



The Road to Everest From Colonization to Self-Determination

--A Brief Analysis of the Future of Tibet within the Framework of European Parliament Resolutions on Tibet (1989-2007)

The Tibet issue has been an issue of great complexity ever since the occupation by Chinese armies of Tibet in 1950s. The complexity of the issue consists largely in the unabated tension between China's resolute sovereignty claim on Tibet as an inseparable part of China and aspiration of the Tibetan people for self-determination—an aspiration considered by Chinese authorities as a decisive step towards Tibetan independence. Although there have been unprecedented changes in Sino-Tibet relations and in political discourses exploited by both sides over the half century, the issue itself remains centered on this very tension.

The Tibet issue has attained enormous international visibility and is today a contentious component of the international politics. However, despite relentless efforts of the international community to seek a solution to the issue which is

acceptable and beneficial to both China and Tibet, no substantive progress has ever been made in the process of determining the political future of Tibet. The high-handed and discriminatory policy of the China's government in Tibet over the past half century is still continuing, making the aspiration of the Tibetan people desperate and casting a shadow over world community's hoping to resolve the issue with a spirit of conciliation, understanding and peace. In addition, the Chinese resurgence on the world scene as a near-super power propelled by its vigorous economic development, has strengthened, with the support of the People's Liberation Army, its political and military presence in occupied Tibet, making it able to suppress all kinds of activities aiming to express peacefully political views of the Tibetan people in Tibet. The worsening of human rights situation of the Tibet people and ineffectiveness of the engagement of the international politics in the Tibet issue compelled the Tibetan Government in exile, in particular His Holiness the Dalay Lama, to pursue a genuine autonomy in replacement of its previous stance on outright independence for Tibet with a peaceful way. Accordingly, foreign governments adapted their Tibet policies to this new political trend without, at the same time, ceasing to raise some fundamental concerns regarding human rights, religious freedom and cultural autonomy in Tibet.

The Tibet issue has been the sensitive subject in Sino-European relations since the end of 1980s. The whole spectrum of Sino-European relations changed after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the European Union has rejoined the United States in pressing China through diplomatic channels to improve its human rights situation. At the same time, the European Union started to take a decisive measure to put the issue high on the agenda of its diplomatic policy. However, it should be pointed out that the approach of the European Union towards the issue has been more pragmatic and less confrontational than that of the United

States that it is concerned mainly with keeping a balance between human rights considerations and economic and political interests. Otherwise stated, the European Union has tended to manage the human rights situation in China in a framework of distant but non-confrontational Sino-European relations.

In this general framework aforementioned, the European Parliament has constructively and decisively engaged in the long and painstaking process of seeking a peaceful solution to the Tibetan issue by adopting numerous resolutions on Tibet from 1989 till 2007. In calling upon the Chinese government to comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it has relentlessly criticized violations of human rights by Chinese authorities in Tibet. As regards the political future of Tibet, it has been urging Chinese authorities to initiate constructive dialogue with the Tibetan government in exile. Although European Parliament resolutions on Tibet (hereinafter abbreviated as EPRT) are essentially intended to hold the Chinese government accountable for its policies and actions in accordance with universal law and principles of human rights, there is little or no real improvement in the issue so far. Rather, there remains a massive gap between European Parliament resolutions on Tibet and the Chinese government's willingness to actually implement them.

In taking into account the seriousness of the issue as expressed in the ineffectiveness of resolutions on the one hand and the unwillingness of the Chinese government to comply with it on the other, the paper will be focused on the problem of how European resolutions on Tibet highlight gross violations of human rights in Tibet and what impact it could exert on the process of determining the political future of Tibet. To this aim, we will first introduce the historical background of the issue. And then, we will go on to bring EPRT into the context of the political reality of the

region in order to assess whether or not EPRT have made substantive contribution to the improvement of the issue, given the fact that China and Europe have strategic and economic incentives encouraging them to be more pragmatic and to maintain stable relations. In addition, by paying special attention to limitation and ineffectiveness of EPRT, we will put the emphasis on the fact that more active involvement of the European Union in the Tibet issue reflected on EPRT is vital for ending the political stalemate that has lasted for the half century.

1. The Historical Background of the Issue

The political status of Tibet before 1949 is highly controversial. There is no consensus not only among experts, historians and politicians but also between Tibet and China over the political history of Tibet before the invasion of China. However, it is widely accepted by the world community that Tibet was invaded by China in 1949-50 and faced the direct loss of life that results from battles and, soon after, the loss of its unique cultural and political identity it had traditionally enjoyed. In 1959, after the invasion of China, China crushed the 1959 Tibetan uprising, after which over 100,000 Tibetans fled and became refugees all over the world. China's policy of occupation and oppression has resulted in a tremendous negative impact not only on cultural and religious heritage of the region, but also on legal and civic rights of the Tibetan people, ranging from religious intolerance and violations of fundamental human rights to environmental degradation and mass transfer of ethnic Chinese to Tibet, etc. In particular, the government-encouraged transfer of Chinese settlers and workers to the region in violation of the Tibetan people's right to self-determination which implies the right for the Tibetan people to decide democratically on levels and patterns of

immigration, has accelerated the phase of sinicization of the Tibetan people and their culture. The fundamental motivation behind the forceful imposition of sinicization policy upon the Tibetan people is to transform the region into new adequate living space for the ethnic Chinese population at the expense of the extinction of the indigenous Tibetan culture.

