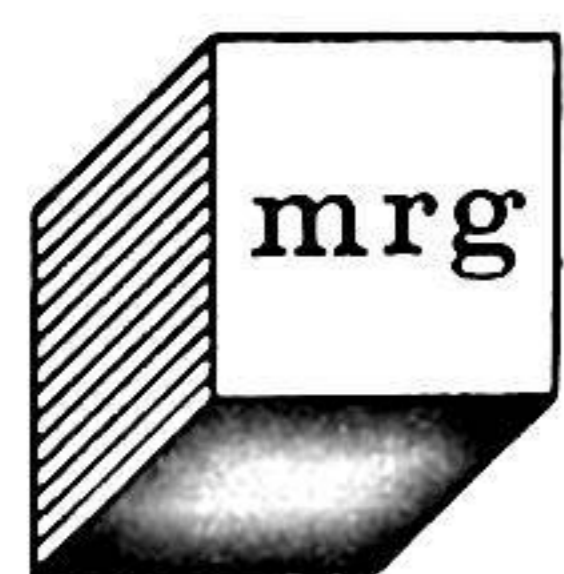
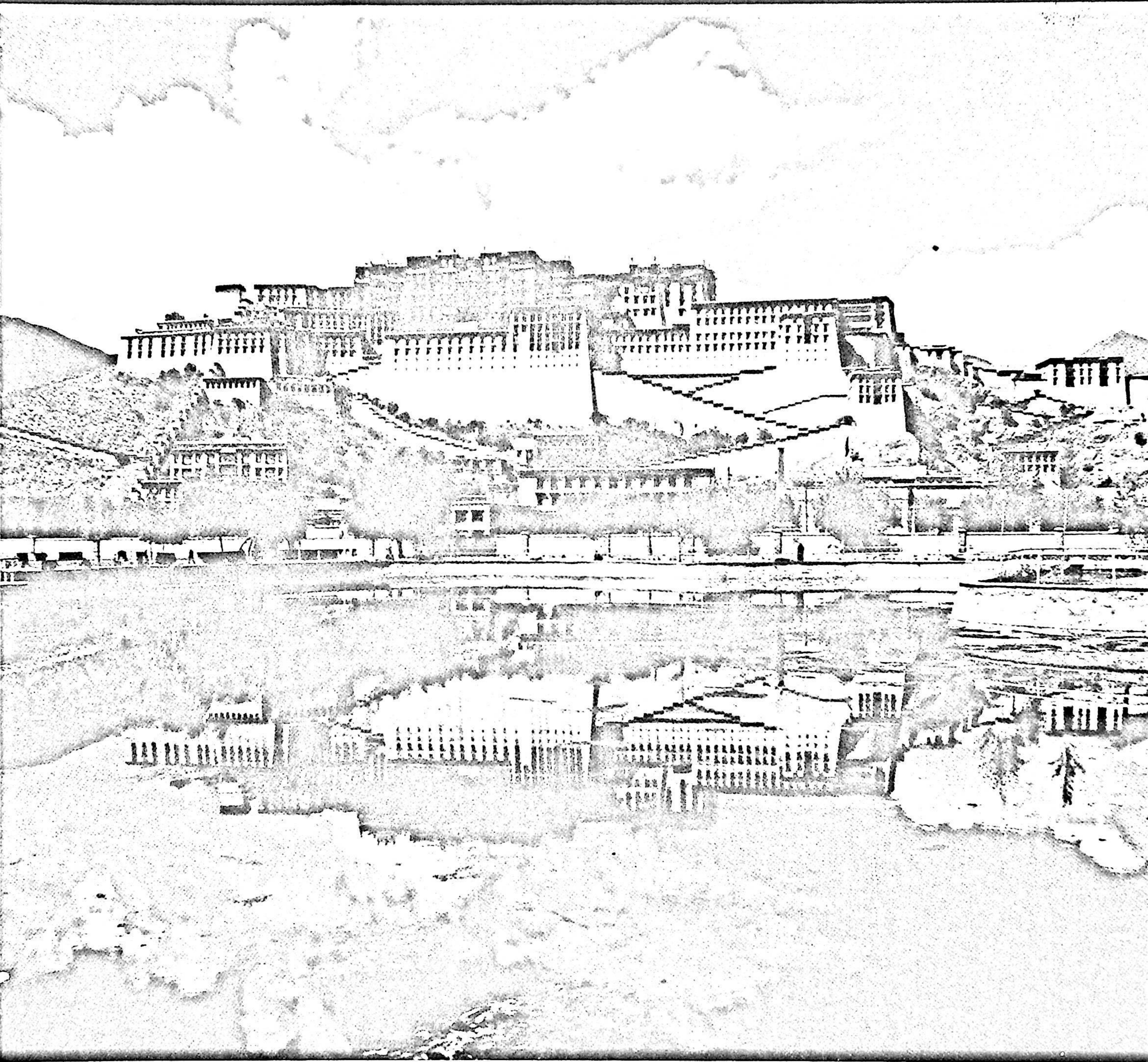


THE TIBETANS



Report No. 49

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**MINORITY
RIGHTS
GROUP**

The **MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP LTD.** is an international research and information unit registered in Britain as an educational trust under the Charities Act of 1960. Its principal aims are —

- To secure justice for minority or majority groups suffering discrimination, by investigating their situation and publicising the facts as widely as possible, to educate and alert public opinion throughout the world.
- To help prevent, through publicity about violations of human rights, such problems from developing into dangerous and destructive conflicts which, when polarised, are very difficult to resolve; and
- To foster, by its research findings, international understanding of the factors which create prejudiced treatment and group tensions, thus helping to promote the growth of a world conscience regarding human rights.

The Minority Rights Group urgently needs further funds for its work. Please contribute what you can. MRG is eligible to receive a covenant if you prefer.



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Minority Rights Group, please see the back cover.**

THE TIBETANS

by Chris Mullin

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**From the Universal Declaration
of Human Rights,
adopted by the General Assembly
of the United Nations
on 10th December 1948:**

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

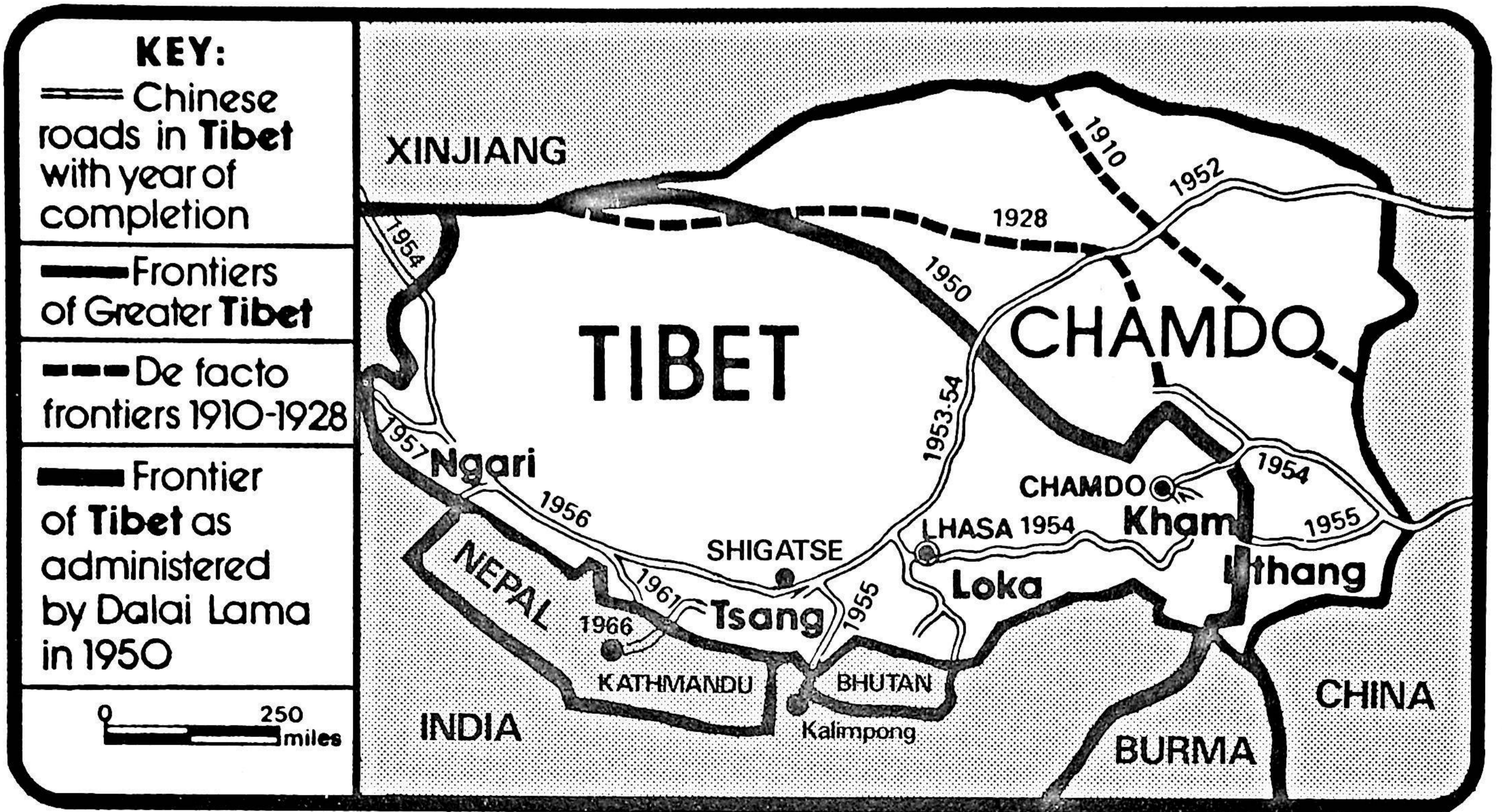
Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.



'Far East Economic Review'



INTRODUCTION: China's minorities and Tibet

The minority peoples of China divide into 54 nationalities and altogether constitute just 6% of the population. In most other countries they would be considered statistically insignificant. In China 6% of the population is 54 million people. More importantly, they occupy over half the land area of China, much of it strategically vital.¹

Most Chinese – known as Han – are rice and wheat farmers who live crowded into the valleys of the Yangtse and Yellow rivers or in the fertile eastern coastal provinces. By contrast the minority peoples, some of whom do not concede that they are part of China, for the most part occupy the great grasslands, deserts and mountain regions in the extreme north, south and west of China. In some regions they straddle the borders with countries whose relationship with China is either hostile or cool – the Soviet Union, Vietnam and India.

