



TRAVELLERS TO TIBET

A Selection of Eyewitness Accounts
by Tibetans and Others
(From 1959 to 2004)

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FOREWORD

Communist China's liberalization policy of the late 1970s opened the gateway of 'The Forbidden Land' to the outside world for the first time since it assumed full control over the whole of Tibet in 1959. This was a turning point in the history of the Tibetan people's struggle for their basic human rights. In the political front, it opened a new chapter by establishing the first-ever direct contact with the Beijing leadership, while in the social front, it paved the way for the ordinary Tibetans—both inside and outside Tibet—to exchange visits and meet their relatives. It also afforded many foreigners the opportunity to travel to Tibet and see through their own eyes the ground realities, in contrast with the most-trumpeted slogan of the Chinese government: that earth-shaking changes or developments had taken place in Tibet since its 'liberation' from 'feudal serfdom'.

Prior to the liberalization era, and since China's occupation of Tibet, there was only minimal information trickling out of the country, and written accounts were almost non-existent. The opening up of Tibet, however, resulted in many Tibetans and foreigners producing a large amount of literature in the form of articles and travelogues through their eyewitness accounts and first-hand experiences of Tibet. For a long time, we have felt the need to bring out a compilation of some of the most representative of these articles. The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also advised many times that such a compilation would contribute immensely towards raising awareness about the plight of the Tibetan people, and also about the non-violent nature of the Tibetan movement for freedom from oppression.

The Department of Information and International Relations of the Central Tibetan Administration is, therefore, very happy to bring out this publication entitled *Travellers to Tibet: A Selection of Eyewitness Accounts by Tibetans and Others* at a time when there is a growing number of people across the globe taking keen interest in and being more sympathetic to the just cause and suffering of the Tibetan people. This book is a compilation of 26 articles on a wide range of issues concerning life in Tibet from the late 1950s until 2004. They are reproduced from international as well as Tibetan periodicals, and arranged in chronological order of the events they describe. As the title of the book suggests, these are accounts of those who have articulated their true experiences using hard facts about Tibet after having lived there or made a personal journey into the country.

We sincerely hope that this publication will help create greater awareness about the Tibetan situation, eventually leading to the fruition of the aspirations of six million Tibetans to enjoy genuine autonomy within the existing constitutional framework of the People's Republic of China.

Secretary
Department of Information and International Relations

March, 2004

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IN SEARCH OF NEW TIBET

by Tsering Dorji Gashi

from the book *New Tibet*, Department of Information
and International Relations, also published in
Tibetan Bulletin, December 1985–March 1986

[The experiences narrated in this article took place
around the year 1960.]

We had left Chengdu by train and arrived at the Liuyon railway station. The railway track had not yet been laid beyond Liuyon and from there onwards we travelled by bus. It was December and the weather was extremely cold. When we were negotiating the Thongo-la pass we wrapped ourselves with all the blankets we had. Still our hands, feet and backs pained as if pricked by thorns. We covered our heads and faces with scarves. Our breath froze and stuck beneath our chins and we looked like characters from a Chinese opera, with long, white beards. Since we had stayed for long in low altitude, the climb to Tibet made us feel dizzy and we were overcome by nausea. Our heartbeat became abnormal, some of those who were less strongly constituted even fainted on reaching the top of the pass. One of the main reasons for our physical discomfort in our own land was the poor diet we were given back in Peking.

After six days we reached Nagchuka. Nagchuka seemed to be a town formed in the midst of an encircling chain of snow-mountains. Buried by mountains, wind and snow, the whole place was nothing but a scene of desolate whiteness, except for houses, tents and yaks. The temperature was around 30C below zero. Even in such hard conditions, the *Horpa* nomads were stripped bare down to their waists and were loading the yaks with a nonchalance which roused my admiration for these hardy people who could so casually defy the harsh Tibetan weather.

All the Chinese cadres in Nagchuka were armed. From the first glance we could see that the People's Liberation Army out-numbered the inhabitants of the place. I concluded that this condition could result only from a failure at 'suppression of the rebellion'. Our arrival at Nagchuka did not evince the slightest signs of welcome from its inhabitants.

While we rested in the place for about four hours the only person who showed recognition and welcomed us was Wangdrak, who belonged to the second batch of Tibetan students to leave the Institute of Tibet. Wangdrak looked like a typical PLA soldier and was armed to the teeth. His formidable military appearance was in complete contrast to his civility and peaceable nature back at the Institute.

Wangdrak was happy to meet us and told us all the news. He had been in several expeditions throughout the Great Northern Plains, or Jangthang, to eliminate 'rebel bandits'. There were still remnants of Khampa guerrillas hiding in the mountains. Both soldiers and cadres when moving around the place and its vicinity, had to move in groups of ten and be fully armed; otherwise they felt endangered. Nagchuka prison held more than 600 inmates. Many who were imprisoned before were either transported to Tsa-la Karpo Lake or to Kongpo. Wangdrak told us of many people having committed suicide.

While hearing these accounts of life in Tibet a big question at once arose in my mind. I concluded that conditions elsewhere in Tibet would be very much like the one prevailing in Nagchuka. This would mean that many of my acquaintances and relatives might have been branded 'rebels' and put into prison. While pondering thus I did not know how I should react if I were met by an acquaintance.

Soon we continued with our journey. When we reached Jang Yangpachen some of the fellow travellers said that soon the Potala would come into sight and rushed for the bus windows. As for myself I thought that the sooner we reached

Lhasa the better. After journeying for about four and half hours and while turning the corner of the hill where the Drepung Monastery was situated, suddenly the magnificent spectacle of the Potala burst full before us. The eternal Red Palace, possessing the power to rob men's minds, was there in its full splendour, an ornament of Lhasa city. The splendid, awe-inspiring Potala seemed a palace of the gods descended from the heavens down to the land of men. The golden roofs of the Potala glittered brilliantly in the rays of the morning sun and I felt as if the road leading to Lhasa were covered with drops of gold.

Having a history of more than a thousand years, the Potala has turned into a symbol of Tibet. From the top of the Potala there now fluttered a Chinese flag.

While we were in China we had heard that during fighting the Chinese had bombarded the Potala and I thought a corner of the Winter Palace was badly damaged. On closer inspection it was with relief that I found that nothing of the sort had happened and that the Potala still retained its magnificence and splendour as in 1956 when I had first seen it. The Potala was there with its undamaged beauty. Thinking thus we found ourselves deposited before Teykhang House in 'Shol' at the foot of the Potala.

After our arrival in Lhasa I did not have to go to the villages to act as an interpreter. I worked at the Teykhang House, which housed the People's Printing Press of Tibet. I worked in the press for about eight months. Later the People's Printing Press of Tibet was integrated into the Tibet Daily Press.

Formerly, Lhasa was the seat of the Tibetan government under the Dalai Lama. Which Tibetan would not feel happy to be in the city where His Holiness the Dalai Lama resided? But this was not so in my time. Lhasa under the Chinese communist was the source of trouble to the Tibetans. Everywhere one looked in Lhasa, the most common sight was the Chinese. At the point of gun the

Chinese taskmasters took the Tibetans everywhere they liked, to the North, to the South and forced them to work hard. Those nationalists who had revolted against the tyrannical rule were transported to the worst places in Tibet, like Kongpo in the south and Tsa-la Karpo lake area in the Jangthang, the 'Siberia of Tibet'. The others were kept in Lhasa as free labour force. A rough estimate of prisoners in Lhasa, while I was there, could be 5,000. These prisoners were made to work like animals. For example, if there was any construction work to be done, whether building a bridge, factory, or road, the prisoners were made to do it. People were made to pull horse-carts, and iron ploughs in the fields alongside yaks, and carry boulders on their backs. Their feet, hands, and backs turned into one big sore, and bled. But they had to still continue with their work. The prisoners enjoyed not a single freedom and were treated like animals; the forced labour was unremitting. The Tibetans who were made to do forced labour came from the following categories: Tibetans who fought the invaders, those who struck wall-posters demanding Tibetan independence, those who joined demonstrations, aristocrats, and rich merchants.

These Tibetans are still undergoing extreme hardship and suffering in the hands of the Chinese. The Tibetans who the Chinese considered dangerous were caught, imprisoned and made to suffer. They came from all the classes of Tibetan society. They included merchants, peasants, nomads, monks, soldiers of the former Tibetan army, government officials and Tibetan aristocrats. At night they were locked up in prisons in Drapchi and Nachentrang and various army cantonments. The most dangerous prisoners, who were not taken out of the prisons and driven to work, include Lhalu, Lama Lobsang Tashi and Gyaltzen Yonten. This type of prisoner was put in the PLA prison at Lhasa. What type of punishment was meted to them is not known. A few of these 'blackest' prisoners were released in

1964 with a lot of propaganda blasts in an apparent attempt to polish up the regime's international image. However, during the Cultural Revolution they were clamped back into jail and nothing more was heard about them.

The Tibetans who lived outside the prison-walls enjoyed a little more freedom. Some made their living by carrying on petty trades, others by working in handicraft centres, some by working on the construction works and road building. A few fortunate ones possessing one or two acres of land cultivated their plots. Similarly there were Tibetan cadres, factory workers, teachers, soldiers and intelligence men. The Tibetan society that I saw in Lhasa was confused and unsettled. Each and every family in Lhasa was labelled with new words we never came across before. The families were put into three broad categories: the very rich, the well-to-do, and the poor. Even among the poor two types could be distinguished: the 'white poor' and the 'black poor'. In addition, the other Tibetans were put into Marxist social classification of landlords, petty bourgeoisie, and the capitalists. The Tibetans were categorised into different classes and were ceaselessly told to wage class struggle to the end. The labelling of Tibetans into different classes was a clever move. It created a situation where one Tibetan cadre could not trust another, and the atmosphere became charged with mutual suspicion. Doubtless the reason for creating this situation was to destroy the Tibetan unity. No one could express his opinions freely; the atmosphere of fear and suspicion was too strong and pervading for that.

Along with the social transformation in Lhasa, the names of streets, areas and parks of the city were also changed. For the first few days in Lhasa, we felt as if we were in a city we had never been to before. To give a complete list of all the places and streets of Lhasa that were given new names would be tedious, so here I will give only a few examples. Norbu Lingka is called 'People's Park' and the Lhasa-Muslim Cinema Hall is called 'Lhasa People's Cinema Hall'. Streets

were commonly labelled: ‘The Victory Street’, ‘The Great Leap Forward Street’, and ‘Sunshine Street’, and different sectors of Lhasa are known as ‘South Sector and Liberation Sector’.

When I first came to Lhasa before the 1959 Uprising, the Barkhor or the area around the Central Cathedral—the focus of the veneration of every devout Buddhist—was seething with life and activity. There were pious Tibetans circumambulating around the Cathedral which housed the image of Jowo Rinpoche, and merchants loudly advertising their wares. After coming from China all this had stopped. The Chinese out-numbered the Tibetans in Lhasa. The Chinese enjoyed far more rights than the Tibetans, who were not treated as human beings. A foreigner, who had not been to Tibet before and was totally ignorant of things, would while in Lhasa feel as if the Tibetans are living in refuge in someone else’s country. To lose one’s country means to become a serf to a foreign lord. Since 1959, the Tibetans have literally become the serfs of the Chinese overlords. Freedom, the essence of Tibet’s distinct way of life, has been destroyed.

While in China, I had always longed to be back in my own country. But when I actually got to Tibet I saw that the Tibetans had been turned into serfs and servants of alien masters, and I got no happiness from being in my own land. Like other Tibetans I too had to struggle to survive the whims and fancies of a foreign master. In this way I spent almost a year in Lhasa.

Typical of the Chinese, they had a definite policy towards a few upper class Tibetans. At that time there were a number of Tibetan collaborators. These Tibetans were financially bought, economically looked after and politically directed by the Chinese. They were labelled the ‘patriotic few’ and enjoyed a comparatively comfortable life. Under this category there were people like Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, Sampho Tsewang Rigzin, Phakpala Gelek Namgyal, Tso

Dhondup Tsering, Pongda Yarphel, Samding Dorje Phakmo, Trathong Chey Jigme, Lhamon Yeshe Tsultrim. These people were given ranks in the Tibet Autonomous Region. As for Pongda and Samding Dorje Phakmo, they were considered to have done meritorious deeds by coming back to Tibet after fleeing to a free country. But the Tibetans considered them to be fools for coming back, despite the two's insistence that their mental fog had turned to 'rays of understanding'.

It is possible that anyone who has not experienced the hardships of Chinese rule would be fooled by their deceptive ways. Between 1964-1965 Lhamon Yeshe Tsultrim and Trathong Chey Jigme were separately put into jail. Sampho Tsewang Rigzin, Phakpala Gelek Namgyal, Tsogo Dhondup Tsering, Samding Dorje Phakmo and Pongda Yarphel were subjected to varying degrees of *thamzing* ['struggle session'] during the Cultural Revolution, and at present no one knows where many of them are.

Especially among these the Chinese have completely obliterated all traces of Sampho Tsewang Rigzin. Pongda Yarphel was given severe treatment and eventually quietly killed. Under party surveillance Samding Dorje Phakmo was made to do forced labour in the day and at night she had to confess her 'sins' in large political meetings. On top of this in large important meetings she was paraded as one of the 'patriotic few' or a 'democratic personage'.

Ngabo Ngawang Jigme is used as a puppet by the Chinese. He was given rank and post which carried no real power. He was taken to China and was shown like a toy to foreign visitors. It is definite that the real Chinese policy in Tibet is to use Tibetans from all classes to further their colonial interests. There is not the slightest indication that the Chinese policy in Tibet is for the good of the Tibetans.

ONE MONTH IN TIBET

by Tsultrim Choephel Tersey

published in *Tibetan Review*, June 1979

On the morning of the 30 April [1979], I went to the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu immediately after breakfast. There was a Chinese official outside the gate talking to a Tibetan residing in Nepal who also wanted a visa to visit his relatives in Tibet. The Chinese said he had to attend an urgent meeting and asked him to come back after a couple of days. Then I went to him and said in English that I was a Tibetan from Switzerland carrying a visa for Tibet from the Chinese Embassy in Bern. I showed him my Swiss Identity certificate with the visa and asked to make arrangements for my entering the country. I was taken inside and in a small office we talked for a while. He told me there are vehicles going to Lhasa from the border and I could go there anytime I liked. They said they do not have a car there and so I would have to hire a taxi to go to the border.

So I went to the border right after lunch and arrived there about 4.30 in the afternoon. There I went to the Nepalese check-post to report my departure for Tibet. All three Nepalese officials who were there took me near the bridge and called the Chinese guard at the other end, and explained to him about me. The guard could only speak Chinese and a few words of Nepali. I tried a little Tibetan with him and all he could reply was 'Ha go song' (understood). Finally I managed to explain to him that we needed a Tibetan speaking person to translate for us. Then from the Chinese check-post, a Tibetan about 21-22 years old came. I explained to him the purpose of my being there and said I wanted to go into Tibet immediately. The Chinese replied he can't let anyone through without orders from his superiors and had to telephone them first. He explained the border is closed at 4 in the afternoon and there was no one there with proper authority. After

making the call he asked me to wait for a while for the reply. I complained to him for long time and tried to impress him by showing him my visa which I said was issued directly from Peking. After a while, he seemed a little intimidated and assured me that a vehicle would come to pick me in an hour.

When there was no vehicle after an hour, I again started complaining to him. He looked quite scared by now. The Tibetan interpreter—he was from Lhokha (in southern Tibet)—also said he would like to help me but was powerless. He said the Chinese is really scared and when I do get into Tibet would I please not complain about them to the authorities? I assured him that I would not. We sat there on the bridge chatting for about half an hour. He seemed genuinely pleased to talk to me. Then I advised him to go back to the Chinese check-post and otherwise his companion might get suspicious. I came back to the Nepalese check-post and we waited there. Finally, at about 9:30 p.m. Nepalese time, which turned out to be 12 midnight Chinese time, a jeep came for me.

There were two Tibetans inside the jeep—their names were Tenzin and Bhuchung. They took me to the other side of the bridge and to a small guesthouse where they gave me some hot water and Chinese tea. I was in Dam (pronounced Tramo by the Chinese). Then Tenzin, speaking in a loud voice as if addressing a huge gathering said: 'The Party is happy to welcome any compatriot who comes here from abroad. And we also welcome you...' It was a long lecture and he talked about the policy of liberalization adopted by the Chinese government, etc. There was no point in replying to these, and they also did not seem to expect any answer, because later when I asked them a few simple questions, they just looked at each other and did not reply. By that time it was about 2 a.m. I was shown to a small room and told to sleep there.

At 8 in the morning, a very young Chinese who introduced himself as a clerk in the Guest House, came to

me and again delivered a short lecture similar to the one I heard at night. Having got over that, he said that since I came too late last night there was no one to check my luggage and would I come to the check post again that morning? At the check post I was given some Chinese tea and told that they would come in the evening to look through my luggage. I told them that was fine with me and that I had nothing to hide. All I had apart from personal belongings was a few lengths of woollen cloth as presents for my parents. Everything else I had was entered in my passport. A while later I asked them again when they were coming for the checking. They said now they have decided not to come. 'Since you are a Tibetan compatriot, we trust your words, and you can go on your way now', they said.

Back at the guesthouse there were five Tibetans: Tenzin was from Lhasa; Bhuchung from Ripung, Tsang; Pema from Shigatse; Tsamchoe from Tsona, and her husband Wang-chuk, who appeared to be the top Tibetan at the guesthouse.

That day—the 1st of May—being the Communist Day, they were picnicking near the guesthouse, and called me to join them. They had a large pot of *chang* (Tibetan beer) and a bottle marked 'brandy', which they offered to me saying, 'This is brandy from Peking'. I tasted the liquor and found that it was an ordinary local brew. I told them that it was not brandy because I come from the land of brandy and know what it tastes like. They looked very embarrassed and insisted that I had some anyway.

I remarked that they were all Tibetans there and asked if it was like that everywhere. Could we, for instance, talk freely and frankly? Would it put them in trouble afterwards? They said there is nothing to worry about and that I could freely visit their homes and talk to them. We stayed drinking and talking till about 4 P.M. Then they said since I had come to my country after 20 years, they would like to invite me to their house for a typical Tibetan meal. The

meal consisted of cooked meat and tsampa made out of peas. They also made some Tibetan tea for me saying I probably have not had it for the last 20 years. I said we drink Tibetan tea in Switzerland every day. There is plenty of tea leaves in India. We get it from there. Do you also get butter, they asked? I said, 'Switzerland is a prime producer of butter in the world. These days it is famous for watches; before that it was famous for butter.'

After a while, a woman came with a message that the head of the Dam Uyon Lhenkang (Revolutionary Committee) was on the phone and wanted to meet me. While I was getting ready to go, he came there himself. His name was Lee Shaowan, but actually he was a Tibetan and his original name was Ngawang. He also made the now familiar lecture of welcome and said if I wanted anything I was to let him know. They informed me that they have now arranged a formal welcome for me at the guesthouse.

At the guesthouse, they had Chinese tea, liquor, biscuits and sweets laid on the table. After repeating the lecture, Ngawang asked me when did I intend to leave for Lhasa and would I give him the names of my parents and other relatives in Lhasa. I said that actually I had supplied these to the Chinese embassy in Switzerland about a year ago, but he could also have it if he desired. So I gave him the names and said that I wanted to head for Shigatse immediately. He said that I would not reach there if I left that evening. I insisted that I wanted to get as much into the country as possible without any further delay. He asked me to wait for 3 or 4 days, explaining that he would have to send a telegram to Lhasa and also one to Shigatse for transport. In the meantime, would I have some more tea, cigarettes, etc? I had some and asked them if they wanted a drink. When they said 'yes' I opened a bottle of Scotch for them. Then I said: 'You make a lot of propaganda outside about great preparations here to receive Tibetans visiting from abroad. But when I got here yesterday, I had the most difficult time of my life. I was hungry, thirsty and cold for

several hours. I didn't have so much difficulty even when I was escaping from here in 1959. I'll always remember this experience.'

They apologised, saying the guesthouse has been opened only recently and that I was the first visitor. They said they were not experienced enough and asked me to forgive them for the inconvenience. Eventually, I said that if transport for me did not arrive by the third day, I would return to Kathmandu and wait there until they informed me that the transport was ready. I said I could not stay in such a remote place, without proper amenities, 'In any case, time is valuable to me', I added, 'and I shall have to return to Switzerland on a certain date and I have no time to sit around doing nothing like you people seem to have.' They said there was no need to return to Kathmandu and that they would make sure the transport is there the following day.

It was dinner time now. They said there was a film show after dinner and that it was a very good film and would I like to see it? It was a Chinese who had come to inform me of this. Later I asked the Tibetans what it was about. They said the plot was like a traditional Tibetan story. It was about a flower which fulfilled all your wishes if you prayed to it. I said that sounds very good. The Chinese teach that there is no gods or demons, so I will be interested in seeing this film. So we carried folding chairs and climbed a very steep hill to see the film. It was being screened outside a military headquarters. The audience consisted of soldiers—mostly Chinese, but there were many Tibetans too. They all seemed very young, between 16 and 25 years of age, I would say. Even at the film show they had brought their guns and other weapons. There was something wrong with the projector and it took them about two hours to repair it. I was about to leave when it started.

It was indeed a film about magic and gods and I took it as a good omen: seeing a film on these subjects as soon as I entered Tibetan soil. After that there was a film about

soldiers and peasants. I did not want to see it and returned to the guesthouse.

During the film, I chatted with Turing Ngawang. He was from Powo Tramo, near Chamdo, but was mostly stationed in Kongpo Nyitri as a Chinese cadre. I told him that I was a Bapa (a native of Bathang, eastern Tibet) and remarked we were both Khampas. I informed him that the person who had led the PLA into Tibet—Bapa Phuntsok Wangyal—was one of my uncles. Now I hear he is in prison and some say he has already been killed. He expressed surprise and said he knows Phuntsok Wangyal. He told me not to worry because Phuntsok was alive and well, in Peking. He also said there are many other Bapas among cadres in the Tibet Autonomous Region as well.

In Shigatse

On 3 May, my jeep arrived and at about 11 a.m. I left Dam for Shigatse. I was accompanied by a Tibetan called Tsewang Norbu. The journey lasted about 11 hours—I reached Shigatse at 10 p.m. Tsewang Norbu was very helpful in answering my questions during the journey as we passed through Nyalam Dhingri, etc. It was the harvest season: I could see hundreds of people working in the fields. They were all wearing *chubas* (Tibetan national costume). Later I thought about it and it seemed stage managed because in towns like Shigatse and Lhasa *chubas* were a very rare sight indeed. Moreover, I heard that a few days before my arrival, they were instructed to wear *chubas*. Another thing I noticed was very young children—between seven and 15—working in the fields, looking very dirty and tired. I asked Tsewang Norbu how come such small children were working. Aren't there schools for them? He said that there were schools but perhaps the parents brought them along in the fields to help them finish their work quicker.

Notwithstanding the *chubas*, all the people I met on the way were in extremely poor condition. You could tell it by looking at their faces, hands and feet. We stopped at

Dhingri Gankar for lunch. There was a big communal canteen there, but there was no food. In the kitchen, there was a young girl. She told me her name was Yankyi and she was 22 years old. Her parents were in Shigatse and she had not seen them for two years. There was no food except a few Yoshang Bhaley (fried Tibetan bread), which were about five days old. Yankyi served us that bread and a mug of hot water each. Before leaving, I told Yankyi that if she wanted to see her parents in Shigatse, I would be happy to take her along. She said she would not get the leave, and looked very sad.

The jeep was made in Peking and not at all in good condition. There were several breakdowns on the way. Between Dram and Shigatse we had to stop 12 times for repairs, and the road was very bumpy. There were no proper metalled roads. They were barely good enough for a vehicle to drive. When another vehicle passed you from the opposite direction, it left so much dust that you could see nothing for a long while.

About my fare, I was told in Dram that the usual rate for Khatsaras (ethnic Tibetans of Nepalese nationality who are permitted to travel between Tibet and Nepal on business) was RMP 45 from Dram to Lhasa. 1 RMP was equal to 7 Nepalese rupees, and 90 RMP was equal to 100 Swiss francs. They said since I was a tourist it would be slightly higher for me. On the way, I also saw yaks and some people on horsebacks carrying guns. I did not know whether they were security guards and usually seen there.

At Shigatse, there was another small guesthouse. A young Chinese gave me some water to wash myself. I was covered with dust all over. He also made the welcome speech. I was not at all well because I had also caught a little cold from the film show at Dram, when it drizzled a little towards the end. Add to that the tiresome journey. The road was so bad that my suitcase kept on the back seat fell off the jeep six times. I kept on telling the driver—who was a Chinese—to drive slower, but he would not listen.

At Shigatse, I complained about his driving and informed them that I was ill. At once, two doctors and a nurse—all Tibetans—were brought to me. I was also short of breath and needed oxygen. The doctor felt my pulse, gave me an injection and told me that my blood pressure had risen. It was considered very dangerous because many people in Tibet had died of it.

Hospitality in Shigatse was very satisfactory, and there also I was asked to let them know should I have any complaints. They advised me to take a rest the next day instead of proceeding immediately for Lhasa. In the morning I desired to visit the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. When I got there everything was arranged to receive me. First of all I was asked to take a rest in the reception room, where tea, sweets and cigarettes were laid out for me.

There were no monks in robes to be seen anywhere. The in-charge said he was a monk, but he was wearing *chuba* and a felt hat. Another monk—the caretaker—was in shirts and trousers. The images in the chapels seemed in good condition. The Chinese said that I could take photographs outside but not inside. In the middle of the images there was a throne. When I asked if it was the Panchen Lama's, he said 'yes'. I asked if the Panchen Lama stops there during his periodic visits from Peking. Again he said 'yes', and I asked if he had been there recently. No, not since 62, he answered.

I said that the Chinese had proclaimed sometime back that the Panchen Lama was in Lhasa and installed in place of the Dalai Lama. Suddenly the caretaker's expression changed probably because he got some sign from the Chinese escort standing behind me. So I decided not to press him on. Back in the reception room, I asked him how many monks there were in Tashi Lhunpo. Answer: About 300. But they can not stay in robes. During daytime, they have to work in the fields. Only the caretaker and the in-charge are kept in the monastery to look after it. The in-charge was about 42 and he said he has been a monk

since the age of seven. Asked if he still says prayers these days, he said: 'Under the Party's genuine policy, anyone is free to practise religion.' He then went on about Marx and Lenin. When I repeated my question, he said he still retains some faith. Regarding prayers, he said, under the Party's policy, those who want to pray are free to do so, but those who don't want to, don't have to, and there was no force on them.

The monk and I were sitting together on one side of the table while the Chinese escort and some Tibetan cadres were on the other side. Every time I asked the monk something, he answered looking at the Chinese. So I said to the Chinese: 'The monk keeps looking at you instead of answering my questions directly. He seems very scared of you, doesn't he?' The Chinese said 'Oh, no. He can say anything he likes.' After that the monk looked at me while answering my questions. But whatever he said sounded like a prepared speech and was not a direct answer to my question.

Outside, I asked the Chinese if I was free to go anywhere. He said I was if I did not lose my way. So I went to the old part of the town to look at the shops. The Chinese also turned up there but stood at a little distance from me. I met an old, sick woman. She said she was 67 but looked much older probably because of her ill health. She said she was from Lhasa and has for a long time been suffering from all sorts of diseases and that she cannot live without tea and tsampa. I asked: 'Why don't you go to the hospital?' She said: 'They wouldn't attend to old people at the hospital because we cannot work.'

Q: Do you receive pension from the government?
Answer: None. If I could work I get a little money, otherwise I starve.

I thought of giving her some money, but the Chinese was looking from a distance and I was not sure that she would be allowed to keep the money once I left that place. So, instead I said to her: 'Please don't worry. I am a Tibetan

from abroad. Previously we were called reactionaries, but nowadays, we are called compatriots and welcomed back. Please don't fear and say everything you wish to say to me.' She said she didn't have anything else to say and that all she wanted was some tsampa and tea.

I went around town with a camera. I saw many young Tibetans too. At first they seemed to think I was a Japanese, so when I spoke to them in Tibetan. They looked pleasantly surprised and asked me personal questions. They seemed pleased to hear that I was going to Lhasa to visit my parents. Both old and young people openly expressed their happiness at meeting me. They didn't seem to be afraid of anything there.

When I returned to the guesthouse, 12 members of the Reception Committee were waiting for me. After more refreshments and speeches, I asked what I had to pay for my transport from Dram to Shigatse. It was RMP 64—about 70 Swiss francs. I was told that the fare from Shigatse to Lhasa would be slightly less. The reception committee told me that in Shigatse there was a relative of Mr. Phala (former representative of the Dalai Lama in Switzerland, now retired), Mrs. Kyibuk. She had heard that all her relatives were in Switzerland and wanted to talk to me. I said, of course, I knew the Phalas well and agreed to meet her. I thought this would be an opportunity for a free and frank exchange of information about the real situation in Tibet. But when I met her all she would do was repeat Chinese speeches. I said I was not interested in such talks and if she had any message or letters for Mr. Phala I would be happy to take them. She said there was not much time, but if I called on her on my way back from Lhasa, we would talk comfortably. I promised to do so.

In Lhasa

I reached Lhasa at 4 p.m. on 5 May. We passed through Gyantse and on the way I stopped several times to take photographs. The journey took us seven hours. I noticed

on the way that all the old fortresses (*dzongs*, used as district headquarters before 1959) were destroyed. I asked my companion, Tsewang Norbu, the reasons and he told me, 'Some of them crumbled because of old age and some were destroyed by the masses to show hatred for the old authority.' Outside Shigatse, I saw a monastery called Zhalu Gonpa. I asked how many monks were in it. Answer: Before 1959, about 3,800. Today, none.

At the Lhasa Reception centre two Tibetans were waiting for me: Lhoyang, who is from Gyerong, and Sotop, from Lhasa itself. I was to know gradually that Lhoyang was completely pro-Chinese. They told me that they have traced my family in Lhasa and both my parents as well as seven brothers and sisters were alive and well. I was given the choice of either staying there at the guesthouse or at home with my parents. I said I would like to stay at home most of the time, but could they also keep the room at the guesthouse so that I could come there sometimes for a wash or something and of course, I would pay for it. As soon as I heard about my parents, I started weeping and couldn't stop throughout the subsequent conversation.

So after cleaning up, I went home. It turned out that when I arrived at the guesthouse, my sisters were waiting outside. Of course, we did not recognise each other. They had gone home and told my parents that it was not me that had arrived, but some Japanese. They were all sad and thought the Chinese were deceiving them for some reason saying that their son had come from abroad for a visit. They thought some stranger would be brought to them and tried to pass off as their son. My mother remembered that I had a deep scar on my hand and decided to check it when I arrived. Besides, the Chinese had been saying all the time that Tibetans who went abroad suffer from various diseases, lack of food, disunity among themselves and all sorts of other problems. So they expected me to look like a poor beggar, weak and bare-footed. My father was even thinking of buying a pair of shoes for me. Of course, I went to see

them in decent clothes and looking quite healthy. Outside my home, my parents and nearly 50 neighbours were waiting to see me. There was no end to the tears of happiness when I arrived.

During the last twenty years, there was hardly any Tibetan who did not have to undergo a great deal of suffering. But my family was specially hit. That was mainly because when Phuntsok Wangyal, a former top official of the Communist regime, fell from grace, my father and all his other brothers were harassed and accused of being Kuomintang spies. He was subjected to *thamzing* (struggle sessions) and tortured for many years. My three brothers and four sisters—I am the eldest—were doing labouring work. My sister was doing hard work carrying rocks since the age of ten, and I saw her back was full of wounds and scars. They have never been to school and did not know anything. However, our parents had taught them a little Tibetan at home and the two elder sisters could write a little. They did not know any Chinese at all. They had time for nothing but work. As soon as a wound appeared on the back, it was bandaged, and back to work without any rest. They were made to carry rocks in baskets and were paid according to the number of baskets. My father also worked and there was no special provision for his old age.

Upon entering Lhasa, I saw many Tibetans on both sides of the road. Seeing their poor clothes and general appearance, I could not help crying. They were unbelievably poor. Among the youngsters, hardly anyone was in Tibetan dress. But many of the elders were. My parents explained that Tibetan dresses were not encouraged and, in any case, the rationed cloth was not enough to make *chubas*. So they all had to make Chinese suits.

I was told that I could rest for a day and that the following day I had to go to the Foreign Office to show my passport. At the Foreign Office, there were lots of discussions about my passport. I told them that it was issued by the Swiss Government for Tibetan refugees. But

they would not believe me and insisted that it was a passport for Swiss nationals. None of the Chinese officers knew anything about my passport. A few could speak some English, but knew no German, French or Italian—the languages on my passport.

A Tibetan official and a Chinese official came to see me. They were said to be of equal rank, but it was apparent that the Chinese made all the decisions. After the usual welcoming speech, they said that there was great progress being made in Tibet ‘which you are seeing for yourself. You’ve been hearing a lot of malicious rumours abroad; you haven’t heard the facts. Now you can see the realities for yourself. As the Chinese saying goes, “Seeing one is better than hearing about a hundred”. So now you’ll see that the Chinese Communist Party has turned Tibet into something that it never was.’

I replied: ‘When you brought the PLA into Tibet, you promised lots of progress. But I have not so far seen anything to be impressed with. For example, India is a very poor country. But in the last 20 years they have really changed a great deal. In comparison, nothing much has happened in Tibet. Anyway I would be seeing more in the next few days.’ I was sure the interpreter was not translating everything accurately. His translations seemed a lot shorter than what I was saying. Incidentally, I asked them if they still considered me a ‘reactionary’. I said that I was 11 years old when I left Tibet, and at that time I did not know if the Chinese had done anything bad, but neither did I know if they had done anything good. They replied: ‘We do not consider people like you reactionaries because you were young at that time. But there are a few people who opposed the masses and it is those people we regard as reactionaries. You need not worry about yourself.’

Now there was the question of my jeep fare. It was my fifth day in Lhasa when I told them I wanted to settle that account. They told me that there was a little error when I paid the fare up to Shigatse. ‘It seems you were only charged

RMP 64 from Dram to Shigatse. That was actually only the cost of petrol. The total charge is higher. Actually, foreign tourists are charged twice the total cost, but since you are a Tibetan compatriot we will charge you the same rate as the ordinary Tibetans here.' So the revised rate was as follows: Dram to Shigatse, RMP 283. Shigatse to Lhasa RMP 213. After a rough calculation I realized that I had to spend more than 1,000 Swiss francs on the two-way journey alone. Secondly, I had hired a jeep that morning to go to the Men-Tsee-Kang (Medical Centre) for treatment and after that to the Foreign Office and thence back home. They charged me RMP 50 for that. They said it was the same rate whether you use the jeep for a few minutes or for the whole day. I boasted that I would pay it even if it was RPM 100 a day. Thus I paid RMP 250 for the five days in Lhasa that I had used the jeep occasionally. I commented that you claim to do a great deal for fellow-Tibetans, but charging such exorbitant rates for transport was plain robbery, and that I had not read about such expensive transport in the *Peking Review*. There were more expenses after that. The room I had at Shigatse was RMP 2 a day. I thought it was the same here, so I had kept the room even if I was staying with my parents. However when I was making the payments they charged me RMP 15 a day. So I told them that I did not want to keep the room anymore.

The facilities in the guesthouses I had been to were very poor. There was no water connection in any of them. Even for washing, they had to bring water in a jug and I had to wash in a bowl. Toilets in the guest house, as well as throughout Lhasa, were the same as in the old days. No flush, no water—just a hole dug in the ground. There is another guesthouse in Lhasa—meant for foreigners. Perhaps that has better facilities.

One day I was invited along with my parents to a welcome dinner by the Reception Committee. Incidentally, the two guides assigned to me—Lhoyang and Sotop—

visited me at home throughout the day with small messages like that. Anyway, the dinner started with a meeting. It was mostly talks about what progress has been made in Tibet and what new projects were being carried out.

After that they asked me about the Tibetans in Switzerland. I said there were about 1,200 Tibetans in Switzerland and all of them were employed with salaries of not less than 2,000 Swiss francs a month. They remarked the cost of living also must be high. I said that it is, but supposing a husband and a wife were both employed, every month they could save the husband's salary and easily meet all their expenses with the wife's salary. Similarly, regarding education, I continued, young Tibetans know four or five languages. I was asked what languages did I know. I replied that besides Tibetan, English, Hindi and German, and I knew Italian because I had been to an Italian University. What did I study there? I said that among other things, I studied Communist Philosophy and I knew Marx and Lenin quite well. Of course, I studied other things at the University, but I felt like saying that at that time.

After the meal, I was asked if I wanted to make any suggestion from my observations in Tibet so far. I said that I did have suggestions to make, but most probably they would not be carried out. Anyway, I began: 'As you know very well, I have been a refugee since 1959, and because of the effort of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I got education, food and shelter. Secondly, since you have announced that you have opened the door to all visiting Tibetans and make a lot of propaganda about your policy of liberalization, I decided to make this visit and leave my fate in your hands. On the way, some foreign reporters had asked me whether I had no fear for my personal safety. I said I was fairly confident that I would not be killed. Even if you did decide to kill me, I am just one person who has willingly taken the risk. But the whole world is looking to see what happens to me. So it would be highly embarrassing to your

country.' They replied that they were very happy to hear that I did not listen to the malicious rumours and decided to make the trip with complete faith in the words of the party and the Government. They asked me to make my suggestions frankly.

I said: 'My first suggestion concerns future Tibetan visitors from abroad. I felt very sad when my parents asked me if I had not brought them watches or any other gifts from Switzerland. I was given to understand that I was not allowed to bring anything like that, so I had not. Anywhere else in the world gifts are exempted from duties. So you must consider letting future visitors bring gifts to their relatives. Secondly, you announce that there is a policy of liberalization in Tibet. Now that I have seen the little of the conditions here, it is very difficult to believe in your policies. We know from reliable sources that there have been famines and starvation in Tibet since the arrival of the Chinese. In the olden days no one had heard of such things. There were a few cases of travellers being frozen to death in high mountains, but there never was scarcity of food. But such conditions exist since the Chinese occupation, and this fact is recorded even in the records of the United Nations.' They said that it was all propaganda and refused to admit it.

'Because of these facts', I continued, 'if I went back and told the other Tibetans in exile that everything is fine in Tibet, no one would believe me. So if you want to convince them you should send more people out than those coming in.

When they go out, maybe our exiled government will provide them hospitality. Even if they do not, there is a Communist Party of Tibetans in exile now and I am sure they will look after them. They can go on pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya and other holy places. There is still this devotion to religion among at least 85% of the Tibetans here. So far as I can see there is not one Tibetan in Tibet who does not wish to go on such a pilgrimage. In olden days,

people used to travel on foot from as far away as Amdo to visit Bodh Gaya. So you should send more people out if you want to practise your policy of liberalization.'

They said that that was a good idea and if anybody wishes to go on such pilgrimages they would be allowed to do so. So I continued my suggestions: 'I have told you about my work and income in Switzerland. As a visitor I find it very expensive here. It is not too bad for me because I am quite well off. But in the future, there may be visitors from Nepal and India, where the level of income is not so high. When they come here for a visit, they will realize how unfair your government is. One thousand Swiss francs is equal to about 9,000 Nepalese rupees. They would not have that much money to spend on travel alone. You should really make your reception and hospitality as attractive as you make out in your propaganda. I have been to many parts of the world and have found out that transport is most expensive in Tibet. When I talk to newsmen outside, I shall certainly relate these personal experiences. So you will have to reconsider this policy.'

They had lots of explanations to give. For instance, China produces its own watches now and if lots of foreign watches entered the country, it would be difficult to find markets for Chinese watches. So if anybody wants to bring in watches they will have to pay duties. They said that if no duties are charged on gifts in other countries, that is their own business. They have their own rules here.

Regarding sending people outside, they said there have been many people going out. I said that we heard you send only some members of the family and detain others in the country. 'You should give permits to everyone who wants to go out', I said. 'For example, if I wanted to take my parents out, you should let me.' When I talked like this, my parents were visibly scared. So I told the meeting: 'My father and I have different ways of thinking. He has lived under you for 20 years, whereas I have been in a free country since the age of 11. I have got a free mind and I

express it freely. Moreover, you know that I am not a member of the Tibetan Government-in- Exile, nor do I hold any position in the Youth Organization, nor am I a people's deputy. So whatever I say is my own personal opinion. If my father does something wrong, there is no need to punish me for that. Similarly, If I do something, you should not punish my father for it.' They told my father not to worry and that they are very pleased with his son's frank views.

Then I asked Thinley, a former aristocrat, about the policy of freedom of religion in Tibet. He said that freedom of religion means anybody who wishes to practise religion is allowed to do so, but if he does not so wish, the Government can not force him to. I said that the government does not believe in gods and demons. For a while they looked at each other and then at me in contempt...

I asked Thinley how long did he study Marx and Lenin. He said that he had studied a little bit. I said that would not stand a chance if we talked about Marx and Lenin. 'I have studied them for six years and they never said that there is no religion, no God, or that if there were, they should be exterminated. Freedom of religion means it is none of the Government's business whether any member of the society wants to believe in religion or not. It is up to the people themselves. Your government, on the one hand, preaches that there is no God or religion, and that people must obey all the government declarations. But on the other hand, it says there is freedom of religion. People have no choice there. Marx never said anything like that. Maybe Mao said it.' They said that there was no time for further discussion that day and would fix another date. But they did not. I learnt later that most of the prisoners in Tibet in recent years have been there on religious grounds. Among the youth most were on political grounds, but even among them there were many religious prisoners—discovery of His Holiness pictures in their possession, secretly practicing rituals, etc.

Thinley used to come to me every day asking me if I had enough food. There is a real problem of livelihood. In my home there is no money. After receiving the monthly salaries, they are allowed to buy a little grain on ration. They do not get any yak meat. Once a month, a little amount of tinned pork is brought from China, which is also rationed. Besides that, they get a little bit of vegetable and tsampa. So I told the Reception Committee that I needed yak meat, pork, rice and flour and that I would pay for them. Everything I had asked for was delivered the next day. They charged me slightly above the usual price for them.

I also desired to meet Lhawutara (a former aide of the Dalai Lama, now believed to be a top collaborator with the Chinese) and as many of the 34 recently released prisoners as possible. They promised to arrange the meeting. The meeting was arranged at the guesthouse and I was asked to pay about RMP 15 or 25—I do not remember exactly—for some fruits and biscuits for the meeting. Rent for hiring the guesthouse for that meeting was about RMP 5-10. They said that most people are busy with work, but have arranged for me to meet Lhawutara and three of the recently released prisoners. They were Lhamon Sonam (a former attendant of the Panchen Lama), Kungo Mendoepea and Shoekoepa (all former officials).

Before talking about that meeting, I would like to go back a little. I have another uncle at Chengtu. He was a teacher at the Chengtu Nationalities School. He had studied Chinese for a long time and was an important official at the Amban's office in Lhasa during the Kuomintang days. Three days before the meeting, he had sent a message desiring to meet me. He was usually allowed a month's annual leave when the government paid his fare for visiting home. However, he had recently been home during the Tibetan New Year, and so I had to pay his air fare—RMP 350. His name is Lobsang Gyaltsen, his Chinese name is Chang Shishi, and is a very well known

figure. He was in prison for four years and was recently released. His new official post has not been decided yet.

All of Phuntsok Wangyal's brothers were imprisoned when he fell from grace. I discovered that I had about 100 relatives in office. About 40 of them had been brought back to office about five years ago. When Uncle Lobsang Gyaltzen came to see me I told him about my desire to meet Lhawutara and others. He told me that at the meeting there will be political discussion and that I should prepare well what I would ask and what I would reply to their questions. He told me he still had faith in religion and told me to pray to His Holiness' photograph. So I put the photograph before me—there was no altar in the house, of course—and recited two prayers to His Holiness.

Meeting with Lhawutara

I went to the meeting in a *chuba*. Lhawutara and the others received me outside the guesthouse. They were also wearing *chubas*. There were also some photographers around. I had made it clear during the dinner with the Reception Committee that under no circumstances did I want to be photographed by them as I know that later they would try to use it in their propaganda magazines. So I refused to be photographed with the four. The chairman of the Reception Committee assured me that it was only for remembrance and that it would not be used for propaganda. So they took photographs of me shaking hands with the four. When we were entering the guesthouse, Lhyang and Sotop also followed. I acted as if I objected to their being there. They took the hint and left us alone.

I directed most of my questions at Lhawutara. But before the actual discussions, I decided to try and break his morale a bit. So I said, 'When I was a student at the Tibetan school in Mussoorie in India, there was also a boy called Lhawutara there. Is he by any chance a relative of yours?' He said, 'Oh, yes, I remember—a son of my relatives. How is he?' I said, 'Through the grace of His

Holiness he went to a good English school. And having finished it he is now working in the Tibetan Government office. He is doing very well.’ Lhawutara kept quiet at that and looked very thoughtful. In fact, I do not know whether Tendar Lhawutara is now working for the Tibetan Government (actually, he is currently residing in the United States), but it was important to shake his confidence a bit by talking about his relative abroad. Usually, all Tibetans in Tibet deny that they have still relatives living abroad. After a while, I began by asking him what he had to say about his years in prison.

Lhawutara: When I was sent to prison, I thought it was for life. Then I studied Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung thought and began to understand everything clearly. So I was released after three years. Even while in prison, I was not tortured or anything.

Tersey: Do you still have faith in His Holiness?

L: I do not have much faith.

T: The Chinese say that there are lots of schools in Tibet now and all kinds of progress have been made here. But so far, I did not see any sign of progress. I saw hundreds of children working in the fields. How come they are not going to schools?

L: Eighty to ninety percent of the children have the right to go to school. They are taught Tibetan, Chinese and many other subjects. Those children you saw in the fields were kept at home by their parents.

T: Are you free to have political discussions?

L: Yes.

T: In the old society, you were a trusted secretary of His Holiness. You proved yourself to His Holiness and got to be a Dhungyig Chenmo. You did not bribe your way up or anything like that.

L: That’s right.

T: How did you change your mind so soon and how did you lose your faith in His Holiness?

L: When I was secretary to His Holiness I had the

determination to do my best, but even then we were not happy. We always had the fear of oppression from the one above us, the anxiety of the one equal to us getting an upper hand, and added to it the one below us was a constant source of worry, not knowing what they will do next. All these worries, anxieties and fears are now past due to the kindness of the party. The reason why I lost faith in His Holiness is because His Holiness kept the plan of his escape a secret from me. Though Surkhang and other ministers had a hand in excluding me from the plan, I hold His Holiness as personally responsible for not confiding in me and I was left with the impression that His Holiness is dishonest in his dealings. Moreover, the Chinese thought I knew about the plan and pestered me for a very long time. Due to these reasons, I lost faith in His Holiness completely.

T: I was only 11 years old when I left Tibet. Due to my long years of study and stay abroad, I have begun to believe in the principles of socialism and communism. I do not have an official duty as a representative of the Tibetan government, but since I am a Tibetan I am of this strong opinion that from a child born today to an old man dying tomorrow, every Tibetan has the individual responsibility to struggle for the independence of Tibet. I would like to know what is your and your friends opinion on this?

L: We have no specific opinion to express on this. But the independence of Tibet is an impossible thing. For centuries, Tibet has been an inseparable part of the motherland and it can never be separated from it. History and many other things prove that Tibet is an inalienable part of China and nowhere is it mentioned that it is an independent nation.

T: You know very well that Tibet was an independent nation. But you must say what you must say since it concerns the safety of your life and livelihood. But I would really like to know if it is your own opinion or the Chinese have forced you to say these things.

L: These are my own opinions.

T: If these are your own opinions, we have some points to debate over. First, how do you explain from history that Tibet is part of China?

L: Tibet has been a part of China since the fifth Dalai Lama when he had dealings with the Manchus.

T: Leave aside the fifth Dalai Lama and let us take history to King Songtsen Gampo, who obtained Gyasa (Chinese consort) as his queen. Are you saying that Tibet is a part of China since Gyasa came to Tibet from China?

L: Yes, this is right.

T: If so, Bhel-sa (Nepalese consort) came to be Songtsen's queen from Nepal, but why does not Nepal claim Tibet as their part?

L: I do not know about this.

T: So, you do not know history properly. Gyasa was sent to Tibet by the Chinese emperor not because he considered Tibet as part of China but he really had no choice since Songtsen threatened him with his military might, as you yourself know very well. Therefore, Tibet and China were two separate and independent nations, and during Songtsen's rule Tibet was an independent nation. So now I do not need any more confirmation, since you have agreed that Tibet was an independent nation during Songtsen. Taking a personal example, you have an estate in Phenpo which belongs to you. If I live in your estate for a year or two and claim it is my own, will it be acceptable to you?

L: Tibet has been a part of China ever since the Sakya rulers. All the Dalai Lamas were selected by means of the Serbhum (Golden Vase selection) which was done according to the order of the Chinese Emperors.

T: Most of the selections of the Dalai Lamas have been done without resorting to the Golden Vase method. It was only the Chinese emperor who proclaimed that the Dalai Lamas are selected by the Golden Vase method. In fact, Tibetans avoided this method, which you know well.

What do you feel about regaining the independence of Tibet?

L: I do not entertain any hope of regaining the independence of Tibet, as Tibet has already become an inalienable part of China. Hope of an independent Tibet in the distant future is a dream.

T: Hope of an independent Tibet may be a dream for you, but for us it is a reality. There have been times in our history when we have invaded and conquered China, but now because China is powerful, it has conquered Tibet. But today no Mongols claim that China is an inseparable part of Mongolia. Because China is powerful, it has conquered and occupied Tibet, Inner Mongolia and East Turkestan, etc. but do you sincerely believe the Chinese when they claim these nations as their parts?

At such questions, he had no reply and stayed with his head bowed down. So I requested him not to harbour such thoughts, and pointed out that when he went to sign the 17-point agreement, he went as a representative of the Tibetan nation.

L: You are wrong. I went to sign the 17-point agreement as a representative of the Tibet region of China.

T: But the Chinese have failed to respect and practise the 17-point agreement.

L: No, the Chinese have put into practice the 17-point agreement.

T: But only a peaceful liberation was agreed to in the 17-point agreement, while in the eastern province of Tibet, the Chinese attacked with violence and penetrated till Chamdo with arms.

L: But the eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo are not part of Tibet.

T: But you know very well that Kham and Amdo are inseparable parts of Tibet.

To this, Kungo Lhawutara had no reply and sat with his head bowed down. When I was talking and debating with

Lhawutara, who stayed with his head bowed down, I saw that Kungo Mendoepa was shedding tears. I also saw that Mendoepa had a cigarette in his hand which he did not light for about half an hour. But he seemed to be afraid of Lhamon Sonam Lhundup, who is reputed to be a Chinese stooge and is considered quite bad among Tibetan circles in Lhasa. He was on my right hand side. The facial reaction of the three while I talked to Lhawutara was very sweet—specially Mendoepa and Shoekoepa. But I also noticed that both of them were afraid of what I might ask them in front of the Chinese. So I was asking my questions to Lhawutara only.

In fact, the next day some Tibetans who came to meet me told me that they had met Mendoepa before the meeting and he had told them he could not sleep the whole night dreading what questions I might ask him before the Chinese. Later, I also learnt that while we were talking many Chinese spies were outside.

Now, coming back to the conversation with Lhawutara:

T: Recently, there have been talks of His Holiness returning and, moreover, some months ago you spread rumours using words like ‘Dalai bandit’, etc. May I know your opinion on this?

L: This is right. Sometimes, in our political vocabulary, some words like ‘Dalai bandit’ have been used. But within these 20 years many changes have taken place for the Tibetans in Tibet. If now the Dalai Lama, out of compassion for the Tibetans in Tibet, returns and works for their welfare and happiness, we will welcome him. If not, our attitude and policy will remain the same.

T: It is not an easy thing for His Holiness to return. Even if he is willing, the Tibetans, the UNO and all the countries who sympathise with the fate of Tibet will not allow it. If it is so easy to return to Tibet, there is no reason why we should stay in exile for 20 years. Only when a decision as to what is good and bad for the Tibetans is reached, His Holiness will return. Until then, it is useless for

you to worry. Even if it takes another 30 to 40 years, he will only return when it is for the good of the 6 million Tibetans.

So how do you feel about the independence of Tibet?

L: I have already replied and do not want to discuss the question any further. But which nations in the world support the Tibetan question in the UNO?

T: In 1959, about 53 countries voted for Tibet. All these countries still support and sympathise with Tibet. But the reason why a decision could not be reached at that time was because super powers like Russia were on the Chinese side. But the situation is reversed now, and Russia is proclaiming that Tibet is an independent nation and brought the issue into the UNO forum recently. And many documents, some international, have established the fact that Tibet is an independent nation. For example, Tibetans in exile are living in about 16 different countries who are friendly with Tibet. His Holiness has visited all these countries and will soon visit them again. When the time comes, all these countries will rise up and support the Tibetan independence. So you see, it is really useless for one person like you to say independence for Tibet is only a dream.

L: We do not know anything about the outside Tibetans, and what they are doing. We are just like 'frogs in the well who have not seen the ocean'.

Lhamo Sonam: I am happier than before when I served in the entourage of the Panchen Lama.

T: But the Chinese have contradicted what they first promised and later practiced. From 1950 to '59 itself, many monasteries were destroyed and people killed in Kham and Amdo provinces though Mao has himself desired only a peaceful liberation of Tibet.

Lhamo Sonam and Lhawutara confessed they did not know anything about such things.

T: Only now Tibet has been opened a little, but during 20 years, in China itself countless Chinese have been killed,

imprisoned and starved to death, which the Chinese themselves are now disclosing through pamphlets and wall posters in Peking. Do you know anything about such things?

They said 'no' to this question.

The way I argued with Lhawutara made all of them very happy. The very next day I learnt that Lhasa was full of discussions regarding the meeting. Tibetans told me that Lhawutara had a meeting with the Chinese just after our meeting finished. In the meeting he said that one Tibetan from exile has asked him these questions on the history and political status of Tibet to which he had no answers. When some expected 18 visitors come, they will ask him similar questions and the Chinese must teach him how to answer such questions. To this, I heard that the Chinese told him to forget history and everything else but give a detailed account of the progress which the Tibetans have achieved within 20 years under the Chinese. This will be sufficient answer, they said. Again, back to the meeting.

T: How long will the present policy of relaxation and leniency last?

L: Under the perfect guidance of the party, this policy will remain unchanged.

T: I would like to request you to spend your time in prayers and other religious activities. And I also request you, as the first Tibetan visiting Tibet, to try to release all the remaining prisoners in Lhasa and every other part of Tibet.

L: Since you left Tibet when you were 11 years old and have come back after 20 years with good intention of requesting the release of prisoners, we shall certainly do our best and inform our superiors regarding the same. Whatever you have told us will remain fresh in our minds since we have never heard them before.

Evidence of Nationalism

Prisoners in Tibet are countless. In Lhasa itself there are many prisoners but it is hard to specify how many

are in any one prison. Most of them have been imprisoned since 1959 and are serving for life under death-sentence. For example, one Tibetan has been imprisoned for singing an opera song praising His Holiness during Losar last year. People told me that 99% of the Tibetans are for independence, but 1%, mostly former aristocrats, are still with the Chinese and to the Tibetans they are worse than the Chinese themselves. They warned me that such people have been sent to meet me and I must be careful when I talk to them.

Though there is no organised and visible Tibetan resistance, underground resistance seems very widespread. Last year during Losar they put up a wall poster. One Geshe from Drepung came out into the open, went to the Revolutionary Committee office and said that since Tibetans are allowed freedom to worship and the right to speech, we want to stick up our opinions on the wall. The committee did not say anything to this. So the poster went up. Many Tibetans crowded to read the poster. They said it stayed the longest on the wall and the Chinese were later heard as saying that the mastermind behind the poster is not an ordinary person but someone who is experienced and well acquainted with the administration. I have a copy of the wall poster.

Whenever I had visitors at home, I used to send my parents out so that they would not be in trouble with the Chinese after I left.

One day, a group of women came to see me and each brought a flask of tea, bread, chang and biscuits, etc. They told me about a number of nationalistic songs sung in Tibet, and I've got them recorded. Before the Cultural Revolution came in 1968, children sang in the Barkhor:

'Get ready with your knife and table. The fat pig is about to be killed.'

One or two months later, the Cultural Revolutionaries and the reactionaries fought each other and the streets of Lhasa were littered with blood and corpses.

In late 1976, children sang:
'We will not trade the Ta (horse) for bhong (donkey).
My mother will scold me otherwise.'

Tibetans take ta (horse) which the children want to keep
in the song to mean Talai Lama.

Then in the late 1977-78, a new song hit the streets:
'Kelsang la
Auspicious times are ahead now'

Tibetans take this to be a very auspicious song and hope
that auspicious times will indeed come.

This year [1979], suddenly people in Lhasa sang a song
from Bathang. No one in Lhasa knows the origin of the
song but my uncle who came from Drinthu (Chengdu) to
meet me said that in 1930. Phuntsok Wangyal sang this
song during a family party wearing typical Bapa dress. He
sang this song as he danced and my uncle recollects that
tears came rolling down Phuntsok's eyes. The wordings of
the song runs:

'The stream from the same source
Must go separate now
But we will meet in the sea
Let us pray that this be so
The horse is garlanded with bells
The golden saddle has been put'

Soon after this song came to Lhasa people heard that
His Holiness was visiting Lhasa. When I took evening walks
in the Barkhor, I saw groups of children playing *piwang*
[one-string musical instrument] and singing this song. At
the start of this year, people again sang a new song:

'We have watered the lotus
And the lotus has bloomed
Let the lotus be
Auspicious for all'

Tibetans like this song very much, and judging from such children's songs, they think something good will happen very soon.

But the Chinese have misinformed the Tibetans in Tibet that the exile Tibetans are disorganised and disunited; that Tibetans are scattered everywhere and have difficulty earning their living. I clarified these points to the best of my knowledge to those who came to see me. And all of them cried when I explained these things. When they cried I also cried with them.

