



Global Perspective of Freedom Struggle of Tibet : An Analytical Study Regarding Views of U.S.A. & Rest of the World

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Abstract

The Tibetan freedom struggle represents one of the most enduring and internationally debated political and humanitarian movements of the modern era. Since the incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China in 1950 and the exile of the 14th Dalai Lama in 1959, Tibet has become a focal point of global discussions related to self-determination, religious freedom, cultural preservation, and international diplomacy.¹ The issue transcended regional politics and gradually emerged as an international concern involving major powers, international organizations, and civil society movements across the world.

This research paper critically analyses the global dimensions of the Tibetan freedom movement with particular reference to the perspectives and policies of the United States of America and other nations. The study examines how Tibet became strategically important during the Cold War period, especially due to covert American involvement through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).² It further evaluates how the international discourse on Tibet shifted from strategic geopolitics to concerns relating to human rights, democracy, and cultural identity in the post-Cold War era.

The paper also studies the role of India, the United Nations, European nations, Buddhist organizations, human rights groups, and the Tibetan diaspora in shaping international opinion regarding Tibet. Special attention has been given to the role of the Dalai Lama in transforming the Tibetan issue into a moral and humanitarian question rather than merely a territorial dispute. The study concludes that although Tibet has not achieved political independence, the Tibetan movement has successfully preserved its cultural identity and internationalized the debate on human rights and spiritual freedom in contemporary global politics.

Key Words: Tibet Freedom Struggle, Dalai Lama, U.S. Foreign Policy, Human Rights Diplomacy, Global Geopolitics

Introduction

The Tibetan freedom struggle is one of the most complex and sensitive issues in modern international relations. The conflict involves historical disputes, geopolitical interests, ideological rivalries, questions of sovereignty, and concerns relating to cultural and religious identity.³ Over the decades, Tibet evolved from a regional political issue into an international humanitarian and diplomatic concern.

Historically, Tibet maintained a distinct civilization with its own political institutions, Buddhist traditions, and cultural practices. However, the Communist Revolution in China in 1949 transformed the geopolitical landscape of Asia. In 1950, the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet, and by 1951 the Seventeen Point Agreement formally incorporated Tibet into the People's Republic of China.⁴ While the Chinese government described the process as the peaceful liberation of Tibet, Tibetan nationalists viewed it as foreign occupation.

The situation intensified in 1959 following a major uprising in Lhasa against Chinese rule. The uprising was suppressed, and the 14th Dalai Lama fled to India along with thousands of Tibetan refugees.⁵ India granted asylum to the Dalai Lama, who subsequently established the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in Dharamshala. This marked the

beginning of the international phase of the Tibetan movement.

During the Cold War period, Tibet acquired strategic significance in global politics. The United States viewed Communist China as a major ideological and geopolitical threat and therefore covertly supported Tibetan resistance groups through the CIA.⁶ Tibetan guerrilla fighters were trained and assisted in resistance operations aimed at challenging Chinese authority in Tibet. However, American support remained limited and largely motivated by anti-Communist strategic objectives rather than recognition of Tibetan sovereignty.

The normalization of U.S.-China relations in the 1970s significantly altered the international dynamics surrounding Tibet. Although covert military assistance declined, Tibet continued to remain relevant in global politics due to increasing concerns regarding human rights, religious freedom, and cultural preservation.⁷ Western democracies, international organizations, and global civil society groups gradually framed Tibet as a humanitarian issue rather than solely a geopolitical dispute.

Another important dimension of the Tibetan struggle has been the moral and spiritual leadership of the Dalai Lama. His philosophy of non-violence, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence attracted global sympathy and transformed Tibet into a symbol of peaceful resistance.⁸ The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Dalai Lama in 1989 further strengthened international awareness regarding Tibet.

At the same time, China's growing economic and political influence has restricted stronger international political support for Tibet. Most countries officially recognize Tibet as part of China while simultaneously advocating cultural and religious rights for Tibetans. This contradiction reflects the broader tensions between ethical concerns and geopolitical realities in international politics.

This paper seeks to analyse the Tibetan freedom struggle from a global perspective with special emphasis on the role of the United States and the responses of the international community. The study also examines how Tibet continues to remain relevant in contemporary debates concerning democracy, authoritarianism, and cultural identity.