Article 4 of the Constitution states that “All nationalities in the People’s Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China’s nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited.” In particular, covered under Section 6 of Chapter 3 (Articles 112-122) of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, it is stated that national autonomous regions are guaranteed by the State a range of rights, including independence of finance, independence of economic planning, independence of arts, science and culture, organization of local police, and the use of local language. Although the Constitution acknowledges minority self-determination unprecedented in Chinese history, this autonomy exists in name only, and is subsumed to the fundamental national interest of China to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Despite fine-sounding promises prescribed in the Constitution, the Chinese government has actually given a very low priority to ethnic minority rights, human rights and the right to self-determination, let alone the actual realization and implementation of these rights. China is violating its own constitution by contradicting it as it is continuously inflicting the oppression of the Tibetan people.

The so-called unity of nationalities in line with “one China” policy is a key element of Chinese policies towards Tibetans. As a foundational political doctrine of the CCP for handling ethnic minority affairs, it essentially aims not to promote the rights of Tibetans to self-determination set down in the Constitution, but to achieve the objectives of collectivization, i.e., that of ethnic homogenization geared up for promoting one “*Zhonghua minzu*” (literally translated into English as the “Chinese nation”) transcending ethnic divisions with a central identity to China as a whole. As an old term, “*Zhonghua minzu*” usually denotes the historical inclusion, integration and assimilation of peoples to various extents Chinese civilization. It is now made suitable for the demands of a new political situation to deceitfully obliterate the considerable difference between ethnic Chinese and other ethnic minorities. The re-appropriation of the term itself is a preliminary step on the part of the Chinese government to turn Chinese society as a whole into a culturally homogenized as well as ethnically integrated society consisted of only one nation—Han Chinese.

After the occupation of Tibet in 1949-50, this policy meant to systematically erode the cultural difference and identity of Tibetans. These social changes brought about complete disruption of traditional Tibetan ways of life and of other Tibetan institutions. Systematic destruction of more than 6,000 monasteries and death of hundreds of thousands of Tibetans, including monks and nuns who resisted the policies forcefully imposed upon them, are quite sufficient to endorse the argument that the Chinese Constitution and its genuine enforcement in Tibet are at bottom contradictory to each other. A great deal of abstractness of the Constitution concerning ethnic minority rights in China has become substantive instrument to mislead the world community and conceal from it “the final solution” of the Chinese government to the Tibet issue.

During the 1960s, the policy of unity of nationalities amounted to a declared policy of sinicization implemented with the slogan of unification of all proletariat workers regardless of nationalities and cultural differences. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a campaign was launched to eradicate all kinds of cultural practices and traditional ways of life conceived of as expressions of so-called four olds (old thoughts, old culture and old customs and traditions). The campaign was motivated by the idea that the Cultural Revolution should bring about the formation of the state culture based on the communism ideology. The Chinese government and politicians knew well that the communism ideology that longs for a classless and homogeneous society could hide the true face of the policy of sinicization that actually represents the nationalistic interests of the CCP. By confusing issues, the CCP tried to justify the long-term policy of ethnic homogenization of Chinese society in the name of establishing communism society in which cultural differences and economic disparities are to be totally eliminated.

The policy of unity of nationalities remains, without doubt, the first priority in China's policies towards Tibet. Recently, a campaign against Tibetan Buddhism was launched. Since the early 1980s, Tibetans have been rebuilding and re-populating their monasteries at a speed which China apparently perceives as a threat to its policy of sinicization of ethnic minorities, because now all further reconstruction has been banned and an absolute limit has been placed on the number of monks and nuns. This is a severe attack on Tibetan identity and culture, because the re-introduction of Buddhist institutions in Tibet has precisely been an opportunity for Tibetans to resist from below the forceful imposition of the policy of sinicization, to maintain their cultural and religious difference and to communicate with their own religious tradition and affiliation.

China skillfully used existing cleavages in Tibetan society to create fear, distrust and conflict among Tibetans and to consolidate its own power in the country. All of this had the destructive effect on ethnic solidarity of the Tibetans functioning as a key to the formation of collective ethnic identity. Under the heavy surveillance of Chinese security forces, everyone was subject to silence, pretending to be pro-Chinese by hiding their real views and unable to form unity of purpose.

In addition, as part of sinicization policy, Chinese authorities are now stepping up their programme of Chinese language education in Tibet with the promise of providing Tibetan students with better jobs in the Chinese administration as cultural and political brokers. Chinese language education will definitely lead to the gradual loss of Tibetan language in all fields of the cultural life of Tibetans, which is a further threat to the erosion of Tibetan identity. Another policy of sinicization is the prohibition of the teaching of Tibetan history that contradicts with the official version of Tibetan history approved by the CCP. For the Chinese, the teaching of Tibetan history in schools may incite and enforce nationalistic feelings of the Tibetan students as essential to their cultural awareness and national identity and create an internal alienation among generations.