Before my visit, the Chinese had told Tibetans in Lhasa that one Tibetan is coming from Switzerland to visit his parents and another group of 18 Tibetans, who represent the Dalai Lama's party, are coming to Lhasa very soon, and the people must know to differentiate between the two. The group of 18 will create rumours, indulge in reactionary and seditious talks, and distribute reactionary pamphlets which must be handed to the party without reading them. But the Tibetan from Switzerland will come to visit his parents living in Tsarong Gya Kha Lam, and he may visit any families in the Barkhor section. He should be received with proper hospitality and smiles.

Learning about my coming visit, some groups of Tibetans had approached lamas to learn from them whether the person can be trusted. From the divinations (mo) and oracle prediction (lha-bab) they learnt that the coming visitor can be trusted, as he is a true servant of His Holiness and the Tibetan people.

From my diary, some 1,300 persons came to meet me while I was in Lhasa. I always talked to them in private. During my 20 days, daily 20 to 70 persons always came to see me asking about their husbands, relatives, wives, children, etc in exile. I told them about the exile situation, organization and the spirit of struggle for independence to the best of my knowledge. From about 1,300 persons, not even one was able to control his tears. All cried.

A group of underground activists, all young Tibetans also came to see me secretly. As they saw me, they cried and said that they have no regrets if coming to see me costs them their lives tomorrow. They also requested me to tell the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile, the UNO etc that 99% of the Tibetans in Tibet are ready to overthrow the Chinese yoke and struggle for independence. I also cried, and there were times when we literally kissed away each other's tears. Specially, the young Tibetans embraced and cried very much. From them I was able to get many documents.

When I was in Lhasa there was a rumour that Tibetans in the Kokonor area fought with the Chinese for many days. Religious practice is very strong, especially in Kham and Amdo provinces, where even children of 3 to 4 years know how to say Mani and Drolma. But most of the monasteries are destroyed. Only Je Khumbum and Tashi Kyil and Derge Parkhang in Derge still exist.

The elder Tibetans in Lhasa are very proud of the young Tibetans. Many of the young Tibetans are very nationalistic and told me that their one desire is to see His Holiness and bring the religion of Buddha back to Tibet.

According to the Chinese, 30% of the staff were Tibetans till 1966, but now 66% are Tibetans. I saw more Tibetans working in most of the offices.

A week after my arrival, the Chinese conducted a meeting and they said that though the visitor from Switzerland was to meet his parents only, he has been spreading rumours and other seditious propaganda and all the people must beware of him. I was informed of these developments by secret letters which I received daily. These letters were anonymous. Some letters told me to leave Lhasa immediately, as it would not be safe to stay long. Others told me to sacrifice myself for the country and people. Some letters arrived in the evening and the next day people came to see me and told me that they sent the letter I had received the evening before. I received about 30 letters,

but one was particularly interesting and important. I received it on 13th May midnight from a little boy. It said that since the 5th, about 9,900 spies from China have come to Lhasa, from which about 200 returned due to health reasons. This information was confirmed also by a Tibetan working in the office where new arrivals are registered. My uncle also told me that the flights from Chengtu were booked for 15 days by PLA and Peace Militia, and he was told to wait for 15 days. As a special case, I appealed to the Lhasa revolutionary Committee and they managed to get him a seat from China to Lhasa, for which I paid RMP 356.

I also received about 16 letters from Tibetans living in the Barkhor area who wrote that they were very willing to meet me but could not come to see me since the Chinese kept constant watch, and requested me to come to stroll in Barkhor so that they could see me from a distance. When I went to Barkhor for the first two times, I went in Tibetan chuba so that they could recognise me. I saw many people watching me. Almost all of them had tears in their eyes. To those that were near, I cried out that the sun will soon rise from behind the mountain and that they should rest in peace and happiness and we will meet soon.

For the visit to Tsuglag Khang, I chose a day in consultation with people. As a special case, the iron-gate to Jowo Rinpoche was opened to me. I went inside with scarves and, keeping my photographic equipments with the guide, made prostrations before Jowo Rinpoche. Offering a scarf to the right I said the prayer 'Words of Truth' by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, and offering a scarf to the left I said a prayer composed by the 13th Dalai Lama. The guides clapped and I nearly lost the coherence of my prayers. But all the time I had my ears outside, where a large number of Tibetans, mostly from Kham and Amdo, had gathered. They showed no sign of fear to the Chinese guards or the guides, but showered grains of rice and wheat on me and shouted and thanked me for giving them an opportunity to see Jowo Rinpoche and get blessings after

so many years. These Khampas and Amdowas had come from the east thinking that His Holiness will visit Lhasa. Later I was surprised to find among the grains thrown on me some Tibetan coins, including a Tamka Karpo which even my parents had not seen since 1959.

I was not allowed to photograph the statues inside. According to many sources, except for Jowo Rinpoche and Songtsen Gampo, the rest of the statues are all new without anything inside. Even sources in Nepal confirmed that the reason why no photographs of the statues are allowed is because they have been made very recently. I also learnt that one of the artists made a dress for Jowo Rinpoche. For this he was paraded through Barkhor with the dress on his head. Later he was questioned and imprisoned.

Ramoche was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Not even a single statue remains. Both the Potala and Tsuglag Khang are open twice a month for the public. But those employed by the Chinese are not allowed to go round Barkhor. If they are seen doing that, they immediately lose their jobs. My relatives came with me to Barkhor and said that they do not mind losing their jobs since the occasion is so important for them.

My family and relatives express special happiness over the song from Bathang since Phuntsok Wangyal, who sang it in 1930, was released from a Chinese prison about a year ago and will be coming back to Tibet. After Phuntsok's fall, about 100 of our relatives lost their jobs under the Chinese.

I also received a letter from Phuntsok's daughter recently in which she said he has been released and received at a reception given by Teng Hsiao-ping. Present at the reception were Ngabo and the Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama showed great happiness in meeting Phuntsok, came to receive him at the door and showed him to his seat.

At the time of release about a year ago, they said Phuntsok Wangyal was totally insane. His prison was a small cell with one hole for air and space enough to keep a bed.

His wife committed suicide by cutting her throat. His four children, including an adopted orphan, have suffered so much that they are all suffering from tuberculosis.

I also learnt that Phuntsok Wangyal has a very good relationship with Teng Hsiao-Ping, who in fact had appointed him to lead the PLA to Tibet. So during the reception Teng assured Phuntsok that he knew very well how much he had suffered but still held him in high esteem as Phuntsok had achieved more than a true Chinese communist. As such his case will be considered at the highest level and Teng will personally look into the matter. Meanwhile Phuntsok should rest in peace. Teng had also assured Phuntsok that his two brothers, though under Kuomintang pay, had helped in carrying PLA documents during the time and will be considered at an equally high level.

There is also a rumour that between 1930 and '40 Phuntsok founded an East Tibet Youth Association (Shar-Bhoe Sshunno Lhentsog) which the Chinese did not recognise. But then Teng promised to see that this is recognized. Ngabo seemed to have a strong hand in Phuntsok's downfall. I also learnt that some of the sons and daughters of Lin Piao and Phuntsok are active in organizing anti-Mao posters and other campaigns in Peking. Phuntsok's daughter seemed to know all the foreign embassies in Peking and she was said to practice shooting on Mao posters.

In Lhasa, the Chinese invited me to a concert. I found that, except for some steps during the dance, the whole Tibetan performance was turned into Chinese, including the introduction. After the show, I complained that I could not enjoy the performance since it was in Chinese and enquired why it was not in Tibetan. They said the troupe was going to Peking very soon and as such, it was in Chinese. But I protested that a Tibetan performance should be in Tibetan and programmes can be written in Chinese and distributed. I also asked if a troupe were to come from

Peking, will they practice the whole performance in Tibetan because it is going to be performed before Tibetans in Lhasa? They said this will not be. So, I pointed this out to them as a case of neglecting the culture and tradition of the so-called minority. I told them that if it were not for the kindness of the Tibetan parents, young Tibetans by now would have forgotten their language and culture due to the deliberate neglect of the party. To this they did not say anything. At the performance I noted that the Tibetan songs were sung with Chinese accents. All the young performers spoke Tibetan with Chinese accents which were extremely hard to follow.

On the 23rd they invited me to a lhamo (opera) show about Nangsa. This same opera was shown to Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, Lady Egremont from England, and another Westerner. It is said that during the performance some Khampas attacked the girl who played the nun's role in the opera the night after they performed for Prince Peter but she escaped unscathed. When I went to see the lhamo many Tibetans had gathered. They said they have come to see both the lhamo and me. In the Nangsa story everything is unchanged except the last part, where Nangsa reincarnates. This part has been cut off. They have introduced very good stage settings for the palace, inside of the house, the river, and things like that, but songs are sung in between the performance. The main actress who played Nangsa was about 24 years old and spoke Tibetan with a heavy Chinese accent.

During the show, a yak dance took place. Usually, it was only the officials who clapped. In order to see the response of the Tibetan spectators, I clapped as soon as the yak appeared, and all the Tibetans clapped with me, most of them looking towards me. But while the yak dance was going on, some girls entered the stage driving a tractor. This was to mean that tractors are more efficient than yaks.

In the Ngansa Lhamo itself, they showed a scene where Nangsa gets married and all the ministers and king come

in royal robes of brocade and silks. A drekhar (Tibetan New Year clown) came on the stage and I clapped. A large group of young Tibetans on my right gave a tremendous ovation.

As a reply to my questioning of Lhawutara, the Chinese in Lhasa invited me, my parents and uncle to a meeting. Since they insisted, we all went to attend it. In the meeting was Thinley, who had boasted that he had studied Marxism and Leninism. He asked me to tell the Tibetans in exile how well they receive Tibetans who return to Tibet, the tremendous progress they have achieved under the party and also that Tibet is an inseparable part of China. He also said that we can stay in Tibet if we want to, or return to adopted countries if we prefer. He insisted that I tell the Tibetans in exile what I have seen with my own eyes during the visit.

I told Thinley that it is entirely up to the Tibetans in exile to do whatever they want to do. The Chinese in Tibet cannot control the Tibetans outside. Whether they return or adopt other citizenship, it is not the concern of the Chinese in Tibet. To this they did not say anything.

I also told Thinley that I have seen much and heard much about progress in Tibet since 1959, but when I actually came to Tibet, the progress was far below my expectation and that I wanted to know the cause of this. To this he replied that due to the Gang of Four, the progress has been hindered. I told him that anything wrong in China or Tibet is blamed on the Gang of Four, so it seems the Gang of Four is a blessing to China. He said the like of the Gang of Four will never rise again. I gave him the example of the rise and fall of Teng Hsiao-ping and questioned his confidence in saying that the likes of the Gang of Four will never come.

At last, I agreed with them that I will tell the Tibetans in exile that there is no progress in Tibet due to the Gang of Four, but cannot tell lies about progress and happiness when actually there is no progress, but only fear and insecurity.

Lhoyang, my pro-Chinese guide, told me that he is impressed with me but it is sheer foolishness for the Tibetans in exile to waste their time in demanding a free Tibet, as many conditions must be fulfilled to make such a dream a reality. He said that first there should be a number of nations who recognise Tibetan independence. Secondly, this is impossible, as all the nations in the world have contact with China and no nation will recognize Tibet without first consulting the Chinese. And thirdly even if these conditions are fulfilled it is the Tibetans in Tibet who must say whether they want an independent Tibet or not. But right now even one condition is not fulfilled for you, as 99% of the Tibetans in Tibet do not want to become separate from the motherland and 1% reactionaries are being educated and reformed.

To this I replied that the UNO records will show how many nations sympathise with Tibet and cited the recent Russian initiative. On the historical questions I cited all the points I cited to Lhawutara.

He mentioned Lobsang Jinpa (president of the Tibetan Youth Congress) and Jamyang Norbu (founder of the newly started Tibetan National Democratic Movement) by name and said that what these young Tibetans are doing in exile is utter foolishness, and demanding independence for Tibet is like a bee hitting its wings on a rock. And even if Tibet were to become independent, it will be ruled by imperialist India, Britain and other countries.

About 2,000 Khampas and Amdowas from Kanze, Minyang, Kokonor etc. came to Lhasa. I mixed around with them and asked them many questions. They told me that they have come to see His Holiness and are disappointed that His Holiness had not come. But they expressed their happiness in seeing Lhasa itself, Sera and Ganden monasteries, the Potala and Tsuglag Khang. They said they came to Lhasa without Chinese permission and will live in Lhasa as long as their money, butter and meat will last them. Later they will beg for food if necessary. All of them were

dressed in typical Khampa dress with a dagger each. They told me that in Kham, though there are no monasteries, people practice religion. The Chinese are not very effective in controlling them and they never look on the Chinese with favour.

People were allowed to visit the Potala. An old man working in the Potala told me that some time ago Chinese made a Tibetan woman urinate in the ante-chamber of His Holiness. She became sick for about 8 months and later found blood coming out of her vagina, and when thus very ill she revealed what she had done under Chinese instruction.

I visited both Sera and Drepung monasteries. All the khamtsens (hostels) were locked, but I was taken to the assembly halls and the larger shrines. They all seemed in good state. I purposely felt underneath some of the statues to see if they were empty; they were not, and looked quite old and authentic. In the smaller outhouses there were lay families, but I did not see any monk. I was told that the monks go out in the fields to work and return at night. The shembus [tops of curtains] over the windows and doors of the hostels looked old, tattered and covered with spider's webs—it looked as if they had not been changed for 20 years. All the doors and windows were also shut tight and it was hard to believe that anyone lives in those buildings.

When I was a monk at Ganden, I was in the Phara Khamtsen [Hostel]. But since then, Ganden has been totally destroyed, I asked to be taken to the Phara khamtsen of Drepung. There was a monk outside who appeared to be very pleased when I introduced myself, but I got the impression that he did not want to talk to me in front of my guides. So I took hold of his arm and entered the assembly hall together with him. He was wearing ordinary monk's robes. But in one of the prayer rooms there was a Mongolian geshe who was assigned to explain things to me. He was wearing elaborate robes and brocade shoes, which is very unusual.

On the roof of the Drepung monastery some repair work was going on. I could hear the workers singing from downstairs and desired to go up and see them at work. All the workers seemed to be working normally except an old monk about 70, looking very thin and unhappy. As soon as he saw me he started weeping. But when my companions appeared behind me, he went to a corner and started wiping his tears. Throughout my stay there the old monk kept looking at me. Before leaving the place, I casually strolled up to him and whispered in his ears, 'Geshela, please don't lose your heart.' I asked my guides how was it that such an old monk had to work: doesn't he receive any pension? They said there is pension schemes for them, but they continue to work to make more money. I retorted what was the use of having more money since you could not buy anything unless you had the permits to do so.

While I was coming out I noticed that the outer gates of Toey and Pompa Raga Khamtsens were opened. While passing by Pompa Raga, I suddenly heard cows bellowing from inside. I asked what was a cow doing inside a monk's hostel room? I tried to open the door but it would not. From inside Toey Khamtsen, I could hear children and hens. As we were going out, I stopped a while to take pictures. Suddenly, the door to the Toey Khamtsen opened and a small boy came out. As my guides were out, I immediately entered the house. Inside, there were women, children, goats, sheep and hens. I came out and remarked to my guides that Pompa Raga was full of cows and Toey full of hens. They really looked scared but tried to laugh it off as a joke.

Drepung's main source of income was apples. They had about a 6,000-apple orchard there. At Sera, there were about 4,000 apples. The monks told me they make their living by selling apples. The Mongolian geshe told me that the inmates earn about RMP 500 a year. When asked what he did with his RMP 500, he replied that he uses it on food and clothing. I said that he must be working very

hard because other people earn only one RMP and a few Maotse a day and they do not have anything to save, but he must be very well off. The monk said 'yes', smiled, and did not say anything more.

The monk I had met at Phara Khamtsen was just coming out of a door outside. I asked him if he lived there, and without waiting for a reply entered the room. It looked like an ordinary room with a teapot and a mug of tea on the table. I looked at the shrine. There were some volumes of scriptures arranged neatly before it and covered with a large piece of cloth. I lifted the covering and found many volumes tossed haphazardly at the back. I picked some of them and said that he didn't seem to be taking very good care of his scriptures. He just said 'yes, yes'.

At Drepung everything I saw seemed intact. However, I had reasons to suspect the conditions at Sera are not so good. When I went there, as soon as my jeep stopped outside, they told me that there was a power failure. So we used candles to look at the images inside. The big ones had butter lamps in front of them but it was very difficult to see the smaller ones. Later, when I asked around the town, people told me it was not all that bad, actually, and that most of the famous images are there. People also informed me afterwards that the butter lamps at Sera were seen in some restaurants after my visit.

There are no private shops in Lhasa. Everything is owned by the co-operatives. There are a few Khatsara shops owned privately. Some Khampas sold butter and things like that in the streets, but no Tibetan residing in Lhasa owned any shops. Even the four teashops are owned by the co-operative. No one is allowed to buy more than his quota. One day my sister asked me to buy her a jumper. She said she was not entitled to buy it, but maybe they would sell it to me. I went inside and told the man at the counter that I wanted to buy that jumper. He said it was not for sale yet. I asked him if they were just keeping it there as a decoration. He did not reply and went to an inner room.

The next day, I went to the Revolutionary Committee office and told them that most people in the market behaved very decently towards me but there is this fat man in such and such shop. He still seems to regard me as a reactionary. I happened to go to that shop again after three days. There was a girl at the counter, but the fat man also appeared shortly afterwards, looked at me and smiled. I ignored him and asked the girl whether I could buy that jumper. She said, 'please wait, Gen-la'; incidentally, in Tibet everybody called everybody else 'Gen-la' (a form of address usually reserved for teachers). No one is allowed to use the words 'kusho' and 'kungo' anymore.

Anyway, back at the shop, the girl went and consulted the fat man, after which it was sold to me.

Another day, I went to buy some shirts for my father. His only shirt had several patches on it. I selected three shirts and asked the price. They were RMP 8 and some Moatses each—total about RMP 25. I put the money on the counter and asked them to pack them. They asked me if I had permits to buy them. I said I was from abroad and the Peking government did not tell me anything about permits but said I could buy anything. They consulted a Chinese woman for some time and then sold me the shirts.

Conditions at home

One of my sisters works as an unskilled labourer at an iron factory and gets RMP 30 a month. My other sisters have better jobs and get RMP 60, 70 and 90 a month respectively. RMP 90 is really a top wage. I heard there are a few persons who get as much as 100, but I did not meet any. A pair of shoes cost between RMP 23 and 30. Most of the people in Tibet earn between RMP 30 and 50. Woollen chubas are a rare sight. Those I have seen have from 10 to 15 patches one on top of the other on them. It seems not one new chuba has been made since 1959. Even many of those who had more chubas before '59 had sold them at second-hand shops when they ran out of money. They were

paid a very small amount of money for them, but they are displayed for sale at the shops and priced extremely high so that no one can afford them. Recently some people from Kham were selling their chubas. My mother's chuba also dated before 1959 and she had 12 patches on it. My sisters did not have any. One day I suggested taking a family photo in chuba. They said they would have to borrow from someone else. Even my father did not have a chuba. They had all been sold.

At home there are my parents and three brothers. All the sisters lived with their husbands, except one who lives at home because her husband used to be a lodger with us. Besides, the elder sister also started living at home recently when she got separated from her husband. She has been working hard to support my parents, who since last year have been declared too old to work, but they have never gotten any pension.

When I first got home I had to pay some money to someone but did not have any Chinese currency in my pocket. I asked my father if he could lend me RMP 20. But all they had at home was 2 or 3 RMPs and a few Maotse. Not only that, my father had run up about RMP500 in debts and had no hope of being able to repay these in this life. I cleared up all that debt for him.

Furniture at home was mostly of pre-1959 vintage. Moreover, all the small precious objects had been taken away or sold. Only the bulky ones were left. When I also came home, there was not enough blankets for all of us. Even photographs taken before 1959 had been taken to the Revolutionary Committee office. We used to have a large image of Jetsun Dolma. I was told that it was thrown into the Tsangpo during the Cultural Revolution. Even then, my father told me that we were what might be considered middle class because all the children were adults and earning wages. Most other people were much worse off.

Electricity has been installed in most houses in Lhasa, but there was no power before midnight, by which time

most people could not afford to stay up because of having to go to work early in the morning. But since electricity is there and people have to pay for it whether they use it or not, everybody seems to have kept their lights on whenever there was power, even in those rooms which were not in use.

The road in Barkhor is tarred and metalled. The old huts look the same, there is no sign of any improvement on them. The most impressive building constructed since the arrival of the Chinese is the Men-Tsee-Kang (Medical Centre), and that is because the Chakpori Medical College has been completely destroyed, just like *dzongs* [forts] and all other buildings on high hills. At Men-Tsee-Kang, both Tibetan and Chinese medicines are practiced. When I went there for treatment on the second day of my arrival in Lhasa, I was diagnosed both according to the Tibetan and Chinese systems. Men-Tsee-Kang is the only new building in Tibet constructed in Tibetan style. There is another new building for the youth organization with ping-pong and other indoor games facilities. I was told that since recently you can also have parties and western style dances in there.

I was visited by six or seven members of the underground youth organization, which is not the same thing as the Chinese youth organization. One of them invited me to his place for a purely Tibetan meal for one whole day. So I had really traditional Tibetan food from breakfast to dinner. At first, I thought it was as he said, all paid for by one person. Later, I learnt that the youth organization had secretly funded it. I asked him what if the Chinese found out about it. He said they talked of it and decided to use three or four names of those who would risk arrest if it came to that.

Further, this youth group had nothing to do with the underground resistance movement unearthed a few years back and the leaders executed. But I met some people who were also actively involved. For instance, on 7 June 1968 a large number of youths were massacred inside the Central

Cathedral (for a detailed description, see *Tibet: The Undying Flame* by Kunsang Palor). I found out that not all had died in that fight. Some had their arms chopped off, some their legs, etc. The husband of one of the girls, who had been speared in the stomach but had survived, came to see me one evening. I told him about the youth activities in Switzerland and how we had set up a small fund to help other needy Tibetan youths elsewhere. From that fund I gave him some money to be given to the 7 June massacre victims or their relatives. He accepted it with gratitude and said that his actual purpose was to ask me for the photograph of His Holiness that I carried with me. I had only one and many youths as well as elderly people had asked me for it. I had been telling them that they were welcome to look at it, but I could not part with it while I was in Tibet. But I really could not refuse it to the youth organization and gave it to them and asked them to look after it carefully. They said it was more valuable a gift than a large sum of money.

Sterilization of women

The Chinese had been propagating that in Tibet people can have as many children as they liked while in China they were not allowed to have more than two or three. I have been told that up to the advent of the Cultural Revolution people in Tibet were allowed to have any number of children. After that, anyone having three children was sterilized. My sisters had also been sterilized after two or three children. If you did not submit to the sterilization, you faced starvation because no food ration was allocated to the third and subsequent children. People in Tibet know about conditions in China too in that regard. There had been many cases of children being sold for RMP 5-10 in the streets of Peking. In Lhasa itself, the director of the People's Hospital had many children. When livelihood became impossible after a while, he had killed his own 12-year-old daughter. Many other Chinese

officials had taken their children from the Lhasa area to Kongpo and left them on hills as a joke, but with the actual intention of making them fall off and die. I heard about innumerable such cases.

During my 20-day stay in Lhasa I never saw one crow. They had all been exterminated and the surviving ones had migrated. Besides, the Chinese had ordered children to kill flies, and for every 250 flies killed they were paid a certain amount. Apart from a few Khatsara houses, there was no Apso dogs in sight. They had all been beaten to death with sticks, stones, shot or poisoned. Even cranes and ducks were missing from the river. The excuse given by the Chinese was that dogs are extra mouths to feed besides being unhygienic. The main reason, I was informed, was to make children commit sins and draw them away from religion. All the former incarnate lamas are made to catch fish, kill pigs and sheep.

One such young lama, Tadrags Rinpoche (incarnation of the last Regent of Tibet), secretly came to see me one evening. He was very evasive in his answers to my question because he felt embarrassed and guilty for the sins he had been committing. I explained to him that times were such that he had no choice over what he did—‘leave alone animals, you shall have to kill human beings too if they so order you’, I added. ‘But you can say prayers for them and I’m sure that would be of great benefit to them. Even His Holiness is aware of these things and understands that you have no choice but to follow orders.’

He did not say anything, but sat there quietly with tears running down his cheeks. The only remark he made was, ‘you are very lucky to be free and able to see His Holiness whenever you like’.

There were many such Lamas. Because of the work assigned to them, the Tsangpo River had also almost run out of fish. I heard that sometimes people waited for the whole day without being able to catch any fish. There were no wild animals in sight either.

Inquiries about relatives

I would like to go back a bit again—before my meeting with Lhawutara. One evening, an old man in Chinese clothes came and wished to see me. He introduced himself as Shoekoepa, whom I had earlier met with Lhawutara, but we both pretended to have met for the first time. I called him inside. He wanted to know about his son, Yaba Tsenshab, who lives in Switzerland, and two other sons in the United States. I do not know the two in the U.S. but told him all I knew about Yaba Tsenshab. I asked him if he still had faith in His Holiness and whether he believes Tibet will regain her freedom. He replied that it is impossible for someone old and in his death-bed not to have faith in religion. I had heard that his sons in the United States were trying to get him out of Tibet. He said he knew that, but had sent them a message saying that he was too old now to start a new life and that he wished to die in Tibet. He told me he had undergone some *thamzing* [‘struggle session’] in prison, but was not subjected to severe tortures.

Before leaving Switzerland, many people had asked me to find out about their relatives in Tibet. There were some in Shigatse. So before proceeding to Lhasa from there, I had told the Chinese that on my return journey, I wished to meet the people on this list. I emphasized that I must see them and that if I did not see them, or if you brought any excuses, I would take it to mean that they have been killed and would report to their relatives accordingly.

On my return to Shigatse, they had five of these people waiting for me. Throughout my stay in Tibet, I never saw anyone like those five. They were all wearing expensive, elaborate clothes—brocades and double silk shirts, etc. And they all had big titles like secretaries and accountants in Chinese offices. But their hands were not like those of accountants or clerks. They were full of scars and swollen, with knobbly fingers. All the people I met in Tibet were curious to know more about the forthcoming visit of the

18 Tibetan exiles (it was cancelled due to Chinese insistence that they describe themselves as Chinese). They all requested that we send only those Tibetans from exile who genuinely feel for His Holiness and the Tibetan people. They had heard that two of the people in the group (names withheld to avoid possible libel suit) cannot be put in that category. They fear such people might undermine what little hope they had for a bright future.

People in Lhasa seemed to be very well informed. They knew all about the former guerrilla base in Mustang, etc. I filled them in with various details that I knew. They had a specific complaint about the Tibetan language broadcast of the All India Radio. They said many words were misused and mispronounced, tending to cause misunderstandings. For instance, they often said 'Gyakar' (India) for 'Gyanag' (China) and vice-versa. I also can corroborate that complaint. For instance, on 27 May, while reporting the crash of the DC-10 jet near Chicago, the announcer, Lobsang Dawa, called it CD-10. Secondly, the Lhasans complained that the announcers speak too fast and are sometimes difficult to understand. They asked me to inform His Holiness and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile to look into these matters if they have the authority. They said they have great hope for the AIR broadcasts and that they always wait for it with doors and windows closed. They feel sad with the poor quality of the broadcast, especially in view of the fact that the Chinese make sure that their own broadcasts reach all corners of the world loud and clear.

A SUMMER HOLIDAY IN TIBET

by Christina Jengen and Suzette Cook
published in *Tibetan Review*, May 1981

He had been examining our luggage with curiosity for ten minutes now. From the middle of the room the young nomad stared at us. His sheepskin coat was thrown back from one shoulder, his hair in dishevelled braids. He might have been the model for a freedom fighter's memorial. We were not surprised: people had asked this question many times before. We had been in the bus station hostel in Chamdo, the biggest town in Eastern Tibet, for more than a week, waiting for the bus to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. We were 1,200 kilometres from anywhere foreigners usually went inside Chinese borders.

We had been studying economics and literature at Peking University since 1978 and had decided to spend our last Summer holidays in Tibet. It was difficult to make preparations in Peking: Lhasa had only been opened to foreign visitors in 1979 and the last European to follow the route we planned to take had been arrested by the Chinese and had made the trip in custody in 1950. So we had no idea what to expect. Over a period of almost seven weeks we travelled by road from Chengdu, in Sichuan Province, through Chamdo and Eastern Tibet to Lhasa. After two weeks in Lhasa we took the bus to Nepal.

Stories about Tibet varied according to the source. The Chinese talked of great achievements there since the overthrow of the traditional system; Westerners and Tibetans reported destruction and genocide. The Chinese had gone into Tibet in 1950 claiming that Tibet was part of their motherland and in 1959 the Dalai Lama and approximately 80,000 other Tibetans took refuge in India and Nepal because of the consequences of their claims that Tibet is an independent nation. Since then, the Tibetans in exile have stated that the Chinese presence in Tibet has

meant widespread destruction of the Tibetans' culture and means of existence. The Chinese say they peacefully liberated Tibet from a brutal feudal theocracy, in exchange for the benefits of Socialism.

Most visits by foreigners to the People's Republic of China are highly organized and limited in the extent of what is presented. The same is true for the Tibet Autonomous Region. We were lucky to have the chance to travel more widely and look more freely at the situation in Tibet these days. As far as we know, we were the first foreigners ever to take the new Chengdu-Lhasa highroad. Travel is so much under official control that, instead of going on foot or horseback as we would have liked, we were forced to travel by bus and truck on the main roads. During the 1950s, the Chinese built three major roads into Tibet: from Sichuan Province, Qinghai Province and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. A railway line from Qinghai Province is also under construction. The road through Qinghai is the easiest, and is therefore the main transport route. Coming from Sichuan, we saw mostly military trucks, though as it happened the truck that took us part of the way was carrying firecrackers. Most of the trucks going the other way were loaded with timber.

According to what the Chinese told us, the road to Xinjiang is the worst of the three. Every ten kilometres along the road from Sichuan is a roadwork depot, because due to difficult weather and terrain constant repair of these dirt roads is necessary. Individuals with travel permits may go by bus, truck, or in special cases, by jeep; others can only walk, or perhaps ride. At two-thirds the average yearly income for a Chinese peasant (which is around US \$50), we thought the cost of a bus or truck ticket from Chamdo to Lhasa unreasonably high. In fact, the price was comparatively higher than in the Chinese Provinces. Passengers on the buses were mostly Tibetan cadres, while others travelled by truck. Chinese went by plane if possible. Considering who profits by these roads, and for what

purposes, we could not see that they were really of much use to Tibetans. Most of the Tibetans we saw were not actually using the roads: they were either herdsmen tending their yaks or sheep, or lone riders seeming to come from nowhere and vanishing into the vast landscape.

All people under the Chinese system are supposedly registered, which then determines one's membership of a unit. The unit controls one's job, housing, income and distribution of cotton and grain and coupons. On our way we spent a relatively long time in the newly settled areas along the roads. These settlements consist mainly of compounds for the convenience of military or transport units, and the members are, with few exceptions, Chinese. They have been sent from their homes in the Chinese provinces to work in Tibet, and they continually complained, amongst themselves and to us, about living conditions—by these they meant food, climate and the fact of living in a minority (non-Han nationality) area.

Both of us had travelled extensively in China and we did not find conditions basically different from anywhere in the Chinese countryside. Chinese families in Tibet also live in one or two rooms, the choice of foodstuffs is extremely limited (rice, steamed bread, pork fat and one or two kinds of vegetables), and the supply of consumer goods is very irregular. For example, inconvenienced by the constant power failures, we tried to buy candles over a distance of about 1,600 kilometres, but on each occasion we were told that there were no candles because it was summer. No wonder the Chinese complained. Candles were a necessity.

Registration is meant to ensure equal distribution of staple foods, in particular grains, which are purchased with grain coupons and money. The staple foods of Tibetans are butter, tea and tsampa (roasted barley flour). Buttered tea is drunk throughout the day, and tsampa is mixed with it into a kind of dough for meals. Rancid butter could be used in lamps for religious or other purposes. In such high

altitudes we found the Tibetan food more agreeable than the rice-based Chinese diet, so on our way we had some experience of the food situation as it was for Tibetans.

Trying to purchase butter at the government stores, we went through a process of registration but then we found that the large amount of butter on sale was rancid. Under the circumstances we had no choice but to buy it. Not until later did we discover that a little fresh butter could be purchased on the newly-permitted free markets for three times the price. It seemed strange to us that, since Tibetans prefer fresh butter, it should only be available in such small amounts and at such high prices, while the butter on the market under government control went rancid in the store-houses.

Traditionally the Tibetans often eat yak or mutton, but we never saw meat on sale until we reached Lhasa. In the government transport station canteens, where we had to take our meals, only old salted pork fat was available. It was a relief after seven weeks in the countryside to see fresh meat on sale in the street markets of the capital. People told us that meat had been on sale in Lhasa since 1979. Grain, however, is the most important part of the diet. According to the Chinese, production figures have been raised by the application of scientific methods to agriculture, such as growing Summer and Winter crops. This particular method would only have long-term results if large amounts of fertilizer were brought in, and fertilizer is already in short supply in China.

Wherever we stopped to eat, groups of beggars would gather, only to be chased away by the Chinese staff as they asked for leftovers or grain coupons. It was clear from their large numbers and persistence that they were truly in need. When we bought a steamed bun to give to a boy who was begging, we were met by astonished silence from the Chinese in the canteen—apparently this was not the custom. Normally any left-overs went to the pigs. The Chinese claim bigger yields of various types of grains, but

we had to wonder who was benefiting; the Tibetans did not seem to have very much.

Other economic improvements which the Chinese say have come since they introduced socialism in Tibet were not obvious. Industry, said to be formerly non-existent in Tibet, did not seem to have advanced much. It is true that there are two large factories—the cement works in Lhasa and the woollen mill in Linzhi—but the hundreds of small factories with tens of thousands of Tibetan workers mentioned in Chinese reports seem to be no more than simple workshops, manned almost exclusively by Chinese workers. A blacksmith is still a blacksmith and a tanner is still a tanner, although they may be given different names nowadays in statistical reports. Working Tibetans were mostly to be found as manpower in agriculture, forestry, roadwork or construction.

Tibet's mineral wealth has been known for centuries, but traditional Tibetan society did not feel the need to exploit it. However, this is one economic field in which the Chinese have been very active: a number of expeditions have been sent out to make geological surveys and to prospect for minerals. Tibet is rich in coal, iron, peat, salt and borax, and we met one expedition which was looking for gold. When we asked them if they expected to find much, they assured us there was plenty of gold and they hoped to begin mining operations soon. Since there are no factories for the refining and processing of minerals in the whole of Tibet, we can only conclude that they are being exported to provinces of China, with no direct benefits for the Tibet Autonomous Region.

According to the Chinese, two of the areas in which the greatest advances have been made are education and medical care. Before liberation, they say, not a single school was open to the working people of Tibet, nor was any hospital or doctor available to them. In the traditional society, education was the responsibility of the monasteries. Pupils came from all ranks of society and were

taught various subjects within the scope of their religious education, such as mathematics, astronomy, logic and fine arts, as well as some understanding of medicine, architecture and agriculture. The most famous school of medicine was in Lhasa on the Iron Hill (Chagpori); since 1959 only some pieces of the walls remain. There are supposed to be 6,000 primary, secondary and tertiary-level schools in Tibet today. The 4,000 monasteries of the old society combined all levels of education, and might well have educated the same number of pupils, without having to provide for the great number of Chinese now in Tibet. When asked, a lot of Tibetan children along the road said they did not attend school, though they had picked up some Chinese through daily contact. In Lhasa this was not the case; even young children told us they were in school.

Chinese teachers explained to us that the level of education in Tibet meant that, except in very few cases, children could not hope to pass the entry examinations for tertiary education and that the standards did not equal those in any of the Chinese provinces. Most of the children in schools seemed to be Chinese, though their parents would try to send them to school in their home provinces where they have the chance of a better education. Apparently there are Tibetans who, outside of this educational system, try to maintain their culture in their own way. We were once visited by a nomad in his mid-twenties who could not speak Chinese. We communicated with him through sign-language and a Tibetan dictionary; and he wrote a letter, which he wanted us to pass on to the Dalai Lama. Later we realized how extraordinary this all was. As he knew no Chinese, obviously he had become literate in Tibetan without the help of the Chinese education system, already in existence for more than twenty years.

The Chinese claim that medical care is now provided for everyone, but we saw signs indicating that was not the case. On the way we particularly noticed that people had

problems with their eyes: trachoma and cataracts seemed to be common and many people had bad eyesight. Their teeth looked very healthy, though we were surprised to see a travelling Chinese dentist doing thriving business because the local clinic offered no dental services. In cases where, to us, medical care was obviously needed, we saw that people did not always make use of the local clinics. In the past, people relied on the monasteries for medicinal help; these provided direct assistance and distributed medical herbs. Today barefoot doctors are supposed to reach people in the remotest areas, in the same way monks once travelled throughout the country. Fortunately, the thin air at such high altitudes keeps the spread of disease in check, and the Tibetans are not subject to the kinds of health problems that affect communities at lower altitudes. This may help to explain their relative lack of concern for hygiene, often commented upon by Chinese and Westerners. By all reports the standard of health care in Lhasa is high today, but outside the capital the situation is not comparable.

The same could be said of living conditions, though even in Lhasa itself the houses did not look very well kept. Beside cities in China, Lhasa is no more than a small town, with a population of 120,000 (as recorded in May 1980), 50,000 of these are Tibetans and 70,000 Chinese, not including the many soldiers. The old city still retains the charm of old age, but it is clearly in decay. The new section of Lhasa, three times the size of the old Tibetan city, is well-planned and attractive compared to Chinese post-liberation cities we had visited before; yet the houses, usually built barrack-style, might have been designed for a crowded city like Peking, and to Western eyes appear rather poor. The Chinese buildings mainly belong to administrative, transport and military units, and like Chinese compounds elsewhere include housing and working facilities. The Potala, the winter residence of the Dalai Lama, emptied of all but its most spectacular treasures and now undergoing restoration, still dominates the valley.

To the Tibetans, religion has always been an accepted part of normal life. Since they came in the 1950s the Chinese have been trying to undermine the influence of religion amongst Tibetans, in accordance with the Communist Principle that religion is harmful to society. All but a handful of the most famous monastic buildings have been destroyed. People told us the monks have been killed or made to do other kinds of work. Of the 20,000 monks formerly in Lhasa's three great monasteries, about 200 now remain, and along our 2,400 kilometres from Chengdu to Lhasa, we did not see a single one. Judging by the number of ruins we saw, we could imagine how many monks had disappeared.

Despite the visible destruction, we could not mistake the evidence that the religious faith of Tibetans of all ages is very much alive. Everywhere we saw people turning prayer wheels, telling rosaries, making circumambulations of the remnants of holy places and murmuring their prayers as they went about their daily business. For twenty years pilgrimages—of great importance in Tibetan Buddhism—were not allowed. This was changed in 1979, but because of the problems of overcrowding in Lhasa due to the sudden influx of pilgrims, a relatively small number of those who apply is permitted to go. Truck transport is available at a high price, but we still saw pilgrims making the journey on foot, as in former times. Some of the only remaining religious monuments we passed were cairns of stones on the tops of mountain passes built up by travellers over the years, and a few *chortens* (shrines) newly made of sods. Prayer walls along the road now bore political slogans.

As religion is the force that animates all aspects of Tibetan culture, and there is so much evidence of its wilful destruction since the 1950s, it is hard to understand how the Chinese can claim that traditional Tibetan culture is being preserved.

In a town in Eastern Tibet we were lucky to be able to watch rehearsals of dances to be performed at a coming festival. This would be the first performance for twenty-two years. The large crowds of spectators were very excited, and although it was funny to see the enthusiasm and good humour with which the dancers tried to teach each other the proper steps, it was sad to realize how much they had lost. The dances were back but deformed by political causes. Few people were left who remembered all the prescribed movements. Another strange incident involved a customs officer in the Lhasa post office, where we were mailing some packages home. When he went through them, he found some small horse bells which we had purchased at the market: these, he said, could not be exported without a special permit from the Culture Bureau, because they had been made before 1959. The Chinese apparently felt in retrospect that Tibetan culture had been arrested in that year.

As far as we could find out, changes were underway in Tibet before the massive arrival of the Chinese. These changes would have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary; the slow pace of change might have cost the people less. In the West we are no longer familiar with societies which are strongly motivated by religion. In Tibet, the physical vastness of the land accounts for a mental atmosphere, which does not conflict with a religious outlook. The Communist Chinese have never seen it from this point of view and they believed rapid and fundamental changes were necessary.

Apart from the economic value Tibet has for China, its geographic position makes it of extreme strategic importance. The world's largest plateau at an average altitude of more than 4,000 metres, it borders on Northern India, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma. Beyond the Karakorum Range lie Pakistan and Afghanistan, and across Xinjiang is the USSR. There are enormous numbers of soldiers and military transport vehicles throughout the country, whether

for specific strategic reasons or as an aftermath of the peaceful liberation of Tibet it was hard to say. Many of the Chinese we met were quite sincere in their conviction that the changes they brought about are beneficial to Tibet, but they had neither interest in nor knowledge of the culture they had tried to alter. It might be kept in mind that the Tibetans are not the only non-Han nationality that lives under these kinds of conditions inside Chinese borders. In 1979 a new policy for the Tibet Autonomous Region came into effect, said to be more liberal because it included measures such as decreasing numbers of Chinese workers in Tibet, re-opening some places of worship and allowing some sideline means of production. But these are superficial changes, quite consistent with the principles on which the existing system is based, and lately there are signs that the Chinese are returning to the stricter policies of a few years ago.

For all the changes that took place in Tibet and the disproportionate number of Chinese to Tibetans there, it was extremely obvious to us that the material destruction of Tibetan culture has not resulted in its spiritual weakening. The religious element of life is not questioned by the Tibetans. This includes their wish that the Dalai Lama returns to live amongst them, but they do not accept the conditions which the Chinese are offering. People still make prostrations and circumambulations, use prayer boxes and rosaries, and, if possible, they go on pilgrimages.

Everyone asked us about the Dalai Lama, sometimes giving us special messages for him. People came up to us for a variety of other reasons: some out of curiosity and amusement, some trying to sell us all kinds of hand-made articles, some just to express friendship—something they had not been able to do for twenty years. In many cases, however, they had another specific reason for speaking to us: they wanted to make it clear that Tibet is an independent nation, that the Chinese should leave their country. The Chinese insist that Tibet is part of the

Chinese motherland and that they justly liberated the Tibetans from oppression by a reactionary ruling class. The national status of Tibet may be seen as a legal question, but since Tibetans regard themselves as independent of China, what rights do the Chinese have to be in Tibet? The Tibetans should be left to themselves, as has always been their wish. For twenty years they have not had a voice except for their government in exile in India, and general opinion does not take exiled governments at their word.

Although it has never won positive international assistance, there has always been Tibetan resistance to the efforts of the Chinese to enact their belief that Tibet is part of China. This resistance continues; individual Chinese talked to us about infiltrators in the South-East border area and dangerous people in the mountains, and drivers did not like to travel except in convoy. We ourselves saw Tibetans throwing rocks at passing trucks, a symbol of the Chinese presence. Western journalists have been allowed to visit Lhasa since the Summer of 1979, and like tourist groups they are limited to a short visit to selected places. If they report too openly on Chinese matters, they run the risk of never being allowed back to the People's Republic. The Chinese system can also prevent them from witnessing events it does not wish to be made public. For example, foreign journalists were sent away from Lhasa in August last year so they could not report on the reaction of thousands of people who had gathered to welcome the Third Delegation from the exiled government.

It has been charged against the Tibetans that they kept to themselves too much. Perhaps they felt no need for closer contact with the outside world, which may explain why they did not make the seriousness of their internal problems known to the world in time. Their appeals to the United Nations were deferred in the face of concern with other international problems. No great attention has been paid to their pleas since, thanks to the international importance of the People's Republic of China.

TIBET AND CHINA'S POLICY OF
LIBERALIZATION—SOME PERSONAL
OBSERVATIONS

by Dawa Tsering

published in *Tibetan Review*, July 1981

Introduction

I am a Tibetan born in India in 1953. In 1960 I entered the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala, from where, two years later, along with 22 other children, I was sent to Switzerland. However, I could not adjust to the way of life there and was sent back to India in 1965. From 1967 to 1974 I was in the Indian army, in a division consisting of Tibetan recruits. I got disillusioned with that life and I longed for a visit to my ancestral homeland. Having heard contradictory stories about the situation in Tibet, I decided to go and see for myself what the truth was. I prepared myself for a long time studying Marxist-Leninist and Mao Tse-tung thoughts. Without telling anyone about it I went into Tibet in March 1979. At first I was really pleased to see what I thought to be progressive changes there. However, I gradually began to see through the actual nature of the Chinese presence in Tibet. I realized that there was nothing I could do for my people by staying there, and so returned to India in May 1981.

A part of my story has appeared in *China Reconstructs* of June 1980. I had written the first draft of that article and handed it to one of the correspondents of *China Reconstructs*. That was as early as December 1979. In February 1980 its editor wrote to me asking for additional information for inclusion. I replied to his questions as best as I could. They did not send me the final manuscript for my approval; only a copy of the issue when the article was printed. I noticed in the article that my personal story was fairly accurate. However, regarding my feelings in Tibet and my observations, there were lots of inaccuracies and,

in some cases, views attributed to me were completely opposite of those I held. For instance, I was supposed to have said: 'It seems to me that people of different nationalities in China belong to one great happy family, very different from what I encountered in capitalist countries.' That was my first impression in China but it certainly did not last long. Now that I am in exile again, I wish to say frankly what I saw and heard when I was in Tibet regarding the condition and aspirations of the ordinary Tibetans.

In actual fact, I have already been interviewed twice by *Tibetan Review*. The first time was in Szilling (in Amdo province of Tibet) where I was studying in the National Minorities Institute, by Thubten Wullschleger, an old friend from Switzerland, who was touring Tibet as a member of the third fact-finding delegation sent by the Tibetan government-in-exile. This interview was published in the February 1981 issue of the *Review*, which also carried the reprint of my *China Reconstructs* article. My second interview with the *Review* was published last month.

Despite these two interviews I still feel it important for me to say something in article form. The first interview was mainly on my reasons for visiting Tibet, and the second was mainly on the reasons for my return. In the present article I shall try not to repeat my earlier comments, although in some cases it becomes unavoidable. It has been shown to me for approval and necessary corrections before going to press.

Life in Tibet Today

In their colourful magazines, China proclaims that Tibet has now been completely transformed from a backward feudal state to a progressive, prosperous and modern one. If you go there on a guided tour you would be quite inclined to believe that, as I did during the early days of my stay there. However, it was not long before I realized that I was only taken to selected spots and introduced to selected people. Once I came into contact with the

ordinary people I was stunned by the difference between what is on paper and what is actually happening.

The living standard of the ordinary Tibetans since the Chinese occupation in 1959 has been extremely poor. When I left Tibet the condition had been made slightly better because of the introduction of the liberalization policy. During my second Tibetan New Year there, I was staying with my uncle and his family. We had fairly decent food to eat, as I was still a privileged guest of the government. However, I noticed that some other Tibetans in the village had only boiled potatoes to eat. There was no meat, no fats of any kind, not even green vegetables. In contrast with that during my last Tibetan New Year there—which was shortly before I left—they actually had some meat, butter and vegetables to eat.

Some petty trades are also allowed these days. Usually, however, the only source of income for the ordinary Tibetans is the wages paid according to work done in the commune. This varies from place to place and from year to year according to the fertility of the land and climatic conditions. I think my uncle's family can be considered an average. There the average annual earning of an average adult is 300-350 *gyamas* (*gyama*=1/2 kg.) of grain, plus between 300-350 yuans in cash for the whole family of 12. The average monthly income of those who do other than agricultural work, such as truck drivers, is about 60 yuan. These wages are the only income received by the Tibetans. Out of it, they have to pay for everything else that they need, such as other foodstuffs and clothing. It also has to support the aged and the children in the family who cannot work.

China says it grants state subsidies to improve conditions in Tibet. Perhaps it does, but there is nothing to show for it in the people's standard of living. No Tibetan is aware of any such subsidies. They told me that they produce a lot more than they used to before 1959,

but they get a lot less to eat. The major portion of the harvest is always taken away by the Chinese as taxes.

Education

Education in Tibet is almost entirely in Chinese. A little Tibetan is taught in some schools but that does not make any difference. The curriculum is planned in such a way that it can only benefit China. History, world news, etc. are all Chinese interpretations. There is no access to any other reading material. It is not a free system of education: there are no diverse courses of studies. Students cannot decide what they want to study, nor what they would like to become when they grow up. Another point to consider is that much of Tibet is nomadic area and I was told by Chinese officials themselves that there are no schools in such areas, as the population is sparse.

Szilling Minority Nationalities Institute, which I attended for about two years, is supposed to be an institute of higher studies. But none of the students I met there can be said to have a good background of elementary education. Most of them are cadres between the ages of 20 and 40 learning Chinese language. Altogether there are about 1,300 students at the institute: about 150 Tibetan students with elementary and middle level education; 150 other national minorities with similar background; 300 Chinese students; 600 Tibetans without any previous education enrolled in the cadre course; and about 100 other national minorities in the same category.

My fellow students there are supposed to be from among the most highly educated national minorities. But in terms of the standard of education and facilities available, it does not begin to compare with schools of higher learning in the outside world, or even with those in China proper. Of course, it is regarded as best in Tibet itself. It offers courses in mathematics, political science, history, Chinese language, etc. There is a science faculty too, but it has only Chinese

students; no Tibetan or other national minority students can be found there. In short, the educational system is planned in such a way that it is extremely prejudicial to a member of the national minorities and is designed to ensure the domination at all levels of administration and society by the Chinese race.

Modernization

I saw quite a few factories in Szilling and other parts of Tibet. Almost all workers in these factories are Chinese. Wherever there are a few Tibetans or other national minorities employed, they only do secondary or menial work. Actual production work is handled by Chinese personnel at all levels. For instance, in the factories in Szilling more than 95% of the workers are Chinese. All the products of these factories go to China. They are mainly raw materials. Some finished products do come back to Tibet, but they are priced so high that very few Tibetans can afford them.

There are some hospitals too and they give free treatment to students and cadres, but the ordinary people have to pay. These hospitals are always crowded as they are not very large in size and there are not enough of them to go round even for the small population of Tibet. Except for emergency cases, treatment of ordinary Tibetans in these hospitals is very casual.

Religion and Culture

When I first arrived in Tibet, practice of religion was completely banned and I only saw half-a-dozen people in monk's robes in the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse. About a year later, things changed a little. There are now more monks. But the traditional manner of practising religion is still forbidden. Monasteries do not have the power of administering their own affairs. Everything is controlled by the government. Devotees who want to visit monasteries have to obtain permits, and in the case of Lhasa

buy tickets. The officials decide how many to allow at one time. Offerings made to the monasteries and temples are also taken by the government.

These days the Chinese are claiming to be spending quite a lot of money in the renovation of some monasteries. But this renovation consists only of whitewashing the exteriors. There is hardly any restoration work done inside and at the back.

Regarding culture, there were no Tibetan books to be seen, except for political ones, when I arrived in Tibet. Since last year, a number of literary works, such as the *Sakya Legshay* and stories of *Ling Gesar* are being printed. However, these are not printed in sufficient quantities to meet the demand. You can hardly buy them in public and there is a thriving black market for them.

Future Prospects

Tibetan reaction to the present Chinese policy of liberalization is very guarded. They will not be surprised if things reverted back to the previous state any day. They can see that despite the limited freedom granted nowadays, there is still no power in the hands of the Tibetans. The Chinese are still trying to deceive the Tibetans at all times. I got into heated arguments with them several times when I found them treating me like a child. For instance, at the National Minorities Institute, one of my teachers used to tell me that Tibetans as well as all other national minorities originated from the Chinese race and that is why areas inhabited by them are inalienable parts of China.

The Chinese now indicate that they want to give autonomy to Tibet. Even if such a status were acceptable to the Tibetans it should be remembered that when they talk of Tibet they only mean the Tibet Autonomous Region. I think in any discussion about Tibet, Kham and Amdo also must be included.

It is not possible to speculate on what the future of Tibet will be with any degree of certainty. The present

Chinese system of government is dictatorship of a few, and I cannot see this working indefinitely. Power must be shared with the people. People do not believe in words anymore. Included in the regular programme of my institute is a weekly political meeting. I attended several of these. The officials say the same things or similar things in all these meetings. I noticed that at least half the members of the audience were dozing. They have heard these things over and over again for the past two or three decades and they cannot even pretend to be interested anymore. What is even more interesting is that the officials also do not seem to care anymore whether the people are listening.

The Chinese system is called communism, but it is quite different from the communism I read about in books. It is brimming with corruption, nepotism, highhandedness and many other evils that communism is supposed to be fighting against. One final example: In the institute, when some new Tibetan cadres come, they are put up in dormitories even if they have their families with them. A Chinese family, on the other hand, is given a comfortable set of rooms. This should give the readers an idea of the Chinese version of socialism and egalitarianism—not to mention their famous national minorities' policy.

A VISIT TO MY HOMELAND

By Ngawang J. Topgyal, translated from the
Tibetan by Trinley Nyandak
published in *Tibetan Review*, January 1983

My daughter Norzom Topgyal and I went to Tibet in September 1982 to visit my mother. We stayed in Tibet for a month and a half. My mother's livelihood has improved somewhat since 1980. Before then the Tibetans in Tibet suffered from an acute shortage of food: about 15 pounds of tsampa (roasted barley flour) was allotted to each working person a month. On these starvation rations, one had to perform 16 to 17 hours of hard labour, one was forced to attend three to four hours of nightly criticism meetings and was completely deprived of fundamental human rights.

When the Chinese troops came to my village, Nyadam, in the district of Nyindu, they confiscated all our family possessions and demolished the house. My mother lived in the ruins of our house for two months in the bitter cold. Subsequently, she was black-listed and given the damnatory labels of upper strata class, reactionary, and counter revolutionary against Mao Tse-tung. The last designation was assigned because she once called the flat buttons imprinted with photograph of Mao, which people were forced to wear as a badge in homage to the Chairman, as 'Mao head'. My mother was continually subjected to struggle sessions for 16 years. During these sessions, she was publicly humiliated, punched, kicked around, and the hair from her head pulled out by the handful. For five years she had pus-oozing sores all over her head and pus draining from her nose. Many of her relatives were forced to beat and revile her during some of those sessions.

After she was 'struggled' in our village, she was taken to Nyindu, about a day's journey from ours. Throughout the journey, she was forced to carry a load of firewood on her

back and driven like an animal, lashed on her buttocks. In Nyingdu, she was 'struggled' for an entire day, and forced by the Chinese authorities to admit alleged charges. Truth had no defence. Falsifications and lies took precedence.

She often thought of committing suicide, but she did not because such a deed was against Buddhist doctrine. Instead, she would face India, and quietly pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The thought that his Holiness was alive in India was a prime source of her strength to live.

In 1981, the Chinese government gave my mother 1,400 yuan (US\$ 933) as compensation for the confiscation of our family possessions. That amount was a mockery. The value of my mother's family jewelry alone would be worth about 300,000 yuan according to today's prices.

Today my mother lives with eight of my relatives in a house no more than 8 by 12 feet. My mother's eyes are so badly impaired that they water continuously. She is 69 years old, and is forced to look after the cattle for a living.

Lack of travel facilities

We went to Tibet via Nepal. From the Nepalese border we walked for three days on a dangerous trail up to Tromo, as the Chinese call Dram, where there is a guesthouse. When I say dangerous, I mean it in every sense of the word. One misstep could cause you to lose your life in a fall over the steep cliff. At Dram, we waited for eight days before we got a ride in an open truck to Shigatse. The dirt road was extremely bumpy and dusty and the price for this arduous 36-hour trip was 57 yuan. When we reached Shigatse, our clothes and hair were caked with dust, and we had to dig out dirt from our noses and ears. I met people at the guesthouse who had been waiting 18 days for transportation.

The guesthouse simply consisted of five and six-bedded rooms. Each guest was charged two yuan per night. This

fee did not include food. The daily breakfast menu was rice gruel and a steamed bun. Lunch was rice or a steamed bun with one vegetable dish fried with rotten pork fat and small strips of pork. Dinner was more or less the same. I was very sick for a few days and coughed incessantly. Since there was neither a grocery store nor a restaurant nearby, we had no other choice than to eat the food served at the guesthouse.

At the guesthouse, two Chinese officials came to meet me. They asked me whether I met His Holiness the Dalai Lama during his 1981 visit to the United States.

I said that I had.

‘Do you know whether the Dalai Lama met President Reagan?’

I said I did not know.

‘How many Tibetans are there in the United States?’

I replied that there are about 250.

‘Are you going to stay in Tibet?’

I said I was definitely not under present circumstances.

In Shigatse we waited for three days to get any kind of conveyance to Lhasa. Except within the city of Lhasa, there was no public transportation in Tibet. People have to wait by the wayside to get a ride in passing trucks. From Lhasa I rented a jeep with a driver to go to Nyingdu, which was about a three-hour journey. There was no motor road from Nyindu to my home village Nyadam. We walked. The roads in Tibet are used almost exclusively by Chinese military trucks. I was told that Nagchuka, northern Tibet, is a very important Chinese military base. In the event of an uprising, the Chinese could dispatch 10,000 troops within two days to any part of Tibet.

Autonomy

The Chinese are publicizing Tibet as an ‘autonomous’ region of China and proclaim that Tibet is run by the Tibetans. Nevertheless, the reality is just the opposite. Chinese are in charge. The Tibetan cadres or minor officials may have beautiful titles, but the real power is

still within the grip of Chinese hands. Chinese officials outnumber Tibetan cadres. Similarly, in the Lhasa workshop, out of 1,000 employees, there are 200 Tibetans. In the Lhasa Post Office, there are two Tibetans; the rest are Chinese. In the Airline Ticket Office in Lhasa, all employees are Chinese except a lone Tibetan guard. The list can go on and on. In short, all high paying, respectable jobs are held by the Chinese. Tibet's so-called 'autonomy' is a farce and a deception of the world's media who accept Communist propaganda as the truth.

General conditions

In Lhasa and Shigatse there are large numbers of beggars, comprising the orphaned children, handicapped, and mentally deranged. Many pilgrims to Lhasa from other parts of Tibet have to resort to begging because the Chinese authorities refused to give them the ration cards required to buy food. In general, Tibetans who are not residents of Lhasa are not given ration cards and are therefore forced to return to their distant homes. On the other hand, Chinese visitors are given ration cards immediately as well as jobs if they are seeking employment.

