counties of the "TAR". Therefore, when the Chinese authorities refer to Tibet they only mean the "TAR" region. In this paper however, the term Tibet is used to refer to the entire country as it is known and recognised by the Tibetan people.

Should I Visit

Currently there is a tremendous drive to increase tourism in Tibet. There is also a general effort to project Tibet as having benefited from the Communist regime. For all travellers there is an opportunity to assess this claim and personally witness what is happening to Tibetans in their homeland under Chinese occupation, and maybe help expose the reality of the situation to the international community.

Many travellers have reported having been frequently restricted by heavy Chinese regulations and some have described feelings of fear and intimidation. As a result, many people have misgivings about visiting Tibet. Some people feel somewhat immoral squandering their money in Tibet, knowing that the Chinese government benefits from tourism. Contributions via transport costs and permits may be unavoidable, but careful choices of where other money is spent can reduce excess governmental financial gain.

Due to strict controls on access to outside information, many Tibetans are unaware of the level of support that exists in the international community for the Tibetan cause, or of the exile community in India. This information if judiciously passed on by a careful tourist can greatly boost the morale of those in Tibet.

Tibet?

Additionally, for decades the Chinese have consistently implied to Tibetans that their culture, religion and language are worthless. Now Tibetans are witnessing foreigners travelling great distances — at great costs — to visit Tibetan holy places, and showing an interest in their culture and language. This may encourage Tibetans to believe again in the value and worth of their own culture.

Tibetans are characteristically friendly and cheerful in their disposition. In some well-publicised cases foreigners have assumed that this means that these Tibetans are content with their situation and have abandoned the freedom struggle and their reverence for the Dalai Lama. A good way to assess the situation is to observe on Wednesdays in Lhasa the number of Tibetans offering prayers and participating in the incense burning ceremony. According to the Tibetan astrological calendar Wednesday is a special day for offering long life prayers to the Dalai Lama. Despite increased surveillance, Tibetans will gather in large numbers to attend the special Wednesday prayers especially since a ban was imposed in 1997 on observing the birthday of the Dalai Lama (6 July of the Western calendar).

H

Historical background

Tibet has a recorded history since 127 BC. The first King of Tibet, Nyatri Tsenpo was enthroned in this year. The Tibetan Empire reached its peak during the 7th and 9th centuries, extending into China and other central Asian countries. Tibetan armies seized the Chinese capital at Ch'angan in 763 during the reign of the great Tibetan King Trisong Detsen. Between 821-822 a peace treaty was concluded between the Tibetan Emperor Tri Ralpa Chen and the Chinese Emperor Mu-tsung. During this period Buddhism was introduced into the country and became the state religion.

Tibet occupied 2.5 million square kilometres of land between the two giants of Asia, India and China. The politics of both countries had historically exercised considerable influence over the development of Tibet. China had always coveted Tibet as the 'Western Treasure House' (Ch: Xizang) and Indo-Tibetan relations cultivated spiritual and intellectual advancements in Buddhism.ⁱ

In 1207 Tibet was invaded by Mongolia, but Kublai Khan offered the rule to his Tibetan spiritual teacher, Drogon Choegyal Phagspa. In 1270 Kublai Khan founded the Yuan Dynasty. China's present day claims that "Tibet has always been a part of China", derive from this period when they were both ruled by the Mongols. The Mongol administration of Tibet was unique compared to the other conquered territories

due to the priest-patron relationship it shared with Tibet. Tibet was integrated into the administration of the Mongol Empire but not into the administration of China.

In 1642, the Fifth Dalai Lama assumed religious and secular power over Tibet. He established the system of Tibetan government called "Gaden Phodrang". In 1653, the Dalai Lama made a state visit to the imperial capital of China, recently taken over by the Manchu Emperors. The Manchu emperor Shunzi travelled on a four-day journey outside his capital (Peking) to receive the Dalai Lama and honoured him with a treatment reserved for an independent sovereign.ⁱⁱ

In 1720, the Manchu Empire offered to lend troops to escort the young 7th Dalai Lama from eastern Tibet to Lhasa for his enthronement ceremony. With the appointment of Ambans, a type of political envoy, in 1728, the Manchus did succeed in establishing some degree of political influence in Tibet. They helped repel a Nepalese invasion in 1792, but failed to respond to a British invasion in 1903-4. However, the 13th Dalai Lama severed all ties with the Manchus when the Manchus attempted to depose him in 1910. When the Manchus fell to the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalists) led by Sun Yatsen in 1911, the 13th Dalai Lama issued a proclamation amidst the chaos reaffirming Tibet's independence on 14 February 1913.

After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, China was internally divided and militarily weak. One of the

primary objectives of the Guomindang was to forge unity and restore influence. A number of missions were dispatched to Lhasa to re-establish relations with the Tibetans. In January 1949 Chiang Kai-Shek and his government fled to Taiwan, and on 1 October 1949, the People's Republic of China was established and Chairman Mao proclaimed in Tiananmen Square, "China has stood up". The Communists set out to regain the territorial acquisitions that the Guomindang had inherited. This shift in power marked the beginning of the end of Tibet as an independent state, since the Communists proved to be even more determined than the Guomindang to assert China's control in Tibet.

Upon assuming power, the Communists made it clear that the last remaining task for the victorious People's Liberation Army (PLA) was the "liberation" of Tibet. The upper echelons of the Communist party had already developed strategies for the incorporation of what they regarded as 'Chinese national minorities' within the framework of the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, the Communist leaders were acutely aware of their lack of influence in Tibet.

Since 1913 Tibet had, for all intents and purposes, been an independent state. It exercised full authority over its internal and external affairs and had its own distinctly Tibetan government, currency, postal system, language, and religion. However, the external threat to Tibet could not have come at a worse time, since Tibet's supreme leader, the Dalai Lama, was a

young boy of fourteen years old who had not established his authority.

The first military skirmish between Tibetan troops and the PLA took place at the end of May 1950. On 29 July, Beijing Radio broadcast a speech by General Liu Bocheng, who stated that the primary task of the South-West Military Administrative Committee was to liberate Tibet and that the 'PLA must launch an attack'. With 40,000 PLA soldiers on standby ready to march into Lhasa, there was very little the Tibetans could do to counter the Communist advance, and a team was sent to Beijing to negotiate surrender. The controversial 17-Point Agreement was signed in Beijing on 23 May 1951 thereby signing away what little was left of the claim of Tibetan independence. By the summer of 1956 fierce resistance to reform and Chinese aggression began to emerge in eastern Tibet, and by early 1959 this had spread to Lhasa and the PLA was on full alert. The final spark that led to the famous Lhasa Uprising of 1959 was an invitation extended to the Dalai Lama by the then Chinese representative in Tibet, Tan Guansan, to a show in the Chinese military camp. When this information became public, the Lhasa masses became gravely concerned that the show was just a pretext to kidnap the Dalai Lama. Thousands of people gathered demanding to see the Dalai Lama and to stop him going to the camp. A revolt broke out, rapidly expanding into a brief national uprising. Thousands lost their lives. His Holiness the Dalai Lama fled Tibet on 17 March 1959. On 23 March, the Chinese hoisted the five-star red flag over the Potala Palace. After he was given asylum

in India, during his first press conference on 20 June 1959, the Dalai Lama refuted the 17-Point Agreement.

Following the invasion, events in Tibet can be divided not three periods, which have led to claims of genocide. The retaliations for the 1959 Lhasa Uprising claimed thousands of deaths of Tibetans through execution, imprisonment or starvation in prison camps. According to a confidential Chinese government document, between March 1959 and October 1960, 87,000 Tibetans were killed. It was also during this period that thousands died as a result of the Great Leap Forward, an attempt by Mao to replace the production of agriculture by steel and to introduce the commune system. The second period of grave threat to the Tibetans was the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) although in Tibet it reportedly lasted until 1979. Mao's frenzied efforts were based on a campaign to remove the "four olds"; old culture, old thoughts, old customs and old tradition. The third "dark" period was from 1987-1990 during which martial law was imposed in Tibet for thirteen months following a series of large-scale demonstrations in Lhasa. It was during this period when approximately a hundred Tibetans were shot dead by the Chinese Police for calling for Tibetan independence. Additionally thousands were imprisoned.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1988 the Dalai Lama announced the five-point peace proposal, a major concession in an attempt to bring a solution to the Tibet issue. The struggle continues...

