


The Divergent Discourses Corpus: A Digital Collection of Early Tibetan Newspapers from the 1950s and 1960s

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he production of digital corpora is standard procedure for libraries. However, because of the relatively high cost, digitising archival holdings everywhere is still not a common practice, particularly beyond the global north. For Tibetan studies, it is a sad reality that the plethora of invaluable material is squirreled away in too often inaccessible archives in the People's Republic of China (PRC), uncatalogued boxes in Western libraries, or unexplored private collections. In the case of newspapers, the situation is even more problematic. Neither Chinese nor Indian institutions have systematically collected and preserved Tibetan language newsprint, or they may be reluctant to make it accessible to the public. The same is probably true for the early newspaper publishing houses and editorial offices that often lack the interest or funds to sustain a continuous publication archive. Moreover, many offices ceased to exist, and rapid and dramatic economic development has led the sources to disappear without a trace. The value of newspapers as a detailed historical record is too often underestimated; or, to the contrary, e.g., in the People's Republic, newspapers are seen as containing sensitive information that needs to be censored and controlled.

The Divergent Discourses project¹ studies the role of narrative and discourse in the perpetuation of antagonisms in the Tibet-China dispute in the formative period of the 1950s and 1960s. For studying Tibetan history and societal change, Tibetan language newspaper archives can constitute a significant source.² They document contemporary events and debates in minute detail and reflect the slow and gradual changes in language, society, and topics that would otherwise escape scholarly attention. To facilitate the study of Tibetan language discourses in the communities within the PRC and in South Asia, the project compiled a corpus of Tibetan language newspapers, the Divergent Discourses Corpus (DD Corpus).

At the time of writing, the DD Corpus contains 16,718 pages from 16 newspapers published between 1950 and 1965 in India and the PRC. The newspapers have been sourced from the holdings of universities, libraries, and archives outside the PRC, accumulating a substantial number of Tibetan-language newspapers from that period. The corpus does not, however, contain a complete set of any one newspaper and cannot claim to represent all newspapers published in Tibet and Tibetan areas. There were probably more newspapers, especially on the prefectural and county levels, whose names and histories have not survived the turbulent years of the 1950s to 1970s in the PRC.

Most of the newspapers in the corpus were scanned by the project,³ and will – where copyright permits – become openly available online

¹ The Divergent Discourses project received funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) under project number 508232945 (<https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/508232945?language=en>), and from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under project reference AH/X001504/1 (<https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FX001504%2F1>). For more information on Divergent Discourses, see <https://research.uni-leipzig.de/diverge/> (accessed on January 10, 2025) and the other contributions to this special issue.

² When using the term Tibet, I do not refer to a Tibetan country, or Tibetan region, etc. but imply the broadest sense of the term, encompassing all Tibetan communities in the PRC and beyond, including in India and Nepal.

³ Where available, we relied on copies previously scanned by other institutions, such as the Columbia University Libraries (CU), the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences (OI), and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LT). We would like to thank the Leipzig University Library and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin for their support in digitising materials for the project.

at Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin's Crossasia repository starting in 2025.⁴ Besides the digital images, the newspaper corpus will be made available as machine-readable e-text to facilitate studies using Digital Humanities approaches and tools.⁵

The following sections will describe the DD Corpus and its context of the 1950s and 1960s to provide a more comprehensive picture of the material it contains, as well as to point out the gaps and limitations researchers should be aware of when using the material.

1 *Publication and Production of Tibetan Newspapers*

Tibetan newspapers are a relatively recent phenomenon.⁶ The concept and technology were introduced to the Tibetan cultural sphere only in 1904 by the German missionary August Hermann Francke (1870–1930)⁷ and independently by the Chinese Ambans Lian Yu (聯豫, born 1886, office in Lhasa 1906–1912) and Zhang Yintang (張蔭棠, 1860–1935, office in Lhasa 1906–1907) in 1907.⁸ Before 1950, only a handful of Tibetan newspapers – produced mainly by Moravian missionaries – existed on the southern slopes of the Himalayas, including the well-known *Tibet Mirror* (TIM, founded 1925). When the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) annexed Tibet to the newly established PRC, some Tibetan language newspapers were published in the Republic of China, e.g. the bilingual 'Vernacular News in Tibetan Language' (*Bod*

⁴ <https://crossasia.org/en/> (accessed on January 10, 2025).

⁵ For a technical and more systematic corpus description, see the appendix.

⁶ Tibetan newspapers and their history are with a few notable exceptions mostly unstudied. A general overview of newspaper publishing in the first half of the 20th century was provided in English e.g. by Sawerthal 2018 and Erhard *et al.* 2018; in Chinese by Xu 2003, Zhou 2005; in Tibetan Klu ma tshal 2001, 2009. For the second half of the 20th century, see e.g. Shar ba thog med 1999, Zhou 2005, Hartley 2005, and Erhard 2015.

⁷ On Francke's *Ladakh Akbar*, see Erhard 2021: 272–279; Erhard & Hou 2018: 4–7; Römer & Erhard 2007: 242–247; Walravens & Engelhardt 2010; and Walravens 2002.

⁸ On the ambans see Ho 2008; Kobayashi 2020; on their newspaper, see Erhard & Hou 2018: 8–9.

yig phal skad kyi gsar 'gyur) by the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Bureau (MTAB) in Beijing.⁹

In the societies of the global north, newspapers are attributed the democratic role of checking the reach of government and its institutions and, at the same time, providing a forum for public exchange and debate, thereby creating the public sphere, which in the words of Jürgen Habermas, is a sphere “which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer or public opinion, [and] accords with the principle of the public sphere – that principle of public information which once had to be fought for against the arcane policies of monarchies and which since that time has made possible the democratic control of state activities” (Habermas 1974: 50). As such the concept of “public sphere is a ‘political term’ that relates to the democratic system” (Fiedler & Meyen 2015: 837).

In less democratic or even autocratic societies, such as Tibet and the People’s Republic of China, neither a democratic public sphere nor a ‘free press’ existed. Here, newspapers were published and controlled by the state or state-like institutions.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the state’s or government’s “leaders ... despite all pretence to the contrary (‘The Party is always right’, ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’), could not simply represent power, they had to legitimize it through public communication” (Fiedler & Meyen 2015: 837). Consequently, authoritarian governments use their force to build a confined, authoritarian public sphere by “limiting the range of topics that can be discussed openly.”

On the other hand, the state wants to create the appearance of uncoerced loyalty and thus has an incentive to hide the repression that disciplines the public sphere. The result is that the authoritarian public

⁹ For a detailed portrait of the newspaper as an example of the Chinese *Baihua* movement, see Pistorius 2019. Erhard and Hou (2018: 15–17) list twelve Tibetan language newspapers published in the Republic of China but admit that only the *Vernacular News in Tibetan Language* has become accessible.

¹⁰ While the absence of a public sphere in the context of authoritarian or totalitarian states, such as Myanmar or North Korea, is widely accepted, Fiedler and Meyen (2015) nevertheless argue that, e.g., in the GDR, a public sphere, however limited, existed.

sphere is characterized by both state repression and state-manufactured legitimating messages. (Dukalskis 2017: 26)

In Tibetan exile communities, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), i.e. the Tibetan government-in-exile based in Dharamsala (H.P) in India, exerted significant control over Tibetan newspapers of the 1960s,¹¹ as becomes obvious from the recollections of Gönpo Dorje (Mgon po rdo rje, 1935–2016), a former member of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile who had worked since 1964 in various functions for CTA newspapers. He summarises the aims of the first exile newspaper *Freedom* (FRD, *rang dbang gsar shog*):

... recognising the need for communication between the exiled Tibetan government and the Tibetan people, for Tibetans to learn about world news, and for a modern, quality newspaper in the Tibetan language to serve as a platform for Tibetan government politics, initially Gyalo Thondup (Rgya lo don grub, born 1928)¹², the elder brother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, took full responsibility. He established the *Freedom Press* in Darjeeling, arranged for funding and materials, purchased the necessary equipment, organised staff, and made all preparations without hesitation. Then, the Kashag (Tibetan cabinet) in Mussoorie appointed Yeshe Dargye, an official of the Tsedrung rank, as the head of the *Freedom Press* in Darjeeling.¹³

¹¹ A free press only developed later from the 1970s on with publications such as the *Tibetan Review* under the editorship of Dawa Norbu, or in the 1990s, the short-lived *Mangtso* edited by Jamyang Norbu, Lhasang Tsering and Tashi Tsering, see, for example, Norbu 2011.