In facing the imminent danger of cultural extinction, the Tibetan people have continued to struggle for independence or self-determination. But this life-and-death struggle of Tibetans for cultural survival and national self-determination has been regarded by the Chinese government as the subversive act of secession from China, an act that violates Article 4 of the Chinese Constitution and poses a fatal threat to “the unity of the nationalities.” Though the Tibetan Government in Exile upholds the belief in a non-violent struggle as their means for self-determination, the Chinese

government has accused it of trying to “split” the “motherland” and violating the territorial integrity of China.

With regard to the Tibet issue, Melvyn C. Goldstein argues that “the core of the conflict is the historical dispute over the status of Tibet. The Chinese vociferously argue that Tibet has been part of China for hundreds of years and therefore properly is a part of China now. Tibetans equally adamantly contend that Tibet was not part of China until its conquest by the PRC in 1951 and is today a captive nation with the right to independence.”[1] A solution to the historical dispute is dependent as much on who are involved in it as on how to interpret existing political discourses—i.e., on the hermeneutics of political discourses—being exploited by both sides. At present, the interpretation of the dispute as such relies on the shift in the structure of power—on the problem of who has, in principle, the adequate right and sufficient power to interpret the discourse. As Michel Foucault aptly puts it, the interpretation of the discourse, whether or not it is political or literary discourse, is essentially shaped by the authoritative position of the one in a society and culture who possesses the right to interpret it. As such, with the powerful military presence and economic domination in Tibet, the Chinese government is taking control of the interpretation of political discourses concerning the legitimacy of the Tibetan claim on independence, self-determination or greater autonomy.

On September 21, 1987, His Holiness the Dalay Lama addressed to the United States Congressional Human Rights Caucus “Five Point Peace Plan.” This plan contains five basic components: “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 Tibetan’s 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." Since the Dalay Lama's proposal for the political future of Tibet as addressed in his "Five Point Peace Plan," the emphasis of the Tibetan movement abroad has shifted from claiming full independence to genuine autonomy—from secession from China to the right to self-determination of the Tibetan people. In addition, it has paved peaceful ways to conflict resolution in Tibet. But it should also be borne in mind that this proposal was not unanimously accepted by all factions of the Tibetan movement both abroad and in Tibet.

The reaction to this plan from Beijing was quite scathing, since Beijing considers that the Dalay Lama's demand for a genuinely devolved autonomy, in which the Tibetans could manage their own affairs, is nothing else but a camouflaged form of Tibetan independence. The Chinese government has equally rejected all kinds of proposals made by Tibetans aiming at self-determination which is believed by the Chinese government as a subversive act.

The wake of the dilemma that the Dalay Lama faced in the 1950's—the rise of the uncompromising attitude of the new generation of Tibetans who claimed outright Tibetan independence and the implacable will of the Chinese government which vehemently opposes this claim—led him to reconsider his approach to the Tibetan issue. As a result, he has offered numerous initiatives for a political solution, among which abandoning the claim on full independence of Tibet is prominent. Moreover, he has insistently expressed his willingness to enter into negotiations with the Chinese

government. The Dalai Lama has made it clear that negotiations must be centered around ending China's population transfer policy, respecting the fundamental human rights and democratic freedom of Tibetans, the demilitarization and denuclearization of Tibet, the restoration of control to the Tibetan people of all matters affecting their own affairs, and the protection of the environment. Again, the "Middle-Way Approach" of the Dalay Lama intended to create an atmosphere of mutual trust has been strongly rejected by the Chinese government. The Chinese government has uncompromisingly insisted on maintaining the status quo in Tibet because it is afraid to get the virtual stability of the region out of control. By calling the Tibetan issues an "internal Chinese affair" and appealing to the pretext of non-interference policy, the Chinese government goes great lengths to oppose to any form of formal meeting of foreign governments and government officials with the Dalay Lama, threatening them with the imposition of "severe measures", "resolute blows" and "merciless repression". And it has continuously accused the exiled "Dalai Clique" of instigating all protests and resistance movements in Tibet.

Since being awarded the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, the Dalai Lama has gained international recognition, meeting the leaders of many countries and giving speeches around the world. The meetings are usually considered by Chinese authorities as having a religious agenda, but for them to be held at all is encouraging. Despite the fact that extraordinary efforts of the Dalay Lama have gained international recognition and support, Western governments have treated the issue with caution, trying to keep the realistic balance between the preservation of Tibetan culture and the territorial integrity of China. Therefore, instead of supporting Tibetan independence, they have almost unanimously accepted an idea of unconditional negotiations between China and Tibet as a result of the change of the political goal of

the Dalay Lama himself and the resurgence of China on the world scene as an economic power house. They have tended to limit their involvement in the Tibetan issue to raising only the problem of human rights abuses in Tibet with the fundamental respect for sovereignty of the People's Republic of China. By so doing, they seem to succeed in reconciling their moral obligation to express concerns at violations of the rights of the Tibetan people with their commercial relations with a country, The People's Republic of China, which, by some estimates, is the world's third largest economy.