Review of Literature

The Tibetan freedom struggle has generated extensive academic discussion among historians, political scientists, international relations scholars, and anthropologists. Existing literature highlights different dimensions of the Tibetan issue including historical sovereignty, Chinese policies, Cold War geopolitics, human rights concerns, and transnational activism.⁹ The literature demonstrates that Tibet cannot be understood merely as a territorial issue; rather, it represents an intersection of politics, religion, identity, and international diplomacy.

One of the most significant contributions to the study of Tibet and international politics is Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison's *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet*. The authors provide a detailed account of covert American involvement in Tibet during the Cold War period.¹⁰ Their work reveals that the CIA trained Tibetan resistance fighters and provided logistical support to anti-Chinese operations. The book argues that American involvement was primarily driven by strategic anti-Communist objectives rather than direct support for Tibetan independence.

Melvyn C. Goldstein's research offers a critical perspective on U.S.-Tibet relations. Goldstein argues that although the United States covertly supported Tibetan resistance groups, it never formally recognized Tibetan independence.¹¹ His analysis highlights contradictions within American foreign policy and explains how Tibet was used as a geopolitical instrument during the Cold War.

Carole McGranahan's work on the Chushi Gangdrug resistance movement emphasizes Tibetan participation and agency in the resistance struggle. She rejects the assumption that Tibetan resistance was entirely dependent on American support and instead highlights indigenous Tibetan nationalism and local resistance traditions.¹² Her contribution is important in understanding the internal dimensions of Tibetan political identity.

Tsering Shakya's *The Dragon in the Land of Snows* is widely regarded as one of the most authoritative works on modern Tibetan history. The book analyses Tibet's political transformation after 1947 and discusses internal Tibetan politics, Chinese intervention, exile politics, and international diplomacy.¹³ Similarly, Sam van Schaik's *Tibet: A History* provides a broader historical understanding of Tibet's political and cultural evolution.

Scholars such as Donald Lopez and John Powers have examined Western representations of Tibet.¹⁴ Their studies suggest that Western fascination with Tibet often romanticized Tibetan spirituality while overlooking complex political realities. These works contribute to understanding how Tibet became an influential symbol in global popular culture and human rights activism.

Recent literature increasingly focuses on China's global rise and its implications for Tibet. Contemporary studies indicate that China's economic influence discourages many nations from openly supporting Tibetan political aspirations.¹⁵ Nevertheless, human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continue to document concerns regarding religious restrictions, cultural assimilation, and political repression in Tibet. The role of the Dalai Lama has also received considerable scholarly attention. Researchers emphasize his contribution in transforming the Tibetan issue into a global moral movement based on peace and non-violence.¹⁶ His advocacy of the "Middle Way Approach," which seeks meaningful autonomy rather than complete independence, has significantly shaped international perceptions regarding Tibet.

Although substantial literature exists on Tibet, comparative analysis of global perspectives remains limited. Most studies focus either on Cold War geopolitics or Chinese domestic policy. Therefore, there is a need for integrated research examining the role of state actors, non-state actors, international organizations, and civil society movements together. This paper seeks to address that gap through a multidimensional analytical framework.

Objectives of the Study

1. The present study seeks to understand the broader international dimensions of the Tibetan freedom struggle.
 2. The objectives are designed to analyse both historical developments and contemporary geopolitical realities associated with Tibet.
 3. To examine the historical development of the Tibetan freedom struggle.
 4. To analyse the role of the United States in Tibet during and after the Cold War.
- To study the perspectives of major global powers and international organizations regarding Tibet.
5. To evaluate the contribution of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan diaspora in internationalizing the Tibetan issue.
 6. To assess the contemporary relevance of Tibet in global politics and human rights discourse.

The achievement of these objectives will contribute toward a deeper understanding of Tibet's international significance in the modern world.

Research Gaps

1. Despite extensive literature on Tibet, several important areas remain insufficiently explored.
2. The identification of research gaps helps in establishing the relevance and originality of the present study.
3. Limited comparative analysis between strategic and humanitarian approaches toward Tibet.
4. Insufficient interdisciplinary studies connecting geopolitics, religion, and cultural identity.
5. Lack of detailed analysis regarding the role of non-state global actors supporting Tibet.
6. Limited focus on the transformation of the Tibetan movement after the Cold War.
7. Inadequate discussion concerning the impact of China's global rise on Tibet-related international policies.

