

● LEIDEN UNIVERSITY



“The Repercussions of the 1980s Sino-Tibetan Negotiations on the Tibetan
Community”

Master Thesis: East Asia

Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University

Statement of Originality: I, Rinchen Maha Tengo, declare this thesis as my own original work. Where works of others are used, I have acknowledged the authors.

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List of Acronyms

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
MWA	Middle Way Approach
PRC	People’s Republic of China
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
KMT	Kuomintang
ROC	Republic of China
UFWD	United Front Work Department
TYC	Tibetan Youth Congress

Abstract

1959 heralded an exodus of approximately one hundred thousand Tibetans who followed their leader, the Dalai Lama, into exile in India, following a failed uprising against the Chinese rule. Until 1978, there was no contact between the exile Tibetans and the Chinese government. During the 1980s, four rounds of talks were held between China and Tibet, which were eventually unfruitful. This thesis will explore the long term effects of these talks on the Tibetan diaspora, and analyse how the lack of agreement between the Tibetan and Chinese negotiating teams has led to the formation of two main political factions - one claiming Tibet's right of independence and complete separation from the People's Republic of China (PRC), and another group advocating for greater power and more rights for Tibetans within the framework of the Chinese political system.

This study contributes to the existing literature by delving into the archives and by providing insights from prominent Tibetans on the negotiations. It reveals that China's main demand during the negotiations was the return of the Dalai Lama to the PRC, while the Tibetan side urged for the formation of a unified region of all the occupied Tibetan regions and increased freedom and rights for autonomy. It explores how the two parties were on different directions and had different leverages for the negotiations. The study concludes that there had never been any real attempts from the Chinese side to negotiate with the Tibetans. The Tibetan delegations, however, raised false hope among the Tibetan people, both inside and outside of Tibet.

Introduction

The negotiations between Tibet and China from 1978 until 1989 has remained a significant milestone in post-1959 Sino-Tibetan politics (Norbu, 2001, p. 314-316). The first step was initiated by Deng Xiaoping in December 1978, when he met Gyalo Thondup, the brother of the Dalai Lama, and stated, “apart from independence, all issues can be discussed” (Thondup, 2015, p. 263). This statement was made in response to the decision made by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile to drop their original aim for independence from China, and to propose the Middle Way Approach (MWA) as a means to gain genuine autonomy for Tibet, hoping that it would be a more pragmatic and realistic approach (UMAYLAM-Middle Way Approach, 2017, p. 32).

The MWA (Tib: *Umay-Lam*) was introduced by the Dalai Lama and called for a genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people while proposing to remain within the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Tibet would thus not seek independence from Beijing, and the Chinese government would have armed forces stationed in Tibet until Tibet would be transformed into a zone of non-violence. The idea of the MWA was founded on Buddhist principles, in an attempt to find a middle ground and compromise between Tibet and China, avoiding an extreme approach or tactics (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018, p. 225). Genuine autonomy would allow Tibetans to manage their own internal affairs such as religion, language and cultural heritage as well as Tibet’s environment, education, tourism, science and other non-political activities (His Holiness's Middle Way Approach For Resolving the Issue of Tibet, n.d.). A key issue in the call for a genuine autonomy proposed that all the culturally Tibetan areas within China, i.e. the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the ethnically Tibetan areas in the provinces of Sichuan, Gansu, Yunnan, and Qinghai, would be governed under one single administration (Norbu, 2001, p. 314-316).

When the two sides began the negotiations, it was clear that they had contrasting aims and objectives. According to *Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation* (1992), the Chinese side only demanded patriotism and unity from the Dalai Lama, hoping for him to return as a Chinese citizen (p. 30). However, Dumbaugh (2008) points out that China demands patriotism from all of its citizens, including the Tibetans. Patriotic education campaigns were widespread in

Tibet, and these patriotic campaigns were used as means to control monastic activities and to undermine the authority of the Dalai Lama among the loyal Tibetans. These types of campaigns became tools to deal with the so-called “convergence and collaborations of five evil forces” which refers to the independence movements for Xinjiang, Taiwan and Tibet as well as the Falun Gong movement and the pro-democracy movement (p.10).

During the first meeting on 28 February 1979, according to *Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation* (1992), Deng Xiaoping told Gyalo Thondup: “The Dalai Lama is welcome to come back. He can go out again after his return” (p. 30). Regarding the negotiations, Deng also pointed out: “Now, whether the dialogue to discuss and settle problems will be between the central government and Tibet as a state of Tibet or as a part of China? This is a practical question” (*Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation*, 1992, p. 30). This quote indicates how the Chinese leadership only wished to discuss Tibet as a part of China, and that talks of Tibet as a state or a country would not be tolerated by China.

Another issue which both parties faced was a strand of disputes around the status of Tibet and its relationship with China, which has been at the core of Sino-Tibet conflict. Sperling (2004) points out that China continues to claim that Tibet has been an inalienable part of China, especially since the thirteenth century, while the Tibetan side argues that Tibet had been an independent nation state until 1959. There have thus been conflicting arguments regarding this historical narrative (p.12-18). The negotiations during the 1980s did not come to a conclusion and no solution was reached between Tibet and China. The stalemate continues to this day.

In my thesis I contribute to the debate by exploring the Tibetan community’s response to the negotiations. I will endeavour to discover how Tibetans today view the negotiations and how they reflect on situation. I will also attempt to find out how the Tibetans exploited the negotiations. The thesis therefore focuses on the Tibetan viewpoints of the negotiations and explores the factors that led to the suspension of the talks. It will analyse whether the Tibetans view this era as the closest opportunity so far for a meaningful dialogue with China and whether they hope to see a potential resolution within the present Dalai Lama’s lifetime.

The Tibetan diaspora is still divided on this era of Tibetan history, which has led to a significant divide within the Tibetan exile community. Some factions, including organisations such as

Students for a Free Tibet have radical demands, such as asking for complete independence from China, while others, including the Dalai Lama, heed Deng Xiaoping's words, and have switched their stance and now strive to gain genuine autonomy through the MWA.

It also appears that there was false hope raised among the Tibetans who thought that the Tibet issue would be resolved during the 1980s. The existing literature pays little attention to certain questions such as whether the Tibetan government-in-exile and the Tibetan negotiation teams contributed to the failure of the negotiations. What can we learn from an analysis of the historical documents considering how much the situation has changed, and what do the historical documents say about the status of Tibet?

Based on the evidence presented in this thesis, the Chinese government actually benefited from blaming the Tibetan government in exile for the failure of the negotiations, and were therefore not negotiating in good faith. One of the findings of this research is that the Tibetan delegation teams were not accurately reporting the progress of the talks back to the Tibetan people. Despite realising that the Chinese side had no intention of really negotiating, they did not inform their own people about the actual situation of the negotiations. Research on the communication breakdown between the Tibetan negotiation teams and the Tibetan people has been lacking in the existing literature. This thesis will therefore analyse these issues by exploring official documents, newspapers, academic works, including interviews with prominent Tibetans. The aim is to contribute towards the scholarly research on the Sino-Tibetan relations.

Literature review

Although there exists ample literature on Sino-Tibetan developments and China's goals and intentions during the negotiations, there is a relative dearth of literature examining the Tibetan side and the Tibetan contributions to the failed dialogue that took place during the 1980s.

The disputes over Tibet's status have been central to the Sino-Tibet relations and negotiations. Arguments put forward by both the Tibetan and Chinese sides on whether Tibet has been an integral part of China for over hundreds of years will be analysed in the thesis. Sautman (2002) agrees that the fixation of both parties regarding the historical relationship could have contributed to the failure of the negotiations (p. 82).

Brook, Praag and Boltjes (2018) state that history is adduced to provide evidence for conflicting claims over identity and territory. In order to gather support for their own positions in negotiations, political factions in conflicts contort the ways to invoke history when they address their audiences. This is because some of the claims over sovereignty, borders, and validity is based on historical arguments (p.184-185). Hence, as Brook, Praag and Boltjes (2018) indicate that the Dalai Lama's denial of China's claim that Tibet has been a part of China since ancient times was seen as one of the reasons which hampered the negotiations to proceed (p.189).

When trying to resolve conflicting claims over territory, historical perceptions thus influence the substance of negotiations. This has been displayed in the Sino-Tibetan talks (p.189) and this is the reason why the Sino-Tibetan negotiations have reached a stalemate which continues to this day. In relation to this argument, scholarly discussions on the concepts of Tibet's sovereignty, autonomy, and independence have been researched.

Sovereignty and independence in the context of Tibet's relationship with China

According to Brook, Praag and Boltjes (2018), the idea of sovereignty in the modern-day system of international law differs from different contexts and earlier periods. In the fields of different studies in the present day, however, it is now commonly acknowledged that the idea of sovereignty is associated with the independence of a state, meaning the individual state has the right to exercise authority over its territory and people without external interference. This key

principle of modern international law and the Westphalian international order which defines territorial or sovereign equality of states does not apply to Asia historically (p.15). In Asia, sovereignty was simply meant to associate with one person, the ruler, and not with any specific territory. This is exemplified by Brook, Praag and Boltjes (2018), “the lawful authority of a ruler to wield power over his subjects” (p.15).