¹² Although Gyalo Thondup did not hold official positions in the CTA at that time, he acted for several decades from the 1950s onwards as an important negotiator between Tibet, the Republic of China (ROC) and the PRC as well as a political agent in the United States, and from the late 1970s (cf. Rgyal lo don grub 2015).

¹³ [...] byes 'byor bod gzhung dang / bod mi mang dbar la gnas tshul shes rtogs bya rgyu dang / bod mi rnams kyis 'dzam gling gi gsar gnas shes rtogs bya thabs dang / bod gzhung gi chab srid kyi gleng stegs sogs la bod mi rang nyid kyi skad yig thog nas deng dus dang mthun pa'i gsar shog tshad ldan zhig dgos gal che bar gzigs tel thog mar yab gzhis stag 'tsher gyi sa chen rgya lo don grub mchog nas thugs khur rkang bzhes kyis rdor gling rang dbang gsar khang tshugs yul dang / dngos dngul thabs shes gnang rgyul 'phrul 'khor yo byad spus gzigs gnang rgyul las byed pa go sgrig gnang rgyu sogs sku ngal 'dzem med thog nas gra sgrig cha tshang zin pa dang / ma su ri bzhugs sgar bka' shag nas rtse drung

In the 1960s, Tibetan exiles initially settled in the long-established communities in Darjeeling and Kalimpong in West Bengal, the newly founded settlement in Mussoorie in Uttarakhand, or worked in road construction in Sikkim. Lacking sufficient skills to read news in Hindi or English, it was strongly felt that the scattered community needed “a modern, quality newspaper.” The main protagonists in setting up the newspaper as a means “for communication between the exiled Tibetan government and the Tibetan people” were closely linked to the Dalai Lama and his government.

The objectives of Darjeeling’s *Freedom* were to be a political tool to protect the interests of Tibet as a nation and the religious and political freedoms of the Tibetan people. In the mid-20th century, when Tibetan communities were separated, parents, children, relatives, and spouses were scattered under Chinese communist oppression, not knowing where others had ended up — like blind people lost in the desert. During this time of great hardship for Tibetan refugees, *Freedom* published announcements that helped many families reunite and reconnect. It showed exiled Tibetans how to contact the Tibetan government-in-exile and provided extensive guidance on livelihoods, education, healthcare and other matters. At that critical time when the fate of Tibet as a nation and the Tibetan people hung in the balance, *Freedom* continuously published political guidance for Tibetan communities on how to navigate immediate and long-term challenges, how to distinguish between enemies, friends and protectors, and how to chart a path forward. This benefited both the government and the people.¹⁴

las tshan ye shes dar rgyas rdor gling rang dbang gsar khang gi 'go 'dzin du bsko dzongs gnang ba (Mgon po rdo rje 2015: 54).

¹⁴ *Rdor gling rang dbang gsar shog gi dmigs yul ni/ bod rgyal khab dang / bod mi rigs kyi chos srid rang dbang dang bcas pa'i khe phan srung skyob byed thabs chab srid kyi lag cha zhig pa dang / dus rabs nyi shu pa'i dkyil smad tsam la gzhis byes bod mi rnams kha bral gyi dus skabs la/ rgya dmar gyis drag gnon 'og nas pha ma dang / bu phrug gnyen nyel/ bza' tshang sogs kha 'thor nas gar slebs/ gar yod mi shes par long ba thang dkyil du lus pa ltar btson byol bod mi rnams dka' ngal che dus/ rang dbang gsar shog gi thog nas gsal bsgrags byas pa la brten nas/ gnyen ngo 'phrod de khyim tshang mang po rug 'dzoms thub pa dang / byes 'byor bod gzhung la 'brel ba zhu lam bstan pa dang / de bzhin 'tsho thabs dang / shes yon slob grwa/ 'phrod bsten sogs kyi lam ston rgya cher byed thub pa dang / skabs der bod rgyal khab dang / bod mi rigs bcas pa'i gnas stangs 'chi gson gyi bar*

Although the Tibetan societies in the PRC and the Tibetan diaspora are ideologically different – the first being a Leninist party state and the latter moving towards democracy – in the 1950s and 1960s, their use of media in the PRC and in Tibetan communities of the early exile appears to share some similarities.¹⁵ Among the Tibetan exiles, newspapers were a tool to connect the diasporic community, spread out initially across the subcontinent, including Nepal and later globally. Additionally, the newspapers of the CTA were intended to create a Tibetan community that shares a worldview, a set of values, and a specific concept of Tibet, or in other words, create unity. Besides its practical value as a communication channel for the CTA to the Tibetan exile community, the newspapers also served as a community or even Tibetan nation-building tool.¹⁶

Similarly, Tibetan newspapers in the PRC served as a tool for the Communist government to reach out to its Tibetan subjects and communicate the ruling ideology (mostly unknown and unintelligible for most Tibetans at the time) as well as government incentives, policies and campaigns. At the same time, the newspapers were seen as a tool of persuasion to better integrate Tibetans into the multi-ethnic Chinese society (*krung hwa/zhong hua*).

Although, as mentioned earlier, Tibetan newspapers existed since 1904, with the founding of the PRC and the Chinese annexation of Tibet in the following decades, newspapers became, together with radio broadcasts, the sharpest instruments of propaganda in the China-Tibet conflict. Franklin Houn, writing in the 1960s, summarised the function of the press in the early PRC:

mtshams su slebs brten/ dza drag gi dus skabs der rang dbang gsar shog thog gzhis byes bod mi rnams la 'phral phugs kyi mdun lam dgra gnyen mgon gsum 'dzin stangs ma 'dzol bar byed sgo'i chab srid kyi lam ston rgyun mthud nas gsar spel byas pas gzhung dmangs gnyis phan byung (Mgon po rdo rje 2015: 55–56).

¹⁵ Roemer (2008: 165–166) discusses the problems faced by Tibetan exiles in their process of democratic transformation and identifies a lack of freedom of speech until the 1990s.

¹⁶ According to McLagan, before the 1990s the CTA censored publications, “for the sake of maintaining unity in exile” (McLagan 1996: 238).

The Chinese government, like that of the Soviet Union, maintains strict controls over the entire publications industry. The press, by its nature peculiarly responsive to changing events, appears to serve the following four functions: propaganda, agitation, public information, and “self-criticism.” (Houn 1961: 91)

Even though the statist and propagandistic nature of Tibetan language newspapers within Tibet or the PRC makes them a problematic source for studying Tibetan society and sentiment, they contain in a relatively unfiltered form the state’s intentions, policies, and concepts, or at least those that the state and the Party considered favourable to its project. They also reveal the state’s strategies of communication to its Tibetan subjects. In this respect, newspapers – and other public documents, such as policy publications and official autobiographies – can be used to make up for the lack of available or accessible archival documents.¹⁷ The DD Corpus of early Tibetan newspapers of the 1950s and 1960s was compiled to provide a resource for those studying this crucial period in Tibetan history.

1.1 Tibetan Newspapers in the People’s Republic of China between 1950 and 1965

In his 1961 study of Chinese Communist propaganda, Franklin Houn describes the Chinese press in the early Maoist period (Houn 1961: 91–154). He describes the Chinese newspaper landscape in horizontal and vertical dimensions. The vertical organisation of the newspapers corresponds with four of the five geographic and administrative levels into which the PRC is divided – national, provincial, prefectural (district), and county – to ensure a newspaper network on each level, “to serve the party, government, and mass organization” (Houn 1961: 103).

¹⁷ While archives in the PRC are sometimes accessible, in Tibetan areas research is extremely difficult and access to archives mostly impossible. With regard to exile communities and the CTA, archives are also limited.

