

## Problems in the Tibetan Region: China and Its Efforts to Suppress Self-Determination by the Tibetan Society

Munif Arif Ranti, Cindy Juliana, Izzatinnisa

Department of International Relations, Gadjah Mada University  
Yogyakarta, Indonesia 55281

Email [Munifarifranti@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:Munifarifranti@mail.ugm.ac.id)

Email [Cindyjuliana@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:Cindyjuliana@mail.ugm.ac.id)

Email [izzatinnisa@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:izzatinnisa@mail.ugm.ac.id)

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### Abstract

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As a minority, Tibetans struggle to realize self-determination amidst the onslaught of oppression by China so that they can achieve freedom. Using a constructivist approach, this research analyzes China's dynamics in suppressing the fulfillment of Tibetan self-determination. The suppression carried out by China represents its more assertive position in the problems in Tibet, as well as being an idea that shows the interest in aligning Chinese identity, which makes the problems of minority groups a threat of separatism. The findings of this research include several main notes. China has succeeded in suppressing Tibet's position through various actions ranging from strengthening constructions related to Tibetan history and identity that can benefit its internal position, emphasizing securitization in the Tibetan issue to expand its sovereignty in peripheral areas, practicing modern colonialism, and strengthening the practice of particularism and creating a "New Era of China" that can limit Tibetan society. Thus, the self-determination that the Tibetan people want to achieve will only be an unrealizable wishful thinking.

Keywords: **Self-determination, Tibet, Human right, Constructivist**

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tibet is a region located in the center of East Asia. China's historical and autonomous region is often called the "roof of the world." This is due to the geographical location of Tibet, which occupies highland areas and vast mountains, including Mount Everest. Geographically, Tibet borders Qinghai province to the northeast, Sichuan to the east, Yunnan to the southeast, Myanmar, India, Bhutan, and Nepal to the south, the Kashmir region to the west, and the Xinjiang Uighurs to the northwest. Headquartered in Lasha, Tibet, it comes from Mongolian Thubet, Chinese Tufan, Tai Thibetan, and Arabic Tubbat. Tibetan society comprises ethnic Han (Chinese), Hui (Chinese Muslims), Monba, Lhoba, and other minority tribes. Tibetan and Burmese are related. Spoken Tibetan has developed regional dialects and subdialects that are mutually understandable. The Lhasa dialect is used as a lingua franca. There are two social levels of zhe-sa speaking (honorific) and phal-skad (ordinary); their use depends on the relative

social status of the speaker and listener. Mandarin has become more common in the region since the 1960s (Falkenheim et al., 2024). The profile of Tibet shows the diversity of the various minorities that occupy Tibet.

Tibet's international standing is still a matter of debate today. The Tibetan region claims to be an independent nation, has sovereignty as a state, and is not part of China. However, this needs to be recognized internationally. This condition led to the rebellion that occurred in Tibet and several regions in China in 2008 (Lal, 2020). Tense relations between China and Tibet have been ongoing since China's independence in 1949. The Tibetan people deny China's claim that Tibet has been part of China for centuries. The issue of sovereignty between China and Tibet is increasingly complex as it concerns both historical aspects and political status. The different perspectives between China and Tibet are rooted in religious and political disputes dating back to the 13th century. China claims Tibet has been part of China since the 13th-century Yuan dynasty.

In contrast, Tibetan nationalists and their partisans deny this. Tibet claims that the ruling power then was the Mongol Empire, which also happened to include China. At that time, Tibet was a sanctuary region where Tibetans offered spiritual guidance to the emperors in exchange for political protection. In 1903, Qing-ruled China regarded Tibet as politically subordinate, increasing its control over the Tibetan government. However, in 1913, a year after the Qing dynasty collapsed, Tibet declared its independence, and all Chinese officials were expelled from Lhasa by the Tibetan government. From then on, Tibet functioned as a *de facto* independent state until the Chinese army invaded Tibet's eastern border in 1950 (Bajoria, 2008).