With regards to sovereignty in the context of Tibet’s relationship with China, Dickinson argues that it is imperceptible to maintain that China had absolute sovereignty over Tibet prior to 1950. Particularly, it was certain that China did not exercise rule over Tibet during the first half of the twentieth century. However, Tibet’s failure to modernise and build relations with foreign countries hampered the ability to be recognized as an independent state. It is because the major powers had no good reasons to support Tibet against China. Consequently, the legal status of Tibet was undetermined at the time when the Chinese Liberation Army entered Tibet and has been controversial ever since (Dickinson, 2008, p.117-119).

According to the document *Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation* (1992), Tibet has never been an independent state as the central government of China wielded sovereignty over Tibet for more than 700 years. The document claims that the PRC has archived millions of recorded historical documents in both Beijing and in Lhasa that can prove that Tibet has always been part of China. It also states that Tibet has never been recognized as an independent state by any country in the world (p.17). Worth mentioning here is what is meant by statehood in the context of international order.

The most widely accepted requirements for the formation of statehood are described by the Montevideo criteria. According to these terms, a state should possess a) a permanent population, b) a defined territory, c) government, and d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Shaw, 2003, p. 178). Dickinson (2008) argues that based on the constitutive theory of recognition, the creation of a state depends on the very act of recognition, meaning that a state has to be recognized to become one. The declaratory theory of recognition is significant. Tibet, for instance, has been a non-recognized state since the 1950s (p.105-108).

In *Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation* (1992, p. 3) and *Concerning The Question of Tibet* (1959, p. 187-188), the Chinese side claim that the Tibetan race had links with the Han

race before the Common Era, and that the relationship was sealed with the marriage between the Tang Princess Wencheng and the Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo. The documents state that with this marriage, kinship ties of unity were secured, and Tibetans and Chinese enjoyed close economic and cultural relations during 618-907. To support their claim, they refer to the Tang-Tibet Alliance Monument, erected in 823 in front of the Jokhang¹ temple in Lhasa. The inscription on the Monument states the following:

The two sovereign, uncle and nephew, having come to agreement that their territories be united as one, have signed this alliance of great peace to last for eternity! May God and humanity bear witness thereto so that it may be praised from generation to generation (quoted in *Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation*, 1992, p.3).

Concerning The Question of Tibet (1959) also cites a memorial sent by the Tibetan emperor Tridu Songtsen to the Tang Emperor Xuanzong in 729 A.D. In there, it states that Tibet and China are of “one family”:

I, a relative of the former emperor, also have the honour to be married to Princess Chin Cheng and we are thus members of one family, and the common people throughout the land live in happiness and prosperity (p. 188).

This memorial is thus regarded as an important document for the Sino-Tibet relationship.

While China has been assertive that the two countries have been unified since the Tang dynasty, they claim that the official incorporation of Tibet into Chinese territory did not happen until the mid-13th century, which was during the Yuan Dynasty. China claims that the political and religious system of Tibet was introduced in 1275, when Kublai Khan, the first Yuan emperor, gave Phagpa, a Tibetan scholar-monk, the authority to rule Tibet, and that China consequently controlled Tibet from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century (*Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation*, 1992, p.4; *Concerning The Question of Tibet*, 1959, p.190).

¹ The Jokhang temple is the most sacred and most worshipped temple in Tibet, situated in the capital city of Lhasa (Dorje, Tsering, Stoddard, & Alexander, 2010, p.7).

The Tibetan government in exile, by referring specifically to the Simla Convention², argues that when the Kuomintang (KMT) overthrew the foreign Manchu rule and gained control of China, Tibet also gained its own independence. According to them, Tibet carried out during this period its own foreign affairs without any interference from another state. Thus, from 1913 to 1950, Tibet functioned as a sovereign state under a condition which is generally accepted within international law. Referring to official documents, the Tibetan government in exile (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018, p. 38-39) thus proves that Tibet had been, *de facto*, an independent state.

Beijing, nevertheless, disputed the claim by stating that it is a fiction created by the “Dalai Clique”, foreign anti-China forces, and imperialists. In particular, Beijing placed blame on Britain, referring to “British imperialists”, for waging an opium war on China and for attempting to carve up China by separating Tibet from China (*Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation*, 1992, p.17-18).

Even though China has been ruling over Tibet since 1951, the Tibetan government in exile claims that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) constituted an aggression against a sovereign state and forced upon the government of Tibet to sign the Seventeen-Point Agreement³ (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018, p. 37). China, however, refutes the claim and emphasises, “the central people’s government and local government of Tibet signed the 17-Article Agreement on measures for Peaceful liberation of Tibet, and Tibet was peacefully liberated” (*Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation*, 1992, p.42). Dickinson (2008) points out that Tibet collapsed as a state in 1951 when China imposed the Seventeen-Point Agreement on Tibet, and argues that the interference by China in the political system of Tibet was a violation by the Chinese of the terms of the Seventeen-Point Agreement (p.80-81).

² Under the Simla treaty, which was signed in 3 July 1914 between Great Britain and Tibet, Inner and Outer Tibet was proposed. Inner Tibet comprises both eastern part of Kham and Amdo which China would have the control over. Tibetan government would have the control over Outer Tibet which contains western Kham, central and western Tibet. According to the treaty both China and Britain would stop interfering in the administration of Outer Tibet and Chinese armies was to withdraw from capital city Lhasa. The Tibetan government agreed to the revised document but China repudiated the convention despite agreeing to the initial draft of the treaty. However Britain and Tibet signed the treaty with Indo-Tibetan border lines which came to be known as the McMahon Line. Tibet in the following years declared full independence (Smith, 1996, p.197-204). See chapter 7 for details.

³ Under the treaty Tibet was incorporated into China as one of its autonomous regions (Smith, 1996, p.303),

China's claim that Tibet has been part of China for centuries was primarily based on the historical relationship with the Mongol and Manchu (Qing) rulers, whom the Tibetan government in exile points out were not the dominating Han Chinese (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018, p. 37-41). Brook, Praag and Boltjes (2018) state that once the Nationalists threw out the Manchu rulers from the Qing capital and established the Republic of China (ROC) with a provisional institution, they declared the ROC as the successor to the Qing empire, incorporating also its vassals such as Mongolia, Tibet, and East Turkestan (p.186). However, Mongolia and Tibet resisted in joining the new republic and instead considered themselves as independent states (Praag, 1987, 136).

Tibetans argue that the Mongol and Manchu rulers expanded their political influence not only in Eastern Europe and throughout East and Central Asia including Tibet, but also ruled China. During periods of Tibet's long history, Tibet came under various foreign influences, such as the Mongols, the Gorkhas of Nepal, the Manchu emperors, and Indian British rulers. Also, Tibet's exercise of power on its neighbors, including China, has not been disputed in Chinese documents (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018, p. 38).

Some scholars share the same view by arguing that Tibet's long standing independence resonates over centuries and disagree with the China's assertion of Tibet that can be traced back to the Yuan dynasty or even Qing dynasty. Kapstein (2006) argues, it was Gushri Khan, a Mongol prince, who consolidated the Dalai Lama's power. This happened two years before the Qing overthrew the Ming dynasty and moved their capital to Peking in 1644. In 1642, the Mongol patron Gushri Khan met the fifth Dalai Lama, also known as the Great Fifth as he unified Tibet for the first time since the 9th century. Kapstein cites the fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, which states that the Qing emperor travelled beyond the Great Wall to meet the fifth Dalai Lama. Although the Qing emperor conferred a title to the fifth Dalai Lama, it was more of a symbolic gesture as Gushri Khan had already consolidated the authority of the Dalai Lama (p.140-141). Wang Lixiong, a well known Chinese writer and scholar within the PRC, also supports the argument in his article *Reflections on Tibet*, by pointing out that during the entire 185 years of Qing rule, Qing emperor's role in Tibet was, as wang used the term as, "Residential Commissioners" known as ambans who stationed in Tibet as a symbolic mandate rather than governing over Tibet (Lixiong, 2002, p.81).

According to Lixiong (2002), during the Qing Dynasty, Tibet was governed by its both religious and feudal lords, not by China. China did not have authority over Tibet. He argues that Qing imperial presence in the Lhasa were merely as commissioner, a very few and logistical and military personers of Qing were in Lhasa. Since the commissioners spoke no Tibetan, they would not be able to exercise control over Tibet in an effective way. They simply served as connectors, mediating between the local rulers and Qing authorities. The Dalai lama later even called Qing representatives as “tea-brewing commissioners” (p.81)

It thus appears that both sides present different interpretations of the Sino-Tibetan relationship. This makes it therefore crucial to understand how history has been recorded and utilised by different rulers or governments. Brook, Praag and Boltjes (2018) argue that histories have been written on the commission of rulers to legitimize them and to validate territorial expansion and their political projects. This makes it therefore even more important to look up information and draw conclusions from a wide variety of sources in order to examine different viewpoints (p.189-190).