Balanced human rights considerations with economic and political interests in the contexts of international politics concerning human rights issues are currently making the Tibet issue more complicated than ever. Soft and relaxed diplomatic pressure from large trading nations means that, for now, China can afford to maintain only a token respect for human rights. As a result, though Beijing's largely successful strategy that is characteristic of combining commercial incentives with human rights talks, tough stances and retaliation against confrontation and dynamic foreign policy, has saved it from the international community's moral condemnation concerning its poor human rights record in a strict sense. More pitifully, it has left no room for Beijing's self-reflection on human rights situation at home, let alone its improvement.

2. The initial concern: the UN resolutions on Tibet

On 21 October 1959, the United Nations General Assembly raised human rights situation in Tibet by adopting a resolution. In the resolution, the UN General Assembly focused exclusively on calling for the respect for human rights situation of Tibetans in accordance with the related principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is noticeable that the United

Nations General Assembly, in its resolution, did not point the finger at China, which was committing human rights abuses in Tibet. As a result, quite naturally, the resolution lost its target and was unsuccessful to put the responsible part—China—under moral condemnation and political pressure. Considered from its overall aim and content, the resolution failed to address, much less to answer, all levels of the questions contained in the Tibet issue. As ambiguous and disoriented as it might seem, it allowed China to escape from the direct moral condemnation of the international community with almost total impunity. One of the reasons for this impunity is that China was not a member nation of the United Nations at the time when the resolution was adopted; it is quite arguable that it was not therefore bound by the resolution.

And yet, considered from the positive side of the issue, a strategic implication and symbolic meaning of the resolution should not be underestimated. Though the resolution did not play an essential role in finding a peaceful solution to the Tibet issue with the participation of China, it was the first attempt of the United Nations General Assembly to conceptualize the issue at stake—to bring the issue into the context of the Universal Declaration of Human rights and hence to come up with its broad definition. It should be acknowledged that the first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on the Tibet issue shaped, to a certain extent, the way to look at, if not resolve, the issue within the framework of international law. The concepts used in the resolution provided a general political guideline for public awareness and understanding of the Tibet issue. For example, the terms used in the resolution as “self-determination” and “respect for the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people,” have still been functioning as a conceptual framework for various levels of human rights dialogue with China.

Despite the fact that a series of UN Resolutions on Tibet in the early 1960s was adopted in the absence of China, they showed a continuation of the engagement of the UN in the issue. Consistent with its general approach to the Tibet issue already iterated in its first resolution, the United Nations General Assembly had expressed the concerns at the continued worsening of human rights situation in Tibet. The name of China was incorporated into the UN resolutions on China only when China joined the United Nations in 1971.

After joining the United Nations, China initiated a system-reformist approach in the 1970s, supporting a new international political and economic order and treating the United Nations as a forum to address and find a solution to various issues the developing countries are facing. Even though Beijing's membership of the United Nations made it become a party to the UN Charter manifesting the basic human rights, China has not shown its willingness to abide by this Charter in the strictest sense of the word. From time to time, by using its dynamic diplomacy and economic influence, China has skillfully manipulated the forum in order to divert the attention of the international community from its domestic human rights scandals. By playing economic cards, intensifying its lobbying efforts, appealing to its traditional friendship with Asian and African nations, which, like China, have poor human rights literature as well, and creating its impressive image with its economic growth, Beijing has generally succeeded in preventing the U.S. and its allies from passing resolutions on China's human rights situation at the UN human Rights Commission on Human Rights.

3. Looking at the Issue through EPRT

Along with the United Nations, the European Union has decisively and consistently engaged in the improvement of human rights in China. The European Union's engagement in human rights issue in China is a quite recent event, started only after the end of 1980s as Ming Wan points out, "Human rights was largely a non-issue in Sino-Western European relations throughout the 1980s. It is true that human rights in China became a concern for nongovernmental organizations in the late 1970s."² The European Community (EC) did not raise human rights issue in China as it did for other countries.³ The silence of the Western European countries about human rights situation was broken when the 1989 Tiananmen massacre took place, which put China on defensive in the UN.

The European Parliament has passed a series of resolutions on Tibet from 1987 till 2007 in hopes for bringing an end to this unresolved and complex political crisis. Aligned with the general approach of the United Nations in terms of respecting for human rights and freedoms of Tibetans, the European Parliament has demonstrated its unique stance on the issue. The European Parliament's approach to the issue through adopting resolutions differs essentially from that of the United Nations General Assembly. This difference consists largely in defining the political and cultural status of Tibet before and after the invasion of China in 1950s. This new trend is not only essential to situate the Tibet issue in a proper historical context, but also to support the usage of such concepts as self-determination, the respect for Tibetan culture and religious life, restrictions on migration and settlement of Chinese into Tibet in EPRT. In the resolutions passed on 14 October 1987, 15 December 1992, 13 July 1995, 18 April 1995, 13 March 1997, 13 May 1998, 6 July 2000, the

European Parliament defined the political status of Tibet before and after the invasion of China as an illegally occupied territory by China in 1950s. It was acknowledged in EPRT that before the Chinese invasion Tibet succeeded in maintaining its own unique cultural, religious and political identity distinct from China. In recognizing the illegal occupation of Tibet, EPRT called upon the Chinese government in its resolution passed on 15 March 1989 to end its military presence in Tibet and to respect, with a spirit of tolerance and conciliation, the autonomous status of this region “within the framework of Chinese constitutional practice.” While putting the emphasis on the real implementation of Chinese Constitution in Tibet concerning ethnic minority rights, EPRT consider the concept of self-determination to be the realistic solution to the issue.

