

# »Those Who Strive to Rip the Motherland Apart Must Perish«— Reactions to 2008 Tibet Protests

Katarína Čavojská

The Internet has become an important tool for communication, not only for spreading information that does not appear in conventional media, but also for connecting like-minded people and organizing their actions. Even in the People's Republic of China (PRC), where the Internet is monitored and censored, it serves as a platform for self-expression and bottom-up activism. The rise of bottom-up networks, public sphere and civil society is what Western analysts and media hoped for when the Internet found its way to China—it was believed that the Internet as a gateway to varied sources of information would help to by-pass official propaganda, spread freedom (as it allows to react immediately and voice a multitude of opinions, contrary to propaganda that used to work only with one approved opinion in one direction—from propaganda creators to the consumers), and enhance democratization (owing to its participatory nature). However, »the Chinese Party-State has embraced the new technologies, utilizing them as new mediums for propaganda work and essential components of China's modern economy. The Party-State has dealt with the potential dangers of the technology by means of a carefully constructed system of regularly updated controls«. <sup>1</sup>This does not mean that there is no grassroots activism possible in China—bottom-up networks do exist among China's 420

1 Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 125.

million Internet users.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, their aims, motivations and achievements are not always exactly what was hoped for.

### *Online Nationalism*

Nationalist views and actions expressed online are outcomes of constant interactions, conflicts and adjustments taking place among popular nationalism (*dazhong minzuzhuyi* 大眾民族主義), the nationalism of intellectuals (*zhishifenzi minzuzhuyi* 知識份子), and official nationalism (*guanfang minzuzhuyi* 官方).<sup>3</sup> Both intellectuals<sup>4</sup> and government bodies<sup>5</sup> may actively create and disseminate nationalist discourse, while the role of popular nationalism lies (according to Wang Jun) more in the consumption of nationalist discourse, its spread, or in voicing popular opinion. The importance of popular nationalism lies in its size—when united by a common interest, Chinese Internet users constitute a formidable force. However, it is not always possible for the Chinese government to pull the strings—netizens may be able to challenge the state monopoly over the creation of nationalist discourse and policies, and negotiate their own vision of

2 China Internet Network Information Center, »Internet Statistics—Internet Fundamental Data (By June 30, 2010)« <cnnic.net.cn/en/index/00/index.htm> (June 23rd, 2011).

3 Categories by Wang Jun 王軍, »Shixi dangdai Zhongguo de wangluo minzuzhuyi« 試析當代中國的網絡民族主義 [A Tentative Analysis of Contemporary Chinese Online Nationalism], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* 世界經濟與政治 2/2006, 5–6.

4 'Intellectuals' may include online disseminators of nationalist ideas who try and influence directly the thinking of consumers, researchers whose works inspire or enrich popular discourse on nationalism, or people who actively create websites dedicated to spreading and defending their idea of nationalism or attack websites with content they disagree with (Wang Jun, »Shixi dangdai Zhongguo de wangluo minzuzhuyi«, 5).

5 Official nationalism does not only manifest itself online via state-run websites or other channels of state-approved information, it also incorporates blocking or closing down inconvenient websites and censorship practices, as they provide the opportunity to understand what is currently considered unacceptable (see Wang Jun, »Shixi dangdai Zhongguo de wangluo minzuzhuyi«, 6). I would also include *wu mao dang* 五毛黨 into this category as well because they are supposed to stir discourse in an officially-approved direction (allegedly, the CCP has bloggers and discussants on its payroll to spread the official line, and *5 mao* is the fee they receive per comment).

nationalism (the process of negotiation is a fairly democratic and non-hegemonic one, with users formulating their opinions and exchanging views freely<sup>6</sup>).

Chinese netizens have proved several times that they were able to respond actively and autonomously when they felt seriously threatened and considered official protection of their interests insufficient, thus promoting and negotiating their own vision of nationalist policy. The type of response varied with each case. In 1996, during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Atlanta, Bob Costas, NBC commentator, voiced suspicion that Chinese athletes used doping. Chinese students in the US protested and demanded an apology. However, NBC did not respond. Chinese students mobilized compatriots around the globe and collected capital for further promotion of their aim, the realization of which was entrusted to an executive committee for strategic planning and negotiation. The committee consulted lawyers and decided to voice their protest via a paid advertisement in *The Washington Post*. NBC finally expressed their apology.<sup>7</sup> In this case, citizens acted independently and purely on a civil basis (they were not trying to engage the government to solve the issue), they raised awareness of the issue, mobilized a great number of like-minded people to support their case, and solved the issue with the help of paid professionals.

Nevertheless, in another cases, activists eventually tried to engage the government, or even questioned the government position and proposed an alternative solution. I will use Sino-Japanese relations as an example. Even today, the situation is still sensitive due to past conflicts<sup>8</sup> and territorial disputes,<sup>9</sup> and little is needed to provoke resentment among Chinese people. In 2005, a series of anti-Japanese protests swept China, caused by biased Japanese history textbooks, and the Japanese bid for permanent membership on the UN Security Council. However, the anger of Chinese netizens was not aimed at Japan solely—Chinese government-controlled media were criticized for not reporting on patriotic

6 Liu Shih-diing, »China's Popular Nationalism on the Internet. Report on the 2005 anti-Japan Network Struggles«, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7, 1 (2006), 150.

7 Xu Wu, *Chinese Cyber Nationalism. Evolution, Characteristics, and Implications*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 29–31.

8 Typically, Japanese attitudes towards its WWII history recurrently cause upheaval among the Chinese public. For example, visits to Yasukuni Shrine, where convicted WWII war criminals lie buried among Japanese national heroes, by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (b1942, Prime Minister 2001–06) used to be such a bone of contention.

