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Changes and Continuities in Tibet Autonomous Region Leadership Since 2012: Ethnic Composition, the Tibet Aid Program and Professional Backgrounds

Devendra Kumar



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About the Author:

Dr. Devendra Kumar is an Associate Fellow, at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi NCR. He can be reached at devendra.kumar@snu.edu.in

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Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence
NH-91, Tehsil Dadri, Gautam Budh Nagar District
Uttar Pradesh – 201314
INDIA
Ph: +91 120 7170100
E-Mail: chs.shss@snu.edu.in
Website: <https://chs.snu.edu.in>

Changes and Continuities in Tibet Autonomous Region Leadership since 2012: Ethnic Composition, the Tibet Aid Program and Professional Backgrounds

Devendra Kumar

ABSTRACT: This paper maps the changes and continuities in leadership in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) since 2012, when Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Based on an analysis of career trajectories of officials, their biographical data, and other sources, the paper examines cadre management and appointments as a component of China's Tibet policy. It looks at leadership at prefecture, provincial, and national levels and seeks to answer the following questions – what are the general profiles of cadres in TAR? What are the patterns of change in ethnic composition of cadres and what role does the Tibet Aid Program play in this respect? What do cadre management and the patterns of appointments reveal about China's Tibet Policy?

KEYWORDS: Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), ethnic representation, cadre management, leadership, Tibet policy, change.

List of Tables

- Table 1: Administrative-Political Hierarchy in China and Number of Administrative Divisions in TAR
- Table 2: Ethnic Composition of TAR's Population (As per Census of 2021)
- Table 3: Top Leadership of TAR
- Table 4: Key Officials and Statistics of Top Leadership at Prefecture Level
- Table 5: Tibetan Cadres in the Central Committee
- Table 6: Tibet Aid Cadres in Key Positions in TAR (as of June 2023)
- Table 7: Leaders at Provincial Level with Economics and Science & Engineering Background Transferred from Elsewhere in TAR (as of June 2023)

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Ethnic Composition of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of TAR
- Figure 2: Ethnic Composition of the People's Congress of TAR
- Figure 3: Ethnic Composition of the Standing Committee of Party Committee of TAR
- Figure 4: Ethnic Composition of Party Committee of TAR

Introduction

This paper maps out the leadership in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in the post-20th Party Congress period, its composition, and policy implications during the third term of Xi Jinping as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC). It also examines the changes and continuities since 2012 by focusing on whether and how ethnic composition of leadership at prefecture and provincial level has changed and the significance of these changes for understanding China's Tibet policy. Understanding leadership reshuffles is a key component of understanding CPC policies in TAR as they provide a reflection of existing policies in the region, tell us about who the new leaders are, and also reveal possible policy directions based on their ideological and policy orientations and career trajectories.

Although the reshuffle of individual officials at various levels is an ongoing process with frequent transfers, promotions and demotions, large-scale changes take place every five years at county, prefecture, provincial and national levels, each level preceding the next higher level in the Party-state hierarchy. The leadership selection for both state and party takes place simultaneously; the CPC Central Committee (CC), National People's Congress (NPC), China's legislature, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) represent three key organs of the Party-state and this national level institutional structure is replicated down to the county level (Donaldson 2017: 110).

Each level has a Communist Party Committee, a Standing Committee of the concerned Party Committee, People's Congress, CPPCC, and government/bureaucracy (see Table 1). All other institutions, such as the courts, for example, are similarly replicated at each level. The latest cycle of five-yearly leadership transition started with selection of committees of Party, CPPCC, and People's Congress at county and prefecture levels in 2021 and ended with the 20th National Party Congress in October 2022 and the sessions of CPPCC and NPC in March 2023, which formalized the leadership changes in both Party and state at the national level (*Xinhua* 2022).

Table 1
Administrative-Political Hierarchy in China and Number of Administrative Divisions in TAR

Administrative Level in China	Total Number in TAR	Mode of Election / Selection	Legislative Power	Party/People's Congress Standing Committee
Province/Autonomous Regions/Special Regions	1	Indirectly by immediate lower level	Yes	Yes
Prefecture-level: Prefecture/Prefecture-level cities/Autonomous Prefectures	7	Indirectly by immediate lower level	Yes	Yes
County-level: counties/county-level cities/urban districts/Autonomous counties	74	Indirectly by immediate lower level	Yes	Yes
Township-level: Towns/Townships/Minority Townships/Urban Subdistricts	685	Direct Election	No	No
Village level: street, neighbourhood and villages committees	5,579	Direct Election	No	No

Sources: The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China 2018; China Statistics Press Co. Ltd. 3-5.

Local and provincial leadership in TAR feed policy inputs to the higher levels and implements policies on the ground, and hence, understanding the leadership is an important aspect of understanding policies in general. Moreover, given questions over the legitimacy of the Chinese state in TAR, leadership is a key component of understanding the policy focus and planned trajectories of the central leadership.

There are very few studies on leadership in TAR (Connor and Barnett 1997; Barnett 1999; Yasheng 1995; Arpi 2013; Ranade 2017). In addition, these studies do not examine cadre management and leadership during Xi Jinping's tenure since 2012 except those by Claude Arpi and Jayadeva Ranade analysing leadership changes just after the 18th Party Congress in 2012. This study fills a gap by examining the issue of representation of ethnic Tibetan leaders from prefecture levels up to the central level, Han leadership in TAR, and the Tibet Aid Program (援藏计划 *yuan Zang jihua*), which includes transfer of cadres from elsewhere in China as a key component of the policy, alongside the transfer of capital and enterprises. It also examines the Tibetan members of national bodies namely, CC, NPC and CPPCC. By so doing, it provides an analysis of the significance of how the Chinese state manages ethnic Tibetan cadres at various levels.

