Human Rights and Exile-Tibetan Politics

STEPHANIE RÖMER

Nowadays politics, the topics of human rights and Tibet are inseparably connected. Even though the issues are not always on our screens, since the 1980s the international media report at regular intervals about human rights abuses in Tibet. Documentary films, radio programs, reports in magazines and newspapers and speeches by Tibetan former political prisoners give evidence of human rights violations in Tibet. Data on the human rights situation that are used in these reports are provided by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like Amnesty International, Tibetan Support Groups (TSGs) — for instance Students for a Free Tibet — or exile-Tibetan NGOs, foremost the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy. Especially during the Tibetan mass demonstrations before the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and the subsequent detentions of protesters in Tibetan-populated areas, the topic of human rights in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in general and in Tibet in particular has risen to the next level.

However, the topic of human rights is not just communicated to prove the violations themselves, but also serves political interests. While the Tibetan exiles in India are emphasizing the topic of human rights violations, the Chinese communist government in contrast is constantly downplaying the conditions in Tibetan-populated areas. This paper will look from a political science point of view at the question: how is the concept of human rights politicized in the Tibetan context? After a brief description of the Tibetan political structures in exile, I will look at how human rights are communicated by

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Tibetan exiles and how this topic is taken up by the international community. To conclude, I will give a portrayal of the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, one of the main voices of human rights in Tibet.

The Tibetan Exile Political System

After the arrival of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in India in March 1959, more than 122,000 Tibetans have followed him into exile until the present day.[1] The majority of the exiled Tibetans live in India, Nepal and Bhutan where they found a new home in one of the 53 Tibetan permanent settlements. With help of the host countries, and also with international operational and financial assistance, these settlements were established during the 1960s. Apart from the Tibetans in South Asia there is also a considerable number living abroad: in the USA, Canada, Switzerland and other European countries.

Despite the scattered distribution of their present places of living, all exiled Tibetans are politically represented by the so-called Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (CTA), the present Tibetan Government-in-Exile. This exile administration, which was founded in 1959, is set up in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala and can be described as the center of Tibetan exile politics. The entire administrative infrastructure, including the Dalai Lama's private residence, is located in and around Dharamsala, but mostly in the governmental district, called Gangchen Khyishong. In addition to the exile government, many exile-Tibetan NGOs and radio stations call Dharamsala their headquarters or have at least a branch office there. Because of Dharamsala's political importance and its being home to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, this former British hill station on the southern edge of the Himalayan mountain range has changed rapidly over the last decades. The town developed into a tourist center; today the streets are jammed with traffic and the town has been changed with foreign funding; schools, medical and handicraft centers have been set up; Indian and Tibetan shopkeepers are in line with movie halls, restaurants, hotels and guest houses; monasteries and museums attract the tourists.

1 CTA 1969, pp. 95–120; CTA 1994, p. 3.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

The Tibetan Government-in-Exile struggles from its base in exile to return to a free or at least autonomous homeland, meaning the entire territory populated by Tibetans, compromising of three large Tibetan regions Ü-Tsang, Amdo and Kham, i.e. today's Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and parts of the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. Furthermore, the exile administration claims to represent the entire Tibetan nation, i.e. all Tibetans living both inside and outside of Tibet. But these representative claims are internationally not recognized. Rather, the Tibetan exile government receives all of its international moral and operational support from governments, transnational organizations, NGOs and individuals.

The CTA's structure and policies are characterized by the main principles of Buddhism and democracy, which indicate a combination of traditional values of the past with Western political concepts. This combination was outlined by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in the beginning of the 1960s and later determined by two exile charters. In regard to the combination of politics and Buddhist religion the exile administration is set up as followed:

At the top of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile is the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. He is the ruling institution and holds, at least theoretically, ultimate legislative, executive and judiciary powers within the CTA — competences that are still determined by their Indian hosts. That is, despite the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's position of superior power within the CTA structures, all political decisions need to be approved by the Government of India. The Dalai Lama is serviced by a private office that handles all affairs that regard his person, from the management of thousands of visitors annually to the organization of his daily schedule.