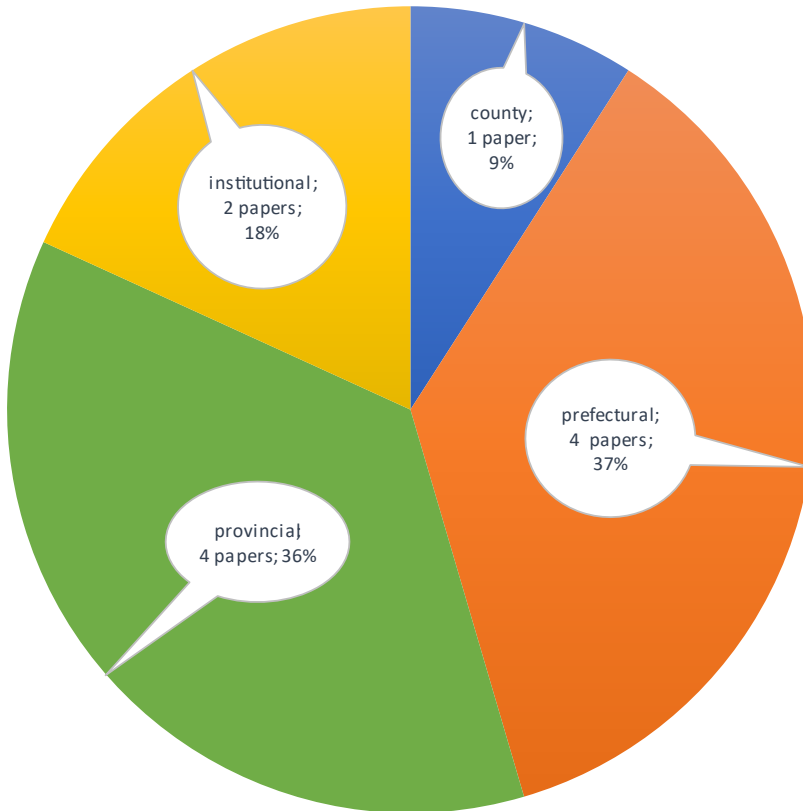


Figure 1 Horizontal division of newspapers corresponding to PRC administrative levels in the *Divergent Discourses* corpus

The horizontal organisation of the newspaper publications follows the principle of specialisation. On each (vertical) level, the state apparatus produces highly specialised publications targeting specific groups, e.g. the youth, university students, workers and other population groups. For the Chinese language press in 1956, Houn explains that 352 newspapers existed above the prefectural level, and 33% were targeting the youth. Of the 1,049 county-level publications, 49% were published for farmers and workers, while special papers were published for industrial and mining centres and targeting workers (Houn 1961: 106–107).

The minority language newspapers follow this pattern of vertical divisions. The DD Corpus includes two provincial-level publications, the *Qinghai Tibetan News* (QTN, *Mtsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur*)¹⁸ and the *Tibet Daily* (TID, *Bod ljong nyin re'i gsar 'gyur*). It contains several prefectural-level papers – the *Minjiang News* (MJN, *Ming kyang tshags dpar*), the *South Gansu News* (SGN, *Kan lho gsar 'gyur*), and the *Garze Daily News* (GDN, *Dkar mdzes nyin re'i gsar 'gyur*) – and one county-level newspaper, the *Gyantse Daily News* (GTN, *Rgyal rtse nyin re'i gsar 'gyur*).

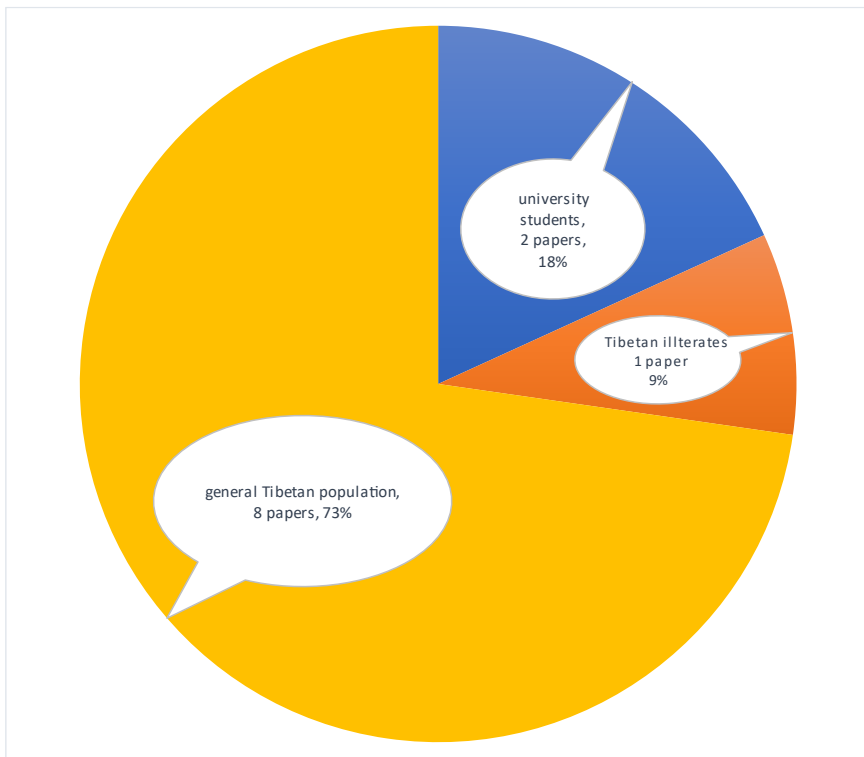


Figure 2 Functional division of Tibetan newspapers in the PRC in the Divergent Discourses corpus

¹⁸ The three-letter sigla for each newspaper title are used in the filenames for each image of a newspaper page in the Diverge corpus to facilitate identifying the newspaper title.

Most newspapers were published for the general Tibetan population. However, two newspapers in the corpus do not correspond with an administrative region. These are university newspapers published for students at one or another of the “Institutes of Nationalities” (*mi rigs slob chen*; Chin. *minzu xueyuan*). The *Tibet Daily Pictorial* (TDP; *Bod ljong nyin re'i gsar 'gyur brnyan par*) is the only example in the corpus of publications that targets a less educated and illiterate population by focussing on visual communication in the form of photographic reproductions, drawings, or cartoons.

While Tibetan newspaper publications serve at the same time as functional publications, ensuring smooth and (in theory) culturally sensitive communication with the Tibetan population, the Divergent Discourses corpus contains no examples of functional publications targeting a specific group, such as workers, soldiers, students, or farmers, among the Tibetan population, though these were commonly published in the reform period after 1978.

It seems likely that the creation of a Tibetan-language newspaper network on a scale or form similar to that of Chinese-language newspapers was challenged by several factors, including the economy and demography of Tibetan areas.

1.2 *Tibetan Newspapers published in exile communities in India*

Being less organised and lacking strong state central control, Tibetan newspapers published in India appear to be more diverse than their trans-Himalayan counterparts. Although smaller in number, we have a more complete picture of their publication history. All the newspapers we identified targeted the scattered Tibetan community in India and beyond. As such, these newspapers would correspond to national-level newspapers like the Chinese-language *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) in the PRC.

Unlike the fully state-controlled Communist hierarchical structure found in the PRC, we find in India a liberal model in the early years that gradually gives way over time to a more centralised one, controlling the relationship between the administration and the press.

Until the arrival of the Dalai Lama and the first wave of Tibetans as refugees in India, besides the very local papers published by Moravian missionaries, the only Tibetan newspaper was Dorje Tharchin's (1890–1976) privately published the *Tibet Mirror* (TIM, *yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*), which ran from 1925 to 1963. As an inde-

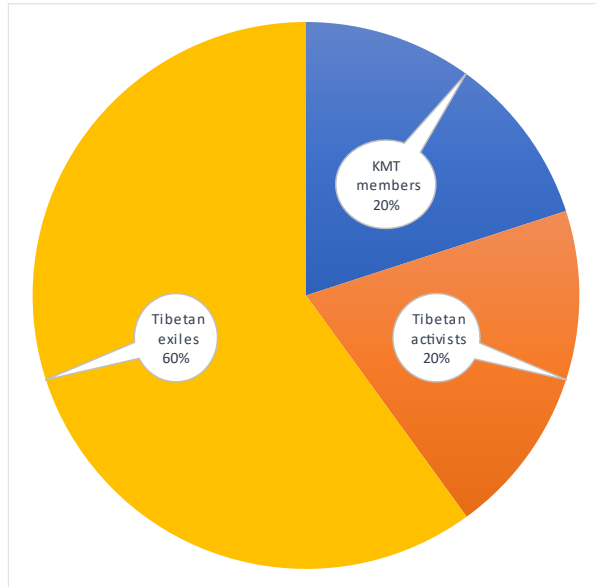


Figure 3 Functional division of Tibetan newspapers in India in the Divergent Discourses Corpus and their target audience.

pendently run newspaper, the *Tibet Mirror* was undoubtedly influenced by various actors, such as the British Indian government and later the Indian government. Still, editorial decisions were always taken by the editor, Tharchin (Moskaleva 2023: 47–55).