The analysis is focused on the following questions:

1. What is the general profile of leadership in TAR?
2. What explains the low representation of Tibetans at national, provincial

and prefecture levels?

3. Who are the emerging next generation leaders among Tibetans?
4. What role does Tibet Aid Program play in Han leadership representation in TAR?
5. What does the nature of leadership in TAR tell us about China's Tibet policy?

Methodology

The analysis is based on biographical data and career trajectories of leadership at prefecture, province, and national levels in TAR during Xi Jinping's tenures as General Secretary since 2012, as well as of ethnic Tibetan cadres at prefecture and provincial levels from other Tibetan areas in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces. It has looked at cadres in People's Congresses, CPPCCs, Party Committees and Standing Committees at these levels. In addition, the paper has consulted primary and secondary sources to contextualize why leadership changes and ethnic composition matter in understanding China's policies in TAR.

In China's administrative hierarchy, the county is the lowest level of administrative unit with legislative powers and standing committees of the CPC and People's Congress. Prefecture-level administrative units function as political and administrative conduits between lower-level bureaucracies that deal with the people on everyday basis and higher-level leadership and bureaucracies (Tsai and Tian 2023).

Prefectural-level leadership level plays a very important role in China; it becomes more significant in ethnic minority regions in terms of whether they have ethnic minorities in the ranks and whether they follow the Party or collude with dissenters. In TAR, cadres at provincial and prefecture level are crucial to implementing the Party-state's policies and getting feedback from the ground level; this level is also where future leaders from outside TAR usually start their career.

The remainder of the paper is divided into four sections. The first section analyses overall trends in ethnic composition of party and government institutions from prefecture level upwards. The second section then discusses whether and to what extent the cadre transfer policy under the Tibet Aid Program shapes the ethnic composition of leadership in TAR. The third section highlights the major factors which favours promotion to higher levels as well as profiles such key leaders, who have been promoted in recent times. The final section summarises key findings of the paper.

Leadership in TAR since 2012: Changes and Continuities

This section provides an in-depth analysis of provincial and prefecture level

leadership in TAR. It focuses on the leadership composition and changes in the Standing Committees of the Communist Party, Standing Committees of People’s Congress, and governments. The key anchor of the analysis is whether and how much the ethnic composition of leadership has changed since Xi became the General Secretary in 2012. Analysts of the Chinese state have highlighted that ethnic Tibetan cadres are getting less importance during Xi’s tenure with increasing domination of Han ethnic leadership (Arpi 2013). This arguably signifies the Chinese state’s deliberate promotion of Han ethnic leadership in an effort to deal with perceived security and stability threats.

An ideal situation is when the composition of leadership reflects the ethnic composition of TAR population as well as follows the laws and rules of China’s political system. Table 2 provides a snapshot of the ethnic composition of the population of TAR. Here, the Han population only includes their population according to the census, which counts only those Han with *hukou* (household) registration in TAR. In addition, based on the 6th Census of China data from 2000, Chinese sources estimate that there is a “floating and temporary population” ranging from 5% to 6% of TAR population, the majority of whom are Han who have migrated to TAR (Ma and Lhundup 2008; Ma 2011; Ma 2018). This proportion has certainly gone up as the Chinese state has promoted Han migration and increased investments in socio-economic policies in the region over the years (Zangmo 2019).

Table 2
Ethnic Composition of TAR’s Population (as per Census of 2021)

Ethnicity	Total	Share of Total (in %)
Tibetan	3,137,901	≈86.01
Han	443,370	≈12.1
Mongol Hui Monpa Salar Lhoba Dengba Naxi/Nakhi Sherpa Bai and others	66,829	≈1.85

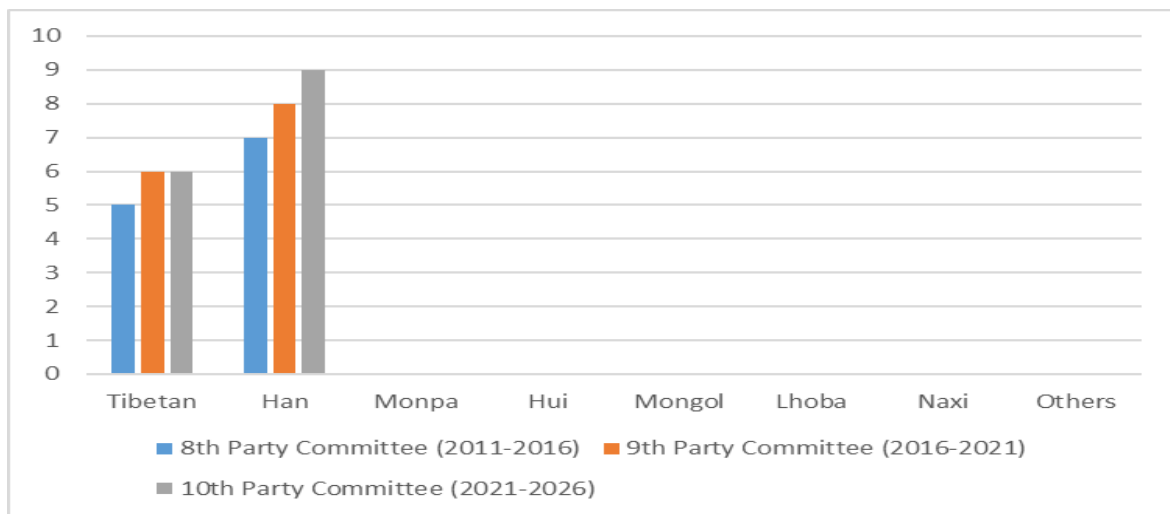
Source: Xizang Zizhiqu Tongjiju 2021.