Even though the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is being vested with sweeping powers, the CTA has a legislative organ, which fulfils the demands of a democratic system. 46 Tibetan deputies stand at the moment for the regionally and religiously heterogeneous Tibetan community: Each region of the national territory of Greater Tibet — Ü-Tsang, Kham and Amdo — is represented by ten deputies, out of whom at least two have to be women. On the religious side, the major Tibetan Buddhist schools, Nyingmapa, Kagüpa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa, provide each two deputies. Since 1976 there have been two Bön delegates as well. There are also two deputies who represent the interests of the exiled Tibetans in Europe and one for those

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

who live in North America. In this regard, the composition of the assembly emphasizes the CTA's claim to stand for all Tibetans despite their differences in regional heritage, religious affinities or current place of residence. The CTA deputies meet twice a year to discuss financial and political matters, while in emergency cases they can be called for extraordinary sessions, as well.

The Tibetan executive is subdivided into the Tibetan cabinet, its subordinate departments, and constitutional bodies. The cabinet, the *kashag*, is the main executive body of the CTA, which strongly relies on the traditional structure of the Lhasa government, as indicated by its name, structure, and function. The *kashag* consists of four ministers, or *kalon*s. One of the *kalon*s acts as prime minister. The four ministers head the following exile-Tibetan departments: security; information and international relations; health; religion and culture; education; finance; and home affairs. There are also three constitutional bodies, namely the Tibetan Election Commission, the Tibetan Public Service Commission and the Tibetan Audit Commission.

The Supreme Justice Commission represents the Tibetan judiciary, a new invention in the Tibetan political context. It adjudicates all civil disputes within exile-Tibetan communities and settlements, but in all court decisions it is subordinate to Indian law.

To summarize, one can state that through an elaborate structure, which is subdivided into numerous units and highly specialized sections, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile is able to reach all exiled Tibetans in India, Nepal and Bhutan and also those who live abroad. Furthermore, the administrative setup emphasizes its representative claims regarding the Tibetan territory and people.[2]

Additionally, there are different exile-Tibetan NGOs, which have their head office in Dharamsala and also maintain local offices in the major Tibetan settlements. Despite their independence, all exile-Tibetan NGOs act within the CTA political framework and support its official policy through their high specialization in various fields, as will be seen later when looking at the topic of human rights more closely. The most important exile NGOs regarding their political relevance and numbers of members are the Tibetan Youth Congress, the Tibetan Women's Association and the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

2 Cf. Roemer 2008.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Talking about Human Rights in the Tibetan Exile Community

Since 1959 there has been a steady flow of new Tibetan arrivals in India and Nepal. One can estimate that between 2,000 and 3,000 Tibetans cross annually the borders. Most of them are Buddhist monks and nuns who flee religious persecution, young Tibetans seeking better education and job opportunities in exile than they have at home, and former political prisoners who were tortured while being jailed.[3] With the constant number of newly arriving Tibetans the matter of human rights violations in the homeland has been always visible in the host countries. But in the context of Tibetan exile politics, the human rights issue was not highlighted in the international community until the 1980s. The political developments that led to the international promotion of the human rights situation in Tibet can be described as follows:

Right after the flight of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama the topic of human rights already became important for the Tibetans with respect to two reports of the International Commission of Jurists (in 1959 and 1960). This commission charged China with a genocide in Tibet that targeted Tibetans' religious beliefs. Furthermore, one can see that immediately after the Dalai Lama's arrival in India, the Tibetans profited from wide international media coverage by promoting worldwide the plight of Tibetans through press articles and TV reports. The Tibetan exile political elite used this interest to lobby the United Nations (UN), which finally passed three resolutions: in 1959, in 1961 and in 1965.[4] There, the UN General Assembly expressed its concern about the human rights violations in Tibet.[5] But the initial expectations of the exile-Tibetans, that the UN would be in a powerful position to help them, was disappointed by the fact that China was in such an internationally strong political position that the resolutions had no consequence. The opportunity for exile-Tibetan efforts to raise awareness in the UN became even worse in 1971. First, the US Nixon administration altered its focus in the Cold War and stopped struggling against China. This deci-

3 CTA 1994, pp. 41–42; Hoppe 1997, pp. 95–96.

4 Resolutions 1353/14 (1959), 1723/16 (1961) and 2079/20 (1965). Cf. CTA 1997, pp. 4–6

5 Morris and Scoble 1990, p. 177.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

sion had the side-effect that the USA lost interest in Tibetans and withdrew its support from them.[6] Second, in 1971 China was conferred its own membership in the UN. The permanent seat in the UN Security Council in particular provided the Chinese leadership with a powerful instrument to block any resolution on Tibet.