Although nominally the minority nationalities have been part of the Chinese empire for many centuries, effective central government control over minority areas was exercised only by the strongest dynasties before the victory of the Communist Revolution in 1949. This has meant that in the past, provided that they posed no threat to the central government, the minority peoples were generally left in peace. Over the centuries many of them developed unique and sophisticated cultures which survived undisturbed until the coming of the Chinese communists. From the beginning the communists professed a desire to preserve and even encourage the more benign aspects of minority cultures while at the same time enabling the minority peoples to contribute to and share in the development of China as a whole.

In practice this has not always worked out as planned. While there have been undeniable improvements in the health, education and even prosperity of many minority peoples in China, the promise of self-government has proved largely illusory. What has been presented as an opportunity for education and economic development has often turned out to be little more than an attempt to assimilate minority peoples into the Han culture. Religion, language and local agricultural practice has often been suppressed at the cost of great resentment and, in the case of Tibet, armed rebellion.

To be fair to the Chinese government, it is among the first to own up to the serious mistakes that have been made in the treatment of minority peoples. At the time of writing, a genuine effort appears to be underway to put right the wrongs of the past. For the first time in 15 years the practice of religion is again permitted; local languages and literature are being revived; Han officials in minority regions are now being replaced by locals. Inevitably, however, a question mark hangs over these latest changes. How long will they last? Will the line change again? Will there be another Great Leap Forward, another Cultural Revolution or another Gang of Four? Nobody knows.

Whatever the answer, one other point must be made. The Chinese communists' treatment of minority peoples in China has, for all its faults, been incomparably more civilized than that meted out by, for example, white settlers to the American Indians, the Australian Aborigines, the Indians in Brazil or for that matter the Palestinians in Israel.

This report looks first at the theoretical basis for relations between the Chinese government and the minority peoples of China. It then goes on briefly to compare theory with practice in China's largest and most difficult autonomous region, Tibet. In a way it is unfair to concentrate on Tibet because it has been without doubt the least successful example of relations between the Chinese communists and a minority people. On the other hand, it does encapsulate everything that has gone wrong with the Chinese government's policy towards minorities.

Tibet offers another advantage. More information is available on the subject than on any other of China's minority regions. This is not saying a great deal. The minority peoples of China dwell in some of the most remote and inhospitable territories of the earth. They have been visited by very few outsiders, either before or since the revolution in China. Much of what has been written is based either on hearsay or interpretation of official publications or broadcasts. Tibet is different. Because its civilization seems to exert a unique fascination on the handful of westerners who have ever reached Tibet, many of them have written copiously about it. Besides which, because Chinese policy there went so badly wrong, 100,000

Tibetans now live in the outside world and have provided a steady stream of information (not all reliable) to anyone who cares to listen. Finally, the Chinese themselves, deeply embarrassed by their failure, have also fed the outside world with a steady flow of information (not all reliable) on Tibet. The result is that we know more about Tibetans than about any other of China's minority peoples.

CHINA'S MINORITIES POLICY – IN THEORY ²

The importance of remaining on good terms with the minority nationalities has been an article of faith in the Chinese Communist Party from its earliest days. In 1922 – only one year after the foundation of the CCP – the Second National Congress proposed that the Han, Mongol, Tibetan and Turkic peoples of China should inhabit a federation of separate republics along the lines already laid down by Lenin in the Soviet Union. By 1935 this approach had been modified and the CCP declared that national minorities who co-operated in resistance to the Japanese invaders and the civil war against Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang would be given autonomous and equal status in the new China. This meant that while national minorities would not have the right to secede from the People's Republic of China, they would have control over their own affairs. This was to form the basis of future CCP policy towards the minority peoples and it remains in force, in theory at least, until the present day.

The status of the minority peoples in China is set out in three basic documents: *The Common Programme* (1949); the *General Programme for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities in the People's Republic of China* (1952) and the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (1954).

Article 50 of the *Common Programme* reads:

'All nationalities within the boundaries of the People's Republic of China are equal. They shall establish unity and mutual aid among themselves, and shall oppose imperialism and their own public enemies, so that the People's Republic of China will become a big fraternal and co-operative family composed of all nationalities. Greater nationalism and chauvinism shall be opposed. Acts involving discrimination, oppression, and the splitting of the unity of the various nationalities shall be prohibited.'

Nothing in this clause should be interpreted to mean that the nationalities were to be allowed to opt out of building socialism or communism. The CCP has always accepted that because of the different historical, political, cultural and religious conditions prevailing in the minority area the pace of change might be slower; that there might be some difference in style; that the idiosyncracies of the various nationalities might be tolerated, but the goal has always been the same: prosperity through socialism. This was made clear from the start. This, for example, is what the President of China, Liu Shaoqi, had to say in his *Report on the Draft Constitution* delivered in September 1954:

'The building of a socialist society is the common object of all nationalities within our country. Only socialism can guarantee to each and every nationality a high degree of economic and cultural development. Our state has a duty to help all nationalities within the country to take this path step by step to happiness.'

And this is what the *Peking Review* had to say on the subject 25 years later and after many mistakes in policy towards the nationalities were openly acknowledged:

'The population of the minority nationalities in China comprises only 6% of the total, but the area they inhabit is about 50 to 60% and is rich in natural resources. Since the bulk of China's grasslands and forests and many kinds of minerals are in those regions, their active support and participation is indispensable to socialist modernization.'

Returning to the *Common Programme*, article 51 states:

'Regional autonomy shall be exercised in areas where national minorities are concentrated and various kinds of autonomy organizations of the different nationalities shall be set up according to the size of the respective populations and regions. In places where different nationalities live together and in the autonomous areas of the national minorities, the different nationalities shall each have an appropriate number of representatives in the local organs of political power.'

At the lower levels of the administration this policy has been generally adhered to. In every prefecture, county, town and province it is no doubt possible to show a percentage of minority representatives which accurately reflects local demography. Even at the National Peoples' Congress minority nationalities are guaranteed at least 150 seats or more than twice the number they would be entitled to on a proportional basis.

Appearances are, however, deceptive. For real power in China resides not in the machinery of government, but in the Communist Party and, as we shall see, nearly all the important posts in the Communist Party committees in autonomous regions are occupied by Han Chinese. Even in cases where the principal post is occupied by a representative of a minority nationality, his deputy is invariably a Han and all the evidence suggests that this is where real power lies. The same applies in the People's Liberation Army, which in areas like Tibet and Xinjiang, plays a very important role. Virtually all the senior officers are Han.

Article 53 of the *Common Programme* states:

'All national minorities shall have freedom to develop their dialects and languages, to preserve or reform their traditions, customs and religious beliefs. The People's Government shall assist the masses of the people of all national minorities to develop their political, economic, cultural and educational construction work.'

However worthy the intentions, the record shows that – until recently at least – local languages, traditions and religious beliefs have been systematically suppressed. In minority regions most government business is transacted in the Han language; most education above primary school level is conducted in Han; most literature is written in Han and – at least during the period 1966 to 1976 – the practice of religion was all but outlawed and most churches, temples and mosques physically destroyed. Where there has been economic, social or education progress it has been mainly along guidelines laid down centrally and followed throughout China.

One of the main instruments for developing the political and economic – if not the cultural – side of life in minority regions has been the series of nationalities institutes set up to educate minority cadres. At present there are ten nationalities institutes (including those in Peking, Shanghai, Xianyang, Kunming, Chengdu, Urumqi, Nanning, Changsha) and by the end of 1978 94,000 people were said to have graduated from them. Teaching takes place in Chinese and students must first learn Chinese before they can proceed with other courses. I visited the Minority Institute in Chengdu in April 1979 and was told the syllabus included politics, history, mathematics and animal husbandry. At that time there were 830 students from 11 different nationalities (one third of the total were Han Chinese). The institute had opened in 1951 and was closed during the Cultural Revolution. Inevitably, graduates from nationalities institutes tend to be Sinocised having learned the Chinese language and an officially approved version of history and politics.

Overall responsibility for policy towards minority peoples is in the hands of the State Nationalities Affairs Commission headed by a government minister.

TIBET

Tibet is one of the earth's most remote territories, sealed off from the outside world by the massive Himalayan mountains to the south and east and from the north by the wastes of the Qinghai desert. In area it is almost as big as Western Europe and has a population of just 1.8 million. In addition several million other Tibetans live in the neighbouring provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Qinghai and Gansu. In the high grasslands to the north of the country the people are mainly nomads who make a living rearing yaks and sheep and live in yak hair tents. In the centre and eastern parts of Tibet the people are mainly farmers living in valleys between high mountains and subsisting on a staple diet of barley porridge and butter tea. The average height above sea level of the populated areas in Tibet is about 12,000 feet.

Until 1959 Tibet was ruled by the Dalai Lama and a hierarchy of monks (or lamas) and aristocrats. The Dalai Lama is believed by most Tibetans to be the reincarnation of Chenresi, the Buddha of Mercy, and no amount of Chinese propaganda to the contrary has convinced them otherwise. The present Dalai Lama, who now lives in exile, is the 14th reincarnation. When he lived in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, the Dalai Lama dwelt at the top of the Potala, a spectacular 13-storey palace, from where he was permitted almost no contact with ordinary mortals. When he left the Potala, which he rarely did, he travelled in a curtained sedan chair, escorted by horsemen and foot-soldiers and protected by monk-policemen armed with staves.