The Standing Committee of the Communist Party in TAR is the main party organization at the provincial level. In this institution, the changing dynamics of ethnic representation have started to reflect in its composition (see Figure 1). Up to the 8th TAR Party Committee (2006-2011) there was almost equal representation of Han (six) and Tibetan officials (seven). This has changed in subsequent Party Committees with Han officials (at 60% of total) having majority. Thus, in this crucial party institution, the representation of Tibetans

has gradually declined. If this trend continues, the Party Committee at provincial level will reflect the ethnic composition of current prefecture party committees, discussed below, with Han being an overwhelming majority in next five to 10 years.

Meanwhile, the Party Secretary of TAR provincial Party Committee has always been a Han. People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officers served as Party Secretaries until December 1988, when a civilian cadre, Hu Jintao, was sent to the region for the first time. Since then, the profiles and backgrounds of cadres at this position have shifted from military to other domains, namely, experiences in internal security and social management, economic affairs, ideology, among others. The current Party Secretary, Wang Junzheng, was appointed in 2021. He was previously Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a quasi-military organization, and head of the Political and Legal Affairs Committee of Xinjiang. Since 2012, while two Tibetan ethnic Deputy Secretaries have been appointed along with two Han deputy secretaries, overall, the balance has remained in favour of Han, in comparison with previous period.

Figure 1
Ethnic Composition of the Standing Committee of Party Committee of TAR



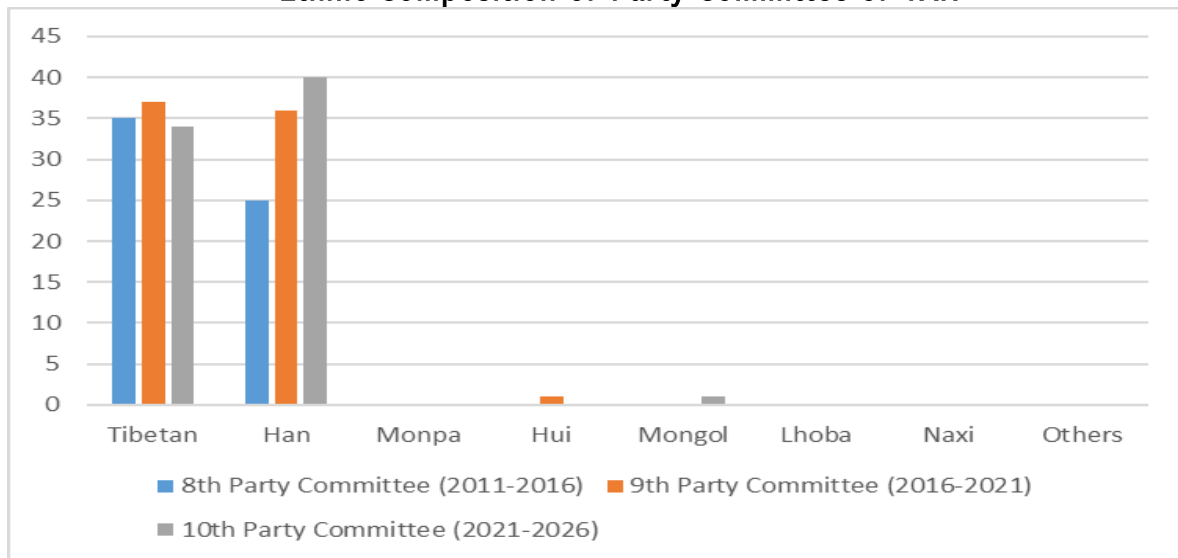
Source: Compiled by the Author.

However, the composition of Party Committee, which is larger than the Standing Committee, at the provincial level provides a more complex picture. If we look at the Party Committee of TAR, which consists of full members (with voting rights) and alternate members (non-voting), Tibetan representation has declined, although it cannot be considered a drastic change. The Tibetan majority with approximately 58% full members in the 8th Party Committee (2007-2011) has come down to approximately 45% in the 10th Party Committee (2022-2027).

As Figure 2 shows, in the Party Committee, which has more membership, the changes in ethnic representation are gradual, but steady in favour of Han ethnic cadres. However,

among alternate members, the representation of Tibetan and other numerically smaller ethnic communities has remained constant. Alternate membership is generally used to accommodate other smaller ethnic communities like Monpa, Lhoba, Hui, Mongol, and Bai, who rarely get a seat as full member and the rarest in the Standing Committee. As it is the case with People’s Congress, the trend of declining Tibetan representation reflects the similar changes in Party Committees in prefectures.

Figure 2
Ethnic Composition of Party Committee of TAR



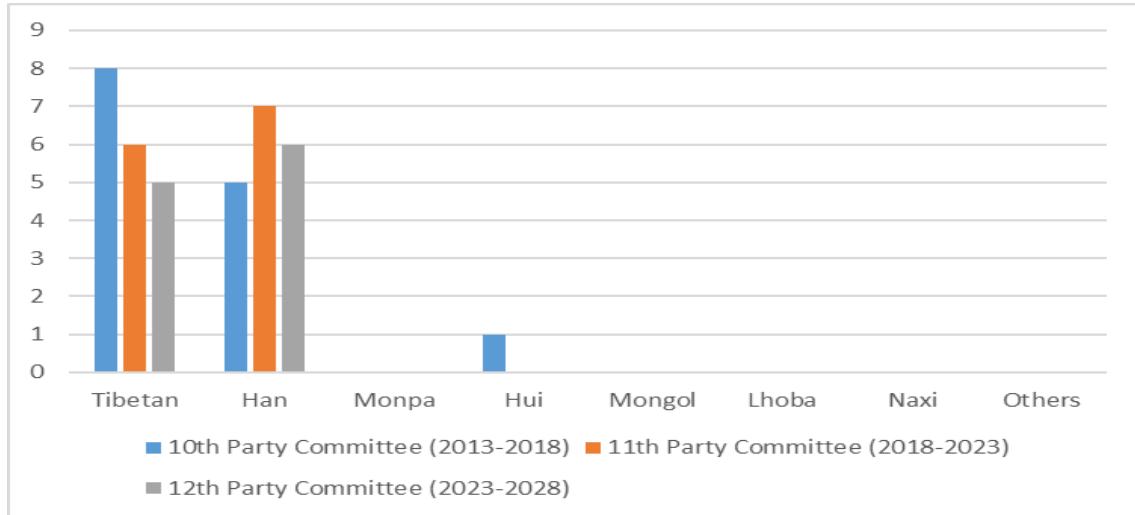
Source: Compiled by the Author.

