

A Study of Tibetan-Chinese Political Relations 1950 — 2008

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1 Introduction

Tibet has been occupied by China for over 50 years already, yet no progress has been made on solving the Tibetan problem. On 1 October 2009, China celebrated her nation's 60th birthday by holding a grand procession and military parade on Tiananmen Square. China's top leaders highly praised their own achievements at this official function as usual, however, something is amiss in the picture so-called "harmonious society". Today's China is, shall we say, a complicated country. A high economic growth rate has continued for two decades, but the closed political system known as "one-party rule" is as authoritarian as before. Actually any organized objection to the Communist Party was ruthlessly extirpated. The event in Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989 is still clear in people's memory. Recently the rebellions broke out in Tibet in March 2008 have also underlined the fact that more than a half century of Chinese occupation aren't working and never successful. Resistance to Chinese rule hasn't come just from the "Dalai clique", as Chinese officials put it, but from all 6 million Tibetans. The situation of human rights in Tibet attracted the attention of people all over the world once again.

As is generally known, China is the third largest country in the world, after Russia and Canada, and has an area of 9.6 million square kilometers. Only half of China is occupied by Han Chinese; the rest is inhabited by Mongols, Tibetans, Uyghurs and a host of other national minorities who occupy the periphery of China. From the capital Beijing, the Chinese government rules 22 provinces and four special municipalities of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing. The others are five autonomous regions of Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Guangxi and Tibet. These, of course, are in really administered by the central government just like other divisions.

The total number of the people in China would be over 1.3 billion. Han Chinese make up about 92% of the population, the rest is composed of 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities. Although minorities account for only 8% of the population, they are distributed over some 50% of Chinese-controlled territory, mostly in the sensitive border regions. Therefore minority separatism has always been a threat to the stability of China, especially among the Tibetans who have a lot of trouble with the Chinese.

It is needless to say that maintaining amicable relations with the minorities has been a continuous problem for the Chinese government. The minority regions provide China with the greater part of raw materials such as wood, wool and other animal products for their industries. Particularly Tibet is rich in natural resources including gold, silver, iron, lead, copper and so on, and this is one of the reasons why the Chinese had been quick in colonizing it. Tibet was earlier named as "Xizang Autonomous Region" on Chinese maps, but according to the historical concept, the total land of Tibetan plateau would be over

2.2million square kilometers, including the provinces of Qinghai and Gansu (traditionally known as Amdo), and parts of Sichuan and Yunan (traditionally known as Kham).More Tibetans now live outside the Xizang Autonomous Region than inside it.

The Chinese are always saying that for many centuries Tibet has been part of China, and the Tibetans are content in their regime. But the Tibetans countered that their country had become independent of China lasted until 1950, when Chinese troops conquered Tibet. Which of these two claims is true? Why did the Tibetans have so hostility to the Chinese? The reality is that Tibet has heavily garrisoned by Chinese troops over 50 years, partly to protect China's borders and partly to prevent rebellion among the local people. There is a great deal of ill-feeling on both sides. Though it takes courage to tell truth, we must seek truth from the historical facts.

2 The Rise and Fall of Chinese Empire and Its Effects on Tibet

Before to enter the subject of this research, it would be necessary for us to look back on the past political status of Tibet and, in particular, the nature of the relationship with China. Knowledge of the past can help us to understand the present, as past events and developments have, in no small measure, shaped the present.

2.1 Tibet's autonomy and China's suzerainty

Political contact between Tibet and China began in the 7th century when Tibet became unified under the rule of 33rd King Songtsen Gampo (581~649) of the Tubo dynasty. Because his brave armies won great victories and conquered western China and northern Nepal, the Chinese Emperor Taizong and Nepalese King Amsuvar-man were forced to yield their daughters in marriage to the conqueror. The Chinese princess is well-known as Princess Wen Cheng. Both princesses were devoted Buddhists and it is by their persuasion that Buddhism entered into Tibet rapidly. By the time of King Trisong Detsen's reign (755~797), Tibet became one of the most powerful nations in Inner Asia, so much so that in 763 its army was able to capture Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), the capital of Tang dynasty. After that, a Sino-Tibetan treaty was signed in 822, signatories to the treaty swore that "...the whole region to the east of Daduhe is the country of Great China and the whole region to the west of Daduhe is surely the country of Great Tibet. Henceforth, the two countries shall not fight as enemies and neither side will wage war into the other's territory." Today we can learn of the treaty from a stone monument still stands outside the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa.

For the next four centuries, Tibet languished and Tibetan-Chinese political relations were nonexistent during this period. In 1260 Kublai Khan, the greatest Mongol ruler and the founder of Yuan dynasty, appointed the Abbot of Sakya Phagpa (1235~80) as an imperial preceptor, accepted Buddhism and offered the sovereignty of Tibet to the Abbot. This marked the beginning of the rule of Chinese suzerainty in Tibet. In 1358 one of the greatest men was born in Amdo, became the founder of the Yellow Hat sect (Gelugpa) later. He is known as Tsongkhapa(1358 ~ 1419).Then Ganden Truppa, the successor of Tsongkhapa, became famous as the starting point of the unique system of reincarnations. Sonam Gyatso, the third reincarnated head of the Gelugpa, is remembered for having spread the Yellow Hat order in Mongolia, and received the title of "Dalai Lama", meaning "ocean of wisdom", from the devoted Mongol chief Altyn Khan

in 1578.

Among the Dalai Lamas, the fifth (1617 ~ 82) won a special honor. He invited the Mongols for support and gained the sovereignty of Tibet through his own efforts in 1641. He also visited Beijing in 1653, and the Qing Emperor Shunzhi made one day's journey from the capital in order to receive him. Like Kublai Khan, Shunzhi also accepted Tibetan Buddhism as the state religion of his empire. The 5th Dalai Lama was treated as an independent sovereign by the Qing Emperor. It is with the Dalai Lama's assistance that the Manchu Qing dynasty had designed to establish and strengthen their rule among the people of Mongolia who were the followers of the Dalai Lama.