In early 1951, the incorporation of Tibet as part of China went smoothly when China affirmed that Tibet was part of China. However, after 1959, the Tibetan uprising and the Dalai Lama's escape drew international sympathy towards Tibet's aspirations for self-determination. The events of 1959 were actively discussed and considered by the international community. This eventually caught the attention of the United Nations by passing a resolution supporting Tibetan independence in 1961 (Sperling, 2004).

Unrest in Tibet has been ongoing since the Chinese communist military occupied Tibet in 1959. From 1966-1976, there was a cultural revolution in Tibet with the closure, destruction, and damage of temples and monasteries by the Chinese authorities, and thousands of Tibetan monks were imprisoned. Many Tibetans were persecuted, killed, or imprisoned by the Chinese government in order to implement the communist system and collective leadership to control the Tibetan population strictly. After the death of Mao Tse-tung in 1976, China's policy towards Tibet changed. The Teng government (1979) adopted a more liberal policy towards Tibet by repairing various damages and allocating funds for road construction and hydroelectricity. However, the Chinese government remained reluctant to grant Tibet regional autonomy. On September 30, 1981, China offered Taiwan a particular proposal of nine-point conditions for unification. However, when the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan leader, requested that China grant him the same autonomy rights as Taiwan, the request was rejected. This triggered Tibetan unrest. In September and October 1987, there were anti-communist Chinese riots in Tibet. Unfortunately, the Chinese government violently suppressed the riots. The U.S. State Department sided with China, but the U.S. Senate voted to condemn China's gross human rights violations strongly (Chiu & Dreyer, 1989).

Since China occupied Tibet, many Chinese policies have threatened the existence of the Tibetan people. There are three areas of threat. First, China's birth control and immigration policies led to the number of Chinese outnumbering Tibetans within their borders. Not only that, Tibetan women face harsh treatment due to the Chinese government's birth control policy. It is said that 87,000 women were sterilized in Qinghai by the end of 1989. Secondly, Chinese policies led to the division of society into two classes. Chinese families in Tibet enjoyed many privileges compared to Tibetans living in China in general. Third, Tibet's natural resources were transported to China, and Tibetans received very little in return. Furthermore, as a direct result of this policy, Tibet's ecological balance is severely compromised.

There are different views between China and Tibet in understanding the securitization of territory. From the Tibetan point of view, there is a desire to secede from China. The UN Charter states that the right to self-determination as a people is part of human rights. This is further specified in the 1966 International Covenant on Human Rights. The Tibetan people have clearly expressed their desire for independence and urged the international community to take action on this issue. More importantly, China is currently occupying Tibetan territory and is, therefore, in violation of the principle of territorial integrity. In short, under international law, there is only one possible solution to the Tibet issue, which is the de facto restoration of a de jure Tibetan state. China's refusal to do so violates international law and should be dealt with in the political arena. However, time is not in favor of a separate Tibetan people, given the threat to their existence posed by China's occupation policy. Hence, Tibet's self-determination efforts have yet to go anywhere (Moquette, 1990).

Tibet has been part of China for 70 years. Since the conclusion of the 17-point agreement in 1951, the Chinese Communist Party has taken away every aspect of Tibet, from the freedom to learn the Tibetan language to religious practices. Things started to change when the PLA army established complete control over Tibet. Taking a lesson from Stalin and Khrushchev's playbook, Mao understood the importance of destroying an identity by destroying its language. In Tibet, further restrictions on the already diminished rights of the Tibetan people indicate the intensification of repressive policies under Xi Jinping. Since coming to power in November 2012, he has initiated a sea change in China, Tibet, East Turkestan (Xinjiang), and Inner Mongolia by curbing the little space available for religious freedom. Sarah Cook, a senior research analyst at Freedom House, writes, "...religious persecution has increased overall, with four communities, in particular, faring poorly-Protestant Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, and Hui and Uighur Muslims."