The People’s Congress of TAR is the legislative arm of the province. The current committee was selected in December 2022, and it had a total of 437 deputies selected by prefecture-level People’s Congresses including 49 from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)-Tibet Military District and People’s Armed Police Tibet Corps). These deputies selected a Standing Committee comprising of the Chairperson (Lobsang Gyaltzen, an ethnic Tibetan cadre), 11 Deputy Chairpersons, one Secretary-General and 67 members of People’s Congress (*Tibet News Network* 2023). In terms of ethnic composition, out of 67 members, 27 as well as six Deputy Chairpersons and one Secretary-General are Han while 35 members are Tibetan. Each cadre is also allotted a portfolio in either party or government/state bodies.

Tibetan representation in the Standing Committee of the provincial People’s Congress has declined drastically since 2012. Tibetan cadres were in the majority in the 10th Committee (2013-2018), but Han cadres have come to dominate in the 12th Committee in January 2023 (Figure 3) —the change is consistent and decisive in favour of Han cadres. Given that the Standing Committee is the nucleus of decision making in the body, it can be argued that the changes in the ethnic composition in the body are consequential and likely

to continue.

Figure 3
Ethnic Composition of the Standing Committee of the
People’s Congress of TAR

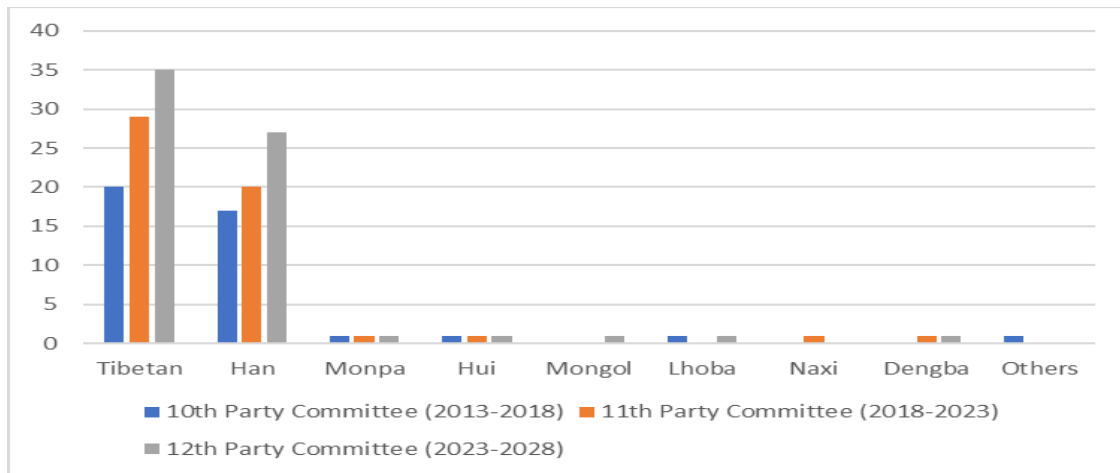


Source: Compiled by the Author.

By contrast, the provincial People’s Congress provincial still has Tibetans in the majority (Figure 4). In addition, the ratio of Tibetan and Han cadres has also remained more or less stable. However, there is a consistent upward rise in the absolute number of Han cadres from 17 in the 10th Committee (2013-2018) to 27 in the 12th Committee (2023-2028), which is significant given the fact that Han population has not increased in TAR during the period in same proportion.

The decline in the number of ethnic Tibetan members is also reflective of the trend of decline in the number of deputies from the prefecture level. For example, out of 437 deputies, 328 were Tibetans in 2013, while in 2023, out of 437 deputies, only 266 are Tibetan deputies; most of the difference is made up with an increase in ethnic Han deputies. A close look at the chances of an average deputy getting elected to the People’s Congress and Standing Committee suggests that Han deputies have greater chances despite their share of deputies being less.

Figure 4
Ethnic Composition of the People's Congress of TAR



Source: Compiled by the Author.

Numerically smaller communities namely, Monpa, Sherpa, Naxi/Nakhi, Dengba, and Lhoba have one seat each in the People's Congress; these communities do not have representation in the Standing Committee which is in keeping with the past trends. However, the People's Congress is used to accommodate these communities both as a counterweight to Tibetans as well as to cultivate them due to their concentration in border areas along with Tibet. China-watchers have highlighted the significance of such efforts to co-opt the Monpas by China for its policies in Tibet as well as for India-China relations as these communities have their co-ethnics living in India (Arpi 2021). Similarly, the presence of a Dengba representative in the People's Congress, selected for the first time in 2017, is significant. The Dengba living in Zayul county in TAR are one of the four groups of the Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh and have a history of Chinese cultivation for intelligence purposes (Aiyadurai and Lee 2017: 369).