The loose life of the 6th Dalai Lama became a source of dissensions among the Tibetans, and the Qing Emperor found opportunity to weaken Tibet. In 1700 Chinese forces occupied Dajianlu (Dhar-tsedo), a hill which marked the traditional Sino-Tibetan border near Kangding in Sichuan province. Six years later, the Chinese put the 6th Dalai Lama to death. The Qing Emperor Kangxi even dispatched an army to Tibet in 1718. But the army was defeated and Kangxi gave in and accepted the Tibetan nominee as Dalai Lama. Two years later, Kangxi dispatched a new and bigger army with two officials called Amban to Lhasa under the pretext of enthroning the 7th Dalai Lama. In 1750 the Ambans got the Tibetan regent murdered, and in retaliation the people of Lhasa massacred the Chinese. This gave another opportunity for restoring Chinese ascendancy and strengthening the power of Ambans in Lhasa. After that, for a hundred years Tibet was administered by Tibetan regents over whom the Chinese Ambans had varying degrees of influence.

2.2 A short-lived independence

The authority or the influence exercised by the Chinese over Tibet had gradually become feebler during the second half of the 19th century. The custom of forwarding important decision to the Amban, who in his turn submitted them to the Chinese Court, was nullified during this period. At the same time, the British began to playing an increasingly important role as mediators in problems between Tibet and China.

With the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, Tibet entered a period of factual independence, and it was to last until 1950, when Chinese communist armies conquered Tibet. Soon after the 1911 revolution broke out in the mainland of China, the Chinese Ambans and troops, who had surrendered in Lhasa, were deported by the Tibetans across the Indian frontier. In January 1913 the 13th Dalai Lama (1876~1933) returned to Lhasa from Sikkim and regained power in his own hand. As the Tibetan Prime Minister Lonchen Shatra explains, "The Dalai Lama wanted Tibet to manage her own internal affairs, to have no Chinese Amban, no Chinese officials, and no Chinese soldiers in Tibet; only Chinese traders could come in and lastly. Tibet was to include Nya-rong, Derge, Batang, Litang, and the country as far Dajianlu, the districts that had been snatched away by the Chinese during the last two hundred years."¹ In fact, Tibetan government first began to expand its international relations with India, Nepal, Mongolia, Britain and Russia during this period. Tibet was taking its first steps to join the modern world.

However, the government of the new Chinese Republic did not accept the position. It was not long before Yuan Shikai, the president of Republic of China, promulgated the presidential order that Tibet was to be regarded as on an equal footing with the

provinces of China. To make matters worse, the British again opened negotiations about Tibet's position with China, and attempted to establish Chinese suzerainty over Tibet once again. It is significant because the British feared that Tibet might seek assistance from Mongolia and through Mongolia from Russia. Tibet was tossed up and down by the irony of fate.

Under these situations, the problem of Tibet was not likely to be solved. So on 13 October 1913 a conference was held in Simla, India. Tibet initially wanted the conference to declare it independent. Lonchen Shatra, the Tibetan plenipotentiary, expressed this in his opening statement when he said: "Tibet and China have never been under each other and will never associate with each other in future. It is decided that Tibet is an independent state and that the precious Protector, the Dalai Lama, is the ruler of Tibet in all temporal as well as in spiritual affairs."² Chen Yifan, the Chinese plenipotentiary, forcefully opposed this claims. Sir Henry McMahon, the Indian Foreign Department Secretary, served as the British plenipotentiary. It was he who played the leading role in guiding deliberations and in arriving at decisions.

The discussions extended over six months and it was on 27 April 1914 that the convention was initiated by the three delegates. According to its provisions Tibet was divided into two zones: the zone contiguous to China was styled Inner Tibet; the zone far removed from China but contiguous to Inner Tibet was styled Outer Tibet. It is Outer Tibet whose southern boundary formed the northern boundary of India. The eastern part of this boundary is well-known as the McMahon Line.

It is needless to say that the division of Tibet into two zones had a model case in the two zones of Mongolia: Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia. The British and the Chinese provided in the convention that Inner Tibet was to be a free region for Chinese troop and colonists. Lhasa would retain only the control of the monasteries and would be allowed to appoint local chiefs. Keeping Outer Mongolia in mind, they provided for the autonomy of Outer Tibet, allowing the Chinese suzerainty over Outer Tibet but not allowing her to station troops or establish colonies.³

Actually the provisions of the convention were only initiated by the three delegates. Two days after, the Chinese government disowned the action of her plenipotentiary. China's disowning was caused by disagreement on the border line between China and Inner Tibet, as established in 1727.

After the breakdown of the convention and consequently of its provisions concerning Tibet and China, things became easier for the Tibetans. With that Tibet became completely independent, and from 1912 until the Chinese invasion in 1950, neither the Chinese nor any other state had any power whatever in Tibet. In March 1919 China proposed the resumption of negotiations initiated at Simla, but Tibetan government rejected. From 1912 onward there had been no Chinese Amban at Lhasa and the government of Tibet had stopped referring its affairs to Beijing. After the failure of the 1914 convention, fighting broke out in 1917 and resulted in a crushing defeat for Chinese forces.

We shall also mention some great events as follows: In 1928 the Kuomintang government sent a mission to Lhasa, not to force their suzerainty or to assert their historical aggressiveness, but to invite Tibetans to join the Chinese Republic. This

invitation was ignored. Hostilities recurred in 1931 and 1932. The occasion was the effort of the Kuomintang government to assert its authority over the territories of Amdo and Kham, where the Tibetans were operating. In 1936 the Tibetans also routed the communist armies, the Red Army on the Long March, from Kham.

It shall not be able to complete this account without mentioning the different attitudes toward China between the Dailai Lama and the Panchen Lama – Tibet's second greatest incarnation. From ancient times, conflicts had sprung up between the two Tibetan leaders over the autonomy of Tashilhunpo Monastery, the traditional seat of all the Panchen Lamas, and its estates. The 9th Panchen Lama (1883~1937), after appealing to the Chinese to mediate, fled to Qinghai, where he stayed for 14 years until his death. That is why the Panchen Lama had for generations been supported by the Chinese as a rival to the Dailai Lama. Whatever the case, from the year 1912, Tibet was to enjoy 38 years free of interference from China.