The majority of Tibetans are engaged in farming, cattle raising, cleaning latrines and construction work. In construction, Chinese overseers herd Tibetan men, women and children like animals as they carry huge loads of stones or brick on their backs. Many Tibetans have suffered back injuries and developed sores on their backs. I met many Tibetans who lost their arms or legs or eyesight while working in factories and in construction work. These handicapped workers have neither been compensated nor been provided for. On the other hand, I was told that if a Chinese worker were injured while working, he and his whole family would be supported by the government.

Peking has announced the dismantling of commune systems in Tibet and the allocation of land and cattle among the people. But communes remain intact even in the

vicinity of Lhasa, and people have no freedom to leave them. In some places where communes have been dismantled, land and cattle are allotted according to the number of people in a town or a village. But people over 50 years old and children under 15 are given less land and fewer cattle.

Freedom of religion

Tibetan cadres are not allowed to practice Buddhism. Students are promised jobs after their graduation on the condition that they have no religious beliefs and do not practise Buddhism. Nevertheless, I found tremendous religious fervour everywhere in Tibet, particularly among the young. I had encounters with many 7 or 8-year-old Tibetan children who would stare at me for a long time and study me. Cautiously they would approach me and ask questions about where I came from. After they were convinced that I was not a fake overseas Tibetan hired to spy for the Chinese, they would ask if I could please give them photographs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and protection cords. They said they would treasure such gifts more than anything else. Of late in the Tsona area, southern Tibet, the Chinese have confiscated Buddhist scriptures and photographs of the Dalai Lama and publicly burned them.

My visit to Sera Monastery brought back many fond memories. I was a monk at the monastery in 1959, and I was saddened to see the state the monastery is in today. Formerly, there were many colleges, and each college had a huge assembly hall. The only assembly hall that remains today is that of Hamdong College. All the rest are in ruins. The rear portion of Sera was destroyed and the front portion remains. The Chinese told me that there are about 300 monks, but I saw fewer than 200 monks. Before the Chinese occupation, Sera had about 7,000 monks. Now, with the exception of the Tamdin image (one of the holiest of images) all other images and statues in the Sera Monastery are recently made copies.

Similarly, during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese plundered Ganden Monastery, the third largest monastery in Tibet, transporting all its priceless articles, its gold, its silver, its precious stones and all metals to China. When all treasures were removed, the monastery was razed. Today, Ganden is being rebuilt by Tibetan volunteers to whom the Chinese government has so far not given any aid.

On 28 September 1982, when I was in Lhasa, the Chinese invited all Tibetan visitors to Ganden for a reception. I did not attend the reception. However, I learned from my friends the following information. The visitors were served *chang* (Tibetan beer), Chinese liquor, tea and candies. They were invited to participate in the games of Mah-Jong, dominoes and cards. And of course, they were treated to a speech by a Chinese official. The main point of his speech was that the Tibetans destroyed Ganden, and that the Chinese government is planning to contribute about 50,000 yuan sometime in the future for its reconstruction.

The Panchen Lama's visit to Tibet

I was told by well-informed sources that the Chinese had arranged for Panchen Rinpoche to be seated on the throne of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. But the Panchen Rinpoche refused to comply with the arrangement and stated emphatically that there is only one person who is worthy to be seated on the throne. That person is His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. Because of his defiance of the Chinese and his reverence for the Dalai Lama, Panchen Rinpoche's prestige and the reverence accorded to him by the Tibetan people have been greatly enhanced since his visit in July 1982.

Exploitation of natural resources

The Chinese are mining coal in Phenpo, gold in Tsona and iron in Jang. All these products are being transported to

China. The Chinese have denuded large tracts of forestland in Kongpo and all timber is being shipped to China. Tibet's wildlife, formerly seen in abundance, is now almost non-existent.

One day when I was walking in the streets of Lhasa, I ran into six geologists. They were from France and Germany. They said that they were conducting geological surveys around the mountains near Lhasa, and were working for the Chinese government. I asked them whether they had found anything so far. They replied that they were studying the mountains.

Health and Education programme

In Nyadam, with a population of 300, there is neither a dispensary nor a doctor, only a 'veterinarian'. The veterinarian said, 'I didn't study medicine, but the Chinese asked me to be a veterinarian. When animals get sick, I have to take them to a veterinary hospital in Lhasa.'

Tibetans from other parts of Tibet do not get medical treatment in Lhasa hospital. Even if they are dying, they are chased away. I was told that in order to get good medical treatment, it is necessary to give a substantial gift to a doctor. This is a common practice in dealing with Chinese officials, and popularly known as 'back-door policy'.

In my mother's village, there is no school. Parents have stopped sending their children to a small school in Nyindu because they said that even after five years of schooling, children did not know how to read and write. The teachers themselves are poorly educated. Some of them had only three or four years of schooling.

Many die in Kongpo

Many of my friends famished during the Cultural Revolution. At that time the Chinese sent several prominent and educated Tibetans to Kongpo to do road construction. Food

was so scarce that if somebody found a bone, everybody would rush to pound the bone into powder and make a soup which was regarded a great treat.

Every morning my friends would touch the person sleeping beside them to see whether they were alive. If a person was found dead, the others would be happy for him, saying he had liberated himself from an earthly hell. The Chinese used to pile up corpses, and when they reached the size of a small hill, the corpses would be set on fire.

Appeals from Tibetans in Tibet to fellow countrymen in exile

‘We fervently appeal to all our fellow countrymen in exile that it is absolutely necessary to follow the supreme leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There must not be any sectarian dissension among Tibetans. We must be united. Our hopes rest in those of you who are in the free world. Death does not deter us. We are all ready to die for our country and for our freedom.’

These appeals are made by people from all walks of life: old and young, male and female, educated and uneducated.

Before leaving Lhasa, I gave some presents to my uncle’s three children. They did not accept them, and said: ‘What you give us today might not stay in our hands tomorrow. Instead, please make some religious offerings on our behalf. We would appreciate that more.’

BETWEEN HOMELAND AND EXILE

by Kesang Tseten

published in *Tibetan Bulletin*, May-June 2000

An exile's return to his homeland is about the encounter between exile and homeland. Sometimes though it is more than that; it affords an opportunity to look at exile.

For the first time since the Chinese occupation, Tibet opened to the world in the early 1980s. In the first year, probably more Westerners set foot in Tibet than had ever in all its history. For the first time after 30 years, relatives inside and outside Tibet were meeting. Like the Berlin Wall coming down, it was a very dramatic and exciting time.

I was a student in America then. I remember the small group of Tibetans gathering at the Office of Tibet to listen with great emotion to those who returned from visiting Tibet recount their experience. Tibet was hardly ever in the media then, in the United States or anywhere else.

For me, awareness of who I was—a Tibetan and an exile—came relatively late, when I was in college in America. I had spent most of my childhood, most of 10 years, ensconced in a Presbyterian boarding school in Kalimpong near Darjeeling. Dr. Graham's Homes had been founded for orphans of Anglo-Indians, so I grew up mainly with Anglo-Indians, but also Bhutanese, Sikkimese, other Tibetans, Nepalis, Nagas, Lushai, and Khansi.

In college in America I read vociferously books about Tibet, and studied some Buddhist philosophy with Robert Thurman. It was with such bookish knowledge that I discovered and began to articulate my identity as a Tibetan. Sheer passion marked my knowledge of Tibet, albeit from a distance. And passion and distance often defines the exile.

In 1985, a few years after I returned to Kathmandu, my chance came to go to Tibet. Ironically, it was as a tour guide,

an appointment that seemed to mock the *gravitas* of my exile identity.

At the outset of my trip an incident occurred that was to foreshadow my later journey to my hometown. I met my first Tibetans at a temple in Chengdu where we were sightseeing before flying into Tibet. There were crowds of Chinese tourists. Since religion had been banned for three or four decades, the Buddhist temple was an exotica. Out of the milling crowds emerged a Tibetan family. They were wearing Tibetan clothing; the women's braided hair sported turquoise and amber. They were obviously exotic to the Chinese, who were following them. Someone from my group said, 'Wow! Who are they?'

Excited, I approached them. To my utter surprise, they spoke to me in Chinese. I tried again—they spoke back in Chinese. Finally, the man acknowledged in Tibetan that they were Tibetan, and then reverted to Chinese. I walked away disappointed, disturbed.

In 1987 I finally visited my hometown, Gyelthang. It is far-flung in the southeastern tip of the Tibetan plateau, 1,600 km from Lhasa. Like most of Kham, it is now part of a Chinese province, Yunnan. It is close to Chinese lands, near the homes of numerous ethnic groups called 'minority nationalities' by the Chinese. I did not know much about Gyelthang, for I had grown up in exile. The little I knew of it was from my mother—my father having died somewhat young—and my fellow Gyelthang people, who made up my community in exile.

I was going in with a certain notion of Tibet based on an image in exiles' minds. This identity largely subscribed to a hegemonic central Tibetan concept of the Tibetan nation. Thus, even we eastern Tibetans were likely to look to Lhasa, its mountains, monasteries, its lakes and rivers, central Tibetan songs and language, as constituting the components of Tibetanhood.

While the idea of a distinct Tibetan civilisation is powerful and alive, that of Tibet as a perfectly homogenised

pan-Tibetan entity took root in exile, primarily a political condition. The identity I had come to assume was, in a sense, generic, shaped by a new kind of nationalism forged in exile.

This was fine and perhaps inevitable, except those outlying, marginal places like Gyelthang had peculiarities that did not fit into this picture. Thus, aspects of our regional idiosyncrasies and our 'local' history were given short shrift.

What the exile Tibetan encounters and reacts to most strongly when he or she sets foot in Tibet is the phenomena of sinicisation, which is all-pervasive—precisely because it shakes up some of our assumptions and idealisations. These features of sinicisation are encountered as part of the daily fabric of life by the Tibetans who took my mediocre Tibetan to be the Lhasa dialect. In the prefectural capital where people held secular jobs, they tended to speak more Chinese than they did Tibetan.

It was evident why that was so. The vehicle of sinicisation was potent, all pervasive, embodied in the institutions of State and society, of the affairs of the public domain, the work culture, schools, post offices, bus stations and bus timings. Because the vocabulary of everyday reality was in Chinese, even those who were fluent in Gyelthang language, more fluent than I was, reverted or resorted to Chinese. As for the Gyelthang language, it had been relegated to the hearth, tucked within domestic confines, a reflection of a culture on the retreat.

During my three-month stay, I witnessed the 30th anniversary of the founding of the autonomous prefecture of Dechen, of which my hometown was capital. There was pageantry, a parade of troops in their full regalia; there were horse races, fireworks, openings of new buildings—some in exaggeratedly Tibetan style. Crowds came to the parade, to hear the speeches, to see the fireworks and the balloons, to see the props in Technicolor. Exhibits were displayed to mark the progress and the targets to achieve by the year 2000.

I was unnerved by the seeming willingness of the Gyelthang and Dechen folk to partake. Could this be real? Tibetans celebrating the Chinese consolidation of their presence in Tibet? Could they not see through the bluff, I wondered. On the other hand, they seemed-light-hearted. Was it just a *mela*, a *tamasha*, as it might be called in India, a happening of no significance?

On my last night, at a family dinner, one of my cousins handed me a brightly wrapped package. It was from the head of the People's Association. It was a new picture book of Gyelthang released the day before, and pamphlets in Chinese about the region's progress. My cousin hesitated a moment. Then he said, 'Don't mix with the wrong people in India.'

I felt the blood rush to my face. When would they get it? I would return the package, make my point in front of them all. My gentle cousin, only the messenger, seemed to have no inkling of how I felt. It dawned on me that we belonged not to different systems but to different enclosures, entirely different realities. The chasm between us was immense. I was from the outside—wherever Tibetan exiles lived. China was the adversary, a cosmic one, a central point of reference in our self-definition, built on the premise of exile. The sad truth was that the occupation of Tibet, the determining reality for us, lay outside the angle of vision of my cousin and many Gyelthang folk. It was not that they were pro-China or anti-Tibet; rather, the political discourse that defined us did not have the same significance or simply registered minisculely for them.

Not surprisingly, where I felt most at home was where the real bastion of Tibetan culture lay, at the monastery. It was the clergy that had fallen drastically from grace, it was monks who had suffered the greatest violation of their worldview. The sinicisation I encountered made me decry the loss and the betrayal of things Tibetan. I had become the tradition-holder or defender of it, notwithstanding the shaky grounds of this position. On my first visit there, an

uneasy quiet reigned. A few pilgrims went about hesitantly, as if unsure of the rituals of daily worship. The monks seemed furtive, like victims, or like fugitives on the run.

Like many in Tibet, Gyelthang's monastery had been razed to rubble during the state-endorsed hooliganism called the 'Cultural Revolution'. Lamas and monks had been tortured, killed; there had been wholesale destruction and looting of religious paraphernalia. Then in the 1980s, following the touted religious freedom that came with Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the hill-site had come to life with the reconstruction of the monastery; there were now several hundred monks.

I met a monk whose passionate hatred of the Chinese authorities had nothing in common with the pasture of reasonableness the office-going Tibetans inhabited. 'Our Gyelthang youth are blind. Because they read and write a little Chinese, they think they know it all. They think us fools.'

I had met Thupten and his relatives en route to Buddhist sites in India. From his foray south of the Himalaya, Thupten had glimpsed in exile a radiant vision of Tibet. A vision of Tibet that seemed able to rebut the Chinese chauvinistic view of it. In exile, he had found Tibetan Buddhist tradition alive and flourishing and, most of all, spread worldwide. There were religious initiations, grand monasteries, a self-confident clergy, dharma books, foreigners clad in monks' robes, and foreign statesmen saluting the Dalai Lama. Millions followed the dharma, and there were lamas and dharma centres all around the world. The spirit of Buddhism outside Tibet was more powerful than anything he had ever seen. Thupten had carried these impressions back to the small world at the edge of the Tibetan plateau, to continue his uphill battle with the 'enemies of the faith'.

The enclosure of Gyelthang jolted me into seeing who the seeker was. It was there, when everything seemed upside down, that I saw how much I was made up of my

own yearnings and sense of loss. I believed I could be alive only as a Tibetan exile, right to my bones, blood, and senses. To be Tibetan, to be against the Chinese, the cosmic nemesis; to be Tibetan Buddhist, not American or European; I could partake of other worlds, yet remain separate; it was an advantageous, wonderfully elastic identity, allowing more than one way of being.

I realised that much of my indignation and anger came because my experience in Gyelthang shattered the idealised notions of Tibet I had held. Doubly so because I myself did not meet this high idealisation. Only when I allowed it, did I see that their sinicisation and loss of tradition were aspects of their daily life, not ideological, part of the normalcy of their own enclosure. Theirs was not a pro-China position, as mine was not a disavowal of Tibetan culture. In both enclosures, inside Tibet and outside, profound changes had occurred, the claim of different nuclei, modernisation, the world itself. Forty years is a short time historically, a long time in anyone's life.

THE YEAR OF PREACHING DANGEROUSLY

by Ngawang Chojor

published in *Tibetan Review*, March 1987

This is an account of our experiences in Tibet from August 1985 to August 1986. My brother Chophel Rinpoche and I went there to visit our relatives, following the repeated proclamation of religious freedom in Tibet.

As soon as we reached Dram, the Tibetan side of the Tibetan-Nepalese border, we were inspired to observe the announcement of 'Religious Freedom and Growing Racial Harmony in Tibet' emblazoned boldly on the portals of all Chinese offices there. It pleased me greatly to think that the arduous journey which my brother Chophel Rinpoche had to undertake, despite his age and frail health, was not going to be fruitless, since he would be able to benefit the people of Tibet by giving them religious instructions. My optimism was strengthened when I saw a learned lama preaching Lam Rim, or the Buddhist doctrine of a graduated path to enlightenment, to a congregation of over ten thousand devotees in the main hall of Drepung Monastery in Lhasa.

From Lhasa, a plane took us to Trinto, where there were numerous old temples in their original pristine state. The statue of the Buddha still stood majestically on a high mound, and the temple of Woneysing continued to house all those statues including that of the Boddhisatva Kuntu Sangpo, which was three storeys in height. Besides that, there were uncountable pilgrims holding smouldering incense sticks and burning butter lamps. Certainly a sign of religious freedom, we rejoiced! Our travel to Yunnan and the adjoining areas gave us more or less the same impression.

However, our euphoria quickly dissipated on our arrival in Geythang. The Chinese officials there seemed to harbour

an 'I-couldn't-care-less' sort of attitude. More importantly, no one from the monastery of Geythang had come to welcome Chophel Rinpoche, which was quite unusual. Anyway, Rinpoche wrote an application to the Chinese authority in Geythang, requesting that since he had very little knowledge in secular matters, he be allowed freedom to give and receive religious teachings. With this, we proceeded to Sumtsenling monastery, which is situated within the territorial jurisdiction of Geythang. On our way, Laka Gyatso, a Tibetan collaborator of the Chinese Government, boarded our jeep. As we approached the monastery, we were amazed to find that there was no one from the monastery waiting for us even within the former boundary of the main monastery grounds. Rinpoche was highly revered in that monastery and under normal circumstances he would have been received ceremoniously at the boundary. However, when we got closer to the monastery, Karsar Rinpoche, together with a large following of about 700 to 800 monks and lay-people, was waiting for us just outside the entrance of the shrine-hall. Leading us into the assembly-hall of the monastery, Karsar Rinpoche, at the head of the other people, conducted a brief ceremony supplicating Chophel Rinpoche to live eternally. During the ceremony, Laka Gyatso swaggered in and sat at the head of our rows to inspect our activities.

Afterwards, Laka Gyatso came to our residence to warn us that it was against the policy of Communist China to allow us to indulge in religious teachings or to meet common people. The only thing allowed for practice were the Buddhist tenets of Ethics and Transcendental Wisdom. To this Chophel Rinpoche replied by maintaining that he had no other wish. Totally infuriated by the audacity of the reply, Laka left us saying that he would have to consult his superiors.

The following day, Laka had gone to the monastery to announce that such 'law-ignorant and feet-in-two-boots'

people as Chophel Rinpoche and I were not allowed to preach within the confines of the monastery or to the common people individually, much less to the congregation of a great populace. The responsibility for seeing to the compliance of this order was forced onto Karsar Rinpoche and the other monks of Sumtsenling monastery. Such a tyrannical attitude towards this old and highly realised lama like Karsar Rinpoche was a matter of immense sorrow for me. They had also been ordered to report our reactions to this prohibition to the Chinese authority. It was during this conversation with the monks that we realised why they had not been able to come out even up to the boundary fence to welcome us when we first arrived. The Chinese had actually warned them against it, forcing Karsar Rinpoche to see to its compliance.

Anyway, Chophel Rinpoche's reaction to it was the pronouncement that if a religious man like him was not allowed to preach the words of the Buddha, then he would return immediately to India, since he would be neither able to meet his Guru nor his mother—both of them having died under the Chinese oppression. This was said with the understanding that it would be reported to the Chinese. And so it was.

Obviously fearing the unfavourable impression which our return to India was likely to produce, the Chinese officials told us to hold on for a few days until a comprehensive meeting was arranged. The ensuing meeting was attended by 22 people—eight from the Chinese side and the rest from our side. Assuming a conciliatory attitude in this meeting, the Chinese pointed out that what Laka Gyatso and other officials had told us was only a remnant of the ashes of the Gang of Four's policy, an anachronism under the present leadership of China, and that from now on we were allowed to preach whenever and to whomsoever we chose to, provided it was solicited. Chophel Rinpoche stated that unsolicited preaching is against the

teaching of the Buddha. Therefore, we would certainly not be the ones to violate it. He also challenged the Chinese to accompany him and see for themselves whether he kept his words or not. On my part, I added that the Chinese Government had been merely launching empty propaganda by announcing frequently that they would welcome the Tibetans in exile willing to visit their relations in Tibet. I was quickly admonished against spreading such insinuating remarks and told to go ahead if I wanted to indulge in religious practice. Gyaser Sang, a Tibetan representing the Chinese side in this meeting, followed it by saying that we could go ahead with making our 'ching ching and jiling jiling racket' in whatever manner we fancied. Although a Tibetan by birth, he did not know the Tibetan word for our religious cymbals which was why he, in a mocking disdain, imitated their sounds.

For about two months after this meeting, Chophel Rinpoche gave Lam Rim and various other teachings to the monks of Sumtsenling Monastery. Thereafter, he was invited to preach in the villages, where he insistently refused to accept the offerings from the devotees. Disconcerted with the religious fervour of the people, six Chinese approached us in the village of Zamtrul to forbid us from any communication with the general populace, and preaching outside the confines of the monastery. What was the point of our staying in Tibet if the Chinese insisted on making our lives so stifling, we questioned! After a brief reflection, they said that we could stay for two more days, as the people of the village had already prepared for our stay. The two days passed. We were staying at our late mother's house when the Chinese came and told us in the strongest terms that we should not be staying there. This was absurd! Once again, we declared that we would not stay in Tibet even for a single more day if the Chinese had restrictions to our staying even at our own home. As before, we were told to wait until they had consulted the

higher authorities. But they had accused Sumtsenling Monastery of subversion for having shown respect and hospitality to us.

Brimming over with a conciliatory attitude, they expressed appreciation for our not having accepted any offerings in the villages, and asked us to bear with the mistakes they had made the previous day. And so we stayed on for a few days at our mother's house, occasionally going out to visit our relations and friends. During that time, Chophel Rinpoche was showered with invitations to perform religious rites and give teachings. He got round to fulfilling the requests of the people in about 20 hamlets in that area, and we found everywhere that although people's faith in religion was tremendous, they dared not show it openly. Therefore, to avoid catching the attention of the Chinese, Rinpoche was forced to give only brief teachings.

How poignant it was to hear people confess to one another that now that they had had the opportunity to receive the benefit of such a lama's teachings, the purpose of their lives was fulfilled! It was really gratifying to see them radiating with the joy of satisfaction. With such a bitter-sweet delight stirring in our minds, we set out for our next destination: the village of Baryor in Torma Rong.

In Baryor, we were intercepted by a telephone call demanding our immediate return to Sumtsenling Monastery. Once we were in the monastery, some Chinese cadres came equipped with a legal book. While accusing us of having violated five points in the Article 55 of that book, the cadres told us not to meet our own siblings, let alone friends and relatives. Chophel Rinpoche was also strongly warned against giving in to the people's requests for religious teachings or blessings, and against storing away the offerings made to him by the people in the villages. Also, we were threatened with serious consequences if seen at public gatherings. Undeterred by the threat, Chophel Rinpoche pointed out that the accumulation of wealth had

neither any attraction for a religious person like him, whose sole purpose in life was to work for the cause of Buddhism, nor had he come to Tibet for material gains, and that if they were not sightless they should be able to see whether he was carting away any offerings from the people or not. Totally taken aback by this reply, the inflamed Chinese swore that if they were human beings worth the name they would see to our arrest by the army. This would, of course, be a natural reaction from the Chinese, for whom bullying Tibetans had become a way of life. Unfortunately, the threat given by the Chinese filled the Tibetans present on the spot with such a great fear and concern that they wept uncontrollably. At that sad moment I felt deeply convinced that although the present leadership of China attributed the blame of all the past misdeeds in Tibet to the Gang of Four, they were really no different. The liberal policies with religious freedoms and scores of other things, which they claimed to be espousing, were merely empty rhetoric aimed at fooling the Tibetans and the world at large.

After they stormed out with the threat, we had a meeting with the monks during which it transpired that earlier when we had been in Baryor, it had been announced to the monks that if they were not able to persuade us to return to the monastery, they might as well expect the spectacle of us being dragged into the prison with our hands and legs shackled. Also the state grant being received by the monastery would cease, and whatever they had received so far would be seized back.

Two days passed. Another group of officials visited us. This time to apologise for their colleagues' misconduct. It was out of naivety, they said, that their colleagues had accused us of having violated some five points of the Chinese legal code. We were once again at liberty to go wherever we liked and meet whomsoever we chose to. Such was the way in which they oscillated between one extreme and the other. Taking advantage of their latest whim, we

visited our aunt and complied with people's requests for prayers and religious teachings, which came from village after village. Many Tibetans belonging to the Chinese Communist Party also attended them—showing tremendous joy and devotion. One Chinese official had the cheek to invite us to comment on the magnitude of progress achieved by the region since its integration with the motherland! He apparently expected 'WOW's' from us, which in front of all these people would give legitimacy to their rule. But Rinpoche replied candidly that it was plain for the inhabitants and the Chinese official himself to see. Certainly the absence of a single individual in a village who could even read Tibetan script is not a sign of progress, Rinpoche went on. I, on my own part, expressed the need for opening up 'real schools' for the Tibetan people.

Progress, as a matter of fact, was virtually non-existent, unless the denudation of our once vast and beautiful forests to make roads for the Chinese military purpose could be termed as a permanent sign of progress. There was not a single inter-village path being made for the Tibetan people. Far from building any economic infrastructures for the benefit of the people, the Chinese officials held envious attitudes toward one or two rare cases of Tibetans who had become well-off recently through their business acumen and hard work. A fair number of tiny establishments called schools were no doubt there. But the Chinese language was the only thing taught to the students, who were predominantly Chinese in any case. In most of these schools, the teachers came only two or three times *in a month!* As if this was not enough, the Tibetan students were encouraged to hunt, despite the fact that hunting was considered an abhorrent practice in our social and religious traditions.

During our last days in Geythang, some Chinese officials, including Laka Gyatso, remarked that as soon as the diminutive old man, meaning Teng Hsiao-ping, kicked the bucket, the dynamic policy of Mao would come into

force, and with it they would, once again, wield the autocratic power of the pre-Teng era. Therefore, the Tibetans had better stop imagining that their newly acquired 'freedom' would last for good, they said. And when that happened, they went on, those people who had been guilty of insubordination would have to pay very dearly.

—*Translated from the Tibetan*

OBSERVATIONS ON A FACT-FINDING
VISIT TO TIBET

by Michael C. Van Walt

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Chinese Presence

At every stage of the trip in Tibet I was struck by the overwhelming presence of the Chinese, both military and civilian. It was the most obvious and disturbing in Lhasa. In medium size towns we saw Chinese populations roughly equivalent to the local Tibetan population. The Chinese usually live in their own communities in walled compounds. In small villages along the road to Lhasa there were hardly any Chinese and perhaps in some no Chinese at all.

PLA officers and men, who are prominent everywhere, are very young. In Lhasa soldiers flock the streets, especially on Sunday, when they enjoy taking pictures of themselves in rented Tibetan costumes in front of the Potala. Soldiers and officers do not appear to mix much with the civilian population. In Lhasa they generally move around in groups. Open trucks loaded with standing soldiers are a very common sight in Lhasa.

Lhasa is without a doubt a predominantly Chinese city. Few Chinese venture into the Tibetan areas most frequented by tourists. Consequently, visitors to Tibet often get a misleading impression of the extent and nature of the Chinese presence. Yet if one explores the whole of the city of Lhasa and other towns, i.e. the old picturesque city and the new areas—which are far more extensive than the old—one is immediately struck by the scale and permanent nature of the Chinese presence: in Lhasa, at least two thirds of the population is Chinese, most of the shops are Chinese, almost all restaurants are Chinese, most of the vehicles are used and owned by Chinese, the army—whose presence is overwhelming in Lhasa—is almost exclusively Chinese, and all Government and administrative offices are

run and managed by Chinese and employ almost exclusively Chinese personnel.

Lhasa is a modern Chinese city that is growing extremely fast. There are construction projects absolutely everywhere in the Chinese part of the city. Multi-storey apartment buildings are going up at an unprecedented rate. Some new buildings, such as the large Tibetan Dance and Drama Theatre, right opposite the Lhasa Hotel, have been constructed as symbols of the promotion or preservation of Tibetan culture. Upon inspection, it appears they are no more than show pieces. Thus, the only performances that were taking place in the Dance and Drama Theatre were film shows of the life of Dr Sun Yat-sen and Kung Fu movies! A performance by a Chinese opera company was announced for the near future.

Destruction

A striking feature of the landscape from the border to Lhasa and in the Tsangpo valley is the incredible number of ruins all over the valleys and on hilltops. Along both sides of the road the number and size of ruins is awesome. Most of these ruins are monasteries destroyed between 1959 and 1976. Some were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but many were destroyed before then. The ruins vary in size. In some cases they consist of a few walls of a monastery. But we also saw entire villages that have been reduced to ruins. Administrative buildings or forts, (dzong in Tibetan) and other historic buildings have also been destroyed.

The Chinese reportedly took religious statues, jewellery and other valuables from the monasteries, temples and historic buildings and destroyed parts of them before the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution they ordered or encouraged local Tibetans to use the stones as building materials and the wood as firewood or as construction materials.

Today some monasteries are being partially restored. Tashi Lhunpo, Drepung and Sera monasteries are partly restored. We visited Ganden monastery, which Tibetan volunteers are painstakingly reconstructing. There are some monks who live and work there and some Tibetan novices who are being taught by the older lamas.

Living Standards

Small farming villages on the road to Lhasa have hardly, if at all, changed since 1950 or 1959. The standard of living in these villages appears to have been raised to the pre-1959 levels, after years of turmoil and hardship, as a result of the reforms announced in 1980, 1981 and 1983. On the other hand, in Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyantse the standard of living for the average person is somewhat higher than in the villages.

The conditions in which the Tibetans live are relatively primitive and much inferior to those in which the Chinese live. The Chinese do not live in luxury in Tibet, indeed, they must live in fairly harsh circumstances. But their housing, the facilities at their disposal and the infrastructure which they have built up, is much superior to that available to the Tibetans. Consequently, the standard of living in Tibetan areas is strikingly lower than in the Chinese areas. The modern appearances of Chinese areas is totally lacking in Tibetan areas. Illustrative is the fact that although electricity wires run along the entire length of the road from the border to Lhasa, electricity is available only in those towns and villages that have Chinese settlements or offices. In villages where there are no Chinese, the wires simply run through the village without supplying it with any electricity at all.

Education

Tibetans are, on the whole, extremely uneducated. Their Chinese counterparts give a more educated impression.

Among Tibetans there are hardly any persons with sufficient education or experience to act as community leaders, intellectuals or teachers, or to fulfil any of the positions and professions needed in a developing community. Most Tibetans in Tibet are either engaged in petty trade, buying and selling things on the market, or in farming. Others are unemployed. A lot of young men in Lhasa hang around in little restaurants drinking or roaming around aimlessly.

The only way in which a young Tibetan can rise above this sad fate is to seek work in a hotel, in the service industry, or in an administrative office. In order to do so, however, he has to virtually become Chinese. Any such position requires Tibetans to learn Chinese, follow a Chinese education, work for the Chinese in a Chinese environment, and leave their own way of life and Tibetan environment behind. The opportunities for Tibetans, even those willing to be sinicized, are few, for their Chinese counterparts (who are arriving in Tibet in increasing numbers) have priority.

Reforms

Tibet is under a more conservative, i.e. leftist/Maoist regime than that of China. The Deng Xiaoping reforms appear to be slow in making their mark in Tibet. The atmosphere is oppressive, communist and totalitarian. Loudspeakers (taken down in China) are still mandatorily turned on in the mornings and evenings in many areas, in order to force the party's propaganda on the population.

An outsider might get the impression, especially walking around the market places in Lhasa, that there is a degree of freedom and contentment. People are carrying on their business and some probably make a fair amount of money. Especially in the Jhokhang, the central cathedral, countless pilgrims, many of them from Kham and Amdo, pray and prostrate themselves before splendid statues and paintings.

Tibetans are allowed to pursue their way of life to the extent that this is not threatening to the Chinese, i.e. so long as it does not encourage a feeling of Tibetan national identity or political consciousness. In fact, to this limited extent, the Tibetans are encouraged to preserve their lifestyle as a major tourist attraction. At the same time, the Chinese aim to keep the Tibetans uneducated to prevent them from becoming a threat to Chinese domination. Thus, Tibetan communities are made to feel content to live at a level and standard they were used to before the Chinese invaded Tibet.

Tibetans are allowed to practice religion in a devotional sense, but serious religious teaching is not permitted. If one sees the kind of religious instruction that is given and the religious activity that is carried out among Tibetans in exile, one realizes that Tibetan Buddhism is a highly intellectual, philosophical and even scientific activity. That type of religious activity is forbidden in Tibet.

Religious freedom in Tibet in practice amounts to permitting a form of blind faith, which is, consequently, the only form of practice tourists see. This policy creates for tourists an image of Tibetan Buddhism in keeping with what the Chinese Communist claim it is: mere blind faith.

Many Tibetans cautioned me that the present changes in Tibet, the so-called liberalization policies, are probably not permanent. They feel the situation is very unstable and are afraid that there will be a change for the worse. Thus, there is a general feeling of uncertainty, insecurity and fear among the Tibetans who are trying to make the best of it while the situation lasts as it does. The appearance of freedom in Tibet is very deceptive. For, while Tibetans are left to live a depraved life in their own style, they are being discouraged from taking an active part in the development of their country and to become citizens of a twentieth century world. In fact they are being encouraged to become the 'American Indians' or 'Aborigines' of

Tibet and China: an undeveloped and backward population group which attracts tourism, and which does not actively take part in the mainstream of modern society.

Tibetan Resentment

In talking to Tibetans, as I was able to do on numerous occasions, with the help of letters of introduction given to me in India and with the help of contacts that Ngawang (a guide and translator who came with me from India) was able to make, it soon became evident that Tibetans are desperately unhappy under Chinese colonial rule. People I met warned me spontaneously, and with a great degree of urgency, that although there may be a semblance of freedom in Tibet, including religious freedom, Tibetans are not free at all. Tibetans cannot do and say what they want; a number of people are in prison or have been executed for their beliefs, for their religious activity, or for their political activity. They complain bitterly about their situation and ask for help from outside. They put their hope and faith in a better future almost entirely in the ability of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to do something to help the cause of Tibet. Speeches or statements of the Dalai Lama, on tapes or in print, political pamphlets and even videotapes and pictures are widely circulated in secret in Lhasa. A strong feeling of resentment of the Chinese and desire for the return of the Dalai Lama is unmistakably present among all Tibetans.

Prospects for the future

I cannot overemphasize the sense of urgency that has come upon me since I set foot in Tibet.

In the next decade or so the Chinese community is not only going to grow in size to enormous proportions, but it is going to grow also in economic power, technology, and experience. I think that unless something significant is done urgently the future will see a Chinese population transfer of incredible proportions.

In the next ten or twenty years ten million or more Chinese are likely to move to Tibet. With the increasing gap in the levels of education and income and in the standard of living between the Chinese and Tibetan communities, it will not take long to transform Tibet into an integral part of China in the true sense: Tibet will simply be another Chinese province, populated predominantly by Chinese and managed wholly by themselves and for themselves. In five years, the situation in Shigatse, Gyantse and other cities will be very similar to that in Lhasa today. The same pattern will be followed in smaller towns, particularly in the border areas. These towns and villages will grow dramatically by virtue of the influx of Chinese. As a consequence, Tibetans will be reduced to an insignificant minority in their own country: an impotent minority closely resembling the American Indians in the United States or the aborigines in Australia. They will remain a curiosity for tourists, particularly for Chinese tourists, and a relic of a long forgotten past.

The more the situation develops in the way I have described, the less relevant the Tibetan community in exile will become. The Tibetan exile community will still be the only true preserver of Tibetan culture, but politically that community will become less and less relevant to the situation, as Tibetans inside Tibet are no longer a political factor the Chinese must contend with. Of course, the Dalai Lama will always remain a relevant player, but his leverage will also decrease proportionately to the success of the Chinese entrenchment in Tibet and to the decrease in relevance of the Tibetan community in exile.

Consequence for Asia

For Asia, the Chinese influx will be of major significance, because the geo-political map of Asia will be redrawn. Once Tibet is truly converted into a Chinese province, inhabited by millions of Chinese, it will no longer be necessary for the Chinese forces to cross an inhospitable plateau of

enormous dimensions in order to reach the Indian subcontinent. In the past, China's inability to effectively expand its power or influence in the Indian subcontinent has been largely determined by the problems it has faced in the hostile environment of Tibet.

Once Tibet is largely populated by Chinese, the latter will be as keen on preserving their position in Tibet as whites are to preserve theirs in South Africa. These Chinese immigrants will be very loyal subjects of Peking, on whom they will depend for the protection of their interests. The Chinese army will certainly be able to rely on this population in times of conflicts. This is in stark contrast with the present situation, where the PLA feel insecure in Tibet and are threatened by a hostile population. Thus, the political map of Asia will change because the highly strategic plateau of Tibet will not only be under Chinese control, but will indeed become an extension of China. This is, of course, of particular significance for Nepal and India who stand to fear the most from such a development in Tibet.

FROM LADAKH TO TIBET
ACROSS 50 YEARS

by Prof. Robert Raof

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I have been interested in Tibetan culture for more than fifty years. In 1936 I was privileged to accompany Marco Pallis (author of *Peaks and Lamas*) first in northern Sikkim and later in Ladakh. In both these areas the predominant culture is—or was—Tibetan and the religion was Tibetan Buddhism. In addition, in Sikkim there was a considerable number of Tibetans returning home after visiting Bodh Gaya and other holy places in India. In those days there were no medical services outside towns, so naturally I was often called to give advice to the Tibetans, some of whom had contracted malaria in India.

In Ladakh we visited many monasteries and stayed for a while in P'yang, where I was initiated into the rudiments of *thangka* painting. A particularly delightful feature of Ladakh was that villages were usually approached through a *chorten* gateway or at least by *chorten mani* walls. In those days there were no roads; you either walked or rode a pony or mule. I was struck by the general air of serenity, and although life was physically hard—naturally there were no labour-saving machines—people seemed very cheerful and sang as they worked often long into the night if there was a full moon and harvesting or threshing had to be done. There was also a remarkable sense of unity between human beings and the rest of creation. Clearly, western civilisation has much to learn from them.

Recently I re-read my 1936 diary and once again realized the rich culture to be found in the numerous monasteries. Since then I have had the opportunity to visit Tibetan refugee colonies in Dharamsala, Gangtok, Darjeeling and Nepal. Last year I had the opportunity to visit Tibet itself. I can only judge of pre-invasion Tibet by

my experience in Ladakh, which I am told closely resembled parts of western Tibet. Also I have had first-hand accounts from Marco Pallis and people such as Abdul Wahid. Wahid's account of his overland journey from Leh to Lhasa covers some of the same ground as my recent—also far more rapid—trip. Another very charming feature of Ladakh was the frequent rock carvings and paintings—all contributing to the general benign atmosphere. I will endeavour to give a factual account of my recent trip, and if I appear to make criticisms it is to help others to make adequate preparations if they wish to take a similar trip.

In order to reach Tibet overland from the south one must first go to Kodari in Nepal and then walk across the so-called Friendship Bridge; apparently it is not strong enough to take vehicles and one's heavy baggage is carried by porters. From the other side of the bridge there is a steep climb up to the customs and immigration post. Shortly after this, one finds the Zhangmu Hotel. Here there are a number of small three-bedded rooms. There was cold running water but no hot water—not even Thermos flasks. The staff were mandarin—speaking Chinese even though the waitresses were dressed in Tibetan style. The service was indifferent and the food poor—tepid and undercooked.

The next day we learned that the road had been blocked by a landslide and that there was a long walk to the buses which, hopefully, were waiting for us above the landslide. Porters, mainly Nepalese or Chinese, were engaged to carry our luggage. In the evening it was worse than this, as when our party was halfway across, there was a further landslide. I was at the back and had to return and then climb up a very steep slippery slope of loose gravel and scree. I was helped by a porter, but he wanted to go faster than I could manage; so it was not a pleasant experience. Eventually, after about three-quarters of an hour, we reached the road; at this point the porters predictably went on strike for more money. The Chinese guide who was supposed to manage

these things was quite useless and there was a long delay until the porters finally yielded up our luggage; quite a lot of petty pilfering took place. Eventually we set off.

The first part of the journey was still in the rainfall zone and there were many trees, but the valleys are narrow and steep, giving little scope for agriculture. The scenery is magnificent and the weather was fine and sunny. Shortly after leaving Zhanmu one can see the recently built Nepali monastery at the site of Milarepa's cave. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to visit the cave.

There were very few buildings apart from Chinese military camps and ruined monasteries. When we asked the Chinese guide why the monasteries were ruined he said that it had been done by the British in 1904, in spite of the fact that this region is hundreds of miles away from the ill-advised 1904 campaign. Unfortunately, such false propaganda is likely to be believed by uninformed people.

After crossing the La Lung Leh pass with the usual prayer flags, the valleys were wider and there was some agriculture. There were some small villages but the houses were very poor single-storey huts made of sun-dried earth, not even clay. There were very few animals or wild life; threshing by hand was being performed in the open air. The women mostly wore traditional Tibetan costume but very worn and ragged, the men wore non-descript cast-off Chinese clothes; during the whole trip I only saw one man—apart from monks—wearing traditional Tibetan costume; that was at Gyanse.

Due to our late start we had to spend the night at Tingri hostel. It was bitterly cold; the three-bedded rooms were very draughty: I slept in all my clothes plus a padded overcoat and wearing a scarf and balaclava plus a number of damp, rather smelly, padded Chinese quilts. I am told that there was running water somewhere on the premises but I never found it. We did manage to get a thermos of hot water. We had wisely brought with us soup packets,

muesli, dried milk, tea bags and instant coffee. Without these we would have been very hungry throughout the trip. As it was, I lost a stone in weight.

The next day was bright and sunny but cold; again we had wonderful views. After crossing two more passes, the Jia Tsuo (17,226 feet) and the Tsuo La, we entered the broader valleys of the Tsang region. Here we saw some yaks and sheep and goats; the animals were also being used for threshing. The houses were better, two storeys and built of stone, but still inferior to those I had seen in Ladakh. The roads were mainly dirt tracks and very dusty, much of the traffic was military vehicles, lorries with soldiers or jeeps. There were also lorries carrying wool. I am told that all the wool is taken by the Chinese government either for export or for the government carpet factories. Certainly one did not see the previously ubiquitous spinning which was a feature of Ladakh. Nor did we see any genuine home-woven material or carpets.

At Shigatse we stayed at a pretentious hotel. There was running cold water but not hot water; but with some difficulty it was possible to obtain thermoses of hot water, the food was again poor, lukewarm and undercooked, the service was reluctant. For instance, it was arranged that we should have breakfast at half past seven but no staff appeared till after eight o'clock. The hotel was extremely cold.

The visit to Tashi Lhunpo monastery was in many ways the highlight of the tour. Compared with earlier photos and sketches there has been a good deal of destruction but the main buildings are intact. There is a scaffolding round the damaged Panchen Lama's private apartments but no evidence of building while we were there. There are wonderful treasures in Tashi Lhunpo, and a number of sets of extremely beautiful thangkas including those depicting previous lives of the Panchen Lama. For subtlety of colouring, vitality of line and composition they equal or surpass any I have seen. Sadly I could not stay long enough to study them adequately. The wealth of artefacts in Tashi

Lhunpo shows what a gifted and energetic people the Tibetans are—or were—until they were suppressed by the Chinese. There were relatively few monks; I did not see any novices.

On our way we had stopped briefly at the once-important centre of Lhatse. In his book *Caravane Tibétaine*, Abdul Wahid describes it as flourishing with comfortable houses in one of which he had a hot bath in January. He describes the streets and houses as being grandiose; sadly, it is far from that now.

Our next stop was at Gyantse, which has unfortunately lost much of its previous commercial importance. The natural trade route between Tibet and India via Chumbi valley to Kalimpong is closed. As a result, if a Tibetan from Lhasa is given leave to visit the holy places of India he must travel several hundred miles west, then across Nepal down to Delhi and then several hundred miles east. Goods also have to make this circuitous path; such is progress.

Another sad feature is that one does not see any schools for young novices in the monasteries such as one sees in Sikkim and Darjeeling. In the past, young monks came from Ladakh, Sikkim and the Tibetan hinterland to study at Tashi Lhunpo and similar 'seats of learning' to be instructed in the meaning of the scriptures, the art of meditation, etc. But without an adequate number of Geshes it is difficult to see how the doctrines can be passed on in sufficient numbers to provide spiritual leadership for the people as a whole. It is very easy for ritual without understanding to become meaningless.

In Lhasa, both the Jokhang and the Potala were crowded; progress from floor to floor is by steep ladder stairs; entrances to side chapels are by narrow doorways usually with a step; under such circumstances there is inevitably some jostling and it is hard to judge the religious atmosphere. One can admire the wonderful skill of those who built these buildings, particularly the woodwork, which is fitted together so accurately that no dowels or nails were

needed. One or two places were less crowded and I was particularly impressed by the serene atmosphere in the Dalai Lama's private apartments in the Potala.

I was also impressed by what remains of Drepung Monastery. In the Chanting Hall the saintly Abbot, who had survived thirteen years of imprisonment, was addressing a large congregation of Tibetans including small children, all of whom listened with close attention. We were told that Drepung still has 600 monks (compared with its previous 7,777) but there was no evidence of a school for novices such as one sees in Tibetan monasteries in India.

Through the good offices of Ugyen Norbu (Secretary, Tibet Society of UK) I had acquired some forty excellent photos of His Holiness and some ceremonial white scarves. These were presented at Tashilhunpo, the Jokhang and the Potala; I wish that I had brought more. My first efforts at giving away the photos were disastrous, as I was instantly mobbed so that afterwards I presented them mainly in temples and monasteries or to individuals inside chapels.

I am extremely grateful for having seen some of the treasures of Tibet; yet I am left with a feeling of great sadness. It does not seem that young Tibetans are being taught the spiritual disciplines necessary for understanding the sacred doctrines. With the widespread destruction of monasteries, most of the population are cut off from religious instruction and support; it is difficult to see how understanding of the scriptures can be preserved and handed on to the next generation under present circumstances.

I confess that my first view of Lhasa was an anti-climax. I had become used to photos and paintings showing the mighty Potala in perfect harmony with the surrounding mountains and with the beautiful Tibetan houses at its base, the whole surrounded by the Lhasa 'green belt', where picnics were held. Now that these last two have been obliterated by ugly Chinese buildings, the previous

harmony has been destroyed—I admit that we have often done the same to our own cathedrals.

At Lhasa we stayed in the New Tibet Hotel, which was far more comfortable; the plumbing worked and we were able to have hot baths; the food was better and there was even a bank where we could obtain Chinese money. At night there was a very noisy 'disco', which was obviously popular with young people. In the semi-darkness I could not say whether they were Chinese or Tibetans.

Our first visit was to the Jokhang. This wonderful building was started in the 7th century. It contains many side chapels and a top storey courtyard approached by a series of steep ladder-stairs. It houses the statues of Buddha brought to King Songsten Gampo by his Chinese and Nepalese wives. It also contains thangkas reputed to be 1,000 years old. One could spend weeks without seeing all its treasures. The crowds in the narrow passages and stairs lead inevitably to some jostling. Under these circumstances it is hard to gauge the religious atmosphere, but the same may be said about our own popular cathedrals, such as Canterbury, in the tourist season.

Outside in the enlarged road leading to the Jokhang the crowd was a strange mixture—the devout prostrated before the main entrance, the super-devout doing prostration circumambulations of the Barkhor. There were some Jhang Thangpas, men and women still wearing their traditional sheepskin clothes, some were very smart with fabrics of bright colours attached. One could not help wondering if they were a tourist attraction. For the rest, although the older women wore traditional but faded and shabby chubas and aprons, the young people and men wore nondescript Chinese jackets or *anoraks*. The sad thing was that the children and young people spent their time begging or trying to sell poor quality mass made articles at inflated prices. I am not referring to traditional beggars—the old, the very poor, the blind and crippled who played a

role in society by giving the more affluent an opportunity to acquire merit by giving alms. I also noticed that there was none of the usual laughter and gaiety which one had previously seen among Tibetans.

Lhasa struck me as a sad city which has largely lost its original Tibetan character. Two outstanding buildings, the Potala and the Jhokhang, with their incomparable treasures, have survived the holocaust. Otherwise most Tibetan buildings have been destroyed. The medical college on Chakpori Hill has been destroyed—and replaced by a television mast! Many, if not most, of the beautiful old Tibetan houses have been swept away to be replaced by either modern Chinese ‘concrete shoe boxes’ or roads; the previous ‘green belt’ round Lhasa has also been largely replaced by Chinese barracks. Apart from the immediate Jokhang area, Tibetans were outnumbered by mandarin-speaking Han Chinese and virtually all jobs higher than unskilled labourers were occupied by Chinese.

It was rare to see a Tibetan who wore reasonably new clothes; certainly I saw no new Tibetan clothes. The shops which we saw did not contain genuine hand-made Tibetan products, and there was a notable absence of small workshops. The conditions in the carpet factory were poor and the products inferior to carpets woven by Tibetan refugees in Gangtok, Darjeeling, Dharamsala and other centres. It is particularly sad that most wool is being exported—either in a raw state or as carpets—and Tibetans are no longer able to obtain wool to spin, weave and manufacture their own traditional clothes.

Possibly the final blow to Tibetan culture in Tibet is the exploitation of the Tibetans by tourism. It is a widely accepted principle of modern science that observing a phenomenon alters its nature; this is certainly true of tourism, particularly when large numbers of foreigners and affluent Westerners invade a country with a relatively small population which has already been reduced to poverty.

When a pilgrim, performing prostrations in the Barkhor, has been photographed or videoed many times, it is almost inevitable that an element of self-consciousness is introduced. Religious and traditional ceremonies can easily be made to lose their original meaning and become tourist attractions; one hears that tourists can now pay to look at monks meditating or chanting. Those who are better qualified than me say that much of the recent freedom to worship is *dzuma*, intended to impress visitors. It was distressing to see how Tibetan children come begging whenever a foreigner arrives and older girls sell their personal trinkets. Only the Jhangthangpas in their sheepskin clothes seemed to be immune to this degradation. More western style hotels are being built and the situation is likely to deteriorate.

The overwhelming impression is that the Chinese have completely taken over Lhasa and the surrounding districts including the most fertile parts of Tibet. In numbers the Chinese now exceed the indigenous inhabitants and Lhasa is no longer a Tibetan city. The relatively few remaining old Tibetan houses are now rookeries. It would seem that the policy is to destroy all Tibetan culture and gradually drive out the Tibetans, apart from the few needed for menial jobs. I am sorry to be so gloomy but I can only say that what I saw was worse than I had expected.

TRYING TO BE AN IDEAL TOURIST IN TIBET

by Laurie Hovell

published in *Tibetan Review*, October 1987

I first went to Tibet in August 1985. I was lucky to be among the first tourists to travel the long-forbidden land. As I was planning to make another trip there, I was interested in the debate about the role and influence of tourists in Tibet. In his article 'On the Brink' (*Tibetan Review*, November 1986), Jamyang Norbu asks tourists to boycott Tibet. He reasons that the lucrative tourist trade draws Han Chinese into Tibet; there are already more Chinese in Lhasa than there are Tibetans. Norbu also encourages Tibetans to carry out small acts of sabotage on bridges, buses, roads and the like; this will make staying in Tibet more difficult for both Chinese and tourists. Those on the other side of the debate include foreign friends of Tibet, many Tibetans and the Dalai Lama. These people maintain that informed and sympathetic tourists can help: they can talk to Tibetans there about the continuing efforts to free Tibet. They can tell other foreign visitors about the history of the Chinese occupation of Tibet and about Tibetan culture in general.

When I was on the beach in Kerala, I saw many scantily-clad Europeans wearing Tibetan turquoise and coral next to their sun-burned skin. In Bombay, all varieties of *inchis* wore emblems of their journeys to Tibet. Were these trinkets mere souvenirs, or did they represent a deeper interest in Tibet and Tibetans? Tibet is quickly becoming the 'in' place on the tourist track, and all sorts of adventurers are heading up to Shangri-La with backpacks, mountain bikes, and Toyota Land-Rovers. But how much knowledge of the country do we carry with us? In popular conceptions, Tibet is depicted as a remote and barren land where people don exotic costumes and show an

intense devotion for frightening deities. Tibet is where people do prostrations in the dust: the Lonely Planet guidebook calls this a form of 'break dancing'. Most people also know that Tibet is now under Chinese rule. Getting a visa for China is not always easy, and getting to Tibet can be challenging; these things make Tibet even more appealing for those tired with the beaten paths through India and Nepal.

I am sympathetic to Jamyang Norbu's position on tourists in Tibet. I see how foreign tourists can affect and change the cultures they come to observe. Sometimes this influence has negative aspects: look at the seedier sides of Kathmandu, Bombay, Goa. But influence from the outside need not be negative. On my second trip to Tibet, I hoped that I, as a student of Tibetan culture and language, could help the Tibetans, if only on a small scale. I thought I might be able to tell Tibetans in Tibet that their exiled brothers and sisters were still striving to help win freedom for them. I could tell the Tibetans whom I meet that the Dalai Lama remembers them and works for them.

So I prepared to go. I went to the Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala just after the Tibetan New Year of 1987. I was given books, pamphlets, and Dalai Lama photos to distribute in Tibet. The Secretary treated these objects, most of which would be illegal in the People's Republic of China, with an air of gravity. Political information can be powerful ammunition. I sewed the propaganda into a hiding place in my backpack, obtained a visa in Kathmandu, and set out for Tibet.

The Nepal-China border is an eerie place, traversed by a friendship Bridge. The bridge has a line printed on it to mark the political boundary, and you can guess which country has a larger portion of the bridge. A Chinese soldier stood just across the border in a baggy green uniform. 'Ni how', Hello I said in Chinese, and grimaced. I was glad to be in Tibet, but dismayed by the number of PLA soldiers lounging around tents set up along the road.

One must walk for several hours from the Nepal border to reach Khasa, the first town in Tibet. Tibetans were at work building the new road, and we exchanged greetings. I made it through Chinese customs without a hitch. The customs officials were more interested in how many cameras I had (one), how many watches (one) and how many bicycles (none). They were also distracted by dozens of Nepalese porters carrying loads of wool from Tibet to Nepal.

After an overnight stay in Khasa, I, along with 28 other *inchis*, boarded a China International Travel Service bus bound for Shigatse and Lhasa. When some of the tourists learned that I had been in Tibet before and knew a little Tibetan they asked me for information on the area. 'But aren't the Tibetans better off now than they were before the Chinese came?' I thought of the stories I had heard about the torture and hardship the Tibetans had gone through between then and now. 'It's true that they do have roads and buses and tourists and thermoses now, but they have little political or religious freedom. And they don't have their leader, the Dalai Lama.' Another time on the bus, some tourists were reading *Time* magazine, and I heard one explain to the other that Lama Osel was the new reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. As we climbed the road to Nyalam, we encountered some *dzo* [female to the yak]. 'I've never seen a yak before', one English boy exclaimed. 'You still haven't', I told him.

Next day on the way to Lhatse we picked up two hitch-hiking *inchis* [Westerners]. One had his scraggly hair braided up in tassels in his approximation of a Tibetan hairstyle. I heard him exclaim as he got off the bus, 'Kali Sho', and I knew he had learned his rudimentary Tibetan from the inaccurate section in the Lonely Planet guidebook. They were walking to Rongbuk Monastery, and I admired their intrepidity.

In Lhatse we stopped for petrol and our first cup of tea after a long day of driving. Children with runny noses and rags for clothing asked for our oranges and biscuits. Many

of the tourists were disturbed by the poor and hungry kids. There are no luxury hotels in Lhatse, of course, so we bunked in a dormitory. I talked to some monks who had come from Nepal to visit the monastery at Sakya. They liked Nepal better. The mountains, clouds, and sky shimmered and glowed under the late evening sun: I was glad to be there. The sun did not set until after nine o'clock; all clocks are set at Peking time, as if the government could set the course of the sun. The next day we headed for Shigatse and a welcome chance to get off the bus and stay some place for a few days.

I have related some of my impressions of other travellers in Tibet not in order to try and show that I have some superior knowledge of Tibet. In many ways I am ill-informed, and I can be arrogant about the little knowledge that I do have. I did meet a few well-informed and sympathetic tourists who instead of spreading ignorance spread some light. They have a genuine warmth for the Tibetan people and know about the political upheaval that has brought the Tibetans to their present situation. But all of us—first-time travellers and old Tibetophiles—would learn from our time in Chinese-occupied Tibet. Konrad was a Swiss traveller who would become greatly affected by what he saw in Tibet; but one of the first times I spoke with him, he gestured at Samduptse Dzong, the ruined fort that hovers over Shigatse. 'How many years ago was it destroyed? Five hundred years?' No, my friend. A bit more recently than that.

On my fifth day in Tibet I went to Tashi Lhunpo, His Holiness the Panchen Lama's monastery. An elderly monk collected our five yuan at the gate. I, along with many pilgrims and other foreigners, made my way among the open gompas. It was a revelation to be able to speak with the people there: on my first visit to Tibet, my vocabulary was limited to *yakpo du*, *yakpo mindu*. One monk took me aside, and whispered his distrust of the Chinese. Other monks and pilgrims asked for Dalai Lama photos, a plea

that has become almost as common as the cry for *baksheesh* is in India. As I wandered around the monastery, I remembered the pamphlet that I had put in my bag that morning. It contained a speech given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on 10 March 1984. I wished that I had given it to the man who tended the altar in one of the gompas; he had told me about how Tibetans were killed by the Chinese. At the tomb of the Panchen Lamas I chatted with a group of monks. They asked me about the coral necklace I was wearing, and then they told me I paid too much for it. They asked me if I knew Geshe Sopa in America and I told them I had heard him speak. They asked me about the Dalai Lama, and when I told them that I had received his blessing at Losar, they were pleased. *Yakpo du, Yakpo du*. And as we stood on the steps of the gompa, happy just to be communicating with each other, I impulsively reached into my bag and pulled out the pamphlet written by the Dalai Lama. It was my gift to them, my hope for their future.

The rest of the afternoon was spent recovering from altitude weariness. In the early evening I went for a stroll in the market streets with another American, Karen. At a busy intersection, a soldier stopped his jeep, and three people got out. Someone asked us, 'Do you speak Chinese?'

'No', we said. The soldier turned to his companions and spoke in Tibetan: 'They don't speak Chinese and they don't speak Tibetan.'

'Oh, but I do speak a little Tibetan', I offered.