Despite the fact that a certain sense of ambiguity hangs over the notion of self-determination, it sends a clear message of the European Union about the Tibet issue to both sides, i.e., China and Tibet, as well as to the world community that a claim on outright independence of Tibet is both unrealistic and unsupportable. Instead, the claim on self-determination, regardless of how ambiguous the term is, may well be attainable through unconditional negotiations between the Tibetan Government in Exile and China.

There is a substantive link between the European Union’s stance on self-determination of Tibetans and the Dalay Dala’s Five Point Peace Plan. Though the Dalay Lama did not use either the word “self-determination” or “independence” of Tibetans in his Five Point Peace Plan, he made it clear that his main goal is to seek a genuine devolved autonomy instead of independence. In his recent statement on the 47th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day addressed in Dharmasala, India,

on 10 March 2006, he reiterated his position on the future of Tibet as follows: “I have only one demand: self-rule and genuine autonomy for all Tibetans, i.e., the Tibetan nationality in its entirety. This demand is in keeping with the provisions of the Chinese constitution, which means it can be met.” On this point, the European Parliament considers the Five Point Peace Plan as “the rational basis for negotiations without pre-conditions,” (EPRT of 13 April 2000) and the key to find the solution to the issue.

Generally speaking, EPRT have reflected, to a certain extent, the political reality of Tibet as continuous demonstrations of the European Union’s concerns at the civil, political, social and cultural rights of the Tibetan people in Tibet. Among the concerns of the European Union, the worsening of human rights situation of the Tibetan people is a prominent priority of EU policies as it is one of the founding principles of the Union. As regards the deterioration of human rights situation in Tibet, the European Parliament has constantly raised its concerns at those issues threatening to destroy the dignity and rights of the Tibetans as illegal arrest of political activists, unjust trial of Tibetan prisoners, increasing and large-scale use of the death penalty even for minor crimes, forceful abortion, discrimination against Tibetan language, suppression of the peaceful expression of political or religious views, etc. The European Parliament has almost responded to all the major human rights abuses in Tibet through passing resolutions. It has called upon the Chinese government to comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which China is a signatory country, to cease all kinds of inhuman treatments of Tibetans immediately, to respect cultural and religious rights of Tibetans.

The demographical change shaped by the accelerating growth of Chinese settlers and workers in Tibet since the end of 1980s is one of crucial issues leading to the intensification of the deterioration of the human rights situation of Tibetans. Since the change at stake has put and will be putting a tremendous negative impact on living conditions of Tibetans, it has been repeatedly expressed, with special concern and strong emphasis, in EPRT as a very serious human rights violation in Tibet. This change is conceived acutely by the European Parliament of as a threat to reduce the Tibetan people to a minority in their own country. It is further understood that Chinese policy of population transfer brings about degradation of the Tibetan environment and the exploitation of its natural resources for the benefit of mass influx of the Han Chinese rather than stimulating the Tibetan economics (See EPRT of 15 December 1992).

The Chinese government has mobilized all available sources—diplomatic and economic—to resist the criticism of EPRT about its poor human rights record that puts China under ineluctable moral embarrassment and tarnishes its image as a great nation with huge economic success. It has countered the criticism with highly controversial principles of non-interference principle, rights to development, and a relativistic and collective notion of human rights supported by the exaggerated view of cultural differences between East and West. The Chinese government has refused to accept the notion of human rights as a universal concept applicable to every human being without any pre-conditions. It has instead insisted that the definition of the term human rights and its practical implementation differ from culture to culture, and even from country to country. In an attempt to turn the notion of human rights from being a universal concept into culture-bound relativistic one having no universal applicability,

the Chinese government has tried to turn the tables on all those who are condemning China about its poor human rights record.

The most sensitive, indeed difficult, subject has consisted in the heart of Sino-European relations is the problem of how to raise human rights issue in a persistent and effective manner, given the fact that economic relations of the European Union with China have been improving rapidly as China emerges on the world scene as an economic power house. China's rapid economic development since the early 1990s has played a key role not only in resisting the pressure from the European Union concerning human rights condemnation, but also in promising the member states of the European Union with lucrative business opportunities in China in exchange of the exclusion of human rights topic in Sino-European talks, relations and Summit. We should take into account the fact that though there is a fundamental difference between China and European Union in understanding the concept of human rights, there is also common interest and strategic partnership based on stable economic relations that bind them more than ever. It is not unknown to both sides as well to the outsiders that while China needs Europe's market, investment and technologies, Europe needs, with equal urgency, the Chinese market and its political influence as permanent member of the UN Security Council.

