CHAPTER FOUR

Pro-independence Demonstrations of 1987
Tibet came into the limelight in 1987, after 28 years since the Dalai Lama’s flight in 1959. The absence of the media coverage led to the belief and conclusion that everything is well in Tibet and that China is benevolent to Tibetans as it claims to be, and the Tibetans are consequently satisfied.

The 1987 Lhasa pro-independence demonstrations were a landmark in Tibetan history. This history has proved that religion do not wither away in the embrace of secular societies. An institution may be destroyed or person may be eliminated, but not the ideology.

In order to camouflage the wrong policy of Mao Tse-tung towards Tibet, Deng’s regime has granted economic development and unprecedented freedom of religious expression to Tibetans. But Tibetans revolted the moment the Chinese authorities allowed relaxation in freedom of religion. The revolt was a blend of both religious and political elements. The crucial role, played by monks and nuns, depicted and epitomized how far the religion is still permeated in Tibetan society and the demonstrations that took place near the holy place of monasteries are symbolic of this fact. Despite the colossal destruction of religious institutions, especially during the “cultural revolution,” the influence of Buddhism and sense of unremitting loyalty to the Dalai Lama remained visible. There were also modern political elements that reflected the popular aspiration. Throughout the protest, the protesters entertained the very notion of independence.

Under the aegis of hardcore communist Mao Tse-tung, the expression of religion was death issue. But after exit of Mao, Deng Xiaoping with psyche, badly affected by Mao’s paradigm of socialism, unleashed the “liberalization” policy towards Tibet, intended on improving socio-economic conditions and freedom of
religious practices. Deng's liberalization policy emboldened the revival of political consciousness among the Tibetans and helped to strengthen the Pan-Tibetan consensus.

So it was not surprising that during the pro-independence movement, the Tibetans have been able to utilize the idea of democracy and human rights to endorse their demand for independence. They do not see any contradiction between their own national and cultural aspirations and political modernization. Unequivocally, on 10 December 1988, on human rights day, one wall poster in Lhasa stated:

"Long live the long established country!  
Long live the succession of glorious Religious King!  
Long live the Dalai Lama!  
Long live the great unity of the people of the whole nation!  
"Long live the restoration of Tibetan independence!  
"Long live the new constitution of democratic freedom! Remember the courage of our brave departed heroes. Remember the human rights and United Nations."

The above expression of passage displayed reflects the aspirations and the paradigm of their notion of independence. As far as Tibetans are concerned independence implies freedom to practice Dharma, but freedom in turn is senseless without acknowledging the human conditions. "Human Rights" in Tibetan literally means the rights of transmigrations/being (gra-ba mi’i thob thang), and transmigrator (gra-ba) remain the basic equivalent in the language of Buddhism. The three terms, independence, freedom, and human rights lead in the order of ascending

generality back to the issue of making human life meaningful. Religious freedom implies the right to prepare for the future lives, which implies unselfish action for the benefits of others. This includes political life in general as well as working for independence. Opposed to these actions are motivated by the selfish interest of this life. Here, the latter refers to Chinese promises merely to “make life better.” This is how Tibetans understand the concept of human rights, and thus they divide altruism from selfish and the sacred (which include both politics and religion) from the profane. What in western political context are essentially secular political values are, for the Tibetans, identified with the sacred side of the equation and are symbolically opposed to the Chinese system in Tibet, which belongs to the profane side. The monk adds: Reciting om mani padmme hum, visiting temples, and making donations are not considered the real freedom of religion.²

In the current frame of Chinese hegemony, the Tibetans are able to draw on rational elements from within the religion. Democracy and human rights are now common and widespread ideas among Tibetans and it is taken for granted that these constitute the right for Tibetan independence.

Events leading to pro-independence demonstrations

From 1987 to 1992, about 140 protests and demonstrations were held in Tibet. The reason for the protests and demonstrations was to show opposition against the alien rule in Tibet. Since the pro-independence protest in 1987, the Tibetans demanded not only independence, but also democracy and human rights, because they were treated as second-class citizens in their own country, and the Chinese suppressed

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their rights and freedoms. Tibet, once an independent country, is today on occupied
land.

However, the economic conditions of Tibet were improved and the cultural
and religious freedom was given during the Deng Xiaoping era, and it led to the
revival of protest, and demonstrations erupted. In fact, Deng’s idea was to control
the expressions of religion and culture and make them serve the interest of the
Chinese state. However, the policies turned to other results.

In the space of ten days in the autumn of 1987, three significant
demonstrations took place in the centre of Lhasa. On 27 September 1987, the
peaceful demonstration led by the monks from Drepung monastery turned violent.
When the monks displayed the Tibetan flag and shouted, ‘Tibet is independent,’
they were attacked and beaten by the police, and 36 demonstrators were imprisoned.
The monks from Sera staged another similar demonstration on 1 October 1987. They
too were attacked and beaten up by the police, and taken to a nearby police station.
Thus an angry crowd burned down the police station in an attempt to free the
arrested demonstrators. In retaliation, the police shot at the crowd and killed at least
eight people and wounded many.\(^3\) On 6 October 1987 another incident took place
when about a hundred people marched from the direction of Sera monastery towards
where the Tibet local government was quartered, but they were arrested by the
police before they could even reach their destination.

The pro-independence demonstrations were conspicuous of the just
aspirations of the Tibetan people. There were both religious and political elements,
seen in the demonstrations. Despite the distractions of Tibetan religious institutions

\(^3\) Ibid. p. 207.
since 1959, and especially during the so-called Cultural Revolution, Tibetan Buddhist influence was still felt and cherished.

There were some focal points for the outbreak of the 1987 protest demonstrations of Tibet. Firstly, Tibetans were frustrated with the Beijing official policy of population transfer, which has turned Tibetans into a minority in their own country. The Chinese population policy divided the entire Tibetan population into small units, between 1959 and 1979, in order to control directly. Moreover, the state dominated every aspect of the Tibetan life.

Secondly, the Hans held the best jobs and best lands. Thirdly, the Chinese criticized and condemned the Dalai Lama's ten days visit to USA in 1987. The Chinese considered it as purely anti-Chinese, based on political motivation.

Fourthly, the Americans renewed their interest in Tibet, which encouraged the Tibetans for freedom struggle. They blacklisted China because China continuously ignored the UN resolutions on human rights and Tibetan self-determination.

Impact of Deng's Policy of Relaxation in Religious Freedom

The freedom of religion is one of the Deng's "liberalization" policies towards Tibet. Under his regime the relaxation of religion was used to camouflage the gross failure of the past brazen policies of Mao Tse-tung in Tibet.

Being a Buddhist country, Tibetan life has revolved around religion. Religion is the major point of contention between the Chinese and the Tibetans. The relaxed religious freedom under Deng's regime since 1979 was subjected to numerous restrictions. While earlier, one son from each family usually became a
monk, now permission was required from the parents, monastery and religious affairs commission that is the part of national minorities commission.

The 1982 constitution affirmed freedom of religious belief and non-discrimination against any citizen because of belief and disbelief in religion. It protects normal religious activities. It then brings forward few restrictions that no one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public administration, impair the health of the citizenry or influence educational system of the state. Finally, it declares that no religions should bring in affairs, which may be subjected to foreign domination.