They turned to us with renewed interest. 'We'd like to ask you a few questions', a young man interpreted for us.

'What for?'

'Just come with us to the Public Security Bureau. We would like to speak with you.'

It still had not dawned on me that the questioning had anything to do with the little pamphlet I had given to the monks. 'Well, I'm not going with you unless you tell us

what you want to talk about.’ I thought, stupidly, that perhaps they were taking a survey on tourists’ views on accommodation in Tibet, I started to walk away. The soldier came after me. ‘Acha, please come with us’, he said in Tibetan. ‘We want to talk with you.’

We had a good-sized crowd gathered by this time. Karen and I agreed to go with the soldier and the two men in street clothes to a nearby restaurant. They asked some general questions: when we had come, where we stayed. Then they asked the crucial one: ‘Did you bring any books with you to Tibet?’ Karen knew about the pamphlets I carried and tried to distract them from questioning me. She said, ‘Oh, I brought some personal reading material, you know. Some novels. A travel book or two.’ The soldier turned to the other two men and spoke in Tibetan, ‘It’s not her. It’s this one’, and they looked at me.

I denied all knowledge of any books. But I’m not a very good liar, and I was caught. I was one of the few blondes in Shigatse who could speak Tibetan. They asked us again to go with them to PSB. Our Tibetan hotel manager saw us get into the police jeep, and we tried to smile and wave to assure him that everything would be all right.

We sat down in the plush red and green office. Tea was served and cigarettes offered around. I told them that I had given a pamphlet to a monk at Tashi Lhunpo. A monk had brought them the pamphlet: did I know what was in it? My Tibetan was not that good: I couldn’t read it. I told them I thought that it was a religious writing as it was by ‘His Holiness’. Karen nudged me; I had shown where my allegiance lay.

All the questioning was done through interpreters. The soldier switched often from Chinese to Tibetan: he spoke no English but I took him and the two interpreters to be Tibetan because when they addressed each other they usually used Tibetan.

Through questioning, this is the story that came out. I told them that I had bought only one book in Dharamsala

at a store that sold religious books. Because it was written by the Dalai Lama I thought it would be a nice gift for a Tibetan. Tibetans were always asking for Dalai Lama photos: I thought they might also like a book.

‘But how did you come to give it to this particular monk? Who exactly did you give it to?’

I paused. Karen rushed to fill in the silence. But I was taking my time, trying to remember exactly what happened. The monks were not ‘at fault’, and I did not want to implicate them. In the questioning I became keenly aware of speaking on two sides, trying both to give them information that would satisfy them but which would not compromise my strong feelings about Tibetan independence. I did in fact lie about the number of books I had, where I had gotten them, and about what I believed was in them. I did not want to become a martyr. There were more books to be handed out.

I had to write a little essay for them about my crime. When I finished, they asked, ‘Didn’t you know you were breaking the law? It’s fine to bring in photos and religious books, but political things are strictly illegal.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘I did not know that religious things were allowed.’ And I had not. Dealing with interpreters gave me a certain amount of lee-way; they asked me a series of questions. I found that I only had to answer one to them.

‘Do you know what’s in this book?’ the soldier asked, waving the green pamphlet at me. ‘It speaks of Tibet as a separate country, and Tibet is actually part of China!’ The interpreter chortled as if everyone who thought differently was a fool.

I did not apologize. They kept my passport and took me back to my hotel with an order to come back the next day. As I was leaving one interpreter whispered to me, ‘Don’t worry.’

Back at the hotel, word of my arrest had spread. The hotel manager and his wife were deeply concerned; the woman was in tears when she told me how her husband

had been imprisoned for twenty years. Many of the tourists were interested in what had happened to me, if only for the sheer sensation of it. But others came to ask more about the political situation and to ask why I became involved in it. Konard, the Swiss man who had asked about the ruined fort, offered to take the rest of my political pamphlets to Lhasa. If I were allowed to continue travelling, I would meet him there and take them back. If I were deported, he would try to distribute them.

I spent a turbulent night. I did not think that I would be dealt with too harshly; if they had planned to jail me they would not have let me go. I did believe that they might kick me out of the country. But I had known the risks involved in carrying the political literature into the People's Republic, and I was willing to pay the price. I brought the pamphlets into Tibet because I believed that there was a communication gap between the exiled community and the Tibetans in Tibet. And I care about the movement for Tibetan independence. But I came to see for myself that Big Brother was definitely watching: in a small way I experienced the lack of political freedom that I had heard so much about from exiled Tibetans.

I went back to the Public Security Bureau the next day as I had been ordered. They continued their line of repetitious questioning, perhaps waiting for me to contradict myself, and I had to write another self-criticizing essay. The police told me to come again after two days.

I filled my days in Shigatse. Twice a day I made the pilgrim circuit around Tashi Lhunpo, the scene of my crime. Most of the pilgrims I met there were either older people or women. The young people were in school: I often heard them from my hotel, shouting Chinese phrases back to their teacher. Or the young people were, like the men, earning a wage somewhere. Sounds of chanting floated up from the monastery below. From the market came the clang of Chinese disco. Morning and evening, a loudspeaker on the ruined fort blasted advice and music in Chinese. And

pilgrims circumambulated Tashi Lhunpo. I tried to concentrate on something other than my immediate personal troubles. But I did not want my faith to blind me or make me forget my political convictions. I did not want to count 'Om Mane Padme Hum' on my prayer beads in order to forget that I was being confined to Shigatse against my will.

Four days after I was first picked up, I returned to the PSB for what I hoped would be the last time. Tea was served and cigarettes offered around. The drama seemed to be losing its attraction: Karen had departed for Gyantse and only one interpreter showed up. The soldier's words were translated: 'You acknowledge that you broke Chinese law. The pamphlet you brought you believed to be of a religious nature, when in fact it contained reactionary political views. At first because you were afraid, you lied to us and told us that you knew nothing about the pamphlet. But then you told us the truth and we thank you for that. We do not want to persecute—I mean prosecute you. You may go.'

'I can go to Lhasa?'

'You may go to Lhasa if you wish, and you are welcome to come to China any time. But do not bring any books with you.'

They handed my passport to me and I thanked them. I walked out the door and down the street, almost skipping. I saw the other interpreter standing on a street corner, chatting with some friends. I went straight to the bus station to buy a ticket for the next day's bus to Lhasa. That evening when I tried to pay my hotel manager for my room, he refused to take my money. He and his wife were greatly relieved for me; they were probably also relieved that I, as a known 'fugitive', was leaving their hotel. But we had become friends over the past few days. Pa-La gave me an old Tibetan bank note, and Ama-La made me promise that I would stop back in Shigatse.

So I headed for Lhasa with Konard, the Swiss friend who had offered to carry my pamphlets. In Lhasa I was to encounter more anti-Chinese sentiments among Tibetans, and it was easy to find willing takers for my pamphlets. But Lhasa is not where this information is most needed. Whenever I could, I tried to give the pamphlets to people in outlying areas.

Lhasa had changed quite a lot since I was first there in 1985. Back then there were only two hotels for foreigners; by April of 1987 there were six or more, including the luxurious Lhasa Hotel on the way to Drepung. And even more Chinese restaurants had sprung up. Whenever possible, I patronized Tibetan-run establishments. But all hotels, whether they are operated by Tibetans or Chinese, belong to a commune and must give a good portion of their profits to the Chinese government. I visited Lhasa's holy places, its monasteries and temples, which had become tourist spots. The Potala seemed like a great mausoleum. Its corridors are well-treaded by tourists, pilgrims, and Chinese. There are rumours that the caretakers have a number of television sets inside to keep them occupied. On the day I visited Norbu Lingka, the place was bustling with pilgrims from Amdo and with a delegation from Colorado, USA.

Some tourists were disappointed that they could not see the sky burials in Lhasa. In 1985, camera-totting tourists had made themselves unpopular and the Government closed the site to foreigners.

The pilgrim circuit at the Barkhor circles the Jokhang and passes through the market where Chinese merchants set up shops next to Tibetan traders. Here you can buy fluorescent synthetic clothing from the Chinese; you can buy yak meat and butter. While pilgrims from all corners of Tibet do prostrations around the Jokhang, merchants sell tea bowls and turquoise, *chang* and cassettes.

I also made a trip to Ganden and was delighted to see that some of the wreckage has been restored. As far as I know the reconstruction is not a Chinese project but was undertaken by Tibetans. The only Chinese I saw there was a single bus-driver. But Ganden was flooded with perhaps 500 pilgrims and 300 monks in residence. There were only three *inchtis* there.

When I revisited some of the places I had seen on my first trip, I saw how my attitudes had changed. My first trip to Tibet was full of extremes: I was ecstatic just to be there, among the friendly Tibetans in that dramatic landscape, but I was infuriated by the presence of the Chinese, by the sight of ruined monasteries, and by the thought of atrocities committed against the Tibetans. On my second trip to Tibet, I was confronted with many questions about the position of the Dalai Lama, about the real possibilities for independence, and about the actual aspirations of Tibetans in Tibet. I was aware that I had certain preconception and gaps in my knowledge that might prevent me from understanding what I saw.

Tourists can be fooled by appearances: the Chinese encourage this. We are fairly free to travel in the country; we are not afraid to have political discussions in public. As my case bears out, we may not be punished if we are caught breaking the law. The sight of Tibetans at prayers in temples and on the street might lead us to believe that the Tibetans are free to worship as they please. Monasteries are filling up with monks once again; as many as 600 stay at Tashi Lhunpo. But something that is not easy to discover is that public religious teachings are forbidden. As one exiled Tibetan put it, the Chinese allow the blind faith aspects of Tibetan religion while prohibiting its intellectual tradition and growth.

Photos of the Dalai Lama are no longer illegal, and this can be deceiving for a visitor. His photos are allowed. But this is not to say that the Dalai Lama's political views are tolerated or that his religious teachings are permitted. In

some ways the Chinese government uses the allowance of Dalai Lama photos as a symbol of their own supposed tolerance. The Dalai Lama is important to the Tibetans in Tibet, but they receive a symbol that is, to a large degree, stripped of its political impact. Tibetans in Tibet may simply not know about his efforts on their behalf. It must be acknowledged that there is an underground network in Tibet, which helps pass along information from India and Nepal. But a general lack of information accounts for a difference between the Tibetans in Tibet and the Tibetans in exile: those in Tibet do not necessarily have the same political views or even the same degree of political consciousness as those in exile have. I do not see either group as monolithic, but most exiled Tibetans believe that an independent Tibet is both necessary and just. (Whether they believe independence is achievable or not is another story.)

In Tibet the views are most varied. Many people wait for His Holiness to return to Tibet, but this is not necessarily a political view. Many believe that the Chinese have gravely mistreated their people, but others cooperate with the Chinese. Some may cooperate out of fear: this is what I believe about the monk who turned me in. But some, like the soldier I encountered, cooperate with the Chinese out of conviction. And there is still another group of Tibetans who have little concept of the political situation. These people, largely villagers and nomads, are concerned with day-to-day living. They revere the Dalai Lama, but they may have come to accept the Chinese presence in Tibet as a fact of life. Many villagers' lives have been drastically affected by forced agricultural programs and famine. Their lives have been changed by electricity, roads, and new products. But these changes have not necessarily made them political. In one village home near Ganden, I saw a poster of Chinese political figures next to images of Chenrezig and Sakyamuni Buddha. In some minds, Chinese government and Tibetan religion can co-exist. To

most exiled Tibetans, such a juxtaposition would be unthinkable.

I think that most Tibetans in Tibet see foreigners as sympathetic to them. After all, we often carry photos of the Dalai Lama with us; we visit their temples and markets. We have come to see *them*. Numerous times I have been pulled aside to be asked about the Dalai Lama or to be told about the problems Tibetans face under the Chinese. This also happens to people who have no knowledge of Tibetan. As Karen expressed it, 'I may not be able to do anything on a grand scale. But I can be an ear for the Tibetans.'

Most tourists to Tibet are indeed sympathetic towards Tibetans. Most at least read in their Lonely Planet guidebook about Tibetan history. (This guidebook, because of its political stance, is probably illegal to carry into China.) While it may be true that most tourists care about Tibet only as long as they are there, others can have some impact. We can talk to people in our own countries about Tibet. This article is my attempt to share with Tibetans and others what I observed and experienced. I have no doubt that the resolutions adopted by the United States House of Representatives in June 1987 were connected to increased contact between Tibetans and westerners. This bill, which recognizes the Chinese government's violation of Tibetan human rights, is putting Tibet back in the international news. Thirty years have passed since the Chinese occupation: let us hope that the renewed interest does some good for six million Tibetans.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON CHINESE ATTITUDE TOWARDS TIBETANS

by Prof. Michael Futrell

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On a recent conducted tour in Tibet, I was struck by the attitude of the Chinese guide, a well-educated and sophisticated young woman from the ancient Chinese capital of Xian. For her, as for the members of our Canadian group, it was the first visit to Tibet. She said to me: 'Is this a culture shock for you? You can't believe what an extreme culture shock it is for me!'

I told her that as a devotee of mountains and mountain travel since childhood and a long time admirer of Buddhist art and philosophy I found Tibet moving and inspiring and thought that my companions, less specially oriented, were still deeply impressed. Her evident shock (in one monastery courtyard she replied to my anxious inquiry about her pale and tottering appearance by saying that she simply could not stand the smell anymore) alternated with condescension or implicit scorn. As she aimed her camera in one shrine where we had just been informed that photography was not permitted, to my reminder of this she replied, with confidence worthy of a nineteenth-century European imperialist, 'But I am Chinese!' For her, Tibet was intolerably backward, squalid and primitive, and that was that.

These and similar experiences confirmed something that seems clear to me from long acquaintance with educated Chinese and several journeys in China, something that all concerned with Tibet should realize. That the Maoist attempts to destroy Tibetan culture was an extreme manifestation of a general Chinese belief that there is nothing special about Tibet.

I should be one of the last to excuse or justify what Chinese have done to Tibetans; however, interested as I am

in Chinese culture as well as Tibetan, I urge all who care about Tibet to consider the following, sweepingly compressed, but I think essentially valid, observations.

In the first place one should bear in mind the long and complex history of China's relations with peoples and cultures on China's periphery, not only Tibet, but also conspicuously Korea and the countries of South-East Asia. There too, the traditional Chinese conviction of superiority has been manifest over a wide range of attitudes of imperial domination and sometimes-benign paternalism and diplomacy. (In this connection anyone interested in Tibet who visits China should not miss the magnificent Lhasa temple, or Yonghegong in Beijing, and should try to make the excursion north to Chengdu, formerly Jehol, the Qing emperor's summer residence, where too, eighteenth-century Chinese emperors erected vast Tibetan-style temple-monastery complexes.)

Then, though Buddhism was introduced into China early in the Christian era, and during several centuries flowered brilliantly in both art and philosophy, that era is now long past. Subsequently, though Buddhism remained a major element in the rich Chinese cultural tradition, it was no longer a developing and dynamic creative force. In this century it has become uncommon for educated (and often increasingly Westernized) Chinese to be profoundly involved in Buddhism as many Tibetans continue to be. Indeed, many twentieth century Chinese intellectuals, not only Marxists, have severely criticised and repudiated such seemingly obsolete areas of their tradition. They are predominantly concerned with remedying what they saw as China's weakness and backwardness, by comprehensive modernization.

Again, extending the historical scale farther back in time, thought provoking is the monumental recent study by Benjamin Schwartz entitled *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. This book contains, naturally, only passing references to Buddhism, because the foundations of

Chinese culture examined by Schwartz were already there, and highly developed, well before Buddhism came to China and indeed a thousand years before Buddhism came to Tibet.

Returning to recent years, when thinking about what Chinese recently did to Tibetans, one should remember what Chinese simultaneously did to Chinese. The unparalleled scale, scope, intensity and ferocity of the so-called Cultural Revolution seem still inadequately grasped. Among the most memorable recent accounts of survival, together with John Avedon's pages (in his *In Exile from the Land of Snows*) about Dr. Tenzin Choedrak, stand such remarkable Chinese autobiographies as *Son of the Revolution* by Liang Heng, *To the Storm* by Yue Daiyun and *Life and Death in Shanghai* by Nein Cheng.

During the last several decades small but increasing numbers of people on the European and American continents have become aware of the exceptional qualities inherent in Tibetan culture, where a handful of people on the inhospitable roof of the world have during a thousand years generated artistic and philosophical treasures. For Tibetans and sympathetic Occidentals alike it is, I believe, a sombre but salutary and necessary realization that most if not all Chinese are likely to react to Tibet, or the thought of Tibet, more or less as did the smart young woman from Xian with at best condescension and at worst contempt.

Reading Anne Thurston's impressive overview of the Cultural Revolution *Enemies of the People* (with an apt epigraph from Ibsen's Dr. Stockman: 'Our spiritual sources are poisoned, and the whole of our vaunted social system is founded upon a cesspit of lies') one may feel that the sixty years of political, social, cultural and intellectual turmoil in China beginning with the May Fourth Movement of 1911 have done terrible psychological damage. This period (both before and after the communist takeover in 1949) is marked by continuous denunciations of some aspect or other of tradition, and the surviving

victims (sometimes also agents), of the Cultural Revolution whom Anne Thurston interviewed seemed trapped in the ambiguities of moral relativism. Even the bravest found no deeper ground for integrity than the weakening concept of family honour, which might still be enough to deter suicide. Nien Cheng, the author mentioned above, was an exception: though a deeply patriotic Chinese, her commitment to the traditional Christian and humanistic values of her Western education brought her through years of torment with conscience intact.

In the Soviet and East European experience of persecution, the most memorable records of successful endurance reveal a devotion to traditions of integrity transcending mere individual survival: Vladimir Bukovsky's *To Build a Castle* and George Falud's *My Happy Days in Hell* are outstanding examples of a not-specifically-Christian tradition that goes back to Socrates. It seems clear that the steadfastness with which Tibetans resisted recent Chinese imperialism was rooted in their traditional, largely Buddhist, culture.

For most of this century China has been spinning in the cross-currents of conflicting anti-traditional modernizing campaigns and crusades that have left Chinese morally confused and spiritually rootless, very rarely with more than superficial awareness (if that) of the tragedy inflicted on Tibet by the agonizing convulsions of their own Chinese disorientation. As Thurston writes: 'The elemental rules of humans living together have been lost.' But she rightly adds, 'The germs of the Cultural Revolution are in us all.'

**TIBET IN SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1987:
A WESTERN SCHOLAR'S OBSERVATIONS**

by Robert Mont

published in *Tibetan Review*, August 1988

**I. Impressions of Tibetan culture and the Chinese response
to the Lhasa demonstrations**

The recent, dramatic events in Tibet have become international page one headlines. Unfortunately, the foreign correspondents corps only arrived in Lhasa on 4 October, well after the demonstrations of 27 September and 1 October, and they involuntarily left Tibet, under Chinese orders, on 9 October. This tight schedule, the immediacy of events, and Chinese restrictions on telecommunications meant very little writing about Tibet itself has appeared. Of necessity, international coverage of rising tensions in Tibet prior to October could only relay information gained second hand. Even after they arrived, the correspondents had no opportunity to visit areas outside Lhasa, and they could not live in Tibetan-run accommodations, which lack modern telecommunication facilities.

This article attempts to fill these gaps. I arrived in Tibet well before the first demonstration, hoping to pursue such 'touristic' aims as hiking and seeing the historical sights. History intervened and my social science training compelled me to open my eyes, listen, and ask questions. The present observations about Tibetan culture and the recent events thus supplement the very capable reports many journalists sent from Lhasa under very trying conditions.

On first arriving in Tibet, I heard stories about fights, often in restaurants, between Chinese and Tibetans. Yet I also observed apparently relaxed relations between Chinese and Tibetans. The military, too, kept in the background.

As I stayed longer in Tibet, cracks appeared in these initial impressions. When travelling on a bus once, I discovered a young Chinese (who did not work in a

public-security organ) carrying a handgun. When I asked about the legality of this and noted I could not conceive of non-security personnel carrying handguns in China proper, several fellow passengers told me, 'Tibet is different. It is a frontier and people need self-defence.'

Tibet is different from China. In trying to analyze the complexity of Tibetan culture, I realized the three English phrases which many Tibetans learn—'hello', 'how much?' and 'Dalai Lama picture'—reflect three very important aspects of Tibetan life: its friendliness, its entrepreneurship and its religiosity.

Tibetans are extraordinarily friendly. Passing foreign strangers on the street, they often say 'hello' or '*tashi delek*' (the Tibetan equivalent) to express a welcome. This contrasts strongly with China where a sharp 'hello' frequently assaults the foreigner as the speaker attempts to attract the foreigner's attention to goods or services for sale.

This friendliness also exists among Tibetans themselves. Many times I have witnessed banter and such horseplay as water fights and even mild wrestling—often between men and women (behaviour also seen in Western cultures, but extremely uncouth in China). Similarly, in a bus or on the back of a truck, or in a courtyard, one or two Tibetans will often sing a Tibetan folk song, or even a recent disco hit. Tibetans appear to have a *joie de vivre*, a gaiety and jollity that Chinese lack.

Three personal anecdotes illustrate this Tibetan friendliness. The Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, the Centre of Tibetan religious life, with its small, dark and sombre side chambers and its terrifying images and frescoes, creates an eerie atmosphere. One day, in a dark corner, I came upon a fierce-looking Tibetan, his face dirty and hair askew. We stared at each other. I cracked a small smile and he responded with one of the broadest, most beautiful smiles I have ever seen.

At the site of an important religious festival in Shigatse, 340 kilometres west of Lhasa, many picnicking Tibetans

played *sho*, a three-person Tibetan dice game resembling backgammon. After observing a group and asking to take a picture, I received an invitation to join the group and an explanation of the game. As the hot sun shone, the player made certain I joined them drinking *chang*, a home-brew made from barley which, when good, resembles alcoholic cider.

Monks now guard the treasures and provide explanations to the tourists in the Potala Palace. In one large room a monk smoothly skates along on pieces of cloth beneath his shoes humming Buddhist chants and intoning 'Sixth Dalai Lama Sitting Room' to foreign ears. He also tweaked my whiskers, a friendly gesture I repeated with his more sparsely covered cheeks. Over a week later, when I returned to the Potala, I went up to this monk and intoned 'Sixth Dalai Lama Sitting Room' and tweaked his whiskers. I received a huge hug and a detailed outline of the artifacts in the room.

By stressing this Tibetan friendliness, I do not wish to imply Chinese lack friendliness, as in the many years I have lived with Chinese, I have been treated well and developed close friendships. But Tibetans lack the Chinese barrier of reserve, which requires either an introduction from a third party or a substantial period of time before friendship can develop.

Those of us who study Chinese and become aware of their superior entrepreneurial skills tend to forget other peoples too possess such talents. Tibetan entrepreneurial abilities certainly impressed me. A Khampa (from eastern Tibet), according to local pundits, will sell you anything he or she possesses, provided the price is right, and many Khampas certainly did try. While Chinese and Chinese Muslims (Hui) play an important part in the Tibetan economy selling clothes, operating restaurants, and providing such services as shoe and bicycle repair, Tibetans too operate general goods shops, hotels, restaurants, and stalls selling Tibetan jewellery and goods. Historically, Tibetans ran large trading networks. This historical

background and the keen entrepreneurial skills, which Tibetans manifest today, suggest Tibetans can play a central role in developing the contemporary Tibetan economy.

When a foreigner travels anywhere in Tibet, even in Shigatse, the area under the charge of the Panchen Lama, people besiege him asking for a 'Dalai Lama picture'. This reflects both the importance of the Dalai Lama to the average Tibetan (despite his twenty-eight year exile overseas) and the intense religiosity of Tibetans, which the foreigner cannot help but observe. Pilgrims and devotees fill Tibetan temples offering yak butter, silk scarves, and money to the deities, and many pilgrims perform numerous full prostrations, a physical exercise which would exhaust even the most hardened professional sportsman used to rigorous calisthenic routines. Pictures of the Dalai Lama (often photocopies) have become a third type of currency which foreign travellers carry in Tibet together with Foreign Exchange Certificates (FEC) and *Renminbi* (RMB). Along with most foreigners, I gave Dalai Lama pictures only on special occasions where I had received some special service as a free truck ride, permission to photograph special temple art, or an especially good explanation of some historical or religious site. The Tibetans, who often placed the Dalai Lama pictures on their heads, universally welcomed the photograph as a gesture of thanks.

This combination of friendliness, religious intensity, the strange temples and palaces, the barren, mountainous landscapes, and perhaps the effects of the high altitude combined to give me the most exciting travel experience I have had in years. Then politics, violence and terror raised their ugly heads and a feeling of depression replaced the exhilaration. Well before the demonstrations, an early morning earthquake had rocked my bed in Lhasa; perhaps, as the monks claimed, this foreshadowed the events to come.

The Tibetan quarter of Lhasa resembles a white, grey and brown kasbah of two and three storey stone and mud buildings. At its centre lies the great Jokhang Temple, the

religious centre of all Tibet. The Barkhor Bazaar and residential housing encircle the Temple. To the northwest, and originally well outside the city, stands the Potala Palace, looking down from its hill-top location. In an arc surrounding the Tibetan city, stretching from the north to the southwest, the Chinese have built their government and military offices and housing, filling in the space between the Tibetan quarter and the Potala, and going well beyond.

On 27 September monks from the Drepung Monastery, about eight kilometres northwest of Lhasa, marched into Lhasa and demonstrated for an independent Tibet. Little violence appears to have occurred, though police arrested several people.

On 1 October, China's National Day, monks from the Sera Monastery, four kilometres north of Lhasa, marched into the city. They demanded an independent Tibet and went to the police station just south of the main entrance to the Jokhang Temple. The demonstrations set alight seven police vehicles (three motorcycles and four jeeps) and then burned the police station itself, enabling several prisoners from the 27 September demonstration to escape. Official Chinese sources say that the Chinese forces obeyed the order not to fire, but both Chinese and Tibetan sources confirmed that the police did in fact open fire and at least six (the official death toll) and as many as seven or nine Tibetans were killed. A Chinese source sympathetic to Tibetans provided the best explanation for the shooting. The order not to shoot did exist, but as the flames burning the police station began to destroy the personal belongings and endangered the families of the police living in the police station, some police lost control and opened fire. The deaths, from police shooting, resulted.

During these events, I was west of Lhasa in the cities of Shigatse and Gyantse, where no demonstrations occurred. When I returned to Lhasa late on 2 October, rumours filled the city.

On 3 October, some Chinese sources told me a Chinese police chief had been shot dead the previous day. Either to protest to the Chinese authorities or to protect their treasures (or both), the monks closed several important tourist sites like the Potala. However, that morning I visited the Sera Monastery, where monks said two monks lay dead (two of the victims of 1 October) and several escaped prisoners were hiding. The previous night the military had surrounded the monastery, but had not attempted to enter, and by noon just a few armed police remained in evidence. Only roadblocks, harsh orders not to take photographs and an inspection of my bus gave evidence of the special situation outside. At lunch-time, the Barkhor Bazaar around the Jokhang Temple seemed relaxed and normal. That afternoon the China Travel Service finally obtained permission for groups to visit the Potala. The calm, relaxed atmosphere in the Potala provided no warning of the terror about to strike that night.

Between 10.30 and 11 p.m., those of us living in the Tibetan quarter of Lhasa began to hear the wail of police sirens. After a while five police motorcycles with sidecars and a police jeep drove slowly down our street with red light flashing and siren blaring. One of three Tibetans standing across the street no more than fifteen metres away, apparently drunk, started to move towards the police vehicles. Though restrained by his companions, his movement caught the eye of a motorcycle driver and the vehicles quickly pulled up. Police with handguns and long guns jumped from their vehicles and in an instant had guns drawn on the men and pointed up at the surrounding roofs above where we stood. A woman screamed and ran into the street, and the police also held guns to her head. For some reason, perhaps the foreign observers across the street, the police did not arrest the man.

The police then proceeded to Barkhor Square in front of the Jokhang Temple. Six policemen remained with the vehicles and shone lights on rooftops, while the other

thirteen police, with weapons drawn, went to the Temple entrance before returning to their vehicles and continuing their slow siren-accompanied procession through the Tibetan quarter. For the next hours sirens could be heard wailing throughout the Tibetan quarter of Lhasa and before 1.30 a.m. the police made at least four more passes on our street, each time with sirens announcing their arrival and each time with handguns drawn and pointed at the second and third storey residences of Tibetans.

This display of strength had one purpose: to create an atmosphere of terror. The police, with their sirens, clearly wanted residents to know they had arrived, and their slow pace probably revealed a lack of anxiety about an attack, for a machine-gun emplaced on a rooftop would have easily wiped them out. If, as the Chinese newspapers reported, only a 'small number of splittists' have caused the demonstrations, why did the authorities require such a massive display of police terror throughout the entire Tibetan quarter of Lhasa? That night I witnessed many Tibetan women in tears and much Tibetan anger.

The next day, 4 October, the foreign press corps arrived from Peking as did many senior Chinese police and military officials. Rumours said the police had arrested many Tibetans the previous night, but no one had been killed. The authorities allowed no buses or cars to leave Lhasa, though buses from Golmud in Qinghai and other places did arrive. Despite contrary rumours, planes continued to fly in and out of Lhasa. Apparently the Chinese wanted to keep Tibetans and foreigners involved in the demonstrations in Lhasa until they could study videotapes of the demonstrators. Information given to me by China Travel Service sources, that all film would be confiscated upon leaving Lhasa, turned out to be false. In the Jokhang Temple, there seemed more worshippers than usual, but eventually the roof, which had been closed 'because of the special circumstances', was opened. The Barkhor Square and Bazaar functioned normally. On the

other hand, telecommunications links with the rest of China remained restricted and closed early. At any mention of the situation in Lhasa, the telephone line went dead. That night all was quiet. Had the senior officials from Peking provided cooler and wiser advice?

At 1.30 p.m. the next afternoon (5 October), I witnessed a display of force on Peking East Road, an important thoroughfare through the Tibetan quarter. A police jeep, red light flashing and siren wailing, led a cavalcade of ten open trucks, each packed with standing soldiers semi-automatic or automatic weapons at the ready and often with bayonets fixed. One truck had a machine gun over its cabin. The troops all appeared Chinese to me. The message seemed to be: 'We Han have the power. Do not try anything silly or we will deal with you.'

Finding the atmosphere in Lhasa oppressive and depressing, I decided to spend my last few days in Tibet travelling in the Yarlung Valley, the cradle of Tibetan civilization located to the south and southeast of Lhasa. All vehicles leaving Lhasa had to stop and each Tibetan, Chinese and foreigner received a close visual check as well as inspections of his or her identification. The Yarlung Valley had remained peaceful, though Chinese-speaking Tibetans frequently quizzed me about the events in Lhasa.

On 6 October, according to a foreign correspondent who witnessed the event, monks from the Drepung Monastery marched into Lhasa.

After a time when both monks and police seemed confused about what to do, the police began to beat and arrest the monks near the Potala. Some reports indicated that the police released the arrested monks the next day, though other reports said two monks died from their injuries.

An intensely defensive reaction, with xenophobic overtones stronger than anything I had seen in the People's Republic of China since the December 1978 decision to open China to the outside world, accompanied these events.

Well before the demonstrations, China condemned the United States for allowing the Dalai Lama to visit Washington. The Chinese also expressed anger when United States congressmen criticized the civil liberties situation in Tibet. And, undoubtedly, a few foreigners did become involved in the demonstrations. On 3 October, the Tibetan Autonomous Region People's Government issued an announcement, while the Lhasa Municipal People's Government simultaneously issued Announcement Nos. 2 and 3. The last dealt specifically with foreigners, 'welcoming friends from the world's nations to come to Tibet for sightseeing, travel, visits, work, the conducting of trade talks and economic cooperation.'

The announcement continued: 'Any foreigner coming to Tibet must respect our national sovereignty, obey our laws, must not interfere in our internal affairs, and must not engage in any activities which do not accord with the person's status.' The announcement then declared certain limits: 'Foreigners must not watch (*weiguan*) or photograph the disturbances which the few elements of splittism manipulate and they must not disseminate distorted information not in accord with the facts and truth about the disturbances.' Since any tourist could be near a demonstration, all of which took place near important tourist sites, and since the Chinese version of 'facts and truth' often seemed removed from reality, this clause appeared especially threatening. The announcement warned that anyone who 'incites, supports, or participates' in the disturbances will be prosecuted according to Chinese law.

On the night of 6 October, the police conducted a midnight inspection of foreigners at hotels in the Tibetan quarter. One American civil rights lawyer told me how the police opened the door without knocking, turned on the lights, flashed torches in the faces of the sleeping guests, checked passports, and questioned each person about his or her reason for being in Tibet. At one hotel, the police

questioned all foreigners; while at another they only roused Americans. The police did not bother guests at the posh Lhasa Hotel on the other side of town.

The next night, at 11 p.m., the Tibetan Government's Foreign Affairs Office called the foreign correspondents together and gave them forty hours to leave Tibet.

On my last night in Tibet, a xenophobic Chinese policeman bade me a poignant farewell, when a friend and I walked on the side of a road at the airport. Coming from the opposite direction, the policeman repeatedly beeped his horn as he swerved his motorcycle over to the wrong side of the empty road and forced us off the pavement. A Western diplomat later told me how a military vehicle had similarly crossed the road and missed him by inches as he bicycled in Lhasa.

I left Tibet sad at leaving such a beautiful, friendly land, but relieved to escape the oppressive atmosphere. On 14 October the Chinese Government announced that Tibet would 'not receive tourists or visitors for the time being'. Is this action and the expulsion of the foreign correspondents an attempt to hide the activities of the Chinese jackboot from the eyes of the world? Hopefully, sanity will prevail and happiness return to Tibet. Then other people too will be able to enjoy the warmth of hearing Tibetans say 'hello' and '*tashi delek*'.

II. An examination of Chinese claims to Tibet

Conscientious historians and social scientists frequently use agreed-upon 'facts' to buttress quite different arguments. A legitimate case for Chinese sovereignty over Tibet can probably be made, but recent Chinese attempts to prove 'Tibet has been part of China for more than 700 years', the lead sentence in a Xinhua article appearing in the *China Daily* on 6 October [1987], seem especially obtuse. The Chinese case, as exemplified in the Xinhua article, emphasizes five points:

First, at its most powerful stage in 641 A.D., the Tang Dynasty married its royal Princess Wencheng to the Tibetan ruler. Statues of Princess Wencheng, who in Tibetan tradition became Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess (Bodhisattva) of Mercy, do appear in the Potala Palace and the Jokhang Temple, but whether the Han craftsmen accompanying her gave 'an impetus to the economic and cultural development of Tibet' remains questionable. Much more significantly, the Chinese never married royal princesses to 'barbarian' states securely under their suzerainty. Princess Wencheng made her long journey in an effort to generate peace with Tibet, which posed a dangerous threat, even to the powerful Tang Empire.

Secondly, the Chinese argue, Tibet 'officially came under the jurisdiction of the central government... during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)... In 1253, Emperor Mongko of Yuan Dynasty sent troops into Tibet... and from that time, Tibet came under the jurisdiction of the Yuan empire and has since then been part of the Chinese territory.' Of course, the Yuan Dynasty was in fact the Mongol Empire. If such historical reasoning has validity, the proper conclusion should be that both Tibet and China proper today belong to the Mongolian People's Republic.

Thirdly, according to the Chinese, in 1653 the Shunzhi Emperor (a Manchu and not a Chinese), met the Fifth Dalai Lama and, according to the Xinhua article, 'bestowed the title, Dalai Lama, on the fifth Dalai, thus establishing the title "Dalai Lama".' A Chinese guide in the Potala drew the obvious conclusion: 'Thus, the first to the fourth Dalai Lamas did not exist.' The foreigners listening to this historical exposition remained totally unconvinced; certainly Tibetans too find the argument vacuous.

Fourthly, the Chinese argue the Dalai Lama agreed to the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet in May 1951, though with the Chinese People's Liberation Army occupying Tibet, it remains questionable whether or not the Tibetan leaders

had much leeway in their decision-making. The Chinese Communist leadership, it must be noted, did place high priority on national unification (including Tibet). They continued to commit armed forces to the 'liberation' of Tibet at the very same time China was fighting the United Nations forces in Korea.

Lastly, the Chinese sources emphasize the horrendous life of the pre-liberation 'serf' under the government led by the Dalai Lama. Academics specializing in Tibetan studies argue that the Chinese created this self-serving description of a hellish society, and that while the common person in pre-'liberation' Tibet did not lead an idyllic life in a Shangri-la, neither did he live in constant fear of (to quote the above-cited Xinhua article) 'fetters, thumb-screws, wooden pillories and cages, hooks to gouge out eyes, knives to split noses and hamstring and rip out hearts... [being] throw[n] into pits of scorpions... having his eyes gouged out, the flesh on his legs sliced off, his tongue cut off or his hands mutilated.'

In 1959, a large number of Tibetans rebelled against the Chinese 'liberation' and, when the rebellion failed, the Dalai Lama fled to India. In the ensuing 'leftist' years, the Chinese attempted to assimilate such minority nationalities as the Tibetans to Han culture. They also pursued many silly economic ideas. For example, the Chinese forced the Tibetans to grow wheat rather than their beloved barley. Of course, the wheat did not grow in the dry, high altitude fields of Tibet. The Chinese also forced the Tibetans to raise pigs instead of cattle and sheep, even though pigs cannot graze in the high-altitude pastures of the Tibetan plateau and Tibetans prefer to eat beef and mutton. During the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards destroyed priceless Tibetan treasures and even today some sites destroyed in the Cultural Revolution look like wartime bomb targets. Some Chinese argue, 'Han Chinese also suffered grievously during the Cultural Revolution',

but the Han inflicted this upon themselves. When they destroyed Tibetan sites, they added the sensitive nationality factor to the torrid mix.

For centuries, the Tibetans had little ongoing contact with the Chinese. The Manchu (Qing) dynasty at its apogee in the eighteenth century only incorporated areas to the east of Jinsha river, the current eastern border of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and, even in these areas, never imposed Chinese administrative organization. In 1910, at the very end of the dynasty, the Chinese successfully invaded Lhasa, but the fall of the dynasty forced the Chinese to leave. In early 1913 the Tibetans declared their independence and the various governments of the Republic of China, including that of the Nationalists (Guomindang), could not extend their influence to all of China proper, let alone Tibet.

In May 1980 Hu Yaobang and Wan li led a delegation of the highest-ranking Chinese officials ever to visit Tibet. Apparently their report, which the Central Committee approved, virtually condemned Chinese actions in Tibet since 'peaceful liberation'. Thus, the period from 1951 to 1980, the first sustained period of Han-Tibetan contact in Tibet itself, proved, even by Chinese standards, to be unsatisfactory for the Tibetans. Bad memories and poor working habits do not change overnight. Though progress had undoubtedly occurred in Tibet on many fronts over the past six to seven years, much ill-feeling remains to be overcome. Roads, schools, hospitals, and increased incomes have never satisfied a nationality determined to gain its independence. Tibetans argue eighty percent of the Tibetans want the return of the Dalai Lama, and independence from China. Irrespective of the accuracy of this figure, many Tibetans in Tibet certainly do voice a desire for 'freedom and independence' from China despite the severe sanctions for such beliefs. Using military and political instruments, the Chinese do control Tibet today. Whether or not Tibetans will voluntarily accept this

Chinese suzerainty at some future time remains an unanswerable question. Much will depend upon current and future Chinese policies towards the 'roof top of the world'.

III. Some practical, realistic solutions to China's Tibet problem

Most people would love to tell national and world leaders how to run their governments, and this desire possesses academics even more strongly than the average citizen. Despite the Chinese demands that foreigners not become involved in Tibetan affairs, I have put my friendship for China and fondness for Tibet to the fore, surrendered to my academic predilections, and pretended I am a senior Chinese adviser. My unsolicited briefing paper on Tibet follows:

In Tibet, our country faces a very serious internal and foreign relations problem. Incorrect policies can easily escalate the Tibet problem out of control. In solving this problem, and in the spirit of 'seek truth from facts', we must bear the following points in mind:

(1) We must face the fact that the vast majority of Tibetans are very religious, and that a majority of Tibetans do worship the Dalai Lama and desire his return to Tibet. Most Tibetans only respond negatively to propaganda against the Dalai Lama; thus, such propaganda is counter-productive. Similarly, we must continue the policy of increasing autonomy for Tibetan monasteries. Any attempts to exert external control over Tibetan religious institutions will produce a continuing negative response.

(2) Tibet provides our most severe nationality problem since Tibetans have a very strong sense of nationhood. In 1985, the Xinjiang riots cost over forty lives, several times the recent Tibetan disturbances, but we did not publicize these riots as the Uighurs did not demand independence, but only a reduced Han population in

Xinjiang. The Tibetans are also unique among our nationalities in that they have an articulate exile community, which adds to our foreign relations problems.

(3) We must avoid the use of value-laden terms such as 'backward' (*huohou*), 'primitive' (*yuanshi*), and 'superstitious' (*mixin*) when discussing the Tibetans. Such value-laden language prevents us from fully understanding the objective facts. Furthermore, did not we Hans recently succumb to a very destructive superstition when we worshipped Mao's Thought during the Cultural Revolution?

(4) We must not lay such propaganda emphasis on the investments for economic construction made in Tibet since 1980. If anything, we owe a moral obligation to Tibet for the destruction which occurred there from 1951 to 1980. In any case, financial incentives have never bought off a nationality determined to gain independence. However, we should continue to develop Tibet economically since integration of the Tibetan economy within the greater Chinese economy will facilitate political integration.

(5) We must continue and accelerate developing the role of Tibetans in the Tibetan economy and government. Why must eighteen year-old Han middle school graduates from Chengdu guide tour groups in Lhasa? Could not Tibetan middle school graduates do as well?

(6) Even before the disturbances, we announced that more Tibetans would be provided secondary education in China proper. We must avoid taking Tibetan teenagers from their families and culture, and should make all efforts to provide primary and secondary education in Tibet itself.

(7) We must avoid using the West, and especially the United States, as scapegoats for our Tibetan problem. Such attacks will not solve our Tibetan problem and will only increase our foreign relations problems. In the recent events, our attack on the United States' invitation to the Dalai Lama may have even helped foment the crisis.

(8) We must make greater use of the people's police (*minjing*), which has many Tibetans, and avoid use of the

Han-dominated armed police (*wujing*) and military when enforcing the law in Tibet. The use of Han-dominated public security organs create nationality conflict. If the people's police cannot control public order, we must question the validity of the policy which creates the disorder.

(9) We must control the private ownership of handguns in Tibet. Private citizens must not take the law into their own hands; such actions can only exacerbate tensions between nationalities.

(10) We must end the 'leftist' policy, long since gone in the major cities of China proper, of loudspeaker broadcasts. In such Tibetan cities as Lhasa, Shigatse, and Zedang, the braying of donkeys, cattle, and sheep in the city centres, and even the constant all-night barking of the hordes of Tibetan dogs, intrudes less on Tibetan life than the blaring loudspeakers. People today have radios and televisions to hear newscasts and announcements.

(11) We must use velvet-glove policies in Tibet. We tried iron-fist policies for thirty years and they only created more resistance. Despite setbacks, such as the recent events, we must persist with mutual understanding and forbearance. Otherwise, our Tibetan problem will escalate.

In summary, to solve our Tibetan problem, we must acknowledge Tibetans have a strong sense of nationality and a deep devotion to their religion and its leaders. We cannot expect overnight miracles; solutions will take time. Any return to 'leftist' policies will simply prolong the day when Tibetans will happily claim to be Chinese. We must 'seek truth from facts'.

EXPERIENCE OF AN ENGLISH TEACHER
AT LHASA UNIVERSITY

by Julie Brittain

published in *Tibetan Review*, April 1988

I arrived in China on 12 February 1987 to work at the University of Tibet in Lhasa as a teacher of English and to do some methodology of teaching with the Chinese/Tibetan English teachers in the department. A colleague (Jane Peek) and myself were given a certain amount of training (a one-week course on methodology and a two-week course in Mandarin language) at the expense of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) through whom we were recruited. VSO is supposed to be an apolitical organization; it is a registered charity which sends not money but skilled people to developing countries. Its main aim is to place a volunteer in a situation where he/she will work alongside a local 'trainee' who will eventually take over the role the volunteer had. VSO has a policy of working only in countries which either have a reasonable human rights record or where, despite the human rights records, they can work with the people who will benefit from their being there. It is, however, worth bearing in mind that although technically apolitical, VSO receives 50% of its funding from the British Government and must therefore, to a large extent, follow the official political line. I refer to this because I feel it is relevant in discussing VSO's presence in China at all, which must be considered in any review of their being in Tibet.

We spent three days in Peking, during which time we were entertained by the Chinese Department of Education. There were eight of us: all rather interesting from the Chinese point of view because, although VSO has been working in China (as teachers only) for some five or six years now, we were the first group to be sent to the 'minority regions'—two for Tibet, two for south-west China and four for Sinkiang province.

We spent a further three days in Chengdu as guests of Sichuan University and arrived in Lhasa on 19 February. We were given a flat on the campus. Conditions were extremely bad when we arrived and the university did nothing to improve them. This is only relevant by way of backing up what I believe was the case—that those high up in the education administration in Peking (or perhaps Lhasa) had requested ‘foreign staff for Tibet University’, but that the university itself did not want foreigners. That we were not welcome was evident from the start. We supposed two foreign teachers looked good on paper in order to impress those concerned with the state of higher education in Tibet. We signed a two-year contract with the university; they paid us 650 yuans a month.

The University

When we arrived there were only two-year courses. Now there is a first, second and third year. The academic year begins in March and is divided into two semesters: August-January and March-July. The final exams are taken in July. It was never clear what the degree awarded was. When we began we were told students of English had to complete four years—books were ordered and a curriculum written to those ends. We were later to discover via our students that theirs was in fact a three-year course. When the department was questioned about this matter, the answer was three years due to lack of money to finance students beyond that time.

When we took over in February we were told there were roughly 700 students, half of those being Tibetan. Information regarding faculties and departments was forwarded to us by Jill and Charlie Hadfield, who worked at the university from August 1986 to January 1987. They were sent by the Peking British Council to assess the project, write a suitable syllabus, order appropriate textbooks—in short, to set up the long term VSO project which was to be run by two suitably qualified and experienced teachers.

The university is very definitely a Chinese establishment. There must be about 1,000 students there now. Figures are not easy to come by but I would guess slightly less than half are Tibetan. They are very often the children of cadres or are actually half-Chinese. Example: Our second year English majors is an 'all-Tibetan class' as opposed to the present third year who are all Chinese except for one Tibetan (she married an Austrian and has now left the country) and another one, possibly two, who are half-Chinese. Altogether there are 15 students falling into two categories:

(1) About ten seem to come from small villages and have received a poor quality basic education—even in Tibetan their skills are basic (and Chinese). They are not, to be blunt, at an educational standard required by a university—through no fault of their own. For them Lhasa is the big city and they are easily distracted from work, and lured into teahouses! This was the group known as 'the slow class—they were my responsibility and had six hours' alternate tuition at a lower level. They were a delight to teach but forever hopeless, I would say, at least in English. Many wanted to change their subject but were not allowed to. Other English teachers said they were stupid because they were Tibetan. One referred to the Tibetan practice of inter-marriage within families which then produced 'stupid children'. Two of this class, for example, would no doubt have been successful in other departments had they been allowed to choose: Qiong Da Cering (Chundak Tsering?), required to study English but desperate to study traditional Tibetan medicine; and Don Lou (Dhondup?), required to study English but desperate to study Tibetan language and literature. These were subjects offered by the university. We asked ourselves why the students were humiliated in this way and they were not allowed to change their subject. The answer seemed to be 'quota', a Chinese teacher (Music

Department) told us. Statistics—like the two foreign teachers who were not wanted but looked good, so ‘the village boys’ looked good on paper. These boys are expected to graduate next year and teach English themselves in a middle school—the idea terrifies them so much that one or two I got to know a little indicated the future they see before them makes their life now unendurable.

(2) The rest of the second year was somewhat better suited to their pre-determined fates. Many enjoyed English and made excellent progress in one year there. Age and maturity was a problem. Some of the boys were 16 or 17 last year; the girls were young too but more mature and able to apply themselves better. The boys were often a problem. Some age limit should have been observed (minimum 18 years?). These students were the better-educated ones—on the whole from Shigatse, Gyantse and Lhasa. Although Tibetan, they often spoke Chinese amongst themselves during the break. Their parents were frequently cadres (when we asked). Once we took them on a picnic and sang them English songs. When we asked for a Tibetan song no one could sing us one—they only knew Chinese songs.

To take the English Department as an example of the trend which may represent the entire university policy toward the Chinese/Tibetan ratio:

The 3rd year class, started in 1985 had 16 students in '86. Out of them two were Tibetans, two Chinese-Tibetans and 12 Chinese. Many of those Chinese were either born in Tibet or have come from Sichuan because Tibet University is easy to get into—Sichuan demands higher grades. All Chinese in this class have their roots in Sichuan province. Even those born in Lhasa are totally separate from Tibetans. One student tells me: ‘I never buy food from a Tibetan; they are not clean.’ They live in their own world of China

within Tibet, and long to return to Sichuan. They will have to work a minimum of eight years as teachers in Tibet before being allowed to transfer. None speak Tibetan though all have to study it.

By 1987 one Tibetan (Yang Tsog) wins scholarship to study in Oregon, USA, and departs in June. In January this year a second Tibetan student married an Austrian. A lot of trouble over this, but she has a passport to go to Austria.

The policy seems to be: 'This university is virtually Chinese—we need Tibetans to balance it out.' Quota system means, (a) students are forced to study English whether they like it or not, and (b) students are chosen regardless of aptitude.

The first year class, started last year, is roughly half and half. There are 22 students, half of whom are Tibetans. Chinese students sit on one side; Tibetans on the other.

This time the university seems to have got it right. These students are all very bright, keen to study English and motivated by the prospect that they will all become interpreters or translators at the end—teaching is not popular with anyone. Their basic education is good; their knowledge of English is better than many third year students'. Their knowledge of the world is extensive. They are a model class—hand-picked by someone, but we do not know by whom or how. They receive a lot of attention and study more hours of English than either the second or third-year students. Noticeably well disciplined and industrious, both second and third-year English majors dislike them because they say they receive attention. We never discovered much more about that.

The general standards within the English Department anyway are low. It is more a high school mentality that prevails. Chinese is the official language. A Tibetan English teacher will teach English to an all-Tibetan class—in Chinese medium.

The Teachers

It is difficult to say how many there are at any time in the English Department. At the moment to my knowledge there is one female Tibetan, one male Tibetan-Chinese, four male Chinese (including the present head) and two female Chinese.

The Dean of the Department (the language faculty which embraces English, Tibetan and Chinese) is a Chinese from Mongolia and is married to the university president, Tsewang Gyurme (he is in Germany for a year and returns to Peking for six months of 'political study'). Our Dean is said to be rather fiercely anti-foreigner.

Teachers do little work. The average is four hours a week. There is no enthusiasm and staff meetings are unheard of. There is an incentive scheme to bring Chinese to Tibet: very few hours, an 'altitude allowance' which doubles their income (it is not clear to us if Tibetan teachers get the same money), six months' home leave plus a paid flight home after something like two years in Tibet and, most importantly, after eight years of 'service' in Tibet, the Chinese are allowed to choose, in theory, where in China they would like to live and work. This is important because the work-unit system is such that a man may be posted thousands of miles from his wife and family. After eight years in Tibet you can be fairly sure of going to where your family is. So Tibet is a transit camp for those wanting something other than job satisfaction. People come and go, but everyone is waiting to go. The students know this and feel angry about it—they feel neglected and of course the lack of continuity has disastrous effects on their education.

Example: We arrive in February 1987. The head of the department is Ying Zezi from Shendong province in northern China. He has been at the university for 11 years and hates it. He is openly desperate to leave. He showed us an article he had written for a Chinese journal—'Tibet's History and People'. It is not only very patronising but full of historical errors and swamped with politics. In June

he got a doctor's certificate to say he has a weak heart and must return to China. He bought the medical certificate. From June to August there is a new head of the department, also from China. In September, he too, though only in his late thirties, gets a certificate from his doctor saying he has a weak heart and must return to China. He is succeeded by Li Hai Jun, also from China. He takes a few weeks 'altitude rest' which goes on until January, so he never starts teaching but does manage to start studying towards an examination he sat for in Chengdu in December. If he passes, he will win a scholarship to study in the USA.

There will be a new 'head' in March. No one stays. In general, the level of English of the teachers is very low. Many cannot actually speak English. A few of our more talented students can speak with greater fluency than any of the heads of department have been able to.

Our Work

Jane and I worked 15 hours a week each contact time plus a lot of hours building up resources, for example, making work-sheets for the video and language laboratory. We were more or less used to the work of four teachers. We were never able to do any teacher training because (a) there was no interest among the teachers and, (b) no one was ever there long enough to think about attending a course of work-shops. We had our own office so that our contact with our colleagues was minimal. We were not told anything about holidays, exams, administration. We worked more or less in a vacuum.

Resources and Potential

The potential, given the resources, is enormous. With the right people Tibet University could have one of the finest languages departments anywhere. It was made clear to us when we were appointed in London that this was a very special project. It was the 'pet' of the British Council in Peking—the showpiece of China, no less. We were

encouraged to build up resources. The policy was virtually 'ask and you'll get it'.

We arrived at an astonishing selection of textbooks given at the request of the Hadfields by the British Council. It was as good a selection as any top language school in Britain would have. We had tapes, tape-recorders, wall charts, videos and video machine, two language laboratories, a listening library, an excellent course-book to use with each class—in short, we had everything.

At present English is taught through Chinese, except in our classes of course. The huge collection of textbooks were ordered so that the Chinese/Tibetan English teachers could begin to discard the very old, heavily political Chinese-English textbooks they were using. Our posting was partly so that we could show the teachers how to use these new books. But, as I said, no one wanted to know; so they sit and gather dust while the sayings of Marx continue to be translated in class. The students are frustrated by this but, with only 30 hours a week between us, we could only use these beautiful books now and then. Our main work as oral/aural teachers was to follow our course-book.

Before I left we received about 200 beautiful hard-backed books, as a gift from someone in the States. These were added to our library, as were others we often received as gifts. There is no shortage of good will towards Tibet University. Under the right circumstances we could really have made it into a marvellous place to study—but it was like talking to a brick wall!

Despite all this, the students—both Chinese and Tibetans—were marvellous to work with. Leaving them, when I decided I should go, was really very difficult. I felt more than anything else that I was betraying the loyalty they had shown by working so hard when it was not English they wanted to study, nor even, in many cases, Tibet they wanted to be in. To be fair to all, it was not the fault of the Chinese students that they were there, and they had their own problems despite being a privileged group.

My Reasons for Leaving

I left Lhasa on 16 January [1988] without telling anyone other than a few close friends. I was afraid of being stopped had I told the university, and also I did not want to have to explain why at the time. My feeling was that I was longing to leave China but very sad to leave Tibet—since the two cannot be separated, there is no way to avoid having strong mixed feelings. I still feel that way although I do not regret leaving—I am sure I have made the right decision, even if it meant depriving my students of 50% of their native English teaching force and, more importantly perhaps, continuity.

The decision boiled down to considering the two extremes: What immediate benefit can I bring about? What are the wider implications for the Tibetan nation if I continue to work here? There are arguments for both. It took me months to sort out which side of the fence I was going to land on.

One day I went to the university foreign affairs office (Waiban). They told me: ‘The British government sent you here and the Chinese government received you. You represent two great countries holding hands in friendship.’ That decided me. I realized after all I had seen and heard I did not want to represent the friendship between my country and China. Moreover, I felt that as the first foreign aid agency to be invited to work in Tibet (I am not sure, but certainly one of the first), VSO was sanctioning the situation in Tibet. The Government could now say to the world: ‘Look, this reputable charity is working here. So it’s all O.K. If it weren’t O.K. they wouldn’t be here.’ Even Jimmy Carter came to visit the English students—that was 27 June 1987, before the October events—but even the sham that is Lhasa had stopped convincing me it was all O.K. I refused to meet Carter with my class. My colleague met him to maintain the peace. It was around that time that I began to see a little more clearly how things really were for Tibetans in Lhasa. I felt that if for no other reasons,

I should resign as a principle, in order to tell whoever might listen why I wanted to resign when I had a good job, good resources and some of the most pleasant students I have ever taught.

I do not want to be a symbol of Chinese-British co-operation, and in particular I do not want to be held up as a sign that all is well. Photographers would frequently come into the second year 'all-Tibetan' class and also newsmen and visiting foreign delegations—not to my slow second year class, not to my Chinese third year, but to the model class. Finally, my colleague has decided not to let it happen again. The University of Tibet, in my opinion, is no more an educational establishment than the apparent religious freedom that tourists think they are witnessing when they see Lhasa folks and pilgrims walking around the Barkhor. The whole thing is no more than a stage set for a film. Scratch a little beneath the surface, begin to look and listen beyond the undeniable magic of Lhasa itself, and no one can fail to realise people are not happy, all is not well—there is fear, repression and hatred, just simmering under all the semblance of everyday normal life.

Before going any further, I would like to say that when I stepped off the plane in Tibet, I was primarily concerned with the job ahead of me. Of course, no one comes to Tibet without feeling it is somewhere very special, but I knew if I was to do my job and stay two years, I could take no political sides. Indeed my organisation forbids any kind of political siding—a volunteer is apolitical and just does the job. My sympathies were with Tibet but I thought, 'One must move with the times. This is linguistically and culturally a separate nation, but politically it is China. I'm in China.' I would leave the room if anyone started speaking about Tibetan independence. I simply did not want to know. Many foreigners travelling in Tibet were violently pro-Tibetan and anti-Chinese. I want to make it clear that I never took sides. If anything, I always defended China

because the anti-Chinese parties were so one-sided in their arguments.

What I write here is not intended to be overtly political. I have never been interested in politics. Indeed I could hardly tell you what is meant by communism or socialism. I gradually and reluctantly came to the conclusion, however, that to remain a political immortal in Tibet was to be amoral, if not actually immoral. I remained as neutral as possible right up until the events of 27 September and 1 October [1987] and following [5 March 1988]. Thereafter, I was unable to remain sitting on my professional fence. To jump down from the fence to the pro-Tibetan field was, I realized, being unprofessional. What choice!