With the influence of the growing economic co-dependence between China and the European Union, the European Union's stance on human rights concerns at Tibet has considerably been weakened since the beginning of 1990s. With regard to this critical shift, Ming Wan points out that "China's rapid economic development since the early 1990s is a major factor explaining Western Europe's shifting position... Human rights is not seen as an important issue in the bilateral relationship

with Europe. Despite symbolic discussions of human rights, human rights is now essentially sidelined in European relations with Beijing.”⁴

China’s biggest bargaining chip in negotiations with the European Union member states is consisted of a double-edged policy of retaliation and reward. This bargaining chip operates in such a way that China issues the threat of retaliation for those overly critical of its poor human rights record and rewards the cooperative governments with lucrative commercial contracts. However, what is most important in this double-edged policy of China is that it often results in the diversification of economic interests among European Union member states concerning China. In October 1993, the German government announced a new foreign policy aiming to strengthen economic relations with Asia in general and China in particular. At the same time, the French government also took action to improve relations with Beijing.⁵ Thus, non-unified economic interests among European Union member nations with regard to China have made it difficult, if not impossible, for the European Union to adopt the homogenous diplomatic policy to deal with overall economic relations with China without, at the same time, neglecting human rights situation in Tibet.

The European Union adopted a “Long Term Policy for China-Europe Relations” on July 15, 1995, which was a sign of considerable shift in the European Union’ policy towards China. The main characteristic of the shift is to transform a policy of confrontation into that of corporation. This shift is essentially different from the policy of con-gagement adopted by the U.S. referring to the balancing act between trying to “contain” China by limiting its reach and power while continuing to “engage” it economically. The EU further developed a strategy to build a “Comprehensive Partnership with China” on March 25, 1998. In these documents, it

was made clear that frequent public denunciations of China rather than active engagement with it will not only do harm to strategic relations with China, but also to the improvement in the process of democratization as well as in human rights situation in China. The basic idea behind this cooperative partnership policy is that instead of isolating China from the rest of the world in general and from the West in particular, the European Union should take initiative of establishing cooperative relationship that would make a significant contribution to the progress in China's democratization and human rights situation. Therefore, the European Union, embracing a more pragmatic vision of economic engagement with China, treated China not as an enemy to be defeated, but a huge market to be exploited. This substantive shift in Sino-European relations is reflected the European Parliament's resolution on the Commission communication on a long term policy for China-Europe relations (COM(95)0279-C4-0288/95) as follows: "whereas it is important for both the European Union and China to have a co-operative rather than a confrontational relationship, developing mutual economic interests and encouraging China's fuller participation in dialogue based upon the principle of 'not just business as usual, but also politics as usual.'"

The impact of cooperative partnership between China and the European Union on human rights concerns of the European Union at Tibet is conspicuous. As documentary reflections of Sino-European relations, EPRT have continuously mirrored a change of the emphasis that the European Union puts alternatively or in unity on two sensitive sides of its whole engagement with China: business and human rights. This tension is manifest in the European Union's attempts to call upon the European Union Commission to "make the granting of assistance to China conditional upon the observance of basic rights and freedoms, particularly in Tibet, and to report

on the situation in Tibet annually.” (15 December 1995 of EPRT). Similar contents were also successively placed on EPRT adopted on 24 June 1993 and of 17 May 1995. Seeking to preserve well-balanced cooperative partnership relations with China without sacrificing human rights concern at Tibet shows us the complexity of the European Union’s engagement with China. If China uses common economic interest between the two as a means to evacuate the pressure of human rights considerations of the European Union, then the European Union tries to make this very interest conditional in order to give weight to the improvement of human rights situation of Tibetans in China.

4. Critical Evaluation of EPRT

While reflecting the political, religious and cultural situation in Tibet, EPRT have expressed the consistent concern of the European Parliament at the Tibet issue. It has addressed several issues crucial to the preservation of Tibetan culture, to the political future of Tibet and to the improvement of human rights situation of Tibetans. Despite the attempts made by the European Parliament, there has been no structural change in the issue till now. The bottom line is that the pressure EPRT are exerting on the Chinese government to improve the human rights situation in Tibet are largely ineffective. The ineffectiveness is related to several aspects that are difficult to be summarized here. So, we will limit our approach to addressing some important aspects that have negative influences on the European Parliament’s involvement in the issue.