PLA representatives also are part of Party-state bodies at all levels in TAR, depending on the rank they hold. The PLA and the People's Armed Police (PAP) have a certain number of deputies at each level. For example, the 12th People's Congress had 49 deputies from PLA quota with Han cadres being an overwhelming majority with 35 cadres and 12 Tibetans. Similarly, in the 11th People's Congress of TAR, there were 28 Han cadres out of a total 45 from the PLA quota. Lt. Gen. Yin Hongxing, the Political Commissar of the Tibet Military District (TMD), is the sixth-ranking member of the Standing Committee of Party Committee of TAR; his predecessor Lt. Gen. Zhang Xuejie held the same position in the institution. In sum, Han cadres dominate in Party-state bodies in TAR as deputies and representatives from the PLA and PAP quotas.

The trends of declining representation of Tibetan are more striking at the prefectural level below the province, particularly in key leadership positions. Tibet Aid cadres (援藏干部 *yuan Zang ganbu*) have significantly increased Han

representation during Xi's tenure. For example, at present 15 Deputy Mayors in seven prefecture level administrative units are Tibet Aid cadres, against 17 ethnic Tibetan cadres out of a total of 45 officials designated as Deputy Mayor/Executive Deputy Mayor. While Tibet Aid cadres are appointed by their parent province or organization, other deputy mayors, both Han and Tibetan, are generally promoted from within the region. This indicates that overall promotion policy favours longer experience at the local level. While majority of promotions are from the within, the practice of appointing officials from the Tibet Aid Program from other provinces/cities at deputy mayor or higher levels directly, suggests that they have certain skills which the party deems important for its policies (for more details, refer to Table 6 in Section 3).

Table 3
Top Leadership of TAR

Name in English	Chinese Name	Current Positions
Wang Junzheng	王君正	Party Secretary of the Communist Party of TAR
Yan Jinhai	严金海	Chairman, TAR People's Government
Lobsang Gyaltzen	洛桑江村	Chairperson, the Standing Committee of People's Congress of TAR
Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai	帕巴拉·格列朗杰	Chairman, the 12 th CPPCC of TAR

Source: Compiled by the Author.

Similar trends of increasing number of Han officials at mayoral positions are noticeable. Out of seven Mayors at prefecture level, four officials are Tibetan – Ba Ta, Mayor of Nyingchi; Dan Ba, Mayor of Nagqu; Luo Qingwu, Mayor of Qamdo; and Dampa Wangjoo, Mayor of Ngari – one is Hui (Ze Li recently appointed to Lhokha), and two are Han. Wang Qiang's appointment as the Mayor of Lhasa is reflects a broader trend of breaking the law of autonomous regions, which mandates that government/state positions should be filled with ethnic minority cadres in autonomous regions/prefectures/counties (Zhang 2012). Wang is the first Han Mayor of Lhasa since 1980.

While Tibetan cadres used to be in the majority as Party Secretaries of prefectures prior to 2011/12, there have been gradual changes in favour of Han officials over the last decade. In Qamdo, the appointment of a Han Party Secretary broke a cycle of appointing minority leaders as Party Secretaries.

Norbu Dhondup (Ch. 罗布顿珠) from 2014 to 2017, Abu (Ch. 阿布), a minority Hui leader from Lhasa from 2017 to 2020, and Purpu Dhondup (Ch. 普布顿珠), the current party secretary of Lhasa served as Party Secretaries of Qamdo. However, the appointment of Gong Huicai, a Han and currently one of the vice

chairpersons of TAR government reflects a larger trend of appointing Han officials at these crucial positions at the local level. Similarly, the appointment of Zhang Yongze and Xu Chengcang as Party Secretary of Lhokha in 2015 and 2017 respectively ended Tibetan representation in the position.

In short, five out of seven Party Secretaries of prefecture-level entities in TAR are Han, which is in contrast to the situation in 2012. Similarly, Han officials dominate at the Deputy Party Secretary position in prefectures but changes at this level had been taking place for longer than at the Party Secretary level. Once again, it is Tibet Aid cadre that have tilted the representation at this level in favour of Han officials and even more than at higher positions.

The changes in the composition of top leadership at the prefecture and provincial levels are reflective of changes in the composition of prefecture level Party Committees. Table 4 provides a statistical overview of the ethnic composition of the current prefecture level Party Committees selected in 2021 and 2022. All seven party committees have come to be dominated by Han officials in majority while these committees had Tibetan ethnic majority until 2011/12.

Table 4
Key Officials and Statistics of Top Leadership at Prefecture Level

Prefecture/ Prefecture-level cities	Party Secretary (党委书记)	Deputy Party Secretaries (党委副书记)	Mayor (市长)	Ethnic composition of Standing Committee
Lhasa City	Phurbu Dhondhup (Tibetan)	Guo Guo (Tibetan), Liao Ken, Chen Jing & Wang Qiang	Wang Qiang	16 = 5 Tibetan + 11 Han
Shigaste City	Sonam Nyima (Tibetan)	Wang Fanghong & Ge Qingming	Wang Fanghong	11 = 4 Tibetan + 7 Han
Nyingchi City	Ao Liuquan	Ba Ta (Tibetan), Liu Guangming, Zhang Xiuwu	Ba Ta (Tibetan)	14 = 3 Tibetan + 11 Han
Ngari Prefecture	Duan Hai	Dampa Wangjoo (Tibetan) & Han Xuejun	Dampa Wangjoo (Tibetan)	12 = 3 Tibetan + 9 Han
Nagqu City	Zhuang Jinsong	Dan Ba (Tibetan), Yu Guoqiang & Tashi Dorji (Tibetan)	Dan Ba (Tibetan)	14 = 5 Tibetan + 9 Han
Qamdo City	Gong Huicai	Luo Qingwu (Tibetan) & Wang Yadong	Luo Qingwu (Tibetan)	13 = 4 Tibetan + 1 Mongol+8 Han
Lhokha City	Xu Chengcang	Tsering Phuntsok (Tibetan), Ze Li (Hui), Shan Qiang, Wang Yunqing	Ze Li (Hui)	17 = 5 Tibetan + 1 Hui + 11 Han

Source: Compiled by the Author.