Besides appealing to the UN, Tibetan exiles have always sought to resolve the Tibetan issue themselves, including efforts to improve the living conditions for those Tibetans left at home, on a bilateral basis between Dharamsala and Beijing. These efforts were officially represented by numerous negotiations between the PRC and the exile-Tibetans at a high political level, but without noteworthy success.

Realizing that the UN would not act in the interest of Tibet, nor would the bilateral negotiations with the Chinese leadership bring the desired results, the exile government shifted its political focus in the 1980s to the international grassroots level. From now on, international NGOs were the main focus of the political activities of the Tibetans. In this context, Tom Grunfeld points out that Jimmy Carter's election to the presidency of the United States in 1977 influenced the decision of the exile-Tibetan elite to focus on human rights issues, because Carter was "[…] pledging to carry out a foreign policy based on the principles of 'human rights' around the world." This led Tibetans to declare that "it is his special emphasis on the human rights issue that makes him a potential Messiah for Tibetans".[7] Thus, the CTA realized that the human rights discourse was an important tool for any displaced and indigenous people in particular to change the political situation in their home territories — a relevance that had its beginning with the *UN Declaration on Human Rights* in 1948 and became important in the 1970s anew. Because the topic of human rights is still one of the key concerns of the UN, it brought the Tibetans unexpected hearings in the USA and Europe. This fact has since the 1980s provided the Tibetans with the opportunity to communicate its political objectives through the language of the Western world, using terms like "human rights" and "injustice".[8]

6 Xu 1997, p. 1066.
7 Grunfeld 1987, p. 198.
8 Mountcastle 1997, p. 296.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

According to an interview with the present exile-Tibetan prime minister, human rights and environmental issues are regarded by the CTA as more important than the topic of Tibetan independence itself.[9] Such a statement is at first sight surprising because Tibetans since entering exile have aimed to return to a free homeland. But looking at the political situation of the exile-Tibetans and international political circumstances in general one can understand the reason for such emphatic weighting. Starting with the political position of the exile government in India one has to realize that the CTA was never in the situation to act independently from the political will of the host country, India. Apart from political benefits in their domestic agenda, India hosted the Tibetans because of a deep sympathy for the Tibetan people based on the Buddhist religion. But to limit its own security risks, India forbade the CTA to struggle against the PRC from Indian soil. This meant that the exile government had to focus on topics that are in the first place easier to communicate than a direct encounter with China in order to regain the homeland. This served as one reason among others for the exile-Tibetans to decide that the preservation of Tibetan religion and culture was going to be one of the top priorities of the CTA politics. In this cultural and religious orientated frame the human rights topic fits as well as the promotion of eco and women's rights. All three topics are promoted internationally and are known among Tibetan and Western pro-Tibet activists as the so-called "universal rights strategy". This term combines Tibetan cultural protection and nonviolence with the advocacy of human, environmental and women's rights as a vehicle to campaign for the exile-Tibetan struggle.[10]

Moreover, the destruction of thousands of religious sites in Tibetan-populated areas in the PRC, in addition to the ongoing detentions of compatriots at home, had a deep impact on the Tibetan exiles' decision to focus on human rights. Furthermore, the human rights-based approach contributes to the limitation of potential conflicts between Tibetans in exile and those who are left behind. This can be explained by the fact that in comparable exile situations, the exiles' geographical distance from their home territory, their absence from important happenings and limited ability to re-

9 Interview with Mr. Tenzin Norgay, Dharamsala, 24.04.2002.
10 Pike 2001, p. 14.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

tain a foothold at home may result in a break between the exiles and the nationals at home. This gap is even widened by different social, political and economical living conditions, ideological goals and views on how the present political system at home should be changed or overthrown. In the worst case both groups, the exiles and their compatriots at home, may fight each other instead of concentrating their energies to struggle against the present alien power in their homeland.[11] Coming back to the Tibetan exiles, one can argue that through a public articulation of the human rights situation in Tibet and efforts to improve circumstances in their homeland, at least contemporarily, their compatriots at home are shown that they are not forgotten. Moreover, they are often at the center of exile-Tibetan politics.