E Entry Formalities for Tibet

Entry requirements for the 'TAR' are constantly changing and usually require a special permit. However, as only less than half of Tibet is under the jurisdiction of the 'TAR', access to much of eastern and other parts of traditional Tibet require only a mainland China visa.

A separate permit in addition to the Chinese Visa is required to enter the 'TAR' region. Recent information that one does not need to be in a group to acquire visas and can acquire individual permits is incorrect; plans for individual entry are expected to be approved by 2004.

Entry into and travel around the 'TAR' region is strictly controlled and highly regulated, especially on the entrance routes into the 'TAR', and these regulations can change without warning. Highly sensitive days, such as political anniversaries and high level governmental visits, can prevent issuance of permits and visa extensions. Local political activism can also be the cause of abrupt closure of certain areas. Therefore, especially if travelling alone, it is worth keeping in touch with developments regarding regulations for the areas you anticipate travelling to, both before and during your visit.

Controls that may be enforced:

- Permits and visa extensions refused or cancelled
- Increased surveillance

- Increased armed personnel presence
- Curfews
- Late night hotel checks by the Public Security Bureau (PSB)
- Increased number of checkpoints on travel routes
- Prohibitions on kora or circumambulation routes, or incense burning
- Random checks on Tibetans for permits

Tibet from mainland China

There are several ways of getting to Tibet. Once you are in Mainland China, you can enter Lhasa by land or air. Most overlanders will try to reach Lhasa from Chengdu, Kunming, Xining (via Golmud) or Kashgar.^{iv}

■ OVERLAND

The only overland officially open for independent travellers is the 1969km Qinghai-Tibet Highway from Xining to Lhasa via Golmud.

Chengdu to Lhasa is linked by the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, currently being reconstructed. The direct route stretches for 2166km runs through Lithang and Markham on the southern route, and the 2427km northern branch runs via Derge and Chamdo. Both branches merge near Pomda and then continue west towards Lhasa. From Chamdo there is also a less travelled 1028km overland route to Lhasa heading due west via Nagchu.

The Sichuan-Tibet highway is officially open as far west as Batang or Derge and can be reached from Chengdu by public bus. Thereafter, public transport is rare or non-existent and truck drivers face heavy fines

if caught carrying foreigners. Cyclists and hitchhikers can avoid the main checkpoints by travelling in the night but if caught, the possibility of fines and being turned back at any village or hotel they stay in is high.

Kunming to Lhasa is connected to Lhasa by a spectacular 2400km Yunnan-Tibet Highway via Dali. Dechen (now “Shangrila”) “Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture” is the last open town along the Yunnan-Tibet Highway. The route from Dechen to Lhasa joins the main Sichuan-Tibet Highway near Markham.

Kashgar to Lhasa The 2884km journey along Xining-Tibet Highway from Kashgar to Lhasa via Mt Kailash is long and arduous.

■ BY AIR

Xining to Lhasa There are direct flight operating four times weekly between Xining and Lhasa. However, it is much more expensive than the bus fare from Gormud to Lhasa. Individuals will have to purchase tickets from a travel agent and will require a special permit to do so, or membership of a tour group.

Chengdu to Lhasa Flights operate twice daily in season from Chengdu to Lhasa. One must book their flight with a travel agent. The China southwest Airlines office will not sell air tickets for Lhasa for individuals. Instead, the agent will arrange tickets and permits by forming an ad hoc travel group. There are other flights operating from Beijing (via Xian or Chengdu), Guangzhou and Chongqing to Lhasa.

Kunming to Lhasa A weekly Kunming-Lhasa flight is available and independent travellers will have to book tickets with a travel agent as part of a tour group.

Tibet from Nepal

■ OVERLAND

Kathmandu to Lhasa One can travel with a valid Chinese visa over the Dram (Zhangmu) border by renting a four-wheel drive vehicle with a driver from the CITS officials next to the Chinese immigration post.

One can also book an organised overland tour from certain travel agents in Kathmandu. However, this may not be a reliable means of travelling because of the frequent erratic closure of this route.

Via Purang: Since the mid 90's it has been possible to join a tour package entering Tibet at Sher (in Nepalese Kojinath) near Purang, approximately 120km south of Mt Kailash. Sher is accessible via a five-day trek from Simikot, in western Nepal.

As late as April 2003, the Tibet-Nepal border was sealed due to the epidemic SARS.

■ BY AIR

Kathmandu to Lhasa There are flights from Kathmandu to Lhasa three times per week. Only China Southwest Airlines is permitted to fly the route. Individuals can only purchase tickets through a travel operator.

Sensitive Dates to observe while in Tibet

Losar ■ Tibetan New Year. Usually around February.

March 5 ■ Major pro-independence protests took place on this day in Lhasa in 1988 and 1989.

March 10 ■ National Uprising Day - Anniversary of the Lhasa uprising in 1959 commemorated in the exile community every year.

May 23 ■ Tibet signed the controversial 17-Point Agreement in 1951.

Saga Dawa ■ 4th month of the Tibetan Calendar. Usually around May-June. The Enlightenment and Death of Buddha. Many pilgrims come to Lhasa.

July 6 ■ Birthday of the Dalai Lama 1935.

August ■ Shoton (Yogurt festival). Many pro-independence demonstrations have taken place during this time due to the crowd it attracts.

September 27 ■ First freedom protest in Lhasa, 1987.

October 1 ■ Founding of the PRC and major protests in Lhasa.

December 10 ■ Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Dalai Lama in 1989.

Restrictions will also apply during visits of high-level government officials or international delegations.

T Travel in Tibet

Outside the 'TAR'

Most of the traditional Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham have been incorporated by the Chinese into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. Most of these areas are now open for foreign tourism. By travelling into areas away from the sinicised larger towns, it is possible to see Tibetans still living comparatively traditional lives. Villages tend to retain at least some of the traditional style housing of the region, though religious activities may still be restricted, and local festivals prohibited or curtailed.

■ Permits

Most of this area is easily accessed by independent travellers holding a China visa. Sensitive areas - such as mining and 'development' projects, prisons, military bases, and sites of recent political unrest - are either permanently or temporarily closed to foreigners both within and outside the 'TAR'.

■ Transport

In the open areas, travel is permitted on local buses or by paying for a lift on a truck or hire vehicles.

■ Accommodation

Enforcement of accommodation restrictions varies from location to location. In some areas there will be only one hotel where foreigners are permitted to stay, whereas in other areas it is possible to stay with local

Tibetan families. However, you should be aware that foreigners staying with local Tibetan family will be under official surveillance.

Inside the 'TAR'

Entry and travel within the Chinese designated "Tibet" is definitely restrictive and expensive, and rules and laws often change without warning and are subject to individual application.

■ Permits

There is a zone around Lhasa that does not require additional permits. Outside of these areas is another matter. Other than the direct run down the 'Friendship Highway' to the Nepal border, all areas require an official tour group - with driver, guide and hired jeep, and up to four permits. Not all areas are accessible even with applications for permits.

A

A brief background on the situation in Tibet

Monitoring and evaluating human rights situation in Tibet is a challenge considering the lack of transparency and secretive nature in which Chinese government function. China's human rights policies and practices in Tibet are not only contradictory but also self-defeating.

Many of Beijing's policies regarding Tibet are directives that are implemented at the local authorities' discretion. This means that often there is a substantial discrepancy between different areas as to which policies are implemented, and to what degree. There is no one area of Tibet that is representative of the situation for every Tibetan, and travellers will witness a variety of conditions and enforcement of policies throughout the country.