When a Dalai Lama died a search was immediately instituted to find his reincarnation. The process sometimes took several years

while high lamas travelled on horseback to all parts of Tibet in search of a baby boy answering to the description of the Living Buddha. Once the reincarnation had been discovered he was taken to Lhasa and closeted in the vast Potala palace. Since the Dalai Lama was always discovered in infancy, Tibet would be governed by a Regent until he attained his majority. The Regent was invariably the Abbot of one of the great monasteries around Lhasa and it was not unknown for fighting to break out among monks of rival monasteries when they were unable to agree on who should be Regent. Despite the respect for all living things which is supposed to characterize the practice of Buddhism, the regents were not above murdering even the Dalai Lama himself in order not to have to surrender power as he attained his majority. The ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth Dalai Lamas all died before they reached the age when they would assume responsibility for governing Tibet. The ninth was murdered and the twelfth died in suspicious circumstances.⁴

Tibetan Buddhism was far from the gentle, peace-loving creed it is often made out to have been. Many centuries before the coming of the Chinese communists Tibetan Buddhism had deteriorated into lamaism – rule by lamas. To consolidate their hold over the population the lamas had devised a fearsome array of demons and monsters which they threatened to turn loose upon any hapless Tibetan foolish enough to stray from the path they laid down. It is not necessary to take the word of the Chinese communists for what went on before they occupied Tibet. Percival Landon, a correspondent of *The Times* who reached Lhasa with a British military expedition in 1904, wrote:

'No priestly caste in the history of religion has ever preyed upon the terror and ignorance of its flock with the systematic brigandage of the lamas.'⁵

Heinrich Harrer, who spent several years in Tibet up to 1950 and who was extremely sympathetic to the old order, wrote of an attempted coup by a former monk Regent:

'The monks of the monastery of Sera revolted ... and panic broke out in the town. The dealers barricaded their shops and took away their goods for safety... The nobles shut the gates of their homes and armed their servants... People were less preoccupied with the political crisis than with the fear that the monks of Sera, who numbered many thousands, would break into Lhasa and pillage the town.'⁶

Clearly these were not monks in our sense of the word.

Altogether about one-fifth of the male population of Tibet were monks and every valley had its monastery – in all about 2,700. The greatest were around Lhasa: Sera, Ganden and Drepung. Drepung, the largest, had about 10,000 monks. Many monks were only children offered up to the monasteries by poor parents in lieu of taxes or debts to act as servants for the more important lamas. Other children were sent to the monastery as an act of devotion and others still because the monasteries offered the only hope of education and advancement in a land which had no secular schools.

Most land in Tibet was owned either by the monasteries or by the handful of aristocratic families. The position of the Tibetan peasant has been described by Captain W.F.T. O'Connor, the British agent stationed at Gyantse in Tibet around 1904. Captain O'Connor wrote:

'... Throughout the country there are two classes – the great land-owners and the priests – which exercise each in its own dominion a despotic power from which there is no appeal. The peasant on an estate is in almost every sense a serf. He is bound to furnish the greater part of his agricultural produce for the use of his landlord, keeping only enough for the bare support of himself and his family. He cannot without his Lord's permission leave the soil or the country, and he is compelled to provide free transport and supplies to all official travellers – Chinese or Tibetan.'⁷

Captain O'Connor went on:

'But in spite of this state of affairs, it need not be supposed that, administratively, the Tibet peasant is ground beneath a tyrannical yoke. In spite of the arbitrary rule of the nobles and officials the country on the whole is well governed and the people well treated. They are not, it is true, allowed to take any liberties or to infringe the orders of their superiors, but as long as they confine themselves to their legitimate sphere of action and, above all, abstain from political offences, their lives are lived simply and happily enough under a sort of patriarchal sway.'⁸

For those who did not 'confine themselves to their legitimate sphere of action' hideous punishments lay in store ranging from flogging (sometimes to death) to the amputation of limbs, the putting out of eyes and flaying alive. In 1967 the museum in Lhasa contained dried arms and legs hacked off in this way and even the skin of a man allegedly flayed from head to toe.⁹ Heinrich Harrer wrote:

'I was told of a man who had stolen a golden butter lamp from one of the temples in Kyirong. He was convicted of the offence and what we would

think an inhuman sentence was carried out. His hands were publicly cut off and he was then sewn up in a wet yak skin. After this had been allowed to dry, he was thrown over a precipice.¹⁰

While it would be wrong to exaggerate the unpleasant aspects of life in the old Tibet, they should be borne in mind in any objective assessment of what has happened there in the last 30 years. Captain O'Connor perhaps best summarized life under the old order when he wrote of Tibetans as 'simply agricultural people, superstitious indeed to the last degree, but devoid of any deep-rooted religious convictions or heart-searchings, oppressed by the most monstrous growth of monasticism and priest-craft which the world has ever seen.'¹¹ This was the world that the Chinese communists entered in 1950.

THE STATUS OF TIBET¹²

When they entered Tibet in 1950 the Chinese communists did not regard themselves as invading a foreign country. All Chinese governments (communist, nationalist and imperial) for the last 260 years have regarded Tibet as part of China and, by and large, Chinese sovereignty in Tibet has been accepted by the outside world. When central government in China has been weak, as it was for the first half of this century, the degree of control exercised in Tibet has necessarily been tenuous and Tibetans have enjoyed *de facto* independence. Nevertheless the fact remains that no country in the world has ever formally recognized Tibet as an independent country and when the communist government moved into Tibet it merely saw itself as undertaking the liberation of the most remote part of China's territory.

Many Tibetans, not unnaturally, take a different view. They argue that their country is ethnically, culturally and geographically quite distinct from China. Further, they say that whatever the historical relationship between China and Tibet, after the collapse of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1911 Tibet was for all practical purposes self-governing and remained so until the arrival of the communist armies in 1950. Moreover, Tibetans argue, on several occasions between 1911 and 1950 Britain and America and a number of other countries tacitly acknowledged Tibet's independence.

What view one takes of these competing claims depends on where one opens the history book. The International Commission of Jurists in its influential, but extremely suspect, report on Tibet chose to commence its consideration of the question in 1912 and came to the conclusion that Tibet was an independent country.¹³ In reality the matter is a little more complex.

The recorded history of Tibet starts in the seventh century when the country was ruled by a long line of kings of whom the most significant was Song-Tsen-Gampo (said to be the 33rd king). In addition to his three Tibetan wives Song-Tsen-Gampo married two princesses, one from Nepal and one from China. The princess from China brought with her an image of the Buddha, the Jo, which to this day is displayed in the central cathedral in Lhasa (the Jokhang) and is regarded as the holiest idol in Tibet. It was about this time that Buddhism became established.

The 36th king invaded China and conquered several provinces; under the 37th, monks were ordained for the first time; the 40th king agreed a boundary between China and Tibet and the 41st and last king had two sons who quarrelled and caused the kingdom to disintegrate.

The country was reunited in 1253 under the lamas of Sakya, a monastery in central Tibet. Shortly afterwards the Mongol Emperor, Kublai Khan (who later conquered China) appointed the ruling Sakya lama as his viceroy in Tibet.

The Dalai Lamas came on the scene in 1642 with the assumption of supreme religious and temporal power by the chief lamas of the Drepung monastery. According to the present Dalai Lama his previous incarnations were regarded as 'religious instructors' by the emperors of China. A more likely version is that the emperors regarded Tibet as a vassal state (though whether the feeling was mutual is a matter for debate). Officials called ambans were appointed to represent the emperor in Lhasa and the emperor Chien Lung (1736-96) insisted that all appointments of importance in Tibet should be ratified by the Imperial Court. Some ancient Tibetan documents are said by the Chinese to be headed 'By order of the Emperor of China, the Dalai Lama is the Pontiff of Buddhism'.

In the 17th and 18th centuries Tibet was twice invaded – once by nomads from Xinjiang and once by Gurkhas from Nepal. On each occasion imperial Chinese troops were sent to drive them out.

Chinese troops and ambans remained in Lhasa until 1912. Then, taking advantage of the revolution which had deposed the emperor the previous year, the Tibetans evicted them.

But having rid themselves of the Chinese, the Tibetan government made little or no effort to consolidate Tibet's independence by establishing relations with the outside world. The only exception concerned relations with the British who ruled neighbouring India. In 1890 the British had signed an agreement with China which fixed the boundaries with Sikkim and allowed Britain certain trading rights in Tibet. In 1904, having failed to establish contact with the Tibetan government, the British sent a military expedition to Lhasa which forced the Tibetans to sign a trade agreement. Although they dealt solely with the Tibetans the 1904 agreement was later renegotiated with the Chinese, thereby acknowledging Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

In 1913 the British convened a conference at Simla in northern India which was attended by representatives of Tibet and China and which agreed to recognize Chinese 'suzerainty' in Tibet. However, the agreement also provided that neither the British nor the Chinese were to send troops to Tibet or to interfere with the administration of the Tibetan government. Although this agreement was initialled by the representatives of Britain, Tibet and China, the Chinese government immediately repudiated it. Britain and Tibet alone signed.

For the next 38 years Tibet was for all practical purposes independent. The authority of the Tibetan government was absolute and China itself was plunged into civil war and chaos.

The attitude of the outside world was ambivalent. On the one hand no foreign government ever formally recognized Tibet as an independent country, but on the other several countries dealt with Tibet as though it were an independent country. In 1943 the Americans sent a mission to Lhasa to ask the Tibetan government for permission to survey the land route for the passage of supplies through China to Tibet (this was refused). In 1948 a delegation of Tibetans travelled to India, Great Britain, France, Italy and the United States on passports issued in Lhasa.

Meanwhile, however, the Chinese government, although incapable of exercising authority in Tibet, continued to insist on its right to do so. The 1931 Constitution promulgated by Chiang Kai-shek's government clearly specified that Tibet was part of China. Tibetan delegates participated in the Nationalist constituent assembly which approved the 1946 Constitution and they also sat in the Chinese National Assembly in 1948.

So when, soon after the revolution, the People's Liberation Army started to move into Tibet they were merely pursuing the historic claim of Chinese governments that Tibet was an inalienable part of China.

TIBET BEFORE THE UPRISING (1950-9)

The Chinese People's Liberation Army began to move into Tibet in October 1950. After they began their advance Mao Tse-tung advised them to proceed with caution as the Chinese Communist Party had almost no supporters in Tibet.¹⁴ On 19 October the Tibetan and Chinese armies clashed at Chamdo and the Tibetans were decisively defeated. On 7 November the Tibetan government appealed to the United Nations for help. In the UN General Assembly the delegate from El Salvador requested a debate on Tibet but the British delegate proposed that the matter be adjourned *sine die* on the grounds that the status of Tibet was in doubt. He was supported by the Indian delegate who believed that the matter could be settled by peaceful negotiation.