1.1 Lack of consistency in EPRT

As we have said, calling upon the Chinese government to respect human rights and freedoms of Tibetans is a fundamental concern both in EPRT and United Nations General Assembly's resolutions on Tibet. All important is the consistency expressed in EPRT that to improve human rights situation in Tibet constitutes the core of the Tibet issue. However, there is also a serious inconsistency in raising some grave human rights violations in Tibet. Take the disappearance of the Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as an example. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his parents were abducted by the Chinese authorities shortly after he had been recognized by the Dalai Lama as the latest reincarnation of Tibet's second most important spiritual leader, the Panchen Lama, who died in 1989. The case of the Panchen Lama was addressed in on 14 December 1995 of the European Parliament resolution on the selection of the Panchen Lama. In the resolution, the European Parliament condemned China's intervention in the nomination of the candidate for the title of Panchen Lama and the forced appointment of the alternative candidate imposed by Chinese authorities. The case of the Panchen Lama was dropped from the list of grave human rights violations in Tibet addressed in EPRT at the end of 1990s. The inconsistency in the European Parliament's concern at the selection of the Panchen Lama has significantly alleviated its political pressure on China concerning the recognition of the genuine Panchen Lama, whose spiritual role would be essential for unifying the religious identity of Tibetans around the world.

There are also lots of other important issues that are being dropped from the list of important human rights concerns of the European Parliament at Tibet, among which the government-encouraged mass transfer of Chinese immigrants and workers into Tibet is a prominent one. In recognizing Tibet as an occupied country in its earlier resolutions, EPRT had urged the Chinese government not only to bring an end

to its military presence in the region, but also to abandon its immigration policy in accordance with the self-determination of Tibetans who have the rights to determine the pattern and scale of immigration policy. However, the issue has started to gain less and less attention of the European Parliament in a crucial time when the mass transfer of Chinese immigration into Tibet is getting escalated.

2.2 Lack of the whole-hearted engagement beyond economic interest

To a certain degree, overall Sino-EU relations are shaped by a tension between human rights concerns of the European Union at Tibet and the increase of trade relations between them. The tension tends to gravitate towards the fundamental tension—the tension between Tibetans' desperate aspiration for the preservation of Tibetan culture and the Chinese government's resolute policy aiming to achieve cultural unification admitted of no cultural diversity.

The essential role that the European Union plays in diffusing these tensions have been to call for the Chinese government to enter into fruitful and results-oriented negotiations with Tibetan Government in Exile. However, the tremendous imbalance manifest in the power structure between Tibetan Government in Exile and the Chinese government has made these negotiations ever more complex, if not impossible. The development in strategic partnership between China and the European Union that makes them depend increasingly on each other has had little effect on changing the imbalance in the power structure. Although the European Parliament, while accepting that China should in no way be isolated in its international trade, urged the European Union Commission to “make all future economic and commercial agreements with the People's Republic of China conditional upon respect for human rights in China in the Tibetan region.” (EPRT of 24 June 1993), the conditional economic relations between these two powers are only limited to very few areas, in particular to the E.U

arms ban on China.⁶ Still worse, recent developments between China and the European Union show that the European Union puts less and less emphasis on the strategic importance of conditional economic relations with China, as evidenced by the fact that after 1995, there have almost been no EPRT to urge the European Union Commission to make the economic relations with China conditional. That is, the conditional trade relations of the European Union with China were dropped from the list of EPRT after the end of 1990s. A lack of the consistency in addressing the Tibetan issue within the frame of conditional trade relations has greatly diminished the efficiency of the European Union's diplomatic engagement with China over the Tibet issue.

An EU-China specific dialogue on human rights was launched in 1995 and interrupted in the Spring of 1996. Since its resumption in November 1997, China has shown a new-found willingness to engage in a serious and results-oriented dialogue. All subjects of concern, even the most sensitive ones, have been addressed during the discussions and the prospect of continued, regular dialogue has now been established. As it attaches great importance to the respect for the cultural, linguistic and religious identity of ethnic minorities, the European Union continues to raise issues relating to these matters in Tibet. And yet, these discussions and bilateral talks between the European Union and China over the Tibet issue has not brought about any improvement in the Tibet issue so far. One of chief reasons for this inefficiency is that the European Union's Chinese policy finds itself in the increasing tension between economic interests with China and human rights concerns at Tibet. In the meantime, the European Union is encountered with the growing pressure coming from the Chinese government which asks the European Union to make the conditional trade relations between them unconditional. As such, the European Union's engagement

with the Tibet issue is now only confined to repeating the gradually limited concerns at human rights violations in Tibet.

3.3 Lack of the unified strategy

A lack of the unified strategy of the European Union is essentially concerned with a structural problem that already exists in the European Union itself. Since the European Union is still on the way towards a politically, economically and culturally unified union, its human rights policy suffers from the lack of the unified strategy unanimously implemented by all European Union member states. By being diversified in its economic relations with China, member states have failed not only to adopt the more integrated and cohesive approach to human rights issues in China, but also to implement and monitor EPRT in a more efficient way. The existence of the diversified, non-unified and heterogeneous approach within the context of the European Union and its member states has reduced EPRT to a rhetoric and symbolic diplomatic discourse about human rights condemnation on a country, i.e., China, which is, in principle, outside of legal binding force of the European Union.

4.4 Lack of monitoring mechanism

Although the European Union has adopted numerous resolutions on China and Tibet, it has not yet established the effective monitoring mechanism to supervise their implementation. The implementation of EPRT not only needs the very strong diplomatic activities that can put a considerable pressure on China, but also, more importantly, a strong coordinating mechanism. This mechanism facilitates interaction between the European Union and the Tibetan Government in Exile, and plays an essential role in monitoring the implementation of EPRT in Tibet.