■ Discrimination

China justified its invasion of Tibet as "civilised" Chinese "liberating" the "backward and barbaric" Tibetans. Through this they instigated a structure of racial prejudice and domination that has only continued to intensify. The outcome is a constant level of racial discrimination against Tibetans. In many instances, such as cases of torture in prisons and the treatment of school children, the attitude of the Chinese is as severe as to consider Tibetans as sub-human.

This racial discrimination affects every sphere of soci-

ety. It ranges from the highest levels of officialdom and governmental policies, to the everyday attitudes and interactions of the poorest immigrant. The consequences of this, overall and individually, can often be severe. This can affect not only the lives and futures of individual Tibetans, but also the race as a whole.

One such example of this discrimination is the use of Chinese as the official language of Tibet. Chinese is used in all government and public offices and official situations. Employment in official positions directly depends on fluency in the Chinese language, which immediately puts Tibetans at a disadvantage. All public signs and official documents are in Chinese script. In the 'TAR' it is now compulsory to have Tibetan script on public signs as well as Chinese, but the size and visibility of the Tibetan script is significantly smaller. Also, the Tibetan used is a direct translation from Chinese rather than the correct Tibetan grammar. This in itself is a deliberate undermining of the language.

As a visitor to Tibet, you can observe the attitude of both migrant and tourist Chinese to local Tibetans. What level of social interaction is there between Tibetans and Chinese? What language does the Chinese use with Tibetans?

■ Population transfer

One of the long-term official policies of Beijing has been active population transfer into minority countries, designed to effectively demographically control

a dissident population. This is particularly predominant in the urban districts resulting in the marginalisation of Tibetans that makes it impossible for them to participate in society on an equal basis. Along with an implanted sense of superiority carried by the Chinese migrants, Tibetans have become second-class citizens in their own homeland by virtue of their race alone.

This population transfer is also a direct result of the Chinese control over the 'development' of Tibet, which is designed with little consideration for Tibetans but with great attention to Chinese profits and benefits. Workers are shipped in from the mainland via lucrative incentives. This is despite widespread Tibetan unemployment. Preferential housing and services, such as education and healthcare facilities, are established and run for the principal benefit of the Chinese settlers.

This intensive influx of Chinese comes in conjunction with the importation of Chinese culture and lifestyle. This sheer weight of numbers, combined with the discriminatory practices, are heavily detrimental to the preservation of Tibetan culture and values, conservation of the environment and wildlife, and to the upholding of basic human rights for Tibetans.

Chinese immigration centres on the urban districts, and so, different pictures of Tibet can be obtained from visiting rural and urban areas. Even within urban areas it is well worth wandering around away from the main tourist sites and into the everyday sections of

towns and villages.

Notice whether there are distinct 'quarters' or do Tibetans and Chinese live intermixed. If there are separate sections, are the conditions and facilities the same in each? Can you detect the attitude of each race toward the other? For what reasons did the immigrants come to Tibet, and how long have they been there? Do they get benefits for being there? How long do they plan to stay? What is their overall attitude about Tibet, and its people?

■ **Employment and Livelihood**

Unemployment among Tibetans is constantly on the rise, and discrimination within employment is rampant. Apart from the incentives used to encourage Chinese immigrants to Tibet, there is a huge disparity in working conditions and wages between the races. They are more often given jobs involving high risks and poor conditions. Where Chinese do hold identical positions to Tibetans they earn at least double the wage. There are also numerous reports of compulsory unpaid hard labour enforced on Tibetan communities.

Compulsory confiscation of land, compulsory fencing and stock reduction quotas bite deeply into the ability for nomadic and rural Tibetans to support themselves. The majority of Tibetans' income level falls well below the Global Poverty Line. This meagre income then directly affects access to education, employment, healthcare, food, clothing, and housing.

One of the major discriminatory practices within the employment field is not just the preference given to Chinese immigrants, but the level of fluency in the Chinese language as a determining factor. Tibetans are automatically disadvantaged, and the only remaining option is to resort to bribery and connections (Ch: *guanxi*) to gain work, but this is more often than not beyond the means of most Tibetans.

Propaganda from Beijing focuses greatly on the hailed 'development' of Tibet. But benefits from increased infrastructure, and employment from the huge construction and mining projects located in Tibet, are not realities for Tibetans. Despite the high Tibetan unemployment levels, workers for these projects are imported from the Chinese mainland, which also adds to the population manipulation within Tibet.

The infrastructure benefits are designed to assist the Chinese settlers, not local Tibetans. For example, Tibetans not only get second preference to the Chinese in housing allocations but are also evicted from their own dwellings so that Chinese-style apartment blocks can be constructed for the immigrants. Compensation for housing and land ranges from non-existent to meagre, and few, if any, options exist to replace lost assets.

Nor is the focus of Beijing's development projects on sustainability, as they are only concerned with the exploitation of Tibet's natural resources. No country can claim sustainable development if its people are not involved in creating or taking part of its benefits.

Because of this destruction of their way of life, many Tibetans have to resort to running small business enterprises in an attempt to support their family. Even within this sector discrimination is rife, with permits and prime locations given in preference to Chinese applicants, and once again bribes and connections become the basis of success.

The inflated and highly discriminatory taxation affects the livelihood of every Tibetan. Not only are there a wide range of taxes that are Tibetan specific, but also in some places, at times there are random taxes that are dictated by the whim of the local authorities. Taxes are routinely so high as to make subsistence extremely difficult for many Tibetans.

Talk to Tibetans in all areas. What sort of work do they undertake and are these the same jobs as the Chinese hold? Are they paid an equal amount? What sort of taxes do they face and do Chinese pay the same taxes? Where does that money go and for what is it used? What promotion and further training opportunities do they have? How did they get their job? Do they face discrimination in obtaining work or within their work? How many unemployed Tibetans are within the local community? What chances of employment do they have? What do they do each day, and how do they survive without work?

Look at tourist services. Who owns and works at the restaurants and shops? Who is employed at the main tourist sites? Are tour guides Tibetan or Chinese? Who is selling traditional Tibetan articles and souvenirs? Where are the shops run by Tibetans located

compared to the Chinese run enterprises?

China claims to have improved conditions for Tibetans over the years. The condition and quality of the houses that they live in, the clothes that they wear, and even their overall appearance and health will give some indication of the situation for Tibetans. Ask what their standard of living is. Do they think that their situation has improved recently? What difficulties do they face in subsistence? Does the Chinese government assist in difficult times, such as drought or a severe winter? Do the Tibetans own the home they live in? Have Tibetans lost homes or land to housing or development projects? Were they compensated? Were there alternative sites of at least equal quality at equal cost available for them to be able to replace the lost assets? Are Tibetans being employed at any local development project sites? Are Tibetans able to access and afford any of the new facilities that may have been constructed in their region? Do they feel they are benefiting from the projects or the accompanying infrastructure?

■ **Tour Guides**

Tibetan tour guides are under constant suspicion and observation by the Chinese authorities. They are forbidden to discuss anything political or nationalistic with foreigners. They are expected to give the official Chinese lines and propaganda, upon threat of loss of employment if they deviate from this. It is best to avoid discussing politics or potentially dangerous topics in the vicinity of your guide or driver, even if you do not involve them directly, as they are routinely

questioned at the end of each trip. The less they overhear the safer it is for them.

However, you may find that there are still Tibetan guides who will discuss such subjects with you, either instigating the conversations or in response to questions. Always be very cautious as this is placing them in a very hazardous situation, so be aware of your location and the proximity of others when you talk with them. The Chinese security network is extensive, with security cameras, and plain-clothes police and undercover agents rife throughout the main tourist, and potential trouble, locations.

Partly because of this situation, the Chinese authorities are attempting to replace all Tibetan tour guides, and possibly even drivers, with Chinese. According to a Xinhuanet report on 16 April 2003, a first batch of 100 tour guides from 23 Chinese provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities arrived in Lhasa to “help boost the local tourism” posing a further threat to the livelihoods of Tibetan guides. The guides have for several years been under political pressure. In recent months, more than 150 Tibetan tour guides have lost their jobs following checks on their background and suspicion regarding their political affiliation. Those Tibetans with a record of having visited India, where the Dalai Lama lives, are suspected of ‘separatist’ activities and severely discriminated against. Last year Tibetan tour guides were required to produce a stamped official letter reading they had never visited India. As a result of which, more than 160 Tibetan tour guides were dismissed by January

this year being replaced by Chinese guides who have been arriving from Sichuan and other Chinese provinces to seek work in the tourism business in Lhasa.

