Tibetan Resistance

Non-violent resistance has been at the core of the Tibetan movement. This form of resistance is embodied by rejection of violent practices that have thrown the rest of the world into war and strife. The ability of Tibetans to keep their struggle non-violent stems from their unflinching belief in the Dalai Lama and in turn, the Dalai Lama’s uncompromising stand on violence.

Despite all odds, the non-violent struggle has flourished inside Tibet and is led courageously by men and women from all walks of life. The Tibetan diaspora and supporters give their actions a voice and wings in the international community.

Cultural expression

A new form of resistance – cultural expression – emerged in Tibet following the 2008 uprisings. Often termed Lhakar, which translates to White Wednesday, the idea is to express the Tibetan identity publicly through the open celebration of cultural traditions. This might involve wearing Tibetan clothes, speaking Tibetan language, singing Tibetan songs and dancing to them, eating Tibetan food, or promoting Tibetan businesses. Lhakar is commonly observed on Wednesdays, the Dalai Lama’s auspicious day. This movement has been highly successful inside Tibet even as poets, writers, and singers are arrested for their peaceful expressions of hope and love of country. Lhakar has also caught on in the diaspora community around the world.

High Peaks, Pure Earth is a blog celebrating contemporary cultural expression in Tibet.

Lhakar Diaries is a diaspora-managed blog dedicated to the Lhakar movement inside Tibet.

Peaceful protest

In efforts to resist Chinese oppression without resorting to violence, Tibetans have expressed their dissent through peaceful gathering including picnics, fasting, religious ceremonies or street protests. Although these protests are always non-violent, they have often been met with violence by China’s security forces. Here are three examples:

On July 6, 2013, the People’s Armed Police opened fire on unarmed Tibetans who were holding a picnic in the Tawu region of Kham in Eastern Tibet to mark the Dalai Lama’s 78th birthday. At least two Tibetan monks were killed and several others were seriously injured. Many Tibetans were detained after the incident for questioning.
On May 24, 2013, more than 4500 Tibetans protested near Naglha Zamba, a sacred hill rich in mineral resources in Driru, Eastern Tibet. They were expressing opposition to the harmful exploitation of mineral resources by Chinese miners. Local authorities deployed over fifty military convoys to the protest site. The stand-off lasted several days.

In 2010, Tibetan school and college students rallied over plans to restrict the use of their language. Hundreds of students and some monks marched through the streets of Rebkong to express opposition to new education policies proposed by authorities including downgrading Tibetan as a medium of instruction in schools. Students carried a banner with the slogan: “Return the authority of the Tibetan language.” A video of their protest is found here. Although armed police followed the protest, they did not intervene.

**Self-immolation**

In December 2013, Tsultrim Gyatso, a monk from Eastern Tibet set himself on fire in Sangehu County. He left a note explaining that his act was intended to bring attention to the oppression faced by the Tibetans, the exploitation of natural resources through mining, and the urgent wish for return of the Dalai Lama. His reasoning echoes several others before him who expressed similar views as they made the ultimate sacrifice. Since March 2009, at least 125 people have set themselves on fire in protest of the deteriorating human rights situation inside Tibet. Nearly 70% were below the age of 25. This ultimate form of resistance has not harmed a single Chinese person.

An updated list of Tibetans who self-immolated is found here.
Internet activism

The outspoken writings of the poet Woeser have come to characterize Tibetan Internet activism. While her forthright blog writings and ability to broach sensitive issues have provoked censorship and house arrest, they have not stopped Woeser from being a dynamic voice for Tibet. Still, sending news abroad about the human rights situation in Tibet, and particularly about the self-immolations, has resulted in the arrest of several Tibetans at least one of whom received a death sentence.

New restrictions on the tools of communication have been imposed by authorities, including the destruction of satellite dishes and receivers. Moreover, China has completed, or nearly completed, implementation of a new policy designed to curtail “rumours” by requiring all Tibetans to register with their real names for telephone and Internet services.

Nowadays, police carry out random checks of mobile phones carried by Tibetans. Any phone found to store information received from abroad can mean imprisonment for the owner. In January 2014, Chinese police have detained and tortured a young Tibetan man after finding photos and audio recordings of speeches by the Dalai Lama on his mobile phone.

Despite such risks, Tibetans actively engage the use of modern communications such as the Internet and cell phone technologies in order to both receive and send information to friends and colleagues outside of Tibet. This information exchange is a powerful tool in the struggle to document factual information about events in Tibet and to maintain community solidarity between Tibetans in Tibet and those in exile.

To keep yourself updated about new acts of Tibetan resistance as they occur, like us on facebook/CanadaTibet or follow us on Twitter/CanadaTibet.