Since 1980, millions of yuans have been allocated to repairing monasteries to satisfy ‘the wishes of religious believers and to correct the leftist mistake.’ 1400 monasteries and other religious institutions have been repaired, refurnished and opened to the public of Tibet, and some 34000 lamas and nuns have taken up residence in this establishment. The monasteries have three sources of income - (1) alms from worshipers, (2) production and commercial activities, and (3) government grants. For the first time in twenty years, the monks were allowed to hold the Monlam festival in 1986, and moreover, famous lamas and scholars were invited to teach religious literature and history. After reforms the Tibetan’s were able to reconstruct the monasteries, which had been suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. Divination was openly practical and the services of religious specialists were sought for the performance of beneficial rites. But it should be noted that while the party policy calls for freedom of religion as well as “freedom to propagate atheism,” it says that religion has been the root of Tibetan backwardness.4 The

Indian Express (New Delhi), 30 July 1979.
reconstruction of monasteries, monuments, etc, have been highly selective for serving the political and economic purpose as well as to give impression to this effect in the eyes of tourists rather than giving consent to the living cultural and religious institutions according to Tibetan perception. Further, the state’s continuing interference in the religious and cultural life remained a source of resentment against the government. Thus from time to time, there was rise of protests against the Chinese.

It is no wonder that the late Panchen Lama, on 28 September 1983, called for the eradication of Chinese interference in the administration in Tibet.

On 10 March 1987, the Dalai Lama stated: “the so called religious freedom in Tibet today amounts to permitting our people to worship and practice religion in a merely ritualistic and devotional way. There are both direct and indirect restrictions on the teaching and study of Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism is thus being reduced to blind faith which is exactly how the communist Chinese view and define religion.”

However, the Chinese leaders still regarded the religious issue as central to the Tibetan question. Deng’s policy of religion was designed to win the loyalty of the Tibetan people. But this policy could not bring reconciliation. In fact, it has brought revival of nationalism. The pro-independence demonstrations completely shattered the Chinese dream of political reconciliation through the new religious “liberalisation” policy of Deng.

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SWB FF/MSCI, 5 April 1989.

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Spread of Pro-Independence Demonstrations

Under the Deng’s regime, the Chinese tried to reconcile with the Tibetans through many packages in terms of economy and restoration of religious rituals. But no amount of policies could satisfy the native people until they were fully granted sovereignty. Thus, political unrest in Tibet, manifested in protests and demonstrations, erupted on 27 September 1987, after the Chinese authorities had criticized the Dalai Lama’s ten days visit to USA and the mass rally on 24 September 1987 when eleven Tibetans were arrested and sentenced for criminal offences and two Tibetans were condemned to death.

According to Scotsman (Edinburgh) dated 27 September 1987, the Tibetans demonstrated in the streets of Lhasa to protest against Chinese rule of the region. It is reported that twenty-one monks and five other people had shouted that ‘Tibetans wanted independence’ and demonstrators assaulted the police who had tried to intervene. The protest lasted for less than an hour and the police arrested some of the protesters. The unprecedented Tibetan campaign against China, and the symbolic carrying of the traditional flag of snow mountains and lions as religious icon, was an unpleasant surprise for China. Religion largely defined Tibetan identity.

The demonstrators had drawn a barrage of criticisms from the official Chinese media, and it accused a US government’s failure to prevent the Dalai Lama’s political activities while in Washington.6

Washington Post on 30 September 1987 reported that the demonstrations were staged after the executions of two Tibetans in Lhasa on the ground of murder

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charge. But according to official sources from Tibetan’s exiled government (Dalai Lama’s office), those executed by the Chinese on 24 September 1987 were freedom fighters and not murderers. The Chinese News Agency said that the demonstrators’ demand for independence of Tibet has been taken as a “serious political incident” by Chinese authorities.

On 29 September 1987, large number of Tibetan demonstrators gathered at the lawn of the Boat Club, New Delhi, to protest against the alleged recent crackdown in Tibet in which at least twelve persons were executed and imprisoned in Lhasa. About 500 peaceful demonstrators burned a Chinese flag. Another protest and demonstration was held on 3 October 1987 in front of the Chinese embassy in New Delhi. The Tibetans protested over the killings in Lhasa, and they strongly condemned the Chinese action and demanded immediate release of the freedom fighters.

On Chinese National Day, 1 October 1987, another remarkable demonstration was held in Tibet. The protesters proceeded around Barkhor, carried Tibetan Flags, and shouted slogans about Tibetan independence. But on the fourth round of the rally, the police quickly broke the demonstrators in violent manner, and monks along with thirty common people were arrested and taken to the local police station. Then, a crowd of 2,000 to 3,000 Tibetans gathered in front of the police station and began to throw stones at the policeman and this compelled the standing

8 Indian Express (New Delhi), 1 October 1987.
9 The Times of India (New Delhi), 30 September 1987.
10 Patriot (New Delhi), 30 September 1987.
11 The Sunday Statesmen, 4 October 1987.
police to retreat to the compound. The crowd then overturned and set on fire a number of abandoned police vehicles including the fire engines, employed in controlling the spread of protest and demonstration movements. About eight demonstrators were killed in violent clashes between the demonstrators and Chinese police. Subsequently, China deployed reinforcements armed with automatic weapons and mounted machineguns. The army paraded through the main streets surrounding the Tibetan section of Lhasa.12

According to the China News Agency Official reports on Chinese National day, about one thousand demonstrators burned down the Chinese police station and police cars in Lhasa. Apart from that, same rioters snatched away guns from the police and shot at the officers, who followed order not to fire.

*The New York Times* stated that a march for independence by thousands of Tibetans in Tibetan capital turned violent when the demonstrators stoned at the police and fired at police station. The protest on 1 October 1987 was the second protest in a week in Lhasa. The protesters shouted slogans in Tibetan language: “Free Tibet,” “Chinese out of Tibet,” and “the Dalai Lama, come back to Tibet.”13

The pro-independence protests and demonstrations made the Chinese to face one of the worse political crises in Tibet of nearly thirty years, after the police station was reduced to ashes by a large crowd of demonstrators. At least six of them were reported dead.14

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The disturbances that broke out on the Chinese National Day were due to the arrest of twenty monks who shouted independence slogans and lifted up the Tibetan National Flag while they went around the golden-roof of Jokhang temple.\textsuperscript{15}

On 4 October 1987, the Sunday Times reported that the Chinese police had brutally beaten the demonstrators and shot at them in their effort to put down the worse outbreak of violence in the isolated nation since Mao Tse-tung’s Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. The demonstrations began after the police arrested twenty monks who were leading a march in front of a temple and chanting: “this is Tibet, a free and independent nation.” The demonstrators opened fire on police vehicles, and laid siege to the police station. A crowd of about one thousand stormed the police station where the monks had been arrested.\textsuperscript{16}

The severity of the demonstration against the Chinese rule in Tibet apparently took the central government by surprise, as the largest violent incident of its kind occurred since Tibetan abortive uprising against the Chinese in 1959. The Chinese blamed that the two demonstrations in Lhasa were sparkled by the Dalai Lama’s ten days visit to USA, where he had outlined the Five Peace Plans for Tibet which included Tibet as a “zone of peace,” disarmament of Chinese force in the region, and status of Tibet as an autonomous region of China.\textsuperscript{17}

According to \textit{Wall Street Journal}, on 1 October 1987, the Chinese National Day, thirty-three monks circled the temple and proclaimed independence for Tibet. The police arrested the protesters and thus an angry crowd burned down the police

\textsuperscript{15} Tim Lord, \textit{The Observer}, 4 October 1987.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Sunday Times}, 4 October 1987.
\textsuperscript{17} Robert Grieves, \textit{The Times}, 5 October 1987.
station, meanwhile the police responded with gunfire. As a result, the death toll reached to about nine. The protests were launched after the Dalai Lama’s well-publicized visit to USA. 18

A monk from Drepung monastery said that the protest demonstration on 1 October 1987 was due to the Chinese police who insulted their spiritual leader. On top of that, they put up the posters all over the monastery. Which made the monks furious at the police and as soon as they left the monastery, the monks removed the posters and went on to retaliate. Thus, the protest on Chinese National Day was the product of the Chinese police.

