

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Aberdeen		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 22 (Anthropology and Development Studies)		
<b>Title of case study:</b> UK Tibet Policy		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2003-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Martin Mills	Senior Lecturer	2003 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research by the University of Aberdeen's Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research (led by Dr Martin Mills) has facilitated parliamentary deliberations on Tibetan matters in the UK and Europe, shifting the debate away from a longstanding stalemate over sovereignty and towards a more forward-thinking policy position on popular protest, state policy and environmental constraints. The Centre is now leading a Scottish Parliament inquiry on the impacts of climate change on the Tibetan Plateau across the wider Asian area. This has allowed the Group to grow in influence as the only research-led parliamentary group on Tibet in Europe, making it a growing focus for visits by international policy makers and civil society organisations</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research (SCHR) has built on wider research on the relationship between livelihood, state policy and the environment carried out within the University of Aberdeen's Anthropology department (e.g., Ingold 2000; Anderson et al 2017; <a href="http://arcticdomus.org">http://arcticdomus.org</a>), which has focused on the relationship between political and protest activity across the wider Tibetan Plateau. Research by SCHR's primary investigator, Dr Martin Mills, has underpinned a substantial body of work focused on the ethnography and history of Tibetan religious and state institutions, and in particular the manner in which such institutions were framed by a wider 'environmental body politic' in which ceremonial relations with the landscape were the structuring framework for statecraft and religious authority (See previous Impact Statement, R4). In line with other researchers in the Anthropology department, this approach sought to move away from human-exclusive frameworks of social analysis and instead embed local social practice within a wider historical, policy and environmental framework, which has been the defining format for doctoral research by the Centre (Woodhouse 2012, Butcher 2013, Adhikari 2014, Pearce 2017).</p> <p>From 2008 onwards, Mills' research has focused on the way histories of statecraft and an environmental body politic influence modern patterns of protest and political life in Tibetan regions and the organisation of diasporic Tibetan communities. Studies carried out on communal and individual protests in Tibetan areas [1, 2, 3] and responses to mass relocation and resettlement [6] pointed towards deep shifts in Tibetan political consciousness in response to Chinese administrative and nationalities policies, policies which combined environmental and security frameworks in a manner which effectively segmented the Plateau [5].</p> <p>A key component of these was large-scale resettlement of indigenous Tibetan nomad populations from the Tibetan Plateau's massive Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve under the PRC's Ecological Migration Policy, which saw 90,000 nomads relocated in response to the desertification of the nearby Yangtse, Yellow and Mekong river sources. Both activists and international ecologists</p>		

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contested the reasoning behind this policy, prompting a deep study by the SCHR of PRC environment policy regarding ethnic minorities and national water security.

In 2019, the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tibet (CPGT) requested the SCHR as research secretariat formulate a comprehensive briefing paper on the Asia-wide impacts of climate change in the Third Pole Region, focusing on the effect of cryosphere changes on Asian water cycles. SCHR research in this area has identified key divergences in policy responses on climate change – problems of political capture of scientific conclusions along nation-state lines, scaling divergences between global level dynamics and regionally specific interactions, and the organisation of engaged scientific disciplines. These profoundly affect both the manner in which environmental problems are understood and the way in which policy is formulated. Advice and collaboration in these analyses was provided by Prof. Brice Rea (Glaciology, University of Aberdeen) and Prof. Pete Smith (Soil Science, University of Aberdeen), the Tibet Policy Institute (Dharamsala), Gabriel Lafitte (Australia) and ICIMOD (Kathmandu).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] Mills, M.A., 2008. 'The 2008 Protests in Tibet: Main Facts & Analysis'. *SCHR Working Paper*.

[2] Mills, M.A. 2012. "Self-Immolation amongst Tibetans, 1998-2012". *SCHR Working Paper*.

[3] Mills, M.A. & S. May, 2013. "Self-Immolation amongst Tibetans, 2013 Update". *SCHR Working Paper*.

