

## **Politics, secrecy and the uses of media: Chen Kuiyuan and the Panchen Lama reincarnation dispute, 1995**

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In 1999, a book was published in the series *Gaoji Ganbu Wenku* (High Level Cadre Documents Series) by the Publishing House of the Central Party School in Beijing (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe*). It contained a number of major speeches and writings by the then Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Chen Kuiyuan, including some apparently highly confidential internal reports by Secretary Chen concerning the search for the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. The reports appear to challenge dominant western assessments of those events, and at the same time, by putting secret party texts into the public arena, seem to represent a specific approach to political secrecy and disclosure. Why did Chen have these reports published, and what do they tell us about the history of the dispute over that reincarnation? This was only one of many examples of uses of the media by political leaders in that issue, which included film, publications and newspapers, not to mention the extraordinary photo-realist triptych of the December 1995 ceremony created at the request of officials involved in the reincarnation dispute. The paper looks at the mechanics of representation in that dispute, and the ways in which different types of media were used by the various parties to present their positions. It looks at the links between these forms of technology and the thinking of the participants, and asks how these might relate to a “modern” form of Tibetan politics, and to concepts of criminality and secrecy.