Escalation of protests outside Tibet

After the incident of 1 October, thousands of Tibetans in Dharamsala held a demonstration to express their resentment over the provoked firing by the police on a peaceful agitation in Tibet. The Tibetan Youth Congress also launched protests, and alleged that several innocent people were killed and many were imprisoned without trial. 19

On 7 October 1987, another demonstration was staged in Chandigarh (India). The protesters burned Chinese flags and the effigy of Deng Xiaoping and they distributed the pamphlets, which contained the human rights violations in Tibet and highlighted the Dalai Lama’s five points of peace plan. 20

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On 9 October, the protesters from Darjeeling submitted their memorandum to Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, seeking his intervention “to save Tibetan brethren in Tibet.” On the 10 October 1987, the protestors from Delhi handed over a letter addressed to Javier Perez-de-Cueller, the then UN secretary General for implementation of the General Assembly resolutions of 1959, 1961 and 1965, which refers to human rights and self-determination in Tibet.21

The Tibetans form Germany demonstrated on 12 October 1987 for the re-establishment of Tibet as an independent state.22

The Dalai Lama supported the continuation of peaceful protests against China. He stressed that the demonstrations were necessary for expressing national sorrow. Thus he advocated the peaceful civil disobedience, since he thought it was important to let China know that the Tibetans are not happy.23

**Intensification of protest and suppression**

After the 1 October incident, the central authorities imposed strict curfew and curbed the press of Lhasa. On 6 October 1987, a group of young monks protested in front of the TAR government compound against the continual detention of twenty-one monks of Drepung who had staged the first demonstration on 27 September. However, few minutes later, around two hundred and fifty armed police arrived to control the protesters, and many monks were arrested and viciously beaten with belt, stick, rifles and pieces of metals. But after two days, all of them were released.24

For the third time in nine days, the Tibetans marched against the Chinese rule on 6 October. The protesters chanted anti-Chinese slogans, but once again, the demonstrations were broken up by security forces and about sixty people were detained by soldiers, but another group of about a hundred proceeded towards the TAR government office. However, they too were arrested.25

The three pro-independence protests and demonstration movements in Tibet initiated a new phase of protest against the Chinese rule in Tibet, which continued to the present. Whenever the right opportunities came, the Tibetan grasped the chance. Thus there is a channel of protest, which is up to date.

In 1988, the Tibetans staged a remarkable protest demonstration. On 5 March 1988, after a long gap, the Chinese planned to hold Monlam prayer festival to prove that the situation in the Lhasa was normal, and that the authorities were in control and the current policies were effective. Meanwhile, the monks from Ganden, Drepung and Sera decided to boycott the forthcoming Monlam festival. On this basis, many Tibetans were arrested and moreover it seemed that it was the right time to popularise their political demands. As soon as the authorities came to know the non-cooperation plan of the monks, the Panchen Lama was dispatched to Lhasa on January 1988 in an attempt to repair the damage caused by the October riot and bring Tibet back on track. As a result, Beijing released fifty-nine people on 21 January 1988. But the monks called it a bribe. Further, all the arrested monks, and Yulu Dawa Tsering, had not been released.

However, Monlam prayer festival took place with a few participants without any major incident till 4 March 1988. But on 5 March a monk from Ganden rushed

to the officials who had assembled for the closing ceremonies and began to shout and argue with officials who failed to release Yulu Dawa Tsering. He was imprisoned for speaking to foreign journalists about animosities against the China. The monks’ protest led to full-scale violence and, in confrontation, one monk was shot dead. Subsequently, the Monlam ceremony degenerated into full-scale riot within Barkhor and Jokhang. After this incident, the demonstrators shouted that Tibet is independent while carrying the dead body. In order to control the massive protest, the police surrounded the temple and charged in with tear gas where the monks were trapped inside. Thus a large number of monks were killed.

The violation of the Jokhang temple by Chinese soldiers had a significant impact for the rest of the Tibetans bringing them closer to solidarity. The people of Lhasa made it clear that as long as the Chinese troops maintained their presence around Barkhor, they would continue to demonstrate. Thus on the first anniversary of 27th September 1987, the Drepung monks staged more demonstrations, but the massive military presence with armed patrols made it impossible for mass demonstration. The bloody confrontation anniversary of 1st October 1987 also faced the same fate.

On 10 December 1988, when Peking tried to refurbish its image abroad by full preparation to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the signing of Union of Human Rights, the Tibetans took the advantage of the benefit of doubt through demonstrations against the Chinese. Despite the presence of Chinese soldiers, demonstrators marched towards Barkhor. In order to control the protesters, the

police opened fire on the large crowd. This was the first time that the Chinese security forces had opened fire without provoking a Tibetan crowd.

One week later, on 18 December 1988, more than sixty Tibetans gathered in Tiananmen Square to protest against the shooting in Lhasa of unarmed protesters.

On 30 December 1988, about three hundred students and teachers from Tibet University launched a demonstration. They demanded the re-installing of Tibetan language as the official language of the region, more respect for Tibetan religion and culture, and the disarmament of Chinese security forces taking view of the 10 December incident. 27

The Tibet University students held another demonstration on 4 May 1989 at Narbulinka. On Chinese youth Day, and some students and teachers staged a demonstration. Lhasa University students staged another protest demonstration on 14 May 1989. Around 1000 students went for hunger strike in support of Peking students.

Martial law was introduced in Lhasa on 8 March 1989, after a bloody incident. The armed forces were deployed to control the spread of protests and demonstrations in Tibet. But the iron hand could not crush down the spirit of nationalism. Thus, with or without the law, another demonstration was staged on 9 March 1990 after the imposition of martial law. There was a huge demonstration against the Chinese, the day before the 31st anniversary of Tibetan National uprising.

After ‘lifting’ the martial law, the first protest and demonstration was staged by students. The demonstration coincided with the Tibetan festival of the Saka

27 Ibid. p. 142.
Dawa, the anniversary of the enlightenment and death (Nirvana) of the Buddha. The demonstrators (Tibetan university students) demanded greater usage of the language and respect for the Tibetan culture. But police curbed demonstrators and security forces arrested eight of them. It seems that after the lifting of the martial law, more armed forces have been deployed secretly, and they had permanent hideouts on the rooftops of the surrounding buildings near Barkhor and Jokhang temples and neighbouring Tibetan quarters.

The Drepung monks were arrested before they could stage another demonstration after lifting the martial law. The demonstrations calling for Tibetan independence seems to have taken the Chinese by surprise which revealed that thirty years of cruel totalitarian communism have not erased the national identity of Tibet. The eruption of nationalism in Tibet in the wake of Deng’s liberalization polices leaves to speculation any reading on how long China can afford to pay the cost of an armed occupation. Between 1987 and 1992, about 140 demonstrations against alien rule have taken place in Tibet. Thus, after 1987, the Tibetans were struggling not only for independence but also for democracy and human rights continuously.

**Buddhist Tradition and Tibetan nationalism**

Since the beginning of protest movements against the Chinese hegemony over Tibet, the value of Buddhist rituals and practices has sustained a symbolic dialogue with its "other," however one sided it may be. The Buddhism has acted as a catalytic agent in the notion of "tryst with destiny" under the aegis of the Dalai Lama. He exerted the notion of the "power," getting transformed into "compassion."

The transformation of "power to compassion" (and non-violence) is not only of significance and relevance to the Tibetans, but also to the rest of the world as
well. Apparently, the Tibetan protest movement has been able to sustain the freedom struggle over a long period because of non-violent ethos. The Buddhist ethos could enhance far-flung accommodation as well as compatibility with modern progressive ideas such as the concept of democracy, human rights, liberalization, egalitarianism and nationalism, which reflect human worth.