9 Japan, the PRC and the Republic of China on Taiwan all claim sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands/Diaoyu dao 釣魚島; the PRC and Japan agreed on the joint development of local resources in the 1970s.

protests which took place in cities around China and unreliable coverage (when compared to other sources of information), and netizens actually accused the government of not protecting the fundamental interests of the Chinese people, as it claimed to.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese government tried to stop the demonstrations by denouncing the protests as illegal riots, but this just made netizens to scold the government instead of Japan. One netizen on Strong Nation Forum (*Qiangguo luntan* 強國論譚) explained:

[...] One of the main factors of the escalation of the June Fourth student strikes [in 1989] was the labeling of the protests as anti-Party and anti-socialism by the editorial [of *People's Daily*] on April 26th. Has the Shanghai municipal government<sup>[11]</sup> ever tried to figure out the consequence of the report?<sup>12</sup>

In the following chapters, I shall examine the nature of nationalist discourse on the Internet over the 2008 protests in Tibet and subsequent global criticism of the handling of the affair. In this case, Chinese netizens widely supported the government position and tried to defend what they perceived as their country's sovereignty and autonomy. A prominent example is the story of Grace Wang (Wang Qianyuan 王千源).<sup>13</sup> She won the sympathy of some netizens, who interpreted her gesture as fight for freedom and democracy. However, others condemned her as traitor to the nation (*Hanjian* 漢奸) for not supporting Chinese interests.<sup>14</sup>

### 2008 Unrests in Tibet

The Tibetan community in PRC had been restless before March 2008. Apart from long-term internal factors (the harsh internal policy towards Tibet, a limited religious freedom, limited impact on the policy-making process, etc.), certain external factors arose and might have contributed to the open manifesta-

10 Liu Shih-diing, »China's Popular Nationalism on the Internet«, 145-149.

11 Protests were denounced by an editorial published in *Liberation Daily* / *Jiefang ribao* 解放日報, the Shanghai Communist Party Municipal Committee's official newspaper, on April 25, 2005.

12 Quoted from Liu Shih-diing, »China's Popular Nationalism on the Internet«, 148.

13 A Chinese student of Duke University who tried to enhance mutual understanding between two opposing camps—a group of Chinese students promoting Chinese government positions and a demonstration supporting Tibetan independence, when these two protests were taking place simultaneously on April 9, 2008.

14 Netizens got hold of her US address and telephone number, as well as her parents' address in China, and she and her family faced insults, threats and even attacks.

tion of resentment. The upcoming Olympic Games in Beijing (held in August 2008) brought China under international scrutiny, which resulted in the criticism of human rights abuse and of Chinese policy towards Tibet. Moreover, the Dalai Lama's activities were becoming more pronounced as the Olympics drew nearer.<sup>15</sup> These circumstances might have given rise to the impression that the »situation in Tibet plays an important role in Western powers' policies towards China again.«<sup>16</sup>

In October 2007, Chinese police detained five monks who were celebrating the Dalai Lama being awarded by the US Congressional Gold Medal. In March 2008, they were still in detention. The events themselves were set off on March 10th when 300 monks from Drepung (*bras spungs*) monastery tried to march into Lhasa and file a petition for their release—they were stopped by the police and 50 alleged leaders were detained. From March 11th onwards, Drepung monastery was under siege, nobody was let in or out and food and water supplies were blocked. Other Tibetan monasteries, in Lhasa as well as in Sichuan Province, protested and subsequently were put under siege. The situation escalated on March 14th when monks from Ramoche monastery in Lhasa opposed to the police presence and local Tibetan people joined them in the brawl. Police withdrew from the area as the crowd burnt shops and houses.<sup>17</sup> Similar unrests took place at Labrang (*bla brang*) Monastery in Gansu province on March 15th and at Ngaba (*rnga ba*) in Sichuan on March 16th, protesters burnt shops and damaged cars, demanding Tibetan independence and the Dalai Lama's return. Similar actions took place in regions with Tibetan settlement for weeks before Chinese troops succeeded in putting them out.<sup>18</sup>

Paramilitary troops suppressed the unrest with force. The Chinese account of events stated that no lethal weapons were deployed, while Tibetan media in

15 In 2007, the Dalai Lama met with Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and US President George W. Bush when the Dalai Lama was awarded with the Congressional Gold Medal.

16 Martin Slobodník, »Proteste in Tibet« [Protests in Tibet], *China heute* 27,3 (2008), 75.

17 In Lhasa alone, 18 people lost their lives, more than 380 were injured, and material damage was estimated at 245 million RMB. Source: »Lasa 3·14 dazaqiangshao shijian zhenxiang« 拉薩 3·14 打砸搶燒事件真相 [True Picture of Beating, Smashing, Looting and Burning in Lhasa on March 14th] (2008) <news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-03/21/content\_7836117.htm> (June 16, 2011).

18 Warren W. Smith Jr., *Tibet's Last Stand? The Tibetan Uprising of 2008 and China's Response* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010).

India reported 80 victims among Tibetans and many others injured.<sup>19</sup> From March 15th, Lhasa was under tight control and local authorities searched for protesters, detaining more than 1000 people. In the aftermath of protests, Tibetan monks and the public were subjected to patriotic education and forced to denounce the Dalai Lama and voice support for Chinese government policy. To ease international pressure, the Chinese government agreed to resume formal talks with the Dalai Lama's envoys (these took place in May to July and in November 2008). However, the talks did not yield any results.

### *The Chinese Concept of Sino-Tibetan Relations*

According to Chinese propaganda, the most prominent reason why China is entitled to govern Tibet is the history of Chinese rule over Tibet. Official Chinese historiography claims that Tibet used to be a part of China in the past, which is supposed to make Chinese rule legitimate even though the ties upon which Tibet became incorporated within China did not last.<sup>20</sup> Second to history is the issue of good governance—Chinese propaganda contrasts the region's economic development under CCP rule with poverty and the cruel feudal practices of the past.<sup>21</sup> The image of a cruel past is used to discredit the Dalai Lama and picture him as a power-hungry feudal who only seeks to restore his former rule. A *Xinhua* agency report turned attention towards former Western

19 »Fact Sheet: Tibetan Deaths Under China's Crackdown since March 2008« (2009) <[www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=760&articletype=flash&rmenuid=morenews&tab=1](http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=760&articletype=flash&rmenuid=morenews&tab=1)> (June 28, 2011).

20 For comparison between the Chinese interpretation and Tibetan accounts of history see John Powers, *History as Propaganda*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), or Elliot Sperling, *The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004), <[www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/PS007.pdf](http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/PS007.pdf)> (January 21, 2010).

21 Wang Lixiong offers an overview of Chinese economic help to Tibet (financial allocations, low import duty, exemption from tax for farmers and herdsmen, infrastructure projects, health care improvement and higher literacy rates), which resulted in economic growth of the region. Wang Lixiong, »The "Tibetan Question": Nation and Religion«, in *Exploring Nationalisms of China: Themes and Conflicts*, ed. by C. X. George Wei and Liu Xiaoyuan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 151–172. However, the distribution of profit might be uneven—A *Financial Times* article suggests that those who draw most profit from government policies in Tibet are mainly ethnic Han and Hui, while Tibetans often stay excluded (Geoff Dryer, »Beijing Bets on Economy to Stabilise Tibet«, *Financial Times* Feb 17, 2010).

colonial powers which, once unable to gain Tibet by military power, »began to build up their influence among the upper-class elements of Tibet, instigating them to oppose the Chinese government in a bid to separate Tibet from China«, as Hu Yan 胡岩, a professor from the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, put it.<sup>22</sup>

Chinese media coverage of the March 2008 events differed from Western reports<sup>23</sup>: Chinese media focused on the stories of innocent Han and Hui Chinese and the cruelty of attacks, constantly emphasizing that these actions were nothing but violent crime, endangering national unity and peaceful development.<sup>24</sup> Chinese police and paramilitary forces allegedly responded in accordance with the law and adequately to the situation. Media quoted high-level state and provincial officials' statements to point out the background of these actions—in their version, the violence was committed by a 'very minor group of people' (*ji shaoshu ren* 極少數人) who acted on behalf of 'foreign anti-China forces' (*guowai fan Hua shili* 國外反華勢力), 'Tibetan independence separatist forces both within and outside China' (*jing nei wai »Zang du« fenlie shili* 境內外“藏獨”分裂勢力),<sup>25</sup> or directly the 'Dalai Lama clique' (*Dalai jituan* 達賴集團).<sup>26</sup>

22 »British Invasions Probed as Root Cause of Tibetan Separatism«, *China Daily* Apr 8, 2008.

23 Western media reported on unrests in the broader context of the Sino-Tibetan issue—the means by which Tibet became part of China and the PRC deficiency in respecting human rights and religious freedoms were mentioned. But what provoked resentment towards Western media among Chinese was publishing pictures that had been tampered with (e.g. displaying intimidating presence of Chinese paramilitary troops while cutting out groups of armed Tibetans damaging and burning cars and shops), and incorrectly labeled pictures (a picture of Nepalese police suppressing Tibetan demonstration labeled as if it took place in the Tibetan Autonomous Region) etc., as pointed out in »Bufen Xifang meiti paozhi bushi Xizang baodao« 部份西方媒體炮製不實西藏報道 [Some Western Media Put Together Unfaithful Reports on Tibet] (Mar 21st, 2008) <news.sina.com.cn/c/p/2008-03-21/232315198897.shtml> (Jan 25, 2010).

24 For illustration see *Xinbua* report »Waijiaobu fayanren jiu Lasa fasheng da za qiang shao yanzhong baoli fanzui shijian da jizhe wen« 外交部發言人就拉薩發生打砸搶燒嚴重暴力犯罪事件答記者問 [Spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Answers Journalists' Questions About the Serious Violent and Criminal Acts of Beating, Smashing, Looting and Burning that Took Place in Lhasa] (Mar 17, 2008) <news.xinhuanet.com/world/2008-03/17/content\_7809132.htm> (May 27, 2011).

25 For illustration see *Xinbua* report »Xizang zizhi qu zhuxi jiu Lasa da za qiang shao shijian da Zhong-wai jizhe wen« 西藏自治區主席就拉薩打砸搶燒嚴重暴力犯罪事件答中外記者問 [The Chairman of Tibetan Autonomous Region Answers the Questions of Chinese and Foreign

*Reactions of Chinese Netizens*

Netizens' reactions reflected the above-mentioned opinions. But before I proceed to the reactions themselves, I would like to bring specific features of the Chinese Internet space into focus. The Internet is controlled and censored in China, and control is performed by variety of means. Servers or websites with potentially dangerous content are blocked entirely (the list of blocked websites is constantly changing; no message specifying the reason why the site in question is blocked appears when user tries to load the page—there is only an error message stating that the page cannot be displayed or is currently unavailable, that the server is taking too long to respond, or that the web site might be experiencing technical difficulties, thus evoking the impression that the page is actually not blocked).<sup>27</sup> The government also blocks certain sensitive words ('Tiananmen Massacre' *Tian'anmen guangchang da tusha* 天安門廣場大屠殺, »Falun Dafa« 法輪大法, 'Free Tibet' *ziyou Xizang* 自由西藏, or, recently, 'Jasmine Revolution' *moli geming* 茉莉革命<sup>28</sup>), it might be impossible to load a website with such content (unless it is a recognized part of official propaganda), and if anyone tries to post a comment containing such words, it will be reviewed by a censor who might block the comment if found inappropriate (there are general guidelines, yet it is always down to a particular censor to decide whether to allow

Journalists About the Indicents of Beating, Smashing, Looting and Burning in Lhasa] (Mar 17, 2008) <[news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-03/17/content\\_7808998.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-03/17/content_7808998.htm)> (May 27, 2011).

26 For illustration, see the *Xinhua* report: »Wen Jiabao: Xizang zizhiqū zhuxi jiu Lasa da za qiang shao shijian shi Dalai jituan you zuzhi, you xumou, jingxin cehua he baodong qilai de« 溫家寶：西藏自治區主席就拉薩打砸搶燒事件是達賴集團有組織、有蓄謀、精心策劃和暴動起來的 [Wen Jiabao: Acts of Beating, Smashing, Looting and Burning in Lhasa Were Organized, Premeditated, Carefully Planned and Incited by the Dalai Lama Clique] (Mar 18, 2008) <[news.xinhuanet.com/video/2008-03/18/content\\_7813104.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/2008-03/18/content_7813104.htm)> (May 27, 2011).

27 There is means of overcoming this barrier—for example, websites like <[www.freetoview.com](http://www.freetoview.com), [www.d-tunnel.com](http://www.d-tunnel.com)> and the likes connect to a server using non-PRC IP address, thus allowing to load 'forbidden' websites; according to my personal observations, Chinese population of netizens is acquainted with such means.

28 »Jasmine Revolution«, a series of revolutionary movements in Northern Africa early in 2011, which inspired Chinese netizens to organize demonstrations and demand more liberal public environment, less censorship, livelihood improvement, and even changes in the political system.

a comment or not, so similar cases might be judged differently).<sup>29</sup> And, allegedly, the Chinese government also has some bloggers and comment posters<sup>30</sup> on its payroll to make sure the official line appears and keeps resonating on the Internet, or to moderate the discussion and steer it in a desirable direction. These are the constraints imposed on the Chinese Internet space that might considerably influence the content of discussions, especially when it comes to such a sensitive issue as Tibet and undoubtedly the question of national unity. Therefore, we need to bear in mind that Internet discussions mirror not only and not exclusively the actual views of netizens, but also a considerable portion of official propaganda, and that if no critical or opposing voice appears, this does not mean that there is none—it might also mean that it has been erased.<sup>31</sup>

I decided to examine two Chinese forums—Strong Nation Forum (*Qiangguo luntan*) and discussions on *Sina* (*Xinlang* 新浪). To illustrate the above-mentioned disparity between Chinese and Western discourse on the Tibetan issue, I add a short analysis of a discussion that took place on *The New York Times* forum.<sup>32</sup>

Strong Nation Forum<sup>33</sup> is run by the news service portal *Renminwang* 人民網, which is an online edition of *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日報), owned by the CCP and used as a propaganda tool.

This forum is constantly monitored and ‘cleaned up’ by full-time employees following orders from the Central Propaganda Division. It is heavily penetrated by pro-government users, including professional netwriters (*wangluo xieshou* 網絡寫手) who receive stipends from the authorities. As a result, the discussions on display are less confrontational and almost always close to the party line.<sup>34</sup>

I expected opinions close to the official line as the forum as such has the potential to attract this type of users. I included the comments sorted according to the keywords ‘March 14 Incident’ (*sanyisi shijian* 3 · 14事件) and ‘beating,

29 On the regulation of Internet, see Wei Zha, «Unwelcome But Applicable Mission—Internet Censorship in China» (Louisiana State University, Theanship School of Mass Communication, 2007) <[www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/1/6/9/5/6/pages169562/p169562-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/6/9/5/6/pages169562/p169562-1.php)> (Dec 7, 2009), 12–25; and Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship*, 125–140.

30 The above-mentioned *wu mao dang*.

31 Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship*, 127–135.

32 Reactions to the article by Jim Yardley, «Simmering Resentments Led to Tibetan Backlash», *The New York Times* Mar 18, 2008; all comments are from Mar 18, 2008.

33 <[bbs1.people.com.cn/boardList.do?action=postList&boardId=1](http://bbs1.people.com.cn/boardList.do?action=postList&boardId=1)> (June 15, 2011).

34 Jack Linchuan Qiu, «Web Review: The Changing Web of Chinese Nationalism», *Global Media and Communication* 2,1 (2006), 125–128.

smashing, looting, and burning in Lhasa' (*Lasa da za qiang shao* 拉薩打砸搶燒), altogether I analyzed 207 posts.

*Sina*<sup>35</sup> is a privately-owned, commercial portal, and the fourth most frequently visited among PRC Internet users.<sup>36</sup> I chose this forum to get a sample of mainstream netizens' opinions (I expected a commercial portal to attract a greater variety of netizens than Strong Nation Forum which specializes in state affairs). As for the March 2008 unrest in Tibet, *Sina* opened a special section for commenting on this issue. At the time when this research was conducted,<sup>37</sup> there were about one million comments in a special section devoted to the issue; I analyzed 105 of them.<sup>38</sup>

I followed the comments on both forums. I am talking of comments, and not discussions, because there were hardly any dialogues or opinion clashes—on Strong Nation Forum, discussants were rather unanimous, while on *Sina*, there were just individual opinions with few people reacting to them. To make the outcome more exact I generated a list of opinions resonating in Chinese cyberspace,<sup>39</sup> then counted how many times respective opinion occurred in chosen discussion; when the post reflected more than one opinion, I listed it under several categories. I excluded posts that simply copied press statements or articles. On *Sina* forum, several posts were identical, even though posted by different user.

35 <www.sina.com>.

36 According to <www.alexa.com> in the spring 2010, when the data for this paper was being collected.

37 March 18, 2010.

38 Due to the great amount of posts, I decided to examine a certain number of the most appreciated (50) and least appreciated (55) posts (just in case netizens would not respond well to non-mainstream opinions; however, the views of events in both groups were similar, the only difference being the topic—the least appreciated posts dealt mainly with accounts of the unrests, number of victims, material damage, while the most appreciated are of later date, focus on trials with the accused leaders of unrests, Western leaders' reactions to the unrests or to the Tibetan problem as such, imprecise Western media, and even the faulty coverage of events and the Olympic torch relay.

39 I was working with the *Tengxun xinwen* 騰詢新聞 portal forum to generate a preliminary list; when working with *Sina* I found out that the issue has become interconnected with the Olympic torch relay so I added a few categories to reflect this situation.

Qiangguo luntan (*Strong Nation Forum*)

The leading motif reflecting the mood on this forum is simple »support for the motherland and strong *Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族«<sup>40</sup>—an opinion expressed in one third of all examined posts, closely followed by »the West does not wish China to be strong and will do everything to harm China« or »the unrest was provoked by the West«, seeing the US or Germany as imperialist countries trying to control the world order.<sup>41</sup> Some netizens even compared the present-day Western interference with Chinese affairs and criticism of certain Chinese practices to past humiliations, the ‘century of defeats’, and the ‘tragedy of the eight united armies’, seeing potential risks arising. They also linked Western support for Tibetan independence (as they perceived it) with support for Taiwan, accusing the West of plotting against China and trying to disrupt national unity, the worst of Chinese fears. But apart from anxiety, there was also pride in the progress China had made to change into a world superpower that is not to be bullied or taught how to manage its internal affairs.<sup>42</sup>

Nineteen postings (out of 207) attributed the unrests directly to the Dalai Lama<sup>43</sup> and believed that the action was planned and organized beforehand. Seven discussants maintained that the Dalai Lama was exploiting innocent and

40 Chinese state in a political sense—China as a union of 56 ethnic groups, the »citizens of China«. Cf. Masumi Matsumoto 松本真澄, *Zhongguo minzu zhengce zhi yanjiu* 中國民族政策之研究 [A Study on the Ethnic Policies of China; *Chūgoku minzoku seisaku no kenkyū*, 1999], tr. by Lu Zhonghui 魯忠慧 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2003), 2.

41 March 21st, 2008: »[...] The Dalai Lama and Chen Shuibian 陳水扁 [b1950, President of the ROC, Taiwan, 2000–08] should be killed with no mercy. US—beat them! You are scared because they seem strong and fight Iraq, they have already killed 5000 people there, what common Americans wish for is conquer it and then fight us! I think that the people of this country scares them, [...]. Fucking America is too much of a bully, even though our weapons cannot compare to theirs, for the sake of our future generations—let us settle this with them!«. (user Fadai Shibo 發呆師傅).

March 21st, 2008: »There will be no peace in Tibet until Germany is promptly punished.« (user Huangjia Daling 黃家大嶺).

42 March 21st, 2008: »Tibet is an internal issue of China, it does not matter what imperialism says, let’s hold our heads high, take up strict measures, secure peaceful life and satisfying work for people.« (not registered user, identified by IP address 58.42.142).

43 I am using the common English term »Dalai Lama« when translating the comments, even though netizens just write *Dalai* 達賴.

naive people to reach his own goals. Eight posters believed that those who participated in the unrest were inspired to do so by A. Merkel or G. W. Bush meetings with the Dalai Lama.<sup>44</sup> An equal number saw a connection between the Tibetan unrest and the Beijing Olympic Games, claiming that the protesters sought to discredit China internationally and felt that China being Olympic Games host was giving them the edge. Only five people considered the whole matter to be too complex and were reluctant to blame the Dalai Lama. Two discussants suggested that the resentment of protesters was caused by the economic imbalance (rich eastern China *vs* poor western provinces) rather than by external factors.

Chinese media coverage<sup>45</sup> emphasized the violence committed by Tibetan protesters, but strictly adhered to the government version about not deploying any lethal arms to suppress the unrest (the police was said not to have responded to violence with violence, *da bu huan shou* 打不還手), and screened a lot of material shot at the time when Chinese police temporarily left the zone of unrest. Such information gave rise to strong emotions among netizens. 21 discussants (over 10%) considered the police response to the unrest too soft and accused the government of being weak, one poster reasoned that the government did so only because it was overly sensitive towards the Tibetan community.<sup>46</sup> Nine discussants blamed the government for letting the situation escalate instead of giving consent to an immediate crackdown. The same number considered the government response to be adequate, this is, not too harsh.

There were no comments sympathizing with Tibetans. For 17 users, they were just criminals who should be dealt with severely, within the limits of the law (these netizens saw protest just as a simple case of breach of law). Eight reactions were more emotional, i.e. »They should all have been shot on the spot«

44 March 18, 2008: »Please let us not forget that these events happened just after the US President and high representatives of the Congress hosted the Dalai Lama. Are these events not interconnected?« (user with IP address 210.21.224).

45 The objectivity of Chinese media was challenged only in one case, and it was done very indirectly.

46 March 21st, 2008: »[...] Why should police and armed police forces protect order with their bare hands? Why not to order to strike back? Lenience only leads to grief, damage, bloodshed and doom. Why is the government of Tibet so benevolent towards criminals and ignores lives of people and their property? It is too tragic. Ethnic groups [*minzu* 民族] should be equal, favouring one group means discriminating against the other one.« (user with IP address 118.244.224).

etc. One netizen voiced his opinion that there was absolutely no reason for such actions, two posters labelled the unrest as terrorism.<sup>47</sup>

Some netizens reflected on special features that might have made it difficult for the Tibetan population to exist within *Zhonghua minzu*—two discussants pointed out that the most profuse factor causing problems in the region was religion (i.e., Tibetan Buddhism)—not simply because of beliefs as such but because of the political affiliation they came with; to resolve the issue they suggested uprooting religious beliefs.<sup>48</sup> Five posters were trying to dismiss any sympathy with the interests of Tibetan protesters (the unrests were started by monks) and the Dalai Lama by pointing out that Buddhism was strictly against violence in any form and that this proved that the Dalai Lama could be neither a religious leader, nor a symbol of peace and non-violence.

Several users on this forum recalled Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) and based their opinions on his thoughts. Eight argued that there was nothing like an ‘ethnic’ or ‘national problem’, because the problem lies in class struggle (»Minzu wenti jiushi jieji wenti.« 民族問題就是階級問題。), and the Dalai Lama—as a former aristocrat—only sought to restore his former privileges when fighting for an independent Tibet.<sup>49</sup> Fifteen users praised Mao Zedong for having been able to resist other countries and not let them interfere with Chinese affairs, implying that the current leadership allows too much foreign criticism and thus appears too weak.<sup>50</sup>

47 March 18, 2008: »Would General Secretary Hu [Hu Jintao 胡錦濤, b1942] dare to host bin Laden in the Great Hall of People? The American President Bush hosted Dalai Lama in the White House, this is the first time when the incumbent US President openly hosted Dalai Lama.« (user with IP address 222.89.187).

48 March 19, 2008: »Tibetans should be held farther from India. We should convert Tibetans to communism.« (user Jida Gaoshou 幾大高手).

49 March 29, 2008: »Is Tibetan independence [*Zang du* 藏獨] an issue of ethnicity [*minzu wenti*]? In my opinion, not at all, millions of liberated Tibetan serfs do not want to separate [from China], how could that be an issue of ethnicity? Unless we uproot pro-slavery governing class, how can the life of serfs improve?« (user »Yijiang chunshui xiang dong liu ye xiang xi liu« 一江春水向東流也向西流).

50 March 21st, 2008: »Could the leaders of our nation keep their heads high and shatter the conspirations of American imperialism, as our honoured Chairman Mao did?« (user with IP address 124.77.160).

Xinlang (*Sina*)

This forum appeared more homogenous than *Qiangguo luntan*<sup>51</sup>—topics were less varied, users were mainly expressing support for the nation, the Olympics, law and order, and blaming the West for harming Chinese interests.

The most prominent opinion was support for the homeland and nation (62 out of 105). Netizens again emphasized that to secure the existence of *Zhonghua minzu*, it was essential to keep China united.<sup>52</sup> When stressing the importance of strong and united China, especially in the context of international affairs, netizens often refer to Western imperialism, a century of defeats etc.—these were powerful symbols of the greatest dangers to the nation's survival China had ever faced. This offers an insight into the importance of Tibet to China—it is not solely a geopolitical issue, it is a matter of survival. The West was perceived as a negative force trying to hinder and subdue China. Therefore, any move Western states, media or citizens make, is scrutinized and criticized. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that almost 23 netizens expressed the view that the unrest was provoked by the West (and four accused 'anti-Chinese forces abroad', *guowai fan Hua shili*) because Western countries were allegedly scared of a strong China and would not detest any means to hinder Chinese progress (support for the Tibetan independence movement, Uighur separatism, Taiwan independence, human rights issues etc).<sup>53</sup>

51 Strong Nation Forum is a specialized space for discussing Chinese politics and 'the state of the nation' (*guoqing* 國情) while Sina is not politically-oriented and serves to diverse users who might not take special interest in the topics related to politics.

52 April 13, 2008: »A strong country means strong people, weak country means weak people, there is no strong country in the world that would not be united.« (user Xinlang Beijing wangyou 新浪北京網友).

April 13, 2008: »We cannot support any activities that could lead to ripping China apart.« (user Xinlang Hebei Hengshui wangyou 新浪河北衡水網友 新浪河北衡水网友).

53 March 20, 2008: »I hope that the broad masses of Tibetan compatriots can see it clearly: a small, power-hungry, narrow part of scum of society is seeking Tibet's independence, which is in total accordance with the revolting strategy of the US and England to rip our country apart. They will always fear strong China. A weak, divided China is what they want, they dream that the tragedy of China during the Opium Wars will be repeated! Only then can they ruthlessly insult and loot. The USSR used to be so strong that it became a global leader, its people were respected by all countries, including those big Western countries! And now, everyone can see what the standing of Russia is after splitting, it is being insulted and oppressed by the US and

The Dalai Lama is rarely mentioned, only three users actually blamed him for organizing the demonstrations. An equal number of posts believed Tibetan actions to be acts of terrorism.<sup>54</sup> In one case, protesters were blamed for acting against Buddhist conduct; once religion was marked as a source of all problems.<sup>55</sup> Just one user voiced the opinion that Tibetans had nothing to be dissatisfied with,<sup>56</sup> which is actually the kind of reasoning Chinese propaganda often uses: the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) enjoys preferential treatment, the government financially backs huge projects and subsidizes the budget of the region. Moreover, the TAR is exempt from the one-child policy, and altogether

the EU. And how about those tiny countries that became independent, you let the US base its military units right in your territory, now you have no influence over anything! Do you feel more respected now? [...] Please, you need to remember, unity and strong bonds within the nation are crucial to enhancing the prestige of China and getting rivals' respect.« (user Xinlang Sichuan Chengdu wangyou 新浪四川成都網友).

April 13, 2008: »To reach their own secret goals, England, France, the US and other capitalist and colonizing countries took up a role to actively react to, support and propagate Tibetan independence, the East Turkestan or Taiwan issue, not a single one amongst them wants China to be united and strong, [...]. Come to think of it, I feel sorry for those fools who go shouting about Tibetan independence, the East Turkestan or Taiwan issue. Other people use you as weapons to attack China, and yet you still wag your tails and cheer "well done", are you actually humans? [...]« (user Xinlang Chongqing wangyou 新浪重慶網友).

54 October 31st, 2009: »China ought to follow the US strategy of claiming bin Laden to be terrorist: claim the Dalai Lama is a terrorist and spread it around the globe, once we find out in which country he is, ask that country to extradite him, if it does not comply, then act like the U.S. when they attacked Afghanistan. Moreover, claim that the leadership of the country in question is a gang of terrorists and fight them as well.« (user Xinlang wangyou shouji yonghu 新浪網友手機用戶).

55 March 17, 2008: »I work in a Tibetan region, I encounter local Tibetans, they are simple and unsuspecting, I say so because their religious belief is extremely strong, really, due to this, when stirred by so-called living Buddhas, they would do anything without fear. Nowadays, the state advocates religious freedom, and this equipped some clerics with the opportunity to encourage and incite common folks to promote so-called Tibetan independence. We should definitely suppress such ripping of the motherland apart, ripping state apart without mercy, as they do not want to be Chinese, as they even throw ancestors and the state aside, so they should not be given the opportunity. This is to be suppressed by an iron hand, I am voting for this with both my hands.« (user Xinlang Gansu wangyou 新浪甘肅網友).

56 13 April, 2008: »Why? The country has done so much for Tibetans, and they still aren't satisfied?« (user Xinlang Anhui Wuhu wangyou 新浪安徽蕪湖網友).

it is supposed to give the impression that Tibetans enjoy the status of a favoured group. Curiously, the basic argument the Chinese government uses to legitimize its rule over Tibet (i.e. history) was only brought up by two users (or approximately 2%, the same portion as on Strong Nation Forum).

As for measures undertaken to get protests under control, Tibetan action was again not seen as something deserving support, understanding, sympathy, or even investigation and contemplation, but rather as a crime that was to be punished—18 users (out of the sample of 105) demanded strict punishment in accordance with the law, and nine proposed harsher and more stringent measures (the ‘eye for an eye’ approach). Eleven advocated suppressing the protests, saying that China solely decides how to deal with its internal problems (e.g. demonstrations and subsequent action against participants) as it sees fit, and no other country has the right to question it. Contrary to Western views, two discussants accused the government of having been too soft with the protesters. Five users accused Western media of insulting China with deceiving media coverage; four supported the Chinese government measures in dealing with foreign criticism and distorted media coverage, and two posters actually proposed a nation-wide boycott of Western companies (Carrefour, Airbus, KFC).

Sixteen users supported the Olympic Games, the hosting of which was seen as a matter of international prestige and an opportunity to show the progress and strength of China to the rest of the world. Therefore it was essential to ensure that everything would go as planned and nothing could disrupt it.<sup>57</sup> The Olympics were seen as a symbol of all endeavours of the nation, a mission to be completed, and of fighting hostile forces in the process.

### The New York Times

The status of Tibet receives the attention of political representatives, intellectuals and common people alike around the world, and this issue usually resonates whenever relations with PRC are mentioned. Therefore, I shall approach the topic of Chinese nationalism online also from another angle—in a global ‘arena’

57 April 13, 2008: »I am strongly opposed to any power working to disrupt the Olympics, China definitely must win. The Olympics must win, those who strive to rip the motherland apart must perish. China must win. Comrades! Gentlemen. Ladies. The 56 nations of China must unite and defeat all forces, oppose separatists together, China must win, the Olympics must win. Long live China, China must win.« (user Xinlang Guangdong Shenzhen Wangyou 新浪廣東深圳網友).

of opinions. I compare Chinese forums' content with discussions on foreign forums; in this case I have used comments from a discussion that took place on *The New York Times* (NYT) website. Foreign forums offered opinion clashes, which are rarely seen on rather unanimous Chinese forums. However, the free exchange of views did not lead to mutual understanding. The reports on demonstrations and other protests in media within and outside China were as different as if they had covered two different issues, and both sides—pro-Chinese and anti-Chinese/pro-Tibetan<sup>58</sup>—believed that their respective version was the only true story. The reasoning of both opinion camps followed a similar line. Both sides used history to argue (Tibet has been governed by China *vs* Tibet used to be independent before it was annexed), the good governance issue (Chinese policies favour Tibet's development and have improved Tibetan people's living conditions *vs* Tibetans suffer under Chinese rule), propaganda and manipulation (Westerners trust Western media whose reports are biased *vs* Chinese are blinded by CCP propaganda, or in one extreme case, all pro-Chinese comments were posted by Chinese government employees).

Chinese users<sup>59</sup> in more than one third of the cases (9 out of 26) accused the Western media of distorted reporting. Western media had lost the trust of Chinese readers who were consequently even less likely to take into account anything that differs from their point of view—they would dismiss it as a case of biased reporting.<sup>60</sup> This concept is hard to grasp for non-Chinese users: Chinese

58 Not all posters who claimed to be Chinese supported the Chinese government stance, and *vice versa*: There were non-Chinese users who approached the issue of protests from Chinese perspective. Non-Chinese users offered a wide variety of views, from a highly idealized picture of Tibet to very detailed knowledge about the historical background; they criticized the unreliability of NYT reports (NYT had no reporter stationed directly in Lhasa, so the articles expressed the authors' opinions rather than offering genuine insight), and that Tibet problems were getting either too little attention for an issue directly related to the PRC and human rights violations, or too much if compared with another regions in a similar situation.

59 Altogether, I worked with 26 postings whose authors claimed to be from the PRC. I did not include comments by foreign-born Chinese, or by Chinese from Singapore etc.

60 »As a student in the US, I think a more important question will be: how will the Chinese young generation look at the Western media and politics after this event? To me and most of people in China, and I would like to say including many in Tibet, the report of CNN/BBC/NYT on this event is simply full of bias and unjustified opinions. Even a little Google work can help more than that. Chinese BBSs are full of attacking threads to the violent protesters and Western media. It is quite different from the situation around 1989.

netizens genuinely believe that Tibet is a part of China and perceive Tibetans as deeply incorporated into the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*). On Chinese forums, no one supported the Tibetan fight for independence, which was seen as a strategy of the West to subdue China, whereas on the NYT forum there was just one user<sup>61</sup> who claimed to be Chinese and voiced support for Tibetans, while accusing the Chinese government of restricting freedom (for all PRC citizens, not just Tibetans), which he saw as the main cause of problems. Four Chinese users were dissatisfied with the lack of freedom under CCP rule,<sup>62</sup> but they did not openly approve of the Tibetan fight for Tibetan independence.

Nine Chinese comments were trying to point out that any other country would deal harshly with such riots (in one case, Tibetan protests were labeled as an act of terrorism). In almost one third of their posts (8), Chinese users emphasized that the history of Sino-Tibetan relations entitled China to govern Tibet—a remarkably high number, as on Chinese forums, only 2% of all postings claimed that China should rule Tibet on historical grounds. I believe that on Chinese forums, no one questions the Chinese right to rule Tibet, hence there is no need to explain this point. On forums outside China, users often side with Tibet, and pro-Chinese discussants feel the need to argue against it—using history (in eight cases) and good governance (five claimed that China liberated Tibetans from slavery, one point out that Tibet enjoys favourable policies).

1. The Dalai Lama is a previous slave owner.

2. China has effectively controlled Tibet from 1200 AD.

3. The protesters are violent and some Han people are killed by them.

4. All in all, if you can split Tibet from China, which is admitted by the UN as one part of China, no country can not be split.» (comment no 206, Yingrui Shang from NYC).

61 »I am a Chinese, and I fully support the Tibetan People and their causes. It is sad to see that the Chinese media is using propaganda on the few footages of violence while they completely block out images and footages of iron fist crack down on the local Tibetans. If Tibet is truly a part of China, then the Chinese Government should treat Tibetan just like the Chinese people. The Chinese media should report that “Chinese” people in Lhasa are using violence attacking other Chinese. When something goes wrong, they blame Tibetan as been violent. How come the communist Government can not appease difference between 2 major ethnic group after 50+ years of ruling? This is the real question that everyone should ask. The Communist Party is using the exact same method they have done to every Chinese citizen who is exercising their right of free speech. This is not new, and won't be changed unless the true freedom reigns in China.» (comment no 146, Puma from NYC).

62 Only two supported the CCP rule.

Two users maintained that the West had no right to criticize China, having misbehaved itself (in the case of native Americans, Iraq, etc.)—even some non-Chinese users held this view. Only one Chinese user blamed the West for orchestrating the protests—a very low number when compared with 29% on *Qiangguo luntan* and 22% on Sina. The Dalai Lama was blamed by two Chinese discussants.

The Olympic Games were mentioned twice, each time in a different context: once as a symbol of progress and acceptance by the West, and once where the protesters were blamed for disrupting the Olympics and spoiling the image of China (many non-Chinese users on NYT forum did call for boycott of the Beijing Olympics on the grounds of human rights abuse and lack of freedom).

Two discussants trying to serve as mediators between sinophobes and defenders of China, pointing out mistakes on both sides. I shall conclude this chapter by quoting Kevin from China (comment no 144):

For those angry Americans, thanks for your attention to Tibet which is a really beautiful land in the world. Every one should try to do something constructive for the improvements of Tibetan people's living standard and for the preservance [i.e. preservation] of their cultural heritage. How ever, it is not smart to say that the young Chinese lack the skills of thinking critically. By irritating us, you don't really understand the word RESPECT which you think the Chinese should show to Tibetan people.

For those angry Chinese, if you read something different from what you read inside home, be skeptical, but be calm. More information is always a good thing. It helps us to make our own judgements. In a long term, it helps us to be mature people. Nationalism is good for us to be united, but it does not mean we are going back to the heydays of imperial China. The world is flat now, we should learn to listen to different opinions and be used to debating [...].

### *Conclusion*

Nowadays, the ‘century of humiliation’ (*bainian guochi* 百年國恥)<sup>63</sup> is clearly a strong trauma for the Chinese. It was under CCP leadership that China began to regain power and confidence, and the CCP is ready to emphasize its victories and to contrast them with the past. I believe that this constant

63 A period starting with the First Opium War (1839–42) when China was unsuccessful in protecting its national interests against Western countries and Japan; a term mainly used by Communist historiography to portray China as subjugated by Western imperialism.

reminding of history makes Chinese people (and netizens) more sensitive and suspicious towards any kind of Western engagement with China, and these feelings may be reinforced by misunderstanding and prejudice from the West. To me, this explains discussants' emotional reactions and blaming the West—they remembered the past and felt endangered. Tibet was again perceived as a global issue, as a part of the 'Great Game' and thus any motives of the protesters or even of the Dalai Lama<sup>64</sup> went unnoticed, as discussants sought to defend national unity (and the concept of the nation as such) against Western powers.

Tibet has been abused as a battlefield for sinophobic attitudes too—to demonstrate the evil nature of the Chinese with the example of Tibet. Sometimes, Tibet is still portrayed as a mythical Shangri-la, which leaves the Chinese with the highly unattractive role of monsters annihilating this paradise. The Chinese are accused of 'cultural genocide' as well—a term they can hardly understand: Chinese tend to exoticize ethnic minorities' cultures, and acknowledge the commercial potential this attractiveness comes with, so they protect minorities' cultures (or at least believe they are doing so), and emphasize the differences. However, as China is a multi-cultural country, they can see no reason why a different culture should imply the creation of a new political entity.

Currently, the Chinese government promotes patriotism (*aiguozhuyi* 愛國主義) in order to ensure citizens' loyalty to the state (and to its leadership). Within patriotism, ethnicity is irrelevant, all 56 nations (or ethnic groups, *minzu*) of China are supposed to co-exist in harmony within one united entity, the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*). Netizens widely blamed Western powers or the Dalai Lama for inciting the unrests, thus implying that without being stirred from outside, Tibetans might not object to the Chinese rule—after all, Chinese governance was considered a good one (liberation, preferential policies, improved livelihood). The strategy of emphasizing violence over the aims of protesters in the media eradicated any sympathy. The Chinese public did not consider the Tibetan demonstrations as a case of civil protests and as a struggle for the rights and freedoms other citizens could profit from as well, but simply dismissed them as a case of enmity committed by criminals (moreover, the protesters belonged to a different ethnic group and despite the proclaimed unity of all *shaoshu minzu* of China, cleavage ran along the ethnic line).

The widespread (Western) opinion that the Chinese are blinded by CCP propaganda is a constraint on understanding Chinese attitudes towards Tibet

64 Although the Dalai Lama is commonly used as a scapegoat for all problems regarding Tibet in official discourse, however, the netizens saw him merely as an instrument in the hands of the West in these debates.

and Tibetans. In the first part of the paper, I explain that Chinese netizens are well capable of making autonomous and independent reflections, and they have access to other sources of information than those tainted by CCP propaganda<sup>65</sup>—but the notion of Tibet as an inseparable part of China is not exclusively tied to the CCP. Actually, it runs so deep that any differing opinion is likely to be dismissed as biased, exactly like some Westerners who dismiss any notion of Tibet as a part of China as paying lip service to propaganda.

*Summary of Positions Expressed on Qiangguo luntan and Xinlang Internet Forums  
(Percentage of Postings' Samples)*

	<i>Qiangguo luntan</i>	<i>Xinlang</i>
Tibet has always belonged to China (or since Yuan dynasty), hence it cannot claim independence.	1.9%	1.9%
Emotional response («they should all be killed») and «eye for eye» approach.	3.9%	8.6%
The action was planned and organized beforehand by the Dalai Lama	9.2%	2.9%
The Dalai Lama is exploiting innocent and naive people to reach his own goals.	3.4%	—
It was an act of terrorism.	1.0%	2.9%
Religious beliefs are the cause, cultural differences should be dealt with more sensitively.	—	—
Religious beliefs are the cause of the protests, religion should be uprooted.	1.0%	1.0%
Buddhism is strictly against violence, monks involved in the protests violated the code of conduct.	2.4%	1.0%
Police response to the unrest was too soft, government showed weakness.	10.1%	1.9%
The government was so lenient because it favours ethnical minorities.	0.5%	—

65 The more radical these sources are, the firmer may Chinese stick to their original opinion—Western media lost their credit with part of Chinese public due to mistakes in reporting, with the possible consequence that Chinese people will consult these sources even less.

Protesters are just criminals who should be dealt with severely and according to the law.	8.2%	17.1%
Protesters seek to discredit China internationally, and close Olympic Games gave them an opportunity.	3.9%	—
Response to the protests was adequate, not harsh.	3.9%	—
Those who participated in unrest were inspired to do so by Angela Merkel's or George W. Bush's meetings with the Dalai Lama.	3.9%	—
Agreeing with Mao Zedong that the main problem is class struggle. ( <i>Minzu wenti jiushi jieji wenti.</i> )	3.9%	—
The crackdown should have been immediate, it was not appropriate to allow the escalation of violence.	4.3%	—
The resentment of protesters was caused by economic imbalance within China (rich East, poor West).	1.0%	—
Western countries do not wish China to be strong and will do anything to harm China—the unrest was provoked by the West.	29.0%	21.9%
China should not let anyone interfere with her internal affairs.	1.9%	10.5%
Disrespect for Tibetans.	—	1.9%
Support for the motherland and a strong Chinese nation ( <i>Zhonghua minzu</i> ).	33.3%	59.0%
Nostalgia: Mao Zedong used to keep China strong and united, not letting the West dominate.	7.2%	—
Chinese media coverage is not reliable.	0.5%	—
Tibetans had no reason for such protests.	0.5%	1.0%
The issue is complex and cannot be blamed on Dalai Lama solely	2.4%	—
Western media spread biased or false information and thus insult China.	—	4.8%
Grieving the victims (among ethnic Han and Hui 回).	—	1.9%
Support for the government in dealing with the West.	—	3.8%
Boycott of Western goods or companies.	—	1.9%
Support for the Olympic Games.	—	15.2%
Acts of 'anti-Chinese forces abroad' ( <i>guowai fan Hua shili</i> ).	—	3.8%

*Summary of Positions Expressed on The New York Times Internet Forums  
(Percentage of Postings' Samples)*

	<i>The New York Times</i>
The West seeks to harm China.	3.8%
Western media reporting is biased.	34.6%
Freedom in China is severely restricted.	15.4%
China liberated Tibetans from slavery.	19.2%
Tibet has belonged to China in the past, hence it cannot claim independence.	30.8%
The riots in Tibet are to be seen as criminal behaviour, not civil protests.	34.6%
It was an act of terrorism.	3.8%
The Olympic Games perceived as a symbol of Chinese success and acceptance by the West.	3.8%
The action was planned and organized beforehand by the Dalai Lama.	7.7%
Protesters seek to discredit China and the Olympic Games internationally.	3.8%
The West is guilty of similar actions (in the case of native Americans, Iraq etc.).	7.7%
Tibet enjoys preferential policies.	3.8%
An effort to reconcile the clashes in opinions.	7.7%
Support for the PRC and CCP.	7.7%
Tibet ought to be independent.	3.8%