3 The “Peaceful Liberation” of Tibet

In the first half of the 20th century, the Tibetan leaders decided to shut off Tibet from the outside world. They did not like the influence of foreign ideas on the Tibetan people, so much so that they lost the best chance to modernize their country and to make it strong and powerful for its independent status and defending its territory. In August 1947 India became independent of England. The India's success gave a great stimulus to the neighboring countries, but the situation of Tibet had grown from bad to worse.

3.1 The Chinese invasion

By the middle of 1949 the communist armies had consolidated their hold of the whole of China proper. Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the embassy staffs of Kuomintang government had been deported from Lhasa on 8 July. On 3 September, Radio Beijing announced an editorial of the Xinhua News Agency as follows: “Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory. The People's Liberation Army must enter Tibet to liberate the Tibetan people. The influence of aggressive imperialist forces in Tibet might be successfully eliminated, and the Tibetan people might be freed and return to the motherland's big family.”⁴ On 24 November Radio Beijing announced to the world that the 10th Panchen Lama (1938 ~ 89) had appealed to Mao Zedong to liberate Tibet.⁵ This was very extraordinary, as the 10th Panchen Lama at that time was only a boy of 11 years. This appeal was followed on 31 December by an official announcement that it would be one of the main goals of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to “liberate” Tibet. Several days later, on 24 January 1950 the Central Military Committee ordered the 18th Army of PLA to march into Tibet.⁶ The pressure of Communist China grew stronger as time passed.

On 7 October 1950, just a year after the PLA takeover of China, about 40,000 battle-hardened Chinese troops attacked Chamdo, an important town in eastern Tibet (the capital of Kham), from five directions. The Tibetan army around only 8,000 men was old-fashioned in their training and weapons. Without any reinforcements to support them, the Tibetan army was easily defeated by the Chinese troops. In Lhasa, Tibetan government reacted by enthroning the 15-year-old 14th Dalai Lama (1935 ~), while Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, the Tibetan commander of Chamdo, had felt that the town could

not be defended any longer, and surrendered to the Chinese in the end.⁷ By this battle, the Chinese destroyed nearly the whole Tibetan force within 18 days.

The Tibetan government and their officials, though desperately wanting to retain the factual status of independence that they had attained, were poor leaders and could not save the nation from defeat and shame. It thus became clear that it was a matter of time before the Tibetans would lose their country. On the other hand, the Indian government, traditional friend of Tibet, became worried about the Chinese communists make their way into Tibet. They suggested to both Tibet and China to negotiate directly and to arrive at a peaceful settlement. There was an exchange of angry notes between India and China. The Indian note, dated 26 October 1950, runs as follows:

“We have seen with great regret the report in the newspapers of an official statement made in Beijing to the effect that the PLA units have been ordered to advance into Tibet. . . . We have been repeatedly assured of a desire by Chinese government to settle the Tibetan problem by peaceful means and negotiations.” India was afraid indeed that a communist-controlled Tibet right at the doorstep of India would be a danger to India’s security. In the same note the Indian government went on to convey to Beijing a clear expression of their views: “Now that the invasion of Tibet has been ordered by the Chinese government, peaceful negotiations can hardly be synchronized with it and there naturally will be fear on the part of Tibetans that negotiations will be under duress.”⁸

To this note the Chinese government, dated 30 October 1950, replied in unflinching tones: “Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory. The problem of Tibet is entirely the domestic problem of China. The People’s Liberation Army must enter Tibet, liberate the Tibetan people and defend the frontiers of China. . . . No foreign interference shall be tolerated.”⁹

In the meantime, on 11 November 1950 the Tibetan government appealed for help to the United Nations, though it was not a member of the UN. The appeal urges the following: “The armed invasion of Tibet for the incorporation of Tibet in Communist China through sheer physical force is a clear case of aggression. As long as the people of Tibet are compelled by force to become a part of China against their will and consent, the present invasion of Tibet will be the grossest instance of the violation of the weak by the strong. . . . The problem is simple. The Chinese claim Tibet as a part of China. Tibetans feel that racially, culturally, and geographically they are far apart from the Chinese. If the Chinese find the reactions of the Tibetans to their unnatural claim not acceptable, there are other civilized methods by which they could ascertain the views of the people of Tibet; or, should the issue be purely juridical, they are open to seek redress in an international court of law. The conquest of Tibet by China will only enlarge the area of conflict and increase the threat to the independence and stability of other Asian countries.”¹⁰

Unfortunately only El Salvador sponsored a motion to condemn Chinese aggression, Britain and India actually managed to convince the UN not to debate the issue for fear of Chinese disapproval. So the UN General Assembly decided to postpone the consideration of the appeal.¹¹ Forlorn and friendless, the dream of Tibetans was gone like mist in the morning sun.

3.2 The 17-point Agreement

The Tibetan government found itself in a very difficult situation. The Tibetan delegates who sent to Beijing from Lhasa had no choice but to sign the 17-point *Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet*, which the Chinese had already drafted, on 23 May 1951. They hoped that the Chinese would be satisfied and stop occupying more certain territories in Tibet. It is the first document that formally acknowledges Tibet as a part of the PRC. At the signing ceremony, Mao Zedong's first remark was "Welcome back to the great motherland".

It is necessary for us to quote a few of its clauses: "The Tibetan people shall return to the big family of the motherland – the PRC"(Point 1); "The local government of Tibet shall assist the PLA to enter Tibet"(Point 2); "The Tibetan people have the right of exercising national regional autonomy. The Central Authorities will not alter the existing political system of Tibet"(Point 3); "The Central Authorities will not alter the established status, functions and powers of the Dalai Lama. Officials of various ranks shall hold office as usual"(Point 4); "The religious beliefs, customs and habits of the Tibetan people shall be respected, and lama monasteries shall be protected. The Central Authorities will not effect a change in the income of the monasteries"(Point 7); "The Central Authorities shall have centralized handling of all external affairs of the area of Tibet"(Point 14); "In order to ensure the implementation of this Agreement, the Central Authorities shall set up a Military and Administrative Committee and a Military Area Headquarters in Tibet"(Point 15).¹² As it turned out, there were no decisions to be made. The Tibetan delegates had two choices: sign on the dotted line or face further Chinese aggression.