After the 2008 peaceful uprising, the CCP's repressive measures intensified against Tibetan Buddhism, especially against Tibetan monastic institutions. As the 2008 uprising in Tibet was the culmination of demonstrations by monks at Drepung monastery in March 2008 for the release of their colleagues from prison, the monasteries were seen as centers of dissent and Tibetan nationalism. There is a shared consensus in the writings of scholars and professors like Tsering Shakya (2012), Tsering Topgyal (2011, 2012), Robert Barnett (2012), Dibyesh Anand (2018) with learned researchers from human rights groups like Tsering Tsomo, Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) Sarah Cook (Freedom House), Sophie Richardson (Human Rights Watch), and on the causes and implications of the CCP's continued implementation of repressive policies in Tibet (Tsultrim, 2020).

From the series of events that happened to Tibet and its people, it shows the repressive actions taken by China against Tibet. This eventually led to various problems, such as the incorporation of Tibetan territory into China's autonomous region, discrimination against Tibetans as a minority in their territory, the occurrence of various human rights violations committed in implementing China's policies towards Tibet, and the pressure from China that made Tibet want to seek self-determination in the form of separatism for the security of its territory. Against this background, this research explores the complexity of the relationship between Tibet and China by analyzing China's dynamics in suppressing the Tibetan people's self-determination. The suppression carried out by China represents its more assertive position in the problems in Tibet, as well as being an idea that shows the interest in aligning Chinese identity, which makes the problem of minority groups a threat of separatism.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses qualitative methods through constructivism and self-determination approaches to comprehensively analyze human rights issues in Tibet and systematically represent the dynamics of the conflict. This research uses the constructivist approach, mainly focusing on identity, to describe the problem dynamics between Tibet and China. The use of the constructivist approach is based on two main aspects. First, constructivism is an understanding that interprets social phenomena as a construction. Second, the constructivist

methodology is actor interaction, which makes the state the leading actor while still considering aspects of entities, culture, and religion (Kubálková, 2019). By understanding this methodology, it can be explained that China built the construction to suppress the opportunity for secession of the Tibetan region, which has its identity claims. As a state actor, China has an essential role in building its identity even towards society to realize interests more solidly.

Constructivism sees that actors judge the logic of appropriateness based on several aspects, including values, norms, ideas, and identity. Thus, constructivism emphasizes actions that consider moral obligations and agreed norms in determining an action. In addition, the actions taken by actors represent the interests formed based on their identity, so their behavior seeks to build consistency between identity and action (Fierke, 2013). Constructivism provides a greater understanding of social processes by emphasizing the presence of constructions formed through the interaction of various actors. According to constructivism, social reality is a construction based on considering each actor's identity so that it is dynamic.

The discussion of identity is not limited to individual identity but also state and national identity. In constructivism, a view suggests that state identity is part of a culture that becomes a socially shared belief. Given their evolving narratives of connecting societal beliefs, state and national identities are often interpreted overlappingly. The distinction between the two identities cannot be segmented directly because internal dimensions are considered in ethnicity and nationalism, and external dimensions are formed from a country's foreign relations (Alexandrov, 2003). National identity can be understood as an identity that is homogeneous or heterogeneous depending on the ethnic background of the people in a region. National identity represents the diversity of backgrounds in society that are united to a certain extent by a common nationality. Meanwhile, state identity is more homogeneous because the background encourages the birth of a country's national "unity." Therefore, the problems between the state and ethnic communities are a dynamic that produces interactions between the identities of each actor. If there is concentration in these interactions, the state's identity will be the main interest that pushes for "unity" to be fulfilled. This is represented through the dynamics of the relationship between Tibet and China in this study. The different identities of the two are the forerunners of conflict that ultimately encourage the suppression of the other party through strengthening elements of state identity. In this case, China dominates identity construction in society so that Tibet will remain part of China with a standard state identity.