For instance, the histories of Inner and East Asian have been predominantly written from the perspective to reflect a Chinese centrality. The history of the Mongols, the Ming and the Manchu (the Qing) empires were thus until recently mostly presented under the headings of Chinese dynasties. This sinocentric view has consequences on the modern-day tension between the PRC and many countries and territories, such as Arunachal Pradesh and the South China Sea Islands (Brook, Praag and Boltjes, 2018, p.18, 186-187).

According to Brook, Praag and Boltjes (2018), in 1938, China produced a map of territory lost to Japanese and European powers. This map of lost areas contains not only countries and regions such as Mongolia and Tibet, but includes also Siberia, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the South China Sea, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, the Malay Peninsula and Singapore, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, and parts of India and Pakistan. Authors argue that this was a reinterpretation of territorial possession in which the specificities of historical interpolity relations completely disappear. This crafted narrative of PRC has had a lasting effect as it was used as the basis of arguments that the PRC has applied to legitimize its borders and claims of historical narratives (p.184-190).

In conflicting situations as mentioned above, a different light might be shed if crafted narratives and self-serving interpretations of past events are used to legitimize political projects and present-day objectives (Brook, Praag and Boltjes, 2018, p.189). Take for instance the term “invasion”, which the Tibetan side often uses in contrast with the term “liberation”, which the Chinese side uses when the PLA took control over Tibet in 1950.

What becomes clear is that the Sino-Tibetan relationship is subject to a sharply polarized dispute, and contradictory historical narratives from both sides date back to as early as the 8th century. Saying this, historical records show that prior to 1950, Tibet did exercise complete independence without any interference from outside forces for a period of about 40 years.

The 1980s Negotiations

Referring to the negotiations, China was willing to open the borders and to allow Tibetans in exile to visit Tibet. However, the Chinese authorities were not willing to discuss the sovereignty of Tibet or genuine autonomy which the Dalai Lama and his government were proposing to China. Inevitably, this was at odds with the Tibetan government in exile who fundamentally disagreed with Beijing’s stance as Beijing never accepted the Dalai Lama’s MWA.

Arpi’s (2012) work focuses on the contacts between Beijing and Dharamsala since the negotiations started in 1979 until 2009. Other works such as *Dharamsala And Beijing: Initiatives and Correspondence 1981-1993* claim that the Dalai Lama has been consistent about his approach on the status of future of Tibet, which is genuine autonomy.

Blanchard (2018) also notes that Beijing’s attitude towards the Dalai Lama has not changed. In the official Tibet Daily news website, Beijing accuses the Dalai Lama of not giving up on Tibetan independence, dismissing his call for genuine autonomy by means of the Middle Way Approach. The article states that the ultimate aim of the Dalai Lama is to promote Tibetan independence. The website further denounces the Dalai Lama for using the western media to spread rumours and slander against China and to disregard the freedom and respect accorded to Tibetan people (para. 4-7).

After carefully examining the literature surrounding Sino-Tibetan relations in the 1980s, several key factors behind the lack of solutions come to light. First, there were misinterpretations between the two parties regarding the demands. Topgyal (2016) argues that both parties entered the negotiations with different demands; the Tibetan delegates wished to discuss a wide range of topics ranging from increased freedoms for Tibetans inside Tibet to issues such as health, education and the Tibetans' economic livelihoods, whereas the Chinese side were solely concerned about the Dalai Lama and his potential return (p.11).

Vogel (2011) points out that China's reasoning to welcome the Dalai Lama back to China was to improve its standing in the international community and to give legitimacy to China's claim over Tibet, as well as to prevent the Dalai Lama from forming allies with the Soviet Union (p.478). Shakya (1999) noted the significance of the Dalai Lama's outreach and position as the leader of the Tibetan people as they would follow any decision he makes. Furthermore, he states that because the Western countries' sympathy for Tibet was mainly due to the charismatic nature of the Dalai Lama, having him back within the Chinese fold would quickly eliminate Western support for Tibet (p. 385). Additionally, Vogel (2011) highlights how Deng placed great importance on regaining control over Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Tibet (p. 478).

China's other reasoning for entering into negotiations was to try and persuade the Dalai Lama and the exile Tibetans to "give up their separatism and return to the motherland" (Wei, 1989, p. 30). Such distinct differences in aims and objectives between the two teams bred distrust and misunderstanding. China's distrust of the exile Tibetan came to the forefront again in 1989, when Beijing accused the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile of instigating the 1989 uprising against Chinese rule (Rabgey & Sharlho, 2004, p.13-15). Smith (1996) points out that the Chinese believed that it was the Dalai Lama who instigated the "separatist activities" in Lhasa and in other Tibetan occupied regions. According to him, the Tibetan government in exile were blamed for their continuous instigation for independence (p.576).

Second, it appears that the Tibetan side asked for too much and had unrealistic demands. Vogel (2011) points out that a contentious issue between the exile government and China was the former's demand for the reunification of all the Tibetan people and their land into one single autonomous region. China would never agree to such a proposal as this would involve

re-establishing centuries' old boundaries of Tibet (Vogel, 2011, p. 218). As a consequence, the Chinese rejected the proposal. As Wei puts forward in *100 Questions About Tibet* (1989), "these areas have never been a unified administrative region" and unifying all the Tibetan areas would be unrealistic due to the vast area that it would encompass (1989, p. 51). If China made concessions to the Dalai Lama, a precedent would be set which would have consequences for China's other ethnic minority areas such as Xinjiang (Shakya, 1999, p. 428).

Another hindrance to the negotiations was that the Tibetan delegates had raised a list of trivial issues which were not helpful for the negotiations. Shakya (1999) puts forward that smaller inconsequential demands made by the Tibetan delegates, which were unrelated to the main issue, further hindered the dialogue between the two sides. He gives an example of the Tibetans' request for the Dalai Lama to meet with Ngabo Ngawang Jigme⁴ and Bapa Phuntsog Wangyal⁵, who were not of much influence in the discussions and negotiations (p. 399).

Third, it seems that there was a lack of trust from the Chinese side in the Dalai Lama's approach for the solution. China remained convinced that the Middle Way Approach was merely a gateway leading to Tibetan independence (Topgyal, 2016, p. 81). As Wei (1989) states, China claims Tibet to be an "inalienable part of China's territory (p. 50). It appears therefore that the Tibetan side had never really managed to reassure to the Chinese Communist Party that the Dalai Lama's approach for the solution was genuine in not seeking independence from China and that the MWA was only proposed for the wellbeing of the six million Tibetan people. China began to realise that they could rule Tibet without the Dalai Lama and winning him over was not seen as that important (Shakya, 1999, p. 408). Smith (1996) notes that China had second thoughts about the idea of pursuing the Dalai Lama's return as the potential effects of Dalai Lama's return could be negative (p. 575).

Fourth, the Tibetan move of releasing a public press to the international media in October 1988 without first informing China was seen as a major *faux pas* by the Chinese, who were greatly offended by the fact that the Tibetans would release such details to the world without first

⁴ Ngabo Ngawang Jigme (1910-2009) was a Tibetan government official who, whilst serving as the Governor of Chamdo, signed the Seventeen Point Agreement in 1951, accepting thus Chinese sovereignty over Tibet (Obituary: Kasur Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, 2009).

⁵ Bapa Phuntsog Wangyal (1922-2014) was a Tibetan politician and member of the Chinese Communist Party. He was the Dalai Lama's translator during his talks with Mao Zedong in Beijing in 1954-55 (Tsering, B, 2005).

informing the people they were hoping to negotiate with first (Thondup, 2017, p. 277-278). Perhaps a lack of judgement and knowledge on how to communicate and negotiate with the Chinese has led to further distrust from the Chinese side towards the Tibetan negotiating team.

Moreover, the unexpected and untimely passing of the Panchen Lama⁶ could have been used by the Tibetans to exploit opening up the dialogue with China. According to the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (1992), the Buddhist Association of China invited the Dalai Lama to Beijing to preside over the funeral rites for the deceased Panchen Lama (p. 52). Due to the mysterious circumstances under which the Panchen Lama died, the Tibetan government-in-exile was on high alert and was distrustful whether the Chinese would provide safety for the Dalai Lama if he were to make such a trip to China and Tibet.

In retrospect, the 1980s Sino-Tibet contacts initiated by Deng Xiaoping could have been the most important opportunity which could have changed the course of the Sino-Tibet relationship. However, after examining the events during the 1980s and the reasons as to why the negotiations have failed, there is a lack of mention of how the Tibetan people were consulted and informed of its progress.