Thus the 18th Army of PLA occupied Lhasa on 26 October 1951. In December 1956 Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai assured Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, that Tibet would continue to enjoy autonomy and that China would not force communism on her. Nehru therefore advised the 14th Dalai Lama, while he was visiting New Delhi, to return to Lhasa and work out the autonomy as best as he could. China insisted that the 17-point Agreement was reached between the two. The treaty was not signed under duress; it was based on peaceful negotiations. However, the 14th Dalai Lama stated in Mussoorie, India, on 20 June 1958, that the consent of his government was secured at the point of bayonet, under the threat of further military operations leading to the utter ravage and total ruin of Tibet.

It is needless to say that Indian government was not very pleased with China, but they had no desire to involve themselves and did not feel any responsibility towards protecting Tibet. On 29 April 1954 India signed an agreement with China renouncing all rights in Tibet and severing her long historical and neighborly ties.¹³ This further led to Nepal's signing a similar treaty on 20 September 1956, in which she surrendered the concessions she possessed in Tibet under the treaty of 1856. On 18 March 1957 the Nepalese withdrew their troops from Tibet.¹⁴ The events as those put a period to Tibet's neighborly ties, therefore, Tibet was unfortunate to lose his international support for its claim to independence.

4 The 1959 Uprising

The invasion and occupation by Chinese communist was to open what is probably the saddest chapter in Tibetan history. There were countless victims of the “liberation” in the Land of Snows. These victims were people who suffered from foreign rule, poverty and hunger as a result of the Chinese occupation.

4.1 The Chinese occupation

Since that time the Tibetans had suffered untold agonies. The Chinese communists had gradually deprived them of all their political rights. The Tibetan government, right from the top to the provincial and district offices, has been made powerless and were governed completely by the Chinese. Soon after the occupation in 1951 the Chinese organized the Regional Military Commanders and abolished Tibet's National Army. On 22 April 1956 the Preparatory Committee for Tibet Autonomous Region was established. Although headed by the Dalai Lama, a majority of its seats were filled by Chinese puppets. In any case, real power lay in the hands of the committee of the Communist Party, which claimed no Tibetan representatives at all. After all, the promise of the 17-point Agreement was not honored just as the Tibetans had anxietied.

Economically Tibet used to be self-sufficient for its food supply. But the Chinese troop was living on local people and their food situation was desperate. The presence of large numbers of Chinese troops in the Lhasa region soon depleted food stores and gave rise to massive inflation. The people in the east and northeast were facing a famine. In the southern and central regions, the Chinese had destroyed thousands of acres of agricultural lands by giving priority to national highways, barracks and arsenals. At that time, most people in Tibet did not have enough food to eat. As the people's health was generally poor and because of a shortage of medicines, a large number of them died.

In Kham the Chinese had actually made the lamas study Marxist materialism and forced political indoctrination. Ordinary monks they try to overcome by such material arguments as this: The monks were made remain in their cells and try to procure food by prayer alone. If the food is not miraculously produced this is supposed to prove the god dose not exist. Meantime, the Chinese had stopped the monasteries from sharing the usual food reserves and torture monks by hunger into abandoning their simple faith. Thousands of monks starved to death for this reason. To Tibetan people the phrase “liberation”, in its moral and spiritual implications, was only a deadly nonsense.

4.2 The resistance and rebellion

Since long ago, the people of Tibet had enjoyed peace. When China attacked Tibet, the people had to suffer the horrors of war. This was followed by more suffering and hardship during a half of century when the Chinese occupied the plateau. The people of Tibet hated their Chinese masters because of the hardships and sufferings they had to bear or the cruel treatment they received.

The people of eastern Tibet called Khampa revolted against the Chinese first in February 1956, they found the resistance group known as “Four Rivers – Six Ranges”. A large number of young men joined local guerrilla group, sank or damaged a great number of Chinese troop. The guerillas often attacked sentries and blew up bridges and roads. Whenever they had chance they ambushed lorries carrying Chinese soldiers along the roads in mountain district.¹⁵ However, all these heroic efforts were in vain, many

leaders and men lost their lives in the days of fierce fighting. In retaliation the Chinese troops had desecrated religious buildings and destroyed monasteries, razed villages to the ground and killed tens of thousands of Tibetan civilians. Since then protests and armed revolts spread to central Tibet, and large numbers of refugees ran away from home and went to Lhasa. It seemed inevitable that Lhasa would explode in rebellion.

On 10 March 1959, the Chinese commander Tan Guansan invited the Dalai Lama to enjoy a performance by a Chinese dance group at the military headquarters. The Dalai Lama was asked to come unaccompanied by any of his bodyguards. This news shocked many people throughout Lhasa. It seemed obvious to the Tibetans that the Chinese schemed to kidnap the Dalai Lama and use him as a helpless instrument. Shortly a crowd of people who get up a panic gathered around the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace, and demonstrated against the Chinese machinations. On 12th Large numbers of Tibetan women also rose up in the front of the Potala Palace, protested Chinese intervention in Tibet's internal affairs and oppression of its people. The next day, a mass demonstration by over 70,000 Tibetans was held to upholding Tibet's autonomy. The situation was getting worse and worse every day.