In addition to using the constructivist approach, this research also uses the concept of self-determination as a practice that is the primary demand of the Tibetan community in China. Tibet is a region with a minority population in China. As a minority group, Tibetans have minority rights that require the state to ensure their fair protection. Unfortunately, the reality of the Tibetan community is not in line with the rights they should have. The problem lies in Tibet's desire for self-determination, which is against China's wishes. In the end, a prolonged conflict occurs between the two parties due to differences in ultimate interests. To analyze this issue more deeply, it is necessary to understand self-determination itself, which has been the demand of the Tibetan people towards the Chinese government since the beginning of the annexation.

The protection of minority groups is a form of recognition of international human rights. For minority groups, there is a right to self-determination that jurisprudence points to an internal dimension to be exercised and negotiated. In practice, minority rights and self-determination often overlap, although the enforcement of minority rights is ultimately a relevant strategy in demanding the realization of self-determination. At least two main obstacles substantially undermine the realization of self-determination. First, there is no guarantee of justice in self-determination. Second, the requirement to realize self-determination is if the complainant is a victim of a violation (Carvosso, 2020). These requirements can be biased and problematic when proving claims, and even if claims of violations are apparent, there is no guarantee that the justice of self-determination can be fully realized. Therefore, self-determination is a challenging endeavor to fulfill in a short period. Especially with conditions that place

superpowers as the main actors, it will be difficult for minority groups to demonstrate their claims in fighting for self-determination.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. China's Construction of Tibetan Identity and History**

The problems between Tibet and China cannot be separated from the elements of history and identity. Both sides have conflicting interpretations of their history and identity. Tibetans see themselves as a broad spectrum and a distinct nation from mainland China in terms of history and cultural heritage. China, on the other hand, sees Tibet as an "autonomous region" and encourages cultural assimilation. In its development, China even established a national identification program whose ultimate goal is to negate the identity and aspirations of minority communities (Mukherjee, 2021). The identity conflict between Tibet and China is still a problem today. Tibet still maintains its independence and wants to be a country without any party's intervention. China, however, considers Tibet to be part of China and remains steadfast in proclaiming Tibet to be Chinese sovereignty. This has led to strained relations between the two. The long history of the conflict between China and Tibet began with China invading Tibet in 1950 when China began to claim that everything in Tibet belonged to China. Some historians say the history of the Chinese invasion of Tibet was recorded with the enthronement of Son-Tsan Gam-Po in 620 AD-650 AD. During his reign, Son-Tsan Gam-Po married two princesses from different regions. One was a princess from Nepal, and the other was from China. This is important to discuss because of the involvement of the spread of Buddhism in Nepal due to this marriage, although the two princesses were not the first to introduce Buddhism to Tibet. Their contribution to the spread of Buddhism led to the erosion of Tibet's indigenous Bon religion (Aiqani, 2018).

Son-Tsan Gam-Po's marriage to the Chinese princess is a marriage that occurred as a result of the ceasefire agreement after the troops of Son-Tsan Gam-Po defeated China, and the existence of this Chinese princess made Nepalese leaders began to be influenced by the Chinese culture brought by the princess. The influence of Chinese culture in Nepal has increasingly changed the characteristics of Nepali culture itself. However, the change in characteristics is not entirely replaced. Nepal still adopts the Indian script as its written language despite some of the influences of the current Chinese government. The history of the spread of Chinese culture in Nepal can be used as an advantage for China in increasing its legitimacy towards Tibet (Aiqani, 2018). The Chinese government still considers the marriage of Chinese princesses in Nepal as a civilizational process that assimilated Tibetan culture and politics into China. Therefore, the issue of Tibet and China's historical identity dispute has been going on for a long time. After Son-Tsan Gam-Po's reign ended, Tibet began to lose its identity. China then took advantage of this condition to invade Tibet for the first time. This invasion by China in the 1950s resulted from China's efforts to invade 1300 years ago (Aiqani, 2018).

The Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 was the beginning of China's exploration of Tibet when the Tibetan king Tensin Gyatso was in office. It began when the Chinese Red Army took control of the Tibetan provincial capital of Lhasa and overthrew Tensin Gyatso's rule. In 1959, Tensin Gyatso managed to escape with the help of Gampo Tashi. Both of them established a government in North India, precisely Dharamsala, as an escape government to avoid invasion and build strategies against invasion from China (Hastuti, 2011). In 1959, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai succeeded in taking over and freezing the Tibetan government. China formed a new government in Tibet, and the Chinese government fully controlled the government. Tensin Gyatso th, the leader of Tibet, and his ministers in India strongly opposed this. According to him, the new government formed by China in Tibet is illegitimate and has never been recognized by the Tibetan people (Hastuti, 2011).

Tensin Gyotso, with this news, made a strategy to rebuild his government in exile and declare to the world that:

"Wherever I am, together with my government, the Tibetan people recognize (Loh, 2022) us as the government of Tibet" (Hastuti, 2011)

After the declaration, about 80,000 Tibetans urbanized and walked to the borders of India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim. In 1976, Mao, the Chinese leader of Tibet, passed away and was replaced by Hu Yaobang in 1980 as the general secretary of the Chinese communist party. Hu Yaobang's speech that Tibetans should have the right to regional autonomy gave the Tibetan people little hope (Central Tibet Administration, 2024). Hu Yaobang, during his visit, also apologized to the Tibetan people for the policies made by the previous government that harmed the Tibetan people. Because Hu Yaobang's attitude was considered too favorable to the Tibetan people, in 1987, Hu Yaobang was ousted from the Chinese communist party (Central Tibet Administration, 2024). One year after Hu Yaobang stepped down, there were massive protests to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the uprising in Tibet. The Chinese invasion of Tibet was deemed a failure because it could not indoctrinate the Tibetan people. Therefore, the Chinese government took a stand by making a political policy in which the Chinese government migrated Chinese people to Tibet. This is considered to be a way out. China carried out this strategy with the aim that if the previous policy could not make the Tibetan people part of China, then the Chinese people would become the majority of Tibet and shift the indigenous Tibetan people into a minority (Dorjee, 2015).

### **3.2. Securitizing the Tibet Issue: China's Power to Suppress the Periphery**

To strengthen securitization, the Chinese government pursued a strategy to invade Tibet. There are several reasons why China is persistent in invading Tibet. The exploitation of Tibetan resources was one of the crucial reasons for China's invasion of Tibet. First, China wanted to implement a communist regime, which the Chinese government wanted to show the extent of legitimacy and ability of the communist regime to take over Tibet. Hence, China's obsession with conquering Tibet in order for China to be recognized for its prowess using the communist regime under Mao. Second, Tibet is an important region for China's national defense. Tibet itself is in an area adjacent to India, Bhutan, and Nepal. With Tibet's strategic location with these countries, China can quickly attack countries adjacent to Tibet through the Tibet route. Third, China wants to change the Tibetan government system using a military system. China wants to modernize Tibet and eliminate the identity of religious values in Tibet. China considers the characteristics of Tibet, which still uses religious identity, to hinder modernization in Tibet (Hastuti, 2011). Fourth, China wants to exploit the resources in Tibet. This sub-chapter will focus on how China strategized to exploit the mineral resources in Tibet. China is a major industrialized country in the world. Therefore, China needs a significant source of energy to support the country. China's exploitation of Tibet's resources is an essential issue for Tibet's future. Tibet has substantial mineral resources in the form of oil and gas.

Chinese colonizers have long represented Tibet as a storehouse of mineral treasures, especially gold. In a book written by Gabriel Lafitte entitled "The Little of the Book is Spoiling Tibet," Lafitte said that the Chinese regime has long been eyeing and wanting to exploit Tibet's energy. However, this ambition has yet to be achieved (Smith, 2013). In the 1990s, China's resource exploitation of Tibet began on a large scale. China has expanded its energy use in the form of electricity. Electrical resources at that time became one of the energy sources that supported economic competition. China began to build dam projects, most of which were in Tibet and Yunnan regions, in the late 2000s. The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) is an essential land for constructing power dams because it is located on several rivers, namely the Yellow River, Yangtze River, and Mekong River. The expansion of energy in Tibet coincided with the enactment of the Renewable Energy Law by the Chinese government in 2006 (Kaewkhunok, 2019). This created controversy at the time. Previously, China's electricity potential was only 615,005 GWh in 2008. After the development of renewable energy in Tibet, China's electricity potential increased to 1,424,180 GWh in 2015 (Kaewkhunok, 2019).