Negotiations did take place and on 23 May 1951 resulted in the signing of a Seventeen Point Agreement under Article 3 of which Tibet agreed 'to return to the big family of the Motherland' in return for a number of guarantees. These guarantees included (Article 4): 'The central authorities will not alter the existing political system in Tibet. The central authorities also will not alter the established status, functions and powers of the Dalai Lama. Officials of various ranks shall hold office as usual.'¹⁵

The Chinese themselves were well aware of the problems they faced in Tibet. This was their interpretation of the agreement:

'Because conditions in Tibet are not ripe, democratic reforms have not yet been carried out there. According to the 17-point agreement... reform of the social system must eventually be carried out. But we should not be impatient; when this will be done can only be decided when the great majority of the people of Tibet and their leading public figures consider it practicable. It has now been decided not to proceed with democratic reform in Tibet during the period of the Second Five Year Plan (1958-62), and we can only decide whether it will be done in the period of the Third Five Year Plan (1963-7) in the light of the situation obtaining at that time.'¹⁶

Under the terms of the 1951 Agreement a series of military/political committees were set up in areas occupied by Chinese soldiers. In Chamdo, which was the first area to be occupied, the Chamdo Liberation Committee was established and in Shigatse a committee was set up in 1954 whose nominal head was the Panchen Lama (then aged 16). The Panchen Lama was Tibet's second highest reincarnation. Membership of these committees consisted of Tibetan dignitaries and Chinese soldiers and cadres. In 1956 these committees were replaced by the Preparatory Committee for the Tibetan Autonomous Region. This consisted of 50 Tibetan members (at least 20 of whom had previously been members of the Chamdo and Shigatse committees) and five senior Chinese officials. The chairman was the Dalai Lama and one of the vice-chairmen was a Chinese general. The secretary was Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, a Lhasa aristocrat and a member of the Dalai Lama's government (Ngapo remained in Tibet after the Dalai Lama fled and he is today chairman of the Standing Committee of the Regional People's Congress). Since the delegates from Chamdo and most of those from Shigatse were in the pockets of the Chinese, the Chinese had an inbuilt majority. Once established the Preparatory Committee began to set up sub-committees to match each department of the Tibetan government.¹⁷

The speed of change depended on proximity to China. Around Lhasa and central Tibet most people's lives remained undisturbed until after 1959; in the eastern area of Kham, however, the Chinese presence was felt almost immediately. Accounts of this period are confused. Some say that the Chinese soldiers behaved well, paid for what they consumed and did not interfere with local life. Others say that the Chinese requisitioned mule transports, porters and labourers for road building and that they paid well below the going rate. Monasteries and wealthy people are said to have been obliged to give 'loans' either in the form of silver dollars or feed for pack animals. Poor people were summoned to meetings where they were told that they had been exploited by the monks and big landowners.

This is what happened in the Lithang valley according to a statement made to the International Commission of Justice. The references to 'riff-raff' and 'lower classes' provide a clue to the class background of the kind of people who led the rebellion:

'In 1954 the Chinese began to organize the lower classes and the riff-raff to rise against the monasteries and wealthy people. By this time they had already begun making propaganda that religious beliefs were all superstitious... the people from the lower classes who had been trained by the Chinese went from village to village making propaganda against the landlords.'¹⁸

The crunch in Lithang came in 1956. The Chinese began to levy steep taxes on traders returning from India and ominously began listing the property holdings of all landlords and monasteries. The Lithang monastery was one of the largest in Tibet and at the end of 1955 the Chinese summoned eight senior monks of Lithang and asked them to compile an inventory of all the monastery's possessions so that it could be assessed for tax. By way of response one of the monks is said to have pulled out a gun and they were allowed to leave. Back in the monastery the monks called a meeting of all village headmen and urged them to take up arms against the communists. So began the Lithang revolt, the first of a series of uprisings against Chinese rule.¹⁹

According to a Tibetan who took part, the fighting began around the end of February 1956 when the Tibetans attacked a Chinese army camp. After the attack the Chinese laid siege to the Lithang monastery which was defended by several thousand monks and local farmers, mainly armed with British 303 rifles (imported from India) and an assortment of elderly Japanese, German, Chinese and Russian guns. The siege lasted for some weeks, at the end of which the Chinese sent in two Peking-educated Tibetans with an offer of negotiations. In return for surrender, the Chinese offered to postpone their reform programme for at least three years. If this was not accepted, they would use aircraft to bomb the monastery.

Since none of the Tibetans had ever seen or heard an aeroplane, the Chinese laid on a demonstration bringing up one aircraft to make a dummy run by dropping its bomb load in front of the monastery and then strafing it. This made a deep impression on the defenders who that night tried to fight their way out through the Chinese lines. Many were killed or captured, but some escaped and fled in the direction of Lhasa.

Lhasa was three months' walk away from Lithang and when refugees from Kham began to reach the city they at first had difficulty convincing the complacent Lhasa aristocrats that there was a serious revolt in the east. In the end the Dalai Lama's cabinet came up with a uniquely Tibetan solution. Instead of appealing to the outside world for help, as they were being urged to do, they launched a nation-wide appeal for gold and jewels for the purpose of constructing yet another golden throne for the Dalai Lama in the hope that this would assuage whatever bad omens they believed were afflicting Tibet.

Others, including the Dalai Lama's own brothers, took more practical action. Before the Lithang revolt they had already established contact with Taiwan and the American Central Intelligence Agency and from about 1955 young Tibetans were quietly smuggled out to Taiwan and the USA for military training. They were then parachuted back into Tibet with orders to organize resistance to the Chinese. Training went on until 1964 and small supplies of money and weapons continued until 1971. Outside aid was, however, never really forthcoming on a scale big enough to influence events.²⁰

Meanwhile in Lhasa a different atmosphere prevailed. From 1952 onwards a number of sons and daughters of aristocrats were sent to be educated in nationalities institutes in China and, far from this causing resentment, there actually seems to have been competition for places. In 1954-5 the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama spent 18 months travelling in China and came away generally impressed with what they had seen. Upon his return the Dalai Lama wrote a poem in praise of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese communists, whose coming to Tibet he described as 'the timely rain'. This poem was later to be the cause of some embarrassment.²¹

People in Lhasa were, however, becoming increasingly hostile to the Chinese. With the number of refugees from the eastern province of Kham growing daily, word of what was happening there spread rapidly and posters started appearing demanding that the Chinese go home. Another source of resentment was the soaring price of grain caused by the Chinese making local purchases to feed their troops and as a result pushing the price out of reach of many ordinary Tibetans. The Tibetan cabinet, meanwhile, bent over backwards to appease the Chinese – even to the extent of depriving nine leading citizens of their Tibetan nationality and imprisoning three others who had offended the Chinese.²² All this merely fuelled resentment.

In March 1959 a revolt broke out in Lhasa. The Dalai Lama fled to India and thousands of Tibetans followed him into exile. The revolt was crushed by Chinese troops, the Tibetan government was dissolved and its functions were transferred to the Preparatory Committee for the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The Panchen Lama was appointed acting chairman of that committee. Life in Tibet would never be the same again.

AFTER THE UPRISING (1959-66)²³

The Tibetan uprising was probably the most serious resistance to Chinese communist rule ever mounted by a minority people. And since so many Tibetans (most of them members of the class which had most to lose) were able to tell their story in the outside world it was also the cause of considerable loss of face. As a result the Chinese have been at pains ever since to assure the world that all was well in Tibet. Manifestly this was not the case – as the Chinese themselves now admit.

According to Chinese sources, about 600 people were killed or wounded in the Lhasa uprising; Tibetan sources put the figure much higher. After the revolt a large proportion of the able-bodied men in Lhasa seem to have been arrested. They were taken to a valley near Lhasa called Nachen and put to work building a hydro-electric complex. Later they were joined by a large number of conscripted labourers.

During working hours each prisoner was given time off to dictate the story of his life from the age of eight. After about seven months the

prisoners were visited by the Indian and Nepalese consuls. Before the visit they each received a new towel and there was a meeting at which they were told that they should look happy in their work; in answer to questions they should reply only that they did not like the old society. On the day of the visit the soldiers who had been guarding them disappeared and were replaced by officials in Tibetan dress. Such precautions were to become a standard feature of visits by foreigners to Tibet.

After about eight months many of the prisoners were released but continued working on the hydro-electric project as paid labourers. Others were sent to the north to help develop the Chang Thang, a vast inhospitable plateau at an altitude of 15,000 feet and inhabited only by nomads. One of those who volunteered has described how they were misled into believing that good conditions awaited them there, but when they arrived they found only tents:

'We were then told Mao Tse-tung had said "hardship only exists to test the bravery of the people".'

In the countryside peasants' associations were set up and meetings were organized at which people were encouraged to denounce former landlords – some of whom were badly beaten and humiliated. Debt titles and contracts binding serfs to service on the estates of their masters were ceremoniously burned. The estates of landlords and monasteries which took part in the rebellion were dismantled and distributed among the peasants who lived on the land. The estates of landlords and monasteries which did not take part in the rebellion were gradually redistributed with modest compensation being paid to the former owners. The payment of compensation was discontinued at the start of the Cultural Revolution. The living standards of a large number of the poorest people in Tibet must have been transformed by this process.

In the monasteries committees were formed consisting mainly of poorer monks and they too held accusation meetings at which lower rank monks were encouraged to denounce high lamas. According to three monks from Drepung, the largest monastery, the monks were confined to the monastery for two weeks; those judged to be reactionaries were separated from the rest and brought before mass meetings. After being denounced, some 'reactionaries' were taken away and apparently executed. The monks were then told that they could not remain in the monastery since they would have to work for a living. After being lectured on what life in the new Tibet held in store they were allowed to return to their home villages. Those who remained went to work on monastery land on what became known as 'lama farms'. Only elderly monks were allowed to remain as caretakers in the monastery itself.²⁴

In the towns a committee structure was established ranging from the *Dsuk* or street committee; to the *Uyenlhankang* or local committee with full-time officials responsible for about 400 families; to the *Doncha* which covered about 1,000 families whose responsibilities included raising voluntary labour for public works. Obligatory attendance at meetings organized either at workplace level or by the *Uyenlhankang* was to become for many Tibetans one of the more irritating features of life under the new order.

A ration system similar to the one that exists throughout the rest of China was also introduced covering grain, butter, cloth and other basic goods.

The beginnings of a modest industrial base was established. By 1976 there were said to be 252 'small and medium' industries in Tibet. Of these the biggest are the Lhasa cement plant; the wool and textile factory at Nyinchi (also spelled Lindze), match and carpet factories, quarries and mines. A wide range of mineral deposits including coal, oil, uranium, gold and copper have been discovered. To create and exploit these new resources large numbers of Han Chinese technicians and workers were brought to Tibet.