So I came to Lhasa with an open mind. For the first couple of months despite being disillusioned with my colleagues at the university, I was quite impressed by Lhasa. I tried to see the good being done by the Chinese presence. And I saw many good things: religious freedom; schools and Tibetan children going off to school every day; the university, industrious students working towards a career that will eventually go towards improving Tibet; hospitals, including the Men-Tsee-Kang for Tibetan medicine; flourishing shops; temples and monasteries; tourists, bringing in much-needed foreign currency; new housing going up in the suburbs.

It took at least until June, four months, for me to begin to see through the film set and beyond to the reality.

— religious freedom? What the tourists see is not that. I need say no more on this since much has been said by many others.

— the university? I have already said a lot about that.

— hospitals? Poor facilities, untrained doctors. (A Chinese student told me that she was afraid here in Lhasa because all the failed medical students are sent to work in Tibet.) The Men-Tsee-Kang? I became friends with the official translator there, a Tibetan girl

called Dawa. She told me they have no money; the doctors cannot study as they wish to and it is not easy to take on trainees because their standard of written Tibetan and their ability to read is not equal to the task of studying Tibetan medicine.

— shops? Mainly Chinese-owned.

— temples and monasteries? Being refurbished at government expense only to win tourist dollars. And monks become tourist guides forced to collect money for tickets.

— of tourism. Is it a blessing or a curse? Both, I suppose.

— new housing? What became of the old?

So for all the good I initially saw, cracks appeared through which I began to see how it all was. It was then I began talking to people, watching, and listening.

There were other reasons why I left:

— the university showed our students (only ours) an anti-foreign propaganda video.

— the university told our students not to talk to us.

— the foreign affairs bureau of the university spread the rumour that we had ‘a bad attitude’, whatever that means.

— a rumour was put round the university that I was anti-Chinese. Not true.

— our mail was opened and read, mail to us was held.

— the foreign affairs bureau was persistently rude to us and denied us basic rights written into our contract.

— our students were encouraged to criticise us during political study meetings.

— friends were interrogated and even put under house arrest for no just cause. (In one instance, a friend was arrested for having no passport. He was later to discover his passport was in the hands of the very people who had arrested him—he had sent it away to Peking for renewal and the Public Security Bureau had intercepted

it on its arrival back to Lhasa.

— friends who had committed no crimes were made to write self-criticisms on trumped-up charges and were given exit orders.

Life on Campus

The students work hard. The timetable is full and they are given lots of homework. Learning is mainly by rote and tests are frequent.

Thursday afternoon is devoted to ‘political study’ sessions in which current affairs are discussed. In addition, ‘politics’ is a compulsory subject which will be examined on. After 1 October all students had to attend special prolonged meetings to discuss, as one first year student put it, ‘the freedom of Tibet’. All staff and administrative departments are involved on Thursday afternoons. Students, after October anyway, if not before, were encouraged to criticise their foreign teachers—us!

The People’s Liberation Army seemed to have a role in the political education. When Qiong Da, the third-year student who married the Austrian, was interrogated about her fiancé (and what Jane and I knew about his being put under house arrest), it was soldiers who questioned her. They were often around the campus and occasionally came into classes to tell students the time and place for a meeting.

Each class had a monitor whose job it was to report on any untoward remarks made by teachers. In our experience, students were not interested in criticising us: officially we were, as foreigners, enemies, but in reality we had an unusually close and warm relationship with our classes. Students—Chinese and Tibetans—visited us despite restrictions. Somehow the university’s official policy of isolating us only made our students more determined to support us.

A typical day in the summer semester:

7.30 am. Loudspeakers go off with music and propaganda.

8 am. Students should get up and attend morning exercises in basketball court. If they do not, it is noted and they will be criticised.

8.30. Breakfast.

9.10-10.10. First class.

10.10-11. Second class.

Break: Exercise in court.

11.20-12.10. Third class.

12.20-1.10. Fourth class.

1.15-1.30. Lunch served. Students collect it and take it to their dormitory to eat.

3.10-4. Fifth class.

4.10-5. Sixth class.

5-6. Duties (cleaning dormitories, etc.).

6.10-6.30. Dinner served.

7-10. Study in classrooms or free time.

10 pm. Electricity is cut. Lights out and bed.

Food

I used to eat with students a couple of times a week because it was cheap. We were issued with meal tickets, but the food was very bad and often made me ill. Everyone complained. The Tibetan students complained that all the food was Chinese—pork was used in many dishes.

Living conditions

Eight students share a tiny room with four bunk beds. There is no privacy for washing, no place to study or be alone. Many complained that it drove them mad. Showers are available every two weeks. No heating at any time of the year. Power cuts are frequent. As for entertainment, there is a film show on Wednesday night, and games of football or basketball. That is all.

General observations

The People: I did not learn much Tibetan and so my Tibetan friends had to be people who spoke English. I cannot say

then that I ever spoke to ‘the ordinary people’. I had three Tibetan friends (*identities withheld—Editor*). These were my main links. The rest of my conclusions were drawn from my own observations. My impression was that no one was content with the way things were. No one is free, not even those who are party members. The system seems to depend on fear. Every day one would hear some horror story—people arrested, imprisoned, or stories about the past. As a foreigner I was confided in quickly: there seems to be an agreement of trust between Tibetans and foreigners. I once bought a jumper from an old lady in the Barkhor. With no words she acted out for me the scene of Chinese soldiers coming at night and taking someone from her house at gunpoint. This was during the time that armed soldiers were marching round the Barkhor—mid-October. This was typical of what would happen. Sitting in front of the Jokhang Temple pilgrims would sometimes approach and communicate their discontent with Chinese rule, and their overwhelming desire that their real leader should be back with them.

People were much more open after the events of October, but even before then there was plenty of open opposition. I tried to avoid the issue of the Chinese presence in Tibet, as I have said, but it was raised again and again. Often I would go to a Chinese restaurant and people would come in shouting against the Chinese. It followed us everywhere and almost every day. In monasteries, temples, walking round the streets, people communicated the same message—we are not happy. There were days I stayed home and did not go out. I did not want to hear any more because it became depressing. Foreigners are one link with the outside world—access to the media. No wonder the Chinese authorities maintain a deep suspicion of us.

Social Conditions: I can only be very general. There are lots of beggars, all Tibetans, and these are not pilgrims coming to Lhasa who may ask for assistance on their journey. They are disabled people, young children, and often old women,

and young women with babies. Also, while many Tibetans seem to live on the streets, I noticed a lot of empty houses in the Barkhor area—I am not sure why.

It is often said that the tourist boom brings prosperity to Tibet. But not to many Tibetans. In front of the main holy places you find Chinese people selling trinkets and *khatas* [ceremonial scarves]. Most of the shops and virtually all restaurants are Chinese-owned and run. Lhasa is turning into a playground for the enterprising Chinese who know how to get money out of foreign tourists.

As regards work, it is true to say that all menial tasks are performed by Tibetans—they are undoubtedly second-class citizens in their own country. You will never find a Chinese doing the following jobs: toilet cleaning, street sweeping, gate keeper, road mending, electrician, plumber or carpenter, to name a few I am sure about.

Where you will find Chinese doing low-prestige jobs is in the world of private enterprise, for example, mending bicycles by the roadside, sewing, selling goods. These are enterprising individuals who have chosen to move to Tibet to catch the tourist bonanza which has raised prices far above mainland China.

Health Care: Tibetan people favour their own doctors and medicine over that offered by the ‘modern’ Chinese hospitals. The Men-Tsee-Kang is inundated with patients; yet I am told there is even now no modern sanitation.

The Chinese-run hospitals are rather frightening. As I have mentioned, the quality of medical care is in question, so that Chinese people would rather fly home than be admitted in Lhasa. I spent a few days visiting a student (Chinese) admitted to the hospital along the Banak Shol Road. Conditions were appalling. She had no pillows in the hospital. The sheets were dirty and an unemptied bed-pan lay under the bed. Although very ill, she was fully clothed. I never saw a nurse in the three days I visited. Visitors wandered in at any time in any numbers. The

doctor attending her smoked. There was no curtain for privacy when she used the bed-pan—neither from other patients and their relatives, nor from the outside world through the window. She was afraid to eat the food provided or drink the water, and lived on biscuits and sweets brought by friends. I do not know how this situation compares with care in the mainland Chinese hospitals.

Public Facilities: There are a few parks; a few cinemas which show Chinese films. To my knowledge there is no public library or public bathing place. (There is one bathhouse and it is reputed to be a public health hazard.) At night there is nothing to do—no opportunities for further education; the university offers no adult education evening classes.

How Chinese is Lhasa? As I have said, our Tibetan students often spoke Chinese rather than Tibetan. I would often ask them, ‘how do you say so-and-so in Tibetan?’ and they would not know, but they would know in Chinese. They told me their Tibetan writing and grammar was bad. Pop music, films, magazines and novels my students liked to read were in Chinese too.

I am told that many of the signs above the shops or buildings which are both in Chinese and Tibetan are merely the Chinese word transcribed into the Tibetan scripts. Billboards displaying health care advice are all in Chinese with pictures to aid comprehension. I was also told Chinese words are being incorporated into Tibetan.

Enterprise: Most of the large hotels, for example, Lhasa Hotel, Sunlight Hotel, are managed by Chinese even though they may give 50-50 figures for employment. It may be so in terms of Tibetan cleaners and Chinese reception staff. The Tibetan-run hotels largely cater to back-packers who live on a modest budget. Thus the big money is channelled towards Chinese-dominated operations. If the

policy of allowing only groups into Tibet is maintained, prohibiting the individual traveller (generally the kind who will stay in the cheaper Tibetan-run hotels), the large Chinese establishments will prosper while smaller Tibetan places will go bankrupt.

It is also true to say that where a new opportunity for enterprise arises, you will probably find Chinese people getting there first. For example, the new rickshaw service in town; the new fad, copied from Uighurs, of selling kebabs. The main meat and vegetable/fruit market, under the Potala, is Chinese, and the traditionally Tibetan market near the Barkhor is also full of Chinese vendors.

I leave the last word with my Chinese students who are second-generation Chinese in Tibet: 'We hate it here but we are not allowed to leave. We must study here and work in the schools for at least eight years.' China seems determined to keep as many Chinese in Tibet as possible. The incentive scheme and the lure of money are not the only means by which they are carrying out this policy.

THE LHASA RIOT AND AFTER: GENERAL
IMPRESSION OF TWO WESTERN TOURISTS

by Robert Barnett and Nicholas Meysztowicz
published in *Tibetan Review*, January 1988

These remarks are notes rather than comprehensive essays, and our conclusions in this instance are speculative rather than definitive. In many ways this itself, this necessary subjectivity, is revealing, because it seems that the Tibetan situation has two levels, one visible and one that can be sensed but not seen. For whilst on the one hand the city was alive with the bustle of Tibetan street life, vivacious and attractive as it has always been, underneath the surface there were pains and tensions that we came to know not so much by observation as by inference. Still, these things must be told, because they may be more important than hard facts, especially in China today, where the urgent need to show a liberal face after the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution has produced an industry of grand words and gestures that may possibly be more cosmetic than effective, however well-intentioned. And just as we had to learn that no statement by the Chinese should be taken at face value, so we came to realise the normal cheer and good humour of Tibetans might well conceal considerable anxiety. It was always necessary to interpret. So the reader will, we trust, forgive us such acts of inference in the following account.

Feelings amongst Tibetans: elation, restraint, fear and unity

There was no doubt that, initially, many Tibetans were elated by the demonstration on 1 October. It was not by global standards a massive show of strength, nor was its tally of victims long compared to other conflicts in the world. But in Chinese politics, where the smallest gesture can speak volumes, for two or three thousand pacifist Tibetans to rout a police troop and burn its office to the ground was no small remark. It was, after years of strict

control, an epoch-making event, and Tibetans were not slow to recognise it. 'Things have changed', one woman said to us. 'In 1959 it was the Khampas who were brave. Now it is us, the Lhasa people. We will fight.' She was not alone. In a quiet corner of a teahouse a shy, bespectacled student told us what he felt about the riot, 'It was wonderful. I never realised what we could do. I did not know we could fight the Chinese. I wish to do it again.'

Even during the riot itself this same sense of high elation could be felt, and even seen. For, well before the policemen opened fire and tears were wept for grief, there were to be seen throughout the crowd people crying openly. It was an extraordinary sight, for at that time these tears could only have sprung from a sense of deep exhilaration felt as long pent-up feelings were finally released: it is hard to think of any other way to explain them. And, indeed, the violence of that occasion had those special features that made it clearly the product of a collective working intellect, and never the wanton bloodlust of those who merely relish destruction. For it was always purposive, and its targets were confined to three: the police station where the monks were held, the police themselves, and, thirdly, vehicles.

Except for half a dozen windows in Renmin Lu, as a child's body was carried by the mourners to be laid before the Government offices—he was 8 or so, and had just died, quite quickly, from a bullet in the back—nothing else that we know of was damaged. And this was by a crowd who for some two hours had complete freedom to do so as they would.

But what was more significant by far than the restraint of the attacks on property, was the total absence of aggression towards the Chinese civilians, neither on that day nor on any other. We never saw a sign of animosity, jibe or dislike towards a civilian nor, indeed, to any individual police going about his duties in the town, and they themselves, once the riot was done, seemed to show no fear

of mingling unconcernedly in quite the normal way. In fact even during the riot itself I saw one policeman bicycle slowly through the back streets of the Tibetan quarter within earshot of the crowd, and no-one took any notice: it was not a riot of revenge or indiscriminating bitterness. It showed in many ways a quite extraordinary refinement of emotion, that such violent hatred of the Chinese Government could be felt without that violence overspilling into other targets of revenge. Even during the looting of the police station, after the police withdrew from the area that afternoon, there was restraint. It went on all day of the 2nd, and on into the 3rd, but it never had the feel of violence to it. It was slow and methodical rather than rushed and rapacious, the quiet diggers looking more like archaeologists as they sifted painstakingly through the embers for their police files or for souvenirs. These souvenirs—useless objects like singed cassettes and (in their hundreds) empty cartridges—were in themselves reminders that to Tibetans this occasion was redolent with symbolism. It seemed that to them the victory of that day was based not on the number of victims or the role call of participants, but on the symbolic achievement of daring to protest.

This elation was always present in the days that followed, at least as quiet pride in their collective enterprise, and at no point we see it yield to either wild optimism or hopeless despair. Tibetans had waited some thirty years for the Dalai Lama to return, and though people asked us every day when he would come, they showed no signs of impetuosity now: patience and quiet certainty seemed always to dominate their emotions. There were of course in those first few days deeds of open defiance, such as the monk at Sera who denied Chinese-Tibetan unity to the face of the officials, and the demonstration of young Drepung monks who set out on the 6th for the Government offices to protest their fellow-monks' imprisonment, but these were not wild, foolhardy deeds of people carried away by un-accustomed excitement: it is certain they

expected to be penalised or beaten for their deeds, as indeed they were. So the elation, like the violence, was in a sense measured or purposive, and neither cowed by nor oblivious to the threat of government repercussions. In due course these repercussions became the shootings, the arrests, the troop convoys, the re-education sessions, the lookouts with binoculars, the foot patrols with riot shields and stun guns. The state wheeled out unhurriedly the hardware of intimidation, and the Tibetans had to maintain somehow their feelings of elation within an atmosphere designed to arouse fear.

We saw the hardware too, of course, as truckloads of soldiers standing at attention and with bayonets fixed, and motorcycles with men squinting down machine-gun barrels, drove slowly past our hotels. And at night we could hear isolated gunshots as, we assumed, police made their nightly arrests. They harassed us a bit as well: police checks of passports in the middle of the night, plainclothes men following us in the street, restrictions on our visas, and the like. But of course the fear for the Tibetans was of a different order, and the real measure of it became apparent to us again not obviously, but through another thing: their extreme reluctance to be seen talking to us.

It should not have surprised us, but it did: we thought that, as in China proper, taboos on conversing with foreigners had gone out with the Cultural Revolution. And anyway one of the most striking features of Tibet is the unfettered eagerness of people there to talk to foreigners, at every opportunity. This was, we came to realise, a freedom that was not complete: people did not dare to be seen speaking aloud to us of what was really happening. Often they came to ask for medicine or give us news, once it was known that we were interested, but always amidst elaborate precautions.

They would whisper things as they passed in the crowd, or gesture us to follow them to some quiet place, or pretend to sell us innumerable things in shops. It led us

into a world of subterfuge and fear that we had not imagined could co-exist with the noisy extroversion of the people we saw around. But the fear of our informants was both visible and crippling—in one case literally so for a woman who came to us doubled up with pain brought on, our doctor said, by pure anxiety—and it had dire consequences, because many times they failed to make rendezvous through fear of discovery. And this almost always meant that they could not collect the medicines that had been prepared for their wounded friends or relatives. In one case, where a youth had led us to his house to treat a wounded man, the boy's father insisted a doctor was not necessary or that the patient was in another town. It was clear that he was terrified that the patient would, through us, be discovered—and indeed we know that we were seen by neighbours as we left the house, just as later we were to discover we had been photographed visiting another patient. But it was equally clear from the young boy's account that this patient was, as yet, untreated and in a short time would die. It was a terrible dilemma for them, the real seriousness of which became even clearer when we heard firstly that people would not go to hospitals for fear of being arrested, and, secondly, that people were prepared to kill themselves rather than go to jail. And later we found out ourselves that this fear of informants and spies was amply justified, when we discovered our most trusted confidant was himself working for the police. The fear of being watched was not an idle fancy amongst Tibetans, for the city was alive with informants. It is the basis of the Chinese police system, and it is that basis that allows the police to show what appears to Westerners to be a relatively relaxed approach. Underneath the surface, of course, it is anything but relaxed.

Nevertheless, the number of collaborators amongst the Tibetans themselves does not seem to indicate a high level of support for the Chinese, if, indeed, it indicates any at all. For the ones we knew (and there were several) were of

the craven, abject variety. They were in fact victims of the state of fear that they helped to propagate, and in some cases we actually knew the specific pressures by which the police obliged them to inform on us and others: one had just been told his brother was in prison, another had only recently been released. What we never encountered, however, were Tibetans who explicitly declared support or approval of the Chinese regime. We were of course told of the words of the Panchen Lama and one or two other high lamas or officials who have voiced public support for the Chinese, but these have almost always been described to us as also being under extreme pressure. Otherwise, support for the Dalai Lama seemed almost universal—but it was not always voluble. Several Tibetans whose opinion of the Chinese we had sought ground the clenched fist of one hand onto the flat palm of the other to indicate how they felt treated. But apart from that they said little. For obvious reasons people did not speak much about these things, but always seemed to feel strongly about them. Often they just laughed things off, not seeking confrontation, though we heard that during a re-education session at the Veterinary Hospital five youths, emboldened by drink, physically attacked the official in charge. They were arrested the following day, but this incident does not seem typical. There was, however, a common attitude to collaborators: they were ostracised. We know that in at least two of the major monasteries monks had pinned letters on the doors of those who had, they felt, collaborated with the Chinese (one had told the police of a Western visitor talking at length with a monk) in which they accused them of being ‘Tibetan only in looks’. And we heard of one India-born Tibetan who read the English language text of Proclamation no. 3 on television—he was the only English speaker they could find to do it, because all the other guides and translators in Lhasa had suddenly discovered urgent jobs or sick relatives—and who was later to find that he

could not walk round the Barkhor for fear of verbal invective and abuse.

The treatment of collaborators was only one indication of the enormous strength of feeling amongst Tibetans concerning the Chinese. We often saw people of both sexes break into tears if we started to discuss these things, particularly if we mentioned that we hoped ourselves to go to see the Dalai Lama. In one case a monk broke into tears in front of us at the thought of what would happen to their monastery once the incumbent abbot retired, because, it seemed, the effort to prevent the Chinese nominee from assuming the position had been so difficult on previous occasions. And though we heard of several people who criticised the tactics of dissent, the risking of lives in the demonstration, the jeopardising of the recent liberalisations and so forth, they were not disagreeing with the basic resentment towards the Chinese presence. Our overall impression was that, notwithstanding differences of generation, the prevailing sense of fear, and the thirty years of waiting, there exists amongst Tibetans an extraordinary unity of emotion in this respect.

The Question of Cultural Repression

In order to describe the conditions under which Tibetans live it seems necessary in the first place to attempt some understanding of the Chinese mind. We say this because the liberalisations of recent years, which are, as we have said before, quite evident, do not seem to tell the whole story. There is an element of control at work that one can always sense but never quite locate, and that seems to us to override the appearance of freedom. Of course we knew that there were limitations on the new concessions, such as the number of monks allowed or monasteries rebuilt, but it did not seem to be these that so soured the general atmosphere. It seemed to be the character of the giver rather than the value of the gifts that dominated that atmosphere:

to put in its simplest, one just could not trust the Chinese not to take the presents back again. It is unfortunate, perhaps, to question someone's motives, but this sense was so pervasive it would be quite wrong not to mention it. Furthermore, an acquaintance with what appear to be patterns of mind particular to the Chinese, or at least Chinese officialdom, goes some way towards elucidating—some would say, justifying—this sense of distrust towards them.

As illustrations of Chinese responses to situations it might be useful first to recount two instances of what were clearly Tibetan perceptions of Chinese psychology and how to manipulate it, because such instances show, amongst other things, that the Tibetans themselves feel the Chinese sensibility is different from theirs and, furthermore, that it is predictable.

The first of these incidents took place on a bus in Gansu, in what was formerly known as the Tibetan province of Amdo. An old Tibetan woman got back on the bus after a meal stop to find a young Chinese boy, in his twenties, had taken her seat. So she spoke to him, but he did not seem to hear, so she tapped him on the shoulder, but he did not seem to notice. The speaking and the tapping got more and more assertive, other people spoke and shoved, and still the boy stared out the window, sometimes pushing people off but refusing to look or speak to them. Eventually the old woman considered the situation for a while and then decided on a ploy: she simply stroked the back of his jacket with her hand, two or three times, as if wiping something off. The effect was instant: the boy, livid with anger, convinced her hands were dirty, jumped up and gave her back her seat, muttering furiously and desperately looking for blemishes on his jacket. It was an extraordinary episode, because it showed that the Chinese boy assumed the Tibetan to be filthy, and that the woman knew this in advance. What was really strange, though, was that his jacket was already tattered, torn and stained.

In effect, it seemed his objections were neurotic: they must have been based on a racist premise about dirty Tibetans, and it must have been widely held for her to have predicted it.

The second incident shows not awareness of racism but awareness of a characteristic of Chinese police, in this case their tendency to overreact. It also shows some rather witty planning by Tibetans. It took place in front of the Jokhang, some days after the riot, and it concerned the pasting up of posters exhorting Tibetans to fight on, and telling them how many had been killed on the 1st. Several of these had appeared on walls, and all had been ripped down with haste by local officers. So what the poster writers did in this case was to place a poster very prominently on the front wall of the Jokhang, and, what's more, in Chinese. As soon as the police saw it there was a flurry of activity: policemen running everywhere, shouting to this paper on a wall, shoving people out of eyeshot of it, and generally getting upset. Even after they had taken the poster down they hung around the patch of wall, looking agitated, pushing inquiring Westerners away—quite violently—and behaving as though they thought it might suddenly recreate itself on that same patch of wall. It was strange that they got agitated, because they were, after all, plainclothes men, and it rather blew their cover, but, more than that it was strange they stuck so firmly to this patch of wall, watching every inch of it and everyone who watched it, because, only ten or at most twelve yards away, was another poster. This poster was not on the same wall, but on a brick enclosure round a shrine that faces the same bit of wall, and the poster was round the corner and so just out of sight. But nevertheless it was incredible that they could not see it, not only because they were so close, but because for at least two hours there was a crowd of twenty or so Tibetans at any one time laboriously reading the poster, which this time was in Tibetan, and, what's more, reading it aloud. And the policemen never noticed.

The whole scam worked so smoothly that it was hard not to believe it was not planned with some foreknowledge of how the policemen would react. And it is fair to say that Chinese authorities hold the written statement in extreme awe and with absolute respect (a legacy, no doubt, of imperial decrees) and so could be relied upon to be extremely upset by written treason. In fact there is some evidence that written statements against the state, or more divergences from authorised propaganda, are at least as serious as treasonable deeds, if not more so. To the Chinese mind state words and pronouncements are inviolable, and so their extreme response to the Tibetans' appropriation of the right to pronounce should not perhaps have surprised us. Nevertheless their reaction was remarkable both for its frenzy and its inflexibility, the failure to see anything except what is in front of them. The incident gave a clue to another characteristic of the Chinese which must have made the Tibetans less confident of the security of the liberalisations they had received—the extreme reaction of the police to things others would consider small, and once engaged, the blindness of that position. We were to find ourselves that the police had no notion whatsoever of defence or discussion of charges; the very mention of such a thing in one case we were involved in (concerning another Westerner) drove them to fury and abuse.

Another aspect of the Chinese mind that we had noticed in our troubles and that helped explain the level of tension in Tibet was the simple fact that the Chinese are extraordinarily reluctant to admit mistakes or faults. To do so involves much loss of face, and loss of face must always be avoided. In the case of Tibet so many errors, the atrocities of the previous decades, have been admitted and corrected, with considerable loss of face, that to complain of more appears, it seems, deeply offensive and ungrateful to them. So there is no potential in Tibet for discussion or criticism with the Chinese, and in any case it is quite foreign for a Chinese person to concede anything in an

argument: they stick to their position at all costs. It is hard to imagine that a psychological factor like this can poison the atmosphere of a city, but, although unseen, it heightens the precariousness of the present reforms.

Evidence that these suspicions may have solid foundations in some cases can be found by looking at Chinese attitudes to Tibetans outside what is now called Tibet, the TAR. There, where Chinese settlers now outnumber the Tibetans, racism and menace are more clearly visible. Chinese on official tours can be seen daily in Buddhist temples rocking with derision at the sight of monks or images or devotees. And in Sorge, in Sichuan, a local lay official marched for hours up and down the choir stalls of the temple throughout a major ceremony, fiddling with relics and vestments and the like to broadcast his disdain. In Lhasa no one is as crude as that, but one senses similar attitudes within officialdom. One discerns it there not by what is evident but by what remains hidden, and in this context it is worth repeating what is obvious, that no one who desires social status or to hold office in Tibet can show religious feelings, if they have them, in the open. Such a person is obliged to speak perfect Chinese, and not to show any sign of Buddhist inclination. It is mainly those without status ambition who one sees practising devotions in public. Similarly, it was only in retrospect that we realised that we had never seen or heard of a lama giving teachings. We had seen many lamas around the Barkhor with little crowds about them, but all of these had confined their activities to recitations and oracle consultations. It is hard not to come to the conclusion that the Chinese ban on preaching by the lamas is part of a process designed to shift Buddhism into the sidelines, towards meaningless superstition. But we were constantly meeting Tibetans who appeared in dress, language, and manner thoroughly sinicised, and who held positions which required that, who had in private Buddhist shrines and hopes: if no one was looking they too would ask for or accept pictures of the

Dalai Lama. Their cultural affiliations persisted but were pushed perforce out of sight.

Judging by the happiness on the face of some Tibetan bureaucrats when they realised that they could speak to us in their own language instead of in Chinese, the situation with language must be much the same. It must be something of an ordeal for them, having to speak Chinese, for it has no closer links to their language than it does to ours, and furthermore the teaching of it is heavy-handed, to say the least, intermingled as it is with the forcing of party dogma and belief. 'All the peoples of China are a tree', goes a song in the very first lesson of a Chinese language textbook specifically for Tibetan primary schools, 'and the roots of the tree are in Tiananmen Square, and all the peoples love Tiananmen Square.'

Tiananmen Square is, of course, in Peking, some three thousand kilometres away, and it is not without significance that it is to Peking that hundreds of Tibetan children are sent for their schooling. Even while we were in Lhasa the Chinese announced that more money was to be spent on education for Tibetans; it added that this would be spent by sending a further 900 children to mainland cities to be schooled. We knew one girl who had spent eight years being educated in Peking: although her work required it (she was a middle school teacher) she hated to speak Chinese. Others that we met had, it seemed, come back more pro-Tibetan than when they left because of the racism they had experienced amongst the mainland Chinese, but it is hard to imagine that their cultural heritage had not been damaged by spending so many childhood years alone in a foreign land. It is, presumably, such features of the Chinese system that lead people to speak of cultural genocide. It is not for us to say whether or not these statements are correct, for what we saw, the visible effects of liberalisation, do not justify it. But even knowing as little as we do of the workings of the Chinese mind it is hard not to see these concessions as rendered

insubstantial by their precariousness. For the erratic volatility of the Chinese official mind, the rigid understanding of the written word, their incapacity to discuss their refusal to concede, their implicit disdain for Tibetans as a race—all these underscore, indeed destroy, the value of the new reforms. It is maybe not surprising, then, that the atmosphere of Lhasa reeks of cultural repression. It would not be unfair to say that our experience of Tibet, notwithstanding the evident reforms of recent years, was the experience of a culture being slowly choked, belittled, and marginalized. It was not a pleasant experience, nor is it, even in terms of China's own express beliefs, desirable. It is certainly not, it would seem to us, the will of the people.

The Effects of Propaganda

On the roof of the highest building on the Barkhor Square, the same roof from where soldiers with binoculars watched all day the pilgrims crowding round the Jokhang, there were four loudspeakers of enormous proportions. For several days after the riot on the First these filled the square with the sound of Chinese martial music, pop songs and some times Tibetan songs as well. Interspersed were long announcements about, we were told, the evils of splittists and the Dalai Clique, as well as our own Proclamation No. 3 telling us in English what we could and could not do. The beating of drums and the blowing of thighbone trumpets by the travelling Ngapas (tantrik monks) doing puja in front of the Jokhang were drowned out by the waves of noise coming from these speakers. And although these broadcasts were in later weeks to diminish in quantity if not in volume—though speaker vans continued to ply the back streets with similar announcements—they were effective enough reminders at the time that the authorities could overwhelm the local culture, one might almost say, at the touch of a button. It seemed even in this instance that the role of propaganda in Tibet was not so much to inform—the distortion of the speakers made all they said

inaudible in any case—as to stifle the environment and saturate the atmosphere with things and sounds official and Chinese.

Of course, propagandists had more to do than just inform. It was our first and most uncompromising encounter with their work that showed us of their need to misinform deliberately. This was their statement that no police had opened fire on the 1st, a statement that we, and many others, knew to be a lie. To hear such bold untruth on the radio and to read it in their newspapers was quite unsettling, for, used though we were to journalistic distortions in our own countries, in China the consequences were far more serious simply because, except for those with short-wave radios, there was no other source of news. We met Chinese people living not two hundred yards away from the Barkhor who repeated this statement to us as a fact: another indication perhaps that even where they have the choice the Chinese are not given to disputing their own pronouncements. Official statements are regarded, at least in public, as being by their very nature true and incontrovertible, and so it was to us even more disturbing that they should also be, in many cases that we came to know, so extraordinarily imaginative in their use of facts.

There was also a machinery of controls and regulations on the flow of information to the outside world as well as from it that we came to know quite well—phone taps, censors, searches, the expulsion of journalists and the new law on the 3rd forbidding us to even watch, still less to photograph, disturbances. We could, however, circumvent the majority of these with a few codes and a bit of school-boy cunning, and it was in fact a challenge we enjoyed. But it was evidently no laughing matter for Tibetans, and not just because the penalties they faced if caught were infinitely more severe. The blackout on communications meant that they were isolated, official statements were beyond contention, and that anything they did by way of

dissent was as likely to be ignored by the Chinese press as it was to be distorted.

The implications of this isolation can hardly be exaggerated. For without access to the media any actions of dissent would be virtually pointless. This was evident enough during the riot itself, for, strangely to western ears, there was no shouting or sloganeering by the rioters, or not to any great extent. But looking back on it, it is clear they had in fact a war cry of their own, a constant refrain that came at us from every quarter, not fierce words but whispered imprecations to Westerners to take photos, quickly, and to get them out, to show them to the Dalai Lama and the world. Throughout the day people were calling us to one spot or another, to act as witnesses or to take photographs of their actions and of the victims of the Chinese response; then they would take the film for us and hide them in case the police should search us or our rooms in the hotels. For days afterwards monks, children and old men were coming up to Westerners in the Barkhor and returning the little plastic cylinders, begging us to smuggle them abroad.

It was always clear that these people were not asking us to record their actions and publish our photographs of them in order that they might bask in fame and glory. But it was some time before we realised that, in a country where control on the flow of information is so tight, and the deluge of propaganda so unremitting, if they could not tell the outside world of what they had done their actions would have been practically worthless. We were almost certain that if Westerners, or someone, had not succeeded in leaking the news of the demonstrations to the world press, the Chinese would never have announced that they had happened. And this would have meant, of course, that almost all the other Tibetans, not to mention the mass of the Chinese, would not have known. It would have been much as it was described at the time to tourists at the Lhasa

Hotel on the 1st: 'Due to traffic problems in the city the shuttle bus will not run today.' Even with the massive coverage in the Western press the Chinese were still insisting that the demonstrations were small events staged by former prisoners with guns, and stopped spontaneously by crowds of disapproving Tibetans. We were sure that they had only admitted the demonstration on 27 September because an Englishman who saw it sent a code telex informing Reuters in Peking; within an hour telex facilities for Westerners were closed or placed under scrutiny. For Tibetans, it was clear, their acts of dissent only achieved political significance if they were made common knowledge; it was equally clear that they were dependent on Westerners to make this possible. Without observers and access to the media their actions would not, in effect, have even happened, and the ones who died would have died, it would be said, in vain. Although our interest was only to maintain the flow of factual information to the outside world, irrespective of whether this information shed a favourable light on the Tibetans or on the Chinese (and we maintained this attempt at objectivity with some rigidity, reporting a Chinese death we knew of as well as Tibetan casualties), we had in fact become caught up in the very centre of the conflict. The Chinese obsession with the written word and with controlling it created a propaganda war—in fact the whole disturbance was, according to some accounts, a battle against state propaganda, because one of its main causes was the intense campaign of criticism and abuse waged against the Dalai Lama by the Chinese press in the last weeks of September. This the Tibetans heard from all sides at this time, and of course without the option of redress, and this was, we were told, one of the main reasons they protested on 27 September. It is one of the main indicators of Tibetan success in their campaign, and probably an indicator of the pragmatism of the Peking authorities, that towards the end of October the government in Lhasa stopped requiring express condemnations of

the Dalai Lama from arrested Tibetans. On the 26th or thereabouts thirteen people arrested on the first demonstration were released after giving public statements of self-criticism. They had, some of them told us, agreed to give formal statements praising China as the motherland, but, despite threats that they would otherwise be beaten, had all refused to condemn His Holiness. Nevertheless they had been released.

So it seems that the Tibetans may at least have gained some advantage in the propaganda war. But unfortunately, they depend almost completely on foreigners for access to the outside world and now that the Chinese are gradually, it seems, ensuring that all these (except for group tours) leave, their power to embarrass the central government becomes negligible once again. Without an outside eye to contest the matter, Tibetans would become again, as far as we would know, no more than those charming peasants in colourful dress one sees smiling from the pages of endless Chinese tourist guides to the quaint and backward regions where their 'ethnic minorities' live. There are people who would say that this paternalistic trivialisation of a people is itself a form of cultural genocide. Whether or not this is true, it serves to remind us how important propaganda is in this conflict, because, unfortunately, it seems that the Chinese are only motivated, at least in matters of minority reform, by the fear of losing face. And they can only lose face, it seems, if foreigners are there to see it, and report it. There are good reasons for suspecting that the Chinese reforms in Tibet are liable at any time to be withdrawn, and good reasons too for thinking that, like the Tibetans waiting with endless patience for the Dalai Lama to return, the Chinese may be waiting for foreigners to leave before responding in full measure to the demonstrations of the last month. This is not a theory: it was a feeling Tibetans expressed to us. An American heard that all individual foreigners had been asked to leave and went to the receptionist of his hotel. 'If we go,' he asked her, 'won't it

be bad for business? What will happen to the hotel?’ ‘The hotel doesn’t matter’, he told us she had replied, ‘If you go they will kill us.’ Her words express much better than ours the fear, the insecurity, and the desperate need to contest propaganda, that dominate the current atmosphere in the Tibetan capital.

AN INFORMAL FACT-FINDING VISIT TO TIBET

by Lord Ennals & Fredrick Hyde-Chambers
published in *Tibetan Review*, July 1988

Introduction

We are very grateful to the Government of the People's Republic of China for enabling us to visit Lhasa, Chengdu and Peking on a two-week fact-finding visit from 29 March to 9 April to study the present very disturbing situation in Tibet. We are also grateful for the time the authorities gave to our exchange of views. We were conscious that we were foreigners discussing particularly sensitive issues and appreciated that we were able to discuss with the Chinese authorities our assessment of the situation frankly and, we hope, constructively.

The opportunity of being received at a high level in Peking and Lhasa, of exchanging views with the representatives of the Government of China (including the Panchen Lama), of meeting monks, lay people in Lhasa and exchanging views with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala and in London was unique at a time when visitors and journalists are severely restricted in visiting Tibet.

In view of what we believe to be the gravity of the situation we felt a heavy responsibility to put forward proposals for consideration by the Chinese authorities to avert a worsening crisis and bring about a long-term solution based on the principles of the United Nations and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The time is now ripe for serious discussion about the present and the future. There is no need to be pessimistic about the prospect of genuine negotiations. For their part China has now become a constructive force for good, is playing a positive role in the world and has shown a high degree of statesmanship in its handling of the future of Hong Kong.

As for the Tibetan people, our visit there, based on a great deal of evidence from those in Tibet and elsewhere, confirms the impression that there is a very wide measure of support for the Dalai Lama and his Five-Point Peace Plan. To this should be added the indisputable fact that the Dalai Lama is a man of peace.

The suggestions discussed with the Chinese authorities are at the conclusion of this preliminary report.

The denial of human rights in Tibet must be dealt with not by continuing repression and force, but by statesmanship and in a genuine wish for peace. Urgent action is needed to avert a situation that would bring further damage to China's reputation and to the Tibetan people.

Objectives

Our informal fact-finding visit to Tibet was encouraged by both the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Chinese authorities. The objective was to talk with as many people as possible, Tibetan and Chinese, officials and ordinary people and to comment on our impressions in Peking and to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and, where appropriate, to make constructive suggestions.

Methodology

Because our time in Tibet and China was limited, considerable thought and effort was given to preparing for the visit and agreeing on the programme. This involved briefings and discussions with numerous individuals with long experience and expertise of China and Tibet, with the Chinese authorities, Tibetan officials of the Dalai Lama's administration and the British Foreign Office.

Each member of the group brought a particular expertise to the visit.

The Rt. Hon Lord Ennals is a former Labour Secretary of State for Health and Social Services (during his period of office he and Lady Ennals paid an official visit to China) and Foreign Minister with a long record of friendship for

China and support for its entrance into the UN. He also has a long association with the Tibetans through his refugee work, particularly with the Ockenden Venture, of which he has latterly been Chairman, and has the highest regard for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He is President of the UK Gandhi Foundation.

Fredrick Hyde-Chambers (Director of the Industry and Parliament Trust) has been associated with the Tibetans since 1951, working full-time for the Tibet Relief Fund for several years when it was first founded, is a member of its Council and Trustee of a number of Tibetan refugee projects. He was Consultant on the BBC Everyman film *The Lama King*, author of two books of Tibetan folk tales and the novel *Lama*. In April he was awarded one of the two annual Airey Neave Scholarships for a study of the Tibetan situation.

Lady Ennals is an educationalist who has extensive experience of refugee situations and of life in the third world. She worked as a nurse in Vietnam during the height of the war. During Lord Ennals' official visit to China in 1978 her programme concentrated on education.

Yeshe Tsultrim is warden of the Tibetan Cultural Center of the Ockenden Venture in Cambridge. He was born on the old border of Tibet and China and spent some time in Lhasa in the Gyuto monastery prior to the 1959 Tibetan uprising. After arriving in India as a refugee he came to the UK in the late sixties and has for most of the time worked with the Ockenden Venture helping to look after refugees of other nationalities, including Vietnamese. He authored the *Mouse King* with Hyde-Chambers.

Sources of Information

In Tibet, government sources of information were: officials of the Religious Affairs and National Minorities Commission, the Foreign Affairs Commission, the Chinese Communist Party, the Lhasa University, the Number 3 Middle School, the Tibetan Medical Centre and Hospital;

Drepung, Sera and Gaden monasteries, etc. We were fortunate enough to have both formal group discussions with the senior officials of these bodies and informal discussions on an individual basis.

The same pattern was followed with the same government departments in Chengdu and Peking. In all we spoke with some 67 government officers.

We also had informal discussions with the British Embassy in Peking and the American Consul General in Chengdu, who is responsible for Sichuan and Tibet, and with informed individuals, both Chinese and foreign.

Non-official Tibetan sources were drawn from a complete cross-section of people in age and occupation, from those with extremely good positions to those who were working in very humble jobs. They were lay and monks, the majority lay, and numbered over 50, plus a number of people who conveyed documents to us.

Preliminary Report

The findings in this preliminary report were those which have all been discussed with the authorities in Peking and we have made some initial suggestions, with their encouragement, which are detailed at the conclusion of the report.

The amount of information obtained as a result of our visit does require some analysis if the fullest use and practical suggestions are going to be drawn from the material and our observations. The conclusions from this analysis will appear in the detailed report of our visit to be published shortly by International Alert.

International Alert works with other organisations and institutions and universities to identify present and potential conflicts where international public opinion and approaches to governments can be effective in bringing about peaceful settlements. It is independent, impartial and universal in its activities. It does not seek to take sides in any dispute but works for a viable peaceful solution.

Geographic Tibet

All of us were struck by the immediate geographical difference of Tibet as soon as we began the flight over it. Nature dominates man and it is easy to see why ethnic Tibet follows geographic Tibet. Two thoughts emerge from this. It is remarkable that the Tibetans managed—in a country where communications were, and indeed still are, very difficult to develop—a very distinct and cohesive society and unique Buddhist culture.

Secondly, it is easy to see why the Han Chinese regard it as pioneering in a wild and inhospitable land.

Lhasa

Lhasa is a thriving Chinese city with a poor Tibetan quarter.

The Chinese community tends to keep to itself, but not of course exclusively. The Chinese look prosperous as against the Tibetans, who look poor as a group. A situation has developed where the menial jobs tend to be done by Tibetans. There is growing unemployment among the Tibetans, who are born merchants, as Chinese buy their way into businesses, and the Tibetans sell only to realise too late that they will never have enough to buy another market stall or small business. So there is a significant development of Chinese businesses, and increasing Tibetan unemployment.

In addition, Chinese administrators and those who are working long term in Tibet receive extra payment for being in the uncongenial surroundings of Tibet, though the local authorities say this is because of their extra abilities. But, effectively, for the Tibetans it is one rate of pay for Chinese and another for the Tibetans. There does appear to be an emphasis on the facilities for the Chinese citizens although there are schooling, medical and housing facilities which have been developed for the Tibetans. Unfortunately it is not enough to balance an ever-increasing physical divide and a deeply rooted resentment and bitterness which, we

saw, is developing into a hardening antipathy between individual Tibetans and Chinese which, from our understanding, has not always been the case. The Tibetans see themselves, with justification, as being reduced to a poor minority in their own major city.

A significant incident occurred during the 5 March riot, which both Tibetans and the Chinese authorities agreed took place. For the first time during such demonstrations two Chinese-owned businesses were attacked by the Tibetans: a restaurant and a clinic which were notorious for not serving Tibetans.

Economic Conditions

In the Tibetan quarter of Lhasa, particularly round the Jokhang, there is an increasing reliance on the tourist trade by Tibetans, and the hawkers, while we were there, were fairly desperate because apart from ourselves there was only one tourist group of some 15 Germans. Many young men have become unofficial money changers, the youngest we met was a grubby youngster of about 12. Many unemployed young men, we learnt, are taking to alcohol, which is certainly not the normal pattern among Tibetans.

There was considerable disquiet about possible restrictions being put on tourist groups to Lhasa apart from the banning, which appears to have become policy, of all individual travellers.

Those involved in the hotel trade understood that one of the policies being discussed was to close down the Tibetan-run hotels and keep tourist groups to the Lhasa Hotel and new Tibet Hotel in the heart of the Chinese part of the city and to restrict transport and restaurants to prevent too much contact with the Tibetan population, which would have severe economic consequences apart from other ramifications.

We could not claim to have an overall picture of economic conditions for the Tibetan population in Tibet. However, certainly in Lhasa we found the Tibetans to be in

a deteriorating situation economically and from the impression gained during journeys outside Lhasa they were economically still at a very basic agricultural level. China of course is an underdeveloped third world country and in our discussions with officials they pointed out that Tibetans had begun at a very low economic base because of conditions before the Chinese entered Tibet. We always spoke from our own experience and compared the Tibetans in Tibet with those 100,000 Tibetan refugees in India who arrived in the country totally destitute and were given tracts of jungle to clear and make themselves settlements. They compared more favourably with their compatriots in Tibet. It could be argued that they had a lot of funding from voluntary agencies, but this was initially, not latterly. They had, which is significant, made the most of their opportunities and become the most successful refugee group since the Second World War, despite the disadvantages of being refugees in an alien climate. The Central People's Government has, however, provided large funding for the development of Tibet.

Education

Lhasa University, developed in 1985 from the Teachers Training College, evidently suffers from the problems of any such institution beginning in a third world country. Unfortunately these are compounded by the inertia of the enormous State bureaucracy in China, with consequences in Tibet that invariably add to the existing resentment and racial conflict between the Chinese and Tibetans.

Throughout China the state decides effectively which subjects a student will take and on qualifying will decide a student's occupation. Among a number of Tibetan students, where their preferences appear to be given scant regard, this system merely serves to confirm their belief that their lives are controlled essentially by Chinese.

Two of the classes, Tibetan language and medicine, are conducted in Tibetan, all other classes are conducted in

Chinese. We were assured by the Director that there were to be Tibetan classes introduced shortly to train teachers from schools and the university so that it would be possible to use Tibetan throughout. However, Chinese is the language that is necessary for any advancement in occupation.

We were told that 70% of the students were Tibetan and 30% Chinese, but it certainly appears to be closer to 50% Chinese and 50% Tibetan, with many, if not the majority, drawn from the children of parents who work in the administration.

Religion

This is the key factor in the Tibetan situation. The nearest parallel being Poland, where a sense of national identity and culture are interwoven with the country's religion.

As others have found before us, the Dalai Lama is revered with, as we found when it was known that we would be talking with him, deeply emotional attachment. The same regard was shown by those born sometime after he went into exile, and even by some members of the administration. Anything remotely connected with him is turned into a shrine. His picture is everywhere in the monasteries and we were constantly asked for pictures.

The Panchen Lama, who is a senior member of the National People's Congress in Peking, is a more contentious figure in Tibet and we found mixed feelings about him. But there was general agreement that it could only improve the situation in Tibet if he were able to spend much longer periods in Tibet. The religious devotion of the people, young and old, is very evident, but it is restricted. We were struck by the total absence of *chortens*, as even allowing for the Cultural Revolution's destruction, with the easing of restrictions on religious activity, it was surprising not to seem them. Tibetans automatically tend to build *chortens*, or stupas as they are known in India,

much as people put up wayside crucifixes in devout Christian countries. We were informed that there were some 'difficulties' about this.

We raised with officials of the Commission, the prohibition that there has been hitherto on searches taking place for a new incarnation, when a reincarnate lama dies. (There are something like a thousand of these lamas in addition to the Dalai Lama.) They play a significant role in Tibetan Buddhism, and for years no searches have been allowed for their successors. However, we were informed that there is to be a meeting with some of these incarnate lamas and officials to discuss the best way of solving this problem.

We were informed that throughout Tibet there were now 14,000 monks, which on the albeit limited evidence we have, we found difficult to believe. Someone who wants to become a monk has to obtain the approval of his parents, then the monastery and then the Religious Affairs Commission, which since last year has been combined with the National Minorities Commission in the specific case of Tibet.

The Religious Affairs Department controls the number of monks in monasteries and, whether by design or bureaucratic lethargy, ceilings are kept at a low level.

In Drepung we were assured that there were 450 monks. It was very apparent that there were nothing like that, nor the number that was meant to be in Sera, or indeed in the Jokhang Central temple. Unhappily, this was not because of a restriction on numbers, but, since arriving, we had been repeatedly told of the large numbers of monks from all monasteries which were under arrest, and indeed arrests took place during the night while we were in Lhasa, as a consequence of the 5 March riot.

We were deeply disturbed at the desolation of these monasteries and the Jokhang, and the attempt to dress up the facade of empty parts of the monastery as though they were in use.

We were assured that the reconstruction of some of the destroyed monasteries was entirely state funded, and yet it emerged later that a sizeable amount in some instances was given by pilgrims.

Lay people do have difficulty obtaining Buddhist texts, and enterprising Tibetans have set themselves up to print them as a business, apparently without too much difficulty from the authorities.

People's Liberation Army

Although we saw few armed troops, the military presence is overwhelming and it is quite evident that Lhasa is a garrison town, from the considerable amount of off-duty troops who are always in the streets of the Chinese city, and the size of the barracks just outside Lhasa. We encountered a very sizeable contingent of military police when we visited the headquarters of the National Minorities Commission and were assured that it was to guard this government office. The roads always have military traffic on them. There is a regular daily troop-carrying flight, which we encountered at Lhasa.

Population Transfer

When we discussed the evident amount of Chinese in Tibet the authorities in Lhasa told us that 10% of the city's population was Chinese, though glancing out of the window would have shown it was at least 50%. Their argument is that it is the administration who are settled and they do not include the 250,000 troops of the PLA nor the 'floating population' who are in Tibet for 2 to 8 years on a contract arrangement, whereby they get a special allowance for living in Tibet. When we mentioned this it was at first denied then agreed, but it was said to be due to ability. Also there are a number of entrepreneurs who have set up small businesses, as there is greater freedom for those from the Chinese mainland to travel to

other parts of China, although quite clearly there is some control with permits, etc.

The Riot of 5 March

We received detailed and consistent reports of this major demonstration of which the following is a summary. It should be borne in mind that China is quite unused to demonstrations of this magnitude and the repercussions for the Tibetan population have been severe.

At the end of the Monlam Festival a statue of the coming Buddha is taken from the Jokhang and carried round the Barkhor. It was after this statue completed the circuit that the violence began.

Tension in Lhasa had been mounting for months. After the protests last October many Buddhist monks were arrested and without their release the remaining monks felt that a Monlam prayer festival would be inappropriate and that it would be difficult to avoid further trouble. The Central People's Government in Peking demanded that the festival be held to show to the world that the Tibetans were enjoying religious freedom. To be forced to hold the Monlam seemed to the monks to be an affront to any real notion of religious freedom. Thus tensions mounted between the monks who threatened to boycott the Monlam and the Chinese authorities who refused to compromise or to release any of the detained monks from prison.

The Monlam went on but the Chinese were well prepared. On the afternoon of 3 March the ceremony involving the display of a huge butter sculpture at four points round the Barkhor was marked by the presence of thousands of heavily armed Chinese paramilitary police, many of whom wore civilian clothes. However, on 5 March the military show of force was not so pronounced.

After the statue of the Coming Buddha had been carried back round to the Jokhang Temple some monks began to shout for the release of Yulu Dawa Tsering,

(a Buddhist Lama from Ganden monastery held in prison for making statements expressing support for Tibetan independence). These monks were arrested on the spot and in response monks began throwing stones at the police. The violence which ensued was centred at first round the Jokhang Temple itself. Three government vehicles and state television equipment was destroyed. The Chinese troops stormed the Jokhang and successfully occupied the temple. In the afternoon, reports of a massacre of monks within the temple itself spread throughout the city and incited the Tibetan population to rise up and protest violently, pitting stone-throwing civilians against armed Chinese troops. Thousands of Tibetans were involved—monks, nuns, Khampas (from east Tibet), Amdowas (from north-east Tibet), pilgrims, villagers, and Lhasa Tibetans, but for the most part young people. Older people had experienced the Cultural Revolution and were familiar with the Chinese reaction, and furthermore they have families and children whose welfare would be endangered by their involvement.

The violence continued until midnight when Chinese troops regained control of the Tibetan sector. On that day, 16 Buddhist monks, two lay Tibetans and one Chinese soldier were killed and scores wounded. Two Chinese businesses were destroyed. Racial tension seemed to be at an all-time peak.

On the following days there was a dramatic show of military force in which as many as 122 trucks filled with machine gun-armed paramilitary police paraded throughout the city, effectively terrifying the Tibetan population. The arrests began and perhaps as many as 2,000 have been imprisoned.

Now in Lhasa there is a sense of fear and frustration. Fear of the Chinese authorities and frustration with the apparent hopelessness of the plight of the Tibetans.

Reaction to the Riots

An ordinary tour group visitor to Tibet and Lhasa could well think that life was perfectly normal, unless they knew something about Tibetans, when they might be surprised about their reticence in speaking to the visitors. We tend to forget that daily life has to go on, whatever the tragedy. It takes very little perception though, to get below the surface.

All the reports we received were consistent in the following:

There continue to be detentions of individuals at night. Many identified from the extensive videoing of the crowd, which is common practice in China and following checks of everyone's movements by the cadres of the work units. Everyone belongs to a work unit of no more than ten families and the units have party cadres, militia cadres and security cadres: it is the basic administrative unit in China. In addition there is an enormous number of plainclothes police in Lhasa. At one point following the riot 50 were posted at each of the main monasteries.

A major problem in Tibet is the relative youth of military and military police, which combined with frustration at the Tibetans' attitudes and orders to re-establish order, results in extreme brutality in their treatment of prisoners.

Repeatedly we heard of how 'electric cow prodders' were used both during the riot and as a means of torture. Only since leaving Tibet have we learnt that the personnel of the Public Security Bureau were issued with electric batons throughout China in 1980, and the severity of the charge they give can cause extreme pain and be temporarily disabling to an individual. With the wire coils unravelled they are used to strip the flesh from legs and arms. This was largely discovered from bodies which families were notified to collect from the hospital mortuary, with the requirement that they pay \$150 collection fee. This used to be a common practice during the Cultural Revolution.

At first we treated these reports with reserve but the consistency of the reports, the calibre of the witnesses and their undoubted fear left us in no doubt as to the veracity of the reports from people who had been detained.

The Public Security Bureau is responsible for interrogation and prosecution and prisoners can be held incommunicado for months without being brought to trial, or notification of families. In addition there is throughout China a presumption of guilt. A legal code providing for protection of the individual prisoner has recently been instituted by China. It has still by no means become part of general practice in the Chinese mainland, and certainly not in Tibet where the Public Security Police will use the most brutal means to secure public order and to find out any information about other possible planned public demonstrations.

A terrible cycle of frustration and mutual antipathy is being entrenched by fear and brutality.

Prisoners

We made enquiries after prisoners on behalf of Amnesty International. Details were promised before we left the country and then we were told they would be sent through the embassy in London, but to date have not emerged.

Conclusions Discussed with the Chinese Authorities in Peking

1. The Chinese Government should seek an early opportunity to resume talks about the future of Tibet with the Dalai Lama and his political and religious advisors. It may take a long time for agreement to be reached and, in the course of discussions, both sides must be prepared to make some adjustments in their existing positions. Discussions on an open agenda would be advisable. A solution would bring great credit to China as well as satisfaction to the Tibetan people.

2. Without delay the Chinese Government should arrange for the Panchen Lama to spend more time in Tibet so that he can use his influence to ease the tension there.

3. The Chinese Government should recognise the urgency of the necessity that human rights are restored in Tibet and an amnesty for political detainees should be declared.

4. The Government should announce a review of the continuing build up of Chinese in areas long populated by Tibetans, with their totally different history and culture.

In our view there is a crisis that demands a rapid response.

WHERE IS GENDUN RINCHEN?

by Melissa Mathison

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In April 1992, my husband, Harrison Ford, and I visited Lhasa, the capital of ancient Tibet. We were doing research there for a film I am writing about the early years of the Dalai Lama, beginning in 1937, when he was recognized as the 14th spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet, and ending in 1949, with the brutal invasion of his country by its neighbour, China. After more than four decades, Tibet is the world's longest occupied sovereign state, and the largest.

We were met at the airport outside Lhasa by Gendun Rinchen, one of the handful of Tibetan guides working in the heavily Chinese-populated City. He had a wide, warm smile. He spoke perfect English, and was intelligent, witty and energetic.

But, as we only slowly came to realize, Gendun Rinchen was more than a successful tourist guide. He was a human rights worker in a country where dissent is strictly forbidden.

On the two-hour drive from the airport to Lhasa, we told Mr Rinchen about our research. We talked about the Dalai Lama, specifically about a recent speech in which he proposed that Tibet be made a 'zone of peace'. Mr. Rinchen smiled and nodded. Soon after he asked that the driver stop the van, suggesting that we take a look at the Kyichu River.

We stood on the banks of the great river. 'Take care', he said softly. 'You don't know me. You don't know the driver. Such conversation is not safe for anyone.' We all started silently at the Kyichu, the river the Dalai Lama crossed one cold night, in a yak-skin boat, as he fled the Chinese.

In the days that followed, Mr Rinchen led us well off the beaten track. He showed us the ruined gate of Lhasa, where the four-year-old Dalai Lama first entered the city. He showed us the boarded-up home where the young boy sought refuge, away from his studies and the responsibilities of his position, where he would run to see his family and eat his mother's peasant cooking. (His family fled Tibet when he did.)

Later, Harrison and I retraced a part of the route the Dalai Lama had taken on his final escape in the winter of 1959 from the Chinese assault on Lhasa, which ended in the massacre of thousands of Tibetans.

Rinchen told me what he remembered, what he had heard of the time of the occupation. I told him what I had learned. Some of it was new to him. His country's history is no longer taught in Tibet. The particulars are melting away.

The last major uprising took place in 1989. The Chinese army patrolled the streets for 13 months. Today, you don't see many policemen or soldiers on the streets of Lhasa. Mr. Rinchen told us that they now wear civilian clothing and use video cameras for surveillance.

From the Potala, the hilltop monastery where the young Dalai Lama once stood watching picnickers with his telescope, you can see two of Lhasa's four prisons. According to Amnesty International, at any given time they hold hundreds of Tibetan political prisoners. The prisoners are often held incommunicado, interrogated and tortured, and sometimes released without ever being charged.

