

Genocide in the 20th Century: China's massacres in Tibet: 1966-76

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Dharamshala — Anyone who regularly observes the topsy-turvy world of Chinese politics and policies in Tibet understands that the past, even the remote past, can exert a grief impact on the present and future.

Recent major historical anniversaries — like that of the 1949 Occupation or the 1966 Cultural Revolution and its massacres or the 1959 Tibetan National Uprising Day — can send either perennial chills or doctrinal fevers through China's political culture and media. In Tibet and China, the past is always present, even if, as in the case of occupation and massacres, it cannot be talked about, even in China itself. Mao Tse Tung is responsible for around 47 million deaths, including 1.2 million Tibetans.

The centenary of the genocide carried out by the Chinese government against the Tibetan population in their historic homeland of Tibet, must be observed every year on August 8. The commemorations present an opportunity not only to remember the 47 million victims, including thousands of Tibetans, but also to recognize – and challenge – the Chinese government's continued denial of the atrocities.

Starting in 1949, Tibet was invaded by 35,000 Chinese troops who systematically raped, tortured and murdered an estimated 1.2 million Tibetans, one-fifth of the country's population. Since then over 6000 monasteries have been destroyed, and thousands of Tibetans have been imprisoned. According to different sources, it is estimated that up to 260,000 people died in prisons and labor camps between 1950 and 1984.

Records show that between 1949 and 1979 the following deaths occurred:

*173,221 Tibetans died after being tortured in prison.
156,758 Tibetans were executed by the Chinese.
432,705 Tibetans were killed while fighting Chinese occupation.
342,970 Tibetans have starved to death.
92,731 Tibetans were publicly tortured to death.
9,002 Tibetans committed suicide.*

The free loving world must remember and recognize the genocide of the Chinese and Tibetan people, which started in 1966 and has lasted 49 years, referred to as the cultural revolution. The international community, especially the United States and European Union must recognize the reality of the Tibetan and Chinese genocide and call upon the Chinese government to do the same— considering the monstrous threat genocide poses to the values and modern principles that those nations hold most dear.

The horrors of the genocide and of the crimes against humanity between in 1966-1976 — committed by the government led by Mao Tse Tung— have since been rewritten and swept under the rug, and so has been the death of 1.2 million people. It was a period in which the nation faced famine, systematic torture, brutality, starvation, and mass peasant killings. How can they get away with it? How can they deny such events as massacres or genocide? It's not merely that our memories are short and historical record cycles move on; it's the political reality of the CCP's rule during these ten years— killing between 600,000 and 500,000 Tibetans.

During those 10 years, 47 million people, including 1.2 Tibetans were worked, starved or beaten to death. Members of rural families were seen by the CCP as "digits" (faceless workforce) Parents were forced to bury their children alive for any act of disobedience. Some were doused in excrement & urine, set alight, or had their nose or an ear cut off.

In 1980, the party general secretary Hu Yaobang unwillingly

apologized for the failed policies that made conditions in Tibet worse than in 1959 and then he accused the party leaders of throwing the money entrusted to them to help Tibet into the Yarlung Tsangpo river. The Chinese government has never made a formal apology for their atrocities in Tibet. Today in China, the authorities call for Japan to issue a formal apology on an alleged genocide issue. But the reality is that China itself does not take responsibility for its own mistakes.

In fact, it took reformists in China, led by Deng Xiaoping, three full years to issue a full-fledged condemnation of the Cultural Revolution and its excesses. Deng who opened up China to the outside world, invited the elder brother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for a private visit to Beijing.

Gyalo Thondup visited Beijing in February 1979. There, he met a number of Chinese leaders, including the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping on March 12, 1979. Deng told Thondup that "apart from independence, all issues can be discussed". He even invited the Tibetan leadership to send delegations into Tibet and see things for themselves.

In 1982, Hu Yaobang's political report criticized the Cultural Revolution. Five years later, Zhao Ziyang spoke out the issue of political reform to the prevention of further tragedies in China like the Cultural Revolution:

"We must through reforms ensure that socialist democracy gradually moves toward systemization and legalization. This is the most basic guarantee that we can prevent a replay of the Cultural Revolution and achieve long-term peace and stability."

This is not an apology, but it is still significant. It represents the first time top Chinese leaders had used such conciliatory language to discuss what happened in 1966. In 2012, former Chinese premier

Wen Jiabao told a reporter from Singapore's Straits Times that he knows only too well that resolving these issues means not just carrying out economic reforms, but also means carrying out political reforms, especially reforms to the system of Party and state leadership. Because "we have not yet fully rooted out the evil legacy of the errors of the Cultural Revolution and the influence of feudalism."

During his presidency, Hu Jintao has mentioned the errors of the Cultural Revolution on at least five occasions. One was the commemoration in 2003 of the 110-year anniversary of Mao Zedong's birth.

China not just because they destroyed Tibet, more than half a century after the so called peaceful liberation from serfdom, claims making Tibetans masters of their own destiny, as China claims, 34.4 percent of Tibetans in farming and pastoral areas of Tibet are still stuck below poverty line. What is more, the region accounts for the highest poverty rate in the People's Republic of China, according to state run media reports.

However Chinese authorities have said recent years that, half a million Tibetans will have been lifted out of poverty since 2011. This will still leave 330,000 Tibetans below poverty line, given the report's total of this figure at the end of 2010 at 830,000. Poverty alleviation is one of the greatest challenges in the region after the occupation.

