

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Aberdeen</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA 24 Anthropology and Development Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: UK Policy on Tibet</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact Mills has acted as invited advisor to the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tibet since 2008. During this time he has drafted four major briefing papers on Tibetan political, religious and human rights issues: 'The 2008 Protests in Tibet: Main Facts & Analysis' (2008); 'Issues of Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Dispute' (2009); 'Religious Policy and State Control in Tibet' (2010); " Self-Immolation Amongst Tibetans, 2009-2012' (2012). All of these papers have been ratified by the Cross Party Group as its principal output to the Scottish Parliament, and distributed to European parliaments and human rights organisations. These papers have since been extensively used by the UK Foreign Affairs Select Committee on Human Rights, as well as by human rights and Tibet organisations.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>1): Doctoral research was carried out by Mills at the University of Edinburgh, 1992-7, on Tibetan Buddhist monasticism, and in particular the structure of religious authority and the place of incarnate lamas (<i>tulku</i>) such as the Dalai Lama in Tibetan religious and political thought and practice, especially in comparison with ordinary Buddhist monks.</p> <p>(2): This was followed by postdoctoral research at the University of Aberdeen, 2000-2003, on the role of Buddhist ritual in the internationalisation of Tibetan politics, including in particular the Shugden religious controversy. This work sought to understand the difficulties of applying modern political and human rights theory to Tibetan constitutional affairs, and outlined instead the means by which ritual performance and authority provided 'passive' forms of political control.</p> <p>(3): Further research at the University of Aberdeen from 2003 to 2010 focused on the constitutional history of Tibet. Particular attention was paid to understanding the history of the Dalai Lamas as the centrepiece of a coherent set of constitutional ideas beyond mere religious charisma, and as inheritors of Tibet's larger mythic history. This latter research included a three-month research trip to Lhasa in the Summer of 2004, and the extensive translation of Tibetan historical sources. This research has sought to bring theoretical clarity to the role of the 'ceremonial state' as a basis for Tibetan ideas of legitimate governance, and has clarified our understanding of the Dalai Lamas within Tibet's wider constitutional milieu. This research was funded by the University of Aberdeen, the Carnegie Trust, the Frederick Williamson Memorial Fund, and the AHRC Research Leave Scheme.</p> <p>(4): From January to April 2012, Mills carried out research at the University of Aberdeen amongst Tibetan refugee communities in North-West India. This included research with the Tibetan Government-in-Exile on democratic reform and on the recent spate of self-immolations. The first of these was designed to elucidate Tibetan understandings of democratic governance in the post-Dalai Lama context. Overwhelmingly, this research demonstrated the enormous difficulties that the Tibetan refugee elite had in constitutionally separating themselves from the Dalai Lama's religious and political mandate, and how this was moulding the constitutional reform process. Research on self-immolations concentrated on two aspects: firstly, the relatively novel creation of narratives of national patriotism amongst the last testaments of Tibetan immolators themselves and the links between this and the Chinese government's 'patriotic education campaigns' in Tibet throughout the last twenty years; and secondly, the contrast between this and the statistical rise of self-immolations within the Peoples' Republic of China as a whole during the same period as those in Tibetan regions. In short, self-immolation appears to be a Chinese mode of local resistance which has been adopted by Tibetans in the last few years in accordance with a distinctly Tibetan narrative.</p>

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3. References to the research

Mills, Martin A., 2000. 'Vajra-Brother, Vajra-Sister: Renunciation, Individualism and the Household in Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6(1); ISSN: 0025-1496. Based on 19 months' doctoral research in the Western Himalaya.

Mills, M. 2003a. *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*. London: Routledge. Reviewed in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 2004, Vol. 63: pp 1122-1124; also *Inner Asia* 2005, Vol. 7.2, pp. 289-91.

Mills, Martin A., 2003b. 'This Turbulent Priest: Contesting Religious Rights and the State in Tibetan Shugden Controversy'. In Mitchell, J. & R. Wilson (eds.) *Human Rights in Global Perspective: Anthropological Studies of Rights, Claims and Entitlements*. (ASA 2001 Monograph). Routledge: 0-203-50627-8.

Mills, M. 2007. 'Re-Assessing The Supine Demoness: Royal Buddhist Geomancy in the Srong btsan sgam po Mythology'. *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol 3.

Mills, M. 2009. 'This Circle of Kings: Modern Tibetan Visions of World Peace', in P Kirby (ed.), *Boundless Worlds: An Anthropological Approach To Movement*. Berghahn Books, New York, NY, USA, pp. 95-114.

Mills, M. 2012. 'Ritual as History in Tibetan Divine Kingship: Notes on the Myth of the Khotanese Monks'. *History of Religions*, vol 51, no. 3, pp. 219-238. Originally presented in 2006 as "Kingship and the Constitutional Imagination in Tibet", plenary paper given at the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Königswinter, Germany, August 27th-September 2nd, 2006.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research outlined above, along with **Mills'** role as Co-Director of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research, was what led to his being invited to act as the principal academic advisor to the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tibet. This invitation was made on the grounds of **Mills'** experience and involvement regarding the Tibetan 'Shugden controversy' from 1996-2003 (Mills 2003b), for which he carried out research between 1993 and 2003, wrote an internal assessment for Amnesty International following human rights allegations made by worshippers of the deity, and dealt with media inquiries. **Mills'** works (Mills 2003b and 2009) now represent major sources for public and scholarly debate on this controversy.

