



## The “Chinese Miracle” Challenged by Tibet

Mathieu Duchâtel

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# China Analysis

## Les Nouvelles de Chine

This section, prepared by the Asia Centre ([www.centreasia.org](http://www.centreasia.org)), draws mainly on the press in Chinese, aiming to reflect the point of view of the People's Republic of China on international questions and issues related to Greater China.

## The “Chinese Miracle” Challenged by Tibet

**Analysis by Mathieu Duchâtel**

**Based on:**

- Li Ping, Li Yajie, “Behind the orchestration by the Dalai Lama clique of the major insurrectionary movement in Tibet,” *Xinhua News Agency*, 1 April 2008.
- Cao Xin, “Alternative thinking on the question of Tibet,” *Nanfang zhoumo*, 2 April 2008.

Can China's policy toward Tibet become more flexible? Reading the official Chinese press gives little cause for optimism. Since the beginning of the troubles on 14 March, Beijing has launched a full-scale information war. Beijing's official line — accusing the “Dalai Lama clique” of a violent drift towards independence despite the economic development Chinese policies have brought to the Autonomous Region — is endlessly repeated in China and abroad. The closing of the Autonomous Region to foreigners has prevented an alternative version of events or any measure of the extent of the repression. The overwhelming majority of the Chinese media has rejected all debate over the root cause of the riots. Our selection compares two contrasting texts. An article from the official Xinhua News Agency spells out, for Chinese readers, the government's arguments supporting the thesis of a plot. The text is based on a central argument that is often called into question abroad: that the Dalai Lama and his government-in-exile, who seek autonomy, directly control the pro-independence groups. The article from the Guangdong provincial weekly *Nanfang zhoumo*, on the other hand, links the Tibetan riots to China's cultural policy in the region, an argument that is unanimously accepted abroad. While the article serves as evidence of this argument's currency in Chinese liberal circles, taking such a position publicly remains risky; the author was expelled from the newspaper in early May.

China's whole argument is based on a denunciation of the Dalai Lama's independence project, although the Dalai Lama himself ceaselessly repeats his demands for nothing more than the autonomy guaranteed in the Chinese Constitution.<sup>(1)</sup> According to Xinhua, the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile is said to have decided, during a meeting in Brussels in March 2007, to seize the opportunity of the Olympic Games to provoke a crisis and focus the world's at-

ention on the Tibetan cause. In concrete terms, the events of March are said to result from an alliance between the forces of the Dalai Lama and the most radical organisations calling for independence, including the Tibetan Youth Congress, the Association of Tibetan Women, and Students for a Free Tibet. These organisations unveiled in the United States their plan for “a great insurrectionary movement of the Tibetan people,” based on the idea that 2008 is the “last chance of success” for the independence of Tibet. In India, pro-independence groups decided on a series of concrete measures and obtained the approval of the government-in-exile. First of all there is a series of political demands that, from China's point of view, go well beyond demands for autonomy: the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet, the departure of Chinese colonists, and the liberation of political prisoners. Should China refuse to accede to these demands, the plan calls for a resort to violence. The instigators of the plan made no attempt at stealth; seven pro-independence associations presented its major points at two press conferences in New Delhi in January 2008. Planned to begin in March 2008, the insurrection was supposed to constitute “an historic turning-point in Tibet's struggle for freedom.” Two dates were supposed to mark the intensification of Tibetan protest. Outside China, on 10 March, the Tibetan Youth Congress began a peaceful march from India towards the Tibet Autonomous Region. In other countries Tibetans took a day off work to launch a range of actions, including hunger strikes and attacks on embassies of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In “Greater Tibet” — the Autonomous Region along with the areas of historic Tibet an-

1. The principle of the autonomy of national autonomous areas is established in Article 30 of the Constitution of the PRC. Article 4 guarantees the equality of the nationalities in China.

nexed to the provinces of Gansu, Sichuan, and Qinghai – the riots began on 14 March. According to Xinhua, the government-in-exile’s Department of Security played a key role in the coordination of operations and carried out command and intelligence functions. On 17 March, in order to counter China’s deployment of effective security measures, the government-in-exile is alleged to have decided on an operation to repatriate the most active participants in the riots to Dharamsala. The rest of the article attempts to prove the role of the government-in-exile based on the arrest of an unidentified Tibetan, who is alleged to have been entrusted by the Department of Security with clandestine missions, including setting up a network of informers in Tibet, collecting intelligence, and distributing tracts about the Dalai Lama’s activities abroad. According to the article, Chinese Public Security forces found compromising documents at the alleged agent’s home, including reports and photographs of the riots, which he was preparing to send to the Tibetan security services.

As with all official sources, the Xinhua article reveals a kind of amazement at the riots. What can possibly explain Tibetans’ discontent with the economic development of their region? Opened up by a railway line, the region is benefiting from China’s growth. The entire Chinese public message counters the ideologues of independence with the pragmatists of development. *Nanfang zhoumo* is the one and only media organ that seeks to identify Chinese policy towards Tibet as a potential cause of insurrection.

As the weekly sees it, the power of religion in Tibetan daily life and the population’s veneration of the Dalai Lama are two unavoidable realities. China had better face them and rely on its Constitution. Instead of perceiving the Tibetan leader as a political threat and seeking to discredit him, China should resolve to treat him as a religious leader. The relative insolence of this statement is tempered by a call for strict adherence to the domestic laws of the PRC. However, *Nanfang zhoumo* calls for a real change in strategy, asking the Chinese government to distinguish between the various Tibetan groups abroad rather than rejecting all of them out of hand. The article suggests that it would not be counterproductive for Beijing to adopt a policy of “smiling in order to dissipate antagonism” towards the Tibetan exiles who followed the Dalai Lama in his flight to India in 1959. They do not all favour independence: they belong to a complex society that has changed considerably since that time. Likewise, China should make a clearer distinction between proponents of non-violence who are asking for autonomy, and extremists who preach violence in order to obtain independence.

But *Nanfang zhoumo* goes further, implicitly linking the March riots with the policy of Zhang Qingli, who was appointed Party secretary of Tibet in 2006. Perhaps China should draw on the policies of Guo Jinlong, now Mayor of Beijing, who was Party secretary in the Autonomous Region from 2000 to 2004. His moderate approach favoured stability. In particular he guaranteed religious freedom to all – except Party members – and distinguished normal ethnic and religious activity from “separatist” acts. Since even Chinese experts agree that many aspects of Tibetan religion are compatible with the Chinese dream of building a “harmonious society,” why not build a new relationship with the Tibetans on this basis? Buddhism in Tibet does not favour “extremist” behaviour. Therefore, according to the weekly, Tibet must “be treated differently from other regions dominated by ethnic minorities.” Without calling directly for dialogue, *Nanfang zhoumo* suggests an adjustment in China’s political line towards Tibet. It recalls that on 28 March, the Dalai Lama published an “open letter to [his] Chinese brothers and sisters” in the Western media, in which he committed himself to not supporting independence and to opposing any boycott of the Beijing Olympics. These two promises correspond exactly with the demands expressed by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao for the resumption of dialogue. •