With the gradual establishment of Tibetan refugee settlements and, later, of the Tibetan exile administration, the need for effective communication was felt, and Tibetan newspapers were founded in the West Bengal hill station of Darjeeling. The CTA could not exercise media power or control on the scale of China, but it still appointed the editorial office and funded the publication. The first paper, *Freedom*, was started in March 1960, just one year after the 1959 uprising. It was followed by a short-lived second newspaper, *Defend Tibet's Freedom* (DTF, *rang dbang srung skyob gsar shog*), run by Lhamo Tsering (1924–1999), who later became Gyalo Thondup's deputy in organising the guerrilla forces. In 1965, both papers were ordered by the CTA to merge. They then formed the daily newspaper *Tibetan Freedom* (TIF, *bod mi'i rang dbang*), which, from 1978 onwards, became more closely integrated into the CTA as an official gazette and is still running today,

edited by the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR) in Dharamsala. These publications served as the main means of communication for the CTA with the general Tibetan exile public.

At the same time, there were at least two unrelated Tibetan-language newspaper projects in India. One was a party newspaper called *Central Weekly News* (CWN, *krung dbyang gsar 'gyur*). It was published by the Chinese Nationalist Party then based in Taiwan, the Kuomintang (KMT), and targeted a Tibetan exile audience from 1960 onwards. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the KMT as an opponent of the Chinese Communist Party appealed to some Tibetans as a potential ally in their quest for independence (although in fact the KMT was opposed to independence for Tibet).¹⁹

The *Central Weekly News* was published by Tempa Landoo (Bstan pa lhun grub, 丹巴隆舟 Danba Longzhou), also known by his Chinese name, Gao Qiangui 高攀桂, until the late 1970s in Calcutta.²⁰

The other Tibetan-language paper from this period had no title. It was issued under the name of *News Office of the Indian Government (Gangtok)* and published in the mid-1950s. Only a few copies have survived in the Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde (VM) but these are currently misplaced and thus inaccessible.

In sum, the development of Tibetan newspaper publishing in India until 1965 went from a proselytising Moravian press to a long-running independent modern newspaper, *The Tibet Mirror* and eventually to a government gazette, the *Tibetan Freedom*. The rise of the Communist Party in China and its integration of Tibet in the People's Republic in the 1950s resulted in the rise of institution-controlled newspaper

¹⁹ Moskaleva describes how, for example “in Tharchin’s anti-communist discourse, the Kuomintang government occupies an important position of a ‘friend’ of Tibet.” If successfully overthrowing Communist rule in China, “the Kuomintang promises to grant independence to Tibet” (2023: 274).

²⁰ I am grateful to Ling-wei Kung (Taipei) for clarification of Tempa Landoo’s Chinese name and identity. He is still best known as a KMT member and translator of Sun Yat-sen’s (孫中山 1866–1925) *Three Principles of the People* *Dmangs gsum ring lugs* (三民主義 *sanmin zhuyi*), which he first published in 1974 at the *Krung dbyang gsar 'gyur par khang* in Calcutta. I want to thank Chen Nai-hua for sending me images of the edition Sun 1985.

projects in exile, whether run by actors such as the Indian branch of the KMT, the Indian or Sikkimese government, or the CTA.

2 *Acquisition of Materials*

Early Tibetan newspapers until 1965 are widely dispersed globally; no single institution or library holds a comprehensive collection of Tibetan newspapers.²¹

The idea of compiling a larger corpus of such papers and making it available in digital form grew out of the rediscovery of the newspapers brought back by Johannes Schubert (1896-1976) in 1955 and given to Leipzig's Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde (MV)²² and those collected by Josef Kolmaš (1933-2021) between 1957 and 1959 during his stay in Beijing and given to the Oriental Institute (OI) of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague.²³ The two collections combined provide a comprehensive collection of newspapers – although incomplete – from 1954 to 1958.

A digital collection containing ca 70% of the entire *Tibet Mirror* print run was compiled, digitised and made openly available under the guidance of Luran Hartley at Columbia University (CU) from 2009 to 2013.²⁴ This collection combined the 97 issues of the Columbia University Library's Tharchin Collection with the *Tibet Mirror*

²¹ For post-Cultural Revolution, reform era newspapers, the situation is different and Tibetan language newspapers are held at Columbia University, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, the Library of Congress and others.

²² Schubert published a descriptive catalogue of his acquisitions in 1958. Most publications still uncatalogued are in the library of the Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig. The sigla in parenthesis are used in the filenames of the individual newspaper pages to allow the persistent identification of the library where the newspapers are held.

²³ Kolmaš published a descriptive catalogue of this collection in 1978.

²⁴ https://archive.org/details/ldpd_6981643_000 (accessed on January 10, 2025); for a detailed description of the Tharchin Collection, including the digital holdings of *Tibet Mirror* see https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/eastasian/special_collections/tibetan-rare-books---special-collections/tharchin.html (accessed on January 10, 2025).

holdings of Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library²⁵ in the United States, and the collections of the Collège de France (CF)²⁶ and the Musée Guimet.²⁷

Another effort to digitise and transcribe the *Tibet Mirror* was undertaken from 2015 to 2018 by the Collège de France (Wang-Toutain et al. 2018: vii; Wang-Toutain 2018). The project was joined by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LT), which holds another collection of 254 issues of the *Tibet Mirror* (Topgyal 2016).

As noted by Anna Sawerthal in her work on the *Tibet Mirror* (Sawerthal 2018: 343–346), the library of the Department for Indology, Tibet and Buddhism (IT) at Vienna University holds a significant collection of the main five Tibetan-language newspapers published in the early years of Tibetan exile in India, including the *Tibet Mirror*, *Freedom*, *Defend Tibet's Freedom*, *Tibetan Freedom* (TIF, *bod mi'i rang dbang*), and *Central Weekly News*. These collections are complemented by the holdings of *Defend Tibet's Freedom* at the British Library (BL) in London, of *Freedom* in the Bodleian Library (BD), Oxford, and those of the *Central Weekly News*, held at the library of the University of Washington (UW) and the Library of National Chengchi University (NC), Taipei. There are also copies of some of these titles in the holdings of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the Tibet Museum (TM), and a few copies are also in private collections. Other papers were already fading from collective memory. The historically interesting *Defend Tibet's Freedom*, which was started by Gyalo Dhondup in 1963 and run by his close assistant Lhamo Tsering with funding from the CIA, is virtually unknown, and seemingly no copy has survived in the exile community in India. At least one other Tibetan-language newspaper is known to have existed at this period: the publication produced for Tibetan guerrilla forces based secretly in

²⁵ <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/digitallibrary/tibetmirror.html> and <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2057570> (accessed on January 10, 2025).

²⁶ https://omnia.college-de-france.fr/permalink/33CDF_INST/1kslc0r/alma990004692210107166 and https://salamandre.college-de-france.fr/archives-en-ligne/ead.html?id=FR075CDF_00IET00TM&c=FR075CDF_00IET00TM_e0000002&qid=eas1736260177978 (accessed on January 10, 2025).

²⁷ <http://www.guimet.fr/fr/> (accessed on January 10, 2025).

Mustang, Nepal, until their dissolution in the mid-1970s. Called *Understanding* (GOT, *go rtogs*), it seems that no copies have ever made it into the archives.