The whole of Tibetan society was divided first into two and later into six classes ranging from serf-owners and their agents to serfs. Everyone was required to attend meetings at which they had to denounce the old order and at which members of the old order (lamas and landlords) had to undergo *Thumzing* (reform through struggle) which often involved being subjected to physical violence.²⁵ People from the lower orders who were judged not to have denounced their former masters with sufficient enthusiasm were themselves subjected to *Thumzing*.

Although no doubt Tibetan people had many genuine grievances against their former masters these struggle sessions, like so much else in China, were carried to ludicrous extremes. Dhondub Choedon, herself classified as a former serf and a minor official in

the Red Flag People's Commune in southern Tibet until she fled in 1973, has described the *Thumzing* sessions she attended:

'The Chinese make us retail the evils of the old society without the least regard for the truth ... They make the Tibetans bring false accusations and denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama before the gathering. The meeting will not stop till the whole audience denounces the Dalai Lama, and later, the Panchen Lama. If anyone in the audience does not join, the Chinese will declare that he is "infected with blind faith and empty hope"; and saying that he must be "relieved of his mental burden" he will be subject to *Thumzing* in that meeting and made to confess his own "wrong thinking".²⁶ 'During these meetings everyone had to cry and say "the gods, lamas, religion and monasteries are the tools of exploitation; the three serf-owners made the Tibetans poor; the Chinese Communist Party liberated us and gave us food, clothes, houses and land; the Chinese Communist Party is more kind than our own parents".'²⁷

As the various campaigns for reform grew more intense, so more and more people had to face *Thumzing* sessions to be unburdened of their backward thinking. Mrs Choedon, whose account of life in the Red Flag People's Commune is wholly credible, gives many examples of people in her village and from the surrounding area who committed suicide rather than face *Thumzing*.²⁸

Nevertheless, although strongly discouraged, the practice of religion in Tibet does seem to have remained possible until the start of the Cultural Revolution in late 1966. One nun who left Tibet in 1974 told me that her convent – about half a day's walk from Lhasa – was undisturbed until 1961:

'We were then asked to come to an army barracks and for two months we were given political lectures. The Chinese told us we could not remain in the convent; that in the new society we had to work for a living, although we were free to choose what work we wanted to do.'

She and another nun asked to go to Lhasa where they were found a rent-free room and set to work converting wasteland into a vegetable garden. Later she worked as a labourer at the Nachen hydro-electric project. During all this time she remained a nun with her head shaven and wearing her red nun's habit. This resulted in her being labelled a 'reactionary' and a 'greenbrain' at the nightly local meetings; there was also pressure on her to get married, but provided that you had a thick skin it seems to have been possible to continue practising religion until the onset of the Cultural Revolution.²⁹

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION – AND AFTER (1966-79)

The Cultural Revolution was without doubt a traumatic experience for most Tibetans and appears to have alienated irrevocably many who until then may have been able to live with the changes that had overtaken their homeland.

It began when young Red Guards came from elsewhere and were appalled to see the slow rate of social progress in Tibet compared with other areas of China. The practice of religion was still widespread and the move towards agricultural communes – which began in most other areas of China in 1958 – had hardly commenced. The Red Guards argued for immediate transformation towards socialism without regard for local conditions.

These arguments caused a split among the thousands of Han cadres in Tibet and they divided into two factions: the *Nyamdel* who favoured existing policies of gradual transformation, and the *Gyenlog* who wanted instant change. The division quickly spread to Tibetan youth, particularly those receiving Chinese secondary education, and before long serious fighting broke out between the rival factions. For a while the *Gyenlog* triumphed and so began the systematic destruction of much of Tibet's rich cultural heritage.

Young Red Guards, most of them Tibetans, went from village to village seeking out and destroying prayer wheels, prayer beads, scriptures and any other relics of the old order. Mrs Choedon describes how the Cultural Revolution came to the Red Flag People's Commune at the end of 1966:

'One day two Chinese and six Tibetan officials from the sub-district came to our commune and selected thirty young Tibetans from the *nangzen* (serf) class who held Party membership. These thirty recruits were then appointed as the Red Guards and told what they should do.'³⁰

They were given the task of destroying the 'Four Olds': old thought, old culture, old habits and old customs:

'The Red Guards started off by destroying all the small shrines and pulling down the prayer flags. Then they confiscated all religious objects and articles, even prayer beads. They destroyed all religious monuments and paintings in our area. They took the statues in the Tramdub Dolma

Lhakhang (monastery) and sold them to the Chinese antique shop in Tsethang and burnt all the ancient holy scriptures. They cut off the long hair of all the men and women and killed all the dogs ... Tibetans found lighting incense were charged with attempting arson and paraded with dunce caps. Old people murmuring silently were denounced as being superstitious.³¹

One man from Nuplung, a hamlet in central Tibet, described how villagers were ordered to dismantle the disused local monastery and the stupa in front of his house. The scriptures taken from inside the stupa were mixed with manure and spread on the fields. 'Many of the people were crying and fainting while they did this and as a result of this incident the caretaker of the monastery went out of his mind.'³²

Only a handful of the greatest monuments in Tibet were spared: the Potala and the Drepung monastery in Lhasa, the Tashilunpo monastery in Shigatse and perhaps another half dozen or so of the great treasure houses of Tibet. The rest were destroyed (many smaller monasteries had already been demolished before the Cultural Revolution).

The Jokhang in the centre of Lhasa, one of the oldest and holiest shrines in Tibet, was severely damaged; the spectacular Dzong (government headquarters) which dominated Shigatse for centuries was dismantled stone by stone; Ganden, Tibet's third largest monastery, was completely destroyed; the Yumbu Lagang, said to have been built by the first Tibetan king more than 2,000 years ago, was also laid to waste. Tibetan festivals, songs, dances were banned as remnants of the old order.

Two features stand out from this orgy of destruction. One is that despite the apparent hysteria it was carefully controlled. Recent visitors were, for example, told by local people that the destruction took three stages. First, experts came and marked the precious stones and they were then removed; then came metal experts who marked the precious metals for removal; the buildings were then dynamited and timber was taken away for use by the local commune and the stones were left for anyone to use.³³ In Phari, in southern Tibet, four of the five local monasteries were dismantled, but the most important was left untouched; in Lhasa the homes of the 300 to 400 Nepali community were left alone and even the raids on the Jokhang were not carried out until objects of value had been removed.³⁴

Secondly, most of the destruction was carried out by young Tibetans. The Chinese took care to stay in the background. No doubt the Tibetan youth were egged on by the Chinese; no doubt many now regret what they did, but the fact remains that the actual destruction of Tibet's cultural heritage was carried out by Tibetans. For example, at the Tashi Kensa peoples' commune outside Shigatse, I was told by Tibetans that 200 young people from the commune had taken part in the destruction of the Dzong.

The Cultural Revolution also saw the introduction of communes throughout most of Tibet. Many Tibetans who had previously benefited under the redistribution of land from the monasteries may have felt they were losing what they had earlier gained. From now on most land would be communal, farmers were paid a basic ration of grain and the surplus would have to be sold to the State at fixed prices (well below the open market rate); grain was also set aside for tax (6%), seed and reserves. The share of the proceeds from grain sold to the State was allotted according to work-points and earning these required working for longer hours than Tibetans were accustomed to.

The commune system in Tibet was not greatly different from that already introduced (and working tolerably well) throughout the rest of China. Tibet, however, had certain peculiar features.

Firstly, in most of the rest of China there is simply not enough land to go round, making some form of collective farming unavoidable if everyone is to eat. The same rationale does not apply in Tibet which, although it lacked the capital for private farming, is sparsely populated and in which vast tracts of cultivable land lie unused.

Secondly, besides the 120,000 Han cadres and technicians living in Tibet there is also an army of perhaps 250,000 soldiers, most of whom are Han. Although many Han grow their own vegetables and although much of their food is imported from the interior of China, much grain has to be purchased locally. What's more, Han eat wheat while the Tibetan staple diet is barley. The result is that Tibetans found themselves being ordered to grow wheat instead of barley much of which they were then obliged to sell at an artificially low price, often leaving insufficient for their own consumption.

Although food production in Tibet undoubtedly increased substantially in the years after 1959, the benefits of this increase do not seem to have devolved upon Tibetan peasants. Complaints of food shortages were a persistent theme of all Tibetan refugees. Dhondub Choedon gives examples of families who had to live for months on wild vegetables after their grain ration ran out and in some cases starving to death.³⁵

Thirdly, a large proportion of Tibetans are nomads who live by barter. With the introduction of communes barter was forbidden; instead they were obliged to sell their produce to the State at less than market rates and strict controls were introduced on the killing of animals for meat. Mrs Choedon cites an example of a woman who killed a ewe without permission and who was denounced and paraded round the commune with the bloody sheep's head round her neck as a warning to others. This kind of behaviour was not designed to win friends.

Finally, whatever the merits of the commune system (and it is undoubtedly one of the most successful institutions of communist China) as far as Tibetans were concerned it was just another feature of an alien creed. The communes were introduced ruthlessly and insensitively by the same officials who were in the process of destroying the rich cultural heritage of Tibet. In the circumstances Tibetans could hardly be expected to welcome the communes and by and large they didn't.

Besides increasing the steady trickle of refugees into India and Nepal the drastic transformation of feudal Tibet also provoked resistance. In 1967, for example, a group of Tibetans led by a nun from Nyemo, about 40 miles south-east of Lhasa, attacked a Chinese military post killing soldiers and hideously maiming local Tibetan officials. The revolt lasted several months and when it was finally ended 16 of the ring-leaders were publicly executed.³⁶

In September 1971 nine young people were publicly executed in Lhasa after being caught trying to set up a resistance movement. The following year sentences of between five and 15 years were imposed on 12 people for what were described as 'underground activities'.³⁷

By 1969 the worst of the Cultural Revolution was over. The army stepped in and arrested leading members of the Gyenlog faction and some effort was made to repair the worst of the damage. Funds were made available for repairs to the Jokhang and the few surviving national treasures such as the Potala Palace and the Drepung monastery. Some relaxation of the official attitude towards religion occurred. In 1974, for example, a group of 40 Tibetans were allowed to visit Bihar in northern India to attend a sermon given by the Dalai Lama, saying that news of the sermon had been announced in their village by the Chinese authorities who had told them that those wishing to attend could do so.