For an explanation of exiles' promotion of human, ecological and women's rights, one can also look at the Tibetan exile government's role in the international community. Certainly, Tibetan exiles attempt to mobilize and expand international support through the combination of Tibetan Buddhism and universal rights. The key figure in this course is the Fourteenth Dalai Lama himself. Through his extensive traveling around the world he is able to highlight the topic of human rights in front of different audiences, e.g. in front of Tibet activists, Buddhists or even economists: "I do not see any contradiction between the need for economic development and the need for the respect of human rights".[12]

The universal rights approach is useful for many different kinds of pro-Tibet activist, as the representation of each specific right provides a symbolic and ideological package that is utilized in Western activists' discourse in order to categorize and promote the Tibetan exiles' claims of Chinese abuses in their homeland. Such a categorization of the exile-Tibetan struggle provides activists all over the world with a clear organizational framework, which makes a quick and efficient classification of Tibet-related issues possible. Each key right demands its own audience and forum for articulation and therefore appeals to a wider range of potential supporters than the exile-Tibetan political struggle would do alone. While the Tibetan Government-in-Exile is able to expand international support with

11 Shain 1989, pp. 146–147 and 154–155.

12 Dalai Lama 1993, p. 14.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

such policy, international NGOs profit from the satisfaction of having contributed something to the attainment of a worthwhile cause: the Tibetan freedom struggle.

But the "universal rights strategy" has not only Western advocates but also exile-Tibetan supporters in the head Tibetan NGOs that actively participate in the discourse. In the Tibetan exiles' search for outside support, they have learned the language of the Western world and adopted Western ideas, skills and methods to navigate within the international political arena. Consequently one can state that Westerners and exile-Tibetans hand-in-hand fashion new spaces in the global process, which are accompanied by a certain success in the implementation of the new skills, which in turn make these Western perceptions even more popular among the exile-Tibetan elite. Especially important symbolic events and conferences are used to promote issues and to build networks "[…] even when their connection appears somewhat tangential to the Tibet issue".[13]

The success in communicating the Tibetan exile struggle in this specific way is also the result of the existence of a market for universal rights in Western liberal societies. Upendra Baxi states:

> Human rights movements at all levels (global, national, and local) have tended to become capital-intensive. The praxis of protecting and promoting human rights entails entrepreneurship in raising material resources, including funding, from a whole variety of governmental, intergovernmental, international, and philanthropic sources. These sources are organized in terms of management imperatives, both of line management and upward accountability.[14]

In this regard, the promotion of human rights improves the international NGOs' positions within a market of human rights. Through the highlighting of human rights in the Tibetan context they are able to expand their own network of supporters and improve their own organizational position.[15]

Universal rights, including human, women's and environmental rights, have become political symbols that promote the notion of justice, which provides the Tibetan Government-in-Exile with a powerful instrument against China. But this strategy con-

13 Pike 2001, p. 85.
14 Baxi 2002, p. 123.
15 Bob 2002, p. 44.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

tains, according to Upendra Baxi, also a situation of overproduction of human rights in the international sphere.[16] In this regard, the exile-Tibetan struggle movement risks over-employing this topic, which may lead to the result that the Tibetan cause becomes just another human rights issue among others in the eyes of the international community. Furthermore, the communication of the exile-Tibetan struggle in human and other rights-based discourses may

> […] fundamentally alter the sites in which the Tibet issue is heard, or even subsumed by a larger human rights rhetoric. In the long run then, the universal rights strategy as it is currently employed may be counterproductive to Tibetan nationalist interests.[17]

In this context international TSGs can be called opportunistic in making use of the various universal rights as soon as appropriate or possible.[18] The effects of such strategy can be summarized in two points: firstly, the so-called universal rights strategy legitimates the exile-Tibetan struggle because it becomes concordant with international agreements on human and other rights; and secondly, it provides all international actors with an argument to express their dissatisfaction about the Tibet issue despite the PRC's growing strength in international economics and politics.

Because of the policy shift towards the international grassroots level, since the 1980s the Tibetan exile struggle has been transformed into a dynamic and multidimensional organizational movement, including a growing number of non-Tibetan supporters who are able to work on different fronts by using highly skilled methods of communication, such as reports and lobbying, to publicize worldwide a litany of suffering and pain. Already by the year 1997 more than 350 TSGs placed morality, nonviolence, truth and justice on the agenda of the international community.[19]

TSGs focus generally in the following fields: They try to raise awareness in the international arena through intellectual, financial and technical resources that are not available to Tibetan exiles. Additionally, they are actively engaged in the Tibetan exiles' struggle through lobbying and putting pressure on politicians and