Meanwhile, the members of the Cabinet and the National Assembly gathered immediately in an anxious debate and issued a proclamation of independence. A group of government ministers announced that the 17-point Agreement was null and void, and Tibet renounced the authority of China. They were in continuous session up to the afternoon of 17 March, until came to a unanimous decision that the Dalai Lama should leave Lhasa and move to safety beyond the reach of the Chinese. The decision was conveyed to the Dalai Lama with pleading to leave immediately. Around 10 p.m. the Dalai Lama dressed in the garb of a poor monk, emerged from the south gate of Norbulingka with his attendants.¹⁶

Early on the morning of 20 March, Chinese troops began to shell the Norbulingka, the Potala and other temples. When a crowd of some 10,000 Tibetans retreated into the sacred precincts of the Jokhang, that too was bombed. It is thought that after three days of violence, 10,000~15,000 Tibetans lay dead in the streets of Lhasa. The uprising in Lhasa was widespread rapidly in many areas such as Loka, Shigatse, Gyantse, it took over one year of time to put down the rebellion. Some estimates put the numbers of 87,000 deaths during the periods from March 1959 to September 1960.¹⁷

In spite of a mammoth manhunt by the Chinese troops, fortunately the Dalai Lama and hundreds of his followers reached his journey's end into the Indian territory on the night of 31 March. Later, a government-in-exile was established in Dharamsala, with a democratically elected Parliament with the twin objective of taking care of the Tibetan refugees and to provide a base for the struggle to regain Tibet.¹⁸ The 1959 uprising attracted the attention of people all over the world, and caused India and China to be at feud with each other. It was not long before the clash between the two countries led to the serious border incidents.

4.3 The accusation by the United Nations

On 9 September 1959, the Dalai Lama made another appeal to the secretary general of the United Nations for help: "Since their violation of the territorial integrity of Tibet, the Chinese forces have committed the following offenses against the universally accepted

laws of conduct: First, they have dispossessed thousands of Tibetans of their properties, and deprived them of every source of livelihood, and thus driven them to death and desperation. Second, men, women, and children have been pressed into labor gangs and made to work on military constructions without payment or on nominal payment. Third, they have adopted cruel and inhuman measures for the purpose of sterilizing men and women with view to the total extermination of the Tibetan race. Fourth, thousands of innocent people of Tibet have been brutally massacred. Fifth, there have been many cases of murder of leading citizens of Tibet without any cause or justification. Sixth, every attempt has been made to destroy our religion and culture. Thousands of monasteries have been razed to the ground and sacred images and articles of religion completely destroyed. Life and property are no longer safe, and Lhasa, the capital of the State, is now a dead city. ”¹⁹

On 21 October 1959, the United Nations General Assembly, by 45 votes 9 (with 26 abstentions), approved a resolution which deplored the events in Tibet and called for China respect for the fundamental human rights of the Tibetan people.

5 The Tragedies of “Democratic Reform”

After the rebellion and suppression, the Chinese completed control over the whole Tibet. They called their rules with too flowery words such as “democratic reforms”, “emancipation of one million serfs and slaves”, “socialist transformation” and so on. But the truth has just come out: it drove Tibetan’s spiritual leader and more than one hundred thousand people into exile; caused some 1.2 million Tibetan deaths (20 percent of Tibetan population) and destroyed about 6,400 (99 percent) monasteries.²⁰ The Tibetan’s miserable conditions were beyond description indeed.

5.1 The reign of violence

The Chinese made a number of important changes in the administration of Tibet. They abolished Tibetan government and set about reordering Tibetan society in accordance with Mao Zedong’s principles such as “The philosophy of the communist party is the philosophy of struggle”; “In the final analysis, national problem is the matter of class struggle”, etc. The Tibetan officials and intellectuals were put to work on manual labors and subjected to struggle sessions, which sometimes resulted in death. The PLA troops rounded up a large number of guerrillas, many people were taken away and were never seen again. Those who the Chinese thought had supported or helped the guerrilla were shot. Young men were incarcerated or put in labor camps. The people of Tibet thus spent the darkest days of their lives under Chinese rule.

Freedom of religion was also suppressed in those days, more than six thousand “feudal” monasteries suffered official oppression. People were refused permission to donate food to the monasteries, and monks were compelled to join struggle sessions, discard their robes and marry. Monasteries were stripped of their riches. It forced all the people to work, including the monks. Those who did not work properly were severely punished. Thus the people of Tibet hardly enjoyed any freedom.

Tibetan farmers were forced to collectivize into the “people’s commune”, and were told what to grow and when to grow it. The Chinese officials made some decisions to alter Tibetan farming practices. Instead of barley, the Tibetan staple, farmers were

instructed to grow wheat and rice. However, these crops were unsuited to Tibet's high-altitude conditions. As the result, shortages of food came after, it is estimated that by late 1961, 70,000 Tibetans had died or were dying starvation.

In May 1962, even the 10th Panchen Lama, a privileged Chinese puppet, began to have a change of mind. He presented Mao Zedong with a 70,000-character report on the hardships his people were suffering, and requested religious freedom and an end to the sacking of monasteries. Four years later he was sent to the Qincheng Prison, an infamous prison for political prisoners near Beijing, for a 10 year-stay. For the Chinese, he was the last obstacle to be cleared away in the lead up to the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region. It was formally formed on 1 September 1965.

The tears were set to keep on coming, the largest misfortune came to be known as the Cultural Revolution. During the years 1966 ~ 76, all Chinese suffered in the social movement caused by Mao Zedong, but it was Tibet that suffered most dearly. The Red Guards raided the temples everywhere, desecrating whatever religious objects they could get their hands on. It was the beginning of the large-scale destruction of virtually every religious monument in Tibet. By the Chinese-initiated struggle sessions, people are required to renounce their "reactionary" past and accuse others of similar "crimes". This often resulted in many extreme brutality and death. Furthermore, the Dalai Lama became public enemy number one, and all Tibetans were forced to denounce him as a parasite and traitor. Even Buddhism itself was accused of being a "reactionary", Buddhist scriptures were burnt and used as toilet paper.

All these measures made many people of Tibet oppose the Chinese rule. Throughout these years, there was increasing violence in Tibet. The government suppressed many of riots and arrested a number of the riot leaders. Because of such strong opposition, the Chinese found that the only way they could get the people of Tibet to obey them was to use force. People who spoke against the government were imprisoned. Any printed matters which criticized the Chinese were investigated. Any groups which opposed the Communist Party were also arrested.

To make sure that the Tibetan people obeyed them, the Chinese set up a huge network of secret police, including some undercover monks, to watch the activities of the public. People who thought to be against the government were arrested and severely punished. They were often tortured, or made to do hard labor for years in labor camps. Many of them were hanged or shot dead. In a mere 30 years, China had turned Tibet into a land of nearly "hell on earth".