In the border regions a more lenient policy had always been applied. Officials were under instructions to observe a ten-point policy which included fewer criticism meetings, a less rigid agricultural policy and lenience towards offenders. The purpose was to discourage people from voting with their feet by fleeing to India and Nepal. Presumably a similar policy applied in all China's vast border regions.

In 1975 and 1976 a handful of foreign visitors were allowed into Tibet. They were the first for many years and included the author Han Suyin and the writer and film-maker Felix Greene. Careful preparation attended their coming. Through the network of factory, district and communal committees people were advised to wear their best clothes and not to talk politics; if asked about independence they were to say that it would not be a good idea because life was bad under the old society. They were also warned that plain-clothes security officers would accompany the visitors.

The fall of the so-called Gang of Four in Peking at the end of 1976 had no immediate effect in Tibet. Although the political demise of Madame Mao and her colleagues led to widespread liberalization in the rest of China, Tibet was too remote to be affected by what happened in Peking. Perhaps the most telling sign of business as usual in Tibet was that, although 20 years had passed since the Chinese takeover, both the government and Communist Party of the Tibetan Autonomous Region were dominated by Han officials, many of whom did not even speak the Tibetan language.

The first signs that life for Tibetans was about to change for the better came in July 1979.

TIBET TODAY

At the Tibet People's Congress in July 1979 the retirement was announced of the Han General Ren Rong who, as Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of the Autonomous Region, had been in charge of the province for most of the previous decade. At about this time a delegation of Tibetan exiles representing the Dalai Lama began a long tour of their homeland as guests of the Chinese government. For three months they were allowed to go where they wanted and see whoever they wanted. At times they were greeted by scenes so emotional that even the Han guides travelling with the delegation were in tears.

When they emerged the delegation of exiles were extremely critical of what they had seen. Although no official account of their report was published it is believed to have come as a profound shock to the central Chinese government in Peking.

In April 1980 the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party held a special session on Tibet – a measure of the importance they attach to the subject. Later it was announced that the General Secretary of the Party, Hu Yao-bang, would be visiting Tibet to see for himself what was going on. On 15 May the appointment was announced of a new First Secretary for the Tibet Communist Party – Yin Fatang, also a Han military man, but his job was said to be to eliminate 'ultra-leftist influence' and take into account real conditions in Tibet.

Hu Yao-bang arrived in Tibet on 22 May and seems to have read the riot act to officials on the spot. While he was there the Chinese news agency published a list of six requirements aimed at creating a 'new, united, prosperous and highly cultured' Tibet. These included:

1. 'Anything that is not suited to Tibet's conditions should be rejected or modified, along with anything that is not beneficial to national unity or to the development of production.' Demanding 'uniformity in everything' was condemned as 'subjectivist'.
2. Efforts must be made to 'lighten the burden of the masses'. To this end all taxes and State purchasing quotas were abolished for at least the next two years. People should not be assigned work without pay and prices for produce purchased by the State should be negotiated and not fixed by central authorities.
3. 'Peasants should plant whatever crops they wish and no one should interfere'; private production should be encouraged as 'getting rich is nothing to be afraid of'; 'policy requirements should be relaxed, relaxed and relaxed again'.
4. Although the central government already spends more funds in Tibet than in any other province or autonomous region the centre will increase funds for Tibet still further. In particular primary school teachers, whose salary was the responsibility of the local commune, will in future be paid by the State.
5. 'So long as the socialist orientation is upheld, vigorous efforts must be made to revive and develop Tibetan culture, education and science. The Tibetan people have a long history and a rich culture. The world-renowned ancient Tibetan culture included fine Buddhism, graceful music and dance as well as medicine and opera, all of which are worthy of serious study and development.'
6. 'Unhealthy tendencies' prevalent among some Han cadres should be corrected. These tendencies were said to include 'taking advantage of position and power to assign jobs to their own men' and 'violating nationality policy'. More responsibility should be given to Tibetan cadres.³⁸

As yet it is too early to say what the effect of these new policies will be. In the main cities there are signs that they are being implemented seriously, but reports from the remote countryside suggest that local officials are having difficulty coming to terms with the change of line in Peking. As of September 1980 the situation appears to be as follows:³⁹

Religion

Tibetans are now allowed to worship unhindered in the great shrines of Lhasa and Shigatse. The metal gates which until April 1980 barred the entrance to the Jokhang in Lhasa have disappeared and the Jokhang is now open to the public for eight hours a day. The Potala palace seems to be open only on Sundays on payment of a small entrance fee. The Drepung, Sera and Tashilunpo monasteries also appear to be open daily, admission free. State funds are being used to restore the main temples although it seems unlikely that

local people will ever be allowed to restore the thousands of small temples and monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Tibetans representing the Dalai Lama who travelled for more than three months in the Tibetan countryside say they saw no intact monasteries or temples outside the three main cities.⁴⁰ They also report witnessing incidents of harassment of people trying to practise their religion.⁴¹

The official attitude to religion is perhaps best summarized in a small booklet called 'Basic Study Guide No.55' (*Lobjung Che Zhi*), published by the Information Office at Chamdo in April 1980. It contains advice for members of the Communist Party and Youth League and cadres. The full text is reproduced as Appendix 2. Here is an extract:

'Anyone above 18 years has the right to have faith or not, and the right to propagate atheism. No one can induce a child under 18 to do anything religious or take them to a religious service. Anyone wishing to practise religion must obey all the laws and regulations passed by the government. No one can try to revive the power of religion that has already been destroyed. Anyone interested in being a member of the Communist Party or Communist Youth Organization cannot practise religion. It is the duty of the Communist Party to try to persuade any members who have a slight faith in religion to give it up. If they refuse, the Party should expel them ... 'Has policy on religion changed recently out of a desire to induce the Dalai Lama to return? Our policy has never changed; the recent relaxation is not a new policy. Whether the Dalai Lama returns or not, we must carry on our policy on religion.'⁴²

In Lhasa and Shigatse the altars before all the shrines are piled high with the offerings of pilgrims; butter lamps burn before the statues of Buddha and even pictures of the Dalai Lama are publicly displayed. Tibetans young and old, from town and countryside are to be seen prostrating before the Jokhang and other great temples.

As word that worship of the Buddha is again permitted has seeped out over the high passes and into the lonely valleys, pilgrims from all over Tibet have started to make their way to Lhasa and Shigatse, often walking for up to three months. Pilgrimages of this length must be extremely disruptive of commune life and it is unclear to what length the officials go to discourage them. According to the Dalai Lama's representatives people leaving their village without permission forfeit their ration cards and, once lost, these are difficult to regain.⁴³ Since grain is not available on the free market, food would be extremely difficult to obtain for a long journey. Nevertheless there are now hundreds of pilgrims from the eastern province of Tibet camped around the Jokhang in the centre of Lhasa.

The position of monks and lamas is less clear. Most of the main shrines are looked after by elderly monks and there are a handful of monks in their 30s and 40s who entered the monasteries as boys. The Drepung monastery which was before 1959 the largest in the world with over 10,000 monks now has just 240; the Tashilunpo in Shigatse once had 3,700 monks and is now said to have 535 – about 100 of whom live on the premises while the rest work at farming some distance away. The Dalai Lhama's delegation say that except in the three main cities they saw only 'one person in monk's robes outside official circles'.⁴⁴

The key test of how serious the new climate of religious freedom is, will be whether young men are allowed to become monks. At Drepung five or six new monks are said to have come forward since the liberalization and elsewhere in China Buddhist monks and Catholic priests have been ordained; so the signs are promising. What is clear, however, is that the monks will never again be able to live off the people as they did in days gone by.

Education

With the exception of a few secondary schools in the main cities – many of whose pupils are the sons and daughters of officials – the standard of education in Tibet is very poor. Primary school education was, until the recent changes were announced, the responsibility of the commune. Teachers are usually youths who have themselves had just six years' education; there is almost no teaching material in the Tibetan language and many children work on the land with their parents rather than attend school. A delegation of Tibetan exiles who spent three months travelling in Tibet in 1980 said they did not meet a single Tibetan who had a university education. Tibetans trained at nationalities institutes in Peking generally received six years' basic education in Chinese and the early years are spent learning to read and write Chinese. All secondary education in Tibet is in Chinese.

Health

Even to the casual observer it is evident that the standard of health care is much lower than in the rest of China. The number of qualified Tibetan doctors is minute and the quality of many barefoot doctors, who receive only a few months' training in basic medicine, is hair-raising. Good hospitals do exist in the main cities, but like so many other parts of the modern infrastructure, they appear to serve Han or Tibetan officials.

The written word

The main bookshop in Lhasa contains almost no literature, not even textbooks, in the Tibetan language. Nearly all street signs and official notices are in Chinese and where there is a Tibetan translation it has only been tacked on as an afterthought.

Administration

Despite the fact that they have had nearly 30 years to train Tibetans for positions of responsibility, Han officials still dominate the upper and middle levels of the administration; most technicians are Han and in many factories even the majority of workers are Han. Most Han do not speak a word of Tibetan, they do not eat Tibetan food and live separately from Tibetan people. Some are openly contemptuous of the Tibetan way of life.

Overall about 40% of all cadres in Tibet are Tibetan and these are mainly concentrated at the lower end of the administration.⁴⁵ As we have seen, since 1979 the Chairman of the Autonomous Region has been a Tibetan, but the most powerful position – First Secretary of the Tibetan Communist Party – is occupied by a Han; seven of the 13 vice-chairmen of the Autonomous Region are also Han.⁴⁶ A visitor to the Lhasa vehicle maintenance factory in 1975 reported that of the 863 workers only 231 were Tibetan.⁴⁷ As of September 1980 the Lhasa Branch of the China Travel Service employed no Tibetan drivers and only took on its first Tibetan English interpreters in August 1980.

Many Tibetans – and presumably other minority peoples – are excluded from membership of the Communist Party by virtue of the regulation, cited above, that only atheists are eligible for membership.