The development of renewable energy in TAR has undoubtedly had a positive impact on China's industrial development. However, this brings environmental issues. Not only does it have an impact on the environment, but this invasion of energy resources also provides discrimination to local communities. This is a significant problem in Tibet. The existence of a

power generation project in TAR does not involve the Tibetan community. The Tibetan people are not provided with additional employment opportunities by the Chinese government. China prioritizes native Chinese people to work on projects in the TAR. Meanwhile, the Tibetan people are the second workers in renewable energy development projects. Renewable energy in Tibet is an environmental problem and societal inequality (Kaewkhunok, 2019). In line with the humanitarian problems in Tibet, renewable energy implemented by China focuses on large-scale investments through Chinese government companies rather than encouraging people to participate in developing existing power plants in Tibet. This can be seen from the development carried out by China only for the country's economic development to meet China's industrial needs. Not to improve the quality of life of the people in the area. Not only that, in carrying out its economic invasion, China also dominates the tourism sector in Tibet. It is recorded that the Han Chinese dominate more than 60 percent of Lhasa. It can be said that China's aim in carrying out an economic invasion in Tibet was indirectly successful (Kaewkhunok, 2019).

### **3.3. Modern Colonialism in Tibet: Emphasis on Self-determination of Minority Communities**

Modern colonialism has occurred in various countries. Aspects of colonialism cannot be ignored, especially for post-colonial countries. Colonialism today is different from colonialism during the world war, where imperialist powers did not necessarily carry out the practice of colonialism. The current definition of colonialism includes power over a society with a state's political control. Modern colonialism currently occurs in the form of relations between foreign rulers in another authoritarian region who seek to monopolize natural resources, labor, and trade and often drain and impoverish the native population, as well as destroy the culture of the native community (Rapanyane, 2021).

China's existence applies to international politics and has become ingrained in the domestic realm. We often hear about colonial practices carried out by China against peripheral countries such as Africa and Latin America. China has done the same in the domestic realm in Tibet and several other regions. The practices of colonialism carried out by China in the domestic realm are also called internal colonialism. The terminology of internal colonialism describes the unequal position between ethnic groups within national boundaries. This aims to discuss the relationship between groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural clusters controlled by different populations (Chung, 2018). China's internal colonialism towards Tibet involves aspects of political domination, economic exploitation, and socio-cultural marginalization. From the aspect of political domination, it is described from the position of the Chinese Communist Party, which dominates the entire autonomous region of China filled with Han-Chinese people, and there has never been a CCP member of Tibetan ethnicity. In the aspect of economic exploitation, there is a reasonably large income gap between the poorer and dominant ethnic minorities living in rural areas. Compared to the more affluent and dominant Han ethnic minorities who live in urban areas. On the other hand, the aspect of socio-cultural marginalization is the government-sponsored Han-Chinese migration to Tibet. In addition, primary and secondary education is provided exclusively in Mandarin.

China's behavior towards Tibet can be defined as colonialism. This is proven by the military security discourse that China uses to perpetuate the practice of colonialism in its country. This modern colonialism makes Tibet as a colonized party inferior, dangerous, and always under suspicion, thus becoming a subject that must be secured, domesticated, controlled, or eliminated. The mass protests carried out by the Tibetan people in 2008 showed the power control exercised by China. The CCP seeks to build propaganda against military securitization actions from the government as a form of liberation of grateful subjects. In China, the regional autonomy system is a governance mechanism, not a form of liberation for minorities. The Chinese government agrees with its securitization by insisting that the Tibetan problem is not an ethnic, religious, and human rights issue but rather China's efforts to eradicate anti-Western China. China argues that its colonialism in Tibet is an effort to eliminate acts of extremism, separatism, and terrorism, which will threaten China's stability (Anand, 2019).