5.2 Under the Open-Door Policy

The death of Mao Zedong on 9 September 1976 produced important changes to both China and Tibet. After the disastrous Cultural Revolution, even the China's top leaders themselves have begun to realize that their rule in Tibet had taken a wrong turn. Hua Guofeng, Mao's chosen successor, get to know the reality about Tibet and decided to soften the line of policy on Tibet. In April 1977, the Chinese government announced that it would welcome the return of the Dalai Lama and other refugees, afterwards the Panchen Lama was released on 25 February 1978.²¹ Before long, the Jokhang Temple and the Potala Palace was reopened.

The Tibetan government-in-exile received cautiously the invitation to return to Tibet.

The Dalai Lama decided sends a fact-finding mission to Tibet first on 2 August 1979. Although the results of the mission were damning, two more missions headed by the Dalai Lama's brother followed late in 1980. Their conclusions were despairing. The missions catalogued up to 1.2 million deaths, the destruction of 6,254 monasteries and nunneries, the absorption of two-thirds of Tibet into China, about 100,000 Tibetans in labor camps and extensive deforestation.²²

It was Deng Xiaoping who adopted a more pragmatic approach to Tibet. On 14 March 1980 a conference about Tibetan problems was held under the leadership of Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, Deng's right-hand man, for studying what new measures to be taken.²³ Soon after, Hu carried out a tour of inspection in Tibet. His conclusions painted a grim picture of life on the roof of the world. Then a six-point plan to improve the living conditions and freedoms of the Tibetans was drawn up, which included among its salient points:(1) Full play must be given to the right of regional autonomy of minority nationalities;(2) The people in Tibet should be exempt from paying taxes for two years. All kinds of exactions must be abolished;(3) To promoting Tibet's economic development more rapidly, some specific and flexible policies suited to conditions in Tibet must be carried out on the whole economic front of the region;(4) Helping the poor households and poor areas to develop production, limited private enterprise will be allowed;(5) It is necessary to do a good job in inheriting and developing Tibetan culture. The Tibetan people's habits, customs, history and culture must be respected;(6) Full time cadres of Tibetan nationality should account for more than two-thirds of all government functionaries within the next 2~3 years.²⁴ This is well-known as "Relaxing the Policies", Hu Yaobang also promised to make every possible effort for Tibet.

The early 1980s also saw the return of limited religious freedoms. Ruined temples were repaired, monasteries were reopened, new monks were allowed to join orders and the Tibetan language was permitted to be used more extensively than before. Importantly, there was also a relaxation of the proscription on pilgrimage, and pictures of the Dalai Lama began to reappear on the streets of Lhasa. As was the case in the rest of China, Tibet entered a period of liberalization and reform, limited personal freedoms were restored.

At the same time, talks between Tibetan government-in-exile and Chinese government continued, but with little results. In April 1982 the Tibetan delegates sent to Beijing from Dharamasala were told that the structure of "one country, two systems", which offered to Hong Kong and Taiwan, cannot apply to the case of Tibet, and if the Dalai Lama returned, he would be given a post of the National People's Congress and reside in Beijing, but not live in Tibet or hold positions there. By 1983 talks had broken down and the Chinese government had decided that they did not want the Dalai Lama to return after all. Since then Tibet became the "front line of the struggle against splittism", as the officials described. The problem of Tibet was still unsolved.

5.3 The series of bloodshed

Administratively, the Chinese government imposed reforms they hoped would stabilize the situation in Tibet. But social unrests had become more serious in the latter half of 1980s. On 27 September 1987 a group of 30 monks from Sera Monastery began circumambulating the Jokhang and crying out "Independence for Tibet!" "Long live his

Holiness the Dalai Lama!”. Their ranks were swollen by bystanders and arrests followed. Four days later (1 October), another group of monks repeated their actions, this time brandishing Tibetan national flags – the Snow Lion Flag. As the monks were beaten and arrested by Chinese police, a crowd of some 2000~3000 angry Tibetans gathered. They threw stones or bottles at the police and overturned or burnt the patrol cars. Then Chinese police began firing on the crowd. There was a series of occurrences. On 5 March 1988, some riots led to bloodshed in the Monlam festival. Troops and Police force were sent to suppress the riots, about 18 Tibetans died and 150 were wounded in the disturbances. Following this, serious riots broke out in Lhasa and continued for a few days.

Many events occurred one after another. On 5 March 1989, the largest anti-Chinese demonstrations since 1959 taken place in Lhasa. The government’s response was violent, and martial law was declared, which lasted for more than a year. Hundreds of Tibetans were reportedly killed, and a number of people were arrested, who were thought to have caused all the trouble. Hu Jintao was the Party Secretary in Tibet at that time. Under his leadership some economic development were realized, but the problem of human rights remains.

Then in March 2008, communal riots suddenly broke out in the Barkhor area, a pilgrim circuit around the periphery of the Jokhang Temple. At least 20 people were killed and a few hundred were injured, but according to the Dalai Lama’s aides, about 99 people dead. This time the flames leaped to far-flung ethnic regions such as Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu provinces. Together these riots were the worst riots in Tibet since 1989.²⁵

5.4 The Dalai Lama’s approach to reconciliation

Why had the large-scale riots taken place one after another in Tibet? There is still a pile of long pending problem of Tibet. Today the 14th Dalai Lama has become a world-famous person, working tirelessly to make the world more aware of his people’s plight. His visits to foreign countries led to international condemnation of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. On 21 September 1987 the Dalai Lama made his first political speech in America before the Congress, and outlined a five-point peace plan as following: (1) Transforming Tibet into a “Zone of Peace” and requiring the withdrawal of all Chinese troops from the region; (2) Reversing the transfer policy of Han Chinese to Tibet; (3) Respecting the Tibetan people’s basic human rights and freedoms; (4) protecting Tibet’s natural environment and abandoning the dumping of nuclear waste; (5) Beginning earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet, and of relations between the Tibet and China.²⁶ However, China denounced the plan as an example of “splittism”.