The Buddhism in contemporary Tibet is identified with progressive politics. The Buddhist monks and nuns have disseminated new ideas since the 1987 pro-independence movement in a remarkable way. They constitute moral communities in Tibet, and the largely spontaneous rebuilding of Buddhist institution has been a collective project for uniting Tibetans. The pro-independence movement led by monks and nuns have been seen as a religiously sanctioned one. The emerging of new model for expression of resistance were deeply blended with chosen Buddhist rituals such as sacred places and auspicious dates, which corresponds with religious festivals. The major demonstration in Lhasa was mobilized on this basis. The Tibetans are deeply dyed with the religious colour, as they perceive the Dalai Lama as the symbol of their religion, culture and civilization, if not political sovereignty, and it is in this psychological sense of cultural sovereignty they resist and oppose Chinese rule in Tibet. Religion, which had always been of political salience for the Tibetans, acquired a new self-conscious political significance under the Chinese rule. Since the Chinese taken over Tibet, Buddhism became the effective matrix of Tibetan identity.28

The tradition and culture, both of which originated from religion in most of the societies, tacitly shape the national identity. Indeed religion is the reference point

par excellence in any traditional society, with great tradition as a morally binding
force. There are formal terms in almost all the world religions, conventionally used
to designate the non-believers.

As religion per se does not directly or substantially constitute social identity,
it may give only membership in ideological community and manifest itself as
mechanical solidarity, as instanced in the pan Islamic movement and the
international communist movement.29

The fact is that human identity is not tied up with a world religion sui
generis, but with the native union of religious tradition. This is largely a function of
synergetic adoption and socialization process.

The world religion provides only the logical structure of particular national
identity and the structure of skeleton has inevitably been fleshed with local genes,
which include prior culture patterns, language, popular disposition (local psyche)
and economic base. We must as a research strategy focus our analysis as the
sociological interaction between religion and local genius, which together produce a
unique national tradition, from which national identity is culturally driven under the
condition of mass politics.30

Apparently the national identity in the past, i.e., 7th to 19th century, was
strongly expressed than in the contemporary Tibet. It is observed that from 11th
century onwards the national consciousness of the Tibetan people was greatly
suppressed. This is not really surprising when we observed the manner in which

30 Ibid. p. 74.
Buddhism took hold on the mind of the people at large except with prevailing monastic education. If patriotism is the core of the nationalism and if it were even felt, it is often expressed in times of protecting Buddhist doctrine and its institutions and not the country as a nation or as a state. In other words, there were periods, when immersed in the tranquillity of Buddhist compassion, the Tibetan people had almost forgotten who they were and where they were. Thus, when Tibetan lama met a Mongol Khan or Manchu emperor, it was only on rare occasions the Lama took the trouble to put his national interest.

After 1987 pro-independence movement, the national identity was reinforced and visibly highlighted. And subsequently, Buddhism in contemporary Tibet was identified with progressive political ideas such as democracy and nationalism, which could articulate the means of the process of national building and prove as an effective ideological counterbalance in the face of the advance of Chinese brand of Marxism in Tibet.

Since the Chinese took over Tibet, the process of Tibetan national building has been influenced through western thought and reaffirmed with Buddhist culture. This phenomenon made them enormously proud of their identity. The fabrication of culture and religion is complex, but it does play the governing factor in the building of Tibetan nationalism. Because, religion has an indisputable role in Tibetan history, politics and culture; the very structure of the Tibetan government, prior to 1959, hinged on religion and the role of religious personages in the government. Dawa Norbu asserts that, for Tibetans, Buddhism is the ultimate source of their pan-Tibetan identity. He noted that Tibetan language and literature, as "worthy of
academic pursuit and world recognition," must be attributed to the Lama and Lamaist (Tibetan Buddhist) tradition.

The Tibetan national identity is notably spiritual. The institution of the Dalai Lama as the spiritual temporal head was something of an "invented tradition," because it emerged out of past Tibetan symbols and the conventions that transformed gradually through six hundred years of Tibetan history, since the 13th century conception of *chos srio gynis idan* (religious and political affairs combined). The following particular historical aspects of cultural inheritance are the important elements in the transformation of this concept:

1. The belief that Dalai Lama is the incarnation of Tibetan patron deity Avalokiteshwara

2. The Dalai Lama is linked to 7th century king Songsten Gampo, who is the credited with the spread of Buddhist faith in Tibet.

The institution of the Dalai Lama brings in an instrument of social and political order, has been a directive force in history, and is political centre in recent times. Notwithstanding the Chinese occupation of Tibet (1951) there is no decline in its importance and influence. The tremendous force behind the institution lies not in its originality or novelty but in its lofty moral character and spiritual message it holds for the people of Central Asia.\(^{31}\) The success of Lamaist state was owing to the austerity, discipline and spiritual quality of the lamas and nuns. Apparently, the influence of lamas and nuns is clearly reflected in the conversion of the Tibetans and Mongols from fierce fighters into extreme pacifists.

In the present scenario, the Dalai Lama enjoys the same degree of the single most undisputed symbol of being Tibetan. He is the man of remarkable wisdom, ambassador of world peace, and champion of compassion. He is not only the holy incarnation but also provider of political and social leadership for a religious dominant society.

Since 1987 pro-independence protest movement the Buddhist faith was regenerated, the specific aspects of rituals were emphasized. The religion occupied the central place in pro-independence protest movement; every Tibetan saw it religiously sanctioned action. However, it is rather the ethical than the magical elements that predominated the current protest. The demonstrations done on traditional forms of Buddhism offer Tibetan assurance about ultimate religious ends as well as effective means to realize those ends through individual behaviour. Religious discourse is one area where Tibetans retain confidence even after decades of assault on their society and culture. Then it is not surprising that the political protest has come to be framed in religious idioms. The novelty of demonstration lies in extending the meaning of familiar cultural symbols and practices to the dangerous territory of public opposition to Chinese rule.32

Aspiring religious rituals as symbol of protest was in response to the Chinese state's suppression of Tibetan dissent. Paul has pointed out that the performance of rituals, expressed through bodily habits, gestures and movements, provides the basis of collective social memory. He further says that in commemorative ceremonies, for instance in the function to retain the identity as a community, they do so through performances that are habitual and ultimately bodily acts.

32 Ronald D. Schwartz, 1994, p. 22.
As such, one can easily conceive the performing of Khorra as religious ritual in Tibet. The Khorra is accepted ideology, which has dominated and was assimilated into the Tibetan protest movement against the Chinese state because it gives deeper meaning to Buddhism. The inclusion in turn strengthened the influence of protest movement in the Lamaist nation. The philosophy and metaphysics of Khorra is more profound than any weapon. The Khorra is not only the apex of religious conceptual system, but also provides the unique practice around the sacred places and infinite aspect for the common people to engage in meritorious actions in order to achieve re-incarnation and ultimately attain the salvation.

Unlike other rituals, the Khorra is unusual and performed in public and outdoor among strangers and acquaintances alike and can be mixed with other activities. This unique kind of ritual (Khorra protest) enables Tibetans to cross the dangerous threshold, separating private religious practices from public political protest against the Chinese hegemony.

Robert Ekvall has remarked on the ubiquity and ceaseless characteristic of Khorra, which literally draws the largest possible circle around the Tibetans as a people and a community. It offers religious practices without status distinction, and thus opportunity to recognize common features shared from every background. He stressed that Khorra is an agent of metamorphosis. The impact of Khorra makes a Tibetan feel that he or she is participatory in common endeavour and is given in oneness with fellow beings. The pattern behaviour of bskor ba path gives the participant a sure criterion for recognizing the followers. The significance of Khorra ritual is bskor ba path transposed into political action. The obvious evidence of religious transformation into public protest was by fabrication of Khorra with
symbols of Tibetan nationhood—the Dalai Lama, the flag, the monk and nascent consciousness, which separate Tibetans from the Chinese. The Tibetan Buddhist ritual in principle is dedicated to all and performed for the benefit of all community to ensure general well being, not exclusively for one's own benefit.