The existing literature misses a few key aspects. The misinterpretation between the Tibetan delegation teams and the Tibetan people and its support groups. It appears that the Tibetan delegates never told the Tibetan government in exile and the public about the reality of the negotiating process. This brought false hope to the Tibetans and their supporters. Also, up to until the 1980s, the Tibetans were seeking total separation from China. The change of stance and the switch from demanding independence and reducing it to seeking a genuine autonomy had a profound effect on the Tibetan people. This thesis will analyze how the new demand for autonomy caused a divisions among the exile community.

⁶ The Panchen Lama is the second highest Gelugpa Lama after the Dalai Lama. The 10th Panchen Lama (1938-1989) held numerous positions within the Chinese Communist Party and died in Shigatse, in Tibet, in 1989 Tibet (Kristof, N, 1989).

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to explore and to gain a deeper insight into the Sino-Tibetan relations. In particular, I am interested in the Sino-Tibetan dialogues in the 1980s and the reaction of the Tibetan community in exile towards the negotiations. The nature of the research is both interpretive and investigative. By using archival documents as well as qualitative information gathered from the interviews, this thesis will explore the position held by the Tibetan negotiating team and ask why they were unable to fully present the details of their negotiations with China to the Tibetan people. It attempts to examine the failed negotiations and the repercussions of it on the Tibetan community. This necessitates a further investigation into the related historical background of Tibet in relation to China, which is central to the dispute.

For this, various methods of research were adopted. For instance, process-tracing method as described by Dur (2008) to attempt to locate “the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” (p. 562). This method thus examines the pivotal steps or moments and their effects on the outcomes. With respect to ascertaining the cause and effect of the failed negotiations in the 1980s, the thesis depicts the effects of demands that the Tibetan delegates made to the Chinese authorities during negotiations in the 1980s, as well as the different Tibetan political factions within the exile community.

This thesis does not use any empirical evidence because of the difficulties of finding Tibetan and Chinese participants and sufficient representative bodies. However, as Dur (2008) states, although some research methods rely on interview materials to obtain insights into the development that could not be gathered from other documents analysed, it is crucial not to rely heavily on interview material (p. 563). Dur also suggests that although it might be difficult to cross-check all the evidence gained from the interview, it is important to do so (p. 564).

Hence, the thesis applies a triangulation of methods with the use of interviews, archival data, as well as the most recent primary and secondary sources. Dur (2008) believes that reliance on one method could lead to bias, which could be sometimes solved when two methods are combined (p. 569). This was an additional argument for a multi-method approach for this research.

In terms of first hand sources, works such as the autobiography of Gyalo Thondup, the elder brother of the Dalai Lama who acted as the Dalai Lama's unofficial envoy, were consulted. As Fritzche (2005) notes, memoirs recreate events and experiences that had not been yet told, producing thus new evidence (p.38).

Archives

Important works on the Sino-Tibetan history were consulted in order to seek out other seminal works and to select the main participants on this issue (Trachtenberg, 2006, p. 51). The primary sources included numerous official documents published by the Chinese authorities and the Tibetan government in exile. Documents such as the *Autonomy and the Tibetan Perspective* by the Tibetan Parliamentary And Policy Research Centre (2005) and produced in collaboration with numerous scholars of prominence such as Michael Van Walt Praag, Eva Herzer, Wendy Miles, Warren Smith, Allen Carlson, and Tsering Shakya put forward the Tibetan argument. Chinese-produced literature such as *Tibet - Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation*, *100 questions about Tibet*, *Freedom of Religious Belief in Tibet*, and *Concerning the Question of Tibet* give an insight into China's position on Tibet.

The sensitivity of the subject matter allowed me to consult only a few Chinese language documents and articles, such as the websites of the China Internet Information Center, the People's Daily Online (人民网), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Despite the best effort to use as many Chinese documents as possible, the thesis may appear to be more focused on the Tibetan side.

The official website of the Tibetan government in exile, such as "<https://mwa.tibet.net/>" and "<http://www.officeoftibet.com>" were accessed to gain an understanding of the Tibetan side on the Sino-Tibetan dialogue that took place since 1979 and how the dialogues are interpreted at present. In addition, the concepts of the Middle Way Approach, genuine autonomy and Tibet independence are also explored as these terms are central to the argument.

A number of 1980s and 1990s Indian newspaper articles, as well as journal articles published at the time of the events and which can be found in the archives of the Tibetan Library in Dharamsala, India, were also consulted for the thesis. These newspaper articles provide an

external narrative and vital information on the Sino-Tibetan relations as they offer views and interpretations held by the Tibetans and the Dalai Lama on the situation in Tibet and on the development in their contacts with the Chinese government.

Since there might be a media bias on the coverage of the Tibet issue, methodological triangulation as proposed by Dur (2008) is useful to corroborate statements and facts. For instance, when it comes to the Tibet issue, the Western and Indian media appears to report more on the issues of independence, freedom, and protection of human rights in Tibet. The Chinese media mainly reports on national sovereignty, the emancipation of slaves, improved livelihood of the Tibetan people, stability, unity, and so on.

Interviews

Qualitative data in the form of research interviews was collected from a prominent Tibetan politician and a Tibetan activist. It should be also noted that most of the Tibetan participants during the negotiations have passed away. Despite best efforts to interview the few remaining ones, they were unable to be reached. Qualitative data from a sufficiently representative body from the Chinese side was not sought as the aim of the thesis is centred on how the Tibetans were informed on the negotiations. I concluded that a Chinese perspective would not add any significant information to the narrative.

Except for high level talks with Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang and Yan Mingfu, of whom the former two are deceased, the existing literature does not reveal any other names of the Chinese envoys who participated during the negotiations. One could therefore argue that the research shows omission bias due to the lack of interviews with Chinese scholars. However, to gain a fuller picture, Chinese documents have been analyzed, as mentioned above.

The interviews were particularly useful for this thesis. As Seidman (2013) notes, the purpose of interviewing as a method of research is to hear the stories and understand the experiences of the interviewee (p.9). The reasons for conducting the interviews was therefore to elicit areas of weaknesses by the Tibetan delegates. By conducting research in the form of interviews in conjunction with consulting archival research and other sources, a greater insight behind the Sino-Tibetan negotiations was achieved.

The interview structure followed the framework laid out by Seidman (2013). He suggests carrying out three interviews per respondent for the purpose of qualitative research - the first, in order to ascertain the interviewee's life story and to gain an understanding of the social and cultural context through which s/he experienced the events under analysis, the second, in order to recollect details of the experience, and the final interview to allow the interviewee to reflect on the experiences and the events (Seidman, 2013, p.18). Due to time constraints, only one interview was completed per respondent. Saying this, a rough structure as described above was followed.

The interviews were conducted in English or in Tibetan, depending on the interviewee's language proficiency regarding the interview subject. If an interviewee's command of English was poor, the interview was conducted in Tibetan so that they could express themselves as fully as possible.

For this study, I have interviewed Tenzin Tsundue⁷, a Tibetan activist and Lukar Jam⁸, a 2016 Tibetan candidate in the election for the Tibetan government in exile's Prime Minister position. The reason I have chosen Jam and Tsundue for this study is that both are regarded as two of the most prominent figures in contemporary Tibetan politics. Both of them have also worked as researchers on the subject of modern Tibetan history for decades, especially Jam. Within the exile Tibetan community, which is a culturally conservative and deferential society, both interviewees are thus known to be vocal and to have outspoken opinions. However it is imperative to keep in mind the potential for bias, just as for any other source used. Interviewees can be especially subjective.⁹ Dur (2008) states that claims made in interviews could be biased as

⁷ Tenzin Tsundue is a Tibetan activist advocating for the Tibetan independence as well as a writer and poet. (Tsundue, (n.d.)).

⁸ Lukar Jam Atsok (commonly known as Lukar Jam) is a Tibetan politician and ex-political prisoner. In exile, he later became the president of the non-profit organization Gu-Chu-Sum, which serves for the welfare of Tibetan political prisoners. He was also a researcher on the Sino-Tibet relations, particularly on the Sino-Tibet peace talks, as well as a political activist for the last 35 years. Most recently, he became a candidate for the Prime Minister (Tib: Sikyong) of the Tibetan government in exile in India in 2016, where he came in third place (Wangchuk, 2017, March 24).

⁹ It is important to mention here that both Jam and Tsundue are supporters of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC). The original objective and aim of the TYC until recently was to campaign for total independence, which is against the policy of the Tibetan government in exile, who advocates for the Middle Way Approach, as proposed by the Dalai Lama. Although the interviewees might be biased or partial, I found their narratives to be important and interesting enough to include them as the main interviewees. They are relevant because they reflect many of the standpoint of the Tibetan community on how they think about the negotiations and the Sino-Tibet relations today.

the interviewees may consciously or unconsciously misrepresent a situation. They may also have other reasons and a preference to overestimate or underestimate a situation, or have possible problems recollecting past events (p. 563).

