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China: The "Green Book" issued to Tibetans; how it is obtained and maintained, and whether holders enjoy rights equivalent to Indian citizenship (April 2006)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Except where noted, the information in this Response is based on a 13 April 2006 telephone interview with the Elected Representative of Tibetans Living in the United States and Canada to the Tibetan Parliament in Exile. The information on the Green Book provided by the Elected Representative is based on knowledge gained through his involvement in the reform of the Green Book rules, as well as his own experience as a Tibetan.

Background

The Green Book is a receipt book that details annual voluntary contributions made by Tibetans living in exile to the Tibetan Government in Exile, which is located in India and is also known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006; Office of Tibet in London n.d.b; CTA 27 Apr. 2006). The idea for the Green Book first emerged during a 1972 General Assembly of the Tibetan Freedom Movement, where participants recommended that Tibetans living in exile voluntarily provide financial support to the Tibetan Government in Exile (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006; Office of Tibet in London n.d.a; *ibid.* n.d.b).

The Green Book rules are established by the CTA parliament, and administered by the CTA (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). Financial contributions to the CTA are now required for "fulfilling Tibetan citizenship" (*ibid.*). The Green Book, described as "the passport of the exiled Tibetans to claim their rights from the Tibetan Government in Exile" (Office of Tibet in London n.d.a), grants those who make their annual contributions the right to vote and stand for election, to apply for scholarships awarded by the CTA, and to work for the CTA, among other rights (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006; see also Office of Tibet in London n.d.a).

Green Books are issued only to Tibetans residing outside of Tibet; the Website of the Office of Tibet in London states that possession of a Green Book would be grounds for "persecution" in Tibet as it is "the most official document issued by the Tibetan Government in exile" (*ibid.*; see also ICT 13 June 2002).

According to April 2006 correspondence from the CTA,

[t]he Green Book is designed to serve the purpose of [an] identity certificate [for] Tibetan nationals in lieu of the passport. The holder of the Green Book is recognized as a bonafide Tibetan (27 Apr. 2006).

Right to Obtain a Green Book

All Tibetans and their children living in exile may obtain a Green Book (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006; CTA 27 Apr. 2006). According to the Green Book issuance rules, a Tibetan is any person born in

Tibet, or any person with one parent who was born in Tibet (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006).

Tibetan associations located outside of Tibet that issue Green Books are responsible for verifying whether or not a person is Tibetan and keeping records of all the Tibetan people living in the area (Representative of the Office of Tibet in New York 20 Apr. 2006). According to the Office of Tibet in New York, most Tibetans in exile are registered in Tibetan communities (e.g., in Nepal) (ibid.). As most Tibetans do not have any personal identification documents, Tibetan nationality is determined through an in-person interview with an association member (ibid.). According to a representative of the Office of Tibet in New York, Tibetan nationality can be determined based on such things as language, mannerisms, and physical features (ibid.).

Issuing of Green Books

The Department of Finance of the CTA in India has issued Green Books since 2004, when reforms to the Green Books were made (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006), and is "the singular authority to issue [the] Green Book" (CTA 27 Apr. 2006). Prior to these reforms, Tibetan associations in foreign countries issued Green Books (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). If a Tibetan community was very small and did not have an association, the representative office in the region would issue Green Books (e.g., the Office of Tibet in London, the Office of Tibet in New York) (ibid.).

The issuance procedure in April 2006 was that Tibetan associations collected and verified Green Book applications and fees, confirmed that the applicant was Tibetan, and forwarded this information to the Office of Tibet in the region, which then sent the applications and fees to the CTA in Dharamshala, India (ibid.; Office of Tibet in New York, 20 Apr. 2006). According to the CTA, "the Department of Finance does not accept incomplete [or] unverified application forms" (27 Apr. 2006).

Once the Department of Finance of the CTA issues the Green Books, they are sent to the relevant Office of Tibet, which sends them to the corresponding Tibetan association to distribute to the applicants (Office of Tibet in New York, 20 Apr. 2006; Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). For example, in Nepal, the Tibetan Freedom Movement is responsible for collecting Green Book applications and fees, and for distributing the documents once the Department of Finance of the CTA has issued them (ibid.).

Green Book Fees

There is no fee associated with the issuance of the Green Book itself (CTA 27 Apr. 2006; Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006); however, once the Green Book is issued, Tibetans are expected to make voluntary contributions (ibid.). All Tibetans in exile over the age of six years are asked to make annual voluntary contributions to the CTA (Office of Tibet in London n.d.a; Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006).

Suggested contributions for the Green Book vary according to age and place of residence. In western countries, such as Canada and the United States, Tibetans aged six to seventeen years contribute US\$36 per year; Tibetans aged eighteen years and older contribute US\$46 per year; and Tibetans who are aged eighteen years and older and are employed contribute US\$96 per year (ibid.). In India, Nepal, and Bhutan, Tibetans aged six to fourteen years contribute twelve rupees per year [US\$0.27 (XE.com 24 Apr. 2006a)]; those aged fifteen to seventeen years contribute forty-eight rupees per year [US\$1.07 (XE.com 24 Apr. 2006b)]; those aged eighteen years and older contribute fifty-eight rupees per year [US\$1.29 (XE.com 24 Apr. 2006c)]; and those aged eighteen years and older who are salaried contribute four per cent of their basic salary, or two per cent of their gross salary, whichever is higher (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). If a Tibetan living in India, Nepal, or Bhutan is not salaried, but has an income, the suggested contribution is 0.15 per cent of the person's net annual income (ibid.).