[4] Woodhouse, E., Mills, M. A. et al, 2015 "Religious Relationships with the Environment in a Tibetan Rural Community: Interactions and Contrasts with Popular Notions of Indigenous Environmentalism". *Human Ecology*. 43, 2, p. 295-307.

[5] Mills, M.A., 2017. "Dividing the Third Pole". *Asia Dialogue*. <https://theasiadialogue.com/2017/06/21/dividing-the-third-pole/>

[6] Mills, M.A. & S. May 2018. 'Mass Relocations and Nomad Settlement on the Tibetan Plateau'. *SCHR Working Paper*.

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

The impact of this case study involves changing Scottish government policy towards the Tibetan region, influencing policy deliberations by the Central Tibetan Administration and prompting a parliamentary Third Pole climate inquiry.

#### Parliamentary Briefing Papers

The SCHR provided "invaluable" [S1.1] research-based working papers to the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tibet (CPGT), material which guided the creation of full parliamentary briefing papers to MSPs [S2.1-3]. On the basis of these, the SCHR was promoted to full secretariat and research support for the CPGT in Oct 2016, allowing it to develop a framework both for doing research *for* parliaments and similar organisations and for doing research *with and through* parliamentary engagement. This has allowed the Group to grow in influence as the only research-led parliamentary group on Tibet in Europe, making it a growing focus for visits by international policy makers and civil society organisations. The Chair of CPGT, Scottish Parliament, has said:

*The ongoing success of the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tibet is largely due to the input of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research at the University of Aberdeen. The research that Martin carries out and submits to the Group ensures enough interest in the content of the meetings that they are well attended by academics, elected members, those who are interested in Tibet and the Himalayan Region, as well as Tibetans who live in Scotland. In addition to this, because of the respect given to Martin Mills'*

*research we often have visitors who are prominent in the Tibetan community worldwide.* [S1.1].

Much of the SCHR research material provided between late-2013 and 2014 focused on protest and popular dissent on the Tibetan Plateau within the wider PRC policy context, with research on self-immolations and mass resettlements directly informing parliamentary debates at both Holyrood and Westminster [S3]. In 2015, the CPGT hosted an exhibition in the Scottish Parliament, where a petition 'Paris declaration on the Freedom Struggle of the Tibetan People' was presented and signed by over 40 MSPs, European Members of Parliament in Exile and Director of the Tibet House Trust, Ven Thubten Wangchen [S3.4].

Between 2014 and 2019, SCHR research has focused on the way protest in the region has increasingly shifted away from questions of political sovereignty and more towards issues of land rights and usage, and the impact of environmental, resettlement and extractive policies. In 2018, in tandem with research on the upgrading of centralised mining on the Plateau, the SCHR presented its working paper on the resettlement and relocation of some 2,300,000 Tibetans from 2006 onwards. The research (Mills 2017) identified the progressive economic segmentation of the Plateau into mining, tourism and nature reserve regions as part of the PRC's resource development plan for western Chinese provinces within an increasingly constrained environmental context. This was reviewed by the CPGT and a revised version ratified and published as a Group Briefing Paper to the Parliament [S2.1] and detailed in a presentation delivered by Mills to Tibetan and international policy makers in Brussels and Oslo in 2016.

### **Parliamentary 'Third Pole' Climate Inquiry**

The Tibetan region holds the largest concentration of frozen freshwater outside the two polar ice caps and provides water to almost half of the planet's population. The growing environmental constraints on PRC strategy on the Tibetan Plateau, revealed in the research on protest and resettlement, led to a SCHR review of the underlying scientific material on climate change on the Plateau and their impacts within the PRC on resettlement policy. This research review, presented in a preliminary form by the SCHR at a parliamentarians-only exhibition at the Scottish Parliament in March 2019, which was attended by the Tibetan Society and MSPs [S3.6] revealed significant underlying anomalies, scale conflicts and contradictions in the extant scientific material, particularly with reference to future water resources across the Asian region.