These changes in the lower rungs of party hierarchy are better guides to shifting ethnic representation in TAR as it should be noted that although Han population in Tibet is increasing, it is still very low and hence, Han ethnic representation should be lower in these institutions. Most Han officials at the local to provincial levels are not from TAR but brought from outside the region. In fact, in most of the prefecture level party committees, Han representation ranges from 60% to 80% of the total officials, which is almost the exact reverse of the division of the actual population.

At the national level, three Tibetan cadres are alternate members of the 20th Central Committee (2022-2027) – Phurbu Dhondup (Party Secretary of Lhasa), Karma Tsenden (Secretary, UFWD, TAR), and Tshering Thar (Deputy Governor, Qinghai, and a member of Standing Committee of Qinghai Party Committee) while Yan Jinhai is a full member. In the 19th Central Committee (2017-2022), there were two full members — Che Dalha (currently a member of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC and Deputy Director of Agriculture and Rural Committee) and Lobsang Gyaltsen (Chairman of the Standing Committee of People's Congress, TAR) — and two alternate members — Norbu Dhondup (currently the Tibet Autonomous Region Federation of Trade Unions) and Yan Jinhai (currently the chairperson of TAR People's Government and Deputy Party Secretary of the Communist Party, TAR) — of Tibetan ethnicity, while the 18th Central Committee (2012-2017) had one full member – Pema Choling – and four alternate members — Lobsang Gyaltsen, Li Changping from Sichuan, Gompo Tashi, Danko (Table 5). Thus, Tibetan representation in the CC has declined both in terms of number as well as political importance as three Tibetan cadres are alternate members while only one cadre is a full member.

Table 5
Tibetan Cadres in the Central Committee

	18th Party Congress	19th Party Congress	20th Party Congress
Full Members	Padma Choling	Che Dalha, Lobsang Gyaltsen	Yan Jinhai
Alternate Members	Lobsang Gyaltsen, Danko, Li Changping, Gongpo Tashi	Yan Jinhai, Norbu Dhondup	Purpu Dhondup, Karma Tsenden, Tshering Thar

Source: Compiled by the Author.

Meanwhile, the 14th NPC elected in March 2023 has 33 Tibetan members out of its total membership of 2,977. However, it only has two Tibetan cadres, Lobsang Gyaltsen, and Lobsang Jigme Thupten, as members of its 175 — member strong Standing Committee. The 13th NPC (2018-2023) had 33 representatives out of 2926 and three members — Pema Choling, Lobsang Gyaltsen, and Lobsang Jigme Thupten as members of the Standing Committee while the 12th NPC (2013-2018) had 32 Tibetan representatives out of 2987

and two members —Pema Choling and Lobsang Jigme Thubten Chökyi Nyima, the 6th Jamyang Shepa from the Labrang Monastery and Lobsang Jigme Thupten — of the Standing Committee. Thus, in the last one decade, in the NPC, the representation of Tibetan cadres has remained stable.

Similarly, in the CPPCC, the representation of Tibetan cadres has remained stable since 2012. The 14th CPPCC (2023-2028) has 44 Tibetan members out of 2,169 with five officials as members of its Standing Committee- Tashi Dawa, Dorji Rabten, Che Dalha, the 7th lama Thupten Khedup, and the 11th Panchen Lama, Chökyi Gyalpo; Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai is one of 23 vice-chairpersons of the institution. The 13th CPPCC (2018-2023) had 38 members out of 2,223 and 4 Sanding Committee members out of 300 while the 12th CPPCC (2013-2018) had 42 members out of 2,237 and five Standing Committee members out of 300 with Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai one of 23 vice-chairpersons. Thus, there is no change in both numbers as well as the political importance of Tibetan cadres in CPPCC.

Out of aforementioned 44 members of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC (2023-2028), 11 are Abbots and living Buddhas of monasteries which include Lobsang Jampa, the 39th Drigung Kagyu Living Buddha of Drigung Kagyu Sect (one of the eight lineages of Kagyupa sect) in the Drigung Monastery; Tashi Gyaltzen, Deputy Director of the Management Committee of the Sera Monastery in Lhasa and vice president of Buddhist Association of China; Jampa Lasang, the Khenpo of Drepung Monastery, Lhasa; the Deputy Director of Management Committee of Shakya Monastery', Sa'gya County, Shigatse; Gedhum Chokyi lama, the 11th Panchen Lama; Lama Lodro Gyansto, the 9th Hukuktu Living Buddha, 7th Taksang Tulk Garang Thubten Lashay Gyatso from Taksang Monastery in Dzoerge, Ngaba county in Sichuan, 3rd Shangen Tulku, Phalden Dorje from Litang in Sichuan, and Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai, the 11th Qamdo Pagbalha Hutuktu, Golden Jampaling Monastery, Qamdo, TAR. These leaders have been part of CPPCC at local, provincial, or national level for years, and therefore, their continuation as well as the overall Tibetan representation in the National Committee of the CPPCC shows that appointments in such institutions are targeted at co-option, as the founding mission of CPPCC has been.

Bringing religious clergy within Party-state's institutional fold serves varied purposes. Religious figures can help the party interpret and provide alternative explanations and narratives of Tibetan Buddhism and history, and even justification for the Party-state's efforts to nominate next Dalai Lama. In addition, by giving state patronage and incentives, the state attempts to bring in the idea that not only has the Chinese state historically been the main stakeholder in approving reincarnation but also that there is no single preeminent religious figure in Tibetan Buddhism.