The interviews were either face-to-face interviews or conducted via Skype and recorded for the purpose of transcription. Before each interview, each subject was sent a written consent form to read, sign, and to return prior to the interview taking place. Due to the sensitive political nature of the subject matter, the consent forms also gave the interviewees the option to remain anonymous. All the subjects taking part in the research for this thesis gave their written informed consent not to remain anonymous and to allow their names to be published. The interviews followed the Leiden University ethics procedure.¹⁰ The interviewees have also been fully informed about the purpose of the interview and were also provided with a detailed description of the topic of the interview.

¹⁰https://bmslab.utwente.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DSW_code-ethics-social-and-behavioural-sciences-jan16.pdf

Analysis

The Tibetan delegates' negotiating position

At first, the Tibetan team were optimistic about their negotiations with the Chinese. This is due to Gyalo Thondup's successful first meeting with Deng Xiaoping in Beijing on 12 March 1979. After the meeting, he returned to India with positive views on the current Chinese leadership and their commitment to improving the Tibetan region. During the meeting, Deng told Thondup that "except for independence, everything is negotiable. Everything can be discussed." (Thondup, 2015, p. 263). During his visit to Beijing, Thondup also met with various Chinese leaders who told him that it was a mistake to hold the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans accountable for the 1959 Lhasa uprising and they placed the blame instead on the Gang of Four¹¹ (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p. 74). Hearing the Chinese leaders blame their predecessors and not the Tibetans for the past gave Thondup further reasons to believe that the attitude of the Chinese leadership was changing and that they were willing to learn from past mistakes.

Moreover, Deng verbally agreed to many requests made by Thondup (2015), including opening up the borders in order to allow exiled Tibetans to visit their families and allowing Tibetan teachers from India to teach in Tibet and in institutions throughout China, such as at the Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing (p. 259-260). Finally, Deng was also enthusiastic about the idea put forward by Thondup of opening an Office of Tibet in Beijing to facilitate relations and communication between the Tibetan government in exile and China. Deng thus invited exiled Tibetans to visit Tibet and to see the actual situation for themselves saying, "better see once than to hear a hundred times." (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p. 74).

Deng's invitation resulted in the first fact-finding delegation to visit Tibet in August 1979. The delegation comprised of Phuntsok Tashi Takla, Lobsang Samten, the Dalai Lama's younger brother, and Juchen Thupten. The group spent one month each in the traditional provinces of Amdo, Kham, and Utsang (Thondup, 2015, p. 263-264).

¹¹ The Gang of Four were prominent four Politburo members during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), who were later arrested and charged for a number of crimes which included attack on Party members, destroying the economy, the educational system, and so on (Onate, 1978, p. 540-541).

It became apparent during this trip that Beijing was caught off-guard when ecstatic crowds, in their thousands, greeted the first delegation wherever they went, expressing thus their devotion to the Dalai Lama. In fact, prior to the visit, local Chinese officials had warned Tibetans against physically attacking and abusing the Tibetan delegation, expecting that the Tibetans would display indifference or contempt towards the delegates. The Tibetans, however, told the delegation stories of tragedies that had befallen them and their families over the past twenty years (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p. 74-75).

This tour reaffirmed to the Tibetan delegation and the Chinese government that the hearts of the Tibetans were still steadfastly with the Dalai Lama despite decades of Chinese rule and propaganda (Arpi, 2009, p. 64). The reaction of ecstatic crowds who received the delegation drew attention on the Chinese leadership's failure of its Tibet policy. This reception was unexpected and contradictory of what the Chinese officials had been led to believe (Rabgey and Sharlho, 2004, p.4-5).

As a result, Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, led his own fact-finding delegation to Tibet in 1980, coinciding the 29th anniversary of the Seventeen Point Agreement of the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet. During his trip, Hu gave a speech to five thousand cadres in Lhasa, under the slogan 'Strive to build a united, prosperous and civilized new Tibet'. At this event, Hu listed a few new policies and tasks for Tibet, including tax relief for Tibetans, adoption of a special policy to revive the Tibetan economy, including the adoption of a system of private economy with economic household responsibility. Furthermore, he outlined a policy to develop agriculture and animal husbandry, to make efforts to develop Tibetan science, culture and education, and to make preparations to establish the Tibet University. Finally, Hu aimed to implement a policy on minority nationality cadres, to strengthen the unity between the Han Chinese and Tibetan cadres, and to transfer a large quantity of Chinese cadres who had worked in Tibet for many years back to the interior of China (Arpi, 2009, p. 64-66). These policies, aimed at appeasing the Tibetans and improving their economic livelihoods and protecting their cultural heritage, were taken as evidence that the Chinese were committed to improving the Tibetans' living standard.

In May and July 1980, two more fact-finding delegations went to Tibet. The latter consisted primarily of a delegation that looked into the state of education in Tibet, headed by Jetsun Pema, the Dalai Lama's younger sister. Both delegations encountered a similar reaction and outpouring of Tibetan emotions towards the Dalai Lama. The Chinese government was surprised and threatened by such public display of support for the Dalai Lama, and in August 1980, Beijing cancelled the fourth delegation, telling the Tibetans that "the weather in Tibet is going to be cold... and some development works are in progress" (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p. 75).

Later on, during the late 1980s, the Tibetans once again looked to be in a strong negotiating position. This was due to a number of internal and external factors. First, uprisings in Tibet occurred from 1987 onwards. These protests occurred 6 days after the Dalai Lama took the bold step of internationalizing the Tibet issue. He did this by unveiling a new Five Point Peace Plan for Tibet during his address to the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus on 21 September 1987. The five points are as follows:

1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a 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 (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p. 79).

The Dalai Lama soon received a response from a Chinese foreign office spokesman in Beijing, who stated on 23 September 1987: "We are opposed to Dalai's engagement in activities anywhere and in any form at splitting China" (Arpi, 2009, p. 105). On 27 September 1987, for the first time in decades, Tibetans in Lhasa took to the streets, protesting Chinese rule.

Second, on 28 January 1989, the Panchen Lama died unexpectedly. According to Thondup, Deng Xiaoping wanted the Dalai Lama to visit Tibet and to conduct the memorial service, while also

taking the opportunity to meet with Chinese officials. The Tibetan government was strongly opposed to this proposal and persuaded the Dalai Lama not to go, fearing for his safety. However, Thondup thinks that it was another missed opportunity for the Sino-Tibetan relation to develop further (2015, p. 281). Rabgey and Sharlho (2004) point out that this indecisiveness further indicates that the Tibetan side was ill-prepared to engage with the Chinese government in seriousness (p.34). Beijing seemed frustrated and offended by the Dalai Lama's rejection of the invitation. In *Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation* (1992), it states:

President Zhao Puchu of the association handed a letter of invitation to a personal representative of the Dalai Lama, providing the Dalai Lama with a good opportunity to meet with people in the Buddhist circles in China after 30 years of exile. But the Dalai Lama rejected the invitation (p. 32).

Third, on 10 December 1989, the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and as a result, the plight of the Tibetans received worldwide media coverage and attention. This was viewed by Beijing as evidence of Western countries antagonising China. In addition, recent major unrests in Beijing and in Lhasa around that time made Beijing fear that Western conspiracy might undermine its rise in the world. Hence, China had second thoughts and endorsed a hardline approach of enforcing social stability. Beijing also believed that China's problem inside Tibet could be handled without the Dalai Lama. Beijing's distrust with the Dalai Lama thus grew along as the Dalai Lama increased his relationship with the West (Rabgey & Sharlho, 2004, p.15).

Furthermore, as Lukar Jam recollects, the years from 1989 to 1991 were a turbulent period for China and her allies. Two significant events took place during 1991: the fall of the Soviet Union and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, on 21 May 1991. According to Jam, the fall of the Soviet Union had a massive impact on the Tibetans' view on China, with many people speculating that China would follow the footsteps of the Soviet Union and collapse soon after (personal communication, 29 October 2018). Dickinson (2008) points out that China learned a lesson from the disintegration of the Soviet Union that the PRC should not fully grant self-determination to its national minorities. Instead, it chose a system of regional autonomy within the unitary state as well as the establishment of a multinational unitary state (p.111).

However, despite earlier positive reassurances from the Chinese leadership to Thondup in 1979, through to a resurgence of media coverage on Tibet in the late 1980s, the Tibetan delegations had been unable to take advantage of their position during the negotiations. The Tibetan delegations did not fully communicate their progress to the Tibetan people. Therefore, many Tibetans remained hopeful that a solution would soon be found.

Tsundue states that delegates such as Gyalo Thondup still tries to claim that he could have brought about a solution, yet has no evidence to substantiate this claim. In his words, “so autobiographies like this, many more will continue to come, and all of them will defend their own positions” (personal communication, 5 October 2018).