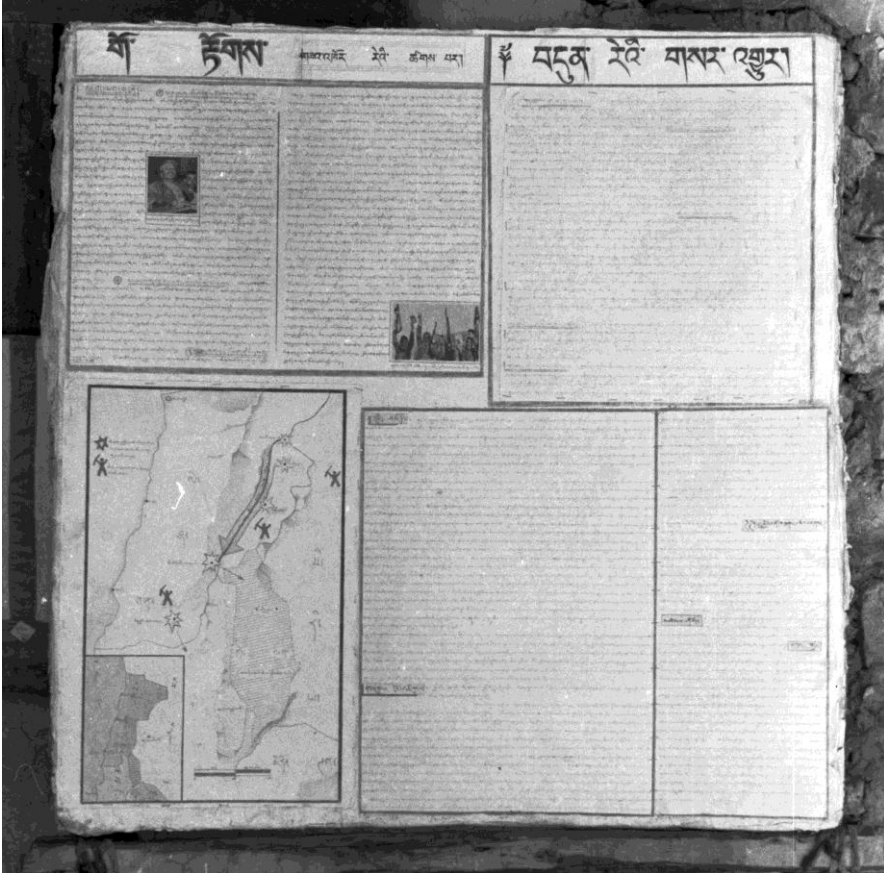


Figure 4 Issue of *Understanding* (*go rtogs*) put up on a wall (Lhamo Tsering Archive / White Crane Films)

As for papers from within Tibet, several libraries in Europe and the US have microfilm editions of the *Qinghai Tibetan News* and of the *Tibet Daily*.²⁸ Smaller collections of original copies of these provincial-level newspapers from within China are in the Schubert and Kolmaš

²⁸ The microfilm editions held by the Columbia University Library (CU), the Library of Congress, appear to be the same as the copies held at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SB) produced by China National Microforms Import & Export Corporation, Beijing.

collections in Leipzig and Prague, respectively, and in the libraries of Columbia University and Vienna University.

This survey of available materials outside China demonstrates how widely scattered the remaining copies of Tibetan newspapers from that period are. In addition, there are several newspaper titles whose existence is known primarily from hearsay, mainly smaller newspapers published in outlying districts of Tibet. For instance, our corpus has a single issue of such a newspaper, the *Gyantse News*. We can assume, there was also a *Shigatse Newspaper* and perhaps a *Nagchu Newspaper*, but no issues of such papers from the early years have come to light.²⁹

Besides the corpus's academic value, we hope that compiling digital copies of these widely dispersed papers will enable this archive to be preserved and accessible to the wider Tibetan community.

3 *The Divergent Discourses Corpus of Tibetan Newspapers from 1950 to 1965*

The DD Corpus combines in one collection eleven newspapers published within the PRC and five newspapers published in exile communities on the Indian subcontinent.³⁰

²⁹ In fact, in the 2000s and 2010s, among others, both a *Nagchu Newspaper* (Nag chu tshags par 那曲报 *Naqu bao*) and *Shigatse Newspaper* (Gzhis rtse'i tshags par 日喀则报 *Rikaze bao*) were published (Erhard 2015: 166–167). See also Hartley 2005 for an overview of newspapers in the post-Mao era.

³⁰ Although we know of them, newspapers of the 1950s such as the རྒྱ་གར་གཞུང་གི་གསར་འཕེལ་གྱི་སྐད་ཀྱི་སྐོར་ (rgya gar gzhung gi gsar spel las khungs sgang thog) published in Gangtok, Sikkim, or the ཀུན་མཁྱེན་རྒྱུང་འཕྲིན་གསར་འཕེལ་ (kun khyab rlung 'phrin gsar 'gyur) published in Beijing, we were not able to obtain copies so far and hence could not include them in the corpus.

3.1 Newspaper Publications from India in the DD Corpus

	Newspaper title	Place of publication	Years in DD Corpus	Issues/ pages in DD Corpus
1.	ཀླུང་དབྱུང་གསར་འགྲུལ (<i>krung dbyang gsar 'gyur</i>) 中央週報 (<i>zhong yang zhou bao</i>) "Central Weekly News" (CWN)	Calcutta, W.-Bengal	1963–1964	30 issues 120 pages
2.	རང་དབང་སྲུང་སྐྱོབ་གསར་ཤོག (<i>rang dbang srung skyob gsar shog</i>) "Defend Tibet's Freedom" (DTF)	Darjeeling, W.-Bengal	1963	14 issues 240 pages
3.	རང་དབང་གསར་ཤོག (<i>rang dbang gsar shog</i>) "Freedom" (FRD)	Darjeeling, W.-Bengal	1961–1965	203 issues 1420 pages
4.	བོད་མིའི་རང་དབང (<i>bod mi'i rang dbang</i>) "Tibetan Freedom" (TIF)	Darjeeling, W.-Bengal	1965	294 issues 916 pages
5.	ཡུལ་ཕྱོགས་སོ་སོའི་གསར་འགྲུལ་མེ་ལོང (<i>yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long</i>) "Tibet Mirror" (TIM)	Kālimpong, W.-Bengal	1950 – 1963	97 issues 1008 pages

3.2 Newspaper Publications from the PRC in the DD Corpus

	Newspaper title	Place of publication	Years in DD Corpus	Issues/ pages in DD Corpus
6.	དཀར་མཛེས་ཉིན་རེའི་གསར་འགྲུར (<i>dkar mdzes nyin re'i gsar 'gyur</i>) 甘孜日報 (<i>ganzi ribao</i>) Ganze Daily (GDN)	Dartsedo, Sichuan	1959	74 issues 296 pages
7.	རྒྱལ་ཤེགས་འགྲུར (<i>rgyal rtse gsar 'gyur</i>) 江孜報 (<i>jiangzi bao</i>) Gyangtse Daily News (GTN)	Gyangtse, TAR	1954	1 issue 4 pages
8.	དར་མདོའི་གསར་འགྲུར (<i>dar mdo'i gsar 'gyur</i>) 康定報 (<i>kangding bao</i>) Kangding News (KDN)	Dartsedo, Xikang ³¹	1954–1955	15 issues 60 pages
9.	མིང་ཀླང་ཚགས་དཔར (<i>ming kyāng tshags dpar</i>) 岷江報 (<i>minjiang bao</i>) Minjiang River News (MJN)	Maoxian, Sichuan	1953–1955, 1959	83 issues 348 pages
10.	གསར་འགྲུར་མདོར་བསྡུས (<i>gsar 'gyur mdor bsdus</i>) 新聞簡訊 (<i>xinwen jianxun</i>) News in Brief (NIB) ³²	Lhasa, TAR	1953–1955	96 issues 394 pages

³¹ The province Xikang 西康, or Shis khams in Tibetan, was established in 1939 and dissolved into the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and Sichuan in 1955.

³² Bapa Phüntso Wangye in his (auto)biography mentions “Brief Communications in Tibetan” or *bod yig bsdus 'phrin*, an early 1950s newsheet edited in 1952 by “a new research committee that translated news and directives into Tibetan”, as the predecessor of the Tibet Daily (Goldstein 2004: 179). Its title and description are similar to NIB (= *Gsar 'gyur mdor bsdus*), but predate it by at least one year. It is

	Newspaper title	Place of publication	Years in DD Corpus	Issues/pages in DD Corpus
11.	མཚོ་སྔོན་བོད་ཡིག་གསར་འགྲུར (<i>mtsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur</i>) 青海藏文報 (<i>qinghai zangwen bao</i>) Qinghai Tibetan News (QTN)	Xining, Qinghai	1951-1960, 1963-1965	1,083 issues 4,098 pp.
12.	ཀན་ལྷོ་གསར་འགྲུར (<i>kan lho gsar 'gyur</i>) 甘南報 (<i>gannan bao</i>) South Gansu News (SGN)	Zö (Tib. gtsos, Chin. Hezuo), Gansu	1959	17 issues 68 pages
13.	བོད་ལྗོངས་ཉིན་རེའི་གསར་འགྲུར་པར་རིས་ (<i>bod ljongs nyin re'i gsar 'gyur par ris</i>) 西藏日報 (<i>xizang ribao</i>) Tibet Daily Pictorial (TDP) ³³	Lhasa, TAR	1959	2 issues 8 pages
14.	བོད་ལྗོངས་ཉིན་རེའི་གསར་འགྲུར (<i>bod ljongs nyin re'i gsar 'gyur</i>) 西藏日報 (<i>xizang ribao</i>) Tibet Daily (TID)	Lhasa, TAR	1958-1959, 1961-1965	1980 issues 7641 pages
15.	ལྷོ་རྒྱལ་མི་རིགས་སློབ་གྲྭ་ཆེན་མོ་ (<i>lho nub mi rigs slob grwa chen mo</i>) 西南民族學院 (<i>xinan minzu xueyuan</i>) South-West Institute for Nationalities (XMX)	Chengdu, Sichuan	1955, 1959	13 issues 52 pages

conceivable that the *Bod yig bsdus 'phrin* represents an earlier name of the *Gsar 'gyur mdor bsdus*.