Other religious leaders include Tenzin Thinly, who is abbot and Living Buddha of Tsomon Ling Temple, one of the four royal regency colleges in Lhasa with a history of co-option by the Chinese during the Qing period. He has served in senior positions in the CPPCC of TAR for the longest time since the 1980s. Lama Lodoe Gyansto was approved as the 9th

Hutuktu Living Buddha of the Lamo Dechen Monastery (Gelugpa sect) by the Qinghai Government and since then has served in CPPCC from country levels to national level. Amchok Rinpoche, who returned back to China from India and the Living Buddha of Galden Jampaling Monastery in Qamdo, is also a member of the 14th National Committee of CPPCC; official media has profiled him as an ideal Tibetan monk.

In addition, at the TAR level, the Samding Dorje Phagmo, the highest female reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism, from Samding Monastery and Lobsang Jampa, the 39th Drigung Chungtsang Living Buddha of the Drigung Kagyu Sect are members of the CPPCC. Sangye Pema Rinchen, the 10th Living Buddha of the Lithang Chöde Monastery in Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, is the Deputy Director of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan and someone who will likely play an influential role for a long time to come.

Tibet Aid Cadres: Who Are They and What Do They Do?

As part of the Tibet Aid Program, which was started in the early 1980s, several hundred cadres from affluent provinces serve in counties, prefecture, and provincial levels where their parent province/organization is a partner for a tenure ranging from one to three years (Zhihu 2022; Song et al 2019). Cadres coming to TAR under the Tibet Aid Program are governed by the Central Organization Department and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (Zhihu 2022).

Usually, the leader of a batch of Tibet-aid program cadres from an SoE, central department or province/provincial level cities take up leading positions at prefecture or provincial level. Thus, at least one of Deputy Party Secretaries, Mayors or Deputy Mayors is a Tibet Aid cadre at prefecture levels at present. The number of cadres coming to work in TAR are in the hundreds per batch with a leader, and one or more deputy leaders; generally, leaders of a batch are assigned higher position and other cadres take up various lower-level positions.

Cadres are usually selected by their parent organ based on their technical, professional and management skills and experiences to align with the projects in TAR undertaken by them. Every partner province, central department, and State-owned Enterprises (SoEs) send a batch comprising hundreds of cadres each year. As a result, the total number of cadres who have served in TAR since the inception of the program in the early 1990s is in the thousands. Table 6 provides examples of leading Tibet Aid cadre serving in TAR as of today.

These cadres look after departments responsible for handling the portfolios concerning their focus. For example, a batch focusing on poverty alleviation has a leader in key position in finance or related departments. Usually, these cadres leave their office once their batch's term is over and go back to their

parent organ. However, some cadres stay and get promoted in the regional government. Wang Qiang, the Mayor of Lhasa since 2022, is a prominent example of a Tibet Aid cadre's promotion within the region. Moreover, given that these officials manage key portfolios at prefecture levels, their presence makes a huge difference in policy implementation and feedback at the local level.

Table 6
Tibet Aid Cadres in Key Positions in TAR (as of June 2023)

Name in English	Chinese Name	Current Positions
Mei Fangquan	梅方权	Deputy Mayor of Qamdo City People's Government
Yu Guoqiang	于国强	Deputy Mayor of Nagchu Municipal Committee
Han Xuejun	韩学军	Deputy Secretary of Ngari Prefecture Committee of Tibet Autonomous Region
Liu Guangming	刘光明	Executive Deputy Mayor of Nyingchi People's Government and Deputy Party Secretary of Nyingchi Communist Party Committee
Mao Dongjun	毛东军	Executive Deputy Mayor of Lhasa
Chen Jing	陈静	Deputy Party Secretary of the Lhasa Municipal Party Committee
Wang Qiang	王强	Mayor of Lhasa
Yang Chang	杨昶	Deputy Party Secretary of the Shannan Municipal Party Committee
Wang Yunqing	王云清	Deputy Secretary of the Shannan Municipal Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region and Executive Deputy Mayor, Shannan People's Government
Shan Qiang	单强	Deputy Secretary of the Shannan Municipal Party Committee and executive deputy mayor
Li Xiuwu	李修武	Director of the Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the Tibet Autonomous Region
Liu Guangming	刘光明	Executive Deputy Mayor, Nyingchi
Shi Yubin	史育斌	Deputy Mayor of Lhasa
Zhang Wancai	张万财	Deputy Mayor of Shigaste
Liang Nanyu	梁楠郁	Deputy Mayor of Nagqu
Pan Wenqing	潘文卿	Deputy Mayor of Lhasa
Wang Mingzhe	王明哲	Deputy Secretary of the Lhasa Municipal Party Committee & Executive Deputy Mayor of Lhasa Municipal People's Government
Zhang Jianhua	张建华	Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of Qamdo City & Executive Deputy Mayor
Chen Geng	陈耕	Deputy Secretary of Shigatse Municipal Party Committee and Executive Deputy Mayor of Shigatse

Source: Compiled by the Author.

Who has Greater Chances for Promotion? Major Factors and Promising Leaders

This section discusses whether there is a pattern to official promotions – in other words, what factors lead to favourable chances for promotion of an average official? The career trajectories of officials show that three factors, namely, political loyalty, experience of working in TAR or non-TAR Tibetan areas and Tibet Aid cadre status are common to most of the officials from Deputy Mayor and above. However, these same factors may not be applicable to Tibetan officials in their chances for promotion at the central level; Tibetan ethnic cadres rarely get promoted to state institutions at central level other than to

institutions dealing ethnic minority and religious affairs though there are some low-level transfers or postings for shorter periods in non-Tibetan areas. In general, their career trajectory leads them into the CPPCC and NPC at the central level, which are largely ceremonial positions. On the other hand, Han officials have better chances of getting promoted to the national level as well as in other provinces. This view is widely shared among China watchers. Five Party Secretaries of TAR since Hu Jintao's tenure in TAR (1988-1992) have served in top positions nationally while several other officials have been promoted to higher positions in other provinces and at the central level.