The official justification for the increasing numbers of Chinese tour guides employed in Tibet is that the guides from China “speak a foreign language and Tibet has a shortage of tour guides who speak a foreign language.”

When organising the trip, inquire as to both the driver and guide, and insist that they be Tibetan. This will force the authorities to retain Tibetans as guides in their own country, and Tibetan drivers will also keep their jobs. Be polite but firm in your request. When visiting sites with site-specific guides, again request Tibetan guides and if there are none, bring attention to it by asking the reasons why outsiders are giving out information on Tibetan sites. Ask at the highest level as possible –tourist demand can create a change.

■ Education

With the dilution of Tibetan culture and language through the influx of Chinese, education is a decisive factor in the preservation of the Tibetan heritage.

The Chinese claim great improvements in education in Tibet, mainly through the building of schools. But most of these are in urban districts, built for the education of Chinese children and those of Tibetan government officials. For the majority Tibetans, the lack of access to schools because of distance, discrimina-

tion, and high, biased fees, are still the major reasons why their children are not educated.

The other major prejudice in education is the use of Chinese language as the medium of instruction. Tibetan children with no understanding of the language are treated as stupid, rather than uneducated. All higher levels of education, and most employment, rely upon fluency in Chinese. Tibetans are inherently at a disadvantage to native Chinese language speakers. This practise, along with the Chinese-culture biased curriculum, is denying not just an education to many Tibetans, but also any education relating to Tibetan culture.

As a consequence of Chinese policies there are many Tibetans who cannot speak their own language; some believing that it is useless for their future, while others have never had an opportunity to learn to read and write Tibetan even if they can speak it. Even the monasteries, the traditional bastion of Tibetan education, are showing major signs of illiteracy.

Even if you speak no Tibetan, by listening you will hear what language is being used. What language is being spoken the most often in business transactions, between Tibetans and Chinese, and between Tibetans and Tibetans? What language is being used socially, in written documents, and in personal letters by Tibetans? What do they speak in their own homes? In

©Jarrah. Orphans at school in Pelyul, Kham



restaurants? How many Tibetans speak English?

Note where schools are located, especially in relation to Tibetan villages. If you visit schools, ask what subjects are taught, in what language? What is the ratio of Tibetan to Chinese teachers, and students? How much do they pay in school fees and extra costs? How does that compare to what the Chinese pay? Are they happy with the curriculum and the standard of teaching? Have they experienced any bias in examinations? How are their children treated by the Chinese teachers? Do their children have any problems with Chinese students? Do their children have Chinese friends? Are they allowed to celebrate Tibetan holidays and undertake religious practises? If Tibetan children are not at school, ask why not?

Compare the provision and condition of school facilities in rural areas to urban areas, and between schools primarily for Chinese and for Tibetans. Ask Tibetan families if they have children being educated in India? If so what are their reasons for sending them there? Do they have problems with Chinese authorities because of this?

Talk to adult Tibetans - can they read or write? In what language/s? Ask about their own schooling and what/if any changes have been since they were young.

■ Religion

Buddhism has long been recognised as Tibet's main religion. Its biggest threat now is the aggressively

atheist policies of Beijing. Regarding Buddhism as directly linked into Tibetan nationalism, monks and nuns are subject to intense restrictions and violations of human rights. These are designed to demolish both Buddhism and dissent in Tibet.

In many of the supposedly active monasteries and nunneries throughout Tibet, although you can see monks and nuns present, most of them will be simply caretakers and money collectors.

Apart from the gross destruction of monasteries over the years in Tibet, existing religious institutions face restrictions that make it difficult for them to function to their full ability. The numbers of monks and nuns allowed in monasteries and nunneries are strictly controlled. An age restriction of between 18 to 55 years is imposed, which essentially breaks the teaching cycle of the elder, highly educated Lamas instructing young novices. Incumbent "Democratic Management Committees" control the amount and content of study, and what religious rites are performed. Regular "Work Teams" under the 'Strike Hard' campaign impose "Patriotic Re-education" sessions, designed to indoctrinate monastic with communist ideals and the Party line, and suppress political dissent. Monks and nuns are required to denounce the Dalai Lama and Tibetan patriotism. Any signs of dissidence or rebellion lead to dismissal from the monastery or nunnery, and often even arrest.

Tourism is what keeps Buddhism alive at all. The Chinese government recognises the financial value of

Tibetan monasteries. It is not through any benevolence on the part of Beijing that they allow some reconstruction of monasteries and nunneries.

Even within lay society religion is increasingly being suppressed through new policies and restrictions. The focus lies mainly on Tibetans in official government positions or offices, with the prohibition of partaking in traditional religious festivals and rites. Photos of the Dalai Lama are banned throughout the Tibetan population, although this is not so strictly enforced outside the 'TAR' and occasionally photos can be seen there, even in some monasteries.

Many Tibetans, especially at monasteries and nunneries, may ask you for pictures of His Holiness. Although banned they are greatly prized by Tibetans. If you do try to hand out pictures and are discovered you will most likely be fined and deported. All the Tibetans you have had contact with will be also be detained and interrogated, and probably imprisoned.

Heavy restrictions on certain religious festivals such as Saga Dawa and the Birthday of His Holiness are enforced to various degrees throughout the regions also. When visiting monasteries and nunneries, look around carefully and not only take note of the overall atmosphere of the compound and the monks and nuns, but also try to discern how much they are functioning in the real capacity of religious students. Is there evidence of studying or are they mainly used as guards and money collectors in the temples. What is the age range, and number of monks and nuns? Is this

any different compared to what there were there before the Chinese arrived? How are new novices selected, and how often and how many? Do the monks and nuns feel that they are receiving a good education, and to what sort of standard? How often are they subject to 're-education' sessions and what is involved in these?

How often are public religious ceremonies held at the local monastery or nunnery? How many lay Tibetans would attend these? What sort of direct supervision is implemented during these times? Are there any restrictions on religious rites being performed in their community? Are they allowed an altar in their home? Are any religious festivals banned or restricted, and in what way? How do they feel about any government interference in their religious practise that they may experience?

The issue of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Rinpoche of Tibet

On 14 May 1995, His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognised Gedhun Choekyi Nyima then six years old, as the reincarnation of the Xth Panchen Lama. Three days later, the boy and his parents disappeared from their home. Within few months, the PRC government appointed its own Panchen Lama.

A year later, in May 1996, the PRC admitted to holding the XIth Panchen Lama "at the request of his parents" for "he was at the risk of being kidnapped by separatists and

his security had been threatened". Thus, despite its rejection of the Dalai Lama's authority in recognising the Panchen Lama, and its refusal to acknowledge Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the true reincarnation, the Chinese government admitted the detention of the child. It is difficult to understand why the Chinese authorities would go to such lengths to provide "security" for a child who they consider to be just an ordinary boy.

In May 1997, the PRC launched "patriotic education" campaign in monasteries and nunneries in the Tibetan region. Under the auspices of that campaign, the PRC promotes recognition of the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama and denunciation of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. Reports from refugees fleeing Tibet, and from independent travellers, indicate that pictures of the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama are displayed prominently in the main monasteries and tourist hotels of Tibet. Conversely, pictures of the Dalai Lama and Gedhun Choekyi Nyima are banned throughout Tibet. Born 25 April 1989, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was, to public knowledge, the world's youngest political prisoner.

Many high level delegations and offices have expressed concern over the Panchen Lama's continued detention, including the former

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, the PRC continue to deny any outside access to the child and his parents. In October 2000, during a round of human rights dialogue with China in London, British officials raised the issue of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.