In more specific terms, the research above contributed to the production of four briefing papers for the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Tibet in the following ways:

(1): Research Projects 1 and 2 (see above), and in particular the work on the role and status of incarnate lamas within the authority structure of Tibetan religious schools, contributed directly to the 2010 paper "Religious Policy and State Control in Tibet", which outlined the influence and structure of new Peoples' Republic of China regulations on the recognition of incarnate lamas in Tibet.

(2): Project 3 (see above) involved substantial initial research into the 1987-90 protests in Tibet, and provided essential background data to the demographic, geographical and ideological shifts represented by the 2008 protests examined in the parliamentary briefing paper, "The 2008 Protests in Tibet: Main Facts and Analysis". The core conclusions of this paper were presented to a closed meeting of scholars, Foreign Office officials and representatives of human rights organisations at the University of Cambridge in May 2008. It was later reproduced in abridged form by the internationally-distributed *Students for a Free Tibet Newsletter* (http://data5.blog.de/media/521/2541521_bffe98e4f0_d.pdf).

(3): Project 3 also involved substantial research on the history and form of Tibetan claims to sovereignty and governance, and the difficulties of squaring these with the modern constitutional claims of nation-states. This history, and the constitutional problems implied, formed the basis for some of the recommendations in the 2009 briefing paper, "Issues of Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Dispute".

(4): Research Project 4 (see above) contributed directly to the production of the fourth briefing paper on recent Tibetan self-immolations, which was ratified by the Cross Party Group on Tibet in June 2012, from where it was disseminated to Scottish MPs, human rights organisations, newspapers and Tibet organisations. Because of the urgency of the issue, the briefing paper was produced simultaneously with the development of academic research papers which are currently still in production, but which were initially presented at the South Asian Anthropologists Group seminar in Edinburgh in September 2012. The key findings of this research were also formally presented to the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Tibet and attendant members of the UK Human Rights organisations on the 6th June 2012.

The first three of these papers were presented as evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee of the UK Parliament by the Tibet Support Group in 2009. The Select Committee used these extensively as part of their deliberations on the human rights situation in the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), published in its *Human Rights Annual Report 2008*. Their examination of **Mills'** three reports constituted nearly 60% of the PRC section (see esp. pp.EV145-7). In this regard, **Mills'** primary research work – particularly of the late 1990s and early 2000s – contributed directly to Foreign Office deliberations on the China human rights situation.

In autumn 2013, a motion is to be put for debate to the Scottish Parliament by Maureen Watt, MSP. A draft of the motion reads as follows:

“That the Parliament expresses sadness that at least 117 people have self-immolated, often fatally, in Tibet since February 2009; understands that these self-immolations have, with few exceptions, taken place in Tibet itself and expresses concern at the State's attempts to prevent accurate reports of self-immolation reaching the media and condemns the criminalisation of victims' family members and, sometimes, witnesses in the process; **recognises the work of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan studies at Aberdeen University** and Grampian Tibet Support Group in highlighting these issues, as well as supporting cultural and educational links with Tibet and beyond.”

The motion has been tabled but not debated yet because of the summer recess.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Briefing papers for the Scottish Parliament and other groups:

Cross-Party Group on Tibet, 2008. 'The 2008 Protests in Tibet: Main Facts and Analysis'. Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.1.

Cross-Party Group on Tibet, 2009, 'Issues of Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Dispute'. Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.2.

Cross-Party Group on Tibet, 2010. 'Religious Policy and State Control in Tibet' (2010). Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.3.

Cross-Party Group on Tibet, 2012. 'Self-Immolation amongst Tibetans, 1997-2012'. Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.4.

The above briefing papers are available on the public site for the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tibet: <http://scotlandtibet.wordpress.com/> (also the University of Aberdeen's Research Archive site: <http://aura.abdn.ac.uk/>).

Other sources:

- UK House of Commons - Foreign Affairs Committee (2009). *Human Rights Annual Report 2008. HC 557, Seventh Report of Session 2008-09 - Report, Together with Formal Minutes, Oral and Written Evidence*. London: TSO (The Stationery Office). ISBN: 9780215540836. Also available for viewing on Googlebooks.
- *Students for a Free Tibet Summer 2008 Newsletter*. Presents page long summary of

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Briefing Paper No.1 on 2008 protests in Tibet. Available on:
http://data5.blog.de/media/521/2541521_bbf98e4f0_d.pdf

Individuals:

MSP: Convenor of the Cross-Party Group on Tibet, Scottish Parliament, 2012, will be able to corroborate the process of drafting, editing and ratifying of 'Self-Immolation amongst Tibetans, 1997-2012'. Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.4.

Convenor of the Cross-Party Group on Tibet, Scottish Parliament, 2008-2011, will be able to corroborate the process of drafting, editing ratification of 'The 2008 Protests in Tibet: Main Facts and Analysis'. Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.1; 'Issues of Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Dispute'. Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.2; and 'Religious Policy and State Control in Tibet' (2010). Scottish Parliamentary Briefing Paper No.3.

Details of the Parliamentary Motion (see para 4, above), acknowledging the work of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan studies at Aberdeen University, may be found here:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S4M-06980&ResultsPerPage=10>