Many political analysts have said that these recent remarks made by top Chinese leaders are a positive sign toward economic and political reform in the regime, including Tibet. At the very least it shows a willingness to talk about the errors their former made. It's too soon to tell whether the statement will pave the way for an apology – something the Chinese authorities have demonstrated a capacity for in the past.

The total Tibetan population in Tibet is 6 million. Of them, 2.09 million live in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the rest in the Tibetan areas outside the TAR. In Tibet today, there is no freedom of speech, religion, or press and arbitrary detainments continue. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibet, fled to India in 1959. He now lives among over 100,000 other Tibetan refugees and their government in exile.

Forced abortion, sterilization of Tibetan women and the transfer of low income Chinese citizens threaten the survival of Tibet's unique culture. In some Tibetan provinces, Chinese settlers outnumber Tibetans 7 to 1. Within China itself, massive human rights abuses continue. It is estimated that there up to twenty million Chinese citizens working in prison camps.

Most of the Tibetan plateau lies above 14,000 feet. Tibet is the source of five of Asia's greatest rivers, which over 2 billion people depend upon. Since 1959, the Chinese government estimates that they have removed over \$54 billion worth of timber. Over 80% of their forests have been destroyed, and large amounts of nuclear and toxic waste have been disposed of in Tibet.

Despite these facts and figures, some governments, including South Africa and Norway continue to support China politically. This shows their blatant lack of respect for these critical issues of political and religious freedom and human rights.

There are many other countries in which equal or worse environmental and human rights devastation has occurred. So why Tibet? Tibet can be used as the catalyst for change in human rights, women's rights, political, religious and cultural freedom across the globe. Through a concerted effort, the people of the world can stand up against genocide and say "No!" to the corporations and governments that continue to abuse it's people and misuse it's resources. The struggles in Tibet are symbolic for every human rights

struggle and non-violence.

The world will again pause August 8 to remember the 39th anniversary of the beginning of the Tibetan genocide. On August 8, 1966, thousands of Tibetans, including intellectuals and public figures were detained and summarily executed in Tibet — the beginning of the systematic purge of the Tibetan population at the hands of the Chinese government.

Denial, the last bastion of those who commit genocide, disrespects the victims and their communities and lays a foundation of lies for a future that is likely to be characterized by even more distrust and repression. Given this, one must ask: Is acknowledging the Tibetan genocide in China's long-term interest?

The Chinese government has been raising this mistake for nearly a half century. No apology is made, or intended to be made, for this outrage. But there is another path that China can follow, one that has been traveled by countries with historical burdens that are at least as heavy: ending the politics of denial and embracing acknowledgement, thereby opening the way for reconciliation and progress.

For China, the first step would be for President Xi Jinping to apologize to these communities, including Tibetan, Eastern Turkestan and Inner Mongolian communities for the genocide. The apology would have to be straightforward and credible, unlike his predecessors' statement, in which they effectively denied the genocide. He would have to acknowledge publicly that genocide was committed, recognize the state's failure to protect its citizens, and offer a promise that such atrocities will not happen again.

Another crucial measure would be to establish a truthful and accurate historical record of what happened to the Tibetan people. To this end, an independent commission – composed of a mixture of

national and international experts – should be established to build on the work of the unofficial committees in Tibet and China, as well as other regions.

China should also provide reparations for Tibetans, whose plundered property has enriched the modern Tibet state. Initiatives should aim to address the material needs and, at least symbolically, compensate the losses suffered by Tibetans inside Tibet. Monuments and memorials can also serve an important purpose in providing an enduring reminder not only of the victims, but also of the state's promise never to allow such atrocities to happen again.

In a country where perpetrators of genocide have been placed in the pantheon of national heroes, this could send a message to people of the world; that the state takes human rights and the rule of law seriously. However this is a trivial matter: China currently unwillingly bears the dubious distinction of having the highest number of judgments for human-rights violations rendered against it by the UN Human Rights.

But symbolic measures, while important, are not enough to bring about real progress. Chinese government must demonstrate its commitment to ensuring that its laws and institutions effectively protect the human rights of all of its citizens, particularly people of Tibet, Eastern Turkestan and Inner Mongolia. In doing so, it would improve its standing in the UN and beyond.

China has an important role to play in its region and the world – one that is undermined by its continued denial of the Tibetan genocide. Its disingenuous approach to the genocide is inconsistent with its efforts to cultivate a reputation as an honest, reliable partner.

By acknowledging the Chinese and Tibetan genocide, China would establish itself as a mature nation and reinforce its standing as a legitimate regional and world power. This would enhance

geopolitical stability by strengthening Beijing's capacity to mediate and support initiatives in occupied territorial contexts where impunity reigns, such as in Tibet, Eastern Turkestan, Mongolia, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Clearly, the benefits of acknowledging the genocide are far-reaching. But perhaps most compelling are the dangers of maintaining the status quo. As some former leaders, including Jiang Zemin put it, the denial of genocide while committing it enables new forms of genocidal violence to people in the future— unacceptable and out of touch with both historical facts and legal basis.

But, in his own way and escorting his father, Xi Zhongxun, the President Xi needs to apologize sincerely on behalf of the CCP and declare convincingly, "never again." — there is a clear responsibility to step up to the historical moment, call this crime by its rightful name, and declare it intolerable.

Observing the 40th Anniversary on August 8, 2016, Tibetans and supporters must call on the People's Republic of China for full acknowledgment of the facts and ongoing consequences of the Tibetan genocide. Otherwise, each passing day is another opportunity lost for all of us to live up to the refrain of never again and to recognize the genocide.