³³ This newspaper publication is similar yet different from the magazine *China Pictorial* (人民畫報 *renmin huabao*) published in Beijing in various languages, including Tibetan (*mi dmangs brnyan par*) until today. Kamil Sedláček (1972) used *China Pictorial* in his *Tibetan Newspaper Reader*.

	Newspaper title	Place of publication	Years in DD Corpus	Issues/ pages in DD Corpus
16.	<p>ཀླུང་དབྱུང་མི་རིགས་སློབ་གྲྭ</p> <p>(<i>krung dbyang mi rigs slob grwa</i>)</p> <p>中央民族學院 (<i>zhongyang minzu xueyuan</i>)</p> <p>Central Institute for Nationalities (ZMX)</p>	Beijing	1959	3 issues 10 pages

4 Representation and Bias

The question of representativeness and bias in the form of political representation is at the heart of the Divergent Discourses project, as it is broadly assumed that publications stemming from the PRC will show a Communist, pro-Chinese leaning. In contrast, publications from the subcontinent will have a nationalist and pro-independence perspective. Given that newspapers in the PRC are statist papers, it is important to emphasise that these papers present, first of all, the policies, opinions, and objectives of the state and its administrative apparatus.

It is difficult to conclude who might have been the readership of these publications, but, during high communism in the Maoist period, reading newspapers (or listening in groups to recitations from them) was compulsory communal practice, and the reading public depended on newspapers to indicate

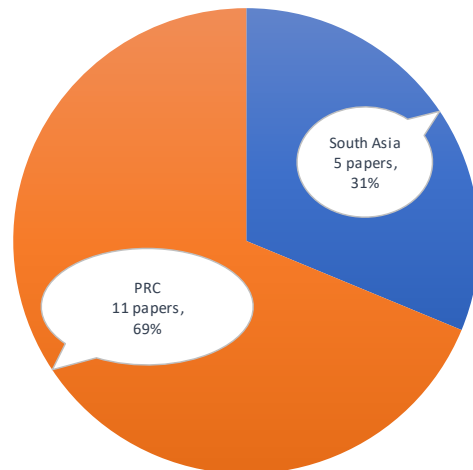


Figure 5 Distribution of PRC (red) and South Asian (blue) newspapers in the DD Corpus

political developments. Nevertheless, these newspapers can be used as sources to study the official narratives and state policies in unfiltered form as they were first communicated to the Tibetan people and evolved over time.

Leaving these fundamental biases aside, collection practices and technical decisions introduce additional bias into the corpus. For example, low quality paper or ink in the original document can result in inferior preservation and can render the text illegible. In such cases, the legibility of the digital version could be of extremely low quality. This was a significant problem with the pages we scanned from a widely circulated microfilm edition. It became apparent that the microfilm was of inferior quality; many pages were photographed twice, some pages were absent, and in many cases, large sections of a page were overexposed. These problems arose with the two daily papers from inside China, the *Tibet Daily* and the *Qinghai Tibetan News*, and image enhancement software was used wherever possible to recover obscured text sections.

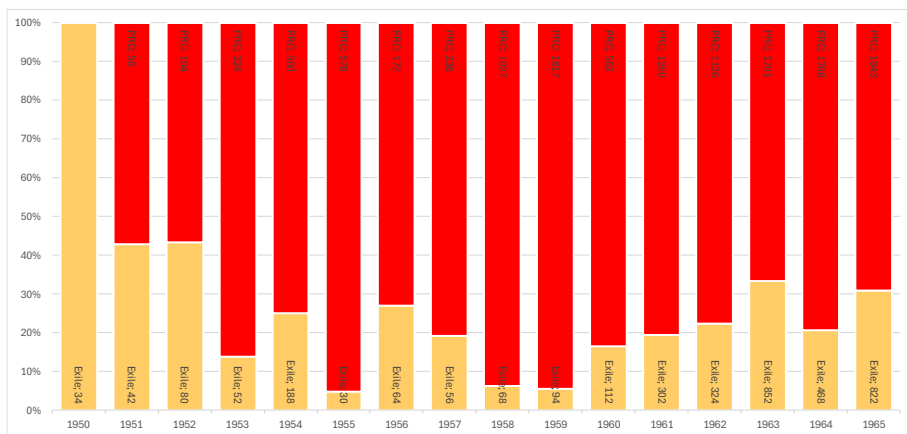


Figure 6 Representation of newspapers in pages from the PRC (red) and from exile (blue) in the DD Corpus over time

Studies of British digital newspaper collections have found that even paper quality – and hence subsequent legibility – can introduce bias into an archive: conservative papers in the UK in the 18th and 19th centuries, for example, were printed on better paper than left-leaning publications, and so are overrepresented in the archive. Such issues, whether of reproduction quality or of gaps in the archive, are present

with every digital collection, as Beelen *et al.* (2023) have noted, and are important reminders of the need to acknowledge bias and to question whose voices are represented in the pages of these publications.

4.1 Synchronic Aspects: Regional Bias

Among the Tibetan language newspapers published in the early PRC, we recognise a hierarchical stratification of the publications following top-down administrative levels: (1) regional (province/autonomous region), (2) prefectural and (3) county newspapers as outlined earlier. On the provincial level, publications for Qinghai and Tibet/TAR are

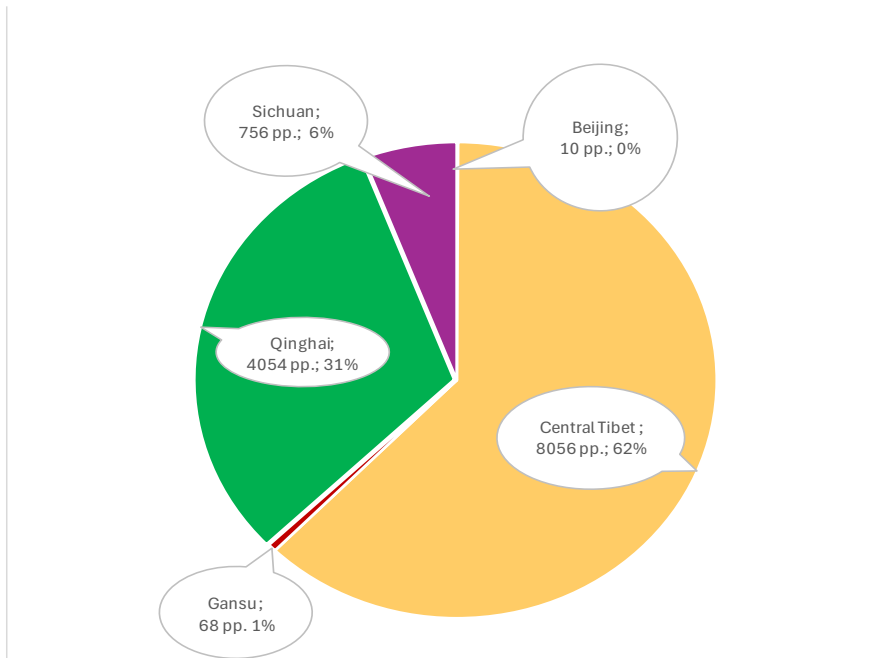


Figure 7 Newspapers in the DD Corpus (in pages) according to PRC province or region of publication

included, while the prefectural-level newspapers all come from Gansu and Sichuan³⁴. On the county level, we could only collect a single

To keep this simple, the numbers for the former province of Xikang are included in the numbers for Sichuan. For one, there are only very few papers in the corpus

Gyantse Daily News issue. The DD Corpus thus reflects the hierarchical stratification of newspaper publications in the PRC. It, nevertheless, is not representative of the newspapers published on each administrative level. County-level publications are in a stark minority while they would have been expected to comprise the largest share of newspaper publications. Similarly, the only prefectural-level newspapers in the corpus are from Ganan (SGN) and Sichuan (MJN,