According to Rabgey and Sharlho (2004), Gyalo Thondup was a key figure. Due to his education in Nanjing and therefore his fluency in Chinese, as well as his close contact to his brother, the Dalai Lama, Deng Xiaoping chose him as the entry person for the negotiations. However, he was not trusted by many Tibetans (p.34). This is due to his vast experience and years spent in China. Jam points out that Chiang Kai Shek¹² played a foster-father role to Gyalo Thondup and sponsored him to study in the United States. Furthermore, Thondup received a Chinese education and also married a Han Chinese woman. Reting Rinpoche¹³ and the Dalai Lama’s close circle prepared him to protect their positions during the critical time just before the Chinese invasion. It is for these reasons that he is believed to be dishonest as his real intentions were questionable (personal communication, 29 October 2018).

Rabgey and Sharlho (2004) argue that Gyalo Thondup’s strong will caused controversy within the exile community, and undermined his effectiveness in the negotiations. However, the Tibetan government was also blamed for an ongoing lack of transparency in the process of the negotiations (p.34).

Jam also believes that the Tibetan delegates did not fully relay the lack of progress during the negotiations due to political reasons. He, in fact, believes that the Tibetan delegations had never been honest and explicitly did not tell the government-in-exile and the Tibetan people about

¹² He was a Chinese politician. From 1928 until 1948, he served as the leader of the Republic of China. He then escaped to Taiwan and continued his leadership until his death in 1975.

¹³ Abbot of Reting monastery who was elected as the interim head of government in the absence of the Dalai Lama (Smith, 1996, p.231).

Beijing's real intention. In Jam's opinion, the delegations who went to Beijing must have to some extent understood the real situation with Beijing, however, on their return, they politicized the issues for their own benefit or to gain a higher position. As he concludes, "they simply fooled the general public and prolonged it for their own benefit" (personal communication, 29 October 2018).

The Tibetan delegates seemed to be dishonest and naive. For example, in October 1988, Tashi Wangdu publicly released the news that talks would take place with the Chinese authorities in the following year in January 1989, without confirming it first with Beijing. A list of names in the Tibetan negotiation team, which included the Dutch lawyer Michael van Praag, was also published even though the Tibetans knew that it would not be accepted by the Chinese. This of course infuriated the Chinese as they saw it as a breach of protocol (Shakya, 1999, 426-427). What this meant was that it further hindered the Sino-Tibetan contacts. Later, Wangdu blamed this episode on the poor advice from officials of the Indian government. Hence Thondup's (2015) belief that the Indians were exploiting the Tibetans. Thondup also states that the Indian government purposely sabotaged the negotiations (p.278). Such kinds of statements thus prove the naivety of the Tibetan delegations.

There is perhaps some truth in that the Tibetan delegates were not entirely truthful as they feared for their career or reputation or for a negative backlash from the public. Indeed, many of the delegates went on to take high positions within the Tibetan exile community. Examples are Gyalo Thondup and Tenzin Namgyal Tethong, who both served as *Kalon Tripa*¹⁴ in the Tibetan government in exile in the 1990s, equivalent of being the Prime Minister ("The Kashag (Cabinet)", n.d.). If they had admitted that negotiations were not going well, it may have affected their standing in the community.

Additionally, another possible reason why the Tibetan delegation kept quiet is as Arpi (2009) states: they did not want to "antagonise the Chinese leadership" and potentially jeopardise the negotiations (p.67).

14 prime minister or chairman of the cabinet

The breakdown communication between the Tibetan delegates and the Tibetan community

Following on from the initial positive meetings Thondup had with the Chinese leadership, alongside the rapturous welcome the Tibetan delegations received during their tours, the Tibetan and Chinese delegations met for exploratory talks for the first time in April 1982. The Dalai Lama sent a delegation of three members to Beijing: Juchen Thupten Namgyal (chairman of the Kashag), Phuntsok Tashi, and Lodi Gyari. This delegation entered discussions with three Chinese officials from the United Front Work Department (UFWD)¹⁵ (Arpi, 2009, p. 77). However, these negotiations did not result in a solution for the Tibetans and for a number of reasons mentioned above, they did not inform the Tibetan exile community of the process and the progress of the talks. The Tibetan delegates eventually reached the conclusion that the Chinese were not sincere in their discussions. Here, I will discuss the main content and demands from both the Tibetan and Chinese sides and unveil some of the reasons why the negotiations were kept secret.

As mentioned above, the Tibetan side pressed for the unification of all the Tibetan-occupied areas, including Kham, Amdo and U-Tsang, in order to conceive it as a single political and administrative entity. They referred to the Nine-Point Proposal¹⁶ which formed the basis of discussions between China and Taiwan. In this proposal, Beijing proposed to Taiwan that politics, finance, and defense would remain under Taiwan's jurisdiction. Beijing had offered these terms to Taiwan as the basis for the unification with China, however, the Tibetan delegates suggested that Tibet deserved an even more special status since its history, language, culture, and people were completely different from the Chinese (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p. 77).

Beijing responded that the only basis for negotiation was the 5-Point Policy¹⁷ and rebutted the Tibetan proposal, stating that, unlike Hong Kong and Taiwan, Tibet had already been liberated

¹⁵ UEWD is the Party's agency responsible for managing relations with important and influential individuals or elites and organizations inside and outside of China (Alexander, 2018, p.3 & 4).

¹⁶ Details on china.com.cn <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/zhuanti/ffl/733739.htm>

¹⁷ Five-point policy was adopted by CCP general Secretary Hu Yaobang in 1981 and handed over to Gyalo Thondup for the Dalai Lama. It stresses that the discussion should be centred on the personal status of the Dalai Lama as an individual matter and his return to China. Details on Five-point proposal in *Autonomy & The Tibetan Perspective* by Tibetan Parliamentary And Policy Research Centre (2005).

and unified with China (Arpi, 2009, p. 77-80). Jam believes that it was a wrong tactic from the Tibetan side to talk about too many issues from the beginning as Beijing only wished to discuss one issue, which concerned only the issue of the Dalai Lama as an individual person. According to Jam, they should have, as Gyalo Thondup requested, only talked about the possible meeting between the Dalai Lama and the president of China, in the hope that the rest of the demands could be made if the two leaders met (personal communication, 2018, October 29).

Both Tsundue and Jam agree that ultimately, Tibetan independence or self-autonomy was irrelevant for the Chinese as they were unlikely to concede to both proposals. Tsundue thus states, “autonomy or independence is the same for China, as they see both as equally dangerous for their national stability” (personal communication, 2018, October 29). This is echoed in *Autonomy & The Tibetan Perspective* (2005), where it is stated that the Chinese top-level policy already made the decision that it was unnecessary to get the Dalai Lama back. The Chinese thus decided to allow the Dalai Lama back to Tibet only under the condition if he accepted his mistakes (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p.78).

The Dalai Lama’s close engagement with the Western countries prompted a turning point in the Chinese approach towards him. A new strategy was applied which focused on enhancing economic development. Social stability was enforced, and China thus steered away from the Dalai Lama (Rabgey and Sharlho, 2004, p.15). After the turbulent period from the 1980s and beginning of 1990s, Smith (1996) notes China did not think it was important anymore to pursue the Dalai Lama’s return as potential effects of his return could be disadvantageous to the Chinese (p. 575).

However, it is important to note that even during the 1980s, there were a few instances which show that the Chinese were not negotiating in good faith. For example, during the second round of talks in Beijing in October 1984, the Chinese side were keen for the Dalai Lama to visit China and Tibet. However, the conditions they put forward, that any foreign press was not allowed to accompany him, made it impossible for the Tibetan side to accept this invitation. The Chinese also wanted to postpone the trip, stating that 1985 was too soon due to construction and development work going on in Tibet (Arpi, 2009, p. 81-82).

At this meeting, the Tibetan side still pressed for the right of self-determination, citing the resolution passed by the Communist Party which states that all ethnic minorities in China had the right either to remain with China or to choose self-determination or even independence. The final conclusion from the Tibetan envoys was as follows: “We can see today that the Tibetans are not happy in Tibet, though you have done a lot to improve their condition, you have not taken care of their aspiration. In this, you have failed.” (Arpi, 2009, p. 82-83) According to *Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation* (1992), the central government of China has promised to adopt special and preferential measures to improve the livelihood of the Tibetans and to enrich Tibetan culture (p.43).

Additionally, both delegations agreed not to disclose the contents of their talks to the media. However, when the Tibetan delegation returned to Delhi, foreign correspondents asked them the reasons of the failure of the talks, and whether it was China who refused the concept of a “Greater Tibet”. The Tibetan side presumed that the Chinese had leaked talks of the negotiations to the press and took this as a further proof that they were not serious about finding a meaningful solution for the Tibetans (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre, 2005, p. 78).

Moreover, another sign that the Chinese did not wish to negotiate seriously on the future of Tibet was highlighted when the Chinese only wanted to enter in discussions if Gyalo Thondup was part of the Tibetan delegation. In June 1987, whilst preparing for another round of talks, the Chinese would only let Gyalo Thondup and his two sons travel without official Chinese documents - all other members of the delegation would have to enter China as “overseas Chinese”. This was a condition that the delegates did not accept (Arpi, 2009, p. 100-101).