The photographs did not answer the basic questions asked of the Panchen Lama such as his whereabouts and well-being. We believe that these photos are not only a totally inadequate strategy to allay international concern, but that any form of perceived appeasement is an empty gesture.

In August 2001, a Polish parliamentary delegation visiting Lhasa was told in response to repeated questions that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was healthy and was with his family. The delegation was promised photos of the boy within six weeks but never received them.

On 29 November 1995, the six year old Gyaltzen Norbu was selected by the Chinese authorities as the 'real' Panchen Lama and subsequently enthroned on 8 December 1995. This caused massive protests all over Tibet.

Consequently, along with photos of the Dalai Lama, pictures of Gedhun Choekyi

Nyima are also forbidden, and in many monasteries the picture of Gyaltsen Norbu is compulsorily displayed. As a safe compromise, Tibetans display images of Choekyi Gyaltsen, the late 10th Panchen Lama instead.

■ Prisons

The majority of political prisoners in Chinese jails in Tibet have always been monks and nuns. All Tibetan political prisoners face extremely harsh conditions and maltreatment. Tibetans routinely undergo torture sessions in attempts to extract confessions while initially held in custody. Sentenced inmates face various tortures if they fail to conform to guard's demands, or to succumb to the political indoctrination. Many have suffered isolated incidences of maltreatment after periods of dissidence within the prison walls.

A network of Chinese prisons straddle the Lhasa suburbs. The infamous Drapchi Prison lies in the suburbs to the northeast of the Potala, New Lhasa Prison sits just beside, and on the valley edge just beyond that are four others. Five km to the west of Lhasa is the Gutsa Detention Centre, where the majority of torture of prisoners takes place. To the east of the town is Trisam Prison. The Drapchi Prison and those nearby can be seen from the ridge to the west of Sera Monastery. At the foot of this ridge lies the sprawling Lhasa Cement Factory. This industry is a financial success mainly due to the use of prison labour.

Living conditions in all prisons are harsh, with malnu-

trition a significant problem. Prisoners routinely undertake hard labour, or often face unachievable quotas in the less physically intense work areas. Most face long hours of military-style exercise drills, regardless of age or physical condition. All failures to fulfil quotas or execute exercises correctly are met with harsh punishments. Any signs of dissent or patriotism are met with severe punishment. As of 2002, TCHRD has recorded at least 82 Tibetans who have died as a direct result of prison maltreatment and torture since 1987.

At strategic times the Chinese government releases political prisoners. This is done purely for political and propaganda purposes. The fact remains that these people should never have been imprisoned in the first place, and undergo prison torture and maltreatment.

With the gross oppression and human rights violations that prevail in Tibet, especially within the 'TAR', the country itself is being designed and governed as a prison. Severe restrictions on movement; the lack of freedom of speech; the right to assembly; and the maltreatment, discrimination, and deprivations causing poverty.

Prisons and politics are not subjects that are safe to discuss with Tibetans while you are travelling through Tibet, in any region. Do not try to instigate conversations along these lines, as you will be placing them at great risk. If a Tibetan tries to talk to you about these subjects, be extremely careful and use your discretion - not only as to where you are if you do decide to pur-

sue these lines of discussion, but also as to whether to talk on these matters at all.

■ Healthcare

All Tibetans suffer discrimination in healthcare, whether they live in urban or rural districts, or in prison. Each group faces their own version of this disparity and all suffer for it.

In prisons Tibetans are regularly refused any medical attention as the officials claim that they are just trying to avoid work. When treatment is granted, the medications are usually outdated and incorrect. Hospitalisation of severe cases happens only when the patient is critical, for an absolute minimum time.

Urban Tibetans have some access to healthcare facilities, but only at a price. Tibetans are required to provide a substantial deposit before medical treatment is even considered, no matter how critical their condition. This can be as high as Yuan 5000 in some hospitals - what can amount to years of income. Even for those Tibetans who have been able to find the money, charges for treatment and other expenses are high, care inferior to that offered to Chinese patients, often even substandard, and ward conditions poor. This is in direct contrast to Chinese patients who are not required to procure a deposit, have lower treatment and drug charges, and who are placed in distinctly superior ward and general facilities.

There have also been cases of Tibetans, injured by police during or after political disturbances, denied

treatment on the basis that they are “disloyal to the Chinese motherland.”

Rural Tibetans face extra difficulties when seeking healthcare. Despite Beijing’s much touted ‘development’ in Tibet, which includes the construction of hospitals, most of these facilities are designed to support the Chinese immigrant population and are located almost exclusively in the Chinese-settled urban areas. Consequently for Tibetans outside of these districts no facilities exist, and the long distances to medical facilities can be prohibitive, terrain difficult, and transport costs expensive. This is in addition to the inflated costs for treatment and often-substandard facilities provided for Tibetans.

There is one sector of imported Chinese modern culture that is booming in Tibet with the support and condonement of the Chinese authorities - the illegal trades in prostitution. In 2000, it was estimated that there were at least 7000 Tibetan girls in the 1000-plus brothels in Lhasa. Originally most prostitutes in Tibet were Chinese, and though many still are, the numbers of Tibetan girls involved are increasing due to lack of education and high levels of poverty.

The lack of hygiene and sexual protective measures are a major health risk to these girls, and consequently to all Tibetans. HIV/AIDS has become widespread within China. The imported prostitutes are a high risk factor for introducing it into, and spreading it throughout Tibet. This is then combined with the absence of any educational programmes, or preventa-

tive or treatment measures. The total absence of testing facilities within Tibet is the only reason there are no confirmed cases there.

There is in fact a dearth of any public health education programmes in Tibet: be it maternal care, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, or the prevention of communicable diseases.

Forced sterilisation is a major issue for Tibetan women. In many areas, once they have given birth to the maximum amount of children allowed, many are subject to surgery or contraception techniques that leave a significant proportion of them permanently physically disabled, of continual poor health rendering them unable to work, or dead. Many women are terrified to even seek medical care for other health problems, fearing the imposition of enforced sterilisation or abortion procedure.

When travelling around Tibet keep an eye open for the location of medical clinics and hospitals. Note too the racial predominance of the population near the larger and newer facilities. Talk to people in a variety of locations as to how far they must travel to access health-care and how much it costs them. Is it any different from the services the Chinese receive and how much they pay? What do Tibetans think about the standard of care they get? What types of medical care do they have access to – Chinese, Western, Tibetan? Are Tibetans in either urban or rural areas aware of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases? Are they aware of sexual protection procedures? Are

there any public health education programmes? Are they aware of and practise good hygiene in their everyday living?

■ Environment

The environment of Tibet is in crisis due to China's materialistic policy of seeing nature as existing only to serve immediate human desires. Some crises are localised, due to spot sources of pollution arising from intensive resource extraction and the rapid construction of cities of immigrants in ecological zones that are both frigid and fragile, prone to sudden collapse from overuse. The rapid urbanisation of Tibet drains water, hydropower, geothermal power and other resources from afar, creating artificial islands of material prosperity in enclaves and corridors, while the great rural hinterland, where most Tibetans live, remain neglected sinks of carbon emissions, under capitalised, and lacking investment in sustainability.

Some of the environmental crisis are not localised but pervasive and extensive, right across a plateau as big as western Europe. The steady and inexorable degradation of the rangelands now threatens domestic herds and wildlife biodiversity conservation alike, and thus also threatens the ongoing viability of the mobile pastoral way of life on which Tibetan civilisation, and the human use of the vast grassland, was based.

Another concern is the unsustainable use of Tibetan natural capital, especially water, forests, landscapes, agricultural soils and minerals, as population densities build beyond the carrying capacity of the land. The

build up of population is made possible only by unsustainable external inputs, including billions of Yuan each year in direct subsidies from Beijing, and the subsidised transportation of all manner of manufactures.

Tibetans are also losing land and livelihood from the damming of rivers for hydroelectric projects that they receive little actual benefit from. Their land is acquired for the initial project, and then unexpected flooding from these ill-designed plans has destroyed crops and grasslands - without compensation.