16 Baxi 2002, pp. 67–76.
17 Pike 2001, p. 74.
18 Ibid., pp. 56–57; Mountcastle 1997, pp. 307–308.
19 Tsering 1997, pp. 18–19.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

officials while rallying the sympathetic public. Furthermore, TSGs create new and expanding links between the Tibetan exiles' struggle and other NGOs. And finally, they provide the Tibetan exiles with models and methods of effective activism. This new set of skills fundamentally altered the whole exile-Tibetan struggle in such a way that the traditional concept of state has been widened to include transnational political action.[20]

> If Tibetans abroad lacked diplomatic recognition, [official] embassies, or representation in important international organizations, they were gaining crucial access to power, money, and the media through their newly forged partnership with these unofficial and ardent American groups and supportive celebrities. Thanks to the appeal of these organizations' cause, the compelling personality of the Dalai Lama, and the shrewdness of their tactical planning, they had managed to circumvent many of the conventional structures of intercourse between nation-states.[21]

The Tibetan Government-in-Exile reacts ambivalently to the involvement of TSGs. Robert Pike points out that the CTA regards the work of the international TSGs as important because these non-Tibetan activists are able to successfully lobby local and federal governments. They are by nature more skilled in navigating within the international community than most of the exile-Tibetans and more familiar with established communication mechanisms of the international community, which enables the activists to communicate the exile struggle within a legal framework in the international arena.[22] Moreover, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama states in that context: "… the non-governmental organizations have a key role to play. You not only create awareness for the need to respect the rights of all human beings, but also give the victims of human rights violations hope for a better future".[23] At the same time the CTA also keeps a distance from global activism because the TSGs focus more on Tibetan independence than on the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's future idea of a genuinely autonomous Tibet.[24]

20 Pike 2001, pp. 35–44.
21 Schell 2000, p. 38.
22 Pike 2001, p. 38.
23 Dalai Lama 1993, p. 14.
24 Dalai Lama 1991, p. 11.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

While the TSGs have so far been successful in legitimizing their work through growing support around the world by following the "universal rights strategy," many Tibetan exiles remain in confusion about the initial goal of regaining the homeland.[25] Some, especially the young exile generation, which are represented by the Tibetan Youth Congress feel that the "universal rights strategy," including the topic of human rights, is ineffective and does not lead to any concrete step towards the a free homeland. It rather offers international agents a way to evade the Tibetan exiles' struggle by paying lip service to it. Furthermore, they disagree about whether universal rights-based discourse will affect the likelihood of China engaging itself in a meaningful dialogue, either with the Western activists or with the Tibetans. Robert Pike states in this context:

> While many Tibetan activists and young Tibetans increasingly question the efficacy of the Dalai Lama's moderate approach and opt to demand full independence, the universal rights strategy — crystallized in the campaigning of Tibet activists — is at odds with their radical goals. While the group of radical Tibetans is still a minority, there is allegedly growing friction among Tibetan youths who are increasingly disposed toward adopting an independence approach. In addition, some TSGs are thinking of radicalizing their demands for independence.[26]

This shows that the Tibetan Governments-in-Exile focus on promoting the Tibetan exiles' struggle in the international sphere under the guise of universal rights is not uncompromisingly accepted by the exile-Tibetan community, and the young generation in particular. Furthermore, the international TSGs increasingly shape the whole debate, which puts the CTA on edge. This new activist paradigm in combination with Tibetan Buddhist nationalism has been predominantly articulated in the world arena by transnational TSGs, meaning by more non-national activists, in this case non-Tibetans, than in any other nationalist movement.[27] This in turn illustrates the high importance of international supporters for the CTA in functioning as a government-in-exile.

25 Pike 2001, p. 72.
26 Ibid., p. 75.
27 Ibid., pp. 18–21.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

The Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy

The main Tibetan exile voice that promotes the topic of human rights is the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD). As already mentioned, human rights is to a large extent promoted among the international community to raise awareness for the Tibetan exile struggle to free the homeland.

The TCHRD was founded in 1996 from a former Desk for Human Rights and Democracy that had worked under the CTA Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR). The change to a new judicial status was carried out in order to expand the possibilities of political action, because as an NGO the center was expected to have more room to act in the international sphere and to have higher credibility among Western human rights activists. While the CTA may be excluded from conferences because of its representative claims to be the sole government of the Tibetan nation, an NGO may not. In turn, the CTA is able to act as an authentic and credible governmental organization and has more opportunities for action in the international political sphere while not dealing with sensitive issues like human rights, which could harm ongoing Sino-Tibetan negotiations. Nevertheless, despite the official separation, the contact between the TCHRD and the CTA is very close. For instance the center works hand-in-hand with the Department of Security, as they both monitor the political situation in Tibet and exchange information on human rights abuses.