Internationalizing the Tibet Issue

Up until this point, discussions between the Chinese and Tibetan sides were largely closed and not widely publicized in the media. 1987 marked a clear change of strategy from the Dalai Lama as he grew frustrated with the lack of progress of the negotiations. China started to speak about the Dalai Lama in the media in an inflammatory manner, accusing him of instigating riots and violence. As they write:

Regretfully, the Dalai Lama did not draw on the good will of the central government. Instead, he further intensified his separatist activities. At a meeting of the Human Rights Sub-committee of the

US Congress held in September 1987, the Dalai Lama put forward a “five-point proposal” regarding the so-called status of Tibet. He continued to advocate “Tibetan Independence,” and instigate and plot a number of riots in Lhasa. (Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation, 1992, p. 31).

China thus laid the blame for the unrest in Tibet solely on the Dalai Lama. Smith (1996) also points out that China accused the Tibetan government in exile and the Dalai Lama for instigating the protests in Tibet and for their continuous instigation for independence (p.576)

On 27 September 1987, Gyalo Thondup met in Beijing with Yang Minfu, the director of the UFWD. Yang also accused the Tibetan government-in-exile of instigating the riots (Thondup, 2015, p. 275-76). The meeting was soon followed up by a letter written on 17 October 1987, where Yang again accused the Dalai Lama of destroying “the unity and stability of Tibet as well as the unity of motherland” (Arpi, 2009, p. 109). He then threatened that China would be forced “to take even more serious measures. Clinging to their conservative position, some people are exacerbating the situation. Through terrorist campaigns, such as bombing, poisoning, assassination etc., they hope to create more disturbances than ever before. Such people are misjudging the changing times” (Arpi, 2009, p. 109).

In his letter, Yang Minfu also expressed his displeasure with the Dalai Lama who appealed to the international community to help find a peaceful solution for Tibet. Yang threatened that this would “neither help to pressure the Central Government into backtracking, nor lead to the materialisation of the dream of Tibet’s independence” (Arpi, 2009, p. 109). However, the Chinese did admit in this letter that they had made past mistakes and had tried to rectify the situation (Arpi, 2009, p. 106-109).

On 17 December 1987, the Tibetan government in exile denied having initiated or planned the Lhasa demonstrations and accused Beijing of not having listened or implemented the numerous suggestions put forward by them, such as uniting all the three provinces of Tibet, rejecting the proposal of a liaison office in Lhasa or in Beijing, and rejecting also the offer of sending Tibetan teachers to Tibet (Arpi, 2009, p. 111-113).

Despite Chinese protestations, the Dalai Lama, in his effort for increased freedom in Tibet, continued with his new strategy of appealing to the international community. On 18 June 1988, the Dalai Lama elaborated on the Five Point Peace Plan at the European Parliament in

Strasbourg, France. In this speech, he reiterated a vision of Tibet as a “self-governing democratic political entity” (Arpi, 2009, p.115) for all the three provinces of Tibet. The Dalai Lama explained that, as part of the framework, the Chinese Communist Party would be responsible for Tibet’s foreign policy and defense, but that a “government of Tibet should develop and maintain relations in the fields of commerce, education, culture, religion, tourism, science, sports and other non-political activities” (Arpi, 2009, p. 114-115). In response, China opposed the “Strasbourg proposal”, rejecting it by saying that it was a conspiracy which the West formulated in order to split China:

In June 1988, the Dalai Lama raised a so-called “Strasbourg proposal” for the solution of the Tibet issue. On the premise that Tibet “had always been” an independent state, the proposal interpreted the issue of a regional national autonomy within a country as a relationship between a suzerain and a vassal state, and between a protector and a protected state, thus denying China’s sovereignty over Tibet and advocating the independence of Tibet in a disguised way (Tibet-Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation, 1992, p. 31).

In November 1988, Beijing informed the Tibetans that the Strasbourg Proposal could not be the basis for future talks. China also put forward the following pre-conditions: talks should be held in Beijing, Hong Kong, or any other Chinese foreign mission office; the present Tibetan negotiating team was not acceptable as all the members have engaged in “splittist activities”; no foreigner should be included in the Tibetan team, and Beijing was only interested in talking directly to the Dalai Lama or his representatives, such as Gyalo Thondup (Arpi, 2009, p. 121). Dharamsala then agreed to include Gyalo Thondup in its negotiating team, but did not alter its stance on the other issues (Arpi, 2009, p. 121).

The examples put forward show that the Chinese government did not seriously consider the Tibetan delegates’ demands. The sole purpose of the negotiations for the Chinese seem to secure the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet. As Tsundue explains, the Chinese “know that they are physically in control of Tibet, now, what is only lacking is the control of the Dalai Lama.” (personal communication, October 5, 2018). Jam posits that it is useful for the Chinese to have a scapegoat for its problems, as they blamed the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people outside of Tibet for the 2008 uprising as well as for other unrests (personal communication, October 29, 2018).

Genuine Autonomy via the Middle Way Approach

The Tibetan government in exile remains resolute with the Dalai Lama's proposal of the MWA to solve the Tibet issue, even though there are factions within itself who resist this line of approach. The Central Tibetan Administration is firm with the argument that "Tibet was never part of China but the Middle Way Approach remains a viable solution" (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018).

After years of consideration and discussion, the decision-making body of the Tibetan government made the decision in 1974 to pursue a policy of securing a meaningful autonomy or genuine autonomy, without seeking complete independence from China. The Tibetan government insists that it is a win-win proposition as it would establish a realistic position which would safeguard the crucial interest of both parties. For the Tibetans, it would help to protect their identity and dignity while offering China the sovereignty and territorial integrity (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018, p. 225).

It was at the European Parliament at Strasbourg in June 1988 that the Dalai Lama and his government officially acknowledged the reality of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet while demanding genuine autonomy as an exchange. This was an attempt to restore the negotiations with the Chinese government under the precondition laid down by Deng Xiaoping who stated that the Dalai Lama and his government would have to give up the idea of independence. The Dalai Lama's demand of autonomy would thus allow Tibetans to deal with their internal affairs, leaving it to the Chinese authorities to take in charge of the defense and foreign political relations (Smith, 1996, p.608).

We can understand genuine autonomy for Tibet as a "one country, two systems" principle similar to that offered to Taiwan and Hong Kong. This would thus allow Tibetans to have a genuine self-rule within the framework of the PRC's constitution. This system would also include the former ethnic Tibetan regions in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan (Sautman, 2002, p. 80 & 84).

Sautman (2002) argues that the Dalai Lama's aspiration for such a system means that the future Tibetan government would be formed through democratic elections. However, to date China has rejected the MWA for the following reasons; firstly, if such a genuine autonomy was granted to

Tibet, a high degree of autonomy would fundamentally alter the political structure of Tibet. Secondly, allowing Tibet to have multi-party elections could provide an opportunity for Tibet to reduce the powers of the Chinese government. Finally, a meaningful autonomy for Tibet, as demanded by the Dalai Lama, was considered by the Chinese as a quasi-independent or a disguised form of independence (p.80-82).

Tsundue argues that the case for demanding genuine autonomy via the MWA was desperately hopeful. He believes that demanding a so-called genuine autonomy was naive from the Tibetan side, and argues that for China, the primary concern is about relinquishing control. He insists that it was foolish to only demand autonomy in the hope of achieving something out of it (personal communication, October 5, 2018). This, he reasons, is because China continues to claim that Dalai Lama's "genuine autonomy" is "Tibetan independence".

On the website China.org.cn (中国新闻网), Lin Feng states that proposals made by the Dalai Lama to establish a separate, independent executive, legislative and judicial organ in Tibet is against the Chinese constitution and its related laws. Lin also argues that genuine autonomy or the demand for a "Greater Tibet" with high-level autonomy without any Chinese military presence means to negate the history that Tibet is an inalienable part of China. For China, the presence of their troops and diplomatic organs are symbols of a government and national sovereignty ("Dalai Lama's 'genuine autonomy' means 'Tibet independence'," n.d.).

The MWA has not been accepted unanimously by all Tibetans. Jam argues that many factions within the Tibetan government in exile do not fully agree with the MWA policy. Many claim that it is a bargaining chip, but numerous Tibetan delegations, such as Gyari Rinpoche and Kelsang Gyaltzen, have failed to convince Chinese officials about the advantages of the MWA. The Chinese have discredited the MWA, seeing it as a first step to gaining Tibetan independence. Jam argues that if the Chinese understood the MWA as a genuine option for the Tibetans to be within the Chinese constitutional framework, then they would accept it. However, this was not the case (personal communication, October 29, 2018).