These gaps indicate the need for a more comprehensive and globally oriented study on the Tibetan issue.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the analytical framework of this study. These questions aim to examine the political, diplomatic, and humanitarian dimensions of the Tibetan struggle-

1. How did the Tibetan freedom struggle emerge as an international issue?
2. What were the strategic motivations behind U.S. involvement in Tibet?
3. How have global powers responded differently to the Tibetan issue?
4. What role has the Dalai Lama played in globalizing the Tibetan cause?
5. How has China's growing influence affected international support for Tibet?

These questions help in systematically analysing the historical evolution and international dimensions of Tibet.

Research Methodology

The present research is based on historical, analytical, and interpretative methodologies. A qualitative approach has been adopted in order to examine the historical evolution and global dimensions of the Tibetan freedom struggle.¹⁷

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources for comprehensive analysis.

Primary sources include speeches of the Dalai Lama, declassified CIA documents, United Nations resolutions, governmental reports, and official policy statements. Secondary sources include books, research articles, journals, newspapers, dissertations, and reports published by international organizations and human rights institutions.

Comparative analysis has been used to evaluate the differing perspectives of the United States, China, India, European

countries, and international organizations regarding Tibet. Historical methods have been applied to trace the evolution of Tibetan resistance from 1950 onward. Descriptive and interpretative approaches have also been employed to examine the role of civil society organizations, Buddhist groups, and international advocacy movements.

The methodology emphasizes objectivity and critical interpretation of both Western and Chinese narratives concerning Tibet. The interdisciplinary nature of the research further helps in understanding Tibet not merely as a territorial dispute but also as a cultural, religious, and humanitarian issue.

Research Study

Historical Background of the Tibetan Freedom Struggle

The Tibetan freedom struggle emerged in response to the political incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China in 1950. This event transformed the political future of Tibet and significantly affected Tibetan cultural and religious identity.¹⁸ The resistance movement initially developed as a reaction against Chinese administrative and military expansion within Tibetan regions.

The Seventeen Point Agreement signed in 1951 promised autonomy and protection of Tibetan traditions. However, growing Chinese control created widespread dissatisfaction among Tibetans, particularly in eastern Tibet. Resistance movements such as Chushi Gangdrug organized armed opposition against Chinese authority.¹⁹ The 1959 uprising in Lhasa marked a turning point in Tibetan history. Following the suppression of the uprising, the Dalai Lama escaped to India and established the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in Dharamshala.²⁰ Since then, the Tibetan movement has focused not only on political autonomy but also on cultural preservation and international awareness.

The Tibetan diaspora contributed significantly to preserving Tibetan civilization in exile. Schools, monasteries, and cultural institutions established in India and abroad helped maintain Tibetan identity despite displacement.

The United States and Tibet

The role of the United States in Tibet was shaped largely by Cold War geopolitics. American policymakers considered Communist China a major strategic threat and therefore viewed Tibetan resistance as a useful mechanism to weaken Chinese influence in Asia.²¹ The CIA provided covert assistance to Tibetan guerrilla fighters during the 1950s and 1960s. Tibetan resistance groups received military training at Camp Hale in Colorado and were supported through secret operations aimed at destabilizing Chinese control in Tibet.²² However, the United States never officially recognized Tibetan independence. After the 1970s, American policy toward Tibet changed significantly due to the normalization of U.S.-China relations under President Richard Nixon. Direct strategic support declined, but Tibet gradually emerged as a human rights issue in American foreign policy.²³ The U.S. Congress passed several resolutions supporting Tibetan cultural and religious rights. American leaders also met the Dalai Lama despite objections from China. Recent American concerns regarding Chinese interference in the succession of the Dalai Lama demonstrate that Tibet continues to remain relevant in U.S.-China relations.

India and the Tibetan Issue

India occupies a unique position in the Tibetan freedom struggle because of geographical, cultural, and political factors. India granted asylum to the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetan refugees after 1959.²⁴ Dharamshala subsequently became the headquarters of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. India's approach toward Tibet combines humanitarian support with diplomatic caution. While India officially recognizes Tibet as part of China, it has allowed Tibetans to preserve their religious and cultural institutions within Indian territory. The Tibetan issue also remains closely linked with India-China border tensions and Himalayan geopolitics. Tibet acts as a strategic buffer region influencing broader Asian security dynamics.

United Nations and International Organizations

The United Nations discussed Tibet on multiple occasions during the 1950s and 1960s. Several resolutions expressed concern regarding violations of human rights and suppression of Tibetan culture.²⁵ However, geopolitical limitations and China's growing diplomatic influence prevented stronger international intervention. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continue to document issues relating to religious restrictions, political repression, and cultural assimilation in Tibet. These organizations have played an important role in maintaining global awareness concerning Tibet. International advocacy groups and NGOs also organized campaigns, conferences, and awareness programs supporting Tibetan rights. Such efforts contributed significantly toward internationalizing the Tibetan issue.