No one knows exactly how many prisons and labour camps are spread across Tibet. Nor do we have an estimate of the damage done to the environment by the clear-cutting of ancient forests and mining of previously untouched mineral deposits. There are unconfirmed reports that China has been dumping its nuclear waste in Tibet. And there is only the word of anguished Tibetan women

who say that they have been victims of forced abortion and sterilization.

Perhaps worst of all, according to the International Campaign for Tibet and prominent human rights organizations, by offering generous incentives for Chinese citizens to immigrate, China has deliberately made the Tibetans a minority in their own country.

Before we left Lhasa, Harrison and I had a drink with the Chinese Vice-Governor, a handsome, charming man. The hotel personnel, all Chinese, could not have been nicer. One can visit Lhasa and have no idea of the despair of a Tibetan's life.

'They made us fear one another', Mr Rinchen had said, telling us a disturbing story: He was eating dinner at a friend's home, and they were reminiscing about their childhood in old Tibet. The friend's teenage children came into the room, and they immediately cut short the conversation.

In a country where neighbours and family members are encouraged to inform on one another, where the mere possession of a book by the Dalai Lama or display of a Tibetan flag can lead to years in prison, fear is constant.

The day we left Tibet, we gave Gendun Rinchen our address and said we would be back. What could we do for him? He gave us his business card. 'If you receive word that I am in trouble, will you try to help me?'

On 30 May of this year, we heard that he might have been arrested two weeks before in the middle of the night by the Chinese State Security Police. The Tibetan Information Network, a human rights monitoring group based in London, believes that the police found a letter in his tiny apartment addressed to a European delegation then visiting the country on a human rights fact-finding mission. The note contained the names of Tibetans held on political charges. These names are not readily available to the world community. They are state secrets. Gendun Rinchen's penalty for 'stealing state secrets' could be death.

Today we do not know where he is, how he is, if he is still even alive. We received an unconfirmed report that he is being held in a maximum-security military prison outside Lhasa.

In August, Senator Max Baucus of Montana visited Lhasa and asked to see Mr. Rinchen. The deputy party secretary, Ragdi, told the senator that our friend had 'stolen many confidential materials for a long time', and 'coaxed people to overthrow our present system' and that he 'favoured the independence of Tibet'.

Mr. Rinchen did not speak to us of overthrowing his government or of Tibetan independence. His concern appeared to be much more basic: the treatment of human beings. Now he may be one of the Tibetans he has worked so hard to save.

REFLECTIONS ON A VISIT TO TIBET

by Chime Dolker

published in *Tibetan Bulletin*, January–February 1995

After 24 years of being born and bred in another country, I finally had the opportunity to visit my homeland. It was on 24 May 1994, as our plane flew from Nepal over the snow-clad mountains of Tibet, I could feel the excitement mounting in me. I had so many questions in my mind about Tibet. After landing at Gongkar airport, we (I was travelling with my father) left for Lhasa, which was about an hour and a half away. As we approached Lhasa we could see the Potala palace and also towering above Lhasa was the 'Chagpori' (the once-famous centre for Tibetan medical studies). We stopped in front of the Potala and prostrated in true Buddhist fashion. I could feel tears flowing down my eyes and I cried unashamedly. These were both tears of happiness and of sorrow. Happiness because I was given the chance to see what had been history to me so far, and sorrow because even as I bowed in respect, I knew the Potala was empty without the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Potala reminded me of the mystical phoenix, rising from its ashes with renewed strength to live again.

While we were in Lhasa for the next few days, we visited the other holy shrines as well as monasteries. For me this period was spiritually uplifting. We also went out regularly to the restaurants for our meals. It was in these restaurants that I closely observed fellow Tibetans living in Tibet. What I saw disappointed me. These young people seem to exist on Chinese beer, cigarettes and cheap wine. The prices of alcohol, I learnt, were cheap. In Lhasa I saw endless number of bars and nightclubs and later at nights there were ugly scenes enacted on the streets. I felt sorry for them. They are young and full of stamina and fervour. They have the potential to make good and responsible

citizens but this potential is clearly being misdirected. I was beginning to understand what the Chinese meant by their policy of Liberalisation. Of what I learnt, crime rates are high in Lhasa but law and order takes a back seat and waits.

It is true the Chinese have brought about changes in Tibet: politically, economically and socially. To me the most conspicuous change was the presence of a large number of Chinese in Tibet. There were Chinese-owned stores, restaurants, hair saloons, bars and so on. To make it short, there were Chinese and more Chinese everywhere. I see this as a serious threat to our very identity. Right now the world knows us as 'Tibetan' but in a few decades we could be the 'endangered race' or, God forbid it, even the 'extinct race'.

We also visited Gyangtse, Shigatse, Sakya and Tsurphu (the seat of the Gyalwa Karmapa). It was very comforting to visit some of the villages around these places; I felt that finally I was in Tibet. There were much fewer Chinese in these rural areas and the village folks were simple, religious, and still adhered to old values, culture and traditions. But I wondered for how long? Most of the temples and monasteries were new. The old structures were all in ruins. So I had to use my keenest imagination to reconstruct the past. In early July we left for Kham (Eastern Tibet). On our way, hundreds of trucks laden with wood drove past us. Obviously they were headed for Chengdu. I learned that all the wood was being transported from Kham areas, through rivers and then collected at some point and taken to China. I knew enough about the environment to realise the ill effects of cutting down trees in large quantities. There were beautiful streams flowing by the roadside and there were impatient rivers roaring by, but their movements were weighed down by the burden of carrying hundreds of thousands of wooden logs along their course to China.

On reaching our destination in Kham we were warmly received by our relatives. We stayed in Kham for about two

months. During this time, I went out of my way to speak with the young Khampas. I wanted to understand them and in doing so, I hoped to understand my homeland. I wanted to belong there. These young Tibetans were mostly farmers, monks or small-time businessmen. There were no schools around, except in the bigger towns where Chinese is taught with great passion. These people seemed to have succumbed to Chinese indoctrination. They seemed to think that the three provinces of Tibet—U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo—were all separate. I do not blame them. I told them that Tibet is one, we are all united by a common language, script, religion, culture and history. We share a common past, a glorious past, which was intruded upon by the Chinese.

Since the last 10 years or so, many Tibetans from India and the West have visited various places in Tibet. What surprises me is that Tibetan intellectuals, businessmen and religious teachers have failed to explain the true facts of Tibet to these simple people living in really remote parts of our country. Also, what I found most distressing in my observations of Kham was the possession by individuals of weapons (rifles, pistols) with no restrictions. Every young man seemed to own a gun. The guns are expensive no doubt but there are no laws prohibiting either the sale of guns or fee ownership. Obtaining a license does not seem to be a problem, so every one has easy access to weapons of their choice. Maybe that is how the Chinese define freedom of action. I just had this really wild thought, that if a civil war ever took place in Tibet, everybody would be well armed against each other and at each others' throats. Is that what China hopes for? Well, we were so politely informed by Chinese embassy officials that there is no violation of human rights in Tibet, and that everybody was free to do as he or she pleases. But we were not allowed to visit certain parts of Tibet, including places of pilgrimage.

On the surface everything appeared calm and harmonious, but there were strong undercurrents of

restlessness among the people. Even during our brief stay we learnt of many revolts and uprisings which were quickly suppressed by the Chinese. Now back in India, I often think of Tibet and I worry about the plight of our brothers and sisters there. I hope every young Tibetan has the opportunity to see and feel for the country that rightfully belongs to us. I went to my homeland in search of my roots and now I know I belong there although for political reasons I am compelled to live in another country as a refugee.

A JOURNEY TO MY FORBIDDEN HOMELAND

by Lhundup Dorji

published in *Tibetan Review*, December 2003

This was way back in 1994. Soon after finishing my all-India high school examination, I decided to visit my parents in Tibet for my two-month vacation. The decision was sudden and unplanned. It had been more than ten years since I had last seen my parents and relatives in Tibet. Several times earlier, I had given up the idea of visiting Tibet after hearing stories of hardship and ordeal faced by those who had been there. But now I longed to see my parents after such a long time. Besides, after finishing my last paper, I had no idea what to do during the more than two months of holiday. And the knowledge that my parents desperately wanted to see me weighed heavily on my mind. In fact, it was to fulfil my parents' last wish that I decided to undertake the trip, whatever the risks and hardships might be. I always believed that it is one of the most important moral duties of a person to fulfil his parents' wishes and to give them love and care especially in their old age. Our parents' love and concern for us can be known truly only when we become parents ourselves.

It was while I was preparing for my exams in December 1993 that one of my uncles came to Dharamsala to see my little brother and me and to receive the blessing of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He told me of my parents' strong desire to see me before they died. At that time I just told him that I was not sure if I could make the journey. But after he left I found myself in a dilemma: on the one hand I was scared of the risks involved in undertaking the journey back to my village in Tibet, but on the other hand I could not ignore my parents' wish and my desire to see them. Finally, knowing how very uncertain life is, I thought that it was the right time to do something that would

probably be my greatest service to my parents. And so, despite my fear and anxiety, I set for myself a mission to visit my village and to meet my parents, whatever the cost may be.

With a group of other students going for their vacation to Nepal, I left Dharamsala in the beginning of May 1994. That was my furthest journey outside Dharamsala since joining the Tibetan Children's Village school in 1984. So, I had no travelling experience at all and was totally dependent on the experience of the other students. The train journey from the nearby town of Pathankot to the border town of Gorakpur was an excruciating experience. None of us had booked seats in advance, so we all had to travel in the ordinary, third class compartment. The seats were hard and the compartment was filthy and stinking. I came face to face with India's downtrodden and poverty in that train journey.

The first obstacle, as I expected, started to unfold at the India-Nepal border. We arrived there at around 2:00 in the morning. We passed through the first two Indian checkpoints without any problem. At the third checkpoint, two guards demanded money before allowing us to pass through. After some heated argument, a bribe of Rs.50 per person was fixed. However, when we reached the Nepalese check-post, the guard refused to let us pass. He told us to wait till the immigration office opens in the morning. Normally, like any Indian and Nepalese citizen, Tibetans too could freely travel across the border without going through the immigration process. But this time a strict restriction was being imposed on Tibetan travellers, presumably on account of the much-publicized planned Peace March by Tibetans in exile from New Delhi to Lhasa that year. We had to sleep at the Nepalese border gate till the immigration staff arrived around 9:00 AM. But they said that only those of us who had their parents in Nepal could enter the country. I did not know what to do, but certainly did not want to go back. Luckily, some students

were able to call their parents in Nepal and some of them flew to the border from Kathmandu with their passports. With their help I was able to leave by bus for the Nepalese capital late in the evening. During the course of the journey, the bus was stopped two or three times and the identity papers of all the passengers checked.

Despite the casual jokes and gossips we shared as if nothing happened, we were all depressed and frustrated within. Our experience during the journey and at the border brutally reminded us what it meant to be a stateless person. Everywhere you go everybody takes advantage of your statelessness, and there is no protection for you. I could imagine the circumstance under which my fellow-Tibetans travel across the Himalayan mountains, escaping the Chinese rule in search of freedom and with hope of seeing His Holiness. Compared to them, our difficulties were nothing. What protection these people have? The kind of brutality and inhuman treatment they suffer at the hands of the border guards is well known. But in Dharamsala or elsewhere in exile we pass our days busily engaged in earning our livelihood, with hardly an awareness of them.

It was a great relief to reach Kathmandu the next morning, around dawn. But for me it was not the end of the mission; the journey ahead was far more difficult and demanded even greater determination and will. I planned my trip to my home in Tibet by acquiring information about the situation at the Tibet-Nepal border. I looked for people who might be going there, but could not find anyone. I heard stories about similar trips undertaken by other students.

I left Kathmandu early in the morning around 5:00 AM local time by bus up to a small town called Barabis with my elder brother who lives in Nepal. He was working in a carpet factory owned by a Tibetan after dropping out of school in Dharamsala. He accompanied me to the border. We reached Barabis around 2:00 in the afternoon. It was cloudy and drizzling; the sound of the strong, voluminous

flow of the river flowing between the hills filled the valley. The Friendship Bridge across that river marks the border between the two countries. I could clearly see from the Nepalese side what was going on at the Tibetan/Chinese side. At that moment there were two guards standing at the end of the bridge. I felt scared at the very sight of the Chinese guards in green uniforms.

As soon as the bus reached the border, we straightaway walked towards the Nepalese checkpoint at the bridge. I walked behind some local Sherpas, a woman in Tibetan dress and some young people. They all walked straight across the checkpoints on the bridge. There was no checking or questions for them. We followed them as if we were also locals like them, but we were stopped by the customs officer and asked where and why we were going. My brother told them we were going to the Tibetan border town of Dram for shopping. They asked for our identity paper. On coming to know that we were Tibetans, he pointed his finger towards a house on his right side and said, 'You must go to the immigration office there. I can't let you go without passports.'

I could not go to the immigration office, as I did not have a travel document. It was obvious that I could not cross the border that afternoon. Besides, it was getting late and my brother had to go back to Kathmandu for his work. My brother explained our situation to a Tibetan-looking man who happened to pass us by and asked for his advice. He turned out to be a Sherpa owning a restaurant nearby. He told me to try the next morning with Indian and Nepalese tourists who usually go to Dram for shopping without facing any problem. The Sherpa gave me lodging for the night while my brother returned to Kathmandu.

The Sherpa had a son named Tenzin who knew some of the Chinese border guards. He looked young and strong and was as big as his father. He could speak English, so conversation was not a problem. He took me to a small restaurant where three Chinese guards and some Nepalese

youngsters were talking and laughing. Tenzin told me that the Chinese guards come to the Nepalese side to have tea and food in those teashops in the evenings. He knew them very well. He talked to them in Nepalese. He told them that I would be going to Dram the next morning and asked for their help. I felt relaxed when they agreed.

I woke up the next morning to the sound of the gushing river. The sky was clear blue and the morning sun was shining on the mountains. That lifted up my spirit a little and I felt positive. Without even washing my face, I went straight down to the restaurant to have a quick tea and then went to look for Tenzin. Many people had already lined up at the check-post and Tenzin too was there. He was standing on the side, rather than being in the line. Upon seeing me, he waved his hand at me.

Unfortunately, everyone was being checked for his or her identity papers that morning. When all the others were done, I went up and was asked for my passport. But I had none except for my school identity card. Tenzin pleaded with the officer several times to let me pass, but there was no hope. I therefore told Tenzin not to insist any further. He was disappointed and walked back across the bridge and soon disappeared from my sight.

I felt tense and frightened; I did not know what to do. Even going back to Kathmandu was very dangerous. There were three or four checkpoints between the border and Kathmandu, and suspected illegal refugees from Tibet were being detained. I too could be caught as one. Except for my school ID card, I had nothing to prove that I was from India. It then remained for me to remind myself that I had to make the trip back to my village, whatever the risk may be.

While walking away slowly from the check-post towards the small bazaar, a big truck arrived and was preparing to cross the border to the Tibetan side. At that moment I thought of a dramatic plan. I noticed that the guards at the check post were fully engrossed in examining the

documents being presented by the drivers and in questioning them, while no one watched the other side of the trucks. I therefore quickly walked to the back of that truck and from there to the edge of the bridge on the non-driver's side without being noticed. As the guards busied themselves with the truck driver, I quickly walked away and crossed the line in the middle of the bridge, soon finding myself on the Tibetan side.

Two Chinese guards sat at a table on the Tibetan side of the bridge. Upon seeing me, they gestured to order me to come to them. There were four or five Indian and Nepalese civilians standing around them. Luckily, the Chinese guards were the ones to whom Tenzin had introduced me the night before. As I proceeded to tell them I was the guy they had met the night before, the truck that enabled me to come this far slowly crossed the bridge and stopped by us. With their attention now focussed on the truck, the guards told me I could go.

While the driver was having his documents checked, four or five people who had earlier been waiting there started climbing into the back of the truck. Guessing their destination to be Dram, I too joined them. I imitated whatever they were doing. Soon more and more people got in and by the time the truck began moving it was packed with passengers. After the truck had moved up for about five minutes, some one started collecting the fares. I noticed that everyone was paying ten rupees each and followed suit. It took around ten minutes to reach the check-post at Dram.

I was extremely nervous and tense throughout the ten-minute ride. Now the truck stopped at a checkpoint where two guards stood by a lone table on one side of a thick chain hung across the road. The view across it was a very distressing sight.

The first civilians I saw across the checkpoint were some Tibetan young men in western dress—one in a Chinese army green jacket that was worn out at the sleeves—with plaited hair and some women in traditional U-Tsang dress.

They looked filthy and very impoverished. Later I learnt that they were coolies/porters at Dram and belonged to villages around my native village. It broke my heart to see them living in makeshift plastic shelters surrounded by utter filth. Looked down upon and discriminated against because of their filthy look, they could not bargain but had to accept whatever they were paid for their work. When I came through this place way back in 1984, the coolies were Nepalese.

Dram itself had changed completely. In 1984 it looked like a Nepalese town, with few shops and not much activities. Now it had turned into a Chinese town. There were so many shops and restaurants run by the Chinese, apart from some by Tibetans from Kham and Amdo regions of Tibet.

I got off the truck with the other passengers and lined up as if I was one of them. They all started moving up across the check-post under the watchful eyes of the security guards. But somehow I was singled out from the line by a guard who took me to the veranda of their office. He gestured with his hand to ask me where I was going. He was a Chinese who spoke some broken Tibetan. I told him I was going to Dram for shopping and for sightseeing. But he did not believe me. He took my bag, the only luggage I had, and searched its contents. He found nothing, except my clothes and some holy pills and threads. Then he searched my whole body and found the bunch of letters I had agreed to a number of people to deliver to their relatives in Tibet. It was put in a purse tied around my waist. He also felt my school ID card in the back pocket of the half pant I was wearing inside my trouser. When I resisted taking it out, he grew suspicious and serious. He took away the ID card and the bunch of letters and showed them to his senior sitting at a table. He was an elderly Tibetan with a small dark face. He put them on the table and started questioning me. I told him I was living in

Kathmandu, working in a carpet factory, and was going to Tibet on a pilgrimage.

Then he opened up the letters. They were all personal letters with no political contents and he said nothing. But when he examined my ID card, he found out that I was a student. With a look of seriousness, he asked, 'What is this? Just a moment ago you said you were a factory worker, so why this ID card?' I replied that I was a student, but dropped school and started working just a few months ago. Luckily, he could not read English, so did not know that the ID had been issued by a Tibetan school in Dharamsala, India.

After many other questions, he gave the letters and the ID card to the Chinese guard who had caught me. I had to accompany this guard, but did not know where. I was absolutely nervous and almost shaking. I took a deep breath to relax and cool myself and with a forced smile asked the guard where he was taking me. But he did not say a word, and just pointed his finger ahead. He took me into a room in a residential building. Someone was sleeping there with his army uniform lying besides his bed. He woke up, issued some instruction in Chinese to the guard and went back to sleep. The guard then took me to another room. There a middle-aged Tibetan man was getting ready with his uniform. The guard handed over the letters and my ID card to him and left. Without uttering a word, he sat on his chair and started reading the letters. After going through all of them, he asked me many questions. I talked to him with a smile and respect. He seemed to be a nice fellow, but expressed helplessness in my case. He said I could not enter Tibet without a passport. Faced with the threat of being handed over to the police if I persisted on continuing my journey, I agreed to go back to Nepal. Then he gave back to me the letters and my ID card. I was particularly relieved to get back my ID card, as it was my passport to enter Nepal and also to go back to India. Between the Nepalese border and Kathmandu there were some three or

four checkpoints where the guards were notorious for their ill treatment of Tibetan refugees fleeing their country. The Tibetans were frequently repatriated to the Chinese authorities.

From the veranda of the building I could see the narrow valley below, filled with the sound of the gushing river flowing down towards it. The building was located somewhere down the main street of the small bazaar consisting of several small shops and restaurants. From there it was a five-minute walk to the checkpoint. The officer and I came up together till the small bazaar. From there he headed up for Dram while I pretended to head down to the Nepalese side.

When the officer disappeared from my sight, I went into a small restaurant and ordered a cup of tea. Most of the shops and restaurants were owned by Sherpas. I sat down at a table opposite a young Sherpa man. He spoke a bit of Hindi mixed with Nepalese and we started talking. I ordered for him a jug of *chang* (Tibetan barley beer) and he started talking about himself. He had been to India, particularly to Himachal Pradesh, the Indian State where I was studying. I sought his advice for crossing the check-post at Dram. He said there was only one way: to climb up the thickly-forested mountain, pass a hydroelectric power station on its top and then go down to Dram under the cover of darkness. But I found this way too dangerous. He was willing to guide me if I paid him.

As we were talking, I saw through the window a young Tibetan woman in the traditional dress of my region. I immediately called her into the restaurant. She turned out to be from a village close to mine and was working in Dram as a coolie. From her I learnt that there were three young men from my village who were also working there as coolies. So I sent through her a message to them, informing them of my arrival, and my wish to find a way to cross into Dram. She had apparently come down to deliver a luggage. It was around 2:00 pm. The sky was clear and the

sun was very bright. About half an hour after the woman had left, I saw two young men, with ropes about two metres long slung on their shoulders, going up and down the street. I immediately went out but did not recognize them. But they, upon seeing me, shouted out my name.

As we talked, they turned out to be my childhood playmates. I was overwhelmed with joy, meeting them after ten long years. They looked older than their ages because of their difficult livelihood and the harsh climate of Tibet. They were willing to help me to cross the check-post and proceeded to disguise me as one of them. I had to dress like them in worn out and dirty clothes. I wore a pant belonging to one of them over my jean and a slightly worn out Chinese army green jacket taken off by another of them. They emptied my bag and put the contents in a dirty sack carried by one of them on his shoulder. I slung over my shoulder the rope belonging to one of them. One of them took in his hand my thick jacket. I tousled up my hair to make it look unkempt and applied some black dirt on my clean face. After finishing the make up, we headed up towards Dram. I was feeling frightened and absolutely nervous. I had already been sent back from the check-post only a couple of hours ago, so it was possible that the guards would recognize me. But the boys gave me a lot of encouragement, making me feel a bit relaxed. As we approached the checkpoint, I walked between the two boys in a line. Upon crossing the checkpoint I looked straight ahead, concentrating on the prayers I was saying in my mind while my heart pounded with fear. Finally, I made it to the other side of the checkpoint and my joy knew no bound. I never looked back and did not even see the guards clearly.

I had to stay at Dram for three days. An elderly man from a neighbouring village married to a girl from my village allowed me to stay in his small room. He was to arrange my onward journey to my village with a group of young people going back to their villages. They were all looking for a truck going to Lhasa, or Shigatse, as their

villages come on the way. The group consisted of one man named Gyaltsen and four women. I dared not go out during the day while in Dram, for the risk of getting caught still existed. Two boys had been caught while trying to get on in a truck. I was therefore still not certain whether I would finally make it to my village and see my parents.

We left Dram before dawn. It was very cold and I was still in disguise. Luckily one of the boys from my village lent me his warm sheepskin jacket. I was seen off by the three boys from my village. I felt extremely grateful to them for their help. I had nothing to offer them in return except some holy threads blessed by His Holiness, as I was a student. I was by that time left with less than one thousand Nepalese rupees in my purse. I changed that into Chinese yuan.

The road from Dram was extremely rough and dangerous. A little slip to one side would have plunged the truck deep down to the river that was gushing between two steep mountains. The truck continued its dangerous climb in darkness until we reached Nyanam town, when daybreak became sufficient to enable one to see the surrounding clearly. The snow had still not melted.

Nyanam had changed completely. It had expanded greatly and was full of modern buildings. The checkpoint was at the end of the street just before a bridge, marked by a thick rope hung across the road. Everyone on the truck was required to get down and show his or her identity document. I became nervous and frightened. Gyaltsen told me not to get down, for if the guards talked to me they would at once know that I was not a local. He told the guards that we were all from Dingri County and I was not feeling well. Checking was relaxed for people from the local area, but strict for those from Lhasa and beyond. In our truck there were other Tibetans going to Shigatse and Lhasa. One of them had so much luggage. Checking finished smoothly.

As we moved away from Nyanam, the landscape began changing dramatically. The green forest and other forms of

vegetation gave way to barren mountains typical of Tibet. Over long intervals I saw solitary villages. The truck halted atop Thongla pass and every one got down to put up prayer flags and say prayers. I could see from the pass tips of some of the higher mountains clearly. Chilly wind blowing on the pass made one feel very cold. As we descended the pass, I saw more and more villages. We reached the village of Dhingri about midday and the truck stopped in a courtyard for everyone to have lunch. From a restaurant at a corner Gyaltzen bought a thermos flask filled with hot tea and, like other people, we sat in the sun, enjoying the tea with *tsampa* and dried meat.

While we were preparing to leave, I caught sight of a familiar face. He was a boy from my school back in India. He had arrived in Tibet two weeks ago and was travelling in a horse carriage with his father to another village to visit more relatives. It was wonderful to see him as we knew each other very well.

After Dhingri, I had to face one more checkpoint before finally reaching Shekar town. That checkpoint used to be near Shekar, but now it had been shifted further away to a desolate plain with no inhabitants. I was told that checking there was strict, which made me feel tense and anxious. I heard that a young monk had been caught and beaten there. There were two jeeps at the checkpoint and its passengers were showing their passports to the guards. As soon as our truck stopped after the jeeps, a guard came running towards it and asked everyone to get down and show their documents while he himself climbed up into the truck. Gyaltzen told him that I was sick and requested him to allow me to remain in the truck. As the truck was emptied of the passengers, except for me, the guard started checking the goods. He opened up the bags and checked their contents. I was sitting at one corner of the truck and he started conducting his check from the other corner. I had my bag next to me and was wondering how to hide it. Fear and nervousness made me feel my heart beat faster.

And as he moved towards my side, I quickly placed my bag among the goods that had already been checked while his attention was focussed on another side. I myself moved to the other side. I heaved a great sigh of relief when he finished checking the goods and got off. Had he seen the contents of my bag, I would definitely have got caught.

One man travelling to Shigatse who had some Buddhist scriptures and some statues of the Buddha with him had some of the scriptures confiscated. He told the guards that they were meant for a monastery that was undergoing renovation. He was taken to the office and came out after about ten minutes. And the truck started moving.

It was only after we left that checkpoint that I finally felt that my mission was accomplished. We reached Shekar town shortly after, at around 5:00 pm, when the sun was about to set. We got off and the truck continued its journey to Lhasa. Gyaltsen looked for any vehicle going towards my village. Luckily, a tractor belonging to a school in his village happened to be going there the next day and the driver agreed to take us along. The village is some ten kilometres away from my village. I had been there before 1984.

We stayed in Shekar town for the night. Gyaltsen knew quite a lot of people there. He took me with him wherever he went. I was most frightened when he took me to what turned out to be the house of a Tibetan policeman. He served us tea and snacks. I came to know that he was a policeman only after seeing his green cap placed on a cupboard. Gyaltsen teased me by saying people from India and Nepal were very scared by the very sight of green uniforms. But he assured me that he knew the guy well and there was no danger. That night Gyaltsen and I shared a room in a guesthouse.

We left for my village around noon the next day. We had to sit in a wagon attached to the tractor. Passengers had to sit on the goods that had filled the wagon. It was a very bumpy ride, as the road was rough. I got a space just

above a wheel, with my dangling legs almost touching it. A couple of times I nearly fell to the ground. It was good that the tractor was moving slowly. After two or three kilometres we stopped at a nice spot for refreshment and the driver collected fares from us. The rough ride resumed after about ten minutes.

The familiar sights I passed while riding in the tractor brought back vivid memories of my childhood. I kept dreaming of them over the ten years I had lived and studied in India. Now I was back and they were very real. I could not help feeling fascinated by my native land, even though it was barren and harsh.

Seeing my native village was an absolute delight. It was the month of May and the farming season. I could see farmers ploughing their fields with the bulls and yaks and women throwing the seeds. Soon my own village came into view. The houses as well as the village looked smaller and more impoverished than I thought they had been. Perhaps it was only because I had grown up and become more aware. Small children came running towards the tractor when it stopped in the middle of our village and they gathered around it. It was exactly what I too used to do in my time. I jumped down from the tractor and the tractor resumed its journey. I thanked Gyaltzen for all his help.

The small kids watched me, none of them knowing who I was. Then from a house came a woman with shaved head; she recognized me and called out my name. As she came closer, I recognized her as a nun I knew in my childhood. She immediately invited me to her house and served me tea. My parents and relatives had no idea about my coming. However, soon the news of my arrival spread like a wildfire in the small village and my big brother came looking for me. He took me to his house, and soon relatives came pouring in. It was such an emotional scene. Then my father and mother came. Meeting with them after such a long period was the climax of my mission. It was a dream come true.

BUDDHIST SPIRIT RESISTS YAK-BURGER CULTURE

by Christopher Gunnes, *BBC Worldwide Magazine*,
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The young Tibetan girl in my arms clings tight. Behind us, the stage sparkles with tinsel and fairy lights. A would-be Chinese pop star writhes to his own music in a white Lurex jump-suit; the strobe lights catch his face, frozen in ever-more ridiculous contortions.

Chinese soldiers in thickly quilted olive-green great-coats, some in each other's arms, gyrate self-consciously and a little drunkenly. High on the wall of the dance floor, a huge picture of the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, forced into exile by invading Chinese soldiers, smiles down. Banned by Beijing, it is one of the great strengths of Tibetan Buddhism that his spirit seems to permeate every aspect of life—even the Sun City nightclub, playground of the Chinese elite and the newest and ritziest karaoke bar in downtown Lhasa.

Buddhism for Tibetans, in the face of repression by the Chinese, has taken on the sacramental significance which throughout history has sustained all religions under persecution. For the clergy and laity alike, the Church in Tibet has an outward and physical manifestation, with an inward and spiritual meaning. And it is the latter, the spiritual dimension, that has made Tibet indomitable, although Beijing has dealt systematically and viciously with the physical Church.

I visit the Jokhang Temple, the holiest shrine in Tibet, at the most auspicious date in the Buddhist calendar, the Great Prayer Festival. Several years ago it would have been packed with monks. Today, there are just a handful. The Chinese have moved thousands into monasteries outside Lhasa, where they are easier to control. Government agents

patrol the perimeter of the temple and pro-Beijing monks have infiltrated the clergy.

What was once a living centre of Buddhism has been rendered a museum by the Chinese Government. Extensive restoration work throughout the Jokhang looks, to the casual eye of the tourist, as if the authorities have moved to preserve the Buddhist traditions here. But this is literally a whitewash.

Strict limits have been imposed not just on the number of monks but on the scope of their religious activities. The detention and interrogation of Buddhists suspected of separatist sympathies is frequent and widespread.

As is often the case in Lhasa, appearance and reality are quite different. Beijing's policy here is predicated on the belief that in controlling the appearance, it can control reality, too. But that is a miscalculation and one which fails to take into account the spiritual world that Tibetans inhabit: a universe in which suffering and pain offer release from the daily trials of physical existence. The greater the trials, the greater the potential for redemption.

The harder the repression by Beijing, the more ordinary Tibetans believe they will find release. It is a paradox which has defeated the Chinese Government and which sustains the Buddhists of Tibet.

That is not to say that a political and temporal battle is not being waged by many Tibetan Buddhists. For them, Church and state are inseparable. The survival of Buddhism has become synonymous with the aspirations of a free and independent Tibet. Hopes for the return of the Dalai Lama from exile in India are more than just those of a people craving a political figurehead; they have taken on an almost messianic aura.

In the face of the threat posed by Buddhist traditions in Tibet, the Chinese Government has mounted a campaign of harassment that seems to pervade nearly every aspect of life. Huge numbers of Han Chinese from China's lowlands are being settled in Tibet. Ordinary Chinese are

given rich financial rewards for going to Lhasa: a 30% salary rise, for example. And whereas in the rest of China they are officially allowed to have just one child per family, in Tibet they are permitted to have two.

The non-Tibetan population of Lhasa has grown at over 10% annually for the past three years. Within a year, Tibetans in the city are likely to be outnumbered. ‘The Chinese will soon obliterate our Buddhist culture’, a young Tibetan monk told me. They believe the invasion of non-Tibetans is part of an attempt to dilute their national identity. Beijing presumably hopes that collective amnesia might somehow follow and that the Tibetans might forget their separatist aspirations.

The Han Chinese import into Tibet a way of life; the symptoms of modernity which have affected all other cities in China are now ubiquitous in Lhasa. It is not just karaoke bars but junk literature, pop videos and junk food—yak burgers are the rage.

Across the city, Chinese restaurants and supermarkets are replacing the traditional Tibetan shops that once stood in their place. In the Barkhor, the pilgrim circuit around the Jokhang Temple, about a third of the traditional buildings have been destroyed. Just a few months ago, the Government pulled down a historic house just at the back of the Jokhang, and in its place has built a hideous marble shopping mall. Vast and sterile, it stands like a communist-style mausoleum to an endangered culture.

The Chinese argue that they are spending billions on the development of one of their most backward ‘autonomous regions’. But what they claim to be a philanthropic policy is destroying Tibet’s unique brand of Buddhism. Most worryingly for the clergy, the new way of life is luring away young Tibetans from their Buddhist traditions.

Underpinning this assault on Tibetan Buddhism lies a darker aspect of Beijing’s policy. The Chinese see Tibet as a buffer zone between countries such as Nepal, Pakistan and

its giant neighbour, India, with whom it fought a border war three decades ago. As if to reinforce the importance of Tibet as a national security asset, the Chinese have stationed as many as 200,000 troops there, according to Western intelligence.

More sinisterly, there are growing suspicions that part of China's nuclear arsenal is stationed in Tibet. To make matters worse, uranium is listed in the latest Chinese census as one mineral as yet unexploited in Tibet.

So in the face of these geo-political and economic realities, where can the Tibetans turn, in view of the 'new world order' and what is meant to be an era of justice and self determination? The answer depressingly, but most emphatically, is not to the Western world, as the Most Favoured Nations Status debate has demonstrated beyond doubt.

China has assured the West that it will respect Tibet's religious and cultural traditions in return for favourable trading status. However, I saw little to suggest that Beijing was honouring that commitment. More disturbingly, the Western diplomats I met in China seemed deliberately blind to what is happening.

Maintaining stable trade relations with the fastest-growing economy in the world is a higher priority than preserving religious and cultural rights in a distant Himalayan theocracy. Despite the impassioned rhetoric to the contrary, jobs in the West are ultimately more important to our leaders, though it is awkward for them to admit it.

In the face of that, the erosion of Tibetan Buddhism will continue. But given the economic leverage which the West now has, it will be its leadership, as much as the gerontocracy in Beijing that must shoulder the blame when, as will surely happen, the world suddenly wakes up and is scandalised by the destruction of Tibetan culture. It is only then—when it is too late—that the half-heartedness and hypocrisy of Western policy towards Tibet will be fully exposed.

IMPRESSIONS FROM A RECENT VISIT TO TIBET

by Maura Moynihan

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A majority of the incoming Tibetan refugees presently seeking asylum in India are from Amdo and Kham. Thus I travelled to Kham in 1995 to witness conditions under Chinese occupation. My companion and I had hoped to travel beyond Derge towards Lithang and Bathang, but we were placed under house arrest in Riwoche after Public Security Bureau agents saw us drinking tea and photographing a vegetable market in Chamdo without our guide, who had gone in search of a mechanic to repair our Land Rover. This incident demonstrated just how carefully foreigners are watched. Nevertheless, we were able to travel extensively throughout northwestern Kham beforehand.

Kham has endured depredation and invasion for many decades: the Chamdo monastery, the third largest in Tibet, with a vast library and medical college, was burned to the ground in 1904 by the Manchu general Chao Her-feng. In 1919, after Kuomintang brigands had terrorised Kham's villages and cities for several years, Tibetan militia joined with the Lhasa army and drove the Chinese out. In the early 1950s Mao claimed the region based on the 1905-1910 Manchu conquest of eastern Kham, and imposed 'democratic reforms' which consisted of massive confiscation of the lands and property. Lamas, traders, chieftains, all Tibetans with 'bad class status', were subject to 'thamzing', or 'struggle sessions', wherein victims were publicly tortured and humiliated. In 1956 the Khampas united in a massive revolt which spread to U-tsang, Tibet's central province. In early battles the Chinese were routed by the Tibetan guerrillas, but Chinese reinforcement drove hundreds of thousands of

Khampas into central Tibet. When the Great Leap Forward commenced in 1958 nearly all over Kham monasteries were looted and demolished.

In March of 1959, as Mao's armies advanced towards Lhasa, Khampa guerrillas disguised the 23-year-old Dalai Lama as a servant and bore him over the Himalayas to safety in India. After the south-western Kham was attached to U-tsang, which was designated the official Tibetan Autonomous Region, northeast Kham was attached to Szechuan province.

There are virtually no old Tibetan buildings left in Kham, though in some areas I observed Tibetans rebuilding with traditional materials. The Chinese military infrastructure is sophisticated, as it is ubiquitous; small villages have military bases with radio towers, satellite dishes, soldiers, and karaoke bars and brothels for their entertainment. Boulevards display huge murals with illustrations of red-cheeked cadre with decidedly Caucasian features, wearing army caps and Mao suits, saluting the red flag. This kind of Leninist poster art has disappeared from the streets of Peking and Shanghai, but in Tibet it remains a potent symbol of a conquering army and the Communist ideology to which Peking's politburo still adheres.

The Mao cult, presumed dead, persists in Chinese-occupied Tibet; restaurants, stores and offices bear a new icon of Mao as a youthful, slender cadre gazing upwards with an eager smile. Popular songs played on radios and in karaoke bars extol the achievements of the Chairman, who is perhaps the greatest mass murderer in human history. A Princeton University study obtained documents from the Chinese Communist system Reform Institute (initiated by the progressive Communist party chief Zhao Ziyang, who was purged shortly thereafter), which estimate more than 80 million died during Maoist 'reforms', most during the Great Leap Forward from 1956

to 1963. If resurgent Hitler or Stalin cults appeared in Europe, western diplomats would be much alarmed, while China's continuing deification of Mao is deemed irrelevant.

Vast tracts of virgin forest have been clear-cut, and there is clearly no management of forest resources. In the Chamdo region I observed a yellow fungus throughout acres of decimated pine forests. Travellers' accounts of Kham prior to 1959 describe gazelles, deer, antelope, bobcats, fox, wolves, rabbits, and birds. Poachers from Szechuan and Yunnan, and PLA soldiers who used machine-guns to slaughter entire herds of antelope, deer and gazelle, have decimated Kham's once abundant fauna. In the course of my journey I counted two rabbits, ten gophers, one fox. Today there is more wildlife in Virginia than eastern Tibet. Riwoche, once an important centre of artisans and writers is now little more than a main street of karaoke bars, pool halls, rows of concrete military barracks. There is only one store with Tibetan signage, all other advertisements and signs bear Chinese characters. Nevertheless, behind the tin and formica monoliths of the main street I saw many houses with traditional Tibetan design features, made of wood, mud and stone.

At present the population of Chamdo is at least 80% Chinese. In an old Tibetan neighbourhood near the central monastery all skilled Tibetan craftworks is now performed by Chinese immigrants. The only section of the bazaar with a clear majority of Tibetan workers is the meat market. There is some intermarriage between Chinese and Tibetans, although the two groups retain distinct ethnic identities. Tibetans still speak their language and wear Tibetan clothes and ornaments, often mixed with jeans and Western jackets. A majority of Khampas we met still carried a dagger or sword, even those working for the police and army. The Tibetans we spoke with complained of the lack of education and jobs. There is no higher education; high school and college-level students have two

choices: to go to China and accept cultural and linguistic sinofication, or risk the journey over the Himalayas to join the Dalai Lama's exile schools in India.

Most Tibetans were very eager to hear any news of His Holiness and were grateful to learn that he was prospering in his exile home. Along the roads we met many Tibetans en route to India. Some had already been walking for a month before reaching Chamdo, and anticipated another month of walking to reach Lhasa. A majority of these refugees were monks seeking to join a monastery and study Buddhism, though we also met many laypersons who could no longer live under the strictures of the Chinese occupation.

Nevertheless, the great monastery at Chamdo, rebuilt for the second time in this century, is filled with young monks and lay pilgrims. Local administration does not provide adequate facilities for monasteries. An enormous military cantonment sprawls below Drepung Monastery near Lhasa, with satellite television, fleets of automobiles, plumbing and electricity, whereas the monks at Drepung must haul their water from a single spigot several hundred feet below the dormitories. Monks in Kham endure the same privations. Nonetheless, I visited re-built Bonpo and Buddhist monasteries in Nagchuka, Sozo, Tinchu, Riwoche and Chamdo. Each Gompa was filled with young monks and a few old teachers who had survived the pathological assaults of the Chinese invasion and the Cultural Revolution. The speed with which Tibetans have rebuilt their monasteries and the persistence of many aspects of Tibetan customs and dress shows a determination to resist sinofication.

There is a less heavy industry and 'urban renewal' in Kham than in Lhasa. I visited Lhasa in 1994 and 1995. In one year Tibet's ancient capital has become a different city. Since 1994 there are over 1,000 new Chinese buildings and industrial projects, while hundreds of traditional

Tibetan buildings have been razed. The Shol, a historic township at the base of the Potala palace, has been bulldozed and replaced by a vast, Stalinesque People's Park with illuminated fountains and ersatz Victorian chandeliers. The Tibetan families which had inhabited the Shol for generations have been forcibly resettled in tin barracks several miles away, with seven to ten people sharing single rooms. The Lhasa valley now teems with factories, military barracks, prison camps, concrete row houses, Chinese bars, beauty parlours, and brothels. Once the centre of a highly sophisticated Buddhist civilisation, Lhasa has become a crude Chinese city with a small Tibetan enclave, preserved as a tourist attraction.

Those who believe that free trade will inevitably engender democracy should visit occupied Tibet to understand the grim reality of China's capitalist police state, where cultural genocide, slave labour, torture and summary execution easily co-exist with a vigorous market economy. Economic engagement did not reform Hitler's Germany or countless other criminal regimes; it made them richer and more powerful. The capitulation of Western governments to business interests has not moved China towards democracy; it has merely enriched and emboldened Peking's junta government.

A STRANGER IN MY NATIVE LAND

by Tenzin Sonam

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Part One: Around Kumbum

The two Chinese ladies sharing our compartment have been chatting ceaselessly for hours now, their conversation fuelled by an unending supply of roasted melon seeds. Earlier, in an unexpected gesture of friendliness—unexpected, because we had been travelling together for almost 18 hours and they had not once acknowledged our presence—they had brusquely offered us a handful of melon seeds and then, just as rapidly, retreated behind the curtain of their conversation. My wife, Ritu, and I have been in China for only three days but already we are accustomed to the indifference with which the Chinese seem to treat foreigners.

But Chinese attitudes to outsiders are the last thing on my mind as the train nears our destination, Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. Ever since we entered China I have been in a state of permanent tension, strung equally between apprehension and excitement. I am a Tibetan exile, born and brought up in India. All my life I have thought of Tibet as my homeland and China as the country that deprived me of it. I can scarcely believe that I am finally here, deep inside enemy territory, approaching my father's native land. Not far from Xining is Kumbum Monastery, one of Tibet's great religious institutions and the defining landmark of the region where my father was born. Kumbum is at the edge of Amdo, one of Tibet's three traditional provinces. Since the Communist Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1949, most of this region has been incorporated into Qinghai Province.

Low, dun-coloured hills, eroded and fragile, stretch out on either side of the train. We have been travelling due

west ever since we passed the old Silk Road outpost of Lanzhou a few hours ago. The Gobi Desert lies to the north and in the south, the Tibetan plateau begins its gradual rise; we can just about glimpse the faint adumbration of its mountains, ethereal above the undulating horizon. We pass villages—clusters of flat-roofed adobe dwellings—and farmland scratched out of the side of barren declivities. Factories appear, their chimneys seeping black smoke, then blocks of white-tiled apartment buildings and colonies of mud huts next to the tracks, slum-like yet surprisingly clean. There is none of the chaotic jumble of humanity and poverty that litters the approaches to large railway stations in India. I was brought up to think of Xining being as a part of Tibet, but there is nothing remotely Tibetan about this modern Chinese city that we are entering.

We used to have a photograph of Kumbum Monastery hanging prominently on one of the walls of our home in Darjeeling, the old British hill station where I was born and where I spent my childhood. It was an impressive picture, a black and white panoramic triptych of what looked like a town spread out at the foot of oddly denuded hills. It was unlike anything I had ever seen, a hive-like agglomeration of low, rectangular buildings, some with curved roofs, their courtyards surrounded by long, white walls. There were stands of autumnal trees in the foreground but the surrounding hills were barren, which for me was unthinkable, living as I did in the sub-tropical lushness of the Himalayan foothills. I could not imagine that my father had once lived there. Tibet seemed infinitely remote, unreal behind the great ramparts of the Kanchenjunga in whose shadow my sisters and I grew up.

My parents had left Tibet prior to the failed Lhasa uprising of March 1959 and the consequent escape of the Dalai Lama to India. In the early sixties Darjeeling was full of Tibetan refugees, and our house was a transit camp for numerous relatives and friends who had recently fled their

homes. To my child's eyes, their torn clothing, their haggard and tense faces, and above all, their ripe, unwashed body odours were all evidence of the horrors they had just left behind. Our unexpected guests were mostly my mother's acquaintances from Central Tibet but every now and again we had visitors who were from the Kumbum region. These men were special; they spoke a strangely accented Tibetan but even more mysteriously, amongst themselves and with my father, they spoke in the Xining dialect of Chinese, which none of us could understand. They also shared with my father a love of noodles, which they prepared in a variety of different ways, a culinary distinction that set apart our household from all other Tibetans.

Sometimes they would joke with me: 'And where are you from?'

I would reply, 'From Amdo!'

They would persist, 'But where in Amdo?'

I would then triumphantly declaim, childishly proud of my improbable provenance: 'I am from Amdo Kumbum!'

The train pulls into the station. We anxiously scan the faces of the people on the platform searching for my first cousin, Nima, who is supposed to meet us, but there is no sign of him. We wait for him outside the main entrance. A small sign in Tibetan—Xining Railway Station—hidden amongst giant Chinese characters, is the only indication that this place has anything to do with Tibet. The plaza in front of the station is dominated by a bizarre sculpture, an arch shaped like two crossed yak horns. The milling crowd seems to be made up mainly of Chinese and Hui Muslims, the latter distinctive in their white caps, black headdresses and wispy goatees, their facial features more Central Asian than Chinese.

As we wait, we notice two Tibetan women at the far end of the plaza approaching the station. They stand out immediately in their long, black, sheepskin-lined robes,

their hair braided in the 108 plaits typical of the nomads of Amdo, encrusted with heavy turquoise and coral jewellery. One twirls a prayer wheel while the other marks her prayers on the beads of a long rosary. Their languid, almost hypnotic, movement creates a kind of invisible force field that clears a path in front of them, the crowds peeling away in their wake. They climb the stairs leading to the main entrance where we are seated and then unexpectedly, with great composure and insouciance, squat on the ground in front of it. The two women seem to inhabit some other plane, oblivious of the swirling mass of people around them. Their faces are deeply creased, the furrows around their eyes flashing good humour. They carry about them a whiff of the open air, of high mountains and endless grasslands. They speak to each other in the Amdo dialect of Tibetan, which I can vaguely understand. I feel a sense of pride and solidarity just looking at them.

‘Our first real Tibetans!’, I say to Ritu, who is equally captivated by their presence. But the instinctive rush of excitement subsides and I realize how vulnerable they actually look, huddled together like two relics from a lost world, ignored and inconsequential amidst the bustle of a frantic and foreign city. After a while, a group of men led by a monk in maroon robes arrives. The women join them and they disappear into the station.

We have been waiting for a few hours now. I have made several calls to Kumbum Monastery, where my cousin lives and works, but he is not there and the person who answers the telephone can barely speak Tibetan. Our hearts sink at the thought of venturing out into what increasingly seems like a hostile city.

‘Welcome home’, Ritu teases me.

Nima finally arrives, shouting and clapping his hands from across the entrance. Somehow, we had missed each other on the platform and he had returned to Kumbum Monastery, 25 kilometres away. He is the only member of my

father's family in Tibet that I have met before. He came to India in the early eighties; the political reforms that followed Mao's death in 1976 allowed Tibetans for the first time since the Chinese occupation to visit their relatives in exile. His visit restored our family links in the Kumbum area after a gap of nearly thirty years.

As we drive through Xining, Nima chatters away excitedly, eager for news and gossip about family and friends in India and elsewhere. It is strangely comforting to be talking about these faraway yet familiar people and events. Fortunately for me, when Nima came to India he learnt to speak the Central Tibetan dialect which is the lingua franca among the Tibetan community in exile. It would have been hard enough for me to communicate in the Amdo dialect, which is quite distinct from Central Tibetan, but here in the Kumbum region even that would have been impossible, for the local Tibetans have long since lost their language and speak only the Xining Chinese dialect.

The city sweeps by—broad avenues with surprisingly orderly traffic, pavements crowded with food stalls, modern high rises, and everywhere giant billboards flagrantly broadcasting the good capitalist life—and then we are out in the countryside. The harvest is in full swing. We pass endless rows of haystacks precision-lined like soldiers on parade and mud-walled villages and roadside eateries festooned with green banners, their signs all in Chinese. We soon arrive at Huang Zhong, or Rusar as it is known in Tibetan, the district headquarters just outside Kumbum Monastery. It appears to be another Chinese town. I catch sight of a few monks, conspicuous in their maroon robes, and a group of Tibetan pilgrims—nomads in sheepskin tunics—wandering about with slightly bewildered expressions. The final stretch leading up to the monastery is lined with souvenir shops. Nima tells me that they are almost all owned by Muslims.

The curved roofs of the monastery appear like a mirage, the first manifestation of Tibetan culture. I think of the

black and white photograph of my childhood but my memory bears no resemblance to this freshly renovated complex that we are entering. I notice immediately that the hills behind the monastery that were so prominently barren in that picture have turned into farmland. We drive past the famous row of eight stupas that guards its entrance. They seem marooned in the middle of a large, newly paved plaza. The monastery looks freshly scrubbed; the main road is paved and clean. We pass a brand new public toilet. Coloured light bulbs are strung along the edges of the temples like decorations in an amusement arcade. Everywhere, there are signs of construction or renovation but some vital component seems to be missing, and then it hits me—there are hardly any monks visible. Every now and again, I glimpse them, in twos and threes, wraithlike in their robes, disappearing around corners, melting away into shadows and alleyways. I immediately think of the Tibetan refugee monasteries in southern India, not half as big or imposing as Kumbum yet alive with activity, filled with the din and clatter of religious endeavour, their atmosphere charged with a spiritual resonance.

Kumbum Monastery grew up around the spot where Tsongkhapa, one of Tibet's greatest scholar-saints, was born in 1357 to a nomad family. Tsongkhapa reformed Tibetan Buddhism and his teachings gave rise to the Gelugpa Order, which became the dominant religious and political force in Tibet. The monastery was consecrated in 1582 by Sonam Gyatso, the Third Dalai Lama, and in time became renowned as one of Tibet's six great Gelugpa monasteries.

In my father's time, nearly four thousand monks lived here, their collective energy engendering several of Tibet's great religious thinkers and scholars. They came from all over Amdo and from as far away as Mongolia and the Russian Buddhist enclaves of Buryatia and Kalmykia. The monastery was closed down soon after communist Chinese

forces took control of the region in 1949 and a large section was levelled during the Cultural Revolution. In the late seventies Kumbum slowly came to life again but the activities of the monastery were tightly regulated and today, only a maximum of 400 monks can be enrolled. With restoration Kumbum suffered another fate; its proximity and accessibility to China made it a potential tourist attraction, and in an effort to realize this, the authorities turned the monastery into a museum-like heritage centre.

We are staying within the monastery complex at the residence of Zorgey Rinpoche, one of Kumbum Monastery's high lamas, who is closely connected to my family; the previous incarnation and the founder of the lineage was my great uncle. The present Zorgey Rinpoche is now in his seventies and has lived in exile for the past four decades, the last thirty years in America. Following a family tradition, Nima is the rinpoche's steward, and despite his master's absence, represents his interests at the monastery.

All tourists pay an entrance fee to visit the monastery but pilgrims are exempt. Thanks to our guide, an old monk who works with Nima, we fall into the latter category. We go from shrine to shrine, making our offerings, joining the pilgrims who are mostly nomads, traditionally dressed and speaking the Amdo dialect. Photographs of the Dalai Lama and the late Panchen Lama are prominently displayed in all the chapels, a reminder of the extent of the Dalai Lama's influence inside Tibet. Pressed up against the pilgrims in the dark interiors of the temples, the hushed sounds of their devotions mingling with the familiar smell of butter lamps, and watched over by the serene faces of the giant Buddha statues, I can imagine what Kumbum must once have been like. But the spell is broken by a group of Chinese tourists who barge into our midst, unconcerned by the display of reverence and piety around them, their bullhorn-toting leader loudly explicating in her brutally insistent and shrill voice.

We visit a building that houses displays of the butter-sculptures that Kumbum is renowned for—intricate tableaux of scenes from Buddhist mythology populated by gods and goddesses and lesser beings, all meticulously shaped out of vividly coloured butter. But the skills of Kumbum's butter sculptors are obviously adaptable; one display case encloses a large tableau of the Palace of Heaven at Tiananmen Square complete with tiny representations of Mao, Zhou, Deng and company, frozen in the archetypal Communist gestures of applause. I marvel at this improbable juxtaposition of the sacred and the stridently profane.

I find it disturbing that most of the monks we encounter speak only Xining Chinese. I begin to wonder whether the monastery has, in fact, become a mere showpiece for tourists, its monks there simply to provide the requisite colour. It is only after we have been here for a few days that I discover that Kumbum's monastic legacy is very much alive. In one of the old courtyards of the monastery we come upon a group of about fifty monks engaged in a vigorous debating session—the formalized system of dialectical inquiry that is at the heart of the Gelugpa tradition. The staccato explosions of their ritual handclaps punctuate their excited arguments. To my surprise they are debating in Tibetan. The majority of the monks look to be in their twenties and would have been born long after the Communist Chinese takeover of Tibet. They would have grown up in a world bereft of religion; Kumbum would have lain empty and in ruins, a decaying symbol of a forgotten past. And yet, here they are, their faith undimmed, once again engaged in the spiritual traditions that are at the core of their identity as Tibetans.

My father was born in the village of Nagatsang, five kilometres from Kumbum Monastery. Our ancestors were nomads who settled there shortly after the establishment of the monastery in the 16th century. From the 17th

century onwards, large groups of Chinese and Muslim migrants moved into this region and soon outnumbered the sparse Tibetan population. When my father was a child, the three original Tibetan families of Nagatsang were surrounded by over fifty Chinese households and this is the case even today, except the families have multiplied and the village has expanded.

As the youngest son, my father was destined to become a monk at Kumbum Monastery—two of his older brothers were already monks. But my grandfather was unusually far-sighted and realized that unless Tibetans became proficient in the Chinese language they would increasingly become marginalized in a society that was completely dominated by Chinese and Muslims. So, instead of Kumbum, my father was sent to the local Chinese school and from there, in 1945, to the Institute for Frontier Minorities in Nanking. Soon after his arrival in Nanking, he met and befriended Gyalo Thondup, the older brother of the Dalai Lama, who had come to study at the nearby University of Political Science.

My father briefly returned to Nagatsang in 1946. This was his last visit home. In early 1949, the Communists were on the verge of a national victory and their troops were poised to enter Nanking. Gyalo Thondup and my father fled to Shanghai and from there to India. By the time they arrived in India and based themselves in the border town of Kalimpong—then the most important Indian trade-post with Tibet—Communist troops were already on their way to the Tibetan capital, Lhasa. The two went to Lhasa in 1952 but their visit was short-lived; the Chinese occupation forces had set up base there and were suspicious of Gyalo Thondup's motives for coming back. After their return to Kalimpong, Gyalo Thondup initiated a number of operations in support of the growing resistance movement inside Tibet, the most significant of which was to solicit support from the CIA. My father was delegated to coordinate and oversee the CIA's undercover

aid programme. Before long, he found himself embroiled in the murky world of espionage and guerrilla warfare, an involvement that dictated his life for the next twenty years.

After the fall of Lhasa in 1959 the resistance forces, supported by the CIA, regrouped in a remote corner of northern Nepal; my father was the key liaison between the two. The CIA pulled out abruptly in 1969, a precursor of the soon-to-come detente between America and China. The guerrillas continued their campaign until 1974 when they were finally disbanded after a tense showdown with Nepalese troops. My father was involved in this confrontation and, along with six other guerrilla leaders, spent seven years in a Nepalese prison as a result. After his release, he worked for the Dalai Lama's Government-in-Exile in Dharamsala in northern India and eventually attained the rank of a minister. Fifty years have passed since my father left Nagatsang.

A few days after our arrival in Kumbum Monastery, Ritu and I visit Nagatsang. The low, rolling hills on either side of the dirt road from Rusar are dotted with neat stacks of freshly harvested wheat, row after row of aesthetically pleasing inverted V's that somehow look quintessentially Chinese. We enter the village; high mud walls surround each dwelling and intricately carved wooden entrances—their frames papered with auspicious Chinese characters—lead into their compounds.

We stop outside the house of one of my relatives. Dhondup, the eldest of my first cousins, comes out to greet us. Inside, a lot of people are gathered—various cousins, their wives and children—all smiling and laughing and speaking Xining Chinese while I, also beaming, reply in Tibetan, our greetings spontaneous, warm and mutually unintelligible. We are ushered into the main room. There are sofas on either side of a low table and a wood-burning stove in the middle. The walls are decorated with glossy posters of sylvan, Alpine scenes; post-card chalets beside

tranquil lakes. Picture frames crammed with snapshot collages hang prominently. I notice photographs of my family, even a few wedding pictures of Ritu and me, and it is suddenly moving to think that my relatives, who I am now meeting for the first time, have spent years of their lives with our pictures on their walls.

Dhondup has flourished since the economic reforms; he is now a building contractor and a rich man by village standards. We are offered small cups of strong alcohol that we are made to knock back in a gulp. Bottles of beer are opened and simultaneously, cups of a local specialty—green tea, dried fruits and rock sugar steeped in hot water—are placed in front of us. The women serve us: a pork dish, the meat succulent with fat, chicken stewed in soya sauce, stir fried green peppers with mutton, fried aubergines, all accompanied by steamed and baked breads.