Nevertheless, the Tibetan government continues to claim that the impact of the MWA was positive and productive. For them, the dialogue about the MWA enabled Tibetans to have direct contacts with the Chinese leadership for the first time since 1959. Although these meetings did

not solve the Tibet issue, they argue that it helped the Tibetan side to better understand the Chinese position. It also gave them an opportunity to explain the position of the Dalai Lama and the views of the Tibetan people about their concerns of China's rule in Tibet. Lastly, they state that the dialogues also gave the Chinese leadership a chance to resolve the Tibet issue (Central Tibetan Administration, 2018, p. 236-237).

The division of the Tibetan community: Rangzen vs Umaylam (MWA)

A consequence of the Tibetan government's shift in stance from seeking total independence from China to compromising and settling on increased freedom within China has led to a split within the Tibetan community. The Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile aim for genuine autonomy, whereas other organisations still campaign for Tibet's independence. The Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) previously was a pro-independence group, however this has now changed and on their website, they state that the Tibetan Youth Congress does not follow any particular political ideology (About TYC, n.d.).

When the stance from independence to autonomy was shifted, it was a major decision and initially evoked a great reaction from the Tibetan community, which caused division. Tibetans supporting total independence were discredited by others as being "anti-Dalai Lama". Supporters of Tibetan independence have also reported receiving threats of violence (Lazar, 1994, p. 23)

The *Rangzen* (independence) faction, for example supported armed struggle. High profile rangzen supporters in the Tibetan community include the brothers of the Dalai Lama, Thubten Jigme Norbu and Tenzin Choegyal, who served in the Dalai Lama's cabinet (Tibet: Kashag). Also, foreign support groups such as Students for a Free Tibet also pressured the Dalai Lama to show progress in his dealings with the Chinese government (Sautman, 2002, p.88)

Sautman (2002) points out that pragmatism, however, has become more popular among educated Tibetans, as they prioritise above all, issues such as saving the Tibetan language, culture and the fragile environment. Hence, a new "Preserve Tibet" or "Save Tibet" movement has been garnering more support. This meant that they accepted Chinese sovereignty over Tibet if steps are taken to preserve the Tibetan language, culture, and environment (p.89).

Since the MWA has been proposed as a realistic and pragmatic approach to resolve the Tibet issue and to gain genuine autonomy, it is also important to analyse the viewpoints of ordinary Tibetans on this topic. The MWA has the unanimous support from the Tibetans both inside and outside of Tibet. It claims that the MWA, which is a means to resolve the Tibet issue was based on a referendum held in 1997 within the Tibetan exile community (“*Umaylam*,” 2017, p.444).

Dawa Norbu argues that despite major events such as the Tiananmen Square incident, the collapse of Soviet Union, or the Dalai Lama becoming a Nobel laureate, Beijing could not be pressurised to engage in dialogue with the Tibetan government in exile. This forced the Dalai Lama to open the Tibet issue for a public debate with the Tibetan diaspora. Out of the discussions, four different approaches emerged: “continuing the Dalai Lama’s middle path policy of genuine autonomy; launching a Gandhian civil disobedience movement (*satyagraha*) inside Tibet; asking for self-determination, or fighting for independence.” (Tibetan Parliamentary, 2000, p. 213).

According to the Central Tibetan Administration, the results of the 1997 opinion poll conducted within the exile community resulted in 64% expressing support for the Dalai Lama’s vision (2018, p. 226). However, Jam argues that this fact is not necessarily a declaration of support for autonomy:

I cannot remember the exact number, but roughly around 25% of the people agree with the *Umaylam* [Middle Way] approach, and another, approximately 20% to 30% of the people say they would follow whatever the Dalai Lama’s approach would be. If you add up these two numbers together, which the government in exile did, you then get a total percentage, which is higher than the percentage of people who support independence. When *Umaylam* was finalized as an official approach in 1992 or in 1993, it was confirmed that around 62% or something have seemingly agreed with the *Umaylam*. However, most of the 62 % of the people simply said that they would follow whatever the Dalai Lama says. So this means, if the Dalai Lama said his approach was independence, they would then all follow the independence road. If his approach was *Umaylam*, then they would follow that [approach] too. This is not the people’s idea. (personal communication, October 19, 2018).

According to the Tibetan exile government, the Tibetan people voted in a resolution that the Dalai Lama should be the main decision maker on Sino-Tibetan relations. Norbu (2000) argues that the majority of people who voted for the Dalai Lama’s policy were innocent and uninformed

about the nuances of his compromised politics (p.214). This reflects the great trust and hope the Tibetan people place on the Dalai Lama (Middle Way Approach, n.d.). What we can conclude from this is that shows a great endorsement of the Dalai Lama, but not necessarily of the MWA as a policy in its own right.

Conclusion

I have set out to examine the the negotiations between China and Tibet during the 1980s and how the Tibetan community in exile looks back during this important time in Sino-Tibetan relations. I also wanted to discover the Tibetans' opinions on why they think the negotiations failed, missteps the Tibetan delegates made, and how this time period has shaped the Tibetan community since.

My findings were that the Tibetan community was divided by the decision taken by the Dalai Lama to reduce his demand for Tibetan independence into his new compromise for increased rights and freedoms for Tibetans whilst remaining a part of China via the MWA. This decision was reached after a democratic process which resulted in Tibetans placing their trust in the Dalai Lama, supporting whatever political decision he made. This split continues to this day.

Despite not asking for independence from China, these talks did not come to any fruition and have stagnated. The Chinese officials strongly opposed relenting any control over Tibet and were therefore not negotiating in good faith. The Tibetan negotiating team, however, presented a more optimistic image to the Tibetan community, which resulted in many Tibetans to believe that an agreement would soon be reached.

Through qualitative data gathered from archival research and interviews conducted with Tibetan activist and writer Tsundue as well as Tibetan politician and former political prisoner Jam, it can be concluded that as China has already achieved its aim of ruling over Tibet, they did not have any sincere wish to resolve the Tibet issue. The Tibetan negotiators did not relay a full and reliable account of their interactions with the Chinese negotiators. This led to a misunderstanding by the Tibetan people of the nature of the talks. It has been proposed here that China, in fact, is content with the current state of affairs and uses the Dalai Lama's exile to its advantage: they can refer to a scapegoat to pin their failures on. To conclude, Tibetans campaigning for independence do not hold much sway as it is of no significant concern for China.

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Appendix

i.



Universiteit Leiden

Description of the thesis: Sino-Tibetan Relations during the 1980s

I am a master's student at Leiden University (the Netherlands) and I am conducting my thesis on Sino-Tibetan relations during the 1980s. The data from the interviews will be analyzed by myself, under supervision of an Assistant Professor. We are asking your participation in this project.

What is this thesis about?

This thesis is part of the masters course that I am undertaking. The thesis looks into the contact made between Chinese and Tibetan envoys during the period of the 1980s. We want to critically analyse the events that took place, and try to find any mistakes that may have hindered peace talks between the two sides.

Voluntary basis

Your participation is completely voluntary. Not agreeing to participate, or withdrawing from the project at any time, will not have any consequences for you.

Confidentiality

You have the option to remain anonymous if you wish. This would mean that your name would not appear in the thesis. However, if you give your written consent below, then we will include your name as part of the information you give during your participation.

What do we ask of you?

If you agree to participate, we kindly ask you to sign the informed consent form below. Please sign the form below and email it back to us before arranging an interview.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact Rinchen Tengo via richie95@live.co.uk. If you would like to contact the lecturer involved in the project, please send an email to Lindsay Black via l.black@hum.leidenuniv.nl.

Kind regards,

Rinchen Maha Tengo



Universiteit Leiden

Informed Consent Form

I was asked to participate in the thesis entitled: To What Extent is the Tibetan Side to Blame for the Failure of the Negotiations with China during the 1980s?

I was informed about this project to my satisfaction. I have read the information carefully. I was allowed to ask questions. If I had questions, these have been answered satisfactorily. I have carefully considered my participation. I am allowed to withdraw from the project at any time, and without giving a reason. Withdrawing will not have any consequences to me.

Please check one of these options:

- I give permission to save and use my answers to the interview for this thesis.
- I do not give permission to save and use my answers to the interview for this thesis.
- I give permission for my name to be used in the thesis.
- I do not give permission for my name to be used in the thesis.

Name participant: Tenzin Tsundue

Autograph:

Date and place: 5th October 2018, London, UK.

ii.



Universiteit Leiden

Informed Consent Form

I was asked to participate in the thesis entitled: To What Extent is the Tibetan Side to Blame for the Failure of the Negotiations with China during the 1980s?

I was informed about this project to my satisfaction. I have read the information carefully. I was allowed to ask questions. If I had questions, these have been answered satisfactorily. I have carefully considered my participation. I am allowed to withdraw from the project at any time, and without giving a reason. Withdrawing will not have any consequences to me.

Please check one of these options:

- I give permission to save and use my answers to the interview for this thesis.
- I do not give permission to save and use my answers to the interview for this thesis.
- I give permission for my name to be used in the thesis.
- I do not give permission for my name to be used in the thesis.

Name participant: Lukak Jam

Autograph: [Handwritten signature]

Date and place: 6-11-18.

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

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