EPRT of 16 January 1998 expressed the urgency of appointing an EU special representative for Tibet who is “responsible for doing everything possible to carry out

the Union's demands as regards the civil and political rights situation in Tibet, with a remit to monitor developments there." The appointment of the special EU representative for Tibet would have the visible impact on the improvement of the human rights situation in Tibet and on supervising the implementation of EPRT in Tibet. But this idea has not widely appreciated by the European Commission for fear of the possibility that a special EU representative would be able neither to visit to Tibet nor to meet representatives of the Beijing government.⁷ Hence, it is considered as an unrealistic option, whose efficiency is highly sceptical.

Conclusion

The Tibet issue has been a very important part of the EU-China relations that it has undergone many crucial changes in the perception, policy-making procedures and resolutions of the European Parliament. As a centre of the European Parliament's concern, it has attained great attention of the European Union as it has developed towards a *sui generis* supranational and intergovernmental union of 27 states. As the economic relations between two great political powers are developing rapidly, the Tibet issue has turned into a more complicated political and diplomatic problem, thus becoming a testing case for the realization of an idea of fundamental human rights, the idea upon which the European union is based. Although the complexity of the issue is related to so many matters, whether historical or political, it would be suffice to summarize here that human rights dialogue between the EU-China is a limiting case for both China and the EU not only because it is an intergral part of the Chinese democracy development, but also because it is a valuable instrument and an important element of overall EU-China relations relating to economic interest, strategic partnership, and the respect for human rights situation in China, etc. One would not be

blamed for exaggerating that the issue itself remains the ongoing focus of all the levels of EU-China relations. If China, by relying on its enormous economic influence and taking advantage of its permanent membership of the UN Security Council, uses the economic and political interest as a shield against human rights condemnation of the European Union, then the European Union appeals to human rights issue as a sword to urge it to embrace the process of democratization.

It should be borne in mind that the increase of trade relations between the EU and China has made enormous effect on raising the issue at the parliamentary level. Overshadowed by business relations, the concerns of the European Parliament about human rights violations in Tibet are, to some extent, reduced to a rhetorical and repetitive speech devoid of the strong diplomatic pressure on China. Still worse, some crucial human rights violations threatening to the cultural and religious life of Tibetans are gradually dropped from the list of human rights concerns of the European Parliament at the Tibet issue. Suffered from the lack of consistency, of the whole-hearted engagement beyond economic interest, of the unified strategy and of monitoring system, EPRT are becoming less and less effective, given the fact that China keeps up its economic pressure on the European Union to abandon its serious wish to find an ultimate solution to the issue. To consider the Tibet issue within the framework of the European Parliament, in this sense, needs more concrete action, unified strategy and genuine dedication.

[1] Melvyn C. Goldstein, "Tibet and China in the Twentieth Century" in *Governing Chinese Multiethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Washington: the University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 188.

² Ming Wan, *Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Relations: Defining and Defending National Interests* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 66.

³ Cohen, "People's Republic of China", pp. 485-89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-84.

⁵ Wu Jiuyi, "Deguo xinyazhou zhengce chuxi" [Germany's New Asian Policy], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 12 (1993), p. 29-3.

⁶ There has been no consensus among European Union Member states and politicians over whether or not it is high time to lift the arms embargo of European Union on China started from the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. Despite the fact that Europe's public has been strongly opposed to the lifting of the China arms ban, there are some politicians who endorse the lifting of the China arms ban as early as possible in order to boost the economic relations between China and the European Union. For example, on February 27 2005 European Union's trade chief, Peter Mandelson, speaking in a press conference after the meeting with China's vice premier Wu Yi and Commerce Minister Bo Xilai, has criticized a 15-year-old European arms embargo on China, saying it was high time to lift the ban given the rapidly developing relations between the two sides.

⁷ Recently, Mr. Per Gahrton, member of Group of Greens, raised the issue of the appointment of the special EU representative for Tibet. He asked a question as to "why will the Commission not heed the European Parliament's clearly expressed wish in this case and appoint a special EU representative for Tibet, as has been done for seven other regions of conflict in Europe, Africa and Asia?" (H-0149/04) Here is the answer given to his question by the European Commission as follows: "The Commission, while not opposing in principle the concept of Special Representative for Tibet, must express doubts as to whether the appointment of such a Representative would bring any added value to the present situation where regular channels of communication already exist between China and the EU, notably within the EU-China bilateral dialogue on human rights. It also wonders whether such a Representative could positively contribute to the fragile process now underway between Beijing and the Representatives of the Dalai-Lama (something which the EU has encouraged over the years). Moreover, as mentioned in several instances, the Commission takes the view that a Special Representative would most likely be prevented by China from playing an effective role on the ground. In this respect, it appears that, while she has already been three times to China, the US Special Co-ordinator for Tibetan Affairs has thus far not been granted a visa to Tibet."