Following the Spring 2019 exhibition and reception at the Scottish Parliament (material from which was discussed in depth with parliamentary delegates from the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and the Chinese Consul General), the Cross-Party Group hosted Lobsang Sangay (the Central Tibetan Administration President) in June 2019 to discuss policy on the Tibetan Plateau and issues of climate change. In summer 2019, the CPGT requested that SCHR co-ordinate an inquiry at the Scottish Parliament in Spring 2020, to bring together key research actors such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the CTA Environment Desk, as well as independent specialists, in order to produce some level of resolution on these issues.

In order to help tackle climate issues in the region, the Office of Tibet (London) and Tibet Policy Institute (Dharamsala) invited Mills to speak at the '2<sup>nd</sup> Climate Action for Tibet' in Madrid during the COP25 UN Climate Summit in Dec 2019, alongside the president of Casa de Tibet in Spain and the Executive Head of the Environment Desk of the Tibet Policy Institute. Dr Mills highlighted the SCHR's research findings on implications of temperature rises on the Plateau for local populations, and for water security and population sustainability in the wider Asian region [S4.1]. Mills was also invited by the Global China Institute to speak on the environmental situation at the 6<sup>th</sup> *Global China Dialogue Conference* at the British Academy and UK Parliament in December 2019.

In January 2021, the SCHR summarised their findings in a working paper (presently under peer review) for the Cross-Party Group on Tibet on climate change in the Third Pole Region, highlighting in particular the previously unforeseen consequences of *combined and cumulative climate change effects* on regional hydrology and water supplies in Asia.

Sonam Frasi, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for Northern Europe, spoke of the impact Mills and the SCHR's research has had:

*"The [SCHR] has consistently brought scientific research material and methods to the solution of problems that are otherwise intractably political. This allows policymakers to consider not simply the political dimensions of their work, but information and perspectives that could only be brought to the table through the capabilities of university-level research. Dr Mills' organisation and work on climate change has brought together and synthesised huge bodies of international research material on one of the major dangers and challenges faced by the world today: that of the environmental fate of the Tibetan Plateau and the freshwater supplies of the Asian continent, and to the growing impact this has had and will have on the populations of that region ... The SCHR's recent climate change analysis brings considerable light to the intractable human rights and policy issues surrounding the mass relocation of Tibetan populations within the Peoples Republic of China, and we hope it can help solve some of these difficulties as part of the general focus on the Plateau's environmental crisis."* [S1.2]

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

##### S1 Testimonials:

1. Linda Fabiani MSP, Chair of Cross-Party Group on Tibet, Scottish Parliament.
2. Sonam Frasi, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for Northern Europe and the Baltic States, Office of Tibet, London.

##### S2: Parliamentary Briefing Papers (available at <https://scotlandtibet.wordpress.com/reports/>)

1. Scottish Parliament, 2021. "Third Pole Climate Inquiry: Losing Asia's Cryosphere". *Cross-Party Group on Tibet Briefing Paper No.7* (TBC)
2. Scottish Parliament, 2018. 'Mass Relocations and Nomad Settlement on the Tibetan Plateau'. *Cross-Party Group on Tibet Briefing Paper No.6*
3. Scottish Parliament, 2013. "Self-Immolation amongst Tibetans, 2013 Update". *Cross-Party Group on Tibet Briefing Paper No.5*

##### S3: Self-immolation Debate, Scottish Parliament

1. <http://www.thetibetpost.com/en/news/international/3870-scottish-parliament-addresses-self-immolations-in-tibet>
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeFpxGG4aUQ>
3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/scotland-26036978>
4. <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/whall/?id=2015-06-18a.172.0>
5. <https://tibet.net/scottish-parliament-discuss-self-immolations-in-tibet/>
6. <https://tibetsociety.com/tibet-society-attends-tibet-reception-held-in-the-scottish-parliament>

##### S4: Events

1. <https://tibetpolicy.net/the-2nd-climate-action-for-tibet-panel-discussion-held-in-spain/>