Large-scale mining is taking away grazing lands and farms. As most mines only employ Chinese settlers, the local populations are receiving no benefit from this exploitation of Tibet's natural resources, only losses. Some sacred sites are being mined, and in other areas "holes as big as four to five storey buildings" are being left in the landscape.

The alpine meadows, endless pastures and vast prairies of the Tibetan Plateau are one of the world's major ecosystems, as essential in absorbing climate warming greenhouse gases as any forest. These pastoral landscapes sustained vast herds of wild antelope and gazelle, mingling with the domestic herds of yaks, sheep and goats of the Tibetan nomads, for many centuries. Now these rangelands are under threat, due to the misguided policies of an occupying force that has no understanding of this wide but fragile grassland that quickly becomes desert if misused.

The erosion and degradation of the grasslands is a

classic instance of China's policy failure. It began in the terrible decades when Tibetans were powerless, herded into communes, with all power in the hands of cadres and their "scientific" knowledge. In the 1960s and 1970s China felt compelled to make Tibetan lands yield more, especially more meat, than the grasses could bear. As herd sizes doubled and quadrupled at the command of the cadres the silent cancer of degradation began. This unstoppable erosion, affecting most of the vast plateau, is now approaching a crisis.

Around 1980, China abandoned the compulsory communalisation of the nomads and distributed land and animals to each family, holding them responsible for everything. But China also brought in a policy of sedentarising the nomads, requiring them to settle permanently in houses on the land leased to them by the authorities, and to fence the land allocated, often by going into debt. This enclosure policy has concentrated herds in small areas which quickly become overgrazed, while restricting customary flexibility and mobility.

The great Tibetan forests were systematically felled, the trunks tumbling into rivers to be floated to Chinese provinces downstream, except for the many that smashed in the rapids. Tibet's ancient old growth forests were also trucked to China, by Chinese settlers working for state owned enterprises, selling Tibet's natural heritage at low state controlled prices to other state enterprises making railway sleepers, mine pit props and construction timber.

In the warmest, wettest region of Tibet, where massive forests of Himalayan fir, oak and rhododendron once flourished, the crisis of deforestation is ongoing. In 1998 China announced logging was to cease, long after most of the forests were felled and taken to inland provinces. This at first seemed like good news, an opportunity to reforest bare slopes plunging down to the river valleys that not only provide central and southern China with water, but also India, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

It is now five years since the ban on logging was imposed by Beijing on the provincial and local authorities whose revenues, and Chinese settlements, relied on logging enterprises. It is five years since China faced up to the stark choice between Tibetan wood and water, after realising it could no longer take both as if the free supply of Tibetan natural capital was endless. The disastrous Yangtze floods of 1998 forced the choice. China chose water as the most precious of commodities, requiring that the watersheds be re-vegetated if extremes of flood and drought were to be avoided.

However in reality, inside Tibet logging did not cease. It simply became more expensive to bribe local officials to issue the necessary permits, adding to the price, making wood a luxury commodity attracting more black economy operators. Reports of the US Department of Agriculture monitoring the situation on the ground confirm the eyewitness testimony of Tibetan refugees that logging continues.

Official Chinese plans concentrate massive capital investments in large scale infrastructure projects to extract natural gas from Tibet, mine copper and chromite, and intensify exploitation of Tibetan salt lakes from which China takes the raw materials to make plastics, chemical fertiliser and magnesium. Chromite is much needed.

Parts of the Tibetan plateau are already highly industrialised, with little attention paid to pollution control. In the arid Tsaidam basin of Tibet's far north, oil fields pump two million tons of crude oil annually to nearby petrochemical refineries. Asbestos mining, aluminium smelters, lead and zinc mining are expanding, under the protection of politically powerful Chinese patrons. Tibetans are powerless to appeal for pollution control equipment to be installed, because the factories are owned and run by the same people who are supposedly in charge of environmental protection.

The powerlessness of Tibetan communities is evident in the case of the Tongren aluminium smelter, located in the quiet Tibetan farming Rongwo Chu valley just north of Rebkong (Tongren in Chinese). Due to a complete lack of pollution control equipment, toxic fluoride-laden smoke pours from this smelter, causing sheep grazing on grass that absorbs the smoke to die of starvation after their teeth fall out. All appeals have met with no response, as the smelter is owned by cadres of the nearest township, who are also the officials responsible for pollution control.

The major 'Western Development Projects' that have

an effect on Tibet will also have a dramatic effect on Tibet's environment. The controversial Golmud-Lhasa railway bisects fragile ecosystems and wildlife migratory routes. In the South to North Water Diversion Project, China's Ministry of Water wants to annually drain water from the Drichu (Ch: Yangtze River) into northern China to solve chronic water shortages there. The Western route of the options under consideration involves eight possible diversions through southern Amdo, and involve using nuclear blasting to create tunnels through the mountains.

Many areas in Tibet are restricted to tourists because the Chinese do not want foreigners witnessing sites that are causing gross environmental damage or near ones that are politically sensitive. An example is the Lhoka district near Lhasa, which has major mining enterprises and some recently closed monasteries. To visit Lhamo Lhatso, located in this region, multiple permits and a guide are required.

All these implications on Tibet's environment have long term and long reaching consequences both within Tibet and internationally. Apart from the detriment to Tibetan livelihoods and lifestyle, scientists have observed that the environment of Tibet affects the world's jet-streams, which result in an adverse impact on the global climate.

Talk to locals and find out what projects are active in their area and how it impacts on them. What evidence of logging do you see, be it clear felling or logging trucks (note that most trucks are now covered to

hide the cargo)? If you are forbidden to enter an area do you know why, what may be in there? What levels of pollution do you see, for both land and water contamination? What evidence of non-natural soil erosion and landslides is there? How much wildlife can you see and how many different species? How aware are the Tibetans of the damage being done to their environment? How do Tibetans themselves treat their environment?

■ Militarisation and Control

Military and police bases are scattered throughout Tibet: every town has an army base of some size, and checkpoints are a regular feature of travel for both foreigners and Tibetans. Tibetans however are not allowed to travel freely in their own country, if even at all. Official permission is needed for any movement



©Jarrah. Barkhor PSB Station

outside of the immediate area of residential registration, and severe fines and harassment of families are common upon violations of these restrictions. It is not just a case of requesting permission and a paper being issued - movement is tightly controlled and often prohibited. The Chinese immigrants are not subject to the same level of these controls and restrictions.

The obvious presence of the armed forces and security is designed as a direct deterrent for political dissidence, and personnel are rapidly shipped to any location to subdue any unrest. At perceived times of heightened political tension, the military and security presence, plus other means of observation and monitoring in the streets is greatly increased, and at times curfews are enforced. It is solely the Tibetans, and to a lesser extent the foreign tourists, that are subjected to these control measures. The Chinese do not undergo these unremitting permit and identity checks or harassment.

Although it is not possible as a tourist to get details, when travelling around Tibet note the location and approximate size of military bases, prisons, monitoring equipment, police presence, patrols and checkpoints that you see. Observe how many uniformed personnel are on the streets, and at tourist and religious sites. Did you see any military vehicles – what was the size of the convoy; location and direction; and what were they transporting? It may be possible to talk to Tibetans about travel, and the procedures and restrictions that apply to them.

General Recommendations

■ Security

The Chinese have an extensive security network throughout Tibet, but it is the most obvious inside the 'TAR' region. The most prominent aspects of this system are the well-known cameras in places such as the Potala, Jokhang and the Barkhor kora (circumambulation) route in Lhasa, and the obvious presence of the uniformed police and military personnel. But these are only the superficial levels of the system - the tip of the iceberg. For the oblivious visitor, this can at best just mean that they never have any idea of the scrutiny that they have been under, but at worst can place Tibetans at grave risk when potentially well-meaning but mindless actions are taken by tourists.



©. Security camera at Potala

There are a large number of not only plain-clothes police but also many undercover, and this is then linked in with a large spy network. Always be cautious, especially at the main tourist sites - such as Drepung or Sera monastery for example, one might approach you and immediately start talking politics, or asking for photos of the Dalai Lama.