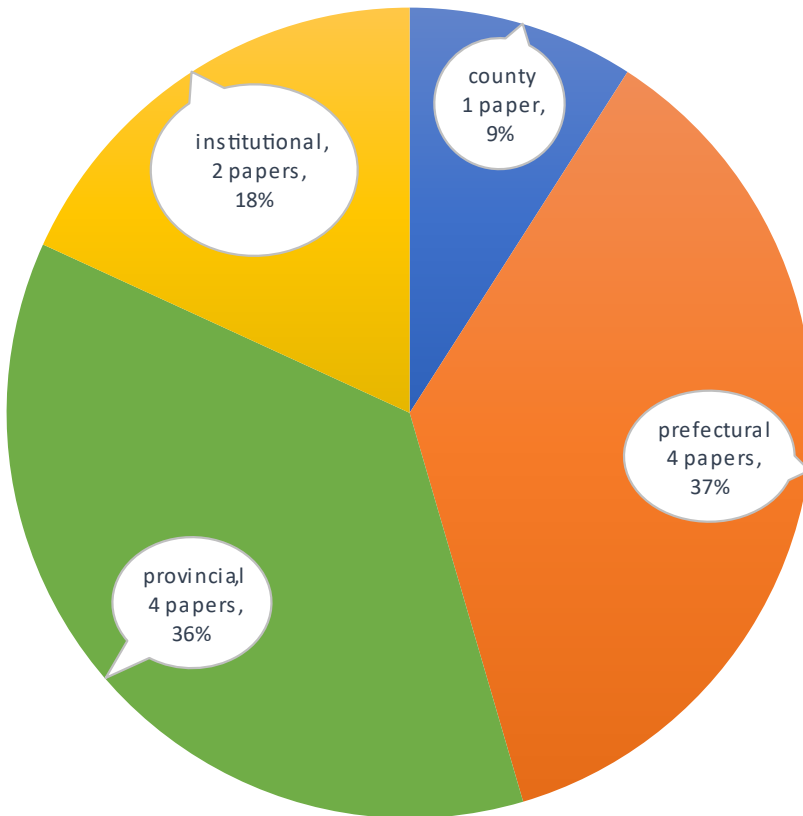


Figure 8 Hierarchical division of newspapers in the DD Corpus in the PRC

published in Xikang. Second, these were then merged or continued as publications from Sichuan, while we do not have any publications in the Diverge Corpus that would have been published in parts of Xikang later coming under TAR administration.

GDN, KDN), while prefectural-level newspapers from Tibet or Qinghai either have not existed at the time or have not been preserved.

Breaking up the newspapers according to the administrative provinces/regions of the PRC makes an even stronger representational imbalance visible. With 68%, most of the corpus (measured in newspaper pages) was published in Tibet/the TAR, and 32% came from Qinghai, while a mere 6% was published in Sichuan and Gansu. The Central Institute for Nationalities (Zhongyang Minzu Xueyuan) in Beijing published a newspaper of which three issues with a total of 10 pages are included in the corpus.

This reveals a significant bias towards publications from Central Tibet and the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The corpus contains three newspapers from Tibet, including the *Tibet Daily*, which, as a daily newspaper, contributed significantly more pages to the corpus than, e.g. the *Qinghai Tibetan News*, which was only published at first weekly and later twice a week.

The regional biases in the Divergent Discourses corpus are important as there are significant differences in policies and their implementations between provinces. Between January and March 1959, for example, the QTN extensively reported on the successful implementation of various policies to technologically advance agriculture and animal husbandry. The majority of articles focus on manure collection, an increase in agricultural production, and collectivisation, while the newspapers published in Maoxian, Sichuan, and Kanze engage in heated class struggles against counter-revolutionaries, monks and former landowners. At the same time, in Tibet before 1959, an altogether different set of policies was implemented. The DD Corpus's stronger representation of Central Tibetan newspapers results in a bias towards more gradual, liberal and less radical attitudes and policies in Tibet.

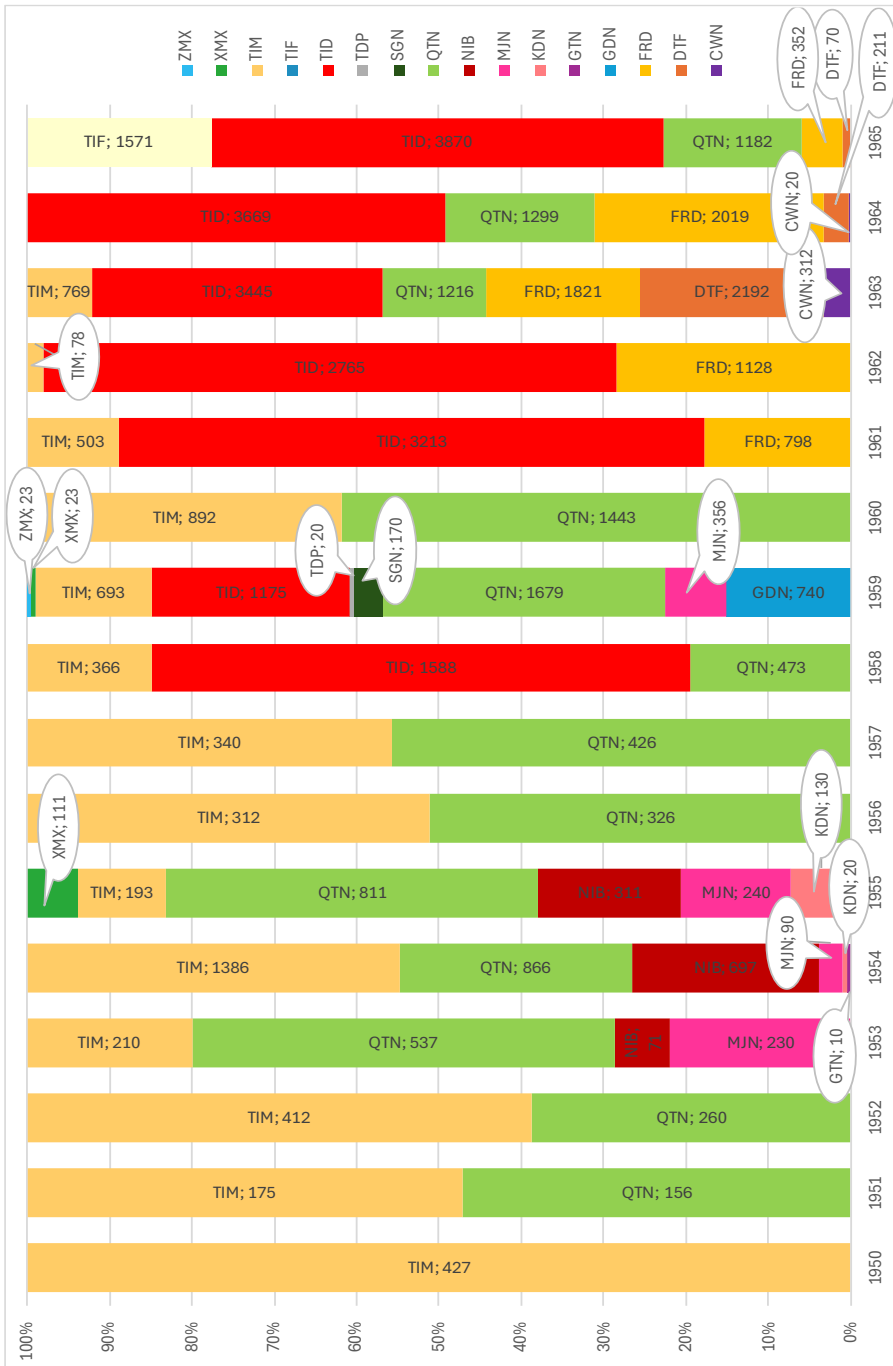


Figure 9 Newspaper shares in pages in the DD Corpus per year.

Newspapers were a relatively new phenomenon in Tibetan areas, and their technological and economic prerequisites were limited. For example, the first Tibetan language newspaper published in the PRC was the QTN in 1951. This was possible because it used a printing press sacked from the Kuomintang in Xining (Hartley 2003: 83). For the year 1950, the Diverge Corpus contains only the *Tibet Mirror*. The following year, with the founding of the QTN, there are two newspapers in the corpus. In 1953, more newspapers were started; the *News in Brief* in Lhasa and the *Minjiang News* in Sichuan. For 1954 and 1955, the DD Corpus features six newspapers from all Tibetan regions, including TIM from Kalimpong in West Bengal, India.