A year later, on 15 June 1988 the Dalai Lama elaborated on the speech before the European Parliament at Strasbourg in France, giving up the demands for full independence and offering China the right to govern Tibet’s foreign and military affairs.²⁷ This idea was known as “Autonomy on Greater Tibet”. It meant that the Tibetans will keep its own local government, and left the control of foreign affairs, defense and internal security to the Chinese government. It retained control over religious and education, and also keep much of its control over finance. The sphere of “Greater Tibet” would include not only today’s Tibet Autonomous Region, but also the historically Tibetan areas of

Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. The Dalai Lama has said many times that he supports China's sovereignty over Tibet, were Tibet granted real autonomy, he would likely endorse China's claim in such a referendum.

Anyway, protests and crackdowns have been continued in Tibet until now. Although the exiled Tibetan young people began to talk of the need to take up arms, the Dalai Lama still hold his strong conviction: if there is to be any improvement in the situation in Tibet, it could only be achieved through nonviolent means. The 14th Dalai Lama's efforts to achieve peace and freedom for Tibet are recognized when he is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 4 October 1989. It marked a greater sympathy on the part of the Western world for the plight of the Tibetan people.

6 Four Focuses of the Tibet Issue

To thinking about the problem of Tibet, it's easy to notice that the chief culprit is the China's policy of ethnic assimilation. The Dalai Lama has referred to it as "cultural genocide", as it makes forcible attempts to change Tibetans into Han Chinese. After the public disturbance in 2008, the Chinese government yielded to the pressure of international opinions and reopened negotiations with the Tibetan government-in-exile. However, the talk was divided shortly as before. There would be no end to the controversy between the two sides, because such nationalistic conflicts have no easy answers.

6.1 About the historical status of Tibet

The Chinese leaders and many people strongly opposed the separation of Tibet from China. They said that Tibet had kept very close commercial and other links with the mainland for a long time; such links should not be cut. Instead, Tibet should be combined with the mainland and settlements to form the "Chinese big family". The Chinese government insists that China has exercised sovereignty over Tibet for 700 years now, ever since the period of the Yuan dynasty.

The Tibetans, of course, don't support this claim; they denied that Tibet was under Chinese suzerainty. According to their view, China had helped Tibet with troops in the past, but so had Mongolia, Korea, Vietnam and some other countries.²⁸ The Qing Emperors appointed two officials called Amban to represent him in Lhasa. They exercised some authority, but they exercised it through the government of the Dalai Lama, and made no attempt to absorb Tibet into China as a province. Giving presents and donations to some large monasteries clearly shows that the relations between China and Tibet were those between a layman and his priest. The priest receives help but thereby does not become the subordinate of the lay donor.

As a matter of fact, both Yuan dynasty (1279~1368) and Qing dynasty (1644~1911) was founded by the minority race, the Mongolian and the Manchu, and the Han Chinese were treated worse than the Tibetans during this period. Throughout the Song dynasty (960~1279) and the Ming dynasty (1368~1644), both were founded by Han Chinese, the two nations had virtually no contact with each other. The Song and Ming emperors exerted no administrative authority over Tibet; Tibetan-Chinese political relations were nonexistent during this period.²⁹ Actually before the China's invasion, Tibetan government had their own armies and ruled their provinces independently of China. It was during the

reign of 13th Dalai Lama, Tibet first began to expand its international relations with some countries such as Mongolia, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Britain, Russia, and made a number of international agreements.

It is true that when the Mongol or Manchu empire disintegrated, both China and Tibet regained their independence. If the fact that Tibet was once ruled by the Yuan or Qing dynasty forms a legal basis for China to claim sovereignty over Tibet, it seems like South Korea claiming sovereignty over Taiwan because both were ruled by the Japanese. Anyway, though nominally under Chinese suzerainty, Tibet was effectively independent during the first half of the twentieth century.

6.2 About the justice of Chinese domination

The Communist Party also stress a point that they had carried out a revolution and socialism so that the people of Tibet could become free from the feudal system, and has brought much prosperity for the Tibetan people. Even in today, there are many ordinary Chinese people who honestly believe that the PLA saved the Tibetans from feudalism.

For many years, China's propaganda has described the old Tibetan society as a "feudal serf-owning system characterized by the combination of religious-political rule". As they criticized it, not only the means of production but also the serf's personal servitude had belonged to the serf-owner class in those dark ages. The upper classes exploited the serf classes, the serfs were forced to work in the manorial land and offered harsh Ula service and corvee labors for their own owners. If people who suffered dire poverty could not pay back the usurious exploitation, they would be sent to the prison and punished severely. That is why the Tibetan people and the patriotic personages were yearning for early liberation of Tibet, and one million serfs and slaves strongly demanded to conduct the democratic reforms.

Needless to say, Chinese government chopped logic here, and the truth is distorted in this theory. Because there were many exploitations and atrocious punishments in old Chinese society, too. If the Chinese hope the Tibetans to approve the justification for the "liberation of Tibet", they should use the same standard to approve the justification for the Western country's invasions of China such as the Opium War (1839 ~ 42). This theory is not only an ignorance of Tibetan history and culture, but also an expression of contempt toward the Tibetan people.

It must be said that Tibetan's anger has many sources. They believe that the Han Chinese used to look down upon all ethnic minorities as barbarians (wild, primitive people). The government did not treat Tibetans in the government service very fairly. The officials in control of the government, for example, the chief secretary of the Communist Party committee, are almost Han Chinese who sent to Tibet from the mainland. Many of them believed that Han Chinese is superior to Tibetans. Tibetans who as well qualified as Chinese were not given the senior or more important posts or jobs in government departments. Almost all of the Tibetan official have power in name only. Certainly the Han Chinese is not winning any friends in Tibet.

6.3 About China's economic assistance

The Chinese for their part cannot understand the Tibetan's heart. There are many who think that Tibet would not be able to survive as an independent nation. They believe that Tibet was in a hopeless economic situation. As they say it, China has built

roads, schools, hospitals, airport, factories and other things. As part of its “great leap west”, the Chinese government has poured billions of dollars into Tibet’s infrastructure in recent years.³⁰ Many ordinary Chinese people think that the Tibetans should be grateful to China for brought much economic prosperity and happiness to Tibet. They also believe that the Tibetans are receiving special treatment from Beijing. But the Tibetans see things differently. They say that the real beneficiaries have been the Han Chinese, and the non-Tibetans should not be given business chance so easily. Indeed, Tibet has accomplished its economic growth at high cost of environmental disruption.