Three of my first cousins sit with us steadily downing alcohol. Nima interprets for us; none of the others speaks a word of Tibetan. Dhondup is the most garrulous. He is also the only one who remembers my father: ‘Your father used to come home from school and he would play the flute. We were only children then but we loved him so much. Oh, I have so much to talk to you about, if only I could speak Tibetan!’

‘Is she Tibetan?’ asks one of my cousins, pointing at Ritu.

‘No,’ I say, ‘She is Indian.’

‘Is she a Tibetan born in India?’

‘No, she’s a real Indian.’ I ask Nima, ‘Have they seen Indians before?’

‘Only on television’, he replies.

‘He is Tibetan but he looks like an Indian’, says another of my cousins, pointing at me.

‘I guess I’ve lived so long in India that I’ve become an Indian myself!’ I reply to their merriment. But in fact, the irony is that in exile, I have had the freedom to develop

and express my identity as a Tibetan more completely than my relatives here and unlike them, I was brought up with strong nationalistic aspirations. Here, Tibetans have been a minority for so long that for them to even consider the notion of a separate and independent Tibet is unimaginable.

The morning advances. My father becomes the focus of our conversation. To my cousins, he is the last surviving member of their parents' generation and, as such, the patriarch in absentia. They tell me to convince him to return; they want him to live out his final years in his family home among his many relatives. I promise to convey their message but deep down I know that my father will never come back. He has spent most of his life actively working for the cause of Tibet's independence. For him to return would be an admission of failure, a negation of his entire life's work.

The talk, the alcohol and the rush of memories make Dhondup melancholic and he unexpectedly breaks down and sobs like a child, hugging me, speaking to me in Xining Chinese, shaking his head and groaning as if racked by some deep, searing pain. I cradle him and try to comfort him, confused, the alcohol gone to my head as well—these unfamiliar surroundings, this stranger in my arms with whom I have nothing in common and yet who is bound to me by ties that are more deep-rooted than shared memories or experiences.

After a while, we visit the very spot where my father was born; the original house has long-since been dismantled and literally divided among three of my cousins.

'These are the beams from the old house', Dhondup says. 'And that tree was there when your father was a child—take a picture of that, he'll remember it—and that's the spot where he used to sit and read his books or play the flute.' My cousin has recovered from his momentary breakdown and he is now even more drunk, staggering, grinning broadly, doing an impromptu jig and saying to

me, 'This is one of the happiest days of my life because you have come back to your native land and we have finally met.'

We are now to pay our respects at the graves of our ancestors. We walk through the village in conspicuous procession, Ritu and me in our Western, mountaineering-style clothes, various cousins and nephews carrying bits and pieces of our gear—my camera bag, the video backpack, a tripod—and my drunk cousin, supported on either side by two boys, singing and lurching wildly. We pass a group of old men sitting beside the road. One of them remembers my father; they had gone to school together as children. He peers at me as if to find some identifying feature that will connect my face to the one he dimly remembers from more than sixty years ago, but he shakes his head, either giving up on the effort or simply not believing that I am who I claim to be.

Just outside the village, in a small clearing beside the path, lie a few unmarked mounds of earth. These are the graves of my grandparents. I am taken by surprise since Tibetans usually cremate their dead or feed their remains to vultures. But here in the Kumbum area, Tibetans have assimilated the Chinese custom of ancestor worship. A cousin burns coloured paper—symbolic money—as an offering while the rest of us make prostrations in front of the graves. Seeing me participate in their family ritual, Dhondup is again overcome by emotion. Wailing loudly, he collapses on top of one of the mounds: 'Grandma! Two of your grandchildren have come all this way to see you, and you are not here to receive them...'

We troop across the fields to a site above the village where more mounds are scattered—various granduncles and aunts. From here, the golden roofs of Kumbum are visible at the far end of the narrow valley.

Dhondup is once more in high spirits. 'This spot', he says, his arms flailing, 'is your father's, and this...' he

stumbles towards me, 'is your spot, and this ...' he gestures at Ritu, 'is for you!'

The sun is setting. The surrounding hillsides have taken on a warm, golden, almost liquid sheen, and their rows of haystacks stand out, stark and surreal, like a de Chirico painting.

My relatives, like most Tibetans in the Kumbum region, are literally clinging onto the last shreds of their cultural identity. They still have Tibetan names and are officially registered as ethnic Tibetans, a minority status that allows them certain privileges, and most importantly, they still maintain their faith in Tibetan Buddhism—the proximity of Kumbum Monastery continues to exert a strong influence on their lives. But in every other respect, they have become indistinguishable from their Chinese neighbours. Until the onset of the Cultural Revolution, their womenfolk could always be recognized by their Tibetan dress without which they never ventured outside, but the madness of the intervening years wiped out that one surviving display of ethnic separateness.

The loss of language and traditions is the first step in the dissolution of cultural identity. Here among my relatives, in this far corner of Tibet, that process seems almost complete.

One evening, we return to our quarters at the monastery to find two Chinese men waiting for us. They are in their early thirties. As soon as they see us they leap to their feet, their faces beaming with a friendliness that seems excessive. The insincerity of their reception is confirmed when, instead of shaking hands, they insist on folding their palms together and mechanically rocking their heads back and forth in a parody of the Indian gesture of welcome which they no doubt believe is the proper way to greet a Tibetan from India. Their strange behaviour is explained when I learn that they are from the United Front,

the insidious Communist Party organization whose aim is to bring within the control of the Party—at any cost—all non-Party and non-Chinese groups and minorities. It is at the forefront of any dealings between China and the exiled Tibetans.

The taller of the two, a bespectacled and slightly nervous-looking character, welcomes us in Chinese and immediately launches into a little speech, thanking me for coming back to my motherland and apologizing for not knowing earlier about our arrival and therefore for not being able to look after us. Could we, he asks, join them for a meal and a friendly chat tomorrow? Nima translates for us. I feel trapped. I have no wish to have anything to do with them, yet I fear that any unfriendliness on my part will have repercussions on my relatives. I explain to them that my wife and myself are here on a family visit and that they are most kind but there is no need for them to go through so much trouble on our behalf.

‘No,’ he insists, ‘you must give us at least an hour of your time. Please, an hour is all we ask.’

Ritu and I look at each other; there is no escape. ‘Alright,’ I say to them, ‘we would be happy to meet you for an hour tomorrow morning.’

I feel apprehensive about our impending meeting; in a sense, I am finally coming face to face with my enemy.

‘Don’t worry,’ says Ritu unconvincingly, ‘it’ll be an experience.’

The next morning, Mr Chen, the bespectacled man, comes to pick us up. He has brought with him an interpreter, a young, well-dressed Chinese woman whose English has traces of an American accent although it transpires that she has never studied in America. She seems keen to make a good impression on us. Her presence and her eagerness to show off her English dispels my anxiety.

We are driven to an official guesthouse in Rusal and ushered into a room where a number of other men are waiting. Over mugs of Chinese tea, Mr Chen makes

another speech, the gist of which is to ask us if we have had any problems during our stay. I say that our stay has been very pleasant and that it has been wonderful to meet my relatives but that I am very disturbed to find that none of them speak Tibetan. I suggest that perhaps more could be done to promote the Tibetan language. The interpreter seems surprised to hear this and tells me that as far as she is aware both Tibetan and Chinese are taught at schools in Qinghai. I tell her that that may be so in other parts of the province but that around Kumbum, it is definitely not the case. Mr Chen quickly interjects that they are grateful for my advice and that, in fact, the government has already initiated certain programmes to do precisely what I have suggested. He then casually says, 'Your father is very old now, he should return to his homeland. He has been away for too long. Please tell him that we welcome him back. We will be happy if he comes back to live here but if not, we will be equally happy if he only visits us. Please tell him that we will look after all his needs and he will have no worries when he comes here.'

So this is what it is about, I think to myself. I reply that I will certainly convey their message to my father but that because of his age I doubt he will be able to make the journey.

'Has your father ever been to Hong Kong?' Mr Chen asks.

'Yes', I reply.

'Well, if he cannot make it to Qinghai then we will be happy to meet him in Hong Kong', he says, making his earlier appeal redundant. I wonder what they think they can achieve by meeting him, in Hong Kong or anywhere else.

We sip some more tea and make small talk; the main purpose of the meeting is clearly over. We are about to take our leave when Mr Chen announces that we will now have lunch. I protest that this was not part of our agreement but he is insistent. He tells us that arrangements have

already been made. We are led to another room where a large round table is laid out for a feast. Along the way, one of our hosts unexpectedly asks us to pose for a photograph with the others. Ritu immediately declines. He turns to me.

‘It’s only to have a memento of your visit here’, our interpreter says genially. I hesitate for a second and catch Ritu’s eye. ‘I’m sorry,’ I say, ‘but I would rather not.’ The pages of Chinese propaganda journals are full of photographs of returning exiles, smiling happily with their United Front patrons; undoubtedly, Ritu and I would have made a welcome addition. Our hosts are noticeably offended but do not insist.

We sit around the table. A bottle of alcohol is taken out of its packaging. We tell our interpreter that it is too early in the day for us to drink strong spirits. Some of our companions look disappointed when the bottle is taken away. We are undoubtedly about to partake in one of the official banquets that are reportedly causing such a drain on the state exchequer, and since copious quantities of alcohol are one of their main attractions, we must appear like real spoil-sports. The meal comes in courses and we are served at least twelve or thirteen different dishes.

Under Ritu’s questioning, Mr Chen and the interpreter admit that they cannot speak the Xining Chinese dialect very well and that this part of China is completely different from their native province which is far away on the eastern coast. They talk about the difficulty of adjusting to the altitude—Xining is at 2,700 metres—and of getting used to the different food habits and customs. A certain wistfulness creeps into their conversation. The absurdity of their situation becomes clear; here they are, playing out the fiction that we—Tibetan and Chinese of Qinghai Province—are brothers when the reality is that they are themselves strangers to this region. I see them for what they are, the bureaucratic elite of a colonial power, serving time in a distant corner of the empire.

One day we visit Taktser, the village where the present Dalai Lama was born, a two-hour drive from Kumbum. On the way we pass huge factories, some shut down, and small towns where most of the restaurants seem to be owned by Muslims, their presence announced by the familiar green banner with the crescent and star imprint. We stop to eat in one of them. Nima tells me that the Muslims make the tastiest food and can be trusted to be clean. Throughout this region, the main staple is flour, and most of the restaurants specialize in noodle dishes, some of which are familiar to me from my home in India. Like most Amdos in exile, the one cultural trait that my father retained from his childhood was his love of noodles and we grew up eating a variety of noodle dishes that were native to his province. And so it is that coming here to my father's homeland and discovering how much of a stranger I am, the one recurring point of familiarity is the food.

The road to Taktser becomes a dirt track that climbs up the side of a hill. We pass huge coloured rock formations, deep red chimneys of stalactites bunched together like a Gaudi cathedral. The earth is browner, more desert-like, more suited to the grazing of animals. The familiar inverted V haystacks are beginning to seem faintly sinister, as if these precise military formations somehow symbolize the transformation of nomadic land into agrarian, the essential component in the settlement of Tibet by Chinese immigrants.

Near Taktser we see a large stupa in the distance. My cousin tells me that it commemorates the passage of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama through this area in 1909 when he was returning to Lhasa from Mongolia. According to tradition, he pointed to the village of Taktser high on its spur and remarked how pretty it looked, thereby foreshadowing his own rebirth there.

We drive into Taktser. The village seems deserted. It is similar to all the other villages we have been to; the same high mud walls and carved wooden entrances decorated

with Chinese characters. Nima goes to look for the person who still lives in the house where the Dalai Lama was born. He is the last surviving relative of the Dalai Lama in his native village. The original house was torn down a long time ago and a new one built on its spot. The man is not at home but his wife is. She cannot speak Tibetan but this fact no longer surprises me. Behind the house is a temple that the Chinese built in the early eighties at a time when they were making efforts to induce the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet.

The main entrance to the temple, an imposing gateway, seems permanently locked. The temple, fronted by canopies of white canvas with stark, black designs, is in the traditional Sino-Tibetan style of the area with a distinctive pagoda-like roof covered in tiles. A huge flagpole—attached to the four corners of the courtyard by strings of prayer flags—dominates the complex. The place seems forlorn and lost, wrapped in a silence that is broken only by the rhythmic flapping of the canopies. In the main shrine room, a large framed photograph of the Dalai Lama rests on a throne. A bowl of apples, smaller bowls of rock sugar and boiled sweets, a couple of unlit butter lamps and a few ritual articles are laid out on a table in front of the picture. A few thangkas—religious scroll paintings—hang on the walls, and some statues rest on the shelves of a long wooden cabinet behind the throne. The temple is devoid of any sense of spirituality.

I think of the Dalai Lama, thousands of miles away in his exiled home in Dharamsala; it seems unimaginably remote. I think of the long and eventful course of his life, inextricably bound to the tragic fate of his country, and I find it hard to believe that it all began here, sixty years ago, in this forgotten outpost at the furthest edge of Tibet.

Part Two: Lhasa

The train jerks to life. Hurried hugs, last-minute goodbyes, then Nima and Dhondup, who have come to see us off at Xining station, jump off the moving carriage. They walk alongside our window, waving at us until we gather speed and leave them behind, Dhondup's wizened, childlike face, screwed in a grimace that is both an attempted smile and a suppressed sob. For a while I sit numbed in silence. I wonder if I will ever return. Although our stay has been emotionally turbulent and I have had to reconcile myself to the reality of Kumbum's ethnic and cultural isolation from the rest of Tibet, I still feel a sense of affinity, of connection, to the place. I have met long-lost relatives and re-established long-severed family ties; in a sense, I have taken that first step towards discovering my own personal history and locating my place within it.

After a few hours, the enormity of our impending journey sinks in—we are finally on our way to Lhasa. We have been hearing conflicting reports about whether or not tourists are being allowed to travel to Lhasa. The official celebrations to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region have just concluded in Lhasa amidst tight security and a conspicuous absence of publicity. From what we can gather, tourists were banned during this period but no one seems to know if that is still the case. There is a chance that we might be stopped at Golmud, the rail terminus from which buses to Lhasa leave. Excitement, tainted by the omnipresent undercurrent of fear, propels us into the unknown.

By nightfall we are on the shores of Tso Ngon [blue lake], Tibet's largest lake and one of its most sacred. The rhythmic clatter of the train echoes across its phosphorescent surface, an endless sheet of calm water that disappears into the gloaming. The young Chinese tour guide in her fashionably tight black jeans and Nike trainers sits across us, engrossed in a glossy magazine. She is with a group of Taiwanese tourists who are going to

Golmud and from there by car to look at the Kun Lun mountain range. Above her the Muslim couple who had earlier chattered and cooed to each other like two pigeons in love now sit perched on their bunk bed, lost in a deep and mutual sulk, the beginning of a battle that continues through the night, its ebbs and flows drifting in and out of our sleep.

Earlier, the woman had attempted to engage us in conversation, using the Chinese girl's limited English as a go-between:

'Where are you from?'

'From England.'

'Where are you going?'

'To Lhasa.'

'Lhasa!' She had rolled up her eyes in an expression of horror, 'There is nothing in Lhasa!'

'Where are you going?' we had asked her.

'To Golmud. My husband... business... I hate Golmud. I hate this...' She had waved her hand extravagantly at the window, 'All desert. No trees. No people...' and rolled her eyes again in despair.

In the morning, the scenery has changed dramatically. We are travelling through a truly bleak and forbidding landscape. Huge salt flats coruscate in the morning sun. In the distance, a line of trucks, silhouetted against the stark whiteness, shimmers unsteadily. We pass small settlements, wretched and makeshift, like science fiction penal colonies. And even as the thought passes my mind, I remember that this is where some of China's worst gulags are located, where thousands of Tibetans met their end in the first decades of Chinese rule and where numerous political prisoners are still incarcerated.

Golmud appears out of the desert in the early afternoon like the frontier town it is, its presence heralded by rusting heaps of machinery, hulks of factories, and then rows of apartment buildings—everything tinged with an air of

temporariness. A rabble of touts descends upon us as soon as we leave the station. We shake them off and walk uncertainly across a vast concourse. An empty bus drives up behind us and the driver calls out, 'Lhasa! Lhasa!'

He looks Tibetan to me. I ask him, 'Do you speak Tibetan?'

He is taken aback but quickly recovers and says in the Lhasa Tibetan dialect, 'You're Tibetan! Going to Lhasa? Well, get in fast. This is the first bus to Lhasa.'

'Where are the rest of the passengers?'

'Don't worry Gen-la, just get in', he says with a friendly grin. 'Gen-la' is an honorific term for 'teacher' and is commonly used—particularly in Lhasa—to address older men or strangers.

'Are foreigners being permitted to travel to Lhasa?'

'Of course. Only yesterday, we took two Westerners.'

'How much is the ticket?'

'It's not expensive. Don't worry; it's the same for everyone. You'll find out as soon as we get to the office.'

I find it a bit disconcerting that he cannot tell me exactly what the fare is but the newness of our experience—the excitement of actually being able to talk to a fellow-Tibetan—dulls our suspicion. The driver keeps up a non-stop monologue the refrain of which is that we are Tibetans and can trust each other. His final word of advice is:

'Stay away from the Muslims. They'll cheat you blind—they can't be trusted and they'll kill you if they can.' I've noticed this mistrust of Muslims even in Kumbum; a mixture of awe and fear seems to inform any discussion about them. Above all, the Muslims are clearly seen as a separate and insular group, one against whom the Tibetans and Chinese, at least around Kumbum, seem instinctively allied.

Our bus pulls into a depot. We see another bus, already packed with passengers, waiting to depart. Our driver

casually tells us that we have to shift to the other bus, as that one will leave first.

‘But you told us that this was the first bus to Lhasa’, I tell him indignantly.

‘No, no, I meant that we’re all the same. We’re all official Lhasa buses so it doesn’t make a difference. Anyway that is a Japanese bus and it has a heater. You’ll be grateful for that when you cross the Dang La Pass. It can be bitterly cold up there.’

Karl, the young German traveller who was the only Westerner on the train with us, is standing by the bus, fuming with anger.

‘Bloody Chinese, they want 1,100 yuan from us and the ticket is actually only 300 yuan. I’m not going to pay them a single extra yuan!’

We go into the CITS (China International Tourist Services) office with Karl. The surly Chinese woman behind the desk informs us in barely intelligible English that we have no choice; all foreigners travelling by bus from Golmud to Lhasa have to buy a special ticket for 1,100 yuan, which includes three days of official sight-seeing in Lhasa whether or not they want to avail of the privilege. Karl explodes in a paroxysm of rage and screams at the woman, accusing the CITS of being bandits and thieves. She merely ignores him, undoubtedly inured to such scenes, which must be a regular occurrence here. In the end, she agrees to deduct 100 yuan from his ticket since he is a student. He considers this a small victory in his personal and ongoing battle against the depredations of the CITS, who have fleeced him for months across China. Ritu and me are secretly relieved; at least nobody is stopping us from going to Lhasa.

Most of the good seats on the bus are already occupied. The passengers seem to be mostly Chinese. I tell the driver who brought us here that he has not been frank with us and ask him to at least find us some good seats. Looking

sheepish, he orders a young Chinese couple to vacate the front row and offers it to us.

‘Gen-la, these are the best seats. I told you, you could trust me. Don’t worry, the driver is Tibetan and the bus is Japanese. You don’t have to worry about a thing!’

The route takes us through a vast desert plain flanked on both sides by mountains. The crests of the range on the left are uniformly rounded and snow-capped like the crenellated battlements of a fairy-tale castle. On the right, a jagged tangle of untidy peaks, stark and hostile, stretches as far as the eye can see. A giant pipeline snakes beside the road, disappears for miles and then unexpectedly reappears, burrowing out of the hillside like a monstrous worm. Out of the dead desert, a herd of *kyang*—the Tibetan wild ass—magically materializes, racing away from the speeding bus. Two bactrian camels appear, plodding regally in the opposite direction, the identities of their riders too distant for me to discern. All the while, we are heading straight for a barricade of icy peaks that seems to emerge like an optical illusion from a point beyond the horizon. Before we know it, we come up against it and at the last moment, veer to the right. The wall of snow mountains rises perpendicularly from the side of the road itself. These are the Kun Lun mountains which stretch deep into the northern plateau all the way from the Sinkiang border. I can now understand why a group of Taiwanese tourists might want to come all this way just to catch a glimpse of them.

We halt at a truck stop in the shadow of the mountains. The restaurants are mostly Muslim, a few are Chinese. Everyone in this forlorn outpost seems depressed and grim-faced. These are the dregs of China’s deprived millions, the men and women who are threatening to overwhelm Tibet. For them, even the unremitting loneliness and hostility of life in this alien land is better than the poverty they have left behind. As we walk back to the bus we notice with surprise a Tibetan restaurant.

A beautiful Amdo woman, bejewelled and traditionally dressed, stands at the doorway, shining radiantly like a ray of hope in this mean and desolate truck stop. I wonder what has brought her here.

The two drivers exchange places. There is a bunk in the front for the spare driver to sleep on. Darkness descends swiftly as we cross the Kun Lun pass. Late at night, we are awoken by loud voices; the bus has stopped at a check-post. Two officers climb aboard. Thickly moustached and smelling of alcohol, they look like brigands in a Bollywood movie ineptly disguised as policemen, their long, dandruff-flecked hair struggling raggedly from under their peaked caps. They move through the bus checking permits and papers. They stop when they see us. They look Tibetan to me. I can see them silently debating whether or not to ask us for our papers. Earlier, at another check-post, the inspecting officer, a Chinese, had not even bothered to look at our passports, but now, the more evil-looking of the duo decides to have some fun and loudly asks me in Chinese to show him my passport. I hand it to him and, like a buffoon in a Monty Python sketch, he reads it upside down until he comes to my photograph at which point he triumphantly points at the picture and then at me. Laughing loudly, he hands it back to me and the pair stagger off the bus.

It is bitterly cold. I ask the driver to turn on the heater but he tells me that it has stopped working a long time ago. So much for trusting fellow-Tibetans! I settle back to sleep. After a restless slumber filled with strange dreams that seem full of portent, I am jolted awake again. The bus is struggling up an incline. In the beam of the headlight I can see that the road is muddy and rough and rutted with ridges. Outside, the faint moonlight reveals a sea of peaks surrounding us like the crests of petrified waves. We must be approaching the Dang La, at 5,220 metres the highest pass on our way to Lhasa and the watershed between Amdo and Central Tibet. I try and stay awake

to witness this momentous crossing but the next thing I know it is morning and the sun is streaming through the window.

We are travelling through lush, rolling grassland, rimmed with brilliant snow-mountains. Nacreous cloud-puffs hang dreamily in the inky, ultramarine sky. We pass herds of yak, silent rows of crumbling stupas, and clusters of whitewashed villages, flat-roofed and spiked with fluttering prayer-flags. In the brittle, early morning sunlight, the landscape appears mythical, like a scene in a thangka painting. At these altitudes—we must be over 4,000 metres—one is constantly in a state of mild hallucination; the lack of oxygen and the clarity of light conspire to induce a sense of euphoria which might explain why the Tibetans, despite being a practical and down-to-earth race, produced so many mystics, saints and seers.

By mid-morning we are in Nagchu, its muddy main street lined with more Chinese and Muslim restaurants. We have not eaten since last evening but the two drivers working in tandem seem determined to go all the way to Lhasa without another food stop. Two Tibetan ladies enter the bus and bully the surly, second driver, an Amdo from Tso Ngong, into sharing his bunk with them. My heart warms to see them; they are dressed in the typical style of Lhasa which is not much different from the way my mother still dresses in India—multicoloured, striped aprons over long chubas (the traditional, gown-like dresses that are worn, with slight variations in style, throughout Tibet), their hair braided into two plaits with tresses of brightly coloured thread. They banter with the Amdo driver, speaking in the mellifluous tones of the classic Lhasa dialect, which now sounds like music to my ears. Everything about them seems familiar to me. I feel a pang of homesickness, a yearning for something—a sense of identity, perhaps—that seems so close and yet so elusive. I am finally encountering

the Tibet of my imagination and yet, my thoughts are of my home and family in faraway India.

The two Lhasa ladies are nibbling on long strands of dried cheese that are unlike anything I have seen before. They notice me staring at them. Smiling in a friendly manner they offer some to us. The dried cheese is delicious, soft and chewy yet brittle enough to snap off. The Amdo driver tells them that I am a Tibetan and they are properly amazed. They tentatively ask me where we have come from and when I respond in Tibetan they exclaim with disbelief. When they learn that I was born in Darjeeling, one of them asks me if I know her relative who also lives there. I tell her that I do not recognize the name. Finally, unable to contain herself any more, the lady with the relative in Darjeeling leans forward and says conspiratorially:

‘Do you know a place called Gangtok?’

‘Yes, it’s not far from Darjeeling.’

‘Wasn’t a Kalachakra Initiation Ceremony held there last year?’

‘Yes.’

‘And didn’t Kundun (the Dalai Lama) conduct the ceremony?’

‘Yes, he did.’

‘My relative was there. I had planned to meet up with him but the Chinese wouldn’t give me a permit. Did you go? Have you ever seen Kundun?’

‘No, I wasn’t able to go to Gangtok but I have seen Kundun many times, in Dharamsala and in the West.’

‘You are so fortunate. We have no freedom at all. Don’t believe what the Chinese tell you and don’t believe what you see in Lhasa. It looks like they’ve done a lot but for us the situation is worse than ever. Everything is tense and uncertain—it is as if we are lying on a bed of thorns—we never know when things might change for the worse.’

She changes the subject suddenly, realizing that she has said more than she should have. We continue to talk for a

while but a certain wariness has now crept in, a kind of unspoken warning against speaking out too freely. They go back to their own conversation but in more subdued tones. I look around. Everything seems as it was but something subtle has changed: we have spoken publicly about matters that are taboo and in a country where control is maintained through the organized dissemination of fear and paranoia, even the slightest deviation from protocol is enough to taint the atmosphere with suspicion.

The Nyenchen Tangla massif rises on our right, its thrusting triangular crown lost in a brooding mass of cloud. We pass long convoys of military trucks heading back towards China; they are empty. Every now and again the road becomes perfectly straight for stretches, its surface smoothly paved over and painted with strange oracular markings—diamonds, arrows, dashes. I recall having heard that in Switzerland the highways have been constructed such that in times of war they can double up as runways for fighter jets. These stretches of road look like perfect landing strips—ominous signs of the phantom army that the truck convoys have just replenished.

We cross a number of small passes. As the bus sweeps past the cairns and prayer flags that mark their summits, the two ladies shout out in unison, ‘Lha Gyal Lo! (Victory to the gods!)’ I find their spontaneous exhortations stirring; all else may be lost but some deeper reserve of faith and resistance remains uncowed.

It is early afternoon when we enter the broad Lhasa Valley. At the outskirts of the city, the highway becomes a wide boulevard, its verges neatly fenced and landscaped. I have no illusions about Lhasa—I know the Chinese have transformed it beyond recognition—but even so, I can barely contain my excitement. Every Tibetan, old or young, in Tibet or in exile, yearns to visit Lhasa; it is our Mecca, the focus of our identity as Tibetans and its overwhelming physical symbol is the Potala Palace whose familiar

outlines are etched into our psyches like a subliminal imprint of our origins. I strain to catch my first glimpse of the Potala, but all I can see are block after block of modern houses, clinical and characterless, their signs mostly in Chinese. The first and most depressing truth about Lhasa hits me like a blow between the eyes; it has been reduced to just another, provincial Chinese city. We drive past a roundabout which encloses a travesty of a public monument—two giant, golden yaks posing heroically in a posture that only Communists could imagine—and suddenly we are released into a vast, empty, concrete square, and here, towering above us, is the Potala itself.

The palace is enormous, larger than any picture could ever convey, and it is breathtakingly magnificent, undiminished in impact despite its iconic familiarity. It seems to have magically evolved out of the hard escarpment—an organic unity of form and colour, massively solid yet exuding a sense of lightness, like a giant ocean liner straining to break loose from its moorings. Once, the historic village of Shol lay at its foot but only recently most of it was bulldozed to make way for this broad, soulless plaza. Streetlights shaped like kitsch chandeliers line the brand new boulevard that traverses the square and leads into the heart of what remains of the old city.

Karl, our German companion, has a copy of a well-thumbed *Rough Guide to Tibet* and according to it the only place for budget travellers to stay in Lhasa is the Yak Hotel. For want of an alternative suggestion we decide to go there. A large wooden gate leads into the hotel courtyard. We enter and cannot believe our eyes; it is crowded with young Western tourists sunbathing and drinking beer! We could be in Kathmandu or Bali, the scene is so outrageously contradictory to our expectations of Lhasa.

The Yak Hotel is situated on the busy Beijing Shar Lam in the old quarter of Lhasa. The street is crowded with

shops, restaurants and karaoke bars, and threaded by small alleyways that lead into mysterious recesses. Cycle-rickshaws with bright, Tibetan-style canopies ply the street and on this one stretch, Tibetans seem to be in the majority. A side street near the hotel leads to the Jokhang temple, Tibet's holiest shrine. The square in front of it is a heaving, surging mass of humanity, an exhilarating conflation of motion and colour and sound. For a moment we just stand there, the crowds eddying past us, our senses reeling under this onslaught of visual and aural stimuli, my mind stunned by a profusion of conflicting emotions—joy, amazement, sorrow. Stalls selling trinkets of every description disappear into the Barkhor, the narrow souk-like marketplace that circumscribes the temple complex. Pilgrims and traders from every corner of Tibet, represented in a bewildering array of costumes and hairstyles, lend a festive touch. Here, one can still catch a glimpse of the old Tibet, precariously preserved, like an oasis in the middle of an encroaching wasteland.

We walk slowly towards the Jokhang complex. I notice the disproportionately large presence of security personnel in their blue uniforms, lounging uncouthly. I notice the surveillance cameras perched at vantage points around the square. In recent years, the Jokhang Square has been the scene of several pro-independence demonstrations. Underneath the surface of this pleasing scene of medieval hustle and bustle, I can feel the tension, stretched taut like the skin of a balloon waiting to explode.

In the small courtyard in front of the temple entrance, pilgrims make full-length prostrations, the flagstones dark and glistening, polished by the ceaseless sweep of their bodies. We enter the temple, following the beacon of flickering butter lamps held aloft by the faithful, lulled into a reverie by the continuous drone of murmured prayers and the smell and aura of sanctity that smothers us like a gentle, blinding fog. Swept along by the measured shuffle of the crowd, we enter the sanctum sanctorum, aglow in

the golden wash of giant butter-lamps. We look up at the Jowo Rinpoche, Tibet's most venerated Buddha image, swathed in *khatas*—the white scarves that symbolize respect and goodwill—his face incandescent and compassionate; a shiver runs down my spine. The throng of people push us along, around the statue and out. We wander as in a dream through the maze-like interior of the temple, along corridors where shafts of light paint passing pilgrims in medieval chiaroscuro. We make our offerings at the multitude of shrines that lead one into the next until we seem to merge into the substance of the place itself, becoming a part of a continuum that seems to stretch back to some ancient and unremembered past. Perhaps, this is the essence of Tibet, its elusive genius locus, this alchemic concoction of magic, tradition, faith and spirituality.

We find a steep staircase that delivers us, blinking and dazed, into the blinding sunlight of the rooftop. Everything seems silent, then the hum and bustle of the city intrudes and the spell is broken. Ritu points out to me that we are standing on the exact spot from which a Chinese police videographer shot some of the harrowing scenes of police brutality against unarmed monks here inside the Jokhang during the pro-independence demonstrations of March 1988. That footage was smuggled out of Tibet and the more graphic scenes were subsequently broadcast throughout the world. One particular image leaps to my mind—less publicized because the scene it depicts is so fleeting: A plainclothes officer in trademark leather jacket is standing in the shadows—perhaps right there on that level below us—surveying the mad scramble of panicked monks as they are chased and beaten up by uniformed policemen armed with batons; suddenly, he launches a vicious kung fu-style kick at an unfortunate monk who strays too close to him and then, having made crunching contact, coolly withdraws into the fringes of the action, as if that premeditated burst of violence was merely routine target practice, as if the monks running

helter-skelter in blind terror were no better than animals.

We walk across the roof terraces. All that terror and mindless violence seems far away. A group of young monks are huddled together in the courtyard below us. One gets up, laughing, and runs away; the others chase him in boyish excitement. In the distance, the Potala Palace looms like a sombre shipwreck beached on the shores of an alien city.

The days pass by, each more depressing than the previous. In the tea-shops and restaurants around Beijing Shar Lam, on public buses, inside the shrine rooms at the great monasteries of Drepung and Ganden, inside even the heavily monitored Potala Palace, people open up to me when they discover that I am Tibetan, some overtly, others in couched terms, all describing in one way or another, the desperation of their situation, all risking, by this one act of defiance alone, prison and torture. They tell me about the influx of Chinese settlers that has already marginalized them; they tell me about the lack of educational opportunities and the discrimination against Tibetans that has led to large-scale unemployment among their youth, most of whom can be seen whiling away their time in the pool halls, video parlours and karaoke bars that seem to dot the streets in and around the old quarter. Their hatred of the Chinese is barely contained, their desperation stretched to the limit. Inside the darkened recess of a shrine room in one of the monasteries, a young monk says to me, 'We are like exhausted birds momentarily resting on a branch; we don't know when we'll be forced to fly off again.' They beg me to carry their message out, to the Dalai Lama, to the world. They display a naive faith in the ability of the international community to help them. They cling on to the belief that their cause is neglected only because it is not adequately publicized. All I can do is hold back my tears and promise them that I will do my best. I am overcome by a deep, helpless rage.

Lhasa is a microcosm of the effects of four decades of Chinese rule in Tibet. Walking around it is to see a city violated and brutalized beyond belief. And yet, this systematic deconstruction of the history and culture of an ancient civilization is taking place utterly brazenly, without even the pretence of subtlety or subterfuge. Thus, the blurb on the ticket to enter the Potala Palace ascribes its construction to the seventh century Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo and makes no mention of the Fifth Dalai Lama during whose reign, a thousand years later, the major part of the palace was built, and nor does it allude to the fact that until 1959, the palace was the residence of the Dalai Lamas. The tickets to visit Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace, contemptuously refer to it as Luo Bu Lin Ka, a crude Sinicisation that, like the newscasters on Lhasa Television who are made to read Tibetan in the nasal, whining tones of Mandarin Chinese, perverts the language beyond recognition. And while the city expands and preens its glass and concrete achievements, the Tibetans themselves are ghettoized into the confines of the old city, useful only as adjuncts in the sanitized reduction of Tibetan culture into a tourist attraction.

Within living memory Lhasa was an entirely Tibetan city, the spiritual beacon for a civilization that stretched from the Himalayan kingdoms to the steppes of Mongolia. In 1950, when the first troops of the People's Liberation Army entered Lhasa, there were, at most, a handful of Chinese here—mostly traders and businessmen. Today, at every level, the Chinese dominate Lhasa and the Tibetans are a minority, strangers in their own city.

It is 9 p.m. and the streets of Lhasa are in total darkness. This has been a regular occurrence since our arrival; with a perverse sense of timing that might simply be an unsubtle form of state control, the lights go out every evening just as the sun sets and do not come back on again until the middle of the night. Every now and again the gloom is shattered

by a burst of neon and flashing lights—the karaoke bars seem to have no electricity problems. We are with a young Tibetan who we met earlier on the pilgrimage bus to Ganden Monastery. He had promised to take us to visit a karaoke bar but now, as we pass the sleazy allure of their garish signs, he is reluctant: ‘Let’s forget about going to a karaoke bar. They can get rough—people get drunk and start fighting—they’re not very pleasant. I’ll take you to another place; it’s a new restaurant—one of Lhasa’s fanciest. We don’t have to eat there—it’s too expensive—but we can have a drink and watch the scene. Gen-la, you should see this side of Lhasa as well.’

We insist that we want to see a karaoke bar but our companion is determined to take us to the restaurant. He is an unusual character; soft-spoken, bright, vehemently critical of the Chinese, and—as we later realize—deeply depressed. He has no fixed employment and gets by on a variety of odd jobs. His melancholia affects me acutely; through him I glimpse, if only for a moment, the desperation of trying to survive as a young Tibetan in Lhasa.

In a side street just beneath the ghostly hulk of the Potala Palace we stop outside a building that looks like it is still under construction. A neon sign proclaims in English: Highland Lake Palace Restaurant. We walk up a flight of stairs to the top floor. The building site ambience of the preceding floors gives way to a grand entrance, surprising in its unexpected formality. Bow-tied waiters usher us into a spacious, softly lit hall—a fantasy nightclub from a Bollywood movie. At the far end, on a stage swathed in red velvet, a Nepalese band from Kathmandu plays the latest Hindi film songs. Everyone here is Tibetan, mostly middle-aged, the men in dark Western-style suits, tie-less for the most part, and the women in smart Tibetan dresses. I feel incongruous in my down jacket and heavy work boots. Despite the din, some men are jabbering loudly into their cellular phones; others display their beepers prominently.

These, we are told, are the proud symbols of Lhasa's nouveaux riches.

The Nepalese singer, dressed in a sherwani—the long, formal Indian jacket—sits cross-legged in front of a harmonium in the pose of an Indian classical singer. Completely contradicting his image, he launches into a raucous Bombay disco number. The lights dim and a crystal ball spins drops of coloured light across the room. Two men walk up to the dance floor and unexpectedly start to waltz. The men dance awkwardly but determinedly, locked in a kind of surreal tango, following an inner rhythm that has nothing to do with the synthesized backbeat of the musicians on stage.

Our Tibetan companion looks around him in disgust and whispers to me: 'They're all businessmen. They've got so much money they don't know what to do with it. They don't give a shit about Tibet. If they wanted to, they could do so much, but all they're interested in is making more money.'

The restaurant is now packed and the atmosphere boisterous; money and alcohol seem to be flowing liberally. Strangely though, after that first tentative waltz and despite the repeated exhortations of the singer, no more dancers venture onto the floor. Our companion tells us that perhaps Ritu's and my presence—a couple of foreigners—right next to the dance floor is inhibiting the normally energetic crowd; we are spoiling what is in effect an in-house party. This is confirmed by the behaviour of the waiters who attend to us ever more vigilantly, firmly filling up our glasses after each sip and bringing us the bill even before we have emptied our beer bottles. But we have seen enough and do not need any persuasion to leave.

Outside, the sidewalk is full of motorcycles and a few brand new Toyota Land Cruisers. We make our way back to the old city in pitch darkness accompanied by the serial yelping of unseen dogs.

After a few days in Lhasa, Ritu and I decide to go to Sangta to meet my relatives—my mother's older sister and brother. We had hoped to send them a message warning them of our arrival but this proved impossible; despite being able to call anywhere in the world from Lhasa's brand new telephone exchange, the idea of calling Sangta just across the river was met with stares of blank incomprehension.

My mother was born in Sangta. Her family originally lived in a house just outside the village but some years before her birth, perhaps in the early nineteen thirties, bandits had raided their home. They tied my granduncle—the only man present in the house at the time—to the horns of a cow and sent my grandmother and her children scattering into the nearby hills before making off with the family wealth. Thus impoverished, my family moved into a small barn in the middle of the village where my mother was born a few years later. Not long after her birth, Sangta, along with a number of other villages, became a part of the estate of the present Dalai Lama's father who had then just accompanied his young son to Lhasa. It was traditionally the custom that the families of the Dalai Lamas were instantly elevated to the status of aristocrats and granted large estates by the government. When my mother was sixteen, she was conscripted into the service of the Dalai Lama's late elder sister as a maidservant. In 1956, my mother accompanied her to India on an extended pilgrimage during which they also went to Darjeeling where the Dalai Lama's older brother, Gyalo Thondup, was then living. There, she met my father and the two decided to get married. She never went back to Tibet.

My mother was fortunate; her family soon suffered the full brunt of the Chinese occupation. My grandmother was singled out as a class traitor. For years, she was forced to live in a tiny cowshed and made to endure countless struggle sessions. Ironically, one of her crimes was that she was accused of having voluntarily offered my mother into

feudal slavery. In late 1980, while I was away studying in America, my grandmother and my aunt came to India and after nearly 25 years were reunited with my mother. Although my grandmother stayed on for five years in Darjeeling, I was unable to visit her, trapped as I was at the time by my impecunious situation as a student, a missed opportunity that I regret to this day. Shortly after her return to Tibet in 1984, my grandmother died at the age of 85.

Travelling in a hired jeep, we cross the bridge that spans the Kyichu River at the eastern edge of town and follow a dirt track along the opposite bank. The broad showcase boulevards of New Lhasa are already a dream; it takes us over an hour to cover a distance of about 15 kilometres. We drive into Sangta on a wide, dusty road lined on both sides by houses that are enclosed within mud walls like mini-fortresses. A solitary man walks past and we ask him for directions. He tells us that my aunt lives just down the road. We continue driving until we see an elderly lady, slightly hunched, her face sunburnt and creased, her head wrapped in a scarf, standing outside a house. We stop beside her. She looks at us curiously, her face breaking into an expectant smile. I've seen photographs of my aunt from when she visited India and although there is nothing immediately familiar about this stranger's face, something moves me to ask, 'Are you *somo-la* (aunty)?'

Her face lights up in shock and then crumples into an expression of pure grief. She throws up her arms and wails loudly, 'Oh my God... you've come... we didn't know if you would make it...'

I get out of the jeep and hug her tightly, flustered at this unexpected revelation, murmuring confused greetings and explanations. I hold her in my arms, her bony and wiry frame racked by heaving convulsions. Only one thought reverberates foolishly in my mind—this is my aunt—and simultaneously, I find myself noticing the grime

and caked dirt on her dusty chuba and the smell of hay and soil that emanates from her. Her daughter, Dolma, tall and gangly, her head also wrapped in a scarf covered with bits of chaff, approaches us awkwardly and shyly hugs me.

Later, we sit inside my aunt's shrine room, which also doubles as the guest room. My uncle has been called from next door and he now sits beside me, looking at me in wonder and saying, 'Son, this is like a dream... you've dropped in on us like a dream.' My aunt's husband and Dolma rush in and out in a fluster, offering us salted, butter tea and then sweet tea and then plain hot water, uncertain about our tastes. The room is small but comfortable, dominated by a large, elaborately painted and carved, wooden cabinet. Inside its glass case are displayed numerous statues of Buddhist deities and photographs of the Dalai Lama and other high lamas. A wooden pillar props up the ceiling in the centre of the room and next to it, a kettle bubbles away on a wood-burning stove. A large frame hangs on one wall, crammed with snapshots, many of which are of my family in India.

My aunt has recovered from the shock of our unexpected appearance and now talks animatedly, her Tibetan tinged with a faint village brogue that I find quaint and endearing. She urges us to drink more tea, 'Please pretend to have some, we don't have much to offer, this really is a village, you must find it very strange...'

'No, no, we really like it here', I reassure her, genuinely feeling at home. There is a sense of familiarity about my relatives, as if I have known them all my life, which makes me feel instantly comfortable.

'We received a letter from India several weeks ago saying that you might be visiting us, but we had given up hope. The funny thing is, last night I had this strange dream: your mother had sent me a present, all nicely wrapped up, and when I opened the packaging there were silver offering bowls inside. I knew they had been sent for a

reason but I couldn't remember what it was. I was telling Dolma about the dream this morning and wondering what it could mean, and now you have suddenly arrived...'

My aunt bears a strong resemblance to my mother but although she is not much older than her, years of suffering and hard labour have etched her face with deep lines and aged her far beyond her years. We talk late into the night, exchanging family news and gossip, packing a lifetime into a few short hours.

In the morning, we walk around their modest but comfortable home. Their storeroom is crammed with sacks of grain. I exclaim to my aunt that there seems to be enough stored here to last them several years.

She smiles apologetically and says, 'It's true. We have several years worth of grain here. I don't know why we don't sell it, the rats are eating it all.'

But I can guess why they feel the compulsion to hoard; like most Tibetans, they starved their way through the sixties and seventies, victims of the disastrous agricultural and nomadic reforms imposed by the Chinese in the first decades of occupation and then by the devastation of the Cultural Revolution. After the turmoil of those years, life in Sangta today seems to have returned to something of the same rural simplicity that existed before the invasion; if there has been any significant development, it is not readily apparent. It is as if, having been dragged bewildered and uncomprehending through a long and turbulent nightmare of physical and psychological terror, where everything that had ever seemed true, familiar or enduring was turned on its head and smashed into a million pieces, the people were then told to rebuild their lives from the shattered vestiges of the very thing they had tried to eradicate. I get a sense that for villagers like my family the last few decades have been like a bad dream from which they have just awoken, uncertain about what is real and what is illusory and how long this current phase of

tenuous calm will last before the next round of madness erupts. For the moment, they seem grateful for small mercies—to have some freedom of religion, to be allowed to farm and trade and barter in relative obscurity.

News of our arrival has spread and several visitors—distant relations or friends of the family—have come to pay their respects, all curious to see us. I would love to spend more time with my relatives but I am concerned that our presence here will needlessly draw attention to us. The last thing I want is to be forced into some kind of meeting with officials of the Tibet Autonomous Region. We decide to return to Lhasa. My aunt burns some incense, an auspicious offering to see us on our way. My relatives put khatas around our necks. I hug my aunt and uncle and get into the jeep. Everything has happened in a flash, it already seems unreal. As we drive away, they wave goodbye in that peculiarly Tibetan way—hands cupped together in front of them, motioning up and down in a gesture that is partly respectful and partly instinctive. When and under what circumstances will I meet them again?

On the rooftop of the Potala Palace, we come across a local dance troupe performing for a Chinese television crew. The dancers are brightly clad. Their dance is choreographed in a pseudo-traditional style but the accompanying song sounds like an old folk tune, underpinned by the haunting strains of the *piwang*, the Tibetan fiddle. A Chinese woman directs the dancers. They go through their routine again and again, sweat breaking out across their painted and smiling faces.

Behind us, the golden, curved roofs of the Potala gleam in the intense clarity of the mid-morning sunlight; below us, the boxlike buildings of new Lhasa spread out in every direction, broken only by the yawning expanse of the empty square and the abrupt projection of the Chakpori hill, the site of Lhasa's famous college of medicine, now dismantled

and spiked by a television tower. I think of the Dalai Lama's private apartments immediately below us, empty for 36 years, yet still retaining a sense of his presence. I think of the courtyard in front of it where Chinese tourists dress up in Tibetan costumes and have their pictures taken, tittering excitedly.

On the rooftop, the dancers start yet again, the melancholic melody of their song drifting over the city. For a moment, I feel utter despair. Then I look down again at the concrete sprawl of Lhasa; it appears insubstantial, out of place, an ephemeral imposition. In the distance, the great, barren hills, etched with deep black shadows, stand out in stark relief against the pure elemental sky. Suddenly, the dancers, the television crew, the tourists taking pictures, all fade into inconsequence. Only the indubitable solidity of the mountains and the imposing mass of the Potala seem real and enduring and somehow reassuring.

Tomorrow morning we leave for the Nepalese border. I will remember the words of the young man who told me, half in irony and half in deadly earnest, pointing at the rows of Chinese shops on Beijing Shar Lam: 'Don't worry Gen-la, next time you come back, we'll make sure they're all gone!'

Our minibus comes to a halt at Nyelam Thong La, 5,200 metres high and the last pass before we leave Tibet. In front of us, a smooth arc traces the horizon where the Tibetan Plateau ends and plunges dizzyingly through deep gorges and canyons into the lowlands of Nepal; behind it and towering above us even at this altitude, rise the snowy ramparts of the Himalayan massif, unlike any mountain range we have seen in Tibet—higher, wilder, more jagged and precipitous.

We have been travelling for four days through the heart of Central Tibet, that vast swathe of barren flatland, flanked by row after row of stark mountain ranges and high,

windswept passes where stone inscriptions stand in lonely piles and skeins of prayer-flags flutter heartbreakingly, transmitting entreaties to the gods who deserted their posts.

We leave Nyelam Thong La and with it our last view of the Tibetan Plateau. The mountains close in claustrophobically as we enter the deep gorge that leads us like a secret passage through the impregnable barrier of the Himalaya. The descent is unstoppable, the bus hurtles downwards like a mad roller coaster and before we know it thick sub-tropical vegetation covers the hillsides and the air is warm and humid and fecund. Our minibus is trapped in the narrow main street at the border town of Dram, a traffic jam of trucks and buses all waiting to cross into Nepal. Familiar Nepalese faces are everywhere; we could already be in Nepal. We leave the bus and walk to the border control, my heart pounding, one last bout of cold-sweat paranoia—will they be waiting for us here, ready to confiscate our Hi8 videotapes and our rolls of films? The officer who looks at our passports is Tibetan. She checks our visas and then passes them on to her Chinese colleague. He stamps our passports and waves us through. The Nepalese border post is still a few kilometres downhill. There is only one pick-up truck whose Nepalese driver offers to take us for an exorbitant fee. Ritu haggles with him in Hindi and brings the price down. We ride the bed of the truck down a monsoon-destroyed path until we come to the river that marks the frontier. Even here, at this furthest edge of Tibet, Chinese traders have set up makeshift stalls. We cross the bridge and enter the dingy, miserable, Nepalese outpost of Kodari. A rush of elation and relief floods us; five weeks of pent-up tension uncoils in an instant! Even the venal immigration officer who hints at a bribe before he will open up the office to issue us our visas seems like a long-lost friend.

Freedom! How we take it for granted. Tonight, we will sleep well in a comfortable hotel in Kathmandu but up there, beyond these vertical slopes, on the pure, high

plateau of my sad, disempowered motherland, already so remote we might have dreamt it all, our less fortunate compatriots will sleep yet another night on beds of thorns.

Postscript

A little more than four years after we visited his native village, my father passed away in a Delhi hospital in January, 1999, his life's dream of returning to a free Tibet unfulfilled. Earlier this year, we learnt that my cousin Nima, who was only in his early fifties, had died in a hospital in Xining. Nima was our one real link with my father's family in Tibet, and with his death, the tenuous bond that he and I had re-established between the long-estranged strands of our family seems once again to have slipped away; since his death we have had no news from Kumbum.

Meanwhile, the situation in Tibet continues to deteriorate. Although the Dalai Lama has long since given up the demand for independence, the Chinese authorities show no sign of relenting to his pleas for talks to bring about a negotiated settlement. On the contrary, they have stepped up the campaign to vilify him; photographs of the Dalai Lama are now completely banned, both in public places and in homes. The flood of Chinese migrants continues unabated and their burgeoning presence and influence threaten to swamp even the rural areas that have so far escaped their intrusion. And as a corollary, more and more Tibetans are escaping their homeland, braving the hazardous crossing of the Himalayan passes in a bid for freedom. Last year alone, more than 2,000 new refugees arrived in Dharamsala. The fate of Tibet has never seemed grimmer.

—Dharamsala, September 2000

AN EYEWITNESS IN LHASA

by Thomas Feeny

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This article is dedicated to Dolma Tsering, the first and closest of my Tibetan friends, and to my mother, without whose inspiration I would never have taken up the challenge.

Three months ago, I knew nothing of Tibetan oppression. I saw the country almost as a work of fiction, a place of magical beauty and spiritual strength, where snow glistened in the flickering flames of a thousand butter lamps, and chanting monks spun prayer wheels in remote Himalayan temples. My brief journey into Tibet allowed me the joy of experiencing these scenes as reality, yet my exultation was equally ripped apart by the suffocating presence of Chinese troops that smothered the country and squeezed the freedom from its people. It was immediately clear from the first day that this trip would dishearten far more than delight.

I first fell in love with the Tibetan people in Nepal, where I had been teaching and giving medical assistance in four of the many refugee camps. Daily contact with residents old and young quickly inspired in me a profound respect, admiration and affection for what is undeniably the kindest and most hospitable race of people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. As my understanding of their culture grew, my desire to visit the country that lay at the root of all their hearts and prayers became increasingly pressing, and within two weeks of work at the camps I had extended my flight home and shelled out the exorbitant fee demanded by the Chinese authorities for a week's trip to Lhasa—such was the effect of these incredible people.

Current regulations ruled that only officially recognised tour groups could enter Tibetan at that time, and I found myself among a small collection of American, French and

Spanish tourists, all of whom shared my relatively basic knowledge of the occupation. Having been warned of widespread undercover agents in league with the Chinese, I kept my work at the camp secret, and posed as an innocent, agenda-free tourist to everyone around me. It felt strange to take such precautions, yet the necessity was quickly made apparent by the lines of Chinese security officials who 'greeted' our arrival, with beady suspicious eyes emphasising the large posters that threatened severe punishment for those who 'endangered the interest of the motherland in any way'. We were quickly herded into a bus for a brief welcome by our Tibetan guide, and then we began the 90-minute transfer to Lhasa itself.

It was at least 45 minutes before I saw a single Tibetan, labouring with a yak on what looked to be the most barren and infertile soil I had ever seen—a figure dwarfed and humbled by the majestic snow-capped mountains that towered over him from behind. It was this scene of dramatic rural desolation that introduced me to the beauty of Tibet, a country where man has succeeded in living in a symbiotic, respectful relationship with the most forbidding and hostile natural surroundings. Now, with the advent of the Chinese, the balance has been lost and the approach through the capital suburbs exhibited the ugly scars of frantic Chinese construction, offensive and alien in its commercial reverence. This intensified as we finally entered Lhasa itself, heralded by a huge army barracks and training ground.

Entering the Chinese quarter, we were bombarded from all sides by the neon signs of bars and clubs, from which speakers blared songs of allegiance into the street. Cavernous, dark department stores began to line the roads, jostling for space with shiny high-rise banks and hotels. A few Chinese citizens were aimlessly wandering the streets, but even they seemed to recognise the terrible inappropriateness of the expensive suits and high-heeled shoes that

continued to gather dust in the shop windows. Such development, so proudly cited by the Chinese authorities as evidence of Tibetan ‘advancement’, spoke only of thoughtlessness and a desperate attempt to overwhelm—a sterile, soulless cavity.

The contrast with the Tibetan quarter of old Lhasa was striking to say the least. Here I was finally able to lay eyes on the people I had come to see, slowly picking their way through the comforting bustle of the crumbling streets. Sellers yelled their wares from market stalls piled high with fresh produce, children scampered mischievously between the sluggish traffic, and aged monks mumbling mantras peered with interest at the commotion through think-rimmed glasses. It appeared to be a normal city scene, until one looked closer and saw evidence of the restraints that shackled its movement. Groups of soldiers sat smoking in doorways, sporadically barking out what seemed to be warnings to Tibetans venturing to pass before them, and then smiling as if this was some form of entertainment. Blood-red Chinese flags cast further shadows over the scene, constantly belittling Tibetan dignity and identity in their defiant testament to communist power. Such inescapable reminders of their oppression seemed to weigh heavily on every shoulder, and have extinguished the twinkle in the Tibetan eye to leave a deep-seated sadness in its place.

Yet incredibly, these people still seemed to be as kind and good-natured as they ever were. Having parted from my group as soon as possible, I was able to explore the streets alone and found myself amazed at the capacity of the people to smile warmly when their eyes met mine, as if making me feel welcome far outweighed their own concerns and circumstances. Our exchanges were sadly confined to the most basic of pleasantries, for it would take just one of the hundreds of eyes around us to bring heavy penalties upon the Tibetan who dared communicate

further. They even seemed apologetic at keeping this enforced distance, which saddened me greatly and revealed the horrific extent to which they have become both physical and mental prisoners in their own country.

Nowhere was this more apparent than at Jokhang Temple, the spiritual centre of Tibet and a symbolic testament to hope alongside the Potala Palace. In the throng of pilgrims that perpetually circumambulated the complex from dawn till dusk every day there could be seen people from all reaches of Tibet, in all manner of traditional costumes. Many had the powerful pronounced features of Eastern Tibet and the Amdo region; others recalled the warrior-like nobility of the North American Indians. Whatever their appearance, however, it was evident that this mass of people—every man, woman and child—were united through the strength, resilience and confidence of their Tibetan identity. It is this collective force that the Chinese seek to tear asunder, yet that continues to defy them, giving one man the courage to raise the Tibetan flag in Potala square, and another the conviction to refuse orders to denounce his religion and the Dalai Lama. Both are tortured beyond belief, yet their efforts are never seen to fail, for their suffering is carried within each of those who continue the struggle, and adds fuel to the fire that burns therein.

The Chinese seemed particularly aware of this communal strength at Jokhang, and had installed a permanent line of soldiers to ‘co-ordinate’ the proceedings, which amounted to using sticks to herd the pilgrims like animals, and using loudspeakers to order them against gathering in groups of more than three, lest this give rise to spontaneous demonstration. Never had I seen such open contempt for a violation of fundamental human rights, and the air was thick with uneasy tension and the memory of the bloody atrocities that had already stained these sacred cobbles. Throughout the week I was party to many

variations of this oppression—soldiers waving their guns at elderly Tibetans to gleefully enjoy the expressions of fear and panic they aroused; posters proclaiming the glory of the motherland plastered across the now decrepit Tibetan cultural centres—even a hideous Chinese amusement park had been built immediately behind the Potala in what seemed to be a crude attempt to cheapen its significance. Worst of all, however, was the sight of Tibetans walking arm in arm with the PLA [People's Liberation Army]. It seems a certain number have to all appearances transferred their loyalties to their oppressors, who willingly adopt them as spies, informers or employees who can be trusted to remain obedient in political-sensitive positions. Sadly, our guide turned out to be one of these men, and stumbling across him from a distance, drinking and laughing with an armed official, destroyed not only my respect for him, but also the trust that I had begun to place on his shoulders. As he took us around the parts of Potala, Sera and Drepung monasteries appointed by the Chinese for public viewing, I wondered at his ability to live with his hypocrisy, affecting deep-seated Tibetan loyalties on the one hand, and maintaining an allegiance with their oppressors on the other. By the end of the week he appeared to notice the heat of my critical scrutiny, and taking me aside told me bluntly and without warning that 'If I was not very, very careful, things would get very bad for me and I would not be able to leave the country.'