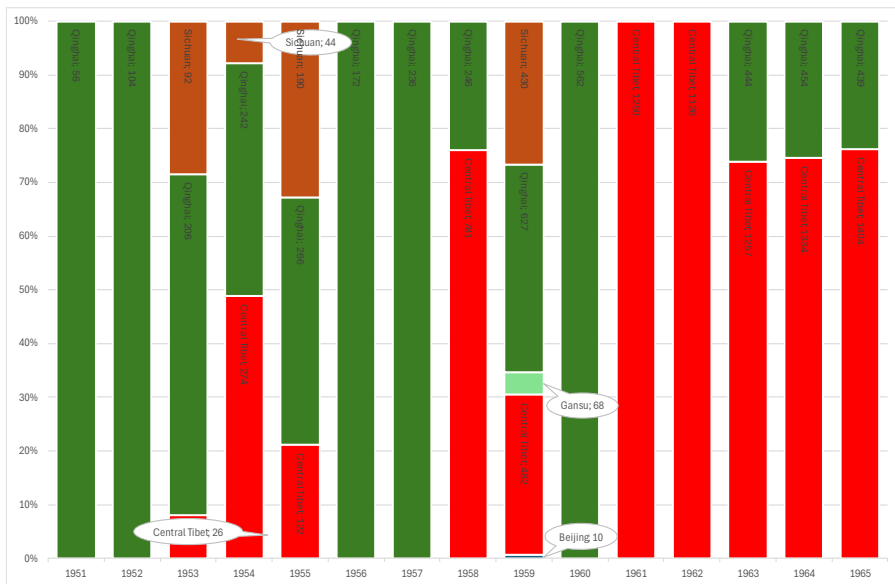


Figure 10 Newspapers in pages per province/autonomous region (PRC) in the DD Corpus per year.

The voice of the exiled Tibetan elite has only been present since 1960 when *Freedom* started publication in Darjeeling. However, from the same year onwards, the representation of PRC newspapers becomes less diverse, mainly the TID from Lhasa and the QTN from Xining.

From Fig 9, it is evident that the Diverge Corpus has significant regional and temporal gaps. Nevertheless, carefully selecting newspapers in the corpus will allow researchers to conduct comparative studies over the whole period. Combining TIM with FRD

and *Tibetan Freedom* allows the study of exile Tibetan positions for the whole 15 years covered in the corpus. Fig. 10 shows that combining *News in Brief* with *Tibet Daily* gives a relatively complete collection from Central Tibet lacking issues for only five years (1950-1952, 1956-1957) which can be compared to the *Qinghai Tibetan News*, which is missing only three years (1950, 1961, 1962) for the whole period, for a diachronic comparative study of Tibet/TAR and Qinghai province.

5 Conclusion

The Divergent Discourse Corpus of Tibetan language newspapers is a first attempt to provide a Tibetan language newspaper corpus as a comprehensive historical source. The problematic accessibility of archives and the preservation status and sometimes inferior quality of the original material are reflected in the composition of the corpus. The research design must leverage the resulting representational issues and biases to get representative findings.

Despite the described limitations, the scope of the Diverge Corpus will allow researchers to systematically study the narratives that framed the diverging conceptualisations of Tibet at the time. It will allow – perhaps for the first time – to inquire into the linguistic, social, political and ideological transformations of the 1950s and 1960s.

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Appendix:

Systematic Description of the Divergent Discourses Corpus

The DD Corpus contains the following datasets (1) the raw images of 17,115 newspaper pages; (2) enhanced images;³⁵ (3) e-texts, and bibliographic information for the 16 newspapers in mets xml-format. All datasets are stored in the Crossasia repository maintained by Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin once they become available.

Storage and File Format

From scanning to text extraction, the project preserves a set of data at each stage. All datasets are stored using a human-readable file name in the following format encoding basic bibliographic information:

XXX_YYYY_MM_DD_ppp_LL_abcd
Title_Year_Month_Day_Page_Library_Shelfmark
TID_1964_01_09_001_SB_Zsn128162MR

TID_1964_01_09_001_SB_Zsn128162MR denotes page 1 of the January 9 issue of the year 1964 of Tibet Daily held at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin with shelfmark Zsn128162MR. This will ensure that at any time, the original page from which the digital copy was derived can be identified and located.

³⁵ See Sabbagh 2025 in this special issue, for a detailed description of how the project enhanced images for automatic text extraction.

Newspaper Titles

#	Code	Newspaper title	Donors (shelfmark) ³⁶
1.	CWN	<i>Central Weekly News krung dbyang gsar 'gyur</i>	IT (AC16810977); UW (99133499060001452);
2.	DTF	<i>Defend Tibet's Freedom rang dbang srung skyob gsar shog</i>	IT (AC16810250); CU (AN6.T6 .R36); BL
3.	FRD	<i>Freedom rang dbang gsar shog</i>	IT (AC16809715); BD
4.	GDN	<i>Ganze Daily dkar mdzes nyin re'i gsar 'gyur</i>	OI (XIV 92/1959); RB
5.	GOT	<i>Understanding go rtogs</i>	TS (not included corpus)
6.	GTN	<i>Gyantse News rgyal rtse gsar 'gyur</i>	LT
7.	KDN	<i>Kangding News dar mdo'i gsar 'gyur</i>	MV (As Z Ag 10)
8.	MJN	<i>Minjiang News min kyang tshags dpar</i>	MV (As Z Ag 8); OI (XIV 93/1959)
9.	NIB	<i>News in Brief Gsar 'gyur mdor bsdus</i>	TL; MV (As Z Ag 9); CU (AN6.T6 G76)
10.	QTN	<i>Qinghai Tibetan News Mtsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur</i>	CU (AN6.T6M4); SB (Zsn 128163 MR); MV (As Z Ag 12); OI (XIV 85/1959)
11.	SGN	<i>South Gansu News kan lho gsar 'gyur</i>	OI (XIV 90/1959)
12.	TDP	<i>Tibet Daily Pictorial bod ljongs nyin re'i gsar 'gyur par ris</i>	OI (XV 86/1959)
13.	TID	<i>Tibet Daily bod ljongs nyin re'i gsar 'gyur</i>	OI (XIV 91/1959); SB (Zsn 128162 MR); IT (AC16863326)
14.	TIF	<i>Tibetan Freedom bod mi'i rang dbang</i>	IT (AC16810977)

³⁶ The shelfmarks link to respective online catalogues. Where no shelfmark is provided, the holdings are not catalogued.

#	Code	Newspaper title	Donors (shelfmark) ³⁶
15.	TIM	<i>Tibet Mirror</i> <i>yul phyog so so'i gsar 'gyur me long</i>	MV (As Z Ag 11); IT (AC16810250); CU (DS786.A1 Y85); CF (3 IET PER 1-28)
16.	XNX	<i>South-West Institut for Nationalities</i> <i>Lho nub mi rigs slob grwa chen po</i>	OI (XIV 89/1959); MV (As Z Ag Z)
17.	ZYX	<i>Central Institute for Nationalities</i> <i>Krung dbyang mi rigs slob grwa</i>	OI (XIV 88/1959)

Donor Institutions

The newspapers in the DD Corpus were sourced from the following twelve libraries and private collections.

Code	Library	Newspapers
BD	Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK	FRD
BL	British Library, London, UK	DTF
CF	Collège de France, Bibliothèque des études tibétaines, Paris, France	TIM
CU	Columbia University Libraries, New York, USA	DTF; NIB; TIM; QTN
IT	Library of the Institute for South Asian, Tibetan, and Buddhist Studies, University Vienna	CWN; DTF; TIF; QTN; FRD;
MV	Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde, Leipzig, Germany	MJN; KDN; NIB; TIM; QTD; XNX; ZYX

Code	Library	Newspapers
OI	Oriental Institute (Czech Academy of Sciences), Prague, Czech Republic	MJN; TID; QTN; SGN;
RB	Robbie Barnett, London, UK (Private Collection)	GTN
SB	Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Germany	QTN; TID
TL	Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA), Dharamshala, India	NIB; FRD
TS	Tenzin Sonam, Dharamshala, India (Lhamo Tsering Archive/White Crane Films)	GTN
UW	University of Washington, Washington, USA	CWN