More importantly, the Chinese government believes that one of the reasons for continuing separatist sentiments and opposition is Tibet’s lack of integration with China. Since the 1990s the chief aim of the government has been to fully integrate Tibet with China. This has meant the opening of Tibet, allowing and actively encouraging Chinese migration into the region. The Chinese policy of Han immigration had already been successfully carried out in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Qinghai, and now Tibet was targeted for mass immigration after the open of the new line that directly links Golmud and Lhasa for the first time on 1 June 2006. The extent of immigration poses the grave danger that the Tibetans will become a minority in their own country.

In any case, despite Chinese government efforts to paint a rosy picture of life on the roof of the world, the general picture is of a country under foreign occupation. The fact remains that China did hurt Tibetan people’s dignity as human beings.

6.4 About the conflicts of religion

Besides the political and economic reasons for the problem of Tibet, there is a religious one. It is a fact known to everybody: the Tibetans and the Chinese are inevitably opposed to each other on the views of religion. Tibet has been called the most religious country in the world. The Tibetans have their deep faith on Buddhism, and have demand the freedom of religion for a long time; however, the Communist Party professes atheism themselves as the Marxist ideology. It considers religion to be base superstition, a remnant of old China used by the ruling classes to keep power. This is in line with the Marxist belief that religion is the “opium of the people”. In 1954 the 14th Dalai Lama was invited to Beijing, where amid cordial discussions with Mao Zedong, he was told that religion was “poison”.

Buddhism has a high influence over the lives of Tibetans and Mongols even in today. Especially in Tibet, monasteries wield the strongest influence in the life of the people. They generally are centers not only of religion, but of trade, culture and social life. There are no exact figures, but probably ten percent of the total population were monks or nuns before the Chinese invasion. The Tibetan’s faith is deep and pervasive, it often takes the form of pilgrimages which are long and austere. Today many temples and monasteries have been reopened, religion is still a very powerful force among the Tibetan people.

Since the early 1980s, Chinese government allowed many temples to reopen as active places of worship, in 1982 China amended its constitution to allow freedom of religion. However, all religions activity is firmly under state control and many of the monks are caretakers within renovated shells of monasteries, which serve principally as tourist attractions. In many ways, the Chinese government’s control extends into every part of the individual’s freedom of religion. The issue of religious practices remained one of the

main sources of friction between the government and the Tibetan people.

There are a lot of instances which support this theory. On 28 January 1989 while visiting Tashilhunpo, the 10th Panchen Lama died and left a legacy of serious trouble that remains unresolved. The Dalai Lama recognized Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the 11th Panchen Lama in May 1995. However, the Chinese government appointed the other, Choekyi Gyaltzen, half a year later. The 6-year-old boy Choekyi Nyima and his family are not seen or heard in public since then. Moreover, the government passed a new law called “Provisions of reborn’s reincarnation” on 5 September 2007, deprived the Dalai Lama’s authority of designation. In January 2000 the 17th Karmapa(1985 ~), Tibet’s third greatest incarnation (especially for the Kagyu sect), ran away from Lhasa and fled to Dharamsala. This news was a great shock to China, the government felt that they had lost face. The situation of religion in Tibet is getting worse and worse every year.

The similar cases will be found elsewhere. Religious institutions have recently been the focus of “patriotic education” and “civilizing atheism” campaigns, and strict quotas have been imposed on numbers of monasteries and their resident monks and nuns. In addition, the officials launched the anti-Dalai Lama campaign inside Tibet, compelling all government officials to denounce the Dalai Lama since the 1990s. Even in the monasteries the monks had to sing statements opposing the Dalai Lama. For example, monks in Drepung Monastery were forced to sign a form denouncing the Dalai Lama. Those who disobeyed were punished. After bring the disturbance under control in 2008, the government has set out to rally public sentiment against the Dalai Lama. The Tibet Party Secretary Zhang Qingli called him “a jackal wrapped in monk’s robes, a monster with a human face.”This naturally provoked the Tibetans feel a great antipathy toward the Chinese. In recent years, tempers on both sides turned from bed to worse.

Nevertheless, the 14th Dalai Lama is regarded as the head of the Tibetan Buddhism, and many of Tibetan people are still loyal to him. In spite of 50 years of China’s propaganda, the Dalai Lama has been a shining symbol of Tibetan identity, and the Tibetan people still have strong feelings of Buddhism. The Chinese government has never succeeded in reducing Tibetans to such a slavish state of mind.

7 Conclusion

What is the cause of the Tibetan problem? It is mainly because the China’s minority policy. In its formative years, the Chinese Communist Party had followed the Soviet Union’s lead and adopted the policy that ethnic territories in China would be autonomous republics with the right of secession. We can learn of these provisions from the Declaration of the Chinese Communist Party National Convention II (1922) and the Constitution of the Jiangxi Soviet Republic(1931). By the end of Sino-Japanese War (1937 ~ 45), however, this policy shifted to political centralism, and when the PRC established, its nationality policy held that China would be an indivisibly multiethnic state with autonomous nationality regions rather than republics, and that had no right to secede. Tibet was considered one such nationality region, whether the Tibetans liked it or not.

It is a matter of common knowledge: Tibet was conquered because of its good geographical position. As an important buffer zone between China and India – they have

the strong spirit of rivalry each other, China would not give up on Tibet in future. The Chinese government can coerce Tibetans, but it cannot win their hearts and minds. Only a wise and tolerant policy can do that.

Today the Tibetan independence movement has reached a critical juncture, because China refuses to initiate meaningful dialogue. No progress has been made until now, certainly not since the Dalai Lama's renunciation of the goal of Tibetan independence in 1988. Perhaps Chinese government still hopes their problems in Tibet will disappear after the Dalai Lama pass away, but the newer generations carry the same spirit: Tibet should one day become free from Chinese rule. Although it seems that the Tibetan people have to follow a thorn road to freedom and independence, their struggle will become a great plus for the realization of Chinese democracy.³¹

Notes

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