To be threatened by a Tibetan had once been inconceivable to me, but as I was discovering, it is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which the Chinese have polluted both the people and the soil of this once-magnificent country. So it was that late one night towards the end of the week, when two of the Americans in my group confided in me that they had been secretly filming material for a documentary on the Chinese occupation and would like to interview me as to my experiences, I declined. If I

had accepted, and the tape had been seized during the relentless security checks at the airport, I would most probably not have been here writing this now. Even then, my experience was limited to a single city, and it must not be forgotten that Chinese persecution is widespread in all areas of Tibet, and to a degree far more serious than those I have outlined here.

In conclusion, Lhasa is today a capital crushed by construction and consumer culture, by a population transfer that is quickly reducing Tibetans to little more than a tourist attraction in their own country, and by a disregard for human rights never before tolerated in other countries. The rape of Tibet by the Chinese has left the remains of a pillaged paradise, where each street speaks a different sorrow, where the snow that was once pure now runs with blood and tears.

I will never forget my trip to Tibet, and how within a week it opened my eyes to two extremes of humanity—the ruthless insensitivity of the Chinese regime that continues to torture and abuse, and the unerring strength and compassion of the Tibetan people.

A NEW THRESHOLD TO SAVE TIBET

by Chokey Tsering

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I was a foreign English teacher at college in Xining, the dusty capital of Qinghai province in Northwest China. All of my students were Chinese. My mother's words to me before I left Canada remained with me in Xining.

'Hmph! You're going to help Chinese. To help *them* develop.' So, I made a point of tutoring English to Tibetans at my home.

It was an unforgettable experience. Never in a single year have I experienced so many emotional peaks and plunges—the exhilaration of finding my life-partner, the recurring frustration of being misunderstood for my 'funny' ways, and the grief of witnessing the physical and spiritual devastation of a homeland I had learned to love years before I laid eyes on it. Never in a single year have I caught so many colds and taken so many antibiotics, distributed as liberally as the bean-curd moon-cakes during the Chinese New Year. I learned many survival skills too, like how to relinquish my western courtesy and shamelessly push and shove with the toughest of them if I wanted a seat on the crowded buses in the city. Ask me how to blow my nose without a tissue and I will teach you. But the most important lesson came when I least expected it.

One night, I was sitting in my living room in one of the concrete tenement apartments allotted to teachers living on campus. The fluorescent ceiling light buzzed and flickered overhead and cast a yellowish hue to the spare surroundings. The room seemed to reflect the chill and pallor of the December evening outside. Some nights I would sit in darkness, preferring its natural, soft depth to envelop me. On that particular evening, I had been flipping through channels on my TV in a slight stupor. I paused at a commercial of a sad-faced woman sitting alone

in a room much like mine. A smiling child appeared and he ran towards the delighted woman. The two embraced, weeping joyfully.

It was a symbolic reunion. The child was Macao, the former Portuguese colonised region of southern China, running gleefully into the arms of the woman—‘mother’ China. The commercial had nudged at seminal thoughts and feelings that had since been circulating in my mind.

Today, more than ever, Tibetans need to return to *their* motherland. As Tibetan communities proliferate throughout the world, the concept of Tibetanness is becoming increasingly diversified. In a sense, the differences I initially observed between myself, a Tibetan born and raised in the west, and those Tibetans raised in post-Mao Tibet, mask an underlying similarity: each of us have acculturated to the dominant ethnic culture of our respective societies. But without a self-governing territory to anchor our people and our culture, subsequent generations of Tibetans are in danger of becoming estranged from one another. If we let this happen, it will create a gulf that cannot be dissolved by merely crossing the dividing oceans between us.

In those young Tibetans I saw what my life might have been like had my parents remained in Tibet. Never having seen a Tibet without Chinese, it was difficult for them to conceive of its independence. Yet this is the political and social context that shapes young Tibetans’ lives in Tibet and influences their life decisions. This was perhaps the most unsavoury realisation I experienced during my brief life there. The sight of a beggar defecating in public was less jolting than seeing a rosy-cheeked Tibetan youth wearing the khaki uniform of the Chinese government.

Economic liberalisation has greatly impacted lives in China, even in far off Xining, where morality, once dictated by the Communist Party, is now increasingly prescribed by the ethos of consumerism and commercialism. Today’s nouveau riche in China consist of an unseemly

melange of former Red Guards, disillusioned intellectuals, and ordinary Chinese weary of politics and more interested in lifestyle rather than revolution. Urbane businessmen and pop stars are the archetypes for today's urban youths. In Xining, the differences between Tibetan and Chinese youth are melding, forming a generation raised by western-imported, Sino-tailored pop culture—today's surrogate parent. Many young Tibetans I have met prattle in Mandarin with their peers and wear the latest fashions dictated by MTV.

Situated in Huangshi River Valley in eastern Qinghai, Xining is an alpine city 2,261metres above sea level. For most of the year, the city is cloaked in a perpetual layer of dust that rises into the air by fierce gusts of winds. Considered the economic, cultural and political centre of the province, Xining has some 400 plants and mines, six colleges and universities, eight hospitals and bustling commercial centres where the cuisine reflects the province's ethnic diversity. The city has a population of about 1 million. Ethnic minorities, mainly consisting of Hui (Muslims) and Tibetans, account for about 15 percent of the city's total population.

Xining is notorious for its prison camps wherein political prisoners from the former Kuomintang army, Cultural Revolution victims, former Red Guards and opponents of the current regime languish. Public sentencing, perceived by Chinese as an effective method of maintaining social order, is not uncommon. On a sunny May afternoon last year, in front of the Xining Theatre downtown, crowds of onlookers gazed at a hapless prisoner receiving his sentence. Shortly after, he was whisked away to a prison on the outskirts of the city to take a bullet in his head. The crowd dispersed and the markets' activities resumed. It was just another day in China.

In the centre of the city, a medley of sounds, sights and smells vie for the passer-by's attention. Vendors shout cheap prices into megaphones from behind a display of fake Nike

and Adidas products. Techno-dance music blast from imitation-Gap stores. An unemployed man kneels with his head bowed in submission, wordlessly begging for money, as the foot traffic threatens to trample on him. Along street corners, one can find rows of stalls selling roast mutton on spits, yoghurt and scale-less Qinghai carp.

Yet only a 20-minute drive away north of the city, stand rows of shanties alongside the Huangshi River. Thinly clad children with tangled hair and dried mucus on their grubby faces stare with vacant eyes. The rancid odour of erosion is suspended in the air. Despite all its 'progress' the city exudes a Dickensian aura. Weary mules plod methodically with bowed, nodding heads, oblivious to the trucks of lumber and livestock blaring past. Walking tractors cough and sputter their way amongst the street traffic, producing a meandering trail of black smoke. Tall smokestacks from coal refineries puncture the sky, their sooty smoke billowing out against a back-drop of barren mountains that surround the city. Like most cities in China, Xining has its ample share of poverty, unemployment and pollution. The alcohol consumption rate in Xining is the second highest in the world.

Qinghai is one of the poorest provinces in China. It has an average altitude of more than 3,000 metres. Pastoral and agriculture areas make up 96 percent and 4 percent, respectively, of the province's total area. The province has one city (Xining), one prefecture (Haidong), and six autonomous prefectures. The minority autonomous regions comprise 98 percent of the entire province. Qinghai, with the exception of the eastern area around Xining, was formerly part of the Amdo province of Tibet.

Today, artificial boundaries carve into this eastern Tibetan province and Tibetan inhabitants are relegated to the minority Tibetan prefectures of Haibei (Tib: Tsojang), Hainan (Tib: Tsolho), Huangnan (Tib: Malho), Guoluo (Tib: Golog) and Haixi (Tib: Tsonub, also a Mongolian prefecture). Southwest of the province lies Yushu

(Tib: Jeykundo), of the formerly Kham province of Tibet, but today another Tibetan minority prefecture in Qinghai. Qinghai's total population is approximately 4.95 million, minority nationalities accounting for 42 percent of the total population (2.12 million). An estimated 1.02 million Tibetans reside in the province.

My presence in Xining hit a sore spot for some of my Chinese colleagues and students alike. I surmised that they had a difficult time accepting an educated Tibetan woman—the statistics among Tibetans simply did not support this. 'You're not Tibetan. You think you are, but you must be Chinese', one of my Chinese students surmised.

My foreigner credentials were dubious according to the Chinese. They could not believe that a woman with yellow skin, who looked just like they did, was capable of teaching English as well as a white person. So, my skills were constantly doubted. In Xining white foreigners are accorded undue social prestige. As a local, being seen with one raised you up a notch in the *éclat* scale. But my Asian face was not marketable. I could not be paraded around the campus for my Chinese colleagues to show off.

In the early stages of my life in Xining, I struggled with random moments of frustration at the flagrant racism of Chinese towards Tibetans. Riding on the bus one day the conductor refused to let a group of Tibetans board. As the bus continued past them, he pinched his nose in disgust and explained to the rest of us, 'Don't want them stinking up the bus.' The occasional sight of Tibetan nomads, ambling their way along the congested streets in their conspicuous clothing, would elicit among passers-by rude stares and whispers. I wanted to scream at them, '*You're* the ones who don't belong!'

In Kumbum Monastery, half an hour's drive from Xining, this frustration swelled into a silent rage. The famous monastery was established by Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Today a popular tourist site, it is frequented by laughing

Chinese tourists, donning Tibetan 'costumes' and posing for their cameras. While there, I observed tourists surrounding a group of chanting monks, snapping photos of the 'performance'. In the background a young monk sighed as he bent to pick up an empty Pepsi bottle tossed away by irreverent tourists. I wanted to approach him, to tell him I was sorry.

The transformation of monasteries into profit-making enterprises makes meaningful spiritual activity less viable as monks are commonly reduced to entertainers and caretakers of monasteries. Monks are often bribed into spying on their friends; this engenders an environment of mistrust and secrecy in the monastery. In confidence, however, many whom I met were outspoken about their political views and their loyalty to the Dalai Lama. In the monasteries random inspections by 'culture' police were common. Hung up high in some temples was the cheerfully smiling picture of the exiled Tibetan leader. When ordered to dismount the pictures, the monks would either outright refuse or comply, but only to mount them again.

'So what if I escape to India?' one of the monks asked, shrugging his shoulders. 'I'm not afraid of getting caught. I can take the beating.'

For these monks, religion has anchored them to Tibetan culture and nationalist sentiments come as a natural outgrowth of this devotion. But it was different among the younger laic Tibetans. Although religious, Buddhism is not a pivotal aspect in their lives. Tibetan human rights and independence are preceded by the more immediate concerns of practical living. Furthermore, the relentless pressures they face to adopt Chinese ways do little to convince them of the urgency of safeguarding their culture.

My travels to the Tibetan prefectures beyond Xining were some of my most memorable experiences. Many Tibetan regions were much more developed than I had expected. Even in the more remote areas, telephone poles

sprouted out from grasslands that were occupied by sparsely scattered nomad tents. Bumpy roads sliced through their natural tranquillity, enabling honking trucks to muscle their way through throngs of sheep and yaks. Nomadic grasslands, once expansive and unfettered, are steadily dwindling as they are parcelled by barbed-wire fences as a result of new laws on land-division and livestock ownership. With no voice or representation in China's modernisation efforts, Tibetan nomads can only watch from the sidelines as their livelihood is steadily undermined by Chinese notions of the 'good life'.

In Yushu (Tib: Jeykundo, Kham) I bathed in warm springs with sacred healing powers. I climbed mountains and explored meditation caves. I picnicked with friends under tents pitched on fields with colourful patches of wild flowers. We ate boiled mutton clutching the slippery chunks of meat in our bare hands and slicing off pieces with sharp, heavy knives. Heaping bowls of Tibetan home-made yoghurt topped with dollops of sugar made frequent rounds among the feasting picnickers.

Yushu is the main pastoral area of Qinghai and boasts the greatest number of yaks in the world. In the evenings, I would zip throughout the town of Jeku in a horde of motorbikes, a popular mode of transportation in many Tibetan towns in the province. Masses of glittering stars that shone from an ebony sky lit our trail as we bumped and twisted along narrow roads, their surface sculpted into deep grooves by hardened tyre tracks. From the distance came sounds I rarely heard in Xining—dogs barking and howling. Compared to Xining, where dog-meat is an expensive delicacy, Tibetan regions are canine havens.

In Huangnan (Amdo) I visited a small, dusty village of about 800 inhabitants. One uneven dirt road connects it to a nearby town. On each side of the road stand an array of houses made of adobe and bricks. From their exterior, these houses are unappealing to the eye, but they enclose picturesque courtyard interiors with hardwood panelling.

Vast quadrants of wheat fields stretch out beyond the cluster of homes towards the grassy hills in the distance. Further out, I frequently sighted kaleidoscopic figures patterning the mountainsides—Tibetans, stooped in enduring positions painstakingly searching for and picking out *yartsa gunbus* (cordyceps) that grew in abundance. Cordyceps are a prized commodity containing many medicinal agents. One tiny stem costs about 10 yuan (almost 2 USD). Gathering them is quite labour-intensive, as a handful can take hours to accumulate.

While there I witnessed local politics in action. The men of the village had previously gathered to discuss the problem of Tibetans from neighbouring villages stealing in to pick cordyceps on their territory. It was a solemn occasion that day as they met with the guilty interlopers. They faced each other with stony expressions and sat cross-legged, forming two tiers on the roadside. I was gently pulled away by a friend when venturing closer to investigate. Although the dispute was peacefully reconciled, the men had hidden knives and guns under their clothes should the other side prove uncooperative. Violent confrontations were not uncommon, even in this pacific community.

I also took part in a *mani* pilgrimage, a bi-annual affair when the villagers assemble at the local temple and distribute *pechas*, Buddhist scriptures. Carrying the *pechas* on their backs, they trek for about four hours, outlining the borders of the village. They stop and sit momentarily at *choetens* (stupas) situated at strategic corners of the village and pray for good crops and the prosperity of their village.

At the temple I was asked how many *pechas* I wanted to carry. They were sandwiched between wooden planks, which added significant weight to them. Before answering, I spotted a girl of about ten tying up a bundle of two. ‘Three please’, I replied.

I thought the journey would never end. Our 'path' was craggy and barely discernible. At one point it narrowed dangerously while bordering the edge of a steep cliff. For what seemed like an eternity, I shakily placed one Nike clad foot in front of the other, trying not to look down into the rocky abyss to my left. Meanwhile, little girls half my size and carrying twice my load giggled and sang as they glided past me in their ragged slippers. So, I persisted, wheezing and tipping, up and down the steep hills. I remember thanking god for Blue Cross.

In spite of my pain, I was able to appreciate the prettiness of our group. The villagers wore colourful sashes and head-scarves, forming a bright rainbow undulating throughout the verdant hills. As they walked, they sang, *Om Mani Padme Hum*. Their high-pitched voices carried far over the hilltops, sending out a melodious prayer to all who could hear it. A light drizzle exhumed a sweet odour from the muddy earth below our feet and cast a soft mist upon our faces. It was a moment I felt proud to be Tibetan.

In a semi-nomad family's home in Haibei prefecture, I sat on hard floors, crunching into pieces of rock-like Amdo bread that we passed around. I frolicked with the children, delighting in their raspy, incoherent chatter and the perpetual snot that dribbled down their faces. Their wind-burnt, scarlet cheeks looked as if ruby-coloured lipstick had been smeared recklessly over them.

Nearby, I spent the night at a Tibetan primary school where students are instructed in Tibetan, Chinese and, uncommonly, English. The latter is thanks to a Norwegian teacher who had been with the school since its inception. Over the years, he became an integral part of the school's expansion, helping to bring in much-needed funds and equipment such as computers.

I later learned that he was a die-hard Christian missionary. Upon hearing the news, I recalled with a sinking feeling that he was intending to adopt some of the

students and had taken them back with him to his home in Norway. I had also heard that he was seen in Yushu, taking Tibetan children from orphanages to his school. In spite of all the good that missionaries are doing for Tibetans, proselytising them is the main impetus for their ‘dedication’ to the Tibetan people. Their sanctimonious intolerance is based on a blatant disdain for Tibetan Buddhism—what some Christian missionaries consider demon worship.

Presently, less than .01 percent Tibetans are Christians. As the statistics demonstrate, Tibetans are pretty much dedicated Buddhists. But unlike their forerunners, members of today’s generation of Tibetans come from a bicultural heritage. They grow up struggling to reconcile the cultural contradictions that confront them. The lack of positive Tibetan role models for young Tibetans coupled with the pressures they face from a rapidly modernising China do not rule out the possibility of a prevailing identity crisis among future generations.

Xining is teeming with Christian missionaries who often arrive as foreign language students. They are increasingly monopolising foreign teaching positions because of their wealth and good *guanxi* (connections) with the Public Security Bureau. In fact, these religious zealots have more in common with Chinese atheists than is initially apparent. Both aim to dismantle Tibetan culture, their motivations based on a mutual belief in their respective superiority, as a race or religion.

But the biggest threat to our survival as a distinct people was the apathy I detected among young Tibetans at the college where I taught. The Tibetan students—who are from Yushu (Jeykundo) and Golog—attended classes in the minority department. The Chinese and Tibetan students were considerably segregated, academically and socially.

The Tibetan students enjoyed a lot of freedom compared to their Chinese counterparts. Their classes would begin at 8:30 in the morning and end at noon. The rest of

the day would be spent sleeping until dinner time or boozing it up. 'I want to fly', was a cocky response by one of them when asked what he wanted to do in life.

In classes, students would often nap, sometimes snoring aloud while their jaded teachers would drone on. The teacher-student relationship was unprofessional. One night a drunken teacher attacked a Tibetan student. Upon hearing his cries for help, his friends came to his rescue.

This student was a friend of mine who later died in a motorcycle accident. I remember him mainly for his gentleness and his beautiful singing voice. The circumstances surrounding his death were soon twisted and the prevailing gossip on campus was that he committed suicide. Unlike the truth, this outrageous lie was more befitting to the predominant conception of Tibetan youth: as degenerate social rejects with no future.

Compared to the Tibetans, the Chinese students were more diligent in their studies and their lives were more regimented. They attended classes from 8:30am until 9pm, with breaks in between. They often complained about not having enough leisure time. But this demonstrated to me that the system cared about them while it had virtually given up on the Tibetans. They were set up to fail even before they enrolled.

When examination time arrived, I noticed a peculiar activity. Instead of studying, many of the Tibetan students would have frequent, brief meetings with their Chinese teachers. Before leaving to meet with them, the students would make sure they had fresh packs of smokes and lighters—bribes for their teachers. They were not discussing study strategies, but were buying from their teacher notes on answers to the impending examinations.

What I have learned from observing their lives is that the problems Tibetans in Tibet face are more complex and manifold than I had originally perceived. Pointing fingers is less credible today. Tyranny in Tibet today has an insidious dimension that is harder to isolate.

Rational-bureaucratic institutions in China, under the auspices of economic modernisation, work symbiotically to create an overall system that reinforces Chinese cultural supremacy. The average young Tibetan is immersed in this highly discriminatory system that predetermines his life chances based on his surname. Unable to conceive of this bigger picture, the resultant frustration and anger he feels is instead potentially directed at a more immediate target—his ethnic identity.

In many ways, current economic development policies in Tibet are today's modern formula for cultural genocide. They also accord Chinese policy-makers a defence of unaccountability with regards to Tibetans' comparative underprivileged status. This poses a grievous effect on the degree of personal ambition among young Tibetans because consequently the blame for their underprivileged status falls on themselves or on predestination.

When I first arrived in Tibet, I held the notion that the best way for young Tibetans in Tibet to escape the glass-ceiling impasse in their lives was to leave Tibet and resettle elsewhere. But this merely facilitates the Chinese in presiding over our country, making decisions and changes that is our inherent right. Leaving Tibet is like abandoning her in her most crucial hour of need. I now believe that migration should flow in two directions.

Trade liberalisation in China has unfortunately entailed the arrival of foreign enterprises that prey on Tibet's natural resources. But an open-door policy also suggests a wider threshold for Tibetans from the West to enter. Why not join the tide of profiteers swarming into Tibet? The difference would lie in what we seek to gain in this endeavour.

It is time a new generation of Tibetans returned to Tibet, armed not with guns but with diversified aptitudes that China has yet to make available to her own people. Enterprises come in wooed by the almighty buck. We can enter in the pursuit of offsetting, to the extent possible,

the harmful effects of this trend. We can strive to become investors in our own sense—investing in the future of Tibetans and in the health of our nation. For many in the Tibetan Diaspora arming ourselves with literacy and skills serves a broader purpose of eventually helping Tibet in whatever capacity we can.

Joining Tibetan human rights organisations is not our only avenue in this pursuit.

I have seen NGO development projects taking place in Tibetan areas that have enabled uncommon participation by Tibetans in their unfolding. Small-scale projects such as these focus on the explicit needs of local inhabitants. This is one area in which those of us in the west can contribute; tourism is another.

As a growing industry in China, there is a demand in this profession for English-speaking tour guides. But the prevailing trend right now is the hiring of Chinese graduates for well-paying jobs as tour guides in Tibetan areas. Related to the growth of tourism is the rise of the English-teaching profession. Yet these positions are also dominated by Chinese. Currently, receiving English language instruction is a coveted opportunity from which most young Tibetans and poor Chinese are excluded. Teaching Tibetans English improves their chances at taking over the jobs in their hometowns that Chinese are currently monopolising. It could also potentially slow the incoming tide of Chinese migrants into Tibetan regions.

Just like Tibetans living in the West, Tibetans in Tibet want a good education, a good job. Helping them realise these objectives is a deeply political act, with even more lasting effects than any flag-waving and shouting for independence can achieve, for it shifts the distribution of power and social resources within an ethnic hierarchy that commonly relegates minority Tibetans to the bottom rung. In the long run, levelling the income disparities between Tibetans and Chinese may invalidate the predominant myth of Tibetan backwardness and inherent inferiority. With the

foreseeable recession of negative reinforcement from the broader society, the importance of preserving Tibetan heritage may be acknowledged and facilitated among a more buoyant and proficient population. With more earning power, the system may even become more malleable to Tibetans. Modernisation and Chinese language fluency are not the only culprits of cultural extinction. In an immediate sense, it is poverty and discrimination, for they teach young Tibetans the futility of learning their language and depict their ethnic membership as a liability. My argument is analogous to a vaccination. Give them some of the 'toxin' and thereby strengthen their resistance to it.

Freeing Tibet has become a protracted struggle. Over the years, unforeseen changes have been taking place in the lives of Tibetans, requiring more than one approach working simultaneously to deal with the numerous social problems that our people face. Helping Tibet goes beyond freeing the tortured prisoner and decrying religious persecution. It includes helping those Tibetans who are not in prison, who have never raised or even seen a Tibetan flag, who have Chinese friends, and whose lives are more or less integrated into a Chinese-dominated society. In our unswerving efforts of reclaiming a homeland, let us not neglect its soul.

INSIDE CHINA'S TIBET

by Vijay Kranti

Part I. China Opens Up its Tibet Zoo
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If you are a first-time visitor to Lhasa or visiting this 'Roof of the World' after a gap of over ten years then irrespective of whatever you have read or heard about Tibet from a distance, you cannot escape the psychedelic bombing that comes crashing on you with the very first visuals of the city. This bombing is far more overpowering than the splitting headache that sets on most visitors as a result of high altitude and the shortage of oxygen, a striking feature of China's most celebrated colony—Tibet.

If you have been hoping to see yaks roaming muddy streets of this Tibetan capital, then herds of swanky Pajeros, omnipresent Land Cruisers, luxurious green-top taxis and cars supporting the best known international brands are bound to give you the shock of your life. The most overpowering sight is that of one kilometre long shopping plaza that connects the Potala, the traditional seat of the Dalai Lamas, and Jokhang, the national cathedral and the most revered temple of Tibet. With their glittering facades and well-packed modern merchandise, the massive Chinese stores lining this street can put even the best shopping malls of western cities like Washington, Berlin, Paris, Zurich and London to shame.

But the worst shock lies in stock for those western tourists who have been hooked to the picture postcard images of old Tibet and have been wondering if there are still some Tibetans left in Lhasa. There are thousands to choose from in the Barkhor, the heart of the Tibetan quarter of Lhasa. Walking in a hip-to-hip crowd of

circumambulators along the periphery of Jokhang temple many among the crowd hail from distant villages and are distinguishable from their colourful and best traditional attires and, of course, their rosaries and hand-held prayer wheel ('Mani'). The rest include the locals and Buddhists from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan etc. Even if there are a few hundred video cameras watching the crowd from trees and walls of surrounding houses, do not worry, they are meant only for Tibetans.

Inside the Potala and monasteries like Jokhang, Drepung, Sera and Tashi Lhunpo too, the locals offer mounds of butter, scarves and small currency notes, while the foreigners leave behind heaps of dollars, Yens and Sing-D's (Singapore Dollars) to reflect the height of their faith. Each monastery has its own population of maroon-robed monks. In Sera courtyard you can see about 200 of them debating religion. Their session is well synchronized with the tourist buses. As tourists are tired of taking their pictures and buses start moving out the debate session also comes to an end. How many of them are genuine monks and how many are on PSB (Public Security Bureau) duty to keep watch on the visitors and fellow monks is only a matter of guess. Previous experience shows that no sensible tourist can afford landing into trouble by engaging in a serious dialogue with them.

As in any other given situation this visual encounter with China 's Tibet too offers enough space to draw many meanings and interpretations to each interested quarter. The first ones to venture are, obviously, Beijing masters of Lhasa who present the astonishing civic progress of Lhasa as a precious 'gift' from the 'Great Motherland' to an impoverished people of Tibet. They are also quite enthusiastic in presenting the surging crowds of pilgrims at Barkhor, as a proof of religious freedom given to the Tibetans. Interestingly, these two also happen to be the major issues on which China has been facing the international community's ire since it forced the Dalai Lama

to flee to exile in 1959 and finally assimilated Tibet into the fold of 'the great Chinese motherland'.

It is not surprising that China has, of late, adopted a new aggressive policy of saying this all by opening Tibet to international tourism and inviting the world citizens in true Deng Xiao-Ping spirit to 'seek truth from facts'. As a result of this approach, Beijing has opened its Tibetan doors even to Indian visitors who, barring a hand-picked select group of 'China Friends', had been simply barred from visiting Tibet during the past 50 years.

For a keen watcher of the Tibetan scene for three decades now, this opportunity to seek the truth from the facts was too tempting to ignore, even if it meant travelling 750 kms as an ordinary tourist in an air-tight bus and staying in 'sanitized' country hotels under the supervision of a China-trained Tibetan tour guide and a government sponsored driver.

If you have a reasonable background on the subject and the right kind of eye to separate the chaff from the barley, you cannot escape admiring the great Chinese art of creating colourful and breathtaking facades. But if you want to see the real colours of this city then, unlike the typical Western 'Ingee' (a Tibetan synonym for the white Europeans and Americans) tourist who loves to remain within the confines of the old Lhasa zone of the Potala-Shol-Jokhang-Barkhor and its dingy lanes and restaurants, you will have to take a 10-Yuan taxi ride in any direction of this ultramodern city. And, as I did, just allow yourself to be lost in the streets and discover it without a guide.

One kilometre away from this 'Tibetan Quarter' in any direction will reveal what stuff the new Lhasa is made of. And, for whom! In nicely laid out modern and comfortable multi-storied houses one rarely sees a Tibetan face except in the mornings when they come in groups of twos and fours to sweep the streets and collect garbage on behalf of the local municipality. On the other hand, one needs to walk only an extra ten metres from the main glittering

Beijing Street into the Tibetan quarter of the town to see the contrast. It is as dramatic as stepping out of a TV soap set to the back stage in a few seconds: small, congested houses, Tibetans and 'Ingees' negotiating their way through ankle deep sewer water spilling out of blocked sewer lines, poor kids playing in mud or hanging around a chain of dingy shops selling cheap goodies.

Just another hundred metres in the street and it leaves no one in doubt about who is the real beneficiary of all the visible economic progress in Lhasa. Barring a few Tibetan policemen who are too visible in the Barkhor zone for obvious reasons, one rarely finds a Tibetan face in the government offices or even in the tourist offices of Lhasa, Shigatse, Tingri or Lhatse. On the religious front too, the real Chinese game seems to be far from what appears on the face of surging religious crowds at Barkhor or massive offerings inside the Potala and big temples. Fifty years of the Chinese religious record in Tibet, as presented by various UN agencies, human rights groups, media reports and first-hand accounts of visiting diplomats etc. have made it clear to the Beijing leaders that they cannot tackle the Tibetan problem by crushing religion and culture. Beijing's eagerness to foist a hand-picked Panchen Lama on the Tibetans and its more than open role in the selection of the new Karmapa in past years only shows that Chinese leaders are finally waking up to the power of religion in their worst-headache colony—Tibet. (It is the Chinese's misfortune that the new Karmapa slipped out to India to join hands with the Dalai Lama.)

The Beijing leaders' decision of giving religious freedom to the local Tibetans on the one hand and opening the gates of Tibet to the outside world on the other only reflects a new Chinese strategy that aims at turning its old sins to its advantage. After the Dalai Lama and his supporters have worked for more than 40 long years to make Tibet a household name in the West, Beijing has now

decided to cash in on this awareness and mint millions of Touro-dollars. The Chinese can surely afford to do so. Besides a massive network of informers and spies to its credit, the population-transfer policy of Beijing has already tilted the population scale against the Tibetans in all their cities in a ratio of at least 10 to 1. With examples of hundreds of political workers languishing in jail since ages, Beijing has already ensured that Tibetans do not create any significant political problem for the Chinese masters. No wonder the Chinese rulers of Tibet can now make political as well as financial capital through selling Tibet as the most popular cultural zoo of our times.

Part II. How Tibetans Make a Statement
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In China's Tibet today one thing which is at a premium is the knowledge and fluency in English. A Radio Jockey on Lhasa's Radio China International is a dream position that a young Chinese girl or a Tibetan boy would love to reach—irrespective of the trash or pidgin that some of the RJs roll out. Young girls and boys working as tourist guides in the Potala palace or in the government-controlled tourist circuits are another lot who are a target of envy among the youths living in today's Lhasa.

But there are situations when being young, educated and English speaking does not guarantee any convenience or advantage; more so if one is a Tibetan and sitting among inquisitive foreigners in a restaurant or another public place. I learnt this lesson in a sudden meeting with a young Tibetan in a Lhasa restaurant. The ease with which he answered my queries in English about a place was tempting enough for me to ask him if I could share his table.

He was a graduate from a Chinese university working in Lhasa. Soon I realized that he was waiting for his girlfriend to have dinner in that restaurant. After exchanging formal niceties I placed an order for cold drinks for both of us and kept asking him elementary questions about the social life in Lhasa. In the beginning he looked enthusiastic but as our meeting crossed five minutes I could see his discomfort and restlessness. From the sides of his eyes he was looking at people on tables around us to ensure that he was not being watched for talking to a foreigner.

The last straw came when I asked him about his assessment of how acceptable was the Chinese-sponsored Panchen Lama boy to the Tibetan people as against the one

recognized by the Dalai Lama in exile. By that time his girl friend had also joined us and he had already explained to her about me. I too had waved the Tibetan waiter girl for a third drink to for the lady. My question had an electrifying effect on him. He looked down on the table for a moment, held his girlfriend's hand and signalled her to stand up.

In a soft and friendly voice he said, 'You are asking very difficult questions. I am afraid my wrong answer will not satisfy you.' And before I could absorb what he had said, he stretched his hand for a good bye and said, 'I am sorry, we have to reach a friend's place for dinner.' He nearly pulled his girl friend out of her seat, went to the cash desk, paid for all the drinks and walked out with a light good-bye nod to me. His statement was far clearer than I had expected.

I got the real answer to this question in Shigatse, the second largest city of Chinese-occupied Tibet. The town is home to Tashi Lhunpo monastery, the seat of Panchen Lamas. In 1995 China arrested the six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the exiled Dalai Lama as the 11th incarnation of the Panchen Lama, and installed its own hand-picked boy Gyaltsen Norbu as the 'real' incarnation. Tibetans are fond of displaying the pictures of their incarnate lamas at any and every available place in the house or place of work.

While no Tibetan would dare display a photo of the Dalai Lama or Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the photos of the Chinese-sponsored Gyaltsen Norbu too are conspicuously absent from shops, small bakeries, restaurants and even poster shops that dot each street in Tibetan cities. People, instead, display big portraits of the late 10th Panchen Lama —a too clear statement to be misunderstood.

The only place where I could see the Chinese-sponsored Panchen Lama's picture during my 8-day and 750-km.-long encounter with today's Tibet was inside Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. Here too, one cannot miss how the

Tibetan devotees quietly bypass his seat and picture. In sharp contrast one can recognize the vacant seats of the Dalai Lama in every big or small monastery just by the large heap of Khatas (ceremonial scarves) and currency notes offered by the devotees. One also cannot miss the long scarves tied around the wooden pillars of Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace from where he escaped to India in 1959. Yet another statement of an occupied people?

There are occasions when Tibetans make loud political statements too. But after the 1987 public demonstrations and the ruthless Martial Law that followed, the frequency of open public demonstration of anger has gone down drastically. It would be only once in a few months that a couple of monks, nuns or lay Tibetans would surprise the PSB agents and bystanders in Barkhor with a Tibetan flag, flying pamphlets and shouting slogans. It is public knowledge that this kind of act is bound to result in severe physical torture plus 8 years in jail, if not 25 or 40 years. There are more than 400 of them languishing in the dreaded Drapchi prison of Lhasa alone.

In the past 50 years Tibetans have had enough lessons on how to live with their Chinese masters. They have been through testing periods when anything Tibetan was the focus of Chinese destruction. Not only the temples and the omnipresent Chorten (Stupa) were destroyed, even the 'Dhongmo', bamboo tea mixer used for making Tibetan salt-and-butter tea was banned for decades. It was not uncommon to face public ridicule, even public spitting and kicking, in a 'Thamzing' (community-conducted public trials) for crimes as serious as holding a prayer wheel 'Mani' in public or for making tea in Dhongmo which makes a gurgling sound that is audible a street away in the quiet morning hours.

No wonder Lhasa looks peaceful and Tibetans appear to be content with the Chinese rule to a visiting tourist who is overwhelmed by massive buildings, ultra-modern

shopping arcades and, of course, by Tibetans going around the Jokhang temple with their rotating prayer wheels and clicking rosaries.

But if you are one of the kind who would not get swayed by this glitter, then you are surely not going to miss the statements people make even at an as impossible a place as a discotheque. Unlike the Chinese Karaoke bars that offer every kind of music and sex escapades through an ever increasing population of Chinese prostitutes from the mainland, the Tibetan 'Nangma' is a different kind of experience in beer, dance and social life. These discotheques have come to stay practically as the only public place where 10, 50 or even 100 Tibetan youths can meet under one roof.

A Nangma comes to life after 11pm when Tibetan girls and boys in ages ranging from 13 to 30 suddenly start pouring in, in groups of twos, fours and even a dozen at a time. All dressed in jeans and T-shirts, they sip Coke, beer or just mineral water and swing on hard Chinese Rock amidst a flood of laser beams, crystal lights, dry ice fog and nauseating cigarette smoke. Dance sessions take intermittent breaks when live singers take to the floor.

The evening when I witnessed the show started with a 'Tashi Delek!' song by a young male singer. Sung in Tibetan, the good-luck wishing song attracted a long scarf from the management and many cheers from the crowd. Next song was a politically correct one praising Beijing for whatever it does to Tibet. Not a single clap. No cheering. No scarves. The real hero was another young Tibetan who presented a traditional love song that filled the hall with a bursting applause and two scarves from the crowd in addition to the one from management. But anyone hardly listened to him when he presented a politically correct song in Chinese that showered praise on Tibetans for improving the environment of the country. But the real stealer of the hearts was 'Madhuri Dixit', a young Tibetan girl dressed in an Indian Saree and overdone make up. Though a poor

imitation of the famous Indian cinema heroine from whom she borrows her nickname, yet her Hindi song ‘Chal Jhhoothi’ pulled all the plugs and drowned the hall in claps, cheers, whistles and—five scarves from the audience.

Among the Tibetan society at large too, there are many innocent-looking songs like ‘Agu Pema’ (Uncle Pema) which quickly do rounds in the community and disappear before the Chinese authorities realize that the song had a political message behind it. This particular song which sounds like one sung in the memory of a lost dear uncle, is actually dedicated to the exiled Dalai Lama who is also revered as ‘Pema’ (meaning ‘Lotus’) among the Tibetans. This song is already out of circulation inside China’s Tibet but it is still a hot number among the exiled Tibetans who are always eager to hear any political statement that emanates occasionally from their colonized motherland.

TOLERANCE AND TOTALISATION

by Matteo Pistono

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Religion in contemporary Tibet

Adaptation is the primary tool Tibetans use to maintain the practice of religion in China-occupied Tibet. The people have been forced to remain malleable in their expression of religious faith and yet they are today, over four decades after the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, as faithful to Buddhism and to the Dalai Lama as a spiritual leader as they were before the 1949 invasion. And this is so despite what the People's Republic of China (PRC) leaders and Chinese media may say in articles such as the one in *Xinhua* newspaper entitled 'Support for Dalai Dwindles' (March 2001). The state mouthpiece reported a poll in which 86 percent of Tibetans in Lhasa considered the Dalai Lama 'a separatist and a politician'. This is propaganda that few China- and Tibet-watchers take seriously.

There is often an assumption by Tibetan support groups in the West, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and writers on current Tibetan affairs that there are blanket policies emanating from Beijing that cover all elements of Tibet's religious life. This myth of 'totalisation', the false belief that one situation represents the whole of the experience, is counter-productive, giving, as it does, a false impression of the state of affairs. One example is reporting of the kind that implies that because a few nuns at one convent in Lhasa were expelled, all nuns in the Tibetan Autonomous Region are at risk. This kind of myth is created by repeated generalisations that propose a homogenous policy of religious suppression is carried out dutifully in all corners of Tibet by government cadres. Repetition makes the myth self-perpetuating and soon it passes into the realm of 'knowledge' on Tibet.

It is not always so readily apparent what policies are brewing behind the high walls of the offices of the Chinese Communist Party and Religious Affairs Bureau in Beijing even though analysts abound world-wide whose job it is to decipher these signals. Clearly, when it comes to on-the-ground application, whatever policies may emerge from Beijing, these policies are not implemented uniformly throughout the monasteries, nunneries and other religious institutions across the Tibetan plateau.

Tibetans are attempting to quietly carry out their religious practice in the face of formidable obstacles set up by China's state bureaucracy. These obstacles include the United Front Work Department, the Religious Affairs Bureau, the Tibetan Buddhist Association and the Democratic Management Committees in monasteries, political education teams, work inspection teams and a host of security organs. While there is much speculation on what it must be like to be a Tibetan Buddhist in Tibet today, there is little known that is not inspired by either the Chinese state or by counteractive perceptions of the Chinese state. Certainly, much can be said about Tibetan Buddhist expression, and the often brutal repression of it in Tibet today, but a few anecdotes from Tibet should illuminate the resilience of religious expression and the nature of Tibetan Buddhism as it is practised in its native land.

Gar

In the eastern region of Tibet traditionally known as Kham, now incorporated into Sichuan province, the phenomenon of 'monastic encampments' (*gar*) has developed over the last decade. These camps that house monks and nuns from across Tibet, and have a significant number of Chinese students as well, have formed around charismatic lamas in remote areas far from, but not out of the reach of, local government cadres. None of them have significant ties to pre-1959 monastic institutions, hence there is no history

of conflict. Neither are they 'rebuilt' monasteries that had been destroyed before or during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, the *gar* are not administered or run as traditional monasteries, but function more as secluded meditation retreat centres. The number of monks and nuns that they house vary greatly.

From a couple hundred at the smaller ones to 3,000 at Yachen Gar in Payul (Chinese: Baiyu) county in Sichuan, by last year an estimated 10,000 monks and nuns lived in small meditation huts at Larung Gar near Serthar in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) prefecture.

Yachen Gar was home to a few hundred Chinese students and Larung Gar hosted nearly 1,000 Chinese-speaking students from China, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. All were expelled on order of Chinese government officials in the summer and fall of 2001. Before the expulsions, Chinese-speaking lamas at both encampments oversaw the Chinese language curriculum, which included simultaneous translation of the teachings by religious leaders like Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (at Larung Gar) and Achuk Khen Rinpoche (at Yachen Gar). While the Tibetan and Chinese students followed the same teacher, there were ethnic tensions. As one Chinese nun who studied at both encampments before being expelled said: 'Some Chinese at Larung Gar say that the Chinese and Tibetan monks and nuns at Larung Gar are like shining stars in the night sky; we are both beautiful in our own space but if we collide, then there will be a large explosion. Perhaps they are right.'

There are around a dozen *gars* in Kham. Nevertheless, the earthen and mud adobe homes of the encampments, spacious teachings halls, and apolitical teachers that comprise the encampments have become the only place anywhere in Tibet or China where students can receive a comprehensive Buddhist education. In addition to receiving teachings and instructions on philosophy, students are introduced to the core of Tibetan Buddhist

meditation practices. Essential to these meditation practices are the oral transmissions of scripture and meditation texts, empowerments into tantric practice, and the pith instructions for meditation.

For decades since the Dalai Lama and most other senior teachers fled Tibet, the focus of monks and nuns in search of religious education had been on how to evade border authorities and escape to India to the monasteries in exile. Today, the *gars* serve as centres for spiritual gravitation; a draw for thousands of monks and nuns who are restricted by Beijing's polices from searching out adequate Buddhist instructions in their home areas.

Patriotism test

While there were monastic camps in pre-1959 Tibet, the particular formation of the current ones as well as the sheer numbers found in eastern Tibet is a recent phenomenon. This boom can in part be attributed to the strict controls that have been placed on traditional monasteries and religious practitioners. One of the most relentless efforts to control religious institutions and practitioners began in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 1996 with the 'patriotic education' campaign. Government-driven patriotic education is still in full force today across the Tibetan plateau including Kham and Amdo.

Patriotic education aims to instruct and test all monks, nuns and teachers in every monastery and nunnery across the Tibetan plateau on the correct view of religion, law, history and the Dalai Lama. Work teams of Communist Party cadres, both Chinese and Tibetan, conduct study sessions lasting from a few weeks up to many months at the monastic institutions. Often work teams become a permanent feature at those monasteries that are historically significant, high profile to tourists or politically active. Examples of this include Labrang Tashikyil in Amdo (Qinghai province), Litang monastery in Kham (Sichuan province) and Tsurphu monastery in central

Tibet, home to the teenage Karmapa who fled Tibet in 2000. In March 1998, the patriotic education programme was extended to schools and to the 'citizens' of Tibet.

One of the primary aims of the patriotic education programme is to encourage disavowal of allegiance to the Dalai Lama and to discredit him as a religious teacher. This includes signing written statements condemning the Dalai Lama as a fraud and 'splittist'. At a July 2002 meeting of the Directors of People's Management of Monasteries, Li Ligu, Deputy Party Secretary in Lhasa and leader of the Regional Group for Monastery and Religious Affairs, stated clearly what the duty of monastics is with respect to the Dalai Lama. *The Lhasa Xizang Ribao* daily newspaper reported Ligu as stating, 'Monks and nuns should be bold in exposing and criticising the Dalai Lama in order to clearly understand the Dalai Lama's political reactionary nature and religious hypocrisy and to enhance their awareness of patriotism.' Discrediting the Dalai Lama is one of the most pernicious aspects of the PRC's patriotic education because it contravenes a fundamental monastic vow of not disparaging one's root teacher.

Patriotic education and other such coercive measures aimed at religious practitioners have proved to be difficult to carry out in the *gars* of eastern Tibet. The encampments are unconventional, remaining outside established patterns of religious institutional and organisational structures that Chinese officials are used to controlling. There is no formal admission to the encampments and monks and nuns often return to their home monastery after attending a series of teachings. The monastics here do not gather for daily chanting sessions as they do in traditional monasteries and nunneries. Rather, the monastic body gathers as a whole only when teachings and empowerments are being given. A loose organisational hierarchy prevails at the *gar*, as opposed to the more rigid system of traditional monasteries in Tibet. The prominent incarnate lamas who give religious authority to the encampments attempt to

remain outside any administrative role that would place them in contact with local and provincial government cadres. Nearly all the teachers offer teachings in an ecumenical style, as opposed to the sectarianism that is found among some Tibetan Buddhist teachers. This teaching style allows for a much wider pool of disciples because students can come from any region and any 'school' (including Nyingma, Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu, Jonangpa, Bon as well as Chinese Chan Buddhist), and then return to their home areas to practice and often teach themselves.

Chinese government officials are confounded by a system whose organisational formation they do not understand, and by the sheer numbers living under institutions that fall outside the pale of their administrative system. Because of their enigmatic nature, places such as Larung Gar and Yachen Gar and the lamas who teach there are often seen as uncontrollable and thus a threat. In spite of this suspicion, many lamas have developed a close relationship with local government leaders, and this often translates into political currency. Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, however, are examples of what happens when there is a perceived threat and political currency runs dry. Both encampments experienced mass expulsions of monks and nuns, and both saw the demolition of thousands of meditation huts. The destruction at Larung Gar in particular was on a scale not witnessed since the Cultural Revolution and has been well documented by non-governmental organisations, human rights watchdog groups and foreign governments.

Banning Wednesday

'The so-called issue of Tibet is the main pretext for western countries, including the United States, to westernise and split our country. Western countries, including the United States, want to topple our country and further the cause of their own social and value systems and national interests. In order to achieve this, they will never stop using the

Tibet issue to westernise and split our country and weaken our power. The Dalai clique has never changed its splittist nature; it has never stopped its activities to split our country. Therefore, our struggle against the Dalai clique and hostile western forces is long-drawn, serious and complicated’—Zhao Qizheng, minister in charge of the Information Office of the State Council at a meeting of National Research in Tibetology and External Propaganda, 12 June 2000.

The PRC makes it abundantly clear to foreign governments and Tibetans and Chinese alike that the Dalai Lama is the most problematic of their problems in Tibet and a concern for their international image. State-sponsored media and government leaders express this quite publicly. Because the PRC accuses the Dalai Lama and those who work with him with attempting to ‘split the motherland’, any activity whatsoever that has to do with the Dalai Lama is by extension seen as ‘splittist’ activity. In 1995, a renewed offensive was made on the Dalai Lama, which included banning his photographs and intensifying media attacks on him as a religious fraud. This was a change from the 1980s when the Dalai Lama was attacked primarily as a political leader. In Tibet today, religious devotion to the Dalai Lama, including acts such as listening or watching audio or video cassettes about or by the Dalai Lama or conducting any secular or religious ceremony in the Dalai Lama’s name are seen as acts of political rebellion. Hence, local government departments regularly issue and enforce strict regulations on politically sensitive dates such as 6 July, the Dalai Lama’s birthday, or 10 December, International Human Rights Day, and on the anniversary of the Dalai Lama’s Nobel Peace Prize. On 24 June 2001, the Lhasa City Government posted citywide notices which stated, among other items: ‘The People’s Government forbids any person, any group, or any organisation, in any form or in any place to use any situation to represent celebrating the Dalai’s birthday, to

pray to the Dalai for blessing, to sing prohibited songs, to offer incense to the Dalai, or to carry out barley-flour-throwing illegal activities.’

While authorities and security personnel in Lhasa on 6 July and other dates keep a keen eye open and the detention cells ready for use, a contrary event occurs every Wednesday. On that day, Tibetans across Tibet and in particular in Lhasa carry out intensive popular religious practices, more than on any other day of the week. These include devotional practices such as circumambulating and prostrating in front of the Potala and Jokhang temples, making offerings of burning juniper incense, pouring alcohol in traditional vessels in front of the Tibet’s protector deity, Palden Lhamo, and tossing barley flour into the air. Why Wednesday? According to the complex Tibetan astrological calendar, the Dalai Lama’s birth sign falls on that day. As with many days in the Tibetan calendar which are deemed to be auspicious, pious and devoted behaviour is believed to carry special weight on these days.

This unorganised yet massive expression of devotion to the Dalai Lama that is evident on Wednesdays took place in a similar fashion before the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959. But because of the political climate now and the volatility that surrounds the figure of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, according to elderly Lhasa residents, the Wednesday observances are carried out with even more vigour than before 1959. When asked about the possibility of police questioning prompted by these observances a 65-year old Tibetan man responded, ‘What do you think, will they ban Wednesdays?’

Lamas and comedians

Innovative ways to express religious ideals can be seen in Tibetan pop culture as well. Religious expression is well apparent in the many bootlegged music cassette recordings of pop and folk songs. Stand-up comedians also

bring to light religious ideals through their humour. Across the Tibetan plateau, from dusty wind-swept small towns to the large Sinocised cities in Tibet, one will find music cassettes interspersed with those of Tibetan Buddhist teachers giving teachings or simply chanting Buddhist scriptures. The cassettes are recorded and informally distributed by students of the specific lama whose voice and name appear on the cassette. Some of the more popular teachers' cassettes found throughout all regions of Tibet are Lamrim Rinpoche from Drepung monastery, the previous Panchen Lama, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok from Larung Gar, and Achuk Khen Rinpoche from Yachen Gar. Invariably, the cover of the cassette tape will depict the individual lama in a celebrated form with various Buddhist deities hovering over him.

The mixture of pop and folk music with Buddhist teachings in these cassettes represents more of young Tibetan monks' interests and less a marketing ploy. Nonetheless, it is a new kind of expression of popular religious practice. When a monk in Kandze (Chinese: Garze) was asked if the cassette recording of him playing the *dranyen*, a traditional Tibetan guitar, was a violation of the monk's vow not to indulge in mundane music and dance, he responded, 'All my music is an offering to my lama. That is why I put his photo on the cover of the cassette.'

In addition to low budget cassette bootlegs, professionally produced video compact discs and digital videodiscs of Tibetan pop music videos that have stars singing and demonstrating devotion to lamas are prevalent throughout Tibet. In the classic karaoke VCD and DVD style, the words of the song (in Tibetan and Chinese language both) run continually on the bottom of the television screen. In monasteries throughout Tibet, monks gather in the evening after their nightly prayers in front of the television to watch the Tibetan equivalent of Hrithik Roshan or Bono singing

Tibetan pop tunes that intermingle with long-life prayers to Tibetan lamas and praises to Manjushri, Chenrezig and other Buddhist deities.

Joke

On Lhasa television, as well as recordings on VCD and DVD, two of the most famous Tibetan comedians use humour in subtle skits to emphasise the importance of symbols of Tibetan Buddhism. One particular joke involves the most revered statue in all of Tibet, Jowo Shakyamuni. Hundreds of devotees daily, and on special occasions, thousands, make traditional butter lamp and silk scarf offerings and prostrations to the statue of Jowo Shakyamuni. The Jowo statue portrays the historical Buddha in his youth and was part of the dowry of the Chinese wife of Tibet's King Songtsen Gampo, Princess Wen Chen, in the seventh century. The Jowo is located today in the inner sanctum in the Jokhang, Lhasa's central and most important temple. Tibetans often say that one must see Jowo Rinpoche at least once in their lifetime.

The joke is told by two stand-up comedians, Migmar and Thubten. The latter pretends he is the Jowo statue. Migmar is a cunning Tibetan art thief who enters the Jokhang late at night to lure Jowo out of the temple. 'You must be so bored. All these long years here in the same cold, dark temple. You have to breathe all this butter lamp smoke, day after day', Migmar, the art thief, commiserates with Jowo. 'Year after year you sit here in the same clothes, listening to same ol' prayers. Say, why don't you come with me on vacation. I'll take you to a nice place in Hong Kong and then to a really nice cosy home in America. You will be able to visit all your other statue friends who left many years ago.' At this point in the joke, the laughing crowd has understood the poking of fun at illegal antique dealers and art thieves and know that their Jowo is not going to have anything to do with the enticements offered. The skit

continues in this vein until the gilded statue exclaims to Migmar, 'You silly little man, who do you think you are? I'm staying here with the Tibetan people!'

Article 36 of China's constitution states, 'Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. The state protects normal religious activities.' Crackdowns at monastic encampments in eastern Tibet, the continuation of patriotic education, and the Chinese government's intransigence towards religious devotion to the Dalai Lama are but a few examples which demonstrate that Tibetan Buddhists do not enjoy freedom of religion under Chinese rule today. Yet, the innovations of Kham should remind those outside Tibet that there is still today, in some areas, authentic transmission of Tibetan Buddhism. Popular religious practice in the name of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa and other communities is still happening on a weekly basis. And Tibetans are finding new and innovative ways in monasteries and popular culture to express and communicate the importance of Buddhism in their lives.

This adaptation of Tibetan religious expression is analogous to the power and fluidity of a river. Dropping steeply off the Tibetan plateau into Asia's major river systems, Tibet's waters trickle through the rocky alpine mountains, flow into the arid valleys, and crash into the Himalayan foothills and jungle, overcoming the obstacles in their way. So it is with Tibetan religious expression; adapting to the current environment keeps the river of Tibetan Buddhism flowing.

SEVEN DAYS IN TIBET

by Tom Cockrem, published in *World Tibet News*,
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I am standing with my camera in the shadowy corner of a corridor—one that surrounds the holy inner sanctum. It is a devotional path, or *khora* (circumambulations). Pilgrims have ventured here from all parts of Tibet and beyond.

There are tall, broad Khampas from the east, with their long hair tied with red tassels, Amdo women with extravagant tribal jewellery, and weather-beaten peasant folk in long, drab sheepskin jackets from as far away as Sichuan in China, Nepal and even India and Bhutan. The same folk pass me time and again, by now exchanging smiles. They will keep up their circumambulation long after I have gone.

This for me is the culmination of our trip—one that it certainly deserves. We have finally arrived in Lhasa, capital of Tibet. The temple I am visiting is the Jokhang. Its builder was the all-conquering Songsten Gampo, who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the 7th century AD. The Jokhang is nothing if not a great survivor. It withstood even the carnage of the Cultural Revolution, when its sacred inner sanctum was deemed fit only for pigs. Now faithfully restored, the temple once more accommodates a host of exquisite golden statues—Lamas, future buddhas and heroes—and resonates with the chants of the assembled throng of monks. Its rooftop is as ever a peaceful and exquisitely adorned retreat, where you go to meet the monks, who come out for debates around a pot of herbal tea.

It is easy to get excited about Tibet. It is just so disconnected from the mundane Western world. The mountains see to that. To the south, the Himalayas all but seal the country off from India and Nepal. The mighty Karakoram does the same job in the west, as does the Kunlun

in the north. On their Tibetan side the mountains never make it all the way back down. Instead they stretch out into a plateau, which at around 4,000m vies in height with many of the world's most awesome peaks. Not much grows on this plateau—it is just too cold and high, and the earth is often frozen underneath.

It is amazing to think that people choose to live here. But they do. These are the hardiest of men, whose lungs have adapted to the thinness of the air, and whose skins have hardened, tough against the bitter winds and snows, and the fierce rays of a scarcely filtered sun. They manage to grow barley and potatoes, and keep lots of yaks and goats, and sheep that look like goats. And that is how they survive.

Tibet, of course, is famous for its monasteries. It does seem ironic that in a land that would offer its inhabitants so little, they in turn show more gratitude than almost anybody else. The monasteries testify to this. They are gargantuan in size, and spectacularly opulent, with copious repositories of gold and jewel-encrusted art. Tragically, most were robbed and decimated in the Cultural Revolution. One that was not was Tashilhunpo in Shigatse.

Situated some 250km southwest of Lhasa, Shigatse is Tibet's second biggest town. So vast and gleaming is the walled Tashilhunpo Monastery, that we stayed here two nights, just to try and do it justice. The site comprises numerous treasure-laden chapels, gold-topped funerary *chortens* (stupas), prayer rooms and temples whose corridors have been worn smooth by crimson-robed monks.

All such power centres were historically protected by a fort, or *dzong*. These typically crown a nearby hill. The most famous is at Gyantse, another busy trading centre southeast of Shigatse. The fort owes its ruined state mainly to the British, who in 1904 shelled it almost to oblivion, as part of their campaign to shore up Tibet against an

impending Russian threat. You can climb up to the top of the old fort. Your reward is the fantastic view you get of all of Gyantse below, and of the town's main claim to fame—the Pelkor Chode Monastery. Dominating the monastic grounds is the golden spire-topped Kumbum Chorten, whose six concentric floors contain no fewer than 77 chapels, many embellished with exquisite mural art.

Travelling in Tibet means negotiating mountains and their passes. These all offer breathtaking views—literally—and, at 5,000 to 6,000 metres, they seriously test your adaptation to the altitude. At Gyatso La (5,250m) and Kamba La (5,045m), you look back down on the emerald green Yamdrok-tso lake, whose multiple arms thrust themselves between the root-like buttresses of such lofty ice-capped monsters as Mt Nojin Kangtsang (7,191m) and the lake's centrepiece, Tonang Sangwa Ri (5,336m).

Lhasa on first arrival is a disappointment. It has been modernised to the point of losing its identity, with ultra wide boulevards lined with nondescript glass towers and malls. Your compensations are only two. But these are fantastic—the Jokhang and the Potala. The Potala has been standing here, commanding Marpo Hill since 1645. It is an architectural phenomenon, so huge and multi-faceted, it at one time comprised almost all of Lhasa, housing parliament, administrative offices, schools, chapels, private apartments, the Dalai Lama and his entourage, prayer cells and even the gold-encrusted tombs of past Dalai Lamas.

The building is now a museum, peopled mainly by tourists. Yet it presents itself today almost exactly as it did in those early 20th century photographs you see. All that is now missing is the village of Shol, which stood humbly at the mighty building's feet. It was deemed by the Chinese to be in the way of progress.

The pilgrims come here too. The most earnest among them throw themselves onto the ground every few steps of their *khora*, touching the pavement with their foreheads.

And this they might do for days on end. But most devotees confine such prostrations, or *chak*, to the portal of the Jokhang. The standard quota is 108.

It is true that Tibet has been encroached upon by crass modernity. But really, that has only occurred in the towns. Elsewhere, it is essentially unchanged, and remains a deeply mysterious and forbidding land—by dint of its location, its prohibitive climate and political sensitivity. You feel extremely privileged to be able to visit at all. It is not an easy road. A touch of nausea, perhaps, and intestinal rebellions may accompany your trip. But you love it just the same, and find genuine enchantment every day on every side.

On the seventh day of our visit—a day of rest in Lhasa—I found myself already contemplating my next visit, for our route was a much-travelled one. Many others are not. And who knows what unfathomable wonders they conceal?