In addition to these three factors, there are Han officials who are parachuted into TAR due to their special skills at a relatively young age, usually in their 40s and 50s. These skills are expertise in economics, in science & technology – including fields like hydrology and engineering – and in ideology. A few prominent examples of such officials are given in Table 7. Chen Yongqi, for example, comes to Tibet from a fairly senior previous position – he was deputy governor of Shanxi before his appointment as Executive Vice Chairman of TAR. Similarly, Fu Yongbo's appointment as Executive Deputy Mayor of Nyingchi reinforces the idea emerging from the patterns in these appointments that the Party-state is bringing young leaders at provincial level with background in economics, science, and engineering; Fu has a PhD in mechanical engineering from Tsinghua University which is also the source of a prominent clique in the Chinese leadership under Xi (Bo 2017; Tsai and Liao 2021).

Table 7
Leaders at Provincial Level with Economics and Science & Engineering Background Transferred from Elsewhere in TAR (as of June 2023)

Name in English	Chinese Name	Year of Birth	Educational Background	Current Positions	Previous Immediate Position
Chen Yongqi	陈永奇	1967	PhD in Economics	Executive Vice-Chairman of the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region	Deputy Governor of Shanxi
Fu Yongbo	符永波	1981	PhD in Mechanical Engineering, Tsinghua University	Executive Deputy Mayor of Nyingchi city	Dongfeng Motors
Li Hongjun	李宏军	1979	PhD in Science and Engineering	Secretary-General of TAR Government	New Appointment
Lai Jiao	赖蛟	1972	Engineering as well as economics from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore	Head of the Organization Department of TAR	Member of the Standing Committee of the Party Committee of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
Lang Fukuan	郎福宽	1966	PhD in Finance	Vice-Chairmen of the People's Government of Tibet Autonomous Region	Party Secretary of the party group of the Finance Department of the Tibet Autonomous Region
Ren Wei	任维	1976	PhD in Thermal Engineering (Tsinghua University)	a member of Standing Committee of TAR Party Committee and Executive Vice-Chairman of TAR	Deputy Manager of the Datang Power Corporation

Wang Yong	王勇	1972	PhD in Economics	Vice Chairman of the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region	Director, Guizhou Provincial State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission
Wang Qiang	王强	1967	PhD in economics	Mayor of Lhasa	Tibet Aid cadre

Source: Compiled by the Author.

Among the ethnic Tibetan cadres, Phurbu Dhondup (b. 1972), the Party Secretary of Lhasa City and member of the Tibet party standing committee is young as well as holds important positions. He is among the important leaders of Tibetan ethnicity, who has served as vice chairperson of TAR government, Party Secretary of Qamdo, Mayor and Deputy Party Secretary of Shannan. He is also an alternate member of the 20th Central Committee. Another young Tibetan cadre is Cai Rangtai, the youngest deputy governor in Qinghai appointed in 2021. Ding Younghui (b. 1970), the current Deputy Mayor of Nyingchi City People's Government and Sonam Tashi (Ch. 索那塔杰) (b. 1975), the Deputy Mayor of Shigaste are other Tibetan cadres with experiences in working in TAR and expertise in science/geology and economics respectively.

Greater number of Tibetan ethnic cadres are appointed at positions at the local-level propaganda departments and UFWD while Han cadres dominate at the provincial level. A plausible explanation for this division can be that Tibetan cadres are useful in conveying messages in the language people understand and know local conditions better and hence, are generally preferred in positions at the local level.

Conclusion

The overall picture of the representation of ethnic Tibetan cadres in TAR as well as at the national-level Party-state organs is that Tibetan representation is declining while a greater number of Han officials are holding positions at provincial and prefecture levels. However, the decline is not uniform across all three levels of Party-state hierarchy analysed in this study. While at the central level, Tibetan representation in the NPC and CPPCC remains stable in the period since 2012, their importance both in numbers well as political importance has slightly declined in the CC.

In other state institutions at the center, Tibetan officials are serving either as lower-level bureaucrats or in organs that deal with ethnic and religious issues such the State Administration of Ethnic Affairs. This situation has not changed from the period before 2012. Apart from central government institutions and Tibetan areas outside TAR, Cui Yuying (崔玉英), born in Bome County in Nyingchi and brought up in Changle, Shandong, is the only Tibetan cadre who has served outside Tibetan areas in recent times, first in Fujian provincial CPPCC and then as one of the vice ministers of the Central UFWD. Currently,

she is the Deputy Director of the Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese Committee of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC.

At the provincial level, Standing Committees and Party Committees reflect the larger changes taking place at a much greater pace below the provincial level. Thus, prefecture-level changes are a better guide to understanding the factors as well as the pace of changes in leadership composition that provincial-level Party-state organs have started to reflect.

Talking about the major factors causing these changes in representation in favour of Han ethnic cadres, Tibet Aid program, the Party-state's focus on testing cadres in difficult conditions for future promotions and bringing in more Han officials with special skills in the economic, and science & technology domains are major factors driving increasing number of Han officials at leading positions. However, the pace of shifts in representation should also be attributed to the larger tendency of the Party-state to appoint greater number of Han officials particularly at below provincial levels.

By looking at trends in the last one decade, it seems plausible that Han officials will dominate all levels of leadership in TAR as China focuses heavily on stabilizing Tibetan areas and strengthening border regions by developing physical and digital infrastructure, settling nomad populations, and running ideological campaigns to reinforce a sense of Chinese nationhood. One might also add that in given concerns over political stability in the post-Dalai Lama period, the Party-state is trying hard to co-opt as well as coerce Tibetan religious leaders to strengthen its claim to adjudicate the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. All these factors make it natural that Chinese policymakers will continue to appoint Han officials to key positions and in large numbers in Tibetan areas.

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