The international promotion, highlighting and protection of human rights in Tibet is carried out by the TCHRD through numerous English-language publications, annual participation in international human rights-related conferences, campaigns and lobbying activities. Furthermore, the center takes up requests relating to particular issues and political prisoners, networks and shares information, organizes workshops, applies for funding and conducts briefings on the human rights situation in Tibet. Special campaigns and commemorations are annually organized on the occasion of the Panchen Lama's birthday (25th April) or the World Human Rights Day (10th December). To sum up, one can say that the number of annual publications and the extent of organization of workshops, discussion rounds etc. is unmatched in the exile NGO scene. Most activities and publications are especially designed to attract

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

an international audience. In this regard, one has to mention that through all these activities the TCHRD maintains a wide network of cooperation with international NGOs, governmental bodies and transnational organizations. It is interesting to note that the TCHRD is almost exclusively financed by Western agents, who themselves have a vital interest in promoting the topic of human rights.

For a successful promotion of human rights violations, the TCHRD needs internationally acceptable data of tortured and imprisoned compatriots through which it is able to emphasize the cultural differences between Tibetans and Chinese. Since the Chinese takeover, the monastic segment of the Tibetan population in particular has been repeatedly involved in Tibetan resistance activities that caused imprisonment, torture or even death due to the tight control in the TAR.[28] As soon as the monks and nuns are free they flee with the help of international human rights activists to the Western world, where they report about their imprisonment, ranging from terrible torture methods to the plight of other prisoners and their health. In this regard, one can say that there is an interrelation between Western human rights activists and the Tibetan former political prisoners.

Despite knowing much about the human rights situation in the homeland, the TCHRD has no direct contact with compatriots at home. Only through the broadcasting of radio stations like Radio Free Asia (RFA), Voice of America (VOA) or Voice of Tibet (VOT), telephone calls, and frequent cross-border movements is TCHRD informed about conditions in the homeland. People within Tibet are informed from the same communication channels about political activities in exile. TCHRD staff even state that Tibetans in Tibet are encouraged to struggle for their rights continuously, even though only a limited number of them know about the concept of human rights at all. In this regard, one can say that TCHRD gives these Tibetans a voice in the international sphere. Thus, TCHRD builds a bridge between those left at home, the Tibetan exiles and international agents.

28 Schwartz 1996, pp. 74–108.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Conclusion

One can conclude that exile-Tibetans successfully promote human rights within the international community. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama plays an important role in this context as he is able to convincingly promote human rights through his extensive traveling around the globe. Since the 1980s the exile-Tibetan struggle has been subdivided into different specific rights that are placed in different global arenas. The topic of human rights is embedded within the so-called universal rights strategy. The promotion of specific rights, including human, women's and ecological rights, provides the international activists with symbolic and ideological instruments that are utilized to categorize and support the exile-Tibetans in their struggle to stop human rights violations in their homeland. In this context, the concept of human rights is applied to mobilize international NGOs to participate actively in the Tibetan exiles' struggle to free the homeland. Such a strategy has positive effects on the position of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile because it legitimizes its political claims to act on behalf of the national cause, which is represented in the exile struggle. Furthermore, the "universal rights strategy" is beneficial for the organizational survival of the many TSGs.

In addition, human rights are communicated so as to bridge the present and potential gaps between exiles and the compatriots at home. They are linked to the exiles' struggle and their hardship is promoted in the international sphere. In this regard, both national and international support can be created by the exile-Tibetan political elite.

The most important exile-Tibetan voice that is specialized in human rights is the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy. This Tibetan exile NGO, and not the Tibetan Government-in-Exile itself, creates wide recognition and moral support from international human rights activists, NGOs and TSGs. In this regard, TCHRD works successfully in raising international awareness through the issue of human rights. Moreover, the center overcomes the limitations of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in maneuvering in the international sphere and consequently expands the exile government's access to the international community. In summary, the issue of human rights is highly politicized in the exile-Tibetan community as it is indistinguishable from the efforts that are spe-

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

cifically designed to assist repatriation. Human rights in combination with Buddhism became a vehicle for both Tibetan and non-Tibetan activists to promote the Tibetan struggle worldwide.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839412633-009 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -