

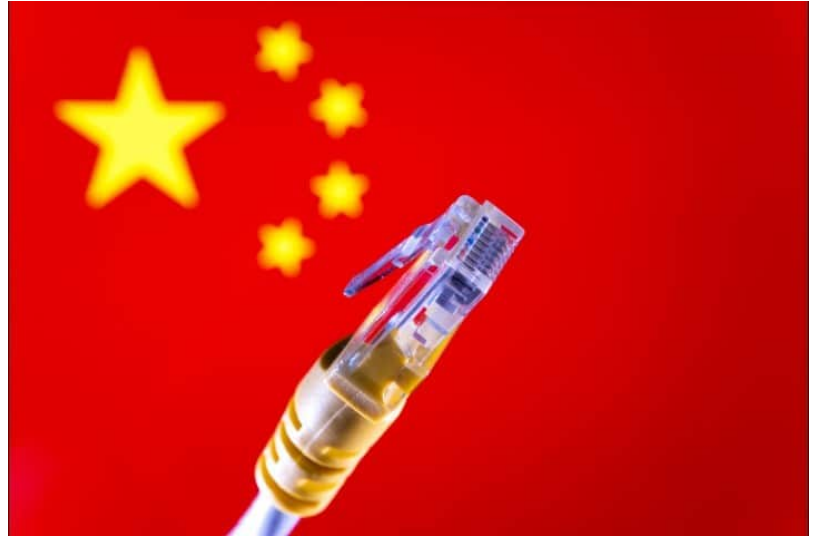


Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on February 3, 2023

## China Enforces New Cybersecurity Rules in Tibet

SINGAPORE — A new Chinese cyber law in Tibet materialized on Wednesday (Feb. 1), with the government declaring harsher punishments for anyone found to be stirring “public disorder by engaging in separatist acts.”

The law, initially passed in 2016, was formulated to boost digital state surveillance and censorship in the region. These new measures enable the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to single out Tibetans for online activity regarded by authorities as critical of Chinese rule in the region.



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Dawa Tsering, the director of the India-based Tibet Policy Institute, told Radio Free Asia that “there are no proper guidelines on which the Chinese government has grounded these regulations in Tibet. Anyone that the Chinese authorities deem to have impaired China’s national security and public interest can be punished under this law. There is a lot of ambiguity.”

The vaguely worded law itself fails to detail the type of violations that would land individual Tibetans in hot water with authorities, stoking concerns that the Chinese police will abuse it to persecute anyone with cultural, social, or religious links to Tibet.

“Though the law is meant to protect and honor the Tibetan human rights, culture, history, natural resources and environment, the ambiguity of these regulations will negatively impact Tibetans,” Sangay Kyab, a researcher at the Tibetan Center for Human Rights, said. “[The laws] will leave room for Chinese authorities to arrest and detain them on simple but also uncertain charges.”

For example, Article 11 of the law stipulates that anyone seen to be a hindrance to national security and the public interest, regarded as anti-socialist, or suspected of participating in separatist activities by keeping any relations with Tibetan independence groups or individuals would be penalized.

Furthermore, those who share photos, speeches, campaigns, books, or videos, or who support Tibetan separatist activities, also face the risk of suppression.

“Tibetans inside Tibet are going to suffer even more so under the guise of this cyber security law,” said Gonpo Dhondup, president of Tibetan Youth Congress. “And the law is also a strategic move by the Chinese government to disconnect Tibetans inside Tibet with those in exile.”

In August last year, authorities in Tibet detained a 30-year-old Tibetan writer and former teacher for supposedly liaising with exiles outside China, based on reports from Radio Free Asia.

The writer, known as Palgon, was arrested at his home and has since vanished from the public eye. “There is still no information on where he is being held at the moment. His family members were also not informed or given proper reasons for his arrest other than Palgon’s contact with people in exile to offer prayers to His Holiness the Dalai Lama,” according to a source inside Tibet.

Palgon hailed from the Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in China’s southeastern Qinghai province.



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He had been an elementary school teacher in the prefecture's Pema county, but later resigned from his role and became an independent writer instead.

For months, the CCP has been arresting monks, writers, young protesters, and other Tibetan figures in a broad clampdown on dissent to the regime. Typically, detainees remain incommunicado for months while awaiting their sentences.

Tsering lambasted such arrests, saying that they reflect the CCP's efforts to prevent Tibetans from communicating with the outside world. "The Chinese government does not want the international communities to know about the harsh policies that they have been implementing on Tibetans in terms of religion, culture, and language," he said, as cited by Radio Free Asia.

Police in Pema county and Golog prefecture were not available for comment to the media in the wake of the arrest.

An earlier report by *Tibet Press* asserted that China dismisses Tibet's ancient individual existence, instead claiming it to be a part of the mainland, premised on a disputed agreement in 1951.

The Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, also known as the 17 Point Agreement, was signed on May 23, 1951, by a person devoid of legitimate authority to represent Tibet, the *Tibet Press* claimed.

According to the same report, China had promised to maintain Tibet's traditional and religious integrity, as well as ethnic groups' local practices.

The controversial deal was forcibly signed and hence did not have legitimacy, the report elaborated, and noncompliance with the agreement led to the 1959 Tibetan uprising. Subsequently, the CCP suppressed the protests and forced the 14th Dalai Lama to escape to India with his followers.

Tibet has not been the only region to have faced internet crackdowns from the CCP. Last month, authorities declared an internet censorship crackdown in China to stamp out "gloomy sentiments" due to Covid-19 "rumors" during the lunar new year festival.

The month-long nationwide internet censorship clampdown, known as the "Spring Festival online improvement" program, targeted people spreading what the CCP regarded as "rumors" about the spread of Covid and patient experiences.

China's national cyber administration highlighted the "in-depth rectification of false information and other issues to prevent gloomy sentiments."

It particularly mentioned the investigation and punishment of "online rumors related to the epidemic" and "fabricating patient experiences," as well as producing or sharing fake virus treatments. The announcement declared that such a move would "prevent misleading the public and causing social panic."

Online, Chinese social media has been teeming with personal stories of people contracting Covid-19, struggling to obtain medication or healthcare, and losing elderly relatives to the virus. These social media posts countered the official narrative that the government's response was "science led," causing significant online criticism of the government. In response, citizen reports after the lifting of the zero-Covid restrictions were lambasted as a "China-bashing carnival" in state media.

To complicate matters, the CCP has been highly resistant to foreign criticism of its Covid-19 response and allegations that it has not been transparent with data. As China's censors have seemed to struggle



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with social media criticisms after the reversal of the country's zero-Covid policy, recent attempts at internet censorship reflected ongoing attempts to eradicate dissent and guarantee that China's online environment mirrors the Party's image and ideals.

"After all this, they will say you have to be happy, it will be politically incorrect if you are not happy," said one Chinese Twitter user in response.

"It seems that the best way to solve the problem is to 'cover your mouth,'" said another. "I can't say anything but praise."



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