### **3.4. China's New Era: Is Tibetan Freedom Just a Wish?**

Strengthening China's position in pressing for the realization of self-determination for the Tibetan people depends on the particularist approach carried out by China. In a report issued in 2018, China stated that universal values would only be a threat. China initiated human rights with Chinese characteristics that reject universality (Roche, 2021). The approach taken by China in viewing human rights is based on the emphasis that these rights are historical and not innate. Therefore, the essence of China's human rights approach is related to social and economic welfare (Boer, 2022). The adoption of this human rights approach by China has implications for the difficulty of access for minorities such as the Tibetan people to obtain self-determination because China will continue to be present as the only means that can act in determining the fate of every person in their country. The Tibetan people are shackled by various policies carried out by China to suppress their freedom in social, political, economic, and even religious activities.

In order to strengthen its position in Tibet and also to improve its image, China then used what is known as the "New Era of China," which prioritizes several development concepts, including inclusiveness. In the long term, China promotes and is committed to building Tibetan unity and realizing shared prosperity (Zhimin, 2019). This practice is a representation that China is trying to reshape the beliefs of the Tibetan people so that anti-China protests will no longer develop. The main goal of the "New Era of China" is to strengthen China's integration as a nation whose primary goal is to achieve peace. Even though this ambitious goal sounds positive for the survival and protection of the Tibetan people, we need to be careful about whether what China is doing is purely to strengthen integration with Tibet or whether, in the long term, it will only cause more misery for the Tibetan people.

The Chinese leadership has an optimistic agenda regarding a "new world order," reflecting China's authoritarian and state-centric system. Through this agenda, China focuses on being a leading power in the Asia-Pacific region and the world by holding robust control (Gompert, 2022). In realizing this agenda, China is committed to starting from within the country through Chinese national reform. Citizen development in China experienced relatively rapid reform in China's new era under the leadership of Xi Jinping. The reforms are related to the Chinese government's goal of building a vision and mission of ideal citizens with vital political and ideological insight. In China's new era, its primary roots are laid in a culture that builds political legitimacy. The culture in question is traditional culture transformed as a functional political asset supporting China's claim to specialism in a historical-cultural context (Zhao, 2023). This momentum is a significant consideration for China to unite the differences within the country into a unified whole that agrees with the same historical-cultural context, namely the Chinese nation.

With the presence of national reform in China, which upholds unity, it is not surprising that problems involving minority groups are positioned as a threat to state sovereignty. China places the problem in Tibet as part of the threat of separatism, which poses a challenge to efforts to control the state and party in China. By framing the problem in Tibet as part of a separatism issue, China has received much criticism regarding human rights violations. This criticism is based on international concern over the fulfillment of minority rights in Tibet, which are not being fulfilled optimally. One of the countries that has imposed sanctions on China regarding human rights violations is the United States. The sanctions are in the form of visa restrictions on certain Chinese officials. Even though these sanctions are not significant regarding China's treatment of groups that are considered separatist and threaten China's cohesion, they can influence China's foreign policy and economy to a certain extent. Despite the challenges that arose in response to criticism of violations of the rights of the Tibetan minority, China overcame them by building a regime that was able to control the state to reduce internal repression (Gompert, 2022).

China's nation-building policy under the leadership of Xi Jinping has a firm idea of unifying China as a harmonious nation. If examined in depth, the ideas that China wants to realize have the potential to limit the freedom of minority groups. China's efforts to revitalize its

national community not only overcome barriers to minority culture and identity but also prevent minority groups from carrying out self-determination. China puts implicit pressure through this idea for minority groups to make "self-sacrifice" to give up their identity and rights in order to be in line with China's national alignment agenda (Bulag, 2023). Thus, the realization of self-determination is only a mechanism for articulating struggle in conflict. Prolonged and political stagnation that curbs the rights of minority groups but cannot fully provide freedom for minority groups. In many cases, self-determination becomes a claim that is formed relationally by prioritizing efforts to form institutions that act as the voice of society. Self-determination needs to be studied as a form of aspirational and regenerative politics (Loong et al., 2023). Unfortunately, with China's policy of limiting the freedom of minority groups under the pretext of anti-separatism, it will be difficult for minority groups such as Tibetans to achieve the self-determination they desire.