In the same way, the monks are taking the private religious verbalization that the ordinary (laity) accompanies the performance of Khorra—the reciting of prayers—and transforming it into public and collective ritual by substituting the slogans of Tibetan independence. The oath taking in front of the protector deity Palden Lhamo and the burning of bsangs are likewise simple familiar religious acts, performed prior to embarking any dangerous or important undertaking; here they initiate protest.

The rituals that punctuate the daily life of Tibetans—Khorra, prostration, burning of bsangs, reciting mani—are familiar and accessible habitual acts. They are learned and remembered through imitation. This meaning in terms of religious ideology is thus secondary to the facts of their performance. These ordinary rituals of daily life have been spontaneously recovered simply because people remember how to do them. Much of the inscribed specialized knowledge that interprets rituals might have been lost; but habits are less easily eradicated, as they are die-hard.

As it is observed, the rituals are expressed through bodily habits and provide the basis for collective social memory (Paul Connerton, 1969). Commemorative ceremonies are habitual performances that are ultimately bodily acts, reminding a community their identity.33 Khorra as traditionally practised, in fact, conforms to the experiments of the current official policy on religion that allows the expression of

33 Ibid. p. 28.
'voluntary religious faith.' Throughout the Cultural Revolution any display of religion was forbidden, and only in the 1980s the Tibetans began to practice again religion publicly. Khorra — along with prostration, turning prayer wheels, and burning incense — is acceptable under the new policy precisely because it appears to be private and personal; religious ‘superstition’ is tolerated as long as it does not challenge the authority of the Chinese state. Making use of Khorra as the political protest by monks and nuns illustrate precisely the limits of Chinese defined religious freedom. In fact, the monks are forcing the Chinese into a dilemma of striking at the ordinary religious Tibetans transforming their personal practice of religion (which Chinese policy allows) into a practice through which recovering symbols of nationhood becomes an act of rebellion.

Conventionally, religious practice in Buddhism certainly favours private acts of rituals. There is a strong ‘ant-irrational’ basis in the merit system of Buddhism. Act of charity that implicates giver and recipient in a relationship of personal obligation are perceived as less desirable in religious terms. The acts are given where reciprocation is not accepted typically; lay Buddhist practice is individualistic and voluntary. Merit making is ideally identified with larger, universalistic and hence impersonal interests. It is realistic and hence impersonal interests that require a nation of general welfare, not delimited by, and is opposed to, particularistic social bands.

Nationalism also fulfils this requirement that the nation is this non-particularistic and general sense; this can be a medium for realizing these same religious interests. The nation is, in Benedict Anderson’s words, “an imagined
political community,” which offers Tibetans an opportunity to recognize the “deep horizontal comradeship” that collectively defines them over and above personal relationships and loyalties. Here, it is not necessary to substitute the Tibetan nation in the canonical Buddhist formula of acquiring merit by working for the welfare of all beings.

The Drepung monks have invented a new form of protest. The monks marching down one of the long boulevards running through Lhasa and assembling in front of government building could be seen as a kind of ritual preparation for a confrontation with the government, the protesters gaining confidence and adding to their members in threes (ritual action in Buddhism frequently follows a pattern of “threes” out of reverence for the triple jewel: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha). But protest demonstration around the Barkhor takes place on the home ground of Tibetans, in the traditional old part of city. The government compound is in Chinese territory in the Chinese part of the city. Lhasa represented two cities: a dense Tibetan core that reminds of pre-1959, and Lhasa that reflects the larger modern Chinese city, which has grown to encircle the shrinking Tibetan centre. The Chinese feel uncomfortable when they venture into the old part of Lhasa, with the demonstrators around the Barkhor (in 1987). Tibetans thus were symbolically making out their own territory. The audience for Khorra protest is Tibetan community, not the Chinese government.

Protest in front of the government buildings might be the kind of demonstration that the Chinese authorities expected and might have understood, but for the Tibetans it would have meant acknowledging the Chinese representation of the issues such as how much and what kinds of religious freedom are to be

34 Ibid. p. 29.
permitted, and whether special treatment is to be accorded to minority nationalities by the Chinese state. This was in fact, the case with demonstration on 6 October 1987, where the audience was Chinese and the context was familiar through still illegal means of the protest directed towards a government. On the other, the Khorra protest around the Barkhor has continued and has served to sharper the social and symbolic opposition between Tibetans and Chinese. Tibetans have developed a way to highlight the separation of the Tibetan and Chinese worlds, staking out and defending Tibetan territory in a manner that repels Chinese efforts at incorporation.

The flow of pedestrian traffic in Barkhor is always in the clock-wise direction. For instance, to return to a place passed earlier on the circuit one is expected to continue all the way round (the full circuit is about 0.75 kilometres). Movement for more than a few feet in the reverse direction is perceived as wrong, though there are no sanctions and little public notice is taken of an individual violator. The exceptions to the rules are the Chinese, who either wilfully or from ignorance frequently walks in the reverse direction. Tibetans always perceived this as irreligious, an affront to their idea of sacred order (though in line with Buddhist individualism, the sin rebounds only on the individual violator). The excuse that the Chinese are not engaged in religion is irrelevant; the Chinese remain trespassers on a Tibetan terrain the symbolic topography of which is apparent to all the Tibetans as a visible feature.

The Barkhor became contested territory as the Chinese security forces attempted to occupy it and Tibetans attempted to reclaim it as their own through public protest. As such from 15 October 1987 onwards, the armed Chinese security forces began to patrol the Barkhor in the anti-clockwise and thus anti-religious
direction. Whether the Chinese were aware of the symbolism of this or not, it was noticed and commented on by Tibetans. In order to suppress display of Tibetan nationalism the Chinese were determined to downplay the Tibetan symbolism in many ways that cast them as destroyers of religion and violators of the scared order represented by Khorra.

Current protest, however, has taken the form of a symbolic opposition of Tibetans to the Chinese state in which Tibetans have been able to mobilize their own symbolic resources in a coherent challenge to Chinese hegemony. Thus, in reclaiming the Barkhor as Tibetan territory, Tibetans are reproducing, as a symbolic opposition, the structural (and geographical) opposition between Chinese and Tibetan communities in Lhasa. To reject protest in a Chinese territory, i.e., to reject petitioning the government for redress of grievances, is just to reiterate the opposition.

The Tibetan grievances against the Chinese occupation of their country and the depredation by communist party rule are long-standing. Tibetan resistance has taken a variety of forms during the four decades of occupation.

Since 1987 pro-independence movements, the Jokhang temple evokes a multi-layered symbolism of Tibetan nationhood that has resisted Chinese efforts to represent Tibetan national history as ancillary to the power of the Chinese state. The Jokhang temple is associated with Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo who introduced Buddhism to Tibet. Thus pro-independence activists maintained the Jokhang temple and Lhasa as sacred images of Tibet. The Jokhang temple became the hub of political activities; this was owing to the origin of this feat of nation building. Through the temple, Tibet emerges as a realm, ordered and regulated in accordance
with the tenets of Buddhism. The subjugation, in myth, of the forces of the underworld, turning them from evil to good, signifies both the triumph of Buddhism and the consolidation of the polity under the government of religious king.

In contrast, the Chinese version of universe in the reform era had always been centered on the Norbulingka, which, in comparison with the palace, can be seen as the secular seat of the Dalai Lama; it has not been revered by devotees to the same degree as object of pilgrimage on circumambulation.

The Jokhang projected the symbolism of Tibetan nationhood. As an evocative symbol for Tibetan nationhood, the Jokhang temple has the three terms - nation, state and religion - ordered according to the original Buddhist paradigm. It thus provides yardstick against which exercise of state power (China and Tibet) can be measured and judged. 35

The test of the Chinese government’s control over the situation in Tibet would be the upcoming Monlam festival, when hundreds of monks from Ganden, Drepung, and Sera would congregate in the Jokhang temple for a celebration lasting ten days, which is instituted by Songsten Gampo.