Understand also that all international phone calls from Tibet are routed through Beijing, and are taped and monitored. Free speech is not a viable concept in Tibet. Additionally, emails are filtered for 'trigger' words, and many websites banned – this means that you cannot access these and attempting to will trigger official interest on the internet café that you are using, as well as in yourself. Chinese authorities appeared to be using packets sniffers-devices that scan Internet transactions, including e-mail, to block text with sensitive word combinations. Even Yahoo! has now signed an agreement with Beijing to censor web searches from China. So will writing about anything political from within Tibet via email. Please consider those who run the café are trying to make a living from it. Also be mindful of the fact that if the owners are Tibetan, they will bear more severe consequences for breaches of Chinese censorship. Any international Tibet website, including just doing a search for 'Tibet', America's CNN, the British BBC, Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) and the Australian ABC – all these are blocked, along with many others.

Previously, different branches of the Chinese security forces were indicated by the colour of the uniforms.

However, in May 2001, all uniforms were changed to a standardized blue. Consequently, the Barkhor Patrol - consisting of previously unemployed youth and social outcasts, who are paid by the Chinese to patrol, clean and maintain the peace specifically on the Barkhor; the PAP – People's Armed Police, often used to quell disturbances with specially trained violence techniques; and the PSB – the Public Security Bureau, the administrator of criminal justice in the 'TAR'; are now only identifiable by the differing Chinese characters on the arm badges. All of these operate within Lhasa, as do additional members of the PSB who are dressed in civilian clothing.

■ Photography

Photos are valuable documentation of all sorts of subjects in Tibet, and don't always need a verbal explanation in a country where talking may be dangerous, or difficult due to language barriers. Obviously any unusual occurrence or disturbance is a distinct, though dangerous, opportunity, but everyday sights and situations are just as important. Photograph the conditions Tibetans live and work under, in all regions of Tibet, as well as the changes the Chinese are making.

Verbal detail from reliable origins can be a good source of information, but can also involve risks. Use your judgement and assess situations from all angles. When you document information, keep the 'worst case scenario' constantly in mind – that if you are detained for any reason, your belongings will be searched and notes read. Write in a manner that is not giving obvious information to an outsider, but still so you can

decipher accurate details afterwards.

Observe the amount of brothels and prostitutes in Lhasa and other major cities. The issue of prostitution is not a case in isolation but within a social context of a system, which has the underlying political aim of eradicating the influence of the Dalai Lama and corroding Tibetan morality. There are approximately 2,000 brothels and about 10,000 prostitutes in Lhasa (municipality) alone, many of them intentionally housed around the sacred kora path.^v

■ **Accommodation**

Even if invited, it is essentially prohibited to stay in a Tibetan household inside the 'TAR' and will place the family at serious risk of reprisals. Even in places where it is permitted - with authorized permission - it will still place that family under official observation.

Considering the current political situation in Tibet, you should bear in mind that letters, telephone calls, e-mails, and faxes may be censored and surveyed. You are under surveillance all the time.

■ **Talking to Tibetans**

When you talk to Tibetans on an everyday level, you will find most of them open and friendly, but it is very dangerous for any Tibetan to discuss political or human rights issues with foreigners, or to pass on information for you to carry to the outside. To actively seek such information places local Tibetans at great risk. However, you may encounter situations where Tibetans instigate a discussion, or ask you to deliver

information. In these instances use your own discretion, as for some reason Tibetans seem to have a tendency to disregard the obvious dangers to themselves. Do not underestimate the risks that these people are facing by approaching you, even if they seem to do so.

When talking with Tibetans be very aware of your location - of possible security cameras, and of the possibility of others overhearing. For example, the famous teashop opposite the Snowlands Hotel, is well known locally for the level of spies frequenting its crowded tables; others can be solitary diners in restaurants; or hanging out in the discos and karaoke bars. It is also known for neighbours to report visits of westerners to Tibetan homes.

Information on the exile Tibetan communities is also often little known. It can be well worth visiting India before your visit to Tibet, and make the trip to Dharamsala to see at least one exile community. Dharamsala is the home of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile, and many newly arrived Tibetans as well as those born in exile live there. You can talk to Tibetans in India and find out why they fled their homeland, and learn more about the situation of the exiles. However, in Tibet always remember the risk you are putting a Tibetan through whenever such topics are raised. The worst that can happen to you is interrogation and deportation, the least that can happen to a Tibetan is torture and imprisonment at the hands of the Chinese authorities.

■ Language

Even just a few words of Tibetan, such as the greeting “Tashi Delek”, will be extremely well received by the Tibetan people. This not only shows them that you hold their language and culture in high enough esteem to learn even just those few words, but it differentiates you from the average tourist by telling them that you are interested in Tibet and its people. This can also help open up doors of friendship. Once talking with Tibetans, many who are always keen to practice their English on willing foreigners, you can easily discuss non-sensitive issues that are still vital to understanding and learning about what the situation is like for them there: general home life and everyday living conditions; about school, work, taxes, and healthcare - their views on life in general. Much can be learnt from what is not said.

If you know any Tibetan words be sure to use them even with Chinese residents.

■ Clothing

Loose, durable, comfortable clothing suitable for the season you will encounter is practical for Tibet. High fashion is not a consideration in a region that has yet to graduate clothing-wise from the 1980’s except for big cities like Lhasa and Shigatse! Tight or exposing clothing, especially on females, although now becoming common on tourists from the Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, mark you as an ignorant tourist. Decorum is still the standard for dress in Tibet, and with the environmental conditions that Tibet can deliver, function and practicality is by far the most

important. Apart from the discos there is little night-life to consider dressing up for in Tibet, and overall Tibetans will far more appreciate an understanding of their sensibilities than an expanse of flesh.

Wearing Tibetan style clothing is definitely appreciated by Tibetans. As with the use of their language, you are telling them that you consider their culture both interesting and worthwhile. Even just a simple Tibetan style shirt will be noticed, but full traditional dress on a foreigner could be interpreted as indicating Tibetan sympathies and may bring you unwanted Chinese attention. The crass have-your-picture-taken-in-Tibetan-costume tourist zone of the Potala Square is the obvious exception!

H

Holy Places

Tourism is what keeps Buddhism alive in Tibet. The Chinese government recognises the financial value of not only what they can reap from the donations and offerings, from both local and tourist alike, but also the inflow of money from tourists utilising the services during their visit to holy sites.

Consequently, if you want to leave donations or offerings at temples, the only way to ensure that the Tibetans benefit from your contribution is to give the money directly to the monks themselves. Obviously, the unavoidable entrance fees go straight into the Chinese coffers, but also the Khenpo (Abbot) of the monastery is forced to hand over all of the offerings from the altars as well. It is only money that is handed directly to the monks, or the Khenpo himself, that is kept and used by them. Be discrete.

When visiting any religious site, whether a temple or natural site like Mt. Kailash, observe and honour the Tibetan customs. Dress appropriately and remove hats, do not smoke or leave litter, and walk clockwise around temples, statues and the site itself. Never touch the head of a monk or nun, and please use discretion and regard when photographing people or ceremonies. Ask permission first, keep quiet if moving around, and never intrude with the camera.

Many Tibetans, especially at monasteries and nunneries, may ask you for pictures of His Holiness. These

are totally banned within the 'TAR' and most of the other Tibetan regions. Even so they are greatly prized by Tibetans and so it is totally your decision as to whether you take these with you. If discovered you will most likely be deported, and Tibetans you have had contact with will be interrogated. Note, however, that small passport-sized pictures are the easiest hidden and handed over. Otherwise Mani Rinlbu (the tiny pills blessed by His Holiness) and Tunga/Jendue (the blessed amulet/knotted cords) are also greatly appreciated and not banned - or obviously linked to His Holiness if discovered.