The Chinese government now acknowledges that this situation is unsatisfactory and steps are being taken to change it. Several thousand Han cadres are in the process of leaving and their jobs will be taken by Tibetans; Tibetan language courses are being arranged for many who remain and the government says it intends to double the number of Tibetans in positions of responsibility over the next two or three years.⁴⁸

Prospects for a settlement

The Dalai Lama and about 100,000 Tibetans live in exile, mainly in India and Nepal, and their presence outside Tibet constitutes a grave embarrassment to the Chinese government. In the last two years the government has gone to considerable lengths to woo them back. Contact between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama was secretly renewed in 1978 and in August 1979 the first of a series of delegations of Tibetan exiles left for lengthy fact-finding visits to Tibet. Their reports have been extremely critical (and to some extent exaggerated). Nevertheless these seem to be the main source of information for the Chinese central government about what has been going on in Tibet – in the absence of accurate accounts from their own officials. As a result serious efforts appear to be underway to rectify the wrongs of the past.

The Dalai Lama at this stage is reserving judgement:

'My general disposition is looking, watching. Frankly speaking it is difficult to trust the Chinese. Once bitten by a snake you feel suspicious even when you see a piece of rope.'

Although he speaks highly of the new Chinese leaders, he is very critical of local officials in Tibet:

'Their behaviour is very silly. I doubt whether the senior Chinese leaders actually know the situation, so my own people are making careful, unbiased observation. They will explain to the Chinese leaders and, according to the situation inside Tibet, I will have discussions with the Chinese leaders. If both sides are genuine, the right solution will be found.'⁴⁹

It is unclear what exactly might form the basis of a settlement. The Chinese will never concede that Tibet is an independent country and it is unlikely that the Dalai Lama would insist on this (though

some of his followers might). Apart from that everything else is negotiable. The Dalai Lama has often described himself as sympathetic to socialism which, he says, has many good points in common with Buddhism. He has also said that he would not insist on political office for himself, though clearly many Tibetans would expect this. Of the future, the Dalai Lama says simply:

'The main question is the happiness of our people. Once the Tibetan people are actually – not artificially – satisfied, then certainly I will return.'⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

Despite lip service to the contrary – and in contrast to their earlier policy – it seems to have been the object of official Chinese policy since the Cultural Revolution to Sinocise the Tibetan people with little regard for local feelings. The main features of this policy were as follows:

1. The domination by Han officials of the highest levels of the party and administration in the autonomous regions;
2. the failure of the Han to learn local languages or respect local customs;
3. between 1967 and 1979 the systematic suppression of religion and the destruction of cultural relics;
4. the introduction of drastic changes such as the commune system without regard for local conditions, and the forced settlement of nomadic peoples;
5. serious damage to the local economy by, for example, insisting on growing wheat in place of barley or pastureland;
6. all secondary education is in Chinese.

Although the speed and intensity with which ethnic minorities were integrated into 'the big family of the Motherland' varied from one region to another, reports from Xinjiang, home of the Uighur and Kazak peoples, suggest that their experience has been remarkably similar to that of Tibetans.⁵¹ There may, however, be variations in regions like Inner Mongolia where an autonomous region was established as early as 1947 (two years before the final victory of the revolution) and where the communists enjoyed indigenous support from the beginning.

To be fair, the many negative aspects of attempts to Sinocise the minority peoples have to be balanced against undoubted improvements in health, welfare and in many cases living standards. It should also be said in mitigation that the Chinese government now acknowledges the failure of its minorities policy and is committed to making amends. It must be judged by results.

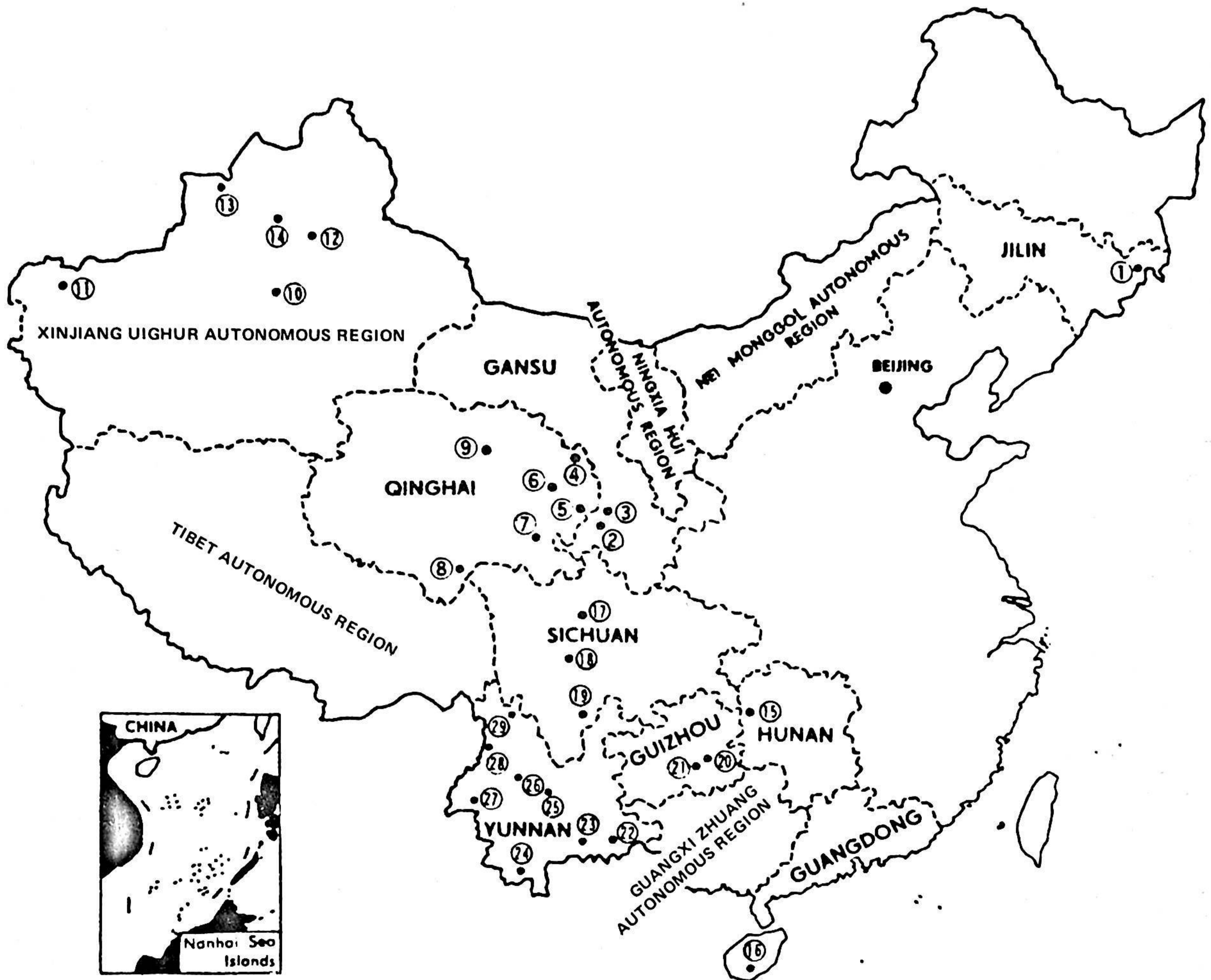
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NOTES

- 1 For a full list of all the minority peoples of China and where they live, see Appendix 1.
- 2 The documents quoted in this section are taken from 'The Consolidation of the South China Frontier', by George Moseley, 1973, pp. 4-11.
- 3 *Peking Review*, 22 June 1979, p. 5.
- 4 I am indebted to Hugh Richardson, former British Consul in Lhasa, for this information.
- 5 'The opening of Tibet', Percival Landon, London, 1905, p. 191.
- 6 'Seven Years in Tibet', Heinrich Harrer, Pan 1956, p. 196.
- 7 Landon, *ibid*, Appendix D, pp. 345-6.
- 8 Landon, *ibid*, p. 346.
- 9 'Inside Story of Tibet' by Ratne Deshapriya Senanayake, Afro-Asian Writers Bureau, 1967, pp 154-60. Hugh Richardson comments: 'I do not believe the stories of flaying alive and hacking off of limbs and know of no such allegations before the Chinese occupation'.
- 10 Harrer, *ibid*, p 76.
- 11 Landon, *ibid*, p 347.
- 12 In this section I have relied for the Tibetan exile point of view on the following sources: 'Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic', report of the International Commission of Jurists, pp 139-49, Indian edition (1966); 'My Land and My People' by the Dalai Lama, 1962, McGraw Hill, chapter 4; I am also indebted to Sir Algernon Rumbold, President of the Tibet Society, for a note he prepared for me on the subject. For the Chinese point of view I have relied on accounts by authors favourable to China, including Senanayake, pp 37-52, *ibid*; and 'Lhasa, the Open City' by Han Suyin, Cape 1977, pp 11-19. Among the more scholarly accounts Hugh Richardson's 'Tibet and its history', London, 1962, is the best.
- 13 For an account of the doubts that surround the ICJ report see article by Chris Mullin in *China Now* No.78, May/June 1978.
- 14 Mao Tse Tung, collected works, Vol V, pp 73-4
- 15 ICJ, *ibid*, p 172.
- 16 From a selection of Chinese communist party documents published by the Union Research Institute, Hong Kong, p. 287.
- 17 Dalai Lama, *ibid*, p 133.
- 18 ICJ Appendix one, statement No.50. Despite my earlier reference to the 'suspect' nature of the ICJ report I have cited cases which I have been able to corroborate in conversation with eyewitnesses.
- 19 For an account of the uprising in Lihang and the events surrounding it, see 'How the CIA went to war in Tibet' by Chris Mullin, *Guardian*, 19 Jan 1976; also *Far East Economic Review*, 5 Sept 1975. This is based on interviews in India and Nepal with Tibetans who took part in the CIA operation.
- 20 Mullin, *ibid*.
- 21 For the full text of the poem see 'The Timely Rain', by Stuart and Roma Gelder, Hutchinson, 1964.
- 22 Dalai Lama, *ibid*, pp 135 and 162.
- 23 This section is based mainly on 'Red Roof of the World' by Chris Mullin, *Guardian*, 6 June 1975. This article is based on interviews with Nepalese citizens with access to Tibet in 1975 and Tibetan refugees who at that time had only recently left.
- 24 ICJ Appendix one, statement No.33.
- 25 *Thumzing*, or struggle session, was similar to the 'speak bitterness' campaigns held throughout China during land reform.
- 26 'Life in the Red Flag People's Commune' by Dhondub Choedon, p 60, published in 1978 by the Information Office of the Dalai Lama, Gangchen Kyishong, Dharamsala, Himachel Pradesh, India.
- 27 Choedon, *ibid*.
- 28 Choedon, *ibid*, pp 68-9.
- 29 Mullin, 'Red Roof of the World', *ibid*.
- 30 Choedon, *ibid*, pp 64-5.
- 31 Choedon, *ibid*.
- 32 Mullin, 'Red Roof of the World', *ibid*.
- 33 Tibet News Review, Vol.I, No.3/4, report of the second delegation representing the Dalai Lama, p 19.
- 34 Mullin, 'Red Roof of the World', *ibid*.
- 35 Choedon, *ibid*, pp 36-7.
- 36 Mullin, 'Red Roof of the World', *ibid*.
- 37 Mullin, *ibid*.
- 38 New China News Agency, 30 May 1980 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, June 4)
- 39 This summary is based on a short visit I made to Tibet in September 1980; I have also quoted from a report by Phuntsog Wangyal, a member of the second delegation of Dalai Lama's representatives which visited Tibet between May and August 1980. Like many Tibetan exiles Mr. Wangyal can be inclined at times to exaggerate—for example, he told a meeting in London on 1 November 1980 that Tibet was 'a barren country with naked people'; that Tibetans worked 18 hours a day; that 'two-thirds' of school time was spent studying Mao's thoughts; that every able-bodied man has to give a pint of blood each week; that all new buildings were in the Chinese and not Tibetan style. Allowing for this, however, his report is worthy of study—not least because he travelled in areas of Tibet which few outsiders have ever seen. Mr. Wangyal's report appears in *Tibet News Review*, Vol 1, No 3/4, Winter 1980/1.
- 40 *Tibet News Review*, *ibid*, p 19.
- 41 *Tibet News Review*, *ibid*, pp 24-5.
- 42 Purchased in Chamdo by a member of a Tibetan exile delegation in May 1980.
- 43 *Tibet News Review*, *ibid*, p 21.
- 44 *Tibet News Review*, *ibid*, p 21.
- 45 Interview by the author with Losang Tsetin, a vice-chairman of the autonomous region, in Lhasa, 19 September 1980.
- 46 New China News Agency, 1 September 1979 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 4 September).
- 47 Han Suyin, *ibid*, p 116.
- 48 Losang Tsetin, *ibid*.
- 49 Interview with the author, *Guardian*, 27 March 1980
- 50 *Guardian*, 27 March, *ibid*.
- 51 For example, reports from Xinjiang—the autonomous region in the west of China—say that Kazak herdsmen were forced to settle down and grow wheat (with disastrous results); religion was forbidden and mosques destroyed during the Cultural Revolution; all secondary education was in Han; and to this day there is almost no literature in the Uighur and Kazak languages. In 1960 60,000 people fled to the Soviet Union from Xinjiang. For recent reports see 'China's Turkic Moslems ...' by Fox Butterfield, *International Herald Tribune*, 31 October 1980; 'The Moslems of China' by W. Zafanolli, *Le Monde*, 20 January 1980.

