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Tibetan Activist Is Back Home Doctors Likely To Treat His Heels, Cracked Vertebrae

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Daja Meston, the Boston-based scholar and activist who suffered severe injuries while in the custody of Chinese officials last week, was in fair condition and undergoing medical evaluations yesterday at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

The hospital declined to provide further information on Meston, who arrived in Boston on a medical-evacuation aircraft around midnight Tuesday. But Carl Williams, a human-rights activist and a friend of Meston's, said doctors are likely to work first on the activist's crushed heels, then on his two fractured vertebrae.

Meston sustained the injuries when he jumped or fell from a third-floor hotel room where he was undergoing questioning by Chinese security personnel. The Chinese detained him, and an Australian colleague who was freed unharmed, on charges that they were conducting research illegally and taking pictures in a restricted area.

A sociology professor, Gordon Fellman, who taught Meston when he was enrolled in Brandeis University's program on peace and conflict studies, said after a half-hour hospital visit yesterday that Meston "was thrilled to be home, but it seemed that the trauma of whatever they did to him was overwhelming." Fellman said he had not questioned Meston about what had happened in his detention, and said it might be weeks before Meston is ready to discuss the experience.

A Jewish-American whose parents raised him in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Nepal, Meston has been daring in his efforts to rally public sentiment against Chinese efforts to destroy Tibetan culture.

Two years ago, he assisted US Representative Frank R. Wolf, a Virginia Republican, in making an unauthorized trip to Tibet, after which Wolf sharply condemned Chinese repression of the Tibetans, to the fury of the Chinese.

The trip was made to examine the impact on Tibetans of a Chinese government plan to resettle 58,000 poor farmers into an area now dominated by Tibetan and Mongolian herdsmen. The area, in the remote far west of China, has been designated Qinghai Province since the Chinese conquest of Tibet, but it is part of historic Tibet and encompasses the birthplace of the Dalai Lama, the country's exiled spiritual leader.

The Chinese plan depends on financing from the World Bank to irrigate the land. The bank board voted narrowly in favor of the \$40 million loan in late June, but only on condition that outside observers have unrestricted access to the area to assess any danger to indigenous people or the environment.

Tibetan activists say that, because of the Chinese commitment to open access, Meston, who is more commonly known by his Tibetan name, Wangchuk, could not have been conducting an illegal investigation, as Chinese authorities alleged. Before his release, Meston signed a confession, which Williams said was not made under duress, outlining his activities in China.

"He agrees with the events" described in the document, said Williams, the friend who helped bring Meston home from China, "but not . . . that it's a crime." Williams said Meston is able to move his legs and feet, and to swivel his torso from side to side, despite his foot and back injuries, but will probably need permanent pins and screws to repair his bones.

Williams said Meston did not talk about his ordeal during a hospital stay in Hong Kong between his departure from the Chinese mainland and his arrival in Boston. "I was in hell for two weeks," he said Meston told him. "This is heaven.