European and Global Perspectives

European nations generally advocate peaceful dialogue and respect for human rights in Tibet. The European Parliament frequently criticized restrictions on religious freedom and cultural expression in Tibetan regions.²⁶ Several European leaders hosted the Dalai Lama despite Chinese objections. Global civil society played an equally important role in supporting Tibet. Tibetan Freedom Concerts, student movements, Buddhist organizations, and celebrity campaigns generated widespread international sympathy toward Tibet.²⁷ These movements transformed Tibet into a symbol of peaceful resistance against authoritarianism. The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Dalai Lama in 1989 further strengthened Tibet's moral legitimacy at the international level.

China's Perspective on Tibet

China consistently maintains that Tibet is an inseparable part of Chinese territory and strongly opposes international interference in Tibetan affairs. Chinese authorities emphasize economic development, modernization, infrastructure, and social reforms implemented in Tibet since 1950.²⁸

China also accuses foreign powers of encouraging separatism through support for Tibetan exile groups. Due to China's increasing economic and political influence, many countries avoid openly supporting Tibetan independence despite expressing concerns regarding human rights. This reflects the broader tension between economic pragmatism and ethical diplomacy in contemporary international politics.

Contemporary Relevance of Tibet

The Tibetan issue continues to remain relevant in the twenty-first century because it intersects with debates concerning democracy, authoritarianism, cultural rights, and religious freedom.²⁹ The succession of the Dalai Lama has emerged as a particularly important issue with global implications.

Contemporary Tibetan activism

increasingly emphasizes cultural survival, environmental concerns, and meaningful autonomy rather than armed resistance. The Tibetan struggle therefore represents not merely a political conflict but also a broader movement for cultural preservation and spiritual identity.

The issue continues to influence international debates on minority rights and the relationship between state sovereignty and human rights in global politics.

Findings

The findings of the present study reveal several important dimensions regarding the Tibetan freedom struggle and its international significance. They are as below -

1. The Tibetan struggle evolved from a regional political conflict into a global humanitarian and human rights issue.
2. U.S. involvement in Tibet during the Cold War was primarily motivated by strategic anti-Communist interests.
3. The Dalai Lama played a decisive role in transforming Tibet into a symbol of peaceful and non-violent resistance.
4. International support for Tibet remains largely moral and humanitarian rather than political or military.
5. China's increasing economic influence has significantly limited stronger international intervention regarding Tibet.
6. The Tibetan diaspora successfully preserved Tibetan cultural and religious identity in exile.
7. Tibet continues to remain strategically significant in Asian geopolitics and international human rights discourse.

These findings demonstrate that Tibet occupies a unique position at the intersection of morality, diplomacy, and global politics.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The Tibetan freedom struggle represents one of the most important examples of peaceful resistance in contemporary world history. Although Tibet has not achieved political independence, the movement succeeded in preserving Tibetan identity and attracting sustained international attention toward issues of cultural freedom, human rights, and spiritual autonomy.³⁰

The role of the United States in Tibet evolved from covert strategic involvement during the Cold War to broader support for human rights and cultural preservation in later decades. Similarly, international organizations and Western nations largely framed Tibet as a humanitarian issue while avoiding direct political confrontation with China. The Dalai Lama's philosophy of non-violence and dialogue significantly enhanced Tibet's global legitimacy. At the same time, China's growing global influence restricted stronger international support for Tibetan political aspirations. Consequently, Tibet remains an unresolved issue shaped by both ethical concerns and geopolitical

realities.

The Tibetan struggle continues to symbolize the broader global tension between state sovereignty and cultural self-determination. Its relevance is likely to continue in future international debates concerning democracy, minority rights, and global human rights norms.

Suggestions

1. International organizations should encourage peaceful dialogue between Tibetan representatives and China.
2. Greater global efforts should be made to preserve Tibetan language, culture, and religion.
3. Universities and academic institutions should promote interdisciplinary Tibetan studies.
4. International human rights monitoring regarding Tibet should be strengthened.
5. Diplomatic and non-violent approaches should remain central to resolving the Tibetan issue.
6. The future of Tibet ultimately depends upon constructive international engagement, cultural preservation, and peaceful negotiations based on mutual respect and dialogue. Etc.



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