Monlam has a special significance among Tibetan religious festivals. It rededicates Tibetan society each year to the supremacy of Buddhism. When Je Tsongkhapa instituted the festival in Lhasa in the 15th century, he linked monastic rituals to a collection of customary sites marking the transition from the old year to the New Year. In Tibet, as in many other cultures, the New Year is a limited period fraught with dangers, when the forces of evil must once again be challenged and

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3 Ronald Schwartz, 1994, p. 34.
defeated. In the traditional Tibetan New Year, rites of exorcism are performed to drive away threatening demonic powers. The function of Monlam is continued under monastic auspices, but has acquired an additional Buddhist meaning. The monastic ceremony of Monlam celebrates the meritorious victory of the Buddha over non-Buddhist teachers. Thus, the ceremony signifies the triumph of Buddhism over other doctrines – first in India, then once again in Tibet. Monlam links archaic rituals for restoring and protecting society to the more recently acquired aim of preserving and defending Buddhism (Tucci, 1949).

Monlam has taken these ancient New Year rites and given them a special meaning in the context of the Buddhist doctrine of collective salvation. It is final ceremony, which centres on Maitreya, the Buddha of the next age, and looks forward to the return of harmony to the world with the re-emergence of the pure doctrine in the mythological future. The demonic powers, threatening society and bringing strife and suppression, are identified with the moral degeneration of the present age. The recommitment of Tibet as a nation to the course of Buddhism is thus a step towards the collective solution of the world salvation.

Apparently, the Chinese response to Monlam festival was an important symbol of the new liberal religious policy, since it was after few decades that such a spectacular and colourful public event illustrating the return of religious freedom took place. Thus it was imperative that the 1988 celebration should proceed as before. The potential for civilian disorder, with many hundreds of monks assembled in the central Lhasa, was certainly not lost sight of the authorities. On the other

36 Maitreya is byams pa in Tibetan, meaning the future Buddha.
hand, a successful Monlam would be proof that the situation in Lhasa was normal, that the authorities were in control, and the current polices were effective.

Meanwhile, the Monks from Ganden, Drepung and Sera had collectively decided to boycott the upcoming festival in 1988. They maintained that idea of holding Monlam festival would be meaningless while hundreds of Tibetans were still under arrest, and political education sessions were continuing in the monasteries as unacceptable. As they understood that the Chinese state had a considerable symbolic investment in the festival, and the presence of large numbers of Tibetan pilgrims in Lhasa for the New Year celebrations would add to the importance of the event, the monks reasoned that the tactic of a boycott would effectively make their political will and embarrass the Chinese authorities and it could be done without endangering themselves. Because the Monlam festival evolved as a carnival-like event in which the normal routine of the society is temporarily suspended. The reversal of social role, which is general feature of this period in many cultures, has a special political significance as an expression of the structure of the Tibetan state. As prior to 1959, before China has taken over Tibet, the roles of the secular authorities and the monasteries were revered during the Monlam festival. In this occasion the locus of power shifts from the Potala to the Jokhang temple. The Tibetan state, by publicly submitting to monasteries’ authority, reaffirms its raison d’etre in the form that it has taken under the Dalai Lamas – a state whose secular authority is ultimately a dispensation from the monastic hierarchy.

The ceremonial attendance of state officials during the events of Monlam in the pre-1959 Tibet likewise signified their submission to the authority of religion as their acceptance of the role custodians of Buddhism. In return, the state was once
again extended spiritual legitimacy. During the festival the state is ritually purified, renewed and realigned and its enemies are symbolically driven off. Monlam, thus, acknowledged that the relationship between state and religion was always potentially strained and could never be taken for granted, but to be corrected and reaffirmed politically.

Whether the Chinese state were aware of the special political significance of Monlam is impossible to determine. Certainly, by claiming sponsorship for the festival, they were attempting to shift the ceremonial locus of Chinese power from the Norbulingka, to which they have already laid claim with secular celebrations of Tibetan “minority” culture, to the Jokhang, the symbolic centre of the Tibetan nation. W. D. Shakapa succinctly explains that the significance of Monlam is not circumstantial but it embodies in itself the theory of state-clergy relations in Tibet and it retains an intrinsic power, which makes it difficult for the Chinese to reshape it to their own. Because, the symbolism of Monlam is not easily manipulated, since it requires the compliance of monastic establishment. The monks respond by refusing compliance, openly challenging the representatives of the Chinese government in Tibet and thereby denying the Chinese State its legitimacy in its claim to be a patron of Buddhism (in symbolic terms, a move exactly paralleling their planned boycott). Within the terms of the Tibetan construction of the state, withdrawing legitimacy remains a traditional prerogative of the monastic establishment. By coercing the monks into participating in the Monlam festival, the Chinese authority had offered the monks the opportunity to do just that. Trapped in their office in Jokhang for two hours, the government representatives were publicly humiliated in the end, and had to be rescued through military intervention. Again the symbolic victory belonged to the monks.
The legitimacy of the Tibetan government in the past rested on the duality of functions. The traditional formula for the Tibetan state was "religion and politics affairs combined," a formula epitomized by the Dalai Lama who was both the most powerful patron of religion, protecting the interest of monasteries (and transforming revenues to them), and at the sometime headed by the highest religious figure, the Dalai Lama himself. The Tibetan state continued the original Buddhist paradigm of statehood, the religious king who serves as a protector and defender of religion – the two functions of patron of religion and head of religion collapsed into one.

The Tibetan state under the Dalai Lama was "non-coercive regime," and the rule of the government never depended on the mobilization of its military forces; the means of the forces at the disposal were limited. The monasteries around Lhasa constituted a powerful army on their own right, and were not below challenging the Tibetan government if they felt that their interests were threatened. But, fundamentally, the question of political legitimacy in Tibet was not resolved through the monopolization of force of the state. Instead, it was achieved through an organizational balance established between the secular interest of the state and the religious interest of monasteries. The monasteries retained the capability of withdrawing legitimacy and refusing to comply with the demands of the state.

The key to understanding the significance of the Monlam festival is the special value of the Tibetan state. When the Chinese government try to assume the role patron of religion, attempt to insert itself into this ritual equation, but under the condition of Chinese rule in Tibet and in the absence of the Dalai Lama, the rituals
of the Monlam festival can only evoke a counter image, i.e., of an independent Tibet.\textsuperscript{37}

Another ritual, which played the nodal role in transformation of Tibetan protest movement, is food. One food that has acquired political significance and became a tag of identification is tsampa, which is largely utilized in rituals. Roasted barley is used in bsangs or incense burning ceremonies during the Tibetan New year (Losar). Apparently, it is maintained as the “long life pills,” which are blessed by the God King. The political impact of Tsampa can indeed be traced to a time just after the Chinese took over Tibet. A historian, Tsering Shakya, succinctly asserted that during 1959, at peak of Tibetan national uprising against the Chinese hegemony, Tsampa was considered as “the most basic element” which united the Tibetan speaking language population of that time. It was addressed to all Tsampa caterers that if Buddhism provided the atom of Tibetanness, the Tsampa provided the sub particles of it. The use of Tsampa transcended dialect, sect, gender, and regionalism (Shakya, 1993:9).

Apart from Tsampa, another transcended phenomenon is the mountain cult that represents special characteristic aspects of the manifestation of their identity. Indeed, it is a benchmark as a conduit for their political protest against the China.