APPENDIX I



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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture 2. Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 3. Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture 4. Haibei Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 5. Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 6. Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 7. Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 8. Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 9. Haixi Mongolian, Tibetan, Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture 10. Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture 11. Kizilsu Khalkhas Autonomous Prefecture 12. Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture 13. Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture 14. Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Xiangxi Tujia, Miao Autonomous Prefecture 16. Hainan Li, Miao Autonomous Prefecture 17. Aba (Ngawa) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 18. Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 19. Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture 20. Qiandongnan Miao, Dong Autonomous Prefecture 21. Qiannan Bouyei, Miao Autonomous Prefecture 22. Wenshan Zhuang, Miao Autonomous Prefecture 23. Honghe Hani, Yi Autonomous Prefecture 24. Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture 25. Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture 26. Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture 27. Dehong Dai, Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture 28. Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture 29. Degen Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture |
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Population and major areas of distribution of Chinese national minorities

National Minorities	Population	Major Areas of Distribution
Mongolian	2.6 million	Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, and Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Gansu, Qinghai Provinces
Hui	6.4 million	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Gansu, Henan, Hebei, Qinghai, Shandong, Yunnan Provinces, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Beijing, Tianjin
Tibetan	3.4 million	Tibet Autonomous Region, Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, Yunnan Provinces
Uighur	5.4 million	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region
Miao	3.9 million	Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan Provinces, Guangxi Zuhang Autonomous Region, Sichuan, Guangdong Provinces
Yi	4.8 million	Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou Provinces, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
Zhuang	12 million	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Yunnan, Guangdong Provinces
Bouyei	1.7 million	Guizhou Province
Korean	1.6 million	Jilin, Liaoning, Heilongjiang Provinces
Manchu	2.6 million	Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Hebei Provinces, Beijing, Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region
Dong	1.1 million	Guizhou, Hunan Provinces, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
Yao	1.2 million	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou Provinces
Bai	1 million	Yunnan Province
Tuija	770,000	Hunan, Hubei Provinces
Hani	960,000	Yunnan Province
Kazakh	800,000	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Gansu, Qinghai Provinces
Dai	760,000	Yunnan Province
Li	680,000	Guangdong Province
Lisu	470,000	Yunnan Province
Va	260,000	Yunnan Province
She	330,000	Fujian Zhejiang Jiangxi, Guangdong Provinces
Gaoshan	300,000	Taiwan, Fujian Provinces
Lahu	270,000	Yunnan Province
Shui	230,000	Guizhou Province
Dongxiang	190,000	Gansu Province
Naxi	230,000	Yunnan Province
Jingpo	80,000	Yunnan Province
Khalkhas	90,000	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region
Tu	120,000	Qinghai Province
Daur	70,000	Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Heilongjiang Province
Mulao	70,000	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
Qiang	80,000	Sichuan Province
Bulang	50,000	Yunnan Province
Salar	50,000	Qinghai, Gansu Provinces
Maonan	30,000	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
Gelao	20,000	Guizhou Province
Xibe	40,000	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Liaoning Province
Achang	10,000	Yunnan Province
Tajik	20,000	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region
Nu	10,000	Yunnan Province
Uzbek	7,000	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region
Russian	600	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region
Ewenki	10,000	Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Heilongjiang Province
Benglong	10,000	Yunnan Province
Baoan	6,000	Gansu Province
Yugur	8,000	Gansu Province
Jing	5,000	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
Tartar	2,000	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region
Drung	4,000	Yunnan Province
Oroqen	3,000	Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Heilongjiang Province
Hezhe	800	Heilongjiang Province
Pumi	20,000	Yunnan Province
Monba	40,000	Tibet Autonomous Region
Loba	300,000	Tibet Autonomous Region
Jinuo	10,000	Yunnan Province

Source: *Beijing Review*, No.9, 3 March 1980. Based on 1978 population statistics.

**APPENDIX II: Basic Study Guide No.55,
published by the Chamdo Information Office, 1980***

'Religion is a tranquilizing poison used by capitalists to oppress people. So why does the Communist Party have to tolerate freedom of religion? The existence of religion – its development and decline – is a fact. That the people who believe in religion come mainly from the ordinary people is also an undeniable fact. We have to stop religion in that it is blind faith, against the law, and counter-revolutionary:

Blind faith includes reciting things, doing circumambulation and asking Lamas for help when someone is sick and dying.

No one is allowed to take any money in the name of religion or to try to revive what has been destroyed. Anyone asking for blessings for sick people or doing prayers or divinations for money is acting against the law.

Under the guise of religious practice, anti-revolutionaries may pass messages, conduct espionage, and urge people to destroy communism and form themselves into organizations.

Anyone above 18 years of age has the right to have faith or not, and the right to propagate atheism. No one can induce a child under 18 to do anything religious or take them to a religious service.

Anyone wishing to practice religion must obey all the laws and regulations passed by the government.

No one can try to revive the power of religion that has already been destroyed.

Anyone interested in being a member of the Communist Party or Communist Youth Organization cannot practice religion. It is the duty of the Communist Party to try to persuade any members who have a slight faith in religion to give it up. If they refuse, the Party should expel them.

These days some individuals in the Communist Party and Youth Organizations and Officers too, practice religion, chant things and go to sacred places. Such activities are clearly indicated as being forbidden. Although our constitution allows people to have the right to religion, it should be abundantly clear

**As translated by a member of a delegation of Tibetan exiles who recently visited Tibet.*

that Communist Party and Youth Organization members do not have the right to practice religion. Though they are part of the people, Communist Party and Youth Organization members are supposed to be more advanced and better educated people.

Under the constitution, Communist Party and Youth Organization members have the right to induce people not to believe in religion and to criticize religion. It is your duty to do this. When you first became a Party member, you pledged to hold tight the banner of Communism, so Communist Party and Youth Organization members and Officers should be people who propagate atheism and try to separate people from faith in religion.

'Has policy on religion changed recently out of a desire to induce the Dalai Lama to return?'

Our policy has never changed; the recent relaxation is not a new policy. Whether the Dalai Lama returns or not, we must carry on our policy on religion.

Nowadays in the name of religious freedom people create ugly rumours. They say that the Dalai Lama is being invited back to Tibet, which is a sign of the weakness of China and the victory of the Dalai Lama. They say that the Dalai Lama will come, the times will change, the people's communes will break up and the old Tibetan system of Chosi – "government according to religion" – will be restored. They say that the communists are trying to win people over by bribing the poor. They dig up old prophecies. Under this present freedom of religion people go on pilgrimages, practice religion, and collect money and grain in groups to try to make money. This is all wrong. Also people take youngsters to religious places and try to teach them religious ideas. Some schoolteachers even try to use their position to talk about religion. All these activities are contrary to rules laid down in the constitution.

From the commune's property no-one has the right to donate one cent, one grain, one ounce of butter towards the Dharma. Although collecting money in the name of religion is thus forbidden in the constitution, there are those who collect money through chanting prayers and the like. One incarnate lama collected 400 yuan in three short years in the name of religion. This is strictly against the constitution, and, as it says in Article 165: "If anyone collects money or commodities by spreading rumours in the name of God and in blind faith, he will incur a minimum punishment of two years' imprisonment, or in some cases up to seven years".'

Chris Mullin is a British journalist who has specialized in Tibetan affairs, writing mainly in *The Guardian*. He has visited Tibetan exiles in India and Nepal and interviewed the Dalai Lama on three occasions. He visited Tibet in September 1980.



Photographs by Chris Mullin



First published May 1981



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