According to the Elected Representative of Tibetans living in exile in Canada and the United States, a person's Green Book must be up-to-date (i.e., all voluntary contributions made) in order for them to exercise their rights as a Tibetan citizen (13 Apr. 2006). For example, if a person has only paid their contributions up to the year 2004, they would have to contribute for 2005 and 2006 in order to vote in 2006 (ibid.). Previously, Tibetans in exile were able to make up for late payments without penalty; however, since about 2004 or 2005, there has been a ten per cent penalty for late payments (ibid.).

Description of Green Book and Recent Reforms

In March 2005, the CTA started issuing a new version of the Green Book (CTA 10 Aug. 2005). In a 10 August 2005 press release, the CTA estimated that approximately 50,000 copies of the new Green Book had been distributed in north India, Nepal and North America by August 2005, and that a further 50,000 copies

would be distributed in southern and central India as well as other countries by the end of August 2005 (ibid.). Information on the total number of new Green Books that were distributed as of 2006 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Several differences exist between the old Green Book and the new Green Book (ibid.; Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). For example, stamps are no longer inserted into the Green Book after every contribution (ibid.; CTA 10 Aug. 2005). Stamps or stickers were previously issued to the holder based on their contribution amounts (e.g., a person could receive a stamp worth US\$46 for their US\$46 contribution), and were inserted into the Green Book after every contribution (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). According to the new rules, the contribution amount is filled out on a paper receipt and this receipt and the financial contribution is sent to the CTA (ibid.). The receipt number is then recorded in the Green Book (ibid.).

Another difference is that the system of Green Book identification numbers has changed (ibid.). For the old Green Books, each Tibetan community would issue unique Green Book numbers for their community or region (ibid.). Now, all Green Book numbers are centrally issued by the CTA's Department of Finance (CTA 10 Aug. 2005; Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2005), and stored in a central database (ibid.; CTA 27 Apr. 2006). This allows unique Green Book numbers to be issued to all Tibetans (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2005).

Green Books must be renewed every five years (CTA 27 Apr. 2006; ibid. 10 Aug. 2005; Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). Whereas the old Green Book only had an issue date, the new Green Book includes an issue date and expiry date (ibid.). To renew a Green Book, a Tibetan must complete an extension application, which is found at the back of the book (ibid.). If the application is approved, the same Green Book is maintained, but is dated and stamped by the issuing officer (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006).

Another new feature of the Green Book is that the CTA symbol appears on every page of the book (ibid.). In addition, the CTA stamp is located on the first page of the book, which has the holder's picture, while voter registration pages are found at the back of the book (ibid.).

The new Green Book also includes much of the same information as in the old one, including a picture of the holder with their name, birth date, birth place, residence, profession, parents' names, spouse's name, and Green Book number (ibid.).

The new Green Book, which is half an inch smaller in height and a quarter of an inch smaller in width than the old book, is now "more like a passport" (ibid.) The cover of the Green Book is now "soft," when compared with the hard paperback covers of the old book, and is green with a red seal of the CTA imprinted on it (ibid.). The title on the front cover reads [translation] "Exiled Tibetans Freedom and Supporting Voluntary Contribution Book" (ibid.).

According to a 10 August 2005 press release from the CTA, the CTA Department of Finance plans to launch a Green Book Website (10 Aug. 2005). Tibetans in exile will be assigned an individual Personal Identity Number (PIN) and will be able to access information about their contributions online (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006; CTA 10 Aug. 2005). A CTA Department of Finance official stated in August 2005 that Tibetans in exile will "soon" be able to make their Green Book payments online (ibid.; Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). A time frame for when Tibetans will be able to start making their contributions online could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Determining the Authenticity of a Green Book

According to a representative of the Office of Tibet in New York, the authenticity of a Green Book can be verified by the Tibetan office or association that issued the document (20 Apr. 2006). A scanned copy of the Green Book is sent to the regional Office of Tibet, which then sends it to the office that issued it (i.e., the Green Book includes the place of issue) (Office of Tibet in New York 20 Apr. 2006). The issuing office will then verify the bearer's name, as well as the Green Book number, to determine the document's authenticity (ibid.). Currently, these offices and associations do not have an electronic record of Green Book holders; they have only a "manual" record (ibid.).

Citizenship Rights of Bearers of the Green Book

The Green Book does not entitle Tibetans living in exile in India to the same rights as Indian citizens (Elected Representative of Tibetans 13 Apr. 2006). Rather, the Green Book entitles holders to rights granted by

the CTA (ibid.). However, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) 2000 report on the state of the world's refugees, although Tibetan "refugees" in India were considered "foreigners" as defined under the country's 1946 Foreigners Act, they "ha[d] been accorded the basic rights of most citizens but [were] not allowed to contest or vote in Indian elections" (UN 2000, Ch.3, 63).

In 17 January 2006 correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an official with the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi indicated that Tibetans in India are tolerated, and "reports of any Tibetans facing problems due to lack of legal status are extremely rare and [are] dealt with by the Dalai Lama's office" (Canada 17 Jan. 2006). The official added that Tibetans in India have access to employment and education and "are protected from refoulement" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario, the International Campaign for Tibet, and the Tibet Justice Center did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Tibet Justice Center, Tibet Office in London, Tibet Office in New York, United States Department of State, and Voice of America (VOA).

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