Mountain cult manifested itself in nationalism because of its capacity to provide political legitimacy. There is close relation between the mountain cult and Tibetan culture. According to an ancient myth, the Tibetan king descended form heaven (Lhari Gyangto in Kangpo). Thus, the mountain cult draws its inheritance

\textsuperscript{37} Ronald D. Schwartz, 1994, p. 90.
from Lhari Gyantso, king of Kongpo Mountain. Therefore, this legendary cult is deeply rooted in Tibetan national building, and each individual identifies himself as an active member of community, as the patriot of the nation. The nation is at work in the functioning of the social and political organization in Tibetan society. The mountain cult redefines the Tibetan identity where the question of identity has become overwhelming concern of the human being under the condition of “mass society.” The Tibetans identified themselves, as in Weber’s words, “a chosen people” “with a provincial mission” that is under-girded by a belief in superiority or at least the irreplaceability of the group and the group’s peculiar cultural value.

The interpretation is that the mountain cult is shaped by political exigencies of national practices; even as a myth, the cult, in all its popular forms, continues to provide meaning and purpose to people’s lives.

The interplay of traditional culture and nationalism in Tibet is evident in the ritual of political protest. The legendary tradition shows that the mountain cult, especially adopted and responded by a group, needs externalised symbols of its shared ancestry and hence of its common identity to the sacred Mountain, and consequently worked together in providing the sense of common identity that permitted effective group action. The mountain cult and the ancestral tradition provided a combined effective conduct for translating spatial, temporal and consanguine data into profound social reality.

The form of non-violent protests will continue as long as they remained symbolic competition with the Chinese state. The symbolic of Tibetan protest

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movement helps Tibetans to overcome the ideology of Chinese hegemony and build Tibetan nationalism. According to Hibbard and Little, the Tibetan independence movement led by monks and nuns underscores the religious significance of the Tibetan aspirations for self-determination. The right to self-determination is unwrapped up with the right to protect and cultivate the Buddhism tradition, which is very central to Tibetan identity. The process of identity formation has a cultural, religious, political and historical matrix. Thus Tibetan identity draws from rituals, myths, festivals, food and so on.

Responses and Implications of Pro-independence Demonstrations

H.H. The Dalai Lama took an ambiguous stand on pro-independence demonstration. He said: “I do not want to discourage the Tibetan people to self-determination. At the same time, I will keep the things open politically.”

His perception on Lhasa uprising of 1987 was perhaps influenced by his trip to the US, where he formulated the five-point peace plan seeking Tibet into “zone of peace.”

The Dalai Lama has an unshakable belief in non-violence. He always propagated it. Whatever may be the motivations of the Tibetans fighting to regain their independence, he continues to hold that the violence against the Chinese would be suicidal. As a fervent admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama is convinced that that the violence is contrary to human nature. What is more, it would ammunition for the faction in Peking that favours a harder line in Tibet and it would weaken the position of moderate Chinese. The Dalai Lama’s position is bitterly

rejected by the radical fringe among the Tibetan exiles, which consider that no solution is acceptable other than full independence.

Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR), Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamshala maintained that out of 130,000 Tibetans in exile, one person does not advocate the independence of Tibet, and that person is the Dalai Lama. Interestingly, a survey indicated that 64.4 per cent of Tibetans in exile follow the wishes of the Dalai Lama. Considering these factors and carefully analysing the aspirations articulated by the two parties (Tibet and China), there appears no contradiction on the fundamental issues. The Beijing desires to protect Chinese sovereignty in Tibet and Tibetans expressed to safeguard their civilization. Drawing from Deng’s expression (except for independence, anything else can be discussed), Beijing indicates desires to maintain sovereignty, while the Dalai Lama asserts: “I am not seeking independence, as I have said many times before. What I am seeking is for the Tibetan people to be given the opportunity to have genuine self-rule in order to preserve their civilization for the unique Tibetan culture, religion, language and way of life to grow and thrive. My main concern is to ensure the survival of the Tibetan people with their own unique Buddhist cultural heritage.”

The Tibetan Youth Congress openly advocated terrorism against the Chinese inside Tibet until 1989. The Tibetan youth congress argued: the Dalai Lama wants happiness, not only for the Tibetans, but also for all beings. He talks about a world without borders, without passport and without police. He believes in that sort of

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things. But we just cannot see things in same way. We cannot say: since the Dalai Lama doesn’t hate Chinese we wouldn’t either. We simply cannot. On the contrary we hate China. They invaded our country. Why should we let them sleep in peace?41

Regardless of his opposition, his endeavour to restore independence through non-violence under the aegis and virtues of realism, patience and vision brought the ray of hope in 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, which served as tremendous source of encouragement to his people, particularly those who were on the verge of losing hope in the possibility of achieving freedom for Tibet through non-violence. The Nobel peace prize comes as a slap in the face of faltering regime and added insult to injury, for no citizens of the PRC has ever been awarded a Nobel Prize in any field at all.

In international arena, the Dalai Lama’s proposal of conversion of Tibet into a “zone of peace” has been endorsed as realistic and reasonable by many governments, as his proposal is concerned not only with the fate of Tibet but also of China, India and whole world.42

Therefore, not only the moral objective and civilization shall be responsible towards Tibet, but also the high ecological and security interests of India, Asia and the world demand unambiguously Beijing to respond to this generosity and responsibility of the Dalai Lama formula for peace in Tibet, which is the most significant initiative of wisdom and companionship in politics of Asia since

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41 Ibid. p. 186.
42 Tibetan Review, 19 October 1987, pp. 5-7.
Mahatma Gandhi's self sacrifice espousal of Hindu and Muslim unity in Indian subcontinent.\(^{43}\)

After the bloody pro-independence demonstrations and subsequent imposition of military rule in Tibet, major US newspapers have blasted the repression in the country. The US senate has passed a resolution condemning the Chinese brutality, while Swiss, French, Canadian and British governments have called on the Chinese to respect the human rights in Tibet and to search an accord with Dalai Lama for a peaceful resolution of the Tibetan crisis.\(^{44}\)

However, the question arises: can Tibet depend on international support in its efforts to hold on its own against its largest neighbour? It is hard to say, as no country in the world has recognized the government in exile of the Dalai Lama. Most of the countries have established diplomatic relation with the PRC, implying recognition of Tibet as an integral part of Chinese territory. Inevitably, this created a Frankensteinian situation, which curbed the Dalai Lama's moves.

According to the Panchen Lama, who unfortunately met with untimely death on 29 January 1989, the pro-independence demonstrations that were sparked off and perpetuated by monks in 1987 and 1989 can by no means represent the majority of the living Buddhists. However, he condemned the Chinese actions in the end and stated that the Chinese follow a carrot and stick approach to achieve long-term stability in Tibet.


\(^{44}\) See world wide parliamentary and international initiatives in appendix
For years the Panchen Lama officially supported Peking position. But later, there appeared to be a perceptible change in his stand on the Tibetan issue. He stated that damage caused by the leftist mistakes were harmful than rightist wrong policy. In his appraisal of the social process analysis, Tibetan society went straight from the serf system into the socialism and had not even reached its primary level of socialism. By explaining the leftist mistakes, he might have annoyed a section of rulers in Beijing. With the passing away of the Panchen Lama, negotiation with the Dalai Lama may become imperative for Beijing. 45

The Panchen Lama's last public statement was remarkable; three days before his death, he declared that Tibet had lost more than it had gained from the arrival of the Chinese. The Dalai Lama refers to him as a "freedom fighter." 46

The Chinese response to pro-independence demonstration was mostly suppressive, and carrot and stick formula did not work. With the failure of carrot and stick policy, the pro-independence demonstrations spread horizontally and vertically at different voices with similar sentiments beyond the control of Chinese iron hand. Washington post and International Herald Tribune reported on 10 March 1989 that the Chinese apparently considered the Lhasa riots seriously and deployed the regular army and declared martial law in Lhasa for the first time since the uprising in 1959 in Tibet.

The Chinese communist party, which promulgated the wrong policy in Tibet, should have realized and not to repeat mistakes. Because, the carrot and stick policy neither helped to control independence agitation nor convict those booked under it.