The Chinese government recognizes the right of the Tibetan people to exercise autonomy, especially by the agreement with the Tibetan government in 1951, resulting in the formation of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Establishing the TAR aims to contain Tibet as part of China entirely through administrative tools. This policy is a paradoxical representation of the Chinese government, which provides support for the existence of indigenous communities or minorities but, in reality, does not provide full recognition of the existence or fulfillment of the rights of minority communities (Jnawali, 2023). As part of a particular autonomous region in China, Tibet experiences major obstacles in articulating self-determination claims in any way (Loong et al., 2023). This obstacle is caused by China using the autonomy of the Tibetan people as a justification so that Tibet does not need to realize self-determination and must become part of China's territorial unity. Apart from placing restrictions on the freedom of minority groups, China is also trying to shape the construction of identity so that Tibet can be in line with China's wishes and is no longer considered a threat to separatism.

The establishment of regional ethnic autonomy for Tibet in 1965 was a form of detention carried out by China against the Tibetan people in order to prevent the independence of the Tibetan region from being realized. The Chinese government firmly rejects the idea of self-determination of the Tibetan people by ignoring the idea of Tibetan national history. For China, autonomy is not related to Tibet's ambition to break away from China (Jnawali, 2023). Thus, self-determination of the Tibetan region is a dream that cannot be realized as long as China is still committed to uniting its region in one common identity even though it has to sacrifice the original identity of the Tibetan people.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This research discusses the issue of the Tibetan region, which is still characterized by various problems. There needs to be more clarity in matters between Tibet and the Chinese government. The integration of Tibet into China has been in the works for a long time. Unfortunately, stability has not been realized due to various problems (Sperling, 2004). The problem between Tibet and China is often framed as a violation of universal human rights, but China always develops justifications that can mitigate its position on the Tibet issue. As a minority, the Tibetan people are struggling to realize self-determination amidst the onslaught of operations carried out by China so that they can achieve freedom. From this issue, self-determination efforts or other liberation struggles carried out by the Tibetan people will not be successful as long as China's position on the issue of the occupation of Tibet is stronger. We believe that China has succeeded in suppressing Tibet's position through various particularistic policies or "cultural relativism" and turning the Tibetan issue into a form of securitization. Therefore, this research will focus on four main arguments. First, China strengthens constructions related to Tibetan history and identity that can benefit its internal position. Second, China emphasizes securitization in the Tibet issue to strengthen its sovereignty in peripheral regions. Third, the practices carried out by China in Tibet are a form of modern colonialism that can suppress the sovereignty of the Tibetan people. Fourth, particularism and

the realization of the "New Era of China" will be the most dominant aspect that curbs the freedom of the Tibetan people.

As an elaboration, the main problem between Tibet and China is the difference in the goals of each party. The Tibetan people strive to realize self-determination so that they can have complete freedom and are no longer bound by Chinese oppression. However, in reality, these efforts cannot be realized because of China's increasingly strong position and its ability to justify its actions in Tibet. China has succeeded in suppressing Tibet's position through various actions ranging from strengthening constructions related to Tibetan history and identity that can benefit its internal position, emphasizing securitization in the Tibetan issue to strengthen its sovereignty in peripheral areas, carrying out the practice of modern colonialism, and strengthening the practice of particularism and realizing the "Era New China" that could limit Tibetan society. Thus, the self-determination that the Tibetan people want to achieve will only be a dream that cannot be realized due to the strengthening of China's position and its practice of particularism in human rights issues.

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