■ Lhasa

Lhasa originally consisted of small villages nestled around the Potala and the Jokhang. Prior to 1949, Lhasa had an estimated population of 20-30,000. Now, there are an estimated 250-300,00 Chinese immigrants alone. Lhasa has been reduced to a bleak metropolis of glass-and-tile buildings. The only area with any remaining Tibetan character is around the Jokhang - and that is fast being torn down and replaced with Chinese imitations of traditional Tibetan architecture, and large multi-storey hotels.

■ Potala

The former winter palace of the Dalai Lamas has long been reduced to a museum resembling a mausoleum. Few rooms are open to the public, police and spies roam throughout, and surveillance cameras are prolific. Every year Tibetans are forbidden to enter the Potala on the Dalai Lama's birthday.

■ Potala Square

Created for the '30 Year Celebrations of the TAR' by razing Tibetan homes, Potala Square is Lhasa's Tiananmen - designed as a large parking lot for military vehicles and a display ground for military might. Also a popular Chinese-tourist photo location, the Red Flag of China flying in front of the Potala is where Tashi Tsering attempted to raise the banned Tibetan flag in August 1999. Within a few months he had died from the injuries received at the hands of the Chinese police. The PSB are located at the southwest corner of the Square - the police vehicles outside easily identify the location.

■ Norbulingka

The Norbulingka is the remnants of the glorious summer palace of the Dalai Lamas. There are no obvious signs of the damage inflicted by the Chinese mortars on the night of the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, just absent buildings. Nor of the fierce resistance by the Tibetan people outside the gates. Maintained only enough to draw the tourist dollar, the main reason Norbulingka still exists is for the mockery of the annual Shoton (Yogurt) Festival in September - where the grounds are transformed into a mass of Chinese-run gambling stalls and sideshows.

■ Barkhor

Adjoining the recently widened (for military vehicles) Dekyi Shar Lam (Ch: Beijing Donglu), lies the holy centre of Lhasa. The Barkhor area surrounding the Jokhang is the last remnant of Tibetaness in Lhasa, and it is fast disappearing. The frequently remodelled

©Jarrah. Barkhor police, Lhasa



Barkhor Square, levelled in the early 1980s, is another open area designed to assist Chinese suppression of any displays of Tibetan nationalism. Both the Square, and the kora streets surrounding the Jokhang, are constantly monitored by video surveillance cameras and numerous security personnel – both uniformed and otherwise. This is the location of the majority of freedom demonstrations by Tibetans - from individuals or small groups chanting independence slogans, to the full-scale mass protests that happened in the late 1980s. Much blood has been shed here, but the original cobblestone paving that witnessed such times, has now been replaced with shiny granite slabs.

At the southwest corner of the Barkhor kora route, just around the corner from the Mandala Hotel, lies

the PSB Station - a gaping entranceway wide enough for military vehicles, that opens onto a large courtyard parking area. Topped with large, Chinese-character signs, when walking along the southern section of the kora the PSB ironically sits directly under the view of the distant Potala.

■ Jokhang

The Jokhang itself was used during the Cultural Revolution as a military barracks and a slaughterhouse, and later as a hotel for Chinese officials. Of the few temples in Tibet not destroyed before the Revolution, like the Jokhang most only survived because they were used as storehouses for grain or accommodation for officials. The temple statuary and religious objects were, as with those from the Potala, destroyed or taken to be sold in China.

■ Drepung, Sera and Ganden Monasteries

The outskirting monasteries of Drepung and Sera, and the farther outflung Ganden, all suffered destruction and thefts by the Chinese. These were the three great monasteries of Lhasa, and were (and still are) regarded as major sources of dissidence and unrest. Massive destruction was done to the buildings, much of which can still be. Ganden suffered the most, being dynamited to rubble. But with the limited numbers of monks and nuns allowed to enter monasteries and nunneries under Chinese rule, most of these ruins will remain derelict. Drepung once housed around 9000 monks, Sera 5000 and Ganden over 5000. Now their numbers lie in the few hundred at each monastery.

©Jarrah. Police Vehicles at Tashilumpo monastery, Shigatse



Outside of Lhasa, especially in the distant regions, many Tibetans will never make the pilgrimage to the Holy City in their lifetime. Any pictures of Lhasa, such as the Jokhang and the Potala, are extremely popular for this reason. In fact, any pictures of anywhere in Tibet are always popular! Also photos of your own immediate family will be clamoured after by friends that you make in your journeys. Tibetans just seem to love photos and have an insatiable curiosity about the outside world.

P Post Trip

TCHRD relies on recent arrivals from Tibet for most of its information. However, tourists are also a great source of information and the advantage tourists have over Tibetan refugees is the fact that they can corroborate their observations through the pictures they have managed to take! Having said so, an important aspect to keep in mind is that 'nosy tourists' are never welcome in Tibet. The authorities will allow you to take pictures to your hearts content but will confiscate the entire rolls on your way out.

We would appreciate if as soon as possible after your trip you could send information and observations including photographs with as much detail of dates and locations etc. on them. If you witness important incidents or receive first hand accounts, please contact us urgently at:

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S Suggested Readings & Websites

Suggested Readings

■ **History & Politics**

My Land and My People – His Holiness the Dalai Lama,
Editor David Howarth

Freedom in Exile – His Holiness the Dalai Lama

In Exile From the Land of Snow : The Definitive
Account of the Dalai Lama and Tibet since the
Chinese Conquest – John F. Avedon

The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern
Tibet since 1947 – Tsering Shakya

Red Star over Tibet (reprinted as Tibet : The Road
Ahead – Prof. Dawa Norbu

Tibetan Nation – Warren Smith

Tibet: A Political History – Shakabpa W D

Demise of the Lamaist State – Melvyn Goldstein

Circle of Protest – Ronald D Shwartz

■ **Biographies**

Fire Under the Snow - Palden Gyatso
Sorrow Mountain – Ani Pachen

■ **Guidebooks**

Mapping the Tibetan World – Gavin Allwright, Atsushi
Kanamaru and Yakiyasu Osada

Tibet Overland – Kym Mc Connell

Suggested Websites

■ www.tchrd.org

Tibetan Centre of Human Rights and Democracy
The only Tibetan-run Human Rights NGO, based in Dharamsala, and monitors the Human Rights situation in Tibet. The site carries full, downloadable copies of all the publications of the Centre, including this guide, plus other information on political prisoners, news, and current campaigns.

■ www.atc.org

Australian Tibet Council
This site not only covers an overview of the political situation, news and campaigns, but also has an excellent travel information section. A small amount of this information is Australian specific, but the majority relates directly to Tibet itself, is constantly and well maintained, and is a rich and thorough source of facts and advice for travellers.

■ www.kotan.org

Kotan Publishing
An excellent site, that covers news, weather, maps, and a directory of links that includes travel sites. Still under further development and operated by the publisher of the guidebook "Mapping the Tibetan World".

■ www.tibetinfo.net

Tibet Information Network
Independent London-based Human Rights monitoring organisation. Their site offers new and reports, a look at the issues, and a reasonable travel section.

■ www.tibet.org

Tibet Online
A good wide-ranging site that covers news, human rights issues, and the environment, and has some travel links.

■ www.tibet.ca

Canada Tibet Committee
This site is designed to increase the awareness of Tibet, and offers a valuable resource in the World Tibet News bulletins. Released daily, these collect and distribute all articles published in the media worldwide that relate directly to the Tibetan situation. The site also covers general information and current campaigns.

■ www.phayul.com

Phayul
An independent site focused on Tibetan news.

■ www.tibet.net

Tibetan Government in Exile
Official website of the Tibetan government in exile based in Dharamsala. Offers information on the political situation as well as the Tibetan government in exile. Includes the online version of the bi-monthly Tibetan Bulletin, that covers all Tibetan issues, and regular news updates.

■ www.tew.org

Tibet Environmental Watch
A site detailing the existing environmental problems on the Tibetan plateau, with news, reports, and wildlife, geographical, and development sections. Also a link to maps of Tibet and Lhasa.

■ www.khamaid.org

KhamAid
A Kham specific site with a large section on travel.