Knowing the implications of the past policy failures, the Chinese communist party still followed the same path even after pro-independence movement. It shows the lack of political acumen.

In view of reacting sharply to pro-independence demonstrations, it seems that the policy makers have lost faith in their own strategy and imposed martial law, thinking that such an anti-people law can damage the very fabric of Tibetan theocracy.

The Chinese policy makers were faced with two choices. The hard liners took the opportunities provided by those riots to criticize the “relative” liberation allowed by Deng and his followers in Tibet and argued for much tougher line. Alternatively, the moderates may have to think again about the best to meet the Tibetan demands for greater political and cultural freedom without undermining overall Chinese control. As such, the approach will have to consider the Dalai Lama, who has always argued for non-violence for his supporters and confined himself to demanding greater autonomy for Tibet rather than complete independence.47

On June 1988, the Dalai Lama stated in European parliament that he wanted to “achieve a realistic resolution to my nation’s plight.”48 After the announcement of the five-point peace plan in Washington, he asserted that as a leader of six million Tibetans, he had taken the initiative to resolve the Tibetan conflict. This peace plan contains five basic components. They are:

1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet into zone of peace

2. Abandonment of China’s population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people

3. Respect for the Tibetan people’s fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms

4. Restoration and protection of Tibet’s natural environment and the abandonment of China’s use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste

5. Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

In this process, “the government of PRC could remain responsible for Tibet’s foreign policy.” The Dalai Lama initiative calls for a government in Tibet that should comprise popular branch and independent judicial system, and its seat could be in Lhasa. This means that government of Tibet has the right to decide affairs relating to Tibet and Tibetans.49

This is significant although the Dalai Lama enjoy the unopposed authority. The Tibetan nationalists who commands enormous influence and played a significant part in the pro-independence demonstrations are increasingly dominated by those who want independence and believe that it is only a matter of time before the overwhelming majority of Tibetans feel this way and are then prepared to fight for it. While those in underground respect and acknowledge the authority of the Dalai Lama, they believed that his model of ‘non-violent’ opposition and ‘limited political goal’ are outdated and that will progressively be seen to be so. Ironically

both the Dalai Lama and Beijing can come to each other's aid by taking each other seriously. But whether this came about or not would depend on what lesson the Chinese leadership learned from the latest protests in Tibet.50

After the Dalai Lama's proposal of peace formula, the Beijing offered for a peace talk with the Dalai Lama and gave recognition to the Tibetan God King and also opened option for any place for negotiation, on the condition that no foreigner would be present and categorically stated that everything is negotiable except Tibetan independence.

At the same time, Chinese made it clear that Peking had not been part of any accord based on the Strasbourg formula that would place Tibet in quasi-sovereign situation under the Chinese suzerainty or virtual independence. Under the international law, China's relation with the Tibet would belong to the category of relationships that can exist between two states and one offers protection to the other, which accepts it. Therefore the Dalai Lama's proposal was a trap to be avoided by China, for what the Dalai Lama wanted was not 'one country, two system' but 'two country two system.'

Michael C. Van Walt van Praag, the Dalai Lama's legal adviser, pointed out that an association with China would allow Tibet to recover its sovereignty. He emphasized that this type of relationship where the country that has decided to seek association with another power has the option of terminating the relationship when it no longer desires. An arrangement of this type would mean that Tibet would be independent according to international law. But unfortunately, the Chinese government is not likely to prefer moves leading to de jure independence.

50 "Chinas failure," The Times of India (New Delhi), 12 March 1988.
Anyone who thought that a giant step forward had been taken in the search for a compromise solution has been disappointed. In the opinion of the many observers, Chinese has not been acting in global faith, nor has it ever had any intention to really negotiate. Basically it has been trying to buy time. Confronted with the proposals that have won the Dalai Lama a reputation as a man of peace and conciliation, Chinese felt compelled to respond in order to avoid appearing on the international stage as the party that refers to compromise. The theory has its merits. What does China need most? It needs time. For, with the passing of time, Peking can hope for the Tibetan problem to disappear. 51

The Dalai Lama said that, for the past 14 years, he was not only willing to negotiate with the Beijing but also made maximum concessions in the series of initiatives and proposals, which clearly lie within the framework for negotiations as stated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 that “except for the independence of Tibet, all other questions can be negotiated.” His formula of five point peace plan for Tibet in 1987 and the Strasbourg proposal in 1988 envisage a solution which does not ask for the complete independence of Tibet. However, the Chinese government refuses to enter into negotiation of any kind. It has also avoided discussion of any question of substance, insisting that the only thing to be solved is that pertaining to his personal return to Tibet. He said that the issue is not about his returning to Tibet. But the issue is the survival of the 6 million Tibetan people along with the protection of our distinct culture, identity and civilization.

After 14 years of declaration of peace, he stressed that his approach towards the Beijing has failed to produce any progress and added that Tibetan youth congress have been disheartened by his conciliatory stand not to demand complete

independence for Tibet and believe that there is no hope at all. But he urge. Tibetans have to place their hopes on international support and help in bringing about meaningful negations to which he still remains committed. If this fails, then, he said: “I will no longer be able to pursue this policy with a clear conscience. I feel strongly that it would then be my responsibility, as I have stated many times in the past to consult my people on the future course of our freedom struggle. Just as the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stated in the parliament on December 17, 1950, I too have always maintained that the final voice with regard to Tibet should be the voice of the Tibetan people. Whatever be the outcome of such consultations, it will serve as a guideline for our future dealing with China and the reorientation of the cause of freedom strategy.”

Recently, the Dalai Lama stated: “if you look at the desperate situation in Tibet, you can say it is hopeless. But China is changing. They will have to go along with the global trends,” which strongly advocated non-violence that is not in accordance with the position of Tibetan Youth Congress which advocates violent struggle against China. He continued: “As long as I am alive I will oppose violence against my brothers and sisters. Compassion and altruism guide me.”

As Dawa Norbu observes, when the certain events raise the Tibetan hopes and expectations, fertile speculation about Tibet’s near future began by the 1980s in Dharamsala and around the world where pro-Tibet groups are active. However, neither the collapse of the soviet empire nor the Tiananmen Square pro-Democracy demonstrations, nor the western acclamation of the Dalai Lama as a Nobel laureate was enough to pressurize the non-nationalist leaders in Beijing to resume the Sino-Tibet dialogue. The Chinese intransigence frustrated the Dalai Lama’s repeated calls

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52 *The Times of India* (New Delhi), 21 October 2001, p. 6.

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for a negotiated settlement on the Tibet issue, finally forcing him to declare the
often-expressed opinion that the most essential issue of Tibet is the happiness of the
Tibetan people. However, it is noted that the essence of the Tibetan issue is the
identity of Tibetan people. By the time the Tibetans lose their national identity, there
will then be no more issue of Tibet. Tibet would then be simply a minority Chinese
and the existence of Tibet as a distinct nation would come to an end. The Chinese
attempt to alter the Tibetan national identity by defining Tibet not as nation but only
as a minority nationality of the Chinese nation. In Marxist parlance, nationality
exists subordinate to a nation.

The international Tibet issue now became primarily an ideological struggle,
one that will presumably continue as long as the Chinese rule over Tibet. The
ideological struggle is important as the political struggle with regard to the survival
of Tibetan national identity. Since national identity is essentially subjective or
ideological, Chinese annexation of Tibet and all its political campaigns in Tibet have
been aimed at elimination or, at least a transformation, of Tibet’s national identity –
past, present and future – into the Chinese national identity. China currently has all
powers in the political struggle, but the ideological struggle is more evenly matched.
China’s propaganda machine is hampered by its jargon and its inability to justify
Chinese rule over a non-Chinese people. The Tibetan self-determination argument is
very persuasive and one that china cannot logically counter.53